

THE PHYSICIAN'S WIFE.

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A NOVEL.

BY
HELEN KING SPANGLER.

"Ein Buch ist ein Buch."

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CHAPTER I.

"I GIVE you fair warning, Bess, that 'the doctor' flirts outrageously ; and, therefore, you have my commands not to encourage him in the least in any such proceeding with yourself. He means nothing by it, for he never came down with an actual offer of his hand, along with his heart, until I had the good fortune to secure both."

"Oh, he flirts, does he?" replied Miss Bessie Gilbert, with ever so faint a start, and a very decided blush of pleasure. "How very exceedingly annoying that must be to you, who wouldn't look askance at Apollo!"

Nevertheless, Bess was a trifle too much elated at the news just imparted to her to feel any very sincere sympathy for me in my supposed affliction.

I may as well tell you here that I am Portia Severn, and that Bess Gilbert is a school friend, who came from Winsted by the morning coach to assist me in devising ways and means for spending money on my trousseau, for I expect to be married before long. Bess is one of those rare anomalies in nature who love dearly the game, but scorn the "distinguished odium" attached to the name "flirt." She is not willing to acknowledge even to me her real propensities ; so hurriedly returning to the book she had been reading when I so abruptly broke the thread of the narrative by the sentence with which I

began this tale, and reading intently to the close of the page, she deliberately turned the leaf, scanned the heading of the following chapter, without, I am sure, in the least catching the meaning of the words printed thereon, then slowly closed the book with a yawn, which displayed a row of the whitest of teeth. She at this climax looked up, only to observe that I was regarding her with curious eyes.

Miss Bess was about to proclaim that she believed she would run up-stairs and improve her toilette (though but ten minutes before she had said, in an up-and-down manner, that "she wouldn't dress to see the Prince of Wales"); but the words died on her lips, and her purpose of beautifying herself came suddenly to an end, as I remarked, "What made you look that way just now?"

"What way?" with much innocence.

"As though you were pleased with the idea that the doctor flirted."

"I? Nonsense! I think you grow morbid!"

"Nevertheless, you did look pleased," said I, with a smile, noticing that Bess was beginning to elevate her left eyebrow, and that a wee dimple was beginning to appear in the corner of her mouth,—always an indication that Bessie's temper was rising. "You will be still better pleased, dear," I continued, "when you see how very handsome he is; but for the sake of your peace of mind, do not become too much interested. For he has disappointed more than one of the young and fair, who think I ought to be jealous of his attentions to others, and that he might be easily snatched from me by a well-directed attack, led on by some one thoroughly equipped with all the accoutrements of war,—to wit, bright eyes, red lips, and soft words. Now, the fact is, he never even makes love, except with his eyes; and it is just those very eyes that I want to warn you against, as the breakers and

shoals upon which a hundred or more hearts have been cruelly wrecked; and the doctor still remains as innocent as any lamb."

I arose as I said this, and demonstrated as though I would pierce Bessie's heart with my embroidery needle; while she, with a still higher elevation of her eyebrow, and the dimple deepening in the corner of her mouth, said, "And all this warning on account of a country doctor, whose pockets bulge out with bottles of castor-oil, himself smelling, no doubt, of assafoetida and blue mass from the crown of his superannuated silk hat to the heirlooms left him by his great-grandfather in the shape of hob-nailed boots. No, thank you! Miss Severn pays too high tribute to Miss Gilbert's youth and innocence."

Saying this, Bess glanced at herself in the mirror opposite, and, laying hold of a long, bright curl which hung gracefully from her chignon, she pulled at it with her soft, pink-tinted fingers until she straightened it out, then let it fly back to its place again, to see if it would stay in curl. Apparently satisfied with this experiment, she took out her pocket-handkerchief, and, throwing it carelessly over her head, she raised the window and stepped out upon the porch. Calling Hairpins, my small terrier, with whom she has made friends since her arrival, she took the direction of the foot-bridge, singing in a tone which she vainly strove to make careless and indifferent, but which I, who know Bess so well, am thoroughly persuaded was no contradiction whatever to that elevated eyebrow and that coquettish dimple. In short, Bess is very angry with me.

In the midst of all this excitement of preparing for my wedding, it may seem strange that I should determine upon writing a book; but such, nevertheless, is the case. I intend to publish my entire history to the world, from this day until I shall get too old to hold a pen.

This shall be the first chapter. Of course I have no more idea how things are going to turn out than the man in the moon; so I shall just record things as they take place. If I write a chapter a week,—and it is a poor life that hasn't one chapter a week in it,—I shall have fifty-two chapters at the end of the year. I never thought, however, until this moment that fifty-two chapters make a very respectable-sized volume; so, by the time I am eighty, I may have a library of my own works. Still, I am not unmindful that an allowance must be made for sickness and such things; and, for fear some misfortune may overtake me before my plan is consummated, I shall write as fast as ever I can. My history is not to be at all retrospective, only so far as I shall describe to you my meeting with the doctor.

My father is an iron-monger, and works at the trade himself, being his own foreman, or boss. So that when he came home one evening, all begrimed with coal-smoke, and stepped into the little bath-room off the hall to give himself a washing before tea, it was not a matter of surprise to me, and I did not even look up from my music, at which I was practicing, when he passed the drawing-room door. It was always my custom to wait until my father's toilette was completed before greeting him with a kiss of welcome. This was his wish, and I always complied with it.

So I went on running the scale and humming do, re, me, fa, sol, la, se, do, in the most monotonous manner in the world; for of all things I hated to practice my singing-lessons. I loved dearly to sing in my own way, and not according to any rules. Yet, knowing my father's wish that I should become a good, scientific singer, I did my best to rid myself of a habit I had contracted, of breaking off from my do, re, me, fa's, and trilling the

waltzes and gallops played by the village band, every one of which I knew by heart, and I felt, as I sat evening after evening at the foot of the garden listening to the musicians practice, that I could vastly better interpret the meaning of the composer, without notes, than the players on the brass instruments could, with every advantage in the way of instruction in their favor. For example: When the leading brass horn would toot *traw-law-law*, and the drum would come in with *driddlety-drum-tum-tum*, I burned with impatience, for I knew that Strauss meant no such heavy and lumbering sounds to creep into his dreamy, delicious waltzes. And then, of all things in the world, a fife playing at a waltz! These things, I may as well say, were my only trials, save indeed the death of my mother, which took place when I was too young to know how great a loss I had sustained. Yet I have never ceased to mourn for her, particularly since I have grown up, and have seen other girls with kind mammas.

Well, this evening I was more resolutely than ever driving the waltzes and gallops out of my mind, as I sang over my exercises, when, hearing a door slam, I concluded that papa was coming, and, hurriedly closing my music-book, I ran to the door to meet him. The moment I turned from the piano, my eye fell upon the tall figure of a man, who, with gloves and cane in one hand, hat in the other, stood regarding me with the most singular expression I ever beheld. Perhaps it was because his face was so entirely handsome, and his bearing so noble, that I was not in the least frightened at seeing him stand there, without saying a word or offering to explain why he was there. I only raised my hands to my face and ejaculated "Oh!" when papa came in, neatly dressed, and with his face all aglow from the soap and water and rubbing to which he had just been treating himself.

"This is my daughter Portia, doctor," said papa; "Doctor Alvord, my child," turning to me. I acknowledged the introduction with a very slight inclination of the head in the direction of Doctor Alvord, feeling somehow as though he had played the part of an eavesdropper, in listening to me practice when I was unaware of his presence. He, however, took hat, cane, and gloves all in one hand, and extended his unoccupied hand towards me, saying, "Your father is responsible for the rudeness you condemn in me, my child. He seated me near the door in the hall, and your sweet voice was so tantalizingly musical, that it was impossible for me to resist the temptation of approaching this fountain of melody in rapt silence."

All the time he was speaking he held my hand tightly in his, and, as his eyes were bent upon me, I noticed that they had that peculiar expression in their brown depths that I had noticed upon first discovering his presence in the room. It was not a look of admiration. How could a superb man in the prime of life look admiringly upon a girl of nineteen, who, in an impatient, squeaky voice, had grumbled out her do, re, me's with so little spirit and such evident ill humor? Neither was it a look empty of a feeling of interest in me, else why should he look at me at all, or notice in the least that I was offended at his intrusion? No! in looking back now, and knowing all I do know about Doctor Alvord, I cannot for the life of me define that expression. In part, it seemed to say, "Poor little girl!" for the rest—but we are retrospect-ing. Certain it is, he has never looked at me in that way since, and I am dealing with the present and future; the past may be told in a few words.

Doctor Alvord came out nearly every evening with papa from the city, and I learned to await his coming

with delight. In less than six months from that time we were engaged; and papa, upon the announcement of our engagement, withdrew from the iron-works, at least from active personal participation in its management, though retaining his interest as a member of the firm. The doctor's practice was confined almost wholly to the vicinity of Hollybrook, where the blast-furnace and the iron-works stood; and it was natural that my father should encounter him frequently on his way home, and that was all the acquaintance my father had with his guest. At least I was given to understand that such was the case.

I am, it seems, the envy of all the girls; for although the doctor is emphatically a ladies' man, and enjoys nothing more than chatting with a pretty girl, yet his attentions are altogether too general for me to apprehend danger from any quarter. He takes me every place, honors me first, sees that I am properly cared for, and then lets his eyes wander about until they fall upon somebody else. And there are always plenty of eyes to flash responsive echoes to his own. I often wonder what he can see in me to admire that he should ask me to become his wife. There is Sallie Carter, the Winsted physician's daughter. To be sure her father is not wealthy; but he has a fine practice, and Sallie is very pretty, and evidently hangs upon the doctor's smile. Then there is Emily Danby, Amelia Barton, and last, but not least, the elegant Miss Sedgwick, whose father is a baronet and she an heiress in her own right.

And now I come back again to this morning, when Bess, with her languid eyes turned towards me and her eyelashes curled up to their fullest capacity, remarked, "Oh, he flirts, does he? How very exceedingly annoying that must be to you, who wouldn't look askance at Apollo!"

CHAPTER II.

THIS morning came and went much as my mornings usually come and go, except that Bess and I went to Winsted to cull over the new flowers at the milliner's, and rake fore and aft, as Bess expressed it, the boxes of gros-grains in search of becoming colors for neckties and knots for the hair. We gathered up Sallie Carter in our wagonette on our way to town, and there being but two seats in the conveyance, Bess sat alongside of Humphreys, the gardener; and in making game of that young man, trying to make him think that in her opinion he was fully her equal, her good humor seemed to be restored, and she entered into all bargains connected with gloves, boots, pocket-handkerchiefs, and the countless *et cæteras* which go to make up a young bride's wardrobe, with an interest and spirit worthy her accustomed sunny disposition.

Bess has most exquisite taste; and as she is the only daughter of the Viscount Gilbert, she has unlimited pocket-money. Aside, however, from the purchase of an occasional pound of cream chocolate, to be used as the collective nouns in German, by a plurality of individual considered as a unity, that unity being in every case herself, I never knew her to spend money upon any person beside herself. Her pound of cream chocolate would pass around perhaps once, or twice at farthest, and then sink into the depths of her jacket-pocket; and, "Girls, help yourselves," she would occasionally say; but who would want to place their hand in their neighbor's pocket, even upon invitation?

Well, if I wished to be the least bit particular to explain Bessie's peculiar habit of holding fast to all she had, I might recall those feast days at the seminary, where all the girls threw in five shillings or thereabouts to buy the confectionery, and Bess never had anything less than a guinea. Kate Porter obtained the exact change once for that golden guinea, when she applied to Bess for her proportion of the outlay, and was met in the usual way. Kate rattled out shillings and pence in a sounding heap upon the table, saying, "I can change it, dear." Bessie's face took on scarlet in an instant, as she raised her guinea from its soft bed in her velvet *porte-monnaie*. However, this is retrospective, and I should not have alluded to it. You see, Bessie's penurious propensities drew me thither; for I thought this morning, when she was raking over all the pretty things at the store and appropriating the prettiest to her own use, she might have remembered that I was soon to be a bride, and needed all that was of the best quality.

Bessie's father, the Viscount Gilbert, is, strange as it may seem, my father's partner in business. Papa brings the brains and capital, Lord Gilbert furnishes the influence. But that is neither here nor there, except to explain how it comes that I, the daughter of a mechanic and commoner, am on intimate terms with the daughter of one to the manor born.

Well, this morning Sallie Carter, seeing the very meagre stock from which I had to select after Bessie's overhauling, looked up at me with a mischievous smile, saying, "Bessie's trousseau will outstrip yours, it seems. Who is she going to marry, pray?" The salesman smirked, and hustled the boxes of ribbons back to their respective shelves, almost overcome with an inclination to laugh at the bare idea of pretty Sallie Carter perpetrating a joke;

while the boxes aforesaid, with their contents, almost came to grief through his careless handling, and his waistcoat expanded immensely because of the repressed laughter underneath.

When we reached home we found a half-dozen or more callers; and when Teenie, my maid, came out all eager and expectant to carry in my packages, her countenance dropped considerably as I handed out packages marked Miss Severn, in the proportion of ten to every one marked Miss Gilbert.

The rector passed by as I was stepping out of the wagon, and eyed the parcels rather curiously, I thought. Papa has not spoken to him yet with reference to my forthcoming marriage. I wonder what he will think when he finds out it is to happen so soon?

Let me see, this is the first of September; scarcely six weeks, and I shall be no longer Portia Severn. Doctor Alvord will be here Sunday. He has never been so long without coming to Loch Severn since we became engaged. How surprised Bess will be when she sees him! I never could persuade him to have a likeness taken and give it me; therefore one obstacle that might have stood in the way of giving Bess a genuine surprise doth not present itself. Hob-nailed boots with leather shoe-strings! what an idea!

Well, I suppose I must begin another week, in accordance with my fell purpose of writing a chapter a week.

Saturday afternoon Bess went out for a stroll, accompanied by Hairpins. She hadn't been gone very long, though I thought when she started out that she intended exhibiting herself in the village to that good-looking young salesman in Winthrop's, as I imagined she had designs upon him. I may have been mistaken, but hardly think I was, for I know Bess so well. However, she re-

turned sooner than I expected, and far too soon to have gone to the village and back. She looked very pretty and bright, as she picked a rose from the China aster and pinned it on her shoulder. She has a fancy for wearing bouquets on her shoulders, like epaulets, instead of on the bosom, where most women are fond of wearing them. I knew before she spoke that something had transpired to please her, for she had a trick of pretending to look abstractedly into space when she wished to conceal any pleasurable emotion.

Therefore, when she said, looking off into space, and pinning on her epaulet at the same time, "Have you any families of rank in the neighborhood, Portia? I imagine that I have just met a very agreeable young nobleman. A most perfect gentleman, at all events; for, seeing in me a frenzy over the exhibition furnished by Hairpins and a huge mastiff engaged in a street fight, he laid hands upon the mastiff and choked him quite dead, restoring Hairpins to me unharmed. Then, with the most distinguished bow I ever witnessed, he took the path through the woods and disappeared,"—I knew something had happened to please her.

"Is that him, dear?" I inquired, indicating by a gesture a figure approaching us through the garden gate. Bess flushed to the roots of her hair as Doctor Alvord approached; and, raising my hand to his lips, a ceremony he invariably performed on his visits to me, irrespective of who was present, he looked up inquiringly at Bess, awaiting an introduction; whilst I, spiteful thing, merely said, "Bessie dear, this is the doctor."

I saw that she was taken completely by surprise, for none of us had been looking for Doctor Alvord before the morning train. He, however, after his usual manner of restoring young ladies to sense and reason, beamed

upon Bess such a look of admiration from his splendid eyes that she awoke at once to the delightful consciousness of being dressed with uncommon elegance, and repaid the look bestowed upon her with interest. Bessie's face seemed more like that of the lovely Madonna, than of the artful minx she really was.

"I never was more tired in my life," said the doctor, as, entering the library, he drew me beside him on a sofa, and, laying his head on my lap, stretched his feet over the arm of the sofa and closed his eyes, indicating thereby that he wished his head fussed with, that he might take a nap. It was pure ignorance in me, this submission to unwarranted liberties on the part of my fiancé. I fussed with his head, and smoothed the thick locks about his forehead, just because I thought it was the proper thing to do, after the most approved fashion of all engaged lovers. It is true I feel sometimes like rebelling, and changing my situation of abject slavery to one of imperious command, ordering Doctor Alvord to sit in an erect posture, and both entertain and caress me for awhile. But when these little angry waves of impatience sweep over me, they are met by the sober reflection that the doctor's profession is an intensely wearing one, physically as well as mentally; and that any little attention I may bestow which tends in the least to soothe his weary spirits or refresh his physical being is an act of charity, as well as a manifest duty I owe the man whom I expect to comfort through life.

The spectacle that presents itself to my mind's eye occasionally, of a whole lifetime in prospective surrendered to the occupation of head-tickling and head-chafing, is not particularly captivating to a young woman of my age; but I fervently pray that the doctor may grow weary ere long of my services in this capacity, and that he may

discover another and less monotonous field of operations, that may prove useful to himself and at the same time agreeable to me.

Well, as I said, the doctor had just closed his eyes, when Bess rapped at the door. The doctor jumped up in haste, as Bess, entering the room, begged us to excuse her for the interruption, as she wished to get the second volume of "*Villa on the Rhine*," after which she would leave us to our own devices. I saw Doctor Alvord's eyes follow her graceful figure as it glided along in the direction of the library; and I was surprised and not altogether pleased when he offered to reach the book down from its shelf, seeming to see, in flattering Bessie's beauty, attractions superior to those he had but a moment before settled himself to enjoy.

"You like Auerbach?" he said, looking straight into Bessie's blue eyes. "I should imagine that a young lady of the present day would hardly waste her time over such stupid scenes as Auerbach describes in his works, all about German country life, goatherds, shepherdesses, and the like."

"Auerbach is one of my favorite authors," replied Bess, with a ready lie, considering it altogether the thing to admire in any author that which men suppose women to be unable to appreciate or comprehend. "Irma's journal, in '*On the Heights*,' I admire above all things."

"You do?" said the doctor, with that look which seemed to say, "Your beauty far exceeds that of Irma herself, and you would be equal to the task of preparing a far more interesting work than Irma's journal;" but he only said, "I am glad you like it; we shall be friends, for the reading of Auerbach's novels is my only dissipation."

Now, whilst I sat there in an abstracted mood, listen-

ing to them talk, and expecting the doctor to resume his Turkish prerogative every moment, I recalled an expression of impatience that had escaped Bess that very morning as she was reading Irma's journal. It was so inconsistent with what she was saying that I rolled it over in my mind while Bess was talking.

"Bah!" she had said to me an hour before, "why do you keep such trash as this in your library? Tedious is no name for it! This insufferable Irma, with her disgusting little 'pitch man,' and her pretended admiration for steep hills and goat's milk; she ought to have made the king run away with her, and, after securing his crown, pick the jewels out of it and have them reset into countless necklaces and bracelets! Then when he became tired of her, as he inevitably would after living with her a month or two, she could have opened the front door and bid him begone!"

What a contrast! Here she was with her eyes rolled up sentimentally and growing eloquent over the beauties of Irma's character. I almost exploded as I looked at her. As Doctor Alvord reached up to the shelves and took down book after book, upon the varied contents of which they descanted largely, I felt that in this fortunate absorption of my lover and guest I might effect my own escape; so arising noiselessly from the sofa, I slipped out of the room. But I had only closed the door after me when it was jerked open again, and Doctor Alvord, with a smile, drew me back into the room again, saying, "Not so fast, my pretty one." Back again to the sofa we went, where, after arranging his limbs again into an elegant negligé, he whispered almost inaudibly, as though borne down with physical weakness, "Tickle my left temple, Portia; I watched with a sick child last night and have a slight headache," then resolutely closed his

eyes, and steadfastly kept them closed, until an unmistakable gurgling sound in his throat suggested to me that it was barely among the possibilities that a handsomely bewhiskered throat might, with the assistance of those faultless lips, perpetrate a vulgar snore.

Feeling all the horrors of an incipient disenchantment possess me, I coughed loud and long; whereupon he arose, shook himself apparently in the best humor, and, lighting a cigar, stole off to the stables, without volunteering even an "I thank you."

An hour afterwards, when I went in search of Bess for luncheon, I found them together, making shoulder and button-hole bouquets of my choice tea-roses. A feeling came over me that Bess was being trifled with. But I comforted myself with the thought that I had performed my duty religiously when I gave her the admonition which appears in the opening chapter of this book. And, too, Bess has seen far more of the world than I have, so she will not be likely to waste any genuine ammunition on a man so soon to commit matrimony with her friend Portia. Thus well assured, I called the twain in-doors, where we all made merry over our cozy luncheon of biscuit and tongue, peaches and cream, lady-fingers, and the loftiest of mountain-ice cakes. I put away a cup of the nicest cream, together with a delicious little lunch, for papa to eat to-night when he comes home late. He never gets home now before ten or eleven o'clock, and eats his supper in town. I always sit up for him, and see that his gown and slippers are warmed in advance of his coming. Then I pour his tea, and he tells me of things that have happened at the Hollybrook works; and occasionally he takes a peep up into the heart of the great city, and his descriptions of things and persons he sees when there are so entertaining, that I often lie awake for hours after-

wards trying to imagine myself a resident of London, with its ever-varying sights to attract the eye, and its busy noise to gratify the industrious ear and break the monotony of an uneventful life.

CHAPTER III.

I THINK I have never described my home and my father; and as they are of concern to the present, it is eminently fitting that I devote one of my chapters to a description of them.

First, papa is as fine a looking man as one would pick out of five hundred who tread the streets of great cities. I do not trust alone to my own bias when I say this, for many others have told me so. And as for his mind, it must be a well-filled store-house, else the rector, with his every Sabbath afternoon visit to Loch Severn, would have long since exhausted its intellectual resources. Indeed, for the past fourteen years, as far back as I can go in memory, Doctor Martyn, the rector, has passed his Sabbath afternoons regularly with papa, coming in at the little garden gate immediately after luncheon, and remaining to tea; and this mutual interchange of views upon all subjects could not fail to be of profit to both of them.

Loch Severn is built after the Elizabethan plan, with large, airy rooms and wide window-seats, with scarce a window in its whole structure but that one might say of it who sat therein, "What perfect scenery! what a restful, winsome nook!"

We had no portrait-gallery, for our ancestry was neither

numerous nor conspicuous on my father's side. And on my mother's—well, into that sacred and charmed circle of knights and baronets neither my papa nor myself ever dared to intrude; nor, indeed, had we any disposition to do so. Mamma, my beautiful, angel mamma, ran off and married papa, and that is how they came to get married; for had old Dudley Montague appeared on the scene just one moment sooner than he did, he would have shot both groom and clergyman and have borne his daughter (my mother) back on his prancing steed to North Ardenham, the home of her birth. As a consequence of this, you must know, this book would never have been written, and you would never have become acquainted with either Bess Gilbert or Doctor Alvord. Our servants are few, but, as time has proven, well chosen; for in the nineteen years of my life we have seen no changes here, save what death wrought for us by carrying off Miles, the gardener; and Humphreys, his son, grew as it were from childhood with no other thought than to one day fill the niche made vacant by his father. Mrs. Jessop, the housekeeper, has her peculiarities, some of which are annoying to me. One in particular I may name, as it consists in her persistent indulgence of the thought that she is in some way responsible for my moral training. And the question as to whether I shall one day be a spirit doomed to roam the world in restlessness, or ascend to the highest seat in the future kingdom, would seem to depend largely for a satisfactory answer on the number of chapters in the Bible she reads to me daily, together with the prayers she offers up in the secret recesses of her closet. Secret, did I say? No one would for a moment suspect there was anything secret about it; for as it directly adjoins my sleeping-apartment, I can hear issuing therefrom, at almost any hour of the night, my name

shouted in tones of the utmost vehemence, midst groanings unutterable and sobs most heart-rending. I am used to it now, but have often thought that if Mrs. Jessop spent half the time on her knees in prayer for her own soul that she agonizes for mine, she would have long since ascended in a chariot of flame, and have been translated to the realms of everlasting bliss.

I am by no means satisfied with my own attainments in the matter of religion. Yet I read my Bible daily, and strive to collect my thoughts every time I pray that I may be certain I use no disrespectful language to the Almighty, nor bring into his presence a heart filled with malice, or envy, or strife towards my fellow-beings. I would as soon think of screaming at papa at the table to hand me the bread or replenish my plate with chicken as to howl forth my wants to the All-Seeing and Ever-Present, as does Mrs. Jessop. And if I walk out, she seems to be in constant dread lest some tottering church-steeple may be waiting to topple over and crush me. When I ride out she watches uneasily behind the blinds, expecting me to return a mangled corpse, with my infidel soul given back to him who gave it. When I go fishing, she bids Teenie leave me not a moment, lest I fall into the stream, scarce deep enough to float a trout, and be brought home a dripping, seaweedy victim to the imaginary waves. Do not I know that I am taken care of by him who notices even the fall of the sparrow? Wherefore need I fear?

"Miss Portia," said Jessop this morning, solemnly, as I came in from the garden hanging on the doctor's arm, and, carrying my garden-hat full of peaches, deposited them on the lunch-table. "Miss Portia, I fear you are too happy. Something always happens when people forget their Maker, as you are doing daily."

"But I am not in such a perpetual state of ecstasy as

you suppose, Mrs. Jessop," I replied; "besides that, I do think of my Maker."

"Has your mind dwelt on this morning's text, child, concerning the 'Pestilence which walketh in darkness, and the arrow which flyeth at noon-day'?"

I made no answer, for just then I espied in the hall the figures of my two guests, who were engaged in conversation. And I overheard Doctor Alvord praise Bess in very warm terms for a ballad which I myself had sung that morning before he, or, as I supposed, any one was up and about. It is a fancy of mine to keep carefully concealed from Doctor Alvord the fact that I have both an ear for music and a voice for song, until after we are married and settled down in our new home. It is my purpose then to burst upon him with my accomplishments, chief among which is my voice that is daily receiving strength and culture at the hands of Boreneo, the famous London tenor, who gives me a lesson three times a week.

Well, when I heard Doctor Alvord praising the exquisite tones he had heard accompanying "Blau von Augen weiss von Stirne," ascribing them all to Bess; and when I remembered the tin-panny character of that young lady's voice, I could hardly restrain myself from breaking out into a prolonged roar, but controlled myself, remembering that she was my guest. What was my surprise, however, at hearing her reply, in tones which she endeavored to render as flute-like as possible, "You like the German music, then? Another mark of congeniality between us. I am glad you heard me sing, if it pleased you, for the professor has expressly forbidden my singing another note while the wretched condition of my throat continues. I was betrayed into a little burst of song by the beauty of the morning; and one bird in particular, seated

on my window-sill, challenged me in a manner that was not to be resisted."

Bess lowered her tones in saying this, as she perceived I was listening, but I heard every word she said. And after the doctor had whispered some compliments, which I knew carried with them a reproach of the imaginary bird as compared with the charming voice he had heard that morning, they separated, he going up-stairs to his room and Bess coming towards me in the dining-room.

"How could you tell that hateful story, Bess?" I asked, looking her straight in the eyes, while contempt and indignation were struggling in my breast.

"Story!" she exclaimed. "Did you not tell me on no account to allow it to leak out that you had a voice? I supposed I was serving you to your entire satisfaction; and here, the very moment an opportunity offers whereby I can prove my willingness to aid you in keeping your secret, you fire up as though I had done you an injury, and straightway denounce me as a story-teller!"

I confess I was greatly overcome at Bessie's assurance in casting all the burden of the falsehood on my shoulders; especially as she spoke with great warmth and displayed the shadow of a dimple in the corner of her mouth, while her left eyebrow manifested an upward inclination. I never can command any good answers to make to people who try to hoodwink and impose upon me, until the opportunity for doing so is past; then I can think of a thousand crushing things to say. I was not a tittle quicker with my wits on this occasion than I usually am; so I only went on staring at Bess and piling up peaches in the fruit-basket, whilst she, after having her say, moved gracefully off, calling Hairpins as she went.

A cruel wish entered my heart as I saw her graceful figure glide down the garden-path. I wish she would fall

in love with him, I thought; for her terrible agony at not being able to get him would more than balance accounts for the impertinence and snubs she heaps upon me.

CHAPTER IV.

THERE has so little occurred this week that I have doubts about my chapter being of any great length.

Papa gave me *carte blanche* to get what I pleased; and, although my extravagance has been the means of adding an extra prayer and innumerable groans to Jessop's already lengthy exercises, yet I find that I have not nearly all the things I shall need, for of course I must provide for city, not country, life. Doctor Alvord speaks of two very delightful families with whom he is intimate, and tells me they are impatient to make my acquaintance. One of these families I have often heard of before, and I had no difficulty in finding in the "Baronetage" the name of Mortimer Hays, Bart.

The doctor says that Miss Olive Hays is about my age, and that she is prepared to fall in love with me at once. I am proud of nothing except my voice; and if I am expected to show off to advantage, I certainly will astonish somebody, for Signor Boreneo says I acquire something new and original every lesson I recite. His impulsive foreign ways are very amusing to me, indeed. He often acts, after I have executed a trill to please him, as though he thought nothing in this world was quite good enough for me. When he enters the room, and before giving me a lesson, his manner justifies me in thinking that he inwardly longs to remove the shoes

from off his feet at the hall door, lest their squeaking propensities may jar upon my ear, thereby affecting the tones of my voice.

Bess and I went to Winsted to-day to make some more purchases. We are quite good friends again, and this, I am sure, is due to Bessie's amiable disposition; for although I usually detest any one who is guilty of deceit and falsehood, yet I find myself forgetting that Bessie has ever practiced the one or resorted to the other.

Only three more weeks are left out of the six that remained when I first began to write. We have not decided yet whither we shall hie ourselves for a wedding trip. I should love above all things to go to Germany. I suppose it is because I know more of the language of that country than of any other. A sea-voyage, too; how charming it would be! Papa has some surprise in store for me by way of a gift. I know this, for I overheard Mrs. Jessop say to him yesterday, "I think, James,"—she always calls papa "James,"—"I think the child has already too many things to keep her in a state of worldly-mindedness without those suggestions of the Evil One."

"Suggestions of the Evil One!" That means something very nice, I know; for the more nearly things resemble his Satanic Majesty in the opinion of Mrs. Jessop, the more nearly do they approach what is perfect in my sinful estimation. Sinful? No, I cannot think so. Shall the devil have everything that is beautiful and lovely, and only those things that are hideous and unseemly belong to the gifts of a kind Benefactor?

Yesterday I went out to gather autumn leaves. Bess had a headache and stayed at home, so I was obliged to go alone. I secured some beautiful boughs, and on my way home stopped for Sallie Carter, and we have had Teenie pressing forest leaves and fern almost ever since,

while we converted them into wreaths and bouquets with which to decorate the pictures. Some branches of the smoke-tree, too, we mixed in, and festooned the wall from one end to the other in the library. I never saw anything look half so lovely.

CHAPTER V.

ONLY a week remains now before I change my name. Doctor Alvord has been here all the week. It is true I have seen but very little of him, being so engaged with my various arrangements that Bess has done all the entertaining. They went to Winsted after breakfast, so I shall have a good long morning in which to write up the week.

The same thing has occurred over and over again,—trying on dresses and boots innumerable, fancy jackets, and lovely-tinted ties. My trunks are a marvel of neatness in their packing, and bear testimony to the skillful manipulation of Mrs. Jessop. It is quite the fashion now to have one's dresses button up behind. Mrs. Jessop mortified me extremely before Sallie Carter this morning, by wanting to know what use a married lady expected to make of dresses all buttoned up behind. I didn't in the least understand her, until Sallie burst out into one of her shrieks, and, clapping her hands to her head, rocked back and forth, gibbering something about Mrs. Jessop's wisdom and forethought in anticipating the difficulties I would be likely to encounter a year hence in trying to make a fashionable young lady's wardrobe subserve the purposes of motherhood.

Not a day has passed this week but I have received

some kind token of love, or some message, from my friends in the village.

The servants all have a very mysterious time of it, I think, dodging about and trying to avoid me. I presume they too have a surprise in store for me. How can I ever be sufficiently grateful for the kind friends who have been raised up, as it were, to take the place of my sainted mother, who was early taken away from me?

I had only proceeded thus far when the sound of wheels attracted my attention, and, looking out, who should I see but Bess and Doctor Alvord returning from Winsted, and accompanied by a gentleman stranger. Bess was chatting in her gayest manner, and, as the carriage passed under the porch, she alighted and came flying up-stairs two steps at a time, her face all aglow with news.

"Put up your pen, you silly thing," she said, "and come make the acquaintance of your new relative."

"What?" said I, staring idiotically at her, and realizing for the first time that a change in my name necessarily involved a change in my family relations. "Who is it?" I at length asked nervously, shaking out my dress, the economy of whose neatness had been somewhat disturbed by the posture I had assumed while writing. It may be a reprehensible habit, and not strictly in accordance with the rules of decorum, but I always sit on my foot when I am alone, whether it be in church or any place where my pedal extremities are not expected to be called soon into requisition; and so perfect have I become through practice, that I may withdraw foot number one when the position grows painful and substitute foot number two, with apparently no more labor than that required for the arrangement of my train. Bess would have been horrified had she known what I had been doing. When I said "What?" a painful shudder stole over me,

as I imagined my foot was caught in my hoops; so to gain time I drawled my interrogatory somewhat after this fashion,—*"W-h-a-t?"* She, however, suddenly turned again to the door, and there stood Doctor Alvord and his brother.

"Allow me," said the former, stepping forward, closely followed by the stranger. "This is my brother, Doctor Edwin Alvord, who wields the dissecting-knife with far more dexterity than your humble servant; and as for pills, my dear, he prescribes two doses of calomel where I prescribe one."

The brother smiled gravely, as though he was not altogether unprepared for the novel introduction just given; whilst I, taken at so great a disadvantage, and feeling very like a one-legged duck, responded to the hand extended towards me in token of brotherly love by holding on to the back of the chair upon which I had been sitting and violently kicking out behind, after the manner of a restive horse. This performance, though not graceful, was certainly mysterious; and being my only alternative to that of pitching forward on my face, I considered it the most expedient. I was not disappointed with the result; for, although I was obliged to encounter the doctor's look of inquiry, his brother's serious expression of surprise, and Bessie's air of blank amazement, all these were as nothing to the state of utter confusion and consternation into which the whole party would have been thrown had I steadfastly adhered to my resolution not to betray the habit into which I had fallen, and tumbled forward on my face with my foot entangled in my skeleton.

I always try to do my very best under all circumstances, so I composed myself, and quietly allowed my hand to take, rather than be taken by, that of my expectant brother-in-law. I was conscious of being looked at

steadily, and with a vast deal of interest, by the stranger, but I returned the look, saying that I hoped my singular behavior had not wrought the conviction in his soul that I was a fit subject for a very elaborate prescription, at which they all laughed good-naturedly.

I perceived at once that the only point of resemblance between the brothers was the smile, which, though almost settled into a perpetual expression on the face of my doctor, seemed almost a stranger to the face of his brother, for he became suddenly grave, almost cold, as though he scorned the thought that he had been led to indulge a pleasantry in an affair so trivial.

Charles Alvord, my fiancé, continued smiling all over his handsome face, as though he had but just been let into the secret of the joke, and enjoyed it hugely.

My next thought was: I wonder if it is customary for the relation of an expectant groom to arrive a week before the ceremony? and simultaneously came the thought, whether or not the oak chamber was prepared.

This question bid fair to be answered speedily, for the doctor, turning to me, asked whether I could accommodate so much medicine with lodging for the night; that his brother was tarrying a day at Winsted, and had run over to make the acquaintance of his new sister and enjoy the hospitalities of her roof one night. I replied, "Of course," with as much cordiality as I could under the circumstances; and, feeling myself about to blush at thought of the nearness of our future relations, I said "Of course" with a boldness that almost frightened me. I hurriedly sped out of the room and down-stairs in search of Mrs. Jessop.

Replacing my rumpled gown with a fresh dotted, blue muslin, soon to be a relic of my young ladyhood, I shortly after slipped into the oak chamber to see if everything

looked bright and cheerful, as befitted the place where my respected relative was to rest his weary limbs for the night. Seeing a ponderous copy of the Bible lying on the little stand, the streamers from a huge book-mark floating therefrom, I removed it, and put in its place a book of Psalms, large print, and my prettiest Prayer-Book. Then I raised one of the large windows, which Mrs. Jessop studiously kept closed against the dust and flies, and a current of pure, fresh air entered the room, laden with the breath of the heliotrope-vine that clambered beneath the window. The fading sunlight, too, gilded the grand old chamber, until I experienced a feeling of pride at the thought that Doctor Edwin Alvord could not fail to see that I lived well, and that, no matter how superior his or his brother's home might be in point of luxuriousness, it could hardly have an appearance of more substantial grandeur, and all-time prosperity, than my own dear home exhibited.

After tea we strolled about the grounds, looked in upon the garden, made a few bouquets, which Bess and Doctor Charles took the greatest interest in seeing well bestowed on shoulder and in button-hole.

Doctor Edwin found a pansy on a mound, surrounded by pusley, and a sprig or two of cypress. Stooping down and plucking it at the roots, he handed it over to me with a queer expression, saying, "That bed of treachery and death is no place for a flower so innocent as this. Pray protect it, Miss Severn." I took the flower he offered me, but became afterwards so absorbed in talking of other things that I unconsciously twisted the head off my pansy, observing which, I threw the stem away. Doctor Edwin stooped again the second time, and, picking up the poor, broken flower, opened his note-book and pressed it between two fresh leaves, remarking, "It

always seemed strange to me that people have no other feeling for flowers than the sense of pleasure they derive from their beauty and perfume. They always inspire me somehow," he continued, "with a feeling of pity, giving everything as they do and receiving nothing in return. A dead or dying flower always fills me with sadness. This one's fate seems to have been particularly unfortunate, for it was begotten in an atmosphere of death and blossomed in the midst of rank treachery. Then, when I would have rescued it by giving it to a fair young lady, who might have gladdened its remaining days by placing it in a stem-glass of fresh water, and renewing the attention daily, until, by tender care and nourishment its sweet breath filled the air, she, who might have been its savior, assumes the rôle of executioner, and without either thought or feeling leaves her victim dying upon the ground."

"What plant do you call treacherous?" I asked, feeling, in spite of the ridiculous ideas just advanced, that one's sympathies might be aroused for even a floweret, if they were only appealed to with the eloquence of Doctor Edwin.

"And have you never heard," he said, "the story of the Pusley. There was once a great king, who became so dissatisfied with his kingdom and subjects that he journeyed into a far country, that he might the better discover from among other sovereigns, whose reign had proved successful, the best means whereby he could bring peace and contentment into his own domains. In one kingdom he made the acquaintance of a princess of rare beauty, and felt that he would be supremely happy and contented if he could but obtain her hand in marriage. He sued for her, and not in vain, for shortly afterwards they were betrothed; and a spirit of tranquillity came

over him as he contemplated the love he had gained. His feelings were so much absorbed in self that he thought but little of his subjects or his kingdom; and he flattered himself that discontent had crept within his borders from no lack of good subjects or proper management on his part, but because of an irrepressible longing of his nature for something which the deep devotion and self-abnegation this beautiful princess laid at his shrine completely satisfied.

"Before the nuptials, a sister of the waiting bride came home from her studies; and, although she possessed not a tithe of the exquisite beauty belonging to the princess, she had a nameless, subtile power, which made all persons bend to her, and ere long the king became her slave. Where this power came from no one could divine. She seemed to be a sprightly, amiable, gay young princess, without a thought of her own charms. On the contrary, she was often heard to say, 'I am ugly, I know it, and I don't care.' This seemingly low estimate she had of herself divested her of all shadow of vanity and made people think her what she was not, for a vainer or more perfidious little entity never drew breath than Pusley. Look at her," said Doctor Edwin, pointing to a flower-bed; "see how unassuming, how fresh and green her leaves spread out, but her tendrils are dyed in blood. See," he said again, lifting up a long, trailing vine and exhibiting the stems concealed beneath the leaves; "nothing but blood, blood, blood. Well, she made up her mind that her sister should not marry the elegant young king. It was entirely too bad that Ivy, who had beauty and various accomplishments which she did not possess, should secure the young king; so she set to work with a will, and succeeded in supplanting her sister."

Here Doctor Edwin paused, and called my attention to

the exquisite bud and leaf that his brother was handing to Bess near by.

"I dare say," he continued, "your friend will not cast away that bud as you did the sweet pansy I gave you a moment ago."

"Go on," I said, so absorbed was I in the story which remained unfinished, unheeding, too, the fond looks that were passing between my friend and fiancé. "Go on!" I cried, rather impatiently, and somewhat rudely, as Doctor Edwin continued watching the retreating figures of the doctor and Bess.

"Well," said he, suddenly, his eyes fairly glistening from beneath their heavy brows, "there is nothing more to tell. Pusley has crowded her sister out into the cold, and, whenever you see her namesake," pointing to the flower-bed again, "you will find that she is still at her old tricks. She first springs up beside her relative the Myrtle, then the Dew-plant. The gardener says to himself, 'It is a harmless little shoot, which sunlight will soon kill;' but it is not long before Pusley gains the affections of all around her in the flower-bed, and so insinuating is she that often she causes separations between the flowerets, now shooting up between the Daisy and its family, scattering them here and there; anon rending asunder the amorous vine from its hold on the lichenized stump, and causing the feeble tendrils put forth at night to lie a scorched and withered tangle ere the sun declines. Tell me," continued Doctor Edwin, starting, and looking at me as if he would penetrate my very soul; "do you love my brother, or are you an——?"

I thought he was going to say "idiot." Indeed, I almost know now that he was; for with an effort he restrained himself, and laughing aloud in a strangely forced manner, he took hold of my arm and hurried me to the

door of the summer-house, where Doctor Charles lay on a bench, apparently asleep, with his feet resting upon a chair. Near the other door, with vines falling down on her exquisitely-shaped head of soft, brown hair, sat Bess. Could I believe my eyes? She seemed to be dozing, too, a flushed, uneasy-looking slumberer, a sleeper that a breath, it seemed, might awaken. Her eyelids quivered in a nervous and most unaccountable manner, and her fingers trembled to their very taper ends. I turned at once, and fled into the house; and it was that very evening Doctor Charles told me that he no longer loved me.

The week is up, and I scarcely know how I shall be able to write this chapter; I, who was so full of pride and conceit as to think that no other woman could possibly come between me and my affianced.

What had I done, though, that such an indignity should be put upon me,—I, who never harmed a fly? It is with difficulty that I can bring myself to the humiliating task of telling you all the circumstances of my history. Would that I might leave out this chapter! would that I might blot out all the succeeding chapters of my life and go and commune with the dead! But I have promised all of my history, and I shall not shrink from the performance of a duty, however unpleasant and distasteful it may be to me.

The events I have just related transpired on Wednesday evening, and the following Tuesday was to be my wedding-day. When I sped with the wings of the wind into the house, and up the stairs to my room, but one sound seemed to pursue me, but one name filled my ears,—Pusley. Bess, then, was that artful princess who stole from poor Ivy the heart of the king. Fool that I was to be so wrapped up in my own conceit as to blindly suffer such a thing to come to pass! I dug my hands into my

flesh; I tore wildly at the collar encircling my throat, that I might get air to breathe! Fool, idiot indeed, to permit the spell to be broken before my very eyes, and myself to be made game of by Bess, to gratify her humor of downright fiendishness. But it shall not be! I resolved to make him marry me in spite of all. I would torture his life out with reproach and abuse after we were wedded. I would make him pay dearly for his cruel trifling with a tender girl's affections. Bess loved him; it would kill her to lose him. Give him up? No, no; that I shall never do!

How long I thus communed with myself I cannot say. But dinner was announced, and Mrs. Jessop, vainly endeavoring to get into the room, bade Teenie enter by fair means or foul. Accordingly, when I saw Teenie's head appearing above the transom, I knew that I had been diligently sought after, else Teenie never would have dared my displeasure by intruding upon me so. Dropping my hair over my face, I flew to the door and opened it, bidding Teenie hurry and dress me, as it was late, and affecting to have overslept myself. Perhaps after all, I whispered to myself, I am only jealous. Why should I be apprehensive of Bess? She is not nearly so handsome or bright as Sallie Carter or Amelia Barton, and yet I was never jealous of them.

This last thought gave me courage, and, urging Teenie to dress me with all speed, I inquired if papa was home yet, if Miss Gilbert was in the drawing-room, if—I know not what all I asked. But Teenie, I remember, said that papa was there, dressed and waiting for dinner. I caught up my bright braids with a sort of careless care. I pinched my pale cheeks until I left cruel marks all over them. I bit my under-lip until it bled. And was I the serene creature of less than half a day since? Were

those eyes mine that, viewed in the mirror, shot out devilish flashes from their bursting orbs? I felt that my whole being was up and in arms. I had no idea of the power within me. Ah! I was about to do battle in defense of my pride, my dignity, my injured love. Love? Alas! I cannot say if it were love; for in those moments of torture I wondered why I felt no pang of wounded love. I wondered why my heart did not reach out to Doctor Alvord and utter a great cry of sorrow at the contemplation of losing him. The blow to my pride was a heavy one indeed, almost too much for me to bear; but where was the sense of loss which I ought to have experienced at the thought of having one beloved torn from me? The reed was indeed bruised, but not broken!

I hastened down-stairs, but when I reached the door of the drawing-room I held the knob in my hand nearly a minute before daring to enter. Well do I remember the picture that presented itself to me then and there: Bess and Doctor Edwin playing at draughts; papa reading the evening paper; and Doctor Charles sitting with his head thrown back, apparently counting the moments until I should break the tedious monotony of the scene.

As I entered noiselessly and took a seat beside my affianced, he gave a start which almost unbalanced him. "Portia!" he exclaimed. "Why," laughed I, "one would suppose I had been on a voyage to the moon, to see you so surprised at my sudden arrival."

Neither Bess nor Doctor Edwin looked up from their game, and even papa only glanced at us over the top of his paper, and immediately resumed his reading. Just then dinner was announced, and we all went out. I rejoiced to see that the doctor's eye never once sought Bessie's, and my spirits arose accordingly. Fool that I was not to know that this very inattention was the perfection

of studied art, and that beneath the apparent indifference slumbered a furious volcano of feeling that would soon burst forth and destroy everything within its reach!

After dinner, papa went to his study, Bess complained of headache (heartache?) and retired, whilst Doctor Edwin appeared with his traveling-bag, saying that he was about to leave on the down train, and would bid us all adieu "until the following Tuesday."

No sooner were we well settled in the drawing-room, the doctor and I, for our evening *tête-à-tête*, than he came close to me, raised my hand to his lips, and began: "Portia," he said, his face assuming a shade of paleness I had never seen there before,—“Portia, I have found that you do not, and never can, supply all the needs of my soul. You do not love me as I wish to be loved.”

"What is wrong?" asked I, calmly. "Am I not slave enough already to your caprices? Have you discovered an unexplored apartment in your temple which my diligence and industry have failed to reach? Or are the locks on your massive forehead beginning to feel no further need of gentle manipulation at my hands?"

"You jest," he said, impatiently. "Try to understand that your love does not satisfy me. Try to believe that Portia Severn and Charles Alvord must always remain two distinct individuals, and can never be united."

"Say rather," said I, flinging a bitter look at him, "that you have ceased to love Portia Severn, and blame your own inconstancy for it! Yet know you that I do not give you up. I value my dignity and personal character too highly ever to suffer them to be made the toys of a fickle man's fancy; and, knowing that you have ceased to love me, I still insist that our engagement stand, and that our marriage take place next Tuesday."

I waited in almost breathless silence, expecting him to ask my pardon for what had occurred, and make some demonstration toward a reconciliation. I did not look up, but felt, rather than saw, his eyes resting upon me. At length he said,—

"I was prepared for anything but this. Am I to understand that you, in spite of the knowledge that I do not love you, insist upon holding me to an engagement which cannot but be distasteful to me? Is it because you still love me, and hope to win me at some future day, that you refuse to give me up?"

"Love you? No!" I answered. "So far from loving you, I utterly detest you. Nevertheless, I insist upon your fulfilling the engagement."

"Is it possible," he said again, excitedly, "that you, a woman of character, of pride, of *virtue*, wish to join in such a hollow mockery? I now have no hesitation in saying that which a moment ago I would fain have spared you, had you confessed that your motive in holding me was that which any pure woman might claim of a man who had proved himself unworthy of her love and regard; know, then, that, soulless as I may seem, I have too much honor to sit down to any such entertainment as the one to which you would invite me. Indifference on my part and hatred on yours would constitute a happy alliance indeed. I am aware that the blow to your pride will be a heavy one should it be known that I have played you false; but to hedge this, I propose that you release me at once and marry my brother, thus claiming all the distinguished honor that may attach to your discarding me. If you do not consent to this I shall leave your home to-night, never to return."

Could I believe my senses? Was Charles Alvord adding insult to injury by proposing to me a marriage with

his brother, whom, until to-day, I had never seen? Surely my brain must be turned.

"Charles," I said, and something in my tone must have moved him to strong pity, for, springing towards me, he threw himself upon his knees, crying, "Forgive me, Portia, I know not what spell is upon me!" "Charles," I repeated, in angry tones, "is it possible that you can so insult me and hope to go unpunished?" I arose hurriedly, and, going towards the bell, was about to summon a servant, when he rudely caught my hand, saying, "Bring your father in here and I shall escape by this window! Portia Severn, listen to me! I madly love your friend Bessie Gilbert! It is this love which has so altered me! I have known of it long, and fought against it bravely, but in vain! I told my brother of it when last I went home to Hollybrook. He, with his generous soul filled with infinite pity for you and the terrible position in which you are placed, offered to make you his wife, if thereby he might mitigate the pangs of your wounded pride. I know you are a desperate woman at this moment, else you would not have insisted upon our marriage under the circumstances. Think calmly! Would it not be far better to accept my brother's offer—my brother, one of nature's own true noblemen—than to bear the pity and endure the gossip and criticism of your village friends, in whose eyes a jilted woman is synonym for a disgraced one? Would it not be far better, I say, to marry my brother and trust in the future for happiness, than to wear the willow and forever move among your friends as it were under a ban? Tell me!" he demanded, still holding me at arm's length from the bell-rope and speaking rapidly.

There was so much plausibility in what he said, especially as he seemed determined to cast me off, that I had

to pause for a moment in order that I might fully realize my situation. All that he had said was too true. My trousseau, which had been such a labor to prepare; my presents; my congratulations, all seemed to say to me that marriage was necessary in order to save me from disgrace. Of what profit would life be to me after it was known that my lover had decamped, yes, deserted me, almost at the very altar? If I told them I had changed my mind about marrying, they never would believe me; but if I appeared to assert myself and should show preference by actually marrying another than Charles Alvord on the day I was expected to become his wife, though proving my fickleness, would it not at the same time save me from the bitter humiliation that otherwise must inevitably follow? If Charles Alvord, loving another and resolved upon deserting me, should consent, for the trifling consideration of my giving him up, to suffer all the mortification attached to the name of a discarded lover, and should proclaim that he had been jilted by me, had I not better accept the situation with gratitude, leaving all to the future, as had been suggested?

