

DOUBLY FALSE.

BY

MRS. ANN S. STEPHENS.

AUTHOR OF "FASHION AND FAMINE," "THE SOLDIER'S ORPHANS,"
"THE HEIRESS," "THE GOLD BRICK," "SILENT STRUGGLES,"
"THE OLD HOMESTEAD," "THE REJECTED WIFE,"
"MARY DERWENT," "THE WIFE'S SECRET," ETC.

There is no pathway leading to the light,
Save that which honor treadeth for her own.
The only star, that guideth through the night,
Truth wears, triumphant, on her azure zone.

* * * * *

The false, e'en to themselves are traitors all,
Deceit must ever end in weary strife,
As serpents' eggs give vipers from the thrall
Of their warm fosterage, it chains the life—
Colls in and out in many a poisonous fold,
And hisses through the future uncontrolled.

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TO

MY SON'S WIFE,

MRS. ANNIE SUTTON STEPHENS,

THIS BOOK IS

MOST AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

ANN S. STEPHENS.

WASHINGTON, D. C., MAY 5TH, 1868.

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DOUBLY FALSE.

CHAPTER I.

MUSIC AND DANCING.

A SPLENDIDLY bright day in early spring. The ocean was unusually calm; but a pleasant sunshine broke up its greenish blue, and dashed its tiny ripples with the restless glory of quicksilver shimmering over crystal. Far away the waters lapsed imperceptibly into the pure atmosphere of the horizon, veiling the soft union with a gossamer haze exquisitely beautiful.

Not a sail was in sight!—not a bird in the air! One great ocean steamer moved through the calm of the waters, her broad, white sails curving like the tired wings of a sea-gull, and her black pipes heaving forth mighty fleeces of smoke, that curled, eddied and fell apart in the wind, floating off in a soft film of silvery gray, dazzled through and through with sunbeams.

The steamer was full of life, cheerful and brilliant. Though not absolutely crowded, it had no room to spare, and all the luxury that could be introduced into a sea voyage was to be found on its decks that pleasant spring afternoon. Fur rugs and little encampments of crimson cushions lay about in the shady places, occupied by men, women and children, sitting low like Turks, if not exactly in the Oriental fashion. Campstools and a few easy chairs

were filled with dreamy occupants, some reading, some chatting, and others sound asleep.

Perhaps four hundred passengers were on board, most of them of that idle upper class which holds some of the weakest and again the most powerful members of social life in its ranks. They were in this case neither better nor worse than the crowd of people who usually cross and recross the Atlantic every season, as if it were some inland lake. Upon those fur rugs and cushions a few men, tired out with the active duties of life, sought that necessary reaction a sea life brings; with them were merchants on business, clever men travelling for information—common-place people killing time—sharpers on the alert for prey—adventurers, and worse still, adventuresses, forcing themselves, by craft or brazen assurance, into respectable society—with all the odds and ends of that strange thing called fashionable life. To this great majority were added one or two God-gifted souls to whom life, in itself, was an exquisite blessing. These found even that calm sea voyage full of wonderful poetry which the crowd never dreamed of. They saw glorious pictures in the sky as it bent over them—thrilling music in the soft heave of the waves which floated them steadily shoreward, and still more varied interest in the life that moved and changed and worked itself out among the human beings with whom they were cast.

Of this class was the young girl seated on that carriage-robe of white fur, which was spread out on a shadowy portion of the deck like a snow-drift, half melted away, upon a ground-work of azure-cloth scalloped and embroidered into a rich lace-work border. She was a bright, happy-looking girl, with a face that Titian would have given a goblet of wine to paint, exactly as she reclined, with her elbow resting on a pile of cushions over which a shawl of blue cashmere, with a good deal of gold-color in the border, had been flung in rich drapery. Her head, with more

ruddy brown hair than most women possess, was supported by the palm of a white and finely-shaped hand—not very small, for the girl herself was of generous proportions, and in perfect symmetry lay her chief claim to that grace and loveliness which distinguished her.

Close by the pretty couch, which had an air of the Orient in it, sat a middle-aged man, rather handsome—very respectable—and at the moment closing his eyes in a dreamy way which might or might not be slumber. Something in the distance aroused the girl and caused the father to open a pair of mild blue eyes rather suddenly, for she cried out in her quick, eager way:

"Look, look, papa!"

It was only a couple of sturgeons tumbling over each other and leaping into the sunshine, which for an instant scaled their backs with silver and kindled a little rainbow among the drops they flashed into the air.

"Isn't it wonderful, papa, that such awkward creatures can manage to display so much beauty?" cried the girl, resting one arm on her father's knee and raising herself up to the cushions that she might watch the ponderous gambols that any one else might have considered a disturbance.

"Nonsense, my dear; we have seen a hundred of them tumbling about like salt-water pigs. Let me rest, do—this glare hurts my eyes."

"Well, sleep away, dear old papa, if you like it best—I'll settle to reading again, since you will have nothing to do with me."

This was uttered with a good-natured little laugh, while the young lady settled back into her former position, assuming her book, in its dainty binding, of scarlet and gold, which had been lying half-buried in the white fur, but she contented herself for a time with rustling the leaves as it lay in her lap.

With a smile on his lips the old man fell off into his

sweet slumber again, and his daughter began to read. Just then a group of young persons came up from the cabin, chatting together and sending out little joyous bursts of laughter. The first that appeared was a young lady who presented so complete a counterpart of the person we have been describing that a stranger would have glanced at the white carriage robe at once to make sure that she had not left it. The same lithe form was there, the same brilliant complexion, with eyes not altogether gray or blue, but which partook of either color as fancy or passion warmed them. The hair was of that remarkable tint which even artists have failed to name properly, but which the Venetians painted in all its glory. These traits, and more than these, the two girls had in common; no sisters ever looked more alike or possessed the same grace of manner. They were closely related, no one could doubt that who looked upon them, though one was quietly reading her book and the other appeared in all the ardor and joyousness of a spirited conversation.

"No, indeed," she was saying, "I make no pretence; I play well enough, perhaps, but it is my cousin whose voice you heard last night. There she is. Ask her."

She looked very beautiful, standing there in the passage with a cashmere shawl gathered in careless grace around her, while the wind shook out the barb of Brussels point tied in a knot at the back of her little straw hat, and fluttered the cock's plume in front, giving a look of breezy cheerfulness to her persona.

"Go ask her—or shall I?"

"You; you, of course," cried out half-a-dozen voices; "she might refuse us."

Cora Lander walked across the deck, sweeping it with her robe of rich silk—far too rich for the occasion—and paused close by her cousin, who raised her eyes from the book she was reading with a pleasant smile.

"Virginia, dear, do come and pacify these good people with one little air. They heard that outbreak of yours last night in *Ah che la morte*, and will not be content without the whole of it."

Virginia Lander dropped her book, and a bright color flashed over her face, but this was all the sign of annoyance that she gave, though she felt much.

"Oh yes, I will sing, if they desire it," she said quietly. "Come with me, Cora, and play the accompaniment."

The two girls went down to the cabin in company, and a brighter, lovelier pair you have seldom looked upon. It was not the prettiness of common beauty, which is in fact less effective than intelligent ugliness. But there was something unique, graceful and spirited which belonged to them alone, provoking inquiry and commanding admiration. Besides, one of them, the daughter of the old man dozing there on the deck, was heiress to every dollar the millionaire possessed.

Cora Lander sat down at the grand piano in the cabin. Virginia took a position by her, and a merry group of young people swarmed around, eager for any amusement that promised to break up the monotony of sea-life, but so full of mirth that they could hardly keep quiet even for the music. A prelude—a masterly sweep of the keys, and then Virginia Lander's voice, full, rich and clear, broke in—at first timidly and with a tremor of distrust in it—for she did not like this public crowd of listeners. But even timidity cannot long hold true genius in thrall. After a moment the color flashed into her face—her lips parted, warm and red as coral, and out gushed the whole volume and force of her exquisite voice, thrilling the hearts that listened as music had seldom touched them before. The depth, power and wonderful pathos of a voice cultivated to perfection charmed the crowd into willing silence, which continued a full minute after the last notes left her lips. Then there

was a tumult of compliments—exclamations of delight from those who spoke from the surface—and deep sighs of absolute ecstasy from such as understood and felt the delicious sweetness of her performance.

Virginia was pleased. Who is not by genuine admiration? She laughed a little nervously, blushed crimson on seeing that a good many gentlemen had joined her audience, and retreated shyly to a sofa at some distance.

That moment you might have discovered where the difference lay between these two girls. It was in the expression. As Virginia drew back, half pleased, half ashamed of her own success, Cora let her white hands fall on the keys she had touched with such wonderful skill, and an expression swept over her face that transfigured it completely. In all that buzz, hum and general outburst of praise she had no part. Her supporting music, brilliant as it was, had been utterly overwhelmed by Virginia's voice. She sat a moment looking straight before her. Humiliating disappointment left her eyes almost black. Her lips curled in their scornful redness, but the color in her cheeks died out, sweeping all the young brightness from her features.

This lasted a single minute, but during that brief time no one would have thought Cora Lander like her cousin Virginia, who had crept into a corner of her sofa abashed by the burst of genuine applause that followed her singing, but thrilled by the sweet exercise of her own genius, which was in itself a delight.

For one instant the stormy look darkened on Cora's face, then, with an impulse which seemed inspiration, but was defiance, she dashed her hands across the keys and swept them with a power that hushed every voice in the room and turned the current of applause in her favor.

Virginia's face brightened beautifully as this outburst of approval reached her. Always generous and sympathetic, she forgot herself utterly and came up to the piano radiant.

Cora saw her, and with a proud lift of the head, dashed into a waltz which rang through the cabin like a silver war-trumpet challenging hosts to action. Half-a-dozen young ladies accepted the exhilarating appeal, wound their arms around each other, and whirled off in one of those impromptu dances which are the very effervescence of happy youth. Cora cast a glance over her shoulder and dashed on, winging those light feet with melody. Away and around they flew jostling each other, laughing at the fun, changing partners—falling into little mistakes, and sending their clear laughter through the music in a riot of sweet sounds.

Those who could not find room to dance applauded with hands and voice: those who could rushed on more joyously, laughing at their less fortunate friends, till the whole cabin was one whirl of gaiety.

In the midst, piercing like an arrow through the mellow laughter, came a cry from midship:

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

CHAPTER II.

OVERBOARD.

FIRE! Fire! Fire! This withering cry stopped every pulse of life as it ran through the ship. For one awful second it held that crowd in the cabin motionless and pallid as if a storm of ashes were passing over it. Some of the dancers kept their position, like statues, with scared faces bent together, feet advanced and smiles frozen on their white lips. Some staggered out of the whirl and clung together shrieking in each other's arms. Others crouched down in corners, sending out piteous cries. One or two

laughed out a hideous mockery of their own fears, and a few weak voices joined in protesting that it was a hoax. Still all listened with hushed breath for a second cry which might be their doom.

Cora Lander laughed away the pale terror that seized upon her, and dashed the awful scene with defiant music.

It came again—that wild, desperate cry—deeper, hoarser and still more terrible—smiting the crowd with fresh panic. A mad rush was made for the deck. The selfish instinct of life which levels men with wild beasts was uppermost then. Under that fierce stampede of feet the helpless and feeble were forced aside or trampled down, and through the tumult arose their sobs and moans, with the low roar of half-smothered flames and gushes of black smoke that came rolling down the cabin stairs thick and stifling.

Virginia Lander sprang to the steps and rushed on deck, seeking her father. Cora plunged into the frightened crowd, struggled through and followed her cousin, looking keenly around for some means of safety as she went.

The old man was on his feet, white as death, but with all his faculties clear. He reached forth his arms as Virginia came up and held her close, promising his own heart that they would die together. Cora planted herself by his side, pale with terror, but vigilant.

The steamer lay with her head to the wind, which swept the flames fiercely as they belched up the hatchway and ran along the cordage like sheet lightning. The captain thundered orders through his trumpet which no one obeyed. Men rushed to and fro with buckets, and flew in despair to the pumps, but, spite of this the conflagration roared like a volcano deep in the iron hold, and rushed up through port-hole and hatchway, fringing the sails with flame and creeping along the ropes till they shone out against the sky one net-work of tangled fire.

It was awful to see human beings struggling up through

the surges of hot smoke, and reeling into the fresh air one mass of flames. Now the scene became terrible. Great gushes of fire roared up from the cabin and seized upon the wood-work around it. The mainmast, already girdled with flame and eaten half-way to the heart, trembled like a forest tree beneath the axe. The ventilators were choked up with human beings, suffocated in a wild effort to escape certain death in the steerage. Now an effort was made to get out the boats; but they were seized upon and swamped under a frenzied rush of the crowd. The wretched people retreated from bulwark to bow—anywhere that promised a moment's shelter. But the hot flames pursued them, leaping, hissing, routing them from every chance of life. Some jumped overboard in sheer madness; others swung themselves down to the sea with chains and ropes, which might grow red hot or be burned under their grasp any instant. It was awful to see those panic-stricken creatures huddled together like frightened deer hemmed in by a prairie fire, shrinking, shivering and white with a dread that was worse than death.

Mr. Lander and those two girls had kept their place firmly upon the deck, watching for some chance of safety, but driven towards the bulwarks step by step as the flames leaped upon them. The sails had burned out, scattering a rain of fire over them, and were now given to the wind in black patches of tinder. The cordage had broken up into rags of fire. The yard-arms were burning and cut against the sky, like a great cross appealing to God for mercy. Only a few moments more could those helpless creatures keep a foothold where they stood. Even now the boards under their feet were hot and drops of turpentine came oozing out from all their pores, tempting the flames which licked them up with ravenous hisses. Not ten feet away, the planks had parted and they could look down on that sea of fire raging in the hold.

Virginia gave one glance and clung to her father, striving to shield him from the heat. Cora saw a thousand tiny threads of flame creeping towards them, and seizing upon the fur rug wound it about her, looking fiercely down on the storm of fire, as if she longed to defy it. That girl, leaning there against the bulwark, with that awful light upon her face and the fur robe giving a savage aspect to her dress, seemed like a priestess overwhelmed by her own incantations.

Just then a boat had been cautiously lowered by some of the hands—so cautiously that the terror-stricken creatures cowering on the deck took no notice, for despair had paralyzed them. Cora saw it and her hopes took fire. Without a word to the others, she flung off the robe, leaped upon the bulwark, and plunged into the sea, twenty feet below. The boat had pushed off and was some yards away, but she was a good swimmer, and followed it, shrieking for help with every dash of her arms.

Had it been a man, the sailors would have left him to die, for the boat was full; but there was something so strange and brave in the desperate effort this young creature made for life, that they took her in with broken cheers and pushed farther from the doomed vessel, from which men and women, with their garments one cloud of flame, were continually dropping.

Virginia looked up, saw that the place where her cousin had stood was empty, and uttering a cry of anguish, sprang to the bulwark.

"Oh father! oh Heaven help us! She is gone—she is lost! No, no, thank God, thank God, she is in the boat. That is her. Look, father, look! That is Cora."

That moment the mainmast trembled like a tree cut through the heart and fell, dragging the steamer on one side by its weight. Then the engine gave out, and the boiler collapsed with a dull sound, sending up a storm of

hisses, as if ten thousand serpents, coiled in its iron heart, had suddenly crept into the flames.

The man at the wheel, who had stood firmly till now, gave way under a hot rush of fire, and leaped overboard, abandoning the steamer to her fate. Left to itself, the doomed vessel, with its awful freight of fire, headed to the wind, which gathered up the flames and hurled them in broad sheets and masses back upon the poor creatures who crouched upon the deck. They started up like herds of deer in a burning prairie, and rushed toward the bow dumb with horror. There they huddled together in a trembling crowd, turning their wild, white faces on the sea of fire which raged behind them. Some crept out on the bowsprit and clung to it. Others had dragged articles of furniture with them which they were lashing together as a forlorn hope.

Lander snatched up his daughter and followed with the rest. He too had seen the boat in which Cora had found safety, and knowing that Virginia could swim like her cousin, resolved that she should be saved.

When they reached the bow, he took Virginia in his arms and kissed her with solemn tenderness.

"Oh, father, this is terrible—must we die? Must we die?"

A great surge of smoke swept over them and he held her face close to his bosom till it went by.

"Virginia, hear me."

She guessed what he was about to say, and cried out against it:

"No, no, papa—I never will—never without you."

"But Virginia, my child."

She clung to him wildly, desperately.

"But you can swim. The boat is not so far off," he pleaded.

"But you, papa, can you swim?"

Lander shook his head.

"Then I will not go. Better a thousand times die here together. What would life be without you?"

"Virginia, this is wrong. It is selfish."

"No—no—no, father! and if it is, God will forgive the child who wishes to live or die with her own father. See, I am not afraid. When the fire drives us away from here, we will jump into the water together. I can swim for us both a little while, then, if we must go down, God will see how it was and let us be together again, for He alone knows how dearly I love you."

"My child, my child!"

The old man lifted her in his arms and was about to hurl her over. She could swim, and alone, without incumbrance, might reach the boat. With another to drag her down, it would be certain death.

She understood his design and clung to him with passionate tenacity.

"Father—father, I will not!"

"It must be. God help us, child—it must, it must!"

"Not yet, father; not alone. I will not go alone."

She clung to him madly, turning her stone, white face over one shoulder and watching the conflagration with frightened eyes.

"Oh, father, the wind is with us. See how it fights back the flames. But, my God—my God, how that slow, cruel fire eats into the deck! How it crumbles and falls piecemeal into that red gulf! It creeps upon us inch by inch, and the space is so small now. Not yet! father, not yet! We have a few minutes more. Then we will go together—only so. God is good to give us this one chance of death without torture. Stand closer, close to the bulwark, father. How the poor creatures crowd! Yes, yes, we will give way for children, they must not burn. Poor mother—poor woman. Go first—go first—we can wait."

A tall, powerful man from the steerage, with an infant in his arms, was pushing by them, huddling his wife and four other children up to the charred bulwarks. The children gave one glance into the depths below and cowered back to their mother's feet, whimpering and sobbing in pale terror. The man placed the infant on its mother's bosom and took them both in his arms with solemn tenderness. The woman released herself wildly from his arms and cried out:

"They are not all here. Brian! Brian! Oh, Father of mercies, where is my son?"

That instant a lad came across that skeleton deck, leaping from one blazing beam to another with the desperate energy of some wild deer breaking away from the hounds. His feet sent back a storm of hot sparks as they touched the seething wood. His woollen clothes caught fire, enveloping him in heavy gushes of smoke. He struck the last beam with a staggering leap—reeled dizzily, and was plunging head foremost into the gulf of fire yawning for him, when a single cry sent the strength back to his heart. His mother's voice reached him through the roar of the flames and struck the sick weakness from brain and limb. With a desperate bound, he landed by his father's side, strangled and quivering from head to foot. His hands were scorched; his hair was crisped, and a deadly whiteness showed itself through the smoke and ashes which blackened his young face. He struggled to speak, but his chest only heaved and the parched upper lip curved away from his teeth, giving his mouth an awful look of agony. His eyes were uplifted to his father's face, burning with pity, despair, and such courage as the hero feels when he leads a forlorn hope on the battle-field.

He spoke at last, and his voice was like the cry of a wild eagle.

"Father, let me go first. God has saved me for that!"

The father turned and looked upon him almost with a smile on his lip.

"It will give them courage, father. Mother—mother, it is only a moment's pain. Kiss me, mother, for I must go."

He flung both arms about his mother, folding in the infant. He kissed the quivering face of the woman, the wondering eyes of the babe, seized his father's hand, wrung it hard, and clambered up the bulwark.

A feeble hand caught at his clothes and a wild voice cried out:

"Brian, Brian, take me, take me; I cannot climb up alone!"

This was the eldest girl, who grasped eagerly at his smouldering jacket. The lad sprang back, took her in his arms and tried to lift her up the bulwark.

"Yes, Ellen, we will go together—you and I."

He gained the narrow ledge of wood, and was dragging her up, when a lurch of the half-burned wreck broke his hold and sent him headlong into the deep; she fell back upon the deck moaning.

The father turned to his wife, who shook so violently that the babe almost fell from her hold.

"One has gone—Mary—Mary!"

It was all he could say. The words turned to ashes on his lips, but his eyes looked out upon the water with an awful meaning.

The frightened creature understood him and held the child close. She lifted her cold lips meekly for the last death kiss, but he had no power to give it. The rugged whiteness of his face met hers one moment and was withdrawn again. Then, with his strong arms shaking like reeds, he lifted her upward and loosened his hold. Twenty feet below there was a break in the waters, a dash, and the sharp cry of an infant, but the sounds were faint and lost

in the roar of the flames. The man bent forward to look over, but his heart failed, and, with a desperate calmness, he selected the smallest child left in that quaking group—a little, chubby girl—and lifted her to the bulwark. One instant those great, quivering hands rested on her head—then came the gleam of a baby face against the black side of the vessel, a flash of soft hair in the wind, and scarcely a ripple followed to tell where the little creature dropped into eternity. Another—and then the last of the flock stood, white and still, while the wretched father blessed her as he had sanctified the others.

She was the oldest of four girls, something more than a child, but the most helpless of them all, for the girl was hunchbacked and dwarfed, but it was the quiet, calm face of an angel that looked up into those agonized eyes.

"Good-bye, father—I am not afraid."

The words were on her lips when she dropped from under the benediction of his hands, and now all was gone. Of a large family, the father stood alone. He turned that hard, white face upon the spot where his little brood had stood, looking yet for another. Then came a cloud of vague bewilderment, followed by the truth, sharp and quick. With one strong cry of terrible anguish his arms were flung upward and he plunged overboard.

Virginia and her father saw all this and their souls grew strong within them. What had they to give up compared to the awful duty which this man had performed? How patiently, and with what meek faith that woman had gone down to her death! It seemed a little thing for them to die with each other. After such heroism, Lander knew Virginia would stay by him to the last, and forbore to urge her farther. So long as there was a chance of life on the vessel, they would seek it together; when that was gone, a plunge after that doomed family and all would be over.

But their time grew short now. The fire was burning

fiercely towards them. Every instant narrowed the space which was even now overcrowded with human life. Each minute some unhappy wretch was jostled overboard, as the crowd pressed closer and closer to avoid the burning death that seemed ravenous for every human life on board.

"Lift me up to the bulwark, father, if there is a hope of life let me search for it."

Mr. Lander lifted her up to the charred bulwark, and held her there with desperate firmness. She leaned forward and gazed through the eddying smoke out on the sea—praying for a sail—praying for help—nothing was in sight save a few struggling creatures in the water—that boat drifting to and fro at a safe distance, with Cora Lander in it, and a frail raft on which two or three desperate men were working hard to keep above water. Beyond this she saw one or two capsized boats drifting keel upward—and that was all.

From this hopeless waste of waters, she turned to the vortex of fire raging beneath her—turned with thrills of terror that made the very heart shudder in her bosom.

It was an awful sight! The great ship lay seething in the water more than half consumed, a skeleton of fire preying on itself. The light wood-work had flashed out with vehemence and sunk to a sea of fiery smoke in the hold. Except a few miserable feet at the prow, nothing was left but a mighty cradle of red-hot iron, ribbed and beamed and braced with such massive strength that fire itself seemed incapable of destroying it. Huge beams, scintillating stormy sparks with every sweep of the wind, spanned what had been the deck from bulwark to bulwark. Great, crooked ribs of solid fire curved down to the engine, which lay massive and inert—its iron heart pulseless—its mighty arms paralyzed—its boiler a hollow ball of iron, and all its wonderful mechanism a vast heap of white heated metal.

Virginia Lander recoiled from this fearful sight, and sunk back to her father's arms, shuddering.

"There is no hope," she said. "The fire is working this way and undermining us. Anything is better than a death like that!"

"How near?" questioned the old man.

"God may give us half an hour."

"Even in that time He may send us help," said the father, bending over her with yearning tenderness. "Oh, my child, when I think of your young life going out so early, I'm a coward!"

"No, no, father; after looking down into that awful gulf of fire, death in the cool waters seems Heaven to me," said Virginia.

That moment a portion of the deck on which they stood crumbled in, and a column of flame shot up close to them. Two or three women, mad with fright, leaped overboard, their faces marble, their garments one mass of fire; others sunk with fragments of the deck into the hot torments of the hold and were lost in those scarlet billows before a sound of anguish could tell of their fate.

Nearer and nearer those doomed ones came the stifling death, not a foot of safe timber was left. On the very edge of that hollow cradle of fire they stood, clinging together for the last time.

Now a slender dart of flame shot up between the warped boards on which they stood. Still they clung closer to each other, shrinking away from it.

CHAPTER III.

ADRIFT.

"FATHER, our time has come."

Virginia Lander spoke gently, and in a calm voice, but her face was white as snow.

The father bent his colorless face to hers, kissed her on the forehead, and wound his arms around her.

"God have mercy upon us!" broke from his white lips.

"Oh God, save him!" trembled upon hers.

They would have gone quietly over, but a dozen others, stricken with new terror by this sudden outburst of flame, rushed over them and separated the father from his child. It was like a stampede of wild animals, trampling each other to death. A whole crowd hurled itself into the deep at once, blackening the waters one horrible minute and sinking into eternity the next.

Virginia Lander was borne down with the rest, but she rose again, crying out as her head reached the surface:

"Father—father—father!"

No answer! Men were sinking all around her, but among all those struggling creatures she could not see him. She supported herself on the water, shrieking as each man went down with a mad fear that it was her father whose death she witnessed. Then, as the waters swallowed those toiling wretches one by one, she commenced swimming up and down the black hull of the vessel, pleading with those who hung by the chains and ropes to tell her if they had seen him fall.

A sweet voice from one of the trailing ropes answered her at last:

"I saw him come down close by the bow," it said; "he fell with the great crowd."

It was the hunchbacked girl, up to her neck in water, clinging to a rope.

Virginia made for the rope, and seizing upon it, dragged herself up half-way from the water, searching right and left for that one face. She dropped at last, bringing the girl with her. But for this she would have sunk without a struggle, weighed down by despair. The child gave a sharp cry and struggled for the rope again with a last instinct of life.

While lifted above the water, Virginia had seen the boat lying at a safe distance, with her cousin in it. She held the girl up, seizing the rope again.

"Lay your hand on my shoulder; hold firmly, but do not pull me down," she said. "We will try for the boat. Are you afraid?"

"No."

"Cling to me, then: do not struggle—one moment—he may be floating yet."

She lifted herself out of the water again and made a last despairing search for her father. Then, with a moan, she settled down and told the hunchback how to fasten both arms around her.

The girl obeyed without a word, and with her wild eyes fixed upon the boat, that frail girl gave herself to the deep, burdened with another human life. Slowly and firmly her delicate arms smote the water. Her wild eyes were fixed on the boat, which lay motionless just beyond the fiery glow of the flames. How cool and quiet it looked. That one dark spot was life to her, all the rest a grave.

It was wonderful how strong and self-possessed she was. That other life clinging to hers inspired her with a power of compassion. She could have sunk herself, without a moan; but that helpless soul, she must bear her to a place of safety. While God gave her strength she would use it. So she moved steadily on, growing weaker and weaker, but slowly nearing the boat.

When Cora Lander saw that face rising above the water

she gave a cry, which the struggling creature heard, it was so sharp and ringing.

"Take up the oars! Take up the oars! Pull off! pull off!" she called out to the men.

The men, who had been watching this brave girl struggling toward them, snatched their oars and pushed forward to meet her. Cora seized one of them fiercely by the arm.

"Not that way—are you mad? They will be upon us like sharks. How many boats have you seen swamped before your eyes? Back—back, I say, and out to sea! We are loaded down already—another would sink us!"

The man shook her off with horror. He thought that the two girls were sisters.

"Bear away toward the ship, one and all," he cried. "See that head in the water with its trail of hair, and the other face behind. They shall be saved if I go overboard to make room."

Human hearts are full of good impulses, say what you will. Every manly arm in that boat gave its strength to save those sinking girls.

"Pull on; pull away—see, she wavers; her strength is gone—great Heaven, they will sink, and we so near!"

Cora half started up in the boat, white as death, but with cruel expectation in her eyes.

"Keep up, keep up—hold on another minute, and we are with you," shouted the generous fellow, while the oar bent under his strong force and the boat plunged forward like a goaded race-horse.

That brave girl heard the cry, and made another feeble effort to sustain herself; but the hunchback dragged heavily upon her and she felt herself going.

"It is me—it is me—I am sinking you," cried the sweet voice, and the slender arms loosened their hold.

"No, no," broke in a sob from the noble young creature, as the tightness was removed from her neck. "Clasp tighter—tighter—God is giving me new strength."

But the girl dropped away in silence, sunk and rose again close by the boat, which came up with cautious slowness. An oar was thrust out for her. She seized it and was dragged in half suffocated.

A drift of human hair, weltering like sea-weed in the water, was all that could be seen of Virginia, who was sinking. The man who had taken command leaped overboard, gave a plunge and brought her up, senseless.

"Make room," he cried, lifting her up to the hands stretched out to receive her. "God help us, she may be dead!"

"No," said that sweet voice once more, "God would not let her die so. Put her head in my lap; she shall have some of my life."

The hunchback struggled up to a sitting posture in the bottom of the boat, and they laid Virginia's head in her lap, while the man who had saved her took a travelling flask of brandy from his pocket and poured some of it through those white lips.

"Is she better—will she come to life?" cried Cora Lander, bending over her. Does that blue around her mouth mean death? She is my cousin, sir, and I have a right to know."

"She is not dead," answered the hunchback, looking up. "With my hand here, I can feel her heart stir."

The strange creature had forced one of her tiny hands under the wet garments that lay heavily on Virginia's bosom, and found her heart fluttering with faint thrills of life—so faint, that a rude hand might not have discovered them.

Cora took up one of her cousin's hands and began to chafe it in her own, stopping now and then to feel if there was a pulse in the wrist.

"You feel anxious now," said the man who had saved that young creature. "Still, if we had listened to you, she would have been dead long ago."

Cora lifted her eyes to his face with something like defiance.

"How could I know that it was my cousin?"

"As I did from the first; sister or cousin, I scarcely know which, the likeness is so great."

"But I did not dream of it."

"Still she was a woman struggling for life," replied the man, forcing a few more drops of brandy between the lips, which had parted a little, but were yet without color.

"Man or woman, I had no power of knowing," was the half reproachful answer. "I, who am so short-sighted."

"But you seemed to be the first one conscious of her struggles to reach us."

"You are unkind—almost rude, sir. I saw a crowd of black objects plunging down the sides of the vessel and swarming this way. How could we withstand them? If I begged you not to let them swamp us, was that so very unfeeling? But you have saved my dear cousin, and I can forgive all."

"See, her lips move—she stirs," said the low voice of the hunchback once more. "Let us thank God and be still."

Cora crouched down by her cousin, sobbing piteously.

"Oh, Virgie, dear Virgie, open your eyes and say if I deserve all this man has been saying! I, who love you better, a thousand times, than myself! Cousin, cousin, do you hear me?"

The hand which she was chafing clasped itself feebly around her fingers, and a low, gurgling murmur died on those lips. Then the soft gray eyes opened, and dazzled by the slanting sunbeams, closed again.

"Is it you, Cora?"

"Yes, cousin—yes, we are safe now."

"And—and father?"

No one answered her. She waited awhile and a spasm of pain swept over her.

At last she spoke very, very faintly:

"Is my father here, Cora?"

"No; we have not seen him!"

Virginia fell back heavily on the hunchback's lap, and visible thrills of pain swept over her. At last two great drops came from under her closed lashes and rolled slowly down her cheeks. She did not mention her father again, but lay still while the sunset came and went, leaving the waters purple around her.

The boat had drifted slowly off from this burned ship, which lay a smouldering heap of blackness upon the ocean. A few human beings were desperately clinging to the bowsprit, which could be seen cutting blackly against the sky. But Virginia Lander had no courage to look at the mournful spectacle, and the boat, with its freight of human souls, drifted slowly out to sea. The night closed in upon them with purple warmth awhile, then deepened into a black void with one fiery spot burning like a red-hot coal through that chaos. That one glow of fire was the burning ship.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MANSION ON THE RIVER.

UP the Hudson river—no matter how far—stands a mansion that would be wonderfully beautiful in any country where the leaf never falls. In the summer time it is a splendid place enough even here, for its walls are of pure white marble, and its architecture Grecian, which gives you an exquisite idea of coolness and grace scarcely possessed by any other habitation. It is not exactly a palace, though many a queen has contented herself in a home less spacious. But the tall Corinthian pillars that

gleam through the trees—the balconies sculptured like snow-wreaths—windows of solid plate glass, so clear that you scarcely know when they are open or shut—and cornices wrought with no common chisel, or designed by no common brain, give you an idea of splendor scarcely less than royal.

The grounds, too, convey an impression of foreign lands, for it is the first week in September, and all around this dwelling, arrayed in wonderful contrast, is the cool green of closely rolled sward and trees splendidly grouped, sheltering the blaze and glory of flowers born in every known country that the sun shines upon. A lawn, large enough for a small farm, rolls with green breaks and undulations to the edge of a precipice which terraces it from the river.

Hot-houses and graperies form long avenues of rolling glass, which the sunshine turns into waves of glittering silver at noonday, and kindles up with bright golden fires for an hour before the night closes in. A stretch of woodland lies to the left, full of shadowy dells and green nooks, where splendid ferns and young wintergreen are found in abundance. Here nature holds unmolested reign. The forest turf is kept clear of brush, and dead branches are pruned away from the oaks and beech trees, letting the sun in here and there with a cheerful effect.

Along the outskirts of this grove, between its marginal trees and the lawn, a pretty upland stream, of no insignificant depth, has cut a ravine where ash and dogwood droop and cast the snow of ten thousand blossoms from year to year. Through the boulders and rocks that break up this ravine, the stream descends in riotous waterfalls—sleeps in deep pools—where the speckled trout once led a deliciously tranquil life—and rushes down to the great river in miniature breakers that fill the air with music. Two or three rustic bridges cross this stream, from which pleasant

footpaths lead into the woods, where singing birds answer back the sweet chime of the waterfalls, and half tame squirrels leap from bough to bough, rustling the leaves in harmony with all the other wild, sweet sounds.

Back of the house, and away on either hand, lie broad meadows, rich in a second crop of grass—orchards, just beginning to droop under the weight of swelling fruit, and dim woodlands, left to nature only where art fails to give them possibilities of new beauty.

This is all one domain. Its owner was Amos Lander, the man whose terrible fate we have recorded in the last chapter, with that of the steamer in which he had set sail for America. During ten years of his life, Lander had retired from business, wealthy, honored, and in all respects a prosperous man. A large portion of that time he had devoted to the pleasant task of beautifying and improving the place which was hereafter to be the home of his darling child and heiress, Cora Virginia Lander, usually called Virginia, to distinguish her from her cousin of the same appellation, who took the other name of Cora.

During the time that these two young girls had been completing their education under the best teachers of France and Italy, the kind old man had devoted himself heart and soul to embellishing this noble home, which was to be their first grand surprise on returning to their native land.

Amos Lander had been abroad several times during that period; for it was impossible for him to live years together without seeing his child. He was also deeply attached to that other Cora Virginia, who was the child of his only brother, left to his bounty and compassion by that brother on his death-bed. If Amos Lander's heart was bound up in his daughter, it was good enough and broad enough to enfold this orphan child with a love that was almost paternal. Those who watched his face might have seen by the

glow of love that his own child was forever uppermost in that warm heart, but in all his acts he treated the girls exactly as if they had been sisters, usually called them his children, and, with delicate tact, avoided such explanations as would have led to inquiry with regard to their relative claims on him.

Each time that he visited Europe, Lander brought home statues, exquisite marbles, pictures, bronzes and rare plants, all intended to beautify the Paradise he was creating for his child and ward.

Not until the year in which Lander set forth to bring the girls home had that marble house been complete in all its appointments; but for some years before the girls went away it had been the residence of Mrs. Noel Lander, widow of the brother we have spoken of, and the mother of his only child, whom we left drifting upon the ocean in a frail boat, without food and almost without hope.

This woman had never been permitted to feel the poverty to which the death of an insolvent husband might have consigned her. In her prosperity, she had been reckless, extravagant and terribly ambitious. By audacious expenditure she had attempted to conceal a low origin and many humiliating antecedents. But while the younger Lander went backward day by day, everything throve and turned to gold with Amos. At last the younger brother died, heart-broken and ruined, leaving his wife destitute, with a child to encumber her future.

Then Amos Lander came forward, forgetting everything but the brother who had loved this woman, and holding her very faults sacred for his sake. He took the widow into his own family, as if she had been a sister in reality. Her child shared the same nursery and the same lessons with his own. A good and gentle wife welcomed her ungrudgingly to a share of her home, her wealth and such household affection as loving hearts bestow on the bereaved.

But Amos Lander, noble and generous as he was, fell into deep grief a year or two after his brother's widow became an inmate of his family. The woman whom he had loved with all his life and soul died suddenly, breaking up the richest hopes of his life. He was never the same man after this. Business lost its stimulant, pleasure its zest. The bloom and brightness of his life was gone. While he was in this state of mournful apathy, the widow Lander quietly took possession of all household authority, and, with adroit kindness, settled herself as mistress of the family. If her brother-in-law thought of this at all, he was grateful for it in a passive way, and thus strengthened her position.

But that did not satisfy her craving nature. She would be mistress in her own right, not by sufferance. The rich widower should be brought to acknowledge not only how needful she was to him, but that he could not live without her. As his wife she would possess everything that a nature like hers could desire. His wealth excited her cupidity, and his position was exalted enough to gratify even her grasping aspirations. In order to captivate this man, she brought all the powers of a really fine person and considerable talent into action. But all her efforts were insufficient even to arouse their object to a sense of her wishes. The idea of giving a stepmother to his daughter never entered the good man's imagination, and if the thought had presented itself, the woman whose false ambition had brought ruin to a beloved brother could not have been its object. A person who could satisfy herself with possession without one honorable effort to deserve it was not likely to attract a man like Lander. Toiling to make the rich man her victim, she was compelled to live upon his bounty, and this galled her ambitious spirit to its depths.

About this time she began to hate that generous man with the quiet, settled hatred which a woman, not scorned

but neglected, can feel in all its bitterness. This hatred extended even to his child; but it was never once expressed by word or action. The widow was dispirited, but she did not altogether despair. Time frequently carries great contradictions and improbabilities in his bosom. She could watch and wait. During several years the widow did keep her soul in tolerable patience; but there is no human being so blind as the man who veils his eyes with one grand idea of the heart. Lander had no future save that which centred about his child. To him she was the loveliest and best creature that the sun ever shone upon. Her smile warmed his heart to the core. Her laugh was all the music he ever cared to hear. Her breath, as he kissed her, was like the perfume of roses. Her childish love was absolute despotism; her tiny hand held his very heartstrings. Fortunately for him the child grew up good and true-hearted, like her mother. Beautiful also, but of a different type from the woman he had lost, whose soft black eyes and raven hair haunted him to the day of his death with a sweet remembrance of beauty, perfect in its kind.

As a lily breathes the perfume of kindred lilies, this child possessed all that was brightest and sweetest about her mother, the tender smile and loving expression—while she was like her father's family in form and glowing warmth of color. These latter traits she shared alike with her less fortunate cousin, but the expression was all her own.

Time wore on and there was little change. Amos Lander was kind to his brother's widow, and more than kind to his orphan niece, who inherited all her low-born mother's taste for splendor and thirst for wealth. He loved them, too, in a secondary way, because one looked like his idol and the other had been in many ways useful to her childhood. Besides, the brother who was dead had been very dear to him. So, next to the one being who possessed

him supremely, these two persons stood nearest to his affections.

Things were in this state when Amos Lander took his last voyage, with the purpose of bringing the young girls home. He left Mrs. Noel Lander in full charge of the mansion, and at last she felt the joy and glory of supreme command. No person born to luxury could have enjoyed it with the zest which this woman experienced when she found herself mistress of that almost princely establishment. She took her enjoyments to the full as they arose, like a humming-bird that leaves no drop of sweetness in the honeysuckle for want of vigorous shaking. The choicest of everything in that luxurious dwelling had already been appropriated to her own use. Her chamber window looked out on the brightest flower-beds and coolest trees. Of all the rare objects gathered in the mansion, she selected what seemed to her most valuable and gorgeous for her own rooms and personal use. The woman loved her daughter, it is true, but not as she worshipped herself, not as a good mother loves her child.

She was sitting at breakfast—this woman who seemed at this time little better or worse than her fellow-creatures—she was getting anxious about the steamer, and had asked more than once for the morning papers, though it was hardly time for the train which brought them up the river to be in. Still her anxiety failed to diminish an appetite which was both keen and fastidious. She went on with her breakfast with a relish—picked out the dainty white meat from the breast of a nicely-broiled chicken which lay on a plate of china, and disturbed the little island of cream that floated on her coffee with a gold spoon, which she stopped now and then to examine with a sensuous enjoyment of possession.

"I wonder how I ever got along without these things," she said, laying down her spoon and leaning back to survey

the apartment. "How rich and bright it looks. This is the joy of wealth—well-grounded wealth—for, next to that girl, he loves us, and an estate like his can bear dividing—a moiety of it is riches. But then, if he should die without a will—if this belated steamer should be lost, I am a beggar. I, who shudder in my sleep, dreaming of the old times when I was sent barefooted on a cold October morning to search for the cows browsing in some swamp before we could hope for a meagre breakfast of hasty pudding and milk. What if I come to that in the end? Could I do anything to prevent it? So many years of comforts like these have left me helpless as a child. Great Heavens, I wish the steamer would come! it terrifies me to think of this one black chance! David—David, is not that the whistle?"

The waiter thus addressed—who was bringing in a fruit-dish on which lay two magnificent clusters of hot-house grapes, purple and amber-hued, blending their tints in luscious ripeness—came forward and placed the fruit before her.

"No, madam, that is a passing boat, but the train is due now, and John is waiting at the depot. We shall have the papers directly, never fear."

Mrs. Lander bent over the dish of fruit, touching it daintily with her finger.

"When were these cut?" she inquired, rather sharply.

"At sunset yesterday, I believe, madam."

"Take them to the kitchen, and order the gardener to bring me some fresh from the vines," she said; "and see that this does not happen again."

"Yes, madam. It is not often that you ask for fruit at breakfast; that is how it happened, I suppose."

"The possibility that I may ask should be enough," was the haughty answer. "There—there—surely that is the train. Run and meet John. Bring me the papers at once."

"But the grapes, madam?"

"Well, yes. It will scarcely make a minute's difference. Go to the gardener. See, John is coming up the terrace steps, walking fast. Go—go—"

The woman was really agitated, and her hand shook as she reached it forth to receive the papers, which John gave her with unusual hesitation.

"Have you read—have you seen anything?" she demanded, in a voice made sharp with anxiety.

She opened the paper as she spoke and looked at the first page.

"AN OCEAN STEAMER BURNED AT SEA."

The woman read this and uttered a cry of pain, so sharp and sudden that David, who was half-way to the kitchen, ran back in affright. Mrs. Lander had fallen forward in her chair, with one hand pressed to her side; quick spasms swept over her face, and she shook from head to foot. David stooped to take up the paper, which had fallen to the floor; but she snatched it from him, and clenching each hand on an edge of the sheet, made a desperate effort to hold it still and read, with some fortitude, the awful calamity which had befallen her.

"Burned to the water—all lost! All lost! Great Heavens, this is awful!" she cried, dashing the paper from her and sinking back in her chair, shocked and trembling. "Read it," she added, "read it, and search out if any one was saved—the words run like vipers before my eyes, I cannot make them out! Read, and if they are all dead tell me at once and let the blow kill me."

David took the paper from her shaking hand and read down the first column, which was half capitals. She watched him with a shrinking terror in her eyes.

"All! all! are they all gone?" she said, with a struggle of the voice.

"Some boats put out, but they were swamped; eighteen persons were found clinging to the bowsprit—"

"Men or women?"

"Men—all men. The women had jumped overboard."

"My child! my child!"

A pang of womanly anguish broke forth in this cry—for one moment the mother forgot everything save that her child was dead. This outburst of true sorrow touched the men who witnessed it with compassion. David knelt before her and attempted to chafe her cold hands; she wrung them from him with passionate violence and buried her face in them.

"Oh, it has come to pass—it has come to pass! I am a beggar again!"

The two men looked at each other, wondering. The woman dashed her hands apart, burst into a fierce laugh, and slid from the cushions of her chair to the carpet in strong hysterics. She was taken up with her eyes set and the white upper lip curved back from her teeth, shrieking like a maniac. The burden of her cry was, "I am a beggar—I am a beggar!"

CHAPTER V.

THE IRON SAFE.

THE two men carried Mrs. Lander to her room and laid her down on the white bed, with a canopy of lace falling mercifully over the selfishness of her agony. Through the delicate frostwork of this lace they watched her writhe and moan like a spirit in torment. A woman servant came in but dared not approach the bed, for the cries that broke from under that cloud of lace appalled her. So the servants stood together in a helpless group, gazing wistfully at one another, shocked and irresolute. They all wanted to

help and comfort her, but were afraid. At last the woman started up on the bed and flung back the volumes of lace that shut her in, with a wild sweep of one arm. Her breakfast cap, with its fresh rose-colored trimming, had fallen off, and lay in a knot of matted lace and ribbon under the hand upon which she leaned. Her hair, scarcely yet touched with gray, fell in a coil to her shoulder and slowly untwisted there like a serpent troubled with sluggish life. The spasms had left her face cold and white, but full of keen intelligence.

"David," she said, in a shrill whisper, "come here."

The man approached her and bent his head.

"You have his keys—bring them here. He was sorting papers the night before he left. There is a will! The keys—the keys of his desk, I tell you; I want to look for the will."

"But, madam—"

"Hush! Do not say it—do not dare to say it! I know there was a will. Lander was not a fool or bad enough to go to sea without a will. So bring the keys, and when I find it you shall have five hundred dollars."

She whispered this in his ear with the craft of an insane person, and watched his face keenly to mark the effect made by her promise.

David, who was Mr. Lander's confidential man, hesitated what to do. If his master was dead, this lady would be, in fact, the person who had a right to command him. He knew nothing of the law in such cases, and had no one wiser than himself to consult with.

"Give me the keys, I will have them," said Mrs. Lander, imperatively.

David went to his room and brought down his master's keys with evident reluctance. The offer of five hundred dollars had aroused unpleasant suspicions in his mind. Mrs. Lander took the keys quietly, for her mind had re-

gained its firmness somewhat, and even in that hysterical fit was active for her own interests. She twisted the loose hair up from her shoulders, and flung a shawl over her white morning dress, which had been crushed and torn about the neck in her struggles.

"I will ring for you if any help is wanted," she said, looking David steadily in the eyes, for she saw by his face that he was prepared to follow her. Her coolness impressed the man so decidedly that she had left the room before he could find words for an opposing answer. When she was gone, the two servants stood gazing at each other. John gravely shook his head. Both these men had been under Mr. Lander's employ long before he gave up active business, and were better educated than the common run of servants. Having followed their old employer into private life out of pure gratitude and affection, they still kept a vigilant eye on his interests, and mutually disliked the woman who had just walked away from them with such hard self-possession.

"I tell you, Dave, she's a clipper," said John, with a sob in his voice. "Take care—take care. Who knows what the law will do with this place and all that belonged to him? That poor, pretty child too. Down in the deep, black water—think of it! think of it!—with her yellow hair, and them eyes shut and cold! I seem to see her now! They went together, Dave; I'll be bound they went down with their arms around each other. Oh, it's hard! it's hard!"

"But about Mrs. Noel, John; I don't like this. She come to, awful sudden for an honest woman. What right has she, after all, in Mr. Lander's office, or study, as she calls it? None at all. I tell you, Eben Stone is the only man who has a right to those keys, and I've been a fool to give 'em up."

"That's a fact, if one had but the heart to realize it—but I can't—I can't—with him and her under water,"

answered John, wringing his hands in genuine sorrow. "All that he had seems to be nothing compared to them two lives."

"I tell you what I will do, John," answered David, whose grief was too deep for much expression. "I'll jump onto the down train and bring Eben Stone up here. He'll know what is right, and do it—women or no women."

"Yes, I would," answered John. "To think that a woman could start up in the midst of a fit like that and ask for keys! Yes, I'd do it. Eben Stone's the man to settle her. Bring him up, Dave."

David went into the back entrance hall for his hat, and John followed him.

"As a general thing, I don't think peaking and listening through keyholes just honorable," he whispered, "but for this once I reckon I'll do it."

David shook his head and hurried out of the hall, for the rattle of a distant train admonished him that there was no time to lose. John turned another way and, with the feeling of a heavy weight upon his shoulders, crept up the back stairs, resolved to find out what the widow was doing in his master's study, and yet honestly ashamed of the method forced upon him. But he found the door locked and heard no sound within.

Mr. Lander's study or business office was in the second story, remote from the bed-chambers, and in the back part of the house. He had been a man of fine natural tastes, and there was an excellent sense of fitness in all his arrangements which made that entire dwelling like a well-studied poem. There was little ornament in this room. Devoted as it was to the practical realities of life, everything connected with it was plain and simple. A heavy black walnut desk, almost entirely devoid of carving; a case or two of the same sombre wood filled with papers, and a solid iron safe built in the wall, composed the principal

articles of furniture. Three office chairs, cushioned with green leather, a basket for waste papers, now entirely empty, and a severely plain gas burner of bronze upon the desk, completed the room. The walls were frescoed in panels of dove-color, pointed with green, and even the mantel-piece was one solitary picture—that of a little girl sitting on the grass and taking off her shoe, with a roguish, naughty expression of the face that made you love the golden-haired imp even on canvas. Here, in this business office, where no other signs of luxury were allowed to creep, Mr. Lander had installed the shadow of his child, the creature for whom he thought, and calculated, and saved gold by thousands, loving the exertion because it might bring power and happiness to her in the distant hereafter.

When Mrs. Lander entered this room a dreary chill fell upon her. Everything was so orderly, so clean and cold, that it seemed like forcing her way into a death chamber. But after one half moment's pause she walked in resolutely, sat down in one of the office chairs and unlocked a principal compartment of the desk. It was full of papers neatly arranged in packages and labelled with the methodical precision of an old business man. She took up these packages one by one, and re-arranged them carefully. Her face was no longer pale, but hot with a living red. Her eyes, vivid and keen, darted from package to package with the quick scrutiny of a lawyer.

Nothing that she wanted was there, and with her lips compressed till their sensual fullness almost disappeared, she closed the desk and locked it with a sharp wrench of disappointment. Then her eyes fell on the iron door which enclosed the safe, and her face lighted up. What a fool she had been to waste so much precious time at the desk when the most important papers must be in the safe, which up to that moment she had overlooked. In the palm of her left hand she held a key, unlike the others,

but whose secret she understood. She paused a moment with her hand on the closet door—made a rapid calculation and applied the flat key. Then the heavy door swung open, and this was followed by an eager and quick rustling of paper. Directly she came forth from the iron closet with a folded paper in her hand. Her face was flushed scarlet, her eyes fairly scintillated with triumph. She unfolded the large sheet and devoured its contents eagerly.

"As I thought—as I knew," she said, aloud, pressing down the paper on the desk with both her hands. To Virginia. After her, if she dies childless, Cora—then, then me—me—me!"

Her voice rang through the room clear and exultant; she stooped her face and kissed the paper passionately, as if it had been a living soul. Then she fell to perusing it again, and a dead white blank settled on her face.

"Oh, this is too much—too much—too much! It hurls me down a precipice—I can grasp at nothing. This sick faintness—no, no, I must shake it off, or they will come and find me here and it thus."

The woman thought herself wholly alone, and her passion was so great that she spoke aloud with rash vehemence. At last she grew quiet and leaned over the desk, pressing it hard with both elbows, while her white face pored over the paper with the blank dreariness of despair.

"Great Heavens, what am I to do—what can I do?" she muttered at last, starting from the chair. "All this so near, so certain to pass from me. It is hard—it is terribly cruel!"

She paced the floor with quick, impetuous steps, then new thoughts crept over her, from which she shrunk shivering at first, as if they had been vipers. Then her movements became slow and measured, her face hardened to a more deadly white, and taking up the paper, she folded it carefully, and withdrawing it when half way to her pocket, placed it in her bosom.

A little time after this, John, who had been baffled in his attempt to watch all these proceedings, met Mrs. Lander in the upper hall moving toward her own suite of rooms. She stopped and spoke to him with the grave sweetness of a person who had striven to resign herself to inevitable bereavement.

"I could not examine anything in that room," she said. "The effort was too much. Where is David? To-morrow he must go to the city and summon Mr. Lander's man of business, who knows something of the law, I think."

"David has gone now," said John, bluntly. "I dare say Mr. Stone will reach here before night."

The woman started and drew a sharp breath, but the keys in her hand gave an assurance of power, and she merely said:

"Indeed, I am glad of it. Where does Mr. Stone live in the city? I mean, where is his place of business?"

John gave the required information. She thanked him with an air of sorrowful abstraction, and turned into a little sitting-room that opened alike from the hall and her bed-chamber.

CHAPTER VI.

EUNICE HURD.

In this pretty room Mrs. Lander found a woman who had for years acted partly as her maid, partly as a general superintendent of the household. This person was some years older than herself, with plenty of gray in her red hair, and a greenish tinge in her eyes, which had all the watchfulness of a cat's without the slumbrous softness peculiar to that animal.

The woman had no sign of grief on her hard face, but turned upon her mistress with the sharp vigilance of a fox.

"Is it true?" she said. "All sunk or buried—is it true?"

"Yes, Eunice, it is true," was the faint answer.

"Dreadful death! No wonder you look white," said the woman with curt sympathy. "What'll become of us, I should like to know?"

"Eunice."

"Well, I listen."

"Put on your bonnet and shawl, then walk to the telegraph station just as fast as you can."

"What about, Eliza Landers? I ain't used to being sent on errands, and won't agree to it, nohow."

"It must be done; I can trust no one else just now. Get your things. It is only a message that I must send to New York."

The woman arose and went out. Mrs. Landers sat down to her writing table and wrote this message for Eben Stone:

"Get me all the facts of this terrible disaster. Learn everything, and come to me at once. A messenger has gone to you, but in my grief I gave him no instructions. If it is true, be here to-morrow at the latest. I can do nothing without you."

"Take this," she said, when Eunice returned, "and tell them to send it at once."

Eunice took the paper and went out, reading it as she walked.

"Make out that word for me—she writes like spider tracks—what is it?" she said, addressing John, whom she met on the stairs.

John read the message, and went away heartily ashamed of his suspicions. Eunice threw a glance at him over her shoulder and proceeded on her errand smiling grimly.

That woman understood her mistress thoroughly, and served her well.

"This will give me time, which is everything," reflected the widow as she saw Eunice crossing the lawn with her quick, springy step. "He cannot go about town, gather up facts and reach this place before to-morrow. That secures twenty-four hours. If I could but force myself into composure now. This tremor is what men call nervousness, I suppose. How it shakes one! But an iron will should make iron nerves. I cannot afford to be weak; but when I think of my girl—my bright, proud girl, how I long to lie down and moan the pain out of my heart."

She looked out of the window, pausing there in her restless walk, and saw Eunice coming up from the station with the straw bonnet pushed back on her head and walking forward with great, rapid strides. How coarse and vulgar she looked with the velvet grass and the glow of richly grouped flowers all around her. It was the wonder of Mrs. Lander's friends that she had kept this woman about her person so long. Without taste in dress or kindness as a servant, even, she had for years and years managed to make herself of consequence to this luxurious woman in a way that no one could understand.

"While Mrs. Lander stood by the window, Eunice came into the room, treading down the moss-like pile of the carpet with her heavy shoes. The widow was singularly fastidious about these things, but she never rebuked Eunice, who just then flung off her shawl with a jerk that swept a Parian vase, all frosted over with snow-flowers, from a console close by, and dashed it into fragments.

"That comes of crowding up everything with trash that's of no more use than moonshine," she snarled, casting vicious glances at her mistress. "I wish you'd call somebody to sweep up the splinters—I'm out of breath, and won't."

Mrs. Lander stooped down and began to gather up the fragments herself. If she intended a rebuke by this action, it was a failure, for the woman shot one of the largest fragments toward her mistress with the toe of her shoe while untying her bonnet.

"As well you as I," she muttered, trampling another fragment to white powder in the carpet. "I sent your message, and all the house knows that I've done it—a thing that you'd never have thought of with all your brains."

"That was well. I am glad of it," Mrs. Lander answered, apparently unconscious of her servant's insolence.

"You want something else of me, I suppose, by the meek way you take things," continued the maid. "What is it?"

"Eunice!"

"Well, what is it, I say agin?"

"You have not practised writing much lately, I suppose?"

"Not a bit—who accuses me of it?"

"But you have not forgotten how, entirely, have you?"

"That depends on how much on it is to be done."

"You can write your name, I dare say."

"Which name?" questioned Eunice.

"The name you are known by here," answered Mrs. Lander.

"Never signed it more than twice in my life—felt like a thief—if the old folks had been alive wouldn't a done it. But, after all, a woman must earn her bread and butter in some way, now what was that you wanted. Now come to the mark—what is it you're driving at?"

"Eunice, you have always been faithful to me."

"Of course I have—why not?"

"But the secrets we have had together were nothing compared to this."

"Well, out with it. Don't beat this bird around the bush—it's of no use."

Mrs. Lander took the will from her bosom and held it open before her maid.

"You can read writing, I know. Try and understand that," she said, in a hoarse whisper.

Eunice read the paper from beginning to end twice over with the carefulness of a lawyer. Then she dropped the hand which held it to her side and looked into the white face of her mistress, which was half averted.

"Well, I understand it."

"You are no coward, Eunice."

"No; but here are three of these catecornered bits of paper. Who does the other belong to? A good deal depends on that."

"Your brother—is he about the stables now?"

"I reckon so, his supply of whisky has been kept up regular as you ordered."

"But is he sober?"

"He's always sober when his drink comes regular. I've told you so fifty times."

"Eunice, can we trust him?"

"I can, and that's enough."

"I will speak to him."

"That's what you haven't done these three months, and Josh feels it awfully, I can tell you."

"Is it so long? But he never comes near the house."

"Because his business is in the stables."

"Well, bring him here this evening after the rest are in bed."

"No I won't; he stomps like a horse, and they'd hear him stombling up the marble stairs. Go into his room yourself. It's over the carriage-house; he sleeps there alone. You walk like a cat, and I'll try the pussy-dodge for once in a pair of your quilted silk slippers. My feet

are small as yours, if I have got sandy hair and high shoulders."

Mrs. Lander mused deeply for a minute, during which she took the paper from Eunice and folded it again, then she said, with a strange oblivion of her servant's rude speech:

"Perhaps you are right, Eunice; Joshua so seldom comes to the house, that it might cause remark; but you must see him first."

"Of course I must."

"I will never forget this act of devotion," said the lady, with feeling.

"I don't mean that you shall," was the curt rejoinder.

"But I want to know one thing before we go a single step further. Is there such a thing as a genuine goose-quill pen on these premises. I wouldn't use one of them steel or gold things to save—no, I don't think I'd do it to save myself from getting married, or you from being just as poor as I am, lady as you are. And as for Josh—"

"There is not a pen of the kind in the house, Eunice, I am sure."

"Then we may as well shut up shop. If there was a goose on the premises, now, I'd soon manufacture a pen worth while. Goodness, now I've just thought of it. There's my white fan, that I've had ever since you got—"

"Eunice!"

"True as the bible. Well, as I was saying about the fan—it's got enough quills in it for a dozen pens; so that hash is settled. Just hunt up that little gimcrack knife with the gold handle, that you keep in what you call the dressing-case, and sharpen it up well before I come back."

Mrs. Lander opened her dressing-case and let out a bright glitter of gold from its scent bottles and pomade boxes, while she took out a little knife and began to sharpen it, obedient as a child to the curt directions of her

own servant. Her hand trembled a little in the operation, for she was a woman and a mother, after all—terribly bereaved, and, though intensely selfish, not altogether without natural feeling. Eunice came back directly with an old fan, which had once been white, in her hands. This she tore apart with something that sounded almost like a sigh.

"He gave me this the day you bought him off with a hundred dollar bill and sent him arter that other girl. I've kept it nigh upon twenty-five years, and now it's got to be torn up for you agin. It had a pink ribbon in it once, but that consarned young-un of yours tore it out for a doll's sash—the little—"

"Oh, Eunice, Eunice!—Don't, don't!—She is dead, she is dead!" cried the mother, with a sharp outburst of anguish.

"So she is," answered Eunice, pausing in her work of destruction on the fan. "I'd forgotten that. Well, don't shiver and shake so. I didn't mean it. Here now, try and see if you can make a pen worth while, and do stop taking on—it fidgets me like anything."

The quill which Eunice held out was a forlorn looking thing, pierced with a wire which had left its rust behind and moth-eaten in its plumage, but the heart of that strange creature yearned after it with coarse tenderness, for it had been a keepsake from the sole lover of her long barren life—the only possession she had connected with a sentiment. When the pretty knife in Mrs. Lander's hand rasped its way through the quill, the pang of regret which rose in that hard bosom ended in a growl, half rage, half pain.

"Give it to me," she said, "you cut like a butcher. That's no way to make a pen."

Eunice snatched the quill and knife—crowded herself up close to a window with her back to her mistress, and

fashioned a rude pen, which was pointed on her thumb-nail.

"There," she said, locking both pen and knife in the dressing-case, "that job's done. Now I'll go and find Josh. But do chirk up a little, that tallowy face fairly makes me sick. Take something, now do."

She searched among the crystal toilet bottles in the next room for some restorative, for her mistress was faint and exhausted, but found nothing to satisfy her, and went to her own room for a huge bottle of camphor, which was the only stimulant she had faith in. When she returned Mrs. Lander lay back in her chair, with closed eyes, lips perfectly bloodless and quivering with distress.

"This won't do—so just come out of it," cried Eunice, in a rage. "I scorn and despise a person who gives up half way. There, there, if that don't bring you right up to the mark, nothing on earth will."

Eunice dashed a quantity of camphor into the hollow of her palm as she spoke and held it under Mrs. Lander's nose, spite of the faint struggles made against it.

"Fainting away—I never saw you mean enough for that before. What has come over you?—getting childish in your old age?"

"Oh, Eunice, don't reproach me. Just that moment I realized so keenly that she was dead, and I all alone in the world," said the poor mother.

"All alone; ain't I with you?"

A broken sigh was all the answer Eunice got for this consolatory suggestion.

"There, thank you, I am better now, Eunice. Take the bottle away, it strangles me."

"Of course, but it has brought you to just as I expected. Now lie down while I go and have a talk with Josh. If I find you in that way when I come back, don't ask me to help you out, for I won't."

CHAPTER VII.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

Eunice found her brother Joshua in his room over the carriage-house, busy with a harness which he was putting in order. This man was a heavy, shambling fellow, younger by ten years than Eunice, and every way unlike her in person, save that he had the same sandy complexion. His limbs were short and stout, his countenance sullen, and his movements sluggish. He looked up as Eunice entered and nodded his head, but fell to work again without speaking.

"Joshua," said Eunice, "you have heard of what has happened, I dare say."

"Yes, the coachman was telling me of it. But it won't hurt us, will it? The place is left all the same."

"But it's ten chances to one if *she* stays in it," said Eunice.

"Ha! what's that? If *she* goes, why what's to become of us?"

"That's what I come to talk about, Joshua."

"Josh-u-a! Well, now, what has come over you to be so polite? Want something, I know, but what?"

"She wants something of you, brother."

"Brother! How loving we are all at once."

"Come this way, Josh, if you like that better; see that no one is about, first. There, sit down close by me on these carriage rugs, and speak low."

Joshua sat down on the pile of rugs where Eunice had placed herself and prepared to listen, with his legs stretched out and the soles of his coarse shoes turned toward the door.

For the first time almost in her life Eunice spoke low and in cautious words. It was a long time before she

could make herself thoroughly understood, and after the sense of her conversation had settled on that sluggish mind moments of sullen hesitation followed, which aggravated the hot temper of the woman almost beyond endurance.

"Is it sartin that the gal is dead?" he muttered at last.

"Certain. No woman was saved. Some got into the boats, but they were all swamped."

"And *she* will be turned out doors."

"Yes, a brother's wife isn't a natural heir, you know."

"I don't know nothing about it—but it'll sarve her right—hang her, what kind of feeling has she got, cutting down a feller's licker and stinting off his wages. That wasn't according to promise; darn her, she needn't come to me."

"But you and I will have to go, or work like dogs for what we get. You don't like hard work more than I do, Josh; but we shall get enough of it if *she's* driven out."

Joshua fell into thought here, and, dropping his chin on his chest, pondered over this rather unpleasant aspect of his affairs.

"Will she stop interfering with my drink?" he said at last.

"Yes, I promise that."

"And give me a decent bed. I'm tired of sleeping on horse blankets."

"I will send a mattress out this very day, with plenty of bedding and a carpet, if you want one."

"Which I don't—wasn't brought up on one; but the old folks did somehow or other make out to give us beds to sleep on."

"But you shall have everything. Would you rather be coachman or wait in the house?"

"Neither one nor t'other; shouldn't I make a figger with them fancy coats on, stuck up on a high seat like—oh, git out with yer nonsense! As for the house, you'd a been a tarnal sight wiser if you'd kept out of that. Why, there

ain't no more gentility in one of us than you'd find in a bush fence. It's like putting young crows in a brown thrasher's nest. No, no, I'll stay where I am, and potter about just as I've a mind to. She needn't talk about permission to me. It's too late, I'm Josh Warner—beg your pardon, Josh Hurd—and nothing else can be made of me. She must let me alone, give a little extra chink when I want it, and never put no more of her restrictions on the lick."

"She will promise all you want of her own accord, Joshua, and I will see that you get all that she promises," was the conciliatory reply.

"Let her come then," was the sullen answer. "But send out a lamp of some kind; she ain't used to seeing candles stuck in a blacking bottle, and might turn up her nose. Let her come, Eunice, and I'll make my own bargain—consarn her!"

Joshua scrambled to his feet with this concluding speech, and fell to work on the harness. Eunice watched him for a moment in grim displeasure, but gathered herself up and went away not altogether satisfied, for she saw that Joshua understood the situation and was disposed to make the most of it. Up to this time both she and her mistress had underrated his stupid cunning.

When Eunice returned to the house, she found her mistress prostrate on the bed with the curtains gathered so close that the vague outlines of her form and a wild glitter of the eyes were all that could be seen through them. She lay like a wounded animal in its lair, racked with anguish but vigilant for her own safety. The closing of a door or a heavy footstep threw her into a trembling fit, but her thoughts were keenly at work all the time.

Eunice had no mercy on a state of feelings of which she was and ever would be profoundly ignorant. So she swept the volumes of lace aside and looked down upon the suffering woman with harsh contempt.

"Well, sob away; I suppose you will cry it out sooner or later," she said. "I've seen Josh; he's growly, as I expected, but I talked him over, and if you promise fair he'll be on hand."

"What time is it now, Eunice?" asked the suffering lady.

"Nigh upon two o'clock, I reckon."

"Oh, Eunice, I should so like to be still a little while!"

"Well, why don't you? There is nothing to be done afore dark, when everybody is abed. Stay alone and cry it out, if you want to, I shan't interfere."

"Thank you Eunice," said the mistress, meekly. "There is such a struggle here, and here, that it kills me."

The wretched woman laid a hand on her heart, then touched her forehead, sighing heavily as she spoke.

"Take one at a time, that's my advice; give up the head and tussle it out with that tormenting thing you call a heart. Thank goodness, I never felt nothing there worth crying over. But to-night, when the time comes, just shut down the water-gates and give that head of yours a chance. Grief is grief, but business is business; mind that!"

Eunice dropped her arms, and the curtains settled over her mistress with the pliant fall of new snow. Seized by a vague instinct of humanity, she closed the blinds and filled the room with merciful twilight, then stole out on tiptoe with a caution that made her shoes creak dismally and sent a shudder from the bed.

Hour after hour Mrs. Lander lay upon her bed praying for a moment's sleep, which would not come. Her first passion of tears had, as Eunice predicted, set her mind free, and it came out of her great burst of grief hard and sharp as steel. Shall I tell you how this woman reasoned there in her solitude? Do not think it unnatural, for such things may exist in human nature—up from her worldly heart

came consolation in this form, even when she was weeping for her lost daughter :

"Had she lived, I must have been dependent still—worse off than ever, for even as a child she was haughty and selfish—and he was generous as the sun. But—but she *was* my daughter, my only child—my hope, my beautiful, beautiful darling!"

Here came a great flood of anguish, which proved the natural motherhood of the woman, but directly her keen selfishness broke through.

"Mistress of all this—unrestricted and young enough to think of a future—no, no, I could not give it up. What do these half-cousins, to whom the law awards it, know of wealth and its uses? Besides he wished it. The will is every word in his own handwriting; never was a man's desires made more positive. Then, I shall do so much good with the money. Let it pass from me, and the poor would be great sufferers. But above all, he wished it. He gave it to me."

Thus the woman reasoned in her tears and wept in her reasoning. She would doubtless have given up the property could that sacrifice have brought his child to life. But with the certainty of her death, the possession of wealth was a consolation the sweetness of which she began to taste keenly even at this early moment.

Toward night Eunice came into the chamber with a cup of strong tea and some toast, of which Mrs. Lander partook. After this she became restless and walked her room to and fro, watching the crescent of a new moon which just smiled on the lovely landscape and died out pleasantly, like the dimples on an infant's face.

At last the door opened and Eunice threw a black shawl into the room.

"Cover up that white dress from top to toe," she said. "They are all hived up for the night. Come along."

There was no sound upon the stairs—scarcely the rustle of a dress, to tell when those women went out or came in. Two waving shadows flitted across the grounds, followed by the sound of a deeply-drawn breath, as the stable door opened and closed with noiseless caution. Then a rough head appeared at the window a moment, and the light seemed to go out. Some thick, dark substance had been drawn over the glass.

All this precaution seemed useless. No one was watching. The grounds lay shadowy and quiet in the calm night. The slow sweep of the river rose above the sounds of wakeful insects that chirped their tiny music in the leaves. All at once the roar and rush of an engine thundering along the road startled the two women, who had left the stable and were creeping through the shrubbery on their way back to the house. The sound frightened them, neither could have told why, and they ran forward breathlessly. The front door being farthest from the household, stood open, but there was a long stretch of the marble pavement which they were compelled to pass in reaching it. Before leaving the shrubbery, they paused to listen to the tread of feet coming up a flight of steps cut along the face of a stone precipice which lifted the lawn above the river. Two men were evidently coming up from the railroad, which wound along the foot of this precipice, and a few moments would bring them in sight of the house.

"It is David and that man," whispered Mrs. Lander. "They will find the door open. What shall we do?"

"Run for dear life," answered Eunice, and gathering up her skirts, she made a vigorous rush for the portico.

Mrs. Lander followed close, keeping inside of the pillars, and scarcely allowing her feet to touch the marble pavement.

"There they come," whispered Eunice, pausing for one instant to reconnoitre. "I can see their heads—now for it!"

The next instant both the women stood in the entrance hall, clinging together and panting for breath. Eunice shook off her mistress, closed the door with noiseless slowness, drew a bolt and turned the key in its lock.

"Now get rid of that and go to your room. It's natural that I should be up," she whispered. "I give you ten minutes to get all right. Hark!"

The two men were outside the portico, walking across the terrace. Eunice took off her blanket shawl, and groping her way to the rack at the lower end of the hall, hung it up with other out-door garments, and stood in the dark, waiting.

The sharp ring of a bell sounded through the stillness of the house. Another and another peal. Then Eunice came forward and called out to know who was there.

"It is I—David and Mr. Stone," was the reply.

Eunice struck a match, lighted the hall lamp, and then deliberately opened the door.

"It is fortunate I was up," she said. "The Madam has been taking on so, I was afraid to go to sleep. Have you any news, sir?"

"Nothing more than the papers give," answered the lawyer. "Poor lady, it must be a dreadful blow for her."

"Awful," answered Eunice. "She hasn't lifted head from the pillow since morning."

The faint sound of footsteps and the trail of a dress came from above just as Eunice uttered these words. She caught a quick breath and went on:

"Dear me, that must be her! She's heard the door-bell, and guesses that it's you. It's enough to break one's heart to go up and tell her there's nothing to hope for; but it must be done."

"Say that I will see her in the morning," said the lawyer, placing his hat on the hall stand.

"I'll go to her at once and have the worst over, or she'll

be wandering through the house all night. David, you take Mr. Stone to his room."

With this Eunice went up stairs abruptly, leaving the two men to take care of themselves.

CHAPTER VIII.

FINDING THE WILL.

THERE was a heavy rain falling the next morning, and the whole house took a dreary aspect, spite of the fragrance that came up from the flowers with every light gush of wind, and the cheerful adornments of the breakfast room, which overlooked one of the loveliest pictures that domain could produce. At another time there might have been a pleasant variety in this stormy day, for the shifting clouds were beautiful, and gleams of sunshine now and then struggled through the trees, bathing them with light for an instant, then throwing them back into the mingled fog and glitter of a fresh burst of rain.

One grand old willow stood out on the lawn just before the bay window, with its great boughs dripping down to the grass a mighty fountain of leaves, and the window itself was curtained with crimson, flowering honeysuckles, threaded about the lower sash with white jessamines, over which ten thousand rain-drops trembled and fell away, dashing the broad window-panes with little rivulets of brightness. The room itself was both elegant and comfortable. Fruit and flower paintings in harmony with the scene without hung from the walls. The table itself was a picture, with its delicate china, its cut crystal and frosted silver. Yet the lawyer who sat there alone took no heed of these things. His mind was on the ocean with

that burning ship, for Mr. Lander had been his friend, and he had regarded that bright-haired child, the daughter, with no common affection.

The only picture in the room was a portrait of this girl, taken when she was perhaps ten years old. It was larger and less childish than the picture which hung in Mr. Lander's office, but there was no mistaking the identity. She sat with her arms folded on a desk, looking wearily at an open book, which contained, no doubt, some hard lesson; other volumes lay scattered on the desk, which added to her disquiet; tears were brimming into her eyes, and you could almost fancy the lips beginning to quiver.

Stone looked at this picture now and then as he made a pretence at eating breakfast. The sight of it saddened him to the heart, and more than once he rested his forehead on one hand, sighing heavily as if the child had been his own. He sat in this position when a low, female voice disturbed him. Mrs. Lander drew towards the table and took a seat, not as if she intended to partake of the breakfast, but with the dreary air of one who forces herself to perform a painful duty.

Mr. Stone lifted his massive forehead from the hand which supported it and turned his eyes kindly upon her. She was very pale, and her face presented the washed-out appearance of a woman who had cried all night.

"You were looking at her picture," she said. "It is like her, poor child. You will find one in every room that her father occupied much; he doted on her."

"She was a fine child," said the lawyer, gently. "They tell me that you also have lost a daughter."

"My only child," answered the mother.

"And who are the nearest relatives?"

"The children of Mr. Lander's cousin, who died long ago. They are somewhere out West."

"Farmers?"

"I believe so."

"This will be a fine property for them to fall into—a very fine property," said the lawyer, gradually gliding into the spirit of his profession.

"Yes," answered the widow, faintly.

"Have you any knowledge of a will, Mrs. Lander?"

"I—I—have heard of one, or that he was about to make one before he went over the seas after the girls; but he might not have done it. There seemed to be no occasion. He was not a very old man, and worshipped his daughter, whose health was perfect. I thought of this yesterday, and went into his study to look for something of the kind, but my heart gave way; I could not force myself to touch his papers, and sent for you. But it is doubtful—very doubtful if anything is found."

"We will have a search. You eat nothing, madam."

"I cannot taste a morsel."

"And I have got over what little appetite this news has left to me; so we will go to my poor friend's room at once."

"No, no, I would rather not. The very sight of his chair and desk made me faint when I went in yesterday. Here are the keys; this, which belongs to the safe, has some mysterious combination which no one but David comprehends. But he will go with you—a more trusty creature never lived."

"I can believe that," said the lawyer. "He seems a smart, honest fellow enough. Let him show me the room."

Stone had arisen by this time and rang the bell. The sadness which hung around him when alone had vanished entirely. He took out his watch like a man impatient to proceed to business. Mrs. Lander kept her seat by the table and said nothing. She did not seem to know when David came in and the lawyer followed him from the room. Eunice entered the breakfast-room soon after, and began to

replace some silver on the sideboard, casting sharp glances at her mistress as she passed to and fro, but there was no talking between them. Eunice trod softly, and her mistress seemed to listen with a strain of the senses.

At last a slow, heavy tread came down the stairs, and Mr. Stone entered the breakfast-room.

"Madam," he said, with a distinctness that made the widow start in her chair, "had Mr. Lander, among the people about him, any such persons as Eunice and Joshua Hurd?"

"One of them names belongs to me, I calculate," said Eunice marching up to the table like a grenadier.

"To you, eh? Well, where is the other witness?"

"The other what?"

"This Joshua Hurd?"

"Where should he be but somewhere about the stables? Show me where a hoss is, and I'll show you Josh Hurd. Why the critter's my own brother. But what do you want of him, if I may be so bold?"

"Did he and you sign a paper for Mr. Lander just before he went away?"

"Jest afore he went away. Well I reckon it must a been nigh on to a week or ten days afore."

"But you did sign one?"

"In course we did. I happened to be going by his office door and he called me in—"

"Well?"

"He was a writing fast, and kept me till he got through. I looked on till I got a tired out. Then he signed his name to the paper, and told me to write mine too."

"And you did?"

"Of course I did; then he told me to call John or some one of the servants, but John was out and I ran across to the stables for Joshua."

"Did you know what this paper was?"

"Yes; Mr. Lander told me that he was willing away his property."

The lawyer was not quite satisfied, clear and simple as all this appeared. One of those inexplicable feelings that are beyond all reason had seized upon him, and unconsciously he fell into a spirit of sharp cross examination.

"Can you find this man, Joshua Hurd? I would like to speak with him," he said.

"In less than no time. He's always on hand about the stables," answered the woman, and she marched off with an air of relief.

Mrs. Lander had not spoken during this examination, but her eyes were bent anxiously on the lawyer, and he could see that some hard strain of the nerves was harassing her. This was scarcely more than natural, considering her position in the family. Still the lawyer watched her with vague doubts, which he could not himself have accounted for.

"Is it true? Has a will been found?" she asked, after a pause which seemed unnaturally long. Her voice was low and hoarse, her eyes downcast, she did not lift them fully to his once while she was speaking.

"Yes, a will has been found in Mr. Lander's safe, witnessed by the woman and a man who is her brother."

"Oh!" exclaimed the widow, and she fell into silence, leaning her elbow upon the table and shrouding her face with one hand. She evinced no curiosity to know how the property had been left. Was it because she had no hopes in her own behalf or from the reticence of fore-knowledge?

The lawyer asked himself this question as he gazed at her from under his heavy eyebrows. The woman seemed conscious of his scrutiny, and moved in her seat; then her hand dropped and she lifted her eyes clearly to his.

"To whom does the will relate? Where does the property go?" she asked.

He did not answer her; for that moment Eunice came in, followed by her brother, who seemed restless and uneasy as the lawyer turned upon him. First he buried a huge hand in his pantaloons pocket, then drew it out with a jerk and took off his cap in hot haste, struck with a sudden remembrance of some early maternal lesson on the subject. He grew red and sallow under the keen eyes bent upon him beneath Lawyer Stone's heavy brows. Indeed, in all respects, this man, Joshua Hurd, was a remarkably uncouth specimen of a down East ignoramus—an animal possessed of appetites and plenty of that low cunning which is sometimes more than a match for absolute wisdom. To use his own term, endorsed by the more acute sister, Joshua knew as well as another man "on which side his bread was buttered, stupid as he seemed."

"Come here, my good man, into Mr. Lander's office, I want a little talk with you," said the lawyer.

Joshua, who had been standing with one foot planted hard on a cluster of flowers glowing in the carpet, and the other raised upon the square toe of his shoe, like that of a tired horse, settled down into a walking condition and shambled out of the room.

"Sit down, Mr. Hurd, sit down," said the suave lawyer, pointing to a rotary chair near the desk; "I want a little talk with you about the paper you signed for Mr. Lander. When was it? I forgot the exact time."

"It was jest afore the Gov'ner went away from home last time," answered Joshua, with the dogged air of a stupid schoolboy.

"But when was that?"

"Last spring."

"Do you remember the date?"

"No."

"Was it morning or evening?"

"Can't remember."

"Which signed the paper first, you or your sister?"

"Eunice."

"Was Mrs. Lander present?"

"No!"

"Had Mr. Lander signed it when you came in?"

"Unsartin."

"Did Mr. Lander say anything?"

"Said it was his last testament."

"Was that exactly what he said?"

"Jest that. I looked round for the book, but there wasn't none there, nor Bible neither; but he said it was a testament, consarned if he didn't."

"Did you tell any one of this?"

"No; 'twasn't none of my business what the old chap wrote about his testaments."

The lawyer was puzzled. It certainly was strange that Mr. Lander, with two intelligent and tolerably educated retainers in the house, should have selected this boor for a witness to his will. But there was nothing to be gathered from the curt answers that had followed his investigations. So far, the will seemed legal in all its forms, and Mrs. Lander was, by its provisions, sole legatee of all her brother-in-law's wealth.

Mr. Stone went into the breakfast-room again and found this lady gazing fixedly on the carpet at her feet, so lost in thought that she sprang up and uttered a little scream when the lawyer addressed her.

"Madam, the will we have found is entirely in your favor."

There was no surprise in her face; no outburst of satisfaction. Her eyes were turned wildly on the lawyer, her lips moved, but she did not speak.

"The news overcomes you, madam!"

"Yes, yes—I—I am a little faint—thank you, I am only a little."

The woman gasped for breath and pressed one hand on her bosom. She did, indeed, seem ready to faint.

Eunice Hurd came into the room like a grenadier and swept off with the widow, almost carrying her.

"She's tired out, and talking ain't good for her."

Eunice flung the words over her shoulder, looking back upon Lawyer Stone with a defiant air which he could not understand.

The lawyer sat down dissatisfied, and taking out the will, read it over again. It was certainly in his friend's handwriting, and he was made joint executor with Mrs. Lander. Why was it that a sense of mystery and wrong-doing clung to him?

CHAPTER IX.

THE BILL OF EXCHANGE.

A young man entered an eminent banking house in the lower part of the city, with the air of a stranger, and presented a bill of exchange so large in amount as to occasion some surprise, for he drew the heavier portion at once in gold and carried it off in a leathern satchel which he carried in his hand. The strain upon his arm denoted no ordinary amount of the precious metal; though he carried it with assumed ease, the blood rose to his pale face with the exertion. This circumstance, and something in the appearance of the man, drew the general attention upon him as he passed out of the bank. There was scarcely a clerk in the room who did not follow this stranger with his eyes and comment upon his elegance of manner and person. His air and dress were foreign, his beard black and bright as the plumage of a raven, was trimmed with great neat-

ness, and magnificent black eyes completed the manly beauty of a face which no one could have looked upon without admiration.

"There goes a fellow that ought to be a lord, from the cut of his figure," said one.

"Or a government speculator, by the pile of gold he carries away," answered another. "Only he looks too modest and walks too quietly for that."

"Some English nobleman going out to hunt on the Plains, travelling *incog.*, no doubt—that sort of thing is getting very fashionable of late," observed a third. "Stylish fellow, anyway."

More than one person who met this man in the street made the same observation. His quiet, yet lofty carriage, joined to a style of beauty which was both statuesque and manly, singled him out from the crowd. Both men and women turned to look at him as he passed, wondering vaguely about him.

The stranger walked on, apparently unconscious of the general regard, but his observation was keen, notwithstanding this seeming indifference, and a smile curled the lips beneath the shadow of his black beard as he entered one of the up-town hotels and proceeded to a suite of rooms taken that morning an hour after his arrival in the steamer from Europe.

When he entered the Fifth Avenue hotel, the stranger had carried a leathern box in his hand, such as statesmen and persons travelling on business sometimes use for convenience when papers are to be transported from place to place. This box stood on a console in the parlor when he entered that room on his return from the banker's. He drew an easy chair toward the console, sat down in it and unlocked the box, in which were some papers and small packages, which might or might not contain valuables.

He pressed these papers down with his hands, then

unlocked the satchel and poured a steady stream of gold into the box till it was even full, and the satchel scarcely lightened of one-third its contents. Then he dropped a handful or two of the coin into his pockets, locked the satchel, and flung it with a heave and a crash on the top of a wardrobe, which stood in the bed-chamber opening out of the room where he sat. A massive cornice of carved rose-wood formed a hollow which would have concealed a larger package, and in which this sunk completely out of sight.

After the exertion of hiding away his gold, the man sat down, brushed some particles of dust from his coat and took a package of letters from his breast pocket. These he examined with great care, and seemed to be taxing his memory severely regarding the writers, for he muttered more than once, "Well, I never saw this man," or, "I wonder how the fellow looks."

The letters were directed to some of the first statesmen and merchants in the country. One, which bore the name of Lander, he singled out and examined carefully.

"They never met, I feel quite sure they never met," he muttered, smoothing his jetty beard with one hand as he read. "I wonder how near the old man lives. But I forget, the luggage will soon be here, and I have made no preparation."

Seymour, for by that name the man registered himself, arose suddenly, took his hat and went out. He was a little bewildered now, and seemed to be looking for some place which he was reluctant to ask for in words. A moment he paused before the windows at Tiffany's, and seemed tempted to go in, but turned away, crossed the street and stopped at Morley's, where he lounged away half an hour examining specimens of antique furniture with the air of a connoisseur.

A dressing-case, richly appointed, and a desk of ebony, mounted with silver, seemed to strike his fancy. These he

put aside for purchase, inquiring first if the cases that belonged to them could be found, if the mountings could be brightened and the whole put in order at once.

The man paid for these articles in gold, and the only remarkable thing about his purchase was that he ordered both desk and dressing-case to be carried to an express, from which they would be delivered at the hotel. The stranger left his name in full; Horace Seymour, and gave the number of his rooms.

The next remarkable step that this man took was to wander on and on till he came to a pawnbroker's shop with a host of miscellaneous articles hanging at the window. He went in and inquired for second-hand watches, something unique. If one could be found with the letters H. S., or even S., singly upon the case, he would not mind the price; a crest, too, might enhance the value of the article.

The pawnbroker's sharp eyes brightened at this. Some imprudent Smith, called Henry, Horatio, Horace or Hector, perhaps, had left his unfortunate initials tied up unredeemed, on the back of a fine hunting-watch, worn just enough to become highly respectable. This Horace Seymour purchased without demurring at the exorbitant price which the pawnbroker instantaneously put upon it.

When the watch was transferred to his pocket, he desired to examine any other curious things in the way of jewelry that might happen to remain on sale. Directly a case of trinkets was brought forth, out of which Seymour selected a seal ring whose value even the pawnbroker did not know, for it was an antique head, exquisitely cut, and almost worth its weight in diamonds.

Seymour's eyes brightened slowly as he saw this gem, but he examined half-a-dozen uninteresting articles before he touched it. Then he carelessly asked the price, paid it without comment, slipped the ring on his finger and walked away, leaving the pawnbroker almost in tears because he

had not asked an additional ten per cent. on the articles that had just left his den.

"If I'd only known how much he would bear," lamented the man to himself. "Why the fellow never once attempted to beat me down, and wouldn't if I'd asked double. But I always was a coward—a mean coward—afraid to set a price on my own soul. What's the good of these ten twenty, thirty gold eagles, when it might have been twice as much and something to drink thrown in. Oh, the gentleman has robbed me with his still manner and thoughtful face. It might have been double! It might have been double!"

Meantime Seymour had walked quietly up Broadway toward his hotel, making his own combinations. Two express wagons stood in front of the office, and porters were busy carrying up his trunks, while the dressing-case and desk were brought in. Everything was in order. His rooms would soon have a home-like appearance.

When the chandelier was lighted over his head that evening, an ebony desk, mounted with silver, and filled in all its compartments with papers, stood open on the table before him, and in the shaded light of the bed-room beyond was a dressing-case, with all its toilet paraphernalia laid out ready for use.

Seymour rang the bell and desired that some person should be sent to him from the office. That personage made his appearance and stood some minutes at the door, while his guest was busily writing. At last Seymour looked up.

"Ah, I beg pardon."

"Step in if you please. Is there a person in this establishment who would take charge of my things and help me a little about dressing?"

"That is, you want a servant."

"Not exactly. In this country the best servant that

ever lived would be spoiled in a month. But I should like to have a person generally at my command."

"That class of men are not abundant in our cities, sir, but I have a needy chap now and then hanging about the office; one was there this morning wanting to do odd jobs."

"An American?"

"I did not take the trouble to inquire; but he may be there yet. He seems a bright boy."

"Send him up, if you please."

The clerk disappeared.

After a time a knock at the door aroused Seymour again, and a young man, scarcely more than a lad, came in. He was very thin, rather untidy, but had a look of quick intelligence that pleased the traveller at once. With a single glance of his great bright eyes, the lad took in every object the room contained.

"You sent for me, sir," he said.

"You? Oh yes; you are the person I desired to be sent up. Well, what can you do?"

"Almost anything, sir?"

"Do you know the city?"

"I can find the way anywhere," answered the lad, evasively.

"Have you ever been in service?"

"Never; but I know what a gentleman wants, and can do as much as another."

"But I might want something out of the common way."

"Not knowing exactly what the common way is, that would not trouble me much."

"What wages will you want?"

"Whatever you are willing to give."

"Very well, we will settle that after I have learned something of your capabilities. But your clothes are not exactly suitable for a gentleman's attendant."

The youth looked down on his coat, which was wrinkled and clouded in its color.

"They have been in the water," he said, with a shiver. "No wonder."

"Have you no others?"

"No, I have nothing else."

"Here; go out and buy a neat outfit. I suppose the shops are open yet. It must have been a heavy storm that drenched you so!"

The young man reached forth his hand for the gold which Seymour held towards him.

"It was a shipwreck—a hard choice between fire or water, sir."

"Indeed! Some other time you shall tell me about it; but just now I am anxious to see you in neater trim. Those things smell of sea water."

"No wonder. But—but, sir, can I spend a little of this money for food?"

"Food! Why, man, you don't mean to say that you are in such a strait as that?"

"I am nearly starved."

Seymour started from his chair and rang the bell violently. The youth had made a step forward to render this service and came into the full light. Then, for the first time, Seymour saw how meagre and white his face was. The wonderful brilliancy of his eyes sprang from protracted and ravenous craving for food.

"Poor fellow!" said Seymour, "poor fellow! I did not dream of it! Wait a minute."

A servant entered, answering the bell promptly.

"Bring up something to eat, and a bottle of wine, at once."

"What will you order, sir?"

"Order? Why everything; beef steak, birds, chickens, turkeys."

"Sir!" exclaimed the servant, opening his eyes wide, and stepping back with great dignity.

"Well, say beef steak and plenty of potatoes. Are you Irish, my good fellow?"

"Yes, I am Irish," answered the youth.

"Plenty of potatoes then—boiled, fried, stewed, with anything else that takes no time in cooking."

The servant bowed and went out somewhat astonished. Seymour laughed lightly and turned upon the youth, who met his look with eyes full of tears.

"Oh, sir, you are too kind," he said.

"Not a bit, my good fellow; nobody on earth can be too kind, it is not the fault of human nature. I'm not quite brute enough to see hunger like that in a fellow creature's eyes and not try to feed it. But no one shall say that I'm not hard-hearted for all that, especially if any one offends me."

"Shall I go down stairs, sir?" asked the youth, who was shaking with an eager hope of food. "Will they give it to me in the kitchen?"

"No, here. I want to see you eat. Jove! how I envy you."

The youth drew back and leaned against the wall, clasping his hands hard, as if imploring the minutes to pass quickly. At length a sob of joy broke from his lips. He could hear a jingle of crockery coming up the stairs.

