

THE CURSE OF GOLD.

BY

MRS. ANN S. STEPHENS.

AUTHOR OF "WIVES AND WIDOWS," "FASHION AND FAMINE," "THE SOLDIER'S ORPHANS,"
"THE REJECTED WIFE," "THE OLD HOMESTEAD," "THE WIFE'S SECRET,"
"MABEL'S MISTAKE," "THE GOLD BRICK," "SILENT STRUGGLES,"
"MARY DERWENT," "DOUBLY FALSE," "THE HEIRESS."

Earth teems with good and evil: from her breast
The rooted corn springs vigorous to the sun;
While summer breezes toss its bearded crest
Until a glorious ripening work is done.
Thus men are amply fed and doubly blessed.

Deep from the caverns of her stony heart,
Toil drags the yellow gold, which, burning there,
Is innocent of harm, — but once apart
From its dark motherhood, fell hate, and care,
Curse half its uses in life's stormy mart.

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TO
MRS. DUDLEY S. GREGORY,
OF JERSEY CITY,
THIS VOLUME IS DEDICATED,
WITH
THE SINCERE FRIENDSHIP
AND RESPECT OF THE AUTHOR,
ANN S. STEPHENS.

P R E F A C E.

It has happened of late that several of my books have been more or less criticised for improbabilities attached either to a character, or some event selected from the rest of the book as too extravagant for belief or for the harmonies of true art. Now, singular enough, in every instance, the events or characters selected for these criticisms have been facts in themselves, or portraits drawn from persons well known to myself and others. If such criticism should fall on the character of Madame De Marke, I may perhaps be permitted to state that this woman has lived within the last fifteen years, and was well known in a certain neighborhood in the city of New York for her wealth, her eccentricity, and her avaricious habits. Her person, her manner of life, and her extreme parsimony, are in no respect overdrawn. The room in which she lived and died is described exactly as she inhabited it in 1849. Of course, the events of the story which runs through this volume are not absolute facts, but the character of the woman, improbable as it may seem, is the *vraisemblance* of a real individual.

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THE CURSE OF GOLD.

CHAPTER I.

A WARD IN BELLEVUE.

THE sick ward of a hospital, mockingly, it would seem, called Bellevue. The room was long, low in the ceiling, and lighted by a range of windows sunk deep in the wall, which overlooked the East River and an expanse of Long Island that curved along the opposite shore.

A few poverty-stricken women, and some worse than that, because bowed down by shame as well as poverty, had sought this ward as the only place in which their anguish and sorrow could find shelter.

Narrow, pauper cots, furnished with straw beds and covered with coarse, checkered cotton, were ranged down each side of the room, with just space enough between to allow a sort of foot-path in which the nurses could pass from one bed to another.

Every cot was occupied. Here a young face, so pale and mournful that your heart ached while gazing on it, was turned sadly toward you on the straw pillow, or a feeble

hand would make an effort to draw up the coverlet, that you might not mark the flush of shame that stole over her forehead, or discover the cause of that shame which lay nestled in her bosom.

Other faces met your view, coarse and shameless, or haggard with long suffering; and some turned upon you eyes so full of gentle submission, that you wondered why human beings so opposite in their nature should be crowded together in one room, even by the terrible leveller Poverty.

Sounds, in painful harmony with the scene, greeted your entrance. Murmurs of sharp impatience, imprecations suppressed only by fear, and open complaints from the coarser and ruder inmates, drowned the sighs and timid whispers of maternal love that gave a breath of heaven even to that miserable place.

Two cots in the room, both standing in a remote corner, were occupied like the rest, but gave forth no signs of life. They stood close together, and of the occupants it seemed impossible to say which was living, or which was actually dead, so coldly pale were the two faces that gleamed upon you from the pillows. Both were young, and one was wondrously beautiful even in that deathly state, when forehead, hands and lips were blanched to the whiteness of a corpse.

The other was less beautiful, but very young, and so fragile that you wondered why death had waited to find her in that miserable place, for she was dying. The gray shadows, settling like a mist upon her face, the locked whiteness of her features, the imperceptible stiffening of her white hand upon the coverlet, all proclaimed this truth with terrible distinctness. But there was yet a breath of life close to her heart, a faint flutter as if a wounded bird had folded its wings forever, and then all was quiet as if sleep were there, or death had come twice.

The gray shadows of a winter's morning crept through the checkered curtains of a neighboring window, and hung

coldly around that pauper couch; and amid the muttering of patients restless with fever, or clamorous for nourishment, the wail of sickly infants, and the outcries of healthy ones, this poor young creature died and grew cold, unwatched and unwept.

The other, she who lay so like an exquisite statue on the neighboring couch, would no life ever return to her? There was a faint motion of the bed-clothes, as if breath still lingered there; but did it exist in that fair young mother or in the child, for she, poor thing, was a mother, and even in the chill of insensibility she held the little being into which her own seemed to have merged, clasped to her bosom.

Just as the day dawned, a nurse came into the ward, not with her usual dauntless step, but stealthily, and casting sidelong glances from cot to cot, like a panther fearing to arouse his prey. She stopped once or twice and arranged the pillows of her patients, with a sort of cajoling attention, always leaving their faces turned from the corner where those two young creatures suffered. Then she stole softly between the two cots, and bending down her face till her soiled curl-papers almost touched the dead, listened, felt the cold hand on the coverlet, and cautiously turned down the clothes.

At the head of each cot a square wooden label was hung against the wall, on which was painted the name and number of the occupant. The nurse took down these labels when quite sure that one of these young women was dead, and replaced them again, looking furtively around as she did so.

After making herself busy with the labels a while, the nurse stood over the cot of the dead woman and took a rapid survey of the ward.

All was quiet, save the murmurs of a child, far down the room, who was struggling to keep its place in the arms of a drowsy mother.

The nurse was relieved by this sound. It gave her time for breath. The rustle of her own dress seemed less startling. She turned to the other bed, stooped over it still more cautiously, and laid her hand down upon the heart of the senseless woman.

She half rose, gave a sharp glance over her shoulder, and taking each of the fair hands, clasped so fondly around a sleeping infant, forced them gently apart, and lifted the child from its mother's bosom.

A shudder passed through the frame of that young mother, as if the last gleam of life had been torn from her heart. Her eyelids quivered, and her lips were, for an instant, faintly convulsed.

The nurse turned suddenly to the other couch, and back again, while this life-struggle was going on. Without unclosing her eyes, the poor creature reached forth her arms, clasped them fondly again with a sigh of ineffable delight, and sunk away motionless, without a perceptible breath.

But it was not for joy. As the child, a moment before, had seemed to keep the vitality in her heart with its own warmth, so now some outward chill drove back the blood to its centre. With a moan, and a struggle, she came to life, opened her great blue eyes, and fixed them wildly on the nurse.

"I am cold, oh! so cold," she said, shivering, and cowering down into the bed; "what have you done to me?"

"Done to you?" said the nurse, faintly, "done to you? Nothing, but try my best to bring you to. Why, it's almost dead you've been, I don't know how long."

The invalid did not hear this. A momentary impulse of strength seized upon her. She flung back the bed-clothes, and bending her face downward, fixed those wild eyes upon the child. One glance, and she lifted them with a sharp, questioning look to the woman, and passing her hand over the little face, whispered hoarsely, —

"What is this?"

The nurse put her hands down and touched the infant. The poor mother felt those coarse hands shaking against her own, and shrunk away with a faint cry: it seemed as if they had inflicted a wound upon her.

It was some moments before the woman spoke. When she did, it was with a sort of unnatural quickness, accompanied with hurried glances down the room.

"Where's the doctor? It might have been expected. Fainting fits all night — overlaid and smothered it. Half on your face when I came in — arms grasped around it like a vice. No wonder it's cold."

"Cold. Is that all — only cold?" cried the mother, trembling all over, — "only cold?"

"Cold as a stone, and dead as a door-nail, that's what it is?" answered the nurse, sharply, for that moment the physician of the ward came in sight, and the nurse judged well of the effect her brutal speech would have on the young creature.

With a cry, that in her feebleness scarcely arose above a wail, she fell back perfectly senseless again.

"What is the trouble here?" inquired the doctor, coming forward. "Oh, I expected this!" he added, glancing at the dead; "scarcely a breath of life in her from the first. The baby too, I suppose."

"No!" answered the nurse, quickly; "*that* poor creature has lost her baby. Hers is just alive yet; I wish they would n't send such delicate creatures here. It's enough to destroy one's character to have them die off so."

"But she is not dead," replied the doctor, passing between the two cots, and taking the little hand that had fallen away from the child; "almost as bad though; a hard chill — we shall have fever next! Take the child away. No wonder she feels cold! How long has it been dead?"

"It was cold when I came in."

"Well, well, have it removed. She will never come to with that freezing her to the heart."

"And the other baby?" questioned the nurse, anxiously.

"Give it to one of these women to nurse, till something can be done; and order two coffins. They must n't lie here, or we shall have a panic among the patients."

The nurse made an effort to take the child once more from its mother's arms; but, for the first time, she seemed nervous and reluctant to touch the dead. The doctor startled her, saying impatiently, —

"There, be quick, or the woman will die! That will do — now let me see if anything can put life into her? Poor thing, poor thing! It's a pity the baby is dead — but then what chance has an orphan in this world? — better dead, if she could only be brought to think so!"

While he was talking, the nurse bent suddenly to the floor and snatched up a small, silken bag, which, suspended by a braid chain, had been torn from the invalid's neck when the babe was first removed from her arms. The doctor turned his eyes that way.

"I am always dropping this pin-cushion from my side!" she said, hurriedly, gathering up the chain in her hand; "there is no keeping any thing in its place."

"Don't stop for such nonsense," cried the physician, impatiently, "or the woman will die under our hands."

The nurse thrust the silken chain and its appendage into her bosom, and began in earnest to render assistance.

CHAPTER II.

MARY MARGARET DILLON.

THE poor young creature was aroused at length from the chill torpor that had seized upon her; but she awoke to a hot flush of fever, raving with pathetic wildness of a thousand things which no one comprehended — of a husband that had left her in the depths of trouble, of the child that she fancied herself clasping, and of the nurse who seemed forever and ever over her bed, as she persisted in thinking, like a great, black statue that had chilled her heart to death beneath its shadow. Thus she raved and muttered, while the fever kindled wilder and hotter within her veins, and her eyes grew star-like in their glittering brightness.

Hour after hour she kept up these mental wanderings, and then sunk away again.

Meantime the nurse had been very restless under the doctor's eye, and negligent beyond anything known of her before when he was away. But for the kindly interposition of a convalescent patient in the ward, the poor invalid must have perished from inattention, if not from positive violations of all medical rules.

The woman of whom we speak was a plump, wholesome, little Irish dame, with the freshest face and warmest heart that ever looked poverty in the face.

She had entered the hospital quietly, and grateful for the asylum thus provided for her in time of need. In the depths of winter, with three little children "to the fore," as she said, and the husband without a hand's turn of work, what had she to do eating up the bread that was but half enough to keep the hunger from so many clamorous mouths. Why should n't she take herself to the hospital thankfully,

while the good man—for want of better work—minded the childer at home?

Mary Margaret Dillon had no pride in the matter, not she. Bellevue, in her estimation, belonged to the people. John possesses a right to vote among the sovereigns and had paid taxes, for which his landlord took the credit, in the shape of exorbitant rents for the last ten years. Thus he had secured, as she considered it, a lien upon at least one humble straw bed in the hospital, and of that she took possession with as little feeling of humiliation as beset Victoria when she mounted the throne of England.

When the scene we have just described happened, Mary Margaret, who had neither lost her roses nor her cheerfulness, was sitting upon the side of her cot, striving with her active little hands to remedy the fit of a scant calico dress in which her fourth born was arrayed. As she sat thus, smiling fondly upon the infant, and finding a world of beauty in its plump face and tiny red hands, the buxom mother would have made a capital model for one of Rubens's Madonnas.

"Is n't it a darlint?" she murmured, touching each velvet cheek daintily with the tip of her finger, pursing up her lips and emitting a succession of audible kisses upon the air, the sound of which almost brought the first smiles to her baby's mouth.

"Is n't it a wonder and a beauty, with its diamond black eyes and ilegant hair, like his father before him?" she continued, stretching the little fellow across her lap, and striving to cover the tiny feet that would peep out from beneath the coarse dress, by two or three vigorous pulls at the skirt. "Won't the children be dancing with joy when they get us home again; and John, faix! but he'll never grumble that there's another mouth to fill—barring the year when it's in arms, poor crathur—for the blessed Virgin that sent the baby 'll find work for us long before it 'll have teeth for the praties, sure."

Thus the good woman and unconscious philosopher mut-

tered to herself, as she sought to redeem her babe from the unbecoming effects of his pauper dress—smoothing its silken hair with the tips of her fingers; and coaxing it to smile with kisses and gentle touches of the cheek between whiles, she continued her murmurs of gentle fondness, happy as a mother bird upon her nest.

She had tied the awkward sleeves back from its shoulders with knots of faded pink ribbon, taken from her own cap, and was holding it at arm's length with a broad smile of triumph, when the nurse passed the cot with her checkered apron folded over some object that she held to her bosom.

"What have ye there, Misses Kelly, saving yer prudence?" inquired Mary Margaret, holding her baby poised in mid-air, and turning her kindly eyes upon the nurse. "It is n't dead, sure?"

"*She is,*" answered the nurse, nodding her head toward the cot.

Mary Margaret held her breath, and tears stole to her eyes as she stood up, trembling beneath the weight of her infant—for she was still very feeble—and looked toward the pale face of the dead.

"And the poor, young crathur in the cot alongside, what has happened to her?" inquired Mary Margaret.

"She's as good as dead, don't you hear how she raves? Mutter—mutter, she has n't strength for more: all the doctors on earth could n't save her."

"And her baby?" asked Mary Margaret, filled with compassion, and hugging her own child fondly to her bosom.

"Oh? that's yonder by the dead woman, cold as she is!"

Mary Margaret held her child closer, and the tears streamed down her face.

"Give me a look at the motherless crathur," she said, laying her child upon the cot, and reaching forth her arms.

The nurse hesitated an instant, and then flung back her apron from the face of the infant.

"Poor thing, poor thing, how deathly it looks! what great, wild eyes! How it stares at one!" exclaimed Mary Margaret, half sobbing.

"It's half starved," answered the nurse, looking down upon her burden with a callous smile; "it won't feed. To-night will see the end on't."

Mary Margaret glanced at her own sleeping child, and then turned her brimming eyes upon the other.

"Give it here," she said, "there's enough for both—give him here."

The nurse frowned and drew up her apron.

"The doctor must settle that. It's not my business, Mrs. Dillon," she said, harshly.

"The doctor! Well, where is he? Be quick and ask him, or let me."

"When he comes in the morning will be time enough," answered the nurse, preparing to move on.

"The morning! Why, the poor crathur 'll be gone afore that," persisted the kind woman, stepping a pace forward, and supporting herself with difficulty. "Let me have it, I say!"

The nurse jerked her arm from the feeble grasp laid upon it, and harshly bade the woman return to her bed and mind her own business.

Mary Margaret tottered back and sat down upon the foot of her couch.

"It 'll die, it 'll die afore the blessed day is over," she muttered, sadly, for her maternal heart ached over the orphan. "Arrah, if the doctor was only to the fore!"

She ended this piteous exclamation with a joyful outburst.

"The saints be praised, here he is, welcome as cowslips in spring!" and regardless of her feeble state, she arose and stood ready to address the doctor, as he came down the ward.

The nurse uttered a sharp exclamation, in which an oath was but half smothered, and advancing fiercely toward the

cot, flung the famished child down by the sleeping babe of Mary Margaret.

"There, take the brat!" she said, with an unnatural laugh. "I meant that you should nurse it all the time, if you had n't teased one's life out about it."

Mary Margaret did not answer; her limbs were trembling like aspens, and she sunk upon the cot overpowered with fatigue. Drawing the little stranger softly to her bosom, she pressed it gently there, felt the thrill of its eager lips, and drawing a deep breath of satisfaction, watched its great eyes turned upon her own, till, as if struck by the same mesmeric influence, the woman and the infant slumbered together.

It was a sweet picture of helplessness and charity, a noble proof that no human being can find a place so humble upon this earth, that some good to others may not be wrought out of it.

As the woman and children lay thus, buried in that gentle sleep which sometimes falls like dew after a good action, the lifeless young creature was lifted from her pauper death-bed, and carried forth to be stretched in the still more poverty-stricken pine coffin. Then the marble form of the infant was carelessly carried after, and that bereaved mother followed it with her wild, bright eyes, and laughed as the door closed.

CHAPTER III.

THE HOSPITAL NURSE.

LATE in the evening, the hospital nurse, who had been an evil actor in the scene we have just described, stood, with a smoking lamp in her hand, in a closet or store-room

where the patient's garments were kept. From one of the shelves she took a bundle tied up in a coarse woollen shawl, and drew forth a long merino cloak that had evidently found its origin in old Ireland. She folded the cloak cautiously around her, and selecting a bonnet from a score or two that filled a side press, she tied a green veil closely over it. Then she extinguished her lamp, finding her way out by the glow of its smouldering wick, and leaving a cloud of offensive smoke to deepen the already unpleasant atmosphere of the room.

The woman had evidently intended to disguise herself, and she stole like a thief down the dark passages of the building, avoiding the officers and keeping close to the shadow whenever she came within the range of a light, like one who feared to be seen.

At last she came out into the grounds in front of the hospital. The moon was up, but hidden occasionally by masses of clouds that cumbered the sky with a darkness that threatened snow. The woman waited under the shadow of the steps till a heap of these clouds had completely obscured the moon, and then darted out, taking a central walk that led from the principal entrance to Bellevue down to the water.

A grape-arbor, at the time of our story, ran half-way down this walk, covering it, even in winter, with a thousand gnarled and twisted vines, that kept the light away and afforded the obscurity of which she seemed so desirous.

Here she paused, and heaving a deep breath, walked more leisurely forward, drawing her veil closer, and folding the cloak over her garments more resolutely as she approached the open grounds again.

As she came forth, the moon had waded half through the bank of clouds, that had overwhelmed it for a moment, and began to pour its faint silver along their edges, a sight beautiful to look upon, but very repulsive to the woman, who wanted no radiance and could expect no beauty on the dark path she had begun to tread.

Resolved to be in advance of the threatened illumination, she darted in a slanting direction across a range of garden beds, that lay, a mass of trodden mud and decaying vegetable stumps, between her and the southern wall.

Again she was in safety, though the moon had rolled forth into the clear of the sky once more, and all around was dimly illuminated. She stood in the shadow cast by a low, stone building, half buried behind heaps of coal, empty barrels, and all sorts of refuse lumber that had been allowed to accumulate in that portion of the grounds.

Another might have trembled and shrunk back appalled from the position in which this woman found herself. It was late at night, and she stood in the very presence of death. The atmosphere was heavy and so oppressive, that even in the clear cold of the night, a faintness crept over her, not from fear, not from any over-excitement of the nerves, but purely from the unwholesome air that she breathed.

She knew that the low stone building was heaped with the dead, prepared for burial with such scant care as the pauper receives. She knew, also, that there was an epidemic in the hospital, and that this store-house of mortality was unusually crowded; but this gave her no uneasiness, and she shook off the sickness that oppressed her, with a sort of scorn, as if she and death had become too familiar for him to take such liberties with her.

The effect which habit produces upon a coarse nature, was repulsively visible here. The woman stood within a narrow path, over which the dead-house flung its repulsive shadow. On the other side the moonbeams fell, grim and ghastly, revealing double rows of rough pine coffins, lifted endwise, and arranged in hideous proximity, so far as the dim light would permit her to see.

Thus between these hollow receptacles prepared for the dead, and death itself, the woman walked, the moonlight revealing the suggestive horror on one hand, while a dense

shadow and a thick wall of stone shut out the real horror close by.

But what cared the hospital nurse for this? The coffins on her right, so glistening and ghastly, were nothing but a heap of pine boards fashioned in a fantastic shape to her. The building simply a grim pile of stone, which cast a convenient shadow for her to walk in. She rather resented the closeness of the atmosphere, but scorned to walk faster, and cast it off with a sort of defiant toss of the head, muttering that "she could stand anything, and was n't to be frightened by shadows, not she!"

Thus picking her steps leisurely, she went down this valley of death; and secure of not being discovered from the hospital windows, passed through a gate, in the wall near the water, which had most conveniently been left unlocked by the porter.

Once free of the hospital walls, Jane Kelly moved on with more resolution. An omnibus stood at its station on one of the avenues. She entered it, and seating herself in an extreme corner, subsided, to all appearances, into a state of passive indifference.

The omnibus heaved and rumbled on its way, receiving here and there a woman of the lower classes, or a half-intoxicated man passing home to his family after a primary meeting or a reunion in some corner grocery.

The hospital nurse got out where Nassau Street verges from Chatham, and disappeared after walking half a dozen blocks down one of the cross streets. We find her again threading her way up through the darkness of a large building, divided into offices and rooms of various sizes, mostly untenanted at that hour of the night. The passages were profoundly dark; the staircase narrow, winding in and out with no regard to architectural rules; in some places considerably out of repair, while in others bits of coal and peanut husks crunched underfoot, and gave evidence of a general state of untidiness perceptible even in the dark.

At last the woman came to a wooden door, at which she paused. A gleam of light stole through a crevice over the threshold, and struggled around an iron key half turned in the lock. With this came a faint noise as of some person moving within.

Jane Kelly knocked at this door, rather timidly, as if she were a little uncertain about the place she sought.

There was no answer. But the noise of a moving chair, and a shuffle of feet as if approaching the door, kept Jane Kelly stationary. After some delay the door was partially opened and a face looked through.

"Who are you? What do you want here with a veil on that nobody can see through? Go away," said a sharp, angry voice.

"You told me to come!" said the woman, lifting her veil and bending forward that her features might be seen.

"Not at this time of night," cried the voice, which now exhibited a slightly foreign accent; and, without having really seen the face presented for her inspection, the woman who owned it was about to close the door entirely.

"You don't know me. I came from Bellevue," said the nurse; "you told me to come, and I'm here."

"Bellevue, Bellevue. Oh! and in the night. Come in; has anything happened? anybody dead, eh?"

The door was flung open more generously, and the visitor half pulled, half invited through.

CHAPTER IV.

MADAME DE MARKE.

THE room in which Jane Kelly found herself was almost in darkness. Some smouldering embers sent faint red gleams from an open fireplace, over which a strip of coarse

bagging had been nailed to keep in the smoke, and by this she could only discover that a poverty-stricken look pervaded everything around her. A small weird-like woman stood but half revealed by the light, gazing sharply upon her. Spite of the darkness, she felt that two keen black eyes were piercing her through and through.

All at once the woman stooped, and taking a handful of shavings from an old candle-box that stood on the hearth, flung them upon the embers.

A burst of light revealed a smoke-begrimed room, a tattered old bed, some broken chairs tied together with coarse twine, and a rickety table. The sudden light was greeted by a hoarse croaking which came from the direction of the bed; but the flash was so transient that these things left little impression on the girl's mind, which fastened entirely on the woman herself. Lean, spare, pinched in all her features, grim, unwashed, witch-like, the owner of that room stood in its midst, with the sudden radiance full upon her one minute, and the next she was lost in shadows—all but the eyes, which were still peering into Jane Kelly's face.

"Holy mother! I shall have to light the candle, after all. Waste, waste, nothing but waste. Stand still while I get at a coal of fire. Don't move, or you might tread on the cat, and she won't like it."

Here the woman went rattling among some loose articles of crockery on the table, and falling upon her knees before the fireplace, ignited a tallow candle with much puffing and blowing. Then she stood up, held the candle over her head, and searched her visitor from head to foot.

"There, there, sit down," cried the woman, sweeping a lean, gray cat from the rush-bottom of an old chair with one broken arm, and presenting it to her guest in a quick, eager way.

"Any news?—anything to tell? Why should you come so late? Why don't you speak?"

"Yes, I've got news. It's all over—"

"What? Dead? Really dead? But which of 'em? Not both? That would be too good luck! Not both, eh?"

"No, madame, that isn't just true yet. But to-morrow will tell the story. If it had n't been for a woman in the ward, who *would* give the medicine after I'd forgot it agin and agin, you might have saved the expense of two graves. Something interesting, you know, in burying a baby on its mother's bosom.

" 'We laid you down to sleep, Mary,
With your baby on your breast.'"

"Sweet song, is n't it, ma'am? that is what I call touching."

"What are you talking about touching? Poetry! froth and nonsense! I thought you came here on business—to tell me something."

"So I did; haven't I told you that the baby was dead?"

"But she! how about her?"

"She was just agoing, when the doctor—" Jane Kelly broke off suddenly, for Madame De Marke sprang to her feet and caught her by the dress. Jane understood this sort of thing and flung her off rudely enough.

"Then she is n't dead?" cried the woman, working the long, sharp nails of her right hand fiercely against the palm. "But the child? Is that dead and buried?"

"Oh! I saw that nicely stowed away among a heap of little coffins, on a wheelbarrow, and ready to be bundled off to the dead-house. All right with the baby!"

"You're sure there's no mistake?"

"Sure? Did n't I put on its cotton shroud myself,—a mighty scant thing, only just wide enough to wrap around its little limbs without a fold? I marked the coffin, too, with my own hands, letter L, with chalk. If you want to be satisfied, it's easily found, and can be kept till the mother is ready. It'll save expense, besides being so interesting."

"Expense!" cried the occupant of the room, with a look

of sharp anxiety. "Expense! I thought the city bore that. Do they charge for putting a miserable baby into Potter's Field?"

"No, but then most people like a single grave, you know; it only costs a dollar."

"Only costs a dollar! as if dollars were made to fling into Potter's Field. Why, woman, do you know how much a dollar is worth? How much interest it will bring, how many years it will take a dollar to double? A dollar for a dead baby! If I'd spent dollars so extravagantly, do you think I should 'a' been rolling in gold now, rolling, rolling in it—do you hear?"

Jane Kelly cast a rather scornful glance around the miserable chamber, with its naked floor, single bed, and coarse wooden chairs. This did not look much like rolling in gold.

"You don't believe me? you think I lie. Very well, very well. You fear that I cannot pay up; very well again; we shall see to that!"

"It's no joke," said Jane Kelly, who really did begin to fear for the safety of her bribe, after discovering the nakedness of the land. "It's no joke to do what I've done; and a poor body like me might be a trifle anxious about the pay, without blame, let me tell you, ma'am."

"Did you kill the baby?" inquired Madame De Marke, in a low, cunning whisper. "Because if you did, of course that makes a difference. Did you kill it?"

Jane sat silent, tempted to assent; for the woman's words seemed to promise a heavier reward, if crime had really been committed; and her rapacity overcame her prudence.

"Did you kill it?" eagerly repeated the woman.

"Don't ask me!" answered the nurse, drawing down her veil as with a spasm of remorse, "I don't want to think about it."

"Then you did kill it!" cried the woman, and her little, black eyes twinkled with mingled cupidity and malice.

"The price ought to be doubled, ma'am. One's conscience is worth something."

"Double! oh, ho! Double, is it?" cried Madame De Marke, rubbing her long, thin hands together with malicious glee. "Why, woman, it's you that should give me money for keeping your wicked secret, Mary Mother forgive me."

Madame reached forth her hands, and took a golden crucifix, with a piece of twine attached, from a ridge over the fireplace which marked the line where a mantelpiece had been, and kissed it reverently.

The sight of this crucifix, which was of pure gold and exquisitely wrought, gave Jane Kelly renewed confidence in the ability of her employer to reward the service she had rendered. Though a poor match for the shrewd and singular woman with whom she had to deal, Jane was quick-witted enough to see her mistake. But she allowed Madame De Marke to go on, while her own thoughts were taking form.

"You see," whispered madame, fixing her sharp eyes on the nurse, "you see it is dangerous keeping a secret of this kind for any one. Then your coming here to-night, people might suspect me of having some interest in the matter, and that would never do. Still, for a trifle, say two or three months' wages, I will keep silent about it."

"Two or three months' wages from me to you!" cried the nurse, astounded, "from me to you!"

"Why, murder! you know, my dear, murder! you don't seem to appreciate the nature of a secret like that."

"But I have committed no murder. The baby died naturally. Who talks of murder? *I only let it alone.* Where is the law agin that, I'd like to know."

"You did n't kill it!" cried madame, with a grim smile, and still rubbing her hands; "did n't kill it?"

"Masterly inactivity," as the papers say, nothing more,"

answered the nurse, gathering self-possession as she remarked the rather crestfallen looks of her companion.

"Well, then, if the creature died naturally, what more can be said about it? Of course, you don't want money for a baby that died of its own accord."

"But I do want money, all you promised, and I will have it, too."

"All I promised? how much was that?"

"Two hundred dollars for the baby; four, if both went together," answered Jane, resolutely.

"Two hundred dollars!" cried madame, lifting up both hands, with the long, claw-like nails, like a bird ready to pounce on his prey. "Two hundred dollars! Is the woman crazy? Why, it was *two dollars*; a handsome little fee to the nurse, for kindness and care of a poor girl that once lived with me. Two hundred dollars!"

"The poor young mother is n't dead; and good nursing may save her. I am a good nurse, when I fancy the patient, Madame De Marke."

CHAPTER V.

THE MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE.

MADAME DE MARKE was evidently startled by the threat which Jane Kelly insinuated, rather than spoke; her eyes fell and were lifted again with a sidelong glance. Jane read the glance, and her own eyes filled with the low cunning always uppermost in her nature.

"I have two ways of nursing. That 'masterly inactivity,' which worked so well for the baby—regular attention to the doctor's directions when he happens to be an experimentalizing student, or inattention to his orders when he is honest and knows what he is about. Any one of 'em is

pretty sure to create a demand for two breadths of cotton muslin and a pine coffin."

"And which of these will you take?" asked madame, anxiously.

"None of them, madame. You don't choose to settle up, and I don't choose to work for nothing. Can't afford it; nurses' pay is next to being a beggar; it's only two months since they gave me so much as would keep me."

"Why, I thought you had been in Bellevue for years?"

"Oh, yes! off and on I have. But then I was only a nurse with five dollars a month. Not much chance to make money, except once in a while, when somebody outside wants a thing hushed up, like this, for instance, or a patient happens to hide a few dollars under her pillow, which gives a few lean pickings and stealings to the nurses."

Madame De Marke's eyes brightened, and a crafty smile stole over her lips. "Perhaps she'll have some money hid away. I should n't wonder; enough to pay for your trouble all round; she always was hoarding up. Oh, I have no doubt you may trust to finding heaps of money between her beds, but she'll take care of it while there is a breath of life in her, never fear that."

The nurse laughed a low, sly laugh, that rather discomposed her hostess.

"I've searched," she said; "the poor thing lay insensible two whole hours."

"Then you found nothing?" inquired the Frenchwoman, with a look of keen anxiety.

"Nothing but a little silk bag, with some papers in it."

"Papers! What were they? I have missed papers. What were they? Or perhaps you can't read. Let me look at the papers."

"Oh! yes," answered the nurse, demurely, "I can read. There was a paper with some poetry on it."

"Poetry!" cried Madame De Marke, in a tone of ineffable

contempt, but which gave forth a burst of relief also. "Poetry! is that all?"

"No," replied Jane Kelly, with quiet deliberation. "There was some marriage lines between George De Marke and Catharine Lacy."

Though her face was repulsive and dull from want of washing, Madame De Marke turned pale, and her eyes began to gleam with fierce desire when Jane told what the papers were of which she had become possessed. She stretched forth her hand, and commenced eagerly working the fingers, as a hungry parrot gropes for his food.

"Give me the lines. They belong to me. *My* name was Catharine, and De Marke's name was George. Give me the lines. She stole them."

"Haven't got them with me," said Jane, folding the cloak more closely around her, with real fear that the witch-like woman would tear them from her bosom, if she knew that they were about her person.

"But you will bring them? — say to-morrow night."

Jane Kelly laughed, and looking into the eyes of the eager woman, muttered, —

"Nothing for nothing."

"I—I will give you the — that is, a hundred dollars for the paper," urged the woman, still working her fingers eagerly.

"To-night?"

"Well, yes, if you give up the paper; but then for cash down there'll be a discount, — say fifty dollars. Times are very hard."

"Not a cent less than the full hundred," answered the nurse resolutely.

Madame De Marke sat restlessly in her chair. The idea of parting with so much money was absolute torture. A hundred dollars! Why, she did not spend more than half that sum on herself during a whole year; and for that inso-

lent wretch to ask so much for a single scrap of paper! the very thought enraged her.

"Say seventy-five now," she pleaded, in a wheedling tone, weaving her fingers softly together.

"I don't want to sell the paper. If the girl gets well, as I mean she shall, it'll be worth more than a hundred dollars to her."

"But she has no money."

"Well, I can afford to do without money when a kind act is to be done. The city government always gives me a home and work when I want them."

"Take seventy-five."

"Well, say seventy-five for the paper, and a hundred for the baby."

"The baby again!" snarled Madame De Marke, "it's dead of its own accord. I won't pay a sous for it — not a sous!"

Jane Kelly hesitated a moment, looked around the room as if afraid of being overheard, and then leaning forward, whispered a few words in Madame De Marke's ear.

"I—I'll give you the money. Seventy-five dollars down, one hundred when — when it's all set right."

"It's all set right now."

"Very well, very well, you are a noble girl, Jane. Jane, what is the name?"

"Kelly — Jane Kelly."

"You're a noble girl, Jane Kelly. I'd trust you with untold gold. No, not gold, there is something very tempting in gold, too tempting for human nature; but I'd trust you with silver untold, silver or bank-notes, if I only had them about me. But the times are so hard. Say fifty dollars down, all in solid silver; it'll make your heart jump to hear the dollars fall upon each other. I tell you it's enough to break one's heart when such music goes the other way. Now you will take the fifty, that's a dear good soul."

Jane shook her head stubbornly.

"Now consider how much money is worth just now; fifty dollars is worth a hundred at any other time."

Jane Kelly arose and prepared to go. Bad as she was, this woman's clinging avarice disgusted her.

"Well, well, if you will be so hard-hearted, I must try and raise the money, though how it is to be done I can't begin to tell. Wait a minute. Just step out into the passage, that's a nice girl."

CHAPTER VI.

THE DIAMOND EAR-RINGS.

JANE stepped into the passage, and Madame De Marke closed the door after her. In the upper portion of the door was a narrow sash window, covered inside with a faded, red valance, through which the light came with a dull, lurid glow. It will be remembered that Madame De Marke had kindled the end of a tallow candle after the entrance of her visitor, and thus the meagre room was in some sort illuminated.

Jane naturally kept her eyes on this curtain, for all without was profoundly dark. All at once she discovered a corner of the faded maroon folded back, leaving a small, triangular corner of the glass uncovered. To this corner the nurse bent her eye, and saw Madame De Marke half-way under the bed, where she looked more like a bundle of old clothes crowded away from sight, than a human being.

By her side, upon the soiled floor, stood an ink-bottle with its neck choked up by the swaling stump of her candle. For a moment, the body of Madame De Marke almost dis-

appeared under the bed, then she crept slowly backward, upon her hands and knees, dragging what had once been a small soap-box, after her.

When once free from the bed, Madame De Marke arose softly to her feet, crept toward the door, and tried the lock to be certain that it was secure. Then she gave the valance a pull, which, fortunately for Jane, rather increased the scope of vision, which, for the moment, she was admonished not to enjoy.

After satisfying herself that all was right, Madame De Marke seated herself on the floor, and drawing the ink-bottle close to her side, unlocked one of the iron bands that had been fastened around the box, and cautiously lifted the lid, raising the light in her left hand as she proceeded. Again she looked over her shoulder, holding her breath and half closing the lid. But perfect silence gave her confidence, and with a slow movement, as if each motion were a pang, she began to count out some gold pieces, which she laid in her lap with great caution, lest the gold should clink, and thus reach the ears which she knew must be listening outside the door.

All at once she stopped, held a half-eagle between her fingers, where it began to quiver and gleam from the unsteady motion of her hand, while a look of indescribable craft stole over her face. With both her eager hands, she huddled the gold back into its repository, and in its place drew forth a tattered morocco jewel-case that once had been purple, but had now a most shabby appearance, till she unclosed the lid and revealed a treasure that made Jane Kelly's heart leap in her bosom.

The concentrated light of the candle fell within the casket, and she knew by the rainbow gleams and sparkles flashing out, that jewels of price were almost within her grasp.

Now Jane had a great passion for trinkets of all kinds, and it is doubtful if the whole of the bribe for which she

waited, would not have taken the form of some paltry ornament within twenty-four hours, had it been paid down in gold. As it was, she pressed her eye close to the glass, and peered gloatingly down upon the burning stones, conscious of their brightness, and with a dazed sense of their value.

Directly Madame De Marke closed the casket, and thrust it into the depths of a soiled pocket, that hung between her ragged calico dress and a repulsive under-shirt made from the fragments of an old patch-work bed-quilt. Then she clasped the iron bars over her box, and going down upon her hands and knees again, thrust it away out of sight, reappearing feet foremost, while her face, as it looked out from under her arm, had the aspect of a laughing hyena, so visible were the workings of some new-born diabolical craft upon it.

"Now what is she about? what is it makes her smile so?" thought Jane Kelly, recoiling from the window-pane with a shudder, for as the woman arose her sharp eyes were turned that way. "Is she a witch? Does she know that I am peeping? Is that gold? Is the case ——"

She broke off suddenly, and shrunk backward into the darkest corner of the passage, cowering down as if she had been seated on the floor and was but just aroused.

Madame De Marke opened the door, and her little, sharp face peered out.

"Come, come — hist, have ye gone?" she whispered.

"No, I am here; the darkness makes me drowsy, that's all!" answered Jane, coming forward, "especially after watching so many nights without a wink of sleep."

"Step in quick — why there's heat enough gone through the door already to warm a barn. Heat costs money, don't you know that? It's enough to ruin one to have company in this way, wasting everything."

Jane entered the room.

"You haven't thought better of it? You are resolute to

strip me of more money than I can save in a year? You won't relent, eh?"

"I want the money, ma'am, nothing more. It's my just right. I've earned it, if anybody on earth ever did."

"And you won't take anything but money, not money's worth, now?" cried madame, peering eagerly into the face of her visitor.

"Why? Have n't you got the change handy?" asked Jane, with her thoughts fixed longingly on the jewels she had seen.

"The change! She calls seventy-five dollars change. As if a lone woman, like me, ever had so much money by her at once."

Jane thought of the gold she had seen, but still her wishes turned to the diamonds in preference, and she said quickly,

"Well, money or money's worth. I don't much care which, so long as it's the genuine article."

"Well," said the old woman, drawing the casket slowly from her pocket, and opening it; "here's something now worth five times the money, and just the thing for you, with your plump neck and rosy cheeks. What say? Will ye have 'em instead of the money, especially as the money can't be had just yet?"

"Let me look at them?" cried Jane, eagerly seizing upon the case. "*How* they do flash! Ear-rings, breast-pin. Oh! but they burn like fire. What are they?"

"Diamonds; every one worth heaps of money," answered madame; — "took 'em as security for a debt, you know."

"And will you really let me have 'em?" asked Jane, almost gasping for breath.

"Well, now you can't expect 'em all, till there's been more work done. Diamonds ain't picked up from the gutters, I can tell you."

"But how many? The ear-rings now. May I have them?"

She lifted up a long, old-fashioned ear-ring, as she spoke,

glittering with innumerable pendants, that made her eyes sparkle as she held it up to the light. "These now?"

"Not all at once," answered madame, softly, and purring about her victim like a cat. "Say one ear-ring or the breast-pin for the papers, and the other ring when that girl is — is asleep, you know."

Jane shook her head, and grasped the ear-rings closer in her hand, gazing upon them with hungry eyes.

"No, no, I'd rather leave the breast-pin, and take both ear-rings."

Madame took the casket from her visitor's hand, and half closed it.

"If I give both rings for the papers, there is no depending on the rest. No, no; take one, and come back for the mate when the whole job is finished."

"But what good will one ring do me?" cried Jane, almost with tears in her eyes. "I can't wear it!"

"But you will soon be after the mate," answered madame, holding up the ring in her claw-like fingers, and making the pendants tinkle before the longing eyes of her guest. "In three days they will both be yours."

"Yes! but what if it can't be done? Some people never will die without a tussle for it. What good will this be to me then?"

"You can sell it for three hundred dollars, or pawn it."

"Three hundred dollars!" cried Jane, incredulously.

"More than that," answered madame. "You thought I would n't be liberal; you higgled about the price. There is three times the sum in your hand, and without asking, too."

The low, wheedling tone in which this was spoken would have created suspicion in a person less eager in her greed. But Jane clutched the prize in her hand, though she still cast longing glances at the casket.

"When shall I see you again with news? Remember, don't come till you want a mate to that."

"To-morrow night; I'll come to-morrow night, see if I don't."

"Be careful of the ear-ring, dear. Keep it about you. That Bellevue is such a place for thieves. Now the papers."

Jane took the little silken bag from her bosom, and gave it to the eager hands that were extended for it.

"That will do. Now, good night, dear. Come again. Good night. If you should meet a policeman, just turn your face toward him, and he'll know it's all right. You've got a beautiful face, Jane Kelly, a beautiful face, — no policeman that sees it will disturb you."

Jane was now in haste to depart, and made her way out of the building in safety, though Madame De Marke only followed her to the nearest flight of stairs, with her candle and ink-bottle, leaving her to find the rest of her way out in darkness.

Jane certainly did meet a policeman not many paces from Madame De Marke's door, and mindful of the counsel she had received, her face was turned boldly toward him. He gave it a searching look, and walked on.

Madame returned to her room, set her light on the bottom of a chair, and opening the little silken bag, examined its contents. Then, with a chuckle of intense delight, she drew forth her treasure-box again, put the papers, and what remained of the jewels, into it, and then blew out the candle, rubbing her hands with low, gleeful chuckles, that broke upon the stillness, at intervals, for half an hour. The woman had evidently accomplished some great point in her transactions with Jane Kelly that night.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TWO INFANTS.

MARY MARGARET DILLON lay in the sweet sleep which so frequently follows exhausting efforts. Clasped by her right arm she held the strange baby close to her bosom with persevering charity that lived even in her slumber. But her motherly face was turned, with the irresistible instincts of nature, toward the little chubby-faced fellow at her left. He had been nestling closer and closer under her arm without arousing her, and now lay drowsily comforting himself with his little red fist, at which he tussled and worked with persevering philosophy, now and then giving out a loud, relishing smack, as if determined to notify the little interloper how richly he was provided for.

In the energy of his satisfaction, the youngster threw out his feet, and made his tiny elbows play with a vigor that soon aroused Mary Margaret. She gathered up the strange baby to her bosom with a warmer clasp, as if to shield herself from temptation, and then nestled her loving face down to the other baby, and bending back her arm to give him a hug, she began lavishing kisses and blessings upon him.

"Bless the rogue—arraah, bless the crathur! Sure his ginerous Irish blood is up already in consideration of the stranger baby; faix, and is n't he independent, as an Irish baby born in this blissed land of liberty should be, sure, continting himself intirely with a taste of his own blissed little fist, that by the token 'll yet work for his mother whin she's feeble and auld. Faix, and would n't the father of him be a proud man, this minit, if he could see the little filler acting in all respects like a gentleman intirely?"

Mary Margaret was interrupted in her pleasant natural talk by a faint shriek that came from the lower end of the

ward, and starting up from between the two infants, she threw a skirt over her shoulders and ran down the dim room. She paused suddenly with an exclamation of terror, for there upon the cot where we left the pale, young mother, she saw a form so fair, so wild, and yet so spirit-like, standing erect in the smoky light, that all the native superstition of her race rose up to chill her.

"Blessed saints! but it's a wraith," she murmured, sinking gently to her knees, "the poor, beautiful crathur has gone sure enough, and this is the shadow she has left, och, hone—och, hone."

A less fanciful person than good Mary Margaret might have mistaken the vision hovering about the pauper couch for something supernatural. The thin, childish face, so white at the temples and forehead; the burning red of the cheeks; those wild, feverish eyes flashing like stars; the long, thick tresses sweeping down in a golden veil to the coverlet, were full of supernatural loveliness. Mary saw the thin, white hands and arms uplifted in wild grace; the form, slender, waving "like the stalk of some tall flower that threatens to break with the first blast of wind, rising, as it were, into the night." It was enough to still the blood in the veins of that kind woman, and send her frightened speech in fragments of prayer to her lips.

"Whist—whist! what is it sayin'? for sure it's words that I hear. Drink, drink! It's alive! it's the poor young crathur herself clamoring for the drop of could water, and no one forenent to give it. And I, unnatural heathen that I am, lying there atween the babies, and sleeping as if the whole world belonged to me. Water, drink, sartinly, me poor, white darlint; jest aise yerself down till the pilly and see if I does n't bring yees a hull teapot full."

It was useless making the request. The poor, young thing waved to and fro on the bed, flung out her thin hands, groping in the air for something to lay hold of; then her

fragile limbs seemed to wither up; she sunk down through the murky white in a pale heap, covered only from sight by the abundance of her golden hair.

"Hist, hist! what is the matter, darlint?" said Mary Margaret, softly dividing the silken waves from the childish face and attempting to arrange the bed.

The young creature looked up, and a gleam of intelligence shot through the fever in her eyes.

"I am parched, I want drink, my head throbs, my bosom is full of aching fire. My hands—put them in cold water, they are so hot—they will not let me touch it while these hands are so burning hot."

"There is no drink here!" said Mary Margaret, searching among some cups and bowls that stood upon a chair near the bed, "not a drop of anything."

Mary ran to her own bed, seized a basin of cold tea that her kindly persuasion had obtained from one of the nurses, and held it to the burning lips of the patient. Then she began to smooth down those long tresses with her hands, and by a thousand gentle movements intuitive to her womanly nature, quieted the delirium that had seized upon the poor girl afresh during the loneliness of night.

As Mary Margaret was performing these kindly offices, she happened to turn her eyes toward a corner of the room. There was nurse Kelly, not asleep, as she had at first supposed, but with her arms folded on a little board table, her chin resting upon them, and her eyes peering angrily through the light shed from a smoky lamp hung behind her on the wall.

Sharp and angry as the notice of a rattlesnake, came that glance through the darkness; and Mary Margaret's hands shook as she sat down the basin of tea with a sort of nervous terror. Still she was too brave and too earnest for anything like an ignominious retreat, even from the glare of those eyes.

The poor, young patient was relieved by the drink so kindly given, and lay very quietly, unconscious of the malignant influence that had crept even to her pauper couch, unmindful of the gentle care that fell like dew around her. But the noble Irish woman lingered at her post with an instinctive feeling that she was needed to keep watch and ward over that frail life.

But young Ireland in the other cot had at last become heartily dissatisfied with the state of things in that neighborhood. The mouth from which his tiny fist was withdrawn now filled with indignant cries, and Mary Margaret, hastily gathering the skirt around her shoulders, ran back to silence the little rebel before he disturbed every patient in the ward.

She lay down by the child outside the bed, supporting herself on one elbow, for some holy instinct still kept her on the watch. After she had rested a while, and the voice of young Ireland had subsided into satisfied and half-cooing murmurs, she saw the nurse arise cautiously, open a drawer of the table, and steal round to Catharine Lacy's bed, over which she hovered a moment and disappeared in her corner again. Then came a few moments of silence, broken only by the deep breathing of the sleepers and a restless moan or two from the young woman's cot.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VIAL OF WHITE MEDICINE.

MARY MARGARET was strangely wakeful, and as her child sunk off to rest, she left her bed again and stole down the ward to see if her charge slept. Then the nurse arose and came boldly forward. A strange, wheedling smile hung

around her lips, and there was something in her look that made Mary Margaret shudder.

"It's very kind of you, I'm sure, Mrs. Dillon, to be taking all this trouble for me, that isn't fit for duty to-night no more than your baby there. I'm very grateful that you will have an eye to this poor thing, for my sick headache just uses me up, and the doctor is very particular about her medicine. If you'd only take charge now while I catch a little nap, it would be a charity to more than one; but do be particular about the medicine."

Mary Margaret was seized with an unaccountable shudder, but she answered quite naturally, "Sure and I'll do me best, marm."

"That's a good soul; don't forget the medicine, the directions are all on the bottles, and — and —"

The voice was husky and unnatural, and all around her mouth settled a strange pallor, as if the sickness of which she complained had seized with new force upon her.

"I'll do my best," repeated Mary Margaret, and she sat down upon the foot of the poor young creature's bed like one who had resolved to guard it well.

The nurse went half-way to her chair in the corner, and turned back with her face from the light.

"In fifteen minutes it will be time to give her first dose," she said, still huskily, and with an effort; "a teaspoonful, don't forget."

"I'll not forget, will I, me purty darlint?" answered Mary Margaret, folding the two pale hands of the invalid between her palms, and gazing upon her with kindly mournfulness.

The nurse stumbled back to her corner as if worn out with her headache, and sat brooding there, sometimes with her eyes closed, sometimes with that basilisk glance peering out from above her folded arms. She reminded you of a rattlesnake watching amid its own coils.

Mary Margaret caught these glances once or twice without appearing to regard them, but they kept her intellect upon the alert, and without knowing exactly what she was to guard against, the good woman felt that harm was around her, and that the evil thing must find her watching. A slight change in her position threw the light directly across the chair upon which the cups and vials used about the sick had been placed, and where she had left her basin of weak tea.

Without having consciously made the discovery, Mary Margaret became aware that the only vial which stood upon the chair had been moved, and that its contents, a pale wine color, had become white as water. Still the vial was the same, and as she bent over softly to read the label, that was also unchanged, a "teaspoonful every hour." This was what she read and had seen before while searching for drink among the empty cups.

Why was this? For what object had the contents of that vial been changed? Who *could* have done it but the nurse, and why *had* she done it? Then Mary Margaret began to ponder over the change in nurse Kelly's manner—the sudden favor into which she had fallen, and an unaccountable antipathy to give the medicine in that bottle seized upon her.

"Isn't it time to give the medicine?" asked a low voice from the corner. "It should be given on the stroke of the hour."

"Yes!" answered Mary Margaret, with a start, "it's time."

She turned her back toward the nurse and received the light over her shoulder. A pewter spoon lay upon the chair. She held up the vial, and, pouring a few drops into the spoon, drank it herself with a rash determination to know, if possible, what the drug was before she administered it. It left a strong taste of opium in her mouth; and, quick as thought, she remembered that morphine was colorless, that

a few drops would kill, and she had been directed to give that frail creature a teaspoonful.

Mary Margaret shuddered from head to foot. The blood seemed curdling in her veins; her plump fingers grew cold as she clasped the vial. How much had she drank? Would those few drops be her death? No, no, they could not be enough. She felt sure that God would not let her perish there in the midst of her duty.

"Have you given her the medicine?" asked the hoarse voice again from the clouded corner.

"Not — not yet. I — I am pouring it out," was the reply, and setting down the vial, she hastily poured out some tea into another spoon and gave it to the patient, who smiled gratefully as the moisture crept through her lips.

"Has she drank it?" asked the nurse, starting up as Mary Margaret settled the invalid back upon her pillow.

"You see!" answered Mary, pointing to the moist lips of the girl.

The nurse pushed her away between the cots, saw the vial with its cork out and moisture about the neck, and her white lips broke into a half smile, so cold, so deadly, that Mary Margaret shrunk back as if a snake were creeping across her feet.

Still the woman did not seem quite satisfied, but took up the spoon, out of which Mary Margaret had drank, and touched her tongue to the bowl.

"Oh!" she said, rather in a deep breath than with words, "oh! now watch, and I will go to bed a while. If she sleeps, let her! — if she wakes up, call me."

"And if she is worse, where can I find the doctor?" asked Mary, gazing wistfully at her enemy through the lamp-light, and shuddering at the strange sensations that she fancied to be creeping over her. "The doctor, where is he?"

"Call me if you want any one. Bellevue doctors don't come to the beck and call of their pauper patients."

"But I must have a doctor!" persisted Mary.

"*Must!*" echoed the woman, turning deadly white. "Oh!" and with a slow, cat-like movement she crept back to the bed, lingered over the pillow an instant and disappeared, carrying the vial of medicine with her.

Poor Mary Margaret scarcely saw it. Her eyes were growing so heavy, and an oppressive languor weighed down her limbs. She forgot every thing, even the fair young mother, who opened her eyes and asked so meekly for drink again. All that the poor woman hoped for now was power to get back to her own pauper cot and die close to her baby. She thought nothing of the strange nursling then, for all the feeling left unnumbed in her heart turned to her own offspring.

Half unconsciously she gave the invalid some drink, and then moved with slow, leaden steps across the floor. It seemed as if she had been walking miles when she reached the bed, and turned back the blankets with her heavy hand. The two infants were huddled together below the pillows. One was her own child: with that she wished to lie down and sleep; but the other, it must not perish with her, some one must care for it, but who?

Heavier and heavier grew her brain; still, kind thoughts lingered there last. She took up the strange baby, staggered with it down the ward, and laid it softly into the fair bosom of the young girl but late so feverish and delirious.

"It must not starve, and it must not die," said Mary Margaret, in her thick, fettered speech. "Take care of it. I — I must take no baby but my own."

And with a still slower and more dragging step, Margaret went back to her cot, fell down, and became senseless as stone.

The sick girl grew calm as Mary became more and more like the dead. Her slender arms clasped themselves like vine tendrils around the child. A smile stole over her

mouth, and a cool moisture crept, like dew upon the leaves of a lily, over her neck and forehead. With sweet, drowsy fondness, she drew the little creature closer and closer to her bosom—gave out one long sigh of exquisite satisfaction, and murmured some words which sounded, in their sweet indistinctness, like the cooing of a ring-dove.

The fever had abated. That wicked nurse was struggling in vain for the sleep that had fallen so calmly on her intended victim. Thus with bland, healthful life closing around her, the young creature was left to her pure motherhood, dreaming that her own child had crept back close, close to her bosom, from which the pain was melting away in soft warm drops, which broke like pearls between the infant's lips.

CHAPTER IX.

EARLY IN THE MORNING.

EARLY the next morning Jane Kelly came into the ward, pale and heavy-eyed, as if she had been watching all night. Her step was heavy and reluctant as she moved down between that double row of beds, glancing furtively over them toward a distant cot, which was that morning the only point of interest for her. As she drew near that bed, the woman grew pale and paler. She hesitated and turned aside; now settling the blanket over some patient; now stopping to move a pillow, but all the time drawing nearer and nearer to that one spot.

At last she came to a bed where a woman lay with a child on her arm, in the deepest and most deathly slumber that ever fell upon a human being who lived to see the day-light again. The plump, round face was white as snow under the voluminous ruffles of a cap, quilled like a dahlia

and radiating round her head like a sun-flower. Purple shadows lay all around her closed eyes, and gave a deathly hue to her lips, which were just ajar, revealing the edges of strong, white teeth underneath.

"What's the matter here?" cried the terrified nurse, seizing Mrs. Dillon by the shoulders, and shaking her till the cap trembled in all its borders.

Mary Margaret fell back heavily from those disturbing hands, but neither opened her eyes nor gave a struggle; her head descended like a log to the pillow, and one hand dropped over the side of the couch heavily, like the hand of a dead person.

Jane Kelly's exclamation had disturbed some of the sleepers nearest to Mrs. Dillon's bed. One or two started up and cried out,—

"What's the matter? Dear me, what's the matter?"

"Nothing is the matter!" answered the nurse curtly, "only some sleep heavy and some don't, that's all."

Then the sleepers settled down to rest again, and Jane, after placing her hand on the woman's chest to be sure that her heart was stirring, went hurriedly down the ward, so frightened by what she had seen, that she was ready to rush upon anything that was to come.

She found a lovely young face nestled close down to the head of an infant, pale, certainly, but with the flush which lies in the heart of a white rose just dawning on her cheek, and a smile hovering around her faintly parted lips.

Again Kelly uttered a cry of surprise—hushed on the moment of its outbreak—she stood over the young mother frightened and pallid, with the upper lip lifted from her teeth, like that of a dog who longs to snarl aloud and dares not. She looked around to make sure that none of the patients were watching her, then bent her head close to that smiling mouth, and listened for the breath which was so hateful to her.

Yes, the girl breathed. Still the movement of her chest was almost imperceptible. The perfume of a flower could have been felt almost as distinctly as the respiration that kept the dew upon her lips. But Jane Kelly was too wise in her experience not to know that this was a healthful sleep; that the rich vitality of youth was there, and nothing baneful, as she had expected and hoped. The child stirred and dropped its little hand like a rose-leaf on that fair neck. Then the smile deepened, and the blue eyes opened.

"Oh, you have n't come to take him from me! he has been so good all night. Let him stay, let him stay, nurse!"

"That will be as the doctor wishes, I reckon," answered the nurse, in her worst mood, for she was greatly disturbed. "It is n't that young fellow, let me tell you—this is one who won't listen to no nonsense, if he thinks it is n't good for you or the young one; you won't get leave to keep him now, I tell you."

"But it is good for me, I am sure of that, and this poor little baby, too; see how sweetly it sleeps."

Jane Kelly gave a sidelong look at the child, muttered something about the ridiculousness of setting children to take care of children, and flung herself away from the bed.

Directly, Jane went again to the cot on which Mary Margaret Dillon was sleeping, what might prove the sleep of death. Seizing the woman by both shoulders, she half lifted her from the bed, and shook her vigorously. Putting her mouth down to the sealed ear, she shouted forth a fierce oath that aroused every patient in the ward, but had no effect upon the sleeper.

Jane Kelly was terribly frightened. It might not be long before the doctor would come in, for some of the patients were in great danger, and he usually visited such very early in the morning. If he found Mrs. Dillon still insensible, and so deathly white, an explanation would be demanded, and Jane Kelly trembled to think of the result.

This apprehension made the nurse desperate. All her efforts had failed to reach the sealed senses of the woman whose sleep threatened to be eternal. As a last resort, she snatched up the child, and shook it till its teeth would have chattered had such appendages been yet given to its mouth; as it was, the little fellow set up a yell that would have done credit to the wildest pappoose of the wildest Indian that ever lived—a yell that reached the locked brain of the woman, and set the warm motherly blood to beating in her heart. The deathly look went out from Mary Margaret's face. The lips began to stir; her heavy eyelids were slowly lifted; she turned over on her side, muttering,—

"Was it the mother's darlint?"

I think Jane Kelly must have pinched young Ireland directly after this, for he set up another war-whoop, and this time Mary Margaret started up in her bed and began to feel blindly around for the child, muttering to herself, and rocking to and fro; a moment after, she fell upon her side, and sunk into a sound sleep again, from which all the efforts of the nurse could not arouse her.

In less than an hour, the doctor did, in fact, come into the ward, in order to visit one or two patients who required constant attention. It would have been easy enough for Jane Kelly to have concealed the condition of Mrs. Dillon; but young Ireland happened to choose that moment for a new outbreak. He was getting hungry and did not like the state of things in his neighborhood at all, and there was no way of appeasing him short of absolute choking, a process Jane Kelly longed to put in force, but dared not.

"What is the matter here?" inquired the doctor; "why don't the woman take care of her child? This noise will play the mischief with my patients. Wake her up, nurse, and have the little fellow silenced."

"But I can't; she won't wake up," said Jane desperately.

"Won't wake up; why?" said the doctor, stepping close

to Mrs. Dillon's cot. "Dear me, what is this? Has she taken anything?"

"Yes," said Jane Kelly, with prompt falsehood, "brandy. She had visitors yesterday. I found the bottle under her bed empty."

"Brandy, and this comes of it. There must be bad management here, Jane Kelly."

Jane made no answer, but busied herself in arranging the room.

CHAPTER X.

THE VELVET PRAYER-BOOK AND ITS CONTENTS.

AFTER the doctor had gone, Jane Kelly was putting fresh straw into the bed on which that young mother had died only a few hours before. She found a prayer-book bound in purple velvet, such as fanciful young girls carry to church, hid away in the loose straw she was throwing out. Jane instantly seized upon the book and began searching it leaf by leaf, in hopes of finding some secret hoard of money concealed in its pages. She was disappointed in this, but she found a sealed letter which keenly excited her curiosity, for it was directed to a name that she recognized. A slip of paper was folded around this letter, on which was written a wild and blotted request that it should be forwarded at once, whatever the writer's fate may be. The name on this slip of paper was that which had been placed on the wooden tablet at the head of that young mother's cot. More than this, while searching further among the blank leaves, the woman found a name written that startled her a little, and suggested a train of thought which held her inactive for some minutes.

This name belonged to a lady, well-known and of high standing in all the charitable circles of the city. Jane Kelly had seen it many a time, heading committees for calico balls, charity concerts, and all those religious and philanthropic devices by which money is lured into mercenary or merciful channels, as the case may be, by a union of fashion and philanthropy.

Jane Kelly found this lady's name in a blank leaf of the prayer-book, which from its date must have been a Christmas present. Mrs. Cordelia Judson to — The name written here was not that printed on the wooden tablet, but that did not disturb the train of Kelly's conjectures; nothing was more likely than that the real name should be in the book, and a false one given to the tablet.

These shrewd calculations occupied the woman all the time she was filling the bed. When the last wisp of straw was crowded into the tick, she sat down upon it, carefully opened the imperfectly sealed letter, and read it from beginning to end. When she folded it again, it was slowly, and that hard face had softened with a touch of womanly pity.

"Yes, it shall go to him," she muttered, folding the slip of paper around the letter; "such men deserve stabbing to the heart. It shall go, but I must have a copy if I have to sit up till morning to write it. If that lady is what I think, it will bring in money. Oh, yes! I will keep a copy of this letter; poor thing! poor thing! I wish it had been the other. After all, shall I give the copy to that old Frenchwoman? No, no; she haggles; — I will take it to the other." After this, Kelly gave herself up to such deep thought that she remained full half an hour sitting upon that straw bed, gathering up her knees with both hands, and ruminating on the things she had found; over and over again, she counted the probabilities of making this discovery valuable to herself. How came that book there, hid away in the straw bed of a hospital? Had Mrs. Judson given it to the girl, or had she

stolen it from the person to whom it had been presented by this proud lady? It was no uncommon thing for the inmates of that institution to have prayer-books given by ladies as lofty in position as Mrs. Judson, but those books were cheap things from the Bible-House, printed on paltry paper, and bound in spotted leather that made the fingers shrink from touching it.

Plenty of such poverty-stricken books were lying about in the wards all the time; but this was a very different affair. The book was almost new, the velvet fresh and bright as the sunny side of a plum. The clasp seemed to be of pure gold, and the paper was thick, smooth, and of a rich creamy white that met the touch like satin. These ladies did not write their names, and call the paupers "dear friends" when they distributed their pious offerings to the inmates of the hospital.

Such was the burden of Jane Kelly's thoughts, as she sat with her eyes on the ground, and her feet half buried in the refuse straw just emptied from the bed.

She got up at last, folded the book and letter in an old pocket-handkerchief, and went to work again, still thoughtful, and revolving something in her mind.

"If the girl stole it," she said, talking to herself, as she sometimes did when no one was by to listen,— "if she stole it, why, then, the lady will be glad to get it back again, and no harm done, or good, either, except it may be a dollar-bill or so on my side of the reckoning. If it really belonged to the poor creature, and, after all, she looked and talked like a lady, this rich madam must have known her well, and there is something at the bottom of it all which may bring lots of dollar-bills. At any rate, there's no harm in trying. That letter gives me courage. I'll try it, anyhow."

Jane Kelly now fell to her work with vigor, and directly where the death-couch of that young girl had been, a cot, piled high and evened down under a coarse white counter-

pane, stood ghostly and cold, like an enormous grave just sheeted with snow; and all the ward took that air of chill cleanliness which, in a large room full of human beings, is necessary and admirable, but bleak as a desert.

It was a little remarkable that Jane was constantly going to and fro from the spot where she happened to be at work to Mrs. Dillon's bed; that she sometimes felt her pulse, and once or twice, during the morning, took up young Ireland, and fed him from a bottle with her own hands.

It was also singular that she never went near the younger woman, and seemed shy of even looking at her. People are sometimes seized with repulsion against persons about whom they have meditated great injury. Was this the case with Jane Kelly?

It was deep in the day before Mary Margaret was aroused; but the lusty cries of her child at last broke the leaden sleep that was upon her, and she sat up in bed, dazed and bewildered, wondering what it was that made her eyes so heavy, and had left that throbbing pain in her temples.

She took up the child, with a dreary sense of weight, and once or twice almost dropped him from her arms from the heavy dulness that would not be shaken off.

"I've been drainin' sure," she said, looking about for the child. "Arrah, here he is, wide-awake, wid his fist doubled under his cheek, and his eyes smothered wid the tears, bad luck to me!"

All at once she seemed to remember something; for, dropping the child on the bed, she got off at the side, and, with her limbs trembling and her head reeling, went to the bed occupied by Catharine Lacy and the infant that had been lent to her. When she saw Catharine lying there, with a smile on her lips, and the babe sound asleep in her arms, the good woman gave a little shout, and fell down on her knees by the cot, exclaiming, "Glory to God! there she is to the fore; I've been draining. Glory! amin!"

"What is it—what makes you so glad?" said a sweet voice from the bed. "Oh, Mrs. Dillon, I have been sleeping so sweetly."

Mary Margaret did not seem to hear this. The sting of some sharp anxiety had aroused her for a moment; but when that was removed, the heavy, slumberous feeling came back. Lifting herself from the bed, she moved toward her own cot, swaying heavily to and fro as she walked; but all the while she was muttering thanksgiving for some great mercy received or danger escaped. Directly she reached her own bed, Mary Margaret fell asleep again, taking care of her child dreamily, and with her eyes now and then unclosing when he grew absolutely impatient.

It was the sudden appearance of Jane Kelly that thoroughly aroused her. Had a rattlesnake forced itself across her bed, it is doubtful if she would have shrunk from it more nervously. The sight of that face brought all the transactions of the night before to her mind, and she called out, "Don't come near me! Don't touch me!"

"Who wants to touch you, woman, after a drunken sleep like that? Be quiet now, or I'll have you turned out of the hospital."

Mary Margaret gazed on the woman in speechless astonishment. "Drunken!—me! me!"

Here the poor woman burst into a passion of angry, fierce crying, for the insult of that insinuation stung her like a wasp.

"Yes, woman, you, you! The doctor saw you; all the women in the ward saw you, lying there dead in for it. If it had n't been for me, you would have overlaid that cub of yours and smothered him. Don't look at me in that way. You ought to hide your head."

Mary Margaret's eyes were wide open now. She charged with drinking—she, who never touched a drop year in and year out, not even when Dillon brought his friends to their

home, or took her out to a wake. The charge was abominable.

"Jane Kelly," she said, rubbing the tears from her eyes; "you know that there is n't a word of truth in what you say. It was n't brandy, but something worse, ten thousand times worse, that I took."

"And what was that?" inquired Jane, placing her arms akimbo and taking altogether a fighting attitude, which rather terrified Mary Margaret, for she was not strong enough for a combat, had any idea of the kind been in her thought.

"I don't know what it was, but there was morphine in it and it put me into a sleep that was like dying."

Jane Kelly laughed violently, holding her sides and appealing to the women around her with repeated nods of the head.