But again, what manner of man was this whom I was asked to marry? A man confessedly at the beck and call of a capricious brother, as shown by his readily consenting to marry whomsoever that whimsical brother saw fit to indicate. "And your brother?" I asked, trembling from head to foot with excitement and rage. "The Jack-in-a-pinch whom you call your brother, he is anxious for this arrangement?"

"Anxious is scarcely the word to apply to the part my brother desires to take in this affair. He is willing, Portia, and you must be content with that; for Edwin is not the man to run his head into the matrimonial noose without a thought of what he is doing. No, not even to

please his brother, or to stand between a woman and the jeers and scoffs of her sex. Rest assured, however, that you will never be overwhelmed with sentiment at his hands; for Edwin is a man sternly practical, and who attends strictly to business. Yet he would honor before the world any woman whom he married, should she prove herself willing to perform her duty."

As Charles Alvord ceased speaking, I moved mechanically toward the door, for the purpose of leaving him alone; but he again laid his hand upon me, which I longed to shake off, but had not the strength to do so.

"Stay!" he said. "I must have an answer to this question before I permit you to go from the room. Besides, as a protection to myself, I must exact a solemn promise from you that you will in no manner betray me to your father, and that you will inform me of your decision the moment it is made."

Too much overcome to resist him, and too undecided as yet with regard to the course I should take, I gave him the promise, and, groping my way to my room, I sat down on the first chair that stood in my way.

Wrapped in deep meditation, I felt as though I was no longer Portia Severn, nor did a glance at the mirror reassure me as to my identity. Who was that wild-looking woman, with fierce eyes and disheveled hair, who glared at me so madly from the mirror opposite? I hoped I was losing my mind. Why could not I grow ill, like women do in books when anything happens to disturb them and authors wish to enlist the sympathy of their readers in behalf of their heroine? Why is it that a woman is considered so much more an object of pity when her senses leave her and she raves in wild delirium, unconscious of her misery, than the one who fully realizes her condition and suffers a thousand deaths? Could mortal have suf-

fered more keenly than did Prometheus, as, chained to the rocks of Mount Caucasus, with his conscious senses about him, the vulture kept prodding at his ever-beating heart?

CHAPTER VI.

"Hist, child!" said my father, angrily. "This is contemptible conduct; it is, indeed, indecent. Do you mean to say that in one short week your mind has changed, and that you are ready to substitute another for the man who has been your affianced husband these six months or more?"

"I mean to say it, for it is indeed the truth," I replied, looking steadily at my father, yet feeling as though my brain was on fire and I was becoming insane. "Doctor Alvord disappoints me in many things; and, as we have talked the matter over together, he never would be satisfied to take me an unwilling wife. Therefore I think you had better accept the situation just as it is. I shall be marrying a Doctor Alvord after all, and I cannot see that it will be a matter of any special consequence to you whether I choose Alvord Senior, or Alvord Junior, so long as I am suited."

"But, child," cried my father, eying me curiously, "is it true that you are suited? If this man has been trifling with your affections and has instigated you to the course you are about to pursue, I will give him no rest, as there is a God in heaven, until I have avenged your honor and my dignity."

"Rest easy, papa," I said. "I would not marry Doctor Charles Alvord if all the wealth of the universe

were piled at his feet and he loved me with the devotion of a mother for her babe. Do not for a moment suppose that I am unwilling to marry Doctor Edwin Alvord. I have thought many times that the other one and I were unsuited to each other; and while I confess that I shall not be the happiest bride to-morrow the sun ever shone upon, yet I am certain I shall be an infinitely more contented one. No, no; please do not question me. Only believe that I am perfectly satisfied with this new arrangement."

"But, Portia," objected my father, his voice breathing tenderness, and his eyes filling with tears, "why need you leave me at all? I shall be lonely without you. Give up this caprice, or call it what you will, and allow me to tell Alvord to-night that you have altered your mind again, and that you do not intend to marry him."

I dared not trust myself to look at papa, lest I should burst into a flood of tears and betray all. I simulated a cheerful laugh, which cost me a year of my life I know, so racking was it to my nerves; and seeing papa move towards the door, as if to execute what he had just proposed, I playfully interposed my body between him and the door, saying, "Papa, will you believe me if I say that I was but jesting a moment ago when I told you I would be only contented as Doctor Edwin Alvord's wife, and that I love him passionately, and that it would kill me to have you separate us? What if I consented to marry your friend Charles Alvord because I thought it was your express wish? What if he knows that I have never loved him, and consents, if not cheerfully, at least willingly, to the change?"

"Portia," said my father, fondly pressing me to his breast; "I thank God, my child, for this timely intervention, that has opened your eyes to a mistaken sense of filial duty."

Putting me gently away from him, he went to his desk,

and, unlocking it, took out my mother's jewels, newly set. So rare and sparkling were the stones, that for a moment my eyes were dazzled so that I could not examine them. "These," continued my father, "belonged to your mother, who loved me well, and adorned my whole life with tenderest care and most heavenly devotion. Take them, for it is fitting that they belong to a daughter so nearly her counterpart. And let me pray that the same affection which fills your breast for your promised husband may bloom and blossom into the perfect flower."

I almost shrieked aloud in my agony of remorse as my father uttered these words. Did he know they were a curse and not a blessing? Was this irony? Did he know how I hated, yes, loathed, the man who, with neither passion in his heart to direct his choice nor hatred of another to force it, was marrying a woman out of pity, to help her out of a painful dilemma? No, he knew it not; for, after pressing me again and again to his noble, parental heart, my father left me, going, I well knew, to his study, where in the secret depths of his soul he might commune with his Lord and Friend, invoking a blessing upon the head of his daughter.

CHAPTER. VII.

ANOTHER week of horrible suspense and anxiety is passed.

The rector came and married me to Doctor Edwin Alvord, whilst Bess and Charles Alvord, Sallie Carter, Amelia Barton, Miss Sedgwick, and a number of my Winsted friends witnessed the ceremony.

I carried things with a high and mighty hand, laughing at the jests that were sportively offered in my presence, and studiously avoiding contact with my supposed discarded lover. It was generally believed, though none pretended to solve the mystery, that I had fallen desperately in love with my fiancé's brother at first sight, and that Edwin Alvord had persuaded his brother to give me up. Then there were rumors afloat that I had become jealous, without cause, of my guest Bess Gilbert, and that, Doctor Edwin falling in love with me, I sought to avenge myself on my quondam lover by marrying his brother.

I could see by the countenances of all that they regarded it at all events a tremendous sensation, and one which would not easily die out in the village where I was born. I told those of my intimate friends who felt at liberty to interrogate me to believe anything in the world save that I was an unwilling bride; and my gay and lively appearance certainly added confirmation to my words. Never in my life had I felt such a lifting up, as it were, and out of myself. I was another being. Ah! had I been myself, think you I could have acted that damnable lie at the altar? No! Portia Severn had the principles of truth too deeply implanted in her mind ever to lend herself a party to a life-long falsehood. I was another then than Portia Severn.

The morning of the wedding I had chosen as a suitable occasion on which to display my voice before Charles, and exhibit the deceit and falsehood of which the woman he now loved had been guilty. I selected, too, the identical German ballad which two weeks ago had been the subject of so many complimentary remarks directed to Bess.

"Sing, my child," said Signor Boreneo, with earnest-

ness. "The bride who sings on her wedding-day will be a happy one. Therefore do you sing your sweetest."

"My sweetest, signor," said I, with a smile, "could not approach the angelic warbling of my friend Miss Gilbert; ask her to sing 'Blau von Augen weiss von Stirne.'"

"You jest," said Signor Boreneo, looking up and espying a smile on my face, with a correspondingly embarrassed and dismayed expression on Bessie's countenance.

"Sing it, sing it," urged Charles Alvord, trying to lead Bessie to the piano, as if to spare me the embarrassment growing out of what he supposed to be my having no voice. "Miss Gilbert will sing it this once, I know," he continued, going up to Signor Boreneo, and trying to hinder him from forcing me, as he supposed, to the piano.

"I will try it," said I, thanking Charles Alvord for his interference in my behalf with a smile in which I vainly tried to conceal my triumph. And, seating myself at the piano, my voice poured forth such a flood of song as surprised even myself and turned every heart to melody. How proud I was of that voice, my cherished treasure, the idol that I almost daily worshiped on bended knees! Charles Alvord stood by the window almost petrified, every new strain thrilling his soul and causing him to take a step nearer to where I sat. "The sun shines forth, the buds are bursting," I sang as though the sun in my heart did really shine.

"Portia," he said, in a whisper, coming closely to where I sat, pouring out my very soul in song,—*"Portia,"* I again heard him whisper, "had I known of this before!"

"Portia," repeated I, mockingly, "*Selig sind die da Leid tragen!*" snapping my eyes at him in derision, while, for the benefit of the lookers-on, I beamed upon him

my sweetest smile, saying, in an ordinary tone, "Es ist nichts erbärmlicher in der Welt, als im unentschlossener reusch." Then taking the arm of my husband, I left the room.

"I shall not speak to him," I said to myself as, bidding my friends adieu, and observing the door of the carriage close, I sank back on the cushioned seat alone with my husband. "Though he urges me to talk, I shall not even reply. The craven creature, to move off with all that load of dignity in his bearing, and seat me, his wife, in a carriage, to carry to his home; me, the poor, miserable victim of two men's playful whims! He shall find that I, though a sacrifice, am not destitute of dignity." "Dignity of what?" a voice within me asked, almost so loudly that I looked up fearing he had heard it, too. I only met his calm, steady gaze fixed upon me; and as he moved forward, the better, as I supposed, to arrange some shawls for my comfort, I angrily pushed away his hand, and, forgetting my determination not to speak to him, I said, "Do me the favor to attend to your own affairs; my comfort or discomfort is a matter that concerns me alone!"

He took no notice of what I had said, but continued arranging the shawls and cushions, so that, as I supposed, I might quietly repose thereon at any time I saw fit.

"I hope," continued I, my eyes feeling as if big with daggers,— "I hope you have no more idea of claiming the privileges of a husband, even to the extent of busying yourself about my comfort, than I have of granting them."

Taking out his watch, he deliberately looked at the time, and replaced it in his fob pocket before replying.

"However that assumption may have obtained in your mind," he answered, "it certainly did not have its origin in any thought or act of mine; and I sincerely trust that

you will at once divest yourself of any notion which raises me to the dignity of an ogre and reduces you to the character of a martyr."

I felt well punished for my impertinence, and keenly did I feel how impotent was my wrath when, a moment afterwards, my husband settled himself in the cushions he had arranged with so much care, as I thought for my own special accommodation; and, drawing his hat over his eyes, manifested, by his indifference, how slight the inclination was on his part to recommend himself to my favor or remove a straw out of the way of my fixed determination to ignore him altogether.

I remember so well the maple-trees in the woods, as we passed along, so bright and gay with autumn tints. Then, glancing at the would-be sleeper, I thought what a spectacle he would present to the eyes of the company we had just left behind. The horrors of loneliness took possession of me as I found myself fast putting behind me old familiar scenes: the noisy brook, dashing its way through the wood where, with fishing-line and well-filled lunch-basket, I had whiled away whole days before my life had been rudely disturbed; the mossy glen where I had slept away many an afternoon, lulled to sleep by the drowsy hum of bees and the songs of birds; last, but not least, the village where my early school-days had been passed, the most delightfully memorable of my existence.

Leaving these certain scenes of pleasant memory for uncertain and uninviting scenes of the future, one happy thought occurred to me in the midst of my contemplations, that my husband had promised papa that I should continue with my music lessons, the same as though I was in my old home. Indeed, it was his own wish, as well as papa's, he being passionately fond of

music. As for me, I should have gone into ecstasies over the thought but for the reminder that by pursuing my musical studies I should be contributing continually to my husband's pleasure.

We reached, at length, the station, and, taking the train, sped onward toward the city; and in less than two hours after I left home I was again seated in a carriage beside my husband; whirling through the city's suburbs; here passing parks and monuments, there catching glimpses of melodious fountains, while my eyes dwelt upon the beautiful lawns and magnificent residences for which the suburbs of London are so famous. As we passed by Hollybrook market, and I noticed in the distance a huge building which I concluded must be the iron-works, I felt a chill creep over me as I thought we were nearing our home. Home! Did ever word sound so dismally in the ears of a newly-made bride as that simple word *home*! It passed through my heart like a poisoned arrow.

CHAPTER VIII.

As we whirled by a row of houses almost precisely alike, I thought how terrible it would be to have to live in one of them; and a sense of relief came over me when we passed the last one and the carriage had not stopped. Pretty soon we suddenly turned a corner, and the sight that presented itself to my view is one I shall never forget. It was a large square, lined on either side with splendid mansions, bay-windowed and turreted in an imposing style, and forming one grand square avenue, it seemed, of splendor and wealth indescribable. I saw then, what before had

been a mystery to me, how one could reside in the vicinity of the Hollybrook Iron-Works and still be an aristocrat.

This square was as completely cut off from the market-places, the long row of tenement houses, and the puffing, boisterous iron-works, as if it were a thousand miles removed. Not a sight of the busy scenes through which we had passed; not a sound to break the sublime silence in which these houses seemed to be wrapped, save the splashing of the fountain which occupied the centre of the square, and was its only ornament. It is true, far as the eye could reach, one might catch sight of busy forms treading the streets; of carts and cabs, drays, and even butcher-wagons; but everything was at so great a distance that it did not disturb the peace and quiet of Etheridge Square. Only here and there the figure of a gentleman or a lady, distinguished in bearing, might be seen tripping up the tall flights of steps leading to some mansion. Here and there a child's face peeped out from the window, or a servant came to the door in answer to a summons from the door-bell.

At one of these houses, to my surprise, the carriage drew up, and the sudden stopping of the horses almost unseated us. We alighted, and my husband, handing me up the steps, vigorously pulled the bell, after which he descended a step or two to receive the wraps and bags from the driver. A footman immediately responded to the door-bell, and, ushering us into a room so large and dreary looking that I almost fainted on the threshold, he rang at once a bell which summoned the housemaid, whom I was directed to follow. If I could only have put out my arms and buried my head in the housemaid's bosom, and there given vent to my feelings of dreadful homesickness; if I could have felt even that my husband would—what? Pity? No; I had realized enough of his

pity already. I contented myself with silently groaning in the travail of my heart.

As I noiselessly followed the housemaid through the immense parlors, gorgeous with paintings, and carpets whose roses seemed to bend beneath my feet, we came to a staircase, broad and tapestried, at the foot of which stood a marble figure holding a taper, which shot out a full jet of gas. Be it remembered that London is dark at three o'clock post meridian on autumn days; especially am I learning this to be the case at my home in Etheridge Square. At the upper landing there burst upon me an immense bay-window, pushed out, as it seemed, from the very mansion itself, and occupying space independent of any other belongings. Into this window I was conducted, and, a door being opened, I found myself in a chamber paneled and dressed in oak, just as our guest-chamber at Loch Severn was finished, except that the appointments of this one put to blush our old-fashioned, high-post bed and carved bureau; for, though the carving on the different articles of furniture disposed about the room in no way corresponded with the prevailing styles of imperfect upholstery, being massive and grand in the extreme, it nevertheless exhibited vastly more of *the stately* than was combined in what I had been taught by Mrs. Jessop to regard as infinitely lovely, and in every way equal to the class of furniture belonging to people of rank.

I stood a moment looking at myself in the tall, exquisitely-carved mirrors which reflected my image at almost every step I took, and did not perceive that the housemaid still remained standing, awaiting her dismissal. I hurried to the window to see what out-look I had therefrom; and as I did so, I caught the eye of my husband, who had just paid the driver, and, in returning

to the house, had glanced up at the window. I could scarcely repress the cry which arose to my lips, and involuntarily the words, "Take me back! oh, take me back!" escaped me, as, dropping in a seat beside the window, in terror at the sound of my own voice, I buried my face in my hands, and shed the first tears that had moistened my eyes since the evening that Charles Alvord discarded me.

The voice of the housemaid saying, "Dear lady, can I help you?" aroused me at length; and, motioning with my hand that I desired her to leave the room, I did not even tear off the jockey hat which I had selected with so much care, and to the becoming character of which all the girls had amply testified, but throwing myself across the foot of the bed, I lay as one in a trance for I know not how long, conscious, yet unable to stir.

Experiencing all the horrors of my situation,—shut up in a marble palace on Etheridge Square, with an unloved and unloving husband, a host of gaping, curious servants, and cut off from every association of my past life as completely as though I were indeed lying in my grave,—I felt as though I was gradually stiffening into ice. The sensation first appeared in my head, then down my body and limbs, until I felt as rigid as a lump of ice might feel were it possessed of animation. I have since discovered that this feeling was due altogether to nervousness, and that a warm cup of tea only was needed to restore me to my accustomed strength. This I received at the hands of a servant, the little housemaid, hours I should think after I so recklessly threw myself across the couch.

A message also came from my husband, inquiring whether I would dine below-stairs or in my room. "In my room," I repeated, at the same time inquiring of the housemaid her name. "Eliza, ma'am," she answered,

regarding me with such an expression of sympathy that I was tempted to claim her friendship at once ; but I only assumed a forbidding look, calculated to smother any further sympathy on her part, and, saying that I wished to be alone, I began sipping my tea mechanically, without taking further notice whether my wishes were regarded or not.

I awoke the next morning somewhat refreshed, having slept so soundly that the sun poured in great streams into my window, flooding the whole room with its brightness. Had it not been for this I might have continued sleeping until noonday, for aught there was else to disturb or arouse me. The noise of the fountain in the square outside was the only sound to be heard, and it was so tranquillizing in its ceaseless monotone that it must have lulled me to sleep, and might have kept me in slumber's embrace had not the brightness of the sun interfered to rob me of the repose I so much needed and of the oblivion I craved.

As I slipped into my slippers and stepped to the window, turning the Venetian blinds that I might look into the street below, I heard the front door close, and, a moment afterwards, observed Doctor Alvord take the opposite side of the street and walk down in the direction of where we turned off from Hollybrook. His head was slightly inclined forward, and I watched him as he passed two or three of the lonely but grand-looking mansions which lined the street opposite us, until, suddenly wheeling around, he retraced his steps, and, walking back hastily, I heard the hall door open and close again. My watch had run down, and I had nothing by which to tell the time of day. I tried to catch a glimpse of the sun, but, unacquainted with the situation of the house, I could not tell by the shadows which fell athwart the flagstones and

cast their mantle over a part of the fountain whether it was ten o'clock or later. I began to dress mechanically, however, and just as I had adjusted the tie of my morning-wrapper the housemaid appeared, and handed me a small scrap of paper sealed, and after delivering it into my hands she immediately left the room. As I opened it nervously these words met my gaze :

"I must insist upon your dining down-stairs to-day. My reputation as a physician and a gentleman forbids the thought that I can sustain the one or be worthy the other so long as a lady guest in my house excludes herself from the table, and receives her meals, at the hands of a servant, in her own apartments.

"Yours respectfully,

"EDWIN ALVORD."

"A lady guest !" I repeated to myself, as, looking up, I encountered a very pale face staring at me from one of the tall mirrors. Is it possible that I am understood to be only a *guest* in this house? Do the servants, then, regard me with suspicion? and was the housemaid's sympathy directed to one who might be her superior in position, but, oh, God ! her inferior in character? Could it be possible that Doctor Alvord would so humble me as to allow his servants to misunderstand the true position I held in that house? No, no, it could not be ! Whatever might have been his motive for wedding me at all, whether it was to offer himself a sacrifice to his brother's wavering affections, or because of pity for my utter forlornness and the embarrassing situation in which I had been placed by a member of his family, either of these motives should have made a man superior to the meanness of placing me in a false position.

Opening the door that led into the bay-window at the

head of the stairs, that I might call back the housemaid and question her, I almost knocked over a woman standing just outside my door, who, by her confusion of manner and profuseness of apology for being in my way, satisfied me that she had had her eye at the keyhole.

"Will madame please pardon?" she said, in very tolerable English, showing by her pronunciation, as well as by the beribboned appearance of her dainty cap, that she was the Frenchiest of French maids. "Monsieur direct me to leave the door not at all until madame signify her wishes for the morning,—whether she will walk or ride, or examine the conservatory, or make a still more satisfactory meal in the breakfast-room."

Uttering her words rapidly, they sounded very much like a horrible jumble; but hesitating long enough to catch her meaning, I merely replied to her elaborate harangue that I wished to see the housemaid.

"La housemaid?" repeated Miss Bedizen, with her eyebrows elevated.

"Yes, the housemaid," I shouted, growing nervous at the catechising I saw awaiting me, as to the why's and wherefore's I should want the little housemaid when one so grand and altogether elegant awaited my slightest order.

"The order I gave you was to send the housemaid to me at once," I continued.

"But Elise is doubtless mopping the oil-cloths or cleaning the mirrors. Would madame have so untidy a person about her?" For answer I only closed the door of my room, and, pushing the bolt above it, I rang furiously at the bell, which I afterwards learned gave such a hearty response to my call that the cook was thrown into the highest state of excitement, supposing the whole up-stairs was in flames, or that I had suddenly fallen into a fit.

When Eliza came in looking like a frightened rabbit,

and almost breathless, I quickly closed the door, not, however, before I observed two wicked-looking eyes flashing at me beneath the frill of the jaunty little cap worn by my French maid.

"Eliza," said I, "tell me who that woman is."

"That—oh, ma'am—my lady—that is Dele, the woman my master brought here less than half an hour since to be your maid. She came too late to carry my master's note up to you, and she scolded me for my impudence in carrying the note before she arrived; as if I could tell when she was coming."

"Very well, Eliza, you did perfectly right; and I want you to change these clothes you have on for more tidy ones, and come to me this evening after we have dined. I choose to have you for my maid rather than that woman, and shall mention my preference at the dinner-table, when my husband returns."

I said all this deliberately, laying some stress upon "my husband," that Eliza might not misunderstand me; and, although the little housemaid smiled until she became really quite pretty during the first part of my speech, she manifested no surprise when I intimated the relations I held to Doctor Alvord.

It was scarcely an hour afterwards that Eliza presented herself at the door of my room dressed in the trimmest of prints and frills, with a white apron so neatly made, and its gathers "stroked" to such perfection, that I was certain the garment must have emanated from an industrial school. Handing me a card, she blushed at the evident satisfaction I manifested at her appearance, then quietly slipped out of the room. The card simply bore the name "Boreneo," and I knew at once that my dear master had judged, and rightly, that I would receive with pleasure a call from him on the day following my marriage.

As I flew down the broad staircase, and entered the first of the drawing-rooms at the foot of the stairs, I was conscious of being pursued by a pair of hateful, vindictive eyes; and although the owner thereof had a most velvety and cat-like tread, she nevertheless did not conceal from me the fact of her leaning over the banister to the depth of her waist, that she might witness the reception I gave my guest.

CHAPTER IX.

THE dreaded hour, six o'clock, came at last, and as I entered the dining-room, I saw that Doctor Alvord was already there, standing with his back to the fire and his face toward the door through which I entered, so that we had nothing to do but to face each other at once.

He advanced towards me, and, observing that I was handsomely dressed, he looked pleased for a moment, whilst he directed me to my position behind the urn at the head of the table. I tried to be grand and stately, but, as I am scarcely of medium height, I only succeeded in presenting a cock-sparrow appearance, as was shown me through the mirror I was obliged to confront on my way to the seat assigned me, into which I sank, delighted that the urn served as a barrier between us. I am not accustomed to an urn. We use the old-fashioned coffee-and tea-pot at Loch Severn, papa fancying that the aroma of the coffee and tea escapes, or is received by the dining-room ceiling, when the contents are transferred from one vessel to another.

So when I twisted the faucet, supposing that a delicate

little dribble would descend into the cup placed there to receive it, I beheld a mighty torrent rushing from the spout, deluging table-cloth, napkins, cups, and saucers. With amazing presence of mind I twisted the faucet back again to its place, and by this time the butler entered bearing the dinner. Seeing the confusion which reigned at table, he hastily retired and brought in a generous-sized napkin, which he spread over the cloth next me, and restored everything to order.

Doctor Alvord neither looked amused nor the reverse while this state of things lasted, though I thought he must either have laughed or frowned according to his temper. He merely held knife and fork suspended in air, as if awaiting an opportunity to ask me what part of the fowl I would take.

I may as well state here that this meal was the most horrible event of my life thus far. The coffee running out, the butler staring at me, Doctor Alvord with suspended knife and fork waiting for me to say what I wanted,—all conspired to fill me with feelings of such painful embarrassment as I had never experienced in my life before. However my own spirits may have suffered from the catastrophe, it in no way seemed to have affected Doctor Alvord. His appetite seemed to be sharpened rather than impaired, as one by one the different courses were brought on. At length the removal of the plates for desert brought a pause, and twice my lips almost framed the request that I might have Eliza for my maid, and that the French maid procured for me might be assigned to other duties in the household. But each time the words died on my lips, so reluctant was I to break the silence that reigned between us, or to encourage Doctor Alvord to think that anything like even friendly converse could be inaugurated between two persons so totally at variance as

we were. In truth, as I sat there listening to him munch his dinner with so much evident satisfaction, and reflected upon the little sentiment and refinement that nature must possess that could manifest no sympathy with the discomfort attending an accident such as befell me at the beginning, and which the assurance of my perfect indifference to, or positive hatred of, himself could not conceal, I felt that my lot was harder than I could bear.

The dessert being placed upon the table at length, I nibbled at a macaroon, tasted the pudding, took a sip of the chocolate, and, in the bitterness of my disgust and wrath, drew myself up again, throwing angry glances at the apparently unconscious victim opposite me; but again remembering that I must be looking quite like a cock-sparrow, I subsided with an involuntary sigh, drawn from the very depths of my misery and despair.

"Did you wish to speak to me about anything?" inquired my husband, pushing his plate from him and looking at me with a pair of gray eyes the color of which I observed for the first time.

Taken by surprise, I had hardly time to collect my scattered thoughts when he again said, seeming to regard with a puzzled air the bow of crimson ribbon and lace I had pinned in my hair, "If there is anything I can do for you, I hope you will not hesitate to apprise me of it."

"The French maid you were so kind to secure for me is not at all to my liking," I replied; "and, with your permission, I will exchange her for the little housemaid, Eliza."

He regarded me with more interest than he had evinced at any time yet, and answered that I was at liberty to make any change in the domestic kingdom I saw fit, adding, as I was hurrying out of the room, "I trust you

are aware that Elise is inexperienced, and that Adele has no superior in her profession."

I paused long enough to hear the suggestion, and thinking it was not put in the form of an interrogatory, thus requiring no answer, I merely bowed my head without looking up, and started for my room, completely ignoring Adele as I rang the bell for Eliza. The girl came up all excited with the new and, if I might judge by her manner, pleasing aspect of affairs. I began: "Eliza, Doctor Alvord has signified his willingness that you shall wait upon me, and I desire to tell you what I shall require of you, that you may make an intelligent beginning. First, then, I shall only expect you to talk when you see that it is agreeable to me; for sometimes I feel like talking and sometimes I do not. When, therefore, you perceive that I am in a mood to be entertained, you are to tell me everything of interest that may come into your mind, whether it concerns yourself or anybody else. Next, I shall on no account consent to your talking with the rest of the servants about your master or me; and should you feel called upon at any time, through friendship for me, to defend me against attacks which the rest of the servants may make upon me, you are not to do so, but remain silent. I see by your countenance, Eliza, that this will be difficult for you to do. Understand, however, that I have no wish to repel any kindness you may feel for me; on the contrary, I am pleased with it; and I may as well say here that it was the knowledge of your kindly feelings toward me which prompted me to select you as my maid. I choose to dismiss Adele from the household," I continued, in a tone louder than that in which I had laid my injunctions, in order that Adele herself, who, I had no doubt, had been listening, might hear, "for the reason that I cannot have any one in my employ who is guilty of

eavesdropping. You will, therefore, be mindful of this, Eliza, for I can forgive anything sooner than an improper spirit of curiosity,—a spirit that tempts one to the dishonorable act of listening at doors or peeping in at keyholes."

I swelled with conscious triumph as I said this, and fairly trembled with the delightful agony which resulted from the unbottling of my long pent-up feelings.

All at once a silvery laugh, proceeding from the window wherein I had left the French maid darning lace, smote upon my ear, and, too angry longer to contain myself, I jerked open the half-closed door.

"Mon Dieu! I say, Elise," laughed Adele, flowing with merriment, "commend I that instruction to your attention. *Il ne faut jamais défier un fou* (one must never bid defiance to a fool). *N'oubliez pas* (don't forget); for should you dare to speak when 'my lady' frowns, or fail to speak when she smiles, you will be accused of *lèse majesté*, and off will go your ears." Suiting the action to the word, Adele demonstrated how irresistibly funny such an operation would be.

As she alluded, in her French phrase, to my being a fool, I thought I would furnish her nothing upon which such an opinion might be based. So summoning all the dignity of which I was possessed, I pointed to the stairs, saying, "Go! You shall not remain an hour longer in this house."

"I, madame? The master has not dismissed me. I go not a step until he makes this wish to me known." And again Adele laughed heartily.

"But I dismiss you at once," I replied, with much emphasis, and in a spirit of triumph. "My husband has given me *carte blanche* to command what I will of the servants. Go, therefore," I repeated, pointing to the stairs.

"No, no, madame," replied Adele, looking so cool and composed that she must have shown in strong contrast with the excited, blustering little figure confronting her. "It is customary here for the master to pay his servants before dismissing them," she continued; "and I hardly think *you* have money enough to pay me, as I charge five hundred francs for every one of the sixty minutes which go to make up the nine hours I have been here. My master has gone away to spend two weeks. I do not say that I would charge him that much for my services, but *vérité* that is what I charge you. So, if you have not the money to pay me, I see not how you can turn me out-of-doors. No, no, madame, think better of it; for until the master returns I shall not be ready to take leave."

Adele must have seen and felt her power, as I, without another word, retired to my room. "The master away for two weeks!" I repeated to myself. "And gone without apprising me of it. Eliza knows of it, the cook, the butler, the stable-boy, the footman, Adele,—all know of it. I, the mistress of the house,—I shall not say his wife,—must be the only one of the household who was in ignorance of Doctor Alvord's departure. Doctor Alvord may come, may go, and I be as ignorant of his coming and going as the marble image on the fountain past which he moved back and forth day by day. Why should I expect to know?" I continued, looking out upon the lamp-illuminated street, and seeing across the way a nursery full of happy children sitting upon a rug around the fire, while the mother sat in their midst telling them stories. A nurse was laying down the covers to each little bed, after which she returned to the window and closed the blinds tightly. I felt suddenly shut out from the warmth of that cheerful room. I felt that each one of those darling

children had pushed me out of their room and closed the door upon me.

Turning around, I called out, "Eliza! Eliza!"

"What, my dearest lady?" cried Eliza, running forward and reaching me just as I was about to fall, as I thought, fainting. But no. I could not even have that relief in oblivion. I had only been dizzy for a moment. "Undress me, Eliza," I said, "and go below-stairs for an hour. I shall ring for you when I want you."

CHAPTER X.

BUT why describe the routine of the past two weeks? I think I said in the beginning that that must be a poor life which failed to furnish a chapter a week. I wrote that under very different circumstances from those under which I am now writing. I must not forget, however, that I took my lesson this week, and bravely battled against all weaknesses. For did I not remember those days of past blissfulness, when my dear old master patted me on the head and called me his princess, his nightingale, and every pet name under the sun? How different it all is now! Even my master is changed, and he now calls me madame, with a most pronounced accent, and praises my voice as, I imagine, a courtier would compliment a lady of wit and rank in a fashionable drawing-room.

A letter from dear papa, announcing his departure from England for France, there to remain a month or two, has filled my cup of bitterness to the very brim. Is it possible that papa can have conceived the idea that I married

Doctor Alvord out of spite? Or does he know the truth now, and dreads to meet me, being filled with pity for me?

I have compelled Adele to abandon my window. I have, therefore, but rarely seen her throughout these two weeks. Eliza says her ladyship dines at my table when I am through, sleeps half the day, and spends the other half in the library, reading. I suppose that sort of life suits her exactly. It is a pity she had not my opportunities. I could hardly wish her, impertinent as she has been to me, a life of such horrible monotony as mine is. I saw her once peeping through the door when I was taking my lesson, and afterwards, when I met her in the hall, she said, "Madame, I have heard all the voices in England, but none that would compare with yours. Pardon me the compliment, but I charge nothing for it."

I would have replied civilly to her had she omitted the last clause of her sentence; but as she did not even wait for me to reply, I paid no attention to her.

Eliza is sick with the headache, to-day; and as I loaned the poor girl my vinaigrette, and bade her lie down on my couch, she has no words in which to express her thankfulness, but lies with her eyes swimming in tears, and her little pug-nose dripping with the same limpid fluid, snuffing away at my smelling salts and looking the personification of profound gratitude.

I presume I must dress for dinner, as the two weeks have gone by, and Doctor Alvord will doubtless be home this evening. I shall tell him of Adele's behavior, without manifesting any desire that he should dismiss her. He will thereby understand that I have no wish to interfere with the management of his affairs, and will accordingly take the hint that he need not meddle with anything I may see fit to do. If I take a notion, I shall walk down to Hollybrook to-morrow, and inquire if any

one has heard from papa lately. I have had but one short letter from him since he left.

The evening is past, and Doctor Alvord did not return. I am glad of it, for my greatest trial, I see, is to come at meal-time, when I am obliged to be in his company. The following evening, however, he returned; and when dinner was fairly over, I was rushing headlong from the room, in accordance with my fixed determination always so to do, when Doctor Alvord, looking again, as I thought, directly at the bow in my hair, and not at me, said,—

"I have made arrangements to give a party, and deem it proper to inform you that I have decided upon this night a fortnight for the occasion. However disinclined we may both be to acknowledge our relationship," he continued, noticing the objections to be met that my countenance betrayed, "I nevertheless feel that common decency demands a public recognition of the fact that we are married. Putting aside, as I most cheerfully do, every consideration of right, privilege, and courtesy, and allowing you full liberty to spend your time after the manner that suits you best, I must yet insist that an outward observance at least of the rules which govern the conduct of married people be strictly adhered to. For this reason I have determined upon a party, that our true relations may be established in the eyes of society, and that no misconception of your position in this house may longer have place in the mind of any one. This I conceive to be a duty I owe you, as well as myself, and I doubt not that, upon reflection, you will see precisely as I do with regard to the matter."

"But," objected I, feeling that I was growing pale, "you forget that I have not been called upon. It seems that the large circle of acquaintances that I was given to understand belonged to the name of Alvord

has diminished somewhat since this time four weeks ago."

He looked at me with a surprised air, and then, as if recollecting something, said, "You refer, I imagine, to the friends and acquaintances who hold my brother in particular esteem. I need only to remind you of the false position in which you placed yourself, with regard to him, when you married me, to furnish a solution of what seems mysterious in the conduct of Charles's friends and admirers. They think you were false to him, and hence feel no inclination to cultivate your acquaintance; by consequence, I lose them also. That, however, is a matter of no consequence to me, only so far as it affects your position before the world," he continued, observing that I turned crimson with shame and mortification at the allusion to the unhappy termination of my love-affair with Charles Alvord. "And as for the lack of attention, we by no means consider the absence of callers a test here of one's social status. The inhabitants of Etheridge Place have a code of their own, and the views of fashionable ladies on this square are not at all in harmony with the views of London at large on any important subject."

I fancied here that a slight shade of irony had crept into his tone as he spoke of "social status" and "fashionable ladies." I had not imagined until now that he cared for such things. I had somehow formed the opinion that his profession absorbed the thoughts of Edwin Alvord, to the exclusion of everything else. And when he talked of these things, I involuntarily looked up, as if to see in the avower of these sentiments a contradiction of my first impressions concerning him; but he was the same heavy-browed, wise-headed, professional-looking man. The high, broad forehead indicated brains and thought, anything in the world but "social status." The unculti-

vated moustache and absence of tasteful cravat, together with the preoccupied expression which his countenance invariably wore, betokened anything but a craving after favor from "fashionable ladies."

Why was it that the innumerable impertinent and silly speeches which I had half framed from time to time died on my lips as I thought of addressing them to Edwin Alvord? I had no respect for him, I told myself over and over again. How could any woman respect a man who had allowed himself to be used as a cat's-paw? "Jack-in-a-pinch" was just the name for him, and he met its signification in almost every particular. These thoughts rushed through my brain as I stood staring vacantly at him; but recovering myself, I asked, "And, pray, what exclusive code am I, now a dweller on this very desirable square, expected to follow in order that I may obtain favor?"

"You are to invite company, and those who accept your invitation expect to enter your name on their visiting list; those who send regrets are possible acquaintances, to be determined afterwards by the impressions, favorable or otherwise, you succeed in making upon those who do come. Those who neither come nor send regrets, desire it understood that they are averse to cultivating your acquaintance."

"Mein Gott!" exclaimed I, involuntarily using a pet German phrase. "What a humiliating ordeal to subject one to! Is there no way of avoiding this 'code' and still establish some social position in the neighborhood?"

"None!" slowly replied Doctor Alvord, looking at me with something like interest for the third time since my acquaintance with him. "Besides," he added, "the risk and the humiliation are not all your own in this in-

stance. It is rarely the case that any one will disregard altogether an invitation to a house on Etheridge Square, for that house is surrounded by splendid possibilities. It may become the most popular resort in the neighborhood, distancing all other houses in high social character; and those who slight a first invitation never have an opportunity to slight a second one, even though they apologize ever so humbly. Success, however, I may add here, depends largely upon the mistress of the mansion. I trust my meaning is understood."

Here Doctor Alvord again assumed the preoccupied air that was natural to him, looking as though he was perpetually suppressing a yawn; and, slightly withdrawing, he indicated to me that he considered the interview at an end. Without even looking at him a second time, or saying "good-evening," I rushed out of the room, leaving him, I suppose, in no sort of doubt as to the ultimate failure of his house to establish social relations on Etheridge Square, particularly if everything depended on the mistress of his house.

I may as well confess that when I am enraged I bristle all over in a most unbecoming and unladylike manner. Many who move in the most polite circles of society think it no discredit to themselves if they are unmercifully snubbed, provided they can disguise their feelings and preserve an unconcerned demeanor. They measure their superiority by the amount of kicking and cuffing they can bear without resentment or apparent concern. But I, upon the slightest provocation, manifest my indignation in unmistakable ways, oftentimes, no doubt, magnifying a supposed slight into an intentional wrong. This I know does not savor of good-breeding, certainly not of sweetness of temper, and I should wrestle courageously with the habit and endeavor to master it. The next time Doctor

Alvord snubs me by signifying his desire for me to withdraw from his presence, I will ripple out a "ha-ha," "te-he-he," "good-evening," and, making a grand salâm, I shall back out of the room like a horse backing a cart against a curb-stone. And when I shall attain to the perfection of looking as though I longed to have him snub me again, I shall be ready to be mistress of this grand house on Etheridge Square.

Eliza tells me that preparations for the magnificent party are steadily progressing. I have scarcely been below-stairs this week, except to dinner, being engaged in unpacking my trunks and arranging things in the wardrobes, having at length arrived at the conclusion that I am actually settled here, and am not sojourning merely as a visitor, a thought of which I have been trying to persuade myself ever since I came. Having banished the delusion from my mind, I now make haste to compel my trunks to disgorge, greatly to the relief of Eliza, who has caught only glimpses of my outfit from time to time, and who, I dare say, has often wondered why I did not uncage my struggling finery.

I shall add here that the French maid took her departure the very morning after Doctor Alvord's return. Her parting injunction to Eliza was: "Look well to thine ears now, Elise!"

CHAPTER XI.

I HAVE tried to divide my weeks into chapters, but as I faithfully record events as they occur to me each day, I presume it matters little whether I specify each particular week in the calendar.

The reader may sum up the chapters, which date from the first of September, and in doing so will find that the time at which I am now writing is about the middle of November. I cannot well separate the past two weeks, and make a page of them even, without I include the events of the two weeks during which Doctor Alvord was absent in one chapter; as sleeping, eating, drumming on the window-pane, catechising Eliza, and exploring the contents of the library, will explain the manner in which I passed each day.

I learn that every servant about the house is new, at least new to this establishment; and that Doctor Alvord has an immense practice, beside being one of the professors in the Royal Academy of Medicine, where he lectures twice a week.

If I had felt any curiosity as to the manner in which he spent his time when in the house, I would doubtless have looked about for a study, or a medicine closet, or something of that description; but such a thing never entered my head until I encountered a door at the end of the long passage-way in the second story. With true womanly curiosity I tried to enter, but could not, though the fact of the knob resisting me was the first thing that aroused my curiosity. "Merely a lumber-room" I thought; but recalling it the next day, I asked Eliza what

it was, and, to my surprise, she spoke of a skeleton which she had seen dangling behind the door, as she peeped through a crack, one morning, when she was cleaning the hall.

"A skeleton!" repeated I, with a shudder. I am mortally afraid of skeletons, and have I been dwelling in this house an unconscious victim to the possible machinations of a grinning skeleton? I wondered if this could be so, and I tucked away in my mind that piece of information, intending to inform Doctor Alvord, when he came home, how nervous the thought of that skeleton had made me, that he might see the necessity of having it removed. However, my summary dismissal from his presence, and the altogether confused state of my mind brought about by the sudden announcement to me of the contemplated party, drove the skeleton out of my head, and it was not until this morning, when I passed the door of the study and heard something like the creaking of dry bones, that I remembered it, and I shuddered as I imagined I could see Doctor Alvord making his skeleton perform.

My courage is something remarkable, at least I have always been told so. My reputation while at school was that of one who was afraid of neither man nor beast. While this is in part true, yet there is nothing that so strikes me with terror as the thought of death and the grave. And the longing I expressed in my half-delirious moments, four weeks ago, to die, finds no echo in my breast now; for, although my lot were fraught with ten times the misery I now feel, I would still pray that I might live, and escape as long as possible that narrow home brimful of horrors to me, chief among which is the dread that I may awake some time and find myself fastened down beneath the lid of a coffin, where no ear could hear my cry, no arm could be stretched for my relief.

From the contemplation of these horrors I turn to thoughts of what I am to wear to-morrow night. I have waited in vain for some suggestion from Doctor Alvord that would give a clue to what is expected of me. I have, I blush to say it, arrayed myself in every conceivable style, dressed my hair in all sorts of ways, languished, grown stately, blustered, and humbled myself at different times, during the past fortnight, trying to engage Doctor Alvord's attention sufficiently to be told when I have done the right thing, looked the right way, or costumed myself as becomes the hostess of a grand mansion in Etheridge Square. But all to no purpose, for Doctor Alvord, aside from bestowing on me an occasional glance of doubtful satisfaction, evinces no concern whatever whether I am arrayed in the height of fashion or appear as if I had just emerged from a village thousands of miles away from any city. I shall wait until dinner, the last opportunity I shall have for seeing him before the party. Dinner-time is the only time we meet, as I invariably breakfast in my room, and Doctor Alvord always lunches down-town.

I think I will puff my hair, and sprinkle ever such a little mite of powder over it. This may be the very thing, after all; I never thought of it until this moment. Finger-puffs are quite becoming to me, particularly when I wear them very high on my head. Powdered hair, too, will suit my complexion, as I am pink and white and have black eyes.

I left off writing last week when I had come to the determination to powder my hair. I could hardly wait until Eliza got the brush and comb, so eager was I to have my hair dressed.

And when she came up with a bowl of flour from the kitchen, the excitement of the moment grew intense. I did not think that I could ever again feel anything like

excitement over my toilet. All of my dresses, as I bade Eliza lift them one by one out of my trunks, appeared to me like so many spectres. But in arranging something suitable to be worn at the party, I donned each one of the garments—selected with so much care, and blessed with the benediction of Jessop as they issued from the hands of the dressmaker. I discovered in the occupation of dressing myself up, as though I had some special occasion for so doing, a capital method of killing time, so long as my stores remained unexhausted and my appearance failed to produce the sensation that I so persistently sought after.

I never reflected upon what I should do after this end had been attained; when the routine of beginning at the beginning and going over the same field had lost its novelty, and when the stimulant produced by Doctor Alvord's stolid indifference had lost its effect. But to return to the night preceding the party.

After receiving the finishing touches to my puffs, in the way of a gentle sifting of flour over my head through the agency of the flour-dredge and Eliza's skillful manipulation, I glanced at myself in the mirror, and was fairly captivated with my appearance. If my eyes were ever dark, they certainly never looked so large and black as they did then, beaming from beneath that wealth of powdered hair. If my skin was ever fair, it never seemed so beautifully white as then, when brought in contact with my crimson cheeks and silvery puffs. If ever I was vain, it was at that moment, when I swept out the folds of my apple-green silk trimmed with the finest point lace, and made surplice almost to my shining silver belt-buckle. I felt, I say, at that moment a degree of admiration for my personal appearance that, to draw it very mild, bordered on vanity.

"You will want your green satin fan, my lady," said

Eliza, at the same time handing it to me; and to crown all, I decked off in my mother's jewels, never removing my eyes from the mirror, and looked, as I thought, the very picture of a queen.

I fancied that the butler was completely overcome with awe as I passed him in the hall on my way to the dining-room; and, feeling a new importance, I turned the knob of the dining-room door and entered. Doctor Alvord was seated near the fire, apparently in deep thought, for he never raised his head when I entered.

I swept softly to the table, and finding that even the rustle of my silk did not disturb him, I gave a faint cough, which caused him to start, and, without even looking up, he said, "Pardon my inattention; you should at least speak, I think, and make known your presence," whereupon he began dissecting the fish without another word, or so much as a glance at me.

We disposed of the different courses in a mechanical way, and not a word was spoken by either of us. What shall I do, I thought, if he persistently refuses to even look at me? I resolved at length to make another effort, and inquired, in a voice rendered almost unnatural by the painful silence that had reigned, whether he would have more coffee. I thought at first he had not heard me, and was about to repeat the question in a louder tone, turning away my head in order that he might obtain a good look at me, when, with a start, as if having just heard my question, he again begged pardon for inattention, and, crumbling up a piece of bread in his fingers, he arose from his chair, and, as if addressing the tablecloth, wished that I would excuse him, as a very sick patient claimed his attention, and moving toward the door, he would have disappeared in another moment, but I could not permit it.

"Stay, Doctor Alvord," said I, rising quickly, and not even stopping to think of my train, my fan, or the dozen and one things which had occupied my attention before dinner. "Your evident disregard of the embarrassing situation in which I am placed impels me to call your attention to the fact that I have no more idea concerning what is expected of me to-morrow night than has my maid; and any failure which may, nay, is sure to, follow the evening's experiment, will be owing in as great measure to your indifference as to my ignorance."

Doctor Alvord held the knob of the door in his hand as I spoke, and, turning around suddenly, he said, "I was not aware, until this moment, that the thought of pleasing me occupied any share in your plans or speculations." His eyes swept me from head to foot as he said this; and as he surveyed me thus, something in my appearance seemed to arrest his attention, for, pausing just long enough to take breath, he added, looking as though he were really in an uncertain state of mind, "I thought the party was to be *to-morrow* night."

Mortified beyond measure at the implied censure contained in his words, alluding, as he no doubt did, to the overdressed state of my person at this time, I felt that I would sink into the floor. Until then the appropriateness of my attire for a home dinner had never entered my mind; I had only thought of its becoming character, and of how it might attract the one for whose eyes it was intended. Did that curious look, then, mean that he suspected me of trying to attract him? Did he think all that pomp and grandeur which attended upon the very rustle of my dress and the spread of my gorgeous fan was an attempt to render myself beautiful in his eyes? Manifestly no; for as the angry tears sprang into my eyes at this painful inspection, I made a dash forward to the

half-open door, as though I would pinch my way out at all hazards.

Doctor Alvord arrested my progress by laying hold of my arm and gently, though firmly, forcing me into a chair. "My poor child," he said, whilst I, almost bursting with anger and humiliation, struck his hand with my fan, "your education and training have been so thorough, that if I thought at all about your appearance to-morrow night, I felt safe in leaving to your own good judgment the selection of what would be suitable to be worn on the occasion. And, although I am not versed in such matters, permit me to say that nothing could be more becoming to a hostess than a plain black silk, free from ornament of any kind; and nothing could be less appropriate for the occasion than your present *tout ensemble*," saying which, he opened the door for me to pass out, turning away his head as he did so, that he might not seem to perceive my rage and embarrassment. I shot through the door and along the passage-way, seeing nothing as I sped up the stair-steps, only hearing those terrible words, "nothing could be more inappropriate for the occasion than your present *tout ensemble*." If my dress was out of taste for a huge party, how horribly *gaucherie*, then, must it be for home toilette! And might not the elaborate toilettes I had been making the past two weeks be even now the subject of remark and ridicule in the servants' hall? Was that surprised and stupid ogle bestowed on me by the butler a stare of astonishment because of my heathenism?

Eliza met me with looks of delighted expectancy beaming in her countenance as, hearing my steps, she threw open the door of my room and prepared for my reception by wheeling a large chair to the register, that I might warm my feet, clad as they were in the most delicate

satin slippers. "Undress me!" I ordered, in a harsh tone. "Did you not know better than to dress me up like a peacock! merely to dine below? A pretty lady's maid you are, indeed! I wish from the bottom of my soul that I had kept Adele."

Eliza immediately responded to my bidding with nervous fingers, saying, as she drew the hair-pins from my hair, and attempted in vain to get the flour out also, the moisture generated in my hair forming with the flour a sort of paste, that resisted all the maid's efforts to remove it, "Dear, dear lady, I thought you looked so beautiful. I thought only of what my master would say when he saw you."

"Your master!" said I, with a scornful look. "Your master said I looked *horrible*; so in future you may as well not think at all for all the good produced by your cogitations."

I meant the last word to bewilder Eliza. I often slipped in such words as "appertaining" and "concomitant" and "elucidate," together with a dozen or more like them, that I might enjoy the look of wonder depicted on Eliza's face. Handing her the ribbon of my fan one day, I said, "Eliza, elucidate the mysterious intricacies of this breeze-stirring appendage!"

Turning away with a huge "ha! ha!" almost ready to burst from my throat, I repeated, sharply, "Why don't you elucidate it? Make haste, for I desire the appendage elongated, in order that with greater facility I may brandish the breeze-encourager!" I shall not attempt to portray her look of abject helplessness as, fearing her ignorance would offend me, she began to fumble with the fan-string; and when, flying back to her, I said, "Untie that knot!" she looked as though the mighty affairs of state had been removed from her unwilling shoulders,

and went about untying the knot, humming softly. When I said "cogitations," therefore, it must have sounded to poor Eliza as though I was bidding her not to think, lest witchcraft dwelt in her thoughts.

I steadfastly closed my eyes, however, while she removed the pins, and after something like order had been restored to my head, vigorous brushing being resorted to, I at length fell to sleep on the chair, and never awoke until long after midnight, when I arose, and, throwing on my wrapper, began to write. In fact, I am writing now, though the day which is to usher in the party is dawning, with many a streak of gold flaming in the sky above the fountain, and making the water-nymph who sports in the basin look as though she really enjoyed her bath, which must seem a cruel pastime in the "twilight cold and gray."

