

THE OLD COUNTESS;

OR,

THE TWO PROPOSALS.

BY

MRS. ANN S. STEPHENS.

AUTHOR OF "LORD HOPE'S CHOICE," "THE REIGNING BELLE," "MARRIED IN HASTE,"
"MABEL'S MISTAKE," "DOUBLY FALSE," "WIVES AND WIDOWS," "MARY DERWENT,"
"THE REJECTED WIFE," "THE SOLDIER'S ORPHANS," "THE OLD HOMESTEAD,"
"FASHION AND FAMINE," "THE HEIRESS," "RUBY GRAY'S STRATEGY,"
"THE CURSE OF GOLD," "SILENT STRUGGLES," "THE WIFE'S SECRET,"
"PALACES AND PRISONS," "THE GOLD BRICK," "A NOBLE WOMAN."

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A SEQUEL TO "LORD HOPE'S CHOICE."  
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THE OLD COUNTESS;

OR,

THE TWO PROPOSALS.

CHAPTER I.

LOVE-LIGHTS IN TWO HEARTS.

DURING fourteen years Hepworth Closs had been a wanderer over the earth.

When he was carried out from the court-room after Mrs. Yates' confession of a crime which he had shrinkingly believed committed by another, he had fainted from the suddenness with which a terrible load had been lifted from his soul.

In that old woman's guilt he had no share. It swept the blackness from the marriage he had protested against as hideously wicked. The wrong he had done was divested of the awful responsibilities which had seemed more than he could bear. The revelation had made him, comparatively, an innocent and free man. But a shock had been given to his whole being which unfitted him for the common uses of society.

After all that had passed through his mind he could not bear to think of joining his sister or husband. The keen

feelings of a nature, not in its full development wicked or dishonorable, had been startled into life, when he saw into what a gulf he had almost plunged. He saw the sin and the wrong he had done in its true light, and not only repented of it, but abhorred it from the very depths of his soul. He longed to make atonement, and would have given ten years from his life for a chance by which he could have sacrificed himself to any one that poor murdered lady had loved.

These feelings rose up like a barrier between him and his sister. Her influence over his youth had been so powerful that his own better nature never might have asserted itself but for the tragedy which followed his first plunge into deception and wrong-doing. He loved this beautiful young woman yet, as few brothers of any age or class ever did; but the shock of that tragedy was on him, and his impulse was to flee from her and the man for whose sake all this trouble had come.

Hepworth Closs was not the first youth whose life has opened with evil thoughts and evil deeds, from which his manhood shrank appalled.

The unformed intellect and quick passions of youth have wrecked many a noble soul, by the sin of an hour or a day, beyond the redemption of a toiling and regretful after-life. The man who does redeem himself must have a powerful nature, which will force its strength to be recognized, and make its regeneration felt. But to the sins of youth much should be forgiven, which, in the mature man, justice might utterly condemn.

Hepworth Closs arose from that fainting fit humbled and grateful. That moment his resolve was taken. He would not share the benefits which might come to him through his sister's marriage, nor in anything partake of a reward for the evil he had, in mercy, been saved from. The world

was before him. He would work his way into prosperity, if possible; if not, bear his fate like a man who had deserved suffering, and could endure it.

One act of restitution was in his power. The property of the unfortunate person, whom he knew as Lady Hope, had fallen into his possession, for the house had been purchased in his name, and, in like manner, her deposits had been made. He had never intended to claim this money as his own, and invested it now, holding himself as the trustee. This done, he threw himself upon the world, quite alone.

During fifteen years he had asserted the honorable manhood that had sprung out of his erring youth. That fearful tragedy had sickened him with deception, and with all ambition which did not spring out of his own honest exertions. He went forth, with all his energies on the alert, and his intellect free from the suspicions that had for a time enthralled it. He had craved riches, and hoped to obtain them through Rachael's marriage. This had been a temptation. He had ambition still, but it took a far more noble direction. With wealth he would gather knowledge; with both, mental force and moral power.

He went. Men saw him in the gold mines of California, in Australia, and among the traders of India and Japan. Then he came back to New York, and was honorably known upon the exchange. Then came a yearning wish to see his sister, the only relative he had on earth; and we find him at the gate of Oakhurst Park, just as Lady Clara dashed through it, as bright a vision of joyous, happy girlhood as ever crossed the path of any man.

That moment I think that Hepworth Closs fell in love with the girl. If so, it was absolutely his first love. The boyish and most unprincipled passion he had felt for that murdered lady had no similitude with the feelings that possessed him now. It was a wicked, insane desire, springing

out of his perverted youth—a feeling that he would have shuddered to have recognized as love, in these, his better days.

Yes, it is certain Closs loved the girl at first sight, but was unconscious of it, as the nest is when a dove settles down to its brooding.

As for the girl, she had seen but few men in her life calculated to disturb the repose of a creature so gifted and rich in imagination. At first Hepworth had seemed rather an old person to her, notwithstanding the gloss of his black hair, and the smooth whiteness of his forehead. With a trust in this, which gradually betrayed her, she accepted him frankly as a relative, and in less than three weeks, grew restless as a bird. She wondered what had made the world all at once so gloriously beautiful, and why it was so difficult for her to keep the tears out of her eyes when the soft purple evening came down, and divided the day which had been spent with him, from the night, when she could only hope to see him in shadowy dreams.

Rachael Closs saw all this, and it filled her with bitter rejoicing. How would her powerful old enemy receive the intelligence that a brother of hers had won the heart of the future Lady Carset? that he would be lord of the proud old castle, which must go with the title, and mingle the blood she had so often denounced as base with that which had turned against her, with such hot scorn, ever since she entered England as Lord Hope's wife?

The very thought of that haughty old peeress so humiliated was wonderfully pleasant to the wounded pride of Rachael Closs. But far beyond this was the yearning, almost passionate fondness she felt for her brother and the beautiful girl who had been to her at once a Nemesis and an infatuation.

This was what Lady Hope had hinted at when Hepworth

first came. The great wish of her heart had grown to be the union of these two persons, next to one supreme object of love, the dearest beings to her on earth. It seemed to her that those long, weary intervals, which grew more and more frequent, when Lord Hope left her alone in the desolate splendor of that great house, would be more endurable if she were certain that these two persons would always be near her. She was not ambitious for her brother. That feeling had died out years ago; but her love sprang to him, like a freshly-kindled flame.

With Lady Hope, as with Rachael Closs, there was no moderation in her feelings, which were tenacious as they were powerful and exacting. But Rachael, with all her impetuosity, had strong contradictory qualities. She was sagacious, and could rein in her passion of love or hate as an Arab controls his desert steed. That which her soul most desired she could wait for.

One night, when the moonbeams lay like silver on the stone terrace, and the shadow of the peacock fell from the balustrade like a second bird, Lady Hope complained of fatigue, and retreated into her own room, leaving Hepworth and Clara sitting upon a flight of steps which led down to a flower-garden, somewhat neglected of late years, which lay beneath the stone terrace and brightened the grounds nearest to the lady's apartments. Not far from these steps was a noble old cedar of Lebanon, rooted deep, where the drawbridge had been hundreds of years before. Beneath it was a rustic seat, and in its branches innumerable birds were sleeping.

There never was, perhaps, a finer contrast of silver light and black shadow in any landscape than surrounded these two persons, as they sat together side by side, both thinking of the same thing, and both reluctant to break the delicious silence.

At last Hepworth spoke—it was but a single word, which made his companion start and hold her breath.

"Clara!"

She did not answer him; that one word frightened her. She had half a mind to start up and hide herself in the shadows, for he was looking in her face, and the moonlight fell like a glory over his features, which she now saw were grave even to sadness.

"Clara, do you know that I must go away soon?"

"Oh, no! no!"

The girl had not expected this. The infinite tenderness in his voice had led her completely astray, and she broke forth in an eager protest.

"I must, dear child."

"Dear child!" repeated the girl, half crying. "Yes, yes, you treat me like a child—as if I could help being young—as if I could not feel and think and be miserable like other people. It's hard, it's cruel, it's—it's—"

Here Clara burst into a flood of tears, and leaping to her feet, would have run into the room where Lady Hope was sitting, but Closs caught her in his arms.

"What are you crying for, Clara? Why do you wish to run away? It is wrong to say this, but I must go, because of loving you as no man ever loved a woman before."

"A woman?" said Clara, and gleams of mischief peeped out from behind her tears. "You called me a child just now."

"Woman or child, Clara, you are the dearest thing to me on earth."

Clara struggled in his arms, and tried to push him from her.

"I—I don't believe you. There!"

"Don't believe me?"

Hepworth released the girl, and allowed her to stand

alone. On any subject touching his honor he was peculiarly sensitive.

"Because—because men who love people don't run away from them. It—it isn't reasonable."

All the mischief in her eyes was drowned in fresh tears. She thought that he was offended, and the estrangement of a moment seems eternal to first love.

"Honorable men do not permit themselves to speak of love at all where they have reason to think it unwelcome," was his grave reply.

"Unwelcome? Oh, Mr. Closs!"

Clara held out both her hands and came nearer to Hepworth, like a child that wants to be forgiven. He drew her close to his side, but spoke a little sadly.

"You see how much I must love you, Clara, to forget all that a guest in your father's house should remember."

"I—I don't know; I can't understand what it is that you have done wrong. I'm sure I'm ready to forgive you."

She might have said more, but he took the breath from her lips, and held her so close to his heart that she could feel its tumultuous beatings.

"But I can never forgive myself, darling."

"Oh, yes you will!"

The creature pursed up her lips and offered them for his kiss—thus, as she thought, tempting him into self-forgiveness.

"Is it that you really—really love me?" questioned Hepworth, searching the honest eyes she lifted to his with a glance half-passionate, half-sorrowful, which brought a glow of blushes to her face.

"Can you ask that now?" she questioned, drooping her head. "Will a good girl take kisses from the man she does not love?"

"God bless you for saying it, darling! Oh, if it could be—if it could be!"

"If what could be, Mr. Closs?"

"That you might be my wife, live with me forever, love me forever."

"Your wife?" answered Clara, pondering over the sweet word in loving tenderness. "Your wife? Are you asking me if I will be that?"

"I dare not ask you, Clara. What would your father say? What would he have a right to say?"

"I'm sure I don't know," answered Clara, ruefully, for she could not honestly say that her father would consent.

"You see, Clara, I have nothing to do but say farewell, and go."

CHAPTER II.

CLARA APPEALS TO HER STEPMOTHER.

LADY HOPE had retreated into her own room, for the absence of her husband was beginning to prey upon her; and she was all the more sad and lonely because she knew in her heart that the two persons whom she saw together in the moonlight were thinking, perhaps talking, of the love which she must never know in its fullness again—which she had never known as good and contented wives experience it.

Indeed, love is the one passion that can neither be wrested from fate or bribed into life. It must spring up from the heart, like a wild flower from seed God plants in virgin forest soil, to bring contentment with its blossoming.

The sunshine which falls upon it must be pure and bright from heaven. Plant it in an atmosphere of sin, and that which might have been a holy passion becomes a torment, bitter in proportion to its strength.

Ah! how keenly Rachael Closs felt all this as she sat there alone in her bower room, looking wistfully out upon those two lovers, both so dear to her that her very soul yearned with sympathy for the innocent love she had never known, and never could know upon earth! Yet, dear as these two persons were to her, she would have seen that fair girl and the manly form beside her shrouded in their coffins, if that could have brought back one short twelve-months of the passionate insanity which had won Lord Hope to cast aside all restraint and fiercely wrench apart the most sacred ties in order to make her his wife. She asked for impossibilities. Love born in tumult and founded in selfishness must have its reactions, and between those two the shadow of a wronged woman was forever falling; and, struggle as they would, it grew colder and darker every year. But upon these two persons time operated differently. The wild impetuosity of his character had hardened into reserve. His ambition was to stand high among men of his own class—to be known as a statesman of power in the realm.

But, in all this Rachael knew that she was a drawback and a heavy weight upon his aspirations. Was it that she was less bright or beautiful? No, no. Her mirror contradicted the *one* doubt, and the power which she felt in her own genius rebuked the other.

Once give her a foothold among the men and women who had so persistently considered her as an intruder, and the old vigor and pride of her life would come back with it: the idolatry which had induced that infatuated man to overlook

these stumbling blocks to his pride and impediments to his ambition would surely revive.

"Let him see me at court; let him compare me with the women whose cutting disdain wounds me to death, because it disturbs him; let him place me where this intellect can have free scope, and never on this earth was there a woman who would work out a husband's greatness so thoroughly."

In the first years of her marriage, Rachael would say these things to herself, in the bitterness of her humiliation and disappointment. Others, less beautiful and lacking her talent, had been again and again introduced from lower ranks into the nobility of England, accepted by its queen, and honored by society. Why was she alone so persistently excluded? The answer was always ready, full of bitterness. The enmity of old Lady Carset had done it all. It was her influence that had closed the queen's drawing-room against Lord Hope's second wife. It was her charge regarding the Carset diamonds that had made Rachael shrink from wearing the family jewels, which justly belonged to her as Lord Hope's property. It was this which made her so reluctant to pass the boundaries of Oakhurst. It was this that embittered her whole life, and rendered it one long humiliation.

These reflections served to concentrate the hopes and affections of this woman so entirely around one object, that her love for Hope, which had been an overwhelming passion, grew into that idolatry no man, whose life was in the world, could answer to, for isolation was necessary to a feeling of such cruel intensity.

As the hope of sharing his life and his honors gave way, doubts, suspicions, and anxieties grew out of her inordinate love, and the greatest sorrow to her on earth was the absence of her husband. It was not alone that she missed his company, which was, in fact, all the world to her; but,

as he went more and more into the world, a terrible dread seized upon her. What if he found, among all the highly born women who received him so graciously, some one who, in the brightness of a happy life, might make him regret the sacrifice he had made for her, the terrible scenes he had gone through in order to obtain her? What if he might yet come to wish her dead, as she sometimes almost wished herself!

In this way the love, which had flowed like a lava stream through that woman's life, engendered its own curse, and her mind was continually haunted by apprehensions which had no foundation, in fact, for, to this day, Lord Hope loved her with deeper passion than he had ever given to that better woman; but with him the distractions of statesmanship, and the allurements of social life, were a resource from intense thought, while she had so little beside himself.

She had striven to bind him to her by kindness to his child, until the bright girl became, as it were, a part of himself, with whom it would be death to part.

Is it strange, then, that this dream of uniting Clara to her only brother should have been very sweet to the unhappy woman?

Lord Hope had been absent a whole month now, and even with the excitement of her brother's presence, Rachael had found those four weeks terribly long.

What would she do if that fair girl were separated from her entirely? Then solitude would be terrible indeed!

But another anxiety came upon her by degrees. In what way would her husband receive Hepworth Closs? How would he accept the position the two persons out yonder were drifting into? Would he consent to a union which even her partiality admitted as unsuitable, or would

he, in his cold, calm way, plant his foot upon their hearts and crush her fond desire out of existence?

As Lady Hope pondered over these thoughts in silence and semi-darkness, Clara came through the window, in great excitement.

"Oh! mamma Rachael! He is going away from us. He told me so just now; but you will not let him. You will never let him!"

Lady Hope started out of her reverie.

"Going away? Where? Who? I cannot understand, Clara!"

"Hepworth—Mr. Closs, I mean. Oh, mamma! he threatens to leave us here all alone by ourselves—the most cruel thing that ever was heard of. I thought how angry you would be, and came at once. You can do anything with him—he loves you so dearly. Let him threaten if he likes, but you will not let him go. You will tell him how foolish, how cruel it is to leave us, while papa is away. Oh! mamma Rachael, you can do anything! Do this! Do this!"

"But why, darling—why do you care so much?"

"Why! why!" Clara threw back her head till the curls waved away from her shoulders, then a burning crimson came over her, the shamed face drooped again, and she answered: "I don't know—I don't know."

Rachael bent her face till it almost touched that hot cheek, and whispered:

"Is it that you love him, my own Clara?"

Again Clara lifted her face. A strange light came upon it. Her lips were parted, her blue eyes opened wide.

"Love him—love him? Oh! mamma Rachael, is this love?"

Rachael smiled, and kissed that earnest face, holding it between both hands.

"I think it is, darling. Nay, I am sure that you love him, and that he loves you."

"Loves me? Then why does he go away? I should think so but for that."

"Because of that, I am afraid, Clara."

"Loves me, and goes away because he loves me!" said the girl, bewildered. "I don't understand it."

"There may be many reasons, Clara."

"I can't think of one. Indeed I can't. Papa never was cruel."

"He may not think it quite honorable to let—make you love him, when your father knows nothing about it."

"But papa would not mind."

"Hepworth does not know that; nor do I. Your father is a very proud man, Clara, and has a right to look high, for his only child."

"What then? Mr. Closs is handsomer, brighter, more—more everything that is grand and royal, than any nobleman I have ever seen. What can papa say against that?"

"But he is a man of no family position—simply Hepworth Closs, nothing more. We can scarcely call him an Englishman."

"What then, mamma? He is a gentleman. Who, in all this neighborhood, can compare with him?"

"No one! no one!" answered Rachael, with enthusiasm. "There is but one man on all the earth so far above the rest; but persons who look upon birth and wealth as everything, may not see him with our eyes, my Clara. Then there is another objection. Hepworth is over thirty."

"Mamma Rachael, you know well enough that I never did like boys," said Clara, with childish petulance.

"And compared with the great landed noblemen of England, he is poor."

"Not so, mamma Rachael. He has made lots and lots

of money out in those countries where they dig gold from the earth. He described it all to me, about washing dirt in pans, and crushing rocks in great machines, and picking up pure gold in nuggets—why, he found an awful big one himself. I daresay he has got more real money than papa. I do, indeed."

Lady Hope sighed. Perhaps she thought so too; for Oakhurst was closely entailed, and ready money was sometimes scarce in that sumptuous dwelling.

"And then how much shall I have? Let me ask that of papa."

"But you will inherit something with the Carset title in spite of your grandmother."

"Yes, I know. An enormous old castle with just land enough to keep it in repair. That isn't much to boast of, or make a man like Mr. Closs feel modest when he thinks of me."

"But the title. Is it nothing to be a peeress in your own right?"

"I would rather he were an earl, and I a peeress in his right."

"You are a strange girl, Clara."

"But you love me if I am, mamma Rachael."

"Love you, child! You will never know how much!"

"And if it so happened that he did really like me, you wouldn't go against it?"

"But what would my will be opposed to that of your father?"

"Only this—you can do anything with papa. Don't I remember when I was a little girl?"

Rachael sighed heavily.

"That was a long time ago, Clara, and childish wants are easily satisfied."

Clara threw both arms around her stepmother's neck and kissed her.

"Never mind if he is a little stubborn now and then; you can manage him, yet, mamma. Only, don't let Mr. Closs do that horrid thing. I never could ride alone with the ponies after the last three weeks. You don't know how instructive he is! Why, we have travelled all over the world together, and now he wants to throw me overboard; but you won't let him do that, mamma Rachael. What need is there of any thought about what may come? We are all going on beautifully, now, and, I dare say, papa is enjoying himself shooting grouse. When he comes back and sees how much Mr. Closs is like you, everything will be right. Only, mamma Rachael, tell me one thing. Are you sure that—that he isn't thinking me a child, and likes me only for that? This very night he called me 'my child,' and said he was going. That made me wretchedly angry, so I came in here. Now tell me—"

"Hush! hush! I hear his step on the terrace."

The girl darted off like a swallow. For the whole universe she could not have met Hepworth there in the presence of a third person.

As she left the room, Closs entered it.

"Rachael," he said, standing before his sister, in the square of moonlight cast like a block of silver through the window, "I have been weak enough to love this girl whom we both knew as an infant, when I was old enough to be a worse man than I shall ever be again; and, still more reprehensible, I have told her of it within the last half-hour; a pleasant piece of business, which Lord Hope will be likely to relish. Don't you think so?"

"I do not know—I cannot tell. Hope loves his daughter, and has never yet denied anything to her. He may not like it at first; but—oh! Hepworth, I know almost as little of my husband's feelings or ideas as you can."

"But you will not think that I have done wrong?"

"What, in loving Clara? What man on earth could help it?"

"Well, I do love her, and I think she loves me."

"I know she does."

"Thank you, sister; but she is such a child."

"She is woman enough to be firm and faithful."

"You approve it all, then?"

Hepworth sat down by his sister and threw his arm around her.

"My poor Rachael! how I wish this, or anything else, could make you really happy!"

She did not answer; but he felt her form trembling under his arm.

"But I only see in it new troubles for you and dishonor for myself. There is really but one way for me to act—I must leave this place."

"And Clara? After what you have said, that would, indeed, be dishonorable."

"She is so young; the pain would all go with me. In a few months I shall probably have scarcely a place in her memory."

"You wrong the dearest and finest girl in the whole world when you say that, Hepworth! To desert her now would be profound cruelty."

"Then in what way am I to act?"

"Write to Lord Hope; tell him the truth—that you have won the respect of men by your actions, and have, with your own energies, acquired wealth enough to make you a fair match in that respect for his daughter. Make no allusion to the past; he is proud, and terribly sensitive on that point, and might suspect you of making claims to equality because of it."

Hepworth smiled as he stood before her in the moonlight, and she saw it. Wide travel and experience among men

had led him to think that, after all, the highest level of humanity did not always range with hereditary titles; but he only said, very calmly:

"Lord Hope cannot accuse me justly of aspiring where he is concerned."

Rachael felt the hot crimson leap to her face. Did Hepworth dare to equal himself with Lord Hope, the one great idol of her own perverted life? She answered, angrily, forgetting that the sinner was her only brother:

"Lord Hope need have no fear that any man living will so aspire."

"Poor foolish girl!" said Hepworth, feeling the flash of her black eyes, and touched with pity, rather than anger, by her quick resentment. "Do not let us quarrel about Hope. If he makes you happy, I have nothing to say against him."

"Happy! happy!"

Rachael shrank back in her seat, uttering these two words in a voice so full of pathetic sorrow, that it brought the pain of coming tears into Hepworth's eyes. He was glad to turn the subject.

"Then you are not willing that I should go away?"

"It would almost kill me to lose you again, Hepworth."

The young man felt that she spoke the truth; the very tones of her voice thrilled him with a tender conviction.

"I will write to Hope," he said; "it must end in that or absence. It shall not be my fault, Rachael, if I ever go far away from you again."

Lady Hope took her brother's hand between hers.

"That is kind, and I really think the only wise thing to be done," she said. "Hope knows that you were born a gentleman."

"And having married into the family himself, can hardly say that it is not good enough for his daughter. This is

answer enough for all objections of that kind. In fact, Rachael, I begin to think we can make out a tolerable claim. Now that we have decided on the letter, I will write it at once, here, if you will let me order more lights."

Hepworth rang the bell as he spoke, and directly wax candles were burning on the ebony desk at which Lady Hope was accustomed to write.

Having made up his mind, Closs was not the man to hesitate in doing the thing he had resolved on. He spread a sheet of paper before him, and began his letter at once. Rachael watched him earnestly as his pen flew over the paper.

For the first time she realized, with a pang of apprehension, the step she was so blindly encouraging. What if Lord Hope took offense at the letter, or should condemn her for the intimacy which had led to it? She was afraid of her husband, and each movement of Hepworth's pen struck her with dread. Had she, indeed, laid herself open to the wrath of a man, who was so terrible in his anger, that it made even her brave heart cower?

"There, it is finished," said Hepworth, addressing his letter, and flinging down the pen. "Now let us throw aside care, and be happy as we can till the answer comes."

Lady Hope sighed heavily, and, reaching forth her hand, bade him good-night.

CHAPTER III.

LOVER'S QUARREL.

THEY were sitting together, under the great cedar tree, declared lovers; perhaps not the less happy because some

little doubt rested over their future, so far as the young lady was concerned.

As for Hepworth Closs, he had made up his mind to expect difficulties, and knew how to conquer them, if human ingenuity could do it. He loved the bright young creature, and had resolved within himself that no unreasonable opposition on the part of his former friend should prevent him marrying her, while there was a possibility of conciliating his bride, or working upon the love which he had always evinced for his child.

Hepworth had learned, from conversation with both the ladies, that the Lord Hope of the present day was a very different person from the rash, headstrong, audacious young man whom he had almost threatened with disgrace fourteen years back.

Then he was ready to cast wealth, rank, conscience, everything, aside for the gratification of any wild passion that beset him. Now he held the rank to which he was born sacred above all things; was careful, if not covetous, of wealth, because it added power to rank; and was known the whole country round as one of the proudest noblemen and most punctilious magistrates in the three kingdoms.

This man's daughter he—Hepworth Closs—desired to make his wife. Nay, in spite of fate, meant to make his wife, unless she, in her own self, cast his love from her. Having settled upon this, he cast off all care, and gave himself up to the supreme happiness of loving and being beloved.

So, as the two sat under the cedar tree, that bland autumn day, Clara thought, in her wilful little heart, that the man looked too confident and happy. She had no idea of settling down into a commonplace engagement, sanctioned or unsanctioned. What business had he to look so supremely

contented? Did he not know that girls sometimes changed their minds?

In short, Lady Clara was in a wilful mood, and could be provoking enough when the fit came on her. Just now she was embroidering diligently. The golden stamens of a superb cactus glowed out stitch by stitch, as her needle flew in and out of its great purplish and crimson leaves.

"Why don't you look up, Clara? I haven't seen your eyes these ten minutes."

"Indeed! Well, I'm too busy. Pray hand me a thread of that yellow silk."

"Not if I can help it, ladybird. It's very tiresome sitting here, only to watch your sharp little needle as it drops color into that great flower. One never gets a sight of your full face."

"Then you don't like the profile?" said Clara, demurely, and her needle flashed almost into Hepworth's eyes as he bent over her. "That is just what I expected. It isn't three days since you first pretended to care for me."

"Pretended! Clara?"

"That was the word," answered Clara, holding her work at arms' length, and examining it, with her head on one side, like a bird eyeing the cherry he longs to peck at. "Lovely, isn't it?"

"I have been where you could gather armsful of them from the wayside," answered Hepworth. "That is well enough, of course, for silk and worsted; but you never can get that mixture of crimson, purple and glittering steel, that makes the flower so regal in the tropics; then the soft tassel of pale gold, streaming out from the heart, and thrown into relief by this exquisite combination of colors. Ah, some day I will show you what a cactus really is, Clara."

"Perhaps," said the provoking girl, searching her work-basket for the silk she wanted. "Who knows?"

A flash of color flew across Hepworth's forehead. The handsome fellow never had given himself much to the study of women, and even that pretty creature had the power to annoy him, mature man as he was. She saw that he was vexed, and rather liked it; for if the truth must be told, a more natural coquette never lived than Lady Clara.

"Are you beginning to doubt, Clara?"

"Doubt? Oh! not at all. I don't honestly believe that there ever was a more perfect flower than that. See how the colors melt into each other; then the point of that long, prickly leaf coming out behind. I tell you, Mr. Closs, it's perfect."

She was looking down at her work, and he could not detect all the mischief that sparkled under her drooping lashes.

"Clara, what does this mean?"

The girl looked up at him so innocently.

"Mean? Why, it means a cactus-flower."

Hepworth Closs had never been a patient man, and the feelings which that wild girl had awakened in his heart were all too earnest for such trifling. He rose to leave her. Then she gave him a side glance, half comic, half repentant.

"Are you going?"

"Yes."

"Dear me, I am so sorry, because I wanted to tell you something."

The girl spoke and acted like a penitent child. Hepworth sat down again, but his face was clouded.

"You can do anything with mamma Rachael, and I want you to ask a great favor for me."

"Why not ask yourself? My sister denies you nothing."

"But this is something peculiar, and she may think papa would not like it. There is to be a new opera brought out in London, and such a lovely girl is to make her first appearance in it, handsome as the morning, and with a voice like ten thousand nightingales. Now, I do so want to hear her on the first night."

"Well, that is easy."

"Yes, yes—if mamma Rachael would only think so. But papa is awful particular, and she may be afraid to take me. But with you for an escort, there can't really be any harm; so I want your help."

"But how did you know about this? I have not seen it in the journals."

"No, it hasn't got abroad yet. I will tell you all about it. When I was a very, very little girl, my poor mother died in America, where she was travelling among the Indians, I believe, with my father. Well, you see how hard it was on papa to be left with a poor little girl among the savages. I do not know just how it was; but when he married mamma Rachael, ever so long after, of course she got an American nurse in New York, who has been with me ever since. I call her my maid now, and won't have any other, French or not—for she's good as gold, and loves me dearly. You will believe that when I tell you our head game-keeper wanted to marry her—she loved him, too, but wouldn't leave me. Margaret left a sister behind in New York that she was very fond of, and has been pining to see for years. Just before you came she received a letter from London, saying that her sister was there, travelling with some lady connected with the stage, and asking Margaret to come and visit her. Of course, Margaret went, and has been all this time on a long visit to her relative,

who came to Europe with the great prima donna, Olympia. It is her adopted daughter that is coming out."

"Olympia. Yes, I saw her in America last year—a wonderfully beautiful creature, in a certain way; but her style of acting is not exactly what I should choose for you, Lady Clara, though her voice is wonderful."

"Oh, it isn't her I care about, but the young lady. Margaret says she is lovely as an angel, with a heavenly voice, but that she is frightened to death at coming on the stage, and begs and pleads with her mother not to insist on it; but Olympia is determined. My heart quite aches for this poor girl. She is about my age, Margaret says, and so beautiful—not a bit like me. I dare say it's true, for I would give the world to be an actress, and have the whole world go mad over my singing. By-the-way, Mr. Closs, do you know that I can sing? Mamma Rachael often says, if I were not a lady, I might go on the stage and beat half the prima donnas; besides, she says, I am a natural actress, and that seems to displease her."

"I think you are a natural actress," said Closs, with a tinge of sarcasm, for this whole subject displeased him, he scarcely could have told why.

"Now you mean to be unkind," said Clara, rising, with a warm flush in her cheeks; "I will not ask another favor of you."

Clara gathered up her embroidery, and prepared to leave the sheltered seat in which this conversation had been held. She certainly was not acting now, for Closs saw that her eyes were full of tears.

"Clara," he said, holding out both hands; "Clara, forgive me."

She hesitated a minute, then set down her basket, and crept close to his side, wiping the tears with one hand,

while he clasped the other. Then she snatched her hand away, and held it behind her.

"No—I won't forgive you."

"Not if I persuade Lady Hope to take you up to London for this appearance?"

"Ah, then, perhaps."

"And go with you myself?"

"That will be splendid."

"That Olympia is a magnificent creature. I took supper with her once in New York."

"You, Mr. Closs! You took supper with her?"

"She sang for us that night, divinely."

"And you admire her so much?"

"Very much."

"Mr. Closs, I do not think I care to go. There is no need of your asking Lady Hope—I decline the whole thing."

"Still, I think we will go, Clara, if it is only to show you how much a woman can be worshipped, and yet despised. Yes, yes, we will go and hear Olympia sing."

But Clara was not to be so easily appeased. She gathered up her worsted and embroidery, huddled them together in her work-basket and went away, refusing to let Closs carry her basket, or even walk by her side.

While he stood watching the haughty little thing, a voice from the other side of the cedar tree arrested him. He turned, and saw a face that had once been familiar, but which he could not at the moment recognize.

The woman came forward with a startled look. She was evidently past thirty, and had an air of independence, which he had never seen in an English domestic.

She came closer, their eyes met, and he knew that it was Maggie Casey, the chambermaid who had led him up to

that death-chamber, the last time he visited it. She had recognized him from the first.

"Mr. Hepworth," she said, in a low voice: "Mr. Hepworth!"

Closs had almost been prepared for this, and did not allow himself to be taken by surprise.

"You have got half the name right at any rate," he said, quietly; "Hepworth Closs, and you have it complete. You never could have heard it in full, when you lived in New York, I fancy."

"Closs, Closs? No, I never heard that name given to you; but it once belonged to Lady Hope, I remember."

"And of course, naturally belongs to her brother, my good girl," said Closs, with a quiet smile.

"Her brother? Whose brother? Not the Lady that was—"

The girl broke off, and her voice died in a low whisper.

"No, no!" broke in the man, with sudden impatience; "that was a terrible thing, which you and I will be all the happier in forgetting. The poor woman who did it is suffering a hard penalty, if she is not in fact dead."

"Yes, sir, yes; but how came her grandchild here? How came you there?"

"Hush!" said Hepworth, in a voice of command, that startled the woman; "who gave you authority to ask such questions? What can you know about the old woman's grandchild?"

"I know that the young lady who left you ten minutes ago was the little girl they called her grandchild. I saw the coroner holding the poor little thing up to look on the dead lady. I think that lady was her mother."

"And have told her so, perhaps?"

"No; I never did, and I never will. She called the old

woman, Yates, grandmother; but I know better than that, for I know where her grandchild is this very minute."

"You know her grandchild?"

"Yes, I do, and a prettier creature never lived."

"You know her, and will tell me?"

"Indeed, I will do nothing of the sort," answered Margaret, for she had thrown off the jaunty abbreviation of her name. There is something about all this that puzzles me. People that I never expected to see again keep crossing my path like ghosts, and somehow most of them have something to do with that time. Why can't the whole thing rest? I'm sure that poor old woman, Yates, has had her punishment, and I don't want to talk about what I don't understand."

"You are wise," said Closs, whose face had lost all its cheerfulness; "there is no good in even thinking of a dead past, and, as you say, that poor old woman has her punishment. I am glad you have said nothing of these things to my sister, or Lady Clara."

"Why should I?" said Margaret, with shrewd good sense: "what good would it do? In fact, what do I know? I only hope no such trouble will ever come to this house."

"Heaven forbid!" said Closs, fervently, and the two parted.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ITALIAN TEACHER.

LADY Clara was right. Olympia had brought her daughter to London after a professional tour on the continent, not as her daughter. Olympia would not force herself to admit

that the tall Juno-like girl, who outshone her in beauty, and rebuked her flippant grace by a dignity at once calm and regal, could, by any possibility, be her own offspring, at least as yet. She had arranged it with Brown that no public acknowledgment of Caroline's relationship should be made, and that she should pass as an adopted child or protegee, at least until her success on the operatic stage was confirmed.

Brown had stipulated, on his part, that the girl should receive her musical training in strict privacy, so far as that was possible, and, in no case, should be moved from his personal supervision, a condition that Olympia accepted with delight, for, after a month or two, she began to feel the presence of her cast-off husband something of a restraint, and regarded the quick growth and blooming loveliness of the young girl as almost a wrong to her own ripe beauty. Still she would not loosen her hold as a parent on the girl's life, but still hoped to reap a golden harvest from her talent, and sun her own charms, as they waned, in the splendor of her child's beauty.

With these feelings, Olympia opened her campaign in Europe, and swept a brilliant career from France to Italy, and from thence to Austria and St. Petersburg, leaving Caroline with her guardian and maid, in a village near Florence, where she could perfect herself in Italian and music at the same time.

There Caroline's life really began. They were staying at a pretty villa, terraced up from the banks of a bright little stream, that emptied itself into the Arno, so isolated and lonely, that it was perfect heaven to Brown, who was set down at once as the young lady's father, and to Eliza, who delighted in the chance of rest this arrangement promised.

While in Florence, Brown had taken his charge to one of the best teachers in Europe, who consented to break through

his usual rules and give her lessons in the pretty home she had decided on. He would also charge himself with selecting a teacher of the language, who should make her pronunciation of the sweet Tuscan perfect as her voice, which was, in fact, something wonderful.

Some persons were in the musician's room when these arrangements were made, and one of them, a young man, drew slowly toward the piano, like a bird charmed against its will, and listened with rapt attention while Caroline took her first lesson. The girl looked up once or twice, as her voice rang out with unusual power, and unconsciously answered back the warm smile that enkindled his whole face. A musician himself—she knew by the very expression of his dark eyes.

Brown saw it too, and was delighted with the effect of her genius, which he, in his partial affection, deemed transcendent.

"He is a professor, I dare say, or perhaps a great singer," thought the kind old man; "but she charmed him at once."

Brown was confirmed in this idea when the eminent teacher he had consulted fell into a discussion with the man in Italian, which Caroline did not hear, and Brown himself could not understand, but which evidently turned upon Caroline's performance. They were both delighted with it; that was evident from the very ardor with which they spoke. Brown was pleased with all this, but Caroline, perhaps, remembered it with greater interest than he had felt, for the young man's face haunted her long after she was settled in the pretty villa, and had made herself at home among the vines and flowers that turned those terraces into a jungle of fruit and blossoms.

Nothing could be more lovely than the home Brown had chosen, and certainly no place could have been found more

completely isolated. The coming of her teachers even became a matter of deep interest to Caroline.

One morning, when her language-master was expected, she went out early and stood upon the lower terrace, looking down the little stream which led to the Arno, as I have told you, impatient for his coming; impatient to know what sort of a person he would prove, and if his society might not break the monotonous stillness of that beautiful place. It was early yet. She had no reason to believe that her new teacher would be there for hours. She felt it very tiresome, walking up and down those terraces and watching the ripe olives drop one by one into the long grass from the branches overhead. The restlessness of youth was upon her, and she longed for some means of leaping over the next three hours, when the new teacher would come, perhaps with a disappointment.

He might be some poor old soul, whose very presence would prove an annoyance. No matter; a disappointment or an annoyance was better than utter stagnation. She wished the new man would come, she wished there was something for her to work at till he did come.

A flight of stone steps fell down to the water from the lower terrace. Fastened to an iron staple sunk deep into the granite, was a little boat swinging by a cable. Caroline's heart gave a leap at the sight.

She ran down the steps, untied the cable, and in a moment was sweeping down the little stream, pulling her oars like an Indian girl.

It was a lovely flow of water, clear as crystal. The sky was mirrored in it softly blue; the sun struck it with arrows of silver, the flowering shrubs trailed down from its banks, and rippled the waters like the lost plumage of a peacock; fruit-laden vines broke away from the olive branches, and dipped their purple clusters in the stream,

where they shone out richly—amethysts gleaming through crystal. Everything was beautiful around her. Full of youth and health she gloried in the exercise of rowing; gloried in the sunshine and quivering shadows through which her pretty boat ploughed its way, breaking up pictured trees and clouds, and turning them to foam.

The current was with her, the wind swept softly down stream, bringing a scent of wall-flowers and jessamines with it. The boat shot downward like the shuttle through a web. The water deepened, the stream grew wider; she could hear the broad, free rush of the Arno, a little way off. Still she went on.

It would be glorious, finding herself in the broad river sweeping toward Florence, in her arrow-like boat. Of course she could turn at any time, but not yet.

Something stopped the boat. A wild vine, hidden in the water, had seized upon it, and swept it half around, then a current tossed it forward into a sweeping whirl of waters. She was close by a vortex near the mouth of the river, a ravenous little whirlpool that threatened to swallow her up. The oars dropped from her hands; she seized the sides of her boat and sat still, rigid as stone, white as death. Then a great arrow, or what seemed to be one, shot through the water close by her, ploughing it white with foam. Then a man leaped into her boat, pitching a pair of oars in before him, and holding the cable of another boat in his hand.

He neither spoke nor looked at her, but twisting the cable around one ankle, and setting the other foot upon it further up, seized his oars, and for a minute or two battled like a tiger with the waters.

The boat rocked, wheeled slowly away from the awful danger, then plunged forward with a shock that brought a sharp cry from Caroline's white lips.

"Do not be afraid. The danger is over."

She turned her pallid face, and over it came a flash of recognition. It was the man who had listened to her first lesson in Florence. He recognized her, pale as she was, and slackened his oars—they were out of danger now.

"Am I so fortunate? My pupil! This is a great happiness."

Caroline leaned forward and held out her trembling hands. Words of gratitude were on her lips, but they only trembled there, without utterance. He leaned over the little hands, as they came quivering toward him, but could not touch them, his own being sufficiently occupied with the oars.

"There is nothing to fear now sweet lady," he said, in Italian, which never sounded so sweet to her before "The danger is wholly past—but it *was* danger!"

Caroline shuddered; she almost felt those curling waters sweep over her. The sensation was terrible.

"And you saved me?—you, whose face I have seen before so often, so often. It seems like that of a friend."

"Once—only once. I wish it had been a thousand times, if that could lessen your fright."

"Tell me how it was," said Caroline, beginning to recover herself. "I cannot realize it."

"Nor I, sweet lady, it was all so sudden. I saw a boat whirling toward that treacherous vortex, the flash of a blue mantle, the whiteness of an upturned face. What I did, you know. I cannot tell how it was done; did not dream who the person was. Now, I long to fall upon my knees and thank God."

Caroline clasped the hands which had fallen to her lap, bent her head, and unspoken words of thanksgiving trembled in her heart. The man looked upon her eagerly.

That gentle glow of devotion gave her face the sweetness of a madonna.

He thought this, and almost dropped the oars, the longing to fall down upon his knees by her side was so intense.

She saw this, understood it, and smiled for the first time.

"I was asking God to forgive me for being grateful to you before I thought of Him.

"And I was asking Him to make me grateful enough for having saved you. Surely that should bring his blessing on us both."

Caroline bent her head, and a sweet smile crept over her lips. Then she bethought herself of the things of this world, and grew troubled.

"But I am taking you from your course. Forgive me!"

"From my course? Not so. It was for this purpose I come. Perhaps you are not informed that I am to make your Italian more perfect than it is, which is scarcely needed."

"You sir!—you?"

She said no more, but her face lighted up, and he saw her hands softly clasp themselves, as if she were thanking God over again. Then his own head bent forward, and he made a great effort with the oars, but it was only to hide the smile that broke over it.

So up the little river these two people went more and more slowly, for the stillness and the beauty were pleasant beyond anything, and both dreaded the moment when this delicious happiness would end. But they reached the steps at last, and there was Mr. Brown and Eliza, on the lower terrace, in great trouble.

They had missed her and the boat. Dreading they

scarcely knew what danger, both were anxious to follow her, but they had no means. Thus an hour of keen anxiety had passed, while they stood watching the river.

"There is your father, looking anxious," said the young man. "I hope he has not suffered much."

Caroline did not answer him, but sprang to the steps and ran up them, holding out her hands.

"My child! my dear, dear child!" cried Brown, throwing both arms around her.

He often used endearing terms like this when much affected, and she thought nothing of it, but kissed his face, and kissed Eliza also, who scolded her terribly, as was her habit when disturbed by a sudden fit of tenderness—a state of feeling she was sure to resent.

"Father Brown, this is my new teacher. The professor sent him. He has just saved my life. I have tried to thank him, but could not. You have more power."

Brown and Eliza both came close to the young man; but he shook his head, and tried to evade them. After her tender thankfulness, their gratitude, generous and pure as it was, seemed coarse to him.

"We must begin the lesson," he said, laughing, and drawing a book from his pocket. "This little accident, which was nothing, has made us lose time."

He said this in Italian, which, of course, silenced them; and at this moment the man could say nothing which his companion would not confirm.

Caroline smiled, and went up the steps from terrace to terrace, while he kept by her side. Her color had come back more vividly than ever. The sunshine struck her hair, and turned all its brown to gold. She was dressed like a peasant of the better class, with some scarlet in her blue bodice, and more bordering the bottom of her skirt. Her neck was uncovered, for the blue mantle had fallen off

and now lay in the bottom of the boat. It was a becoming dress, but not for her—she was too queenly.

They went into that old stone dwelling, forming one group; but the moment the parlor was reached, Eliza went off to her work, she said—but if any one had followed her, it would have been to a chamber under the roof, where she was upon her knees full twenty minutes, thanking God for Caroline's escape from death.

Then Brown went away, and seated himself in an arbor on one of the terraces, where he was seen once or twice to take out his handkerchief and wipe his eyes, as if the dust troubled him.

The man up yonder, brave as he was, had rather evaded his gratitude; but he knew that God would listen.

Then Caroline took one of the volumes her new teacher had brought, and retreated to a latticed window, which had a cushioned seat in it large enough for two, though I really do not believe she thought of that. At any rate, he did not accuse her of it, even in his thoughts, but went quietly to the window and took a seat by her side, at which she blushed a little, but did not move.

Caroline was very well grounded in her Italian; so, instead of grammars, these young people fell to reading the native poets, and began with Tasso—a course of studies well calculated to produce more results than one; but Brown did not understand Italian, though he was a splendid musician, and repeated it like a parrot. Besides, what did Eliza know about Tasso, Petrarch, Dante, or any of those wild fellows that disseminate love-poison by the line?

When her teacher was ready to go, Brown asked his name. I have no idea that Caroline had thought of it. The young man seemed quite taken aback for a minute, but answered, after that, something that would have sounded like an English name rendered in Italian, had a

thorough Italian scholar been present, which there was not.

Well, for three months those young people sat twice a week in the seat in the lattice-window, and read the poets together. Need I say more about that?

At the end of three months Olympia had an engagement in London, and sent for Brown to join her there with his charge.

CHAPTER V.

THE MOTHER AND DAUGHTER IN OPPOSITION.

OF course there is no such thing as arousing all London into a fit of enthusiasm, because millions of people are not moved at the same moment by anything less than a revolution. But the West End, just then, wanted an excitement, and found it in the coming of Olympia. Her style was new, her action a little too free, perhaps, for the high-bred dames of the aristocracy; but they all went, and were amused, shocked, fascinated, and went again, but only to keep the young people, they said, from utter demoralization—the creature really was irresistible.

At any rate, Olympia was the fashion, and drew famously, till a rival novelty proclaimed itself. Then she was horror-stricken by seeing a few empty seats in the house. To Olympia, an empty seat was desolation.

That night Olympia went to her daughter's room the moment she reached her hotel after a late performance. The cloak which she had worn from the theatre still hung about her shoulders. Her cheeks blazed with rouge, her eyes were restless and anxious.

