

THE REIGNING BELLE.

BY

MRS. ANN S. STEPHENS.

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

Scatter the seed with a reckless hand;
Sow falsehood deep with truth;
Mingle them well in the teeming land,—
Is the wild, wild cry of youth.

But errors, sown in our early prime,
Grow strong in the coming years,
Their roots strike deep through all after time
In the fount of human tears.

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THE REIGNING BELLE.

A NOBLE WOMAN.

PALACES AND PRISONS.

MARRIED IN HASTE.

RUBY GRAY'S STRATEGY.

WIVES AND WIDOWS; OR, THE BROKEN LIFE.

THE REJECTED WIFE.

THE GOLD BRICK.

THE CURSE OF GOLD.

THE HEIRESS.

FASHION AND FAMINE.

THE OLD HOMESTEAD.

SILENT STRUGGLES.

MARY DERWENT.

THE WIFE'S SECRET.

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TO

MRS. ALEXANDER RAMSEY,

OF ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA,

I DEDICATE THIS VOLUME, FROM A RESPECTFUL SENTIMENT OF ADMIRATION FOR HER NOBLE QUALITIES AS A LADY, ADDED TO THAT SINCERE FRIENDSHIP THOSE QUALITIES ARE CERTAIN TO INSPIRE WHEREVER SHE IS KNOWN.

ANN S. STEPHENS.

St. Cloud Hotel,
New York, June 26, 1872.

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THE REIGNING BELLE.

CHAPTER I.

THE SHOPPING PARTY.

AROUND her were such glowing colors, in masses, or floating airily through the room, that a face less richly tinted would have seemed pale by contrast. Behind her was a pile of India shawls, in which the rays of a gorgeous sunset seemed to have mellowed down in one soft, glowing heap. By her side was a morning-dress of Oriental cashmere, with vivid palm-leaves running far up the skirt, which trailed down from the wire skeleton that supported it, and swept the floor like the plumage of a peacock.

In fact this vast show-room was one panorama of bright, beautiful things; and most beautiful of all was the young girl, with her rich complexion, just verging on the brunette, and her large, blue-gray eyes, that looked out from their sweeping lashes like shadowed waters where the rushes grow thickly. Her hair, too, was lustrous and abundant, neither black, auburn, nor brown, but with a gleam of each as the light chanced to fall on it.

The face, we have so imperfectly described, was turned toward a flight of stairs that led from the more general warerooms below, and across it flew a shadow of pride or

pain, as a party of ladies, accompanied by one gentleman, came up the stairs, and loitered along the show-room, where she was standing. One of the clerks went forward to meet the party, and turning, walked by the side of the younger lady, who came on somewhat in advance of the rest, politely attentive to business.

“Shawls, did you say?”

“Yes,” answered the young lady, smiling blandly in the face of the clerk, whose soft amber beard stirred almost imperceptibly with an answering smile. “I scarcely know yet what we do want; but my friend has a perfect passion for shawls, and I dare say will add another to the variety she has stored away in her cedar-closet, where even the moths are forbidden to touch them. Oh Mrs. Lambert! here is something lovely!”

The elder lady came forward, and, taking out her gold-mounted eye-glass, examined the shawl which had struck the young lady's attention. It was, indeed, a fabric of wonderful beauty, soft, firm, and wrought in with a splendor of harmonious colors, which the most perfect taste alone could appreciate. But the lady who examined this exquisite workmanship well understood its value, and after making herself mistress of all its perfections, quietly inquired the price.

The sum named would have bought a pretty homestead for some poor family in the country. The lady seemed in no way surprised by the amount, but took the shawl from its stand, while the young lady beckoned the girl, who had withdrawn a little way off, to try it on.

This young creature came forward, not blushing under the astonished eyes turned upon her, but rather growing pale, with a keen feeling of humiliation, and submitted her queenly person to be enveloped in the rich folds of the shawl. When she felt all those strange eyes upon her the color came back to her face, while the downcast lashes swept her glow-

ing cheeks, and her lips began to quiver, as if a burst of tears were struggling upward.

“Mother,” said the young gentleman, in a low voice, “the counter would be a better place.”

“No, no!” broke in the very positive young person, whom the elder lady addressed as Miss Spicer, who leaned forward and touched the shoulder over which the shawl was draped with her parasol. “Nothing like a live person to carry off a thing like this. Please move forward and let us see how it falls upon the train. Superb, isn't it?”

Eva Laurence lifted her eyelids with a sudden flash, and stepped back from the insolent touch of that parasol, with a gesture at once haughty and graceful. Then, remembering what was expected of her, she moved across the floor, displaying the shawl in every fold as it swept from her shoulders, down the long, black train of her dress. All other eyes were fixed upon the garment, but young Lambert saw that her bosom heaved, and the hands folded over the shawl trembled. He was turning away, touched by this evidence of painful embarrassment, when Miss Spicer darted forward, seized upon Eva's train, and spread it out upon the floor, exclaiming,

“There now, that's something like. Isn't it superb?”

“It is, indeed!” answered Mrs. Lambert, surveying the tall, well-formed girl with her glass. “What do you think, of it Ivan?”

“What do I think, mother? Why, that the young lady will be tired to death before you have made up your mind. Permit me——”

Here young Lambert lifted the shawl gently from Eva's shoulders, and laid it on the counter.

Eva drew a deep breath and moved off to a window, resentful and hurt, she could scarcely tell why—for had she not come to that place for the very purpose that wounded her so? Did she not receive extra compensation because

her stately figure carried off those costly garments to such advantage? What right had she that this patrician party had invaded?

Still the girl's cheek burned, and her shoulders felt heavy, as if a burden more oppressive than twenty shawls bore them down.

CHAPTER II.

THE GIRL OF THE TIMES.

WHILE Mrs. Lambert was completing the purchase of her shawl, the young man moved quietly about the room, carrying his cane in one well-gloved hand, with which he manifested a little impatience, as most men do when forced into a shopping excursion with members of their own family; but, with all his restlessness, he kept Eva Laurence well in view, wondering in his heart who she was, and how she came to be in that strange position.

Miss Spicer, too, had her curiosity. Troubled with no sensitive hesitation, she watched the girl in a bold, staring way, now and then turning a quizzical look on young Lambert, which brought the color to his face.

"Stylish, ha!" she whispered, taking the young man's cane from his hand. "Stop here often after this, I dare say—I would if I carried one of these things."

The young lady gave emphasis to her words by a dashing flourish of the cane, which, being a flexible, gold-mounted affair, she was twisting back and forth in her hands.

The young gentleman made a gesture as if to reclaim his property.

Miss Spicer gave up the cane.

Eva Laurence saw all this, though her drooping eyes seemed fixed on the floor, and the proud heart burned with-

in her; for now and then Miss Spicer glanced across the piles of merchandise to where she stood, taking no pains to conceal that she was an object of curiosity, if not of conversation.

"There now, don't look so savage, my friend," said the lady, "and you shall see what a chance I will give you for a second survey."

Before young Lambert could answer, the reckless creature had called another clerk to her side.

"This velvet cloak," she said, "I should like to see it tried on. Please call the young person."

The clerk stepped over to Eva Laurence, and spoke to her. She looked up quickly, bent her head, and came across the room, almost smiling the contempt she felt for that rude girl, who only seemed the more plebeian from the fact that her coarseness was smothered in purple and fine linen.

Without a word Eva invested herself in the velvet garment, and with its rich, deep laces settling round her, stood out in the midst of the open space to be examined, looking gravely and quietly on the group that gathered around her.

Then the ladies fell to examining the cloak by detail; handling its glossy folds, criticising the pattern of the lace, and exclaiming at the perfect fit; while Spicer turned the shrinking girl round, and jerked the cloak in and out of place, as if that proud, sensitive creature were a mere lay-figure, with a wooden soul, created for her amusement.

"There now, Mr. Lambert, tell me if this is not perfect?"

Miss Spicer turned as she spoke; but the gentleman, for whom all this display had been gotten up, was at the other end of the room, looking diligently out of the window.

"Mr. Lambert! Mr. Lambert! Come; we want your opinion," cried Miss Spicer, so loudly that every one in the room could hear.

"I beg your pardon," answered the young man, blushing with angry annoyance; "gentlemen are no judges of such things."

Miss Spicer walked toward him, grasping her parasol as if it had been a spear, with which she meant to pierce him through.

"Now, this is too bad, after all the pains I have taken! Come along, I say."

Lambert turned from the window and followed his tormentor. He did not even glance at Eva Laurence.

"Mother, I have an engagement; pray, excuse me."

"An engagement—gone! The idea!"

With this exclamation, Miss Spicer turned from the girl she had tortured, and the cloak she did not want, with a gesture of the hand, meant to indicate that she had done with the whole affair, and became all at once impatient to leave the establishment.

Mrs. Lambert, who had concluded her purchase, and had been standing an amused spectator of her friend's defeat, was now ready to go; and Eva saw them depart with a feeling of resentful humiliation, which brought a hot red to her cheeks, and mingled fire and tears to her eyes.

"You find it hard," said a voice at her elbow. "We all rebel at first; but time and patience do wonders."

The person who spoke was a slight, dark-eyed man, about thirty-five or forty years of age, whose low, kind voice fell gently on her disturbed senses.

"Yes, it is hard," answered Eva; and the tears that had been gathering in her eyes flashed over the vivid red of her cheeks, and melted there like dew upon a peach. "I did not expect this—I thought that ladies alone would claim my services."

"You forget," said her fellow clerk, "that money does not always fall to the wise or the refined."

"But a person like that, coarse, unfeeling, and insolent—what right has she to money, while I have nothing?"

"Ah! there is the old story, restless rebellion against things as they are and must be. The law gives her a fortune which some one else has earned—it is the chance of her birth; but nature withheld from her many things far more precious than wealth, which she has lavished on—on others, perhaps."

Eva blushed, and a smile quivered over her lips. This half-suppressed compliment soothed her wounded pride a little, but she soon broke into impatience again.

"Is there no way in which a poor girl can support herself without meeting these bitter insults?" she exclaimed.

The man shook his head.

"Do intelligence, refinement, noble aspirations, go for nothing when joined with honest labor?"

"Yes, child, as they enhance the value of that labor."

"And labor is slavery," murmured the girl, looking toward the broad window, against which the sunshine was breaking in bright waves of silver. "That girl is her own mistress—can go where she will—say what she pleases—wound others if she likes, without rebuke or compunction."

"Would you call *that* a privilege?" questioned the man, who listened with a grave smile.

"No, no! I could not do it. Knowing how keenly a poor girl can feel, no amount of prosperity could induce me to wound one as—as that girl has hurt me. If I were rich—"

"Well, if you were rich? What then?"

"I would think of others, use my wealth to make others prosperous. No girl with a soul should be shut up in a great room like this, to show off garments for happier woman to wear."

"Yet it is only a little time since you were so glad to come here."

Eva's face changed and the cloud was swept from it as if by a flash of lightning. She reached forth her hand.

"You think me impatient, and so I am; ungrateful—but that I am not. I was glad to come here—so glad! The sweetest hour of my life will be that in which I carry home my first week's wages, and see those poor, dear faces brighten with a sight of the money. How can I be so unreasonable? Forgive me!"

CHAPTER III.

A HUMBLE HOME.

UP town, where vacant lots can still be found, stood a small wooden building, scarcely more than a shantie in dimensions, but perfectly finished, so far as it went, and neat in all its appointments as any palace. Two small rooms on the first floor, and a like number of sleeping chambers, with their ceilings in the roof, took up the entire length and breadth of the building. The little space of ground, not occupied by the building, was given up to turf and brightened with flowers, which climbed the fences and ran up the little portico, as leaves cluster around a bird's-nest in the spring. Indeed, that little spot of earth was lovely. In the cool of the day, thousands of purple and pink morning glories shook the dew from their delicate bells, and, at all hours masses of scarlet beans, cypress-vines, and sweet scented clematis, kept the little enclosure bright and beautiful, week in and week out, so long as the season lasted.

The house itself contained little of value. Curtains of cheap muslin, white as snow, through which you could see a thousand delicate shadows from the flowers outside, shaded the windows.

In the front room was a pretty chintz couch, home-made, with dainty cushions, and an easy-chair to match, the workmanship of some strong, deft hand in the first construction, and finished up by the taste, still more perfect, of a woman, to whom the æsthetic influence was second nature.

Two or three really fine engravings were on the walls, and in one corner stood a straight-legged, old piano, with an embroidered stool.

Two persons sat in this room, at nightfall, on the day Eva Laurence made her little outburst of pride in that fashionable establishment down town. One was a tall, spare woman, about fifty years of age, perhaps, originally from New England, as you might detect from a certain peculiarity of speech, and the constant occupation she found for her hands, even while seated in that roomy easy-chair. The other was a young girl, seemingly about fourteen at a first glance; but on a second look, you saw traces of thought and of pain on that noble face, which took your judgment in a few years. The girl was near the age of her sister Eva; in fact, there was not a year between them, and if that had been all, they might have passed for twins. But there the resemblance ended. Nothing could be more unlike the rich coloring and perfect figure of Eva than the pale delicacy and wonderful expression of this girl on the couch.

"Mother!"

How sweet and low that voice was! This one incomparable word seemed rippling off into music, full of tenderness and gentle pathos.

"Well, Ruth, what is it? Shall I move the cushions?"

"No, mother; but you seem thoughtful. Has anything gone wrong that I do not know of?"

"Wrong? No! It is only the one old trouble!"

"The house?"

"Yes. I am afraid, Ruth, that we shall have to give it up. The mortgage will be due this year——"

"But Eva thought——"

"Yes, dear, I know. If she had only got her situation a little earlier, there might have been some chance; but the lot is growing more valuable all the time, and Mr. Clapp is a grasping man."

Ruth Laurence clasped her hands, and turned her eyes upon the wall.

"Oh! how helpless I am!" she said, with a thrill of pathetic pain in her voice. "If we could both work now."

"But that is impossible. Besides, what would the house be without you—a cage without its bird?"

That moment, a brave, young voice came singing up to the front-door of that tiny house, and a bright face leaned through the open window, under which Ruth was lying, and shook some ripe leaves from the vines upon her.

"All right—both here," cried as fine a school-boy as you ever sat eyes on, swinging a package of books down from his shoulder, and coming through the little hall. "I've got along famously, mother: not a demerit. But what makes you look so sober?"

The lad seemed to lose something of his bright animation as he entered that humble parlor and saw his mother's anxious face, his large grey eyes clouded over with anxiety and he stood a moment gazing mutely upon her.

"Well, mother," he said at last, "has Eva come home yet? She promised us a famous supper when those people paid her, and I'm on hand for it, if ever a little chap was. Not here yet, you say! Now that's what I call rough! Isn't it, sister Ruth?"

"She will be home soon," answered sister Ruth, returning the boy's kiss with a gentle sigh.

"How cold your lips are!" exclaimed the boy, and a look of tender trouble came into his eyes. "Is it because you

are hungry, sister Ruth? If it is, I'll—I'll go and sell my school-books, and play hookey after it, to get you something to eat. As for me, I was only in fun. A chap of my age don't want much, you know."

"But the books are not yours, dear," answered the sweet, sad voice from the couch; "they belong to the city."

The boy stood still a moment while the slow color mounted to his face.

"I know that," he answered, almost crying; "but just then they seemed to be mine, dear old friends, ready to go anywhere for my good. Anyway, if I was a fairy now, every one of them should turn into something good to eat; bread for me, and pound-cake for mother, and—and——"

"Beef-steak for us all!" said the mother, joining in the conversation.

The boy drew in his breath and smacked his lips, as if the very idea of a warm beef-steak were a delicious morsel to be tasted and lingered over.

"Oh, that! but then one must not be extravagant. Who knows! Eva may come back with a whole pocket full of rocks!" the boy broke forth, after a moment of dull despondency. "Come, mother, cheer up, something good is going to happen. I feel it in my bones."

Mrs. Laurence arose feebly from her chair, took the boy's head between her hands and kissed him, with a sort of slow restrained passion, half a dozen times, as if she thought each kiss could be coined into food for his hungry lips.

"Are you so very——"

"Not a bit of it," cried the lad, shaking his head free, and making a dive at his books, that the poor mother might not see his hard struggle to keep from crying. "Hungry, oh, no! Didn't one of the big boys give me half his lunch? That's a roundabout whopper, I know," he muttered to himself; "but them eyes, I couldn't stand 'em, and she been sick so long. Capital lunch it was, too:

corned beef sandwiches and pickles—famous! So just think of yourself, mother, not me. But here comes Eva. Hurra!"

Sure enough, that moment Eva Laurence came through the little gate, sad, weary, and despondent, moving through the dusky flowers like a spirit of night. She entered the little sitting-room, and going directly up to her mother, kissed her in silence. Then she sat down on an edge of the couch, looked tenderly upon her invalid sister, and whispered to her,

"Have you had nothing? Has no raven or dove from Heaven come to feed you, my poor darling?"

Ruth shook her head, and tried to smile.

"It is mother who needs it most," she said. "She is not used to being ill, poor darling, and did without so long herself before she would own that we were getting short. Have you brought nothing for her?"

Eva shook her head, and whispered, "I did ask. Don't think me a coward, Ruth, but they will not break their rules, down there, for anyone."

"What can we do?" cried the sick girl, clasping her hands. "I can wait, but mother and poor Jim? Then you will break down."

"No," answered Eva, almost bitterly. "Mr. Harald has insisted on sharing his lunch with me every day—that is the worst of it. I am kept strong and rosy, while you and mother, who need wholesome food much more, are left here to suffer. You don't know, Ruthy, dear, how I have longed for an opportunity to hide some of his nice things away, and bring them home; but he always eats with me, and I have no courage to speak. So I feast like a princess, and feel guilty as a thief."

"But you need strength so much more than we do," answered Ruth, clasping her pale hands over Eva's neck, and kissing her beautiful face. "It would break my heart to see you growing pale and thin like the rest of us."

Eva sprang to her feet, stung with unreasonable contrition for having tasted the food she could not share with those she loved.

"What can I do? Is there nothing left? If we could only bridge over the next two days—but how?"

"Just you hold on," said little Jim, pitching his pile of books into the next room, and shutting the door upon them with a bang, as if nothing less than a great effort could free him from temptation. "Just you hold on. This is a free country, and every American has a right to have something to eat; yes, and be President of the United States, if the whole people want him to—not to speak of women who haven't got their inalienable rights to be men just yet, but are hungry and thirsty just the same. Give me a chance, now."

Out of the house James Laurence went, putting on his thread-bare cap as he ran. The women he left looked at each other, and almost smiled, his enthusiasm was so contagious.

"Where can he have gone, what is the boy thinking of," said Eva, untying her shabby little bonnet, and sitting down in helpless expectation. Ruth looked up, smiling. She had great faith in little Jim, and, spite of all the sweet patience which made her character so lovely, thought, with keen physical longing, of the good which might possibly come out of his sudden resolution.

"We never know what ideas our blessed Lord may give to a child," she said; "besides, it does seem impossible that, in a country like this, God's innocent creatures can be left to starve. I think Jim will come back at least with a loaf of bread; the man who refused us may trust him. Let us wait and see."

This sweet prophecy fell so tranquilly on the soft, summer air that, spite of themselves, these women began to hope.

CHAPTER IV.

LITTLE JIMMY GOES AFTER WORK.

LITTLE James Laurence gave himself no time for cowardly thoughts, but ran bravely towards a grocery store, where the family provisions had been bought in better times, but where all credit for their present necessities was now curtly refused.

The proprietor of this store had fortunately gone out, and his wife stood behind the counter, serving a customer. She was a stout, matronly body, with clear, light-blue eyes, and a pleasant smile, which was turned with more than usual kindness on the boy as he entered almost upon the run. Something in that young face, in the large, eager eyes, and restless mouth, struck her with a vague idea of commiseration. When her customer went out, carrying a brown paper parcel, she folded her plump, round arms on the counter, and leaning over them in a luxuriously cozy position, accosted the boy.

"Well, Jimmy, what shall we put up for you? One never sees any of your folks lately. Seem to have took their trade somewhere else?"

James went close up to the counter, and fixed his great, hungry eyes on hers: the light from a swinging lamp overhead fell upon his face, and the kind woman read something there that made her heart ache.

"Why, Jimmy, my dear boy, what is it? No trouble, I hope, beyond the great loss?"

Had the woman been cold or angry, that brave boy would have faced both without a tear; but now, sudden moisture sparkled in his eyes, and he winked his long, black lashes over and over again to break it up while he was speaking.

"We haven't traded here lately, Mrs. Smith, because we had no money, and your husband got tired of trusting."

"Who told you so?"

"He did."

"Then he—— Well, he's one of the best fellows that ever lived. Does it all for the sake of me and the children—you must understand that, youngster. He's generous as the day, is my husband. Now what is it you want just at present?"

"Mrs. Smith, we haven't had anything to eat in our house these three days."

The boy's voice broke as he said this, and tears fell from the eyes he lifted to that woman's face, whose kindness he could only see through a mist.

"Not had anything to eat in three days, and I here! Oh, Jimmy Laurence! what were you all thinking about? It's too bad, there!"

Mrs. Smith drew a plump arm across her eyes as she spoke, then seizing the lad by both hands, she fell to kissing him over the counter, then gave him a box on the ear, and pushed him away.

"Why didn't you come to me? Why didn't your mother just step over and tell *me* about it? Business is business, but this—— I've no patience with you, Jimmy Laurence, nor none of your tribe."

"But we did not know. He said——"

"*He* said. He can say anything he likes when there's no woman by with a will of her own. Now come round here this very minute and tell me what you want."

"Oh, Mrs. Smith, you are so good! I didn't mean to beg for things, or run in debt more than we have; but we must have something to eat, or—or more of us will be down sick; but I mean to work for it—that is what I came for. There is a load of coal coming to-morrow morning. I want to bring it in for you."

"You, Jimmy! You bring in coal, poor, slender, pale-faced darling!"

Little Jim flushed all over at this insinuation against his manliness, and rolling up the sleeve of his jacket, exposed a delicate, white arm, with the little hand clenched, and blue veins thus forced to notice on the wrist.

"See, Mrs. Smith," he said, "there's muscle for a boy; lean, but tough—just feel it."

Mrs. Smith did span the delicate wrist with her thumb and finger, feeling the quick pulse stir feebly to the touch, and turned away her face to keep the boy from seeing how close she was to tears—an unusual thing with her.

"Yes, I see; not much flesh to spare."

"No; some fellows have lots, you know—but that don't make 'em powerful. Mrs. Smith, just look at the boys that ride circus horses, and jump through hoops, how lean they keep 'em. Just let me feed up a little, and I shall be in prime working order."

"Well," answered the woman, laughing away the tears that had actually begun to float in her blue eyes, "we will feed you up and try."

"That's splendid," cried the boy, pulling down his jacket-sleeve, which was far too short, and woefully threadbare. "Then I was thinking of another thing. Saturday nights you are so busy, and have lots of things to carry home—couldn't I do some of that just as well as the bigger boys? You don't know how spry I am. Now a basket like that is nothing to me."

Here the noble little fellow lifted down a basket of groceries that stood on the counter, ready to be carried home, and dragged it, staggering and breathless, across the floor, where he gave way and fell across it, utterly insensible.

Good Mrs. Smith ran around the counter and lifted the poor little fellow in her arms. Then she sat down on a

candle-box, and pressing that pale head to her bosom, began to pat him on the back, rub his hands, and push the hair off from his forehead with quick, motherly tenderness. This flamed up to generous rage when her husband came in with his fresh, prosperous look, and asked her what she was about, and what boy she was hugging.

"Come and look for yourself, John Smith, and if you are not quite a heathen and Sandwich Island hottentot, ask God to forgive your cruelty. Look at that face; look at these limp, little hands; just go to the door and look down street towards the house, where all those morning glories only cover up starvation. You brought it on, Smith; you refused them credit when they hadn't another place to go to, and the poor things are just starved out—starved out! Do you hear me, John Smith? And one of 'em, for anything I know, dead in your wife's arms—just an awful judgment against you if he is—poor, sweet, innocent darling, as wanted only to work for a morsel of bread. He work? John Smith, I hate you!"

"Come, come, old woman. Isn't this going a little rough?" said the grocer, quite bewildered, and taken aback by this assault from the most genial and kind creature in the world. "What has got into your head, and who is that in your arms?"

"Who? don't ask me. It's little Jimmy Laurence, the son of that splendid policeman, who was shot down in the street by a highway burglar; one of the steadiest customers you had when we wanted custom bad enough, mercy knows. He's just starved out, mother, sisters and all, and you've done it by telling them you couldn't trust any longer; but I'll pay you off. They shall have everything they want, if it's half the store. I'll send for carts, and have the whole stock moved into their kitchen. How can you look me in the face, John Smith? Bring me some water, brandy, peppermint, hartshorn. Can't you step about? Or do you want to kill him over again? There!"

CHAPTER V.

A FEAST AFTER A FAMINE.

JOHN SMITH had done his best to obey these confused demands. He brought water, and held it in a stone pitcher, while Mrs. Smith thrust her hand to the bottom and sprinkled little Jimmy's face; but this failed to bring a sign of life back. So he put down the pitcher, and brought a little tin measure half-full of brandy, from some secret corner back in the store, which his better half snatched from him and held to those pale lips. Some drops trickled through the teeth that had fallen slightly apart, and, after a little, the boy began to stir. Then the good woman burst into tears that came in a torrent, deluging all the full-blown roses in her cheeks, and shaking her bosom with sobs.

"There," she cried holding the lad out on her lap as he struggled to life again; "take him, leff him, make sure what a shadow he is; then down upon your knees, John Smith, and thank God that you're not quite a murderer! Your meanness will be the death of me yet. Now I warn you. Me and the children, your duty to take care of us? John Smith, John Smith, now don't get me out of patience."

"Well, then, what if I say that I am sorry—right down sorry?"

"In that case, John Smith——"

"That I will let them have anything they want, without charging till better times come round," continued the grocer, soaking a cracker in brandy, and feeding it in fragments to the boy.

"John—John Smith, I always did say——"

"And what we haven't got, I'll go right out and buy with our own money—sausages, beefsteak, mutton-chops. Will that pacify you, Mary Jane?"

So the two set to work in earnest, while little James looked on, somewhat faint still, and pleasantly bewildered, with a strong taste of brandy in his mouth, and a warmth in his whole system that he had not felt for months.

"Don't take too much of that, Jimmy dear," said Mrs. Smith, looking up from the basket she was packing. "Dried-beef, crackers, tea, bread; just stuff in a codfish, Smith, edgeways down this side, and fill up the chinks with apples—them red ones are the best. As I was saying, Jimmy, one cracker can soak up no end of moisture, and your cheeks are getting red. Now, Smith, run out, and hurry back with the other things."

Smith went out, and his wife, in her rich benevolence, began to fill innumerable paper bags with dried prunes, raisins, loaf-sugar, and other little dainties, which, in her eager haste to pack up substantials, had escaped her mind till then. These she pressed down into the basket, and stuffed into her own pocket, which were quite full when her husband returned with three or four paper parcels in his hand, looking more radiant than any man who had bribed his wife's forgiveness with a diamond bracelet could have done.

"Now, wife, you are ready?"

"Stop a minute. John Smith, you are an angel, coat, boots, and all; but I've thought of something. Any fire in your kitchen, Jimmy, dear?"

"No, ma'am. We haven't had any use for a fire lately!"

"Exactly. No wood, no coal?"

James shook his head. Mrs. Smith opened a side door, and called to some one in the upper rooms, in which her family dwelt.

"Kate! Kate Gorman!"

"Well, marum, what's to the fore now?"

"Come down stairs, Kate—but no matter. Is there a good fire in the range?"

"Never a better!"

"Then take this, and this; broil the steak, fry the ham, slice up the cold potatoes left after dinner, and fry them; then heat some tin pans, and put them in."

"Thin I'm not to set the table, marum?"

"No. Make a strong pot of coffee, and one of tea, bring 'em hot; pickles, mustard; and don't forget some of them strawberry preserves, too."

"But what am I to do with the same, Mistress Smith?"

"Bring them all over to the little white house, with the morning glories. Open the gate softly, and come round to the back-door. Step down here, Kate, and I will tell you."

Kate stepped down, and in the darkness of the stair-case received very particular instructions, which she obeyed implicitly.

Then Mrs. Smith returned to the store, took up the heavy basket, and called James.

"Run on first, now," she said, "and keep them all busy about something; take half a dozen apples, and give them each one; then step back and let me into the kitchen. It is sure to be ready and neat as wax. I've got matches here; then keep them all busy, and be a little boisterous till I get things ship-shape."

Little James obeyed; and a few moments after burst in upon the mournful silence into which his mother and sisters had fallen, with eyes as bright as stars, and a heap of red apples in his arms.

"Didn't I tell you?" he cried out, pouring the apples into Eva's lap. "One, two, three, four, five. One a piece, and another to spare. Here, mother, the biggest for you, plump and rosy as Mrs. Smith's cheek, and smelling luscious. There, Ruthy, darling, I'll get a knife and peel yours."

With this the artful little rogue ran into the kitchen, unbolted the door, and seizing on a knife, was back again in an instant.

"No, no, James, dear! We must not waste good things like that," said Ruth, holding out her slender hand for the fruit which she regarded with longing eyes. "Put away your knife—I am in a hurry for my apple."

James sprang to her couch, held the apple to her mouth, and laughed aloud as her teeth sunk into its crimson side.

"Eva, why don't you pitch into yours?" he said. "Just watch Ruth, then see how mother is going it."

"I do not need it. These two will keep over."

"Oh, yes! Keep over, of course. Well, just as you like. But I say, let to-morrow take care of itself. 'Hi diddle diddle, the cat's in the fiddle, the cow——' No, that's all nonsense; the animal couldn't do it, but I could. There, now, what do people have foot-stools lying about loose for. One step more, and the only gentleman of this family would have been full length at your feet. Mother!"

The boy sprang to his mother, and kneeling before her, pulled down the hand she had lifted to her face, and kissed it tenderly.

"Oh, mother! I thought nothing could make you cry."

"I am growing childish, James; sickness weakens one so," answered the woman, who was usually firm as iron. "Besides, gratitude brings tears easy."

"Yes," said Ruth, thoughtfully; "for rain, there must be some warmth; the cold, bitter days only bring down hail and sleet."

"Tell us," said the mother, wiping her eyes, "where did you get these?"

"From Mrs. Smith, mother. Isn't she splendid?"

"But you did not ask her again?"

"Yes, I did; not for them, but to let me work for something to keep us alive; so these apples were handy, you see, and I'm going lots of errands—never you fear!"

"How they set one craving for more," said the old lady, who had the great hunger of a past fever on her, which was

maddening—and she eyed the two apples in Eva's lap ravenously.

Eva reached forth one of the apples, but James put it back, shaking his head playfully at the mother's greed.

"Not healthy to eat too much at once. Wait a little, and then——"

That instant the door leading into the kitchen was flung open, and the delicious scent of hot beef-steak and steaming coffee filled the little parlor. Eva and Mrs. Laurence started up, and cried out in their joyful amazement, for there, lighted by two lamps, was a table, well spread with all their scarcely-used dishes, on which was a repast such as they had not tasted for months.

"Take your place, mother—the armed-chair for you. Pour out the coffee, Eva, while I roll Ruthy up to the table. Want help? Well, yes, you may lend a hand this once, for a cracker or so, soaked in bitterness, don't make giants of boys all at once. There, Miss Ruthy, what do you think of that?"

Miss Ruthy, the moment her chair was drawn close to the table, folded her hands on the white cloth, and bowed her face upon it, thanked God as he is seldom thanked at any meal. Then the bowed heads were lifted, and this little household, so downcast an hour before, came out into the sunshine of this marvellous plenty; and those sad faces grew bright with smiles of thankfulness, while two eager faces peeped in through the morning glories at the window, enjoying it all, as if the grocer's wife and her servant had been good fairies.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE MORNING.

A sudden burst of sunshine had come in on the Laurence family, brightening the darkness around them. It glinted through the white curtains, where they floated over the window, as the morning dawned upon them. At daylight every one was astir and full of cheerful activity; the cloud, which had so long hung blackly over that family, had turned its silver lining, and the very edge seemed radiant.

The boy was up earliest of all, building a fire in the stove, and making ready for his mother to come down. He was singing to himself all the time, while a bright tin tea-kettle kept up a murmuring accompaniment, and softened the air with its vapory steam.

Then the good housewife came down, pale, gaunt, but unconsciously almost smiling, and Eva followed, supporting Ruth with both arms, until the invalid dropped into a chair, and drew a breath of exquisite satisfaction, as she looked over the little table her mother's deft hands had spread.

There was no prodigal display at this cheerful meal; but to sit once more at a table, even sparsely spread, was a delight to the whole family. So thankful smiles dawned softly on those wan faces, and pleasant looks were cast through the window, when Mrs. Smith parted the purple morning-glories with her two hands, and called out in a kind, cheery voice,

"Well, good folks, how do you find yourselves this morning?"

Little Jim gave a leap from his seat, opened the door, and let in Mrs. Smith, with a gush of fresh air, that seemed to set all the morning-glory bells to trembling with delight as they peeped into the room and tossed drops of dew over the window-sill.

"There, now, that's something like!" said the dame, gloating over the scene as if every living soul at the table were her own especial property. "Mercy on us! how we have all chirked up since last night. Well, Jimmy, what about the coal?"

"Oh! I'm on hand!" answered the boy, pushing up the sleeves of his jacket. "That beef-steak has made me tough as an oak-knot and springy as a steel-trap. Just show me the thing that is to be done, and see if I don't do it."

The good dame regarded the delicate child with infinite compassion, as he made his little boast.

"Yes, yes," she said, "you shall do anything you want to by-and-by, when good living has toughened you up. But just now we must give you light jobs, such as carrying home single parcels, and helping a little at the counter, maybe now and then—but you mightn't like that?"

"Like what? Why, Mrs. Smith, I'm just in for liking anything!"

"But then you are so manly, and this is girls' work."

A flush of scarlet came over that bright face, but it passed away in an instant; and holding up his arms, James asked the good woman if those hands and wrists were not slender and white as any girl's.

At this Mrs. Smith laughed till her sides shook, and declared that, boy or girl, he was a splendid little fellow as the sun ever shone on; and if Mrs. Laurence felt as if she could spare him he might come up to the grocery, and when there was no light jobs for him to do, there was the cradle to rock, and the baby to tend up stairs.

Again the hot scarlet swept its way to the lad's face, and a choking sense of shame rose to his throat; but he conquered the rebellious feelings like a hero, and protested, half crying, when he meant to laugh, that tending a baby must be prime fun, and rocking a cradle like rowing a boat. Just what he had wanted to do all his life. Besides, Mrs.

Smith's baby was such a first-class young one he wondered that any girl could be strong enough to hold her.

"Then it is all settled, Jimmy, dear!" exclaimed the good wife. "Smith couldn't make much of an opening for a little chap as had got to learn the business before he could be of any use; so Kate Gorman and I thought how handy it would be to have some one about the baby now and then, just for that, and running the fancy errands, as I call them,—John Smith don't like lazy people about him, and we musn't eat the bread of idleness, you know, James."

"I want to earn every mouthful of bread I eat," said the boy, bravely, "and enough for others, too. If you'll set me to washing dishes and peeling potatoes, I'll try and do it well. See if I don't."

"Come along, then," cried the woman, taking his hand with a firm clasp. "You're willing, Mrs. Laurence?"

The poor, pale mother turned wistfully to her boy, who looked her firmly in the eyes, and smiled as if rocking cradles and tending babies were the great aim and glory of his young life.

"It will be in the house, and—and you'll be a mother to him, Mrs. Smith?"

"Won't I?" answered the dame.

"And you will let him come home sometimes?"

"Every night of his life, and three times a day, if you want him. Goodness gracious! you don't expect that we intend to work a little fellow like that every hour in the twenty-four. I didn't come here like a highway robber to run off with your son, and make a white slave of him; but just to give him what he seems to want, something to do, and something to eat."

"And I'm in a hurry to begin," said James, piling up his school-books on a set of hanging-shelves over the fire-place, and resolutely suppressing a big sigh that rose to his lips.

"Perhaps the coal would have been too much for me. At any rate, I can do the other. But I say, Mrs. Smith?"

"Well, Jimmy. Just thought of something, I see."

"Can I sleep at home? Ruth there is awful timid, and is sure to lie awake without a man in the house. Besides, mother, who has always been used to it, and Eva, who likes to have me about."

"Indeed, I do, darling!" cried Eva, kissing the bright, young face; and turning to Mrs. Smith, she said, tenderly, "He does seem to be a protection, and we all love him so."

"Of course, you do! He's just the loveliest little shaver in the world! I only hope that John Smith, junior, will be up to his mark, which I think he will, being bright as a new dollar, if such things are in these greenbacky days. As for sleeping at home, I never had any other idea. Now, come away, Jimmy, or something else will turn up; and my time is short, having left Kate Gorman tending Jerusha Maria, and breakfast on the table, which Smith won't touch a mouthful of till I am there to cut up and pour out, being of that loving nature—though he does, sometimes, cut up a little rusty with customers. Come, Jimmy."

James pulled down his sleeves, and put on his cap, after which he kissed his mother and sisters with clinging affection, as if he were starting on a whaling voyage, and marched off to the grocery, side by side with Mrs. Smith, who stopped in the store long enough to fill his pockets with nuts and raisins. Then she took him up stairs, and laid the baby she called Jerusha Maria into his arms, and taught him, with brief scolding, how to arrange his knees, so that the little curly head and the feet, in their tiny worsted socks, should not come too closely together, while the rest of that plump body dropped through, and was ignominiously doubled up, which happened, I am ashamed to say, more than was proper during the first half-hour of the lad's promotion.

At these times Mrs. Smith would turn very red, and wonder if she had done quite wisely in the first outburst of her warm-hearted charity. While Kate Gorman paused in her work now and then to shake out the child's long skirts and settle her comfortable, where she could bury her chubby hands in the boy's hair, and refresh herself with a vigorous pull now and then, all of which James Laurence endured with the smiling stoicism of a young Indian.

CHAPTER VII.

SUNSHINE.