The thought which has tormented me most since I arose is, that I have no black silk dress. Think of my destitution! Yet I really believe I omitted that feature from my wardrobe just because Jessop was so determined that my whole trousseau should take on that sombre hue. I had a very pretty black silk made less than a year ago, but wore it very little on account of Jessop's persistently associating the color with mourning, and manifesting her satisfaction every time I put it on; so I discarded the black silk altogether. If I only knew of a London dress-maker now, I would find no difficulty in getting one made. I certainly have courage enough to go around the corner into Hollybrook Street and select one; perhaps the salesman may be able to direct me to some place where I can have one made by evening.

As I was thus musing, I opened the door of my dressing-room, and silently contemplated the array of elegant robes spread out before me. Pearl gray, lilac, lavender, cinnamon brown, azure, emerald, topaz, and last and most

beautiful of all, my wedding-dress of white satin, pinned up in linen towels, and, "though lost to sight, to memory dear."

The Winsted dress-maker had certainly done her best; yet had she been thoroughly skilled in the art of preparing wedding outfits for brides, she never would have been guilty of the omission of a black silk robe *en train*.

I had scarcely ceased my inspection, when, glancing out of the window, I observed Doctor Alvord's muffled figure on the opposite side of the street, and the wearied face he turned towards where I sat behind the blinds showed plainly that he had been up the entire night. Long afterwards, I inquired of Eliza if her master had left the house, but she replied that he was sleeping in the library, and wished me to come to him as soon as he awoke. Of course I shall not go a step. Two snubs in succession are quite enough for me,—ignoring altogether my presence at the dinner-table, then telling me to my face that I was dressed in frightful taste. After all this, can he expect that whenever he shall deign to ask for me I am at his beck and call? Nay! I shall not go to him, whatever my lord of the castle may think of such disobedience.

After what transpired this morning, I find the desire to mortify him before his invited guests strong within me. Were it not that such a course might savor too strongly of the cutting-off-one's-own-nose process, I would most assuredly do something to-night to spoil the effect of his plans. Yet it would be mean in me, after all, to torture that face into more painful weariness than it indicated a little while ago.

CHAPTER XII.

My chapter last week was suddenly cut short by the arrival of a carriage at the steps, out of which emerged the unmistakable form of Mrs. Jessop. I knew it was her the moment her foot pressed the carriage-step, clad in the thickest of leather, and rejoicing in new shoe-ties, minus the tin ends, which latter she always clipped off, judging them to belong to that class of glittering shams yclept foolish ornament.

When she grasped her bandbox with one hand and carried in the other a huge basket, not allowing the driver to lay a profane finger on the handle thereof, I needed no further assurance that it was Mrs. Jessop herself. But what had brought her here? That I flew down-stairs to ascertain.

"Portia," she said, solemnly, allowing me to lead her into the library, which I had forgotten held one occupant already,—“Portia, you are looking thin. Dissipation does not agree with you.”

“No, I should think not, Mrs. Jessop,” I replied. “The dissipation of being close mewed in the house, day in and day out for weeks, is not calculated to bring much color to the cheek or amplify the corporeal to any great extent. Take off your things,” I added, seeing Jessop almost crazy to drop on her knees and “invoke the Divine Blessing,” as she called it.

“No, Portia,” she replied, even more solemnly than before. “I only came to make a call, and I felt satisfied that you would not reject the last year's black silk now, however small need you may have judged there was for it in the past.”

Had anybody else been in the room, and understood Jessop's allusion to my present possible need for a dress which unfashionably hooked up in front, I should have felt deeply mortified and chagrined; but as I was really glad of the dress, knowing at the same time that the necessity which pressed me for just such a garment was quite as imperative, though altogether of a different nature, as the one which Mrs. Jessop alluded to as probably existing, I laughed aloud, a joyous, free laugh as of old, which so startled the sleeper who was reclining on a lounge that he sprang into an upright posture, looking quite bewildered. Upon seeing Mrs. Jessop seated near the door, he advanced toward her with outstretched hand, bidding her a hearty welcome.

As Jessop made a low courtesy in response to so much condescension, I pretended to busy myself with the strings of her handbox, and became so absorbed in what I was doing that I apparently did not notice Doctor Alvord leave the room. After urging Mrs. Jessop to tarry and make us a visit, he returned again to the lounge for his hat, which, as is not uncommon with men, he had forgotten until the cold air admonished him that his head was uncovered.

I arrayed myself in the black silk gown after Mrs. Jessop's departure, and decided that, with a very few alterations, it would answer well my purpose. The style was not old-fashioned, except as related to the hooking up in front, and this I easily remedied by having Eliza remove the buttons from the front and place them on the back, which gave the frock every appearance of being made after the most approved fashion. These details all seem trivial even to me as I write, but I promised to deal fairly by every particular of my life, and no one shall have occasion to say that I have not kept my promise.

Nine o'clock was the hour that the guests were expected to arrive; and as one by one the perfumed notes of regret came in and were placed in the card-basket in the centre of the room, I felt Doctor Alvord's arm tremble slightly as he remarked, "There are more cowards in society than ever I imagined." Just then a heavy pull at the door-bell was heard, and, as the footman directed a gay party up-stairs, I detected evident satisfaction in Doctor Alvord's face, as, glancing sidewise, I observed him gnawing at his under-lip, making the imperial, which adorned the hollow beneath his unusually full under-lip, stand straight out, after the manner of men who are engaged in deep thought, unaware of their anything but attractive appearance. I, however, noticed in that brief glance that the doctor was dressed in the extreme of fashion, with a rose in his button-hole; and looked altogether as though his toilette had been a subject of great care and painstaking. I cannot describe his appearance exactly, for I have looked at him so little that I scarcely know whether I think him really handsome or whether his medium height, broad shoulders and chest are things to be desired in men before the tall figure and attenuated waist.

There seemed, however, to be no doubt of this kind lingering in the mind of a lady who entered the room a moment afterwards, for there first appeared in the doorway the figures of a gentleman and lady, the former in strong contrast, physically, with Doctor Alvord. The lady no sooner caught sight of us standing in the archway than, leaving her companion, she hurried forward, with her blonde curls nodding, her blue eyes dancing, and, laying her hand familiarly on Doctor Alvord's arm, said, "How naughty you were to surprise me in this way!" And, without waiting for an introduction, she turned to me, saying, "We shall never be good friends if we wait to be

presented formally to each other. And as I know you are Mrs. Alvord, the doctor will bear me out in saying that I am Gay Valentine. It is only necessary for you to know this, dear Mrs. Alvord, in order that you may find excuses in your mind for anything I may do. So that when I take your husband's arm, like this, and place your arm in that of my husband, and walk off, like this, expecting you to follow at once, you may be sure that I am bent upon nothing so much as the destruction of the hideous tableau you two together made but a moment ago." And, looking at me over her shoulder, she actually walked off with Doctor Alvord before my very eyes. Nor did he look in the least like a lamb led to the slaughter, but rather like a very willing victim to a pretty woman's caprice.

I presume I ought to have felt thankful for having gotten rid of him, but when, obeying the command given, I took the bony arm of Lord Valentine, hanging loosely and disjointedly, I felt that there were even worse things in the world than standing beside Doctor Alvord, holding on to his closely-knit arm and regarding the bouquet in his button-hole, though but a moment ago I had felt great uneasiness at my proximity to one so disagreeable to me in every way, and to whom I felt sure I was equally obnoxious.

The party was not large; but as one by one the guests arrived, Lady Gay dragged Doctor Alvord over to where I stood holding on to the arm of her husband, and, after going through with formal introductions, led him off again, flinging her witty sallies in every direction, and making all with whom she came in contact feel at ease. Once I heard her ask Doctor Alvord, "What in the name of wonder possessed my lady of Severn to wear that black dress at her own wedding reception? Hasn't she even a white muslin gown to bless herself with?"

I could not catch Doctor Alvord's reply, but burned with rage and envy as I saw her sweep along through the rooms, her *mauve* silk trimmed in gold lace and fringe, corresponding almost exactly with the color of her hair, and seeming to have been selected for the purpose of making the owner appear as dazzling as possible; while I thought of the gowns and jewels in my own room, that eclipsed anything Lady Gay wore, and which my own judgment prompted me to wear, but I had been directed to do otherwise. Particularly did I find my temper rising when the dancing commenced, and I found myself screwed up in high neck and long sleeves, in spite of my pretty neck and plump arms. It was only that afternoon that I had blessed Mrs. Jessop, feeling that once at least she was almost an angel, coming to me in my need as she had done; I felt now as though I could see her tumbled into the bottomless pit, the sanctimonious, praying, hypocritical old mourner!

I almost forgot to say that the manner of serving refreshments at the entertainments in Etheridge Square differed so materially from all the parties I ever attended at Winsted, that the blackest of horrors seized me when I observed a waiter enter the room, just after refreshments were announced, bearing a huge bowl, which I supposed at the time contained punch, and direct his steps towards me. He had three or four towels thrown across his arm, and on closer inspection I judged the bowl to contain water. However, I continued to talk rapidly to Lord Valentine about Winsted, Loch Severn, etc., intending not to appear to notice the servant. But Lord Valentine called my attention to the waiter standing at my elbow, and as I carelessly glanced into the bowl and noticed that it contained a fluid resembling water, I shook my head, resuming conversation with even greater

animation than before. Observing Lady Gay dip the tips of her lily-white fingers in the bowl and dry them on a towel, Lord Valentine remarked, "I admire your independence, Mrs. Alvord, in refusing to countenance a custom which seems to be a relic of a less enlightened age than this. Fancy the suggestion such a ceremony calls up! It simply means that some one in the assembly, with whom you have been dancing, may have had soiled hands. It is a foolish custom, to my notion, and should be abandoned. My wife, however, would sooner lose her neck than fail to follow all the social conventionalities of Etheridge Square."

I noticed that every lady in the room, except myself, bathed their fingers, so I presume I may be considered ever hereafter decidedly *outré*.

When I wrote to Sallie Carter the next day, I related the circumstance to her, described my horror at seeing the waiter come toward me, and embellished my letter as much as I could so as to make it interesting to her. I stated among other things that when I was satisfied the bowl contained water, I dipped my fingers in it, and, forgetting in my confusion to use the towel, I watched my opportunity and dried my hands unobserved on the lace curtains behind me. I know she will laugh heartily when she comes to that. It is precisely what Sallie would have done had she been caught in the same pickle.

The next morning I was scarcely out of my bed, indeed, I had only tossed down my hair for Eliza to brush and dress, when I heard a light tap at the door, and, before it could be answered, Lady Gay burst into the room.

"Do you know," she exclaimed, without pretending to regard my look of annoyance at her intrusion,—“do you know that you have captured Lord Valentine com-

pletely? He says he never knew so much simplicity linked with such rare beauty as you possess in all his life; and he holds you up for my imitation. So I came over this morning to take a lesson."

While Lady Gay was delivering this speech her eyes were wandering about the room, taking in all the gowns that hung up almost in alphabetical order in my dressing-room, the door of which stood open. She gave a scream, and, making a dive forward, unhooked the garments one by one from their moorings, and, rapidly turning each of them, cried in astonishment, "Why didn't you wear this, or this, or this, last night, you foolish woman? You have missed your only chance in this world for becoming the reigning belle of Etheridge Square; for never was there known as fine a 'first company' in the whole history of this neighborhood as the one assembled here last evening. I told Lord Valentine that I knew you and Dr. Edwin sat up for hours last night talking and rejoicing over your success. For of course it was a success, and those present cannot escape returning the compliment; so far you are secure, and you may in a measure recover the prize for handsome dressing, which was within your grasp last evening, but which you neglected to reach out for. After all, one doesn't always know how to dress for the first time in these gay circles. There are so many cliques and so many codes, that it bewilders one even to contemplate them all. However, rest assured that black silk dress did the business for you last night; all but ruined you in fact. Take my advice, and don't attempt the elegant simplicity again, except indeed it takes the shape of a black velvet, five pounds a yard, or some such matter."

Lady Gay rattled her sentences and delivered her admonitions with such rapidity, that I confess to having felt all the bewilderment that Eliza's looks expressed.

"This morning," continued her ladyship, "Lord Valentine said, 'Gay, I think you owe Mrs. Alvord an apology for carrying off her husband so unceremoniously last night.' But when I quoted, 'A fair exchange is no robbery,' he seemed pleased and satisfied. One can almost always wheedle a man if she goes about it in the right way. His real object when he commenced talking was to give me a good, sound scolding for leaving him so summarily last night at the door of the drawing-room; but indeed I couldn't help it. I only returned from Paris yesterday to find Doctor Edwin married, much to my disgust—I beg pardon, much to my surprise. However, I may as well confess that I never thought he would marry, and never wanted him to, for he was always such a splendid escort whenever I could persuade him to take me anywhere. He knows just what to do for you, you know, at the opera: feels when you want to be fanned; always carries the most powerful opera-glass to be had anywhere; slips out to smoke a cigar when one feels like flirting and he considers himself *de trop*. Oh, I assure you, dear woman, we lost a treasure when Doctor Edwin married; and it is not to be wondered at, all things considered, that I particularly should feel a little bit injured at the thought of not having been consulted in the matter. A line would have reached me in scarcely no time at all, and I would have dropped everything to come over to England."

"Come over: what for?" I ventured at length to ask, being in doubt as to her meaning.

"What for?" can you ask? Why, to put a stop to the whole affair," she replied, looking at me with a pair of large blue eyes, while I meditated upon the extreme coolness of her statement. "Not of course that I would have been certain of success by any means," she continued,

observing something like astonishment in my face. "Still, I should have left no means untried. The thing is done though, now, and you and I are bound to be the very best of friends." Saying which, Lady Gay gave me a dainty kiss and took her departure, "in search of Doctor Edwin," as she declared, "who," she had no sort of doubt, "was deeply engaged in feeding the skeletons in the study."

"My lady," stammered Eliza, pursing her mouth and looking seriously shocked, "we will lock the door o' mornings hereafter, and we shall see if Mrs. Golden Locks will get in."

CHAPTER XIII.

At dinner that day, after frigidly regarding the coffee I was pouring, sufficiently to chill a less steaming beverage, I went on an exploring expedition for my tongue, and, finding it, I utilized it in the following manner: "It seems that, after all, my notions of suitableness and propriety were not at variance with those of your neighborhood, and that your own judgment was wretchedly at fault."

"To what do you allude?" inquired Doctor Alvord, looking up from his plate in surprise.

"I *allude*," said I, sarcastically, laying stress on the word allude, "to your error last evening, in suggesting to me a course which, now that I have seen your 'society,' no longer commends itself to my regard; and I claim that you were wrong and that I was right."

"You refer, I presume, to the suggestions I made con-

cerning your toilette. If you will permit me to repeat what I said, I think you will find in it nothing that will justify you in supposing that, in giving my opinion, I quoted the sentiment of the fashionable circle in which we live. On the contrary, I distinctly gave my opinion as my own, and without reference to any custom of society; and I still insist that you more nearly filled the requirements of a hostess as you were attired last evening than if you had dressed in accordance with your own judgment, which, howsoever much it may differ from mine, was, I am bound to admit, the echo of that part of the fashionable world represented here last night."

"You set up, then, for me, a stranger in these parts, a standard of your own, which you knew to be at enmity with the established usages of the people who were represented here!" I feelingly exclaimed, eager to tell him what Lady Gay had said concerning my near approach to having become the reigning belle had I followed the dictates of my own taste and judgment, yet unwilling to show my weakness by repeating such a compliment. "And pray what did you mean, then, by pointing out to me the difficulties to be encountered in gaining a foothold in your so-called good society?"

"What I said on that score," he replied, looking grave, yet speaking with considerable animation, "was of a satirical nature, and I trusted you would so interpret it. I had full faith in your innocent disposition, as well as in your desire to become a dutiful and amiable wife, though you could not be a loving one. I felt that you would scorn to advertise yourself in the market as a fashionable woman in Etheridge Square, if you knew of the slums and cess-pools through which your character would be dragged, in order that your person might be quoted as the loveliest, and your entertainments as the most brilliant

in the neighborhood. It seems that in hinting to you the necessity of publishing to the world our relationship, that you might establish a dignified position and I maintain my reputation for decency, you mistook my motives. Please understand, then, for I wish to be plain, that no woman shall have it to say that she reposes on the dignity of my name and feeds the while on the smiles and flattery of other men."

"What!" cried I, trembling from head to foot at the implied insult. "What do you take me for? Is it, then, incompatible with your notions of decency and virtue for a woman to seek in the excitement of society those pleasures which fate has denied her in private life? Is it your purpose to close the door upon me, and shut me in like the veriest nun in a convent, after you have held out the hope that I might find some congeniality without, and thus be enabled to bear in a measure the horrible destiny which your cruel hand helped to shape for me? Have I so little strength of character in your eyes that you must needs insult me by intimating that I have only to become a fashionable woman in order to accomplish my own ruin? Let me tell you,"—and my voice trembled so that I could scarcely speak,—"ay! permit me to *assure* you, that I too have a right to make suggestions; and when you attempt to put me aside a second time without apology in order that you may indulge in *tête-à-tête* with your Lady Gays, you will find something more difficult to deal with than a miserable, heart-broken little figure in a 'black gown and no ornaments.' Pah! you men have strange notions of what woman are made of. You doubtless formed your ideas of my submissiveness from what you saw of me at Loch Severn, tickling your brother's temples and meekly enduring his snubs. I am not the same woman by any manner of means."

Twice he essayed to speak, while I was possessed of rankling hate and anger. Once I knew that he desired to excuse himself for the part he took in Lady Gay's strategy. But I moved off toward the door, and he, catching me firmly the second time by the arm, held me tightly while he said, "You do not deserve an explanation of my words; yet, in justice to myself, I maintain that you alone are responsible for the construction just placed upon them. I never so much as hinted at any possibility of your ruin. I never thought of such a thing, and hence could not have insulted you by any such insinuation. I referred simply to the disastrous consequences which I have known to follow the course of scores of innocent women of fashion and of my acquaintance, who truly loved their husbands, but who were led by their love of admiration and flattery into acts having the appearance of evil, which branded them with the same mark as that worn by a guilty one. You came here without even regard for me to restrain you from plunging into excesses, into which your beauty, heightened by dress and an exquisite taste combined, would certainly have precipitated you. My influence, therefore, would have been as naught in directing you away from these alluring paths after you had once fairly entered upon them. Thus it was that I chose to give my commands upon the subject; and I repeat that I have too much pride to allow myself to be the toy of any woman's caprice, for I am bound to protect my dignity in public, however keenly it may suffer in private."

"Then it is not altogether a solicitude which begins and ends with *my* reputation and *my* standing in society?" I interrupted.

"We are one by marriage," he replied, looking pale and worn, just as he had looked the previous morning

after passing the night at the bedside of the sick,—“we are one by marriage, however widely apart we may be in all things else; and that which affects the one must necessarily affect the other. Go,” he added, releasing me; “and if I have a right to make any request of you which cannot be construed into a command, it is, that you will forgive whatever of seeming harshness and cruelty you may have judged me guilty of, and try to bear your lot with as much patience and fortitude as its forlorn character will permit.”

I had scarcely reached my room and settled myself to write, that I might not forget a single word that had passed between Doctor Alvord and myself, when a servant entered, bearing a little scrap of paper, upon which was written the following:

“I intended to ask you this evening if you would like to attend the opera. I secured tickets for two, hoping thereby to furnish you a more agreeable means for spending the evening than even the fascinating company of your maid can afford. Let me know at once whether you approve of the plan.

“E.”

I twisted the note into a taper, and, burning it at one of the gas-jets, bade the bearer of the message tell his master that I would be obliged first to replenish my wardrobe before I could be seen in public.

How the butler stared at me! for he it was who brought up the note. Did he think that I was given over body and soul to dress, and that after having worn each of my charming dresses once, they were henceforth to be the prey and plunder of the cook and chambermaid? It matters not what he thought.

I see but one means of escape from death by *ennui* left open to me, and that is manufacturing jaw-breakers with which to befuddle Eliza's mind. Consider me, therefore, diligently perusing the dictionary and the Book of Exodus for the next week at least.

CHAPTER XIV.

THIS morning I started out to take a little fresh air, resolving to go in the direction of the Hollybrook Works. So, slipping on my things, I left the house unnoticed, and, after walking for a square or two, I turned into an unfrequented street, as it seemed, intending to walk its length if I did not become tired too soon.

I had scarcely walked ten paces when I discovered, sitting outside a doctor's office, a familiar form. Yes, there sat Doctor Charles Alvord, with his feet elevated above his head, and smoking a cigar; while a head protruded from the window, all done up in curling-papers, and half enveloped in what seemed to be a soiled dusting-cloth; and a gay, bantering voice issued therefrom as I approached the house. The laugh died on Bessie's lips (for it was her) upon recognizing the once Portia Severn passing her house without a token of recognition. Charles Alvord removed the cigar from his mouth at once and eagerly sprang forward. I would have passed on, but he detained me in a manner that I could not resist, fearing lest the occupants in the houses on the opposite side of the street might witness the act and construe it into something mysterious.

"Why, Portia," he said, "where have you kept your-

self? Bessie and I have literally raked London for you, and here you come quietly walking along the street as though you lived in the neighborhood."

"I have been at home," I answered, too much saddened by my lot to utter the sarcasm which would once have readily sprung to my lips at the mention of Bessie Gilbert, now Alvord, as I learned for the first time.

"At home!" he exclaimed, in a bewildered manner. "At Loch Severn? How in the name of wonder, then, came you here?"

"Loch Severn?" returned I. "I have not seen Loch Severn these six months. I reside with my husband at No. 100 Etheridge Square."

Charles Alvord gave a low whistle as I finished speaking.

"What! Among the aristocrats in Etheridge Square? No wonder Edwin has never hunted me up."

"I thought," said I, bewildered in turn, "that you were partners in business, and that you, particularly, delighted in the friendship of some families of note and rank in the city?"

Charles Alvord colored slightly, and replied, "Edwin and I were partners once; but when—when this ugly piece of business on my part was enacted, which, by the way, I most heartily regret, he pulled up stakes and left me the field entirely. I supposed he had moved farther down-town, and that after what had happened we could not, of course, be the best friends in the world. I therefore left him to himself, though Bess and I have looked through all the public gardens in the city for a glimpse of you. My practice is not extensive; still, it is quite large enough to keep Bessie and me in cigars, cigarettes, chocolate candy, and the like; also to furnish a couple of tickets to the theatre now and then. You see, Bessie and I eloped, and Papa Gilbert has never forgiven us."

At this I observed Bess through the window vigorously pulling the papers out of her hair. Knowing that she intended appearing also, I started forward and hurriedly walked away, though I heard her voice calling me in frenzy as I passed rapidly down the street and into my own square.

"Is it possible," I said to myself as I hurried along, "that *that* is the man whom I once adored? And would he have been what he is had I married him? Better, far better, to live unloved and unloving in a great house with a stranger for a husband and I to all the world a stranger, than to settle down to a life of such dreadful inertness as the one I would have shared with Charles Alvord. Oh!" cried I, almost aloud, springing up the steps to my elegant home, and, with a ring at the bell, receiving all the deference from the footman that a queen might expect from her subject. "Is not my lot a perfect hey-day of delight compared with the one I have escaped? The man who could content himself with a Bessie Gilbert in curling-papers and ragged dust-cloth could never have filled my ideal of what a man should be."

CHAPTER XV.

SIGNOR BERNARDO BORENEO gave me a music-lesson to-day, and I enjoyed my own performance vastly better than I had thought I ever would again. Did the idea originate with him, or how came I by it, that if I chose to go upon the stage I might have the whole of London at my feet? Who planted that little seed of desire in my heart, and bade me nourish it, until it has blossomed at last into a

wild and uncontrollable passion to test the truth of—what? Yes, the signor whispered it ever so faintly to my heart, else how should I have ever happened to think of such a thing? All this week, indeed, all these three weeks, ever since the signor came to give me that first lesson after the party, strange sights have crossed my vision, as of a room filled to overflowing with a grand audience, nodding plumes and soft laces and shimmering silks seem to rise up unbidden from this audience-room, and strange murmuring sounds, linked with shouts of applause, strike my ears, when I am suddenly aroused to the fact that I am dreaming. Dreaming? Could that perfect vision be only a dream? Dreams are lies! This sight recurring to me again and again, ever the same nodding plumes, soft laces, and shimmering silks, the same murmuring sounds,—surely these are not lies. I, who have never been within the walls of a theatre; I, who never heard a celebrated singer execute a single note; I,—that was surely my own self, and no other,—who stood upon the stage and bowed thanks to that captive audience that overwhelmed me with applause.

"I do not mind telling you, signor," said I to-day, turning over the leaves of my music-book with feverish haste,—“I do not mind your knowing that I am not happily married. You already know it, else why should you tempt me with such a picture as the one you opened to my vision three weeks ago,—a picture of plumes and laces and silks, all vying with each other to do me homage,—a vision in which the floral tributes paid my genius would do credit to the royal gardens? Answer me,” I continued, my voice growing husky from the intensity of my emotion, and observing that my master had arisen, and stood before me with his eyes all aglow with enthusiasm, and his hands trembling with excitement. “Answer me!”

I again cried, "is this vision false or am I indeed that goddess?"

"Madame, I——" began Bernardo.

"Nothing but the truth!" I cried, looking him in the face with a gaze strong enough to wrest truth from marble.

"Is my vision clear? have I seen the truth?"

"The truth!" exclaimed my master; "only one-tenth of its beauty you have seen. The truth, madame, would be far grander than my poor, feeble tongue can express."

"Then," said I, rising nervously, "the multitude shall tell it me! Advertise that a young prima donna will sing this night a fortnight hence. My husband will never know it: he rarely attends the opera; and think you he would recognize his own wife in the *grand parure* of a *dame d'opera*? I shall not fail you, be assured of that. I will do all, and more than is expected of me. Offer no objections," I urged, waving my hand for him to depart.

"The responsibility is all mine. Should you refuse to accept me I shall apply elsewhere, for I am determined to prove this vision real, though it should cost me my life. Will you have me?" I asked, impatiently, as, picking up my music, I started to rush up-stairs.

"It shall be as you say, madame," replied Bernardo, with flashing eyes; for my old master had found in me at length the embodiment and soul of true art, as he conceived it to be and as he wished to present it to the world.

Allons: I will carry those of you who have followed my history thus far with interest to the night when, in accordance with the announcement made on the flaming posters throughout the vast city, "Signor Bernardo, the Italian tenor, begged to introduce to the public one of his protégés in the person of Mademoiselle Porti, the prima donna."

Arriving at the door of the theatre, and descending

from the carriage, I was conducted to a private entrance, through which I found my way into the green-room and to a mirror, where I might touch my ashen cheeks and lips with an article that my toilet-box failed to supply, but which was lavishly abundant on the untidy dressing-room table at the theatre. I knew that excitement flashed in my eyes and that fear had found its way into my trembling frame; yet I never thought of wavering in my purpose. Bernardo reassured me every now and then, and promised to stand behind the scenes, within sight of me, that he might watch my every movement.

When I stepped out upon the boards, the fulfillment of the first part of my vision was there complete,—the vast audience-room, the radiant lamps, the grand audience with its nodding plumes, soft laces, and shimmering silks; and when the applause which greeted my first appearance had died away, and my voice rose and fell with the delicious language of melody spoken by the orchestra, I took courage from the silence that seemed to pervade the house, and allowed my voice to soar higher and with still greater power, until the very ceiling rang like so many soft-toned bells. Oh, I was indeed in love with my voice when that great crowd listened with bated breath as I trilled the thoughts of the great composer, singing with my soul rather than with my lips, when bouquet after bouquet found its home on the stage, and I seemed surrounded by a very garden of roses! Then the curtain descended, and I knew no more until Eliza's voice, calling me in loud and tearful accents, aroused me to consciousness and to the fact that I was having a second call before the curtain. Feeling that I was not at liberty to decline so flattering a call, and stimulated by my success, I repeated again, with equal effect, "*Oublier je ne puis*;" that composition which is so full of pathos and passion. My voice

lost none of its power as the evening advanced ; but after all was over, and I again entered the carriage and was being driven rapidly home, I sank back upon the cushions almost senseless, leaving Eliza to give the orders to the coachman to put us down at Hollybrook Street and Etheridge Square. Eliza carried with her the key of the area door, it being her night out, and we had no difficulty, therefore, in reaching my room ; for had I met my husband in the passage-way, the dimly-lighted hall would have revealed to him nothing more movable than a servant returning home late at night, with which conclusion he would have dismissed from his mind the closely-veiled and muffled figure.

Once in my room, I, strange to say, sank upon my knees and thanked God for bringing me so successfully through with my scheme for attracting applause and deceiving my husband. Yes, that was the form of my prayer, unholy as may have been the results for which I thanked God. Yet, have I not said that I always lay bare my soul to my Maker and seek not to deceive Him, whatever else my impulsive and wayward nature may prompt me to do ?

The next morning I read with eager eyes and throbbing heart the following critique from the press, which, vast as it is in London, and various as are its opinions generally on all subjects, had but one voice in speaking of last night's performance. I quote from the *Telegraph* :

"MADEMOISELLE PORTI'S DÉBUT IN LONDON.

"It is satisfactory to record, at last, a brilliant and unmistakable triumph at the Academy of Music. The clever artists presented during the earlier parts of the season have met with some favor, but aroused little or no enthusiasm. With Miss Porti, however, the case has proved

different. Her *début* last evening lacked none of the elements of the most exciting and popular success. There was a densely-crowded house, and the manifestations of delight, which began before the prima donna had fairly finished her first aria, increased in intensity until the very close.

"Her appearance prepossessed the audience, and she greatly increased the favorable impression by the neat and elegant little introductory song entitled '*Oublier je ne puis.*' The rendition of this famous air showed her to be possessed of a clear, firm, homogeneous voice, rich and flute-like, cultivated almost to the very point of perfection, and withal so naturally sympathetic, that words fail us in speaking its praise. She phrased the aria beautifully ; and, without lavishing upon it any supernumerary embellishments, gave it a charming grace and brilliancy. The audience repeatedly broke out into wild demonstrations of delight, which none but a genuine artist could have given impulse to. After the close of the opera, the audience paid her the compliment, unusual in London at that time in the evening, of five calls before the curtain."

I read the paragraph aloud to Eliza, while, seated at my feet, she drank in every word as though she herself shared in the compliments paid me. I had consented to engage myself for three nights only, not knowing indeed but that something might happen even in that short time to compel me to forego my darling project and greatly embarrass Bernardo.

As I stepped into the carriage the third night after my engagement, a face came close to the carriage window, and, after peering in, hissed out, with an unmistakable French accent, "Mademoiselle Porti, indeed ! Thou art none other than Madame Alvord, the physician's wife !"

I would have leaned forward and offered her almost any sum to keep silence ; but the driver started his horses into a run, and I sank trembling back upon the cushions.

What would be the consequence of my rash act were it to become known to my husband that I stole away from his house under cover of the night and entered it again at midnight ?

"Eliza," I said, "you must look up that woman tomorrow. She will be haunting the house for an interview with me, which I shall on no account condescend to grant. Place yourself where you can talk freely with her without fear of being overheard, and comply with any demand she may make upon my purse ; for the money I have received these three nights may as well be used for the purpose of paying for the privilege and liberties I took in earning it." Nevertheless, Eliza has seen nothing since of the French maid.

As we reached the area door a figure, which I knew to be Doctor Alvord's, was ascending the steps.

"Elise," he called, leaning over the balustrade, "is that you ?"

"Yes, sir," replied Eliza, shaking as if possessed of a fit of ague.

"Who have you there ?" again inquired Doctor Alvord, contrary to his custom of asking questions of any one.

"Say your mother," I whispered, fearing that the interrogator was about to descend the stone steps for the purpose of inspecting the company my maid had brought with her.

"Only a friend to pass the night with me, my master," answered Eliza, respectfully, her voice trembling somewhat, which might have seemed due to the chilly night air which swept up from the river.

"Pass on," said Doctor Alvord, going upward another step and ringing the bell.

An hour afterwards, when the house was quiet, I slipped from my maid's room to my own, and found hanging on the knob of my door a basket of ripe, red strawberries, large and luscious.

"Who do you suppose placed them there, Eliza ?" I asked, the following morning, after relating the circumstance to my maid.

"The master, of course, dear lady," replied Eliza, as she smoothed out the last crease in my wedding-dress, which I had worn at my farewell the night before, and quietly laid it in the box prepared to receive it.

I blushed as red as the berries, for some reason or another. Was Eliza administering a rebuke to me when she, for the first time since we had been together, failed to respond to my evident wish to be entertained ? Adele's parting injunction came into my mind, and, speaking sharply, I said, "Look well to your ears, Eliza !" which caused my poor little maid to drop the dress suddenly into the box and, looking up, regard me with a look of pity.

Lady Gay has been exceedingly kind to me, taking me places in the city where I would probably never have gone had not some one taken pity on my forlorn situation and offered to escort me about. It seems that the greatest interest is felt in polite circles with reference to Mademoiselle Porti. In describing her to me, Lady Gay observed, "She fulfills my idea of the possibilities which might be found in you, beginning where you leave off, with your pretty face, your oftentimes sparkling wit, and even biting sarcasm, and just carries out my notion of what you ought to be, you silly thing. Why not let Doctor Edwin languish awhile ?" she added. "It will do him no harm ; indeed, he will think all the more of you for it. I see that you are settling down into two morbid, devoted,

old-fashioned people before you are over the honey-moon. My word for it, this state of things is not going to last. So much absurdity on the face of anything never does last. Why, just look at it! Here you are, a beautiful (don't look so dreadfully scornful)—a beautiful, amiable, accomplished woman, not yet twenty years of age, moping about and dragging out a weary existence, contented to sit at table once a day (you see I found out all about it from the servants),—once a day, I repeat, ogling a second moping, listless figure that ogles you in return, and, like the dog in the fable, neither feels like abandoning business to look after you, nor consenting to any person else attending to your wants. Oh, the selfishness of such people!"

"But," objected I, "when Doctor Alvord has expressly forbidden my becoming a woman of fashion, and has even placed my whole wardrobe under a ban, obliging me to dress in a less attractive, though in his eyes a more suitable, style,—what am I to do?"

"What are you to do?" repeated Lady Gay, with spirit. "Why, dress up in your very prettiest, then sit in his lap, and coax and coax, and wheedle and wheedle, until he thinks you are the most provokingly lovely thing under the sun, and, depend upon it, he will let you do as you please."

I confess the picture of taking such liberties with Doctor Alvord's knees, even had I been so disposed, seemed to me as anything else in the world but a way out of my dilemma; but I only looked incredulous, and said nothing.

"Now, my word for it," continued Lady Gay, "should you even begin flirting, the tiniest mite in the world, ten chances to one you would convert your amiable, though exceedingly inert, spouse into a fiery young Othello, equal to anything, from a dirk-knife to the most comprehensive of feather-beds."

"But," interrupted I, "what advantage could I possibly expect to gain by converting my at least contented husband into a jealous one? Would not my last state be worse than my first?"

"Emphatically no," replied Lady Gay. "Exchange husbands with me for a season, and I shall agree to show you an attentive, indulgent, obedient slave, instead of a tyrannical master, bent only on the accomplishment of his own ends."

"But," said Doctor Alvord, coming into the library just then, laying his hat down on the table as though he had been engaged with us in conversation and had been interrupted a moment,—“but you see, Gay, my wife has no notion of exchanging me for that great hulk of a six-footer whom you claim for a husband. She is a woman of too good taste for that. Besides, with all due deference to your charms and excellencies, I should never agree to such an exchange."

"Oh,—well,"—replied Lady Gay, looking somewhat amazed and embarrassed at having been overheard advising a wife to act contrary to her husband's wishes; "as it takes two to make a bargain, I suppose I may as well withdraw my proposition. Nevertheless, as I never say behind a person's back what I am unwilling they shall hear me say to their face, I repeat that you are an ogre of the first quality, and you only need the seven-league boots to complete your equipments."

I was interested, in spite of myself, as I listened to this conversation; and I thought how charming it would be were it all true. How I should love to have a husband so jealous of me that people would call him an ogre! How little would I care for society, or even for being talked to or entertained, if I could only sit back and, contemplating such an ogre, call him all mine, and know that I, too, was

all his own! With what a cheerful heart and light step would I fly from room to room, as the hour approached for dinner, or even lunch and breakfast, to put little finishing touches here and there, that the man who valued me so sacredly as to be angry at another's approach might see in every book, flower-vase, or picture about the house something that would remind him of me, his willing slave, his woefully and delightfully "put upon" wife!

Lady Gay took her departure, laughing over her shoulder at both of us, whom she really believed, with all her cunning and penetration, were two very devotedly attached people.

"When this really becomes irksome," she called out, just as she left the hall for the street, "let me know, and I shall take great pleasure in escorting Monsieur le Docteur to the opera, and shall undertake to provide an escort for his good lady. *Au revoir!*" and she was gone.

"Will the 'doctor's good lady' permit me to be her escort to the 'Merry Wives of Windsor' to-night?" asked my husband. And as I half nodded my head in token of assent, not wishing to appear stubborn, he raised my hand and just brushed the tips of my fingers with his lips. They burned, I imagined for hours afterwards, like four little coals of fire; and, upon making an examination of them, I concluded that they were strawberry-stained, being pink to the very nails. By the way, however, it is more than a week since I finished that last basket of strawberries!

CHAPTER XVI.

My first appearance in public with Doctor Alvord brought with it nothing new or strange, if I may except the flutter it created when I entered the theatre, caused by my having on the Lyons velvet polonaise, trimmed with fox fur in the very latest style, and which the footman brought to me with the compliments of his master as I was drawing on the sleeves of my jacket just before we started.

I would have rejected the gracious gift, could I have done so with anything like decency; but I decided upon the compromise of christening it, and burying it immediately afterwards.

I wondered, as I seated myself beside my husband and experienced all the pleasure one feels at being admired,—I wondered if the decided sensation created by our entrance would have been produced on the nights that *Porti* sang. Lord Valentine entered our box later in the evening, accompanied by Monsieur Marchand, a young artist from France, who was pursuing his studies at the Royal Academy of Art.

"Nothing would do," said Lord Valentine, whispering to me in a most disagreeably familiar tone,—"nothing would do but Marchand must make the acquaintance of the physician's lovely wife. Good family,—and, by the way, 'pon honor, the women are all mad with envy over that new *coupé* of yours in the way of a jositie." As he was about to leave the box Lord Valentine executed another very audible whisper, in which he reiterated the statement that the young artist was of excellent family.

"And, by Jove! if a woman must turn her eyes away from her husband occasionally, why not do credit to her judgment as well as her taste, eh?" With which parting hint, overheard, I am certain, by my husband, Lord Valentine retired, leaving me the victim of a vulgar man's coarseness, and placing me in a false light before Doctor Alvord, who must think I have encouraged his lordship's familiarity, and therefore richly deserved the insult implied by his parting remark.

I was surprised beyond measure the evening after we had attended the theatre, when Doctor Alvord asked me, just before the close of our silent and solitary meal, if I would not like to invite some of my friends to visit me. "I trust you will have no hesitation," he said, "in making welcome here any one whom you may choose to entertain. I fancied that you and a Miss Carter were friends when I saw you together at Loch Severn. Invite her to visit you, and to come and sing duets with you. It may relieve in a measure the monotony of your life in Etheridge Square."

The tears sprang to my eyes at once at the mention of dear Loch Severn; but when Doctor Alvord recommended a perpetual duet for Sallie Carter and myself, I burst into a hysterical laugh, which caused him to look gravely at me for a moment, when he said, "I was not aware that I had perpetrated any joke. Be so kind as to explain."

I tittered a moment longer, unable to control myself. "You will allow me, perhaps, to regard anything in the light of a joke which has the effect of provoking a laugh in the course of our solemn dinner festival," I said. "Your allusion to Sallie Carter and myself warbling an everlasting and ceaseless duet together had in it something ludicrous. Pardon me, however, for any disrespect whatever to yourself was foreign to my thoughts. I thank

you for your permission, and shall avail myself of your kindness at once, I promise you."

Doctor Alvord gave me one of his exceedingly rare smiles as I ceased speaking, and added, "You are at liberty henceforth to discover anything that is laughable in my conversation, and to enjoy it; but at the same time permit me to remind you that an unintentional joke is only enjoyed by one party usually, and that party is not the one who perpetrates it;" saying which he moved his chair, indicating that, the meal being over, nothing else worth tarrying for remained.

I went at once to my room and wrote to Sallie Carter. She will get my letter by to-morrow's post, and come up about Monday, I think, this being Friday. Everything would pass off right well if Doctor Alvord did not throw cold water continually on anything that savored of a good, solid giggle.

"What portion of the metropolis will you visit to-day, ladies?" asked Doctor Alvord the third morning after Sallie Carter arrived, and we had all three together visited the Museum, Art Gallery, and had attended a *matinée* at Covent Garden.

We were at breakfast when Doctor Alvord asked the question, for, since Sallie came, I am breakfasting below-stairs, and find it a vast improvement on the cold coffee, soggy toast, and tough beef prepared for me heretofore at the hands of an unfriendly cook. Sallie and I returned looks, each hoping the other would proclaim the morbid desire that consumed us, to visit the Kensington Gardens. At length I ventured, while Sallie severely scrutinized the sweet potato on her plate before disintegrating it, "Would it be proper," I said, rapidly gathering courage from my husband's kind look of inquiry, "to visit Kensington Gardens and review the animals?"

"Proper?" he repeated. "Why not? Everybody has visited, or expects some day to visit, Kensington; and I can see no objection whatever to your going by yourselves."

"Oh," said Sallie, elated at the thought of being able to enjoy the sights with me alone, yet permitting her politeness to get the better of her sordid reasoning, "we expected of course that you would accompany us, and we certainly hoped it."

"I was going to remark," continued Doctor Alvord, with a slight inclination of his head in acknowledgment of the compliment paid to his merits as a companion,—*"I was going to remark that it is just a pleasant walk there, and I think you will enjoy it immensely. Bobbs shall follow after you, at a suitable and convenient distance, so that you can at any time command his services should you get into trouble of any kind."*

If ever I felt like bursting into hearty thanks to anybody I did at that moment, when Doctor Alvord was arranging a blissful day of perfect freedom for Sallie Carter and myself. It was glorious to feel that we could roam through Kensington Gardens at will, and comment upon the various sights there, without being under any restraint whatever. Nor were any injunctions laid upon us relative to how we should conduct ourselves; for, as Doctor Alvord arose from the table and moved back his chair, he remarked, "You mustn't regard Bobbs as within anything like speaking, or seeing, or hearing distance until you absolutely need him; for people who go to the Gardens expect to carry with them nothing of the distinction attendant upon one of Mademoiselle Porti's engagements."

"Did you hear Porti when she was here?" asked Sallie of me, after Doctor Alvord had left the room and she,

girl-like, had returned to herself again. "Squire Sutphin was in town and heard her," she continued, "and returned to Winsted saying that she (Porti) was as much like you as two peas."

"Nonsense!" said I, coloring; for although I was continually hearing Porti's praises sounded in my ears, I could never get used to it, and always felt a guilty blush steal over my face. "They say she is coming back during the holidays, to be here but one night," said I; "and I mean to hear her if I am living."

"Portia, dear," said Sallie, "what a divine husband you have! Of course you get along well together."

"To be sure we do," returned I, with emphasis, feeling at the same time that the slight acquaintance I had with my husband scarcely warranted so much earnestness on my part. "Come along," I added. "Bobbs is ready, equipped and awaiting orders."

How we sniffed the crisp, frosty air, and took in great quantities of London busy life, as we threaded the avenue leading to Holybrook Fair, and thence to the Kensington Roads, where, tripping along and chatting with all our might, we expressed pity for more than one poor, weary-looking housewife, who was taking up the thread of existence in the skein of that day's cares and trials! How we pitied those occupants of carriages, who, with closed windows and multitudinous wraps, knew nothing of the warmth and glow produced by an elastic step and a cheerful heart!

We had scarcely entered Kensington, when we noticed two gentlemen advancing towards us on horseback, followed by a groom; and in a moment I discovered one of them to be Lord Valentine, who, to all appearances, had been indulging in a debauch the night before, and chose, for some reason of his own, to ride, rather than to sleep,

off the effects of his potations. Advancing towards where we stood waiting for them to pass, the pair halted, and Lord Valentine, with an incoherent allusion to an "old gal," by which I was certain he was designating me, was promptly brought to order by Monsieur Marchand, who, wheeling around so that his horse came between us and Lord Valentine, explained that Lady Gay was up in one of the pavilions. Dismounting, Monsieur Marchand handed his bridle to the groom in attendance, bidding him conduct his lordship immediately home.

Here was a check to our morning's enjoyment which we had not anticipated, and which, considering all things, we found particularly hard to bear. I, however, introduced Sallie to the young Frenchman, who, after acknowledging the honor, turned to me and kept up such a stream of conversation all the way to the pavilion that I thought even Lady Gay would be a great relief. In this, however, I was mistaken; for Lady Gay Valentine, after congratulating me upon having come safely through the operation of cutting my eye-teeth, and after making various other allusions to my independence and final self-assertion, walked off unceremoniously with Sallie, who was overawed by the beauty and charmed with the wit of Lady Gay, leaving Monsieur Marchand and myself to entertain each other. It was not a difficult matter for me to entertain my companion. He found apparently as much pleasure in hearing himself talk as he would had he been in company with the most brilliant conversationalists, himself listening to wisdom instead of imparting it. He talked of France, of its unlikeness to England, particularly in the absurd custom, as he declared, of placing married ladies in our country at a disadvantage in society simply because they happened to be married. Then he went on to say that his mother, *une femme couverte* of

uncommon chastity (just think of it!), received as much attention from the *beau monde*, especially from the *beaux esprits*, as any *femme sole* in England.

My cheeks burned and my heart beat wildly as I interpreted the unmistakable glances of admiration bestowed on me by Monsieur Marchand. Where were Sallie and Lady Gay, that they should leave me to repel single-handed the *double entente* of this ardent young Frenchman, who evidently misjudged the occasion of my rising color, and mistook me for one of the *sans souci* women of his own country, upon whom he had been lavishing such extravagant praises.

"Monsieur," said I, steadying my voice, that it might not betray the deep mortification I felt, lest in his apologies for having given me offense he might attract even more the attention of those around us, who were already regarding us with too much attention,—“Monsieur, you will please understand that in the sentiments you have just expressed we do not agree. I entreat you to act less vehement, both in speech and gesture, lest there be some persons here who will misconstrue your conduct and report me unfavorably to my husband, whose honor I prize most highly, and whose regard I covet.”

"*Ma foi*, madame!" cried Monsieur Marchand, looking at me with two large, innocent-looking eyes; "to think that I should only have succeeded in annoying you, when I would lay down my life for your sake!"

Just then I bethought me of Bobbs, who, regaling himself at a water-tank, looked all the unconsciousness that might be expected from a well-trained domestic whose mistress was *en tête-à-tête* with another not her husband.

While I was considering whether I dare claim Bobbs's protection or not, I caught sight of a carriage containing only one occupant, and, could I believe my eyes, that

one was no other than Doctor Alvord himself, as, upon seeing us, he bade the driver stop.

My tongue, which was never remarkable for volubility in his presence, refused even to wag a syllable, whilst Monsieur Marchand attempted to explain that we had become separated from our party—and—

"What party?" interrupted Doctor Alvord, with forced calmness, looking from one to the other, and no doubt mentally commenting on my confused appearance.

"Mademoiselle *Cartair* and Lady Valentine," explained Monsieur Marchand, with readiness.

"Lady Gay here?" was all that Doctor Alvord said, as, assisting me into the carriage, without extending an invitation to Monsieur Marchand, he bade the driver proceed at once to Etheridge Square.

"I do not wish to alarm you, Portia," said my husband, calling me by my familiar name for the first time in our acquaintance, "but a telegram received this morning announces that your father is ill and wants you to come to him. The down-train leaves in less than an hour, and you have no time to lose. Take with you nothing save what you can conveniently carry, and I will follow with your friend on the train this evening, as I cannot arrange matters so as to get away before then."

Long ere my husband had ceased speaking I was sobbing convulsively; and he, not knowing how much of my emotion to ascribe to grief, bade me calm myself, as in all probability I would find things, when I reached home, not so bad as I apprehended.

"This, then," said I, as I went whirling off on the cars, taking the direction of Loch Severn, "is the end of a day which promised so much enjoyment. First to be insulted by an impulsive Frenchman; then to have my husband think that I have taken a mean advantage of the

license he kindly granted me, and possibly misconstrue the whole affair into an assignation. And worst of all, dear papa sick, perhaps dying." And I sobbed again, causing Eliza to weep also, so that we won the sympathy of every occupant of the coach.

Arriving at Loch Severn, I found papa's condition not dangerous; but he was possessed of such a consuming desire to see me, his only child, that nothing short of a telegram addressed to me would answer his purpose.

"You must moan and pretend to be in great agony, papa," I said, "when Doctor Alvord comes, or he may not approve of your dispatching in such haste for me to come to you only to relieve a little headache, which would have been well to-morrow if you had let it alone." Saturating a piece of cloth with strong camphor, I bandaged papa's head, and he, although exchanging jokes with the rector but a moment before, drew down his face and uttered a dreary moan as the door opened and Doctor Alvord approached the chair upon which he sat. The doctor, after consulting again and again the pulse of his patient, looked with no small degree of astonishment and curiosity at the bandaged forehead and tightly-closed eyes.

My husband returned to London to-night, on the ten o'clock up-express, and I am to return with my father to-morrow morning.

Sallie Carter dropped in a few moments this evening, and is so full of London, and Lady Gay, and Kensington, to say nothing of my home, which she contends is the most gorgeous palace under the stars,—so full is she, I say, of these things, that I may safely count on being addressed henceforth as "My Lady Alvord, formerly of our own Winsted," although I am nothing but a physician's wife, neither loved nor, I suppose I may safely say,

honored by my husband since the mysterious events of yesterday. I scarcely know whether I am rejoiced at the thought of returning or not. I presume one may learn to adapt herself to circumstances always; and I find that the feelings with which I contemplate a return to the home of my husband are in no way akin to those which attended me on my first journey to London.

After all, if Doctor Alvord could only be made to regard me with something like friendship, it would not be such a terrible thing to live in the same house with him. I might even be brought to pass an evening quite agreeably with him if he would chat with me as he does with Lady Gay!

CHAPTER XVII.

MONSIEUR MARCHAND called last evening with Lady Gay; and, Lord Valentine coming in a little later, we took a hand at cards.

I would have felt embarrassed upon meeting Monsieur Marchand again were it not for the fact that I know he intends no disrespect to me. He only thinks that I don't believe, or properly understand, how completely he has become my slave. When, therefore, Lady Gay threw down the ace of hearts, saying, as she swept the trick into her lap, "Nobody can say henceforth that I am heartless," Monsieur Marchand looked at me, and whispered, "You at least are heartless, else why so cold do you remain?"