Caroline started up from her sweet sleep, disturbed and almost terrified.

"What is it, mamma?" she said, holding back the hair from her lovely face with both hands. "Is any one ill—Mr. Brown?"

Olympia sat down on her daughter's bed, and drew the cloak around her; not that she was cold, but to show that her resolution was taken.

"No one is ill, Caroline; as for Brown, I know nothing about him. But I come to prepare you; for this week we shall bring you out. In what opera have you practiced most?"

"Bring me out? Oh, mamma!"

The girl fell back on her pillow, dismayed, and clasping both hands, held them out imploringly.

"Oh! I thought you had given it up."

"Foolish child! I never give anything up. Ask Brown."

It was true; that woman never gave up her own will to any one. The possibility of sacrifice or willing concession could not enter her mind.

"But I cannot, I cannot! Oh, mother! think how little I have seen of crowds. To sing before one would *kill* me!"

"Mother!" repeated Olympia, "how often must I tell you that I hate the word!—an American vulgarism!"

"Forgive me, mamma; it was only because I was so frightened at the idea of singing in public. But I know that you did not mean it."

The poor girl made a pitiful attempt at disbelief, and tried to win acquiescence with a timid smile.

"I not only mean it, but will have no more evasion or protest. When we left New York, you were dying to get on the stage."

"Oh, that was before I knew—before I dreamed—"

"Before you knew—before you dreamed what?"

"That it made one so—so—"

"Well, speak out!"

"So unhappy. Indeed, indeed, I cannot say what I mean; only, I would rather die than put rouge on my face, and—oh, forgive me! I did not mean to make you look so angry!"

But Olympia was angry. The prima donna of a company does not usually bear much opposition, even in trifles, and here Olympia had great interests at stake.

Through the young girl before her she intended to run a second career, and thus crowd the enjoyment of two lives into one.

"This all comes of Brown," she said. "He would have you kept quiet, and out of the world, pretending that society would distract attention from your practice; but it was all an artful plan to keep you to himself. I have not been so busy as not to understand that, let me tell him."

Caroline started up in bed, almost as much excited as the actress.

There was plenty of good honest character in the girl; and, if she appeared timid, it was from delicacy, not weakness.

"You wrong Mr. Brown. There is not a selfish feeling in his heart. What he does, is always done for my good."

"Yes; I suppose it is for your good when he drinks too much!"

There was a sneer on Olympia's lip, an evil spirit in her eye, which destroyed all its beauty; but even this did not make the girl shrink; she only put out both her hands, and turned her head away.

"Oh! how can you?" she cried. "I never saw him in my life when he was not in all respects a gentleman."

"But I have! I have!"

"Ah, madam, it is cruel to say this. Mr. Brown was my friend, my only friend, long before—before you came and took me away from my poor little home. If you could make me think ill of him, would it be kind?"

"But he has been treacherous; he has taught you hatred of the profession which you were so crazy for at one time."

"No, no; it was not Mr. Brown. I saw for myself."

"Yes, the dark side; never in its brightness or its glory. But you shall, you shall."

Caroline lay back upon her pillow and covered her face with one hand. The sight of that beautiful woman, so hard in her resolve, so completely ignoring all feelings but her own, was hateful to her.

"Please let me rest to-night," she pleaded.

"To-night, yes. It is enough that you understand me now; but, after this, I shall expect no opposition. If you are so stupidly ignorant of the power which lies in your own beauty and genius, I am not. So try and come to your senses before morning. Good-night."

The woman went out, with her head aloft, and her cloak trailing behind her, for, in her excitement, she had flung it away from one shoulder, that she might gesticulate with the arm that was free.

Caroline turned upon her pillow and cried bitterly till morning.

Olympia was right. The girl had been scrupulously kept from all society that her freshness might be preserved, and her education completed.

She had been to the theatres, here and there, when some new piece was presented, but it was rather as a study than an amusement; and after a knowledge of the public idol in private life had slowly swept away all the romance of their first meeting, the innate coarseness of this beautiful, selfish woman was not long in revealing itself to the pure-minded

girl, who soon began to grieve that she could not love and still admire the mother she had at first almost worshipped. Olympia, who had found it easy enough to dicte to managers, and oppress subordinates, had far different material to act upon when she broke in upon the midnight sleep of the girl Daniel Yates had grounded in the nobility of true womanhood.

The next day, being Sunday, was Olympia's great day of rest and amusement. She slept till long after mid-day, ate an epicurean breakfast in a little dressing-room with rose-tinted draperies, ran lazily over the pages of some French novel, in the silken depths of a pretty Turkish divan, heaped up with cushions, till long after dark; then threw herself into the mysteries of a superb toilet, and came into her exquisite little drawing-room like a princess—say Marguerite of Navarre—ready to entertain the guests, invariably invited on that evening, in a fashion that made her quite as popular in this particular social strata as she was behind the footlights.

From these little suppers Caroline had been carefully excluded up to this time; but the morning after she had left the young girl in tears upon her pillow, Olympia broke into her day of luxurious repose by sending for her agent, with whom she had a rather stormy interview in the dressing-room, from which Brown came out pale as death, but with an uprightness of the person, and an expression in the eyes that no one had ever seen there before.

About an hour after he had departed, Olympia's French maid was seen hurrying up stairs to the chamber which Caroline occupied, and where she stood that moment, just as she had sprung from her chair, with a wild and startled look; for every knock she heard seemed to come from her mother, whose appearance she dreaded terribly that morning. But, instead of Olympia, the French maid came in,

with a creamy-white dress of India gauze thrown over her arm, its whiteness broken up by the blue ripple of a broad sash, with a purple tinge in it; and in her hands the woman carried some half-open moss-roses, with a delicate perfume absolutely breaking from their hearts, as if they were the outgrowth of a generous soil—which they were not, however difficult it might be to decide from a first or second look; these French are so like nature in everything but themselves.

The French maid laid these things daintily on Caroline's bed, where the roses glowed out, as if cast upon the crust of a snow-bank. Then, looking upon the girl's magnificent hair, which was simply turned back from her forehead and done in braids behind, she said, with pretty, broken speech:

"I will do it in crimp and puffs, if mademoiselle pleases. With her face, it will be charming."

Caroline drew a deep breath, and cast a half-frightened, half-pleased glance at her maid, Eliza, who stood near by, looking grimly at preparations she could not understand. This was not half so dreadful as the presence she had expected, and the dress was so lovely that she could not keep her eyes from it.

"What is it all about?" questioned staunch America, with a look at France which was not altogether friendly.

"It is," answered the French maid, spreading out her little hands, "It is that madame will have mademoiselle down to her little supper. The evening will be very charming because of mademoiselle."

Caroline glanced at the blush-roses, and her eyes began to sparkle. Then she caught a glimpse of Eliza's face, and turned her glance resolutely away, looking penitent. Eliza knew something of madame's little suppers, but Caroline did not. If bursts of laughter and a soft tangle of voices sometimes came up to her room in the night, she had no

means of knowing that the noise was not from the servants' hall, and Eliza would have died rather than enlighten her. Besides, she had nothing absolutely wrong to tell, for some of the first young noblemen in England came to Olympia's little entertainments; and when Eliza heard their names announced she had not a word to say, having lived long enough to attain a reverence for titles.

In fact, it is doubtful if she did not value her charge a little more highly from the fact that she lived in a house where noblemen came and went with such evident sociability.

At first Eliza had darted fiery glances at the robe of India gauze, thinking it a theatrical costume; but when she learned that it was only a dress which would introduce her darling into the best society, from which a selfish mother had rigidly excluded her, she allowed her features to relax, and absolutely smiled on the little French woman.

Then the smile, which had been struggling all the time about Caroline's mouth, broke over her whole face. She could neither keep her hands from the dress or the moss-roses, but touched them daintily, half doubtful, indeed, if they were intended for her.

"If mademoiselle will please," said the little French woman, drawing a low chair before the dressing-table, and taking an ivory brush, carved at the back like a Chinese puzzle, in her hand.

Caroline sat down, smiling in spite of herself. Eliza stood a little on one side, resolved to be upon her guard.

While she was looking, down came that abundant hair in a torrent, tress upon tress, wave after wave, with tinges of gold rippling through and through the brown. The little French woman held up both hands, brush and all, in astonishment, and burst out in a noisy cataract of French, which delighted Eliza all the more because she could not understand a word of it.

But Caroline did understand, and this outburst of genuine admiration pleased her so much that, in a moment, her face was glowing like a whole thicket of roses, and she hadn't the courage to lift her eyes, from fear that Eliza would see how foolish she was to care about what the little French woman said.

Eliza saw all this, but it only made that grim smile broader and deeper on her own face; and when the golden-brown hair was frizzed and rolled, and dropped in two rich curls on that white shoulder, she turned her face upon the French woman and said, "Very nice!" in a way that made the little woman put her head on one side, and nod it half a dozen times, while she answered:

"Yes, I tink so."

India gauze was dropped like a cloud over Caroline's head; the sash of purplish blue was girded around her waist, and bunched up in superb bows behind; then the cloudy stuff was gathered up in drapery from a silken under-skirt, tinted like the sash, and fastened back with clusters of the moss-roses.

This completed the toilet. No jewels were there, not even a string of pearls, though Olympia had ropes of them; and Caroline rather sighed for their completeness when she took a full-length view of herself in the mirror, as foolish girls will, who never learn the value of simplicity and freshness until both are lost.

Then the little French woman went away to Olympia, giving Caroline plenty of time for reflection. The first thing the girl did was to look shyly at Eliza, who pursed up her lips, and did her best to keep from smiling. Then she took courage, and said:

"Eliza."

"I hear," answered the grim hand-maiden.

"Eliza, do you think *he* would know me in this dress?

Or, if so, would he like it, as he did that dear Italian costume?"

"I don't know," answered Eliza. "Them Italians have queer notions about dress. Now, for my part, them short skirts and low-necked waists did well enough for common-sized girls; but you're too tall, and carry your head too high, for anything but a skirt that sweeps out and puffs up like that."

"Still, I shall always like the dear old costume, Eliza. Oh, what a happy, happy life madame broke up when she sent for us!"

"Yes, I suppose so. You seemed to enjoy it; and as for that young fellow, what with his boating on the river, his shooting birds—which I hate—on the hills, and his lessons—well, really, he might about as well have lived with us."

"Oh! Eliza, shall we ever be so happy again?" cried the girl, kindling up with bright memories.

"Not just in the same way; real folks never are. But I suppose people have a pretty equal share of the good and bad things of life, as they go along. Now I haven't an idea but that the young fellow thought all was up with him when he got the letter you left at the house."

"I should not wonder," said Caroline, and her bosom began to heave with an after-swell of the indignation which had stormed it, when she left Italy at an hour's notice. "It was a cruel thing. I never will forgive you or Mr. Brown. A few hours would have made no difference, and he was coming the next day."

"What then? If he was a teacher, Mr. Brown left his money, with two months' overpay."

"His money!" repeated Caroline, with infinite scorn.

"If not money, what did he come for?" questioned the hand-maiden, sharply.

"Eliza, you shall never think that—it degrades him and

me. He never touched—he never thought of money. If Mr. Brown left it, as you say, I am sure he felt insulted.”

“Then what did he come for?” inquired Eliza, with dry, emphasis.

“Because—because he loved me, and could not live without seeing me, because I—I—”

“Loved him,” said the maid.

But Caroline had broken down wholly with this first passionate confession. The poor girl sank to a couch, flushed all over with such shame as only a woman of fine sensibilities can feel for that of which she has no reason to be ashamed at all.

“Oh! Eliza, how can you be so cruel?” she exclaimed, dropping her hands, and revealing a face of crimson, wet with tears. “I never meant to keep it from you.”

“Of course, you never meant it, and you didn’t do it, which is more. You supposed I didn’t know. Men may be blind as bats—they usually are; and our Brown is worse than the commonality. But trust an old maid for spying out a love secret. It’s like exploring a strange land for her, you know. Lord! Miss Carry, you can’t keep a secret from Eliza Casey; but then, why should you? Isn’t she bound to be your staunch friend forever and ever?”

These words opened a new source of anxiety to the really unhappy girl, who forgot her love-shame, and plunged at once into a new subject.

“Oh! Eliza, if you could help me. Madame is determined. That is, she wishes me to go on the stage.”

“Well, you have been told that from the first.”

“I know—I know; but it seemed so far off then, like death, or any other evil that you know will come, but cannot tell when. But now she says it must be at once. Oh! Eliza, I never can do it. The very fear of it makes me shudder.”

“But why? I remember, when we first came out here, you had no other wish but to be like her—your mother, I mean. Like her! I would rather see you dead!”

Eliza muttered the last words under her breath, and Caroline only heard the question.

“Yes, I know. Everything seemed so bright then—she brightest of all; but I was getting to shrink from it before we went up to that dear little villa, and since then it has seemed like death. Oh! tell her this, Eliza, and beg of her to let me be as I am.”

“But shall I tell her all, and say that is the reason?”

“No, no, no! You may think it. Mr. Brown may think it. That is like myself having a secret; but do not tell her for the whole world.”

“Tell her! Well, well, I aint likely to; but if she is set upon it, what can I say? Madame is not a woman to give up her plans, and you have got *such a voice!* Sometimes I think it would be splendid to see you taking the wind out of her sails.”

“But it would kill me!”

“Poor thing! Well, never mind—I will stand by you, right or wrong; but this will be a tough battle. Tell me, though, did that young fellow have anything to do with setting you against the profession?”

“There it is, Eliza. He never knew that I thought of it, and used to speak of female performers with such careless contempt, as if they were ten thousand degrees beneath him.”

“And he only a teacher!” said Eliza, lifting her head in the air.

“And he only a teacher; but so proud, so sensitive, so regal in all he said or did. Oh! Eliza, if he knew that Olympia, grand, beautiful, and worshipped as she is, were my mother, I fear he would never care for me again.”

"Why, how on earth could you help that?"

"I could not, and it would be wicked to desire it. But, Eliza, I ought to have had the courage to tell him, and I put it off. Every day I said to myself, the very next time he comes, and at last you know how it was. I had no chance, and now I may never see him again. He will always think me Mr. Brown's daughter, and I shall feel like an impostor. I cannot help this; but to go on the stage, when he has said so much against it, that I will not do, unless forced there by my mother's authority."

"Well, as I said before, I will stand by you, right or wrong; and so will Mr. Brown, I know. I only wish he was your father."

"He could not be kinder if he was," said Caroline.

Just then the door opened, and Olympia's French maid looked through.

"Madame is in the drawing-room, and waits for mademoiselle."

"I will come! I will come!" exclaimed Caroline, breathlessly, and she hurried down stairs.

CHAPTER VI.

SOME OLD ACQUAINTANCES GET INTO A CONJUGAL DIFFICULTY.

LORD HOPE had a house in Belgravia, that could always be made ready for the family at a day's notice. So Rachael, who could refuse nothing to her brother, sent up her steward to make preparations one day, and followed him the next with Lady Clara and Hepworth Closs; Margaret Casey and other servants in attendance, of course.

These persons reached London on the very Saturday when Olympia was stricken with dismay by finding an empty seat or two in her usually well packed houses. When this discovery first broke upon the prima donna, Hepworth Closs was sitting quietly in the pit, where he found himself, as if by accident. They had reached town only in time for a late dinner, when the ladies, being greatly fatigued, proclaimed their intention of retiring early, which was, in fact, casting him adrift for the evening. Being thus let loose upon the world, he very naturally brought up at the opera, and was seated so near the stage that his eyes more than once caught those of Olympia, who gave him one of those quick glances of recognition, which seemed aimed at the whole audience, but hit only one person.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but isn't she a stunner!" said a voice, as the first act closed. Hepworth might not have recognized these words as addressed to himself, but for the weight of a large hand which was laid on his arm. As it was, he turned promptly, and encountered a stout, heavy man, handsomely dressed, but for a massive gold chain which passed across his bosom into his vest pocket, and drooped in glittering lengths far down the rotundity of his capacious person, and a large diamond that blazed on his plaited shirt bosom. From the chain and the diamond, Hepworth's first thought was, that the person must be some Californian or Australian acquaintance, belonging to his old mining days, but the man soon set that idea aside.

"You don't happen to remember me, Mr. Hepworth, but I knew you at the first sight. Ask my lady here. Didn't I say, Mrs. Stacy, that gentleman with the coal-black mustacher, and them splendid eyes, is Mr. Hepworth, if ever I set my two eyes on Mr. Hepworth, which I did many a time, when he used to come to Forty-third street?"

Hepworth started. Forty-third street! Was he to be forever haunted by the place and people connected with that awful tragedy? Why was this? The guilt was not his, yet he could not feel himself near any person, however remotely connected with it, without thrills of dread.

The man had been talking on, but Hepworth heard nothing at first, he had been too painfully startled; when he did listen, these words fell on his ear:

"That was an awful affair, Mr. Hepworth; most people was astonished, but I never was; always had my suspicions of that old woman; believe she robbed the house of lots and lots of things, after the lady was dead; in fact, am sure of it. Mrs. Stacy here is of my opinion. There was a girl in the house—perhaps you remember her, sir—Maggie we used to call her; she and the old woman Yates was thick as thieves, and both laid their heads together. It wasn't for nothing, let me tell you; their nests were feathered, you may believe. There never was a sharper girl than Maggie Casey."

"She was just a forerd, imperdent cretur as set her cap at you like a fiery draggon," broke out the woman, who occupied a seat by the stout man, and was evidently his wife; "a cretur as I wouldn't wipe my shoes on, after a long walk—no, not if she'd give me fifty pair for doing of it."

"I am not saying anything to the contrary, my dear, am I? That girl was after me sharp enough, but I never encouraged her. Mr. Hepworth can satisfy you on that point, my own Harriet, for I remember, as if it was yesterday, he and I talking about it the very day afore that murder, and we both agreed that her conduct was scandalous."

Hepworth shuddered. How well he remembered that artful conversation. How hideous it appeared to him now.

"But I don't think Mr. Hepworth remembers us for

positive, even now," said the woman; "just look in my face, young gent, and say if you do."

"Harriet, my dear, isn't that a little, just a little, promiscuous?" said the husband, as a broad, red face, with a pointed nose, turning up in the centre, and two small leaden blue eyes looking across it, was bent forward, and challenged Hepworth's inspection. "Remember, things have changed since we knew this gentleman."

"In course they have changed, and I haven't no doubt that is just what is a puzzling him now; but when I ask Mr. Hepworth if he remembers the first punken-pie he ever eat in his born days, and who made it, he'll be sure to remember Harriet, and I ain't ashamed to say that I am her, if I do wear an Injur shawl, and if that diment in your bozzom is a flashing right in his eyes. Self-made men, and women too, mayn't be of much account in England, but in New York, the aristocracy are always a trying to make out that they were born next door to the alms-house, and started life with just twenty-five cents in their pockets, so you and I needn't be ashamed."

Hepworth was not cosmopolitan, and managed to get the truth out of this confusion of cockney, Irish, and Yankee dialect. In fact, at the first moment, he had recognized Matthew Stacy and Harriet Long in the persons who claimed his acquaintance, and they stung his memory like a nest of serpents.

"You'll be glad to know," said Stacy, "that Harriet has been, in all respects, up to the 'casion whenever I've made a rise in the world. There's smartness in that woman, I can tell you. When I was elected alderman of our ward, she just went into the saloon and dealt out licker to my constituents with her own hand. There is no telling the number of votes she got for me by that perseeding. You'd be astonished."

Here the curtain went up with a rush, and Stacy could only make himself heard by sharp whispers, which reached Hepworth in fragments, when the music sank lowest.

"Got into a first-rate thing. Mayor with us—street contracts—cut through, widened—got hold of a dead charter—revived it—stock went up like winking—kept the Irish vote of the ward in my fist—no counting the presents that woman got. I never took one, of course; such a woman!"

Here Olympia's voice swept through the house, with an outpouring of melody that brought the audience to its feet, but when the tumult subsided, Hepworth found that the man had been talking on and on, with an under-tow of political gossip, that reached him in words at last.

"They wanted the Legislature, which wasn't to be had without money, you know; two or three men had been seen—nothing less than a hundred thousand would do it. I was president of the board, went up myself, saw the members, who sent me to their confidential men—jackals we call 'em, ha! ha!—got it done for sixty thousand—said nothing, but divided the rest—jackals got twenty, the other twenty—you understand. She got an Inger shawl out of that operation, the very one she has on."

"No, it isn't nothing of the sort. This one was the other," whispered Mrs. Stacy, holding up a corner of the magnificent shawl she wore.

Hepworth turned and gazed upon the shawl until his face grew white as death, in the gaslight. The very sight of that rich garment made him faint.

The mistake he had made had a silencing effect upon Stacy too. He had no wish that the history of that garment should be produced, and when his wife was about to speak, silenced her at once.

"My dear Harriet," he said, "how often have I told you that talking at a theater or the operer is awfully vulgar. I

wonder you can persist in it, and Mr. Hepworth by. Just listen to that music! Haven't you no taste? If you haven't, just take a look around the boxes. That young feller there is the Prince of Wales."

Mrs. Stacy took a mother-of-pearl opera glass from her lap, and obediently turned it upon the royal box.

Before the performance was over, and while Hepworth was drawn back, in spite of himself, to the most painful scenes of his life, an usher came down the nearest passage, and put a little twisted note into his hand. It was from Olympia, inviting him to supper the next evening.

Hepworth crushed the pretty missive in his hand, while he turned to send a verbal refusal, but the usher had withdrawn, and he had no other way of sending a reply that night.

The opera was at its close now, and Hepworth left the house, irritated and restless. Could he find no place in which this miserable past would not haunt him? He had hardly made his way through the crowd when his arm was seized, and Stacy almost wheeled him around on the pavement.

"My dear sir, this way. Mrs. Stacy is already in the carriage. Of course we would not ride and let you go afoot. Have been a poor man myself once—needn't deny that to you. Know what it is to keep up a show without capital. But no old friend of mine shall go afoot while I have the wherewith to pay for a carriage, and an empty seat in it. Shall set in the back seat with Mrs. Stacy, upon my soul you shall, and that's an honor I don't offer to every man. Now just tell me where you are putting up."

Hepworth laughed, in spite of his annoyance. The patronizing fussiness of the ex-alderman struck a keen sense of the ridiculous, which was strong in his character.

"If you insist," he said. "But you are too generous."

"Not at all, not at all. When Alderman Stacy does a thing, he does it handsomely. This way, this way!"

Hepworth seated himself in the carriage where Mrs. Stacy squeezed herself in one corner, and gathered up her skirts to make room for him, and Stacy had his foot on the step, when a new poster, just placed at the door of the opera house, struck his attention, and he stepped back to examine it.

"First appearance of a young American, a protege of Olympia.' Just read that poster, Mr. Hepworth, and tell me what you think of it," he said, lifting himself into the carriage. "Mrs. Stacy, my dear, just look that way, and tell me if you can guess who it is that will make a first appearance Monday night? You know that young lady, and so does Mr. Hepworth. Now, make a guess."

"How can you?" said Mrs. Stacy. "You know, Matthew, dear, I never was good at conundrums and such like."

Matthew puffed himself out with a deep, long breath, and claspings two huge hands encased in flame-colored gloves on his knee, leaned toward Hepworth.

"You try, now."

Hepworth shook his head, and Stacy burst out with his mystery.

"It's the identical child that was brought up at the inquest in Forty-third street—Daniel Yates' little daughter."

"No!" exclaimed Mrs. Stacy. "That little creature?"

"It ain't nobody else—you may bet high on that, Mrs. Stacy."

Hepworth kept perfectly still, but his heart fairly stopped beating.

"But how did you find out, Matthew, dear?"

"Oh! we aldermen find out everything. The girl was brought up in the country, near Sing-Sing, in a cedar-post cottage that the executor wanted to raise some money on.

I went up to see it, and had a good look at the girl. Yes, my dear, she was, to say, very handsome, but proud. Daniel Yates had brought her up like a queen, and I give you my word she looked it; but there was no mistake about it. The executor had just gobbled up everything Yates left, and there was no one to look look after him, so that the girl was just nowhere financially. I found out that the cottage could not be sold or mortgaged, nor let either, according to law, though the executor tried it on hard, and came again and again about it, especially after she left it. So I found out everything about the girl. That primer donner took a fancy to her, and adopted her right out of hand because of her voice, and to-morrow night you can both of you see her, for I mean to have a box up among the British aristocracy that night, and I invite you both free gratis for nothing."

"Are you sure of this?" questioned Hepworth, who had not spoken till now.

"Just as sure as I am that Alderman Stacy sits before you. But if you don't believe it, ask the girl yourself. I mean to call on her, and Mrs. Stacy will do likewise. You can go along. That is, we will call, if she comes out first chop on Monday night."

"Mr. Stacy," said the superb matron in the back seat, drawing herself up with wonderful dignity, "I don't mean to put on airs nor nothing because I'm your lady and richer than some folks, or Mr. Hepworth wouldn't be an honored guest in this here carriage; but I must set my foot square against actresses and primmer donnors—in short, theatre-clers in general."

"Just you hear that," said Stacy, looking at Hepworth. "Isn't she coming it down strong, and lifting of her head high?"

"It isn't that, Mr. Stacy, but because I am a wife and a—a woman—that I feel called upon to stand between them

creturs and the sect. Pay them your money, Mr. Stacy—pay them any amount of money from the front—but nothing beyond that, Mr. Stacy!”

“Oh, humbug,” said Mr. Stacy; “that is putting it too strong, Harriet—as if I couldn’t pay money or not, just as I please.”

“It isn’t humbug, Mr. Stacy, but a question of benignant morality, which it is every woman’s duty to take up and hurl back, till she totters on the brink, martyr-like, between heaven and earth! Don’t you think so, Mr. Hepworth?”

“Did you ever hear anything up to that?” exclaimed Stacy, swelling with pompous satisfaction. “Harriet is the sort of woman that a man of substance can depend on, morrerly, financierly, and—and—. Not that I’m going to give in, you know; but it’s satisfaction to know that your money has lifted such a person into her proper spear.”

“That’s very kind of you, and I feel it, Stacy, dear; but when you speak of lifting me up with *your* money, who was it that owned the first five hundred dollars you, or me, Mr. Stacy?”

“Harriet!”

“It’s no use thundering out my baptismal name against me, Mr. Stacy, for that’s a thing I won’t bear at no price! Truth is truth, Mr. Hepworth, and rich as that man is, rolling over and over in gold, like a porpose in salt water, it was my five hundred dollars that did it! Let him say if I didn’t own that much?”

“But didn’t I marry you, and then didn’t you own me? Would you set down good looks, financial ability, and moral character A number one, at five hundred dollars, and you—”

What was coming next Hepworth was destined never to learn, for Mrs. Stacy, overcome by a fit of conjugal remorse,

leaned forward and placed one substantial hand in the flame-colored glove of her husband.

“Matthew, forgive me! I didn’t mean it. That mention of the primmer donner and her protager upset me; but I am your wife yet, Stacy, dear—your true and lawful wife—just as ready to travel with you into every tropical climate of Europe as I ever was.”

Stacy would not clasp his flame-colored fingers around that hand, but let it drop with ignominious looseness, while he drew a handkerchief from his pocket and buried his face in it.

“Harriet! Harriet! you have hurt my feelings, mortified my—my manhood before an old friend!”

It was in the night, the carriage was close, the lamps dim, and Hepworth only knew that there a heap of drapery launched itself into the front seat, that a voice came from the midst, saying:

“Oh, Matthew! Matthew!”

Then the white handkerchief dropped like a flag at half mast, and the reconciliation was complete.

CHAPTER VII.

THE OPERATIC SUPPER.

“INDEED, Mr. Closs, I insist!”

“But, my dear child, I have no particular desire to go.”

“That is because you think that I care about it. Why should I? In fact, it is unbearable that you should have the idea.”

Hepworth Closs had in all loyalty told Lady Clara of the

invitation he had received from Olympia, and, instead of resenting it as he expected, she met his vague desire more than half-way—one of the wisest things any woman can do, for half the sins in the world are committed because they are forbidden; not that this young girl knew of the wisdom. With her, it was half pride, half bravado; she was indignant that Hepworth should think of going—more indignant that he should have refused the invitation at once, without telling her of it.

The result was, she insisted on his accepting it, though her heart was burning with jealousy all the time.

Closs, as I have said somewhere, had learned many things in his travels; but in Japan and the frontier countries of America girls like Clara had not often come under his observation, and he was far too deeply in love for a cool examination of her character or actions.

So her impulse of unbounded generosity deceived him utterly, and having some shrinking curiosity regarding Daniel Yates' daughter, he resolved to accept Olympia's invitation.

Of course, Clara found a dozen absurd reasons for quarreling with him that day, not one of which seemed to relate to Olympia; yet that beautiful woman was the root of them all, if Hepworth could have understood it.

But he only comprehended that every room in that sumptuous dwelling was dull as a wilderness on that particular Sabbath day. Rachael kept her room; Clara would not make herself agreeable; and he felt it a relief when night came and took him to the little bijou of a mansion where Olympia was waiting the advent of her guests.

Hepworth had seen this woman in New York, and knew something of the fantastic elegance with which she could surround herself; but the house he entered surpassed anything he had ever seen in that republican city.

Nothing sad or even grave in art or nature was ever permitted to visit the Queen of Song in her own home. Her servants were expected to be smiling and cheerful. There was not a sombre corner in her dwelling.

The very hall was a marvel of art; statuettes of snow-white marble, airy and graceful as stone could be chiselled, seemed ready to escort the guest into the unique drawing-room beyond.

Delicate bric-a-brac occupied gilded brackets on the walls, or crowded the statuettes upon the floor; a laughing faun held back the silken curtain that concealed the entrance to that inner room where the goddess herself presided; a soft mellow light fell upon these treasures, making their beauty still more exquisite.

A servant in silver and blue livery admitted Hepworth, and pointed to the faun, who seemed inviting him forward with a fantastic gesture.

The servant disappeared, his duties ended when the outer door was opened.

Those who visited Olympia were supposed to know their way to her presence. Hepworth lingered a moment in the hall. Those beautiful marble people seemed enticing him to stay, and, for the instant, he felt an unaccountable reluctance to present himself before the actress; a feeling of humiliation came upon him that he should be willing to visit any woman whom the lady of his love could not meet on equal terms. What right had he there?

This question was almost upon his lips, when a silken rustle made him hold his breath. It was a young girl, tall, stately, beautiful, coming down the marble stairs. He was standing near the centre of the floor, but drew back, step by step, as the girl descended, turning white and cold, as if there had been some wrong in his admiration of an antique

group in bronze, which occupied a bracket on the wall close by him.

The girl paused, looked toward him, and, after a little hesitation, crossed the hall.

"Permit me to show you the way," she said. "The servant should not have left you so."

Hepworth did not speak, but stood gazing upon her blankly. Her beauty had struck him dumb.

She made a little gesture with her hand and moved on. He followed, without a word, by the marble faun, through the lifted curtains, and into the presence of Olympia, who was walking up and down the Gobelin carpet, with the light of a Venetian chandelier falling over her.

She was becoming impatient for the arrival of her guests. Yet the room seemed peopled fully; for, on every hand, mirrors that seemed framed in a network of gold, threw back and duplicated the group that stood there, the rich coloring of the draperies, two vases of Malachite and Sevres, the gifts of emperors, and the carpet, where masses of blossoms seemed starting into fresh bloom, wherever a footstep trod them down.

"Mr. Hepworth!" cried Olympia; "my good American friend! This is a happiness!"

Hepworth bowed over the white hand she held out; but did not kiss it, as she might have expected, being used to all sorts of homage.

She looked at him in pleasant astonishment, dropped her hand with a faint laugh, and turned to the young girl.

"Caroline, you have never seen Mr. Hepworth, I think."

"Closs, Hepworth Closs, dear lady; you forget."

"Do I? Well, it is very likely, though, I am sure, we always called you Hepworth; but that's nothing; in our Bohemian set we generally preferred the given name, and

sometimes only took half of that. Ah, ho! here come our friends at last!"

The curtain was flung back, revealing what seemed a crowd in the hall, which soon came forward, with little ceremony, and some rather riotous noise.

Olympia was in her element now. Heart and soul she loved society, and all these persons were picked people of her own choice—brilliant persons in their various capacities, each bringing a store of wit or some accomplishment to swell the general gaiety. Artists, dilettanti noblemen, epicures, and persons who would have accompanied Orpheus in all his explorations for the music he could give them.

Of course, there was high mirth and some sparkling wit among a group like this, in which several females mingled brilliantly, and sang like sirens after Olympia had set them the example. These were professional, of course, but wonderfully clever, and talked charmingly, as women who are reckless of criticism usually do; but in all that was said, a certain vein of doubtful license sometimes brought the color to Caroline's cheek. She could not thoroughly understand the conversation of these people. They seemed to have come out of another world to astonish and bewilder her. She knew that some of the men present were noblemen, and saw that their manners, and even the tones of their voices, changed when they addressed her.

From the secluded life she had led, this girl was incapable of making quick comparisons. She only knew that none of these men possessed the gentle tenderness or the proud bearing of the teacher, who had become to her a beau-ideal of true manhood. Of all the men present she felt the most sympathy with Hepworth Closs. He had been in America, had known the places she loved so well, and could understand her loneliness in a scene like that;

but there was something even in this man that startled her a little.

His fine eyes were frequently lifted to her face with a look that troubled her, a look that seemed to go beyond her and far away into the past or future. What was he thinking of? Why were his answers about America so dreamy and vague? Why did he look so sad while the voice of Olympia was filling the whole house with such glorious bursts of music?

Before she could answer any of these questions, Olympia arose from the piano, and, with a light wave of her hand, said:

"Come, Caroline, let them hear what is in your voice."

How careless and natural it all seemed! What a tumult of smiles and entreaties followed these few caressing words!

They were words of iron to that proud, shrinking girl. She knew how much of stern, selfish power lay under the peach-like softness of that voice. Her color went and came; her lips parted in absolute terror. She understood now why she had been permitted to join her mother's guests for the first time.

"Come, my darling!"

Olympia's voice grew softer, sweeter; but there was an undertone in it that Caroline dared not disobey. She arose, white and cold, her limbs trembling, her eyes turned upon Olympia like those of a hunted doe appealing for its life; but there was no relenting in that beautiful face—nothing but smiles.

Hepworth Closs saw how cruelly the proud girl suffered, and was by her side in an instant. The firm clasp of his hand, as he led her to the piano, gave her strength. She thanked him with a look, and those frightened eyes implored him to stay by her, as if he were the only friend she recognized in the room.

It must be a terrible fright that can entirely overcome real genius.

The first notes of Caroline's voice trembled out from her lips like the cry of a young bird when it first tempts the air. The intense stillness with which the little group listened, took away her breath. But all this passed away; her voice gathered up its tones and swelled into a power of music that Olympia, in her best days, had never reached. She forgot the people around her—forgot everything but the glorious genius which thrilled her whole being with ecstasies of harmony. The nightingale, nested in clustering roses and bathed with moonlight, never poured forth its song with a sweeter impulse.

At first it was the desperation of genius, but that soon merged itself into an exquisite power that held her little audience in amazement.

Olympia grew restless. Had she, with her own hands, given her crown and sceptre to another? How superbly beautiful the creature looked with that glow of inspiration on her face! How her own devoted adorers crowded around the piano, leaving her on the outskirts of the crowd quite alone!

The woman's self-love and most active vanity were disturbed; but above that rose another passion that had of late years grown strong within her—avarice. She recognized the sure ring of gold in those notes, and exulted over it.

As Caroline turned from the piano flushed, and, as it were, inspired by a new life, a little storm of bravos broke over her. Just then the supper-room was thrown open; but even the exquisite picture it presented failed to draw the crowd from its new idol.

But Caroline was falling back to her normal state, and all this tumultuous admiration terrified her.

This annoyed Olympia, also. She made a signal to the servant who stood waiting, and his announcement, in a loud voice, that supper was served, broke up the crowd which held Caroline prisoner.

Olympia led the way into the most superb little supper-room that even an artist could imagine. It was, in fact, a temple, connected only by one compartment with the house.

A shallow dome, with ground glass, through which a tender light shone like sunbeams through sifted snow, by a gilded network over ground glass, which also reflected hidden lights like a chain of clouded stars.

This gallery was connected with the floor by slender marble shafts, around which passion flowers, white jessamines, creeping dwarf roses, and other clinging plants wove their blossoms up to the lighted gallery, whence they fell in delicate spray, forming arches of flowers all around the room.

The recesses thus garlanded in were lined with mirrors, in which the crimson cushions of couch and chair, the splendid supper table, with all its rich paraphernalia of frosted plate, sparkling glass, translucent wines, and fruit in all its mellow gorgeousness of coloring were reflected over and over again.

When that gay crowd came into the room, led by Olympia, every recess seemed to fill with its own merry company, and in each that handsome prima donna presided like a goddess; while the tall figure of a proud, beautiful girl sat near, looking strangely wild and anxious as a loud, bacchanalian spirit broke into the scene, and turned it into a revel. Amid the gurgle of wine and the mellow crush of fruit, some one called out:

"Fill up! fill up! A bumper to our new Queen of Song!"

With a half-suppressed shout and a waving of glasses, the party sprang up, drops of amber and ruby wine rained down to the table from a reckless overflow of the uplifted goblets.

Every recess gave back the picture with endless change of view; and then the voice called out again:

"To-morrow night we will show her how England can receive American genius and American beauty. Lady, we drink to you."

To-morrow night! Every vestige of color fled from that poor girl's face. She attempted to rise, supported herself with one hand on the table a moment, then in the midst of that riotous toast, sank back to her chair, with her face turned imploringly on Hepworth Closs.

When the revellers had drained their glasses and turned to look for a reward in the face they had pronounced divine, it had disappeared. Amid the confusion, Hepworth had led Caroline from the room.

"It is too much for her," said Olympia, tossing half a dozen peaches on the table in her search for the mellowest. "She is such a noble, grateful creature, and has not yet learned how to receive homage."

"While our Olympia almost disdains it. Fill up for our goddess, The Olympia!"

"Wait a minute!"

It was the young noble next the actress who spoke. He had taken some grape-leaves from a crystal vase near him, and was weaving the smallest amber-hued and purple clusters with them in a garland, with which he crowned the goddess before her libation was poured out. She accepted the homage, laughing almost boisterously, and when the grape-wreath was settled in her golden hair, stood up, a Bacchante that Rubens would have worshipped; for it made

no difference to her in what form adulation came, so long as she monopolized it.

That moment Caroline was lying upon her bed up-stairs, shaking in every limb, and crying in bitterness of spirit.

CHAPTER VIII.

BEHIND THE SCENES.

OLYMPIA had selected an auspicious time for the first appearance of her protege, as she always persisted in calling Caroline.

It was the fashion just then to recognize American genius with something like enthusiasm, and the very suddenness with which this young girl had been brought forward operated in her favor.

A glowing account of her voice and beauty had reached the public just at a time when no special excitement occupied it, and this served to draw a crowd around the opera house long before the hour of opening.

On the outskirts of this crowd, the carriage which contained Olympia and her victim—for such the heroine of the evening really was—made its way toward the stage door. Olympia leaned out of the window, and cried exultingly:

“Look, child, look! Hundreds of people waiting already!”

Caroline cast one frightened glance at the crowd, and shrank back with a faint moan.

Just as the audience began to pour in through the opened doors the carriage drove up to the stage entrance, and Olympia took a leap from the steps and held the carriage door open with her own hand, while Caroline de-

scended more slowly. The light from a neighboring lamp fell upon her face, and revealed the tears that stood upon her cheeks, and a half rebellious look in the eyes, which Olympia saw, and met with angry bitterness.

“Crying again? Shooting spiteful looks at me, as if I were a monster, instead of a tender, considerate, self-sacrificing mother, ready to share everything with you, even my glory! Was ever such ingratitude?”

Caroline did not answer, but walked into the narrow door, and stood upon the dreary stage, panting for breath, like some superb animal from the wild woods, hunted down, and without hopes of escape.

“This way—come this way,” said Olympia, taking hold of her arm. “Perhaps you will remember that we are late. The audience was crowding in like a torrent when we passed the door. Come!”

Caroline allowed herself to be led along the stage, through yawning vistas of scenery ready placed for use, and along dark passages, until she came to Olympia’s dressing-room, in which a blaze of light was reflected by half-a-dozen mirrors, and fell like sunshine on a pile of gorgeous vestments laid out for her use.

Caroline shrank back with a faint, sick feeling. Oh, how everything had changed since she was so fascinated by a scene like that! Her delicate, proud nature revolted from the splendid confusion. From her very heart she loathed the sumptuous garments with which Olympia had hoped to tempt her.

“Is there no hope?” she cried, desperately. “I would rather suffer anything than undertake this part!”

“Hope? Yes, there is everything to hope. The house is crowded already. There never was so fine an opening. Come, make ready!”

“Not if I have the power to resist.”

She spoke in a low but resolute voice, which frightened Olympia, who stood gazing at the pale young face turned upon her with a frown of terrible anger gathering on her forehead.

"Caroline, you cannot resist. My word is given, the contract signed, my honor pledged. Would you disgrace me forever?"

"Your honor pledged, and I belong to you," said the girl. "I see, I see—there is no escaping! It is my miserable destiny!"

Caroline took off the cloak in which she was wrapped, flung down all her magnificent hair, and seated herself before one of the mirrors.

"Do with me as you please," she said, turning a weary glance upon the mirror. "It may be my death, but you *will* have it so."

The next moment that unhappy girl found herself in the hands of a clever French maid, who fairly revelled in her task, as she shook out that rich mass of hair, and held it up for the light to shine through. But Caroline took no heed. The toilet only reminded her of that most hideous one when Marie Antoinette was prepared for the scaffold. For the moment she almost wished it possible to change places with that unhappy woman.

But the French waiting-maid went on with her work, while Olympia stood by, directing her.

Not till she felt a soft touch on her cheek did the girl rebel. Then she started up, and, pushing the maid away, rubbed her cheek with a handkerchief so resolutely that the maid clapped her hands, declaring that it was enough—no roses could be more lovely.

Then she fell to her task again, muttering to herself:

"Oh, it will come in time! Youth is so satisfied with itself. But it all ends in that."

Here the maid nodded toward a tiny jar of rouge, as if to encourage it, and went on with her task.

"Now look at yourself!" said Olympia, tossing aside some garment that had been flung over the swinging-glass. "What do you think of that?"

Caroline looked, and saw a beautiful woman, with sweeping garments of rose-colored silk, and a cloud of frost-like lace flung over her head and trailing down her shoulders. Splendid jewels—whether real or false, she did not care to ask—twinkled like stars through the lace, both on her head and bosom. The pictures thus reflected were beautiful, but stormy.

Olympia saw that the rebellious spirit was but half subdued.

"What can I do?" she said, in her perplexity, addressing the maid, who lifted up both hands and shook her head as she answered:

"Ah, madame! if a toilet like that fails, who can say?"

"I will send for Brown. She will listen to him," said Olympia, driven to desperation. "With that spirit, she will never get the rollicking air for her first act."

She went to the door, and found the teacher lingering near, restless and anxious almost as herself.

"Brown—I say, Brown—come in! She is dressed, but so obstinate! If she were about to play Norma, it would be worth everything, but in this part—! Do come in, dear Brown, and get her up to the proper feeling."

Brown entered the room in absolute distress. He would gladly have kept that young creature from the stage; but having no power to aid her in avoiding it, was nervously anxious that she should make a success.

Caroline turned to him at once, and came forward with her hands held out.

"Oh, Mr. Brown, help me! It is not too late. Let

them say I am sick. Indeed, indeed, it will be true! She can take the part, and leave me in peace. Ask her, beg of her; say that I will go into her kitchen, be her maid, go out as a teacher—anything on earth, if she will only spare me this once! Ask her, Mr. Brown. Sometimes she will listen to you!”

Brown held both her hands. They were cold as ice, and he felt that she was trembling all over.

“My dear, dear child! I have pleaded with her. I have done my best.”

“But again—again! Oh, Mr. Brown, do!”

Brown drew Olympia on one side, and entreated her to give the unhappy girl more time; but he knew well enough that he was asking almost an impossibility—that the woman had no power to grant that which he implored of her. In her arrogant power she had pledged that young creature, body and soul, to the public. How could she draw back, when the crowding rush of the audience might now be heard from the place where they stood.

Still the man pleaded with her, for he loved the girl better than anything on earth, and, knowing something of the feelings which made the stage so repulsive to her, would have died to save her from the pain of that night's experience.

Olympia was impatient, nervous, angry. What did the man think? Was she to throw away the chances of a great success and a brilliant fortune, because a romantic girl did not know her own mind? Was she to disgrace herself before all London?

Brown had no answer. The whole thing was unreasonable—he knew that well enough; but his heart ached for the poor girl. So he had done his best, and failed miserably.

“Go back and cheer the foolish thing up,” said Olympia.

“You can do it. She loves you better than any one in the world. Now, if you want to oblige me, give her courage, soothe her. I never saw such a creature! With the genius and voice of an angel, she has no ambition; but it will come. Before the drinking song is over, she will forget herself. Go, Brown, and give her courage.”

Brown went back to the dressing-room, feeling like an executioner.

Caroline met him eagerly; but when she saw his face, her heart turned to stone.

“I see! I see!” she said. “I am doomed! But, remember, I was forced into this. Of my own choice, I would have died first; but she is my mother, and, in my ignorance, I promised her. Tell *him* this, if you should ever see him. I never shall. After what he said of parts like this, I should perish with shame. Ha! what's that?”

“They are calling you,” faltered Brown.

She caught a sharp breath and sprang away from him, like a deer when the hounds are in full cry.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIRST PERFORMANCE.