EVA LAURENCE was radiant that day as she walked down to the wareroom, which scarcely seemed to her like a place of toil. For the first time in weeks she had left a really cheerful home. The few days which intervened between her and the time her first wages would be paid were bridged over, and she no longer trembled with a wild fear of starvation for those she loved. Trouble might come, but nothing quite so dreadful as that. The heroism of her little brother had worked marvels, for which her heart swelled with tender gratitude.

The young man, who wore that soft, amber beard, was struck by her brilliant color, and deigned, in a careless way, to compliment her upon it as she passed him. This she scarcely noticed, being so occupied with pleasant thoughts, that his condescension passed unheeded; but when Harold came up, she reached forth both hands, and, looking in his earnest face, said,

"Good morning! What a lovely day it is!"

"Yes, very lovely—a great change," he murmured, press-

ing her hands one instant; then dropping them with a gentle sigh.

"Yesterday was so gloomy," she said; "but this——"

She broke off with a faint laugh, for the sky was, in fact, clouded; and she remembered the floods of silvery light that had come through the windows the day before, mocking her anxiety, and turning her heart sick with a thought of the dear ones at home.

Harold looked at her a moment in a grave, questioning way. He had seen the young clerk address her, and gave the smile on her lip, and the glow in her cheek, an interpretation that made his own greeting constrained and formal. Eva did not heed this either, the warmth at her heart was not to be chilled by a cold glance just then, even from the man who had been kindest to her. She went to a mirror, in which customers were expected to admire themselves, and stood before it smoothing her hair, graceful as a bird, and quite as unconscious of her own beauty.

Just then a party came into the show-room, and Harold turned his attention on them, while Eva stole away from the mirror, and stood ready to be called, without one trace of the shrinking pride which had made her so sensitive the day before.

The lady, who soon required her attention, was a stout, full-featured dame, arrayed in costly silk, flounced, looped, and puffed, until the rich material was lost in a confusion of trimmings, which fluttered, like the plumage of an angry bird, as she walked.

Up and down the vast show-room this person wandered, touching first one article, then another, with a heavy hand, so tightly incased in canary kid gloves, that the delicate fabric seemed ready to burst at each incautious movement of the imprisoned fingers. Now and then she would toss the fabric aside with a scornful little sniff, and ask the obsequious clerk if he had nothing better than that to show a

lady who did not stand on prices, but must have the best of everything when she went a shopping. What would she please to look at, indeed? Why just what happened to take her fancy; as for wanting anything particular, she was a long way beyond that. If the young man had anything very *rechercher*, and out of the common, she didn't mind looking at it; but, goodness gracious! Who was that young woman?"

Here the new customer lifted both hands, and parted her lips with an expression of growing amazement, while her eyes, deepening from blue to pale gray, were fastened on Eva Laurence.

"That young lady," answered the clerk, "is Miss Laurence, just engaged. You are not the first person who has been struck with her good looks. Haven't a more genteel girl in the establishment."

The customer dropped her hands, and turning abruptly from the clerk, walked to the stair-case, where an elderly man stood waiting for her with the patient indifference of a person impressed into service he did not like.

"Herman! Herman Ross!" she exclaimed, in an eager voice, "come here this minute and see for yourself. Did you ever in your born days! Look there! Is n't that the loveliest creature you ever set eyes on?"

Eva was standing at a far-off counter, looking thoughtfully into the distance, with that soft, happy smile brightening her whole face, as the full light from a neighboring window fell upon it.

The man paused as he saw the face, and drew back with a sudden recoil from the eager hand still pressing his arm.

"What is this? What does it mean?" he demanded, turning white, and looking forward with a wild stare. It is twenty years. I cannot go back to that, but—but—be quiet! Leave me alone!"

The man walked forward unsteadily, and, like one im-

pelled to an action against his own consciousness, until he came close to Eva, but with such noiseless action that she did not heed him.

"Will you tell me your name?"

Eva started. The voice that addressed her was so low and hoarse that surprise became almost terror in her.

"My name? My—my name? Did you ask that?"

"Yes—yes!"

Eva turned her eyes on the white face which was reading hers with such pathetic earnestness, and all the angry surprise his abrupt address had kindled, died out under the sad penetration of his glance.

"My name is Laurence—Eva Laurence," she answered, with gentle courtesy. "Pray, why do you care to know?"

"I can scarcely tell you, young lady. Excuse me, there must be some mistake. Laurence—did you say Laurence?"

"That is my name."

"And your father?"

"My father is dead," answered the girl, with a flush about her drooping eyelids, under which quick tears were springing.

"Dead? But your mother?"

"She is living."

"Ah! But you have other relatives—brothers, sisters, perhaps?"

"Yes, I have a brother and one sister."

"Like you? Is she beautiful like you?"

"I do not suppose any one could think of me, looking at her," answered Eva, speaking her honest conviction.

"I should like to see your sister and your mother," said the man, "Might I? Would it be unpardonable if I called on them?"

"I do not know, we have seen few people since my father was killed."

"Killed, did you say? Killed?"

"Yes," answered Eva, almost in a whisper; "my father was shot down in the street by a man he was arresting."

"Shot down! That was terrible! Forgive me, young lady, if I have made you cry. Nothing was further from my thoughts."

CHAPTER VIII.

TRYING THINGS ON.

THE stout woman who had brought on this conversation came up now, her face beaming with curiosity and her dress fluttering ludicrously.

"Well Herman, don't you think I have been kept waiting about long enough? One gets out of patience, Miss, especially when one is used to being studied and waited on by no end of servants, and such like. Now, if you'll just look out of the window, you'll find my footman watching the front entrance like a cat, with one hand on the carriage-door; for he knows well enough there'd be a high breeze if I was kept waiting a single minute; so you mustn't wonder if I am just a trifle hard on shop girls—I always keep them on the jump."

"Oh, I am quite ready to wait on you," said Eva smiling.

Mrs. Carter smiled also, for her genial nature was always ready to meet cordiality half way, and she said blandly,

"Would you mind just stepping over among the lace shawls, they tell me you're hired to show such things off, and I might take one, if they've got something a little superber than the shawl Mrs. Lambert just brought home from Europe. She sits right before me in church, you know, and wears it in the most aggravating way. Every

time I kneel down, that eternal pattern of morning-glory vines, creeping over her shoulder, is before my eyes, daring me to get anything like it, if I can, for love or money. I'm expected to feel meek and humble all the same. It isn't in human nature. That woman and I can't be members of the same church if she keeps this thing up. One's moral character won't stand such strains; kneeling at the same altar with a woman who wears a fifteen-hundred dollar lace shawl, and mine only a thousand, and Carter fairly wallowing in greenbacks, is more than I can stand."

Eva listened till her amused smile deepened into a laugh, which the man heard with a thrill of pain that ran through him like an arrow. Filled with recollections that made his blood stir like old wine in his heart, he drew back and watched the girl narrowly, as she conversed with his sister.

"Oh! if you want a fifteen hundred dollar shawl, it is an easy thing to get. Shall I go with you to the lace counter?" said Eva, quite unconscious of the stranger's regard.

"But it must have a morning-glory vine running through it, leaves and bells like hers, only more of 'em. I'm resolved that our church shall see no costlier shawl than Richard Carter's lady wears, while it sends up a steeple. Now just tell that young man to show us the very best he's got. Nothing less than fifteen hundred, understand."

The light-haired clerk heard all this conversation, and followed the party up to the lace-counter, where he became very officious in exhibiting shawls, to which he affixed enormous prices with a solemn gravity of countenance that impressed Mrs. Richard Carter greatly. This helped her to fix upon a beautiful fabric, certainly, but one she would not have deigned to purchase at its real value, which was just five hundred dollars less than the depletion of that huge roll of greenbacks with which the good lady went armed on her shopping excursions.

"There," she said, crushing the money she had left into

her reticule-purse, and winding the chain about her wrist and little finger, on which she wore a great diamond ring outside the glove, "I begin to feel like myself again. You are sure that a higher-priced shawl than that isn't to be found in New York, young man?"

"Positive of it, madam: for I don't believe there is another salesman in New York that would have the courage to set that figure," he muttered, after the first brief reply. "Not another imported. Rest content that you have *the* shawl of the season, madam. Shall I send it to your carriage?"

"Yes, give it to my footman, a tall fellow in maroon livery, with a gold band. You'll see Carter's and my monogram on the carriage door."

The clerk went away with a droll look in his eyes, and a smile struggling on his lip; for he was well acquainted with the class of persons to which his customer belonged—a class that, like many other strange things in social life, is an offshoot of a civil war, which has served to vulgarize wealth attained by accident or fraud, until refined people shrink from competition with it in sensitive shame.

"I'm ever so much obliged to you for showing off the patterns for me," said Mrs. Carter, turning toward Eva with cordial warmth. "The people always are obliging in this establishment; know in an instant when a lady carries the look of money in her face; but I must say, that you are the most stylish girl that I've seen here yet; was struck with you the first time, wasn't I, Herman?"

Here Mrs. Carter turned in search of her brother, who had retreated out of hearing.

"Oh! there he is, mousing off by himself; but he don't take his eyes from your face. No wonder, there is enough in it to strike anyone all in a heap. He don't seem to get over it, though. Awful sensitive! But we all are that. Exquisite feelings, born with us. He's my brother, you

know—my only brother. Left New York when he was a young man, and just come back again. I shouldn't have known him, he's so altered. Do you think we look alike? He used to be very handsome, and people took us for twins.'

A smile quivered across Eva's lip, and the lids drooped over her laughing eyes; but both died out suddenly as her glance fell on the strange man, who seemed to shrink away from her mirth as if it wounded him.

"I must not laugh," said Eva, in her thoughts. "Perhaps he feels how ridiculous his relative makes herself, and is annoyed by it. But why does he look at me with such sorrowful eyes. Yes, he is a handsome man, and seems to be both sensible and sensitive; but *her* brother—I don't believe it."

The man came forward as these thoughts disturbed the girl, asked Mrs. Carter if she was ready to return home, and, lifting his hat with grave politeness, led the way down stairs.

The tall footman was at his post, shut the carriage-door with a lordly bang, and climbed up to his place by the coachman, leaving the two persons inside to themselves.

"Well, now," said Mrs. Carter, eagerly, "did you ever see anything so handsome? She quite took my breath away at first. As for you, Ross, well the color hasn't come back to your face yet. What is the matter with you?"

"Yes, I saw," answered the man, dreamily, "I saw that she was beautiful."

CHAPTER IX.

THE LAMBERT MANSION.

THE Lamberts were a proud family, aristocratic in birth intellect and breeding. This branch with which our story deals, had added great wealth to its other possessions by marriage with a rich man's only daughter.

Mrs. Lambert was not content with a home in the Fifth Avenue, which many a small monarch might have coveted for a regal palace, but she must have it altogether different, more superb than her neighbors, unique as well as magnificent. Mrs. Lambert had led society so long, and travelled so much, that commonplace things, bought by the yard, and arranged exactly like every other house of the class, were far beneath her aspirations. Her stately mansion abounded in beautiful objects, rare and costly, which she had been years in collecting at every curiosity-shop and brie-a-brae sale in Europe.

The ground on which the Lambert mansion was built had been a farm, or rather homestead, when its present mistress was born. As the city throve and grew around it, that which had been a modest competency became enormous wealth, in the heart of which she replaced the old homestead with a palace, and turned the old garden and goodly home lot into a wilderness of flowers. These grew and bloomed beautifully, in spite of three or four grand old forest trees which still kept a firm root-hold in the soil. Standing in front, with those broad steps winding up to the entrance through their heavy stone balustrades, you saw nothing of the lovely green paradise that bloomed on the other side of that costly building. The plate glass windows were so brilliant, the stone work so elaborate, that an idea of nature took you by surprise.

Leave the avenue only for a minute, turn down the first cross street, and the bloom, the rich greenness, and rustle of leaves, come upon you like enchantment. Through them all, you saw sheets of curved glass rolling downward like sunlit waves of the ocean; and through them come the splendid glow of blossoming flowers, among which you could see birds fluttering, and a fountain shooting up diamonds.

This bit of paradise had formerly been old Mr. Lambert's kitchen-garden, planted around the edge with currant-bushes, and with a thicket of feathery fennel rising like a green fountain in the center. Where the thicket of tea-roses blossomed most richly, he had planted an asparagus bed and sold the product to market women at the highest price he could get. That great plot of heliotrope and scarlet geraniums, gave him a rich harvest of beets and carrots, in the good old days. But of all the old, thrifty life, there was nothing left save one great white rose-tree, that still clambered up a green post, and half-buried a pretty wren-house in its sturdy foliage.

This wren-house the old man had devised when he planted the rose on his daughter's birth-day, a bit of affectionate sentiment, she could never force herself to root from the gorgeous splendor of her after life. So there the rose-tree bloomed, and the wren-house gave forth yearly broods of young birds, that in their turn built nests, and filled the little spot with songsters bright and beautiful as the flowers.

Mrs. Lambert was a middle-aged lady now, and the white rose had died more than once in its main stock since she was born. Still shoots sprang up from the roots again, and the bush remained itself; while an old, old man, who had worked on the original homestead, and now lived over one of the stables, kept the wren-house thatched, and the ground rich around the old memorial bush, sometimes crying a little as he dug up the earth, and counted the years since the first slender twig was planted by the hand so long

cold, while he stood and looked on, wondering if the sprout would take root.

This old man, with hair as white as snow, was in the garden a few days after the opening of this story, looking weird and strange in all that bloom as the old white rose itself; this, being out of flower, was gnarled and rough, having nothing but green leaves to shelter the wren-house with. Some of its branches had died with age, and with his withered and trembling hands the old gardener was attempting to cut the lifeless wood away, a task that went to his heart, for it seemed like digging his own grave.

As the old gardener hacked at the rough wood, a man, who had been loitering along the sidewalk, stopped, as many a curious person had done before, and looked in upon the pleasant spot, while his hand held lightly by one of the iron rails. It was a white, thin hand, but not of that delicate mould which entire freedom from toil, from the cradle up, leaves to the possessor. Some time in its owner's life that hand had wrought and toiled, though the palm was soft now and the fingers slender.

Something in the face, which looked over the iron railing, seemed to interest the old man, who paused with his knife half through the wood of the rose-bush, and shading his eyes, took a keen survey of its features.

As if impelled by some mysterious attraction, the old gardener left his knife sticking in the wood, and moved with slow difficulty toward the iron railing, exactly as if the man had summoned him. Indeed, it almost seemed as if he had done so, for the moment those hobbling steps paused the stranger began to ask questions, which the old man, usually so grim and crusty with persons he did not know, answered with prompt respect.

"A beautiful garden this," said the stranger, gently, meeting the old man's gaze with a look that had something anxious in it.

"Well, yes, I should think so. It has been a growing a good many years, and from the first was rich."

"Are you the gardener?"

"What, I? Of course. What else should I be, if not the madam's gardener? I, who helped her to dig up her first little flower-bed when she wasn't more than so high."

Here the old man bent down a little, and measured off the empty space about to the level of his rheumatic knees.

"But you seem a very old man to work at all."

"Do I? Well, it isn't any hard work I do. There is a boy out there by the green-house that keeps himself busy obeying my orders, and he gets along pretty well considering."

Here the old man pointed to a tall, stalwart laborer, some thirty-five years of age, who really did the work of the place, and whom the old man considered as a boy.

"I'm not so old as to want help, you know," continued the old gardener; "but the madam——"

"I think you said she had lived here from a child?"

The stranger's voice was hoarse and constrained, as he interrupted the old man with this question.

The gardener brushed back the gray hair from his ears, as if something in the voice bewildered him; then he answered,

"Why, everybody here knows that. The big wooden house is gone, but that heap of stone stands over the old cellar, and *she* lives like a queen where her father died. The great difference is, she picks roses where he sold leets and carrots; and them green-houses stand just where his pig-pens were. Wonderful, isn't it?"

"But you have not told me who the lady is?"

"Not told you? Ha! ha! As if everybody didn't know Mrs. Lambert."

"The lady is married, then?"

These words fell heavily, like drops of lead, from the

stranger's white lips, and his hand, which clasped the railing, tightened spasmodically around the iron.

"Married! Why that was years and years ago. She went across the seas to some foreign countries after her father died, and came back with a husband and a son.

"Her son?"

"Lord a mercy! No! Step-child—a first rate shaver by Mr. Lambert's first wife; but she don't seem to know the difference. He'll get every cent she's worth, and that's a heap of money, I tell you. But there she goes down the back walk toward the green-house, you can see her white dress through the bushes."

The stranger grasped the iron spikes with both hands now, and the face, which looked over them, was white as death.

"Let me in! Let me pass through!" he exclaimed, looking wildly around for a gate.

"Well, I should rather think not; no trespassers ever get in to tread down the madam's flowers. She wouldn't allow it. Halloo! what are you about?"

The stranger had discovered a gate upon the latch, and opening it, much to the old man's surprise, passed into the garden.

"Stop there! Hold on, I say!"

The stranger did not even hear this quivering protest, but walked swiftly across the garden and entered a green-house, that rose in its midst like a mammoth bird-cage of rolling glass, choked up with leaves and blossoms. Beneath an acacia-tree, covered with soft, yellow blossoms, stood a lady, with her white arm uplifted, gathering a spray of the delicate plant, which she was about to group with a quantity of moss-roses and heliotrope, which she had plucked in the open air. She dropped her hand in amazement as a strange man entered the green-house, and the branch she had half broken rustled slowly back to its place.

"Elizabeth!"

The lady started. A cry that rose to her lips as her name was uttered, broke into something like a sob, and she seemed about to escape.

"Elizabeth!"

She turned now, trembling, white, shrinking with dread, and looked into the man's face.

"You—you——"

Her blanched lips could utter no more, she seized the acacia by its stem, and the trembling of her arm shook down the blossoms like rain upon her bowed head.

CHAPTER X.

DAWNING PROSPERITY.

LITTLE James Laurence worked manfully in his new vocation. He carried home packages of tea, pounds of sausages, and paper bags stuffed with crackers, quicker than any boy of his size was ever known to do before. He ran errands up and down stairs for Kate Gorman, and soon learned to toss "Jerusha Maria" in the air with an adroitness that threw her into an ecstasy of crowing, and set her long clothes to fluttering through and through, like the plumage of a bird. He learned to put on her tiny socks when she shook them from her plump, little feet; and never touched the top of her head without trembling for the delicate spot there, which Mrs. Smith had anxiously warned him of. He kept the child's cradle in a soft, monotonous jog while she slept, without complaint, though the day was ever so bright, and the cheery sound of boys playing marbles, on the side-walk, tempted him sorely at times.

For all this James got his board, and two dollars a week, a sum that brought a marvellous quantity of groceries every Saturday night, as Mrs. Smith reckoned up accounts, and sent the boy home rejoicing to spend the Sabbath with his family.

Eva, too, had received her last instalment of wages, and Mrs. Laurence grew stronger and stronger each day, as that heavy burden of anxiety was lifted from her shoulders. As for Ruth, who lived in the happiness of those around her, this gleam of sunshine revived her strength and beauty as if she had been a flower. With the reaction of infinite relief, she began to wonder if there was anything on earth that she could do for the general happiness.

To say that Mrs. Smith was the good angel of this little household, would be to cast a certain degree of ridicule on this robust, ruddy-faced, and genial-hearted woman: for she had nothing of the angel about her, except that sweet snow-plumed spirit of mercy that brooded in her warm heart, as doves make a nest of soft materials, and glorify them with the cooing music of perfect love.

No, Mrs. Smith was not an angel, by any means. She had some household ways that angels would have considered out of place, not to mention her name, which was the reverse of poetical to say nothing of the seraphic. Sometimes the good woman scolded her husband roundly, and once or twice—I tell this with infinite reluctance—she had been known to snatch Jerusha Maria from the soft depths of her cradle, after that young lady had cried till her face was of a lovely purple, and shake her till the feathers would have flown, had her mother been an angel, and thus endowed her with the plumage of a seraph.

In fact, Mrs. Smith was a kind, wholesome specimen of the middle class American house-wife, and a good friend to the Laurence family. That was all. She had, when business grew prosperous, taken a lad from the street, rather

more impulsively than we have seen her adopt our friend James, and believing herself to have met with success on that occasion, was the more willing to try a new experiment of mercy. But, like a good many other kind-hearted people, she forgot to guard herself against the infirmities of human jealousy, and was quite reckless of the fact that Jared Boyce received his fellow clerk with scowls of dissatisfaction, and that sneers of disdain curled his incipient red moustache, whenever the lad came near him.

This youth was left in charge of the store whenever Smith went out to make purchases, and his wife was called up stairs, which happened frequently, as time wore on, for Jerusha Maria was cutting her teeth in a vicious state of mind, and Kate Gorman had more than she could do in the kitchen.

Of course, this threw young James more frequently into the store, where Jared found occasion to impose all sorts of petty indignities upon him. These crafty annoyances the boy, too noble for complaint, bore with a degree of manliness that threatened to baffle the object his enemy had in view. One thing James saw clearly and felt, as only a proud, sensitive child could, Jared Boyce did not want him about. Why?

James asked himself this question again and again, with tears in his eyes, sometimes in the depths of the night, when a vague sense of trouble would keep him awake, sometimes when burdened with a heavy basket in the street; but he took counsel of no one, and bore his own trouble in silence like a little man as he was.

After awhile things changed somewhat with the lad. Jared cast off his morose bearing, and made some cringing advances toward cordiality, from which the boy shrunk with sensitive dread.

One day, when James had gone out with some packages, Smith came into the store in haste, while a countryman who

had brought in a load of produce, waited at the counter with a whip in his hand.

"Thirty-seven dollars," said Smith, opening the money drawer and counting some bank-notes that he found there. "No need of waiting; generally enough on hand for small amounts like this. Ha, Boyce! who has been paying out money. I'm ten dollars short. Run up and ask the old woman if she's taken any. If she has, tell her to shell out, the man is waiting!"

Boyce turned slowly, and went up stairs. He paused once or twice while ascending, and bit his white lips, as if doubtful what course to pursue. Then he lifted his head with a dash, ran the fingers of one hand through his fire-red hair, and flung open the door where Mrs. Smith was sitting with "Jerusha Maria" on her lap, rubbing her gums with the handle of a dessert-spoon, in the desperate hope that she was aiding a refractory tooth to cut.

"Mrs. Smith, the boss wants to know if you've took any money from out of the drawer. He wants to make up a bill."

"What, me! Goodness gracious! What do I want of money, with Jerusha Maria crying her eyes out, and I trying my best to set her teeth of an edge. Tell Smith not to make a fool of himself, but search his own pockets. Dear me! will that man never have no consideration!"

"Then you haven't got the money?" said Jared, looking over Mrs. Smith's head, as if he were questioning the wall.

"Money! Not a cent! Don't bother me!" cried the dame flinging down the spoon, and searching the child's mouth with her motherly finger. "What do I know about the store, with this little angel screaming like mad with the ache of her precious gums! There, there! mother knows they buse her darling! Oh, goodness! Kate Gorman, come here. I'm sure there's one coming through just under my finger; look, now."

Kate set down a saucer she was wiping, dried her hands hastily on the dish-towel, and came forward beaming with expectation.

"Just turn her purty face to the light," she cried, sinking on her two knees before the child, and peering into the mouth in which sobs and screams were half smothered. By gorry! and so it is, true enough! like the pint of a needle agin yer finger. There, now, the swate crathur will have some peace an' quietness. Boyce, go down an' tell the master that it has come, and not stand gaunking there."

Boyce, who had been in no haste to go down, closed the door softly, and stood ruminating on the outside. Directly his face brightened with some new-born thought, and he entered the store with his usual manner.

"Mrs. Smith says she hasn't took a cent from the draw, boss."

"Hasn't taken a cent from the drawer!" exclaimed Smith, excitedly. "Then where the thunder has that ten-dollar bill gone! I left three in that identical drawer not more en half an hour ago, and now only two is left. Who has been back of the counter since I went out?"

"Not a soul but me and Mrs. Smith's new boy, Jim."

Smith's countenance fell. He went to the drawer again, drew it completely out from under the counter, turned it bottom up, with a bang, and once more searched every fragment of paper with care.

Then he remembered the countryman, who was waiting patiently, and assorting out some small bills, paid him in moody silence.

Boyce was very busy all this time re-arranging boxes, and dusting the counter; but his furtive eyes now and then turned upon Smith with the look of a hound that fears chastisement, and his work was done in a quick, nervous fashion, quite unusual to him.

Meantime, little Jim came in with an empty basket on

his arm, bright and radiant as a June morning. Smith lifted his eyes from the desk where he stood, and when he saw that cheerful, honest face, his own brightened. He had intended to question the boy, but thought of his wife, and had not the heart to do it.

"There is another basket to be taken to Mrs. Lambert's cook, who comes down all this way because of one of the footmen being the cousin of my poor dead mother; so look sharp and get the things there in time," said Boyce, swinging a basket up to the counter. "Tell her every article is choice, as choice can be, such as we don't give to common customers, by no manner of means. There, now, heave away!"

CHAPTER XI.

GOSSIP IN THE BASEMENT.

JAMES received the basket, and carried it off manfully, but began to drag in his walk, and set the heavy load down for a moment's rest after he had carried it a block or two, for his spirit ran far beyond his strength, poor fellow! When he entered the spacious kitchen in Mrs. Lambert's dwelling, the perspiration was standing in drops on his forehead and he staggered in his walk.

Two or three servants were in the kitchen, gathered in a group around a sallow and highly dressed young lady, whose French cap was in a flutter from the active movement of her head, and whose hands were now and then taken from the pockets in her apron to illustrate what she was saying with peculiar emphasis.

So occupied and interested was this group that no one observed the tired boy, who stood panting over the basket he

had placed upon the floor, waiting for some one to claim its contents. Even the cook, whose duty it was, stood by her table with the rolling-pin resting motionless on a half-formed pie-crust, her hands white with flour, and her mouth open with eager curiosity, listening to the female in that French cap so intently that she had no eyes nor ears for anything else.

"I tell you the man was a total stranger. Old Storms can't remember ever seeing him before—and he remembers every one that ever came here since the deluge. He protested against the man's coming into the garden, and held the gate to with all his might; but the stranger just pushed him aside, and tramping across the garden, made straight for the conservatory without a word, as if everything belonged to him."

"Did you ever see such impudence," said a jaunty footman whose eyes were bent admiringly on the speaker. She nodded an assent, and proceeded with her narrative."

"Old Storms followed after just as fast as he could hobble. First he heard a little scream, then a dead silence, and through the glass he could see the tall acacia-tree bending and fluttering as if a storm had struck it. Then came quick words. The man spoke low and steadily, but madam's voice rose high and sharp as no one ever heard it before; and when old Storms looked in, she was white as a ghost, and shaking like a leaf. She saw his face peeping through the door, and lifting her arms, motioned him away, while her eyes seemed to shine right through him like burning stars."

"But who was the man? Why didn't the madam order him out?" exclaimed the cook, grasping her rolling-pin with all the force of a large, heavy hand. "I only wish it had a been me."

"But it was madam who ordered old Storms out; she that stands everything from him, even to being snubbed

about picking her own flowers," answered the maid. "I don't understand it. She must have known the man, yet she was afraid of him, she was white as a sheet."

"And quivering all over like a jelly," broke in the cook. "Wasn't that what you said, Ellen?"

"I said nothing of the kind, cook," answered the maid, with infinite disdain. "No one was talking of jellies, that I know of, so please to keep such comparisons for the kitchen."

The cook turned her back on the exasperated maid, and began rolling out her pie-crust with vigor, muttering to herself,

"Sich airs! Just as if wearing a high-flying cap made some people better than other people."

"But you didn't tell, Miss Ellen, what came of it all; which of the madam's people was it who showed that strange person into the street?" inquired the dashing footman, who had listened so eagerly to Ellen's story.

"Which of 'em? Not you, Robert, by any manner of means. The truth was, old Storms kept guard over the conservatory a full half hour. Then the man came out, looking stern and white, as if he had been committing murder. He passed right by the old man without so much as looking at him, and tramped off through the garden-gate, wading right through a bed of heliotropes in full blossom, and coming up against that old white rose-bush, with the wren's-nest over it. Then he stopped as if some one had shot him, and leaning his head against the post, shook till the leaves trembled and the branches rustled."

"Old Storms could not wait to see anything more, for looking through the glass, he saw madam lying in a heap, with her head against the marble of the fountain, not a mite of color in her face, her hands, or her neck. At first he thought she was dead, and began to wring his old hands over her, and cry out so loud that the under-gardener heard

him. Dropping everything he ran into the green-house and lifted her up while old Storms came in after me.

"Of course, I went out with a flask of hartshorn in one hand, and aromatic vinegar in the other. That poor old fellow went before, with great round tears rolling down his cheek; but I was too frightened to cry, you may believe that. Why Mr. Robert there could have knocked me down with a feather."

"As if I could be hired to do anything so exceedingly unmanly," said the footman, bowing low, with one hand on his heart, "the bare idea is wounding to—to—" Yes, wounding, Miss Ellen."

"But I didn't mean it as such. The feathery idee was a comparison, not an actuality, Mr. Robert. Excuse me, I meant no harm; there isn't a girl living who appreciates your superfluous qualities better than I do. Pray forgive me!"

Robert allowed himself to be appeased, and took Miss Ellen's hand affectionately in his, while he besought her to go on with her touching narrative.

"There isn't much more to tell," said Ellen, leaving her hand rather longer than was necessary in the footman's clasp. "I found her what seemed to me stone-dead, her hands cold as ice, her face white as the marble over which the water dripped, her hair wet with the spray of the fountain. Old Storms began to cry, and the under-gardener—"

"Well, Miss Ellen, what of him?" demanded the footman, tossing the clinging hand away indignantly. "What of that cretur? Did he have the cheek to offer to help, and lift the madam up, and, perhaps, touch that hand in doing of it—that hand which mine— Speak, Ellen, what *did* that wretched being presume to do?"

"Why, Robert, he only lifted her up from the cold marble of the floor, and laid her on a garden-sofa."

"He did? That is enough. I understand the rest.

Perfidious woman! You helped him! Your hands met—your eyes——"

"No, Robert, no! I hardly looked at him. But what could we do? Old Storms hasn't the strength of a baby, and I was so frightened!"

"But you talked with him?"

"Only to get all the particulars which the crabbed old man wouldn't talk about. In fact, he tried to make me believe that nothing out of the common had happened; that no strange man had been there; and he was awful huffy with the under-gardener for coming in after me. In fact, if I had depended on old Storms, not a soul in this house would have known anything about it."

"We don't know much as it is," muttered the cook, kneading handfuls of butter into her piecrust, while Ellen made the most of her story.

"Well, you may know this, if you'll take the trouble to understand," answered Ellen, with a toss of her head. "It was full ten minutes before the madam came out of her fainting fit, and when she did, it was to sit up like a ghost and look around with frightened eyes, as if she dreaded something, and there old Storms stood half crying. When she saw me the color came back to her face with a rush, and in her grand way, she asked what I was doing there. When I attempted to answer, she pointed to the door and said,

"Go, leave me. There was nothing the matter, that you should be called. The heavy perfume of the flowers made me faint; but Storms was enough."

"Then she arose with her haughtiest air and swept by me like a queen."

"Rather hard on you, Ellen. I should say it all meant that you wasn't wanted," said the cook, dusting the flour from her hands with a sort of glee, for she had made that a pretence for clapping them.

"I wasn't addressing my conversation to you," replied Ellen, with lofty disdain, and was about to say to Mr. Robert "that when I went into the house madam passed me without a word, and shut herself up in her own room where she has been these two hours without ringing her bell once. Now I say that looks mysterious."

"Sensationing, at least," answered the footman.

CHAPTER XII.

JAMES MAKES AN ACQUAINTANCE.

"PLEASE, will you tell some one to empty the basket. I've been away from the store ever so long."

It was the voice of little James, who had been modestly waiting to be noticed while this eager conversation went on, and now addressed Ellen as the most important person in the room.

"Groceries," cried the girl, with a magnificent lift of the head. "Do I look as if groceries belonged to my department, boy?"

"Give 'em to me," cried the cook, swinging the basket up to a dresser with the nerve of a giant. "There is a mighty difference between buttoning a lady's boots and cooking her dinner, of course. We are all fine ladies here, only it hasn't got about yet. There, now, run home as quick as you like."

"Has that boy been listening all this time?" cried Ellen, casting angry glances at the blushing young face.

"I—I tried all I could not to hear," said the boy, modestly. "It was not my fault; I wanted to get away from the first."

"Well, mind you hold your tongue about anything I've

been saying, or you'll get into trouble, and lose madam's custom."

"That's just as *I* say," answered the cook, defiantly. You stick to your ribbons and curling stick, Ellen Post; I and this boy can get along very well without you. There's your empty basket, my little fellow; now run home, and don't mind what any one says to you but myself; but remember to come earlier to-morrow, for I am bound to go out early anyhow, having a little business at the Savings Bank that must be seen to, not being one of them stuck-up persons that heap everything on their own backs—I look out for a rainy day, I do."

Here the cook lifted her head in the air and took a deliberate survey of Ellen Post, at which stage of the quarrel James left the kitchen, full of wonder that there could be so much discontent in a house like that.

On his way home, the lad almost ran against a gentleman who was walking slowly along the side-walk. In attempting to avoid the collision his foot slipped, and he fell forward upon the flags with a force that stunned him for the moment. The gentleman lifted him from the stones in considerable agitation, and putting back the hair from his forehead, examined the bruise, which was swelling rapidly upon it.

"My poor boy," he said, in a voice so sweet with compassion that tears swelled into the lad's eyes at once, though the pain of his fall had brought no moisture there.

"Oh, it's nothing, sir! We boys are used to such tumbles. You are only too kind about it. All my own fault, sir, thank you!"

"No, but you are hurt, and need help. I cannot let you go home alone."

James tried to get up a brave laugh; but the blow had made him dizzy, and he staggered forward rather than walked.

"Where do you live? Not far from here, I suppose," inquired the stranger, with gentle kindness.

"Oh! I live in one place and tend store in another," answered the boy.

"You had better go home, then, and I will get a doctor to put something on your forehead."

"What, a doctor for this? Oh, my! that would be funny! The boys would all laugh at me!"

"Still you have had a serious fall, and such things are often dangerous. Tell me where you live?"

"Well, sir, if you insist upon it, I am going right by the house. It won't take long to put a piece of wet paper on a fellow's forehead; and as you want to see it done, I haven't any objection, though mother and Ruthy will be surprised."

So James, unconscious of the tender gratitude which prompted the act, gave one hand to the stranger, and the two walked along together.

"What is your name, my little man?" inquired the stranger, greatly interested in the boy.

"James. James Laurence."

"Laurence? I met a young lady of that name not long ago—a very beautiful young lady."

"Was she in a store?"

"Yes."

"Tall, with eyes that look like water in a shady place?"

"She had soft, pleasant eyes."

"Did she tell you her other name? Was it Eva?"

"That was her name."

"Well, then, you've seen one of the brightest, sweetest, darlinest girls that ever lived, sir; let me tell you that, if she is my sister."

"Then the young lady is really and truly your sister?" said the man, and a strange tone of disappointment broke into his naturally sad voice.

"Really and truly she is my own sister; but no wonder

you can't just believe it, she's so much grander and brighter than any of us. I never see a great, stone house like that I have just come away from, without thinking our Eva was made to live in it, and be a queen, with lots of common people to wait on her."

"What house have you just come from, my little friend?"

"Mrs. Lambert's!"

"Ha!"

"It is that great house on the corner, with so many flowers behind it. Eva is so fond of flowers, too. It is she who trains up the morning glory vines, and plants sweet peas and crimson beans among them. Sometimes I almost like our little garden as well as Mrs. Lambert's. We plant our own flowers, you see, and that makes a difference in the way of enjoying them."

"It does, indeed! Do you go to Mrs. Lambert's often?"

"I never went there till Mrs. Smith took me into the grocery; but I used to pass by the garden every day. It was a little farther to school through that street, but I loved to walk slow and look through the iron fence, where the great tea-roses and geraniums seemed to set the ground on fire, and that white-headed old man moving about among them was like a picture. At first he was awful cross, and would order me away, but after a while, when he saw that I never so much as reached my hand through, he would sometimes chuck a rose, or a sprig of something sweet through the fence, and go away chuckling to himself. I always carried the flowers to Ruthy, or our Eva, they are both so fond of them, you know, and this made us all just a little acquainted with the great house up yonder. I dare say the proud lady would think our garden no great things, but the girls love it a good deal better than she loves hers, I promise you; for, go by ever so often, I hardly ever see her in it."

"Have you ever spoken to the lady?"

"What—me? No, indeed; but she spoke to me once!"

"How was that?"

"One day when I was walking with my sister Eva, she leaned out of her carriage, and looked after us in a strange earnest way, that made Eva pull down her veil. The next day, as I was going along by the garden-fence, the lady was close by me picking flowers on the other side. I suppose my eyes looked greedy for them, for she called to me in a kind, sweet way, and reached some of her flowers through the railing. I was afraid to touch them at first; but she smiled, and said, Old Storms had told her how I loved to hang about the railing, and that I had a young lady with me once, who seemed as fond of flowers as I was."

"Oh! I said, a thousand times more so. Eva loves them better than anything in the world. When I said Eva, the lady seemed to grow restless, and dropped some of her flowers without noticing it."

"That's a singular name," she said, "that is——"

"That is, for poor people, I said, when she stopped, as if afraid of hurting my feelings. Yes, we all know that; but then our Eva never seemed like poor people. Everybody thinks she is a lady—and so she is, every inch of her."

"The madam smiled when I said this, and her face grew red as a rose all in a minute, as if I had been praising her instead of Eva, which wasn't likely, being only a little boy, and she a splendid lady. Then she asked me about my father who was killed, sir, when we needed him most; and about my mother who was working so hard to keep us together, and said that perhaps she would come some time and see our garden, if it was so pretty; but she never came."

The stranger listened to that frank, young voice with gentle interest, asking a few questions now and then, always calculating to draw out some detail about the lady of the great house, but without directly alluding to her.

"But since then you have been to the house?"

"Yes, sir, after I went into business. That was what took me there to-day."

James spoke guardedly, now he remembered that what he had overheard was not his to tell. The stranger showed no disposition to carry the subject further, but fell into thought, and moved forward as if he had been alone.

"There, there! you see Eva's morning glories running up the window," cried the boy.

"Is this your home, my boy?"

"Yes, sir, while we can keep it, that is; but who knows what good luck will come next! If I were only a man now!"