I felt my cheeks flame up directly, as I knew, what Monsieur Marchand did not, that Doctor Alvord was approaching, and had heard the impertinent remark.

A circumstance transpired to-day which offered me an opportunity of finding out whether Doctor Alvord intends to respond to the calls of society which his introductory party awakened.

Cards were brought in to us at the table this morning for Sir Scott and Lady Ainslie's evening at home, this night one week. My husband evidently expected me to ask whether we should accept, send regrets, or decline going without sending any apology. In fact, my tongue held a bit of stinging sarcasm to this very effect. But when I glanced up and observed in my husband's countenance just what was expected of me, I determined not to confirm the suspicion, and remained on the defensive. That is, I merely laid the cards down beside my plate and endeavored to put on a sweet smile; such as I had seen people do, particularly women, when they felt the very *maddest*, remarking that Lady Ainslie's invitation was exactly like Lady Ainslie herself, neat and precise. I went on spreading my muffin with an air as though mind and soul were absorbed in getting butter on every minute particle of the same, and as if curiosity concerning the party dwelt not within me.

I only succeeded, however, in accomplishing a very awkward piece of business, for my husband looked at me, and then burst into the first hearty laugh he had indulged in since we were one. I suspended operations with my muffin long enough to look up, so taken by surprise was I.

"Shall we go, Portia?" asked the doctor. "I leave the matter with you to decide."

"Pray do nothing of the kind," I replied; "I am subject only to your commands, not to my own caprices. My judgment is so frequently at fault, that I should never think of trusting it to decide a question of such gravity as this. Shall we, or shall we not, go to Lady Ainslie's,"

I continued, studying the nozzle of the urn attentively. "It is a mighty question, be it remembered; let none but monarchs dare to answer." The latter part of my speech must have been accompanied by a smile, perhaps a reflection of Doctor Alvord's humor; for he continued in the same strain, saying, "I insist upon awaiting your royal pleasure."

"Wait, then," was the only reply I made, as I turned out a second cup of chocolate.

I heard him rise from the table and advance towards me. I did not look up until he came close to me, and I wondered if he was going to kiss or strike me. Taking hold of my chin, and compelling me to look into his face, he said, "For a young woman brought up as you have been, I consider you impudent in the extreme!" then he left the room without saying another word. I sat for a moment thinking over what I had done. What a mean spirit I had shown! Yet, strange to say, I thought not so much of my impertinence as having neglected a rare opportunity for a *tête-à-tête* with my husband. He evidently intended what he had said concerning the party as an advance toward some kind of a reconciliation between us. How noble and magnanimous he is in everything he does! Nothing mean nor little about him! I would have held out until doomsday without speaking a word; but here he, really the party aggrieved, was offering his hand to me first, and making all sorts of concessions, and that, too, to secure my happiness, for I know he has neither time nor inclination to indulge in party-going. Clearly, then, I was in the wrong; so, jumping up from the table, I rushed down the hall, and luckily stopped him before he had crossed the threshold of his study.

"Please pardon me," I said, "for my unseemly conduct, as well as for neglecting to thank you for the pleas-

ure you held out to me. If you will permit me to decide the matter now, I shall decide in favor of our going."

He merely bowed, and I, feeling that I had been dismissed again, withdrew to the hall and entered my room, musing, that of all the acting I ever heard of in my life the drama, which represented my married life was the strangest.

I had scarcely entered my room and fairly seated myself when in came Lady Gay.

"Come with me at once!" she exclaimed, throwing herself into a chair, and looking the picture of health, happiness, and loveliness. "I want you to help me select a set of jewelry. I intend to wear turquoise at the party, and I must have one of two sets I saw at Guards's yesterday. I am determined that you shall wear pink as a contrast, as we shall be a great deal together during the evening. So, if you haven't a pink dress, just make up your mind to get one."

"But——" began I.

"Not a word, sweetheart; I saw the doctor as I came up the hall, and I made my demand of him in person. He says that not even I am to dictate to you what you shall wear, for you are to do just whatever you please."

This was plainly what Doctor Alvord had intended saying to me when I so pertly closed his mouth. I know his wishes on the subject of my dressing, however, and now I shall have a good opportunity of demonstrating that I regard them with some sort of deference. Lady Ainslie herself, the prim hostess, shall not be more plainly dressed than I.

Nevertheless, scarcely an hour had passed after I had thus resolved ere my determination was swept away like chaff before the wind. A rose-pink silk was selected at Kauffman's, with slippers to match at Hale's, and nego-

tiations were set on foot for a set of coral to match Lady Gay's turquoise, when Mr. Hale himself brought me from a distant counter a most exquisitely-carved sandal-wood box, upon opening which, I lifted therefrom piece after piece of rose-colored coral, with no gold whatever to be seen, save on the under-side, and there, engraved in characters most chaste, was the name "Portia Alvord."

My hands trembled so that I could with difficulty replace the jewelry, while Mr. Hale informed me that my husband had ordered it the evening before, and that nothing could have induced him (Mr. Hale) to anticipate the surprise in store for me but the circumstance that I was about to purchase a set of the same character, although not nearly so lovely.

I was silent all the way home, though Lady Gay rattled away in her usual fashion, praising my husband, saying what a very slave he might become if I only know how to manage him, and laying the jewels to the account of some little coddling I had been practicing the day before. "Don't tell me," she said, punching me in the side with her smelling-bottle, "don't dare to tell me that you haven't been making him mad and then coddling him up. That is the way I manage poor Fred when I want anything in particular. In fact, that is the whole secret of my new turquoise. When Fred came home the other night considerably under the weather, I wouldn't speak to him, and didn't for days afterwards, until I found I had reached the point when he was about to fly up himself and rebel against my top-loftical manner. Then I fell upon his neck, as he came into the breakfast-room, and, scaring up a few crocodiles, I shed them all to advantage on his shirt-front. Two large drops lingered on my eyelashes, and, after he had kissed them off, I asked for the turquoise."

I could not help laughing at Lady Gay's strategy, particularly as she looked so sweet and innocent. A brighter and shrewder man than Sir Frederick Valentine might easily be fooled by such a pair of blue eyes and such capital acting.

"You are mistaken, Lady Gay," I said. "I never coddle, as you call it, and had no more knowledge of these corals than the man in the moon."

I could see that Lady Gay did not believe me, although she said no more upon the subject. Her attention seemed to be absorbed in becoming corsages, suitable shades, and the like, and she made no further allusion to my wheedling propensities.

Doctor Alvord left home this evening to be gone until Friday. The house seems more tomb-like than ever. How bright and lovely everything might look if we only loved! How the paintings below-stairs would warm into life, how the very chairs would invite one to luxuriate in their softness, if we could only look into each other's eyes and talk with our lips, or even with our eyes alone, instead of sitting rigidly upright and talking in monosyllables! How the hearth would glow, and how I would rush out to meet him on the steps, if—not if *we*, but if *he* only loved! Yes, I know that I could desire nothing more, and yet I could ask for nothing so seemingly impossible to be granted.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE evening for the party arrived, and I, in a flutter, descended the stairs to join my husband, who, standing with hat in hand, inspected me from head to foot, asking if I was warmly enough clad, at the same time glancing down at my slippered feet, and seemingly taking an inventory, silk stockings, bows, and all.

"I never take cold," I said. "I have been careless all my life concerning my clothing; never too cold in winter, or too warm in summer."

Doctor Alvord said nothing; but, as we stepped outside the door, I felt myself lifted up and carried, nor was I put down again until I found myself buried in a wealth of fur-robes, by the side of my husband in the carriage, and we were whirled off toward the Ainslie mansion.

It was really a delightful party, and when I had danced the first waltz with my husband, and found my card filling up rapidly, I regretted there was no room left, until late in the evening, for another dance with him. There are few men who waltz as well as Doctor Alvord does. One thing in his favor, I suppose, is the shape of his foot; another is in the shape of his arm, and I presume one may mention such things in her husband.

As we finished the last round I asked, "Are you not overcome with eagerness to repeat this waltz?"

"You waltz very well, if that is what you mean," he replied.

"I did not ask for a compliment," I retorted, sharply. "You must be very dull not to see that I was hinting to be invited to waltz again."

"With me?" he asked, looking up with surprise. "I thought that you were doing penance, or at least were answering the stern demands of society, in granting me this one."

I imagined his arm was drawn around me somewhat more tightly; yet, after all, it might have been a faithful corset-lacer admonishing me that to have secured perfect comfort and ease throughout the evening I ought to have permitted it to have its own sweet will in a measure. However, when I think of it now, I am quite sure the pressure was not that of my lacer, but of a good, strong, healthy arm.

Just then the music ceased, and Monsieur Marchand claimed my hand for the cotillion which followed. He, too, dances well, and the fact of my having two such excellent partners for the evening put me in the best of spirits. I laughed at everything, silly or otherwise, though there was very little that could be called otherwise in Monsieur Marchand's speech. He called me once or twice in the pauses his guardian angel. I have ceased to blush at his compliments, feeling that he knows no better, and does not mean any harm.

My husband, however, gazed with something very like disdain upon the innocent young Frenchman, as he clung to my hand rather more tenaciously than the other gentlemen in the cotillion. This, however, may be explained by the fact that the other gentlemen had each his own wife.

I scarcely know why I relate these details in a mood so seemingly joyous. I am anything in the world but happy.

But I must tell you of the difficulty into which I was led by my own and Lady Gay's folly. Well, one of the most wealthy and aristocratic dowagers on our square, Peacock by name, took quite a fancy to Monsieur Mar-

chand, and requested Lady Gay to present him to herself and daughter. Lady Gay came running to me at the end of a waltz, saying, "Come along, I have some fun in view;" and, taking hold of me, she rushed me into the conservatory, where sat Madame and the Honorable Miss Peacock under a spreading lemon-tree, apparently supremely careless and indifferent to the surrounding gayety. I had no idea what Lady Gay intended until, observing her pluck a gentleman by the sleeve who stood with his back to me, I understood all. Addressing Monsieur Marchand, she said, "See, monsieur, that fine-looking, aristocratic old lady seated beneath that lemon-tree, and accompanied by a beautiful young girl?"

"Oui, madame," replied Monsieur Marchand, with much enthusiasm; "beautiful! *dégagé!*"

"Very well," continued Lady Gay; "her name is Peafowl, and she is very proud of her name. The oftener you make use of it, therefore, the better will you establish yourself in her favor."

"Oui, madame!" again exclaimed the young Frenchman, with elaborate and profuse salaams.

"Now, monsieur, Madame Peafowl is desirous of making your acquaintance, and I shall take great pleasure in presenting you."

"Madame Peafow-al," murmured Monsieur Marchand, as Lady Gay, seizing one arm, and compelling me to take the other, started in the direction indicated.

"*Coûte qu'il coûte, chère madame,*" continued the monsieur, with an air of jocoseness, "*coûte qu'il coûte,* I shall give madame her name on all *possibil* co-casion."

Lady Gay, taking advantage of the natural confusion that always attends an introduction, pronounced Peacock in a very low tone of voice, and Monsieur Marchand in a very distinct one. "Ah, Madame Peafowal," began

the Frenchman. Here the dowager stared at him with all her might, and the daughter looked up in innocent surprise. "You look so distingué seated here, and Mademoiselle Peafowl"—turning to Marian Peacock with a decidedly French air—"look so extremely *pastorale*, that Madame and Mademoiselle Peafowl resemble two ladies *à la Parisienne*, seated outside the threshold of *la maison de campagne!*"

"Sir, you mistake my name," interrupted Madame Peacock, swelling with dignity, whilst Lady Gay withdrew her hand from its support and prepared to slip away, chuckling visibly behind her fan. Madame Peacock observing this, and thinking that Monsieur Marchand intended to ridicule her name by purposely miscalling it, arose to leave, staring angrily at him and with her nose distended. Monsieur, thinking he had not sufficiently fulfilled all the requirements, although he had spoken her name six times already since the introduction, continued talking in an embarrassed manner. Plucking a leaf from the lemon-tree and placing it in his note-book, he remarked, "This I shall take back to France, that I may recall how the ladies Peafowl looked seated without their *maison de campagne.*"

"Sir!" declared Madame Peacock with vehemence, "my dignity is every way equal to your modesty! I decline to make your acquaintance!" saying which she swept away, carrying her daughter with her, and dragging after her about two yards of train, fit appendage to a name so lofty.

I could not restrain a laugh at the exhibition, while Monsieur Marchand looked the picture of chagrin and despair, and called upon me for an elucidation of the mystery. I could say nothing, being convulsed with laughter.

"How strange are some *Anglaise* ladies!" said he, as he watched the movements of the departing Madame Peacock. "I must put me that item in my note-book. One class of *Anglaise* matron so proud of their name that offense they take if we *Parisiennes* fail to utter it repeatedly; and this neglect they call modesty. *Mon Dieu!* what can they call their demand, then, but the reverse of modest?"

I looked about me, and discovered Lady Gay seated beside Doctor Alvord, giving him a history of the joke perpetrated on the innocent young Frenchman and the proud old English matron. Every now and then I heard her silvery peals ring through the conservatory, but I listened in vain for the deep tones of my husband's voice to mingle with them. "No! whatever Lady Gay does will do very well for her, but not for his wife,"—that is what I knew was passing through his mind when, a few moments afterwards, I passed where they sat, and both saw and felt the stern look bent upon me from my husband's eyes.

He probably thought I was explaining the thing to my companion; he considered me equal to anything,—that I could see. He fancied, no doubt, that I enjoyed the joke just because I laughed; when, in truth, Monsieur Marchand was no more a victim than I was, although Lady Gay will doubtless convince Doctor Alvord that the joke was the joint production of us both, and that I am as responsible for its results as she is.

My enjoyment for the evening was at an end; but, with that strange perverseness for which women are celebrated, I continued to dance with more spirit, to laugh more heartily, and to smile more lavishly than I had before during the evening, until every one save my husband signified by their attentions that they considered me quite charming.

Monsieur Marchand left early, his sensitive nature not recovering from the shock occasioned by the semi-public rebuke administered to him at the hands of Madame Peacock. Upon taking our leave, Doctor Alvord manifested his displeasure by silently handing me into the carriage, and speaking not a word to me all the way home.

Still hoping he would give me a chance to explain, or at least to deny any complicity with Lady Gay, I too remained silent until we reached the foot of the steps leading to our home, when he, after carrying me up the steps, as he had before carried me down, set me in the hall, saying, "I forbid you ever again speaking to Monsieur Marchand, either in public or private; and hereafter, if you have any practical jokes to perpetrate upon people, I request that you first inform me of your purpose, that I may withdraw myself from the responsibility attached to the same, and not be compelled to share the consequences that inevitably follow such extremely hazardous and altogether vulgar performances. I presume it would be useless for me to argue with you upon the character of such things as practical jokes; but, standing as I do in the attitude of a husband, you will understand me when I say that I shall decline to be your defender, or even apologist, should your singularly unwomanlike propensities lead you into difficulty at any time."

He withdrew his hand from my shoulder, where it had rested while he was speaking, and, motioning for me to pass on, he stood with averted eyes, waiting for me to improve the privilege.

"Doctor Alvord," said I, choking with emotion, "I will say to you what you said to me on a former occasion,—*you do not deserve* an explanation of this affair; and as your charge in this case is of a nature more grave than was the misunderstanding you forgave in me a short time

ago, I cannot consent to even attempt to make my innocence clear to you. You are continually believing the very worst you can of me; and it will be largely your fault if I am converted into just what you believe me to be, a vain, silly, vulgar, contemptible woman of the world." Saying this, I burst into tears, no longer able to control my anger and mortification.

"If I have been misinformed——" began Doctor Alvord; but ere he had finished his sentence I was up at the first landing, and in another second had reached my room, where, in the solitude of my chamber and soul, my feelings relieved themselves in copious tears.

I did not go down to breakfast the next morning, and know not whether my husband waited for me or not. In the evening, as I had about decided to dine below-stairs, a message came from Doctor Alvord containing a request that I so dine. I never knew until this evening one-half the intellectual resources belonging to my husband. Without alluding in the most remote manner to our difference of last evening, he introduced subjects which it had always seemed to me he avoided purposely, or was but little informed upon. I laugh now when I think of what a delightful repast we enjoyed, discussing such things as mutton, ducks, terrapin, etc., each in their order. I am at home on these subjects, having been engaged in sheep-raising at Loch Severn; and my numerous ducks, and well-stocked fish-pond, could attest my familiarity with that species of animated nature. Have I not sat by the hour under a tree watching the ducks swim, nod, and trim their feathers? Have I not rested beside my beloved lake for whole days at a time, half asleep, half awake, poring over the habits of my speckled trout, my bass, and my sunfish? And now that my husband has introduced these topics, it would seem as if he has

done so purposely to draw me out in conversation upon them.

He lingered at the table, too, longer than usual, and, offering me his arm, conducted me into the library, where, selecting a volume that contained information upon the subjects about which we had been talking, he read aloud to me with a remarkably fine accent, and when the clock struck ten and he closed the book, I thought it could not be above an hour since my entertainment began, and so mentioned to him, thanking him at the same time for his kindness.

"Your unconsciousness of the flight of time is all the thanks I want, my child," he replied. "A good listener may entertain as well as a good reader; and, assuming that I have been the latter, we should consider that we have both profited equally by the evening's entertainment."

Looking at his watch, his face again assumed that look of abstraction which, I begin to think, is natural to it; and, taking my arm, he accompanied me to the very door of my room, where, mercy me! my wrapper and skirts lay in a heap on the floor, it being Eliza's day out, and I having been too indolent to hang them on their accustomed nails. I now wished that I had performed my toilette in my dressing-room, that I might invite him into my parlor, to look about and see how luxuriously as well as cozily his liberality enabled me to live. He, however, expected nothing of the kind, it seems, for, bowing, he wished me a very good-night, and turned in the direction of his study. I never, *never* passed a more delightful evening in my life. I think I can with a clear conscience write papa a cheerful letter to-morrow.

I think I failed to mention anywhere that I promised Boreneo one more engagement, and that immediately before the holidays. I have refrained from speaking of

it, because I have lost all interest in the rôle of prima donna as enacted by myself. I am continually thinking of the narrow escape I made from detection when I last sang. It all seems like a dream to me now, and I cannot bear to hear my master mention it. Observing that I felt thus, he released me from my forthcoming engagement, though he candidly told me that my failing to sing on Christmas-eve would seriously embarrass him pecuniarily, as well as in his standing as a manager. Nevertheless, he advised me to do nothing rashly against my judgment and inclination.

And now I blush with shame whenever I think of the deceit I am about to practice, or rather repeat, upon one whose regard I am learning to prize more and more every day. When I think of the fate from which he rescued me, and of the exactitude with which he has fulfilled his part of the contract, I feel that I owe him a debt of lasting gratitude; yes, more than this, I owe him the strong upholding of his name and honor so far as I am able to lend a hand. I owe him my best assistance in enabling him to attain that distinction in the world to which his talents entitle him, and towards which all his efforts seem to be directed. What enjoyment has he in domestic life? What rest has he here for his weary soul and tired body, when, rising in the morning, he takes a solitary breakfast and enters upon the duties and toils of the day, then returns home at night, his brain filled with anxious care for his patients, and, sitting down opposite a selfish, sullen, uncompanionable woman, whose every look is a reproach, and whose every word is a stab at his generous nature, he enters upon the routine of a meal which has nothing to recommend it to his favor save the thought that thereby he closes the mouth of scandal, and arrests, or at least mollifies, the stream of gossip that flows from the kitchen?

My very soul grows sick at the thought that I, who really desire to do some good in the world,—I, who long to be a ministering angel to suffering humanity,—am circumscribed within the narrow circle of this loveless home. Why cannot I break down the walls of this self-imposed prison-house, shake off this robe of selfishness, and contemplate sorrows beyond those which dwell within my own breast and haunt my own life? Why not see if, in trying to lessen the burden borne by my husband, I may not, in some measure, and for a season at least, lose sight of my own troubles? In serving humanity, what better rule can I adopt than to do with my might whatsoever my hand findeth to do? In accomplishing good, is it necessary for us to love that which we select as an object for our benefactions? Does the nurse, of necessity, love the patient whose every comfort depends upon her care? Does the physician love the injured one merely because he chooses to bind up the bleeding wound and to pour upon it the oil of healing? Ah, no! Let me, then, arouse myself, and see if I may not at least be a nurse and physician, though I can be neither a loving wife nor a devoted friend.

CHAPTER XIX.

AFTER my determination of last week, I began my experiment the very day following. Arising not exactly with the lark, but at a very seasonable hour, I dressed myself with great care, vouchsafing no explanation whatever to the open-mouthed Eliza, who, accustomed to my whims, asked no questions, but evidently wondered what new expedition I had planned, and whether her attendance was to be commanded or not.

"Come, Eliza," I said, "I am ready for my bronze slippers with the scarlet rosettes. I shall breakfast below-stairs this morning."

"With my master?" inquired Eliza, looking pleased; and, diving at once to the bottom of the shoe-box, she brought up the required articles, and hastened to put them on me, lest any delay might be the means of causing me to change my mind.

"With your master, of course," I replied; "who else is there to breakfast with, pray?"

"Let me tidy up the room while you are gone, my lady," said Eliza, handing me my smelling-salts, without replying to my scornful question; and, following me to the door, she watched me descend the stairs with an air of pride and satisfaction. As I passed the library door, Doctor Alvord emerged therefrom, and evidently did not observe me at all, as he neither looked up nor turned around as I passed him. Something prompted me to stop and wait for him to join me; so in ever so faint a tone, though having a ring of cheeriness in it withal, I

bade him good-morning, stopping a moment as if to warm my feet at the register.

He responded with a hearty "Good-morning," though betrayed into a look of amazement.

"I thought," said I, crimsoning slightly, as he was about passing on, seemingly with no intention of stopping,—"I thought that perhaps you would like—that is, I felt that it would not be a very great annoyance to you if I should breakfast with you this morning instead of alone."

He at once arrested his steps, and, joining me, extended his arm, as if for me to take it. I was prepared for nothing so embarrassing as this. Never having taken my husband's arm since the morning he led me from the room in which we were married, I availed myself the second time of its support; albeit, the strangeness of the proceeding carried with it this time nothing of the repugnance that attended my acceptance of the courtesy once before.

"We are of a very suitable and convenient height to promenade together, Portia," he said, addressing me familiarly for the second time since the law made us one. "Could we not walk together oftener than we do without causing any very great inconvenience to either of us?"

He did not look directly at me as he said this, only held my hand comfortably in his large, firm arm, keeping perfect step, and apparently lost in contemplation of the rosettes on my slippers, which bobbed in and out with much persistency beneath the fluted trimming on my morning dress. Taking courage at the thought of not being looked at, I said, "You keep step remarkably well for a man walking with one of the opposite sex," and we passed into the breakfast-room.

Who would imagine, upon seeing us enter the room to-

gether and take our places at the table, that although one in the flesh we were in spirit as far apart as the poles?

"Your friend's visit was cut short, I imagine?" began Doctor Alvord, tucking his napkin in his shirt-collar and looking at me across the table.

"Yes, somewhat," I replied, thinking suddenly of the scene at Kensington Garden, and of the bewildered condition in which my husband had discovered me. "Where did you find her and Lady Gay after you returned to the Gardens?" I asked.

"By the swing, the circular swing drawn by a horse, and advertising to go twenty times round the world for a sixpence. I fancy that a very little persuasion was needed on the part of Lady Gay to induce your friend to take the trip," he replied. "In truth, I believe they were negotiating with the owner of the swing when I came up, for Lady Gay was in conversation with a very seedy character, and I heard such words as, 'stop when we wish,' 'makes us sick,' 'horse ever run off?' etc.; from which I inferred she was inquiring whether the motion of the swing ever produced sickness, whether the horse was fractious, and last, if it would be possible to stop the conveyance before the journey was at an end should the passengers so desire; all of which important intelligence I lost by appearing too early upon the scene."

"But," interrupted I, "do you really suppose Lady Gay Valentine would be guilty of such folly, knowing that people would recognize her?"

"No, no; certainly not," replied my husband. "Gay belongs to that class of individuals, by no means small, who think that anything is in order that contributes to self-gratification, provided the world at large is ignorant of the transaction."

"Indeed!" said I, looking intently at Doctor Alvord,

and endeavoring to discover the hidden application I imagined was contained in his speech. "I thought Lady Gay was a woman who never troubled herself about public opinion. Her eccentricities are apparent to every one; and while I should not have thought that even she would allow her natural proclivities to lead her so far as your statement warrants me to suspect, yet I am none the less surprised at what you say concerning the value she attaches to public opinion."

"Well," replied Doctor Alvord, with a smile, "Lady Gay's rôle is just that and nothing more. Knowing that her natural overflow of spirits precludes the possibility of her being called a dignified woman of fashion, she wishes to appear as a lively, yet innocently mirth-loving and eccentric character. To this end she does a great many apparently rash acts, *à l'abandon*, which, notwithstanding, are carefully studied, and the result of a familiar acquaintance with the natures of people. She knows just how much she will be forgiven in the eyes of the world, just how far she can go without passing that line which will place her outside the pale of society, to which she is the veriest slave. Therefore, when Lady Gay wishes to flirt, she does it openly and above-board, that others may be spared the trouble of watching her. How much of it she practices under cover I cannot tell. But, in my opinion, women whose inclinations take that direction in the least degree are apt to go further than even they intended, and some sort of concealment becomes in the end a necessity. These, however, are only one person's views I am favoring you with. I have always found Lady Gay perfectly upright in her deportment, in public as well as in private. What might have been the case had my inclinations taken the same direction with her own, I have no right even to conjecture. Now, besides having no ambition to become a

successful ladies' man, I hold that a man has as little right as a woman to trifle with those feelings which should be held sacred through life, or to disturb those relations which a solemn vow before the altar has imposed."

What extraordinary sentiments to express! I thought, especially considering our relations toward each other. Could this be love-making? and was my feeble advancement toward the introduction of a more agreeable state of things between us to be met on the very threshold by my husband boldly avowing that I had a right to claim the privilege of his regard and even love, and that I was equally in duty bound to bestow my own where it properly belonged?

"But," I ventured, when my surprise had somewhat abated and my disapprobation of such sentiments had at length found a voice, "we cannot compel affection. That love and regard which is forced results generally in hate or, worse still, disgust. For I claim that while respect may be a thing to be won, affection is implanted by nature, and cannot be cultivated where it does not in some measure exist in the heart."

"You believe, then, in the doctrine of affinities," said Doctor Alvord, looking paler than usual; and, laying down his knife and fork, he acted as though he would read my every thought. "I, too, have ideas concerning the enforcement of affection, and I judge it to be, to say the least, inexpedient. On the other hand, I insist that no one is justified in seeking an affinity outside the pale of manifest duty; and that those who recklessly disregard natural obligation, and bestow upon others that to which the latter have no right, giving freely, and receiving in proportion to their gift, I say such persons deserve the inevitable and dreary fate which is sure to overtake them,—a heart unsatisfied, a life wretched in unfruitful longings, a remorseful and ever-haunting conscience."

I meant to tell Doctor Alvord that he had mistaken altogether my meaning; that my sentiments agreed entirely with those he had expressed; but before I could frame my speech, he had impatiently pushed away his plate, and, rising, had excused himself from the table.

I sat looking at the place he had made vacant, anxious to have myself properly understood, yet indignant at the manner in which he persistently sought to believe the worst of me. I jumped hastily from my chair, and, without knowing really what I intended to do, I flew out of the door and down the passage-way, overtaking my husband just as he was entering his study, and, unconscious of my presence, he closed the door behind him.

Should I rap? Would I be able to explain to him that I understood the drift of his insinuations? and could I convince him that they did not apply to me? Would I not bluster, grow red, and close with some impertinent remark, for which I would be sorry immediately afterwards, that would widen the already hideous breach between us? He evidently supposed, judging by his speech, that I was patching up an excuse to favor Monsieur Marchand's attentions and to return his admiration. In his estimation I was altogether susceptible to influences repugnant to his tastes. I was first accused of wishing to be a fashionable belle. My heart then confessed there was some truth in the accusation, but now stoutly denied it. Then he must needs remind me, on a subsequent occasion, that no matter how delicious the tones of my voice might sound in my own ears, he was willing I should withdraw from further interview with himself; when I was in an agony of doubt as to how I should conduct myself that I might reflect some credit on the creature of his choice.

Now I have met with another rebuff in a shape impossible not to understand,—that if I looked elsewhere than to

himself for the peace and comfort which it was my right and privilege to command, I would richly merit all the untoward consequences resulting from such a course. Did I not deserve something better than this after my magnanimity in coming to the breakfast-table, and after I had shown a disposition to swiftly repair any damage my previous conduct had done? "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?"

As I uttered these last words in my heart, I recalled the wealth of plumes and laces, and the applause at the Theatre Royal, on the occasion of Porti's last engagement. What went I there for but to be fed with praise and to glut myself with the admiration of applauding thousands, instead of brooking the perpetual indifference of one man? I groaned aloud when I thought to what a pass my pride had brought me. How did I know, what assurance had I, that the woman who was so carried away by impulse as to mount the stage and sing, not for money, not on account of her love for the art, not because it was her chosen profession, but because her vanity and curiosity had got the advantage over her, thus involving the name of an honorable man in her reckless essay to obtain praise,—what assurance had I that such a woman might not fall an easy prey to the machinations of some unscrupulous man of fashion and strong magnetic influence? No! I cried, in bitterness, and, after closing the door of my room and bolting it, I gave way to my feelings of grief and shame.

"There, Portia," said I, half aloud, "for thee to know thy disease is half thy cure. Thou art but a vain, shallow, conceited woman; let us see how this knowledge shall profit thee!"

I thereupon resolved that, come what might, I would never again expose the name I bore to criticism and rude scandal.

Was it Fate, or what was it, that came to me in the shape of my music-teacher, bringing with him a printed programme of next week's entertainment, saying, "The posters are out, my nightingale, and all London is gone mad. The tickets have been nearly all sold, so prepare for a triumph such as never woman gained before!"

"It is, then, no longer possible for me to withdraw?" I asked, almost inaudibly.

"Too late?" cried my master. "It is never too late, my child. Although I should be ruined twice over, what is that to me if thy repose is disturbed?"

Had he held me strictly to my engagement, had he threatened me with exposure, I would have dared him to do his worst, and would have gone to Doctor Alvord and confessed all, leaving him to punish me as he saw fit. But when I noticed the pale, nervous, frightened countenance of my master, and knew that my failure to meet the engagement would be worse than death to him, I said, "Just this once, then, signor. Henceforth I belong to my husband, and not to myself, as I have been imagining all along."

He gave me a quick look, as much as to say, "You are then learning to love, and are therefore far more unhappy than you were;" but he only said, "Madame shall have the everlasting prayers of a poor music-master for the sacrifice she now makes," and then he was gone.

"Did I decide aright?" Here arises within me one of the mysterious questions touching the duties we owe our common humanity. A poor music-master with his reputation in my hands, which I may save at the expense of practicing deceit upon one holding toward me the most sacred relation in life. He that is robbed and knows it not is not robbed at all. Will not that apply here? Upon my own head may the consequences of my

rashness descend, be they good or evil; and whatever the result, may I be the better enabled to walk the straight-forward path in future, knowing that if I turn to the right or to the left I may become involved in a maze from which it will be difficult to extricate myself!

A basket of fruit and a fragrant bouquet reached me just as I entered my room after taking my lesson. The fruits are of the most luscious character, grapes, pears, and immense purple plums; the bouquet is composed of daisies, with here and there a purple pansy, like the one that grew in the flower-bed at home among the pusley and cypress-vines. I know the care with which my husband selected the flowers, yet, when I passed him just now on my way from the drawing-room, he did not so much as look up at me, but only bowed in token that he knew of my presence and considered the acknowledgment sufficient for each of us. My heart gave a great throb as I thought that, however so slight may be my hold upon his noble nature, no other woman has it in her power to win him. And, strange to say, this simple knowledge of his honor and integrity, independent of any influence I thought I possessed over his affections, filled my soul with a new and rapturous delight.

"Edwin," I whispered, at the head of the stairs, looking through the banisters and watching his retreating figure. "Edwin!" I called again, louder than before, so that the echo replied to me from the end of the passage. I know the sound reached his ear, just as something mysterious and altogether inexplicable is sometimes borne to our ears on the wind; but as he slowly turned himself around, that he might catch the meaning of the strange sound that followed him, I leaped to the second landing and sank trembling into a chair. Had I gone to him then and told him of the dilemma I was in, what might

we not have become to each other ere this! Yet should he forbid me fulfilling my engagement, what, then, will become of my old master?

CHAPTER XX.

A LETTER came to-day from Sallie, and after settling myself comfortably in my easiest of chairs, with my feet on the fender, I began to read. She says:

MY DEAREST PORTIA,—This morning's post brought me your very welcome letter, and for fear something may prevent to keep me from my purpose of writing you this week, I will begin to answer it at once.

You know yourself how barren Winsted is of news, yet I always manage to eke out an existence, either in helping to support the sewing societies, attending prayer meeting, or in watching strangers from the windows. Of the last mentioned, I have seen but one to-day, a good-looking young German, who has every appearance of being a doctor, carrying his head wisely on one side and taking strides a yard or two in length.

Mamma dispatched me to the corner grocery for a spool of cotton, and of course saw me equipped in a huge pair of overshoes before I was permitted to step out of the house. Of course it was my luck to see approaching me in an opposite direction my young German doctor, and with commendable promptness I availed myself of the nearest alley to slip into, take off the offending clogs, slide them into my muff, and proceeded on my journey vastly better satisfied with my appearance.

Ever since my visit to you I have been practicing that word *fauteuil*, which you mouthed so cleverly when I was with you. I had it to perfection, and last evening, at the society, I called a couple of girls to me, and pointing in the direction of a three-legged stool usually monopolized by old Miss Wiggins, said, as I leaned back luxuriously in the old-fashioned settle, "Draw up the *fauteuil*, girls, and let's have a chat." They both stared at me a minute, and one of them said to the other, "Let's pound her to pieces." The other said, "Pitch her under the table with her *fauteuils* and things."

I continued to gaze dreamily and sweetly at them, and drawled out, languidly, "Don't look so utterly dazed and ignorant gulls. You quite make me ashamed of my native place; so uncultivated, so—a—" here I suppressed a yawn, "—so—but do let me insist upon your drawing up the *fauteuil*." Here I pointed unmistakably at the stool, while the invitation to supper at that minute was the only thing that saved me from the wrath of Josie Summers and Mary Mason, who are the only two girls who have remained impervious to my superior wisdom, manners, style, and culture since my London visit.

Amelia came for me yesterday in great haste to go with her to the artist's to have some photographs taken. She carried a bandbox replete with lace shawls, fancy caps, detached curls, and drapery of various characters. She quite got me into the notion of having some pictures of my own phiz taken.

Amelia grew excited over the contents of the bandbox, not knowing exactly whether to deck herself in a lace shawl and French cap, or to assume the severely classic and twist her load of false hair on the top of her crown and take on a Greek contour. Her mind being torn by so many conflicting doubts, she persuaded me to sit for my photograph

first, saying that by the time the artist was through with me she would be prepared to sit for hers.

The result of my sitting was simply horrid. I looked like a contortionist, having vainly endeavored to render my lips pouting and my eyes expressive. In short, I ended in looking like a monkey, yet unwilling to object to the picture, as artists are generally sensitive in all points containing an objection to their skill.

I waited for Amelia to come from the dressing-room, relying upon her dissatisfaction in regard to the likeness to secure me another sitting. To my surprise, when she came forth she fell to praising the likeness, calling it exact, and so lovely, etc. I stepped behind the screen a minute, and winked and blinked and shook my head and my fist wildly at her, thinking she would straightway moderate her transports concerning what was plainly unsatisfactory to me. But no. She kept on gazing with rapture at the piece of glass held up against a velvet background.

Being so precisely fixed up, I suppose that she feared the delay occasioned by my sitting again would disarrange some part of her toilet. Whatever may have been her motive, I was compelled to come forth again from behind the screen and meekly submit to having pictures printed from that negative. I determined to be equally as relentless, so, when the artist came out of the little dark closet bearing the precious burden of Amelia's counterpart, she the while standing on one foot with excessive impatience, I burst out with an hysterical "*beautiful! elegant! charming!*" though the likeness looked more like a pious donkey than anything else to which I can compare it.

She had pinned her lace cap down in the front of her forehead, whilst the immense frizzes each side lifted themselves straight up, looking exactly like donkey's ears. In

trying to make her eyes look dreamy she had nearly closed them, while her mouth parted in a semi-smile, in order to disclose her one remarkably fine feature, pretty teeth, made her look as though she were about to bray.

I continued to gaze at the picture, while the tears ran down my cheeks, so perfectly ludicrous was it. The artist taking my tears for emotion at so good a likeness of my bosom friend, politely turned away his head, and ceased to regard me, while all of Amelia's pantomime behind the screen failed to move me.

My scruples about not wishing to offend the artist by objecting to his work were not shared by Amelia. Finding that I was bent and determined upon flattering his skill, she suggested, in a husky tone, that the frizzes covered by the lace cap looked as though they might be ears.

"Ears!" I shouted. "Who ever would think of such a thing?"

"Ears!" echoed the artist, with an incredulous laugh and a die-away look at me, I suppose in approbation of my culture and fine discrimination. "It's the best picture I have furnished this year," he added, and straightway stepping into the dark closet, disappeared from view, and we saw him no more until this morning, when he brought our photographs home.

I ran over to Barton's with mine. Amelia received me coldly, and I saw that Mrs. Barton did not feel disposed to welcome me with as much cordiality as she usually showed toward me. I had only to exhibit *my* pictures in order to make peace all round, and indulging in a good laugh, we were all restored to our wonted friendship for each other.

Mamma made a gigantic and triumphant pudding to-day. It was all spongy at the base, looking like charlotte russe, then at the top it was wabbly and lovely. I thought

immediately of you, dear; not in contemplating its sponginess nor its teetery tottery character, but in noticing its size. I felt that such a spectacle would gladden your eyes, particularly as it was to be eaten with cream and sugar and the faintest suspicion of marmalade. I herewith append the recipe, thinking you would like to test its superb qualities.

Take one quart of milk; four eggs, and eight table-spoonfuls of powdered sugar; one dessertspoonful of vanilla; half box of gelatine. Have the yolks of the eggs beaten up well with the sugar before you begin, also beat up the whites to a froth. Then take your quart of milk, and after putting in the gelatine, place all in a tin bucket, and set the bucket in a pot of boiling water, just as if you were going to make boiled custard. Continue to stir until the gelatine is dissolved and the milk looks as though it wanted to boil, then stir briskly in the sugar and beaten yolks with the vanilla. When it becomes somewhat thick (about the consistency of boiled custard), jerk the bucket out of the pot, and commence stirring in the whites of the eggs with all your might. Dig your spoon down deep so that all will get thoroughly mixed. Then pour all out in a mould and let it stand until it gets cold. I am thus explicit that your cook may have no excuse for not producing a pudding every way equal to mamma's.

We are all well. Thank you for your kind invitation. I will come as soon as ever I get some more new clothes.

With regards to your husband and a dozen kisses for yourself,

I am your own

SALLIE.

CHAPTER XXI.

WE have new neighbors across the way. Scarcely less than a week ago the family who resided there with their pretty golden-haired children took their departure, and the house is now become the property of the "Sultan" and his beautiful wife, "Rose in Bloom." Now, this "Rose in Bloom" is no sultana at all, but a very pretty woman. Indeed, a most beautiful and enchanting sorceress, if I am to take the number of carriages laden with *beaux esprit* and wits of society who roll up to her door daily and dawdle an hour or more away as any evidence. I even beheld a very handsome coat of arms belonging to one of our noblest families reposing an hour since on the curbstone of my neighbor's house opposite, and as I left my mending to rearrange a disorderly window-hanging, I observed that the same spectacle presented itself to my eye, though twilight was deepening, and in the Sultan's mansion myriads of lights were twinkling from basement to garret.

This coat of arms was represented by a poor, shivering little gad-fly of a dog, who, doubtless forgotten by his owner, and so unfortunate as to miss an entrance, though following at the heels of his master, howled piteously ever and anon as pedestrian after pedestrian passed by, and after lifting him from his cold bed long enough to study the name engraven on the silver collar about his neck, replaced him with a smile and passed on.

How I came to know whose dog it is happened through Eliza, who, ever on the alert for news, or, who knows? perhaps her humanity was touched! At all events, she

had espied the little waif, and running across the street under pretense of calling back a beggar to bestow alms upon him, examined it, and reported to me that no other than—well, it matters not who was the owner.

I shall not be censorious, though Eliza may be curious. I only wanted to prove that this Sultana was a sorceress, an enchantress, else she never could have held in her toils for a good two hours one of our most distinguished public men, remarkable not only for his executive ability and the skill with which he managed affairs of state, but for the unheard-of manner in which he has kept his character pure and clean, and free from the least taint or stain.

His wife—well, to be sure, all wives are not helpmeets, and Lady—I may as well say it, Lady Melburne was not a—not a *very* celebrated housewife. Be this as it may, we none of us know the hidden life of our friends and acquaintances, and I had not the distinction of holding intimate relations with my lord nor my lady.

Yet still I know the one fact, that Lord Melburne's lovely little tip of a Maltese dog lay on the curbstone, almost perishing for two hours or more, whilst my lord drank in the nectar distilled by the Sultana's eyes and gazed on the rose-leaf of her complexion, the silver ripples of her voice in laughter stealing over his senses, soothing his tired brain, and making him think that after all there are other women in the world save his fascinating young wife, whom he had once dearly loved, though she detested him.

When he pressed the soft palm of the Sultana at parting, and bent his eyes upon the glorious orbs turned to his, he knew that the streams of Lethe were possible so far as his part was concerned, but that a far more unbearable future opened up before him. At least I infer all this, from the fact that for a third time I stepped to the

window, and observing the Sultan's carriage draw up to the door and his magnificence alight, I waited to assure myself of what I knew to be an inevitable consequence of such an arrival.

Lord Melburne in a twinkling appeared at the door, and was let out by a well-trained servant, who closed the door so quickly after his retreat that his lordship's coat-tails were in imminent peril; so I thought then, but have since learned that this open-and-shut sesame is an art, well learned by the Sultana's subjects.

As Lord Melburne pulled his hat low over his forehead and his somewhat drooping form became erect upon reaching the sidewalk, I thought of all the things I have been writing about, while he stooped down, and, raising from the curbstone the little object which met his gaze under the glimmer of the gas-jet, first examined it carefully and then, pushing his hat from off his brow, gave one look up at the gilded window-sash of the Sultan's palace, and hastily dropping the dog into his great-coat pocket, strode on in the darkness toward his home, where he would doubtless find his lady just about stepping into her carriage to banquet with some intimate, and follow the indulgence with a bewildering evening at the French opera.

When my lord glanced up at the window, I saw what he did not,—the Sultana received from the hands of a servant a long, black waiting-robe of velvet, which she slid her arms into regardless of the damage she was doing to the foamy laces, and recklessly crushing the folds of her pearl-gray silk, with which she had received milord, into a tawdry mass, sank gracefully into a deep chair, buckling a golden clasp round her waist as she descended, and, throwing back her lovely head against the damask of the chair upon which she reclined, waved to a servant

her lily hand without moving her lips that I could observe.

But a moment elapsed, and the Sultan entered, and Naphtalia (I suppose the maid's name is some such) glided softly to the window, dropping the blind just in time to prevent me from seeing Rose in Bloom execute the caress she had prepared for her spouse.

Eliza came in, too, just at that moment, saying, "I slipped over but a moment ago to give the poor dog on the curbing some warm milk and to throw a rug over him, but I found him quite stiff and dead."

Poor little thing! I thought, and at the same time reflected perhaps that look milord gave backward into the palace windows ere he left, had despair in it at the sudden presentiment of evil which must have filled his mind as he found death on the very threshold of his new-found existence.

But I only said, "Eliza, how often have I urged you not to busy yourself about your neighbors' affairs? It was commendable of you surely to relieve the poor animal, but I strongly suspect that your curiosity was as much excited as your compassion. Has your master sent no message whatever that will account for his delay?"

"None at all, my lady," respectfully answered Eliza, who still continued to address me as though I were titled, when, as you well know, I am only the physician's wife.

Furthermore, I was lazily putting the last stitches to a night-shirt for my husband, a garment which my ingenuity had first traced in the intricacies of a tangled mass of lines found in a fashion paper, and afterwards made subservient to my whim, which latter had taken the form of plain sewing, for want of something better to occupy me, when Lady Gay was announced.

In she rushed; taking in her whole person through the

mirrors as she passed them, pulling a friz into place and brushing a speck from her brilliant complexion, she at length found her way to my side, and, after kissing me daintily, set herself to examine the work I held in my hand.

"Of all created things on *earth*, what does this mean?" she exclaimed, her eye glancing with more surprise than I thought it capable of holding from the neat hem of the garment to the comfortable-looking collar which adorned the throat thereof. "You don't tell me that ogre has set you to hospital-work?" and her eyes lost their surprised look and became compassionate instead.

"No, indeed," I laughed, blushing in spite of myself. "Doctor Alvord don't even know I am making it. The garment is for himself."

With a wild peal of laughter, she settled herself back in a chair, and remarked, "What an elegant wife you would make for a pauper! I verily believe with such energy as yours you might support a husband and ten small children."

But, by the way, she again picked up the shirt, and, examining the gussets which I had taken such extraordinary care to neatly insert, convulsively inquired, "Wouldn't the doctor sleep just as well without these little ornaments in the sleeves and extremity?"

"*Those ornaments!*" I quickly replied, eager to explain. "Whoever heard of such ignorance! They are to make the garment strong. I think, Lady Gay," I added, piqued at the fun being had at my expense,—"*I think even your soul would melt towards a night-shirt if you were deprived of your balls and your parties, your operas and drives. You see your resources extend far beyond my own, and when I tell you that my husband is gone from home from morning until night, and that I*

have seen no one except the postman for two mortal weeks, you will understand how one might be induced to accept even my employment as a recreation."

Before I ceased speaking, Lady Gay's face had become really compassionate. "I see," she replied, taking my chin in her hand. "It isn't such a fine thing after all to be Madame Alvord, the physician's wife. Pooh! What a tyrant he is! And as for your dear five thousand friends, I told you that black silk on your reception-night did the business for you in that respect, though to be sure you redeemed yourself many times." Pausing here and looking curiously at me, Lady Gay suddenly said, "I see you are about to affirm that it is the finest of fine things to be Madame Alvord, in spite of its being a veritable contradiction to what you previously said concerning your having been reduced to the poverty of a garment like this," and she gave the offending piece of muslin a kick with her small high-heeled boot. "If I understand you correctly, my dear, you wish to see something of the gay world and conform to your husband's wishes at the same time. Is not this true?"

I made a motion with my hand, signifying assent, but quickly began to modify my meaning, by declaring if my husband could only be with me I would want no other society. But Lady Gay stopped me by saying, "I know all the scorn you would express concerning pleasures where your husband was not exponent, but in doing so, remember that you administer a reproof to me expressing contempt for that in my life which, through necessity, has become a habit. Of course you know that I mean the search for pleasure in the opposite direction from Lord Valentine," and Lady Gay smiled, bitterly. "We are wretchedly poor," she continued; "barely able

to keep up an appearance. Fred spending half the income in paying gambling debts and horse-racing, whilst I—well, you know, were it not for my uncle, the merchant of Regent Street, Lady Gay Valentine would be eating humble pie and literally clinging to the skirts of nobility. As it is, I often am able to furnish poor Fred with a nice suit of clothes in connection with my own extravagant outlays, and thereby keep up something like friendship between us, and, to do him justice, I often eke out a pretty set of jewelry or a new gown from his substance when he has it to prey upon. This is not often, however. So wedded have I become to the life I lead that, poverty-stricken as we are, I would not exchange places with you for worlds;” and tapping me on the shoulder with her fan (Lady Gay carried a fan from one July until the next), she, walking to the window, said, “I feel so saintly, so altogether chaste and stainless, whenever I think of that neighbor of yours over the way. What do the men call her,—‘Rose in Bloom,’ or some such nonsense? They say that her husband, the man they call the Sultan, has no idea of her behavior, and quotes her as an exceptional woman of rank, thereby casting a slur on the rest of us.”

I opened my lips to tell Lady Gay what I had witnessed that evening myself, but quickly closed them again, remembering Doctor Alvord's injunction to beware of what I said in Lady Gay's presence concerning my neighbors or friends, she being thoughtless, without malice, and sometimes causing a great deal of trouble where there was least necessity for it.

“They say, too,” continued Lady Gay, standing on tiptoe and looking out of the window, that she might, if possible, see into the mansion opposite,—“they say, too, that the creature is really the most graceful, *ladylike*, *enchanting*, and elegant of women, and that the men rave

about her guileless sweetness, and quote her conduct as an example for their wives. As though a woman could be innocent who received constant attention from gentlemen without the knowledge of her husband! She explains this on the ground that her love of society is only equal to her husband's distaste for it, and that in trying to conform to his wishes, and gratify her own at the same time, she is obliged to resort to strategy in order to accomplish this end; and as she keeps herself free from scandal of any sort, this explanation seems reasonable enough. Yet, what else is the woman but a coquette,—a *complete* coquette,—gaining the admiration, yes, and adoration, of scores of men without having the faintest feeling in the world for them?” After which homily Lady Gay hummed a strain from an opera.

I grew red and white by turns. Was it possible that she knew how accurately she was describing me. Did she realize as I did all the ignominy that *should* be attached to the character of such a woman? I looked up, down, out of the window, everywhere, until, catching my visitor's eye, I discovered in it a merry twinkle. My heart sank within me. Was she about to inform me that she had discovered my secret? Oh, heavens! was she about to make it impossible for me to help Bernardo Boreneo out of his difficulty? Was she going to say, “Confess, Madame Alvord, that you are none other than Mademoiselle Porti, and that you love the admiration of men better than the honor of your husband”?

While I sat as one paralyzed before her, a laugh rippled from between her row of perfect teeth. “Oh, coward!” she cried. “Think not that I am foretelling your future by the light of Lady Rose in Bloom when I urge upon you a little innocent strategy to cause your husband to rouse up from the lethargy, and witness what the supreme

enjoyment of possessing so fair a wife has brought about. Look you," she again cried, touching either cheek with the tip of her taper finger and placing before my face a hand-mirror, which she had, with much dexterity, drawn from her jacket-pocket. "Where are the roses that used to blush here, and the round dimples, which were neither too deep for coarseness and vulgarity, nor too shallow to hold a fastidious admirer? All fled. You might sit with the blunt end of a lead-pencil thrust in either side of this hollow little face and this cunningest of bewitchments," kissing my chin as she spoke, "till doomsday, and the result would be about the same as though you tried to make a dent in an oaken panel with a velvet-covered cat's-paw. Don't misunderstand me," she continued, perceiving my look of bewilderment at the mysterious reference she had made to lead-pencils as dimple cultivators. "You silly thing, don't think for a moment that I suspect you of being given over to such folly, yet, remember that you have much to learn, and that what would be impossible with you is not altogether without the pale of probability for such as I, and scores of others like me, who cannot dissipate year in and year out without paying dearly in some way for our pleasures. Yes," she added, musingly, "even the doctor will not deny that I once had as perfectly natural and pretty dimples as those which he looked at across the table but a few weeks ago.