"Morphine, was it? ha! ha! and where did you get it? there now, where did you get it?"

"I got it from the vial you put by that young crathur there, and told me to give her a taespoonful every once in a while. White it was, and I have the taste of it in my mouth this minute."

Jane Kelly darted down to the young woman's bed and brought back a vial half full of some red liquid.

"White, is it?" she cried, holding the vial up to the general gaze, "and morphine? ha! ha!—just a taste of innocent paregoric, that would n't hurt the baby in her arms, if she fed it to him by the teaspoonful. Why there is n't an hour's sleep in the whole of it. No, no, I'll show you where she got her morphine."

Here Jane made a dive under Mrs. Dillon's bed, and came forth with a junk bottle, which she shook triumphantly in sight of all the curious eyes drawn upon her by this discussion. "Empty!" she exclaimed, "not a drop left. This woman drinks morphine by the bottleful! ha-ha! by the bottleful!"

Here the young patient sat up in her bed and gazed upon the scene with disturbed eyes, — Jane Kelly with the bottle in her hand and a sneering laugh on her lips, Mrs. Dillon sitting on the side of her bed, crimson with anger, her face wet with tears, and her cap-borders drooping like dahlias after a two days' rain; half the patients in the ward leaning upon their elbows and listening with eager curiosity. This was what the young creature saw.

"No, no," she cried, and her sweet voice ran through the discord like the chime of a silver bell stealing through a clash of iron. "She did drink something from the vial; I saw her. I know it was from the vial, and I know that *it was white*; you took that vial away, Kelly, and put the other in its place; my eyes were almost shut, but I saw you."

Mary Margaret clasped her hands in an outbreak of gratitude, and holding them up called out,—

"Do ye hear that now? Hasn't the holy Virgin sent down one of her angels to confound yer wid yer own lies, Jane Kelly. Now just put that bottle away and niver show the likes again — taking away a respectable married woman's character. Put it away, put it away, an' maybe the holy Mother may give me grace ter forgive yez entirely, but don't let the old mon know what yez been at, or he'd break ivery bone in yer body and think it a pleasure."

With this, Mary Margaret, satisfied that her vindication was complete, curled herself into the bed, took young Ireland to her motherly bosom, and told the rest of her griefs to him in sobs and whispers, which he was far too busy to care much about — the spalpeen!

The exertion the young patient had made, left her panting for breath, while drops of weakness gathered upon her forehead like rain upon a lily.

Jane Kelly meantime left the ward, swinging the empty bottle by the neck.

CHAPTER XI.

JANE KELLY FINDS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

THAT night a house on Murry Hill was lighted up with more than usual splendor, not exactly for a party, for then those broad stone steps would have been carpeted to the street, and a sound of music would have been heard by every passer-by. Still there were sufficient indications of company; all the front windows were ablaze with light. The large gas lanterns on each side the steps flooded the pavement with their radiance. The soft hum of voices came faintly through draperies of lace and curtains of satin, and there seemed to be a good deal of commotion in the basement, quite enough to justify the idea of a large party gathered socially.

All this troubled Jane Kelly, who stood by the stone railing with the velvet prayer-book under her shawl, doubtful whether she had not better put off her errand to another day, than risk a denial at the door. Jane was not a woman to hesitate over small difficulties. She was seized with curiosity to know what was going on in that lofty mansion, and went down the basement-steps as if she belonged there.

A sharp pull at the bell brought a servant to the hall-door, a woman-servant, for the men were all up-stairs, dressed like ministers, and with white gloves on their hands.

"Why, Ellen Burns! is it you?"

"Hush."

The servant lifted up both hands with something like terror, when she uttered this word, and looked over her shoulder to make certain that no one was listening.

"Come in," she said, in a whisper; "but not one word about the hospital; I should lose my place if it were known that I had ever been a nurse there."

"Is the lady as particular as that?" answered Jane, sinking her voice and slipping inside the door. "Well, well, never fear, I know how to keep a close mouth, you know that of old."

"Yes, yes, I know,—step in here,—you have come at a fortunate time; two of the girls are up-stairs, and the men are all so busy that we can have the parlor here almost to ourselves."

Jane slipped through the door opened for her, and found herself in a room that struck her as sumptuous.

"Won't the lady come down and catch us in her parlor?" she asked a little anxiously.

Ellen laughed, and throwing herself on a sofa, made room for Jane by her side.

"She come here! Why, this is the servants' parlor, Jane Kelly; we have nice times here, I tell you, especially when she is away at the watering-places;—not that we stay here much, why should we when the drawing-room is more convenient,—such balls and parties as we have! such wine! to say nothing of——, well, no matter. Tell me what brought you here, of all places in the world?"

"No, tell me more about your way of living. It must be sumptuous; I should like it."

"Like it! of course you would; double the wages you get, and half the work."

"No vacancy? One would not get in with the help of a friend like you, Ellen. I should like it, you know."

"Impossible," said Ellen, firmly.

"I thought so. Well, never mind. You were speaking about parties and wine—champagne, perhaps?"

"Plenty of it—like water, in fact—that is, when she's away."

"But how do you get it?"

"She takes the keys of the wine-cellar, of course, but careful as a woman can be, such things will sometimes be

mislaid or lost. Hers got lost one day. She had to get a locksmith and have another made. Singular, was n't it? but weeks after I found that very key in my pocket."

"Very singular," said Jane demurely.

"Is n't it, now? but our little parties have gone off splendidly ever since."

"I should think so," said Jane; "I only wonder you never thought to invite me."

"Could n't," answered Ellen, shaking her head. "The aristocracy would have turned up its nose clear through the basement. Nothing but first-class ladies and gentlemen get into these little swarrys,—ladies' maids, footmen, and so on,—awfully *rechercher*, I can tell you. Why, some of us wear real diamonds; I don't, for my duties are down-stairs, but you may bet on it the girls that take care of their mistress's things shine now and then."

"Real diamonds," said Jane Kelly, feeling hastily in her pocket, and drawing out a paper box which she opened, "something like that, maybe."

"Goodness gracious! where did you get it?" cried the girl, snatching at the diamond ear-ring, which flashed and quivered in the gas-light.

"At any rate, it's my own and borrowed from no mistress, you may stake your life on that—so you see that I *can* cut a splash when I want to."

"Let me see the other," said Ellen, reaching forth her hand toward the box.

"Oh, they are exactly alike, of course," answered Jane, crowding a tuft of pink cotton wool into the box; "mates, you know, and worth lots of chink."

"How did you come by them? now, tell me."

"Never you mind; they belong to me, and I can wear them before the Queen of England if I like."

"Well, you have been lucky!"

"Some folks are lucky one way, and some another,—you

are great on wine and aristocratic company—I—no matter about me,—I'm not good enough for these little swarrys."

"Oh, but I did n't say that. You always was a stylish girl, Jane, and those rings are sumpt'us. With them in your ears, and coming as my friend, what could be said agin you? Got other things to match, I dare say."

"Well, yes," answered Jane, after a moment's hesitation, "or that which will get 'em."

Ellen put a finger to her lips and fell into thought. Jane watched her with side glances, while she packed away her ear-ring in the pink cotton.

"I should be glad to have you come like a princess—you could look it, Jane Kelly. I've often heard young doctors say how handsome you was; among all us nurses, you always would cut the widest swath. If you'll promise to sweep over some of these topping ladies' maids and outshine 'em out and out, I'll get you an invite to our next."

"I'll do it," said Jane with emphasis. "Trust me, I'll walk right straight over 'em."

"That is just what I shall glory in. O Maria! how you startled me; this is my friend, Miss Kelly, just got in from New Haven, where she has been living with, with—"

"The president of the College—lovely family," said Jane.

The young person thus addressed put one hand into the pocket of her dainty white apron, and dropped a little curtsy which had plenty of reservations in it. Then she went to a glass and arranged the hair that rolled tightly back from her forehead, patting it coquettishly on each temple with her hand.

"I—I am glad to see your friend, Ellen, though just this minute it is the least mite of a disappointment. Mr. Simpson asked me to be in the parlor about this time. He will be bringing things down, you know, and I was going to ask,

as the greatest favor, that you would take my place up-stairs awhile. I hope your friend will excuse me mentioning it."

"Don't let me keep you," said Jane, rising with the air of an empress.

"Could n't you go up-stairs with me?" said Ellen, greatly impressed by this grand air. It is only to sit there while I get the ladies' things as they come up."

Jane hesitated. She saw that her chances of an interview with Mrs. Judson were very small, but still the temptation to see more of the house had its force.

"Oh, don't let me drive your friend away!" said the girl they called Maria, settling her apron with great nicety. "I would not have spoken for the world if I had dreamed of such a thing."

"I am not going away, thank you," answered Jane, with a fling of the head which delighted her friend. "Ellen wants me to go up-stairs with her, and I'm agoing."

Now, the girl Maria did not care a fig where either Ellen or her friend went, so long as they left the servants' parlor to her and Mr. Simpson, who had with his own white-gloved hands put away some dainties for this special occasion. These dainties the two had no idea of sharing with any one, much less had Maria the least intention of giving a portion of Mr. Simpson's society to either of the two females whom, much to her disgust, she had found in occupation when she came into the parlor.

"Dear me, I'm so afraid I've disturbed you! had n't the least intention of doing it; perhaps I had better go up-stairs again."

Here Maria seated herself in a rocking-chair, shook out her dress, made herself generally comfortable, and concealed a yawn behind her hand.

"That's just like her," said Ellen, as she went up-stairs with her guest. "She thinks there is nobody on earth but herself; just as if Mr. Simpson ever asked her; she don't wait for that, let me tell you."

"I should like to have her for a patient, that's all," said Jane Kelly, giving her hand a fierce grip. "Would n't I let her beg for drink? Oh, no!"

"Hush!" whispered Ellen; "we are close by the dressing-room — some one may be there."

Jane became silent on the instant, and walking almost on tiptoe, followed her friend along the upper hall.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CONFERENCE IN MRS. JUDSON'S CHAMBER.

ELLEN opened a door at the upper end of the hall, and Jane Kelly found herself in a spacious chamber, brilliantly lighted, with a broad, tall mirror rising from floor to ceiling, and a Psyche glass swinging between gilded supporters, in which she saw herself from head to foot.

Several easy-chairs, shrouded in white linen, stood about the room, and a bed, canopied with lace and crimson satin, was laden down with loose garments, which betokened the presence of ladies enough for a large dinner-party.

On the dressing-table, toilet articles lay about as if but recently used. Combs and ivory-handled brushes, carved into richness, were scattered over the white marble, and on a table close by, an elaborate dressing-case stood open with all its crystal flasks and cases exposed, glittering with gold, and, in some instances, surmounted with exquisite cameos that might have befitted a lady's necklace.

Jane Kelly, after gazing about the room in wonder at its costliness, went up to this dressing-case and began to handle the dainty articles it contained. Ellen turned upon her sharply enough, —

"Don't," she said. "You will get me into trouble."

Jane's eyes flashed; she settled the flask which she had been examining into its place with an angry jerk. "Are you afraid that I shall steal something?" she demanded rudely. "If you are, say so."

"There now, you are going off into one of your old tempers, Jane Kelly. I a'n't afraid of anything of the sort; but you are n't used to handling such things; why, one of them bottles is worth two months of your wages."

"Well, let her keep 'em; I have no use for such things; would n't take 'em for a gift if it was n't to sell 'em again, not I. Things that one can wear are worth having; but I would n't give shucks for a load of gimcracks like these. Who wants 'em to dress with?"

After expressing her disdain of Mrs. Judson's dressing-case, Kelly turned her back upon it, and took a full-length portrait of herself in the mirror.

"Well," she said, throwing the shawl around her, and shaking out the ribbons of her bonnet, "I think the woman in that glass is quite as good-looking as that whiflet downstairs, with her white apron, and her hair combed back like a Chinaman. How I wanted to shake her."

"Now, if I was you —" said Ellen, beginning to feel uncomfortable about her guest.

"Well, what if you was me?"

"I would just take off my bonnet and shawl, so that the ladies, if any of 'em come up, would not think it strange. I will hang them up in the hall-closet, and give you a nice apron to put on—that is, if you have a mind to stay longer."

Jane did not take the hint given in these words. She had made up her mind to stay and get an interview with the lady of the house, if possible. With this intent she took off her bonnet and shawl, gave them to Ellen, and invested herself in the dainty white apron which her friend brought from another room.

"Now," she said, with a mocking smile, "you need n't fidget yourself any more about me. I'm neither going to steal nor disgrace you. I was n't brought up so deep in the woods as you seem to think—had more education than a dozen such creatures as that down-stairs, and know more than fifty of 'em rolled into one. Now sit down here, and let us two have a talk."

Ellen drew a seat close to the cosy chair in which Jane Kelly placed herself.

"Well, what shall we talk about—old times?"

"Old times—not a bit of it; the very name of that hospital makes me sick. I want to get out of it, and mean to. No, no; tell me about your own way of living. What kind of a lady is this Mrs. Judson?"

"Oh," said Ellen, "she's one of the nicest ladies in the world, of course."

"Why of course?"

"Because I live with her, and she pays me good wages. I'm not going to run down the bridge that carries me over."

"Not in a general way; but to me, just for the sake of telling the truth to an old friend, you know."

"Well, if you must know, she's an old cat."

"Exactly," said Jane, with a nod of the head.

"One of your charitable women."

"Gives away prayer-books and Bibles, no doubt."

"Plenty of them; tracts, too; but the Bible-House always finds the books, make sure of that."

"Isn't the woman to give away velvet-bound prayer-books or things of that kind at her own expense, ah?"

"What, she? Well, yes, if the person she gave 'em to was rich enough not to care for them. On Christmas-day I have known her do such things."

"When?"

"Why, what do you care? She won't give you one, I'll be bound."

"I was n't thinking of that—only talking for talk's sake."
"Promiscuous?"

"Exactly. Now tell me, just for fun, you know, who did she ever give a prayer-book to?"

Ellen drew her chair close to Jane, and spoke in a low voice.

"That's a family secret, Jane Kelly, and you must not ask me about it."

"A family secret; just the thing—and not tell me! That isn't like you, Ellen; such old friends as we have been. Did n't I always keep your little affairs close?"

"I know; but one word about this would cost me my place."

"But who's going to say the word? Not Jane Kelly, you may be bound."

"No, I could trust you; but what good would there be in telling?"

"True enough," said Jane, leaning back in her chair. "I don't suppose there is anything to tell. Houses like this are always stupid places for a clever girl to live in. At the hospital one has variety, and can boss it over the women. I might have known that you had nothing to tell."

"But I have—only it's dangerous. Bend your head close, Jane, and I'll tell you all about it,—enough to make you cry."

Jane turned her head, and Ellen stooped toward her, speaking low and eagerly. If Jane was interested, she only gave indications of it now and then by a brief question.

"And she did not know where the girl went—has no idea about her?"

"No, she has n't; and it troubles her—my! how it does trouble her. When they come, there'll be questions, she won't know how to answer. I would n't be in her place for both your diamond ear-rings."

"Has she tried to find her?"

"Of course she has, but quietly, you know. Had a detective here one day up in her own room. Thought we servants did not know; but there's nothing going on that we do not understand."

"Exactly!" said Jane Kelly, leaning back in her chair as if tired of the subject. "Now tell me who are the people down stairs?"

"Oh, it's a meeting of the Society—the annual meeting. Quite a mission—fashionable people from the Hill, and pious people from the side-streets—come early and go home by eleven. They are likely to be upon us any minute."

"Well, what am I to do when they come?" inquired Jane.

"Oh, be ready to put on their cloaks, and hand pins as they want them. It's only the Murry-Hillers that will want attention—the others wear over-shoes, and put them on with their own hands. I never offer to do it for them, at any rate."

"Hush!" said Jane; "they are coming now."

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. JUDSON DISTRIBUTES THE FUNDS.

THE party down-stairs, though considered by the lady of the house as an unceremonious affair, proved in every way successful. A great deal of philanthropy had been discussed, with the terrapin and chicken-salad at the supper-table. At each stage of the refreshments some narrator reached a mission station in India, or descanted on the enormous good some female enthusiast had done in travelling twice to Jerusalem and back again. These things, it is true, were in

many instances whispered over in the sweetest of low voices, after a fashion that might have been mistaken for flirtations in persons of less exalted piety; but no suspicion of that kind could rest here; the very looking-glasses in that superb drawing-room would have veiled their faces from a reflection so undignified and improper. Early that week, there had been a grand charity ball at the Opera-House, and all the ladies who had acted as patronesses were expecting a division of the spoils in bulky rolls of bank-notes to be distributed by each one at her own especial pleasure. These ladies were mostly from the highest fashionable circles; persons who loved to play lady-bountiful with other people's money, and be glorified therefor, as if the thing had been a real charity; and why not? The Opera-House had trembled from floor to dome under the tread of worldly dancers, from whom so much money had been rescued, like brands from the burning. Even the religious women, who represented various moral societies in that room, admitted this. Why should they hesitate to distribute it among their own humble followers, and receive gratitude therefor. Money snatched from the Evil One must be doubly grateful to the Lord.

There was Mrs. Brown, a shining light in "The Society for the Suppression of Vice." Mrs. Green, who headed a Home Mission; and Mrs. Ward, a lady who could deliver more tracts in a given number of hours, than any other female known to the Society; besides lesser lights who hummed and smiled and buzzed about these luminaries, like moths around a candle, to say nothing of some half dozen very silent and subdued men who belonged to the domestic circle of these ladies, and watched them afar off, without having any great desire to come nearer, or claim the glory of one common name.

Mrs. Judson herself was a magnificent type of this class; a pillar of strength—the salt of the earth—an angel of mercy, and all that sort of thing, was the stately lady of that

stately house. No wonder her followers thought so, for she moved among them like an empress, subdued and thoughtful over the shortcomings of her fellow-creatures. The heavy moire-antique had a solemn rustle in it, and the filmy bow that should have fallen like a gossamer on her head, looked stiff and hard when it came in contact with her face. In her person this lady embodied the two social elements that surrounded her. She was religiously fashionable and fashionably religious — stooping down to the good souls that worked out their own charities, with sublime condescension, and sweeping her transcendent virtues through the walks of the upper ten thousand with wonderful effect. This evening Mrs. Judson was surrounded by her worshippers from both stratas of social life; no wonder her somewhat faded cheeks grew red and her bearing more stately. Was she not at that hour about to distribute a large sum of money partly won by her own great social influence? Had not that incongruous assembly mingled and harmonized around her from the cohesion of this gold, rescued from the wickedness of a ball-room? In their pious enthusiasm had they not forced contributions from the worldliness of the worldly? Heartless people had danced and flirted, drank wine and eaten daintily, that she might carry the results to the footstool of the Lord, and with a hand on her heart, thank Him that she was not like those people.

Mrs. Judson felt all this to the innermost recesses of her heart, as she stood at one end of the room conversing with Mrs. Brown, who was solemnly pleading the cause of her society, and impressing upon the lady-bountiful, that, inasmuch as sin was the parent of want, the charity should follow it double-handed; that, in wrestling with the monster, the strength of money must be added to the sanctity of prayer; in fact, the lady insinuated that without money in this case, prayer had not the efficacy which could be desired. It was well enough for starving people to have food;

she did not object to that, but how much more important it was that perishing souls should be rescued as brands from the burning. Ah, if Mrs. Judson could only see what the Society had gone through: the depths of sin to which they had descended in search of souls; the trouble they had experienced in reforming them sufficiently for a glowing report, and the grief with which they had seen them fall back; still, there was one thing encouraging. These backsliders could generally be depended upon to reform again about the time a new report was demanded by the country members, and, as names were owned very promiscuously, that document was usually full of promise, hope, and satisfactory words. Still, the great need was money — money. Mrs. Brown only wished that she had eloquence necessary for a thorough understanding of the good her Society had already done.

Here the two ladies were joined by Mrs. Brown's husband, a tall, thin man, with weak eyes, and an air of subserviency that would have been edifying had Mrs. Judson been a woman worthy of human worship.

"You were speaking of our own little mission, my love," said the husband, deprecatingly. "Speaking with your own unvarying self-abnegation — always her way, dear madam. In order to know what that lovely woman is capable of, you should be with her night and day, as I am, in her laboring among the poor, fallen creatures, who often give back reviling for mercy. Working in season and out of season, waking up in the night and weeping floods of precious tears over the sins of her fellow-creatures. Ah! madam, to know her, you should be her shadow as I am."

If Mrs. Judson had been capable of enjoying the ridiculous, she might have laughed heartily at this harangue which was measured off exactly as Mr. Brown would have preached a sermon.

"My dear, you are too enthusiastic," interposed Mrs.

Brown, tightening the elastic of her glove; "all that I can do will be but a drop in the bucket—an humble instrument, madam, seeking for the means of greater usefulness. It is painful, humiliating, that money should be so needed in the service of the Lord. I sometimes wonder how the apostles got along without it. It seems to me that no sinner will reform without bringing a heavy expense on the Society. Then it costs so much to bring them back when they return to the mire after we have brought them out, and made them clean."

"Ah!" said Mr. Brown, softly rubbing his palms together, "the numbers that I can testify to, made holy and pure almost by looking at this inestimable creature! Madam, she is a woman in ten thousand. I find her the meet companion for a perfect Christian."

"Mrs. Brown is too well known for me to question anything you can say in her favor," answered Mrs. Judson, with lofty patronage in her look and manner.

"But the importance of her mission over all others—the sacrifice, the prayers, the necessity for abundant means, every cent of which is sure to redound to the glory of God, through her hands,—have you thought prayerfully of that, dear lady?" continued Mr. Brown, growing sharp and eager in his eloquence. "Why, one dollar in that woman's hands will go further in saving immortal souls than ten, through some channels that I might speak of. Do not suppose I refer to the distribution of books or the writers thereof; far be it from me to disparage the usefulness of Mrs. Brown's friends, but when large sums of money are to be distributed—hem, ahem!"

Here Mr. Brown cut off his sentence ignominiously, for little Mrs. Green came bustling up, holding her handkerchief and fan as if they had been a bunch of tracts which she was bound to deliver at a moment's notice.

"Ah! here you are, ardent in the good work, faithful

among the faithful. Dear Mrs. Brown, what a treasure you have in this excellent man; some one to strengthen your hands, while I—"

Here Mrs. Green lifted two plump hands, cased in a pair of over-tight gloves, and shook her head mournfully, indicating a great loss, or want, perhaps both; for the lady had lost her shadow two years before, and her grief had already reached the silver-gray stage of consolation.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Brown, wringing her hands, "I really should not know what to do without him. So occupied as I am with this heavenly work, there is great necessity that some trustworthy person should be at home and see to things there. Ah, yes! Mr. Brown is invaluable."

Mr. Brown put one hand on his heart and bent nearly double in the humility of his gratitude.

"See her! hear her!" he said; "always depreciating herself and exalting others. If ever there was a pattern, Mrs. Judson, a pattern,—well, my dear, I forbear; the blushes on that cheek shall always be sacred to your husband. I forbear."

Here Mr. Brown waved his handkerchief twice while lifting it to his face, and retreated gracefully, walking backward.

"Ah!" whimpered Mrs. Green, "it would be such a pleasure to witness a scene like this but for the memories it brings. There was a time when I, even I,—but the thought is too much, excuse me."

Here the little woman drew a tiny handkerchief from her pocket; but as neither of the ladies seemed much impressed, thought better of it, and did not cry at all. If Mr. Brown had remained, perhaps it might have been otherwise.

"Private griefs, however acute, must give way to public duties. Mrs. Judson, you will never believe how many thousands and thousands of tracts I have delivered from door to door when my heart was swelling with anguish. It was a relief; yes, I must confess, it was a relief."

Mrs. Green unfolded her little handkerchief, and shook it out as if she still meditated a few tears; but Mrs. Brown took her up with such vigor that she forgot all about it.

"You are right; such duties are a relief. But when you have money to raise, applications for help crowding on you, obligations to take up, in short, when you are called upon to accomplish a great work with insufficient means, as I was about to explain to Mrs. Judson, there is great need of Christian fortitude to carry one through."

"But I do have such trouble, madam," answered Mrs. Green, firing up in behalf of her especial mission. "You don't suppose that tracts are printed without money. Why, this moment our Society is in debt, kept back from entire usefulness, for the want of means; we are poor, absolutely poor; but for the generous aid we expect from this charity ball of which Mrs. Judson is a patroness, and, I must say, an ornament, we should have been dreadfully crippled."

Here Mrs. Brown seated herself and used her fan with emphasis.

"Really," she said, looking at Mrs. Judson, "the cause of the Lord is beset with difficulties. It seems to me that every society in New York, chartered or private, is coming upon us. At this rate, fifty balls would hardly count. I am discouraged."

Mrs. Green flushed scarlet, but Mrs. Judson merely waved her fan a little quicker.

"There will be a great many private charities to meet. Each of the lady patronesses has a list," she said quietly.

"Yes, I have heard so," Mrs. Brown retorted; "women who have done them services either as toadies or favorites. That is understood among the knowing ones."

"Madam!"

Mrs. Judson seemed at least three inches taller than she had been a moment before, and her *moire-antique* rustled ominously in all its voluminous folds.

"I hear," said Mrs. Brown, in no way daunted, "that there is not the president of a single moral reform or really benevolent society on the committee."

"I believe not," answered Mrs. Judson with cold dignity; "but there is no reason why any or all of these societies should not unite and raise all the funds they can. We certainly do not prevent them."

"Certainly not! certainly not!" said Mrs. Green, who was determined on securing whatever was to be attained by flattery and persuasion. "Only, you know, it would be useless to attempt it, after your brilliant success; what could we do but creep after you at a very humble distance? The truth is, we must depend on the country,—there our reports have a beautiful effect,—and upon the justice of your committee, all composed of ladies lifted beyond the idea of favoritism."

This soothing speech brought down Mrs. Judson's ruffled pride, and she bent her head in acknowledgment of Mrs. Green's good opinion.

"The ladies have striven to divide this money in a way that will secure the greatest good," she said.

"What greater good can there be than the redemption of an immortal soul!" quoth Mrs. Brown, implacable in her belief that all the other societies represented in that room were bent on committing some fraud upon her. "What shall it profit a man though he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

"Very true," answered Mrs. Judson. "Very true indeed. Now, shall we walk into the other room, ladies?—representative ladies, I mean. The money has, I trust, been impartially apportioned between charitable societies and private claimants."

"Private claimants," muttered Mrs. Brown. "I should like to know who they are."

"Hush, dearest," whispered Mr. Brown, who came forward to offer her his arm; "compose yourself; your claims can never be overlooked while I am by."

"*You?*" retorted Mrs. Brown, with as much scorn as could be crowded into a low undertone. "Who ever dreamed of depending on you — cheat others, but don't try it on me."

"My love, I—I greatly fear you are getting nervous."

Mrs. Brown snatched her hand indignantly from her husband's arm, and marched by him in grim silence to the pretty boudoir, where Mrs. Judson was distributing the proceeds of the charity ball with the benign calmness of a saint.

As each lady received her roll of money, she betrayed something more than the usual curiosity of the sex, and was restless to be gone that she might learn the amount. So in a little time the party broke up, and with many thanks and sweet words, the ladies who had missions in the world glided up to the dressing-room where Jane Kelly and Ellen Burns sat waiting.

For two or three minutes Mrs. Brown stood with her back to the busy sisterhood, and both hands were occupied as if arranging her dress, but Jane Kelly caught a sound of rustling paper, and went to the corner where she stood, with a shawl in her hand.

"Shall I help you, ma'am?"

Mrs. Brown crushed the money in her hand, turned suddenly, and saw Mrs. Green behind one of the window-curtains pursuing a like investigation. She stole forward, leaving Jane Kelly with the half-spread shawl in her hand. Before Mrs. Green became aware of it, the sister was peering over her shoulder.

"Just twenty-five dollars extra for your gross flattery," she sneered, thrusting her own money out of sight; "I wish you joy of it."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Green; "some time, perhaps, you will learn that sweet words pay."

Mrs. Brown strode solemnly to the other side of the room, took the shawl from Jane Kelly, and wrapped herself in it,

Then she drew a heavy knitted hood over her head and marched toward the door, where Mr. Brown stood meekly, holding a pair of rubber shoes in his hand.

"My love, it is snowing; permit me —"

Down upon one knee the man went, and taking up the foot that seemed quivering to spurn him, incased it in the rubber—set it deferentially on the floor, planted the other on his knee, and completed his task with evident pride.

There was a general demand for cloaks, shawls, and hoods after this, and the party broke up.

"My dear, how much?" questioned Mr. Brown with insinuating meekness, as he and his wife went down the steps together.

"Don't ask me. It's enough to aggravate a saint. Private charities, indeed, just sending the money back to the Evil One where it came from — then all these riff-raff societies crowding in. The whole thing is just contemptible."

"Exactly, my love," replied Mr. Brown, "exactly."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SAINT AND THE SINNER.

NOW," whispered the girl Ellen, breathless with terror lest Mrs. Judson should come into the room and find a stranger there; "get on your things, dear, we can steal down the servants' staircase and no one the wiser. You must come again very soon, remember."

Jane Kelly consented to put on her bonnet and shawl, but she did it with a cool deliberation which drove her companion wild.

"*Do make haste!*" she entreated, frightened out of all patience, "I hear her coming."

"Well, then, it is of no use; she is sure to be upon us. Never fear, I'll take all the blame."

Jane stepped into the hall as she said this, and stood directly in the light as Mrs. Judson came up the stairs with her head erect and her dress held up a little, that its length might not impede her progress. But for the bonnet and shawl, she might not have noticed Jane; as it was, she stopped suddenly and cast a sharp glance at Ellen.

"Who is this? Who authorized you to bring company up here?" she said, in a cold, calm tone that made the girl shiver.

"No one authorized her, madam," said Jane, with an air of profound humility. "I come on business, special business with Mrs. Judson, the lady of the house."

"With me!"

"If you are Mrs. Judson, and I suppose you are, it being difficult, not to say impossible, to find two such splendid—I beg pardon, ma'am, two such ladies in the world."

Mrs. Judson's face became a shade less haughty, and she said with less anger in her voice,—

"Still there must be a mistake. I never saw you before."

"True enough, lady; but I think you will be glad to see me now. I've got something for you from that poor young creature that you've been trying to hear about."

Jane drew close to Mrs. Judson and said this in a voice so depressed, that Ellen could not gather its meaning. But Mrs. Judson understood her at once. The color left her face, she cast a sharp glance at Ellen and bade her go down-stairs and see that all the blinds were closed, then moving toward one of the chamber-doors, she opened it and made a gesture that Jane should follow. The girl obeyed and closed the door after her, while Mrs. Judson seated herself stiffly, as if she had been in a church.

"You can sit down," she said, with unusual condescension.

Jane did not heed the invitation, but drew close to Mrs.

Judson and took the velvet-bound volume from under her shawl.

"Does this belong to you, madam?"

Mrs. Judson restrained an impulse to snatch the book, and reached forth her hand steadily. She examined the clasp, the title-page, and the words in her own writing before she looked up or spoke. At last she laid the book in her lap, and lifted her eyes to the girl.

"Where did you get this?"

"That is my affair, lady. How much is it worth to the young lady's friends, is the question just now."

"That is, you wish to sell it," said Mrs. Judson.

"Yes, to some one. It must be of value, and I want two things."

"What are the things you want?"

"Money, and a first-rate place—lady's maid would suit me if I could find a lady to be proud of."

"You seem to value this book highly."

"Yes I do—very highly, and to my thinking the price will be growing higher and higher every minute."

"Yet its first cost could not have been more than thirty dollars."

"You know that better than I can. It was n't the first cost or anything like it, I was thinking of."

"What then, pray?"

There was a tremor in the proud woman's voice, spite of the effort she made to control it, and Jane Kelly saw with a throb of pleasure that she grew pale and sat less uprightly in her chair.

"It is n't the book I'm selling, but what I know of the young lady who owned it. She was a relation of yours."

"No she was not!"

"A connection then. You had charge of her."

"Well!"

"You want to know all about her, and being proud as

Lucifer — as an angel, I mean, won't ask. I know it is n't because you begrudge the money — all is, you won't even yourself with me and talk the thing over sociably."

"Sociably! girl, you forget yourself."

"No I don't; it's you that won't forget yourself. This minute you are dying to ask all I know, and that proud heart won't allow you to say the word. Give back the book. The reporters who were so anxious to find out her history will be glad to get it."

"Reporters — reporters," faltered Mrs. Judson, aghast with apprehension. "What does this mean? What has that wretched girl done? tell me everything you know. You are right, it is not money that I consider. Tell me."

"Well, how much are you ready to hand over for the book, — remember, only for the book, the rest I throw in."

"Set your own price; I cannot discuss that with you."

"Well, supposing we say two hundred, and the place."

"I will give the money."

"And the place?"

"Yes, yes, or its equivalent; go on."

"Well, yes, I can trust you; for you are a real lady, and no mistake."

Mrs. Judson opened her work-table drawer, which stood within reach, took a portemonnaie from it and gave Jane two crisp one-hundred dollar-bills without speaking a word.

"No mistake about that; you *are* a lady."

Mrs. Judson made an impatient gesture with her hand.

"Go on. Where is this young person?"

"In her grave."

Mrs. Judson uttered a sharp cry, and half started from her chair.

"No, no, I'm going just a little too far. She is n't buried yet. I managed to keep all that back twenty-four hours; but she is in her pine coffin with about the scantest shroud on you ever saw; and unless you stop it, she'll be taken off in the next boat-load."

"Woman! woman! what are you talking of?" cried Mrs. Judson, starting to her feet in a wild fit of excitement, all the composure of her pride gone, all her sublime calm swept away. "Is that poor child really dead. Tell me at once what you know of her."

Mrs. Judson stood in the middle of the room, wringing her hands, and shivering as if a cold blast were sweeping over her.

Jane looked upon her with a gleam of triumph in her eyes. At last she had made the haughty woman feel.

"This, madam, is what I know of her. About five weeks ago she came to the hospital."

"What hospital?"

"Bellevue, the poor-house hospital. The people who come there are all paupers."

Mrs. Judson lifted both hands, as if to ward off a blow. "Mercy! have some mercy!" she cried; "you are spiteful! you have been sent by some cruel enemy to torture me."

"Not a bit of it, ma'am; I am telling you nothing but the truth," answered Jane, settling her shawl and pinning it afresh; "about five weeks ago she came to the hospital, a quiet, heart-sick, little thing, that seemed afraid to say her soul was her own. I don't generally take much notice of the women, so many are coming and going, but she was so pretty and quiet, that I did now and then give her an extra turn of attention. She was half the time crying, and the other half writing or looking out of the windows, gloomy as the grave, speaking to no one, except it was another young thing like herself that no human creature seemed to know anything about, but so beautiful and humble. Well, it's no use talking; those two young creatures were ladies, and that I was sure of from the first. Well, when the time came, this one, she who owned the book, died."

Mrs. Judson had partially recovered from the shock which Jane had given her, and resumed her seat, pale and shivering, but resolute to listen more calmly.

"Did — did she suffer greatly?"

"Yes; it would set you off again if I was to say how much; both she and the baby died."

"The baby?"

"Yes, of course; I thought you understood that!"

Mrs. Judson leaned back in her chair, gasping for breath. Jane thought that she was fainting, and was about to call for help, but a low voice recalled her.

"No, no, I must bear this alone. Is there more for me to learn? Did she tell you nothing about herself?"

"Nothing; I did ask some questions, but she only cried and kept away from me."

"Did no person come to see her?"

"Not a soul."

"You spoke of writing; what became of that?"

"Oh, it was letters; she sent them away."

"To whom were these letters directed?"

"That I don't know; she always managed to get them off secretly."

"And this is all you know of her?"

"Pretty much."

"But I have no certainty; this book may have been stolen. I cannot be sure that the poor girl is the one I am interested in," said Mrs. Judson, seized by a very natural doubt.

"Yes, you can," answered Jane, bluntly. "You asked about letters. That poor girl left one letter which will tell you something about her. There it is in her own handwriting, if you know that, — look and see."

Mrs. Judson took the letter from Kelly's hand; the address seemed to strike her with astonishment, and her hands shook as she unfolded it. The letter was a long one, but she read it twice, and seemed to ponder over it after every word had been gathered. Jane sat still reading the lady's face, which for a time came out of its cold composure and was disturbed.

"Do you know the writing, madam?"

Mrs. Judson looked up and answered the question, abrupt as it was. "Yes, it is her writing. You will leave the letter with me."

"No, madam, I cannot do that. It would be like robbing the dead. I mean to put that letter in the mail by daylight to-morrow morning. The man shall get it, but I have taken a copy, and that you may have and no extra charge. You've acted the lady by me, and I mean to act the lady by you; give me that letter and take this, it's the same thing word for word."

Mrs. Judson folded the letter and exchanged it for that Jane Kelly held in her hand.

"If this does not satisfy you, there is a way that will. Come and look upon her where she lies."

Mrs. Judson gazed on the woman who made this rude proposal in absolute terror for an instant, then pressing one hand over her eyes she seemed to reflect, and at last said, shuddering visibly, —

"Tell me how to get there without observation, and I will come."

"Could you get up by daybreak?" asked Jane.

Mrs. Judson turned her head wearily against the back of her chair.

"I shall not go to bed. It would be of no use."

"So much the better," answered Jane; "then just as it is getting light I will come here after you. It will be best to walk."

"Yes, that will be best."

"I will see that a gate is left unfastened and that everything is ready."

"Must I go into that dreadful building?"

"What, into the hospital? not at all. She is in the dead-house outside."

Mrs. Judson did not speak, but her face turned coldly

white. Jane looked at her with a sense of superiority. She was far above such weakness as that. Neither the living nor the dead could frighten her much. That half-hour had lifted her into a feeling almost of companionship with the woman who had swept by her so haughtily in the hall.

"Don't take on, ma'am," she said; "if I was you now, it would not be ten minutes before I should be in bed and sound asleep; but there is a difference between people and people; so if you like sitting up in a chair, why, chair it is, say I."

But Mrs. Judson was not sitting in her chair just then. Some new thought had seized upon her, and she was walking up and down the room in great agitation. When Jane Kelly was about to withdraw, she called her back.

"If this should prove true," she said, "I shall want help, and have no one to confide in. Will you be faithful and silent if I double the sum you have just received?"

"True as steel, and silent as the grave. Try me."

"If it should prove true, I will. You may go now."

As Jane went down stairs, Ellen was waiting in the hall, and would have stopped her for a little free gossip, but Jane passed her, only stopping to say,—

"Wait till I come again, then you shall hear lots."

CHAPTER XV.

PREPARING FOR THE FUNERAL.

EARLY the next morning, Mrs. Judson went out from the basement of her house, almost for the first time in her life, and in company with Jane Kelly passed into the street. None of the servants were up, and the lady had put on a

walking-dress, so plain and dark, that no one would have been likely to notice her had many persons been abroad. Through that side-gate in the garden-wall, Jane conducted her charge, and they passed together down that same gloomy path into a little stone building near the water.

"Don't be afraid; it's nothing when you get used to it," she said, patronizingly. "I remember almost fainting the first time I came here, but now I don't even think of it."

All this show of courage did not prevent Mrs. Judson from turning cold as marble when that door was thrown open, and she found herself close by a coarse pine coffin, from which Jane was composedly removing the lid.

The lady cast one glance at the dead-whiteness of the face revealed to her, and retreated into the open air, pale, almost, as the corpse she had left.

Jane followed her, swinging the key on her finger.

"Is it her, lady?" she asked, in a whisper.

"Yes."

"Well, what am I to do?"

"Can it be quietly removed? Is that permitted?"

"Yes; money can do anything. Tell me what you want, and I'll do it; for if any one knows how, it's the person before you."

Mrs. Judson stood in the garden a while irresolute, then she turned toward the woman and said, almost helplessly, notwithstanding her great pride,—

"You know best how to manage it. I will tell you what I want, then try and carry out my wishes."

"Of course, I mean to do that—only tell me what they are."

"She must be buried from my house."

"Well, that can be done."

"But she must be brought there unseen, if possible."

"Nothing easier. You want everything of the best, no doubt?"

"Yes."

"Well, have your crape handy; I'll take care of the rest. When all is ready, I'll call up. Say nothing about it till then, please; just leave the servants to me. Say as little as you can, and don't let them know anything till I come, which will be about dark."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Judson, forgetting her pride in a strong sense of relief. "I shall depend on you."

"Dear me, how a little trouble takes the starch out of a woman like that! Last night she wanted to sweep by me like a peacock; now, now it's all whiteness and swan's down; never mind, I rather like her, any way." Saying this, Jane locked the side-gate and walked leisurely back to the hospital.

A little after dusk that evening Jane Kelly called decorously, and inquired for Mrs. Judson of a supercilious footman, who would have questioned her right to see that lady, but for the timely interposition of the girl, Ellen. As it was, Ellen admitted her at once to Mrs. Judson's bed-room, where she remained a full hour. When she came down stairs, Ellen, was ready to intercept her, and they went together into the servants' parlor, where Jane dropped at once into a most confidential conversation.

"You see, Ellen, it was about that very young lady that I came. A friend of mine lives at the boarding-school where Mrs. Judson put her before she went to the springs."

"The boarding-school! dear me, was that so? Why, not a servant in the house knew a word about it; then it was not a detective she called in?"

"Not a bit of it; that was the madam's real-estate agent."

"You don't say so! But why was it kept close where the young lady went to school?"

"Close! why it wasn't kept close at all. Of course, she could not come home when the house was as good as closed."

"That's true; but where is she now?"

"Ellen, I am going to tell you something mournful. It was that I came to tell Mrs. Judson last night, but you must not let the other servants know. Miss Louisa is dead."

"Dead! and you talked as if you had never seen her, last night. Dear me, dead!"

"Yes, sudden—cholera—taken down and died before help could come. The poor lady up-stairs is dreadfully cut up."

"Dear me, how dreadful!"

"But above all things, don't hint to the servants that she died of cholera; the funeral will have to be from the house, you know, and the neighbors might get frightened."

"Oh! I would n't for the world," protested Ellen,—“not for the world.”

"Now, not a word of this to any one in the house," Jane went on impressively, "your lady would not like to have the boarding-school spoken of."

"But what school was it?"

"Oh, Catholic; those Catholics keep their scholars so close; besides, this idea of cholera might hurt the school. Least said, soonest mended. I don't suppose they let the scholars know what she died of."

"I am glad she died in the true faith, any way," said Ellen, just then remembering that she was a Catholic herself, and making a quick motion of the cross. "You and I don't want to bring trouble on a Catholic school."

"But you will mention to no human soul that she was sent to a Catholic school; her brother is a little that way, I am told, and as for the cholera, not a word."

"Not a word."

"Or my friend would get into trouble. She trusted me just as you have. Was n't it strange that both of you should begin talking about the very same thing, just by accident? But I never mentioned your name to the lady up-stairs, only to say how long I had known you, and what splendid places you had always been in. She thinks my other friend told me all I know."

"That was very good of you."

"Oh, I'm to be trusted. Indeed I would n't mention the word hospital before her for the world; I really believe it would make her faint."

"I'm sure it would," said Ellen.

"Now I must be going. But about that place, Ellen; stand by me and I'll stand by you."

There was a dash of patronage about all this, which impressed Ellen considerably. She went to the basement-door with Jane, as a mark of particular respect, and put a finger to her lip, nodding emphatically in answer to a like signal from the nurse, as she passed into the street.

Scarcely had Jane disappeared, when Ellen ran into the kitchen full of potential excitement, which was sure to throw every servant in the house into a state of wondering inquiry. Of course, she was at once surrounded and eagerly questioned. But no, what she had heard was intrusted to her in strict confidence, nothing on earth would prevail on her to speak. For her part, she had always thought something dreadful would come of that dear young lady being taken off so strangely, without a word to the servants, who had, one and all, been as kind to her as kind could be. Of course, they were all good Catholics, but then, to have religion forced on one was hard. The cholera, of all dreadful diseases, think of it! Well, there was some comfort in knowing the sisters were good nurses. Only she hoped that awful cholera would not spread through the school.

What school? Why, of course, she would not tell for the whole world. Only some one they all knew and loved dearly would be brought home from a Catholic school in her coffin. She, for one, hoped that cholera would neither be left behind or come with her.

Before Ellen had concluded her little harangue, every servant in the house stood listening, open-mouthed and eager as hounds on the scent. Of course, they understood all

about it quite as well as she did, but thirsting for more, asked innumerable questions, to which Ellen shook her head solemnly, and declared that nothing could induce her to give one hint of what had been said in the strictest confidence; it would be awfully mean if she did, and her friend who had lived so close to the New Haven College that she could almost speak Latin, would never forgive her, never!

With an impressive emphasis on the last word, Ellen gave her head a consequential fling, and went up stairs in answer to Mrs. Judson's bell, which had rung more than once.

She found Mrs. Judson sitting quietly in her easy-chair, looking pale and harassed, but in both speech and manner self-possessed as usual.

"Ellen," she said, reaching forth some streamers of black crape and white ribbon, "you will see that these are properly arranged for the door. You will be sorry to hear that there will be a funeral here."

"Dead! oh, dear! how dreadful!" sobbed Ellen, lifting a corner of her muslin apron half-way to her eyes and dropping it again. "Please, madam, where did she die, and what of!"

Mrs. Judson was not prepared to answer these very natural questions, so she swept them away with a mournful wave of her hand.

Ellen took the crape and busied herself in arranging the ribbon. Mrs. Judson watched her quietly. She was very sad, and the shock of the morning affected her nerves so much that she started when Ellen spoke again.

"Excuse me, ma'am, but is cholera catching after the person is dead?"

"The cholera!" faltered the lady. "No, I should think not; but why do you ask?"

Ellen remembered Jane Kelly's charge of secrecy, and struggled hard to obey it.

"Oh, nothing — I only happened to be thinking that —

that, perhaps—dear me! I never thought anything of the kind, only the neighbors, ma'am, might, from its suddenness, think it was something like cholera that took her off. If they do, what shall we servants say?"

"Say that you do not know; that will be right," answered Mrs. Judson, struck with an idea that there might be safety in this supposition, yet unwilling to suggest a falsehood in words.

"Just as if we didn't know all about it," muttered Ellen, as she went down stairs with the crape streamers in her hand. "Law! she might as well attempt to keep the wind from blowing as the whole neighborhood not finding out. The moment this is seen at the door, won't we have calls from every basement in the block? Well, I haven't told a word, anyhow."

About half-past eleven that evening strange sounds were heard in that stately mansion. The tramp of heavy feet, and the smothered whispers of men carrying some burden up the broad staircase. This lasted a brief time; then the stealthy closing of a door, the rattle of wheels moving slowly down the street, and everything was still again. But all night long the gleam of a funeral light broke faintly through the imperfectly closed blinds of an upper chamber, where Jane Kelly sat, half asleep, watching by a coffin covered with black velvet, on which embossments and handles of silver gave out a faint glow, mournfully in keeping with the stillness and the shadows.

A lady, sitting alone in her chamber, heard these sounds with a shudder of mortal dread, and watched also, in bitter solitude; for sleep that night was impossible to her. The servants, high up under the French roof, whispered very seriously in their separate rooms; wondered, commented, and thought of going away in a body from the house, which might be dangerously infected. Early in the morning this excitement spread from basement to chamber, through the entire block; for long streamers of crape at Mrs. Judson's door awoke general apprehension, and that day three families left

the block, driven into the country by fear of the cholera, which had emanated in the mysterious hints of that prudent girl, Ellen.

That afternoon, a hearse with white plumes and a costly coffin, visible through the half-veiled crystal of its windows, drove slowly from the house, followed by a dozen carriages with the curtains down, most of them empty. Even Mrs. Judson's popularity—joined to the pleasant remembrance of a fair young creature who had for a time been considered the sunlight of her home—could not induce the neighbors to brave their fears of infection in order to pay homage to the dead.

So the funeral cortege moved slowly away toward Greenwood, and the mystery of that young creature's death was lost in the general apprehension of a disease which, about that time, was a word of terror in the land.

After this, a black-edged letter, written by a hand that shivered as it penned the words which were to give so much sorrow, went from that house to Europe; a few more were carried east and west. Then Mrs. Judson retired to her place in the country for a fortnight, while the gloom was swept away from the house.

CHAPTER XVI.

PARTING WITH THE CHILD.

MARY MARGARET DILLON was about to leave the Institution. She had dressed her boy with great care, changed the hospital clothes for her own garments, and came to make a last call at Catharine Lacy's bed.

"Faix, but it's goodness all over to see you lying there with the poor orphan in your arms, motherly as can be, though ye do look like a child yerself," she said, seating herself at

the foot of her young neighbor's bed; "and it's thriving so, would n't it be a blessed sight to the mother, who is gone. Poor young mother, if she could only look upon us now and see the child cuddling down in the bed like a birdie in its nest?"

The young woman smiled; she was very weak and pallid yet, but the dimples would come around her mouth whenever she looked down upon the baby.

"Ye're mighty fond of it, I can see that with half an eye," said Margaret, tossing up her own plump boy with both hands; but here's a shaver that will weigh down two of him, if he isn't so white and purty. Did ye ever see a crathur thrive like this little felly. Kiss him now, plump on the mouth, he's nate as a pink all over; and I'm going home for good the morning."

"Going home!" exclaimed her friend, starting up and holding out her arms for the child. "Oh! what shall I do after that; it will be terrible staying here all alone!"

"True, for ye; but I'll be coming and going, never fear. The old man is lonesome like, and the childer trouble him, so he wants me to the fore."

"Oh, if I were only well enough to go out," sighed the young creature, whose delicate arms had already drooped under the weight of Mrs. Dillon's baby; "but where could I go—where could I go?"

"Now, whist a bit," answered Mary Margaret, in full sympathy. "When the time comes, look to the blessed Saviour; but first, ye know, find out the shanty of Margaret Dillon; it's on the rocks above Fortieth Street. Ye'll know it by a black goat that browses there; to say nothing of two geese and a duck that paddles in the bit of a pond close by; whenever it is, ye'll be welcome as the spring-flowers."

By this time the young woman was crying, and Margaret felt sympathetic tears stealing into her eyes.

"Ye'll be sure to come?"

"Yes; you have been so good to me, Mrs. Dillon, and I don't know that I have another friend in the world."

"Well, now, give the boy another kiss,—for luck, you know,—and I'll be going."

The young woman rose feebly from her pillow and kissed the child; then she held up her trembling mouth for Margaret's hearty farewell, and turning her face to the pillow, began to cry.

Margaret, who had been bundling the child away under her shawl, gave him another breath of air, and seating herself on the bed again, began to comfort that poor young creature, who was, in truth, about parting with her last friend. While she was bending over her in a fit of motherly compassion, a woman came into the ward accompanied by Jané Kelly and one of the young doctors, who had charge that day and was scarcely more than a student.

"Here is the child we were speaking of," said Jane, coming up to the bed and turning back the blankets; "all the rest have some one to take care of them."

She attempted to take the sleeping babe from the bed; but the young creature started up like a lioness, her face flushing hotly and her eyes dilating.

"What are you after—not my child! go away! go away!"

"Come, come, no nonsense. This woman has got her order," said Jane Kelly; "give up the child and let's hear no more of this. She is a first-class nurse and will be a mother to it."

"Mother and father both," sniffed the woman; but the young patient grew more and more frightened. Seeing no reason for hope in the woman, she turned to the doctor.

"Oh, doctor, don't, don't! it will kill me to part with him."

Those great blue eyes deepened into the purple of a violet with sharp apprehension, and she clung to the child on her bosom in passionate resistance.

"It does not hurt me," she pleaded; "why, any one can tell you how strong I am. Only yesterday I sat up in the bed half an hour. He's doing so nicely. Ask Mrs. Dillon, who loves him almost as much as I do; poor little creature, I am sure his mother would ask it, if she only knew."

"But the woman has her order from headquarters. She's an experienced nurse, and the child will be better off with her," said the young man, who had been impressed with the opinion that the young woman must be suffering from her care of the babe; for Jane Kelly was considered as authority in these things by the students, and usually managed to have her own way.

"You see how the least thing excites her," she whispered.

The young man nodded his head, and began to reason with his patient.

"You are not strong enough."

"Yes I am, very, very strong."

"But you will go away soon, and then he must be given up."

The poor thing fell back upon her pillow, broken-hearted. This was the truth; what could she do with the child, even if it was permitted her to have it—she, who had no shelter for her own head.

"Ah, sir, let me keep it a little while longer; see what a comfort he is to me. I can almost make him smile."

She touched the infant's cheek with the tip of her finger, and made a piteous noise with her quivering mouth, at which the child began to cry,—and so, in fact, did Mary Margaret.

"He does almost laugh, sometimes," pleaded the patient, sadly disappointed, and looking up with pathetic earnestness.

"It's because you are all looking at him. Please go away, I am quite sure that wom—that lady, will make him cry harder. He seems to know what she wants, poor little fellow."

"But the authorities have decided he must be put out to nurse."

"But not yet, oh! not yet; besides—"

She lifted up her hand, with a gesture that induced the doctor to stoop.

"Besides, she does not look kind," she whispered, trembling with fear lest the woman might understand her. "Indeed; indeed, she does not!"

"Look here," interposed Jane Kelly. "This sort of humbug can't go on any longer. Doctor, you may take it on yourself to disobey an order from headquarters, but I won't. This woman is authorized to take this very child, it being an orphan,—and this child she is going to have, if all the women in the ward go into hysterics."

Here Mrs. Dillon interfered.

"Let the poor thing be, doctor; one day can do no harm. If the child is to be put out, give me a chance; no own mother ever took such care of it as I will."

Here the young woman started up in bed.

"Yes! yes! let her have it—I won't say one word, so long as I know it is with her."

The doctor looked at Jane.

"Why not?"

"Why not? because this woman has her order, and is going to take that identical child along with her, and no shirking."

The young man gave way. He really had no authority to interfere. So with absolute violence Jane forced the babe from those clinging arms, and tore it away, leaving that poor creature in an agony of grief. Again Mary Margaret sat down by the bed, and made an effort to console the grief she had failed to avert, but she was only answered by heart-broken sobs, and her protégé fell into a trembling fit that shook the bed. After a while she seemed more quiet. Then Mary Margaret took up her child sorrowfully, and went away crying, as if she herself had been bereaved. That night the poor creature was taken dangerously ill, and for weeks and weeks scarcely knew a soul that spoke to her.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHERE COULD SHE GO?

A YOUNG girl, pale and fragile almost as a shadow, came through the side-gate of Bellevue. She hesitated a moment, looked up and down the street, and then turning toward the water, moved languidly to an angle of the wharf, and placing a little bundle at her feet, glanced drearily down upon the tide as it rushed in and out against the timbers.

It was near sunset, and the March winds, that blew raw and cold from the river, seemed to chill her through and through, for her sweet, pale features became pinched, while she sat there lost in gloomy thought, and a tinge of purple crept around her mouth, which trembled visibly either from chilliness or coming tears. Her eyes seemed fascinated by the water, so dark and turbid that it appeared to hold some mysterious secret of repose in its depths; and once or twice she murmured, "Why not? why not?" in a voice of the most touching misery. Then she relapsed into silence again, broken only by a shiver when the wind rushed sharply over her.

"Where can I go?" she exclaimed at last, her voice breaking forth in a cry of anguish. "To *his* mother—she will turn me away with insults, as she did before. To my aunt?"

She uttered the name with a shudder, and shrunk down beneath her shawl, as if some blow had been threatened, and relapsed into dreary silence again.

At last she arose with an effort, and casting a regretful look back upon the water, as if she longed to sleep beneath it, moved up the street again, her frail figure wavering to and fro, like the stalk of a flower, beneath the light weight of her

bundle. Thus she disappeared in one of the cross streets that intersect the Second Avenue.

We find her again, just at nightfall, panting with fatigue, before a palace-building in the vicinity of Murry Hill. There she stood, grasping the iron fence with her hands, afraid to advance, and physically unable to retreat. It was a pitiful sight, that fair young creature, trembling beneath the weight of her little bundle, and kept only from falling to the earth by the hold she had clenched on the cold iron.

The brown front of the building loomed above her with forbidding grandeur. The sculptured lions, crouching on the stone pedestals each side the broad entrance-steps, seemed frowning her away. But there she stood, breathless and wavering, afraid to let go her hold lest she should fall to the earth.

The gas had just been kindled within the house, and a flood of light came pouring through the stained sashes of a bay window, and fell like a gorgeous rain on the pavement, illuminating, as it were, her misery.

The young woman fell back, and slowly retreated from the light, clutching at the iron fence at every step.

"Oh that I could get away!—oh that I had not come! I am sinking—they will find me senseless on the pavement. Oh, my God, give me strength—one moment's strength."

There was strong mental energy in that frail creature, and the desperate cry with which she appealed to God seemed to win down life from heaven. She unclenched her hand from the railing, paused an instant, casting her eyes first to the basement entrance and then to the sunken arch guarded by the lions, and walked on with something of firmness, nay, even of pride in the movement.

"No, not there," she said, passing the basement, and mounting the flight of steps hurriedly, as one who felt her strength giving way, "I am her sister's child, and will enter here."

She rang the bell and waited, struggling firmly against her weakness, and sustained by that moral courage which is the only true bravery of womanhood.

"I have done no wrong," she thought, "why should this terror come over me? If poverty and helplessness were a sin, then I might tremble, but not now—not for this—not because I have left a pauper's bed for her stone palace."

The door opened, and a dainty mulatto boy, with livery buttons, and a white handkerchief visible at a side-pocket, presented himself.

"Mrs. Judson? could n't say; better go down to the basement. That's the sort of thing for serving-people, and folks that come with bundles; could n't take it upon me to answer a single question here," he said.

The girl advanced quietly into the hall, and sat down, with the light of a tinted lantern overhead falling directly upon her.

In spite of her little straw bonnet and plaided blanket-shawl, the boy discovered something in her air, and the pure loveliness of her features, that checked his rising impertinence.

"Go tell your mistress that Miss —— no, that her niece wishes to speak with her."

The boy paused to take a survey of her person, and went down the hall, smiling till his white teeth shone again.

"Perhaps it's a lie, and perhaps it is n't—who knows," he muttered, threading his way up the flight of stairs set aside for menials. "But won't she catch it for claiming relationship, true or not?—well, I should n't wonder."

The greatest trial that can be inflicted on an ardent nature is that of *waiting*. When the mulatto came back, he found the young person who had excited his curiosity, with a flush in her cheeks, eagerly watching his approach.

"You may go up to Mrs. Judson's room," he said, and muttering to himself, he added, "and much good it'll do you."

The girl was about to mount the richly carpeted steps that swept down between those curving rosewood balusters like a sloping bed of moss mottled with forest-flowers, but the mulatto interfered.

"This way, miss, this way; Mrs. Judson ordered me to be particular and bring you up these stairs."

The girl withdrew her foot from the soft carpet and followed the boy in silence. The atmosphere of the house affected her feeble form pleasantly, and she longed to lie down and sleep before seeing her aunt. The carpets under her feet were so luxuriously pliant, it seemed impossible for her to move. The air was bland and fragrant; as she pressed forward, the breath of flowers from an open balcony swept over her, and it seemed, after the atmosphere of Bellevue, like a gale from paradise.

Oh! if she could but remain quietly where she was all night, without seeing any one, with that soft carpet to sleep on, the breath of those flowers floating over her. But no, the mulatto kept turning to be sure that she was close behind; for he seemed rather suspicious of her frequent pauses. At last he threw open a chamber-door.

"This is Mrs. Judson's room, miss." The boy made a feint as if going back in great haste, but returned in a moment, entered the chamber, gliding along the wall, and peeped through the partially closed door, with all the craft of his race, determined to ascertain by the first words whether the fair girl with her humble garments was really the niece of his mistress or not.

The room which this strange girl entered was a bed-chamber, fitted up in a style of stately grandeur which contrasted strongly with the mournful look and modest garb of the young girl, who should have claimed a free welcome there.

A spacious bed stood on one side; high up over the pillows was a light gilded canopy of grape-leaves and fruit, through which the crimson drapery, that swept to the ground on

each side, gleamed like flashes of the sunset through a golden cloud. The same rich crimson broke through the open network of rosewood that formed the foot-board and side-pieces of the bedstead; and to this was contrasted the pure whiteness of richly laced pillows, and a counterpane that seemed of quilted snow. On a crimson lounge, severely magnificent, for all this grandeur had an air of rigid coldness hanging over it, Mrs. Judson was seated, with a slight frown upon her forehead, and her keen, black eyes fixed upon the door.

The girl saw this, as she paused a moment in the shadow before entering; and she saw also, with a sinking heart, that the frown deepened as she made her appearance; while a quick pressure of the lip added to the displeasure of that haughty face.

Mrs. Judson had evidently been disturbed while completing her evening toilet, for though her purple brocade fell in precise and voluminous richness adown her tall figure, her headdress of purple velvet and golden acorns hung upon a branch of gilded spray attached to the frame of her toilet-glass, while several diamond ornaments glittered upon the marble underneath, and an undersleeve of Brussels point had evidently fallen from her hand upon the carpet before she assumed her present imposing attitude.

"Well," said the lady, with frigid dignity, "you have come again, I see; what is the trouble now?"

"I have no home — I am in want," said the poor girl, in a quiet, sad voice. "You are my mother's sister — sister to an angel in heaven — and in her name I ask you to have pity on me!"

"No home? no home? Were you not bound to Madame De Marke? How could I, or any one, provide for you better? You astonish me by these complaints!"

"Madame De Marke gave up her house almost a year ago," answered the girl, with a degree of gentle firmness that imparted dignity even to her tone of supplication; "she is very rich; but no beggar in the street lives more meanly."

"Well, but you were bound to her still; she is compelled by law to give you a home."

The girl smiled a wan smile, but with an expression of some humor in it.

"Madame De Marke's home! Do you know what it is, aunt? A room in the loft of one of her own buildings. The lowest servant in your house would turn from it in disdain; and for food, why, aunt, this rich woman lives absolutely the life of a beggar, and in the market asks, for her cat, refuse scraps of meat, which she devours herself. That was the home and food which Madame De Marke gave to me, after she left her house. Instead of being lady's maid, I was compelled to sweep out the offices and scrub the stores for her tenants."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the lady, smoothing the trimming of her sleeve. "Madame De Marke forgot that I bound you to her, it seems to me."

"No, madam, she did not forget it; and because you had abandoned me because of her knowledge that I was friendless, she made me a drudge. I was not strong; the work broke me down. Oh! aunt, I was heart-sick, and ready to fall down on my knees with gratitude for the least breath of kindness, and — and —"

"Well," said the aunt, looking coldly up, as the poor girl paused, her eyes full of tears, her lips quivering.

"There was one noble person who *was* kind to me, so kind that I could not help loving him, aunt." Catharine said this in a low voice, and trembling from head to foot.

"*Him!*" cried the aunt, half-starting from her lounge, "him, a man! Shameless girl! how dare you talk of a love like that in my presence?"

"Aunt, I have not another creature to love on earth."

"And who told you — who compelled you to love at all? It is an indecorous word."

"And yet 'God is love!'" answered Catharine, lifting

her soft eyes, misty with tearfulness, while her lips unconsciously pronounced the quotation.

"Don't quote Scripture here in this infamous fashion; don't talk to me of love. What right had you to love any one but Madame De Marke herself? Thank heaven! I never found it necessary to love any one."

"But I," answered the girl, with the most profound humility, "I had no other happiness. I never knew what it was to love myself, till he told me how dear, how beautiful I was to him."

The aunt arose and stood up. Her dress fell in rustling folds to the floor, her black eyes flashed fiercely.

"How dare you—infamous girl, how dare you? Leave the house!"

"No, aunt, I am not infamous. He loved me, and I, oh! how truly I loved him. We were married, aunt; as honorably married as you and my uncle were. Do not call me infamous; I will not endure it."

The aunt sat down again, wondering at the strange beauty that lighted up that young face, almost touched by the passionate speech, for she could understand all the pride that was in it, though pathos and appeal were lost upon her.

"Speak a little more moderately, if you have anything to say; and if you are truly married, tell me how, and when. I'm sure it would give me great pleasure to have you well settled and off my hands. Who is the man you are talking about?"

"Young De Marke," answered the girl, drawing close to her aunt, and speaking in a whisper; "but do not let any one know; he said I might tell you, but no person else."

"Catharine Lacy, this is a shameful falsehood, or young De Marke is base beyond anything I ever heard of. Wretched girl, I have quite as good proof as you can bring that you are not his only victim. But where is this man now?"

"He is away. I have not seen him since last fall. He

does not know how miserable I am. Aunt, dear aunt, have pity on me; I have just come from the hospital—my poor baby is dead and buried."

"Hospital! what hospital? Not Bellevue? not the Almshouse?"

"Yes, the Almshouse, aunt. Where else could I go? He was away, and if he wrote, I never got the letter. His mother turned me out-of-doors, with bitter language and coarse abuse. I was afraid to come here."

"But if you were married, how dare Madame De Marke treat you in this way?"

"She pretended not to believe me—though I am sure he told her of our marriage with his own lips. She was angry because I would not let her keep my certificate, and said it was all made up."

"Where did this marriage take place?" inquired the aunt, quickly.

"In Philadelphia. He went there when Madame was away from home a week. She did not know of it."

"Let me read the certificate," said the aunt, extending her hand; "if that is genuine, I will see that the rights of my relative are respected, let what will have gone before. This young man must inherit a fine property, De Marke was very rich. The certificate of marriage, girl. What are you waiting for?"

The poor girl began to weep bitterly, and, wringing her hands, fell upon her knees before that haughty woman.

"Oh! aunt, aunt, don't ask me; I have lost it—I have lost it!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

TURNED OUT-OF-DOORS.

MRS. JUDSON drew back from her niece, gathering the folds of her dress around her, as if she feared those quivering little hands might impart shame to her person.

"Oh!" she said, with bitter emphasis, "lost, is it? When? where?"

"I don't know. It was in my bosom when I was taken ill; but after that I remember nothing about it."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the aunt, and the unpleasant gleam broke fiercely into her eyes; "and as you lost the certificate," she added, "what was the clergyman's name who married you?"

"I don't remember. He told me that the paper was right, and I never troubled myself to read it. But *he* knows, of course."

"Oh, of course, *he* knows," echoed the proud woman, disdainfully. "But the place? In what place was this wonderful marriage performed, did you say?"

"In Philadelphia."

"Well, the street — in what street did this clergyman, with the forgotten name, live?"

"I never knew," answered the weeping girl; "but, oh! aunt, do not doubt me; for, as Heaven is my witness, we were married."

"Oh, yes! the proofs are conclusive," answered the lady, with bitter irony.

"Aunt, aunt, do believe me!" cried the girl, moving forward on her knees, and holding up her clasped hands. "*He* will tell you how true it is; *he* will get another certificate. He cannot be away much longer; let me live with you till he comes."

"When he comes to own you, in my presence, you shall have shelter here. Till then, never enter my door again. Go now, and live, if you can, on this falsehood and its shamelessness."

"Oh! aunt, aunt!" cried the wretched girl, "I am his wife — I am his wife! Look at me; do I blush? Do my eyes sink? Aunt, I am innocent of wrong as you are, and as truly a wedded wife as you ever were!"