THE opera-house was full from floor to dome. A cheerful multitude crowded the body of the house with smiling faces, and filled it with gay colors, till it shone out gorgeously, like a thickly-planted flower-garden. The boxes filled, more slowly; but, after half an hour of soft, silken rustle and answering smiles, they, too, were crowded with distinguished men and beautiful women of the British aristocracy, and the whole arena was lighted up with the splendor of

their garments and the flaming brightness of their jewels. Then came a movement, and a low murmur of discontent, which the grandest efforts of the orchestra could not silence. The hour had arrived, but the curtain was still down. Was there to be a disappointment, after all?

In the midst of this growing confusion a party entered one of the most prominent boxes that drew the general attention in that part of the house. A lady in crimson velvet, with some gossamer lace about her arms and bosom, and a cobweb of the same rich material floating from the thick braids of her coal-black hair, came into the box, followed by a gentleman so like her that people exclaimed at once:

"It is her brother!"

These two persons were accompanied by a bright young girl, in white muslin, with a blue ribbon drawn through her hair like a snood, and a string of large pearls on her neck. The girl was beautiful as a Hebe, and bright as a star—so bright and so beautiful that a whole battery of glasses was turned on the box the moment she entered it. Then a murmur ran from lip to lip.

"It is Lady Hope, that person who was once a governess, and the young lady must be Hope's daughter by his first marriage—the future Lady Carset, if the old countess ever dies, which she never will, if it is only to spite that woman yonder, whom she hates. Beautiful!"

"You are speaking of Lady Hope? Yes, very; but strange! Night and morning are not farther apart than those two. Yet I am told they are devoted to each other."

"Not unlikely. See how the woman smiles when the Hebe speaks to her! Wonderful fascination in that face. Just the person to carry away a man like Hope."

Here the conversation was broken off by an impatient outburst of the audience.

In obedience to it the curtain rolled up, and the first act of "Traviata" commenced.

The tumult stopped instantly, and every face was turned with expectation on the stage, ready to greet "the lost one" with a generous welcome.

She came in hurriedly, with her head erect, her hand clenching that cloud of lace to her bosom, and her eyes bright as stars. A stag hunted to desperation would have turned at bay with a look like that; and the poor animal might have recoiled as she did, when that wild burst of admiration stormed over her. For the outcry of the most vicious hounds that ever ran could not have been more appalling to a victim than that generous welcome was to her.

She did not bow or smile, but retreated slowly back, step by step, until a voice from behind the scene startled her. Then she bent her tall figure a little forward, her head drooped to her bosom, and her hands were clenched passionately under the laces.

Again those who were nearest heard the voice, but did not understand it as that poor girl did. In her panic the little acting that belonged to the scene was utterly overlooked; but this proud indifference was something new, and charmed the audience, which took her wounded pride for superb disdain of a pampered beauty, and accepted it as a graceful innovation; while she stood trembling from head to foot, conscious only of a burning desire to break away from it all and hide herself forever. She did once move swiftly toward the wing, but there stood Olympia, and the first glimpse of that frowning face drove her back, panting for breath.

The audience, seeing her panic, encouraged her with applause less stormy and more sustaining.

She felt this kindness. The multitude were less her

enemy than the woman who stood in the shadows, hounding her on. Among all that sea of faces she saw one—that of a young girl, leaning over the crimson cushions of a box near the stage, so eager, so earnest, so bright with generous sympathy, that youth answered back to youth; a smile broke over her own face, and with it came her voice, fresh, pure, soaring like a bird suddenly let loose on the air.

The audience listened in breathless sympathy, which encouraged her. There was no doubt now; fear could not long hold such genius in thrall; her movements became free, her features brightened. She flung the lace back from her head, and gave herself up to the joyous riot of that drinking song.

In the midst of this scene, when every one present, on and off the stage, was lavishing homage upon her, she lifted her eyes to the young girl who leaned forward, poising herself in the box, like a bird preparing for flight, and clapped her little hand with the glee of a delighted child.

Once more their smiles met. Then a deathly faintness came over the debutante, and without a word or motion she sank upon the stage, like a statue of snow which the sun had touched.

In the next box, leaning forward like that young girl—but oh! with what a different expression—she had seen the Italian teacher, her lover.

The drinking-song was hushed in its most exultant swell—the revellers drew around the fainting girl and carried her from the stage, helpless as an infant, white as the lace that clouded her.

The audience watched them bear her away in silence; then it broke into murmurs of regret and sympathy.

“The effort had been too much for her. Of course, such genius was accompanied with corresponding sensitiveness,

but she would speedily recover. It was only a little interruption.”

They were mistaken. The debutante did not return that night; but in her place came Olympia, with a little tragedy in her face, and a touching speech, which excited admiration for herself and unbounded sympathy for her protegee; after which, she entered into the character of Violette, with a grace of action and a power of voice that carried the management through what had threatened to be a serious dilemma.

The truth is, this woman, Olympia, was a remarkably clever person, and knew how to manage her subjects a great deal better than some monarchs of England have done. But she was in a raging passion that night, and the excitement lent her force, which she exhausted in the part, while her child lay moaning on the dressing-room sofa.

In the midst of the first confusion, that young girl in the box had started up, and laid her hand on Hepworth Closs's arm.

“Go back to where they have taken her. You know the way. Tell my maid, Margaret, to come to me at once. No, no; take me with you. I may be of use. Poor girl! poor girl! They have almost killed her.”

“But it is impossible,” said Closs, looking toward Lady Hope, who was leaning against the side of the box, with her face turned away. “She would not permit it.”

“She does not object. We need not be seen. No one will recognize us. Come! come!”

She took Hepworth's arm, and almost forced him from the box.

“Which way? Come! come! I will go.”

Hepworth had been too often behind the scenes not to know how to gain admittance there on this occasion. He knew how resolute that young creature was, when a gen-

erous or daring idea possessed her, and, after waiting a moment for Lady Hope to speak, led Lady Clara away.

Clara was bewildered and almost terrified by the black darkness of the passage, which was lighted only by fitful gleams from the stage; but excitement kept up her courage, and she entered Olympia's dressing-room with the air of a person born to the tragic purple.

CHAPTER X.

THE TWO FOSTER-CHILDREN MEET.

CAROLINE was lying upon a heap of rich garments piled on the sofa. She was trembling still, and every few moments a burst of bitter sobs broke from her. Three women were standing by—her own maid, Eliza, upon whose sympathetic face tears were trembling; Margaret, her sister; and, most conspicuous of all, Olympia's French maid, who bent over the poor girl, with a bottle of perfume in each hand, with which she insisted on assuaging the unhappy girl's anguish.

Lady Clara comprehended the scene at a glance, went up to the sofa, took the French maid by the shoulders, and wheeled her away so swiftly that the bottles jingled; then she fell upon her knees by the sofa, and flung one arm over Caroline.

"Don't mind them; don't let them bother you. Just tell me what has come over you, and I'll set it right, or know the reason why."

The voice, so sweet, so round and cheering, aroused Caroline.

She rose up on her elbow, and seeing the bright, honest face which had bent toward her so kindly from the box, reached out her arms, and wound them over Clara's neck.

"That's right; that's sisterly. I wish you were my sister; but what's the use of wishing? There! kiss me again, for I mean to be a mother to you—I do, indeed! Now tell me, what was it that struck you down so? It was frightful; it took away my breath. Tell me all about it. My maid here and yours were sisters, and I shouldn't wonder if we knew each other in America. But that is so long ago, it wouldn't signify, but for the maids, who love us so, that it makes a sort of tie. Don't you think so?"

"Oh, if it could! if it could! I have no relative but one, and she will not pity me!" cried Caroline, clinging to Lady Clara. "She will make me go back to that hateful part! It was bad enough before, but now I should die of shame!"

"Why? Why now more than at first?" inquired Clara.

"I will tell you. I know who you are, and how good every one thinks you. I hate the stage!"

"How strange! I cannot understand it. You don't know how I envied you when all those people started up, waving their handkerchiefs and shouting—to see them so sorry and disappointed when you did not come back. I could hardly keep myself from leaping over the box, and asking the crowd to let me try!"

Caroline looked into that animated face with wonder. The tears stood still on her cheeks, a faint smile crept into her eyes. Then she shook her head.

"Ah! I understand. There was a time when I thought like you, but that was before—before—"

"Before what? Margaret and the rest of you, just go outside. The room isn't large enough for so many. There, we are alone now. Just tell me all about it. You can trust me."

"I know it. Well, Lady Clara—you see I know your name—"

"Exactly. But just call me Clara—nothing more. I really don't care for being a lady—at any rate, not much. That one thing is going to give me any amount of trouble yet, you'll see. Well, now, having settled the lady, tell me why and when you began to hate the stage so. I think it is a glorious life. Just put me where you stand, without a sovereign to help myself with, and I'd give up the ladyship to you in a minute."

"But that is because you own your life."

"Own my life? Of course I do. That is just what every soul must own."

"Not if—if she cares for some one more than her life."

"Oh-e! oh-e! That is the secret! And he don't like it? The heathen! I wish he had seen you just now!"

"He did. He was standing in the box close by you. I saw his face, for the first time in months. He was leaning forward; his eyes met mine. They were full of reproach—contempt, perhaps. I could not tell, for the house swam round, the lights seemed leaping toward me. Then I felt as if the noise were putting them out, for everything grew dark."

"And you fainted dead away, poor dear! I know how to pity you. Not that I have had trouble yet; but it is sure to come, and then, of course, you will be sorry for me."

"I shall, indeed."

"Just as I am sorry for you now. But who is the man?"

"I hardly think I know. He gave me an Italian name, but I feel sure it was not his."

"That accounts for his antipathy to the stage. If he had really been an Italian, your singing would have entranced

him. It was heavenly; but an Englishman—. Well, well, we must see!"

That moment the door swung open, and Olympia came in, radiant with jewels and fierce with anger. She saw Lady Clara, and stopped upon the threshold in haughty astonishment. Caroline shrank from the stormy expression of her face, but faltered out:

"Madame, it is Lady Clara, the daughter of Lord Hope."

Instantly the frown lost itself in a bland smile. Olympia was equal to her part at all times. She did not often see a lady of rank in her dressing-room, and the honor drove away the indignant wrath intended for Caroline.

"Ah!" she said, "this poor child—it was so unfortunate!" But she will recover. In a day or two she will get back her courage. What a voice she has, my lady! Did you hear? So fresh, so powerful, up to the very time when she broke down. What could have occasioned it?"

"It is indeed a misfortune," said Clara, with some dignity; "because I am sure she will never do for the stage. Her voice is superb, but so uncertain! When we compare it with yours, madame, it is to regret that she ever ventured so far."

Olympia seated herself. She had a few moments to spare before the call-boy would summon her back to the stage.

"There you mistake, my lady. When I was her age no one ever dreamed that I would succeed as a singer; but you see what resolution and study can do."

"But you *had* study; your guardians gave plenty of time. Let her have that time; let her friends have an opportunity to think what is best for her."

"Her friends? I did not know that she had any in England."

"Oh, yes! I am one; Lady Hope is another. Then there is Mr. Closs."

"Oh!" said Olympia. "It is to that gentleman we owe the honor of this visit?"

"Yes," answered Clara. "He escorted me here. Being Lady Hope's brother, it was proper, you understand."

Olympia was looking in Clara's face. The girl pleased her. The bright mobility of her features, the graceful gestures with which she emphasized her expressions, charmed the experienced actress.

"Ah, if my daughter had your abandon!" she exclaimed, with enthusiasm.

"Or if I had her sweet dignity. But fortune is sometimes very perverse. Now I should glory in the applause which makes her faint away."

"Ah! she is sensitive as a child, proud as a duchess; but, where we have plenty of genius, these things only serve to brighten it. I shall take Caroline into my own training. When you come to hear her sing again, it will be a different affair."

"Oh, madam, do not ask it!" cried Caroline, in a panic. "I never, never can go on to that stage again!"

"We shall see," answered Olympia, blandly. "Here comes the call-boy; I must say adieu, with many thanks for this visit."

"But I have a request to make. You will give her time?"

"Oh! yes, my lady. She shall have sufficient time."

Olympia went out smiling; but Caroline understood the craft that lay under her soft words.

"You see that I have accomplished something," said Clara, delighted with her success; "we have gained time."

"No, no! She will have her way."

"What! that soft, handsome creature?"

"Has a will of iron!"

"And so have I!" exclaimed the young girl, "and my

will is that she shall not force you into a life you do not like; but I wonder at it. Upon my word, if it were not for one thing, I should like to change places with you."

Caroline shook her head.

"You have no idea what the life is!"

"Oh! yes, I have; and it must be charming. No dignity to keep up, no retinue of servants to pass every time you come and go; but all sorts of homage, plenty of work, while everything you have brings in a swift recompense. Talent, beauty, grace discounted every night. Oh! it must be charming."

"I thought so once," answered Caroline, with a heavy sigh.

"Well, never trouble yourself to think about it again. If that lovely woman has an iron will, you must get up one of steel; but here comes Margaret. I suppose Mr. Closs is getting tired of staying out there in the dark. Besides, Lady Hope will be frightened. Adieu, my friend; I will manage to see you again."

CHAPTER XI.

LADY CLARA QUARRELS WITH HER STEPMOTHER.

LADY HOPE had fainted, but with such deathly stillness that neither Hepworth Closs nor Clara had been aware of it. She remained, after they left the box, drooping sideways from her cushioned seat, with the cold pallor of her face hid in the crimson shadows, and kept from falling by the sides of the box, against which she leaned heavily.

No one observed this, for the whole audience was intensely occupied by what was passing on the stage; and the

pang of self-consciousness returned to Rachael Closs in the utter solitude of a great crowd. She opened her eyes wearily, as if the effort were a pain. Then a wild light broke through their darkness. She cast a quick glance upon the stage and over the crowd. Then turning to look for her companions, she found that they were gone. A sense of relief came to the woman from a certainty that she was alone. She leaned back against the side of the box in utter depression. Her lips moved, her hands were tightly clasped—she seemed in absolute terror.

What had Rachael Closs heard or seen to agitate her thus? That no one could tell. The cause of those faint shudders that shook her from time to time was known only to herself and her God.

When Hepworth and Lady Clara came back, Lady Hope rose, and gathering her ermine cloak close to her throat, said that she was tired of the confusion, and would go home, unless they very much wished to stay and see Olympia.

They consented to go at once. The pallor of that beautiful face, as it turned so imploringly upon them, was appeal enough.

On their way home Lady Clara told her stepmother of her visit behind the scenes.

Rachael listened, and neither rebuked her for going nor asked questions; but when Clara broke forth, in her impetuous way, exclaiming, "Oh, mamma Rachael, you will help us! You will get this poor girl out of her mother's power! You will let me ask her down to Oakhurst!" Rachael almost sprang to her feet in the force of her sudden passion.

"What! I—I, Lady Hope of Oakhurst, invite that girl to be your companion, my guest! Clara, are you mad? or am I?"

The girl was struck dumb with amazement. Never in her existence had she been so addressed before—for, with

her, Rachael had been always kind and delicately tender. Why had she broken forth now, when she asked the first serious favor of her life?

"Mamma! mamma Rachael!" she cried. "What is the matter? What have I done that you are so cross with me?"

"Nothing," said Rachael, sighing heavily, "only you ask an unreasonable thing, and one your father would never forgive me for granting."

"But she is so lovely! papa would like her, I know. She is so unhappy, too! I could feel her shudder when the stage was mentioned. Oh, mamma Rachael, we might save her from that!"

"I cannot! Do not ask me; I cannot!"

"But I promised that you would be her friend."

"Make no promises for me, Clara, for I will redeem none. Drive this girl from your thoughts. To-morrow morning we go back to Oakhurst."

"To-morrow morning! And I promised to see her again."

"It is impossible. Let this subject drop. In my wish to give you pleasure, I have risked the anger of Lord Hope. He would never forgive me if I permitted this entanglement."

Lady Clara turned to Hepworth Closs.

"Plead for me—plead for that poor girl!" she cried, with the unreasoning persistence of a child; but, to her astonishment, Hepworth answered even more resolutely than his sister.

"I cannot, Clara. There should be nothing in common between the daughter of Olympia and Lord Hope's only child."

"Oh, how cruel! What is the use of having rank and power if one is not to use it for the good of others?"

"We will not argue the matter, dear child."

"But I will argue it, and if I cannot convince, I will hate you, Hepworth Closs, just as long as I live."

"Not quite so bad as that, I trust," answered Hepworth, sadly. "To own the truth, Clara, I fear your mother will have enough to do in reconciling Lord Hope to the position another person has assumed in his household. Do not let us add new difficulties to her position."

Clara began to cry.

"I'm sure I never thought of troubling her or offending my father. It is so natural for them to be good and kind, why should I doubt them now, when the grandest, sweetest, most beautiful girl in the whole world wants help—just the help they can give, too? Well, well, when papa comes home, I will lay the whole case before him."

"Not for the world!" cried Rachael, suddenly. "I tell you, cast this subject from your mind. I will not have my lord annoyed by it. For once, Clara, I must and will be obeyed."

Clara sank back in her seat, aghast with surprise.

"Oh, mamma Rachael, you are getting to be awfully cruel."

"Cruel? No! In this I am acting kindly. It is you who are cruel in pressing a distasteful and impossible thing upon me."

"I don't understand it; I can't believe it. You are always so free, so generous, to those who need help. It is just because this poor girl is my friend. Oh! I only wish old Lady Carset would just die, and leave me everything! I would let the world see a specimen of independence—I would! Don't speak to me, don't attempt to touch my hand, Mr. Closs! You haven't a spark of human nature in you. I have a good mind to leave you all, and go on the stage myself."

Again Lady Hope broke into a storm of impatience so unlike her usual self-restraint, that Clara was really terrified.

"Hush, girl! Not another word of this. I will not endure it."

This severe reprimand took away Clara's breath for an instant; then she burst into a passion of sobs and tears, huddling herself up into a corner of the carriage, and utterly refused all consolation from Hepworth, who was generously disturbed by her grief.

Lady Hope did nothing, but sat in silence, lost in thought, or perhaps striving to subdue the tumult of feelings that had so suddenly broke forth from her usual firm control.

Thus they drove home in distrust and excitement. A few low murmurs from Hepworth, bursts of grief from Lady Clara, and dead silence on the part of Rachael Closs, attended the first disagreement that had ever set the step-mother and daughter in opposition.

When they reached home, Clara, her face all bathed in tears, and her bosom heaving with sobs, ran up to her room, without the usual kiss or "Good-night."

She was bitterly offended, and expressed the feeling in her own childish fashion.

Rachael sat down in the hall, and watched the girl as she glided up the broad staircase, perhaps hoping that she would look back, or, it may be, regretting the course she had taken, for her face was unutterably sad, and her attitude one of great despondency.

At last, when Clara was out of sight, she turned a wistful look on her brother.

"She will hate me now."

Her voice was more plaintive than the words. The confidence of that young girl was all the world to her; for,

independent of everything else, it was the one human link that bound her to the man she loved with such passionate idolatry. Her kindness to his child was the silver cord which even his strong will could not sunder, even if he should wish it.

Hepworth saw her anguish, and pitied it.

"Let her go," he said, stooping down and kissing his sister on the forehead, which, with her neck and arms, was cold as marble. "She is disappointed, vexed, and really indignant with us both; but a good night's sleep will set her heart right again. I wish we had never chanced to come here."

"Oh, Heavens! so do I."

"Rachael," said Hepworth, "what is it troubles you so?"

"What? Is it not enough that the child I have made a part of my own life should quarrel with me and with you, because of me, for a stranger?"

"No; because her own generous nature assures us that the evil will die of itself before morning. This is not enough to account for the fact that you quiver as if with cold, and the very touch of your forehead chills me."

"Do I?" questioned Rachael. "I did not know it. My cloak has fallen off—that is all."

"Mamma Rachael!"

They both started, for leaning over the banisters was the sweet, tearful face of Lady Clara.

"My own darling!" cried Rachael, lifting her arms.

Down the staircase sprang that generous young creature, her feet scarcely touching the polished oak, her hair all unbound and rolling in waves down her back. Struck with sweet compunctions, she had broken from the hands of her maid, and left her with the blue ribbon fluttering in her hand, while she ran back to make peace with the woman who was almost dearer to her than a mother.

She fell upon her knees by Rachael, and shook the hair from her face, which was glowing with sweet penitence.

"Kiss me, mamma Rachael, not on this saucy mouth of mine, but here upon my forehead. I cannot sleep till you have kissed me good night."

Rachael laid one hand on that bright young head, but it was quivering like a shot bird. She bent the face back a little, and pored over the features with yearning scrutiny, as if she longed to engrave every line on her heart.

Something in those black eyes disturbed the girl afresh. She reached up her arms, and cried out:

"Don't be angry with me, mamma Rachael, but kiss me good night, and ask God to make me a better girl."

Instead of kissing her, Rachael Closs fell upon her neck and broke into a passion of tears such as Clara had never seen her shed before.

CHAPTER XII.

THE OLD PRISONER.

IN America again. Yes, fate has swept most of the characters of our story across the ocean; but one remains behind to whom the kind heart must turn with more solemn interest than the young, the beautiful, or the lordly can inspire.

No changes had fallen upon that bleak, gloomy prison, whose very shadow, as it lay across the dusty road, streamed out like a pall. Human crime brings human misery, and that, crowded together and stifled under the heel of the law, is a terrible, most terrible thing.

In the midst of this desolation, that old woman had lived

and suffered fourteen years, without a complaint, without once asking for the freedom, which would have been so sweet to her, even of her God. She had sinned deeply—how far, she and the Almighty, who knows all things, alone could tell; but she had borne her punishment with much humility; in her quiet way, had made her presence in that dreary place a blessing to those more wretched than herself.

During that long, weary time many a poor prisoner had felt the comfort of her presence near her sick couch and her grave. Kind looks had cheered other desponding souls when words of compassion were forbidden to her lips.

One day this woman sat at her task sewing on some heavy prison garments. A skein of coarse thread hung about her neck, and a steel thimble was upon her long, slender finger, where it had worn a ring about the nail with incessant use.

She did not look up when the matron entered the room, but worked on, with steady purpose, not caring to see that strange gentleman who came in with the matron, and stood looking kindly upon her.

"Mrs. Yates."

The old woman lifted her head with a suddenness that almost shook the iron spectacles from her face. Her eyes encountered those of the gentleman, and she stood up meekly, like a school-girl aroused from her task, and remained, with her eyes bent on the floor, waiting for the man to pass on. He did not move, however, but stood gazing upon her snow-white hair, her thin old face, and the gentle stoop that had, at last, bent her shoulders a little, with infinite compassion in his face.

"Mrs. Yates, why do you stand so motionless? How is it that your eyes turn so steadily to the floor?"

The old woman lifted her eyes slowly to that calm, thin face. She did not know it, had never seen it before in her

life; but it was so seldom any one spoke to her, that a soft glow of comfort stole to her heart as she looked, and two great tears rolled from under her spectacles. Then she remembered that he had asked something.

"In prison, here, we get a down look," she said, with pathetic simplicity.

"But you will look in my face now."

She did gaze at him earnestly; but shook her head and dropped her eyes, for the force of habit was still upon her.

"I do not know you," she murmured.

"Did you then expect some friend?" asked the gentleman.

"I have no friends," was the sad reply.

"Does no one come to see you?"

"Years ago my son used to come and his wife, too; but they are both dead."

"Poor woman!"

She looked up again with a glance of earnest surprise. She was so unused to pity that the compassionate voice brought a dry sob to her throat.

"Are you content here? Tell me."

"Yes, I am content."

Her voice was low, but inexpressibly mournful.

"I know the crime for which you were committed," said the gentleman, "and have read the case over. Tell me, were you guilty?"

The old woman lifted her eyes slowly, and replied:

"Yes, I was a guilty woman."

"But were you, before God, guilty of murder?"

She met his eyes steadily. He saw a quiver of pain sweep over her features, and the thin lips began to stir.

"He is dead, my innocent, my honest son. Nothing can harm him now. I have not suffered in vain. Before God I was not guilty of murder, but terribly guilty in taking this

crime on myself: but it was to save him, and I cannot repent, I cannot repent, and in that lies double guilt!"

The stranger searched her features keenly as she spoke. Perhaps he was prepared for this answer; but the light that came over his face was full of compassion.

"Have you done with me?" questioned the old woman, in the meek, sad voice that had become habitual to her. "Perhaps you will not believe me; but God knows!"

The man turned from her and stepped into the matron's room.

The old woman sat down upon the bench from which she had arisen, took the coarse needle from the bosom of her dress, where she had fastened it when spoken to, and threaded it again; but her hand shook a little, and the thread baffled her confused vision. Then the strange gentleman came back again, smiling, and with moisture in his eyes.

"My good woman," he said, "put up your work. You did not know it, but I am the Governor of New York, and your pardon has just gone to the warden."

The needle dropped from one quivering old hand—a thread fell from its companion.

"Pardon for me!"

Her lips were white, and the words trembled from them one by one. She did not comprehend that this man had given her back to the world.

"It is true," said the matron, weeping the glad, sweet tears of a benevolent heart, "His Excellency has pardoned you. This very hour you are free to leave the prison."

"God help me! Oh! God help me!" cried the poor old woman, looking around at her rude work and seating herself among it. "Where can I go?"

The Governor took some money from his pocket and laid it in her lap. Then he went hastily from the room.

The matron sat down upon the bench, and clasped the withered hand in hers.

"Have you no friend?"

"None."

"No duties left undone?"

The old woman drew herself up. Duties last longer than friends. Yes, she had duties, and God had taken the shackles from her limbs that she might perform them. Freedom was before her and an object. She arose gently and looked around a little wildly.

"I will go now."

The matron went out and returned with a bundle of clothes and a black bonnet upon which was some rusty crape; a huge, old-fashioned thing that framed in her silver-white hair like a pent-house. The very shape and fashion of this bonnet was pathetic—it spoke of so long ago. The black dress and soft shawl with which she had come to the prison were a little moth-eaten, but not much, for they had been carefully hoarded; but the poor old woman looked with a sigh on her prison-dress as it fell to the floor, and wept bitterly before she went out, as if that gloomy mass of stones had been a pleasant home to her.

Slowly, and with a downcast look, the old woman went out of the prison, up through the rugged quarries, where a gang of men were at work, dragging their weary limbs from stone to stone, with the listless, haggard effort of forced labor. Some of these men looked up, as she passed them, and watched her with bitter envy.

"There goes a pardon," they said to each other; "and that old woman with one foot in the grave, while we are young and strong! Freedom would be everything to us; but what good will it do to her?"

So the poor old prisoner passed on, sadly bewildered and

afraid, like a homeless child, but thanking God for a mercy she could not yet realize.

There was one place to which she must go. It might be empty and desolate, but there her son had died, and she had seen the roof of his dwelling from the graveyard when they let her come out from prison to see him buried.

She knew the road, for her path led to the grave first, and after that she could find the way, for every step, so far, had been marked by a pang, to which her heart was answering back now.

At sunset, that day, some workmen, passing the village burying-place, saw an old woman sitting by a grave that had been almost forgotten in the neighborhood.

She was looking dreary and forlorn in the damp enclosure, for clouds were drifting low in the sky, and a cold rain was beginning to fall; but they did not know that this poor woman had a home-feeling by that grave, even with the rain falling, which belonged to no other place on earth.

A little later, when the gray darkness was creeping on, this same tall figure might have been discovered moving through the rough cedar pillars of the Yates cottage. There was no light in the house, for no human soul lived beneath its roof; but a door was so lightly fastened that she got it open with some effort, and entered what seemed to her like the kitchen; for the last tenant had left some kindling-wood in the fireplace, and two or three worn-out cooking utensils stood near the hearth, where they were beginning to rust.

When she left the prison, the matron had, with many kind words, thrust a parcel into the old woman's hand. Knowing her helplessness, she had provided food for a meal or two, and to this had added some matches and candles.

In the gray light which came through one of the windows, she untied this parcel and found the candles. It seemed to the forlorn creature as if a merciful God had sent them

directly to her, and she fell upon her knees, thanking Him. The light which she struck gave her the first gleam of hope that her freedom had yet brought. She was at liberty to build a fire on that dark hearth, and to sit there just as long as she pleased, enjoying its warmth. The rain that began to rattle down on the low roof made her shelter more pleasant. She began to realize that even in such desolation liberty was sweet.

She built a fire with the dry wood, and its blaze soon filled the kitchen with a golden glow. Her garments were wet, and a soft steam arose from them as she sat, enveloping her in a gray cloud. The loneliness might have been terrible to another person, but she had been so long accustomed to the darkness and gloom of a prison cell, that this illuminated space seemed broad as the universe to her.

After her clothes were dry, the old woman lighted her candle and began to examine the house. The parlor was almost empty, and a gust of wind took her candle as she opened the door, flaring back the flame into her face. The wind came from a broken pane of glass in the oriel window, through which a branch of ivy, and the long tendril of a Virginia creeper had penetrated, and woven themselves in a garland along the wall. A wren had followed the creeping greenness and built her nest in the cornice, from which she flew frightened, when a light entered the room.

The old woman went out disappointed. The thing she sought was not there; perhaps it had been utterly destroyed. The man who had promised to keep it sacred, lay sleeping up yonder in the graveyard. How could she expect strangers to take up his trust? But if the object she sought could not be found, what was the use of liberty to her. The one aim of her life would be extinguished. She took up the candle and mounted a flight of narrow stairs which led to the chambers.

They were all empty except one small room, where she found an iron bedstead, on which some old quilts and refuse blankets were heaped. Behind this bed, pressed into a corner, was an old chair, covered with dust.

When she saw this, the light shook in her hand. She sat down upon the bedstead, and reaching the candle out, examined the old chair, through its veil of cobwebs. It was the same. How well she remembered that night when her own hands had put on that green cover.

The chair was broken. One of its castors dropped to the floor as Mrs. Yates drew it from the corner, and the carved wood-work came off in her hand; the cushion was stained and torn in places, but this dilapidation she knew had not reached her secret.

She took the chair in her arms and carried it down to the kitchen. Some of the brass nails dropped loose on the stairs, but she took no heed of them. All she wanted was some instrument with which she could turn the rickety thing into a complete wreck. In the drawer of a broken kitchen table she found an old knife, with the blade half ground away. This she whetted to an edge on the hearth, and directly the little brass nails flew right and left, a mass of twisted fringe lay on the hearth, when the old woman stood in a cloud of dust, holding the torn rep in her hand. It dropped in a heap with the fringe, then the inner lining was torn away, handfuls of hair were pulled out from among the springs, and that casket with a package of papers rustled and shook in the old woman's hands.

Mrs. Yates trembled from head to foot. It was many long years since she had touched heavy work like that, and it shocked her whole frame.

The dull monotony of sewing upon prison garments had undermined all her great natural strength. She sat there

panting for breath, and white to the lips. The excitement had been too much for this poor prison woman.

She sat like a dazed creature, looking down into the casket which lay open in her lap, with ten thousand rainbow fires leaping out of it, as the blaze in the chimney quivered and danced and blazed over the diamonds. That morning the old woman had crept out of prison in her moth-eaten garments, and a little charity money in her bosom. Now a fortune blazed up from her lap.

There was money, too, a purse heavy with sovereigns, dropped there from the gold contained in that malachite box, from which all her awful sorrows had sprung. She gathered up these things in the skirt of her dress and sat brooding over them a long time, while the fire rose and crackled, and shed warm floods of light all around her, and the rain poured down in torrents. She was completely worn out at last, and thought itself became a burden; then her head fell back upon the ruined cushions of the chair, which held her in a half-sitting position, as the heaviest sleep that ever came to mortal eyes fell upon her.

Still the rain poured down continually upon the roof and overran the gutters in torrents. Up from the darkness of a hollow near by, the rush and roar of a stream, swollen into a torrent, came through the beating storm like a heavy bass voice pouring its low thunders through a strain of music. The great elm tree at the end of the house tossed its streaming branches, and beat them upon the roof, till a host of warriors seemed breaking their way through, while the old vines were seized by the wind and ripped from the sides of the house, as the storm seizes upon the cords of a vessel, and tears them up into a net work of tangled floss.

The old woman who had left her stone cell in the prison for the first time in fourteen years, heard nothing of this, but lay half upon the floor half on the broken chair, with

the broad blaze of the fire flashing over her white hair, and kindling up the diamonds in her lap to a bed of living coals. She was perfectly safe with those treasures, even in that lonely house, for in the pouring rain no human being was likely to go about from his own free will. But one poor fellow, whose child was desperately sick, did pass the house, and saw the blaze of a fire breaking through a window, where the shutters were dashing to and fro on their hinges, and found breath to say, as he sped on in search of a doctor:

"So the cedar cottage has got another tenant at last. I wonder who it is?"

When the man went by to his work, the next morning, he saw the shutters swaying to and fro yet, and wondering at it, went into the enclosure, in hopes of meeting some of the new inmates; but everything was still, the doors were fastened, and through the kitchen window he saw nothing but a heap of ashes on the hearth, and an old chair, torn to pieces, standing before it.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE OLD COUNTESS.

WHEN the old countess of Carset threw out her flag from the battlements of Houghton castle, it could be seen from all the country around, for the grim old pile was built upon the uplands, and the gray towers rose up from the groves of the park like the peaks of a mountain.

For many a long year that broad flag had streamed like a meteor over the intense greenness of oaks and chestnuts; for, when the head of the house was at home, the crimson

pennant was always to be seen floating against the sky, and over that sea of billowy foliage. The old lady of Houghton had not been absent from the castle in many years, for she was a childless woman, and so aged, that a home among her own people was most befitting her infirmities and her pride.

One day, as the sun was going down behind those massive castle towers, filling the sky so richly with gold and crimson, that the red flag was lost among its fiery billows, an old woman stood on the highway, with a hand uplifted to shade her eyes, as she searched for the old flag.

There was dust upon her leathern shoes and on the black folds of her alpaca dress, for she had walked from the railway station, and the roads were dry.

"Ah, how the trees have grown!" she said, mournfully, dropping her hand. "I never, never thought to be so near Houghton and not see the flag. Is my lady dead?"

The old woman was so distressed by the thought, that she sat down on a bank by the wayside, and over her came that dry, hard foreboding, which forbids tears to old eyes, but holds the worn heart like a vise. Thus, with her eyes fixed on the dusty road, she sat till all those bright clouds melted into the coming night; then she looked up and saw the great red flag streaming out against a sea of purplish gray, as it had done when she was a girl, seventy years ago.

"My lady is alive. She is there. Oh! my God! make me thankful!" she exclaimed, standing up in the road. "Through all, I shall see her again."

So she moved on, carrying a leathern travelling bag, worn and rusty, in her feeble hand. Along the highway, up to the gates of that noble park, she travelled with the slow, toilsome step of old age; but when she came to the gates they were closed, and her voice was so feeble that it failed to

reach the lodge, from which she could see lights gleaming through the twinkling ivy leaves.

In patient disappointment the old woman turned from the gate, and walked on half a mile farther, for she knew of a small public house where a night's lodging could be obtained. She reached this low stone building after dark, and entered it quietly, like a gray ghost.

It was a strange guest to enter that tap-room, with her dusty garments and her old satchel. The villagers, who were taking their beer comfortably, lifted their eyes in astonishment at her sudden appearance, and they rounded with wonder, as she passed through the room and entered the kitchen naturally, as if she had belonged to the premises all her life.

No one in the house remembered the old woman. A curly-headed girl named Susan, had flitted like a bird about that kitchen the last time she had entered it, and now, when a man's voice called out "Susan!" she started and looked around in a dazed way, expecting the bright eyed girl would come dancing through the door. But instead appeared an elderly woman, with quantities of coarse black hair, smoothed under her cap. A linen apron, large and ample, protected her stuff dress, and a steel chatelaine, to which were suspended scissors, a needle case and tiny money box rattled at her side.

"Well, what is to do now, Stephen?" said the landlady, brushing some crumbs from her apron, for she had been cutting bread.

"Not much, only look sharp. Here is an old body just come off the tramp. Ah, there she sits. See to her while I mind the bar, for she seems a little above the common, and is quiet."

The landlord sank his voice as he made the communica-

tion, and, after a glance at the old woman, went back to his guests, while the matron addressed Mrs. Yates.

"Ye will be wanting something, no doubt. Will it be tea or a cup of ale posset?"

The old heart in that bosom stirred with a tender recollection of long ago, as this almost forgotten dish was mentioned, a dish so purely English, that she had never once heard it mentioned in her American life.

"I will thank you for a posset," she said, taking off her bonnet and smoothing her milk-white hair with both hands. "It is long since I have tasted one."

"Yes," answered the landlady, "there is more refreshment in a cup of warm posset, than in quarts of tea from China. Wait a bit and you shall have one of my own making; the maids never will learn how to curdle the milk properly, but I am a rare hand at it, as was my mother before me."

"Aye, a good housewife was your mother," said the old woman, as tender recollections stirred in her bosom, "for now I see that it is little Susan."

"Little Susan, and you know of her? That was what they used to call me when I was a lass, so high."

"But now, what is the name you go by?"

"What name should a woman go by but that of her own husband? You have just seen the master. The neighbors call him Stephen Burke."

"What, the son of James Burke, gamekeeper at the castle?"

"Why, did you know him, too?"

"Aye, that did I. A brave young fellow he was, and every one at the castle up yonder—"

The old woman checked herself. She had not intended to make herself known, but old recollections had thronged

upon her so warmly, that it seemed impossible to keep silent.

"You speak of the castle as if you knew about it," said the landlady, eyeing her askance.

"And no wonder," answered the old woman; "people have told me about it, and I was in the neighborhood years ago, when you were a slip of a lass."

It was strange, but this old woman, since her entrance to that room, had fallen back upon phrases and words familiar to her lips once, but which had not made any part of her speech for years. There was a home sound in them that warmed her heart.

"Did ye ever know any of them up yonder?" asked the landlady, as she placed a broad porringer before the fire, and poured some milk into it.

"Yes. I have seen the countess, but it was long ago."

"May-be it was when the young lady was at home. Oh! them were blithe times, when young Lord Hope came a courting, and we could see them driving like turtle doves through the park and down the village; or, walking along by the hedges and gathering hyacinths and violets. It was a sorry time, though, when he took her away for good and all."

"Is the young lady living near this?" inquired Mrs. Yates, with an effort.

"Near this, my good woman! Why, she has been dead these many years, and Lord Hope had been married to his second wife ten years, when my first lass was born; but he lives at Oakhurst, and never comes here now. No one, in these parts, has seen his second lady, for the countess was sadly put out with the marriage, and all her household was forbidden to mention Lord Hope's name before her. She never got over the death of our own young lady in foreign parts, off in America among the red Indians, who tomahawk

people, and no one asks why. This was where Lord Hope took his wife and child. Can any one wonder that our countess could not forgive him, especially when he came back home with a new wife, and stood out that his daughter should never come to Houghton, till our old lady up yonder was ready to be gracious to the new woman."

"So the child was never at the castle?" inquired the old woman.

"No one hereabouts has ever seen her, though we are told that she is a beautiful young lady, sweet and pleasant, but with a will of her own. The old countess sent for her once, for she must be heiress of Houghton, you know; but she sent back word that nothing could entice her into a house where her stepmother was forbidden to come, and this so offended our countess, that she has taken no notice of her since."

While she was talking, the landlady poured a measure of frothing ale into the porringer, and became all at once silent. The delicate art of curdling the milk into whey took up all her attention. Thus the old lady was allowed to drop into a fit of thought, from which she was aroused, with a start, when the hostess poured the warm posset into a china bowl and began stirring it with a heavy silver spoon, as she called out:

"Come to the table, grandame, and sup the posset while it is hot. You'll not get its fellow till I turn my hand to another for ye. Come, come!"

Mrs. Yates drew her chair to the table, and took up the silver spoon, eagerly. Poor woman! She had travelled all day without tasting food, and the posset took her from a very painful train of thought.

The hostess sat down at one end of the table, smiling blandly over the keen appetite of her guest. With her arms folded on the white cloth, and her ruddy face bending

forward, she went on with her talk. But this time she turned from the castle, and began to ask questions, for the presence of this singular old woman in her house had fully aroused her curiosity.

But the traveller was on her guard now, and escaped these blunt questions with quiet adroitness. When they became oppressive, she arose from the table and asked permission to seek her bed, as the day's travel had left her tired beyond anything.

The hostess took a candle from the table and led the way up stairs, somewhat baffled, but full of kindly feeling. There was something about the manner and speech of this old woman that set all her warm-hearted interest afloat. Who was she? From what part of England had she travelled with that rusty little bag and those thick-soled shoes? That quiet manner and gentle voice might have belonged to any lady of the land.

In the midst of these conjectures the quiet old woman reached out her hand for the candle, and with a soft "good-night," closed the chamber-door.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE OLD COUNTESS AND HER SERVANT.

THE next morning Mrs. Yates was early at the park-gate. She found no trouble in passing through now, and was soon in the avenue, making slow progress toward the castle, under the shade of those vast oaks and chestnuts. The way was long, and the avenue swept upward with what, to the old woman, was a toilsome ascent. The bag, which she

carried in her hand, was of some weight, too, and the cramped inaction of so many years had rendered walking a slow and painful process.

At last she stood in full view of that grand old building—a castle of the olden times—kept, so far as possible to elegance or comfort, in its ponderous mediæval grandeur. But Madam Art had softened all its ruder features. Plate-glass was sunk into those thick walls; circular rooms in those twin towers, commanded a splendid view of the valley, over which the castle was built. The broad stone terrace connecting the towers, and fronting the main building was connected with a velvet lawn by a forest of hot-house plants, that clung around the stone parapet in a sumptuous garland of vines and flowers, that shed a soft and delicious fragrance over everything in and around the building.

Across this lawn and over the stone terrace the old woman toiled toward the main entrance. She was beginning to tremble now with something beside weariness. Her satchel bore down the feeble hand that carried it, till it dragged along the stones with a low, rasping sound, as she climbed the terrace-steps. She lifted the ponderous bronze knocker, and let it fall from her shaking hand with a crash that startled herself, and brought a man, all glittering in silver gray and scarlet, to the door, where he stood, with his insolent lips ajar, waiting to know what miracle had brought that forlorn creature to the grand entrance of Houghton Castle.

"I wish to speak with the countess."

That sweet old voice could not counteract the effect of her dress and worn satchel. The parted lips of the man in scarlet fell together, and drooped scornfully down at the corners.

"There is a proper entrance for servants and village-peo-

ple," said this high functionary, with his powdered head thrown back.

"I know," answered the woman, quietly; "but I wish to see my lady, and do not care to seek her from the servants' hall. Go to her and say that Hannah Yates, an old servant of the family, is below, waiting to see her."

The man hesitated. Then the old woman stepped softly into the hall, passing him so suddenly that he drew back aghast.

"If you will not go, I must find the way for myself," she said, still in a voice so gentle that he could take little offence at it.

Her composure rather disturbed the man, who gave his powdered head a toss, and mounted the broad oaken staircase, with an indignant swell of the chest. Through a long passage, carpeted with the thickness of forest turf, he went, giving forth no sound till he opened a door in one of the lower chambers, and, sweeping a curtain of crimson silk back with his arm, announced the name that old woman had given him at the door.

Something lying under the rich colors of a great India shawl moved quickly; the shawl dropped to the floor, and a little old woman sat up on the couch where she had been resting.

"Yates — Hannah Yates?" Did you say Yates, Henry?"

"That was the name, my lady."

"An old woman like me?"

"Old enough, my lady; but Heaven forbid I should say like your ladyship. I could not force myself to do it."

"Bring her here, Henry."

The door closed, and the old countess drew herself gradually upright.

She was a pale, little woman, with hair as soft and white

as the delicate lace that fell like a spider's web over it. The child-like hands, which lay in relief among the folds of her black-satin dress, were withered in their whiteness, like the leaves of a frost-bitten lily. They were quivering, too; and now that she was alone, you might have seen that delicate head begin to vibrate with a slow, perpetual motion, which had been stopped a moment by the surprise which had fallen upon her. She sat with her eyes on the curtain, which shut the door from view. The trembling of her head extended to her whole body, and her small feet pattered freely on the carpet, like those of a child in the impotence of sickness.

As she looked the red curtain was lifted, and into the luxurious splendor of that room came a tall, old woman, who was trembling like herself, and stood in her presence, apparently afraid to look up.

The old countess arose from her couch, trampling the India shawl under her feet, and moved with feeble slowness toward her strange visitor.

"Hannah Yates!"

At these words the down prison-look that had fallen upon Hannah was lifted from her, and those large gray eyes were bent on the little patrician with a look of intense mournfulness.

"My mistress!"

"Hannah Yates, I never expected to see you again on this earth, and now you come before me like a ghost."

"Ah, my mistress," answered the old servant, with pathetic humility. "I am a ghost of the woman who once loved and served you."

"And I? Look upon me, Yates. How have God and time dealt with your mistress? Has my head been respected more than yours?"

They stood for a moment looking solemnly at each other

—that tall, stately woman, born a peasant, and the delicate, proud, sensitive peeress, whose blue blood rolled through a series of dead greatness back to the Conqueror. The contrast was touching. Both had begun to stoop at the shoulders, both had suffered, and they were as far apart in station as social power could place them; but a host of memories linked them together, and the common sympathies of humanity thrilled in the hearts of both with such pain and pleasure that, unconsciously, the little withered hand of the countess clasped that of her old servant.

"Come in, Yates, and sit down. You are trembling, poor old soul! The world must have gone hard with you when the touch of my hand makes you shiver so. Sit down. We are both old women now, and may rest ourselves together."

So the woman, whose last home had been a convict's cell, and the lady whose head had always been sheltered beneath the roofs of a palace, sat down and looked, with sad timidity, at each other. Still the feeling of caste was strong in the servant. She had drawn an ottoman up to the couch, and placed herself on that; but not until she had taken the shawl from the carpet, and placed it around her mistress, did she thus sit down, as it were, at her feet.