"But this is not what I started out to say. I generally do end in praising my own beauty, when I honestly and sincerely start out to express my satisfaction at that belonging to another. To sum the whole matter up, I insist upon it that you *shall* go out and see more of society, else how can you hope to retain the admiration of even one man, who, though he may not notice it now, will soon begin to perceive, with the absence of your fine color and

departur. . . your dimples, that he has married after all a very commonplace-looking wife, and will continually see less and less to stimulate him to making himself agreeable? In Heaven's name what will you do then, with all your beauty gone, and a dreary mope of a husband, with whom you will be obliged to hold a mummy council three times a day over the tea-pot and coffee-urn, and when the chimes ring out nine o'clock, the laborers' bed-time, totally collapse to sleep the sleep of the dead, until that ground-mole of an Elise creeps up to warn you that it is time for the mummy council to begin for another day?"

With an expression of disgust Lady Gay turned up the tip of her piquant nose, and whipping out her pocket-glass, which she had restored to her pocket, began to arrange a small star-shaped patch on her chin, a little to the right of where a dimple should be, whilst I, amused in spite of the ludicrous picture which included me as an object of derision, laughed aloud, and felt something like a load lifted from my heart.

"It is just as I say," she continued again, pressing the court-plaster with her finger and viewing the effect from time to time in the hand-mirror. "Come, Sister Ursula," she added, "I would not for worlds convert you into a creature like the one over the way, but I do confess that nothing would please me better than to see you occupying the niche in which you belong. And my word for it, until you do you are as good as dead, for even the grave and learned master whom you call husband will never appreciate you, never, never, never!"—and Lady Gay trilled a little couplet,—

The purse is full of money,
Does it satisfy?
Cheers it like the honey
Of sweet flattery?
Never!

The chest, in silk and satins,
 Bursts with wealth replete,
 Wak'st thou in the matins
 Thy life with joy complete?
 Never!

Pour out all thy money;
 On beauty's bloom rely,
 Taste thou of the honey
 Of sweet flattery?
 Ever!

CHAPTER XXII.

"You sing it so well that even I might say, 'Almost thou persuadest me,'" laughed a voice in the doorway, whose tone I well knew to belong to my husband. Although he laughed with much heartiness, I was not deceived in thinking that his voice contained some irony. Lady Gay, too, had taken in the situation at a glance.

Here she was, for the second time, counseling a wife to disregard the wishes of her husband, and discovered, too, in the act. I wondered how she would come out of it all. I was not long in waiting, for, raising a very saucy face to the intruder, she said, defiantly, putting her hands behind her back and nodding her head at each word, "*Ogre!* TYRANT! EAVESDROPPER!"

"It is all very well for you, Gay, to turn it off in this manner. It is well that you can, though your indifference to my presence now is merely because of the knowledge that what can't be cured must be endured. Clearly, you were setting my wife against me, and what you say, though it may be done with the greatest amount of pleas-

antry in the world, may be the occasion of much embarrassment to me, who cannot always be on hand to put in a word in my own defense." My husband suddenly became grave. "You are so free with your opinion concerning my character and conduct, I suppose I may be pardoned if I say that the only thing which saves you in my eyes, indeed, would save you in the eyes of any right-thinking person who regarded any interference between husband and wife by a third party as meddlesome and mischief-making in the extreme, is the fact of your not confining yourself together with your intended victim in some closet, in the secrecy of which you might plant the seeds of distrust, which even the publicity you invoke, or rather incur, can scarcely serve to restrain."

I looked askance at Lady Gay, expecting to see her face flush with mortification and chagrin at this most cutting charge of meddlesomeness brought upon her by my husband. Not so; the same gay smile illuminated her pretty lips, the same laughing, defiant eyes looked out from beneath their curled lashes. I trembled for her as I saw something like an angry frown darken the brow of my husband. I, who had been ten times as flippant, I, who had braved more than once such a look, actually trembled for my champion.

Doctor Alvord must have read something of what was passing in my mind. He drew a step nearer to me, and, handing a chair to Lady Gay, remarked, "Your position certainly cannot be a comfortable one. Let us discuss this subject sitting, if you please." Lady Gay promptly took the chair offered, without saying a word.

"Let us suppose," began my husband, after he had seated himself, "that two people, man and wife, if you please, are contented with their lot. I interrupt myself that I may explain," he added, "your face clearly showing that you

consider the premises to be wrong. Suppose, at least, that two persons start out in life with such an idea. In view of all other circumstances,—in view of things vastly more disagreeable, more utterly unbearable, as you will, than the prospect of contentment, they insist upon it that their course is the best. That a ditch here, a hillock there, a frightful yawning gulf in the distance, are all to be taken in consideration when they accept for themselves the smooth path, the undiversified landscape, the dull and somewhat monotonous journey that contentment points out to them. This is all a metaphor, of course," he quickly explained; "yet allow that these things sometimes occur in real life. Suppose, then, that this path having been chosen deliberately, decidedly, finally,—the journey becomes less and less monotonous, a flower here and there springs up to brighten the landscape, a stream flows occasionally across the path; but a step across, it is true, nevertheless it refreshes the travelers. They each experience a sensation of calm delight which only the nodding flowers and the cooling streams of contentment are able to impart.

"Suppose, still further, that the travelers through mutual dependence become day by day more necessary to each other's comfort. Naturally they will wish to make the journey less tedious. The boughs that occasionally wave over their heads will sometimes drop their burden, and many a rich, mellow piece of fruit that would have been left to decay on the ground is lifted, that it may be bestowed as a gift by the one upon the other, or shared in agreeable silence. Many a nosegay is gathered, for flowers unseen to a careless eye——" Here he paused and looked at Lady Gay. "I repeat it, many a flower unseen to careless eyes is sought after, and cared for, and cherished more sacredly, and far more tenderly, than an exotic growing rank in a green-house, with none but the pro-

fessional hand of the gardener to nourish and tend it. Suppose the journey thus far is nothing like what was expected of it. I mean in tediousness, in monotony, or, indeed, in any of the thousand and one difficulties that encompassed it in the outset, when, suddenly, another traveler joins the pair on the road, and, running before them, opens up a gleaming vista of flowers and fruits, beds of exotics fragrant with unimagined odors, ripe with untold fruit-orchards. The fragrance of the flowers, the wealth of ripeness, intoxicates one traveler. She runs hither and thither, now gathering armfuls of downy blossoms, covering herself up with sprays of trailing vines, filling her mouth with the richest and rarest of juices. The other,—he cares naught for these things in such lavish profusion. The fruits pall upon his taste, the fragrance of the flowers becomes sickening. That he may not lose the companion of his journey, he hastens his footsteps. He stretches forth his hand and calls; he wades through beds of nauseating odors; he tramples under his feet the richest of the fruits. Pah, what folly! His companion has fled!

"What commenced in a pure, unselfish dream, ends in a mad revel, a wild orgie; in short, a ball at the Mercen-courts, a masquerade at the Juvinports."

I glanced at Lady Gay. Her piquancy had forsaken her, her eyes faintly closed until the long lashes lay upon her cheek, her small and exquisitely carved nose descended until it was a shapely piece of sculptured marble, her full lips drew up, her arms dropped.

"And the solitary traveler?" I demanded, as my husband took up his hat and started to leave the room.

He looked a moment at me. All eagerness was in my tone, all eagerness in my face, which could not have been expressionless then, as Lady Gay had but a few moments

since proclaimed it. I held him by the arm, which at another time I never would have dared to touch. He had transported me by his parable for the second time, as he had done in the garden at Loch Severn, when I lost my lover before my eyes and knew it not. He looked at me in surprise. My eagerness had its effect upon him. For a moment his eyes, usually so pre-occupied and absent, swept over my face like a flash of light.

"Tell me, before I answer you,—tell me whether or no it is the traveler in whom you are interested or the story."

My eyes seemed riveted to his face. He drew me into the hall, and, raising my chin with his hand, as he had done on the day my impertinence had proved too much for his gallantry, he demanded hoarsely, almost fiercely, "Tell me this minute!"

"I cannot tell," I stammered. "I—I—only wanted to know how the story ended."

"It ends as it began," he said, pushing me from him. "A traveler traveling the moor alone."

I put out my hand to stay him; I know not why. "Why," I cried, almost angrily,—“why should the one be so weak, the other so strong? How dare you judge, condemn, and execute all in a breath the one, and exalt to so much dignity the other, simply because the one is a feeble frame, the other a massive structure?”

He evidently thought I was suing to him for the pleasures which Lady Gay's hand held out to me,—that I was urging my claims to strength in being able to resist the dazzling allurements of the world's flattery while I indulged myself to the fullest, for, without even looking at me, he said, moving away towards the stairs,—

"Reason can do but little when passion holds sway in a human heart." Suddenly turning around, he approached me again.

"It may be that I do you injustice," he said, "yet I overheard your complaint to Lady Gay. Whatever your desires may be, pursue them. I shall not lay a straw in your path, and can even hope, nay, believe, that your nature is too noble not to reject the dross, your perception too keen not to detect the tinsel in all the glitter held up to your admiring gaze by so fair a hand as that of your friend yonder. When this is proven, join me again in the wilderness. I will patiently wait for you."

And this was what he meant, then, by the parable. I, simpleton that I was, had not connected the story with my life and his. I had listened to it as a child might listen, for the sake of hearing the end. I mechanically walked back to the sitting-room, where Lady Gay sat still in the same attitude in which I had left her. She seemed not to have known of our absence, for, starting up, she cried,—

"And the opera once in a century is the refreshing stream. A visit to Kensington in a decade is the ripened fruit. A wedding-reception, a party at the Ainslies', are the flowers springing up in the path of contentment." She flew at me almost fiercely. "Child," she cried, lifting me into a chair as though I were but a feather's weight, "confess that you have no idea of the heaven such a prospect as this held out to you would be to some women. Confess that you do not, that you never can, understand the soul of that great man. Think of Lord Frederick Valentine. Think of the degradation of being the wife of such a man, and then complain of your lot if you dare, you——"

Idiot. Yes, clearly that was the appellation Lady Gay was about to bestow on me.

I stared at her in blank amazement. Such vehemence I had never seen in any woman, much less did I think

Lady Gay Valentine capable of exhibiting such strong emotion. While I sat speechless looking at my accuser, she shook me fiercely, saying, "I was blaming him all the time for his indifference, and here you are the culprit. I wash my hands of you henceforth. Make a hell, if you will, out of the paradise you are in. You shall never have it to say that I held out a finger to help you."

I tried to assert my dignity. I tried to say, "Madame Valentine, you are extremely impertinent to the physician's wife," but my lips instead of opening closed tightly. I, the little country-bred girl, was mute before the lawless woman of the world. I had shown myself base and ungrateful to the man who had rescued me from such horrible depths of humiliation into which only a nature like mine could descend. I was selfish, complaining of my lot when nothing but my own hateful disposition was at fault.

The woman before me, though skilled in deceit and spoiled by the world's flattery, was superior to me in generosity of purpose, in nobility of soul, for had she been in my place, the thought of another suffering as my husband evidently suffered would have drawn her out of her own selfish sorrow, and moved her to pour healing balm upon the wounds of her companion in grief. "If your small soul isn't capable of appreciating such a nature as his, have the conscience at least to pretend to show respect to it before the world," she said, as, pinning up a fallen curl (Lady Gay would find time to stick in a hair-pin while the Angel Gabriel stood on the threshold), she prepared to depart.

Was I to be cowed in this manner without offering any resistance? Was I, the wife of the distinguished surgeon at the Academy, to be shaken and settled in this manner with impunity? Was I to be taken to task by a quondam sweetheart of my husband's because of my treatment of

him, and swallow the rebuke without a murmur? No. I felt like a young tiger ready to spring. I must have looked like one, for Lady Gay, after glancing at me a second, gathered up her skirts and ran from the room, down the long passage-way, swiftly turning here, now there, looking neither on this side nor that, nor behind her. What need was there to look? She knew that I was pursuing her like a wild thing. She bore in her memory the rage that dwelt in my eyes the moment her glance fell upon me. On she sped, and still the distance between us remained the same. I never thought what I should do if I caught her. My whole strength was put forth in gaining ground upon my adversary. We had for the third time passed the foot of the stairs up which my husband had disappeared but a few moments since. This time Lady Gay suddenly leaped up two steps at a time, I following after with the fleetness of a hare, when a voice from a door in the passage-way shouted, "In God's name what does this mean?" and at the same time I felt myself held firmly by what seemed to be two hands of steel.

My adversary neither halted nor turned back, but, crossing a little hall, disappeared from sight. My heart beat so wildly that I thought it must be throbbing its last. My breath came short and quick. I panted while endeavoring in vain to free myself from that vice-like grasp. I heard the front door close with a loud bang, and knew that Lady Gay was on the sidewalk safe from me. I was glad. What might I not have done to her! What everlasting remorse might I not have brought upon myself had not those hands detained me!

"What does this mean?" repeated my husband, in a voice which he vainly endeavored to render calm.

I stood looking defiantly at him as he bent his face inquiringly over my shoulder, while his grasp relaxed

slightly. An impertinent answer rose to my lips. My lip curled in scorn, but neither word nor sound came therefrom, save a wild, deep sob, which arose from the depths of my very soul, and shook me as no emotion had ever done in my life before.

"I insist upon knowing," he urged. "Have you been insulted? Have you received an affront that I may resent?"

His voice was so tenderly kind and sympathetic, that I felt the drops which had gathered thick and fast in my eyes rain down over my face in a torrent and splash upon the hand caressingly held against my cheek.

How in such blindness I fled from him, and was enabled to reach my room without dashing my head against the wall, I know not, but surely I am seated here in my room scarcely an hour after the events I here describe have transpired, without having had one word of explanation with the noble, princely being who could even perceive in the childish rage of a woman something which might possibly require both sympathy and redress.

CHAPTER XXIII.

I HAVE said nothing about the Sabbaths which have come and gone in their regular succession since I came to Etheridge Square. Indeed, I have thought nothing at all about them. I, who always made one of the little congregation at Loch Severn, rain or shine. I, who have scores of times pressed the rector's hand to my cheek, and half laughing, yet with deep inward feeling, begged him to set apart a half-hour each day for the purpose of bringing my name and the burden of my faults and weaknesses before the Holy One of Israel. I, who carefully gathered up all secular reading each Saturday night, and, after shutting them out of sight until Monday, laid out on the stand the Christian at Work, Clarke's Commentaries, and my Bible, that I might not only pass the day in a becoming manner, but inform myself on topics for religious discussion. Can it be that I have so merged each day into the next that I have not even known when Sunday came round?—nor in truth thought of there being such a day in the calendar, until Doctor Alvord started me out of my torpor by saying,—

"I will have leisure to attend divine service to-day. My regular attendance is upon St. John, Market Square, but I waive all preference if you have any choice."

I looked at him quickly. What manner of man was this, who, after such a scene as the one enacted the day before, was able to subdue all curiosity, and talk in that cheery, agreeable tone about attending worship, and at the same time refrain from suggesting to me that a sermon wouldn't come amiss to my benighted soul, overrun as it

seemed with ingratitude, hate, malice, and general wickedness? His eyes rested upon me for an instant, and as if he divined something of what was passing in my mind, he said,—

"I think I have been very much to blame in failing to provide a means for you to attend church, though circumstances have altogether precluded the possibility of my accompanying you."

"You think my conduct——" I began, looking down in some confusion, for I had resolved upon acknowledging to Doctor Alvord that I deeply regretted having been led into such a display of weakness as the one to which he had been witness.

"Pardon me," he said, interrupting me, "but I am determined to interpret your conduct of yesterday in the most favorable light possible; therefore I insist that Lady Gay must either have taken some unwarrantable liberty with you, or else goaded you to an extent beyond endurance. I can readily see how a nature like yours would suffer when deprived of the gentle influences of the rector of Loch Severn, and the teachings of a parent devoted to the interests of religion. I am only surprised that some evidence of your dissatisfaction at what must have seemed neglect, or at least indifference, on my part toward what the most unworthy of us try to observe, has not manifested itself ere this."

I had come down-stairs this morning to breakfast feeling humiliated beyond anything I had yet experienced. I had resolved to unreservedly ask pardon of Doctor Alvord for the shocking exhibition which had taken place in his house, determined, also, to take all the blame upon myself.

When I reflected, I had found nothing but self-accusation, for after all was not Lady Gay defending a friend,

and thrusting upon me home truths, the correctness of which I could not deny? To be sure, her emotion had carried her far beyond what even she intended, for Lady Valentine had, in rebuking me so severely, only ended after all in betraying her own secret, which was an all-absorbing and unconquerable love for my husband.

So long as she had supposed that we loved each other, so long as she believed that my regard for my husband was such as to render me proud of bearing his name, and that I cheerfully submitted to the inevitable consequences of having become a physician's wife; so long as she believed him happy in my affection and devotion, she had rested content, and herein lay Lady Valentine's heroism.

With her astonishment at the parable which Doctor Alvord had related came doubt, then real suspicion, and when he ended by a reference to a ball at the Mercencourts, a masquerade at the Juvinports, she saw that what would do for Gay Valentine was by no means admissible in the conduct of the physician Alvord's wife.

It was then that, carried away by surprise, pain, and sympathy for the evident unhappiness of the man she called friend, but whom she secretly loved, all the powers of her soul which had lain so long dormant rose up to do battle in his defense. It was then that she shook me. It was then that her contempt for my littleness of soul carried her out of herself.

It was no premeditated insult to me. She had had, indeed, but a few minutes in which to act, much less collect her thoughts to speak, but when she saw in my angry, distorted countenance the effect of her words, and the secret she had betrayed, her only course was to flee, and the wisdom of her course must be apparent to all.

But here, instead of my apology and having my offense pardoned, I was learning that I had committed no offense;

that the one whom I had supposed ready at all times to believe the worst he could of me was making excuses for what I considered almost inexcusable conduct on my part.

"You are too kind," I began again, but something stopped the words in my throat, obliging me to swallow with all speed, lest the choking sensation which I had experienced might end in a flood of tears.

Just then the butler came in with the coffee, and after he had retired, Doctor Alvord, without seeming in the least to observe my emotion, began praising the cook's skill, and in discussing the delicious beef and unrivaled fritters. I managed to recover sufficiently to placidly eye my husband askance, as he unsentimentally appropriated strip after strip of tenderloin, and, with anything in the world but the air of one who had shared my emotion, caused fritter after fritter to disappear, whilst I sat silently and persistently nibbling at a bun, unable to eat a bite.

"Will we walk to church?" inquired my husband, after conducting me to the foot of the stairs, where I, on pretense of warming my feet at the register, paused a moment.

"Now I think of it, we may as well look in at the Bethel School. It is on our way," he added; "that is, supposing you prefer to walk. Otherwise, the carriage can be gotten ready any time."

"To the Bethel School?" I inquired, interested at once. "I wonder if you have any such little waifs as we have at Winsted? You may be sure I shall feel like staying if I once get in such a paradise."

I spoke with great animation, and Doctor Alvord, vainly suppressing a smile at what I now know to have been amusement at the idea of paradise being centred in a Bethel school, said, after waiting with respectful attention

long enough for me to express all the satisfaction I felt at the prospect of such a visit,—

"I doubt if you will be so fascinated when you once get fairly in the school. I had no idea of asking you to remain longer than to see the little eager searchers after knowledge and truth. The condition of many of them is most lamentable so far as cleanliness and order are concerned, bearing, I fancy, but little resemblance to your clean, orderly school at Loch Severn, whose inmates are the children of honest parents, and not of the dregs and scum of London's suburbs. Since you are interested, however," he added, "far be it from me to discourage you from bestowing all the attention you are able on my protégés; for, after all, the time and patience I have given to this institution cannot be wholly lost if the original of this," taking a photograph from his pocket, "proves to be all that he now promises."

The photograph was of a young lad of perhaps fifteen or thereabouts, with a fine, intellectual face, large, hungry-looking eyes, and a mouth gentle and winning as his who stood before me holding the picture.

"The first instruction this boy ever received was five years ago at this same Bethel, and he is now a most promising young collegian, with the practice of law before him in the future, in which calling I am sure he must rise to eminence. His father is a poor, drunken wretch, and his mother—well, he has no mother. But come. You shall see the original and judge of his capabilities;" and taking out his watch, a movement which I find has become almost second nature with him, Doctor Alvord turned, with a slight bow, and left me.

I can hardly describe to you my sensations as, enveloped in wraps, I took the arm of my husband and left the house for the purpose of attending divine worship.

The first thing that I noticed was the extreme neatness, nay, elegance, with which my husband was attired, and as he, holding his hat in his hand, stood waiting for me at the foot of the stairs, I could not but be struck with the noble distinction of his bearing. His look of preoccupation was all gone, as he smiled upon me one of his rare smiles, displaying as he did so a set of perfect teeth, in which I vainly sought for the slightest suspicion of gold or of "rubber gums," the existence of which latter as the most remote of possibilities would be of itself alone sufficient to prejudice me forever against the most fascinating of created beings.

What am I that I should be so fastidious? I am only a strong, healthy, well-looking girl, with nothing false or fictitious about me. Have I not a right to prejudices and nice tastes? Very well. Let this question be settled then. Should Doctor Alvord's teeth turn out to be the mechanical invention of a clever dentist, and his fine head of hair prove——. No, I can see with half an eye that he wears no wig, for people thus equipped are foolish enough to cover up the best part of their face, a high and expansive forehead, and then I may add that I have given sufficient attention to that massive caput to distinguish the shadow of a bald spot on the crown of his head. No, decidedly, he wears no wig. But suppose he did, and that, furthermore, he had not a sound tooth in his head, would not I be justified, in view of my own physical strength, in criticising the physique of Doctor Alvord? Yes. Very well again. But I found no room for criticism. Even his beard was not too carefully trimmed for my notions, while betraying anything but neglect.

His shirt-collar had that air of elegant neatness, neglectful stylishness, which is so difficult of description; and I may add, also, that the spotless shirt-bosom, upon which

reposed a single solitaire diamond button, was the farthest possible removed in appearance from the bulged out, immaculate, corpsy look that newly-ironed garments of that character sometimes persist in taking upon themselves. Indeed, sometimes when Jessop has superintended the ironing of papa's shirts, and her poor, innocent victim has robed himself unconsciously, feeling the while that his linen is beyond criticism, I have felt that I must shriek out when he appeared in the breakfast-room, with every appearance in my eyes of being a recently-resurrected corpse.

No, clearly Doctor Alvord shared my ideas about bulged-out shirt-bosoms, for a flatter space could not be found than the region just above his rolling vest-collar, enveloping his round, expansive chest. Then—but why enter into particulars?

I held all of these items in my eye with a single glance, and I only hoped that I was as free from everything like *gaucherie* as my companion.

"Stop, child," he said, as, taking out a most benignant and fatherly-looking handkerchief in respect to size, he carefully dusted my chin, my eyebrows, and then my fur-trimmed polonaise, whilst I, blushing at the necessity there was for such a piece of gallantry, called up a faint laugh, and said,—

"I seldom resort to powder in any case, and now not to improve my complexion, but preserve it. The unskillfulness with which I wield the puff-ball must be the only corroboration I can offer to the truthfulness of my statement."

"Your word is certainly sufficient," he replied; "though why ladies will persist in using an article so utterly ruinous to the skin, on the plea of preserving the complexion, I never could imagine."

I straightway proceeded to view myself in the hall-mirror as we passed, with the intention of removing every speck of the cosmetic I had so hastily applied ; but, after discovering here and there on close inspection small patches of a somewhat sallow nature, where the dusting had been rather too severe and vigorous, I concluded to let well enough alone ; and now that I had been found out in patching up my once-blooming and healthy-looking countenance, I might as well allow it to remain.

In view of the fact that I so recently aired my sentiments in regard to shams and falsenesses, declaring at the same time my own freedom from all such, this confession may appear somewhat inconsistent to those who follow my history. I can only beg the indulgence of all, by pointing out the rigor with which I maintain the truth in regard to my waning charms. I might very easily have proclaimed I had the complexion of rose-leaf and alabaster combined. Let, therefore, my honesty plead for me.

As we walked leisurely along, now turning aside to view the residences as we went, it being to me a new street, I could not help but feel some elation, some enjoyment ; from whence it sprang I could not define, for I repeated over and over to myself, "This is all very well for to-day. This is really a dissipation, this Bethel visit, but to-morrow and the next day, and nobody knows how many that are to follow, will be passed in the moated grange on Etheridge Square."

How Sallie Carter would be astonished if she only knew that instead of a perpetual routine of ball-going and ball-giving and visiting generally, my soul had been transported, as it were, at the prospect of a Bethel school visit ! Yet, strange to say, my spirits never once flagged. When I was not talking cheerily and with animation, my mind was gayly singing, my heart was melodious.

We had not walked above a mile (I would call it two good miles had I been walking in Winsted woods) when we suddenly came upon a small stone chapel, neat in appearance, through the doors of which, as persons passed in, we caught glimpses of numberless bright young faces, and as we came still nearer hundreds of voices seemed to be raised to swell the hymn, "Glory be to God on high." My heart almost burst with the glad melody within it. Here was my past of mission-school memory revived, and seeming to stalk into my present as a thing determined not to be banished therefrom.

I endeavored to master my emotion as well as I could, but tear after tear found its way down my face, until I suddenly bethought me of the cosmetic, whose properties were altogether averse to salt water ; and choking back the lump that frequently comes into my throat nowadays, I followed my husband's form into the chapel with as much precision as my blinding tears would permit.

The superintendent came forward and welcomed us, expressing regret at the same time on account of the absence of the chorister, whose duty it was to preside at the organ, and, after hesitating a moment, inquired if it would be asking too great a favor of me to start the voices aright once, after which he had no doubt they would continue in the right key.

My husband did not so much as glance at me, but under pretense of examining a singing-book, handed to him by a little blue-eyed, apple-buttery-faced girl, left me to be accommodating or the reverse, as it should suit my fancy. He, however, gave me a quick look of approbation as, drawing off my gloves, I seated myself at the organ and, placing the "Sunday-School Bell" before me, began to sing, "Hark, hark, my soul, angelic voices singing."

I was half through the hymn, so lost was I in the old delightful sense of singing Sunday-school hymns again, before I noticed that not a voice joined me in the song. I stopped suddenly, only to find, upon looking over the school, every Bethel mouth open, every heathen eye staring at me as though I were a Punch and Judy puppet-show instead of a hymn-singer.

In great confusion I turned to the superintendent. "Pardon me," I said. "It is so long since I sang with a school that I was lost in the pleasure which the privilege of again singing afforded me. I did not know—perhaps your school is not familiar with the air I sang."

The superintendent hurriedly came forward, and, tapping a bell, the scholars arose; and with a voice near me singing a profound bass, and the superintendent tenor, the scholars' childish, uncultivated voices, and my own soprano rising clearly above all, I thought I never in my life had enjoyed such a season of praise.

Hymn after hymn was disposed of in the same manner, until, ere any of us dreamed, the hour had slipped by, and not a lesson had been recited. We were all happy. The boy with the large eyes, the young collegian, alone sat mute, and listened to the concert.

Approaching me after the singing had ceased, he said, "Madame, our Christmas festival takes place on Christmas-eve. The scholars all desire that you will be present at that time and sing with us, if it is not asking too much."

Christmas-eve! The time concluded on for my last appearance on the stage in opera. I was bewildered by conflicting emotions.

My husband witnessing my embarrassment, and thinking perhaps that he could imagine the hidden cause, here interposed, and prevented me from replying.

"I am quite sure," he said, "that my wife would only

too cheerfully comply with your request, and, as I understand it, the wish of the school, but an arrangement for passing the evening elsewhere has already been a purpose of mine, and you will therefore excuse us this time. Perhaps at another time, not far distant, we may all enjoy another pleasant service of this kind."

Whilst Doctor Alvord was speaking, I carelessly glanced over the fly-leaf of the book in which I had been singing, and read, written in a school-girl hand,—

"Presented to Alice Barrett by Doctor Alvord, founder of Bethel Mission, No. 4."

"And did you really found that mission?" I inquired, when, after leaving the school, we wended our way churchward.

"No, indeed," he replied. "These are only children belonging to parents who have been connected with me in my practice, either as patients or as subjects at the academy. I merely discharged a duty when I helped to furnish them with the means of obtaining some sort of instruction. This seemed the most practicable, in view of the fact that many families of the extremely poor and degraded are either indifferent to or altogether prejudiced against the school system."

"The attractions set forth in the Bethel are numerous and quite captivating, but so far as I am concerned, I can only contribute to this object the means of living, books, song-books, library-books, throwing in an occasional Christmas-tree in the winter, and providing an excursion or two during the summer. The real life of the mission is sustained by the untiring efforts of faithful men and women teachers, who are neither too rigid in their discipline, so as to make the school unattractive, nor so liberal as to defeat its real object. They rather employ a happy mean, which draws together any amount of igno-

rant, unruly children, and, appealing to all their little weaknesses, succeed in converting the Bethel into a very passable academy."

I remained for a long time silent, busy summing up my husband's noble qualities, and comparing them with my own character.

I could not see how a man so strong in all things else could be guilty of the weakness of yielding to a fickle brother's whim. I was puzzled more and more each day as trait after trait of my husband's nature unfolded itself to view, and left me no alternative but to despise myself in comparison,—I, who had so exalted myself in my own estimation above this man, proving himself daily so far above me in everything.

I felt impatient to know all the circumstances of that interview he had had with his brother ere he resolved upon a step which had proved so fatal to the happiness and repose of mind of both of us, but pride sealed my lips.

An intense longing took possession of my soul to do something worthy of praise. I was not content with merely having my faults and failings winked at, as it were, and smoothed over by the tender hands of Doctor Alvord. I wanted no longer to be either a passively good woman nor an actively naughty one, such as I had too often shown myself to be. I wanted to exalt myself truly and with reason in the eyes of him who certainly knew how to appreciate a truly noble action as well as to perform it. What great act could I do? What mighty sacrifice could I make? Plainly, nothing. My hands were tied. I was bound to engage in a scene which now not only filled me with loathing but horror, on account of the deceit accompanying its performance, and the terrible consequences following a possible exposure.

Was it even now too late to throw myself on the mercy of my husband, confess all, and secure his permission to rescue Bernardo Boreneo out of the financial peril into which my folly had lured him? No, no! What if he should sternly and justly rebuke us both? What if the heavier weight of his wrath should descend upon the head of my simple-minded old master and crush him to the earth, never to rise again in musical circles? What if—A thousand voices seemed to rise up within me and object to this plan. I clasped my hands wildly, and inwardly called upon God to save me.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A WALK of ten minutes or more brought us into Market Square, on one of the corners of which stood an old stone church, seemingly a relic of past ages, with its gray-capped turrets overrun with English ivy, which must have been the growth of a century or more. No fence surrounded it, only grass-plots six feet or more square in front and on the sides, running down Lobdell Street the length of the church.

The first anthem was being sung as I followed my husband down the aisle and entered a pew midway of the church, which I discovered, without looking up, already held two occupants. Both stepped out, allowing me to pass in, and after seating myself comfortably I looked up, as one always will do when waiting for one's companion to do the same. To my surprise I observed Monsieur Marchand about entering to seat himself beside me; but

before I had time to regret the accident which had again brought us together in such proximity, I observed a hand pressed heavily on his shoulder, and though I imagined that he resisted ever so slightly the authority thus being so plainly enforced, he stepped back quickly, and, with a bow, permitted my husband to enter first.

I could not see who the other one was, so taken up was I with the scene at the entrance of the pew, yet I fancied that a smile dwelt upon the countenances of those in my immediate vicinity, as my eye swept quickly round taking in my surroundings. I could well imagine the occasion of it, and the blood mounted to my very temples as I thought what a suggestion must have been called up in the minds of people by the performance just enacted. For once, a Frenchman had been obliged to be publicly reproved for a breach of courtesy, and I was the occasion of it, for had not Monsieur Marchand betrayed by this blindness to what was polite the intensity of his eagerness to sit by me? I reflected that I was not to blame. I tried to still the beating of my heart, but not until Doctor Alvord sat calmly at my side, and, after offering me a hymn-book, himself joined in singing the anthem, and I lifted my eyes to the face of the pastor.

At the commencement of the long prayer my husband knelt, but I only bowed my head upon the seat in front of me. Scarcely had the first response been made when I felt myself nudged on the elbow. I must be mistaken, I thought. My imagination is just now capable of conjuring up anything perfectly horrible. Hardly had I decided that fancy had suggested this thought when another and more decided nudge caused me to turn my head, and looking past my husband's kneeling form, I saw Lord Valentine's countenance turned toward me, heavy and vacant from intoxication, whilst his hand held a hymn-book

toward me, on the fly-leaf of which something was written.

I knew not what to do. If I refused to notice him, I knew from Lady Gay's description of his moods and temperament when he was under the influence of liquor, that it was dangerous to offend, and equally as perilous to encourage him. Monsieur Marchand raised his hand to close the book, and, if possible, avoid the observation of those fair sinners who were embracing this opportunity to examine the millinery in the congregation. I finally decided upon turning my head in the opposite direction, and felt my mortifying situation more keenly than I would have done scarce two months ago, when I cared nothing for myself and still less for my husband.

I had about made up my mind that Monsieur Marchand had succeeded in repressing the viscount's disposition to prove himself sociably inclined, when I felt the weight of a heavy hymn-book alight in my lap. I left it resting there, determined to hand it to my husband when church was out, and have him punish Lord Valentine as he deserved; but ere I had concluded on this plan the prayer ended, and Doctor Alvord, with an exceedingly white face, took the book, and placing it in his great-coat-pocket, folded his arms, and never allowed his attention to wander from the rector for a moment.

I heard a titter from behind me at this climax, which I knew had proceeded from the lips of a young girl in plumes and curls, who sat behind us. She evidently regarded the whole performance as good as a play, and so recounted it to her schoolmates the following day.

Doctor Alvord evidently considered me culpable, for while he offered me his arm with the strictest courtesy and politeness as we went down the aisle at the close of the service, he neither spoke to nor looked at me.

At the door we were met by two shivering, hungry-looking little children, who accosted my husband, saying, "Mother is very bad and father is drunk," and they clung to his hand, looking up into his face imploringly.

He stopped and regarded them with a countenance full of pity, and hurrying forward, called a carriage, into which he handed me with the utmost gallantry, and whilst he carefully tucked the robes around my feet, one and another of the congregation stepped up, and one said,—

"Doctor, the miner's child is just alive, and asks for you." Another said, "The blind harper in Hop's Lane has had another attack." Another said, "I feared that I would not be able to see you soon again, so I return now the money you loaned me last month. It saved our lives." The last speaker was emaciated from sickness, but dressed with scrupulous neatness.

I thought my husband looked somewhat confused and annoyed, but to every one he gave a kind look, adding, as he completed the requirements which he had considered necessary to my comfort and pointed to the two little children who looked so wistfully up at him, "These are my first calls, and each of the others, depend upon it, shall be attended to in their turn;" then closed the door, and I saw him hail another carriage, into which he and the little shivering bodies entered.

I threw myself back in the carriage, and pondered as I was being rapidly driven away. The distinguished surgeon of the academy is a philanthropist. What discoveries have I made to-day! The applicants each and all evidently considered me heartily in sympathy with my husband's cause, for they beamed on me smiles of gratitude for permitting such an invasion of my rights as a wife, and here, to think I had never even suspected him before of being a hero,—the most glorious, too, of heroes, a

philanthropist. I shrank into infinitesimal nothingness at thought of myself. The narrow limits of the carriage seemed a vast world, and I but an insect in it. I was not negatively good. I was criminally and inexcusably passive. I longed to enter the ranks and co-operate with the physician Alvord in dispensing his charities. I even bethought me of the little private income I had of my own, which I felt would help to swell the sum of bountiful munificence which was already being scattered abroad by my husband's unsparing hand.

I could hardly believe it when the carriage drew up to the door, so lost was I in the maze of possibilities that my future held out to me. It was only after I had reached my room and removed my wrappings that I began to reflect upon the disgraceful scene of the morning.

On Sundays we dine at three, and have tea at eight in the evening. So, dressing myself carefully, I descended the stairs a little before the dinner-hour, that I might meet and talk with my husband concerning the morning affair, and have it all well over before dinner.

At the head of the stairs I saw him coming out of his study, and, after requesting me to be good enough to step into the library, he followed me down the stairs without in the least accelerating his footsteps that he might overtake me.

"I almost regret having interposed myself this morning between yourself and your friend, the act having led to consequences I little dreamed would be the result, and on account of which I shall henceforth withdraw myself from the church in which my honor has been so grossly assailed, and my pride so cruelly, nay, so fatally, stabbed."

He spoke with much dignity, and I vainly sought in his stern countenance for the slightest encouragement from him that would lead me to hope that anything I

might say would heal the wound to his pride already inflicted, or exculpate me from the charge of having at least brought upon myself the folly and shame of that morning's proceeding.

"After this," he continued, drawing out the book from his pocket and placing it on the table,—“after this, it would be vain for me to look further for more galling proofs of your total disregard of my wishes, and your evident hatred of every tie that binds us to each other. Let it be the last occasion of the kind, for, understand me, your correspondence will henceforth be conducted on a basis without the pale of my protection.”

“Correspondence!” I cried, hope dawning in my soul. He evidently thought I had been writing and receiving answers from Monsieur Marchand during the season of prayer, and that an approaching “Amen” had necessitated the speedy action which characterized the hurling of the prayer-book over the top of his head into my lap.

Hope dawned in my soul, for I was, truth to tell, beginning to be heartily weary of these everlasting misunderstandings between us. He had not read what was written on the fly-leaf, else he must have known that Lord Valentine and not Monsieur Marchand had written it, and whatever Doctor Alvord might consider the former capable of doing, he knew that nothing like a flirtation between his lordship and me was at all within the pale of probability.

“Stay a moment,” I said, feebly. “You evidently have not half as much curiosity as temper, pride, and suspicion. I know as little as yourself respecting the written contents of that hymn-book. *Suppose we peruse it together.*”

The idea seemed to please him. Until now he had not had a thought save that I was in some way to blame for the disturbance.

Taking a step nearer to me and reaching out his hand, he said, “I wish to offer you my apology previous to the approaching explanation, and not afterwards; it dawns upon me that you are innocent;” saying which, he took up the hymn-book, and, handing it me, glanced over my shoulder as I opened and read, “*Methusalem* and Adonis in the centre. *Bachus* and *Venus* at the 2 extremes. By Jove! what a pretty sight it is for the rest of the congregation!”

It was written in the scraggly, scrawling hand of Lord Valentine, and this, aside from the orthography, would stamp it as emanating from that worthy source.

We both laughed involuntarily, while my husband asked, with something like pain flashing across his countenance, “Was *Methusaleh de trop* there, Portia? Would you have preferred the pretty Adonis to sit beside you? Come now, tell me.”

“I saw no Adonis,” I replied, laughing joyfully, as much at the turn things had taken as at the idea of the erect, vigorous man before me being called a *Methusaleh*; besides, it had never occurred to me to associate the pointed, Vandyke goatee of Monsieur Marchand, the waxed moustache, the girlish mouth and nose belonging to the same face, as a countenance to be admired. I had, on the contrary, rather pitied so much effeminateness in a man, and was disposed to patronize rather than admire. I was thinking of this before I answered at all. I continued to think as I read over the scrawl again.

“At least,” I said, still smiling, without being able to account for the sudden boldness my tongue had taken, “if I might be allowed to suggest an Adonis, he would resemble neither Lord Valentine nor Monsieur Marchand.”

Men usually look conscious when they are flattered. An expression of gentle toleration of another's sentiments in praise of his goodness is seen in his countenance when a

man feels he is being appreciated, and deserves to be. Without knowing it, perhaps, he takes upon himself airs, and if strengthened and encouraged by repeated references to his elegance and superiority, is sure to terminate fatally for him. He becomes insupportable to ordinarily good mortals. His virtues are a burden. They are brought forward so often that one wishes he could be proven somewhat faulty, that something like congeniality between him and the rest of mankind might be established. Therefore I am, and always was, opposed to flattering *men*. There is no knowing how soon it will be followed up by somebody else who has discovered the same praiseworthy trait or feature, and the reasons for your just admiration no longer exist. The excellence loses its excellence. It is no longer owned or desired as something innately good, but as a means by which vanity may be fed and self-praise justified.

I looked in vain for this consciousness in the face of my husband as he stood before me. Instead, he drew his brows together darkly. He looked puzzled, while the smile died away from his mouth and something like sarcasm dwelt there instead.

I knew that he had no idea I meant himself. I was delighted; such unconsciousness as this was truly refreshing. Had I hinted ever so remotely such a tidbit of compliment to Monsieur Marchand, he would have seized my hand and dropped upon his knees before me.

And—yes, even in the days gone by, did not Charles Alvord, my once adored lover, suffer me to worship his godlike beauty, elegant manners and style, and reward me for my sagacity in making the discovery by granting me permission to tickle his drowsy senses into repose and claim him for my own?

"No," I said, looking my husband in the eye, while

he still continued to frown darkly upon me. "No, no. Another than Monsieur Marchand or Lord Valentine is my idea of a supreme Adonis." I dropped my eyes that they might not betray me.

"Permit me to ask," he commenced, hoarsely, "what man in the circle of acquaintance you have met in London since you became my wife has the honor of your unqualified approval?"

The clock ticked loudly on the mantel-shelf. The golden-throated bull-finch in his pretty cage poured forth a stream of melody, and my heart seemed almost attuned to it.

He is jealous, I thought. How delicious! No longer suspicion, but jealousy, racks his soul.

"How can I confess," I said, "when you frighten me so?"

"I forgot myself," he answered, in a still deeper tone, and glancing at him, I observed that compassion had taken the place of rage. "Confide in me," he said. "You will not regret it."

My eye wandered around the walls of the room. A portrait of his maternal grandfather in a long queue and loftily-perched eyebrows seemed to nod at me as well as the huge stock about his neck would permit. A bust of Psyche smiled down at me encouragingly from a bracket. The fish in the aquarium seemed to have become motionless to listen, whilst the purple cactus and gorgeous-hued geranium growing in flower-pots in the window-seat bent affectionately towards each other. The bull-finch ceased singing, and, holding his head on one side, appeared to realize all that was passing in the room.

Suddenly these objects of the animal kingdom seemed instinct with intelligence as well as animation. The fish, the birds, the flowers, all witnesses to the confession that

fluttered in my heart and trembled on my lips. They, the cynical creatures, would hear me declare myself to my husband to whom I had so long professed an indifference, which after all was only half felt.

What kind of an answer was I to expect after I had opened my heart to him and confessed that he was my ideal,—the one god on earth that my soul worshiped? What had I in common with his greatness and magnanimity? Could he find it within the economy of justice to respond with his large nature to a nature so little as mine? Could I bear the dash of cold water which, in candor from him and justice to me, his faithful hand would feel called upon to administer to the love which had sprung up in my heart too late to win a response? These thoughts flashed over me seemingly all at once, yet I was going to brave them all.

Tears shook themselves off my lashes at last. My swelling heart seemed ready to burst, when, with stately tread, Bobbs appeared with a taper, lighted the gas, and in stentorian tones announced Lady Valentine.

The folding-doors swung on their hinges, and Lady Gay stepped in, looking very much as though she considered herself about to beard the lion in his den, for she swept to my side like a flash, and, kissing me with as much fervor as affection, apologized for her husband's conduct, having but a moment since become aware of it, the communication being received from the lips of Monsieur Marchand.

"It seems that I am just in time," she laughed, mischievously, looking from one to the other. "That, too, is the identical prayer-book. I know it by its binding; it is mine. I suppose I may read my husband's notes?" she added, smiling all over her face. "Poor Fred hasn't an idea what he wrote." After reading, she laughed louder

than ever. "Methusaleh, indeed! Monsieur Marchand is at least five years older than your husband, *ma chère*, though he does look so like a fresh young Adonis. Trust these French people to make themselves look young till their very bones rattle with old age. I wish to goodness I had been born in France."

Here dinner was announced, and, Lady Gay taking my hand, said, "Come, let us run together, dear, and by all means let us take the direction of the dining-room."

CHAPTER XXV.

I HAUNTED the library to-day, entering it almost directly after breakfast, and never leaving until Eliza came to apprise me of the fact that I was seated in a window-sill, reading by the aid of the deepening twilight alone. The occasion of my absorption came about in this way. Soon after I entered the library I felt a strange longing to get possession of some exciting novel, no matter how trashy or improbable, so that it lifted me out of the almost impenetrable darkness caused by *ennui*, which was slowly, but surely, settling round my life and entering my soul. I felt a thirst for robbers' caves and smugglers' dens. My soul longed for inquisitions and wars, and untold hairbreadth escapes from the scalping-knife. My spirit yearned for stolen children, gypsy camps, agonized parents, and a wild, ecstatic reunion between parents and child. As my fingers strayed over the volumes of histories which lined the shelves, I rejected with feverish impatience each and every one which I knew dealt plainly with historical facts. I pushed by volume after volume of poetry, prose, science,

and came to a shelf of novels, the most of which looked new. I took up a volume entitled "Daring Deeds by Brave Men," thinking it was just what I wanted. I let the leaves fly between thumb and finger, after the manner of all persons who are examining a book; but as the stories were all short, and were each prefaced with an engraving representing bears and other wild beasts being dispatched by frightened-looking individuals, I concluded that this was not at all what I wanted.

I then took down another, and another, each having some objection not to be overcome. At last a very modest little volume attracted my attention. It was bound in blue and gold, and was entitled "The Tenant of the Cottage." After opening it, and glancing down the first page, and through the first chapter, and the second, and the third, I began to feel as though I might have written it myself, or that some one had written it about me, so many things were there in the character of Dora that resembled what I conceived my own to be; so many things in the career of Louisa Montfort, the rector's daughter, and Dora Morton, that were so exactly like Sallie Carter and me, that I read on, and on, and on, until, oblivious to all things, I minded not the flight of time. Not a pang of hunger assailed me, not a sound disturbed me, until Eliza came just as I had finished the last line; and I turned to her a radiant face, having lived in the short day just passed a whole life-time of my other days over again. I opened my capacious pocket and dropped the volume into it; and, following Eliza to my room, I made a hasty toilette, and at the same time a resolution: Tomorrow, I thought, I will begin and copy this little volume off, and send it to Sallie Carter. I had a double purpose in view; one was, that Sallie would enjoy reading it vastly better knowing that her friend Portia had taken

the pains to copy it for her; the other was, that in transcribing the work, I would find employment for myself, and at the same time keep down that spirit of restlessness which is beginning to make life for me a burden, almost too heavy to be borne.

Consider me, therefore, as rapidly copying "The Tenant of the Cottage" for the next two weeks or more; and as this work involves showing you the manner in which I spend my time, as well as the means employed, I must, in justice to my promise and purpose in the beginning of this book, permit my reader to share with Sallie Carter the fruits of my toil.

I think Louisa Montfort is like Sallie; though my own dear Sallie is not quite so clever, neither is she so naughty, as the rector's daughter. Then, Aunt Dorothy will answer very well for Mrs. Jessop, Sir Dasher for Monsieur Marchand, Aunt Burgess for Lady Gay, and Lady Ethel for my own dearest mamma. I'm sure in *Gil Blas* one comes across a story frequently bearing no connection with the narrative itself. So also in *Don Quixote*, and twenty other novels of olden times. The idea, therefore, is not original with me; neither is the privilege I ask unwarranted or unprecedented. The reader may therefore either pause here in the history of the physician's wife and read my little story, or proceed with my history, and return again to the "Tenant of the Cottage."

[*Note to my Readers.*—I postponed copying the little story mentioned in my last chapter until such time as I should have perfect leisure. My reasons for omitting the task altogether will be found in the following chapter.]

CHAPTER XXVI.

"You perceive that I am not in a mood to be talked to, Eliza," said I, pushing away my maid, as her reproachful eyes smote my conscience until I almost cried out in agony.

I had just come up from the dinner-table, pleading fatigue and a severe headache to my husband as reasons for declining his kind invitation to attend the theatre and hear Porti. I had scarcely reached my room, when Eliza handed me an antique flower-pot filled with a plant the rarest and fairest, the sweetest and most delicate, that was ever nurtured on the bosom of mother earth.

"My master sent to the Palace Gardens for this," said my maid, bending up a spray of the delicate blossom and laying it against my cheek, so that the breath from its fragrant lips almost intoxicated me. Then I pushed her away as I encountered her eyes, and bade her see to it that no mistake occurred to prevent our reaching my room in safety, as I should hold her responsible for any betrayal of my secret. I directed her, at the same time, to go below and carelessly observe to the footman that I was to be disturbed on no account whatever, and that she would return late accompanied by her mother, who would remain and pass the night with her.

"Obtain the key to the area," I added, as Eliza went to do my bidding, "in order that we may enter, should the footman fall asleep or anything happen to delay his answering the summons;" with which parting injunction, acknowledged by a silent though respectful bow of the head, my maid left me to robe myself in a huge water-

proof which completely enveloped my form. My arms felt grateful for the warmth thus produced; for although the room was comfortably warm, the blood did not circulate freely though my plump, round arms, now white as snow, and almost as cold.

I looked at my hands, too chubby and short for a sculptor's model; yet I thought they might easily be mistaken for marble, so white and veinless did they seem.

As I closed my door and, after locking it, placed the key in my pocket, I walked boldly down to the hall, and, seeing the footman enveloped in the meshes of Eliza's strategy at the far end of the hall, I let myself out at the front door, and thence into the plaza. I had but a moment to wait before Eliza came up the area steps, and, hurrying along until we came to Hollybrook, we took a car, and were soon landed at the side entrance to the theatre. My heart beat tumultuously as I ran almost into the very arms of my husband, as he stepped from a car that was going up and entered the car I had left. He offered a thousand pardons for his awkwardness, which I neither accepted nor rejected, but hastened up the stairs, closely followed by Eliza. Once safely in the drawing-room, I nerved myself to the performance of the self-imposed task before me.

"Doctor Alvord will surely be here," I mused, staring at my white face in the glass. What can I do to disguise my countenance? Plainly nothing. There I stood in full evening toilette, arrayed in my wedding-dress, with neither ornament nor flower, and my eyes all ablaze with nervous excitement. A full half-hour must have elapsed, when I, having stimulated with a cup of strong tea, swept out upon the stage to begin my fourth and last engagement. I well remember just how the audience seemed to me, packed and jammed with the beauty and distinction

of London. But, in sweeping my eyes over the house, my glance fell and lingered upon the occupants of a box at my right. "If they do not recognize me," I thought, "I may hope for the best." They were Lady Gay, and Lord Valentine, and Monsieur Marchand. As my eyes still remained riveted on the box, while the orchestra opened with the accompaniment, I observed the party turn around simultaneously, and, after greeting a newcomer in the person of Doctor Alvord, all raised their glasses. I now fixed my eyes on a certain pendant of the chandelier, lest the emotion I felt rising within should overcome me, and poured forth my introduction in the charming little melody, translated from the Hebrew, Hippolyta to her Husband:

"They tell me thou art the favored guest
Of every fair and happy throng;
No wit like thine to wake the jest,
No voice like thine to lead the song.
And none would guess, so gay thou art,
That thou and I are far apart.