It was painful to see the cold, stern pride which rose and swelled in that woman's bosom, lifting her form haughtily upward, and quenching the color from her lips on which the last cruel words of that interview were forming.

"Leave the room; leave my house forever!" she cried, pointing to the door. "Go, hide your infamy, and tell those romances among your proper associates."

"I shall neither disgrace nor use any name with which you have been connected," she said in a voice so steady and low that it fell upon the ear with singular impressiveness. "In my misfortunes you will find no record which can wound your pride or bring disgrace on the name of my mother. I have no permission to use the name of my husband; but he will return, and standing by my side call on you to retract the insults you have heaped upon me. Until then I will perish in the streets, rather than look you in the face or darken your door."

"Oh, aunt!" she continued with a burst of feeling, "you have been very cruel to me, terribly cruel in your doubts, for I am honorably married and as honestly loved as you ever were."

Mrs. Judson drew herself back with haughty uprightness, and pointed her finger at the girl.

"You compare yourself with me!" she exclaimed, — "with me?"

"No," answered the girl, standing before her aunt, pale and proud as herself, but with a pride that had a relenting dig-

nity in it, that sprung from the womanliness of her nature so fearfully outraged, — “no, aunt, I do not compare myself with you, — not for a moment. Let that Great Being make the comparison, who looks upon us both as we stand: you, a rich, proud woman, turning your sister’s child with insult into the street; I, a poor, friendless girl, feeble from sickness, tortured with anxiety, without shelter, and without a human being to care for me — let God make the comparison between you and me. Let him judge us two!”

The young woman turned, as she spoke, and walked from the room, leaving her aunt standing like a statue in the clear gas-light. The passion of that young creature had paralyzed her. She, so unused to contradiction, so imperial in her household, had she lived to be thus braved? What right had that miserable wanderer to call upon the God that *she* professed to worship? She would not have been more astonished had a pauper knelt beside her on the velvet-clad steps from which she monthly communed, in the most fashionable church of the city.

Thus astounded and overwhelmed, the woman stood, till the quick footsteps of her niece were lost upon the stairs; then, with a deep breath, she sat down to compose herself, and even had recourse to an enamelled vinagrette that lay upon the toilet-table, so much had her nerves been shaken. All this had the desired effect, and in a few moments the lady was arranging the golden acorns over her dark tresses, gathering them in clusters where the silver threads lay thickest, and stood longer than usual, regarding herself in the mirror with a sort of wonder that any one had dared to address such words to her.

Directly a waiting-woman entered in answer to a touch that she had given to the bell. “Rachel, there was a girl came here just now; did you see her? is she gone?”

“No, madam, she fainted in the front-hall — fell down like a dead creature before any one had time to show her out the other way.”

“And where is she now?”

“Lying there white as snow, and as cold as ice; the girls have been doing their best, but they cannot bring her to.”

One gentle impulse did arise in the woman’s bosom, as she heard this. She seized the flask that had just soothed her own nerves, and moved a step toward the door; but a cold after-thought drew her back. “The girl might speak, might proclaim her relationship before the household if she were brought to consciousness under that roof. Nay, so little did she seem to be ashamed of the past, the girl might proclaim her pauper condition before the assembled menials.” She laid down the flask and turned to the glass, a little paler than before, but with marvellous self-possession.

“Send for a carriage, and have her carried to the nearest dispensary; there should be plenty of doctors there; it is their duty to see to such persons.”

“But she is insensible, madam,” persisted the waiting-woman, who had some feeling.

“That is nothing,” was the reply; “we cannot leave a strange girl lying in the hall.”

The woman went out muttering to herself, and with angry moisture in her eyes.

The lady seated herself once more, and began to arrange the lace of her undersleeves with considerable nervousness. Something of human feeling was at work in her bosom, and from time to time she arose and looked out of the window, always with increasing agitation. At last, a carriage drove up; and grasping the silken curtain hard with her hand, she half dragged it over her, afraid to be seen watching. She saw, through the dim light, a group of persons carrying a prostrate form down the steps leading to her own door. The carriage-lamps flashed upon a pale face as it was lifted upward. The woman caught one glance and drew back with a thrill of dismay. The face gleamed upward so deathly in its whiteness that she crept from the window,

and cowered down in her sofa-cushions, tormented with the vague fear that the dead was appealing to heaven against her cruelty. For the moment, that proud woman had the sensation of a murderess.

She shook off this uncomfortable sensation, with a great effort walking the floor up and down, and muttering to herself,—

“Bellevue — Bellevue. Another from that place! have they all turned paupers? Thank heaven, however, this girl is gone. I could not have endured another scene like that. I did right; no man or woman can blame me for refusing to be disgraced. How those De Markes haunt me!”

CHAPTER XIX.

MEMORIES AND RESOLUTIONS.

THEY carried Catharine Lacy to the station-house. A doctor was sent for, but it was a long time before he came, and when he did arrive, the poor girl refused all assistance, but lay upon her couch, which was worse than a beggar's, racked with a sense of her utter desolation, till thought caused fever, and fired her whole system with artificial strength.

She spent the night without sleep, and in profound darkness, tortured with visions of her lost child, its pauper grave, and of its father. For the first time she thought of the latter with doubt and bitterness. Had he deserted her? She had read of these things. And her aunt, how cruelly she had taken up the belief of her unworthiness. What had she done to be thus treated by those who should have protected her? Why was she of all human beings selected out for wrong and insult?

These were severe questions for a girl not yet eighteen

to ask of her own proud spirit, in the degrading darkness of a station-house; and if her soul was filled with bitterness, when it could make no reply, who will wonder or blame her.

It is a terrible thing when a warm, young heart learns to distrust humanity, and is thrown into the world without shield or buckler, to contend with that coarse reality which crushes out all the rich poetry of youth and leaves bitterness in its place. No wonder, poor inexperienced creatures, like Catharine, sometimes become reckless and sin against that society which taunts them onward by cruel and undeserved reproach.

What Catharine might have done, after that night of fearful trial, if left wholly to herself, I cannot say; but God puts no human soul upon this earth to leave it altogether subject to evil influences. When humanity fails, then comes a sweet, low voice from the throne of God, and those who listen grow calm and strong, as flowers brighten beneath the soft dew which visits them in the night-time.

True, Catharine was an orphan, but who knows that the mother who has gone with all her earthly affections to heaven, purified and holy, is not a better guardian to the soul of her child than she ever could have been on earth. No, no, Catharine Lacy was not alone in all that night. Spirits hovered around her, and when waves of bitterness would have rushed over and filled her soul, they were swept aside, leaving the young girl more tranquil and strong of heart than she had been for months.

The heavenly love of a mother, who had partaken of divinity, and that earthly love, which draws us closer to the gates of heaven, had watched over the young girl in her deepest humiliation. Toward morning, she fell asleep, with a fragment of the Lord's Prayer upon her lips. It seemed to her in that half dreamy state, as if her parents were both listening as they had done years ago, and smiled to think that she was asking help of God once more. All day the

poor girl slept. Once or twice an officer came in to arouse her, but there was something so child-like and happy in her slumber, that he went out again, leaving her undisturbed.

Toward nightfall, Catharine awoke, and after partaking of some coarse food, which the captain of police had ordered for her, she took up her little bundle and prepared to go forth into the streets again.

Her plans were no longer in confusion. She would go to Madame De Marke, and ask the protection denied by her own relative; this was a duty which she certainly owed to De Marke, before throwing herself upon the wide world. She had little hope of conciliating the eccentric old woman, but resolved for his sake to brave the interview. Very slowly, for she was still too feeble for much exertion, Catharine made her way down the city, strengthened by her own steady purpose, and saved from torturous feelings of suspense by the very hopelessness of her project.

It was nightfall before she reached her destination. The dim stairs, over which she trod, creaked gloomily beneath her light footsteps, adding to the evil foreboding that crept closer and closer around her heart, as she entered the shadow of that now half-deserted building.

Her pace grew more rapid as she advanced, for the courage of desperation was upon her; and her knock against the half-closed door of Madame De Marke's room was clear and firm.

"Who is wanting me?" inquired a snappish voice, and the door was partly opened. "Who is it? you, Jane Kelly? come in, my pet, come in. Is it good news or bad that you bring me? Come in out of the passage. What keeps you hanging back so? Putting on airs, eh? making believe you are in no hurry for the mate to that ear-ring, the sparkler? All fudge and nonsense; just as if I did n't understand it all. Come in with you—there, there, now lift your veil."

The old woman had drawn Catharine through the door

with great eagerness, clutching her arm with those claw-like fingers till the poor child almost called out with pain. She felt that the old woman was trembling with some emotion, which struck her as intense rage, and when her veil was drawn aside it revealed a face so pallid with affright, that for a moment the old woman did not recognize it.

"What? what?" she hissed at last, as the certainty of her identity forced itself upon her, "you alive and here. Oh! ha! she shall pay for this!"

As she spoke, the wretch clutched her hand with a more cruel gripe around the young girl's arm, and gave her a fierce shake.

"Alive!—you alive and here?" she repeated, "oh! but some one shall pay for this."

"You hurt me," said Catharine, shrinking with pain. "I come to you for help; do not harm me!"

"Help! to me for help—you, you!" cried the old woman, drawing back and pointing her lean finger almost into Catharine's face; "help you shall have. Help to the house of correction. I'll help you there, certainly. You can depend on me. But where is the baby—the dear little infant; what have you done with that, eh?"

"It is dead!" answered Catharine, with simple pathos. "I am all alone."

"So the dear little baby is dead, is it? what a pity! There must have been lots of mourners at the funeral. Why did n't you send for me? I'd a come with pleasure."

"Don't," said Catharine, lifting both her hands, and holding their palms out as if to ward off a blow, "don't, unless you wish to kill me. It was your son's child."

"My son's child, was it? oh! yes, I remember now. You were married to my son, as you call him, the last time I saw you. Perhaps you will give me another sight of that precious marriage-certificate."

"Don't ask me for it?" murmured Catharine.

"And why not? I must look at it again and again, before the fact will make itself clear. Come, come, let us see the paper."

"It is lost!" said Catharine, in a low voice; "there is nothing left but my word to prove that I am really and truly your son's wife!"

CHAPTER XX.

ALL ALONE.

MADAME DE MARKE stood a moment irresolute, then she spoke out. "My son! you will call the young reprobate De Marke, my son, as if he ever had a drop of my blood in his veins. I tell you he was De Marke's son by a first wife, and I — Well, yes, I am his step-mother, his father's widow, and his guardian till, till — But what's the use of talking? You could n't understand it."

"But I understand this, and thank God for it. De Marke is not your own son."

"No more my son than he is your husband, honey-bird, be sure of that," cried the old woman, with a spiteful laugh.

Catharine's eyes sparkled. It was something to know that the old woman had really no claim on her for respect.

"But you have always looked upon him as a son, and you know that I am his wife."

"Indeed, *how* do I know that? Let me read over the certificate, and then —"

"He told you that we were married, I am sure of it."

"Oh! they are deceivers all; don't put any faith in the blood, my dear; but just go away like a nice girl and hide your shame in the country. I'll give you a trifle for travel-

ling expenses, and then you might make a nice match, where no one ever heard of you before."

"Hush, madam, I will not listen to this; it degrades me and my husband."

"Your husband, ha! A tender, attentive husband, is n't he? Don't you wonder when he will come back?"

"Tell me where he is gone. Oh, tell me that, and I will trouble you no more!"

"Why? what would you do?"

"I would follow him to the uttermost ends of the earth, as a true wife should follow the man she loves."

"Would you, my dear? But that is just what the young fellow does not want. He has left you, girl, and I tell you he will never return, never, never, do you hear?"

"I do not believe it. Sooner or later he will come back to contradict this wicked slander. He is *not* a bad man!"

"Just as you please to think, my dear; only he is a long time in coming!"

Catharine gave a quick motion of the hand, as if to silence the slander, and turning upon the old woman, demanded if she would give her shelter and protection?

"No, no, my dear, the thing is just impossible," answered the old creature, with jeering malice in her look and voice; "that would be owning to the world that I gave some faith to your romance about Philadelphia, the clergyman, and all that."

"I am almost glad of it," answered Catharine, conscious that a sensation of unaccountable relief went with her words. "Now I have nothing but God to trust in; all his creatures have forsaken me."

"Oh!" ejaculated the old woman, kissing her crucifix, "what has God, or the mother of God, to do with heretics but to punish their sins? Go away, dear, go away."

"I will," was the sad reply. "You send me out among men like a wild bird into the woods, but God takes care even of them."

"That's a nice girl, you'll go into the country away west or east, where no one will ever hear of you again. Don't come back to disgrace the poor boy, and I'll pay your passage in the emigrant cars just as far as you will go. Only let it be a long way off, and remember, dear, how much it will cost me."

"No," answered Catharine, "I cannot leave the city till he comes back."

"I tell you he never will come back, never! You hear me, never! never!"

Catharine turned very white, and clenched her little hand hard on the back of a chair.

"How do you know this, madam?" she questioned, in a faint voice.

"He told me so himself, dear; depend on it, he never will come back, and never can marry you; it would make him a beggar."

"Why?"

"Why, darling? because his father just left it in his will that his son should never marry without my consent; if he did, all the property should come to me. So, my dear, you understand how it would turn out if you were really married; he would be a beggar, and I rolling in gold — rolling in gold. Oh, if you only had been married, now would n't it have been a run of luck for me? But he won't do it — not fool enough for that — never thought of such a thing."

"Do you mean to say that George has practised a deception on me?"

"Oh, a little cheat, nothing else, of course you understand all about it; the certificate that you made so much of, all fudge and nonsense. Just go away, darling, as I tell you; he'll never come back till you do, and never then, I dare say."

Catharine held by the chair still trembling from head to foot. In all her trouble she had possessed one source of consolation and strength — deep faith in her husband's love and

integrity. Now her very heart seemed uprooted. For a moment, she had no faith in anything. She leaned heavily on the chair, grasping it with both hands, but her limbs trembled and gave way; she sunk slowly downward, and bowing her face, cried out in bitter anguish:

"Oh, my God, what have I done that all Thy creatures turn against me? Let me die — let me die!"

Madame De Marke turned away. At the head of her cot was a small hen-coop such as farmers use in transporting poultry to market. Through the bars of this coop, two or three lank, hungry fowls were protruding their long necks, and set up a low chuckle as if they joined the old woman in mocking at the poor girl. "Ha, ha! you understand it, dears," said the crone; "here now, my pets, help yourselves."

She went to a platter that stood on her deal table, and dividing a cold potato with her fingers, thrust half of it through the bars. As the hungry fowls devoured it, she began quietly eating the other half, while she eyed the poor girl with a look of malicious cunning, apparently quite unmindful of the anguish that made her very heart quiver.

At last Catharine lifted her head and looked steadily at the old woman. "Madam, if you have deceived me in this, if you know this of my husband." She paused — the name almost suffocated her; goaded with fresh agony, she arose to her feet.

"Woman, woman, as you have dealt with us, so will the God of heaven deal with you on your death-bed!"

The next instant Catharine Lacy passed through the door, as one flees from an impending death-blow.

Madame De Marke looked after her with a wild, fierce look; then she snatched up her crucifix and kissed it.

"A heretic, a heretic — why should I mind the words of a heretic? What right has she to call on God?"

But her grim features worked with fear long after she ceased speaking, and she repeatedly kissed the crucifix in her hand, as if striving to bribe protection from it.

CHAPTER XXI.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

SCARCELY half an hour had elapsed, when there was another knock at the door, and Jane Kelly, the hospital nurse, presented herself.

"Oh, you have come at last!" exclaimed the old woman. "What news this time?"

"I have come for the other ear-ring; it's all right this time!"

"Dead?"

"Yes, dead, I gave him to my favorite nurse. The Irish woman wanted him dreadfully, and made a fuss at headquarters, but I proved that she lay in a dead sleep from drinking the very night before we sent her home, so my woman got the child and kept it to the last."

"And it is dead, ha?"

Jane nodded her head. "Paregoric for breakfast, cordial betweenwhiles, and laudanum at night; that nurse always has quiet babies; can lay 'em down anywhere in a corner or on a shelf. If they wake up and cry, more drops; you can't think how nat'rally they go to the other sleep at last; it's quite beautiful."

"But this one? don't talk of sleep,—is it dead?"

"As a door-nail!"

"La—a," ejaculated the old woman, with a sort of distrustful exultation, "if I could believe you now!"

Jane fired up in an instant.

"I see — this is to get rid of paying over the other ear-ring; but it won't do, I'm not to be taken in that way. Goodness knows the whole set would n't half pay me for the trouble and risk, to say nothing of one's soul. So it's no

use putting on airs, I've earned the ear-rings, and I mean to have 'em."

"There now, dear, there now, what an ado you are making, and all for nothing at all; dear me, who said a word about not giving you the ring? but the mate, just let me see that, and we will put them together. Earned them? indeed I think you have, dear, and more than that by a good deal. Certainly, my dear, you shall have more than that."

"Oh, thank you! I deserve it, at any rate, though the girl did escape."

"Deserve it, my pet, of course you do, and twice as much; but give me the ear-ring."

"Not exactly!" answered Jane Kelly, "I was not fool enough to bring it here."

"Then you have n't it about you?"

"No, why should I?"

"Oh, no, why should you — but you have n't pawned or sold it, have you?"

"Of course I have n't; none of your fine ladies will get a chance to flourish in them diamond ear-rings now, I tell you; they cost too much for that, and what I've earned I can afford to wear as well as the best on 'em."

"But why did n't you put it in your ear to-night? I should just like to see 'em sparkling each side of them rosy cheeks; why, it'd be a treat to see them and your eyes a-flashing together. I wish you'd brought 'em, dear."

"Well," answered Jane, smoothing back her hair, with great complacency, "it's no use talking about it now, for one ear-ring is safe in my trunk, at the hospital, and the other, you know, is somewhere in the room here, so it stands to reason they can't outshine my two eyes to-night."

"Oh, ho!" ejaculated madame, softly; "in your trunk; well, I should a thought it would have been safer in your pocket."

"Not at all. I keep the store-room key myself, and no

one gets to my trunk now, I tell you. The matron would give her eyes to see what's in it; but, no; close bind, close find, is my motto."

"And so you must have the mate to that ring to-night?" said Madame De Marke, after a moment's reflection.

"Must have the mate to that ring to-night," repeated Jane, with a self-confident toss of the head.

"Well, now, how sorry I am, dear; but the room is n't safe for things so costly, you know, and it was only yesterday I sent it down to the bank."

"Indeed!" drawled Jane Kelly, eying her friend distrustfully; "so you are certain there is no mistake about the bank. It don't happen to be under the bed now, in a little morocco box, inside of one with iron clamps?"

"What, what!" exclaimed the old woman, starting up fiercely, "you know this; you have been peeping and prying about my room, eh? But it is n't there; I sent boxes and all down to the bank; so you can try at your game there; perhaps you've got a skeleton-key, or something of that sort."

"No," said Jane, rising in a fury; "but I've got the power to make you suffer, and I will, if that ear-ring is n't forthcoming by to-morrow night. My oath is good yet, and one picks up a little law now and then in the institution. It's no joke to bribe a person to murder."

"Ha! you're cute, dear — very cute; so you will make oath to that, eh?"

"Yes, I will make oath to that, if the diamond ear-ring in my trunk has n't a mate by this time to-morrow night."

"But you forget," cried the old woman, "*that the baby is dead.*"

"Not at all, Madame De Marke; I recommended the nurse; that was all. She has had plenty of children before from the Almshouse."

Madame De Marke moved restlessly in her seat, and a

look of crafty thought stole over her face. At last she began to smile, and winding her fingers softly around each other, as if caressing herself for a pleasant idea, she said:

"Oh, very well, to-morrow night you may come again; everything shall be ready. You and I are not going to quarrel, dear; come to-morrow night; that's a dear."

"Yes, I will come," answered Jane, brusquely; "depend on that."

She arose, and, folding the shawl around her, with a defiant air, went out, muttering: "Yes, yes, we'll settle this business to-morrow night, no mistake about that."

After she was gone, Madame stood for a moment listening, till the sound of her footsteps died on the stairs; then she dragged forth the iron-bound box, took out the odd ear-ring, and thrust it in her bosom. Snatching up a queer old bonnet, with a crown like a muskmellon, and a front like a sugar-scoop, she framed her witch-like face in it, and stole out of the chamber, treading like a cat, and, in reality, appearing to see in the dark like one.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ODD EAR-RING.

JANE KELLY had proceeded but a few paces from the outer door, when Madame reached the pavement. Very few persons were in the street at that time of the evening; for, though not very late, the building was deep in the commercial heart of the city, and few persons ever spent the night there.

"Oh, there he is."

As the old woman uttered these words, she darted across the street and seized a policeman by the arm.

"Burglary—burglary! I have been robbed. The thief has been trying at my door again; I have tracked her now. There the woman goes; seize her! seize her! she has robbed me of a diamond ear-ring; I swear it, I am ready to testify; here is the mate; seize her, or she will be off."

As she spoke, the old woman drew the ear-ring from her bosom and held it up in the light of a street-lamp. The man gave one glance at the sparkling stones, and darted after Jane Kelly, who was gliding off like a shadow in the distance.

Madame put up her jewel, and followed the policeman, chuckling softly to herself.

"Is this the person?" said the policeman, leading Jane Kelly back, with a strong grasp on her arm. "Have I caught the right bird?"

"That is the woman," replied the old De Marke, peering into Jane's face, "I should know her among a thousand. I caught her in my room, not ten minutes ago, robbing my money-box; picked the door-lock when I was out buying groceries; had this very ear-ring in her hand; you'll find the box open on the floor, just as she left it. I trod softly, light as a feather, darted in upon her, snatched this from her hand—she ran—I after her, and here she is!"

Jane Kelly stood before her accuser as she uttered these charges, dumb with astonishment, and pale with dismay. She looked from the policeman to the old woman and back again with a wild stare.

"What is the witch at now?" she said, at last, in a frightened voice, wincing under the grasp fixed on her arm. "Let me go, I have n't done nothing; I'm a hired nurse at Bellevue Hospital—a paid nurse, do you understand?"

"Is she?" inquired the man, turning to Madame de Marke.

"Don't know anything about her, sir; saw her hanging about my building about ten days ago, first and last time I ever saw her till now. That night I walked in the streets

from twelve o'clock at night till three in the morning, the priest made me do it as a penance; when I got home, the mate to this was gone from my money-box; to-night she came after another haul!"

Jane Kelly turned upon her fierce and pale. "Woman, you lie!" broke from lips that trembled so with fear and passion that the words came almost in a whisper.

"Of course I do; no one ever told the truth about a thief; of course it's all a story, perhaps the magistrate'll think so."

"You do not mean to have me really taken up?"

"Of course not; you've committed burglary on my premises, robbed me of diamonds worth five hundred dollars, and tried to do it again; but of course I a'n't going to take you up, dear. Perhaps I'm tender-hearted, perhaps I love you too much, perhaps you'll be marched off to the police office without another minute's time for abusing me! Mr. Policeman, just move on, I am ready. It is n't too late yet, and I want to get home again!"

"I won't go—I charge that woman with murder, perjury, false imprisonment. She's an imp, a wretch, a wild beast, I tell you; take *her* up, I charge her with something worse than stealing."

Jane struggled fiercely as she hurled these words back upon her accuser, and almost wrenched her arm from the policeman.

"Hush, be quiet, I say!" commanded the man, sternly, "I'll have no more of this; come along, marm, we've held court long enough in the street. If we wait in this way, the magistrate will be gone."

"Oh, I'm ready, I'm in a hurry to go," said Madame, with her glittering eyes turned on Kelly; "it is n't me that delays you; walk on, I'll follow with all the pleasure in the world; perhaps she's got the mate to this about her!"

"No such thing," exclaimed Jane, with another burst of

passion, "you know well enough that I told you it was in my trunk."

"Oh!" ejaculated the officer, with a wink at the old woman, who gave back a significant nod, and cast another jeering glance at her victim.

"Did you tell me that? thank you, dear, it's pleasant to find a person so frank. You hear, sir, she confesses. Kind, is n't it?"

Jane was about to speak, and probably in her wrath might have committed herself still further, but the policeman dragged her forward. She made a little resistance at first, but at last moved on more patiently, though still burning with indignation, which was likely to break forth to her disadvantage the moment she was allowed to speak again.

Madame De Marke seemed to be aware of this, for though she appeared to follow the officer and his charge, every few minutes she would glide up to the side of her victim, and whisper some taunt or jeer that stung the woman's wrath into fresh vigor, and in this state she was placed before the magistrate.

The moment she entered the police-office, Madame De Marke changed her whole manner; the glitter of her eyes was subdued, her demeanor became quiet, and notwithstanding her mean garments and general untidiness, there was something about her which bespoke a knowledge of good society and its usages. Besides, her face bore evidence of a keen intellect, the more remarkable from the squalid poverty of her appearance.

She advanced before the judge, and made her charge in a clear, truthful manner, that left no room for doubt, though the magistrate seemed a good deal astonished by the value of the property stolen; and when Madame, with her usual boast, spoke of rolling in gold, an incredulous smile stole across his lips.

Madame De Marke saw the smile, and a little of her natural shrewishness broke forth.

"You don't believe me; you think, perhaps, I stole the things first myself," she said, sharply.

"No, I do not trouble myself to think of anything that has not taken the form of evidence," said the judge, smiling with an expression that Madame liked still less than the first; "to-morrow we will look into the case, if you appear against the woman."

"But you will lock her up — you will not allow her to go home?" cried the old woman, eagerly; "she will hide my diamonds away, and I shall never see them again!"

The magistrate waved his hand, as if to silence further speech, and writing on a slip of paper, handed it to the officer.

"Come," said the officer, touching Jane.

The woman turned sharply upon him.

"Where are you taking me?"

"Into another wing of the Tombs: don't make a disturbance now, but come peaceably."

"Not unless this old Jezebel goes with me," cried the woman, furiously. "I tell you, she is ten thousand times worse than a thief; she wanted me to commit murder — to let one of the sweetest creatures that ever lived starve on her sick-bed; she tried to bribe me with that very ear-ring. I tell you, gentlemen, she is more of a murderer than I am a thief ten times over!"

She was interrupted by a laugh, low and quiet, but which shook Madame's meagre form from head to foot.

"Pleasant charges, very," she observed, addressing the magistrate; "perhaps I stole my own jewels."

"I shouldn't wonder," murmured the judge, scarcely above his breath, but Madame heard it.

"Yes," she added, "and perhaps I engraved my own name on the back."

She held out the ear-ring, and the judge saw G. De Marke engraved on the antique setting. He had heard the name,

and now gazed with great curiosity on its owner, for with all her apparent poverty he knew her to be one of the wealthiest women in New York. He handed back the ear-ring with a bow, and waving his hand, ordered the prisoner to be removed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

ALONE in the streets of a great city, in the night-time—so young, so beautiful, without a home, a dollar, or a friend, what could the poor girl do?”

Utter hopelessness is almost rest. Catharine could not understand this, and wondered within herself at the strange apathy that possessed her in this the most forlorn moment of her life.

She wandered on, careless of the direction, without object and dreamily. Once or twice she sat down on a door-step to rest, but it was only for a moment, and when she arose it was to forget that a transient repose had been obtained. At last in the drear waste of her thoughts she remembered the Irish woman who had been so kind to her at Bellevue, and around this thought centred other reflections that almost amounted to a resolution. But even this emotion died away when she reflected, that, kind as the woman was, there existed no means of ascertaining exactly where she lived.

Still Catharine wandered on; what else could she do? Even from the door-steps she might at any moment be driven forth as an intruder. It was evidently getting late; the noises of city life were gradually hushed, and the growing stillness appalled her. Never, in her whole existence, had she been so utterly alone.

Awaking from her apathy, as it were from a dull dream, she found herself upon the corner of two thoroughfares, on the east side of the town. The stores were all closed, and the streets on either hand almost deserted.

“Where *can* I go?—what will become of me?” she murmured, looking around with affright. “Will no one have pity on me?”

That moment a woman passed her carrying a basket of clothes on her arm.

“She is going home,” said Catharine, gazing after her through the blinding tears that filled her eyes.

“Did you speak to me, ma’am?” inquired the woman, turning back at the sound of her voice.

A faint cry broke from the poor girl, and seizing the woman joyfully by the arm, she called out.

“Oh, is it you?—is it you?”

Mary Margaret Dillon sat down her basket in utter astonishment, and seizing the hand that detained her, shook it heartily.

“Well, if this is n’t something, innyhow; me jist thinking of ye, and here ye are to the fore; but ye’re looking white as me apron yet, bad luck to the doctors—come by, and let us have a word of talk togeth’er.”

“Will you let me go with you?” inquired Catharine, anxiously, for she had been so often and so cruelly rebuffed that this kindness scarcely seemed real.

“Will I let ye go with me, bless ye’re sowl; that’s a question to put to a Christian woman, now, is n’t it? In course I’ll let ye go with me; why not?”

“But I have no home, nor a cent to pay for—for—everybody has abandoned me—I have n’t a friend in the wide world.”

“Hist, now, that’s talkin’ treason and rank hathenism. Where d’ye think is Mary Margaret Dillon, with her strong hands and a shanty over her head which no one else has a

right to, baring a triflin' claim on the lot o' ground. Is n't that a home for ye, I'd like to know?"

"But I shall be trouble—I shall crowd you," faltered Catharine, trembling with anxiety to have her objections overruled.

"Did ye ever see a poor man's house so full that one more couldn't find a corner to rest in—faix, if ye did, it was n't in the cabin of an out-and-out Irishman," said Margaret, lifting her basket of clothes and settling herself for a walk. "Come along; I want ye to see the childer, bliss 'em, and the old mon, to say nothin' of the pig and three geese, that'll be proud as anythin' to have ye for company."

"Thank you—oh, thank you with all my heart. I will go; perhaps I can do something to pay for the trouble," said Catharine, to whom this vision of a home seemed like a glimpse of paradise; and folding her shawl about her, she prepared to move on with a feeling almost of cheerfulness, certainly of intense gratitude.

"No trouble in life," answered Margaret, briskly. "The old man and the childer'll just resave ye as if ye was one of 'em. Come along, come along, and we'll have a taste of supper and a drop of tae as a remembrance of this matein atween old friends, d'ye see?"

"Let me help with your basket."

"No, no, jist be aisy there; ye're not strong enough for that, and faix it's a sin and a shame that sich a delicate young-crathur should iver be put to the work; home or not, my opinion is ye're a born lady, and that I'll stick to agin the world."

They walked on together, Margaret talking cheerfully, and Catharine mingling some painful thoughts with her gratitude.

"Mary Margaret," she said, at length, in a low, mournful voice, "you will never turn against me, as the others have, because I cannot give you proof that—that the poor baby

they buried away from me was honestly mine; you will take my word for it, I feel almost sure!"

"I don't want ye'r word; one look in ye'r purty face is enough for me, and I'd stand up for ye agin the whole univarse, with old Ireland to the fore."

"Thank you—God bless you for that," answered Catharine, and for the first time in many days a smile broke over her face. "You are so honest and so kind, Margaret, I could not bear that you should think ill of me."

Margaret did not answer at once, but walked on thoughtfully.

"In course," she said at last, "I belave ivery word ye tell me; but if it was n't so—if ye had been a poor, desaved crathur instid of the swate innicent ye are, I would n't turn agin ye anyhow. It ain't Christian, and, accordin' to my idees, it ain't modest for a woman to hold a poor, fallen feller crathur down in the gutter foriver and iver. The blissed Saviour, who was holier than us all, did n't do it, and, by all the holy saints, Mary Margaret Dillon niver will either."

Catharine drew a deep sigh.

"Don't sigh in that way, darlint," exclaimed Margaret, kindly. "D'ye know that ivery time ye draw a deep breath like that it drinks a drop of blood from ye'r heart? Don't sigh agin, that's a darlint."

"I was thinking," replied Catharine, "how much worse it would have ended if I had really been so wicked as they think I am; it seems to me as if I must have laid down on the first door-step and died. Nothing but my own sense of right has given me strength to live—and after all, what have I to live for now?"

"Hist, darlint, hist, this is talkin' like a hathen. Ye're to live because the blissid Saviour thinks it's good for ye, and that's enough for a Christian. Besides, it's mane and low-lived to give way, wid the first dash of trouble, especially

when we see every day that the Saviour makes ye strong and more determined."

Catharine submitted to this rebuke for her momentary repining with gentle patience. The simple piety and honest good sense of Mary Margaret had its effect upon her, and before she reached the shanty where the good woman lived, something of hopefulness sprang up in her heart. She could not help feeling that there was something providential in her encounter with the good Irishwoman at the moment of her utmost need. This gave strength to many hopeful impulses that are always latent in the bosom of the young.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MARY MARGARET DILLON'S SHANTY.

THE shanty to which Mary Margaret conducted her guest stood in a vacant lot, high up in the city. It was a rustic affair, composed of boards mingled with the odds and ends from old buildings, that Michael Dillon had been engaged in demolishing during his experience as a laboring man. Indeed, Michael was a very favorable specimen of metropolitan squatter sovereignty, and had succeeded in securing no inconsiderable means of creature comfort around him, though another man was owner of the soil. He had managed, when out of work, to wall in a little patch of land, in a rude, loose way, it is true, which he denominated the garden, and some dozen or two of fine cabbages, as many hills of potatoes, and a cucumber vine, where great, plethoric, yellow cucumbers were ripening for seeds, gave color and force to Michael's assumption.

In addition to these substantials, Mary Margaret had contributed her share of the useful and picturesque by planting

nasturtians all along the low, stone wall, which clothed the rude structure with a sheet of gorgeous blossoms, and gave it the look of an immense garland flung upon the ground.

Thus hedging her husband's usefulness in with flowers, the province of a true woman, Mary Margaret had helped to win a gleam of the beautiful from the rude, stony soil from which Michael strove to wrest a portion of their daily food.

I have often thought that true goodness, in a woman, at least, is always accompanied with glimmerings of fine taste. Certain it is, Mary Margaret had managed to impart no common show of rustic effect to her little, board shanty. Its door and simple window were entwined with morning-glories and scarlet runners that took the morning sunshine beautifully, and on a rainy day shed gleams of red and purple all over the front of the shanty, tangling themselves and peeping out in unexpected crevices even among the slabs on the roof. Indeed, they encroached on the province of a mock-orange, that for two years had kept possession of the roof, and the sturdy vine was obliged to drop its golden fruit among the purple and red bells of the morning-glory, and even to creep off to the back of the shanty, where no one could see the richness and symmetry of its fruits.

Then there was a sweet-briar bush indigenous to the soil, at one end of her dwelling, which Mary Margaret had pruned and caressed into profuse luxuriance; though it was dark, the scent of this bush greeted Catharine as she approached the shanty; with this pleasant sensation she entered her new home almost cheerfully.

The shanty was divided by a board partition into two small rooms, not so untidy as to be repulsive, but rather close to one entering from the fresh night air. The ante-room contained a bed, in which Mary Margaret's sterner half lay sound asleep, after a hard day's toil beneath the hod.

"Whist a bit, while I light the lamp," said Mary Margaret, raking the embers in a portable furnace so hurriedly together that the sparks flew all around her, "let the ould man slape his fill; he must be up and at work by six in the morning."

Catharine hardly drew her breath, for she was seized with terror lest the sleeping man should awake and resent her intrusion into his dwelling.

"Sit down fornent the furnace, while I boil a sup of water for the tay," whispered the hostess, kindling her tin lamp; "jist give Michael's coat and hat a toss and take the chair yersel'; faix! ye look tired and white enough for anything."

Catharine sat down, for she was indeed quite exhausted, and relieved of the anxiety that had tortured her so long, she almost fell asleep while Mary Margaret made her tea, and cut the loaf which had been carefully put aside for the family breakfast.

There was not much refinement in Mary Margaret's method of serving up her meals; but she certainly made an effort to render things rather genteel than otherwise. A clean sheet, taken from a pile of clothes ready to be sent home, was folded twice and laid on the table for a cloth, and Mary brought forth an old china cup in an earthenware saucer, which she garnished with a pewter spoon, as an especial honor to her guest.

As for herself, she sipped her portion of the "tay" daintily from a little tin cup that belonged to the youngest child.

With all its drawbacks, this was a delicious meal to poor Catharine, and she partook of it with a sense of gratitude so full and gushing that it amounted almost to happiness. Two or three times she turned her eyes upon Mary Margaret and made an effort to thank her, but the words were lost in a glow of emotions, and she could only falter out, —

"Oh, Mrs. Dillon, how I want to thank you for all this, but no human being ever was so poor, I have not even words."

She spoke with some energy, and before Mrs. Dillon could protest against all this waste of gratitude, which she was just attempting, a cry arose from the bed on one side of Dillon, which was echoed by a half-smothered response from under the blankets close by the wall.

Catharine started to her feet. The faintest cry of an infant was enough to thrill every drop of blood in her veins.

"Whose — whose child is that?" she inquired, breathlessly; "surely I heard *two* voices!"

"In course ye did, and why not?" said Margaret, with a baby under one arm, while she plunged about among the blankets for the little creature next the wall. "Come out here, little felly, and show yer blue eyes to the lady. Isn't he a beauty, out and out?"

Catharine held out her arms for the child, who turned his great blue eyes wonderingly upon the lamp, while the poor young creature was striving to fix them on herself, for her very soul yearned toward the little creature. But the child was obstinate, and gave itself up to admiration of the lamp, while she sat gazing on it through a mist of tears, so sadly, wrapped in fond sorrow, that you would have wept at the very attitude.

"Whose — whose is it?" she asked; "both cannot be yours."

"Ye're right in that entirely," answered Margaret, pouring some milk into the tin cup she had been drinking from and placing it on the embers in the furnace. "It's the nurse child, ye have."

"And who is its mother?" faltered Catharine, pressing the child fondly to her bosom, and laying her pale cheek to its warm little face.

"Ye remember the poor young crathur that had the cot next to yours, and the baby they took away from yez?"

"Yes, oh, yes."

"She died, poor, misfortunate soul! and only that I

would n't stand by and see the baby starve to death by her side, it might have been buried on her bosom. I had a fight wid the nurse, bad luck to her! but the doctor stood by me, and so the little thing got a fair start in the world before he came to you. Faix! but she's a wicked crathur, that nurse."

"I believe she was—I am sure of it!" answered Catharine, in a mournful undertone. "Do you know I sometimes think that my own poor little baby might have lived, if she had taken care of it? Such a large, beautiful—ah, if it had but lived—if it had but lived, nothing could make me quite miserable! Mrs. Dillon, poor, helpless, and deserted as I am, I would give the whole world, if it were mine, only to hold *his* child in my arms as I do this poor, little motherless baby. He has left me—he has left me, but I know that I should worship his child."

"Hist, now hist, or ye'll be after wakin' the old man, though he does not sleep like a pavin'-stone in general; and ye'll be afther breakin' the heart in me busom, too, if ye take so on. Here, feed the poor baby wid a dhrop of the warm milk, while I give this little spalpeen a turn. It'll aise your heart, never fear!"

Here Mary Margaret began shaking her boy, and scolding him heartily for greediness, bringing various charges against him as a young spalpeen and a thaif of the worldt. In this torrent of superfluous words, the tears that had been crowding to her eyes were dispersed, and she sat up, a strong-minded woman once more.

"Ye asked me about the baby there," she said, at length, without appearing to notice the tears that filled poor Catharine's eyes. "That hathenish nurse was nigh gettin' the upper hands of me. You remember how she let on to the doctor that it was drinkin' I'd been when the heavy sickness fell on me after takin' a sup of yer medicine, and he, poor innocent, belaved her, an' took away the child that I was fond of a'most as if it was my own flesh and blood,"

Catharine looked up and inquired how it came about that she got the child back again.

"This is the way," answered Margaret. "I did not like the woman that nurse Kelly gave the little orphan to when ye begged so hard to keep it. The heart in my bosom felt like a cold stone when I saw her gathering it up like a bundle under her shawl. There was starvation and murder in her face; more than that, she was faregathering wid nurse Kelly, an' that was another rason agin her. Well, wid these feelins I could n't eat or sleep wid thinkin' of the child, for it seemed to me as plain as the sun that some harm was coming to the little soul. So afore they sent me away from the hospital I inquired, aisy, ye know, where the woman that had got me baby lived, and it turned out that an acquaintance of my own was in the same tinament. When a week was over, I went to visit my acquaintance—d'ye see—and in an aisy sort o' way asked about the woman and the baby. It was just as I had thought; the woman was niver at home, but went out to her reglar day's work, laving the poor little orphan all alone in a basket, sound asleep, in consequence of the laud'num and them soothin'-drops. I went into the room to see it, and there it lay in an old basket on a heap of rags, wid its little eyes shut, and a purple ring under 'em. It had famished away till its own mother, if she had lived, would n't a known it."

"Well, I could n't stand that, so without sayin' a word I up an' takes the crathur in my arms, and walks off to the Alms house in the Park, and there I laid the child that still slept like a log, down afore the gintlemen that sit there for the good o' the poor, ivery day of the blessed year, and says I,—

"'Are ye magistrates and gintlemen,' says I, 'to sit here while the poor orphan childer that ye should be fathers to,' says I, 'are bein' starved and poisoned with black dhrops under yer honorable noses?' says I. Wid that, afore the

gintlemen could say a word for themselves, I unfolded the rags that the baby was wrapped in, and laid its little legs an' arms huddled together like a fagot afore 'em, and says I agin,—

“‘Look here, if yese got the heart for it, an' see for yer-selves.’

“Thin one of the gintlemen up an' spoke for himself, and says he,—

“‘The nurses are all compelled to bring their children here for inspection once in two weeks, an' the time has but just gone by. How can this be?’ an' he was mighty sorry an' put out, I could see that plain enough.

“‘Yes,’ says I, ‘that’s the truth,’ says I, ‘but it’s aisy enough to borry a show-baby when ivery house where these poor orphans go is runnin’ over wid ‘em, and young babies are all alike as peas in a pod,’ says I, ‘and it must be a cute man to know any of ‘em from one time to another. Just wait a bit,’ says I, ‘if ye don’t belave me, and I’ll show you the very baby that was brought here in the place of this. It’s a plump, hearty little felly, and belongs to an acquaintance of my own.’

“‘Can this be true?’ says one of the gintlemen to another.

“‘True as the gospel,’ says I, spakin’ up boldly, ‘ye’ve been praisen that hathen of a nurse for a baby that did n’t belong til ye, and this poor thing has been starved down to nothin’.’

“‘Well,’ says the gintleman, for he was a rale gintleman, says he, ‘I’ll send an officer for this woman, and she shall never, to her dying day, have another child from this department. But what can we do wid the poor infant? We must send for a nurse that can be trusted at once.’

“Thin my heart ris into my mouth, and I hugged the baby to me, and says I, wid the tears in my eyes, says I, ‘Let me have the child to nurse, I’ll be a mother til it, an’ more too, if that’ll satisfy ye.’

“Well, the long and short of it was, they thanked me

kindly for comin’, and give me the baby, wid a dollar a week for takin’ care of it. So when the nurse came home, expectin’ to find it dead in its basket, there was nothin’ for her but a bundle of rags, and a perlice officer to take her down to the Park.”

“Thank God!” exclaimed Catharine, with a burst of gratitude, kissing the child again and again. “It was a brave act, Mrs. Dillon, and the child will live to bless you for it as — as I do.”

“In course he will,” replied Mary Margaret, “for it’s just a miracle the saints might wonder at that he lived at all. At first, ye see, considerin’ his starvin’ condition, I just give me own little felly the could shoulder, and turned him over to the tin porriger; but he got on well enough, niver fear; and the little stranger begun to thrive as ye niver seen in yer born days.”

“He has indeed found a kind mother,” said Catharine, thoughtfully. “But how long will they let you keep him?”

“Well, it’s two years that they put the babies to nurse. I’m tould,” answered Mary, reluctantly.

“And after that?”

“Thin they are sent up to the Almshouse, and after that bound out; if they happen to be killing purty like this one, maybe some rich gintleman or lady up and adopts ‘em and makes a lord of ‘em entirely. Some day you and I will see them blue eyes a-looking at us through a carriage-windy, and I’ll be bound he’ll bow and smile as if we were the real quality itself.”

Catharine became very thoughtful during this prophecy, and turned her eyes away from the child, as if its innocent face gave her pain.

“Niver mind,” interposed her hostess, interpreting her look with that subtile magnetism with which one true womanly heart reads another.

“A great many things may happen in two years, with the

blessings of the saints, so don't be getting down-hearted; there's a God above all!"

"I know it," answered Catharine, gazing with sad tenderness on the child; "but it makes my heart ache to think what may become of this poor baby."

"There now, hand it over, and go to your bed with the childer; it's gettin' down in the mouth ye are, and all for not eatin' a hearty meal whin ye had it to the fore," exclaimed Mary Margaret, depositing her offspring by its sleeping father, and reaching out her arms for the other child. "There, there, go yer ways now; just push the childer aisy a one side, an' make yerself content on half their straw bed on the floor, and a comfortable bed may ye find it."

Catharine arose to obey this hospitable command, but Mary Margaret called her back.

"See here; is n't it as like the holy cross now as two paces?" she said, putting the soft hair back from the baby's temple, and revealing a crimson mark that really had a cruciform appearance, small and delicate as it was.

"Is n't he born to be a saint now!" exclaimed the Irish woman, exultingly.

"Or a martyr, perhaps," said Catharine; and she walked sadly into the little room pointed out by her hostess.

CHAPTER XXV.

SEEKING FOR HELP.

CATHARINE was content in her new home. She had been so completely worn out with suffering and excitement, that any place, which insured quiet and rest, was a heaven to her.

Besides, she found objects of interest in that humble shanty that won her thoughts quietly from her own grief. She was so young and naturally so hopeful, that anything calculated to arouse affection in her nature visited it with soft healing. The nurse's child awoke her heart from its sorrow with a strange influence, thrilling and sweet. She would hold it fondly on her lap, smooth its silken hair with her fingers, kiss its soft lips, its sleepy eyes, and its plump little foot, with an outgush of tenderness that seemed more than motherly. With all her gratitude to Mary Margaret, she could not so caress and love her loud-voiced, hearty little boy. She could not even grieve over the loss of her own child, with that little creature lifting its soft, wondering eyes to her own so earnestly.

Catharine loved to sit in the back-door of the shanty—with the mock orange-vine and the morning-glories framing her in, as if she had been one of those golden-haired Madonnas that Guido loved to paint, creations that seem half air, half light—and caress the child, that was joy enough for her.

Mary Margaret being out most of the day, Catharine was left to the healthful influences of these tender associations. She was still very pale, and her eyes were circled with shadows, like those that trembled upon the wall from the half-open morning-glories, but she began to feel less desolate, and as if neither God nor man had entirely forsaken her.

With all her gentleness and delicacy, Catharine had become precocious in many things. She had many firm and settled thoughts beyond her years. Suffering had done a holy work with that young soul, and while the dews of first youth were on her nature, she was rich in pure womanly principle. She felt that it was wrong to remain a burden on her poor friends. Yet when she thought of going, a pang smote her, and it seemed as if her young heart must be uprooted afresh before she could give the child up.

Poor, motherless girl, and childless mother! She was not yet eighteen, and so delicate that it seemed as if a blast of air might prostrate her.

Two weeks passed in comparative tranquillity. No one inquired after Catharine; and she might have been dead for all her former friends knew or cared about the matter. Her aunt believed her to be with Madame De Marke, and that wicked old woman neither asked, nor cared, what had befallen her.

One morning, before Mary Margaret went out to her day's work, Catharine spoke of her determination to find employment for herself. At first, the kind woman objected, but her good sense directly came into action, and she saw how impossible it was that a creature so superior should be long content with a life in her humble abode.

But what could Catharine do? She understood a little of millinery and ornamental needle-work, but well she knew the precariousness of resources like these to a homeless female. One thing was certain, she must henceforth depend on herself. Her relatives had forsaken her. The husband whom she had so fatally trusted was gone, she knew not whither—gone, she had been told, to avoid her, and to cast off the responsibilities which were to burden her so fatally. This was the bitter drop in Catharine's cup. This was the arrow that pierced her, wherever she turned. She could not entirely believe evil of the man she had loved, but her soul was troubled with a doubt more painful than certainty.

Still, something must be done. She could not remain there, a helpless burden upon the industry of others.

Mary Margaret entered into her feelings with prompt tact. But what step could be taken? With no one to recommend her, scarcely possessed of decent clothes to wear, without the power to explain the miseries of her condition, who would receive her? These considerations daunted even Mary Margaret, but at last a bright idea seized upon the good woman; she began to see her way out of the difficulty.

"There are societies," she said, "in New York, with oceans of money, just got up for the purpose of helping innocent crathurs when the world casts them adrift. What if Catharine applied to one of these societies? The directors were all ladies that would, of course, have feeling for their fellow-creatures." Margaret had seen their names in the papers, and that was a crown of glory in her estimation.

Catharine brightened with the idea. A band of benevolent women, with abundant means and gentle compassion, ready for poor wanderers like her. It promised to be an oasis in the desert of her life. In every one of those women she imagined an angel of mercy ready to receive and comfort her.

It seemed a great blessing that so much benevolence could be concentrated at one point, harvesting year after year for the good of humanity. Yes! she would apply to this society; if destitution and misery was a claim, where could a better right than hers be found? These angel-women would give her employment, they would point out some way of usefulness that she could pursue in peace.

Mary Margaret gave up her day's work, and accompanied Catharine to the home of benevolence. It would have done your heart good to hear those unsophisticated creatures congratulating each other that so much good yet existed in the world, and that women could be found willing to devote their fortunes and precious time to the helpless and the unfortunate.

"Of course," said Mary Margaret, "they'll see the whole truth in yer innocent eyes at once, and all ye'll have to do 'ill be just to hold out yer hand and take the money that their blissed hearts 'ill be jumpen to give. I should n't wonder now," continued the good woman, warming with her subject, "if one of the ladies should insist on takin' ye into her own house and makin' a lady on ye entirely."

Catharine smiled. There was something so hopeful in

her companion's voice, that she could not help yielding to its influence, though her heart was very heavy at the thought of leaving the poor orphan child, who had woven itself so closely around her wounded affections.

At length their walk terminated. Mary Margaret rang, with no abatement of confidence, at the door of a large house, occupied by one of the principal officers of a society abundantly endowed by the trusting charity of many Christian women — generous, noble women, who, like our two friends, fancied that an institution like this could only be guarded by angels on earth, long-suffering, self-sacrificing angels, whose holy mission common mortals must not dare to investigate, much less condemn.

The door was opened by a woman, who received them with an air peculiar to those who have been inmates of our penitentiaries. Her manner was subdued into a sleek, unnatural quietness, more revolting than her original audacity would have been.

"The lady-directress was within," she said, "but engaged just then. They could sit down in the hall and wait, if they liked, or come again."

There was something about the atmosphere of the house that chilled Catharine to the soul, and even Mary Margaret, whose faith in humanity would have extracted sunbeams from a snow-drift, felt anxious and depressed.

The hall was very cold, and they were chilled with the wind of a bleak November day. Catharine shivered beneath her thin shawl, and Mary Margaret insisted on folding a portion of her own gray cloak around her, using this as an excuse for a hearty embrace or two, which left the poor girl a little less nervous and disconsolate than she would have been.

Once or twice a side-door opened, and some poor, want-stricken woman came out, and moved slowly toward the front door. Catharine observed that there was a look of angry defiance on one face, and that another was bathed

in tears. She wondered strangely at this. Why should the poor women go away from a place like that, angry or weeping? These thoughts made her shrink closer to Mary Margaret, and she longed to ask that kind creature to leave the place and take her home again.

Three persons had come out from the side-door, and gone forth to the street with sullen, discontented faces, when our two friends were summoned from the hall.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PROFESSED PHILANTHROPIST.

THE two friends entered a parlor elaborately furnished, and warmed to a degree that made Catharine faint, coming in as she did from the cold air of the hall. A table, with a small desk upon it, stood before the fire, and between that and the cheerful blaze sat a tall and exceedingly sanctimonious person, clothed in a blue merino dress, gathered in folds around the waist and fitting tightly at the throat.

Catharine's heart sunk as she met this woman's eyes, the expression was so schooled — the sleek, hypocritical air was so transparent. She had evidently assumed the saint, till she absolutely believed in her own infallibility. Hollow and selfish to the core, she had no idea that it was not a praiseworthy and most holy action to sit in pampered ease from morning to night, and use the money provided by the truly benevolent as a means patronizing and wounding those who were compelled to submit to her unwomanly curiosity and sly dictation.

This woman had subdued her thin, tallowy features into sanctimonious meekness so long, and had bedewed them so often with tears which came obedient to her wish, that she

had obtained the look of one ready to burst into a holy fit of weeping, because all the world was not formed upon the model of her own immaculate self. Whenever an applicant appeared before her, a watery compassion for the wickedness, for which she always gave credit in advance, suffused her cold eyes. Even her hair partook of the general character, and was smoothed back from that narrow forehead with a precision that nothing less than a tornado could have ruffled.

In truth, Mrs. Brown, whom we have seen before in all her glory, was a finished character. The only human feeling to which she ever gave way was that of intense self-adulation. Even in her prayers she could not refrain from thanksgiving, that one perfect type of human perfection had still been left to a sinful world.

This woman was an absolute study, if poor Catharine had possessed the experience or the will to read her. She had worked so hard in thoroughly forming the character she had so long assumed, that it seemed to be her own. Her tall, precise figure, the slim, long hand, of a dead white and always cold, the narrow face with its dull pallor, — all these were greatly in her favor; but there was one feature of the demure face not quite under subjection. The long nose harmonized with the drooping features both in form and color, but just at the end — as if her true nature must break forth somewhere — it glowed out with a fiery redness marvellous to behold. All the heat and color that should have warmed her thin lips, centred there, as if the nose had instituted some private experiments on the merits of the excise law, and had resolved to keep its pleasant researches a secret from the other sanctimonious features.

"Well," said the benevolent lady, softly, folding her hands over each other and back again, with solemn graciousness, "well!"

Catharine leaned upon the table for support. The very presence of this woman made her faint. Her own sensitive

nature recoiled from the hollow mockery of benevolence sitting in state before her.

Mary Margaret saw how pale the poor girl became and ran for a chair.

"She is sickly, ma'am, for all them red cheeks as she had a minute ago, and it's tiresome standin' long," said the good woman, planting herself by the seat which she had thus considerably provided, with a feeling that after all the place was not quite a paradise.

"I do not object to the young person sitting down if she is ill," said Mrs. Brown, with a wave of the hand, "but if she is so feeble as that, I would remind you that this is not a hospital."

"I am not ill, madam," said Catharine, with feeling, "but I am homeless and almost friendless."

"Then," said Mrs. Brown, bowing blandly, and caressing her hands again, "this is your proper home; that is, providing you can be made useful to the cause, and know how to feel sufficient respect for the dignity of the Board."

"I trust," answered Catharine, gently, "that I shall not be deficient in proper respect for anything that is in itself respectable."

"What!" ejaculated the lady of professional benevolence, sharply, while the bloom on her nose grew radiant, "perhaps I didn't understand you?"

"I merely intended to say, madam, that anything which is true and upright, never can lack respect. Even wicked people are forced to reverence goodness."

"Very true, very true. I have often felt this when addressed by individuals who — who claim help here. Sometimes one is forced to bring the duty of respect before them in forcible language; but it is sure to come, sometimes in silent homage, sometimes in tears, sometimes with sullen discontent; but it's sure to come, before a dollar is paid out from the funds of this institution."

"Well," said Mary Margaret, innocently; "if yer ladyship buys up respect by the dollar's worth, I'm just the person that'll sell bushel-baskets full at a time, especially regarding yer honor's ladyship, for I'm brimming over with reverence for ye, from the crown of yer head to the sowl of yer foot, and ye're welcome to it all; only give this poor young crathur a helpen' hand into the wide, wide world again. It isn't for the likes of her to be kept in a shanty like ours, anyhow."

Even this singular blending of irony and blarney had its effect upon the Lady-Bountiful, who had learned to feed her voracious vanity with husks as well as grain. She smiled sublime condescension on the buxom Irish woman, and gave her hands an extra twirl, stretching her neck and rustling her dress like a heron pluming itself.

"You seem a very sensible woman. Such warmth of piety does you credit," she said. "It is persons like you, strong and healthy, ready to work in return for our charity, and to feel the depth of the benefit conferred, that our Society rejoices in helping. How many children have you, my good woman?"

Mary Margaret gave the number of her children, finishing with a burst of maternal eulogium on the health and beauty of the youngest-born.

"Then," she continued, "there is the little charity baby, just as good as my own, that's got a face like an angel's, and eats like a hathen. Arrah, but that's the boy for ye, with his soft, sunshiny hair, and eyes like the bluest robin's egg; to say nothing of the old man, who wins mate and drink for us all, when there's work to be had."

"Then you did not come for help?"

"Not on me own account, yer ladyship's reverence, if I may call ye so on account of the beauty and holiness that's in ye. There is potaties growin' in the bit of garden, and a pig at the back door, that'll keep the hunger out yet a while;

but this sweet young crathur, if yer reverential piety will just turn itself on her!"

"So many children, and a husband without work! that is a hard case," persisted the Lady-Bountiful brimming over with gratified vanity, which she solemnly believed to be an outburst of charity,—"something must be done for you. Wait a moment."

The lady arose, opened a store-room adjoining her parlor, and after some research, drew forth a pair of heavy, woollen stockings, which some blessed old farmer's wife had sent down to the city in a donation of old clothes, firm in the belief that her little mite would work out a miracle of redemption somewhere among the reprobates of a great city.

"Here," she said, with a look of intense benevolence, holding out the yarn stockings, which, by the way, were not mates, "take these, and, in gratitude to the Society, make a good use of them. Don't use our benevolence as an excuse for waste and idleness; but remember that an obligation like this, received unworthily, can never prove a permanent blessing. Take them, good woman, and while you receive our bounty with a just appreciation of its value, we will remember you in our prayers."

It was beautiful to see the tears spring up, cold and heavy, like melting hail-stones, into those lustreless eyes, as the hackneyed philanthropist, overwhelmed with the magnitude of her own virtues, held out the huge, moth-eaten stockings to the astonished Irish woman.

"Don't hold back; you may accept the charity of our Society without fear; beneficence is its most heavenly attribute. You see before you a proof that where the object is worthy, we are always ready to be liberal."

Mary Margaret took the stockings, tucked one under her arm, while she thrust her hand into the other, which came out at an opening in the heel, doubled-up like a sledge-hammer.

Catharine, amid all her anxiety, could not prevent the smile, that quivered on her lips, from breaking into a low laugh.

The Lady-Bountiful gave her a look of solemn indignation, which Mary Margaret was quick to observe.

"She's overjoyed at my good luck, yer ladyship," said the kind woman, withdrawing her hand into the foot of the stocking; "ye don't know what a grateful crathur she is, always smiling like that when good comes to a friend. Now I dare say she was thinkin' that a ball of yarn, and a darnin'-needle, would make these the most iligant pair of stockings that an honest man can put on his feet; and she knows, too, that I'm the woman that can darn as well as the queen herself. Now, marm, that you've overcome me with your goodness intirely, just give her a turn of your ladyship's benevolence."

"She looks sickly. Besides, I'm afraid she will prove one of the stiff-necked and rebellious class of persons whose ingratitude has pierced the Society so often. But I will ask her a few questions. Will the individual tell me where she was born?"

"Is it important that you should know?" questioned Catharine, in a suppressed voice.

"Certainly; justice may be blind, but charity never is!"

"I have no reason for concealment; but it seems an unnecessary question. I do not ask for money, or charity of any kind. I supposed that a society, established for benevolent purposes, would gladly help an honorable girl to obtain some means of earning her own livelihood. It is not charity that I ask, but help; such as one woman may give to another, quietly and with a feeling of sisterhood. This is what I expected."

"Then you refuse to answer my questions. How am I to know whether you are worthy or not?"

"If I were unworthy, would you be likely to learn it from

my own lips? But I will not refuse; it may be necessary. I was born in the city."

"What is your name? Who are your relatives? How came you here?"

Catharine turned deathly pale and trembled. For the first time in her life she came near assuming her husband's name. It was an act of disobedience, for, until his return, he had forbidden this; but she shrunk from her own name as if it were a disgrace; it seemed to her that every one must know that she was a childless mother. She hesitated, her color came and went, the fear of disgrace struggled hard against her natural dread of assuming her husband's name unauthorized. At last her resolution was taken. She would risk everything rather than disobey the man whom she had loved and trusted so entirely. He might be false to her, but she would still hold firm to her promise — never till he came back would she take his name.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A CHARITABLE CROSS-EXAMINATION.

WHILE Catharine reflected, that woman's cold eyes were upon her, passionless and steady as if she quietly enjoyed the crimson as it flushed and paled on her face.

At last Catharine gave her maiden name, but it was in a low, faltering voice, and with a sharp struggle to keep the tears from her eyes.

"You are single, of course?" questioned the woman, suspiciously eying her from head to foot.

"No, I have been married."

"And is this your husband's name?"

Catharine clasped her hands so tightly, that the blood left them even to the rounded nails. She looked at Mary Margaret and at her cold, hard questioner, as if she would have asked pity even with those eyes upon her.

"No," she answered, at last, "it is not his name; I have never borne it."

"Why?"

"We were married privately, and without his mother's consent."

"I thought so — I was sure of it," exclaimed the woman, softly, caressing her hands again, as if they had detected the wrong in this young girl's character, and she was assuring them of her approbation. "And so you were married privately, without his mother's consent, and without certificate, I dare say?"

"No, I had a certificate," replied Catharine, with tears of shame and anger in her eyes. "I had a certificate, but it is gone — lost or stolen, I suppose."

"Lost or stolen — where?"

"At the hospital, when I was sick."

"Oh! ha. So you have been in the institution. I thought so — I thought so!" cried the woman, with cold exultation.

"In what ward did they place you?"

Catharine did not shrink or tremble now. There was nothing in the remembrance of her maternal anguish and bereavement, to burn her cheek with shame, though it might be blanched with sorrow. She answered firmly, but in a low voice,—

"I was a wife, and they put me among those who had become mothers in their poverty."

"A wife — a mother — and no certificate — that seems strange; — and you even say it to me, me — a lady whose life has been one series of the most perfect rectitude — me, President of this Board, a person who has passed through the very dregs of sin in her pious search after objects of charity,

and kept herself white as snow all the time. Are you not afraid that these uncontaminated boards will shrink apart beneath your feet, as they witness this attempt to impose on us?"

Catharine had learned "to suffer and grow strong." Child as she was in all worldly things, there lay a power in her nature that rose to defend the innocence thus coarsely arraigned. She was pale, but it was a proud, calm pallor, which told how powerfully the blood had flowed back upon her heart, as an army gathers around a citadel when fiercely assailed.

"I have not attempted to impose on you, madam. Circumstances may be against me; still, you know in your innermost heart that what I have said is the truth. But why do you ask these questions? Who gives you authority to tear out the secrets from a human soul, before you will extend help to a fellow-creature who only asks the means of earning her own bread in humble peace? What if I were all that you think me, a weak, betrayed, or, if you will, a wicked young creature — am I the less an object of charity, or of kindness? Have I ceased to be a human being with human wants? Was it thus that our Saviour received the erring and the sinful? Is it thus that our God deals with them here, and at this day? Does he forbid them to earn their bread by honest labor, because of sins that may have been repented of? Does he withhold the sunshine, the rain, and the blossoms of the earth from their enjoyment? I ask you again, would it be a just reason for withholding food and shelter from me, if I *had* done all the wrong you suspect?"

The Lady-Philanthropist really seemed a little moved. A vague speculation came into her eyes, and the yellowish-white of her complexion became ashen; but it was with rage at this unheard-of audacity, not with any gentle acknowledgment of the truth in that young creature's words.

As Catharine ceased speaking, the woman of many virtues

folded the skirt of her dress closer about her person, as if to shield herself from the contagion of such sinful audacity, and sunk into a cold, Pharisaical attitude again.

"Oh," she said, with her eyes lifted devoutly to the cornice, "I sometimes wonder that these sacred walls — yes, I may be excused for calling them sacred, for are they not consecrated to charity? — I sometimes wonder that these walls do not fall down and crush the audacious wickedness that sometimes intrudes itself here. Young person, it is not that you have committed this heinous wrong which offends me. Our society is founded in sin, and established in iniquity. Our mission is more particularly to the sinful, and from them is derived our chief glory; but every one who comes here must contribute something to the cause. Are you willing to become an example, to confess your manifold sins, and give the particulars of your dissolute life, that they can be advertised in the public prints, and embodied in our own annual reports, setting forth the repentance which our kindness and prayers have wrought in you, and the heroism with which you published your crimes that others may take warning? By this means, my dear child, you will not only be snatched as a brand from the burning, but the cause will be strengthened, and means will flow in to secure other cases like your own; by this confession, our country friends, who have done so much for the regeneration of this vile city, will be satisfied that we are up and doing, in season and out of season."

The woman had arisen and taken Catharine's hand in both hers, during the latter portion of this speech. The cold tears dropped, one by one, from her eyes, and rolled with sanctimonious slowness down her cheeks.

"What is it that you desire of me?" said Catharine, bewildered by this solemn acting. "What have I done?"

"What do I desire? Why, that you confess and forsake your sin, but especially confess. I am ready and willing

to take down every word of the fearful narrative, as it falls from your lips. Oh! my dear child, you have it in your power to aid us in accomplishing a great work — begin, dear child, begin!"

The woman seated herself at the table, and took up a steel pen, sharp and hard as herself, which she dipped in an inkstand, shook lightly, and held ready to pounce on a sheet of paper, already arranged, the moment Catharine's lips should uncloze.

"Come, my poor, sweet child, don't hesitate; take up the cross and begin; what was the first step?"

"Madam, I do not understand. What do you wish me to say? I have done wrong in marrying my husband without the consent of his mother, but beyond this I have nothing but grief and poverty to confess!"

Again the tears rolled down that woman's face. She sighed heavily and shrouded her forehead with one hand. Then she shook her head, and looked mournfully at the two women, muttering something in a solemn undertone.

At last she lifted up her head, and smiled benignly.

"I see. This is a case that requires time. I will lay it before the Board. Doubtless the good seed has been planted in our conversation, to-day, and the sisters will strengthen my hands to reap in due season."

"Then you will find the sweet crathur a place and recommend her entirely!" exclaimed Mary Margaret, coming to the point at once.

"We will, as I have just said, take her case into consideration," replied the directress, blandly. "You can go home, good woman, for according to your light I do not doubt that you are good. This person can remain here; I should prefer to have her directly under my own care."

Mary Margaret hesitated, and looked wistfully at Catharine, who returned the glance with a look of gentle submission that went to the poor woman's heart.

"I'll come to-morrow, and bring both the babies with me, niver fear," she said, struggling to keep back her tears; "and remember, darlint, if the worst comes to the worst, there's the shanty and the childer, where ye'll be welcome as the blissed sunshine every day of the year. So don't be down-hearted, or put upon by that cowl'd-hearted lady, or the likes of her, any how."