"So you long to be a man?" said the stranger, looking down at the lad with sorrowful interest.

"Yes, I do. Then, sir, I would keep that roof over my mother's head in spite of all the mortgages in the world. Oh! how I would work!"

"Brave lad, how I envy you."

"Envy me! Well, yes, I am a good deal happier than one could expect. Working for women who love you isn't bad fun; but here is the gate, and there is Ruthy, you can see her through the window. Won't she wonder who it is, and what brings me home this time of day?"

"You seem to have forgotten your hurt?"

"No, it feels a little heavy, and smarts some; but I'll pull my cap down not to frighten them. Of course, it's nothing; but then one's mother is so tender of a fellow. There!"

James pulled his cap far over his bruised forehead, and opening the gate, invited his strange guest to pass in.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GENTLE INVALID.

RUTH LAURENCE though an invalid, was pining for something which might occupy the slender hands which seemed all too frail for labor. She could do many pretty trifles, however, with those deft fingers, and in her soul lay a deep love of art, which they were patiently striving to work out, whenever a bit of wax or a scrap of paper fell in her way. Sometimes, as the wind swept through the open windows of that little room, it carried off tiny morsels of paper, on which a butterfly, a bird, or a flower was sketched, which went whirling off among the old-fashioned flowers like a living thing. Sometimes Ruth would manage to get ravelings from scraps of silk, out of which she wrought rose-buds for pin-cushions, and groups of blossoms for segar-cases which brought in a shilling or two, now and then, for the scanty household-fund, and gave her a world of happiness in the sweet power of creation.

She was lying on her couch, close by the window, with a bit of drawing paper in her hand, on which the soft shadows of a white rose were forming themselves, when a click of the gate-latch, and the sound of strange footsteps made her start and look through the window. She saw her brother James by the gate, and with him a tall man, whom she had never seen before. The stranger waited a moment for the boy to complete what he was saying, and then crossed the little yard, while James ran forward to open the door.

"Ruthy! Ruthy, dear! just sit up a little, if you can; I have brought a gentleman, who wants to get acquainted with us. I told him all about things, you know, and he seems to think—Well, I don't know what he thinks—but something awful kind, I'm sure."

While James stood in the doorway uttering this exciting little speech, Ruth arose feebly from her pillows, dropped her feet to the floor, and turned her eyes upon the stranger in breathless expectation. She saw a tall slender man, some forty or forty-five years of age, with hair that had once been black as the neck of a raven, large dark eyes full of calm sadness, a forehead as white as marble, and but faintly lined. To these were added a fine sensitive mouth, to which laughter seemed to come never, and smiles but seldom; still, in his face and quiet, gentlemanly air, was that indescribable something which awakes sympathy and verges on tenderness.

"Forgive me, young lady; I did not intend to intrude on you in this abrupt way," he said, lifting his hat as he crossed the threshold. "I have met a young lady, your sister, I think, who half gave me permission to call."

"My sister is not at home," answered Ruth, blushing; for she was so unaccustomed to the sight of a stranger that the presence of this one set her heart into a wild flutter.

"I know; this good lad told me as much. He also told me some other things about his family, that made me think—that made me hope—" The stranger paused, and bent his eyes upon the girl with a long, wistful look, that seemed pleading with her for help.

"Perhaps you hoped to find some one that you knew?"

"Yes, yes; I did hope that—but it was long ago. No friend of mine could be young as you are."

"Was it somebody you wanted to find, then? Perhaps mother may help you."

"Perhaps," said the man, abstractedly, still gazing in that delicate young face, as if searching its features, one by one.

"She knew all my poor father's friends," said Ruth, embarrassed by the silence.

"Ah, yes! I should like to see your mother."

Ruth lifted her voice a little, and called out:
"Mother! Mother!"

"Well, I must be going. It's so long since I went out, and they'll miss me at the store," said little James, who had waited in silence for something strange to happen; for this advent of a stranger seemed full of importance to him. "Good-bye, Ruthy; good-bye, sir! I'm off."

As James ran down the front yard, Mrs. Laurence came into the little parlor, untying the apron in which she had been working as she came in. Mr. Ross started, and turning in his chair, regarded her with a sharp, scrutinizing look, which deepened into an expression of keen disappointment.

"This is my mother," said Ruth, bending her head, while Mrs. Laurence paused to fling her apron back into the kitchen, when she saw a stranger in the room.

Ross arose, and stood a moment, waiting for Mrs. Laurence to advance; for, though everything was humble, and even poverty-stricken around them, he felt that these women were naturally far above the level of their appearance.

"I have intruded, Madam, perhaps rudely," he said, at last; "but having met one of your children by accident, her resemblance to one—to an old friend—was so striking, that I ventured to inquire about her here."

Mrs. Laurence seemed more than usually disturbed by this speech; she turned a cold glance on her visitor, and said,

"I cannot remember of ever seeing you before, sir; there must be some mistake."

Ross looked searchingly at the woman, as she spoke; her voice was firm and somewhat harsh; her reception of his polite address a little repellant; but she motioned him to take a seat, and occupied one herself, putting down her sleeves, which had been rolled up to the elbows.

"I once knew a man of your name," said Ross, regarding the woman with a look of hesitation.

"Was he a policeman?" questioned Mrs. Laurence.

"Not while I knew him. We were boys in the same school."

"How long was that ago?"

"More than twenty years—that is, it is almost that since we parted."

Mrs. Laurence reflected a moment, then lifting her face, said,

"Well?"

"He was the dearest friend I ever had. When I left him, he promised to watch over my interests, to——"

"May I ask your name," said Mrs. Laurence now keenly aroused.

"Ross—Herman Ross."

Mrs. Laurence turned her eyes from the face she had been studying with a sort of terror, and her voice grew low and hoarse as she questioned him further.

"And the name of your friend—his full name?"

"Leonard—Leonard Laurence."

"That was father's name," said Ruth, in a half whisper, looking at her mother, who groaned heavily, without saying a word. Low as the words were spoken, Ross heard them, and his face kindled.

"Then, young lady, your father was my close friend, and loved me like a brother. Will you not trust and like me a little for his sake?"

"I love everything that he loved," said Ruth, with tears in her eyes; and she held out her frail little hand, which Ross took, reverently; then he turned to the other woman with a look of touching appeal.

"And you are Leonard Laurence's wife. I remember seeing you once, a fair, young bride."

The iron muscles about the woman's mouth began to quiver, and a flush came around her pale-blue eyes.

"There is a long weary stretch between now and then," she said, turning away her face.

"There is, indeed!" responded Ross, with a sigh, which stirred his bosom with the force of a groan. "A long, weary stretch; full of desolation to more than you and me."

"It gave him a violent death, and me widowhood like this," said the woman, turning cold and white.

"The boy told me something of this, but I was not sure it was the same man. I hoped to find him alive and prosperous. This is a hard, hard blow to a man who had so few friends."

The woman looked at him jealously, as if his evident grief encroached upon her own melancholy right of sorrow. From the first, she seemed to regard him as a person to be kept at arms-length.

"Tell me more—tell me how he died?" said Ross, in a tremulous voice. "It will be a pain, I know; but this suspense and conjecture will have no end, without a thorough knowledge of all that relates to him. I must know."

Ruth looked wistfully at her mother, and was about to utter some tender protest; but Mrs. Laurence lifted her hand, as if she understood the kind impulse, and was ready to take up her hard task.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE POLICEMAN'S DEATH.

"It was 'during the Rebellion,'" said Mrs. Laurence, "when the laboring-classes of the city went wild with a mad idea that the draft was intended to oppress them and favor the rich. Most of our city troops had been drawn off to check the advance of the enemy, and a fearful duty fell upon the

police—as brave a set of men as ever went to any battle-field.

"The riot came upon us unexpectedly. My husband seemed rather more than usually anxious that morning, but not really apprehensive. He was then a captain in the force, and held to be one of the bravest and most experienced men among them. You have seen him. You know what manner of man he was; but, no—you knew him in his youth—this was in his perfect prime. In the glow of health, in the might of firm resolution, he left me that day. I watched him going down the street, from that window—that very window, sir. We had just built this house, then, and were making it a home for the children. The youngest was by my side; he had mounted a chair, and was clapping his hands and shouting for his father to look back.

"Leonard was anxious, and walked on swiftly; for strange noises were in the air, while groups of men and women gathered in the street, suddenly, as if they sprang out of the earth. Still, my husband heard the shouts of his child, and turning, waved his hand to us. I saw that no smile lighted his face. He stopped, and seemed to listen. A low howl swept up the street, as if a den of wild beasts were clamoring for food. This time, he waved his club, and plunged into a great crowd of people, that choked up the street, menacing him with threats. That great heaving crowd poured itself upon him and tossed him into its midst with shouts that made me quake from head to foot.

"That was an awful day. He had left me in charge of our children, and I dared not leave them for a moment. My home was in the very heart of a disaffected district. My husband was obnoxious, from his strict discharge of duty, and suspected of more education, and higher ambition, than the horde that surrounded us. Lonely as our household was, danger menaced us. Twice during the day a crowd came up the street, swarmed into our little garden, and

threatened to burn the house. They would have done it, too, but for Eva, who flung the door open, and standing on the threshold, told them that she was there to protect her mother and two children, younger and weaker than herself.

"Oh, sir! if you could have seen that child standing there, and braving that crowd of fiends! How beautiful she looked, with her coal black hair all abroad; her great eyes burning with courageous fire, hurling words of wild appeal, like bullets, into the crowd. They met her, first, with groans of derision, then with fierce shouts of applause, swearing that she was worthy to lead in their own hot work; worthy of a place by the demoniac women who knew how to cut their way through fire and blood to the heart of an aristocrat.

"Before I could reach my child, or even cry out, a gaunt, gray-headed old woman, with blazing eyes, and lips blistered with oaths, seized her by the arm, shouting,

"Yes, yes! let us set her on to help us! She shall tear the brats from out of their silk nests in the avenue, up yonder, and drown them in the gutters! This is fancy work; just fit for a daring imp that isn't afraid of us! Them who ain't afeared to fight us are bound to lead us. We want a girl, about her age, to hunt up the small fry, and fling them down for us to trample in the mud.'

"As the woman spoke, she lifted Eva from her feet, and would have hurled her into the crowd; but I pushed the children from me, and sprang upon her with the strength of a strong man in my arms. The struggle was short and fierce. I rescued Eva, and thrusting her behind me, took her place on the threshold of our home. The woman sprang upon me like a fiend; froth flew like snow-flakes from her writhing lips, and a glow of blood burned in her eyes—but I had three children to save.

"How I saved them; what words were used; if the

strength of desperation, that fairly turned every nerve in my body to iron, was put forth at all, I do not know; but the crowd broke, filling the air with shouts of laughter, and surged away, dragging that fiend-woman with them.

"Then I bolted the doors, and fell down, weaker and more helpless than the children who crept around me, too frightened for crying. All day long, the howling of the mob, the shrieks of terrified negroes, and the rush of crowds, sweeping by on some errand of destruction, filled us with shuddering dread. When night came we were still alone, watchful and trembling with unutterable fear. I did not think it strange that my husband was absent. While there was a duty to perform, I knew that we need not hope to see him. But, oh, the suspense was terrible!

"All night we waited and listened to the gathering storm, to the howlings of the mob, the startling crash of fire-bells, following close on each other, and the sharp shrieks of men and women, trampled under foot by the merciless rioters, whose fury it was my husband's duty to quell. Oh, that was an awful night! At each sound my children would creep closer to me, and while the heart quivered in my bosom, I tried to comfort them.

"Toward morning, a messenger came from my husband. He was still at his post, and might not be able to leave it that day. We must keep bravely up, and remain quiet, otherwise his mind would be so distracted that it might be hard to go through what lay before him.

"I learned from the messenger that Leonard had tasted no food since morning, and hastily gathered up what there was cooked in the house. I sent it to him with the children's love. Of course, we would be brave and quiet, I said. He must not care for us. I would mind the children, if God would only take care of him. I said this bravely, but my heart quailed within me as I spoke.

"The messenger promised to come back in an hour or two,

and we waited for him with growing terror, for the crash of the fire-bells was perpetual now. All around us, red tongues of flame were shooting up through burning roofs, and the streets were full of straggling rioters, with the plunder of sacked homes on their backs; some of them reeling with intoxication, and cursing everything they met, as men and women cursed each other around the guillotines of Paris, and in the slaughter of the communes. These sights kept me at the window. An awful fascination drew me toward the street whenever a fresh mob came crowding along it. How did I know that he might not be there struggling against the stormy passions that filled the city with smoke and thunder.

"The sun was going down on the second day, and there we stood, carefully holding back the window-curtain, and straining our eyes to catch the first glimpse of his coming, or of some messenger who could tell us of his safety. All at once, a sound of low, growling thunder rolled down one of the cross-streets, and before we could tell what it meant, a group of policemen came up the street, each man armed and resolute, but white as marble, with a knowledge of the fearful odds against them. The leader of these men, towering above them all, was my husband. He never once looked toward the house. Perhaps he feared that the sight of it would unman him. With a loud, ringing voice, that reached us where we stood, he gave some orders to his men, who ranged themselves across the street, from which danger threatened. In a moment they were swept back by a throng of rioters—swept back and scattered by a rush of overpowering numbers. A shot was fired, and one man fell—the tallest, the grandest. Oh, God, help me!—the bravest of them all. I saw him go down. I saw the mob trample over him with yells of rage. His groans, his death-agony are unheeded as the stones under those brutal feet.

"I never knew how it was done, but in a moment I was

struggling and buffeting my way through that avalanche of human fiends, as drowning men fight with the surging waters of a flood. Perhaps they had some compassion; or, it may be, that my white face frightened them, for the crowd broke where he was lying, and scattered away, tracking his blood upon the pavement as they went. I fell down on my knees by his side. I laid my hand on his heart, and drew it away wet and red. His eyes were open, but they could not see his poor wife; his lips were parted beneath the shadow of his beard, which the wind stirred, and it seemed to me that he was speaking. But, no; his murderers had done their work well. I knelt down upon those hot, dusty stones and covered my face, that they might not look upon the agony of my grief.

"Eva had followed me, and the little ones had clung to her shivering and crying as she pressed through the crowd. We were all together—his little family, wife and children—but he was dead. They would not believe it, but called upon him with feeble cries to look up and say that he was not much hurt. I knew that he was dead; that they were orphans, and I, his wife, a widow."

CHAPTER XV.

ARTIST SYMPATHY.

THE woman ceased speaking. During her whole narrative she had shed no tears, but her voice was low and cold, like the air that comes from a tomb. Her lips never quivered, but they grew white as death. While her mother was talking, Ruth had partly risen and drew the window-curtains softly together, hoping thus to shroud something of the grief which this man had so painfully aroused.

Then she sunk back upon her couch, and looked at the stranger reproachfully through her tears. Mr. Ross sat gazing upon the floor, with trouble in his eyes. He felt all the pain he had given, and the thought was full of distress.

"Yes," he said, at last. "I knew Laurence well. He was brave, noble, well-educated. How comes it that he took a position which proved so fatal to him and to you?"

"He could get nothing better to do," said Mrs. Laurence, drearily, "and I had no power to help him. But for the children, I might have obtained my old position as a teacher; but they needed all my care. At first, he did not intend to remain in the police, but time reconciled us to it, and he would soon have laid up enough capital for a start in business. It is all gone now; for I would not let the children go out into the world without education, and they loved study."

"I can easily believe that," said Ross, glancing at Ruth, who still kept her position, with tears trembling on her eye-lashes—a delicate, fair girl, with the refinement of a cultivated intellect in every feature. "At least you are blessed in the children my friend loved so well."

"They are good children," answered the woman, wearily; for the excitement of her narrative had left her cold and weak. Still, the stranger looked as if something was unexplained. He moved across the room, and in a vague way took up the bit of drawing-paper, on which Ruth had sketched her white roses. The delicacy of the touch, and free unfolding of the buds, seemed to arrest his thoughts, and turn them into another channel. His eyes brightened, and bending them upon Ruth, he asked her if she had ever attempted anything in oils."

Ruth blushed and casting her eyes down, that he might not remark the longing wish that spoke there, answered, "No; it had been impossible."

He seemed to understand the craving wish that had never yet been expressed, and after a moment's hesitation, observed,

"I sometimes paint a little." Then, after hesitating a minute, he added, "There must be an upper room in your house which would give sufficient light."

"Yes," answered Ruth, vaguely comprehending his idea. "But mother was in hopes of letting that, if she could find a nice person."

The flash of a kindly thought came into those dark eyes, and Ross seemed about to speak; but he checked himself, looked at the sketch again, and laid it down.

"Is your sister anything of an artist?" he inquired.

"Oh, Eva can do almost anything!" said Ruth, and her face brightened out of its mournful look.

"She is older than you, I should think."

"Older? Oh, yes! And a thousand times brighter than I ever shall be. But, then, there is no one like our Eva."

"She is, indeed, a bright, beautiful creature."

"Everybody thinks that of her."

The man looked earnestly at Ruth. Some thought was in his mind which he did not know how to express. The girl before him was very lovely, but part of this arose from that exquisite fairness, which exclusion from the sun and frail health had imparted, and was in extreme contrast with the dark, rich beauty of her sister. Ruth read something of this thought in the man's face and answered it, smiling.

"Yes, everybody wonders that we are so unlike; but that is in all respects. She is strong, cheerful, splendid, while I—Oh, Sir! you can see how different I am."

"I can see that you are doing yourself injustice," said Ross, taking his hat. "But excuse me, that I have intruded so long, as your father's old friend. You must let me come again. I may be of some service."

Mrs. Laurence bent her head, and her visitor departed.

CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. CARTER MAKES A VISIT.

"MOTHER! mother! come here!"

Ruth lifted her sweet voice a little, and spoke with some excitement, for she was taken quite by surprise by the appearance of a magnificent carriage before the gate; a carriage that seemed half made of translucent glass. Two pretentious menials in livery sat between the glittering lamps on each side the coachman's seat, and a pair of chestnut horses arched their necks, tossed their heads, and made their gold-mounted harness rattle again with their proud, impatient movements, while one of those solemn personages let himself to the ground and opened the carriage-door.

"This is the place, ma'am. It doesn't seem possible, but this is the place. I only hope Battles will be able to hold the horses; but they don't like it."

"Just stand aside, keep my dress from the wheels, and mind your own business, Jacob," said Mrs. Carter, with an imperious wave of her hand, as she rolled herself through the door of the carriage, and lighted heavily on the pavement. "If I know myself intimately you were hired to open doors, and shut your own mouth. So this is the place, is it? And a lovely place it is! Quite a rustic cottage! There, now you may open the gate!"

While she was delivering this reprimand to her servant, Mrs. Carter shook out her flounces, drew the lace shawl more jauntily over her shoulder, and swept through the gate with all the magnificence and glory of an empress about to honor some subject by her presence. Half-way up the path she remembered what was due to herself, and stepped back into a flower-bed, waving Jacob forward with her hand.

The tall footman cast a look of unutterable disgust at his fellow-servant on the box, and, striding up the path, gave a pull at the humble little bell that filled the whole house with its tinkling. Mrs. Laurence came to the door, grim and gaunt, but neat in her dress, and composed in manner.

"Does Mrs. Laurence live here?" inquired the tall footman, striking his gloves together, as if the bell-handle had left offensive dust on them.

"I am Mrs. Laurence."

"Ah, indeed! This is the lady, marum."

Mrs. Carter came forward, smiling blandly, and holding out her straw-colored glove with an air of sublime condescension.

Mrs. Laurence took the tightly-gloved hand stiffly enough, and let it fall from her clasp without a smile. She had suffered, this poor widow, and smiles did not come easily to her face; but if cold, she was well-bred, and stood aside that her strange guest might enter the little passage-way, and pass through the open parlor-door.

"How cozy—how exquisite!" exclaimed Mrs. Carter, glancing around at the snow white muslin curtains and the neat furniture, which would have been poverty-stricken in other houses. "No wonder my dear brother was so charmed. 'Such a contrast!' he said, when he found me in my 'boudoir bower chamber,' he says, they used to call it, in old times. 'Such a contrast,' says he, between you and them—between this and that! You with everything grand and sumptuous; they nothing but taste—pure, æsthetic taste! Their little room is a bijou! Just as I find it!"

Mrs. Carter seated herself as she spoke, and turned her full-blown, smiling face on Ruth, who answered her appeal with a look of gentle welcome; while her mother stood by, evidently waiting to learn why her humble home had been so grandly invaded.

Mrs. Carter observed this, and waved her hand benignly.

"Sit down! sit down, Mrs. Laurence; have no hesitation about it. I have been a poor woman myself; so, never mind the apron, but sit down. My call is for you as well as the young people!"

Mrs. Laurence took a seat near the door, and muttered something about being "a hard-working woman," which Mrs. Carter took up at once.

"'Hard-working!'" "Don't mention it, my dear madam! Your little housework here is nothing to what I have thrown upon me. What with receptions, shopping, promiscuous calls, regulating servants, the torment of dress-makers, and entertaining Carter's friends, I am just worn out. Sometimes I think the happiest time of a woman's life is when she lives in two rooms, and carries her baby about on one arm, while she does her work with the other!"

"Still," said Ruth, with a quiet smile, "we seldom find ladies willing to give up prosperity and go back to that life."

"Well, n—no!" answered Mrs. Carter, glancing through the window at her two servants perched high upon the carriage, and softly pluming herself under the thought of all they represented, "one can't quite expect that. When a dog gets his day he likes to keep it, of course. Besides, it's awful hard to come down."

"Yes," said Mrs. Laurence, in her dull, low tone, "it is hard."

"But this young lady is not all your family? My brother spoke of another."

"That is Eva," said Ruth, with animation. "She is busy in the day-time."

"Yes, yes!—now I remember: of course, she could not be here now. An awful bright girl. I saw her once: pretty as a picture! took a fancy to the turn of her head. My! how she does carry off a shawl! That girl is what I call superb!"

"She is good!" said Mrs. Laurence, with hard emphasis.

"Yes, good as gold, I haven't no doubt," chimed in Mrs. Carter. "That is why I have called. 'That girl is a born lady,' says I to Carter, when we were making out a list of invitations for my great party, 'and I am bound to have her come.' So here is the invitation! Brought it myself, because brother Ross said a call was necessary, and I want to do everything *comme il faut*!"

Here Mrs. Carter took a squarely-folded envelope from her pocket, on which was a flaming monogram in red and gold, which she held out to Mrs. Laurence, who took it gingerly, as if she feared the fiery letters would burn her.

"If this young lady ever goes out, I have another for her," said the visitor, beaming with satisfaction.

"I never do," said Ruth, with a faint quiver of pain in her voice.

"Spine?" questioned her visitor.

Ruth bent her head a little from the pillow, and a look of sadness came into her eyes.

"Don't look down-hearted about it, my dear; you'll soon get about again. I feel sure that I've got a receipt for spine complaint somewhere, and I'll send it to you."

Ruth smiled very mournfully, but thanked her.

"It's you, I suppose, that's beginning to make pickers. Ross told me about it, and I promised to have some done for my boudoir. Those I have cost ever-so-much, but he don't seem to like 'em. 'Something small and delicate,' he says; such as you can do beautifully if I'll only give you time—which I'm bound to do."

The warm, pure blood flashed over that gentle face, and Ruth half rose from her pillow in overwhelming surprise.

"You do not mean it! Did the gentleman in truth think anything of the little things I sent to him. He asked me, or I would not have dared."

"Think anything!" Of course he did; 'gems,' he said,

'they would be, with a little touching-up,' which he meant to show you about. Though how a bit of canvas can be turned into 'gems,'—which are rubys, and diamonds, and such like, I take it, beats me. But that was what he said; and where picters is concerned, Ross aint to be disputed, let me tell you. It was all I could do to keep him from turning half of my picters out of doors; though mercy knows the frames alone cost Carter enough to break a common man; for we bought such as took up the most gold, meaning to have enough for our money."

Ruth lay on her couch while the woman was speaking, lost in a soft glow of gratitude. The one dream of her life gave promise of realization. How diligently she had worked out the little knowledge of drawing and color, which had been a part of her education, when she was able to study, and before the great affliction fell upon her. How much thought she had given, how earnestly she had toiled when this one pursuit became the passion and forlorn hope of her life. Oh, it was heavenly! God had given some power even to her! Those delicate fingers which she clasped over her bosom in a sudden rush of gratitude, had the subtle craft of creating beautiful objects, which, in their turn, melted into gold. Could this be? Was the woman yonder with all that flutter of lace and fringe about her, a reality?

The girl lifted herself slowly from her cushions, and looked around the room. Mrs. Laurence had left it. Something in the kitchen required her presence, and she was getting restive under the infliction of that kind-hearted woman's conversation; so she had glided out like a shadow, scarcely caring whether she was missed or not.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FIRST BANK NOTES.

"SHE has gone—mother, I mean," said Ruth, troubled with a fear that their visitor might be offended.

Mrs. Carter turned her head with a little disdainful toss.

"Yes, I see. Not very good manners; but to be expected.

"Mother is so much alone, she sometimes forgets."

"I should think as much. But that is neither here nor there. If old women choose to cut up rusty they are welcome, for anything I care. But we were talking about the picters for my boudoir. How long will it take you to paint em?"

"Then you were really in earnest? You meant it?" cried Ruth, catching her breath, and clasping her hands in an ecstasy of delight.

"Meant it? Of course I did. Ross has just ripped every one of my picters off of the wall, and says they aint worth the frames, which are lovely, Miss; and I'm sure the paintings were just as bright as red, and green, and yellow could make them. But, hoity-toity! my gentleman just pitched them into the coach-house; and I solemnly believe they are hung up in Battle's room this minute. 'Now,' says he, 'fill them empty frames with something worth looking at.'

"But where are they coming from?" says I, huffy as could be, for I didn't like them empty frames lyin' in a heap on the floor. Then he brought down two or three of the things,—'rough gems' he called 'em,—that you had sent to him, and put them in the frames. I aint no judge perhaps,—so don't be offended!—but, really, now, they did not make half the show that the others did; but he said, there was 'downright genius in them,' and I gave in about it. So, if

you could come to my house,—which, of course, you can't—them four pictures are all you would see in my boudoir, instead of them he had turned out of doors. Now, my dear, how much am I to pay you for them?"

"How—how much? Oh, madam, I—I——"

Then Ruth put both hands to her face, and burst into a passion of warm, sweet tears, that shook her slight frame from head to foot.

"Well, now, I never did," said Mrs. Carter, half starting from her seat. He thought you would be delighted."

"And so I am—the happiest, happiest creature that ever lived. Oh, madam, you seem to me like an angel."

Mrs. Carter lifted her head and plumed herself like a peacock.

"I'm sure I don't pretend to anything of that sort, being just a trifle stout, and not given to flying. But if you like to think so, and it makes you happy, I won't disturb the idea, because it reminds me of things Carter used to say years and years ago, when we first went to housekeeping in two rooms, with a closet in the cellar for wood and coal. Then—then——"

All at once, even to her own astonishment, the woman broke down, her eyes filled with tears, and her bosom heaved with sobs. Impatient with herself, she snatched a handkerchief from her pocket, and swept its rich lace across the redness of her eyes, and gave out a gurgling, hysterical laugh.

"I wonder what's come over me," she said, at last, shaking out her moist handkerchief. "There is no telling about me. Carter says I always was a sensitive creature. Well, Miss Laurence, we were speaking about them pictures. How much now? Ross thought that twenty-five dollars apiece would be little enough."

"Twenty-five dollars!" exclaimed Ruth, and her large eyes widened like those of an astonished child. "Oh, madam you cannot mean it!"

"What! you don't think it enough? Well, say thirty; though I have seen pictures twice their size sell for less. Will thirty satisfy you?"

"Oh, madam, I know you are too kind for that but it seems as if you were mocking me. The amount you mentioned first, is so much that I can scarcely believe it."

The poor girl really could not comprehend her good fortune; she trembled all over. Her great eyes were bent on Mrs. Carter with pleading entreaty, that this cruel, cruel trifling might cease.

Mrs. Carter could not understand all this, but had a vague idea that the price she offered was satisfactory.

"Well," she said, drawing a reticule-purse from her pocket by its gold chains, and taking from that a roll of money, "if you are content with twenty-five, I don't mind throwing in a trifle, so we will make it thirty. There it is—six twenties; and I must say, it does me good to pay it over. Just roll it up, and buy yourself something nice with it. There! there!"

Mrs. Carter came close to Ruth, and bent over her with the money fluttering from her gloved fingers. Instead of receiving it with smiles, as the good woman expected, the young creature, half rose from her cushions, wound both arms around that short neck, and kissed the smiling face with a passionate outburst of gratitude, which awoke all the warm genial womanhood of Mrs. Carter's nature into active life.

"Why, why, dear child! what have I done, that you should smother me with kisses, and hold on to me as if—as if you were my own child, as I wish from the bottom of my heart you were?"

"Oh, madam, you are so good. You have made me the happiest creature that ever lived," cried Ruth.

"There, there, don't set me off again," said Mrs. Carter, patting both those trembling little hands with her own.

"Does a little money make you so happy? Well, just at first, I remember, it does. But then one gets used to it. By-and-by you won't care. Come, now, put up your money, and the next picture will be worth more. Ross is going to show you how to touch 'em up; and he can do it, if any one can, for he belongs to some great pictur academy across the seas, and is A. number one at painting."

In a soft, motherly fashion, Mrs. Carter laid the young girl back upon her couch, and began smoothing her beautiful hair. In the fulness of her content, she answered back with broad sympathy the smiles that came around those parted lips, and the look of ineffable happiness that filled those dove-like eyes, with something more beautiful than sunshine.

"It is true! it is real! and I *am* good for something!" murmured Ruth, holding the money up that she might feast her eyes upon it. "Oh, madam! God sent you here! I was weak and helpless; while others worked, I could only pray. See how the blessed Lord has answered me! I know it is not my poor little pictures, but your goodness that has done this—my prayers and your goodness!"

"You are just a lovely little darling, anyhow; but here is some one coming. There, now, we are ready."

Mrs. Carter gathered up the floating notes, crushed them into a ball, and hid them under the pillow of the couch. Then she wiped Ruth's eyes with her cobweb handkerchief, passed it over her own wet lashes, and called out, "Come in!" as a vigorous knock sounded from the front door.

CHAPTER XVIII.

OLD FRIENDS.

THE door of the little parlor opened, and Mrs. Smith stood in the passage. From her place behind the counter she had seen the splendor of that carriage before Mrs. Laurence's gate, and could stand the cravings of her curiosity no longer. She had held herself as a sort of proprietor of the Laurence family after that famous supper, and felt that any visitor who stopped at that little gate was a guest for herself. At first she rather hesitated to put in her claim; but when a half hour, then an hour went by, and that glittering mass of black and gold still kept its place, the position became tantalizing.

Leaving Boyce behind the counter, the good woman tied on her best bonnet, flung a shawl over her broad shoulders, and made her way down the street, burning with curiosity, and just a little jealous that so much distinction had come to her friend, in which she had no part. Standing there in the entry-way, she hesitated, overpowered by a first glance of the richly-dressed lady who seemed to fill up the little parlor with the splendor of her presence.

Mrs. Carter had hastily put on her company manners, and sat in state, fanning herself with her still moist handkerchief.

All at once, Mrs. Smith started forward, her eyes glistening, and her shawl floating away from the grasp of her hand.

"Mrs. Carter! Well, I never did——"

"Mrs. Smith! Is this you?"

For the moment, both women were natural. Mrs. Carter forgot herself and her finery in the honest delight of meeting an old friend. Mrs. Smith, a little dazzled and

bewildered, came forward with both arms held out, and would have embraced her former crony, but for a sudden consciousness of the silks, and laces, and heavy gold bracelets with which the latter was metamorphosed. This brought the arms slowly down to her side, and left her lips, from which the broad smile was vanishing, half apart.

Mrs. Carter broke into a mellow laugh, and held out both hands.

"So you didn't more'n half know me, Mrs. Smith? No wonder! Sometimes I don't know myself. But how do you do? How are the children and Smith? Is he stout and jolly as ever?"

Mrs. Smith remembered that she had been cutting cheese just before she left the grocery, and wiped one hand on the corner of her shawl before she gave it into the clasp of those straw-colored gloves, smiling gingerly, as if she were afraid of hurting them. But Mrs. Carter was herself that day; a breath of secret human sympathy had swept the chaff from her really good heart, and, for the time, her magnificence was forgotten.

"Well, now," said Mrs. Smith, recovering herself under this hearty treatment. "It's good for weak eyes to see you again, Mrs. Carter; I went around to the old house, nigh on to a year ago, and inquired about you, but they said you had moved away no one knew where; so I gave you up for a bad job."

"A bad job, ha! Well, I wonder what Carter would say? *He* don't think it a bad job, you bet! Just look out there, Smith, and tell me what you think of that?"

Mrs. Smith leaned toward the window, and took in a view of the carriage, with the two men sitting impatiently in the coachman's seat.

"Do you really mean that, Mrs. Carter?"

"That, and an open carriage, besides a couper for Carter, and two saddle-horses, in case Carter and I might want to take lessons and ride in the Park together."

"But how, Mrs. Carter, how?" inquired Mrs. Smith, open-mouthed with wonder.

"You know Carter got into the feed-business; that led him to hosses and mules, and sich. Well, the army wanted hosses; Carter went in under contract. Then the hosses wanted feed, he went in under contract again. Then he got into produce, which kept a running up and down, for ever-so-long; there he made and made, keeping his eye-teeth sharp, you know."

"Mercy on me! You take away my breath, Mrs. Carter!"

"No wonder; it took mine away more than once. After this, he hooked in with a clothing-house, and that was the best of all. Everything substantial but the clothes. Well, these things rolled up, and this is just what it has come to."

Here Mrs. Carter spread her two hands, and rustled her garments with a jovial laugh, while her old friend stepped back and surveyed her from head to foot, with glowing admiration.

"And you don't seem a bit different," she broke forth at length.

Mrs. Carter flushed red, and drew the lace shawl about her with emphatic protest.

"You think so, Mrs. Smith; but others are of a different opinion."

Mrs. Smith, for the first time, felt rebuffed, and answered, meekly,

"You were asking about Smith. He's been a-doing very well—very well, indeed; in the grocery-line, though. You can see our store from the front-yard here."

Mrs. Carter leaned out of the window, and took a survey of her friend's place of business, which had a respectable show of prosperity.

"That looks like living," she said; "and I'm right-down glad of it."

"We live over the store, snug and comfortable," answered Mrs. Smith, highly pleased.

"Children all alive?" inquired Mrs. Carter, with hesitation.

"Alive and hearty, thank goodness!"

Mrs. Carter heaved a deep sigh. "Smith," she said, "I should like to take a look at your young ones. I'm not used to seeing children, in these days, crowding the doors by dozens, as they did in our old neighborhood, where Smith and Carter were such friends, and you and I—— Well, never mind about that. I haven't forgotten it. Wait a minute, I'm going home with you. Good-bye, little girl. Don't she look like a lily, lying there?"

"She's got a lovely color," answered Mrs. Smith. "I never saw the like of it on her cheek before. But where is Mrs. Laurence? Always at work? Mrs. Laurence, I say! My friend, Mrs. Carter, is going."

Mrs. Laurence came into the room, stiff and cold as marble. The softening effects of her illness had worn off, and so had the little gleam of sunshine, brought to her door by the kind woman who was calling her from the kitchen, to which she had retreated the moment Mrs. Carter became interested in Ruth; thus she was entirely ignorant of the event which had so suddenly lifted the invalid into Paradise.

"I had something to do," she said, by way of grim apology, as Mrs. Carter held out her hand.

"Never mind that! I know what it is to do my own work—don't I, Smith?"

"I should rather think so," answered Mrs. Smith, glowing with intense satisfaction.

"With regard to the young lady, of course, we shall expect her. I will send the carriage round, and Ross shall come with it. Be sure that she is ready. He has set his heart upon it, and so have I."

Mrs. Laurence muttered something about being hard-

working people, and quite out of such things; but Ruth interposed, and made confident by the money under her pillow lifted her radiant face, and said, with a thrill of triumph in her voice,

"Oh, yes, mother, dear! Eva will go. She will like it. Please do not refuse till we have talked it over."

"That's right! I leave it all with you, my pretty darling; so, good-day; I mean to call again, very soon. Come, Mrs. Smith, we'll drive round the block, and see how you like it," said Mrs. Carter.

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. BATTLES IS DISGUSTED.

Mrs. Smith settled her shawl with great anxiety, and going up to the little mirror, smoothed out the bows of her bonnet-strings, which certainly appeared all the better for it. Then the two old friends went out together, and the tall footman came down from his seat with a thunder-cloud on his august brow, and opened the carriage-door with a protest in every gesture. At this Mrs. Carter chuckled inwardly, and gave Mrs. Smith the seat of honor. She, good soul, drew a deep, deep breath, as her calico-dress came into contact with the bright silken cushions, and sat bolt upright, as if afraid that their yielding springs would swallow her up, and leave Jerusha Maria an orphan.

"Dear me, how it gives!" she said, casting a half frightened look at her old friend, who laughed with glee, and leaned back in her own luxurious corner triumphing greatly while the carriage moved on.

The ride was brief but glorious. Seldom did a turn-out of that description come within blocks and blocks of the

corner-grocery. Mrs. Smith had the satisfaction of knowing that every window, which bore upon that point, was occupied when she came through the carriage door and swept into her husband's place of business, side by side with that gorgeously-dressed lady.

Boyce, who was behind the counter, posed himself at once for an unlimited order; but Mrs. Smith passed him by with a wave of the hand, and led the way up stairs to her own apartment, where Kate Gorman was busy frying ham for dinner, and James Laurence was carrying Jerusha Maria in his arms, trying to hush her into silence, by bending his head and giving her tiny hands unlimited control of his hair, which was always a resource on such occasions.

"Our last," said Mrs. Smith, taking the child into her motherly arms, and jerking down its long frock with one hand, as she presented the young lady. Jerusha Maria took a firm grip on her mother's shawl, and being thus fortified began staring at the stranger with all her might; finally, she broke into a smile, as a watch, set thick with diamonds, went swinging to and fro before her face.