"Alas! alas! how different flows,
With thee and me, the time away!
Not that I wish thee sad, Heaven knows,
But that thou can'st be light and gay.
I only know that without thee/
The sun himself is dark to me.

"Do I thus haste to hall and bower,
Amidst the proud and gay to shine,
Or deck my hair with gem and flower
To flatter other eyes than thine?
Ah, no! for me love's smiles are past;
Thou had'st the first, thou had'st the last!"

I lowered my eyes as I sang the last verse, and a fascination I could no longer resist directed them to the box where sat the Valentine party. Doctor Alvord seemed to

be smilingly opposing some vehement assertion of Lady Gay, while Monsieur Marchand leaned out of the box to the depth of his waist, staring at me as though his eyeballs were ready to burst.

How calm I was, and with what ease and careless unconcern I accepted the plaudits of the crowd, as though I was conscious of deserving them all; for, I may say, a hundred times, and seemingly from ten thousand voices, the strange whisper of the multitude went round and round; then fell upon my ear.

"The physician's wife!" it said, that vast unity of voices; "the physician's wife!" came the whisper again to my ears, as if borne on the breeze for miles away, and merely touched my senses in its circuit round the room. Yet it affected me not, and with the same self-confidence I sang on to the close of the aria.

How could I sing those words,—

"Alas! alas! how different flows,
With thee and me, the time away,"

and throw into it the feeling which brought tears to the eyes of many, while I grew each moment more strong and indifferent?

How could I sing,—

"Thou had'st the first, thou had'st the last,"

until I could see a deathly pallor overspread my husband's countenance, and still not feel horror-stricken at the thought that my secret was a secret no longer?

And then the floral tribute, out of which I selected but one modest bouquet, composed of daisies and jump-ups, before leaving the stage. I was resolved to answer no more calls that evening, though the floor should fall. As I stepped behind the curtain, what sudden darkness was

that which fell upon me like a pall? Was I suddenly stricken with blindness? And what meant that cry going up from the seething audience, followed by a stillness even worse than the shrieks? How can I tell it you? The horror of that moment overcomes me, and of the terrible hour that followed. It meant that the whole city was in darkness; that from one end of London to the other there gleamed no light, save the feeble glimmer of a lamp here and there at the bedside of some sick or dying mortal. Could anything but this arouse me from the stupor into which I had fallen, and quicken my intellect until I decided upon finding my way to the carriage Eliza had in waiting for me outside, and bribing the driver to see me home if it cost me my last farthing? But what confusion fell upon my ear, as, after groping my way down the narrow flight of steps, I vainly called Eliza! How the crowd, which had let itself out of windows and from balconies on to the pavement, jostled me and swore, as I uttered again and again Eliza's name! "Can no one assist me?" I cried, in a frenzy, when a lantern was let down from a window of the theatre, and for one moment flamed up and then went out. I felt almost simultaneously a hand seize my own, and the voice of a man whispered in my ear, so that I, who could not distinguish a word in the shouts and evident curses sent up from amidst the multitude, heard every word that whisper contained. "Trust me, my angel, I will keep your secret!" and I knew it was Monsieur Marchand, who almost rudely pulled me by the arm, and, pushing me into a carriage, mounted the box with the driver, and, lashing the horses, was borne with me far from the scene of terror.

"How could they find the way?" I thought, as I lay lifelessly back in the carriage, fully aroused to the perils of my situation. The vast city of London in darkness!

Could anything exceed that horror, except indeed the vast city of London in flames?

As we stopped occasionally at a turn in the street, the driver descended, and, lighting a match, examined the landmarks on the way to Etheridge Square. Sometimes I knew that even a London hack-driver might be mistaken as to his whereabouts, for we turned about several times and entered another street than the one chosen with so much confidence.

At length I heard the roar of the blast-furnace, and knew that we were in Hollybrook Street. Pulling down the sash, I almost screamed in an unnatural voice, "Let me down here, for the hope of mercy!" And the carriage suddenly stopped, while Monsieur Marchand, descending from the box, threw his arm around my shivering form,—a familiarity which I had no power to repel,—and with careful tread took the direction of the fountain, the splashing of which sounded like sweetest music to my ears, and renewed hope. Perhaps I might after all get within the house and escape detection. Could I but get to my room, disrobe, and have lights supplied throughout the house before the return of Doctor Alvord, could not I appear as though I had not left the house? And seeing me thus, would not my husband hesitate to make known his suspicions? Would not he think twice before asking me a question which, if innocent, I could resent with disdain, as an insult to me? These thoughts passed through my mind as silently we hurried along.

"Here must be the place," I thought; "Eliza has the key, but I can summon the footman," ringing furiously at the door, and dismissing Monsieur Marchand with a simple thanks, though I was obliged to tear my hand from his, he having in his impulsiveness carried it again

and again to his lips. Bobbs responded to the summons. The first words he greeted me with were, "Pretty doings here indeed, Miss Elise,—the city in darkness and not a light of any description in the house!" I answered him nothing, but, grasping the banister, ascended the stairs, fearing lest in the narrow passage-way he might come in contact with my cold, bare arms, or my satin robe.

"Wait, Elise," he said, following quickly after me, so that I gathered my clothes about me tightly, and increased my speed.

"Elise!" called Bobbs, in an awed whisper; "speak one word to me!" but on I sped, noiselessly treading the tapestried hall, and, feeling my way to the front hall, I knew that Bobbs had grown frightened and ceased to follow me.

In my bewilderment I turned off at the first landing, and, coming to the vicinity of my room, I pushed the key into the nearest door, and in a moment was within.

"Surely this is not my room," I thought, as a strange odor greeted my senses the moment I entered. But, knowing that I could not be far off from it, I resolved to find the mantel-piece and strike a match, that I might the better discover my exact locality. As I moved forward, putting forth my hands, they came in contact with strange objects to me,—things I knew not of. "I cannot be in any of the guest-chambers," I thought; "I surely am not in the bath-room. The laundry is on the floor below this; it cannot be that. Yet wherefore these damp towels, and the sickening odor of chemicals, such as faintly linger around my clothes when they come from the wash, and before Eliza has aired them thoroughly? If I could but find a match!" Pushing forward, I clutched something which, after I withdrew my grasp, gave forth a sound that made my flesh creep. "Rattle,

rattle, rattle!" like thousands of chess-men strung on a cord, and answering to the touch of giant hands. A singular fascination possessed me to stretch forth my hands again, when the loud, rattling sound had subsided into a feeble "click, cl-ick, c-l-i-c-k."

Did not I know that it was the skeleton in Doctor Alvord's study? Yes, for I saw it in all its hideousness, through the thick, black darkness of the room, in which I could see no object. My imagination discerned that grinning, fleshless object, which my hands had put in motion. "Would it not be better to die this instant," I thought, "than to live in perpetual remembrance of this horrible night?" and I clutched the bony thing with hands of iron, fearing that the rattle, rattle, rattle, the click, click, click, would again break forth, and my reason desert me at the sound.

Strange voices and hurried footsteps I then heard below-stairs; I even saw the faint glimmer of a light appear, reflected up the passage-way a moment, and then die away. I knew that I was sane. I wished for the second time in my life that I could go mad. I strained my eyes in the darkness to catch sight of the object which, at another time, the gift of worlds would not tempt me to look upon; and still I held it firmly in my grasp, lest that brain-consuming rattle, rattle should smite upon my ear. My head was thrown back, my eyes were starting out of my head; quick and short the breath came from my nostrils. Yet my body moved not, lest the motion should shake us both together, the skeleton and me.

Another faint light dawned in the passage-way; a quick step entered the alcove a few paces from me, and I heard Doctor Alvord rap on my door, and call in a voice loud enough, I thought, to have waked the dead. But I was not dead! My tongue was glued to the roof of my

mouth, and my teeth!—I felt them involuntarily closing tight, in imitation of the grinning thing before me.

“Portia!” again called Doctor Alvord, trying the door in vain. I surely made no noise, yet something drew him to the study door; something urged him forward.

Did I turn my eyes towards him when he entered? Did I cease to pant, and loosen my hold on that hideous object? No; I did none of these; yet I plainly saw my husband enter. I plainly saw his look of utter amazement; yet he stood behind me, and my eyes were fixed upon the horror. I could not faint; I could not lose my senses. But when Doctor Alvord closed the door and locked it, placing the candle on the bureau, and then came to me, gently unlocking my arms from about the manikin; when he turned my head aside, and placed it on his broad bosom; when he threw his arms about me, and, holding me to him as he warmed me back to life, whispered, “Portia, my poor child!” I knew that he had saved my life, and that he pitied me, as we often pity disobedient children whom we are about to punish.

“My poor, poor child!” he said, pushing the hair from off my forehead, and chafing my arms. “I am no longer your cruel master,” he murmured. “You shall go back to Loch Severn to-morrow, and dwell with your father, whom you love, in your childhood home. Yes, you shall go,” he repeated, caressingly.

My arms stole about his neck. I wanted to say that I loved him, and that we must not separate.

He mistook the action for gratitude, and said, “Forgive me, Portia! I had hoped ere this to have been something to you, but you shall go back to your home to-morrow. I myself will take you there.”

Why could not my tongue speak? Why was it then an impossibility for me to utter one word that swelled my

heart almost to bursting? Wherefore was I denied utterance of the speech that might have brought us together forever? Could I only have told of my longing to confess the folly of which I had at first been guilty; could I have explained how his persistently misunderstanding me, and his apparent indifference to me whenever we met, chilled my soul, though I had learned to love him with my entire being! No! He had made no confession to me. His acts of tenderness were no greater than a strong man might feel for a wayward, suffering child. How could I say, with my heart resting against his, and my lips pressed to his own—how could I say, “I love you! I love you! I love you!” when he had not intimated, in ever so remote a manner, that my love was reciprocated? It was pride that closed my lips; it was pride ruling my tongue and taking possession of my entire being. Oh, how I mourn that I did not at that moment tell him all! For scarcely had I arisen from his knee, than his voice, but a moment ago so gentle and caressing, grew husky with anger as he demanded of me the meaning of the young Frenchman's presence on the steps, scarce a half-hour before.

“What is that painter to you,” he asked, “whom I would have killed, after hurling him from my door, had I not pitied his infatuation and yours? What is he, I say, to *you*? I saw him glaring at you from the box at the theatre! I saw him throw the bouquet, the one you carry on your bosom, the solitary one you selected out of the garden laid at your feet! Did you think I would not recognize you? Were you mad to suppose I would not know my own wife, even before the dozens of voices joined in whispering their convictions?”

As he said this I felt the wave pass over me again, as it did at the theatre, filled with whispered murmurings of

"The physician's wife!" "the physician's wife!" but, unlike the indifference of scarce an hour before with which I listened to the sound, my soul was now filled with regret, shame, remorse, that I had so dishonored my husband, that I had allowed the embarrassment of that dreadful moment to fall upon him,—that he should be obliged to sit calmly there and deny to Lady Gay that his wife was the prima donna of the evening, whilst she urged him to confess that it was so. I could even hear her saying, "The wedding-dress,—you surely know your own bride. Confess that it is your wife, and I will keep the secret for you!"

But, no! I continued to see his noble smile, as I saw him at the theatre, shaking his head calmly and firmly, refusing to betray me or acknowledge his own dishonor. What a moment it must have been for him!

But I offered no resistance to my husband's plans. I answered none of his questions put to me with so much directness. I said not that Monsieur Marchand was nothing to me.

CHAPTER XXVII.

I WENT to my room, and passed the night in packing. Though Eliza came to the door every now and then, crying, "Dear, sweet lady, let me in,—let me make you comfortable," I answered her nothing; and by dawn I had every article that I had brought with me to Etheridge Square under lock and key, confined within my trunks and bags, and stood in my traveling wraps awaiting the summons from my husband.

I heard him call the footman to him as I stood leaning over the stairs, and say, in a voice free from emotion of any kind, just as he would give my order, "My wife is going home to make a visit. If callers arrive between this and my return, say that Doctor Alvord and his wife have gone on a pleasure trip."

What? Did he mean to stay at Loch Severn, then? What meant the order just given? Was it his purpose to stay from London until he could return again with me, cured of my supposed infatuation for the foolish young artist, and no longer fascinated with stage-life?

These thoughts had only time to enter my mind before my husband bounded up the stairs, two at a time, and, bidding me take his arm, conducted me to the carriage, where we were again whirled through the streets to the depot. Not a remark was made by either of us until, reaching the ladies' waiting-room, he carelessly observed that the short supply of gas the evening previous must have occasioned great confusion, and probable loss of both life and property, at the various depots of the city. To which I merely responded by a feeble bow.

I cannot tell what my feelings were as we sped along through field and meadow on our way homeward bound; or, indeed, whether I had any feeling at all. Doctor Alvord seemed to be struggling with some emotion, which I directly interpreted as mortification, rather than extreme anger. His sympathy for me, however, frequently manifested itself in solicitude for my comfort, for the day was stinging cold; and, although I was well enveloped in wraps, a nervous chill seized me every time the door of the coach was opened to admit a restless passenger, who, weary of being seated so long in his own car, sought what change would do for him. For the matter of that, I was cold all the time, with that shivering chilliness that goes to one's very heart and freezes the life-blood. I felt thrust out from all things for the second time in my life, though this time my love suffered rather than my pride; and the sufferings I endured from the latter did not approach in intensity to what I now felt. Could I only have thrown my weary head on his shoulder! Oh, if I could have but touched his hand! then all would have been made plain. But I only pressed my hands more tightly together beneath my wrap, and said to myself, "Better to live thus, far better, than to acknowledge a passion which he, with his strong sense of duty, would try to repay with unceasing attentions. These would only be gall and wormwood to me. I knew that I had only to tell him that I cared nothing for the young Frenchman; that I wished to go back again to Etheridge Square, and confess to him the struggle I had had with the two duties which pointed in such opposite directions, but which had appeared to me as the consequences of my folly. I had only to say these things, and Doctor Alvord would have generously offered me again his home and the protection of his name. Yet I could not bring myself to the task. My lips refused to

frame the words which would make me the recipient of so much generosity, when my heart asked for something more. Besides, might he not judge my confusion, and my promise to do so no more, to be merely a ruse to get back to London and Monsieur Marchand? Might not he construe my penitence into fear on my part as to the consequences of my folly and deceit? I knew not what he intended to do, but I was not left long in doubt.

Arriving at the depot at Winsted, Doctor Alvord hailed the carry-all which was always in attendance at the depot; and seeing me safely within it, he closed the door, and, thrusting a letter into my hand, he stepped again on board the train, and was borne off in a direction the opposite of London.

I longed to look out of the cab-window and see if he turned to look after me. I wanted to see the expression of his face, whether it had in it any sadness at this sudden parting; but the letter dropped from my nerveless fingers on to the floor, and, leaning back in the carriage, I uttered the cry that was in my heart—*deserted!*

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE week has passed seemingly on such leaden wings, that I have lived an eternity in it. I scarcely know where to begin writing; each day has been such an exact counterpart of the other.

When I uttered the involuntary cry, "deserted!" the smart cabman came to the door, saying, "Did you call me, miss?" "No!" I answered, averting my head, and at the same time stooping to pick up the letter given me by Doctor Alvord.

The drive to Loch Severn seemed long to me, yet I somehow wished it might never end.

When at length we drove up the avenue of pines, and I, stepping from the carriage, was received into the arms of Mrs. Jessop with untold "hallelujahs" and unnumbered "God be praises," I felt that I must scream to the driver to take me again to my husband, just as I had called aloud to be taken home again on the evening of my arrival in Etheridge Square. Of what use, however! Doctor Alvord was ere this several miles away from London, and continuing in the same direction. With feverish impatience I withdrew myself from Mrs. Jessop's embrace, and, pleading headache, desired to be shown to my room, and not disturbed until nightfall, when papa should arrive home for dinner.

"Why did not you yourself wait for your father's return, child?" asked Mrs. Jessop, trying to account for my white face in some other way than the sick headache.

"Because my husband chose to bring me," I answered, crushing the letter in my hand and hurrying to my room

with all my might. Locking the door, I tore open the envelope and read. "A long letter," I thought, looking at the beginning and then turning to the end, before reading. "It takes a long letter to sum up my many misdemeanors!" Then I began to read:

"MY CHILD,—I would not cruelly rake over the dead ashes of the past, even in my own justification, were it not necessary to do so in order that I may make myself thoroughly understood, and to prevent, if possible, any future misunderstandings between us. My hasty determination of this night, to go away from here for a season, taking you with me, and leaving you at Loch Severn, was as much for the purpose of giving you relief from my presence as to allow myself time to consider thoroughly a subject which, more than all else in the world put together, demands my sober reflection and engages my attention. I will tell you what my theory has always been concerning women. It may help to explain to you why I took you from your home an unwilling bride and established you mistress of my house and name, placing my reputation in your hands, to honor or dishonor, as the sequel should prove. It is needless to say that I firmly believed in the former result, as a consequence. I have always believed that marriage once contracted, the parties having for their basis of such contract respect, admiration, and a moderate liking, were far more certain to terminate happily than those wherein passion directed, and desire for possession alone ruled, judgment. This, however, was on the supposition that both parties had this respect, admiration, and moderate liking for his and her ground-work. The sentiment of aversion and contempt, recollect, had no part in my theory, entered not into one of its places; neither had spitefulness, nor

malice prepense. I occasionally, however, admitted gratitude, allowing this sometimes to take the place of admiration; but the respect, and moderate regard, I sternly insisted upon. When, therefore, my brother came to me saying that he had too hastily given over his liberty into your hands; that he had become infatuated with another, and scarcely less suitable woman than yourself, in point of family and accomplishments, and announced his determination to make the change at all hazards, I offered no advice, well knowing that it would fall as dew upon a dead plant, or like casting gold-dust to the winds. For Charles Alvord follows the bent of his own inclination in all things. But knowing, as I did, the deep mortification to which you would be subjected, the anger of your father, and the wound which your love would receive, I waited for nothing, but started at once for Loch Severn. There I found you innocent, unsuspecting. Being beautiful, I admired you; commanding universal regard, I respected you; of a gentle and winning nature, I had no choice but to like you. *So that the proposition to make you my wife came from me*, and was no part whatever of my brother's plans. I believed, when we walked together in the garden that day, that you respected me, else why should you lose sight of your lover in listening to the little parable I related, whilst you remained in ignorance of its application? I thought you might learn to like me upon finding that I studied your wishes, and that I was not your stern master, but an indulgent and careful husband. I knew you to be proud-spirited, though not haughty; on the contrary, gentle and sensitive. 'When she knows,' thought I, 'what is in store for her, how it will wring her pride!' I knew this pride would suffer first, because I did not believe then, *I never will believe, that you regarded my brother with either passion or respect;*

else how could you have been blind to his want of allegiance to you, and unquestioningly submit to his tyrannies?

"No! Permit me to reiterate here, that howsoever deep may have been the aversion with which you regarded me, your heart held not one atom of love for my brother! Your pride, then, it seemed to me, was the principal difficulty in the way of your bearing with composure the fate in store for you. Here, let me add, is where I made my fatal mistake. I determined that night upon admitting gratitude as one of the requirements in my theory; this sentiment to supply the lack of admiration I thought you would not be able to feel for me. What was my astonishment and alarm, to find you on our wedding journey to London detesting and loathing, not only this, but despising me. I realized for the first time the difference between gratitude and respect, when I found my wife acting on the defensive with the husband she had sworn to honor and obey. (We left out the word 'love' in the service, did we not?) This condition in which I discovered your mind was not without its effect upon me. I felt myself gradually losing respect for the woman who, so wrapt up in her own selfish sorrow, was unable to see beyond to the unhappiness she was causing one who had meant her no harm, only good. In fact, I found that you had no gratitude to bestow, and I, looking in vain for even that one good thing in itself, made up my mind that you could bring all the sorrow to bear on the occasion that was necessary, and, therefore, wasted no sympathy upon you. Afterward, however, I thought I discovered time and again a disposition on your part to extend your sympathy to me. These were the times when hope entered my breast; when I believed that all might be well with us yet, if we only had patience,—that patience which is bitter indeed, but whose fruit is sweet. This hope remained with me.

Though often crushed, it revived again and again, until, finding that you were not only in danger of being compromised in a worldly point of view, but that the drift of your regard was taking altogether another tendency, out of and away from me; when I saw that my influence had no more weight with you than the barking of a surly mastiff, that you knew would not bite, I felt that *then* was the time for us to separate, for a season at least, and until, after due reflection on your part, you determined either to comply with my wishes or what you deem to be such, to be guided by my judgment in the matter of your associates and the frequency with which you attend public entertainments, or to separate entirely.

"Should you choose, after due deliberation, to adopt the first-named course, be assured I shall assist you to bear existence in every way within my power. But in case your liberty is sweeter to you than public scandal is distasteful, believe me I will lay not a straw in the way of your gaining the freedom for which you pine.

"The four weeks that I remain from London will give you an opportunity for deciding this question, momentous as you will readily judge it to be when I tell you, that in taking this holiday I forfeit my position in the Academy of Medicine; and my return to London will be merely as a practitioner, seeking happiness, shall I say, at the expense of fame, or, having lost all in the venture, obliged to live out my allotted time in an aimless, wretchedly ruined existence."

"This explains it all," I said within myself. How that last sentence wrung my heart! To think that a noble, generous man like Doctor Alvord would cast the die to win or lose such a woman as me!

"Did he love me?" I asked myself, over and over

again. "No, no! Nothing in his letter spoke of love, —only contentment—peace. What a generous heart is this I have trifled with! What a godlike nature, to write a letter such as this, and take the blame upon himself, when I alone am the culprit! Not even naming the many and various occasions wherein I have caused him deep mortification, and only alluding to them generally in the sentence, 'when I saw my influence had no more weight with you than the barking of a surly mastiff, that you knew would not bite!'

"*He* a surly mastiff, with his peace-offerings of luscious fruits, fragrant flowers, and exquisite jewels? He a surly mastiff, with his clear-judging and far-seeing head, his high principles and upright character? For God's sake, then, what am I?"

This I cried out aloud, pressing my hands to my face. "I must answer it! Yes, I must tell him what I think of myself; I will tell him everything else, save that I love him; *that* my actions shall show!"

I looked in vain for his address. I turned the letter over and over, thinking, perhaps, he had written it cross-wise, but I only found this scrap of after-information: "I stopped this morning to inform your papa of my journey to France, and that you preferred to remain at Loch Severn during my absence. Your final decision can be communicated to me on my return to England, which will be, doubtless, four weeks from to-day or yesterday."

"Four weeks!" I muttered, hoarsely. "Four *years*, rather; all this time he is to remain in doubt as to my decision. He thinks I hate him." I shook the envelope, hoping it would contain some message telling me of his whereabouts; but no, nothing. "Despair again in my life, this time the blackest of all!"

I know not how long I sat thus; but when wheels were

heard without, I sprang up, and, running down-stairs, found my father's arms opened wide to receive me. I wept aloud as I clung tightly to his neck.

"My dear child," he said, "is it then such a terrible thing to be left with your poor old father? He must be a wonderfully indulgent husband that so completely wins the love of an idolized daughter from a doting father. You should have gone with him, if you could not stand it so long away."

My papa's tones, full of pique and wounded love, smote on my ear like music. How I doted on this evidence of jealousy of my regard! "Dear papa," I whimpered, between a hysterical giggle and a great sob,— "dear papa, I *wanted* to stay with you."

"Oh!" replied my father, pleased at the ruse, "you are sorry for it now, are you? Very well; it is too late for repentance, and I am glad it is."

Mrs. Jessop, noticing my emotion as she came in, a few moments later, set it all down to grief at parting with my husband, and sang in a low voice,—

"Let my heart but one idol contain,
Lest the Saviour, in deep jealous wrath——"

I knew the rest of it would be something about the idol being "slain," by way of rhyming with "contain," and not wishing to even contemplate such a possibility, I put my fingers in my ears and howled, to drown the words which Mrs. Jessop repeated in still louder tones, seeing that I was determined not to listen.

The first thing I did next morning, after papa went to the city, was to tie on my hood and go out in search of the chickens and ducks, that used to be my dear, delightful companions. The fish-pond was frozen over, but, as I stood shivering on the brink, I fancied that

more than one of my faithful finnies bobbed up to welcome me. Few fish-worms and cake-crumbs had they been regaled with since my departure. This set me to thinking of the day when I had bidden adieu to these friends as Portia Severn, and had been whirled past them out into the broad world of London as Portia Alvord. How strangely altered were my pursuits now! I told myself over and over again that I would be far happier as Portia Severn, fancy free, feeding ducks and coddling kittens, than as Portia Alvord, in love, and wedded to a man whose theories of marriage excluded all such things as violent passion; who believed that respect, admiration, and moderate liking went hand in hand with happiness; who considered the getting on well together to be the highest summit to be attained in married life. Yet I could not convince myself that my former existence would have in it anything like the ecstasy of loving, and being able to convert the object of one's love to the same divine ecstasy. How I longed for the month to pass, that I might begin my experiment! How truly lovable I intended to make myself, watching every opportunity to assist my husband! How glad I was that he had lost the professorship in the Academy! I could now serve him in some way. How I would talk when he felt like talking, and be silent when he became moody, just as I had bidden Eliza do with me!—and in the faithful performance of her duties she had not only made herself necessary to me, but I had learned to really feel an affection for her.

"Thus," I thought, "I will do all and more than is required of me; not slavishly and with the air of a martyr, but cheerfully, earnestly, yet withal betraying in no way my love. Would not he begin unconsciously to find me necessary to him?—and not only that, but grad-

ually imbibe the same affection for me that dwelt in my heart for him?"

I thought of all of these things whilst I stood shivering on the brink of the fish-pond, with the ducks quacking near by, and chanticleer calling me to assist him in providing the wherewith to sustain his drooping form, and that of his numerous family. He knew, they all knew, that their dream of bliss was o'er. They knew the spell was broken; that they were loved no more; for I grudgingly threw them a handful of corn, and without a word to a single chick, or a congratulation for the decided increase I discovered in various families belonging to the Cöchin and guinea-hen, I tore into the house, and, throwing myself into a chair of the library, began to devise ways and means whereby to recover the ground to my husband's regard, which I had lost within the last three months.

"He says in his letter," I mused, looking over the epistle,—“he says he was prepared to admire and like me from the beginning. Now, had I striven from the first to make things agreeable between us, would not he have thought it no more than what one might expect of me, and give the matter no further consideration? By his own declaration, he believed me to be gentle and winning. I have turned out to be wrathful and repellant. This has served to arouse him. He doubtless feels by this time that a little genuine affection would not go so hard with him now. Anything, I suppose he thinks anything would be better than this perpetual jarring, and my vast stock of impudence. On the whole, I think we are better off now than if we had begun our married life with his views. Think? I know it. For I believe if I had not gone through this experience, so far from loving him dearly, as I now do, I should have hated him

most cordially. I feel much better since I came to this determination. I am positively light-hearted! If I only knew where to direct a friendly semi-penitent letter to Doctor Alvord, I would most certainly indite one at once."

In the midst of these cogitations, Jessop passed by the door, singing, in a wheezy voice,—

"Sleep on, sinner, thy doom is sealed!"

I arose, and putting on my jacket, started for Sallie Carter's, intending to spend the rest of the day there. I walked briskly, the keen, frosty air nipping my fingers and toes until they ached; yet I trudged along. Reaching Sallie's, I found Amelia Barton there, and we all repaired to Sallie's pretty room up-stairs, and talked until luncheon. I found that Sallie's stories of the grandeur of my habitation, and of the princely condition of my husband's financial estate, obliged me to subscribe to sundry items which, to say the very least, bordered on the untruthful. For instance: when Amelia asked me at what shop in London my husband had purchased the blue satin hangings for my boudoir; that Miss Selwick had taken a fancy to have her own rooms dressed after that fashion, since Sallie had described mine to her, I had to study a minute before I could recollect that the bay-window in my room, which overlooked the square, had a little drapery of pale-blue silk and lace, the same as my pillow-shams and bed-spread, and that the three windows in my sitting-room rejoiced in hangings which were neither satin nor silk, but a sort of stuff very common in all houses in London,—a mixture of silk and wool,—pretty but inexpensive. The magnificence of the four parlors, and the innumerable volumes which lined

the walls of the library, seemed to have been reserved as subjects not even to be mentioned. For Sallie's skill having been completely exhausted in describing the upstairs, could not, without including the same articles, furnish the first floor. Therefore she eulogized the same in general terms, as too gorgeous even to think of; and rolling up her eyes in a most frightful manner, she successfully impressed upon every one the idea that Aladdin's palace was not at all to be compared with No. 20 Etheridge Square.

Sallie's mother is such a dear, chubby little woman, and so kind and motherly to all of us girls, that we always feel certain she has provided each our favorite dish when we dine or lunch there. It was with delight, therefore, and many inward longings, that, as we entered the dining-room, my eye fell upon a rich, old-fashioned raspberry tart, such as only Mrs. Carter could make. It seemed so pleasant to have some one thoughtful of my likings once more; and as Mrs. Carter appeared in the doorway, looking somewhat overheated from the exercise of preparing and baking the dainty, I could not refrain from giving her a good, hearty hug, while the foolish tears welled up in my eyes.

Mrs. Carter was evidently prepared to find me altogether too grand for this display of weakness, for she very timidly advanced toward me, until, finding that I insisted upon our old, friendly recognition, she folded me in her arms and pillowed my head upon her ample bosom. Doctor Carter coming in a moment later, completed the kindly welcome, and began descanting upon my husband's merits, and praising my discernment in the selection of a partner for life, until my ears tingled and I lost my appetite entirely for the raspberry tart.

"Come now, Portia," said Doctor Carter, in his gruff-

est tones, which concealed the tenderest heart in the world, "tell us what you do the live-long day in your fine city house. Is it true, as Sallie says, that you have only to wave your wand, and forthwith will appear hosts of dancing-girls,—

"And Nubian slaves with smoking pots
Of spiced meats and collected fish,
'Mid all that the curious palate could wish?'"

"Now, papa," said Sallie, evidently annoyed at the suspicion of ridicule that dwelt in her father's tones; "you know very well I never said we had dancing-girls and things."

"No?" said the doctor. "I certainly could not have dreamed it; but that is neither here nor there. Now that this state of things is actually secured, perhaps you wouldn't mind telling us how it all came about,—that is, how you happened to find out that the elder brother was the more eligible, and, dropping the other one like a hot cake, how you happened to snap up Doctor Edwin Alvord, the principal surgeon at the Academy."

I found myself growing scarlet and then pale at the close of this catechism.

"Why, papa," exclaimed Mrs. Carter, coming to my relief; "you annoy Portia. Think what you are saying."

"I know," responded Doctor Carter, laughing; "but hasn't Portia got over blushing yet? Why, Julia, if anybody had asked you three months after our marriage how you came to fancy me as you did instead of my big brother, you would have been ready with the answer, that you recognized my superior attractions, and never a blush would have been seen. Now, I am curious to know about this matter." And, dropping both knife and fork, the doctor threw himself back in his chair and stared at me with all his might.

"Doctor Carter, I'm ashamed of you!" cried Sallie's mother, seeing me speechless, and unable to even turn off the doctor's questions as a joke. "I dare say Mrs. Alvord is disgusted at your familiarity."

"No, indeed," said I, immediately restored; "I like to be called Portia. If you all begin calling me Mrs. Alvord, I shall keep away entirely;" and, choking back tears, chagrin, and embarrassment altogether, I said that I would reserve my communication until I had Doctor Carter's private ear; that I didn't propose giving an account of my courtship to a whole table-full of people. I continued, with an attempt at being playfully sarcastic, "Perhaps, after I have told you of my reasons for choosing my husband instead of his brother, you will still remain in the dark as much as I am concerning the surprising circumstances connected with Mrs. Carter's choice."

The doctor laughed at the feeble jest, and received it good-humoredly.

When I walked home that evening, Sallie "went a piece" with me, and before she kissed me good-by, remarked, "Don't think I am composed of a perfect tissue of lies, Portia dear, because I set forth the elegance of your home and surroundings in such glowing terms. I only exaggerated the truth, and hardly that; for of all people in the world I ever knew, I consider you to be the most delightfully situated, and I envy you the most;" saying which, my dear Sallie sniffled a little bit, I echoing the sound faintly, and we two firm friends parted for the night with mutual assurances of never-dying love and everlasting friendship. I meditated on Sallie's last declaration as I proceeded homeward, and was more determined than ever to improve the opportunities for happiness so indulgently granted to me by fate, who is often so cruel; and I actually trilled a song as I passed

through the bare and leafless wood and enjoyed a slide across the frozen brook and back again, before I proceeded on my homeward journey.

It was almost dark when I reached home. Papa had been home, had his satchel packed, and had started less than an hour before for Birmingham, whither his business called him.

"Your papa left word," said Mrs. Jessop, "that he would return inside of a week; but if business kept him over that time, you were to amuse yourself in any way you saw fit until he returned."

Immediately after tea, I tied on my hood again, the spirit of restlessness being strong within me, and started for the rectory, where I passed a most delightful evening.

CHAPTER XXIX.

My mind, which has been so busy for the past three weeks, suddenly became a blank this morning, as I sat gazing into the fire. I know not what caused it, but I am quite sure that I thought of nothing for the space of a half-hour or thereabouts. In spite of the assertion of learned men that the mind never rests, I know that I lost all memory and all sense as completely as though I were dead.

Gradually it began to dawn upon me that the spring had come, and that I was lying on the bank of the fish-pond among the violets, primroses, and star-like daisy-flowers.

The blackthorn, with its snowy bloom, made the hedge-row in the garden gay, while the meadow in the distance,

bright with cowslips and cool mosses, came to my mind more like a reality than a refreshing dream. I even felt the sun as it glows at mid-day, and sought repose beneath a spreading elm-tree. How long I dreamed or mused I know not.

While I sat there, in a vision as it were of the past, a little hymn came to my memory, that I had not thought of since my childhood, when I was taught to repeat it. It begins:

"The glorious sun is set in the west; the night-dews fall; and the air which was sultry has become cool.

"The flowers fold up their colored leaves; they fold themselves up and hang their heads on the slender stalk.

"The chickens are gathered under the wing of the hen and are at rest.

"The little birds have ceased their warbling; they are asleep on the boughs; each one has his head behind his wing.

"There is no murmur of bees around the hive or among the honeyed woodbines; they have done their work, and lie close in their waxen cells.

"The sheep rest upon their soft fleeces, and their loud bleating is no more heard among the hills.

"There is no sound of a number of voices, or of children at play, or the trampling of busy feet, and of people hurrying to and fro.

"The smith's hammer is not heard upon the anvil, nor the harsh saw of the carpenter.

"All men are stretched on their quiet beds, and the child sleeps upon the breast of its mother.

"Darkness is spread over the skies, and darkness is upon the ground; every eye is shut and every hand is still.

"Who taketh care of all people when they are sunk in sleep,—when they cannot defend themselves, nor see if danger approacheth?

"There is an eye that never sleepeth. There is an eye that seeth in dark night as well as in the bright sunshine.

"The eye that sleepeth not is God's. His hand is always stretched out over us."

What a peaceful closing to a day so delicious as the one which memory and imagination had just awakened for me!

I half believed it was all true, though I awoke with a start, and, going to the window, looked out. I saw

nothing but a raw February day, etc., with its winds and clouds and changing skies.

I heard the rushing blast as it flew down the roadway, and tore furiously round the corner of the yard on its way to Winsted, there to give the inhabitants of that village a puff of its breath.

From whence came, and whither had vanished the odor of the sweet, spicy hay-mow, which but a moment ago greeted my senses? and where the sweet voice of the linnet that sang in the gorse? Where were the violets that "purpled" o'er the banks of the pond, and the cowslips in mead and wood that danced on the twittering breeze? Where the swallows that I fancied but this moment came swooping down on swift, unwearied wing, assuring me that spring was here?

I even, yes, I plainly saw Mrs. Jessop, at this hint from the swallows, as was her wont, go prowling from room to room followed by the house-maid, bearing huge bags, which she thrust up each chimney.

Where were the wild roses, the eglantine, and the pink? Gone,—fled with my dream; and so the primrose, the dandelion, and the periwinkle all departed, save a few flaming-tongued crocuses, that feebly raised their heads from the half-frozen earth, as though wishing to spare me as much pain as they could whilst I viewed the barren landscape without.

I returned again to the fire-place with a shiver, and, taking from the mantel-piece a winter bouquet of flowering grasses, once so light and feathery, but now brittle and with little grace about them, I compared the nosegay to myself, once willowy and graceful as I know I must have been, reared among the blue corn-cockle, harebell, and clematis, but now, when the summer had gone out of my life, left as the flowers in the vase.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE week has passed more rapidly than I had any idea it would. Sallie and I have been almost constantly together, and have made some very pretty brackets out of lichens and mosses.

"I do wish you were not married, Portia," said Sallie to me this morning as, in rummaging the garret, we came across some old false-faces which we used to masquerade in, and frighten the servants. "Now we might perform some of our old tricks, walk stilts, run races on horse-back, or ring door-bells as we used to do. I suppose it wouldn't be just the thing for you to do now, though?" she said, inquiringly, hoping I would contradict her.

"I suppose not," I answered, in rather a dignified tone.

"If we could only do something," suggested Sallie, "without being found out, nobody would be the wiser for it. You have no idea how I longed for you a fortnight since, when I, all solitary and alone, tied a rope across the pavement from Barton's to one of the trees in our lawn. I never can take anybody into confidence. I tried Amelia Barton once, and we dressed in grandma's old clothes, carrying bags with us, and asked alms at the rectory. The dog came out and gave one faint little bark just after we stepped upon the porch, and Amelia's shrieks might have been heard in London. She threw off her bonnet, and, climbing up on the railing of the porch out of the dog's reach, cried out, in a coaxing, trembling voice. 'Don't you know me, Fido? Good Fido,—he knows A-me-lia Barton.' The rector came out

while she was performing this tableau, and of course we were discovered. Since then I have made no more confidantes."

"The ridiculous goose," commented I, "to spoil that delightful opportunity of testing the rector's benevolence! What did he say to you, anyhow?"

"Just what you might expect. After reproving us for our folly, he invited us to tea, which of course we declined. Then another time: Miss Sedgwick has such tremendous trains to her dresses, and sweeps them up the aisle of the church with so much evident satisfaction, that one Sunday I laid my prayer-book and papa's hat in the centre of the sweeping magnificence, as it floated down the aisle coming out of church. I had all the small boys in convulsions, and most of the young girls tittering, while I, apparently unconscious of harm as Miss Sedgwick herself, only waited for her to get out into the full blaze of light in the church-yard, in order to have the procession seen and appreciated. Papa was looking everywhere for his hat, and, though Miss Sedgwick must have felt that she was carrying an unusual load, her dignity wouldn't permit her to look behind her, any more than if she were a second Mrs. Lot, having the experience of Mrs. Lot No. 1 before her eyes. No sooner, however, had we gained the vestibule, than Amelia sprang forward and seized the articles with great alacrity, and with much outward show of being horrified at the base uses to which the sacred appendage had been brought. Her reward for so much cleverness was a disdainful glare from Miss Sedgwick, which Amelia construed into a bow of thanks, and began immediately to explain, while she who by rights should have given some evidence of gratitude to her benefactress picked up her train daintily, and, throwing it gracefully over her arm, walked away without a word, neither listen-

ing to, nor apparently conscious that a being existed on earth in the shape of Amelia Barton.

"I'll tell you what we might do, Portia," Sallie concluded. "You know how our visit to Kensington was spoiled. Suppose we run up to the city some day and repeat our visit."

"W-e-l-l," said I, hesitatingly, not knowing precisely whether, in the absence of my husband and my father, I would be justified in taking such a trip.

"You know all about London, dear," urged Sallie, coaxingly; "and if anything should happen to us, which is not at all probable, you can be taken immediately home."

I did not require much urging, for indeed I longed to see my home again; and although I never would enter it again unless accompanied by my husband, who had led me from it, I still had a longing to behold the mansion which held such possibilities for a happy future for me. I therefore readily consented to Sallie's proposition, and to-morrow was decided upon for our day in the city. We leave home on the eight o'clock train, and return at night any time from seven to eleven. Now that we have concluded all of our arrangements, a feverish anxiety has taken possession of me to be off. I will only glance at No. 20 Etheridge Square, of course.

With what different purposes do Sallie and I visit London! She has in view sights and sounds which will afford her material to weave innumerable romances from, to be listened to by admiring Winsteders; whilst I am intent only in taking one peep at the house which three months ago inspired me with so much aversion, but which now, though void of its master, is more to me than any earthly habitation, as desirable almost as my hope of heaven, and scarcely less inaccessible.

I have passed the entire week trying to fathom a mystery which has almost stricken me dumb with its possibilities of disaster to my hopes and plans for the future. My heavy hands, my languid movements, the altogether paralyzed state of my being, give no idea of the mind busily at work within me, which, now in certainty, now in doubt, racks me with its wild imaginings, until my very, very, being, responsive to its workings, shivers and contracts with emotion. I felt this morning, as I sat in the library with book in hand, as though the chair upon which I sat was a world too large for me. I have so altogether entered within myself, that I feel more like the mummies in the museum than anything living and human. Let me hasten to write it all. It may be that, after reading it over again, I may find something wherefrom to gather a fragment of hope.

The day on which Sallie and I started for London was almost spring-like in its balminess and freedom from chilling blasts. Sallie settled into a corner of the coach, attired in a new checkered silk gotten up for the occasion, and the jauntiest of brigand hats, rejoicing in an almost endless feather. My own toilette was rather more subdued, as I wore my black silk of wedding-reception memory, caught up with a supporter. And though Sallie was severe in her wrath at me for not wearing my polonaise trimmed with fox fur, I resisted all her importunities, and remained clad in my Scotch jacket and fur cap.

It was not without a great many misgivings that I stepped from the depot into a carriage, accompanied by Sallie. "For," thought I, "is this altogether a proper expedition for me to engage in? Would even papa approve it, disposed as he is to indulge me on all possible occasions? The idea of me, because of the marriage ceremony having been said over me, allowing myself to be set up as a

chaperon for Sallie Carter!" It was, however, too late even to think about the propriety or impropriety of my conduct. We were already seated, and being conveyed to Little Camburn Street, where I proposed to Sallie that we should get out and walk to Hollybrook Fair, thence to Etheridge Square, which I pretended was the direct route to the new gallery of paintings which were on exhibition in Holborn, our programme for the day embracing that treat, prior to our visit to Kensington.

"O London!" apostrophized Sallie, drawing in a deep, long breath, laden with the smoke and dust of the great metropolis. "Portia, if I only lived here, it seems to me I could hardly contain myself for the ecstasy that would flood my soul. This busy, stirring life just suits me. Let those who will talk of the fresh, fragrant atmosphere of the country. I would vastly prefer one year in the city, swallowing whole furnaces of smoke and showers of dust, than ten in Winsted, though the air might be perpetually laden with the breath of primrose and heliotrope blossom, which, by the way, it isn't at all, but quite the contrary, our paper-mill, tannery, and three slaughter-houses furnishing the town with odors of a different character. Where you live, however, of course it is different; but then Loch Severn is so solitary, and so far removed from the busy hum of life, that I would fain prefer even Winsted to it."

In this way we chatted until we entered Etheridge Square, the solemn grandeur of its inhabitants manifesting itself even in the precision with which the pebble-stones are arranged in the gutters, and in the unspotted condition of its hitching-posts. Only a few steps brought us to Number 20. A peddler of images and Bohemian glass stood on the topmost step of the flight leading to the entrance, and I saw Bobbs's white calves retreat, as I sup-

posed, in search of the housekeeper. He returned, however, in about a minute, and solemnly shook his head. The peddler shouldered his basket again and was descending the steps, while Sallie and I, with that absorption of mind common to all who are intently watching an object or performance, had gradually slackened our pace; until the door coming to with a bang (we being on the other side of the street heard its very echo) aroused us to a sense of the fact that we were staring; and as we started forward, I swept a glance up-stairs, to my room, past it to the turret and bay-window. Could I be mistaken? No! There sat Adele by the open window, holding some light work in her hand, but her attention was wholly given up to the examination of the two figures opposite her. With a look of recognition on her face, I saw her mouth form into a smile, displaying a row of pearly teeth, as I moved on; and reaching up her hand she pulled down the sash, and, selecting a banana from a fruit-dish, began to peel it, giving no further attention to the street, or sidewalk, or its occupants.

In my haste to get away I could hardly walk fast enough down the street, causing Sallie to inquire, breathlessly, the necessity for so much haste.

"What does it mean?" thought I. "Is Adele reinstated by the will and consent of my husband, or has she taken advantage of our absence and quartered herself there, trusting to the ignorance of the servants as to a means of getting rid of her?"

Once, only once, the question arose in my mind, "Has she *ever* left the house?" but I as quickly banished the thought, as a suggestion from the Evil One.

"Doctor Alvord is a man far too upright to harbor a character such as Adele," I thought. And yet, what knew I against her character? I had only despised her

because I had discovered her listening at my door. I knew nothing whatever against her.

Thus doubting, and being reassured only to doubt again, we reached Holborn Street; and immediately upon entering the Palace of Art, my attention was directed to a voice on the sidewalk, so gay and musical that the individuals, as much as the words themselves, arrested my attention. I turned quickly to look out of the glass door through which I had just entered. "Do let me prevail upon you to take me," said the voice; "the best people are all going." Just then the door closed, and I turned to see a woman most graceful as well as beautiful, with eyes large and gray, having just enough of the steel-blue in them to appear cold, and enough of hazel resting in their depths to make them the most fascinating eyes in the world. I knew before I glanced at the gentleman that the eyes of the speaker were not void of effect, though I could not hear what reply he made. In her enthusiasm she had laid one finger of a fair and jeweled hand on his arm, and whilst I stood looking on, interested in the decision, and wondering what manner of man this was who even hesitated before such irresistible pleading, my eyes wandered to his face, and nearly a minute elapsed before I aroused from the stupor into which a sight of my husband's face had thrown me.

I had scarcely made the discovery, ere he raised his hand to hail a passing cab; and, both he and the lady getting in, I stood as one petrified, watching the vehicle as it moved along Holborn Street, and then turned down one of the side streets jutting therefrom. Sallie's voice calling me at length aroused me, and at the same time I was conscious of the presence of a gentleman who, all politeness and suavity, my bewildered mind at last resolved to be Monsieur Marchand.

With my dawning intelligence came the consciousness that I must act precisely as though nothing had happened to disturb me. That the discovery of the reinstatement of my French maid in Etheridge Square, together with that of my husband's presence in London when I thought him miles away in an opposite direction, and that, too, proving himself susceptible to the entreaties, it may be wiles, of a beautiful woman,—none of these things should in the least move me. Calling up a smile, though I felt it was but the shadow of one,—and being unskilled in concealing my feelings, I found that this my most difficult lesson was rendered almost an impossibility for me to learn, I held out my hand, saying, "I am surprised to see you, monsieur. You know my friend Miss Carter, I believe?"

"Mademoiselle Cartair, certainly! But *surpized*, Madame Alvord! You *surpized* at seeing me? The word a chill sends through me, when hope has been with me *mot du guet* since last we met. *Le Monarque* has had you hid,—deny it not; for scarcely a half-hour since I overheard him telling one of his fair patients that madame was at home in Severn Loch."

Monsieur Marchand spoke earnestly, though affecting to laugh. "I do call that," he continued, "*a ruse de guerre*; why? Because, since madame shone so resplendently at Lady Ainslie's soirée, society demands her presence, and is resolved to win it *à tout hasard*. I assure madame that the invitations cannot be counted which have found their way to Etheridge Place, though I doubt if madame has seen one of them. We have all *à grands frais* endeavored to ascertain madame's whereabouts, and here I, *à l'extrémité*, discover her as naturally as possible, coming into my studio."

"What! this your studio, monsieur?" I cried. "Your name is not in the advertisement."

"Ah, you knew not, then, to where you were coming," answered Monsieur Marchand, assuming a grieved expression. "Know, then, that it is hardly etiquette for a Frenchman to urge others to purchase his own productions, though he may presume to descant upon the merits of a brother artist. Not until after the picture is bought and paid for, therefore, does the purchaser ascertain that he has a work of Rudolph Marchand's."

"You mentioned something about one of my husband's patients. Was that her of whom you speak who but a moment ago was conversing with him on the sidewalk?"

"Madame does but jest," replied Monsieur Marchand, assuming an injured look again. "Wherefore does she make inquiry of me concerning one whom she knows to be the physician Alvord's most exacting patient?" Saying this, Monsieur Marchand dismissed the subject with a most profound bow, and, pointing to a catalogue, he bade us follow him, that he had two new subjects begun which he especially desired us to criticise.

I hesitated a moment; but seeing other ladies engaged in examining the pictures, unaccompanied by either gentleman or servant, we followed the artist, who conducted us to the extreme end of the gallery, and opening a door, we entered a small, high room inclosed in glass, and having a sky-light, which he called his *atelier*.

I was surprised and shocked at the character of some of the pictures which were hanging on the walls or idling in their easels; but how inexpressible was my shame and alarm when Monsieur Marchand, with apparently the most innocent intentions imaginable, called our attention to the nude bust of a quadroon slave, saying, "Ah! it is always the dark-eyed women who make the fine models. This one, you see," turning to the picture of a blonde

having a most exquisite face and throat, "with this style of woman, you perceive, the extent of her charms is comprised in the region above her collarette. Out upon such women to paint!" he continued, in a tone of disgust; "for if one does not cover the bones with a good lot of paint and expand the bodice proportionately, the fair subject anathematizes the artist for not making her other than what she is, though her vanity does ample justice to her own charms as they exist in her imagination, and not depicted with faithfulness on canvas. See that arm," continued he, pointing to a canvas on which was a single arm, the fingers of the hand holding a bunch of cherries. "If madame will take no offense, there is but one arm to my knowledge which will surpass this. Madame's sleeve is in the paint!" he cried, hurriedly coming forward, and raising my jacket-sleeve from a dish of paint, into which I had accidentally allowed it to fall in my amazement at the surroundings in which I found myself.

"As I was saying," continued he,—"permit me;" and handing my arm into Sallie's hands gingerly, that no paint should communicate itself to the rest of my clothing, he brought a towel, and while Sallie unbuttoned the sleeve of my cuff, and pushed it nearly up to my elbow, I stood holding my arm out and away from me, waiting for Monsieur Marchand to make use of the towel in removing the stain.

To my surprise and disgust, I discovered that before doing so he had hurriedly drawn a piece of paper towards him, and was making a crayon sketch of my unfortunate arm.

"Stop!" said I, dashing forward and rubbing my sleeve covered with paint across the paper whereon he had nearly completed the drawing. "Your impertinence has grown too insufferable!" cried I, angrily; "and before

I shall submit to it further, I will walk into the street covered with paint!"