Seymour started up, removed the desk from his table, and ordered the waiter to place his tray there, directly under the chandelier. The man obeyed, and lifted the cover from a noble beef steak, which soon filled the room with its appetizing flavor.

"That is right. You can go now," said the young man, pointing to the door.

The man withdrew.

"Come," said Seymour, "come along. What's your name?"

"Brian."

"Brian—Brian! But I suppose you've got another name?"

Seymour spoke with a touch of impatience. The boy lifted those great bright eyes to his face for one instant, but turned them eagerly toward the food.

"The other name, I meant—the other name first," cried Seymour.

"It's Nolan, Brian Nolan, sir," answered the lad, with an eager catch of the breath.

"Nolan," muttered the young man, "Nolan!"

The boy did not heed him, the pangs of hunger were too keen; he quivered all over with impatience.

"That's right, my poor fellow; that's right, fall to without mercy. Sit down, sit down and be comfortable."

Seymour rolled up his own soft Turkish chair to the table and patted its crimson cushions enticingly.

Truly his good nature must have been genuine when he could so far forget the niceties of refinement. The lad required no second bidding. His eyes took fire as they devoured the smoking food. With the craving of a wild beast, he crept slowly toward the table, evidently striving hard to control himself.

Seymour stood with his elbow on the mantelpiece, watching the poor fellow with a glow of satisfaction as he devoured the steak. A dish was yet covered, he stepped forward and removed the lid, revealing a mound of potatoes, deliciously mealy, cracking the tawny skins in which they had been boiled.

"Mother of Heaven, this is too much!" cried the youth, dropping both hands upon his lap. "Oh, sir, I haven't tasted one since I left home."

"Go at them, then, they'll taste so much the better," cried the young man, laughing and thrusting a fork into one of the potatoes, which he held up and examined admir-

ingly. "By Jove! I didn't think these things could be such a luxury! It makes me hungry to see you eat them. Here, give me a knife and a little salt. By the way, stop a minute, my good fellow; it just strikes me that too much isn't good for a person in your condition. The half of that steak is a rather powerful allowance, and that is the third potato."

"Let me finish this," pleaded the lad.

"Couldn't think of it," answered the young man, replacing the covers on the dishes with decision. Then he rang the bell.

The lad, with his hunger but half appeased, dropped the knife and fork, closed his eyes and fell back in the easy chair, sighing heavily.

"Take the things away," said Seymour, when the waiter came in, "and tell them down in the office to find a bed somewhere for this young fellow. He'll stay with me for the present."

The man went out, closing the door behind him. Seymour stood watching the pale face of the lad with a feeling of singular interest.

"This is what money can do," he thought. "Cheap too—cheap as dirt, and yet how much happiness. Why, that one meal was like a fortune to him. But to be kind, to give real happiness, one *must* have money."

While these thoughts passed through the young man's brain, two great tears stole through the closed lashes of the Irish lad and rolled slowly down his cheeks.

"That's the kind of diamonds I'll buy with the money, if they'll only let me," continued Seymour, still gazing on the lad. "It isn't just to enjoy things myself that I want it, but—but—"

With the gesture of a man who finds his reflections beginning to grow troublesome, Seymour dropped his hand on the lad's shoulder.

"Come now, wake up and get to bed, Brian," he exclaimed, cheerfully. "We will let the clothes go till morning."

Brian looked up, and Seymour saw that his great black eyes were full of tears, while his face quivered all over with grateful emotion.

"Oh, sir, how I thank you—how good you have been to me! What can I do for you?"

"Go to bed now, and forget the last hour, if you can. It has been a little irregular as between master and servant, and may put false notions into your head."

"No, no, no. You have been kind—so kind, I can remember nothing but that. God bless you, sir, and prosper you in everything. I'd rather be your servant than another man's king."

The boy attempted to rise, but Seymour pressed a hand on his shoulder, detaining him.

"So your name is Nolan, and you came from Ireland," he said.

"Yes, sir; oh yes!"

"What part of Ireland, my fine fellow, what part?"

"On the Blackwater, near Waterford."

The young man was disturbed; he walked the room once or twice, then bent over the lad again.

"And your father, what is his name?"

"John, sir; John Nolan."

"Of Rydehurst?" said Seymour.

The boy looked up quickly.

"Yes, that was the name of his place, when he had one," answered the lad.

"And how did he lose it?"

"He sold it, sir."

"Sold it—sold it! Why? How?"

"I would rather not talk about that," answered the boy.

"But where is your father now?"

"Dead."

Seymour sallied back and clenched one hand with a sudden spasm.

"And—and your mother?"

The young man's voice shook as he asked this question, and he was pale as marble.

"She is dead too."

"What!"

This single word was uttered almost with a cry of anguish. The young man's head fell upon the back of the easy chair, and he grasped at the cushions nervously with his hands.

"They are all dead—one after another they went down," said the boy, in a plaintive whisper.

"Was it in the shipwreck?"

"The steamer was on fire."

"And they jumped overboard?"

"All."

"None saved—not one?"

"I alone—I alone!"

"Go," said the young man, "go sleep, if you can."

"Good-night, and thank you again and again. I hope you will never be so hungry or so lonesome as I was."

"Good-night—good-night, boy."

CHAPTER X.

MRS. LANDER ENTERS ON HER FORTUNE.

MRS. LANDER had taken possession of her brother-in-law's estate under the will, and for the first time in her life began to enjoy the power of wealth, the sublime egotism of possession. True, all this fortune gave her no additional

comfort, nor insured to her a luxury not hitherto her own, for since her husband's death she had been denied nothing by his generous brother. But this, to a nature like hers, or indeed to any nature capable of ambition, was the smallest result of wealth. She wanted its power, its influence among men—the reputation it conferred—the envy it created. Having been dependent all her life, these things took a mighty value in her estimation, and no queen ever mounted a throne with more pride than this woman felt in seizing upon the estate which seemed to have fallen into her possession by a miracle.

Up to this time, Mrs. Lander had been very liberal in her social ideas and luxuriously extravagant in her personal habits, having gorgeous tastes by nature, and that coarse hankering for display which women of low birth and inferior associations in early youth are liable to acquire. Beyond this the woman could not go, and a vast capacity for intrigue lay useless and buried in her life which was likely to find room for display now. She was not very old either; the years that carried her beyond forty were hardly worth mentioning. A fresh complexion, robust but symmetrical form, and rather juvenile carriage, made her seem even younger than that. With great wealth added to these attractions, there was much in the future for a woman like that to expect and hope for.

Mrs. Lander went into deep, deep mourning at once. Crape folds a yard in depth covered the skirts of her bombazine dresses; crape veils, with hems that made them almost double, fell from her bonnet; not a gleam of white was allowed to appear about her person. The very handkerchiefs wetted by her tears had a black border one-fourth of an inch wide running under the broadest of broad hems. She stripped her fingers of their jewels, and sent to the city at once, for chains and bracelets and lugubrious brooches of jet, which gave a shimmer of brightness to the

volumes of English crape that clouded her mournfully from head to foot.

The woman mourned for her daughter, undoubtedly. This elaborate show of grief was not all pretence. She would have been delighted to hear that Cora had escaped the shipwreck on any terms; doubly delighted if the rescue of her child could have been achieved without disturbing the will which made her mistress of everything. No doubt she would have been a generous and munificent mother in that case, proud of her child and ready to push her interests to the utmost; but she would have shuddered a little at the thought of depending on Cora Lander for subsistence, though a thought of this kind never took force with her now. Poor Cora was gone with the rest, and ten thousand perfections hovered around her memory. Still the wealth was a consolation.

Five or six weeks after the sad news, Mrs. Lander sent for Joshua Hurd, who came in from the stables walking after his usual heavy fashion, and seeming half ashamed of a new suit of clothes, which gave a certain appearance of neatness to his ungainly person. Joshua's manner was a little singular when he came into the presence of his mistress. He looked around for his sister, and seemed relieved that she was not there. Then he sat down on the very sofa which held Mrs. Lander and her voluminous skirts, planting his heavy shoe on the crape folds of her dress, and sat still, looking stolidly into her face.

Mrs. Lander did not rebuke or attempt to repulse this familiarity, but she gently extricated her dress from his foot, and smiled sweetly in doing it.

"Joshua," she said, "I have been thinking a good deal about the horses."

"That's exactly in my line," he answered. "What about 'em?"

"The pair of chestnuts don't exactly suit me."

"They're splendid critters as ever drew a carriage," interrupted Joshua, bluntly. "What on arth can you want better?"

"They are too bright—too showy for my mourning."

"Mourning! Why, who ever hearn of putting hosses in mourning, I'd like to know?"

"But they disturb its sad harmony."

"Never was a better or a purtyer team of hosses druv. Darn'd if I believe you know what a good hoss is!"

"But they put me in mind of him—of them."

"In course they du! Why not?"

"The truth is, Joshua, now that I'm mistress here, I'd like to choose my own horses and carriages, and everything, and have the credit of good taste in myself."

Joshua lifted one foot, laid it on his knee and nursed it for a whole minute in thoughtful tenderness.

"Well, I reckon that's nat'ral," he said at last. "So you want ter sell them chesnuts? how much do you ask for 'em?"

"That is what I wanted to talk to you about. Of course I shall defer to your judgment."

Joshua dropped his foot cautiously and drew himself up, blushing to the temples.

"I'll sell 'em or trade 'em off for you—but what kind of critters du you want now?"

"Black—I think we will have black."

"Not one of them 'ere Black Hawks?"

"No, nothing of that kind, but a pair of fine, well-matched blacks, if they can be found."

Just then Eunice came into the room, excited, fiery, and dressed with incongruous magnificence. She saw Joshua sitting close by her mistress, and pounced upon him with a vengeance.

"You dolterhead, get up. How dare you?"

She seized Joshua by the collar and almost lifted him

from the sofa, gave him a vigorous pull and planted his feet in the middle of the room.

"I'll teach you!" she cried, shaking her fiery locks at him. "How often I've told you!"

"Look-a-here," said Joshua, dashing the cap on to his head, "it won't be worth your while to do that 'ere agin! I ain't a going to stand it; so you look out!"

"Be quiet, both of you," said Mrs. Lander, with dignity. "I cannot be annoyed in this way."

"You sent for me, or I shouldn't a come," said Joshua, sullenly.

"And I wanted you, Joshua, not only to consult about the horses, but to say that hereafter the entire control of the stables shall be yours. You shall account to no one but me, now that I am mistress."

"That's something like," said Joshua, brightening up. "When that critter lets you alone, you're a trump, and no mistake. But that evil spurret that went down into the swine and druv them into the sea wasn't nothing to her. She's wuss than a hull drove of hogs, if every one on 'em had a spurret of his own."

"Josh!"

"Now jest you keep away, Eunice Hurd. I'm a speaking to her, and not to you by no manner of means. Don't come anear me, I warn you, or I'll bust right out afore everybody. You've trod on me long enough. Now I mean to stomp on you if you don't behave yerself."

Eunice, who had been threatening violence, drew back in blank amazement; her face grew red in spots, her eyes flashed strange light, like the green tints in an opal. She was quivering from head to foot with a vicious desire to box her brother's ears.

"Oh! you snake you—"

"Eunice, I will have no more of this. You must learn that I am mistress here," said Mrs. Lander.

"You!" exclaimed Eunice, turning upon her mistress with intense scorn. "You, and setting there side by side with Josh!"

Mrs. Lander took no heed of her insolence, for she was a woman of wonderful self-possession when the occasion required it. Her voice was quiet and calm as a summer's morning as she once more addressed Joshua.

"You can sell the chestnuts and buy the blacks, as I directed. Use your own judgment in the whole matter," she said.

"So you are a going to buy black horses, are you?—Deep mourning, animals and all," said Eunice, spitefully. "Hadn't you better have a span of white ones ready for the half-mourning. It 'ed be mighty handy—or grays, to shade off into white. I hate such airs!"

"That would be a contrast worth thinking about—I am much obliged to you, Eunice. I will take a day to consider it. White or black. Go now, Joshua, and remember that hereafter you are master out yonder."

"And who mistress in here?" demanded Eunice.

"I am," answered Mrs. Lander, with calm firmness, "and this scene must never be repeated, Eunice. Understand me clearly—must never be repeated."

"Jest say that agin!" said the virago, going off into a fit of hoarse wrath. "I understand you; you want to get the blind side of that soft-hearted creature, and so be one too many for me if I should cut up rusty. But let me ketch him in here agin, or you in there, and I'll show you what's what!"

Mrs. Lander was very pale; every vestige of color left her lips, they were pressed so firmly together. She seemed about to say something defiant, but the strain upon her nerves had been too great, and she fell into a chair, faint and trembling. What was she, with all her wealth, but a slave?

CHAPTER XI.

SALE OF THE CHESTNUT HORSES.

THE next day Joshua went to the city with the chestnut horses, proud of his commission, and resolved to stay a week in town rather than return without the animals his mistress had expressed a fancy for. He drove directly to a large public stable well known as a sort of horse exchange, and at once put up his chestnuts for sale.

While he was hanging about the stables, a young man drove up in a hack and entered the office, followed by a lad, who jumped down from his seat by the driver and lingered near the door, as if afraid of losing sight of his master.

In a place like this, Joshua Hurd felt perfectly at home; he went up to the lad and spoke to him good-naturedly enough.

"Is that 'ere young man arter horses?" he questioned.

Brian Nolan answered that he thought so, but he was not quite sure.

"Got a smashing team in there that I'd like to sell him," said Josh. "What's his color?"

"I don't know," answered Brian; "but there he comes, and you can ask him."

Joshua saw that the young man was entering the stables with the proprietor, and sauntered after them, whistling in an undertone.

"I've got the prettiest pair of chestnuts that you ever set eyes on; just come in. You're fortunate in your time, sir. Those animals won't stay on hand long, I can promise you. The gentleman who owned them was the best judge of horse-flesh that ever visited my stable, or rather his man was, and that's the same thing."

"Why does he sell them, if they are so perfect?" inquired the stranger.

"They're splendid critters," said Joshua, cutting into the conversation without scruple; "not a fault. The person who owned 'em is dead, and the lady thinks that the color is too gorgeous for deep mourning. She wants black hosses, or if them ain't ter be got, white. Them latter she'd trim about the heads with crape rosettes, I reckon, for she's a hull team and a hoss to let on mourning."

The young man took little heed of this speech. He was busy examining the horses, and the proprietor saw at once that he had no ordinary judge to deal with.

"I can offer you nothing better than these if you fancy the color," he said. "They are noble animals."

"They are noble animals. But why does the owner sell them?" repeated Seymour, going back to his original question.

"He was lost at sea—the steamer that was burned, you remember."

The young man shrunk from the subject, which sent the color from his face.

"I have heard of it," he said, hoarsely.

"Terrible thing, wasn't it?" rejoined the horse dealer. "Such a fine old man, too."

"Was he alone?"

"No; that is the most horrible part of it. His only daughter and his niece went down with him."

"But there must be a survivor—or is there no one to claim the service of these noble beasts?"

"The property goes by will, I am told, to some widow up the river."

"She is a fortunate woman," said Seymour, absently "that is, if young enough to enjoy her money."

This did not seem a leading question, yet there was something like interest in the traveller's eyes as he waited for the answer. He could not have accounted for this feeling himself.

"I don't know her exact age, but she is a handsome, stylish woman, with a good deal of life in her. I took these very horses up myself when the owner bought them, and gave her the first drive. Smart woman, I can tell you."

"Wall, I reckon she is jest that," interposed Joshua, arousing himself to animation. "Sharp as a steel trap, and harnsome as a race hoss. It 'ed take two of your city gals to hold a candle tu her."

"You are her servant, I suppose?" said the young man.

"Her sarvant, her sar—. Yes, yes, I am that, only the name don't suit me. In New England, where I was born, they called us hired men. But if she wants to call Josh Hurd a sarvant, so be it. I ain't a going to complain."

This conversation had drawn the young man's attention from the horses, to which he now turned, but with something of decision in his manner.

"Have them put in harness," he said, "and let us take a turn in the Park. I should like to try their action. I will drive them myself, and this fellow shall go along."

The horses were attached to a light wagon, and Seymour took his seat with the ease of a man accustomed to the position. Joshua climbed up to his side, and they were about to drive on, when Seymour remembered Brian Nolan, and bent over the wheel to address him.

"Stay about the stables, and find out all you can regarding these horses," he said, in a low voice.

The lad answered with his eyes, which were full of intelligence. Seymour tightened his reins and drove on in splendid style.

The Park was beautiful that day. It was too early for the regular exhibition there, and the chestnuts had a fine, free sweep along the avenues, delighting their driver and almost giving animation to Joshua. By the delicious little lakes, whitened with flocks of graceful swans—across arched

bridges and around Prospect Hill they swept making the air eddy as they went. The breath of ten thousand flowers came up from the hollows and down from the broken uplands, sweeping fragrance all around them. But Seymour, keenly as he relished the beauties of nature, scarcely regarded the sweet air he breathed or the lovely objects that surrounded him. A strange feeling of depression fell upon him. He drove the horses splendidly, but with a grace and ease that was purely mechanical. At last he fell into conversation with Joshua, not about the horses, as was most natural, but dwelt with a sort of weird fascination on the fate of their former owner.

Was he certainly dead? Yes, there could be no doubt of that. And the young ladies, was it positive that they had perished too? Yes, all had gone down—the old man without a struggle, but the girls had managed to get into a boat, which was swamped after they almost felt themselves safe. How long had they been abroad? Why full eight years. They had been like sisters all their lives, took the same lessons, wore the same clothes, and were allowed the same spending money. In fact, you could hardly tell them apart when they were little girls; but eight years must have changed them a good deal. Joshua would always know them by the temper, if nothing else, for the niece had that, and no mistake, while the other was like an angel. But they were both dead now, and no harm was done since the brother's widow had got the money. What had they been doing abroad? Why going to school to be sure, what else could girls of that age be expected to do? For the last six months they had been travelling about in what people called the Holy Land, which Joshua supposed was just the thing to do if they had got to die so soon.

All this time the names of these persons who interested him so much had not been mentioned. For some unaccountable reason Seymour had shrunk from asking it.

Vague fears were creeping over his heart, and his voice was husky when he at length forced himself to say:

"But the name—you have not yet told me the name."

"The name, sir—why Lander, of course."

That instant the chestnuts gave a wild leap and strained hard upon the reins, that had been sharply tightened, till one of them began to rear.

Joshua turned, looked into the deadly white face of the young man, and snatched the reins from his hands.

"What on earth are you about? Such driving would put wolfishness into a pair of lambs! So, so, old fellows—easy—easy, that'll do. There, sir, you see how easily they are managed."

"Home, home," said the young man. "I am satisfied. Drive back."

"What's the matter?" inquired Joshua, bluntly. "Did the horses scare you so? Why you're white as a sheet."

The young man was trembling from head to foot. His face was contracted like marble, his very lips were bloodless.

"Home, home," he said.

Joshua drove to the stables in wondering silence. The color had come slowly back to Seymour's face, but there was a look of suffering on it that startled the proprietor of the stables as he drove up. Had anything happened? Were the horses restive?

Joshua shook his head. Seymour did not seem to hear him, but stepping from the wagon, walked away. The proprietor followed him.

"Did he not like the horses?"

"Like them? oh yes—oh yes," said Seymour, slowly retracing his steps. "Put them up on my account, and send to my hotel for the gold."

All this was said in a calm, low voice: but it seemed as if a statue were speaking. No price had yet been named for the horses, and he had forgotten it entirely.

"But we have not agreed on the terms," said the proprietor, glancing at Joshua.

"No," said the young man, absently. "What are they?"

The proprietor named a tolerably reasonable sum.

"That will do. Take good care of them."

"But your address, sir?" said the proprietor, taking up a pen from his office desk.

Seymour took the pen and attempted to write, but his hand shook upon the paper, and after he left, the address could hardly be made out.

Brian Nolan followed his master in silence. He saw the look of pain in those dark eyes, and the young heart ached in his bosom with a rush of keen sympathy.

They went into the hotel together, and passed into the ladies' entrance hall. Coming down the long passage on the second-story was a hunchbacked girl, who seemed to have lost her way, for she was looking anxiously at the numbers over each parlor door. Brian caught hold of his master's dress, and the violence of this action drew the young man out of himself.

"What is it, Brian, are you ill?"

The lad held him fast. His pale lips were parted, but he could not speak. His eyes followed the hunchback almost in terror.

"Poor fellow! the old suffering has come back," muttered Seymour, laying a hand kindly on his shoulder. "Brian, my boy."

"It is her! Those are Ellen's eyes. I know her! I know her! she is my sister!"

"Your sister!"

The lad uttered a cry and darted away.

"Ellen! Ellen! oh, Ellen, it is me! It is me!"

The girl started, turned her great stag-like eyes on the boy, and came towards him with both hands extended.

"Alive! alive! you and I!" she said, clinging to him, while tears rained down her radiant face. "Is it, is it you?"

"Oh, sir! it is my sister—my own sister Ellen, that I told you of! She jumped overboard with the rest, and is saved. I know you will be glad for me," cried Brian, drawing the girl up to his master. "See how helpless she is!"

"Poor thing! dear little girl! I am glad to find you here—glad for his sake. He is a good boy," said Seymour, with great feeling.

"He always was a good boy, sir," answered, Ellen smiling through her tears. "Oh, so good!"

"And she, sir," joined in Brian, "she, sir, for all her size, and—and—"

"He means this, sir," said Ellen, gently glancing at her shoulder. "It makes me ill sometimes."

"She is brave as a little lion, though, and kind—kind—yes, she would be just as kind as you are, sir, if she had anything but her two hands."

"Let me look at you, dear," said Seymour, laying one hand on her forehead and bending her face back. "Yes, you have the family look. These are Brian's features—softer, though, as a girl's should be."

"Do I look like him—do I, really?" cried the girl.

"Yes, child, I think so."

"Then people must like my face, at any rate," she said. Seymour smiled faintly and moved a little way from them.

"Oh! Brian, we went through so much!" said the girl, "so much!"

"But you are saved!"

"And you!"

They clung together in newborn joy, closer and closer, as if some one threatened to tear them apart. The young man looked on from the distance, interested.

"But how came you here?"

"Brian, an angel brought me!"

The girl spoke earnestly, and her eyes filled with eager warmth.

"An angel!"

"So beautiful, Brian! so good! so full of courage! She helped me through the water. I pulled her down, but she would not let go of me. There! there she is!"

A parlor door had opened as Ellen uttered her shriek, and two young women looked out, wondering what the sound could mean. Ellen led her brother toward them.

"Oh! Miss, forgive me for screaming out. It is my brother. I thought he had gone down with *them*, but it is he. Don't let anybody take him away from me again—oh, don't! don't!"

One of the young ladies stepped into the hall and laid her hand kindly on Brian's shoulder.

"So you are her brother?" she said, in a sweet, sympathetic voice. "I am glad of that. How were you saved?"

"Somebody flung a chair over, and I got hold of it till one of the boats picked me up."

"What if some of the rest were saved?" said Ellen. "Oh! it seems to me as if an angel had taken care of you too!"

The young creature lifted her eyes to the beautiful face of her mistress, smiling gratefully, though tears were again streaming down her face.

"Let us hope for the best," said Virginia Lander. "But tell me, my lad, how did you reach this place, and what are you doing here?"

"A vessel that picked us up brought me. I was sick and almost starved, looking for work, when a gentleman, so kind and good, hired me to wait on him. He is here, I just came in with him."

That moment a form glided by the little group and went

swiftly down the hall, so swiftly that no one saw more than the flutter of Cora Lander's black garments as she swept down upon Seymour, her eyes wild with delight, her hands held out eagerly.

"Oh, my God, be thanked!" cried out the young man. "My love, my darling, I thought that you were dead!"

"You here! you here!" she answered, giving him both her hands. "And I felt so wretched a moment ago."

"Cora! Cora! I shall go mad with joy! Not an hour since, they told me that you had perished at sea."

"And you had but just heard of it. You believed me lost? Was that why you looked so sad?"

"Judge for yourself. I have followed you, at what sacrifice no human being will ever know. Everything that a man holds dear I risked rather than lose you. My sole object in coming to America was to win you, claim you, love you forever and ever. An hour ago they told me you were dead; my life seemed to go out then."

"Then you mourned, Horace?"

"Mourned! Great Heavens! can you ask me?"

"But now—now that you see me alive and well—yes, yes, I think you are glad."

"Glad!"

"I know you are. Oh, Seymour, I do think you love me."

"Better than my life—better than my own soul! There is nothing on earth that I would not do for you, nothing a man holds dear that I have not sacrificed for you already."

"I do not understand."

"Perhaps not—you never may. But who is that lady with hair like yours?—That form, the face too?"

"That is my cousin. Some day I will introduce you—not now. She is but just come on shore. We shall start up the river this evening or early in the morning."

"Not to-night; let it be to-morrow. This evening I must see you again."

"I shall abide by my cousin's decision."

"Abide by her decision! Does this cousin control you, then?"

"Control me! No; she hasn't the spirit to control a mouse."

"Then you will stay?"

"Yes, if you desire it so much; but—"

Cora broke off abruptly. Seymour was looking at Virginia Lander, who that moment was listening to Brian and looked that way, interested in the man of whom he spoke so gratefully. The expression of her face was beautiful just then. Sympathy with those two helpless creatures had filled her eyes with compassionate tenderness. A sweet smile hovered about her mouth, and all her face was bright with feeling. She did indeed look like an angel rejoicing over the salvation of two innocent fellow beings.

The young man himself, unnoticed by Virginia, gazed upon her, fascinated; he had not even heard Cora's last promise. A shadow, which was almost a frown, swept over the girl's face.

"How very lovely she is. True, there is a wonderful likeness, but—but such a difference. I never saw a sweeter smile on human lips!"

Cora swept by him with angry scarlet burning in her cheeks.

"Virginia, does it strike you that we are getting up a scene here?" she said. "Let these two strange creatures go up to Ellen's room. It will not do for us to form interesting tableaux in the hall. Hear how they laugh and sob! Go, Ellen, go and take your brother away."

Ellen and Brian started off, clinging together and smiling in each other's faces, but crying all the time. Virginia withdrew into the parlor, delighted with this one gleam of happiness, coming as it did out of the awful catastrophe which had made her an orphan. She had been so occupied

with the brother and sister that the meeting between Cora and Virginia had passed unregarded. After Virginia had gone, Cora stood in the hall, proud as Juno, waiting to be conciliated. Seymour drew close to her.

"So this is your cousin," he said. "I never thought that any human being could mate you before."

Cora answered him with a haughty lift of the head.

"If you think so now, I am glad to hear it in time."

The pique and jealousy which embittered these words were manifest and genuine. Seymour was a man of the world, and had read many a woman's heart before that day to the owner's cost, perhaps.

"You are angry with me. For what?" he questioned, in a low voice.

"Angry? No, no; but my cousin will miss me and wonder that I stay so long with a stranger."

"A stranger, Cora!"

"That is what she thinks you, and what you in fact are. How much do I know of you?"

"Everything; I wish no concealment. Grant me one interview where we can converse in quiet—when shall it be, and where?"

Cora started; her cousin was standing in the parlor door looking for her.

"This evening, come to our parlor. She will retire early."

Seymour bowed and walked away, smiling over his success. Cora joined her cousin.

"It is the boy's master," she said carelessly. "A fine-looking young man—don't you think so?"

"Yes, very. Did you speak with him?"

"Only a few words—but tell me, dear, had we not better rest where we are to-night? Think how great the shock would be at home if we go, unexpectedly there."

"That is true, in my haste to get home I forgot that; but we can telegraph before the train starts."

"That would bring our arrival close upon the telegraph. Give a night to think of it. At the best, our return home will be painful enough."

Virginia looked down at her black dress and thought of her father with a pang of sorrow.

"Arrange it as you please, Cora. Heaven knows, I shall not be happy anywhere."

CHAPTER XII.

MEETING OF THE LOVERS.

JOSHUA HURD went down to the hotel where Seymour was staying to get the gold for his horses, and chanced to pass up the hall just as Cora and her cousin were standing within the parlor door. The beauty of these girls would have been striking anywhere, but, in deep mourning and saddened by misfortune, the effect of their appearance was calculated to excite something deeper and purer than admiration. Joshua was not much given to emotions of taste or feeling, but he stopped short in his quick, plunging walk, and stared at them with doubt and astonishment in his face.

"By goram, if grown folks ever looked like children, them gals belong to the family somehow. Sich hair as that doesn't crop out on any other heads that I know on. What if it was them? All her bread 'ed be dough mighty quick."

While he stood muttering these words to himself, Virginia Lander came out of the parlor and passed him. Her long black dress swept across his heavy shoes, and her side face was turned toward him.

"Marm, marm—I say is—is—it you, or ain't it nobody as I cares about? My name is Joshua Hurd."

"Joshua Hurd!" exclaimed Virginia, turning back. "Oh, I am so glad you are here!"

"And it's you, and t'other one tu; I saw you a standing together, and my heart riz right up inter my mouth. But the old gentleman, is he on hand? Thought you was all gone to smash at once."

Virginia turned her face away, not in anger at the stolid creature, but the pain at her young heart was terrible.

"We come back alone," she said, with tears in her voice. "Do not let us talk of it. My cousin and I are all that you will ever see!"

"That's tough," answered Joshua, really disappointed. "Good gracious! who'd a thought of finding you here arter we'd all gone into mourning for you, and got kind'er pacified about so many going down at once. I only hope *she'll* take it mild."

"We have just been speaking of that—my cousin and I. No one must be taken by surprise."

"I reckon I'd better go right hum my own self and kind'er break the news to her easy. She's got sort a used to the property, you know."

Virginia smiled faintly at this and said, in her innocence, "Oh, she will never think of that. It will make no difference to her."

"Who is this?" exclaimed Cora, joining them. "What, Josh! dear old Josh!"

"Yes mam, it's me, sure enough. But you—by jingo, I can't tell which is which. How you have grown, both on you."

"Then you cannot tell us apart, Joshua?" said Cora, smiling. "Try! try!"

"Couldn't du it to save my life," was the puzzled answer. "Defy *her* tu tell which is her own darter and which isn't."

"What nonsense, Joshua! Why I have ridden on your shoulder a hundred times."

"And so has both on ye, that's nothing."

Virginia, who was falling back into the sadness which had become habitual to her, seemed distressed by the light tone of this conversation, and asked Joshua if he could go up the river by the first train and carry the news of their arrival to the home which they would be sure to reach in the morning.

"Yes," Joshua said, "he was on hand for anything, and would make a straight line for the depot the minute he'd secured a bag of gold a young chap in the hotel owed him."

"I will write a line and have it ready," said Cora, exhibiting a good deal of nervous excitement. "Are you going up stairs, cousin?"

"Yes," answered Virginia, sadly. "Even this meeting troubles me more than I expected."

A strange light came into Cora's eyes; she was evidently glad to be alone.

For ten minutes after she entered the parlor, Cora Lander walked up and down the room, at first rapidly, like one whose thoughts were in a tumult; then with measured paces, as she collected those thoughts out of chaos and planted them in her mind. She took up a pen to write at last, but flung it down again, having formed a quick resolution.

"Let him go," she said, beginning to pace the floor again. "It is better not. I will neither send note nor message, but let me be certain."

She rang the bell, and when the servant answered it inquired what was the latest train up the river. The man answered that one would leave a little before eleven. She dismissed him and gave herself up to anxious thought again.

When Joshua came down for his instructions, Cora was sitting in the parlor alone, grave and apparently composed.

"She had changed her mind about writing. Indeed the

effort was too much, but Joshua could tell all that was necessary. Her cousin and herself had escaped and were in New York. A vessel had picked them up at sea when almost starved, and in her they had gone back to England, but these things would all be explained in due time without burdening his memory with them. Tell the people at home that he had seen them, that would be enough."

This she said very quietly, looking in his face all the time, as if to challenge close observation. As he was going out she called him back and said, with a smile:

"So you cannot make out which of us belongs to the lady up yonder, or which is the orphan and heiress?"

"No, I'll be hung and choked to death if I can."

"Oh, you are dull, Joshua; but there will be plenty of the people who can tell us apart, I dare say."

"Not a critter, without it's our Eunice. She might."

"Oh, Aunt Eunice, as we used to call her. How cross she was," said Cora, holding up her hands in mock terror.

"Cross! Wall I reckon she is."

"But she was always devoted to—to Mrs. Lander."

"And is yit; but natur is natur, and Eunice's is awful sometimes. Now Mr. Lander was a good man, but she e'enamost hated him."

"But his daughter, she was a favorite with Eunice."

"No, she wasn't. If you're her, you must have found that out. She took to the other gal mostly, and so did I."

"Indeed! Well, well, you will think better of it when we get home. Go now, Joshua, or you will be too late for the train. By the way, had you not better go early in the morning? It will give you plenty of time. We shall not start before ten."

Joshua gathered up the end of a shot bag, which he had brought from the stable to carry his gold in, and resting it on his knee, tightened the string with both hands.

"Jest as you think best," he said. "Shouldn't wonder

if the madam 'ell be disappointed when she finds out that this isn't all hern," he muttered. "It'll come awful tough for her to give up. Jest as you think best."

Cora arose, and, in order to hurry the man off, tied up the bag with her own hands.

"Go now; go, my good fellow, or you will get but little rest," she said, taking his cap from the marble console and putting it on his head. Be sure and start very early in the morning."

Joshua lifted himself heavily from the damask chair on which he had been seated, and moved away with the bag of gold grasped tightly in his hand, muttering to himself:

"I'll make sure of that by going up to-night."

The moment he was gone, Cora went up to her cousin's chamber, and flinging herself on a couch complained bitterly of a headache, which she said was torturing her. But she declined Virginia's offered help, and lay with her face to the wall, apparently asleep, but buried in deep thought. At dark some tea and a light supper was sent up, of which they both partook with considerable appetite, Cora observing that a headache like that was sure to make her hungry, while her cousin suggested that they had eaten nothing since morning—an unwise thing when they had both so much need of strength. After a little, Cora arose and proposed going to bed at once.

"We have had a weary day," she said, "and you look very pale, dear; besides I am so depressed."

"Yes; it is a sad return home. I do not feel as if I should ever sleep sweetly again."

"But you must. I will not go to my own room till you are safe in bed; you would sit up crying half the night if I left you alone."

"No, my heart is too mournful for tears."

"Still you must try for rest, or no sleep will come to me."

"For your sake, then, I will go."

Virginia arose with a weary look and prepared herself for bed. Cora helped her to undress, and with a gentle hand brushed out the masses of chestnut brown hair which glowed with a ruddy tinge in the light as she braided it loosely in one massive cable. These pleasant feminine attentions were rather unusual to her, and Virginia received them gratefully.

"Ah! what a mournful day we shall have to-morrow," she sighed, wearily taking off her dress. "You have something to look forward to, Cora, but I—"

The unhappy girl turned away her head, and lying down half undressed, with her cheek to the pillow, began to cry."

"Don't, don't give way so," said Cora, bending over her. "Remember, to-morrow we shall be home."

Virginia sobbed still more piteously.

"At home, without him! Rich, helpless, oppressed with cares. How shall I ever fill his place?"

A strange look swept Cora's features. She almost smiled, yet a hateful expression mingled with the smile.

"Do not think about that now, but put on your night dress; you will take cold."

Virginia arose and invested herself in the full white garment which gave her a nun-like purity of look. She dropped on her knees, and with her face buried in both hands, prayed meekly for several minutes. Then she arose with a heavy sigh, and kissing her cousin good-night, lay down, turning her face to the wall.

"Good-night, dear; rest well," said Cora, smoothing the counterpane with her hand. "Now I can go content. Good-night."

With these words, Cora stole softly out of the room, murmuring good-night as she went.

Instead of going to her own chamber, the girl turned toward the staircase and swept down to the broad hall on

which their parlor opened. At the lower end of this passage she saw Seymour walking up and down, on the watch. The moment her dark garments fluttered into sight he came forward and followed her into the parlor. She closed the door and drew a bolt, so gently that he did not detect the action.

"Now, now tell me everything," she said, seating herself on a couch and motioning him to a place by her side. "I am anxious, eager to know what brought you here."

"Why ask that?" cried the young man, bending his radiant eyes upon her, while her hand was pressed between both his so ardently that her fingers unconsciously returned the clasp. "Why ask? You brought me here. I could not live with the Atlantic between us—death seemed better than that."

"And you love me so?"

"Love you! Don't ask me how much, or I might tell you what I have done."

"What you have done? But I do ask."

"Ask what, dear one? There is nothing to tell. I have moved Heaven and earth to reach this place—to obtain the means without which you would not be yourself. I have money now, brightest and dearest—ready gold and plenty of it, at least for the present; enough in fact, to give us a fair start in life. Only say that you love me dearly as I love you, and a glorious future is before us."

"I have said it a hundred times, Seymour," she answered, bending fondly toward him, but remarking, even in this rush and glow of affection, that he looked wild and spoke hurriedly, with his eyes bent downward.

"But again, and again I want to see love light in your eyes and passion on your lips every moment of my life. It is my food, my drink, the air I breathe. Oh, girl! girl! how I love you!"

He threw his arms around her and strained her to his

bosom with a vehemence that frightened her. She was ardent and given up to her own wild will like himself, but there was something beside love in all this, and she felt it with a thrill of terror.

"You are cold; you shrink from me, after all that I have done to win you—while my heart is struggling so madly to find yours."

"No! no!" she protested. "I love you—I love you—ten thousand times over I love you! It may be folly, it may be madness, but I *do* love you."

"My darling! my brave, bright, beautiful love! Now I am no longer afraid. I regret nothing. There is no treachery, no wrong that love like this would not sanctify. Let me look at you. Heavens, how beautiful you are! These little, warm hands, how they cling to mine! how white they are! But I will make them rosy with kisses. Oh, girl! girl! I thought you were dead, that this glorious form was weltering in the deep, torn by sharks—lost! lost! The thought was driving me mad. But you are here! you are here! I can see your heart beat and your cheeks flush, and these dear lips parted with smiles as you listen. Tell me! tell me once more, how much you love me!"

"Why ask me again?" she said. "Did I ever deny my love when you were penniless?"

"No, girl, no; but you refused to share that penniless state."

"Because I hoped for something better. My—my relative was then alive. He was generous, and loved me. When we reached home, I intended to appeal to him. It would not have been in vain."

"Was this your real intention?"

"I had no other—you would have heard from me. I might have asked such letters as would satisfy him of your honorable position, nothing more. But he is dead."

"And so we must fall back on my little hoard of gold. Will that be enough for you?"

"It would be difficult to say how much would be enough," answered Cora, with a bright smile. "Plenty of property is necessary to make love like ours perfect. I should perish, body and soul, without objects of beauty all around me. Is it because you are so handsome, so peerlessly graceful, that I can think of no one else? I often ask myself, if you were plain and insignificant, even common looking, would not my pride sweep you off among the herd of ordinary men?"

"I never thanked Heaven for good looks before," said Seymour with genuine warmth. "In fact, I never thought of it; few men do, I fancy. Then, if I had been good and great, and all that men study and strive for, you might never have thought of me?"

"Oh, I would have everything, but I shall make you vain; your eyes flash with triumph already. See how easily a woman loses her power when she says honestly, 'I love you.'"

"No, no; she exalts herself. Would that I had millions to lavish upon you instead of twenty paltry thousands."

"Twenty thousand! that is not much," she said, growing thoughtful for a moment. "But what then? We shall not be without resources; I have ideas, and courage and will enough for anything. What if I were richer than you think?"

"So that you loved me still, I should rejoice—but only for your sake." The young man spoke honestly, and with a tone of sadness in his voice. "Could I have been sure of you, poverty would have been nothing. Oh! how much better to work for you! But all that is over, and I am brave enough to be glad."

"We must not talk of work—I hate it," said Cora, smiling brightly upon him. "To me the world is divided into two classes—those who work and those who enjoy. Had I been of the working classes, the very loathing of it

would have driven me to struggle upwards, as both men and women can in this country."

"Ah! if we could have had patience to wait for that!" said Seymour, with sudden passion. "To work alone even, hoping for you in the end, would have been Heaven to me; I could have served any hard task-master, like Jacob, for seven long years."

"And in the meantime I should have grown old and ugly—you, round-shouldered, perhaps," said Cora, laughing. "No, no; let us have all or nothing. The world is before us—Fortune has always been true to me. Like the lilies of the field, I have neither toiled nor spun, and it will go hard if fate puts me to it now."

Seymour looked at her animated face in thoughtful admiration. Truly she was very beautiful. All the love she was capable of feeling flooded her eyes and burned on her cheek. She seemed supremely happy, and the young man believed that affection for himself alone kindled her features into superb loveliness. They sat in silence awhile. He was thoughtful and grave, though her head rested on his shoulder and the perfume of her hair swept across his face.

"I wonder if any one ever can be perfectly happy?" he said.

"I think so," was her soft answer. "I feel so."

"When you are mine—all mine—when fate itself cannot wrest you from me, I shall know," he murmured.

"When shall it be? There is no cause for delay."

"I will tell you after to-morrow," she whispered.

"But you leave the city then."

"It is only a short ride on the railway."

"May I come there?"

"Yes, but not directly. There may be reasons against it that I do not know of. But close by the depot is a public house, where you can be comfortable for a few hours

or days. On the third day from this you will find me in the grounds. There was formerly an odd little summer-house up a ravine which opens to the river; you can almost see it from the depot. Wait for me there."

"I shall have but one thought till then."

"And now good-night!"

"But you will not send me away yet?"

"I must. My cousin is ill and may want me."

"Ah, this is cruel!"

"To myself most of all. She does not know of your existence, and might find you here. There! there! you hurt my hand. We shall meet again very soon."

"Not to part—say that, dear girl!"

"I hope so—I think so. But be prudent, and if necessary patient. Remember we have a whole life before us."

"A Heaven, you should say."

She smiled sweetly, gave him for the first time her lips to kiss, and went to the door with his arm around her waist. With a dexterous touch of the finger, she shot the bolt and let him out, almost delirious with mingled feelings of joy, pride, shame and regret.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MIDNIGHT HOUR.

CORA remained in the room some time after Seymour left it, walking up and down, sometimes slowly, sometimes with the quick, impetuous tread of an empress whose power was threatened. Her heart was in a tumult of passionate feeling. The wild rush of joy that had overwhelmed her when she first saw Seymour still beat in her bosom and crimsoned her cheeks. So far as love is a passion, she felt

it deeply toward that man—felt it with that blind impulse which would have overmastered any obstacle and rendered her capable almost of goodness, if that alone could have united them. She would not have married him penniless because self-sacrifice was not in her nature, but she possessed force of character to surmount any difficulty which lay between them, and all her love and ambition craved.

"He is young, accomplished, ambitious, splendidly handsome," she said to herself. "What more can I ask. One thing, and that I will procure. It requires courage, audacity, an iron fixedness of will, almost impossible self-possession; but I have all these things. This thought has been in my mind too long for failure. Once it was a dream, now a fixed purpose—a purpose that cannot fail unless she has grown generous or cowardly—no, she is not old enough for that. I know all her weak points—a love of display, luxurious habits, a hatred of the class from which she sprung. No, I cannot fail with her. Well, the others? This man, for instance, he is easily managed; but then Aunt Eunice, that sharp, hard old Yankee woman, who never forgets. Well, I have courage even to defy her."

Here Cora took out her watch, started on finding how late it was, and hurried up to her room. Without a moment's delay she changed her dress, enveloped herself in a water-proof cloak, tied a thick veil over her bonnet, and, locking the door after her, went down to the street, passing unobserved as some sewing woman going about her ordinary business. She beckoned a carriage which stood near the entrance, ordered it to be driven to the Hudson River depot, and in half an hour was seated in the remote seat of a car, ready to start up the river.

The train started slowly from the depot, and went with some caution through the streets, seeming to scatter back stars along its path as it passed lamp-post after lamp-post,

linking them as it were in a swift chain of fire. At last the engine plunged into the country, lighting up the track and the shadowy trees in its swift progress. Cora sat still, muffled close in her cloak of dull gray, and with her brown barege veil drawn close over her face. She had no luggage, not even a travelling basket or satchel, and sat motionless, looking out of the window as if something enthralling lay in the dark rush of the river and the broken shore along which she was whirled.

At the nearest station to the Lander's dwelling she arose, softly gathered the cloak around her, and, without speaking to the conductor, stepped out upon the platform. She was not the only person set down at that point, but a few moments found her standing there, as she supposed, quite alone, while the train rushed up the river bank panting under every impulse of its fiery heart.

When the train had disappeared like a huge black serpent scaled sparsely with spots of fire, this young girl turned and walked hastily toward a flight of steps which led up the terrace and would conduct her at once to the lawn in front of the late Mr. Lander's dwelling. Even in the darkness, she could detect the gleam of white marble pillars and a lofty façade breaking through the night, contrasted with the huge trees that encompassed them with a world of black shadows.

It was a weird picture of home to which the young girl came, like a thief and with the thoughts of a robber in her heart. If the darkness had permitted it, her face would have shone out white and hard almost as the marble on which her eyes turned with such burning greed. She stood a moment on the verge of the terrace regarding the building, which soon outlined itself in the sable cloud which surrounded it with vast spectral indistinctness. Even thus it was a noble pile, appealing grandly to the imagination, and her heart swelled with rapacious satisfaction as she gathered its value into her mind.

After a little, she began to regard the house with other thoughts. Her eyes wandered over the building in search of a light, which she hoped to find shining through some of the windows. But none appeared, and she walked on, burying her footsteps in the crisp grass of the lawn, for it was too dark for any hope of finding a path. There was no wavering or hesitation about her. Swiftly as a human being could walk, she passed through the shadows and turned an angle of the house. In the window of a second story room, which overlooked a portion of the lawn most thickly planted with flowers, a faint light was burning behind curtains of white lace, which softened it as clouds envelop a star.

"That is her room, I know," muttered the girl; "she never slept without a light. But she has changed apartments with her new fortunes. That used to be a guest chamber."

As she spoke the light seemed to waver as if some one held it unsteadily. It was only the curtain stirred by a gentle wind, for the sash was open that pleasant summer night, and Mrs. Lander, being an epicure, loved to have perfume from the dewy flowers wafted to her as she slept.

"Thank Heaven for that coward habit of a night lamp," thought the girl, stealing softly around the house in search of some unbolted door through which she might let herself in. She tried the back doors first, but to no avail. Then searched for an open window, but Eunice had taken care that no means of entrance should be left exposed. On the ground floor every point was locked and guarded.

After satisfying herself of this fact, Cora went round to the flower garden again, resolved, by some means, to reach the window which had at first occupied so much of her attention. Sharp and vigilant as a fox, she searched the wall for some means of ascent, but the white marble was smooth as snow-crust and nothing but a vast rose bush

broke its polished surface. This bush, however, hung loosely on the wall, and its branches swayed to and fro in the flickering light. Cora was seized with a wild impulse to climb up this uncertain support, and thus, if possible, reach the window. She seized the rose bush by the stem and brought it down violently, with all its blossoming branches trailing on the grass. In starting back, Cora trod upon something hard, which almost threw her down. She groped in the grass at her feet and found that she had stumbled against a ladder, which lay half buried in the grass where it had been thrown by the gardener; who had been busy about the climbing roses the day before and had left his work unfinished. Cora lifted the ladder, with some difficulty, and planting it against the white wall found that it reached the open window. Light as a bird, she climbed from round to round, till half her form and her entire side face was framed, like a picture, against the faintly illuminated sash.

The stillness within the room fell upon her with a sudden check. She leaned forward, holding her breath, and looked in. A bed stood in a corner of the room clouded with volumes of white lace, through which the outline of a female figure could be seen slumbering in the soft radiance which stole like moonlight from a lamp that seemed shaded with transparent snow. All the while Cora Lander remained as it were framed in by the window, a stout man stood beneath that great willow, which drooped over him like the curving waters of a fountain, and watched her movements curiously. But when she disappeared through the window he moved towards the stables a muttering,

"Well, it aint none of my business as I know on, but that is a mighty queer way for any gal to come home. I wonder which on 'em it is!"

Cora Lander, all unconscious of this scrutiny, paused a moment to listen before she crossed the room and drew

the lace curtains back from the bed. Mrs. Lander lay sleeping upon her pillow, frilled, laced, and embroidered with that excess of ornament which those who come suddenly into the possession of riches are apt to indulge in. A quantity of Valenciennes lace lay softly around her forehead and temples. The plump white hands crept out from double frills edged with the same rich material, and the bosom of her night-dress presented one mass of insertion and embroidery. She was a tolerably handsome woman and these things became her well, though a close observer would have understood something of the suddenness of her late good fortune by those elaborate appointments.

Cora Lander's proud lip curved, and a gleam of malicious humor shot into her eyes.

"Upon my word, she dashes into the thing with a will," was her first thought, "No fool like an old fool! All her toilet bottles mounted with gold. Both hands loaded with diamonds even in her sleep! How self-satisfied she looks. No wonder—no wonder! A property like this might make any one rest sweetly. The more she prizes it, why the easier my task."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TEMPTER AND THE TEMPTED.

CORA LANDER bent close to the sleeping woman's ear, and uttered the word "mother," in one of those sharp, sudden whispers which thrill the heart even in slumber.

Mrs. Lander started up with a faint cry, and pressing one elbow into the down of her pillow, gave a wild stare at the face bending over her.

"Who is this? What are you?" she cried, in sudden terror.

"Mother! mother! surely you know me!"

"Know you! know you! I was dreaming of those eyes, but not of you. My child was younger, frailer, lovelier. She is drowned! She is drowned! What do you want of me? I do not know you. How dare you call me mother?"

The woman spoke wildly, almost with defiance. Her hands quivered under their lace ruffles; the embroidery on her bosom rose and fell with a sudden spasm of dread.

"Mother, you know me well enough; I am Cora Lander, your own child."

"My own child?"

"You thought me dead, I dare say. But here I am safe and well. Touch my hand—that will prove it."

"But—but you are taller. You are a woman!" gasped the mother.

"A girl grows taller in eight years. But look close, mother—you would have known me by daylight."

"No, no, I shouldn't—I don't. The hair is like, but darker—the eyes—the mouth—that smile. Cora! Cora Lander! my child! my child!"

All the motherhood of the woman sprang into action then. She seized the young girl in her arms, drew her down upon the bed and rained kisses upon her, sobbing, laughing and shivering under a rush of natural tenderness that swept all other feelings out of her heart. At last she pushed the girl back from her bosom and examined her face line by line.

"And you have come back—my child! my darling!"

"Hush! hush! we are having too much of this," said the girl, sitting down on the bed. "Some one will hear us."

"Well, why not? They will all know in the morning."

"I think not, dear aunt!"

"Dear aunt! What is this for? But it reminds me

that perhaps you and I are paupers. What has become of him? Is he alive too?"

"No, thank Heaven! he is safe, fathoms deep in the Atlantic."

Mrs. Lander drew a quick breath. "Oh! dear, it seems terrible to hear you say this!" she said, with a frightened look. "But if he were alive what *should* we do? Poverty! poverty! poverty! I shouldn't endure that after having so much!"

"But it may come upon us yet," said the daughter.

"How? how? Oh! I remember—that other Cora, the girl they called Virginia. But she is fathoms deep too."

"She is alive and well, down in New York, this moment," said Cora, drily.

"What? what?" cried the woman, strangling with a hysterical rush of feeling. "She alive! Then we are a thousand times worse off than if Lander had lived. He was kind and generous enough. But that child, with her soft ways, and that smile, acting always as if she had been born a lady, while you would let the old Adam out—I would rather starve than take my bread from her! Oh! what will become of us?"

"That is what I came up from New York in the dead of night to talk to you about. No one knows that I am here—no one must know anything about it. Do try and be calm; everything depends on that."

"Well, child, I am calm. Despair has this one good quality—it brings dead repose with it. After a little, I shall find strength to look this thing in the face. But it is hard."

"I know that, mother; you have not tasted the bitterness of dependence alone. I know what it must be to give up a fortune like this. But how came you with it? Did my uncle make a will?" The man you sent to New York with a pair of horses told me so."

"Yes, he made a will—all to no purpose now. Oh! it was to no purpose!"

"And how did this will read? Tell me?"

"It gave everything to her."

"Everything! And you blundered like that?"

"Yes, Cora. He wrote it with his own hand. Upon my life and honor, it was every word in his own handwriting!"

"But was that all? The law would have given it to her!"

"Yes, yes, I know; but the law, instead of giving you and I a chance of the whole, would have scattered it among those country cousins. That was what made Lander's will valuable. If she died without children, you came next, and I after."

"Indeed! Then it was under this that you took possession. It is hard on you that we turn up alive—hard on me too, for Cora may marry and have half-a-dozen children to cut us out. Will do all this, certainly, if we are fools enough to let her."

"But how can we help it? What have we to do but sink back into our old dependence?"

"Mother, listen to me," said Cora, in a hard, firm voice.

"Well, I listen," was the wondering answer. "But how hard your face looks—there is no childhood left in you, Cora Lander."

"I hope not, for the thing I came to talk about is no child's play. It needs firmness, courage, audacity even. I fear that you will be wanting in these qualities when the test comes."

"Why, do you fear me because I am taken by surprise, when roused out of a sound sleep, to find you at my bedside—not white and dripping, as I have seen you so often in my dreams—not the child whose brightness I was so proud of, but a calm, hard woman, taking the lead even with me, your own mother?"

"True, true, there is something in that. The surprise was enough to stagger any one. I might have bent under it myself, especially after tasting the sweetness of such wealth. But what I am thinking of requires the most consummate coolness, nerves of iron, a face of marble. It requires that determination which enables a man to commit what the world calls crime quietly, firmly. You could never do that."

Mrs. Lander looked at her daughter half in triumph, half affrighted.

"You say this to test me, Cora—to make yourself certain that I am incapable of wrong. You suspect me, perhaps?"

"No, no; I wish that were possible."

"What were possible?"

"Why, that you had the courage to reach forth your hand for this noble inheritance."

"But I have the courage. You do not know—"

"Yes the courage to submit."

"No, to struggle—to fight. Only all struggles are hopeless now."

"But you have not the courage, I repeat, to commit what men might call a crime even to make your child, and through her yourself, heiress of all this wealth."

"What—what is it you mean? Are you setting up an inquisition over your own mother? Of what can you suspect me?"

Mrs. Lander was deadly pale, her mouth contracted itself, her eyes gleamed with apprehension.

The girl looked into that craven face with keen inquiry. It puzzled even her penetration. If the mere thought of wrong had so disturbed her mother, there was little hope that the scheme which had brought her there could be carried out. But her searching eye soon discovered more than the mere revolt of innocent conscience in this strange

agitation. There was actual guilt in that face. What could that guilt be? Quick as lightning that sharp intellect ran over all possible causes for this singular agitation, and settled on the will.

"I only suspect, mother, that you tampered with Uncle Lander's will."

Mrs. Lander fell back upon her pillow, white and breathless.

"The will! the will!" she whispered. "Who told—who has dared?"

"Be tranquil, do be tranquil, mother," said the girl taking the trembling hand put forth to repulse her and kissing it tenderly. "All this makes our way clear; I do not blame you. What else could you do?"

"It would have gone to those stupid cousins," pleaded the woman. "Besides, the will was his, every word—"

"Except the names," said Cora, gently. "I understand. Well, after all, that was risking a great deal, while my plan has positively no danger in it."

"But will it secure the property?" asked the mother.

"Yes."

"To me, just as it is now—and without danger?"

"Not to you; that is impossible."

Mrs. Lander's face contracted with disappointment, while her daughter went on:

"But through me your only child, everything can be done."

Mrs. Lander did not speak, but her eyes asked eager questions.

"What matters it," said the girl, "which is absolute owner here? Are not a mother and daughter one?"

"But it seems most natural that a mother should possess the power," faltered Mrs. Lander.

"And so you shall in everything but the name. Only aid me in getting possession, and there will be no dispute about power between us."

"But how?"

"It is easy, mother, and perfectly safe. To-morrow, when we come home, forget that I am your daughter, and in my place accept the girl called Virginia Lander."

Mrs. Lander rose to a sitting posture in the bed, her eyes were full of wild light, her lips parted.

"What!"

Cora answered this sharp exclamation very calmly.

"We two girls are so much alike that people take us for twins. We have been away from the country eight years. No human being is qualified to contradict you when you claim Virginia and disown me. No other evidence of identity will be needed, even if it comes to a court of law. I shall support you—from the first I shall recognize you only as my aunt, claim Amos Lander as my father, and quietly take the position of his child. By what force can she dislodge me?"

Mrs. Lander sunk back to the pillows, astounded by the bold scheme which was to deprive her of a daughter.

"Let me rest—let me think," she said; "the audacity of this thing appals me."

"Do think—reflect; nothing can be safer. It is simply to say a thing and persist in it."

"But the people abroad—those who knew you both at the schools—should there be a contest, they will be called as witnesses."

"What then? They know nothing. We passed as Mr. Lander's children; no distinction was ever made; I doubt if any one knew that we were not sisters. Thanks to Virginia's sensitive generosity, she never spoke of my dependent position, and as for Uncle Lander, he always introduced us on shipboard and elsewhere as Miss Lander and Miss Cora Lander."

Mrs. Lander drew a deep breath; the anxiety was dying out from her face.

"And this would make you heiress of everything?" she said. "But where would my claim be?"

"In your power to dispossess me by a word. That would make you, in fact, mistress here."

"True, true; but they might force me to swear that you were not my child; then my power of retreat would be cut off."

Cora Lander could be sweet and affectionate enough when it pleased her to put forth these gentle qualities. She stooped down to her mother, threw one arm caressingly over her and pressed half-a-dozen soft kisses on her face.

"It is for us both—for you, dear mother, more than myself. I am ready to risk something rather than see you cast back into poverty. Think how hard it will be to give all this luxury up to another—think of my fate, compelled to take every mouthful of bread I eat from her bounty. Mother, if you prove coward and force me to this, I shall hate you!"

"If we could share it together, I would not hesitate, but the wrong and falsehood will be all mine, the reward yours."

"Only in name, sweet mother—only in name. The wealth and power you shall possess alike with myself."

"But this girl, this poor Virginia, whom we are wronging so—what will become of her?"

"Let her stay here and learn the bitter lesson she has taught you and me—that of a poor relative subsisting on a rich man's bounty. We must change places. I will be gracious, kind and killingly generous to her, as she has been to us."

"But she will protest, appeal to the law."

"Let her; without proof against that best of evidence, the woman who claims to be her mother, what will her protest amount to?"

How well this young creature had considered her plans;

not a thread of the web was wanting; even the law itself seemed powerless to break into its meshes; never did a fraud seem more certain of success. The widow had yielded herself to Cora's blandishments; they seemed to insure her a splendid future. With a creature like that, so beautiful and bright, wealth would have tenfold value. The joy of her child's return was mingled with all this. She loved the fair young creature with new-born affection. Her voice was sweet, her smile persuasive. The very crime that she proposed assimilated so well with that already committed by herself, that it broke down the barriers of reserve which long absence and the change from childhood to womanliness would naturally have produced. Sympathy either in good or evil draws hearts close together. Cora leaned toward her mother and kissed her cheek, which was scarlet and hot with struggling emotions.

"Say, now," she pleaded, "if you and I are to be mistresses of this noble property, this house with all its luxurious appurtenances, or beggars again?"

"Cora, I never could endure that. Possession has been too sweet. This broad, free sense of independence has expanded my whole life. I love to give orders and receive the homage of those whom money has made the slaves of my will. I love to feel that the marble under my feet is mine to tread upon or tear up as I will; the fruit and flowers growing around me are mine, mine, mine to give, keep, sell or leave on the boughs. Cora, I never knew till now the entire bitterness of poverty, the abject humiliation of dependence."

"But all this must come unless you act as I wish."

"Yes, I see; I see. But to give up my own fair child and take another in her place, one too whom I have wronged so, that too seems impossible."

"I know, I know; but in secret I shall still be your child."

"But I shall be nothing, not even mother to the heiress."

"You will be her aunt. The most loved and honored relative that ever controlled a household. Besides, pray remember, a few months will put this entire property into my hands, then I can divide it with you."

"And will you? She too can be provided for, and it will not seem so hard."

"We will think of that—but tell me now, are you prepared? Will you promise to be firm? In a little time the train will come down; I must be assured of my position before I go."

"I wish Eunice were here!"

"Eunice, the hard-faced woman with the red hair? Surely you do not trust people like her!"

"She is—" Mrs. Lander stopped suddenly, checked herself, and added, as if from some after-thought, "She is faithful and devoted to me."

"Mother," said Cora, with great firmness, "this secret rests between us two. On your life, I charge you, share it with no other living soul! That would be to make ourselves slaves indeed."

"Not with Eunice? Not with Eunice?" almost pleaded the widow.

"Mother, a secret shared is an object lost. What is this iron-faced woman to us, that we should take her into our souls?"

"Eunice—Eunice. Oh, nothing but a faithful old servant, who loved me well before I became rich."

"Let her remain a faithful servant, nothing more," answered Cora. "I want no confidants bred in the kitchen, no love from any quarter which cannot be paid for with money. So let her pass, for we have but little time. I hear a clock striking, or rather giving out fairy music. What sumptuous tastes you have, mother! It would be a pity to give all these pretty things up to my cousin!"

"That I never will—never! never!" cried Mrs. Lander.

"Then be firm and prepare to receive that other one as your daughter. Good-night, I must go now."

"Good-night! With these words we are torn apart never again to be mother and child! God has given you back to me, and in your place I take money got by crime."

Mrs. Lander spoke low, but with deep, passionate feeling. She was not hard by nature, like the fair young girl who looked down upon her, beautiful as Lucifer and almost as wicked.

"This is sentiment—nonsense—and such things are out of place when an object like this lies before us. We can love each other and live together. Why not? Aunts are often very, very fond of their nieces. It excites no wonder."

"No, no; crime strangles love."

"Not with the strong and bold. Take courage, you have little to do; I am not afraid to lead the way."

Cora turned toward the window, gathering her cloak tightly around her. Mrs. Lander sprang out of bed and followed her with both trembling hands held out.

"One embrace, Cora! Let me feel you close to my heart before you go! Call me mother again!"

"There, mother, am I close enough? Why how you tremble!"

"My child!"

"There! there! kiss me a hundred times if you like; but when that little clock chimes the quarter I must be gone. Why, how foolish you are! how weak! We shall meet again to-morrow or next day, and there will be no more parting."

"Crime parts everything, Cora; I have learned that already. Heaven help us! it had almost reconciled me to your death, and now that you have come back, awaking my heart to its old tenderness, you would pile up barriers

between us. No! no! let us be poor again—very poor! I shall not care, so long as we are innocent and love each other."

"But I should not love you."

"Don't say that! I could give these things up, indeed I could!"

"And repine over it forever after. Know yourself better; but this argument would last forever. Once for all, will you act as I desire?"

"Yes! yes!"

"That is right. Now I love you dearly. You shall be the grand dame of the establishment."

"I know that you will be kind, dear."

"Trust me. There goes the quarter—good-bye! good-bye!"

When the last word left her lips, Cora was outside upon the ladder, with her beautiful face uplifted to the light. In an instant she glided downward into the darkness. The ladder was drawn after her and fell softly to its old place in the grass. A branch of the rose-bush swayed back, as if something had dragged it out of place, and that was all.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DISTURBED CONSCIENCE.

MRS. LANDER sprang out of bed and ran to the window, resolved to call her daughter back and revoke the evil promise she had made. She leaned out into the chill air, careless of the wind, which stirred her night dress as if it had been snow, searching for her child in the darkness. As her eyes got accustomed to the gloom, she saw what seemed like a deeper shadow fluttering on the edge of the terrace, but that was all.

The rattle of a coming train in the far distance kept her at the window. The noise grew louder, wilder and more impetuous. Then a great burning eye, fiery and seemingly bloodshot, glared out from the blackness of crowded trees, lighting them up like the smile of a demon, and a shriek, horrible in its shrillness, cut through the night, making the woman's heart quake in her bosom as if a fiend had mocked her. Then came the sharp clang of a bell, the rattle of iron, and the train swept away again, rushing off like a storm.

Mrs. Lander listened to its receding noises with absolute terror. It seemed as if some awful visitation had left her there trembling and helpless. Such dreams had visited her before. Mr. Lander himself had swept down upon her from mountainous waves, dripping wet, and with his gray hair turned to icicles, clamoring for his property. Her daughter, too, had haunted her sleep, crying for help from some yawning gulf of waters, and she had seen Lander's heiress dancing fantastic flings on the surface of a calm ocean, bright as quicksilver. All these apparitions had demanded a restitution of the property she had just begun to enjoy with such zest. The struggle to retain it, and yet allow them to come out free from their prison in the great crystal deep, had often sent her out of these dreams sobbing with dread and bathed in cold perspiration.

But hard as these dreams had been, nothing could equal the scene that had just swept past her. Was it real? Could it be a vision, like the rest, tormenting her sleep? She pressed her hands on the marble window-sill and leaned out into the night, searching it wildly for some trace of the presence that had seemed so real. The slow rush of the Hudson, sweeping toward the ocean just below the terrace, and a soft shiver of leaves, was all the sound she heard. Nothing was visible save the outline of the flower-beds and groups of shrubbery merging dimly into the pale grey light which was just beginning to dawn in the east.

The woman drew back with a sob of grateful relief. A new class of demons had begun to haunt her. Fiery trains, trailing smoke as they went, out of which came her daughter, more beautiful than she had ever dreamed of, to tempt her into new crimes, had been coursing through her sleep. This vision had driven her out of bed into the chilly night air. All about her shoulders and bosom the linen robe she wore was wet with dew. She was shivering with cold in all her limbs. For the world she would not encounter another vision like that. Such things were getting to be frightfully real. Eunice should sleep in the next room and that would be a protection hereafter. She withdrew herself from the window and crept into bed, shuddering with cold, but rest was impossible; she had been too severely shocked; all that she could do was to lie there with her eyes wide open and watch the daylight as it crept across the window. At last a sunbeam shot through the lace curtains, silvering them like a cloud and filling her room with light.

It was very strange, but the brilliancy and stir of morning only made that vision more definite and certain. Before this her dreams had vanished with the darkness, but this—its distinctness terrified her. She reached forth her hand, it fell upon a hollow place on the counterpane. Lifting herself up from the pillows, she examined the spot. It was pressed down as if some person had been sitting there. She remembered that figure in the gray cloak with its hood falling back, and a sick feeling crept over her. Was it reality? Could it be that Cora, in her natural person, had occupied that place? She started from the bed, resolved to search for other traces of the strange presence.

Mrs. Lander left her bed, she leaned from the window, looking forth upon as bright a sunrise as ever blessed the earth. A shimmer of dew lay upon everything—grass, leaves and branches, were bright with it. A rain of dia-

monds trembled on the great drooping willows, and the flowers knew a double brightness, for the sunshine turned the moisture in their cups to a living fire. All this dazzled the woman without satisfying her. She leaned out of the window, searching the grass beneath it. A ladder lay half-buried in the grass, but near it, slanting down one side, was the print of all its rounds and supporters pressed into the turf like a material shadow, if that could be. Straggling out from under this ladder was a broken rose branch, full of sap and fresh at the splintered end. Away from that, crossing the lawn, a trail of small footprints was plainly visible leading to the terrace stairs.

The faintness of slow fear fell upon Mrs. Lander as she saw all this. She could not yet realize that her child was alive, the impression left by her presence was still so weird. But she knew that the vision of that night could never be shaken off—that, as a blessing or a curse, she must meet it with all her intellect and all her strength.

The woman did not go back to her bed. Those wild, bright eyes were too widely open for that, but she dressed herself in haste, stopping in deep thought sometimes with the comb drawn half through her hair, and gazing on herself in the glass, as if that image had been her enemy, for minutes together; then she would hurry on her garments with sudden impetuosity and drop into thought as before. The woman had no object in this; for when she was dressed the whole effort ended in a hurried walk up and down the room with an energy that was almost appalling, for her feet gave forth no sound from the moss-like carpet, and the workings of her face took unnatural force from the stillness, as if the passions within her were smitten with dumb agony.

Thus it was that Eunice found her mistress when she came to her chamber, late in the morning. No, not exactly thus, for, at the first sound of a step in the hall, Mrs.

Lander drove the trouble back from her face, and quietly asking if breakfast were ready, passed down stairs. She had resolved to keep her own secret, had forced herself to wait, the hardest lesson an ardent nature ever learned.

During the first hours in which this woman was mustering her strength, Cora Lander, who had haunted her like a ghost, was being whirled toward the city in the remotest seat of a car filled with passengers, sound asleep or too drowsy to notice her. There she sat folded in her cloak, vigilant and thoughtful. So far, her proceedings had passed unnoticed, but it would be daylight when she reached the city, and great caution might be needed on entering the hotel. When the train reached its depot she entered the hotel coach, pausing by the steps a moment to observe if any passengers were bound for the same destination, and was relieved to find that half-a-dozen persons, two of whom were ladies, came crowding in after her. The coach thundered rapidly through the still streets, and in a brief time sat down its occupants before the hotel. Cora went with the rest to the reception room, but while the travellers entered she glided away up the stairs to her own chamber, and no human being save one ever knew positively that she had left it.

CHAPTER XVI.

KINDRED LOVE.

THAT night, while Cora Lander was working out her evil plans and Virginia had fallen asleep, with tears in her eyes, thinking of her loneliness, Brian Nolan and the hunch-backed girl sat in a little upper room of the hotel, talking together in that sad, hopeless way which is most likely to

follow a great misfortune. The light was dim, for Brian, with that sensitive delicacy with which a refined nature strives to throw a veil over deep feeling, had turned down the gas, and in this semi-obscurity held his sister close in his arms.

"Don't cry so, darling, don't. It breaks my heart to feel you shake and sob in this way," said the boy, trembling, himself, as he spoke.

"I was thinking how many of us went on board that ship, Brian. Now you and I are left alone! all are gone! all are gone!"

"I know! I know!" answered the boy. "Oh! my poor mother! my grand, strong father!"

The boy shook and trembled as he spoke, and the girl clung to him more tightly, sobbing with half-suppressed bursts of grief.

"He looked so grand—just as Abraham must have stood when his boy lay on the altar. When I mounted the bulwark, I knew it was death; people were sinking all around the ship—"

"Don't, Brian! don't, or my heart will break!"

"Poor sister! poor Ellen! I am sorry! But these things are always in my mind. Only a few days ago I prayed God to take me where they have gone. I was all alone—hungry, oh, so hungry!"

"Poor Brian! I never was that since we left the boat. *She* has fed me as if I had been a bird that she loved."

"God bless her sweet face! But tell me how it all happened. I know that she swam to the boat with you hanging about her neck, but that is months ago. Where have you been ever since?"

"We floated about for three days, cold and hungry, till some of the strong men prayed to die; but she was patient, and tried to make them hope for the best. It would have made you cry to hear her comforting that other proud girl."

when she gave way and would sit moaning and wringing her hands like a crazy thing. *My lady* was calm and still as an angel. Some of the men had tossed some bread and a keg of water into the boat before she put off, and that kept us from quite starving. *My lady* only ate half that was given to her and would have divided the rest between her cousin and me. I would not touch it—no, no, I would have starved to death first—but Cora, that hard, beautiful Cora, devoured it all without a single thank. Oh, Brian, *my lady* is so good!”

“I know it, darling; she looks good. But you were taken up at last.”

“Yes, Brian, a ship bound for South America hove in sight. Oh! what joy came upon us! Then it was, brother, that my young lady gave up and burst into tears. Her white face was so beautiful then. She snatched me close to her bosom and kissed me, thanking God with every kiss. I clung to her; I laughed—I cried—I shivered with joy. The other girl stood up in the boat and beckoned the great ship with both her hands. She was eager as a hawk, but never spoke one word of thanks or seemed to care whether the rest were saved or not. Why, brother, the tough old seaman were on their knees with great tears rolling down their cheeks, sobbing like babies and blessing the ship, as if she had been a living thing that could feel their thankfulness; but her face was one white glow. She looked ready to trample us all down just to get into the ship one minute before us. Once the boat gave a lurch and almost flung her overboard. Then she caught hold of my young lady with both hands and sunk down on her knees, but not to pray. ‘Those horrid men wanted to kill her,’ she said, ‘and tried to throw her into the sea, just when life was so sweet and she was so near being safe.’”

“And you, my poor little sister, were taken on board with the rest and treated kindly?” questioned the lad, kissing that eloquent face with tender sympathy.

“Me? oh yes, everybody was kind to me, you know, for I never left her side, and she was like an angel among them. I wish you could have seen her talking to the men who were very down-hearted after the first few days; for they had not a cent left in the world.”

“And you, my sister, had nothing?”

“Oh yes, I had everything, for I had her! She took great care of me, and loved me dearly; and I—oh, Brian, I am afraid it’s a sin to worship anything as I worship her.”

“No, no, Ellen; such feelings as you and I have for those who saved us are not wrong. It would be wicked if we did not almost worship these people.”

“Well, I do; I do—my lady had rings on her fingers worth a good deal of money, and the other one had just as many, so there was no want when they set us on shore. But she pined and grieved for her father. I never saw anybody so troubled and so still. The other was always brooding, brooding, brooding—I didn’t like her—I never shall like her, Brian. When she touches me only with her dress I start as if a snake were creeping by.”

“Ellen, dear, this will never do. It is the old trouble coming back. I can remember, when you were a little child, these fits of dislike coming over you.”

“But they were always true, Brian; I never shudder so at the sight of a good man or woman. When the snake fear comes on, I know that it is to warn me.”

“All this is because you are what people call sensitive, Ellen, and that will never do for a poor girl who has her way to make in the world,” said Brian, tenderly.

“But how can one help such feelings if God has given them? You might as well attempt to straighten this poor back as ask me not to shrink when anything bad comes near me. I feel it in the air. It troubles me like a fever. It seems as if nightshade and henbane were growing all

around me. But goodness—oh! that is so different. When my young lady comes near I grow strong, and seem to stand up straight like other people. The air is full of bloom—roses and lillies seem breathing through the light. I long to fall down on my knees and thank God for something.”

“Ah, Ellen, my poor sister, all this makes you unhappy.”

“No, no; I am very, very happy sometimes.”

“But not generally.”

“How can I be, and they all gone?” answered the poor girl, plaintively. “Still, when I think how grandly he died—”

“Don’t! don’t let us talk of that!” cried the lad, with an outburst of passionate grief.

Ellen lifted up her mouth and kissed him.

“No, dear, I won’t—only it is a comfort to me sometimes.”

“Oh, Ellen, if he had but lived!”

“Yes, dear; but God wanted our father. Grand angels like him do not often enter Heaven, I dare say.”

Brian held her in his arms, and, bending his face, was about to kiss her forehead.

“Not there,” she said, with sweet solemnity. “Don’t touch my forehead. *He* kissed it—so did *she*—all the salt waters of the ocean could not wash those two kisses out. Her poor lips trembled, but his fell upon my forehead like a seal. Was it to make me gentle and sweet, like her—or great and strong, like him, I wonder?”

Brian looked down upon his sister and smiled through all his sadness. The idea of strength, connected with a creature like that, struck him as almost ludicrous. She smiled also, but with a sort of confidence.

“If I were tall, and large, and grand in my person, you would believe in me.”

“I believe in you now, dear; people can be loving and good without being very powerful.”

Ellen shook her head, and her fine eyes shone with sudden light.

“But if *she* were in trouble, they would find me powerful, feeble as I am. Sometimes I think she will want me, and then I am so thankful for the education our father gave us. It is ignorance that makes a soul weak, I think. They would not believe, Brian, that you and I have been brought up a gentleman’s children.”

“But he was a gentleman.”

“Hush, dear, he told us to forget that.”

“I know, I know.”

“And I want to forget it. Let that proud girl think me ignorant and low-bred; let my lady think so too, or they might both suppose me unfit for a servant, and that I must be, if anything. You and I will take our places low down without fretting about it, Brian. They don’t want education, but faithfulness. Brian, there is something wrong about Miss Cora, I am positive. But the gentleman, who is he?”

“I do not know, Ellen, only when I was hungry he fed me; when I was tired to death he gave me a bed to rest in.”

“Bless him for that!” said Ellen, with deep feeling. “He laid his hand on my head and looked into my eyes just as *he* used to look.”

“And did the snakes creep then?” inquired Brian, with a faint laugh.

“No, no, Brian; but there was something that troubled me. I wanted to throw both arms around his neck and cry.”

“That was gratitude. That is the way I felt when he first spoke to me.”

“No, it is not gratitude, brother; I think it is pity, sorrow—a wish to help about something.”

“But how could you help him?” asked Brian.

"I don't know, but it will come clear yet."

"I love him dearly," said Brian, with tears in his eyes.

"Ellen, I would die for him."

"Brian, that girl knows him; I saw it in her eyes."

"Perhaps; but what then? He has been a great traveller."

"But my young lady did not know him."

"I wish she had; he is splendid, like herself," said Brian.

"Isn't she lovely?" Ellen broke forth. "And he too, Brian?"

"Well, sister?"

"His eyes are like father's."

"Ellen!"

"Dark and large—gray when he thinks, black when he talks."

"You have such strange fancies, sister. It is because his looks is always in your mind—that look when he blessed us."

"It is burned into my heart," said Ellen, in a low voice. "I see it everywhere."

"Even in the eyes of my benefactor," replied Brian, with a faint smile. He liked this fancy in his sister, and provoked her to express it again.

"It is in his eyes," she answered, in solemn earnest. "Not always; but I saw it once when you told him who I was. He looked at me then with such tender pity. Brian, I love that man."

"So do I, with all my heart and soul."

"I pity him too," said Ellen; "more than he pitied me. But why?"

"Because your heart is so kind, little sister," said Brian, pressing her to him.

"No, it is not that. He is rich, handsome, grand. Why should any one pity him?"

She spoke thoughtfully and as if questioning her own mind. Brian sat with his arms around her, and softly smoothed the beautiful hair back from her head, which lay upon his shoulder. She had a fair complexion and a grand cast of countenance, delicate and yet powerful. The forehead was not remarkably high, but broad and almost massive. When she spoke earnestly it expanded over two large eyes, bright with a deep illumination. When she was wounded or perplexed, two faint lines defined themselves between the brows, which would have been rather heavy had her hair taken a deeper brown. This was not a beautiful face, perhaps, but it was one to enter a true soul and picture itself there forever.

"What will they do with us? Where is your friend going?" she said, clinging to him. "Will they separate us?"

A faint shudder passed over her frame as she asked the question, and she laid her face, which seemed chilled, close to his.

"I do not know where he is going," answered the lad.

"She will stay here, or up the river a little way. If your friend lived in New York we could see each other very often," Ellen continued.

"Perhaps he will—I hope he will!"

"I will pray for that," said Ellen, whispering softly to herself.

Her head fell more heavily on his shoulder. This trustful whisper set her soul at rest. She was very weary and feeble yet from previous suffering. He saw the broad white lids droop slowly over her eyes and a smile crept around her mouth.

"How tired she is, poor soul," thought the brother, looking down upon her face. "I love to feel her so near me! How sweetly she sleeps—how still it is—Ellen, dear, dear Ellen!"

His head sunk downwards, his cheek touched her hair. Her soft breath floated across his lips—his eyes grew heavy and he began to dream of wandering off in the fields hand in hand with a baby sister who insisted on filling her tiny apron with the blue violets and golden cowslips which grew along the path they had taken. Near them a little woodland stream laughed, and rippled, and dimpled around the roots of some crooked old hawthorn trees, which loomed up through his dreams, white with blossoms. Above these towered a clump of elms, cumbered with innumerable rooks' nests, which they lifted into the sunshine and half concealed amid a green abundance of foliage. How pleasant and still it was—how softly the waters sung under the bending rushes—how meek and pretty that little sister looked with those blue and golden flowers in her lap.

What was that? Had one of the elm trees broken from its base and thundered to the earth? How dark it was—where was his little sister?

"Ellen! Ellen!" he cried out, in bewilderment.

"Here I am, Brian. Don't be frightened, it is only some one at the door."

"How long did I sleep, Ellen?"

"Oh, a long time; it was a sweet sleep; I was dreaming of the Hawthorn hollow, where all those violets grew."

"And I—"

"Yes, I was sure that you dreamed of something pleasant—but they are knocking again. Yes, yes; Brian will come down in a minute. He hears you."

Brian kissed Ellen tenderly and turned to go.

"I am happy now," he said, "quite happy. God himself has brought us together, little sister. We cannot lose each other again. Good-night. He is wanting me."

"Good-night, Brian. How sweet it will be to wake in the morning and know I have a brother."

CHAPTER XVII.

DREAMS AND STRUGGLES.

EUNICE HURD was almost invariably out of sorts when in her normal condition. The particular morning when we join her again she was unusually crabbed, and disposed to be rather loud in her ill-humor. No person in the whole household had changed so much, after Mrs. Lander's good or ill fortune, as Eunice Hurd. From a gaunt, hard-faced, rigid female of few words and no pretension, she had graduated suddenly into a fine lady of wonderful experiences and ridiculous proportions. Hitherto the grand aim and object of her life had been to hoard up her liberal wages, wear out as few dresses as possible, accumulate second-hand bonnets, and cover all the old parasol skeletons in the house with brown muslin and checked linen, which material sometimes formed a ridiculous contrast to handles of carved ivory, or ebony tipped with cornelian. In fact, a more prudent, economical, not to say parsimonious woman, than Eunice Hurd had been up to this point, was not to be found in a ride of ten miles.

But a sudden outburst of prosperity had fallen on the woman whose patronage had hitherto kept her rather above the level of other servants in the house, and Eunice had been among the first to profit by it. When Mrs. Lander went into the gloom and solemn magnificence of deep mourning, Eunice pounced upon her previous wardrobe like a kite upon its prey. A cheap dressmaker was called in. Velvets, moire antique, and silks of various shades and dimensions were let out, taken in, tucked, puffed, trimmed and vulgarized generally into so many grotesque forms that poor Mrs. Lander failed to recognize any of the elegant garments of which she had once been so proud. Nor is this wonderful. Eunice was at least four inches taller

than the widow, and her gaunt figure possessed no more proportions than a broomstick; whereas Mrs. Lander was symmetrical, rather plump, and walked with the dignity of a Juno, notwithstanding her years.

Beside all this, Eunice had no idea of fitness. To her a handsome dress was proper for all occasions. She rather affected an elaborate toilet early in the morning, and sometimes appeared with the breakfast in silks rustling like a forest in the wind. Eunice had another peculiarity, which rather impaired the full splendor of her appearance. After living so many years on the hoarding system, it was impossible to come out at once into the magnificent disregard of expense which she considered necessary to her advent as a semi-lady. The old leaven was working in her nature continually, and it fairly broke her heart to leave the prodigal length and breadth of Mrs. Lander's dresses in their original amplitude. So, as each garment came under her manipulation, she bethought herself of aprons, saques and other minor articles of dress which might be "got out," as she called it, by subtracting a breath here and there. For these she told the dressmaker to "skimp out" sufficient trimming, and the result was a wardrobe of marvellous variety and picturesque scantiness.

The morning after Mrs. Lander had been so strangely disturbed, Eunice came rustling into her bed-room in a purple moire antique, short enough to reveal her ankles in front, and fluttering out in a train behind, rendered sparse and scant by two missing breadths, which were that moment at the dyer's with various other strange abstractions of like nature. A cap of rich but very dirty blond fluttered on her head, and the deep ruffles of heavily-embroidered under-sleeves fell over her bony, red lands, giving double effect to their coarseness.

"Goodness gracious, if you haven't got up once in yer life without calling!" she cried, on finding Mrs. Lander

seated in her easy chair, pale and quiet, but with a strange look of unrest in her face. "How long have you been up? Gracious knows, this is a new streak! The window wide open, too, and the lace curtains streaming through, a ketchen and tearing in the rose bushes! Well now, I never did!"

"Eunice! Eunice! did you hear anything in the night?"

"Hear anything!—sakes alive, no; how should I? Nothing but the river, that's al'ays sounding like an eternal troop of hosses that never will hold up, and the yell of a railroad whistle, which sometimes makes me e'enamost think the judgment day has come on arth, when it wakes me up sudden out of a sound sleep. Well! what's the matter?"

"Nothing—nothing at all, Eunice," said the widow, rising and walking across the room.

"I know better. Don't try to cheat me; I ain't a bird to be caught with chaff, nor a hoss that can be bridled with a halter nohow. Once agin, what's the matter?"

"Nothing, only I must have had a strange dream last night."

"Like enough, or you wouldn't a been up this morning, sitting like a ghost in that blue chair, huddled up in your shawl. It's enough to give you yer death of cold I tell ye!"

Mrs. Lander went to the window and looked out. A bright morning sun was slanting warmly across the turf, which looked fresh and crisp under its dew. The ladder lay half-buried in the grass which had regained its elasticity and did not seem to have been moved for days. A branch of the rose bush lay trailing along the stone-work of the house, but that might have been left there among the gardener's uncompleted work. No other trace of the midnight presence that was preying on her mind presented

itself to Mrs. Lander. She drew a deep breath, and turned toward Eunice with a look of doubtful relief.

"Did you ever have a dream that was absolutely like reality, Eunice?" she said.

"What, I? Yes, I have, and sich dreams! Once I was a married woman, and hated my husband like pison for whipping three tow-headed young-uns that was the torment of my life. That 'ere dream was enough of matrimony for me for a hull lifetime. Real! I should think it was!"

"But did it seem as if you touched the person—kissed him?"

"What, I? Eliza Lander, I never kissed nothing whatsoever to the best of my knowledge and belief, sence I was a nussing baby. It isn't in me."

"But did you converse? Did the words seem clear and real after you awoke?"

"I don't kind'er remember about the words, but the blows did, orful real. I must have hammered away like all possessed at the bed-post, for my knuckles were sore as if they'd just come out of a hard day's work on the wash-board. As for the man—well, it's of no use talking—I've hated him like henbane ever since. He's jest as real to me as you are, though I never saw him in my born days."

"Eunice," said Mrs. Lander, impressively, "I had a strange dream last night—a dream so like reality, that even now I believe in it—almost."

"What was it all about? Now don't tell me that you're old fool enough to have got a husband into your head! I wouldn't put up with it, asleep or not."

"No! no! It's not that."

"Wal then, what is it? Do speak out, it riles me to see you standing there, shivering and white, like a woman kneaded out of snow."

"Eunice, I saw, or thought I saw, my daughter last night."

"Like enough—you're al'ays dreaming about her—it's to be expected; poor gal, I've dreamed of her myself more'n once. Woke myself up scolding at John for not letting her in only yesterday morning! Nothing in that."

"But I held her in my arms. She talked with me—reasoned with me—kissed me—"

"That is wonderful! Cora wasn't much given to making a fuss over you—no better proof of its being all a dream than that. She took after me a little in the way of grit."

"Eunice, she did kiss me."

"Don't tell me that, without she wanted something awful bad."

"She did, Eunice."

"What was it?"

"Nothing, nothing; I talk such nonsense. What could the shadows that haunt our dreams ask?"

"Well," said Eunice, maliciously, "if any of 'em took to coming back, I shouldn't wonder if it was the old man; he might feel kind'er uneasy about that will."

"But he made it! He made it, Eunice!"

"I know that well enough. But he might take it into his head that the thing wasn't signed according to order. Still he's never troubled me about it, and won't, I reckon, afore the day of judgment, when I mean to give him a piece of my mind for not finishing up his work like a man, afore he went to sea. I've no patience with him!"

The shrill cry of a railroad whistle near the station stopped Eunice in her denunciations. Mrs. Lander started up with a half-terrified look, and went to the window in breathless haste.

"Who is it—who can it be? This train does not usually stop here," she said. "Has it stopped?"

Eunice came up, stood on tip-toe, and stretched her long neck over Mrs. Lander's shoulder.

"I don't see nobody coming up from the station. But, as true as I live, there is our Josh a standing in the stable door. I suppose he's swapped off the hosses and come home to brag about it."

"Only Joshua!" exclaimed Mrs. Lander, with a sigh of profound relief. "I'm glad he's come. I thought—I feared—"

"What?"

"Nothing—nothing, only that dream was so real—so very, very real," said the widow, drawing a hand across her eyes.

"But Josh Hurd is a good deal more real, and here he comes, large as life and twice as nat'ral. Why, the feller is coming right up stairs! What's got into him?"

The tramp of heavy feet made itself heard despite the thick carpet on the stairs, and directly a clumsy knock sounded from the door.

"Come in!" shrieked Eunice, in dire wrath.

Josh opened the door and strode into the room with his cap on and both hands in his pockets.

"They've come, both on 'em," he said. "I've seen 'em with my own eyes. Got here too late to tell you last night, but it's so."

Mrs. Lander fell back into her chair and gazed wildly on him, without the power to speak, while Eunice drew close to her brother, flaming with indignation.

"Who's come, Josh Hurd? Who's come, I want to know?"

"The two young gals, Cora Varginia Lander and Varginia Cora Lander. I've seen 'em, I tell yer, and talked with 'em both, face ter face, and they're proper purty, I can tell yer, both on 'em."

"Joshua Hurd, what do you mean?"

Eunice seized her brother by both shoulders, and gave him a vicious shake as she shrieked this question in his ear.

"I mean ter say that both gals are alive and ki—. Well, I won't say that, because they are both on 'em so genteel. But in about an hour, when the next train comes in you'll hear thunder, that's all!"

Mrs. Lander had arisen and came close to Joshua. Her hand shook like a leaf as she laid it on his arm, and her white face was full of pitiful anxiety.

"Tell me," she said, "tell me all the truth! Is my daughter alive?"

"Yes; and Mr. Lander's daughter's too. They are both of 'em down in York."

"How—how were they saved?"

"In a boat. It was another boat that sunk. They floated, and floated, till a ship picked 'em up. There is a good deal more to tell, but that is the long and the short on't."

Eunice pushed Mrs. Lander away, and seized upon Joshua a second time with two or three rough shakes.

"Josh Hurd, you've been a drinking! This is what they call delireous tremars. I knew you wasn't ter be trusted! I told her so!"

Joshua shook himself loose, growling like a Newfoundland dog with a terrier at his throat.

"Hands off! hands off, I tell you! or I'll pitch in, woman or no woman, jest as sure as you live."

"Speak, then! speak the truth, or I'll shake it out of you!"

"I have spoke the gospel truth. What more do you want, Eunice?"

"I want ter know what you mean by saying that them two gals are alive. It's a trifling with Providence to lie so, Josh Hurd!"

"Jest you wait and see, then," said Josh, shaking himself slowly back into his coat.

"Eunice! Eunice!" said Mrs. Lander, in a low voice.

"It is true, they are alive, both of them. I felt almost sure of it this morning."

"I don't believe it—I won't believe it! Eliza Lander, that chap's lying like a Connecticut trooper; I see it in his face."

"Wait till the train comes in," growled Joshua.

"I am satisfied that he speaks the truth," said Mrs. Lander, faintly. "I felt it—"

"Yes, that dream;" sneered Eunice. "Eliza Lander, you are a bigger fool than I took you for!"

Mrs. Lander arose, pale as snow, but with resolution in her voice and air. A gleam of wild, unsatisfied joy began to deepen in her eyes.

"Go down, Eunice, and prepare everything. My daughter is alive—my niece is coming home to take possession here."

"Take possession!—She! I'd like to see her try it! What's to become of the will, then?"

"That leaves the property to her!"

"So it does!" groaned Eunice, dropping into a chair, while both arms fell heavily downward. "Our cake is all dough, sure enough! Why it'll be wuss than it was afore the old man died! Oh my! isn't this a blow right on the head!"

"You forget that my child is alive," said Mrs. Lander. "This is a joy to compensate for all loss."

"That's true; but then I ain't her mother, and everything was going on so pleasantly. Now all is to be given up! It's enough to grind one's soul out! I shouldn't wonder if she begrudged me these clothes, and everything I've got. I tell you, Eliza Lander, I'd show fight! She isn't your daughter."