"Where did you come from, Hannah Yates?"

"From America. I came from the ship three days ago."

At the word America the old countess shrank back, and held out her hands, as if to avoid a blow. After a little she spoke again, but it was now with a voice sharp with pain.

"Yates, did you in America ever know anything of my child?"

The anguish in that voice startled Hannah Yates, and her old face whitened. How much did the mistress know? If little, perfect candor might kill her. She had not come there to wound an old woman with the horrors that had darkened her life; so she answered, cautiously:

"Yes, I saw Lady Hope more than once after she came to America."

"Thank God!" exclaimed the countess. "I may now learn how and when she died."

"I was not with her when she died," answered the servant, in a low voice.

"But you saw her before?"

"Yes, I saw her often."

"And the child?"

"Yes; the child was with me a good deal."

"Yates, was my child happy in that strange land?"

"How can I answer that, my lady?"

"Did you see Hope there?"

"Once, only once, and that for a moment."

"And you can tell me no particulars. You have no information to give me with regard to the woman who is Lord Hope's wife?"

"Of her I know but little. Remember, my lady, I am but a servant."

"You were my child's nurse. I never looked on you as a common servant, but rather as a faithful friend. So did my poor child. When I learned she was in the same country with you and her foster-brother, my heart was somewhat at rest. But her letters were so studied, so unsatisfactory; yet there was nothing in them of sadness or complaint. Only this, Yates, she never mentioned her husband, not once! I should hardly have known that he was with her but for the letter in which he told me that I was a childless old woman."

Mrs. Yates drew a long, heavy sigh. She understood now that the secret of that awful tragedy in New York had been kept from her old mistress, and resolved that it never should reach her—never while her will could keep back the horrible truth.

"My lady," she said, with an effort, "there is one thing which our—which my young mistress bade me bring to you if—if she should not live to place them in your own hands herself. It is this which brought me across the ocean."

As she spoke, Mrs. Yates took up the leathern satchel, which lay against her feet, and opened its rusty clasp with her trembling hands. She drew forth a casket from the scant garments it contained, and, still kneeling on the floor, opened it. A blaze of diamonds broke up from the box. The old countess uttered a feeble cry, and clasped two quivering hands over her eyes.

"She was troubled about bringing them out of England, and sent them to her foster-mother with this letter."

"Is there a letter? Yates, give it to me!"

Mrs. Yates reached forth the letter, which had begun to turn yellow with age.

The countess took it, and attempted to open her glasses; but those little hands trembled so fearfully that she could not loosen the gold which clasped them in.

"Read it for me. I cannot! I cannot!"

Two great tears trembled out of the pain in that aged heart, and fell upon her cheeks like frost upon the white leaves of a withered rose.

Hannah Yates read the letter—a sweet, touching epistle, full of mournful affection, which that murdered lady had written only a few days before her death, when some presentiment of coming evil was no doubt upon her. The diamonds were her mother's, she wrote, and had only crossed the ocean with her because of the haste with which the voyage to America had been arranged. Fearing for their safety, she was about to intrust them to her foster-mother, who had promised to bring them back to England with her own hands, if any evil should fall upon her, or if her sojourn in America was protracted.

"The jewels which belong to the Carset estate, and the child, which will inherit them, I entrust to my dear foster-mother, when I am gone, and I sometimes think that we may never meet again, my mother. This good woman will bring the diamonds, which I will not have endangered, and will tell you about the child, dearer to me than my own life, nay, than my own soul! Tell Lord Hope, if he should seek to take her, that it was the dying wish of his wife that her child should pass at once into the protection of her own most beloved mother, when Hannah Yates brings her to England. I think he will not deny this to a woman who has loved him better, oh! how much better! than herself—who would die, if she could, rather than be in the way of his happiness. Give him this letter. I think he will not deny the last request I may ever make of him. I will not say farewell, my mother, because the gloom that is upon me in this strange land may be only the home-sickness of a heart separated from those it loves. But, if this is given to you by my foster-mother, know that a cloud of gloom has settled down upon me forever."

This much fell upon the ears of the countess as she held her breath and listened.

When Hannah Yates folded the letter, she felt that a gleam of angry fire broke into the eyes bent upon her.

"Yates," said the countess, sharply, "read the date of that letter."

The old servant read the date.

"Fourteen years and more! Why was that letter kept from me so long?"

"I could not bring it."

"I know you were not young even then, Yates; but your son, my own protegee! Surely, when my poor child gave you this charge, she gave money also? Why was the child kept from me and sent to that man?"

"Yes, there was money; but my son could not come. We had no power to bring her."

"Then Hope took her from you by force?" questioned the countess. "Where is your son, Yates? He was wrong to permit it!"

"With my young lady."

"Dead! Then you, also, are childless?"

Hannah Yates remembered how the news of her bereavement had reached her in that stone cell which was cold as a grave, and shuddered while the lady in her palace questioned her. Then the old prison-look fell upon her, and she sat motionless, with her eyes upon the floor, saying nothing. How could she explain to that proud lady the bondage in which she had been held?

"Ah! if you had come earlier," said the countess, "the child of my child might have been here! That man would not have dared to keep her! She would not have been taught to return my advances with insolence by his evil wife."

"I *could* not come before," repeated the old woman humbly.

"And now it may be too late."

"God forbid!" said the old woman. "No! no! He will show me how to complete my task. It is for that I have been kept alive."

"Yates, you are brave and faithful. I was wrong to question you so. Forgive me, old servant."

Mrs. Yates took the child-like hand held out to her and pressed it to her lips.

"I have tried, dear mistress."

"Go, now, old friend, and let me have time to think. Only this is certain, we do not part again."

"Mistress, that cannot be. I have yet a task to perform. It may be many, many miles to travel. When that is done,

I will come back and spend the few days left to me here. Oh, it seems like home—it seems like Heaven to sit within the sound of your voice once more! But I must depart at once."

"Where, old friend?"

"I do not know yet; but God will direct me."

"As I trust that He will direct me," answered the countess, lifting her eyes in momentary prayer. "Yates, you will never know what fearful suspicions have haunted me—how hard and bitter they have made me. Oh, had this letter come earlier!"

"I could not! I could not!"

"I know that, knowing you."

Hannah Yates lifted her grateful eyes for a moment, and dropped them again.

"Now that I am free from the weight of these," she said, lifting the casket in her hands, "the toil of my errand will be less."

The countess looked wistfully into the box, and shook her head.

"I have been unjust. I have accused that woman falsely. Until this moment, Yates, I have not hesitated to proclaim my belief that the woman they call Lady Hope had possessed herself of these diamonds as she had won my daughter's husband. This is a wrong which wounds me to the soul. It must be atoned for."

Hannah Yates moved toward the door, but heavily, and with the reluctance of a woman whose strength had been overtaken. The old countess sat gazing upon the jewels. How trivial and worthless they seemed to her now! Yet the retention of these very diamonds had been a great cause of offence against Lord Hope's second wife. How unjust, how cruel she had been in this! Was it possible that, in other things, she had been equally mistaken? She took up

her daughter's letter and read it over. The first shock of its reception had passed away, and nothing but the quivering of the head remained of the fearful agitation that had shook her little form like a reed.

Hannah Yates stood near the curtain, regarding her with a look of yearning sympathy. How much she had suffered—how terribly she had struggled to save that delicate creature from deeper sorrow—no human being but herself would ever know; but the thought filled her heart with infinite tenderness. She stepped back to the couch, took the hand which lay in the lap of her old mistress, and kissed it.

The old lady lifted her eyes from the letter. They were full of tears—those painful, cold tears which come in such scant drops to the aged.

"Your hands are cold; you look tired. Ring for some wine and biscuit. That poor, white face is a reproach to your mistress, Yates."

"Yes, I will take some wine and bread before I go—it will make me strong; but not here! not here!"

Again the old countess turned to that letter, motioning with her hand that Yates should stay; but the old woman did not see that gentle motion of the hand—her eyes, also, were full of tears.

When the Countess of Carset had thrice perused her daughter's letter, she laid it down, and resting her hand tenderly upon it, fell into thought.

She was a proud but just woman, on whose haughty power old age had fallen like dew, softening all that was imperious, and shading down strong personal pride into thoughtful mercy.

But for some injustice that she had to repent of, this simple, affectionate letter, coming as it were from the grave, would have aroused nothing but tender grief. It contained no complaint of the man she had married—did not even

mention the governess, who now filled her place; and the possibility that she had terribly wronged these two persons dawned steadily upon her.

She looked up at last, and spoke to Hannah Yates; but there was no answer. The old woman was on her road to the railroad station, burdened only with a secret she dared not reveal, and the gold which had been saved with the diamonds.

CHAPTER XV.

THE EARL'S RETURN.

DAYS passed, and Caroline heard nothing of the new friend she had made; but one day Eliza brought her a letter which had come, inclosed in one from Margaret, who had left town with her mistress so suddenly that she found no time to say farewell.

This was the letter which broke down so many hopes for the unhappy girl:

"MY DEAR, DEAR FRIEND—

"For that you always will be, so long as I have a pulse in my heart or a purpose in my brain! It does not require an eternity for two young girls like us to become firm friends; but it will take more than that to destroy the faith and love we feel for each other. I know that you will believe every word that I say, though I may be compelled to seem cruel and faithless. I cannot come to see you. They tell me it might offend my father. I cannot ask you to his house, because it is his, and I have no authority in it. But the time will come when I shall have a house of my

own, and then no guest shall be so honored. Why do I love you so? Is it that I remember something? Or has any person told me that you and I have slept in each other's arms, and breathed upon the same pillow, with an old woman bending over us—a noble-faced old woman, with gray hair, and a queenly way of carrying the head? Have you any remembrance of a woman like that? Do you remember a hot, red fire, streams of water gushing over it, a ladder, a crowd, and great pipes coiling like a tangle of huge snakes along a street full of people? I do—and this no one has ever told me.

"I want to ask all these things in person. You are from America. I was there once, and after that fire I remember the ocean and a great black ship, which sent banners of smoke over us day after day.

"Then Oakhurst. I was not four years old then, but my life began in America, so far as I know of it.

"I cannot help you now; but if you hate the stage so much, be firm, and madame cannot force you upon it. Besides, I am determined to redeem my pledge; so, if it can be done in no other way, I will just have an early time set for my marriage with Mr. Closs, and then you shall come to us if any one attempts to oppress you.

"Pray do not suppose that any one here dislikes you. On the contrary, Lady Hope admits that you are charming. The trouble is that here, in England, there is so much prejudice against the stage. I cannot advise you, having broken down so miserably in my promises; but I shall not be helpless forever, and when I have power you shall share it.

"If she insists, if the worst comes to the worst, run away, and come down here—I mean into the neighborhood. I have plenty of pocket-money, and drive my ponies just where I please. Margaret will help us.

"I am sure you will forgive me that I cannot do all I promised. It does not grieve you more than it humiliates me. To think that I should offer so much and perform nothing! But it is not my fault, nor is it the fault of any one here.

"Believe in me, trust me, and love me, for I will deserve it all.

"Yours affectionately,

"CLARA."

Lady Clara wrote this letter on the very night of her return to Oakhurst. That much she insisted on doing. Less, she said, would be cruel treachery.

Neither Lady Hope nor her brother were disposed to interfere, and so the little missive went, carrying both hope and pain with it.

It was some days before Hepworth Closs was able to make his entire peace with the young lady. She could not find it in her heart to oppose her stepmother, whose sad, heavy eyes touched her sympathy; but it was pleasant to tyrannize over a man so much older than herself, whom love had made her slave.

With him quarreling was delicious, and she was in no haste to cut her enjoyment short. But even the pleasure of tormenting one's lover has its reaction; so one day, as the sun went down, pouring a flood of crimson into the bosom of that old cedar of Lebanon, Clara relented a little, and allowed Hepworth to kiss her hand. It was impossible to hold out longer, with all the leaves quivering in that soft air, and the little birds hiding away among them, chirping to each other, and setting a sweet example to the lovers.

Of course an ardent man, very much in love, is not likely to rest content with the touch of his lady-love's

hand after he has been kept in quarantine four or five days. Hepworth was ardent, and desperately in love; so he took advantage of her soft relenting, and drew her close to his side, laid her head against his heart, and, with his cheek touching the thick waves of her hair, began to talk of the future, when they would be all in all to each other.

Clara shut her eyes, and allowed her head to rest so close to her lover's heart that it rose and fell with its strong beating. She loved the music of that full, warm pulse, and a smile parted her lips as she listened.

Thus they rested awhile in silence, she, carried into a dreamy elysium by the swell of those full heart-beats; he, calmed by the stir of the cedar-leaves, looking into her face, and wondering, in the humility of true affection, how that bright young creature had ever been won to love him. He bent his head down softly, and kissed the blue veins on her temple.

"Are you sure, very, very sure, that you love me, Clara?"

She reached up one arm, wound it about his neck, laid her cheek against his, and whispered:

"Don't you think so?"

"Lady Clara! Mr. Hepworth Closs!"

It was a man's voice, stern and clear as the clash of bells. Both the lover and the girl sprang to their feet.

"Father!"

"Lord Hope!"

For a moment the two men stood face to face. They had changed since their last parting; still that was but dimly seen in the light of a young moon, which was rising over the trees as the rich crimson faded away.

Hepworth saw that all the wild passion of those times had died out of that face, leaving it calm and hard; but

other change was concealed by the silvery quiver of light that fell upon it through the leaves.

Hepworth was the first to speak.

"My lord, you have received my letter, I trust?"

"Yes—and came at once to answer it."

"By your tone, by your manner, I should fear—"

"While this young lady is by, we will not speak of your fears," said the earl, with a slow motion of the hand. "Clara, you will find your—Lady Hope. She will, perhaps, be glad to hear that I have returned."

"Not while you meet me and—and Hepworth in this fashion, papa. I don't like it. One would think you intended to make trouble."

"Foolish child! Go as I tell you."

"Not while you look at me like that. Do you know, papa, that you have forgotten to kiss me, or even shake hands; and that is a thing I never saw you guilty of before."

Clara drew close to the haughty man, and turning her mouth into a half-open apple-blossom, held it up to be kissed.

The earl put her aside gently, but with firmness.

"Go to Lady Hope, as I bade you," he said. "This is no hour for trifling."

Clara stood motionless. All the color had left her face, even to the lips.

"Papa, are you in earnest?"

"In earnest? Yes."

"And you mean to refuse this gentleman?"

"Undoubtedly I mean to refuse that gentleman."

There was an emphasis of fine irony laid on the last word, which Hepworth felt with a sting of indignation; but he controlled himself, in respect to Clara's presence, and stood aloof, pale and stern as the man before him.

"I will go," said Clara; "but, before I leave you, let me

say one thing: I love this gentleman. But for that, he never would have spoken to me or written to you. It was not his fault, or of his seeking. He had not been here a day before I loved him without knowing it. Now, all the world may know it for aught I care, for I never will marry any other man!"

Lord Hope did not reply to her, but turned to Hepworth.

"You have done honorable work, and in a short time!" he said. "I was not aware that Lady Hope would entertain her relatives in my absence, and with this result."

Hepworth did not answer then, but turning to Lady Clara, reached out his hand.

"Let me lead you to the house," he said. "After that I can meet Lord Hope on more equal terms."

Clara took his arm; but her father interposed.

"I will take charge of the lady," he said, with haughty coldness, drawing her arm within his, and leading her to the terrace, where he left her and returned to the cedar.

"Now, sir, let us conclude this matter at once. You ask the hand of my daughter in marriage. I refuse it. You are here under my roof an unexpected and unbidden guest. From this hour you cease to be welcome."

"My lord, had I never known you in the past, never served you in an unlawful desire, you would not have dared to address me in this fashion. If you and I meet to bandy insults, it is because the past has left no mutual respect between us; but I have this advantage over you; the sins which have drawn on me even your contempt have been long since repented of, while yours, compared to which mine fade into innocence, seem but to have hardened into pride."

Lord Hope smiled.

"Of what crime does Mr. Hepworth Closs charge me?"

"I make no special charge, Lord Hope; but there is an

old woman in America suffering the penalty of a crime which she never committed — which you know she never committed."

"The law decided otherwise, if I remember rightly," answered the earl, in a quiet, calm voice. "But even if it did not, does that relate to the question in hand?"

"No, no, and I am to blame in mentioning it—Heaven knows I wish to think the best! I admit, my lord, your prejudices against me would have been just when we knew each other so well; but I was very young then and can fairly claim to have worked out an honorable redemption from the faults of my youth. Believe me, I have won more than a respectable position among men; have wealth from my own exertions enough to satisfy even your wishes. True, I have not the rank to match yours; but there was a time when you thought it no disgrace to mate with my family."

Lord Hope was moved out of his proud calm now. He lifted his hand with a suddenness that was threatening, and cried out:

"Peace, sir! I have heard enough of this!"

"But I must remind you again that Lady Hope is my only sister, and in these insults you degrade her."

"Degrade her, when she is my wife!"

These words were drawn out with proud emphasis that stung Hepworth like a wasp.

"My lord," he said, "I will bear much from you, because I once loved you, but more from the fact that you are my sister's husband and *her* father; but I warn you not even by a tone to cast reproach or slur upon your wife. She became such against my wishes and in spite of my protest. That lady has all the elements of greatness within herself."

"What right had you to wish or protest?"

"The self-same right that you have to drive me from your daughter. You did not heed my wishes, why expect me to prove more delicate?"

"Because I can enforce what I wish, and you could not."

"How?"

"By asking Mr. Hepworth Closs to leave Oakhurst at once, and by providing against all chance of his coming here again."

Closs turned very white, and his hand clenched and unclenched itself with passionate force.

"My lord, this is a cruel insult, which I have not deserved!"

All at once the earl turned, with some show of feeling, and looked Hepworth steadily in the face.

"Hepworth Closs, listen to me. If I seem cruel and unmanly, it is because I wish to be kind. The hand which sweeps a moth from its circling around a candle, must seem very cruel to the poor insect. I tell you, fairly, Hepworth Closs, it is not so much pride of birth or personal dislike that prompts me to deny my daughter to you. But she is heiress in entail to the Carset title and Houghton Castle, a noble title, without support, unless the old countess makes her heiress, by will, of her personal estates. By marrying your sister, I mortally offended this old lady. Rachael has been, from first to last, the special object of her dislike. Lady Clara has added to this by refusing to visit Houghton unless her stepmother is received there also. This quarrel may throw one of the richest inheritances in England out of my family, and all from my unfortunate marriage."

"Your unfortunate marriage!" exclaimed Closs, hotly.

"How could it be otherwise?" answered Lord Hope, sadly.

There was something in Hope's voice that touched Hep-

worth Closs with feelings akin to those he had felt for the proud young man years ago.

"This was the language I used to my sister the night before she became your wife," he said.

"Oh, my God! if she had but listened—if she had but listened!"

"Lord Hope! do I understand? Has your marriage with Rachael Closs come to this?"

"Hepworth, we will not discuss this subject. It is one which belongs exclusively to Lady Hope and myself."

"But she is my sister!"

"Between a husband and wife no relative has claims."

"Lord Hope, I was once your friend."

"I have not forgotten it. Unfortunately for us both, you were. I do not say this ungratefully. On the contrary, I am about to appeal to that old friendship once more. You ask for my daughter. To give her to a brother of Rachael Closs would be the bitterest insult I could offer the old lady at Houghton. It would close our last hopes of a reconciliation. The estates, in doubt now, would be eternally lost. I cannot afford this. Oakhurst is strictly entailed; I am heavily in debt, so heavily, that we are compelled to practise the most harassing economy. From me Clara will inherit nothing; from her grandmother worse than nothing if she dies offended with us. I am told that she is relenting—that she has been heard to speak kindly of Clara. Can you ask me to insult her over again, knowing all the wrong I have done her, all the ruin it would bring on my child?"

"What can I do?" exclaimed Closs, who felt the reason of this appeal. "How can I act generously to you—fairly to her?"

"Go away. She is young, volatile, capricious, but gen-

erous as the day. Be open with her; tell her why you leave Oakhurst and how impossible it is to return."

"But there is one wild hope for me—the possibility of gaining this old lady's consent."

Lord Hope smiled in pity of the forlorn idea.

"You may as well ask the stars of heaven to fall."

"But it may chance that I can plead my cause with her."

"Then your best argument will be that I have driven you ignominiously from Oakhurst," said Lord Hope, with fine irony in his smile. "She will forgive much to any man I am known to dislike."

"My lord, I love your daughter so entirely, that it is impossible for me to give up all hope. Leave me this one gleam, or, failing in that, give me such chances as time may bring."

Again Lord Hope answered with that keen smile.

"I withhold nothing from you but my consent."

"But, if Lady Carset gives hers?"

"Then I can safely promise mine."

Again the smile came, and pierced Hepworth like an arrow.

"Now I will intrude here no longer," he said, taking his hat from the ground where it had been lying.

"It is better so, inhospitable as you may think me for saying it. Lady Hope will be grieved, I know."

"I am her only relative," said Closs, with deep feeling.

"I know it; but we are all making sacrifices. I am, certainly, in wishing you farewell."

Hope reached out his hand. It was clear he wished Closs to go without further leave-taking. Closs understood the motion.

"I will not pain my sister with a farewell. Explain this as you please, or say that I will write—unless that is pro-

hibited. As for the young lady, I shall never seek her again under your roof; but the time may come when I shall assert the right which every man has to choose for himself, and win the lady of his love, if he can. Meantime, Lady Clara is free as air. Tell her so."

With these words Hepworth Closs turned resolutely from the house in which he had tasted pure happiness for the first time in his life, and went away.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WIFE AND THE DAUGHTER.

LADY HOPE was in her own room when Clara came in, pale and breathless, with news of her father's return. A cry broke from the woman, so thrilling in its exquisite joy, that it won Clara even from a remembrance of the harshness with which her lover had been received. In the birth of her own love, she found intense sympathy for the intense passion that seemed to consume her stepmother like a living fire.

"Oh! mamma Rachael, do you love him so much, and is this love nothing but a torment?" she said, kneeling down at the woman's feet, and trying to draw that wild face down to hers. "He is so cruel, so cruel, I almost hate him."

Lady Hope pushed the girl from her.

"What? Hate him?"

"Then why don't he love you more?"

"He does love me; how dare you question it?"

The words were harsh, but Rachael's voice faltered in uttering them, and the gloom of a hidden doubt broke into

those great black eyes. Clara saw the look, and her heart ached with sympathy.

"Then why does he stay from us so long?"

"Ah, why!" answered Rachael, and the two plaintive words sank deep into that young heart.

"And why does he treat Hepworth, your own brother, so cruelly?"

"Has he done that? Oh, no, no!"

"Yes, mamma Rachael. We both love him so much; but he is very hard with us just now. I thought he would love Hepworth for your sake."

"Ah! I thought so too. It was my last dream."

"And my first," said Clara, with girlish tears in her eyes. "He was very angry—they were both angry. I think he meant to insult Hepworth and drive him away, knowing how proud he is, and he will do it. Oh, mamma Rachael, I am so miserable!"

"Miserable!" cried Rachael, looking gloomily into that fair young face. "Poor child! you have no idea what misery is. God forbid that you ever should!"

"Is not this misery? Papa against me, Hepworth looking so proud and stormy. You. Oh! mamma, I feel for you so much. Indeed, you look more unhappy than I am; but it is hard."

"Hush, dear! That is your father's voice."

"Yes, how low and cutting. I cannot stand it. He is coming this way. I will go to my room."

For the first time in her life, Lady Clara shrank from meeting her father.

"Do not leave me yet," said Rachael, passing swiftly toward the window. "They are together still. I cannot see their faces, but they both stand up sternly in the moonlight. What can they be saying?"

"Something harsh, I know. Lord Hope, when he came

up so still and stern, did not seem like my father. His face looked like marble. He would not kiss me, and—and put me aside, when I offered, as if I had done something terribly wrong, in just getting naturally in love with the most splendid fellow that ever lived. I should think he might remember when he fell so desperately in love with you himself, and have some mercy on a poor little girl." Here Clara seemed to catch a restless infection from Rachael, and joined her in a quick, unequal walk up and down the room, pausing now and then to dash the tears from her eyes, or gaze in wonder at Lady Hope's face, which bore an expression she had never seen in all its gloominess till then.

All at once Rachael paused in her walk, and taking Clara in her arms, looked at her with such earnest tenderness, that the girl hushed her sobs to listen.

"My darling, do you love him so much?"

"Better than my father; better than you. Oh! forgive me, but it is so—better than my own life. I think it is worship, not love, dearest mamma."

"Great heavens! what trouble I have brought upon us all! Oh why, why did he come here!" cried Rachael, beginning to pace the floor again, clasping her hands and tearing them apart, as if angry with herself. "They were such friends once, and loved each other like brothers. How could I think it would turn out like this? I so needed him—this one brother; had such hope in his influence, but it is all over."

"What is all over? You will not permit it? You will not let him be sent away?"

"How can I help it? What power or influence is left to me?" answered Rachael, desperately.

"Oh, mamma Rachael, will you fail me? You!"

"Hush! he is coming. I hear his step on the terrace."

How that dusky face lighted up. That woman trembled

all over under the sound of that man's tread. He was coming to her, there in the room, in which they had once been so happy; coming to her, perhaps in anger. That was nothing. Anger itself would be Heaven, compared to the cold politeness that had sometimes almost frozen her to death. She turned to Clara.

"Go, my child. I will see your father alone."

Clara went to her room. Through the window which looked out upon the lawn, she saw Hepworth Closs come out from the shadow of the cedar, and walk swiftly toward the avenue. By the proud lift of his head, and those quick steps, that seemed to spurn the earth he trod upon, she knew that he had parted from her father in anger, and threw up the window.

"Hepworth! Hepworth! Stop! Stop! and tell me where you are going!"

He did not hear her, the storm in his heart was too violent. He had been driven forth from his sister's roof with a cool politeness that was insulting. The commonest courtesies of life had been denied to him, by the man who had once been his friend. He scarcely thought of Clara, then, a sense of burning indignation swept everything else from his mind.

Clara leaned from the window, trembling with sudden apprehension. Was he really going? Had her father treated him with indignity? Was he giving her up without a struggle or a word of farewell?

While she asked herself these questions, Closs disappeared among the trees in the park, and was swallowed up in the black shadows.

"He shall not go!" cried the girl, in wild excitement. "He shall not be driven away by papa, or any one else! Where is my jacket? What has that girl done with my hat? Ah! here, and here!"

She huddled the shawl around her, tossed the little sailor's hat to her head, and, opening the chamber door so swiftly that it made no noise, darted down stairs, and, avoiding the principal entrance, reached the lawn by leaping from one of the drawing-room windows, where she paused a moment to draw breath. But no time was to be lost. At the rate Hepworth was walking, he must now be well on his way to the lodge. The avenue swept away from the house in a grand curve. She knew of a path through the trees which would lead her straight to old Badger's lodge. It was shadowy and lonesome, but what did she care for that? No deer ever bounded down that path more lightly than Clara went. She did not stop to think of propriety, or of her own object. Her heart told her that Hepworth had been driven from the house, perhaps thinking that she would sanction the outrage; for it was an outrage, even if her own father had done it. He should not go away, believing it possible for her to prove so base.

On she went, eager, breathless, with the streamers floating out from her hat, and her white sacque flying open, fairly racing through the moonlight, like a frightened fairy.

As she came in sight of the lodge, the clang of an iron gate falling into position, brought a cry of dismay from her lips. He had reached the highway. Dared she follow him there?

Clara came out into the avenue, panting for breath. She could hear his quick steps upon the road. How terribly fast he was walking toward the village. Yes, he was surely going that way.

Old Badger stood in the lodge door, shaded by a trailing drapery of ivy, and saw the young lady standing there in the moonlight, wringing her hands and absolutely crying. In his astonishment he addressed Jules confidentially, as she lay on the stepping stone at his feet.

"It is the young lady as sure as you live, old girl, and she's a following that handsome fellow as just left a golden sovereign in my hand, Jules. Something has happened up yonder, Jules. The master has come back and found out what you and I knew all the time. If that handsome brother of my lady hasn't got a ticket-of-leave, I lose my guess; but what are we to do with the young lady, old girl? That is what is a puzzling me just now."

Jules arose, stretched herself, and threw out one paw as she settled down again, when Badger broke out in a glow of admiration.

"Right, Jules. In a matter where the *sects* are concerned, you are true as a clock. I'll show myself; I'll help her."

Jules gave a faint yelp, which brought Clara to the door.

Oh, Badger, you here! Go and call him back. Here is some money; run like a deer; tell him I want to speak with him—must speak with him. It's about Lady Hope; but no matter. Why don't you start, Badger? It's half an hour since I first told you."

But Badger did not start. He stood a little way from the door, examining the money she had given him, by the moonlight, and muttering to himself; when the impatient girl broke out again.

"A shilling! Was it only a shilling I gave you? How provoking! I thought it was gold. Well, start! start! and I'll make it a sovereign—two, three—only bring him back!"

Old Badger went off with a rush now. Ordering Jules to stay with the young mistress and mind the gate, he made swift progress down the road.

"I say, sir! I say! Halloo! I say!"

Hepworth checked his rapid walk, and looked back. Badger came up with a run, feeling that some extra exer-

tion was necessary, when so much gold lay in the question.

"There is a person—well, a lady—a young lady—who wishes to have you turn back, sir. She is waiting at the lodge, sir; and I promised to bring you back, dead or alive, sir—dead or alive!"

Hepworth felt his heart give a great leap. Was it possible that Clara could have followed him? or was it Lady Hope?

"A lady!" he said, "and at the lodge?"

"A young lady—such as isn't commonly seen following young gents by moonlight; but come, sir, she is waiting."

Hepworth turned at once, and retraced his steps. Clara saw him approaching the gate, and swinging it back, ran to meet him, with tears still quivering on her anxious face.

She passed Badger, who was resolved to earn his money at least by discretion, and moved in great haste toward the lodge, never once looking back, as in honor bound, he told Jules in his next confidential conversation.

"Oh, Hepworth, how cruel! how wicked! Tell me truly, were you going without a word?"

Clara had clasped both hands over her lover's arm, and was slowly leading him back, with her face uplifted in sweet reproachfulness to his, and drawing deep, long sighs of thanksgiving that she had him there, chained by her linked hands.

"I do not know. How can I tell? Your father has dismissed me from his house."

"He has? I thought as much; and thinking so, came after you—but only to say that I love you dearly—ten times more since this has happened—and nothing on earth shall ever make me marry any other person."

Hepworth looked down into that generous face, and his own took a softer expression in the moonlight.

"Your father is against us," he said. "I think it must be open defiance, or separation—at any rate, for a time."

Clara's face clouded. She loved her father, and was a little afraid of him as well; but that was nothing to the passionate attachment she felt for Hepworth Closs. She would have defied the whole world rather than give him up; but open disobedience was a terrible thing to her. All at once she brightened.

"Some day, you know, I shall be my own mistress. We can wait. I am so young. When I am Countess of Carset, come and claim me. No one can stand between us then."

She spoke firmly, and with the dignity of deep feeling, standing upright and looking bravely into his face, as if she were a peeress already, and was ready to pledge all the honor of a long race of ancestors for the faith that was in her.

"Ah, if you were only the bright, handsome girl you seem, with no dignity to keep up, no belongings but your own sweet self, how grateful I should be! From this night, Clara, we would never part."

"Oh, if it were! If I hadn't anything to expect! But, no! My old grandmother will be sure to leave me everything she has, just out of spite, when all I want on earth is my liberty, and the love that belongs to me. How I should like to—"

"To what, Clara?"

"Nothing—only I was thinking how jolly it would be just to tie on my hat, button my jacket, and go off with you to America, where people can't die and leave you titles and things; but it is of no use thinking of such a thing.

It would break mamma Rachael's heart; and she needs me so much."

Hepworth caught his breath. The thought had been in his mind. But for his sister, I think he would have proposed it.

"Do not tempt me, darling. We cannot abandon her."

"Oh, no," answered Clara, pouting a little, "I didn't mean anything of the kind. Of course, we have got to part now; I know that."

She clung to his arm more closely, and made him walk slower. Both their faces grew pale and sad in the moonlight. She could not speak because of the sobs that came swelling into her throat. He was silent from a bitter sense of bereavement. After those few weeks of entire happiness, was he to be driven into the cold world again, leaving the angel of his paradise behind?

They were drawing near the gate now. Hepworth would not pass into the boundaries of a man who had wounded him so grievously, so he paused by the park-wall, snatched her to his bosom, kissed her lips, her eyes, her hair, blessing her with his soul, promising to find her again, to be faithful, begging her to love him and no one else, until he broke away from her and fled down the highway, dashing the tears from his eyes as he went.

She called after him. She ran a few paces with her arms extended, entreating him to come back; but he would not hear. All his brave manhood had been taxed to its utmost. He knew well enough that to go back was to take the girl with him, and he was not selfish enough for that.

So poor Lady Clara watched him, till he passed quite away into the shadows, with her back against the wall, and her hands hanging down loose, as they had fallen after her last cry. Then she crept slowly back through the gate,

which Badger had left open, and away into the depths of the park, crying as if her heart would break.

Badger saw her through the diamond-shaped panes of the lodge-window, and muttered:

"Poor thing, she has forgot the gold; but never mind, it will come."

CHAPTER XVII.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

LADY HOPE stood in the middle of the room, breathless. The supreme joy of her husband's presence drove every other feeling from her heart. She forgot her brother, her step-child, everything, in the one thought that he was near her. But, was it certain that he would come? How many months, nay, years, had passed since he had entered that room, once so dear to him that no other apartment in that spacious mansion seemed pleasant? She had allowed nothing to be changed since those days. Year by year those silken hangings and crimson cushions had lost their brightness and grown threadbare; but he had pressed those cushions and been shaded by the curtains, and that gave them a brightness and glory to her which no stuffs of India or cloth of gold could replace.

She knew that he was offended, and doubted. But would he come? His step grew slow; he paused. Would he retreat at last, and leave her there, in an agony of disappointment?

No—after a moment's hesitation, the steps advanced. The very certainty of his approach suffocated her. She had

not deemed herself so weak. All the strength left her frame.

She sank down upon a couch near the window. The moonlight fell over her like a veil of silver tissue, and through it she looked like the Rachael Closs of New York.

Lord Hope tore away the silvery veil with his presence, for the shadow of his tall person fell across it, throwing the woman back into darkness.

But the light which he took from her slanted across his face, and softened it back to youth. Rachael reached forth her arms.

"Oh, Norton! have you come back again?"

Her voice vibrated between passion and pathos. Her trembling limbs rustled the silken garments around her.

He stood looking at her, not sternly, but with grave sadness. It was nearly two months since they had met, but he did not advance, or even reach out his hand. Then she cried out, in a burst of bitter anguish:

"Oh, Norton, will you not speak to me?"

"Yes, Rachael," he said, very gently. "I came to speak with you."

Lord Hope advanced through the window. No lights were burning, for in her sadness Rachael had thought the moonbeams enough.

She moved upon the couch, looking in his face with pathetic entreaty.

He sat down after a moment's hesitation, and took her hand in his.

Awhile before that hand had been cold as ice, but now a glow of feverish joy warmed it, and her slender fingers clung around his with nervous force. She was afraid to loosen her clasp, lest he should leave her again.

"Ah, Norton! you have been away so long, so long!"

"Has that made you more unhappy, Rachael?"

"More unhappy? God help me! have I any happiness beyond your presence?"

"I sometimes think that we two might be less—"

Lord Hope paused. The hand in his seemed turning to marble.

"In mercy, do not say that, Norton! Surely you cannot return love like mine with hate so cruel!"

"We will not talk of hate, Rachael. It is an unseemly word."

"But you are angry with me?"

"No, the time has gone by when I can be angry with you, Rachael."

"Oh! have some mercy upon me, Norton, and tell me how I have lost your love—for you did love me."

"God only knows how well!" answered the man, with a throe of bitter passion breaking up the calm he had maintained.

"Tell me, then—tell me again! It is so long since I have had a happy thought! I will not be put off so! Now that you are here, in this room, with my hand in yours, I will not let you go! Tell me, Norton—oh, tell me why it is that you have changed so completely? This question haunts me. I dream of it in the night; I think of it all day long. Answer me. Though the truth cleave my heart, I would rather hear it! Why have you ceased to love me? Why is it that you can leave me so?"

"Rachael, I will answer you so far as this: I have not ceased to love you."

The woman uttered a cry, and fell down upon her knees at her husband's feet, in a storm of wild and happy tears. He raised her up, bent forward as if to kiss her, but drew back with a heavy sigh. She felt him recoil, and the shudder which chilled him reached her also.

"You love me, and yet shrink from my touch! Ah, me! what has dug this gulf between us?"

"It is the work of our own hands," he said, with strong emotion. "It is your curse and mine that we must love each other, Rachael—love each other, and yet be apart."

"Apart! Oh! will there be no end—no season—"

"Yes, Rachael, when we can both repent that we ever did love each other. Then, perhaps, a merciful God may forgive us the great sin which has been our happiness and our torment."

"But you love me? You *do* love me?"

"A thousand times better than my own miserable life!"

"And you speak of torment! Who shall ever dare say that word again to Rachael Closs? When they do, I will answer, 'He loves me! he loves me!'"

The woman sprang up, exulting. Her hands were clasped, her face was radiant. It seemed impossible that unhappiness should ever visit her again.

"Poor woman! Poor, unhappy woman!"

Hope took her hand in his, and drew her down to his side. She was shaking like a leaf in the wind. For the moment, her joy seemed complete.

"I cannot believe it! Say again, 'Rachael, I love you.'"

"Have I not said that it is your curse and mine?"

"Oh, Norton! how cruel, with that sweet word sinking into my heart, after pining and waiting for it so long! Do not withhold it from me, or think of it as a curse."

"Hush, Rachael! You are only exulting over Dead Sea fruit. It is all ashes, ashes. Words that, up to this time, I had forbidden to my lips, have been said, because of a terrible danger that threatens us. Rachael, did you know of the letter Hepworth sent me?"

Rachael was a brave woman, even in her faults, and would not deny anything.

"Yes, he wrote the letter here," she said.

"And you sanctioned his pursuit of my daughter?"

"Yes, Norton. I loved him; he was my only relative. That he might live near me was the last forlorn hope of my life. Before you condemn me, remember how few people exist in this world for me to love. I have no friends. I was so cold, so dreary! There was nothing left to me but your child and this one brother. How could I part with either of them? That was to be utterly alone!"

Lord Hope checked this pathetic plea. It shook his resolution, and that with a vigor she could not understand. He looked her steadily in the face.

"Rachael Closs, could you have given up my child to that man?"

Rachael fixed her wild eyes on the face turned upon her so sternly.

"Why, why?"

"Had you no thought of the ruin it would bring upon her?"

"Ruin? Did you say ruin?"

"Could you see that innocent girl's hand in his without thrills of painful recollection?"

"Why, he loves her; she loves him."

"So much the more painful."

"What do you mean?"

Her lips were white now, and the teeth gleamed and chattered between them.

"Have you no dread that he will bring that one event perpetually before us?"

Rachael shook her head.

"Does nothing tell you that he was mixed up in that tragedy?"

"What should tell me of that? It was the crime of a miserable old woman."

"Still you understand nothing of that which is a continual pain to me."

A burst of hysterical laughter answered him. The nerves of that woman were undoubtedly giving way.

"You are mocking me. It is only fiends who torment their victims. You are my husband, and should know better!"

"Rachael Closs, control yourself!"

"I am not Rachael Closs!" cried the woman, fiercely. "You would not have treated her so. It is Lady Hope you are putting to torture. Oh, Norton! what have I done to you? What have I done to you that you should mock me so?"

"I wish to save my child—to save myself."

"Well, is that all? She shall never speak to Hepworth again. Yes, what is my brother, or anybody in the world, compared to one smile from my husband?"

"And you will help me to reconcile Clara to that which must be?"

"I will do anything, everything that you wish, only do not leave me again."

"But I must sometimes go out."

"And I cannot go with you. Rachael Closs is not good enough for your high-born friends. Lady Carset has put her ban on your wife, and the nobility of England accept it. But for this I might have been the companion of your visits, the helpmate of your greatness—for I have the power. I could have done so much, so much in this great world of yours, but that old woman would not let me. It

is cruel! it is cruel! You would have loved me now as you did at first, but for her."

Lord Hope took Rachael's hand in his.

"Ah, Rachael!" he said, "if you could but understand the love which can neither be cherished nor cast away, which pervades a whole life, only to disturb it! Between you and me must ever come the shadow of a woman we cannot talk of, but who stands eternally between us two. Even in the first days of our passionate delirium I felt this viperous truth creeping under the roses with which we madly hoped to smother it. The thought grew and grew, like a parasite upon the heart. It clung to mine, bound it down, made it powerless. Oh, would to God the memory of that one night could be lifted from my soul! The presence of your brother here has brought it back upon me with terrible force. But, thank God, he is gone!"

"Gone! What, my brother? Am I never to see him again?"

"Not unless you wish to drive your husband from his own house. I will not be reminded, by any one connected with that night, that it was the mad passion of our love which drove that most unhappy woman from her home, her country, and, at last, into her grave!"

Rachael sat with her glittering eyes fastened on his face. She longed to ask a question; but it seemed to freeze upon her lips. But, at last, she spoke:

"Do you repent that love, then?"

"No! no! Would to God I had the power to repent! but I cannot, Rachael, with you by me!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE STORMY NIGHT AND SUNSHINY MORNING.

LADY CLARA found her way into the house unnoticed, and stole back to her own room, weary and heart-sick from the excitement she had passed through.

For more than an hour she sat by her window looking out upon the moonlight which flooded the lawn, and the dense black shadows of the trees beyond.

The stillness gradually hushed her sobs into a sad calm, and, without other light than that which came from the moon, she crept into her bed, and lay there, as if buried in a snow-drift, cold and shivering from exhausting emotions and exposure to the night air.

She could not sleep, but lay thinking of the man who had been driven from the house that night, wondering where he was, and when, upon the earth, she would meet him.

All at once she started up and uttered a faint cry. Some one had passed swiftly through her door, and was approaching the bed. She saw the face, as it crossed the window, and sank to the pillow again.

"Mamma Rachael, is it you?" she gasped.

Lady Hope sat down on the edge of the bed. She seemed deathly cold; but there was a far-off look in her eyes, as the moonlight fell upon them, which seemed unnatural to the girl.

Clara put back the bed-clothes and reached out her arms; for Lady Hope was in her night-dress, and her feet were uncovered.

"Come into bed, mamma Rachael; you shiver so."

Lady Hope took no heed, but arose slowly from the

bed, and, going to a dressing-table, poured some water from a ewer that stood there, and began to wash her hands.

Clara could see her in the moonlight, and sat up in the bed, afraid and wondering.

"Mamma, mamma Rachael," she faltered, terrified by the sound of her voice, "why are you staying out in the cold like that?"

Lady Hope shook the drops from her fingers, and leaving the table, began to pace the floor. At last Clara sprang from the bed and took hold of her.

Every nerve in the woman's body seemed to quiver under that touch; she uttered a shrill cry, and clung to the girl to save herself from falling.

"Come to the bed with me, mamma. Your hand is cold; it touches mine like snow. That is right; put your arms around me. Poor, poor mamma! how your heart struggles! There, there; the chill is going off. We will get each other warm; for we love each other, you and I, mamma Rachael; nothing on this earth can change that!"

Rachael allowed herself to be taken to the bed; but she trembled violently.

"You are troubled about Hepworth; but I have promised—I do promise. Papa, nor all the world to help him, could change me. Besides, there is another thing; we both love him; that would make us cling together, if nothing else," said Clara.

"Ah, there it is—there it is! Hepworth is gone, and neither you nor I must ever see him again!" answered Rachael.

"But we will! He loves us. I will marry him some day, if I live."

"Oh, no, no! That can never be! Never! never!"

Rachael was fearfully agitated. Clara tore her form from those clinging arms.

"What! you?—you turned against us—you!" she exclaimed, pushing Rachael back from her pillow, and sitting up in the moonlight. "Has my father driven us all crazy?"

"Hush, child, hush! I have been thinking of that. It seems to me that I am mad already. Be kind; oh, be kind! Do not urge me on. To-night I have had such thoughts!"

The girl was frightened; for Rachael was bending over, and the fire of her great black eyes seemed hot as it was terrible.

"Great Heavens!" she cried, "what has my father done to you?"

Rachael had exhausted herself. She lay down, panting for breath; her lips were apart; the edges of her teeth were visible; she did not answer.

Clara forgot her own cause of offence, and laid her hand over those wide-open, burning eyes.

"Poor mamma Rachael! now try and sleep. I never saw you so nervous before. Did you know it? you were walking in your sleep."

The cool touch of that hand soothed the woman. Clara felt the eyelids close under her palm; but a heavy pulse was beating in the temples, which resisted all her gentle mesmerism for a long time; but, after a while, the worn frame seemed to rest, and Clara sank down in weary sleepiness by her side.

When she awoke again Lady Hope was gone. It was the dark hour of the morning; the moon had disappeared from the heavens; the shadows, in diffusing themselves, spread out into general darkness.

"Ah, I have had a weary dream," she murmured; "I

have heard of such things, but never had anything dark upon my sleep before. How real it was! My father home, Hepworth gone, my mother in this bed, trembling, moaning, and, worst of all, against me and him. Ah, it was a terrible dream!"

She turned upon her pillow, full of sleepy thankfulness, and the next instant had deluded herself into a tranquil sleep.

A rapid fall of hoofs upon the avenue shook the stillness. Nearer and nearer they came; then a clang of the great bronze knocker at the principal entrance awoke her thoroughly.

The girl listened; her dream was fast taking shape, and she knew that it was a reality. Had this untimely arrival anything to do with it? A knock at her chamber-door, and her father's voice answered the question.