"Give me a kiss now, and you shall hear it tick," said Mrs. Carter, gathering the child to her own bosom, and throwing the watch-chain over its neck, where it fell in glittering links adown the long frock. "Give me another; there now, take it in your teanty, tointy little hands. Smith, this is splendid! Such a weight! Oh, you little rogue, biting at the diamonds, ha? If you were only mine, I'd feed you with 'em!"

Here Mrs. Carter dropped into a Boston rocking-chair, and laying the child's face close to her bosom, began to sing, and chirp, and kiss her into sleepiness. After this she still cradled her lovingly in both arms and indulging in a word of gossip, now and then, with the mother while her chair kept in motion.

"That brother of yours—whatever became of him, Mrs.

Carter? I remember how anxious you and Carter were. How did he turn out?" inquired the mother, when Jerusha Maria had dropped off. "Did you ever hear from him?"

"That brother? Our Ross? Why, Smith, he's back again, the most perfect gentleman that you ever set eyes on. You know I told you often how he was given to books, studying night and day; how he painted picters, and went into the country, every year, making sketches, as he called it. Never was worth a cent for business; but so handsome, and so wonderfully good! Well, he went off as you know, and, somehow or another, got beyond seas, where they think more of picters than we do, and made a wonderfully great man of him; though not under the old name. He took out a nom-de-something, as such people do, now and then, and left off the last end of his name. So, instead of Herman Ross Baker, we call him Herman Ross, which cuts him loose from the old poverty-stricken life, for that makes him shudder when you mention it."

"Proud, I suppose?"

"No; that isn't it. He's the last man on earth to be ashamed of honest poverty. We are none of us mean enough for that, high as we hold our heads among rich people. But there is something that I don't quite understand about Ross."

"A love-secret, I should not wonder!" said Mrs. Smith.

Before Mrs. Carter could answer that, Kate Gorman put her head into the room.

"Dinner's ready, and Mr. Smith not home yet."

Mrs. Smith arose blushing and embarrassed.

"Only ham and eggs," she said; "but would you, just for the sake of old times——"

"Would I?" cried Mrs. Carter, huddling the baby into its cradle, and taking off her gloves.

"Won't I?"

CHAPTER XX.

OVER THEIR TEA.

KATE GORMAN had received a hint from her mistress and drawn the table out from against the wall, a trouble she seldom undertook merely for the household. She also spread a clean damask table-cloth over it, and gave her knives an extra scour before she put them on the table. Then she took particular pains with the ham, and left a fried egg upon the top of each slice, with the unbroken yolk gleaming like a ball of gold in the centre of the white, which was beautifully browned on the edges.

To these dainties she added a glass dish full of quince preserves, and some nice green pickles, that contrasted gorgeously with the gold of the egg and the red of the ham, when they got on the same plate together.

"Now this is something like," said Mrs. Carter, pulling off her canary-colored gloves with a succession of little jerks, and seating herself at the table. "I haven't set down to such a dinner in years. The very sight of it is enough to warm one's heart."

"Oh," answered Mrs. Smith, "if I had only known you were coming? but it is only a tea dinner. I feel quite ashamed, and turkeys hanging in rows down stairs, with cranberries by the bushel."

"Oh, mercy on me! don't think of it,—turkeys indeed! I can get them every day of my life; but a bit of ham like this, I shouldn't dare to ask my cook for it. She'd sing out shoddy, and quit the kitchen in less than no time."

"Then you really like it?"

"Really like it? I should think so," answered Mrs. Carter, feeling like a truant school girl as she balanced a fragment of egg on the point of her knife, and gloried in

the vulgarity from the depths of her soul. "If you only knew, Smith, what a comfort it is to eat just as you please, and just what you please."

"But don't you?" questioned the hostess, holding her own loaded knife half way to her mouth, and opening her eyes wide.

"Dear no! Why, Mrs. Smith, I should just as soon think of jumping out of the window, as to ask for a plate of corned beef and cabbage in my own house!"

"Dear me, you don't say so?"

"The truth is, you're expected to eat things that you don't know the name of, and turn against when you do. There is patty de for grow, now."

"Patty what?" questioned Mrs. Smith.

"De for grow!" answered Mrs. Carter, with emphasis. Mrs. Smith shook her head.

"Never heard the name before. One of your upper crust friends, I suppose," she said, in a bewildered way.

"No, no, its only the livers of over-crammed geese; but if you were to ask for gooseliver, the waiters would just laugh in your face. They've done it, Mrs. Smith, done it to me and Carter, too!"

"Dear me," said Mrs. Smith, in deep sympathy, "I wouldn't have believed it."

"Oh! my dear, I sometimes think that Carter and I enjoyed ourselves more when we first started life, then we ever shall again—but, dear me, is that some one coming?"

"Only Smith. Of course you won't mind him?"

"Not at all. Just another slice of the ham, its perfectly delicious."

It was Mr. Smith who had come up stairs and stopped in the kitchen to wash his hands, which he did twice when Kate Gorman told him of the guest inside. In fact, he stepped into a closet and put on a clean collar and a pair of cuffs, which Kate buttoned for him—first wiping her hands

on the dish towel and afterward on her own apron, in a sudden paroxysm of neatness.

"There," said the handmaiden, "yer fit to stand afore the Queen; so just go in and take yer bit of dinner like a gentleman, as ye are intirely."

Smith took courage from this encomium, and entered the next room fresh as cold water could make him, and shedding around a wholesome flavor of yellow soap.

Mrs. Carter sprang to her feet, and met her old neighbor half way. "Why, Smith, is this you? Didn't expect to see me?"

"Well, whether or know, I'm glad to see you. How's Carter?"

Mrs. Carter winced a little when her husband's name was thus mentioned shorn of its appendages; but she answered cheerfully, and, seating herself at the table with a flutter of lace and rustle of silks, commenced on her fresh relay of ham with renewed appetite.

"Now, Smith, this is what I call sociable," she said, looking around for a napkin; but not finding one, she used her lace handkerchief instead. "Your wife and I have been a-talking over old times; now its your turn."

Smith looked at the glittering silk of her dress, and heard the tinkle of her gold chains and bracelets with something like dismay. He was beginning to think the clean cuffs and collar insufficient, and wished from the depths of his heart that he had put on his best coat.

"Lovely weather, isn't it?" said Mrs. Carter, feeling a little innocent triumph in her old friend's confusion, but compassionating it all the time.

"I—I don't know—that is, it seemed to me this morning that there was a slight indication of a storm," answered Smith, bringing out his very best language, in lieu of the coat.

Mrs. Carter accepted the long word as a compliment to

her improved condition, and gently plumed herself upon it. She would gladly have matched his elegance with corresponding erudition, but failed to catch the inspiration, and only said,

"Indeed! well, I rather thought so myself."

CHAPTER XXI.

A SLIGHT ALTERCATION.

"My dear," said Smith, looking around the table as if he missed something, "have you nothing better than water to offer Mrs. Carter, and this the first time she has honored us?"

Mrs. Smith looked around in some bewilderment, then answered with a deprecatory glance at her friend.

"The kettle was just boiling, and its likely that Kate Gorman is drawing the tea now—Oolong of the very best. Smith, you do not suppose I should offer Mrs. Carter anything less?"

"Champagne," answered Smith, throwing out his chest with a swell of hospitable importance, "on ice and plenty of it. I'm astonished at you, Mrs. Smith; that you did not think of it."

"But I—I didn't think; I didn't know as you'd like us to break into a basket," cried Mrs. Smith, so eager to exculpate herself, that she grew red in the face.

"As if we didn't break into baskets every day of our lives," answered the grocer, looking severely at his wife. Then turning toward his guest, he observed that Mrs. Smith, he was sorry to say, didn't meet prosperity with the air and grace that must make his friend Carter proud of the wife he had married, who seemed capable of filling any position.

"Oh, Smith!" pleaded the hostess, with tears in her eyes, "sometimes I think you don't care how much you hurt my feelings!"

"But he don't mean it," interposed Mrs. Carter, "it's all because he wants to be hospitable." Here the good woman drew a deep breath and flushed happily, feeling that she had at last matched her host in elaborate English. "But there is no need of it. I'm just sick and tired of champagne. A good cup of tea is worth a dozen bottles, and here it comes steaming hot."

"In that Britannia tea-pot, too," muttered Smith, "as if we had no silver in the house!"

"I'm sure the spoons are all here, they were counted only this morning."

Smith, for secret reasons of his own, did not press the question of silver, and a cry from the next room saved him from the necessity.

"That child shrieking like mad again—upon my word, Mrs. Smith, we must discharge the nurse. She is really incompus—that is, incomp—"

Fortunately for the grocer, who never could have fought his way through the word he was toiling at, Jerusha Maria renewed her shrieks with appalling vigor, and Mrs. Smith rushed into the next room.

James had been doing his best to appease the infant's wrath, which had been kindled by his persistent refusal to let her run her hand into the round holes which Kate Gorman had left open in the stove, when she took the tea kettle off.

A dive into the red hot coals underneath had been ruthlessly frustrated; hence the shrieks of rage which had brought the mother into the midst of the fray. Goaded out of her usual good-temper before, she flamed up furiously now, snatching the young lady from the hold James was striving desperately to keep upon her. Mrs. Smith turned upon him.

"Do you want to kill the child before my eyes?" she demanded, pulling down Jerusha Maria's frock with a jerk, "as if I hadn't trouble enough without you setting in!"

Before the lad could answer, or attempt to defend himself, Mrs. Smith sailed out of the room, smothering the child's wrath by a fiercer embrace than she was conscious of.

"What is the matter?" cried Mrs. Carter, dropping her knife and fork, "poor little darling! who has been 'busing it?"

Mr. Smith was rather disturbed by the cloud on his wife's face, and held out his arms in an abject, deprecating way; but the indignant woman turned her back upon him, and took her own chair, with majestic wrath.

"No, Mr. Smith, I'm not that helpless that I can't take care of my own child."

"But the tea. I thought you might——"

Here Mrs. Smith broke off the speech over which her husband faltered.

"No I mightn't; it won't be the first time I've poured out tea with a baby in my arms!"

"And a nice picter she makes," said Mrs. Carter, "my brother never sees a woman holding a baby like that but he calls, her a madonner at once. I only wish he could see *her*."

"I wish he could—only when she's a trifle more like herself," muttered Smith.

Mrs. Smith did not hear this cautious aside, but holding Jerusha Maria on her left arm, poured out the tea with her right hand, holding the Britannia pot high up, and doing the honors with a dash. Smith took this as defiance, and withered under it.

"Dear me, what is that?" exclaimed Mrs. Carter, listening to a sound of suppressed sobs that came from the next room. "Somebody crying, I do believe."

Mrs. Smith suspended the amber stream that was dash-

ing into one of her best china cups, and listened. Sure enough, suppressed sobs broke from the other room, that smote her to the heart. She sat down the tea-pot, gathered up Jerusha Maria, and went into the kitchen. There she found James Laurence sitting on a chair, with both arms flung out on the table, trying his very best to smother the sound of his own uncontrollable mortification and grief.

"Why! James, my boy; what are you crying about?"

The lad lifted up his head, and hurriedly wiped the tears from his eyes.

"I—I wasn't crying much!" he answered, choking back his tears bravely. "Only—only I try so hard to do everything!"

"I know you do. There never was a better boy. Jerusha Maria, the little darling, *is* aggravating sometimes. What did she want then?"

"Only to put her two hands into the fire."

"You little tyke!" exclaimed the mother, giving a slight shake and then an appeasing kiss to the child in her arms, "and I was cross as fury because he wouldn't let her do it. There, there, James; never mind what I said. Of course I didn't mean it. You haven't a better friend in the world than I am."

"I know that, how can I forget it? nothing else could have brought me down to crying like a baby. The first cross word brought all your goodness to me, and our people right before me, and I felt like—like a wretch."

"A wretch! you are nothing of the kind, Jimmy. Don't think that of yourself—and I haven't been good to you a bit more than you deserve. Here, now, take Jerusha Maria. She wants to kiss you dreadfully. If she wants to put her hands in the fire, you may—yes, just on this occasion, I think you may shake her a little—not enough to make her teeth chatter, though, because you see they are new and tender yet."

"I thought you would never trust her with me again," said James, holding out his arms and smiling, though his thick eyelashes were still wet.

"Trust her with you! there, what does that seem like?" cried Mrs. Smith, putting the child into those outstretched arms, and patting both boy and child into harmony, while her own angry passions gave place to a tender sort of penitence, which extended even to Smith.

"Now, James, take good care of her while I go in and pour out the tea, for I'm afraid its getting cold."

She did go in, beaming between tears and smiles, like an April morning; and performed the honors of her table beautifully, putting two lumps of sugar in her husband's cup with a shy look of concession, which did more to brighten his face than the best bar soap had done.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FIRST FRUITS OF GENIUS.

RUTH LAURENCE kept her secret. An idea had entered her head which she was resolved to carry out, unaided and alone. At first she longed to tell her good fortune to her mother; but Mrs. Laurence was never sympathetic or impulsive enough to win that loving confidence which Ruth longed to give. She had thought her own thoughts, and suppressed her natural impulses so long, that this precious secret became as gold to a miser, after she had dwelt upon it, unspoken for a few hours.

One thing was certain: Eva should go to this party dressed like the lady she was. Enough of the money under her pillow should be used for that. Her own frail fingers had earned this great happiness for her sister.

Tears came into those soft eyes as Ruth thought of it: tender, sweet tears, such as the good and unselfish alone can shed. She murmured to herself: "Yes, it shall be snow-white, and fleecy as foam. I have the idea in my mind, with a contrast—something brilliant and rich. Still, she does not need that to make her the most beautiful of them all. Dear Eva! what a surprise it will be! Here she comes, looking so tired!"

Eva came into the little parlor weary and sad; for the duties of her position were frequently galling to the pride of a high-spirited girl; and every hour some painful contrast was forced upon her which disturbed her sense of justice. While the family had been in absolute want, this feeling was held in abeyance by all those active sympathies that trample down minor causes of grief under great afflictions, but now the proud nature of the girl asserted itself, and strongly cynical and bitter feelings were rooting themselves in her young heart.

Eva took off her bonnet, and, kneeling down by her sister's couch, kissed her tenderly.

"Why, Ruthy, how warm your cheek is! How your arms cling to me! What is the matter? It seems like joy—but how can that come here?"

"A pleasant thing has happened, Eva, dear. You are invited to a splendid party in the Fifth Avenue. Look here!"

Eva caught her breath. An invitation to her! She took the square fold of paper, and, dazzled by the monogram, began to examine it with that nervous curiosity which makes so many people hesitate to learn the truth at once.

"It is from Mrs. Carter, the sister of that gentleman who looked over my drawings. Such a cheerful, kind woman! She brought it herself, that there might be no mistake, and will send her own carriage for you. Isn't it delightful?"

"Oh, how I wish it possible!" exclaimed Eva, dropping

the invitation from her hand with a pang of absolute despair. "That is what so many people were talking about: all the customers were full of it. I think Mr. Harold has an invitation. But it is of no use; I wish she had not brought it."

"Oh, Eva!"

"It is just cruel," answered the girl, throwing herself into a chair, and clasping both hands over her eyes to hide her tears.

"But you are going, Eva. I promised it."

"You promised! poor darling!"

"I did, indeed. So just wipe your eyes, and let me tell you something. Look here! Hush, now! do not cry out!"

Here Ruth took a twenty-dollar note from under her pillow, and held it up before Eva's eyes.

"Ruth, Ruth, where *did* you get that?" cried the girl, in utter amazement.

"Oh, I have been doing bits of work for it on the sly. Eva! Eva! I won't keep anything from you. Look here! and here! I have earned it all with my pictures, that you thought so pretty. This is for you. Stoop down, and let me whisper what I mean to do with the rest."

Eva stooped down, and lifted her head again, all in a glow of delight.

"Oh, Ruthy! it seems like fairy-work! You have taken away my breath!"

"They will take more; and that gentleman will teach me how to give them greater perfection. You see it is no dream, sister!"

"And it was your genius that got me this invitation, Ruth," said Eva, with grateful enthusiasm. "I could not understand it before. It seems almost possible that I may go!"

"Almost! It is quite possible! I have been lying here,

with my eyes on the ceiling, thinking over the dress. It must be lovely, you know, but not cost more than this one bill. White tarletan, I should say, with a long train, a flounce or two, and rows on rows of broad, puffy, ruches. Crimson roses in your hair, and a little cluster on your bosom. No! it shall be one, fragrant and half blown, on the left shoulder. No other ornaments."

"Of course not, you foolish darling! How am I to get them?"

"Not a thing!—just the white and red. To think of it is like painting a picture. I can see you now, with your black hair falling in broad, heavy braids nearly to the shoulders; two or three long ringlets sweeping almost to the waist; just a little coronal of red roses over the forehead; and the dress sweeping away, fold after fold, like dancing white poppies over drifting snow. I tell you, Eva, it will be superb."

"But how is all this to be done, Ruth?"

"I shall be bolstered up, and sew on it in the daytime. You will help me at night. I tell you, dear, it will be charming."

"And you, poor dear, will be left at home, and see nothing."

"What, I! Indeed, you know nothing about it. I shall just lie here, with my hands folded, so, and my eyes shut, thinking over everything as it happens. The way people will look at you, and whisper, 'Who is that? Isn't she—' But I won't tell you all that I shall see. Be sure you will not enjoy it more than I shall. Then there is James!—won't it delight him?"

"But mother! what if she forbids it?" said Eva, with sudden dismay. "She might, you know."

"We must get Mrs. Smith on our side," said Ruth, faltering a little. "Mrs. Smith, and our James. She cannot stand out against them. But hush! she is at the door."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE HIDDEN PACKAGE.

HERMAN ROSS became a constant visitor at the Laurence cottage after his sister had called there. Sometimes he spent hours together in the little parlor, instructing Ruth in her art, and fairly opening a new world to the genius that burned within her. With all her practice she had gone astray in many things, and struggled for hours to produce an effect which he taught her to accomplish with a few dexterous touches of the pencil. His patience seemed inexhaustible; his kindness brought tears into her eyes whenever she thought of it. In a few days she had learned more than blind, unaided practice had done for her in years.

Sometimes Ross saw Eva, but not often, for she came home from her duties late in the afternoon, and his visits seldom lasted till then; but he spoke of her frequently, and sometimes questioned Ruth about her, in a cautious way, as if the mention of her name brought some mental disturbance with it.

"What, Eva older than I am? Dear, no!—far from it! I am nearly four years the elder," she said, one day, in answer to his question. "It is because she is so tall and well-formed that you think so; but she is only nineteen, this month, while I am twenty-two."

"Only nineteen! Just nineteen?"

"Just nineteen, this month!"

"Tell me. Can you remember when she was born?" inquired Ross, more quickly than he usually spoke.

"I can remember when she was a baby; the very first time I saw her was in father's arms, coming through that door."

"And you remember nothing before that?"

"No! How should I?"

"Nothing whatever—no disturbance in the house; no—"

"Oh, yes! I remember very well how surprised mother seemed, and how she scolded about something. I suppose it was because father took the baby out."

"Strange!" muttered Ross.

That moment Mrs. Laurence came into the room.

"You here, Mr. Ross?" she said, in her cold, half-indifferent fashion.

"Yes, madam. As an old friend of your husband's, I have taken the liberty of coming often, hoping to benefit his child a little."

Mrs. Laurence looked at him, keenly. She was naturally a suspicious woman, and intimate association with a person connected with the police had not improved her faith in human nature. She had seen this man regarding Eva with looks that troubled her, and naturally supposed that his extreme kindness to Ruth had some reference to the more beautiful daughter.

"Mr. Ross," she said, with curt honesty, "I don't remember my husband having a friend in the world that I didn't know something about; but so far as I can remember, he never mentioned the name of Ross to me in his life."

"The name of Ross!" cried the man, half starting from his chair. "No wonder! what an idiot I was to forget! But it is so long since I have known my other name. My dear madam, have you never heard your husband speak of Herman Ross Baker?"

This name seemed to strike Mrs. Laurence dumb. She stood for half a minute, gazing at the man, as if a ghost had started up before her. The little color natural to her face died out. Even her lips grew white.

"Herman Ross Baker," she repeated. "And are you that man?"

"That is my name, Mrs. Laurence; and the only one

your husband ever knew me by. I am an artist, and in other countries chose to call myself Ross, leaving the rest of the name so long out of use that I almost forget it myself. Now, I hope that we are not altogether strangers, by name at least."

Mrs. Laurence dropped into a chair, and clasped both hands in her lap.

"So, you are that man!"

There was a look of absolute terror in the woman's face. She sat staring at Ross, with weird curiosity, as if he had been a ghost.

"I never thought you would come—never wanted you to come," she said, at last, wringing her hands with a show of passion of which her countenance, in its set expression gave little sign; "but when the dead order, the living have only to obey. That which he left must be given, though it breaks us all up and turns the house into a tomb."

The woman rose from her seat, and began to walk the floor, while Ross and her daughter sat regarding these movements with intense surprise.

"What do you mean, mother—of what are you speaking? Mr. Ross cannot understand," said Ruth, arising with pain from her cushions.

Mrs. Laurence paused in her walk, and stood for a moment gazing dumbly on the sweet, pale face turned so anxiously upon her. Then she resumed action again, and paced back and forth, as before, muttering to herself. At last, she came up to the couch, and laying her hand on Ruth's shoulder, bade her sit up a little, while she searched for something that must be found.

Ruth left the couch, and sank into a Boston rocking-chair, which Mr. Ross drew forward for her use.

Then Mrs. Laurence flung the cushions to the floor, and bringing a pair of scissors from a work-basket, began to rip

the mattress, at one end, and thrusting her hand into the opening, she drew forth a sealed envelope.

"That is the name," she said, reading the address over. "Herman Ross Baker. My husband did know you. When he wrote this I was told to give it into your hands, and no other, should you come back to this country, after he was dead, which I am sure he did not expect. Take it, sir; and remember he was kind to you and yours."

Ross took the package, and looked wistfully at the writing. He was evidently taken by surprise, and his hand shook with the intense desire that possessed him to tear the envelope and seize upon its secret at once.

"Not here! Read it at home!" said Mrs. Laurence, who saw his hands tremble with eagerness. "It may be a thing to read alone, with fasting and prayer. Who knows? Take it away, and remember how true he was—how good. Ruth, you are growing pale; let me lift you back to the couch. No, sir; it is not needed—one is enough. There, now; don't be troubled, child. No need of that! You see how weak she is, Mr. Ross; so have some compassion on us all. You will understand me, by-and-by."

"If compassion could make you happy, there would be no sorrow under this roof," answered Ross, with a ringing sweetness in his voice, that brought tears to the eyes of Ruth Laurence. "God knows, I will never bring trouble here."

Ruth reached out her hand. "You have brought nothing but good to us," she said, gently. "We all know that."

Ross took the pale, little hand in his, dropped it softly to the couch again, and took his leave, with the feeling of a man who carries destiny in his hand.

A short walk brought Ross to his sister's dwelling. He entered the front door, strode across the tessellated hall, and mounting the stairs, carpeted so thickly that his footsteps

seemed smothered in wood-moss, entered a chamber in the topmost story, which had been fitted up as a studio. With a hand that still quivered with emotion, he bolted the door, and sat down, with the envelope in his hand, overcome with that strange dread which an unbroken seal often brings upon the possessor. Eager as his curiosity had been, he was literally afraid to break the seal. What did it lock in? Why should the man, so long dead, write to him? Was the vague, wild idea, which had haunted him for weeks, a reality?

With these questions in his brain, he tore the envelope, took from it some closely-written pages, and began to read.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHICH RIVER.

"MY FRIEND—One night, while on my beat in the upper part of the city, a young woman, carrying something in her arms, which a large and very rich shawl completely covered, passed me, more than once, in a wild, distracted way, as if looking for something, or some place, which she could not find. I watched her, carefully, as she went back and forth in this strange fashion and at last saw her sink down on a doorstep, when the faint wail of a child came from beneath her shawl. I was about to speak to her, when she lifted her head, saw my uniform, and starting up, came toward me.

"Will you tell me, sir, where I can find the river?"

"The voice in which these words were spoken was low and timid. The female who uttered them seemed very young, in the light of that street lamp, which was near enough to reveal her features, as faces are seen in a dream.

She was utterly unlike any woman who might have been expected out of doors that time of night, and I looked at her keenly before I made answer to her question; but her head drooped forward on her breast, and I could only discern that the face was both young and fair.

"Which river do you ask for?" I questioned, wondering that a young creature with the address and language of a highly-bred person, could be there to make an inquiry so vague and strange.

"Any—no matter which. To find one, shall I turn to the right or left?"

"I was standing above Fiftieth Street on the west, where many vacant lots lay between us and the Hudson, which was not very far off; but shrunk from saying this, and only answered,

"If you turn either way there is a river—but this is so strange——"

"The girl did not hear my closing words, but turned to the left, where the houses were scattered and a grove of trees loomed up in the distance, flinging their shadows against the sky. I could not leave my beat, but followed her anxiously with my eyes, and saw that she walked with a slow step, which bespoke great fatigue, if not absolute despair.

"This is strange," I thought, "that voice had a desperate meaning in it. I wonder if she really thinks of *that*; poor soul!—poor soul, she will surely come to grief. If she were not drifting out of my beat, I would follow her!"

"The moon was up, but clouded, and but few stars appeared; so it was mostly by the street-lamps that I kept her in sight, until she passed out of my beat. When I lost sight of her, she was making straight for the river, and hurried on as if urged forward by the fright my face had given her.

"The clock from a far-off steeple struck the hour.

"It was not many minutes before I was relieved, and free to follow the woman, which I did, though she had lost herself among the shadows. I then turned toward the river, and followed the young creature at a cautious distance, until she left the paved street and went into the enclosure of a private mansion, where shrubbery was thick and the grass so elastic that I could approach close to her unnoticed.

"She had heard the heavy rush of flowing waters coming up through the solemn night, and quickened her steps as if the voice of a friend had called to her from a great distance.

"Oh, it is there! it is there!" she moaned, "my last—last friend—the only one that will take me in and hide me."

"Now her footsteps beat swiftly on the turf as she sped onward, guided by the deep whispering of the waves. She was skirting the walls of a garden, over which roses and clustering masses of honeysuckles trailed out of bounds, filling the night air with fragrance, that for one moment evidently checked the girl in her progress; or she was stricken faint with a sudden recoil of conscience, perhaps.

"They are blossoming now—now around my window, as they did then, just a year—only a year!" I heard her say.

"The girl wrung her hands, looking wildly around, as if she sought for some human being to pity her; but nothing was near save the faint odor of flowers, that seemed to wither her like poison; and the far off drifts of the river, blended with the flow of a soft wind through innumerable leaves, and the stir of roses under their dew.

"The very fragrance and beauty of the night, while it seemed to lift her soul out of its dull apathy, stung it to desperation. She turned and fled from the garden wall, and I lost her among the great primeval trees, that made the place solitary as a hermitage. Without giving it a thought, I plunged into the shadows of the grove, beyond which the great river was flowing.

"I heard sounds of her progress through the undergrowth, and followed with cautious swiftness; for her dress, her air, and the child that she carried under that shawl, suggested a tragedy, which it was my duty to prevent. The street she had been threading, that immense flower-garden, and the grand old mansion, which seemed as if buried in the heart of a wilderness, the shrubbery was so old and thick around it, were now left behind. I could hardly see my way in the dense thickness of those trees which grew close to the river, flinging their shadows over it, in places, and making the spot so lonely that I felt a thrill of dread, as the contrast between its isolation and the street I had left, broke upon me.

"Everything was quiet. My own footsteps were smothered in the forest-turf, and a gentle shiver of the leaves was all the sound I heard. What had become of that poor girl? Had she already found time to make the plunge I felt sure she meditated. My heart shrunk from the thought, so I watched and waited, feeling the presence of another human soul, as one sometimes knows a thing independent of the senses.

"As I stood in the shadow, something seemed to move on a large sloping-rock, which formed a picturesque feature in one corner of the grounds, on which the trees grew less thickly. That moment, a cloud swept back from the moon, and I saw the woman whom I had frightened so, standing on the rocks, which shot some distance into the stream, where the waters eddied and curled around it with a sweet, monotonous music, that seemed to lure and lure the woman on, till she stood on the very edge. Her shawl was thrown back now, and I saw the child. She did not look at it, but turned her face away, and lifted the infant high in her arms.

"I started forward, but checked myself, for she had fallen down upon the rock, and hugging the child to her bosom, was kissing it with passionate vehemence, calling out.

"I cannot—I cannot! Oh, my God! how could I think of it? My child! My child! You are not hurt! There! there! there! Oh, what can I do? what shall I do?"

"Again and again she fell to kissing the little creature, moaning over it like a dumb animal; breaking forth into bitter sobs, now and then, until some fear seized her, and she looked around, evidently terrified by her own voice. Full ten minutes she sat caressing the child, in her passionate despair. Then she arose to her feet once more, uplifted it in her arms, and staggering back, fell prone upon the rock, clasping the infant to her heart.

"The struggle was terrible; but I had faith in the power of a motherhood which could battle so fiercely against an evil resolve, and waited, knowing, that at the worst, I could save her and the child.

"She arose to a sitting posture, very pale and still now, for I could see her face, plainly, in the moonlight; and it was white as snow—white and beautiful. An exclamation almost broke from me. *I knew the face!* More than once had I marveled at its beauty; more than once had I seen it beaming with love, uplifted to another face, which will never leave my memory—that of a man I love better than a brother.

"Do you understand? Can you guess who this young mother was? I did not know her name; but there was no mistaking that proud, white face.

"The young woman sat a long time, gazing at her child, in the moonlight, as if seized by some apathy of the soul which made that rock its last anchorage.

"At last she took off her shawl, and, kneeling over the little creature, wrapped the garment around it. She did not look at it after this, but arose from her knees, and went staggering away from the river, through a patch of moonlight, and into the shadows, looking toward the rock, continuously, as if she had left her heart behind, and longed to pluck it back to her bosom again.

"After she was gone, I went down to the rock which was now bathed in the beautiful moonlight, and seemed as peaceful as a cradle, for the waters as they swept around it murmured a soft lullaby, and a poisonous vine, which had turned scarlet in the hot sunshine, seemed in its duskiness and dew like an imperial drapery cast around the little creature where it lay.

"A bramble studded with green acrid fruit, which bent it down like the plume from a helmet, drooped its shadow over the infant where it lay muffled in the shawl.

"I put the bramble away and was startled when two great, wide-open eyes looked up at me, through the moonlight, as if wondering at the rough features that met them, instead of the beautiful woman's face which had drifted away from it through the shadows.

"I took the child in my arms, and laid its little cheek to mine. The touch filled my soul with tenderness; having seen that woman's face I could not give that child to the almshouse. No, I resolved that she should be my own—the sister of my little Ruth.

"I carried the pretty waif home, and gave her to my wife. She was taken by surprise, and resented the adoption, at first; but it was impossible to resist those pretty, infantile ways, and at last this child became dear to her as our little Ruth. Yes; dear as the boy that was afterwards born to us.

"We kept the fact, that this child was not our own, a secret from every one. Even our children are ignorant that she is not in fact their sister. I never sought to identify the young mother. Remembering how near she had been to murdering her own child, I dared not place it again in her power. Besides, we loved the foundling, and that love grew strong as nature in our hearts.

"You know that I was educated for a better position than has fallen to my lot; and I resolved to give even superior

advantages to my children. My wife is a prudent housekeeper, and out of our small resources we have managed to save money enough for this purpose, and to secure a humble home, in which we are now living. If God spares me, some prosperity may yet be won out of our hard lives. But just now, I am desponding, without reason, for my health is good and my purpose strong. If I should be cut down, what will be the fate of my family? I ask this question with a pang. Have I done right to educate these two girls for a position so much higher than they can ever hope to attain? Have I done right in keeping all that I have told you a secret from Eva herself? Was it not my duty to search out the mother, who had cut her off; thus, perhaps, securing to her a future more promising than anything I had to offer?

"I am asking myself these questions now, and the answer is a selfish one. We could not give her up to another.

"My friend, let me tell you all. The woman who abandoned her child, with such throes of anguish, was no common person. Everything about her bespoke refinement and wealth. The shawl, in which she wrapped her infant, was a rare and costly one. The garments were enriched with the finest lace; the sleeves were looped back with pink coral—such as can only be found in perfection at Naples—fastened with a clasp of gold.

"We kept these things, sacredly, thinking that the time might come when Eva would be driven to seek out her mother. But not while I live. She loves us, and is happy.

"My friend, I have been thinking how suddenly death sometimes comes upon us, and how helpless she will be, with all her fine talents and rare beauty, when I am gone. Thinking of this, how could I help remembering you, my friend of friends. With a tenacity I cannot resist, the thought fastens on me, that I should be doing you a wrong

if I withheld our secret from you. Be this as it may, I know that you will be her friend when I am gone. In her time of need, should it ever come, you may search out that portion of her history, which I have, up to this time, shrunk from investigating.

"If love for this child has made me secretive and selfish, you will have the energy to redeem the wrong and place her in the higher position which I solemnly believe to be hers by right.

One thing I charge you. If it should come out that the girl has no legal right to claim her parents, keep this secret from her, forever. She is proud, and so keenly sensitive, that disgrace would kill her; in that case, my humbler name would be far better than a dishonored one, however exalted.

"You are abroad now; but I have kept trace of you through all these years. Once or twice your letters have reached me. I know that you have won a high place among men of genius; that your guardianship will be an honor to this proud girl; that even for my own delicate Ruth you will have some fatherly kindness. Am I wrong in asking this? I think not. You are the only friend of the old time that I have left. In our school days, we loved each other; in our manhood the feeling grew and strengthened. After my death, if that should come, you will be mindful of the old love, and kind to those I leave behind me.

"One thing you will remember. My wife has the clothes, the coral, and the India shawl, in which little Eva was wrapped that night. She will give them to you, reluctantly, I dare say; no misfortune will ever make her willing to part with the girl; but she will remember my charge, and give them up, at your request. Perhaps they will lead to something in your hands.

"Why do I write this now, after so many years of

silence? I cannot answer. But this evening, a strange, dark presentiment came over me, and I was impelled to place Eva's story on paper. It can do no harm. My wife will keep it safe till you come, if I am doomed. Doomed! How absurd all this seems in a man of perfect health and more than ordinary strength. It is strange and wild, but troubled times are coming upon the land, times when these death shadows will not be confined to one man. Yet, somehow, I feel with mournful solemnity, that, after I am dead, you will get this paper, and act upon it in behalf of your old friend,

"LEONARD LAURENCE."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PAWNBROKER.

Ross never took his gaze from the paper until he had read it through: then he folded the pages back and reperused every word, with a burning, eager question in the eyes, that seemed to devour each syllable as it arose to view. The perusal had left him pale to the lips. He held the pages with a firm, hard grip, as if he feared they would escape him, long after he had mastered their contents. Then he arose, and began to pace the floor, with a slow, heavy tread, pondering over many things in his mind, with a restless burning of the eyes that bespoke a storm at the heart.

How was he to appease this craving curiosity? In what way was he to arrive at the truth regarding this girl, whose future had been placed in his hands, by the document still clutched, tightly, there?

Laurence was right. Herman Ross was not a man to

falter in a case like this. If the girl had claims, he was resolved to search them out, and maintain them after they were found. But something more exciting than mere determination—an almost frenzied wish to learn the whole truth possessed the man. All the proofs that existed he would have at once. Suspense was more than he could bear.

Ross took his hat, and went out again, walking rapidly toward the Laurence cottage. This time he sought the back entrance, and found Mrs. Laurence alone in her kitchen. Her keen, grey eyes were as hard as steel, when she turned them upon him, with a look that seemed half fear half defiance.

"Well," she said, sharply, "you know it all now. Is it in you to take her away from us, now that we need her more than ever?"

"I have come to ask some questions. This paper speaks of articles that are in your possession. May I look at them?"

Mrs. Laurence sunk into a chair; the little color natural to her face died out, leaving only a flush around the eyes.

"I—I cannot give them to you just now," she stammered.

"Did the paper speak of them?"

"Yes; and they are important—very important."

"But how was I to know that you would ever come, or that any one—a man particularly—would want a lot of baby-clothes?"

"But I do want them, and at any cost must have them," said Ross, almost fiercely. "Surely they are not destroyed?"

"Destroyed? No; I haven't done that."

Ross drew a deep breath, and the hot color, which mounted to his face, died out as the woman completed her sentence.

"But they are not all on hand."

"Not on hand?"

"What right have you to question me so? Most of the things are here; but we were starving, sir—starving! Do you know what that means? I pawned one or two things. There, you have the truth. Go in and look at the pale girl lying there; then wonder, if you can, that I gave up everything to keep her from dying before my eyes."

"But they can be found? Surely they are not out of reach?" said Ross, anxiously.

"I don't know. We haven't been rich enough to redeem anything; but you shall have the tickets. Wait."

Mrs. Laurence went up the back stairs, and left Ross walking restlessly up and down the kitchen. She was gone some time, but came down at last, carrying a bundle in her hand.

"Here are the things," she said curtly. "Yellow as saffron, with lying; but here they are."

She opened the bundle, and shook out a long infant's frock, trimmed half a yard deep with Valenciennes lace and embroidery, all yellow with age, but of exquisite richness.

Ross laid it aside with an impatient movement of the hand.

"It tells nothing," he said. "Nothing at all."

"The moths have got into the flannel," said Mrs. Laurence, passing her hand under the rich, silken embroidery of a flannel skirt; "but you can see the pattern, for they never touch silk. Some lady did that, let me tell you, with her own fingers. This is no hired work."

Ross glanced at the pretty grape-vine, which had grown golden on the riddled flannel, and was himself struck by its beautiful finish. All at once he snatched it from the woman's hold, and examined it more closely, as if he saw something curious in every leaf and tendril.

"I should know the pattern. Somewhere I have seen it

before," he muttered, in a voice that was almost inaudible; "but where? how?"

"There is nothing else but this mite of a shirt, with lace around it like a cobweb, and the linen so fine you could almost pack it in a thimble," said Mrs. Laurence, warmed into soft, womanly feeling by the sight of these little garments.

"Nothing more? But the shawl, the coral—where are they?"

"Pawned!" was the curt answer. "I told you so."

"Where? Let me look at the tickets," was the impatient rejoinder.