"She's a mighty purty gal now, I tell you," Joshua cut in "and I'm glad she's got it. That tarnal will won't set heavy on my stomach any longer. When that harnsome

critter comes into her own, I shall be an honest man again in spite of you, Eunice Hurd."

"You never had sense enough to be anything else!" sneered Eunice. "Don't talk to me, I'm sick!"

Mrs. Lander was walking up and down the room, wringing her hands and tearing them apart in great excitement. She was certain now that her midnight visit was a reality, and the great struggle, which was to leave her guilty or innocent, commenced then. Her first meeting with the child, whom she had so honestly believed dead, was to leave her an impostor or a beggar. She had been poor, and knew how hard poverty was; how it ground down the soul and palsied the pride within it; how men, even good men, despised it as a proof of incapacity. No one living, perhaps, had felt the bitterness of these facts more keenly than the woman who paced that sumptuous chamber, which now belonged to another. No creature living could have found more exquisite enjoyment in wealth. For itself and for the power it gave she held it as the great good of life—yesterday it had been hers, untrammelled, unquestioned, almost unlimited. In her domestic life she was a Sybarite. Every enjoyment of sense was perfect in her organism. Her taste in matters of beauty was perfect. Even now, when she thought of her daughter, it was to remember with a glow of pleasure how exquisitely lovely she was. Already she disliked that other girl, the rightful owner of all the wealth which lay around her. Could she surrender everything and take up her dependent life again? The very thought was hateful.

She had but an hour to decide in—one little hour, and half of it was gone already.

"What shall I do? What can I do?" she cried, appealing wildly to Joshua, who sat upon one of the silken chairs, watching her with kindly interest in his rough face.

"I don't know what you are thinking on, or what you

could do, if you wanted to," he answered, honestly. "But do just what's right, that's my advice."

The man spoke clearly, earnestly, and with something impressive in his manner that arrested Mrs. Lander in her walk. She looked him steadily in the face a moment, drew a deep breath, and her eyes fell under his honest gaze. She did not look in Joshua Hurd's face again for many a day after that.

Slowly and steadily the woman paced up and down the room; she had evidently arrived at some resolve; her step fell firmly on the carpet; her face settled into hard composure. Her bosom no longer heaved with sighs or struggled with irresolution. She was mistress of the occasion, and for good or evil had made up her mind.

Eunice watched her with sharp, searching glances. What was the secret of her emotion? This was not the joy of a mother who first hears that her child is safe, nor was it altogether distress. Some struggle was going on which racked the woman's whole being. What could it be? Eunice was herself greatly disturbed; if Mrs. Lander had reigned in the hall, Eunice had been even more powerful in the basement. How would this change effect her? Would the second-class sceptre be wrested from her hand by this young girl? Not without a fight for it. Eunice was decided on that. As she came to this conclusion, a railroad whistle cut to her ear.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHICH WAS THE DAUGHTER?

MRS. LANDER drew slowly toward the window. Eunice Hurd followed her, and behind the cold, hard face of the mistress, peered the sharp, anxious features of the servant.

There they come, three of 'em," snarled Eunice, laying her bony hand heavily on Mrs. Lander's shoulder. "Who's the other?"

She turned sharply to address Joshua, but he had left the room. Mrs. Lander did not move, but spoke to her servant in a forced, husky voice.

"Go down to your place, Eunice."

"What!"

"Go down stairs and see that the preparations are complete. I shall meet my child and niece in the hall."

Eunice hesitated, and stood in the middle of the chamber eyeing her mistress venomously; one would have supposed that the lady had deprived her attendant of some great fortune by the anger she betrayed. Mrs. Lander took no apparent heed of this, but swept slowly across the room, down the marble stairs, forcing a smile to her white face.

They stood in the hall, forming a little group on the tessellated floor—Cora, Virginia and the hunchback, whose face alone was bright with generous exultation. The two girls were pale and troubled; Virginia trembled visibly, but Cora was firm as granite.

When Mrs. Lander reached the bottom of the staircase, she paused a moment, reached out her arms, and, looking at Cora, cried out:

"My child! my child!"

Cora Lander drew back of her cousin, meeting that wild, motherly impulse with icy looks. Virginia cast an astonished glance back on her cousin, and, filled with pity for the mother, whose arms had dropped like lead, went up with tears in her eyes and embraced her. Those arms were lifted heavily and wound over the young girl's shoulders. Kisses fell on that white cheek, cold and sharp, like hailstones on snow. Twice the woman attempted to utter a welcome but the forced voice rattled in her throat, and at last broke forth in a hoarse cry that made Virginia start from her arms.

"My child! my daughter!"

The young girl looked into the hardening face turned upon her one instant in profound astonishment. Then the warm, true heart swelled in her bosom, and she reached out her hand to Cora.

"Not your daughter. It was kind to mistake me so tenderly, but this is your child, dear aunt."

Cora stepped back and waved her hand with a gesture of dissent. Mrs. Lander looked from one to the other with a searching glance, then threw her arms around Virginia again, crying out, still hoarsely and in an unnatural voice:

"No, no; an attempt at deception at this moment is cruel! Do I not know my own child?"

"But, Aunt, you *are* mistaken. Cora—Cora, you can satisfy her. A mother's heart must leap to the touch of her own child."

"But this lady is not my mother," answered Cora Lander in a clear, ringing voice.

Virginia released herself forcibly from Mrs. Lander's arms and turned upon her cousin in dumb amazement. Cora was calm and cold; her lips parted firmly, her eyes were bright, but all the rest of her face bespoke simple surprise, merging into displeasure.

"This is a strange time for joking, cousin," she said. "I wonder that you can trifle with feelings that should be sacred. You might have known from the first that she could not be deceived."

Virginia stood dumb. She could not comprehend the enormous fraud being practised upon her. Once more Mrs. Lander embraced her. Again those cold kisses fell on her forehead. She shrunk from them, shuddering.

"Madam! madam! you should feel—you should know that I am not your child! She stands yonder. I will be no party to a mysticism so cruel. Cora! Cora, I entreat you, put an end to this!"

"What can I do? How can I act? If you persist in disclaiming your own mother, I can only denounce it as a great cruelty whether done in jest or earnest. In my father's time you would not have ventured on a piece of pleasantry like this."

"Cora Lander!" cried Virginia, aroused to indignation by this cool speech. "Cora Lander! is this a farce, or some horrible fraud?"

"I do not understand you, cousin," said Cora, with a gentle lift of the eyebrows. "It seems to me that all this is at least in bad taste—I will not say unfeeling. Remember you find a mother overjoyed to receive you, while I have left the kindest and best father that ever lived buried in the ocean, and return to my own home wholly an orphan. Aunt, forgive me if this feeling has made me seem less glad to see you than I am. Believe me, if your child seems unkind, it is not in her nature to be so in reality. As for me, all the noble generosity which you and my cousin have received from my father shall be renewed in his child. You shall be to me as a mother; your child has always been my sister. There need be no change."

Virginia Lander drew slowly toward Ellen Nolan, and there she stood, lofty, pale, statue-like. The audacity of this scene kindled all the energy of her fine nature into resolute resistance.

"Cora Lander," she said, "there is either a terrible crime in your thoughts or this is a joke so coarse and ill-timed that I can never forgive it."

Ellen Nolan had been vigilant during this scene; her eyes turned sharply from Cora to Mrs. Lander, and she observed that these women never once looked each other in the face. She saw, too, that Mrs. Lander trembled violently and shrunk away from Virginia even while embracing her.

"Dear lady," she said, in a voice so sweet that it sounded

strangely in that atmosphere of discord, "come away—do come away."

"I will," answered Virginia, casting a look of affection on her attendant; "I will. When I am gone, these people may come to their senses. Eunice Hurd, I am glad to see you—very, very glad to see you. Is my old room ready?"

"Yes; the room is ready exactly as you left it, Miss Lander. I have kept it in order, but haven't changed a thing. Mr. Lander wouldn't have that altered."

Cora Lander turned sharply upon Eunice, and the widow lifted an imploring look to her face. But Eunice gave her head a fierce, angry toss, and marched up stairs, muttering defiance as she went. Virginia followed her, treading the steps firmly as a queen enters her palace. But for the strange obstacle which she had encountered, this poor girl would have shrunk from entering the rooms which the presence of her father had once made so homelike; but now all the energy of her being was up in arms. Her cheeks were flushed; her eyes burned blackly. Never in her life had such anger filled her heart. She did not yet comprehend the magnitude of the wrong intended her, but the single fact that some mysticism had been practised upon her in the sacred moment when she entered her home, an orphan and a mourner, revolted her whole being. The tears which she would have shed for her father were turned into angry fire by this insult offered to his memory.

"Come, Ellen," she said, "from this hour you are my cousin and friend."

Eunice turned sharply and looked at Ellen.

"Humph!" she muttered. "Sharp and honest! No place for her!"

A shade of feeling crept over that hard face when Eunice turned the key in one of the chamber doors and stepped aside that Virginia might pass her. Ellen lifted her eyes and caught the expression.

"Be good to her," she said, in her sweet, low voice.

Eunice started and looked down upon that upturned face with the shadow of a smile on her thin lips.

"Go in, both of you," she said, "and take the key inside. I say nothing, because nothing has been said to me; but just now I'd like to wring that white neck, gold chains and all—not yourn, I don't mean yourn," she added, with a swing of the hand. "Go in; go in, you'll find your things right, letters and all. I took care that nobody should get nested here. There, that'll do, turn the key. Sure bind, sure find, as the Bible says."

Virginia stood in the midst of her own room, half terrified, and feeling painfully strange, while Ellen softly closed the door and turned the key. She, poor girl, felt like a deer hunted into its lair by an unexpected rush of hounds. She looked around—old memories came back—there was her little writing-desk, ebony, encrusted with gold, where many a hard lesson had been coned under the loving eyes of her father. Close by stood a low chair, covered with rich embroidery entraced by the hands of a mother she had never seen, save as a shadow hovering over her first idea of life. The colors were faded, the delicate tints of the blossoms had long since been drawn out by the light, but it was still the dearest thing in that exquisite little chamber—that and the desk, which had been one of the last gifts of her father before he took her and her cousin to Europe.

Everything reminded her of that good man; his taste had selected all the ornaments of the room. The carpet, composed of a single medallion, in which masses of blooming flowers seemed to have been cast on newly fallen snow, framed in with arabesques of dove-color and delicate blue, knotted together with garlands of roses, had been of his selection. The walls, so delicately frescoed that the designs seemed like tinted shadows, were more his idea

than the artist's. The great carved easy chair in which he had spent so many hours, while she was sitting at his feet with her little porcelain slate studying out one of the problems he delighted in teaching her. The very books that lay on that pretty table of Oriental alabaster, inlaid with golden beetles, spoke so clearly of him that she gave one broken cry and fell upon her knees by the great chair, convulsed with a storm of grief which shook her from head to foot.

"Oh, my father! my father!" she cried, "help me! help me! for it seems as if I must die!"

A pair of feeble arms were softly flung around her, a little crooked form crept in by the side of her superb beauty, and a voice that seemed that of an angel pleaded also.

"Father! my father! help! help! for she is alone, with no one but me—no one but me!"

For some moments these two voices blended in one prayer, then the sobs that filled the room grew fainter, and the stillness of an exhausted tempest fell upon them. Ellen was the first to move. She arose, and going to a broad window which opened on a balcony, saw two women standing together and conversing earnestly. They had paused a little way from the front portico, and by the gestures of the younger person she judged that some stormy debate was passing between them. As she looked, Mrs. Lander held out her arms with a gesture of imploring tenderness, and would have flung herself upon the bosom of the proud girl who stood before her. But Cora took a swift survey around, caught a glimpse of Ellen's face at the window, and pushed the woman away so impetuously that she reeled back against one of the marble pillars, and thus saved herself from falling.

Ellen turned away from the window, convinced that some great wrong was being done to the young creature who lay weeping, half upon the floor, half on the great easy chair.

"Lady," said the hunchback, "do stop crying so, and let us think what is best to be done."

"What can be done? He is dead—my poor father is dead, and I am so helpless."

"Perhaps I can think a little for you," said Ellen, with tender meekness. "You, sweet lady, were strong enough to carry me safely through the deep ocean. Now let me help you."

"But how, Ellen? What help is there for me?" cried Virginia, lifting her beautiful face, wet with a rain of tears, to meet the kind eyes of her attendant. "Astonishment and grief bewilders me so! What can they want? What do they mean? They cannot be in earnest, Ellen!"

"Yes, lady, I am sure they are in earnest."

"But he was my own father. They know it—that woman was present when I was born."

"Still they mean what they say, I am sure of that."

"But it is impossible. They cannot carry it out."

"No, no; there must be plenty of people who know you."

"Plenty who know me—yes, yes; but we are so alike. We have been away eight years. If her mother does not recognize the difference, who will?"

"But her mother does recognize the difference," said Ellen, quietly.

"Then I have nothing but trouble before me!" said Virginia, sitting down in her father's chair and dropping both hands into her lap in an abandonment of sorrow.

"What *can* I do?"

"Wait, and God will show us the way."

"But I am so helpless—more helpless than you were when I found you in the water, poor little friend! Until my father was taken from me, I never knew what trouble meant. Oh, Ellen! *can* my cousin be so wicked?"

"I think she is a very wicked person, hard as rock. But

God is above all. Let me take off your bonnet, sweet lady, and smooth your hair. Don't, don't shiver so—poor little hands, how the cold strikes through your gloves! Let me kiss them warm. That's right, lay your head on my shoulder, it's broad enough."

Here the kind hunchback gave a short, sobbing laugh, and searched for an answering smile in the beautiful face of her mistress. But Virginia shook her head, and replied tenderly:

"Oh, Ellen! you should not do that. This honest face and true heart is worth a thousand straight forms. How miserable I should be without you!"

"Then there is Brian, my brother, who has such a grand heart; besides he is sharp and bright as a lawyer. Think how many friends you have close by."

"I will—I will."

"That's kind—that's nice! Look out and see how brightly the sun shines. That is the way God smiles when he wishes to cheer us in the midst of a great trouble."

"It does not seem bright to me. This is a sad return home—if it is my home!"

Virginia fell into despondency again. She really was very helpless, but Ellen brightened up and prepared herself for usefulness.

"This is your own room, so here we stay; but the closets are locked. Must I ask them for the keys before I can put away your bonnet and shawl?"

Virginia started from her seat. "No, no," she said, taking a gold chain from her neck, to which was attached a small master key. "My father told me to lock everything up, and promised that nothing should be touched till I came home again. The keys are in that Malachite box on the table. He gave it to me just before I went away."

Ellen unlocked the box with the tiny key, half gold, half steel, which Virginia had worn suspended from her neck many a year.

"Here is a bunch of keys, a package of letters, and some jewelry," she said.

"They are my father's letters and birthday keepsakes," answered Virginia, turning pale with a sudden rush of memory. "My poor mother's jewels, too, should be there."

Ellen closed the box and stood with her hand on the lid, quietly thoughtful.

"These things belong to you, sweet mistress. There may be proofs here of the truth. Let us make sure of them."

"What, child! do you think they would rob me of them?"

"They are robbing you already. Please open this desk and see if anything is here."

Virginia unlocked the desk and Ellen swept out its contents into a corner of her shawl, which she gathered up in one hand for the purpose. There was a quantity of papers, jewel-cases and one or two books. One of these cases fell out of her dress and broke open on the floor, revealing a necklace and bracelets of large pearls, rolling away from their purple satin cushion.

"They belonged to my mother. She wore them on her wedding day—that once, but never again," said Virginia, with tears in her eyes.

Ellen snatched up the case, huddled the pearls into their purple bed and thrust them back among the papers.

"Where can we put them? I forgot to think of that," she said, appealing to her mistress.

"Wait a moment—I know of a place," answered Virginia, drawing back the drapery from an arched recess, fluted from roof to floor with light blue satin. Under this was a pretty, snow-white bed, clouded in from the chamber by curtains of lace delicate as the frost-work on a window, and so voluminous that it seemed like sweeping back a summer cloud from the blue of Heaven when they were

thrown aside. Close by the bed stood an exquisite little toilet table surmounted by an oval glass, in a frame that seemed woven from the most delicate golden spray, over which a dove, cut from mother of pearl was flying with a mass of filmy lace drapery in its bill. An ottoman of amber colored damask stood before the toilet.

"Here, here," said Virginia, dropping on her knees by the ottoman and flinging the top back, which opened on hinges.

A moment after, a peremptory knock was heard at the door. The two girls held their breath an instant, then Ellen ran to the desk, threw the bunch of keys into the Malachite box, and locking that, flung the chain and key over the neck of her mistress exactly as she had been in the habit of wearing it.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE AUDACITY OF CRIME.

AUNT EUNICE had gone off to the back regions of the house with her nose high in the air, and her thin lips pressed together in fierce wrath. There was something going on of which she had been kept in ignorance. Even Joshua seemed to have a share in this something, and took airs upon himself accordingly. Did they think to cheat her? Did they fancy that she was likely to sit still and have sand thrown in her eyes? Did they, indeed!

Aunt Eunice gave her head a magnificent toss as she asked these terse questions of herself, and fell to berating the servants in the kitchen till the red of her face seemed born of brick-dust, and the fire in her eyes grew venomous as a wild-cat's. They absolutely blazed when she saw

Joshua striding cheerfully towards the stables, more upright in person and free of mind than he had been for months.

Meantime Mrs. Lander and Cora were left together, standing face to face in the hall.

Cora opened the drawing-room door and went into the room. Mrs. Lander followed more slowly. There was sorrow and hesitation in her heart, but the younger woman felt nothing of this. Her face wore a triumphant smile as she looked around the room.

"Splendid draperies, and walls tinted like opals," she said, looking around. "Upon my word, madam, you display magnificent taste, and have lost no time. A Turkish divan along the end of the room yonder, with plenty of Oriental cushions, might be an improvement—though I am not quite certain. What a lovely break in the trees that is we see from the window. It gives one such cool glimpses of the river. Oh! Aunt, this is a place worth having."

"Aunt!" repeated Mrs. Lander.

"Yes, Aunt now, Aunt always. That other word is forgotten."

"But, Cora, we are alone!"

These words were uttered in a pleading voice, through which tears were breaking.

That young girl, so hard and self-possessed, had no patience with the woman whose heart was not all base. She sat down in one of the most luxuriously cushioned chairs and motioned Mrs. Lander to take a seat close by.

"Let us understand each other thoroughly," she said. "We have made the first plunge hand in hand, mother and child—I find the water exhilarating—you feel it cold and begin to shiver already. This will never do! We are in the depths, and must swim out boldly or drown. A little firmness, a little of that self-abnegation which is expected from a mother who has her children's advancement at heart, will secure everything. If you falter, madam, we are lost."

"Madam! Madam!" exclaimed Mrs. Lander with a sharp pain in her voice. "You call me madam!"

"A little more of this, and I shall call you coward!" retorted the girl, starting up from her chair with angry vehemence. "Are you tired of all these things, that you falter so at the first step?"

"I did not think it would be so terrible that I should hate myself as I do!"

"Terrible! Why, Aunt, we are triumphant! I am mistress here—absolute mistress—nothing on earth can dispossess me so long as you stand firmly."

"But Eunice?"

"The grim housekeeper—what of her?"

"Nothing, nothing; only she knows so much."

"What can the tigress know? and what do I care for anything she can say? Does a mother's knowledge of her own child require the confirmation of a servant? Let us have no weakness of this kind, madam! We want no confidants, and will have none. If this red-crested serpent attempts to bite, I will crush her under my heel. Such people are to be defied, not conciliated."

"But you do not know her. She is sharp as steel, sly as a fox."

"Let her search and prowl—I fear nothing but the weakness which makes you so white and wo-begone. Remember, the worst is over. Every hour will harden your resolve and sweep away these puerile emotions. Come, come, I love you so dearly that all this suffering recoils on me. Let us work together, support each other. It was for your sake I did it—or mostly that. What a paradise you have made of this place! Could you give it up?"

"It would be like death, I know, child; but this sense of crime takes away all sweetness from possession."

"Sense of crime!" answered Cora, drawing the words out with a prolonged sneer. "Was it your fault that my

father happened to be miserably poor and his brother rich? Was it mine that this poor man chanced to be my father? After all, possession is but an accident. Am I not more capable of appreciating all this wealth—more willing to distribute it than the creature up-stairs? Sense of crime!—I wonder at the words! Much more at the feeling. It is only weak people who condemn themselves even in thought. But, if you must have them, money will supply an antidote—you shall have no stint in your charities. I will build a church somewhere on the grounds, and you shall own the minister, pay his salary, have lectures six times a week, and be the Lady Bountiful of this neighborhood. There, you almost smile. Let us take a little walk in the grounds while my cousin and namesake reconciles herself to my old position; I am dying to look over the place. The grounds extend ever so far, I believe, and beyond them are any number of farms that bring in money. Who is executor under the will? Oh, I remember. Tomorrow we must go to the city—you and I alone."

"Come out on the grass before you talk of this," said Mrs. Lander, looking suspiciously around the room. "With so much drapery hanging loose, there is no certainty against listeners."

"You are right; this thoughtfulness looks well. Ah! here is a window unfastened. This way. What a lovely scene it is!"

Cora Lander swept back a mass of lace and rich amber damask from one of the windows as she spoke and stepped through, pausing under the marble colonnade till Mrs. Lander followed her, and closed the window. Then the little scene Ellen had witnessed transpired, and they walked together into the centre of the lawn, where a bed of standard roses was cut into the sward, and Cora pretended to examine the flowers as she talked.

The conversation was but a sequel to that which had

passed in the drawing-room, but, in the open air and free from all chance of listeners, Mrs. Lander spoke more freely and entered into her daughter's wicked plans with greater boldness. Cora was bending over a splendid rose and inhaling its perfume with keen relish, for so keen was this girl's zest for pleasure that, with her mind thus sharply occupied, she could pause for a sensuous enjoyment and receive it to the full, but a sudden exclamation from her companion startled her away from the flower.

"What is it?" she inquired, sharply, following the wild glance which Mrs. Lander fixed on one of the windows, and seeing the face of Ellen Nolan looking out.

"I see nothing but that tiresome little hunchback peering at us still."

"But she is in that room—no one has entered it since my niece—"

"Madam, that is not a title to use applied to that young lady, even in this solitude," said Cora, sharply.

"But the room contains all her things—her letters, her papers, her mother's trinkets. I never thought of that till now."

"What folly! what madness!" cried Cora, twisting the rose she had inhaled from its stalk with a violence that half uprooted the plant. "That room, and all its contents, belongs to me. Do you understand?"

"Yes, yes: I comprehend all the mischief that may spring from this; but it was Eunice! I am sure it was Eunice!"

"Whoever has done it, there is a remedy," replied Cora. "Come with me—or, rather, stay here. I am mistress of the house, and will arrange the rooms as I please."

This idea, false and mean as it was, seemed to have filled Cora's whole being with pride; she lifted her head with the poise of an empress, and giving a wave of the hand, intended to keep Mrs. Lander back, passed into the house.

Ellen Nolan opened the door of her mistress' chamber, and stood back from the threshold, looking quietly in that hard, beautiful face. Virginia had seated herself in the easy chair and sat with her anxious face turned on the door, waiting for what might come.

"Cousin, I am very sorry to disturb you, but the house-keeper made a mistake in sending you here. This room has always been held sacred to myself. Your old room shall be prepared at once."

She said this firmly, almost quietly, but there was a hard metallic tone in the voice which betrayed something of the wonderful self-restraint which kept her apparently so calm. "You can have more rooms if you want, but not this."

Virginia arose from her seat, pale and firm, but with the pain of a wounded spirit in her face.

"Cora," she said, in her soft, clear voice, "Cousin Cora, if this is a joke, it is a very, very cruel one! Remember how mournful this coming home is—no father, no mother to receive me—no relatives in the wide world that I have ever seen except yourself and my aunt. Cora, my father was always kind to you, considerate and generous to your mother. Think how unseemly a joke of this kind is from her child, under his roof."

Virginia paused a moment, wiped away the tears that were filling her eyes, and went on with a passionate outburst.

"Or is this real, Cora Lander? That look almost warns me that it is. But pause—pause while there is yet a chance of retreating from a fraud so black that it must bring exposure and bitter punishment upon you and your mother! Do not think that I shall submit; that would be to share the infamy. Oh, Cora! Cora! remember what we have been to each other, how dearly I have loved you! I was thinking, cousin, to make you independent the moment I had the power. There is enough for both—enough for us

all. That hard, hard look yet! Oh! cousin, will nothing move you?"

The color had once or twice swept like flame across Cora Lander's face, but it settled back instantly, leaving it of a cold, grayish white.

"I do not understand all this, cousin. That horrible fright which drove us from the burning ship must have left your brain disturbed. It shocks me to think so, but this scene almost forces the belief on me. For your own sake, try to drive these strange ideas from your mind; they distress me, indeed they do!"

Virginia stepped a pace back and fixed her gaze on that immovable face. Every feature seemed cut out of stone. The eyes alone shrunk and fell under that calm, rebuking scrutiny.

"I shall not speak to you again, feeling as I do how deeply-laid is the evil in your heart. But I will at once take such steps as must ensure my legal rights," said Virginia, in a low, still voice, that contrasted strangely with the grating hoarseness which broke through the forced composure of Cora's speech. "Heaven knows, I wished to be good to you! It was in my heart to deal with you as if we had been what so many take us for, twin sisters; but you will not have it so."

Virginia's eyes filled again and her voice faltered. She cast an imploring glance on that hardened girl, and, with an impulse of generous tenderness, held out her arms.

"Let it be thus, Cora. I have no craving wish for all this property—cast this demon thought out of your soul, and let us be as sisters once more. Half of all that I have shall be yours, only lift this awful feeling from my heart and let us be friends again! Oh, Cora! you never will know how dearly I have loved you! Take half—I will gladly give it."

While she was speaking, the form of Aunt Eunice dark-

ened the door, and behind her stood one of the housemaids. Cora recognized their presence at once, and quick as lightning turned upon them.

"You hear her—you hear this magnificent proposition? She will give me a clear half of my own property! You will bear witness that she makes this offer—she, who never had a cent on earth that did not come from my poor, generous father!" she cried, appealing to them, and fastening Ellen with her eyes. "She will compromise for half my inheritance, and condescend to become my co-heiress with all the glory of a generous act upon her! This audacity is beyond belief!"

Virginia sat down speechless and pale. The reality of this wicked design fell upon her with appalling force.

"Take my poor cousin to some other room. In her present state it is impossible for me to have her here," said Cora, addressing Eunice. "The chamber she occupied before is ready, I suppose. If not, ask my aunt to take charge of her daughter till some better disposition of things can be made. I much fear it will be impossible to keep her in the house. I have seen this coming on for a long time."

Eunice Hurd strode into the room, swept by Cora with a sniff and a toss of the head, and went up to Virginia.

"Come here, child," she said, almost kindly. "They have determined to drive you out of this room, and will do it anyhow. But I'm in the house yet, and know a thing or two that they don't maybe give me credit for. As if my eye-teeth wasn't cut afore she or her mother either were born! So she is Mr. Lander's daughter, is she?"

Virginia recognized the rough kindness conveyed in these words, and clung to the hard hand extended to her with gratitude.

"Yes, I will go with you, Eunice Hurd. You knew me when I was a little baby, and used to be kind. Surely you remember me!"

"No matter whether I do or not. I'll stand by you now, if it's only to learn that self-sufficient gal not to try and cheat me! Pshaw! it ain't to be done! Come along; I've got a room ready for you—purty as a picter and neat as wax. Let her bustle about here if she wants to; but I tell her here to her face, she can't trample me under foot, nor her mother neither, till I make up my mind to let 'em."

Tortured and astonished as she had been when wounded by grief and saddened by this mournful return home, Virginia turned gratefully toward the only friend who had received her with kindness.

"Yes, I *will* go with you, Eunice Hurd—Aunt Eunice we used to call you, I remember."

"Of course you do; and as for her—well I say nothing as yet—but, Jerusalem! won't she cuss the day she ever attempted to do her tall walking over me!"

"Woman, be quiet, and take your charge from the room. To-morrow we will have a physician. Just now I wish to be alone."

"Hoity-toity! Who was your servant last year?" cried Eunice, putting her red arms akimbo and shaking her fiery locks till the comb rose from them like the crest of an angry cockatoo. "How much wages have you ever paid me?"

"All that you will receive under this roof," answered Cora, with a dry laugh. "From this moment, I discharge you."

This time Eunice gave her head a sudden jerk, that sent the comb flying half across the room.

"You dare attempt it! you she im—, but I say nothing; only try it, if you dare!"

Virginia, shocked and trembling under all this rude violence, arose from her seat and walked toward the door. Eunice darted a venomous look over her shoulder and

marched after her, followed by Ellen, who looked as if some sudden blow had fallen upon her head, bowing it down upon her chest.

The moment the room was cleared, Cora Lander locked the door and began a search for such objects as might prove of value to her. But the drawers were all locked, and, save the pretty ornaments about the room, nothing of interest to her black scheme presented itself. At last she recognized the Malachite box, and remembered for what purpose it had been used. That was locked, but she broke it open with a wrench of her hands, took the keys, unlocked the desk, and found it empty.

CHAPTER XX.

EUNICE HURD EXASPERATED.

EUNICE HURD was in a state of fierce indignation when she left that girl in the chamber which she was morally certain belonged of right to another. So fiery and intense was her feeling, that she passed by that wing of the building where her own empire was established, and began marching up and down the green sward close to the house, shaking her head viciously and flinging out her hands, as if the very atmosphere were an enemy which she longed to grapple with. After awhile her natural strong good sense conquered all this turbulence, and she began to think and calculate on the existing state of things in that dwelling.

"One thing is certain," she reasoned. "Something is going on which they haven't let me into, and don't mean it. Well, that's good for 'em. I ain't by no manner of means the person they can depend on to cheat a young critter like that out of home and name. Them country

cousins was another thing. Who cared for them? But when it comes to a choice between these 'ere two gals—one of 'em as good as pie and better, while 'tother al'ays was a sneaking, selfish, foxy critter, jest calcerlated for this kind o' business, and nothing else—why it isn't in me to take up that side. Besides, one is liberal as all out-doors, and tother, consarn her! never was ginerous to anybody but herself since she was born, and never will be. So I'll stand up for the right. They've got me to tussle with, let me tell 'em, and they'll find out that Eunice Hurd isn't a baby, by no manner of means!"

Eunice paused as these thoughts filled her mind, and then went on, sweeping the grass with the train of her purple dress, which at length caught on something and dragged at her unmercifully. She turned with a snarl and seized upon the branch of a rose-bush that had fastened its thorns in her dress, and wrenched it away, flinging it to a distance. Again she moved on, and once more a long, thorny branch rasped the rich silk, tearing it in places.

"What on arth is this rose-bush down here for, ripping away at my dress like all possessed? I saw the gardener nailing it up yesterday with my own eyes, yet here it is, trailing off yards and yards in the grass, or at any rate half of it. How came it here? There was no wind last night to tear it down."

While asking herself these questions, Eunice stepped backward, and was nearly overthrown by a ladder, which lay on the sward behind her.

She turned with a fresh snarl and examined the ladder. It lay almost directly under the window of Mrs. Lander's room, holding down a straggling spray of the rose-bush, which had annoyed her so.

"Somebody has been here—somebody has done this," she muttered. "That ladder has been moved since the dew fell, just as sure as I'm a sinner! There's fresh sile

on the end. The gardener hasn't been here since yesterday forenoon. Who has?"

Eunice folded her arms here and fell into thought for a full minute. Then she stooped down, lifted up the ladder and set the rose-branch which it had imprisoned free. It swayed back against the wall of the building, and then Eunice saw that at least half the bush remained firmly in its place.

"Somebody has been here. What for?" she muttered. "What for, I should like to know?"

That moment her eyes caught two stains of fresh earth just beneath Mrs. Lander's chamber window—exactly such stains as the supporters of that ladder would leave on the white marble.

"Some one has been up there," she thought. "In at the window, as true as I live! Jerusalem and California! that was the dream she had! They made up this wickedness in the night, the foxes! But Eunice Hurd is peeping into their hole, she is. That's why the window was so wide open and the curtain streaming out—that's what made her snivel and shake so—as if she could do anything in earnest without me to back her. What's that? Jerusalem and so forth, what is that?"

Eunice saw a fragment of cloth fluttering from an upright branch of the rose-bush just below the window. Snatching up the ladder, she dragged it forward, planted it against the wall, mounted it with the agility of a cat, and came down with the fragment grasped in her hand.

"It is blue merino; is it like her dress? I'll go in before she has time to take it off, and make sure," she said, in high excitement. "They mean to cheat me, do they? Let 'em try it!"

Meantime Virginia and her little maid locked themselves in the chamber which had been forced upon them, and there, like two caged birds, they stood and looked at each

other in pitiful helplessness. At this time Cora was ransacking the closets and forcing the drawers in that other chamber, which contained all the young creature's household treasures.

"What can I do? What ought I to do?" she said, leaning her fair forehead down on Ellen's shoulder. "This is terrible! Only half an hour ago I was thinking all this mine—thinking how to share it with them in a way that might not wound their pride. Now—now, oh Ellen! I feel like a beggar! They would rob me twice. My inheritance and my faith in the goodness of God's creatures they have swept off at a single swoop."

"No, do not think that, lady. Some of God's creatures are very, very good."

"You are good, Ellen; I know that."

"And so are many, many persons that never will be known. I have heard my father say that half the generous deeds and noble sacrifices of the earth are such as will only be recognized in Heaven."

"Your father had great faith in humanity, then."

"Oh yes; he was so patient, so forbearing. He never believed that any one could be entirely depraved, but hoped for the best and did for the best."

"Ah me! only yesterday I thought of the best. How everything is changed."

"Is it only because these people wish to wrong you and steal your name?"

"I thought yesterday," continued Virginia, "that mourning and the sadness which springs out of bereavement were the worst of sorrow. But now that the bitterness of wrong has come, I know better. This lost love and lost faith in the living is worse than death. It seems to me as if the cousin I loved so had passed into another being. My heart aches with bitter pain when I think of her."

"I heard my mother say this once when we had a sharp sorrow to bear, but *he* soothed her and told her in his deep, calm way to leave the wicked with God, who sometimes permits war and strife in nations, sin in households, that some evil may be driven out, some wonderful good secured to the great bulk of mankind."

"I never thought much of these things, Ellen," said Virginia, gently. "Indeed, I never had a trouble till now."

"Then I am older and wiser in this way than you. I knew what hard, hard trouble was when a little girl. It was because you suffered that I loved you so from the first."

"And have you been always in trouble, my poor girl?" said Virginia, smiling sadly on that earnest face.

"No, I was happy once; but that was long ago."

"Long ago, and you so young."

"Am I young?" said Ellen, lifting her stag-like eyes innocently to her mistress. "It never seemed to me so."

Virginia sat down and drew the hunchback close to her. There was a comfort in this, and a sense of protection, feeble as the little creature was.

Ellen, tell me what this trouble was. You and I are alone in the world; I would like to know all that lies back in your life, because I love you and trust you, Ellen."

Tears rose thick and fast into Ellen's eyes. She sunk down upon the floor, half kneeling, half sitting, and uplifting her honest young face so that her eyes looked straight into those bent upon her with such sympathetic earnestness, smiled as people only smile when ready to make a painful sacrifice.

"Yes, I will tell you everything, and would if death had not swept all away. My father was what they call a gentleman once. You saw him and know that he was one. He was married very young indeed, and his wife died,

leaving a little boy behind her that my father loved dearly; so dearly, that he gave up everything and lived almost alone on a pretty place he owned near Waterford, in Ireland, in order to bring the boy up under his own care. For twelve years my father kept himself out of the world and gave up his life to the child. Alfred had no other teacher, and scarcely any other companion. He loved my father dearly, I think, and I know that my father's love for him was like worship.

"At last Alfred was sent to Heidelberg, in Germany, where a great many young men are educated, and my father went into the world again, commencing life as it were then. He had some property, enough for all their wants, and more; but went to work in earnest at his profession, ambitious for his son. After a year or two he saw my mother and married her. More children came—first a son, who died; then my poor self; afterward Brian, but even Brian, bright and handsome as he is, was not to be compared to Alfred. This must be true, for all the people about our place agreed in saying that he was the most splendid young man that the sun ever shone upon. He came home once when I was a little child, but I can only just remember how magnificent he seemed. My father was expecting him to come back to Waterford and join him in the business of his office; but he wanted to travel, and my father felt it a happiness to work that he might enjoy.

"I think Alfred was in Paris a great deal and sometimes in London, for my father went three or four times to both these places in order to meet him. I was a sharp child; people like me often are, I am told; and though my mother never spoke of it, I saw that these visits were always followed by seasons of anxiety, and that men came more frequently to talk with my father about loans of money. Then came discussions about household expenses, and care on every side. So our home grew darker and darker year by

year. If Alfred had seen this, and heard my father walking to and fro in his chamber till after midnight, as I often did, he might have been more thoughtful. But he never came home. When he wrote, the shadow of some great trouble always followed his letters. I used to watch my father when he received these letters, and could see his hands shake and his lips turn pale as he opened them.

"At last a letter came which took my father suddenly from home. We children knew nothing of his business, but the wistful sadness in our mother's face made us thoughtful, even to the youngest, for there were five of us then, not counting the splendid young fellow whom my father loved better than us all.

"When my father came back he looked thin, and his hair had grown white—very white for a man of his age. He was terribly cast down, and for the first time in my life I saw tears in his eyes when he took us one by one into his embrace. It was a miserable greeting, and we children sat down and cried together when he took my mother into a room alone with mournful solemnity, as if they were going to a funeral.

"When they came forth again, my mother was white as death, but there was something in her face that told us that she was ready to make a great sacrifice. Through all the gloom of my father's sorrow there shone out a grand and settled love for her. Something that she had done or consented to do seemed to have anchored her into the very depths of his heart."

Here Virginia interrupted the girl.

"How strangely your words sound, Ellen. They are those of a woman, not to say a poet. I cannot realize that you are little more than a child."

"Nor I; but I was almost always with my father, seldom with the children—and he *was* a poet, though I think he never wrote a word of verse in his life. That, perhaps, is why I speak words that seem strange and out of place."

"Strange child—strange child," said Virginia, tenderly. "I think we do sometimes entertain angels unawares. But go on, I did not mean to interrupt you."

"That night my father gathered us all into the library for family prayers. He did not read the service—I think his heart was too full for that—but his prayer to God, as we all knelt around him, was like the pleading of a sinner for mercy. It was not for himself, we all knew that, but some thought deep in his soul broke forth in a wail of pain that made even the little children look around upon his quivering white face with tears in their eyes. This passionate cry of sorrow merged itself into a swell of mournful thanksgiving for the love and comfort which God had bestowed upon the darkness of his life, even in that black hour. When we all arose from our knees and gathered around him, weeping in blind sympathy, he blessed us with a smile upon his lip.

"Children," he said, 'this is not our home. I—I have sold it and spent the money. We are very poor people now; scarcely a family in all Ireland is so poor.'

"Father, father, shall we live in a cabin and have a nice white pig to sleep in the corner and play with, like Michael Croft?" asked one of the children. "Oh, we shall like that!"

"A faint smile quivered over my father's mouth. He patted the little one gently on the head. 'Yes, child, we will live in a cabin, but it shall be far away from here, with wild woods and green prairies to look out upon; where no one will ever learn that we have been better bred than our neighbors. There shall be plenty of white pigs too, little Willie, but they must have a cabin of their own, and you shall own a young fawn to play with.'

"That will be brave!" said little Willie, clapping his hands and laughing through his tears, while the younger ones brightened up and scattered off into the next room,

eager to talk the thing over, leaving Brian and myself sitting together, sorrowful with thoughts that they were too young for.

"Is it to America we are going?" inquired Brian looking wistfully at his father.

"Yes, my son—does the thought frighten you?"

"No, father. But must you work there—till the soil like a peasant?"

"And does my son fear that?"

"For my father, yes. He was born a gentleman," answered Brian, 'for myself, no.'

"That is bravely spoken, my boy! Fear nothing for me. The education which unfits a man for any duty that lies before him must be imperfect and, in so much, unworthy. You and I will take our first lesson at wood-chopping together, while Ellen here shall help her mother with the housework. We may be very happy in the far West. No one will think of inquiring there how much or how little we have worked before.'

He spoke cheerfully, and looked at my mother, who put her hand softly into his and smiled upon him.

"You see this is not so terrible, after all. I knew the children would not complain," she said, in her low, tender voice. 'We shall only love each other the better in a strange country. He may yet join us there.'

My father turned a grateful look upon her, but gave no answer in words, though a gloom slowly gathered over his face and he sighed heavily.

Brian went up to him and rested one hand on his shoulder.

"Father, I will be a good son, and if ever the time comes that he wants kindness from a brother, let him try me.'

"Then my father burst into tears. I had never seen him weep before; but now he sobbed like a child.

"Who told you anything of this?" questioned my mother, fluttering like a wounded dove around its mate. "Why does a child of mine speak in this way?"

"No one has told us anything," answered Brian, "but we feel, and our hearts speak."

"See how you have hurt him," she said, still dissatisfied.

"No, no; I am not hurt. This is gratitude. Why should we hold aloof from the sympathy of our children? It needs no words. Brian, you and I will be fellow-workers—fast friends—we understand each other."

"I wish you could feel in earnest how much I love you," said Brian, standing up proudly, like a man.

"I did not know myself till now. Here is Ellen, too, with such sorrowful eyes—"

"It is because I am so helpless," I answered, when the great swell of my heart would let me speak. "Because I can do nothing."

"Is it nothing that you can be your mother's comforter and mine?" said my father, gathering me in his arms. "What could we do without you, my Ellen?"

"In this mood we broke up that pleasant old home—sold everything, and with a little money—so little that we could not afford a first-class passage, even for my mother—went on board that steamer. You know the rest, but you do not know how often I stood on the verge of our limits on the deck watching you as you read or talked. Dear lady, my heart went towards you at the first glance: I longed to throw myself at your feet as you lay on that white rug, to kiss the hem of your dress. When the fire broke out—"

Virginia lifted both hands to her face and shrunk back in her chair, moaning with pain of that awful memory.

"I wanted to tell you something more about my father," said Ellen, in a low, penitent voice. "I did not mean to

hurt you so. When the fire raged fiercest, and there was no longer a hope, my father gathered us close to the bulwark—all but Brian, who had gone to the other side of the deck, where a boat still swung with its tackling half burned away. While they were trying to right it, all the cordage parted and it plunged into the ocean stern foremost, almost carrying Brian with it. A great body of flame burst up from the deck, separating us with a storm of fire. Then my father turned away with his face to the water, and said to my mother and myself what he had wished to say to Brian.

"My wife—my child—some of us may be saved. There is no torture in drowning. Fear nothing worse than death. They have flung spars and planks into the water; one of you may reach them, and so float till a ship comes up. Should this happen to either of you, remember the charge I give. Some time in life you may meet him—I mean my eldest son, Alfred Nolan—keep nothing back, tell him all that you have seen, all that you have thought. Say to him that the last words of his father before he went into eternity were these—remember them well, there may be a soul's salvation in them—say to him: Your father dies blessing you, praying for you, rather than his own life. Say—and mark the words well—that his father would gladly die this horrible death even of fire, if its agonies could redeem his son. Tell him that you saw the flames swooping toward me as I said this—that the fire was roaring under my feet and leaping into the sky, leaving only a moment of life, which I used for him. Tell him that the innocent children that will go down with me into eternity are less dear to me than the one guilty son for whom my last breath of prayer shall be given. Say that I perish believing that out of my fiery grave will come repentance, regeneration, and perhaps a useful future to him. Will you tell him this, my child, my wife?"

"We will! we will!" cried out two voices, blending in a solemn promise.

"Mother stood by, white and trembling, with the little ones clinging to her skirts. She looked down upon them with low moans of pain, and on her part clung to the garments of my father. I think if the fire had leaped upon us then we should have perished embracing each other. The fire did leap upon us, and went roaring after us foot by foot till we were driven to the bow, where you stood crowded close with that good man. Then Brian came through the flames, determined to die with us. We two were saved, and these last words of our father are all that we brought with us out of the deep. Some day, lady, I shall see and know my brother Alfred."

"It was an awful scene; my whole being shudders when I think of it!" cried Virginia, quivering with the terror of her own memories. "We are here—you and I, safe; but, ah! me alone! Ellen, I am glad you told me about this noble father. I saw him then, and the very remembrance fills me with a solemn trust in the eternal justice of God. Let us watch and be patient. One person we can trust, and that is your brother. He has a bright, honest face, like yours, dear—only—"

"More life in it; and his figure is so straight and tall. What a man he will make!" cried Ellen, brightening all over. "You would not think it, but he has the pride of a nobleman. That is why he will not acknowledge to the education which cost his father so much trouble. He does not wish to be thought a gentleman's son. As for me, no one would ever suspect good blood or gentle breeding here. So I pass without question. The first sight decides my claims to notice. Even that red-haired woman settled me with a sweep of her hand into something more insignificant than a servant."

"Let them think what they will, Ellen. It is enough

that I know and love you as a dear friend," said Virginia, smoothing the waves of lovely hair that shaded that earnest face.

"Hush, some one is coming," said Ellen starting to her feet; "they must not find me here leaning on my mistress. Shall I open the door?"

There was a knock and the jingle of china in the passage.

"It is Eunice Hurd, I think," said Virginia, trembling, for the scene of that morning had shaken her nerves sadly. "Let her in; she seemed friendly."

The door was opened and a servant came in with a great silver tray between her outstretched arms, on which was a delicate tête-à-tête set of Sèvres china, some glittering silver, and all the paraphernalia of an epicurean breakfast.

"I thought I'd bring it up here, as you didn't seem to hitch hosses with them people down stairs," said Eunice Hurd, marching after the servant. "They haven't taken a morsel yet. Other things to think of, I suppose. How do you feel now, Miss Lander? Chirker than you did, I reckon. At any rate, here's a briled chicken and some biscuit, and *sich* butter. Remember the cheney, I calculate?"

While she was speaking, Eunice, opening out a rosewood card-table, spread a damask cloth upon it with both her large, red hands, while the purple moire antique shook and rustled under her quick motion.

"Reckoned you would," she muttered on. "Twelve years old the day he brought this set of china home. Thought it was for the big wax doll at first. Mercy on us, how he did laugh! Most people would have let 'em all been broken up, but I ain't of that sort. There, marm, is a cup of coffee smoking hot, and plenty of cream to settle it down—and *sich* cream too! The cows have grown so dainty that they won't touch any thing less than white clover, with nipping from the rose leaves and apple

blossoms when they flutter into the grass—queer critters, them English cows are; and sich milk as they give! The calves had a nice time of it this spring, I can tell you. There's a snow-white one, with a black spot shooting up its forehead like an Injun arrow, Joshua wouldn't have it killed nohow till you got home. It's a beauty, I tell you! anything more, Miss? I'd stay and hand the things my own self, only Miss What's-her-name will be prowling inter the kitchen, for anything I know. Make yourself to home, for it is home so long as Eunice Hurd is under this roof."

Eunice gathered up her purple dress with both hands, and was marching out of the room, then she turned back and added:

"If the little flippertegibbet has a mind to, she can come down any time and tell me if you want anything—wouldn't go near the the madam or that gal, if I was you."

Eunice retreated with these words, sniffing the air as she went.

CHAPTER XXI.

MRS. LANDER AND CORA VISIT LAWYER STONE.

EBEN STONE was in his office, sitting at a black walnut desk, honey-combed with pigeon-holes and bristling with papers, given endwise to the light. He occupied the most remote of three rooms, all carpeted, with green; along each carpet, from door to door, a footpath was trodden into the frabic revealing its hempen foundation, as grass is worn from a meadow track. This footpath bespoke many clients, and the whole surroundings a prosperous business. Indeed few lawyers of the city boasted a larger practice or higher standing in the courts than Eben Stone.

It was not often that this man lost his equanimity, but he was a little astonished when a clerk from the front office came into his room, followed by the widow Lander and a young lady, so like Lander's daughter, as he remembered her, that the resemblance really startled him.

The widow sat down in a chair placed for her by the clerk, but did not lift her crape veil, though the young lady put hers aside with a rather defiant sweep of the hand.

"Mr. Stone, I have come to you at once," said the widow, moving nervously in her chair; "something so strange has happened. Please to look on this young lady and tell me if you know her?"

The lawyer, who was a handsome man for his years, which had numbered at least fifty, turned his fine gray eyes on the girl with a look of puzzled recognition.

"But that I am certain it is impossible, madam, I should say, allowing for growth and time, that this young lady might be Lander's daughter."

"You have remembered rightly, sir," said the widow, starting up with nervous eagerness. "She is Mr. Lander's daughter, saved from the wreck almost by a miracle—restored to us only two days ago."

"And Lander—my friend Lander!" exclaimed Stone, eagerly. "What of him?"

The widow shook her head, and her black veil waved mournfully.

"He is dead, sir; my brother and benefactor went down with the steamer."

"And your own child?" inquired the lawyer, in a restrained voice.

Mrs. Lander's black-bordered handkerchief went up under the veil, which was mournfully agitated again.

"Not dead, I hope," exclaimed the lawyer. "Dear me, that is terrible!"

"Not dead, but so much worse. Oh! Mr. Stone, I fear she is insane!"

"Insane!"

Mr. Stone turned his eyes on the young girl as he said this. He saw nothing in her handsome face but a look of gentle concern.

"It was the exposure," she said in reply to his look, "the horrible scene of the fire, that drove her out of her mind, sir. She is not violent—far from it—but I sometimes think it would have been better if she had never been picked up. Why, sir, she does not know her own mother!"

"She does not, indeed, Mr. Stone!" cried the widow, sobbing out the words from behind her veil. "Refused to own me from the first—fancies that she is Mr. Lander's child, and sets herself up for the heiress! You have no idea how painful it is!"

Mrs. Lander was evidently in a sad, nervous state; she began to sob piteously, and trembled so much that the young lady put one arm around her and made a gentle effort at consolation.

"She is so disappointed—so sadly harassed by her daughter's reproaches, sir! You can imagine what it is!" she said, turning her beautiful face on the lawyer. "My heart aches for them both."

"It is a mournful state of things, certainly," said the lawyer, with earnest sympathy.

"What can be done—what steps shall we take regarding my poor cousin? I would give half my father's estate tomorrow, sir, if that would restore her mind. Oh! sir, you have no idea what a lovely character she is—or was before this horrible calamity fell upon her. So fond of me, so grateful to my father. Indeed that she might well be, for he made no difference between us. Pray tell me what can be done for her—you are my father's old friend—point out some way for us. My poor aunt, here, is breaking her heart."

The impetuous feeling with which these words were spoken carried the sympathies of the lawyer with it. The bright, generous glow of that face made even his practised heart beat quicker.

"I cannot advise, I cannot even judge correctly," he said, "without having seen the young lady. It is a hard case—a very hard case."

Here Mrs. Lander bowed her head gloomily and sobbed out:

"Ah! sir, you cannot think how I suffer! How sadly all this has shaken my nerves!"

"But your daughter is not dangerous. I think you told me that she is never violent."

"Not exactly violent as yet. But her conduct in the house is very distressing. She has locked herself into her old room with a little deformed creature saved from the wreck, and refuses to come out. But the servants get access to her, and she talks to them as if she were mistress of the house. As for her cousin and myself, she seems to hate us."

"That is no unusual thing with insane people," said the lawyer. "It often happens that they take dislikes to those nearest and dearest; but this may only be temporary. Has any physician seen her?"

"No one has seen her," answered the widow. "We came to you, as her uncle's old friend, first."

"Still, I think a physician's opinion important."

"What physician would you recommend?" inquired Cora Lander.

"Any respectable practitioner. There must be one in your neighborhood. Indeed, if it should become imperative to shut her up, two would be necessary."

"Oh, don't! don't speak of that!" exclaimed the young girl. "The very thought wounds me."

"Still it may become necessary," said the lawyer. "In what way was she first taken?"

"I can hardly tell," answered Cora. "At first she was terribly depressed, and mourned continually over the loss she had met with in the death of my dear father, whom she persisted in calling *her* father. At first I did not correct her, for sometimes she had, in a caressing way, called him father on board the steamer. But when I heard her constantly doing this—with such deep earnestness, too—I spoke to her about it, when she flew at me like a fury, told me that I only wanted to cheat her out of the property and take her birthright from her. From that day she has been possessed with this wild idea. When she came home, after all our troubles, and found her mother yearning to receive her, she absolutely pushed the dear lady aside, and refused to recognize her. Dear, dear aunt, don't look so sad! it breaks my heart! Indeed, sir, you cannot blame her if she does give way. Oh! Mr. Stone, it was a terrible disappointment! Poor mother! poor, dear aunt! why how you shiver!"

Mrs. Lander was indeed trembling, and her pallid face looked frightful through her crape veil. She had told no more than the truth; her nerves were dreadfully shaken.

"I can endure this no longer!" she exclaimed, starting up in wild haste. "It wrings my heart to hear you say these things, Cora Lander!"

Cora broke off in her speech and looked steadily in Mrs. Lander's eyes. They were wild and impatient. The conversation had evidently overtaxed her strength.

"Well, dear aunt, we will drop the subject," she said, sweetly. "It is painful to us all. Mr. Stone understands how it is with my cousin, and will think for us. We are so helpless, sir."

There was a quick decision in all this which did not strike that keen lawyer as so very helpless. But he made

his observations and said nothing. Once, Mrs. Lander lifted her veil and turned a long, wistful look upon him, as if there was something she wished to say, but the veil dropped again, and she went out, following Cora Lander to the carriage.

CHAPTER XXII.

ANOTHER STRANGE VISIT.

MR. STONE sat a long time after the two women left him, playing idly with his paper-knife, dissatisfied, he could not tell why, and restless even to irritability. Why was it that, from the very beginning, he had been possessed of unreasonable doubts and suspicions, so vague that they melted into nothingness when questioned closely by his reason? Why was it that he could like neither Mrs. Lander nor her neice? Beautiful as the creature was, she utterly failed to touch one chord of his heart or charm one ray of his intellect.

"She has the Lander look and the Lander voice," he said. "I felt the tones as if my old friend had been speaking, but the air, that one glance of the eye, those never belonged to my friend Amos."

While Stone was thus thoughtfully playing with his folder and frowning heavily over it, the young man from the outer office broke in upon him.

"Two more ladies, sir."

"Two more, James!"

"Miss Lander and Miss Nolan. They want to speak with you."

"Send them in—send them in."

Again the bachelor office was darkened by two females in

deep mourning. One, the tallest, struck him so completely as the girl he had just parted with, that he started up in astonishment and stood gazing upon her with softened feelings, for the expression he had not quite liked was gone, and a sweet sadness, such as he had often seen on Amos Lander's features in his hours of grief, had taken its place.

"Sir—sir, you were my father's friend, I know," said the young lady, but with more impressive earnestness than had marked the conversation of his other visitor. "I have come to you in my distress—in my utter, utter helplessness!"

"Tell me first exactly who you are, young lady," said the lawyer, nervously laying down and taking up his paper-knife. Have I seen you before to-day?"

"I am the daughter, the only daughter of Amos Lander, an old friend and client of yours, if you are Mr. Stone. No, we have not met in eight years."

"I am Mr. Stone, undoubtedly, and knew Amos Lander."

"I know, I know; I ought to have remembered you anywhere," said the young lady, seating herself.

"His daughter and his brother's widow were here only a few minutes ago," said the lawyer, fixing his keen eyes on that lovely face.

Virginia met his glance with the earnest, grieved look of a child innocently maligned.

"That cannot be. I am the daughter of Amos Lander," she said, with gentle dignity.

The lawyer looked at her earnestly. Surely there was no insanity in that face. Truth itself was not more pure.

"I almost believe you," he said. "I almost believe you."

"Oh! believe her quite, for all that she says is true," cried the young girl who stood by her chair, advancing close to the lawyer and lifting her honest eyes to his.

"There is some great wickedness here, sir. That hard, bad young woman, who looks so like my lady, is determined to drive her from her own home, to take all her money—her name—everything—and send her out to die. Here—here, where my young lady had a right to expect friendship, she has been robbed of the last friend her father had! It is a terrible, terrible thing they are attempting to do, sir."

"And who is it that talks so boldly, and so well, I must say?" questioned Stone, more and more bewildered.

"I, sir—I am only a poor girl whose life she saved—a helpless creature that can do but little good in the world—God help me—but so long as I can speak, or think, or look, I will protest against the wrong these bad, bad women are doing to her."

"You speak of the widow Lander and her niece, I think."

"I speak of the widow Lander and her daughter—the two persons who have just been here. They are in a plot to rob my young lady—I have watched them, sir, with all my heart and all my brain, for both belong to her. This is what they are doing."

"Sit down, young lady, and let us talk more calmly; these are strange things you are telling me."

"But you will help her?"

"I would help Amos Lander's child in any way. Only let us understand each other."

"There is little to explain," said Virginia, putting aside her veil and drawing close to the table, on which her arm rested. "You know that my father, Amos Lander, had but one child."

"I know."

"I, sir, am that child."

The lawyer bent his head, but made no observation.

"My father was lost at sea, you know how."

"Yes, yes; no need to pain yourself with the story; I know about it."

"You know as well as I do that he took the widow of my uncle into his house—her only child was made one of the family, and in all things treated as a daughter. Eight years ago we went to school in Europe, studied together, and in all things continued to be as sisters. We had the same name exactly, Cora Virginia Lander. She, being a little the elder, was named after my mother, who afterwards gave her name to me on the very day of my birth. Thus we were scarcely to be distinguished from each other. True she took the name of Cora, and I bore that of Virginia—after we went to Europe, reversing what had been before. But we looked so much alike that there was constant confusion in the names, and our signatures were exactly the same. We liked this; it pleased us to be mistaken for each other, especially as Cora loved people to think her the heiress, and I cared nothing about it. I remember when my father came she saw him before I did, and tried to make him believe that it was his child who claimed the first kisses. But she failed. He knew the difference at once, and was angry with her for trifling with him. I never saw him so much excited before or since."

"Was any one present when he rebuked her?" asked the lawyer.

"No; we were alone. I think Cora was offended at this, for she was sullen and unkind for days and days after that. But we soon went on our travels and it all wore off for a time. Papa was known to a good many persons on board the steamer when we returned home, and they made a distinction that wounded Cora dreadfully. It was not our fault. Papa was kind as kind could be to her, but he had not seen his own child in so long, and loved her so dearly, that he also seemed to put Cora aside. It was not intentional, and she carried herself proudly under the pain

but I knew that it was there. Then came that awful, awful day?"

"And how did she behave then?"

"Sir," broke in the hunchback, "she saw a boat putting stealthily from the steamer and plunged into the sea, screaming to be taken in—not one word to the old man whom she now claims to be her father—not one look on her cousin. She left them like a coward and saved herself—I saw it all, I saw it all."

"Then you saw her abandon Amos Lander and seek her own safety?"

"Yes, I did. I saw also this lady, his child I know, stand between him and the flames till her garments were scorched. I saw them driven inch by inch before the howling flames, till they leaped together, clinging to each other from the bow. He begged her to go first, but she would not. Even in the water, she went swimming to and fro searching for him, and crying out to know if we had seen him. Then she saved me; bore me through the water when she was herself sinking—and that wicked girl sat in the boat watching us. I tell you, sir, she would not let the men come to our help. One of them told me so afterward. She wished them to see her cousin die that she might claim her inheritance. I saw this from the first. When my lady was taken, senseless and white, into the boat, that girl felt for her heart, and almost laughed when she found how cold and still it was; but when those poor lips moved and the dear eyes opened, Cora Lander's face grew deadly. It was like that of a fiend. Oh! sir, she is a wicked, wicked girl!"

Ellen spoke with the energy of truth. Her fine eyes filled with light, every feature of her face beamed with honest indignation. She swept away even the cool reason of the lawyer with her enthusiasm.

"Go on," he said; tell me all that passed after this

You have been with these two ladies ever since the shipwreck, I believe?"

"Yes, always," answered Ellen. "With all my brain and all my heart, I have been watchful over the lady who saved my life. I felt that some evil thought slept under the frowns that girl could not invariably conceal. I have spoken again and again of the wealth which would belong to my lady, always to see that curved lip grow white over the set teeth, and an evil fire flash into those eyes which could not be concealed even by the drooping lashes. That girl, sir, from the very first had resolved to personate my lady and thus rob her. How she came to an understanding with her mother I do not know; but of one thing I am certain, they met before that morning. There was mutual trust and mutual dread between them. The girl had mastered her mother. From the first moment of our return she has ruled her with a rod of iron. She is fearless, unscrupulous—terribly wicked."

Ellen broke off and began to pace the floor, clasping and unclasping her hands in her unexhausted excitement.

"It is a base, wicked, deep design," she said, "and they will succeed—they will succeed!"

"You have an ardent friend there, and it may be one who can return the debt she owes you," said the lawyer addressing Virginia. "Now tell me, if you can, how far your own impressions go with hers. Tell me all that has passed—do not allow yourself to be excited—try and speak calmly, I have plenty of time and will listen."

"Oh, I am not excited. This trouble seems so small after the terrible sorrow of his death, that I am likely to give it less importance than it deserves. Ellen has spoken the simple truth in every particular. She has been with me all the time, and having her suspicions excited, has observed keenly. She is not generally uncharitable, and has no cause to judge my cousin harshly. One thing is

certain, Cora has assumed my name, my identity, and will, if I have no power to check her, despoil me of my father's property. She has even attempted to confine me in my own house. Ellen and I escaped from it as if from a prison."

"Did she give you no reason for this attempted confinement?"

"None; in truth I have not seen her since she drove me from my old room."

"Drove you from your old room! But give me all the particulars. Let me know everything that passed—I would rather hear the facts from your own lips."

Virginia obeyed him quietly, and with less betrayal of excitement by far than Ellen had exhibited; her voice was clear, her narrative connected and her language temperate. Tears came into her eyes once or twice as she spoke of her keen disappointment on returning home, but there was not a trace of mental derangement in anything she said or connected with her manner.

The lawyer watched her keenly as he possessed himself of the facts. Every instant he saw some trait in her face, some tone of her voice, which reminded him painfully of his old friend. These shades of expression he had not remarked in the other face. In features the two appeared so completely alike that the resemblance was startling; but that which impressed the lawyer most forcibly was an indefinite air—a shade of the soul which no court of law could ever be made to recognize.

"This is Amos Lander's daughter, and she is sound of mind as I am," he thought, "but how to prove it—how to prove it. If that woman persists in claiming her and renouncing the other, what evidence can be brought to refute the perjury? Who shall claim to know more of a child than its own mother?"

Then the lawyer remembered what had been said of

Virginia's insanity. What was the object? Did they intend to make this an excuse for getting her out of the way? Such things had been, even in the close neighborhood of New York, and in the nineteenth century. This case, take it for all in all, was the strangest and most incomprehensible that had ever come within the lawyer's practice. How was he to unravel it?

For some time, Stone remained pondering over these points of the case, that seemed most complicated, and the two girls sat by in silence, waiting for him to speak. At last he looked up.

"Did this woman know that you were coming here?" he said.

"No, she left in the early train; they both left. Then a woman in the house, whom they seemed to have offended—"

"Eunice Hurd?"

"Yes, Eunice Hurd came, unlocked our door, and told us to go out and get some air. She was mistress just then, and didn't mean to make prisoners of us or let anybody else. We put on our bonnets and went out to the terrace. A train was just that moment in sight. It stopped—we sprang in and were on our way here before any plan of the kind had been thought of."

"That is well. Now take the next train back. It is possible that you may reach home before Mrs. Lander and her companion. Say nothing of your excursion. Do not mention my name, but if they bring any strange men to see you, let me know at once."

"I had thought that you would perhaps advise me to leave the house," said Virginia, "it is so very painful living under the same roof—"

"Leave the house, and so give them possession—nine points of the law flung up at once—not a bit of that—stay where you are—keep together and give them a free rope. That is my advice. But if they make any desperate move,

send for me. If possible, make friends with that hard-faced termagant with the red hair. She may be useful."

"She has been kind to us—very kind in her way," said Virginia. "I think she knows me."

"Heaven send that they exasperate her—but they will, she is forever on an edge, and this successful audacity will be sure to turn the girl's head. That is the way crafty persons usually defeat themselves. It is the small people whom we despise too much for conciliation that play the mischief with us. This girl will run into some mistake of the kind, be sure of that; but we must give her time, plenty of time. Things will all come out right, I dare say."

"The power of justice lies with God," said Virginia, solemnly. "Why should we fear to wait?"

"Wait and work—wait and work, my dear child! Never trust entirely to the Lord while you can work for yourself. Remember he has given you energies to use, and these are his instruments. I do not know what your clergyman might say on the subject, but that is a lawyer's opinion."

"I cannot realize that my cousin really means to defraud and displace me. It seems like some hideous dream," said Virginia, sighing heavily.

"Make up your mind to that, young lady. She is in deadly earnest, and the Evil one seems to have helped her. Never in my experience have I seen a fraud so thoroughly hedged in. The mother is her tower of strength. But they will quarrel. Wait awhile and they will be sure to quarrel. The elder woman has some conscience; as for the other—well, it's hard to think a creature so rarely beautiful has no soul, but, upon my word, all this seems like it! How cool she was—how thoroughly self-possessed—and yet there is fire and all sorts of passion in her eyes."

"Will my young lady be safe under the same roof with her?" questioned Ellen.

"Safe?—Yes, I hardly think the creature would commit murder, at any rate as yet. Young lady, I repeat my advice—return to your father's house and rest there for a few weeks, or months if it seems best; at least till I can thoroughly look into this case. No harm can reach you there. Accept the position she forces upon you—be vigilant, and let this young person keep her wit sharpened—we have a difficult game to play and must use all our resources."

Virginia gathered the dark drapery of her shawl around her, and prepared to go. The interview had depressed her greatly, and everything seemed surrounding her with gloom.

"I wanted rest so much—so much," she said, mournfully.

"That will come—only be hopeful and patient," said the lawyer, kindly. "Meantime you have a good friend in this girl, and in me."

"I trust you, sir; you were his friend—I trust, and will obey you as if it were himself."

"That is well—that is well. Now hasten back, and let no one learn that you have been here."

Virginia clasped the hand held out to her and went away very sorrowful. Everything confirmed her deepest cause of grief, the utter unworthiness of the cousin she had trusted as a friend and loved as a sister.

The two girls reached the railroad depot and took seats in the returning train, depressed and so weary that neither of them spoke until they came within view of that white marble building which was Virginia's home. How strangely it had altered since she had looked upon its Grecian pillars and sculptured façade the day before. It was no longer her home—no longer a place of hoped-for rest, but its white walls loomed before her like those of a prison. The hot atmosphere of strife had poisoned all its

flowers and darkened the very sunlight which fell around it.

Virginia and Ellen wandered awhile among the shrubbery before they entered the house. Virginia was depressed and so heavy-hearted that even the beautiful world of blossoms that surrounded her failed to brighten her face or win an admiring glance. For the time her soul fell into a depression so mournful that she longed to sink down among the flowers and die there. The two beings she most loved on earth were dead. One had gone into eternity through those terrible gates of fire which seemed forever burning before her. The other—ah! more painful still—had sunk into those black depths of sin, shame and dishonor into which her pure soul could not look without shuddering.

The grave consecrates its dead—but sin embalms the soul in eternal poison.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE WAYSIDE TAVERN.

THE railroad depot, which we have had occasion to mention more than once, stood a little in advance of a small cluster of houses which occupied a space of flat ground lying between it and the river. Among these houses was a small hotel, or tavern, at which travellers going back into the country sometimes stopped, and which frequently held guests from the city weeks together for as a transient boarding house, it was well kept and pleasantly situated. This hotel and the surrounding houses were completely shut out from the white mansion by the fine old grove we have described, which swept up to the last slope of the terraces and ended there in a beautiful wilderness, through whose cleft heart came a bright gush of running waters.

Of all the lovely nooks which made that domain almost a paradise, this piece of wildwoods was the most beautiful. But it lay some distance from the house, while some of the great trees that grew upon its outskirts almost sheltered the little hotel, and the inland stream rushing by one end, gave it a rural aspect which can seldom be attained even from a union of trees and running water.

To this hotel, a few days after the Miss Landers returned home, came young Seymour, quite alone and with only a small valise by way of baggage. A handsomely-mounted fowling piece, some fishing tackle and a basket, that seemed never to have been used, were left at the depot, for which the landlord sent his boy at once, for the young man, after an examination of his room and some general inquiries, expressed himself delighted with the accommodations, and determined to stay some days, weeks perhaps, and see what sport could be found in the neighborhood.

The landlord was delighted; never had his door been darkened by a presence so imposing. The extreme beauty of this man's face, his manners, at once dignified and cordial, charmed every one with whom he came in contact. He was delighted with the room assigned to him, remarked pleasantly on its white bed and the muslin curtains which let in such lovely glimpses of green shadows and sparkling water, and expressed general satisfaction. It was a lower room, and a quaint affair, half door half window, opened from it to a little verandah. Below this balcony the brook went eddying and laughing till lost in the darkness cast by a plank bridge which crossed the highway and hushed it into stillness for the space of thirty feet or more, when it broke forth in a riot of sweet sounds and went dancing and sparkling off to its death in the vast sweep of the Hudson.

After giving orders about his gun and fishing tackle, Seymour looked at his watch and inquired what he could have for dinner.

"A broiled chicken, would that do—with splendid potatoes fresh from the garden, custard and apple pie?"

"Add materials for a salad and exchange the pie for a ripe peach, and nothing could be better," Seymour answered.

The landlord went out delighted. He had a private understanding with Mrs. Lander's gardener, and made himself sure of such peaches as the young gentleman had seldom eaten before.

"There," muttered Seymour, as the man went out, "this broiled chicken will help me through an hour, then give ten minutes to the fruit, and a cigar or two will bring me close upon sunset. I wonder which way the house lies from here."

He took a note written on paper of a faint violet color from his bosom and murmured softly to himself as he read it:

"There is a room on the ground floor which you must secure if possible. It opens on an old-fashioned verandah, but little used, from which steps run down to a foot-path which leads along the margin of the brook, till it ends in the strange summer-house I have described. There, my beloved, I shall be waiting for you with an impatience which swells my heart and burns upon my face even as I write, hours and hours from the time when I can hope to see you. Do not fail, the disappointment would kill me if I should go to that place and find it empty. I will not go till the very hour—to wait would be an agony of suspense. I must find you watching, impatient—counting each moment which keeps me from you as an enemy to be wrestled with and hated. But I might keep on forever and say nothing that will satisfy the heart which struggles and swells in my bosom in a wild effort to reach yours. At sunset, remember—at sunset."

The young man kissed this impassioned note more than

once before he placed it near his heart again, for with all his wayward soul he loved the young creature who wrote it.

"Remember the sunset—as if I could forget! Oh! she is a glorious creature, full of genius, ardent, earnest—a woman to live for and die for! How her thoughts leap to mine! I could be the hound, the slave of a woman like that and feel it no degradation, for she loves me—she loves me, and I adore her!"

Seymour walked the room to and fro with restless impatience. The note had broken up all the listless placidity of his manner. He longed to tread the hours under his feet which lay between him and his love. To most men the unwomanly warmth of that note would have brought something like repulsion; but Seymour only loved her the better for this abandon. Fresh from Southern Europe, he brought with him its fire and its intensity of feeling.

The dinner was brought in at last and placed upon a round table, covered with a cloth white and glossy as crusted snow.

With all his sentiment, Seymour was hungry but fastidious as an epicure. He sent the broiled chicken back to be kept warm while he used up a little time in mixing a salad to his taste. That was so much gained. He was fifteen minutes nearer the sunset and had produced a delicious salad before the covered dishes were brought in again. Everything was well cooked and delightfully fresh. Simple as the meal was, he ate it with exquisite relish, finding this a pleasant way of passing the time. The landlord came in at last and inquired if his guest was satisfied with his dinner.

Seymour had just taken a peach in his hand and fastened his white teeth in its crimson side. He took the peach from his lips with a sigh of sensuous enjoyment, and answered in a single word, "Delicious!"

"This is indeed a glorious fruit," he said, eyeing the

juicy pulp and crimson coat of the peach he had half eaten with intense admiration; "and seems fresh from the tree. Not of your own growing, surely?"

"No," answered the landlord, with a bland smile, "they were a present from Mrs. Lander's gardener. Wall peaches sir, and picked ones at that."

"And who is Mrs. Lander?" asked Seymour with apparent unconcern. "Some Lady Bountiful of the neighborhood?"

"She is—or was the lady of the white marble house which you passed a quarter of a mile back—but I really do not know who it belongs to now. Mr. Lander's daughter has come back and everything is claimed by her, I am told."

"And is it a large property?"

"Immense, and falls, every dollar of it, to that young girl."

"Indeed!" said Seymour, pushing the plate of fruit from him. "And the other—I beg pardon, but did not you say that there was a relative?"

"No, sir, I don't remember mentioning it. But there is a cousin, brought up in the house, the very image and picture of the young lady, but poor as a church mouse—hasn't a dollar that I know of independent of her rich cousin. Besides she's said to be—I don't answer for it remember—but she's said to be a little wild, wrong about the head, you know. The fright of that awful shipwreck unsettled her; but it's to be hoped that it will go off. Quiet and her native air will do wonders the doctors say."

Seymour was puzzled and a good deal mystified, but he did not venture on questioning the landlord too closely. "There must be some mistake," he thought; "both the young ladies were bright as larks ten days ago. This must be village gossip, but at nightfall I shall learn everything."

The landlord, finding the conversation droop, went out,

and a servant came in to remove the table and set the room to rights. Seymour stood by the window while this was going on, and smiled as he noticed how the shadows had lengthened, and that faint gleams of violet and rose-color were giving an opaline tint to the west.

When the servant disappeared with the last vestige of the meal he had enjoyed so much, he had still half an hour to dispose of, and spite of his impatience, was not altogether inconsolable that it was so. Under all circumstances, Seymour was a man to make the best of his surroundings, and never failed to snatch the blossoms from each hour as it passed him. The room was scantily furnished, and he looked around for a couch to rest upon. No such luxurious convenience presenting itself he drew a heavy chair, large enough for a modern pulpit and draped with white dimity, up to the window, stretched himself almost at full length in it, and selected a cigar from a case richly mounted and exquisitely embroidered, probably by some lady. This he laid daintily on the arm of his chair, and searching in another pocket, drew forth a small box of enamelled gold, from which a waxen match soon flashed fire in answer to a quick motion of his hand. Then igniting his cigar, with an indolent motion of his red lips, he fell into a reverie, looking out upon the sky with his half-shut eyes and sending up dainty curls of blue smoke at intervals of indolent animation.

Thus he watched the sky till its delicate opal tints turned into seething scarlet, broken up with great ridges of gold, which sunk, and changed, and floated in a deep sea of purple lanced with flame and fringed with living fire. The last sunbeams broke against the window where the young man sat, like a handful of golden arrows. Then he started up from his reverie with a thrill of life that completely transfigured him, flung the end of his cigar out of the window, and opening the lower half, which was of wood, stepped out upon the verandah. The trees above

him, were all ablaze with dying sunbeams, but soft purple shadows were gathering in the ravine, and the brook laughed out fitfully through the beautiful gloom which fell upon it.

A footpath ran along the margin of this brook, to which the wood moss crept, tufting its edges with velvet. Spotted ferns and delicate sarsaparilla brushed against his boots as he passed into the woods, walking rapidly and smiling as he went.

All at once a bend of the path brought him upon a tiny log cabin, which stood upon an embankment of the brook just below a rustic bridge, half stone, half logs, which spanned one of its deepest parts. It was a lovely spot, sheltered by tall chestnuts and a single hemlock, which let in a glow of the red sunset through the dusky green of their branches. In the door of that miniature cabin stood a female, leaning out, with a hand shading her eyes and searching the footpath with eager glances. She had come first, notwithstanding her promise to the contrary, and, while her whole soul went out in longing for his presence, was angry that he should have made her wait.

He saw her from the margin of the brook, cleared its highest embankment with a bound or two, and stood beside her beaming with happiness. Her anger fled at the first touch of his hand; not a gleam of it was left in those deep blue eyes; a tremor ran through her frame, but it was not one of rage or resentment even. She loved the man—yes, at the time she loved him honestly, devotedly, with a wild vehemence that might have made her his slave; and he loved her ardently, madly, with a better love than she could ever give in return. He was not a good man, as our readers will know, but the depth and earnestness of his affection for this girl gave a grandeur even to his most wayward nature.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LOVE IN A LOG CABIN.

THE door in which the lovers stood was darkened by the hemlock; so Seymour drew the young girl into the cabin close to a little window that looked out upon the rustic bridge. It was a lovely object to gaze upon, splendid ferns fringed all the margin of the brook and rooted themselves in the stone-work of the bridge, pluming its mosses with tufts of green; ladies' ear-jewels, wild asters and scarlet cardinal flowers tangled themselves in garlands of gold, blue and red over the water and round the ends of the bridge, massing their rich foliage up the embankment till some of the ear-jewels trembled, like bells of gold, under the cabin window.

"Ah, how beautiful the earth is!" said Seymour, bending to look into her eyes. "Great Heavens! it almost frightens one to feel so happy. Is it so with you, darling?"

"I am very, very happy," she answered, with a sigh that seemed to bring up fragrance from the depths of her heart. "It rejoices me to know that you think this so beautiful—for it is mine, all mine!"

The young man did not take in her meaning, but drew her close to his bosom and answered, with passionate tenderness:

"And you, Cora, when shall I say that you are mine—all mine?"

His tenderness, the impatient trembling of his voice, made her bold, and she answered him with kisses, for his lips had sought them even as his words claimed her.

"I love you—oh! how dearly I love you!" she murmured, forgetting for that one moment her wealth—her crime—everything but the passionate tenderness which swayed her whole being.

"Then why should we wait? Come with me, darling—who on earth can love you as I will? I possess money now, we need have no fear of poverty—full twenty thousand dollars—"

She interrupted him with a ringing laugh, and throwing her head back, looked triumphantly in his face.

"And I, Seymour, I have fifty times as much—more than that—more than you and I can spend, let us be ever so extravagant. Throw your paltry gold into the river, or give it to your servant; with me you shall have everything, for I am rich—you can hardly imagine how rich."

The young man dropped his arm from her waist and looked wildly into her flashing eyes. He was deadly white, even to the lips. Her news seemed to have frightened him.

A shade of terror came into her face, and she seized him by the arm.

"What is the matter?—how pale you are! Why, Seymour, you are trembling from head to foot!"

He broke away from her, folded his arms against the logs of the window-frame, and bowing his face upon them, burst into tears.

"Oh! my God, my God!" he broke forth, "if I had but known this before—if I had but known it!"

The girl was astonished. She had thought to complete the triumph of his happiness with her news, and there he stood trembling like a culprit—weeping like a child.

"Seymour! Seymour, tell me the reason of this! I thought my news would make you so happy," she cried, partaking of his terror, for a painful suspicion had seized upon her.

"Did he know? Did he suspect?"

Her hands shook like wounded birds as she lifted his head from the logs, and the face she bent upon him was ashen with dread.

"Are you angry? Does it make you so wretched because I am rich?" she said, shrinking from the mournful eyes he turned upon her. "Speak to me, Seymour! What have I done to wound you so?"

"Nothing," he said, wearily; "nothing—you are everything that is beautiful, good and generous, while I—oh, Cora! Cora! I am not worthy of you! A beggar, and worse than a beggar, how dare I mate with a creature so beautiful, so bright?"

She drew close to him, for the moment generous and womanly.

"If I owned the whole world, Seymour, and had the beauty of an angel, all should be yours; I only ask that you love me."

"Love you, girl! This is the very madness of love. If you only knew to what it has driven me!"

"If you love me so, it is enough. There, now the color is coming back to your lips. I felt mine growing cold, as if your kisses had frozen there. Come, come, smile again. You frightened me terribly."

"Did I?" he answered, with a forced smile. "I did not intend it—but you took me by surprise."

"Is it such a terrible calamity to be worth oceans of money?" she answered, a little proudly. "Does this wealth make you love me less? This poor little twenty thousand dollars you would have divided with me, whom you thought penniless."

"This poor little twenty thousand dollars!" he repeated, bitterly. "Girl! girl! do you know what it cost me?"

Again she was terrified by his pallor and his vehemence, and answered, trembling:

"No matter what it cost you, I will repay it. There is nothing that love and power like mine shall not redeem."

"Ah! if it could—if it could!" he answered, sorrowfully.

"Why did you tell me that falsehood? Was it to test

me? Did you doubt that I loved you? Why not say then, I am rich and will divide these riches with you?"

"Because my father was living and the wealth was his, not mine," she answered promptly. "That was worse than poverty, for I knew he never would consent to our union."

"But why not say that you were his daughter and heiress? Why pass yourself off on the man who loved you as a dependent niece?"

"Forgive me! forgive me! I was wrong not to know you better; but the deception sprang from a wish to be loved for myself alone."

"Ah, Cora, had you but told me then!" he said, with a piteous smile. "But let it pass. What a brute I am to frighten the color from your face in this way. Come closer to me, love. Do not look so terrified—nothing is wrong between us in reality. There! there! don't tremble so, I am not angry with any one but myself. We were talking about—about the time when we need never separate again—oh! that blessed time for which any sacrifice is not too great. When shall it be, love? In a week? to-morrow?"

"So soon—oh, no! how impetuous you are! Days—weeks—why it must be months before I can even lighten my mourning."

"Your mourning! What is there in a few yards of black crape more or less that should separate us? Must you necessarily mourn the dead less because we love each other?"

"No, no; but there exist reasons which force me to be careful of appearances. My cousin, the girl I represented myself to be when you first knew me, threatens to contest my right to the property."

"But how can she?"

"How can crazy people do any wild thing? The poor creature is insane, but only on this one point. She is so

rational and even cunning, in other matters that astute lawyers may be won to take up her cause."

"But why should this affect our marriage, Cora?"

"You are a foreigner and cannot understand the senseless etiquette which makes deep mourning and solitude imperative in this country after the loss of a relative. Were I to abandon this mourning for a wedding-dress, the world would hold it as strong evidence in favor of my cousin. No daughter could so forget the respect due a deceased parent, it would insist."

"And you would have me wait the tedious result of a law-suit—cast me back from my happiness because people might cavil about time and place. Cora Lander, this delay will prove an eternal separation!"

"No, no it cannot—it shall not! Only wait patiently a few months!" cried the girl, with a burst of alarm. "My heart has nothing to say in this, it pleads for you—for myself—that alone knows how I love you."

"Yet, for the sake of this money, you kill me with delay."

"But I wound myself in doing it. Be patient, do be patient!"

"Patient, girl! when any hour may take you from me," cried the young man, with a despairing gesture.

"No power on earth can do that, Seymour. I would perish rather than give you up. Trust me! trust me!"

"But can I trust Fate? You have no pity, Cora Lander!"

"You are excited—wild. There is no such serious matter in a little delay," she answered, soothingly.

"There is! there is! You cannot understand. How should you?"

"What is there, Seymour, that I do not understand? Have you secrets?"

Cora turned white as marble, and the glitter of steel

came into her eyes as they searched the pale face turned away from her.

"Has some other woman claims upon you?" she added, in a low, husky voice, that made the white lips quiver as it passed through.

"No, on my honor, on my soul, no!"

This exclamation was full of passionate truth. The young man turned his face full upon her now. Slowly the color came back to her cheek and lips, and her heart flung off the pain that had seized upon it with a throb of relief such as she had never felt before. It seemed as if she had wrenched herself free from the grasp of a demon, that pang of jealousy had been so sharp and bitter.

"Cora," said the young man, with emotion, "since the day I saw you, the image of no other woman has entered my heart—scarcely reached my thoughts. I have loved you devotedly, entirely—do not trifle with me now!"

"I do not trifle with you."

"But you prefer the opinion of a crowd of men and women, whom you do not even know, to my wishes or my happiness."

"But I must live among these people, Seymour. They compose the world in which men and women must work out their ambition."

"My only ambition is your love, Cora," said Seymour, with great tenderness.

"And mine is for you," she answered, kindling with enthusiasm. "When we are married, Seymour, I would have the whole world look on and know that it is my hand that endows you with wealth—my love which chooses you from among all other men. There can be nothing costly or rare with which we will not surround ourselves. Love, to be complete, should envelop itself in purple, bathe itself in the perfume of flowers and be lulled to sleep by sweet music."

The young man smiled to see her eyes kindle and her cheeks burn. This material picture fired his imagination, but failed to satisfy that deeper feeling which in reality lifted him above the woman he so worshipped.

"Love like mine craves none of these things," he said, almost reproachfully. "With you, Cora, I could be happy in a log cabin less pretentious than this little rustic nest—away from the world, away—"

Cora interrupted him, a little scornfully, with a laugh that thrilled him half with pain, half with pleasure.

"And I would lavish everything beautiful and precious in the world on you," she said, resting her head against his shoulder.

"But you will not give up any of these things for me."

"I would give up everything for you, if that were needful."

"Then brave the opinion of these people you call the world."

"Had we not better evade it?" said Cora, drawing her face nearer to his and almost whispering in his ear.

"Evade it; how?"

"Why need any one know till all these vexatious questions about the property are settled?"

A sudden joy flashed into the young man's face.

"And would you, would you?" he questioned, girding her waist unconsciously with his arm.

"Will you wait patiently for the time of disclosure to come? Will you keep it secret?"

"I will be anything you wish."

"And not urge me to declare our marriage till it is perfectly safe?"

"Why should I—you will be mine?"

"Then be it next week—nay, to-morrow, if you like."

Her cheeks were one flush of roses, her eyes became flooded with misty softness, over which the white lids

drooped, for she was ashamed of her own eagerness. Though perverted and wicked, she was yet a woman, and trembled a little at the great venture she was making. Seymour did not speak at first and his arms released its fond hold on her waist. She looked suddenly in his face and blushed red when she saw a sort of wonder in his eyes rather than the great joy she had expected. Quick as thought she understood this delicate revulsion.

"Then next week, to-morrow, if you like, we will talk the matter over more dispassionately," she said, drawing gently away from him. "We have many things to reflect on. Even now it would be better to wait."

A flash of eager fire in the young man's face proved the sudden reaction caused by her words. The pride of his manhood, faulty as it was, recoiled from an offer even of the happiness he craved when it came so readily from those crimson lips. But her retreat, which seemed to spring from delicacy, was made with such dexterous craft that it swept this feeling away, and he became an eager suppliant again.

"Not a week—not a day—not an hour—if I can help it, shall this great happiness escape me," he exclaimed, with passionate warmth. "I feel as if each moment might snatch you from me, and tremble as it passes. Let us go at once; there must be a clergyman somewhere in the neighborhood."

Cora gave one of her clear, ringing laughs, and patted her hand with a light caress upon the curls on one side of his head.

"What an impetuous, rash creature it is who has made me love him so," she said. "Why we might as well summon a regiment to see us married. No, that country clergyman will never do. Let us think—let us consult. This thing must be secret as the grave."

"The grave, Cora? That is an ugly word to couple with our love."

"Well, then, secret as the fruit that lies hidden in the heart of a blossom. Will that do?"

Anything that is sweet and lovely will do. "Well, we are to be secret. I consent to that, if it brings no delay."

"We must go to the city. My un—, my father had a house there, which he occupied in the winter of late years; a gem of a residence, I am told. That shall be our home."

"Admirable! But soon—let it be soon."

"To-morrow I will go to the city alone and make all necessary preparation. Next week—"

"Well, what shall come next week!"

"The clergyman, as you are determined to have it so."

Her eyelids drooped as she spoke, and fringes, of a rich golden brown, curled over the passion of love that slept in her eyes. This was not all unreal; she was womanly for the moment. He thought her the very incarnation of pure loveliness, and trembled with a joy that was almost pain as he gazed upon her.

"Then I am determined to have it so. In one week I will bring the clergyman who is to make you my wife to the place you speak of. But your aunt?"

"She must know nothing. Her heart would be with us, but she is weak and irresolute. The shock of her daughter's insanity has unnerved her. In all things I am independent."

"But you will let me go with you to the city?"

"No. You can follow me and I will manage to see you at the hotel just once during the week."

"This week—this one week, and then you are my wife. Oh, Cora! this happiness seems too great. I am not worthy of it; yet if deep, pure, overpowering love could make a man worthy, I might claim something from that."

The young man—earnest and true, most surely, for the moment—held her by the waist as he spoke and looked tenderly into her face. She met his gaze smiling, and with a warm red, which was not blushes, on her cheek.

"My wife," he whispered; "my wife! That is a dear word. Great Heavens, how dear it must be to a good man!"

A sensitive woman would have been troubled by these regretful exclamations, and felt in her heart that there was something wrong under them. But with so many passionate and ardent feelings mingled with the selfishness of her nature, Cora was neither a sensitive nor really refined woman. She scarcely heeded the expressions of self-reproach that escaped him from time to time, and if she did, imputed them to the humility of a man whom she was lifting from poverty to an equality with herself one of the most beautiful and wealthy women of the land.

"Now, good-bye, it is growing dark inside the cabin, and they will miss me at home."

"Not yet, darling; not yet. The stars are trembling down through the leaves with a tender light. See how the purple shadows are deepening along the hollows of the brook. Directly the moon must begin to shine, and that will give a holier beauty to your face. Does not this remind you of that sunset among the hills when I first saw you wandering alone, left behind by your friends, and searching for the path which you never would have found. With what a gentle radiance the moon arose that night! Ah, I was free and happy then!"

"And now your voice is sad, tears tremble in your voice. Why is this, Seymour?"

He bent his face to hers in the purple dusk of the twilight.

"Have you never heard of happiness so great that it trenches on pain?" he said, evasively. "But, look, the moon is rising; you can see its dancing silver on the water. Ah, my beloved, now your face returns to me as it did then, clear and delicate, like a soul imprisoned in marble. I remember well a sadness fell upon me when I left you, so

deep and strange that it seemed like the shadow of some dark fate. It is creeping over me now."

Cora broke impatiently from his arm; she had no sympathy with the sadness of his thoughts, and strove to win him from them by trivial questions.

"I remember," she said. "There was a gentleman with you then, and you would not tell me his name; it is very cruel, for, from the distance, he seemed both elegant and handsome. Who was it, tell me now?"

Even in the moonlight, Cora was surprised to see how white and stonelike Seymour turned. He was silent half a minute, then roused himself abruptly and answered her in a voice that seemed sharp with pain:

"I will answer that question, but on condition that you ask no more regarding that man now or ever. He was my friend and he is dead."

The moment he had spoken, Seymour bent down, pressed a cold kiss upon her lips that clung there like ice, and left the cabin. Cora found him outside the door, leaning heavily against the logs.

"Come," he said, in a troubled voice, "we are getting sad, and that will never do. Which way is your house, along this path?"

"But it is dangerous—you may be seen. I must return home alone," Cora protested.

"I will retreat when we get to the edge of the wood, from thence I can watch you," he answered, supporting her along the path.

Cora allowed the escort in silence. She was depressed by his unaccountable sadness and disappointment in the termination of an interview from which she had promised herself unmixed joy.

They reached the edge of the woods, and then he took her in his arms again.

"And will you always love me?" he said, with pathetic earnestness. "Can nothing turn your heart from me?"

"I will always love you, Seymour. Nothing on this earth can ever turn my heart from you," she answered, almost in tears.

"In sorrow—sickness—poverty?"

"These things are nothing that I should shrink from them," was her reply.

"In disgrace?"

He asked that question in a whisper that crept through her with a chill.

"That can never reach you while I am your wife," she said, proudly.

"But if it should?"

"Then I, your wife, would sweep it away from you, or—"

"Or what?"

"Share it with you. But why ask such questions? Is it to try me? That is ungenerous. Have I not promised to marry you unquestioned, scarcely knowing or caring if you had prince or peasant for a father?"