The latter portion of this speech was delivered in a whisper; and wringing Catharine's hand, Mary Margaret went out, with some new ideas of professional philanthropy that puzzled her honest brain not a little. A motherly old woman passed her in the hall. She was dressed in black silk and had an old-fashioned Methodist bonnet on, which varied but slightly from those worn by strict Quakers, and which are lost sight of now, save by a few old primitive Wesleyans, like the woman we are introducing.

The old woman stood aside, to allow the Irish woman a free passage, and looked after her with a kind, genial smile, which almost asked if the great-hearted Christian could do the Irish woman any good.

Mary Margaret understood the look and answered it at once.

"If ye could only say a kind word for the young crathur in yonder now," she whispered, confidentially, "she's as innocent as a baby, and so handy about house; if ye could only take her home with yoursel' now, it'd be like letting the blissed sunshine into yer door."

"Who is it?" questioned Mrs. Barr, — "a child?"

"Almost, and yet she's been the mother of a child."

"Poor thing!" said the old lady.

"You may well say that — but she's the innocentest crathur in the wide world. So please believe everything she says. It's true, every word of it."

The old woman looked into Mary Margaret's eyes an instant, searchingly, but with kindness, and answered, —

"Yes, if you say it is true, I shall believe it."

"God bless ye forever and ever for that same!" exclaimed the Irish woman warmly, and she went out, satisfied that she had obtained a friend for her protégé.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

JANE KELLY ON HER TRIAL.

THE morning on which Jane Kelly was to have her hearing, found Madame De Marke punctual. The judge, who recognized her real position, was comparatively deferential; for wealth, even when allied with degradation, is not without power. Besides, her manner, as on the evening before, bespoke considerable knowledge of good society and its usages.

Madame De Marke repeated the conversation which she had already stated. A lawyer, employed by her, was also in attendance. Jane was without professional aid.

"The case seems clear," said the judge, when Madame De Marke had closed her testimony. "What have you to say? You may speak now!" he added, turning to the prisoner.

The girl had frequently interrupted Madame De Marke until the judge had sternly ordered her, more than once, to keep silence; and now her suppressed rage found short and bitter words.

"She deserves the State's prison more than I do!" cried Jane, white with passion, and looking at Madame De Marke as if she could have stabbed her to the heart. "She is ten thousand times worse than a thief" —

"Stick to the point," interposed the judge. "The question is not, what this lady may, or may not have done; but what proof there is that you did not steal the jewel."

"Proof! Does anybody want proof that she is black-hearted, treacherous, lying, cowardly, a secret murderer?" raved the girl. "Yes, a murderer! She wanted me to commit murder,—to let a sweet young creature starve on her sick-bed, and tried to bribe me with that very ear-ring. And now she says I stole it."

"Have you any proof of this?"

"Proof! Proof again! What proof is there, but her word, that I took the ear-ring!" said Jane, with quick shrewdness, a thing she was not deficient in, when rage did not overmaster her entirely. "My word ought to be as good as hers. She says I stole the ring, and I say she gave it to me; what proof has she that her story is a bit truer than mine?"

"She swears to it."

"I'll swear to mine."

"That the law does not allow. An accused person cannot be a witness in his or her own behalf."

"But the accuser may be a witness for her side."

"No. It is the Commonwealth that prosecutes, and the accuser is only a witness for the State."

Jane broke forth indignantly—"You dare to call this justice! Such pitiful stuff you name 'the wisdom of the law!'"

She spoke these last words with bitter scorn. "If some one would come, and swear that you, the judge, had stolen, you'd have to believe 'em, ha! ha!"

"Order!" cried an officer, horrified.

"Order! order!" shouted the equally horrified clerk.

"No, I'll not come to order," she cried, raising her voice to a scream of rage. "It's God's truth, that I'm innocent, and that yonder woman tried to buy me to do murder; and she ought to be here instead of me. You let her swear me into prison, and won't let me swear what a lie it is. You're in league against me, every one of you," and she glared

around on the court like a wild beast. "Justice! You call this justice! The devils themselves are more just—"

She was proceeding in this mad way, when the police-officer, rushing up to her, actually dashed his hand over her mouth, crying, "This can't be. Respect the court. Will you be silent, you jail-bird? We'll gag you completely if you don't hush up."

Exhausted by her frantic rage, not less than by her struggle with the officer, Jane soon fell back, panting and exhausted, in the prisoners' seat. When the decorum of the court had been restored, the case went on again; and as the girl had no testimony to offer, the magistrate committed her, and in default of bail meantime, sent her back to the Tombs again.

In due time, her case came up for trial, when the same testimony was repeated against her. But on this occasion, no such scene of disorder occurred as had marked the preliminary examination. Jane, finding how useless were her recriminations, had now sunk into a sullen silence. Only, when asked what she had to say in her defence, she repeated her charge against Madame De Marke, adding,—

"It's as true as there's a God in heaven, whether you believe it or not. You take that woman's oath, and won't take mine; because she's rich, I suppose, and I'm poor. She had nobody by to certify to her story any more than I had. I don't wonder, with such laws, that your State's prison is full."

The judge, however, was not convinced. He charged the jury that the jewel was found in her possession; that she was a character well known to the police; and that the story she told was inconsistent in itself. "Still," he added, "you are the judges of the fact, gentlemen; and if you disbelieve Madame De Marke, you must acquit."

The jury did not even leave the box. They had unanimously come to the conclusion that the prisoner was guilty,

and immediately rendered a verdict to that effect. Yet in after-days, more than one of them had occasion to remember that trial, and their share in it, with something more than doubt.

Jane was sentenced to prison for the full period that the law allowed. Madame De Marke's serpent-like eyes watched her victim closely, while the judge was pronouncing this severe sentence; and the momentary spasm which passed over the prisoner's face was a welcome sight to her selfish heart.

But neither natural inhumanity, nor revenge itself, were the sole feelings gratified by this sentence. That night, as Madame De Marke sat alone, she rubbed her withered hands together with a chuckling laugh, and said to herself,—

"I have 'em safe now. The child is dead. The girl who got it out of the way is in the State prison; and even when she gets out, her testimony won't be received in any court in this country, for convicts are not competent witnesses, ha! ha! This Catharine," she added, with sudden bitterness, "she's dead, no doubt, by this time. People soon die, in New York," she added, with cold-blooded calculation, "if they are starving and delicate. She looked like a ghost—had a cough—hacked away like anything."

The old woman rubbed her hands again with savage glee, and her eyes fairly emitted light in the darkness. "To boast she had married my son! I'll teach 'em all to cross my path. I'll teach 'em. I'll teach 'em."

Mumbling this, she went about her room, preparatory to retiring, in order to see again that all the fastenings were safe. Nor was her sleep, that night, broken by remorseful dreams, as might have been supposed. God's time had not come yet, if, indeed, it was to come in this world.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SHELTERED AT LAST.

WHEN the members of the Board had all assembled, Catharine was again subjected to the ordeal of an examination. This repetition of what seemed to her an uncalled-for curiosity was almost more than she could endure; and if it had not been for the kind Methodist, Mrs. Barr, who continually interfered in her behalf, she would, more than once, have broken down in a passion of tears.

"You can retire now to the adjoining room," said the Lady-Philanthropist, at last. "Meantime, we will take your case into consideration. But," she added, looking around on her fellow-members, "it is not clear to me, by any means, that you are a deserving object of our charity. You appear to have a thoroughly hard and ungrateful heart, and to want that penitence so becoming in one who has sinned greatly."

Poor Catharine! When she found herself alone, she could no longer restrain herself, but sobbed out her grief and mortification in a passion of weeping.

"Oh! if I could find anything to do—anywhere—no matter with whom," she cried, in bitter grief, "I would leave this cruel place this moment." The poor girl took her hands from her eyes, and looked around, half rising as if about to go. "But no! no!" she said, sitting down once more, and burying her face again. "I cannot be a burden on those poor Irish people any longer. I must stay away, even if I starve. I must put up with any indignity. Oh, George! George! how I suffer, could you but know what I have suffered!"

The hum of voices, in the adjoining room, occasionally increased to almost an altercation. But Catharine, absorbed

by grief, did not notice this. She remained silently weeping for quite half an hour, when her attention was suddenly aroused by a hand laid upon her shoulder.

She looked up. It was the kind Methodist lady, who had interceded for her so strenuously. Catharine was ignorant that Mary Margaret had met this good woman in the hall, yet the motherly face, the plain, unpretending manner, and those words of benevolent intercession, had impressed the forlorn girl, and she knew that if she had a friend in the world besides the humble Irish nurse, that friend was now before her. The poor girl looked up, with an attempt at a smile, therefore; but it was such a faint, sickly struggle, that her visitor's heart ached to see it.

"My poor child!" said the old lady.

The tears swelled into Catharine's eyes. There was sympathy, and the promise of aid, in the very tones of this old Christian's voice. It had been long since she had seen so kind a countenance, or heard such soothing language, except from the untutored Mary Margaret.

"My name is Mrs. Barr," said the lady, after a pause. "I am disposed to be your friend. Would you like to go and live with me?"

Catharine's face lighted up as if she were transfigured. Emotion made her dumb. But she grasped the hand held out between both her own, and covered it with grateful kisses.

"There, there," said Mrs. Barr, with tears in her own eyes, "I am but a poor, human creature, and not worthy of such gratitude. Nor is it much I can do for you, either, my child. I am not blessed with a superfluity of this world's goods. But what I have, you shall share, at least till we can look about for something better."

"God will repay you, dear madam," said Catharine, filled with tender thanksgiving; "but, oh, tell me it is all yourself, I cannot endure to be helped by this Society."

"The Society will not have anything to do with it, my child."

"I am so thankful."

Mrs. Barr shook her head.

"My child," she said, "it is natural for you to speak so, but I fear it is wrong nevertheless. My colleagues mean well; at least I hope so," she added, quickly; "but experience has made them suspicious, for they are continually being deceived. Some of them, I fear, have little tact in reading character," she added, soothingly, "and judge many as impostors till their innocence is proved. But sometimes I cannot help differing with them a little. Our Saviour, when on earth, taught us infinite charity. I like your face, too. I believe you innocent." Oh, what a look of thankfulness Catharine gave her at these words! "So let us dismiss this subject now, and forever.

"I can't bring the members to think as I do; for the lady you first saw is prejudiced against you, and has filled the others with her suspicions; but," the old lady continued, "you shall not suffer. Come home with me. I have some sewing I want done, and when that is finished, God, perhaps, will find an opening for you. We will trust in him. Shall it be so, my dear?"

If there were only more such people in this world, as that good Methodist woman, how many poor creatures, almost driven to despair, might be made happy.

Catharine said this to herself, again and again, as she followed Mrs. Barr home. It was not an elegant residence, scarcely even what would be called a comfortable one, but it was clean, tidy, and cheerful; Catharine felt that she had found a haven, at least for the present, and for the future she trusted in God, as good Mrs. Barr had so hopefully bade her do.

"This is the only apartment I have to give you," said that lady, as she ushered Catharine into an attic, freshly white-

washed, with a bed of spotless snow in one corner, "but it has the advantage of having no other occupant. I have but one servant, who sleeps in the next attic; she is a middle-aged, kind-hearted woman, who will never interfere with, and may often be of assistance to you. To-day shall be a holiday, you look worn out; so we will put off work till to-morrow. You may either rest here, or go to see your friend, whom I met in the hall; perhaps it would relieve her mind to know that you are cared for, at least for a time."

Catharine felt as if a new world was opened to her. It was not only that the fear of actual starvation was past, but that the motherly manner of Mrs. Barr had restored faith and hope to her heart, both of which had been nearly shipwrecked. Oh, if we could but remember, that, in bestowing charity, words of kind encouragement often go further than almsgiving. The latter only relieves present necessities, the former restores new energy to the fainting wayfarer on life's stony highway.

When Mrs. Barr left Catharine, the poor girl's strength gave way and she sank down helplessly on the bed. She intended, however, to rest a little while only, half an hour or so, and then to set forth for Mary Margaret's. But almost immediately she sunk into a deep slumber, which lasted for nearly three hours; and when this was over, she found, on going down stairs, that the hour for dinner had come. But she started, at last, for the humble dwelling of the Irish nurse.

"Shure, and you look like another crathur, darlint," were Mary Margaret's words, before Catharine could speak. "They did the dacent thing for yees, at last, the saints bless them for that same! But come in and see the childer. The poor baby, would ye belave it, has pined for yees all day."

When Catharine came to tell her story in full, Mary Margaret broke out into an eloquent invective against the

Society, but especially against the Lady-Philanthropist, Mrs. Brown. Catharine, however, checked her, repeating what Mrs. Barr had said.

"Well, well, darlint," was the reply, "she's a good woman, shure she is; and may the sun always shine about her steps. So we'll say nothing, for her sake, consarpin' the others—the desateful, hypocritical—well, well, I've stopped intirely."

CHAPTER XXX.

MADAME DE MARKE AND HER PET.

MADAME DE MARKE was alone in the miserable room over her own warehouse, down in the very heart of the city, where, at night-time, human companionship was almost impossible. She was assorting some fragments of meats and vegetables, which were heaped in a basket on her lap, and which she had evidently picked up from the refuse in the market that day.

Nothing more repulsive can be imagined than the appearance of this degraded woman who was now given up entirely to her own grasping avarice. If she ever possessed the slightest traces of beauty, they had vanished long ago, leaving her wrinkled and brown, like old scorched parchment. But it was more the presence of moral deformity in her countenance, than the absence of mere physical comeliness, which rendered her so revolting. A pair of keen, sinister eyes, that glanced suspiciously around; a brow on which craft and avarice were plainly stamped; and a mouth inflexible with cruelty heightened her evil aspect, till it recalled that of the witch, Hecate, when she met Macbeth on the blasted heath.

Her only companion was a cat, about as sinister-looking as herself, that gazed with its one greedy eye on each mouthful, as it was lifted from the basket and laid on a broken plate at the old woman's feet; but hungry as the poor animal certainly was, she had been far too well trained to think of touching the food.

As the miserly old woman proceeded in her occupation, she talked, now snappishly, now caressingly, to her cat, stooping occasionally to smooth its ragged fur with her witch-like hand, or warning it fiercely with her sharp, black eyes, whenever it seemed tempted to stretch forth its paws toward the plate.

Human beings, however depraved, must have something to love, and when creatures of their own kind are driven away from them by repulsion, it often happens that the feelings, which find nothing to rest upon in humanity, turn to domestic animals, or anything that can give back love for love without the power to search or condemn.

Thus it was that this miserable old creature loved the unseemly animal, that stood so greedily turning its eye from the fragments of food to the haggard face looking downward with a grim smile of approval, as she saw of what self-control her favorite was capable.

"Now, Peg, don't be greedy and eat me up with your eye, in that way," muttered the old creature, with a strong French accent, laying some cabbage-leaves and turnip-tops in her lap, as she continued her researches in the basket.

"Remember, Peg, how it was you lost that other eye of yours. Didn't you try to rob the chickens, and got your eye pecked clean out for it, Peg? and didn't I kill that bantam, and give you his bones to pick? that should learn you good manners, Peg!"

The cat winked her one eye as if she comprehended the thing, and her mistress went on:—

"There are the hens, poor, innocent dears, with their

heads under their wings, setting you an example, dear;—go take a nap, Peg, and then come back again, and you shall have a taste of the liver when I've got it in order for us."

The cat seemed to understand her, for with a longing look, first at her, then at the plate, she turned slowly and slunk away to a fragment of rag-carpet in a corner of the room, where she crouched down with her head between her paws and her eye half shut, ready to spring out again, should her mistress give signs of relenting.

The old woman followed her movements with a sour smile.

"That's it," she muttered; "for man or beast there's nothing like starvation to force obedience. Those who give enough of anything to satisfy them, don't know what power is. There is Peg, now, if she'd had enough to eat all day, what would be the merit of her creeping off in that way; but now I know that she's obedient, that she fears me. That's the sort of thing I like. There, there, that'll do. Peg, you're a good old girl, there!"

The cat made a spring, and seizing, with teeth and claws, the fragment flung to her, ran off to her corner again, followed by the shrill laughter of her mistress.

"There's gratitude—there's life. Now supposing you'd been a fat, sleek, over-fed creature, Peg, why you'd a been turning up your nose at that, and wanted chicken-bones, or something delicate. Oh! hunger is a keen whetstone, isn't it, Peg?"

Peg answered by coming back, whetted to fresh eagerness by the morsel she had eaten, and lifting her glistening eye with a hungry, beseeching look, that made the old woman chuckle with delight.

"Ravenous, a'n't you?" cried the old woman, while she prepared to cook her supper over the handful of coals that glowed in a bed of white ashes on the hearth. "Well, wait till I've done. Learn patience from your mistress, that's a jewel!"

Here the old creature placed a pair of iron tongs across the bed of coals, to answer as a gridiron, and proceeded in her very eccentric culinary operations, moving about the room with a tread that the observant cat might have envied, it was so stealthy. When her meal was cooked, the old woman placed it on the bottom of a wooden chair, and drawing up another, from which half the back was broken away, she commenced eating, with a zest that nothing but very sharp hunger could have given to such food.

The old woman lingered some time over her supper, sharing the solid half of it rather liberally with Peg, and enjoying herself, as it seemed, to the utmost. But all at once she was interrupted by footsteps on the stairs, and her usual keen, watchful look returned.

"Who can it be? Who can it be, Peg?" she said, anxiously and almost in a whisper. "Robbers, ha!"

She started up with a sharp exclamation, and pointed with her finger to a sash in the upper part of the door, from which the curtain had been partly drawn.

"Peg! Peg!" she cried, in a voice that was sharp with spite, yet shook with terror,— "Peg, it's a man! do you see? If he breaks in, leap on him and scratch his eyes out. Do you hear? tear him to pieces, Peg!"

The door was slightly shaken, at which the cat arched her back and made ready for a spring.

Again the door was tried, and a knock followed.

Peg gathered herself up, and gave out a sharp hiss, which mingled with the shrill voice of the old woman, as the latter called out:

"Who's there? What do you want? You can't come in here. I'm a lone woman, and poor, very poor. Go away, I tell you!"

"Open the door, madame," answered a man's voice, "open the door. It is your husband's son!"

"What? what? Peg, do you hear that? Hush!"

"Open the door, Madame De Marke. I must speak with you. Surely you recognize my voice."

"Yes, yes," answered the old woman, sharply, and looking around the room as if she feared there might be something that required concealment. "Yes, in a minute. Wait while I find the key."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE YOUNG MAN'S RETURN.

DIRECTLY Madame De Marke unlocked the door, and a tall young man of stately presence and a grave cast of countenance entered. He reached forth his hand, with a sort of painful reservation, toward the singular old creature whom he found there.

"So, it is you at last!" said the latter, in a soft, cajoling voice. "I began to think you had forgotten your poor old mother."

"Forgotten you! No, no, that were impossible," was the hasty reply. "But you are alone, you seem to be living quite alone. Where is Catharine?"

"Catharine? Oh, yes, the girl. She has n't been here this year or more. A hard case that, George."

He started, and looked at her sternly.

"What do you mean, madame?" he said. "Where, I say, where is Catharine? I left her with you! I demand her of you again."

"You left her with me, of course you did. Was n't she my own help, bound to me till she was eighteen by the city authorities? Of course you left her here, why not?"

The young man grew pale, and his eyes darkened with intense anxiety; but he restrained his impetuous feelings, and spoke in a voice so low, that it was almost a whisper.

"Tell me, I entreat, madame, where is this girl now?"

"How should I know? She ran away after you sailed."

"Ran away? where? Where?"

"You need n't ask me. How should I know? What carries a wild girl into the streets?"

"The streets!" cried the young man, in a husky whisper. "The streets!"

"I believe," said the old woman, unfeelingly, "she brought up at the prison or Almshouse, at last."

"Prison! Almshouse! Madame, woman, how dare you confess that she was so far deserted, the poor, poor girl. Was she ill? Was she wronged? Tell me why this destitution fell upon her!"

The old woman fixed her keen eyes on the excited and stern face of the young man, with a hard, determined look that made the heart tremble in his bosom; and he shrunk back with mortal dread, as if a rattlesnake were about to spring upon him.

"She had disgraced my house, sir, and I sent her out of it."

The young man started back, and turned white to the very lips.

"Not, not!—woman, tell me what this means!"

The woman was ruthless. The glitter grew sharper and keener in her eyes. She had no compassion on the terrible agitation that shook the young man.

"Go up to the Almshouse, if you want to know more. She may be there yet with her child!"

"With her child, her child? my wife, my poor, poor wife! I tell you, woman, she was my wife. Before God and man, she is my wife—mine, mine—do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear; she said the same thing. I didn't believe her. I don't believe you. It is the old crazy blood up. You would cover her shame with your own. Like father, like son."

"Woman, you insult me, you wrong that dear girl!" cried

the young man, trembling with passion, "I repeat again, she was my wife!"

"Perhaps you can give me the proof?" said the old woman, holding out her hand, while a quiet sneer stole across her lips. "She had nothing to show—you may be better off!"

"Catharine has the proofs. I left them with her."

The old woman laughed, or rather hissed out her satisfaction.

"She was a careless thing to lose them, I must say that. All I asked was some written proof of her story. If she had a certificate, why not show it? I wouldn't have let her go to the Almshouse, if she had!"

The old woman seemed to love the repetition of this hateful word, the Almshouse, for she saw that it made the young man wince; and this was a joy to her.

The poor youth made no reply, but sat down, faint with suffering; for now he began to comprehend the utter misery of his position. Months had passed since his poor young wife could have known the shelter of a respectable home. What might she not have endured, so young, so helpless, a mere child in years! How terribly she must have suffered. The cruelty of his miserable old stepmother was lost in the rush of remorseful compassion that filled his soul. With all this flood of sorrow came a new birth of feeling, so strong, so intense, that it thrilled him from head to foot. He scarcely recognized it as a joy, it was so strange, burning like a drop of elixir through all the pain and disappointment that had fallen upon him.

He was a father! A living soul had started from the immortal life within him; and the thought swept like solemn music through his stormy passions, giving dignity and depth to his manner.

He turned from the old woman with new-born gentleness. His white lips quivered with tender emotion, his eyes grew dark and misty, he forgot that the creature before him had trampled all that he loved in the dust. Thoughts of his

wife and child filled his whole being. He turned away, and was passing through the door, when Madame De Marke addressed him.

"Where are you going?" she said.

"In search of my wife and child!"

The last word thrilled through and through his whole being. His face, that had been pale till now, flushed to the temples, and a smile of ineffable sweetness broke over his lips, as the word, "My child," left them. He even looked at the wicked old woman as if demanding sympathy for his new joy from her.

"If they are upon earth, I shall find them," he said, "by to-morrow, at the furthest, I shall find them."

"And what will you do with them when they are found?" demanded the old woman, maliciously.

"What will I do?" said the youth, "what will I do? Why, give up my strong manhood to their support; for I am strong now."

And so he was. Youth and hope and earnest feeling gave to his nature the energy of middle age.

He went down those flights of winding stairs, with every nerve of his body awake to the joy singing at his heart. What cared he that his child was born in an Almshouse? Was it not *his* child, was not Catharine alive? Was he not young, and strong to work, to suffer, to be her protector, body and soul forever? For he could imagine no time when his love for the sweet girl would cease to be immortal.

What cared he, that, by his father's will, Madame De Marke had power to withhold his inheritance for a time? Let her have it. The West was broad and land plenty; a log house among the prairies, with Catharine and her child, would be heaven enough for him. While these hopeful thoughts floated through his brain, the old woman listened to his light footsteps, grasping the door with one hand, while her witch-like face peered through into the dark passage. When his

footsteps died away, she drew back, and closed herself in, with a low chuckle.

She sat down, dropping one hand on her lap with a quickness that impressed the cat as a signal; and leaping upon the old woman's knee, the animal sat there, gazing into the evil brightness of her eyes with a look of kindred intelligence.

The woman smoothed the ragged back of her favorite with one hand, while a grin of satisfaction disturbed her mouth.

"I hope he will find 'em, Peg, don't you?"

The cat crept upward, and laid her paws on the old woman's shoulder; then with a leap that made her mistress give forth a cowardly scream, she sprang over, and seizing a poor little mouse that was attempting to escape under the door, began to torture it with her paws.

Madame De Marke sat up half an hour later than usual that night, watching the cat as she prolonged her malicious enjoyment, looking away from its trembling victim now and then as if to claim her sympathy.

"That'll do! that'll do, Peg!" said the old woman at last, waving her hand as if to command an execution; "I'm getting sleepy, Peg, kill the thing."

The cat turned her head, holding down the victim with one claw.

"Don't you hear, Peg?" said the old woman, starting up, "kill it, I say!"

The cat made a quick movement, and away darted the mouse through a crevice between the door and the threshold. The old woman laughed with great glee, while Peg slunk away under the bed, looking very much ashamed of her bungling; but when the tallow candle was put out, and Madame safe in bed, she ventured to creep out and coil herself up over the old woman's feet; and with this companionship alone was Madame de Marke left, not only that night, but for months after.

CHAPTER XXXII.

SEARCHING FOR HIS WIFE.

GEORGE DE MARKE walked the streets of New York all that night. Long before daybreak he was hovering around the walls of Bellevue, working off his impatience by abrupt turns among the neighboring streets, or standing upon the wharf with his face to the east, watching for the first quiver of daylight upon the waters of the river.

It was strange, but no misgiving seemed to reach him during that long watch; and he looked upon the gloomy walls of the hospital with a feeling of profound interest; for they had sheltered his wife and child, and anything seemed less degrading to the young man than the miserable home of his stepmother. At last the day gave its first faint glow along the horizon, shedding a pale brilliancy down upon the water, and revealing the Long Island shore in faint glimpses, half of mist, half of light. Then came a soft, rosy bloom, breaking through the mist, and trembling down upon the water as if a shower of rose-leaves had fallen upon the river during the night-watches.

All this seemed very beautiful to the young man, and each new ray of light came to his soul like a promise. It was not till the soft pink tints were all washed away with a deluge of gold from the rising sun, that the youth turned from the wharf and sought admission to the hospital.

The attempt was fruitless. Not till deep in the morning could he gain admission within the walls; so he plunged into the city again, and wandered as before, at random, filled with but one thought, and hungry—not for food, but for knowledge of the only objects dear to him on earth.

Late in the day, he found admission to the hospital.

Catharine was not there. He could learn nothing of her or her child, and now stood by a clerk's desk, waiting with faint heart for the tidings the dumb pages of the register might give him.

"Catharine, Catharine De Marke," muttered the clerk, and running his finger down the column of names, "I find no such name here. There are plenty of Catharines, but no De Markes. You must be mistaken, sir,—the register never is."

The young man bent his forehead to his hand, with a faint groan, while the clerk closed the huge register with a clang, and was about to move away.

"It may be," said De Marke, suddenly lifting his head, "it may be that she gave another name. Poor child! I had never given her leave to take mine. Look again. It may have been registered Catharine Lacy. I am sorry to trouble you, but do search once more. She was my wife, but might not have dared to use my name."

The clerk opened the huge book again, and commenced running down its pages with his finger, with a rapidity that exhibited some feeling for the unhappy man, who stood watching him with such intense anxiety. At last he paused, cast a quick glance at his visitor, and slowly wheeled the book toward him.

The young man bent down, and saw the writing through a faint mist that turned to a burning haze as he read,—

"Catharine Lacy entered—died and buried with her child, April——"

The color left his face and lips. He threw his arms out as if to protect himself from falling, and sunk on a bench that stood by, without a word or a groan. Everything was dark around him. He had no wife—he was no longer a father. The secret of his marriage, so long buried in his heart, had perished in a single instant. Nothing was left but a remorseful memory, which must lie there, the dust of a dead love, forever and ever.

He did not speak a word, but got up and staggered away, weak with the misery that had fallen upon him.

On the third day from this, George de Marke stood once more in the miserable den which his stepmother inhabited. Sternly, and with steady repulsion of manner, he addressed the old woman:

"Give me," he said, "a portion of my father's property, let it be ever so small, that I may leave this place forever."

"There is nothing for you, not a cent," replied the old woman. "You have not reached the age when you can command a sous of my money. That was your father's will. When you bring me a legal son, and are of proper age, it will be time for a settlement."

"But you wrote me, if I would take this unfortunate voyage to the Indies, that a portion of the wealth should be mine at once. For her sake I went. It was like giving up life, but I went resolutely, even though she did not reply to the letter which prepared her for my absence."

"She never got the letter, of course not. I did not believe all the stuff about a marriage, and I don't now," answered the old woman, insolently. "Your letter went to kindle my fire. Five good sheets of paper wasted. If it had only been for this extravagance, you ought to have been disinherited. But where is the girl? What has become of her baby? If you are married, bring out the creatures and the documents. If the child is a boy, you have only a few years to wait before there'll be something to feed him on. Where is the wife and heir?"

The young man arose, without a word, and in this stern silence left the room.

It was many years before the two met again.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

TURNING SHADOWS INTO SUNBEAMS.

WHERE was Catharine Lacy all this time? Away in a New-England village, where a merciful institution had been established for the care and amelioration of insanity. Mrs. Barr had become matron of the house, and she took Catharine with her as an assistant, having learned to know and love the girl as good people are sure to love the excellence they have benefited.

The building was of recent erection; the grounds were newly laid out, and were, of course, somewhat bare of ornament. But a few grand old forest-trees had been left scattered over them in clumps and singly, while an undergrowth of ferns, wild shrubbery and thick rich grass compensated for all lack of scientific culture. Beyond all that, the situation was a commanding one. The prospect from almost every window was beautiful. Hillsides covered with thrifty crops—maple groves that became gorgeous in the autumn—farm-houses that gave an idea of elegance as well as comfort, formed lovely rural pictures whereon the inmates of the institution looked. Indeed, within or without, there was nothing to excite the brain or give an unpleasant emotion. Authority there was, certainly, firm and judicious, but so concealed in all its rugged points, that even the sharp suspicion of insanity failed to jar against it. Indeed, the ruling spirit of this place was Mrs. Barr, whose charity was ever prevailing, and whose firm goodness was rendered efficient by proportionate strength. To her the inmates of this building were objects of unlimited interest. She gave up all the energies of her life for their benefit, and learned to find in each diseased mind some sane spot capable of understanding the sympathy she gave.

What Mrs. Barr was to her charge, Catharine became in another way. Notwithstanding her hard life, she was not uneducated: no girl of good natural ability ever need be ignorant in this land. So long as she can read and write, the keys of all knowledge are in her own keeping; nature supplies objects of beauty upon which her imagination can feast, and books are so plentiful, that she can hardly escape the information they contain.

In her childhood, Catharine had received generous advantages and secured the idea of many accomplishments which application was sure to improve; these she brought into action at once. A love of music placed her in quick sympathy with many of the patients. Her talent for painting, crude as it was, supplied amusement for others. She had a fine voice, and was that rare being, a natural reader. The very tones of her voice filled the listening ear with harmonies. With this exception, Catharine's attainments were few; but natural talent—not to say genius—gave grace and piquancy to them all. Besides, she was so pretty, so exquisitely truthful, that even insanity felt the charm of her whole character.

Mrs. Barr had left the girl to her own gentle devices. A perfect knowledge of her character made this course a wise one. When God gives the power of usefulness to any human being, that power teaches the way. So this young creature was let loose into the establishment as a wild bird is free to the woods, and worked out her own sweet will unchecked. On first coming to the institution, a conversation regarding the future had taken place between Catharine and her benefactress. There was nothing in her history which she had not revealed to this good woman, except the name of her husband and of her aunt. These she kept a secret in her own bosom, and Mrs. Barr trusted her sufficiently to respect a reserve which injured no one.

This conversation arose one day, when Catharine was called upon to sign her name.

"It is not my name," she said, doubtfully, "and I think it would annoy my aunt to see it connected with any public institution, but *his* name I am forbidden to use."

Mrs. Barr took the pen from Catharine's hand, walked to a window, and became very thoughtful for some time. She was a widow with sufficient means for an humble independent support. They had been ample once; but she had given them with a free hand year after year, till but little was left. Her life had been full of benevolence, but she was very lonely, notwithstanding. What if she adopted this young person! The thought became more and more pleasant. She, who had been all her life childless, might gain the benefits and happiness of motherhood by uniting this young creature's destiny with her own. She went back to the table where Catharine was sitting, and placed the pen in her hand.

"Sign it, Catharine Barr, if you like the name and will take me for a mother," she said, "for, henceforth, I consider you as my own child. There is no one on earth to question my right, and it will be a relief to these proud friends of yours."

Catharine threw her arms around the old woman's neck, and kissed her soft cheek in grateful silence. Then she took up the pen again, and wrote *Catharine Barr* plainly as she could through the tears that were filling her eyes. So from that day Catharine knew what it was to have a firm friend, and a tender mother, and in this way her identity was lost alike to those who had sought her so anxiously and to those who gladly forgot her.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ELSIE, THE LUNATIC.

THERE was one person in that institution to whom Catharine warmly attached herself at first sight. She was a middle-aged woman, possessed of a wild sort of beauty, which might have been loveliness in youth, and was now wonderfully picturesque. She had been a long time insane; sometimes in a madhouse, violent and refractory; sometimes in private institutions, always especially cared for, as the rich provide for their unfortunates; but never, until now, surrounded with home-like elegances, and attentions so delicate, that they did not seem to be watchful.

This woman occupied a little parlor and bedroom close to that in which Catharine slept. She was under no visible restraint, for the inmates only recognized their keepers as servants, and felt complimented by their devoted attention. One day, in passing Catharine's door, she saw her bending over the table, toiling patiently over a drawing, which she was forced to work out, with no help save that of her own genius. Something, either in her attitude or countenance, arrested the woman, who turned, and, after peering into the room to make sure that no one else was there, stole in so noiselessly that Catharine was unconscious of her presence, until she felt her breath floating across her cheek.

"Get up, that's all wrong."

Catharine started from her chair in some alarm. The woman sat down, seized upon a pencil, and went to work with the spirit and dash of an artist. That which Catharine had been striving to accomplish, she achieved with a few movements of the hand, creating a perspective here, a middle distance there, and livening up the foreground with a figure or two that fairly startled the girl, as she saw them grow into a *vraisemblance* of humanity under her gaze.

All at once, the woman looked up, and Catharine remarked the wonderful beauty of her eyes, now widening with pleasure.

"*He* stood exactly so, that night," she said, "touching one of the figures with her pencil. I—no, I'm not here. It is that terrible woman. How dare you let her come near him?"

She seized the paper between her hands, tore it fiercely through the middle, and flung it down, quivering, as if she had just dashed a serpent from her. When Catharine stooped to pick up the fragments, her excitement grew intense; she stamped her foot down upon the paper, defied the girl with her great burning eyes, and dashed out of the room.

At first this scene frightened Catharine, but in the end it gave her a hopeful idea. This woman had the knowledge which she was toiling for. Might it not be guided for their mutual benefit? She consulted with Mrs. Barr, and resolved to lure the maniac into an occupation which might bring her dormant faculties into healthy action.

The next day, she went to Elsie's room, with a variety of many-colored silks in her hand. The woman was sitting by herself, silent and sullen. She had some loose beads in her lap, and was counting them over one by one, dropping each with a click into the pile, and evidently wondering why it never grew less. She caught a glance at the silks in Catharine's hand, stirred restlessly in her chair, and fell to counting her beads again. Catharine sat down by the window, spreading out her silks in a connection which would have disturbed any one who had an artist's eye for color. Elsie watched her keenly, dropping her beads all the time; but Catharine could see that the heavy mournfulness of her eyes kindled into intelligence, and that she was growing restless. Still, the little temptress went on matching her colors bunglingly.

All at once, the crazy woman started up, her hoard of beads fell to the floor, and rushed, helter-skelter, over the room. She did not heed them in the least, but set herself down on the carpet, at Catharine's feet, and taking the silks from her hands, began to arrange them in such contrast, or harmony, as her fancy dictated. It was a study to watch this poor demented creature, as she pursued her work, lovingly as a child dresses her doll. She looked up more than once, and laughed pleasantly. Catharine smiled back, for she knew that in this she was resurrecting an almost dead faculty.

By what link of intelligence the maniac and her young nurse became in accord, I cannot determine, but it was not long before Elsie learned to smile when she appeared, and was docile as a lamb in her company. Almost, it would seem, by a miracle, she brought the long-buried talents of former years into action. True, Elsie was erratic, and she would only exert herself when the caprice was on her, but Catharine had the good sense to leave her free, and thus won a world of instruction from her, giving and taking benefit.

Perhaps this was the most tranquil period of Catharine's life. It certainly was the most useful, and God has so ordained it that no human soul can devote its energies to the good of humanity without proportionate self-benefit. In truth, it is only through others that we are ever made happy. Selfishness has no power of radiation, and degenerates the soul it centres in. The great secret of human happiness lies in that benevolence which encompasses the greatest number of God's creatures with benefits.

Was Catharine happy? No, a famished heart is never content. In all her duties, one thought was forever uppermost, and even in her sleep she was haunted by two images: the husband who had abandoned her, and the child that had for a little time taken the place of her own. Was she never on earth to hear of them again? More than two

years had gone by; what had the authorities done with the child? Was he among the pauper children? Was he dead, or had some person taken compassion on his helplessness? She had no way of learning. Mary Margaret, with all her goodness, did not know how to write, and the last time Catharine had looked for the humble roof that sheltered her in the hour of need, a brown-stone house was approaching completion upon the ground where it had stood; the rocks upon which the goat had browsed were blasted away, and no vestige of the pond remained.

More than once, Catharine had written to Madame De Marke, imploring news of her husband. Not a word came in reply, but, spite of all this, a vague faith in him still lived in her heart.

Thus time wore on, not heavily, as he creeps with those who have no duties to perform, but surely leaving traces of his progress, either for good or for evil, on every living thing. To Catharine he had given health, intelligence, a rich growth of mind, and such beauty as her early years had never promised. Her slender girlishness had rounded into perfect proportion, not the less delicate because it had ceased to be fragile. Her face had gained bloom and expression. Timid hesitation of manner had given way to a calm self-composure, modest as it was dignified. Such was Catharine as she entered into her real womanhood.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SHOWING HOW A GOOD WOMAN CAN DIE.

CATHARINE did not observe it at first, but Mrs. Barr had been failing for more than a year. A life of constant exertion began to tell upon her, and she was at last clearly admonished that her days of usefulness were draw-

ing to a close. She said little about this, until increasing weakness forced her to relinquish some of her duties; not that the subject troubled her, but her noble heart shrunk from giving the pain which the mournful truth must inflict on her best friend and almost daughter.

One night there was a dance in the dining-room of the Asylum; for it was a part of Mrs. Barr's new system, that amusements of all kinds, which could inspire wholesome pleasure, were the best means of restoration in almost every case of insanity. It was understood that all the usual preparations for a ball were to be insisted upon, and no set of school-children ever exhibited more interest in an exhibition, than these unfortunates took in their toilets.

Elsie was unusually excited; a dozen times that day she swept through the halls in search of Catharine, first in one dress, then in another, each more fantastic than the rest, yet all arranged with artistic effect, as if she had been intending to sit for a portrait. Other inmates were on the alert, and it was wonderful to see how much of absolute reason mingled with their fantasies. One young creature, fancying that she was Queen Elizabeth and about to hold court, was in great tribulation, because her crown had been torn to pieces and the jewels lost. Another, who fancied herself Charlotte Corday, took Catharine on one side, to consult with her about the possibility of washing the blood from her hands. There was no end to their perplexities or various ways of expressing them.

One poor creature, who fancied that she had killed her husband, insisted on wearing a mask, that the officers might not discover her. But the greater number, being monomaniacs upon some given point, understood the nature of the amusement offered them, and acted with great decorum, enjoying the fantasies of their companions as a sane person might.

Catharine was very busy that day. Mrs. Barr had admitted for the first time that she was not quite well enough

to help, and this imposed a host of duties on her assistant. The dancing-room was to be decorated with garlands, on which the inmates worked with enthusiasm. Supper was to be prepared—in fact, Catharine required all the administrative talent she possessed to carry the affair through with credit. It was a first experiment of the kind; and in the absence of Mrs. Barr she felt the responsibility even to nervousness.

At nightfall the inmates of the house began to assemble; they all seemed to understand that perfectly good behavior was expected of them; and their efforts at superior and extra politeness were touching, and at times ludicrous.

There was no regular music, but Catharine had become a fair performer, and she at once placed herself at the piano; and, trusting to her ear, dashed into the most exhilarating music she was capable of.

Directly, a singular and most picturesque scene presented itself. Each inmate had satisfied his or her own fancy in the way of costume, and in some cases the effect was richly fanciful. Among the rest, Elsie came in dressed after a fashion that had prevailed twenty years before; even in her insanity the exquisite taste for which she had been remarkable in her youth manifested itself. She might have stepped out of some old family picture—the costume was so perfect both in arrangement and coloring.

Catharine, happy in the enjoyment of those around her, was playing with unusual spirit, when Elsie came into the room. She stood awhile by the door watching the dancers; then, as if something displeased her in the music, she crossed over to the piano, touched Catharine on the shoulder, and made a motion that she should get up from the music-stool.

Catharine obeyed, and Elsie, sweeping out her skirts with a queenly gesture, seated herself, and dashed into an old-fashioned dancing-tune that made the room ring again. At first, her touch was a little heavy and stiff, but after a while

those slender fingers flashed across the keys like lightning. The usually sad face became brilliant, and, with a bend of the head that a queen might have envied, that demented woman brought another beautiful talent out of the past, proudly as a child exhibits its most gorgeous plaything.

Catharine was very tired, and went away from her weary work at the piano with a sensation of relief that no one could have guessed at from the expression of her sweet face. She stood a moment at the door, looking at the bright scene her own energies had wrought out of the most unpromising materials that ever presented themselves to human talent. There, under the lights and the flower garlands, she saw those helpless creatures, full of childish gleefulness, dancing, smiling, and filling the room with laughter, genuine as could be heard in any saloon of the large cities.

The sight was a pleasant one, and Catharine turned away from it wondering that she should feel so sad. She went slowly up to Mrs. Barr's room. The good lady had not felt well enough to come down, and she would sit by her a while and warm her heart with a description of the scene she had just left.

Mrs. Barr was sitting alone, with her hands clasped softly in her lap. There was no lamp in the chamber, but the light of a calm summer's moon fell upon her face, touching the middle-aged features with serene beauty.

Catharine drew a foot-stool close to her friend, and sat down upon it.

"How still you are," she said, gently. "It seems like a sabbath here, after all the hilarity down-stairs."

"Are they happy? Does our little plan succeed, Catharine?"

"Yes, madam. You never saw children let out an hour before school-time enjoy themselves more."

"Poor things; how one learns to love their helplessness. I should almost like to stay with them a little longer."

"A little longer?" faltered Catharine, touching the clasped hands in Mrs. Barr's lap with a sort of awe, as if she expected to find them growing cold.

"Yes, my child, but it cannot be. God chooses his own time, and chooses it well. Do not start and look at me so mournfully, Catharine. It is a short journey I am taking; one which every soul must travel."

"But you are not sure; only a little while ago you seemed so well," pleaded Catharine, with tears in her voice.

"Still, I am near the end; the moon is at its full now —" She paused, and looked kindly down into the sad young face uplifted so piteously to hers. This broken sentence had chilled it into paleness.

"You — you do not mean that?" she questioned. "Oh, not so soon!"

Mrs. Barr unlocked her hands, and laid one of them on the anxious creature's head, tenderly as if she had been smoothing the white plumage of a dove.

"Very soon; it may be to-night; I feel it creeping toward me."

Catharine uttered a broken cry, and dropping her head, whispered a prayer for strength.

"Or any hour — the doctor thinks it will be sudden; I know it will be soon."

"Oh, my friend! my dear, dear friend, what shall I do without you!"

"The God who calls me will comfort you, my child."

There was something ineffably calm and sweet in the dying woman's voice, but it was very faint.

"Do you suffer?" questioned Catharine.

"A little, but that is nothing; I want to talk to you, my good child, not of myself — all is right with me, but what will the world have for you when I am gone?"

"Nothing."

When that one pathetic word fell from Catharine's lips,

she covered her face with both hands, and began to cry, not noisily, but with a hush of grief all the more touching from its stillness.

"You must go away, Catharine."

"Yes, my friend," answered Catharine, meekly; "tell me what I must do in your sweet wisdom; God will guide me to follow it."

"There will be new people coming. You are young and very, very pretty, my child; too young, and far too beautiful for a place like this. Some way will be opened, take it. Seek quietness and protection. Some day your husband will come back."

"Oh, say that again, Mother Barr—once more; from those dear lips it seems like a holy promise."

"It is a holy promise, or God would not have sent it so clearly to my mind at the last."

"I will believe it—I do believe it. Oh, if you could only live to know."

"I shall know, child."

Catharine kissed the hand which had fallen away from her head. She did not comprehend the faith in these last gentle words; but Mrs. Barr went on, smiling wanly upon her through the moonlight.

"Oh yes, dear; I shall know; that will be a part of my blessedness. But now, while we are here and so still, let me tell you what I have done."

"No, no; do not tell me! it makes this so real," pleaded Catharine.

"My poor child, it is real."

"Oh, let me hope not, a little longer—only a little longer."

"There is a paper in my desk—a will. It is not much, but all I have is yours."

Catharine began to sob.

"Hush, child, hush! You are my daughter, sent when I needed one most. You have been a good, good child. I

love nothing so dear on earth. It is little, but enough to keep you from taking wages of any one. For all that, darling, you must be useful. God made all his creatures for usefulness. Human suffering will want alleviation. You will find duties at every step. Do them well—"

The good woman paused a moment, struggling for breath. This conversation was exhausting her feeble strength. After a little, she spoke again:

"Keep my name, Catharine, till your husband comes back and gives you his own. It pleases me to think that it does not quite die out with me. Now go down, darling. The good people will want you, and I would like to rest a little."

Catharine arose with a heavy heart, and went downstairs. The inmates of the dancing-room were all in gay commotion. Elsie was at the piano, inspired with her own music. They did not need Catharine, so she went up to her own room, and, kneeling by the bed, wept and prayed for that dear life with passionate earnestness. Never until now had she known how dear and good this woman had been to her; how nobly she had influenced a life threatened from the first with disaster. She felt in all her being a dread of the loneliness which would fall upon her when that gentle guide and wise counsellor was gone. It was difficult to force the cruel belief of her immediate danger on her mind. The calamity was more than her recoiling thoughts could grasp. By degrees, a faint hope broke up through her prayers, and instead of pleading, she fell into a sad reverie. It was a heart-disease; this she knew well; but the peculiar form—what young girl could be expected to understand that? Sometimes such maladies are slow, painful, and full of anguish. Again, they only give a faint indication of the death which is surely coming, and when it does come, strikes its victim down in an instant. This was the insidious disease which had blinded the poor girl to its progress till the end was upon her. She

could not believe in its reality. Now that she was alone, hope would spring up in her heart; she thought of that sweet old face, the low, calm voice, and it seemed to her impossible that death could be so near. Gradually her prayer, which had at first been a passionate entreaty for an existence so precious, took almost a glow of thankfulness. It seemed as if that dear life must be prolonged; as if the very agony of her own prayers must win a beneficent answer from God.

Almost tranquillized by this faith, the weary young creature dropped her head upon her folded arms, and a feeling of drowsy languor came upon her—not sleep, but rest. All at once she was aroused by a shock of the whole frame, so strong and sudden, that she started to her feet with a cry of affright. Quivering in every nerve, wild with nameless terror, she went down to the chamber she had just left.

Mrs. Barr still sat by the window. The pure radiance of the moon lay full upon the hands clasped in her lap, the Quaker cap which framed in that lovely old face—and the muslin neckerchief folded over her bosom. Catharine, with a sigh of infinite relief, went up to the easy-chair. She was not asleep—not even in pain. Those kind, blue eyes were open—that gentle mouth had a smile upon it. She was resting, Catharine thought, nothing more—evidently resting, and did not wish to be disturbed. Had she not asked to be left alone? Catharine moved softly to a shadowy part of the room and sat down, holding her very breath, in fear of disturbing the sick woman, who had not cared to recognize her presence. The music from down-stairs rose to her faintly. Sometimes the dying echo of a laugh came floating upward; but after a while, all this ceased; then the stillness in the room oppressed her.

Again Catharine arose and went close to Mrs. Barr's chair.

"Have you had a good rest, dear mother?" she whispered, bending close to the motionless head.

There was no answer—no sign, no breath that she could hear or feel. She saw the eyes turned to the open window—the smile still hovering about those lips; but she also saw that the whole face had turned whiter than whiteness. The awful silence of the grave was there, and she knew that her best friend had passed over the "dark waters" when that shock fell upon her, breaking up alike her hopes and her prayers.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE OLD MANSION-HOUSE.

A FEW old houses still remain among the villas, hotels, and cottages that make Staten Island a little Eden. Many of these are on the shore, and not being so accessible as these modern structures, are of course less known. One of these buildings, situated almost in the verge of the Island, surrounded by groves of primeval trees, fruit-orchards, and flowing thickets, must now become the scene of our story.

The house was an old, rambling affair, with irregular wings and a centre building three stories high, with heavy stone chimneys, that time itself seemed incapable of destroying, and a peaked roof, with gable-windows, that, however, were all for outside show, looking only from an open garret. It was a substantial edifice, built of stone, but the wings were of wood, with verandas and French windows, half buried in creeping vines and climbing roses. A tall elm-tree towered upward in front of the centre building, sweeping its long pendent branches over the roof, thus softening the contrast between the grim old front with its stone portal, and the wings with their fanciful drapery of flowers. The ground sloped unevenly from the front of the building, and was broken up here and there with fruit-trees and flower-

thickets, until it was separated from a gentle hill by one of those small inland streams that render quiet scenery of this kind so beautiful. Here a clump of weeping-willows gave their waving and golden green to the air, forming one of the most lovely features of a landscape every way Arcadian.

It was a large house, and the modern portion seemed quite unnecessary, save as an embellishment, for two quieter people could not well have been found than the old couple who had inhabited the centre building, with its antique furniture and old-fashioned mouldings, for more than half a century.

One day, not far from the time of our last chapter, old Mrs. Ford was, or seemed to be, alone in this dwelling; for the kitchen was so far away from the room she occupied, that no household-sound reached her. It was a calm June day. The air was balmy with fruit-blossoms. The sky was softly blue, with a white cloud here and there drifting soft snowy billows over it; for a light rain had just passed away, leaving heaps of pearl clouds on the horizon and a world of diamond drops among the green-leaves and fruit-blossoms, that impregnated them with perfume.

The window of her sitting-room was open, and Mrs. Ford leaned out, not to gaze upon the landscape, though she felt all its beauty, but with a keener interest and deeper anxiety than mere familiar Nature could afford.

Her husband, a very old man, had gone to the city, and the old lady was anxiously watching his return. It was now two hours beyond the time. He had driven a fiery horse and was without attendant; what might have happened? Why would not her husband be content to drive a staid family horse, or take the man-servant with him? Why did he go to the city at all? These might have been her reflections on ordinary occasions; but now a deeper cause of anxiety gave keenness to those aged eyes, and sent a nervous quiver to those locked hands, whenever a sound startled her.

At last, she distinctly heard a carriage coming down the road, and rising slowly from her seat, she walked forth into the front porch, where, leaning against one of the stone pillars, she stood pale and motionless, save that a quiver ran through her frame, somewhat more sharply than should have been possible to the simple tremor of old age.

Decorous old age is always beautiful, and this dear old lady, in her dark dress and pure muslin cap scarcely less white than the hair it covered, formed a touching picture, as she stood in the shadow of her home, waiting—for her husband—and alas! for the only child of their love—another might come, but the old lady scarcely thought of that, her heart was too full.

Slowly the carriage came up from the road and swept around to the front door. The old lady could not move. She seemed chained to the stone pillar that supported her. A mist, but not of age, crept over her vision, and through it she saw her husband descend to the ground, and then, as if moving through a cloud, she saw two female forms sinking, as it were, toward the earth, and coming steadily toward her.

She could not stir or speak, but held out her trembling arms.

A tall, thin woman, whose large brown eyes, full of sorrowful reproach, seemed to look through and through her, came up the steps, paused a moment so close that the trembling hands touched her, and walked on without a word.

Then the old woman cried out in her anguish,—

“Oh! Elsie, Elsie, will you not speak to me?”

The tall woman turned at this, came a pace back, and looked at the old lady with her great, mournful eyes, silent as before.

“Elsie, Elsie! It is your mother. Speak to me!”

Insanity is sometimes very cruel. How steadily those great eyes looked upon the quivering anguish of that beautiful old

face! How coldly the woman turned away, and walked into the shadows of her old home, holy with so many memories, all lost in the darkness that had settled on her brain!

Then the old woman sent forth a cry of anguish, and reaching out her arms, fell weeping upon her husband's bosom.

"She does not know me. Oh! John, John, I thought she would have known me!"

The old man, himself trembling with fatigue and agitation, bent down and kissed the forehead of his wife. But he had no words of comfort to offer. It was a terrible thing for an only child to walk thus stonily by the yearning heart of a mother. The poor old man wept over his wife; it was all he could do.

But as his fond arms relaxed, a beautiful comforter appeared, breaking through the mist that grief had cast over those aged eyes like some shadowy angel. Those two withered hands were softly clasped, and a sweet, tranquillizing voice murmured,—

"Do not be troubled; she is so much better, she must know you at last. Have patience, only have a little patience!"

"I will have patience. Oh! is that a new thing to me, poor bereaved mother that I am?" answered the old lady, shedding less bitter tears. "But who are you that speak so confidently, and so well?"

"This—this is the young person who has done so much for our Elsie at the asylum," said the old gentleman. "She has come to stay with her and live with us!"

"What! This young girl,—this pretty, frail creature? I thought it was a woman!"

"And so it is, if suffering can make a poor girl grow old," replied Catharine, mournfully, for it was no other than Catharine Lacy, or rather Catharine De Marke, the lost wife, or, as she was only known then in that house, Catharine Barr.

"And so you have been good to my Elsie?" persisted the old lady, wrapped up in the one idea of her heart so completely, that she left the poor girl's words unheeded. "No wonder she loves you so much!"

"Only wait a while, and she will love you as well. Perhaps in a little time she will know that you are her mother."

"Do you think so? Do you really think so?" said the old lady, with tears in her eyes.

"See how she is looking at us!" was the reply.

Mrs. Ford looked up; and there, in the dim hall, she saw her daughter watching them keenly. As their eyes met, the aged mother smiled through her tears, and the crazed woman began to glide slowly toward her, as if drawn by some magnetic force.

"Oh, you have done this!" cried the old lady,—*"she comes this way—she looks kinder!"* and bowing her head, with a gush of tenderness she kissed the young girl.

Instantly the insane woman darted forward and separated them. With her hands she held them apart, creeping softly toward her mother's bosom.

Not a word was spoken. But the swell and beat of that aged mother's heart brought back true life into the cold bosom of the daughter.

"Mother!" she said, lifting up her two palms and smoothing down the gray hair on each side of that wrinkled forehead. "Mother, how white your hair has grown."

"Thank God!" cried the aged husband, as he saw this. And in the flood of tender joy, through which these words were spoken, he lifted his clasped hands to heaven.

The sound, tender and holy as it was, drove that poor creature back into her insanity. She turned from her mother, looked coldly upon the old man, and then, with a faint shake of the head, walked into the house again.

"Come," said the old man, tenderly, to his wife, "let us

wait God's time. It is something that she has known you for a minute!"

"Something," repeated the old lady, overwhelmed with gratitude; "John, it has given me new life."

Hand-in-hand, full of holy faith, and beautiful in the deep love of their old age, they followed Catharine and her charge into the family sitting-room.

"Sit down here, my daughter, while I take off your bonnet and shawl," said the old lady, wheeling an easy-chair to the window.

Elsie sat down in silence and gazed wistfully in her mother's face, as the aged parent removed the bonnet from her head, that poor head whose ever burning heat had scattered those long black tresses so heavily with snow.

"See," said the woman, trembling beneath the joy of that look, "there is the old pear-tree yet, white with blossoms. I am sure we might find half a dozen robins' nests in the boughs, if you were only young enough to climb them, Elsie."

Elsie smiled. Some vague association seemed breaking through her mind.

"To-morrow you shall go down there, darling; father and I will go anywhere with you."

"Anywhere?" said Elsie, with a fierce look. "Then take me to *him*."

The old lady recoiled, and looked wistfully at her husband.

"Take me to *him*, I say!" almost shrieked the daughter, gazing angrily from her father to her mother.

"No, no," said Catharine, quietly, "that is for me. They must show you nothing but the brook, the birds, and these beautiful trees. I must do the rest. Come."

As if spellbound, the insane woman arose and followed the young girl.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE CLOSED LIBRARY.

WHENCE came the young woman who made her advent in the last chapter? So fair, so gentle in her manners, and yet with an authority of character that made itself respected, — how came she to know the aged couple, whose home was hereafter to be her own?

They knew that she had been the inmate of an Insane Asylum; for there she had learned to love and protect their only child, who was all the dearer to them because of her infirmity. They knew that she had entered this institution, under the care of as good and true a woman as ever lived, from a keen desire to find some place where her daily bread could be earned in seclusion, mingled with a gentle wish to benefit humanity in some way.

The desire to do good to others usually brings its own opportunity, and Catharine had found that the wish is in itself one of the brightest and safest steps toward happiness when the soul is troubled.

It had been the destiny of this young creature to mingle with strange scenes before her character had acquired its natural strength, and through this fiery furnace her spirit came forth pure and strong as gold.

From her first entrance into the Asylum a singular fascination drew Catharine toward this woman, whose madness was full of childlike trust and poetical refinement. In moments of excitement, Elsie's mind seemed burning with thoughts, that in a sane person, capable of conversation and contiguity, would have produced thrilling poetry.

Her grief had a depth of wild pathos in it that won conviction of its reality; her sadness was plaintive in its expression as the notes of a night-bird, when it has no listeners

but the quiet stars and motionless leaves. Her joy was that of a child, wayward and mischievous sometimes, at others full of graceful wit. But these moods seldom came to brighten her monotonous existence.

Elsie Ford's insane life had been, of late, mournfully poetic, helpless, and gentle. She was possessed by broken fancies and yearning desires for some far-off object, which she mentioned vaguely and with a confused strain of affection, always speaking of HIM, but without name. She would shrink back with a sort of terror when any one inquired directly who this being was, who wove his memory with her thoughts forever, and yet seemed a myth even to her.

This gentle frame of mind had come upon Elsie after Catharine had given up so much of her own life in her behalf. It is not remarkable that a young creature who had been herself friendless, came to love this woman, almost as if she had been the child in years that she had become in mind. Elsie returned this affection in her own wild way, giving through her heart the love and obedience which her brain could neither understand nor control.

This change in the condition of Elsie Ford led to a yearning desire in her aged parents to have her once more under their own roof. It was admitted by the physician that a residence at home might prove beneficial to a patient who seemed to be gradually collecting her stray thoughts into form under the loving guidance of her nurse.

This decision with regard to Elsie Ford had been made about the time of Mrs. Barr's death, and the old people, by message and letter, made a pathetic appeal to Catharine, beseeching her to take up her abode with them, and still act as a guardian angel to their daughter.

Catharine remembered the dying counsel of her friend, and gladly accepted the position. Indeed, Elsie Ford was now the only human being who seemed to connect her with

the world. So she followed this one object of her love, not as a nurse, — that was unnecessary now, — but with the devotion of a child, or a younger sister, kindly giving up her own life to another.

Thus, from her long residence in the Insane Asylum, Catharine came with her patient to make a new home on the Island.

It was like Paradise, that serene abode, full of quietness, and surrounded with the fresh luxuriance of spring. After the hushed turmoil of an insane asylum, where the atmosphere was heavy with suppressed groans, and wild cries sometimes broke the midnight stillness, the repose of this old house was indeed Heaven.

The old people, with their refined simplicity, so still and almost caressing in every word and movement, were in gentle harmony with the place. For the first time in her life, Catharine breathed with a deep, full sense of enjoyment.

There was a library in the old house, filled with such books as lead to thought, suggesting grand ideas to the imagination, and strengthening the reason. An intellect of no ordinary cultivation must have selected these volumes, for they were in various languages, and each work was of the choice productions of its nation.

Catharine remarked that none of these volumes had been printed within the last thirty years, though up to that period the literature of many nations was gathered. This fact gave her food for thought, and with a curiosity unnatural to her, she began to conjecture for what purpose and by whom this rare collection had been made. Why had it been discontinued so suddenly, and how chanced it that a library of so much value in all respects had been left untouched, till the dust of years almost obscured the original richness of the bindings?

Another thing aroused conjecture also. The library was on the ground-floor, occupying the extreme end of one wing

of the building, to which a large bay-window had been added, filling the room with pure light and enlarging it at the same time.

When Catharine first entered the room, about a week after her arrival on the Island, it was buried in darkness, for long wooden shutters were closed over the windows; and though it was early daylight, when the fresh, young morning was full of brightness, she was almost repulsed by the dusty and dim atmosphere.

But she had received permission to visit every part of the house, and use anything it contained at discretion, for the comfort of herself and her companion.

With considerable effort she forced open the sashes and flung back the shutters from the dusty panes. The morning sunshine came up through the valley in its first golden brightness, and drifting through the pendent branches of a weeping-elm that sheltered the whole wing, poured itself in a flood through the window, till dust floated like a cloud of golden motes all around.

It seemed to her almost like sacrilege, thus to have let in a broad light on the obscurity of so many years. The bookcases of dark wood, richly carved and set with plate-glass, took the sudden radiance gloomily, and glimpses of the gilded bindings came dimly through the accumulated dust. The bronze medallions that formed centre-pieces over each case were scarcely discernible, and the crimson hangings upon the wall behind, though embossed with a deep velvet pattern, seemed faded to a brown tint.

The two sides of the room were occupied by these bookcases; but on each side the door, which opened opposite the bay-window, several pictures were hung, veiled with cobwebs, and their costly frames gleaming out from wreaths of dust.

Two or three chairs of various patterns stood under these pictures, and slender bronze statues, each holding a

gilded branch for lights in its hand, poised themselves on either side of the window. In two of these branches, wax candles, half consumed, still remained, while others had burned low, leaving the sockets full of wax, now of a dull gray color.

As Catharine looked around, she felt the desolation of the change oppressive, and half-closed the shutters, thus preserving the partial gloom which seemed so congenial to the place.

Why was it that this scene of neglected splendor, this treasure of intellectual wealth, half buried in the past, fell so gloomily on her spirits? What was the room to her? And why was she there, except to ascertain what capacities of home comfort the place afforded for her unfortunate charge?

She could not answer these questions. Her heart beat heavily, and her eyes grew dim with a sort of foreboding terror, as she looked around. Yet a strange infatuation kept her in the room. She longed to know what the books contained, by whom they had been collected, and by whom read.

This curiosity at last overcame the pressure upon her nerves. She arose, and opening a fold of the shutters again, surveyed the room a second time. It was early sunrise, and she had a full hour before Elsie would awake, or the family be abroad.

As the light gradually flooded the room, she became self-possessed and more resolute. The superstitious sensation, that had at first swept her nerves, yielded to a feeling of imaginative curiosity. She opened one of the bookcases almost with a feeling that it had life, and could be pained with the sharp wrench which she was obliged to give the lock.

As I have said, the books were in various languages, and Catharine could read but two, her native tongue and French, which she had caught up almost without effort, by painful associations in early life with persons to whom that language was most familiar; but she took down the Italian,

German, and Spanish authors, with that vague reverence which we always feel for a thing beyond our comprehension, and was seized with a quick thirst of the knowledge they contained.

Here was a new world for the young woman, a world of fresh sensations and never-ending variety. She had fallen unawares upon a mine of thought, unappropriated, beautiful thought, from which she might carry away new life, and not diminish the original stock by a single idea. Here was happiness! here was a solace for the baffled hopes and recoiling affections that had burdened her soul so long. She would no longer seek for joy among the living. The dead had left her the essence of their lives, and she would read their books, she would learn all these strange languages. She would live in the past lives of those who had become benefactors to humanity, by gathering the immortality which belongs to them from the past, for the benefit of generations yet to come.

With these aspirations, Catharine turned over the pages of an Italian poem, that she had taken from the shelves. The very strangeness of the words had its fascination. She panted to wrestle with her own ignorance, and overcome it with a single effort.

But a sound in the house awoke Catharine from this train of thought. She had duties to perform. Life was not given that it might be wasted in vague dreams and useless expectations. She closed the book, and wandered around the room, anxious to redeem it from its state of neglect, and yet reluctant to disturb the repose in which every object had rested so long.

As she stood, a light breeze swept up the valley and blew one of the shutters open, filling the room with light again. She noticed, now, a small mosaic table, half shrouded with a heap of what had been drapery cast over some object in the centre. Catharine lifted this drapery and found underneath

a gilded bird-cage, which, protected as it had been from the atmosphere, looked comparatively bright. The bottom was covered with seed husks, and among them, lay a little heap of gold-tinted feathers, which seemed like a sleeping canary. But as Catharine bent over it, her breath disturbed the feathers, and they began to quiver, while one or two were dislodged and floated softly through the wires.

Again Catharine was saddened. How many years must it have been, since the poor bird, of which nothing now remained but the plumage, had starved to death in its cage? Who could have been so cruel? What evil thing had left all this gloom and desolation behind it?

She lifted the cage softly and wiped the dust from the black marble on which it stood. With the first sweep of her hand there shone out, from the glittering stone, a wreath of white jessamine and orange-blossoms, inlaid into the jetty surface with that exquisite skill known best to the Florentine artizans. Leaves of malachite, veined with many tints of green, were interspersed with the blossoms, and all looked fresh and pure as if the stone mockery had been wrought but yesterday.

Here was a new theme of interest for Catharine. Some bridal garland seemed to have left its shadow on the stone, only to mock her curiosity. Surely all these strange and beautiful objects could not have been gathered for the enjoyment of these two old people; for then they never would have been so completely left to moulder into ruin.

When conjecture reached this point, she was called from the room by the low tinkle of a breakfast-bell, which warned her of the hours she had unconsciously given to this unsatisfactory train of thought. She hurriedly shook the dust from her garments, and went out with a strange, guilty feeling, as if she had been intruding into a sacred place.

How pleasantly the old people received her, as she entered the little breakfast-room that morning; and how could she

help the red flush that rose to her temple, when they kindly inquired what had occupied her all the morning.

Catharine was about to answer, but a glance from Elsie, who looked unusually serious and tranquil as she sat by her mother, was an unaccountable check upon her. There was no meaning in that dark, mournful look, and Catherine had encountered it a thousand times; but some unacknowledged intuition kept her silent; she could not force herself to speak of the room which she had just left.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE FAMILY BREAKFAST.

CATHARINE did not speak of her employment that morning. Some unaccountable restraint was upon her, and she could not force her tongue to ask the questions that were constantly forming themselves in her mind.

The old people were unusually quiet and gentle. Pleasant dreams, or, what is perhaps better, innocent thoughts, had filled their souls with sweet serenity. Since their daughter had returned, imperfect in temper and intellect as she was, their home had brightened into a Paradise around them. They called the poor woman by a thousand sweet terms of endearment, as if she had been still a child, and they indulging in the first bright joys of parental life.