She was to get up, and prepare for a journey at once; her maid was packing already.

What was it? What had happened? Lord Hope forgot that he had not told her. The old Countess of Carset had sent for her. She must prepare to start at once for Houghton.

Clara sprang up, ready to offer battle to the old countess a second time in behalf of her stepmother.

While she was being dressed, Lord Hope stood in the corridor without, reading the delicate, upright characters in which the old countess clothed her thoughts.

"MY LORD:—Circumstances have happened of late which convince me that I have been hasty and unjust to your wife, and have taken offense too readily from the independence exhibited by your child, my grand-daughter. It is my desire to atone for this, as the men and women of our house have ever atoned for injustice. The infirmities

of old age, and more than ordinary ill-health forbid me to visit Oakhurst, which might, perhaps, be properly expected of one who admits herself to have been in the wrong; but, perhaps you and Lady Hope will permit Lady Clara to come to me here a few weeks, in which time, I trust, she will learn to know and love her grandmother.

"Presuming upon your generosity, I have sent my steward and my own maid, that she may have proper protection on her journey. After my grand-daughter has been at Houghton long enough to feel that it is to be her home in the future, I shall expect the pleasure of a visit from you and Lady Hope.

"LOUISA, Countess of Carset."

Never, since the day in which he brought the first Lady Hope home, a bride, had such intense satisfaction filled the earl's heart as this letter brought him.

Involved, as he was, with pecuniary difficulties, harassed about his daughter, humiliated by the silent rejection by which the nobility in the neighborhood had repudiated his wife for so many years, this concession so nobly made by the old countess, was an opening of good fortune which promised a solution of all these difficulties. It had, in truth, lifted a heavy burden from his life.

With the letter in his hand Lord Hope went to his wife's dressing-room, where he found her, hollow-eyed, and so nervous that a faint cry broke from her as he entered the room.

She felt the loss of her brother terribly, notwithstanding what seemed to be a ready concession to the harsh treatment he received, and her sleep, as we know, had been restless and broken in the night.

She was cold and shivering, though the weather was

warm, and had wrapped a shawl, full of richly-tinted colors, over her morning-dress, and sat cowering under it like some newly-caught animal.

Lord Hope felt that his inhospitable expulsion of her brother, and the cruel conversation that had followed it, was the cause of this nervous depression, and his heart smote him. With the letter open in his hand he went up to her chair, and bending over it, kissed Rachael on the forehead.

A smile broke over those gloomy features; the heavy eyes lighted up; she lifted her face to his.

"Oh, you do love me—you do love me!"

"My poor Rachael! how can you permit words that sprang out of the gloomy memories which Hepworth brought to trouble you so? Come, smile again, for I have good news for you—for us all."

"Good news! Is Hepworth coming back?"

"Forget Hepworth just now, and read that."

Lady Hope took the letter and read it through. When she gave it back, her face was radiant.

"At last—at last!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Norton, this will lift me to my proper place by your side. Now, now I will make you proud of me! These patricians shall learn that all great gifts do not spring from birth—that genius has a nobility which can match that given by kings."

Rachael started up in her excitement, flung the shawl away, and stood a priestess where she had just cowered like a wounded animal.

"Now we shall be all the world to each other, and walk through this proud life of yours, fairly mated. Great Heavens! after a night like the last, who could have expected such a morning? But Clara, you will let her go?"

"She is preparing to go now."

"My girl—my bright, beautiful girl! She has always been the angel in my path. But for her, this might never have come. But we cannot give her up—not entirely. You will not consent to that?"

"If we do, it will be only for a time, Rachael. The countess is very old."

"Yes, it will not be for long, and we can trust Clara. I will go to her now. She will need my help, and every minute she stays under this roof is a grain of gold which I must not lose. Oh! Norton, this is glorious news that you have brought me! What can have wrought this change in the old countess? I am going to Clara now."

As Lady Hope opened the door, Clara stood upon the threshold, ready for her journey. She knew that this letter was the first that her father had received from Lady Carset for years, and was curious to know its meaning. She could not remember when Lady Carset's name had been spoken in that house without bitterness, and was astonished to hear the cheerful animation with which it was spoken now.

"Am I really to go, papa? Do you wish it? Is mamma Rachael willing? Let me read the letter, please."

Lord Hope gave her the letter, and replied as she was reading it:

"Yes, my child, it is but right. The old lady is your nearest female relative."

Here Clara reached out her hand to Lady Hope, but kept her eyes on the letter, reading and listening at the same time.

"And you think it best, mamma?" inquired Clara, folding the letter. "What a delicate, stately hand the old lady writes! You don't object?"

"Object, Clara! No, no. I long to part with you, for the first time in my life."

"In some things," said Lord Hope, "the old lady has been cruelly dealt by. Say this from me, Clara. The concessions must not rest all on one side."

"Of course, papa; I will tell her, if you desire it. But why did she not ask you and mamma at once? It is awful lonesome going to that grim old castle by myself."

"It is only for a few weeks," answered Rachael, hastily. "But, dear child, you must not let this old lady stand between you and us. She may have more to give, but no one on earth can ever love you like us."

"Don't I know it? Is that the carriage? Dear me, how things are rushed forward this morning! Am I all right, mamma Rachael? Kiss me once more. What! tears in your eyes? I won't go a step if you don't stop crying! What do I care for Lady Carset, a cross old thing, and old as the hills!"

"Clara, I hear the carriage."

"So do I, papa; but what's the use of hurrying?"

"I wish your grandmother to know that I hold no enmity by my promptness in sending you."

"Oh, is that it? Well, good-bye, mamma Rachael. One more kiss — again — again! Now, good-bye in earnest."

Lady Hope left the room to hide her tears. Clara followed her father to the carriage.

"Poor, poor mamma! How pale and ill she was last night! Oh, papa, do kiss her good-bye for me just once again, when you go back."

Lord Hope turned a smiling look upon the girl, and she added, half in excuse:

"It breaks my heart to leave her so."

Lord Hope did not answer, but folded a cloak around his daughter, helped her into the carriage, and took a seat himself.

Margaret was already seated by the coachman.

"I understand well enough that I am not to travel with my young lady on her journey," she said; "but, so far as her way lies toward London, I am going. My sister wants me there, and I do just as lief be in a tomb as stay at Oakhurst when Lady Clara is away. So, as she is willing, I shall just leave her at the junction, and go up to London. That I can do in spite of the crabbed old thing at Houghton, who wants her at first all to herself."

This was said in confidence to the coachman, who muttered something under his breath about feeling uncommonly lonesome when Mistress Margaret was away from Oakhurst.

Directly after this the carriage drew up at the station, where a grim-looking woman of fifty stood ready to receive the young lady from the hands of her father.

It was not often that Lord Hope was known to exhibit any violent emotion; but Clara felt that he gave way a little when she threw her arms around his neck in parting — and Badger, after he opened the gate to let his master pass through, observed to Jules that something out of the common must be going on up yonder, for all night people had been going in and out like ghosts, and the master seemed like another man.

CHAPTER XIX.

AFTER THE FAILURE.

WHEN Caroline reached home, after that involuntary retreat from the theatre, she went to her own room with Eliza, and falling upon the bed, lay perfectly still, so

exhausted and crushed, that she scarcely breathed. She had disgraced herself, and she had seen *him*.

Alas, alas! he had witnessed her defeat, her bitter humiliation!

Why had she not told him before, that her mother was an actress, a singer, of whose reputation he had heard; that her own destiny must be guided by this woman, and could hardly have a higher aim than she had already reached. He would think that she had deceived him, and she had, but with no premeditation. She had honestly intended to tell him everything, but the suddenness of their departure from Italy had rendered all explanation impossible. What could she do but hide herself forever from him and the whole world? She forgot the bursts of applause that had followed the first effort of her voice, and sank everything together in one sweep of bitter shame.

"My darling! my poor darling!"

It was Brown who had crept into her room, crest-fallen and drooping, like a man stunned by some heavy blow. Caroline started up.

"Oh! my friend! You are sorry for me, yet I have disappointed you so; my heart aches! my heart aches! but what can I do?"

"Never mind," answered the tender-hearted man. "It was the fright, stage fright—a terrible thing; but it seldom comes twice. Why, that woman, your mother I mean, broke down over and over again, but the parts were so small, no one observed it enough to clap or hiss, while you sang like an angel, up to the very minute you fainted. I never saw anything like it."

Caroline sank back to her pillow, moaning. She was still in her theatrical costume, and its glitter sickened her.

"Don't take on so," persisted the kind musician. "It was not a failure. No one will consider it so. On the con-

trary, it can be made to tell, and your next appearance will be an ovation."

Caroline started to her elbow again.

"My next appearance! and you say that! You! you! Oh! Mr. Brown, I did not think you would turn against me!"

"Turn against you, my child?" Tears trembled in the man's voice, and the words quivered on his lips as he added: "My poor darling. Do you not know that old Brown would die for you?"

"Then keep me from the stage; snatch me from a life that I loathe. I tell you, all this is against my nature. I have no genius to carry me forward, no ambition, no hope. Oh! that is gone, quite."

"But it is an honorable profession," faltered Brown, in his distress. "Think how many noble geniuses have found immortality on the stage."

"I know it, I know it well; but they were led that way, heart and soul, while I have no wish for fame or anything that it could bring. What does a woman want with immortality—above all, a poor young girl like me, whose very heart trembles in her bosom, when a crowd of strange eyes are turned upon her, as they were on me to-night?"

"But you will soon get over that."

"No. I never shall. This one night has broken up my life, and well nigh killed me. Let what may come, I will starve rather than tread that stage again."

"Hush! dear, hush! This passion will make you worse."

"But I mean it, Eliza, and I say it here and now, when you and Mr. Brown, the only friends I have on earth, are standing by. Think for me, Eliza, and you also, my kind, kind guardian!"

"Ah, if I had the power," said Brown, answering Eliza's

appealing look with a mournful shake of the head; "but the madame will never give her up."

"She must," said Caroline, kindling with desperate opposition: "I am not her slave. God does not give up the soul and conscience of a child to her mother."

"Especially one who never did a thing for her child, but left her for others to bring up," broke in Eliza, uttering a bitter truth, in her angry pity for the girl. "Mr. Brown, all that I have got to say is this: you and I must stand by this young cretur, let her do what she will. She is more our child than hers. I stand by that. If she don't want to put on this splendiferous dress again, why it shall not come within a rod of her. If her heart is set against singing on the stage, we are not the people to see her dragged there against her will. You stand by me, I'll stand by you, and we'll roll ourselves like a rock in that woman's way, if she attempts to force our child into the theatre again."

"But how can we oppose her? She has the power. We have not, at this moment, five pounds among us."

Eliza's face fell as if it had been suddenly unlocked.

"No more we have, and in a strange country, too," she said, dolefully.

Here Caroline joined in.

"But I can teach. If I please all those people, surely I can teach."

"Sure enough!" said Eliza, brightening a little. "What do you say to that, Mr. Brown?"

"We must take time. Perhaps there will be no cause for trouble. When it comes in earnest, you shall not fight alone, Eliza. So comfort yourself, my child. The old man would rather beg for bread on the highway than see you forced to anything that is so distasteful. Now try and sleep."

Brown bent down and smoothed the girl's hair with his

hand. Then he turned from her with tears in his eyes, and crept out of the room.

Caroline followed him with wistful eyes until the door closed. Then she turned to Eliza.

"Oh! Eliza, do this one thing for me, if you can. Let, let no one come in to-night. I can endure no more."

"They'll have to knock me down and trample on me if they do, that is all," answered the handmaiden. "My gracious! How I wish we were in our own little house again up in Sing-Sing."

"Oh! if we were!" sighed the girl. "Why did we ever leave it?"

"Because we were a couple of born fools, that's why!" answered the maid. "Born fools! and I the biggest, the oldest, the most outrageous fool of all! Wasn't we independent? Couldn't you have took scholars, and I washing by the dozen? Hadn't we the sweetest little garden in that whole town? such cabbages, such onions, and lettuce headed like cabbage, and tender as—as flowers! Whenever I get sick over these French dishes, I think of that garden, and the cow, and the shoat that knew me when I came to the pen with corn in my apron, and gave a little grunt, as if I'd been his sister. Then my heart turns back to the old home, like a sunflower, and I say to myself, 'You perposterous old maid, you! what did you let that poor young thing come from under that honest roof for? You was old enough to know better, if she wasn't; but you had an idea of seeing the world, of dressing up and being a lady's maid, of hearing whole crowds of young men stamp and clap and whistle over that innocent young cretur. You didn't think that she might faint dead away, and—and be brought home heart-broken. Home, indeed! as if this box of gilding could be a home to any American woman! It's perposterous!'"

Here Eliza broke off with a half-uttered word on her lips, for her speech had brought the old home back so vividly to the heart-sick girl that she was sobbing upon her pillow like a child.

A little bustle down stairs, a knock at the door, and, as Eliza ran forward, Olympia pushed it open and came in.

She saw Caroline prostrate on the bed, with that delicate robe wrapped around and crushed under her, and the lace shawl falling from the pillow to the carpet, like a trail of frost.

The sight urged her into one of those quick passions that sometimes threw her whole household into consternation.

"Heavens! what extravagance!" she cried. "Does the creature know that lace like that is worth its weight in diamonds? A silk robe, too, which could not be purchased out of Paris, tumbled up in a wad, and one mass of wrinkles! I see! I see! the revenues of a duke would not meet such extravagance! Get up! Get up, I say! and if you must make a goose of yourself, do it at less cost!"

"Hush, madam! she's sick! She's broken-hearted!" retorted Eliza, turning fiercely red and planting herself before the shrinking girl.

"Well, she must break her heart in something less costly than a French dress worth thirty pounds, and point lace that cannot be got at any price! Just get up, my young lady, and do your crying in less expensive costume! The proper dress for tragedy is white muslin, but just now a night-gown will do."

Caroline arose without a word, and began to undress herself. She no longer shrank or trembled, for the indignant blood rushed to the surface, and pride gave her strength. Eliza took the robe as she cast it off, and folded it with an emphatic sweep of her hand.

"A pretty mess you have made of it," said Olympia,

tossing the lace aside with her foot, and tearing it on the buckle of her shoe, "with your perverse obstinacy—broken up the most splendid debut I ever saw on any stage, and making yourself and your failure the town's talk! if the critics had not been my friends, the whole thing would have been utter ruination; and here you are, with cheeks like flame, looking as haughty as a duchess."

"I am not haughty or perverse," said Caroline, wiping the hot tears from her eyes, "but weary and ill."

"Ill! with that color?" sneered Olympia.

"It is fever," Eliza broke in. "Ten minutes ago she was white as the pillow. You are making her worse and worse, I can tell you that."

"And I can tell you that impudent tongue will lose you a good place within the next ten minutes, if it is not bridled and well curbed. I stand no nonsense from servants. Understand that!"

Caroline cast an imploring glance on her maid, who dashed both hands down upon the dress she was folding, and ground her teeth in silent rage, as Olympia finished the threat with a little snap of her slender fingers.

"What was the matter with you? I have had no chance to ask, with your countesses and duchesses swarming about, as if you had some acquaintances that your own mother could not reach! What came over you? I will know!"

"I was faint and frightened," said Caroline, in a low voice. "The whole thing broke me down."

"But there was something else. I will know it!"

Caroline was silent.

"Will you speak, miss?"

"I have nothing more to say. You could see how ill I was."

"But not the cause; it is that I wish to understand."

Caroline sat down on the side of her bed and remained silent, with her eyes on the floor. She had no answer to give.

"Will you tell the truth, or must I search it out? I was watching you; I saw your eyes and the man whose glance struck you down."

Caroline gave a start, and covered her face with both hands.

"What have you in common with young Lord Hilton?"

The hands dropped from that burning face, and two great, dilating eyes, in which the tears stood, were turned on the angry woman.

"Young Lord Hilton! I do not know him."

The words came faintly from the girl's lips—she was bewildered.

"Why did he drop his glass and bend over the box with that look in his face, then? Why did you start and trample back on your train? Why did you give him that piteous glance just as your eyes closed? The audience might not have seen it, but I did, I did."

"I—I do not understand," faltered the girl.

"Do not understand, miss!"

"How should I, not knowing the person you speak of?"

"Don't lie to me, girl! I am an old bird, and have had my own flights too often not to understand a look when I see it. You have met that man before—I don't know where or how, but you have."

"You speak of a person I never saw or heard of," answered the girl, trembling with inward doubt; "how can I tell you anything about him?"

Olympia almost believed her, and, for once, her acute penetration was baffled; but a doubt remained, and she turned to Eliza.

"If you know anything about this, tell me now; it will be better for her and for you."

"I haven't anything to tell, Mrs. Olympia; not a thing!"

"Was any one admitted to the house near Florence?"

"Yes, ma'am, there was."

"Well, a young gentleman?"

"Yes; one young un, and another, older."

"Who were they?"

"The man who taught her how to speak Italian and the music fellow."

"Only those two?"

"Not another soul came or went while we stayed in that house."

"And she conversed with no one on the way?"

"Not a soul."

Olympia turned to go out. She was not convinced; having no truth in herself she found no power of faith in others; but, for the time, the blunt honesty of the servant and proud sincerity of the girl silenced her, and she went out, muttering:

"I shall get at the bottom of it yet."

Then Caroline turned to Eliza:

"Can it be? I saw no other."

"I haven't a doubt of it," said Eliza. "I always mistrusted him for an Englishman."

CHAPTER XX.

LORD HILTON TAKES SUPPER WITH OLYMPIA.

SHE had fallen ill. The prima donna of a single hour was lying in Olympia's bijou of a house, struggling with a nervous fever. The whole town had been made aware of the mournful fact; for the manager had spread the news broadcast through the journals, thus displacing disappointment with such overwhelming sympathy as the distress of beauty and genius is sure to excite. For more than a week, now, the prevailing topic had been this young girl; first the promise of a brilliant debut, then the momentary triumph and sudden breakdown; now came the news of her illness, true, in so much that she was seriously ill, but exaggerated into a romance which gave her out as dying with a shock of a too sensitive nature.

Olympia sang gloriously to crowded houses. In the romance woven around this young girl her parentage had been hinted at, and the practiced woman of the stage had managed to turn the public rumor into popularity for herself.

She had taken up the opera where Caroline had sunk down, and carried it triumphantly forward, filling the world with admiration of herself and sympathy for the girl.

On the morning when Caroline's illness was made public, some young men were seated in the window of a club-house, and one of them threw down the Times with an impatient movement.

"So we are not to have this new singer again to-morrow night or the next," he said. "Here is Olympia's name in the bills, while the other is ill with something on the brain or nerves."

"All a sham, to enhance the public interest, I dare say,"

answered another, taking up the journal. "There is nothing these musical people will not do for popularity. But it really was not needed here; the girl has beauty enough to carry her forward, even without her glorious voice. For my part, I am all in a fever to see her again."

A young man sat in this circle, apparently occupied by the panorama drifting through the streets. As the conversation went on, the color came and went in his face, and his eyes began to burn; but he said nothing, while the others went on:

"Who is the girl? what is her real name? Some say she is an American; others, that she is Olympia's own daughter, to whom all names are alike; but, then, where was the woman Olympia born? Now and then a word drops from the pretty lips which is purely American; but then she has been all over the world, and has gathered something from all nations, so that one can never make a true guess about her."

"Does this girl look like her?" inquired one of the young men, who had not been at the opera last night.

"No, not exactly," was the answer. "She is taller, more queenly, in fact; quite a different style. This new girl is superb."

"While Olympia is simply bewildering, changeable as the sky, erratic as a comet. We all understand Olympia."

The young man, who had kept silent till now, joined in the conversation, but his voice was constrained, and a little husky.

"Who is this woman, Olympia?"

The other young men laughed at the question.

"Who is Olympia? Why, the most bewitching, unprincipled, delightful bit of wickedness that has been thrown on the world for years. Don't tell us that you are to learn anything of Olympia at this time."

"I have heard of her, and seen her too, but only as a singer. What I ask is about her life, her principles, her character as a woman."

"And you ask that of us, my dear fellow? What nonsense! Have we not said that she is an actress?"

"Well, what then? An actress may be well-principled, honest, honorable, and modest, too, as any woman living. I asked if this woman, Olympia, the patroness, mother, or what you will, of this new singer, is one of these?"

"Don't ask any of us to endorse or condemn Olympia. We know that she gives the most delicious little suppers in the world, sings like a siren, smiles like an angel, and gets more and more fascinating as she grows older, as fruit ripens with age. No one ever thinks of asking her how old she is, or where she was born. It is enough that her beauty is in its summer, her voice perfect, and that she, who perhaps reigned over our fathers, holds us as her slaves. As for honor, dignity, principle, and all that, my dear fellow, who ever expects such things in a woman like our Olympia?"

"Yet she has had the training of this new singer."

"Training? Why it is said that the girl is really her own daughter."

"I heard you say as much," answered the young man, drily.

Then another voice broke in.

"You seem so much interested in these people, Hilton, —why not go and see for yourself? I will introduce you."

"When?"

"To-night. The Olympia has a little supper after the opera."

"But I thought the young lady was ill."

"Oh! that will make no difference. Olympia is a woman to enjoy herself, if Death sat next door. She will

be certain to have her little supper. Will you go? Is it an engagement? If so, I will send her a note."

"Yes, I will go."

That night Olympia held high festival at her pretty house, which overlooked one of the loveliest parks in London. Among her guests was young Lord Hilton, the grandson of one of the proudest old earls in the kingdom.

Olympia was delighted at the presence of this man, who had never before been lured into her circle.

She had another reason for her satisfaction. The look which had disturbed her still preyed on her mind. She had a keen desire to learn how far it had relation to the young girl who lay ill upstairs. In order, if possible, to inform herself, she selected the young man to sit next her at table, and artfully led the conversation to the night of Caroline's failure.

"You were present," she said, "that night. Was ever success more perfect, or failure more complete? It drove me wild!"

"I was present," said Hilton, very quietly, for he felt her eyes upon him with that slow, sidelong glance that has so much cunning in it, and this put him on his guard.

"She was coming out so magnificently," said Olympia, still vigilant, but with the white lids drooping over her eyes, "when, all of a sudden, her voice broke, and she fell. It must have been something in the audience."

"Perhaps," said the young man; "but what? I was looking at her all the time, and saw nothing. In fact, the house was very still. I have seldom seen a crowd so breathless."

Olympia turned one long glance on that face, and saw it was immovable in all the strong, but finely-cut features. Her suspicions grew weaker now, and she gave her attention more generally to the guests, who were becoming a

little impatient of the exclusive attention paid to Lord Hilton; but the craft of this woman was as deep as her feelings were superficial. She could not quite throw off the idea that, in some way, this very person had been the cause of her defeat, and that his visit to her house that night would end in some effort to obtain an interview with the young creature who lay so ill upstairs.

But she was mistaken. Hilton asked no questions, made no effort to draw her out, but drifted into the general conversation pleasantly enough, until the supper was near its close, and the wines had begun to do their work.

Then the entertainment swept into an orgie; tongues were loosened, eyes brightened and swam in moisture.

Snatches of bacchanalian songs broke from the laughing lips of Olympia.

She had been in a little awe of her new guest; but now her real nature broke out. Her wit sparkled like the champagne with which her red lips were continually moist; her eyes shone under the droop of those long white lids. She grew confidential with the young noble, and was easily led by the cool, versatile man, into conversation that she would have stubbornly avoided earlier in the evening. In one of her bold snatches of song she rounded off with a rollicking impromptu, which carried all the richness and force of her voice with it. This threw the whole company into a tumult of applause, but Hilton sat quietly and looked on, with a smile of supreme contempt quivering about his lips.

"Ha," said Olympia, filling his glass with her own hands, "you neither drink nor care for my singing. It is only the youth and beauty of my daughter that can move Lord Hilton."

Her daughter! The face of the young man turned white, and his lips closed sharply. He looked at the woman by

his side, the flushed cheeks, the soft, slumbrous eyes, with absolute repulsion. He hated the very thought that the young creature he had found, like a bird, in that sweet Italian home, could belong in anything to a woman like that. Still, she had, in her reckless inadvertency, called her daughter, and though the very idea drove the blood to his heart, it was only by a cold pallor that the shock this one word had given to him was visible.

"Your daughter is very beautiful," he said, in a low voice.

"Did I call Caroline my daughter? Oh, well, it is no matter—the truth will out sometime, though I would rather wait till her success is assured. When she becomes famous, I shall glory in claiming her; but let me warn you, it is a secret as yet. You will understand. One does not care to own a girl as tall as that while the gloss is on one's hair. Nothing but the most wonderful success will induce me to acknowledge her before the world."

"But if she is your child—"

"I have said that she is my child; but it is a secret, and I did not mean to talk about it. Tell me, now, did you discover no likeness?"

"I did not observe."

"Still, they think her so beautiful."

Lord Hilton made no answer. The conversation had become irksome to him; but some person at the table took the last word from Olympia's lips and repeated it aloud.

"Beautiful! You must be speaking of our new prima donna. In my opinion she is perfect; but you, Lord Hilton, have only seen her from the stage—can form no idea of her loveliness, or of her voice either. There was nothing, the other night, that could compare with her singing at our little supper here. Besides, her beauty, to be

appreciated, must be seen close. There is not a fault in her face or form, I can assure you."

Lord Hilton's face flushed angrily, then a slow whiteness crept over it again, and he bent his head, unable to speak. The task he had imposed on himself had become terribly painful.

Olympia was not particularly pleased with this high praise of another, though all her ambitious hopes lay in the success of the person on whom these encomiums were lavished. She began to shake up the sparkles in her wine by swaying the glass to and fro with her hand, and a sullen frown crept over her face.

"She is obstinate as a mule," she muttered; "tall and proud as Lucifer—not at all like me. But they will rave about her beauty, just as if she were more likely to live than to die."

"What did you say?" cried Lord Hilton, sharply; "die! die! Is there any danger? Is she so ill?"

Olympia lifted her sleepy eyelids and flashed a suspicious glance at him.

"Ah!" she exclaimed; "are you there! I thought so."

"You are not answering me," was the cold reply.

"You asked if there existed any danger, and I answer, yes. Did you think we were practicing stage effects in the journals? My poor Caroline is ill—very ill."

"And what made her ill?"

"What made her break down, after such glorious promise? Why, after she sang before my friends here, as fresh as a lark, and drove them all so wild that I, Olympia, was almost overlooked? There never were such expectations; but see how it ended—a total failure, and brain fever."

"Did you say brain fever?"

The young man scarcely spoke above a breath.

"Yes, it is on the brain, or the nerves, I am not quite sure which; but the doctors look terribly grave when I ask them about her, and speak as if she would die."

"Would to God she might die!" exclaimed the young man, trembling from head to foot with a burst of agitation that would not be suppressed longer.

"What—What?" exclaimed Olympia, starting back in affright. The glass fell from her hold, and a rivulet of amber-hued wine flashed along the snow of the table-cloth while she sat gazing upon the young lord.

"Excuse me; I was thinking of something else," he said, with a strong effort of self-control. "May I presume on your favor, and steal away, now? The rest will not miss me, I think."

Olympia nodded her head hastily. The spilled wine was dripping on her dress, so she started up, and Lord Hilton withdrew while she was shaking the drops from its silken folds, and creating general confusion by her laughing outcries.

Lord Hilton looked back as he crossed the passage, and shuddered at the picture of riotous luxury that supper-table presented.

"And she was among them, in a scene like that," he said, as the door closed after him.

CHAPTER XXI.

ON THE WAY TO HOUGHTON CASTLE.

At the junction of the railroad where Margaret changed cars for London, a young man, who had just arrived by the train, took the seat left vacant, and arranged himself comfortably for a protracted journey. Lady Clara watched him with some interest, and more than once caught a glance from his fine eyes as they wandered from the pages of his novel and dwelt upon her own bright face. Clara had been left to her own devices while preparing for her journey, and the antique attendant who had been sent to protect her was grievously scandalized by the jaunty little sailor's hat and double-breasted jacket which she had selected for her travelling costume. But the woman had been bred to almost abject subservience, and had no idea of venturing upon spoken criticism or advice. She was greatly troubled, however, about the impression this singular costume might produce on her old mistress, and felt really shocked when she saw the half-puzzled, half-amused expression of their fellow-passenger's face, as his eyes first encountered the future countess.

By-and-by the old woman fell into deeper consternation, for she began to remember that handsome face, in spite of the brown beard that curved like a bow over the upper lip, and swept down toward his bosom in soft, silken waves that a child would long to bury its little hands in.

"It is Lord Hilton, the grandson of the old earl," she muttered, in silent consternation; "and to see her like this, after all the mistress has been planning, is terrible to think of."

The young man had been so much occupied with the younger and prettier face that any regard for that of the old servant was impossible; but after a while his eyes fell on those hard outlines, and he gave a start of recognition which made the old lady move restlessly in her seat.

"Why, Mrs. Judson, is it possible that I find you so far from home!" he exclaimed. "What can possibly have come over the old lady that she is willing to part with you for a journey long or short?"

"My lady is not so well as we were when you left this neighborhood for foreign parts, my lord. Indeed, I am much afraid you will find her greatly altered. She is now almost entirely confined to her room."

"I am sorry to hear that. Lady Carset is, after all, an aged woman; but it would be mournful to see her broken down. Let me think. She is quite as old, if not older, than my grandfather, is she not?"

"There is not a year between them, I have heard my father say," answered Judson, with a prim consciousness of the delicate subject they had trenched upon; "not that I know of myself."

"Certainly not. But my grandfather—it is some weeks since I heard of him."

"The earl is quite well, my lord. He was at the castle only last week, and spent a long morning with my lady."

"Indeed!" muttered the young man. "That probably accounts for my summons home."

"She had been uncommonly anxious for a long time, and at last sent for him to come and see her."

"Very natural. They are old friends."

"Then, my lord, she sent me on this journey—not that I came alone. The steward is on the train. My lady would not permit her grand-daughter to travel with but one attendant."

"Her grand-daughter?"

"I beg pardon, my lord, but this young lady is Lord Hope's daughter."

Hilton lifted his hat and met Lady Clara's look of smiling surprise with a courteous bend of the head, but her quick eye caught the sudden glow that swept his face, and wondered at it. She wondered still more when a grave expression followed the blush; and, instead of making himself agreeable, he opened the novel that lay on the seat, and seemed to be occupied by its pages, though she remarked, with an inward chuckle, that he never turned a page.

After a while the young man laid down his book, wearily, and Clara saw his chest heave slowly as he breathed a long, deep, but unconscious sigh.

"He is in trouble, like me," was her quick thought. "Perhaps his grandfather is a hard, cruel old man, and drives everything he loves out of doors, without caring how he may feel about it, or perhaps—"

Clara might have gone on conjecturing all sorts of possibilities; but that moment the train stopped at a small town, and close by the station she saw an old woman, with a pile of crimson-checked peaches and some pears on a table beside her. An exclamation broke from her, and she leaned eagerly forward just as the carriage-door was unlocked.

"Oh, how splendid! such peaches! such pears!" she exclaimed, feeling in the pocket of her sacque for some loose money, which she usually carried there. "Oh! Margaret—"

Here she turned to the woman next her, and blushed with vexation when she remembered that Margaret was no longer there to take her commands.

"Dear me! I forgot. No matter. Oh, mercy! what have I done?"

She had done nothing but what was most likely to obtain her object, for Lord Hilton had pushed open the door, leaped out, and in a minute or two returned with his hands full of the peaches and pears she had craved so. She was blushing scarlet when he came back and dropped the luscious fruit into her lap, as if they had been acquainted fifty years.

"Oh, you are too kind! I did not mean—I did not expect; but please eat some yourself. Here is a splendid one. Mrs. Judson, take pears or peaches, just as you like—delicious!"

The mellow sound of this last word was uttered as her white teeth sank into the crimson side of a peach, and for the next minute she said nothing, but gave herself up to a child-like ecstasy of enjoyment, for the road was dusty, and this luxurious way of quenching her thirst was far too sweet for words. Besides, her companions were just as pleasantly employed. She saw the young man wiping a drop of amber juice from his beard, and wondered where the Abigail found her self-command as she watched her slowly peeling one of the finest pears with a silver fruit-knife which she took from her traveling satchel.

"Splendid, aint they?" she said, at length, leaning forward and tossing a peach-stone out of the window, while she searched the golden and crimson heap with her disengaged hand for another peach, mellow and juicy as the last. "I had no idea anything on earth could be so delightful. We had breakfast so early, and I do believe I was almost hungry. Oh, how pleasant it must be when one is really famished!"

Here Clara cast another peach-stone through the window, and began to trifle with a pear, just as Judson cut a

dainty slice from the fruit she had been preparing. Clara laughed, and reached a handful of fruit over to the gentleman who had made her a gift of the whole. He received it cheerfully—in fact, it was quite impossible for any man under thirty to have spent a half hour in that young girl's society without feeling the heart in his bosom grow softer and warmer.

"What a lovely day it is!" she said, tossing off her hat, and leaning forward, that the wind might blow on her face, which at the moment had all the sweet blooming freshness of a child's. "I wonder if the country is as green and fresh as this, where we are going?"

"Ah, I can answer you. It is far more beautiful. Houghton Castle is among the hills. The park is like a forest, and in the valley you can see a river, winding in and out like gleams of quicksilver. A grand old place is Houghton Castle, let me answer you, Lady Clara."

Clara shook her head, and drew back in her seat.

"I wish, from the bottom of my heart, that the dear old lady could just take the title and the castle with her."

She seemed very much in earnest, and pulled the sailor's hat down over her eyes, to conceal the tears, that were filling them with moisture.

Lord Hilton was surprised. He had certainly intended to interest the young lady by a description of the noble place that would some day be hers.

"Ah, wait till you have seen Houghton. It is one of the finest old strongholds in the kingdom. The only wonder is that Cromwell, that magnificent old hypocrite, happened to spare it. When Lady Carset stands upon her own battlements, she can scarcely see the extent of her lands. A very wealthy lady is the old countess."

Clara all at once began to wonder how it happened that the man was giving her so much knowledge about her own

near relative. How did he know that her information did not equal his own?

"You live near Houghton, I suppose?" she said.

"Yes; when the flag is up, we can see it plainly enough from my grandfather's place."

Clara brightened out of her momentary depression. If she were compelled to stay long at Houghton, it would be pleasant to meet this handsome and pleasant young man. How kind he had been about the fruit. With what genial sunshine his eyes dwelt upon her, as he sought to interest her about the place to which she was going. Judson was not so well pleased. She had some doubts of the propriety of permitting these young persons to drop into such familiar conversation, with no more impressive introduction than the chance courtesies of a railroad car.

True, she had known the young man when he was quite a child, and liked him, as well as her prim habits and narrow channel of thought would permit; but nothing in her experience had taught her how to act in an emergency like that.

The young people had given her no opportunity for reflection, but plunged into an acquaintance at once. The whole thing troubled her greatly, but what could she do?

There they sat, face to face, eating peaches together, talking of the scenery, laughing now and then, again and again half quarreling, as if a dozen years had ripened the acquaintance between them. It quite took away her appetite for the fruit, and she clasped her little silver knife, with a helpless sigh, and dropping both hands into her lap, wondered what on earth she could do, and of course did nothing.

The young people forgot all about the prim Abigail, and went on with their conversation; but after awhile a shade of sadness crept over both those young faces. Their hearts

wandered off into serious reveries, and for a time they became unconscious of each other's presence.

Clara was thinking of that night, which now seemed far, far away, but was, in fact, scarcely twenty-four hours back in her life—of the words that were spoken, the promises given, and sealed with kisses, which seemed burning on her lips even yet.

Oh! where was he now, the man whom she loved so entirely, and whose humiliation made her heart ache, and burn with sorrow and wrath every time she thought of it? Would he hold to his faith with her, after such scornful treatment from her father? Where would he go? Where was he now? He had been a wanderer always, and had found himself sufficient to himself.

After he saw her the first idea of rest and a permanent home had opened new vistas of hope to him. He had found the one thing that had hitherto been denied to his existence—found it only to be driven from the light that had dawned upon him, like a trespassing dog.

Clara's heart swelled as she thought of all this, and all at once the prim Abigail was astonished out of all propriety by a burst of sobs from the corner in which Clara had retreated.

The young man looked up and came out of his own melancholy thoughts, just as Mrs. Judson had drawn forth her smelling-bottle and was pressing it upon the girl, who averted her face and sobbed out, piteously:

"Oh! let me alone—please let me alone!"

Judson retreated backward to her place in the opposite corner, while the young man motioned her to remain quiet, and let the pretty creature sob out her grief unmolested.

At last Clara had wept her sudden burst of sorrow away, and became conscious of her own strange conduct. She pushed back her hat, drew the soft gauze streamers across

her eyes, and burst into a sobbing laugh, exquisitely child-like, but which Judson could not in the least understand.

"I'm afraid I am getting homesick," she said. "I never was so far from Oakhurst before, and, until this morning, you know, I had never seen either of your faces, but all that need not make such an absurd baby of me."

Mrs. Judson unfolded a fine pocket handkerchief and held it toward the girl, with the most anxious look possible to imagine.

"Wipe your eyes, dear young lady, wipe your eyes. We are coming to Houghton, and I would not have you seen with that face for the world."

"Yes," said the young man, looking out, "yonder is Houghton Castle."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE OLD COUNTESS.

"I WILL see her now, Judson." The old lady of Houghton came out from her dressing-room as she said this.

She had a little cap of gossamer lace and silver ribbon on that shaking head, and tied a girdle of silken cord around the floating folds of her cashmere morning robe, which would better have concealed the attenuated figure underneath, had it been permitted to float loose, as it had done. But the dainty old lady still felt a stir of feminine pride in her toilet, and though the exertion took away all her strength, she had made these pretty additions to her dress, rather than meet her grandchild, for the first time, in the disarray of an invalid.

"I will see her now, Judson."

She repeated this, panting for breath, as she sank down to the couch in her favorite tower-chamber, and took the delicate handkerchief of lace and cambric, on which Judson had just dropped some pungent perfume.

Judson left the room; directly the red curtain parted again, and behind the grim waiting-maid came a young girl, flushed with excitement and rosy with perfect health, but so strangely dressed that the old countess uttered a little exclamation of surprise, mingled perhaps with a little displeasure. The jaunty hat with its blue streamers, the double-breasted jacket, glittering with buttons, took away her breath.

Lady Clara hesitated a moment, took off her hat hurriedly, like a naughty boy, and came forward with an easy step, as if she had been in a forest, and the high heels of her pretty boots trampling down wood moss, instead of the tangle of flowers in that sumptuous carpet.

The old lady sat gazing on her full half a minute. The girl flushed crimson under the steady look of those brown eyes, turned around and gave her hat a toss to Judson, who let it fall in her astonishment at the audacious act, and came forward, half-indignant, half-crying.

"Grandmother!"

As that fresh, young voice fell upon her, the old countess reached forth her hand.

"My child!"

The old voice was faint, but kind. Lovely as that young creature was, she brought sadness and disappointment with her. The prejudice of years is not easily swept away from the mind of an aged woman, whatever her strength of character may be. This girl was the step-daughter of the governess she had so long detested, and she seemed to bring the atmosphere of a hated place with her. Perhaps she had expected a more stately bearing in her daughter's child.

A chair had been drawn up to the couch by the thoughtful Judson, and the countess made a gentle motion that her grand-daughter should occupy it.

Clara sat down, feeling nervous and very miserable; for those eyes followed her with mournful curiosity, which the high-spirited girl mistook for criticism.

"I dare say that I am not so handsome or so good as my poor mother was, but she loved me dearly, everybody says that, and for her sake you might be glad I am here, grandmother, especially as you sent for me."

As Clara said this, tears swelled from those blue eyes that had been slowly filling, and dropped to her cheeks like rain upon damask roses. This appeal, so childlike in its passion, lifted the old countess out of her seeming apathy. She arose, laid her hands on that young head and kissed the flushed forehead.

The moment Clara felt the touch of those tender lips, she threw both arms around the shadowy old woman, and broke forth.

"Oh, grandmother, grandmother, don't stop to think about it, but let me love you! I want to so much, for without that I shall be awfully homesick."

The old lady's heart beat as it had not done for years. Never, since her only child went forth from those proud walls a bride, had any one dared to claim her love, or speak to her as one free soul speaks to another. In the haughty isolation of her rank, she had almost forgotten that equality could ever be claimed of her. The very audacity of this cry for affection stirred the old lady's pride like a trumpet.

"There speaks the Carset blood," she said, appealing to the grim hand-maiden who stood by; "always ready to give and bold to claim just rights. My grandchild is of the true stock, you see. God bless her and love her as I will!"

"There, now, that is very kind of you, grandmamma, and

you are just the dearest, sweetest and queenliest lady that ever made a poor girl happy, when she was, in fact, homesick as death. The truth is, mamma Rachael spoils me so completely with her great love, and—but, oh! I forgot you can't bear mamma Rachael. Dear me! I am always getting into scrapes. Does that belong to the Carset blood, I wonder?"

The waiting-maid stood petrified when the old countess broke into a soft, pleasant laugh, at what she deemed the insolent familiarity of this speech. "Did you hear that?" she exclaimed, wiping the moisture from her eyes, and increasing the vibrations of her head.

"Who but a Carset would dare ask such questions? Getting into scrapes, child; why there never was a family so reckless or so independent. That is, I speak of the males, remember! the ladies of the house—but you will see in the picture gallery, and judge for yourself. No commonplace women can be found among the Carset ladies. Some of them, my child, have intermarried with Royalty itself. You are the last of the line, Lady Clara."

Clara turned pale. She thought of Hepworth Closs, and how far he was removed from royalty; but with no thought of faithlessness in her heart. She was very sure that the next Lord of Houghton would wear neither crown or coronet—but, like a wise girl, she sat still and said nothing.

The old countess was very feeble. Notwithstanding the excitement, which left a tremulous pink on her withered cheeks, the strength began to fail from her limbs. Gathering up her feet upon the couch, she closed her eyes.

When she opened them again, Lady Clara was bending toward her with a look of tender anxiety that went to the old lady's heart. A soft smile stole over her lips, and she held out her hand.

"Go to your room, my child."

Clara stooped down and kissed that delicate mouth with her own blooming lips.

"Sleep well, grandmother," she whispered; "I will come back again by-and-by, after I have seen the other ladies in the picture-gallery."

Clara picked up her hat, and was going out on tip-toe, when Judson laid a long, lean hand on her arm, and addressed her in one of those shrill whispers, which penetrate more surely than words.

"Don't wear that thing into my lady's presence again," she said. "Did you see her eyes, when they first fell upon it?"

"What, my poor little hat? Has grandmamma really taken a dislike to that? I am so sorry."

The old countess opened her eyes, and rose on one elbow among her cushions.

"Let the child alone, Judson. The hat is well enough, and she looked very pretty in it."

"Nobby, isn't it, grandmamma?" said Clara, tossing the hat to her head, and shaking down the blue streamers; "and I'm so fond of it."

"Judson," said the old countess, "do not attempt to judge for your mistress at this time of day. No one but a Carset could wear a thing like that, without looking vulgar; but you saw what an air she gave it."

Judson was astounded. She had absolutely trembled, when that round hat came into the room, in defiance of the faint protest which she had ventured to make.

"I was afraid, my lady, that a dress like that might set you against the young lady."

"Set me against my own grandchild, and she so unmistakably a Carset! I am surprised, Judson."

"I am sure there was no idea in my mind of giving offense. She is a pretty young lady enough."

"Pretty! Are you speaking of that charming young creature, with the air of a duchess and the heart of a child, only to say that she is pretty?"

"Did I say pretty, my lady, when I think her so beautiful?"

"All the more beautiful, Judson, for not being so tall as some of the ladies of our house. She owes nothing to size. Perhaps you have remarked, Judson, that those of the purest Carset blood have never been large women."

A sweet, complacent smile quivered around those old lips, as the countess settled back among her cushions. She, a petite creature, had Carset blood in her veins from both parents, and in her youth she had been distinguished among the most beautiful women of England. She was thinking of those days, when those withered eyelids closed again, and they followed her softly into her sleep, which the grim maid watched with the faithfulness of a slave.

Meantime Clara went into the long picture gallery, and there among a crowd of statues, and deeply-toned pictures by the old masters, made the acquaintance of her stately ancestors, and of the ladies who had one and all been peeresses in their own right—an access of rank, prized almost like a heritage of royalty by the old lady in the tower-chamber.

No one had gone with the young heiress into the gallery, for, with her childish wilfulness, she had preferred to go alone, and single out the Carset ladies by their resemblance to the old countess.

All at once she stopped before the picture of a lady, whose face struck her with a sudden sense of recognition. She looked at it earnestly—the golden brown hair, the downcast eyes, the flowing white dress. Across the mind of that wondering girl, came the shadow of another woman

upon a white bed, with hair and eyes like those; but wide open, and to her lips came two words, "My Mother!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

EXPLANATIONS AND CONCESSIONS.

It often happens that a proud, austere person, so grounded in opinions and prejudices as to be considered above and beyond ordinary influences, will all at once, give heart and reason up to passionate or capricious fondness for some individual—often a very child—and yield everything to persuasion when reason is utterly rejected.

Indeed, few people like to be convinced; but the strongest mind ever bestowed on man or woman finds something gratifying to self-love in the persuasive enticements of affection.

This singular moral phenomenon astonished the neighbors and household of Lady Carset when she gave herself up, with the abandon of a child, to the caressing young creature, who had, it seemed, appeared in her home to win her back from the very brink of the grave, and make the sunset of her long life brighter with love than the dawn had been.