"What if he were low-born?"

"Low-born—that is, a man who worked for his living? Well, what do I care for that? In this country work is the foundation of greatness, statesmen tell us. If you have nothing more serious than low birth and poverty to frighten me with, pray compose yourself."

"But if it were crime?"

She started, for that word lay buried deep in her own heart, and the husky slowness with which it was uttered seemed searching it out.

"Sometimes a great motive, an overpowering ambition, almost ennoble crime itself," she said. "If the object were sufficient, even that could not conquer such love as ours."

He snatched her suddenly to his heart, kissed her two or three times upon the eyelids and lips and let her go. Cora found herself out in the moonlight and alone before she recovered from the surprise left upon her by this action.

Seymour drew back into the shadows, from which he watched her as she crossed a meadow separated by an invisible fence from the lawn. When she disappeared among the shrubbery, he turned, walked hastily back along the narrow footpath, and entering the log cabin, threw himself prostrate on the floor, with his face buried in his folded arms. There he burst into a passion of tears that filled the little building with such sounds of grief as had never visited it before. At last the violence of his emotion exhausted itself. Then the sweet hum and flow of the brook stole in through the open door and swept away his sobs into their own music, soothing him, unconsciously, till the wet lashes closed over his eyes and the moonlight streamed in upon his sleeping face, giving it the rare beauty of some sculptured ideal. Had you looked upon him then you could have thought nothing that was not bright and good of the young man; grief and that gentle sleep had purified his nature for the time, and no dark passion left its shadow upon that face.

Hour after hour the young man slept with the scent of ferns and ripening leaves sweeping over him hushed into sweet rest by the chime of waters, the rustle of forest boughs and the far-off flow of the Hudson, which came up from the distance like a voice from eternity sweeping through the night. All at once the cry of a whip-poor-will from the hemlock, whose branches swept the cabin roof, aroused him. He started up, felt the sublime stillness of the night like one in a dream, and at last began to realize where he was and what had happened.

Fortunately the young man had but to follow the footpath which brought him to the tavern stoop into which his own room opened. He had purposely left the inner door locked, and that which he had unfastened remained partly open. So he made his way to bed in the dark, satisfied that his absence had been undiscovered.

CHAPTER XXV.

CORA LANDER AND EUNICE HURD IN COLLISION.

IN the morning Cora Lander went to Mrs. Lander's room, which that lady seldom left now, and told her abruptly of her intended trip to New York.

"I am weary of this great gloomy place," she said; "the presence of your insane daughter oppresses me; I wish to be alone."

"Oh! if I could be alone!" said the poor woman, smoothing the crape of her sleeve with a nervous hand. "If I could ever be alone!"

"Why if this eternal room, with its stifling perfumes and endless clouds of lace, isn't being alone, I should like to know what is," said the girl, with careless disdain. "I should die shut up so; but every one to her taste."

"I had no fancy for being shut up, Cora, till you came with that cruel temptation. Now it seems every minute as if that poor girl would break in and reproach me. I do not hear a step on the stairs that it does not bring the heart into my mouth, or see her shadow in the garden that it does not make me long to throw myself out of the window. But what are you going to the city for?"

"I must find another lawyer, and be near him for consultation. Stone is not more than half in our interest; I see that plainly enough, and if this troublesome creature should go to law with us—"

"Oh Heaven, forbid!" moaned the widow. "If they take me into court I shall die!"

"Nonsense, aunt, don't talk in that way; it makes me angry! You were a woman of resolution and power once—what has become of your courage?"

"It went out when she entered this house. I shall never be myself again."

"Come, come, this is puerile, I am weary of it! Say, will you go with me to consult these new lawyers? We can stay in the town house when we desire it, and they can come to us."

"What, the lawyers? No, no, I will not see any of them again, if I can help it. Better stay here a thousand times, even with her and that little hunchback prowling about. I would like to get away somewhere but not among the lawyers."

This was said in a pleading, piteous tone, which almost made Cora smile, for she had no wish to take the widow with her and only proposed it in the deep craft which marked all her actions.

"Well, aunt, if it troubles you so, I will not press your going, though it is important. But you must not be surprised if I should fail to come back for some days."

"If you could only take *them* with you," she said, brightening perceptibly. "It was so pleasant before they came. The mourning did not seem so very bad; what with buying dresses and planning out bugle trimmings, one found enough to occupy the time. But now nothing but this room seems to belong to me. The servants don't mind my orders."

"There cannot be two mistresses in a house, aunt."

"There it is, 'Aunt! aunt!' I'm not your aunt, and I won't be called so when we are alone, understand that; and I tell you another thing, Cora Lander; the time will come when I shall tell the whole world of it, if you don't treat me more as a daughter should. After I have made so many sacrifices, too, given up everything."

"Mother!" said Cora, in a low, threatening voice, that made the poor woman shrink back in her chair. "If you ever threaten this again, I will put you into an insane asylum. It will be the only way of saving you from State's prison."

"State's prison! Cora Lander, how dare you use that word to me!"

The widow started up from her chair with all her old haughty grace, and stood tall and erect before her child, stung into active resentment dangerously menacing.

"I do not use it unkindly, mother, but in necessary warning. You cannot turn back or unsay that which makes me heiress of this property. To admit your part in this would inevitably lead to a prison, and to prevent that, I solemnly assure you, I would find means of putting you in some asylum."

"Yes, that is where you wanted to put *her*, but I would not permit it—we have done her wrong enough. I sometimes lie awake all night thinking of it."

"But you did not lie awake when you held possession under that will," said the daughter, with deliberate cruelty.

"No; why should I? No one was wronged then. Those distant relatives never expected a dollar of his money. Besides he intended it to be so, I am certain he did. Then I was my own mistress, and should have sent those fourth cousins money from time to time, when I haven't a cent now, only what you choose to give me."

"But you shall have plenty so soon as things are settled. Do be patient and a little reasonable. Now tell me about the house—is it furnished and in order?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Are any servants in charge?"

"Yes, one; an Irish woman I placed her in the house."

"Still," said Cora, with sudden caution, "I had better go to a hotel. That house would be so lonely without you, and I shall probably want to stay in town sometimes for days together, the house will be out of order, I'm sure of it. You are certain that it would be unpleasant to go with me?"

"I should like the change, Cora, but those lawyers would be my death in a week."

"Well, then I will try and do without you; take good care of yourself. Now kiss me, mother, and good-bye."

Mrs. Lander received Cora's embrace, but she returned it with little warmth; the harsh words she had used still ranked in the mother's heart, and, as usual, mutual crime was fast corroding mutual love both in the parent and the child.

As Cora was going out, Eunice Hurd came into the room, carrying a china plate with some fruit on it. She swept by Cora with a sniff and a toss of the head indicative of unmitigated hostility, and went up to her mistress with something like tenderness in her manner.

"Here now, poor soul, do try and eat one of these peaches, they're mellow as sunshine can make 'em, and red as a baby's cheek. Then here's a bunch of grapes with the juice just ready to bust the skins, took right from the vines, and a pear that'll melt in your mouth; just let me cut one in two."

"Thank you, Eunice, but I do not want them just now; perhaps Miss Lander would take one."

Eunice made no answer to this suggestion except to turn her back square upon the young lady.

"It ain't of no sort of use," she said, almost with tears in her sharp voice. "You don't eat enough to keep body and soul together, but you shall or I'll know the reason why. You're pining to death—eat jest the wing of a chicken this morning, and didn't half pick that. Strong coffee, morning, noon and night, and nothing can be wuss for you. Shake your narves all to pieces. Come, now do take one of the peaches, it's ripe enough to melt in your mouth."

Mrs. Lander reached forth her hand languidly and took the peach Eunice held toward her.

"There, that seems something like," cried Eunice, in triumph, as the widow began to eat the fruit with forced

relish. "If they'd leave you to me, I'd bring you round in short order, but where weeds are rank flowers won't grow."

Eunice gave a vicious look over her shoulder at Cora as she spoke, which terrified Mrs. Lander and brought that angry steel gleam into the young lady's eyes.

"Aunt," she said, with haughty emphasis, "I am very reluctant to interfere in any way with the servants you choose to keep about you; but this person I really must dismiss. Her ill-breeding and studied rudeness is unpardonable."

Mrs. Lander started half up from her chair, agitated and frightened, as nervous persons will be at any sudden proposition.

"Oh, Cora—Miss Lander, don't—don't, I beg of you, attack Eunice. She is strange—she is odd—but she is my—my—"

"I'm her old, faithful servant and friend, Miss Cora Virginia Lander," said Eunice, snatching some word from her mistress before it passed her lips, and turning boldly upon the young lady, "and it'll take more than you, or fifty just like you, to send me away from her. Try it, and see."

"I repeat it," said Cora, passing by this covert threat with the disdain of a strong character, "that you must leave this house."

"Cora! Cora Lander!" exclaimed the widow, with passionate protest, "she has lived here ever since you were a little girl. Mr. Lander always was kind to her."

"For my father's sake, I would do anything but keep an insolent servant in my employ."

"Father's sake!" burst forth Eunice between a snort and a sneer, which left Cora pale as death and sent Mrs. Lander off into a fit of hysterics that really threatened her life.

"Just clear the room and leave me to take care of her," commanded Eunice, with a sweeping wave of her hand.

"The sight of you'll only make her worse, and I can't stand it; pison's nothing to it."

Cora still white with wrathful fear, obeyed the woman, only pausing to say, "I am going to the city for a few days; when I come back I shall expect that my aunt will have discharged you. Under this roof you cannot stay!"

I think the girl would have said this if her own life had depended on silence. Yet it was done with a secret trembling of the heart, which imperceptibly stole into her voice. Eunice, who had a sharp ear, understood it, and, uttering a contemptuous "Oh, now don't," raised Mrs. Lander up with both her powerful arms and helped her to the bed.

"There, now lie down, that's a good soul, and don't fret; so long as Eunice Hurd is under the same roof with you nobody shall tread on you, niece or child, I don't care which. What's this stuff in the cut-glass bottle? There's opium in it, and you oughtn't to take it. Nothing is the matter with you but worry. Never was a woman that eat and drank with better relish till these girls came to turn us all out of doors. I'd like to see 'em try it! Well, just take a few drops. Has she gone out? Yes, and joy go with her. Shut the door? Of course I will. Now we are alone—I have turned the key. Yes, lay your head on my bosom, poor dear; there isn't one that loves you better in these United States. Don't take on—don't cry so, now don't. That's right now, put your arms around my neck and hug me close if you want to; I'm crooked as a sassafras root with you sometimes, I know; but, mercy on us, I love you all the time, and would lay down my life for you. What was you saying? Wal, if you are sot on it, I'd try and mollify the stuck-up critter, but it goes agin the grain. Still I'd do anything on arth for you, and allays would, you know that."

By this time Eunice had her weeping mistress gathered up in her arms, and was rocking her head and shoulders back and forth on the bed.

"Couldn't you just taste some of the grapes now, that's a dear soul? You can see right through the white ones."

"Eunice," said Mrs. Lander, when the roughly kind woman had laid her back on the pillow. "Promise me one thing."

"Of course I will. What is it?"

"No matter what any one says to us, do not leave me."

"Leave you, Eliza Lander! They shall tear me limb from limb first! As for that girl, she's brought a curse and a mildew into this house; but God is just, and she will suffer for it."

"Oh no! no, Eunice! Do not say that! It kills me to hear you say that!"

"Well then, I won't say it. Only remember this, while I live, neither she nor any one else shall put upon you. There she goes trapseing off toward the depot, and there go the men lugging down her trunk. One would think she was going to stay a year; I wish to gracious she was!"

"Does she look back? Is her face sad? I was very ill, you know, when she left the room."

"Sad; no, she steps along like a young colt. Now she's stopping to pick her hands full of them everblooming roses that you think so much of. Wal, never mind, more will blow out by to-morrow, and she won't be here to grab them."

"She knows how I love them, and picks them for my sake," said Mrs. Lander. "Oh, Eunice! isn't she graceful? Isn't she very, very handsome?"

"Yes, I reckon most people would think so. But I like the poor critter up-stairs best, that no one ever seems to have any motherly feeling for. You couldn't tell 'em apart, sure enough, but there's something in her eyes that this one will never have. You can't tell what it is any more'n you could make out where the smell of a rose comes from; but it's there, and that is what I call being handsome."

"Have you seen Vir—have you seen my daughter lately?"

"I see that poor motherless child every day, and that crooked-backed angel that is with her—but it is enough to break one's heart."

"Is she so very unhappy then?"

"Unhappy! I should think she would be. But I have no patience to talk about it. It riles me up awfully, till I am almost sot agin you!"

"Against me! what, you also, Eunice? Don't say that! I am unhappy enough already."

"Well, then, lie down and go to sleep; I won't say another word to worry you."

Mrs. Lander closed her eyes wearily, then opened them again and looked with frightened earnestness into the grim face bending over her.

Something in those eyes answered the question she dared not ask, and with a faint moan she turned her face to the wall.

That moment a light knock came to the door, and Eunice, thinking it a housemaid called out sharply, "Come in."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FIEND AND THE ANGEL.

THE door opened and Virginia Lander passed through. Her face was sad and pale, violet shadow lay faintly under her eyes, and the long, sweeping folds of her black dress trailed upon the carpet. How like she was to the haughty girl who had so lately left that room. The face, the hair, the carriage the very bearing of the head seemed hers. In

everything but the soul which gives vitality and expression the two girls were identical. In certain moods, Cora was like her cousin, for at times she could be sad, regretful, and given up to tender thoughts. Then again, on rare occasions, Virginia could be indignant, proud, almost imperious; but that was always under a keen sense of wrong. Then it was that you could not have told the two girls apart. True, Cora had her own harsh individuality. The sneer that sometimes curved her red lips downward was never seen on the sweet mouth of Virginia, and her eyes never knew the steel-like glitter which sometimes shot through the sleeping venom of her cousin's deadly glances. But these startling expressions came but seldom even on Cora's face, and it required a sharp observer to mark the difference. Eunice Hurd *was* a sharp observer.

"I heard that you were ill, Aunt Lander, and came to help you, if I can be of use."

Her voice was low and calm, but no trumpet ever thrilled human nerves as it disturbed those of Mrs. Lander. A sudden trembling seized upon her which shook the whole bed. But she made an effort to meet this kindness with answering affection, and struggling up from her pillows, held out one shaking hand.

"Thank you—thank you, my—my—"

She could not utter the lying word. Her teeth began to chatter, her lips turned white.

"You are ill—you suffer—let me bathe your forehead."

"No, no; do not touch me. It is very kind of you to come, but I am well, I need no help. Eunice, tell her that I—I—"

Here the wretched woman fell upon her pillows and burst into tears.

"You only make her worse," said Eunice, with strange gentleness. "It's her nerves, they're all shook to pieces. Jest go cut, that's a good soul."

"Let me say one word to her," persisted Virginia, with sweet firmness. "Aunt Eliza, do try and compose yourself, I will never harm you; I will try not to blame you very much. Do not let my presence disturb you so—I shall never forget how good you were to me once. Look up and see how much happier I am than—than—"

She was about to say, "than you are," but checked herself and changed it into "than you might suppose."

"Oh, God help us! Can any one be happy in this house?" exclaimed Mrs. Lander, in an outburst of bitter grief. "I cannot! I cannot! everything is dust and ashes!"

"Ah! I fear we shall none of us be happy again," said Virginia, filled with commiseration by the evident distress of a woman she had once loved tenderly. "But God is just, and we can trust in him."

Mrs. Lander started up in her bed. "Do not say that! You intend it as a reproach, and reproaches are cruel."

"No, no; I did not mean to reproach any one; only to comfort you a little if I could. I saw *her* go down to the depot, and thought that you might be alone and suffering. But I have only disturbed you."

"Disturbed her! I should think you had!" answered Eunice, sharply. "Everything disturbs her, poor creature. Jest go out, that's a good soul; she ain't herself nohow."

Virginia went softly out of the room, sad and heavy-hearted. What but misery came out of the vast property that her father had left? Those who held it seemed scarcely less unhappy than herself. Through that spacious mansion, bedded in flowers and swept by perfumed winds, the different members of the family wandered like unquiet spirits. No one was really at rest; no two of the Lander blood thoroughly loved each other. Distrust, and that hatred which springs from suspicion, poisoned the life that might have been so sweet and luxurious there.

Ellen Nolan met Virginia as she came from Mrs Lander's chamber.

"You look ill, dear lady," she said, lifting her fine eyes to the disturbed face of her mistress. "Why is it that this sin, in which you have not participated, should trouble you so?"

"Come with me, Ellen—come with me. The very atmosphere of these rooms oppresses me. The woods out yonder look so cool and green: there is a log cabin within them, that I once used to play in. Cora and I have spent many a happy day there keeping house with our dolls. It is a quiet, pretty place, and my father loved it. Let us go down there."

Ellen was ready to go anywhere with her mistress, and glad to feel the entire freedom promised by those distant woods. So the two girls, in reality companions rather than lady and servant, went together across the lawn and into the woods, where the brook made its sweet music under the rustic bridge and the sunlight came in a maze of golden green through the hemlock boughs. Virginia entered the log hut and looked around with a sad, wistful expression of the face.

"How many times *he* has been with me in this little cabin. It was here he first taught me to read."

"Let us sit down and think how he would have wished you to act in this hard strait," said Ellen, drawing a splint-bottomed chair to the window and unfolding a camp-stool for herself. "Surely, if the spirits of the dead even can visit us, his will be near to guide his child when so terribly beset!"

"I think he has guided me, Ellen. All the time something whispers me to wait and let God himself unravel the iniquity which surrounds me. I have seen Lawyer Stone a second time, and even his sharp intellect fails to discover any means of redress so long as my aunt persists in the

statement she has made. It seems like madness when I contradict this statement without a single witness to sustain me."

"Your aunt is not bad enough to persist in this forever. In her sense of justice there may yet be hope. She looks miserably, and the servants tell me is in no respect the woman that she was," said Ellen. "Necessity, in this case, may prove the best wisdom. You can do nothing but wait."

"Oh! Ellen, my life in this house is one torment. But I cannot leave it."

"But where can you go, if it becomes unbearable?"

"Anywhere, so that you and I are alone,"

"But we have no money!"

"Yes, in the drawer of that desk was a box with some gold in it; not much, but enough to keep us a year or two, with economy, I should think. Then the pearls and other bits of jewelry are worth something. My poor, dear father gave me the gold, piece by piece, all through my childhood, and the box we called my bank. He little thought how precious it might become to me. But in what way to use it—where to go—Ellen, you are wise, and have learned something of the world—what could you and I do? We will live very humbly, work hard, if that is needful. I can do embroidery and fine needlework."

Ellen shook her head and sat in restless thought awhile—then she looked up brightly.

"That will never do; thousands of women are dependent on needlework and starve on it. But, lady, I can work."

"You, Ellen!"

"Yes, lady, I am weak and crooked, and seem very helpless, but God, in compensation, my father used to say, has given me a strength here and here, out of which you and I shall win bread and that independence you long for." Ellen touched her heart and her forehead lightly as she spoke.

"What do you mean, Ellen?"

"I can think—feel—dream—write such things as men and women will take joy in reading."

"This you can do, Ellen; I see it in your face, I read it in your words; sometimes they thrill me with all the sweetness of poetry. Yes, Ellen, you can write a book—but what can I do?"

"Sing like an angel, dear lady. In all my life I never heard a voice like yours."

"But to make that available I must be seen and take rank with opera singers. There would be no privacy for me."

"True, true; and that would be terrible. Well, you were not born to work. Your gold shall keep us a little while independent if you are compelled to use it. When that is gone, I will do the rest. God will help us, for he always aids those who try for themselves. While I write you will sing, thus making a noble voice richer and sweeter. Then, if my poor effort fails, you will be prepared to make sacrifices. Besides, God will not drive you to the last resource unless it is good for you."

"How wisely—how like a woman you talk, Ellen. If we could only go at once."

"What prevents us, lady?"

"This, Ellen; Lawyer Stone does not sanction our leaving the house. While we stay here, he says, the right of possession is a disputed question. If we go away, it is to surrender all."

"And we must live here."

"It is my duty, Ellen. The rights which my father gave me must not be abandoned weakly. As I would be in duty bound to protect another, I must protect myself. The property which my father left is a sacred trust to be used for the good of mankind, as he used it. In her hands it will be perverted; humanity will gain nothing by it."

Even now it gives neither comfort nor content to any one. Wealth is a wonderful power, Ellen, either for good or evil. I have thought a great deal of this in our lonely sea voyage after the ship rescued us. It was a weight upon me, Ellen, and I prayed for strength to bear this noble responsibility as he had done. But it is wrested from me."

"Not altogether, sweet lady. God is just."

"But for that belief, we should be helpless indeed," said Virginia, smiling kindly upon her humble friend. "Ellen, yours is wise counsel; we must not waste our lives in vain regrets or idle dreaming. That which is in your brain and my voice shall be worked out faithfully. In this large house we can live almost solitary lives—you and I. That strange woman, Eunice, will, I think, help us in this. We will study, practice and wait."

"I have often heard my father say that the great secret of success lay in knowing how to wait and when to act."

"Your father was a wise, good man, Ellen."

Ellen Nolan's eyes filled with tears, and in her sweet humility she took Virginia's hand and kissed it.

"Hark, I hear some one coming," said the young lady. "Look out, Ellen, and see who it is."

Ellen looked out of the little window and saw a man coming up the path by the brook. He stood in the shadow of the bridge a moment, cast one glance at the cabin, and retreated hastily. Ellen did not see his face clearly, but the figure was that of a young person, tall and elegant.

"It is some traveller from the tavern below here, I fancy," said Virginia when Ellen told her what she saw. "We must go away; this place was solitary enough while he lived, but everything is changed now."

Ellen looked a little anxiously after the man. His air and figure seemed familiar to her and brought the brother she loved so much to her mind, by some unconscious train of association.

"Yes," she said at last, with more cheerfulness than was usual to her, "let us go now. But what a lovely place this would be to write in, so cool and shadowy, it seems almost like the green light of a wilderness."

Virginia smiled and shared the poetic love of nature which beamed in those honest eyes with that kindred sympathy which makes letters and music twin arts.

"How I wish we could gather up the murmurs which come up from the brook and the mysterious shivering of the leaves in one melody," she said. "I have tried more than once and failed."

"Try again," answered the hunchback, hopefully, "over and over again; that is the way in which genius accomplishes itself, my father often said. If you have an idea, work it out. When God gives a thought, he gives the capacity for developing it. Gold never comes from the mine without hard labor. Toil and thought go hand in hand."

"Your father must have been a strangely thoughtful man," said Virginia, looking with tender affection on the hunchback.

"He was—he was!" answered Ellen. "I love to think his sayings over in the night; I love to feel them starting up like blossoms in my own heart. He was a good man, was my father. I know how he lived—you saw how he could die."

"The inheritance he has left you, Ellen, is better far than gold."

"Yes, because it is a part of himself."

"Still he was, from your account, a practical man."

"I think that genius which is not practical may be called by some other name—insanity perhaps. He used to say so, and I believe it. The great geniuses of the age, those who will live and breathe through all time, are, at least in this age, eminently practical men. It is small minds that affect eccentricity."

It was a study to watch those young lips uttering thoughts and sayings that seemed so much beyond her years; but Virginia was right, Ellen had received an inheritance of thought from her father with a memory which treasured every saying of his as a miser hoards his gold. What seemed to be precocity in her sprang out of the intense love she had borne for him. When she spoke of him or his thoughts the light would deepen and kindle in her eyes; her white forehead expanded and the expression of her mouth grew beautiful to look upon.

"How deeply you have thought of these things," said Virginia, stealing an arm fondly over Ellen's shoulder. "Sometimes it seems to me as if nothing could make you unhappy."

"Is any one in this world altogether unhappy, I wonder? When God has made the earth so beautiful and filled it with so many sources of comfort, no human soul should be really miserable. Then the thoughts of that other world, to which your father and mine have gone, fills the future with noble sources of aspiration. While love exists in this world and travels on through eternity, linking humanity with the divine, what present trouble should rob a firm heart of its energies and its hopes?"

"I love to hear the father's thoughts on the child's young lips, but it makes me almost afraid of you, Ellen," exclaimed Virginia, smoothing the bright hair of her protégé with a kindly touch of the hand.

"Not of me, lady; you cannot be afraid of me while I love you so dearly."

Speaking thus lovingly to each other the young girls left the cabin and walked slowly towards the house.

"It is strange, but this seems really like my home, now that she is away," said Virginia, looking towards the house, whose pillars rose white and symmetrical from the green of the lawn and shrubbery. "I breathe more freely."

"Carry out your idea of living by ourselves, and this nervous feeling, which holds the very breath in one's bosom, will pass away. This life of ours gives too much time for thought."

"Yes, yes, we will go to work," answered Virginia, made cheerful by the idea. "There is music in my throat, and thought in this brain of yours."

"These are our mines, and we must work them," said Ellen. "Perhaps it was for this God allowed that wicked girl to steal your inheritance. Who knows?"

By this time the two girls had reached the house and disappeared behind the white pillars with their arms around each other, happier than they had been for months.

CHAPTER XXVII.

PREPARING FOR HAPPINESS.

THE town house which had once been the property of Amos Lander was a small building, old in itself, but to which modern improvements had given an air of elegance more than in keeping with the times. It was in the heart of the city, and surrounded by a small garden overrun with a luxurious variety of roses, so rare and well cultivated that they sometimes outbloomed the summer. The house stood back from the street, directly in this nest of flowers, which climbed up its walls, hung a living drapery around the windows, and made the verandah in front a perfect mass of rich leafiness. Since Mr. Lander's death these roses had been permitted to run riot in their rich blossoming. Great branches of the running species broke loose and shook themselves free of restraint, dashing showers of leaves and petals about whenever a high wind swept over them. The

verandah, which was a delicate network of iron, had a straggling, neglected appearance, and many a flower-loving child peeped with longing eyes through the iron fence at the beds of heliotrope and verberna that were half-choking up the little yard in front.

This semi-desolation prevailed when Cora Lander unlocked the gate and passed through, holding up her black dress from the tangle of scarlet verbenas that had crept over the pathway.

Cora cast a disapproving glance at all this neglect and rang the bell, which required some effort, for the wire was getting rusty. After awhile the door was opened and an Irish woman, evidently just from an ill-kept kitchen, asked abruptly what the lady wanted.

"I am Miss Lander," said Cora, sweeping past the woman and entering the house with a haughty feeling of proprietorship. "My aunt told me that some one was left in charge here. Are you the person?"

"I suppose so, marm," answered the woman, distrustfully.

"Where is the key to this room?" inquired Cora, shaking one of the parlor doors, which was too closely fitted for any effort of hers to open it.

"The door is locked—where is the key, I say?"

"In my pocket, marm," said the woman, thrusting one hand into the pocket of her dress and doggedly holding it there. "How am I to know who you are? Miss Lander was drowned with her father, how can you be her then?"

"I tell you I am Miss Lander, the owner and mistress of this house. Open the door, I say?"

Still the woman hesitated; imperious as the command was, it failed to intimidate her.

"I have seen Miss Lander," she said, "but it was nigh upon eight years ago. How can I tell, especially as she was drowned with her father, to say nothing of being burned up?"

"If you have seen Miss Lander," said Cora, who was anxious to take possession without disturbance, "you will remember something about her. Was she at all like this?"

Cora took off her bonnet, pushed the masses of ruddy hair back from her temples and turned her face on the woman.

"I—I—yes—yes, she did look like that as much as green apple can look like a ripe one; but it isn't a handsome face that I would give up my keys to. But that ring on your finger, I've seen that many and many a time on the old gentleman's hand. He left it with the madam, I know, and if she could give it to you, I can open the door, and will, right or wrong."

The woman unlocked the door and flung it open with a bang.

"Go in," she said, following Cora into the darkened room. "Go in, and I'll open the shutters."

Directly a flood of light was let into the room, subdued a little by the thick leafiness of the verandah, but quite sufficient to reveal a dusty parlor, well furnished, but with a good deal that was old-fashioned and faded about it.

"That will do," said Cora, casting a half-scornful glance around her. "Unlock the other rooms, I must see them all."

The woman obeyed, for, with her bonnet off, Cora had enough of the Lander in her face to satisfy a more careful person of her identity.

"They've been shut up a good while, and ain't in over good order, I'll own up to that," she said, as Cora took up her lace parasol from the piano, where she had laid it, and brushed the dust away. "But madam hasn't been here since the old man died, and it's of no use fixing up for people if they won't come. This room is the back parlor, half full of books, for Mr. Lander dearly loved reading. That's his picture over the fire-place."

Cora started as a stream of light poured through the window close by her and fell on the portrait of Amos Lander, whose eyes seemed bent mournfully upon her. Something like a pang of remorse seized upon the girl for a moment, and putting one hand to her side, she uttered a faint cry of absolute pain. Those mild eyes seemed to follow her with reproaches which she could not bear.

"Close the shutters," she cried out, sharply, "you throw in light enough to blind one."

The woman fumbled awkwardly at the blinds, and secured them at last, slowly gathering a sinister light over the picture, which took a stern, threatening aspect from the change. Cora Lander felt a cold chill creeping over her, and the sensation made her angry.

"Will you never have done?" she said, leaning over the woman and sweeping the dusty slats up with her hand. "I have seen enough to know that everything shall be changed here. Now lead the way up stairs."

"There is a dining-room, and—"

"I know, I know, but the air is oppressive. Up stairs it may be more cheerful."

Cora shivered as she thus abruptly broke in upon the woman, and when she went into the hall her very lips were cold and pale. That picture had reached even her heart.

The chambers, like the lower part of the house, were furnished after the fashion of years ago. She remembered each object, and to her own surprise felt a sort of terror at approaching them. They had been so closely associated with the man whose only child she was wronging that each article seemed an embodiment of her crime. After passing through the upper stories in quick haste, she came down again, and pausing in the hall, addressed the woman.

"Have a room made ready; I shall sleep here to-night. Get a cup of tea, and anything else you like, ready for me a little after seven. If there is anything in the house that

you fancy, set it aside and have it for your own. But make your selection at once, for to-morrow I shall order all this old-fashioned furniture moved out and new put in. Don't be modest and open those eyes so. Take what you want, and as much as you care for. Have your wages been paid?"

"Yes marm, up to this week."

"Do you live here alone?"

"My husband comes home at nights."

"That will do. Tell him to look out a residence of some kind for you. The furniture is already provided. I will pay a year's rent in advance and give you a month's wages. Stay to see all this trumpery removed; then go to your new home. I shall not want you an hour after that."

"But, Miss, consider. Who will take care of the house?"

No matter about that. I may sell it—rent it, or shut it up entirely. At all events no one will be wanted to keep watch and ward."

"Dear me, what a change!" exclaimed the woman, lost in astonishment. "This comes of the old going out and the young coming in their footsteps—I'm much obliged for the furniture—much obliged—but it does seem strange!"

"Don't trouble yourself about that. As I estimate it, you have no reason to complain. Take what you want for this new home of yours—call in a second-hand furniture dealer to buy the rest—he can give the money to you for anything I care—But have the house empty by to-morrow at noon."

"Everything—must I take everything, Miss?"

"Yes, everything."

"What, Mr. Lander's picture—must I sell that?"

Cora hesitated, turned pale, and then, with an air of desperation, answered:

"Yes, that above all things."

"What, sell your own father's picture, Miss!" said the woman, looking at Cora with new distrust.

Cora shrunk back as if the woman had given her a blow. She had not been sufficiently on her guard with this low-bred woman, who could feel what she had forgotten. A cloud of scarlet swept over her face at the thought. Then her quick wit asserted itself.

"It is not a good likeness; I do not prize a portrait which distorts its object. That is why I wish it taken down."

"Oh!" said the woman. "His daughter is the best judge, but it seemed to me natural as life."

Cora swept the subject away with a motion of her hand.

"I saw a little room over the hall," she said, "with things in it that seemed newer than the rest: at any rate there is nothing that I remember; have that ready for me to sleep in. Tell your husband to find out some good gardener and have all these straggling vines and bushes tied up, properly cut and roll what little grass there is and trim the flower-beds. There is a marble fountain in the yard, dry as a desert. Have the water thrown in and order the gardener to bring some aquatic plants."

"Some what, marm?"

"Plants that live with their roots in the water—some of those broad-leaved Ethiopian lilies, and—and—. He will know best what to bring—I want mosses, too, and plenty of fern roots—but I will speak with the gardener myself. Let your husband find one to-day, I will give him my directions in the morning."

The woman, still half bewildered, promised all that she required, but she did it like one in a dream. She could hardly believe it a reality when Cora entered the hired carriage she had left before the gate and drove away.

It is true money can almost annihilate time itself. By the terms of that will found in Amos Lander's room his

daughter came into full possession of her property, with all its uses, at once. The will had been admitted to probate without question, and a large sum of money was found in one of the city banks subject to her order. Never in her life before had she possessed personal control of large sums of money. Like most other young persons under the protection of their elders, she had found all her wants supplied without much responsibility. Her dependent position had made this irksome. From day to day she had longed for the independence which money gives—thirsted to spend gold without a thought of economy or fear of questioning. Virginia had never known this feeling, and her indifference, no doubt, sprang out of a position directly opposite to that of her cousin. She would have felt no pleasure in the excitement which burned in scarlet on Cora's cheek and made her eyes sparkle like stars.

The first thing that Cora Lander did was to search for a fashionable intelligence office and inquire for servants of a certain class, peculiarly difficult to obtain. A woman of education and some refinement, not very young nor really handsome, but to a certain extent a gentlewoman, was particularly wanted. Her duties would be manifold, but then there was no trouble about compensation to a person that suited. She would be expected to act as housekeeper for a very small family, as lady's maid when such services were required, and, indeed, make herself generally useful, but no really hard labor would be required of her. Did the gentleman at the desk know such a person?

The man shook his head. He knew plenty of housekeepers, and ladies' maids without number; but the exact combination of qualities desired by the young lady was not easily found.

"But when I tell you that wages are of no consequence, that I am ready to give any premium for the woman I am in search of, will not that secure her?"

The gentleman at the desk removed the pen from behind his ear, ran it down page after page of a book he opened, paused, looked up, then shook his head, answering Cora's eager question if he had found what she wanted, despondently.

There was a person that might have answered, perhaps, only she was a foreigner, just come over.

That would answer. Was she lady-like? Did she dress well? Was she a trifle ugly?

The young lady had almost described the person in his mind. She was lady-like, about thirty-five, and dressed neatly, as a lady should, but there was one fatal drawback, she spoke no English.

Spoke no English, there was no objection to that; indeed it was rather a recommendation—but what language did she speak? German and a little French. Better and better. Where was the person? She would be wanted immediately. In the neighborhood—how fortunate! What was her name?

"Alice Ruess."

"Married or single?"

Indeed the gentleman behind the desk could not tell, but she looked like a woman who had known trouble, so he took it that she was or had been married.

"Would he send for this person at once?"

"A boy had already gone—would the young lady sit down and wait?"

Cora sat down within the sacred enclosure which held the desk and its proprietor, who was averse to losing time, and so turning easily on his stool, made some professional inquiries regarding the other servants that had been inquired for.

A good laundry woman and the best cook that could be procured for money. There might be a little time given for a first-class chambermaid, but these two were indispensable.

The man at the desk had his eye on exactly the persons wanted. Would it be any objection if the laundry woman was black?"

No, that would be an advantage.

Then there would be no trouble about the matter. A cook and laundry woman would be on hand—but what name? Where should they be sent? Mrs. Seymour, No—street—all right. Just in time—here comes the German woman, all in black and neat as a new pin. Cora half rose from her seat and saw a well-formed, light-haired, and blue-eyed woman, neither handsome nor ugly, but with a worn and rather sad expression, coming into the office.

"Ah, madam, we are in luck; hadn't an idea we could get you a situation, and here it is dropping into your lap, like a ripe peach; just have a little talk with this lady."

The man spoke in execrable French, and opening the gate of his enclosure, let the woman in as an especial recognition of the style and beauty of the fair lady who sat there scrutinizing the stranger through her veil. Alice Ruess passed through the gate and Cora addressed her at once, but, a little to the man's disappointment, she used neither French nor English, but spoke to the woman in German.

The conversation was not long, half that Cora wished to say was left for another time; but she studied that face well, and drawing her own conclusions therefrom, hired her at once, depending rather on what she supposed than on anything she knew of her fitness for the place.

When the preliminaries were arranged, Cora gave a satisfactory examination of the dress worn by her new recruit, and without farther ceremony requested her to step into her carriage, which stood at the door. A morning of tiresome shopping was before her, and she wanted a companion.

Alice Ruess was ready. She was afraid her alpaca

dress was not quite good enough, but if the lady did not object to that, nothing would give her more pleasure than a ride. So the two went out together, followed by the proprietor of the office, who opened the carriage door for them, leaving a twenty dollar bank note, his share of the transaction, on his desk.

Feeling for the first time all the importance of a large bank account, Cora drove from warehouse to warehouse, giving prodigal and almost unlimited orders for the adornment of a house not yet divested of its costly old-fashioned furniture.

She made all her purchases in the name of Mrs. Alice Ruess, who was a stranger in the city, she said, and speaking no English, had entreated her aid in furnishing a house she had taken. Her friend was wealthy—very wealthy, she asserted, and cared little for prices. She only stipulated regarding the time—that was important to her—everything must be done at once. Three days was the latest moment she could give.

This Cora said as she went from store to store, buying costly hangings, carpets, china, linen, pictures, statuettes bronzes, and all the multifarious articles that go to make up a sumptuous establishment.

"Crowd the house with as many workmen as you please," she said; "my friend does not care for the confusion, but in a week her house must be in order. Beyond that time she cannot wait."

The dealers promised, one and all. A customer who gave such unlimited orders, and was so indifferent to prices, did not often fall in their way. Of course everything else must be put aside for her accommodation.

Alice Ruess behaved beautifully, taking just as much interest in these proceedings as seemed becoming, and giving a quiet attention to what passed, which convinced the dealers that she was not altogether indifferent to the

value of their goods or an incompetent judge of their qualities. Indeed, she once or twice prevented Cora buying an inferior article, for, with all her prodigality, that young lady was rash and inexperienced, as youth will be, and really required the quiet counsellor who moved at her elbow. Of course all the conversation which passed between these two was carried on in French, and, pleading her friend's ignorance of our currency, Cora paid the bills in money as she went, sometimes joking gracefully about the pleasure of handling so much money, though it did belong to another person.

Thus Cora Lander went on with the sad-faced German woman by her side, receiving what seemed to others the reflected homage of her friend's wealth; but knowing that it was all her own, she enjoyed it to the utmost. Never in her life had she felt the power of property so exultantly. Truly, if crime produced such results, she was content to be criminal.

Among other things, Cora purchased such dresses as could be worn indoors. She hated the deep mourning, which was in fact a part of her fraud, and resolved to cast it off in the privacy of her married life. If she could help it, no one thing should remind her of the days that were gone, or the man whose wealth she was squandering. Among dress-makers and milliners, as with the rest, money proved itself omnipotent. There was no danger that Cora Lander's nuptials, private as they must be, would cloud themselves with mourning. It was dark when Cora returned to the house, which seemed gloomy as a sepulchre to her, for, with all its memorials of the past, it was in truth a dreary place for one who knew its history, and sometimes felt the weight of a perpetuating sin on her conscience. She had left Alice Ruess at her boarding-house and was quite alone.

She found the woman and her husband ready to receive

her. "Those movables" had at last settled themselves upon their conviction. They only feared that she might change her mind and withdraw her promise, which would in fact, secure a little fortune to them. Hoping to please her, they had lighted up the dining-room and spread a somewhat dainty repast there; but she could remember sitting by that table with her uncle and mother, when they were all a united family. Then the widow and her little girl were grateful for the shelter that good uncle had so kindly given them, and opened their hearts to his daughter with maternal and sisterly affection. The very last time she had been at that table Mr. Lander had given her the watch she wore, with words of such gentle affection that she remembered how gratefully tears had crowded to her eyes. Now she was in that room again, and how? An imposter, a swindler, an ingrate. For the moment she became conscious of all this, and saw herself as she was.

The chandelier burned brightly over her head, revealing familiar pictures on the wall and pouring a flood of light on the silver, glass and delicate china, which had been hastily brought forth and polished for her use. A faint cloud of steam came from the silver tea-pot which stood upon the tray, hot from the kitchen fire. A nicely cooked and well-selected repast stood temptingly ready. Near the table waited the woman who would be enriched on the morrow. She bore the consciousness of this on her smiling face. Before the waiter a large, cosy chair had been drawn, tempting a weary guest with its crimson cushions. Cora was tired and hungry, for she had eaten nothing since morning. She threw her crape bonnet and black shawl on a sofa, pushed the hair away from her temples with both hands with a feeling of relief—for she had worn the bonnet since morning—and sat wearily down in the chair.

The woman came forward and poured some tea into the china cup, with its exquisite whiteness enriched by a deep border of gold and purple.

"I hope the tea will suit you," she said, obsequiously, for the promise of to-morrow was still in her mind. "It is hard to get cream in the city; but my old man found some. Take a waffle; I wasn't exactly the cook, but as a little girl you used to like my waffles."

Cora helped herself to one of the waffles and began to drink her tea with a relish. She was far too weary for conversation, and allowed the woman to talk on, scarcely heeding her.

"I suppose you remember the silver," said the woman, coming gradually round to a question she was longing to ask.

"Yes," answered Cora, glancing wearily at the tea-set, "I remember when my aunt bought it."

"Your aunt, Miss!" exclaimed the woman. "Why she never brought the value of a silver thimble into this house. That tea-set was made especially for your mother not a year before she died."

A faint crimson flashed over Cora's face but she answered, quietly enough:

"Did I not say my mother? Surely I could have mentioned no one else; though I am so weary that the words change on my lips."

"You said aunt, young lady, and seemed to connect her with an idea of silver plate, a thing I'll be bound she never saw till she came to this house. I'm poor enough, goodness knows, but, if folks tell true, that lady, with all her airs, didn't begin to come up to me in the way of property, and never would have done if it hadn't been for your father. Dear old man he was as good to her as good can be, to say nothing of her daughter, who was the spitefullest, worst tempered young 'un that I ever waited on. Has she got over them tantrums of hers, Miss, I'd like to know."

"She—my cousin—of whom are you speaking, woman?" cried Cora, flashing an angry glance over the table.

"Dear me, how much you look like her this minute!" replied the woman, laughing nervously. "That was where it lay—nothing on earth could be more lovely than your disposition. I never saw that look on your sweet face before in my life. It's got by living with her so long, I suppose. When she was good-natured, no one could tell you apart hardly; but when she got the evil one agoing, you were no more alike than chalk's like cheese. I could always tell you apart by the temper."

Before the woman ceased speaking, the angry flash had been forced back from Cora's face, and a smile stirred her lips.

"I loved my cousin very much," she said, sweetly. "She was a little quick at times."

"It wasn't exactly what I should call quick," said the woman.

"No, no, perhaps not; but I am sorry to tell you she is not altogether right in her mind."

"Well now, did you ever—I shouldn't wonder. She had a sort of disposition that never suited me, and then her mother made it worse and worse, indulging her so."

"It was injudicious, I dare say; but Aunt Lander suffers for it now," answered Cora, leaning her head sadly on one hand. "It is a terrible thing to see a young creature like my cousin out of her mind."

"Speaking about the silver," said the woman, coming desperately around to her personal interests again. "I suppose you would like that to be kept back—not thrown in with the rest, I mean. Then there is the china, and glass, and ivory-handled knives. Shall I keep them back too?"

"What are you saying—what is it about, the silver?" inquired Cora, starting out of her amiability a little too abruptly.

"I was asking if you wished to keep that and the—"

"Keep that, no! Glass, china, knives—have I not told you to sweep everything out of my sight? They take away my appetite—they torment me! If I hadn't been hungry as a wolf, I could not have endured them, even for one meal."

She spoke with startling emphasis, and was pale to the very lips with some suppressed feeling. The woman, though well-pleased with her words, stood gazing upon her in dumb surprise. What could have angered the young lady so?"

Again Cora caught that look and saw danger in it—the great danger of perfect recognition. With a power of self-control that crime had taught her, she gradually softened down from the perilous vehemence which she felt to be so unwise.

"I have a detestation of old things," she said; "silver among the rest. Besides, it was my father's wish that the furniture of this house should be changed entirely. I but carry out what I know would have been his wishes when I give them to a faithful servant like yourself."

The woman's face brightened and her voice bespoke the contentment that had come upon her with this understanding of all her anxieties regarding the smaller valuables of the establishment.

"I'm sure, so long as I and my husband live, we shall be grateful to you, Miss, and the good gentleman who is gone, for all your kindness."

Cora laughed, a light, half-mocking laugh, which stung the woman, who was proud in her way.

"Oh, I did not do it out of kindness, and don't want to be troubled with gratitude, if such a thing exists in the world. I have deprived you, or shall deprive you of a good place, and mean to pay you well for it."

"But your father, if he wished us to have the things, was kind."

"My father—I had forgotten."

"Forgotten your own father, and sitting in the chair he used at this very table! I placed it for you on purpose."

Cora dropped her knife so suddenly that it broke a piece from the plate she was using. She turned in the chair, saw its heavy oak carvings and its crimson cushions as she had seen them a hundred times when her uncle's form rested against them. She turned very faint, and starting up, pushed the chair away with all her strength. It seemed as if she were beating her hands against a tombstone.

"What is the matter, Miss? What is it frightens you so?"

Cora forced a smile to her white lips.

"Nothing—nothing—I think your tea was strong enough to make me nervous. Good-night; if my room is ready, I will go to it at once."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THAT BIJOU OF A HOME.

It was finished. Money, the great magician, had done its work, and a prettier place than that modernized little house in the heart of a great city could not well be met with. The grounds were all in order—the straggling rose-bushes were confined to their trellises and supporters once more—the great mound of heliotrope and verbenas was trimmed at the edges, and its glowing crimson and purple filled the eye with beauty and the air with perfume. The fountain was in full play; its bright waters cooled the air, and its basin was garlanded two feet deep with plants massed in rich combinations of color. Green mosses drank in the sparkling waters and covered the pots which con-

tained the plants so richly that the whole great wreath of blossoms seemed to take life from its greenness. It was late in the season, but spring time, summer and autumn seemed to meet in that little nook of a garden, turning it into a Paradise.

Back of the house was a high iron fence, over which a Virginia creeper swept in and out, forming draperies inexpressibly graceful, which the first breath of autumn had turned crimson at the edges, where the leaves were most exposed. This background of green and crimson foliage framed in the house like a picture. The burning red more than replaced all the flowers that had perished.

In-doors the change was even greater. Upholsterers, painters and artists had done their work well. It seemed impossible that so much could have been completed in three days. But many hands had been busy on the ceilings, the walls and the floors—all that money, taste or labor could do had been forced into that young creature's service, that her wedding might combine everything within the reach of a sensuous imagination. It was finished now—complete in all its appointments. Not a vestige of the old furniture remained; everything was new, fresh and the most exquisite of its kind.

That day week two servants came into the house—a man who scorned to speak any language but the French, and a woman who could converse with him brokenly, but her native tongue was German. Later in the day another woman came, broad African in every line of her face and curve of her body. On this woman the other two looked with supreme contempt.

In the basement these three persons assembled for the first time. They had been engaged in different points of the city, and no two of them had ever met before. As for the African, she could not understand a word that the others said, but she was shrewd enough to understand the sneers

and contempt exhibited in their lifted shoulders and mobile eyebrows. Her heart resented these gestures, calling her fellow-servants poor white trash in the depths of her soul, which epithet, in its supreme contempt, was a full equivalent for their shrugs and sidelong glances.

When these three had looked on each other sufficiently, they felt a desire to investigate such appointments of the household as belonged to their individual callings. The man-cook fell to a critical examination of sauce-pans, kneading-boards, jelly moulds and freezes. Everything was there, and the most perfect of its kind. The smaller sauce-pans were all lined with silver; the flour-dredge, the nutmeg grater and spice boxes were altogether of that precious metal. In the drawers were piles of kitchen napkins, fine as those in general use at any gentleman's table. The cooking apparatus was perfect, and covered with ever-so-many patents attesting the fact. Limpid water flowed abundantly through silver faucets, and light came in from the most desirable point.

At first the Frenchman was a little disappointed. He had hoped to find some deficiency to shrug his shoulders and spread his hands over in horrified refinement; but the perfect arrangement of everything took him by surprise. His hands and shoulders were lifted in astonishment. His admiration was uttered in bursts of French quite unintelligible even to the German woman.

"Great heavens, what perfection! and here, too! In Paris it would be nothing, but outside, across the Atlantic, it is wonderful! This lady must be a genius; I am honored in serving her; she will appreciate the delicate aspirations which I shall give to her palate. There will be pleasure in exercising my art for her. Heavens! I have dropped into Paradise!"

The Frenchman sat down, smiling complacently on his little kingdom. He longed to share his exultation with

some one, and looked around for the German woman, who had, however, left the room. But Hagar, the black servant, was there, standing in the door of the laundry, where she had been to inspect the stationary tubs and water-faucets. Their completeness brought a smile to her broad face and revealed a row of teeth, white as ivory in themselves, and rendered whiter still from contrast with her black skin.

The Frenchman was willing to put up with this auditor if no better could be found. He burst forth in a torrent of French, broken up in ejaculations, which drove the smile completely from Hagar's face. She thought that he was scolding her, and grew frightened. Seeing that this was the result of his eloquence, he subsided into gesticulations and grimaces which made the negress laugh till her sides shook. She was a plump, comely African, and the laugh that heaved her full bust had all the mellowness of a deep contralto voice just as it bursts into tune.

The Frenchman was in despair. What was the use of being supremely satisfied if no one would sympathize in that satisfaction with him? That sort of mellow laughter was not sympathy. He might as well have iron as silver in his utensils for any heed she took of the subject.

Just then the German woman came back to the kitchen. She had been up stairs to examine the chambers and the toilet arrangements. They were superb. Bohemian glass, mounted with pure gold; a dressing-box of malachite with *such* appointments! gold, gold, gold—nothing but gold—all contrasting so richly with the clouded green of the malachite; she had never seen anything more superb—she, who had possessed the honor of waiting on many a lady of rank in her time. In this country it was wonderful—beyond belief! She could not understand it! The lady they were to serve must be some princess to whom privacy was an object. What would be her own situation; until positive of that she would be watchful and silent. So she

came down quietly and asked what it was which had excited the contraband, for with that word even she had become familiar,—who could help it in those times? At any rate they had all been very fortunate.

Hagar caught the word contraband, and understood that if nothing else.

"Yes," she said, coming eagerly forward, "I is contraband, driv clar away up Noth by de war. Sot free when Mars Sherman march by old Mars' plantation. Don't know what yer sayin more en dat, but Ise contraband, and I glories in dat truf, Hallaluyah—thar!"

Having uttered her manifesto, Hagar retreated into a corner of the kitchen and sat down triumphant. If those two people didn't understand her, she couldn't help it, "dey was poor white trash anyhow, and de berry next time dey looked at her so she'd sing ole John Brown right in dere faces. Bressed be de Lord, she could sing!"

The Frenchman and the German woman looked at each other in amazement, then, after a volley or two of French exclamations, they began to laugh, for Hagar's gesticulation had been more effective than her words. Then Hagar caught the word, put her threat in force, and broke forth defiantly into "Old John Brown," a gentleman with whom her auditors were entirely unacquainted, both in fact, and in history. But they had heard good singing enough to understand the superb fullness and depth of that voice which defied them with all its force, and stood listening, surprised and charmed.

When Hagar finished with an angry motion of the head, which seemed to shake the last mellow notes up from her chest, the Frenchman came forward, bowing and smirking, with his hand extended.

"Madam, or perhaps it is mademoiselle, permit me to offer my homage. That voice is one grand success. I give you my honor it is one grand success, madam. I am

charmed; mademoiselle, here, is charmed also. The air is superb, the words must be what we call stirring—they reach one's heart—upon my honor, they reach the heart."

Hagar saw that he was complimenting her, and showed her teeth liberally through the broad smile that swept her face.

"Dat ar music brought him plump on em knees—taut it would. Dat old John Brown took him right off en his feet. I ain't nuffin but a contraband, sure nuff, but Ise done it for *him*."

With this comfortable self-assurance, Hagar folded her arms over the broad chest, which still seemed heaving with unexpressed music, and closing her eyes, pretended to sleep.

The two persons, thus left together, sat down and held a few words of conversation.

"Mademoiselle—is it Mademoiselle or Madam?"

"Madam," answered the German woman, giving a guttural sound to the word which made the Frenchman shiver. "Madam, if you please."

The French cook seemed disposed to press her confidence further; but that moment the door bell rang and brought Hagar to her feet.

"It's the young missus!" she exclaimed, going up-stairs in haste and opening the front door, where she dropped a low courtesy as Cora Lander walked through, clad in rich mourning, so heavily trimmed with bugles that it swept the marble pavement like a hail storm, as she moved.

"Have the other people come?" she inquired.

"Yes, missus, dey am here. Shall I call dem up?"

"No, no; I will go down to the basement."

Cora swept through the hall and down the stairs in haste. She had only seen her new servants at the intelligence offices, and wished to give them directions.

The Frenchman and his companion both arose as she entered the kitchen. Since they had seen the house the new mistress had become an object of great curiosity to them.

"Your name is Alice Ruess, I think?" she said, addressing the woman. "Step into the servants' parlor, I wish to speak with you."

Alice arose and followed her mistress into the front basement, which was more expensively furnished than most gentlemen's drawing-rooms.

"Sit down," she said, addressing Alice. "Understand, I look upon you as half mistress of this house; in fact no other mistress must be known, at least for the present."

"Madam!" exclaimed Alice, surprised out of all composure, "I do not understand."

"But you must understand. 'I shall live in this house, be its mistress and your mistress in fact, but it is a fact that must not exist outside these walls. To the world you are Mrs. Ruess, the lady of the house. Your name will be upon the door. When the mistress of the house is inquired for, you must present yourself.'"

"But, madam, I have no money—no means."

"I find the money and pay the bills that are made out in your name."

"Ah, very well, that makes it easy."

"But, remember, there must be no company."

"Not a soul, mademoiselle."

"After to-morrow you will call me madam."

"Madam—is my lady married then?"

"She will be after to-morrow."

"Ah, I begin to comprehend. It is a secret marriage."

"Alice Ruess, this marriage is to be kept so secret that it will be almost a fortune to any one who keeps it safely for me—ruin to the creature who betrays it. To-morrow night I shall be married in this house—your house, remember."

"I shall not forget, lady."

"Your house, not only to the outside world but to the other servants."

"I understand. Madam or mademoiselle shall be obeyed."

"It must be understood that we board with you—that is, my husband and myself." Cora felt a warm flush spread up to her face as she uttered the words "my husband," and a sigh, of such exquisite pleasure that it seemed almost like pain, broke up softly from her bosom. Alice Ruess smiled covertly, and felt a sort of envy creeping through her heart, of the beautiful young creature who was just entering a life in which she had been shipwrecked. "It must be also understood that we have just come from abroad, which is the truth—"

"Ah, forgive me, but I thought so!" exclaimed Alice, interrupting her. "Such taste, such grace, were never born or fostered in this country."

Cora bent her head in reply to this intended compliment, and went on:

"You—pay strict attention to this—knew us in the old country—came over in the same steamer—"

"Indeed I did."

"And for that reason—being too wealthy yourself for the need of such means—you took us as inmates."

"Lady, I am listening."

"To-morrow the bills for all that has been done here will be sent in. You must pay them—they are made out to Mrs. Alice Ruess—here is money. I have made a rough computation; there will be plenty left for the household expenses for weeks to come. Take it, and remember to keep a strict account. I can be generous, but no one must cheat me."

"Is mademoiselle afraid to trust her money with me?" said Alice, turning red with anger. "Does mademoiselle mean that?"

"No, I mean nothing of the kind. Were I afraid, you would have no opportunity to cheat me. I only wish to

draw a line clearly between that which I will give and that which I place in your hands for specific purposes. Be faithful, and we shall have no reason to complain of each other."

"Lady, I will be faithful."

"Alice Ruess, I believe you."

Cora arose as she spoke, all her other directions she gave standing.

"The cook—can you judge, Alice—is he what they recommend him to be?"

"Lady, I think so."

"The supper to-morrow night must be perfect."

"Supper for how many, lady?"

"Two."

"What, no more?"

"Only two—us two, alone," she muttered in English, while a gleam broke through her half-closed eyelashes as she looked modestly down.

"A little supper, very perfect, for two. That man will prepare it—I answer for him."

"As for the rest, let the lights be shaded, get flowers the choicest and sweetest—you should have taste, I see it in the kindling of your eye—yes, I will leave that with you; see that they are not gathered before sunset, we must have no wasted perfume. If I could rifle sweetness from the flowers of Paradise for him I would do it—I would though they never bloomed again."

Cora spoke these last words in English, but the woman read them in her face, and hers clouded over. Once she had felt like this herself. How had it ended?

Cora shook out the folds of her heavy silk dress and prepared to go.

"Be sure and have nothing wanting," she said; "I depend on you entirely."

"Will no; mademoiselle stay all night?"

"Not for the world. I might dream, and that would be a terrible beginning. No, it is almost time for the train, and I have a carriage at the door."

"But the name, lady? I have not as yet heard your name."

"True enough. Well, it is no matter about that just now—to-morrow evening I shall be Mrs. Seymour. A pretty name, don't you think so?"

"Yes, lady, a very pretty name; may you be happy in bearing it."

"Happy!" cried the girl, almost clasping her hands. "Nothing shall—nothing can prevent that."

Again Alice looked away, and again her face clouded over; she almost hated that radiant young creature, because of her faith in the man she loved and in the destiny which united them.

"It is almost time for the train," said Cora, taking a watch from her side, glittering with diamonds that formed a raised monogram on the back—*his* initials and hers, for Seymour had given it to her out of the paltry thousands which she had considered as hardly worth mentioning. "It is almost time—let me think—I have said everything; you understand my wishes."

"Trust to Alice, lady, she will not disappoint you."

"Well then, good-night; I hope those people in the kitchen will suit; they are highly recommended."

"Yes, highly recommended. What, will you go out this way?"

"Certainly; it does not matter," said Cora, opening the basement door and drawing the thick crape veil over her face, but she came back again with some anxiety on her face.

"The dresses, have they come?"

"Yes, lady, you will find a pile of paper boxes in the dressing-room."

"That is pleasant. How prompt these people have been. I never knew what a glorious worker money was before."

The young girl said this half aloud as she mounted the steps and stood in the flower garden. They had obeyed her well. She felt the freshness given to the air by the play of the fountain. Some drops fell upon her veil and trembled there like lost diamonds. The perfume of late roses swept over her. Again that delicious sigh rose and swelled in her bosom.

"All this—and he loves me. Was the love of Venus herself ever more richly surrounded? I have beautified this place for him. It is my taste, my wealth, my great love for him, that has done it all. I give him love, gold, beauty, and by-and-by position. He should have had all at once—everything I have on earth—if he would but have waited. Waited, no, he loved me too well for that; and I loved him a thousand fold better because he won me from all my strong holds with such impetuous affection. It is like being carried off by violence, forced into such happiness as the soul grows faint in thinking of, and this will endure for a lifetime. I wonder if it will. Can such love die? How empty and blank my heart would be without it!"

These were the eager ejaculations and broken questions that chased each other through Cora Lander's mind as she drove to the station and took her seat in the cars. She had seen Seymour in the city, a few moments, three days before, but fearing that he might prematurely guess at the exquisite home she was preparing for him, had sent him back to the country tavern, promising to meet him at the log cabin that night and arrange for the future. It was scarcely dark when she reached the station, for a fine round moon was just rising, and by its light she found her way into the grove and along the footpath which led to the cabin, certain that she would find him there, waiting for her with all that ardent longing which filled her own heart.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE WEDDING TOILET.

It was not exactly a dressing-room, nor was it a boudoir, in which Cora Lander stood robing herself for that secret marriage, but one of those elegant snuggeries which bespeak unbounded resources and a taste so luxurious that it almost revolts the imagination.

A toilet table was there, standing against the blue of the wall; its tall mirror framed in with a sumptuous enwreathment of gilded flowers, drooping lilies and clustering roses. From the bell of each lily a slender jet of gas shot forth and lighted up the whole toilet with quivering fire, indescribably beautiful. Above the mirror, and floating down each side of the table, was a cloud of filmy lace, grasped in the hands of a flying Cupid that seemed to float in the air and bathe itself in starlight, so adroitly were the wires hidden that connected it with the ceiling.

The table beneath the glass was an elaborate combination of ivory, satin-wood and gold, which stood upon a low platform of the same delicate workmanship, curved back at the sides just far enough to support two figures carved in ivory, with bands of gold about their heads and touches of gold gleaming along the draperies. These figures seemed to have just seized upon the floating lace flung to them by the Cupid, with uplifted hands and with feet advanced, gracefully poisoning themselves to dance off with it.

Upon this table the malachite dressing-case lay open, with all its crystal and golden equipments flashing in the light, and close by was a jewel-box, with the lid flung back from which came the flash of diamonds through a rope of pearls that coiled over the edge and trailed half across the table.

Beyond this superb article of furniture there was little

indication that the room was used for anything but a place of rest. All the more commonplace appointments of the toilet were contained in the spacious bath-room, seen through an open-door, which had evidently just been used, for the bath of snow-white marble, lined with some silver-plated metal, was half full of water that sent a faint perfume of roses into the dressing-room. The fur of a white bearskin rug, which lay on the marble floor, had been lately trampled on by wet feet, and on a marble slab, beneath a mirror let into the wall, lay combs and brushes, with a crystal array of pomade boxes, perfume bottles, caraffes of water, all in confusion, as Cora Lander had left them ten minutes before, when she entered the larger dressing-room.

A dress of white silk half covered the blue damask of a couch that stood in the room, and over a large Turkish chair close by the delicate frost-work of a Brussels veil was thrown out in exquisite relief by the richer color of the damask.

Alice Ruess stood near her mistress, who was surveying herself in the glass, well-pleased with the effect of her own work. Never had Cora Lander appeared more beautiful than she looked that night, even before the bridal robe had fallen over that cloud of muslin skirts and the delicate Valenciennes edging that cast its almost imperceptible shadows on her arms and bosom. The hair was rolled back from her forehead in rich folds, ending on the left side in a single long heavy curl, which fell in coils of ruddy gold on her white shoulder.

"It is beautiful," said Cora, turning toward Alice and taking up the rope of pearls; "shall we twist these around the back hair?"

"Not for the world, mademoiselle is lovely as it is. The veil will be enough."

Cora relinquished the pearls with evident reluctance;

but she recognized a genius in the woman before her, and was wise enough to submit.

"What will you fasten the veil with then?" she inquired.

"These, mademoiselle; they are fresh as May dew and white as snow, just one little blush of pink at the heart—no more."

Alice went to an alabaster vase that stood in a corner of the room, and took from the flowers crowded in it a handful of white roses, warmed, as she said, with blushes at the heart. These she laid carefully upon the dressing-table after pulling away all the green leaves.

Then there was a rustling of heavy silk, delicate satin gaiters laced over symmetrical ankles, and at last what seemed a shower of frost-work cast over a dress white and shimmering like crusted snow.

No wonder the waiting-woman stepped back and surveyed her mistress with clasped hands and exultation in every feature. Never had high art a lovelier object to exhaust itself upon. Some sweet, womanly feelings had crept into that young heart, spite of its ambition. The long, curling lashes swept a cheek brighter than any damask rose that ever bloomed; a smile parted those red lips. When she looked up the love-light in those soft almond-shaped eyes made the heart yearn toward her; for the time she was natural, womanly, almost good.

"You have made me beautiful, for that creature in the glass is beautiful," she said, flinging some jewels out of the box and searching for a roll of bank-notes it contained. "Take this—and this. I hope you are poor, that it is the first money you have possessed for a long time; I would have it a surprise, for I must make some one happy to-night, or this feeling here, so sweet, so sacred, so holy, would kill me. Oh! if I were worthy of it!—Oh! if—. But I will think of nothing but him. Neither angel nor

fiend shall drag my thoughts back to the old subject. In an hour, *one* little hour, I shall be his wife. Heavens, how I love him! And he loves me! I know it! I feel it here, deep, deep as my heart can feel! Oh! if, like Cleopatra, I could melt all that I have into a single pearl, he should drink it and I would smile as it touched his lips. If this wealth has cost me my own soul, so much the better—it is for him—all for him, and cheaply bought. But why am I thinking of that? he will never know. Heavens! must this subject forever crowd upon me? What business has it here? I, who have commanded wealth almost unlimited, should know how to crowd back my own thoughts. Oh! if I could! if I could!”

Cora had been speaking all this, wildly, brokenly, in English. Alice could not understand the language, but she saw the color come and go in that beautiful face till it became pale as death. Then the features began to quiver, and tears rose slowly to those eyes so full of sparkling happiness a moment before. Spite of her resolve, the fiend and the angel of her life were having a sharp struggle that evening. She fell down into the Turkish chair, and grasping a fold of her veil in both hands, pressed them to her eyes. When her hands fell away, the lace was wet and Cora Lander's lips were quivering. She would have given the world that moment could she have flung all her hideous wealth away and gone to her husband with a pure heart.

“Is mademoiselle displeased with her dress? Would she prefer the pearls?” inquired Alice, troubled by this new display.

“Displeased—no, no—what a child I am! The roses are lovely as innocence itself. When little girls are confirmed they wear white roses. Who shall forbid me to loop them in my bridal veil? I will not have the pearls, Alice.”

“If mademoiselle pleases, I can clasp one string about

her neck and twist the other about her arm. Let me try them.”

“As you please,” answered Cora rising to survey herself once more. She bent her stately head before the glass and held forth her arm firmly while the woman wound the string of pearls over it serpentwise, and clasped another around her neck.

“There, mademoiselle, your toilet is perfect. There is your handkerchief. Now sit down awhile, it is so fatiguing; you look pale. Let me open the window, this fresh air, cool with drops from the fountain, will bring back all the lost roses to this pretty cheek. Ah, I thought so—they come back all at once. It is a footstep on the gravel.”

Cora started to her feet; a smile just parted her lips; she seemed inspired.

“Does mademoiselle expect company to the wedding?” inquired Alice.

“Not a soul, Alice. My happiness is so complete, I would not share it with an angel.”

“I thought, from the grand toilet, the quantity of flowers and the little supper, that Monsieur would bring some friends, perhaps.”

“No, the clergyman will come, perform his duties and go. We want no strangers—nor must you ever mention to a human being what you witness here to-night.”

“Lady I never will.”

“The time may come when I shall call upon you; till then promise that you will be silent.”

“I promise; on my honor I promise.”

“Truly,” said Cora, smiling at her image in the glass, “we have made a grand toilet; we have a profusion of flowers, and this new French cook has promised wonders for the supper. What then? A bride should dress for her husband, not the crowd that choose to follow her to the altar. Should I make this evening less splendid because he alone

will enjoy it? No, no; love, to be perfect should be nobly surrounded. It shall be—it shall be so with us!”

“Mademoiselle, some one rings at the door.”

“It is my husband!” cried Cora, radiant, “Go down, Alice, and—stay, stay. I will go myself. Hark! there is no footstep but his?”

“None, lady.”

“I knew it. I felt sure that he would come alone. Heavens, how my heart beats!”

CHAPTER XXX.

AFTER THE WEDDING.

CORA LANDER ran down stairs into the parlor, whose frescoed ceiling, dove-tinted walls and thickly carpeted floors were lighted up for the first time, and there, standing as it were in the midst of an enchanted bower, was Seymour, her bridegroom.

“Great Heavens, how beautiful you are!” he exclaimed, coming forward with both hands extended. “So radiant and so lovely, all for me!”

She placed her two gloved hands in his, and stood before him blushing and with downcast eyes. Her hands shook and quivered in his like young birds caught among the roses.

“Oh! Seymour, do you love me? Shall this last through our whole lives?”

“So long as we live, Cora Lander, I will love you for better for worse, in good or evil, in holiness or sin. You and I belong to each other. *Nothing but death shall part us, so help me God.*”

Why did her hands cease their happy flutter and grow

cold in his clasp? What was it that sent the blood from her face and neck till they were white as the pearls on her bosom?

“Why, love, how white you are!”

“Your love is savage, Seymour. It half frightens me.”

“My love frighten you! What have I said, dearest, only that I would love you forever and ever?”

“But you spoke sternly.”

“Solemnly, sweet one, not sternly.”

“I am very foolish to let the tone of your voice wound me so.”

“Yes, darling; but it is over now. There, there, lean your head on my shoulder, so; and let me kiss the roses back to these lips.”

They sat down on a sofa near the window. Her lips had got back their redness; her cheek, warm with a flush of happiness, lay close to his. She half clouded him with her bridal veil.

“And you, Cora, will it be always thus with you?” he whispered. “Will my love content you forever?”

“It contents me now, Seymour—I am supremely happy—nothing comes between my heart and yours. In this place we can be happier than mortals ever were before.”

“And is this to be our home?” said Seymour, glancing around the sumptuous room.

“Yes, it is our home; I give it to you. Thank Heaven, my love does not come empty handed!”

Seymour gently released her from his arm, and moving to a window, looked out. The little garden in front was flooded with moonlight; drops from the fountain were shooting through it in bright flashes and raining back upon the flowers, which repaid them with perfume. It was indeed a little Paradise that his bride had created for him. There every sense could be gratified. The most refined

idea of beauty must be satiated in a place like that—a creation of love itself.

Was he satisfied? I think not. This man, with all his faults—and he had more than the reader yet knows of—was proud in his way, and it is in the nature of proud men, good or bad, to give benefits to the women they love; to receive them entirely wounds all sense of manhood. In the first abandon of her love, Cora had felt great pleasure in the idea of bestowing benefits on the man who was to be her husband. In her short-sighted egotism, she expected every new benefit conferred on him to add another link to the chain of flowers which was to bind their lives together. She was generous to him, because at that time, she considered his destiny as her own, and it was simply being generous to herself. She made no calculation for change, either in herself or him. The rash, impetuous passion that carried her selfish nature out of itself she really believed would last forever. It pleased her to be munificent with him—to make his life one dream of Paradise was her ambition. But it was to be a Paradise she was to give him and share with him.

Did she expect gratitude for this or a greater harvest of affection? Yes, in simple truth, this was what lay in her heart. With all her ability, her craft and daring, the young girl sitting there in her bridal dress knew little of human nature, or she would not have attempted to humiliate the man she loved with obligations with which it was his place to endow her. From every point of earth she, with her money, had gathered materials of enjoyment for him, exulting in the power of thus proving her love. The result was that he stood there by the window, moody, and with a clouded brow. Was he, too, an appendage? Did she wish to overshadow him with her wealth—crush him down with her munificence?

She came to the window where he stood and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"You look sad, darling. Why is it? I expected to see you all joy."

"And so I am, dearest girl. Why should you think otherwise? No woman ever gave her pet macaw a more glittering cage."

He spoke with something of bitterness. She had been too lavish of her superior gifts, and he felt it.

"You have taken a dislike to my house—our house—and I—I thought it so beautiful," she said with tears in her eyes.

She was keenly disappointed. After all, objects of material beauty are very uncertain things when we depend on them to perfect our happiness.

He looked down upon her and relented. Other and deeper causes of regret lay in his heart; but he crowded them back and allowed all the warm tenderness of his love to answer that tearful look.

"It is beautiful," he said, "but how can I think of that with you by my side? Come closer to the window, love, and let us watch for the man who will make you my wife."

She drew close to his side and allowed him to circle her with his arm as they stood looking out upon the moonlight.

"How lovely and how still it is," she said; "we can almost hear the bell-like tinkle of those water drops as they fall back into the fountain. Softer and sweeter music never heralded in a wedding. Will you accept the omen, Seymour?"

"I can accept nothing that does not promise happiness with you so close to my heart, Cora."

A sharp click of the iron latch startled them both. The gate fell to with a clang that struck those two young creatures like a blow. Then, like a spectre, came the dark form of the clergyman, sweeping the moonlight from the flowers with its shadow.

"He is coming," whispered Cora, chilled, she knew not why.

Seymour did not speak, but he strained her to his bosom so violently that she gasped for breath.

"Have you no fear of me—no questions to ask? It is not too late."

"Fear of you," she answered, clinging to him tenderly when his arm would have released her. "Fear of you—I should as soon fear the flowers around that fountain. Questions—why should I ask questions just as our two lives are trembling together? Hark, he is ringing the bell!"

They left the window and sat down upon the couch, waiting for the clergyman. He came in, after some delay, smiling blandly and rubbing his white hands over each other, while he paused on the threshold and cast a wandering glance over the room. Then his observation fell on the young couple. He moved forward and greeted them cordially.

"Then it is to be a wedding, after all," he said, glancing at the costume of the bride. "I was not prepared for that."

"No," said Cora, blushing under his gaze. "There will be no one present but ourselves."

The minister smiled, glanced at her a second time, with a look that bespoke as much admiration as clerical eyes are ever permitted to express, and answered still more blandly:

"And the witnesses, dear lady—we must have witnesses."

The young people looked at each other in dismay.

"Alice Ruess might do for one," said Cora, in a low voice. "But the other?"

"My boy, Brian Nolan; I wish I had brought him; he might be of use, he is sufficiently intelligent."

"Is he trustworthy?" asked Cora, in a whisper.

"I would trust him with a secret that held my life, if needful," answered Seymour. "But we have no one to send for him."

"No," said Cora. "But the Frenchman—he will do."

A few minutes after, Alice Ruess and Lubin came into the room and stood near the couple while they were married. Then the clergyman kissed the bride on her burning cheek, shook hands with Seymour, pledged them in a glass of amber-hued wine, and went away far richer than he had expected to become that night, leaving a wedding certificate behind, and any amount of warm congratulations. The name of the bride written on that certificate was Virginia Cora Lander, and the bridegroom's name was written out in full, Alfred Nolan Seymour.

Cora scarcely stopped to read the document, but put it in her bosom, afraid to trust it away from her own heart, so precious did it seem to her.

Seymour did not think of the fact then, but he afterward had cause to remember it. The clergyman was an utter stranger to him. Alice Ruess had employed a friend to engage him, and so he came personally unknown to them all. His name was signed to the certificate, but no one cared to examine that just as the man was going away.

That little supper had been served in the dining-room, and Lubin, the French cook, was in an ecstasy of impatience lest his favorite dishes would be spoiled. The clergyman had been a little late, having met with some difficulty about finding the house. Then he had lingered awhile after the ceremony, charmed by the sprightliness and beauty of the bride, lured, as even clergymen will be sometimes, by the sparkle and flavor of rare wines, taken in moderation, and therefore slowly.

Thus it happened that Lubin's supper was put back, and Lubin himself almost driven to despair. He stood ready to serve out his own rich viands—for, to secure that pleasure, he was willing to give up any amount of dignity—waiting for some signal of the clergyman's departure. But, as I have said, the good man was in no haste, and Lubin had plenty of time to survey the round table, rich with

gold and silver plate, glittering with cut crystal and crowned by a swelling mound of flowers covered by a glass shade, so transparent that it seemed a film of woven air. Thus the poor fellow stood with a snow white vest contrasting with his black clothes, kid gloves, spotless as the vest, half broken-hearted and ready to cry with vexation. The chandelier over his head was one blaze of gas; the ceiling to which it hung was aglow with flowers, that seemed to burst into fresh bloom under that blaze of light and open out new folds of beauty. A carpet, thick and soft as forest turf spread away from the table and met the edges of the room in a heavy rope of flowers that coiled all around it, chaining in a broad medallion in the centre.

All this was new, and thus had a claim on the Frenchman's imagination; but he had neither heart nor eye for anything but the dishes left under black Hagar's care, which he knew were losing something of their perfection every instant. At last he heard the front door close, and Alice came into the dining-room to say that Madame and Monsieur were ready for supper.

Into this blaze of lights and glory of flowers the young couple came and seated themselves at their first home repast. In his travels, once, Seymour had passed through a forest twenty miles deep, haunted with birds and full of wild deer that had never heard the crack of a hunter's gun. In the very heart of this forest, close by the corduroy road, stood a log cabin, so newly built that tufts of hemlock and pine still clung to the green bark of the logs. Two or three acres of land were cleared around this rude dwelling, but a great walnut tree had been left to shelter it, and morning-glories were already creeping toward its tiny windows. The door of this dwelling was open as he rode by, and at a small table, covered with a cloth white as snow, he saw a young couple eating bread and milk. Seymour thought of that picture and sighed as he sat down to the exquisite little supper with his wife.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE AUDACITY OF CRIME.

It was October now—gorgeous, beautiful October. All the trees on the Hudson felt the ripeness of the year in their foliage, which had taken rich gleams of crimson into its greenest masses, and was just beginning to throw out flashes of gold where the maples grew thickest.

In September Mrs. Lander had consented to accept Cora's invitation to stay with her awhile at one of the fashionable hotels in the city. A splendid outfit of second mourning had been the principal inducement held out for this temporary change of residence, and this important business occupied the widow almost exclusively.

As for Cora, she took little interest in all the details of dead silk, gray silk, bugle trimmings, or black ribbons. Indeed she was seldom at her rooms twenty-four hours together. The first year of her mourning had not yet expired; she made this an excuse for avoiding all society and living a secluded life, which even her reputed aunt could not understand. There was neither sympathy nor confidence now between these two women. Cora held her mother at arm's length and kept out of her society as much as possible. She gave no explanation of her own mode of life, but came and went as it pleased her, answering to no person for her movements. At first there was a glow and enthusiasm about her that forbade all thoughts of wrong or sorrow in her life. If she was reticent, it was easy to see that intense happiness was all that she had to conceal. She absolutely lived away from every friend, in a world of her own that became more and more secret every day.

At last Mrs. Lander grew weary of shopping, and more weary of the strange isolation which Cora's retired life forced upon her. She demanded more money and a broader

range of social life in the hotel, both of which Cora refused. So, one day when Cora was more insolent than usual, Mrs. Lander packed up her things and betook herself to the old home, where she threw herself upon Eunice for sympathy and protection.

When the evil spirit of the family was gone, something like tranquillity settled upon the household. Eunice, who controlled her mistress with an iron hand, broke up the old habit of staying in her chamber by main force. The family meals were served in the dining-room, she said, and were not to be scattered all over the house in trays, as if they kept a tavern, as it was when that other highflyer was at home. If she was expected to superintend things, every soul under that roof would come down to regular meals in the regular place. She was tired of seeing such goings on, and meant to take the reins in her own hands, just to see how it seemed after being put down and rode over, as she had been for ever so long.

She said this to Mrs. Lander when she came back from the city with her intense mourning softened by gleams of jet, and her neck surrounded by a rope of great black beads, to which a good-sized cross was suspended.

Mrs. Lander might not have yielded to this dictation in Eunice, but for the trouble that had arisen between her and Cora at the hotel, which had at length aroused all her temper and her old pride. Mrs. Lander never gave even Eunice the details of the quarrel which had preceded her exit from the hotel. But it had arisen in this way. After spending large sums of money on her wardrobe, Mrs. Lander had asked for more, and was put off grudgingly with a small sum, and in a manner that drove all the woman's smothered temper into revolt. "She wanted more," she said, in hot anger, "five times as much—ten times—twenty times. The money belonged to her a great deal more than it ever did to her daughter."

"Your daughter," said Cora, rolling up the rejected money and crowding it coolly back into her purse. "Never call me by that name while you live, unless you wish to be arrested as a perjurer. You have rejected me and claimed that other creature over and over again, and I, for one, believe you. I am no more your daughter than you are mine."

"Cora Lander, are you crazy or a fiend to say this?" cried the woman, appalled by an audacity she had never dreamed of before.

"I am simply in earnest, madam."

"Madam! and we alone!"

"No child can be sure of its parentage. We must take the word of some one. A mother's word is held as the most sacred evidence. That you have given, society has accepted it. The Probate Court has accepted it. I accept it. The thing is decided."

"But it was not true—the falsehood was of your own contriving, wicked, wicked girl!" cried the astonished woman.

"Falsehood! I will not permit you or any one to use such language to me. I had long been troubled with suspicions, and did what I could to get at the truth. It came from your false heart with a pang, I dare say; but it was the truth, nevertheless."

"Cora Lander, this is too much! Are you my child or a demon?"

"I would certainly rather be a demon than your child, provided demons could inherit. As it is, I prefer to be as I am, the child and heiress of Amos Lander."

That young girl looked in her mother's face with cold audacity as she uttered this speech. It was evidently premeditated and the result of deliberation. Did she wish to drive the poor woman to extremities? One would think so. Mrs. Lander's passion was completely subdued by this unheard-of assurance. She began to doubt her own senses. Was that creature really her child?

"Do not go too far," she said, standing up with some of Cora's own stony resolution in her face. "If you treat me in this way, so help me Heaven, I will retract and expose everything!"

"Do," answered the wicked girl. "Try that, and so surely as we both live, I will ground a charge of insanity on that very confession, and shut you up in a mad-house. Remember, madam, it was your lips that first proclaimed the fact that insanity was a family inheritance on your side of the house—that it had already appeared in your daughter, the young woman who has driven me out of my own house by her crazy vagaries. What is more natural than that you, my poor aunt, should give way to the malady that you assert has existed for generations among your ancestors—such ancestors?"

"Cora Lander!" cried the wretched woman, coming out of her amazement pale and stern as the bold creature who taunted her, "be careful how you gibe at me and mine! Whatever I am, you came of the same stock."

"That is exactly what I deny, and am prepared to deny before the face of the whole world. My mother was a Ravensworth—a nice old family, that never had a blemish were the Ravensworths—I will not hear a word against them."

Cora smiled as she spoke, the very insolence of her words made her lip curve. Mrs. Lander saw this, and was seized with a new idea. She came eagerly forward and threw her arms about the girl.

"Ah! now I understand it all. You are only teasing me—saying all these horrid things to see if I mind them. Of course I did a little—who could help it? But it is all over. Give up the money, dear, and we will have no more of these cruel jokes—they hurt me, indeed they do. There, now kiss me."

Cora kissed that poor, quivering face with lips of ice.

"I will give you the money, aunt, of course. I have always wished to be liberal, both with you and my cousin; but there is no joke in what I have been saying."

"Oh, how can you, child! This is too cruel!"

"Cruel! no, it is a fixed truth, Aunt Lander."

"Aunt Lander! I will *not* hear that!" cried the woman bursting into a passion of sobs.

"You will and must," answered Cora, in a low resolute voice, "for never on this earth will I recognize you by any other name."

"But I will compel you," said the desperate woman, in a hard whisper.

"Hush! this white rage will make you ill. Here is the money, take it and let us be at peace."

She took the roll of notes a second time from the reticule purse still swinging from her wrist, and held it towards Mrs. Lander.

"No!" said the outraged woman, dashing the money from her, "I will perish first."

Cora picked up the money with a forced smile, and would have offered it a second time, but Mrs. Lander had left the room.

Half an hour after this scene, the widow Lander came from her room with her mourning shawl on and a thick crape veil drawn over her white face. She shivered as if an ague fit had seized upon her, and went back for her furs, thinking, poor woman, that they might drive off the cold that was freezing her heart. But even under that thick cloak of Russian sables she shook with that inner cold which seizes upon the very life.

Cora stood at the window as her mother went out, and a cloud swept over her face. With all her iron courage, she did not feel altogether secure.

"Let her go," she said at last, turning from the window. "This money will soon draw her back; she cannot live

without it. Why on earth did I refuse all she wanted? Why—because having decided on being mean, I must have it out. It's my fate, when a thing is to be done I must rush at it; there is no patience in my whole nature. It was a dangerous move, though! How she turned upon me. I had no idea that she had so much iron in her composition. What if she should really revolt and do what she threatens? But she will not do it. If she did—well, my threat might soon be a reality—I would fight it out to the bitter end."

Cora left the window and sat down near the fire, hardening her heart; for some natural relenting did force itself upon her. After all, the woman was her mother, and had been an over kind one all the early years of her life. But the crime which she had been tempted by her very affection to commit stood between them, till the girl began almost to hate the mother who knew how wicked she was. In a little time she reasoned: "*Our* life must begin, and I want no incumbrances—Seymour and I are enough for each other. We must become leaders in the world—I in society, he in political life. Whatever he wants, that my husband shall have. With wealth, beauty, talent like mine, it will be easy to give him any position he may desire—I will obtain it for him—I will subdue men and women in his behalf—when I am ready to take his name he shall soon stand highest among great men. Talent; oh, yes, no one can question that! Thank Heaven, he has the ability to back up all my exertions to hold place with the strongest and the proudest!"

Foolish, vain woman! did she not understand that a man, to be great must work out his own greatness? That he despises the ladder erected by other hands than his own, though he may mount it to the topmost round. She was thinking of ambition now. Before it had been all love, that wild impetuous love, which is sure to end in some other selfish passion.

Months had gone by, and her great love had already come to this. She thirsted now for her days of mourning to be over, that she might come forth into the world hand in hand with her husband, and astonish it. But exactly as she had prepared that exquisite home for her married life, she would burst forth upon the great world and dazzle it. When she presented herself to society as an heiress, a bride and a beauty at the same time, it must be surrounded with even greater splendor than she had already secured in her secret home. Until all this was arranged and her mourning thrown off, that home must be enough for them both.

Was Cora, in fact, beginning to weary of it? Had the first bloom of her love gone off? Did she find constant companionship sometimes a little oppressive? Better women might have done so without blame. Men worth having do not care to be caged with their mates eternally, like singing birds.

Cora had not come out of that cruel scene with her mother anywhere near so calm and unhurt as she seemed. The widow's resolution had startled her. There was something in her conscience, too, that disturbed her temper. She was surprised and fearfully anxious; that sudden departure annoyed her exceedingly. The presence of her aunt, as she introduced the woman, was a necessity for her at the hotel. Perhaps she might come back again—time would show. She would say nothing of their separation, but go for a time to her own house, leaving every one to suppose that aunt and niece had gone up the river together, meanwhile.

Cora went to her own house. Seymour had gone out, his servant said, but would return soon, he was quite sure. Cora was ill at ease; the little drawing-room, with its closed curtains and maize-colored furniture, was overheated, and oppressed her. A certain feeling of satiety

made her turn palled from the costly things which she had deemed indispensable to her wedding. "I will have them changed," she said. "The same thing for ever and ever—how it tires one!"

Up the stairs she went into her own bed-chamber; there the heart would be less oppressed. That day the room did not look exactly the same to her. The lace curtains, falling like sifted snow over the bed, had lost their first crispness; the silk, of a faint rose-color, with which the walls were fluted from floor to ceiling, was beginning to fade to a dull white where the sun had touched it. The alabaster vase which stood close to her pillow was full of dead flowers. Here, too, a faint betrayal of disgust came into her face. The dead flowers made her angry—knowing how keenly she loved flowers, he might at least have kept them fresh even with his own hands. It was not much to expect in return for all she had done.

Hah! woman, had it come to that? Are you beginning to count obligations? Better not let your husband know it.

The trouble was in Cora's heart, not in the rooms; but she would not look there, fearing to discover something worse than dead flowers, no doubt. Sweeping her long, black dress over the carpet, she entered that little snuggerly that I have told you of. The toilet-table was littered with ornaments just as she had left them. A wreath of artificial daisies hung over one of the gilded lilies, and a lace handkerchief, more than half soiled, was thrust beneath another.

"It seems like the room of a broken-down actress," she said, looking around, bitter at heart. "As I can flee to no other place, this shall at least be made tidy."

She rung the bell and Alice appeared, calm and quiet as ever. What did madam please to want?

Why everything; but first, she would like to see that table cleared off, the wreath flung into the fire, and the handkerchief—that might as well be sent to the laundry. It had cost thirty dollars or so, and was worth keeping.

Madame should be obeyed; if Madame remembered, she had requested that the things on that table should not be disturbed. What dress would madame prefer?

Madame was out of temper, and answered sharply that she did not care to change her dress.

Alice looked at the black bombazine, trimmed knee-deep with crape, and shook her head. Madame knew best, she said; but it seemed strange to see her sitting in that chair which had relieved the whiteness of her bridal dress so beautifully, in such gloomy mourning. But Cora had a little satisfaction in keeping on her sable dress—had not Seymour neglected to put fresh flowers in that Hebe vase? So she sat still in her mourning, angry with herself, angry with him—out of humor with all the world.

An hour went by—another—and still Seymour did not come. This was strange. The young man had few acquaintances in the city, and nothing was likely to delay him long. It was dusk before Cora heard his step on the gravel. She had become nervous with anxiety, and sprang up with a feeling of relief, followed close by a flash of resentment that he had caused her so much pain. She stood in her bedroom window and saw him pass the fountain. He walked hurriedly—wildly—like one in a dream, or like a ghost just freed from the grave; for his face was deathly white and his eyes were full of terror. She heard Alice tell him that she was up stairs, and listened for some exclamation of pleasure, but a single sentence escaped his lips, which fell upon her ear like living fire;

"Great Heavens, I hope not!"

The blood sprang up from her heart hot as venom. She bit her lips till they grew white under her teeth. Now she was thoroughly angry.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A WEEK OF LOVE LIFE.

SEYMOUR waited awhile in the hall, afraid to present that scared face before his wife. He turned to Alice, and, lifting the hat from his head, questioned her.

"Do I look ill? Do I look wild?"

Great drops of perspiration stood on his forehead and upper lip; his whole face was fearfully pale, his eyes unnaturally bright.

"Yes, monsieur," answered the woman. "Monsieur is pale and wild. Let me bring monsieur some wine."

"Wine!—No, no, bring me brandy. Tell Lubin to send the decanter."

Seymour went into the parlor and threw himself on a couch, wiping the moisture from his face as he waited for the brandy. It was the couch on which he and Cora had seated themselves after the ceremony that had made them man and wife. This came to his mind, and tears sprang to his eyes. "Poor girl—poor, unhappy girl—had I known this, I would have died rather than drag you down with me," he muttered.

Alice came in with the brandy and a goblet. Seymour seized the decanter and filled the glass half full, dashing the brandy over his unsteady hands as he did it. He drank eagerly, set the glass down on a Mosaic table, leaving a broad stain, and starting up, would have gone in search of his wife, but she met him at the door with a white heat of anger on her face and a smile upon her lips.

By this time Seymour's face was flushed with color, and a gleam of red stained the pure white of his eyes. She thought that he was intoxicated, and for the moment loathed him; for Cora was as fastidious as she was unprincipled. Drinking was sure to imperil the grace that she

was so proud of and stain the noble beauty of his features. This was why she recoiled from it with such terror.

"What is the matter, have you been ill?" she demanded, in a low, constrained voice.

"Yes, darling, I have been very ill."

"In the street?"

"Yes, something seized me in the street—a vertigo."

"It seems more like a panic," she said, looking keenly in his face.

"I—yes, I suppose it must be like a panic. Being so ill, I was afraid of terrifying you—the very thought made me a coward."

"Was that all? Well, you see that I am not frightened."

"That is a brave girl. Kiss me, dear, for I am almost heart-broken."

She kissed him upon the forehead. His lips were moist with brandy; she could not have forced herself to touch them, with all her self-control.

"What is it about, Seymour? What is it that is breaking your heart?" she asked, softly, thinking of her own secret with dread.

"Breaking my heart? Did I say that? What nonsense! I was only afraid that you would think me worse than I really was. See, I am well again; give me a few moments to dress for dinner, and I shall be gay as a lark."

He ran up stairs laughing rather loudly, and, entering his dressing-room, fell upon his knees by the couch, and struggled with his grief till the frail structure shook under him.

"What can I do? What shall I do? No deer was ever run to covert so closely as I am. She will hate me, or it will be her death. Better the last—better death a thousand times! One look of hate on that face would be such punishment as no other human being has power to give. Oh! my God! my God! how I love her! Will she

believe it? Can I convince her that it was this craving affection, this intense love that drove me on? Oh! if I had told her that day in the little cabin, when the subject came up so naturally! She would have forgiven me then, I am sure of it—forgiven me and saved me—but now I dare not tell her. There was something in her eye and the touch of her lip that froze me. Can she suspect?"