It was beautiful to watch the holy workings of nature in those old hearts, as they sat by the breakfast-table that bright spring morning side by side, with their daughter, who was languidly reposing in an easy-chair on the opposite side of the table. In the wanderings of her intellect, she had retained exaggerated vestiges of a taste originally luxurious and imaginative. Now the dress, which had once been

splendid, became picturesque, and at times fantastic, but it was always arranged with a certain effect that bespoke great original refinement. She delighted in strong contrasts, rather than incongruities of color, and invariably rejected all fabrics that were not the most delicate and costly of their kind. In a store-room overhead she had found a wardrobe that had once been fashionable and costly, and the discovery had seemed to give her inexhaustible pleasure.

This morning she had arrayed herself with peculiar care. Her white muslin robe was elaborately embroidered down the front and over the bosom. She wore dainty slippers of crimson Russian leather, embossed with gold; and had tied a small lace handkerchief under her chin, which mingled softly with the profuse wealth of tresses, which she had been at great pains to train in long ringlets, evidently with some vague reminiscence of her childhood. There was nothing very fantastic in this, certainly, but the kerchief on her head, and the muslin of her robe, was of that pale yellow tinge, which nothing but time can give; and the gold upon her slippers was tarnished till it seemed like bronze.

Besides this, poor Elsie had made still more striking additions to her toilet. Over the muslin robe she wore an ample gown of crimson satin, lined with a lighter tinge of red, which was fastened at the waist with a belt of black morocco, united in front by an antique golden clasp.

There was something about this dress, and in the evident satisfaction with which Elsie exhibited herself in it, that touched some hidden memory in the old people. They looked at each other furtively, as if anxious to know what impression it was making; and at last the old lady's eyes quietly filled with tears, while a flush stole over her husband's forehead, as if old memories were carrying the blood hotly to his brain.

Catharine saw all this, and it added to the perplexity of her thoughts. But no one spoke. After a little, the old

man bent his head with a sort of start, as if the thought had just struck him, and asked a blessing on the food, a duty which had never been delayed before for many a long year by any worldly thought. Catharine remarked that his voice was indistinct, and the few words which fell from his lips came singly and at intervals, as with an effort of pain.

Elsie had not spoken all the morning. There she sat, in her easy-chair, eying her strange dress with a vague smile, as if wholly absorbed by it. She shook out the satin folds of her robe, tightened the golden clasp at her waist, and smoothed down the yellow and costly lace that fell over her hands, with dim self-complacency, smiling now and then on her parents, but uttering never a word. At length she seemed satisfied with her finery, and turned her eyes upon the window.

"Shall I open it?" said the dear old lady, still with tears in her eyes.

The daughter did not reply, but a soft smile came to her eyes, which still looked longingly through the sash. An old pear-tree was just in sight, clouded with white blossoms; and a pleasant wind sighed through a thicket of lilac-bushes and snow-balls, that grew nearer to the window, shaking their dew and perfume upon the air.

The smile upon Elsie's lips grew brighter. She stood up, and looked earnestly through the window. A gleam of intelligence shot over her face.

"The beehives, the beehives—who has broken up my beehives?" she murmured, in a tone of vague displeasure. "What have they done with my beehives, mother?"

The old woman's eyes glistened through their tears. It was the second time that Elsie had called her mother; and the very heart seemed blossoming afresh in her bosom, as she listened to the holy sound.

The beehives—Elsie's beehives? Alas! they had been taken away from beneath the old pear-tree more than twenty

years ago. The bees had been left to plunder the adjoining thickets and clover-fields, year after year, while no one touched the honey; and thus they had hived in neglect, dispersed, and left their cells empty so long that the old people had almost forgotten that they ever existed.

"The bees! oh, Elsie! they have gone to the woods," said the old man, in a voice of touching apology. "We did not kill them; we never gathered an ounce of their honey. You do not mind that they are gone, Elsie dear?"

"Oh," answered Elsie, wearily, as if the effort to remember had exhausted her,— "gone, are they? what for? why did they go? How everything slides, slides, slides away, and I keep running after, forever and forever running after. Oh! I am tired."

The old people looked at one another, and at Catharine, hopefully.

"Let her rest," said Catharine, in a gentle whisper. "Perhaps it may end better than we think!"

"Yes," said the old man, stealthily clasping the withered hand of his wife. "Let us watch. She may wander back to her youth again, and forget all that has passed."

"It may be so—God help the poor child—it may be so," murmured the old lady, casting looks of wistful tenderness across the table, while her daughter began to eat daintily, putting on airs like a child entrusted with a fork for the first time.

It was remarkable that the old lady never spoke of her daughter, though an elderly woman with waves of gray in her hair, except as "the child," or "the dear young creature." To her, those white hairs had no significance of age, but were the marks of a deep sorrow, over which the mother's heart mourned perpetually.

The breakfast was finished in silence. Catharine, usually so attentive to every movement of her charge, sat preoccupied and thoughtful. The old people dropped back into

their habitual calm, and Elsie still amused herself by arranging and re-arranging the folds of her robe, claiming admiration for the effect, by child-like glances at her mother. Perhaps they were right; the woman certainly did seem to be going back to her childishness again.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE TWO PORTRAITS.

WHEN Catharine arose to go, Elsie, following out the wilful instincts of her new character, crept close to old Mrs. Ford, and clung to her dress, entreating to be left; which flung the old couple into a state of absolute delight beautiful to behold. It was the first time their child had been content to remain alone with them since her sojourn in the house. Now she clung pleadingly to her mother's dress, and, seating herself upon a low stool at her feet, began to amuse herself by arranging scraps of silk, which she found in her mother's work-basket, with great nicety as to the colors, which made the old people look at each other with mournful smiles; it put them so in mind of old times, when she was indeed a child, body and mind.

Meantime Catharine had gone back to the library. She would summon no help, but, closing the door which shut her out from the rest of the house, began to work diligently, cleansing the books from dust, and re-arranging everything exactly as she had found it. In the progress of her task, she was constantly falling upon some new object of interest. The books we have spoken of held forth a sort of enchantment which turned her from work. The bronze medallions took a new interest after the dust had been removed from their delicate lines. But beyond this was a vague feeling

that she had a personal interest in redeeming those beautiful objects from neglect. The very atmosphere of the place seemed familiar, as if she had breathed it before. At any rate, a new vista of life opened to her from that room. It contained the means of knowledge, the power which should be to her in the place of lost happiness.

In a day or two this room was entirely in order, but it was only at intervals that Catharine could visit it, and her labors were performed with a guilty feeling, as if every wave of her brush must inflict a pang upon the old people who trusted her so thoroughly.

Had any one asked the girl why it was that she left the pictures to the last, and the meaning of the strange thrill that checked her whenever she approached them, no answer could have been obtained. She would have called it a foolish superstition, perhaps. Indeed, she did chide herself more than once for the vague feeling that possessed her, and imputed it to the general impression that she was intruding on sacred grounds, which had seized upon her from the first.

When all was finished, the crimson drapery taken from the table and arranged that it might flow over the bay window, or fall in rich waves against the black-walnut case-ment on each side; when the great library-chairs were dusted and in place, and the mosaic table shone out clear and bright, with the bird-cage in the centre, she turned slowly and walked toward the pictures.

Again the strange chill arrested her. A thin veil of gauze hung like a dusty cobweb over the paintings, and the frames gleamed out dim and misty from the crimson walls. She stood and wondered, holding her breath. How many years had that dusty web concealed the canvas which she was hesitating to look upon? Who had placed it there? Why had it never been removed? Perhaps it might prove the portrait of old Mr. Ford, or that dear old gentlewoman, his wife.

These thoughts kept her motionless till curiosity became painful. With a faint laugh at her own irresolution, she sprang upon a library-chair and tore away the gauze.

What a beautiful creature she must have been, this Elsie Ford, with those lustrous eyes, that peachy bloom of the cheek, and those lips so full and ripe, like strawberries with the June sunshine upon them, the smile hovering like the shadow of a honey-bee about the mouth, dimpling it softly at the corners. How beautiful Elsie Ford must have been!

Catharine's eyes filled as she looked upon the portrait, and traced back its dim resemblance to the stricken woman whom she had just left, catching like an infant at the sunbeams that came into her chamber-window. The bright, beautiful life, so charming in the picture, had all faded out from the original being. That image on the canvas seemed vital, Elsie the picture. Catharine sunk down to the easy-chair and wept.

After a time she went to the pendant of this picture, still oppressed by the strange dread which had followed her ever since she first entered the room. A sweep of her hand carried away the gauze from this portrait also, and that which was behind seemed to chill her into marble. She did not breathe, the color left her lips, and she retreated slowly backward, mute and astonished.

It was the portrait of her husband, the man who had abandoned her and her child to disgrace and starvation. Her own husband, for say what they would, deny it as he might, the man yonder, smiling upon her from the crimson of the wall, with his clear gray eyes and chestnut hair, *was* her husband. All the perjury on earth could not change the truth.

It was a terrible shock, this sudden appearance of the man who had wronged her. How frankly those eyes looked down into hers; that smile hovering around the fine mouth! her heart swelled to meet it with a great throb of joy. Those

curls — chestnut with a gleam of gold in them — how often had she swept them together in masses with her own hand, and laughed at the air of playful impatience with which he had shaken them back to their place on his white temples.

Oh, these memories were too sweet and too painful. The joy of the past was upon it in a bright, rosy cloud, but underneath lay the black thought that he had wronged and left her; even as she looked on the picture, it was there, darting like a flash of lightning through her heart.

In this struggle of joy and anguish she sat down, gazing up wistfully at the portrait, and though she knew that it was inanimate, beseeching it to speak one word, and tell her that he was blameless, — that the miserly old woman, his mother, had maligned him, and she would believe his first breath, believe even a look against the whole world, against facts, against truth itself.

Thus, half madly, the poor girl, the wife who had no husband, who had been a mother and was childless, pleaded with the dumb, smiling picture.

At last the sound of her own voice fell back upon her like a mockery. She hushed her weeping and grew still, but the yearning affections, which are the perfume of womanhood, struggled out of passion into thought. She pondered over her whole life, not yet a long one, not really eventful, for the most terrible suffering more frequently springs from commonplace circumstances than from startling romance. It was a life of feeling, of endurance and doubt, rather than action — so far destiny had been wrought out for her. She had neither chosen nor rejected it, gloomy as it had always been. Save the few months in which love had filled her dreary lot with sunshine, so glorious that her heart ached to think of it, existence to her had been a dreary thing. But the very absence of earthly friends had unconsciously lifted her thoughts to a higher and holier power, and there she had learned to look trustingly. She was young, too, and

healthy; thus life was not altogether a desert, though some of it had been spent in an insane asylum, and the rest marked by orphanage and desertion.

Desertion, ah! there was the doubt, which had never yet been entirely put to rest. Now, with that bright, honest face looking down upon her from the wall, her whole nature rose up against the conviction. He had died suddenly, or something would yet arise to clear him from the evil suspicions that she — wretch that she was — had dared to harbor against him.

These thoughts became a conviction. Her face, still wet with tears, was bathed with smiles. A holy faith in him she had loved so truly filled her soul, and the happiness therefrom rose and sparkled like starlight all around her. Her hands were softly clasped; her lips murmured a prayer for the forgiveness she would not grant to herself. She began to love the old library and everything in it, for was it not the scene of this sweet revelation? She had found her husband again.

CHAPTER XL.

THE BIRD-CAGE.

AS Catharine sat pondering over these thoughts, full of happiness and thanksgiving, the door was softly opened, and Elsie Ford stole in cautiously, like a timid child that had gone wilfully astray.

Catharine sat buried in the easy-chair with her back to the light, which lay full upon the two pictures. Languid from the emotions through which she had just passed, and held in thrall by the very quiet with which Elsie had entered, she sat motionless, watching the poor creature as she glided through the room.

The crimson drapery had been drawn over the arch of the window, falling a little apart in the centre, through which came a column of light upon the portraits, leaving the remainder of the library bathed, as it were, in the gloom of a warm twilight.

For a moment Elsie looked around as if bewildered. She had flung aside her crimson robe after one elaborate toilet, and now appeared in a plain morning-dress of pure white, loose from the shoulders down. A band of scarlet chenille, twisted lightly together, gathered up the long tresses of her hair, which she had arranged in fantastic waves and masses back of her head, as we find it in antique statues. In truth, all Elsie's fantasies in dress had a classic grace about them, which perhaps sprung from some early taste, brightened into the picturesque by insanity. Thus, in her cloud-like white dress, and with the glowing scarlet in her hair, she moved across the room, pausing every step or two, and listening as if she feared that some one might follow her.

A gleam of sharp intelligence shot across her face as she saw the bird-cage, and darting toward it, she opened the door, chirping softly with her lips, as if to call the bird forth. But the jar that she had given to the cage, and the air set in motion by her drapery, took up the heap of plumage that she had taken for a bird, and sent it floating through the room.

Elsie dropped her hand from the cage-door, and drooping downward in sad despondency, turned her head from side to side, gazing with a woe-begone countenance at the feathers as they quivered from her sight and settled down like soft gleams of gold in the dusky corners.

"Gone, gone; all alike, all alike," she muttered, in a low, tearful voice. "So it is always, always; everything that loves me dies — everything that I love melts into air, or turns into some wicked creature and stings me. My poor bird, my pretty canary, why did I come? Why did I let

these wicked hands touch his cage? they have driven him off, turned him into a wasp that will sting, sting, sting, oh!"

She shrunk back from the light, and held out her hands with the palms outward, as if warding off the insects that she fancied herself to have created.

"I can't help it—how can I? If these cruel things start to life with a touch of my finger, it is his fault, not mine; he drained the life from my soul and filled it with this wickedness. If it kills all beautiful things, and turns them into vipers and stinging insects that come back upon me for food, eating and biting at my temples day and night, how can I help it?"

The poor woman uttered these wild words with a low cry of anguish, fighting the air with one hand, and gathering the folds of her white robe up over her face with the other, as if to protect it from harm.

At last she looked up fearfully and with a shudder. What she deemed the swarm of yellow wasps no longer flew across the light, for the feathers had settled upon the floor, and their absence seemed to give her relief.

As the drapery fell from her face, it was clasped again between her folded hands, while a dull stillness fell upon her. She was looking at her own picture.

Catharine held her breath, for she was awe-stricken by the changes that swept over that pale face. Never, in all the vagaries of her insanity, had she seen that expression on Elsie's features till now.

At first the face took an expression of dull surprise, mingled with an under-current of contempt, as if she fancied that some one were attempting to impose upon her. She drew a step nearer, holding her breath, advancing timidly as if she expected it to fly away at her approach, as the bird had done. When she saw that it remained crowned with light and smiling upon her, the poor woman stole closer, and at last touched it with her fingers.

A look of wild amazement swept over her face. It had not disappeared with her touch. It smiled upon her yet. No venomous thing had sprung from those parted and smiling lips. It was herself gazing upon herself. She was there—and it was there—oh! how that poor brain worked and toiled to solve the question of its double self. Was she, the creature of pain, with her temples full of fire, which had no power to melt the snow from her hair, an evil growth from the loveliness before her, and that perfect still? After wandering so many years, with age upon her limbs, and a curse at her heart, had she come back upon her own young self to be met with smiles and pleasant looks, as if no wickedness had ever crept between them?

How was it that this beautiful woman, Elsie Ford, Elsie,—no, no, she would not speak or think the name that would wound the beautiful young creature, for the world she wouldn't do it,—she who knew so well what pain was, and how sharp a pang the sound of that name had been before her own heart became so clouded and heavy. No, she would be very kind to the poor young creature; it would be a pity to drive that smile away, and see those red lips growing pale and blue with such lurid words as she could utter, but would not.

But how came Elsie Ford there, surrounded by so many beautiful objects, and with the sunlight dancing and sparkling over her hair, as she had seen it playing upon the neck of a raven? She remembered well that these long tresses had been cut off, and the dress of amber brocade taken away. In its place—oh, she remembered that with a cry of anguish—in place of that robe they had bound her arms under a hempen garment, so strong, and scant, and coarse.

Oh! she remembered more, a thousand times more! but it was all so confused, flame, smoke, tears, cries breaking around her as she had seen (for Elsie had climbed the

fiery mountain) Vesuvius, clad in ashes, and crowned with clouds of smoky flame.

But how was all this? How had Elsie Ford come out from this fiery furnace so beautiful, so pleasant to look upon? It troubled her poor brain to make it all out. Ah! now she had it once more: Elsie had not been into the valley and shadow of death. It was herself only, the evil growth cast off by the beautiful one, who had been so full of trouble. He had not killed Elsie, only herself; not even that. Death would have been very pleasant at his hands; that was perhaps why he had let her suffer so much, but not die.

Poor Elsie! Some gleams of reason were struggling through all this wild talk, and this confusion of thoughts, and every ray of consciousness was a pang.

She turned from the picture at length, shaking her head wearily, as if the struggle for memory had worn her out. Then her eyes fell upon the other portrait, the handsome, bright-looking man who had left so strange an impression upon Catharine.

Her eyes grew larger; her lips parted, and with a long, breathless gaze she sunk slowly to the floor, like a snow-wreath touched by the sun.

Catharine arose and bent over the prostrate woman.

"Elsie, dear Elsie, speak to me!"

There was a movement of the white drapery, and a low moan.

"They are together; they two together yet, and I, oh, me—oh, me!"

She did not lift her head again, but went trembling and drooping from the library, moaning all the way.

CHAPTER XLI.

NURSES FOR THE CHILDREN OF THE POOR.

I MUST go back a year or two, and take up an event, which happened during Catharine's sojourn in the Insane Asylum.

An old man, gray-haired, and with a most bland countenance, cordial and ruddy, lighted by those soft chestnut-brown eyes that are always so pleasant of expression, sat behind his desk in the Almshouse building at the Park. It was visiting-day in his department, when all the orphan infants, put out to nurse by the city, were expected to be brought to the office for inspection, or for such changes as time made necessary.

It was a strange scene, at times painfully revolting, and again full of natural pathos. One after another, these poor little pauper souls were brought in, wrapped in an old shawl or torn blanket, motherless, or worse than motherless,—their very existence the growth of sin, or of misfortunes almost as bitter. The women who carried them were usually but one degree removed from the Almshouse themselves, and became the paid mothers of these miserable children, in order to save their own offspring from the same terrible fate.

Some of these women were kind, and gave themselves lovingly to their infant charges, yielding their hearts to humanity without reservation. These took their seats in the outer office, with quiet and serene faces, folding their orphan babies in their arms, with a soft, motherly instinct that had no thought of the searching eyes turned upon them, but waited serenely in an atmosphere of honest love. Others, cruel and crafty, were anxious only to pass examination, and

obtain the money which was to repay the forced succor they had given the forlorn children in their arms. These women were often seized with paroxysms of affection, as they ranged themselves to wait, and fell to caressing the poor infants with revolting fondness, hugging them to bosoms that loathed the contact, and kissing the poor lips from which their cruel hands would gladly have withheld the very food necessary to life.

Among these women, some motherly from nature, others cruel against nature, there came a little Irish woman, plump and rosy, and evidently of a cheerful habit, better clad and better looking every way than her companions. She held a beautiful little boy by the hand, who came reluctantly, lifting his fine eyes to her face with a wondering, anxious look, and dragging back shyly, half-hiding behind her gown, as he approached the crowd of strange women.

The poor creature had evidently been crying. Her eyes were red, and her rosy cheeks tear-stained, while her plump lips seemed laden with suppressed sobs, that threatened to break forth afresh every time her eyes fell upon the boy, who was so anxious to hide himself in her garments.

"Mammy, mammy, take me home; don't stay here, mammy; let's go home," pleaded the boy, pulling her gown with both his plump hands, while she lingered to wipe the tears from her eyes. "I won't stay; I won't speak to that man; he makes you cry."

Mary Margaret could not answer him, but a great sob burst from her lips, and snatching him up, she buried her face in his bosom.

The little fellow drew back, and laid a soft palm on each cheek, while he looked — oh! so lovingly, into her eyes.

"Don't, mammy, don't; please don't — home, go home!" he said, grieved and wondering.

"I can't, I can't; they won't let me take you home again. My heart is broke. Oh! it's got a pain that'll last

forever. Eddie, my darlint, put your two blissid little hants together, as if ye was prayen' to the Virgin herself, me boy; and ask the gentleman to let yees go back wid yer own nurse."

Eddie patted her cheeks again, while his beautiful lips began to quiver, and his eyes filled with tears.

"Yes, yes, don't cry any more. Eddie will tell him; don't cry; he will."

Struggling down from the poor woman's arms, the little fellow clenched his small white fists, and rubbed the tears from his baby-eyes, half-grieved, half-belligerent, while he marched up to the superintendent, who greeted him with an extended hand, smiling kindly.

"Well, Eddie, my boy, where's your hand?"

Eddie hid his little clenched fist in the folds of his dress, and received these advances with a defiant pout.

"Mammy wants me to go home, and I *will* go home!" he said, while his little form swelled and struggled with a rising sob.

"And so you shall, to a nice, big home, where you will have lots of little boys to play with."

"I don't want no boys to play with, but Pat and mammy," answered the little fellow, walking backward toward his nurse.

"But you shall live in a grand, big house."

"Mammy lives in a grand, big house," answered the child, quite convinced that his shanty-home was equal to any palace. "I like her grand home!"

"But mammy has n't got cherry-trees, and apple-orchards, and meadows full of clover," said the officer, amused, and yet touched by the child's resolute air.

"But she's got morning-glories, and — and red beans, and oh, dear! she's got everything — she has," cried the child, with a burst of tearful eloquence.

"Mister," said Mary Margaret, approaching the officer in

her motherly sorrow, "if ye'd only let the little felly stay a bit longer, till he's big enough to wear jacket and trousers, ye know; he's backard-like, ye see, and wants good motherly nursin' more 'n a three-months child."

The officer shook his head, and Mary Margaret looked wofully down upon the little fellow, who was striving to envelop himself in the folds of her calico dress.

"He's no mother but me, yer honor. It'd kill him intirely to go up yonder with the rest, and have all his beautiful curls cut short, and—and, oh! yer honor, it'll be the death of us both—it will. Could n't ye be merciful this onest? Consither he's a poor, motherless crathur, and only me to look up to in the wide worlt!"

Again the officer shook his head, but there was relenting and sympathy in his eyes. How could he help it, with that frank, pleading look fixed upon him, and the pretty child peeping out wistfully from the shelter of her garments.

"Indeed, Mrs. Dillon, I am sorry, but we have stretched a point in this case already, in consideration of your affection for the boy. The law is that all children, dependent on the city, must be removed to the institution when they are two years old. Now we know that little Eddie there is almost three, and he must take his chance with the rest."

Poor Mary Margaret's countenance fell, and Eddie made a grand effort to draw her away by force.

"Home!" he pleaded, "home, mammy; I will go home!"

"It may be," said Mary Margaret, determined not to give up while a hope was left. "It may be yer honor thinks it's the dollar a week I want; and it's bad enough me and the childer need it, anyhow; but if ye'd but consint, I'd take Eddy, the crathur, for half price, an' 'd think it a bargain, yer honor. If the old man had a word agin it, d' ye see, I'd sit up anights, and do another 'xtra gentleman's washing; it'd be no throuble in life, while I saw his beautiful, curly head peeping up from under the blankets, wid my own

two spalpeens on each side, to keep the darlint from falling out of bed, ye know. I'd always manage to get him a sup of new milk, yer honor, and 'd never put in a taste of water, as I do—an' little blame to me—wid the others."

Again Mary Margaret paused; she had no other arguments to offer, and her poor, kind heart swelled painfully, when she saw no symptom of yielding in the face of the official.

"I cannot, indeed, Mrs. Dillon. It is out of my power; the child must not remain entirely with you; with so many children of your own, it would be impossible for you to bring him up as he should be; your husband ought not to permit this injudicious kindness."

Poor Mary Margaret had nothing to answer. She knew well enough her husband, a hard-working man, had trouble enough to supply the clamorous wants of his own children, and that little Eddie, with his beauty and his sweet ways, had never been taught to rough it at home with the rest. Besides, there was a more powerful argument still,—that inexorable officer.

Mary Margaret looked down at the boy, and tears stole into her eyes, slowly blinding her to his wistful little face. She looked at the officer, clasping her hands and bending forward as if he had been the picture of a saint.

"Would ye do it, if I'd just go down on me two bended knees to yer honor—would ye now?"

"I have no power," answered the man abruptly, bending over the book of records that lay open before him, that the woman might not observe the moisture that crept into his eyes. "I have no power," he repeated again, abruptly, nay, almost with harshness, for he was afraid to trust himself longer with those two faces turned so imploringly upon him, compelled as he was to act by a rigid law.

Mary Margaret stooped down, and lifting the child in her arms, drew a corner of her shawl over him.

"Would yer honor let me keep him wid meself and the childer one more night then? It may n't come so hard to give him up, after we've had time to consider on it, and raisen it over wid de poor motherless orphan. If it was to go to heaven itself, we could n't give the crathur up the night. Will ye let him go home wid me just lying agin on me own motherly breast, as ye see him now? It'll never be again, an' I've nursed him like me own."

"Yes!" said the officer, kindly, glad to have a petition he could grant, "yes, yes; take him along, and if you wish it, go with him yourself up to the Island. Then you can be satisfied how well he will be cared for in his new home."

"Thank yer honor kindly. I'll do me best to be content," said the poor woman, wiping her eyes with a corner of her shawl, and folding it over the boy again. "Do ye think they'll bind him out, and put him to strangers entirely, yer honor?"

"No, no! he is quite too young for that. It is more likely that some person may adopt him and make a gentleman of him."

"He is a gentleman, every inch of him," answered Margaret, giving the child an enthusiastic hug, while her ardent temperament caught fire at this prophecy of a grand fortune. "It's meself that has been particular regarding his manners, never letting him run out in the sun or make dirt-pies, or pick up oyster-shells from the gutter, wid the common. See if he is n't white an' clane as a dove—the crathur—neck an' all, wid reverence to ye."

Here Mary Margaret jerked down the little fellow's calico frock in front, exhibiting a plump, snowy neck, softly flushed like a shell that has just left the water, and a pair of dimpled shoulders, from which the short sleeves were gathered up by bows of faded pink ribbon.

"Wouldn't any gentleman be proud of the like of that for a child of his own, now?" she continued, uttering her

words between the kisses that she lavished on the white neck and shoulders, leaving a flush with every touch. "Thank ye, kindly, for giving him to me and the childer for one night more; it's like sending a lost bird to its nest agin. God's blessings on ye!"

Thus, half in tears, and half grateful, Mrs. Dillon made her way through the hungry crowd, that even in its misery cast admiring glances after the child, and walked homeward. Striving to reconcile herself to the inevitable with resolute philosophy, but with a swell of grief at heart, which threatened every moment to break into a deluge of tears, she presented little Edward to his foster-brothers and playfellows once more. She informed them, a little crossly, for her true sorrow would break forth in some shape, that it was only for a night, and after that Eddie would be made a gentleman of entirely, and that "if he was going up among the common childer, it was only for convanience like, and after a while would be traiting 'em all with great civility, and bowing to 'em from his carriage-windy."

Her young brood took this information rather shyly, and Terry, who had been like a twin-brother to the little orphan, rebelled at once, vociferously protesting that he would go with Eddie and be a gentleman, too. But at length young Ireland was consoled with a promise, that perhaps he might yet ride behind the carriage which Eddie was undoubtedly to occupy, while the dear little fellow himself underwent a world of caresses, and was hushed to sleep with many a smothered sob.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE ADOPTED SON.

THE next day Mrs. Dillon stood at the ferry at Randell's Island, looking wistfully back toward the spot where she had just left the ewe lamb of her flock. Her face was red with weeping, and from time to time she lifted up a corner of her shawl and wiped the drops from her eyes. Little Terry set up a pathetic howl, as the boat which had brought them over put back on its return voyage. Mary Margaret had no heart to chide him, but turned sorrowfully away, grieved to the soul as few mothers would have been.

And there sat poor little Edward where he had been left, like a lost babe in all that wilderness of young life; all alone, and yet surrounded by so many. The very size of the nursery building terrified him. The crowd of strange faces hushed his grief into dumb silence. The nurses seemed like enemies that intended him some bodily harm, and from whom he would run away the moment their backs were turned.

The child looked up to impart these thoughts to his foster-mother, and she was gone. He searched wildly around; his innocent eyes grew large with affright; his mouth and chin began to quiver; and his poor little hands were pressed hard down upon the bench where they had seated him. That baby-struggle was a pitiful thing to witness. That tiny form, taking up its first battle of life, with no weapons but its terror and its tears, was touching beyond description.

When he saw that she was gone, and that he was quite alone in that forest of human beings, the wild eyes began to fill, his face flushed, and sobs of home-sick anguish heaved his chest. A group of little orphans, who had learned to keep their sorrows in silence, cast shy glances at him from

the benches; while he, with a child's instincts, looked wistfully at them through his tears, expecting the sympathy which they felt but could not express.

A nurse came toward him filled with kindly interest, and in her motherly way strove to soothe him.

"What is the matter, little one? don't take on so!" she said; "don't cry, that's a dear."

"Mammy, mammy! I want mammy!" pleaded the child, stretching out his little arms, but folding them over his face, and turning his back as she would have taken him up.

The nurse had many other cares, and left him to his grief. When she came back again, he was gazing out through the window with heavy eyes, and a look so heartbroken that she made fresh effort to console him.

It would not do. The child only asked for his mammy, answering everything with the same pleading look, and the same home-sick cry.

At night, when stretched upon the straw bed in the infant's dormitory, with a strange child resting on the same pillow, still and orderly, with its sorrows hushed down into a dreary content, little Edward lay sobbing in the stillness. The presence of so many children, filling the room with the monotonous breath of their slumber, frightened away sleep.

The moonlight, as it stole in through the windows, revealing the range of cots with the pale forms upon them in fitful gleams, made him think but the more yearningly of home. Everything was cold, purely clean, yet full of desolation to the child. He dared not cry; the stillness and expanse of the room — vast compared to Dillon's cabin — held him in awe. Vague ideas of something strange that was to happen, made his eyes gleam out large and wildly in the moonlight. There he lay, that poor, wakeful child, holding his breath, and swallowing his sobs in vague terror of the very life with which he was surrounded. Then the stillness was broken by rattling sounds in the wall, and the

patter of tiny feet along the floor. The rats, which haunt all public buildings impudently, as if they possessed an elective right to municipal plunder, were out on a midnight revel in the ceiling, and commenced chasing each other across the spotless floor.

Poor little Eddie heard the sound with a thrill of terror. His limbs shook, a low cry broke from his lips, and creeping forward he clung, shivering, to the other little child, more fortunate in its power to sleep, that lay in the same cot.

But, no, the child was used to these noises and would not awake. With those trembling arms clinging to him in wild terror, and those brown curls, damp with tears, falling over his face, the child slept on, leaving the poor stranger more desolately alone from his slumbering presence. He had become used to the vastness and the midnight noises, and could not feel the baby-heart fluttering like a wounded bird against his side.

And this night was a type of many that the boy spent in his new home. He would not be comforted; his eyes were always heavy or filled with pitiful tears; his little heart pined with a tender, yearning hunger for the friends who seemed hundreds of miles away. Grief was tenacious with him. His cheeks grew white as snow; there was always a troubled quiver on his baby-lips if any one spoke to him; but the noise of his sorrow was stilled, and so those who had charge said kindly to one another,—

"Poor thing, it is the homesickness; he will soon get over it."

But weeks passed, and Eddie did not get over his homesickness. He grew pale and quiet, but that sensitive baby-heart was desolate as ever. Visitors were, in those days, only admitted to the children once a month, consequently Mary Margaret did not see her child during these weeks of anguish.

One day, when the little creature was becoming dreamily

passive, a strange gentleman and lady entered the baby's nursery as they passed over the institution. They were both young and of singularly aristocratic appearance. Certainly there was nothing in the lady that reminded you of Mary Margaret Dillon, but the heart sometimes finds strange likenesses. When Eddie looked up, the lady's back was toward him. She was about the size of his nurse; this must have been all, but it was enough.

The child let himself down from his seat and ran toward the lady, his bright eyes flashing, his hands extended, and his soft brown curls all afloat.

"Mammy, mammy, take me," he cried, making ineffectual leaps to reach her arms.

The lady turned her face—a beautiful face, in nothing like Mary Margaret's, save that it was bright with kindly surprise.

The child dropped his eager hands with a look of pitiful disappointment that touched her to the soul.

"Who is this?" she said, as the little creature crept, broken-hearted, back to hide himself among the other children. "Tell me, what poor child is this that mistakes me for his mother?"

She blushed as she spoke, and turned her eyes shyly from the look of half interest, half of amusement which her husband turned upon her.

"Come here, darling, let me talk with you," she said, following the child. "Tell me your name."

She held out her arms, smiling, and with a glow upon her face, "Come!"

The boy glanced upward to her face. His eyes filled with light; his lips parted, and eying her with the shy look which we meet in a frightened rabbit, he held up his arms, laughing for the first time in weeks.

The lady snatched him eagerly to her bosom. In an instant his arms wreathed themselves lovingly around her neck, and his cheek lay against hers.

"Strange, is n't it, that he should take to me so suddenly?" she said, pressing the pretty face closer to hers, and giving it a sidelong kiss. "Is n't he pretty?"

"Yes, and no?" answered the husband, laughing. "He would be a little heathen if he did not take to you; and he is beautiful as one of Raphael's cherubs."

"And so loving," rejoined the wife, with a pleading glance. "What a pity to leave him here!"

The husband looked gravely from the lady to the child. In his heart he thought her like one of Raphael's Madonnas, only no painted child was ever so lovingly beautiful as the orphan she held.

"Could n't we?" pleaded the lady, softly with her lips, most eloquently with her eyes.

"It is a serious business," answered the husband, still gravely, and with a sort of sadness.

"But we have none of our own, and our home is so large?"

The cloud deepened on her husband's face.

"I know it," he said; "this thought of adopting a child takes me painfully."

"He looks like me enough to pass for ours," said the lady, blushing scarlet as the words left her lips. "I mean he has the same colored eyes and hair, and — and —"

"Yes," thought the gentleman, "they are alike; it would be a pity to disturb the picture." How pleadingly his eyes look out from under those curls, the same rich brown, with a gleam of gold in it. How came the little fellow so like my wife? But he only said very seriously, "Put him down, Mattie, we will talk it over at home!"

The lady saw that he was in earnest, and attempted to unwind the child's arms from her neck. But the little fellow cried out,—

"No, no, mammy, mammy!" all in a tremor of affright clinging closer, and raining wild, sweet kisses upon her face.

This was a kind of eloquence that neither the gentleman

nor lady could withstand. The homely but pathetic cry of "mammy," ran like a thrill of music through the young woman's heart. Her eyes swam in a tearful mist; her cheeks flushed with the hidden sweetness of a word never applied to her before. She had no power to force the child away, but drew him closer and closer to her bosom.

"Let me take him!" said the husband, with a troubled smile.

He reached forth his arms. Eddie lifted his head and eyed him with a sidelong glance, while he loosened one arm from the lady's neck, and clung closer with the other.

"Come, my little shaver, and see what I've got for you."

The boy bent slightly forward, and at length allowed himself to be taken, searching the gentleman's face earnestly all the time. But when a motion was made as if to place him on the floor, the gentleman found his neck suddenly encircled by those two loving arms, and the little, tearful face was laid confidently on his shoulder.

"Take me home—take me home," pleaded the sweet voice.

"Could n't we take him home and decide after?" pleaded the lady, with gentle feminine tact. "It will be a pleasant visit for the poor child, if nothing more."

"He seems bent upon it," answered the gentleman, laughing, and rather pleased with this half measure. "I think you could hardly get him from me yourself, Mattie."

The lady only laughed. She had no desire to weaken the effect already produced by the caressing helplessness of the little orphan, by claiming more than an equal share in his preference.

"Well, then, let us go," she said, in haste to have the child all to themselves.

"First, let us inquire about him. Perhaps he has parents or friends to interfere. In that case, you know, it would be out of the question."

The young wife looked very grave at this, and the cloud of anxiety did not leave her face till it was ascertained at the superintendent's office that Edward was an orphan, his father unknown, if living, and his mother's death recorded in the hospital books at Bellevue.

Thus accidentally, and almost from an affectionate caprice, this poor human waif was taken from his home in the nurseries; and when Mary Margaret came with her eager love on the visiting-day, leading little Terry by the hand — who was the bearer of a great orange for his foster-brother — the child was gone.

This was a terrible blow to the good nurse. But when she heard that Eddie had gone off with an undoubted gentleman and lady, and that a splendid private carriage had waited for them at the ferry, she was, to an extent, consoled, though this was all the positive knowledge the laws of the institution allowed her to obtain.

As for little Terry, he broke forth into a vociferous fit of crying, and for some minutes his plump and freckled cheeks were inundated with tears; but he, too, found a source of consolation in the big orange which now belonged entirely to himself, and which he devoured incontinently, skin and all, while seated on the wharf waiting a return of the ferry-boat which would convey himself and his mother back from their disappointing visit.

CHAPTER XLIII.

SITTING BY THE DOOR.

A QUIET and most beautiful life was that which Catharine led, in her country home. She was left completely mistress of her own time, with those kind old people,

who were always too happy when Elsie was alone with themselves; but with all the resources of enjoyment about her, a strange nervousness possessed the young woman. Notwithstanding the entire frankness of the old people, and the paternal interest with which they regarded her, there was a sort of dignified gentleness about them that forbade any allusion to the subject that haunted her thoughts continually.

How came her husband's portrait in that library, and what was the secret of its strange effect upon the demented daughter of the house? Why did it hang pendent with hers?

Again and again these questions arose to the young woman's lips; but they always died upon them unuttered. The subject of this closed library was so completely ignored, it seemed so decidedly cast out from the routine of life among them, that she had no way of introducing it that would not seem forced and abrupt.

Besides, a species of superstition seized upon her, regarding this apartment. Like most sensitive persons, who have suffered deeply, she shrunk from turning back to the painful points of her own experience; and blending these objects, as she necessarily must, with her own fate, the reserve which lay upon all the rest, fell like a mist over her also. This feeling grew with time, till she hoarded her own thoughts upon the subject as if they had been a sin.

But she was drawn with irrepressible attraction toward the room. It was the only place on earth where she was certain of perfect solitude. No one ever visited that wing of the building, or at least ever penetrated so far as the library. The grass around the bay-window grew rank, and uncared for, while the lilac-trees and clustering roses remained leafy and unpruned from year to year, though perfect order reigned everywhere else in the grounds.

Early in the morning, before the family were astir, Catharine always spent an hour or two in the room so full of in-

terest, yet which every one seemed to shun. The picture of her husband upon the wall seemed like a living soul. It had brought back her faith in humanity. It had made her less alone in the world.

A wonderful amount of knowledge may be accumulated, by devoting two morning hours out of the twenty-four to study, and, perhaps, the pleasantest acquirements we possess are those gathered up of our own free will, unaided and, as it were, in secret.

Thus it was with Catharine. With a tolerable rudimental education she found no difficulty in a want of masters, and every day saw her naturally fine mind expand itself with freshly gathered ideas, that gradually consolidated and took the form of knowledge.

Among other things she found a portfolio of drawings, rough studies, and bold, spirited sketches, such as genius throws off as it searches for perfect development, with implements and materials of art, which had long slumbered in disuse. The sight of these things awoke a new desire and a new talent in her. She would learn to paint. She would study hard, and so perfect herself, that some day his portrait should be hers. She would work incessantly till her art should achieve a copy of that. This was all the result she thought of—his picture—nothing more.

Here was an object for exertion. So she went to work, heart and soul, to obtain this shadow of a lost happiness; looking dreamily toward the future when he might learn how faithfully she had worked and thought for him.

It may injure Catharine, a deserted wife and childless mother, so young and so wronged, when I say that her life on the Island was one of tolerable happiness; but she was not an angel of suffering, only an earnest, hopeful, young creature, resolved to perform her duties honestly as they arose. Spite of everything, she was looking forward to the possibility of meeting her husband in the future, to rejoice

over him if he was blameless, and to forgive him under any circumstances.

Here again some of her own sex may condemn her for want of pride, and exclaim of what female dignity demands from the sex. But as I have said, Catharine was no heroine, only a beautiful, high-minded and gentle-hearted woman full of feminine compassion, not only for the miseries, but for the weaknesses of mankind. She never thought of her husband so much as having sinned against herself, individually, as of the wrong done to his own manliness.

People who have never loved can talk of that implacable dignity so regal in the proud woman; but those who love know well that affection is stronger than pride, nay, stronger than death itself. The woman who boasts that she would be unforgiving to the man she loves, has very little of tenderness in her nature, or real dignity either. Never does the true Christian, or the true woman, which is much the same thing, appear more beautiful than with a feeling of charity warm at heart. The highest and purest charity is that which refuses to look with implacability on the wrongs from which we have suffered.

These gentle and forgiving feelings grew strong within the heart of the young woman, as she studied in that solitary room, solitary save for the pictured presence of her husband. Her character became fixed and noble, with the gradual expansion of a fine intellect, and it was not long before the frail, fair girl, so rich in all generous feeling, became deep-thoughted as she had hitherto been warm-hearted.

For some time after her first discovery of the library, Catharine thought herself sure of solitude whenever she entered it. Once or twice she had heard soft footsteps creeping about the door, but after a moment's attention forgot the circumstance.

But one morning, while busy at her easel, working des-

perately toward the one object—a copy of her husband's portrait—she heard the heavy breathing of some object outside the door, followed by a suppressed murmur.

Catharine arose suddenly, and opened the door, holding her palette and brush in one hand. There in the hall, with her long, flowing night-dress lying around her like a snow-drift, sat Elsie, her dark, wild eyes turned wistfully toward the library, as Eve might have been supposed to crouch at the gates of Eden.

With a timid motion of the hand she beckoned Catharine toward her, uttering a low hush with her lips.

Catharine stepped out and bent over her, as she was seated on the floor.

"Hush! hist!" whispered Elsie, lifting her finger with a look of affright. "Is he there? are they together? does he suspect that I am here in the cold, waiting? don't tell him. I won't come nearer, but it seems so hard to sit here all alone, and they in there. Please don't tell them. Is he speaking to her? Does she say anything about me? She should n't, it's cruel. I carried off all the gray hairs, and the disgrace, and the heart-burn. They might let me stay here, you know."

The tone in which these words were uttered was so pleading and pitiful, the dark eyes, uplifted like those of a feverish child pleading for drink, had so much pathos in their glance, that Catharine felt tears trembling in her own voice, as she stooped down and endeavored to soothe the poor woman.

"Come in—come sit with me, Elsie dear. They will be glad to see you," she said, humoring the idea that possessed her charge.

Elsie shook her head. "I could n't—it sets my heart afire to see him looking so kindly at her, and so cruelly at me. But listen: I was more beautiful than she is, once, and he thought so—he did, indeed, but somehow—I don't understand how it was done—they made a division of God's

gifts, do you see. The beauty and love they left with her; to me, they gave age and tears, sinfulness, disgrace, hemp-jackets, and told me to go alone and be still. The evil spirit had been driven out from between them. They called it Elsie. Yes, they gave me her name, and told me to be gone. That is the reason I sit here on the floor, so cold and gray, while she enjoys herself in there. Don't tell them, for I like to stay!"

"Come back to your chamber, said Catharine, gently; "put on a nice dress, and we will go in together; they will be very glad to see us!"

"Did they tell you so?" inquired Elsie, quickly.

"Yes, they told me so!"

"Did they?—that was kind. But I can't accept it, you know. When the people off yonder in the Bible sent their poor goat into the wilderness loaded down with their sins, he never came back to disgrace them, but lay down and died of hunger in the woods."

"But you are not driven away—you are not alone or hungry!"

"Oh, yes, I am!—here, here!" said the poor creature, pressing a hand to her side, and rocking back and forth as with pain; "but it don't kill, this hunger. I starve and starve, but never die. Hush, they will hear me. Go back and shut the door. I like to sit just as I am; but don't tell for anything."

Catharine hesitated, and made another effort to win the poor creature from her uncomfortable position. But Elsie was in a positive mood, and would neither go into the library or to her own room, though the morning was chilly, and her raiment so insufficient; nothing would urge her to move.

"I know—I know," she said, impatiently, when Catharine urged this, "it is cold, it makes me shiver all over; but then you can guess how it is. I am to take all the cold, too, with the wakefulness and watching, it is a part of me this

cold; when I tremble, they smile. Do you know I never smile: that is left to them!"

"Then," said Catharine, gently, "I will stay with you."

"No, no. The cold is catching, you will take it!"

"But I must, unless you will go with me!"

"Not there," pleaded Elsie, pointing to the library.

"No, to our room."

"Well, if *you* are cold, I will go!"

After that day, Catharine often found Elsie watching by the library-door, as she came out from her morning studies.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE ITALIAN VILLA.

WITHIN sight of the library window, and down upon the sloping grounds that rolled in broken hollows to the sea, Catharine had noticed the building of a pretty Italian villa, that for a month or two of the spring had been throwing out some new wing or cornice through the trees that were to embower it. Even the workmen's hammers could now and then be heard in the stillness of the morning, when nothing but the birds and those who toil for their daily bread are abroad.

In a still life like hers, everything has its interest. From almost unconsciously watching the progress of such portions of the building as the irregularities of the ground made visible, Catharine began to wonder who this pretty residence was for, and how its inmates might hereafter affect her own singular life. It was the only dwelling in sight, and threatened to encroach somewhat upon the isolation of her home. Thus the subject became one of peculiar interest to her; while the old people now and then wondered who was

building a house so near them, and if their close neighborhood to strangers might not interfere with the entire freedom which poor Elsie now enjoyed.

Elsie herself heard the conversation regarding this new house, with wild attention. It seemed to startle her, and she murmured some vague comments as the others conversed, which betrayed a degree of unrest and excitement, that filled the good old people with fresh anxiety.

At length, in the month of June, just when the roses were in their richest flush of beauty, the workmen seemed to have completed their task. No more sounds came on the wind to remind the family that human life was so near. The glaring freshness of unpainted wood was toned down into a warm, gray tint, scarcely visible beyond the tall elms and fruit thickets that covered the intervening grounds. From any effect it had upon Catharine's life, the house might never have existed; it was a pretty object in the distance, nothing more; and yet it always gave her a faint pang when she looked that way. The same strange sensation occasioned by her husband's picture seemed in some way associated with this house; yet it was perfectly new, and had no possible connection with her or hers more than the forest-trees that had supplied the timbers.

One afternoon the family were all gathered in the common sitting-room, loitering about the tea-table, till twilight stole on, and the air was heavy with falling dew. Elsie was sitting as usual at her mother's feet, looking vaguely up to her face, and smiling that wan, hollow smile, that had neither intelligence nor warmth, and yet was so grateful to the gentle old mother.

Mr. Ford had been dreamingly reading the religious paper, which brought his weekly allowance of literature; but as the golden dusk stole on, he laid the venerated sheet upon the table, and was serenely reflecting over its contents.

Catharine sat by the window, restless, and with a vague

feeling of expectation, the more remarkable because no guests were ever invited to the lone dwelling, and because her reason told her that this impulsive feeling, that some one interested in her was coming, must be perfectly groundless. Still she sat wistfully gazing out into the dusk. Every sound, if but the fluttering of a bird upon its nest, made her start. She went forth in imagination into the world again, and mixed in the great drama of life, from which she had so long absented herself.

As she sat thus, leaning upon the window-sill, there came up through the evening mist two figures, a lady and a child, moving onward softly like shadows gliding over the grass.

Catharine held her breath and gazed upon them in silence. Were these the persons whom she had been unconsciously expecting? Who were they? And why did they creep so noiselessly across the sward?

The lady was in mourning, not the heavy black which shrouds the person as in a midnight of despair; but her garments were of soft, pale gray, that floated around her like a mist, leaving her gentle face in relief, dim but beautiful.

The child moved like a tropical bird beside his companion; his dress was of crimson, rich with the most delicate embroidery, that lay upon its borders like the plumage on the neck of a flamingo. The light was too dim for more than a general view of the strangers; but as they came slowly houseward, her heart beat fast, and she felt a sudden warmth mount into her cheek, as if something kindred and pleasant were stirring her spirit to its depths.

Impelled by a sudden impulse, at once urgent and unaccountable, the young woman arose and went out upon the front door-steps, as one who receives an expected guest.

The lady and the child paused, — they had not intended to enter the house, but, lured on by the quietness and lovely glimpses of scenery that surrounded it, they had been led unconsciously in front.

"Look, look, mamma. See that beautiful lady! She is coming to speak with you; come!"

As the child spoke, he drew eagerly upon the hand which led him; and Catharine, impelled by the same influence that had brought her to the door, descended the steps and met them.

The lady smiled.

"My little boy is so delighted with the fruit-trees and flowers, that I cannot keep him off your grounds," she said, mistaking Catharine for the mistress of the house. "It is an intrusion, I fear?"

Catharine did not answer. She was looking downward, with a sort of fascination, into the beautiful eyes of the boy, who neither smiled nor spoke, but returned her look so earnestly that his face grew sad, and he seemed ready to burst into tears.

"We will retire at once!" said the lady, hurt by her silence; "I am sure it is an intrusion."

Catharine lifted her eyes from the child, and cast a wistful, inquiring glance upon the mother, as if the words of this excuse, so sweetly uttered, had fallen upon her ear, but not upon her sense.

"He is yours!" she said, with a strange smile; "dear soul, he is yours!"

Again her eyes were turned on the boy, who met them with a steady, earnest gaze, half tearful, half smiling.

The young widow gave a troubled assent, and turning slowly, appeared about to retrace her steps.

"Do not go yet!" pleaded Catharine, catching her breath, and for the first time realizing her position and the strangeness of her conduct. "The grounds are pleasant always at sunset, and so little disturbed, that you can find the charm of a wild wood almost in them. I should like to show you some of the finest views."

The lady smiled, and bent her head in acceptance of this kind offer.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE STRANGE LADY AND HER CHILD.

CATHARINE reached out her hand. The little boy looked up with a rosy smile, and gave his.

"Do you like to hunt bird's-nests, and wade through the wet grass for peppermint, darling?" she inquired, taking the child's hand, while her own began to tremble at the touch.

"I don't know about the other, but birds, yes, yes, I love birds; mamma has got, oh, so many, in a big cage at home," answered the boy.

"He has not been much used to the country," added the mother; "we only came to the Island last week, and our place is so new, that it scarcely can be called rural just now. These old trees and thickets make me almost dissatisfied with the barrenness of our home."

"Then you live in the new house yonder? I am glad of it. We are close neighbors. I have looked at your pretty villa from the window yonder, for months, wondering who would live in it. You will remain there, and this little boy—oh, how glad I am that he will stay in the neighborhood."

"Thank you; this is very kind, after our intrusion; but your father must think it strange. We did not intend to come so near the house," said the lady, glancing at the window, at which a venerable head appeared, while Elsie was seen fluttering like an unquiet spirit in the dusk of the room beyond.

"He is not my father," said Catharine, simply, "only the person I live with. His daughter is ill; I am her friend, that is all."

"The companion of a sick woman, and so young, so—"

The lady was about to have said "so beautiful," but checked herself, blushing.

"It is a pleasant life," said Catharine, "and I am happy in it—merely to have a *home* is so much of itself."

"Yes, it must be a great blessing to those who have ever been homeless," answered the lady, with a look of interest. "It makes me shudder to think how desolate a poor young creature must be, cast upon the wide world. I have known beautiful, helpless women driven to the very almshouse from the want of a roof to shelter them."

A shudder passed over the lady as she spoke, and her eyes filled with trouble.

"Yes," said Catharine, with a degree of composure that had the dignity of experience in it, "I have seen these things—they do happen, but there are troubles that make even the almshouse as nothing. While we have one true heart to love us, it is shelter enough. To be unloved is perfect desolation."

A faint blush stole over the lady's face, the flush of suppressed tears. She looked down at the child, and clasped his hand closer.

"We have lost our shelter," she said.

The boy's face clouded. He understood that look of gentle grief too well.

"He has no father, then?" inquired Catharine.

"No one but me in the wide world."

The boy took hold of his mother's garments, and looked lovingly in her face. It was a pretty habit of dependence that he had learned while an infant, that of clinging to his mother's skirts, and she loved him for it.

These two women, complete strangers to each other, wandered slowly away from the house, talking quietly and sadly, like old friends that could afford to be natural; but by degrees Catharine became restless and slightly perturbed. There was something strange in this sudden confidence with

a stranger, that made her thoughtful. Familiar sounds in the voice, a sort of mesmeric atmosphere that had hung about her own childhood, came back. It seemed as if she had known this gentle widow years ago, and the wildness of the idea harassed her. The child, too—his eyes, the pretty curve of his red lips, the pure forehead, all were familiar; she seemed to have kissed them a thousand times; and it was with an effort of self-constraint that she kept from throwing her arms around him.

This strangely familiar feeling was shared by the widow; while the boy gave his hand lovingly to Catharine, and walked by her side silent, but listening to all they said. But he became restless after a while, and looking up roguishly in Catharine's face, lisped out—

"You so pretty—what is ou's name?"

"My name is Catharine—Catharine Barr, my little man. Now tell me what yours is?"

"My name is Edward Oakley," answered the child, "and my papa has gone to heaven, he has."

Catharine started, and dropped the child's hand. Mrs. Oakley was looking another way, and did not observe the change in her countenance, but the child saw it, and, thinking that she was cross, hung back and began to search for amusement for himself, while the two women passed on, unconscious that he had deserted them; for the name of Oakley had disturbed Catharine so much that she lost all self-possession. More than once she cast a long, searching look on the face of her companion, and each time became more and more satisfied that her intuition had been correct. She had known and loved that woman in her childhood.

But little Edward had forgotten them both in the beauty of everything around him. The night was just setting in, balmy and clear. The dew was falling, and the grass sparkled with moisture beneath the glow of a full moon. The fire-flies scattered their tiny stars along the sward, and

flashed in and out of the thickets with a brightness that dazzled the child. He sprang away, with his arms extended, rushing on, and grasping at the grass with his little hands here and there, hoping to fill them with sparks.

The ground was uneven and rolling where they stood; a hickory-grove lay in the distance, and all along the slope of the hill were knolls covered with winter green and barberry thickets, in which the child soon lost himself.

The fire-flies were constantly deluding him, flashing here and there, but never giving themselves to his grasp. He had outrun the voice of his mother, and the stillness frightened him. All at once as he stood listening, a whippoorwill began his night-plaint in the hickory-grove. The boy began to tremble as he heard it, the sound was so near a human lament, that it filled him alike with affright and compassion. Some one was in pain; he was sure that wicked robbers were hurting some lady down in the woods. What could he do? Where was his mother that she did not help the poor creature, whose lament fell so plaintively on the night?

The child called aloud for his mother, who had gone wildly in an opposite direction in search of him; and Catharine had blindly followed. Thus every instant increased the distance that separated them. Each interval of silence filled him with fresh terror, and when the bird-wail came, his own wild cry for help rang with it to return upon him without answer.

At last shriek after shriek rent the air; but all in vain. Then he sunk to the ground. Lifting his eyes to the stars, and folding his hands palm to palm, he began to say his prayers. They were broken with sobs of grief, for it was difficult for the child to have faith in heaven, when his mother neglected to come.

As he knelt upon the turf, sobbing out fragments of the Lord's Prayer, a light tread came behind him, and he was lifted suddenly from the ground.

"Mamma! mamma!" he cried, joyously.

But it was not mamma. It was a pale, dark face, that, lighted up with passionate joy, bent over him. The dark eyes, taking that strange brilliancy that nothing but moonlight can give, seemed burning their glances into his. The lips, all in motion, and agitated with broken murmurs, rained kisses upon his face, his arms, his hair, and even upon the folds of his dress.

"George!—Georgie, my own Georgie!"

"No, no, not yours. I won't, I won't!"

The little fellow struggled violently in the strange arms that had seized upon him, and his eyes grew wild and large with terror. But the female bore him on, whispering to herself,—

"I have found him, I have found him. Let them take all the rest. He is mine, mine!"

She raised her voice and sped on, shouting, "Mine, mine!" Her long, iron-gray hair had fallen loose, and floated out upon the wind; a tragic joy sat upon her features, as the moonlight glanced over them; and between her words she laughed a clear, gleeful laugh of defiance, which the whip-poorwill answered by his slow wail.

The boy grew still. Something in the face of his captor fascinated him. The breath was checked upon his parted lips as she bore him along.

As she approached the house, Elsie, for it was she, slackened her pace, and began to caress the child with a gentle sweetness that soon dispelled his terror. The words fell from her lips with a sort of charm. He began to wonder, rather than fear.

"Hush, now hush, don't speak a word, little Georgie; don't breathe loud, that's a dear. There, there!"

She pressed his cheek to hers, whispering these cautions softly, and stole through the lilac and snow-ball thickets into the house.

[She glided, with ghost-like stillness, through the hall, and through a long, dark passage, into the library. The shutters had been left open, and the room was filled with moonlight. It came through the bay window in a silvery flood, leaving but few shadows, and lying full and broad upon the two pictures.

A great easy-chair stood in the centre of the room, and in this she placed the child, still holding both arms around him, while she crouched half upon her knees to the floor.

"See, see! the boy comes willingly; he wishes to come; he loves me, and will stay forever and ever. Oh! ha! smile and smile; you cannot get him away again; he is mine, I tell you, all mine!"

As she spoke, Elsie fell to caressing the boy, stilling his fears with the mesmerism of a strong though disturbed volition, till at last he wound his arms about her neck, and fell asleep, with his head bent forward upon her bosom.

Softly the poor, demented woman drew him down to her side upon the floor, and making a couch of the cushions which she took from the chair, she covered him with the great crimson shawl worn over her loose, white robe.

Thus resting upon one elbow, and brooding over the child, as a thousand sweet feelings settled upon her face in the moonlight, she lay till daybreak, watchful and silent, triumphing in her soul over the two portraits that were to her human beings over whom she had attained a conquest.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE MANIAC AND THE CHILD.

MEANTIME the mother and Catharine had exhausted themselves in searching for the child. Mutual anxiety had drawn them together, as months of common acquaint-

ance could not have done. When they returned to the house after midnight, in order to send the servants out to continue the search, they found the old people up, and in a state of painful excitement. Elsie, who had left them as they supposed, to go to her room, had mysteriously disappeared.

Here was a new source of alarm. Never before had Elsie been known to leave the house after dark. What could have led her forth? And where had she fled to?

Again they all sallied out, the old people and the two young women, followed by the servants; but all in vain. At daylight they returned home, weary and sorrowful, filled with dread that something fatal had happened to these helpless creatures, so loved and so strangely lost.

At daylight a new thought stole upon Catharine. The library! Elsie might have concealed herself there, or might even be crouching near the door in the passage. She started up, ran along the passage, and flung open the library-door.

There was Elsie, in the gray light of the morning, with one arm over the child, watching the pictures with her black, wakeful eyes, and with that triumphant smile still upon her lips. The red drapery, the beautiful head of the boy resting upon the cushions, and Elsie with those bright eyes and the iron-gray hair sweeping around her, formed a group that was more than picturesque.

Catharine uttered a joyful cry, that brought the stranger and the two old people into the passage. The venerable parents ceased to weep as they approached the room, but a pallor came upon their faces, and they drew close together, as persons oppressed with a cold atmosphere strive to impart warmth each to the other.

Elsie half arose, supporting herself with one hand pressed against the floor.

"See, father — see, mother, I have got him. The night-

angel let him loose upon the moonbeams, then came to my room, whispering that he was alone searching for his mother and fleeing from one who was not his mother, but who had stolen the name and kept it, while we, who had his blood in our veins, were pining.

"I listened to the night-angel, for he is grand and true, though since I came here he has almost forsaken me. I listened to the night-angel, when he told me that a child of my blood was uttering cries for help in the open fields; that the forest-birds were scaring him with their hooting cries; and the woman who is *not* his mother was searching for him.

"The window was open, the grass underneath soft and silvered with moonshine. I flung out the folds of my shawl and stepped forth upon the air, sinking downward, but holding out the red wings of my drapery as the angels do when they descend from heaven — but they would not hold me up, and I fell upon the grass, which bathed my face and hands with its silver dew. Still I heard the cry of my child afar off, and mocked by a miserable whippoorwill, that taunted his agonies of fear with long, mournful wails, that pained me to the soul. I have heard that whining bird before; he loves to mock at me and mine. Years ago he began it, years from now he will keep it up.

"My poor baby was there alone on the hillside, shrieking for me to come; I knew that the woman who is not his mother was after him heart and soul, as I was, the woman that is not his mother, who stands there!"

"Here Elsie half started from the floor, and pointed her finger at the poor young widow, who began to tremble and turned white beneath the gleam of those wild black eyes.

"Go home!" continued Elsie, with a look of sudden affright; "he is mine, God gave him to me first, and when he was lost the night-angel brought him back to me. You are not his mother! It is my blood that reddens his cheek, my breath that heaves his bosom, my soul that looks through

his eyes. Go home, the boy is mine, — mine, I tell you, mine!"

Elsie almost shrieked these words out, in her eagerness to drive the pale young widow away; and she bent over the child fiercely as an eagle broods over its young.

The widow drew timidly forward, with her eyes, full of crushed tears, bent upon the child.

"Go home!" commanded Elsie, in wrath. "Go home! You are *not* his mother!"

"But I love him. He is mine. He never knew any mother but me," pleaded the young woman, while the tears started in large drops from her eyes, and her hands clasped themselves as if eager to implore silence and mercy from the maniac.

"No," answered Elsie, and her black eyes kindled with fiery light to their depths; "no, he is mine. When the blood reaches his heart, mine beats quicker; when it stops, I shall perish; he is my soul, lost years and years ago, which the night-angel has brought back. Go away, go away!"

The poor young woman looked around for some one to aid or comfort her. Catharine came forward.

"Yes," she said, gently, "the night-angel knows that Elsie is the child's mother; but he is so young and must be cared for. This is his nurse, who has taken charge of him for you. It is she who told the night-angel when he was ready to come back."

"Oh! are you sure?" questioned Elsie. "She does not claim to be his mother?"

"No, only his mamma. You don't mind what he calls her, if it is not mother."

"You are sure, quite sure?"

"Quite sure. Wake him and see if he calls her anything but mamma."

Elsie smiled. "Wake him, oh, yes, I know how!" She bent her pale lips to the rosy mouth of the child, leaving a timid kiss upon it.

"It makes my heart beat," she said, drawing a deep breath, and glancing furtively up at the portraits. "They are jealous. Yes, they know what it is to be jealous now."

CHAPTER XLVII.

THREE HEARTS GO OUT TO LITTLE EDDIE.

EDDIE only turned his beautiful head on the cushion, and went to sleep again, with soft murmurs and a deeper breath.

"Shall I kiss him once more?" inquired Elsie, lifting her large, pleading eyes to Catharine. "You don't think it troubles him?"

"No, he will awake next time."

Elsie bent down and pressed her lips like a burning seal upon the child's forehead, which flushed crimson beneath the pressure. He awoke with a faint struggle, and starting up, began to rub his eyes with both hands.

"Edward — Eddie!" exclaimed the widow.

The child scrambled up from the cushions as if to run toward her.

"Mamma, my own mamma!"

Elsie's face darkened like a thunder-cloud; her pale lips began to quiver, and she made a dart forward with her hand.

The child shrunk back on the cushions, frightened.

Catharine bent over Elsie, smiling.

"You see the child does not call her mother!"

"Don't he? No; that is true; she is only the nurse. Take him away, he must have a bath, you know; nurse, you will see to it."

Even as Elsie said this, however, the strength went out from her limbs, a delicious shiver ran through her whole frame, and as if the breath inhaled from those rosy lips had been a sweet poison, she breathed a sigh, and her head sunk slowly to the floor. Her hands dropped loose from the child, and she lay among the billowy folds of her white robe and crimson shawl, pale as snow, but with a smile of ineffable joy upon her face. The draught of life she had drank from those warm, half-parted lips was stealing like an elixir through her veins.

"Let us take the child away now!" said Catharine, stooping gently down and lifting the boy from the cushions, where Elsie's helplessness had left him.

"God bless the dear little fellow, he has made her smile," said the old man, looking from Edward to the white face of his daughter, while his features, usually so placid, quivered with a rush of affection. "Look at her, mother. When did she smile so naturally before?"

"But how white she is," said the dear, old lady, full of tender anxiety; "if it were not for the smile, it would seem like death!"

"But the smile, look at it! Since the day we saw that face under its wedding-veil, white as it is now, but so happy, she has never looked like that," said the old man.

"But what if it were death?" answered the old lady, constantly rendered anxious by any change that fell upon her daughter, who, spite of her sorrow and gray hair, always seemed a child to her. "I have heard that those who suffer most on earth often look happy as angels the moment they cease to breathe. Tell me, husband, tell me," she continued, clasping her hands with sudden affright, "is this sleep or death?"

"Neither," said Catharine, who had resigned the boy to his mother, and was kneeling beside Elsie. "She is insensible, that is all; a little effort will bring her to."

"Not yet—oh! not yet," cried the old lady, with tears in her eyes, drawing timidly toward the prostrate woman. "Let me kiss her while she looks so natural. Husband, come!"

She fell upon her knees, holding up her arms for the old gentleman, who knelt beside her; and the blended tears fell warm and fast on the poor maniac. First one and then the other bent forward, pressing timid kisses upon that pale face, thus assuring themselves that it still retained a glow of life.

Meantime Catharine drew her visitor aside. "Take the boy away," she said, hurriedly, "she will not miss him, perhaps, if he is out of sight. But let me come and see him sometimes; I will not trouble you often."

"I would leave him with you, if it would do her good, that is for an hour or two," said the lady, who was trembling still with the joy of having found her darling.

Catharine looked at the sleeping boy, with a keen desire to have him with her a few hours longer; but a habit of self-control, which suffering had matured, enabled her at once to suppress the wish.

"No," she answered, "it would do no good, unless she had him always with her. It is a wild fancy that may not return while he is out of sight; besides, you look weary. Up all night, and so anxious."

"I will go then, if you think it best," answered the widow, with an effort; and she moved away with the child.

"One moment!" pleaded Catharine, for her heart sunk as she saw the boy carried off. "If you will sit down in the breakfast-room a moment, while I take care of poor Elsie, perhaps you will permit me to help you carry him home. I should be so happy, and you are worn out!"

"He is heavy," answered the widow, "but that is nothing. I am so glad to get him in my arms again. I could carry him over the whole world without feeling the weight."

"I should like to carry him," said Catharine, gently, "if you were willing."

"I will wait, of course I will wait. He is heavy, and I am almost tired out, as you say. It is very kind of you; I will wait!"

The widow saw how anxious Catharine was, and with gentle tact gave way to her wishes.

They hurried into the breakfast-room together, and after Catharine had arranged the cushions and white dainty couch for the child to rest on, she returned to the library.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE IMAGE IN THE GLASS.

ELSIE had partially recovered. Her eyes were open, and she was resting on her elbow, looking with childlike wonder around the room; while the dear old people stood hand-in-hand, regarding her through a mist of grateful tears.