There was nothing in the young girl which did not seem beautiful to the old relative. Her originality, which made the well-trained servants stare, seemed the perfection of piquant grace to one whose fastidious tastes had been an example to the whole neighborhood. In her estimation Lady Clara could do nothing which was not in itself loveliest and best. The old lady had been so long without an

object of affection, that her love of this girl became almost a monomania.

"I have an atonement to make," she would say to herself in excuse for this extraordinary and most pleasant subjugation; "for years and years I have driven this young creature from me because of what, I am almost convinced, were unfounded suspicions against her father and that woman. It is but just that I should accept my grandchild with generous confidence; and she deserves it—she deserves it."

After reasoning in this fashion awhile the repentant old lady would rack her brain for some new device by which this bright creature, who had come like a sunbeam into her house, might be persuaded never to leave it again. It was not altogether the selfishness of affection that actuated this honorable woman. It was hard to believe that a Carset could have acted unjustly, or even be mistaken; but, once convinced of that, her very pride insisted on a generous atonement. Never in her life had she been so humiliated as when the sight of those diamonds convinced her of the cruel charge which she had maintained for years against a person innocent of the offence imputed to her. She remembered, with compunction, how much harm she had done this woman, whose greatest fault now seemed to be that Lord Hope had married her.

Her own example had sufficed to exclude Lady Hope from the society to which her husband's rank entitled her, and her open expressions of dislike had cast a ban upon the stepmother, which had, to an extent, reacted on her own grandchild.

These thoughts troubled the proud old peeress a long time before she gave them expression; but, one day, Clara sat by her, looking a little sad, for, now that the excitement of her first coming was over, she began to think of Hepworth Closs—to wonder where he was, and yearn for some

news of him to a degree that clouded her whole bright being like a feeling of homesickness.

"Poor child!" thought the old lady, while her soft, brown eyes dwelt upon that downcast face, as it bent over a piece of embroidery in which a cactus-flower formed the chief central glory; "how weary and troubled she looks! No wonder, poor thing! half her time is spent here with a stupid old woman, shut up so long from the world that she is but dull company for any one. I wonder if the thing which is upon my mind would really make her happy?"

"Clara."

The girl started. She had been so lost in thought that those bright eyes had been watching her some minutes, while she unconsciously pursued her work, and indulged in a reverie which was shadowed upon her features.

"Clara, you have not told me much about your stepmother."

"But I think of her; I was thinking of her then. Indeed, indeed, grandmamma, I always must love mamma Rachael, for she has been everything that is good and kind to me—I only wish you could understand how kind. If I know anything it is because she taught me."

"Among other things, perhaps she taught you to hate that cruel old Lady Carset," said the countess, a little suspiciously.

"No, grandmamma, no. She never said anything to make me dislike you; but I did—it was terribly wicked; but how could I help it, loving her so, and knowing that it was you that stood in the way of all she most desired in life? Remember, grandmamma, I had never seen you, and I loved her dearly. It was hard to see her overlooked and put down by people who were not fit to buckle her shoes, all because you would not like her."

"And you will always love her better than the cruel old lady?"

"Cruel! How can you? There never was a sweeter, kinder, or more lovely old darling in the world than you are! but then she is good, too, and so unhappy at times, it almost breaks my heart to look in her face."

"And you think I have made her so?"

"I think you might make her very happy, if you only would, grandmamma."

"Would that make you happy, little one?"

The old lady reached out her little, withered hand, and patted Clara's fingers, as they paused in her work, while she spoke. The girl's face brightened. She seized the little hand between her rosy palms, and pressed it to her lips.

"Oh, grandmamma! can you mean it?"

"I always mean to be just, Clara."

"Then you will be very, very kind to her?"

"Does your father love this woman?"

"Love her? Oh, yes! but this thing has come a little between them. She has grown shy of going out, while he must be in the world; and all her life seems to vanish when he is away. Sometimes it makes my heart ache to think how much she loves him."

"But he loves you?"

"Almost as much as mamma Rachael does. He was never cross to me but once."

"And then?"

Clara turned pale, and took up her needle.

"I would rather not talk about that just now. You might be more angry than my father was."

"It would be very difficult for me to get angry with you, little one."

"But you would, if I were to be very obstinate, and insist

on having my own way about—about something—that—that—"

The old lady's face grew very serious. She understood these signs, and they troubled her; but she was feeble, and shrank from any knowledge that would bring excitement with it.

"Some day we will talk of all that," she said, with a little weary closing of the eyes.

Clara drew a deep breath. She had been on the verge of making a confidante of the old lady, and felt a sense of relief when the subject was thus evaded.

The countess opened her eyes again.

"Clara," she said, "bring my writing-table here. We will not trouble ourselves to ring for Judson."

Clara dropped her embroidery, and brought the sofa-table, with all its exquisite appointments for writing. The old lady sat upright on her couch, took the pen, and began to write on the creamy note-paper her grandchild had placed before her. Clara watched that slender hand as it glided across the paper, leaving delicate, upright letters perfect as an engraving, as it moved. When the paper was covered, she folded the missive with dainty precision, selected an envelope, on which her coronet was entangled in a monogram, and was about to seal it with a ring, which she took from her finger; but recollecting herself, she drew the letter out, and handed it to Clara, with a smile that kindled her whole face.

Clara read the letter, threw her arms around the old lady, and covered her faces with kisses.

"Oh, grandmamma, you are too good! Do you—do you really mean it? Ah, this is happiness!"

"You shall help me make out the invitations. There was a time when Houghton had no empty chambers. It will go hard, my dear, if we cannot find entertainment for

your father and the lady he has married. On that day, Clara, I will present you to the world as my grandchild and heiress."

"Not yet! oh, not yet! Wait till you know more of me."

"Hush! hush! This is not my only object. If I have wronged your stepmother, or neglected your father, the whole country shall see that a Carset knows how to make reparation. Lady Hope, too, shall be presented to my friends as an honored guest. This entertainment will be my last, but they shall find that the old countess knows how to receive her guests."

"Grandmother, you are an—an—. You are just the sweetest old lady that ever drew breath! If you were to live a thousand years, I should love you better and better every day! To see you and Lady Hope together will be splendid! And they are to stay at Houghton a month. By that time you will love each other dearly."

Clara took up her work again, but the needle flashed like a thread of lightning in her unsteady fingers. She could not work after this glorious news.

The old lady smiled blandly, and sank down among her cushions, exhausted.

"Go out and take a walk in the park," she said, observing that Clara was fluttering over her embroidery like a bird in its cage. "It will do you good, and I will try to sleep a little."

CHAPTER XXIV.

DOWN BY THE BROOK AMONG THE FERNS.

CLARA put on her hat and wandered off into the park, as happy as a bird.

She had found the dearest old fairy godmother. She saw a glorious light breaking in upon the life of her stepmother, and out of all this generous conduct in the old countess sprang a vague hope that she might yet be won to sanction her marriage with the man of her choice.

She took no heed of the way, but wandered on, treading the earth like a sylph, and breaking into little snatches of song whenever the birds in the branches put her in mind of it. She was descending into a little, ferny hollow, with a brook creeping along the bottom, along which a narrow foot-path ran, when the crackle of a broken branch, and the quick tread of a foot, made her pause and look at the opposite bank, down which a young man was coming, with more swiftness than he seemed to desire, for he only saved himself from a plunge in the brook by leaping over it, with a bound that brought him to Clara's side. It was Lord Hilton.

"Forgive me, if I came near running you down," he said, with laughter in his eyes, and taking off his hat; "it was neck or nothing with me, after I once got one downward plunge. I inquired for you at the castle, and they told me that you had just gone out of sight in this direction, so I followed and am here."

Clara held out her hand, with the sweet, joyous laugh of a pleased child. She was very happy, just then, and he saw it in her eyes.

"But you have been long in coming," she said. "I told grandmamma about our journey together, and she has been expecting you at Houghton every day."

"And you?"

"Of course, I have been dreadfully disappointed. Are you aware that it is more than a fortnight since you bought those peaches for me?"

"But you will approve my reasons for keeping away, when I tell you what they are."

"Perhaps—I doubt it; but tell me."

"You will not be angry?"

"No."

"Not if I tell you the plain truth like an honest man?"

"I love the truth. Why should it offend me?"

"Lady Clara, I have almost resolved to make a confidante of you."

Clara brushed some fallen leaves from a rock, near which they were standing, and sat down, motioning him to take the vacant place by her side.

"There—now let us begin."

"Do you guess why I did not come before, Lady Clara?"

"No—I have not the least idea. Perhaps you did not like me, or were shocked with my hat; poor thing, it is getting awfully shabby."

"Shall I tell you?"

"Of course; why not?"

"Because the old gentleman over yonder and my lady at Houghton, had set their hearts upon it."

"Set their hearts upon it. How?"

"They have decreed that I shall fall in love with you, and you with me, at first sight."

Clara stared at him a moment, with her widening blue eyes, and then broke into a laugh that set all the birds about her to singing in a joyous chorus.

"What, you and I?"

"Exactly."

"But you have more sense. You could not be induced to oblige them. I feel quite sure."

"But why, pray? Am I so very stupid?"

"No; but you are so very kind, and would not do anything so cruel."

Lord Hilton laughed; he could not help it.

"But why would it be cruel?"

"Because — because it would get me into trouble. Grandmamma is a lovely old angel, and to oblige her I would fall in love with fifty men if it were possible, especially after what she has done to-day: but it is not possible."

"And the old gentleman at the opposite side of the valley is good as gold, and I should like to oblige him; and sometimes I feel as if it could be done, so far as I am concerned, but for one thing."

"And what is that?"

"Lady Clara, if I had not been fatally in love already, I should by this time have adored you."

The color came and went in the girl's face. She tore a handful of ferns from the rock, and dropped them into the water at her feet; then she lifted her eyes to the young man's face, with the innocent confidence of a child. Her voice was low and timid as she spoke again; but the ring of modest truth was there.

"Lord Hilton, I am very young; but in what you have said, I can see that you and I ought to understand each other. You love another person—I, too, am beloved."

A shade of disappointment swept the young man's features. He had not wished this fair girl to care for him, yet the thought that it was impossible brought a little annoyance with it.

"And yourself?"

"I have permitted a man to say he loved me, and did not rebuke him; because every word he spoke made my heart leap."

"But will the old countess consent?"

"I thought so—I hoped so, till you startled me with this idea about yourself. Oh! be firm, be firm in hating me. Don't leave the whole battle to a poor little girl."

"Perhaps I shall not feel all your earnestness, for there is no hope in the future for me, with or without consent. I can never turn back to the past, though I am not villain enough to lay a heart which contains the image of another at any woman's feet, without giving her a full knowledge of that which has gone before. The love which I confess to you, Lady Clara, was put resolutely behind me before we met."

Quick as thought a suspicion flashed through the girl's brain. She turned her eyes full upon the handsome head and face of the young man, and examined his features keenly. His hat was off; he was bending earnestly toward her.

"Lord Hilton, you sat in a box in the opera next to us on the night when that young American singer broke down. I remember your head now. You were leaning from the box when she fainted; her eyes were turned upon you as she fell. She is the woman you love."

"Say whom I loved, and Heaven knows I did love her; but she fled from me without a word, to expose herself upon that stage. I thought her the daughter of a respectable man, at least; when I am told in every club-house, she is the nameless child of that woman, Olympia. I would not believe it, till the actress confirmed the story with her own lips; then I learned that her home was with this woman, and that she, a creature I had believed innocent as the wild

blossoms, had used her glorious voice for the entertainment of her mother's Sunday evening parties."

Lady Clara grew pale, and her eyes began to flash.

"You are doing great wrong to a noble and good young lady," she said, in a clear, ringing voice, from which all laughter had gone out. "You are unjust, cruel—wickedly cruel—both to yourself and her. I have no patience with you!"

"Do you know Caroline, then? But that is impossible."

"Impossible—what? That I should know the daughter of Olympia? But I do know her. There was a time, I honestly believe, when we were children together, cared for by the same nurse. This I can assure you, Lord Hilton: she was not brought up by the actress; never saw her, in truth, until she was over sixteen years old, when the woman, hearing of her genius and beauty, claimed her as a chattel rather than a child."

"Are you sure of this, Lady Clara?" inquired the young man, greatly disturbed.

"I know it. The poor young lady, brought up with such delicate care, educated as if she were one day to become a peeress of the land, took a terrible dislike to the stage, and, so long as she dared, protested against the life that ambitious actress had marked out for her. That night you saw her she was forced upon the stage after praying upon her knees to be spared. Her acting, from the first, was desperation. She saw you, and it became despair; and you could doubt her—you could leave her. Lord Hilton, I hate you!"

"I begin to hate myself," said the young man in a low voice; but even now, what can I do? What power have I to wrest her from the influence of that woman?"

"What power? The power of honest and generous love. Ask her to marry you."

Lord Hilton answered with a faint, bitter laugh.

"Ask her to marry me, and, with that act, proclaim myself a beggar! I tell you, Lady Clara, there is not upon this earth a creature so dependent as a nobleman with nothing but expectations. Were I to follow your advice the doors of my home would be closed against me. I should have a title, by courtesy, to offer my wife, and nothing more. She would, perhaps, be compelled to go on the stage to support me—a poor substitute for these two vast estates which these old people hope to unite in us."

CHAPTER XXV.

HOW LADY CLARA GOT HER OWN WAY.

LADY CLARA turned on the young nobleman with glowing anger.

"Lord Hilton," she said, "it is the land they are thinking of; but an earthquake may swallow it before I will sell a corner of my heart at their price. I am only a girl, Lord Hilton, and, perhaps, this ancestral grandeur seems less to me on that account; but the noblest possession that can be given to me is liberty—liberty of heart, limb and conscience—liberty to love and hate—though I do not hate any one very much—but to love that which is splendid and good without regard to anything else. The grandest thing upon the face of the earth, Lord Hilton, is to own oneself. If I were a man no one should own me but the woman I loved."

Was the girl inspired? You would have thought so from the sparkle that came into her eyes, like sunshine

striking the dew in a violet—from the quick, generous curve of her lips, and the flush of color that rushed over her face.

Lord Hilton looked at her with such admiration as would, perhaps, have made obedience to the wishes of his family an easier thing than he dreamed of; but he knew something of the world, and had, more than once, searched the female hearts that came in his way, for the gratification of vanity alone. He read the one before him on the instant.

"The man you speak of is without these advantages," he said. "I understand—they are a wall between you and him."

"No. This morning my grandmother told me that I was to be her heiress; but I entreated her to take time. Before she decides, I wish her to judge of this man as he is, without prejudice or favor. Then she shall know all, and if she is willing to endow us with her wealth, there never was so grateful a girl as I shall be; but, if not, I will fall upon my knees, kiss her dear old hand, thank her for what she has done, and go away to America, where a man's talents and energies can work out something that will answer very well for a patent of nobility."

"And you will carry this out? give up the title?"

"The title! Ah, that may be of value in America," answered Clara, with a laugh full of good-natured scorn; "those things, they tell me, are at a premium out yonder."

"Brave girl! You shame me by this generous energy."

"Shame you? not at all; only I happen to know that there is something worth living for besides the things we hold so precious. A man, brave enough to work out his own career, has taught me that real greatness is not always hereditary. Ah! if you could only think so, too, Lord Hil-

ton, you would understand that there is nothing on earth so sweet as the love for which we make sacrifices."

"What a strange girl you are, Lady Clara! Up to this time you have seemed to me only a very pretty and very capricious child—a charming child, truly, but—"

"There it is again," cried the girl falling back into her natural manner; "everybody will insist on treating me like a child. Oh! how I wish I was a little taller, like—like Caroline!"

Lord Hilton started, and a flood of recollections came back upon him—that soft Italian sky, a flight of vine-draped terraces, and, on the steps, that tall, beautiful girl watching for him. In this picture he forgot Olympia and everything that had repulsed him.

"I shall never think of you as a child again, but as *her* friend—her earnest, kind, noble friend!"

"And so I am. Oh! if I were a man, and loved her—"

"Well, what would you do in my place, supposing yourself a man, Lady Clara?"

"This is what I would do: The old gentleman over yonder has a generous heart, I dare say. I would first make my peace with that noble girl. It would not be easy, I can tell you, for she is proud as an empress; but she would be forgiving in the end, and for that I should adore her. Then I would take her by the hand, lead her up to that kind old nobleman over yonder—for I dare say, he is like my blessed grandmother, proud as Lucifer and kind as an angel—and I would just tell him the truth, lay the whole case before him, and either take his blessing on two bowed heads, or throw down my title, gather up all that honorably belonged to me, and carry my youth, my knowledge, and my energies into a country where no man would question whether my wife had Olympia's blood in her veins or not. This is what I would do, Lord Hilton."

"Lady Clara, I thank you."

Lord Hilton reached out his hand, smiling, but there was moisture in his eyes.

"And you will do it?"

"First, Lady Clara, I must have her forgiveness for doubting her—for being a coward. Where is she now? Can you tell me?"

"Ill, very ill, battling breathlessly with that woman, who still persists on her reappearance. You can save her from it. Will you?"

"No wonder you ask the question, Lady Clara, I have not deserved great confidence. But one thing; these are strange confessions that we have made to each other; let them rest inviolate between us. We shall be friends. Let the world think us more, if it likes."

"With all my heart. And now, good-by. I am going back to the castle."

When Clara reached the castle she found a letter waiting for her. It was from Margaret, who was still in London, at Olympia's house.

Clara read this letter with a very thoughtful face, and went at once to Lady Carset's room, with the letter in her pocket and painful anxiety in her heart.

Lady Carset had come out of her sleep, wonderfully refreshed and cheerful.

The effort which she had so generously made to make atonement for what she considered the one mistake of her life, gave to her own heart a feeling of exquisite rest. The company of her grandchild also had let a whole burst of sunshine into that princely old castle, and its mistress seemed to have grown young in its warmth and brightness. She had been thinking of the girl ever since the day she left her eyelids, and now, when she came in, with her sweet face

clouded, the idea that had been floating in her brain took form.

"You seem troubled, Clara," she said. "Did the great, wandering old park frighten you with its loneliness? Sit down, darling, and we will talk of something I have just been thinking of."

Clara sat down on the foot of the couch, and taking the small feet of her grandmother into her lap, began to smooth and caress them with her hand.

"I am an old, old woman, my darling, and not over strong, so it is impossible for me to make a companion to you."

"Oh, but I love you so much!"

"I know, dear; but would you not like a companion of your own age—some nice young lady, who could go with you into the park, share the pretty phaeton, and help drive the ponies I have ordered for you, when I am taking my rest here?"

"Oh, grandmamma, who told you what was in my mind? how could you have guessed it? Can I—may I? Grandmamma, I know the very person!"

"She must be well-educated and well-bred."

"She is a lady about my age, but handsomer."

"I will not believe that, Clara," said the old lady, smiling.

"But she is—taller, more queenly. You will like her so much! Besides, she is in such trouble. I will tell you all about it, grandmamma."

Then Lady Clara told Caroline's story, how she had been brought up by a good man, believing herself his child, until he and his good wife died, and, just as she grew into womanhood was claimed by the actress Olympia, who was determined to force her upon the stage, from which she shrank with a loathing that had made her ill. Lady Clara

did not mention the name of Daniel Yates, because it had made no impression upon her, if, indeed, she had heard it; but she succeeded in interesting the old countess, and it was decided that Caroline and the servant who had clung to her so faithfully should be sent for.

When Lady Clara left her grandmother's room, the face that had been so clouded was radiant, for, after having all her anxieties swept away, as it seemed by a miracle, she had ventured upon a positive request, which made her breath come short as she made it.

With some adroitness, and a talent that would have made her fortune on the stage, she brought the subject round to Lady Hope, and from her to the fact that she had an only brother, who had travelled in foreign parts for years, but had just come back to England, and had been at Oakhurst.

The old lady listened with gentle attention, but did not divine Clara's wishes by intuition as she had before.

"He is mamma Rachael's only relative, and she loves him dearly," said Clara. "I think she would always like to have him with her."

Even this gentle hint did not arouse the old lady, who was falling back into a pleasant lethargy, so common to aged persons.

"You would like him yourself, grandmamma," continued Clara, getting anxious; "he has seen so much, and talks so well; besides, he knows everything about horses, and taught me so many things about managing them."

"Indeed!" said Lady Carset, arousing herself, for she had been a splendid horsewoman in her time. "It would be a great comfort if we had some one besides the groom to advise with about the ponies. Then, we must have a couple of saddle horses for you and the American young lady. Would this young gentleman— Is he young, Clara?"

"Not very," answered Clara, blushing quietly, and droop-

ing her head to hide the fact, as the old lady took up her sentence again.

"I suppose not. So, as your stepmother might be pleased, what objection would there be to inviting this gentleman to the castle? When Lady Hope comes, I would like to have as many of her friends here as possible. Houghton will seem more like home to her. As for you, Clara, it will always be your home, so we must try and make it pleasant. Write the letter for me, child, and invite the gentleman here."

It was this conversation that sent Lady Clara out of her grandmother's room with that radiant face.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE QUARREL AND THE LETTER.

"TAKE your choice, young lady, take your choice! Either consent to have your name on the bills for Monday night, or leave my house, bag and baggage, one and all of you! Either obey me or go! I wash my hands of the whole affair."

Here Olympia rubbed one soft white hand over the other, and shook them apart, as if she were already washing off the annoyance that proud girl had given her.

Caroline was deathly pale. She had grown thin and languid with the illness that still hung about her. Around her enlarged eyes lay faint, purplish shadows, that deepened their sad expression; but, with all her weakness, a look of settled resolution lay on her face.

"Be it so, then!" she said, with pathetic sadness. "If my own mother—"

"Mother? Hush that! I don't believe a word of it! Brown may talk, and swear that he never lost sight of you, but he needn't tell me! My daughter! why don't you glory in the stage, then? Why don't you go down on your knees and thank me for that voice? Don't dare to call me mother till you can learn how to obey me!"

"I cannot obey you in this. If you drive me out to perish in the street I will not!"

"Then into the street you go! Let Brown try his hand at earning a living for you. It is more his duty than mine."

Caroline turned a wild, wistful look on the woman as she said this; then she moved a step toward her, and the tones of her voice, as they came through her white lips, were mournful and stormy, like wind over snow.

"What do you mean, madam? What is it that you insinuate?"

"Only this," answered Olympia, with a malicious laugh. "As you are resolved—as you never will be anything to me again, and are determined to throw away all your advantages, I think the truth will bring down your pride a little, and so mean to give it just for once. I really do suppose that you are my daughter—else, where did you get the voice you are giving to the wind? But, if you are, that man Brown is your father, for he was my husband once."

Caroline stood looking at the woman, white and still, her large eyes widening, all her features in a tumult. Then she fell upon her knees, covered her face with both hands, and cried out:

"Oh, my God! is this good man my father? Are these the thrills of joy that a child knows for its parent?"

A man who had opened the door of Olympia's boudoir was arrested on the threshold by these words.

Olympia saw him and sank to a chair, laughing maliciously.

"Ask him," she said, pointing to the man; "ask him. Don't look so astonished, Brown. I have told her all about it, and you see how white it has made her. She does not seem to relish you for a father much more than she does the stage!"

Caroline dashed the tears from her eyes, and arose, with a smile breaking through the scattered moisture.

"Not like him! He has always been kind, good, generous. I did not need this to make me love him. Father, *my father!* how many times I have called you so, but this is real! Oh, God be thanked that you are my father!"

"Ask him how he intends to support you," broke in Olympia, washing her hands over again in dumb show, and drawing in her breath till it hissed through her white teeth, as if a snake had crept up from her bad heart.

"I *will* support her! God helping me, I will! Don't feel down-hearted, my poor child. You shall not be ashamed of me. For your sake I will do anything. I can go into an orchestra."

"What! I ashamed of you, my father? Why, it gives us to each other. I have something in this wide world to love!"

Brown's eyes filled with tears. He was trembling violently.

"Father, my dear father!" murmured Caroline, drawing close to him, with a feeling that he was all the friend she had in the world, "do not look so troubled. This gives me such joy that I cannot bear to see tears in your eyes, my father."

Brown did not speak; he had no power of voice, but stood, with her hands in his, looking into her face in pathetic silence.

Olympia arose.

"It is a pretty scene, and well acted," she said; "but I

am tired of being sole audience. When you have settled upon anything, I shall have the pleasure of bidding you farewell. I must go to rehearsal now. When I come back, it will be convenient to have the house to myself. I give a little supper this evening, and I remember you do not exactly approve of my little suppers, and, for the world, would not shock the young lady! Good morning, Caroline. Good morning, Brown. You see our pretty experiment has failed, and we have got to part again. I think this time will be forever!"

Olympia swept out of the room and entered her carriage, looking like a baffled fury.

Then those two were left together, and for half an hour they sat, looking at each other with sad, wistful eyes, talking of the past in snatches, till slowly and sadly their minds turned to the future, and that looked blank enough to them. What could they do? Olympia had never been generous to her daughter or the agent. They had neither money nor valuables. How were they to live, even for a week?

"I can, perhaps, obtain a situation in some orchestra."

Poor Brown spoke under his breath, for he knew well enough that Olympia would never permit him to earn his bread in that way, so long as her influence in the theatres could prevent it; but it was the only hopeful idea he could think of, and so he suggested it with desponding hesitation. But, to the young girl, there was encouragement even in this.

"And I can take pupils. You remember the young lady that came to me that night in the dressing-room — Lord Hope's daughter?"

"Remember her!" exclaimed Brown, brightening all over, "I should think so! When she turned her face upon me and said, 'Don't be so anxious, sir. She is

better now,' I longed to fall down on my knees and worship her!"

Tears came into Caroline's eyes. Her nature was noble and full of gratitude. She could endure wrong and cruelty without weeping, but generous and kind actions melted her heart.

"Ah, how good she was; we can trust her, my father."

How falteringly, and with what pathos she used this grand old word now! Before, she had done it in affectionate play, but now, a solemn feeling of tenderness thrilled the syllables, as "father" dropped from her lips, and made the heart swell in his bosom with a tremulous response.

"She will speak to Lady Hope, and they will recommend pupils to us. Oh, if we could only go back to Italy!"

As this exclamation was on her lips, the servant in blue and silver came through the door with a salver in his hand, on which lay a letter. The seal and monogram had struck his eye, and he brought the missive in with an excess of ceremony that would have been laughable at another time. He brought the letter to Caroline. She tore it open, and an eager, almost wild look of thankfulness swept over her face as she read it.

"Oh, father, father! See what the good God has done for us!"

The servant, who lingered in the room, was so astonished at hearing that sacred name used with thanksgiving or reverence in Olympia's house, that he dropped the silver tray and stood open-mouthed regarding the young lady.

"Read it! read it! Oh, this will be Heaven to us. Remark, please, you are to come with me and Eliza. Let us start by the very next train."

It was Lady Clara's letter, which, of course, contained an invitation from the old countess. Clara had added a

little hospitality of her own, and suggested that Brown should come to Houghton for awhile, and give her music lessons—she was getting so out of practice. As usual, the girl had her way, and that letter was the result. But Brown's face grew thoughtful as he read.

"What is the matter?" inquired Caroline, anxiously.

"But how are we to get there?"

All the anxiety that made Brown's heart heavy under this good news, broke out in these words. Caroline's face clouded, and her voice faltered.

"Let me call Eliza and Margaret; perhaps they can point out something."

She rang the bell, and directly both the maids were informed of the dilemma they were in.

What was to be done? It was impossible to remain a day longer in Olympia's house. The thought was intolerable. Margaret and Eliza stood looking at each other in blank helplessness. What was to be done? All at once Margaret gave her head a fling and brightened all over.

"Never mind," she said, with one of her old coquettish gestures. "I may, I may—who knows?"

Without further explanation the girl went up stairs, got out her most becoming hat and feather—for she had never been restricted, like an English servant, in such matters—wrapped a scarlet shawl over her flounced dress, and, after practising a little before the mirror, came down with a glittering parasol in her hand.

"Eliza, just come here and see if my panner is looped properly," she said, giving that article a shake as she looked in at the door.

Eliza came out of the room, grim as ever, and gave the panner a discontented jerk or two.

"Now what are you up to?" she inquired, curtly, for she

was sometimes a little scandalized at her younger sister's coquettish airs.

"Never you mind, only tell me one thing, honest. Look at me. Ain't I about as good looking as I ever was? If I am, tell them to wait till I come back."

"Don't ask me!" was the curt answer. "Of course they'll wait, because they can't help it."

CHAPTER XXVII.

MAGGIE CASEY MEETS HER OLD LOVER.

MARGARET CASEY called a cab, and ordering it to drive to Morley's, Trafalgar Square, betook herself to rearranging her toilet. She re-clasped a pair of heavy gold bracelets around her wrists—at any rate there was enough of gold in them to make a dashing display—and settled a splendid shawl pin to her own infinite content, then she shook out the folds of her dress, and settled down to serious meditation.

Certainly she did not appear much older than when her good looks had been a temptation to Matthew Stacy, which came very near depriving Harriet, the cook, of her pompous husband. Excitement had brought back the youthful color to her face, and a spirit of benevolent mischief kindled all the old coquettish fire in her eyes. Indeed, take her altogether, the air of refinement, which she had obtained as a lady's maid, and a certain style that she had, might well have made Mrs. Matthew Stacy look about her when Margaret came out in force, such as marked the dashing lady who descended from that cab, just lifting her dress enough

to reveal glimpses of a high-heeled boot, and an ankle that Matthew Stacy recognized in an instant, for nothing so trim and dainty had ever helped make a footprint in his matrimonial path, you may be sure. He was standing on the steps at Morley's, with a white vest on and his heavy chain glittering over it like a golden rivulet.

"What! No! yes! On my soul I believe it is Miss Maggie!" cried the ex-alderman, stepping forward and reaching out his hand. "Miss Casey, I am in ecstasies of—of—in short, I am glad to see you."

Maggie bent till her pannier took the high Grecian curve as she opened her parasol, then she gave him the tip end of her gloved fingers, and said, with the sweetest lisp possible:

"How do you do, Mr. Stacy? It is ages and ages since I have had the honor of meeting you. How is Mrs. Stacy and the—and the—"

"Thank you a thousand times, Miss Casey; but—but—in short, Mrs. Stacy is the only person about whom you need inquire. There was another—forgive the outburst of a father's feelings—but a little grave in Greenwood, that long, tells the mournful story."

Here Alderman Stacy measured off a half yard or so of space with his fat hands, but found the effort too much for him, and drew forth his pocket handkerchief.

"Forgive me, but may you never know the feelings of a father who—who—"

"How distressing!" said Margaret, waving her head to and fro, until her eyes settled on a window of the hotel.

"But do control yourself. I think that is Harriet—I beg pardon—Mrs. Stacy, at the window, and your grief may remind her of her loss."

"Mrs. Stacy! Mrs. Stacy!" faltered Matthew. "Miss Maggie, would you have any objection to stepping a little this way? It is so unpleasant for a young lady of your

refinement to stand directly in front of a hotel filled with gentlemen. Beauty like yours is sure to bring them to the windows in swarms, as one may observe, and I—I have enough of the old feeling left to be jealous, miserably jealous when any man dares to look upon you."

"But I come to call on your wife, Mr. Stacy."

"She is not at home, I do assure you. She has been shopping since—since day before yesterday."

Margaret's eyes twinkled.

"Then, perhaps, I had better go up, and wait for her?"

Margaret was bright, but even here her old lover proved equal to the occasion.

"My dear Maggie—excuse me, Miss Casey—I do assure you my lady has taken the parlor-key with her. She will be so disappointed at not seeing you!"

"It is unfortunate," said Maggie, playing with her parasol; "because I was in hopes of having a few words with you, and that would be improper, I fear, without her."

"My dear Miss Maggie, not at all—not at all. You have no idea of the quantities of women that prefer to see me alone. Indeed, sometimes I think Mrs. Stacy is a little in the way. Just walk quietly along, miss—not before the windows. Excuse my infirmity, but there are some feelings that one never can throw off. Hold that elegant parasol before that lovely face, and I will be with you in a twinkling. The park is not far off. One moment, while I run up for my cane."

Margaret allowed herself to be persuaded, for the last thing in her mind had been to see Mrs. Stacy. Like those other ladies Matthew had boasted of, she very much preferred to see him alone, and would have been greatly annoyed had Harriet, in fact, appeared at the window.

So, making a merit of her own wishes, she slanted her parasol toward the house and sauntered down the street,

while Matthew ran up-stairs, panting for breath, and, entering his parlor, looked anxiously toward the window.

"Matthew, dear, is that you?"

Matthew's foreboding heart revived. That mumbling term of endearment, coming, as it were, though a mouthful of cotton wool, reassured him. He stepped to the sleeping-room door, and found Mrs. Stacy, with her head buried in the pillows and her feet thumping restlessly on the quilt.

"What is the matter, my love?"

"Oh, Stacy, dear, such a sudden take-down! My old neuralgia. Matthew! Matthew! don't leave me! I feel as if I was just a goin'!"

"Oh, nonsense, dear. All you want is plenty of quiet. A good, long sleep would bring you around in no time. Just snuggle down in the pillows, and take yourself off to sleep till I come back."

"Are you going? and me like this? Oh, Matthew!"

"You can't feel it more than I do, Harriet, dear; but I must go down to the bankers with this bill of exchange. Ten thousand dollars isn't to be carried round in a man's pocket safely. Besides, there is a special messenger just come up from the bank; so I must go, you see. But it breaks my heart to leave you so—indeed it does!"

"Oh, if it's about money, I do not mind. That is a thing which must be attended to. But Stacy, dear, don't let them keep you long; but go at onst, and right back."

"The moment those rich old fellows will let me off—the very moment, dear!" cried the model husband, waving his hand airily toward the bed, and taking up both hat and cane; "so try and sleep."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

JUST FIFTY POUNDS.

Mrs. Stacy, thus reminded of her own needs, began to moan softly among her pillows, and called out to the walls and windows that she wished, if that pain was going to keep on so, that she never had been born. If it wasn't that she had the very best husband that ever drew breath, she would just give up, and want to die; but for his sake she would try and worry through.

Stacy was far out of reach both of the moans and this conjugal tribute to his goodness, for he had hastened to join that bank messenger who, somehow, took the form of his old sweetheart, and shaded him now and then with a coquettish bend of her parasol.

"Found your cane," observed Maggie, glancing at the ponderous gold-headed affair in the hand of her old lover.

"Oh, yes; no trouble; had just stood it up in a corner of the parlor."

Maggie laughed a little under the cover of her parasol, but kept a discreet silence about the locked door until she was snugly seated in the park, with Stacy crowded close to her side.

"Ah," he said, heaving a sigh that lifted the white vest like a snow-bank, "this is something like happiness! If you could only know what your haughtiness has driven me to—but it is no use trying to make you understand! Look at me, Miss Maggie! Am I the same man that adored you so? Don't answer. I am, I am, for—Harriet, forgive me, I love you yet—I love you yet!"

"But you left me, Mr. Stacy."

"Rather say the furies driv me. I wasn't myself. It

was another fellow that woman married: the true man staid with you, and here he is, just the same as ever, if you would only believe it—but you won't, you won't!"

"How can I believe it, Mr. Stacy, after abandoning me so?"

"But not till you driv me to it—not till you had slapped my face with that precious little hand."

"Mr. Stacy, I—I'm glad you care for me a little, because I want a great favor of you."

Stacy sat upright in the iron seat, and pulled down his white vest with a couple of jerks.

"A favor, did you say?"

"Yes, a great favor."

"And what may its nature be, Miss Maggie?"

"Mr. Stacy, you are a rich man."

Stacy was troubled. To deny his wealth was a terrible sacrifice of vanity—to admit it might be exposing himself to depredation.

"Well, yes," he said at last, "I am rich. No one in New York would doubt that; but over here one has such trouble in getting funds, you understand. It was only this morning Mrs. Stacy wanted money for a little shopping, as she called it; but I couldn't give it to her—upon my soul I couldn't."

"Then, it would be of no use to ask you for a loan of twenty-five pounds, as I thought of doing."

"A loan of twenty-five pounds, my dear Maggie! Five hundred pounds would not be too much, if I were only in New York; but here in London, where Alderman Stacy is not known, I could not raise even the miserable sum you want—I could not, indeed."

Maggie's eyes began to flash, for she understood the meanness of this man, and despised it; but she thought of that anxious group in Olympia's parlor, and resolved to have the money.

"Still, considering everything, I think you will try to oblige me."

"Don't ask me. It wounds my manhood to refuse; but let us talk of something else—those dear old times—"

"No," said Margaret, unlocking one of her bracelets, and closing it with a vicious snap. "If you cannot let me have it, I will go to your wife."

"My wife? You go to my wife! Why, she hates you like poison!"

"And I am not very fond of her; but I want this money, and she will have to give it me."

Stacy pulled down his vest again, and broke into a mellow laugh.

"Well, I *should* like to see you try it on! What would you say to her, Maggie?"

"I would say: Mrs. Matthew Stacy, you and I were fellow-servants together in New York, where the lady was murdered; and for some days, you and I, and the person you have married, were left in charge of all the valuable property that house had in it. One of those nights I went away, leaving everything in its place. When I came back again the wardrobes had been plundered, the bureaux broken open, the wine-cellar pillaged."

Matthew Stacy had been growing crimson while Maggie spoke. He put up a hand to his throat, as if something were choking him, and tore open a button or two of his vest; then he gasped out:

"Miss Maggie, Miss Maggie, do you mean to insinuate that I or my wife Harriet—"

"I don't mean to insinuate anything, because what I say I know. You and your wife took these things. I knew it at the time; I can prove it now."

"Prove it fourteen years after?"

"Some things do not wear out—jewelry and India shawls,

for instance. I was at the Opera not long since. My sister, who used to come and visit me so often, is a little in that line, and I used to show her all the shawls and splendid dresses our mistress used to have. Well, that night at the Opera we both saw your wife, sitting by you, with the best shawl the madam had, on her own shoulders. We knew it at a glimpse. There isn't another just like it to be found in England or America. That shawl, Matthew Stacy, is worth thousands of dollars, and your wife, Harriet Long, the cook, was wearing it."

"Margaret! Margaret Casey, you had better take care."

"I have taken care. This woman had a gold-mounted opera-glass in her hand that we both can swear to. Besides that, she had a little watch at her side, set thick with diamonds. That watch she took to a jeweller to be mended. It is in his hands yet. When I leave this seat, it will be my first business to make sure that she never gets the watch again."

"But it is fourteen years—time enough for anything to be outlawed."

"I have asked about that. Crimes are not like debts—they cannot be outlawed, Mr. Stacy."

"And you could find it in your heart to hunt down an old sweetheart like that, providing all you say is true? I wouldn't believe it of you, Maggie."

"It seems to me that sweetheart just now refused to lend me twenty-five pounds."

"Refused! No, he did not refuse."

Matthew caught his breath, and changed his wheedling tone all at once. A new idea had struck him.

"But, supposing what you say is true, there isn't any one in England to prosecute—"

"Yes, there is the lady's agent. He sat by you when we first saw the shawl. Mr. Hepworth Closs."

Matthew Stacy sprang to his feet, perfectly aghast.

"And you have told him?"

"Not yet; but I mean to!"

"You mean to—"

"Yes, I do!"

"That is it—that is it—the self-same creature that left the print of her fingers on my cheek, and of herself on my heart. It is her who wishes to cast me to the earth, and have me stamped on by the law. Oh, Maggie Casey, Maggie Casey, I wouldn't have believed it of you!"

"And I wouldn't have believed you capable of refusing me fifty pounds!"

"Fifty pounds! It was twenty-five, Miss Margaret."

"Yes; but I've changed my mind. One does not want to be refused a miserable sum like that. I've doubled it."

"But I did not refuse; I only wanted to put the subject off till we had talked of old times—I didn't refuse you by any manner of means. You hadn't told me anything about yourself—how you came here, and what you were doing, or anything that an old lover's heart was panting to know."

"Well, I will tell you now. I have been, ever since that time, in the family of a nobleman, as a sort of half servant, half companion to his daughter."

"You don't say so! Then what on earth can you want of twenty-five pounds?"

"Fifty."

"Well, fifty it is, then. Between us, that was all I hesitated about; twenty-five pounds was such a pitiful sum for you to ask of me. You didn't understand this noble feeling, and almost threatened me; but not quite, and I'm glad of it, for Matthew Stacy is the last man on earth to give up to a threat. I hope you will believe that, Miss Margaret."

"Fifty pounds!" said Margaret, lifting a tuft of grass by the roots with the point of her parasol.

"Did I dispute its being fifty? Certainly not. Now just say how you will take it—in gold or Bank of England notes?"

"Notes will do."

"I'm glad you said that, because I happen to have the notes about me," answered the alderman, drawing out a plethoric note-case, and counting the money with terrible reluctance. "Here we are; just the sum. Now tell me, were you really in earnest about its being fifty?"

"Just fifty," answered Margaret, counting the money on her lap; "just fifty."

Matthew heaved a grievous sigh, and stood up.

"Now I suppose that little affair is settled forever?" he said, working both hands about the head of his cane, while he eyed the girl askance.

"I said fifty pounds, and fifty pounds it is," answered Margaret. "Now let us be going."

"But you mean to act fair?"

"I mean to act fair, and return your money."

"Oh, I don't mean that, I don't want that! It was the other affair; you could not do anything so cruel."

Margaret turned short round and faced the stout man, who was trembling, abjectly, from head to foot.

"Mr. Stacy, I have kept silent fifteen years and rather over. If I have not spoken before, you may be certain I never shall. I wanted this money very much, indeed, and shall repay it with less thankfulness because of the mean way in which I forced it from you. Your wife may wear her shawl and watch to the end, for any harm I mean her. Good morning, Mr. Stacy."

Stacy stood just as she left him, thrusting his cane into the turf.

"And she wouldn't have done it after all. What a confounded fool I have made of myself! Two hundred and

fifty dollars, and gold up to one-forty at home, which makes another clean hundred. What a mercy it is she didn't ask a thousand, though! She took the starch out of me, through and through. I should have handed over anything she asked."

As Stacy was walking from the park, now and then giving a punch to the turf with his cane, in discontented abstraction, he nearly ran against a man who had just passed the gate, and, looking up angrily, saw Hepworth Closs. The poor craven turned white as he saw that face; but Hepworth was in haste, and took no heed of his agitation.

"You are just the man I most wanted," he said.

"What—what—me? Is it me you wanted?" stammered Stacy, smitten with abject terror.

"Yes; you are an American, and will understand the value of American bonds."

"American bonds! Surely, Mr. Closs, you will at least give me a chance of bail? I tell you it is all false! That creature isn't to be believed under oath."

"I have no idea what you mean," said Closs, a good deal puzzled; "but you evidently do not understand me. I am about to leave England, and have a monied trust to settle before I go. There is a reason why it is inexpedient for me to act in person. I wish to pay the money, but give no explanation. Will you act as my agent in this?"

"Is—is it—that estate you are just settling up?" asked Stacy, below his breath, for he felt as if the earth were about to swallow him. "Is it that?"

"I can give you no explanation. This money came into my hands years ago. I invested it carefully—doubled it over and over again; but now I wish to give up my trust. I have it here in American bonds, fifty thousand dollars."

"Fifty thousand!"

"Just that. I wish you to take this to the young lady,

to whom it rightfully belongs, and place it in her own hands, with the simple statement that it is hers. Will you oblige me in this?"

"First tell me who the young lady is."

"Lady Clara, the daughter of Lord Hope, of Oakhurst."

"The daughter of a lord! My dear sir, I shall be too happy!"

"But there is a condition. I do not wish the lady to guess where this money comes from. You must be understood as the agent, who has invested and increased it from a small property left in New York by a relative. This will work you no harm, but, on the contrary, win for you favor and gratitude from as noble a lady as ever lived."

"Will it get an invitation to Oakhurst for myself and Mrs. Stacy? That is a thing I should like to mention incidentally, to the Board of Aldermen when they give me a public reception in the Governor's Room. Will it bring about something of that kind?"

"That I cannot tell. The young lady is not now at Oakhurst, but with her grandmother, at Houghton Castle. It is there you will find her."

"Houghton Castle! Why, that's the place I saw mentioned in the Court Journal. There is to be tremendous doings at Houghton Castle before long; a grand entertainment, to which all the grandees, far and near, are invited. What if this fifty thousand dollars should get me and Mrs. S. an invite? That would be a crusher."

"It is possible," said Closs, controlling the fierce beating of his heart. "Come to my hotel in the morning, early. I am anxious to get this trust off my mind."

Stacy promised, and the two men parted, the one elated, the other doubtful, harassed, and painfully disappointed; but the very next day after Matthew Stacy left London for

Houghton, Hepworth Closs received a letter, which put all ideas of a voyage to America out of his mind.

CHAPTER XXIX.

OLYMPIA'S DEFEAT.

OLYMPIA stood, panic-stricken, in her fantastic little boudoir, when she reached home and found a note from Caroline, bidding her farewell, and stating that, not being able to comply with her wishes, she had accepted the other alternative, and left her house forever, in company with her father and the old servant, who had been so faithful to her. The note breathed of sadness and sorrow at the manner of her leaving, and, if firm, was entirely respectful; but it said nothing of her plans, nor told where she was going.

Now, Olympia thought that she had provided against the possibility of a choice between her cruel commands, by depriving both Caroline and her father of all means by which they could leave her. She had gone out, certain of the girl's forced submission, and came back to find her gone. She crushed the note in her hand, flung it down and stamped upon it furiously; for it seemed as if half a million of gold had melted down into the bit of paper, which she could only trample under her feet in impotent wrath.

"The viper! the ingrate! the thing made of iron! Oh, if it were her! if it were her! I would trample her through the floor! Where did she get the money? He had nothing—she had nothing. I thought I had chained them to me by their poverty; then I came home, so exhilarated by this great offer from the manager—and she is gone! So beautiful! and such a voice! Gone! gone! Oh, what a loss!"