He started up while these thoughts were flashing through his mind, bathed his face in cold water over and over again, and began to brush his hair violently. The exercise did him good; he tore away at his black curls like a tiger.

"If I could tear them out! If I could only change this mass of black waves, all might yet be saved. But with her eyes upon me there can be no change. Oh! if she would but go away for a month or two, or let me. Perhaps she will. Yet how can I live without her, my wife—my dear, dear wife!"

He sat down on the couch now, with the hair-brush in his hand, gazing past it on the floor, in deep thought. All at once he started up and began to dress himself more rationally. His face cleared, his lips parted and lost the iron tension of nerves that had strained them together when he attempted to speak cheerfully. An important idea had come into his mind—an idea that drove away all the excitement from his brain and left him with the face of a man who had indeed been ill.

When Seymour went down stairs all the wildness had left his eyes. He was calm and thoughtful, but apparently suffering from past or present pain. He went up to Cora and kissed her tenderly upon the forehead; she had shrunk from meeting his lips with hers once, and he would not offer them again.

"Did I frighten you, darling?" he said, smoothing the bands of her hair with one hand. "Forgive it; I was really ill. But for the brandy, I must have fainted—see how my hand trembles now."

She looked up at him,—the beautiful dissembler—and touched his trembling hand with her lips very lightly, but the gesture was playful, and she smiled one of her sweetest smiles.

"I am so unaccustomed to sickness that it frightens me. Come, now let us go to dinner—I, for one, am hungry. Aunt Lander has gone up the river, and I shall be my own mistress till she chooses to come back."

Seymour tried to express his happiness, but the words stopped in his throat. She looked at him earnestly.

"My husband does not seem so glad as I had expected," she said, laughing.

"Not glad, Cora! If there is a joy on earth for Alfred Seymour, it is the presence of his wife. Never on this earth was a woman so beloved—so worshipped."

"Is this real, my friend? Am I indeed so dear to you yet?"

"Ask your own heart, Cora. It shall answer you."

It did answer her, and truly. Yet she was not satisfied. What was it that had begun to alienate her from the man she had loved so passionately? Who can tell the exact time when the ripe leaves change and fall? When I say that Cora Lander's love for her husband, from the first, had been an unreasoning passion, those of my readers who know anything of the human heart must have expected the change that was creeping upon her.

"Shall I drink wine?" said Seymour, laughing pleasantly. "Or will you shrink from the flavor on my lips, Cora?"

"Wine—oh, I will pledge you in champagne with all my heart," she answered; "but brandy, I detest that; you never drank it before."

"Because I was never so ill before, Cora."

"And now, dear, you eat nothing."

"I have no appetite."

He did indeed seem ill, and it was true that he could not taste the food she placed before him.

"Do try something; I have a horror of sickness. It puts me in mind of death," she said, seriously disturbed. "I would not have you really ill for the world."

Seymour leaned back in his chair and covered his face for a moment with one hand.

"It is this confinement, Cora. What if I take a little trip somewhere? That will set me up, I dare say."

She looked at him a moment, and then answered in her usual clear, calm voice:

"It may come to that, but let us hope not. I cannot spare you yet, Seymour."

The words were affectionate enough, but there was something in her manner which broke the harmony.

"Well," he said, "we need not talk about that just now. I am already enough of an invalid to keep me in-doors for some days."

Cora had spoken the truth; she did hate sickness, and had no patience with it in any one. Her own abounding health was perfect, and she was always tempted to consider indisposition in others a pretence. That Seymour could be feverish and complain took away from his perfection with her. The man she loved should have been lifted far away from infirmities like that. But she had some sympathy in her nature, and was just then disposed to take a romantic view of any question that presented itself.

"That will not be so very unpleasant," she said; "you shall lie upon the couch and listen to me while I read."

"And will you stay with me, Cora?"

His voice trembled with tender thankfulness, which surprised her.

"Why that was exactly what made me rejoice when my aunt took her departure. It left me at liberty. The people at the hotel think that we have gone up the river in company."

"So my bird of Paradise has flown to her cage."

His words were forced, and she felt it, but answered lightly:

"To find her mate sick on the perch."

They both laughed at this, and she arose from the table.

"Come, Alfred, if you are going to play invalid, let us begin."

He followed her up stairs wearily and with an oppressive weight on his mind.

"Lie down upon the couch, I will search for your dressing-gown and slippers. Here they are—now see what a capital nurse I shall make."

He took the dressing-gown and put it on, thrusting his feet at the same time into a pair of Damascus slippers which she had given him. Cora brought a pillow from the bed and laid it on the couch.

"There, everything is ready. Lie down and tell me what book I shall read."

"Anything you like, Cora."

He lay down wearily on the couch and curved one arm over his eyes, as if the light disturbed him. Cora got a book and began to read, but his immovable position annoyed her.

"Does your head ache badly?" she inquired.

"Yes, it aches; I ache all over;" he replied, turning his face to the wall; "but go on, I am listening."

Cora went on with her book, and Seymour lay perfectly still. At last a slight noise, something like a broken sob, disturbed her. His hand was over his eyes, but she saw by the crimson strain on his forehead and the quiver about his mouth that he was crying.

"Why, Seymour, what on earth is the matter with you? This is intolerable! I hate tears; especially in a man."

He dashed the drops from his face and turned suddenly.

"You will soon begin to hate me—I feel it—I know it!"

Cora looked at him steadily. It was true she had no sympathy with grief. What business had he to bring sickness and tears into that chamber?

"Do not let your prophecy work out its own fulfilment," she said. "The great charm of our love was that no disagreeable thing ever came near it."

He lay quite still, gazing at her from under those long, moist eyelashes.

"In sorrow or humiliation you would not love me, then?" he said, with a keen interest in the question that convulsed all his features.

"I don't know," she answered thoughtfully, as if the question had presented itself for the first time to her mind. "To me love is only perfect with pleasant surroundings. Now, sorrow and tears are not pleasant, take them from any point of view one will; and sickness—when real and in earnest, is simply revolting."

Seymour got up from the couch with a pitiful attempt at playfulness.

"Then I must be making myself very disagreeable," he said.

"You might be, Seymour, if the fever did not make your cheeks so red, and if that quick fire had not driven the tears from your eyes. So lie down again. I rather like you in that dress, it puts me in mind of the Orient."

Seymour lay down again with a heavy sigh, and she went on reading. After awhile her voice became low and drowsy; she read on brokenly, then making long pauses. At length the book fell into her lap, and, with her red lips parted as the last word had left them, she fell into a slumber so profound that she scarcely seemed to breathe.

Then Seymour turned upon his couch and gazed upon her with indescribable mournfulness, which changed after awhile to an expression of such pain as seldom visits an innocent man's face.

"It is enough," he thought, "she would not overlook it. That which wounded her delicacy or stung her pride would kill all love. She has no patience with sickness or sorrow. Well, be it so; I can bury my secret here like the Spartan boy, till it eats my heart out. Expose it, I never will."

Seymour arose carefully from the couch and went into his own room. With eager and trembling hands he put on his coat and boots, brushed his hair and went softly into the next room. Cora was sleeping sweetly, and dreaming of something very pleasant. Her lips parted in a smile, and her cheeks were two sleeping roses. Seymour loved the woman and could not keep his lips from her forehead, but they touched it lightly as rose leaves fall, afraid that a touch would disturb her, and stole out of the room again, holding his breath as if it had been sacrilegious to kiss his own wife in her beautiful sleep. It was dark now, he looked out of the window to make sure of this, and left the house, with the latch key in his pocket.

First he went to the hotel, where Brian Nolan still kept his room. Brian met him with an anxious face, for he saw at once that there was something wrong. With him sympathy was intuitive; he could not look on his master's face without knowing of the pain that was consuming him.

"Brian," said Seymour, sitting down on the boy's bed panting for breath.

"Sir, I am here," answered the boy, lifting his great, loving eyes to the young man's face.

Seymour drew Brian close to him and took his head between both his hands. Thus holding him fast, he looked earnestly into that young face.

"Brian, do you love me?"

"Love you?" answered the boy with a quick heave of the chest. "Yes, I do love you."

"But if I were a bad man—if I were wicked, could you love me then?"

"I don't know, because that would make you another person."

"But if I had, under great temptation, done a wrong thing, could you love me then?"

"Yes; it would break my heart, but I should love you all the same."

Tears stood in the boy's eyes; he looked wistfully in Seymour's face.

"You are only saying these things to try me, sir," he faltered out.

"Yes, I am saying them to try you, Brian. God forbid that I am ever compelled to put such affection to the test. But it is a great thing to know that it exists; I shall not feel quite friendless or alone in the world now."

"Ah, sir, how can you be alone?"

Seymour smiled but gave no answer. He could not tell that boy of the speeches his wife had just made, and of the anguish with which they had filled his heart. He had evidently called on the boy with some definite purpose, but a change had been wrought by those few words of simple affection, and requesting Brian to be sure and keep within his room all the evening, he let the boy go.

"No, no; better run some risk myself than mix him up with the affair. Danger—I cannot avoid that, but it must be braved rather than imperil him. What a grand heart the lad has. Let me get through this tight place, and he shall be lifted out of this menial position. It is a shame to keep a lad of his parts among such associations, but at present I can do no better. When our marriage is made known, then indeed—"

Seymour was in the street as these thoughts ran through his mind. Whatever enterprise had brought him forth, he was evidently resolved on pursuing it alone. Following a well-formed purpose, he entered a hair-dresser's establishment.

Wigs—certainly. Light brown—then the gentleman did not want one for himself?

No, it was for a friend—an actor going his theatrical rounds in the west. A moustache too—his friend would want a moustache certainly, something heavy, to match. Were they certain to compare well by daylight? No, he would not have time in the morning, they must be ready for the express.

So the wig was purchased, and on the next block a pair of light steel glasses, fanciful affairs, such as young men sometimes wear who effect short-sightedness. With these done up in a parcel and held tightly in his hand, Seymour walked home in haste, hoping to find his wife still asleep. Cautiously he turned the latch key in its lock—more cautiously still he went up stairs, thankful for the thickness of the carpet, which rendered his footsteps noiseless. Cora was asleep exactly as he had left her, except that the heavy hair at the back of her head had partly broken loose and coiled down to her shoulder. He had walked rapidly, and, though it seemed an age to him, the real time of his absence had been brief.

Seymour was scarcely a minute changing his dress and locking up his purchases. The gas had been lighted early but burned low; he turned it on more powerfully under its Parian shades, flooding the chamber with moonlight. Still Cora slept, enjoying her slumber, as she did every other physical indulgence. In her very dreams she always had a glowing sense of life, which made her sleep delicious. Sickness really would have been a terrible calamity to this woman.

Seymour kissed her upon the lips now, and attempted to twist her hair into place. This awoke her, and she started up, rubbing her eyes open with both hands, like a sleepy child. Then she opened them wide and wonderingly on her husband.

"Dear me, I must have fallen away reading; and you, I will wager anything, dearest, that you set me a naughty example. After all, this 'Enoch Arden' does not stand a second reading; the story looms out of the verse a little too broadly after you have had time to think it over. What business had this Enoch to let his wife live with another man? It made him the chief sinner."

"You would have had him claim his wife, then?" said Seymour.

"Yes; was not his happiness worth as much as that of the other man? She was his wife."

"Yes, but she was prosperous and happy with the other man, innocent of all wrong."

"What then? He, her husband, was miserable, and had a right to her."

"You would not have given her up, then?"

"Not if I loved the woman still—that is, supposing myself a man. Could you have given me up so?"

She asked this, laughing; but he answered in fiery earnest.

"Give you up, Cora? No, no, a thousand times no! The man who takes you from me must give his life or take mine."

"But if I loved him?"

"Then I would kill you."

"Dear me, what a blood-thirsty old darling it is," cried Cora, who had just re-arranged the hair in a sumptuous twist behind her head. "But it is very pleasant to be loved in this brigand fashion, so long as one loves back, you know."

"You speak as if change were possible, Cora."

"Well, all things are possible in this world, I suppose."

She said this roguishly, looking at him over her shoulder as she thrust a golden arrow through her hair.

"Cora!"

"Don't speak so—I am loving you desperately this minute; only don't talk of being sick again and spoil it all."

"But one cannot always be well—"

"What nonsense! of course you can. Come, take your place again, and I will go over that scene in the woods where the children go a nutting. That is beautiful!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE FIRST CLOUD.

CORA arose the next morning with a delicious sense of home-life upon her. She entered her dressing-room in a pretty morning robe, looking fresh as a flower, and informed Alice that she wished to have her breakfast served there, if Mr. Seymour would take it with her.

"Monsieur had eaten his breakfast and gone out," Alice said. "It was past ten o'clock, and he had been gone half an hour at least."

Cora was vexed. Why should he have gone out before she was awake? Then, eating his breakfast alone, as if he were a business man, and had any excuse for neglecting his wife. She would take no breakfast; he had broken up all the happiness of her morning by these strange actions. Indeed, she would go back to the hotel and stay there till he knew how to appreciate her company.

These were the first thoughts that flashed into her mind. Her life with Seymour had been one of perpetual adoration. No man ever loved a woman more sincerely, but it must be wonderful genius which can perpetuate through all married life the devotion of the lover or the bridegroom. Having created her Paradise and chosen her

husband, Cora expected the first passionate homage which he lavished on her to last forever. Without knowing it, she held him as a sort of splendid vassal conquered by her charms and bought by her munificence. This act of leaving her alone was his first offence, and she resented it as a great wrong. A little persuasion from Alice, however, induced her to taste some breakfast, which was placed temptingly before her on a sofa-table; but she was really too much annoyed for any relish of the meal. The tête-à-tête set of snowy Parian provoked her with its one empty cup. Lubin had done his best with the little breakfast, looking upon her visit as a sort of gala season in the house. Everything was perfect; the biscuit white as snow, the butter absolutely tasted of the sweet grasses upon which the cows were fed, coffee that filled the little room with its fragrance. But he was not there, and this very perfection stung her with fresh anger.

"I have a great fancy to go up the river," she said, pushing the cup from her after taking one sip of the coffee. "It would serve him right; I really seem to be in the way here in my own house."

Her own house! She was beginning to remember that everything was hers. How much love can rest in a woman's heart when such thoughts become familiar to it?

"Who is that? Go look, Alice; I heard the gate close."

Alice went to one of the front windows and saw a tall, fine-looking man, with light brown hair and a pointed moustache, walking toward the house. She returned to the boudoir and told her mistress.

"Who can it be, Alice, we have no visitors?" said Cora, a little disturbed. "Some one to see Lubin, I suppose."

"No, madame, his air was too gentlemanly for that."

"It can be no one else, that is certain," answered Cora. "Besides these French artists—Lubin is one, I am sure—sometimes look like gentlemen."

The mistress and servant were so deeply engaged in this discussion that they did not hear the faint click of a latch-key or the footsteps of a man as he ascended the stairs and entered Seymour's dressing-room.

The first thing that the young man did on entering the room was to lock himself in. Then he took the wig from his head and the moustache from his lip, and crushed them both into a drawer, which he locked with force. While doing this he panted for breath, and drops of perspiration stood thickly on his forehead. But now he took time to bathe his face and hands, change his coat and brush his hair with scrupulous nicety. After thus refreshing his toilet, he took a package from an inner pocket in his vest, opened it and counted fourteen bank-notes of five hundred dollars each. These notes he secured in a travelling-belt and laid upon the bureau, while he counted what might have been some thousands of dollars in gold in a hurried, breathless manner, as if the task was one which he longed to get over. Both the gold and the notes he crushed into the writing-desk we have seen him use for the same purpose before, which he locked with care.

"Now," he said to himself, wiping the moisture away which would keep gathering on his forehead; "now I can go to her with a lighter heart. Great Heavens! that man's eyes are on me yet! I wish there was brandy or wine up here. He has driven all my strength away."

There was no brandy or wine, so he poured out some cologne water from a bottle on the dressing-table and drank it off eagerly. Even that did not give him strength to appear at his ease before his wife, but he heard her voice in the next room and entered.

This is what Seymour had been doing that morning. While his wife was asleep he had gone into his dressing-room and carefully put on that wig with its light, curling hair, and the moustache with its curved points turning

upwards after a fashion that changed the entire expression of his mouth. Then the glasses were put carefully over his eyes, and a coat of pinkish drab cloth replaced the quiet color that he usually wore. This disguise he completed with a stove-pipe hat, so new that it shone like satin, and a little rattan cane.

Thus, entirely changed in his appearance, Seymour went softly down stairs, a little before ten, and let himself into the street. He hailed an omnibus at the next corner, and rode down Broadway, with some ten other persons, all going to the lower part of the city on business. One of these men was the person of whom he had bought those chestnut carriage horses. He resolved to court this man's attention, and thus test his disguise.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but permit me to open the window, it seems a little close."

The man of horses looked at him indifferently, moved, and allowed the window to be opened. Seymour drew a deep breath as he sat down. The man had not recognized him in the least.

He entered the bank where some of his money was still on deposit, and where his bills of exchange had been cashed; after a few moments' delay he quietly presented a draft at the desk, and to the very clerk who had done business with him before, signed by Alfred N. Seymour, with Philip Ware's name on the back. The clerk examined the signature, compared it with one in his books, took a quiet survey of the person who presented it, and counted out the money. There was still a balance left in the bank.

"Where is Mr. Seymour just now? I see this is dated at Quebec. On his way home, perhaps?"

This was exactly what Seymour wanted. He had been all the way fruitlessly studying how to open a conversation that should lead to the answer he was ready to give.

"More than probable. He was intending to sail from Halifax the week after I left Quebec."

"Well, I suppose we shall hear from him when he wants the rest of his money," observed the clerk.

Seymour smiled, lifted his hat and walked out of the bank. On the steps he almost ran against a man, who came up so suddenly that he sallied back with a sharp recoil, as if the stranger had struck him.

"I beg pardon," said the stranger, lifting his hat. "Did I run against you, sir?"

"It is I who should beg pardon, I fear—pray excuse my awkwardness," answered Seymour, in a voice so hoarse and changed that his best friend would not have recognized it.

The two men bowed politely to each other and Seymour passed on, hurrying to the nearest omnibus, which he entered, trembling from head to foot and pale as agitation could make him.

Thus it was that Seymour returned home. No wonder he wanted a few minutes' rest before he entered the presence of his wife.

"Am I late, my angel?" he said, drawing a chair to the little table. "Is there not at least one cup for me?"

Seymour took up the little silver coffee-pot, and lifting the lid, looked in.

"Why it is almost full," he said. "Waiting for me? How good you are. I had almost given up the pleasure of our breakfast in this pretty nest."

"But why—why did you go out this morning, of all others?" said Cora, rather sharply.

"Why because my head ached fearfully, and I hoped to drive it off before you awoke to be annoyed with it; but, unhappily, I got into the wrong omnibus, and it took me out of the way."

Smiles began to hover about Cora's mouth again; she filled one of the Parian cups and gave it to him, resuming her own breakfast with fresh appetite.

"The air does not seem to have given you much color," she said, looking at him earnestly.

"No, it must be change of air, I fear, Cora, before I am quite myself again. It enervates one to be idle so long, even with the sweetest and dearest woman that ever lived, coming to one like an angel now and then. You must let me take flight for a week or two, Cora; after that I will come back to my birdie the happiest fellow alive."

"You are very anxious to leave me, Alfred."

"Yes, dearest, since you have told me how unpleasant the presence of a sick man is to you, I dread being taken down. Really, love, I am no fit companion for you. An excursion West among the prairies will send me back to you healthy as a crusader."

"If I could only go with you, Alfred."

"But that is impossible. We must not be seen together until all the world knows of our marriage."

"I have a great mind to proclaim it to-morrow," answered Cora. "Only I do want all my affairs settled first and out of the executor's hands. When he once renders up his charge we need not hide away in this stupid place. I am tired of it already."

"And I like its solitude. It is a little romance we are living out here, Cora. The very secrecy is charming."

"But you will leave it and me."

"Only because I must, or you will cease to love me."

"But not yet—a week from now, say."

"Very well. Only you must nurse me, pet me, read to me, swear to love me forever and ever, let what will befall us. That will make this one week a heaven."

"You are not content with that, but spend the whole morning no one knows where, and leave me to eat my breakfast alone," she said, with a look of pleasant reproach.

"Ah! yes, I must atone for that. Not one step will I walk from this house till the week is up. Will that satisfy You, Mrs. Seymour?"

"Are you in earnest? Is this a promise?"

"A solemn promise."

"Then I must forgive you; but it was a little hard."

Seymour arose from the table laughing.

"Now let us begin our week," he said. "That at least, we will snatch from fate itself."

Cora took no heed of the significance of these words, though they came from a heart heavy with foreboding.

"Now what shall we begin this glorious week with? Let it be music—how you did love music in those old days."

"And now as well as ever—better, if you are the musician. Come, the piano has not been opened yet—your hands shall consecrate it."

Cora looked into the glass, pushed the hair back from her temples, shook out the lilac-tinted folds of her morning dress, and swept on before her husband into that gem of a drawing-room. There stood a grand piano, and close by a music stand, for nothing had been omitted in that establishment. Seymour opened the instrument, drew an easy chair so close to the music stand that the flow of her dress fell over his knees, and, leaning back, prepared to listen or think such thoughts as make men grow old in their youth. Heaven help the man! Such was his strait that he was thankful to be silent and reflect a little—thankful to shield his agony of apprehension under the sweet storm of music that soon broke over him.

Thus the young couple spent the week, all alone, surrounded by splendor in every form, loving each other and putting that love into language sweeter than poetry, but which did grow just a little tiresome from eternal repetition. Cora brought forth all her accomplishments to charm him with. When she sat down to the piano, people in the street stopped to listen, and wondered who and what the family were that had surrounded itself so richly, and from which such music came floating like strains from Paradise.

Sometimes, in her more fanciful moods, Cora would take her guitar from its case and sing ballad after ballad with a sprightliness which would have brought any man to her feet. They played chess in her boudoir, arranged flowers in the vases, watched the fountain throw up its waters in the moonlight—in fact lived out the picture which Claude Melnotte placed before Pauline as his bright ideal of a love life. Yet something was wanting. Those young hearts, so close together, were far, far away from each other at times, each busy with its own hidden secret, and each tempted almost beyond endurance to own everything, and thus get rid of the one hindrance to a happiness which might have been so complete.

At times, during that week, Cora had almost wished for some change. She was not satisfied that Seymour had kept his promise so faithfully, but would have given anything to see him go in and out as if occupied like other men. Sometimes she would shut herself up for hours only that she might feel the pleasure of welcoming him when her door was opened. After all, I think this one week of unbroken happiness had more effect on the after fate of these two persons than any one reading this history will admit. Satiety is a worse evil to deal with than want itself. Love is sometimes smothered under too much luxury, as honeysuckles and roses strangle each other when they grow close together.

Seymour was saved from this by his own troubles. He had an inner life of apprehension and regrets which lifted him out of the enervating effects which fell upon his wife so imperceptibly, that she was all unconscious of the change as the bough from which a ripe pear has fallen. Cora told the truth, she began to feel a loathing for the home which her taste had made so beautiful. I think a week, at this time, in the log cabin, which Seymour could not keep out of his mind, with prairie chickens cooking by an out-door fire,

and fresh water brought from some spring under the rocks, would have been far better for those two young hearts. Under the blue sky, with God's grand old wilderness shading them, they might have found out the secret of making love immortal. As it was, they were about to part—he for the woods and the prairies, and the woman for her ill-gotten home and crime-stricken mother.

They stood together that morning in the little room of which both would have been weary but for the anticipation of this parting hour—stood together with arms interlaced, looking into each other's faces till tears blinded them.

"We have been so happy here," she sobbed, looking around with new interest on everything. "Oh! Seymour, Seymour, will this ever come to us again!"

The man commenced trembling, and could only answer her with passionate kisses. With that cloud over his head, how dare he reassure her?

"You will not forget me?" she pleaded, clinging to him. "Nothing shall drive me one moment from your heart?"

"Nothing but death can drive you from this heart, my wife—nothing but death."

"What can I do for you? I would give the world to work for you, suffer something for you!"

"Rather be happy for me, sweet wife."

"I cannot be that, and you gone."

"It will not be for long—I pray to God that it may not be for long," he said straining her to his heart. "Do you doubt it; is there a single fear in your heart that we shall meet again and that speedily?"

"No, darling, no. I talked at random. Now farewell! Kiss me once more, again—again! God bless you, Cora. Think kindly of me. Love me, let what will come. Nothing but death can really part us, remember that, for you are my wife—No human power can change that. Once more, farewell!"

"Seymour! Seymour!"

There was no answer. The door closed and he was gone.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

EUNICE HURD FINDS HER MATCH, AND SO DOES THE HEIRESS.

CORA went up to the house on the river, heavy-hearted, but with a certain sense of relief which she could not quite understand. The parting scene with her husband had exhausted the sensibility of her nature. She really thirsted for change. This working out of a secret romance was getting a little wearisome. Unless she could exhibit this handsome husband and glory in him, as her own property, with all the rest of her possessions in full and imperious ownership, marriage seemed to her almost a failure. In fact it would be the same to any other woman if she attempted to shut herself out from the world and live to the music of sweet lutes and all that sort of thing. One might as well expect to feed on Hymettus honey and May-dew gathered from opening violets and not be ravenous with keen, wholesome hunger in the process.

Now if Cora's love for that man had been anything but a willful, selfish passion from the very first, she would have come out from this paradisiacal experiment weary of that, certainly, but not of him; she had not reached this state exactly, but was open to any temptation or circumstance that might end in utter distaste for the life she had so rashly entered upon. With all his faults, Seymour possessed the better nature. He at least loved her honestly, madly—it might prove fatally.

Once at home and in her own dominions, the heiress assumed her old position with all the insolence of a woman whose authority had slept for a season, only to assert itself with increased vigor on the awakening. She was a woman who forgot nothing which affected her own interest or pleasure, and who never forgave the person who once offended her.

Cora's first object, on going home, was to dismiss Eunice Hurd from her household. That woman had tacitly repudiated and defied her; she had become a partisan of the cousin whose very existence was hateful to herself—for on this earth there is no antipathy equal to that inspired by a person whom the hater has wronged.

On the very day she reached home, Cora sent for Eunice, and, in a few cold, quiet words, gave the woman her discharge.

Eunice stood stiff and upright, with her nose high in the air, and her greenish eyes regarding the young lady with a sidelong, sneering expression, which made Cora's nerves creep in spite of herself.

"Here are your wages for the full year, exactly what my aunt has always paid you. As I give no warning, and expect you to quit the house at once, it is but fair that you receive full pay for the year. My aunt will write you a recommendation."

"*Your aunt!*" sneered Eunice, with a long-drawn breath. "YOUR AUNT!"

Cora turned cold, but kept her eyes unflinchingly on the woman, knowing well that a contest almost of life and death was before her.

"Yes, I said my aunt. Always having been known as the head of this house, her recommendation would be better recognized than mine."

Cora spoke calmly and without a quiver in her voice to betray the dread that had seized upon her like a vulture

with the first look of those eyes. She never took her gaze from the woman's face either. Yet Eunice saw her advantage and took it, for no self-control could conquer that shrinking of the person which is the result of sudden fear.

"I shall take no recommendation from her or you," said Eunice, slanting her head from the right shoulder to the left.

"And why?"

Never was a question asked with an appearance of more innocent surprise, and never did forced composure effect less.

"Because I don't intend to leave this house, Miss Cora Virginia Lander, till its owner tells me to go, which she isn't likely to do in a hurry."

It took strong nerves to suppress the trembling which seized on Cora, or force a natural voice through that contracted throat, but the young impostor accomplished it, and answered, with a laugh:

"I have already told you to go—foolish woman, are you waiting for a second dismissal?"

"No, I'm not waiting for anything from you, or the like of you; but I can't but just keep my hands off you. Who was it sent that poor creature home, crying like a baby? Who was it that refused to give her money, to buy dress with and threatened her with an asylum?"

"And my aunt told you that?"

"YOUR MOTHER told me that."

Cora arose fiercely—her forehead, her lips, her very hands were whiter than whiteness, but she confronted her enemy bravely.

"Woman, who put you up to this?"

"Who put me up to it? The great God, who will, sooner or later, punish you for your cruelty to the weak, foolish woman who is crying her life out up-stairs. Don't speak to me—take your eyes off from my face, they have got rattlesnakes in 'em!"

"Woman, are you mad?"

"Yes, I am mad as blazes—don't provoke me! don't I say, or I'll tear the nest you have feathered so cunningly all to flinders!"

"Indeed!—How?"

Cora was cool and resolute now. In this struggle she was careful not to lose a point from weakness. She was pale yet, and her eyes glittered like steel; but she had full control of her voice. Eunice had prepared her for the worst, and knowing the danger she had to meet, the girl grew brave and cautious as a tiger.

"You want to know, do you? Well, I'll tell you, up and down is my fashion. You're a cheat—a humbug—a mean, cruel cheat, and I can prove it—yes I can! you needn't widen your eyes at me, I *can* prove it, and if it wasn't for the poor creature up stairs, I'd do it too once. Attempt to abuse her again, only just look sideways at her, and I'll pull the pillars out from under your temple, as Job did in the Bible. You had her for awhile, but I've got her now. When she haint got no one else to go to she comes to me—I'll stand by her, never fear."

"What has my aunt told you, pray?"

Cora was cautiously drawing out all the power Eunice possessed, but the woman was not deficient in her own craft.

"I didn't need her to tell anything; I have got my own eyes and ears; I can ask questions, if I ain't over quick to answer 'em. The man who came up on the same cars with you that night is on hand when I want him—oh yes, that makes you hop, does it—kinder stirs up the rattlesnake in them eyes. But that isn't all. That man was used to climbing ladders, and he did it."

"Woman, you lie!"

The words broke from Cora's lips sharp and venomous; she shook from head to foot with mingled rage and desperation.

"You wore a blue merino dress and left a piece on it behind you. That dress you was kind enough to pitch at me one day. It was torn and you was too much of a lady to mend it. That accounts for my having the dress, but it don't account for the piece that you left sticking to the rose-bush under Mrs. Lander's bed-room winder, which piece I took off that morning, and which piece I matched with the dress after you pitched it at me over them bannisters; it was an awful scragly tear, and it fitted to a T. I've got the dress and the piece safe and sure."

"Fool! I have not worn that dress for ages—I am in mourning."

"Of course, and for that reason didn't wear black that night, but put on the only other dress you had, the one you had jumped overboard in. It smells of salt water yet. That's another clincher! Besides there's a place in the front breadth which that little humpbacked girl up stairs darned for you after you got a shipboard again. I know all about it. Old moles are as cute as young ones any day."

"This dress is nothing to me; I have not worn it since we went on shore from the wreck—no creature on earth has ever seen me wear it."

"Oh, wasn't there? What was the conductor a doing when you opened that gray cloak to take out your ticket? What was the man a doing who knows how to climb ladders when he sees 'em at a lady's winder? What was the other conductor a doing who took up a passenger who wore a blue dress and gray cloak after midnight at the station down here? Wimmen in these parts don't start on journeys often after midnight, and when they do the conductors are apt to eye 'em sharp. That one did eye his passenger with the blue dress very sharp, for he saw her get into what they call a hotel coach and that went to the very place you was all putting up at. Oh! I am nigh upon as wide awake as you are, Miss!"

A gleam of sharp intelligence shot over Cora's pale face; while the woman was talking, a smile of assured triumph came to her lips.

"What is all this to me, woman? I know nothing of the matter. If any one came here that night, it was my cousin. From the first she was resolved to claim my inheritance. What more probable than that she should have stolen away and attempted to gain her mother over to the plot. Now that you tell me these things, I have no doubt of it."

Eunice stood aghast; her mouth fell, her eyes fairly quivered with astonishment.

"For her sake we had better say nothing about it," resumed Cora, blandly; "it would throw discredit on the family were it known that a person so young, and always respectable till now, had contemplated so base a fraud. Of course her mother will keep the secret, and, in pity for my cousin, you must be silent, Eunice. There is no sacrifice that I would not make to protect her reputation. The knowledge of this unhappy attempt to defraud me of my birthright gives you a hold upon the family, Eunice. Remain with us, if it pleases you, and keep that dress in your possession; it may be wanted as proof yet. I remember now, it was in my cousin's trunk when we came ashore. There does seem to be something providential in your having found the piece. Take especial care of it, Eunice."

Eunice Hurd was not altogether subdued, but she stood her ground like an Indian woman, from whom the enemy has stolen a quiver of arrows. She was defeated but not convinced. This permission to remain was, after all, a kind of triumph, and she was preparing to withdraw her forces in tolerable order, when Cora spoke again.

"You are right, Eunice, I should have been more liberal with my aunt; the knowledge that her daughter entertained this nefarious design—"

"Ne—ne—what?" interrupted Eunice.

"Nefarious—it means wicked, Eunice."

"Oh," ejaculated the old maid, "that's it, is it?"

"As I was saying, Eunice, you have been a trusty servant in the family for years, and are no doubt almost indispensable."

"Inde what?" questioned Eunice again, growing snappish as Cora became blander and sweeter.

"A person that she cannot do without; that is the spirit of my word, Eunice, and I dare say you and I will get along very nicely together after we know each other thoroughly. Now that I have learned the secret cause of my aunt's irritability, I would not deprive her of your services for the world. Are we friends now, Eunice?"

Cora held out her white hand with the most winning grace imaginable, but Eunice clenched her bony fingers and put the hand behind her, angry at herself for being so tempted by that smiling manner.

"We are friends, Miss, just so long as you treat that poor lady, for she is a lady, well and with kindness. She has always been mistress here, and I won't obey nobody else. She's always been used to having plenty of money, and that she's a going to have."

"Why, Eunice, what do you think of me? Am I a tyrant or a miser, that you insist on these things? Was not my father always generous to her and my cousin? Was not that ungrateful girl educated at my father's cost exactly as I was educated? I know he loved these two helpless women, and, notwithstanding my cousin's attempt to wrong me, I am anxious, in all things, to carry out my father's wishes. When the estate is settled, my aunt and cousin shall each have a fixed income. I promise it on the honor of a Lander."

"You mustn't stint her now. She's got to have all she wants."

"Of course."

"Nor the young creature up stairs. It'll be dangerous, now I tell you—"

"Do you think her so insane as that, Eunice?"

"Insane! stuff! She is no more crazy than you are!"

"I am sorry to hear that, Eunice. It would have been some excuse for her conduct."

"Her conduct?"

"Yes. That midnight visit to the house seems very like the freak of a crazy person. I hope it was! In charity, I hope it was!"

Cora had controlled herself wonderfully through this scene; she carried everything before her so adroitly that her spirits rose almost to elation at its close. For this once she had escaped and forced down the peril that threatened her, but she felt the necessity not only of conciliating this shrewd woman, but of obtaining in herself a reputation for great liberality and kindness. The generous nature of Amos Lander's child was too well known for an abrupt change of character to be accepted readily. This sudden fright, brought on by her first effort to play the despot, had warned her of the peril in time.

Mrs. Lander had returned to her home almost broken-hearted. It was with great difficulty that she kept back her secret from Eunice, who might have won it from her had she not already gathered it up by her own ingenuity. But this interview with Cora had so completely demoralized her facts that Eunice resolved to win more positive knowledge from the lady herself. But even here the young woman had been too quick for her. Scarcely had Eunice made what she considered a victorious retreat, when Cora went to Mrs. Lander's room, for the first time since her return home. She found that lady seated by the bed in her room, looking over a quantity of mourning dresses, rich in themselves, but from which the first freshness was gone.

The sight of those crape folds, crumpled and taking a brownish tinge from use, filled her heart more than a thousand harsh words could have done, with a sense of her daughter's cruelty.

"Oh! it is dreadful," she exclaimed, looking at the dresses through her tears. "They are absolutely growing foxy, and she won't permit me to get all the new ones I want nor to freshen them up with jet. I proposed that, and she said no, as if I had been a child or a servant. *He* never did that by me—oh, my good, kind brother! I thought it hard not to control everything when he was alive, but what was that compared to the life I lead with her?—and she my own child, to whom I gave everything—cursing myself to do it. These old things, she said were quite good enough to last the year out. She had heaps of new dresses, to my knowledge, at the dressmaker's at the very time. An English crape, worth all these together, covered with such a lovely pattern in bugles—silks that would stand alone—grenadines, and I don't know what. *She* must brighten up her mourning, indeed, but as for me, old bombazines and alpacas are good enough!"

Mrs. Lander was giving way to thoughts like these when Cora entered the room. Mrs. Lander uttered a little scream, and started from her chair, feeling strangely guilty, as if the thoughts she had just indulged in had been made known to her daughter.

"Oh! Cora, is it you at last?" she exclaimed, turning away her face to hide the tears that stained it.

A white arm stole caressingly around her neck; two warm lips were pressed to her cheek. She turned and threw both arms around her daughter.

"Oh! Cora, Cora, how could you be so cruel to me?"

"Dear mother, I am so sorry."

Mrs. Lander burst into tears and fell to raining kisses on that upturned face, which looked to her so beautiful with that expression of penitence upon it.

"Darling mamma; so you have been fretting over my crossness—thinking me stingy, and that hatefulest of all things, a miser—have you? Stingy to you, above all creatures on earth! How could you believe it? Something had gone wrong with me; I was vexed, and you, mamma, were just a little unreasonable. I had been spending so much money—and so had you."

"Why, not so very much for me. Cora, those crapes and things were very expensive, I know, richer by half than mine—but the cost was nothing to you, with so much money in the bank."

"Oh yes, I know all about that. It wasn't so much the money, but other things. Besides, you went off on a tangent and hurt my feelings so. I waited and waited, thinking that you would come back, but love for the dear cross mamma was too strong. I had to follow her at last. Now kiss me and let us be friends."

The heart of that poor woman rose and swelled with such tenderness as only a mother can feel. She kissed the fair face lifted to hers over and over again. She took it between her hands and gazed fondly upon it through the happy tears that would come rushing to her eyes.

"Oh! Cora, you do love me a little," she said, in her pathetic longing for the affection so long withdrawn from her. "We might be so happy if you only loved me."

"We are—we will be happy—I have come here determined on it. Come, come, forget and forgive! How long it seems since I have seen you!"

"Miserably long, my child!"

"Still, it is only a week—such a week! One sometimes crowds so much happiness into a week that it answers for a life-time. Don't you think so, mamma?"

"Happiness! You mean misery, child. Neither of us can have been very happy the last week, I am sure."

"Happiness—did I say that, and you with tears in these

dear eyes all the time? Of course I meant unhappiness, but one does drop syllables so when the heart is full."

Mrs. Lander laughed, and smoothed Cora's hair back from her forehead.

"What are you about here?" inquired the daughter. "What a pile of dresses!"

"They are my old mourning. I was just ready to send for Eunice and see if they couldn't be freshened and pressed out."

Cora gave the pile of dresses a push with her hand.

"Give them away. Eunice will look lovely in black—give her your whole wardrobe. To-morrow we will go to the city and get an entire outfit. The dressmaker is working for you now."

"Second mourning—shall it be second mourning, Cora?"

"Just as you please. Yes, for my part, I should much prefer that. By the time the estate is settled entirely, we can come out in white and silver-gray."

"Lavender for you—it will be lovely with your hair."

"Do you think so?—Oh, Eunice, is that you? Come in and carry this pile of dresses away. My aunt will not wear them any more. She has had enough of bombazines, and is coming out with something brighter. My cousin, too, we must order new dresses for her—she will never do it for herself."

There was a gleam in Cora's eye and a mocking smile on her lip, which informed Eunice that she had just come too late if she expected to take advantage of the quarrel which had sent Mrs. Lander home, half distracted. So, with answering self-composure and craft, she gathered up the dresses in her arms and carried them away. On her progress down stairs, she met Ellen Nolan and stopped to speak with her.

"Tell Miss Virginia to come down to her meals as usual

—I don't want no change," she said. "Miss Cora promises to behave herself, and I guess she will."

"My lady has decided how to act; she will come down. She, at any rate, has nothing to be ashamed of."

Thus a sort of hollow truce was arranged, and, by mutual consent, all subjects calculated to create discord were avoided.

CHAPTER XXXV.

CLARENCE BROOKS.

A STRANGER arrived by the railway and came up from the river hotel to pay his respects to the family. He had been a travelling companion and old friend of Amos Lander in Europe, who had so earnestly invited him to visit the family should he come to America, that he was searching the neighborhood for that purpose, where he had first heard of Mr. Lander's death.

The card which the man sent up to the mistress of the house bore the name of "Clarence Brooks."

Cora received the card in her room, and went down to meet her guest sedate and thoughtful, as became an only child within a year of her father's death. She found a tall young man—that is, a man of some two or three and thirty—standing by one of the reception-room windows, looking out upon the prospect. The scenery was beautiful from that point, for a group of the Highland Mountains rose above each other along a sharp curve of the river, which took the appearance of a mountain lake so completely that it was impossible to believe there was a broad inlet or outlet in that green entanglement of hills. The railroad, running under the terrace, was entirely concealed, and, with the

exception of a mansion just visible on the opposite shore, everything beyond the house seemed wild as it was beautiful.

Cora, whose footsteps were lost in the moss-like thickness of the carpet, walked quietly up to the window and spoke.

"You will find nothing more beautiful on the Rhine," she said.

"Nor anywhere else," so far as my experience goes," answered the gentleman, turning one of those clearly cut manly faces upon her that impress you with a sense of greatness at the first sight, and regarding her with two fine gray eyes, that smilingly searched her through and through.

"It is a lovely scene."

She stood by his side and looked out upon the landscape he praised. It was autumn now, and all those hills broke up in one wild flush of dying colors, the crimson and golden maples—the deep purplish red of the oak—the soft, pale maize-color of the ash, and spotted red of the gum tree mingled and massed their sumptuous foliage together so richly, that the waters of the river, as it weltered under the shadows at sunset or in the morning, seemed filtering through broken jewels and sands of gold. It was near sunset now and the effect was beautiful.

"I have never seen anything so strikingly beautiful," he said, turning so slowly from her face to the scene, that she was puzzled to know which he was really praising.

"There is nothing like our woods in the autumn, when a sharp frost comes suddenly. We had one last night, and you see the result."

"It is worth coming across the Atlantic, if only seen for an hour," he answered, again falling to the perusal of her face, which wore its most delicate bloom that day.

"I, for one, am grateful to the frost if it makes you so in love with my country, Mr. Brooks."

"And I am a thousand times grateful that it is seen in its richest beauty by the side of my old friend's daughter."

Cora started and her color changed; she never could hear Amos Lander's name with composure; it seemed like calling upon her judge to come out of his watery grave and denounce her.

The stranger saw this sudden change in her face, and remembering how her father died, fell into deep sympathy with her grief at once.

"I have a letter from your father, Miss Lander, written only two days before he took passage on that unfortunate vessel. It contained an invitation to this house. Will you read it?"

Cora was glad to take the letter, and thus get back her self-control. She reached forth her hand, but drew it back again, shuddering as the paper touched her fingers. It seemed as if her crime must be written out in a letter sent so near upon her uncle's death.

Mr. Brooks observed this movement, and, mistaking its meaning, unfolded the letter before he offered it to her again.

"It may give you pain, dear lady, but as you are mentioned in it so lovingly, the pleasure will overbalance all."

Cora took the letter, and read it through in the light of the window.

"MY DEAR BROOKS," it commenced, "we sail for my own blessed land in three days from this—that is, I, a niece, who has been at school with my daughter, and the dear child herself. I wish you had seen her, my friend. Never, I do think, was a father so blessed in his child as I am, and ever have been. I do not know as you will think her beautiful; to my eyes she—well, I will not say all that a fond old man may think of his only child—besides, in this respect, my niece shares admiration with her. Strangers,

I assure you, can hardly tell them apart. But to me the difference is as great as that which lies between sunshine and gas-light. Not that my brother's orphan is an inferior girl—far from it—but my young wife's spirit does not look out of her eyes, and the sweet, gentle, yet exalted nature of my young wife does not dwell in her heart, at any rate for me.

"Come to us, my friend. I am your senior by many years, it is true, but we have enjoyed life together before now, and will again, God willing. That which we were talking of must be kept a secret between us. The dear child must not be influenced even by a shadow of suspicion that her father wishes her happiness in that form. But come, and we two will watch for the first blush that gives us hope. This idea has been the one dream of my life—in all other things I am a practical and commonplace money-making man. But, where she is concerned, I am romantic as a poet. Am I praising her too much? Will this enthusiasm of a worn-out old heart lead your imagination astray? No, it is impossible—never on this earth was there a better child. Remember, I do not dwell upon her beauty—of that I am no judge. They tell me she looks like the Landers,—that is, the women of our family,—and this must be true or people would not so often mistake her for my brother's orphan. But, in the soul, the expression, there is no shadow of resemblance—there, as I have said, my girl is her mother over again.

"Come to us, my friend, and see what a grand, noble country you were born in. Make my house your home. I only wish fortune had not dealt so bountifully with you; for then I might hope that some commercial advantages that I can control would keep you near me, even though—. But that subject is too sacred for a letter.

"You are going East, the last letter tells me—up the Nile and over the Holy Land. I hope your travelling com-

panion will prove all that you think him, but sudden fancies of that kind sometimes prove dangerous.

"God bless you.

AMOS LANDER."

The blood had receded from Cora's face when she first took this letter; for she would rather have strangled an asp in her hand than touch the writing of a man whose child she had sacrificed; but it came back hot and red long before she had concluded the reading. Clarence Brooks saw this and smiled softly; he thought those bright blushes came from a consciousness of Amos Lander's meaning, so vaguely expressed in the letter.

"It was the last letter he ever wrote, I feel quite certain," he said.

Cora could hardly refrain from crushing the paper in her hand.

"He does not speak over kindly of me—my cousin, who was an orphan and at his mercy," she said, in a voice that trembled more with anger than grief.

"Miss Lander!"

"The voice in which this name was uttered put her on her guard at once.

"I loved my father dearly—dearly," she said, with quick moisture in her eyes. "But this young girl is so helpless, so dependent. His brother's daughter, too—with all her faults. But he was wise—he understood her better than I can. Oh! father, father, forgive me if, for one moment, I thought you a little unjust and forgot all that has happened since!"

She kissed the letter in what seemed a passion of tender remorse, and flinging herself in a chair, turned her face to the cushions and sobbed audibly.

Clarence Brooks walked to a distant window and looked out, a little disturbed by this scene. He rebuked himself for the tone in which he had addressed her, and was anxious

to make some apology. In a few moments Cora came toward him, wiping her eyes with a tiny handkerchief bordered with black an inch deep.

"Forgive me," she said, "I did not mean to give way, but the sight of his dear handwriting was a terrible shock. Then so many things have conspired against my cousin, and those who cannot love her as I have will not take the charitable side of this question. No one but her poor mother and myself—but I forget, you are a stranger to us all."

"No, not quite a stranger. One who knew the father so well and loved him so entirely cannot be considered in that light, surely, where the daughter is concerned."

"Indeed, you seem to me like a friend!"

"That I will be, Miss Lander, if you permit it."

She smiled through the tears that still hung on her lashes.

"If I permit it? He loved you; that letter proves it."

"Yes, he loved me well enough—"

Brooks paused, colored, and added, "well enough to invite me here."

"There was something else to which my father seemed to allude, as if there existed some plan, some hope?"

No lamb that ever followed its mother with his mouth full of white clover ever looked more innocent than Cora when she asked that question. Clarence Brooks felt the blood mounting to his face under those wistful eyes, but answered, evasively:

"Oh, that was nothing—only a little plan we had in common."

"Commercial?" she inquired.

"Perhaps it might be considered so."

"Certainly, I remember that last sentence. Poor papa never could quite give up business."

"Some time, perhaps, I shall desire to explain his plans

more fully," said the gentleman; "when you are more composed and I shall have been fortunate enough to obtain your confidence."

She smiled sweetly upon him.

"I have no talent for business," she said; "still *his* wishes, I think, would come to me by heart. But I am very thoughtless. My aunt will fancy that I am assuming her prerogatives; she does not know that you are here."

Cora rang the bell, gave directions to the man who presented himself to inform Mrs. Lander that a gentleman was waiting to see her, and then she resumed her seat again, breathing a little quickly.

Mrs. Lander came into the room sweeping her black garment slowly down its whole length, and looking a little terrified, as had become her habit now when any person called upon her unexpectedly.

"Aunt, dear aunt, this gentleman, Mr. Clarence Brooks, brings a letter from my father."

"Your father, Cora?" cried the widow, beginning to tremble. "Why he has been dead years and—"

"Not quite a year yet, dear aunt," said Cora, with a quick catch of the breath. Then turning to Brooks, she added, in a low voice, "The shock affects her yet; she cannot hear his name mentioned without this confusion of thought."

"Was he a friend of Amos Lander's?" questioned the widow, looking from the stranger to Cora.

"Yes, aunt, a very dear friend."

"And he has a letter from him, written by his own hand? How can that be? The dead do not write."

"It was his last letter, lady, written just before he sailed."

"On that fatal ship—for fatal it has been to me—fatal it will prove to us a'l, I solemnly believe! Did you also escape?"

"No, Madam, I never was on board. Some months before Lander sailed, I had turned to the East. His letter followed me into the Holy Land."

"Where none of us will ever follow him!" muttered the widow, seating herself drearily.

Brooks did not catch her words, but he was struck by the singular manner of the woman. There was absolute terror in her eyes as she turned them upon him.

"It must have been a terrible shock to affect her so," he thought. "Even the daughter, who shared his danger, bears it with more fortitude."

"Do you wish to see my father's letter?" said Cora, gently.

Mrs. Lander made a sudden gesture of repulsion.

"It will be a pang at first, but—"

"Yes, Cora, I will read it. If he has left a wish that I can fulfill, weak and hampered as I am, I would give my life to accomplish it. That would be something to show how sorry I am for—for—"

"Dear aunt, we know how much you regret his death. Take the letter to your room and read it there—Mr. Brooks will excuse you."

Mrs. Lander took the letter and went out. Cora excused herself with a gesture and followed her into the next room.

"Do you wish to ruin me, and yourself also, that you take that paper as if it were a rattlesnake, and talk like an insane person? I tell you this gentleman must be received cordially. He knew Amos Lander well, and is a man of mark, or I know nothing about it. Invite him to remain, and enforce the invitation by something like cheerfulness. It is my wish!"

"Then, if I must be cheerful, take the letter; I won't read it!" answered the harassed woman.

"There, there, take it to your room and do as you like about reading it, though I think you will find something in

his last words to rouse your pride a little. For my part, I am glad this gentleman brought it. If I had one scruple, it has vanished now. Read it, read what he says about us and about her. It will bring the color to your white face, I warrant."

"I will read it," answered Mrs. Lander. "After all, it's nothing but writing. That cannot kill one."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A LETTER FROM THE DEAD.

MRS. LANDER went up to her room and read the letter through. It brought the blood to her cheek and the old pride into her heart. "Did he think her everything, and my child the dirt under his feet—and this to a stranger? Well, we shall see how it works now that my girl stands first and foremost! As if his child was the only person worth speaking of! Cora is right. I do feel as if it wasn't so very wrong—as if she was born to the place. Isn't one Lander as good as another? Was Amos one whit better than his brother because everything turned to gold for him and iron for my husband? Cora is right; property belongs to those who have the power to hold it. That was the origin of all property; why should the rule be changed now? As for Virginia, she never would have made anything of it all; she has not even the spirit to fight for it. Cora, now, would have done that, and conquered too. But she must be very, very good to Amos' daughter—that I will *insist* upon."

In her indignation, Mrs. Lander had flung the letter on a table, and was walking up and down the room firing her resolution with thoughts like these, when Eunice opened the door.

"What's the matter now?" she said, in her curt, dry way. "Some highflying feller has come, so the men tell me, and acts as if he was going to stay all his life. Now I want to know the truth on't."

"Yes, a gentleman has come, Eunice—a very fine-looking man indeed. He brought a letter from Amos Lander."

"Amos Lander! Well now, that beats me! Has Amos Lander come to life as well as the rest on 'em? I'm glad on it. Now we shall see who's who!"

"Eunice Hurd, how can you talk so wickedly? Amos wrote the letter before he sailed on that terrible steamer. Of course he's fathoms and fathoms under water."

"Oh, he is, is he? Well, dead men tell no tales—I wish they did. Anyhow, who is this feller, and what does he want?"

"He's a gentleman Amos knew abroad, Eunice. I can't stay to tell you more; my niece will expect me back—I only came out to read the letter. Is my hair all right—does this dress sweep gracefully? Do, for once, be good-natured and tell me. I declare it seems like old times to have company in the house!"

Away Mrs. Lander swept with something of her old spirit and grace, leaving Eunice standing in the middle of the room, struck dumb with astonishment.

"Well!" she ejaculated, "well, this does take me right off from my feet! Hoity-toity, how we do spread our feathers! That Eliza Lander is enough to tire the patience of Job and all the other Bible folks that were sot up for patience. Now, this morning she was broken-hearted, ready to go into a Methodist class-meeting and confess more sins than the class-leaders could listen to in a week. Now she's all ago putting on airs like a girl, and ready to stand by that young serpent to the last. I can see that in her eyes. I wonder what has done all this."

The open letter offered a solution of these doubts. Mrs.

Lander, in her haste and excitement, had forgotten it on the table. Eunice seized upon it and soon mastered its contents, spelling out the words aloud and making her comments as she went on.

"Oh yes, his daughter is all in all. Well now, she was a purty cretur, and kind as kind could be. Of course Eliza's girl was no more to be compared to her than chalk's like cheese—a hateful, stuck-up cretur, that hadn't heart enough to be grateful, though Amos Lander did treat her as if she'd been a princess instead of—well now, I mustn't talk about that out loud, if I am alone." Eunice muttered all this over to herself, then fell to reading the letter with earnestness, and went on with her comments. "I didn't think Amos Lander was cute enough to find out the difference between them two girls. He allays treated 'em so much alike. I saw it clear enough. They didn't seem scarcely a bit alike to me. When nobody else could tell 'em apart, I knew which from which by the look of the eye and the bend of the head. That's a thing one isn't always free to swear to, but it satisfies me. Oh! if Eliza Lander wasn't what she is, I'd set things to rights in less 'en twenty-four hours. I wonder if they'll let her see this—poor thing. It's the last line her father ever wrote, I'll be bound. She shall have it—they shan't keep this from her with the rest."

Eunice obeyed this impulse, and took the letter up to Virginia, who was practising her noble voice in the remote room assigned to her.

"Here, take this and just tuck it in your bosom if you want to keep it," she said, flinging the letter down upon the piano. "It may be a comfort to you, and it mayn't—I don't know, but if anybody in this house has a right to read it, you have."

Virginia took the letter and read it through. Eunice stood by and watched her with interest. She saw the color retreat from that beautiful face as the poor girl recognized

the handwriting; then it came back, swelling the delicate blue veins and flushing the whole face with a pressure of tender weeping.

"Oh! how he loved me—how he did love me!" she cried pressing the paper to her lips with mournful rapture. "Eunice, had you given me back every dollar my father was worth, I should not have been more thankful. Who was the letter written to? How came it in your hands? Be kind, dear Eunice, and tell me all about it."

"Now don't be making an old fool of me—don't now, I can't stand it. The letter was sent to a man that is in the house this minute—a first-rate looking chap, with an air as if he was President of the United States and King of the Sandwich Islands thrown in. He was an old friend of your—of Amos Lander—and I like his looks, what I saw of 'em through the door."

Virginia was reading her father's letter a second time.

"What does he mean? Is it something that relates to me, I wonder?" she thought. "But all the letter is about me. How the gentleman will be disappointed. Who ever will regard me with my father's eyes? Alas! alas! and he is dead! God help me! if I could have gone down in his arms, what a mercy it would have been! This great crime would have been spared to Cora, and I should have been so much happier."

"Hope the gentleman won't be disappointed in Mr. Lander's daughter," broke in Eunice. "She's making herself agreeable now, I tell you."

Virginia looked up wonderingly. For the moment she had forgotten that Cora was in the house.

"And will she take my father's friend from me? The man he seems to have loved so dearly?"

"I don't see how you are to help it."

"I will go down and speak with him."

"And what will you tell him? That letter musn't kick

up no row. It isn't the time, and I won't have Eliza Lander thrown into hysterics, if I can help it."

"I will tell him that I am Miss Lander."

"But you won't be particular about the which Miss Lander, will you now, that's a good girl?"

"Have no fear about that—I shall provoke no dispute. But the man who was my father's friend I must and will welcome under my father's roof. It matters very little whether he thinks me the mistress or a guest here. My father wished me to know him, and I will."

"Well, I reckon I'd do purty much the same thing; your—that is, Amos Lander did intend you to know one another, I'm sure of that from the letter—that is, supposing you are—mercy on me! one does get tangled up so, its dreadful talking at all!"

Ellen Nolan was sitting in another part of the room, writing with such earnestness that she did not heed what was passing near the piano; but she heard Eunice now, and looked up.

"Come here," said Eunice; "tell her not to go down and raise a muss. That's a York word I despise, but it will get into one's mouth unawares. But don't let her raise a muss with a stranger in the house. It's none of his business which is which."

"But I don't intend to make a disturbance, Eunice."

"Well, then don't go down. It'll make me sick as rank pison to see her a introducing you."

"You are right, Eunice; I will not take any part in the imposition which places me in a false light before this man or any other person. At first I was excited and rash. To present myself in any other character than my own would be to sanction a fraud."

"If the gentleman is worth knowing, he will not like you the less because you cannot present yourself as an heir-ess," said Ellen, in a low voice.

"True, Ellen. I will take no part in his reception."

"That's a good girl. Give out rope—give out rope—if she's wrong. I don't say she is, though; but supposing she's wrong, she'll hang herself at last. Be sartain of that."

Eunice went out with these words on her lips, leaving Virginia and her companion together. Virginia gave her father's letter to Ellen.

"He so wanted me to know this gentleman," she said, regretfully. "I have heard him speak of Mr. Brooks a hundred times on the passage, and before that."

"Who is Mr. Brooks, lady?"

"He is an American by birth, the son of a banker who spent his life in London, having moved there when this young gentleman was a lad. My father knew his father before he left this country, and has always considered the younger Brooks almost as a son. I think there was some unusual friendship between the families while our parents were young men together. At any rate they were fast friends for life."

"Have you ever seen this Mr. Brooks?"

"No; my father said that he had written to invite him here, and seemed to think much of it. He described him to me as good and noble—a man among men. He appeared to wish that I should consider him as a brother."

Ellen read the letter seriously.

"He seems to have some unexplained idea here—some hope only hinted at."

"Oh, they had business together; I think there was some talk about establishing a banking-house in New York to co-operate with that in London."

Ellen smiled faintly, but kept her eyes on the letter.

"I think Eunice was right," she said at last. "Yes, she is right."

Virginia sighed heavily, the oppressive weariness of that

most wretched life was beginning to tell upon her. It was hard to turn aside from the closest friend her father had. But that, like the rest, she must give up or enter upon a contest from which humiliation or sure defeat might follow. For half an hour she walked up and down her room feverish with anxiety. No poor fly in the net of a spider ever felt the thrall of its imprisonment more keenly than she did. She could have given up the property with but little regret. Never having learned the power or value of money, it was of minor importance to her. But to remain under that roof, to live with the woman who had so wronged her, and not exhibit the slow indignation that crept upon her stronger and stronger every day, was fast growing into a torture.

"What have I done—how have I deserved this treatment?" she cried out at last. "Am I or am I not Amos Lander's child? How can a wise and just being look on and see such terrible iniquity prosper?"

"Hush, lady! this does not seem like yourself. The Being you speak of bides his own time. Wait patiently."

"And see my patrimony taken from me—know that my father's dearest friend is to be swept from the lowly path she has doomed me to tread—alone. Oh! it is beyond belief—beyond bearing! I *must* do something, or go mad!"

"No, dear lady, you will not go mad; that is exactly what they want."

Virginia listened angrily. She was indeed out of all patience. The life that lawyer Stone recommended had become unendurable. Must she wait forever in that dull agony of living? Shut out from friends—forbidden to make acquaintances by her false position—a prisoner, chained down by circumstances more potent than iron shackles? Better break through it all—give up everything and strike out boldly for a new life.

Ellen looked up as her mistress paced the room to and

fro with fire in her eyes and defiance on her lips. "Now," she thought, "Not even I could tell her from her cousin. That very tread is alike; with what imperious pride she walks. How the color wakes and trembles in her face. Thank Heaven, it cannot last."

That moment Virginia sunk to the music stool, dropped her folded arms on the instrument, and her face fell upon them, half smothering the burst of tears that shook her from head to foot.

"Oh, it is cruel! it is cruel!" she moaned. "If I only knew how to act!"

Ellen's arms were around her in an instant, gentle kisses stirred her hair and fell upon her neck.

"Be patient—oh! be patient," whispered that sweet voice. "God is just. Wait and see."

Virginia lifted her head and swept the hot tears from her eyes.

"Ellen, I—I—really think this is jealousy. How foolish! I never saw this gentleman in my life; but the thought that she assumes my place with him hurts me worse than the loss of all this property. There, you see how weak I am!"

Ellen answered with a kiss so fervent that it was far more eloquent than words.

A servant knocked at the door. Miss Lander's compliments—there was a gentleman below who had known Mr. Lander, and would like to see Miss Virginia.

"Say that Miss Lander is not well, and desires to be excused," answered Virginia. "Heaven knows it is the truth," she said as the man closed the door after him. "I have worried myself into a headache, Ellen."

The poor girl laid herself on a couch and quietly wept herself to sleep. Never since her father's death had she been so disturbed.

Ellen went on with her writing, and in a few moments

was so lost in her subject that she did not hear the long-drawn sighs that came now and then from that dear slumberer on the couch. This power of concentration it was which constituted the force of Ellen's genius. She literally lived and breathed in the ideal life her mind created. This it was which gave the girl that untiring industry without which the brightest genius in life must die out in flashes of poetry and broken efforts at prose. Those who reach the temple of fame, in these latter days, must work their way to its very portals, and toil harder and harder after they are reached, for that which is won by toil must be by toil maintained.

Clarence Brooks excused himself from accepting the invitation that Mrs. Lander pressed upon him, to take up his quarters at the house. He had left his portmanteau at the little hotel just beyond the station, he said, and would remain there for the present. He should even then claim hospitality of Mrs. Lander to an unreasonable extent. If he did not really sleep in the house, they might expect him there half the time, as he was sure to get terribly weary of his own society. There seemed to be pleasant drives in the neighborhood; and shooting—he should think there must be shooting in the back country. Did Miss Lander ride?

Yes, Cora admitted that she had a tolerable seat on horseback, but since they had been in mourning she had scarcely cared even to take the air.

"Oh, that must be remedied," the gentleman said. "He must run down to the city and look up a good saddle horse. Was the lady provided with one?"

"Oh yes; two ladies' horses were in the stable—one black as jet, the other white as snow, which Mr. Lander had himself selected for herself and his niece before he went abroad."

By the way, Mr. Brooks wanted to know if he was not to have the pleasure of seeing this niece who was in her

person so complete a counterpart of the lady before him. He had heard of such resemblances; but really, in this case, could hardly think it possible that two persons so entirely beautiful could exist.

Here it was that Virginia was sent for. There was no possibility of keeping her in the back-ground after this, and Cora submitted with charming grace. Her cousin was just a little peculiar sometimes; but, for all that, one of the most interesting characters in the world. Mr. Brooks would be charmed with her—everybody was.

Here the servant came in and received his orders. Mrs. Lander swept after him into the hall.

"Tell her she must come, I insist upon it," she whispered. "This gentleman must see our family circle complete."

It was some time since any of the servants had cared much about Mrs. Lander's wishes. They were the first to ascertain who was in fact mistress of the house, and veered round accordingly. Before he had taken three steps this eagerly-given message was forgotten.

Meantime Clarence Brooks and Cora were talking by the window; for the gentleman never seemed to weary of looking out upon the soft, smoky air, and rich coloring of the trees.

"Black or white—which should it be? His saddle-horse must match one of the young ladies' ponies. Might he choose at a venture with fair hopes of adopting her color? Then it should be black."

Cora's eyes sparkled as she lifted them to his face.

Ah! he had won. Black was her color. Well, his steed should be coal black and not too large. He did not wish to be overpowering. A ride under those superb trees would be delightful; he was almost tempted to run down to the city at once. A day lost that fine weather would be a misfortune.

Here the servant came in and delivered Virginia's mes-

sage. Cora shook her head, cast a deprecating glance at her guest, and allowed a gentle sigh to escape her lips.

"It is one of her nervous days," she said, "I am so sorry."

"Is your cousin apt to be nervous?" the gentleman inquired.

"She is a little—just a little excitable, as you may guess from my father's letter, but a dear, sweet creature. I am so sorry she is ill!"

"Yes, I have great compassion for illness of all kinds. My own experience in that line has been terrible."

"Indeed! and you look so thoroughly well!"

"Yes, you will hardly believe it, but not a year ago the best physicians of the East gave me up for dead. It was when I lay ill of the Syrian fever, in Damascus. I must have been in some sort of a fit, for the natives were urgent to have me buried, and even the physicians were about to give way, when I came to life again. It was the crisis of my disorder, and I ran a narrow chance of being buried alive. It isn't a pleasant thing to remember even now, I assure you."

"It must have been terrible! I have heard of such things, but always accepted them with some unbelief," said Mrs. Lander, joining in the conversation. "Were you conscious?"

"Yes; that was the most awful part of it. With every nerve stiffened to iron, and all my senses acutely awake, it was the most exquisite torture to hear those about my bed discussing my funeral. With closed eyes and everything but the brain spell-bound, my hearing became unusually keen. I even heard the rustle of paper two rooms off, when a person I thought true as steel was searching for the letters of credit I had taken out for America and carried with me. The sound, to me, was like the shiver of leaves

on a breezy day, yet it must have been faint enough, for the man had a light touch."

"Did he leave you?" asked Cora, suddenly interested.

"Yes; but I do not wish to think of that. There might have been extenuating circumstances, and I loved the fellow so thoroughly that even now it is a pain to think ill of him."

Cora could not press the subject beyond this point; but she was seized with an eager desire to learn more, and resolved to question her guest some other time and learn all that there was to know of this singular event.

Two days from this, Virginia and Ellen went down to the grove. It was a lovely afternoon, made brighter and more exhilarating by a sharp frost that had brought whole rainbows of color in the woods the night before. The roses were all gone now, but many of the bushes were flushed with berries red as coral, and a rich variety of chrysanthemums still brightened the lawn and garden.

"After all it is a beautiful world," said Virginia, pausing in her walk. "One looks at this scene in amazement after being abroad so long. I wonder how an American can ever content himself in any other land when this is his home. Look at the hills, Ellen—have you genius enough to describe what you see there?"

"Who has?" Ellen replied. "No pen can do it—no pencil can copy it. After all, God is the great artist."

"I am glad the frosts have been so sudden and sharp; they have found enough sap in the leaves to make them vivid. Look here."

Virginia sprang up, snatching at a twig of maple, broke it off with her hand and held it towards her companion.

"Here is the most perfect green, fringed so vividly with red that each leaf might have been traced with vermillion. No painting was ever half so beautiful. Ah! here comes one quivering down from some tree far off; deep red, veined

all over with maroon color so dark that it looks black at first sight. Oh! Ellen, no pen of yours or pencil of mine will ever equal that. Come away, it makes me envious."

"Thankful, rather, dear lady."

"Well, thankful. So I am, Ellen. While God surrounds us with so much beauty, we ought to be full of gratitude, and so happy. Come, come, let us go down to the grove, the leaves are thick there."

The girls walked on, chatting cheerfully together; both were young and full of healthy life. No crime or sense of evil-doing touched the conscience of either. The very day was enough to make them happy, spite of their present position—spite of the bereavement which usually overshadowed them.

"I know of a chestnut tree that must hang full of burs; the frost last night has let the nuts out—suppose we go look for them. It makes one feel like a child again to get into the woods. Oh! there is Joshua Hurd, coming up the carriage road with two splendid horses! The white one is a beauty! See how she shakes her mane, and dashes the gravel with that delicate hoof! Oh! Ellen, I should so like to have a gallop!"

"I would have one, if I were you, lady. Ask Joshua to saddle that white beauty. Why not?"

Virginia shook her head, but that moment Joshua came up, riding the black horse with a dash and leading the other, who curvetted and danced over the gravel like some beautiful child tossing her hair to the wind; the sweeping whiteness of its tail and the mane flowing free, like floss silk set in motion, gave an air of superb grace to all the creature's movements.

Joshua drew up the black horse and challenged the girls' admiration of the creature by his really fine horsemanship.

"Isn't she purty as a blackbird, Miss Ellen; jest let me lay my hand on your head and she'll whirl round you like a

top; never saw the beat of these 'ere two animals for ladies' hosses. Which on 'em do you like best, Miss?"

"The white one, I think, Joshua."

Josh began to whistle.

"There's gumption," he said, patting the white horse with his great rough hand. "She would have the black one. Wanted to know which Mr. Lander bought for his own daughter. I told her black was his choice—no lie, neither, but then he chose it for t'other one—and black she would have. Why Snowball cost a hundred dollars the most! I sarched her out myself, and know all about it. She's yourn anyway, for the other gal pounced on the black 'un like a hawk on a spring chicken. When do you want to ride her, Marm?"

"I'm afraid I shouldn't be permitted," said Virginia, speaking to Ellen in an undertone.

"I'd like to know who's a going to stop you when Eunice Hurd says it's got to be done, or while Josh Hurd takes care of the hosses? Jest give the order, and I'll have her saddle on in no time. Now do, I want to see this animal on the road dreadfully!"

"I will think of it, Joshua; thank you very much—another day will do. Are you sure, old friend, that my—that Mr. Lander bought that horse for me?"

"I'm sure he bought it for his own child, and jest as sartin that the other one never will ride her. I'd drive a nail under her huff if she was to ask for her."

"But why, Joshua, if you recognize her as the mistress of this place?" asked Ellen, very quietly.

"Because I aint a heathen, neither am I a justice of the peace. What belongs to hosses I know all about, and will stand up to like a sojer; but property belongs to the courts. I may feel bad to see things going on so, but it's none of my business. Besides I couldn't go agin my—my old mistress; what she says is right, I'm bound to say is right so

long as Eunice don't go agin it. But hosses is hosses, and no one touches this white beauty but you, Miss; you may depend on that as sure as your life."

Joshua rode off after this speech, scattering the gravel right and left as he went.

"That looks well," said Ellen, turning to her mistress.

"It proves that I have one humble friend that I did not count on," answered Virginia. "Now for the woods—I long to be in action. Can you climb, Ellen?"

"Me!" said the hunchback; looking mournfully down on her person.

"Oh! forgive me, dear; I am in such spirits to-day, that I talk at random."

"I can pick up chestnuts as fast as any one," answered Ellen, laughing. "I can run too—come along."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

TELLING WHAT VIRGINIA AND ELLEN FOUND WHILE LOOKING FOR CHESTNUTS.

VIRGINIA and Ellen had reached the edge of the woods, and ran like children down a footpath which led to the little log cabin. On the other side of the bridge stood a huge chestnut tree, heavy with brown burs, opened like stars by the frost. Some of its branches overhung the bridge, which was now bereft of all its ear-jewels and asters, which had perished long ago with the first cold turn. But quantities of ferns clung about its arches yet, shedding that delicate perfume on the air which is only exhaled after a frost has revelled among their long feathery leaves.

Virginia and Ellen ran along the bridge, laughing joyously as the chestnuts rattled over their heads. Virginia

gathered up the skirt of her black dress and began to pick up the nuts, sweeping the beautiful leaves away with her hand as she searched for them.

"Oh! Ellen, I remember doing this so often, when Cora and I were little girls. She was wild as a bird then, and I loved her—you have no idea how I did love her."

Ellen drew close to her mistress, and, holding out her skirt, exhibited the nuts she had gathered about the bridge.

"So many!" exclaimed her mistress. "Why, Ellen, you beat me."

"Come to the bridge, they lie thick among the fern leaves."

Virginia left her place and ran down to the bridge, over which a great gnarled branch stretched itself horizontally, bristling all over with burs.

"If I had a club, or something to beat them down with," she cried out, "what quantities we might gather. Stay, I can climb up the sides of the bridge and shake the bough."

"Pray, let me do that for you, Miss Lander," said a voice from the log cabin. "You would stand a fair chance of being thrown into the brook."

Virginia started, dropped down from the side of the bridge, up which she was clambering, and stood looking at the cabin window thoroughly abashed. Who was there? What man had been listening to them?

"Forgive me, I did not intend to listen," said Clarence Brooks, coming through the door, "but really it is dangerous, Miss Lander, and I must be permitted to help you."

Virginia guessed who it was, and made an effort to resume her tranquillity.

"You are not so angry at this intrusion that you will not bid me good morning, I hope?" he continued, gaily. "If so, I shall regret my good fortune in seeing you again so soon."

He paused all at once, and stood on the bridge regarding the young girl with a puzzled look. Virginia dropped the skirt of her dress and allowed the chestnuts to rattle over the bridge.

"I think—I fancy perhaps—that you have mistaken me for my cousin," she said, advancing toward him with her hand extended. "If it is Mr. Clarence Brooks, this is the first time that we have met."

"I beg ten thousand pardons, Miss Lander, but the resemblance is so—so very remarkable—yet when I look on your face there is a difference, which one feels rather than sees. Now that I have been so careless or so rude as to force myself upon you, pray let me attack this great bough. It would have proved too tough for a lady's management, believe me."

Brooks sprang upon the parapet of the bridge, and seizing the huge chestnut branch, shook it with so much vigor that a storm of nuts came rattling over the bridge and splashed into the brook on either side. Here the wavelets seized upon them and went dancing on their way, laughing, chasing, jostling each other and sending out a ripple of music all the while.

The girls darted back and forth, picking up the nuts in wild glee. Virginia, all careless of the effect, gathered up her skirt again and dropped nut after nut into it with joyous rapidity. The frills of her white underskirt fluttered around her daintily clad feet, relieving the general gloom of her dress. Her straw hat, with its knots and streamers of black ribbon, had fallen off, exposing a head of hair that would have driven Titian wild with a wish to paint it exactly as it was done up in a sumptuous coil back of the head, and rippling in wavy folds away from the forehead. There certainly was feminine grace and pure guilelessness in this girl, which Cora never, in her most amiable moments, could hope to possess.

"She is what Lander describes. They are alike, yet how unlike," thought Clarence Brooks as he grappled the bough, for another hard shake. "The heiress has dash, brilliancy, self-possession, but this girl is pure, womanly. How could Lander be so blind? Even a father's partiality must have seen the difference."

As this thought flashed through his mind, Virginia looked up and laughed; the supply of nuts was nearly exhausted on the bridge, but overhead yawned hundreds on hundreds of great clustering burs, to which the ripe fruit clung in rich abundance.

"Oh, Mr. Brooks, they are getting scarce down here."

The voice was cut short by a tornado rushing over the great chestnut bough, and such a storm of nuts came pattering around her that she cried out for mercy, as well as she could for laughter.

Down he sprang from the side of the bridge and began scattering the gorgeous drifts of ripe leaves about with his hands, shaking out the nuts and filling Virginia's skirt with such perseverance that she soon began to feel oppressed by the weight.

"Come this way and empty your nuts on the cabin floor; we must not leave these for the squirrels," said Brooks. "Take my arm and I will help you up this rough slope. Here we are, with room enough for a dozen bushels. There, now you are free to begin again."

Virginia laughed and dusted her hands, knocking the rosy palms together in childish glee.

"What a quantity! and we so little time about it! Why the old monster must have bushels and bushels on its upper branches. Would you believe it, Mr. Brooks, we used to climb ever so high in that chestnut tree when we were girls. It was great fun, I can tell you!"

"Suppose I climb it now?"

"Well, if you like it; I'm sure there is no danger. But where is Ellen?—we have run away from her."

Brooks leaned out of the window.

"No," he said, "she is down among the fern leaves. What a strange little creature it is."

"Sir," answered Virginia, "She is an angel."

"I shouldn't exactly look for an angel in that form."

"But you would. Her face is splendid when she thinks brightly or feels deeply. To me, that girl is beautiful."

"Love makes all things beautiful. It even made your uncle think his daughter more lovely than his niece."

The light went out of Virginia's face instantaneously, and her eyes filled with a rush of tears, so sudden and impetuous that they startled even his composed nature.

"No, no, he never did. I beg pardon, Mr. Brooks, but upon this subject I am a little sensitive."

He saw that she was trembling all over in the sharp struggle she was making against her tears. Just then Ellen came up to the cabin with her contribution of nuts. She saw that Virginia had been crying, and guessed the cause.

"Please not to speak with her about—about Mr. Lander; it breaks her heart to hear him mentioned," she said, in a low voice, that sounded severe to the man, who was feeling like a culprit. But instantly her voice changed—she poured her nuts into the general pile and called out cheerfully:

"There's plenty more, Miss Lander; the fern leaves under the bridge are thick with them."

Virginia leaned out of the window to hide her tears.

"I will gather no more," she said; "the childish spirit has left me."

"Have I driven it away?" said Brooks, leaning against the window-frame, really troubled. "If so, sweet lady, one sob from those lips has been punishment enough."

She drew her head in from the window and met his look with a smile which made the tears flash as if they had leaped up from her heart-perfect diamonds.

"I am very foolish, and should ask your forgiveness. Now, if you have the nerve for a climb, which is an undertaking, I can tell you from experience, Ellen and I will do the work below—won't we, Ellen?"

"Indeed we will," answered the hunchback.

Brooks caught a glimpse of her face as she spoke, and admitted in his mind that it was one not easily forgotten, for never in this world did spirit master the material more thoroughly.

"Come then," he said, throwing himself down the acclivity which lifted the cabin from the bridge. "Now give one leap, and I will help you down."

Ellen came forward first, looked him steadily in the eyes a moment, and said, gently:

"Yes, I can trust you," and sprang into his outstretched arms.

Virginia hesitated one instant, but made her leap, and for one instant the strong man held her in his arms. It was but an instant—still the blood thrilled in his veins and his heart gave a bound that startled him.

"Now," he said, dashing over the bridge, "let us go to work in earnest. I never went a chestnuting before in my life."

"Nor I," said Ellen, kneeling down among the leaves, "but it is pleasant, so pleasant!"

"Indeed it is," he answered, "I shall never forget this day. It is like working out a dream."

"Or a fate," muttered Ellen.

Virginia leaned against the great, rough trunk of the chestnut, and watched Brooks as he swung himself upward from one huge limb to another. Her father had done the same thing for her hundreds of times in his younger days, but she had never looked upon the process with anything like terror till then. Was it that she had grown older and understood the peril as she had never done before? Before

he reached the topmost boughs she was pale as death, and stood trembling at the root of the tree like a frightened child.

"Oh, come down, come down, there is peril in it!" she cried out when a limb swayed and cracked under his feet. But he had swung himself out of danger and sent back a laugh from among the leaves.

"Keep from under," he called out, "for now comes the deluge."

Virginia and Ellen ran down under the bridge and waited among the ferns. Directly it seemed as if a hail-storm were rattling over their heads; now and then a nut dropped down to their hiding-place and rolled into the brook.

"Once—twice—three times, and I am coming down to help pick them up," called out a voice high in the chestnut.

"Dear me, how high he is!" exclaimed Ellen, shading her eyes with one hand. "The limb he stands on bends like a whip-stick. I wish he would come down!"

"Ask him! oh, ask him!"

Virginia's hand trembled as she seized Ellen by the arm. Her voice was low and hoarse. How could she have tempted a fellow creature into such peril?

"Call to him, Ellen! Why don't you call, when I ask you?"

"He is coming down, dear lady. There is no danger now. This is the fourth volley of nuts. How fast he comes—don't you hear the leaves rustle? There, he has swung himself on to the side of the bridge and is looking down at us."

"Are you sure—are you quite sure?"

"Look up and see."

Virginia lifted her eyes and saw the head of Clarence Brooks, splendid with excitement, bending over the arch

"Come and see how thickly the earth is covered with them—or shall I jump down there and rest awhile?"

He swung himself over an end of the bridge, and with a leap landed in the bed of ferns.

"Ah, how pleasant it is," he said, lifting the light hat from his head and allowing the wind to sweep over it. "The air is more bland than spring time. If this is what you Americans call chestnutting, I would not mind gathering nuts forever. What do you say to that, little lady?"

He spoke to Ellen, who had fixed her large eyes on him in undisguised admiration. She laughed and said that hour in the woods had been like Heaven to her. But she crept away as she spoke, and going down to the brook, walked a little distance up its bank, apparently enticed by its murmurs. She did not go out of sight, but the young couple were not the less isolated. Yet they both felt themselves alone, and possibly it was a consciousness of this fact which kept them so silent. But the silence itself was full of exquisite pleasure. He sat by her side, pulling up tufts of the frostbitten ferns and flinging them lazily into the brook, which laughed, and sparkled and carried them away, as it had before rippled off with the chestnuts. She was thoughtful and dreamy, but tranquil as a breath of Heaven. It seemed as if she had known that man all her life—as if she were stronger, wiser, infinitely better, when he was by her side. She, too, began to tear the fern leaves up by the root and cast them after his. Sometimes the leaves united and floated off together, mingling so closely that all proprietorship was lost. Then these two people, so lately thrown together, would look at each other and smile as if some mutual hope had been fulfilled in the companionship of those dim leaves.

"Why would you not come and see me when I inquired for you?" he asked at last, struck by a sudden thought.

"Do not ask me."

Virginia spoke in a low voice, but it was serious as death, and he could not press a subject that had begun to trouble him.

"But you will not refuse yourself to me again?"

"Yes, up yonder I must."

"And why? Have I been unfortunate enough to have offended you unseen? Have I an enemy?"

"No, no, it is not that. On the contrary, I never heard anything that was not good of you; never had a thought of you that was not pleasant."

"Then you have thought of me?"

"Oh yes, with *him*, you know, I could not help it."

"Then I was in good hands. Your uncle thought far better of me than I deserved, but charity was in his nature."

Virginia was silent; she could not speak of the dead as her uncle. Then Brooks spoke again:

"But you have not told me why you will refuse my visits."

"Will you not accept the fact without explanation?"

She turned her eyes on his face with a look of such entreaty that he had no heart to press her farther. But she seemed to have formed a sudden resolution, and spoke again, more frankly:

"My cousin and I are not good friends—I cannot meet any one with her on equal terms or without pain."

Clarence Brooks grew thoughtful. He would not ask any explanation of the estrangement she spoke of, but the fact of its existence struck him unpleasantly.

"But she spoke so affectionately of you," he said at last.

Virginia looked up wistfully.

"Did she?" was all her lips uttered, but there was deeper meaning in those eyes.

"Her father always spoke of his daughter as royal in her generosity."

"Oh, sir, you do not understand—you never will understand!" the poor girl cried out in her anguish.

"I can understand, dear young lady, that you at least are blameless, let the cause of this trouble be what it may."

"I am blameless, do believe that—neither in thought, word or deed have I ever wronged my cousin."

"You tremble. This agitation will hurt you, Miss Lander. As her father's friend, I may have some personal influence with your cousin. Be sure it shall be used in your behalf."

"No—no, I beseech you, sir, as his friend, I beseech you not to intercede for me or even speak of me to her. Our difficulty is one which never can be reconciled by human means, I solemnly think. Let it alone, sir—let it alone."

"On one condition, I will. If you ever discover a way in which I can interfere with any hope of success, call on me. Promise this, and I will be silent."

"I do promise it."

"With all your heart?"

"With all my heart and soul."

"Then it is a compact."

"Yes," she answered, smiling sadly enough, "it is a compact."

"But I must see you again."

"I do not know how," she answered, drearily.

"But I must and will, unless you hate me for this first rude intrusion."

"Hate you!"

Her eyes opened wide at the idea. She reached out her hand, then drew it back, blushing red, and strove to conceal the action by tearing up a little wild vine that grew by the stone on which she sat, fiercely as if it had done her some harm.

Clarence Brooks smiled. He had gathered up some experience of the better sort of women in his lifetime, and understood an innocent impulse better than most men. He took the hand quietly which she had withdrawn, and pressed his lips upon it.

"Think of me kindly, at least," he said, with more ten-

derness in his voice than he was conscious of. "Heaven knows, I shall think of you often enough."

Virginia arose.

"You are weary, you will gather no more nuts to-day?" said Brooks, reluctant to part with her.

"Not to-day," she answered. "Some other time, perhaps. They are safe in the cabin; no one ever comes there in these days."

"But to-morrow?"

"Yes, to-morrow we will come," she answered, with shy frankness. "I shall be glad to see you again."

"No one shall gather our harvest of nuts. Meantime I take it on myself to guard this part of the woods till you come again."

Ellen saw that they were both standing, and came up from the brook side.

"Are you going, lady?"

"Remember Miss Nolan, you are to help finish our work to-morrow. We have a large crop to gather in, and must commence early—say just after dinner."

"If Miss Lander pleases, I shall like it; one so enjoys running wild in the woods," answered Ellen, brightening all over. "See what a color it has given the lady!"

It is true Virginia's cheeks wore a rich flush. This idea of another day's meeting had set her heart in a pleasant tumult, and every pulse sent up a glow of wild roses to her face.

"I hope it will be a pleasant morning," she said. "Now good-bye till we meet again."

Brooks walked with them till they reached the edge of the woods. Then, seeing a look of anxiety on Virginia's face, he lifted his hat and returned along the footpath.

When they were alone, Virginia turned and looked earnestly at Ellen.

"Have we done right? Was it well to encourage this gentleman in all his kind attentions as I have done?"

"Lady, I think it is right. He was your father's friend. It was certainly his wish that you should know each other. Nothing could be more clearly expressed than that was in the letter."

"It is strange, I cannot lose my identity for a moment, but he looks upon me as the niece my father mentions with such wonderful sagacity. I wonder how he came to understand her so well? How I trusted her then! how I loved her!"

"She fascinates all who meet her for the first time," said Ellen, drily.

"Do you think he is pleased with her?" asked Virginia, in a low voice.

"At first—yes. The glowing affection expressed in that letter being applied, as he thinks, to her, will draw him toward her. She is beautiful, has many accomplishments, converses well, and, worse than all, has a triumphant sense of success. This may please him for a time, but he is no common man, lady."

"Indeed I think so, Ellen."

"His keen penetration will not long be at fault; the true nature of your cousin will sooner or latter appear."

"Sooner or later—sooner or later. Oh! there lies the danger. What if he too were shipwrecked? He speaks of having influence with her already."

"Dear lady, can you trust nothing to this gentleman's penetration? Can you trust nothing to our God?"

"But we do fall victims to craft and wickedness."

"For a time."

"Oh, Ellen, I never felt my helplessness or the wrong that has been done me as I do now. This man was my father's friend."

"And will be yours. The high nature must assert itself."

"At any rate, I am powerless as a child. Were I to tell

him the truth he would not believe me against a mother's assertion. Then the very distrust that my father expressed of her, will, in this gentleman's mind, apply to me. Oh! Ellen, is it not terrible that, in defrauding me, that wretched girl should find the power to make me responsible for all the wrong acts of her own life. It is I who abandoned my benefactor and left him to perish, while saving myself! It is I who attempted to claim the patrimony of his child! These thoughts are driving me mad. In wresting away my fortune, she has left me a burden of reproach. This is how I am placed. Never was a poor girl so fearfully beset. If I dared to take fate in my own hands, to change my name and escape from all this, life might become endurable again."

"Not yet, lady. Do not abandon the home which is by right yours, while it can be held with self-respect. My father used to say that difficulties change or disappear when firmly met. We have but to watch and be ready when God opens the path for us. When everything seems dark and you are afraid to move in the gloom, rest quietly and be hopeful. There will be a break in the clouds somewhere, and light must shine through. This was my father's method of reasoning."

"True, Ellen, but he went down with that burning wreck."

"I know it. There was a glorious opening in the clouds that beset his path. He lacks no enlightenment now. He believed then that God's justice was eternal; he knows it now."

The two girls had been walking slowly with downcast eyes, not heeding the surrounding objects, but they both started when a horse came sweeping down the carriage road, and the skirt of a long riding-habit flaunted by.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

BREAKING IN THE BLACK HORSE.

CORA LANDER curbed in her black horse and called out, with radiant good humor:

"What, out walking? What a glorious day it is! But what has become of you, cousin? I missed you at dinner yesterday and at breakfast this morning. Do be a little more sociable—I so long to hear you sing again. So, so, Blackbird!"

The horse was purposely rendered restive by a tight curb, and was tossing his lovely head impatiently, while the gravel flew from under his hoofs.

"Which way have you been?" she inquired, slackening the curb.

"Into the woods," answered Virginia, gravely.

"Into the woods—why that is a long walk."

"We did not think it so when we were children together."

Cora curbed her horse sharply again. He reared to his hind feet, shaking his head and arching his neck till the jet black mane streamed on the wind; then, seizing the bit in his teeth, he dashed away, plunging forward like a prairie horse in the lasso.

"There, he will hurl her from the saddle! Great Heavens, how he plunges!" exclaimed Virginia.

"No, he won't—she wasn't born to be killed by a critter like that, I answer for it," broke in Joshua Hurd, coming upon them from behind a thicket of almost leafless rose bushes. "Never you fear about her; she's got grit enough for that animal. Look at her now. Golly, ain't she a clipper?"

Cora had turned her horse off the road and was riding him furiously over the lawn, lashing out with her whip and

beating his side with her heel till the foam flew over his chest like massed snow flakes.

"She's a darned sight more likely to kid the hoss than he is to throw her. Consarn the critter! don't she know the natur of a dumb beast better than that! Why, you should see this identical animal in the stable, he's playful as a kitten. Snowball herself ain't playfuller."

That instant Cora flashed by them like a comet; her hat had been blown from her head; her face flushed with wild excitement. She took a swift circuit on the lawn and reined up the quivering beast upon the carriage road again, drooping and panic-stricken.

"Joshua Hurd, come take this brute," she cried, leaping from the saddle. "I think by this time he begins to know who his mistress is—I'll teach him!"

"He's teach'd a ready, marm," answered Joshua, catching the bridle she flung to him. "But we hain't got a feller in the stables as could find it in his heart to treat a critter so, if he was ever so contrary."

"You are not pleased, Joshua Hurd?" she cried, turning sharply upon him.

"No, I ain't!"

"Then you can call up at the house and get your wages; I keep neither refractory men nor beasts in my employ."

"Yes you do. 'Cause I'm 'fractory as all possessed. Ask Eunice, if you don't believe it."

She flashed a fierce, baffled look upon the man, and biting her lips till they turned white under her teeth, she struck the skirt of her riding-habit five or six times fiercely with her whip, as if that allayed her fiery resentment.

"Go back to your lair in the stables, I will attend to you," she said, trembling with passion or dread, for it galled her that Virginia should hear this. "While I am mistress of this establishment, those who receive my money must be obedient and respectful."

Joshua drew close to her, grasping his oilskin cap in one hand fiercely as she held the whip. He trod upon her skirt, thus holding her prisoner with his feet, and placed his mouth close to her ear. What he said no one but herself could tell, but she turned ghostly white and attempted to step back, but his heavy shoes were planted so firmly on her skirt that she was held face to face with him till the twinkle in his small eyes drove her frantic.

"Stand off my dress, sir, and begone, or I shall forget myself."

The whip quivered in her hand, specks of foam flew from her white lips. She seemed absolutely about to strike him.

Joshua kept his position just long enough to provoke her beyond bearing, then moved away, muttering as he went, and leading the horse loosely by its bridle. Cora watched him with flashing eyes until he disappeared behind the stables—then she turned upon Virginia.