"How did I come here?" said Elsie, in her sweet, natural voice, that made those two fond hearts leap in unison; "I must have studied late, and fallen asleep after. Did he miss me?"

The old people looked at each other in alarm.

"Of whom does she speak?" inquired Catharine.

"Of him," answered the old man, glancing toward the portrait. "What can we answer?"

"He did not reach home last night," said Catharine, gently.

"And who is this?" inquired Elsie, bending her brows, "who knows of my husband's movements better than I do myself? Send that woman from the house, father. The last one, you remember the last one!"

"Elsie, do you not know me?" inquired Catharine, astonished.

"How should I?" was the terse answer. "What am I to you?"

"I am your friend!"

Elsie laughed softly. "I never had but one friend, and she —"

"Well, never mind her, darling," interposed the old lady, anxiously.

Elsie cast a scrutinizing glance at the old lady, and a look of profound astonishment came to her face.

"Why, mother, how strange you look! How old you are! Dear me, your hair has grown so white; and that queer cap. This will never do, mother."

"My child — my dear child!"

Elsie laughed, and shook her head.

"Don't plead. Don't attempt to persuade me, mother. You must always dress like a gentlewoman. That hair and cap are frightful. Remember how much he thinks of these things."

The old people remained silent. This was a phase of madness that they had never witnessed before. Catharine, too, was puzzled. Elsie seemed struggling with some old remembrance, or rather to have cast herself back into a far-off scene of action, forgetting everything else; and the young woman could only look on, waiting for opportunity to act.

Elsie spoke again.

"But while I am scolding you, mamma, I had forgotten to look at myself, in this robe so disordered, and my hair all down. What will he think of me?"

As she spoke, Elsie moved toward a small mirror, set into the door of a cabinet, with which she seemed familiar.

"Why, how is this?" she cried, with astonishment, as the reflection of her figure came back from the glass; and holding out her long hair at arm's length, she allowed the gray

tresses to drop slowly from her figure, repeating the question sharply, "what is this? whose hair is this?"

No one answered her, and she stood gazing upon herself in wild amazement, turning her dark eyes upon her parents with a stern, questioning air, as if they had transfigured her.

"I cannot make it out," she said at last, dropping her arms sadly downward; "I cannot make it out."

"It is remembrance. It is a return of sanity!" whispered Catharine. "Her recollection of what she has been, her forgetfulness of me—it is a hopeful sign."

The old people began to tremble. Their withered hands clung together, shaking like autumn-leaves; low murmurs broke from their lips, but no words were uttered. They listened in breathless suspense for the next sentence that might fall from those troubled lips.

"I wonder—I wish some one would tell me what it means," she continued, looking wistfully in the glass. "How am I to get these lines from my forehead, these, these——"

She checked herself suddenly, gasping for breath. Her eyes were fixed wildly on the mirror as if she had seen a basilisk there; her white lips began to tremble; and uttering a low cry, she dashed her clenched hand against the glass, shivering it to a thousand fragments.

"I have done it—I have done it!" she cried, with an insane glare of the eyes, as she held out her clenched hand, all crimson with drops of blood, for them to look upon. "She crossed my path once, twice, again! She looks like a witch now; but it's her—I know her! I have crushed her, do you see?"

As she cried out in this exultant fashion, Elsie's glance fell upon the bay-window, and instantly the breath was hushed on her lips.

"There, there," she cried, "I killed her, but she is there yet!"

They followed her eyes, and there, close by the old-fash-

ioned bay-window, peering into the room, stood a strange woman, gaunt and witchlike, both in face and figure. Her sharp, wizened face was buried in a huge bonnet, which might have been in fashion twenty years before; and her soiled, even ragged, dress, was partially concealed by a shawl covered with a glowing pattern of red, green, orange, and blue, which was, possibly, in vogue at the time the bonnet was made. Still, both these articles seemed unworn till now. The blond and flowers on the bonnet were yellow and faded with time, not by use. Her shawl had evidently just been shaken out of its original folds. But for these articles of finery, her appearance would have been that of a beggar. It was now merely fantastic; for her gaiter-boots were not mates—one was buttoned, and the other laced with a bit of strong twine. She wore no stockings; and the fingers of one hand protruded through a soiled cotton glove, while the other was concealed under her shawl, evidently lacking a mate.

This fantastic figure stood close by the window, peering through with her keen, black eyes, that had the sharp glitter of a rattlesnake in them. But for this keen intelligence, she might have been taken for a common vagrant, on whom some kind old woman had bestowed charity from her hoard of old-fashioned garments. Instantly a cry broke from Catharine also, while the good old couple looked at each other in dismay.

No one spoke, but all remained paralyzed, white as death and gazing at each other. Catharine, usually so self-possessed, shook like an aspen, and Elsie crept to her side, seizing upon her garments for protection, a sure sign that her insanity, for a moment put off, had returned again, more fiercely than ever.

The strange creature at the window seemed rather amused by the consternation she had produced. Her face wrinkled into a laugh, and the glitter of her eyes seemed to strike fire upon the glass. After indulging herself a moment or two, she turned away, walking deliberately toward the front door.

CHAPTER XLIX.

ENEMIES MEETING.

THE young widow still remained in the breakfast-room, sitting by the little boy, who slept peacefully upon a sofa. As she looked up from the beautiful face, so warm and rosy with sleep, her eyes fell upon this singular woman, who stood within the hall, looking keenly at her from the shelter of her huge, old-fashioned bonnet.

The impression made upon this young woman was quite unlike that left upon the group in the library. A look of profound surprise, not unmingled with amusement at the strange figure which presented itself, came over her face, for she had recovered her child and was disposed to cheerful thoughts.

"The people are all in another part of the house," she said, pleasantly, "but here is a trifle, if you require help."

The woman came forward, with a chuckle, and seized upon the piece of silver so kindly offered.

"Ha, ha—I am rolling in gold, rolling in it, do you see. But as for help, the more one has, the more one wants help. I have a cat and three chickens at home, that'll be the better for what you give them. As for me, I can make my bed of gold and feel it soft. Oh! ha, that's a pretty boy you've got there."

The young mother was gratified. The woman before her became less grotesque. Maternal love was beginning to soften even her evil exterior.

"Yes," said the gentle matron, "he is a darling. If you could but see his eyes now. Wait a moment. He stirs!"

"Ah! I can wait to see his eyes, dear little rogue. How white his forehead is! What curls, brown as a chestnut,

with a touch of gold in it. Ah, there lies the beauty. Gold, gold, I should like to see it everywhere."

As she spoke, the old woman crept close to the sofa, and began to lift the curls, which lay on the child's temple, with her claw-like fingers.

As she did this, the widow, who was looking on rather anxiously, for she recoiled from the sight of those hooked finger-nails so close to the snowy forehead of her child, saw for the first time what looked like the shadow of a ruby cross upon the boy's temple, the top running up among the curls, which, strangely enough, did not grow upon the spot, but only sheltered it from casual scrutiny.

"It is the mark of his fingers. He always sleeps with his hand under his head," observed the widow, with a vague feeling of awe. "His skin is so delicate, the touch of a rose-leaf makes it flush."

"Pretty though, is n't it?" said the old woman, with a sharp laugh.

"Everything about him is beautiful to me," said the young woman, gazing fondly on the child.

"Eddie, my darling—has he slept enough?"

The little fellow, fully aroused at last from his sweet slumber, turned upon his cushion and began to rub both little fists into his eyes, while his lips parted like the sudden unfolding of a rose-bud.

"Mamma!"

The little fellow rose to a sitting posture and held out his arms.

"My darling!"

"Dear little fellow. Never mind, come to aunty," interposed the strange woman, reaching forth her arms, that fell around the child like a pair of flails.

The boy struggled and wrung himself free from this unwelcome embrace.

"Let me alone," he said, clenching his tiny fist, and stamp-

ing fiercely upon the sofa-cushion, "I don't want beggar-women to touch me!"

"Beggar!" cried the woman, with a shrill laugh. "Ah! that's a nice joke, my darling. Beggar! I've half a mind to shake you where you stand. Beggar! Oh! it's a sweet child. Of course it's your own, ma'am?"

This question was put with startling abruptness, accompanied by a sharp, scrutinizing glance, that drove the blood from the fair cheek it searched.

"Mine, of course. Yes, of course," faltered the lady, drawing the boy toward her with both arms. "Mine, yes, yes, whose else? What do you mean, woman?"

Her voice was sharp with anxiety. Her soft eyes turned a startled gaze on that grim face, which looked to her like that of a fiend.

"Oh! of course, why not? he looks like you, don't he? Of course, who doubts it?" mocked the woman.

"Go away, go away, beggar-woman," cried the child, clinging to his mother's neck with one arm, and clenching his right hand with puny courage. "Don't look at my mamma so. Don't speak to her. Go away, or I'll, I'll — yes, I will — so there now!"

Here the little hero burst into tears, and hid his face upon his mother's shoulder.

"What do you want, woman?" inquired the young matron, rising with the boy in her arms. "If you wish to see the gentleman of the house, he is engaged. I do not live here. Let me pass."

"Let me have another look at the darling, just a peep into his eyes, I'm so fond of children," said the woman, with wheedling softness, that was far more disgusting than her rudeness had been. "I want him to know me, bless his pretty face!"

"Let me pass!" insisted the widow, beginning to feel terrified, "I do not wish him to look at you."

"Oh! that's cruel now, and the boy so like his father!"

"So like his father! Did you know him, then?"

"I did not know your husband; but I did know this child's father," was the answer.

"No! you did not — you could not. The thing is quite impossible. No one ever knew him."

The old woman laughed. "I must have another look," she said, attempting to seize upon the child, who uttered a sudden cry.

Presently a form came leaping through the hall, uttering a shriek with every bound. Her hair streamed backward, her eyes blazed, her arms were outstretched. She rushed forward, like a bird of prey with its spoil in sight. Her hands fell with a clutch upon that meagre woman, shaking her in every limb as they seized upon her shoulders.

"Ha! ha! I have found you at last," cried she, "touch him, touch him, oh! touch him, and I'll —"

Elsie paused a moment, and stealing both hands slowly from the shoulders to the throat of the old woman, clutched it, turning her head backward and saying to Catharine, "May I? shall I? She has grown into a fiend; let me choke her."

She pleaded for permission to kill that woman as a mother pleads for the life of a child. The insane lustre of her eyes grew brighter, her pale hands quivered eagerly about the lean throat upon which they had not yet firmly closed. She was pleading for permission to kill the woman as if she had been a serpent.

Catharine came up, terrified but firm. Her clear blue eyes were fixed steadily on those of the maniac, her slender form erected itself into command.

"Come," she said, "leave this woman; she belongs to God."

"Why don't he kill her then?" hissed the maniac, striving to evade Catharine's glance.

"Because he is, perhaps, punishing her with life."

"But it would be so pleasant to kill her!" pleaded Elsie, "and I will. Nobody gives me any happiness. I will take it for myself."

Even in her peril, for it was imminent, the strange woman did not lose her craft. She managed to fix her eyes, cold and sharp as steel, upon the glittering orbs of her enemy.

"See, stoop down and I'll tell you something," she said, in a voice that gave no evidence of the terror that shook her heart.

Elsie looked down into the cold depths of her eyes, and her head bent slowly forward like a bird that is charmed to death.

"Of him? Will you tell me?" she whispered.

"He wishes to see you. He sent me to ask if he might come. Let me go, and I will bring him."

"Where is he?" whispered Elsie. "I heard him crying in the woods last night, crying out so mournfully; but I knew the reason; he had lost the child. Oh! how one cries out who has lost a child! But I found it. Ha! ha! I found it! and let him wail on. No wonder he complained all night, it is very lonesome to be without one's child. Do you think he will moan every night till the boy goes back?"

"He will come and ask you to stay with him," said the crafty wretch, drawing a deep breath as she felt the pale hands unclasp from her throat.

"But you will not go—you will stay here, or sail off over the seas away, away. Yes, yes, I will go down into the woods. Turn your face to the east and I will go westward. One, two graves shall be under the setting sun, canopied with clouds of crimson and amber and pale green, all floating, floating, floating. But you—you shall die alone, alone, alone!"

Her hands dropped away from the trembling creature,

and were flung triumphantly upward. Her voice rose and swelled into a sort of chant, and as she passed through the hall, the words, "Alone, alone, alone," came back with a mournful emphasis that made even that bad woman turn pale.

CHAPTER L.

A VISITOR TO BREAKFAST.

THE old gentleman, who had regarded this scene in anxious silence, now moved forward and confronted his unwelcome visitor.

"Madam, this is your second visit here," he said; "what new trouble is to fall upon us?"

"He-he!" laughed the woman, hysterical with fright, "I only came to inquire after the interesting young lady, who has made my neck burn with her fingers. Her welcome was a warmer one than yours."

"What is your business here?" persisted the old man.

"Nothing, nothing. I came down to the Island for amusement, and thought I'd just call and see how things went on in the old place. You don't seem glad to see me. But I got used to that long ago. Nice little fellow, isn't it?"

She pointed her finger at Eddie, who, shrinking away as if from a basilisk, began to cry.

The old man turned his eyes that way. In the confusion and anxieties of the morning, he had hardly looked on the child. Now the glance brought an entire change in his countenance. A faint color mounted to his forehead, and stepping forward, he took the boy suddenly from his mother.

"Don't let her touch him. Oh! don't let her touch him!" pleaded the lady.

"Not for the universe!" said the old man. "I know what her touch is to innocent things like this. Have no fear. She shall be driven hence, leper as she is."

"Leper! Ah! that's a new name," half snarled, half jeered the woman. "I thought you had run yourself out abusing me. But this is something uncommon! Leper! that is a name in your Protestant Bible, I suppose."

"If you have business here, speak; if not, go out from under my roof; I cannot breathe while it shelters you. Go, I say. You have driven my poor child mad again. The sight of you is worse than death to us all."

"Now this is hospitality, this is gratitude. Well, well, I am ready to go. Shall I carry the little boy for you, ma'am?"

"No," replied the widow, breathless with apprehension; "give Edward to me, sir. I must return home. My people do not know that he is found."

"Oh! don't be frightened. I a'n't after your precious treasure. Keep him to yourself, for what I care. He is n't mine a bit more than he's yours, so we won't quarrel about him."

The witch gave the strings of her bonnet a sharp jerk as she spoke, tied them in a hard knot under her chin, and fluttered from the room, leaving an unpleasant laugh floating behind.

When she disappeared, moving downward to the water, the old man spoke again:

"I will carry the boy home for you. Don't be frightened. She is a wicked woman, but her day is over; she can insult nothing more!"

"Who is she?" inquired the widow, so anxiously that her question seemed abrupt.

"An evil woman, who has led an evil life," he answered.

"Do not mention her. Drive her from the house. I charge you, never let that woman enter the presence of my child again," interposed the old lady, who entered the room that instant.

"She never shall, mother, she never shall," answered the husband. "Be pacified. She will not attempt to return."

"She, who haunted my child into a madhouse, comes again like a fiend that will not be satisfied. Poor, poor Elsie, she will not speak to me. There she sits in a corner of her room, singing over that one word 'alone, alone.' Husband, husband, it is breaking my heart."

"Be patient, wife. The woman has gone. Elsie will recover from this wild fit—do be patient!" he replied, soothingly.

"I will go to her. I will sit down by her side, and weep while she sings. I am old and weak. What else can I do but weep for my child."

The old lady went out, making this mournful plaint, and her husband, with a troubled face, and slow, sad step, bore little Edward homeward. As he walked, the good man became composed; the little form pressed to his bosom gave bloom and life to his feelings; a glow of enthusiasm stole through his veins; and without knowing it, the old man grew strong in the young life given to his embrace.

The widow walked thoughtfully by his side. Her brow was clouded, her look troubled. She glanced back now and then, apprehensive that the evil woman might follow her and the child.

The house, which they entered, was a graceful contrast to the one they had left. Verandas of light iron work ran around one wing and across the front; passion-flowers and other rare hot-house vines crept in and out through this network, like colored embroidery on a lace ground: the whole dwelling was light, cool, and exceedingly pleasant. The fragrance of cape jessamines and heliotrope stole out through this tangled veil of flowers; and hid away among the vines were cages full of singing-birds, sending out gushes of song to greet the early morning.

The old gentleman did not notice these things, but placed

the child gently upon his feet in the veranda, and turned away. His heart was full of apprehension regarding his daughter. The half-subdued madness had returned upon her, their old enemy had appeared again. The fear of long, long years was entirely broken up. Why should that wily serpent have crept into his Eden a second time? Filled with these thoughts, the old man bade his neighbor a gentle good morning and went away.

Mrs. Oakley entered her dwelling, weary, and filled with a vague terror by the scene she had witnessed. The night's watch had left her garments in disarray. The dark-brown hair was partly unbraided, and fell in waves half-way to her shoulders; her bonnet was pushed back, and her pale face stained with tears.

A small breakfast-room opened upon the veranda, its French windows clouded with lace, and its adornments cool and simple. A breakfast-table had been spread in expectation of her coming, and with its service of pure white china and frosted silver stood before these misty windows, through which a net-work of vines and blossoms was softly visible.

A person, who sat in this room, saw Mrs. Oakley as she entered, and arose as if to go forth and meet her. But a glance at her pale face checked him, and seating himself, he saw her pass to her chamber.

The gentleman sat alone some time, dreamily watching the humming-birds, as they flashed in and out through the blooming screen of flowers, shaking the dew in glittering drops upon the sunshine, and humming softly to the bells they robbed of honey. A smile was upon the stranger's lips. He seemed waiting in tranquil mood for some anticipated joy. At last Mrs. Oakley came in, leading her boy by the hand. A robe of spotted muslin had displaced her half-mourning dress, lilac ribbons knotted it together down the front and brightened the folds upon her bosom. Her beautiful tresses lay coiled in one heavy braid around her

head. Nothing could have been more simple than her appearance. But her face was pale, and a look of fatigue hung upon it.

She evidently expected to find the breakfast-room empty, and entered it with downcast eyes. An exclamation from the child, and a joyful leap forward, made her look up. A wave of crimson rushed over her face; she smiled half gladly, half shyly, and held out her hand.

"When did you come? Have you waited long?" she said.

It was a commonplace welcome in words; but her voice grew sweet with suppressed tenderness, as she uttered it.

"I have been waiting and dreaming here this half hour," answered her guest, taking Eddie in his arms; "I did not expect to find you from home so early."

"Oh, it was Eddie's fault, he ran away and was lost all night."

"Lost! how? Where did you find him?"

There was no reason why the young widow should not have answered this question. But there was a feeling of sadness connected with the scenes she had witnessed that night, which checked her, and she merely replied that a neighbor had found the boy and taken him home.

"And oh," interposed Eddie, "she was such a tall, black lady, with eyes all fire, and such hot lips."

"You did not like her then, my little man?" inquired the visitor.

"Yes, I did. She loved me, oh, so much. You don't know how hard she kissed me, and hugged me till it stopped my breath."

"I don't wonder," replied the stranger. "Who could help loving you dearly?" and his fine face flushed crimson, as he pressed a kiss on the rosy mouth of the child.

"Come," said Mrs. Oakley, blushing also, but smiling amid the pleasant confusion. "We shall all have an appetite for breakfast."

And with the timid bashfulness of a girl, she sat down to do the honors of her new home to one whose gaze she had learned to tremble under.

CHAPTER LI.

OUT IN THE STORM.

WHY did that miserable woman prowl, so cat-like and stealthily, around those two houses? What motive could have brought her so far from home, a second Satan, to poison and blast the Eden of peace and charity those two aged people had gathered around them? What had they ever done, that she should persecute them so ruthlessly with her presence?

They knew her, that was certain, for, Catharine, even beyond her own shuddering fear, had noticed that their limbs trembled beneath them as she approached, and that a deadly fear burned in their eyes and spoke in every line of their gentle faces.

Elsie too. The very sight of this evil woman had driven her into fierce insanity again. Why was this? Had they known her before? If so, how and where? The portrait of her husband, — was that, too, a mysterious link between these old people, so opposite in character, so unlikely to hold anything in common? How was she connected with them all?

These conjectures kept Catharine awake half the night, while poor Elsie moaned and muttered in her sleep, or started up with wild cries, calling upon God to drive her enemies forth and not let them torment her forever!

Catharine left her bed, feverish and excited by these thoughts. She felt sure that Madame De Marke had not

recognized her; for she had been standing on one side in the library, when those evil eyes looked through the window. But the very sight of her old enemy left a nervous dread behind it, and she could not rest. Events of importance to her own destiny seemed to be crowding themselves around her, vaguely, it is true, but with a force that awoke a sort of terror in her.

She opened her chamber-window and sat down. Elsie was moaning and muttering in her bed, agonized by sleeping terrors. The wind without rose high and blustering; clouds lowered down among the trees; and gusts of rain drifted through the leaves, bathing them, as it were, with liquid diamonds, through which the lightning shot from time to time, with its thousand golden arrows.

Next to her chamber, the two old people lay awake. The sound of their conversation came to her ear at times through the pauses of the wind, like a softened and mournful echo of Elsie's raving.

Beneath her was the library, with its mysterious associations. The trees around it loomed against the bank of clouds, disconnected from their blackness only by the lightning that shot from it. All was gloom within and without; and amid the storm, her sobs rose and swelled unheard and unfelt, save by her own lonely heart.

The lightning grew stronger and enveloped the whole landscape in broad, lurid sheets, revealing the country around and a sombre expanse of water beyond. At these times the new cottage stood out in broad relief, and the whole space of ground between that and the old mansion-house was momentarily illuminated. The scene gave the young woman a fierce sort of exaltation, while it filled her with grief. She thought of her husband and longed to shout his name aloud, to ask him to come forth from the bosom of the storm and tell her that he was yet alive.

While this excitement was upon her, a crash of thunder

broke over the house, and a rush of wind rent its way through the trees, scattering their foliage in torn masses from the boughs. Then came another fiery scroll, unfolding itself upon the wind, casting its blue radiance upon the earth, and kindling the sky with its forked light.

The flash was so vivid and so prolonged that she started up with a cry of alarm. It was echoed by a shriek that cut sharper than steel through the noise of the storm.

"See, see," cried Elsie, who now stood beside her, "the lightning has got him; call him back; call him back, I say!"

Her eyes flashed out their insane fire, lightning against lightning, both springing from darkness. The wind swept through her hair, filling it with rain-drops. The white folds of her garments and those flowing sleeves fluttered and shook about her like the wings of a spirit. Her clasped hands were extended over Catharine's head into the storm. Elsie, aroused by the burst of thunder, had rushed from her sleep and stood before the window, daring the tempest as if she had been its spirit.

"Call him back; he is mine. Call him back!" she shrieked.

"Great heaven! what is this?" answered Catharine, pale with astonishment, for directly before her, passing, as it seemed, backward beneath the branches of the elm-tree, was her own husband. But while the words were on her lip, the lightning passed by; and the man who had appeared before her for a single moment was engulfed in the darkness.

It was an open casement by which they stood, just over the bay-window of the library. I have mentioned that an old forest-tree overshadowed this portion of the house, drooping its branches downward like a tent. As the darkness closed in upon them, Elsie leaped like a panther through the casement, lodged a moment on the bay-window,

and seizing a pendent branch, flung herself forward into the blackness of the storm. A sharp, long cry came back from the tempest in which Elsie seemed to have been engulfed.

Catharine stood helpless with surprise and terror, straining her eyes to discover a trace of the maniac. But Elsie had disappeared. A flash of lightning revealed her for an instant as she rushed through its gleams beneath the trees, giving her white garments and her long hair back to the blast; then all was dark again.

Trembling with affright, Catharine ran down stairs, seized a blanket-shawl, and went out in search of her charge. The storm still raged, but not so furiously as it had done—everything was wet through and through; every leaf dripped rain, the grass was so wet that it seemed like wading through a swamp as she passed on. Her night-robe was soon soaked, and her bare feet chilled to marble, as they sunk in the cold grass.

But she took no heed of this. Elsie had gone toward the water, and she was wild with fear that in her madness the maniac might plunge into the deep.

Quick as the lightning that now and then revealed her way, she darted shoreward, calling out for Elsie as she went; but terror and speed deprived her voice of all power, and she could utter the name of her charge in hoarse whispers only.

As she passed by the cottage, a glare of lightning fell upon her, and through it she saw an open window lighted from within. That same man was framed in the open sash, whose apparition, a few minutes before, had drawn Elsie into the storm.

Was it a real being? Or was it the picture which she had copied in the library? The same proportions were there; the coloring was alike; but this picture looked human. Was it her breathing husband? Or had terror driven her mad also?

She paused a moment, with her face uplifted, wondering if she were mad, or not; if the vision were a hallucination or a reality. The rain beat into her uplifted face, the wind blew fiercely over her thinly clad form. No wonder she seemed ghost-like to the man who saw her from the window.

A voice down toward the water aroused her from this wild trance. She turned and ran toward it, calling aloud. "Elsie! oh, Elsie!"

CHAPTER LII.

OUT IN THE STORM.

AS Catharine approached the shore, Elsie came toward her, drifting, as it were, like a cloud before the storm.

"I have followed him, I caught him; see here!" she cried, with great exultation; "see here! I have torn off her crown; I have rent away her robe; but they are both gone; gone into the depths of the sea; that is the way he treats me; always with her! always with her! and oh, oh! how like a fiend she has grown; she was never handsome, never; but I have disrobed and uncrowned her; see! see!"

As she spoke, Elsie held up the crown of a bonnet, to which a trail of yellow lace was clinging, and a fragment of faded calico. How she had obtained them, Catharine could only conjecture; and she was now too much excited for thought on the subject.

"Oh, Elsie! how you have frightened me; let us go home!" she pleaded, locking her arms with those of the lunatic. "I am wet and cold. Do go home with me, Elsie!"

"Poor child, poor little dear! Cold is it! Elsie is always cold and wet too—wet with her own tears. You see the ocean yonder? it was a dry plain till I wept it full of sor-

row; now, see how it heaves and foams, and laughs at the lightning; all the moans lie at the bottom, for it does groan heavily at times. When she went into it, I could hear it sigh and heave and struggle as my heart did when the snake crept around it, tightening and tightening its coils till I was stifled with groans; but the ocean has got her now; I am glad that I gave the brave old ocean so many tears. They have drowned her at last; I heard them gurgle in her throat. Oh! it was music to hear the strangle. I wish you had heard it—I wish you had heard it!"

Catharine was seized with sudden horror. Had the poor, demented one really committed some violence? Or was this talk merely the ravings of her diseased mind?

There was no more information to be obtained from Elsie. The storm, or perhaps some encounter in which she had been engaged, rendered her wild with excitement. She dared the lightning with her pale, clenched hand, and answered the thunder with shrieks of defiance. She danced with her shadowy-white feet through the wet meadow-grass, and laughed like a riotous child, as the rain swept in gusts through her hair.

When they neared the cottage, a change came upon her. She grew still and hushed, looking forward with breathless awe, and moving with the noiseless motion of a ghost.

"Hush, hush," she said, "we may disturb him, and then he will follow her into the deep waters. Do you think she will stay there though? Who can keep her there? The monsters of the deep will hurl her back to land; she is too wicked for them. The serpents that coil and knot themselves among the rust, and gold, and scattered pearls that lie forever among the coral branches, down, down where the waters are calm like a baby's dream—the serpents, I tell you, will uncoil and slink away into the black depths of the sea, rather than live with her, though she is their sister. Oh, if they would keep her. Do you think they can? I sent her down to them with my mark upon her throat—a hot mark,

red as blood. They will understand it. The mermaids,—listen, my bird of Paradise,—the mermaids are my friends; I have lived with them years and years. They have strung pearls on my hair, and that's what makes it so white. I wish you could see them floating, floating, floating, with pale green hair and emerald eyes. They sing, too. Oh, my bird, won't they sing when she plunges downward headforemost in her rags, with my mark flaming on her throat? Hosanna! hallelujah! Roll, roll ye mighty thunders—roll, roll!”

Elsie had uttered the first portion of this wild speech in a hoarse whisper as she glided by the cottage, but her voice rose as she proceeded, and at last broke forth into a fierce, reckless chant, like that with which Rachael electrified an audience, when she raved and moaned through the liberty chant of France.

Catharine was impressed by the wild poetry that broke more from the eyes and action of the maniac than from her words. Still, she had an undercurrent of thought that led her to look wistfully at the cottage as she passed. The window where she had seen a light was now darkened and closed; everything was still, and she felt almost as if some fearful delusion were being practised upon her every way she turned.

The rain had somewhat abated when the two females reached the house; but even at its height the old people had evidently come forth in search of their child. Back and forth, among the shrubberies and beneath the old trees, they wandered, their hands nervously interlocked, and their feeble voices rising in anxious cries for their daughter.

Elsie heard them, and sprang forward triumphantly.

“Come,” she said, “come, you may breathe now; the air is pure; the earth may laugh with blossoms without fear of death-tramps from her cloven feet. Come now, let us sing together, we and the stars!”

She waved her hand toward the sky where a few stars were struggling through an embankment of clouds, very pale

and languid after the vivid flashes of lightning they had just witnessed.

“Come,” she cried again, “let us laugh, let us sing! Come, come, come!”

Elsie led the way into the house, and went directly toward the library, leaving wet tracks upon the carpet, and wrapping her dripping garments close about her.

The old people and Catharine followed in silence, shuddering with the dampness and chilled with the cold, but carried on by the force of that insane will.

Elsie flung open the library-door. A gust of wind swept through, meeting them as they entered from the bay-window, which was open to the night.

“Give me light, light! I would look on him; I will tell him myself.”

Catharine struck a light, which flared and quivered as she held it upward.

Elsie seized it fiercely and held it above her head, looking upward for the picture. It was gone; a stained place upon the paper marked the spot it had occupied, and that was all.

The candle dropped from Elsie's hand, which was still uplifted as if paralyzed.

“Gone! Oh, my soul, he has gone with her!”

These words were uttered in a feeble, heart-broken voice, and Elsie glided away through the darkness into her chamber. For days and weeks she did not speak again.

CHAPTER LIII.

COMING HOME FROM CALIFORNIA.

A STEAMER had just arrived, bringing passengers from the gold regions of California,—a rough, wild-looking set, whose half-savage aspect gave the impression

of a gang of returned convicts, rather than of refined and enterprising men, as most of them undoubtedly were. To have seen the coaches and hacks as they gave up their burdens at the various hotels, one would have fancied that the inhabitants of Van Diemen's land had escaped in battalions, and were about to overrun the country.

One of these carriages drew up at the Astor House, and a young man sprang out, carrying a portmanteau, which seemed of considerable weight, in his hand. His appearance was rather picturesque than otherwise, for he was one of these persons whom no disarray of costume could render less than gentlemanly. In fact, a black wide-awake, set carelessly a little on one side his head, was the most becoming thing in the world, and a Mexican blanket, bought from a fellow-passenger and flung over his arm, gave a brilliant contrast to his gray and travel-soiled clothes. A flowing beard, which no neglect could prevent from rippling downward in rich waves, veiled the lower portion of his face, revealing a finely curved mouth and a set of snowy teeth when he spoke or smiled. A noble and frank face it was, which looked so eagerly from beneath the hat we have mentioned.

The young man went directly to the office, registered his name, and inquired, in an anxious voice, if Louis De Marke had left an address there.

"Louis De Marke," was the reply, "is an inmate of the house. He has been in town some months, and is probably in his room, No. —."

The young man's face lighted up. He flung down the pen with which he had just written "George De Marke," and taking up his portmanteau, followed the waiter, who stood ready to guide him through the intricacies of the establishment.

"Never mind. This is the room, you need not announce me," exclaimed De Marke, as the waiter paused before a chamber-door.

The waiter disappeared; the door was opened hurriedly, and the quick exclamations, "Louis," "George," "brother," were followed by a warm embrace and an eager clasping of hands.

Never perhaps has it happened, that two men, not twins, bore so close a resemblance to each other, as the persons who stood in that chamber, with their hands interlocked and their eyes sparkling with affectionate welcome. There was scarcely the fraction of an inch by which you could distinguish them in height or size. The same open, frank expression of face was there; the form and color of the eyes were alike; indeed, save for the more neatly trimmed beard and perfect toilet of the one, you could not have known the brothers apart. Even in manner they were the same, for the careless but not ungraceful air which one brother had brought from his wild life in the gold regions, met its counterpart at once. The very smile and laugh of one had the sunshine and heart-warm richness of the other.

The new-comer was perhaps some four years older than the other, but this was only detected by close examination.

"And so you have come at last. O brother, brother! how I have wanted you!" said Louis, drawing his guest to a sofa, and shaking hands with him over and over again. "You have no idea how very, very much I have wanted you!"

A shade of trouble came over his face as he spoke, and instantly that of his brother darkened with the same shadow, as if the pain which one felt must have a mutual vibration.

"And I," said George, with a sudden overshadowing of all cheerfulness, "I have a great many things to say to you. Since we parted, Louis, I have suffered as you will hardly think me capable of suffering."

"And I," answered Louis, sorrowfully, — "and I."

George sat down by his brother, and threw one arm over his shoulder with a slight caress.

"What is it, my brother? I was in hopes that, save our one great cause of annoyance, you had escaped any serious trouble."

Louis shook his head and a mist crept over his eyes.

"It is a hard thing, George, for a fellow no older than I am, and disposed to be happy, as you and I both are. It is hard, I say, to carry about a secret, that one feels forever heavy upon the heart, but dares not talk about."

"What is this secret, my brother?"

Louis turned suddenly and seized his brother's hand; tears sprung to his fine eyes, and he choked down a sob that struggled hard with his manliness.

"George, before you went away I was married."

The elder brother started, and turned pale to the lips; but he only said,—

"Go on, Louis, I listen."

"I had been married some months then. Do not be angry that I did not tell you."

"Angry, why should I? How dare I be angry with you for a concealment which—but I interrupt you; go on."

"I think you would have liked Louisa. She was the dearest and most lovable girl in the world."

"Was, Louis? You say *was*, as if your wife were dead."

"Dead, O brother! if this question could be answered! But it cannot. She is dead to me, I fear, and yet alive, she and her child."

"Be calm, brother, and explain all this. Whom did you marry? where is your wife?"

"I can hardly answer either question. She was an orphan, and had an only brother older than herself. The name was Oakley. She was in school, but staying with a lady who lived in the next street to us; our gardens adjoined. I mean the year before our father died, when his family lived like civilized beings, for my mother had not then given herself up to avarice as a terrible passion.

"This lady had a daughter somewhat older than her ward. I have since learned that she was also the aunt of Catharine Lacy. You remember Catharine?"

George lifted one hand suddenly to his forehead.

"Yes," he answered, in a husky voice, "I remember her. She is dead."

"Yes," answered Louis, thoughtfully. "Poor girl, she died in a strange way; it was a wonderful thing altogether. This proud woman was her aunt, who bound her out to Madame; Catharine never once mentioned the fact; perhaps Mrs. Judson forbade her. Some one has the murder of that girl upon his soul."

"Do not say that," cried the young man, starting up distractedly. "She was my wife, Louis, my lawfully wedded wife; and they let her die in a charity hospital! It was our mother's work, this foul murder. Louis De Marke, it was her work!"

"And this other woman is answerable for a like crime!" answered Louis, hoarsely. "Louisa went to the same hospital; they were found side by side in that fearful sick-ward, your wife and mine. Poor young creatures, scarcely more than children themselves. I saw the record of Catharine's death, but of my poor girl there is no record, save of a discharge. I have been unable to gain one trace of her since she left the hospital walls. It is now more than three years, George; and I have borne this secret alone till my heart aches with the weight of it."

"I know, I know what it is," answered the elder brother, passionately. "Thank God, we have met once more where at least the rash acts of our youth can find a voice. I little thought, Louis, how like your life had been to my own!"

"Poor girls, poor young creatures! we led them into great misery, George."

George shrunk back, as if some thought, which had stung him for years, became a sudden pang.

"Youth is sometimes very cruel," he said, with the bitterness of self-reproach. "But Heaven is my judge, I never intended wrong to my poor young wife. Her condition was miserable enough with Madame De Marke, after our father's death; and our secret marriage could hardly render it worse."

"But Louisa! *Her* condition was happy enough, till I came to embitter it with my love; for I loved, oh! George, I *thought* I loved her!"

"But you talk at random, Louis. Even yet I cannot comprehend who this young person was, or how you became so fatally interested in her," said George; "come, old fellow, tell me everything, — there is no fighting with death, but if your wife is above-ground, it will go hard if you and I cannot find her?"

Louis shook his head; but George spoke out again with well-assumed cheerfulness. "Let me know every particular about this marriage, and I will go on a crusade for you — it will be like a romance. Indeed, our two lives are a romance. Who would believe that we have never lived under the same roof since you were an infant; that I was bred in Germany, you here; that we never met till both were men, yet loved each other dearly from the first. It was strange, for your mother hated me always. It was she who packed me off to a school in Germany when a mere child. My father sent me money and a letter twice a year. In time, my school was changed to a university; after that I was sent to travel. Then a letter came to say that my father was dead. I came home a stranger; not ten of my father's nearest friends knew of my existence; but we met as brothers should meet, thank Heaven for that! For your sake I tried to like my father's widow; I sought her out and went to see her often. Would to Heaven I never had: then one of the sweetest and loveliest creatures that ever lived might have been saved."

CHAPTER LIV.

LOUIS DE MARKE'S CONFESSION.

LOUIS DE MARKE sat for some moments, with a hand to his forehead, perplexed, and, at heart, reluctant to speak. It is true he had been months and months pining for the company of his elder brother, resolving to give him all confidence, and to ask for both counsel and help, at his hands, but now he shrunk from speaking. At last he dropped his hand, and began, abruptly enough:—

"It was a sad romance to her, and to me. "I have told you, my wife was an orphan and the ward of her only brother. Her father had been the intimate friend of Mrs. Judson, who I have since learned was Louisa's godmother. The brother, after his father's death, placed Louisa under this woman's care."

"And you became acquainted with her?" inquired George, deeply interested.

"Yes! Our gardens adjoined; the fences were open and low, and an arbor ran from one to the other. I was often in our side of this arbor, and the young ladies came down to the portion upon their grounds, with their books and music. You have never seen Mrs. Judson's daughter. She was one of the loveliest creatures eyes ever dwelt upon, serene and gentle as an angel, a sort of moonlight beauty which one loves to dream over."

"You are speaking of Miss Judson now, not of the girl you loved?" questioned George, surprised at his eloquence.

"I will be truthful with you, George, even to my own shame. It was Miss Judson whom I first loved—Louisa was a secondary object with me then; in fact, I considered her as a spoiled child. It was a mad passion, something

less than idolatry, my love for the other; a madness that—yes, let me confess it—that holds me yet.”

“And did she know of this passion?”

“How could she help it? I was too young for concealment, but no words of love ever passed between us. We met frequently, in the way I speak of, and would stand on a pleasant moonlight evening, screened by the clustering vines, leaning on the light fence which separated their arbor from ours, saying little, but filled with a world of sweet thoughts that made these stolen hours the most delicious of my life. Yes, George, she must have known that I loved her, but I did not speak. How could I, with every dollar I expected to have in the hands of my mother, and she so grasping and avaricious that I could scarcely persuade her to give me enough money to purchase food, for she had fairly starved me out of her house.

“Mrs. Judson, you remember, bought the house she lived in of our father, just before he died, and did not move into it until Madame had abandoned all attempts at respectable life, taking that poor girl Catharine with her. First, she went into an inferior dwelling, then to the garret where she is to be found now.

“I refused to give up my room in the old home, and she consented that I should board with the tenant to whom it was rented. In this way it happened that I was saved the shame of her interference, and kept our domestic troubles a secret from this proud girl, and as far as possible from the world. But you will understand that the dread of this exposure would keep me silent. I dared not tell this splendid girl that I was the legal dependant and slave of a woman who did not give herself the common decencies of life, out of the great wealth my father left, and that two years must pass before I could come to her mother as an independent gentleman and ask her hand. Now I could do a thing like that, though the very idea of my mother's life makes me shrink,

but then I was inexperienced, shy, and terribly depressed by the course my mother was pursuing. The great terror of my life was that those two persons should meet.

“I loved this noble girl to distraction, and, brother George, I am sure that she loved me, though all this time she was engaged to another man.”

“Engaged to another man, and knew in her heart that you loved her?”

“Do not blame her; had I spoken out, she might have found courage to break an engagement which, I am sure, was made at the persuasion of her mother. Yet I am told that Oakley was a noble young fellow, and loved her dearly. She was not unhappy with him.”

“How do you know that, brother Louis?”

“Because she has told me so since his death.” George De Marke crushed the wide-awake in his hand, while a low whistle expressed the new light that was dawning upon him.

“Well, go on,” he said, with a gleam of humor in his eyes.

“All this time, while I was lavishing the first thoughts of my youth upon her, she was engaged. I was nothing to her; Louisa told me this. Her own brother was betrothed to Miss Judson; on his return they were to be married.

“I do not think Louisa saw my anguish, or my despair, when she gave me this information, for deep feelings are seldom the most demonstrative. I felt myself growing pale, my very lips were chilled through and felt like marble as I closed them. She did not observe it. The very warmth was quenched in my veins, and she only said, as we shook hands in parting,—

“‘How cold your hands are, but the night is a little chilly.’

“As if influenced by some strange sympathy unexplained to her own heart, she bent down and kissed my hand; but I shrunk from the touch of her lips—they sent a pang through and through me. At such times even the most delicate sympathy is painful. How could this be otherwise than bitter?

"Those few words had blasted all the hopes of my life; but how could she understand this? I must have seemed strangely cold and ungrateful to that poor girl, who loved me all the time, but, in the egotism of my anguish, I was unconscious that she was made to suffer also.

"I saw Miss Judson after this, and with her own lips she told me of her engagement. She was white and trembling all the time, while I stood taking the death-blow of my hopes, in dead silence. I think now, that she hoped for some protest, and in her heart longed for an explanation, which I had no power to give. The expression of her eyes haunted me afterward, so wistful, so tender—oh! if I had spoken then. But I did not—could not. The image of my mother, in all her grim avarice, was standing before that young creature so pure, so exquisite in her refinement, made a coward of me.

"We parted that evening in mute anguish. Her hand was cold as snow when I dropped it from mine, and even in the moonlight I could see that her bosom swelled with proud grief. She never came to the garden after that, though I haunted it like a ghost.

"Oakley came at last to claim his bride. I heard of this through Louisa, who wandered into the arbor more frequently than ever, where she was almost certain to find me in sight. I was very wretched in those days, and, in the egotism of a first great sorrow, never thought to ask why this girl sought the old haunt so often. My object in seeking her was to obtain news of the woman I loved. In my thoughtless selfishness, I led the gentle girl into interviews that she might have misunderstood.

"Louisa was a sweet, kind girl, innocent as a child, and as confiding. Her society became a great relief to me, and I lost no opportunity of meeting her. Miss Judson was her superior in age, and in everything that goes toward making up a grand character; but a more affectionate, truthful, and kind creature never lived, than Louisa Oakley.

CHAPTER LV.

THE NIGHT OF MISS JUDSON'S WEDDING.

THE night of that wedding was a terrible one to me. Tortured, wild, and filled with unutterable sorrow, I saw the house lighted up from roof to cellar. With my heart aching, and my head hot with pain, I stood by the window in my room listening to each sound, as a man condemned to death hears the tramp of a crowd gathering to the scaffold on which he is to suffer. As each carriage paused at the door, my heart shrunk within my bosom.

"I was all alone in the house where our father died. You were absent; I had no human being to comfort me in the great agony of that bereavement, for there are bereavements worse than death, oh! a thousand times worse than death.

"I had been all that afternoon walking the streets, in hopes that fatigue might weary out the pain I felt. Sometimes my whole nature rose up in rebellion against fate, and against myself. Why had I kept that long, cowardly silence? I loved the girl a thousand times better than my own life; yet had never told her of it. Held back by sensitive dread, I had allowed another man to take the woman I loved out of my life. Because my poor mother had faults, I had doomed myself to a lonely future.

"These harassing thoughts embittered the pain I was suffering. I hated myself for the want of courage that had wrecked my hopes, and left me standing there, the most humiliated and wretched being, I do think, on earth. That moment my imagination was sharpened by pain: I fancied, in my anguish, all that might be passing in that stately dwelling: the bridegroom in his resplendent happiness, all unconscious that his good fortune was rending the hope from another man's life;—the bride, robed in sumptuous

whiteness trembling upon the verge of that abyss, that was to separate us forever—I wondered if she thought of me. All at once a faintness, like that of death, fell upon me; I saw the bride walking past the windows of her chamber; her hand threw aside the curtains, while she looked forth upon the night, her beautiful head crowned with orange-blossoms, and the gossamer veil sweeping downward like the furred wings of a seraph. All excitement left me. I was sad and heart-broken. The sight of her sweet face filled my soul with tender regrets, as if an angel, lost to me forever, had looked serenely down upon me, unconscious of my anguish and lifted forever above it."

The young man paused and wiped the drops of perspiration that even a remembrance of former anguish had brought to his forehead.

"I could not stay at the window after those crimson curtains closed upon my love, but went down to the garden, and leaning upon the frail fence by which we had stood so often, wept like a child. Remember, George, how young and inexperienced I was.

"All at once, I heard a footstep on the gravel-walk; and, through my tears, I saw a figure coming toward me, glistening white, and pure through the moonshine. My heart leaped; my breath stopped. Could it be my lost love coming to say farewell?

"Hoping this, and faint with expectation, I waited for that white figure to draw nearer. It came swiftly; I saw the face, and my heart fell back; the breath left my lips in a moan. It was Louisa Oakley. She saw me in the arbor, and came forward with a glad look upon her face. I was in the shadow, and she could not detect the sorrow on mine. The girl was very happy and full of pleasant excitement.

"I felt sure of finding you here," she said, "and came down to say how sorry I am that you are not one of the groomsmen. With you, I could stand up without trembling.

If you had only known my brother, it could have been managed, and then the wedding would be splendid."

"I replied with such composure as I could command, but she detected the sadness in my voice, and mistook it for disappointment regarding an invitation to the wedding.

"It could n't be helped," she said; "Mrs. Judson never dreamed how intimate we have all been; besides, I think she was a little prejudiced against your mother."

"Louisa was very gentle and full of affectionate playfulness, but you can imagine how she wounded me by this mention of my mother. I felt keenly enough that, but for her, I might have stood where young Oakley was then. Oh, George, it was hard to bear!

"The kind girl, feeling that I continued sad, insisted on standing out in the moonlight, that I could admire her dress, which fell about her in soft fleeciness, like drifts of newly fallen snowflakes. She was not very beautiful, but the whiteness and tender radiance of the moon, falling around her as she stood crowned with roses, made a lovely picture of which she was shyly proud. It was that I might see her in her pretty dress that she had come down to me, I think.

"These things may seem trivial, George, but the details of a painful event fix themselves terribly on the memory. There was not a word spoken that night, or a shadow upon the windows of that house, which was not imprinted on my soul forever.

"I called Louisa from her conspicuous position in the moonlight—for her white garments seemed like grave-clothes to me—and with a quietness that seemed marvellous to me, inquired if the bride seemed happy. It was a desperate question, but my heart struggled yet for some hope, that, even at the bridal hour, she would think of me with regret.

"Louisa answered innocently enough that she had never seen a happy bride in her life. The persons to be married were always nervous and frightened. It was only the brides-

maids that really enjoyed themselves. As for her brother, he was happy as a king; but the bride said so little and moved about so quietly that there was no judging about her.

"Then I asked, 'Had the bride ever spoken of me?' My voice was steady, but I drew no breath till the answer came.

"'Yes,' Louisa said, 'now that I think of it, there has been some conversation about you this very evening. When the dress was laid out, the bride whispered, with tears in her eyes, "*He* will never see me in my wedding-dress! he, our best friend! Oh, Louisa, if it could only be put off a little longer."

"'But that was all nervousness, you know,' continued my tormentor, for spite of her kindness she was sure that 'this getting married is sure to make one want to hold back just at the time, I suppose. She can't help being happy; who could with a husband handsome and kind like my brother? I tell you, he is splendid—the best fellow in the world. Never fear—they will be happy as the day is long, both so handsome, and good as gold.'

"I grew impatient under all this. Did that girl love to torture me? What did she tell me these things for? Was she determined to crush my heart? or drive me mad? I answered her with sharp impatience. What, I do not remember, and probably did not know at the time. But it must have sounded harshly to the poor girl, for she went into the house weeping; I did not regard it at the time. She had given me a fresh pang, and I had no pity for her. My whole being was absorbed in self-compassion; there was not a creature in the world to whom I could have spoken except you, George, and you were away.

"When Louisa left me, I went up to my chamber; it was a back-room overlooking the gardens. I sat by the window all night, for my grief and the solitude were complete. I

heard the carriages disappear, while the hum of voices grew faint upon the night-air. I saw the blaze of lights go out, and at last the beating of my own heart was the loudest sound I heard.

"The daylight flashed around me where I had sat so many dreary hours, but still I remained motionless, letting the morning deepen toward the noon. It seemed to me that I should never care to stir again. I was aroused as if from a dull dream, by the noise of a carriage driven down the opposite street. It was Oakley, with his bride, on their way to the European steamer. It seemed as if the horses that bore her away were tramping my heart under their hoofs; but when the sound died in the distance, my breath came more freely. It was over, and I knew the worst. When that knowledge comes to any brave soul, fate has lost half its power to torture!"

"I know it," answered the brother, who, shrouding his face with one hand, while his elbow rested on the table, had listened attentively. "But fate sometimes leaves a long, dull waste of lurid hopes to mourn over, after the worst is known."

CHAPTER LVI.

THE BROTHERS TALK OVER THEIR FATHER'S DEATH.

LOUIS," said George De Marke, "how long was all this after our father's death; I have never had a thorough knowledge of that time. Everything connected with it was too painful for questions."

"I remember," answered Louis, "she had driven you from the house before I was old enough to know that I had a brother. You were happier for it. Year by year, our home

had become more uncomfortable and dreary. As age crept on our father, some cause of strife, which always existed, seemed to break out afresh between him and Madame. I never thoroughly understood it, George; there was something in the past never explained to us. Quick words and broken sentences, which I remember now, though scarcely noticed at the time, connect this mystery with your own mother."

George De Marke looked up with sudden interest. "It is strange," he said, "but I never heard anything about my mother. Madame never mentioned her!"

"Nor did my father; during his life I was kept so far apart from his confidence, that I never ventured to question him regarding his or her family. Indeed, it was years before I knew that Madame was not alike your mother and mine. It was discovered to me at last by some angry words with which she was taunting him, as if some disgrace had been attached to your birth. This made me angry at the time, but I accepted it as little more than a burst of fiery malice. Forgive me, dear boy, for saying so of my mother; but she was used to saying what came uppermost in her mind when he offended her, and I gave it no importance."

"I dare say it had no importance," said George, "she must always have delighted in tormenting him."

"That is probably true, dear boy—but as I became a man, the fact that I knew absolutely nothing of my mother's family forced itself upon me. If my father had been living, I would know all about her. Had I been here when he died, that one subject should not have been left in the dark."

"You would not have had the heart to question him, George. He was sadly changed before he died, and so nervous that a word would make him tremble. Sometimes the very sound of my mother's voice would set him to shaking all over."

"My poor father! Did he suffer so much?" inquired George, shading his eyes to conceal the tears that sprung into them.

"More than I can remember without pain," answered Louis. "He took a terrible dislike to Madame toward the last, and I had great difficulty in protecting him from her temper and cupidity. You cannot know how difficult it was, in health, for his iron will to keep down her parsimony in our household; when he lay sick and helpless, I found it almost impossible to obtain necessary comforts for him."

"Poor man! so rich—so proud, and brought to that! He must indeed have been miserable."

"Yes, both in body and mind," was the answer; "I am sure that something preyed on him at the last. But Madame never left him at this period, and though he seemed anxious to converse with me, her presence always prevented it."

"Strange what could have troubled him so! Possibly it might have been that he repented of that strange will."

"Not altogether that, I think. It was some persons he wished to see,—an old man and woman. Madame spoke of them impatiently in that way, but promised to send for them."

"And did she?"

"No, there was no effort made to send for any one. Another night, when he was growing worse and worse, I heard him pleading with her; some person was to be sent for whom he wished to speak with before he died—must speak with if she was on the face of the earth. Madame became furiously angry then. She no longer attempted to pacify him with promises, but filled the sick-room with her angry revilings, while he lay trembling under her violence till the bed shook beneath him. At last, urged on by rage, such as I had never seen even in her before, she darted toward the bed, and would have seized him by the shoulders, but I flung my arms around her, and prevented the sacrilege by taking her almost by force from the room. When I came back to the bed, our father was stricken with paralysis."

"Oh, George! it would have broken your heart, could you have seen his beseeching eyes follow me around the room

after that. I knew that he would have spoken to me then, had the power been left him. Once, when Madame was out for a moment, he made a desperate effort to speak, but his voice came forth in a broken moan; and I saw two great tears roll from the pleading eyes, wrung from some want which he had no power to express."

"Could he not write?" inquired George, in a troubled voice.

"No; he made an effort, and with his poor shaking hand, strove to scrawl a name; but I could not read it; Madame came in while I was trying to make it out. With an angry glance at him, she took it from my hand and tore it up.

"My poor father's eyes turned upon her with an expression that would have melted a heart of iron. I have heard of wounded stags, weeping while under the torment of a pack of hounds, George. The great tears which came again to that old man's eyes, when his wife—I will not call her mother with this feeling upon me—tore up the name he had tried to write, seemed as if shed under like torture."

"All this fills me with self-reproach. I ought to have been by my poor father's death-bed. I being older than you, might have comprehended his wishes," said George De Marke, sadly.

"I cannot tell, George; it might have been a wish to redeem the injustice of his will; sometimes I think it was only his lawyer's name that he wrote; for Madame looked like death when she read it. I am sure she did read it, illegible as it was, for she muttered something that made the sick man struggle in his bed. Nothing but the fear of losing her grasp on the property could have disturbed her so!"

"It was a strange will, and unjust as strange," said George. "Why should our father have feared to trust my intellect more than yours, Louis? If at thirty I have never given proofs of insanity, and am the father of a lawful son, then and not till then can I demand an equal share of the prop-

erty with yourself. This is a strange clause against an elder son, who has never offended him, or deserved anything but kindness at his hands."

"It is indeed. The anxieties of his death-bed must have arisen from this cause. But it was all needless; for though I had a hard struggle to get my portion from Madame at the time of my majority, it is safe from her control now, and the income is enough for us both."

George reached forth his hand, grasping that of his brother with grateful warmth.

"You forget," he said, pointing to his portmanteau, "that I am just from the gold region, and though not able to compete with my rich brother, there will be found yonder enough of gold and bills of exchange for my moderate wants, till the time appointed by my father's will arrives."

"Are you so rich as that, George? I am glad of it; independence is the right of every man, but I should have liked to divide with you, after all."

"I am sure you would, dear old fellow; but the time is not far off, and I think it will go hard for any one to give proofs of insanity against me so far; and if my brain has withstood all that I have endured till now, it will probably hold firm to the end."

"Yes, that will be easily settled. But the babe? Poor Catharine Lacy left no living child, so it is stated in the hospital record."

"So it is recorded; poor girl! poor wronged wife!"

"She was a lovely creature," said Louis, "a sweet, gentle girl. How was she driven to such straits, George?"

"It is answered in a sentence," was the stern reply. "Madame De Marke, who had doubtless suspicions of our private marriage, induced me to go to India, by promises of giving a portion of my inheritance into my own independent possession. She had entire control, even of the income, you know. In his large shipping-interest, my father had

left unsettled affairs at Calcutta, which she professed to be very anxious about. I was to remain abroad two years and settle up all his affairs in the East, as the price of my own independence. I had just married Catharine Lacy, who urged me to make this sacrifice, and expressed herself willing to stay with Madame, hard as her life was, until my return.

"If Madame knew of our marriage, her dissimulation was complete, for she gave no sign of such knowledge. I now understand it all. She either had information of the marriage and wished to separate us, or had a suspicion that the poor child was devoted to me, and that by marrying her, one condition of the will might be secured."

"It is possible," muttered Louis.

"With this promise, she sent me to the East Indies, where letters might not reach me for months; made that delicate girl a drudge of all work, and at last drove her to desperation, to the Almshouse, and, God pardon her!—I never can,—to death."

"It was a terrible fate," said Louis; "but in charity to my mother, let us hope she was not all to blame. There was a time, George, when I can remember her a stylish and attractive woman—never generous or liberal, it is true, but far, far above what she is now. The powerful will of our father kept down her faults, and at his death they broke over all control. It seems to me that, on this one subject of money, she is a monomaniac."

"You are her son, Louis, and heaven knows I have little wish to wound you by talking of her failings; but you will comprehend how they bear on this case. If I fail to accomplish the conditions of our father's will, this property goes to your mother during her life, and afterward to you."

"Yes, I know; there the sting lies. It is, in fact, my interest she is seeking. It is for me that she hoards and starves, and has committed this terrible wrong."

"No, it is for the love of hoarding. Did she not struggle to keep possession of your portion also?"

"But that was for my own good, Madame urged; she was in terrible trouble about my fancied extravagance, and would gladly share her den with me in order to roll up her income. I really think it grieves her that I will not consent to this. But we were speaking of Catharine Lacy. I was in complete ignorance of everything you have told me regarding her. Indeed, my whole attention was too painfully occupied elsewhere. I was absent when Madame made her degrading change of residence."

"I know it; we were both sent out of the way, while she made arrangements for a life of miserable parsimony. Had I dreamed of the way she intended to live, my poor young wife would never have been left to her mercy. From her own confession, Catharine almost perished of absolute want in her miserable den."

"But her aunt, Mrs. Judson, was a rich woman. It is strange that she did not apply to her," said Louis. "Did she never think of that?"

"I cannot tell. Probably the poor angel kept her word too faithfully. She had promised not to make our marriage known. Remember, Louis, I was young, and did not think of the cruel necessity that might arise to protect herself by this very confession. When it came, Madame turned her into the street, and somehow—I had no heart to inquire the harrowing particulars—she reached the hospital, and died there!"

The brothers were silent for some minutes; when they looked up, it was through a mist of tears which no manly pride could suppress.

"They were together, your wife and mine," said Louis, at last, drawing a hand across his eyes. "Poor Catharine!—poor Louisa!"

George did not answer, but his chest heaved, and his face

fell forward upon the arms which were folded on the table before him. At last he lifted his face, pale and tear-stained, turning it to his brother.

"This remembrance is killing me, Louis. We will never talk these matters over again."

"As you think best, George," replied the brother, "but I *must* speak with you. My situation is more painful than yours, for suspense is added to the rest!"

"True, true. I interrupted your story, Louis. You see how selfish grief is."

CHAPTER LVII.

THE SECRET MARRIAGE. — LOUIS GOES ON WITH HIS STORY.

I THINK, George, that concentration of feeling belongs to our race. I felt when Oakley carried off the only being I could ever love, that life would thereafter be desolation to me.

"This very feeling led me to seek the society of Louisa Oakley, who remained with Mrs. Judson, and still met me as of old. She was the only person of whom I could hear tidings of my lost love, the sole link that connected me with the romance of my youth. When letters came to her from abroad, she brought them for me to read, little dreaming of the heart-aches they gave me. Mrs. Judson was a proud, cold woman, full of sanctimonious reserves chilling to an impulsive young creature like Louisa. Her ideas of duty were rigid, her whole life, as she said almost in her prayers, one series of the most perfect rectitude. For any human being to suppose that she had a fault, was a proof of depraved judgment, for which she could find no possibility of excuse.

"You can imagine, brother George, that a home presided

over by a woman so coldly perfect, would be a cheerless abode for an ardent, gentle girl, after a companion like Miss Judson had left it. You can imagine also, that her heart would turn for sympathy wherever it could be found.

"Louisa was incapable of concealment or dissimulation of any kind. It was not long before the conviction forced itself upon me, that, heart and soul, this young creature loved me. This was a wretched discovery, and, at first, aroused nothing but repulsion in my heart; but that which I had myself suffered came back, in a thousand gentle and compassionating feelings. The pain still fresh in my own bosom was too recent; I could not inflict it upon another, that other a creature so lovable and so good, — my only friend.

"There was no confession of attachment in words, but from the day of this discovery our interviews in the arbor became more subdued, and the compassion which I felt for her must have taken a shade of tenderness. It was not love, but what young girl of sixteen could have detected the difference between the gentle gratitude with which a bereaved heart receives affection, and the bright outgushing of an impulsive attachment?

"I was not quite of legal age, and was left under the control of Madame, as you know, by our father's will. She decided that I should spend at least a year abroad — you remember there was an excuse of financial business to be settled there also — and I had no power, and scarcely a wish, to oppose her. But the effect of this arrangement on Louisa astonished me. She was in absolute despair; the feelings, that, up to this time, had been implied rather than expressed, now broke all bounds. No argument of mine would reconcile her to a separation. She conjectured a thousand evils that would follow my absence. Her brother would take her away — she would be forced to give me up — to marry some other person utterly repugnant.

"I was very young—you know, George—and to any man an attachment so earnest and passionate would have been gratifying. When argument and entreaties failed to convince her that an eternal separation was not threatened, I—rashly, madly—proposed a private marriage before my departure. She assented too readily, poor girl! Her guardian was away for a short visit out of town. There was no one but a housekeeper to control her movements. We stole out one evening and were married. The clergyman found witnesses, and I placed the certificate he gave us in my pocket-book. Neither of us thought how important it might become, and it was forgotten when we parted.

"I dared not own my marriage, dependent, as I was, for every dollar I used upon my mother; and feeling that she would cast me out penniless, I could see no way but to leave my young wife where she was till my return. Soon after that I should be of age, and so far as property was concerned, independent to claim and protect my wife.

"Our voyage was a protracted one, as you know. Accidents happened to my letters. It was months before I heard from my young wife. Her first letter was full of affection, the second struck me as saddened in its tone. They had been written months when I received them. Then followed complete silence. Up to this time my mother had lived very plainly indeed. I left her, as you will remember that I told you, in the poorest house on our father's estate, but her method of existence had not sunk to its present level. When I came back she had taken up life in her present miserable abode. Catharine Lacy, so long a sunbeam in our house, had disappeared. Louisa! my wife! you know what my compassion drove her to—a pauper bed at Bellevue.

The week I returned home, a package of letters that had followed me half over the continent, reached New York. They were from my wife, and told me her mournful story.

Up to the very hour of her anguish she wrote every thought and feeling of her heart; poor, poor child, how she suffered; how she may yet be suffering!

"During the absence of her guardian, who had gone with a party to the springs, she fled from the house, and in her helplessness sought a home wherever it could be found. This rash step the poor child had taken to escape a disgraceful expulsion from the house of her guardian. With no marriage certificate, for, thoughtless wretch that I was, it still remained in my possession, and unable to find proofs for herself that she was a wife, the poor girl wandered off, hoping to get shelter somewhere till I returned. She was willing to face poverty, but not the woman from whom no pity was ever to be expected for weakness or disobedience.

"The letters I have with me still. The latest, you will see, are written at and dated from Bellevue. After following me from place to place, they reached me here covered with post-marks. Read them, George,—I cannot; every word is written in fire upon my soul."

Louis turned away his pale face and shrouded his eyes as his brother read.

CHAPTER LVIII.

LOUISA'S LETTERS.

MY HUSBAND:—Once again I write to you from the depths of a weary heart, without hope, without a belief that you will ever see my letter, but I must speak to you before I die! for it seems to me impossible to live and face that woman. I wrote to you again and again, Louis. I told you of the terrible strait to which I was driven. I appealed to you from the depths of my humiliation. I besought you to give back my secret and send the

proofs of our marriage before it was too late — before disgrace fell upon me, and the shelter of a respectable roof was taken from over my head.

"You did not answer. Day after day I waited, day after day I stole like a thief to the post-office, and read over, name by name, the list of advertised letters, hoping against convictions that yours had been overlooked in the delivery. None came. Oh! if you could think how desolate I grew; all alone, so young, so full of dark foreboding — I feared the proud woman to whose guardianship my brother had left me. Her black eyes seemed to follow me everywhere. I trembled at the sound of her footsteps. In my dreams, her presence overshadowed me till my brain ached with the oppression.

"One night she came to me in my chamber. I was in bed weeping, but she did not seem to hear it. The light was dim, and my face turned to the wall. Possibly she did not know how wretched I was.

"'You seem sad and depressed,' she said; 'is it because you have no companion in the house? or are you pining over the absence of your brother and friend?'

"I tried my best to answer steadily, but the tears would come; for her manner was strangely kind, and, for the first time in my life, I longed to throw my arms around her neck and ask her to pity me.

"'I am not quite well,' I said; 'the study is hard, and I cannot bear so much as some girls.'

"'How would you like to go into the country a while?' she asked.

"'To the country, — some farm-house where I might have a chance to be alone. Oh, if I could! If I could!' —

"'Not quite so rural as that,' she said, 'but if you like it, we will go to Saratoga.'

"My heart sunk within me. Saratoga! and with her! I answered faintly, that I would much rather stay at home

and rest. At first she opposed this, but I pleaded so hard for quiet and solitude, that she at last consented and left me at home, only extracting a promise that I should receive no company, nor go out alone. The next morning, she started on her journey. I watched her from the window as she got into the carriage. It was a relief to see her go, but my heart was heavy as death. In her way she had been kind to me and I was deceiving her.

She is gone; and the great solitary house is mine to roam in as I please. I go down to the arbor twenty times a day. The clematis vine is white with blossoms, as it was the day you told me how dear I would ever be to you. I sit down under the shadows that twinkle around me with every stir of the leaves, and think of you, your looks, your words, the expression of your face when we parted, till my heart swells with the joy and pain of memories that are my glory, and yet kill me. Oh, if you were only here — if I could but see you a single moment! But God help me, an ocean divides us! I may never see you again. Sometimes I think it will be so, and that makes the thought of death terrible.

"The loneliness here would be pleasant, but for the dread of what is to come. I think of her return with terror. If I hear a carriage in the street, my heart stands motionless till it has passed the house. I dare not meet her again. What can I do? Where shall I go? Louis, Louis, my heart will break if I do not hear from you.

"A friend of Mrs. Judson's called here this morning; she says that my guardian may come back any day. She wishes the house to be in readiness. I must go; but where? Father of mercies, tell me where!

"When the lady was gone, I went up to my room, and throwing myself on the bed, almost prayed to die. It was wicked, I know; but I am afraid! Oh, if you were only here, my husband — if you were only here! I have been lying still as death, thinking and planning until thought tortured

me. A thousand wild prospects of concealment till you came, presented themselves; but they were all vague and impracticable. About midnight I arose softly, and finding a lamp, searched through my drawers for money and trinkets. A few dollars, and a more costly supply of jewelry than most girls of my age are allowed to possess, was all that I could depend upon. These, with a few valuable laces, I tied up and locked in my wardrobe; for I must go—I must go! Once more I will steal to the post-office. God may have mercy upon me and send the letter I have asked for so often—oh, so often. I have been—I have been—nothing there. Over and over again I read the printed list through my blinding tears. My name was not there. Nothing for me—nothing for me! Then my last hope went out, and I wandered off anywhere in search of a hiding-place, where death might find me undisgraced. In a narrow, uncleanly street, I saw a sign on which 'Boarding' was written in great yellow letters. I knocked timidly at the door, shuddering at the sound my own hands made. I will not describe the interior of this house. It would make you wretched; for you have not intended to be cruel.