"*Ma fois!*" excitedly exclaimed Monsieur Marchand, regarding my burning cheeks and blazing eyes with something like fear. "I meant no insult; I beg ten thousand pardons!" And kneeling before me, Monsieur Marchand actually kissed the hem of my Scotch jacket. We must just then have presented a pretty spectacle. The open-mouthed Sallie staring at the humble young artist, whilst my attitude, I fancy, must have represented Xantippe in one of her worst moods. Although I had declared my determination to go into the street covered with paint rather than have my arm become the property of Monsieur Marchand, I was in no hurry to make good my resolve, as might be seen by the apparently menacing gesture unconsciously formed by my arm, which to a spectator would have indicated that I was about to administer a vigorous pounding upon the devoted head of the luckless artist.

"Come," I said, looking at Sallie with increasing fury,—the ludicrous not striking me at the time, and indeed not for hours afterwards,—"remove this paint from my arm, and let us remove from here at once;" and, closing my lips, I refused even to speak a word until the operation was completed and I had turned my back upon the *atelier*. Monsieur Marchand followed us out into the salesroom, still humble and grieved, while I maintained a dignified silence. Sallie, however, in response to his appeals as to whether he had done anything very dreadful, frequently murmured, "Of course not," and, "I'm sure Portia will forgive you after awhile," and, "How very awkward!" "How exceedingly unfortunate and unpleasant!"

I majestically hailed a carriage as we left the studio,

and without vouchsafing a syllable to either Sallie or Monsieur Marchand through my firmly-closed lips, I ordered the driver to take us to Kensington Gardens.

"What a liberty," I thought,—"what a shocking liberty to take with a married lady! A married lady, too, with such a devoted, truthful, and faithful husband as mine!"

"Really," said Sallie, when we were fairly on our way, and she had soothed the gentle spirit of the impulsive young Frenchman—or endeavored to, at least—by a tenderly sympathetic look, as he, no doubt squeezing her hand at the same time, handed her into the carriage, while to me he said, "Madame, I have been *un sot à triple étage*,—pardon, pardon, pardon!" "Really, Portia, I think you are too hard on the poor fellow. You might at least have bowed your head to some of his apologies; it wouldn't have broken your neck."

"I think you are very unkind, Sallie, to side with Monsieur Marchand against me," said I, as gently as I could. "If you knew what all I had endured from his burdensome attentions, you wouldn't so readily excuse him."

"I'm sure," interrupted Sallie, with no doubt a recollection of that air of *empressement* with which Monsieur handed her into the carriage, and thinking that I was far too much disposed to consider myself admired and doted on by the young artist than there was any need of,— "I'm sure there was nothing so terrible in his wishing to sketch your arm. You are a married woman, and as married women are generally supposed to be free from false modesty, I cannot for my part see why you should object to granting his reasonable request."

"Very well, Sallie," said I, "we will not quarrel. It is plain that we do not agree."

The rest of our ride was taken in silence; but Sallie and I, being friends of long standing, had no thought whatever of entertaining hard feelings towards each other.

By the time we entered Kensington, all went smoothly with us again.

The remembrance of that day will long remain with me. Though I should die a hundred years hence, I feel that I shall see vividly to the end one circumstance at least of that afternoon's adventures, which even the fear of eternity cannot blot from my memory.

We had visited all the places of interest; had even given the squirrels a call, and were watching the cunning white mice play hide-and-seek with each other in their cages, when close to where I stood—indeed, so very close that our gowns brushed against each other—came the lovely, irresistible woman I had seen in the morning; this time leaning on the arm of my husband! They did not see me, for, besides my being on the other side of the cage, so that in looking at me they would be obliged to turn, they manifested just then as I saw them no interest whatever in white mice. The delicious accents of the lady's incomparable voice mingled with the deeper tones of my husband's, and they seemed to both talk at once, as if determined that the other should give way. "But, Edwin," the lady was saying. "Don't interrupt me, Helen, if you please," returned my husband, with that tone of decision which had produced an effect even on me, when I fancied that I hated him. "Don't interrupt me, I say. I love you far too dearly ever to permit an intimacy between Lady Gay Valentine and yourself, which will certainly end in your becoming estranged from me."

I saw the soft lashes of her wonderful eyes droop, and

thought I noticed ever so faint a pout come to the full red lips.

"Come here, Portia; do hurry," cried Sallie. "A little covert of foxes, I do declare!" I hurriedly drew down my veil, while the couple simultaneously turned about in the direction of the voice. Seeing two women with no escort, I suppose the lady's gray eyes must have fairly glistened like steel, just as I knew they could do. I hastened around to the other side of the box, thus placing an obstruction between us. The gentleman, however, took a step forward, dropping the lady's arm, for I heard his step following me, while I, keeping within the shadow of the boxes, reached Sallie's side, and, hurrying her forward, we entered our carriage again, and were driven rapidly from Kensington.

"Who is this fair patient," thought I, "whose character is of so much more importance to Doctor Alvord than that of his own wife?" The most terrible pangs of remorse; the most intolerable anguish and sense of desolation seized my soul, as, riding homeward, I thought how I might have spared my husband this temptation to love another than me; how I myself might, nay, would, have occupied that place by his side, had not my own folly kept me away. "Was it too late now? No! I certainly might hope to win him even yet, if I brought the whole strength of my consuming love to bear upon his faithlessness; for had he not recognized the right a woman possessed to her husband's love? and had he not declared his readiness to show allegiance to that love? Did he not suspect me of bestowing my regard elsewhere?"

At the depot I wrote one line, showing the depth of my penitence and the strength of my forgiveness, for I told him of what I had overheard. I would not trust

the note in the hands of a boy, so I paid the driver and had him carry it directly to No. 20 Etheridge Square, to await the return of my husband; and my heart was calmed in a measure.

"Portia," said Sallie, as we entered the coach and were homeward bound, "I don't see why you didn't go home and take me with you to stay all night. Doctor Alvord has returned from his journey; Monsieur Marchand will tell him that you were in London, and how will he like it to think that you went back to Loch Severn without making an effort to see him?"

"I explained it all in my note just now," I carelessly replied. "I think it would look much more strange for me to visit Etheridge Square for one night, and go posting back to Loch Severn in the morning. If I should go home, I would doubtless remain there, and you would have the felicity of taking your trip to Winsted alone."

"I never thought of that," said Sallie, winking fast with both eyes, and trying to look convinced and unconcerned, when I knew all the time that her shrewd mind had arrived at pretty nearly a correct conclusion concerning the existence of a barrier between my husband and myself.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ANOTHER week has gone by, and as each separate day dragged its slow length along, I expected every train would bring me my husband, or at all events some message from him; but each time I was doomed to disappointment. What did it mean? Was my sacrifice of pride on the altar of love to be after all of no avail? Or had he determined to allow me the month for reflection, and run fewer risks of my decision being revoked ere the change of the moon?

Papa came home on Wednesday, and remained until to-day. He could not but feel downcast that we had so little time to visit with each other. The business which takes him away this time is something that concerns his own property, and requires immediate attention, else he might postpone it. How can I live out these two dreadful weeks again? I may be said to literally feed upon hope, for I eat little or nothing. I, whose appetite used never to quail at sight of a dinner composed of a half-dozen or more courses, now almost faint at the sight of a roast of beef, and raspberry tarts have lost their charms for me.

A card to Miss Sedgwick's tenth of February party has just been received. I was somewhat surprised upon receipt of it, for we have never been intimate in all our lives. I presume it is on the strength of my being Madame Alvord, wife of the principal surgeon in the medical academy, that I receive the distinguished honor now. I wonder if I shall be in my city home by the tenth of February? That will exceed the limit prescribed by Doctor Alvord more than a week. How the wind howls to-night! how bitter cold

it is! I think I must be growing thin, for I feel the cold so much more than I used to. I will have Eliza mull some cider, and I will toast my feet well before going to bed.

Somehow I cannot believe that Doctor Alvord, with all his many provocations, can be guilty of falling in love with another woman. The term love used by him may have been only an extravagant way of expressing friendship. She is only some one in whom he takes unusual interest. My heart leaps at the thought.

Mrs. Jessop came in as I finished writing, last week, and asked me to sing—

"Asleep in Jesus, blessed sleep."

I was in a mood to gratify her, and sang my very best. The hymn had in it something soothing and sweet even to me, and when I ceased singing, I thought, "In the grave, at least, there is rest and peace, and in the world to come there must certainly be that happiness and bliss denied to so many mortals on earth;" with which comforting reflection I drank my mulled cider, ate my toast, and crept into bed, there to say over and over in my mind, "She was only some intimate friend whom he was warning against Lady Gay's improprieties;" and, falling asleep, I enjoyed the first good, sound slumber that had visited my eyelids since the day I came home.

The next morning when I awoke the snow was almost an unheard-of depth. I ran out and scooped up a tumbler-full of lovely snow-flakes, and poured cream into it. I found it very passable ice cream. Sallie came in during the morning with her cheeks all aglow with health and fine spirits. I looked at myself in the glass after she had left. How faded I have grown! The remorseful pangs seized me again, and held me in their relentless grasp for fully two hours, during which time I could neither sit still nor

lie down, but walked the floor to and fro, carrying my hands behind me.

How strange that one can be one minute elated and hopeful, the next cast down in utter despair! I think this state of feeling was brought about by Sallie mentioning that a decorator had arrived from London to prepare Miss Sedgwick's house for her ball. Sallie, always on the lookout for *tête-à-têtes* with all persons who had access to grand houses, had the decorator come and rehang two paintings for her, which afforded her an opportunity for a most agreeable chat.

"Who is the Countess Charmian, Portia? I understood the decorator to say that he had hung a fine painting of 'Dawn on the Highlands' at the house of the physician Alvord, in Etheridge Square, and that the painting belonged to the Countess Charmian, who is now visiting there."

"Visiting at the house!" I exclaimed, completely thrown off my guard at thought of the beautiful creature I had seen walking with my husband occupying my seat at the table, and administering to the wants of Dr. Alvord with the same dainty grace that characterized the laying of her jeweled hand on his arm, and persuading him to accompany her—whither? I had been witness to this ceremony, and doubted not that this was the beginning of her power over him. "What did it all mean? Why did my husband tell me he was going to remain away a month, when scarcely one week had passed after his departure ere he is seen in London, arm in arm with a beautiful woman? Has his disgust for me grown so intolerable that he seeks to allay it by taking into his household one who will help him to forget that I had ever made life burdensome to him? Had he time in the short week which intervened between our separation and my seeing

him again to go to France and return? *Had he gone to France at all?* Was this what he meant by the clause in the letter he had given me, 'should you decide that freedom will be sweeter to you than public scandal is distasteful, be assured that I shall place not a straw in the way of our final separation.' Plainly, then, he had intended to do his whole duty, believing firmly in my hatred of him to insure him a happy release. Under the circumstances, what ought I to do?"

While these thoughts rioted through my brain in rapid succession, Sallie stood waiting a reply to her question. I forced myself to be calm. My struggle with love and pride and grief was fearful to behold.

"Dearest Portia," said Sallie, "forgive me. I had no idea you were suffering so terribly. *Depend upon it, darling, he cares the most for you; else why should he have stolen you from his brother, Portia darling?*" No answer, although I heard her. That same cold, icy feeling had taken possession of my body that had seized me on the night of my arrival at Etheridge Square. I longed to scream, and relieve myself. I saw Sallie's scared and even horrified countenance, without being in the least able to speak or reassure her. "Is this the third and fatal stroke of paralysis for me?" I thought. I remembered my introduction into my husband's home. I recalled all the circumstances attending the fright I had had in the study, after I had laid hold on the skeleton. This feeling was but a repetition of what I had felt twice before. A very small circumstance might turn the scale either way, to make me laugh or cry, and thus restore me. The relief came at last in the person of Mrs. Jessop, who, in a shrill, galloping voice, stood singing just outside of the window, and beating eggs at the same time, keeping perfect time with the egg beaten. Her song was, as I said, sung in

a galloping manner, pulling up with a jerk at the end of each word, to keep herself in time,—

"Sinner, hark, the trum-pi-et (beat, beat, beat)
Is sound-i-ing (beat, beat, beat)——"

I uttered a wild shriek of laughter, which caused Mrs. Jessop to proceed in a higher key, according to the excess of my hilarity. Sally joined feebly in the laugh with me, saying, "Where was the use of frightening me that way? I thought you were going into a fit."

I arose, and, throwing my arms about Sallie's neck, wept long and silently, whilst she—dear, affectionate child that she is—stroked my hair, saying, "Don't tell me a syllable more than you choose; only perhaps you would feel better to open your heart to some one, and maybe I can help you."

I made no answer, but continued weeping silently, a great sob now and then choking me, which a fresh flood of tears drove away. At length I said, "I will tell you this much, Sallie, and more at some future time: my husband is not to blame in the least."

"I thought," began Sallie—she was going to say, "I thought this countess was at the bottom of it," but she changed her mind and said, "I thought, from what I saw of his conduct towards you at the time of my visit, that he adoringly doted on you. Come, dear, my sled is here, and you shall have the first sleigh-ride you have had since you were a child. I don't much like the looks of that sun; it seems to have designs upon our sleighing from the way it pours itself down. You see it is frying the snow from the house-tops opposite."

There was something original in the idea of fried snow, and I echoed Sallie's laugh by a faint one of my own.

"Come, come, get your things, dear!" And, without

uttering another word of protest, I hurried on with my hood and cloak, and was soon flying down the road toward Winsted in Sallie's fine cutter.

When we reached the village, we stopped at the post-office. Among the four letters I received, I looked in vain for the familiar handwriting of Doctor Alvord; but they were all in the feminine school-girly hand of my companions of boarding-school memory except one, and that was from papa.

"I should like to have you come to me at Bridgewater, my Portia," the letter said; "a fall has sprained my ankle severely, so that I shall be confined to the house for a week or more. Bring 'Stanly on Improved Steam-Power,' 'Mitchell on Blast Furnaces,' and 'North on Mechanical Inventions,' together with any other light reading that you may see fit. Come at once."

I communicated the contents of the letter to Sallie, who insisted that I should lunch with her first, and then she would drive me home to gather together what articles I needed for a week's absence from home, when she would take me over to Bridgewater herself in the afternoon, the distance being but a few miles.

After exhausting every possible phase of the forthcoming ball, and viewing her purchases in every possible light, Sallie turned the horse's head toward home, where her mother, whom we discovered looking for us from the dining-room window, beamed upon us with a face which betrayed any number of raspberry tarts, and certain possible delicious surprises in the way of experimental recipes from the new cook-book, which Sallie had purchased at a book-stall when on her visit to me in London.

As we entered the dingy drawing-room of Doctor Carter's house, the figure of a man stepped forward; and in the unmistakable foreign accent with which he blessed the

lucky stars for "this meeting," as well as the bustling, effusive character of the greeting he gave, we were not long in recognizing him as none other than Monsieur Marchand.

"Say that you consider me *une affaire flambée*, dear madame," he said, laughing. "Mademoiselle Cartair and I have become such wonderful friends, such pard-nairs, as it were, that I may claim her hand for the first quadrille at Mademoiselle Sedgwick's ball, almost without begging for the favor."

I bowed my head slightly, and, turning to Sallie, found her looking as crimson as the bow in her hair.

"Really, monsieur," she said, "I did not look for you for a week yet."

"No? Well, then, mademoiselle has learned one lesson,—nevar permit a gentleman to call without following the permission with open eyes and watchful ears; for, depend upon it, he will avail himself of the very first opportunity granted him to accept of your goodness."

After delivering this speech to Sallie with a most devoted air, he turned to me, saying, "Madame knows not what she misses by being away from home when such a distinguished guest adorns her parlors as Le Countess Charmain."

I thought I detected a sneer in Monsieur Marchand's tone; but when I looked again, he appeared to be all affability and respectful attention.

"Her acquaintance will doubtless 'keep,' monsieur," replied I, nerved to the task before me; for, come what might, I was determined that no one should find me a weak and sighing damsel for a faithless swain. "I shall be in London, doubtless, ere the countess departs."

"Madame is not aware, then," cried Monsieur Marchand, earnestly, taking a step forward and staring at me

with all his might,—“madame does not know that Le Countess is a fixture; in short, is at home at No. 20 Etheridge Square.”

If a bombshell had exploded at my ear I could not have been more startled than at this communication; but I only replied, with my features set and rigid, “I did not know it, but doubtless the communication I expect from my husband this evening will contain all the information that you have been beforehand with.”

“Oui, madame, oui,” repeated the Frenchman, choking; it seemed, with the desire to show me what a poor ignorant creature I was. “But, could Monsieur Alvord have failed to inform madame of his true object in going to France?”

“What does the man mean?” thought I. “An *object* in going to France? Had he not stated to me that his object in going was to give me time to consider whether or not I intended to return to him? Did he presume so far on my answer being in the negative as to provide a substitute, enthrone her in my place, and give the world of London to understand that he suffered as little inconvenience by my desertion of him as it could be possible for any one to suffer? No, no! This thought was altogether at variance with the usages of society. Common decency even demanded that the forms at least of a separation should be gone through with, and a divorce decreed, ere any other woman could, with the faintest show of respectability, be accepted as an exchange.”

I felt like a poor, deserted, insignificant little creature, as I stood there struggling with my feelings, while Monsieur Marchand awaited with evident curiosity my reply to his interrogation.

“Doctor Alvord always shapes his conduct to suit my convenience,” I replied, trying to look indifferent; while

I suppressed a yawn, and picked up a volume of poems from the stand, pretending to have found a verse which absorbed my attention.

“Madame’s modesty is so stupendous, so admirable, that it will not permit her to assume credit for the good nature implied in the shaping of her convenience to suit Monsieur le Docteur’s conduct;” and Monsieur Marchand stood looking at me as though he had said an excellent thing.

How I longed to ask him all the particulars! yet too proud was I even to hint at such a craving. Sweeping from the room in a manner that I vainly attempted to render stately and indifferent, I requested Mrs. Carter to have me conveyed to Loch Severn, telling her my reasons for going, that papa had sent for me; and though Sallie had offered to drive me over that afternoon, the presence of Monsieur Marchand would prevent her fulfilling the engagement.

I lost no time in driving home, and from thence to Bridgewater, where I had determined upon making one more effort to communicate with my husband. Lest he should become disgusted with me for what might seem an effort on my part to force myself upon his notice, I merely asked the reason for his silence; that I had heard of a guest being at the house, yet, if he could spare the time, I would like him to come out to Loch Severn the following Tuesday, which the physician at Bridgewater had made the limit of papa’s confinement.

“I am positively growing thin and wan,” I said to myself as, sealing the envelope, my hands trembled so that my attention was called directly to them. And I noticed that the plump finger which had received my wedding-ring with so much reluctance had grown small enough for the ring to drop off unassisted, while the diamond set in

the circle was perpetually turning around to the middle of my hand.

Even papa noticed my altered appearance at the very first glance, saying, "You wouldn't make a successful widow, my Portia. It is one of the requirements of a woman who has lost her husband that she be round, besides being rosy and sweet-tempered, that she may the more readily supply the loss which she has sustained."

Papa must have noticed the effort I made to smile at his jest, for he immediately asked me if I felt altogether well; and although I assured him that I had neither an ache nor a pain, he insisted upon having my pulse consulted by the physician who attended him.

Bridgewater is a very populous, as well as an extremely pretty place. The first acquaintance I made was with the landlord's daughter, who, with no end of streamers and a profusion of artificial flowers in her hair, came to call last evening. Her whole mind seemed to be absorbed in fashion, and her very soul yearned, as it were, for a Gordian knot which would depend from her left shoulder by a cord sweeping downward, finding rest at last in the hollow space in her back, immediately above the bustle. The dream of her existence, the fulfillment of which she had long ceased to expect, was a green velvet riding-habit and cockle-shell ear-rings, such as a picture supposed to be Victoria was attired in, which portrait was the pride of the house, and hung in the finest spare room in the inn, and that was the one we were then occupying. She brought two of her friends in to see me to-day, who requested the privilege of cutting the pattern from my Scotch jacket, exclaiming, as I readily granted their request, "What sweet pockets! What a jockey collar!" (meaning, no doubt, jaunty collar.)

I presume, if I stay here long enough, I shall see myself

repeated at every step I take, for I find that even the style of my stockings is a matter of absorbing interest, as the housemaid was examining this morning the pair I left off, when I came up from breakfast, and the attention she was bestowing on them rendered her oblivious to the sound I made in opening and shutting the door; but when I spoke, she cried, "Laws o' me!" and dropped the articles which had undergone such minute inspection, with the apology that Miss Amarintha had declared they were silk, whilst she, the housemaid, had insisted that they were Lisle thread. Taking it altogether, my stay in Bridgewater, with dear papa for a companion, was far pleasanter than it would have been had I remained at Loch Severn. In fact, I believe I could never have lived through this last week alone at Loch Severn, with Eliza's inquiring look fastened upon me continually, and Mrs. Jessop's mouth pursed up into a dignified button, perpetually warning me of my impending doom, and the raging condition of my blessed, merciful Saviour's anger toward me. No! I am far better off in this quiet village, with the being next dearest to my heart, than beating my wings against my prison-house at Loch Severn, waiting for a line to assure me that my return to wifely allegiance will be met with something akin to pleasure.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WE had scarcely entered the avenue of pines leading to the homestead, when Eliza met us, her face beaming all over with gladness. "Something for you, my dear lady!" she shouted, whilst I motioned the driver to stop, and permit my little maid to ride with us to the house.

"What is it, Eliza?" inquired I, vainly endeavoring to stay the rising color which mantled cheek and brow, as I thought of the white-winged messenger that might then be reposing on the table in the library.

"Don't be silly, Eliza," said I, sharply, as my maid rolled up her eyes and sucked in her lips, as though she had a mammoth chocolate cream between them. "Tell me what is there at once!"

Eliza must have felt her ground well, and known that she might safely brave my wrath, in view of what was to follow; for she held her tongue between her finger and thumb, thereby indicating that it was useless to catechise her.

"I take it to be a new bonnet all covered over with vines and things," said my father; "fresh from Worth's, of course; one doesn't visit Paris for nothing."

Eliza shook her head in mulish silence, whilst I alighted from the carriage, assisting papa out, and trying to appear as though I was not consumed of curiosity.

"Never mind me, Portia," said papa, hobbling to the steps. "Here, Martin," he called, "relieve this young lady." But I, disdaining assistance, held papa firmly by the arm until we reached the hall, and unable longer to

keep up the dissimulation, I hurried into the library, where the first thing that met my eye upon entering was a basket of fresh, ripe strawberries, large and luscious, with the green leaves laid out, and forming a rich contrast with the fruit. By the side of the basket containing the berries was a small-sized pasteboard box, tied with a string. This I removed with all possible haste, and drew forth a bouquet of most exquisite beauty. "Where is the message accompanying these, Eliza?" I asked, anxiously. "No message? There certainly must be a message of some kind. Not even a card?" And looking at the box, I could not discover even my name on the lid. "This is very extraordinary," thought I. "Who brought these, Eliza?"

"The mail-carrier at Winsted delivered them here, saying that he was directed to bring them to the physician Alvord's lady. I knew at once, when I saw the camellia and the tea-roses, that they came from the master."

While Eliza was talking, I continued my search for the card, or for some token to assure me that I owed the gracious favor to my husband's kind remembrance; but nothing appeared.

"It is just as I thought," mused I; "he has resolved not to communicate with me until the month has expired. This certainly looks like an advancement towards reconciliation. Does he intend it as a silent reply to my letter?"

It was Saturday when the bouquet was received. The same mysterious gift was repeated on Monday; and so sure was I that Tuesday would bring my husband, that I began to shiver as the afternoon train came whistling across the edge of the wood, on its way to Winsted station, and I thought what an undertaking I had engaged to perform,—the winning of my husband's love, and at the same time

his respect, while I maintained my own personal dignity, unmixed with mawkish sentiment.

The train went whirling by, and I even fancied that I saw Doctor Alvord's stout figure standing on the platform of the rear car. I waited breathlessly at the casement, watching far down the avenue of pines; but though I turned my head again towards the room, noting every article contained in it, from the tall, moon-faced clock in the corner to the smoke bush above the portrait of my mother, hoping, by the time I turned my eyes again without the window, the sight of a carriage would gladden them,—though I resorted again and again to this self-deceiving measure, no carriage appeared in the open gateway.

"He has walked," concluded I. "It takes much longer to walk the mile and a half than it does to ride. I need not look for him yet for a good ten minutes or more;" and returning to the moon-faced clock, the smoke bush, and the vases on the mantel-piece, I lifted a flower from a secluded place in the bouquet and placed it in my hair. "How extremely ugly I have grown!" thought I, looking severely at my reflection in the glass. My nose, which used to be the best feature in my face, looked pinched, and altogether out of shape. My lips were no longer full and red. Even my forehead seemed to have a bald appearance, such as I had so often criticised as faulty in Miss Sedgwick's beauty, giving the tufts of hair which encircled it the appearance of a wig, and the whole face the look of a poorly-executed design in wax: of Charlotte Temple bald-headed and wearing a wig. "My forehead used to be broad and low," I said, half aloud; "and I never dreamed until now that I was half so hideous." And the vision came to me of that matchless-faced woman who hung on the arm of my husband at

Kensington, and whom he named Helen with so much tenderness in his tone.

As I stood gazing at myself, taking in all the defects of my countenance, which had never appeared to me with so much force until now, I espied the figure of a man at the extreme end of the walk; and, hastily retreating to the other room, not wishing to be found so anxiously watching and expectant, after I had made the arrangement for the meeting, I sank nervously into a chair by the south window, and began busying myself with some worsted-work, pretending to assort the colors, when in reality I was getting them into a succession of tangles.

A tap at the door, and, looking up, I expected nothing else but the kind, sympathetic eyes of Doctor Alvord to meet mine, when instead, it was only Eliza bearing the basket of fruit and the bouquet, the third offering of the kind I had received.

The disappointment was almost too great for me to bear, although I told myself over and over again that less than a week would elapse ere the month would be up, and Doctor Alvord was doubtless waiting for that. Bidding Eliza bring fresh water for the vase, I arranged the flowers therein with my own hand to suit myself, and determined that, come what might, I would not allow myself to watch again the coming of my husband until the following Monday.

I had said nothing to papa with reference to the difference between Doctor Alvord and myself. I hinted not in the most remote manner that the celebrated Mademoiselle Porti was his own daughter. And when a paragraph appeared in the papers to the effect that strong suspicions were entertained by the music-loving, play-going portion of the community that the mysterious Mademoiselle Porti was none other than the wife of a

distinguished member of the medical fraternity, I listened to him read it aloud to me as calmly as though I had no interest in the matter, further than the attention I gave while the reading was going on. I had not even mentioned the fact of my husband being in London.

"It is scarcely a week, my Portia," said papa this evening, "ere you take leave of me. Cannot you prevail upon Doctor Alvord to permit you to remain another week with your poor invalid father?"

Although I was assured in my soul—not a shadow of a doubt clouding the certainty—that my husband would come for me at the expiration of the two weeks, I felt a glad thrill pass through me at the thought that, in any event, no matter what be the unforeseen circumstances awaiting me in the future, I would still have a home at Loch Severn; I would still be necessary to the comfort and happiness of my beloved papa. I hesitated before replying. "Oh, if you don't want to stay," continued my father, with the querulousness of an invalid, "that's altogether another thing. I had hoped you thought enough of me to wish to see me safely through with this sprain; but it seems I have been mistaken."

"Don't talk that way, papa," said I, not bursting into tears as I once would have done; "you cannot mean what you say. My first care, of course, shall be your comfort; and if prolonging my visit another week will accomplish this, I shall be only too happy."

"That comes merely from the lips, my Portia; your heart does not echo it. Nevertheless, I am unselfish enough to be glad that your attachment for your husband is so strong. Did he mention anything in his last letter about Hollybrook Street? Of course not, though; how should any one but me give a moment's thought to that dingy, grimy, sooty region of blackness? Yet I yearn

for it. Yes, my Portia, it is in the midst of that very uninviting locality that I lose sight in a measure of the terrible loss I sustained in the death of your mother. I even long to return to the casting-room and the bellows, for there I found my surest springs of Lethe. I presume, however, that the father-in-law of the distinguished physician Alvord must not think of contaminating himself by coming in contact with vulgar moulds and filthy furnaces." Here my father settled down gloomily into his chair for a nap, and I, gliding out of the room, sought relief at the piano, which I had never opened until now since my return home.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

To describe to you the despair and anger that seized me when, on last Monday, I waited with certainty for the coming of my husband; to repeat to you the thousand wild purposes that found a lodgment in my brain, as I contemplated the possibility of my being cast off forever from the protection of one whom I at least claimed as husband and protector, would require more nerve than I possess to write it. I can only relate to you the facts as they are, and not their results. No, no! I should go mad were I to depict my sufferings over again,—the sense of mortification and injured pride being more terrible to endure than the sense of disappointment itself.

My father already begins to suspect that something is wrong, though he can scarcely dream the extent of the mischief which I am in hourly terror of. Have I ceased to love my husband? Sometimes I think I hate him

more bitterly than human can hate aught but death. Sometimes I catch myself damning with all the fierceness of a lawless bandit the fresh, sweet flowers which, all along through my struggles and misery of the past week, have been heralded as messengers of hope and ministers of salvation to come. Perhaps, after all, he never sent them; perhaps that sheep-faced Frenchman, with his insufferable arrogance and foreign airs, has hired a man to bring them to me, else why should he have failed to place my name on the lid of the box? He knew that, failing to recognize the handwriting of my husband, I would not prize the offering.

I had just reached the word "offering" in my record, when papa's voice called me from the porch,—“Come, Portia, I am going to walk over to Winsted for exercise, and I want you to go with me. Your cheeks show that you need the air. Not a word, now!” he said, with emphasis, seeing that I was about to beg him to excuse me. “Put your things on at once. I want your assistance, too, in selecting me a becoming neck-tie, to be worn at the grand party to-morrow night.”

“Papa!” cried I, in utter astonishment, “you really do not mean to go to Miss Sedgwick’s?”

“Why not?” returned he. “I am not too old to enjoy these things in a measure. Besides, I am determined to be your escort once more as of old. Don’t deny me this, my Portia,” continued he, looking at me with much tenderness in his eyes. “I have set my heart upon conducting you there, and I feel that you will be cruel if you deny me. I have some fatherly pride left, though you seem to think that, because I am no longer necessary to your happiness, I can dispense with your friendship and companionship as readily. Come! get on your jacket and hood. A half-hour will be sufficient for even

my halting gait to gain Winsted comfortably by luncheon; and Doctor Carter will be home at that hour without doubt.”

I slowly turned into the house, and put on my things without saying a word, having become too accustomed to my father’s charges of a want of affection for him to do other than protest in general terms that he was mistaken. This time I was too much taken up with the idea of being forced again into that society which I hated so cordially, and from which I wished to withdraw for the remainder of my life.

The walk to Winsted was longer than I anticipated; for scarcely had we turned out of the lodge-gate, when papa began: “You have been trying to deceive me, Portia, for a long time, in part successfully, with reference to the condition of things existing between yourself and your husband. Without wishing to force you to a confidence which you have hitherto denied me, I consider it my duty to inquire of you what it all means. And in case you insist upon a reticence which I must characterize both as unfilial and disrespectful, I shall take a trip to London on purpose to see Doctor Alvord, and ascertain from him the meaning of this state of things. And woe betide him, I may add, if aught in his treatment of you has been the cause of this estrangement!”

I had long been expecting my father to catechise me upon this subject, for I felt that I had long been unable to further conceal from him the distress of mind under which I labored.

“Rest assured, papa,” I answered, my voice trembling with emotion, “that all will be explained ere long.”

“But I do not rest assured anything of the kind,” cried my father, sharply. “Your fine London physician has discovered that the country-bred daughter of a mechanic

is not fit for his magnificent home on Etheridge Square, and has doubtless made you aware of his opinion in more ways than one."

"But suppose," said I, calmly,—“suppose I have been to blame in the whole matter from beginning to end, and that Doctor Alvord, so far from treating me with disrespect, had borne with me until patience ceased longer to be a virtue?”

"You the one in fault? You badgering and hectoring him until he could no longer bear it? Don't tell me any such lies, in the hope that I will believe them! Your affection for your husband, and your shouldering all the blame, shall not shield him from my wrath, I promise you. When he stole your love from his brother and married you, I felt then that you had made a wrong exchange. With Charles Alvord, indolent though I agree he was, and perhaps a trifle selfish, you would have been far happier, living if need be on my bounty, than as the dependent slave of a haughty aristocrat, who married you for your beauty, thinking to secure a fine mistress for his home. While you, unfortunately, had given up your whole heart to him, seemingly at first sight; and failing to inspire him with the same sentiment with which you regarded him, you grew silent, mute, yes, my Portia, almost homely. He, growing tired of you, dropped you at Loch Severn, pretending to go off to France on business, when I dare say he took the next train back to London."

"Papa," said I, with all the dignity I was capable of summoning, "believe me when I say I have *not* lied to you; that I have never received— Did you ever discover me in a falsehood? Well, then, know, *know*, that a queen could not have received greater homage from her subjects than I received from the domestic household of

Doctor Alvord; and that my husband's attention and regard for me was not only felt in private, but was the theme of public remark. The lack of beauty which you discover in me," continued I, in a tone somewhat piqued, "was never hinted to me by my husband, either in word, look, or deed, and I would stake my life and reputation on his integrity and faithfulness to me, though I might have grown as hideous as the witch of Endor and as silent as a mute, had anything but my own disagreeable nature produced the deformity. No; I implore you to allow things to take their course, at least for awhile, and until I can determine my own course for the future. When I feel the need of your advice, doubt not that I shall ask it freely, and expect forgiveness from you for the deception I have so long practiced. Though you may forgive me seventy times seven, it will never help me to cover my own sense of guilt and shame. I do not mean shame, papa," I hurriedly cried, observing my father's look of horrified wonder. "Not shame; I should have said folly. Though, so far as the word is concerned, one may be covered over with shame without being actually dishonored. Understand me, therefore, that I, knowing the whole truth, prohibit, nay, positively forbid, your questioning me further upon the subject, and should you condescend to ask an explanation of Doctor Alvord, you will regret it, believe me, for I am resolved that he shall in future make every advance toward a reconciliation. And, although we should be separated for all eternity, I would never myself ask, nor permit another to ask for me, the reconciliation which past efforts on my part have failed to bring about."

"You admit, then," said papa, earnestly, "that you have humbled yourself, and asked to be forgiven for your fancied fault?"

"I admit," answered I, "that I have taken every step towards showing penitence for the wrong I committed in every way consistent with my dignity as a woman. Believe me when I say that nothing has been left undone; and should you go to Doctor Alvord to seek an explanation, you will only succeed in trailing in the dust what little spirit and pride there is left in me; and rather than owe my return to London as Doctor Alvord's wife to these means, *I will destroy my life!*"

"My Portia, is it, then, so bad as this?" cried my father, in pitying tones. "My word for it, you need not further distress yourself; for I promise you I shall be guided altogether by your wishes. I trust you, my child; I sympathize with you; and, come what may, your father's home is not more truly his own than it is yours; and in the very warmest corner of my heart of hearts I shall fold you."

As my father ceased speaking, I put my hands to my face and burst into tears. We had reached the edge of the village; and though I trembled with physical weakness and agitation, yet a burden was lifted from my heart that I had borne for many a day. "Let Doctor Alvord continue his coldness; it would only serve to weaken my love for him, while in its continued action, might not the love of my life, which had been at once my glory and my curse, receive its death-blow? Then would I return again to my father's house, the free-hearted child that Charles Alvord found me on a chilly night in February, little less than a year ago, drumming at my music-lesson, and with no other earthly care greater than the committing of the do, re, me, fa's, which I then felt to be a crowning sorrow."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"My dearest lady," cried Eliza, as I was selecting something from the wardrobe to be worn at Miss Sedgwick's ball, "please wear the green silk dress that you wore down to dinner one day, with your hair powdered."

"You forget, Eliza," interrupted I, "that I had no such collar-bones nor elbows as these when I wore that square-necked and loose-sleeved garment."

"Your neck and arms are not so *very* bad," urged Eliza, showing thus the depths of depravity into which even a truthful maid like my Eliza may descend, from her association with one like myself, who was ever enacting a perpetual deceit. "The gauze scarf, trimmed in lace," she continued, "could be draped over your shoulders, and I am certain no one will notice your arms; they are fuller than nine-tenths of those belonging to young ladies I have seen in the neighborhood."

"No, Eliza," said I, unhooking a plain black-and-white checkered silk from a nail,—one of my young-ladyhood dresses,—“I shall wear this, and no ornaments. Please don't urge me," I added, seeing that Eliza was about to object strongly to my disfiguring myself in "that bag,"—a term she always used when she wished to apply an opprobrious epithet to an ill-fitting garment.

Just then papa rapped at the door, and, upon being admitted, said, "I hope, Portia, that you will dress in a manner as befits your position in London society, however averse you may be to so doing. Nothing speaks so well for the prosperity, contentment, and even happiness

of a young married woman, as to be well and tastefully dressed. From the social position you occupy, great things will be expected of you in this respect; and in appealing to your own sense of propriety, I may be permitted to add that it is my wish that you select something which will be in the very best style. I need not suggest anything to you; but if you really desire to please me, you will wear your wedding-dress and your mother's ornaments."

Eliza was hastily replacing the checkered silk as papa said this; and I, with downcast eye and trembling limbs, thought of the mockery with which I was expected to go through. I had almost cried, "Anything but that, papa," when I asked myself, "*Why* anything else but that? Are they not all alike, and I like them all, a base deception and a mockery?" "Very well, papa," I replied, faintly-smiling, and bidding Eliza get down the box. I took out the two gorgeous cluster-rings from their cases, that I might show my father how perfectly they fitted my fingers; but not wishing to pain him, I replaced them without carrying out my intention. Papa silently left the room. I thought he suspected me of my intent, for I fancied that a look of almost horror overspread his face as he noticed me shut the casket as he turned to leave.

"I must have a little rouge, Eliza," I said. "Borrow some of one of the servants, for I cannot go to the party in this ghastly condition." And as Eliza left the room, flying to do my bidding, I arranged a red rose in my hair, hoping its richness would reflect some lustre upon my wan and death-like countenance. Very soon she returned with paint-pot and brush, but I shrank back from the deception. "No, no, Eliza; I have changed my mind. That rosy bloom would but ill accord with the rest of my complexion. Take it away!" And with a

wave of disgust I motioned my maid to carry it back again where she had got it.

It began to sprinkle as the hour approached for us to leave home for the ball, and I hoped the rain would pour down in torrents and prevent our going, although I doubt if even that would have induced papa to depart from his purpose of attending. As we were shut tightly in the carriage and covered with wraps, the chill that seized me must have been rather of a nervous character than from the effects of cold; yet my teeth chattered, and I presented every appearance of discomfort. When we approached Winsted, at the outskirt of which was the Sedgwick mansion, I had almost determined upon imploring papa to allow me to return, as I shrank more and more within myself at the thought of the remarks my changed appearance must certainly call forth. As we alighted, and trod the narrow strip of tapestry stretched from the door to the gate, the band was playing a waltz, and we knew that we were not early arrivals. There was no one in the dressing-room, so I could arrange my skirts to my satisfaction, and have the exclusive use of the mirror; and, mentally commenting on my own appearance to the effect that I did not look so very horrible after all, I took papa's arm, and entered the large parlors, the scene of gayety and music. I felt rather than saw the surprise depicted on the countenances of those of my acquaintances who had not seen me for a fortnight. Some I met now for the first time since my return home; they only stared their blank amazement; and I could see by the sudden elevation of fans to their owners' lips that Portia Severn was getting thoroughly discussed by the groups of school-girl acquaintances collected in various corners, some of them making their *début* in society for the first time.

We women know that there is no severer critic of woman than woman; and in my secret heart I dreaded the cruel, unsympathetic glances of those with whom I had never been on intimate terms. True, my costume was faultless, my jewels simply unrivaled in that gathering; but would they not all know that something other than illness had eaten the rose from off my cheek and quenched the light from out my eye?

"Have you been ill, Portia?" asked one, and then another, looking at me with tenderness. "No, no, no!" I replied, with something of my old impatient spirit asserting itself. "Why will you all be having me ill?"

"Madame's dissipation in London has compelled her to seek the quietude of her home to recruit," broke in a voice at my elbow, that I well knew belonged to no other than Monsieur Marchand. "The more populair becomes a lady in English society, the greater the demands upon her constitution; or, as in France we say, '*Aujourd'hui roi, demain rien!*' Veritas, the adage relates rather to the holding of principalities and titles; yet, could there be any inheritance equal to that of a fine constitution?"

He spoke with much rapidity, thinking perhaps that I intended to carry my anger towards him even into the drawing-room where we were gathered. He judged a poor, weak mortal like me wrongfully. He thought I was strong in resentment, though weak and apparently wretched in frame. Something must have shown him his error even before he was half through speaking, for, holding out his arm to me, I too readily availed myself of the support thus offered, and without which I must have fallen.

"My angel!" he murmured, as, drawing me away from the group of friends and seating me in a window, he brought me a glass of wine, at my request.

"Hush!" I interrupted. "They are looking at us, and thinking it means more than it does." But Monsieur Marchand continued to deplore the condition in which, after a few short weeks, he had found me. "Curses on him who has wrought this change!" he muttered, between his teeth. "You are not ill; it is your mind that complains and finds no rest! Ah, *ma petite* lady, let me avenge you; permit me that one boon, though you deny me all else in the world."

I essayed to rise, but found myself too weak. I called in a feeble voice for papa, who stood within six feet of me. The room was buzzing with merry voices and the scrape of the violin. No one was noticing me. "I love you, my nightingale! my sweet, lovely blossom! my crushed rose-bud!" Monsieur Marchand's voice continued murmuring, while he, carried away by the excitement of the moment, knew not half he said.

Another entered the room, seemingly in search of some one. He passed so closely that I put out my hand and touched his arm. He turned, looked, and seeing a gentleman at my side, passed on. *He did not know me, though I was wedded to him!*

I recollect nothing else, save that Sallie Carter came up to me that moment, exclaiming, "Why didn't you tell me that you came with your husband?" And for the first time in my life I fainted, although often before I had prayed to God that he would send me unconsciousness.

I knew nothing until a confusion of voices sounded in my ears, and the melody of distant music. Doctor Alvord held my hand in his, watching the fluttering, feeble pulse; and, as I opened my eyes, he exclaimed, as though the words were fairly wrung from his soul, "*Good God, Portia, has it come to this?*"

I tried to speak. I wanted to ask where was the Count-

ess Charmain, but fate was against me. It shut my lips down tightly upon the bit of sarcasm which longed to pass them. I looked fixedly at him. I drew in my breath at the sight of the face so beloved, that was gazing upon me with so much anxiety and such divine pity. Once more his fingers sought my pulse.

"Turn them every one out!" I cried, "the buzzing, heartless gibberers! Turn them out; I want to speak to *my husband!*"

He only half heard me, after all; for, going to the group of women who had come in from time to time, he requested them to vacate the room, and, sending papa to me, he let himself out by a side door, and I saw him no more.

A fainting spell does not necessarily last long. I was restored sufficiently in less than half an hour to make it safe to remove me to my home.

Papa, with a countenance overspread with mingled anger and pity, said nothing whatever upon the subject of my sudden attack, but started the following morning, on the ten o'clock train, for London, without letting me know that he was going. I seated myself at the window to read after he was gone, trying to reconcile myself to the events which were sure to follow on the heels of papa's hot-headed haste. And as I glanced along the local column of morning despatches in the "Telegraph," my eye fell upon a paragraph which so startled me that, in my weak and nervous condition, the paper dropped from my hand, and I uttered a piercing shriek. Eliza came flying to me, her eyes ready to drop out from fright. "Get my travelling suit ready," said I, "and bring the carriage to the door at once!" in my confusion mixing up my orders so woefully, that poor Eliza knew not which she was expected to execute. Tearing off my morning dress, the languid

air that possessed me but a moment before was supplanted by one of intense excitement, as I, hurrying to habit myself in the suit laid out for me, thought of nothing but the haste which prompted me.

The paragraph I read ran as follows:

"DISTRESSING ACCIDENT."

"The rain which descended the greater part of the night turned into sleet towards morning, so that occupants of carriages, as well as pedestrians, were constantly in danger from the slippery condition of the streets and pavements. Doctor Edwin Alvord, the distinguished surgeon at the Royal Academy, met with a terrible fall, which is likely to prove fatal. He was returning from a party at Winsted, and somewhere between Hollybrook Fair and his residence on Etheridge Square, he slipped and fell, producing concussion of the brain, and, it is feared, other internal injuries. It is not known how long he remained thus before he was discovered; but a watchman conveyed him home shortly before daybreak. Up to the time of this writing he had not recovered consciousness. This will be a sad blow to his estimable and accomplished wife, whom we learn is on a visit to her home in Severn County."

When I arrived at the depot in Winsted, I was obliged to wait nearly an hour for an up-train which was delayed. I did not allow poor Eliza to speak to me, or even make a motion, lest it might be construed into her seeking to dissuade me from undertaking the journey in my present feeble state of health. The silent reproach with which she looked at my unprotected feet, and the haste with which she raised the umbrella over my head as we passed from the waiting-room to the coach, almost induced me to with-

draw the restrictions; but when I considered that in doing so I would make myself liable to answer any question which her anxiety for me and distress for her master might call up, I concluded that perhaps, after all, we had better continue just as we were.

You have been with me, reader, so often to London and back, that you are as familiar with the route as I am. So you may readily imagine we landed in Hollybrook Street, and, after a short ride, were set down at Number 20 Etheridge Square.

I had made up my mind fully as to how I intended to act in case my husband was still unconscious. I know not where I received the strength to plan, nor from whence came my settled calmness, unless I refer both to that Source at whose command even the angry waters of the mighty ocean cease to be troubled. And what are the emotions of a frail woman to the turbulent billows that stir the bosom of the great deep?

Eliza rang once, twice, and even thrice, before an answer came to our summons, and then it came in the shape of Bobbs, who appeared with solemn visage at the head of the area steps, saying that nobody was to be admitted into the house, the attending physician having given strict orders to that effect.

"But, Bobbs," said I, raising my voice, "you know me. I am mistress here," while he stared at my changed appearance like one in a daze.

"Certainly; come right in," he simply said, leading the way through the passage and up into the hall. After taking off my things, I was ushered straight into my husband's apartment.

The attending physician, or rather physicians, for there were three of them apparently in consultation, looked up as I entered, taking me, I suppose, for the nurse; and re-

turning again to the patient, they gave me no further attention, but seemed to be anxiously awaiting some signs of returning consciousness. They had just finished an examination of his person, endeavoring to satisfy themselves, if possible, of any internal injuries that might have been received. I judged this from the technical terms used in delivering their opinions to one another. I recognized some of the terms as identical with the ones my school physiology had caused me so many severe hours of toil to learn. I crept timidly to the bedside whereon was stretched the apparently lifeless form of him who, but a short two days ago, I had deemed it possible for me to forget, but who I knew and felt, as I gazed upon him lying there, was the life of my life, and could no more be separated from the thoughts and feelings that connected him with my future existence than the arrow can hide itself from the bow, saying, "We can live apart."

"Doctor Harris?" I called, softly, arranging the pillows about my husband's head, and addressing a physician whom I knew slightly, and who was present at our wedding reception.

As I spoke I hoped he would recognize me, but he only looked at me in a respectful manner, while I introduced myself, saying, "I wish to take sole charge of my husband during his illness, or at least during his unconsciousness."

"You nurse him, Mrs. Alvord?" said the doctor, starting up in surprise. "You look more like being nursed yourself!"

"Yes! yes!" I said, impatiently. "There is nothing in the world the matter with me. I am well, and please be kind enough to show me the medicines I am to use until you call again."

"If the countess was only here, she might be of some

service to the physician's wife," I overheard one of the gentlemen say. "Hardly," was the reply, uttered in so low a tone that I barely caught that word, and none of the sentence that followed.

Doctor Harris gave me all necessary directions, after which they all took their leave, and I—why should not a wife be left alone with her husband?

"And so the Countess Charmain is no longer here," said I to myself, as, hurrying to the bed again, I knelt and, clasping the motionless hand, gazed steadfastly at the closed lids of the eyes I had learned so to love. The doctors had said that we might look for at least two weeks of this unconsciousness. Two weeks? "Oh, God!" I cried in my anguish. "Might not the lamp of life be wholly extinguished ere then forever?"

My thoughts should have formed themselves into a prayer. I knew that I ought to go to the never-failing source of relief in times of trouble; but I knew, too, that I could not say, "Thy will be done." Foolish heart, not to know that God's will is done at all times, not ours! and that He enables only those who seek Him as a friend to bear with fortitude those trials that belong to humanity, while we who refuse his proffered help must endure all alone.

"Where are Doctor Alvord's friends?" I asked of Doctor Harris, on his return that evening to visit his patient.

"You mean the countess."

"No!" replied I, sharply. "I mean his neighbors, the dwellers on this square. Do they not feel any interest in his welfare? The accident happened last night, and no one has been in here to inquire about him."

Doctor Harris looked at me strangely, saying, "I think you mistake. There were upwards of a pack of cards, I

should judge, taken from underneath the door a few minutes ago, and,"—smiling,—"you wouldn't expect an aristocrat on Etheridge Square to enter the house by the area? He would lose caste at once."

"I see," said I, "that you admit no one. Is that decision final? I have dispatched my maid to Hollybrook to inform my father of my whereabouts, he having been away from home at the time the news reached me, and I left without his knowledge. Should he present himself for admission, is he to be denied?"

"Well, yes, dear madame, unless he will consent to enter as you did; and please bear in mind that it is really imperative that no one shall disturb the patient, for it is not uncommonly the case that in some forms of concussion of the brain the patient, though apparently unconscious, is in reality alive to all his surroundings." Saying this, Doctor Harris left me to the astonishment which his words had produced.

Could it be possible that that form lying so still and motionless was aware that a hand had clasped its own in anxious frenzy, and that a voice had wailed forth the name of the prostrate one in tones of unmistakable passion? Those lips so pale and mute, did they feel the pressure of a first wifely kiss? Did he hear the mad utterances of a despairing soul whispered into his ear, a soul that dared not pray, lest the words would not be "Thy will, O Lord, but mine, be done"?

I bent above the unyielding form, I moved the lids of the sightless eyes, I raised the lifeless hand and let it drop again; it fell heavily on the bed, like the inanimate object that it was. My forced calmness was deserting me. I whispered in what I deemed to be thundering accents the word "forgive," and laid my cheek against his own, and kept it there. In the silence that followed, in the still-

ness of that horrible moment of despair, I heeded not the cat-like tread that approached. I heard, but heeded not. In vain the voice of Adele, the French maid, broke in upon the death-like stillness of the room. In vain she taunted me with words like these: "You love, then, in death him whom you hated in life? Madame returns, then, to her duty when the occasion for it is no more. Madame's tea is ready for her; allow me to remove Madame, that I may send for the undertaker to dress the body!"