Here Olympia, who had never known what self-control was, flung herself on a low, silken couch, heaped with cushions, like a divan, and began to pound them with her little fists, and spurn them with the soiled white satin slippers, in which she had been to rehearsal. This burst of hysterical fury would have brought down the house had she plunged into such naturalness on the stage. But she started up, and after snatching a mosaic card-receiver from her footman, and dashing it against a marble statuette of Venus coming from the bath, thus demolishing what little drapery the poor thing was trying to make the most of, came partially to herself and demanded what the fellow wanted.

The footman, shivering under his blue and silver, pointed to a card which lay on the carpet.

"Why don't you pick it up?" cried Olympia, stamping her satin slipper into a cluster of roses, that seemed to disappear from the carpet.

The man took up the card and handed it to her, with a reverence so humble that she longed to trample him down with the mock roses, and get him out of her sight; but, as he towered above her a foot or two, the process seemed difficult, so she ordered him out of the room, and looked at the card.

"Lord Hilton! Dear me!"

Olympia made a dash through the silken curtains, ran into the hall, just as Lord Hilton was leaving the door-step, and called him back.

He followed her into the boudoir, telling her the reason of his visit as he went.

This inflamed her anew, and she turned upon him savagely, but with some attempt at self-restraint.

"You wished to see Caroline? the ingrate! the viper! the raven with a nightingale's voice! You wish to see

her? Why? This is singular. I thought she was a stranger to you. No! Then, where did you meet?"

"I have seen the young lady frequently in Italy. Will you please to have her informed that I am here?"

"Informed—I! Well, my lord, this is droll! No such person is in my house. I could no longer tolerate her. She is gone."

"What! Your daughter?"

"My daughter! Did I ever say that? Ah, I remember—it was after one of our little suppers, when one gets liberal! But this ingrate was no daughter of mine, but my protégé—something to fasten the heart on, as one loves a Skye terrier. Her father was a poor man—very poor, almost degraded, you understand—so, in my unfortunate munificence, I lifted her out of her poverty, gave her some of my own genius, and took her to my bosom, as Cleopatra took the asp; and she stung me, just in the same way, villainous ingrate! This girl has treated me shamefully. I had made *such* an engagement for her—such concessions—carriage for herself, dressing-maid always in attendance, a boudoir for her retirement, private box, everything that a princess might ask; bills almost made out, and when I come home, she is gone. Read that note, my lord; it lies there at your feet. Read it, and tell me if you ever heard of such base ingratitude."

Lord Hilton took up the crumpled and trodden paper. His eyes eagerly ran over its contents, and brightened as they read; while Olympia prowled around her boudoir, like a newly-caged leopardess.

"Read! read!" she said, "and then say if anything so ungrateful ever lived. No, no, my lord, she is no child of mine. I wash my hands of her—I wash my hands of her!"

Here Olympia laved her white hands in the air, and went

through a process of dry washing in the heat of her promenade up and down the room.

"And have you no idea where the young lady has gone?"

"An idea! How should I have ideas? You have read her letter. Well, that is all."

Lord Hilton folded the note, and softly closed his hand over it.

"Then I will no longer trouble you, madam," he said, holding back the curtain, while he bowed himself through the entrance.

Olympia watched the crimson curtains close over him, standing, with some effort at self-control, in the middle of the room. Then she broke into a fresh paroxysm, shattered a few more ornaments by way of appeasing her appetite for destruction, and plunged down among her cushions in a fit of shrieking hysterics that brought the whole household around her.

A knock at the door—another visitor—brought Olympia out of her fit, and turned her general rage into spite.

"Show them in—show everybody in! If they want to see how I bear it, let the whole world come!" she cried, spreading her hands abroad.

The man who went to the door obeyed her, and brought in an old woman, whose anxious, tired face might have won sympathy from a stone. She entered that glittering room without excitement or any appearance of curiosity, and when Olympia, in coarse and spiteful irony, bade her sit down in one of the easy-chairs, she took it quietly.

"There is a young lady staying with you, madam, that I wish to see. I think she is known by the name of Brown."

"Brown? Brown? There is no such person here. How dare you come troubling me about her, the ingrate, the asp, the—the—"

"It may be that the young lady may still be called Yates. She bore that name once."

"Yates? Brown? Brown? Yates? I know nothing about them. Don't go on in that fashion, questioning; for I won't hear it! Who are you that dares come here with such names? I do not keep a lodging-house. I am Olympia!"

"But there was a young lady here—the one I wish to see," said the old woman, with calm persistence.

"Well, and if there was?"

"I have very urgent reasons for wishing to find her."

"Well, perhaps you will, who knows? Needles have been found in haymows, but I wasn't the person to pick them up, and it strikes me that you won't be more fortunate."

"But I must see this lady!"

"If you can find her, certainly; but she is not here, and never is likely to be again—the wretch—the viper!"

"When did she leave here, madam?"

"When—when? What is that to you? Am I come to the pass that I cannot turn a viper into the street without being questioned by every old tramp that prowls about? I tell you the creature you call Brown—"

"Caroline Brown," said the old lady, gently.

"Well, the creature you call Caroline Brown, then, has gone from my house forever. I neither know nor care what has become of her."

The old woman arose, and walked close to Olympia.

"You have forgotten me, Olive Brown. It is a long time since you brought that helpless little child to me."

Olympia turned white, and, turning, fiercely ordered the servants from the room.

"Who are you? What are you?" she faltered. "What

tempted you to call me by that name, and they standing by?"

"I am named Yates. Years ago you brought a child for me to care for."

"Oh, it is the child again! I tell you, on my honor, she has left my house, I do not know where she has gone."

"Are you certain, madam?"

"Certain! Yes—yes. She left my house only this morning."

"Then I will go in search of her. Will this never end?" sighed Hannah Yates.

"Stop! stop!" cried Olympia. "Promise to say nothing of that name. Promise!"

"I am only wanting to find the young lady—not to harm any one."

"But it would harm me if you told that. Brown! Brown! Think of Brown for a stage name! Can't you understand that it would be death to me? Half my popularity lies in the fact that no one can tell who or what I am. Now, do be silent, that is a good old soul, if it is only for *her* sake; for you know, in spite of the way she has served me, everything I have or make will go to my child in the end. I am ready to make it worth your while to be quiet."

Here Olympia took out a portemonnaie and unclasped it. The old woman put the glittering thing aside with her hand.

"I do not take money," she said. "All I want is to find her. If she is gone, I must search farther."

Then, with a meek bend of the head, Mrs. Yates left the room and the house.

* * * * *

Lord Hilton went out of that house, relieved by the

denial of Olympia that Caroline was her daughter, but in other respects cruelly disappointed. The greatest and most generous wish of his life was to find the young girl, and atone for the cowardice which had made him avoid her for a time. He had resolved that the fact that she was Olympia's child should not prevent him acting this manly part; but when that degradation was lifted from her by the woman's own words, his heart was set free from an intolerable weight, and went back to its old love with a happy rebound. He remained in London some days, spending the time in vain efforts to learn something of the beautiful fugitive, and then started back to the neighborhood of Houghton Castle, bitterly disappointed.

For some distance, after he entered the railroad carriage, Lord Hilton was alone; but at the junction, where he had formerly met Lady Clara and her maid, a gentleman and lady entered the carriage, and sat down opposite him. There was something singular about the lady; her large, black eyes illumined the whole face with a glow of proud triumph that seemed to have uplifted her whole being. It was this brilliant seeming of happiness which at first baffled Lord Hilton; for after the lady had been seated awhile, she probably began to feel the restraints of a stranger's presence, for a fit of thoughtful lassitude crept over her, and her eyelids began to droop.

He remembered the face, now. One night he had seen it at the opera, leaning against the crimson lining of the box, paler by far than now; but the beautiful outlines were the same, though that face had been still and passive, while this was irradiated even in its rest.

Turning his face from the lady, Lord Hilton encountered a face that he knew in the tall and distinguished-looking man who accompanied her.

"Lord Hope, this is a pleasure," he said, holding out his hand. "The last I heard of you was in Scotland."

"Yes, we found the shooting good, and staid longer than usual; but I fancied you were down at the old place."

"And so I was, but these railways send a man from one end of the universe to another so rapidly that one does not know where to date from. I have been up to London for a day or two, and am on my way back again."

Here Lady Hope lifted her slumberous eyelids, and was introduced.

The sweet, alluring smile that we have seen on the face of Rachael Closs had come back to it now.

"I should almost have known Lord Hilton," she said, "from Lady Clara's description. She was indeed fortunate in chancing upon you for a travelling companion."

"I have that great kindness to thank you for, Hilton," said Lord Hope. "Clara's letters were full of your adventures on the road and at Houghton. I did not know that you had left the neighborhood, though."

"I think myself more than fortunate," said Hilton, addressing Lady Hope, "in having the honor of introducing two such ladies to the castle, for I take it you are going to Houghton."

"Oh, yes, of course; it was impossible to refuse Lady Carset. We shall be at the castle some time, I am glad to say."

How her magnificent eyes flashed. The very bend of her head was regal, as she thus announced a triumph she had been toiling for ever since she had become Lord Hope's wife.

The scorn of that old woman at Houghton, had been the bane of her existence. Like an interdict of the Pope in olden times, it had kept her apart from the people of her own rank, as an excommunication would have done in past

ages. But all this was removed. As it would seem by a miracle, the bitter prejudices of that old lady had given way, and through the broad doors of Houghton Castle, she was invited to take her place among the peeresses of the land.

This had brought back the fire and bloom into Lady Hope's life, and when Lord Hilton leaned out, as he had done with Lady Clara, and exclaimed, "There is Houghton," a glorious smile broke over her features.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FAMILY MEETING AT HOUGHTON.

THE train which took Caroline and her party down to Houghton, reached their destination just as the sun was setting over the glorious old trees of the park, and trembling in golden brightness in the ivy that clung to those twin towers.

Scarcely had they left the train, when a basket-carriage came dashing up to the platform, and a young lady sprang out, tossing her reins to a dainty little tiger, who sat behind, erect and decorous, knowing himself to be an object of general attention.

"So you are really here. I am so glad to find you! All right, this way—jump in; don't be afraid, the ponies are gentle as gentle can be. Here we are, never mind the others. There is a carriage on the way for them; but, of course, I got here first; always do. Give me the reins, Joe—now for it."

The little carriage wheeled around, and Lady Clara

looked back, nodding to Brown, as her ponies took the road in full speed.

"Nice old fellow, isn't he? I am so glad to get him here, for I am going back on my music terribly."

"Did you know he is my father?" said Caroline, in a gentle voice.

"No!"

"He is, indeed. I never learned it till yesterday; but it does not seem strange, for no father was ever more gentle or kind than he has been since the first day I knew him."

"And Olympia—she is your mother, no doubt?"

"Yes; she is my mother."

"All right, we needn't talk of her! it isn't of the least consequence. You must not speak so sadly. I dare say she is a good enough person; but you don't know how to manage her. For my part, I rather like her; but the old gentleman is just lovely! I am glad he is your father; because he can take care of us so properly, and grandmamma will like it, I know. I have got you a chamber next to mine. Our dressing-rooms open into each other, and they are both near grandmamma's apartments. Dear old lady, she is just the kindest, sweetest, loveliest mite of a woman you ever saw; like a darling old fairy. Won't you love her?"

They drove along now for some distance in silence; but as they mounted to the uplands, where Houghton stood, Caroline began to take a lively interest in the scenery, which was both grand and beautiful in that region. Away toward the horizon, at the upper end of the valley, was some large building, whose gray walls and oriel windows were just now burning in the golden fires of a magnificent sunset.

"What place is that?" said Clara, repeating the question her companion had asked, "Oh, that is Keath Hall,

and may some day belong to Lord Hilton, a friend of ours."

Caroline felt her breath taken away, she had no power to speak, while Lady Clara sat smiling pleasantly to herself. The poor girl felt like springing out of the carriage, and fleeing to the uttermost parts of the earth, rather than be in the neighborhood with a man who had scorned her so.

"Lord Hilton is not there now," said Clara, with the innocent quietness of a kitten; "something has taken him to London or Italy, I believe; but he is very pleasant, and I like him well enough to be sorry about his going."

Caroline breathed again; but her face was very sorrowful and her heart heavy, during the rest of the drive.

The size and splendor of that vast building almost terrified the girl, who had been brought up in that little cedar cottage. She gave no indication of this in her manner, but walked by the side of her friend through that spacious hall, with its bronze statues, suits of armor and bossed shields, as if no meaner roof had ever sheltered her.

"Come," said Clara, as the young traveller took off her tiny hat, and began to smooth the hair back from her temples. "I am so impatient to have grandmamma see you. That will do—that will do. Come, now."

The two girls went out together, Clara leading the way, and directly stood in the dim light of Lady Carset's chamber.

"Grandmamma, I have brought my friend to pay her respects," said Clara; "only to pay her respects, for, of course, she is famished; but I felt how glad you would be, and brought her directly up here."

The old countess arose from her chair, and came forward holding out her hand. She did, indeed, seem like a fairy godmother, with that soft lace quivering over her snow-white hair, and those great diamonds blazing on her tiny hands.

"I am glad to see you, Miss—Miss—"

"Miss Brown, grandmamma."

"Oh, indeed! well, I am very glad to welcome you, Miss Brown. They tell me you have a fine voice. I should like to hear it some day, when you are not tired."

"If my voice will give you pleasure, lady, I shall, for the first time in my life, be grateful for it," said Caroline, so impressed by this sweet old lady's kindness, that she longed to throw both arms about her.

"What, what? I did not hear distinctly. Oh, it is the voice they tell me of, which thrills the heart with its sweetness; was not that what you said of it, Clara? No wonder people like it. I do."

The old lady still held Caroline's hand—her delicate fingers clung to it, with the loving tenacity of a child. She looked up to the beautiful face with eager, wistful curiosity; but the light always came dimly into that chamber, and its rich draperies of lace and brocade threw their shadows over Caroline; besides, those old eyes were dim with age, or she might have been troubled that such dangerous beauty should come into her house in the form of a dependant. As it was, she allowed the two girls to depart, without dreaming that a more beautiful woman than her grandchild had almost been put upon a level with her.

Two or three days after this, Lord and Lady Hope arrived at the castle, and the old countess, for the first time, saw the woman who wore the coronet which had once belonged to her child. It was beautiful to see that proud lady—for now you could decide that she had been very proud—preparing herself to receive this woman, whom she had hated and wronged so grievously. She stood up in her tower-room when Rachael entered it, her black satin dress trailing far out upon the floor, the yellow old lace fastened over

her bosom with a cluster of diamonds, and a handkerchief of delicate lace in her hand.

There was a little more motion of the head than usual, and that was all the evidence she gave of extraordinary emotion.

Lady Hope came to the door, leaning on the arm of her husband; but, on the threshold, she abandoned his support, and came forward by his side, apparently calm and self-possessed; but a proud fire shone in those black eyes, which would not be quenched.

"I have sent for you, Lady Hope, because I thought that the most open and honorable way of acknowledging the wrong I have done you, and of asking your forgiveness."

The old countess folded her arms over her bosom, and bent, in her proud humility, before that beautiful woman whom she could never, never love.

Rachael Closs forced back the triumph that swelled haughtily in her bosom, for the old lady's acknowledgment fired her heart like burning incense; but she bowed her head, as if she had committed the fault, and turning to her husband, appealed to him:

"I cannot—I have no language in which to say how this kindness overwhelms me. Pray tell her from this hour I forget that she has not always thought so kindly of me as I have deserved."

Lord Hope was greatly agitated. The keen eyes of that old lady, as they turned upon his face, troubled him. His very lips were white as he attempted to open them, not to utter the elegant speech suggested by his wife, for his heart seemed to break forth in a single sentence:

"Countess, have the justice to blame me if any wrong has been done to you or yours. As for this lady, no more devoted mother ever lived than she has been to your daughter's child!"

A burst of sobs arose from the other side of the room, and Lady Clara came forward, her face wet with tears, her mouth quivering.

"Indeed, indeed she has! Oh, grandmamma, do *love* her, because she has been so good to me and everybody else!"

Lady Carset reached forth her hand gently, and with delicate cordiality; but there was no yearning of the heart there, such as had marked her reception of that young girl.

Lady Hope cared very little for this. She had attained the great aim of her life in this recognition; anything like warmth of affection would have been as irksome to her as it was impossible to the old countess. She took the little hand, pressed her lips upon it, and retreated from the room, keeping her face toward the old lady, as if she were retiring from the presence of a queen.

The old countess stood up bravely, and bent her delicate person with the exquisite grace of a lady of the olden time, as her guests disappeared. The moment they were gone she turned to seek her couch; but her limbs lost their strength, her feet became entangled in the satin train, and she would have fallen to the carpet but for Lady Clara, who sprang forward and held her up.

"Dear me, how you tremble! Oh, grandmamma, don't! I never saw you cry before. It breaks my heart!"

The poor old lady was trembling in all her limbs, and crying like a child. It had been a hard cross for her feebleness to take up when she admitted that man and woman to her presence. It seemed as if her own dead child had stood between them, and with shadowy arms striven to push them apart.

"I have done no more than my duty," she said, with a piteous smile. "It was hard, very hard. Still a Carset

must not allow any wrong to go unatoned for, and about those diamonds I did wrong her."

Clara did not speak. She was frightened by the agitation into which this scene had thrown the old lady, and only besought her to rest; but strong, nervous excitement is not so easily pacified. The countess conquered her tears, but the couch shook under her nervous trembling. Then Clara ran to her own apartments, and came back to an adjoining room with Caroline, whose voice had a power of soothing which even excitement could not resist.

"Begin to sing—something low and sweet," she whispered. "I will leave the door ajar."

Then Clara stole back to her grandmother, and directly a soft strain of music stole into the room, almost unnoticed at first, like the perfume of flowers, but growing into harmonies so full and swelling, that the whole atmosphere seemed flooded with it.

The old countess listened; the faint breath paused upon her lips, her eyelids began to quiver, and her little withered hands stole up to her bosom and rested there in a tremulous clasp.

"It is a heavenly voice. My child is not angry with me. Oh! how sweetly she tells me so! how sweet—how sweet!"

And so she fell asleep after awhile—all the trembling gone, all the pain swept from those delicate features. Then Caroline came in and sat down by Lady Clara, smiling over the gentle work she had done. The old lady opened her eyes once, and, reaching out her hand to Caroline, who sat nearest, murmured:

"You are not offended with me, child?"

"She takes you for me," whispered Clara, "and is dreaming, I think. Let us be very still."

So the two girls sat together, and guarded the gentle slumber into which the old countess had fallen, with loving

solicitude. She seemed to feel their loving presence even in sleep, for a heavenly smile stole over her face, and occasionally she whispered as if answering some pleasant voice that came stealing through her dreams.

CHAPTER XXXI.

DOWN AMONG THE FERNS AGAIN.

LADY CARSET had extended numerous invitations to her old friends, and it was understood that Lady Hope would represent the head of the house and do the honors. This compliment was partly in atonement for the wrong that had been done Rachael Closs, and partly from the infirmities of extreme old age, which rendered it even dangerous for the old countess to entertain her guests in person.

For the first time in her life, Lady Hope was in her true element. The weight of an intolerable restraint had been lifted from her. She was mistress of one of the most splendid establishments in all England, not even for a time, for would it not descend unbroken to a step-daughter who worshipped her? Was not the will which settled this already made, and she as good as mistress there during her whole life? She had thought Oakhurst a noble possession, but it dwindled into insignificance when compared with the splendor of Houghton Castle. Very seldom in the world had the ambition of an aspiring woman been so suddenly and completely gratified. It had been all like a dream to her, but now she felt the reality, with an exultation of spirit that took ten years from her person, and a weird burden from her heart. This great happiness sprang out of two grand passions—love and ambition.

The first was gratified in this — Lord Hope was a changed man—a shadow had been swept from his path—hidden shame had changed to unchecked pride. The woman he had married, because of an overpowering love, was now in a position to fascinate society with her beauty, and win its homage with her genius. They had come out from the shadow and were in the broad sunshine.

All his old fondness returned; she could tell it by the elasticity of his step, by the proud uplifting of his head, by the very tones of his voice.

She had thirsted for greatness, and it was hers. She had pined for the old love, and it had come back to her. No wonder the carriage of this woman was lofty, and her voice full of music. No wonder that the rich coloring of her youth returned, and her eyes took back their velvety softness.

At this period Rachael Closs was at the pinnacle of her hopes. She could scarcely understand that this lofty position had not always belonged to her. To dispense almost regal hospitality came to her as the most natural thing on earth, and as each day brought some noble guest to the castle, she received them with more finished grace and a deeper consciousness of power.

Of course, at this time, Lady Clara was most frequently with her stepmother, for the old countess would have it so, and Caroline took her place very frequently in the tower room, where she felt herself to be more than welcome. Indeed, the old lady seemed almost as fond of her as she was of the bright, generous heiress. Caroline would not consent to mingle with the gay crowd which kept up a brilliant carnival all day long in the park, in the vast drawing-room, everywhere, except in that one old tower where the countess spent her quiet life. At the grand festival she had resolved to come forth and do the honors of

her own castle, but until then she contented herself by receiving her guests, and then pleasantly turning them over to the splendid woman who filled her place with such consummate ability.

This arrangement threw Caroline almost constantly into the seclusion of the tower apartments, and it so chanced that she had not once met Lady Hope, who was, in fact, unconscious of her presence in the castle.

Clara remembered, with some trepidation, the rebuke which had been given her, regarding her liking for this girl, and, not caring to provoke a repetition, did not mention the fact of her residence at Houghton. Thus it chanced that neither Lord Hope or his wife knew of the independent step their daughter had taken.

Lady Clara had evidently something on her mind one day, for she gave up a ride to the hunt, a thing she had set her heart upon, and came after Caroline to take a long walk in the park with her. Caroline went gladly, for her heart was aching under its broken hopes, and as the excitement connected with her new home died out, a sense of bereavement and desolation came back. She was, indeed, very wretched, and Lady Clara saw it. Perhaps this was the reason she took her protégé out for that pleasant walk in the park.

When the two girls reached that hollow through which the brook ran, and where the ferns grew, Clara became suddenly conscious that Caroline must be tired.

Perhaps she was. Caroline, in her listlessness, did not care to ask herself about it, but sat down on a fragment of rock, as Clara directed her, and fell to watching the brook with her sad eyes, as it crept through the ferns and gurgled over the pebbles at her feet.

Meantime Clara had wandered quietly up the hollow, and disappeared in search of something which grew a little way

off, she said. So Caroline was not to move till she came back, unless she wished to be lost utterly.

Caroline liked the solitude, and the cool ripple of the brook soothed her. She was rather sorry when a footstep on the forest turf heralded the return of her friend; but she looked up with a welcoming smile, and saw Lord Hilton, her Italian teacher—the man who had told her more than once that he loved her better than his own life!

She did not cry out, or rise from her hard seat, but sat still, looking at him in mournful quietness. What was he, what could he ever be, to her? A nobleman of the realm, and the Olympia's daughter!

He came down the bank and seated himself by her side.

"Caroline, have you no welcome to give me?"

She looked at him with a gleam of excitement in the sadness of her eyes.

"You know who I am, and I, alas! know that you are Lord Hilton," she said, with a touch of pathetic pride.

"How can I welcome you?"

"Have you, then, ceased to love me, Caroline?"

Her pale face flushed, her eyes kindled.

"Is this a question to ask me?"

"Yes—because I have never ceased to love you, and never shall."

"Not when you are certain that I am the daughter of—of—an actress?"

"Not if you were the daughter of fifty actresses, Caroline! I have been searching for you, in London, everywhere. More than once I inquired at Olympia's door."

"You!"

"Indeed I did; but she would give me no information."

"She could not. I left no word."

"And now that I have found you, Caroline?"

"My name is Brown, Lord Hilton. I am, in truth, the

daughter of that good man whom you supposed my father."

"And of Olympia?"

"Yes, they were married and—and divorced before she became celebrated and took the name of Olympia."

Caroline said all this with a feeling of self-torture that took all the color from her face. The love of Lord Hilton seemed an impossibility to her, and she gave him the hard truth, under which her heart was writhing, without a reservation of pride or delicacy.

"It is of very little consequence whose daughter you are," said the young man, tenderly, "so long as I love you, and am, with God's blessing, resolved to make you my wife."

"Resolved to make me your wife!"

The words came one by one from her lips, in measured sadness. She knew the thing to be impossible, and uttered the words as if she had buried some beloved object, and was mourning over it.

"I repeat it, Caroline. There is no change in my love—no change in my determination. All that I felt for you in our sweet Italian life lives with me yet."

Caroline turned her eyes full upon him. An expression of pain broke through their mournfulness.

"It was impossible!"

That was all she said; but he knew how much agony the words had cost by the whiteness of her lips.

"But why," he pleaded, "if we love each other, for you love me yet?"

"Yes, I love you!"

Hilton threw his arms around her, and kissed her cold face in a transport of thankfulness.

"Then, why not? We were betrothed in Italy, when I believed you Mr. Brown's daughter, as I do now."

"But I did not know that you were an English nobleman, and heir to a large estate."

"Is that a crime, Caroline? Besides, you need not trouble yourself about the estate. When I ask you in marriage, that is given up."

She turned to him suddenly, and held out her hands.

"Are you, indeed, ready to give up so much for me?"

"I am ready to give up everything but my honor," was his reply.

"I am only a poor girl, with no honor to hold but my own; but you shall not find me less generous than you are."

He kissed her hands in passionate gratitude.

"Ah, darling, I knew—I knew that it must end so."

She forced her hands from his clasp.

"You misunderstand me. I love you better than myself! better than my life! Do believe it! And for that reason we part, now and forever! I could not live through another hour like this!"

"Caroline!"

"I know it is hard; my own heart is pleading against it. But there is something which forbids me to listen."

"Caroline, I will not permit this! It is unnatural, cruel!"

"I know it! I know it! Still it is our destiny. Nothing that has been said, or can be said, will change the fact of your birth and mine. Do not, I implore you, press this matter farther. It is hard to fight against my own heart and you. Spare me and let me go!"

Caroline arose and absolutely fled from the man she loved. He did not attempt to detain her, but walked away slowly, half offended—but more resolved on making her his wife than ever.

CHAPTER XXXII.

OUT AMONG THE TREES.

NOT far from the glen, loitering up and down a secluded forest-path, Caroline met Lady Clara, and, by her side, the young man whom she had met that night at Olympia's supper party. This took her by surprise, and she turned into another path, where a sheltered garden seat invited her to rest.

Lady Clara had not seen her companion, and was too much occupied for any thought regarding her. She was talking earnestly to Hepworth Closs, who had refused Lady Carset's invitation to take up his quarters at the castle, but was staying at the public house down in the village, until after the festival, at which Clara still refused to be introduced as sole heiress of the broad domain on which they stood.

"Let us be patient," she said. "I cannot distress this kind old lady while she is so disturbed and so feeble. Let things take their course till she is strong enough to endure this additional agitation. She was greatly pleased with you that morning when you called. By degrees she will learn to like you; and when she finds that Lord Hilton has no idea of joining the estates by a marriage with her heiress—a thing which I know she has at heart, but she has, as yet, only given me warning by most delicate insinuations—your proposal will not disturb her so much."

Hepworth Closs had learned the great lessons of patience, and loved the young girl by his side too sincerely for any protest against what was, in fact, a necessary delay; so he answered her kindly;

"So long as we are not entirely separated, Clara, I can bear anything, even your father's hostility, which, after all, is but natural."

"But that, too, will be swept away by grandmamma's consent; and I am sure she loves me so much that, with patience, that may be obtained. Besides, there is your sister, eager for your interests and pining for your society."

"Poor Rachael! How does she bear the honors heaped upon her up yonder?"

"Like an empress. Indeed, I never saw her really happy before. My father has all at once taken to adoring her. No wonder! Happiness has made her so grandly beautiful, so dashingly brilliant in all she says and does. The new duke, who has just come down, is so taken with her that he scarcely leaves her side."

"I am glad of that," exclaimed Closs. "If ever a woman was born to control society, it is Rachael. Does she know I am here?"

"I have not told her yet. It will be time enough when all this tumult about the heirship has abated. And perhaps it will be best to let papa find it out in some natural way, when he will, I hope, be anxious to recognize you as Lady Carset's guest, and make atonement for his harshness at Oakhurst."

"What a wise little diplomat you have become, Clara!"

"Yes, I think so. It is just beginning to dawn on me that rash action is the worst kind of selfishness; how, just by a little kindness and a great deal of love, I, a harem-scarem girl, who never stopped to think in my life before, have reconciled an old family feud of fifteen years standing, brought Lady Hope triumphantly to Houghton, and swept ever so many cares out of my father's way, besides all the little pleasantness that my coming has given to the old countess. I wouldn't boast in this way to any one else,

Hepworth; but these things make me proud and happy, so I tell them to you, as I whisper it to myself. When I first came here, it was with the resolution of appealing to grandmamma against Lord Hope's opposition to us, and, if she went against me, to throw up everything, and set them all at defiance. But one must have a hard nature to attempt such harsh measures with that sweet old lady. It would break my heart to leave her—wound my conscience to give her a moment's pain. As for her title and her wealth, I tell you, honestly, they are encumbrances I do not want. A thousand times, rather, would I have her consent, with that of my father, and freedom to go with you where we pleased. I want no greatness or power for myself, unless it comes through the man I love; but for you, Hepworth, I am ambitious, and would rather a thousand times go to America, and share the honors which your own genius would be sure to win, as plain Mrs. Closs, than stay here as mistress of Houghton, a countess in my own right, and you only recognized as the husband of Lady Carset."

The hot color came and went in her lover's face as Clara spoke out the thoughts that haunted her about the future—his own thoughts expressed through her girlish lips. He turned suddenly, took her hands, and kissed them both with passionate warmth.

"Oh, if they would but give you up with nothing but this glorious freedom, I should not have another wish on earth; but they are about to bury you so deep beneath their wealth and titles that I may not be able to find my love when I ask for her."

Clara smiled.

"You shall never ask for me that I will not come. There is not in all England wealth or honors enough to buy me out of your reach. Only let us wait patiently a little while longer."

"Sweet child! generous woman! Jacob never served more faithfully for his love than I am willing to wait for mine. Only this, we must not be kept apart."

"We will not be kept apart. Our souls belong to each other. No person on earth shall enthrall them."

"Then I am content; all the more because I know what utter desolation absence is. Ah, Clara, it seemed like an opening from Paradise when you wrote me to come here! Heaven knows where I should have been now but for that blessed note!"

"But you are here, safe and well, for which the good God be thanked! Everything has happened without disappointment to any one, unless it may be Caroline's mother, the handsome Olympia. She is furious, Lord Hilton tells me. I am a little sorry for that poor woman. Of course, she wasn't just as she should be to Caroline, but I can't help liking her, after all. There that dear girl sits, like patience on a monument, waiting for me. I wonder what has become of Lord Hilton?"

Here Lady Clara and her lover separated; she joined her friend, whose garments were visible through the green of the leaves, and he walked toward the village, very happy, notwithstanding the uncertainty of his affairs.

As Hepworth entered his room at the inn, he was accosted with boisterous familiarity by Mr. Stacy, the New York alderman, who expressed the broadest astonishment at his presence there, and was anxious to know if it would break up his own mission to the castle.

Hepworth reassured him on this point, and gave some additional directions, which the alderman accepted with nods and chuckles of self-sufficiency, that were a little repulsive to the younger and more refined man.

"I understand Matthew Stacy is to be 'A Number One'

in the whole business—sole agent of her mother's trust; by-the-way, who was her mother?"

There was a shrewd twinkle in Stacy's eye as he asked this, which Hepworth comprehended and met at once.

"Her mother was the first Lady Hope, the only daughter of Lady Carset, up there at the castle. She died in America while travelling there with her husband, about fifteen years ago."

All this was plain and simple. The alderman drew a deep breath, and the shrewd twinkle went out of his eyes.

"To tell the truth," he said, "I was thinking of that poor murdered lady, Mrs. Hurst. You know there was a little girl at the inquest that would have been about the age of this young lady; for I took a peep into the peerages, after you opened this matter, and I thought possibly that Mrs. Hurst and Lady Hope might be—you understand?"

"What! Identical! Did you mean that?"

"Well, no, not exactly identical—she was respectable enough—but the same person."

"But you forgot, Mr. Stacy, telling me that the young lady who appeared as a singer in the opera that night was that very child."

"By Jingo! you are right! I did that same. Of course—of course. What was I thinking of? How she did sing, too; ten thousand mocking birds in her throat, all piping away at once. What was I thinking of? Now, Mr. Closs, while I'm gone—for I mean to strike while the iron is hot—just have the goodness to look in on Mrs. S., she will feel it a compliment, being a trifle homesick and lonesome down here. But tell her to keep a stiff upper lip; there isn't many ladies, not even your barronessers and duchessers, that shall outshine her at the grand party up yonder."

"The grand party!" repeated Hepworth, in amazement. "Are you invited there?"

"Not just yet, but of course I mean to be. One good turn deserves another, Mr. Hepworth—I beg pardon—Mr. Closs, and if I take this pile up to Castle Houghton, it is no more than fair that the young lady gives me an invite for myself and Mrs. S. Turn about is fair play, all the world over, Mr. Closs. and I don't mean to lose my chances. Some men would ask money for all this, but I am ready to put up with an invite. Mrs. S. has set her heart on it. Ask her to let you see that red velvet dress that she got made on purpose, and the panier. Don't, by any means, forget to ask her to show you the panier; it's tremendous, I tell you."

Mr. Stacy stood for a moment longer, shaking the links of his gold chain up and down in one hand, as if he had something else to say, but not remembering what it was, he disappeared, and was soon driving, in the best carriage he could obtain, toward Houghton Castle.

Lady Clara was in her own room scolding, persuading, and comforting Caroline, when a card was brought to her, and she read, with astonishment, the name of "Matthew Stacy, Esq., Ex-Alderman, New York."

"Who is this person?" she inquired.

"Haven't the least idea, my lady; he asked for yer leddyship, and would, on no account, see any one else, yer leddyship."

"Where is he now?"

"In the small drawing-room, yer leddyship."

Clara went down, excited by the painful curiosity which always disturbed her when she met any person from America. What could he want?

Alderman Stacy arose as she entered the room where he was sitting, and made three profound bows in the different stages of her advance from the door, then he sat down in a light chair. The delicate India carving began to creak

under his weight, and he sprang to his feet again, looking over his shoulder at the combination of azure silk and lace-like ebony in awkward consternation. Then he took another chair, all cushions and softness, in which he sank down luxuriously, and began to fidget with his chain.

"You are from New York, Mr. Stacy—I think it was on your card?" said Clara, commencing the conversation.

"Yes, exactly, my—my lady—Empire State; besides that I have a little business with you—pleasant business, I may undertake to say; money, my dear young lady. Money always is pleasant. What ancient poet is it that says, 'money makes the mare go?' which means, I take it, that it drives men and women—I mean gentlemen and ladies—just alike. So I call it pleasant news, when I tell your ladyship that I have got a pile of it for you—American bonds, payable in gold."

"Money for me—for me?"

"No wonder you are surprised. The amount was an astonisher for me when I came to reckon it up. At first it was a mere nothing, only a few thousand, but gold, in my hands, grows, grows, grows, and now, my dear young lady, that little heap left by your lamented mother—you understand—"

"Left by my mother, and for me?"

"Yes, your lamented mother, the first Lady Hope, a lovely woman, but delicate, very delicate; carried off by consumption at last. Well, just before her death she sent for me—we were great friends, you know. Being alderman, in fact, president of the board, I had an opportunity to offer her some municipal civilities, such as the use of the Governor's room to receive her friends in, and the freedom of the city. I assure you she had the broadest liberty to ride where she pleased, especially in the Central Park. Then we took her to the institutions, and she had a lovely dinner on

Blackwell's Island, for I was hand in glove with the commissioners. I don't tell these things to boast of 'em only to explain how she came to trust me as her executioner—I beg pardon—her executor, and send for me just as her spirit was taking flight."

"Oh! please tell me of that—of her—I do not care about the money," cried Clara, interrupting this pompous tissue of falsehoods, with tears in her eyes. "You saw her, you talked with her?"

"Often and often."

"Oh, tell me!"

"Not just now, young lady. Business is business, and we must not get things mixed. Some other time, after your great party, for instance, I shall be too happy, for Mrs. Stacy and I shall stay in the village, till after that august occasion; but now I come on business, nothing short, and I am in a hurry to get these ten thousand pounds American gold-bearing bonds off my stomach—I beg pardon—conscience. Here, my lady, is the pile of bonds. Every one will bring the tin when its wanted, no mistake about that."

Here Mr. Stacy laid a package of bonds in Lady Clara's lap, and stood with a beaming face, regarding her puzzled look, as she examined them.

"And these are worth ten thousand pounds?" she said.

"Exactly."

"And left to me without reservation or condition, by my mother?"

"Exactly. 'My dear friend,' said she, 'you will find somewhere about three thousand pounds in the bank. That money I leave in your hands, for I have faith in you, Stacy. That money is sure to grow, and when my daughter, Clara, gets to be about eighteen or so, pay it and the increase over to her in my name; tell her to keep it for her own independent use; to say nothing to Lord Hope or his wife—I mean

if he should marry again—but to use it just as she pleases, without regard to her grandmother or any one else.' These were the directions your mother left with the money, and I hope you will make sure to abide by them, my lady."

"I will remember every word you have said," answered Clara, whose face was beginning to brighten under a new idea, and the bonds were becoming very precious to her. "But is there nothing I can do in return for this kindness?"

"I expected this. That was just what she said, 'My friend,' says she, 'there will be no such thing as paying you in specie for the service you will do my child; but she will be a lady of rank, Mr. Stacy, and as such will know how to return your kindness, and entertain you with the best. Though dukes and princes should be her guests, she will have pride and glory in introducing her mother's faithful friend to them all. Yes, him and that splendid woman, who is your wife, the friend of my bosom,' says she; 'and if you ever go to England, be sure to take your wife along, then you'll have a chance to learn what British hospitality is in the walls of Houghton Castle, my own birthplace.'"

"My mother has promised nothing in my power to perform which shall not be done," said Clara, a good deal puzzled by all that she heard, and quite at a loss to judge of the social status of her visitor. But the great fact remained—her mother had trusted him; he had brought her a large sum of money, which nothing but the most honorable integrity would have prevented him keeping for his own benefit. The man who could so faithfully render back an important trust, must be worthy even of her grandmother's hospitality.

The moment Mr. Stacy had bowed and stumbled himself from the room, Clara ran to Lady Carset, and obtained an invitation for M. Stacy, Esq., and lady, to the entertain-

ment which was now close at hand. With that invitation, went a large package directed to Hepworth Closs, in which a letter was enclosed, requesting him to take such legal steps in her behalf as would secure the amount contained in the American bonds to Mr. Brown, the father of her dear friend, Caroline. "I know that she would refuse the independence for herself and her father, if I were to press it upon her; indeed, she has already done so, when I only hinted at the matter; but when it is secured irrevocably to her father, she must submit to being made comfortable in spite of herself. The money is mine to use exactly as I please, and this is my pleasure. Pray help me to carry it out. There is no need of consulting that dear old man, Brown, whose welfare I seek quite as earnestly as I do that of his daughter; for he is just the sweetest and dearest character I ever knew, and I would give the world to see his blessed old face, when he first discovers that he is a rich man. Tell me all about it. Be very careful and delicate in your management of this business, and say nothing until you have put it out of your power or mine to revoke what will make me the happier in the giving than they can be in receiving. When we meet I will tell you how this money came to be mine; but before then, I trust it will be in the possession of another. What do I want of American bonds? I think it would offend my dear old fairy-grandmother if I took them, and I know you will approve what I am doing."

Closs read the letter with a smile of pleasure; but when he took up the bonds again, his face clouded.

"Can I never wash my hands of that poor lady's money," he said. "Do what I can, it will come back to me."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE BALL AT HOUGHTON.

THE night arrived at last in which Lady Carset was to do the honors of her own castle, and receive the highest and brightest of the land in person. A range of boudoirs and saloons, connected with the state drawing-room, were thrown together, and united in one splendid vista by silken draperies and hot-house plants, which formed noble wreaths and arches over each entrance, filling room after room with brightness and fragrance.

The conservatories had been stripped that night, that their treasures of rare exotics might brighten the splendor of those rooms, and soften the ancestral grandeur of the vast entrance hall. They wound in massive wreaths around the carved balustrades of that broad oaken staircase—were duplicated over and over again in the height and breadth of those noble mirrors. They formed a blooming border around the oaken floors, black with age and bright with polish, of the dancing-rooms. The gilded orchestras were interlaced with them, and, in every group of plants or clustering wreath, jets of gas twinkled out like stars, casting tremulous shadows from the leaves, and lending a richer color to the blossoms.

When the first carriage load of guests came sweeping across the stone terrace, Lady Carset left her dressing-room, and, leaning on the arm of Lord Hope, took her place in the central drawing-room, with gentle dignity, and stood, with the gaslight quivering around her, touching up the richness of her purple garments with golden ripples of light, and striking out rainbows from the great Carset diamonds,

which held, and gathered up the woven moonlight of her lace shawl on those dainty, sloping shoulders and delicate bust, which had not known such ornaments for years. A ripple of these noble jewels ran through the soft waves of her hair, and held the tuft of Marchant feathers and lap-pets of gossamer lace back from her left temple, whence they floated off gently into the snow of her hair, scarcely whiter than it was. A lovelier representative of the grandest aristocracy on earth, or a more dainty lady of the olden times, had never, since its foundation, done the honors of Houghton Castle. But the sweet old lady was already forced to exert all her strength, that nothing should fall short of the old hospitality on this the last fête she ever expected to give.

Lady Clara had followed her, half dancing, half floating down that broad staircase, jerking blossoms from the plants as she went, and forming them into a tiny bouquet for her grandmother. Her dress was just one cloud of silvery whiteness. A little cluster of moss rose buds on the left shoulder, and another in her belt, were all the ornaments she wore. She had insisted, with almost passionate vehemence, that no mention of her heirship should be made that night, and the old lady consented with reluctance, but appeased her own impatience by a grand festival to all her tenants and retainers in the park, where nothing had been omitted which, in feudal times, was considered proper when the heirship of Houghton was proclaimed. Still, in words, the old lady had kept honorable silence, and no one, even from the grandeur of the entertainment, had a right to more than guess that the general heirship was settled on Lord Hope's daughter.

In fact, this entertainment was ostensibly given to Lord and Lady Hope, and the old countess had taken up the sparkling weight of all those Carset jewels, that all the

world might know that they had come back honorably into her own possession. It was a splendid and most delicate way of acknowledging herself in the wrong.

Before the guests had commenced to arrive in any numbers, Lady Hope came floating into the state drawing-room, with a noble cactus flower sweeping backwards from the left side of her head, and resting upon the massive braids of her hair, which curved upwards like a helmet, from her neck almost to the forehead. Chains of large rubies encircled her neck and arms, harmonizing with the cactus blossom, but forming a bold contrast to the amber silk of her dress, which swept far back upon the polished floor, and took the light as birds of Paradise fling off sunshine from their plumage. A beautiful and right queenly personage was Rachael Closs that night, as she moved across the floor and took her place by the little countess, who looked up and smiled gently when she saw that Lord Hope's wife appeared in the old family rubies, which she had presented to her that morning.

One bright glance at Clara, another of sparkling triumph at Lord Hope, and Rachael gave herself up to the brilliant duties that lay before her. This night was to be the crowning success of her life.

The guests swept through the great entrance, and into the drawing-room now, in crowds and groups. Music sounded from half a dozen gilded orchestras, and the oaken floors of that old castle began to tremble under the feet of many dancers, as they kept time to the music, and sent out a soft undertone of conversation.

Lord Hope opened the ball with the élite of the élite. Lord Hilton led Lady Clara into the same set, at which the old countess nodded her head and smiled. She observed that the young nobleman bent his head, and looking in the bright face of her grandchild, was talking earnestly to her,

at which the dear old lady smiled again, and put up her fan, that no one might observe how pleased she was.

This was what Hilton was saying:

"And she would not come down, fearing to meet me? This is hard, Lady Clara!"

"No," answered the girl, reaching out her hand for a ladies' chain, and breaking from it in haste. "It is not altogether that; she says that it is impossible to be of us—that her birth forbids it, and any attempt at equality could only end in humiliation. I cannot persuade her out of this idea: entreat as I would, she refused utterly to come down. Then I got grandmamma to urge it, and she did it beautifully, but it was no use; and there the poor darling sits all alone, hearing the music and our voices, as prisoners in their cells listen to bird songs through windows in the walls. It is cruel! Why can't people be born all alike, and go up and down according to their own merits, I wonder?"

"That is an American idea. You must have picked it up there in your infancy, Lady Clara."

"I should not wonder. Some day I mean to go back there and see what social equality is like."

"Oh, you will find no place on earth where your title will be of so much value, Lady Clara," said Hilton, laughing.

"Well, that is because the Americans respect history, and associate us with the great deeds of mutual ancestors. It is the romance of tradition that interests them; for they are great readers, these Americans, and know more of us, as a people, than we do of ourselves. We represent the warriors and the statesmen which they have clothed in the poetry of great deeds. If the nobility of this day disappoints them it is our own fault. When they learn that our great-

ness consists only in titles, we shall have little homage merely for them."

"What a strange little creature you are!"

"Yes, rather. It is our turn now."

After a little there was another long pause in the dance. Then Hilton went back to the subject nearest to his heart.

"You could not possibly persuade her to come down—not here, but into some of the less public rooms?" he said.

"Impossible. She would not think of it."

"Cruel!"

"Yes, I think so; but then, I would do exactly the same thing."

"What makes you start so, Clara?"