"The woman who received me was kind enough, but uncouth and slatternly. She asked no questions, and I was too tired and wretched for any question about her prices. They seemed reasonable for a small chamber in the back of the house, with decent food,—a garret almost, and very gloomy. So much the better; it was the more removed from notice.

"The next day I told the servants that I had received a letter from Mrs. Judson and must go away at once. I took the precaution to send for a carriage, and in all things leave the house as I should have done had Mrs. Judson really expected me.

"I let the man drive me to a railroad depot, then discharged him and took another carriage which left me and

my trunk at the house which was to be my home. Just at night I stole away to this desolate shelter, and here, Louis, I remain utterly alone, never going out, even for a breath of air.

"At last, everything is gone, money, trinkets, clothing, piece by piece. I have given them to the woman who supplied me with food and shelter, and now my destitution is complete.

CHAPTER LIX.

AT BELLEVUE HOSPITAL.

LET me do this woman no injustice. She was not wantonly cruel, but a life of hard poverty had made her cautious. She did not turn me away absolutely friendless, but took me to this, my last shelter, Bellevue Hospital. Perhaps it was all that she could do. The poor are sometimes forced to be cruel, and she was very poor.

"Oh! my husband, God forbid that you should ever see the rooms and the people with whom I have spent this last miserable week—the last of my life, I am certain it will be the last of my life. They have given me a narrow straw bed and a wooden chair, on which I sit all the day long with my face to the wall, dreaming such leaden, gloomy dreams. Now and then an oath or a coarse laugh makes me shudder to think where I am.

"Sometimes when a strange step comes along the floor, my poor heart gives a struggle, and I think it is you come to look after your poor little wife. Then I fancy in a desperate way that my brother will come to the hospital in search of me; and I feel a dreary satisfaction that with this dress, this thin face, and great wild eyes, he would go away and never dream it was me. Besides, I have never used either

his name or yours; when you come to look for the register of my death, 'Mary Barton is the name.' Next to it you will find written the brand of infamy which I do not deserve: but my promise was given.

"I have told no one of our marriage; but the angels will know it, and you will know it. And now I wish to write of something else, but cannot. My eyes fill with tears, my cheek burns, and my pen wanders to and fro on the paper. I charge you, Louis De Marke—I charge you with my dying breath, sweep the disgrace I am willing to bear myself from the name of your child!

"Oh, Louis! my heart is broken; the last gleam of hope has departed. I shall not have the power to die, for this anguish will put death aside. Now I understand the dreary doubt which has been forever haunting my life. It was an unconscious want which kept me restless from the first. Now I comprehend it all. You never loved me. I have forced myself to write the words—it seems like tearing a young tree up by the roots. All the strings and pulses of my heart quiver.

"Why not have told me this before it was too late? but no, it was a happy delusion; I cannot grudge myself the only sweet dream of my life. The truth would not have made me less desolate now.

"How did I learn this?—listen. In the next bed to mine is a young person, whose face struck me from the first, a fair, beautiful girl, with the most sorrowful eyes I ever saw. She came to the hospital shortly after I did, and like me, sat by her bed day after day, in mournful silence. Sometimes she would sew a little—sometimes read a tract or the Bible, which so few inmates of that place ever touch. It is hard to be utterly alone in the world, and I had been months without intercourse with a human being of my own class. One day, when she looked unusually sad, I spoke to her, and after that we fell into miserable companionship, for

I knew by every look and word, that she never had belonged to the class of women about us.

"I think two more unhappy beings never lived than we were; still, there was some consolation in the mournful sympathy which we felt for each other. Some days, when the morning sunshine came through the window which separated her bed from mine, we would get up a gleam of cheerfulness, and strive to encourage each other, knowing all the time how futile it was. When I attempted to comfort her, she answered me kindly, but was too sorrowful for consolation. The gloom of coming anguish, and probable death, hung over us both. We had no heart for words.

"It is terrible here at night. I cannot sleep, with so many strange women breathing heavily around me. The hush of the city chills me through and through. It seems like lying in a graveyard, especially when the slow sob of the river comes up to me through the silence. This other poor girl is often awake in the night. When she does sleep, it is restlessly, and sometimes her moans break into words.

"This night, this very night—it seems long as eternity—she began to murmur in her dreams as I lay weary and wakeful. All at once I started up in bed and listened. She had uttered a name,—your name, De Marke, uttered it softly as a dove coos in its nest.

"That one word was a revelation to me. Quick as light my thoughts flew back to the past—a thousand proofs, trivial but convincing, crowded upon me. The vague uncertainty that had kept me always so restless, was a miserable conviction now. No, not yet, I would not believe the mutterings of a dream—there should be no uncertainty.

"I leaned from my cot and grasped the white arm of the sleeping girl, which had fallen downward over the side of her bed. She awoke with a start, and I saw her blue eyes fixed wildly on my face.

"'Tell me,' I said, 'was it the son of George De Marke,

a shipping-merchant lately dead, of whom you spoke but now?" She lifted her white hands and clasped them wildly.

"Did I speak of him? when? how? Who tells me that I spoke of De Marke?" she said.

"In your sleep, a moment since," I answered; "tell me about him, I must know!" She looked at me wildly, but did not answer. "Tell me," I said, "do you love this man?"

"Better than my life!—better than my own soul!" she answered, lifting her clasped hands to heaven.

"And he—did he love you?"

"I asked the question faintly, my lips were cold, my heart in an agony of suspense. She turned her eyes upon me—those beautiful blue eyes—full of tears that glittered painfully before my sight.

"Love me? yes, I am sure he does—sure as I am of my life."

"I tightened the grip of my hand upon her arm, for agony made me strong, and I was unconscious of the cruelty, till she shrunk away quivering from my touch.

"Then God help you, and forgive him!" I said. She did not speak, but cowered down in her cot, with a low moan, as if my words had wounded her to death. At last she said to me timidly, for my wild anguish had frightened her.

"Why do you speak in this way? God is over all, and he knows there is nothing to forgive."

"I remembered my promise then. No wrong that you could inflict, would absolve me from that. It was on my lips to say this man is my husband, but I drew the bitter truth back into my heart, where it shall lie buried forever.

"I answered her question vaguely, saying that I did not think any good man would have permitted her to come there.

"Then she began to cry bitterly, and amid her tears begged

me not to think so. Her coming there was no fault of the person we were speaking of. He was far away across the ocean, and could know nothing of it.

"I have risen from my cot, and seated on the floor, I scrawl this, by the dim night-lamp upon the wall. She may be asleep; I dare not speak to her again; I have nothing more to learn, nothing to hope for.

"It is morning, I have folded my letter, and send it after you, black with shadows. If my fate is life, you and I shall never meet again on this earth. I am a poor, weak woman, but not poor enough, even in this place, to wait for a man who married me out of compassion for the great love I bore him.

"Oh! how I did love you, my husband, how I do love you this miserable minute—forgive me! forgive me! I shall never say this to you again; but every pulse beats with love for you—but you! It was only pity. At sunset last night I was ill, and afraid to die. The day has broken, and I am praying God in mercy to let me die. You never loved me! miserable thought. If God grants my prayer, look for the record! It will be Mary Barton, died so and so. The name will pass unnoticed by every one else. You will understand that it is your poor wife who died here all alone. Then you will pity her, and perhaps love her memory a little. Let me sign your name? It will be the first and last time.

LOUISA DE MARKE."

When George De Marke finished reading this letter, Louis dropped the hand from over his forehead, and parted his lips as if to speak; but the pallid agony of his brother's face checked him; and they, who had met so eagerly, sat together minute after minute in dumb silence. At length Louis spoke.

"It was a terrible mistake, but one which no human foresight could have prevented," he said. "Poor girl! if she is ever found—but this seems almost hopeless. I have omitted nothing in my search for her."

George made a strong effort to throw off the pain this glimpse of his wife's death-bed had brought upon him, and strove to enter into his brother's anxiety.

"Have you no trace of her?" he questioned.

"None; an old man who walked about the grounds saw her on the day of her discharge, sitting on a wharf, close by the walls of the hospital."

"With her child?"

"She took no child with her, he said, but sat in that one spot till night. From that time I have lost all trace of her."

"Have you ever questioned Mrs. Judson?"

"I did; telling her all the facts, and claiming my wife at her hands."

"Well?"

"At first, she refused to answer me; but when I told her of our marriage, she admitted everything, but persisted in stating that Louisa died in the hospital and was buried from her house, the servants believing that she had been brought home from a Catholic school. She was very anxious that I should keep my marriage and the manner of my wife's death a secret; and up to this time I have done so."

"May not this possibly be true?" inquired George De Marke, with sudden animation.

"No; I have searched the wards and traced all the facts. It is useless to guess what Mrs. Judson's motives for concealment are; but it was Catharine Lacy who was taken from the hospital after her death, by an undertaker, and carried in the night to Mrs. Judson's house, from which there was a pompous funeral the next day. The undertaker showed me his certificate for burial, but said that he had never seen the lady, as all the bills were paid by one of the nurses at the hospital."

"Did you find this nurse?"

"No; she left the hospital about that time, and I could get no intelligence regarding her."

"Did you question Mrs. Judson about her niece, my wife?" inquired George, still disturbed by a vague hope.

"Yes; but she denied all knowledge of her whatever."

"It is a sad mystery," sighed George, falling into deeper dejection from that one gleam of hope. "The fate of my poor wife seems to be certain, and it is impossible that yours could have been living without leaving some sure trace of her existence. She probably never came away from the wharf where that old man saw the darkness gathering around her. Deep water is a terrible temptation to persons driven to despair, as she was."

Louis De Marke arose and began to walk the room. George took his hat and went into the street. Neither of the young men had the heart for any further conversation that day.

CHAPTER LX.

THE FEMALE MISER IN HER DEN.

PEG—Peg, don't you hear me, Peg! I am tired and so hungry, Peg. Will no one give me drink or a mouthful to eat?"

This oft-repeated complaint was answered by a hoarse croak from the small hen-coop that stood on the floor, and three lank chickens thrust forth their open bills and withered, thin necks, through the upright bars of their prison, casting side-glances toward the old woman, whose face and hands drooped over the side of the bed.

The sound of this response, which came from the half famished creatures like the croak of so many hungry ravens, brought tears to the sick woman's eyes, for these dumb sufferers had been her companions so long, that all the sym-

thies of which she was capable went out from her own forlorn state to theirs. But these humanizing feelings were all driven away when Peg, the ungrateful cat, stole out from under her bed with a fragment of food in her jaws, which she carried to the fireless and unswept hearth, and devoured under the fierce, hungry gaze of her mistress, with the sly look and crouching air of an ungrateful thief as she was.

The old woman was feeble from long illness, but nothing could quite overcome the bitter malice of her nature, and the sight of her prime favorite caring for her own wants with cool selfishness, as if she had been human, quenched her tears in anger.

She gathered herself up in the squalid bed, and shook her clenched hand fiercely at the feline reprobate, who, as if comprehending all the impotency of this rage, answered it with a greenish glare of the eyes, and a low, muffled growl over the food she was devouring.

As the old woman fell back upon her pillow, shedding tears of imbecile rage, a knock came to the door, for the first time in many days.

The cat listened a moment with her paws fastened greedily on the fragment of food, and her ears thrown back. The chickens drew in their lank necks and huddled together in the back of their little coop; and the old woman cried out piteously, and yet with a tremor of rage in her voice,—

"Come in, whoever you are. Welcome, in the name of the blessed Virgin!"

The door opened, and a woman entered the room firmly, and with the demeanor of one who had a right there. Her dress was very humble, and made after a fashion that had prevailed years before. A large bonnet of pink silk, now faded and crushed, was on her head; a fall of discolored blonde lace, once very costly, half shaded her features; and a mantilla of antique voluminousness fell over a dress of soiled calico.

"Who are you? and what do you come for?" inquired Madame De Marke, striving to support herself on one elbow in the bed, while she shaded her eyes with the other hand. "Has anybody heard that I was sick? Why did n't they send me a Sister of Mercy?"

"I am all the sister of mercy you'll be likely to get to take care of you in this world or the next," replied her visitor, looking around the room with a smile of grim satisfaction. "All right! So you are sick and want help—hungry and want food. I like that. It goes a good way toward convincing me that there is a just God, and I don't like to give up that idea altogether, though he did make such creatures as you are."

The old woman uttered a sort of hiss, and clenched the hand she had lost all strength to threaten with.

"I know you. Yes, yes! I know you well enough now, Jane Kelly. Your time in State's Prison is up, and you've come here to insult me on my sick-bed. That's brave of you now, isn't it?—mighty brave!"

"I came here because I had no other home to go to, and because you owe me money that I will have: and I owe you punishment for all the wickedness you have heaped on me, which you are sure to get. It's settling-day between us."

"What do you want? What do you mean? I don't owe you anything. I never did anything against you, Jane Kelly, never in my whole life. On the contrary, I always liked you, and when that impertinent policeman would take you up, and the judge insisted on sentencing you, I did my best to buy you off. It was all because you would n't do all that we bargained for, that you fell into trouble. But you are a good-hearted creature, Jane, and won't bear malice against a poor, harmless old woman for what she could n't help. Come, take off your bonnet, Jane, and find a chair. I'm so glad you came."

Jane took off her bonnet, and revealed a crop of short,

black hair, which she shook at the old woman with a malignant laugh.

"This is your doings!" she said, threading the thick locks fiercely with her fingers. "It was a yard and a quarter long when you swore it off my head. Well, never mind, every dog has its day, and mine is coming round with a sharp turn. Before this gets to its length again, you'll be six feet under ground, or where I just came from."

"Hush, now do hush," pleaded the old woman, with a feeble attempt at her old cajoling tone. "Don't talk about being six feet under ground. I'm only a little weak, you know, and grieved at the ingratitude of the world. Just look there, Jane Kelly, my dear old friend; look at Peg; I would have staked anything on the faithfulness of that cat; but ever since I've been sick she's never been near my bed, but goes off mousing and stealing for herself, just as if I was n't here and could n't be hungry, I, who taught her the difference between cooked birds right from the restaurant and live mice. Would you believe it, ever since I've been unable to help myself, she's done nothing but catch mice."

There the old woman's passion threw her into a coughing-fit, but the moment it was over, she began again.

"To-day, when she came with a bird dripping with gravy in her jaws, I tried to coax her up to the bed; but no, there she stood leering at me with her round, glaring eye, and munched the bird up bones and all before my face. I tried to get at her, but the room turned black as midnight, and though I could hear her crunching and growling under the bed, it was of no use pleading. Look at her there, Jane Kelly, the viper that I warmed in my bosom, and if you wish to fight anything, try her, she deserves it. But I, — just come to the bed, my friend, take my hand, there's nothing but kindness in me. I'm full of friendship for you. Sickness and trouble have changed me, Jane, and if I did you any harm, it has been repented of long and long ago."

Jane scarcely seemed to heed all this, save that she went up to the hearth and gave Peg, the cat, a vigorous kick with one of the heavy prison-shoes that still encased her feet. This injunction to punish the cat seemed to be the only portion of the old woman's speech that impressed her enough for action. Though it was very evident that the miserable old creature was absolutely suffering from starvation, Jane seemed in no hurry to relieve the discomforts of her position, but seated herself in one of the dilapidated chairs, and took a well-satisfied survey of the room, till her fierce gaze at last encountered the keen, black eyes of her enemy glancing upon her from the bed.

"So you have suffered a good deal?" she said, abruptly.

"A great deal. You would be sorry for me, Jane, if you knew how much."

"I'm not sure about that. Hungry sometimes, eh?"

"I'm hungry now!" answered the sick woman, while tears dropped like single hail-stones from her eyes; "I'm very hungry, Jane Kelly."

"And thirsty?"

"My mouth is parched for want of a drop of water!"

"And weak?"

"So weak that it troubles me to move a finger, except when I'm angry. Peg gave me a moment's strength, and your coming kept it up — but now I am helpless."

"Yet you are rich?"

"Oh, yes, very rich; rolling in gold — rolling in gold!" cried the old woman, with a fresh gleam of the eyes.

"And where is this gold? I want my share of it."

"Your share, oh, ha! you're joking now, my beautiful friend. Of course, one never keeps money in a place like this! Safe in the bank, mortgages, railroad stock, bonds."

"And jewels perhaps — old-fashioned diamond ear-rings, mated this time," said Jane Kelly, glancing under the bed, at which Madame De Marke grew more livid than sickness

had left her, and began to writhe upon her pillow as if seized with a sudden paroxysm of pain.

"No, no," the invalid almost shrieked, "the judge kept them both. I never could get those ear-rings back from his clutches. They were to be kept for you, he insisted, when you came out of prison. I only wish we had them here, and they should sparkle in those pretty ears before you could find time to ask for them."

Jane gave her head a contemptuous toss, but the eyes of the old woman were fixed upon her with that keen, mesmeric power which in serpents is called fascination; and spite of her coarse shrewdness, the material of the one woman was yielding itself to the diabolical subtlety of the other.

"You must not complain of the prison, Jane Kelly, for it has made a lady of you. Why, your forehead and neck are white as lilies, and your cheeks are like wild roses, only when you look cross one loses sight of the dimples. It's worth while staying between four stone walls a year or two, if it brings one's beauty out like that!"

"Like this!" said Jane, with another wilful shake of the head, which sent the hair in disorder over her brow and temples. "This is one of the beauties I have gained!"

"But it will be thicker and softer, and —"

The old woman broke off suddenly, and turned upon her pillow moaning. Jane Kelly arose with an impulse of compassion.

"What shall I do for you?" she said.

"Something to eat, and a mouthful of water," moaned the patient, wearily, "I am almost dead!"

"Where shall I get food?" inquired Jane. "Water I can find."

"Give me water—a little water—it costs nothing; give that first!" said the old woman, in a feeble moan, true to her great vice, even while hunger was gnawing at her vitals.

CHAPTER LXI.

MADAME'S GOLDEN CRUCIFIX.

JANE took a broken pitcher from the table and went out in search of water. When she returned with the cool moisture dripping through the fracture over her hands, the sick woman aroused herself and sat up in the bed with outstretched hands, and eager, gleaming eyes. As she drank, the chickens in the coop began to flutter wildly against each other, and dart their long necks through the bars with a hungry cackle, that made the sick crone laugh hysterically as she held the pitcher to her mouth.

"Give them some, poor dears, they want it badly. It costs nothing, so give them enough. It's a dreadful thing to be thirsty," said the poor woman, relinquishing the pitcher and drawing a deep, broken breath.

Jane set the pitcher down before the hen-coop, and the poor creatures made a rush at it, darting their eager heads one over the other through the bars, and casting upturned glances as they threw back their bills to swallow the water for which they had been thirsting. The old woman turned herself over to the side of the bed and watched them with a look of keen enjoyment, working her withered and moist lips in sympathy with their tumultuous satisfaction, and talking to them in broken exclamations, as if they had been human beings.

"Now," said Jane Kelly; "tell me where I can get something to eat. You are starved almost to death, and I am about as well off—haven't tasted a mouthful since yesterday."

"Something to eat? Oh, yes! one can't live without eating, and that's what makes life so expensive. If you had a little money now—"

"Haven't got a red cent in the world; that's why I came here!" answered Jane, indignantly. "Came a purpose for the gold you are rolling in, and mean to have it, too!"

"Oh!" sighed Madame De Marke, "if I only had it here, you should n't go away empty-handed."

"I don't intend to go away empty-handed, nor hungry either, so long as there is a box full of gold and diamonds under your bed, my fine old lady!" cried Jane, preparing to creep under the miserable cot on which Madame De Marke lay.

A low, cracked laugh broke from the sick woman, as she felt the rather stout person of Jane Kelly striving to force itself between the crossed supporters of her couch in search of the box; but she said nothing. When an oath bespoke the disappointment of her visitor, in not finding the object of her search, the old woman began to shiver with affright, for there was something fiendish in the sound.

"Now," said Jane Kelly, lifting herself fiercely from the floor, "you'll have the goodness, just for the novelty of the thing, to tell me where that box, with the iron bars in which you keep my ear-rings and somebody else's gold, is hid away. I want that box, and I mean to have that box. Do you understand, my precious old Jezebel?"

"It's in the bank. It's been in the bank ever since that night!"

"That's a lie!" answered Jane, sternly.

"On my soul, on my life!"

"Bah! *your* soul! *your* life! Why all the life in your miserable body is mine, if I choose to go away as other people would, and let you starve it out. A little masterly inactivity, and where is your life or soul either? If I let one go, it'll take something more than a gold crucifix to save the other, let me tell you."

"Don't be wicked, don't be sacrilegious," pleaded the poor woman, thrusting her hand under the pillow, and hold-

ing fast to the crucifix she had concealed there. "Don't talk about letting me starve more than I have! If you only knew how horrible it is to call, and call, and call, with nothing but your own voice to come back from the empty rooms; all night long, without a living soul within hearing, and all day long, with people moving about under your room, filling the building with life, and yet too far off for screams to reach them—oh! Miss Kelly, dear, dear Miss Kelly, don't talk of leaving me to suffer all that over again!"

"Then tell me where the box of gold is!"

"I have told you. It is in the bank."

"Give me an order to take it out then!"

"I can't. My hand is so feeble I can't write. Give me something to eat. Nurse me up a little, and I'll do it for you in a minute. You know I would, Miss Jane!"

Jane looked at the old creature with bitter scrutiny, and at last broke out,—

"I don't believe you!"

"Oh! how cruel you are. If I take my oath of it, will you believe me then?"

"Will you take it on the Bible?"

"Yes, yes, on the Bible—your Protestant Bible, if that will satisfy you!"

"It won't," answered Jane. "What do you care for a Protestant Bible? I must have your oath on the crucifix, before I believe it."

"The crucifix! But I haven't got a crucifix!"

"Where is the gold one you used to plot mischief over on your knees?" questioned Jane, sneeringly.

"The gold one? The gold crucifix? Oh! yes, that is in that box, with all the other jewels. It was n't safe here, you know!" answered the old woman, clutching her fingers more tightly around her treasure, "so you see I can't swear on the crucifix; but I'll do it on anything else you like!"

Jane had watched the sly movement of the old woman's

hand, with all the sharp suspicion natural to her character. Without a word of reply, she drew close to the bed, seized the old woman's wrist, and drew forth the skeleton hand still clutched upon the crucifix.

"Miserable old liar, what is this?" she cried, shaking the poor hand till the crucifix fell from its clutch.

"I don't know," answered the old woman, cowering down in the bed. "It's my religion. It's my all in all. Don't touch it."

"Bother!" exclaimed Jane, brutally seizing upon the crucifix and holding it up. "Now swear on this, that you have put the gold and jewels in the bank, and I'll believe it. Come, sit up and swear. I'll hold it to your lips."

"No, no. It's not allowed to swear about worldly matters on that. Give me anything else, and I'll do it," cried Madame, snatching at the crucifix.

"This, or nothing," was the stern reply.

"Give me my crucifix. Oh! lay it down. Give me my crucifix!" almost shrieked the old woman, with wild terror in her eyes, as she saw Jane walking backward toward the door, carry off her treasure.

"No, no, I'm going to try what it can do; you have prayed to it for bread that did n't come. I'll set it to work. See if I don't get something to eat out of it."

"Something to eat?" cried Madame De Marke, "what! my crucifix! Where are you going?"

"To my uncle's!"

"You have no uncle. It will be lost, bring it back. I have a shilling in the pocket of my dress — you shall have that, only give back the holy crucifix."

"A shilling, indeed. My uncle will give me ten times the money if I spout it handsomely — but don't fret, I'll bring you the ticket, on honor, and you can buy back your religion with some of the gold when it comes from the bank. Keep cool, old lady, it's my turn now."

"But you will not carry off my crucifix!" screamed the old woman.

"Won't I?" replied Jane, with a taunting laugh, "won't I? It may save you, but you can't save it: here goes, my fine old lady."

Jane Kelly turned back to utter the last tormenting words, and left the old woman in a pitiable state of distress.

"My crucifix, my crucifix, oh! she has carried off my soul. My strength is gone. The blessed mother of God has seen them carry off her son. I am nothing, I am crushed here in my own bed. She has given me over to purgatory, while there is breath in my body. I cannot live, and without the blessed crucifix I cannot die! Woe, woe, they have left me at last, a poor, miserable, weak old woman."

Here the cracked voice broke into moans and unequal sobs, between which came forth the plaint of "My crucifix — my crucifix!"

CHAPTER LXII.

BEGGING FOR FOOD.

IN about half an hour, Jane Kelly returned with a basket of food upon her arm, and full of malicious cheerfulness.

"There, old woman, do you see this? plenty to eat and a sharp appetite. When would that miserable old image have brought so much in your hands, I should like to know?"

"But where is my crucifix? You have not sold it?"

"No — no — spouted it, that's all."

"What do you mean? Who has got my crucifix?" shouted Madame, wild with terror and grief.

"A nice old Jew, who turned up his nose at your image, as if it had been a leg of pork; wouldn't believe it was

genuine gold at first, and made a reduction of twenty-five per cent. extra on the value, because of the insult I had offered in bringing the image to him. I told him you would redeem it with a thousand dollars, rather than lose it. A thousand dollars, you hear, old lady!"

"A thousand dollars," muttered Madame De Marke, turning to the wall with a stifled moan, "a thousand dollars. This wicked wretch has ruined me!"

"Why, you old hypocrite, I could n't take less. Did you expect me to make a Judas Iscariot of myself, and ask only thirty pieces of silver. I a'n't so irreverent a creature as that, anyhow."

"A thousand dollars!" moaned the old woman.

"Don't fret about that, mother. The Jews a'n't going to give more now than they did in old times; the ticket says ten dollars; the heathen would n't raise another sixpence."

"Ten dollars—ten dollars—and all in her hands," muttered the old woman,—"why, ten dollars will last me two months, and she'll use it up in a meal almost. Oh, if I were but strong and well!"

"But you a'n't strong nor well either, so just make the best of it and stop whining. I'm tired of it, let me tell you!" said Jane, peremptorily. "Hush up, now, and not another whimper."

The old woman turned her face upon the pillow, and wept out her grief in silence; she dared not disobey her hard task-mistress.

With a good deal of clatter and noise, Jane went about the room, kindling a fire from some charcoal she had brought in her basket, and setting out the broken dishes on the bottom of an old chair that had lost its back. An expression of almost fiendish satisfaction was on her face, adding to the repulsion which hardship and wickedness had already left there. She was evidently planning some new torture for the woman, who had so justly earned her vengeance.

Directly, the charcoal began to crackle in a broken furnace that stood within the fireplace, and the fumes of a fine beefsteak filled the chamber with an odor that had probably never visited it before.

The famished old woman grew restless under this rich perfume. Her eyes gleamed, her fingers worked eagerly among the bedclothes. At last she forgot the loss of her crucifix and every other pain, in the animal want thus keenly aroused.

"Oh!" she said, snuffing up the fragrant smoke, as it floated over her, "how delicious it is! How I long for a mouthful. Jane Kelly, dear Jane Kelly, make haste. No matter if it is underdone—I like beefsteak any way. Just one mouthful, on a fork, Jane, while you cook the rest!"

Jane Kelly laughed, and turned over the steak, pressing it beneath her knife till the juice ran out upon the coals, filling the room afresh with its appetizing fumes.

"What are you laughing at?" cried the old woman, breaking into hysterical muttering. "I ask for a mouthful of steak and you laugh!"

"I laugh, of course I do! Is there any law against laughing, let me ask?—anything immoral in it? because I'm getting rather particular on that point, since I handled the crucifix. Why should n't I laugh, Madame De Marke?"

"Oh! you should. Why not? I could laugh myself at the thoughts of our supper. I could—I, I'm laughing. Come, come, be quick. I want something to eat. I am dying for something to eat!" Here the old woman struggled up in bed, and held out her arms, working her lean fingers eagerly, like the claws of a hungry parrot.

"Well, I hope you may get it!" said Jane, cruelly, "I hope you may get it!"

"What! what do you mean?" faltered the poor woman, falling helplessly back on her pillow, with a look of pale horror. "What do you mean?"

"I mean just what I say. That I hope you may get something to eat; for if you have one mouthful from me, it 'll be paid for, I tell you!" answered Jane, with brutal satisfaction.

The poor woman uttered a faint moan, and the gleam of her hungry eyes was quenched in tears of cruel disappointment.

"Oh! this is too wicked — you will not be so fiendish, Jane Kelly. If a mad dog, who had bitten you, were as hungry as I am, you would give him something to eat!"

"Yes, of course I should. One cannot hate a brute beast enough to starve it to death. Besides, they do not lock each other up for false swearing. Oh, yes! I would give a piece of this steak to a hungry dog — or a hungry cat either. Here, Peg, Peg, come here, Peg!"

As she spoke, Jane cast off a fragment of the steak, and held it up at a tantalizing height above the eager cat, who mewed, and leaped, and quivered all over with impatience, to seize upon it.

Madame De Marke watched the contest with gleaming eyes. When she saw the fragment fall, to be pounced upon by the voracious cat, a sharp yell broke from her, and she cried out with the pang of a mother over her ungrateful child.

"Oh! oh! how she devours it, while I am starving. Peg, oh! misery, Peg, how can you?" Again Jane Kelly burst into an unfeeling laugh.

"How much will you give now, old lady," she said, "for a piece of steak, like that which poor, dear, grateful Peg is tearing with her claws?"

"How much will I give? Oh! if I had thousands here, you should have them — only for the least mouthful. But you have taken my all!" cried the old woman, piteously.

"Tell me where the box of gold and jewels is, and I'll give you some," replied Jane, flinging another piece of steak to the cat, and preparing to seat herself before the broken platter, on which she had placed the larger portion.

"The box? The box? Oh, I have told you. In the bank. I sent it there!" was the affrighted answer.

Jane divided the steak before her, and tearing out the heart of a white loaf with her hand, began to eat.

"Oh, Jane Kelly! how can you? Have pity, have pity. I am so hungry, Jane Kelly!"

"Of course you are, so is Peg; so am I, and the poor chickens too!" answered Jane, rising with her mouth full, and playfully aiming fragments of bread at the open bars of the hen-coop. "It's human nature to be hungry."

"Oh! it's against nature. I shall perish with hunger — with enough to eat all around me, every living thing mocks my want. See them eat! see them eat! the greedy, ungrateful wretches — see them! and I starving, starving, starving!"

The poor woman made a desperate effort to spring up and seize the food before her; but her head reeled, her limbs quivered, and darkness filled her eyes instead of tears. She fell back upon the bed with an impatient cry of anguish, which was rendered hideous by the eager munching of the cat and the satisfied chuckle of the hens, — all too busy with their own wants for any thought of her.

"Come, come!" said Jane, more feelingly, "tell me where the box is, and you shall have a beautiful meal!"

"I cannot, I cannot!" moaned the old lady, — "ask anything else, and I will. Do!"

"That box, with the iron clamps. Nothing more, nothing less, tell me where it is!"

"In the bank. I have told you."

"It is here. I will have it within an hour, whether you tell me or not. But if I am obliged to search for it, the fiends may feed you if they will — not a mouthful shall you have from me!"

"Oh! cruel, cruel. What can I say? how shall I move you?"

"Tell where the box is!"

"I cannot — I do not know. It is at the bank — in the bank."

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE IRON-BOUND BOX.

JANE KELLY sat down resolutely and went on with her supper. The old woman watched each mouthful that she swallowed, with working lips and eyes that grew fiercer and larger each moment.

"Oh, mother of heaven, I shall die!" she sobbed out at last, throwing her flail-like arms over her head. "Give me something to eat—give me something to eat, or I will tear you—tear you in pieces!"

Jane lifted her face and looked composedly on this burst of agony. Then without a word she went on with her meal. When she saw this, tears began to stream over the old woman's face; when she heard Madame De Marke pleading piteously for a single crumb of the bread, or one little mouthful of the steak—"One crumb, one mouthful, she would be content with that," Jane still never spoke, but enjoyed her meal in stubborn silence.

"Do you hear?—oh! Jane, do you hear me?"

"Yes, I hear!"

"One mouthful, only one mouthful, dear, good Jane!"

"The box, only the box, dear, good madam!" was the mocking answer.

"Oh! will nothing but the box answer? Am I to starve?"

"If I am obliged to find it for myself, you certainly will!" said Jane, resolutely pushing back the chair from which she had been eating. "Now for a grand search!"

Her eyes accidentally fell on the hen-coop, as she spoke, and Madame De Marke, struck with terror, called out,—

"No, no, do not disturb the poor things; they have done nothing!"

A suspicion instantly seized upon Jane. She advanced

toward the coop, and stooping down was about to remove it from its place.

"No, no, stop, I will tell you, Jane. Give me something to eat first, and I will tell you about it."

"Tell me first!" persisted Jane, with her eyes on the hen-coop, "tell me where the box is, first!"

"Will you give me food if I do?"

"Yes, as much as you can eat."

"Now?—at once?"

"Yes, this minute!"

"But what do you want of my gold?"

"No matter!"

"You will not take much; enough to redeem the crucifix—no more than that?"

"Speak, or I will find it without your help."

It seemed as if the struggle between habitual parsimony and the sharp demands of hunger would never cease to rend that poor skeleton form. The old woman writhed upon her bed, in absolute torture, yet her mercenary soul clung to its gold against the very pangs of hunger. At last she shrieked out,—

"Give me food. Give me life, but do not take all!"

"Where is the box?" persisted Jane, steady to her point.

"There, there!" cried her victim, "remove the coop. Under it is a loose board—beneath that you will find the box." As she ceased, the old woman fell to weeping and moaning over her losses.

Jane removed the coop, thrust aside a loose board, and found the box between the floor and ceiling.

"All right. Give up the key, old lady!"

Madame held out a key, which had been concealed in her bosom, weeping bitterly all the time.

Jane opened the box, pushed aside the gold with her hand, and took out the tarnished jewel-case.

"I will not rob you, these are mine," she said, thrusting

the case into her bosom; "and this," she continued, taking out a slip of paper; "this belongs to one we have both wronged. Take your money, I have got all that is mine!"

"Give me the gold — here, here, on the bed. Give it up, my gold! my gold!"

The old creature forgot even the pangs of hunger, in the sudden relief produced by the words of her enemy. She grasped out handfuls of the gold, and hugging it between her thin palms, kissed it eagerly before she would thrust it back to the box again. A moment before she had thought it all lost, now she was laughing hysterically, and shedding feeble tears over what had been saved.

"Here is your supper!" said Jane, drawing the broken chair forward, and holding up the plate of food; "here is your supper!"

The gold dropped from her shrivelled hands. For one moment hunger grew strong over avarice; she seized the offered food with one hand, and directly began groping after the gold with the other.

While she was thus employed, Jane Kelly left the room.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE BROTHERS CONSULT AGAIN.

THE two brothers sat together in Louis De Marke's room. Both seemed anxious and thoughtful. George had a look of habitual sadness upon his face; but Louis was like one who struggles against fate without the resolution to brave it.

"Go to her, George, go, I entreat you," said the latter, "for I dare not, I cannot. Tell her the simple truth, say that in doubt of my position, sometimes almost forgetting it

in the magnitude of my great love for her, I looked and acted as no honorable man should have done, bound as I was. True, I never spoke of love, and in this sometimes strove to satisfy my conscience; but words are the weakest confessions that a man can make; and nothing but a coward shelters his honor under the miserable pretence, that a passion uttered in every action and look is unspoken, if not syllabled in so many words.

"I loved this woman in her girlhood — hopelessly, for she married another. But even in look, or gesture, it was unexpressed. Then my poor Louisa came as a more solemn barrier against this passion, came and vanished like a troubled shadow, leaving me desolate and a wanderer on the face of the earth. I came home; I found Townsend Oakley dead, and the woman I had so worshipped a widow, free as air, more beautiful than ever, and ready to renew her acquaintance with me as the dearest of her early friends.

"It was wrong, I know it, George, but how could I resist the happiness of seeing her? How force myself to repel the dawning favor that I found in her eyes? I did not speak — thus appeasing conscience with mental craft. But she must have known how madly I loved her, and, conceal it as I may, it was the very delirium of joy that I felt whenever an unconscious proof escaped her, that her own warm heart answered back the passion burning so fatally in mine.

"During the winter, this intimacy continued. In the spring the young widow, in pursuance of a plan laid out by her husband before his death, completed a pretty cottage on Staten Island, near the sea-shore, and retired there with her little boy."

"She had a child then?" interrupted George, with interest.

"One of the loveliest children that you ever set eyes on, so bright, so incapable of being spoiled, my heart leaped toward the child the moment I saw him!"

George remained thoughtful, while Louis walked up and down the room, excited and restless.

"It is strange, if your wife is living," said George, at last, "that no traces of her can be found. Have you searched since we talked of this before?"

"Everywhere, and in vain. This is the misery of my position!" answered Louis, passionately. "If she could be found, a sense of duty would give me strength; I could struggle against this fascination; but with this dull blank of uncertainty before me, I have no power to wrestle with myself."

"We are both in a terrible position," said George, "but we must act as honest men, and trust God for the rest. You are right, Louis. Leave this country at once. Let me continue the search for Louisa. If I find her, we will join you in any country you may wish. If all search proves vain, she is doubtless dead."

"Yes, I will go. Oh! George, but for you I should never have found strength to leave her, and encounter the desert of existence before me. Yes, I will go!"

The resolution was uttered with a gesture of dull despair; and he added, "I *must* go, or more evil will come of this!"

"It is best," answered George, pressing a hand to his forehead, as if to still some pain there. "But that I can serve you better here, we would go together. All places are alike to me now!"

Louis sat down by his brother. Tears stood in his fine eyes, and dusky shadows settled beneath them.

"You will see her, George, see her in all her serene loveliness; you will sit by her side, talk with her—talk of me—of my weakness. She is gentle, and will not think my love for her a crime. You will tell her that I have been married—married to her husband's sister, who may be alive, or who may be in her grave—I know that you will deal with my name in brotherly kindness. But do not let her despise me; tell her how much it cost me to abandon everything for a hard duty. Deal kindly with me, brother, for my heart is almost breaking!"

George threw his arms around his brother, and drew him close to the honest heart so full of compassion for his troubles

"Take courage, Louis. All will end well. I will not rest till this mystery is solved. In a few months I will find your wife, or bring you proofs of her death."

"And must I go at once?" said Louis, looking wistfully into his brother's face. "Why must I leave my native land? The very air she breathes is precious to me."

George smiled compassionately.

"It is far better, Louis, that you should be away. How could you be content without seeing her?"

"True, true. I will go! Everything is packed. A few hours, and the steamer sails. In that time we shall be separated, perhaps for years, brother."

"No, no, I will join you."

"You have a weary search first. I have tried it."

"Not as I shall, with coolness and decision. You were too much interested. Trust me."

"I do, in all things."

"And you will go to-night."

"Yes, to-night," was the mournful answer.

"Have you taken leave of Madame?"

"No; when I called at her room, a few days since, she was gone. Somewhere in the country the people below stairs told me, and might not be back for months."

"It is strange," said George; "her life, I find, has become utterly degraded. The den which she inhabits is the most poverty-stricken place I ever saw. She seemed greatly annoyed at seeing me, and refused all conversation. The most that I could obtain from her was complaints of your undutifulness and prodigality."

"Don't talk of her, George. She is my mother, and I can only say with Hamlet, 'Would it were not so!' but you will see her, and explain my sudden departure in the best way possible."

"Yes, I will see her. Not only for that, but because I believe she is in some way involved in this mystery regarding the young creatures so fatally connected with us."

"She denies it positively."

"This may be true in all else. But I know that her persecution drove Catharine to the hospital."

"I do not doubt it. But she never knew Louisa. Besides, I do not think she would deliberately wound me — her own son."

"We will not urge the question further," answered George, suppressing the indignation that arose in his heart against his enemy. "She is a woman, and your mother."

"True, true, so let us talk more directly of ourselves, for we have but an hour."

CHAPTER LXV.

THE WASHERWOMAN'S INTRUSION.

A LIGHT knock came to the door, which softly opened, and a woman appeared bearing a long basket full of clean linen on her arm.

"I hope I'm not too late for yer honor," she said, placing her basket on a chair, and wiping the perspiration from her face. "It's a long walk from yon, and, do what I would, the time went by quicker 'an I ever seed it."

"But you were to have brought the clothes home yesterday," said George, annoyed by this intrusion upon the precious moments which remained before his brother's departure. "Usually you are more punctual, Mrs. Dillon."

"True for ye there," answered our old friend, Mary Margaret, while a crimson blush reddened her good-natured face.

"But do ye see, gentlemen, I've been away for a bit,

looking after a darlint of a little boy as is precious to me as my own flesh and blood, though he is a gintleman now entirely — for all he was born side by side wid Terry in the hospital — more blame to them as sent his poor mother there!"

There was something in this speech that made the brothers start. Their own minds had been so occupied by recollections of the hospital, that the subject, brought upon them so suddenly, and from this unexpected source, seemed like a revelation.

"Of what child do you speak, Mrs. Dillon?" inquired George, while Louis stood with his wild eyes fixed upon her.

"Why, of me own little nursling, to be sure, as was born the week after little Terry, and took the bit and sup wid him, side by side, after his poor dead mother was took out of the ward in her pine coffin."

"And how old is little Terry?" asked Louis, abruptly.

"How old is little Terry? Faix, and I can tell ye to a day, yer honors," said the washerwoman, counting the plump fingers of one hand, which she held up with the thumb protruding. "D'ye see these? Just add two months an' ten days to that same, and ye have little Terry, the spalpeen, all to nothing, yer honors!"

The young men turned their eyes from the plump hand and gazed with a sort of awe upon each other. A rapid calculation ran through the mind of each. Mary Margaret had pointed out the day upon which Louisa's last letter was dated.

"And what became of the mother, that her little boy should have been given to you?" inquired George, almost holding his breath with anxiety.

"She died, poor crather. I see her draw the last gasp myself, and helped to straighten out her poor limbs. A naiter corpse I never saw. She was more natural than any wax image in a museum."

"And what was her name?" asked Louis, turning pale as the question left his lips.

"I don't well know, yer honor. They goes by numbers, not by names, in the hospital; and sometimes she muttered over one name, sometimes another, till it was hard to get the rights of it. Besides, she never said nothin' about herself, only when she was out ov her head, as ye may say, wid the pain and trouble."

"But you heard her mention some name, surely?" said Louis.

"Yes, and more 'an once, yer honor. First it was Mrs. Judson; then Barton; then Oakley; and then it was De Marke—that was the last word as ever left her poor lips."

The brothers looked at each other again, and both grew pale as death.

"I thought it strange more 'an once, for there was two on 'em, and ye may well say they was both beauties, a-laying side by side—and when the fever was on 'em, this De Marke was on the tongue of one as well as t'other. You'd a thought they both knowed something about the man as bore that name."

Louis De Marke went close to George, and leaned on his shoulder. George felt that he was trembling from head to foot, and drew him toward the sofa. "Let me question her," he said, in a low voice, "the thing involves us both!"

Mary Margaret, who had been sorting the linen from her basket while she was speaking, now turned, and her eyes fell on the young men. She saw how pale they were, and stopped in some bewilderment.

"I will go," she said, taking up her basket. "The old man is right; my tongue is always too fast for my teeth; what had I to do talking of sich to young gentlemen as knows nothing about 'em?"

"Stay, Mrs. Dillon!" said George, "we are both interested, deeply interested; tell us more about these young

persons; we were taken by surprise and did not hear distinctly. Did one or both of these poor ladies recover?"

Mary Margaret sat down with the basket upon her knees.

"Was it one, or both, ye asked? Arrah, but I wish it was both, that I could tell ye of; but I saw one poor crathur carried out in a wooden coffin, wid two breadths of factory cotton on her for a shroud, and for all that she looked like a marble image, wid the raven black hair parted on her white for'ed, and the lids folded so could-like over her eyes, that had been black as stars and as bright as dimints."

"Black eyes? Did you say that the poor girl who died had black eyes and hair?" exclaimed Louis.

"Black as midnight, yer honor, eyes and hair—more, by the token, I closed them two eyes mysel', and the color sunk into my heart!"

The young men looked at each other almost wildly.

"This is very strange!" said George.

The lips of the younger brother were white as marble, and when he tried to answer, they gave forth no sound.

"And the one who lived?" said George, with increasing agitation,—was she dark like the other?"

"Dark, did ye say? Why, her hair was like burning gold, and her eyes—the bluest bit of sky ye ever saw was nothing to 'em. Thin her face, it was white as a lily wid a taste of red just in the mouth and cheeks. She looked like a born beauty in spite of the narrow bed and checkered covering, the day I went out of the hospital, and followed me with her great lovin' eyes all the way down the ward, as if she knew I was the friend to stand by her."

"But you left her alive?" said George, growing more and more excited.

"In course I did!"

"And had no proofs of her death after?"

"Proofs, yer honor? What proofs could I have of her death, when she came her own self to my home, after that,

and slept in the same bed wid the childer for a whole month, to say nothing of the strange baby, as the other poor crathur left ahint her."

"Stop!" said George, starting up with a flush upon his forehead, while his whole frame quivered with excitement. "Be careful what you say. A mistake in this matter would be madness to us both. Are you sure, my good woman, quite sure, that the fair girl came forth alive from that hospital, and that the other died there?"

"Quite sure? Faix and I am, if one's own blessed eyes are to be trusted. Did n't I straighten one out for her coffin, and nurse the other into life when she lay at death's door — to say nothin' of the bit of a baby!"

"One word more, Mrs. Dillon. Do try and remember. Did either of these young creatures ever call each other by name in your hearing?"

"Faix, and they mentioned a good many names, I'm thinking, especially the fair one; but they seemed to mane nothing."

"But among those names was that of George or Louis ever mentioned?"

"Agin and agin, yer honors; but it was in the fever, not atween themselves."

Louis De Marke buried his face in his hands, and George walked hurriedly back and forth in the room. The latter made one or two efforts to speak, but broke off as if the questions at his heart were too momentous. At last he drew close to Mary Margaret:—

"Where did she go from your house? Where is she now?"

His eyes were fixed almost wildly upon her; he trembled from head to foot.

"I don't know, yer honor. An old lady, wid the queerest bonnet on ye ever seed, took her away somewhere into the country, or foreign parts maybe; and the baby was carried off by a gintleman as wanted a son, and so took the darlint

to make an heir of him, and maybe a king one of these days — the Lord be praised, for he was a beauty all over."

George walked unsteadily to his seat, and sat down with a low groan. Her words had wrung his heart with the most bitter disappointment.

"And this is all you know?" he said, faintly.

Margaret looked at him with her kind eyes, and answered that she could remember nothing more.

"And this young person, the fair one, I mean, did she never mention her name to you in all that time?" inquired Louis.

"I disremember, yer honor. We called her the darlint at home: but it seems to me that she once told the old man that her name was Catharine, or the like of that!"

"Catharine!" broke from the lips of both the young men, and actuated by one impulse, each grasped the hand of the other.

Mary Margaret arose to go. That moment a servant knocked at the door. All was ready for the journey, which Louis had forgotten.

The brothers looked at each other in surprise, as if the idea of separation had just arisen.

"No, I will not leave my native land till this mystery is explained," said Louis, in answer to his brother's anxious look.

The servant went out, Mary Margaret gathered up her basket and disappeared with him, leaving the brothers alone.

"She lives, I am certain that Catharine lives," exclaimed George, sinking down upon the sofa, and gazing at the pale face of his brother through a mist of joyful tears.

Louis could not answer, for in his heart there was a wild struggle. Self-reproach, regret, and a thousand tender memories of his wife, struggled hard with another image that rose, spite of himself, amid these sad memories, leaving him in a state of strange excitement.

At last George became more composed.

"Now," he said, "we have the world before us. Let there be no rest till all this strange story is put into proof."

Louis arose.

"I am ready, brother." Then, with a burst of natural sorrow, which was not in the least incompatible with the feelings we have just described, his eyes filled with tears, and he exclaimed, with a world of regret in his voice,—

"My poor, poor wife!"

CHAPTER LXVI.

A DOMESTIC STORM.

MOTHER," said Mrs. Townsend Oakley, lifting her eyes gently from the needlework with which she was employed, "why was it that you took so strong a dislike to the De Markes?"

Mrs. Judson lifted her eyes to the face of her daughter, and kept them upon it so long that a burning crimson spread over the fair cheeks and forehead.

"Why did I dislike the family, daughter? Because the woman who called herself the head was in every respect unworthy."

"But the son, mother, surely he was a gentleman."

"He was a villain?" answered Mrs. Judson, with a degree of sternness that made her daughter start, and brought a deluge of fiery blood to her face.

"How? Why, mother, I never heard a word against him in my life before!"

"Probably not; but had you searched deep enough, acts, rather than opinions, would have settled the truth of what I say. Your husband's sister died in a charity hospital. He it was who sent her there."

"Mother, mother!"

The poor young woman gasped for breath. She could no longer syllable the words that rose to her lips, but with a faint struggle fell back insensible in her chair.

Mrs. Judson arose with a heavy frown, and bent over her child. All of human feeling that she possessed was centred in her, and this sudden indisposition terrified her more from its cause than in itself. With trepidation she wheeled the easy-chair close to an open window and sprinkled the pale face with water. The effect was rapid. After a moment the white eyelids began to tremble, and the young widow fell into a fit of bitter weeping.

"My child — my child, what is this?" exclaimed Mrs. Judson, in a voice that betrayed the struggle of affright, tenderness, and severity going on in her bosom.

"Nothing, mother. You were so abrupt in telling me of poor Louisa: even now I do not understand it. I knew that Catharine Lacy, my own cousin, was in a hospital, and perhaps died there; but Louisa, indeed I can hardly believe it."

"It was the truth, though."

"But, mother, Townsend always thought she died at your house."

"How was I to tell him otherwise? He would always have censured me for leaving her with the servants,—he would never have believed that a creature so young could have outwitted us all, and concealed herself, even in the greatest extremities, up to the very day of her death. She was dead, and I informed him of the fact. The particulars would have aggravated his grief."

"And how did you learn these particulars, mother?" asked the widow, with a degree of self-control that kept her face white as snow.

"I saw her myself, in the hospital."

"You saw her? She told you this with her own lips?"

"She was dead and in her coffin."

"But you saw her and took her away then?"

"I saw and recognized her; she was buried from my house, and with that funeral the shameful secret died."

"Poor, poor girl; how Townsend did love her!" sobbed the widow. "It would have broken his heart."

"So I thought," said the mother, smoothing the folds of her dress with feelings of deep self-satisfaction; "it was far better to keep him in ignorance. But for your mention of that young reprobate, I should not have distressed you or myself by speaking of it."

Mrs. Oakley shrunk back with a shudder as De Marke was thus alluded to, but gathering up courage, proceeded with the subject.

"But what proofs have you that *he* was to blame, mother?"

"It was conclusive. He it was that deluded her away from my protection, he told me so himself."

"But," said the widow, looking suddenly up, while a gleam of light kindled the tears that filled her eyes, "he may have been married to her!"

"Yes," answered the mother sharply, "and he may have been to Catharine Lacy at the same time."

Mrs. Judson drew a small embroidered portfolio from her pocket, and springing the gold clasp, took from among other documents a copy of the letter which Jane Kelly had found in the prayer-book, and which so long after had reached Louis De Marke.

Mrs. Oakley reached forth her hand with an effort, and nerved herself to read the letter through. Her face grew paler and paler as she proceeded; the tears crowded to her eyes, and spite of all her efforts, the letter quivered like a dry leaf in her grasp. At last she looked sadly up at her mother.

"And did they both die with *his* name upon their lips?"

"It is the usual infatuation," answered Mrs. Judson, bitterly, but evading the direct question.

"But the child, poor Louisa's child, what became of that?"

Spite of her self-command, Mrs. Judson shrunk from the question. She had never inquired regarding this child, and a sensation of shame crept over her as she admitted the fact.

"Then you do not know if it is dead or living?" inquired Mrs. Oakley, in a low, grave voice, which fell upon the proud woman's ear like a rebuke, which she was instantly ready to resent.

"Did you expect me to drag proofs of our own disgrace before the world, Mrs. Townsend Oakley?"

The widow arose, her cheeks flushed and her lips quivering.

"I will search for this child. If it is alive, God will permit me to make atonement," she said, gently.

That instant little Edward entered the room. The curls were blown back from his broad forehead, and his eyes sparkled; he had caught a great painted butterfly, and held it up in triumph. The attitude, the curve of his bright lips, the whole face, struck both these women with one thought, and their eyes met. A sudden and dark frown swept over the face of Mrs. Judson, while the daughter grew still and white, as if all the blood in her veins had turned to snow.

"You need not search far," said Mrs. Judson, pointing her finger at the child, "he came from the institution."

Mrs. Oakley slowly approached the boy. Her hands trembled violently as she put back his hair, and a spasm of pain shot through her as the boy sprang up, and locking his arms over her neck, attempted to surprise her with his eager kisses.

"Who made you cry, mamma? — who made you cry?"

"No one, darling," said the widow, struggling against the recoil of her own heart, but forced, as it were, to unclasp his little hands.

The boy drew back, and his bright lips began to quiver.

"I have lost the butterfly," he sobbed, regretfully, follow-

ing the gossamer wings, as they floated away, with his eyes; "and now my own mamma don't care about my kisses!"

"She does—she does!" cried the widow, sinking to her knees, and winding her arms around the child. "The better, all the better, if these dear eyes are his. Ah, I knew! I knew that there was some sweet mystery in a love that no mother ever felt more purely for her own child. Oh, it is everything to know that his life fills my arms, that I have fed and cherished it so long!"

"Woman, what is this?" cried Mrs. Judson, stalking across the floor and laying her hand heavily on her daughter's shoulder; "are you raving mad? Is it a De Marke you speak of?"

"Yes, mother," said the widow, rising to her feet, but with the child's hand in hers. "It is of a De Marke that I speak; appearances may be against him, but I will not believe him so wicked till the proofs are beyond contradiction. Louisa may be dead; Catharine Lacy may be dead; but though their last acts and their last words accuse him, I will not believe them. Something of trouble and sorrow there may be, but nothing that should bring contempt upon an honorable man!"

Mrs. Judson stood motionless, towering upright like a pillar of marble. Her voice was concentrated and hoarse; she made no gestures, but her eyes absolutely burned with indignation.

"And you know this De Marke?"

"Yes, mother, I know him!"

"Have seen him since your husband's death, perhaps?"

"Yes, mother, often!"

"Here in this house, no doubt, where the widow came to bury her griefs?"

Here the proud woman's wrath blazed forth. Her hand was clenched; her foot was half lifted from the floor, as if to spurn the widow and child from her presence.

"Here, I say, here you may have received him, in a house consecrated to tears, under the roof which shelters your mother!" she continued, lifting her hoarse voice.

The young widow stood pale and firm before all this wrath; and the pretty child clung to her eagerly, following each motion of the haughty woman with his brave, bright eyes.

"It is true," she said, "I have seen him here."

"And you encourage him?"

"Mother, I love him!"

The words were spoken unfalteringly, but with that gentle dignity that always accompanies truthful courage. The mother looked at her in white wrath. Her hand was slowly uplifted, her lips moved without uttering a sound, and with this mute malediction she left the room, and, in a few moments, the house.

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE WOUNDED BIRD.

ONCE alone with the child, Mrs. Oakley gave way to the painful thoughts that crowded upon her. What right had she to feel these pangs of bitter jealousy regarding a man who had never spoken to her of love? who had never, in word at least, expressed more than a friendly interest in her or hers? Was it her place to arraign the man as false or wicked who had given her no power to question his slightest action? And—oh shame on her womanhood—had she not confessed to loving him unsought, shamelessly confessed it, and, above all, to that austere mother who held the faintest approach to enthusiasm as a species of madness?

The blood burned upon that young cheek as she remem-

bered the words that scarcely seemed her own — words that had driven that proud mother from her roof, and now burned in fiery shame upon her cheek. But this sudden intelligence had driven her almost mad. Doubt, jealousy, and a thousand wild pangs rent her heart with a pain never dreamed of before.

"Oh, if the dead could arise, if the truth could be dragged up from the depths of their graves! I cannot believe it, I will *not* believe it. My own cousin—my own dear sister, oh, if it should be true—if he has indeed wronged them in this fearful way."

She had sunk to the floor, and burying her face in her folded arms, murmuring these things aloud. The poor woman was so unused to passionate conflicts, that this gust of sorrow swept over her like madness.

"Mother," said Edward, laying one plump hand on her shoulder, and bending his grieved face lovingly to hers, "mother dear, look up! The lady, the lady!"

Mrs. Oakley lifted her face, affrighted that her passion should have had other witnesses than the child. But when she recognized the intruder, the feeling of annoyance gave way, and she arose with a sad smile, apologizing for her singular position.

"I have brought a lame bird for little Edward to nurse," said Catharine, entering the drawing-room, with her right hand folded over a robin nestled in the palm of her left. "Some cat has wounded it, I fancy. See, darling, what I have brought for you."

Catharine spoke hurriedly, and turned her eyes away from Mrs. Oakley, for a single glance at her agitated face was enough to arouse all the instinctive delicacy of her nature.

"I don't want a lame robin," said Edward, turning away with tears in his eyes. "They have hurt my pretty mamma, and I'd rather take care of her. She's worse wounded than the bird."

Mrs. Oakley's face flushed with fond triumph as the boy came toward her; turning her eyes upon Catharine, she said,

"Is n't he truthful? Is there a drop of faithless blood in his veins?"

"He is an angel!" answered Catharine, gazing fondly on the child, and stooping down, she passed her hand through the curls that fell over his white forehead. In doing this she exposed the tiny red cross which we have before seen among those clustering curls.

Catharine caught her breath at the sight, and drew away her fingers as if the cross had been of living fire.

"What is this?—whose child is this?" she questioned.

"If I did but know—if I could but have a certainty!" answered the widow, almost wildly. "But why do you ask just now? Has every one conspired to torture me with doubts and accusations? Who told you that he was not my child?"

"No one," answered Catharine. "Up to this hour I supposed that he was your child; but this mark,—forgive me, but I have seen it before."

"When? how? Where did you ever see this red cross upon his temple?"

"I saw it, or one exactly like it, some years ago, upon an infant not three months old," said Catharine, answering the impassioned interrogation with thoughtful sadness.

"And where?—not that the children could possibly have been the same, you know,—but where was the child with a cross like this?"

Catharine hesitated a moment, and then answered with grave composure,—

"The child was a nursling in the house of a poor Irish woman, who was kind to me when I wanted friends."

"But where did this Irish woman find him? Of course, he had parents?" questioned the widow, breathlessly.

"I think he was an orphan."

"Well, but where did she find him?"

Catharine grew very pale, but she answered quietly, —

"In Bellevue Hospital, I believe."

The widow drew a deep breath. She looked anxiously from little Edward to her visitor, attempted to speak, and desisted again, as if afraid of saying too much.

"And his mother? Oh, for mercy's sake, if you know anything of his mother, tell me about her?"

"I know nothing," answered Catharine, with sudden reserve. "How should I?"

"Not even the mother's name? Only tell me that, and I will pray for you — bless you forever!"

There was so much anxiety, something so eager in her voice and manner, that Catharine was deeply touched.

"I only know her Christian name, certainly," she answered.

"Yes, yes, and that was ——" Mrs. Oakley broke off, checking herself suddenly in her interrogations.

"That was Louisa, I am sure it was Louisa; as for the rest, I have no certainty."

"But you heard other names?"

"Yes, several."

"Tell me, pray do — what other names did you hear?"

"One name was Barton; the other ——" Catharine stopped abruptly, and her face grew pallid.

"Well, that other. I do not recognize this."

"The other," said Catharine, looking sadly into the anxious face turned upon her, "the other was your own name — Oakley."

CHAPTER LXVIII.

DOUBTS AND FEARS.

THERE was a new servant in Mrs. Townsend Oakley's household; a large-featured, energetic person, whom the housekeeper had engaged in town as a chamber-maid. This woman was busy in the west room, when Catharine entered Mrs. Oakley's parlor, and though occupied, she kept a vigilant watch on all that was passing between the two young women. She saw Catharine draw the boy toward her, and remarked the look of agitation which could not be misunderstood, on discovering the cross upon his temple. The distance prevented her hearing any words, but as she fixed her scrutiny upon the various faces of that little group, a gleam of sharp intelligence shot from her eyes, she softly laid down her duster, and keeping out of sight in the movement, crept stealthily behind the half-open door.

Now she could hear their voices, low and troubled, but still distinct to her keen ear.

"She is right, my mother is right," said Mrs. Oakley, wringing her delicate hands in an abandon of grief. "How dare he? How could he enter my house? How could I — oh! weak, weak wretch that I am!"

"Of whom do you speak?" said Catharine, pale as death, and shivering till her teeth chattered.

"Of De Marke, — of that boy's father!"

"And what of him?" The voice in which this question was asked had grown so husky, that the listener could scarcely hear it.

"Listen to me," was the answer. "I have no human being, except yourself, from whom it is possible for me to seek advice: and my position is a terrible one. You are not like a stranger to me, I can trust you."

"Yes, you may trust me," said Catharine, in a low, firm voice, "I will deal honestly by you."

"Look at this boy. Is he not beautiful? His eyes, his mouth, his every movement, can anything be more frank?"

"He is lovely. No angel could be more innocent."

"And yet that boy's father, his own father, remember! with a brow as open, an eye as frank, a lip always smiling, that boy's father is—oh! my God that I should live to say it—is a traitor—a—a—"

The poor lady broke off, closing the last words in bitter sobs. Her clasped hands unlocked, and she buried her face in them, trembling from head to foot, and weeping bitterly.

"You may wrong him," said Catharine, faintly.

"No, it is all too clear," answered Mrs. Oakley, shaking her head mournfully; "his mother was poor Oakley's sister. You saw her, she called herself by his name; it was Oakley, not De Marke, that she called herself; are you sure of that? Oh! it would be something to believe that he married her."

Catharine stood by a sofa. She sunk slowly down among the cushions, breathless and aghast.

"You are certain that she did not call herself by his name. Oh! try and remember."

"No, no, I never heard her claim that name," fell in cold, measured words from Catharine Lacy, as she sat there stunned and immovable, as if suddenly frozen into stillness.

"Still he might have been married to her. It is possible," said the widow, with all a woman's generous faith in the man she loves, rising up afresh in her heart.

"No!" answered Catharine, with the same cold measurement of words. "It is impossible. He could not have been her husband."

"Why, how do you know? How came you with a knowledge of him or his?" cried the widow, with a pang of jealous suspicion in her voice.

"Remember, lady, I have spent many, many months in public institutions!" answered Catharine.

"I know—I did not think. Forgive me, I am almost mad. Besides, you do not seem like that, so kind, so sweet and lady-like."

"You have made me your friend,—I feel for you. This is a fearful discovery. But tell me, how can I help you?"

"Tell me all you know of this poor child's mother. It may wound me to death, but I shall feel so restless till the worst is confirmed; then perhaps God will give me strength. Tell me all!"

"I have, lady. She came to the hospital only a week or two before her death."

"And you saw her then?"

"Yes; I can never, never forget her poor, mournful face, never, never." Catharine bowed her head, and a shiver ran through her frame, while two or three tears forced themselves through the hands, which she pressed over her eyes.

"Tell me more of her."

"There is nothing to tell. She seldom spoke, seldom lifted her great, mournful eyes from the floor. I heard her once call the names I have mentioned; but I think she was very ill then, and did not know what she was saying."

"Was it when she was dying?"

"I don't know. I remember seeing her dead, and carried out in her coffin; but that is all. Indeed, indeed, I can tell you no more."

Catharine's voice grew sharp with the struggle of her anguish. These questions tortured her.

Mrs. Oakley was terrified by the pale contractions of that face. Never had she witnessed anguish so terrific and so still.

"And De Marke could leave her to die without a word—could do this, and with the guilt on his soul come here with protest—no, no, not with protestations—crafty and careful, he looked love, but never talked of it. I cannot point out

a single word of affection, and yet there was love in every look, every tone of his voice. Oh! I cannot think of it with patience."

"And you know that this man loves you?" asked Catharine, a little hoarser than before.

"Loves me? I never had a doubt of it till now — nay, I do not yet doubt it. He may be reckless, wicked, utterly unprincipled, but I *know* he loves me; and oh! shame, shame, shame, I love him."

"You love him, knowing all this," said Catharine, standing up.

"It is my shame, and will be my misery forever and ever," answered the widow, covering her face with both hands, while the hot crimson swept over her neck and forehead, like a fiery brand.

"And would you marry him?" The voice, in which this was uttered, fell so cutting upon her ear, that the widow dropped her hands, looking suddenly up.

"Marry him? no! To act is within my own control—to feel is, alas! what I cannot help."

That moment, the little boy came across the room, his bright eyes full of tears. Holding up both hands, he strove to throw them around Mrs. Oakley's neck. She drew back with a repulsive motion of her hand. His arms dropped, the rosy lips quivered, and sitting down upon the floor, he began to sob as if his heart were breaking.

Both the women stood looking at him in pale silence. Suddenly their eyes filled, a simultaneous sob broke from their bosoms, and they sunk to the floor together, wreathing their arms around him and covering his face and brow with kisses.

"He is n't to blame, you know," pleaded the widow. But Catharine had dropped her face upon her knees, and only answered with a keen shiver, as if she were in pain. Thus she remained some minutes, evidently struck with a pang of great suffering.

"Are you ill?" inquired Mrs. Oakley, laying a hand on her shoulder.

"Yes, I believe I am ill," answered Catharine, standing up. "I will go home now."

"Not now. It is cruel, I know; but one word more. That letter mentioned another person, Catharine Lacy—did you know anything of her?"

"Catharine Lacy, who should know anything of her? Is she not dead?"

"Yes, I know there is a record of her death at the hospital; but I should be so grateful for some further knowledge of her. You will not wonder at this when I tell you that she was my own cousin."

"Your cousin, lady; and yet permitted to die there?"

"It was not my fault, oh! believe it. I never even heard of her destitution."

"But your mother?"

"Hush! It is not for me to arraign my mother!"

"True, true."

"Tell me, I beseech you, something about this poor girl. It was another mournful death for which that man must one day answer."

"I can tell you nothing of Catharine Lacy. Her history is written out, they tell me, in the hospital books."

"I am sorry that you know so little regarding her," said the widow, disappointed. "We loved each other as children; but I was always away at school, or somewhere, after that; and we never saw each other. Poor, poor Catharine, she was an angel-child."

"You loved her, then?"

"Loved her? She was dearer than a sister to me. I would give anything, suffer anything to know that she was alive, or had died happy." The widow's eyes were full of tears, and a thousand regretful feelings trembled in her voice.

"Oh! if you know anything about her, do tell me."

Catharine took the hand, held out to her, with a pathetic gesture, and kissed it, saying,—

“God bless you!”

The next moment she was gone. The widow and child saw her glide through the French window into the veranda, and disappear like a shadow, as she had entered the room.