Mrs. Laurence drew an old, worn porte monnaie from her pocket, and took from it two pawn-tickets, which she handed to her visitor, almost smiling at the disappointment that lay before him.

Ross glanced at the tickets, and dropped them to the table in bitter distress. They had been forfeited a whole year.

"I did not suppose they would amount to much now," said Mrs. Laurence, picking up the papers. "Sold long ago, I dare say."

Ross took the tickets from her hand again, and read the address with a forlorn hope that the articles, so important to his search, might be found unsold. He left the house at once, and proceeded to the pawnbroker's, scarcely heeding or caring that the whole world saw him enter a place that is the last foothold of poverty before it drops into abject want.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PAWNBROKER'S OFFICE.

A DULL, dreary place was this pawn-office; its narrow counter all grim with use; its walls studded from floor to ceiling with miserable looking bundles; its boxes partitioned off like cells in a prison, where the sensitive and inexperienced sheltered themselves while taking their last degrading steps on a downward career. All these things struck Ross with a chill, for there is something fearfully pathetic in poverty when it takes a form like that.

With a sense of strange humiliation, this refined gentleman glided into one of those secret boxes, into which want shrinks from the human gaze with a keener sense of shame than guilt often knows. His breath came short, and he asked, hoarsely, if there was yet a possibility of redeeming the articles which the two crumpled tickets represented.

The pawnbroker, a heavy, dark man, whose hands were as unclean as his practices, took the tickets, saw the date, and handed it back with a gruff shake of the head.

"Forfeited long ago. You ought to have seen that, if you know how to read."

"I beg your pardon," said Ross, too anxious for resentment. "Of course, I was aware of the date; but is it possible to obtain these articles?"

"Obtain them? No; they are sold."

Ross still held the rejected tickets in his hand, which shook a little.

"Sold; but there must be some record. Is it not possible to find them?"

"I don't suppose it could be done. Whoever got those two things had a bargain that they won't be likely to give up. The shawl was real Injy; worth a thousand dollars, if

it was worth a cent; and the coral was a lovely tint, like a tea-rose, and carved beautifully—not to be matched in this country. Bargains! Both great bargains!”

“I am willing to pay their full price—double that——”

“Ha! What is that? Double?”

“Yes; that is not more than I am willing to give.”

“Double-double! That would be two—say three thousand. Is that the correct sum—three thousand? A good thing! A good thing, if you get them!”

The craving wretch spoke gleefully, rubbed his palms together, and eyed Ross as if he longed to devour him.

Through all his anxiety, Ross felt the disgust such greed was sure to inspire, and answered him sharply.

“I will give two thousand for the shawl, and two hundred for the coral—not a cent more; but that can be settled with the possessor of the articles, who will probably be content with their full value. If you will inform me who the purchasers are, it is all I desire at present.”

“Who they are? Oh, yes! Such greenness belongs to us. Young in the business, you know. Haven’t cut our eye-teeth. You’re likely to get at them articles without me, very; but how are you going to do it, that’s the figure? How are you going to do it?”

“Then you will not help me?”

“Why that is just what you and I are bargaining about. Say three thousand, and I’m on hand.”

“Three thousand for articles not worth more, by your own showing, than a third of the amount, and for which you only advanced fifty dollars. Surely, you cannot be in earnest.”

“In earnest? Well, you will find that I shall not abate one dollar. A thing is worth what one can get for it. You want this shawl and coral for something more than their worth, and so make fancy stock of them. You understand they are my fancy stock, and for any good they will be to you, I am the holder.”

“But they are sold, you admitted that.”

“Yes; but my books are not sold—and without them, how can these things be traced? Oh, never mind! you will come to my terms, people generally do!”

Ross took his hat from the counter, and turned to leave the box, in which he had stood while conversing with this man. The pawnbroker eyed him furtively, with a crafty smile on his lips. He was not disheartened, for the anxiety in those deep-set eyes was too apparent for doubt. The man would make any sacrifice rather than lose the articles he sought.

“You will think better of it, sir,” he said, leaning over the counter, and following the retreating man with an oily smile. “Remember, I am always to be found here.”

Ross lifted his hat and disappeared, making no other reply. For a moment, disgust of the man overpowered even the strong wish that had brought him to that miserable place.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MRS. CARTER STANDS BY HER OLD FRIENDS.

MRS. CARTER had that profound respect for her own taste which springs out of utter ignorance; and her great party would have been something wonderful in the way of shoddyism, but for the gentle and kindly interference of her brother Ross. But she looked upon him with something like adoration, for his opinions were so modestly given, that they seemed to originate in herself. Thus he had sent the gorgeous pictures from her boudoir to Battles’ room in the stable, and after them went many an object of inestimable value to the lady, but which were received by the æsthetic coachman with a sniff of critical contempt.

Up to this time the contractor's lady had reveled in the adornment of her house. She had often heard it said that certain persons of her new circle, who had shot up like mushrooms in the unhealthy atmosphere of our civil war, owed all that was elegant in their establishments to the artists and upholsterers they employed. This was a charge Mrs. Carter resolved should never be brought against her. So, after six months of hard worry and interminable shopping, an effect was produced of promiscuous gorgeousness, that was wonderful to behold. The really refined persons who began to patronize her, were so completely surprised by this display, that she mistook their amused astonishment for admiration. This inspired her with new ambition, and she plunged into attempts at harmony and contrast, that fairly set the beholder's teeth on edge as words of hollow flattery passed through them.

Thus it was that Mr. Ross found his sister and her habitation. Carpets, gorgeously independent of draperies; florid frescoes, statues in deep shadow; flaming vases in the light; mirrors in every available space; and pictures, such pictures! in magnificent frames, surrounded him on every side. But genius is great, and money all potent. Out of this confusion, the man of real taste soon produced effects harmonious as a poem; and no person could enter that mansion with an idea that its arrangement had been left either to an upholsterer or to an ignorant woman. Soon Mrs. Carter saw how much more beautiful everything had become, and gloried in it.

Having surrendered so much to her brother, she was ready to yield to him in all things connected with her social life. When he suggested the purchase of Ruth Laurence's sketches, and asked for an invitation to the party, for which cards were about to be issued, she consented at once, and thus fell in with her old crony and friend, Mrs. Smith.

One afternoon, Mrs. Carter came home in a state of

unusual excitement. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes sparkled, and her style was like that of a warrior preparing for battle. Without stopping to take off her things, she mounted to her brother's studio, which was in the very top of the building.

"Herman," she said, sitting down by her brother's easel, "I've got myself into a scrape, and I want you to help me out. Not that I need help, if Carter wasn't so uppish about such things; but he was determined that I should give up the old set for good and all, when I came in here—and so I did. The day I went to see that Miss Laurence, who should come in but my old neighbor, Mrs. Smith, just as good, whole-hearted a woman as ever lived. Of course, I was glad to see her—my heart not being a nether millstone, nor yet a junk of ice. Then she was natural as life, thinking, no doubt, that I should keep her at arms-length, because of all this silk and lace, and bracelets, and she only in a calico-dress. I hadn't the heart to do it, Herman; old neighbors are old neighbors; and, between you and me, brother, I'm not certain that them old times were so much worse than these. At an rate, my heart warmed to Mrs. Smith, and that child of hers, so that I hated to come home."

Here Mrs. Carter walked to the window, passed a hand over her eyes once or twice and came back again.

"Mrs. Smith has got a splendid baby, you know; and holding it in my arms was such a heart-aching treat, after all that we have lost, Carter and I. It's a thing we never mention between us; but the sight of a fine, wholesome baby is sure to make my breath come quick. After losing three of them, and none left, and this house built with a nursery, it's heart-rending to think of; and I couldn't help thinking that Mrs. Smith was richer than I was, after all.

"Well, we took dinner together—ham and eggs—real old times; and cooked so nice. So, while the old home-feeling

took full hold of me, I up and gave my old friend a card for my party, having one in my pocket at the time. This was the reason of my doing it, unthinkingly, as one may say, and long in advance of other people. She was so pleased—tickled almost to death; and is going to buy a new mory-antique, and—what will please you, I know—says that she will bring Miss Eva Laurance with her—carriage-hire being all the same for three as for two.”

Here Ross made an impatient movement, which his sister saw, and half resented.

“Now don’t you turn against me, Herman. It’s bad enough to have Carter curling up his nose at old friends, that were always ready to help him, when he needed help; but my own brother——”

“You misunderstand,” said Ross. “I find no fault with feelings that do you honor. Far from it. But as for Miss Laurence, we had arranged about her coming, and there need be no alteration in that, I should think.”

“But Carter objects even to her. And as for Battle, his sneers about going into that neighborhood are beyond bearing.”

“Perhaps in some respects, Carter is right. You will find it very difficult to make classes mingle harmoniously, even in this republican country. Stronger and more experienced woman than you have tried it, and failed signally. A land that owns no aristocracy but that of wealth, will always draw sharp lines between the poor and the rich.”

“But you do not object—you will help me out. I wish now it hadn’t been done; but one can’t take back an invitation; and Carter is very cruel to ask it; isn’t he?”

“Of course you cannot take back an invitation. And I dare say your old friend will manage to appear well enough for the occasion. Society, since the war, has put up with a great many strange innovations. So, I have no doubt that your friend will pass.”

“It’s kind of you to say so,” answered Mrs. Carter, with tears in her eyes. “As for Carter, his heart is like a millstone, since he became so rich. Oh, Herman! sometimes I wish we had been content as it was.”

“Well, well, throw all these little troubles off your mind. I have something to tell you—something to propose. Perhaps a great favor to ask of you and Carter.”

“It’s granted, Herman. I’d lay down my life for you; and so would Carter. He’s awful proud of having a real gentleman in the family. So am I—and that gentleman my own brother.”

Ross reached out his hand, and drawing the kind-hearted woman toward him, kissed her on the cheek.

“Now tell me what it is,” she questioned, cheerfully. “If it’s money——”

Ross shook his head.

“Not that! Not that!”

“Dear! Dear! What can it be then? Just tell me.”

“Not now. In a day or two.”

“Another invitation for some one? Well, you shall have a whole handful of blanks, and fill them out yourself. Will that do?”

“For the present, less than that will do, sister.”

“Well, as many as you like, and anything else you like. Now I begin to feel better, and will go down to Carter, like the mistress of her own house.”

With this heroic resolve, Mrs. Carter left the studio.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

YOUNG LAMBERT SPEAKS OUT.

"Yes, mother, it is the truth; I have seen the young lady more than once."

"I know it, Ivon. You were seen walking by her side in the street."

Mrs. Lambert spoke calmly, but with a cold intonation of the voice that her step-son understood as something far more expressive than an outburst of anger; but his answer was as quiet as her question had been.

"Once or twice I found myself on the same side-walk with the young lady to whom I have been properly introduced."

"Properly introduced! How can that be? There is no proper introduction between a shop-girl and a young gentleman of position and fortune," replied the lady, with an angry flush on her cheeks.

"Position, if you please; but as for the fortune, that depends—I claim nothing on expectations. It would be arrogance if I did."

"This is a sudden fit of humility, Ivon."

"No, madam, it is not sudden; the thought has been in my mind a long time. No man has a right to discount on the future, or waste his energies because there is no immediate need that they should be put forth. Say that I am young, well educated, and have just property enough, from my father, for individual independence, and you will have defined my position exactly. Is it so very much better than that of the young lady we are speaking of?"

"The young lady, as you call her, is a shop-girl," answered Mrs. Lambert, with unsuppressed scorn.

"And in that my superior. She earns her own indepen-

dence, and aids those more helpless than herself, while I—— Well, it is useless to say what my life has been. The greatest energies I have as yet been called upon to put forth, is exerted in collecting your rents, and depositing your money."

"But you are my son—not one person in ten remembers that you are not actually so. Some day, if you do nothing to prevent it, the bulk of my property will be yours. All my real estate must descend to a Lambert. It is a proud old name, and needs wealth to sustain it. To your father I gave that wealth. It was a part of his greatness, and lifted him above all the petty economies which have so often degraded our American ministers abroad. It was my pride that through me his position at the Imperial Court had no such humiliating difficulties."

"And it was his pride, for he told me so a hundred times, that no high-born lady of that proud land ever filled a lofty position with more dignity and grace. Young, beautiful, and richer in acquirements than in wealth, how could it be otherwise? Ah, madam, he thought less of your property than of those other things. Where love is, gold sinks to the bottom."

Mrs. Lambert did not reply at once; a cold shadow crept over the animation of her face, but she answered at last.

"Love is a delirium, which comes in force and power but once in a lifetime—a dangerous insanity that never dies. Do not permit it to overpower your reason, Ivon. Of all the passions it is most to be dreaded."

"But how is one to guard against it, madam?"

"I cannot advise," answered the lady, "for no human being ever took counsel patiently from another, when this passion was upon him. I can only warn you, my son, that no greater trouble comes on earth than springs out of a low-born union. It is the one mistake which can never be wholly retrieved—class should match with class. When love descends, it is terrible."

"But what constitutes class in a republic, mother, where society is ever changing? One must merge into the other. Look at the social upheaving which the war has brought about, where the very lowest strata of society has been forced to the surface, and claims rank with the best."

"I know, I know!" cried the lady, impatiently. "Poverty itself is better than that!"

"It seems to me that honorable birth, talent, and pure morals, should form the aristocracy of a great nation—these are personal attributes which cannot be attained by accident or dishonesty, as money is often acquired."

Mrs. Lambert made an impatient movement with her hand.

"It is useless arguing, Ivon. Class must be distinguished as we find it. The Lamberts have no need to doubt their position in any country. Be careful not to imperil it by too open attentions to the girl I have been speaking of."

"But, mother, she is refined and beautiful."

"So much the more dangerous."

"Thoroughly educated, accomplished, even."

"Perhaps! How am I to know?"

"You have seen her, heard her speak."

"Yes, I have seen that she is dangerously beautiful; heard her speak with shrinking, that seemed almost repulsion. Ivon! Ivon! let me never hear of her again!"

"How can you be so prejudiced, mother, knowing so little of the poor girl?"

"How much can you know, Ivon?"

"Everything. I have taken pains to inquire."

"Knowing that she was a shop-girl, what more did you wish to learn?"

"All that could be told."

"Well, what *did* you learn?"

The lady spoke breathlessly, as if the subject pained her, and she was impatient to end it.

"I learned who her parents were."

"Well?"

"Her father was a policeman."

"A policeman! Well, what more?"

"Who is dead. This girl is helping to support his widow and two other children, one a confirmed invalid. They are very poor."

"Then leave them in their poverty, I charge you."

Mrs. Lambert spoke with unusual warmth. The subject had disturbed her greatly. Something more deep and subtle than her indomitable pride had been touched, of which she was even herself unconscious.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MISS SPICER.

A CARD was brought into the dainty boudoir in which Mrs. Lambert was conversing with her son. This was followed so quickly by Miss Lucy Spicer, that there was no possibility of refusing her admission, even if the occupants of the room had desired it. But her presence was welcome to the lady, for she arose promptly to receive her guest, glad to escape a subject which was hateful to her.

"Looking younger and more lovely than ever!" exclaimed Miss Spicer, after kissing the lady with enthusiasm. "I wonder if it will be possible for me to grow handsomer as I grow older? Of course not. It's only one or two women in a generation that can do that."

Here Miss Spicer seemed to become suddenly aware of Ivon's presence, and addressed him.

"Now this is a treat, Mr. Lambert; one never expects to find you at home; but here, with mamma, in this bijou of

a room, is a surprise. Come, now, let us make up before the maternal ancestor. It wasn't my fault. I couldn't, for the life of me, help seeing you, and that abominably handsome shop-girl. Why didn't you take a back street?"

"Then it was Miss Spicer. I could not imagine who had done me the honor of reporting my movements," said the young man, bowing low.

"Angry, ha! Don't like people to make a note of his little escapades. Well, it isn't quite fair. But when one overleaps all the barriers of society so bravely, of course, he must expect it to be known."

"And, of course, young ladies who have nothing else to do, must be expected to magnify and multiply the news."

Miss Spicer threw up her hands.

"Nothing else to do! Now I like that; as if there ever was seen a creature so hardworking as a young lady in society. Only think of the notes one has to write; putting off disagreeable people, and enticing the other set on; the shopping; the walks down town just as business breaks up, when crowds of us turn southward as steadily as sunflowers keep with the sun; hunting down dress-makers, tormenting milliners, reading all the French novels, little flirtations with one's music-master, learning love phrases with one's Italian teacher. I tell you, Mr. Lambert, one has to crowd life even to get in gossip and scandal enough to spice it respectably. Don't talk to me about having nothing else to do."

"I never will again. The occupations you enumerate are too grand and noble for dispute. Hereafter I shall set down a fashionable young lady as the busiest and most useful creature on earth."

"Of course we are. Eternally on the go, scarcely time to breathe from morning till night."

"Perhaps that is why so many of them are called 'fast,'" said Lambert, demurely.

"Oh, you abominable creature!" cried the young lady,

shaking her cane-parasol at Lambert. "That's intended for me; but I don't accept it. You are to consider me as among the prudes and conservatives, remember. Did I not come here to rebuke your own fast conduct? Don't expect to get rid of the shop-girl by attacking me."

"I have no wish to get rid of her in any way, Miss Spicer," said Lambert, gravely. "Nor do I care to make her the subject of this conversation. Mother, have you any commands?"

Mrs. Lambert, who had been quietly listening to this war of words, shook her head.

"Oh! if you are going down the Avenue, I don't mind walking a block or two," said the irrepressible Miss Spicer, pulling down her lace mask, and grasping the coral-mounted handle of her parasol, as if it had, in fact, been a cane.

"It will require something of that kind to set you right, after your promenade with the lady we don't care to mention. But, wait one moment, I had forgotten what brought me here. Mrs. Lambert, do give me your advice. I have a card for that Mrs. Carter's party. What shall I do about it?"

Mrs. Lambert looked up quickly, and a flush of unusual color came into her face.

"I—I beg pardon; what did you say, Miss Spicer?"

"Only if I can venture on accepting. She is so awful shoddy, it will be great fun."

"I have received cards," answered Mrs. Lambert, quietly, "and it is probable that I may accept."

Miss Spicer let her parasol drop to the floor, and clapped both hands.

"That is splendid! Then we can all accept. They tell me her house was like a curiosity-shop, when her brother, a great artist, came from abroad, and pitched all the trash she had been collecting, into the stable. He's splendid, every one says! Awfully handsome, and so aristocratic. I

know half a dozen girls that are dying-to go on his account. The wall-flowers are all in a flutter, I can tell you, for he isn't young."

Mrs. Lambert arose hastily, walked across the room, and re-arranged the folds of an amber-satin curtain, that fell over a broad window of the boudoir. In her nervous haste, she loosened the heavy cords that held it, flooding the window with silken drapery, and the room with mellow, golden light.

Miss Spicer laughed, lifted her parasol from the floor, and began gathering up the folds of silk with it, thus throwing Mrs. Lambert's face into full light.

"Why, how strangely you look!" she said, in her reckless way. "Pale as a ghost! Wanted air, and going to open the widow. I'll do it for you."

A gush of fresh air swept through the open sash, and brought some color to Mrs. Lambert's face.

"Are you better, dear madam?" said Ivon, approaching the window with tender anxiety.

"Better! No, indeed! I've not been ill. It was only the shadows thrown from this yellow drapery. Help me draw the cords. No, no! leave the lace down, a softened light is pleasanter. Now, Ivon, I will not detain you or Miss Spicer from your walk."

"That is giving us both a polite dismissal," cried the young lady, laughing. "Well, come along, Mr. Lambert, your maternal ancestor gives permission. I won't take your arm unless you insist. No one will have a right to think us engaged, if I walk along demurely by myself, not even the pretty—— What, frowning! Well, I never will say she's pretty again—never! never! never!"

CHAPTER XXX.

OLD MEMORIES AND PRESENT STRUGGLES.

It was some moments before Miss Spicer's voice died away at the front door; and for a long time Mrs. Lambert walked to and fro on that moss-like carpet, treading down its clustering blossoms as if she longed to trample them out of sight forever. The elegant coldness of her manner had vanished entirely; her hands were clenched, her lips moved, uttering nothing but shadowy words, until at last they broke into sound.

"So they will make a lion of him. Even these girls have found out how more than handsome he is; how infinitely above the shallow men they profess to admire. Great heavens! has it come to this? Thirty-nine years of age, and jealous of him now, as I was then! Oh, how I did love him—how I do love him! Can such feelings die? Can the grave bury them? Can a human soul cast them off? And I, I met him with scorn. The madness of that fatal hour seized upon me when he stood before my face, like one from the tomb. How could I look him in the face? Why was it that my pride refused to bow itself, while half my being yearned toward him? What does he think of me? Scorn and loathing! Scorn and loathing! What else can I expect? What else would a sane woman wish? But is this sanity? Will this passion haunt me forever? Even thus, is it not better than the barren life I have led all these years?"

The woman, too restless for continued motion, threw herself on a couch, and buried her hot cheek in its amber cushions, as she had done years before, when love for this one man threw her heart into tumults of tenderness or

doubt. Had years done nothing for her then? Had time dug no gulf between them deep enough to terrify her heart from its hungry longing? Had silence, like that of the grave, failed to chill it into indifference?

He had asked none of these questions. Would he ever care to have them answered? Was the heart he had given her, dead? Yes, yes! he had left her to bitter retribution. The passionate reproaches with which she had driven him from her in his first youth, when a keen sense of his poverty and her riches gave a double sting to her cruel words, had been fatal. Her sin against him had been too great.

This woman was not given to weeping, but she cried like a child now. For weeks and weeks she had expected Ross to seek her again. In spite of everything, she had a lingering faith in the love which had seemed immortal, and still trusted in the great nobility which had seemed capable of infinite forgiveness. But he did not come; and now she heard his name uttered by that flighty girl, suddenly, and with flippant ease, as if it were not a thousand times removed from her, or the females she coupled with it.

While the lady lay prostrate thus wounding her soul with bitter memories, her maid came in, saw that she was resting, and left a note upon the table near her couch. She started up, as the door closed, holding her breath. It was from him; she knew that before the address met her eye—knew it by the wild tumult in her bosom, by the joy and pain that thrilled her from head to foot.

How strangely her name looked written in that hand. The seal—ah, yes! she remembered it. Letters upon a tombstone could not have made her heart sink so heavily. Her fingers were cold as she broke the wax, and, oh! how they trembled as she unfolded the paper underneath.

The note began coldly. It addressed her as Mrs. Lambert—the hateful name that clung around her like a serpent

now. In that name the writer embodied ten thousand reproaches—a world of withering contempt. It was needless, she thought, to utter it in any other form. Still, he made, or implied, a request—that was something; a request, where he might have commanded, and she would not have dared to disobey. It was a little matter. He had just learned that an invitation had been sent to Mrs. Lambert for his sister's party—a thing he had not thought to provide against—and which might seem like an ungenerous effort to place her in a false position. It was, perhaps, best that they two should learn to meet in the world to which she belonged, and thus spare themselves the pain of such accidental encounters as circumstances might force upon them; but of that, she must judge, and hold herself free to accept, or refuse, this invitation to his sister's house, as her own wishes might dictate.

The note was cold and formal enough. Ross said nothing of his own wishes, but left her free—a thing which no woman ever yet desired, where the man she loved was concerned. But, chilling as it was, this woman pressed it to her lips and her heart, with a wild and passionate fervor never known to her girlhood, or that of any other woman. Over and over again she devoured the words with her eyes, and would, if possible, have plucked them from the paper with her lips. Would she go? Would she meet him again? Yes; if an army had stood between her and him, she would have forced a passage through. So completely had her heart taken up its old passion for the man whom she had cruelly wronged.

CHAPTER XXXI.

BITTER JEALOUSY.

MISS SPICER was not given to much ceremony at the Lambert mansion. In an hour after she went down those broad steps with Ivon Lambert, her high-heeled boots pattered up them again; for the young man had lifted his hat politely to her, when they came opposite a fashionable club-house, and sought refuge there.

The young lady had stood on the sidewalk long enough to get up a laugh, and clench her parasol, which she shook at him, to the edification and amusement of half a dozen young men gathered in the club-house windows. Then she retraced her steps, and, much to her disgust, walked up the Avenue alone, making keen observations as she went.

All at once the young lady started off into a quick walk, and, having obtained admittance at the front door, ran up stairs. Without waiting for an answer to her knock, she darted into the boudoir, and found Mrs. Lambert lying on the couch.

"Do get up, this minute, Mrs. Lambert; they are going by—that girl and the gentleman we were talking of. What an awful flirt she must be—first one man and then another. It's just abominable! Oh, how I wish Ivon could see her now!"

Mrs. Lambert started from her couch, and hurried to the window, urged forward by an impulse that swept away her usual slow grace of movement. Miss Spicer was astonished at the impetuosity with which that delicate hand dashed the lace curtains from before the glass.

Quick as lightning, those jealous eyes took in the two figures moving along the opposite sidewalk. Both were tall and of commanding presence. The man's head was slightly

bent; the girl's face was uplifted, and she was listening to him, with a smile on her lip. Truly, she was beautiful. The face, too, seemed familiar; something she remembered afar off, came back to her, as she looked upon it; something lost and vaguely regretted; but what, or when known, she could not tell—the attempt was like groping through a dream.

"Is that the man Ross you were speaking of?"

Mrs. Lambert's voice was low and forced. The lace which she grasped shook in her hand so violently, that Lucy Spicer must have seen it, if she had not been crouching on the floor, and watching the two people through the lower sash. As it was, she only answered,

"Yes, that's the man! Splendid, isn't he? but old enough to be her father, though. Oh, I hope she'll catch him, if it's only to spite Ivon! for he treats me shamefully; indeed he does. If I could only give myself time, I'm sure it would break my heart, the way he goes on."

Mrs. Lambert heard nothing of this. She was only conscious of a quick, darting pain, which settled down into leaden heaviness, through which she could hardly breathe. Those two people went slowly out of sight, the lace dropped from her hand and fluttered down, softly, as snow-flakes fall, under the warm amber of the curtains. In this rich twilight the woman hid her pallor, and the red flush about her eyes, from the curious girl, who still sat watching on the carpet, and went back to her couch, hearing the clatter of that ceaseless tongue as men listen to a far-off wind.

"Mrs. Lambert, now remember, you saw this girl flirting like wild-fire with a man she never saw before half a dozen times in her life; that's certain, for I've taken pains to find out all about him. There never was so great an artist born as he has been. Gets thousands and thousands for a picture; so that he don't trouble himself to paint for common people. Besides all that, he's the only brother that

rich Mrs. Carter has got; and her husband says he don't want a better heir to his property; so he'll be an awful catch, everyway; quite too good for that creature. If it wasn't for getting into a scrape with Ivon, I'd cut in there. I have a mind to do it now. It would serve Ivon right for daring to walk with her and own it to my face. Couldn't even take the trouble to cheat me with a fib. I hope you'll give it to him, Mrs. Lambert; he don't care a cent for what I say. Won't you, now?"

Here the young heiress gathered her plump little person from the carpet, and knelt down by the prostrate woman, who lay with her face turned to the cushions, which her hands grasped nervously.

"You will talk with him, Mrs. Lambert, alone, and earnestly."

"Talk with him! No, that can never be again!" cried the woman, in her passionate grief, lifting herself from the couch. "Why should we two be alone? I am nothing to him. That day has gone with my youth and beauty; these it was that he loved. How much of them is left?"

The unhappy lady threw out her arms, as if appealing to her own image. In a great mirror opposite her couch, the pale, anxious, disturbed shadow of a woman flung out her arms also, as if repelling her appeal.

Miss Spicer was astonished; she had been speaking of young Lambert, and found this burst of feeling incomprehensible.

"Now I'm sure you are mistaken," she said. "Men don't care a bit about their mother's beauty, and can't, in reason, expect them to be young. I'm sure Ivon loves you a great deal better than most sons love their own parents. So do think of it, and give him a good talking to; for one thing is certain, I'm not going to take up with a shop-girl's leavings."

In a confused, weary way, Mrs. Lambert comprehended

that the girl was speaking of her own affairs, and had no idea of the anguish which had made her so reckless of exposure. She seldom lost her proud self-possession so thoroughly, and made a strong effort to recover herself before that sharp girl could observe how disproportioned her agitation was to the ostensible subject in question.

"Excuse me, Lucy, my head is aching fearfully."

"Poor dear! I know how to pity you; only mine is the heart, which your cruel son is just breaking," answered Miss Spicer, pressing both hands to her right side, just where the organ she spoke of was not, and shaking her head woefully.

This attempt at the sentimental did more toward restoring Mrs. Lambert's composure than any amount of reasoning could have done. A keen sense of ridicule broke up the tumult of feeling that had almost prostrated her, and, spite of it all, she smiled.

"How am I expected to help you, Lucy?" she said, with something of her usual sweet manner.

"Why, Mrs. Lambert, I have just been telling you."

"But that was while my head ached so badly."

"Well, if people won't listen, it's of no use to ask advice; but, if I must say it all over again, I want you, in short, to give that son of your's a good, hard scolding."

"I never scold," answered Mrs. Lambert, with a grave smile, for there was trouble at her heart yet, not the less keen because pride held it in abeyance.

"Well, then, stop giving him money."

"Oh! but I rather think he would like that, Lucy."

"Like it! Like it! No he wouldn't!"

"I don't know; he's getting restless, of late."

"Ever since he saw this girl—I wish that shawl had been in the bottom of the Red Sea! Oh! if I had her within reach of my cane-parasol for ten minutes! Did you ever see such a great, tall thing as she is? Sweeps along like

a peacock. Oh, mercy! There he is coming! Don't tell him that I've been here. I'll run down the back stairs, and out through the garden!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

DRESSING FOR THE PARTY.

EVA LAURENCE was dressing for her first party, and the very anticipation of its delights gave resplendence to the wonderful beauty of her face. She was young, ambitious, and rich in that vivid talent which doubles enjoyment and gives a keener edge to pain than ordinary natures ever endure.

Ruth was sitting up, among the cushions of her couch, looking bright and happy as an angel. Her soft eyes were full of serene love-light; a faint color came and went in her cheeks; and little quivers of delight stirred her fingers, as she smoothed the drifts of snow-white tarlatan that draped her sister's slender person.

"Oh, how beautiful it is! How soft and white! You look like a bride, Eva!"

"Or a ghost!" muttered Mrs. Laurence, in a troubled undertone. "The ghost of a child we have sheltered and loved, but who will belong to others when we want her most."

"What are you saying, mother?" cried Eva, who was stooping forward to look at herself in a little mirror between the windows, which just took in the outlines of her splendid neck and shoulders. "Something about my dress that you don't like, I suppose. It was extravagant spending so much money; but you must scold Ruth. She would do it, wouldn't you, Ruthy, dear?"

"Oh, yes! mother must scold me! but she won't do it, in earnest. I'm not afraid. Didn't she work like a regular seamstress, to help finish the dress; and isn't it beautiful? All it wants is a little warm color."

"It wants nothing in the world," said Eva, passing both hands over the dark braids of hair that fell in rich loops down her neck, making its whiteness like the leaves of a magnolia flower. "I never was dressed so well in my life, and, perhaps, never shall be again, who knows?"

"I know," answered Ruth. "These fashionable people adore good looks; and, oh! sister Eva, how beautiful you are! Come down here, and let me kiss you. How warm and red your cheeks are; it is like feeling a peach at one's lips. How I would love to paint you just this way, only a little color in the dress. I insist on that for the picture; it costs nothing, you know."

"Come in," Mrs. Laurence called, a little sharply, for she was ill at ease that evening, and even a knock at the door annoyed her.

It was only little Jimmy, who peeped through the door, after knocking, to make sure that even his presence might not create some confusion while that momentous toilet was in progress. He carried a mass of loose roses in his arms, white, golden-tinted, and red, some half open, some in full bloom, and others folded buds, clasped in with moss.

No wonder Ruth uttered a glad cry, and clapped her delicate hands, gleeful as a child who suddenly finds its wishes gratified. No wonder Eva sprang forward, and put a hand on either side the boy's face, and kissed him, rapturously, over and over again.

"You darling! You boy of boys! Where did you get them?" she cried. "Oh! how could I be so careless?"

In her eagerness, she had swept half the flowers from Jimmy's arms, and they lay at her feet, sending up odors that filled the little room. She stooped to gather them up, still questioning him.

"Where did they come from, so fresh, and such long stems? There is one on your train; it seems to be buried in snow—such a lovely color," cried Ruth, fairly trembling with delight. "Now I will make the dress perfect."

"Where did I get them?" answered James, emptying his fragrant burden on Ruthy's couch, and kneeling down to gather up the portion scattered around Eva. "It's a pretty way to find out, smothering a fellow with kisses, and asking him to talk. Well, if you want to know, a friend of mine gave them to me."

"A friend? Oh, James!"

"Yes, I say it again—a friend. You have seen him, Eva, through an iron fence; gray hair; legs like broomsticks. Does it strike you?"

"What, that old man? No!"

"I tell you, yes! He was watching for me by the gate. I'd been leaving some groceries in the basement, you know, and took a peep through the railing. Always do. The gate opened softly, and his queer old face looked through. 'Come in!' says he. 'Have you got a basket?'"

"'No,' says I. 'The cook hadn't time to empty it.'"

"'Well, come along; I want to send something to that pretty sister of yours,' says he."

"I went in, so astonished, that I was steering through the middle of a flower-bed, when he called out, 'This way!' and went on among a whole heap of bushes, just as full of roses as they could hold. Here he took out a great jack-knife, and cut away like fun, giving the flowers to me till my arms were full, and their breath made me long to dance."

"'Take them to the young lady,' says he, 'and say it wasn't just old Storms that sent 'em, but some one else that——'"

"Oh, James! did he say that?"

"Of course he did, and more yet; but I'll tell you that when we are all alone. It's sort of private."

Here the boy made signs, and whispered mysteriously, glancing at his mother, who was retreating to the kitchen with a cloud of unusual darkness on her face. She saw in all these excitements only signs of disaster and separation.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ABOUT THE ROSES AND VIOLETS.

Now we are by ourselves, girls," said James, "I'll tell you all about it. There was some one else in the garden."

"Some one else!" exclaimed Ruth.

Eva, blushing vividly over face and bosom, began to arrange the folds of her dress with great earnestness, but said nothing.

"You know who it was, Eva," said James, with a sly glance. "I've seen you walking with him."

"No, no, James! only as he was coming the same way. Don't believe it, Ruth. I never did more than that," cried Eva, eager to defend herself, yet trembling with a sense of shame.

"Who said you did? Oh, Eva! Eva! I've found out something. It wasn't old Storms that gave you this, anyhow!"

Here James held up a little cluster of sweet-scented violets and sprigs of heliotrope, gathered around a moss rose-bud.

"He picked this, Eva, with his own hands. I wish you could have seen what a fuss he made in putting them together. Old Storms offered to help him, but he said, no! he would do that himself. Then he said, 'Give this to

your sister; I know that she is going out to-night, and shall be honored—that's the word, Eva—honored if she will wear it."

Eva took the tiny bouquet and held it, irresolute, casting a shy glance at her sister, who looked gravely, almost reproachfully at her.

James, who was watching them both, broke forth in his boyish impatience.

"There, now, Ruth, don't be an old maid, and spoil all her fun. She hasn't done anything, I tell you. Not one quarter as much as all them Fifth Avenue girls are doing every hour of their lives. Now what are you pouting for?"

Ruth smiled again. A sudden doubt had haunted her for a moment, but it passed from her innocent mind like dew from a lily, and all was bright again.

"Who is he, Eva?" she said, reaching out her hand.

"A gentleman, Ruth, if ever one lived. He has been at the store several times, and Mr. Harold introduced him. They went to school together, and—and that is all. Only his name is Lambert—Ivon Lambert."

"His mother is as proud as if she were governor of North America; but he isn't—not a bit of it," broke in James. "The way he talks to me is quite friendly. That fellow, Boyce, now, would never condescend to it, knowing that I 'tend that baby sometimes; just as if he and his red hair was anything particular. If Mr. Lambert had not been a thorough gentleman, I wouldn't have brought his flowers, anyway. You ought to have known that, Ruth."

"As if I did not know it," answered the sweet invalid, penitent and ashamed of the momentary cloud that had come over her. "Eva, dear, let us begin again."

Ruth gathered up the flowers in her lap, and began to arrange them in glowing clusters, with which she looped back the over-dress.

"Now just a dash of this warm crimson for your hair,

and nothing can be more lovely," she exclaimed, pulling Eva down to her knees, and fastening a red rose and some of the mossiest buds among her braids.

When Eva arose from her knees she held the little cluster of violets in her hand. Looking wistfully down upon the blossoms, she unconsciously took a position, which filled Ruth with the enthusiasm of an artist.

"Oh, if I could paint her now!" she thought.

"Would there be any harm?" questioned Eva, in a low voice, turning her eyes wistfully from the flowers to Ruth's glowing face. "I—I suppose he would rather expect it. Don't you?"

Ruth smiled, and held out her hand for the flowers, but Eva pretended not to see her. Even to that gentle hand she would not, for one moment, consign the precious blossoms. So, with a gentle wile of abstraction, she placed the flowers on her bosom, which rose and swelled to their almost imperceptible touch, as waters bear lotus-flowers on their waves.

"Now, isn't she stunning?" exclaimed James, moving in a circle, and on tiptoe, around the room, afraid of touching the snow-white train with his foot. "That Miss Spicer, who goes down the avenue to meet him, every day at three o'clock, will be nowhere. In fact, I don't believe there'll be a handsomer girl at the party to-night. She's A No. 1, and a picked article at that. Hallo! Who's coming?"

James heard the outer door open, without a knock, and a heavy rustle of silk in the passage. Eva gathered up her dress, and sat down on Ruth's couch, ashamed of her own beauty, and wondering who the intruder could be. Ruth smiled, and said,

"I dare say it is Mrs. Smith."

So it was, that good woman in all her glory. She pushed the door wide open; for, with a huge panier added to her own generous proportions, the skirt of her dress turned

upward, and thrown over her shoulders, that open space seemed scarcely sufficient to admit her.

"Just run down to give you a look at my dress before the carriage comes," she exclaimed, flinging an avalanche of red moire antique down from her shoulders, and spreading it along the humble carpet with the pride of a peacock. "What do you think of that, now? Seven dollars a yard, and twenty-five yards, besides trimming. Going it, rather, for a corner groceryman's wife, isn't it? But when an old friend asks you, a'most with tears in her eyes, to be at her first party, one can't refuse to do the thing up brown, which I think Smith and I have done it. Low in the neck, you see, and Marier Antoinet sleeves to say nothing of white kid-boots, with heels like that!"