"Adele!" I shrieked. "He is not dead,—the physicians all say he is not dead!"

"The physicians!" replied Adele, in a tone of contempt. "*He* was the only one worthy the name in London! See," she continued, taking out a small glass and holding it before the seemingly lifeless lips; "this is our test in France. See you the least film across this mirror?"

I looked with all my soul in my eyes. "You are blind, Adele!" I shrieked. "See!—the faintest shadow of a mist."

"Tush, madame!" cried Adele, sharply, as I thought, and as though we were simply disagreeing on a matter that involved nothing like life and death. "Tush! see you not, madame, the nose on your face, and the eyes in your head, as plainly as though nothing had marred the surface? Out upon you, madame, for a poor reasoner! The physician Alvord is dead, and all your repentance will not restore him to life again."

Strange to say, I did not feel the taunts and disrespectful language of the French maid. My agony was so great, yet my hope so strong within me, that even the almost fatal assurance given us by the mirror did not altogether drive from my soul the belief that my husband still lived.

"Come!" said Adele again, laying her hand on my shoulder. "*Allons, madame! Bon gré, mal gré,* the physician is gone, and Madame must eat something, or she will have no strength to go through with the ceremony."

"Stop!" exclaimed I. "Send Eliza to me at once; she shall go for Doctor Harris."

"Of what use is it, madame? No one can be of service here but the undertaker."

I flew to the bell, and ringing it with all my might, I dispatched Eliza on my errand, well knowing that I might trust her to perform all I asked. Adele swept from the room with the air of an insulted queen, and I was again left alone with my dead.

Doctor Harris brought another physician with him, and scarcely had they made an examination of the body,—indeed, a glance at the invalid's face seemed to convey fearful tidings to them,—when they bestowed on me a look of compassion, and both gravely seated themselves beside the almost rigid figure lying on the bed, proceeding at once to the various tests common in such cases. They made their investigations, seemingly as though they had previously decided the question of life or death, and as if what they were doing now was only a matter of form.

"Come, Mrs. Alvord," said Doctor Harris, compassionately, "a very sad duty now remains unperformed. Allow me to insist upon your taking some nourishment and sleep, or you will not be sustained in the coming trial."

Why did I not shriek aloud in agony? Why was it that no tear arose in my eye, and that I felt such superhuman strength take possession of me? It was because I *knew* that my husband was not dead. It was because I

was *not* blind, and *did* see the film rise in the glass, faint and the ghost of a breath though it was. "I do not stir from this room," said I, "until you have confessed your mistake. He is not dead; he lives!"

They shook their heads in pitying silence. "Send for Herr Henrique! My husband had confidence in him. He shall view the body, if you will have it the body alone!"

"Herr Henrique?" they both repeated, looking at each other. "He is only hospital surgeon!"

"Nevertheless," I repeated, "send for Herr Henrique. My husband shall not be pushed alive into the grave."

I rang for Eliza to bring me some toast and tea, which I left untasted on the stand. Less than half an hour brought Herr Henrique, alone. The physicians Harris and Romain considered themselves discharged. Very well. They had done as much as they were able.

"See, Herr Henrique, see for yourself; am I not right? My husband lives!" pressing the cold hand again and again to my lips. I must have been a pitiful sight indeed to the young hospital surgeon, whom my husband had praised, and in whose skill he had such confidence. I cared not how I looked if only I might be confirmed in my faith. An hour, two, even three hours passed by, and then the clock on St. James's rang out midnight. The young surgeon moved not from his position, neither spoke a word to me. The moon poured in at the open window, and I noiselessly glided to the window and closed the blind, unable to bear the terrible spectacle it illuminated in the death-like chamber. With the coming dawn, a strange and irresistible stupor came over my senses, and I slept. When I awoke and stood beside the watcher, I looked into his face for the con-

firmation of my words. "He lives!" said Herr Henrique, pressing between the almost set teeth of my husband some liquid contained in a spoon. "He lives! yet we know not for how long; an hour, mayhap a day! Have you anything to say to him? Say it now, for he is conscious; trust nothing in the hour or the day."

"But I do trust in the hour and the day, Herr Henrique!" cried I aloud and purposely, that my words might reach my husband's ears. "I trust not only in the hour and the day, but in the many, many years in which my husband is to live!" Yet I did press my lips to his ear and repeat the word, "Forgive!"

Herr Henrique still remained, and when Mr. Schöler, my husband's lawyer, arrived, and I was summoned to go and see him, I knew by the sad face with which he greeted me that he thought all was over. Judging by my countenance, he must have thought me a very heartless woman; for, after informing me that Doctor Alvord's will had left me the sole inheritress of his fortune, I could not prevent the smiles playing over my face and dimpling in the corners of my mouth.

I removed any suspicion of heartlessness, however, by saying, in a cheerful tone, "He will live to enjoy his own wealth and the fruits of his industry for many years to come."

The undertaker arrived, all spick and span clad in black. His bland and solemn visage but ill accorded with the fiendish jig-dances performed by his eyes, as they vainly strove to conceal their satisfaction at so remunerative a piece of business in prospective. I motioned him out, saying, "We harbor no dead men here!"

The neighbors called in to condole with me. I laughed in their faces. Lady Ainslie, with her trim-

gloved hand, raised her eye-glass, and viewed me through it a full minute, then moved to depart. I caught hold of her dress as she left the room, and, pulling her back, said, "I have passed such a night of horrible suspense, that I believe it has unsettled my brain. You condole with me in vain, for my husband lives!" To each and every one I could only say, "My husband lives!" and the sympathy which beamed from even the otherwise proud, cold faces, made me warm and glad within.

I met Adele in the passage-way, as I was returning to the invalid's chamber. She seemed to glare with tigerish ferocity on my poor, faded, yet happy countenance. She whispered almost beneath her breath, yet I heard her, "Of what use will Monsieur's recovery be to Madame? He loves her not. It is only the Countess Charmain who holds him in her toils."

A cold blast of dread and despair swept over me; yet I still sped onward, repeating, "If he only lives!—if he only lives!"

"And he *will* live!" answered Herr Henrique, as I again entered the room where he so faithfully watched. "The worst is passed; perhaps by to-morrow—the next day at furthest—he may open his eyes."

How attentively I watched beside the bed that day no one but myself can know. The young surgeon came thrice, each time departing more hopeful than before,—more sure, indeed, of the result which his own skill had brought about.

The following day it was the same, although the eyelids quivered, the nostrils expanded slightly, and the lips, parched and dry though they were, began to gather a little of the life-blood which coursed feebly through the animated frame. Yet the eyes did not unlock, nor the

lips essay to speak the troubled thoughts that flitted through the weak and dizzy brain.

As I left the room the third day to exercise up and down the passage-way, believing that my husband slept, I picked up a scrap of paper from the threshold, which seemed to disfigure the otherwise tidy appearance of the passage-way; and as I mechanically read the few words that were written thereon, something familiar in them arrested my attention. It was merely the ragged portion of a letter torn thus:

at Bridgewater
severe spr
look for
obliged for
Papa goes
accompany

And yet the words, I say, seemed familiar to me. "Why should I not supply the absent letters? Had I not written it all? Was not this my Bridgewater letter, thus torn rudely to pieces and scattered to the four winds? This was the way my advance towards reconciliation had been received. Just outside of the room where death had almost tarried, and where my love had brought him back to life, lay the evidence of my husband's unforgiving spirit towards me. Just as I was breathing forth a prayer in thankfulness to God for my husband's salvation, the assurance of the uselessness of my mission in that house came to me in the shape of a little piece of paper, blown into an obscure spot after his scornful hand had torn up the letter, while the first gust of wind from the passage-way below had whisked it from its hiding-place, and laid it at my very feet. I am justly punished for my presumption," thought I. "Yet why presumption, after receiving such a letter from Doctor Alvord as

the one he pressed into my hand at our parting? I shall do my duty here whilst he is sick; that is nothing more than even he could expect. After that, I care not what becomes of me."

As I slowly walked towards the room, to enter again upon my silent watch, I thought I heard a door within creak on its hinges. Opening the door hastily, I went straight to the invalid, and discovered a faint flush coloring his cheek and brow, which I had not noticed before. I arranged the pillows comfortably. "A mouse has got in that chest of drawers," thought I, pausing, and hearing a gnawing, grating sound in the region of an old-fashioned sideboard situated near the bed. "Eliza shall bring a trap to-morrow, and we will catch him," I thought; and seating myself beside my husband, I engaged in some light sewing, until the doctor should make his appearance.

"What is this?" he asked, the moment he looked at his patient. "A fever? I left him cool, and with no appearance of heat about him, this morning. Has he spoken?"

I shook my head decidedly. "He has given no indication that he wished to speak. I left the room for a little exercise but a few moments ago, and returning, found him just as you see him now."

"This must not continue," the doctor said. "I leave this cooling draught, and in the mean time be good enough to bathe his head in lukewarm water, and occasionally the palms of his hands as well."

I applied myself diligently to the task thus assigned me, and had the satisfaction of soon finding my patient free from the alarming symptoms which had manifested themselves. Herr Henrique insisted upon sitting up with him that night, saying that there were no very sick patients at the

hospital demanding his attention. And as I would not thereby resign my charge into any other hands than those which had co-operated with me in my husband's restoration, I readily assented, and lying down on a couch, I passed the night between sleeping and waking, in rather a comfortable manner.

At day-break Herr Henrique asked for some warm water with which to bathe the patient's feet; and as I knew no one was up in the house, it being too early for even Eliza's thrifty habits, I descended to the bath-room, and, in the dimly-lighted passage-way, ran against a man just emerging from a room in the passage leading to the dining-room. "Bobbs!" I cried, quickly recovering myself. But the figure made no reply, and quietly pursuing its way onward, it descended the stairs which led into the cellar-kitchen. I got the water, and, hearing suppressed voices below-stairs, I paused a moment to listen; but hearing a door close, and nothing further from the voices, I concluded that some one of the servants had been out later than usual and was trying to come in unobserved, though why he should be up in the first story I could not conceive.

Hastening back, I gave the water over into Herr Henrique's hands. After bathing his patient, the doctor left no other directions further than perfect quiet and repose for his patient, saying, "He will probably sleep two hours or more. Your exercise, if you take any, and I strongly recommend it, had better be taken now, that you may remain by his side as much as possible, noting every change in his condition, and report it to me."

For an hour after Herr Henrique left the house I sat watching the steady, natural breathing of my husband, when the steward sent for me, saying that he wished to speak with me concerning the low state of the larder;

that Saturdays it was his custom to lay in supplies of game and fowl, and that these were only to be procured with cash, the produce dealer of whom they always purchased these things being at present engaged in doing a cash business. I did not hesitate a moment to furnish him with the necessary amount, though it did not occur to me, until after I had done so, to inquire who was to dispose of all this quantity of game, fowl, and fish. Certainly not the master of the house, nor the mistress either, if I might be permitted to call myself such; for toast and tea was all I asked for, and all I desired. Adele, Bobbs, Eliza, and the rest of the domestic household were, then, to luxuriate upon these delicacies, in the enumeration of which the steward had included celery, salads, and pigs' feet enough to supply a considerable *restaurateur*.

I laughed silently to myself at the idea of all the pomp and ceremony which would attend the dinner among the domestics on the morrow.

I stopped once on my way up-stairs and peeped into the dining-room, where so many silent meals had been taken, and where my husband taught me my first lesson of respect and regard for him. I stopped a moment at the register, where I had waited for him on the memorable day that I had resolved upon altering my course and becoming more agreeable. I stepped half-way into the library, where the one delightful episode of my married life had occurred, and where we had whiled away an evening together without a single thought as to the flight of time. Then hurrying forward, with my heart swelling, and my eyes swimming in tears, I sped up the stairs, two steps at a time, thinking my delay much longer than it really was. As I opened the door, the same creaking noise I had heard once before sounded within, only more distinct than before. My husband's eyes were certainly

open, and dwelt upon me for a moment after I had entered the room, then closed again. A curious snap behind me caused me to quickly turn my head, but I could see nothing but the old chest of drawers, massive and solemn looking. It was not set straight, I thought. I had never noticed it until now. One end was pulled out, and the glass on top of it was tipped up, so that it reflected every article in the room: the sick man reclining with flushed, almost purple face; his wife standing by his side awe-stricken and frightened. "Could he have gotten up in my absence," I asked myself, "and sought for something within the chest, leaving it thus in his haste?" I laid my cool hand on his burning cheek and brow. I saw the distended nostrils tremble with the emotion he was evidently trying to overcome. His lip quivered, while his whole frame betrayed deep agitation. Yet he lay with his eyes closed and his brow firmly knit, as though, come what might, he was resolved to betray no sign of consciousness other than what he could not help. I bathed again the fevered brow, just as I had been ordered to do before. I gently moistened the palms of his burning hands, until he sank into a sweet slumber, though the fever still mantled cheek and brow. In a couple of hours Herr Henrique entered, and I saw that his coming had disturbed the patient. I motioned with my finger that there was something of importance to be communicated, and shook my head, indicating that he was not to allude to the feverish state of the patient's looks while he sat down at the bedside. I picked up a book and wrote on the fly-leaf hurriedly all that I wished to tell, and passed it into Herr Henrique's hand. I was determined not to leave the room again even for a moment without Herr Henrique remained to watch, pointing at the same time to the disordered condition in which I found the chest of drawers. Herr Henrique passed out,

giving me a sign that he had understood. On his return that evening, he brought a slip of paper bearing these words: "Seem to leave the room, but remain and watch the patient's motions." "What a horrible thing to do!" thought I, while my looks bespoke my reluctance to comply with the doctor's request. "What if he should be insane, and his composure now be but the cunning of a maniac, who has only to be left alone that he may break forth in wild ravings and destroy me? What if that chest contains implements for self-destruction, and I, standing helplessly by, should be compelled to witness my husband draw the keen-edged razor across his throat or plunge a knife into his heart?" Herr Henrique calmly shook his head, as he, evidently discerning my thoughts, denied the danger I apprehended. Pointing to himself, and indicating that he was willing to take my place in the allotted task, I unhesitatingly manifested my determination to do what was required of me, upon which I received a kindly recognition of approval for my devotion to the cause I had undertaken.

At the close of the third day after this arrangement had been entered into between us, Herr Henrique handed me a slip of paper, on which he communicated to me his surprise that the patient made no sign of that return to consciousness which he was certain had returned to him. He received his nourishment with closed eyes, and marks of strong emotion seemed ever present with him, though he resisted every form of outward manifestation. "Mein freund," sometimes he would say in a whisper, "sprechen, mein freund, länger kann ich nicht warten;" but while the brows would knit together in evident distress, no sound would pass the lips so firmly pressed together.

Herr Henrique suggested in his note that this evening should be the opportunity afforded the patient to rise again

from his bed, if he had done so before; and he quickly construed a look of distress on my face to mean that I feared my husband's intellect had fled. Shaking his head with emphasis, he left me without a word, save directions in the hearing of the patient, adding, "I will call again in the morning. Please see that my directions are followed implicitly, and that you take your exercise an hour hence, when the patient sleeps."

I was alone, with no conception of the plan I would make use of to aid me in discovering what was done by my husband in my absence. I glided from one end of the room to the other, looking for some place where I might successfully hide. Nothing presented itself to me, save a curtain which hung over some books in a corner, and which was seemingly too scant to cover my form, and at the same time perform the office for which it was designed.

The tea-bell sounded through the house an hour later, so shrilly that the patient frowned, and partly raised his hand as if to stop it. I thought this a good opportunity for me to pretend that I was going; and as I arranged the covers of the bed, smoothing down the pillow on which his head lay, and giving the other pillow a shake, I stooped and placed a gentle kiss on the hand exposed to view. The frown deepened still more, and the invalid impatiently turned his head to the wall. Nothing could have been more favorable to my purpose than that act. I hurriedly started towards the door, and as I opened and shut it, darting behind the curtain at the same time, I saw my husband sit upright in bed, and with his hand reach out towards the wall. Scarcely a moment elapsed from the time he arose, until—could I be dreaming?—the chest of drawers moved quickly out, as though it were nothing but a chair, and there appeared the tall form of Adele.

Hurrying to the bed, she laid thereon a letter, and as quickly departed. "Stay!" cried my husband, his eyes glowing like stars. "Is he in the house now?"

"Oh, monsieur!" said Adele, clasping her hands in an attitude of entreaty, "don't ask me!"

"Answer!" shouted my husband.

"Monsieur knows too well," replied Adele, dropping her hands listlessly and disappearing, while the same clicking sound I had heard before, supposing it proceeded from the mice, followed her going.

My husband tore open the letter and read.

"Ah!" I thought, "with what eagerness does he read the Countess Charmain's words!"

"Curses on her!" he cried at last, "and on him! May the fiends of hell plague him!—the ogre, the worse than cannibal, to begin his meal before the carcass is ready!"

"Is he cursing her, then? Is she untrue to him?" I laughed almost aloud in my fierce joy. I wanted her to disappoint him. I wanted her to be faithless. Ah! what music it was to my ears to hear him curse her!

"*Portia!*" he cried, with all his might, and fell back on the pillow, purple and gasping for breath. I hastened to him; I rang furiously at the bell. "If he only lived through this, I might be his. Had he not called me in the extremity of his grief and disappointment? Was I not there to atone for him as well as for myself? Go, Eliza!" I said; "go at once for Herr Henrique; tell him your master is very near death!" And Eliza with the wings of the wind waited not for another word, but disappeared like a sprite.

Adele pushed against the door as I closed it. "Can I assist any, madame?" I trusted myself with no answer; it was a case of strength against strength. She pushed

without, and I within. Her act of courtesy was a ruse to get in, that she might gain possession of the letter, understanding from Eliza's haste that the patient had been suddenly stricken. Her great, strong form pressing against the door was too much for my feeble powers. She dashed away the obstacle to her entrance as though I were a feather, and, hurrying to the bed, she snatched up the letter which I, in my terror and anxiety, had left untouched, holding it firmly in her hand as she left the room.

"Hold on to it," I said, "for it is the last you will get."

"Ah, madame," she replied, looking at me with the eyes of a snake. "The Countess Charmain is winning—bewitching,—winning—bewitching," repeating the words in a monotone as soft and murmuring as a waterfall.

When Herr Henrique arrived, I related, in the presence of the unconscious man, who was my husband still, although he might be faithless, all that I had seen, without intimating my belief, nay, my certainty, that the letter was from the fair Countess Charmain, whom he loved. I told how he had called my name after reading the letter, and Herr Henrique looked up at me earnestly, giving me such a strange look that I hardly knew how to interpret it. Was it reproach, or scorn, or pity, or what?

"Nun, was ist zu thun!" he exclaimed. "Do you love him?"

I answered him with all my soul in my eyes, and I pressed the hand that lay on the coverlid so motionless and still to my heart, and to my lips, and to my weeping eyes.

To my astonishment, and that of Herr Henrique, my

husband hoarsely spoke: "Go, Portia! I do not wish to behold you! Leave me this instant!"

Herr Henriques motioned me to leave the room, and I required no second bidding. Going to the room that I had not entered since my return, I locked myself in, and wept my poor, weary soul out to the silent chamber, that gave back no answering sound to the sobs that rent my very being.

"I must go," I said; "I only make him worse." Eliza came to the door: "Dear lady, Herr Henrique wishes to speak with you." How quickly hope entered into my heart that I might stay! I, who, with pride crushed, anger and mortification raging in my breast for the buffeting I had endured,—I, the once imperious, high-spirited, provoking Portia Severn, ran to meet Herr Henrique, hoping to be re-instated as nurse over an unloving and faithless husband.

No sooner had I entered the room than I discovered that my husband had arisen, was dressed in gown and slippers, and seated in an easy-chair.

His proud, handsome face, which he restlessly turned from side to side, colder towards me than to aught else, rested against the back of the chair. "Portia," he said, without looking at me, while Herr Henrique left the room, and closed the door after him,—“Portia, I have wronged you, by accusing you of sin without having proof of it. I beg you to forgive me, and thank you for the diligent faithfulness with which you have nursed me. You will do me a favor by reading aloud. My brain is weary, and I feel that something soothing in the way of a poem will rest me.”

I said not a word, fearing if I spoke it would be to fall down on my knees and worship the being who had opened up such a heavenly road to reconciliation as this for us

both. I picked up one, then another of the volumes laid out on the table, and selected at last "The Vagabonds," reading it through without a false note in my voice, though, when I came to the end, how I felt for poor Roger! Indeed, I could see the resemblance between his affection for his master and my own for him I loved, though Roger was really the more highly favored, having a master that loved him in return.

I made another selection, and then another.

"That will do," said Doctor Alvord; "you are very kind, and must be tired. I had no idea that I had been ill so long; please leave me to myself. Good-night!" And he abruptly dismissed me, without even glancing in the direction where I sat. Doctor Alvord leaned back his head and closed his eyes, and I arose softly and left the room.

Adele stood at the corner of the passage-way with a tray, upon which was perched a quail, a cup of coffee, and some conserves. I thought she was going into my husband's room, and noticed, therefore, all the viands on the tray with jealous interest. She turned, however, at the passage leading along past the study, and entered a room nearly opposite it, closing the door after her. "I dare say it is only a ruse to mislead me," I thought. "I will watch her." But although I stood for fully half an hour, peeping now and then around the corner, all my vigilance failed to discover anything like an attempt on her part to gain my husband's apartments.

Eliza tells me that she heard lively voices in Adele's room, which is the one I saw her enter, until a late hour, and a man's voice singing a chorus. I inquired of Eliza the whereabouts of Lady Gay, knowing she would have been to see me ere this had she been in London. I was informed that she is visiting relatives in Scotland, and I

presume is having the gayest kind of a time. Bobbs was heard to say in Eliza's presence to-day that the house was nothing now to what it was when the Countess Charmain was here. But I have expressly forbidden Eliza asking a question concerning that individual, and, though her curiosity is something pitiful to see, the child stands it very well, particularly as Adele has the name forever on her lips.

I no sooner arose, this morning, than a message came to me from my husband. He desired to see me. With trembling fingers I gathered up my hair in a twist, too anxious to know why I was wanted to go through the usual process of hair-dressing. I found him apparently in the same position I had left him last night, except that Herr Henrique had pushed his chair nearer the window, toward which the tired eyes were languidly turned.

"Herr Henrique has some directions to give, Portia, concerning my medicine. Do me the favor to attend closely to his instructions. I desire further to say that neither Adele, Elise, or any other servant is to be admitted into my room. If you have any messages to send, be good enough to have Elise receive and report them outside of the door."

I was glad of this. It looked to me as though he had determined at all hazards to separate himself entirely from the woman who had so fascinated him. Adele was evidently the go-between and friend of my lady. Yet, in studying over what I had heard and seen last evening, I could not understand, though I lay awake half the night, Adele's confirmation of Doctor Alvord's fears that "he" was in the house. Who could "he" be? The bearer of the letter from Countess Charmain, or the

lover of the perfidious woman, himself come to await the death of my husband, trusting in the infatuation of the latter to leave something grand in the shape of a legacy to the woman who had proved faithless? Though this did not seem at all probable, yet it was the only conclusion I could arrive at, after speculating half the night.

A very strange thing happened this evening,—at least it seemed strange to me. I was reading "*Childe Harold*" aloud, and, in turning over a leaf, my eye fell upon a half-sheet of paper, at the top of which was, "Dear Portia," and a little further down, "My Portia," and then, "Portia," still lower down, "Mrs. Alvord," all in my husband's hand, as though he had begun a letter to me and was not satisfied with the style of address. I saw it all at a glance. He had thought, then, of writing to me; he had even begun a letter. I felt myself blushing, and my voice slightly trembled, causing the invalid to look up and speak sharply.

"I see nothing very amusing in the passage you are reading, nor yet anything pathetic, while your face and your tone indicate both. If you are having it all to yourself, pray be so kind as to close the book and carry it to your own room. I presume I shall be able to read it myself by the time you are through with it!"

The tears came into my eyes at once and blinded me, great drops falling on the page before me.

Noticing my emotion, he spoke more kindly: "I insist upon your carrying the book to your own room. I am hardly accountable for my rough temper these times; please excuse me, and good-evening."

I arose, taking the book with me. Reaching the door, something impelled me to return. I went close to his chair, and pointing to the paper, I said, "It is this evi-

dence of your remembrance of me which has moved me so. I had thought myself entirely forgotten."

"It is rather late in the day, I fancy, for you to feel moved at my remembrance of you; particularly since your own memory is none of the best." He pushed me gently aside, and turned his head away, which act I considered less singular and inexplicable than his words. I went, however, as he seemed to desire it; and I have read over and over again the "Dear Portia," and the "My Portia," and the "Portia," a dozen or more times, having torn off "Mrs. Alvord" at the end of the page and made of it a diminutive bonfire.

This morning dawned fair and lovely, and with the appearance of Herr Henrique came again the message from the invalid's room.

This time I was dressed, and in viewing myself a moment in the glass before answering the summons, I had a suspicion that the outlines of my face were growing round again and the color returning to my cheeks; and even the collar-bones, which I have been hiding under a stupendous *ruche*, gave me encouragement to tuck in my dress a little each side, and make something of a surplice waist. This suspicion of my "picking up" again was confirmed when Eliza, kneeling down and pulling in place the gathers of my dress, observed, "You do not look like the same person you did when we returned, dear lady. I think toast and tea agree with you,—either that or nursing an invalid."

"Mein freund has consented to drive out to-day," said Herr Henrique, pleasantly, as I entered the room. "He needs air as much as anything."

I answered nothing, but looked the satisfaction that I felt, and proceeded at once to unhook my husband's great-coat from the nail where it hung behind the cur-

tain. How I loved that old-fashioned, big-flowered curtain! Had it not helped me to unravel the mystery of my husband's relapses into illness, almost after convalescence? What might not have been the end had Adele been permitted to continue her secret visits, bearing the exciting news that threw the patient into such violent fits of emotion? I had not the least doubt in the world that Herr Henrique had told my husband of the discovery that had been made, at the same time expressly forbidding a repetition of the same.

"Come, Portia, make haste," said my husband, after being wrapped in his fur-lined overcoat, and as, drawing on his gloves, he stood impatiently reaching out for his cane.

"I did not know,—I had not thought that I was expected to attend you," said I, delighted with the prospect before me of a drive in the open air with my husband. I hurried from the room, while the invalid muttered something about my being at liberty to use my pleasure, which Herr Henrique vainly endeavored to render unintelligible by indulging in a forced cough.

"Come, come, madame," he cried, seeing me hesitate, fearing that after all I was not wanted, and that I owed my invitation to courtesy alone. "Herr Alvord cannot get on without you. Make haste, and meet us below in the hall."

"Meet us here!" fretfully ordered my husband. "I want your arm. I should have thought you would have been already prepared when you came in here."

I did not stop to point out my husband's inconsistency, in supposing that I would be ready without having been previously informed that a drive was contemplated, or that I would be wanted even in that event; but quickly putting on my jacket and hat, I appeared at the door again in time

to receive a compliment from Herr Henrique for my expedition, and a faint echo of the same from my husband, who, taking my arm, leaned on it not nearly so heavily as I imagined he would, compelling me to believe that the only reason my presence was required at all was to furnish a commentary for Adele, who stood watching us at the end of the passage-way, until we were seated in the carriage.

The air seemed to exhilarate the patient wonderfully, for we had not driven more than a square or two before he remarked, "I feel as though I could run a mile or two in this bracing air;" and farther on he requested that the carriage be stopped, and that we alight and visit some of the shops, look in at the new Art Gallery, and lunch at Keplar's.

I almost longed to go into the new gallery of paintings, knowing what my husband was evidently ignorant of, that the studio belonged to no other than Monsieur Marchand. I had determined upon the course I should pursue. It was that I would recognize him no more than I would any stranger to whom I had never been presented. I burned to repay him for the insult he had offered me in the shape of his guilty affection, on the evening of Miss Sedgwick's party. I desired above all else to prove to my husband how supreme was the indifference with which I regarded Monsieur Marchand.

It was, therefore, something like a feeling of joy, though in reality it was revenge, that entered into my heart as I followed my husband into "Bland & Company's" studio, and criticised with him the paintings there on exhibition. Herr Henrique came in shortly afterwards, and expressed his satisfaction at abandoning the carriage and taking to our legs, as he in his broad foreign tongue expressed it. We walked together the length of the gallery, looking

over the gems collected there; and I was gratified at the evident deference my husband paid my opinion, as a critic of the various works of art hanging on the walls. He seemed to forget himself and his illness and irritability, for he frequently called me away from something I was looking at to enjoy something else that seemed to give him pleasure.

"Here, Portia, is not this something astonishing?" Or, "Portia, tell me the name of this in the catalogue, and do you think well of it?" etc.

At length we all paused before an immense painting, which, for a moment or more, awed us into silence. On turning to the catalogue, I found the title of it was "Veronica gazing on the face of her dead rival."

Something about the faces looked familiar to me, and seemed to strike each of us at the same time; for I heard my husband say, turning to Herr Henrique, "Is not that beheaded face strangely like Helen?" and, then, to me, "Good God, Portia, did you, or could you, ever look like that?"

The picture represented a woman—yes, it was indeed a likeness of me—with dark, revengeful eyes, gazing on a face faultlessly chiseled belonging to a head severed from its body. The long golden locks of the rival were besmeared and dripping with blood, though the pure, stainless face, with closed eyes and white lips, was turned upward on the dressing-table where it lay. The lips of the murderess were partially unclosed, the upper lip drawn so tightly that the impress of her teeth appeared through the satin skin, at once expressing remorse, gratified revenge, and insulted pride. Those who have seen this painting will never forget it. The bloody knife held in the hand of Veronica, the tufts of hay and straw lying at her feet, with which she intended to remove the evidence

of her guilt, her horrible beauty rendered fiendish by the crime she had committed,—all conspire to make the painting one of the most painful interest. In this face Monsieur Marchand—for I could not doubt its authorship—had painted so perfect a likeness of me, as I was before sorrow had robbed me of my rounded form, that even I could not but acknowledge its faithfulness. The other,—the rival,—the exquisitely moulded forehead and chin of the lovely young victim, was not this the Countess Charmain?

In the silence that followed our discovery, I caught the arm of Herr Henrique, and whispered my belief. "What do you say?" asked Herr Henrique, in a loud tone. "Repeat your question; I cannot have heard you right;" but I caught the eye of my husband resting upon me with a look of strange and eager inquiry.

"The price of this picture?" he demanded of a man standing in the recess of a window. The one addressed wheeled about, and disclosed the face of Monsieur Marchand.

"Two million pounds, monsieur," was the reply, spoken as if the sum asked was so small as to be within the reach of everybody.

"That means, I suppose, that the picture is not for sale," laughed Herr Henrique, while Monsieur Marchand replied, "Precisely," and stepped forward to speak to me. I turned on my heel and walked toward the door, with a haughty step, and a proud, high head. My husband and Herr Henrique quickly followed.

"Perhaps Monsieur will be good enough to convey to Madame the property she left in my *atelier* a short time since," said Monsieur Marchand, in a hissing tone, at the same time laying across my husband's arm a handkerchief having my name upon it in full view. "The day I

sketched your arm, madame," he added, seeing me pause and listen, without turning my head.

I had nothing to say: it was too true. What might not be the suspicions engendered by that handkerchief in the mind of my husband? What would Herr Henrique think of me? The form of Veronica was bare almost below the bosom, and her beautiful round arm exposed to the shoulder. Of what folly, nay, indecency, might I not be suspected of having committed? A model in Monsieur Marchand's studio! I, the wife of the physician Alvord, degraded to an artist's model!

"It is not true!" I cried, as the door closed upon us, and I heard Herr Henrique charge my husband in a low tone to "Forget not the innocent Desdemona." "I can explain it all, if you will permit me; I have been guilty of nothing more than folly. Believe me, my husband," I continued, throwing my arm about his own and clasping it to my bosom. "Say that you *know* I am innocent before I prove it you,—I cannot bear your suspicions!"

"I do say it, Portia!" replied my husband, pressing my arm to his side with a fierce and passionate movement. "I *do* say it, and further: that whatever may have been your temptation to commit sin, I believe in your purity as I believe in God!"

I looked all the gratitude that my emotion prevented me from expressing.

"I forbid your speaking of it again," said my husband. "I believe you, and trust you. Let the past alone; we have both been to blame in a measure. If you need my protection from insult in the future,—insult, which may not have appeared to you as such in the past owing to the bent of your inclinations, remember that you have your husband's arm, that you bear his name,

and that he will always remain your champion so long as you confide and trust in him."

Saying this, Doctor Alvord called my attention to the new Academy of Medicine in process of erection on Asbury Street, saying, "I shall tell you something tomorrow which will explain to you why I did not go to France. The fact of my not having gone as I expected is doubtless already known to you."

"Perhaps I know more than you think," said I, "and an explanation may be superfluous. But I am willing to exercise the same magnanimity toward you in this case that you have kindly shown towards me. Consider, therefore, that I am ready like yourself to let by-gones be by-gones."

He looked at me strangely and replied, "It is scarcely possible that you know a secret that has long been my exclusive property, although you may have guessed much concerning it that may be true."

We had been out nearly two hours, and the incident which happened in the studio had changed our plans altogether with regard to a lunch at Kepler's. As we approached the mansion on Etheridge Square, which I hoped and believed was to be henceforth my peaceful, if not my happy, home, we noticed the footman carrying up the steps a load of wraps and bags, which we concluded must belong to the occupant or occupants of a carriage that was driving away from the door, and which had emptied its load at our house. While I was wondering if it could be any friend of mine, or any strange visitor arrived to mar the pleasure of the reconciliation between us, a gay voice rang out in the hall as the footman was about to close the door, and my husband springing out of the carriage, hurriedly assisted me out, saying, "It is none other than Charmain herself, God bless her!"

My heart sank within me. Would troubles never end with me? As I slowly followed the elastic step of my husband up the steps, I beheld a young girl of eight years or thereabouts rush into his arms, as he exclaimed, "Why, Charmain, how came you to give me such a surprise?" Then, turning to me, he said, "Portia, allow me to introduce you to my niece, the Countess Charmain."

"*This* the countess of whom I have heard so much," thought I, "and concerning whom my soul has been consumed with jealousy?" I looked around, expecting to find that I had made a mistake—that the chit Charmain was not the one to whom I was just introduced. Seeing no one else, I reached out my hand to my husband in a dazed sort of way: "And the woman you were walking with at Kensington Gardens, not long since, whom you called Helen?" I asked, looking anxiously at my husband.

"*That*," said my husband, smiling, "was my only sister Helen, the mother of our Charmain. Come, Bobbs," he called, "tell Elise to make haste, and also inform Adele that her young mistress has arrived home unexpectedly, and that a fire is to be lighted in her room at once."

A strange male servant accompanied Bobbs to deliver the order, while I looked after them wonderingly, and in a state of puzzled surprise.

Doctor Alvord took me by the hand, saying, "Was that you at Kensington, Portia? I am really sorry you ran from me; I wished to present you to Helen. However, there is a lifetime before us in which the same opportunity may occur many times."

A lifetime before us? Oh, world of beauty and gladness! A lifetime for me to gain the love of my husband, who has not given his love to another, and who may yet

some day bless me with this priceless treasure! A lifetime before us! "Saints and martyrs be praised!" I exclaimed, with real solemnity mingled with joy, as my eye fell upon an engraving of the Inquisition, which hung in the hall.

I ran up the stairs. I seized poor Eliza by the waist, and, throwing her into a large chair, held up my finger before her and said, "Eliza, pack my things; the Countess Charmain has come!"

Eliza knew very well by the contradiction my face gave my words that she was expected to do no such thing. I left her staring at me, and busied myself pulling out my ribbon-box; and as I drew from thence my softest and prettiest laces, I commanded Eliza to dress my hair with more than ordinary care, that I might go below-stairs and assist my husband to entertain our niece, the dainty little Countess Charmain.

"Adele?" I called, peeping through the door as I heard the French maid singing snatches of an opera in the hall, on her way to her young mistress's room. "*Ma chère Adele*, you looked not for the winning, bewitching, —winning, bewitching countess so soon, did you?"

She paused, looked at me a second, and then replied, "Madame condescends greatly to parley with a *bonne*," and swept onward, leaving me with the humiliating consciousness that I had been justly punished and rebuked for the folly I had committed in revenging an insult which involved my descent to the same level with the Frenchwoman.

The little countess was indeed the very life of the house. I longed to know her history, but was deterred from asking any questions, because no information concerning her was vouchsafed me. I frequently thought that the incidents of the past few months would not have

transpired had she been an occupant of the mansion on Etheridge Square when I entered it as mistress.

Doctor Alvord did not recuperate as rapidly as we had been led to hope from the beginning of his convalescence. He became silent and moody, and at times refused to be seen all day.

I was unable to account for this, inasmuch as it had been proven, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the suspicions created in my mind with regard to his infatuation for the woman with whom I had seen him walking were altogether unfounded, at least so far as related to his holding for her any improper affection; and as no other female suggested herself to my mind in that capacity, nor was suggested to me, however remotely, by anybody, I was unable to account for my husband's conduct.

Had he grown to dislike me? Was my presence a burden to him? The denial of this was seen almost daily, by his refusing to receive any attention at the hands of another. Even Charmain only last week proposed to lay his gown on the back of his easy-chair, and place his pipe on the stand where he sometimes wrote, and he immediately inquired, upon entering the room after his accustomed walk up and down the hall, "Who upset my gown in this manner? My handkerchief is in the spittoon, and the tassels of my cord are in a nice condition to trip me into the fire! And who charges me with smoking a pipe in the evening? Here, Portia, be good enough to bring my cigar-case, and arrange my gown with something like comfort and convenience!"

The little countess, upon hearing this, laughed aloud, and has since ordered me about mockingly in the same manner.

"I say, uncle," she exclaimed one evening, after a day of more than usual irritability on his part,—"I say, is

Aunt Portia a slave, or a queen? You pay her the most flattering compliments daily, by showing her that no one is able to contribute to your comfort so well as she is; and then you scowl at and scold her in a manner terrible to behold. Pray, is not that the way the *Shah* treats his wives?"

"I scold and scowl?" said my husband, looking up with a deepening frown. "I am too well waited on to do anything of the kind."

"Just look at yourself, then, if you don't believe me," continued the little niece; "just behold those eyebrows!"

The invalid turned his eyes in the direction of the mirror, with that irresistible impulse which compels us sometimes to do things which are distasteful. A smile swept over his face as he replied, "I certainly do not mean to be disagreeable. On the contrary, I too fully appreciate the extent of my indebtedness to all those who have attended me during my illness. If my manner gives offense, I presume it is within my power to purchase attention from sources where I shall not be required to be in a perpetual state of *salaam*-making."

I looked down, and, under pretense of wishing to close the blinds, I turned my back on him while he spoke.

"Why don't you speak, Portia?" he asked, after a pause.

"Speak?" repeated I; "I did not know that your remark was in the form of an interrogative. Since you give me to understand, however, that such is the case, I am forced to say—desiring to be truthful—that, so far as I am concerned, a simple 'thank you' would be all-sufficient in acknowledgment of my meagre services,—indeed, all that I could expect——"

"Or desire, either," he added, coldly.

"That depends," said I, nervously twisting at the blind, "upon the spirit with which you receive my attention. If," I continued, seeing Charmain leave the room,—“if I am to be a servant to you, I would suggest a little milder form of speech than the one you usually adopt toward me. If you regard me as a friend, that alters the case; for I could then submit to any amount of badgering, without a question as to the propriety of your conduct, feeling sure that I pleased you in what I did.”

"But," he quickly replied, "what extraordinary sentiments! Is the hope of your pleasing me the only consideration in the matter? What becomes, then, of that reciprocity which is supposed to belong to every true friendship?"

"That," answered I, slowly, standing with my hand on the knob of the door,—having performed my duties for the evening, and being about to depart,—“that is not difficult to decide, the friendly spirit on the other side being already a matter of fact not to be gainsaid.”

"Come back, Portia!" he cried, earnestly, as I opened the door and was hurrying out. "Do you mean that your regard for me is such that no kind of treatment I may offer you will drive you from me?"

"No!" I replied, "I do not mean that. I trust that I have some pride yet remaining, though I confess I make but a poor display of it. I mean that, so long as your feelings towards me, as expressed by your manner of treating me, may be attributed directly to your ill health, I shall murmur not a word; but if I am to be subjected to the mortification of your French maid's taunts and sneers, caused by her witnessing the paltry regard you manifest for me, I beg leave to say that you expect something beyond my endurance."

He arose while I was speaking, and came towards me.

Taking my chin in his hand, he turned my face up to his as he had done on one occasion before in our early-wedded life, when my impertinence was too much for his patience. I thought he was about to take me to task for my words. My eyes were so full of unshed tears, that I was blind to his look. It must have been a very compassionate look, and I surely must have wrung his heart with sympathy, for with a sudden movement he drew me towards him, and, kissing my eyes dry of their tears, he held me so tightly to his heart that for one sweet, delicious moment I felt myself beloved by him.

"Go, Portia," he said, opening wide the door; "go, poor child. I pity you; I pity you even more than I pity myself!"

"Your pity," cried I, "is less endurable even than your indifference! I despise it, I scorn it! Open the door!" I shouted, as I found myself in the hall and the door closed upon me. "I will have none of it! Hate me, if you will, but *dare* not to pity me!" I said in a sort of frenzy, my glimpse of possible love being so rudely shut out from me.

I heard a mocking laugh close by. "Madame supplicates," said a voice; "Madame grovels, but it is all emotion spent in vain."

I turned to punish the intruder on my grief in the only way in my power. I meditated throwing myself upon her and tearing her with my hands; but I looked in vain for the maid Adele; the next moment she was not there. Instead, was I really going mad, or was Monsieur Marchand standing with outstretched arms beckoning me towards him? What fascination was it that guided my tottering steps that way? Was it he who lifted me from my feet and carried me to the opposite side of the hall? No, no; for there he stood, this time with arms folded,

looking like a statue, while a voice belonging to none other than my husband hoarsely spoke, "Choose now, Portia, for this is your last opportunity. Go with him, if you will! Indeed, I say," angrily stamping his foot,—"*I say, go with him!* You can hereafter be nothing to me!"

"Go with whom?" cried I, in a bewildered manner.

"With me, my angel," at last spoke Monsieur Marchand. "He renounces you. You have expiated what you have fancied to be your sin. Yet, is it sin to love as we love?" He took a step towards me, while my husband, paler than marble, urged me forward. Again I cried, "What means this? Am I dreaming, or is my brain indeed turned? My husband," I cried, in a pitiful tone, "why do you not punish this man's insolence?"

"What," asked Monsieur Marchand, "you will deny me here?"

I struck my hands together in frenzy. All was clear to me now, yet could I not prove my innocence? "Do you dare to insinuate," said I, turning upon the Frenchman with a look of despairing hope,—"*will you pretend to my husband that I knew of your presence here in the house, and that I have been intriguing with you?*"

"Does Madame wish me to say that I came as a thief and a robber? How else shall I explain my presence here? No, no, madame, our folly, or our faithfulness, call it what you will, must now come to an end. We are discovered! He is generous,—see, he is so generous as to urge you forward! He wishes me to possess you!"

"It is a lie!" I cried, rushing towards my husband. "He loves me,—me alone! Fool!" I again cried, taking hold of Doctor Alvord's arm. "You once called me fool and idiot; was there more reason for my deserving it then than for you now? See you not the conspiracy against us? The woman loves you, the man has loved me! They

are related,—they are brother and sister! Oh, how soon has your promise to protect me from insult proven itself to be but idle talk! That creature's love holds out no temptation for me. I scorn, despise, I loathe him, and have never for one moment lent an ear to his pleading. Where is Adele? Call her! Dismiss her this instant, and thus prove your confidence in me and get rid of a viper at the same time! Am I not your true, wedded wife?" I continued, clasping his hand within my own as in a vice, while I looked up into his eyes. "Believe anything save that I have been untrue to you in word, thought, or deed. No, no, Edwin Alvord, if you turn against me now, if you doubt me, nothing either in heaven or on earth will ever serve to assuage the remorse you will feel in future for such an act!"

He had no alternative but to fold his arms about me. My love had conquered. Henceforth my way to happiness and perfect peace was clear, for he lifted me in his arms, saying, "I believe you, Portia, my love, my wife!"

Our bliss swallowed up all other considerations. We heard not Monsieur Marchand's retreating step, until the slamming of the front door betrayed his exit.

"Madame mistakes," said the voice of Adele close to us. "Monsieur is no relative of mine. I know him not; I never even saw him until he came to visit Madame, and left the note for her."

"Adele!" called a voice from the hall, shrilly; "Adele, do you intend never to come?"

The Countess Charmain's head appeared around the corner of the hall, done up in innumerable curl-papers. A thought struck me. "Charmain," I asked, "do not you know a Monsieur Marchand, a friend of Adele's? He visits her room sometimes, does he not, and you find remnants of a feast in the morning, on the stand in

Adele's room, which communicates with your own, with perhaps the end of a cigar, or at best a few cigar ashes? Think, Charmain," I urged, "*is not this true?*"

Charmain came forward. She looked first at Adele's threatening countenance, then turned towards mine. "I intended to tell you, Aunt Portia, that I consented for the fun of the thing to assist Adele in deceiving you into the belief that I was a young and beautiful lady, that your jealousy might be excited towards me in your absence. I did not know until afterwards how wicked I was in helping to destroy my uncle's letters to you, which I obtained from him under pretense of giving them to the footman, when, in reality, I allowed Adele to have them."

"Letters to me?" I cried. "Then you wrote me, and that horrible suspense I endured was the work of an enemy to your peace as well as mine. Charmain, you know not what sorrow and trouble you have caused! What became of my letters?" I asked, whilst Doctor Alvord looked sternly at the little maid.

"Yours? I never knew of any you had written. Adele must have obtained them at the post-office, whither she daily goes. I heard her talking and laughing one evening in her room when she thought I was asleep. I peeped in and saw a man with whiskers dressed in woman's clothes, and he looked so horrible that I was frightened, and went to my bed again. I never told Adele of this."

"Come, Adele," said my husband, angrily, while I felt his whole being tremble; "your sin has at length found you out. Let not even the rising dawn find you in this house."

"But Monsieur forgets that he is not my employer, but the Countess Charmain's mamma."

"Silence!" roared Doctor Alvord; "is not this my house? Go at once to your room and prepare to leave;

and whatever you find it inconvenient to take with you to-night, shall be sent you to-morrow."

I looked up. "Adele, I forgive you, because of my happiness, and your disgrace; but had you succeeded in your infamous plans, my curse would have followed you to the end of your days."

"Madame is magnanimous," she replied, "to offer me forgiveness when I neither ask nor accept it;" when she swept off with a stately air, and after first removing the paper from her young mistress's hair and smoothing out the ribbons of her toilette, she left the house.

"Tell me," said my husband, a few moments later, when I sat on his knee and rested my poor, tired head on his great, broad chest,—“tell me, Portia, when did you first suspect yourself of falling in love with your husband?"

"I think," said I, demurely, "it was on the evening that you walked off with Lady Gay, she looking so beautiful and so charming, you so handsome and so indifferent to the claims of your impertinent young wife. Whatever suspicions I harbored, however, concerning the yielding up of my heart and soul to you, I never once suspected you of any such folly until to-day, when you kissed the tears from my eyes."

I clung to him closely as I said this, remembering the desolation that filled my soul when the door closed between me and my newly-found bliss. "I was a better actor then than I thought, or perhaps you are but an indifferent judge of what is good acting."

"Why," said I, "did you find out your heart before to-day?"

"I have known it, my love, since the day I first beheld you, when, covered with blushes, you extended your hand to your would-be brother-in-law. Do you suppose I would have married a woman whom I didn't know I could love

with all the passion of my life, and with a constancy that would reach into eternity? No, no! The day I met you proved the death of my theory of marriages, based on friendship alone. I saw plainly, what you did not see, that love for my brother Charles was something that did not exist in your heart. I thought, nay, I may say now that I knew, we were destined for each other. Your bright ways and your fresh young face were just the things to mate with my quiet life and business habits. A man who works in the tread-mill of every-day labor does not care to return to his home and find a solemn, faded face looking at him over the tea urn. A woman who laughs much and enjoys her own joke, loves to excite mirth in another, to provoke a smile at her wit, rather than to have fun made for her. I was prepared to listen, and I knew the wit was not wanting in you. Why might you not soon learn to see this also? Indeed, I even went so far as to believe that you did recognize my fitness as a life companion for you; and when you gave me such a back-set in the carriage on our wedding journey, I laid it all to pride, as well as the dozen other incidents of the same kind that followed. It was only after Mademoiselle Porti sang for the last time, and I made the discovery of your identity with her, that I felt any real alarm. Here you were the centre of an admiring populace; any moment I might lose you. The alluring smiles and applause of an appreciative public stood between us. I resolved to take you home, to try what four weeks of separation would do for us both, for I still clung to the belief that we were destined for each other, if we could only arrive at an understanding. When I started for France, I met my sister Helen and the traitress Charmain at the very next station out. A strange coincidence, as you will readily imagine; yet stranger things even than this are constantly

happening in the world. Helen had a history. She eloped with a young Frenchman, and I could not forgive her, until the death of her husband a year since brought us into correspondence with each other. She wrote that if I would come for her, she would return home with me; but, although I started a week after the letter was received, she had resolved upon making the journey alone."

"But," interrupted I, "you hinted at a secret that was wholly your own. This, of course, is all news to me, and I was woefully jealous of the Countess Charmain, supposing her to be no other than the woman with whom I discovered you walking; but this was known to others also."

"Yes—well—as to the secret, my love, Helen's letter savored strongly of a very brief widowhood, and I was determined, she being headstrong and utterly beyond my advising, to adopt Charmain myself, and make her one of our household. Helen returned to France the day I met with an accident, and Charmain accompanied her all the way to Birmingham to visit our father and mother. There is where she expected to remain for a month to come; but let us hope that fate, or a sensitive conscience, or something else, brought her back to witness our true marriage."

"There is only one question I desire to ask you," I said, "and then I shall insist upon having the past be as a sealed book."

"Ask it, my love," said my husband, kindly. "My past is yours to examine as you will."

"I don't mean that," returned I. "I have been consumed with an almost unbearable curiosity to know whether, on the morning of our wedding journey, you arranged those cushions for yourself to recline on, as you declared at the time?"

He shook from head to foot with laughter as he replied, "To be sure I didn't; but what other resort was left me but that ruse, after you snubbed me so unmercifully?"

There was a rap at the door at this point. "It is Eliza," I said, while my husband called "Come," holding me tightly on his knee at the same time. Open-eyed and open-mouthed, Eliza gasped out, "Your honor's and your ladyship's pardon! I thought there was a ring at the bell."

"Tell no such story, Eliza," I laughed; "confess that you heard my husband laugh, and thought he must be going mad, therefore you came in to protect your mistress."

Eliza actually turned white with terror as her great, grand, awe-inspiring master kissed me full on the lips, and said, "Are you not too glad, Elise, to give up the charge into my hands?"

THE END.