Left to her solitude, Mrs. Oakley gave way to all the tumult of her feelings again. The certainty of her lover's treason had been cruelly confirmed, and the thoughts of his enormous turpitude pressed back upon her with double force. The presence of that pretty, tearful child was for a time irksome; and in the storm of her grief she escaped from his touching attempts to comfort her, and fled to her own room.

After Catharine was gone, the new servant came out from her concealment and went up to little Edward, who sat crying upon the floor. She stooped over him, lifted the hair from his temple, and examined the cruciform mark with keen scrutiny. Then she returned slowly to her work, muttering uneasily between the flourishes of her duster.

“Catharine, Catharine—the name is Catharine, that's certain; as for the surname being different, that amounts to nothing—don't I know how easy it is to change names? Why, haven't I half-a-dozen to pick and choose from myself? There is something in the face and the bend of the head that I could tell among a thousand. Now I just as much believe she's the woman, and that's the very child, as I sit here; as for him, why the thing's certain, but the other is n't so easily settled.”

Muttering these words, she sat down, folded her hands over the duster, and continued her ruminations. “Then there was the story of that queer old woman coming to the Island, and the crazy woman up yonder following her into the very water; this has something to do with the matter, I dare say. De Marke? oh! ha? that is the man who comes courting the widow. *Her son!* Now I have it. *She was*

the old woman with the comical bonnet, that was driven into the sea,—of course, of course, was n't she lame, had n't she been hurt someway when I found her in bed half starved to death. But what has she to do with that crazy woman, with the fiery black eyes?—I'll ravel it out, you may believe me; I'll ravel it out; child, old woman, and all, they're mixed up in the same heap. Never fear, I'll be at the bottom of it yet.”

CHAPTER LXIX.

MADAME DE MARKE'S DEATH-BED.

MADAME DE MARKE lay alone in her den, more emaciated and weaker by far than she was when Jane Kelly abandoned her. For a little time she had found strength to creep about and procure food for herself, but some new injury to her bruised limb had followed the exertion, and she was cast back into her miserable bed more desolate than before. Day by day the inflammation burned and burrowed into her wounded limb, and all night long the poor woman lay muttering and raving for something to moisten her hot lips, “Water, water, water.” This was her plaint night and morning. With gold and jewels concealed in the crevices and hiding-places all around her, she lay like the rich man in torment, calling for a drop of water, which even the beggar obtains without stint, but for which she was calling always in vain.

At last the fever ceased, the anguish went out from her limb, and the miserable old woman lay quiet for the first time in days. The fever had kept up her strength till now, and she had not felt the need of food; nor did she even yet. A dumb feeling of content stole over her; she wanted nothing.

The silence of her chickens troubled her a little, but she had no strength to rise up and see to them. She thought of the cat, and wondered where she was, and why she did not come up to the bed and share the supreme content of that sudden freedom from pain. She thought of her son, with a gush of human tenderness, and resolved that, the next day, when she should be quite well, to gather up all her gold and go with it into some more seemly place, where she would summon him to her presence.

But all these thoughts and resolves were vague and dreamy. She felt like one dropping into a sweet sleep, the very twilight of which was delicious. She lay thus, in the dim, mean room, for it was lighted only by a sash in the door; and the sunset that came through the red curtains had the effect of a dull, lurid flame, which could not penetrate to the bed, and filled the rest of the apartment with a fearful light.

All at once she heard footsteps without, and turning her eyes, with a gleam of their original ferocity, toward the door, it opened, and she saw her son enter the room. She laughed a low, feeble laugh, and strove to hold out her hand; but it fell numbly and heavily on the squalid bed, while the laugh died in a faint chuckle within her working throat.

"Madame, Madame!" cried the young man, gazing around the room, at first bewildered by the imperfect light, and filled with repulsion by the squalid objects around him. "Madame—mother!"

A murmur rose from the bed, which struck to his heart, sweeping all the disgust away. The affection of a warm nature, ardent and forgiving, gushed forth even in that spot.

"Mother. Oh! my poor mother."

She looked up, and strove to speak; but a pitiful whimper alone passed through the white lips.

"Mother! mother! What have I done? How could I leave you to this?"

Her eyes kindled; she made a great effort; and at last, as if forced through the ice gathering about her heart, the words, "My son, my son!" shot through her lips.

"Oh! mother, is this all? Can you only speak with this fearful effort? Where is your nurse? Who takes care of you?"

Again she made that fearful struggle, and jerking her arm on one side, pointed downward to the floor.

"My gold. I have gold—gold!"

The young man groaned heavily.

"Do not think of that—your gold is nothing at this hour!"

Again she lifted her finger, and pointed it to his face.

"Gold—it is everything."

"Hush, mother, hush. At this awful moment think of something else. I fear, I fear you are dying."

"Dying!" This time the word was forced upward with a shriek so wild and fearful, that the young man sunk to his knees, and buried his face in the soiled bed drapery, shuddering in every limb.

"Oh! mother, mother!"

"Dying! me—me dying!" broke from those convulsed lips once more.

Louis De Marke looked up. With his quivering hand he grasped that of the dying woman.

"Yes, mother, believe me, there is but a little time for us to settle all that has gone ill between us. I came to ask you some questions, thinking to meet you in good health. The shock of finding you thus is terrible. I pray God, it is not too late for either of us."

"Dying! Take it back, take it back! I am well; no pain, no hunger, no thirst. Dying!" and with a miserable effort the woman strove to laugh, but the attempt went off in a gurgle of the throat.

The young man made a great struggle for self-command; but he was very pale, and his lips quivered with the emotions he strove so firmly to suppress.

"Yes, mother, I solemnly believe that this interview will be our last. Your hand is cold, your eyes are—oh! don't look at me in that way," he continued, shuddering at the glance she fixed upon him. "Next to the welfare of your soul—"

She interrupted him, groping about with her hand.

"My crucifix—my crucifix!"

He searched under her pillow and around the dim room, while she followed him with her wild, despairing eyes. At last, as if with some sudden resolution, she shrieked out,—

"It is gone—she stole it, she has pawned my soul."

The young man came back to the bed in great distress. He knelt by her side, and strove to soothe the despair that had evidently fallen upon her.

"Oh, mother, strive to compose yourself; lift up your heart to God. It needs no crucifix. He is close by, even here."

The old woman started, and her wild eyes wandered fearfully around the room.

"Pray to him, mother."

"No, it is lost, I have sold his Son—no, no."

"Mother, is there nothing that you wish to say? My brother George—have you no word for him?"

"Hush, hush! he will take your portion. He married. He wished to rob you. Don't speak to me of Elsie Ford's son, or of his son either. Let them alone, and you shall be rolling in gold, rolling, rolling, like your mother!"

The young man bent down and listened eagerly to her words.

"Did my brother marry Catharine Lacy, then, with your knowledge?"

"No, they tried to cheat me—to bring a son to claim your father's property. She ought to have died, that Catharine Lacy."

"But she did not. Where is she now? Is she alive?"

Oh! tell me, mother. I shall never be happy again unless you do!"

"Yes, she's alive. I saw her myself, changed but alive. The other girl died. I did n't want that, for she would have been rich, and you might have done well with her."

"Then you knew about my wife?"

"Knew? yes! Did you think I was cheated?"

"But why did you leave her to die there?"

"How could I help it? She would hide herself till the last minute, and it was cheaper there. Sickness costs money, money, I tell you."

"And you are certain Louisa died in the hospital? But there is no register of her death!"

"We had that changed, the numbers and the names. Louisa *would* die, Catharine *would* live. We couldn't help it."

"But where is Catharine?"

A look of sharp cunning came into those sunken features.

"I won't tell. The time is n't up. He is n't crazy yet. I won't help him to bring sons to eat up one-half of your inheritance."

"Mother, remember that you are dying."

"Not yet, not for years. I'm getting stronger every minute. Don't you see how I can talk now. When you came, there was n't a word in my voice. I shall live to see you and Oakley's widow rolling in gold. She's rich."

"Oakley's widow—what do you know of her?"

"What do I know? Had n't I eyes? Did n't I watch you when she was married, watch and listen and pick up things? Did n't I know what was going on in the mind of my own son?"

"O mother, how much misery you might have saved me!" cried the young man in a passion of grief.

"Have n't I just told you she was dead, your young wife? Did n't I go down to that cottage, on the Island, to see this widow and learn all about her? Is n't this kind, when you

have been pining and pining about her? I didn't want to explain that she was dead, and Catharine Lacy alive—it may do mischief yet. It may bring them together, and despoil you of one half the property. He won't go crazy. When he thought the girl dead, it only made him melancholy; he would not go mad. Let him find her, and all that I have done will go for nothing."

"Mother, you should be more just to George. He is your husband's oldest son."

"He is her son, and I hate them both."

"But his mother is dead, years ago."

Again that cunning gleam broke into her eyes; but the woman did not speak.

"Have you no kind remembrance for my brother?" said the young man, on whom that gleam of the eye made no impression, "he has never wronged you."

"Oh! yes, take that," she said, pointing to a picture that stood near the door, with its face to the wall. "It has been his friend from first to last—tell him it nearly cost me my life. The crazy wretch worshipped the picture,—I knew that, and would have it. She came at me like a panther; we were on the shore; I ran for the boat and she after me into the water, knee-deep. The man pulled with all his might; but she held me by the throat, tore at me like a wolf. My foot got fast in the cross-beam of the boat, or she would have drowned me before their faces. The boatmen had to beat her off with their oars, and she let go; but left my ankle and foot wrenched and bruised till I have never had a minute's rest till now—not a minute. Give him the picture, with my love. It's cost me dear; but she has n't got it to pine and pray over. Give him the picture, I say; it's all he will ever get from me."

Louis De Marke listened to this wild speech, shocked and bewildered. To him it had no meaning, but it grieved him to find so much of bitterness and malice in what he thought

to be the last ravings of an unrepentant soul, and that soul the one from which his own drew life.

"Oh! mother, calm yourself, try and talk more rationally; you are ill, very ill; once more I say to you this is the last conversation we shall ever hold together."

"Son, do you believe this? On your soul, is it the truth?"

She spoke in a hoarse murmur. The artificial strength was leaving her in the very grasp of death.

"Mother, yes!"

The woman uttered a low, long wail, inexpressibly mournful.

"It is on me now; it is on me now; my feet are numb; the ice is creeping up to my heart! Holy Jesus, this is death!"

The horror that settled down, with the deathly gray, on her pinched features, was terrible to look upon; but more terrible still was the film that crept over the wild glare of her eyes, pressing them slowly in the sockets. He sat and watched, silent and appalled. So long as those eyes had the power to express the terror that froze them, they were turned upon his face. There was no agonizing struggle. Slowly and terribly, that old woman froze out of existence; and death left her in that squalid bed, a meagre shadow of the humanity her whole life had degraded.

CHAPTER LXX.

LITTLE EDDIE'S GRIEF.

MADAM, a gentleman wishes to see you in the parlor." Mrs. Oakley started up from the depths of a great easy-chair, in which she had been striving to bury her grief; and with breathless nervousness, very unusual to her, paced the room two or three times, smoothing the bandeaux of her

hair rapidly with each hand as she walked. When this quick motion had composed her a little, she went down.

The parlor was dim from the flowering vines that clustered around its windows. But though she saw her visitor but indistinctly, her heart gave a great bound, and she felt the blood surge back and forth from her bosom to her temples, leaving both paler than before.

"Lady, dear lady!"

It was his voice. It was De Marke that came toward her, with both hands extended, looking so bright, so strangely happy.

Mrs. Oakley put out her hands to repulse him. "No, no, do not advance; do not come near me. I have been already sufficiently degraded!"

De Marke stood still, dumb with astonishment, while she shrunk backward, step by step, with her frightened eyes upon him, as if she dreaded lest the fascination in his glance would enthrall her again.

"Mrs. Oakley," he said at last, "may I ask the meaning of this reception?"

His voice was a little tremulous, but full of self-respect.

"You have come here to insult me, sir!"

"I have come here, lady, to say how truly and how long I have loved you."

The widow locked her white hands together and held them firmly; resentment was giving her strength.

"Had you never said the same words to Louisa Oakley, my husband's sister, she need not have died of shame in a charity hospital!" she answered, almost harshly.

De Marke staggered back. The name of his lost wife from those lips, and spoken in bitterness, brought a terrible pang with it. At last he spoke; but it was in a low, broken voice, that went to her heart.

"There was poverty and great suffering in Louisa's death; but no shame, Mrs. Oakley. She was my wife. I was

absent, a minor and helpless; but had I known that she was in danger or suffering from any cause, I would have saved her at the risk of my life."

"Then it was not neglect—it was not from wanton cruelty that you left her?" questioned the widow, drawing gently toward him.

"Sit down with me, lady; it is a sad story. I have been to blame, but not criminal. Will you listen to me?"

They sat down together in the dim parlor, and he told her everything, even the first love which had grown strong in his boyhood; and all its painful results were fully revealed. At first she listened to him with a degree of proud reserve; but as he went on to lay his heart before her, the love-light came back to her eyes, and tears of gentle grief stole up through that light and trembled softly there. Her hand crept to his, timidly asking pardon for the harsh thoughts that had melted away with the honest tones of his voice.

"And now," he said, closing his hand firmly over hers, "can you forgive the rashness of my youth? Can you trust, can you love me?"

She did not answer; but the tears that stood upon her cheek seemed like dew-drops upon a damask rose. She bent her head toward him, half in shame, half in love, like a flower heavy with rain. He gathered her softly to his bosom, his hand was pressed caressingly on one flushed cheek, the other lay close to his heart.

"Oh, I was sure of it. Love like mine—so deep, so faithful—could not be wholly without a return. Tell me, dear one, is this not true?"

"I love you. Indeed, indeed, I love you?"

It is impossible to say how many times, and in how many forms, this one sentence was repeated, before the two parted: but one thing is certain, he had not been gone half an hour before both of them were restless to repeat every word of it again.

After he was gone, the happy lady wandered forth into the grounds, for the rooms of her dwelling seemed altogether too small for the breadth and glory of her happiness. She longed for the open air, the free winds, anything that spoke to her of the heaven which lived in her own heart. As she passed through the flower-garden, a sob reached her from behind a honeysuckle arbor near the path. Any sound of grief was discord to her then, so she turned aside, resolved to make everything happy on that blissful day.

She entered the arbor, and there, crouching down upon the tessellated floor, was poor little Edward, complaining to himself and sobbing as if that dear little heart were quite broken. How her conscience smote her then! How quick and fast the tears came rushing to her eyes.

"Eddie, Eddie, darling!"

The child lifted his flushed face. A smile danced up from his heart and broke in sunshine all over it.

"Mamma, mamma!" he cried, leaping forward, his white arms extended, and the tears sparkling joyfully in his eyes, "you are not angry, you love me, darling mamma?"

"Love you?" cried the widow, raining kisses upon his face. "Love you, darling. I love everything under the heavens, this day, and you, little one, best of all."

Don't believe that, little Eddie. The warm blushes on her face, as she buries it in your curls, contradict every word of it. She loves you a great deal more than she did before, certainly; but her heart has grown large and rich since yesterday; and with all these caresses you are not the first there. Content yourself about that, little Eddie.

In her walk that day, Mrs. Oakley met Catharine, who was rambling sadly through the grounds, which we have said adjoined each other, with Elsie Ford. The two women were very melancholy, and a look of continued pain lay upon them both. No wonder their lives were so sombre, so completely cast upon the shadowy side of existence. Elsie

was very quiet, and her large black eyes wandered toward the little boy with sorrowful intensity; but she seemed afraid to touch him, muttering that he too would fly away and become nothing if she did.

The boy looked at her wistfully, and once attempted to approach her, for those troubled eyes fascinated him. She waved him back, and gathering an over-ripe thistle, that grew in her path, the ghost of a flower that had been, she cast a sigh into its shadowy heart, and, lo! the whole disappeared. A few silvery gleams floated off toward sunset, and she held nothing but a dead, thorny stalk in her hand.

"See, see; don't come this way; everything I touch melts like that, into nothing, nothing, nothing."

The boy looked on and listened. Her voice was so sadly musical, it charmed him. He was very fearless, too, and moved toward her.

She stepped backward, repelling him with her outstretched palms.

"Don't, don't, you are so pretty. I won't hurt *you*. Go away, or it will come to this."

She held up the dry, thorny stem of the thistle, and shook it warningly at the child. Repelled by this, he went away, following Mrs. Oakley and Catharine, who had walked forward, keeping the demented woman in sight.

"Will you not rejoice that this terrible load is taken from my heart," said the widow, chilled by the gravity of her companion. "The only trouble with me now is, that I could have doubted him."

"And is he equally happy?" inquired Catharine, in a low voice. "You are sure that he, too, is happy?"

"I wish you could have seen him. It would be impossible to think otherwise. You know there was some doubt at first that his wife was dead; but it's all cleared up now. His mother, with her dying breath, set it all right."

"And the knowledge that his wife was dead made him happy, you say?"

"Perfectly happy. Remember, it was a long time ago, and he—but poor, poor girl, if he did not love her, he would always have been affectionate and kind."

"Did De Marke tell you that he did not love the girl whom he married and left? It was an unfeeling confession," said Catharine, in a trembling voice.

"It was necessary in order to explain everything. He gave me his whole heart. This is what makes me so happy—nothing is kept back. Remember, I was engaged to Mr. Oakley when he first saw me."

"And he married this other person, without love, merely from compassion, you say!"

"I do not know; it seems hard to speak of the dead in a way that would wound them, if living; but I am quite sure that De Marke has loved me from the first. He says so, and I believe him, in spite of this rash marriage."

"I think so too!" answered Catharine, in a grave, cold voice. Still he might remember how that poor, lone girl worshipped him."

"It is very sad, I am sure it must be very sad, to love any one whose heart is not all given back in return. The anguish which I have felt during these few days has been so terrible, that I can well pity those who suffer with like doubts."

"Can you? I think you are generous and good. Love like yours should be given to a worthy object."

"It is! it is! I would stake my life upon his goodness."

"And if it were yet proved otherwise?" said Catharine, turning her large eyes searchingly on the happy face of her companion."

"I think—I know," answered the widow, with a shudder, "that it would kill me—I could not live after all this happiness, to be cast back even into doubt again."

Catharine looked at her friend very mournfully for a moment.

"We suffer a great deal without dying," she said; moving slowly away, she joined Elsie and the child.

CHAPTER LXXI.

QUESTIONS AND CONFESSIONS.

CATHARINE was alone with old Mrs. Ford. Excitement, and a wild sense of some mysteries which she had failed to fathom, made her bold. She plunged abruptly into a subject long upon her mind, but which she had never ventured to hint at before. Indeed, the quick crowding of painful thoughts, during the last few weeks, had rendered her desperate.

"Mrs. Ford!"

Catharine's voice was so sharp and abrupt, that it made the old lady start and drop the sewing she was engaged on into her lap.

"What is it?" she said, breathlessly; for her thoughts always turned to one object, "Elsie, is anything wrong with Elsie?"

"Mrs. Ford, there is a thing I wish to ask, a thing which I must ask or die. Who is Elsie? Is her name Ford, was she ever married, has she a child?"

Catharine spoke rapidly, almost wildly. Her eyes were keenly anxious, her manner desperate.

Mrs. Ford sat silently gazing upon the speaker. Her face, always pale, grew white and cold; her little withered hands crept together and interlocked in her lap.

"What, what is it you ask? You,"—the words dropped,

half-formed, from her lips; and she gave a scared look at the door, as if preparing to escape.

"Don't! oh, don't refuse to speak," pleaded Catharine. "I must know; my heart will break if I am left in this terrible darkness. What connection has your daughter with the De Marke family?"

"De Marke — De Marke — who ever mentioned the name in this house?" said old Mr. Ford, who entered at the moment.

Catharine turned to him. "It is I. Tell me, I beseech you, what have the De Markes done, that the name should drive the blood from your faces? Why did the portrait of a De Marke hang up in your library? How, and why has it disappeared? I ask these things, because it is impossible to live in such darkness. My own life, and all its hopes are at stake. What brought that wicked old woman here? I must know, or become mad by the side of our poor Elsie!"

The old people exchanged glances. Both were pale, but a look of gentle commiseration settled upon their features.

"This is no idle question, Catharine," said the old man, gently, but with a quiver of the voice, "you would not wound us so from mere curiosity."

"Not for my life. I must know all this hidden history, to see the path that I ought to tread. I am weak and blinded — alone, with no one but God to help me. Tell me the history of your daughter, tell me why the name of De Marke makes you tremble. Is it fatal to others as it has been to me?"

"You," said the old man in surprise, "you!"

"Even so, Mr. Ford. I was married to a De Marke, and he is still living."

The old lady arose, with an air of timid repulsion, and would have left the room; but her husband gently waved her back.

"She suffers; she, too, is a victim, perhaps another Elsie,"

he said, compassionately. "Now, my child, come hither; sit down by the mother and tell her all."

Catharine sat down, still supported by nervous excitement, and laid her heart and her life open before those pure-minded old people. It was astonishing how little time it took to relate events and agonies that had been so long in the acting. She concealed nothing. From the very depths of her soul she drew forth the secrets that had been hoarded there, corroding and wounding all her faculties, and laid them honestly down before those kindly judges.

The old people listened, sometimes sadly, sometimes with broken exclamations. Once or twice glances of surprise, almost of affright, passed between them. When she had finished, the old lady bent down, with tears in her eyes, and kissed her, while the husband stood over them, and lifting his hands to heaven, thanked God that she had been cast beneath his roof.

Catharine arose from her knees, for she had unconsciously fallen at Mrs. Ford's feet, with a deeper breath and more glowing countenance than she had worn for years. No explanation had yet been offered by the old people; but she felt certain that some unseen link of union existed between her fate and theirs, and without speaking, she gazed wistfully in their faces, waiting for light.

"Yes," said the old man, fervently, "it is true. God does sometimes send angels to us unawares. Catharine, my child, it is your husband's mother to whom you have given up the bloom and strength of your young life. The father of George De Marke married Elsie Ford, our daughter."

"And you — and you?" cried Catharine, eagerly.

"Are his grandfather —"

"And Madame de Marke?"

"Hush! do not mention her name; it is an accursed sound under this roof," answered the old man, almost sternly.

Catharine sat down, silenced, but still keenly anxious.

The old gentleman seated himself also, close by his wife, who regarded him with a look, half frightened, half sorrowful.

"Tell her," said the old man, in a low voice, "women understand each other best."

"I cannot. See how I shake."

The old man took the hand held toward him in both of his, smoothing and caressing it with gentle tenderness.

"You can witness," he said, addressing Catharine, "how great this sorrow has been. She cannot bear to speak of it. For years we have been silent, even with each other."

"I see," answered Catharine, looking wistfully at the old lady, and following her own thoughts. "His grandmother! That is why she seemed so lovely from the first—*his* grandmother, and *his* mother, oh! how I have been unconsciously blessed."

"Elsie," said the old man, looking anxiously at his wife, as if afraid that her strength would give way, "Elsie was our only child. You see her now, a poor, brain-crazed old woman; gray-headed and broken-hearted; but then she was—"

"Oh!" broke in the old lady, with her eyes full of tears, that dimmed the glasses of her spectacles like a frost, "she was the dearest, the brightest, the most beautiful creature that ever trod the green grass. You don't know—you can't tell, how many sweet, wild ways she had, and all straight to the heart. He did n't merely love her, nor did I; it was worship in us both; we idolized this child; there was not a curl of her black hair, or a glance of her eyes, bright and brimfull of feeling as they always were, which was not lovely beyond all things to us.

"Remember, Catharine, she was our only child, a late blessing; for we had been years married when God sent this angel to our fireside. You have seen her portrait in the library. It is like her, and yet the bright sparkle of her

nature, the vivid flush of life, that came and went like sunshine upon the hills, this no man could paint. It is all over now. You can see nothing of what I am telling you in her wild eyes, or in the sharp features that are at times so rigid and again so stolid; but *we* find it still. Don't we, husband? Is n't she beautiful to us, even yet?"

"She is more than beautiful, our poor Elsie," said the old man, looking through the window to where the demented one wandered to and fro on the grass, striving to catch the humming-birds that haunted a trumpet vine, by quick dashes of her hand among the clustering bells. "God has rendered her sacred—always and forever a child, spite of her gray hairs. They cast her back upon our hearth-stone, a poor, broken waif, but still a blessing.

"I think," continued the old man, "that it was a little before her seventeenth birthday, when Elsie first saw that man. He was a dashing young fellow, who had just come into possession of a large property, and had returned from his travels abroad, before entering upon the business of life. A neighbor, who lives across the Island, had invited him for a long visit, and through this friend he was introduced into our family.

"We did not think it strange, that young De Marke should admire our Elsie. Who could help it? But when she, who had always been bright as a bird and as heart-free, began to look thoughtful in his absence, and shy in his presence, it pained us a good deal; for she seemed still a mere child, and we had hoped to keep her in the home-nest a few years longer.

"It was a wild, violent passion on both sides. We had no power to resist, for he came with his impetuous pleading, and she, with a thousand winning ways, sometimes lost in tears, sometimes bathed in smiles, lured us from our better judgment. She was far too young, too ardent. Oh! we should not have consented.

"This De Marke was of French origin, as you will judge by his name, mercurial and impulsive, as most of the blood are. I do not think he was a bad or faithless man at heart. I know that he loved Elsie, not as she loved him — that was impossible — but he did love her!"

"Yes," murmured the old lady, "he did love her. Who could help it?"

CHAPTER LXXII.

ELSIE'S MARRIED LIFE.

DE MARKE and Elsie were married," continued the old man. "Elsie was our only one, and all that we possessed was hers, even then, had she desired it. We only stipulated with her husband, that, during a portion of the year, they should make their home with us, here in the old family mansion, which Elsie would some day have entirely to herself.

"De Marke would have consented to anything, in those days; but this proposition pleased him greatly. Alterations were made in the east wing. The library was added, and De Marke brought the choicest of his books from town, that his young wife should blend thoughts of himself even with her studies. It was settled that one half of the year should be spent with us, where Elsie should go on with her studies, and that they should occupy her husband's town-house during the other six months.

"It was a sad day for us when the darling gave her young life so completely to another. Yet, socially speaking, the match was a good one. Elsie was never entirely our own, after that; the intense affection which she gave to her husband was too absorbing for the milder and calmer love that had grown in her heart for us.

"For a year they were very happy. In my whole life, I have never witnessed bliss so absorbing and complete. The joy of a common life-time was concentrated into those twelve brief months. The mother and I forgot our partial isolation, in witnessing a happiness so complete for our child. You have seen the library, and perhaps wondered at the disuse into which it had fallen when you first came to us. That room De Marke fitted up for his bride. In it they studied together, for Elsie was no common girl, and all that her husband knew she was resolved to learn.

"It was in the latter part of this first year that the two portraits were taken. That of Elsie, in the flush of her joy and beauty, may give you some idea of what she was then. I believe that of De Marke was equally faithful. You have seen them. You have sat in the room which was for a time their Eden. De Marke was a young man, ardent, rash, and inflated, by a premature acquaintance with the world, with a false idea of woman. He had no real faith in the sex. Of French descent, he had naturally spent much of his time in Paris, that hot-bed, in which so much that is pure and great in our young men is almost certain to perish.

"It was more than a year before Elsie left our house. Her child was born here, and directly after that De Marke was absent two or three months on a pleasure excursion.

"Elsie, who had been studying the languages with him, being still imperfect in the French, consented to receive a person of that nation into our house, during her husband's absence, as a companion and teacher. I am not sure that De Marke ever knew this person before; but it was through his means that she came to the house.

"She was quiet enough, this strange Frenchwoman, and devoted herself to Elsie and the child with great assiduity. We saw little of her, for she took her meals in Elsie's apartments, but it was impossible to doubt that she soon gained a remarkable ascendancy over her young mind. But as our

child was won from the loneliness, which fell upon her after De Marke's absence, by this companionship, we were grateful to the woman.

"At last, De Marke returned. He was evidently very glad to see his wife and child, but the reaction of an ill-regulated nature was upon him, and Elsie took this to heart as an estrangement. Her health had not returned entirely, after the birth of her boy, and she was the more susceptible on this account. For the first time in her life, our child became irritable and sometimes unjust. De Marke resented this; and at last came struggles, reproaches, and those sullen hours that eat into the happiness like a rust.

"Elsie was only struggling for her husband's love, and he could not comprehend that the deepest love can be tortured into bitter words.

"In this crisis, common to ardent natures like theirs, that Frenchwoman became the confidante of both husband and wife.

"In this state, De Marke took his wife from her old home, and installed her in a splendid establishment, which he had prepared for her reception in the city. She left us—that poor child—drowned in tears—and in tears she came to us again.

"We never knew what passed in Elsie's home after this. Once or twice we visited her always to return, with heavy hearts. Amid all the splendor with which De Marke surrounded her, she seemed pining to death. But Elsie had grown proud and reserved even with her old parents, and when we asked the cause of her evident anxiety, she would strive to cheer us with smiles, and that was heart-breaking.

"The Frenchwoman had changed more than Elsie. From a quiet, humble dependant, she had sprung up into an assuming, fine lady, and seemed far more decidedly mistress of the house than our daughter. Elsie did not seem aware of this, for her poor, wistful eyes were always fixed on one

point. She cared for no authority save that which sprung from her husband's love. I doubt if she was conscious how great the alteration was which we detected in the deportment of this Frenchwoman.

"At last, a change stole over Elsie; a fever of the heart came on; she dashed aside her tears, and plunged madly into the fashionable world. She was young, fresh, and wonderfully beautiful. Her husband's wealth gave power to these attractions. She became the reigning belle of watering-places, the queen of every assembly-room. We read her praises in the fashionable journals. Through all society her loveliness shone light like a star.

"And we two lonely old people heard all this with aching hearts; for well we knew this *eclat* was but another expression of our daughter's misery. Then followed other paragraphs in the journals that had been so busy with the praise of our child. Dark hints, mysterious insinuations, and at last open scandal, that made the mother's cheek turn white, and the blood boil in my veins. We were quiet people; but it was impossible to endure this. To-morrow, I said, to-morrow I will go after my child; they have driven her to desperation; she shall come home; and that man shall render us a strict account of his conduct regarding her.

"The mother only answered me with her tears and gentle entreaties that I would bring Elsie home.

"Everything was ready. In the morning, I was to set forth; but that night, that very night, our child, our poor, poor Elsie came home, in the dark, and all alone.

"Her husband had turned her out-of-doors.

"We were sitting together, the mother and I, waiting for the morning; for sleep was impossible, and we felt less unhappy in each other's presence, though we scarcely exchanged a word in the profound sadness that had fallen upon us. Never, in my whole life, do I remember a night of such dreary length. Everything was still. It was winter, and

the snow was falling out-of-doors in great flakes, with that perpetual whiteness which makes a night-storm so ghastly. The hickory logs had burned through, and fallen apart into a bed of dying embers; and lay smouldering away, giving out smoke, but no flame.

"The old ebony clock ticked loud and sharp, filling the silence with its irritating count of time. Once in a while, we looked out through the frosted windows, searching for a flush of daylight upon the snow; but always to see that eternal sheet of whiteness becoming broader and deeper all around us. This dismal spectacle drove us back into the room, and still another hour we sat cowering together, over the hearthstone that had never seemed cold till then.

"We had drawn closer and closer together, till the fire went wholly out, sharing the misery of that hour in deathly silence. The mother's hand was growing cold in mine, but I had no strength to urge her to bed or wish to rekindle the fire. Gloomy as everything was, the misery in our hearts was darker still.

"All at once, I felt the mother's hand quiver in mine. Her eyes were turned to the window, and directly my gaze followed hers.

"A human face was pressed to the window, a face, pale as the snow that lay in wreathing flakes adown those tresses of black hair, and two black eyes looked in upon us.

"We arose, holding the breath from our lips, and walked hand-in-hand toward the door, treading softly, as if we felt ourselves in the presence of a ghost.

"I opened the door and strove to call our poor child by name; but the tongue clove to my mouth, and all the sound I could make went off through the falling snow like a sob of wind.

"The mother's heart broke its ice first, and in a tender wail she called out, 'Elsie, Elsie! my child, my child!'

CHAPTER LXXIII.

ELSIE RETURNS HOME.

OUR child came toward us, pale and cold, as if drifted to her mother's bosom by the storm. Her trembling arms were held out pleadingly, her eyes seemed full of frozen tears. She shivered from head to foot, and her teeth chattered, partly with cold, partly with anguish. She fell forward upon her mother's bosom, moaning; but no words came with the desolate sound.

"The mother grew strong now—that frail, little woman yonder—and would not let me help her, as she staggered back to the room, carrying her child forward also.

"'Give me fire,' she said, looking at the black hearth. 'Is this the welcome we offer our child?'

"I knelt down upon my hands and knees, thanking God for the return of that poor girl; while I raked the embers together, and blew them into life with my lips. I heaped dry wood upon the coals, and when the flame leaped through, lighting the features of my child, I turned to look upon her, where she lay upon the mother's bosom.

"Her eyes were wide open, and a dusky rim that swept under gave intensity to the blackness. When she saw me looking at her, those poor lips, all blue and cold, began to quiver, and a gush of tears changed the stony grief in her whole face to a look of such mournful tenderness, that I too burst into tears.

"'Father!' she cried, reaching forth her two hands as she had done when a little child,—'father!'

"I stretched out my arms, and strove to draw her downward to the bosom that yearned to hold her; but the mother put me back, with a wave of the hand, and folding Elsie close to her heart, cried out pleadingly,—

"Not yet, oh! not yet. Let her be, or my heart will break."

"She had the best right to her, so I buried my face in Elsie's mantle, and felt comforted by something she had touched."

"I tell you, child, no human heart dreams how much it can love, till sorrow falls on the object it clings to. That child was sacred to us as an angel then — dearer, a thousand times dearer, because they had attempted to crush her with disgrace. Her pale cheek, her tremulous lips, all the traces of wrong and anguish upon her person, were claims upon our tenderness. There was a sort of worship in our grief and in our joy."

"The fire burned up clear and brightly, but as the chill left her poor frame, a sharper consciousness of her position seemed to sting her into restlessness. She clung first to her mother, then to me; twice she bent to kiss me, and then drew back with a look of shrinking terror."

"You know, father; or must I tell you?" she said at last.

"I tried to smile and make light of the things we had heard, by looks rather than speech, and all the time she was perusing my soul with her wild eyes."

"You did not believe it," she cried, with a hysterical laugh, "I knew it — I was sure of it. But, father, mother, he has turned me out-of-doors."

"My child," cried the mother, giving way to tenderness. "But you are home, you are with us, your own mother, your dear old father."

"I know," said Elsie, "I thought of that when they turned me out-of-doors. I will return, said I, to my father's house, a prodigal, but without his sin. Father, believe that; you surely believe that, mother."

"My child, my own child," answered the mother.

"I know that you believe me," she said, and a faint smile stole across her lip.

"The mother caressed her, smoothing back the black hair from her temples, as if she had been a child."

"Tell us, daughter, tell us all," she whispered, tenderly.

"Elsie started up. Fire sparkled through the tears in her eyes. But quickly as it had kindled, the angry light went out; and sinking to her mother's bosom, she answered, amid her sobs, —

"Mother, they have denounced me, they have covered me with scorn."

"They — my child! Of whom are you speaking?"

"Of him — my husband — of De Marke and the French woman, who has poisoned his heart against me. Oh! mother, if she had never entered this house — if she never had."

"But your child, our grandson?" I inquired, after she had grown calmer.

"Elsie shook her head wearily. 'I asked for him, father. I begged on my knees that they would give me my child. I prayed, I wept, I went mad before them; but it was all of no use. My boy — my boy!'

"She broke off moaning, and began to rock herself to and fro, calling out, in tones of piteous tenderness, 'My boy — my boy!'

"Thus we got the history of her wrongs, in snatches, among tears and tender wailings over the happiness torn from her."

"It was true, De Marke had turned her from his door; and the Frenchwoman, her accuser, remained behind. When the sunrise sent its gleams of gold aslant the snow-drifts around us, we had gathered all the facts that she could relate. That French fiend, by cunning and falsehood, had separated my daughter from her husband. Elsie had come back to us, branded and denounced, but innocent as the angels."

"I sought De Marke, in order to defend my child; but

he would not receive me. I wrote to him, he sent my letters back unanswered. But Elsie would not believe him in earnest. She, poor child, still had her dreams and her delusions. They were wearing her to a shadow; but she could not give them up.

"The child," she would plead, "surely he will give back my child."

"Thus, day after day, she lived and hoped on.

"But the end came at last. De Marke entered proceedings for a divorce. I employed counsel. I spent half my substance in defending the honor of my child. But it was all in vain. The divorce was granted, and our daughter branded forever—forever separated from her husband and child. Now listen. That Frenchwoman was the principal witness against Elsie, and in six months De Marke married her. It was this news which drove our daughter wholly mad."

The old man ceased. The perspiration stood in drops on his forehead. This renewal of sorrow had exhausted him.

Catharine looked at him sadly.

"Forgive me," she said. "I have given you pain. But for this knowledge, I too must have gone mad! One word more. This Frenchwoman? Have you seen her?"

"Yes," answered the old man, "was the woman, you remember her. See how sin levels down the soul. Tell me, is not the fate of my child preferable to that?"

"I know this woman!" said Catharine, gently; "she is indeed punished through the degradation of her own nature. But the son? Did Elsie never see her son?"

"Poor Elsie! She would not have known him. For many years we were compelled to keep her in the asylum, from whence she was removed to the care of Mrs. Barr. I believe that De Marke thought her dead, for until the day that miserable woman appeared at the library-window, we never saw either of them."

"And you have never seen her son?"

"He has never inquired after his mother—nor attempted to open any communication with us. He may even be dead."

"Is it not possible that he may have been brought up in ignorance of these facts? I almost think so," said Catharine.

"I do not know—and poor Elsie, what good would it be to her? She has forgotten everything."

As he spoke, the old man arose, and walked into an inner room, closing the door after him. Catharine looked around, and saw that Mrs. Ford had disappeared also; indeed, the dear old lady had stolen away in the early part of this conversation, overcome by the mournful reminiscences it brought upon her.

When she found herself quite alone, Catharine gave way to a storm of feeling that shook her to the soul. She walked up and down the room, murmuring to herself, linking and unlinking her fingers, brushing back the hair from her hot temples, and tossing her arms upward, as if the room were too small for such emotions. She seemed, for the time, almost as wild as her charge. While in this state of excitement, she saw Elsie moving across the lawn, and struck by a sudden glow of affection, ran out to meet her.

"Mother! mother, his mother," she cried, throwing herself on Elsie's bosom. "His mother, his mother, and mine. Oh, thank God, thank God, that he sent me here!"

Elsie looked down upon that glowing face, with a sweet, vacant smile, and began to sing a lullaby, such as had sent her lost infant to sleep.

With a heavy sigh, Catharine arose from that unconscious bosom, and wandered away down to the sea-shore, where she could think and resolve in solitude,

CHAPTER LXXIV.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE WEDDING.

THE revelations, in the last chapter, were a source of new-born peace to Catharine. She felt at home, for the first time in her life. A few words had knitted her forever to those good old people, who had been so long her friends. Grandfather—grandmother—his, and consequently hers. She repeated this in the depths of her heart a thousand times; she would sit, for minutes together, regarding them with looks of unutterable tenderness. Her heart would leap at the sound of their voices, and when they spoke to her more confidently than heretofore, for in the fulness of their confidence this was natural, her eyes would fill with gentle thankfulness.

Still, she told them nothing, but asked for a little time, only a little; and then her heart should be laid open as theirs had been.

And the old people were content. For they saw that the revelation they had made opened new springs of affection in the young woman's bosom; that her former care of Elsie became devotion now; that a new power of love followed every look and word, which the poor demented one uttered.

Still, these pure souls did not entirely read that young heart; they could not hear the words, "his mother," which always trembled, unspoken, on her lips, when she looked at Elsie. They could not understand the tender light, that forever brooded in her eyes, nor feel the thrill that ran through her nerves, at the touch of their caressing hands, or the glances of Elsie's midnight eyes. It was enough for her that their blood ran through his veins; that Elsie, poor insane Elsie, was his own mother.

These thoughts and feelings were uppermost for some days. Catharine would not reflect that the man, whose unknown relatives were so dear to her, had abandoned her to poverty and death; that he had never inquired about her fate at the hospital, or if so, had avoided seeking her out. She would not remember that this man was, even now, about to unite himself to another, whom he had vainly loved before, taking compassion on her perhaps too evident affection. Above all, her pure soul revolted at the thought that another of his victims had perished by her own couch of pain, and that his child was left to wander alone, into any shelter that Providence might provide for the orphan.

But the heart cannot always silence a clear understanding. After a time, Catharine began to feel that a poison still lay in the cup of peace, so unexpectedly presented to her. Again her step grew slow, and her eyes sad. The love with which she regarded the household was full of yearning pain. She had lost all power to unite her thoughts of George De Marke with these good old people. He was all a De Marke, the son of that domestic traitor, the evil of his nature was an inheritance. That man had nothing in common with the Fords; the blood might be in his veins; but it was poisoned, every drop, by that of the De Markes.

Catharine rejoiced that Mrs. Oakley had been informed, regarding the falsehood of De Marke, without her agency. It seemed to her impossible to speak of his faults to any one. His treason to herself was so deeply buried in the depths of her heart, that it would be death to drag the secret forth, even to prevent further wrong. She thanked God again and again, that this terrible duty had been spared her. The very thoughts of appearing as his accuser, filled her with dismay.

But she avoided Mrs. Oakley. A feeling of vague pain, half jealousy, half compassion, kept her away from the cottage. More than this, she shrunk from looking at the child

again. His child and not hers. Poor, poor Catharine! In every way how wickedly she had been wronged, how cruelly bereaved! No wonder she shrunk from looking on the handsome widow, his beloved, and the beautiful boy, his son. Her husband, yes! he was her husband, though she might never have the power to prove it.

Thus Catharine avoided the cottage and the sea-shore, and her walks all turned to an opposite direction. She shrunk even from looking toward the house. Thus weeks went on, and the two families never met. The widow was too happy for any thought of her neighbors, and after seeking Catharine in her usual haunts awhile, always in vain, she went up to her mother's house in town; for her wedding-day had been privately fixed, and there were papers to sign and bridal garments to order.

One day, a servant-woman from Mrs. Oakley's house came abruptly up to where Catharine was standing, and told her this, in a blunt, rude way, that brought a sudden cry from the poor girl, thus taken by surprise.

The woman looked at her keenly, and a strange smile broke over her face, as she heard this cry. "I thought so," she muttered, turning away abruptly, as she had advanced, "I knew it, now we'll see."

Catharine followed her. "When, when does this take place?" she said, pale and wild, like one who had suddenly received sentence of death.

"To-night. A crowd of guests came with them in a steamer hired expressly for the wedding-party. Mrs. Townsend Oakley sent particular word that you were to be invited to meet them. Of course you will come?"

Catharine parted her pale lips to speak, but could not utter a word.

"She wishes you to stand bridesmaid, and be at the cottage when they arrive. As her best friend, she hopes you will receive them, and see that the servants make no blunders."

"Me, me!" burst from Catharine's lips, in a cry of such agony, that the woman stepped back with a startled look, which soon passed away, however, and that gleam of singular intelligence again resumed its place. "Me her bridesmaid!"

"You will certainly come. The mistress depends upon it," she said, without appearing to heed the cry.

"I cannot. Oh, my God! I cannot do it. This is too much—too much! I shall drop dead under torture!"

A look of rude compassion came to the woman's face. She drew close to Catharine, and touched her on the arm.

"You must be there, or the thing will go on!"

"What thing, woman?"

"The marriage of my mistress, Mrs. Townsend Oakley, with another woman's husband—that is the thing!"

Catharine looked at the woman in affright.

"What! what do you know?"

"I know that much, at any rate."

"How—where—when? In the name of heaven, what are you?"

"Mrs. Townsend Oakley's servant,—nothing else."

"But you said something that seems wild. How do you know—"

"That Mr. De Marke is a married man—is that what you ask?"

"Yes, that is what I ask!" answered Catharine, in a strained, husky voice.

"How do you know it?" said the woman.

"Me—me—how do I know it. God help me—how do I know it. I—"

"You see that I do know it, and that I know you, Catharine Lacy."

Catharine staggered back, warding the woman off with her hands, as she drew closer to her.

"That name, why do you call me by that name? I do

not bear it. I will not hear it—I tell you, woman, it is not my name.”

“Right,” answered the woman, smiling shrewdly, “it is not your name.”

“Well then, if it is not my name, why torment me with it? What does Mrs. Oakley want of me? I am not her friend. No one is my friend. I am alone, quite, quite, alone!”

“I am your friend.”

“You, and tell me news like this?”

“You wish to prevent this wedding.”

“No, no; I wish nothing, I hope nothing. I have a hard duty that will torture me, that is all.”

“But you *must* prevent it.”

“I must. Yes, I have known that all along. But how? Great heaven! direct me how.”

“Tell them he has a wife already.”

“A wife. What wife?”

“Catharine Lacy, the name which is not yours.”

“What do you say, woman? How is it you would have me act?”

“Go down to the cottage, meet them as they desire, and when the clergyman calls upon those who know of a just cause, or impediment,—I believe that’s the way it runs,—step forward, and stand face to face with Catharine Lacy’s husband, and tell him that she lives.”

Catharine wrung her hands distractedly. “I cannot, I should drop dead at their feet. How can I do this without proof?”

“Is not your presence proof?”

“No! I am changed. Even if they have ever known me, I could not prove an identity.”

“Still you are his wife.”

“I did not say it.”

“Besides this—to help them on—they can prove that

Catharine Lacy is dead by the hospital books. I know that well enough, though you may not,” said the woman, with a confidential air; “but what then?”

“It would be sufficient proof against anything I could say, if that be true.”

“But he would know you. True enough, your hair is a shade darker, you look taller and larger, your whole person is changed; but you have the old smile, and the same eyes. I knew you, why should not he?”

“Oh, do not ask—he will not wish it.”

“And you will see him marry another. This may be refinement, ma’am; but to my thinking, it’s taking part in the wickedness.”

Catharine shrunk within herself, and her features grew pinched with sudden anguish. For a long time she remained silent, gazing wildly on the woman. At last her pale lips parted.

“True, true. O my God, my God, guide me—guide me!” She sunk upon a fragment of rock, as these words broke forth, and buried her face in the drapery of her shawl.

The woman stood over her, and said, “You see it must be done.”

Catharine moaned faintly.

“Or a great crime will lie at your door.”

Again Catharine moaned.

“This man deserves it all.”

A shudder ran through Catharine’s frame; but she did not look up.

“You will be sure and come,” persisted the woman.

“Yes,” said Catharine, looking up, “it must be. God knows, if it were not to prevent sin, I would never remind him of all he wishes to forget. I would live and die alone, rather than intrude my wrongs upon his happiness. But he leaves me no choice.”

“You are resolute?” questioned the woman.

"Yes; the thing may kill me, but I will come. Still I warn you, woman, it will be to meet unbelief and disgrace. I have no proof to offer, and have outlived my own identity."

The woman made an irresolute movement; plunged a hand into her pocket, and took it out again empty. Then, casting another glance at the trembling creature before her, she gave a more deliberate plunge, and drew forth an old pocket-book, from which she extracted, first a diamond earring, which she clasped in the palm of one hand with two fingers, while she searched among some soiled papers with the other. At last she drew forth a scrap of paper, which she carefully unfolded and read. Catharine watched these movements with a look of wistful curiosity. The strange woman had won a sort of authority over her, and for the time she was almost helpless.

"You are determined to do the right thing, and put a stop to this marriage," she said, holding the paper irresolutely.

"I must," said Catharine. "It will ruin me, and ruin him; but that is better than a great sin. They will not believe me; but I will speak."

"They shall believe you!" answered the woman peremptorily, "ask him if he dares dispute that?"

Catharine took the paper, which Jane Kelly held out, and glanced at it; but her head grew giddy, and the letters floated like traceries of mist before her eyes. She only knew that it was a certificate of her own marriage with George De Marke. Her hands began to tremble violently: she burst into a passion of tears.

"Your courage will not fail," said Jane, "I may be sure of that."

"My duty cannot fail; I must do it," answered Catharine, sadly.

"Then I will go home. Remember, they will arrive at sunset. After that, you must not count on any time as safe."

"I know, I know," murmured Catharine, gazing wistfully upon the certificate in her hand, "there can be no wavering, no doubt now: in this paper, God has unfolded my duty."

She looked around. The woman had disappeared. Catharine was alone with her God.

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE INTERRUPTED CEREMONY.

THAT night, a small steamer put in at a landing, not far from Mrs. Oakley's cottage, and a crowd of cheerful, richly dressed persons came, in scattered groups, along the shore, chattering, laughing, and making the sweet air joyous with merriment. There was one group quieter than the rest, and over which a gentle serenity, almost amounting to sadness, seemed to reign. This was the bridal party. George De Marke walked gravely by his brother, leading the adopted son by the hand; and the child now and then brought a smile to his lips, by his pretty surprise at the number of persons who seemed to be visitors at his home.

At the right hand of the widow-bride moved the stately Mrs. Judson, all smiles and condescension to the man whom, a few days before, she was ready to crush into the earth with sovereign disdain. Her dress of purple and gold brocade swept the grass with its rich folds, and she wore her mantilla of old point as a queen displays the ermine of royalty.

There was no bridesmaid, for Mrs. Oakley, in her heart, had resolved that Catharine should occupy that position. She hoped to see her in time to enter into all those explanations which would render the position unexceptionable to her friend.

As they approached the cottage, the bride looked anxiously

forward, expecting to see Catharine coming forth to greet her; in this she was disappointed.

The visitors, many of them, remained out-of-doors, for the evening was delightful, and a pleasant breeze stole up from the water. Those who preferred it came in-doors, and all around the dwelling, inside and out, groups of happy people wandered to and fro, ready at any moment to be summoned to the marriage ceremony.

Mrs. Oakley went to her room, a little nervous, and somewhat anxious about the non-appearance of her intended bridesmaid. The chambermaid was very busy, upon her knees, unpacking a trunk which contained the bridal paraphernalia. There was a half sneer upon her face, as she unfolded the snowy robe, and laid out the mist-like veil of Brussels' point, with which the bridal wreath was entwined, ready for the fair brow it was to crown.

"What is this? two dresses, and white lace trimmings for both," said Jane, gruffly, laying the dresses side by side, across the bed. "According to my judgment, one will be too many."

Jane muttered the last words in her throat, as she stood eying the bridal robes askance.

"Yes, yes," said the bride, hurriedly, "the dress nearest you, wreath and everything, is intended for Miss Barr. Send some one to say that we are here, and tell her to lose no time, we shall be waiting for her. Of course, you gave my invitations."

The girl answered, that she had delivered both; and as she spoke, the bride saw a smile, creeping, like a viper, across her lips.

"They will come, of course. Nothing has gone wrong, I hope."

"Oh, it is a sure thing, ma'am; they'll come."

Mrs. Oakley had no time to regard the manner of this reply. She felt a little uneasy at the absence of Catharine,

more because it would delay an exculpation of her lover, than from any doubt of her willingness to accept the compliment she had extended in the invitation.

"Well, well, it is no matter," she said, talking pleasantly to herself, as Jane disappeared with the garments she had been directed to have ready for the bridesmaid. "Of course, she will be confident that all is right, or it would not have come to this. I wonder what dear, proud mamma will say to my choice of a bridesmaid. At any rate, she must admit her a lady in everything. Nothing but her refinement and gentle goodness have made those old people regard her as a daughter of the house.

As the bride was arranging things thus cheerfully in her mind, the lady mother came in, her purple silk rustling as she walked, and a cluster of marabout feathers trembling like a handful of snowflakes, where it fastened the frost-like lace of her elaborate head-dress.

As Mrs. Judson came into the room, the chambermaid stole quietly out, cautiously keeping her back toward that lady.

"Not ready yet," cried the stately dame, drawing on her own white gloves with deliberate gravity. "I have brought my maid to help you, child. Come, come, begin at once, or you will be flushed, the most vulgar thing that can happen to a person in your position. Be active," she continued, speaking to a woman who had followed her into the room, "do Mrs. Oakley's hair at once; I will stand by and direct you."

Smiling and blushing a little, the bride placed herself in a seat, and taking out her comb, allowed her raven tresses to fall in a torrent over her shoulders. The toilet now commenced in earnest. Braid after braid of those glittering locks was wreathed around her shapely head, as she sat, with a rose-tinted dressing-gown gathered over the snow of her bridal garments, while the woman adorned her person; and

Mrs. Judson gave directions, making herself more than usually gracious.

At length the lady's maid had completed her work. Around that coil of raven braids lay a garland of white roses, and as the bride stood up, allowing the dressing-gown to fall in rosy masses around her feet, a cloud of misty lace, touched as it were with traces of early frost, rippled in transparent waves down the folds of her moire dress, sweeping to the snow of her satin slippers. Thus the bride stood, lovely as a dream, beneath the proud smile of her mother.

"But the bridesmaid! where is she?" questioned the elder lady, looking at a clock upon the mantelpiece. "It is nearly time."

"She will be here, I dare say," answered the bride, stepping before the dressing-glass, with a faint blush at her own exceeding beauty. "You will like her, I am sure, mamma. She is so sweet and lady-like."

"But you have not told me who she is, daughter?"

"Oh, she is one of the dearest creatures in the world, a sort of protégé, or adopted daughter of Mrs. Ford's, up at the old stone house, yonder. Don't be impatient, she will be in time."

Mrs. Judson shook her head very pleasantly, for she was in high good humor that day.

"Ah! I understand; some young girl, without advantages, that you want to bring out. One of these days you will see how foolish such things are."

Mrs. Oakley was about to offer some good-natured protest. But as she turned to speak, they both heard a slight commotion in the upper hall.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

RIGHTED AT LAST.

HERE she comes!" exclaimed the bride, opening the door. "Ah, I was sure of it! Come in! come in! How late you are; fortunately your dress is all laid out."

Mrs. Oakley held out her hand cordially. Catharine did not touch it, but with a gentle inclination of the head, entered the chamber followed by old Mrs. Ford.

Mrs. Oakley drew back, surprised and almost offended; for, standing in the hall, directly behind the old lady, she saw a white-haired gentleman, leaning upon his cane, as if waiting for something.

"Of course, I am delighted to see your friends. They have given me a pleasant surprise. I scarcely hoped —"

Mrs. Oakley stopped suddenly. She had caught a glimpse of Catharine's white face, and drew slowly back, terrified by its expression.

Catharine was clothed in strange beauty that evening. A painful wildness glittered in her eyes, her lips were like marble, and her cheeks looked cold as snow. She had no bonnet on, but a scarlet shawl had been hastily flung over her dress of black silk, a costume that contrasted vividly with the snow of Mrs. Oakley's bridal apparel.

"What is this? Why have you come in a black dress, and with that mournful face?" she questioned, while Mrs. Judson drew proudly up, first in resentful astonishment, then with a slow dawning of memory, that left her pale and aghast, but still haughtily upright.

"I have come," said Catharine, in a low, pained voice, "I have come, because it must be. Not to share your joy, but to quench it. Not to witness your marriage, for the man who waits for you — I would soften these words, if I knew how, but it must be said — is my own husband."

For a moment there was a dead silence in the room. Every face was white, and every person dumb with amazement.

"I wish," said Catharine, "this duty had been spared me. I struggled and prayed to cast it off. The wreck of one heart was enough. I would not have waited so long, or have spoken now, but that silence would become guilt."

"This is not true!" exclaimed the bride, pressing a hand to her heart, that trembled and throbbed till the cloud of lace that fell over it shook with the agony. "I tell you the thing is impossible!"

"I wish it were. The God of heaven is my judge, that I do not wound you, or him, willingly. But it is a miserable duty, which I cannot escape."

"Send for him. Send De Marke hither at once," almost shrieked the bride, as she stood up with an effort at firmness, but trembling from head to foot. "To his face, you must make this charge. Call De Marke, I say!"

The maid went out, leaving the group petrified into silence, waiting like so many ghosts.

They had not long to wait for the bridegroom. He came with a light step, in full dress, and with one glove in his hand; a flush of supreme happiness was on his face. He could not speak without smiling.

"Is it time?" he said, pausing at the door, in not ungraceful confusion, as he saw that it was a dressing-room to which he had been summoned.

But the silence, and the pale faces turned upon him, drove the blush and smile instantly away. He stepped hastily forward. "What is this? You are pale, you tremble. Great heavens, what has happened? Is she ill?"

He looked first at Mrs. Oakley, then at her mother, repeating, "Is she ill — is she ill?"

Mrs. Oakley, without removing the left hand from her heart, pointed toward Catharine, who stood, pale and motionless, with her eyes fixed on his face.

"Look on that woman, and say if she is known to you."

De Marke turned and looked in Catharine's face. His glance was firm and searching, his countenance agitated, but truthful as noonday. "No," he said, "I haven't the slightest recollection of this lady; yet — yet there is something in her face —"

"Then you know her — it is true — mother, mother!"

The bride staggered back, clinging to Mrs. Judson, who stood in her place, firm and cold as a statue.

"No, I did not say that — there was something in the eyes; but it is gone — certainly I have never seen this lady before!"

Catharine uttered a low moan, and moving toward him, put the hair back from her temples with both hands, exposing her beautiful but deathly features to his entire scrutiny. He looked at her with a glance as cold as ice; that look fell upon her like a blight; she reeled, a mist swum before her eyes, and she could not discern a feature of the face to which her own was so pathetically uplifted. Not a word did those white lips utter. She stood before him, mute and trembling, till the young man turned away, pained and almost angry.

Then all the strength left that poor wife, and she fell forward upon her knees.

"Explain this scene, if you can, madam," said the young man, motioning Catharine away with his hand, while he turned to Mrs. Judson.

Before the lady could answer, Catharine held up one hand, with a paper quivering like a dead leaf between the fingers.

"Look at me! look at me! I am Catharine. Forgive me. They would not let me die — forgive me; but I am Catharine Lacy."

De Marke snatched the paper from her hand, read it at a glance, and with an exclamation of "thank God — oh! thank God," uttered as it were in a flood of joy, lifted Catharine from his feet, and kissed her upon the forehead, again and again.

The bride uttered a cry, sharp with pain; De Marke took no heed of it, but bent tenderly over Catharine.

"And is it indeed true? Catharine, Catharine Lacy? Oh! this is joy indeed."

"Mother, mother, take me away; he wishes to kill me!" cried the bride, throwing her arms wildly around Mrs. Judson.

De Marke heard her, and looked around.

"No, beloved, no, — I am only mad with joy. One moment, one moment!"

Putting Catharine gently away, he rushed past Mrs. Judson, pressed the pale hand of her daughter suddenly to his lips, and left the room.

Again all was still. Mrs. Judson whispered soothing words to her daughter, and old Mrs. Ford knelt beside Catharine, who lay weak and helpless on her bosom.

De Marke returned, flushed, smiling, but with tears in his eyes. Directly behind him came another person, so like himself, that a stranger might have been startled by a resemblance so remarkable.

"See! there she is, take care of her yourself, George, while I beg pardon of this lady."

George De Marke fell upon his knees before the old lady, who still held Catharine in her arms.

"Give her to me! Let me look on her face. Catharine, Catharine, my wife, my wife!"

Catharine knew the voice. She started up. In an instant her face was flooded with tears. The other voice had seemed cold and strange — this penetrated her very soul. She reached out her arms like a little child — a long sweet sigh, as he gathered her to his bosom; and then it seemed as if she could never speak again, that trance of happiness was so perfect. George De Marke was still upon his knees, holding his wife in those strong arms, and thanking God that she was his again, when old Mrs. Ford arose and laid her two

hands upon his head, with the softest and sweetest blessing that ever came out of a woman's heart.

The young man looked up and met her eyes — those meek, brown eyes, so full of pathetic tenderness. Then an old man came into the group, and laid his hand, all wrinkled and quivering, upon those of the gentle matron.

"Son of my child," he said, "God's blessing be with you, even as mine is!"

A soft and holy amen stole from the lips of that dear old lady. Then the venerable couple retreated a little way off, leaving the dew of their benediction on the young man's heart, which had risen full and gratefully to the touch of those hands.

"You have been *her* friends, I can see that. God bless you for it!"

"Yes," answered the old woman, gently, "we are her friends and your grandparents."

"My grandparents! I do not know what all this means; but God bless you both for everything you are and have done. Catharine shall tell me all about it. I want to hear her voice. Look up, darling, and tell me if I belong to this dear old lady and gentleman."

Catharine struggled a little in his arms and lifted her face from his bosom; it had fallen there, pale as a lily, but now the flush of summer roses glowed upon it from neck to forehead. Happiness had made her radiant.

"Not now," said the old man; "let us take nothing from her happiness. To-morrow our grandson will come to us, but now he belongs to her."

And so the old couple went quietly home together, thanking God all the way.

One by one the persons who had witnessed the reunion of that husband and wife glided from the room; and for a few precious minutes they were alone together. But scarcely a word was said. They looked in each other's faces, smiling,

and yet with a shy sort of reserve, wondering at themselves that, having so much to say, sweet silence seemed pleasanter than words.

"Yes, darling, you have changed, but only to become more lovely," he said in answer to the fond question in her eyes.

"And I — you would not have known me, I am certain."

"I had but to hear your voice, the tears blinded me so — now that I can see you, it is the same face, older, braver."

"But brother Louis is more like what I was. No wonder you took him for me."

"But I do wonder my eyes were traitors. How would they betray me so? but I only saw him from a distance, and to-night my distress —"

Here Mrs. Oakley knocked at the door, interrupting them.

"Come," she said, "the people below are getting impatient. I want my bridesmaid. Louis is waiting for you in the other room, Mr. De Marke."

George De Marke went out, obediently, and then Mrs. Judson's maid commenced a second toilet, to which Catharine submitted without protest; she was far too happy for anything like that.

The bridal ceremony was delayed a little; and that was all the guests knew of the scene we have just described. Half an hour later there came forth from that chamber four persons so radiant with happiness, so grandly beautiful, that curiosity, if any had existed, was swallowed up in admiration. A murmur of surprise ran from lip to lip, for the moonlight beauty of the bride was exquisitely contrasted by the radiant loveliness of her bridesmaid, who was, it began to be whispered about, already married to the elder brother of the bridegroom, excellent matches both, for Madame De Marke, the mother, had left an immense fortune, which would be divided equally between the young men.

The guests also observed that Mrs. Judson, the stately

mother of the bride, lost somewhat of her queenly self-possession that night. She kept aloof from the wedding-party, and seemed shy of addressing the bridesmaid, while giving congratulations to her daughter and the newly married husband. But these things were only matters of passing comment, and no one guessed how deep a current of human joy was swelling beneath the commonplaces of this wedding.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

ABOUT THE LITTLE BOY

THREE weeks after the wedding, George De Marke and his wife were established in the home that had been his father's. For the first time in his life, he had learned the particulars of a domestic drama, which had cast his infancy under the influence of that miserable Frenchwoman, whose sins had at last centred into the meanest and most grinding of all vices.

A little week before, this man had deemed himself an isolated being, with no one to love or cling to, except the brother, whose happiness he had resolved to witness, and then become a wanderer again. Now he was at home, settled for life under the roof of ancestors whose very existence had been unknown to him. His mother, whose insanity had taken a gentle and more poetic turn since the death of her enemy, as if even from the distance she had felt the atmosphere of her life relieved of its poison, hovered around him carressingly and with pleasant smiles, for she fancied the husband of her youth had come back again. She no longer shrunk from the picture, which had been returned to its old place on the wall; but would talk to it for

hours, evidently substituting its inanimate features for those of her son when he was away.

But there was still a shadow upon the life of that young couple: the memory of a child, that had perished, and for which there was forever an unsilenced yearning in the mother's heart. The proof of its death was so vague, that sometimes wild dreams of its existence forced themselves upon her; and these feelings she had imparted to her husband.

One day De Marke had just left Catharine alone in the library, with the sashes of the great bay-window open, when two women came by on their way to the front of the house. One was Mrs. Louis De Marke's servant, who had disappeared the night after the wedding, and the other a comely little Irish woman, whose face Catharine instantly recognized. She sprang up with an exclamation of pleasant surprise and ran to the window.

"Mary Margaret—Mrs. Dillon!"

Mary Margaret and her companion turned, and came toward the window.

"Oh! is it there ye are, me darlint?" said the good-hearted woman, "with yer husband to the fore, and no thanks to anybody. Faix! but I'm glad to get a sight of yer beautiful countenance agin, and I've com' all the way down here to give ye a taste of happiness that ye haven't dreamed of. What do you say, darlint, to a child of yer own, just the beautifullest crathur?"

"Hush," said Catharine, bending from the open casement, and reaching out her hand to Mary Margaret. "This is a cruel subject to jest on!"

"She isn't joking, not she," said Jane Kelly; "I've brought her down here, just to strengthen what I have to say, and what I never would have said on earth, if *he* there had n't proved to be another woman's son. If that old Frenchwoman had been his mother, he might have searched till doomsday, and never found the little fellow after all.

"Catharine Lacy, I was your nurse at the hospital; I took the living child from your bosom, and placed the dead baby of Louisa Oakley in its place. You were faving, and did not know it. Don't look so white and so frightened. I had an object. The old French fiend paid me for putting your child out of the way. I did not murder for her money; but I changed the infants, and reported yours dead. More than this, I changed the numbers and names over your cots, and that is why you are registered as dead, and buried, instead of the other."

"But the child, my child!" cried Catharine.

"Mary Margaret took it to nurse."

"Mary Margaret!"

"Yes, yer ladyship," said Mrs. Dillon, "I mothered the little crathur, all unbeknowst that it was your baby as I was doing for. Ye had the darlint in yer own blessed arms, more'an onest, and the most beautifullest sight it was to see yez together, like the blessed mother of Christ pictured out over the holy altar, with the hivenly baby in her two arms—amin!"

"But the child, my child! Where is it? who has got it now? My own, own child."

"It's a'most forenant ye, this blessed minit, yer ladyship. Down in the purty house, behint them trees, a-playin' in the garden, as innercent as a young rabbit. Did n't I just see the mark of the holy cross, as red as a ruby, which the angels left on his temple—"

Mary Margaret broke off suddenly, for Catharine had left the window. In another moment they saw her flitting across the lawn, and under the elms. She was out of sight long before the last sentence was finished.

"Let's go after her," said Jane Kelly. "I want to see their hearts torn in giving him up."

But they had hardly crossed the lawn, when Catharine came back, walking rapidly, with little Edward in her arms.

She rushed by them, raining kisses on the child, and hurrying on, went panting and breathless into the presence of her husband, his grandparents, and Elsie.

"George, George, take him — take him, he is our child, yours and mine — our own, own child. Grandfather, grandmother, mother, thank God! thank God! for it is our son, that was lost and is found."

There was some reluctance on the part of Mrs. Louis De Marke to give up all claim on the child she had loved as her own. But all this was compromised in the end by little Edward himself, who divided all the hours of his bright life pretty equally between the old mansion and the Italian cottage during the first year. After that he proclaimed a determination to give up the cottage altogether, for his other mamma had just taken in a mite of a girl-baby that was always crying, and had n't sense enough to walk alone; if she was going to keep that little thing, he meant to live at grandfather's and nowhere else.

THE END.

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