Here Mrs. Smith lifted her dress and brought to view a high-heeled boot, strained till the buttons threatened to fly off, over a large, dumpty foot, looked exceedingly like an apple-dumpling prepared for cooking.

"There, now, girls, just take a survey of me all round, and give us your opinion; but first, Eva, let me have an observation. All in white, and looking like one of them great swans in the Park; not bad! Though I should like something a little more stylish. You are going as my friend, and I'm anxious about your looking first-rate. Still, it's my candid opinion that you'll do. Step out here, and let us see how your dress falls. Gracious me, what a train! Longer than mine, I do believe; streaming out like a white banner. Yes, I say it again; you'll do, Eva! Now just manage a thing or two for me. I couldn't trust Kate Gorman to put on my head-dress, and brought it along. Stylish, isn't it?"

Mrs. Smith drew a paper from her pocket, and unfolded a yellow feather, long enough to take in her head at one sweep, which she held up triumphantly.

"See how it curls and quivers; something like a feather,

that! Now, I want you to put it on, like a queen wears her crown, over the forehead, round one side, and streaming out behind!"

Eva and Ruth changed glances of dismay. Both hesitated to wound the kind woman's vanity, but felt that silence would be cruel.

"I would not wear anything on my head, Mrs. Smith; you have such fine hair, it seems a pity to conceal it," said Ruth. "Let me do some braids, and change it a little. Then you can have nothing more becoming."

"But I bought the feather a purpose," answered Mrs. Smith, eyeing her purchase with rueful regret; "and it is such a splendid one, with a contrast to it. That was what the milliner observed when I told her the color of my dress."

"Still I would not wear it this evening. Eva sees a great many stylish people, you know, and can tell you that feathers like that are not in the fashion for evening-dress, just now."

"Oh, if she says it, I'll give in!"

"Then let me change your hair at once. Sit down by me. What quantities of hair, and how long!"

Deftly, and with fingers that seemed to fly through the long tresses of hair, Ruth soon crowned the head of her friend with a matronly coronal of braids, and made some other alterations in her dress, which were submitted to with inward protest. Just as the last touches were given, a carriage drove up, and some one rang the door-bell.

Mrs. Smith sprang to her feet, drew up the skirt of her dress, and ran into the kitchen, protesting that she would not see a stranger for the world. As her dress swept with a rushing and voluminous rustle through one door, Mr. Ross came through the other.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MRS. CARTER BECOMES FASHIONABLE.

MRS. CARTER's party had been the grand sensation of a week. Fashionable circles were profoundly agitated by the great social question it evolved. The word "shoddy" became inelegantly common in ladies' conversation. Fastidiously exclusive people, whose fathers had raised cabbages, sold milk, and fattened pigs on land that time, rather than ability, had paved inches deep with gold, smiled significantly, or answered with delicate reserve, when asked if they would be at the Carters'. In fact, superfine jests and aristocratic sneers were the order of the day, until Miss Spicer made a round of calls through all the windings and ramifications of uppertendom, when a marvellous change was produced.

"Of course," the young lady said, "Mrs. Lambert was going, and openly expressed herself as highly pleased with the invitation. Why not? Mrs. Carter was enormously wealthy. Shoddy, indeed! What of that? After a great civil war, society, like States, must be reconstructed." Mrs. Lambert and herself had settled on that, and nothing could move them; the thing must be done in the most liberal manner. The aristocracy of wealth had no right to exclude a lady like Mrs. Carter; as for the smaller and more exalted circle of genius, the lady's brother, Mr. Ross, stood high among the highest there—so the family had a double claim to consideration. At any rate, Miss Spicer went on to say Mrs. Lambert had accepted, and ordered one of the loveliest dresses for the occasion. In fact—though it was not a thing to talk about—some of her diamonds were being reset at Ball & Black's. For years Miss Spicer had not seen Mrs. Lambert enter into the spirit of a grand toilet with

such zest. She was anxious as a girl of sixteen about it. When a royal prince was here she had not cared half so much; but then Mrs. Lambert always did adore genius; and Mrs. Carter's brother was something really distinguished in that line—painted like an angel, and in conversation was perfectly splendid.

It was wonderful how much effect these repeated conversations of Miss Spicer had upon the great social mind of the metropolis. The diverging current turned at once in favor of the Carters. Those who had openly called the lady vulgar, now found her remarkably stylish—not handsome, but queenly and imposing; so generous, too. If she was a little showy and all that, it was because a rich, natural taste was likely to develop itself gorgeously when plenty of money was at hand. Her party would be something perfectly magnificent. Her orders for flowers had exhausted every greenhouse for miles around, and the supper would be marvelous. It was said that an *artiste* had come out from Paris to preside over its preparation.

All this came from Miss Spicer, who entered into the subject with spirit and imagination enough to have given sensation for a first-class novel. So Mrs. Lambert, sitting still in her shaded boudoir, regulated society as she had done for years, without apparent effort; in fact, caring very little about it, except on this especial occasion, when she felt a nervous satisfaction in being the unknown fairy who turned the whole fashionable world into Mrs. Carter's saloons.

The night came at last, and Mrs. Laurence's humble parlor was not the only one in which anxious and beautiful women were adorning themselves before their mirrors, though it was doubtful if one so small as that hanging between those parlor windows was consulted during the evening; or if the loftiest and broadest gave back a figure of more perfect loveliness.

Mrs. Lambert stood in her dressing-room, radiant with jewels, pallid with nervous excitement. She was still a beautiful woman; her mirror reflected that and more, it revealed the faint shiver of her hands, the anxious fire in her eyes, the swell and contraction of her white throat, under its diamond necklace. Ellen, her maid, had never seen her so strangely restless before; she turned her eyes imploringly on the girl, and besought her to say honestly if she looked so old as nine-and-thirty. The maid clasped her hands.

"Indeed, indeed, Mrs. Lambert, you do not look it by ten years."

The proud woman smiled, and touched the girl's shoulder caressingly, for the first time in her life.

"Look again, Ellen; can you see no lines on my forehead, no contraction here at my throat?"

"Nothing of the kind; if they were there, I should, the diamonds light them up so."

"And my hair. Ah! Ellen, I see threads of white."

"That is because you are looking for them; besides, your hair is so glossy and black, the least thing shows. A dust of powder, now?"

"No, no, no! He detests—— You ought to remember that I detest powder. Take the jewels out of my hair, they kindle up every defect. My dress, too, looks presumptuously youthful."

"Youthful, why not? There will be no young lady at the party half so beautiful. Besides, this shade of mauve is neither old nor young, so delicate and rich; just a glimpse of blue, with a faint blush of roses breaking out, as the dress-maker said, when it came home, 'something for point lace flounces to tell upon,' says she, 'satin thick as a board, sweeping so majestic, with the lace floating over like—like mist.' That is what *she* said, but then, of course, you know best, ma'am—nobody ever had so much taste."

Mrs. Lambert was not listening, but unclasped her bracelets, and took off her necklace with an air of disgust.

"One would think I intended to dazzle the crowd," she muttered, "as if such things could do it."

"Oh, madam! you are spoiling everything."

Mrs. Lambert looked at herself drearily in the glass, her dress had lost its brilliancy—she seemed growing older.

"Put them on, again," she said, holding out her white arms, as if the glittering jewelry held by her maid were manacles of iron. "Nothing seems to become me, to-night."

"Indeed, madam, I never saw you look so lovely; no girl ever had an air like that."

This professional flattery was received by the lady with a quick feeling of interest. She longed to believe the girl; longed to think that much of the freshness and dew of her youth remained.

"Ellen," she said, with an appeal for truth in her words, and a piteous shrinking from it in her eyes, "no one will look on me with your partial eyes; suppose you had not seen me since I was—well, since I was married to Mr. Lambert, you remember that, just a chasm of so many years to leap over, would you find me so little changed then?"

"Indeed, ma'am, and I would!"

The girl spoke honestly; flattery had become second nature to her, and she believed every word of it.

Mrs. Lambert drew a soft, deep breath; she had lost faith in her own judgment, and it was pleasant to have her doubts swept away, even by the opinion of a menial. She drew on her gloves, and took up her fan, with a bouquet of tea-roses that old Storms had sent up.

"Madam, are you ready?"

"Yes, Ivon."

The young man stepped into the room with an exclamation of surprise at his step-mother's beauty. The admiration was genuine; Mrs. Lambert's eyes kindled under it, and a warm blush swept across her face.

"It is because you love me, Ivon."

"No, it is because I cannot help thinking you the loveliest woman in society. I never saw but one——"

The young man broke off, blushing more vividly than his mother had done.

"Well, that one, Ivon?" said the lady, with shadows gathering upon her face. "Surely, you cannot mean——"

"But I do, mother; to me there is only one other—but we will not speak of her. The carriage is waiting."

Mrs. Lambert allowed Ellen to wrap her in a soft, white opera cloak, and bent her head for a cloud of zephyr worsted, that fell as light as snow upon it. At another time, she might have felt angry with Ivon for his mention of a girl she repudiated. But now she was self-occupied, and scarcely heeded it; so, wrapping the snow-white mantle around her, she descended to the carriage, with a feeling of anxiety which had not possessed her for years.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A STRANGE PROPOSAL.

AN hour before Mrs. Lambert commenced her toilet, Mrs. Carter entered her own private sitting-room in full dress, ready for her duties as a hostess. Her brother had sent up word that he wished to speak with her before the guests began to arrive, and she was waiting for him with some impatience, for the grand epoch was drawing nigh, and she was rather anxious about the state of affairs below. She was fanning herself with vigor, wondering in her heart what Ross could have to say, when the artist came in.

Then all the good woman's impatience vanished, and she came forward to meet him with her usual genial warmth.

"Now, what is it you want to say, Ross? Of course, whatever it is, I am ready to do it; but we must talk fast, or there's no knowing what will go on down stairs."

"Let your people take care of that, sister, they will know what is proper," said Ross, smiling kindly upon the good woman, who laughed in return.

"You see I did not wear them after all; just a little cluster here, to gather in the black lace—that don't amount to anything, you know."

Here Mrs. Carter glanced down at her silver-grey satin and soft black lace with something like a sigh. It was not at all the toilet she had decided on, but Ross, with suggestive insinuations, had toned down the superb conglomeration of lace, satin and jewels, into this rich, matronly dress, which really made Mrs. Carter look almost aristocratic.

"Nothing could be more becoming," said Ross, in reply to her half-reproachful glance, "I am so pleased that you preferred to wear the lace I brought you. As for the brooch, it is just enough."

"Well, dear, if you think so; Carter rather wanted me to flare out a little more, but, of course, you know best. Now, what is it you want to talk about? Sit down here, and let us take it comfortable."

Ross seated himself upon the couch from which Mrs. Carter swept back her garments to make room for him.

"Sister," he said, with a faint quiver in his voice, "I have been thinking that you and I would be much happier in this great house, if we had some young person to enliven it."

Mrs. Carter drew back in her seat, and lifted both hands.

"Herman Ross, *does* this mean that you want to marry a young wife?"

Ross smiled and shook his head.

"No, sister, I have no thought of marrying any one; but I do think of adopting a girl, and want you to help me."

"Adopting a girl? Why, Ross, that is just what I have been thinking of myself—a pretty, little, curly-headed child, like one that's in her grave. Of course, I'll help you; more than that, I'll do it for you—she shall be mine and Carter's heiress."

"I was thinking of one who shall be my heiress," said Ross, gently. "I cannot give her millions, but there will be enough for us both."

"Thinking of one—why, who can it be, Ross? I had no idea of your taking a fancy to any child."

"Nor have I, this is a young lady."

"You? You, Ross? A young lady?"

"Yes, I will adopt her; all that I have or may have, shall, in the end, be hers. What I want of you, sister, is motherly protection for the girl. You will not refuse her a home?"

"Refuse her! When did I refuse you anything? But a girl—a young lady—I don't understand. Is it any one I know?"

"You have seen her. You remember the young lady who helped select your shawl—Miss Eva Laurence?"

"That splendid creature! You adopt her?"

"Yes, I will adopt her; in fact, you must do it for me if possible."

"And she is to live here?"

"That is what I desire."

"As my daughter?"

"Would you be ashamed of her?"

"Ashamed? Why you and I can make her like a princess. She can go out with me in the carriage, write my letters, make calls. She shall have a maid of her own—shopping money without end."

"There, there, sister, your heart is running away with you. We must be kind to the girl without spoiling her. She is a sweet, modest young creature, rich in feeling and bright as a flower. Let us keep her so."

"Of course—of course! Carter will be delighted. He does so like a pretty face, and hers is lovely."

"But he may not consent?"

"He? Of course he will! All she's got to do with Carter is to have his slippers ready, and read the newspaper for him, now and then; for, between you and me, Carter is not much of a reader, on his own hook. Oh, he's sure to like it!"

Ross leaned forward and kissed the flushed cheeks, which had become rosier and rosier, with the warmth of a generous nature.

"Then we will consider it settled," he said. "I mentioned it just now, because this evening will be an excellent time for introducing her as a friend of the family. That was a part of my idea, when I asked you to invite her."

"This evening? Well, why not, she can help me receive. It will be splendid. I only hope she will be dressed properly—that is, like the heiress we intend her to be."

"We need not doubt that—now I will go for her."

"And I'll just step down and have a talk with Carter about it."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE WAY SHE MANAGED HIM.

Ross and his sister parted; she went into her husband's room, and found him in the agony of putting on a new dress coat, rather too small, and which fitted him like a straight jacket.

"Mrs. Carter—Mrs. Carter, just come and give this skirt a pull, won't you? I feel as if corked up in a junk-bottle. Confound all your parties, and everything else that takes a fellow out of his frock-coat!"

"Why, Carter, dear, it's a lovely fit. Of course you must expect to be tightened up a little at such a time. Only look at me, would you ever have believed my waist could have been brought down to that, yet I don't complain. There are things, Carter, for which we must suffer."

Carter wiped his red face with a towel, there being nothing else convenient, at which his wife cried out, "Why, Carter!" and ran to a drawer, from which she brought a handkerchief of the finest linen, with an embroidered monogram in the corner. Over this she dashed a liberal quantity of perfume from a scent-bottle, which she shook as if it had been a pepper-box. Then she brought out a point lace barb, parted over a white, silk cravat, which she tied around his stout, red neck, leaving a kiss on his cheek when it was arranged to suit her.

All this had its effect. In spite of his coat, Carter softened and became amiable. His hair had been nicely curled at the ends, a thing he had submitted to for the first time in his life, but, on the whole, rather liked. The diamond studs in his bosom glittered like fire-flies, and his watch-chain coiled down his white vest like a golden serpent hiding its head in his pocket.

"Now, my dear," said Mrs. Carter, "just stand back and let me look at you."

"Well, Mrs. Carter, what have you got to say about it?"

Here Mr. Carter put a thumb into each armhole of his white vest, and posed himself superbly.

Mrs. Carter took a general observation, drew nearer, smoothed the sleeves of his coat with her plump hand, and observed that better-looking men might be found in the great city of New York, but she had never set eyes on them. At which Carter, being a little doubtful of himself, blushed rosily, and attempted a dancing step, which proved an ignominious failure, his boots being as tight as his coat.

"My dear," said Mrs. Carter, busying her hands with

the neck-tie again. "Do you know I've been thinking of a pleasant surprise for you—a *very* pleasant surprise?"

"Indeed, Mrs. Carter, you have given me one in this party, which I shan't get over in six months. What is it to be this time?"

"A daughter—a full-grown, lovely daughter. What do you think of that?"

"A full-grown, lovely daughter, Mrs. Carter? Well, I think you are in want of a straight jacket more than I am, and, after the party, this coat shall be made over to you."

"But I am in earnest, husband!"

"So am I, wife, so much in earnest that I shouldn't mind giving up the coat now."

"We have often talked of adopting a little girl since you know when."

"A flush came around Carter's eyes—he turned away from his wife.

"It would be a trouble to bring one up, you know, dear. Now supposing that done, and a girl came naturally into the family about the age *she* might have been, wouldn't you rather like it?"

"I haven't thought about it, wife, have you?"

"Yes, Carter, and you'll see this girl to-night. I've given you the idea, when you've seen her, just say if she won't be like a sunbeam in the house?"

"Like a what?" exclaimed Mr. Carter.

Mrs. Carter blushed and fanned herself nervously.

"It isn't my idea, Carter; I found it in a magazine story, and remembered it because it was so original."

"Let that go. If the girl was like a sunbeam, she'd never get into our house, for fear of spoiling the carpets. You'd be the first to shut her out, old woman!"

"Old woman! I don't like that, Carter. Look at me with your own eyes, from head to foot, and say if you are not ashamed of yourself?"

"Look at you? Well, I'm a doing it; but what on earth have you done with all them things from Ball & Black's? So far, I haven't seen nothing but the bills. I thought you wanted to cut a shine with them to-night."

"Well, so I did, but Ross thought I'd better not. You know, Carter, that beauty unadorned looks better than overloading."

"Oh!" said Carter, "at the magazines again."

"Ross thinks so, at any rate, so I made myself simple but elegant. Don't you think so?"

"Well, I don't know about that, Rebecca, but you're an all-fired good-looking woman, any how!"

"Oh, Mr. Carter! all-fired, and just as people are coming."

"But it's only between ourselves, Beccy."

"But you might——"

"No, I mightn't. What is it, Jacob?"

"Mr. Ross has come, sir, with the young lady, and wants to know if he shall bring her up."

"Yes," answered Carter, after a moment's hesitation, during which he was fitting on a cream-colored glove, with all his might. "Take her into Mrs. Carter's boudoir. We'll be there in no time."

Jacob went out, and his master tugged away at the second glove, which refused to meet at the wrist.

"Mrs. Carter, *will* you give a little attention? This confounded button."

"Yes, my dear, I know what it is, having suffered. There."

The glove was closed so tightly that Carter's wrist began to swell above it, but the spirit of martyrdom was upon him, and he marched out of his room without a word of complaint, resolving to perform his social duties to the uttermost.

Eva Laurence was standing near the window of that

sumptuous little room. Her eyes had just fallen on Ruthy's pictures, framed in an exquisite net-work of gold, and the pleasant surprise brightened her face with a smile that made Carter hold his breath.

"This is the young lady," said Mrs. Carter, going up to Eva with a cordial welcome in her face. "Miss Laurence, you have never seen my husband, but he has come to make your acquaintance."

Eva turned and saw a rather stout and well-formed man coming toward her, with his hand extended.

"Delighted to see you, Miss—make yourself at home, and welcome." Eva, grateful for the warmth of his greeting, laid her hand in his.

"You are very kind," she said, modestly; "but Mr. Ross told me I could expect nothing that was not pleasant here."

"Mr. Ross shall promise nothing for us that we will not perform," answered the host, blandly.

"My dear, that is a carriage—give me your arm. Ross, take care of Miss Eva. Dear me, there is a party going up to the dressing-room. What if we meet them!—oh, the back stairs. They are a little dark, but I'll go first. Carter, take care of my train. Ah, this is something like!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A GLIMPSE OF FAIRY LAND.

No wonder Mrs. Carter gave voice to her admiration. While she was in her dressing-room, chandeliers and wax-lights enough to turn night into noonday, had been kindled down the vista of three splendid rooms, separated from each other only by rich, flowing draperies of silk and lace, vary-

ing and yet harmonious in their colors, as tints melt into each other on a sunset cloud.

In the far distance came the soft glow of milky amber, stealing through transparent under-draperies, and throwing a warm tinge over the pale sea-green of the middle room. Here all the frescoes were delicate and subdued. Flowers seemed to have cast their shadows on the ceilings; the carpets were like snow, in which blossoms, in rich combinations, were sinking. There all was delicate, artistic and suggestive. Marble Floras, half the size of life, with one arm full of roses, held back the draperies which fell tent-like between the rooms. Adown the inner lace-folds, flowers were so arranged that they seemed floating in frosty air.

At each window the same effect was produced. At one a crouching Venus half hid herself in the snow-fall of the curtains; at another, some dancing-girl peeped roguishly out, as if looking for a partner.

All this revealed by rainbows of light trembling down from the cut-glass chandeliers, formed a picture which fairly dazzled Eva Laurence, who stood in the crimson light of the back room, lost and wondering, herself, unconsciously, the most beautiful object present.

Ross, whose genius had created all this, looked on her smiling. Never had his rare gifts wrought out greater happiness to himself. It was like leading this young girl into a paradise of his own creation; one, too, in which he resolved that she should remain all her life, if it so pleased her.

Mrs. Carter gave one glance at the rooms, another to make sure that they were still unoccupied, and flung her arms about Ross, kissing him on both cheeks.

"Let them search, let them say what they please, they'll find nothing like shoddy here," she said, triumphantly.

Mrs. Carter was right. Never was the union of wealth

and genius more perfect in its work. The guests were taken by surprise. Those who came with covert sneers, forgot criticism in admiration. Everything was splendid, everything complete.

A legion of fairies could have devised nothing more perfect. Nor was the effect diminished when the host and hostess took their places; both were observant, subdued and careful. Many of their guests had become suddenly rich like themselves. The war, in its fearful levelization, had given them plenty of company.

If anything, Mrs. Carter was a little over zealous in her hospitality. She presented Eva Laurence sometimes more than once to the same guest. She was rather ostentatious of her brother, but people were prepared to like him and forgave that.

The crowd grew denser and more brilliant as the evening wore on; diamonds shamed the light from the chandeliers; the glow of rich colors became almost oppressive. The crowd scattered itself across the broad hall and into the rooms beyond. In one there was dancing and such music as makes the blood leap and thrill in young veins. Another closed in the supper-tables, where servants were still at work like bees in a flower-garden. The hum of sweet voices, the chime of suppressed laughter, the flash of some witty reply gave zest and piquancy to the scene.

At first Eva was half-frightened. She felt like a bird fluttering in a gilded cage. The scene was unlike anything she had ever witnessed, and her own share in it seemed like a fraud. More than once she was presented to the very persons who had commanded her services at the warerooms. Some of the lace floating around those superb dresses had passed through her hands. She felt keenly the look of surprise with which she was occasionally regarded, and wished herself at home.

"What can it mean?" "Is she a relative?" "How

strange!" Eva heard these low-toned observations frequently; her sensitive ear was keenly on the alert for them. She felt alone in that wilderness of people.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FIGHTING ANGUISH.

AMONG the last of the guests was Mrs. Lambert, with Ivon and Miss Spicer. The lady had lost something of her usual graceful repose, and her eyes shone excitedly under the light of her clustering diamonds.

Ross was speaking in a low voice to Eva when this lady came up to pay her respects to the hostess. An expression of tender interest was on his face, and the girl answered it with a grateful smile. The woman's heart stopped beating; a deadly faintness seized upon her. For a moment she went blind; voices greeted her on all sides; she could not move through a throng like that without pausing every moment to receive the homage of her satellites. But this evening she passed on, hearing nothing, seeing nothing but those two faces.

Still the habit of society was upon its queen. Her salutations had their usual grace, she spoke blandly to the hostess and the host, bent her head to Ross, and ignored Eva utterly.

The girl blushed, and felt the pain of coming tears, for Ivon Lambert was with his mother. Would he too repudiate her.

No, the young man bent before her as if she had been a princess, and would have spoken, but Mrs. Lambert, who leaned on his arm, turned abruptly away. He felt the shiver that ran through her frame, and saw the diamonds

on her bosom heave and fall, as if she panted for breath. Others noticed how pale she was, and detected the delicate shade of rouge, thrown into relief by that pallor—a thing they had never dreamed of before.

Ivon led the lady to a sofa, around which her friends thronged, full of anxious inquiries, each concealing a compliment.

"It was nothing," the lady said, her foot had slipped in getting out of the carriage, and gave her pain for a moment. That was all.

This really seemed to be true. The lady had a strong will and indomitable pride. The blood came back to her face fresh and vivid, her eyes grew bright as stars. She, who seldom went beyond a smile, laughed now a low, sweet laugh, that penetrated the crowd with an under cadence that thrilled it. No young girl ever felt the storm of jealousy like that. The maturity of passion was there, breaking through all power of concealment.

The crowd did not care to search for the cause of this brilliant animation, or some one there might have read that proud heart, in all its fire and pain, and she could not have helped it. As it was, her lips had never been so eloquent, her figure so gracefully impressive. The circle around her was lost in admiration.

Miss Spicer seized upon young Lambert in her usual abrupt fashion.

"Come!" she said, "madame has no need of us, she has become a fixed star, and I'm tired to death of revolving. Mrs. Carter has got to introduce me to the great genius. Everybody says he is so charming, so distinguished and inaccessible—none of the girls can get a smile from him; but I shall, you may bet high on that!"

Ivon suffered himself to be dragged back to the great drawing-room; for he hoped now to speak with Eva; but just as he reached the place where she had been standing,

Ross led her into the crowd. Miss Spicer saw her intended prey move off, and began to reproach Ivon.

"There he goes! and that creature on his arm! I wonder if he wants a shawl tried on. Such innovations! As if the Carters hadn't enough of a pull to get themselves into society, but they must attempt to empty Broadway of its shop-girls!"

By this time Miss Spicer was near the hostess, whom she addressed with vigor.

"Mrs. Carter, I have got such a quarrel with you. When am I to be introduced to that brother of yours? Can't you see that I'm half in love with him already; a dozen of us quarreling which shall be first—genius is so uncommon and so enticing. Is it true, Mrs. Carter, that you mean to give him lots of money? People say so; but that's of no consequence to such of us as can afford to do as we please—for genius, after all, isn't half so common as money. But when am I to be introduced?"

"Oh!" said Mrs. Carter, delighted. "If you had only come a minute sooner! He just went away with Miss Laurence."

"Oh, yes! I saw it. That shop-girl—I beg ten thousand pardons! but truth is truth—has carried him off! Now tell me, how did she happen to get here? Lots of us girls are dying to know."

Mrs. Carter drew herself up with some degree of dignity.

"If you speak of Miss Laurence," she said, "her father was my brother's old friend."

"An old friend? Why, he was nothing but a policeman. I have taken pains to inquire."

"Still he was an honest and honorable man."

"Every inch of him," said Carter, stoutly. "My roof covers no better man to-night."

"As for the young lady," joined in Mrs. Carter, taking fresh courage, "she is likely to become nearer to us than a friend. Isn't that so, Mr. Carter?"

Carter hesitated a moment, feeling as if his wife had entrapped him into a premature compliance with her wishes; but he spoke at last, resolutely enough.

"Yes, Mrs. C., there is no harm in saying that, if Ross stands his chance for a share of my property, the young lady will enjoy it equally with him."

Miss Spicer pursed up her lips till they almost emitted a whistle.

"So, that's the way the wind blows," she said. "Wont it be fun to tell the girls!"

"Miss Spicer, we are keeping Mrs. Carter's guests from her," said Ivon, observing a couple fighting their way through the crowd.

"Just like me, always in somebody's path!" exclaimed the girl, drawing back, but still keeping near the hostess. "Mercy on me! who are those people? Stupendous! Do look!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

MR. AND MRS. SMITH.

THE two people were Mr. and Mrs. Smith, she in the glory and amplitude of her *moire antique*, with the yellow feather in her hair—an addition Kate Gorman had insisted on with spirit, declaring that no mistress of hers was to be put down by them Laurence girls while she was to the fore.

So with her feather all afloat, and her dress sweeping out gorgeously, Mrs. Smith came up and dropped a voluminous curtsy before her old friend, who stooped down, like a queen, and, with both hands, lifted the grocer's wife out of the depths of her obeisance. Then Carter and Smith shook hands, and said, "How do you do?" with solemn gravity, while their wives dropped into conversation about the

children at home; and Miss Spicer hovered near, taking venomous mental notes.

"Oh, my! this is fun alive!" said the young lady. "I only wish your mother had been here to see that curtsy. Wasn't it sublime? I've seen girls making cheeses before this, but a grown woman, and stout at that, is excruciating! Do take me away, Ivon, or I shall do something dreadful!"

Young Lambert gladly led the girl back to his mother, who still occupied her place on the sofa, and had increased her circle of admirers. Miss Spicer took a vacant place by her friend, who was talking brilliantly.

"Oh, Mrs. Lambert, do stop one minute, and hear what I've got to tell you," whispered the young lady, impatient to impart her news.

Mrs. Lambert turned from the gay throng around her and listened.

"He is going to marry her!"

"He? Who?"

The color left Mrs. Lambert's lips as she asked the question, and a cold shiver ran over her.

"Who? Why Ross, the genius—Mrs. Carter's brother. He is going to marry that Laurence girl. Mrs. Carter told me so herself."

"She told you so?"

The woman's voice was low and hoarse; those who had listened to her a minute before would not have known it.

"Yes, and her husband repeated it; he is going to give them all his money in the end. Isn't it disgusting!"

"Did they tell you this?"

"Indeed they did. He is with her now. I saw them going toward the dancing-room."

Mrs. Lambert arose, took the arm of a gentleman nearest her, and moved toward the dancers. She did not speak, could not, in fact, for a band seemed tightening about her throat.

Over the black-walnut floor, with its mosaic border of satin-wood circling the room a yard deep, a maze of dancers were whirling in and out, swaying gracefully to the music, as young trees bend to the wind. Among them was Ross and Eva Laurence, her hand was upon his shoulder, his arm circled her waist, yet scarcely touched it. He was still in the prime of manly beauty, and the girl was loveliness itself. She was dancing with all the spirit and grace of one to whom the exercise was a delightful novelty; and he seemed to feel the glow of her happiness in every nerve of his body. When they rested, he stooped over her lovingly, and smiled as she lifted her eyes to his. If ever exquisite tenderness softened a human face, the woman who watched his so eagerly, saw it there.

Oh! how she hated that girl! With what bitter despair she gazed on the man.

A sort of fascination possessed Mrs. Lambert; she lingered in the room, and seemed absorbed by a scene that had long since ceased to interest her; but her observation was fixed on one couple; she saw every look, watched every motion with a strange gleam in her eyes, and an ominous compression of her lips.

At last the music ceased, and Ross was leading his partner to a seat, when Ivon Lambert came up and claimed her. Then her face changed like a rose suddenly struck by the sunshine; a delicate glow swept over it; her eyes drooped when his hand touched her waist; she leaned toward him as a flower bends on its stalk.

Mrs. Lambert saw this and drew a deep breath. "Youth," she whispered to herself, "turns to youth. I will not believe it."

Mrs. Lambert turned and saw that Ross stood beside her. She drew her hand from the gentleman who had led her to the room, bent her head in dismissal, and touched Ross upon the arm.

Did he shrink, or was that a thrill of pleasure that followed her touch? She would have given the world to know. Her hand grew bolder and laid itself on his arm. He yielded to its pressure, and moved away.

In a wing of the mansion was a conservatory full of flowering plants, and lighted with lamps that swung to and fro among the flowers, like mammoth pearls all on fire. Towards this place Mrs. Lambert led her companion.

CHAPTER XL.

OLD LOVERS.

THEY stood under the shade of a tall drooping tree, starred with soft, yellow blossoms, that rose out of a little jungle of tropical plants in one end of the conservatory. Around them was the soft glow of moonlight, literally shed from alabaster lamps.

From the distance came subdued bursts of music, and close by a fountain sent its diamond drops through the neighboring blossoms, and their bell-like tinkle sounded clear and silvery as they fell upon the tessellated marble of the floor.

Of all places on earth, this was the brightest for a meeting of lovers. But these two persons had grey hairs upon their temples, and a look of such unutterable pain in their faces that all this perfume, and the musical fall of water-drops, seemed but a mockery of something that had been.

"You wished to speak with me," said Herman Ross in a low, sad voice. "I think we are alone here."

"Yes, Herman!"

The man started. Something in the tone of Mrs. Lambert's voice, as she uttered the name, sent a pang through his whole system. Still he seemed calm, and his voice changed but little when he spoke again.

"Is there anything you wish to tell me?"

Ross asked this question earnestly, and his eyes dwelt on the troubled face of the woman with almost imploring earnestness.

"Anything I wish to tell?" repeated the lady, with a startled look. "What could I have, that you do not already know? I—I wished rather to ask a question?"

"Well, I am here and have nothing to conceal."

"Ah! how coldly you speak, Herman!"

"How else should I speak, Mrs. Lambert?"

"I do not know—I ought not to care; but I do—I do!"

The woman spoke with anguish; she did not weep, but there was something more thrilling than tears in her voice.

"There was a time when I believed you," said Ross.

"That was when I had a right to ask. Then you would have believed me against the world."

"Yes, I would have believed you against the whole world."

"But now——"

"Now I believe nothing, without proof."

"But I will believe you, asking no better proof than your bare word."

"In what?"

The woman hesitated. In her first passion she had thought it an easy thing to question him; but his chilling calm daunted her.

"Herman, tell me, and, oh! let it be truth! Do you love that girl?"

The woman clasped her hands, and wrung them together as she spoke. Ross looked at her a moment in grave silence.

"I suppose you mean Miss Laurence."

"Yes, I mean her."

"You ask if I love her?"

"Yes, yes! Oh, tell me!"

Ross paused a moment, but he did not remove his eyes from the woman's face.

"Will you never speak?" she cried, passionately.

"You ask if I love this girl, and I answer. Is there any reason against it?"

"You do! You do! And almost confess it to me?"

"To you, above all other persons, I deny any right to question me."

"Right! I have no rights; only it would be merciful if you would set my mind at rest."

"But I do not wish to answer."

"Oh, God help me! This is hard!" cried the woman, looking wildly around, as if a power of help lay in the beautiful shrubs.

"Is this conscience?" said Ross, bending his eyes sternly upon her.

"Conscience! Conscience!"

"Madam, once for all, if you have anything to confess——"

"To confess!"

Mrs. Lambert's face was white as snow; her lips grew cold, and her voice failed.

"Confess, or confide. I am willing to use the softer term," answered Ross, touched, in spite of himself, by those contracted features.

"But I have nothing to confess, or confide—nothing!"

Ross turned away, bitterly disappointed. Something he had evidently hoped to learn from the lady, which she either did not understand, or purposely avoided.

"I ask you a question, vital to us both, and you refuse to answer," said the lady, still clasping her hands, where the jewels shone, and cut into the tender flesh unnoticed, in her agony of impatience.

"First," said Ross, sternly, "I will ask you a question."

"Then, you will answer mine? Ask it! Ask it!" cried the lady.

Ross gave a glance around, as if fearing that they were not quite alone, then he took the woman's two hands in his, drew her, not unwillingly, toward him, and whispered a few words. She uttered a low cry, wrung her hands from his clasp, and stood mute and pale, gazing on him with a wild gleam in her eyes, that shone like madness.

"Are you mad, or am I?" she exclaimed at last, pressing both trembling hands on her bosom.

"The time of madness for me has long since passed," said Ross; "but you have not answered my question."

"Answered your question! No, then! No, no! A thousand times no! I—I——"

Here the lady fell to trembling violently; for there was a look of unbelief in the man's face, that struck her to the heart, and he turned to leave her in silence. Then the old idea shot through her brain, and she approached him closer.

"I have answered you. Now answer me. Do you love this girl, Eva Laurence!"

"Yes!"

Ross spoke in a low distinct voice, which scarcely rose above the fall of water-drops in the fountain; but it seemed to fill the whole conservatory. The flowers, the water, and the moon-like lamps, had heard it with herself, and seemed to rejoice over it—triumph over her. The last hope went out from her heart then, and she believed herself to be dying.

CHAPTER XLI.

IVON AND EVA.

A HANDSOMER couple than Ivon Lambert and Eva Laurence never measured perfect happiness to music. Tall, graceful, thrilled with a glow of unspoken love, they fairly

floated through the ball-room, which was soon crowded with a circle of curious admirers.

The beauty of this unknown girl had created a wide sensation among Mr. Carter's guests—a sensation intensified by the hints and jeers flung out by Miss Spicer, who felt herself relieved of a rival, and, next to conquest, loved that species of piquant gossip that approaches a scandal. That young lady had been busy as a humming-bird, in a wild trumpet vine, circulating all that she knew of Eva Laurence—her origin, her occupation, and her engagement to the greatest genius just then in fashion.

All this time Eva, unconscious of the general interest, was dancing more than was proper for a betrothed young lady, with Ivon Lambert.

Who was this girl? Was she really engaged? Had she, in fact, on her very first appearance, enthralled the two men most sought after in fashionable circles? A shop-girl, with that air of grace and refinement? Impossible! That, at least, must be one of Miss Spicer's canards. Why, in every respect, this girl had all the qualifications of a Reigning Belle.

These were only a few of the whispered comments that went around the circle, as these young people moved harmoniously among the dancers, unconscious of the general attention bestowed upon them.

In the pause of the dance, Ivon noticed the cluster of flowers that bloomed upon his partner's bosom. Eva blushed when she saw where his eyes were directed.

"You accepted them," he said, with a smile, "without knowing how many wild thoughts were bound up with the blossoms. Had you dreamed of those thoughts, I fear my violets would not have rested on that bosom now."

Eva looked down at her flowers, that rose and fell suddenly, as if they had been cast on the snowy crest of a wave, then she lifted her eyes to his—a single glance, and the white lids drooped again.

Ivon smiled, and his eyes flashed. He required no better answer than that one look. His arm stole around her waist again. Now the thrill of assured sympathy lent them wings. No two birds in mid heaven were ever more alone, or gave themselves up so entirely to the grace of motion. They seemed literally floating on the music.

When the band stopped, Eva drew a deep, deep sigh—the abrupt silence dragged her out of heaven so suddenly.

Earlier in the evening Ivon had seen the glow of flowers, amid softly-shaded lamps, in a vista, from the great drawing-room, and led Eva gently that way. As for the girl, the whole scene was fairy-land to her, and all places alike, while he was by her side. She was quite unconscious of the admiration, the gossip, and conjectures that followed her, as she was led through the crowd; equally unmindful of the vast social distance which lay between her position, and that of the young man whose attentions had drawn all eyes upon her.

Adam never led Eve into a lovelier nook of Paradise, than the little world of flowers in which the girl at last found herself. Everything was quiet there, even the soft tinkle and low, mellow sound of water drops, as they rained over the marble floor, and pattered on the broad-leaved plants that floated on the fountain.