"I suppose you envy me this pleasant position," she said, with a sneer in her voice. "Give me joy of the happiness it brings! There is not a servant about the house your mother has not spoiled."

The quiet contempt with which Virginia heard this was just visible in her face; but she said nothing, merely passing her cousin in silence. Cora followed her, still fiercely grasping the whip and dragging her long skirt over the crisp grass, stirring up a little winrow of red leaves as she moved.

"You have put him up to this," she said; "your underhand cunning is demoralizing my servants."

"Have the goodness to take your hand from my shoulder," answered Virginia, in her clear, low voice. "If you will usurp a lady's place, at least attempt something of her good manners."

Cora's hand dropped as if an arrow had pierced it. The calm dignity of this rebuke struck her dumb. Long before

her usual audacity came back, Virginia and Ellen had entered the house.

Cora was standing mute and angry as her cousin had left her, when a servant, coming up from the post-office, gave her a letter. It was from Seymour; she knew the writing at once, but held it in her hand a full minute unopened. In the days of her eager courtship, she would have torn the envelope into shreds in order to seize upon the precious words it covered. But now she pulled it open at the ends bit by bit, hesitating as if the act were a task she had rather not perform.

One of the gardeners came loitering that way as she was slowly opening her letter. So she thrust it into the corsage of her habit, and gathering up the heavy folds of cloth falling about her feet, hurried to the house and into her own room. Here she cast off her riding-dress, flung it in a heap on the carpet, and locked the door with great caution. Even then she did not read her letter, but pushed back her hair before the glass and put on a fanciful loose-dress of white alpaca, brightened with bows of lilac ribbon—for Mrs. Lander was right, she had begun to soften the rigor of her first mourning to a considerable extent.

"It is a lovely tint," she decided as the ribbons fluttered around her; "I will venture on it to-morrow!"

At last she sat down on a lounge, drew her feet up under the snowy dress, arranged a cushion back of her head and took the letter from her bosom, where it had been lying close to her heart without stirring a pulse there. This was the letter she read:

"MY DARLING:—Oh, that some dearer and sweeter word might be found which could leap from my heart to yours, carrying with it some faint idea of the love that fills my being. I long for a new language of the heart which can at once thank you for the happiness I have known and

the hopes which live in my heart continually as fire once kindled on a vestal altar never goes out. Do believe it, my wife, you are the first woman I ever loved, the only woman on this earth that I ever can love. The happiness you have given me makes me so restless in my absence that I sometimes grow desperate and resolve to come back at once. But I cannot, I cannot. It is necessary that my original idea should be carried out. My health is a little better, and the invigorating air of these vast prairies brings spirit and life back to my frame. Unless you send for me and command me to come back—unless you say that this separation makes you wretched as I am, my reluctant face will be turned westward till I reach the Rocky Mountains.

“Do I wish this, or do I dread it? Both, my beloved. The message which says that my love is necessary to your happy existence would bring me to your side though death itself lay in wait for me there. But it is better—far better that I should go forward; therefore I dread the sweet temptation which would lie in your recall. Do not be unhappy, love—yet I would not like to think of you as content, or really capable of enjoyment, now that I am away from you. This is egotism, and I know it; but such egotism springs out of a soul that would sacrifice itself a thousand times over rather than give you an hour’s pain.

“Do you love me after this fashion, my wife? Sometimes I ask this question aloud in the depths of the night, with nothing but a thin canvas between me and the arch of Heaven; for then a yearning desire seizes me to read your soul and know, of a certainty, that it answers mine in all the sweetness and depths of its requirements. But nothing answers me, not even my own intelligence. I would give the world, if it were mine, to have this question put at rest in my heart. Cora, I would live for you in any stage of poverty and never feel it a sacrifice to be poor or lowly for your sake. I would die for you, my wife, if that were

needful to your comfort or your happiness. To die *with* you, my beloved, would make death sweet to me. Can anything ever part us, my wife? My wife! that is the holiest and sweetest word that I know of in any language. I think this over sometimes and wonder that I am so blessed, that you could have chosen me, given yourself to me with such generous inconsideration. I was not worthy of you; I had neither position, wealth nor any of the great advantages which make you the ornament and glory of social life. But if love is a merit—if capacities of affection can make a man worthy, then am I fairly matched, even with my peerless wife. No other man living—or that will ever live—could have loved her more devotedly. Believe that, oh! do believe it; let what will come in the hereafter, there is not a pulse of my heart that is not yours. What I am, good or bad, this great love has made me. Have I no other object in life? you will ask. I answer, none. From the first hour that I saw you in that beautiful Italian sunset, like a lost angel searching for its fellows, my life had no hope or thought stronger than that one keen wish to see you again. I left study and ambition to those unhappy men who had not seen a woman like you capable of absorbing a whole life and making these things as nothing. I took you into my thoughts and brightened them with your goodness, your genius and your beauty—for you are beautiful, my wife, so beautiful that I close my eyes at night, and, folding your image in my heart, wonder if the angels are more lovely.

Yesterday I took the tress of hair that you gave me from my bosom for the first time. I had not the courage to look at it before. Did you know that it was tangled in with a ring of gold, a plain hoop like the marriage ring I gave you, with the date of our wedding day? Was it really that ring? or another, by which you thought to remind me of an event I could no more forget than a happy

spirit can forget when the gates of Paradise opened for him?

"But the ring troubled me a little. It had become so tangled in the hair that I was compelled to use some force before it was extricated. It was a singular idea, wasn't it, darling? but it seemed to me as if even that light force was hurting you. I had not injured the tress, which now lies in a coil of dusky gold in the palm of my hand, bright and silky as when it was shorn from your head—that head which rested on my bosom with all its wealth of hair thrown abroad that I might cut the richest tress. Oh! my beloved! my beloved! shall we ever meet again? Can any calamity tear you from me? What if you were to die? What folly! Hebe herself never had fresher roses or more perfect health. What if the very intensity of my love should weary you?

"This is how I torture myself with questions. I know they are absurd, that devotion like yours should meet with perfect trust. But there is something in my bosom that will torment me forever and ever, I fear—a sense of unworthiness—a dread that some time you will discover to how many faults a most generous love has blinded you. I wish you had not left that ring so knotted up with the lock of hair. If it was our wedding ring, you should have kept it sacredly on the finger where I placed it, swearing to be faithful, solemnly promising my God to strive hard and lift my imperfect nature up to yours. It was in this way I circled your finger with that gold, my beloved. Is it possible that you have cast it back upon me?

"I met a company on the Plains, going forward to the new Territory of Montana. They are full of hope and eager for enterprise. The mines there are said to be wonderfully rich. How I wish the great wealth you possess had fallen to your cousin, and that you were penniless as I first thought you. Then we would go together into this

new country and I would work for you, think for you, gather up wealth which should be doubly ours, because the energies of affection had won it from the earth.

"What scope and purpose there would be for our energies in this new world. How completely we should live out our youth to ourselves and by ourselves. Say, Cora, is not this possible? Sometimes I have thought that the possession of so much property has cast shadows of care over you which seem unnatural. Is it so, my angel? I would to Heaven you could say yes, and cast the burden of all this money aside. It oppresses me and shames my manhood to feel the overpowering weight of another man's money choking up all aspirations for well-earned success. Cora, Cora, if we had never given undue value to riches how happy we might have been—you and I in the mountains of Montana! I have been looking my past life in the face, dearest, and wonder that the possession of money should ever have been important to me. I think of our life in that exquisite little house which your taste made so beautiful, and ask myself if a log cabin in some western nook, with morning glories running up to the eaves and wild roses in front, would not have witnessed a happiness as sweet and pure as that we knew there. Love like ours needs no luxurious accessories to make it perfect.

"My wife, if I possessed the whole world, and you wished me to give it up that your happiness might be more complete, I would do it. Will you give up this property, which somehow seems at times to weigh you down, and go with me into a new existence beyond the mountains? I ask it in all seriousness. What has this wealth done for us? Shadowed our first union with secrecy—a delicious secrecy, it is true, which had something of Heaven in it, but which is sure to detract from the dignity of a pure love. Sooner or later, we shall wish that our marriage had been open as the day.

"Why will my pen refuse to quit the paper? Because it is writing to you, my wife, and finds the thoughts that turn to you inexhaustible. But you will weary of me, and I force myself to say good-night.

"Are you thinking of me now, as I think of you, with a yearning tenderness that fills the eyes with tears? Good-night, my bride—good-night, my dear, dear wife!

"ALFRED N. SEYMOUR."

She read this letter stretched luxuriously on that couch, with the lilac ribbons fluttering around her, and her foot dropping in and out of the kid slipper into which she had thrust it after taking off her riding-boots. She was not much affected by the reading. The impassioned language sometimes brought a gleam of gratification to her face, and she more than once muttered, "Poor fellow—poor fellow! how he does love me!" But when she reached the latter part of the epistle, her face utterly changed—a cloud came upon her forehead which deepened and deepened as she went on, till she laughed out in her scorn.

"That's splendid! So he really tired of my pretty box, as I did. That is delicious! He would have preferred a log cabin with morning glories. Well, I'm not sure about it. A grand passion might last three or four weeks longer, perhaps, in a breezy new country, with plenty of wild game, and so on. I did rather overdo the thing, but no one can say that it was not regally done. I wish somebody would buy up the whole affair at half-price, I really am afraid it was a failure."

She read on after this, and came to the proposal about Montana, which brought a storm of scornful wrath to her face.

"What, I! I, Cora Lander, with money enough to purchase all Montana—with this form and face, bury myself in the gold mountains, fling away what I have and trust to

chance and his energies for getting more! Why, the idiot! He really has not the capacity I gave him credit for; I should make a pretty figure in the gold regions. So that is the length and breath of his ambition. I am glad he enlightened me in time. Secrecy, indeed! That becomes more and more important to me every day. What fools women do make of themselves while the first grand passion lasts! I wonder if I ever shall be really in love."

The woman started as this question sprang to her lips. It had been coiling in her heart like a viper for many a day, but she was shocked at herself when it crept forth and shaped itself so repulsively.

"Well, I must answer this letter," she said, turning the key of her desk upon it. "That will be a safe way of keeping his face westward. I wish he would go on to that gold country; it would be spring before he could come back. Yet after all, I should rather like to see him. It is something in a woman's life to be so completely adored. That Montana business has put me out of sorts, I suppose, or I should not feel so indifferent. Of course I am fond of him. There never was a creature so blindly in love as I was. But one cannot hold to the exaltation of any feeling forever; I suppose that accounts for it all."

Having pacified an easy conscience in this way, Cora turned her thoughts on the scene which she had just gone through in the grounds. She remembered the unseemly passion into which the horse had thrown her, with bitter humiliation.

"I am mad," she thought, "to give way in that fashion. This temper of mine will certainly betray me, while she is cool and crafty enough to take advantage of it. But it really is hard to keep up such a reputation as the creature, somehow or other, managed to get for munificence, amiability and so on. Then they all were really kind to me, and I cannot order her out of the house without betray-

ing the contrast. She never would have whipped that horse so. It was well they were my only audience. Then that brute of a man—it is clear that both he and that red-haired virago know more than I dreamed of. Can any intelligence they have shake my mother's evidence? There again what a fool I was to refuse money for her eternal shopping! After all, conciliation is the only safe course. But so many secrets irritate the best of tempers, and I am afraid mine isn't quite that. I will have a little talk with this Eunice; as I cannot get rid of her, she must be appeased."

Here Cora rang the bell and gave orders that Miss Hurd, the housekeeper, should come to her.

Eunice was informed of the exact words in which this message was given, and gave her head a proportionate lift in the air as she marched up to obey the summons.

"What do you want of me, I'd like to know?" was her first curt salutation.

"Nothing very particular, Miss Hurd; but you know I have been spending a little money down in the city. You have been in the family a long time?"

"Ever since you was a year old, Miss."

This was a point that Cora was anxious to avoid, so she said, hurriedly:

"Never mind about the exact time; you have been a faithful housekeeper, and, under a false impression, I was about to act unjustly by you. In proof that you have forgiven me, pray, accept this."

Here Cora took a piece of heavy moire antique from a drawer and placed it in the housekeeper's hands.

Eunice turned the rich material over and let it fall in glossy folds from her arm.

"Now if this isn't worth while. I never had a right down new moire antike afore in my life. Well, I don't know how to thank you, never was good at thanking people all my life."

"Never mind that, Miss Hurd, I am glad it pleases you. Some time next week I will pay your expenses down to the city, and a person that occasionally makes up things for me shall fit it for you."

"I hope she'll make it long enough to sweep like anything. It does one good to hear sich silk a rustling and sweeping along the floor. How many yards may there be?"

"Oh, you will find plenty for a long skirt, and to spare. The dressmaker may trim it prettily, as you like it best; I wish it to be complete."

Eunice stood with her head on one side, feasting her eyes on the silk.

"Mercy on me! how do they contrive to catch the lightning so nateral? It seems to be blazing away all along the breadths. Well, Miss, I'm much obliged. Gracious! don't it glisten!"

"That will secure her brother's silence," said Cora, as Eunice closed the door, but the words were scarcely out of her mouth when the housekeeper returned and flung the silk in her lap.

"Put it up; I'm not going to take it," she said, bluntly. "If either I or Josh hold our tongues, it's for Eliza Lander's sake. It'll take a stupendouser silk than that to buy us up, if it is skiltered over with chain lightning. Treat her well and don't bear too hard on Amos Lander's daughter, and I'll stand by and grit my teeth while this inikety goes on, but no silk can buy me up." While Cora sat dumb with astonishment, Eunice left the room.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE FISHING PARTY.

CORA's motive for trying that black pony on the lawn was explained the next morning, when Clarence Brooks came riding up the carriage road on a horse that might have matched that spirited animal in everything but size. Before he reached the house, Cora came forth, equipped for the road and looking bright as the morning. She stood leaning against one of the marble pillars when Brooks came up,—the long skirt sweeping far back on the white pavement and her lithe figure defined by a closely-fitting habit, to which a profusion of gold buttons gave dash and character. The tiny cravat about her throat, and piquant hat curled up at the sides, gave graceful dignity to what might otherwise have been masculine in this costume. But now, from the gauntlet gloves on her hands to the riding-whip, mounted with a thick branch of blood-red coral, her appearance was exquisitely complete.

Brooks must have been less than a man—or more—had he not checked his horse a little, that he might leisurely admire that beautiful woman, posed so gracefully against the marble column. It was a sight which brought the breath quickly to his lips. She saw it all, the sudden check, the look of intense admiration, that touch of the spur which brought the horse so near that she could almost lay her hand on his neck.

"So I find you ready and waiting, five minutes before the time," said Brooks, dismounting and looking at his watch. "What a glorious morning!"

"Too bright for me to remain in-doors one moment after my habit was on," she answered. "Oh, here comes my demon of the stables with Blackbird. I gave him—the horse, I mean—a trial yesterday on the lawn, and he nearly mastered me."

"I hope he is not vicious," said Brooks, casting a sharp look at the horse.

"No, I think not. After our little encounter, I fancy he will be gentle enough. Hold him firmly, Mr. Hurd. He seems in capital condition this morning—does you credit?"

She came down to the side of her horse, and lifting one hand to the saddle, placed her foot in the hand which Brooks presented to her. In one instant she was seated and arranging the folds of her skirt.

"Now," she said, drawing the curb, for she had no objection to a second exhibition of the animal's spirit, so that it was not too violent. "Now."

The horse shook his head, gave a leap, and came into subjection gracefully after the first minute.

"Isn't he a beauty?" she cried. "But I need not ask; I see by your eyes how much you admire him."

"If my eyes express so much, I must be careful in your presence, Miss Lander, or they will tell secrets I would rather keep to myself."

"She laughed, blushed a little, and busied herself with the button of her gauntlet, while her horse struck into an easy canter.

It was indeed a glorious day, the softest and brightest of a long Indian Summer; the scent of ripe leaves and such flowers as give their best perfume to the frost floated on the air; great forest trees, blazoned like war banners, waved above them, and their horses sometimes waded fetlock deep in the floating leaves, dyed richly as the garments of an Eastern Satrap. Through these gorgeous woods, up the sloping hills and along the river, they rode at random. Wherever a picturesque curve or tempting by-path presented itself, they explored it, conversing seriously or laughing off the rare exuberance of spirits that a ride so pleasant and a morning so lovely were sure to produce in two healthy young people disposed to be pleased with each other. Still

any one who had observed Brooks closely under the chestnut tree and on horseback would have seen a difference, too subtle perhaps for words, but marked and easy of detection for all that. With the girl riding so masterfully on her black horse, this man of the world exerted all that was brilliant and superficial in his character; compliments such as only very clever men can utter fell easily from his lips. With Cora he was gay, careless, full of graceful badinage. He saw that she wished to be admired, and fulfilled all her desires in that respect to the utmost, no difficult matter where the woman was so handsome and matched him so nearly in the character of her wit. With Virginia he had been no less cheerful, no less gallant—but underlying all was that impulsive respect and tender sympathy which draw noble hearts close together. He was playful with her, but never extravagant; if he felt the general effect of her great beauty, the feeling was not once expressed in words. In fact it would have been difficult to define what it was that distinguished the loveliness of these two girls. Certainly form or color had but little share in the difference.

Well, that ride through the autumnal beauty of the woods was a success to be remembered for many a day after. But Cora was dissatisfied when she laid her hand on Clarence Brooks' shoulder, and leaped from her horse on the marble pavement where she had waited for him that morning. Again she posed herself against the pillar and watched that noble figure as horse and man swept out of sight.

"Will the man never act earnestly? Does he think I am worth nothing better than the froth and foam of his mind? Who is he saving the wine for, I wonder? He trifles with me. Does he think I have no ideas, no feeling? Seymour at least let me look into his soul. But this man—why his very carelessness defies me. Such a morning—such opportunities, and not a word spoken beneath the

breath or with real seriousness. Yet these careless out-flashes of a superior intellect sicken me with all other homage. The man shall love me, though it breaks his heart. He shall love me!" The woman checked herself an instant and sneered inly at her own wickedness. "Me, another man's wife!"

She went in then, and, as a panacea for such thoughts, read over her husband's letter with the image of a tall, gray-eyed man on horseback between her and the writer, shutting out all that wonderful beauty of person which had enthralled her so only a few months before.

Why did Brooks keep his interview with Virginia a secret? He told himself that she had requested it, but it is very doubtful if he would have said a word about it even if no hint had been given him on the subject. This encounter in the woods was to him a bit of romance which would lose its charm if talked over in commonplace words with any one. He had found the cabin by accident, having discovered the footpath which Seymour had trodden along the brook while smoking a cigar on the back porch, to which his room opened by the door, half sash, half paneling, which had proved so convenient in another romance that we know of, but which was so carefully kept out of sight at this period. Springing over the low railing of the porch, Brooks had sauntered up the path, smoking as he went; now and then he stooped to watch the eddies of the brook and wondered if any of its sparkling pools covered trout worth the trouble of catching; then he looked upward into the gorgeous roofing of the trees which let glimpses of the blue sky in here and there, with stray gleams of sunshine searching for the rainbows that seemed to have got entangled in the leaves.

Of course all this threw the man into a certain train of thought which had both sadness and poetry in it. He muttered to himself: "The melancholy days have come,

the saddest of the year." Then walked on again, thinking of his friend, whose terrible fate haunted him at such times, and wondering if he ever should love the young woman he had seen well enough to make her his wife, for this had been the romantic wish of the man whom he had regarded almost as a father. A heavy sigh answered this question, or rather left it unanswered, for the heart that sent it forth was disturbed by many doubts in which the lady was concerned.

For a long time the young man sat down on a curve of the bank, opposite an elm tree, over which a frost grape-vine had wound and crept, and thrown itself in such leafiness that it flung a broken arch across the ravine; along the drooping boughs long slender clusters hung profusely, with the frost, that alone ripens them, covering their purple with its own shimmering bloom.

Brooks flung away his cigar and began to sketch this pretty object on the back of an envelope.

"Now, if I were an artist, like that young Howe, whose sketches of bits like this have made the English fellows look about them in astonishment, this tree with its trailing fruit and leaves, would make my reputation. It really is exquisite!"

After working away with his pencil awhile, he became dissatisfied with his effort, flung the envelope into the brook and sauntered up the path till the cabin and bridge came in full view, with the huge old chestnut tree spreading its boughs over one, and that group of hemlocks embowering the other.

"Upon my word, here is something like rustic taste!" he exclaimed, in a burst of surprise. "Why the bridge is a gem; as for the cabin I must explore that; what a fanciful mockery it is!"

The bank was steep and the path rough, but Brooks was no holiday man to dread a little exertion. So he caught

hold of a branch, lifted himself upward, and reached the cabin with his breath coming a little quicker from the exertion. Not three minutes after, Virginia Lander and Ellen came down the bank and showed themselves under the chestnut tree.

This was the morning that Brooks was contrasting with his ride that day, as he walked his horse toward the little hotel.

"I wonder if they will really care enough about the chestnuts to think of gathering them," he thought, when an early dinner had been disposed of. "At any rate I may as well take a walk up the ravine. It is a shame to waste one moment of all this delicious weather indoors."

There was no loitering along the path that afternoon. Even the frost grape-vine, bending the stout tree under its tendrils, as love bows a strong man, failed to win more than a passing glance from him. The most beautiful thing, to him, in the woods was a huge old chestnut tree, bristling all over with open burs, its enormous limbs stretching far and wide, and the ground under it thick with long yellow leaves.

He came in sight of this tree, uttered a quick exclamation, and hurried on. A basket stood on the stonework of the bridge, and two girls were busy among the leaves picking up chestnuts.

I cannot permit any one to say or think one word against Virginia or Ellen for thus deliberately meeting this gentleman that afternoon. It was not the careless act of two thoughtless girls, ready to amuse themselves at any cost, but a thing they had both considered over and resolved on. To Virginia, her father's letter was almost a command. He expected her to see and like this man, who was his bosom friend, and this out-door acquaintance was all she could offer him without openly accepting the false position given her in that house. That she could not and would

not do. But chance had thrown this man, whom her father loved, into her companionship. Without formal introduction, they had met, conversed, and fallen into cordial relations. Why should she refuse to see him again? Why deprive herself of the only happiness that had crossed her dreary path since that terrible shipwreck? To her there seemed to be something providential in the accident that had thrown them together. She felt it a sacred duty to know and like the man who seemed to come to her with a message from the dead. Of course Virginia did not understand the full meaning of that letter as Brooks understood it. To her those hints and broken sentences, which he connected with previous conversations, were vague and might have applied to fifty things of which she was ignorant. They really made no impression on her mind more than the rest of the letter. Cora had understood everything at the first glance, but the purer and better girl never dreamed that her father had for years selected Clarence Brooks as her husband.

So there really was nothing unmaidenly in the fact that she went, deliberately and with throbs of pleasant expectation, down to the woods that afternoon. She had seen Brooks riding off with Cora in the morning from her chamber window, and a strange feeling of sadness came over her at the sight. It was hard to know that another person was usurping her place—harder than she had ever felt it before. Cora's clear, ringing laugh came back to where she stood as she rode gaily down the drive. They were splendidly mated, she could not deny that, and a finer couple could not have been found within a hundred miles. But her heart sank and a sense of the wrong done her grew bitter as death in her bosom. She was restless all that morning, and when she spoke the tears rushed so close to her eyes that Ellen grew sad at heart every time she looked up from her writing.

So the two girls kept their promise and went down to the stone bridge, innocent as birds, and came back almost as happy. Such a day for nutting did not often present itself, yet so little had been done in reality. There had been another long conversation among the ferns and a visit to the frost grape-vine, which Virginia sketched on a bit of Bristol board taken from her memorandum book, with a touch and finish that made Brooks doubly ashamed of the scrap he had thrown away.

Would she give it to him? Why, of course, that was what she had taken it for. Not worth offering, but if he liked it, she would bring down materials to-morrow and sketch the bridge and cabin, with that dear old chestnut tree, just as it was. Some time, perhaps, it would serve to remind him of her and Ellen.

So, in this innocent fashion, a meeting was arranged for the next day. It took a long time, I must confess, to gather up all the chestnuts, though the pile in the log cabin grew larger and larger every day for a full week. Then work grew rather dull in the woods. The frost grapes were a resource, but grapes would not last forever, deliciously ripe as the clusters were, and when they gave out, what was to be done? Brooks bethought himself of a pic-nic for three, all the preparations to be left for his superintendence, and some fishing in the brook the day after, for he solemnly believed that trout were to be found higher up the ravine. At any rate, it was worth trying. On second thought, they would have the fishing first, and after that the pic-nic; the trout would be so nice cooked by a fire in the woods, that was, if they caught any. Virginia scarcely believed that there was trout in the brook. But then, to be sure, she had been away for so many years that some change was to be expected.

Well, the next afternoon was devoted to exploring the brook; poles had been provided, and a case of flies quite

enchanted the girls as a matter of high art. So away the trio went up the banks of the brook, casting out their lines and dancing the flies about after a fashion that would have fascinated the most wary trout to his undoing, if any fish of the kind had taken shelter in those bright waters. But coquettes without beaus, and artistic flies in a stream which produces nothing but shiners and pin-fishes, must necessarily be at a discount. Still it is hard to discourage a man who in his heart expects nothing.

Clarence Brooks expressed himself as hopeful that plenty of trout could be found higher up the stream, and the girls, having great faith in his judgment, acquiesced. If they caught nothing at last, it was no fault of his. Besides, a fine, breezy walk, with bright, ripe leaves showering over them at every step, was compensation enough for any fatigue they might have felt. So, after all, the fishing excursion was not exactly a failure. Indeed, but for the shame of it, Virginia would have pronounced the whole affair a brilliant success.

As for Brooks, he went home that night and instead of going up to the house, where Cora sat ready to charm him with unlimited music, such music too! he spent the whole evening alone on that back stoop, so lost in thought that the cigar went out between his lips, and it was midnight before he became aware of it.

CHAPTER XL.

CLARENCE BROOKS TALKS CONFIDENTIALLY TO CORA LANDER.

CORA SEYMOUR—we cannot honestly call her Lander, though others did—had her fit of abstraction also. She

had been in the drawing room all the evening, anxious, feverish, indignant. In all those days she had made no head way with this strange man, Clarence Brooks. Their morning rides had been bright, cheerful, exhilarating as ever. He had spent almost every evening in her company, when she had charmed him with the brilliancy of her music and fascinated him by her conversation. Still the man's heart seemed no nearer to her than ever. She did not want his admiration, that was not enough, but his whole being—that intellect which so overmastered her own, compelling such homage as she had never given to human being before—the heart, proud, tender, honest. She wanted absolute power over this man, to enslave him with her love, tie him down with ten thousand meshes woven by her crafty mind and burning heart. She cried out to herself as Cleopatra questioned her handmaid:

"Did I ever love Seymour like this?"

Her imperious nature answered exultantly:

"Never, never; that was not love. The mad passion of a mad heart lifted him to my level for a brief time, but had no power to hold him there. He is coming, I hear his step on the gravel. No, no, it is the heavy animal, Joshua Hurd. How I loathe that man! He will not come to-night. But to-morrow we ride again. How his absence stings me! I asked him to come—implored him! He only smiled, but promised nothing!"

She walked that spacious room hurriedly up and down, round and round, like a wild leopardess in its den. Fight against it as she would, the knowledge that she was a married woman tortured her. A hoop of diamonds concealed her wedding ring; even in her waning love some romantic fancy had induced her to put it's duplicate with the lock of hair which she had given her husband when he set forth on this journey westward—a journey for which she could find no reason. He was not well, certainly, but that offered no

excuse for this prolonged delay. A sort of vague respect for the sanctity of her marriage vow had kept the ring on her finger, but this evening she took it off, guard and all, and, darting through the French window on to the colonnade, hurled them both into the night with a gesture of absolute loathing.

It was ten o'clock now, and there was no hope that Brooks would come, so her heart leaped forth to the morning, when she was sure to see him.

Once in her own room, she locked the door with an angry twist of the key, and sat down by her desk with hot red upon her cheeks and hot fire in her eyes.

She wrote a letter to Seymour—a harsh, cruel, bitter epistle—reproaching him for the advantage he had taken of her youth and inexperience. She told him, in sharp words, that she did not love him, never had loved him, and from the depths of her heart hated the idea of ever seeing him again. “Go,” it said, “go to Montana, to Oregon, to the Indies, any place where the English language is not spoken or civilized rites recognized. I will send you money for this purpose to an unlimited extent, make you rich enough to satisfy the ambition of any man, but never on this earth let me hear your voice again, never take the name of wife, as regards me, between your lips, for I will perish rather than recognize myself as your wife.”

The letter was entirely in this strain. All the disappointment and venom of a bad heart she threw upon the paper, blindfold as to its consequences. For the time, the cunning and craft of her nature were swept away. This man was an impediment; he had snared her in the first wild impulses of her youth, and she found a keen pleasure in hurling defiance at him.

The letter once written she treated it like an enemy, struck its folds down to the table with her clenched hands, then dropped burning wax upon it, which she stamped fiercely under a seal ring which he had given her.

When all this was done, the cold craft which underlaid the rash passion asserted itself.

“Not yet,” she muttered, “but it shall be, though it were like tearing shackles from my wrists with red-hot pincers. It shall be done, but warily, warily. With gold and courage I shall find my way out.”

She closed her desk and locked it, first securing the compartment in which the letter was placed with a tiny key, which formed an ornament to her chatelaine.

After this the woman went to bed, and lay awake all night planning such plans and thinking such thoughts as take all the youth out of a human life.

Clarence Brooks came at his usual hour in the morning. He was graver than usual, and placed the woman, whose eyes were fixed upon him with such earnest meaning, in her saddle without looking in her face. For a time they rode on in silence. There might have been some cause for this depression in the heavy air and clouded sky which overshadowed the beautiful woods and crisp fields with a gloom which took away half their brilliancy.

“You seem depressed this morning,” said Cora, reining her horse up to that on which Clarence Brooks sat, upright and thoughtful, looking straight before him. “Is it this dull sky, or has something happened?”

“It is not exactly the sky, though we have ridden under those that were brighter—nor is it that anything has happened; but I received a letter this morning which has set me to thinking of unpleasant subjects.”

“Are they such as a very sincere friend may not share?” she asked, sweetly. “I am low-spirited enough myself to sympathize with anything sad.”

“I think it is the saddest thing in the world to meet with ingratitude where one has loved, and treachery in reward for honest confidence.”

“And is this your case?”

"I will tell you, Miss Lander, for it is a thing that has troubled me not a little, and I am in doubt how to act. You remember something that I told you about my illness in the East?"

"Yes, I remember every word you ever said to me."

She spoke impressively and with a slight tremor in her voice. He turned on his saddle and looked at her earnestly a moment. She felt the blood rising to her cheeks, and, with a sudden impulse of that modesty which springs from genuine feeling, made her horse wheel half round, thus taking her face out of view.

"I remember about the illness, certainly. It was strange enough to fasten all its details on the mind."

"You will then recollect that I spoke of hearing the rustle of papers."

"Yes. It was very singular."

"Those papers were bills of exchange on America to the amount of twenty thousand dollars."

"Twenty thousand dollars, just that sum?"

"This was how they happened to be with me in the East. I had intended to go directly to America, but learning that your father had come to Europe, changed my plans and set forward to the Holy Land, without disturbing the bills of exchange, which I determined to use at a later period. These bills were taken from my desk when I was supposed to be dead, by a young man whom I had loved and trusted as a brother."

"Your servant?" questioned Cora, in a low voice.

"No; I had never in my life considered him in any light but that of a friend and travelling companion. He was introduced and recommended to me by a person in whom I had perfect trust. Handsome, accomplished, genial in his character, I had no reason to doubt him, though, from his own confession, he had been a little wild in early youth, which he seemed to regret sincerely. He was, in fact, a

petted favorite, and we travelled together as friends; but, in spite of all that, he abandoned me on what he believed to be my death-bed, plundering my desk of these bills before he went."

"It was an ungrateful act," said Cora; "an unaccountable act in the man you describe."

"The more so," answered Brooks, "because he always had charge of all the money intended for our travelling expenses, and was never questioned regarding it. That money was left. Yet there was enough to have tempted his cupidity."

"Can you account for this?"

"In no way but one. From the time we left Italy the aim and hope of his life seemed to be a voyage to America. He spoke of it incessantly, and made various efforts to break up our trip to the East, that we might go earlier than I proposed."

"You spoke of being in Italy with this ungrateful man. In what part?"

"We were staying at Sarento; I was not well, and liked the place. He was much at Naples, and spent some time in the neighborhood of Gaeta, where he met a party of interesting strangers, some of them American ladies, I fancy, for after that he became wild to visit that country."

"At what period was this?"

"I remember the date well, for I started with him and went up to Rome in advance. He did not join me till six weeks after. It was on the first of June, 18—."

Cora's horse swerved from the road. She struck him violently; so violently that he reared and came down with a force which would have thrown a less firm horsewoman over his head. Brooks dashed up, and, seizing her bridle at the curb, brought the horse's head down upon his chest.

"Are you hurt? What started him? Don't be frightened, he seems quiet enough now."

She was white as marble, and her eyes were turned away from him.

"I am neither hurt nor frightened, thank you," she answered, in a voice so deep and husky that he could not believe her words.

"I am afraid—I am sure you deceive yourself, Miss Lander. Why there is not a gleam of color in your face!"

"That is nothing. He startled me a little, I confess. It was the suddenness. One is not prepared for everything, you know."

She laughed a sharp, ringing laugh, that cut to his ear like an arrow, and turned her white face full upon him, as if to brave the severest scrutiny.

He shook his head and looked more and more anxious.

"This sort of thing makes one a little hysterical, I suppose," she said, more quietly, "though I hate to own it. Come, let us ride on; we are losing the best part of the morning."

Brooks loosened his hold on the bridle, and patted the pony's neck as he arched it again.

"He does not seem in the least vicious. What could have frightened him so?"

"No matter," she answered, moving on; "I am not to be surprised again."

They rode on in silence some ten minutes, then she was the first to speak.

"You did not tell me all. Have you ever seen or heard of this man who robbed you since?"

"Yes, I have seen him twice, and heard news of him only this morning."

"Oh, that seems interesting. When was it that you saw him?"

"Some weeks ago. He was in the Central Park, driving as handsome a pair of chestnut horses as I ever set eyes on."

"Alone?"

"Yes, he was quite alone, and driving himself."

"And the next time? You see I am getting quite curious about this handsome culprit. I think you said he was handsome?"

"Very. I think, in my whole life, I never saw a more perfect specimen of physical beauty. He was clever, too, in a certain way—had a great deal of fanciful taste, and all the telling accomplishments which take so with ladies. But, to do him justice, he seemed to regard these things very little, and rather avoided the popularity they gave him with the sex."

"He must have been a singularly interesting person."

"He was; I loved him almost as if he had been my brother. Even now I find myself making excuses for him. Some powerful temptation must have possessed him—of that I am certain."

"I think you said that you had seen him twice?"

"Yes, but it was under very doubtful circumstances. A person who had loved and observed him less might have been deceived. I was not, though he was carefully disguised. The next morning after seeing him in the Park, I almost ran against him while entering the bank on which my letters of credit were drawn."

"Indeed! when was that?"

"Just six weeks ago to-morrow."

"In the morning, did you say?"

"Yes, not half an hour after the bank opened. He had just presented a draft and drawn out most of the funds that he had left on deposit. The date and signature of the draft and its regular endorsement would have convinced ordinary observers that he was far away from New York, but I was sure of my man."

"Did you follow him?"

"Yes; the carriage which brought me was at the door; I

got into it at once and kept my friend in sight. He entered an omnibus, left it and took another, got out and walked, then suddenly entered a singular house in — street, using a latch-key. It must have been his home."

"Then you had him in your power."

"I knew where he was, certainly, for I took the number."

"And made no use of the knowledge."

"How could I? the man had been my friend, I had aided him, liked him. He had some fine qualities. Was I to degrade him forever for a few thousand dollars?"

"You are a generous man!" exclaimed Cora with quick admiration. "It is the grand character, after all, which wakes up all the homage of one's nature."

After her first exclamation, she had spoken like one in a deep reverie.

"There was no great generosity in leaving this man to his fate. I had no purpose of revenge to gratify."

"Then you have no thought of arresting him?"

"If I had, the thing would be easy enough, for I know where he is at this moment."

"Indeed!"

"A party of my friends are going out to the great prairies, buffalo hunting. This man joined them at St. Joseph, in Missouri. They mention him in their letters as the pleasantest fellow in the world."

"Are you certain it is the same man?"

"Quite certain; he wears a seal ring that I gave him, an antique that I got at Thebes, which one of my friends, who has a fancy for such matters, describes to me minutely. There is not another ring like it in America. Besides, there is no mistaking the account he gives of the person. Then, again, I have reason to believe he went West. When I was in town searching for a good saddle horse, I came across the pair of chestnuts that I had admired so

much in the Park. It was these horses which first drew my attention to the man. They were at a livery stable; the keeper of the stable said that he had just received a letter from their owner, who wrote from the West, ordering them to be sold and the money transmitted to St. Joseph."

They had been walking their horses while this conversation was going on, but all at once Cora drew her bridle.

"Thank you for the story," she said. "Notwithstanding your rare magnanimity, the fellow seems but a very commonplace plunderer after all. Now, I would have gone to you at once, thrown myself on your mercy and given up all. But such courage as that belongs to great manliness, and that the creature never had."

"No, Miss Lander, he never would have had courage enough for that, though I cannot exactly see how you should understand him so well."

"Why all that you have said proves it, Mr. Brooks. But we are allowing this very worthless person to abridge our ride. See, the sun is breaking out. Let us try this stretch of level road and have a race for it. A pair of gloves that Blackbird wins!"

Away she went, challenging him with a clear, silvery laugh, that seemed never to have known what a spasm of the throat meant; but there was what seemed to her an absolute girdle of iron around her chest when that laugh broke from it, and nothing but fierce motion kept her from crying out that this pain was killing her.

"There," she said, five minutes after, drawing Blackbird up so suddenly that he staggered backward on his haunches with his chest flecked with foam and drops of blood about the bit, "I have won the gloves. Now let us ride along like Christians!"

She reeled upon her saddle as the last words died on her lips, and would have fallen, but Brooks pressed his horse close to hers and supported her with his arm.

"I—I am faint—it was imprudent—let us go home," she faltered, leaning her head against him.

"Rest a moment as you are," he answered, gently. "I feared this spirited creature would tire you out."

She closed her eyes, and up through all the anguish in her bosom a soft smile came trembling to those pale lips.

"Are you better, Miss Lander?"

She neither answered nor moved her head, but the smile died out. His position was an irksome one, and there had been a shade of impatience in his voice, which she felt keenly.

"Yes, thank you, I *am* better," she said, after a moment. "The air is very close—this swift motion has made me giddy. How far are we from home? I have not noticed much."

"Four or five miles, perhaps. Have you strength to return? I will ride close to your horse and keep him steady."

"Thank you—oh, yes, I shall be able to manage the distance. If I only had a glass of water now."

"We passed a house a quarter of a mile back; I will get you a glass of water there. Come, Blackbird."

Cora slowly wheeled her horse around, and in a few minutes reached a little one-story house close by the road. Here a glass of water was obtained, and after that they returned home almost in silence. Brooks asked if she felt better, now and then, with that tender sympathy of manner which made a strong contrast with his sterner qualities, and she answered him gratefully, as proud women sometimes will when doubtful of their power.

When they reached home, Brooks lifted Cora from the pony, and, throwing an arm around her, almost carried her into the drawing-room. There he placed her in a curve of one of the broad couches and arranged the cushions for her to lean against.

She accepted these attentions with a wan smile, and taking his hand as it was withdrawn from the cushions, held it close between both hers, looking at him with a mute appeal as if claiming some deeper sympathy than he had yet given her.

"Shall I ring for wine, or anything?" he said. "Perhaps your aunt had better be called?"

"By no means; I am well enough," she answered, rising slowly from among the cushions. "You are in haste to be gone, I see."

"Not if I can serve you in anything."

"But you cannot; I have only to rid myself of this heavy dress and lie down awhile. Good-morning, and many thanks. Shall I see you this evening?"

"I shall certainly come to inquire after your health."

He was gone. Cora ran up stairs, fell upon the bed and lay there motionless.

CHAPTER XLI.

WOMANLY FASCINATIONS.

CORA LANDER lay still a full half hour. No sob stirred her bosom, not a tear reached the feverish hotness of her eyes. Her very hands thrown upward above the pillows were white and still. But for this death in life—this stupor following suppressed excitement, the woman must have gone mad or died.

At last she started from the bed, threw up the window and let the cold air blow over her neck and bosom, tearing her habit open with both hands to give it free course. There was hail in the air, which fell cold and hard as shot on her delicate skin. But she received it with a sob of

satisfaction. It cooled the fever of her blood. How she had struggled against herself—how she had endured—it made her faint to think of it. But she had performed that awful task bravely. He guessed nothing, dreamed of nothing that was going on in her heart while they were talking so quietly. Still he seemed to pity her, thinking that she suffered only from paltry fright brought on by a restive horse. What would he have thought or felt had he known the miserable truth?

"But he never shall! he never shall!" she exclaimed, holding fast to the window-sill and leaning out into the storm. "I will keep the disgrace close as death, secret as the grave; no human being shall ever know what a fool I have been. I will break this thing off, crush it under my feet, tear it out of my life! The villain, the double-dyed villain! The weak, miserable cheat! Great Heavens! and I am that man's wife! His legally wedded wife!"

She drew her head in from the window. Beads of hail lay thickly in her hair and melted on her neck. She shook with cold now, and threw off her wet habit. Wrapping herself in a zephyr shawl of soft white wool, she crouched, like a wild animal, in a corner of a tête-à-tête, and strove to gather up her thoughts.

"Shall I let him know? Shall I load him with the scorn and hatred which makes me despise myself? Shall I forbid him ever to look upon me again? He loves me madly, more madly than I ever thought possible. It might drive him to suicide—I think it would. But the letter found upon him would betray all. I am hampered on every side. What can I do? How free myself? If I could see him once, and kill him with words I dare not write. Yes, that is it—I will do nothing. When he waits day after day, and receives no letter, this mad love will bring him back, spite of everything. Then I will see him—oh! yes, I will see him!"

The cruel scorn that stirred within her broke forth in words here and lifted that beautiful upper lip from the white teeth as a wild animal shows its instinct of hate. She arose from the tête-à-tête, unlocked the desk and took out the cruel epistle written, to her shame, before the knowledge of that day came to her; lighting a small lamp that stood upon her desk, she held this letter over its flame till it shrivelled up and fell in a shower of black flakes from her hand.

"It was a relief to write it," she muttered. "Oh! how I wish it were not madness to send it! Sitting still and doing nothing is the hardest of all."

After this, Cora became more calm, and, huddled in the soft network of her shawl, held counsel with herself. On reviewing her position, she found less cause for regret in it than a first passionate view had revealed. So long as Clarence Brooks was in the neighborhood of New York, Seymour would never return unless some overpowering inducement drew him into a place full of danger. But, with no letters from her, he might return any day. How was she to act then? Break him down with the weight of her own indignation—overwhelm him with scorn—convince him so thoroughly of her loathing, that he would have no heart or power ever to seek her again. She remembered then that the marriage certificate was in her own possession, and, better still, the name and residence of the clergyman only known to herself and Alice Ruess, to whom was consigned the duty of finding him. The cook, Lubin, was not informed in this matter. Seymour, she remembered now, had never looked at the certificate.

Cora thought over all these points with deliberate coolness, and asked herself how it had happened that all the proofs of her marriage lay so completely under her own control. Had some latent caution been at work all the time under the overweening passion that had expired so

soon and so entirely? Had she ever thought of repudiating him in those days?

No, there had been no absolute design in the girl's mind; she was too madly infatuated for that. But, crafty by nature, she had acted with unconscious craft even then, and fairly hugged herself when the memory of all the precautions she had taken presented itself. There was one person who must be got out of the way—two, in fact—Alice Ruess and Lubin. She would attend to that; no time should be lost.

After pondering these things over in her mind hour after hour, Cora prepared to dress for the evening, when Clarence Brooks had promised to come. The dinner hour had long since passed, and it was getting dusk. Hail was rattling against the window, and a mournful sound of dead leaves came up from the grounds, carried off by the wind, which seemed to moan over them. All this made her shudder. She rang the bell and ordered a strong cup of tea. That would give her strength and brilliancy. Brilliancy! She felt a thousand years old! Would a feeling of true youthfulness ever come back to her? A mirror stood opposite her seat, swinging between two gilded figures that seemed to hold it in place with their hands. Did the thoughts which shook her so belong to that beautiful girl, with all her rich hair loosened into sumptuous disorder, and the weary young face resting on that small hand, which the waves of hair half concealed? How delicate and pale and wild-eyed the girl in the glass looked. There was something weird about her which a man like Brooks would shrink from. Yes, a cup of strong tea would change all that; if not, there was plenty of champagne in the cellar, and that always invigorated her.

A dress of purple silk hung in a wardrobe in the next room, she would wear that—nothing should induce her to put on black for that one evening. Everything, out doors

and in, was gloomy enough without that. This purple dress had the bloom of a ripe plum rippling over it in waves. She would wear some delicate lace about her neck and run a white ribbon through the folds of her hair, with a blush rose in the knot. He might think strange of it, but she was weary of presenting herself before him in eternal black.

It is wonderful how soon the thoughts of a young person can be diverted from all sources of annoyance by pretty trifles of the toilet. Even a woman like this gives way to such weaknesses quite as readily as the innocent of heart.

"I will think of him no more," she said, pushing back her hair with both hands; "'sufficient to the day is the evil thereof.' When the time comes for action I will act; I shall find myself sufficient for the occasion when it arrives. After making myself mistress here, unquestioned almost, there is little that I need despair of doing."

With these thoughts floating in her mind, she folded her arms in the shawl, fell back against the cushions of her seat and was soon in a profound slumber.

A servant came up with some tea, but, seeing her position, went away again, walking on tiptoe.

Clarence Brooks came later in the evening, and found Cora radiant. The purple dress seemed rippling with chain lightning as she passed under the chandeliers; the sparkle of champagne was in her eyes; the glow of almond flowers suffused her cheeks. Brooks had never seen her in colors before, at least by gas-light. She was indeed a creation of rare beauty.

"I need not ask if you are suffering—never did I see an appearance of health more perfect," he said, taking the hand she held out.

She drew him toward the couch, where the cushions he had brought for her still lay in confusion.

"Sit down," she said, seating herself in an easy chair

close by the couch. "It is chilly this evening; you will not find a hickory-wood fire oppressive. No, indeed, I will arrange the cushions for you now. Do I look like a patient?"

"Like an houri, rather. What a strange girl you are! Why, this morning, I really thought you would be ill."

"No," she said, leaning her arm on the head of his couch and dropping her hand carelessly downward till the fingers touched his hair, "my sympathies are troublesome enough, but in your case they shall not make me ill."

"You felt for me, then, in my bitter disappointment regarding this man?"

"Felt for you! Did I seem to feel? But we must not talk of it. I am resolved that nothing sad or grievous shall come between us to-night. Every thought given to this miserable person is a jewel thrown away."

He felt her hand upon his hair; he felt her breath floating over his face. This man was not very much better or worse than other men of honor and culture; all this had its effect upon him. The night was stormy and disagreeable outside; hail was beating upon the marble of the colonnade, and gushes of rain swept across the windows. The contrast with all that warmth and silken elegance, full of comfort as it was, made itself felt luxuriously.

That white hand dropped lightly as a snow-flake from his hair and fell down to a level with his mouth. He turned his head suddenly and kissed it. I think almost any other man would have done the same thing, tempted so; but instantly a rush of color came to his face, he started up from his lounging position and begged her pardon with great earnestness.

She smiled sweetly, looked down upon the flush of red his lips had left on the whiteness of her hand, and pressed her own lips upon it.

"This is how I forgive you," she said.

He looked at her a moment and sat down suddenly as if he had been shot.

"Have I shocked you with the punishment?" she questioned, shrinking back timidly. "Do you think the worse of me for that?"

"Think the worse of you—Heavens, no! Why ask the question?"

"You looked so serious."

"Would you have me look triumphant?"

"I—I have been very much to blame."

Tears stood upon her eyelashes. She was really distressed. He saw this, and strove, with delicate chivalry, to reassure her.

"Does the daughter of Amos Lander regret that she has been kind to his friend? Does she fear that he will presume upon it?"

"She fears nothing on this earth so much as losing his good opinion," she said, in a soft, low voice.

"That she never can. It is too firmly rooted. Why, you are trembling, dear child!"

"Am I?—not much—it is very foolish. Will you have some music—some battle-piece to harmonize with the storm?"

"No; let the tumult without take its own way. We will have nothing that is not sweet and pathetic. Shall I open the piano?"

"No; I will bring my guitar."

She went out of the room, ran up stairs, and came down again with a guitar in her hand.

"I must have a low seat," she said, drawing an ottoman close to the head of his couch and resting herself upon it like a Bird of Paradise. Her purple draperies swept far out on the carpet; the rose in her hair sent its perfume across her auditor's lips. There was no use in resisting the charm of her presence; he gave way to it, especially as she

did nothing to challenge admiration, but sat with downcast eyes and a sweet seriousness of demeanor, tuning her guitar.

She played a slow, tender little air at first, and after awhile joined in with her voice, which was sweet and sympathetic without being powerful. There was no attempt at anything superior. She played and sung naturally, but with such feeling that Brooks felt tears stealing into his eyes.

"That is too sad; the guitar is best for lively airs," she said, lifting her humid eyes to his, questioning him with them rather than with her voice.

"Not yet; do not make the transition too abrupt; the charm would be broken. What a sweet, plaintive voice you have."

She answered him with a grateful look. The desire to please was so intense that it absolutely made the haughty creature humble as a little child. Had this feminine spirit been upon her from the first, the struggle that had been going on in the heart of Clarence Brooks would probably never have existed. Be that as it will, for the time he yielded unresisting to the sympathetic feeling which her gentleness and grace excited, and listened to her music with half-closed eyes, doubting if he really knew his own heart, and had not done grave injustice to the lovely creature at his feet.

Cora was not unobservant. From under those fringed eyelids she cast many a look at the noble face, which the fire-light shone upon so fitfully, and felt that her hour of triumph was fast approaching. What would she do with it? Of what avail the conquest she was almost sure of? Was she not that other man's wife? "No, no, no, a thousand times no!" she said in her heart. He had committed a gross fraud in marrying her, had made himself amenable to the law, degraded himself forever. She had been infat-

uated, insane, but not in love with him. All that was a delusion. How could it have been love when she hated him so now? When this new feeling was so different?

This new feeling! Alas, alas, had it come to that? Yes, the haughty creature had found her master passion when it was all too late. She would not believe it, but hoped yet to wrest happiness out of the future, reasoning, as wicked women will, that the one great fault in her husband absolved her from all the obligations of her marriage vow—obligations that the world should never know. This woman, in the grander and nobler passion, as she deemed it, which possessed her now, found excuses for treachery, injustice, and even crime. Had he not deserved all this? Was Alfred Seymour worthy of a moment's consideration? How had he dealt with her?

Exactly as she had dealt with him in her rash, passionate selfishness—if she could only have seen it. But vanity and arrogance would not permit her to look clearly on her own conduct.

It was singular that, in the intense scorn that she really felt for her husband's crime, her own more deadly offence never once presented itself as far outmatching his. She was a usurper in that house; an impostor; a woman who made her beauty the accessory of a fraud whose least crime had been greater than his, because unrepented of, yet she dared to arraign and despise him. The creature was sincere in all this; her crime seemed only the action of great ability—the proof of an intellect born to control circumstances. The woman almost turned her fraud into poetry and gloried in the genius that carried it out. She was thinking these things over as that soft music flowed from her lips.

CHAPTER XLII.

A AUTUMN PIC-NIC IN THE WOODS.

ON the next day, that pic-nic in the woods came off, and a pleasant affair it was. The brook that filled the ravine with its music found its source in a spring that came from a ledge of rocks, high up on a slope of the hills, back of the Lander grounds. This ledge was one broad table of granite, sloping inward some ten feet, where a shelf of stone shot out, cleft by a fissure from the upper rock, and from that long break in the stone the spring leaped forth and poured itself over the granite shelf in one transparent sheet of crystal. These bright waters were gathered below the ledge into one of the loveliest little rocky pools you ever set eyes on. Soft sand with pebbles, white as snow, gleamed up from the bottom, and jagged points of rock held it in, covered with that delicate moss which finds its highest green in the crystal of ever-falling water drops. Here the sheltering banks and overhanging trees had kept away the frost, and all the pool was bordered with tall ferns, spear-like rushes and broad-leaved water plants, turning red about the edges. Some lily pads, too, floated like sheeted emeralds on the water, and the ledge above the little cataract was fringed with maiden-hair, sarsaparilla and other rock-clinging plants, which sent their trailing vines now and then to the very outgush of the waters, rippling them into ridges of silver as they prepared for a plunge into the pool.

A perfect bower of hemlocks, pines, and feathery larches bent over and twined themselves about this ledge, so completely closing it on all sides except the one which opened to the ravine, that twenty people could have taken shelter there undiscovered.

Into this delicious retreat Clarence Brooks came with the

two girls who had so often been his companions of late, after a long ramble through the woods. There really was no tiring youth out in a day like this, for the sky overhead was blue as blue could be, and the clear, silvery sunshine gave it a luminous softness never witnessed in the hot summer time, when out-door excursions are most in vogue.

They came up to the ledge, these three persons, and sat down on its brink, very cheerful and happy, but rather more silent than usual. The truth was, Clarence Brooks had lost a good deal of his playful self-possession since that first day under the chestnut tree. Many things troubled him, and for some days a struggle had gone on in his life which no one dreamed of but himself. It was over now and his resolution taken. But he was anxious, and so grave that Ellen, who had won a high place in the general companionship, asked him more than once what it was which made him so serious. He answered with some light evasion, but soon fell into his quiet mood again.

He was thinking of a downcast face drooping with such feminine modesty over a guitar, which uttered its sweet complainings under a hand that had half challenged half repelled his kiss. He was thinking, more seriously yet, of the dear old friend whose most sacred wishes he was about to sacrifice. Was it right? Was it generous? Did the girl really love him, as every look and word that evening seemed to imply?

He remembered the look, so full of gentle love-light, which she had lifted to his face at parting—the pressure of her hand, which had nestled itself like a bird into his. He remembered, too, how wistfully she had gazed after him when he went out into the storm. He could see her yet, standing in the French window, purpling the golden light behind her like a cloud, the masses of ruddy hair sweeping back from her head, bent slightly forward as it peered into the darkness. Why would this picture haunt him so? On

that day, too, when he had determined on a step which should drive all such thoughts from his mind.

These reflections had possessed him as he waited for the girls under the chestnut tree and amused himself with flinging clusters of the open burs into the brook, which bore them onward as if the rough things were a burden. He could not shake them off after those young creatures came, looking bright as flowers and happy as birds. The spirit of Amos Lander seemed to reproach him for the purpose that lay in his heart.

This was the reason of the seriousness for which Ellen half rebuked him. He threw it off with the vigor of a strong mind giving itself to an honest idea and was himself again as they came out upon the ledge. Here some moss-cushioned stones had been rolled into place, forming seats around a broad, flat stone, which had fallen from the embankment above, and answered capitally for a table.

"Under that broad hemlock branch which sweeps so close to the ground you will find a basket, with lots of things which belong to the housekeeping," said Brooks, looking around well pleased. "My duties lie somewhere back of this pile of rocks."

The girls laughed, and began to loop their dresses high up on their snowy skirts and roll the sleeves back from their white arms ready for work.

That broad hemlock branch, which spread itself along the earth like a banner, concealed a world of choice articles. First came a basket, which gave out a warning rattle of china striking against silver or steel, all buried under a table-cloth and a pile of napkins. This was soon disposed of, and directly that great flat stone loomed up from the centre of the ledge, like a snow-drift, and the girls were busy as bees laying plates, arranging knives and forks, opening little jars of jelly and pickles, unrolling biscuits and discovering little pats of butter stamped with tiny

birds, and all sorts of dainties that were constantly taking them by surprise and bringing forth exclamations of delight.

When all was arranged, the girls began to wonder what had become of Mr. Brooks. They had heard the crash of a breaking stick now and then, denoting his presence somewhere in the neighborhood, and now a curl of blue smoke, floating in and out of the hemlock branches, excited their curiosity. They stole to the verge of the table rock and looked over. Nothing but a silvery flash of water met the view in that direction, but to the right, standing before the hollow of an old oak, whose half dead branches stretched far and wide, bristling through the pines and hemlocks like broken spears, they saw Mr. Brooks. He was hard at work before a fire made of chips and dry branches, turning half-a-dozen lengths of twine attached to a horizontal branch overhead, on which as many woodcocks were spinning round and round, raining drops of gravy on the yellow leaves underneath at every turn. He looked up and saw the girls watching him from the ledge.

"Don't be impatient," he called out; "they are almost done."

Then he gave a twirl to the threads of twine all round, and fell to his task again. The girls enjoyed the sight amazingly.

"Wouldn't it be delicious to spend one's life so," said Virginia, pressing her hands softly together. "I wonder if we shall ever be so happy again?"

"Who knows?" Ellen answered, smiling in her usual quiet way, which was at all times a little sad. "But why not? Nature is the only thing in creation that eternally renews itself. So long as the world lasts she will prove the same."

"Why, how gravely you talk, Ellen! It is not Nature which makes us so—makes everything so pleasant. These

woods are gloomy enough with the rich leaves all turning brown as dust, if a weary heart goes with them. You remember the first day we came here, how grandly all the foliage was colored, how warm and bright the sunshine was. Yet we were very sad."

Ellen looked up with a bright smile in her eyes.

"What is it then that makes the change?" she asked.

A vivid blush rose to Virginia's face; she looked away, far down a vista of the wood, and answered softly that she was sure she did not know. Then Ellen dropped her eyes and sighed very faintly. This love was a mournful study for her, poor thing. She might witness it, feel it, dream of it, but who was ever known to love a girl deformed as she was? Who could understand the true, warm heart and great brain fettered to a form like that?

No wonder Ellen sighed and longed to go away into the woods and sit alone when the happy face of her mistress brought reflections like these into her mind. But why did the heart in her bosom grow heavier and heavier day by day? God help the girl! Did she too love the man who had come so strangely into their lives? or was it only the yearning of her woman's nature for a little of the affection which she saw lavished upon others?"

"Will some one bring me a plate?—I cannot leave the birds," called out a voice from the fire.

Ellen started to her feet, and, snatching a plate from the table, ran down to the oak and received the woodcocks upon it as they were cut loose from the twine that held them.

"Splendidly done—now carry them up, while I go after the fruit and wine," cried Brooks, gaily.

Ellen went up to the rock, carrying the plate of birds steadily between her hands. Brooks went down to the little cataract, and, from under the broad leaves of some water plant that grew among the ferns, brought forth a basket of grapes and delicate lady-apples, with a long-

necked bottle, capped with tin-foil. The spring water had acted like ice upon them, and the first rare bloom lay on the grapes like a frost.

Cora had sent a quantity of cut flowers from the greenhouse to the little hotel that morning, and Brooks had garlanded the basket with them, after his own taste, mingling the scent of roses with the rich odor of the grapes. Perhaps Cora might not have liked this, had she known it, but the party on the ledge considered that basket a crowning glory of the feast.

That was a delicious meal—sharp appetites, the clear autumnal sunshine and soft air of a genial Indian Summer made it perfect. Three children at play in the woods could not have enjoyed themselves more naturally. Even Ellen Nolan came out in force and astonished them with her rare flashes of wit. Brooks was getting to think the world and all of Ellen Nolan—there was something so fresh and sincere about her. Then the bright things that fell from her lips were coupled with words of absolute wisdom, such as only come from keen observation and deep thinking. Sometimes the little creature positively startled him with her sayings.

After the feast was over, and all its fragments packed away except the basket of fruit, which they carried off into the deeper shadows of the rock, Ellen stole off alone, and, letting herself down to the edge of the pool, on which the sunshine shimmered bright as quicksilver, fell to throwing leaves and fragments of wood into the water, giving herself up to gentle thoughtfulness. She had got into her ideal world, and was fashioning a romance out in her mind, smiling or frowning to herself as the scenes she imagined pained or pleased her.

The other two had found a seat far back on the ledge, sheltered by the boughs of a hemlock, that curved over them like a tent. Some conversation had already passed between them, for Brooks was speaking earnestly.

"If you can love me, Virginia, as I love you with all my heart and soul and strength, say it to me in words. I must feel the assurance thoroughly before the exactions of this heart will be satisfied. These blushes are sweet, dear child, and I love to feel your form trembling against my arm. But my love craves something more. Tell it me in words, darling. Can you love me?"

"I do! I do!"

She clasped the hands in her lap and lifted them up as a child does in prayer. Her eyes sought his and fell again, but half veiling the light that filled them; then her face fell forward, and she burst into a sweet passion of tears.

He drew her close to his bosom and kissed her for the first time in his life, gently as a mother kisses her first infant, almost doubting if it yet belongs to her.

Then they sat together in silence, or only uttered such broken words as great joy uses in expressing itself. After a time she drew herself softly from his arms and said, with a little anxiety:

"I have no property; you will marry a penniless girl.

"So much the better. I would far rather have it so than join poor Lander's vast wealth to my own. We shall not need it, dear child; I have enough."

"And you have chosen me, knowing how worse than penniless I am."

"I have chosen you with all my heart and soul, thinking and caring nothing for the rest. It was your uncle's wish that I should marry his child."

"His wish! Indeed—indeed!"

Virginia was greatly excited. It seemed as if, that moment, her father was close to them.

"And he wished it—he wished it! His blessing reaches me in spite of all."

Brooks remembered the vague distrust in Lander's letter, and applied this speech to that.

"If the departed really do know what passes here, my child, Lander has read your heart with a juster knowledge than he had on earth. Do not let it grieve you that great affection for his daughter blinded him a little."

"No, no, he never was unjust. He was good, wise, generous—the best man, I do think, that ever lived. You did not half know him, Mr. Brooks."

"He certainly did not know you."

"Indeed—indeed he loved me dearly—I cannot talk of it now, the subject is too sad; but some time, when I can have the power—when we are away from this place—I will tell you everything—you will believe me—I know that you will."

"Believe you! yes, against the angels themselves."

Then he drew her close to his heart again and soothed the agitation that seemed to have frightened all the joy from her heart.

It was a full hour before Ellen came up to the ledge again, but the lovers felt her presence as an intrusion, and would not believe it when she told them that the sun was almost setting. They went down the ravine almost in silence, and parted under the old chestnut. A few whispered words passed between the two, and he kissed the little hand she gave him while Ellen was looking over the side of the bridge to see if the ferns were all quite dead. When the two girls reached Virginia's room, Ellen found herself all at once held in a close embrace.

"My friend, my friend, thank God with me! It is for myself—my own, own self—that he loves me! Had I possessed my father's wealth there might have been a doubt. Now there is none. Oh! Ellen, how can I make you as happy as the last hour has made me? Child, child, tell me it is all real! Does it take you by surprise? Did you think for a moment that he loved me like that when we saw them riding out so gaily, morning after morning?"

Tell me the truth, Ellen, did you not think it was her he loved?"

"No, dear lady, I felt from the beginning that it was you."

"But I never would have met him so—why did you not tell me? It was like putting myself in his way."

"As he did not seem to feel that an impropriety, we need not grieve over it."

"Grieve! Why, Ellen, it seems to me as if there was no such thing as grief in the world. She has got my father's wealth, child, but, oh! how much richer I am than that can make her!"

"Did you tell him the truth, lady?"

"What, about the property? No; it will be time enough by-and-by, when we have nothing pleasanter to talk about. But you look grave—troubled. What is the matter, Ellen?"

"Nothing, lady; I am a little thoughtful, that is all."

"No, Ellen, there is something more than that."

"Does Mr. Brooks intend to tell your cousin of this?"

"Perhaps it was mentioned. But why should he wish to conceal it?"

"Lady, I think Cora Lander loves Mr. Brooks herself."

"Ellen!"

"It is the common talk of the house. But that is nothing; I have watched her closely, and have watched him too."

"Well, Ellen?"

"She is a girl of subtle power."

"I know that well, but what then?"

"She loves this man, and love with her will be stronger than ambition. If she knows of this engagement, evil will come of it."

Virginia turned deadly white.

"What could she do?"

"How can an honorable person tell what an unscrupulous one will do to accomplish a purpose?"

"Ellen! Ellen! you have hurt me! My heart was so light, and now it feels like marble. How can I protect myself from this girl?"

"Keep your engagement a profound secret."

"But how can I?"

"Easily enough. There is the old way of meeting every morning, if you like. For some cause, she never goes in that direction now. That cause will probably still keep her away."

"But he will see her in the morning; for some reason, he seems anxious to inform her and have everything settled. They are to ride out again to-morrow, and he will tell her then."

"Write him a note—ask him to delay it."

"No, Ellen, I cannot do that without giving a reason. Besides, what have I to fear? He will protect me. His love is enough for me to shelter under. Let us think no more of it; your great affection for me makes you over cautious, my friend."

"It may be so," Ellen said; "at any rate we must not keep ourselves miserable with doubts. I have made you look serious."

"Yes, a little; I cannot help it. Yesterday I had nothing more to lose; now I have nothing to gain. In his love God has given me back everything."

"And if she deprived you of that?"

"Don't, Ellen; I cannot think of it. That would be death."

"Do you love him so entirely?"

"Yes, Ellen. I would not have told you so yesterday, because I did not know. I thought perhaps that it was her, and was ashamed of the feeling that is my glory and blessing now. Like the poor Spartan boy, I should have

let my heart be torn in silence, and even you would never have guessed. But now I need not blush, though blushes will come in spite of one out of such feelings, just as perfume steals from a lily. But I need not blush with shame, at any rate, when you ask me this question. Yes, Ellen, I love him better than anything in the world; to me there is but one man on earth. But I am extravagant—words sound coarsely here. Yes, Ellen, I love him: our language can express no more.”

“Then, God make you happy,” said Ellen, solemnly. “Guarded by His love and this other love, all must be well.”

Virginia and Ellen usually took tea in their own room when Cora was at home. Indeed, at such times, they seldom appeared in the lower part of the house at all. Eunice had fallen into this arrangement, and, as neither Mrs. Lander nor Cora made objections, their isolation from the family had become almost complete. That evening they ate very little; Virginia, spite of the doubts that had been forced upon her, was far too happy for any thought of refreshment, and Ellen had evidently something on her mind which made her very serious. She went out with Eunice when she carried off the tray, whispering good-night to the happy young creature, whose greatest wish was to be alone with her memory and her dreams.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ELLEN NOLAN VISITS CLARENCE BROOKS.

ELLEN NOLAN was prompt, both in action and thought. Virginia, in the full security of a first passion, believed herself safe in the shelter of her lover's strength, but with

a presage of evil which sprang out of her own quick intelligence, and would not be shaken off, her friend resolved to meet the question herself. Putting on her black bonnet and shawl, she left the house, and, following the railway soon reached the little hotel where Clarence Brooks found a temporary home. Some men belonging to the station sat in front of the house. To avoid these persons, Ellen passed down on the opposite side, keeping in the shadow, crossed the road at the bridge, and came in sight of the little porch to which the sitting-room Clarence Brooks occupied opened. She drew nearer, saw him walking to and fro in the parlor, and, running lightly up the steps, knocked with her finger against the sash-door.

Brooks saw her through the glass, and opened the door at once, wondering what could have brought her there.

“I have come,” said Ellen, breathing hard, for she had walked rapidly; “I have come to ask a favor of you, Mr. Brooks.”

“There is nothing on earth that I will not grant you, Miss Ellen,” he said, cordially; “but first sit down and let me offer you a glass of wine.”

Ellen took the wine and drank it. She was a brave little creature, ready to go any lengths for the right; but Nature had left her feeble, and, at times, she felt this a great drawback on her exertions.

“Mr. Brooks, my young mistress has told me of—of—”

“She has told you that I love her, and hope to make her my wife. I suppose there is no secret in that; so you need not hesitate.”

“That is what I come to ask, Mr. Brooks. Will you let it be a secret?”

“Did you come from her? Does the lady wish it?” he questioned, in some surprise.

“No; I asked her permission; rather, I urged her to make the request, but she declined.”

"Then why do you ask it?"

"I cannot explain, Mr. Brooks, and you would not understand me if I did; but I ask this favor of you nevertheless, believing that your happiness and the welfare of Miss Lander depend on it."

"Miss Ellen, you surprise me a little. I have never known any good come from a secret yet."

"Indeed," answered Ellen. "What has this whole attachment sprung from but a succession of secret meetings?"

Brooks laughed. He rather enjoyed the sharp wit of Virginia's friend, and trusted her integrity entirely."

"But there was a reason for that."

"What was it pray, only that it was impossible to receive you at the house, without giving offence to her cousin?"

"Well, that was reason enough; but I do not fear to give offence when my honor requires it."

"But Miss Cora Lander has no right to your confidence. She is not her cousin's guardian."

"True; but Miss Virginia has a mother."

"Oh! Mr. Brooks, I implore you, let this thing rest a secret, as it has done. Mrs. Lander is a weak, selfish woman, in every way under the control of Cora. She would only do mischief. Believe me, when I solemnly tell you that the secrecy I ask is both honorable and wise."

"But it must be made known. I really would be glad to oblige you, Miss Ellen; but there are reasons why Miss Cora Lander should be informed of my engagement with her cousin at the earliest moment."

"I understand the reasons, Mr. Brooks."

"You!"

"Yes; and that is one motive for my coming here to-night. This much I may speak, Miss Virginia has been cruelly treated by her cousin."

"About property?"

"In every way. She dislikes her—hates her is nearer the truth. When she learns that her own hopes or fancies—call them as you like—have been thwarted—in secrecy too—by the person she has so wronged, her resentment will be terrible."

"We shall not fear it," said Brooks.

"But you will feel it."

"Miss Ellen, I think you are a little hard on Miss Cora Lander. She never has spoken a word to me about your lady that has not been more than kind."

"Oh, sir, do not believe in this; it is a part of her character."

"Hush! hush! Remember this lady is the daughter of my old friend. There has been some trouble, I know, between the cousins. Those things are common enough when great estates are settled, but they all come right in the end; at any rate, in this case, they are of no importance. I never wanted a dollar of Amos Lander's property, and, thank Heaven, do not want it now."

Ellen arose to go, sorrowful and disheartened.

"I thought it best to come," she said. "Knowing the truth myself, I hoped you would believe it: but I have only done mischief—God forgive me!"

"Don't look so sorrowful, child. At the worst you have done no harm. How earnest you are about this strange request."

"But you will not grant it?" she said, looking wistfully into his face.

"I would, child, but that I think it wrong to pass, in the household of my old friend, as a free man, when I am absolutely engaged to a lady under a roof that was once his. It seems like social treachery."

"Mr. Brooks, believe me, I entreat, when I say, that neither in honor or courtesy are you bound to reveal your

real position to either of these ladies. Had Miss Virginia thought so, she would never have accepted you unconditionally, as she has done. Do you hold her sense of honor as less delicate than your own?"

There was something peremptory, and yet so respectful, in this speech, that Brooks, spite of himself, was impressed by it.

"Well, well, I will think the matter over, and speak with your lady about it. We shall meet to-morrow. Be sure and take your usual walk."

Ellen took his hand, tears arose to her eyes, and brightened them into absolute beauty. He wondered that her face had never impressed him so before.

"Oh, if you would only believe in me!" she said.

"I do, child. It is impossible to help it."

"You will not speak of this to-morrow, when you ride out with Miss Cora Lander?"

"No. I have promised that."

"Thank you. My young lady is very happy now, and happiness drives all sense of wrong out of the heart. She may not look on this matter as I do, who have plenty of time for cool thought. That is what brought me here to-night; forgive it, if I have done wrong. Good evening."

Brooks seized his hat and overtook her on the stoop.

"I will see you safely home," he said; "rough men occasionally hang about the depot."

"I would rather go alone," she said gently; "not by the railway, that does frighten me a little. But I know the footpath by the brook and will take that; enough moonlight will come through the branches, now so many leaves are gone, to show the path. I don't want any one to know that I have been here, so shall be safest alone."

Brooks saw that she was in earnest and let her go, but he stood on the stoop and watched her little figure till it was lost in the duskiness of the woods.

Ellen walked up the path rapidly, holding her breath with a vague sense of awe, for the noise of the brook and the shivering of dead leaves filled the night with that weird music which makes the silence beyond it so impressive. The moon gave down a fitful light, exaggerating the shadows and throwing fantastic gleams through the half stripped branches. All at once she stopped and gave out a sharp cry. The figure of a man stood before her in the path, just below the rise of ground on which the log cabin stood. At first she thought it one of those heavy shadows thrown by the body of a tree; but the figure stooped and rose again—a spark of fire seemed to float upward with the motion. Then the blue light of a match revealed, for one instant, the handsome face of her brother Brian's benefactor. All was dark again in an instant, save the glow of a cigar which the man had evidently just kindled.

Ellen hastened forward, sweeping back a branch, that had fallen across her path, so eagerly that it swayed into place again with a loud rustling noise, enough to startle any one desirous of concealment. The branch had brushed her face, blinding her for the moment. When she looked for the man he was gone.

She stood a full minute, searching around in blank amazement, then hurried away, fairly panting for breath, and so frightened that she ran at full speed across the lawn, and sheltered herself in the house.

What was that man doing in a place held so sacred to the Lander family? Was he staying at the hotel? Did he know any one in the neighborhood, or was it a myth that had startled her into such abject cowardice? No, she had seen the face plainly, for that single instant it was illuminated in all its features; but why had it gleamed upon her so strangely in that place?

The next morning Cora carried out a plan that had been

arranging itself in her mind, and went down to the city. She had engaged to ride with Brooks that day, and the sacrifice which she made in giving up this pleasure was a great one; but a feeling of insecurity troubled her, and she resolved to make her future secure at once. She arose early, took her breakfast alone, and went away by the first morning train, leaving a note of apology for Brooks behind her, which she ordered Joshua to deliver before ten o'clock.

It was wonderful the restraint which that girl's absence took off the whole household. No sooner did Mrs. Lander learn that she was gone, to be absent some days, perhaps, than her spirits rose far above their usual languid pitch. She refused to have breakfast sent to her room, and took something of the old liberty on herself, in assuming the head of the family table. Eunice, in high good humor, went up to summon Virginia, carrying Mrs. Lander's compliments with her, in place of the usual great silver tray, with its elegant equipments.

Both Virginia and Ellen were glad to accept any change. Indeed, the former, in her great happiness, could have refused Eunice nothing, for the woman, in her brusque way, had been very kind to her. So they went down to the breakfast-room smiling, and so cheerful, that Mrs. Lander became unusually social. Eunice herself waited on the table that morning, and a sense of domestic comfort prevailed in that well-appointed breakfast room, to which it had been a stranger for months.

"Now, I tell you what it is, girls, jest take the bits atween your teeth, while *she's* gone, and have a good time of it. Miss Virgie, I want to see you a riding on that white pony, that's been a spiling in the stable, till our Josh is getting savage about it. So jest put on your habit after breakfast, and let us see if you can't set a side-saddle as well as other folks. It's a burning shame that you hain't been out afore."

Eunice shook her head, like a vicious horse, and crashed a plate of toast down upon the table, with a force that cracked the delicate china. She was always violent, even in her fits of good nature, and spoke now, in a state of apparent indignation, about somebody, looking fiercely at Mrs. Lander all the time.

"Dear me, Eunice," said the lady, coloring crimson under the greenish deepening of those eyes; "it isn't my fault that Virginia hasn't ridden every day of her life. Is it, my dear?"

"It is no one's fault, I fancy," answered Virginia, smiling—(the happy girl could not speak without smiles that morning)—"only I, I don't care much about riding."

"It's no such thing. You know better. But that white animal has got to be brought out this very morning, or I'll know the reason why."

"But, Eunice, I have no habit."

"There goes another. Wasn't you measured, with t'other one in Paris, and wasn't the habits and whips, and them side-saddles, all sent over together, long afore you started? Trust Amos Lander for that."

"Eunice! Eunice! how can you?" cried out Mrs. Lander, white with the sudden shock which that name was sure to produce. "Have you no feeling?"

"I've got a good deal of feeling for *her*," answered Eunice, who was ready to show fight on any subject just then. "She's been hived up here long enough, and you've stood by and seen it done without a whimper. Some folks are afeard to say their souls are their own; but I ain't one of that sort. Come now, Miss Virgie, jest to please me, let Josh bring out that white critter. *He* bought it for you."

Virginia's eyes filled with tears. Eunice saw it, and drew the back of her bony hand across her own eyes, sniffing violently.

"That's right! that's right! I thought his name would

do it!" she exclaimed. "The habit is all laid out on your bed, gold buttons and all. There's a soft hat, too, with a feather as long as the foot-post. He ordered 'em jest alike, all but the hat and feather. He never made no difference between girl and girl, only as one looked better in a thing than t'other."

A still more vicious look at Mrs. Lander destroyed all that lady's appetite, and, with genuine tears in her eyes, she besought Virginia to oblige her and take a ride. The happy girl would have done anything that morning, to please even her worst enemy, so she made the promise, at which Mrs. Lander arose from the table and kissed her.

Eunice stood by, smiling grimly at all this, with the feeling that she was fast getting up a happy family, which would some time be sheltered under her own wings.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE WHITE HORSE DISTANCES THE BLACK ONE.

IN the exuberance of her spirits, Virginia was delighted with this idea of a ride, the first that she had thought of taking since her return to America. So, later in the day, she put on her habit with its garniture of gold buttons, and the hat with its trailing feather, which made her resemblance to Cora absolutely startling.

Joshua Hurd brought out the horse, washed white as snow, with his mane shining like floss silk and his eyes full of genial fire. Proud as a lord, he lifted Virginia to her saddle, and stood, with his stout arms folded complacently, and a broad grin on his face, watching her as she rode off. Every time that beautiful animal tossed his head, or began to curvette along the gravelled road, Josh would

give out a mellow chuckle of delight, and move his great feet on the ground, in an ecstasy of admiration.

Virginia had refused the escort of a groom. She longed to enjoy her freedom without even that restraint. As for fear, the girl had scarcely a remembrance of the time when she had not ridden on horseback. Besides, who could be afraid of that beautiful animal, whose wildest movements were full of playful grace without a touch of viciousness in them. So away she rode, coming out of the grounds at the broad iron gate, just above the hotel, after which she took the road at a gallop.

Clarence Brooks had received his note just before the hour appointed for his morning ride with Cora. Joshua had been busy preparing his favorite for the road and sent the note by another servant, who loitered on the way, so that Brooks got it just as he was prepared to mount. He went back into the house and seated himself in the stoop, half resolved to give up his ride when Virginia went by on her white horse, casting one shy glance toward the hotel as she went.

Up Clarence Brooks started, knocking over his chair, seized the riding whip and gloves he had flung aside, and, leaping to his saddle, put his impatient horse to the top of his speed at once.

Virginia heard the clattering hoofs behind her and spoke softly to her horse.

"Steady, steady, Snowball; not so fast, not so fast."

Snowball arched her neck and began to amble, as if she understood the beating of that young heart and was resolved to humor it, irksome as the restraint was.

"So I have overtaken you at last," cried out a happy voice, just behind her. The next instant that black steed came neck and neck with her white one, contrasting finely, like the two riders. "Oh, Virginia, this is too great a happiness! What a glorious day we will make of it!"

"I thought you would see us pass; Snowball, here, almost wanted to stop. I think the creature knows more than she ought—indeed I do."

How well she rode; not with the dash and conscious power of Cora. But with so firm a seat, and that gentle touch of the bridle, there was little danger that any horse would rear and plunge with her in the saddle. Away they went, riding off the first glow of animal spirits with a dash. When the horses took their own course, Brooks rode so close to Virginia's bridle rein at times that his hand touched hers, while their horses walked lazily forward or absolutely stopped under some cool shade, seeming to know how pleasant the whole affair was to their riders.

In the fullness of their contentment these two people talked of a thousand things which drew them closer and closer into sweet sympathy every moment. He told how his heart had gone out to her on that first day when they met under the chestnut, how he had struggled against the feeling, which grew stronger and stronger every hour, because it seemed like treason against the wishes of his friend, whose great object had been for a union between himself and the daughter he so devotedly loved. She was beautiful, he said, and accomplished beyond most women. At first he had liked her, notwithstanding a shade of disappointment, for Lander had prepared him for something more feminine—at any rate less pronounced. Perhaps, had things gone on as they commenced—had he never found that log cabin in the woods and looked from its little window—Amos Lander's last wish might have been carried out. But that day of chestnuting had played the mischief with all such ideas. He had found the niece all that the daughter had been described to him—all that he had loved before seeing either. Still the contest had been a hard one. Death had sanctified his friend's wish, and the feelings that were so surely arising to oppose it seemed to him

almost as a crime. He resisted them bravely for a while, gave himself up to the society of Lander's heiress, strove to force his heart into loving her—had admired her greatly, and did then. But the heart in his bosom was not to be controlled. Cora Lander was beautiful, brilliant, talented, noble; but he did not love her, for heart and soul, body and strength, he loved her cousin.

All this was heavenly language to the fair girl who listened. She longed, in the fullness of her confidence, to tell him everything, but the truth was so painful that she put it off. Why dash their happiness with a subject like that? He loved her, and that was enough. Poor, wicked Cora, she was welcome to the wealth—welcome to all the happiness that could be wrested out of a fraud. Why should she feel a pleasure in destroying the respect he felt for her? It might be necessary for her to tell all the truth some time—would be, no doubt—but why trail the serpent over their flowers just then?

So they talked of nothing that was not pleasant and hopeful. Brooks told her of Ellen's visit the night before, and of her strange request, which he could not yet understand. Virginia listened, smiling—what had she to fear with this lordly man by her side? Still she had compassion on Ellen's terror, groundless as it seemed, and said: "Perhaps it would be as well to gratify her. Dear girl, all this fear grows out of her great care; besides, their secret way of love had been so bright, she, for one, would rather keep in it a while longer."

"But your mother, dear girl, we must ask her sanction of our love."

Virginia started at this, and a revulsion swept over her fair face.

"No," she said, "not yet; I cannot consent to that. Do not ask me why, but it is impossible."

Brooks was disturbed by her perturbation, and wondered

at it. He saw the color come and go in her face, leaving it unusually white and serious. This look of distress, devoid as it was of all temper, touched him with compassion.

"Why, how have I managed to drive the color from your face like that?" he said, with a broad smile, which was like sunshine to her. "We need ask no one's consent to our love because that cannot be helped, try as we will. As for your mother—"

"Don't, don't, I cannot bear to hear you speak of her in that way!"

"Why, you sensitive darling, what have I said disrespectful?"

"Nothing, nothing; this shade chills one. Shall we ride on?"

For half a mile they went forward at a gallop. When this hot speed was checked, Brooks turned toward her and said, very gently:

"So, I am not to tell!"

"Give me a little time to think what is right and best," she answered, in a low voice.

"I will—I will, an eternity, if you ask it. Now smile upon me once more. I feel like some poor fellow in a storm while you continue to look so troubled."

She looked up and smiled upon him with such sweet trust, that his heart yearned toward her with a tenderness almost paternal.

"Now," he said, "we have a fine piece of woods to ride through—on the other side is the neatest little country tavern you ever saw. There we will dine."

Virginia brightened instantly.

"You and I alone," she said, radiant with the thought. "Oh! that will be happiness."

They made a short passage of the woods, sending back storms of dead leaves along the road, and at length came in sight of a long stone house, nearly overrun by a Virginia

creeper, blood-red, and half bereft of its foliage, which make the grass around one brilliant carpet of crimson and green.

This creeper curtained the windows of a little sitting-room, with a home-made carpet on the floor, a wooden settee with a green cushion, along one side some upright cane-bottomed chairs standing like sentinels against the wall, and a round table with a faded cloth in the centre. I do not think those young people gave much heed of the hardness of that settee, or were very impatient because that choice little dinner took some time in the preparation. They took pleasantly to the steel forks and coarse napkins, for both were exquisitely clean. As for the broiled chicken, mealy potatoes and home-made bread, I had rather say nothing about them, because the fragments taken out were by no means so many as very sensitive people might expect from two persons so thoroughly in love with each other. A long ride on that glorious October morning had really deranged the usual course of things, and the romance of eating their first meal together was scarcely equal to the reality.

They left that shaded room reluctantly after all, and Virginia cast a wistful look behind her as she passed its threshold. What a happy hour it had been! Even the rag carpet and that stiff settee looked beautiful to her.

The ride home was quieter but not less delightful than the morning had proved. The deep contentment which settled upon them was the delicious repose which follows joyous excitement. These young persons loved each other, and every phase of their growing passion was a delight.

Virginia would ride home alone. She was not prepared to brave the questions and criticism which would follow a bold dash up to the house with Clarence Brooks by her side. He protested and threatened to rebel, but she was firm as a little tyrant, and rode away from him before the

argument was half closed. As for the people at the hotel and along the road, the affair made no comment, for Virginia, in the same style of dress, was so like her cousin that people only observed, in a careless fashion, that Miss Lander had changed her horse that day, and, with a feather in her hat, looked more beautiful than ever. Somehow the black horse had given her a dashing and fierce air, which did not appear at all on that snow white beauty. No wonder Mr. Brooks was in love with the lady. What a match it would be; both so rich and good-looking—in fact, they were the finest couple that was ever seen in those parts, and worth millions between them.

Joshua Hurd was waiting for his favorite when she came up, in a high state of enjoyment. The white horse had, for once, been fairly placed upon the road, and the neighbors had been given a chance to see what sort of animals were kept in the Lander stables; people did not know it, but Snowball was a full-blooded Arabian, and had been purchased in Egypt for Mr. Lander's daughter. Cora had made the wrong choice that time, and Joshua Hurd chuckled over it. What did she know of a horse?

CHAPTER XLV.

GETTING RID OF WITNESSES.

CORA went directly to her house the moment she reached the city. She hated the place now, and nothing but an important purpose would have induced her to enter it. The servants were in possession, all except Lubin, who, loving his art better than money, had left a place where his talent had so little chance of appreciation. The week before, he had discharged himself and sailed for New Orleans. This

was good news for Cora; it relieved her visit of half its difficulty. This man had been present at her marriage; he knew of her domestic life, and was therefore dangerous. But he was removed from her path now, and the only person left whose evidence would be fatal was the woman, Alice Ruess; she it was who had gone after the clergyman; she had witnessed the marriage ceremony and held the whole secret in her possession. This woman must be disposed of—but how? Could persuasion or money do it? That was what had brought Cora to the city. Mrs. Lander believed that the trip was taken in order to superintend the new dresses which had been purchased with such liberality for her own wardrobe. But dressmakers were very little in Cora's mind just then, and while her mother thought her busy with lavender and purple silk, she sat quietly in that little room, conversing with Alice Ruess in the most kindly and social manner. Cora had long noticed that there was something on her humble friend's mind—not that she called her humble—Cora had too much tact for that, under the circumstances. Indeed, did Alice suppose her so entirely taken up by her own affairs that she had no sympathy for others? On the contrary, she had come now to learn if there was nothing that she could do which might alleviate the sadness that really was mournful. What was it that preyed upon Alice Ruess with such depressed effect?

Alice Ruess had her troubles, poor thing—and very serious ones they were. After a good deal of persuasion, and more caresses than Cora usually bestowed on any one from whom she wanted nothing, the unhappy woman was prevailed upon to admit that she was a married woman and had a husband in California, whom she had not seen in three years. He had left Germany, promising to send for her the moment he was settled in the gold region; but year after year had gone by without bringing the promised summons. So she had saved a little money by hard work and

paid her passage to New York, where she was compelled to remain for want of means to go farther. But she was hoarding her wages, every cent of them, and in the course of another year hoped to have enough to pay her passage to San Francisco. It was a long time to wait, but necessity knew no laws; she had been compelled to patience before, and must endure it again.

Then it was that Cora came out in a new and beautiful character. Why had she never been applied to before? It was cruel, it was unjust. Did Alice consider her the most hard-hearted creature in the world? Of course she should go at once to California. In the very next steamer if money could do it. What, separate a husband from his wife for the want of a little money, the thing was barbarous! Alice was in an ecstasy of gratitude. She loved her husband, and was dying to proceed at once on her pilgrimage in search of him. This munificence in her employer brought genuine tears into her eyes. She fell upon her knees, buried her face in Cora's lap, and called down blessings upon her, such blessings as a good woman would have felt to the core of her heart. Even this calculating creature took a sort of glory to herself when the grateful voice, broken with sobs, told how happy this goodness had made her. She had so long pined in silence for the means generously offered now, that it was a benefit beyond her realization.

Cora was glad to know that the means she was using for her own safety had given so much happiness. She liked Alice, and was grateful to her for asking so few questions and receiving all her sympathy with such genuine good faith.

Cora slept at the Fifth Avenue Hotel that night; she still retained rooms there, expecting to return in the winter. As for sleeping in that house, her very soul recoiled from it. She shuddered when Alice proposed it, and put the woman away from her with both hands.

"Not for the world!" she said, breaking into a passion.

She checked herself instantly; it was no part of her purpose to inform Alice of her discontent. Her tools must be used blindly. No old diplomat was ever more reticent in his craft than this young woman, to whom duplicity came by heart. She could not always restrain those outbreaks of feeling which belonged to her double character. But her mind, ever on the alert, had explanations and excuses ready for adroit use on such occasions, and her resources were always sufficient for the occasion.

"You forget," she added, with a saddened face, "he is not here, and without him I think my heart would break, surrounded by these precious associations. Alice, you know what it is?"

Alice began to cry from tender sympathy.

"But Monsieur will return, he has not gone for long," she said, with a kind effort at consolation. "The great God is good, he will not allow Madame, who is so generous, so munificent, to suffer a long separation, such as has taken away all my youth."

Cora was a splendid actress. When she entered into a part like this, it was with all her soul. She put a handkerchief, made of filmy linen and lace, to her eyes, and shook her head mournfully.

"It is a long time even now, Alice."

"But Monsieur will return. He will shoot many birds, grow tired, and come home. Oh, Madame Seymour, I will pray very much for that!"

Cora started as this name was uttered. A gleam of pleasure came to her face, which Alice thought had sprung out of the comfort given by her assurances. But Cora remembered that his name of Seymour was the only one that even Alice ever had known her by. Here she was doubly guarded.

"I see Madame will take hope," said Alice, cheered by her fancied success.

"But I am so young—so foolish, Alice! To me weeks seem like years when he is away."

"Ah yes, I understand. My years have been so long—so long!"

"But there shall be only weeks now between you and your husband. By the very next steamer you shall go."

"Ah, Madame, you are so good!"

"I will send down, get your ticket and arrange about the state-room this afternoon. Now I think of it, get into the carriage and we will drive to the office at once."

The grateful woman put on her bonnet with trembling hands, and throwing a mantilla over her shoulders, stood in readiness to go, more glad at heart, than she had been for years.

They got into a carriage, which stood at the door, and drove down to the Bowling Green almost in silence. Both were cheerful—Alice, because she was going to her husband; Cora from a consciousness that, one by one, the shackles of her married life were giving way. When they reached the office, Cora gave Alice her purse.

"Get the ticket, arrange everything, and keep the rest, you will want it."

"Oh, Madame!"

"There, there; go at once or the choice of berths will be less," said Cora, waving aside the poor woman's gratitude, which, being thoroughly genuine, began to rebuke her a little.

Alice went into the office, and came out with her ticket, smiling gratefully.

"When does the steamer sail, Alice?"

"In three days, Madam."

"Well, I will drive you home; you must begin to pack up at once, three days are soon here and gone."

"In a month—in one little month, I shall see him!"

"And this makes you so happy."

"So happy—oh, *mon Dieu*, so happy!"

"Well, here we are. Be ready in time."

"But the house, Madame—what shall I do about that?"