"Don't you see? There is Mr. Closs going up to grandmamma, and papa standing close by her. Why, Lord Hope is speaking to him! How good! how kind! They are both smiling; now, now, do look on mamma Rachael's face—she sees them, and happiness makes her splendid! He is coming this way. Understand now, I shall dance with him just as often as I can, and you are to help me if I get into any trouble. Thank Heaven, this set is over!"

"You are complimentary," laughed Lord Hilton.

"So I am; but you don't mind it. Here he is. Let me introduce you before he takes me off. Lord Hilton, Mr. Closs."

The next moment Clara was whirling through the room, with Hepworth Closs' arm around her waist, and her hand on his shoulder. She kept her word, and spent half her evening with him, managing to escape observation as much as possible, and thus secured a few hours of supreme happiness.

Lord Hope had received his brother-in-law with gentle-

manly ease. How could he help it, not being master at Houghton?

Besides, he was disposed to cast off all responsibility with regard to his daughter's choice of a husband, and leave everything to the judgment and pride of the old countess, who happened to like Closs, and was not aware how much of that evening he spent with her grandchild.

Rachael was in ecstasies. She loved her brother dearly, and his apparent reconciliation with her husband lifted the last cloud from her heart. It seemed to her that night as if she had nothing to wish for.

The old countess stood to her post bravely, until after the supper-rooms had been thrown open and the gay crowds had passed in and out again; but when the dancing had recommenced and the conversation around her grew brilliant and a little confusing, she turned suddenly pale, and would have fallen, but that Lady Clara, who stood near, sprang forward and threw both arms around her.

"She is better; she can walk now. I will go with her," cried the excited young creature. "Papa, you shall help her up-stairs, then I will take care of her," she added, seeing how helpless the old lady was.

Lord Hope almost carried the old lady up-stairs. Then Clara called aloud for Caroline Brown, who came out from her chamber, and, between them, they led the old countess into the tower-room.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE OLD WOMAN WANDERS BACK AGAIN.

OLD Mrs. Yates had left the railroad station two miles back, and was walking wearily along the high road toward the village, which lay, as it were, at the feet of Houghton Castle, like a spaniel crouching at the foot of its mistress. At the station and all along the road she had observed an unusual commotion. Carriages in an unprecedented number were waiting for special trains, which came in more than once that day for Houghton Castle.

All the vehicles in the neighborhood were in motion, dashing to and from the village inns, the castle, and a neighboring town, where accommodations for a great access of people could be obtained.

Hannah Yates was more than once nearly run over and driven back to the banks of the highway by those flying vehicles, where she stood half-terrified, half-curious, looking after them in wistful astonishment.

What could this tumultuous movement mean? Was it a wedding—but of whom? A funeral—the old countess?

No, no! Destiny could not be so cruel. Besides, there was no such eager driving or smiling faces when the head of that castle was taken from its broad portals to the family vault. It must be some festival, and she was yet in time.

At an abrupt curve of the road the old woman came suddenly upon a full view of the castle. It was all ablaze with lights, and rose up from the embosoming trees like some enchanted palace upon which a tempest of stars had rained down in all their heavenly brightness. The broad

façade which connected the tower was flooded with noonday light, and she could discover groups of people moving to and fro on the stone terrace in front, rendered so small by the distance that they seemed unreal and fairy-like. Down to the verge of the park and upward, curving through the woods, she could trace the chestnut avenue by wreaths of colored lanterns that blazed from tree to tree like mammoth jewels chaining them together. Now and then a carriage broke to view, sweeping along the macadamized avenue, clearly revealed by the light that fell around it.

Never in her life had the old woman seen such splendid commotion about that stately building, yet she could remember many a festive scene in its old walls, when crowned princes had been entertained there with a degree of splendor scarcely exceeded in their own palaces.

As the old woman stood gazing upon this scene, a countryman, passing along the highway, paused near her to get a sight of the castle.

"What is going on up yonder?" inquired the woman, drawing toward him and speaking in his own broad dialect.

"What is't at yon castle? An' who mon you be that donna know that the oud lady up at Houghton is giving a grand blow-out to her gran'child, Lord Hope's daughter, an' to Lady Hope, as people thought she would never abide in her sight?"

"And is Lord and Lady Hope at the castle?"

"Aye, an' the young lady, too—her that the oud countess is o'er fond of; but the young 'un is a right comely lass, an' the oud 'un might go further and fare worse."

Mrs. Yates gathered the woolen shawl she had travelled in about her, and went hastily down the bank on which she

had been standing, so excited that all the weakness of age seemed to have been suddenly swept from her.

She had intended to sleep in the village that night; now she bent her steps resolutely toward the castle.

As she came out of the chestnut avenue, keeping upon the turf and among the shadows, all of the glory of that illumination broke upon her.

The broad terrace, flooded with light—a fountain, directly in front, shooting up a column of liquid crystal thirty feet or more, where it branched off, like a tree of quivering ice swayed gracefully in the wind, and broke up in a storm of drops that rained downward, flashing and glittering through that golden atmosphere to their source again.

Above this rose those grand old towers, garlanded with colored lamps that wound in and out of the clinging ivy in great wreaths and chains of tinted fire, which harmonized with the quivering foliage, and flooded the fountain, the terrace, and all the neighboring trees with a soft atmosphere of golden green.

Here and there the gray old stonework of the towers broke through, revealing glimpses of the giant strength which lay hidden underneath; and over the right hand tower, from a flag-staff turned around and around with star-like lights, the broad, red banner, with which the Carsets had for centuries defied their enemies and welcomed their friends, floated slowly out upon the night wind.

Hannah Yates saw all this, and knew, by the music which thrilled the air around her, that the revel, whatever it was, had commenced; for a sound of pleasant voices and sweet laughter came through the open windows, and from the depths of the park—where an ox had been roasted whole that day, and wine and beer had flowed freely as the waters of the fountain—came subdued sounds of a waning festival,

which had been given to the tenantry and villagers. The gaiety of the castle was answered back from the park, and harmonized by that of the working people who tilled all the broad lands around it.

When the old woman heard these answering sounds she felt that an heiress to all this greatness was acknowledged that night, for when lords gathered in the castle, and tenants in the park, it was usually to acknowledge the rights of a coming heir, and she could not believe that all this had been done in honor of Lady Hope.

Hannah Yates lost all the unnatural strength that had brought her among this splendor. She knew that it was scarcely possible that she could speak with Lady Carset that night, if she could, indeed, gain admittance to the castle; but she went around to a back entrance, and so made her way, unseen, to the tower-chamber, which opened into Lady Carset's dressing-room. There she sat down and waited, hour after hour, until at last the door opened, and the old countess came in, walking feebly between two young girls, one of whom she had never seen before, but the other made the sinking heart leap in her bosom.

When the old countess entered, the lights in her room were shaded, but they struck those masses of jewels in the snowy whiteness of her hair and upon her bosom with a brilliancy that revealed the gray pallor of that aged face with painful distinctness.

Hannah Yates arose from the shaded place in which she was sitting, and came forward to support her old mistress.

The countess looked up, and a faint smile flickered across her face.

"Ah! Yates, is it you?"

Mrs. Yates made no answer, but took that frail form in her arms and carried it to the couch.

"Take them off! take them off! They are heavy, ah, so heavy!"

The old lady put a waving hand to her head, indicating that it was the diamonds that troubled her.

Mrs. Yates, who had performed this office many a time before, unclasped the jewels and laid them on a sofa-table close by, then she removed the burning stones from that oppressed bosom, and unclasped them from the slender arms, while her mistress lay struggling for breath, with her eyes fixed on that kind old face with a look of touching helplessness.

"Give me water," she whispered.

Caroline ran for a goblet of water, and held it to those white lips. The countess drank a swallow and then called out:

"Wine! wine!"

Wine was brought, and she drank a little.

"Go, my child," she whispered, seeing how anxious and pale Clara appeared, in spite of the cloudy softness of her dress. "Go to your room and get some rest. Ah, me! how all this wearies, wearies!"

The two girls hesitated. There was something in that sweet old face that kept them spellbound. The old lady saw it, and reaching forth her hand, drew them, one after the other, down to her lips, and kissed them.

"Good-night, good-night!"

How softly those gentle words fell from her lips. With what yearning fondness her eyes followed those young creatures as they went reluctantly from the room, looking back in wistful sorrow, as they left her in the care of Yates.

CHAPTER XXXV.

LADY HOPE IN THE CASTLE.

LADY CLARA had been dancing, talking and receiving such homage as would have satisfied the ambition of a princess. She had managed to snatch time to exchange many a sweet word and bright look with her lover, and would have been happy in delicious weariness, but for the sudden indisposition which had fallen upon her grandmother. As it was she could hardly realize anything, but gave way to intense weariness, and almost fell asleep as Margaret was undressing her.

But Caroline had been alone all the evening, within hearing of the laughter, the music, and feeling the very tread of the dancers in every nerve. She was young, ardent, and naturally felt a craving wish for the amusement she had resolutely denied herself; now, less than ever, could she feel a desire for sleep. Instead of seeking her room she wandered off to a wing of the castle, in which the picture gallery stretched its silent range of dead shadows, and tried to throw off the unaccountable excitement that possessed her, by walking up and down the long gallery.

The late moon was shining through the windows, and a crowd of dimly outlined figures, in armor or sweeping garments, looked down upon her from the walls.

Why this strange spirit of unrest had sent her to that gallery she could not have told, but it was there still, urging her on and on, she could not tell where, but walked swiftly up and down, up and down, as if striving to weary herself in a desire for the slumber that seemed to have fallen upon every human being in the castle.

As she was walking thus wildly, a footstep, not her own, disturbed her. She stopped to listen—made sure that it was some one advancing, and drew slowly back toward the wall, hoping to shelter herself among the low-hanging pictures.

The moonlight, from a neighboring window, lay full upon her as she retreated across the room, with her face turned down the gallery, and her breath hushed in fear. She saw, coming toward her, now in shadow, now in broader light, a lady, in garments of rustling silk, sweeping far back on the oaken floor, and gleaming duskily, amber-hued in the imperfect light of a small silver lamp which she carried in her hand—a beautiful lady, with rubies on her neck and in her hair. The lamplight, for a moment, concentrated on a face whose weariness was overborne by slumbering triumph, which poised her head like that of a newly crowned empress.

Caroline stood for the moment fascinated, then made a swift retreat, for she saw those great, black eyes turned full upon her, and fled in a panic.

A shriek—the crash of a falling lamp, and a mass of dusky drapery huddled together on the floor, brought the girl out of her covert. Something must have happened—the lady had hurt herself—perhaps could not arise from want of help. She went down the gallery, passing first one window then another, taking the moonlight from each, when the fallen lady uttered another cry, sprang to her feet and fled down the gallery, leaving her lamp overturned, with the wick still burning.

Caroline took up the lamp, and placing it on a bracket, left the gallery, vexed with herself for the fright she had occasioned this strange lady by wandering about so heedlessly in the dark. Still she could not sleep, but went to her own room and sat waiting there for the morning to dawn.

Perhaps an hour after Caroline left the picture gallery, a figure clothed in white from head to foot, came through an end door, walking firmly through the darkness, and touching the floor with the noiseless tread of her naked feet. She walked straight to the silver lamp and took it from the bracket. Now her face was revealed. It was Lady Hope.

She held the lamp before her, and moved on very slowly, looking ahead through the darkness with those wide open, staring eyes.

After that, when all the fires of that vivid illumination had burned out in the park, and were quenched in the castle, a bright star seemed wandering up and down the vast building; now at one window, then at another, lighting it up with fitful gleams, then leaving it in darkness, and appearing again in some far off casement.

Once or twice the form of a woman in white cast its cloudy outline across the plate glass of an unshuttered window; but no person was in the park to observe her, and she wandered on with a lamp in her firm hand, which brightened over the pallid outlines of her face, and kindled up her night drapery like sunshine over drifted snow. Up and down along the corridors, and through the long drawing-room, the figure swept, carrying her lamp, and moving noiselessly over the floor with her white, naked feet.

Upon that unconscious face a look of deep pain had stamped itself in place of haughty triumph, and the wide open black eyes had a far-off look, as if their glance could penetrate the walls and the very sky beyond.

On and on the woman wandered, till she came to a closed door in one of the corridors. Here she paused, laid her right hand on the silver knob, and turned it so noiselessly that, when the door opened, it seemed like the action of a ghost.

The room was darkened from even the faint light of the stars by sweeping draperies of silk, which glowed out redly as the lamp light fell upon it in flashes, as if suddenly drenched with wine.

A high ebony bedstead stood in the centre of this noble room, canopied half way over, and draped like the windows, so that a red gleam fell upon the whiteness of the counterpane as the light of that lamp fell upon it.

A man lay profoundly sleeping on this bed—a handsome, middle-aged man, whose thick brown beard showed soft gleams of silver in it, and whose hair, though waving and bright, was growing thin on the top of his head.

The man appeared to sleep heavily, and a smile lay on his lips; but a look of habitual care had written itself on his forehead, and his mouth was surrounded by stern, hard lines, that seemed graven there with steel.

The woman stood by this sleeping man, gazing on him with the far-off look of a ghost. She turned at last, and set the light down on a console, where it fell less distinctly on the pillow where that head was lying. Then she crept back and sat down on the side of the bed, so close to the unconscious sleeper that her shadow fell across him. Slowly, as if she had been touching a serpent, her hand crept stealthily toward that which lay in the supine carelessness of sleep on the white counterpane. She touched it at last, but started back. A blood-red stain from the curtain fell across it as her bending form let the light stream through the silk.

The woman drew back and passed her left hand quickly over that which had touched the sleeping man. Again and again she rubbed one hand over the other, muttering to herself.

Then a look of passionate distress came to that dark face, and, going to a marble table, on which a silver bowl and

pitcher stood, she poured some water into the bowl, and plunged the hand with which she had touched that sleeping man into it. The splash of the water aroused him, and its icy coldness shocked the woman out of her unnatural sleep. She turned around wildly, with the water dripping from her hands—turned to find herself in her husband's chamber, with his astonished eyes fixed upon her as he sat up in bed.

"Rachael!"

She did not answer him, but stood gazing around the room in wild bewilderment. How came she standing there? By what spirit of love or hate had she been sent to that silver basin?

"Rachael, is anything wrong? Are you ill?"

The woman began to shiver. Perhaps the ice cold water had chilled her.

She looked down upon her hands as if the red shadow haunted her yet, but all she saw were drops of pure water rolling down her slender fingers, and falling one by one to the floor.

"I do not know!" she answered, in cold bewilderment. "Something drove me out from the bed, and sent me wandering, wandering, wandering! But how I came here, alas! Norton, I cannot tell you."

Rachael shivered all over as she spoke, and, as if drawn that way by some unseen force, came close to Lord Hope's bed, and sat down upon it.

"Oh, I am so cold—so dreary cold!"

An eider down quilt lay across the foot of the bed. Lord Hope reached forward and folded it around her, very gently, murmuring:

"My poor wife! poor Rachael! You have been dreaming."

"No; it was not all dreaming, Norton. I did see—no

matter what; but it was something that terrified me out of all the joy and glory of this night. I must have been fearfully worn out to sleep after that; but the lamp, which I left behind me, is burning there, and my hands were in the cold water, trying to wash themselves, when you awoke me. I must have been in that fearful picture gallery again."

"You have courage to go there at all, Rachael!"

"I got there without knowing it. The rooms have been so changed I lost my way, and took the wrong corridor, and there I saw—"

"*Her* picture."

"Was it that? Oh! was it only that?"

"It is there—her picture—life size; and so like that I would not look on it for the world."

"But what carried me there, Norton? On this night, too, when I have been honored, as your wife should be for the first time! when her mother has taken me by the hand and lifted the cloud from my name! Ah, Norton! Norton! it was glory to me when I saw your eyes kindle, and answer back to mine, as the noblest of the land crowded round to do me homage. Then I knew that the old love was perfect yet. Oh, Destiny is cruel, that it will not let me have one perfect day!"

"After all, it was but a picture. Why allow it to distress you so?"

Lord Hope took her hands in his. She did not shrink from his touch now, as she had in her abnormal sleep; but he felt her palms growing warm, and saw the light coming back to her eyes, where it had seemed frozen at first.

"And you love me? I was sure of it to-night. That was my chiefest glory. Lacking that, what would the homage of all the world be to Rachael Closs? I was think-

ing this, when *that* seemed to start up before me, and whispering to myself, 'He loves me! he loves me! he loves me!' like a young girl; for I have seemed very young to-night. Why not? A glorious life lies before us. You will now step more fearlessly forward, and take your place among the great men of the earth,—while I—I will be anything; charm stones, work miracles, to win popularity and lay it at your feet.

"Say that you love me once more, Norton, and then I will creep back to my pillow, the proudest and happiest woman on earth—for, after all, it was only a picture!"

Rachael Closs had hardly done speaking when a cry of distress rang through the neighboring corridor, the door of Lord Hope's chamber was flung open, and a pallid face looked in.

"Come—come at once! My lady is dying!"

Round to other rooms came that cry of terror, arousing those two girls—the one from her sleep, the other from her mournful vigil—and drawing the family together, in pale groups, into the tower-chamber.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DEATH IN THE TOWER-CHAMBER.

THE old countess was not dying, but dead. Hannah Yates, who had watched her faithfully, did not know when the last faint breath left her lips; but she became conscious of a solemn stillness which settled upon the room, and bending forward, saw that soft gray shadows had crept over that gentle face, up to the hair of silky snow, and down to

the slender throat, till it was lost in the purple splendor of that festive robe.

There she lay, tranquil as a sleeping child, with a calm, holy smile breaking through the shadows, and her little hands meekly folded over the gossamer lace on her bosom.

Upon a marble table close by lay the jewels she had worn—a glittering and neglected heap of fire, which gave out more light than the shaded lamps that threw their beams brightly on them, and shed tender moonlight on that lovely old face.

The family were slowly gathering in that death-chamber, where Clara and Caroline were clinging together in bitter grief, and old Mrs. Yates was kneeling with her face buried in the purple of her mistress' robe.

Lord Hope came in at last, followed by Lady Hope, who, even in that solemn place, could not suppress her pride as her eyes fell on Lady Clara, whom she recognized as the heiress of all that gentle lady had left. But Lady Clara saw nothing of this. The poor girl was weeping out her passionate sorrow in the arms of her friend, who bent over her with such tender sympathy that her face was almost concealed.

As Lord Hope advanced toward the death-couch, old Mrs. Yates arose and stood before him. When he had last seen her she was an old woman, but in the prime of her strength; now her shoulders stooped, her hair was entirely white, and she faltered in her walk. He reached out his hand to her. She did not appear to observe it, but said to him, in a quiet voice:

"My lord, I am glad to find you here. God has so ordered it that I was too late for her. She could not hear what I had to say, but you must listen in her stead."

"At the proper time, Hannah; but we must not talk of worldly things in this presence."

Lord Hope bent his head reverently toward the pale form upon the couch, and the old woman also bowed down her face meekly, as she had learned to bow her head in prison; but she answered, with gentle firmness:

"No—that which I have to say must be told now, and in her dead presence. Since God has forbidden me to bring doubt and sorrow on her last moments I thank Him for it, but you must listen."

"Not now—not now," answered Hope, quickly. He was disturbed by the sight of this old woman, whom he had believed to be buried for life in an American prison; but he had learned the great art of self-control, and gave no indication of the shock her presence in that room gave him.

His first impulse was to get Lady Hope out of the apartment. She had never seen Mrs. Yates, but he was fearful that some mention of her name might renew the nervous agitation from which she had but just recovered.

"Come with me, Rachael," he said, in a low voice. "I will take you to our room, for this is a painful sight. Then I will return, alone, to hear what this person has to say."

Lady Hope was willing to leave a scene which filled her with gloom.

Whispering to Clara that she would come back and watch with her when the old woman was gone, she twisted a corner of the black lace shawl, which covered her head, around her throat, and went away, glad to escape that strange old woman, against whom she had taken one of those sudden antipathies which were common to her.

"Dear me! I look almost as deathly as she does, with all these shadows on my face," said Lady Hope, as she stood

before the mirror in her dressing-room, and unwound the black lace from her head.

She was correct. What with fatigue, and the black shadows flung by her shawl, the best friends of this proud woman would have recognized her with difficulty.

She turned for her husband's answer, but found that he had left her at the door. All rest was broken up for her now; in fact, it was almost morning; so she began to pace the room to and fro, thinking, with exultation, of the honors and wealth that had poured in upon her family by that gentle old lady's death.

Meantime Lord Hope had gone back to the death-chamber, where Mrs. Yates and the two young ladies were waiting.

The old woman arose from her knees when he came in.

"That which I have to say, Lord Hope, relates to you, first of all, now that my dear old mistress is gone. When the first Lady Hope came to America, her little girl, then between two and three years of age, was placed in my son's family, and under my charge, as her mother had been when a child. She had reasons, which you will understand, for wishing the child to pass as the daughter of my son; so we gave her his name, and she was known everywhere as my grandchild."

"We had another little girl, about the same age, the daughter of Mrs. Brown, an actress; fair, like your child, and very pretty. This child, Caroline Brown, was almost given to us; for, after the first year, we never saw her mother, or received anything from her. One night I received a note asking me to come down to one of the theatres, and meet a person who had business with me. There was no name to the note; but I supposed it must be from Mrs. Brown, and went. But no person was there to meet

me, and I went home disappointed. That night Lady Hope died."

Lord Hope, who had been anxious and restless, drew a deep breath; for he understood, by the slow caution of the old woman's speech, that she meant to reveal nothing which his anxious and listening daughter might not hear.

"My lady left a letter behind her, with some money, and the Carset diamonds, which she charged me to deliver, with my own hands, here at the castle.

"She had fears about her daughter—anxieties, which I need not explain—and besought me to keep the little girl; to educate her, and conceal her identity until she was eighteen years old, when I, or my son, should take her back to England, and allow her to choose her own way of life.

"I had talked this matter over with my lady, and gave her a solemn promise to protect her child, and the honor of her name, with my life, if that were needed. The very night of her death Lady Hope gave all the papers necessary to the recognition of her child to my son. He brought them home, and, while the children were asleep, we two pledged ourselves to protect your child from everything that her mother feared, and to secure for her all that she hoped.

"My lord, we kept our oaths. He died, broken-hearted, under the terrible burden which we took on ourselves that night. I lived, carrying it with me, till my shoulders are bowed, and my hair white with old age.

"The next day, while *she* lay dead, a fire broke out in the house where we lived. Our rooms were high up; the flames and smoke mounted so suddenly that it was impossible for us to escape by the stairs. The two little girls had crept into a corner of the room, and sat crying there,

with the fire and smoke rolling toward them. I had secured the box, in which were Lady Hope's jewels and papers, and swung it over my shoulders, then snatched up your child."

Here the two girls, who stood, pale and trembling, by the window, uttered a simultaneous cry.

"I remember! I remember!" they said, each to the other, then clung together and listened.

The old woman scarcely heeded this interruption.

Lord Hope looked toward the window, so bewildered that he could neither see nor hear anything distinctly.

Mrs. Yates went on:

"I called on Daniel's wife to bring the other child. Firemen and citizens were climbing the ladders and leaping in at the windows. One man sprang into the room and out again, while I waited for my turn. He had something in his arms huddled up like a bundle—pushed me aside and took my place on the ladder. Then Daniel's wife came to me, wringing her hands and crying. She could not find the child.

"But I had the one most precious to me in my arms. The flames drove me forward, and I let myself down on the ladder. Your child was safe. I know now that the man who pushed me from the window saved little Caroline Brown and brought her to you. She has since been known as your daughter. I saw her in your arms on board the steamer. Last night she was recognized as grand-daughter of Lady Carset."

"But the other—my own child?"

"I had no means of telling you the truth at the time, and, after that, would not do it. The child, I knew, would be a safeguard to little Clara. You would not inquire for her while supposing her in your own possession. But we took one precaution—that of giving her the name of Caro-

line, which was sure to prevent inquiry. After that she was known as Caroline Yates, and, until my son's death, thought herself his child. I never lived with them after that, but saw her from time to time, though she never noticed me or knew of the interest I took in her; but, year by year, I saw her grow up, until my son died. Then I lost all knowledge of her.

"One day I was free to look for this dear child, and went to the cottage where my son's will had secured her a home. It was empty. She had gone away with some singing woman and a person named Brown, who had been her music-teacher.

"The woman had claimed to be her mother, and was known on the stage as Olympia."

"Go on! go on!" exclaimed Lord Hope; "I am listening."

The two girls in the window were listening also. As they understood this story more and more clearly, their arms tightened around each other and a look of unutterable affection beamed upon their faces; but that of the girl known as Lady Clara glowed with a look of generous self-abnegation, while her companion was troubled, and almost sad.

"Go on! go on!"

"I left America at once on learning this, bringing Lady Hope's papers and Lady Carset's jewels with me. Olympia was in England, and, no doubt, your daughter was with her. First I came here, and gave up the trust that had become a heavy, heavy burden. Then I went in search of my young lady. The time had come when she might claim her title and her rights, without violating her mother's directions. After much search, I found Olympia's house, and inquired for the person known as her daughter. She told me herself, and with bitter anger, that she had no

daughter. I knew the woman, and attempted to make her comprehend that I wished to find the young lady for her own good; but this flung her into a passion of rage, and she ordered me from the house. Then followed an attempt to bribe me. Still I kept up the search, and at last traced the girl they called Caroline Brown to this neighborhood."

"To this neighborhood!" exclaimed Lord Hope. "Where? where?"

"My lord, up to this time you have only the word of an old woman, who has suffered under great reproach for all this. I know that the identity of a nobleman's child and the transfer of a great inheritance cannot be so proven. But here is the letter, which Lady Hope gave to me, and another that she wrote to you on the day of her death. Poor, poor lady! She was very sad that morning, and would undertake the letter at once. God seemed to warn her of what would happen in the next twenty-four hours."

Lord Hope took the papers which the old woman handed to him, and there, in the presence of the dead, gathered a confirmation of all Mrs. Yates had told him.

The paper had grown yellow since it was blotted with the tears of a woman he had once loved. No wonder it shook his hand as he read.

"And this girl, my daughter, where is she?" he cried, with a passionate outburst of grief.

The girl known as Lady Clara came out from the shadows of the window curtains, and made an effort to draw Caroline with her; but she shrank back and stood alone, trembling violently.

"Papa!"

"Oh, my poor, poor child! How will you bear this?" cried Lord Hope.

"Trust me, dear, dear papa—for I will call you so.

Nothing can break my heart, if you and mamma Rachael will love me yet; for the rest, I am glad, so glad, that I am no longer a lady, and am left without a guinea. 'This is to be really free!'

"Ah, poor child, how can we ever part with you?"

"Your own daughter will not begrudge me a little love; and, after all, I do belong to mamma Rachael more than she ever can. That is something. Besides, it is from me that you must take your daughter, for I brought her here. Ask her if I did not."

The young girl was smiling, but tears stood in her eyes, and her lips quivered as she spoke.

"Come with me, father, and I will give you to her. It is hard, but I will."

She led Lord Hope across the room, drew back the curtain, and let in the soft gray light of that early dawn upon the trembling young creature who stood there.

Lord Hope shook in all his limbs when he saw that face. The eyes full of tears seemed to reproach him as *hers* had on that fatal night.

He reached out his arms, with a convulsive heaving of the chest, and faltered out:

"Forgive me! forgive me! for I have bitterly repented."

He did not kiss her—he dared not even touch her forehead in that solemn presence; but he laid one hand on her head, rested his own upon it, asking that forgiveness of God which her heart gave, but could only express by pathetic silence.

Then the old woman came up to the window, and stood there, waiting.

When Lord Hope fell back against the window-frame, strengthless from excess of feeling, she laid a hand upon the girl's shoulder, and, turning her face gently to the

light, gazed upon it with tender scrutiny. Then she said, talking to herself:

"It is her face! It is her face!"

"And you are Daniel Yates' mother. How I shall love you! Oh, how I loved him!"

Then the old woman's face began to quiver, and her large gray eyes filled with the slow tears old age gives out with such pain.

"Yes, child, you must love me a little for your mother's sake."

"And for the sake of that good man, your son, who was a father to me. How often he has told me that, if there was anything grand or good in him, it came from the best mother that ever lived! 'Some day,' he once said, 'God may be merciful and let you know her. Then remember that she has nothing left but you.' I do remember it, and no child ever loved a grandmother better than I will love you."

The old woman lifted up her head from the gentle embrace thus offered her, and turned to her dead mistress.

A smile, soft as that hovering about that cold mouth, came to her lips and eyes.

"God is very good to me. Are the angels telling you of it, my old mistress, that you smile so?"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE NEMESIS.

THE last tender words were still lingering on the lips of Mrs. Yates, when the door opened and Lady Hope stood upon the threshold.

She had become restless beyond self-control in her own room, and came back to the death-chamber, wondering what detained her husband there so long. She had thrown the lace shawl from her head entirely; but it fell around her shoulders, shading her bare white arms and beautiful neck, which the amber-hued dress would otherwise have left uncovered. Framed in the doorway she made an imperial picture.

"My lord," she said, advancing to her husband, "what detains you here so long?"

Old Mrs. Yates stepped forward with a scared, wild look; a gleam of anger or fear, bright as fire, and fierce as a martyr's faith, shot into her eyes and broadened there. She came close to Lady Hope, facing her, and laid one hand heavily on her arm.

The haughty woman drew back, and would have shaken the hand from her arm, but it clung there with a grip of steel.

"Lord Hope, is this woman your wife?"

"His wife! Yes, old woman, I am his wife," cried Rachael, pale with indignation; "but who authorized you to ask?"

The old woman did not heed her scornfulness, but turned her eyes upon Lord Hope, whose face was already white with vague terror.

"Is she your wife—the woman who was called Rachael Closs?"

"It is Lady Hope, my wife. Why do you ask?"

"*Because it was this woman who murdered your first wife, Lady Carset's daughter!*"

More than the stillness of death settled upon that room. The two girls hushed their sobs, and clung closer together in awful silence. The man and the woman, on whom these words had fallen like a rock hurled from some great high

stood living and human, but struck into marble by a single blow. The man could not move; the woman did not seem to breathe. Hannah Yates went on, her voice low, but ringing out clear and distinctly like a funeral knell:

"On the twenty-first of June, now more than fifteen years ago, I saw you, Lord Hope, come out of a house in Forty-third Street, in New York.

"You know the house, and can never forget who lived in it. That day I had carried your child to see its mother, and left word at home for my son, Daniel Yates, to go after her; for I had business with a woman at one of the theatres, and was not sure of coming back in time. The woman I expected to see was not there; but it took me a long time to walk back, and it was about ten o'clock when I reached the house in Forty-third Street. Thinking it possible that Daniel might not have come home from his work till late, I was crossing the street to go in and inquire about the child, when the front door opened, and you came down the steps, with a fierce, angry air, such as I had seen many a time on this side the water. I knew that your presence in that house could have no peaceful meaning, and went over. I had a latch-key, and did not need to ring.

"The hall was dark—everything was still below; but a sound of weeping and moans of distress came from my lady's chamber. I went up and found her in the dark, lying across her bed, trembling dreadfully. She shrieked when I bent over her, and it was not till I got a light that she would be satisfied that it was only me. Then she sat up, and, in a rapid way, told me that you had been there after the child, and would have it but that the little creature had crept away and could not be found anywhere in the house. She must have got into the street, and you would find her, or she might be lost. She begged me to go at once and look for the child, and wanted to go with me; but I would not

let her do that. I took her arms from my neck—for, in her joy at seeing the old woman, she had flung them there—made her lie down on the bed, and went away, promising to come back if I did not find the child; but, if I did, it was to be carried to my own house, as she was afraid to trust it near her. With this understanding I left her to search for the little girl.

"She may have crept down to the basement door and be hiding under the steps, I thought. Of course, the little thing would be afraid to go out into the streets. So the first thing I did was to run down into the area. In my haste I had left the door ajar, and bethought myself to go back and shut it, but while I was searching the area a woman ran up the steps and, pushing the door open, went into the house.

"At first I thought it was one of the servants, for they all appeared to be out, but she had on a striped India shawl, such as ladies wore in travelling, and a straw bonnet, from which the veil had blown back. These were not things worn by servants; besides, her air and walk convinced me that this woman was of another class. As she entered the door I saw her face for a single moment, but long enough to show me that I had never seen it before.

"The child was not in the area. I rang the basement bell, meaning to question the servants, but no one answered it. Then I hesitated where to go next, and as I stood in the shadow of the steps thinking the matter over, this same woman came through the door, shut it without noise, and ran down to the pavement. I saw her face clearly then, for the street lamp was bright. It was that of the woman by your side, Lord Hope."

Rachael Closs turned a pallid face upon her husband.

"Will you permit this woman to go on? Is this hideous

lie a thing for my husband to encourage by his silence? Who is this audacious woman?"

Lord Hope attempted to speak, but his white lips seemed frozen together.

"I am Hannah Yates, the nurse of that murdered lady; the woman who has given fourteen years of her life, rather than have scandal fall on the husband her foster-child loved, or the awful truth reach her dear old mistress, who died, thank God, without knowing it."

"And you listen, my lord, to this woman, a confessed murderer, and, no doubt, an escaped convict?"

"He *must* listen, and he must believe! How did I know that he was in my lady's house that night, and the moment of his leaving it? How did I know the very words he used in attempting to force the child from her? No human being but himself and the poor lady, whose lips were cold within an hour, knew of anything that passed between the husband and wife the last time they ever met on earth."

"But you might have overheard—no doubt were listening—if my lord was indeed in that place at all. This is no evidence; even if a woman, convicted by her own confession of a crime she now seeks to cast upon another, could bear witness."

Rachael Closs spoke out clearly now, and her eyes, shining with the ferocity of a wild animal at bay, turned full upon the old woman who accused her.

The old woman put a hand into her bosom and drew out a small poniard. Rachael Closs gave a sharp gasp, and snatched at the poniard, but the old woman held it firmly.

"Lord Hope, this has been in your hands a hundred times. When did you part with it? To what person did you give it? Your crest is on the handle; her blood rusts the blade."

Lord Hope lifted both hands to conceal the horror that was on his face, to shut out the weapon from his sight.

"Oh! my God! my God! spare me more of this!"

The proud noble was shaking from head to foot. The veins swelled purple on his forehead. The sight of that slender weapon swept away his last doubt. Lady Hope shrank back from his side, but watched him keenly in her agony of guilt and dread. Her proud figure withered down, her features were locked and hard, but out of their pallor her great eyes shone with terrible brilliancy. Her husband's hands dropped at last, and he turned a look of such despairing anguish upon her that a cry broke from her lips.

"You—you condemn me?"

Lord Hope turned from her, shuddering.

"You know! you know!"

He remembered giving her this poniard on the very day of her crime. He had been in the habit of carrying it with him when travelling, and though sharp as a viper's tongue, it, with the daintily enamelled sheath, was a pretty table ornament, and she had begged it of him for a paper cutter. He had seen the sheath since, but never the poniard, and now the sight of it was a blow through the heart.

"I picked it up by her bed that morning, after the murder. There is a person in the castle who saw me take it from the place where it had fallen. If any one here doubts me, let them ask a person called Margaret Casey—let them ask her."

That moment the door of the room opened, and Hepworth Closs stood on the threshold. He had been informed of Lady Carset's illness, just as he was leaving the castle, and came back only to hear that she was gone. The scene upon which he looked was something worse than a death-chamber.

"Ask him if he did not see this poniard in her room while she lay unburied in the house."

Rachael turned her eyes upon her brother—those great, pleading eyes, which were fast taking an expression of pathetic agony, like those of a hunted doe.

"And you—and you!" she said, with a cry of pain that thrilled the heart of her wretched husband. "Has all the world turned against me? Old woman, what have I ever done to you that you should hunt me down so?"

Hepworth Closs came forward and threw an arm around his sister's waist.

"What is it, Rachael? Who is hunting you down?" he said, tenderly. "No one shall hurt you while I am near."

She turned, threw her arms around his neck, and covered his face with passionate kisses. Then she turned to Lord Hope, held out her pale hands imploringly; and cried out in pathetic anguish:

"Oh, do not believe it! Do not believe it!"

But Lord Hope stepped back, and turned away his face. She knew that this motion was her doom.

"Let me look at the poniard," she said, with unnatural gentleness. "I have a right to examine the proofs brought against me."

Hannah Yates gave her the dagger. She looked at it earnestly a moment, laid one hand upon her heart, as if its beating stifled her, then lifted the other and struck.

"Now, my husband, will you kiss me? I have given them blood for blood, life for life!"

"She fell in a heap at her husband's feet, and while death glazed over her eyes, reached up her arms to him.

He fell upon his knees, forgetting everything but the one dreadful fact that she was his wife, and dying. His face drooped to hers, for the lips were moving, and her eyes turned upon him with pathetic anxiety.

"It was love for you that led me to it—only that—Oh, believe—beli—"

"I do! I do!" he cried out, in fearful anguish. "God forgive me, and have mercy on you!"

She struggled, lifted up her arms, drew his lips close to hers, and over them floated the last icy breath that Rachael Closs ever drew.

Then the young girl, who had loved this woman better than anything on earth, sank to the floor, and took that pale head in her lap, moaning over it piteously.

"My poor mamma! my darling mother! Speak to me! Open your eyes! It is Clara—your own, own child! Her eyelids close—her lips are falling apart! Oh! my God, is she dead?"

She looked piteously in the face of Hepworth Closs, who had knelt by her side, and asked this question over and over again:

"Is she dead? Oh, tell me, is she dead?"

Hepworth Closs bent down, and touched his lips to the cold forehead of his sister; then he lifted Clara from the floor, and half led her, half carried her, from the room.

Then Lord Hope stood up and turned, with a shudder, to the old woman, who had been to him and his a fearful Nemesis.

"Hannah Yates," he said, "you have suffered much, concealed much, and, from your own confession, are not without sin."

"True, true," murmured the old woman. "I have sinned grievously."

"Therefore, you should have shown more mercy to this unhappy woman. But the suffering and the wrong was done to shield this girl from what you thought an evil influence, and save from reproach two noble houses, to which she belongs—for her face tells me that your story is true. Spare the memory of this most unfortunate, if sinful woman. Spare the high name and noble pride of the old countess,

who beseeches you—her very face seems to change as I speak—for silence and forgetfulness. That which you have done in love, continue in mercy. Let this miserable scene, with all that led to it, rest in sacred silence among us. The persons who have suffered most are now before a tribunal where no evidence of yours is wanted. Look on your old mistress," he continued, pointing toward the death couch, "and let her sweet face plead with you. Had she lived—"

"Had she lived," said the old woman, "I should not have spoken. Death itself would not have wrung from me one word of what her daughter suffered. But the woman who murdered her came suddenly before me. It was a power beyond my poor will that made me speak; but hereafter no word of this shall ever pass my lips. No evil story of suffering or bloodshed shall ever go forth about a lady of Houghton while I can prevent it."

Lord Hope bent his head, and made an effort to thank her, but he could not speak.

"Leave me now," said the old woman. "Let no servants come near these apartments, save two that can be trusted here with me. Some one send Margaret Casey and Eliza, her sister, here. Now leave me, Lord Hope, and you, Lady Carset. You can trust the old woman alone with these two."

Before noon, that day, it was known in all the country around that the old countess, Lady Carset, lay in funeral state in the royal guest-chamber at Houghton Castle, for the long red flag was floating half-way down its staff, and a hatchment hung in mournful gorgeousness over the principal entrance between those two massive towers.

But farther than the flag could be seen, and swift as the wind that stirred it, went the strange story that the beautiful Lady Hope had been seized with a violent hemorrhage

of the lungs while standing by the death couch of the old countess, and had died before help could be obtained.

After this, another wild rumor took wing. The young lady who had been some weeks at the castle was only an adopted daughter of Lord Hope, and, consequently could not become heiress of Houghton under the will or by entail. The daughter and heiress was at the castle, stricken down with grief at the double loss that had fallen upon her since her arrival from abroad, where she had been educated. With a feeling of delicacy that did her honor she had declined to appear as the acknowledged heiress at the festival given to Lady Hope, feeling that it might interfere with her grandmother's independent action with regard to the vast property at her disposal, if she allowed herself to be proclaimed thus early as the chosen heiress, which she now undoubtedly was. The will had been read, and, with the exception of a considerable legacy to Caroline Brown, the adopted daughter, and provisions for the servants, young Lady Carset came in for everything.

Alderman Stacy took this story back to America, and described his reception at Houghton Castle with such glowing colors—when the assembled board were at supper one night, in a pleasant, social way—that one of the fathers proposed forthwith to draw up a resolution of thanks to young Lady Carset for the hospitality extended to their illustrious compeer, and forward it, with “the liberty of the city, under the great seal of New York.” At the next meeting of the board this resolution was carried unanimously—in fact, with acclamation.

Months went by, twelve or more, and then the trees around that grand old stronghold blazed out with lights again. Two fountains shot their liquid brightness over the stone terrace, at which the people from far and near came to drink. One sent up crystal, and rained down diamonds,

as it had done that night when the old countess died. The other, being of wine, shot up a column of luminous red into the air, and came down in a storm of rubies.

The people, who caught the red drops on their lips, and dipped the sparkling liquid up with silver ladles, knew that a double wedding was going on in the castle, and clamored loudly for a sight of their lady and her bridegroom.

After a little, the windows along the façade of the building were thrown back, and a gay throng poured itself into a broad balcony, that projected a little over the stone terrace, where the wine was flowing, and the eager people crowding forward for the first look.

Foremost came Lord Hilton, leading Clara—Lady Carset—by the hand. Then Hepworth Closs stepped forth, and on his arm a bright, sparkling little figure, in a cloud of gauzy silk, and crowned with white roses, who smiled and kissed her hand to the crowd, while her little feet kept time, and almost danced, to the music, which broke from terrace and covert as the bridal party appeared.

Standing a little back, near one of the windows, stood two gentlemen, one very old and stricken in years, who leaned heavily on his cane, and looked smilingly down upon the multitude swaying in front of the castle; and well he might, for two of the finest estates in England had been joined that day, and from horizon to horizon stretched the united lands which the children of his grandson would inherit.

The other gentleman, standing there with the sad, worn face was Lord Hope, who leaned heavily against the window-frame, and looked afar off over the heads of the multitude wearily, wearily, as if the days of marrying and giving in marriage were all a blank to him. When the young bride, who had given up her name, title and fortune willingly to

another, came up to him at the window, she laid her hand tenderly on his arm, whispering:

"Farewell, father, farewell! I am not the less your child because of the blue blood, for she cannot love you better than I do. Will you not shake hands with my husband, father?"

Lord Hope lifted his heavy eyes to Hepworth Closs, saw the features of another, whom no one ever mentioned now, in that face, flung both arms about the bridegroom, shaking from head to foot with tearless sobs.

A little while after a carriage drove from Houghton to the station, and in two days a steamer sailed with Hepworth Closs and his wife, with that kind and faithful man, her father, for New York.

Just as they were about to sail, an old woman came quietly into the second-class cabin, paid her passage, and rested there, never coming on deck till the steamer landed. Then she gathered up her effects in a carpet-bag and went ashore.

That night a fire blazed on the hearth at Cedar Cottage, and the dilapidated furniture in the various rooms was arranged in the kitchen.

About six months after, this old woman was found dead upon an iron bedstead up-stairs, and the neighbors held a consultation about burying her at the expense of the town; but, on searching the rooms, plenty of English gold was found to have kept her comfortable for years. Then some one remembered that a convict, discharged from the prison not many years ago, was said to be the mother of Daniel Yates, a good man and excellent citizen, and they decided to bury the poor old convict by his side.

There is a very prosperous firm in New York, which has stood the shock of gold corners, and railway crashes, with

the firm resistance of heavy capital and business integrity. It is the firm of Closs & Brown.

The younger member is an active, shrewd, generous man, full of resources, and capable of wonderful combinations.

The other superintends the in-door business, and makes himself very useful, in a quiet sort of way, in keeping things straight—no unimportant position in a business house, let me assure you.

As for Caroline—Mrs. Hepworth Closs—you may see her, any fine day, dashing faster than the law allows, along the avenues of Central Park, holding a pair of white ponies well in hand, while she chats and laughs with her husband, glorying in him, and exulting in the freedom which she gained in losing a grand title and estate.

THE END.



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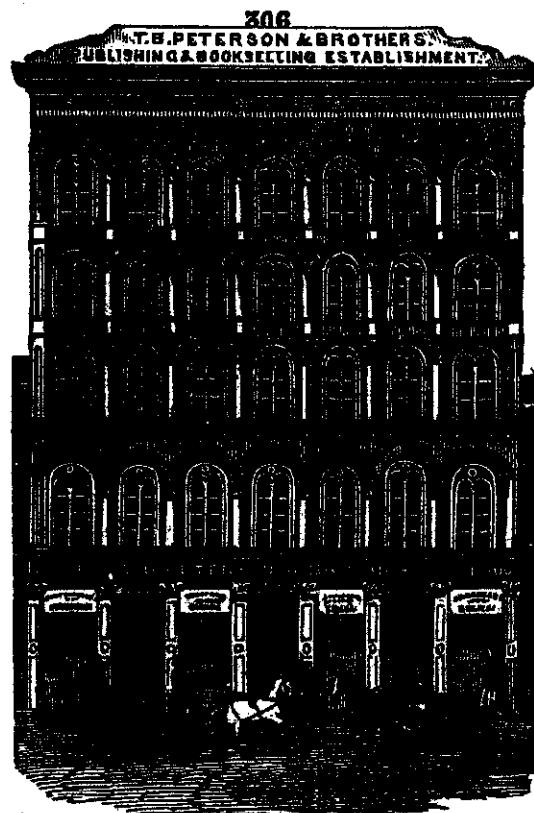
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