The two stood together in silence. The sound of a voice, even in its lowest love-tones, would have broken up the exquisite harmony of the place. Her hand lay upon his arm; he took it in his own, and held it tenderly, as if it had been a flower, and looked into her downcast face, which had been etherealized in the lamp light.

"Eva!"

His voice was low and deep, scarcely rising above the sweet noise of the fountain.

Eva looked up suddenly; then her eyes fell to the marble floor, where the red petals of an over-ripe rose had dropped and lay glowing like rubies.

"Eva, can you imagine—have you ever dreamed how much I love you?"

Her hand trembled in his. She caught one of the red rose-leaves, as it was quivering downward, and dropped it again, with a sigh of infinite happiness. Another leaf lodged upon her lip, and for an instant trembled there, scarcely redder or sweeter than the mouth it touched. Ivan stooped down, and with his lips gathered the leaf from hers. She made no resistance; but drew closer to him, and the clasp of her fingers grew warm and tender.

"One word, Eva; only one. May I love you?"

She lifted her eyes to his. The light of stars seemed quivering in them.

"How can you ask me? Have I not permitted it already?"

The young man drew her gently to his bosom, and laid his cheek to hers, as doves creep together in a nest.

"And you love me?"

"A thousand times better than myself," she answered.

"And some day, not long from this, you will be my wife?"

CHAPTER XLII.

A WOMAN TRANSFIGURED.

His wife. Eva had not thought of that. It had been enough that he loved her, and she loved him. Now an idea of the future flashed through her happiness, and she remembered how far they two were apart. His wife! The holy word thrilled her from head to foot with unutterable bliss, mingled with apprehension.

"Ah!" she said, "what a strange, sweet word it is. How much it means; how impossible that I should bear it."

"It is the sweetest possibility on earth, my Eva; one that I have had in my heart of hearts since we first met."

"How strange," murmured the girl. "But you are so fearless. I never dared look so far."

"But now, my girl, now!"

Ivon threw his arms around her drooping figure, and kissed her with passionate warmth.

A woman had been lying insensible back of a little jungle of broad-leaved tropical plants, out of which a slender tree rose to the glass roof. The coldness of the marble, and some stray drops that reached her from the fountain, brought her back to life, when she heard the low murmur of voices close by, and arose to leave the conservatory.

The place where Ivon and Eva stood was sheltered from sight by the plants that concealed this lady; but through the leaves she saw the girl's face, bathed in blushes, as it escaped from the first kisses of love—and the look of intense happiness that flushed it, stung her to the soul. One man alone was in her thoughts, and his supposed presence there, while she lay stricken lifeless, by the cruel truth he had told her, was maddening.

A stir among the plants drew Eva's attention that way. She saw a pair of white arms flung upward, on which great jewels flashed in the moonlight of the lamps, and shrunk away from Ivon, passing to the other side of the fountain, startled and ashamed.

Before Ivon could speak or follow her, Mrs. Lambert rushed by the fountain, and, seizing Eva by the arm, looked fiercely into her face.

"Never, never, while you and I live, shall you marry that man! Girl, remember that I have warned you! Speak to him—look at him again at your peril! Some things are impossible—this is one. Turn those eyes from my face—never dare to look at me again."

Like a storm, the woman had burst upon Eva; her face

was as white as snow; her colorless lips trembled. The diamonds quivering with fire on her throat and head, were less brilliant than her wild, fierce eyes. Before Eva could speak, or Ivan move, she had swept out of the conservatory, without casting a look on the young man.

"It—it is your mother!" said Eva, as Ivon came toward her; so astonished by this outburst in a woman whose self-control had been perfect all the years he had known her, that surprise had kept him motionless.

"Yes," he said, "it is my mother; but so changed, so fearfully transfigured, that I scarcely recognized her. She seemed to threaten you."

"She did threaten me; her eyes were fierce with hate. What have I done that she should assail me so?"

"What have the angels done? I do not understand this, Eva. It is unlike Mrs. Lambert, who is usually so proud and cold, scarcely deigning to express her own wishes."

"She heard all we said, and it drove her wild. Oh, her face was terrible!"

"I scarcely knew it. If she heard all, it was the suddenness that overwhelmed her. But she is generous. When you are my wife——"

"Ah!" said Eva, drawing away from him. "How is it possible? I have no right here."

"Why have you no right, Eva?"

"The poor have no rights in a place like this," answered the girl, looking wildly around. "I have been dreaming!"

"It will be your fault, and my eternal misfortune, if this dream does not last for life," said Ivon.

Eva shook her head. Her brief trance of happiness was broken up.

"But I will have it so," persisted Ivon, passionately. "On all the earth there is not another woman who shall be my wife."

"Let us go now," answered Eva, sadly. "Your mother

will be watching. I should have remembered her look, when she first saw me standing by Mrs. Carter."

"But for that I might not have said here and now, that no man living ever loved a woman as I love you," said Ivon.

Eva lifted her eyes; they were full of tears.

"I shall never forget that you wished to atone for her injustice."

"Atone! Girl, I love you devotedly, madly. She knows it. I have told her so. And you love me."

Eva dashed the tears from her eyes.

"Yes, I love you so well that nothing shall induce me to degrade you, by an unsuitable or unauthorized marriage. Your mother——"

"My mother is dead long ago! This lady was my father's wife; kind and generous as any real mother could be, till now. I have never wished to dispute her authority; but here it must end!"

"To that, no act of mine shall tempt you," said Eva. "I see now how vain and unwise it was to accept this invitation."

"Oh, Eva, how wild and unkind all this is! A moment ago I was supremely happy. Now the violence of a lady, who has, in fact, no authority over us, is enough to turn you against me."

"No," said Eva, "if she had not aroused me with such cruel violence, it must have come to the same thing. I have no part in this scene, no place among the more fortunate women who grace it."

"But you have a place in my heart, Eva."

"I know it; but that is a misfortune which I have brought upon you."

"A misfortune! It is my glory. Understand me, Eva. From this night, you are my betrothed wife. Nothing shall separate us; no, not even your own proud will."

Eva smiled, but the smile was more pathetic than tears.

"Ah, if my will were all!"

"That, going with me, girl, no power on earth shall reach us."

His courage and his ardor failed to inspire her. She had been cruelly wounded, and the pride she was scarcely conscious of, armed her against him.

"Let me go now," she said, preparing to leave the conservatory.

"Not till you have promised; not till your dear lips have once answered mine," he replied, straining her to his bosom again, spite of her breathless protest. "Leave everything to me. Have no fear that your womanly dignity will suffer, or that I shall yield one jot of the independence that belongs to me."

Eva had no heart to answer. She withdrew herself gently from his arms, and moved toward the door, pale and trembling; for, to her, it was a final parting. He followed her haughty and resolute.

CHAPTER XLIII.

HERSELF AGAIN.

Eva took refuge with Mrs. Carter, who still maintained her post in the drawing-room.

"Are you tired, Eva? Has anything happened to distress you?"

Eva turned, and saw Mr. Ross, whose low, fatherly voice was like a balm to her wounded self-love.

"I am a little tired, and all this bewilders me," Eva replied, lifting her troubled eyes to his. "Ah, Mr. Ross, I have no real place here."

"That is to be decided," said Ross. "Come with me to the supper-room. A glass of wine will do no harm here."

Ross was about to lead her away, when she uttered a faint exclamation, and clung nervously to his arm. Mrs. Lambert was making her way toward the hostess, and the very sight of her sent the proud blood to Eva's cheek.

Proud, graceful, and entirely herself again, Mrs. Lambert swept up to Mrs. Carter. She had drained more than one glass of champagne, at the supper-table, where the sparkle of her wit, and the hitherto unknown sound of her laughter, had entranced and dazzled her admirers.

"Never," they all said, "had the queen of fashion shone out with such wonderful splendor. Something must have inspired her."

Something had inspired her, more potent than admiration, more fiery than wine; the burning pangs of jealousy, added to a cruel defeat, where she had staked her very soul.

Smiling, bland, and wonderfully beautiful, she came up to say farewell. Ross did not attempt to retreat, but waited her approach with dignified calmness. He felt Eva's hand tremble on his arm, but could not comprehend the cause.

Mrs. Lambert did not attempt to ignore the girl then, but passed from the hostess, and took leave of her with ironical politeness, which was extended to Ross, who received it with a grave bow. For once in many years the lady had given way to overwhelming passion; but her will was strong, and habit aided her in concealing the pangs that had stricken her lifeless in the conservatory.

But the restraint she had forced upon herself was beyond endurance. She neither waited for Ivon or Miss Spicer, but accepted the first offered arm, went through the ceremony of leave-taking with fortitude, though the two persons she most loved and hated, stood by the hostess, and gayly bade good-night to her escort, as she entered her carriage.

When once alone, the passions, so long held in restraint,

broke forth vehemently. The woman wrung her hands, fell upon her knees, and, burying her face in the silken cushions of her carriage, sobbed, moaned, and writhed, with a force of anguish that threatened her very life.

Meantime, Miss Spicer had found Ivon in the crowd and captured him at once.

"Where on earth is Mrs. Lambert? I have been searching and searching for her. She was at the supper-table one minute; but before I could fight my way to her, she was gone. One might as well have no chaperon at all, as wander about in this wild fashion."

"We shall soon find my mother," said Ivon.

"Yes, by the crowd that surrounds her. I wonder if she will ever give up her place as a reigning belle? It looks to-night as if that shop-girl were going to step in! Ten thousand pardons; I forget that she was a special friend of yours."

"You mean Miss Laurence. She is a friend that I am proud to own."

"But you will not own her long, as Miss Laurence, let me tell you. What luck some people have! She is engaged."

"Indeed! Since when, and to whom?" said Ivon, indifferently, for he had no faith in Miss Spicer's sources of information.

"I don't know when; but the man I am certain of. It is Mr. Ross."

"Mr. Ross!"

Ivon was aroused now; the very name startled him. Other thoughts crowded in. Why had the Carters taken such sudden interest in the girl? Why had she accepted his declaration of love, but so resolutely refused his hand?

"Has the news struck you dumb?" exclaimed Miss Spicer, with a short laugh. "One would think so."

"Idle gossip, Miss Spicer, seldom has that power over me."

"Gossip! Why, the engagement is declared. I got it from Mrs. Carter herself."

"Is this true?"

"As the gospel. Ask her yourself. She doesn't seem ashamed of the match, but presents the girl to any one that comes up. Disgusting, isn't it. As if she had not trouble enough to get into society herself, without that."

In his anxiety Ivon had turned toward the drawing-room, which Mrs. Lambert had just left. At the door he met the gentleman who had placed her in the carriage.

"Ah! I have discovered you at last," he said, addressing Miss Spicer. "Mrs. Lambert has gone home. She desired me to say that the carriage would be sent back for you."

"The idea!" exclaimed that young lady, casting a significant glance at Ivon. "Does she expect us to ride home alone? People will say that we are engaged."

"Very naturally," answered the gentleman; at which Miss Spicer struck him with her fan, exclaiming again, "The idea!"

The gentleman passed on, laughing pleasantly. Ivon and his companion entered the great drawing-room.

"There they stand now! Does that look like an engagement?" cried the young lady. "Watch their faces, see her eyes. What an artful way she has of lifting them—practises at the counter, I suppose. Do you believe me now?"

Miss Spicer used her own eyes as she spoke, and saw that Ivon was deadly pale. Still, she had no mercy on him.

"There! See how he bends over her! What expression! What tender interest one can read in his face! No wonder she looks at him so earnestly. He is the handsomest man I have seen this year, spite of a few grey hairs. Rich, too, or will be; for the Carters mean to give them everything. Isn't she in a good run of luck?"

Ivon did not answer, but led his companion to the mis-

tress of the house, and went through the ceremony of leave-taking quietly, and as if nothing had happened; but his face was colorless, and the hand which touched Eva's in parting, was cold as stone.

"Why, one would think the girl had rejected you, by the color of your face," said Miss Spicer, as Ivon went with her from the room. He answered her very quietly,

"She has rejected me!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

CLOSING THE SHUTTERS.

JARED BOYCE had a taste for society, and managed to enjoy a good deal of it from the side-walk and park-benches wherein he could get an hour or two in the day-time, or close the grocery early enough to witness the outgoings or incomings of a fashionable party at night. Of course, this great entertainment at the Carters had been the excitement of the week in that corner store. Innumerable were the errands Boyce had run to milliners, thread needle stores, and apothecaries, in behalf of his mistress, who was so completely absorbed in her preparations, that she generally forgot to count the change brought back from these little excursions — a circumstance out of which he had made considerable profit.

On the eventful night, Boyce was as busy as a bee running up and down stairs, crossing the street for yards of ribbon, or papers of pins, holding consultations with Kate Gorman, and haunting the stables to make certain that the carriage would come in time. Now and then he got a glimpse of the mistress, who made a general dressing-room of the whole second floor, and betrayed the progress of her toilet

more frequently than she was conscious of. At such times Boyce would lean forward, with a hand on each knee, and exclaim, in the fullness of his admiration,

"Oh, my! Isn't that dress agoing to put down the hull bilen of 'em. If there's a more stupendous lady than she'll be, I'd like to see her a going to the party, that's all. Jim's sister to think of evening herself agin us. White pigeons agin peacocks, with moons on their spread feathers! Bosh!"

Mrs. Smith heard these exclamations with no little elation; and Kate Gorman repeated them, with Hibernian improvements, that fairly took the good woman off her feet.

It was an important moment when Mrs. Smith descended to the store, with her red moire antique gathered up in voluminous folds around her person, and a huge bouquet in her hand.

When Boyce heard her step on the stairs, he fell to work at once, removed baskets of fruit, butter-tubs and fish-barrels from their places, and widened a safe passage for the gorgeous dress, which passed through, as it were, with a rustle and flutter of acknowledgment. This the mistress intensified, by a world of gracious thanks, and permission to close the store immediately after ten. This was exactly what Boyce had been aiming at, having made a private arrangement to go out with Kate Gorman.

The moment Smith's carriage drove off, Boyce took authority on himself, and summoned James to action.

"Come along here and help put up the shutters. Haul them baskets inside, and don't stuff your pockets full of cranberries, while you're a doing it. I know yer tricks, old feller, so look sharp, if you want me to hold my tongue."

James had just seen his sister come forth in her soft white raiment, and fresh flowers, on her way to the party, and felt some resentment at the disparaging remarks Boyce made about her. But he knew well enough that words

would be of no avail with the young tyrant, and obeyed him in angry silence.

In a few minutes the shutters were closed, and even the coal-bin, which projected on the side-walk, was safely fastened. When this was done, Boyce led the way up stairs, and met Kate Gorman at the landing, with her shawl and bonnet on.

"They're asleep at last," she said, "all but Jerusha Maria; she holds out like a trooper, for the sight of that red dress just drove her wild, and she keeps snatching at the yellor feather yet. I gave her a double dose of paregoric, and got her under a little; but she's wide awake yet."

"Just in time," Boyce broke in. "We shall have a good look at the whole crowd. Jimmy will take care that the young ones don't fall out of bed. Just you go in there, old feller, and see that you stick to your post, and hold that precious little girl in your arms till she crows herself to sleep. It's just the work for you."

"I'll go in, of course, because some one must take care of her," said James; "but it's too early to close up, and you have no business to go out so soon."

"So soon," cried Kate Gorman, tying her bonnet with an angry jerk. "Look at the clock."

James did look at the little time-piece, in its square mahogany case, and was astonished to see that it only wanted a few minutes of ten o'clock.

Kate gave Boyce a knowing wink, and made a swift motion with her fingers, as if turning the pointers of a clock, which he understood, and answered with an approving nod.

"Not just yet," said Boyce, as James was going into the sleeping-room where Jerusha Maria was making vigorous efforts to get out of her cradle. "You've got to go down, and lock us out. I'm not a going to carry a heavy key about in my pocket. Besides, safe bind and safe find is my

motto. So make sure you don't go to sleep with the baby, for we depend on you to let us in, and so will the other party."

James made no answer, but took the key that Boyce held out, and followed the two down stairs. The store was dark as midnight, for the shutters were firmly closed, and the candle which James carried, only gave out a faint circle of light, by which the clerk and housemaid found their way into the street.

James closed the door after them, locked it, and looked around for an iron bar, that usually stood back of the door, ready for the two staples sunk into the woodwork on either side. It was not to be seen. The boy held down his light, and searched for it in every place he could think of, but in vain.

"Boyce has flung it down somewhere, moving the things about," he thought, a little anxiously. "It was awful careless of him; but there's no need of it. The lock is strong enough, and I'm not likely to go to sleep."

Just then the little girl up stairs gave an impatient yell, which drove all ideas of the bar out of the lad's mind; with the key in his hand, he rushed up stairs, calling out cheerfully to the little night-hawk as he went.

During the next half-hour James was busy carrying that spoiled child up and down the room, while she tugged viciously at his hair, sobbed, shrieked, and kicked her tiny feet against his chest, until even her unnatural energy gave out, and she fell asleep in his tired arms.

With the stealthy tread of a cat, and holding his breath, James laid the child in its crib, and sat down completely tired out. He had been busy all day, and excitement had taken away his appetite. He was not hungry now, but found his throat dry, and a feverish thirst upon him.

A pitcher of root-beer stood on the table, with a tumbler, from which Boyce had drank before going out. The bottle

of paregoric, brought from the druggist's that afternoon, was on the window-sill close by, almost empty.

James took up the tumbler, filled it, and drank eagerly. It seemed a little strong, but he thought nothing of that until he noticed the vial on the window. Then he fancied a taste of paregoric in his mouth.

"I suppose they dropped the spoon into the glass, after the baby had done with it," he thought. "But what a jolly dose they must have given her. There isn't a teaspoonful left. How she will sleep, now that I've got her down."

The boy seated himself by the crib, and began to swing it lightly to and fro, rather to keep himself busy, than from any idea of its usefulness. After awhile his eyes grew heavy, and his hand rested motionless on the crib. Then it fell away altogether, and, seated in the Boston rocking-chair, James slept as soundly as his little charge.

Once or twice the boy awoke with a start, as if some noise had aroused him; but his head was heavy, and his senses dull. Strive as he would to listen, sleep overpowered him, and was more and more profound as the night wore on.

CHAPTER XLV.

WATCHING FROM THE PAVEMENT.

MEANTIME, Boyce and Kate Gorman were enjoying themselves in a most aristocratic fashion, in front of Mrs. Carter's dwelling. They had taken a good position, and saw the whole company, as carriage after carriage set down its load. Once, for a very brief time, Kate missed her companion, who had stepped back into the shadow of a neighboring building, and spoke to a young man, who took

something from his hand then slunk cautiously away. Directly he disappeared entirely and was lost in the crowd of curious persons, who had gathered to see what fashionable life was like, when viewed from the side-walk, and by gaslight.

"What, me!" said Boyce, when Kate reproached him for leaving her. "I haven't been six feet away from you all the evening. It was that big woman who stood between me and you. I could have took hold of your dress any minute; only you were enjoying yourself so much with them last two carriage-loads, that I didn't have the heart to disturb you by saying I'm here, Miss Gorman, which I was, though, not being the fellow to leave a lovely and defenceless female alone in a crowd."

"Of course you're not, Mr. Boyce," said Kate, fully satisfied that he had been close by her elbow all the time. "I only did not see you just then, and, being a little timmer-some at night, the thought of your leaving me alone set me all in a trimble."

"But the moment you spoke I was here."

"Of course you were; only I didn't observe it just at the minute. But, oh! what has come over us now? Look there! If she hasn't brought down a handful of stars for her head! Why, sure, it's the queen herself!"

"Not a bit of it," answered Boyce, with supreme contempt of the idea. "She's only a customer of ours. I've had to carry home her groceries more than once, when that boy Jim was out. That's Mrs. Lambert."

"Mrs. Lambert," repeated Kate, who had never heard the name before, but was still wonderfully impressed by the splendor of that lady's dress. "Well, of course, you know; only, if it was not for that, I should take her for something a great deal more particular. Dear me! what a blaze the house is in. How the curtains shake and tremble. To think of Mr. and Mrs. Smith being in there, with the

cream of the country, and I dressing her for the same! It's beyond belief, if we didn't know it?"

"Miss Kate!"

"Well, Boyce, that's me!"

"After the carriages get a little thinner, suppose you and I go down to the theatre?"

"The theatre, Mr. Boyce, wouldn't that make us late home?"

"Well, no. We could just drop into the Bowery, see some of them fellows die fighting like fury, and then get back time enough to see all this company come out and go home. They've been having a good time; why shouldn't we?"

"True for ye: but the child!"

"Haven't we left that boy Jim in full charge, and isn't he a capital nuss. Come now, what's the odds! While this swell-crowd is enjoying of itself with dancing and champagne, oysters and ice cream, boned-turkey, and what not, you and I are human creatures, with a right to live, and have fun as well as them."

"That is the truth, anyhow."

"So, having the funds in my pocket, I am ready to stand that amount, if you're conformable."

"Well, Boyce, I can't say but I am willing."

With this, Kate Gorman took the clerk's arm, and crossing over to a street car, proceeded with him to the theatre.

An hour or two later, the couple stood in front of Mr. Carter's dwelling again. The crowd had dispersed then, and there seemed little to interest any person in the carriages that crept up to the door, and, taking in a sleepy freight of revelers, moved away. Still Boyce insisted that the sight was one that he would not lose for the world, and kept the weary girl standing there, until Mrs. Smith appeared at the door, and, with fussy attention to her dress, entered the hack that waited for her.

When this carriage drove away, Boyce expressed great willingness to go home; and Kate, who had dropped half asleep, moved away with him, heartily wishing herself in bed.

Mr. and Mrs. Smith drove, in a dreary, fatigued state, toward their home. The occasion had been a proud one; but even that could not make them quite insensible to the late hour, and the discomfort of full dress, when the desire for sleep lay heavy upon both.

When the carriage stopped, Smith let himself out, and waited to see his wife safe on the pavement. Then he gave a heavy blow on the door with his clenched hand, waiting afterward with some impatience for it to be opened.

A full minute went by, and there was no sign of life in the building. Then he gave another impatient blow, and stepped back to see if any one was stirring in the second story.

A dim light shone through the blinds; but it seemed stationary, and no one moved. Then Smith shouted, and, taking up a block of wood, flung it viciously at his own window. Evidently late hours did not agree with him.

At last, the light began to waver, and finally disappeared.

Just then Boyce and Kate Gorman came up, much to the astonishment of their employers.

"Why, Kate Gorman, Jared Boyce! What does this mean?"

"Oh! nothing," said Boyce, almost airily. "Only Kate and I have been out on a little bender of our own. The store and baby are all right; we left Jim Laurence locked in with them."

Before Mrs. Smith could reply, the grocery door was opened, and James stood in the entrance with a lamp in his hand.

CHAPTER XLVI.

AFTER THE PARTY.

THE next morning after the ball Mr. Smith arose very cross, and Mrs. Smith slept late, so late that Jerusha Maria grew fearfully impatient, and, having slept off her liberal share of the paregoric, wanted to have the usual rough and tumble romp on her mother's bed. This desire the drowsy woman repulsed with a half-angry growl, that made the child first open her eyes wide with astonishment, then fill her mouth with indignant screams.

This outcry James was expected to pacify, while Kate Gorman got the breakfast in grim discontent, for she too was suffering from want of sleep, and took vengeance on the gridiron and coffee-mill, which she banged about viciously, and ground with the fury of a Nemesis.

While Smith eat his solitary breakfast, which was in itself enough to sour any man's temper, the coffee being thick with grounds, and the fried potatoes bitter with smoke, Boyce opened the store, and dragged forth his baskets and boxes of merchandise under the sheltering awning; he made a respectable display of vegetables left over from the previous night, and fruit with a suspicion of decay creeping through it; for Smith had slept too late for the early market hour, and even his stock in trade felt the effect of that one night's advent into high life, the splendor of which had demoralized his home.

Thus it chanced that the store work came entirely to Boyce, and that interesting child, with her screams, her kicks, and wonderful capacity for hair-tugging, fell to James, while Kate scolded, and Mrs. Smith slept.

In vain the lad tried to hush the indignant young lady; in vain he bent his head, and offered a splendid mass of

raven curls for her hands to revel in. Once or twice, I am afraid, he was tempted to shake her soundly; in fact, he did practice a little in that line, but ended it all in fun, and finished by making up faces, that turned her continuous howl into shrieks of laughter.

At last Smith went down stairs, wondering if there was no way of stopping that child's noise, and wishing that he were a woman with nothing to do but sleep till noon, contented as a lamb, with an Irish girl slamming things about, and a jerky child yelling Hail Columbia in his ears.

Mrs. Smith was too soundly asleep to hear this sarcasm, and the young lady aforesaid set up a new tune of offence, feeling deeply wronged, when her father passed down stairs, without an effort to appease her grief.

James struggled under these difficulties with wonderful patience; he tossed Miss Smith into the air till she caught her breath like a sun-fish out of water. He set her down in his lap, and trotted her to Boston, with the agility of a race horse. He exhibited a pair of red morocco boots on her own little feet, which filled her with a moment's admiration, and a burst of fervent laughter. He carried her to the window, and pointed out her father, who was talking with Boyce in front of the store, in an earnest and rather excited manner, which did not at first strike him as singular, as everybody was restless and excited that morning. But there was something strange about Boyce, who seemed to be talking in a low, eager way, and watching the thunder-cloud on his employer's face, with keen, sidelong glances, that struck the lad who looked on as false and sinister.

Even the child seemed to notice something strange about her father, and stopped crying suddenly. For some unaccountable reason the boy's heart fell, and he watched the two as they walked back into the store with a feeling of vague apprehension. Why, a wiser person than himself could not have told; for he had done no wrong, and had no enemies, unless the young fellow, Boyce, was one.

This was what had occurred in the store below. In the hurry of preparation for Mrs. Carter's party, a considerable amount of money had been left in the desk, a circumstance that seldom happened, and which Smith had always provided against, by a deposit every afternoon. Before going up to dress, he had locked the desk, and put the key in his pocket, leaving it there when he changed his clothes. When he went down in the morning, this money was gone, and with it some of the more expensive portions of his stock—two or three small boxes of choice tea, which bore his private mark, and other articles, amounting to the value of several hundred dollars.

Now, these things might have been removed from the store by one person, but a horse and wagon must have been used to carry them away, if they were taken any distance. It had been considerably after nine the night before when Smith and his wife started for the party. Boyce had gone out with Kate Gorman directly after, as he confessed, having been locked out by James Laurence, who retained possession of the key. How then could this robbery have taken place before ten.

Kate Gorman had been about all the time, and so was James, who was anxious, Boyce said, that the key should be left with him. This was all that Boyce knew of the matter. He and Kate Gorman had been together all the time after they left the store, till they returned to it. Early in the evening they had watched the guests going into the Carter mansion; then they had been at the Bowery theatre. In fact, every minute of his time could be accounted for.

But the boy James, Boyce knew nothing about him, only that he wanted to stay at home, that he was rather anxious to keep the key, and had fastened the door after them when he and Kate went out. Of course there was nothing wrong about that. True, money had been missing in small sums more than once; but thieves were adroit, and, in the hurry

of business, the money drawer was left exposed sometimes. There was no reason to suspect James, because a few dollars had been found missing now and then.

But for these sagacious hints, perhaps, Mr. Smith never would have suspected the boy. He knew how adroit burglars could be, and his thoughts naturally turned in that direction: but Boyce had managed to unite the boy with this very idea. Burglars always have accomplices, he said, frequently among the servant girls; but that could not be true of Kate Gorman, who was honest as the day was long; besides, she had been with him all the time. No, no, it could not possibly be Kate Gorman, nor James. Things might look a little squally in his direction; but the little chap was true as steel; to suspect him was just nonsense.

Smith said little. He was a shrewd, close man, who kept his thoughts and his money very much to himself. He questioned Boyce closely enough, and imbibed suspicions conscientiously, that influenced his after action to a cruel extent; but he came to no definite conclusion for that day at least. This much he settled. Mrs. Smith was to know nothing of the robbery; first, because discovery was not likely to spring out of much talking, and again, because his wife had warned him of danger in having so much money in the store. Besides, what was the use of telling her? Women were always Marplots in such affairs. No, no, he would betake himself to a sharp detective, get the property back, and then inform his wife. Fortunately, she would be far too sleepy that day for any special interest in his affairs.

Boyce was very willing to be silent; in fact he did not take lovingly to the investigation, and was glad to be rid of it; his face had been unusually pale from the first, and he moved uneasily when Smith's eyes were upon him, as if the thought of having drawn suspicion on that young boy were distressing him.

Not even to Kate Gorman did the grocer mention his loss;

but he questioned her in a cautious way, and got full confirmation of all that Boyce had said. After this, he went to a detective, and set him on the alert.

CHAPTER XLVII.

HOW MISS SPICER AND ELLEN POST FRATERNIZE.

THAT day Boyce carried some groceries to Mrs. Lambert's kitchen. He was very intimate in that region, especially with Robert the footman, who had a face not unlike his own, and hair of the same brick-dust hue, a tint that Ellen Post admired exceedingly. In fact, the waiting-maid's fancy did not stop there, but took in the five feet ten of the footman's entire person. For his sake, she gave a little lofty patronage to Boyce, though it was a thorn in her side that Robert's influence had been brought to bear on the cook in the same direction.

After all, society is like a tangle of wild vines, it is impossible to separate the fruit from the leaves that breathe for it. What society is in the mass, families are in detail. Each member has an important influence on the others. The mistress of a household would often be shocked, if she dreamed how completely she is the tool and puppet of a servant, with more brains and less money than herself; or how completely her most sacred thoughts are criticised and discussed in the kitchen.

For some days Miss Spicer had been staying with Mrs. Lambert, who was far from well, and kept her room, refusing to see any one but this girl, who brought her news from their outer world, and talked with her continually on the only subject she wished to think of.

Miss Spicer being an active person, erratic in her move-

ments, and fond of talking, had many spare hours which could not be spent with Mrs. Lambert, who got tired of the girl, the moment her stock of news was exhausted, and pined for solitude, being sick at heart, and weary of everything.

Now there was no other lady in the house, and, as Miss Spicer must fraternize with some one, it naturally fell out that she became intimate, and even confidential, with Ellen Post.

A little before Boyce brought his basket of groceries into the kitchen, Miss Spicer and Ellen were together in the young lady's room, talking over the merits of a changeable silk, which Miss Spicer was in suspense about, not being quite certain of its effect upon her complexion.

Ellen Post stood in the centre of the room, her head crowned with its little French cap, knowingly canted on one side, as she held up the breadths of shimmering silk, which changed and glistened like a pigeon's neck with each movement of her hand.

"Now, for Mrs. Lambert, I should say at once, take it," she said, with the solemn air of a priestess at the altar; "but, for you, Miss Spicer, it is different. As a general thing, solid colors, and delicate at that, is what I could wish."

"You think so, Ellen? Well, I am not sure. The silk is exquisitely lovely in itself."

"Yes, but haven't you observed, Miss Spicer, that the most charming tints in silk are not always the most telling, when you get them on! There is the dress you wore the other night. Now, to my mind, that dress was a failure."

"That dress a failure? Why, Ellen Post, it cost ten dollars a yard."

"Shouldn't wonder; but still, it didn't come up to my expectations. When the madam came out, she killed it dead."

"Nothing, I believe, came up to any one's expectations that night. I never spent such an evening. Every one I knew was out of sorts," said the young lady.

"I'm sure the madam was," answered Ellen. "Never saw her so wild and white in my life. What could have happened? You ought to know, Miss Spicer—you, as one might say, a part of the family."

"No, I'm not, Ellen Post, and it's likely I never shall be."

"Why, Miss Spicer, I thought it was settled. I am sure the madam treats you as if you were her own daughter, and Mr. Ivon——"

"There, there, don't mention him! It's only an aggravation. One day sweet as honey-dew, the next after some one else, flirting, like a humming-bird, right before my face, and daring to tell me that another girl—one of those forward, low creatures that sell goods—has rejected him."

Ellen Post dropped the silk which she had been holding, and all its shining folds fell in a heap on the carpet.

"Miss Spicer, you don't mean to say that!"

"Yes, I do mean to say just that, and could say more. Only think, Ellen Post, of taking that girl's leavings, a creature with hair like ink, and eyes hid away under her lashes like a brook sleeping under rushes. Then the impudence of her air, walking like an empress, and she a shawl-fitter, a—a— Oh, I would give five thousand dollars this very hour to see her so disgraced, that he would be ashamed to own that he had ever spoken to her. I hate her very name!"

"What is her name?" inquired Ellen Post.

"Laurence. Eva Laurence. Such a name for a shop-girl!"

"Eva Laurence. I have heard that before. The madam kept saying it over in her sleep the night she came home from Mrs. Carter's party. She does not like the girl more

than you do, I am certain, though I never heard her speak the name except in sleep; then it left her lips white, as if henbane had touched them."

"I should not wonder," exclaimed Miss Spicer, struck by a sudden idea. "Didn't you tell me that Mr. Ross, the great artist, called here once or twice?"

"Once; I remember only once; but she received him in her private room—a thing I do not remember of any other man—and told me to say that she was not at home to a human being. He stayed ever so long—three hours, I should think."

"That is strange," said the young lady. "She must have known him before."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS.

"MISS SPICER, if you'll promise never to mention it, I'll tell you something," said the maid, after a little consideration.

"Well, I promise!"

"That man, Mr. Ross, I mean, once forced himself into our garden, trampled down the beds, and insisted on finding madam in one of the green-houses, where he did find her, and there they talked together in a strange way. I did not hear what they said, being in another part of the garden, and old Storms there, so that I could not get closer; but his voice was loud and clear, and hers—— Well, I can't tell you what hers was like, only there was something that went to my heart in it—tears buried out of sight since she was a girl. I should say——"

"Well, Ellen, you have surprised me. Who would have

thought it of her—so proud, so grandly self-possessed? I never dreamed that she could give way.”

“Give way! Why, that man left her on the conservatory floor in a dead swoon,” said Ellen Post, bringing her story to a climax with thrilling dexterity.

Miss Spicer sunk down on the carpet, by the billowy waves of silk that Ellen had dropped there, holding up her hands in astonishment.

“Mrs. Lambert in a swoon, a down right fainting fit! I can’t believe it. Indeed, indeed, I can’t.”

“You may, for I helped to bring her out, and a dreadful time we had of it. All that night long she lay like a dead woman, and never spoke a word, except one, and that was a name.”

“What name, Ellen?”

“Herman. I never heard it before, and I don’t know who it belongs to in the least,” answered the lady’s maid.

“Herman; that is *his* name—Herman Ross.”

“Then, one thing is sure!”

“What is that, Ellen?”

“She loves that man.”

“Ellen Post, you take away my breath!”

“She loves that man. It was him she was dressing for that night, when nothing could please her.”

“The night of Mrs. Carter’s party; do you mean that, Ellen?”

“Of course I mean that. Never saw her so hard to please. I took off her diamonds twice, and had to put them on again at last. Never saw anything like it. In any other person I should have known the signs; but who would suspect her of wanting to please any one in particular? But it’s all clear now. We’ve settled on the right man.”

“Why, Ellen, he’s going to marry this Laurence girl himself!”

“What! The man *she* loves?”

“As true as I sit here—he is engaged to her! It all came out at the party. Mrs. Carter told it. This Ross is her brother, you know.”

“That was what made her so white and wild. I understand it all now. That is why she kept repeating the girl’s name in her sleep, which was more like a fit than natural slumber. She has not been herself since.”

“No, you are right there; she seems like one stupefied by a blow—and Ivon is not much better. He was wild as a hawk that night. Only think of it—mother and son; but it serves him right. I have no compassion for him, and all but engaged to me.”

“But if she marries this Ross, all will be at an end with Mr. Ivon.”

“No, it won’t. He thinks her the loveliest, the most beautiful and accomplished creature in the world. Being married won’t hurt her with him. He will never think any one fit to untie her shoes. I want him to despise her—hate her. I want to break up this match, which is killing your poor mistress.”

“But how?”

“I don’t know. What is the good of being rich when the thing you want most can’t be got for money. Oh, if I had that girl under my feet how I would stamp her down!”

Ellen Post seated herself by the window, and fell into thought. She was a sharp, even-tempered schemer, who saw a chance of killing several birds with one stone, if it only could be brought about. Her ideas were crude as yet, but she saw a gleam of daylight through them.

“Five thousand dollars! Did you say that, Miss Spicer?”

“I said five thousand dollars. I don’t know what I said, but I’d give even that. But what is the good?”

"And you mean it?"

"Mean it? No, I don't mean it, for the thing isn't possible. If it were I wouldn't hesitate a moment."

"What you want is to disgrace the girl, so that neither of these men would think of marrying her?"

"That is what I am pining for, and what will make your lady a well and happy woman. It is for her sake."

"Never mind! I see!" said Ellen, interrupting the young lady without ceremony. "Now there are various kinds of disgrace; some think poverty enough."

"But that won't do here; she is poor as a church mouse already, and they do not care a straw for it."

"Yes, I understand. We must plunge deeper than that. When it is accomplished, I may be sure of the five thousand?"

"I might promise safely, and call it fifty thousand; but, if it is possible for you to place this girl in a position which will drive all honorable men from her, I will gladly give you the sum I at first spoke of."

"And the madam?"

"She must know nothing of this. She would condemn us, and reject our help, though it is mostly for her good," said the young lady, with emphasis. "This must rest between you and myself. If another soul is informed, I for one will throw up the bargain."

"There is no need of that," said Ellen, half buried in thought.

"Furthermore, I must have nothing to do with this, only so far as the money is concerned."

"That is understood. In fact, I see nothing that you could be of use in."

"Of course not."

"Nor do I see how any one can act as yet; but all the same, Miss Spicer, I shall earn your money."

"Very well; I don't ask how. I only wish for a thing, and when it comes to pass, give so much money."

"Five thousand," said the maid.

"Five thousand," answered the young lady, and the bargain was closed.

CHAPTER XLIX.

MR. MAHONE.

ELLEN POST went down to the kitchen just after Boyce entered it with his basket of groceries, and there she found Robert conversing in a low, eager voice with the grocer's clerk. As the two stood together, the girl remarked the wonderful likeness that existed between them, in form and color. Both were strong, and, if not tall, well built and active. Boyce was talking earnestly, and glanced around now and then to make sure that no one was listening. There was a look of triumph in his face, that Robert seemed to share, for he smiled broadly, while he listened, and laying his hand on the clerk's shoulder, seemed to commend him for something he had done.