"Leave it with that stout black woman—I forget her name—but she seems honest."

"As madame pleases—Hagar is very good negar."

Alice got out of the carriage and Cora drove away, well pleased with her morning's work. She did not inform Alice Ruess where she was going, but promised to call again or send for her; so the woman was well content.

After driving a block or two, Cora pulled the check-string and ordered the coachmen to return. Alice saw the carriage and came out.

"Come here, close to the door," she said.

Alice obeyed, and Cora whispered to her:

"If my husband should return, tell him I have gone up the river, and do not speak of my coming down again, that might keep him here and I should lose so much time, you know."

"But I shall see you again, Madame?"

"Yes; oh yes, I shall see you off, never fear. But remember what I have just told you."

"Certainly, Madame."

After this, Cora drove away for good, and actually did go to Mrs. Lander's dressmaker and torment the poor woman terribly with a confused discussion about trimmings—white, lavender, purple and gray—with which the second mourning was to be illuminated into a phase at once sorrowful and desponding. The happy medium in such cases is difficult to reach.

Three days from that, Cora drove to the door of her own residence and took Alice into the carriage. The luggage was already on board, and Alice Ruess had no friends to weep over or bid farewell. When once seated in the carriage, she said:

"Oh, Madame, Monsieur came last night."

"What, my husband?" Spite of herself Cora's voice was sharp and startled.

"Yes, Madame, Monsieur Seymour. He was grieved—very sad indeed, when I told him Madame was up the river."

"And I have missed him—of course he took the train at once."

"Perhaps. He went away but said nothing."

Cora looked at her watch.

"The steamer sails at twelve, I have plenty of time. It is only a few hours delay.

She spoke carelessly, but her face was like ashes in its paleness. They drove down to the wharf, crowded with drays, carriages, wheelbarrows, and swarms of people of all grades and character, from the rich aristocrat to the humblest orange woman. Men and women crowded the deck and swarmed up the gangway, jostling each other, some carrying carpet bags, some holding great bouquets, and others, who came late, dragging valises and trunks desperately upward by one handle.

It was a scene of wild confusion. Women leaned down from the deck, searching for those they loved and were leaving among the crowd; some with a last gift of flowers in their hands, others flinging kisses from lips quivering with grief, others again weeping piteously.

Through this crowd Alice Ruess made her way with a little satchel in her hand and a look of touching joy on her face. She had nothing to leave, but all the world to follow. In a few weeks she would see her husband. This was the happy thought that went singing through her mind as she was hustled up to the deck and stood there, eager for the bell to ring, for she considered every minute lost which was not bearing her onward.

Cora leaned out of the carriage, interested in the woman

she had helped. Indeed she felt almost the sensation which springs from a generous action. The poor creature's intense gratitude seemed to make a virtue of her selfishness.

Finally the bell rang, the great cable was uncoiled and followed the heaving vessel like a huge snake till rough hands drew it up, wet and dripping. The ponderous wheels began to buffet the waters; the great vessel swept out into the river and the boom of a gun sent back her last farewell. Cora saw the slender figure of Alice, waving a handkerchief, through the smoke, and drew back into the carriage with tears in her eyes. Whatever her motive was, she had done good to that helpless little woman, and loved her a little as we all love those we have benefitted. But the words she said five minutes after had little of goodness in them.

"Thank Heaven, that possible danger is escaped. This change of name will be like a tombstone on the woman should he ever attempt to search her out."

In going down to the office that day, Cora had suggested that Alice should take out her ticket under a changed name. "It will give your husband a pleasant surprise," she said.

"You will have the happiness of seeing his heart leap into his eyes. But the common-place warning of a passenger list would spoil everything." Alice acquiesced. She would have done almost anything at the bare suggestion of a lady who had so generously befriended her.

This was the reason that Cora congratulated herself with such earnestness. All traces of Alice Ruess were lost when that California steamer left the harbor of New York.

From the wharf, Cora drove to a law office in Nassau street. The man she went to consult was a perfect stranger to her, and she seemed resolved to keep him so, for, on entering his office, she carefully drew the thick crape veil

over her face, and her figure had been as much as possible enveloped in a large mourning shawl. She had only a few words to ask of the gentleman: "Would he give her his attention just for one moment? A friend of hers had been unfortunate in marrying a man afterwards condemned to a term of service in the State's prison, would that fact relieve her from all marriage obligations?"

Cora had been a little unfortunate in her lawyer, who happened to be a clerk in the office. Seeing a stylish-looking lady come in, who evidently mistook him for the superior, he assumed the position and gave his opinion with confidence.

"No doubt of it—no doubt of it. My dear Madam, the lady is free as air. No marriage ceremony can bind any woman to a convict."

"You are quite sure of this?"

The impromptu lawyer smiled in a superior way, and gently waved his hand.

"Those who know me, dear lady, would not find it necessary to ask that question."

"Excuse me," answered Cora from behind her veil, "but my friend is naturally anxious to be certain. Her position is a very delicate one."

"No doubt of it; but the question is a very simple one and easily answered. Why, common sense teaches one that it must be an unjust law which ties an innocent woman to her guilty husband when crime itself separates them. What if a man is condemned for life?"

The petty impostor seemed disposed to enter into an argument on the subject, being rather anxious in his own mind; but Cora was only too glad that his convictions were so positive, and, taking out her porte-monnaie, she handed him a bank bill of considerable value, scarcely heeding the amount.

The man took it, cast a sharp glance at the face, which

only gave an imperfect outline beneath that provoking veil, hesitated and said, "Madam," as if she had spoken.

She turned away, impatient of his scrutiny.

"Hem, hem, Madam, perhaps you will expect some change?" he said, folding the bill and leisurely placing it in his pocket-book.

"It is no matter," she answered, moving away.

"But, Madam, Madam, I insist."

The fellow was closing his pocket-book all the time. She saw the action, and turned away, despising him in her heart. There is, after all, an aristocracy of crime in this world. This woman, whose life was one great fraud, dared to look with contempt upon the man who could commit a petty offence against herself. She did not regret the money he had pocketed so adroitly, for the information he had given her was worth ten times that amount, but her lip curled with contempt of the man.

"To the Hudson River Depot."

Cora was eager to reach home now—eager to commence the contest which lay before her. No, she thought better of it. Seymour would never venture to come into the neighborhood of her residence while Clarence Brooks was there. She would drive to the house in town and make sure of an interview with her husband, should he have returned to it. Her haughty spirit was now prepared for the issue—prepared to repudiate and defy him, if that course seemed best to her. She drove up to the house and entered it, almost expecting to meet the man who had been all the world to her only a few months before in deadly enmity. Whether the contest would be one of force or craft she had not determined, but she was resolved that it should be final and decisive.

He was not there.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE BROTHER'S CONFESSION.

THAT night, a little after dark, Alfred Seymour came to that almost deserted house, and, letting himself in with a latch-key, walked directly up stairs, not with his usual elastic tread, but heavily, like a man borne down with age or fatigue. He entered Cora's chamber and looked around, his eyes heavy with such bitter wretchedness that his most fiendish enemy would have pitied him.

"Oh! God help me! God help and forgive me!" he cried, in a dry, feverish voice. "I cannot find her. She avoids me, and I love her so!"

The unhappy man threw himself on that sumptuous bed, soiling its whiteness with his dusty clothes, and crushing one of the laced pillows against his face, kissed it with a wild passion, that seemed almost like insanity.

"Her head had touched it—her warm cheek lay here, and here the breath from her sweet lips floated over this lace. If she shed tears during my absence, they fell upon this linen. Oh! if I knew—if I only knew!"

The terrible sway of his grief shook the bed till all its frost-like draperies trembled above his prostrate form.

"She loved me once. She did love me—but now, when I come home famishing for a sight of her, she is not to be found! Does she know that I am here? I told that woman to tell her, but find the house dark and empty as a grave. I have been to that house. In my disguise I ventured into the very stables. The stupid man I found there told me that she had not yet returned from the city. I saw *him* too, looking calm and noble, as he always did, riding as I have seen him a hundred times in the desert and on the plains. At first I thought she was with him. The very fear made me faint. Thank God, it was not her,

but so like, so like! Can two women on this earth be so beautiful? I would have sworn not till yesterday. Another man might have been deceived; but I was her husband, and after that one look felt the difference. What an angel that girl on the white horse looked. He will marry her; I saw it in his face, in the movement of his stately head as he bent toward her. God bless him! God bless the woman who makes him happy!"

These were the thoughts which tortured that wretched man as he lay there bewailing the past, half frantic with fever, the most pitiable object that the darkness of that night closed in upon.

Later in the evening a slender figure came through the gate and went down to the basement, where a few words were exchanged with the colored woman. Then Brian Nolan sprang up the stairs, mounted both flights like a deer and knocked at the door, from which low sounds of grief reached him.

Seymour got up and opened the door. Brian almost threw himself at the young man's feet in an ecstasy of joy.

"Oh! Mr. Seymour, you have come back at last! I have waited, and waited—longed for you till the loneliness made me ill."

"Thank God, there is one human being that loves me!" cried Seymour, straining the lad to his heart with an embrace that would have pained him at another time. "You are glad to find me, Brian?"

"Glad—only feel how my heart beats!"

"It is a good, faithful heart, and beats honestly, I know," said Seymour, kissing the boy's upturned forehead. "Ah! if you were a little older, Brian."

"I am old enough to love you dearly and do anything on earth for you that a strong man is capable of. God will give me strength, and love will make me wise when strength and wisdom are needed to prove how grateful I am."

Seymour looked wistfully into that eager face. He felt so friendless that the boy's ardor comforted him.

"I know you love me, Brian."

"Indeed I do; try me!"

"I shall, perhaps, Brian, and that before long. Look me in the eyes, boy."

"See, I do."

"It is an honest look."

"I am honest, Mr. Seymour."

"And for that reason would have no charity for dishonesty in others."

Brian bent his head a moment in thoughtful silence; at last he looked up brightly.

"My father used to say that good people were always the most charitable."

"Your father was a good man, Brian."

The words were spoken so impressively that Brian felt his heart swell with a strange, new feeling.

"Did you ever know my father, sir?"

"Yes, boy, I knew him well."

"What, my own, own father, who is now a grand spirit among the angels?"

"Brian, sit down here—not here, I forget. Come into the next room, it is my own."

With his arm about the lad, Seymour went into another room and closed the door, shutting out the light of a small lamp filled with perfumed oil, which was always kindled at sundown in the chamber they had left. They were altogether in the dark now, save the moonbeams, which flung a belt of silver half across the carpet.

Seymour sat down on a sofa and drew the boy to his side. Throwing one arm over his shoulder, he sat for some time in silence, sighing heavily.

"Brian," he said at last, in a voice so changed that it made the boy start, "Brian, I am going to tell you a great

secret, and trust you as grown men seldom dare to trust each other."

"You may—I will keep your secret; trust me, I shall be proud of that."

Seymour tightened his arm around the lad, and Brian felt that it was trembling violently.

"Brian, I was not good, naturally, as you are."

Brian interrupted him.

"Oh, I'm not so very good after all. Ellen could tell you that."

"But I was not good at all in comparison. My boyhood was full of faults—I did my father great wrong—injured his children—almost broke his heart—"

"Poor man," said Brian, tenderly. "And he must have loved you so!"

"He did love me—never on this earth shall I be so loved again."

"I will love you dearly, Mr. Seymour."

"But I did worse than this in the end; I almost ruined my father and his whole family."

"That was very sad; but I suppose he forgave you?"

"Yes, thank God, he did!"

Seymour's voice was choked with emotion, for some moments he had no power of speech.

"At last I went into the world alone. I meant to act rightly; I had a great many accomplishments, and made friends wherever I went. There was a man among them who took to me, whom I loved devotedly—as you love me, Brian."

Brian's eyes shone like stars in the moonlight, and he drew close to Seymour, murmuring:

"Almost, perhaps."

"I was poor and he was rich. He wanted a travelling companion, for he was going across the desert to Jerusalem and up the Nile—farther than travellers usually ex-

plore—and wanted companionship in his adventures. First we went into Switzerland and Italy.”

Here Seymour stopped, and his heart swelled against Brian’s side with painful throes.

“In Italy I met and loved a lady you have seen once at the hotel.”

“Yes, I saw that you loved her.”

“That is our secret, Brian—keep it sacredly. I have married that lady.”

“I will keep the secret.”

“I thought that she was poor—that poverty would keep us apart forever. It was this thought which ruined me. You are young and cannot know what power love holds over a heart which gives itself for the first and only time to a woman like her.”

“I—I can imagine it,” said Brian, softly.

“We parted. She went one way and I another, following my friend and benefactor—for he was that to me—into the far East. This man was rich and had no relatives that he cared for. Once he said to me, ‘If I should take the fever or be flung from a precipice, it will be a shame that I did not make you my heir, Alfred, when we had lawyers in plenty around us.’ I laughed at this as a joke at the time, but it afterwards suggested a great temptation to me.”

Again Seymour paused. His voice was becoming more and more husky.

“My friend was taken ill. This was on our return from the Holy Land. He had what is call the Syrian fever, and I nursed him faithfully. God is my judge, I loved that man as if he had been my own brother. Night after night I watched by his bedside, trying to pray for him, when I had almost forgotten to pray for myself. One night the coldness of death came upon him—the stillness of Death in all its ghastliness. The people took charge of him then. I will not speak of my grief—that would seem like a mockery after what I must tell you. Brian, when I

thought that he was dead, lost to me forever, those words about the heirship of his property came into my head, haunting me with temptations. I knew that he had bills of exchange to a large amount in his travelling-desk. Those bills were enough to make me comparatively a rich man. His relatives would have the great bulk of his wealth, while I, his best friend, beloved more than them all, was left penniless.

“Brian, I took these bills from his desk, leaving all the money there, which was no inconsiderable sum, that nothing might be wanting, and came away.”

Brian had been gradually shrinking from the arm that held him, but he gave no other sign of the shock that seemed to freeze the heart in his bosom.

“I came to this country and found the lady for whom I had done all this, so wealthy that all the gold for which I had cursed myself was nothing to her. She never knew how it had been obtained—I pray God that she never will. But I know it, Brian, and this knowledge makes a coward of me.”

Brian sat perfectly still, with his eyes and his hands hanging listlessly downward. The boy had not expected this. He was prepared for trouble, humiliation, anything but crime. Seymour sat speechless for a moment, waiting for some sign of the feeling his story had excited.

“I am so sorry—so sorry,” said the boy, drawing a deep breath.

“And hereafter you will hate me,” answered the young man, in a voice so mournful that it brought tears into the lad’s eyes.

“No, no; it makes me sad. I love you better than ever, but with a trouble in it.”

“Dear, dear boy! But I have not told you all.”

Brian shuddered. He thought some deeper crime would be in the next words.

"Do not shake so, boy; I cannot bear to make you suffer. What I have more to say is this. The man I supposed dead is alive and in this country."

Brian started, and grasping Seymour's arm, looked wildly in his face.

"Then you are in danger, sir?"

"Yes, great danger; that is why our happy home was broken up. I dared not face the man I had so wronged; for *her* sake, I fled like a coward; for her sake, I have come back again. Her letters have not reached me. I find this house desolate; for we lived here, Brian, so happy—so happy! That man is in the very neighborhood with her. What if she knows the truth?"

"If she loves you there will be pity and forgiveness."

"But a consciousness of shame and disgrace. My proud, beautiful angel, I would rather die than see scorn on her lips."

"But this gentleman is brave, you say—generous, kind. Go to him."

"Heavens! I cannot do that! One glance of his eye would kill me!"

"I would do it," said Brian, gently. "Indeed I would."

"If I had used none of the money—if I could replace it—that would be possible. Indeed I have thought of it, but I have already spent three thousand dollars."

Brian was thoughtful a moment. Then he started to his feet.

"But the lady—she is rich. Ask her for these three thousand dollars."

"She would give it to me if I dared but ask. Still, what reason can I urge for wanting it? She knows that I have this money."

"Tell her the truth!"

"Boy, boy, I would die first!"

"Oh! if I only had so much money!"

"You would give it to me, I know; but for a friendless unknown man to raise even three thousand dollars is impossible. In a wild hope that it might be done, I sold my horses and all the valuables in my possession. Everything has been turned into money, but that is all I can do."

Brian sat down again and laid both hands on Seymour's arm.

"Let me try and help you?"

"You, Brian?"

The young man looked into the boy's face, which was singularly pale and earnest in the moonlight. Then, in a voice that trembled with tender gratitude, he said:

"If you only could! If you only could!"

"Even a boy like me can try."

"How much this is like your father, Brian."

"Yes, yes, I remember. The other terrible thing drove it out of my mind, but you have seen my father."

"Brian, he was my father, as well as yours. I was his eldest son."

With a wail of such exquisite pain and pleasure as goes well nigh to break a young heart, Brian threw both arms around his brother's neck, sobbed out some inarticulate words, and lay still as death upon his bosom. The boy had fainted.

CHAPTER XLVII.

LISTENING AND PLOTTING.

THE moment Cora returned home, she sent a note to Clarence Brooks, challenging him to ride that afternoon as some compensation for the one she had so unexpectedly deprived him of. With all her anxiety this strange being

had been restless with a feverish desire to see Brooks and hear more distinctly than he had yet spoken the wishes that she believed burning in his heart. Throwing off her travelling dress, she put on her habit, and, ordering Blackbird to be saddled, was ready to start long before the man returned with her note unopened.

"Mr. Brooks had gone out to ride early in the afternoon," the people at the hotel told him.

"What road?" she asked.

The man believed it was the river road. At first they were not quite certain that he had not taken his usual walk up the ravine.

"Up the ravine. What ravine?"

"That in which the pretty log cabin stood. Mr. Brooks spent a great deal of time up there, chestnuting and making pictures on scraps of paper. But he wasn't doing anything of the kind this afternoon, for one of the boys had seen him riding across the little plank bridge below the railway."

A wild, fierce pang shot into that woman's bad heart. She knew that Virginia made frequent visits to the ravine, and her suspicions took fire at once. She turned her stormy face on the man and pointed sternly with her whip toward the stables.

"Go tell Joshua Hurd to bring my horse out at once."

The man obeyed, and five minutes after his mistress was galloping up the river road with fire in her heart and a hot red on her cheeks. She had ridden perhaps three miles in this way, when a rise in the ground gave her command of a cross road which led through a maple grove on the right. With a sudden jerk of the bridle, she checked her horse, and a spasm of pain closed the teeth upon her lips, which grew white under the pressure.

This was what she saw—a black and a white horse drawn close together under a huge maple tree, which was

raining its golden leaves all around them—a gentleman stooping toward a tall, slender girl, who wore a riding-dress almost exactly like her own. These two persons seemed to be talking earnestly, but after a few moments they prepared to move on. There was something wrong about the lady's bridle, evidently, for the gentleman dismounted to arrange it, and snatching the hand which was extended to receive the reins from his, pressed it to his lips more than once. Cora not only saw this, but she observed that there was no glove upon that hand, for the lady drew on her gauntlet as she rode along.

Fierce as war, and hard as iron, that woman wheeled her horse slowly around and rode home. She made no remark, and avoided all questions, but seated herself by a window—massing the curtains into a safe concealment—and waited till her cousin should appear.

Virginia came at last, walking her horse up the carriage-drive; she stooped forward more than once and patted the pretty animal's neck, as if, in the supreme contentment of her heart, she must caress something. Cora remarked the bloom of happiness in her face and the cheerful leap with which she sprang from her horse. The sight was poison to her.

Ellen met Virginia at the door of their parlor, looking anxious and disturbed.

"She has come—Miss Cora is in the house," she said, as if announcing some great calamity.

Virginia laughed. What had the beloved of Clarence Brooks to hope or fear from Cora Lander? Let her come and go as she pleased; a little time would separate them forever. But there was one thing she was anxious about. Could Eunice be persuaded to let them have the tray sent up a little earlier? The ride had given her an appetite, and then she had promised to bring Ellen to this little cataract—it was a shame to call it a cascade—to watch the

sun set. There was a pile of clouds in the west, which would fire up beautifully.

Ellen undertook to propitiate Eunice, with whom she had become a great favorite, and Virginia, after taking off her habit, nestled herself into an easy chair and fell to dreaming, as innocent girls will when love throws a rosy bloom into the atmosphere around them.

The promise held out by that embankment of clouds was brilliantly kept; floods of rosy light floated through them, touched at the edges with fringes of living flames; opaline seas and lakes of amber hue broke out from their depths, surrounded by embankments of living gold, flashes of green and purple shot in here and there, as if the angels had got tired of weaving rainbows and flung their overplus of colors into one gorgeous sunset. As usual, Ellen wandered off by herself and drank in the glory of the scene with thrills of such delight as genius alone can feel. Even those two lovers, happy and refined as they were, failed to reach the exquisite pleasure that stirred her heart.

When did sunset or landscape ever draw two lovers out of their own lives for any length of time? Before those noble colors had begun to melt into that soft purple which precedes the night, the young couple had become, as usual, absorbed in each other. They spoke of their loves—of the bright future which lay before them—of the long, long life in which they were never to be parted.

"It seems too blessed; sometimes I am frightened lest all this should fade away," murmured Virginia as she saw that vivid tumult of colors melt tint by tint into a soft purplish blackness. "What if it should all break up like that?"

"The heavens themselves shall pass away first," said Brooks, with solemnity. "The man or woman does not live that could separate us."

A rustling of dead leaves, as if a sudden wind were whirling them up from some hollow, followed these words

and out from behind the rock against which they sat started a tall figure, wrapped in a large blanket shawl.

Brooks heard this sound of whirling leaves and wrapped Virginia's cloak more closely around her.

"The wind seems to be rising," he said. "I must not keep you out in the cold."

She thanked him with a smile, and, all unmindful of the evil thing that had crept so near them, they went down the ravine together for the last time.

The next day it rained heavily, and with the rain came a high wind, which swept the woods of all their foliage and filled the air with whirling leaves. It was a sad, gloomy day, such as only the late autumn can bring, and no human being, save those compelled to brave the storm, thought of venturing out of doors. This gloomy weather answered to the dark thoughts in Cora's mind, as nature sometimes will aid evil passions. The woman had not closed her eyes all night—had not even undressed herself or gone to bed. Wrapped in the dull red of that great shawl, which had so well covered her movements among the perishing leaves, she huddled herself in a corner of her silken couch, and sat there like some wild animal waiting for its prey—fierce, watchful, poisoned with bitter thought—till the dawn looked in upon her. Then she arose and stood before the mirror, breathing heavily, as if, soul and body, she had been laboring in some oppressive atmosphere.

"It is well this rain has given me a few hours to myself," she said, looking at the haggard face that seemed to threaten her from the glass. "I must have time to get smiles and color back to that miserable face. So beautiful as it was, and yet fail to keep that one man. What was nature doing, to match her features with mine? To make her slender, lithe, graceful as I am? It is like rivalling one's self if it were not for this and this."

Cora touched her heart and her forehead, while a look of

triumph swept over the pallor of her face, changing it so that its resemblance to Virginia's almost entirely disappeared. She had so many secrets, preying upon her like vampyres, that it was a relief to lock herself in that room and talk to her own image in the glass, or answer to the thoughts that haunted her through the darkness when she could not sleep. This expression of feelings which she dared not expose to any human being was like letting in fresh air on a poisonous atmosphere. It became a relief and habit to her at last.

"This quick intellect, this fiery heart—that tact which some people might spend a life time and never learn—she will no more acquire than she will get back the property I am enjoying. After all, compared to these advantages, beauty is a small thing, well enough in its way, but one could afford to dispense with it. Still, in a contest like this, everything counts."

Thus this young woman gave forth her wicked thoughts, that were echoed back by her own heart only as rocky solitudes receive sound. She had formed her plans during the night, and began to work them out at once. Opening her door softly, she stole down a long passage leading to that end of the house where Virginia's apartments lay. These were composed of two sleeping rooms and a small parlor, which Eunice had insisted on arranging for her occupation. Since her plain talk with Cora, this hard-faced woman had exercised her own will in the house with more despotism than she had ever used when Mrs. Lander was mistress. She seemed to take a pleasure in defying the person who had once attempted to drive her from the house. This defiance was most generally exhibited in some act of devotion to Virginia or Ellen, whose noble character had made itself felt even by her rough nature. She saw that it offended Cora to have this unfortunate girl recognized by the servants as their superior, and exalted her accordingly.

The other retainers followed the housekeeper's example, and no person in that mansion was treated kinder or respected more than Ellen Nolan.

Towards the rooms thus independently appropriated by her cousin, Cora made her stealthy way. She remembered that a narrow passage connected one of these rooms with the chamber that Amos Lander had formerly occupied, and which had been shut up since his death. Did this passage lead to Virginia's sitting room or had her sleeping-chamber been arranged next that of her father? This was a question she had stolen forth in the early morning to satisfy herself upon. Treading softly, and holding her breath, she paused by a door, which might lead into Virginia's sitting-room, or, quite as likely, into the chamber where she lay sleeping. With a silken touch, she turned the silver knob and cautiously opened the door just far enough to look in. With a sense of relief, she saw that it was unoccupied and evidently used as a parlor. A piano stood opposite the door, which she knew to have been removed from the drawing room to give space for the grand instrument Mrs. Lander had ordered during her brief season of extravagance. Books lay upon the tables, flowers drooped in the vases. Standing against the door, which Cora surveyed with eager scrutiny, was a desk, littered with manuscripts, some of which had fallen to the floor.

Cora advanced on tip-toe and took up one of those loose sheets. They were not in Virginia's handwriting—nothing of her graceful elegance was there. The manuscript was hasty, erased, interlined and blotted as if a hand, stirred by strong feelings, had seized upon the pen in a passion of thought, and left almost illegible traces on the foolscap.

"Why, has that crooked thing turned author?" she thought. "I should not wonder, there was always something of that kind in her eyes."

She let the paper flutter down from her hand, observed

that the door against which the desk stood opened inward, and was thus blocked up. She was going out with another sweeping survey of the room, when her eyes fell on an object which made her heart stand still. It was the portrait of Amos Lander, hanging above the piano—a picture which, up to that season, had always hung in his office or private study. Struck with awe, breathless with vague terror, the woman could not turn her eyes from that face, which seemed to look down upon her in calm confidence that justice would reach all those evil deeds at last. She strove to wrest her eyes from the glance that held them, but could not, and walked backward, holding her breath, till she reached the door. She closed this and fled along the passage, seeking shelter from that face in her own room.

Some weeks before this, duplicate keys of all the rooms in the house had been brought to her, for she had begun with an elaborate display of housekeeping, which was an unforgivable cause of offence with Eunice Hurd. These keys she now searched over, and taking out the one which unlocked Mrs. Lander's chamber, put it in her pocket.

By this time the household was astir, and she commenced her morning toilet, touching her cheeks with rouge for the first time in her life, for that picture had driven the last vestige of color away from them, and no effort of hers could bring it back again.

"They shall not see how haggard I am," she muttered, sweeping the rich hair back from her temples and coiling it on the back of her head. "If I could get ten minutes' sleep now. But that is hopeless. I can understand how Lady Macbeth felt when she prayed for sleep and only found dreams. But dreams that come when you are wide awake, as I was last night, are the worst of all when you are forced to work them out. Right or wrong—right or wrong I will accomplish mine."

Cora met Mrs. Lander at breakfast, as had become her habit of late, with those hollow expressions of affection which appease rather than satisfy a loving heart. She went into an elaborate detail of the dresses which she had seen in progress; suggested more expensive trimmings for some, and took an interest in the whole affair that charmed her mother into a season of absolute forgetfulness of the sin she had committed. While they still lingered at the breakfast table, a servant came in with information that a boy had come up from the city on the early train, with a letter to Miss Lander, which he was directed to give to her in person.

"It is something from the dressmaker, I fancy," said Cora, rising with every appearance of tranquillity from the table. "I told her to leave the silver gray satin till we sent farther directions. I thought lace would be lovely for the body and sleeves, but she objected on account of the mourning."

"I'm afraid, dear," said Mrs. Lander, "that the dressmaker was right. Even satin may be considered an innovation. Dead silk is really the thing. I am so sorry, but we must give up the lace. People are so censorious you know. Plain, with pipings of black, was what I had settled on. But I will see Fanchon's messenger."

"That will do no good; just write your directions and send the note down to me. I will add all that is necessary. She has my general orders to make everything as beautiful as possible and spare no expense."

"What a dear, kind, liberal creature you are—no mother ever had a more generous child."

"Dear aunt, have you not always been treated exactly as if I were your own child? I'm sure it was my father's wish."

Cora looked steadily into her mother's eyes as she said this, and walked quietly out of the room. There was no

danger that the widow would follow her after this covert rebuke.

Cora found, as she expected, Brian Nolan waiting in a small reception room which opened from the library. She had never seen this lad but once, and that was at the hotel the day after her arrival in New York. She took the letter that he gave her and looked at the address, which was a simple name, with some evidence of surprise.

"This is for my cousin," she said, "I will take it to her. Wait for the answer here."

"If you please, there is a young person living here that I should like to speak with," said Brian, glad to have accomplished his task so easily. "Her name is Ellen—Ellen Nolan."

"She shall be sent for at once."

Cora rang the bell and told a servant to inform Ellen Nolan that a person from the city wished to speak with her. Then she left the room with a quiet, leisurely air, as if the paper in her hand could be of no possible consequence, though it was making her tremble from head to foot.

"I wonder if his wife is so very handsome," thought Brian, watching her as she moved through the library. "This is the lady Ellen loves so much. She speaks softly and does not look unkind, but I should hate to ask her myself. What a slow, proud walk she has."

Ellen Nolan came like a bird into the room where her brother sat. She knew that it must be him, for, in all that strange land, there was no one else who had the slightest interest in her outside of that house.

"O, Brian, Brian, how glad I am!" she cried, throwing her arms around him, and kissing his hair and mouth and eyes with indiscriminate affection. "I have so longed for you—so pined and prayed for a sight of you. Don't think it strange, dear, if I do act like a crazy thing; in the wide, wide world you are all I have, except my lady. God for-

give me if, in my joy, I forget her for one moment. O, Brian, she is an angel!"

"I am glad of that," answered Brian, returning his sister's embrace with ardor, and giving back glad tears in exchange for her kisses, "for I have a great favor to ask of her. Something that will frighten you at first."

"A favor to ask of my lady, Brian?"

"Ellen, I have come to you for help. The best friend I ever knew is in trouble."

"What, the good gentleman?"

"Yes, dear. Bend your head; we are alone, but I dare not speak out loud."

Ellen bent her head, but, in an instant, started back with a cry of such wild surprise, that it was clearly heard in the library, where Cora was reading that letter. She lifted her face and listened.

"What *can* it be about?" she thought. "Surely he has not entrusted that boy with our secret."

She arose white with dread, and, stepping through one of the library windows, regardless of the drifting rain, which wetted her slippers through in an instant, softly opened the blinds of another window, over which she remembered the silken drapery of a curtain was falling loose. The reception room had been occupied late the evening before, and the curtain let down, to shut out all sounds of the storm, which was beating against that side of the house with violence, from which another window, opening to the west, was protected. No servant had entered the room that morning. Thus it remained, with the drapery sweeping over one window and looped back from the other.

Taking advantage of a gust of wind, that came sweeping around the house that moment, Cora softly pushed the unfastened sashes back to the places made to receive them, on each side of the deep recess, and, drawing the blinds after her, sat down on an ottoman, which always occupied the

space shut in by the curtains. In this position he heard all that Brian Nolan had to tell his sister, except those words which he could only force himself to utter in a whisper. This much, however, she did learn. Seymour was making strenuous efforts to repay the money she had taken, and Virginia was to be importuned in his behalf. Out of this came glorious materials for the web her crafty mind was weaving. If she could only bring Seymour and her cousin once into companionship, the task she had imposed on herself would be of easy accomplishment.

Brian kept his benefactor's secret well. Not even to his own sister would he whisper the secret which had been entrusted to himself alone. That which related to himself, Seymour had permitted him to tell their sister Ellen, who sat listening, half in joy, half in bitter grief, but the words of her father still whispering in her heart. He was her brother—with all his faults he was her brother! He had been so kind to Brian, who came to him miserable and utterly unknown. There must be some nobility of heart in a man who could be so generous to a helpless fellow creature. She would see him, help him, toil for him, if the way could be pointed out.

Brian told her of his hopes that her friend and mistress might be induced to let their brother have the money, which would save him from eternal degradation.

Ellen shook her head. "Her mistress was not the rich one; she had the heart of an angel, but—"

Here Ellen paused, sprang up, and clasped her hands with passionate force.

"Oh! it might be—it might be! God grant it! That would, indeed, prove the happiest moment of her life. Brian must not ask her what it was yet; but she had hopes. Only wait a little, and she would soon test her ability."

All this was incoherent enough; but there was some-

thing so earnest and hopeful in all the girl said and did that Brian had that faith in her which singleness of purpose always inspires.

"You will ask this good lady to help us, Ellen," he said; "we are so friendless that no chance must be neglected. If you only knew how he suffers."

"But he shall not suffer long. This will be working out my father's wishes. O, Brian, he loved his prodigal devotedly!"

"I know it, Ellen; but love for a man like that is so natural. It seems to me that he is younger than I am—as if you and I must be strong for him."

"I remember him, Brian. His face was beautiful. His eyes—yes—yes—his eyes are like our father's, so deep, so mournfully deep."

The listener in that window heard nothing of this. Having mastered the substance of their conversation, and discovered their object, she left these affectionate nothings to their speakers, and, opening the letter which Seymour had sent her, began to read it by the bars of light that fell through the shutters.

"My wife, my own beloved wife," it began—"I am here in the house, which was our Paradise, but now seems deserted. Without you, every place is like a desert to me. With you, I desire no better heaven. Come to me, my beloved. Do you know that it is weeks and weeks since I bade you farewell in this room, with your dear head on my bosom, and your trembling lips pressed to mine? That was a moment of anguish unutterable; but, compared to this dull waiting, and the baffled expectation that tortures me, whenever the gate opens, or a carriage turns the corner, it was happiness, for you were with me. I know it is very foolish, but sometimes a fear comes upon me that—No! I will not put into language the

apprehensions that harass me. Your presence will drive them away, as sunshine turns the blackest clouds into embankments of luminous snow. Did the woman tell you that I had returned? I am sure she must have forgotten it, or I should not now be sitting among our 'household gods' alone. But you will get this. I send it by one who is trustworthy, and who loves me. Give him a few gentle words for my sake. Above all, give him an answer to this. Tell me what hour and minute I may hope for you!

ALFRED."

Cora read this letter from beginning to end, without a quickened breath or a flush of the face. She had prepared herself for anything he might say, and no granite was ever harder than the heart which beat in that young bosom.

"Let these young fools talk out their dreams. I have the pith of all they know or intend," she said, inly. "Innocent as lambs they will be working for me. I cannot exactly see how as yet; but this brain is ready to mould events."

She moved from her place of concealment, closing the blinds carefully behind her as she went out, leaving wet footsteps on the marble pavement in her progress.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

HOPES OF REDEMPTION.

WHEN once in her own room, Cora Lander read Seymour's letter again, pondered over it darkly for a time, then threw it on her desk with a burst of sudden animation.

"I have it—I have it," she said, aloud. "We must have no quarrelling, no reproaches—that pleasure I must

forego. It will rack me, but a love like his is not to be trifled with. This man, if I turn upon him, may prove dangerous; despair is always powerful. The strong man who has nothing to lose becomes a giant."

She sat down and began to write, taking a letter from her desk and laying it before her, which she examined carefully from time to time as she proceeded. This was what the letter said:

"MY OWN:—I am afraid to leave home just yet, for reasons which I will explain when we meet. About five miles from this, on a cross road leading from the river, is a long stone building, which you will recognize by the sign as a country inn. You will know it by a grove of maples, through which the highway leads a mile or so after you leave the river. It may be dangerous and difficult, but I will certainly meet you at this place to-morrow evening."

Here Cora made an effort to give something of her old passionate tenderness to the note, but her hand refused the task, and she added:

"I dare not use the language this heart prompts, lest it fall into hands that might make an evil use of it; but in all things believe me unchanged and unchangeable as when we met so often at the log cabin. Do not, I pray you, venture there again, it is dangerous.

V. C. L."

Cora compared this note carefully with the open letter she had laid on the desk, and which seemed to have been written long ago, for it bore a foreign post-mark and was worn about the edges. The handwriting was that of Virginia Lander, and that of the note was almost a *fac simile*.

This note Cora locked in her desk, hastily writing another in her own natural chirography, which she placed in an envelope and left without address.

When all this was done, she put the note in her pocket and opened the door of her chamber, knowing that Ellen must pass by it on her way to Virginia's apartments.

She had not long to wait; Ellen came along the hall, walking quickly, and apparently much excited. The moment she was gone, Cora went down stairs and gave her note to Brian, who was looking out of the window in order to conceal the traces of tears that stained his face.

"My cousin desires me to say that she wishes you to be careful of this. Upon my word she has forgotten the address, but no matter, you will know how to deliver it, I suppose."

Brian took the letter from Cora's hand. For a moment he stood irresolute, looking wistfully in her face.

"Ellen is my sister," he said. "Thank you very much for being so kind to her."

Cora smiled blandly.

"Ellen is a good girl; one deserves no credit for being kind to her," she said.

"She will ask a great favor of you before long, lady—a very great favor. Do not refuse her—it will break a kind heart if you should."

"She need not fear that I shall refuse any reasonable request."

"But it may seem unreasonable."

"Well, even then you may be sure that it will be kindly considered."

Brian looked into her face; brightening with hope, he took her hand and touched it reverently with his lips.

"Lady, I thank you!"

That moment a railroad whistle seemed shrieking for Brian to be in haste. He snatched his cap and was gone in an instant.

"If it were another cause and for another person, I would give the money he asks, if it were only to see his face light

up so pleasantly. How that man makes everybody love him! How I loved him once!—No, no, that was not love; but such delusions take the bloom off a woman's life. I almost wish it could have lasted."

Cora smiled in calm scorn of her own thoughts as they turned to Clarence Baooks, with his grand presence and self-centred manliness. She asked herself if the same woman could have loved two men so opposite—one so inferior. Yet this one was her husband. All at once she remembered that Ellen would be opening her heart to Virginia just then, and it was important that she should know exactly what passed between them. Ten minutes after, she was in the passage between Virginia's parlor and the room that had been Amos Lander's sleeping chamber.

Ellen Nolan was seated at the desk, which, as I have said, stood across the door. She was busy gathering together the sheets of manuscript that lay upon the desk and had fallen over the carpet.

Cora remembered that a pile of books lay on the desk in front of the keyhole, and fearlessly pushed back the porcelain shield which guarded it, thus letting in every word that could be uttered in the room. She could hear Ellen's quick breath distinctly as it came in eager gasps from her lips while the manuscript rustled like dead leaves in her hand.

Then she heard Virginia's voice; she had just entered the room from an inner chamber, and, seeing her favorite with a red flush about her eyes, handling her papers with such eager haste, came up to the desk and began to question her.

"What is the matter, Ellen? What are you doing?"

"Counting the pages, dear lady; thinking how I had best head the chapters. It is almost done, and I want to sell it at once."

"But you have no great need of money just yet, Ellen."

"Oh! yes, I have the greatest possible need. Do you remember, Miss Lander—"

"Call me Virginia, Ellen."

"I will! I will! But you remember, I told you of a brother—an elder brother—whom my father loved so dearly and suffered for."

"Yes, Ellen, I remember everything about him."

"Well, Virginia, that brother is in New York; you have seen him."

"What, I?"

"That splendid man—so handsome, so elegant—Miss Cora spoke to him in the hall. You remember it?"

"Yes, I remember him; he was very handsome in a certain way."

Virginia was thinking of Clarence Brooks, and rather resented the idea of any other man being considered pre-eminently handsome by a person who had seen him.

"In every way—at any rate Cora Lander thought so. He was the one who took compassion on my younger brother. You remember Brian?"

"Yes, dear."

"Well, this man is my brother; I have a message for him from my father given to me on the deck of that steamer when the flames were all around us. That message will be his salvation, I am sure of it. He has fallen into error and great difficulty again, and is breaking his heart over it. Oh! Miss Lander—Virginia—I do so want money! They talk about the misery of slaves, but I would sell myself on a plantation—yes, I would—to pick cotton for three thousand dollars!"

"Three thousand dollars, Ellen!"

"Yes, that is the exact sum I want. Some writers get thousands on thousands for a novel. Do you think the men who buy them would give me three thousand dollars out and out for mine? You shake your head—you don't

know anything about it. But I read the papers, and they tell of such prices. After all, Miss Virginia, three thousand dollars isn't so very much for one's soul—for that is really what a book means when it is worth anything. Dear me, how many tears I have shed, how angry I have been, how sad and mournful. If people want to buy your thoughts and your feelings, why—why—oh! Miss Virginia, *do* you think any one will buy this book and let me redeem my poor brother? My father loved him so—my father loved him so!"

Ellen's head fell forward upon the arms which she threw over the desk, and her excitement burst into a passion of tears that shook her little frame like a storm.

"Ellen, dear, dear child!"

Ellen lifted her head and pushed back that splendid hair from her tearful face.

"You think they will not buy it? Perhaps you think it good for nothing?"

"No, no, Ellen dear, I think nothing of the sort. But the sale of a book, however good, takes time."

"I know it, I know it, and he needs the money at once. What can I do? what can I do?"

"This is what I was thinking of, dear child. I have those pearls and some diamonds, with the other jewelry that was my mother's. We will sell them, raise money on them or something."

Ellen lifted her head suddenly.

"But those jewels are all you have when we go away from this house."

"I know it; but we shall not want them. Oh! Ellen, I am provided for so richly! so richly!"

Virginia's face was scarlet with innocent shame as the fullness of her joy broke into words.

"In a few days we shall be married."

Ellen's tearful eyes opened wide, and her lips parted with sudden surprise.

"Are you not glad, Ellen, that it is to be directly?"

One great throe of pain set that generous heart free.

"Glad? yes, I *am* glad."

That little frame was shivering all over. The wild eyes filled with a light so deep and holy that Virginia unconsciously dropped to her knees, and, drawing down that broad forehead, kissed it almost reverently, she could not for her life have told why.

"In a few days, you said," Ellen whispered, holding that fresh young face between her two shivering hands, looking into it tenderly, and smiling as noble women alone can smile when their hearts are breaking up.

"Yes, he will not wait longer. This very day he is coming to tell my cousin and my aunt. You see how little need I shall have for money."

"But they were your mother's jewels."

"She is an angel now, and knows what I am doing."

Ellen looked wistfully at her manuscript. She so thirsted to redeem this fallen brother with her own work! It would be a consecration of the genius which burned within her.

"You shall do it," she said, with a heavy sigh.

Virginia understood the feeling of disappointment, which another might have mistaken for ingratitude.

"It shall be you, after all," she said. "We will not sell my mother's jewels outright, but raise money on them. Such things are done, and we will find out the way."

"Then, after my book is published, I can get them back again. Oh! lady, that mother you love so is not more of an angel than you are!"

The sound of a soft kiss checking the next words was all the answer that reached the woman listening so intently close by them.

"We will consult him, Ellen."

"Oh! no—no, that would be to expose my brother!"

"Forgive me, I did not think of that. We must manage this business alone."

"Yes, all alone!"

"Still I must see him before we go to the city."

"And will you go?"

"Certainly. Why not?"

"To him—will you go with me to comfort him?"

"I will go with you anywhere in so holy a cause."

"I cannot thank you, lady; my heart aches to express its gratitude. But the words—the words!"

"Hush, dear, it is a great mercy that the means are left to us. But for you, these jewels would have been swept away with all the rest."

"That thought was an inspiration from God, I do believe, lady. He knew that a soul was to be saved, and gave you the means—making three people happy at once."

"Oh! if I could make all the world as happy as I am!" said Virginia.

"Shall we go in the morning?" questioned Ellen.

"Yes, in the morning. This terrible storm will not keep him away; I will send him a note this evening, after he has seen them, saying that I must go to the city for a day or two. Mr. Stone will help us. I think he is a good man, Ellen."

"Oh! lady," cried Ellen, with a sudden outburst of gratitude "I really believe the world is made of good people."

Cora had heard enough and stole back to her chamber, resolved on two things, not to see Clarence Brooks that day, rain or shine, and to search Virginia's rooms thoroughly for the jewel which were to wrest Seymour from the fatal power she held over him. With the knowledge she had just gained to work upon, Cora fell to reweaving the crafty details of a plot which had been forming in her mind, as the web of a spider grows thread by thread.

Before noon, Clarence Brooks called, and was refused. Mrs. Lander was ill, the servant said, and Miss Lander

was so anxious that she did not like to leave her aunt's room.

Brooks was half tempted to ask for Virginia, but remembering her position in the house, forbore until he should have obtained a right to see her when and where he pleased. Cora saw him from her window as he walked down the carriage drive in the rain, with the wind sweeping over him and almost wrenching the umbrella from his hold.

"Let him struggle!" she said, bitterly. "He will have a harder contest than that before the week is over."

That evening Virginia sent her note to Clarence Brooks, informing him of her intended absence. It was a delicate, modest little note, full of shyly-worded regrets, and such hints of love were more expressive to a refined man than any passionate protest could have been.

The difficulty was about obtaining a messenger. In a household of servants devoted to her cousin, Virginia did not know whom she could trust. Ellen would have gone, but it was raining harder than ever, and Virginia would not permit the exposure.

"I will manage it—let me have the note, I will find a safe messenger," said Ellen, thinking of Joshua Hurd. She threw a heavy shawl over her head, slipped her feet into a pair of overshoes, and ran down to the stables. A light over the carriage-house guided her to Joshua's room. She found her way up the narrow staircase and knocked at his door.

CHAPTER XLIX.

JOSHUA HURD PROVES HOSPITABLE AND KIND.

"COME in, if it's you, Eunice," said a voice from within, "only don't go to pitching in about the whisky; I mean to drink a hot punch every night of my life—two on 'em—three on 'em—four on 'em, if I've a mind to. The kettle's on now, I give you fair warning. Come in, if you've a mind to, but none of your tantrums. Josh Hurd is Josh Hurd, and he ain't to be trod on."

"It isn't Eunice—only me," said sweet-voiced Ellen, coming into the room, where Joshua was hard at work, with his coat off, crushing an unfortunate lemon in a huge wooden squeezer, which he held at arm's length, while the juice ran into a tumbler of generous dimensions, in the bottom of which a liberal supply of sugar was fast melting.

"Wait one minute, till I get the licker mixed and the bilin water turned in, and then if I don't show you a punch wuth while for a rainy night, set me down for a fellow that don't know what's what. This 'ere punch will be a sneezer, now I tell ye, Miss Ellen. But hitch your chair up to the stove; no need to be afeared of the tea kittle; I'm going to take that off right away. Golly, don't it steam up splendid!"

Ellen sat down by the little stove, on which a small iron tea kettle was puffing steam from its nozzle with great commotion, and watched Joshua compound his punch with considerable interest. Like the bird that has a nest to build, a mind like hers is forever gathering up materials, rude or beautiful, as circumstance or nature presents them. So Ellen warmed her feet by the stove and looked on, smiling, while Joshua brewed his punch with as much pride as some artists feel in composing a picture.

When the punch was complete, all but the water, Joshua

took the kettle in one hand, a spoon in the other, and stirred his beverage into perfection, tasting it from time to time from the spoon, fearful of getting in too much water. At last he took a spoonful in his mouth, held it there, deliberated over it, and swallowed it at once with a sigh of infinite satisfaction; then he exclaimed, exultantly: "That is punch!" with a nod of the head that seemed to be intended for the tea kettle, which was fast subsiding from a rampant little humbug of a steam engine into a harmless shell of iron; for the steam had concentrated itself into a single drop of water, which trembled meekly on the end of the nozzle, as if afraid to fall at the moment of Joshua's triumphant exclamation.

Then Joshua went to a cupboard, devoted to bridles and small articles of horse furniture in its lower compartment, and in the upper part to such odds and ends of crockery as he had been enabled to pick up in the kitchen. From this miscellaneous assortment, he brought forth a pretty amber-hued glass, with a frost-like pattern of grape-leaves cut around it, but broken off at the stem. This he filled with punch from his own tumbler and presented to Ellen, tasting it with a delicate sip on his way from the table to the stove.

Ellen took the glass and tasted the hot punch, while Joshua stood rubbing his huge hands, delighted.

"Isn't that the clear stuff, now?" he said. "Lifts ye right out of your bo—yer Ingin rubbers, now don't it?"

"Isn't it a little—just a little strong, Mr. Hurd?" Ellen suggested, strangling in spite of herself.

"Strong!" exclaimed Joshua, in supreme contempt. "Strong! why a nussing baby could drink that and think it was fennel-seed tea. Strong!"

"Perhaps it was from being so hot," said Ellen, coughing the next strangle down resolutely.

"Well, melby! that tea kettle does spout the hottest I

ever saw—blow it and shake it up a little, and you'll find it scrumptious enough. There's one good thing about boiling water, it will cool off, and then the whisky comes uppermost."

Ellen followed his directions, and at last managed to empty the tiny glass, which, being without bottom, she was unable to set down.

"Have another?" said Joshua, reaching out one hand while he lifted the tumbler to his lips with the other. "Speak right up, if yer do, for the supply'll give out mighty soon."

"No more, Mr. Hurd. It's as nice as can be, but my head isn't used to it, you know."

"Nice! why of course it's nice! Didn't I wash the spoon and glasses myself? But if you won't take any more, here goes."

Joshua emptied his tumbler and set it down with a deep, deep breath. Then he drew a chair close to the stove.

"Now what is it yer want of me, Miss Ellen?" he said, confidentially. "Whatever it is, I'll do it, for if there's a gal on arth that I set store by, it's you. Next to the hosses, Miss Ellen, I'd do more for you than anybody, not to say our Eunice. She thinks you're awful smart, and I usuerly think as she does. Now what is it yer want?"

"I want you to carry a letter down to Mr. Clarence Brooks and bring an answer back, if there is one, without saying a word about it."

"Your letter? 'Cause if it is, I won't do it, nor tech it. That proud chap 'ed only make fun of you if I did."

"I know it, Joshua," answered Ellen, sadly; "I shall never write letters to gentlemen, like other girls. No one will ever ridicule such things in me!"

"I should like to see 'em try it!" exclaimed Joshua, clenching his huge hands. "But if the letter ain't from you, who 's it from?"

"I will tell you, Joshua; but, remember, it is a secret between us. Miss Virginia wishes to send this note."

Joshua unclenched his fist and uttered a low whistle.

"What, both on 'em—both on 'em!" he exclaimed. "But I'll do that for her, or anything else. Hand over the letter."

Ellen placed the note in his hand.

"You'll want an answer—I'd better not bring it into the house; jest you stay here till I come back."

Ellen promised to wait where she was till he returned. Joshua put on his cap, wrapped an india rubber horse-blanket around him and went down stairs. Ellen, being left alone in the room, fell into thought which was only interrupted by the storm, which pelted against the windows and absolutely raved among the tall elms that overhung the stables. All at once she started up; a thought had come into her head which threatened to destroy all her hopes for the morrow. The jewels which were to redeem her brother had been left in Virginia's room when Cora Lander took possession of it. How were they to be obtained? Cora always locked the door leading to her suite of rooms when she left them, if it was only for an hour.

This thought, added to the gloom of the place and hour, completed the feeling of depression that had for some time been creeping over her. She was sad, too, from other causes. It was hard to feel that she—so full of thought, young, talented and rich with feelings that few women ever possessed—should be shut out of all the sweet hopes that were making Virginia's life so bright. Joshua's speech, rude and uncouth as he was, had wounded her deeply. She could not drive it from her mind.

Ellen arose from her chair and began walking up and down the room. Sometimes, she paused to look out upon the storm, which beat heavily against the windows. It seemed to her that Joshua had been gone a long time; she

listened for his footsteps on the stairs, and peered impatiently from the window. Once she thought that he was stumbling up stairs, and opened the door to listen. It was the horses stamping in their stalls, and she went back disappointed.

At length footsteps plainly sounded from the room below—they mounted the stairs and paused. Ellen flung the door open to give Joshua light, and found herself face to face with Eunice Hurd, who strode into the room flushed red with surprise.

"What on arth brought you here?" she demanded.

"I—I came to see Joshua Hurd," faltered Ellen.

"Came to see our Josh, what for, I want to know?"

"I wanted him to go a little errand for me."

"For you—a rainy night like this—well, I never did! Where has he gone to? What has he gone after?"

Here Eunice began to sniff suspiciously. A new idea had come into her head.

"Isn't that a smell of licker? If this isn't a lemon-squeezer, I don't know what is. What on arth—"

Here Eunice thrust her long forefinger into the tumbler, and scooping out some sugar from the bottom, tasted it.

"Licker, and strong as Jehu—if he was strong, which it ain't no proof of because he driv hard. This ere tea-kettle, too, hooked out of the kitchen! That feller has hot drinks here every night of his life, I'll take my Bible oath. Have you seen him a doin' on it?"

"I'm afraid I have done worse than that. He gave me a little, and I drank it."

"You did!"

"Yes, he was very earnest about it, and—and—"

Eunice had drawn her chair in front of the stove and planted her feet on the hearth.

"Now tell me, Ellen Nolan—honestly—does that critter know enough to make a decent punch?"

"Oh, Joshua knows enough for that and a good many other things."

"Now, do you think so? Josh is a good soul as ever lived."

"He is indeed; but, Miss Eunice, I want to ask a great favor of you."

"Well, what is it?" asked Eunice, drawing close to the stove and lifting the skirt of her dress a little, that the genial heat might fall on her ankles, a sure sign of good humor with her.

"Miss Eunice, there is something in Miss Cora's room that I want."

"Well, what is it?"

"In the recess is an ottoman, something that has strayed into the room, for it does not match the furniture. May we have it in our parlor? I do not suppose she will miss it, or care if she does."

Eunice turned her face square on the hesitating girl, and searched her through and through with those scintillating eyes.

"Ellen Nolan, you are asking one thing and meaning another."

"I know it, Eunice; but that is all I want."

"Tell me all about it."

"I cannot, Miss Eunice. It is my young lady's affair."

Eunice turned round and planted her feet on the floor with emphasis.

"Ellen Nolan, you may believe it or not, but Miss Virginia Lander hasn't, on this arth, better friends than I and Josh are to her. If we could do what we want to, she would be—no matter, I'm ready to help her do anything that won't hurt Mrs. Lander."

"This will hurt no one."

"Tell me what it is? Trust me—you may. I'm bitter as gall sometimes, but I'd amost lay down my life for that poor gal."

Tears actually came into those changeable eyes. The bony hands which Eunice clasped around her knees shook visibly.

"I *will* tell," said Ellen, feeling how sincere the woman was. "When we were in those rooms, the first day we came here, Miss Virginia hid her mother's jewels in that ottoman. It is hollow, and closes with a spring."

Eunice burst into a chuckling laugh.

"That's where they was, is it? *She* knew about them, and has searched all the desks and drawers over and over agin. She seemed to hanker arter them pearls more than anything. So she hid 'em—I wouldn't a thought so much cuteness was in the innocent critter. Only this very night 'tother one was after me to know if I hadn't seen 'em somewhere about among her things. She's jest crazy to get hold on 'em."

"But you will never permit it, Eunice?"

"Permit it! I'd see her in—in Jehosaphat fust!"

"But how can we get them out of her room?"

"Wait till to-morrow, and I'll do it. If she keeps keys, well I have to have 'em too."

Ellen threw both arms around the old maid's neck and kissed her on the lips. A grim smile stole over that hard mouth.

"I ain't much used ter kissing," she said, and her harsh voice broke a little, "but sometimes it is a refreshment, ain't it?"

The loneliness that spoke out in these words touched Ellen to the heart.

"I am so glad I trusted you," she said.

"You might a done it always—I meant to have helped that poor gal—for Josh and I knew how it was—and thought I had it all worked out, but that young serpent was too much for me. The time may come yit. It's only on account of Mrs. Lander that I have grit my teeth and

kept in. She's jest as near to me as Miss Virginia is to you, and that critter has almost killed her. She began to domineer over her as if she'd been a nigger slave driver, and Mrs. Eliza Lander her personal property. But I told her a thing or two and scared her out of that. She's afraid of me now, I tell you. If it hadn't been for that, Miss Virginia would a suffered more en you ever dreamed on; she'd a been in an insane asylum now. It's the gospel truth I'm telling you."

"I believe it. Miss Virginia knows how often you have befriended her."

"She don't know, and she can't know how hard it is for me to do more or not to do more. If it wasn't for Eliza Lander—well, well, that young imp of Satan has got the better of us all—tied us up by the heart. I ain't a religious pusion, Ellen Nolan, and I've done some things that I'm awful sorry for, not meaning to do anybody one mite of harm, but I'd no more change places with that splendid cretur than I would with a rattlesnake carrying a string of rattles that long. I hate the sight of her, and so does Joshua."

Here Joshua came in, dripping wet. He stopped a moment on the threshold, astonished to find Eunice there and embarrassed about the letter, but Ellen spoke to him at once.

"Did you find Mr. Brooks?—have you brought any answer?"

Joshua took a note from his vest pocket and gave it to her.

"It is for my young mistress," she said, addressing Eunice. "We are going to New York just as soon as you can help us about what we were talking of, and after that we shall have some good news to tell you."

"What—she hasn't found any new evidence? That Brooks ain't a lawyer nor nothing, that's going to take up her case, is he? If that's so, I must have her word—no,

she must take her affidavit on it—that she'll be a better child to Mrs. Lander than that critter has ever been. If she'll take her Bible oath to that, I'll do my best to help her, and so will Joshua Hurd; I'll answer for him."

"And he'll answer for hisself," said Joshua, seating himself on the table and pushing the tumbler behind him, fully believing that Eunice had not seen it.

"You needn't push it away, brother Joshua, I know what's been in it."

Brother Joshua! What was the world coming to? Such words of endearment had not met the man's ears for so long a time that he could not remember back to them.

"Joshua?"

"Well, Eunice?"

"Is there any hot water in the tea-kettle?"

"I—I don't know, Eunice."

"Is there any licker in that long bottle there?"

"Well, Eunice, I—I—shouldn't wonder!"

"Lemon and sugar?"

"I sometimes make a glass of hot lemonade before I go to bed on rainy nights like this, and try to keep them things handy."

"Joshua, make me a glass of that hot lemonade, exactly as you have made it once afore to-night; I feel kinder chilly, Joshua."

"Jest?" asked Joshua, looking wistfully at the table.

"Jest," answered Eunice.

Joshua made the lemonade, and the brother and sister sat a long time with their feet on the stove hearth talking in low voices to each other.

Ellen went away just as the kettle was put on the stove again, and Eunice called after her not to fear about the otterman, she would attend to that.

When Virginia received her note, she hurried off to her bed-chamber and read it on her knees by the little shaded

lamp, that seemed to fill the room with moonlight. It was very short, but she read it over and over again, leaving half-a-dozen kisses on the signature and sleeping with it in her bosom that night.

CHAPTER L.

THE FALSE STORY AND THE FORGED LETTER.

EARLY in the morning, Cora sent a note to Clarence Brooks, full of regrets that she had not been able to receive him the day before. Her aunt was better, she said, and she wished very much to see Mr. Brooks as soon as possible. An affair, which she could not speak of except to a very particular friend, who had been her father's friend also, was troubling her greatly; indeed, it had been the cause of her aunt's illness. Would Mr. Brooks come prepared to give her his most serious attention and some little sympathy? She was so young, the trouble that had come upon her seemed worse than it might appear to his experienced judgment.

In reply to this letter, Mr. Brooks wrote that he had intended to call that day, and would be most happy to give her aid or counsel in any difficulty which beset her. Indeed, as the daughter of his old friend, he had an especial interest in her tranquillity and welfare which no time or circumstance could destroy. He only hoped that it would prove his good fortune to remove any little unpleasantness that had for a moment distressed her.

Cora read the letter eagerly.

"That is well," she muttered; "before night he shall share my troubles, I will pledge myself to that. If my

sweet cousin will only oblige me by going out now, she will serve a double purpose; I must find those jewels. Where can she keep them? Not a drawer, wardrobe or desk that I have not searched. If she once gets the money for that wretch I am lost. Let me think; a sharp intellect and prompt action might turn even that to account. If one could only be in two places at once now. In her conversation with that little hunchback she will be sure to betray the hiding-place of those jewels, but I cannot spend my time there. He might call at any minute."

Brooks did not call till afternoon, when Cora went down to receive him in the little reception room, which looked towards the woods. The curtains were all drawn back this time, and the blinds open. She was determined to give no chance for listeners in that interview.

"My aunt is better, thank you, but not quite able to come down," she said, answering his polite inquiries and seating herself on the sofa he occupied. "You must think it strange that I should send that note, but—but—"

Here Cora's fine eyes filled with ready tears, and her speech gave way for a moment. Brooks was surprised and touched. It was not often that Miss Lander gave way in this fashion. He reached forth his hand, laying it upon hers, and felt the quiver that ran through her frame stirring that.

"I trust it is nothing serious; do not agitate yourself so. Tell me what the trouble is and I may be of use."

"I tried to keep it from you—I tried to keep it from everybody, but now it is impossible; I must confide in some one. So young and inexperienced, how can I help it? It is cruel, so cruel in my cousin to drive me to this strait."

"Your cousin, Miss Lander—is all this agitation about your cousin?" said Brooks, struck with sudden amazement.

"Yes, Mr. Brooks, you never will know all that I am

suffering on her account. It is impossible for any one to understand it who has not loved her as I did—and do, for, with all her faults, I *cannot* help loving her.”

“Pray, explain,” said Brooks, a little coldly, “I do not understand.”

“How can you—oh, Mr. Brooks? But I will tell you from the beginning. You know that my cousin and I were educated together—that my father made no difference between us. He was one of the most liberal men you ever knew—”

“I am aware of that.”

Brooks was arming himself against this girl, and she saw it. A stern, angry fire came into his eyes—he withdrew his hand from the trembling fingers that clung to it, and sat more upright, like a judge listening. He remembered what Virginia had told him regarding the enmity of her cousin, and took up her cause warmly in his heart. Cora saw this with one of her side glances, and went on confident of the result.

“We were at school in Paris and in Brussels, and went to Florence afterward to study Italian there. In this place, attended by a governess and faithful old courier, we joined a party of Americans and travelled over Italy some five or six months before my poor father came to bring us home. Up to this time, Mr. Brooks, Virginia and I had been like twin sisters. We loved each other dearly, trusted each other in thought and word—she was everything to me.”

Here Cora broke off with a sob in her throat. That creature would have made a magnificent actress; she really half believed the story she was telling, and wept as artists shed real tears in their imaginary characters.

“But in Italy, Mr. Brooks, all this changed. She kept away from me, insisted on having a room to herself, went out alone for hours and hours together, was unsettled in her spirits—in short here she gave the first wound to a love

that had united us from the cradle. Some weeks after, the old courier explained all this to me. Virginia had made an acquaintance and formed an attachment, which she kept from me and every one. Some strange young man, travelling for pleasure or in pursuit of a calling I did not dream of at the time, had won her heart from us. How or where she first met him I do not know, but her first letter was written from Florence.”

“To whom and where was it directed?” asked Brooks, sternly.

“I do not know. The courier spoke no English, and could not pronounce the name intelligibly. Besides, I was a mere school girl then and shrunk from prying into my cousin’s secrets. I only know that several letters passed between these two persons before my father came.”

“Did you tell him of this?”

“It would have seemed like treason to my cousin. Thank Heaven he was spared the misery of knowing how his generosity had been wasted.”

“Go on, I am listening,” said Brooks, in a cold, hard voice.

Cora looked at him timidly, as if so ashamed of her cousin’s conduct that it weighed her eyelids down, and went on:

“We sailed in that fatal steamer. The fire broke out when my cousin and I were in the cabin; we both rushed on deck, I to my father. She plunged overboard, abandoning us both to perish, and was taken up, swimming for her life, by one of the boats. I cannot describe the scene to which she left us—the fire raging under our feet, the passengers driven closer and closer together like wild animals in the heart of a prairie fire. My father and I clung together; he begged me to leap overboard alone and thus save myself, knowing how well I could swim. But I would not do it. Clinging to each other, we made the fearful leap

together. Others pressed upon us, tore us apart—I never saw my father again. Around and around that burning hulk I swam in search of him. At last the hot flames drove me away. The boat in which Virginia had found shelter was still in sight, lying motionless: I made for it, fighting the waves with desperate energy. She saw me—I know that Virginia saw me, but the boat never stirred. At last the men seemed to rebel against the cruelty of seeing a poor girl sink before their eyes and came toward me. I was sinking, senseless, almost dead, when they picked me up. In the boat with my cousin, was a little hunchbacked creature who had fastened on her in the water and thus saved herself. This girl, Ellen Nolan, became warmly attached to her from that time, and has ever since been the creature of her will. I think, at this moment, she would work, sin or die for the girl who saved her life. I consented that this girl should come with us to America when we were at last rescued by a passing vessel. The secrecy she maintained and her course in the shipwreck had disturbed my confidence in her, but I loved her in spite of all and resolved to deal generously by her and her mother, as my father had done.

"We reached home—my aunt had taken possession of the property under a will found in my father's desk: she believed us all lost, and we took her by surprise. Mr. Brooks, something transpired then which I will not dwell upon; you would hardly believe me if I did. It has no bearing on the point I wish to consult you about, and I have little wish to prejudice you unnecessarily against my cousin. But it created estrangements between us which have, I fear, destroyed all my influence over her—a sad, sad conviction when she stands so much in need of a firm trusted friend."

"Go on," said Brooks, still sitting upright, resolute in his trust of the woman he loved. "Let me hear all—then I will speak."

"Mr. Brooks, that man, the person she met in Italy, has followed her here."

Brooks started; that shot told upon his armor, and Cora knew it. She went on in a low and seemingly reluctant voice:

"He is in this neighborhood; she goes out to meet him."

Again Brooks started, a flash of joy swept his face. She had mistaken him for the Italian lover, who probably never had an existence.

"He must have come about the time that we did, for I know that she has met him, from time to time, in the house where he lives, or it may be boards. Yesterday, just before you called, a youth came here from the city with a letter for Virginia. I was anxious about her, and went down to question him. I wore a black dress, as she does invariably, and people say that I and my cousin are so much alike that a stranger might mistake one for the other. I think the boy did take me for Virginia, for he gave me a note, directed to her, and went on to state the urgent need there was for action regarding a sum of money that was wanted and must be obtained. He spoke of jewels which were to be turned into money, and said, if everything else failed, the rich cousin was to be applied to as a last resort. All this was said as I stood with the note in my hand. The lad was earnest and a good deal excited. I found out afterward that it was his own brother he was pleading for, and that both were the brothers of Ellen Nolan."

Brooks suppressed a start of surprise, and seemed to listen as he had before; but there was a burning red on his cheeks, and even his forehead grew dusky. He lifted his eyes, that had a strange glow in them, and was about to say, "Go on," firmly, as he had before, when his voice faltered and his hand fell nervelessly down from the back of the sofa, where it had been resting. Directly before the

window, and half way through the flower garden, he saw Virginia Lander and Ellen Nolan, conversing earnestly together and walking towards the woods. There in his bosom was the note, so modestly tender, which told him that they were both going to the city early that morning. Cora glanced out of the window, saw what it was that had disturbed him, and said, very naturally :

"There is my cousin now, and Ellen Nolan with her. You have never seen either of them, I believe."

Brooks made no answer to this, but leaned back and prepared to listen; she observed that his face had taken a dead whiteness, and all around his mouth seemed chiselled from marble.

"I went away, as he thought, I suppose, to read the note alone—"

"And did you?" asked Brooks, with sudden impetuosity.

She smiled faintly and shook her head.

I could not have forced myself to obtain information in that way."

"True—very true."

"I sent the note to Virginia by a servant, and told him to bring the answer back to me; but she came down herself and gave her reply to the lad, with some whispered message, which I did not hear. I have no idea what his reason was, but this messenger, who seemed as much interested in the affair as a principal, did not leave the house as another person would have done, but went across the lawn, through the thick wet grass, into the woods yonder. It was raining hard, and I stood by the window a long time, wondering what could take him in that direction, when I saw him come out from among the trees, accompanied by another person, who probably had been waiting there."

"Did you get a full view of this person?" asked Brooks, quickly. "Was he tall or short, light or dark?"

"He was above the middle height and seemed young, but a large Mackintosh concealed his figure, and I was not near enough to distinguish his features. They went down toward the road in company, and that was all I saw of them."

"And what conclusion do you draw from all this?" asked Brooks.

"I am unable to draw conclusions, Mr. Brooks, or decide on what ought to be done; one thing is certain, my cousin is in a dangerous position; she has been led into some entanglement which will be her ruin. The brother of Ellen Nolan can be no proper match for Virginia Lander, and if he were, why this secrecy? She is under no guardianship; my aunt loves her devotedly, and would interpose no objections to a proper marriage. I stand ready—and she knows it—to bestow the portion my father intended for her—more, even. Why does she have concealments, then, from her best friends? How am I to protect her? What can I do? My aunt has fretted herself into a pitiable state of nervous weakness since she obtained a knowledge of this trouble, and looks to me for counsel and help. I have tried to gain Virginia's confidence in every way, but she avoids me, scarcely recognizes her mother, and is only intimate with this strange hunchback, *his* sister."

Brooks shunk from the recollection this speech brought to his mind. Had not Virginia repudiated her mother even to him? Had she not refused to recognize the maternal right of consent to his proposal of marriage? He arose, and, taking his hat, would have left the house without speaking a word.

"Have you no counsel to give me? Remember how young I am," pleaded Cora, following him. "Have I done wrong in telling you this?"

"Wrong! who says you have done wrong? I have a right to know."

"Can you give me neither comfort nor advice, Mr. Brooks?"

He laid one hand on her arm and stood smiling on her for at least a minute, but the smile upon a face so white made her shrink.

"In a few days, Miss Lander, I shall be better prepared to advise you. It is a delicate matter, and must not be rashly handled. Good afternoon."

He seemed firm, but the hat which he had taken shook in his hand.

"This has been a painful conversation, believe me. I tried to avoid it. If there had been any other person with whom the family honor could be entrusted, I would not have troubled you."

"There is no other person—there must be no confidences with strangers on a subject like this."

"No, I felt that, oh! how forcibly."

She clasped her hand on his arm, thus mutely claiming his sympathy. Tears stood in her eyes; she closed those long silken lashes and crushed them back as if ashamed of the sweet feminine impulse which had sent them from a kind heart.

"My father would have been so sorry," she faltered.

Brooks put her hand gently from his arm and turned away; for the heart in his bosom began to swell, and he was afraid of the passion that had well nigh outmastered his manhood.

Cora watched Clarence Brooks as he went down the carriage drive; her features did not change, she had acted her part so well that it seemed absolutely real to her.

"What a grand heart is there—how good and kind he is."

She stood awhile by the window with those false tears on her eyelashes, wondering if he would follow Virginia to the woods or go directly to the hotel. He went down the

terrace steps and took the railway track, which curved in a circuitous bend there, making his walk twice as long as it would have been by the carriage drive.

"He will go there—it is only because he thinks that some of us may see him. Ah! there they come; I shall have time."

Virginia and Ellen came across the lawn, walking slowly and with an air of depression. Cora watched them impatiently.

"Will they never go in?" she cried, stamping her foot on the carpet. "Twenty minutes, I only ask twenty minutes."

She ran up stairs, put on the shawl which was so nearly the color of dead leaves, and went down the back way. Once out of doors, she took a path, well sheltered by shrubbery, which led around the stables, and skirting the grounds, mostly under the protection of a stone wall, entered the ravine a little below the cataract. Here she took the footpath, treading it like a panther, and sheltering herself behind a clump of wild spruce trees, took an observation. No one was in sight. The ravine was a solitude; by this time the leaves were almost swept from the trees, giving deeper gloom to the evergreens, which grew thickly along the brook. After making sure that she was not observed, Cora darted down below the bridge, dipped a letter, which she took from her bosom, in the brook, and climbed the bank again. Just where the path was broken up by the roots and stones which formed an embankment for the log cabin, Cora threw the wet paper down among the leaves, partly unfolded as if it had opened in falling. The leaves all around it were still moist and sodden from the storm; she trailed a torn oak leaf half across it, and made her way up the ravine, swiftly as she had entered it, and went home, sheltering herself, as before, back of the stone wall and in the thick shrubbery.

She was right, ten minutes after Clarence Brooks came, with long, powerful strides, up the ravine, searching for Virginia Lander. His strong spirit was determined to throw off the doubts that oppressed it or learn the worst at once. He had not seen her return from the woods, and felt an almost savage wish to find her where he could wrest the secret from her heart and crush her with scorn, or hear the vindication which he still hoped, and almost believed that she would be enabled to make.

But the woods was solitary as a grave; the foliage had been so completely swept from the trees that he could command a full view up the ravine from the stone bridge to the cataract, that mocked him with a sharp pang of memory, and he thought of that picnic on the ledge with a sudden rush of feeling which absolutely brought hot tears to his eyes. Virginia was not anywhere in sight; the whole ravine was a solitude, all the hollows were full of dank leaves, the forest turf was carpeted with them, not as they had been, rich and gorgeous only a week before, but with the colors all washed out, broken and sodden, decaying refuse of the autumn. The naked boughs rose drearily against a dull sky, sending forth that low metallic chiming which is the winter music of the woods. The brook, bereft of half its brightness, crept along, saddened, like a criminal going to judgment. The chestnut tree was studded with brown burs, open like stars, from which all the nuts had fallen. A few long, ragged leaves fluttered on the branches and from the topmost boughs two crows called to each other gloomily.

"I will go up to the cabin," that unhappy man muttered to himself. "Possibly they are among the evergreens and I can see them from the window."

As he turned to mount the eminence that paper fell under his observation. He stooped, picked it up almost mechanically, and was about to throw it down again, when

something in the writing fixed his attention. The paper was wet but not much blotted; with a little trouble he read it from beginning to end, and, strange to say, a sensation of relief succeeded the reading; that dead certainty which follows suspense, though it amounts to despair, is always a relief, for the tension of nerves gives way and a species of rest follows.

"It is true! She loves some other man—she never loved me. This beautiful creature, with her innocent looks and frank speech, is one mass of deception. Amos Lander's letter warned me of this clearly as his generous nature could warn the friend he loved against a creature of his bounty. But I was wilfully blind, worse than blind, a willing idiot. Still there was some excuse for me; a lovelier creature than she seemed never possessed a man's heart."

Brooks did not enter the cabin but turned drearily, as men prepare to leave a grave newly filled, and walked slowly toward the hotel, so wretched that he scarcely cared to live, for if ever man loved a woman on this earth he had loved Virginia Lander.

Meantime Virginia and Ellen had returned home from a dreary walk disappointed; Ellen had been writing hard since the first break of day, writing as only one whose genius is inspired by a noble purpose can write. Sheet after sheet of manuscript she had flung from her, eager for the next, panting to complete the work which would redeem her brother from the peril that threatened him. But, with the best of us, the spirit is sometimes willing when the flesh is weak. Virginia saw that Ellen grew pale as she wrote, that her little hand trembled to and fro on the paper, leaving blots and erasures behind it. She went up to the desk and leaned caressingly on the writer's shoulder.

"Come, Ellen, stop writing a little while."

Ellen shook the arm from her shoulder and went on with her work.

"No, no; God has given me these hours to finish *m*. Do let me alone!"

"But I am so anxious to go out. He will be regretting our absence and go up to the cabin—I feel sure of it!"

"*He!* oh, he cannot come here till my work has set him above all fear."

"I was not speaking of your brother, Ellen."

Ellen took her mind, with a wrench, from its subject, and tried hard to understand what was wanted of her. She had that essential qualification for an author, and that rare thing among women, a power of strong concentration, and it possessed her then entirely.

"What—what is it?" she questioned, while the pen quivered in her hand. "Afraid this will hurt me?—Not at all. Fresh air?—We can have plenty of that by and by."

"But it is for myself I am so anxious to go out," said Virginia, partly in her own behalf, and partly because the pallor on that thin face terrified her.

"You, yourself?" Ellen flung down her pen. "Well, what is it you would like, lady? I—I am ready. A walk? Of course, nothing better, only don't let us stay out long. You see, I am close upon the ending, and—and—my things? Oh yes, I will have them on in a minute."

In this state of bewilderment, Ellen went out, following Virginia almost in silence to the woods. She had not entirely gained command of her own mind, which would keep turning back to the creation it had left with such reluctance. They found the ravine solitary, and so changed, that Virginia felt oppressed by everything she saw.

"He is not here. He will not come to-day. Why should he, thinking us in the city?"

With these words, she wandered on up to the little cataract, which had lost all its crystal brightness, and was swollen by the rains into a great outgush of muddy water.

Here she lingered about awhile, looking anxiously down the ravine for the person who was listening with a burning heart to Cora Lander's falsehood.

"He is not here! It is of no use waiting; the storm has made everything so dreary that it chills one. Shall we go back, Ellen?"

"Back?" answered Ellen, eagerly. "Oh, certainly; this air has done me so much good."

So the two girls went home again, one sad and out of spirits, the other eager for work. They saw nothing of Brooks, who had just left the house, but went at once to the parlor up stairs, where Ellen fell to her writing again and Virginia sat down by the window, wondering why Clarence Brooks had not yet come to the house as he proposed.

It was getting dark, when Eunice came into the room, carrying an ottoman in her arms.

"Here," she said, setting it on the floor, "take out what there is in it quick! She's gone down to tea, and I must have it back again afore she comes up. The critter has got eyes like a hawk."

Virginia started from the window, touched a spring in the wood-work and flung back the top of the ottoman, revealing a miscellaneous heap of papers, jewel-boxes, pen-holders and loose ornaments.

Eunice snatched Ellen's shawl which had fallen back from her chair, spread it on the carpet and emptied all these things into it. Then she closed the ottoman with a snap, and carried it away, muttering:

"The Lord knows they're your own property, and you're welcome to 'em."

Ellen wrote on, she had neither heard nor seen anything of this. Away in a world of her own, she was working out a brother's freedom. Once more Virginia aroused her.

"Ellen! Ellen! we have got the jewels! See here!

these pearls must be of great value—and these, and these!”

Ellen started and looked up, holding her pen suspended.

“What is it? Pearls, and such pearls!” she cried, as Virginia laid the necklace of large strung pearls, with seven pear-shaped pendants, on the paper before her. “And diamonds too! We shall go to the city now. No more delay. God bless you, dear, dear lady, for this! I am so tired that thanks struggle in my bosom without utterance; but I feel them. I wonder why Eunice don’t bring in the tea, my throat is parched and my eyes burn—why don’t she bring in the tea?”

“She brought it an hour ago, Ellen, and you drank two cups.”

“Did she? I knew nothing about it, a glass of water will do just as well. These things, how beautiful they are! Your mother’s too! It is cruel, but you shall have them back again. I feel it in my heart that these sheets of paper will redeem your mother’s jewels. Strange, isn’t it, that these blotted pages should have gold in them? I cannot comprehend it.”

Here this strange girl fell to her work again, while Virginia carried her treasures into the next room, where she lay down on the bed, sad at heart and weeping softly because of the loneliness brought on by two days’ absence from the man she loved so devotedly.

Between eight and nine o’clock that night, Virginia was aroused by the tread of a horse passing by the house, and going to a window, looked out. The clouds had all rolled themselves away in billows of fiery gold at sunset that night, and the broad, silvery radiance of a full moon fell upon the earth. Virginia saw nothing, but she still heard the cautious footfall of a horse falling upon turf near the house.

“It is one of the servants going on some errand,” she

thought, and went back to her half darkened room again. Ellen wrote on, made restless for an instant by the strange sound, but unconscious of it the next moment.

Joshua Hurd, who had gone to bed very early that night, heard a strange noise in the stables just as he was falling asleep. He got up, opened the window and looked out. The front of the stables was flung into deep shadow by the drooping elm trees, but he distinctly saw a white horse come out from the open door with a lady on his back.

“What on arth does it mean?” he muttered. “That is Snowball; but which of the wimmen folks is it, and what is she up to?”

That moment the horse came into the moonlight and he saw the lady’s face, clearly as any face could be seen, with a soft hat drawn over the forehead and shaded by a long feather.

“That long feather belongs to her, sure enough; that she serpent never wears one. What can she want a horse-back this time o’ night? If ’twas t’other, I shouldn’t wonder, but her! Well, it’s all right, I haint no doubt. She’s a good gal, if ever one lived, and I ain’t a going to tell nothing about her even to our Eunice. Least said is soonest mended. But where on arth can she be a going?”

CHAPTER LI.

THE MIDNIGHT RIDE.

CLARENCE BROOKS sat on the stoop, into which his room opened, that night, thinking over the last few weeks in his mind. How could he have been so utterly deceived. Why had this girl, loving another, engaged herself to him? Was it in human nature to feign that purest and holiest of

all passions so thoroughly? No, he could not believe that. Whatever had been, Virginia Lander loved him then—to believe otherwise would be horrible. That she had fallen into a serious, perhaps disgraceful entanglement with some unprincipled man, it was impossible to doubt, but she was young, inexperienced—no, no, he could not say that, remembering all she had said to him—how earnest and true she had seemed. The girl was artful, unprincipled, worthless. Yet he could not fling her entirely from his heart. Some designing man, with the aid of that singular little hunchback, had perverted her into the thing she was. What had they really intended? If she did not love him, why—”

He paused, angry with himself. The girl was not worth thinking about. Yet if, by a miracle, she should prove innocent—that was, of course, an impossibility. Cora Lander had no motive for deceiving him. She did not know of his engagement or dream of the secret meetings which had so ensnared him. That secrecy, which seemed so pleasant at first, veiling his love with a sort of romance—why had he never suspected its true meaning before? She would have married him; her earnestness on this point was evident enough. But why?—Did she know him to be a wealthy man? He had never told her so much till the very day of their engagement, and she had no means of understanding the fact. If money was not her object, where was the motive for all this deception? That letter, in the very handwriting which had been worn against his heart, had method, decision in every word. It was not the language of a young girl wildly in love. How far had Ellen Nolan influenced the destiny of her benefactress? Was it this strange girl who had led her into the meshes of a deception so debasing? He remembered with what noiseless facility she had disappeared whenever he wished to converse with Virginia. Had this been a practice with

her? Was she indeed the crafty little thing such conduct would bespeak her?

To these questions of the brain, Clarence Brooks' heart was constantly answering, "no!" But for the letter in his pocket he would have cast off all that burning load of suspicions and trusted to the simple denial of a young creature, whose very presence was a contradiction of everything evil. True, she had seemed willing to make an unnecessary secret of her acquaintance with himself—had met him over and over again in the solitude of that glen, with no companion but that little hunchbacked imp, as he called Ellen in his mind, for he remembered with bitter disgust how she had pleaded with him not to speak of his engagement that night when she came alone to his hotel.

"I will search this to the bottom," he promised himself, "and either rescue her from these people or force the man, whoever he is, to come out openly and claim her. She is lost to me, I know that," he added, with a swelling heart, "but having consecrated her with a love, pure as man ever felt for woman, I will not abandon her to the fate which may prove a terrible one."

Brooks was thinking in this generous way when he heard the sound of a horse coming along the road, evidently treading upon the turf border. His heart stood still; muffled as it was, he knew the fall of those light hoofs, and listened breathlessly. Directly a white horse, with a woman upon its back, rode slowly over the little plank bridge. The lady turned her face toward the hotel, looking partly backward, and he saw the face plainly as clear moonlight could reveal it. The long feather, which he had seen Virginia wear so often, fell to the shoulder nearest him, but that only established her identity in his mind.

Directly after she crossed the bridge, the lady evidently put her horse to his speed, for the quick clatter of his hoofs sounded distinctly along the road, beating down that noble heart with every step.

As the noise died away, Brooks arose and staggered back against the window-frame sick at heart. Up to this moment he had not given up all hope that, by some miracle, the woman he loved might be cleared from the suspicion which wounded him so terribly. But now all was over. His own eyes had witnessed what his heart ached to disbelieve. She was lost to him forever, but he still hoped not to herself.

He went into his sitting-room and paced it up and down for half an hour, growing stern and resolute every minute.

"I will wait for her here," he said; "as she crosses that bridge I will stand before her horse and demand the truth from her own lips; she shall not plunge over this precipice without some one to hold her back."

His voice shook under the blow he had received. As the poor artist picks up the scattered fragments of a statue which he has just fashioned into beauty only to see shattered at his feet, he resolved to rescue some peace of mind out of the chaos of this ruin for the only woman he had ever loved. With this generous resolve in his heart, he sat down patiently and waited.

It was between twelve and one o'clock when faint sounds of a coming horse aroused him from the stupor of grief into which he had fallen. He listened, stood up and looked out upon the road. Surely there was more than one horse coming, and at a sharp pace too. His chair stood in a shadowy end of the porch, and he sat down again so far out of sight that no one but a keen observer could have discovered his presence there. That double sound of hoofs came along the road so swiftly that two horses appeared above the bridge with a suddenness that startled him. It was the white horse with that lady rider, and a dark bay, ridden by a man. The two came neck and neck on to the bridge, and drew up there in the full sheen of the moonlight. The man and the woman seemed to be conversing together in

low voices. As they talked, their horses veered a little and backed toward the farther side of the bridge, turning those two human faces directly toward the hotel. Brooks started to his feet and leaned forward, struck with sudden panic of suspicion, but as yet uncertain. The man took off his hat, reined his horse close up to the lady's, threw an arm around her waist and kissed her, more than once, with what seemed the passionate earnestness of a farewell.

This was neither resented nor shrunk from by the lady. To the reverse, when her companion put on his hat and turned his horse, she wheeled after him, leaned from her saddle and offered her lips to him again. Then the two parted, one galloping up the road at full speed, the other moving more cautiously toward the Lander mansion. Clarence Brooks fell back to his chair, uttering a single sentence: "That man!"

The next morning Virginia and Ellen started for the city by an early train. At the same hour Clarence Brooks was riding toward the Longstone tavern where he had eaten that pleasant dinner, it seemed to him ages ago. The landlord met him at the door, beaming with hospitality.

"Was it the gentleman who came day before yesterday, the same that put up, for a week or two, in that second-rate affair just above the lower depot, some time since—no wonder he wanted a change for the better—was that the man?"

"Yes," Brooks replied, staggering under the new proof which lay in the landlord's speech. "Yes, it is that man I wish to find."

"Oh, sir, he went away this morning, I took him to the upper depot in my own buggy."

"Has he ever been here before? No, not even for a ride. The folks down yonder say he kept mighty quiet, going a trout-fishing up the brook that runs through the Lander grounds, but never ketchen none. From something that

happened here last night, I reckon one could make a guess about that."

Brooks turned away, heart-sick, but came back directly, and asked if the landlord knew where his guest of the night before could be found in the city.

No, the landlord could not exactly tell; but, from something he overheard the young man saying to a boy that came with him that rainy day, he thought it was—street, somewhere near Madison Avenue.

A flush of red came into Brooks' face. He remembered the locality of a house in that direction perfectly, a singular house, with a back drapery of vines, and a fountain raining water drops down among flowers in front. He thanked the landlord, ordered a glass of wine as an excuse for leaving a dollar behind him, and rode away.

An hour after, he called on Cora Lander, who came down to meet him with an anxious face.

"She has gone, and taken the hunchback with her," she said, in great seeming agitation. "The jewels, too, I can find them nowhere; they belonged to my poor mother; but for that I would not care."

"Belonged to your mother, and gone with her! Why this is—"

"Hush, hush—not that—I did not mean it. She claims that my father gave them to her—perhaps he did. Aunt Eliza thinks so. I only wish that they shall not go out of the family. There is a double string of pearls, with pear-shaped pendants, which has been in the family a long time. If she will only give me a chance to buy them back, it is all I ask. This wretched man may have their value and welcome."

"Miss Lander, do you, know where your cousin will stay while she is in town?"

"I am not certain; she may go to the Fifth Avenue Hotel, but I rather fancy she will prefer a house that my father

used to occupy winters, when we were at school. I have not had the heart to visit it since we came home, but she has been there often, I think."

"Does any other person live there, Miss Lander?"

"Yes, a servant; some one has always been left in charge. It is a pretty place, and my father loved it so, I gave my agent orders to keep it in good condition. Some day I hope to find courage to visit it, but not yet."

No violets after a rain ever looked more touchingly beautiful than Cora Lander's eyes as she said this.

"What do you fear so much, Miss Lander? Is it that your cousin will marry this brother of Ellen Nolan?"

"Yes, I fear that; she has not been kind to me, but I could not bear to see her thrown away upon an adventurer like him; for he must be an adventurer."

"She shall never marry him. Leave that to me!"

"How kind you are—how—forgive me, I hardly know what I am saying; this has made me so nervous; not to tell any one that she was going—I have not deserved this. Indeed, indeed I have not."

Cora turned away and wiped her eyes on a handkerchief taken hastily from her pocket, but they filled again instantly.

"Have you any idea to whom they would go with those jewels?"

"It is impossible to say; perhaps Lawyer Stone would help them. He knows Virginia, and was my father's lawyer. In fact he is one of the executors of his will."

"What is Mr. Stone's address?"

Cora gave the address, but added, with great feeling:

"Don't say a word, I beseech you, that will lead him to think there is anything wrong. If we save my poor cousin, it must be entirely without stain or blemish. So far, the secret of her imprudence rests with us. It shall never go farther if I can help it."

"Have no fear, Miss Lander; you can trust this whole affair safely with me. It is a sad, hard task, but I will perform it."

Brooks was very pale that morning, and there was a strange tone in his voice; but his eyes bespoke a steady, firm resolution. He was going away, when Cora followed him.

"When may I see you again?" she questioned. "I shall feel so anxious, so lonely."

"When your cousin is safe, not before."

She lifted her eyes to his; he turned away, their soft expression so resembled Virginia's that it made him recoil.

"Farewell, then, till you bring me good news."

"Farewell," he answered, and added as he went along, "There will never be good news for me in this world again. God is my judge, I only do this to save her."

A down train came shrieking along as he descended the terrace steps, and a boy met him at the depot with a small valise. He took the valise, sprang into the car, and was whirled off on his painful errand.

The first person Brooks went to after reaching the city was Lawyer Stone. He inquired of that gentleman if Miss Lander had been there that morning.

Lawyer Stone admitted that Miss Virginia Lander had just left the office, with a very singular little friend, whom she had saved from drowning, he believed.

Mr. Brooks then observed, with great quietness:

"Yes, I know, she came on special business, to raise money on some jewels, I believe."

"You seem to be entirely in the young lady's confidence," said the lawyer, smiling.

"So far that I know she is in want of money, and am willing to advance all she may require—that is, in behalf of Miss Cora Lander, who does not wish her cousin to want for money, or anything else. As her agent, I am ready to arrange this matter with you."

"If Miss Lander is so generous," answered Stone, drily, "I wonder she did not prevent the necessity of this application on her cousin's part."

"She was not informed of any necessity, and only heard of it by accident. Even now I must stipulate that her name shall not be mentioned in the transaction."

"I shall respect the lady's secret," said the lawyer, coldly. "When will it be her pleasure to pay over the money?"

"On the day after to-morrow. Will that be time enough?"

"I am not sure, the young lady seems in great haste. But I doubt very much if she could get it so soon from any other source, so we must be satisfied. I am no judge of this kind of security. You may not find these gimcracks of sufficient value for the money."

"If it is convenient, let me see them."

Mr. Stone took an inlaid box from his desk and turned several jewel cases from it to the table.

"Here is something she thinks very valuable," he said, opening a morocco case and revealing a double string of pearls coiled around a red satin cushion.

"They are of sufficient value, no matter about the rest," said Brooks, looking sadly at the pearls, but without touching them. "How much money does she want?"

"Three thousand dollars."

"It shall be ready at the time I mentioned. As for these things, keep them in your own possession. Miss Lander wants neither security nor repayment from her cousin. But say nothing of this at present. We can trust you to return them to her at the proper time. When Miss Virginia comes, simply tell her that the money will be ready at the time mentioned. Good morning, sir."

"Good morning," answered the lawyer, sweeping the jewels back into their box. "A good-looking fellow, and came just in the right time, for I haven't the least idea

that anybody else would have advanced half the amount on these things. What on earth does the girl want with so much money, I wonder? I would have refused to help her, but I knew well enough that some one would direct her to a pawnbroker's, where Mrs. Lander's pearls would have cut a pretty figure. Who is this fellow? I suspect the three thousand dollars will come out of his pocket. That girl does not pay it, I'll be sworn."

Muttering these words, the shrewd lawyer locked the jewels up in his safe and was soon lost in a pile of papers which lay, with a piece of red tape loosely twisted about them, on his table, for he had been disturbed while untying the parcels, first by Miss Virginia Lander and then by Clarence Brooks, in a fashion which took him so completely out of his usual routine that he found some difficulty in getting into groove again.

CHAPTER LII.

ANGELS' VISITS.

THE first step that Virginia Lander took in the business that brought her to town was, as we have seen, to visit Lawyer Stone, who gave her some vague encouragement about raising the money. He asked a good many embarrassing questions, which she was not prepared to answer, and which excited a little distrust in that acute mind with regard to things that had gone before. Ellen had answered for her once or twice, and that rather added to the general bad effect of the visit. In fact, Virginia left the lawyer's office a little disheartened. This helping a fellow creature out of the results of a crime is no easy matter, as she was doomed to learn.

"Now," said Ellen, "let us go to him. Oh! lady, my heart aches with desire; I so long to look on his face again."

They were near the Park now, and Virginia beckoned a carriage. When she gave her orders to the driver, Ellen interposed.

"Not to the house, lest we draw attention to it. Let him stop at the corner."

Virginia acquiesced, and they were set down in Madison Avenue, where the man was ordered to wait. There was a shade of mystery in all this which troubled Virginia.

When they opened the gate, Brian Nolan came to the door and held it open, gazing at them wistfully as they came up the walk. Ellen answered his look with a smile which brought glad light into his eyes.

"Go up," said Brian, "he is in the back room, close by the stairs. If the lady pleases, she can wait in the drawing-room."

He opened the drawing-room door, and Virginia, amazed by all she saw, went in. Was this the home of Ellen Nolan's brother, the man who was in such abject need of money? For a moment all sympathy for him went out of her heart. Those sumptuous surroundings revolted her, for with all those changes the girl did not recognize the house as one that had belonged to her father.

Ellen went up stairs, trembling in every limb. This brother had been, since she could remember, the romance of her family, the being for whom they had all made sacrifices and endured those haunting anxieties which frequently knit an offender closest to the family heart. To Ellen this young man had been a sort of hero, splendid even in his faults; she did not allow even the crime which she knew of to shake her faith in his fine qualities, utterly. It wounded her to the soul, but she said to herself, "He must have been fearfully tempted."

Into the room she went, half afraid and so overcome by a rush of affection that she could hardly stand. Seymour was lying on the dainty couch where Cora had so often idled her time away. His face was turned to the wall, one hand was thrust under the silken pillow and the other lay clenched upon his bosom.

Ellen stole to the couch, and, kneeling down, took the clenched hand between both hers.

"My brother!"

Seymour turned instantly, fixed his eyes on that face and cried out:

"Is it Ellen? Is it the poor girl he loved little better than all the rest?"

"Yes, brother Alfred, it is Ellen. He loved me better than the rest because of this."

She touched her shoulder with a simplicity that was more than pathetic.

"He knew that I should have so much need of love," she added, answering the mournful glance of his eyes.

"Who could help loving you, child?"

It was natural to call Ellen a child; everybody did it, though in thought and feeling she was so old.

"Oh! if I could make you love me, brother!"

"I do—I do; between us there is a terrible sympathy which united us closest in our father's love."

"I know what you mean!" said Ellen, with a smile that brought tears into the young man's eyes.

"That was nothing to the deformity which lay here," he said, with bitter emphasis, striking the clenched hand against his heart. "You awoke all the tenderness of his soul, I tortured him through his entire life, robbed his little ones of their natural rights, and lie here accursed in my own mind—little better than a convict, Ellen Nolan!"

"Hush," she said, gently, "I will not hear you talk so. This one act, which preys upon us all, can be retrieved. She is below."

"She! Who? Not—not—Ellen, dear, tell me who it is."

"My young mistress!"

"Which? Who are you talking of?"

"Miss Virginia Lander!"

Seymour fell back on the couch, great beads of perspiration started to his forehead. He absolutely panted for breath.

"I thought it had been—had been—but no matter, it is before the time. I am mad to dream of it yet. This other lady, what is she doing here?"

"She has come to save you—to save us all. This morning she has been to raise the money you want."

Seymour started up wild and pale.

"What!"

"She is my friend—she saved my life. She saw my father when he prepared us all to die. Now she comes here to save his son from something worse than death."

"You know it—she knows it?"

"Yes, she knows it. I could not ask help without giving confidence."

"She will betray me!"

"She would die first."

"Are you sure—are you sure, Ellen Nolan?"

"Oh, brother, you do not know her!"

"And she will give me this money? Remember, it is three thousand dollars."

"I know; that is what she asked for."

"And will she get it? Are you sure?"

"I think so; the gentleman the same as promised."

Seymour threw both arms over his head and burst into a wild passion of tears.

"Saved! saved! Oh, my God, I am grateful, so grateful!"

His whole frame shook. He clasped both hands over his face and the tears streamed like rain from beneath them.

"She does not know all the good she is doing; she has lifted a human soul out of a plight so desperate that he was ready to kill himself."

"No, no! not that! You could not have thought it!" cried Ellen, clinging to him.

"She has redeemed me—that which the prayers and entreaties of a good father failed to do, this young girl has accomplished. From this day, with God Almighty's help, I will be a good man."

He was in earnest. Those clasped hands uplifted to Heaven—those features, quivering with strong emotion, bespoke the energy of a fixed resolution.

"Our father knew that this day would come, and believing it, sent you his last blessing," said Ellen, almost in a whisper.

Seymour turned his wet face and looked mournfully into her eyes.

"Did he? My poor father! my poor father!"

"They were the last words he ever spoke."

"And I so unworthy! God forgive me!"

"I knew," said Ellen, speaking low and with tears in her voice, "I knew, from that awful hour, how it would end. The duties he laid down were given to me: I am feeble and hardly worth the life she saved; but God sometimes gives great purposes into weak hands."

"You came here with a noble purpose, Ellen."

"*She* came with a noble purpose; this three thousand dollars is all she has got in the world."

"And is ready to give it to a man she never saw?"

"She offers it of her own free will."

"Ellen, is this lady a woman or an angel?"

"Both, I think."

"God bless her! God forever bless her! She has saved me! she has saved me!"

"God has blessed her, for she is dearly beloved," said Ellen.

The poor girl spoke very sadly. Seymour leaned forward and kissed her forehead.

"I will love you dearly, little sister."

She lifted those wistful eyes to his.

"You and I will be all the world to each other yet," she said. "I know it."

The young man smiled for the first time that day. He was thinking of another love which would forever stand pre-eminent with him—of the sweet promises given during that midnight ride. Now that his secret might be kept from her and the whole world, there was love for him deeper and far more precious than Ellen ever dreamed of. In a week, a single week, he would stand without fear before the whole world and openly claim Cora Lander, the most beautiful woman and richest heiress in New York, as his wife. The iron chain of his crime was about to fall from him. As these thoughts passed through his mind, he bent over Ellen with a pity in his eyes that almost broke her heart.

"Heaven so deal with me as I am kind and generous to you little sister!"

Ellen arose; he also stood up, caressing her with his hand.

"I wish you knew how happy I am! What a dead, heavy weight has been lifted from my heart!"

"I do know; it brightens all your face. I too am happy. It is the sweetest thing in life to be grateful. Good-bye, brother; we shall come again the moment that money is paid. Then you will have cause for joy."

"Are you going, Ellen?"

"My lady is below, will you go speak with her?"

"Not now, dear; this news has unmanned me; I could not thank her without making a child of myself. Say this for me, Ellen, and say also that, while I live, I shall be grateful to her. Some day soon I will prove it."

Ellen went down stairs and found Virginia looking through the lace curtains of the drawing-room window. A close carriage stood on the opposite side of the street from which a man was stepping to the pavement.

"Come here, Ellen," said Virginia, in a low voice. "It is very strange, but I thought—you know it is impossible—but a face like that of Mr. Brooks seemed to be taking a survey of this house."

Ellen caught her breath, but went up to the window and looked out, with Virginia's arm over her shoulder. They did not know it, but that moment Seymour was looking out of the upper window, just above them. He saw nothing but a close carriage driving up the street. The man who had stepped from it was walking quietly along the sidewalk, but this conversation had passed between him and Clarence Brooks, who had just driven away:

"That is the man, but do not arrest him while ladies are in the house. When they leave, lose no time."

"All right. You can depend on it, I'll make a neat job of the affair. It isn't often one has a chance at so handsome and gentlemanly a fellow."

So the man walked on in a careless, idle way, which disturbed no one, until Virginia and Ellen left the house. Then he turned and followed them to the carriage, doing a little amateur business of his own, not set down in the programme.

"Now that the Canary birds have flown, I may as well go to work in earnest," he muttered. "What a jolly nest the fellow has got into! Upon my word I hate to spring the trap on him, and so did the gentleman, or I'm no judge of a man's face. How deadly white he was when that girl came to the window. His jaw closed like iron—jealous, I wonder? Robbed him double. I'll be sworn. I may as well begin."

With a soft step, the man paused at the gate, stopped at

the fountain, and, picking a sprig of myrtle from one of the plants still left in the open air, fastened it daintily into his button-hole. Then he sauntered leisurely up to the door and rang the bell.

Brian Nolan opened the door with a frightened face. It was not often that strangers called to see any one there, and the least sound agitated him.

"Was Mr. Seymour in?"

The man did not wait for an answer, but gently pushed by the boy and entered the hall.

"Tell him that I have a letter, or rather a scrap of writing, from a lady who could not say all she wished when she saw him. It is only a line, and in pencil."

"Give it to me, I—I will deliver it, should he come here."

"Beg your pardon, promised not to let it go out of my hands. Up stairs—yes, I am sure she told me I would find him up stairs."

Again the man pushed by Brian, who attempted to intercept him, and quietly walked up stairs. Seymour heard the sound of voices and stood on the threshold of the boudoir listening. The hand with which he held the half open door grew cold and white, and he was about to retreat into the room, when some word about a lady's letter brought the blood again to his scared face. He took a single eager step into the hall, hesitated, and was drawing back again, when the strange man came swiftly up the stairs and laid a hand on his arm.

"Mr. Seymour, excuse the intrusion, but here is a paper for you to read."

Seymour reached out his hand slowly for the paper, looked at the man for a minute, turned deadly white, opened it with terrible quietness and read a warrant for his arrest.

"I wish you had come two hours earlier, it would not have seemed so hard. Give me a few moments for preparation," he said, after a little; "I will not keep you long."

"As many as you like," answered the man, seating himself among the silken cushions of Cora's couch. "One might find much more unpleasant places to wait in."

The man punched one of the pillows into a compact shape and planted his elbow on it as he spoke. Seymour saw the action with a dreary look of despair. At another time he would have flung any man headlong from the window for daring to seat himself among the cushions her cheek had touched. But now—now he turned aside with a groan and went into his chamber. With a slowness that seemed like composure, it was so awful and still, he took from one of his bureau drawers a revolver and examined it. The barrels were all loaded, a single movement of the finger and he would be far beyond the reach of that man. He lifted the weapon to a level with his forehead, turned it and placed the muzzle between his knitted brows. A hand struck the weapon upward and wrenched it from his grasp. Brian Nolan's face, whiter than whiteness, looked into his.

"Coward!"

Seymour shook from head to foot.

"Brother!"

The boy flung himself upon that wretched man's bosom and cried out, in the anguish of his self-reproach:

"Oh, forgive me! forgive me, I did not mean to call you that!"

"Anything unpleasant going on?" questioned a calm voice close by them.

"No, sir; nothing. I am his brother," said Brian; "pray, leave us alone."

"Oh, I understand," said the man, glancing at the revolver. "Often the case when one of my customers happens to be a real gentleman. Rather unfair to me, though; Coroner's inquest, and all that, hurts a man in his profession. Didn't think of that, I dare say!"

Seymour turned his face all white, and withered, upon

the man; he was wondering how careless words could come from human lips when he was in such mortal distress.

"Do go!" pleaded Brian, "you are killing him."

"And have that bit of tragedy over again? No, I must not lose sight of him."

"I must speak with my brother!" said Seymour, in a husky voice.

"Leave us! leave us, I beg of you!" added Brian. He shall not harm himself."

"Give me that trinket, then," said the officer, pointing to the pistol.

Brian handed it to him, and once more the brothers were alone.

"What shall I do? What *can* I do?" said Brian.

"Keep it from her, for God's sake, keep it from her!"

"And from Ellen?"

"Tell her later, but not yet. Poor girl! poor girl! better for her that I perish in prison unknown! Thank God, our father's honorable name has been spared!"

"Can I make no effort to save you, my brother?"

"None—listen. I *was* a coward, but it was only for *her* sake. Save her from a knowledge that would break her proud heart, and you shall see how much I can endure. Come to me in the prison, Brian; I shall have plenty of time for thought there. Oh! my God, my God, help me to endure it!"

"I would suggest," said the calm voice again, "that this conversation is too exciting for any good to come from it. Better take a night's sleep on the gentleman's affair. If your brother is at all sensitive about appearances, I have no objection to a carriage. Covered up my star on purpose to make the whole thing as genteel as possible. In fact, the gentleman who thinks himself aggrieved made that a special request. He even left a sum of money in my hands to buy up the reporters—not that I think it can be done

for money—most of those chaps are kind-hearted fellows as ever lived, and are ready enough to spare a man. If they all agree to it, he is safe.”

“Ask them to spare me for the sake of—of my friends,” said Seymour, in a low voice. “If death could do it, I would die.”

“Never fear, we will arrange that. When all parties agree upon one point, it is easily settled; never met with a more amicable case in all my experience. Oh here is the carriage; I will trust to your honor. You and I will walk out of this house like two friends going for a sociable drive, say in the Central Park. Lovely spot—think I have seen you driving there—pair of chestnut horses, superb—always alone, though—thought that rather singular, upon my honor I did.”

Chatting thus in an airy, pleasant fashion, the officer led the way through the hall and into the yard, where the fountain was still throwing up water-drops like a child at play.

“Some people looking out of that window opposite; suppose we gather a bouquet from these plants; looks innocent, and will satisfy any curiosity that two carriages and my walking up and down has excited among the crinolines. Charming institution, but curious—very.”

CHAPTER LIII.

THAT CRUEL LETTER.

THAT great Egyptian monster, crouching like an embodied pestilence in the heart of New York, concentrating all the horrors of a prison with the awful solemnity of a tomb, never received a human being into its portals who

gave himself up to despair more thoroughly than Alfred Seymour. All night long he lay in that narrow cell—hard, cold granite in the floor, the walls and the ceiling, cold iron shutting him in at the narrow door, which opened and closed with a clang that made him start and shudder from head to foot—all night long he lay, thinking such thoughts as might turn the hair on a young man's head white as snow and create little wonder.

A gleam of moonlight pierced through a long, narrow loop-hole that served as a window, cut so deep in the outer wall that the radiance came through wedge-shaped, and, to his tortured imagination, seemed solid in its whiteness. No steel ever went more keenly through a human heart than that mournful illumination penetrated his. Only the night before, those self-same moonbeams had fallen like shimmering silver along the highway when Cora rode by his side, cheerful as a bird, animated as he had seldom seen her before, talking so hopefully of the early day when their marriage would be proclaimed and they need not steal forth in secret or at night to meet each other. She had even proposed to proclaim the choice she was so proud of and end all secrecy at once. But he dared not accept this generous proposition, though enforced by eloquence and such affectionate caresses as nothing but a heart shackled down by crime could have resisted.

This was only one night ago. It seemed an eternity to him, there in that prison, with the stillness of death all around him. Thinking of her thus, generous, loving and so beautiful, the unhappy man came to a solemn resolution. She should never hear of his fate; they might bury him in prison walls still more gloomy than those which seemed to enclose him in like a grave, and he would make no sign. To-morrow, perhaps, they would bring him into court for examination. He would plead guilty there, and again when they brought him before a higher tribunal for final

trial. No public journal should make a romance of his crime or his misery. He would allow the law to do its worst, and disappear.

This man had done wrong, but he was not a hardened sinner; no creature who was ever wept as he did that night. He had longed to make atonement for his crime, and struggled hard for the power which was almost within his grasp when this ruin came upon him. This nearness to escape made his fate doubly bitter.

"A few hours—only a few hours, and I should have paid all," he said, aloud. Then, frightened by the sound of his own voice, which seemed struggling up from a grave, he drew the coarse, gray blanket over his head and lay moaning out his grief at intervals, hiding away from the moonlight which reminded him so keenly of all that was wrested from him.

At last the dawn came struggling through that loop-hole, filling the cell with gloomy light. Then a crash of locks and the heavy swing of iron doors struck on his ear ominously. The routine of that mournful tomb's life had commenced, and every new sound made him shiver beneath that gray blanket like some wounded animal that hears the hounds scenting out its lair.

After awhile the door of his own cell was flung open, a heavy can was set down on the stone gallery close by, and out of this grim vessel a tin cup half full of coffee was dipped, this with a piece of bread, was placed upon his cell floor.

Seymour drew the blanket from his face and turned his bloodshot eyes upon this coarse breakfast. He was not hungry, and would have rejected the most dainty food—this he loathed.

Hours went by and Brian Nolan came with his sorrowful heart, and again craved to know what could be done for his brother.

Nothing. Seymour had fully made up his mind now.

The misery that Fate had in store for him he would accept. Perhaps he would be so happy as to die. Then that noble young creature who had loved him so dearly would have freedom. She might—no, no, he could not think of a second marriage. He was ready to die, and the rest might follow, but it would be a long, long time—that grand-hearted creature was too thoroughly his for any meaner result. He said all this to Brian, and charged him, as he hoped for happiness, never to betray the secret of his marriage to any human being, not even to Ellen; never hint at his knowledge of it to the woman who, in a fatal hour, had become his wife; but, in every respect to guard the confidence placed in him. Not content with a simple promise, he went farther.

There was a cheap missionary Bible in the cell. This he placed in Brian's hands and bade him take an oath never to reveal the secret of his marriage or hint at it to any living soul.

Brian touched the book with his lips and took the oath.

"It is hard to ask this of me. Your lady has money and power enough to open these doors."

"To let the husband she knows to be a criminal out. Brian Nolan, the first look of her face after that would kill me. I shall plead guilty; there will be no trial. The officer promises me that there shall be no publicity. When all is over, I will write two letters, one to her, one to the man whose vengeance is upon me. There is money belonging to him which he must have—a favor which he will grant if he is not a demon."

The mention of money reminded Brian of that which his sister Ellen and Miss Virginia Lander had promised to bring.

"What shall I say to them when they come with the money?" he asked. "Is it altogether too late, if I appeal to this cruel man with the money in my hand?"

"Yes, too late. He has no power to save me if he wished, I know that much of American law. Beside, you cannot go to him. He, above all men living, must be kept in ignorance that I ever saw one of the Miss Landers. There is no appeal, no hope for me. Give up the thought, Brian."

Brian did give up the thought and went away broken-hearted. Virginia and Ellen came to the house the day after, radiant and happy, with the money which Lawyer Stone had just paid over to them. Brian met them in the drawing-room, thanked Virginia with tears in his eyes, but refused to take the money. His brother had settled all his difficulties in another way. It involved a somewhat lengthened absence from the city, he said, but everything was in a sure course of arrangement. Mr. Seymour had charged him to give a thousand thanks for her kindness, which he should feel to his dying day.

"Did he leave no word for me?" inquired Ellen, nervously. "Not even a farewell?"

"He left you this, and this," answered Brian, pressing his quivering lips to her cheek and forehead.

Ellen knew that there was some terrible sorrow under those kisses, but the delicate intuition that impressed her heart with the truth kept her silent. Virginia, who had been so ardent in her desire to serve Ellen's brother, was a little disappointed by the result, as any generous person might well have been. Still there was joy in the thought that they were at liberty to return home—that within a few hours she would meet Clarence Brooks.

They went up the river by the first train, Virginia grew light of heart as she approached home. Would he expect her just then? Was he disappointed because she did not return the night before? Had he told Cora and Mrs. Lander of their engagement? How would they feel about it, glad or sorry? She almost wished that it had been done

before she left home. It would be very awkward enduring their sneers or congratulations, as they might chance to prove, with no one but Ellen to sustain her.

These thoughts brought a troubled joy with them, and when the train stopped at the depot she had become nervously anxious. Ellen's grave face added to this feeling this return home really was a trying ordeal to a young, motherless girl, who believed that the most precious secret of her life had been given to her worst enemies.

Eunice met them at the door; but no one else came with smiles or welcome. Mrs. Lander was in her room, the servant said, and Miss Lander had gone out to ride on Blackbird. Ellen saw the question in Virginia's eyes, and asked if Miss Lander had gone alone.

"Yes, quite alone; there had been no gentleman in the neighborhood to ride with her these two days; a groom followed her, that was all."

Virginia went up stairs somewhat perplexed. Was Cora so annoyed by her engagement that she would not ride with Mr. Brooks? What could it all mean?

Just as the girls were taking off their things, a clumsy knock sounded from the door, and Joshua Hurd looked in. He beckoned Ellen and retreated into the upper hall. Ellen went out to learn what he wanted, when he placed a letter mysteriously in her hand.

"You jest give it to her. He made me promise to put it into her own hands; but it's the same thing, now ain't it, when I give it to you?"

The letter, which Ellen took, was directed in a bold, firm hand, to Miss Virginia Lander.

"Who gave it to you, Mr. Hurd?" she anxiously inquired.

"He, Mr. Brooks; the chap I took your letter to that rainy night. He came up here yesterday morning, and, arter siting awhile with t'other gal, came out to the stables

—a thing he never done afore—and took a good deal of interest in the hosses, 'specially Snowball, a critter that I allays curry down myself. That morning he diskivered that she'd been rid hard since any one dressed her down, and was curous about the mark of a saddle that was plain as could be on her back. You don't know how that mark came there nor nothing, do you now, Miss Ellen?" he added, eyeing her keenly with his little, sharp eyes.

"Me?—No, indeed. How should I?" answered Ellen.

"Jes so; thought as much. Nor she, nuther?"

Joshua pointed over his shoulder to the room where they had left Virginia.

"What, Miss Virginia? She hasn't seen Snowball these three or four days, I can answer for that."

"Jes so."

"But what does all this mean, Joshua?"

"Nothing, only he said the hoss must a been rid or else I hadn't took good care on her, which made me mad. Rid or no rid, curry-combed or not curry-combed, it was none of his bisness, and I e'enamost told him so."

"Well, Joshua, I don't understand about that, but the letter?"

"Well, he gin me that arter I'd sot him down a peg about the hoss, and a golden half eagle with it—none of yer greenbacks, but gennine gold, woth amost double if one specerlates on it, which I mean to. 'Give that into Miss Virginia's own hand, don't let any other person tech it,' says he. 'I depend on you, Mr. Hurd.' Well, he might do that. If I haint gin it into her own hand, it was because she was doing up her hair afore the looking-glass, and that made me kinder skeery; but it's all right now."

Ellen was turning away, when Joshua began again:

"Miss Ellen, what was the matter with Mr. Brooks? He looked so down in the mouth that I raly felt sorry for him; kinder locked up about the mouth and forrid."

"How can I tell, Joshua?"

"Jes so. But you'll give that 'ere letter?"

"Certainly I will."

"Jes so," muttered Joshua, stumbling down the hall. "Jes so!"

Ellen went into the room where Virginia was standing, and gave her the letter.

"From him! from him!" cried the delighted girl, snatching it between both her hands. "I will be back in a minute, Ellen, and tell you all about it."

She went into the sanctuary of her own chamber, pressing the paper to her lips with both hands, as young girls will when the sweet insanity of a first love is upon them.

Ellen sat down by the window, wondering why her heart felt so heavy; she had fallen into thought about her brother, whose present position seemed to be so mysteriously kept from her, when a sharp cry from the inner room, and directly after a heavy fall, made her spring from the chair in sudden dismay.

The next instant she was in the bedchamber striving to lift Virginia from the floor with her trembling arms and crying out in her alarm:

"My lady! Virginia! Virginia! won't you speak to me? It is Ellen, your own poor Ellen, who loves you better than her life! What have they done to you, darling?"

In her distress, the poor girl broke into the pathetic terms of endearment which are so touching in her countrywomen. She kissed that pale face, dropping unconscious tears upon its whiteness. She strove to warm the cold hand with her own quivering palms. But all was in vain, Virginia Lander lay motionless; her lips ashen, her eyes closed in deep shadows. Ellen at last believed her dead, and shrieked aloud:

"Eunice! Eunice! Oh! my God, will nobody come?"

CHAPTER LIV.

IN PRISON.

A PERSON entered the room and stood close to Ellen. It was Cora, just come in from her ride; she stood motionless, grasping her whip tightly in one hand; masses of heavy dark cloth fell around her feet, sweeping far out upon the floor, and the black hat shaded a stormy brow.

"This is hysterics; she had them frequently in Europe. Go and call Eunice—this shrinking will do no good. Go; I will take care of my cousin."

Cora stooped down to take the pale form from Ellen, but the little creature laid her charge upon the carpet, sprang upon Cora like a tiger and pushed her half across the room, so tangling her feet in the riding-skirt that she almost fell. There she left her struggling to retain her feet, and lifting that pale head, laid a pillow tenderly under it.

"Do not touch her; do not dare to touch her, unless you wish Almighty vengeance to fall on you at once! It will come—it will come!"

Pale as death, and shaking her slender forefinger at the half-terrified woman, Ellen went in search of Eunice.

The moment she was gone, Cora tore the skirt from under her feet, ran to the door, closed it and shot the bolt. Then she took up the letter, which had fallen from Virginia's hold, and tried to hold it firmly between her two hands, but they shook so violently that she could hardly see the writing. The struggle of an iron will soon conquered this tremor, and she eagerly devoured each word as it seemed to flash before her eyes.

"No explanation—no loop-hole for her to creep through. Quiet, gentle, positive! My Heavens, what a man this is! How dare she worship him? Why he is the mate for an empress!"

She heard footsteps in the hall, flung the letter down where she had found it, shot the bolt and flung the door open before Eunice and Ellen came in sight.

"She is getting conscious, I think. How she moans. What can be the meaning of this, Eunice?"

"The meaning—why the poor, sweet creature has fainted away; but what do you care about that, I want to know?"

"Ellen! Ellen!"

These faint words came from Virginia, for into that loved name the moans on her lip had shaped themselves.

"It is not Ellen, but your cousin, dear, dear Virginia, what shall I do for you?"

"Not a thing," Eunice broke forth, seizing upon Cora and lifting her to her feet, for she was half kneeling, "not a thing so long as I am here, and, so help me John Rodgers, I'm not going away. Some one has e'namost killed this poor girl; I don't know who it is, but *you* shan't touch her."

Here Eunice lifted Virginia from the floor as if she had been an infant, and laid her tenderly on the bed.

"Now jest lie still and come to naturally, that's a good girl. No need of shetting them eyes like a scared baby. She's going out right away, knowing she ain't wanted for nothing. Here, Ellen, jest put your arm under her head and yer cheek agin hern so—nothing but double-dyed friends shall get near this bed now, I promise."

"Ellen," whispered Virginia.

"What can I do?"

"Where is it?"

"What, the letter?"

"Yes."

"Here, here, I took it from the carpet. Let me put it in your bosom."

"No, no, it would kill me!"

She pushed at Ellen with both her quivering hands, stretched herself suddenly and fell into another deathly swoon. When she awoke from that it was to the wild unconsciousness which heralds in the first stages of a brain fever.

The next few weeks were full of terrible apprehension to Ellen Nolan and Eunice. Joshua, too, hung about the house night and day, anxious and downhearted, wanting to help, but too awkward for any real usefulness. Mrs. Lander shut herself up in her own room, and regarded Eunice with a frightened look whenever she came in from the sick chamber, but asked no questions. The woman was becoming an abject coward, and had only courage to shut her eyes at her only evil work.

Even in the insane ravings of that fever, Virginia never mentioned the name of Clarence Brooks or spoke of Cora. Both Eunice and Joshua believed that this fever had been brought on by the wrong which Cora had done in usurping her inheritance, a wrong in which they were compelled to participate or expose their own benefactress. This thought gave that rough woman many a sleepless night, and Joshua felt compelled, through all that long winter, to take a double portion of punch to keep away the dreams that haunted him. He told Eunice, that nothing but the liquor kept him from going into a consumption.

Eunice neither scolded nor sneered when he said this; she was too sad for ill temper now. All her fine dresses were packed away in the garret as a sort of self-punishment for her own misdoing. She went about the house like a ghost, and once, when Mrs. Lander questioned her face with those wild, sunken eyes, as she came from the sick chamber, the woman absolutely burst into tears.

How did Cora Lander act in this mournful state of things? At first she was busy all the morning searching the daily papers for a paragraph that never presented

itself. This made her restless and ill at ease. She wanted some proof that her web, so artfully woven, had entangled its victim. One day the express brought up a quantity of dresses for Mrs. Lander, and, in the unpacking, Cora fell upon a small paper which she had considered too insignificant for her notice, and which had, in fact, been overlooked by the officer with whom Clarence Brooks had left the task of silencing the press when Seymour's trial came on.

There was the paragraph. Her eyes seized upon it with the greed of a famished hawk.

"A young man, who gave his name as Seymour, was put upon his trial for embezzlement, and pleaded guilty to the indictment. His appearance and the frank avowal of his guilt excited general sympathy in the court room. Even the judge exhibited more than usual commiseration while sentencing the poor fellow, who was condemned to seven years at Sing-Sing."

This was the paragraph which Cora seized upon with such keen interest. She carried the torn paper to her room and read it over and over again.

"It is done! it is done!" she cried, pacing to and fro in her room like a panther, hugging the paper to her bosom. "I willed it, and Clarence Brooks, the most splendid specimen of manhood I ever saw, has been the instrument of my freedom. I knew it would be so; but this game is but half played out. The next move shall secure him."

Even while she was speaking a knock came to the door, and when she opened it, impatient of the intrusion, a letter was placed in her hand.

"His writing, and to me. How dare the wretch presume so!"

She tore the note open and shook it a moment at arm's length, as if his hand must have left poison in its folds.

I cannot give the contents of this letter, it would be too painful; but she read it, from beginning to end, with dry,

hard eyes, that felt no pity; now and then a gleam of triumph shot through them; otherwise, they shone with a heavy glitter, like dulled steel.

The letter told her of the anguish her husband felt in leaving her again, "it might be for years, and it might be forever." He went into no details. He was going far away, he said, so far that she might not hear from him for months together, but he would write whenever fate permitted him. Something had happened, connected with his life in the Old World, which compelled him to go—something which even the great love which he felt for her could neither overpower nor break through. His absence for a time was imperative as his love for her would be immortal. He besought her to have patience with him, to pray for him sometimes, as he would ever pray for her.

More there was of such sad, pitiful pleading for continued love as would have made any real woman's heart ache with sympathy. Even Cora Lander felt a touch of compassion as she read the last lines of her young husband's letter, knowing where he was, who had sent him there, and how he must suffer. She sat for a time with the paper in her hand, conquering the last remnants of tenderness that evil thoughts and evil acts had left in her nature. Then she flung the letter into the fire and held it down with the poker till it was consumed.

I do not know whether compunction or triumph kept the woman in her room all the day after this letter was placed in her hands, but she refused to come down and see Brian Nolan, and when he sent to know if he was to wait for a reply, she sent back a message that she was too ill for writing just then.

Brian obtained an interview with his sister, who came from Virginia's sick-room to see him, but it was a sad meeting, for Ellen was borne down with apprehensions regarding her benefactress, and Brian had a secret aching

in his heart which forbade him to give or claim sympathy. So he went away heavy-hearted and so lonely that he longed to creep off into some quiet place and die.

But he had another duty to perform, and that took him to the hotel where Clarence Brooks was staying; for he never returned to his rooms up the river, and few persons had seen him abroad in the city.

When Brian entered the room where Brooks was sitting, there was bitterness in his heart which gave him both strength and courage. He approached the desk where the young man was writing and laid the letter he brought upon it without a word.

Brooks started a little, glanced at the boy and took up the letter. He evidently knew the handwriting, for a stern, hard look came over his face and he cut the envelope slowly, like a man who has made up his mind not to be moved from a settled purpose. If he had expected prayers or entreaties in that letter, the contents undeceived him, that was visible enough in the change of his countenance, for a slow color came into his face and all its features softened as he read:

"I have wronged you, have wronged myself more, in an act which makes me seem ungrateful. I thought you dead—as God is my judge and your avenger—I thought you dead and mourned for you—I did! I did! You will not believe it, but I would almost have given my own life if it would have availed to save yours on the day I robbed your desk. It was your heirs I wronged, not you, not you. Remember how I watched your sick-bed, how many sleepless nights I spent—how tireless was my love. The temptation was terrible; I cannot tell you what it was that made me thirst so for money. I dare not, but it was enough to outmaster stronger principles than mine. God help me!

"Clarence Brooks, I loved you even when I wronged you

—no, not you, but a memory that should have been sacred. I love you now, though you have taken such vengeance for my fault as crushes me out of the world. I do not understand it—you never were hard of heart—never cared so much for money as to ruin a fellow creature because he deprived you of it. Something must have hardened you against me before you could bury me alive in this terrible place.

"I do not complain. Having wrought out this fate for myself, I will endure it if God gives me strength—perish under it if that is withheld. Do not think that I write to ask for mercy or excite the sympathy I have forfeited. It is not that which forces me to brave the pain of writing this; but I have a favor to ask—only one, so easy for you to grant, yet so important to me. I have friends, a few both here and in the Old World; the youth who brings you this is my own brother; I have a sister, too, young, helpless, sensitive, friendless save in the love of one person. My fate is a secret to this poor girl, and to all that ever loved me excepting my brother. He knows where I am and how I suffer; poor lad, I have been his worst enemy; yet he loves me, oh! how much better than I deserve! For the sake of this friendless boy—for the sake of my sister and of others not less dear—I ask you, Clarence Brooks, my once friend, to be generous, and keep my misery, my crime, and my disgrace a secret. Do not allow my name to pass your lips to any human being. This is the only request I shall ever make. Grant it, I implore you! Unless you would torture me to death in my living tomb, this small favor will not be denied.

"ALFRED NOLAN,

"For Seymour was an assumed name."

Brooks read the letter carefully, kindly; he had no real vengeance to gratify here. What he had done was in be-

half of Virginia Lander, who had not only wronged him, but was about to shipwreck herself forever. The reader knows well that he never would have arrested this man simply for his crime regarding the money. But the reasons which had prompted the act held good yet; nothing but the removal of this man from her path would keep a girl so infatuated from rushing on to her own destruction.

Brian Nolan stood by the desk looking earnestly into the man's face as these thoughts went through his mind. When Brooks lifted his head, those sorrowful eyes met his; they were full of unspoken reproaches.

"You will grant my brother's request?" he questioned.

"He need not have made it," said Brooks, kindly. "What I have done has been from a stern sense of duty—for the world, I would not take one step beyond that. Say this to your brother; tell him I have done nothing in malice—that I have not an unkind feeling toward him."

Here the young man's voice faltered a little, and he shaded his eyes with one hand.

"Then I can carry your solemn promise back to my brother in his prison?" said Brian, regarding this agitation with something like wonder.

"You may give him my solemn assurance that his wish shall be carried out. Unless he sends a message to me, I will never mention his name."

"Thank you," said Brian Nolan, "thank you for him and myself. There is another thing; my brother left above sixteen thousand dollars. It is your money; he charged me to pay it over. Here is a check for what there is in the bank. The rest I can obtain. Shall I send it here?"

Brooks took the check and tore it in fragments.

"I will not take a farthing of this money. It was not for that I arrested him—God knows it was not for that! Keep the whole of it for him; he will need it when he comes out."

"He will not live to come out," said Brian. "You have broken his heart."

The boy passed out of the door as he said this leaving Clarence Brooks alone.

CHAPTER LV.

THE SECOND CONQUEST.

THE winter came, sharp and cold; while Virginia lay ill; for the fever left her helpless as a child, and the physician said that, without great care, she must sink into a decline. This he suggested to Cora early in the season. Her system, he said, had received some great shock and refused to rally its strength again. Unless something could be done to interest her, his skill would be of little avail. If Cora was rejoiced by this intelligence, she took good care to conceal the shameful truth, for no person ever seemed more anxious than she did for the recovery of another. Indeed she haunted that sick chamber with the pertinacity of a professed nurse, though warned by Eunice again and again that her presence was hurtful to the patient. Fortunately for Virginia, this affectionate farce only lasted two or three weeks, for after that time Cora persuaded Mrs. Lander to go with her to the city, and took up her residence in their old rooms at the hotel. She learned, with infinite satisfaction, that Clarence Brooks had taken rooms there for the season.

This was true, but Brooks had no idea that Cora had made this house her stopping-place, and was surprised when they met in the public drawing-room one day, some few weeks after Seymour's trial. He strove to inquire after the welfare of her cousin with composure, but his voice

shook in spite of himself, and he again thanked Heaven that Cora was ignorant of the deep cause of interest he had in that unhappy girl.

She answered him very quietly, and with every appearance of unconsciousness that Virginia had been quite ill. Some disappointment seemed to have thrown her into a fever. Probably the person who had given them all so much uneasiness had abandoned his pursuit of her after attaining the money he wanted. She could only guess at this. But her cousin had been taken much worse after the boy who had been there once before came a second time with a letter, and for a few days was confined to her room. There was no doubt some tendency to insanity in all this, for Virginia had taken the most unaccountable dislike both to her and her mother. As for herself, it was not strange; but a kinder mother never lived than her aunt Lander. So bitter had this antipathy become at last, that the physician made it a particular request that they should both leave the house until some change took place. This was the reason they had come down to the city. She wished people to understand all this, because it might seem unfeeling in a mother to leave her child in her sickness if all the facts were not explained. The whole affair had been very painful both to herself and her aunt.

Clarence Brooks had no reason to doubt all this; he believed that no human being but himself knew of the identity of Seymour with the man who had robbed him. He was also certain that Cora had no knowledge of his engagement, or even acquaintance with Virginia; the manner and conversation of Cora Lander convinced him of her ignorance. In this respect, it was fortunate that Ellen was so completely at variance with Cora and Mrs. Lander. That romance of the ravine, the sweetest of his life while it lasted, was sacred to himself, and shared only by those two lonely girls. Of course Virginia was sad; of course

she must feel the absence or, if she knew it, the incarceration of her lover with such anguish as might throw her on a sick bed. But this was the natural result of her own mad infatuation; no human help could protect her from it. She had been wrested from this bad man by an act of legal power that made his heart ache when he thought of it; yet, under the same circumstances, he would have done it again, even though the girl had never been dear to himself.

Cora was very sweet and gentle when they met; you would have thought Virginia had appeared over again from her manners, for never on this earth was there a better actress lost to the stage. At her instigation, Mrs. Lander invited Brooks to their parlor. There was no visible reason why he should not accept this invitation to intimacy with Amos Lander's daughter. The treachery of his niece could not reach that fair being. Had not his dead friend warned him against one and invited his love for the other?

He went to that pleasant parlor again and again. He saw that singularly gifted being in all the phases of her loveliness. There was no struggle in his bosom then; never in this world was there a more willing victim. If uncertain of his own feelings, he soon became vividly conscious of hers, for, with all her art, the creature could not conceal the absorbing passion that had entered her heart with such irresistible power.

Cora Lander was right in one thing; she had found her master passion in this love for Clarence Brooks. I have no heart to give the details of that wicked courtship. The old intimacy revived, those two persons spent half their time together; for Cora still pleaded her mourning as an excuse for avoidance of general society. She sent for Blackbird, and almost every afternoon a pair of black horses, with two of the finest-looking riders ever seen in those broad avenues, were admired and commented on till it became generally known that Amos Lander's heiress was engaged to the distinguished-looking foreigner who was forever by her side.

As the spring came on, this rumor was confirmed by the dress makers and furnishing houses where the wedding paraphernalia was being prepared.

All this time Virginia was worse than an invalid; she received no company, and heard nothing that was going on in the out-door world; those who saw her believed that a few months would end a life that, from no given cause, seemed to have become wearisome to that fair young creature, and a burden that she would not be long troubled with.

One day, early in the last month of spring, Brian Nolan went from New York to see Ellen, who received him upstairs in Virginia's parlor; she, poor girl, was lying feeble and pale on the bed in her own room. But the door was open, and the great house so still that almost every word could reach her from the parlor.

Ellen had finished her book during the winter and it lay on her desk, sealed in a large package, which she was anxious to put in some publisher's hands. There was no great vigor of life about Ellen in those days. Her slight figure had fallen away with constant watching and severe thought; her eyes were almost wild with anxiety, and she was constantly giving little nervous starts, as if apprehending some evil every minute.

"You look ill, Ellen," said Brian, sitting down by the desk.

"No, no; I am not ill, Brian, only it makes me suffer to see her passing away so quietly and so surely."

"Is she no better, then?"

"Worse, if anything, Brian."

"Do you know, Ellen—can you guess what it is that preys upon her?"

Brian asked this under his breath. Remember, Cora had denied her identity to him, and had sent down word that she was ill on another occasion. He had seen Virginia at

Seymour's residence, and fully believed her to be his wife, pining perhaps to death under the unaccountable absence of her husband.

"Brian, all that ails her is soon told. Among them, they have broken her heart.

"Do you think she is so bad? Will the sweet lady really die?"

"God help us, I dare not ask the question, much less answer it!" said Ellen, beginning to cry.

Brian could not speak openly, he was held down by that solemn promise to his brother. He had just been to the prison and came up to get news of the woman whom that unhappy convict so thoroughly loved.

"This will be sad, sad news for him," was his silent reflection. "Should she die, he will feel the shock through his prison walls. O! if I dared say one consoling word to her!"

These were silent thoughts; he would not have spoken them for the world, shackled so with that oath of secrecy. But one thing he could do. Seymour had not altogether forbidden him to make a confidant of Ellen. He would tell her, not about the marriage, but regarding his brother's unhappy condition.

"Ellen," he said, after a prolonged silence, "will you shut that door, I want to say something to you alone?"

"She is there, speak low, I think she is sleeping," said Ellen, closing the door softly and retreating to the farther side of the room. "Now you can tell me, Brian. Is it anything about our brother?"

"Yes, Ellen, I just came from him!"

"Came from him? Where is he then?"

"Stoop down your head, sister."

Ellen bent her head, listened, turned deadly white and stepped back as if he had struck her.

"In prison—sent there by Clarence Brooks—Brian, why was this kept from me so long?"

"He forbade me to tell you, or any one. It would have done harm."

"But I am his sister."

"And for that reason have enough to bear. Even now I tell you without authority. But for what I have heard to-day, I would still keep silence."

"And this was where he was—this was why he did not need our money. Brian, Clarence Brooks is a villain; a double-dyed villain! I detest him!"

"So did I at first, but after seeing him—Ellen, there is something strange about this. Mr. Brooks does not seem vindictive. He would not accept any portion of the money, though I urged it upon him. He seemed distressed, anxious to make Alfred's life easy where he is. Ellen, at one time I saw tears in that man's eyes."

"Have you seen him more than once?"

"Yes, but not to speak with him. Only last week I saw him riding in the Park with Mrs. Lander and the young lady."

"What! Cora Lander?"

"Yes, it is said about the hotels that they are going to be married soon."

Ellen flushed red and turned white again; thought after thought flashed through her mind. Cora Lander had known her brother. She remembered thinking so at the hotel the first time they all met there. Had she instigated Brooks to prosecute him as he had done?

There was no chance that an honest mind could follow Cora Lander in her iniquitous scheming, but Ellen jumped at the one broad conclusion that she was at the bottom of all her brother's trouble and of Virginia's sad state.

"That cruel wretch shall not break his heart!" she exclaimed.

Brian thought that she alluded to Clarence Brooks, and answered:

"I do not think it was done from cruelty. This man is not hard-hearted. Something that we do not understand is at the bottom of it all."

"Brian, tell me more of our brother. How many years is it?"

"Seven!"

"So many! Let me think—let me think! Oh! if she were well now!"

"That is it. You must keep this from her, of all persons in the world."

"We must keep it from every one, though the secret burns our lives out."

"If she had not been in the danger you speak of, I would not have told you."

"I do not understand. My lady has nothing to do with it; she would be sorry, of course, but I will not tell her or any one. Our father left Alfred to us. To save him is the duty of my life."

"Ellen."

"Well, Brian?"

"I should like to see your lady."

"No wonder, Brian; it would be strange if you did not. She has the loveliest face. I hear her moving. Perhaps she will come out."

She was right, the door opened and Virginia came into the room, pale as a lily. Her white merino dress was girded in at the waist by a black ribbon, and a string of jet beads fell from her neck. She had heard his voice and put these things on hurriedly, hoping something from his visit, but without knowing what.

"You have come to see Ellen; I am glad of it," she said, gently, as Brian bowed before the frail creature whom he believed to be his brother's wife. "Is there any news of her brother yet?"

Brian's face lighted up. Here was a chance of giving her comfort without betraying his knowledge of her secret.

"Yes, we have heard from him; he is well, and thinks nothing so important as his return to us."

"But when will he return?"

"Not yet; he cannot tell. But this is certain, his heart is with us."

She smiled faintly at his eagerness, and sat down wearily, supporting her head with one hand.

"I shall write, lady. May I tell him that you remember him kindly?" said Brian, so agitated that his voice shook while uttering words that seemed to him of great hidden importance.

"Yes, say that, for I do remember him very kindly, little as I have seen of him. Ellen's brother, you know, is almost my brother."

"Thank you, he will be pleased! Sister Ellen, good-bye."

"I will go with you, brother. We must not say good-bye so soon."

Ellen walked with her brother down to the depot, conversing earnestly with him all the way, and waited till the train took him up.

About a week after this, Eunice intercepted Ellen as she was coming in from the garden.

"Come here," she said, "I've got a letter from Mrs. Eliza Lander. Read it, but don't say a word to *her*."

Ellen read the letter. It told Eunice, as a matter to be kept secret in the household, of Cora's approaching marriage. "Everything is getting ready," it said; "Cora's first year of mourning will be more than over in June, when the wedding will take place at the mansion. She wishes you to have the house put into perfect order. Hire extra help, and tell the gardener to put on a double force if the grounds require it. The wedding will be a large one and some of the first people in the land will be present. There is one thing that troubles my niece, and I share her

anxiety. What can be done with my—with Virginia and her uncouth friend? If she would only consent to live in the city. Cora has such a lovely house; it belonged to Mr. Lander: she will give her a deed of it, if that will suit her for a residence. She can choose her own servants and have some nice elderly person to live with her. The house has just been beautifully fitted up Cora tells me, especially for her cousin. I have been over it, and it is superb. There is a colored woman in charge now, but Cora will send her off and let her cousin have full sway. I think this very liberal—don't you, Eunice? If you like it, would you object to speaking to her about the arrangement? Now that a strange gentleman is coming into the family, it does seem best that something should be done. I wouldn't speak to her myself about it; nor would Cora, she is so sensitive; but you will not mind it, I am sure, Eunice. Do try and get that girl with the back to favor this measure. She can do anything with Virginia.

"E. LANDER."

"What do I think of that?" cried Eunice, when Ellen had read the letter through. "Jehosaphat, Judas Iscariot and Nebbecudnezzer rolled into one heap of wickedness. Eliza Lander's getting to be disgusting! Don't look at me, I'm blushing all over for her. It's scandalous!"

"Still my young lady must go. It would kill her to remain here."

"But it is turning her out of doors. This city house that the critter has been a fixing up isn't her home like this, though it is a purty place."

"She will not go there, Eunice, I am sure of that. But she has some money. We raised it on those jewels—bless you for getting them—and I can work."

"Work! You! why you couldn't iron a pocket handkercher without being tired out."

"But I can write."

"Why that ain't work."

"I fancy you would think it was, Eunice, if you had it to do."

"Why, you cretur you, I thought you was a doing it jest for fun!"

"Fun," answered Ellen, smiling wearily, for this hard writing had worn her out, "see how my hand trembles, feel how hot my head is. This a pretty severe fun, Eunice!"

"And what's the good of wurring yourself out so? I hain't seen nothing come of it but a heap of paper with writing on it that Jehosaphat couldn't read if he was to come right out of the Scripters to do it."

"You may be right. After all my toil, it may be worth nothing," answered Ellen, who had arisen from the pile of manuscript so depressed and exhausted that even such criticism as Eunice gave discouraged her. "But I have tried so hard! Besides she would be disappointed!"

"Will she? Well, cherk up, cherk up, if writing ever is worth anything, yours will come up above the level. I don't know much about it, but I've seen your face kinder blazing out and withering up over that paper day after day. There must be something in it to make a young cretur work as you have. Don't let anything I've said put you down in the mouth, for I don't know no more about writing than a swing fence. Gracious knows, I wish I never had learned, so does Josh, though we ain't either on us much to brag of."

CHAPTER LVI.

A NEW HOME.

EUNICE was going into the house after this speech, but Ellen followed her."

"Eunice, will you give me that letter?" she said.

"Not to show her. I tell you that girl shan't leave this house without she wants to of her own self. Nobody on this arth shall drive her away."

"But she will not remain after this—after her cousin comes back."

"Ellen Nolan, there's a thing that sets hard on Josh's and my mind. You sent a letter once down to the tavern from her, and that Mr. Brooks sent one back agin. Besides, Josh says that the men about the tavern say that you was down there one night to see him. Now was you?"

"Eunice, please don't question me about that. It is all over now."

"Ellen, you're a good girl, and I won't. But tell me one thing; you may, for I don't know anything more about love than I do about writing; but did he kinder make her like him and then treat her bad, going over to t'other? He's a man, and it's in 'em I know."

"Eunice, please oblige me. Don't talk of her, only to decide what is for the best. She's very feeble, and the least excitement may throw her upon a sick bed again. If nothing had happened, we should have gone away. This life is terrible!"

"Not without she wants to; remember Josh and I are agreed on that."

"But it is impossible to stay—the—the—confusion would kill her. Think of some quiet place that she can live in, where no trouble can come."

"I'll think it over. But it's a burning shame."

"Somewhere in the neighborhood of Newburg or Sing-Sing, if you can think of a nice family," said Ellen, faltering in the last part of her sentence, while the slow color came into her face.

"I know a widow woman about four or five miles on this side of Sing-Sing, back from the railroad; she's a New

England woman, and just as kind as kind can be. Sometimes she takes one or two boarders. I'll send Josh right down to see about it if you want me to, and she *will* go."

"Do, Eunice, let him start at once."

"It ain't so far off that I can't come and see you now and then."

"I hope not, Eunice, for you have been a good friend to her."

"No, I haven't—more shame to me—but I wanted to be. You don't know how both Josh and I wanted to be her friend but couldn't. Are you going? Do you want the letter?"

"No, I can tell her; it only takes a few words."

Half an hour after this Joshua was at the depot waiting for a train, and Ellen sat in Virginia's bed-room with both her arms around the invalid, striving to arouse her from the state of dead silence into which she had fallen.

"Oh! darling lady, make an effort and cry; just a few tears will make your heart easier. Look up, look up, and say I haven't killed you with the news!"

Virginia heard this appeal through all her numbed senses. She lifted her head and smiled in Ellen's face—one of the most pitiful smiles that ever parted human lips.

"Ellen, you told me of this, but I would not be warned."

"Sweet lady—dear lady, cast him from your mind. He is cruel, dishonorable, vile! Unworthy of your regret."

"No, Ellen; in that you wrong Clarence, wrong me, if you think I can believe such things of him. It is my cousin—I will not curse her, or blame him. Let us go away, my friend. You are right, let us go away. She took my inheritance and I was powerless to defend it. She has taken the heart from my bosom now and crushed out all its life. Still I am powerless. But some day he will learn the truth, whatever that wicked truth may be; then

she will suffer as I do. I do not ask it—I do not wish it, but God is above all.”

A fortnight after Virginia Lander heard of the wedding which was to drive her from under her father's roof, a little figure, whose deformed shoulders were but half concealed under a circular mantle of black silk, entered one of the principal publishing houses in New York, with a paper parcel in her arms; for it was too heavy for her weak hands. The vast room which she entered was lined with placards of various publications—divided into compartments by stands, crowded with specimen books, and scattered over with desks, each of which represented a department of that vast establishment. A large portion of the front of this room was divided off from the stairs and main apartment by a light wooden railing, which enclosed a well-trodden carpet, with some desks and office chairs, all appropriated by the heads of this great firm, which had existed since the eldest partner was a little child. They were kindly-looking men, who found their greatest happiness in the brotherly society which was sufficient to themselves; still they were at all times ready to give a cordial greeting and kindly hearing to any one who came to them, either in friendship or on business. It so happened that all of the partners were present at the moment Ellen Nolan entered the room.

Genius may be modest and shrinking, but it is seldom at a loss for the best means of attaining a proper object. These men were all strangers to Ellen, but her earnest face and quiet movements won upon them at first sight. The tallest and eldest of these gentlemen arose to meet her, glanced at the parcel in her arms and directed her to another pleasant-faced man, who sat by a desk, leaning back in his office chair and calmly smoking a cigar, which he flung through the window as she came up. This man, with a smile that brightened Ellen's face like a reflected

sunbeam, reached forth his hand for the parcel, simply saying: “Is it a book?”

Ellen sighed heavily as she gave up her manuscript. It had been so long a part of her life that she shrunk from the separation when it came, as an artist hates to sell the picture which is the embodiment of a beautiful idea.

“Yes, sir, it is a book—a novel.”

He looked at her with kindly interest. Her bright face, and, more than that, her helplessness awoke his sympathy. The man of business saw genius in that face—and the man of feeling pitied one whom God had so endowed and yet left imperfect.

“Your first, of course?”

“Yes, the very first I ever attempted.”

Ellen was trembling all over now. It seemed as if half her strength had been taken away with the manuscript.

“Leave it, if you like. We will submit it to our reader.”

Ellen, of course, supposed that her book would be given over to the judgment of some great author, capable of doing at least all that she could accomplish, and gave it up with a sort of awe, for there is no reverence in life so fervent as that which genius yields to genius.

I do not know how it was with this firm, but had she guessed that, in a majority of cases, her manuscript would have been given to some pretending school-girl or favorite friend of the publisher, she might have had less reverence and more apprehension. As it was, she felt certain that the ideas which had thrilled her whole being in the progress of that book would meet with kindred appreciation in some powerful mind, and was content.

So Ellen left her book and went back to the little stone farm-house in a hollow of the hills, where Virginia was longing for her presence as only the suffering and feeble of health can long for companionship. The home which

these girls had chosen presented a great contrast to the noble mansion they had left; yet it was a pleasant residence; neat, old-fashioned, and shaded with a huge walnut tree, which was just putting forth its most delicate green. Quantities of daffodils, jonquils and snowdrops brightened the front yard and the garden. Peach and cherry trees were in full blossom, and the great lilac bushes under the parlor windows were budding with a famous promise of flowers. Humble as all this was, it seemed to those girls far pleasanter than that marble house, with all its discord and painful restraints. Virginia had brightened a little under the comfort and freedom of her new home. The wholesome scent of those garden flowers and walnut trees awoke sensations of pleasure unknown to her former luxurious life. She sought the open air now, and could ramble off at will without fear of meeting her worst enemies. It was a new life in which she was becoming interested; the languor and illness which had kept her in-doors all winter became less and less apparent every day.

One morning Joshua came riding toward the house, leading Snowball by the bridle.

"I brought her down because the doctor ordered something nice to be sent to you. 'Sich as hosses?' says I. 'A white hoss with a mane and tail like drifted snow, is that the medicine you was thinking of?' sez I."

"'Jes so,' says he, 'that kind of a hoss is jest what she wants.'"

"'Side-saddle and all?' says I."

"'Yes,' says he. 'Side-saddle, riding-dress, hat, feather and whip?' says I agin. Then he laughed and told me to bring everything, so I did. Besides, Eunice would put up some jelly and sich like in this basket, and I put something in for you, Miss Ellen. Remembered how you took to the punch that rainy evening, and brought down some of the lick—jest room for it in the basket. Writ out a receipt, too, for the punch with my own hand. Here it is."

Ellen took the paper and thanked him cordially. Persons like her are not apt to ridicule a kindness, however uncouthly expressed. Virginia was looking out of the window with something like animation. Snowball seemed an old friend to her, spite of the memories she brought.

"Yes, Joshua, I promise to ride her; the beauty, see how she paws the turf. Tell Eunice how pleasant everything is here—how much we like Mrs. Rice. I am getting quite strong, as you see."

"Well, yes, you do look better, marm. But it's getting pleasant up our way too. I was down in the gorge yesterday, setting things to rights about the little log cabin. That big chestnut tree is putting out the heaviest grist of leaves I ever saw, and the vines are all green about the bridge. But what do you think I found in the cabin? Nigh upon half a bushel of chestnuts heaped up in one corner. Been there all winter and nobody teched 'em. Curious, wasn't it?"

Virginia's animation was all gone; she sat down in a chair by the window, panting for breath.

"Well," said Joshua, unconscious of the mischief he had done, "I suppose I must be a going. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Joshua," said Ellen, following the kind fellow from the room. "When is it to be?"

"Next month, arly, I reckon by the orders we get. Eunice told me to tell you she thought so. A pair of stupendous carriage hosses came up yesterday, and a new barouche. The stables won't hold 'em if she keeps on."

Ellen went back to the house. She had not yet told Virginia that her cousin's marriage was so near at hand. Indeed they seldom talked on that subject now. It was too seriously painful.

"Ellen," said Virginia, when her friend came in, "after it is all over, tell me."

You would have thought from the quivering pallor of her

face that it was the execution of some friend she was speaking of.

"I will," said Ellen, in a low voice. "It is not yet."

Virginia drew a struggling breath, and no more was said. She had seen Ellen talking with Joshua, and guessed at the subject of their conversation.

CHAPTER LVII.

PLEADING FOR A PARDON.

THE Governor of New York was alone in his private office one day, when his Secretary came in, followed by a little creature that would have appeared like a child but for a face, which possessed a wonderful power of expression, such as only thought and experience could give.

This young creature went up to the Governor where he sat, and, leaning on the table with one arm, looked earnestly into his face—so earnestly that the color mounted faintly over it.

"I have a brother," said Ellen Nolan, "my eldest brother; he has committed a crime, and they have put him in State's Prison. If he were innocent, I would ask your pardon as a right; but knowing him guilty, I have come up here to beg mercy for him. My father, sir, is dead; he was lost in a steamer, burned on the ocean more than a year ago. With his last words he bade me fill his place to this unhappy son, and I promised. Sir, my brother is ill; I fear his mind is becoming disturbed. He will die if you leave him there."

That earnest face, those eyes so full of deep, deep feeling, had more power upon the Governor than this broken speech which seemed to come in gasps from her chest.

"Have you a memorial? Does the Judge or District Attorney sign your petition?"

"I have no petition."

"No petition—no letters?"

"I am a stranger, sir, and do not know how these things are done. Yesterday I was in the prison for the first time; for I had been again and again and they refused to let me in. I found him alone in his cell, burning with fever, wild, with distress. The very sight of me drove him half crazy. He is an educated man, who has committed one grave fault, but there is no wickedness in him. If ever a man was sorry for wrong-doing he is. I know he has done a dishonest thing, but he says it was under terrible temptation, and I believe him. You would believe him, sir, if you had held his poor, shaking hands and looked into his eyes as I did. Oh! sir, I wish you could see him. It would melt your heart. My father loved him so dearly; knowing all his faults, he could understand how a man might do wrong and yet not be so very bad. This is all the plea I have to make. If you keep him there he will die, and my promise, given to a father who was just entering the gates of Heaven, will go unredeemed."

The Governor, who was a kind and most just man, listened to the girl with more than patience. Her energy, that broken language, which was half explanation half petition, all unstudied and earnest as a child pleads, took him by surprise. He asked her to sit down, but she would not. Supporting herself with one arm, she still kept her eyes on his face, looking as it were deep into his heart. The magnetism of a brain and heart like hers, united on one purpose, is more powerful with sympathetic men than argument or prayers; they troubled that man's heart till it stirred mercifully in his bosom. He took Ellen's hand. She seemed so small and helpless that it was like encouraging a child. He asked questions, and listened to the

whole story as she had told it to Virginia months before. When she came to the robbery, her voice broke and her eyes fell; that painful truth brought the crimson of deep shame into her white cheeks. He was guilty, she owned, but not so guilty as might be thought. He positively believed his friend to be dead, and in a loose way that friend had almost promised the money, and more than that to him. It was all wrong—terribly wrong—but would the Governor forgive him for her sake? She was so helpless and an orphan. If he would, they two, with a younger brother she had, would go out West, far beyond the Rocky Mountains, and there work out a new life for him, such as her father could look down from Heaven and ask the angels to witness.

All this was touching and pathetic; but the Governor of a State cannot always listen to the pleadings of his own heart. He became restive under those wistful eyes, that shed no tears, but was all the more powerful for that, and at last broke off the conversation rather coldly. It was imprudent he said, to listen to a petition which had really nothing but sisterly affection to recommend it. It grieved him to say this, but it seemed to him impossible to act otherwise.

He shook hands with the poor girl kindly, but chilled to the heart by his words, she went away feeling like death.

Virginia knew nothing of this. She thought Ellen busy negotiating for her book, and asked her about it when she came home at night, looking so tired and careworn. This reminded Ellen that the week was almost up. In her anxiety she had forgotten the precious manuscript.

The next day she went down to the city and came home radiant. Her manuscript was accepted with warm praise. In a few weeks it would be published.

"Now," she said, stealing an arm around Virginia's neck as she told her the news, "now we shall be independent."

"Ah, how happy you look, Ellen! No wonder! You have done so much, while I have accomplished nothing and have no hope. Oh! Ellen, I tried to sing while you were away, and could not. My voice is gone."

"That is because you have been so ill, dear lady. It will come back sweeter than ever; if not, my book will sell. I can write more, and that will be enough for us both. This is independence, lady!"

Virginia returned her kisses with warmth. She loved the generous girl well enough to take even money from her without a sense of obligation wounding her pride, and that is the greatest test of a magnanimous nature that a human being is capable of in this degenerate age.

"What is the difference?" said Ellen, brimming over with gratitude that she could do something for her lady. "Don't I love to take everything from you? Oh! I'm so thankful that it is my turn now!"

CHAPTER LVIII.

DEATH IN THE LOG CABIN.

CORA LANDER had been a good deal into society during the latter part of her season in town. With her great beauty and reputation for enormous wealth, there was no difficulty in taking her position in fashionable life. It came and lay down at her feet. Hundreds of the highest among the high followed her and her bridegroom to that mansion on the Hudson, where the marriage ceremony was to be performed with a splendor that had never been witnessed in this country before. A glorious moon flooded that clear summer evening with its light, and flashed, like rippling quicksilver, along the river as the train tore along its banks.

The sound of laughter and low, sweet voices softened the noises of the engine and the rattle of wheels to those within the cars, as that wedding party was whirled onward almost with the speed of lightning.

All at once that white house, with all its stately trees, drooping shrubbery and clustering vines, illuminated as with ten thousand stars, burst upon the view. The marble colonnade shone out clear and white, all its fluted pillars well defined, and the long white leaves of their Corinthian capitals tangled in, as it seemed, with wreaths of fire. The roses were in full bloom, loading the air with fragrance; such fruit trees as grew near were lighted up, and their blossoms fell around the hanging lamps like garlands of snow.

From the terrace stairs to the front of the building, a broad pathway of crimson carpeting was laid, bordered on each side with greenhouse plants, massed till their blossoms seemed one tangle of flowers from the steps to the colonnade.

Within everything was in stately keeping with the exterior; all the rooms, on which Mrs. Lander had lavished so much money, were flung open. The air penetrated them through clouds of lace. Some were brilliantly lighted, others left in a soft moonlight obscurity, inviting repose. The colors in each room contrasted or harmonized with the next so imperceptibly that they could hardly be separated in the mind, but composed one grand picture of light, rich coloring and artistic effects.

When the company came pouring into these rooms, chatting, laughing, brilliant with expectation, it only added a movement of graceful life without in the least crowding them. The beautiful women moving to and fro seemed like lost Peris that had found a new way back to Paradise and were rejoicing over it.

This crowd of gay people had come rather early, scattering themselves about the rooms and the grounds, as pre-

viously arranged. The ceremony would not come off before eleven o'clock. Then the supper rooms would be thrown open, and there would be dancing for those who liked it. The whole affair was, in fact, one grand reception. Mrs. Lander received the guests in a dress of silver gray satin, clouded with Brussels point, that swept the carpet in a train absolutely regal. She had cast off her nervousness and threw life into a scene which was her highest idea of happiness.

While all this fashion and beauty were passing in and out of the lower rooms, Cora stood in the chamber of which she had so ruthlessly defrauded her cousin, ready for her second marriage. Excitement had rendered her more than beautiful; her cheeks were burning with rose-tints; the rich tresses, rolled back from her forehead, fairly flung off the light. The satin robe fell around her as snow settles to its place, and swept the floor in long, sumptuous folds. She held the bridal veil in her hand and was directing the attendant how to arrange it in her hair with perfect art and seeming negligence, when a servant knocked at the door.

"See what it is," she said, "surely it cannot be time!"

The woman opened the door and brought back a note, which the servant said a strange man had delivered, with directions that it should be given into her own hands at once.

Cora tore the note open impatiently; she was annoyed by the delay it occasioned. This was what she read:

"I am at the log cabin waiting for you. If you fail to come at once, I shall stand by your side at eleven o'clock.

"YOUR HUSBAND."

Cora Lander neither fainted away nor uttered one sound of the terrible dread that seized upon her. She folded the note and held it firmly in her hand. Then turning to the

woman, she bade her unlace the corsage of her dress, it was rather tight, and she would let the dressmaker, who was in attendance from the city, alter it a little, there was plenty of time. She took up her watch from the dressing-table and made sure of this. It was about ten o'clock.

The woman obeyed, and in a few moments Cora came out of those voluminous folds of satin as if she had just escaped from a snow-drift.

"Shall I carry the dress to Mrs. Green?" inquired the maid.

"Yes, tell her to let it out the least in the world. Give me that scarf, I will attend to something else while she finishes it. These hair-dressers tire one to death. I will ring when you are wanted again."

The woman went out, carrying the dress carefully on her arm. The moment she was gone, Cora stepped into the next room, snatched up the dress she had flung off before commencing her toilet, and put it on. Across one of the chairs hung a lace shawl, which she had worn in the grounds that afternoon. She threw this over her head, gathering it up in black folds about her bosom, which scarcely seemed to rise or fall with human life. The last thing she did in that room was to open a drawer of the dressing-table and take out a small pistol, scarcely more than a toy, which had been given her at the manufactory in Hartford as a beautiful specimen of its workmanship, once when Amos Lander had taken her and Virginia over the works there. It was loaded, for one day she had given it to Josh Hurd to put in order, and he sent it back ready for use. She put this in her pocket, and now her voice was heard for the first time since the maid went out.

"I will kill him! If he attempts it, I will kill him!"

You would not have known that voice—you would hardly have recognized the woman's face as she went out of her chamber and made for a flight of back-stairs leading to a

passage-way near the kitchen. Once in the open air, she paused, holding her breath, if indeed she could be said to breathe at all. How she hated that bright illumination which made the tiniest flowers in the thickets visible; for it had filled the grounds with her wedding-guests, who were walking, chatting, or gathering roses in the beautiful light which fell around them, half moonbeams and half fire.

The woman had no time to wait hesitating there. She gathered the black lace over her head and took a somewhat shadowy course by the stables. Then she skirted the stone wall and ran toward the ravine, passing through the shadows with swift stillness as if she had been a spirit of the night, fleeing in search of perfect darkness. As she went Cora tore her husband's note into fragments and cast it to the winds.

A man was waiting for her in the log cabin; the moonlight lay upon his face as he looked out of the window, revealing its fixed and terrible whiteness. Not twenty-four hours before, he had been in one of the prison cells at Sing-Sing, but the Governor was haunted by the words and looks of that hunchbacked girl so persistently, that his great, generous heart spoke out in spite of legal forms, and a pardon set the young man free.

Seymour went first to his sister, full of eager gratitude; for had she not given him back to his wife and spared her the misery of knowing how unworthy he was? Ellen told him of the wedding, bitterly, for she almost hated Clarence Brooks and the girl he was about to marry. But she did not dream of the awful blow her words dealt on the unhappy man who had just come out of his imprisonment; indeed the resentment she felt towards those two persons must have been overpowering, to break through the joy that filled her heart when she knew of a certainty that her brother was free, and through her intercession.

Seymour left her without a word, but looking deathly.

He had no time to lose; the sun was already verging toward the west.

While Ellen stood where he had left her, lost in painful wonder, Brian came up. He had gone to the prison, hoping to see his brother, and there heard news of his pardon. Knowing well where he would go first, the happy youth followed him to Ellen's residence.

"Where is he? Has he gone in there—was she glad? Now, now, Ellen, she will get well again. It was only the pining."

Brian was so full of joy that he forgot his promise—forgot that Ellen was still ignorant of their brother's marriage.

"What do you mean, Brian? What does all this mean? Alfred came to see me, beaming with happiness, and left me like a ghost when I told him that this was Clarence Brooks' and Cora Lander's wedding day."

"And he did not see her?"

"He saw no one but me, and scarcely that. What does this mean, Brian? He seemed turning to stone when I told him of Cora Lander's wedding."

"Ellen, tell me one thing—did your lady know our brother in Europe?"

"No."

"Has she ever been for days together in the city?"

"No; I have been with her every day, almost every hour. No, I say."

"Ellen, Ellen Nolan, is she—tell me truly—is she breaking her heart for him?"

"For him? No, no, a thousand times no. She has never seen him alone in her life."

Brian looked around, frightened.

"Which way did he go, Ellen?"

"Up the river, toward the depot. But what does this mean? I will know."

"Hush, Ellen, I hear a train coming—kiss me—pray for us—pray for him most of all."

He was gone; she saw him fleeing down the cross-road in desperate haste, never looking to the right or left, but straight forward, as if the race was for his life. She saw him stop suddenly. The train was sweeping by—he was too late.

Yes, he was too late. But the boy walked on, and in a minute commenced running again. Something might delay the train. Three minutes—he only asked three minutes—no, it swept off like a serpent, coiling slowly around a curve of the road, and no other train would stop there before night. He walked on in the desperate hope of being taken up by some miracle of chance, or of springing on board a train at slow speed, for the boy was ready to risk his life without question. He did get on that special train full of wedding guests when it stopped a moment to have the hot wheels examined.

This delay left Seymour to his own wild self till that note was written, and Cora Lander came down to the log cabin, where he stood waiting for her.

She passed in at the door and stood by his side in the moonlight, throwing the lace shawl back upon her shoulders.

"You have sent for me under a threat. I am here to listen, if you have anything to say."

Her voice was hard and sharp as steel; her eyes glittered in the moonlight.

He looked at her and reached out his arms with such a cry of tender anguish as thrilled the very air.

"Oh, Cora! Cora! this is not so! Tell me that is not the truth!"

She stood like a statue, neither repelling nor accepting his embrace. His arms fell heavily downward, a groan broke from his lips.

"Will you not speak to me, Cora?" he cried.

"I have nothing to say, Alfred Nolan."

"Alfred Nolan! Great Heavens! has it reached her at last."

"It reached me at first. Before you were put into the prison, where you should have hid yourself forever had my will availed anything, I knew all that you had done and felt all the shame of having been your wife even for an hour."

The poor man dashed both hands to his face and cried out:

"Oh! my God—my God, have mercy upon me!"

"There shall be no mercy for you," she answered, hoarsely, "unless you quit this place at once and forever. I came here to make this proposal: go to the Indies—go to Australia—I will give you one-half of all that I have on earth; secure it to you with bonds that can neither be violated nor evaded. Only go—go—go! and never let me hear of you again!"

That wretched man shook from head to foot. She saw the agony in his face clearly by the moonlight. That look would have stirred even a hard heart to compassion, but she had none.

"Make up your mind at once. In becoming a convict, you set me at liberty. The certificate of our marriage is in my hands; the witnesses are beyond your reach; the grave itself never closed over a dead man more firmly than that disgraceful secret is locked up from all human knowledge."

"Cora! Cora! was this done purposely? Was it in your heart then? Did you never love me?"

"I don't know what was in my heart, but supreme folly, of which I repented. Yes, if you will have it—if it will make you hate me—revolt at the sight of me—hear the truth. I had ceased to love you before this infamy gave me a reason for it."

"Oh! have mercy, have mercy! And I loved you so! I loved you so!"

She took no heed of the anguish which broke out in this cry, but went on ruthlessly:

"Take my offer—it is a princely fortune, but I am tempted to double it and make sure that these eyes will never see you again. Not that I fear you. Refuse it, come up to the house and claim me, as you threatened so delicately in your note, and I will say, 'this man is insane, he is just out of the State's Prison; I do not know him.' Where is your means of proving that we ever met?"

She broke off, for Seymour seized her by both arms, and, forcing her up to the window, looked wildly into her face.

"Is this my wife? Is this the woman I loved, or some fiend in her shape? Woman! woman! do not go too far! I reject your money; it was for you—not that—I became criminal. I will not permit the crime you meditate against an honorable man. Tell me that it is a slander, a gross falsehood—that you never thought of marrying Clarence Brooks, or I will claim you before the crowd you have gathered up yonder. There is evidence, at any rate, that you lived in the same house with me."

"And I will tell them as I told him, that it was my cousin Virginia Lander who was domesticated with you there—she who is so intimate with your hunchbacked sister. They will believe that, and so will he."

Seymour still held her arms; his dark eyes looked into hers.

"Is the woman a demon?" he exclaimed, wildly. "Is your love for this honorable man such as you gave to me? Would you tear up his heart by the roots as mine is torn?"

"I love Clarence Brooks, the man you robbed; with all my heart and soul. Oh, that makes you writhe! I let go my arms, you are pinching them black and blue, and I am to be married to him this night. In defiance of your ravings I shall. I did mean to shoot you; but, no, I have the courage to dare the worst."

"No, madam," said a deep, grave voice close by her, "neither this night nor ever will you marry Clarence Brooks. He has heard this conversation—your wicked confession arrested him on the threshold of that door. He—"

The woman started upright and turned her haggard face toward him. The moonbeams lay full upon them both. Her dress swayed and rustled as if she were grasping its folds with a shaking hand. With a slow, almost stealthy motion, the hand was lifted. The click of a pistol followed.

Seymour uttered a cry and attempted to wrest the weapon from her, but too late. The sharp sound of a shot rang up the ravine. She fell forward into the arms thrown out to save her, and lay on her husband's breast, dying.

The sound of that shot reached the pleasure grounds where the guests were wandering a little impatiently, for it was full eleven o'clock, and as yet they had seen no signs of the bride and bridegroom. The shot was followed by a wild shriek, and up from the ravine came a boy, flinging up his hands and crying aloud for help. There was a simultaneous rush through the shrubberies. Men, seeing the darkness into which they were going, snatched lamps from the lower boughs of the trees and lighted their way down into the ravine. The lad went before them, pointing out the little log cabin, from which came heavy sobs and moans, such as can be wrung only from the bosom of a strong man.

It was a strange scene, those men and women with their rich dresses sparsely lighted by the tiny lamps, crowding up this broken path and stopping in dumb awe at the cabin door. Brian went in advance. He too had snatched a lamp from the branches and held it up, revealing a terrible picture.

Seymour was holding the woman, whom they had all been so impatient to see in her bridal dress, in his arms. He had been trembling, moaning and weeping over her in

a wild passion of sorrow. In the darkness he had kissed her lips, her forehead and her half-closed eyes, calling upon her to answer him, look at him, breathe so that he could hear the life stir in that bosom. But when that frightened crowd came up he hushed his grief and looked down upon her, still as death.

Clarence Brooks was on his knees also, pressing a handkerchief to the wounded temple, which was blackened a little and bled in slow drops, staining the linen deeper and deeper.

"Here is the physician," said Brian Nolan, addressing his brother.

Seymour lifted his haggard face, and a gleam of hope came into it. An eminent physician, who had been invited among the guests, touched Brooks on the shoulder, who arose and resigned his place. There was no hope—the lady might live through the night, but that would be more than he could answer for. How had this terrible thing happened?

The woman stirred, struggled and spoke:

"I did it with my own hand. The pistol is mine, my name is on it."

Then the clergyman came into the cabin, his long gown sweeping like night around him, as he had put it on for the bridal ceremony. He too knelt by her side and took the pale hand in his.

"Was it an accident?" he said.

"Yes, I did it! I was alone—no one else."

Those white lips only uttered these words. Question that dying woman as they would, she answered still:

"I did it—I was alone—an accident."

Neither Seymour nor Clarence Brooks spoke. The crowd held them no more responsible than the rest. It was natural that the man who had first lifted that dying woman from the ground should be pale and agitated—more

natural that the bridegroom, who stood before them in his wedding garments still and stricken, would be almost paralyzed by a calamity so dreadful. No one dreamed that Seymour was not one of the invited guests; his air, his face, everything about him carried out the idea. So the pallor and the silence of these men passed as a natural thing.

Cora's lips moved, her eyes opened, and she fixed them on Seymour. He bent down his head, and she whispered:

"Be silent, I—I charge you."

He whispered back:

"I will, so help me God."

The clergyman bent over her with sorrow and compassion in his face.

"Poor lady," he said, "tell us how this dreadful thing happened. It may save great trouble."

She made a violent effort and spoke, so loud that they heard her outside of the door:

"I loved this cabin; we were going away in the morning. I had time, and came down to take a farewell look. The pistol was in my pocket, forgotten there; I came to the window, the pistol struck against the logs; I bent down to search for it, low, for it caught in my dress; I was drawing it upward with force, when it went off. It was an accident, I was alone."

The force of these words exhausted her; for a moment she did not breathe. The doctor felt her pulse anxiously. All at once she revived.

"Doctor, must I die?"

"Yes, poor lady, I dare not say otherwise."

She made a painful struggle and turned her head, fixing those eyes, heavy with coming death, on Brooks. The clergyman and doctor saw that she wished to speak with her bridegroom, and made way for him, drawing back to those who stood around the door.

Brooks obeyed the sad appeal of those eyes, knelt down, bending his head to hers.

"I am not his child, but the niece he warned you of. Virginia is his daughter. Spare my memory. Tell her it was I, not my poor mother, who did it. He says I must die; deal gently with me then."

"May God forgive you and pity you as I do."

She turned her eyes back to Seymour and faintly pressed the hand which was shivering under the coldness that was numbing her fingers. Perhaps some gleam of the old love awoke in that death hour, for he remembered in after years that it was his bosom she turned to at last.

"Forgive me, Alfred!"

"I do—I do!"

"Do not let them hurl shame on my grave."

"No, no, I will perish first. Oh! Cora, my wife! my wife! would to God I had died for you!"

Her hand fell away from his, those beautiful eyes turned to lead, her limbs stretched out suddenly and the stillness of death fell upon that log cabin; but outside, the breeze was moaning in the hemlocks; and the low, sad chime of waters came up from the depths of the ravine, answering the shiver of the leaves and the rustle of flowers that trembled beneath their night-tears, and seemed to whisper mournfully each to the other as the death spirit passed over them.

CHAPTER LIX.

CONCLUSION.

A MAN lay sick almost unto death in that stone farmhouse. Hot fever was preying upon his brain; an awful

sorrow gnawed at his heart. He did not even know that sweet-voiced, gentle sister, who watched over him so faithfully, or the wild-eyed boy, who stood hours together at the foot of his bed, praying for him as only good, true-hearted youth can pray. Virginia Lander, too, came and went among them with kindly soothing, though her own heart was filled with gloomy anxieties; for she knew that an inquest had been held in her father's house, and that her cousin, the young girl she had once loved so dearly, lay cold and dead, shrouded in the marriage garments that had been prepared for her wedding. She knew that Cora's own account of the death had been received unquestioned by the jury. Indeed, what other reason could be given for the violent death of a young creature, so richly endowed, whose path of life seemed altogether of roses—a creature who did not seem to have an enemy on earth.

Neither Clarence Brooks nor Alfred Nolan were questioned, but the servants confirmed the account that unhappy woman gave of her death. Having a little time, while the dressmaker was letting out her wedding-robe, she had put on another and gone out, doubtless, as she said, to take leave of a place made dear by loving associations. There she had met her death. It was a strange fancy for a young bride to indulge in; but the evening was beautiful, and she had loved that place from childhood, when it had been her play-house. Some said it was in this little cabin she had first seen Clarence Brooks. So, in place of a scandal, the crowd of persons who had gone up to a wedding and found a deathbed, went home weaving out beautiful romances, which no one ever contradicted. Cora Lander had besought those she had wronged to spare her memory, and they did spare it, with religious sacredness.

While Seymour lay in his first illness, and Virginia shared Ellen's duties in the sick room, Lawyer Stone came down from the marble house and besought her to go home.

The will, he said, left Amos Larler's property to his niece, after the daughter's death, so there was no need of the question of identity being opened at all. He had brought her a letter from Clarence Brooks, the gentleman to whom her cousin would have been married, but for the sad accident which had sent her so suddenly out of life. Would she read the letter before they started?

Virginia took the letter into her own room, and read it alone, with tears and prayers and mournful thanksgiving. It told her everything that the reader knows. It told her more; though there was not one word of love in all those closely written pages, she knew, as well as if it had been printed there in letters of gold, that in Clarence Brooks' heart there had been no real unfaithfulness. He did not say this in words; but it pervaded the whole letter as if it had been lying close to his heart for a year.

So Virginia, feeling this her higher duty, went back to the home which was now all her own. There Clarence Brooks met her at the door. They looked into each other's faces in mournful silence, and, without a word, he led her up stairs into the room from which Cora had driven her so rudely, little more than a year ago. There, upon a bed pure and cold as a snowbank, she found all that was left of this haughty woman. The mother, ignorant of that other marriage, which made the bridal dress a mockery, had insisted that the satin robe, in all its rich amplitude, should go with her down to the grave. She lay there, calm, and still, like a young bride sleeping. The rich folds of her hair had been drawn in waves over the wound on her temple, concealing it entirely. The veil fell over her face, like frostwork on the white rose. All that had been bright and blooming about her had vanished into dead whiteness.

Up to that time, a bitter sense of wrong still lingered in Virginia's heart against Cora Lander. But it melted into tender forgiveness, when she saw her lying there in the

tired repose of death. She lifted the veil, which cast its faint shadows over her face, and kissed the lips that had wronged her so. When she turned away, holy tears trembled in the network of that shrouding lace.

She was about to leave the room, when her progress was stopped by Eunice Hurd, who came in, supporting Mrs. Lander with one arm, and followed by Joshua, whose eyes were red with weeping.

"Miss Virginia, we have come here to say how wrong—"

"Hush!" said Virginia, pointing to the bed. "Spare her; we know everything. Do not be troubled, Eunice; I can never forget how truly you were my friend when I needed one so much. Aunt Lander, for her sake let us be friends. But we must not talk here."

Mrs. Lander looked piteously into that sweet face. She saw nothing but forgiveness there, and the tears began to tremble from her eyes. She cast a glance at the bed, and, in a low, broken voice, tried to take blame on herself.

"It was me. My child! my poor child! It was for my sake she did it."

"Eliza, don't say that; don't say nothing. Let the dead bury the dead. But there is one thing that she did not know, and couldn't have told. Miss Virginia, that poor young creature, that they seem to have buried in a snow-bank, is my own niece, and Joshua is her uncle. Eliza Lander here, is our youngest sister, and she wants us to say so. This awful trouble has took all the pride out of her. She ain't ashamed to own her poor relations now. She wanted to live with us and we wanted to live with her, but she was a lady born, though it was in a house where you could see daylight through the clapboards, and we wasn't. But we wasn't mean enough nuther to want to mortify her amongst her husband's connections, so we jest came here and hired out. All she asked was that we should take some other name, so that we shouldn't be found out, and we did it.

"Arter this, it's sister Eliza Lander's wish that we should take back the old name, but I wont. She's a lady, and I'm proud of it. But I ain't nothing of that sort, nor is Joshua. We've told you the truth, because secrets in a family lie awful heavy on the mind; but, as to the rest of the world, it's none of their business. So my name is Eunice Hurd and his name is Joshua Hurd. Hers is Eliza Lander, and we two are her servants. Where she goes we mean to go, where she lives we shall be chasing after, and we mean to be buried in the same graveyard with her, as that young woman in the Bible said to her husband's marm. If she's sent out of this house poor we'll work for her. She's the only lady our family ever had in it, and we'll work our fingers to the bone, before she shall want her lace cap and silk gown, jest as she allers had 'em when Amos Lander was alive, and you two cousins little girls."

"She shall never want anything that I can give her, nor shall you my faithful friend. Aunt Lander, do be comforted; it breaks my heart to see you looking so old and worn."

She wiped away the tears from those heavy eyes, and kissed that poor, grieving mouth, with more than a daughter's tenderness. "Take good care of her, Eunice, and tell her that, while we can help it, she shall have no more troubles."

Here Joshua came forward.

"Miss Jinia, I can't do much for you. It ain't in me; but I'd—I'd die to please you. Yes, I think it ed come tough; but, if you want me to, I'll give up licker—never taste another drop of punch in my born days, if you say the word."

"But I wish you to give up nothing, Joshua."

"Well then, I'll take sich care of Snowball; litter her down with roses, if you say so. I'll take good care of the black horse too, for her sake, for, arter all, she was my owl niece."

When this conversation commenced, Brooks and Virginia had quietly withdrawn from the chamber of death and closed the door, but Joshua spoke low when he alluded to the young creature lying within, and took off the hat, which had been returned to his head, in that natural reverence which even ignorant men pay to death.

After this, the group went down stairs, but directly Eunice returned again.

"About the mourning," she said. "Eliza Lander is dreadfully anxious, and wants to know if anything has been done."

"Tell her to please herself. I have no need of change," said Virginia, almost smiling. "Take charge of everything, Eunice, for, when all is over, I must go back to the farm-house. Ellen has a brother there, very sick."

He was indeed very sick, nigh unto death, and so he lay for many a weary week. Ellen's book came out, while he was at the worst, and she scarcely knew of it, though its fame went far and wide, reaching distant lands, and critics on both sides the Atlantic pronounced it a work of wonderful promise. She had no thoughts to give from that sick bed, where the son her father had charged her to save, with his last words, lay suffering. Clarence Brooks found his way to that farm-house, and strove to comfort the young man who lay there with more than his old friendliness.

One day when Alfred Nolan was in his right mind and gazing with wistful observation in Brian's face, the boy crept close to his bed, and took the hand his brother held out.

"Brother," he said; "It was I who brought all this upon you. I followed you up the railway—saw you go into that cabin—saw her come down the ravine. This frightened me. I was afraid that some trouble would happen. I heard the threats in her voice and went after Mr. Brooks. He was in a chamber of the house, ready and waiting to be

called by pleasanter messengers than I was. But, when I told him that a man was in peril, he seized his hat and followed me. If his coming caused what happened afterward, I am to blame. Forgive me, Alfred, I intended no wrong. Forgive me."

"My poor boy," said the invalid, faintly; "there was no fault in what you did. God was working out our punishment and it came. It was better to have our lives end so than in deeper sin. I thought these things over very solemnly in the stone tomb down yonder. I have thought them over here since our sister gave me, word for word, that last message from our father. *She* is dead, but God is merciful, and who shall say that the last moments of her young life were not spent in asking for that Divine forgiveness which is not limited by time or space."

Nolan lay still, and with his eyes closed some minutes after he uttered these words. When he spoke again it was more calmly.

"Brian."

"Well, brother."

"This is no place for us. I could never be at rest here. But far away, beyond the Rocky Mountains, lie vast countries, rich in minerals, fertile in soil, and so far from what we call social life, that a man can live by himself and learn to grow strong. God is giving me back life, Brian. I am young, and must no longer be an idle and useless man. Will you go with me to this country, Brian?"

"I will go with you anywhere, brother," answered Brian.

Ellen came in just then bringing a cup of tea for the invalid.

Brian, with all a boy's eagerness, asked her if she would go with them.

"Nay," interposed Alfred; she is feeble. She must be left behind."

She looked at her elder brother, and quick tears came

into her eyes, while she repeated, with sweet, impressive earnestness, the words of Ruth to her mother:

"Ask me not to leave thee, or cease from following after thee. Where thou goest, I will go. Where thou livest, I will live; thy people shall be my people; thy God shall be my God; and where thou diest, there will I be buried."

No more was said that day, for neither Alfred nor Brian could speak, their voices were too full of tears. But it was agreed that the brothers should go first, and prepare a home for Ellen, who would get the money her book was bringing in for their use, write another, and make arrangements with the publishers for more, that were yet to come out of her new life. She thanked Heaven that her work could be done anywhere. Alfred wondered at the prompt, business way in which all this was said; but he had yet to learn that real, absolute genius is comprehensive as Nature itself. Those who confine it to simple romance dwarf God's greatest gift to man.

When Clarence Brooks heard what Alfred Nolan had decided on, he resolved to go with him, for Nolan absolutely refused to accept the money which Brooks had almost forced upon him, and he resolved to invest it there, hoping that it would at last find acceptance. So, after a few weeks, these two men, who had travelled over the Old World in company, bridged the awful chasm that had separated them, and went Westward, taking Brian with them. Ellen went back to the marble house, and joined Virginia in the tranquil life she led there.

About a year from this time Brooks came back again, strengthened and rendered cheerful by the constant change and excitement of a frontier life. A month after that, there was a quiet little wedding in that marble mansion, so quiet that the daily journals brought the first news of it to those who had been invited to that other sumptuous affair which ended so fatally.

At many a breakfast table that mornin'; the news was read aloud, and more than once it was followed by this exclamation: "So Clarence Brooks has married Amos Lander's heiress, after all. So much alike, they say. The bridesmaids—why, there was only one, the author of that book everybody is talking about! Would you believe it? She is a hunchback, but so talented and *petite*. Such lovely eyes and hair too. Mrs.— had it from her publishers."

The next month Ellen Nolan went West with her brother, who had used his scientific learning to great purpose, and was opening sources of prosperity in the wilderness, with his knowledge, which many a hard-working man availed himself of, working the same mines and gathering the same gold, which was fast lifting him into that respectability and independence which honorable labor, either of mind or hands alone can bring.

Ellen keeps his house; she has plenty of mountain flowers all around that neat log cabin, and so many vines clambering over it, that it looks more like a mammoth bird's nest than a human habitation. But, though she loves flowers, and seeks to cover up coarser things with them, back of that house you may find a well kept vegetable garden, which Brian takes care of, and which the colored girl, who went West with her, sometimes vigorously works in, when there is nothing to be done indoors. Especially she goes out when her young mistress is writing by that little window, curtained with morning glories; for then it seems almost wrong to tread hard upon the floor, and she feels like holding her breath as she moves about.

Just now Ellen is reading a letter from Mrs. Clarence Brooks, who proposed, during the summer, to take that Western trip with her husband. She wrote just then to know if there was an unoccupied room in the cabin for them.

Ellen has taken up her pen, which shakes and quivers in

her hand; but she makes out to write, that unoccupied rooms are unheard of in that part of the country, but a new cabin, opening into theirs, will be up long and long before her friends can get there. In fact, Alfred will have the log-rolling at once, that she can have flowers growing over it when they come.

THE END

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