Ellen Post was impatient, and watched all this with irritation. She wished to speak with Robert, and was angry that he did not come forward the moment she entered the room.

"Mr. Mahone," exclaimed the irate maid. "Mr. Mahone, I am waiting to speak with you!"

"Mahone," repeated Boyce, with a sly wink at the footman. "She might spell that with five letters, and begin them with a B."

Boyce spoke in the lowest possible voice, but Robert checked him severely, almost whispering.

"Hush, you young rascal. Don't you know that women have sharp ears. Can I never learn you to be prudent?"

"About the time I learn you to be fair," answered Boyce, a little savagely. "But, remember, this time you've got to toe the mark. I don't mean to do all the work, and feed on the crumbs. So put that in your pipe, and smoke it, Bob."

"Mr. Mahone!"

"Yes, Miss Post, the minute I have settled up with this fellow. He's no more idea of figures than a donkey. Only I notice he always makes the mistake on his side. As I recommended him here, you understand, it's my place to see that everything is on the square."

Ellen Post gave her French cap a toss that set all its ribbons in quick motion, and would have left the room in high dudgeon, but for the business that she had in hand. As it was, she marched up to the young men, and broke up their conference at once.

"You stay here. We may have something to say to you," she said, addressing Boyce, as if she had been that female tyrant, Elizabeth, and he a servant in her path. "Mr. Mahone will tell you if you are wanted. So wait."

Boyce laughed broadly, and took a seat in the kitchen, while Ellen Post and Robert went to the servants' parlor, and shut themselves in, the maid observing that the cook was always prying about, and, this thing being serious, they must have no listeners. With this caution, she seated herself on the hair-cloth sofa, and invited him, with her eyes, to take the vacant place by her side.

Robert, nothing loth, took the seat, and his arm crept along the back, until it almost embraced the long, thin waist of the lady's maid, who looked around sharply to make sure that it was not indecorously near.

"Mr. Mahone!"

"My angel! My—my——"

"Never mind, Robert; this is business. I despise mixing up things."

"Business is pleasure, where you are concerned, Miss Post."

"That is just what I hope it will lead to in the end, for it's a great thing, I can tell you."

"Indeed! Well, that don't astonish me! You was born to great things, Miss Post. No mistake about that!"

"Which I am ready to share," answered Ellen, "for it will take more than one to earn five thousand dollars!"

"Five thousand dollars! Why, Ellen, you take away my breath."

"It took away mine, at first; but now I am ready for work. Are you?"

"Am I ready to make five thousand dollars! Try me, that's all."

"Robert, you know a boy by the name of Laurence. He comes here with groceries now and then."

"Yes, I know all about him. He's in the same store with Boyce."

"He's got a sister?"

"Yes. I've seen her. A stunning girl."

"That girl has set her foot on Miss Spicer!"

"What! There must be some mistake about that; they don't travel the same road."

"No mistake at all. I know what I'm saying. More than that, she has offended the madam, who is bitter against her."

"You don't say so!"

"She is handsome."

"Stupendously so. Her face fairly took me off my feet."

"Mr. Mahone?"

Mr. Mahone dropped his arm, and almost leaped to his feet; a whole volley of small shot rolled off in that one exclamation.

"I beg ten thousand pardons, Miss Post. I was speaking of the opinion others might have. As for me, I have eyes

only for one woman, this side of sunrise, and that woman is Ellen Post."

"Mr. Mahone, sit down. It is hard when the heart is wounded to stick to business; but stick we must."

"Well, Ellen, I don't object. You were speaking of Miss Laurence. I know all about her!"

"But how?" demanded Ellen, forgetting business again, in a sharp fit of jealousy. "Mr. Mahone, do you visit that creature?"

"Me? me? Do you think I haven't better taste than Mr. Ivon? He visits her; but, as for me, I'd rather be excused, not being necessitated to go away from home."

"This is not business," exclaimed Ellen, growing practical, as her jealousy was appeased. "The long and the short of it is, this girl has been forcing herself into the company of her betters, which neither the madam or Miss Spicer will stand. Mr. Ivon has taken to her in a way quite ridiculous; so has another person of quite as much importance. The ladies don't want her to cross their path again. We must see that she don't."

"But how?"

"The Laurence family, root and branch, must be brought to disgrace. Being poor as Job's cat isn't enough, for some rich people have taken them up. She must be so covered with shame, that no one will have the courage to speak to her in the street."

"But how is it to be done. We might get up a big scandal; but people are getting shy of believing such things, when they come from the basement; but for that, I am capital at building castles out of card-houses. In our line now, I could work wonders against any girl——"

"Not any girl, Mr. Mahone," broke in Ellen, with a hot burst of pride. "There are persons that slander cannot reach!"

"I meant any girl like that, if she belonged to our spear,

Miss Ellen. Of course, there are women as high as the stars. Having a sample before me, I can say that, and defy contradiction.

"The girl is awful proud of her family; poor but honest, you know," said Ellen, once more mollified to the business point.

"Honest! My eyes! that is good! Why, Boyce was just telling me that the boy has been robbing like sixty—hand in hand with a lot of burglars. It's a secret; but the detectives are on his track now."

CHAPTER L.

A BARGAIN AT LAST.

"You don't say so! Oh, Mr. Mahone, this is news! Why, just as like as not, she's leagued in with him. That whole family may be a nest of thieves."

"A nest of thieves—and she among them, I shouldn't wonder!"

"Prove it; fasten it upon them; have the thing made public, and our work is done."

"*Would* that be enough?"

"Certainly. Could any girl creep out of a nest of thieves, into such society as the madam and Miss Spicer move in? I should think not."

"Would it be enough to prove the boy guilty?" questioned Robert, thoughtfully.

"No: she will want more than that."

"And even there we may fail. I have it—I have it! Don't put yourself to any more trouble. The whole thing has come into my head at once. I only hope you are as sure

of the money, as I am of earning it. Five thousand you said?"

"Five thousand!"

"Money down?"

"Money down!"

"But the division. We may as well start fair, you know, this being business and nothing else."

Ellen Post looked down, and began to roll up her cap-string with both hands; then she unrolled it, and smoothed out the ribbon. Something was doubtless in her mind, that she did not know how to put into speech. At last she faltered out,

"Would there be any need of a division? I thought—I thought, perhaps, that you might prefer the whole, which is a fortune for two young persons just starting life in a liquor store, say, or a first-class boarding-house, where a real lady is wanted for the head of the table."

"Oh!"

Ellen looked up anxiously. What did that emphatic "oh" mean. Had Mahone only thought of this for the first time?

The face she cast her timid eyes upon was changing rapidly; first, a red flame darted up to the roots of his ruddy hair, then the color melted away, and a slow pallor stole over it, while a thoughtful and sinister light crept into the golden-green eyes. Ellen grew fearfully uneasy. The thousands she coveted would lose half their value, unless Mahone himself was counted in.

"You say 'oh,' as if I had hinted at something disagreeable, Mr. Mahone? If so, let us drop the subject. Other people can be found."

Mahone started, for the girl spoke in bitter earnest.

"Other people, my dear?"

"Miss Post, if you please."

"Don't be so cold, so cruel! If I said 'oh,' it was

because a prospect of happiness broke upon me, that took away my breath."

Here Mahone seized the hand which was lifted to the cap-string again, and repeated the naughty word oh, oh, oh, half a dozen times between the kisses he lavished upon it; but, strange to say, the obnoxious syllable seemed rather pleasant to her than otherwise this time. Circumstances alter cases, you know."

"To think that I shall have a creature like this, and five thousand dollars, all in a breath. I cannot believe it. If a fortune-teller had foretold it, I should have set her down as a rank impostor, and refused to pay her fee. But now, tell me, my Ellen, is it real? Not the money. I don't care the snap of my finger for that! But is it possible that you love me?"

"Love you, Robert? Mr. Mahone, I mean!"

"Oh, call me Robert; do call me Robert!"

"Well, I will! You asked if I loved you? I who never lifted admiring eyes to another man; had you no eyes to read mine, no heart to hear how mine was beating like a— a trip-hammer against my side? Did you never suspect?"

"I never dared to hope; but now—now I am the happiest man alive! You will not talk of other people after this."

There was a tone of anxiety in this last question quite as sincere as the protestations he had made; but Ellen did not observe it.

"I shall talk nor think of no one but you, Robert."

Some one knocked at the parlor door, rather sturdily, and broke up this pleasant scene, which might have lasted for hours, but for that. Mahone started up, and opened the door, where he found Boyce flushed with impatience.

"I thought you was never coming out," he said, rudely enough. "I have got business to attend to, and can't sit waiting here. If you've got any more to say, say it now."

"I'll walk with you, Boyce," answered Robert, "if Miss Post will excuse me."

Miss Post bowed with condescension, and the two young men went into the street together.

That night a woman who lived in a tall tenement house not very far from Smith's grocery, was surprised by the entrance of two men, with whom she was doubtless on terms of great domestic intimacy, for she came out of her bedroom half dressed, and a little cross, for she had been working hard all day, and dropped to sleep while hushing the child upon the bed she had found no time to make. Something that the men proposed made her angry, for she protested, and had fierce words with the tallest of her visitors, who rudely ordered her to be silent, and go back to her child. With some grumbling she obeyed him.

After that, these men came up and down the numerous flights of stairs, again and again, carrying burdens on their shoulders. Then a wagon drove off, and, for an hour or two, the same men were moving like shadows around the house where the Laurence family lay sleeping.

CHAPTER LI.

A BOY IN PRISON.

THE most mournful thing that I have ever witnessed was a child in prison. Once I saw a hardened little sinner of twelve years, laughing at his mother through the gratings of a cell-door. This child was evidently proud of the adroit theft that had brought him to that disgraceful pass, and put on airs that an old criminal would have been ashamed of, while the poor mother looked on speechless with wonder and distress.

In the same prison, and in a cell like that, a boy younger than twelve, knelt the week after Mrs. Carter's party—knelt and prayed by the meagre prison-bed, which shook under the fearful power of his weeping. Once he lifted up his face, and looked wildly around his dungeon. Then his face fell, and a shudder passed over him. A grave, walled in with stone, could not have been so terrible. Eternal disgrace seemed to have closed him in forever. Alas! alas! what had he done to deserve such hard treatment! What would become of his mother, whom he had fondly believed himself protecting? The two sisters, so lovely and good, who had really looked up to him, and loved him dearly—would they ever speak his name again without blushes!

How fearfully lonesome it was. The strange, close atmosphere oppressed him like the breath of a pestilence. The cold whiteness of the walls chilled him. Over and over he repeated the Lord's Prayer—the most holy words that ever came from a child's lips; but they seemed insufficient to his anguish, and he cried out, "Oh, Father! Oh, my God! keep this from them! Let me drop down dead here, and I will not say a word; only do not let them know. It would kill them! It would kill them!"

Then the poor boy would rest a little time in deadly quiet, as if he expected God to answer him then and there; but instead of the still, small voice that he listened for, came the clang of the cell-door, and a fierce cry of distress from some prisoner just brought in. This semi-lunatic from drink, pleaded for brandy just as earnestly as he prayed for help, but in language which made him shudder, as if the torment of some great crime were already upon him.

The night closed in upon him, filling the prison with heavy gloom, inexpressibly mournful. The grating of that iron-door was closed: slowly the gray shadows of sunset fell through the long, narrow slit of stone, so cut in the wall that God's beautiful sunshine could never creep through,

and an awful darkness fell upon him. The clang of each door, as it swung into place along those long iron galleries, had gone through and through him like a dull sword. The heavy step of the keeper, walking from cell to cell, seemed to fall on his heart.

The boy did not sleep that night, but shrunk away from his bed shuddering. Its heavy, gray blankets seemed laden with disease and sorrow left by some one who had gone before. The dull atmosphere of the prison settled down upon him with sickening density. Into the farthest corner of his whitewashed cell he shrunk, and cowering there, like some poor wounded fawn in its covert, listened to all the noises of the night with ears rendered keen by terror. The smothered moans of the prisoners, the scuttle of rats about the water-pipes, the tramp of the keeper on the stone pavement, far below, all had a weird effect upon him, which amounted almost to madness.

Is it strange that the boy did not sleep, and that he crouched low in that dark corner all night long? The dull gray of the morning found him there pale, still, and wildly expectant, as if the next thing that could reach him must be death itself. Then came the clang of opening doors, the harsh sound of feet moving to and fro on the stone pavement, a confusion of voices in command, complaint, piteous expostulation, and coarse oaths; for bad men might be chained by the ankle, but nothing could manacle the vile speech to which they had become so used that it was second nature to them.

Now this boy had been bred among women, gentle, good women who feared, or rather loved God, and were kind to each other. Even his mother, though silent, and sometimes a little unsympathetic, was rigid in her ideas of religion, and sanctioned nothing coarse or wicked, either in speech or thought. So the boy had learned all that a delicate girl should have known; and this, added to his natural manli-

ness, had made him far more refined and gentle than lads of his age usually are. He was not the less spirited and ambitious because of the refinement which sprang out of his home life. Real energy is, in fact, all the more effective when a clear conscience and cultivated mind directs it, both in child and man.

But what could energy avail the lad in that dreary place? He had nothing to struggle against; a vague idea that he was suspected of crime, and brought there to suffer some terrible punishment, preyed upon him, but what the charge was, or how to help himself, was beyond his power of conjecture.

Some bread, and a teacupful of dark liquid the keeper spoke of as coffee, was brought to the cell where he sat trembling and fearfully expectant. The poor boy turned his face away from this food with sick loathing. It seemed as if he could never eat or drink again.

The keeper, who was at heart a kind man, took compassion on the gentle helplessness of this poor child, and strove to comfort him with hopes of a speedy relief; but James only shook his head, and great tears rose and trembled in his eyes. He could have stood abuse bravely, but kindness melted his young heart, and tears dropped like rain from his downcast eyes while that sympathetic voice filled the dungeon. As he sat thus the shadow of another official fell across the threshold of his cell, and a loud and indifferent voice called out,

"James Laurence!"

The boy started up and followed this man into the prison yard. He had scarcely stepped upon the stone-flags, when two officers passed him, leading a woman toward the female prison. The boy saw her face, and flinging out his arms cried out,

"Mother! mother! oh, mother!"

CHAPTER LII.

THE SECOND ARREST.

SMITH had acted with a stern, secret energy. Without consulting his wife, or any one but an iron-hearted detective, he had quietly arrested little James Laurence, and lodged him in the Tombs. Early the next morning, while Mrs. Laurence was busy cooking her meagre breakfast, a strange man stepped into the kitchen, boldly, as if it had been his own home, and told her to get her things, and not attempt to raise a muss about it, because it was of no use; her son was caught, and nicely caged. She was known to be his accomplice—in fact, the person who had no doubt set him on. At any rate he had a warrant against her, as a receiver, and she had better obey it just then and there. The stolen goods had been found in her out-house, and he was after the money sharp; must search the house for that, but not till she was disposed of according to law. Was she ready?

Mrs. Laurence heard all this in stern astonishment. She had been cutting bread, and stood with the knife in one hand, grasping the loaf in the other, motionless as stone.

"Me? Me, and my son James? Are you speaking of us?" she said at last. "What have you done with him? What do you want of me?"

"Just as if you didn't know. Well, if you will have it, I want you to step out before a justice, and answer for yourself."

"Answer for what?"

"For stealing! Robbery! I think they'd call this burglary, only the boy was in the house, and so, of course, could only break out, if breaking was to be done."

"Stealing! Robbery!"

These words fell from the woman's lips like lead dropping on marble. A stupor of astonishment seemed turning her to stone.

"My boy! James, my boy! You said something strange about him; horribly strange, it seems to me."

"I said that we had him safe in the Tombs, where you will be mighty quick, or I'm mistaken. But, come along; it's the best way. The gentleman wanted me to get through without making a fuss in the neighborhood. So get your things, and——"

"What is this? Mother, who is this man?"

Mrs. Laurence instantly came out of the icy trance that had settled on her faculties, and answered sharply,

"A person on business, Eva. I believe I am going out; tell your sister so, and bring my bonnet."

Eva detected nothing in the cold, steady voice of her mother to occasion alarm, and went into the next room for the bonnet and shawl, which she usually wore to market.

Mrs. Laurence took these things from her hand, and put them on. There was no tremor of the fingers when she tied her bonnet-strings; no heave or flutter of the bosom, when the faded shawl was folded over it. This poor woman had been so used to bearing her own burdens in silence, that even this fearful shock was endured with speechless heroism.

"Girls," she said, looking in at the parlor-door, and speaking rather more cheerfully than usual, "don't wait for me, but eat your breakfast; Eva must not be late."

Ruth looked up, and answered, smiling, in her meek, sweet way, "that she would rather wait. Eva, of course, must go."

There was no answer to this, and a minute after Ruth saw her mother go through the gate, followed by that strange man.

"I wonder if it's anything about the mortgage?" she

thought, anxiously. "Only a few months more, and I should have the money. No, Eva, dear," she said, in answer to something her sister had suggested. "I have no appetite just now, and will wait for mother."

Wait for mother! Poor girl!

CHAPTER LIII.

THE WOMAN IN THE LAUNDRY.

THAT morning, a woman, rather young but meanly clad, and appearing miserably over-worked, came into Mrs. Lambert's kitchen. She was conducted to the laundry by the cook, whose department had fallen so woefully behind hand in the way of table-linen, that she considered a little outside help necessary. The woman who was usually called upon, when such occasions arose, happened to be ill, and had sent this haggard young person, who lived in the same tenement-house, as a substitute. The laundry in which her work lay was a little dark, and for that reason the door leading into the kitchen was left partly open.

During the morning a young man came in, carrying a basket of groceries, and, while the cook was heaping the different articles on a table, the two fell into conversation.

When the washerwoman's eyes fell on this young man, she stopped work, and the napkin she was rubbing rolled down the wash-board into the suds, while she held on to a side of the tub with each hand, looking keenly through the door, herself quite unseen.

"I had to do it myself this morning," said the youth, addressing the cook, "because our boy's been and got took up for helping to rob the concern."

"Not that pretty, dark-eyed little fellow that comes here

generally of late," said the cook, with something like regret in her voice.

"Yes, just him; and no mistake about that. He was took to the Tombs last night."

"You don't say so! What did he take?"

"Money, and lots on lots of groceries — tea worth its weight in gold; lots of things."

"But what could he do with them?"

"Well, it's all out now, and I don't mind your knowing about it. The boy's mother is a sly old party, poor as a wharf-rat, and, oh my, how crafty! She sot the boy on, and hid the things for him in the wood-house. The detective found them there. Now, tell me, do you want any better proof than that?"

"Then they found the things on the premises?"

"That's just what they did, and this morning the old woman was walked off by a policeman. I saw her go."

"Well, I'm awful sorry for the boy," said the good-natured cook; "he seemed such a nice little shaver. Them eyes didn't look dishonest; but there is no knowing who to trust these times."

"Exactly! Shouldn't wonder if some one was to suspect me, one of these days. The more innercent a feller looks, the more suspicious, say I. But, tell me, is Mr. Mahone about? I'd just like to speak a word with him, if you'll be kind enough to look him up."

The cook laid a paper parcel on the table, and good-naturedly went in search of Mr. Mahone, observing,

"He's more than likely in the servants' parlor, with Ellen Post. Now you've told me some news that'll give me a fit of mournfulness all day long, so I'll just rertalerate, and tell you something worth while. Mr. Mahone and Ellen Post are engaged. They're going to be married right out of hand. She's going to open a first-class boarding-house, and he—— Well, I suppose he'll do like the rest of 'em, and keep up the marketing."

A clothes-horse, full of snow-white linen, stood near the door where these two persons were talking. The woman at the wash-tub, who had become strangely interested, as the conversation went on, stole softly behind this screen, and stood close to the wall, not three feet from the cook and her companion. She heard all that they were saying, and the last sentence brought a flash of fire to her dark eyes. Why she could not herself have told, for she knew of no person named Mahone, and she had never heard of Ellen Post in her life. Still the fire was in her eyes, and a sharp throb of nameless suspicion in her heart.

For a moment the young man Boyce was silent, then a low shrill whistle broke from him.

"So, that's his little game, is it! Well, all right. Just say that I'm here and a waiting to speak with him. I'll stay here."

The cook having disposed of her groceries, gave the empty basket to Boyce, and went into the servants' parlor.

Directly the footman came out, looking flushed and anxious.

"Is it you, Boyce?" he said, pausing close to the laundry-door, and peering in to be sure the room was empty. "Just step inside here, and be quick; you and I must not be seen together much just now. Well, what is it? Speak low!"

"The old woman, Mrs. Laurence, was arrested this morning."

"All right! But how do you know?"

"I stood in the store, and saw the man go that way; you know the house is in full sight. By just stepping under the awning I can see the vines on the porch, and that crowd of flowers in front."

"Does Mrs. Smith know yet?"

"Yes. She's just found it out, and pitched into her husband awful. He's satisfied, and won't give way an inch.

But isn't she on the rampage! The worst of it is, I've got to go before the justice, and I tell you it's unpleasant."

"Yes; but you are in for it, and must go through. Anything else?"

"Yes; something that the cook told me. Tell me, old fellow, have you put your foot in it to the extent of saddling yourself with another sweetheart. She talks of your being engaged, of a wedding, and so forth. How much of this is true?"

The footman drew Boyce farther into the room, and shut the door.

"I say Boyce, if I was to marry a woman, with more than five hundred dollars laid up from wages, and five thousand a pretty sure thing, would you stand by me?"

"Through thick and thin; so long as we shared!" answered Boyce, holding out his hand, and working his long fingers like the claws of a bird.

"Of course, I should be liberal. Brothers are brothers, you know."

"Yes, and don't they grind one another down? Oh, no, never! It isn't in the nature of one to do nothing, and take all he can grip at. He never lets any one take risks of the law for him. Oh, no!"

"But you will run no risk when I marry Ellen Post. The law comes on me there."

"Exactly. But I come between you and the law, having seen you married to that other woman, and knowing just where she's to be found any minute."

"Well, well, you will not be unreasonable?"

"Oh, no! But won't she cut up rusty?"

"How is she to find out? What does Mary Boyce know about Robert Mahone? Why, she don't know who I am living with. In fact, thinks I'm tending bar in some place where women never come; generally out of business though, or I shouldn't get a share of her earnings."

"And you mean to do it, anyhow?"

"Yes. I've made up my mind. Such a pile of money don't tumble in upon a fellow without some risk; so I'll stand the racket, especially as Ellen Post is a splendid creature."

"Handsome than Mary?"

"No comparison; but you've seen her. She was out here the other day."

"What! That woman with the cap and ribbons? You don't say so; golly! here she comes, and I'm off. Don't want to be introduced to my new sister-in-law just yet. She might put on airs."

With these words Boyce stepped into the kitchen, took up his basket, and left the house.

CHAPTER LIV.

PREPARING FOR THE WEDDING.

"MR. MAHONE! Mr. Mahone! Is there any news?" said Ellen Post, advancing toward the laundry.

"Hush! Step in here; the cook is always prowling in and out of that room. That's right. Shut the door. You were asking about news. Yes, indeed, that boy was arrested yesterday. This morning an officer is after the old woman—two of the Laurence family are in for it. As for that girl, Eva, I'm afraid we can't fasten on her just yet."

"Oh, we can wait for her. Mrs. Lambert's agent was here this morning about foreclosing a mortgage on the house. They haven't kept up the interest. I don't think she'd order them turned out, much as she hates them. So I told him she was sick; but I'd take up his message, which was to ask for directions. She was asleep on the sofa,

so I told him that she was not well enough to talk about business, but wanted this troublesome mortgage closed up at once, without bothering her again about it."

"That was a ten strike," said the admiring Robert.

"So, when they get back from prison, their shanty will be gone, and we shall have rooted them out, trunk and branch. I'm sure that must satisfy Miss Spicer."

"Yes. If she don't pay the five thousand down after that, she's no lady."

"Which she is," answered Ellen, with emphasis. "Why, the very last night, she, knowing what was between us, Mr. Mahone, gave me a white-silk dress, only twice worn, with real lace on the sleeves and bosom, and a wreath of white flowers, which she says are just as fashionable for brides as orange-blossoms, which she hasn't had any use for as yet—more's the shame to Mr. Ivon, who behaves as no gentleman has a right to."

"Well, no one can say that we haven't done our share. When will she pay over, my dear?" questioned Mahone, drawing Ellen tenderly toward him.

"Just as soon as we are married. I asked her, and she said that."

"She did? Well, well! When will that be? With the wedding dress all ready, we might have it in the basement-parlor, within a week."

"Oh, Mr. Mahone, think of it? I couldn't. The cake—the invitations."

"Hang the cake! and as for inform—I beg pardon, invitations; the genteel thing is a strictly private wedding."

"A private wedding, and that dress? *Such* a silk! You could almost stand it alone!"

"Yes, yes, I know. But who does a bride dress for but her admiring husband? I shall worship you in that bridal robe and them flowers; but don't ask me to share the beau-

tiful sight with any other man. I couldn't stand it, being that jealous."

"Oh, Mr. Mahone, I had so set my heart upon it."

"Not as I have set my heart on you, Ellen. Just a carriage, with you and your adorer in it, the white silk dress a rustling around your lovely person, trimmed with flowers white. Well, yes, white, as bridal flowers ought to be."

"What! Without bridesmaids?—without witnesses?"

"My love, I have thought of that. There is my friend Boyce, a genteel fellow, in the grocery line, who has a sweetheart of his own, a Miss Gorman, splendid old Irish name; not to be compared with yours of course, but still respectable on a certificate, very."

"Why, Mr. Mahone, you seem to have settled everything," cried Ellen, half angry, half elated.

"Always under your wishes, being only your shadow and nothing more, Miss Ellen, and having, in fact, no will of my own, nor wanting any."

"So private! So soon! I really don't know what to say, Mr. Mahone."

"Let me say it for you, dearest of women; let me take this modest hesitation for yes. May I—may I?"

"Mr. Mahone, you may."

A moment after this consent was given, the betrothed pair stole from the laundry, Mahone first and Miss Post after. She passed the cook with a lofty fling of the head, and apologized with mock humility for her presence in a place so far out of her usual element as a kitchen, at which the cook said "Scat," which certainly did seem a little out of place, as no cat, black or white, was disturbing the tranquillity of the room.

Not ten minutes after this the washerwoman came out of the laundry with her bonnet and shawl on, white as a ghost, but with undaunted fire in her eyes. In fact the poor drudge looked full of life, and almost handsome; a very dif-

ferent woman from the jaded and hopeless creature who had crept into the house with such humility only a few hours before.

"You will please excuse me, I am not well enough for hard work to-day; for the whole world I couldn't get out another piece."

The woman said this in a quick, eager way, as if she had quite determined on going, whether her apology was accepted or not.

The cook would have argued with her, but the whole matter was cut short by the woman walking abruptly out of the house.

Meantime Ellen Post knocked at the door of Miss Spicer's room. That young lady turned the latch with her own hand.

"Was that Mr. Lambert that just came in? I thought it was his step on the stairs?"

"No, Miss," answered Ellen, confidentially. "It's only me; but I've got good news. The old woman and her boy are both in the hands of a policeman. Would it be convenient to let me have that amount?"

"When they are convicted!" answered Miss Spicer, closing the door abruptly.

Ellen Post stood for a moment in blank amazement, then she gave her head a toss and, speaking to herself, said sharply,

"We shall see! We shall see!"

CHAPTER LV.

EVA'S TEMPTATION.

EVA LAURENCE had no appetite for breakfast, and lingered about home long after she should have been at her duties at the store. There was something so unusual in her mother's going out very early in the morning with a strange man, that both the girls were greatly disturbed, though each strove to hide her anxiety from the other.

Once Eva put on her bonnet, and went as far as the gate, on her way down town; but, after lingering there a minute, she came back again.

"I cannot go, Ruthy," she said, with keen anxiety in her voice and manner. "Where has she gone? It is now two hours! What can have become of her?"

Ruth could hardly answer. Her eyes were full of trouble; her delicate form trembled all over. She clutched nervously at the cushions, but still persisted in saying,

"Oh, she will be home again before long. Nothing can have happened."

"I will, at any rate, stay here till she comes," said Eva, taking off the outer garments she had put on. "I wonder where James is? Mrs. Smith ought not to keep him all night so often. She might reflect how lonesome we are without him."

"It is strange; he is always sure to run in during the morning," said Ruth, shaking like a flower in the wind, with weird terror of some unknown evil. "What is that?"

Eva ran to the window—the gate had opened. It might be her mother. No, it was Mr. Ross coming leisurely up the walk. He saw Eva, and smiled. She could not answer this pleasant greeting, but hurried to the door, anxious and breathless.

"Oh, Mr. Ross, do you bring us any news? We are so anxious."

"About what, my child?"

"Why mother has been out since early this morning. A man came here before breakfast, and she went with him."

"Well, what do you fear? It is not noon yet. How frightened you look! There, there, your mother is sure to come back safely. She is not a woman to run into danger."

The cool, good sense of their visitor tranquilized the girls, and they made strong efforts to be cheerful.

"As for my part," said Ross, sitting down near Ruth, "I am rather glad she is away. The matter I came to talk about does not require her presence just yet. Eva, I have come from my sister, who renews the offer half made to you some nights ago. We desire, very much, that you should come to us, and be a part of our household. Carter is willing, his wife desires it, and I ask no greater blessing than to look upon you as my own child."

Eva started up, clasping her hands with a thrill of unthinking joy; but they fell apart hopelessly.

"Oh, sir! Oh, my friend! I cannot; it is impossible! To leave my family now, when my work is of so much use, would be cruel beyond anything. Look at poor Ruthy. The first thought of it has set her trembling!"

Eva's eyes were full of tears. The idea of this offer had haunted her with temptations, which she resisted, now that trouble was in the house with double force.

Mr. Ross smiled. He did not like the girl less for this generous clinging to her home duties.

"It would be better a thousand times," cried Eva, with passionate warmth, "that you took Ruthy; though what on earth we should do without her, I cannot tell. She, with her genius and goodness, might be a blessing in any house, while I am only useful here."

"My dear child, how quick you are to decide. We do not propose to take anything from your family; on the contrary, in partially leaving it, every one will be benefited. My sister intends to settle upon Mrs. Laurence five times the amount you can earn. I propose to put that fine little fellow, your brother, into school, and after that, through college. As for Miss Ruth here, if she will remain my pupil a few months longer, there will be no need of your toil. Her pencil will do far more than your labor."

Eva looked at her sister in wonder. There she lay, blushing like a wild-rose, trembling like its leaves, and smiling in spite of the fears that had so oppressed her—a creature so delicate and frail, that helplessness seemed her portion forever. Could it be possible, that pure genius in a creature like that, might accomplish more than all her strength of life and power of action? Was genius so far above everything else in this world? These thoughts broke forth in a burst of tender enthusiasm.

"Oh, Ruthy! Ruthy! Is it so? Are you to be the bread-winner, and I the drone? I cannot believe it! I cannot believe it!"

"Nor I," said Ruthy. "It seems like a miracle; but, oh, I will work so hard! Ah, Mr. Ross, you opened a new life to me, when you pronounced my poor sketches worthy of notice."

"The life of genius is always new, for its very essence is creation," answered Ross, with subdued enthusiasm.

"But, to chain genius down to the earning of money, seems so unsuited to its greatness," said Eva.

"Unsuited to its greatness!" exclaimed Ross. "Is it a degradation to be useful, to give bread for thought—for mental power to transmute itself into material blessings? Is the man or woman of genius higher or prouder than the God who made him? Is the wheat, which bends in green and ripening waves to the wind, and grows golden under

the sunshine, less beautiful because hungry millions feed on it? Are the lilies of the field more splendid than the fruit with which our orchards are laden? Why, Eva, every grand or lovely thing that God has created has its uses for mankind. While men starve and suffer, no gift that comes from Him can remain idle without sin. The great reward of genius is its power to confer blessings; first, by the effort itself, giving new objects of thought or beauty to the world, and again by the material rewards, which cannot be used without adding to the comfort and happiness of mankind."

Ross spoke with an outburst of feeling, which Eva's little speech, natural to a romantic girl, need hardly have called forth. She blushed crimson, feeling his ardent words as a rebuke, while Ruth seemed to kindle up with living fire. Her eyes flashed like stars, and a handful of carnations seemed to have been dashed against her cheek, leaving a delicate stain there. She rose to her elbow, radiant.

"Oh, Eva!" she said. "If you knew how happy it has made me to win a little money, when you all need it so much, you would never talk as if the earning it could be considered unsuitable."

"You are right," answered Eva, almost crying. "It was a thoughtless speech."

"Because you really had never considered the subject," answered Ross, heartily ashamed of his own enthusiasm. "But all this brings us no nearer to the question in hand."

Both the sisters grew silent, and the color faded slowly from their faces. They looked at each other with yearning fondness, and, as if influenced by one feeling, the eyes of both filled with tears.

"It can hardly be called a separation," said Ross, touched with lively sympathy. "There need not be a day in which you cannot see each other."

"She must go," faltered Ruth, stretching forth her arms. "To keep her with us would be cruel."

Eva sunk upon her knees by the couch, and buried her face in Ruthy's bosom.

"No! no!" she said. "We cannot part; not while they have need of me."

"But, remember mother, how much more you would be doing for her and James, who felt it so hard to give up school," pleaded Ruth. "This is a poor place for you, my sister."

"But is it better for you and mother?" questioned Eva, almost indignantly, for the temptation to go was strong within her, and she hated herself for it.

"But we will soon make this home pleasanter for them than it has ever been," said Ross.

"Who is that? Mother?" cried Ruth, who heard a woman's step in the porch. "She will think with us, I am sure, Eva."

CHAPTER LVI.

MRS. SMITH BRINGS PAINFUL NEWS.

EVA did not reply to her sister's question, for she had hurried to the door, and found not her mother, as she eagerly expected, but Mrs. Smith, with her bonnet awry, and her shawl trailing to the ground. The good woman's face was flushed with crying, and a fresh rain of tears came to her eyes the moment she saw Eva.

"Don't! Don't! Order me from the door! Don't wither me up into nothing, just with looking in my face! It wasn't my fault; I knew no more about it than my Jerusha Maria, poor innocent darling, that never dreamed what a cruel father she's got. I'll never live with Smith again—never! To go and do such a thing, without telling

me! I'm not a cannibal, nor a Hottentot to stand such things!"

Mrs. Smith had burst forth in this torrent of words and tears on the very door-step. Eva entreated her to come in. Being utterly ignorant of the particular grief that possessed the good woman, she could do no more.

"You're just one degree from a heavenly angel, Eva Laurence," continued the good woman, wiping her eyes on the corner of her shawl, as she passed into the parlor. "Smith won't, but I've come to make atonement on my bended knees. Tell me what to do for them, and I'll do it, if Jerusha Maria and I are left without a crust."

"My dear Mrs. Smith, what do you mean? Who has troubled you so?"

"Who? My own lawfully-married husband. What? Oh, mercy upon me! don't you know yet? Where's your mother?"

"She went out this morning," said Eva, "and has not returned yet. We are expecting her every minute."

"Expecting her! Why, don't you know? Expecting her? Oh! oh! this is hard, that I should have to tell it, and he my husband! Eva, both your mother and James are in prison."

"In prison!"

Three voices at once uttered this one sentence. Ruth started up from her couch, white to the lips; Eva stood rooted to the floor, her eyes widening, and lips just apart. Even Mr. Ross started to his feet, and a swarthy color swept over his face.

"In prison! For what?" he demanded. "Who put them there?"

"Must I say it again? It was my own husband that did it, backed up, and led blind by that copper-headed creature, Ja Boyce. I know as well as I live, that he's at the bottom of it, though Smith sticks to him through thick and

thin. As for that boy, he's innocent as twenty lambs, every one of 'em with fleeces white as snow; but you can't make Smith believe it, he's that blinded."

"Pray, Mrs. Smith, compose yourself, and tell us clearly what all this means? On what charge are these two persons in prison?" said Ross, who was the first to recover his presence of mind.

"Charges? Why, theft! burglary! receiving stolen property! Our store was robbed on the night we went to your sister's party. And they are took up for doing it. I didn't know it till just now. Oh, they were mighty sly, Kate Gorman and all, taking people up, and keeping me in the dark; but I've left 'em. Smith will find out what he's done when I am gone, and his home is full of nothing but loneliness."

"Where have they been taken to, Mrs. Smith?" inquired Ross.

"Where? The Tombs, to be sure. No other place was gloomy enough for them. Smith has gone down to appear. Yes, and a pretty appearance he'll put in for himself. Oh, girls, it was not my fault!"

The poor woman clasped her hands, and seemed about to fall upon her knees before Eva, who flung both arms about her neck, and tenderly wiped her eyes, though her hands shook in doing it, and the dumb anguish in her face was pitiful to see.

"Whatever it is, we shall never blame you, Mrs. Smith," gasped Ruth.

Mrs. Smith fell on her knees before the sick girl's couch, and burst into a fresh paroxysm of tears.

"But you *must* blame him. Who can help it? To keep such things secret from the wife of his bosom; hard as a rock, too, against that poor honest, crusty, dear old woman. Oh, it's too bad! too bad! But that he told me himself, I never would have believed it; but there he is, gone down to persecute like a heathen grind-stone."

"Be tranquil, be patient, my dear young ladies. I will go at once, and see what this means," said Ross, taking Eva's hand, which scarcely trembled more than his own. "They will need some friend. Have no fear; I shall know how to help them."

"I—I will go with you," cried Eva, turning to leave the room.

"No; not yet. It would only do harm. All that can be done I will attend to. It is impossible that there should be anything serious in this. Stay quietly at home till you hear from me."

Eva hesitated. Her first generous impulse was to brave everything for the two beings she loved so dearly. But nobility of purpose is not always prudently carried out. It requires more fortitude to stay at home and wait, than to rush out and act. The girl was brave, but she was also obedient, and when Ruth spoke, she turned from her purpose.

"Stay, Eva," said the gentle invalid. "You can do nothing. Our good friend will help us. Stay till he comes."

Eva sat down, and burst into tears. Forbidden to act, she could only weep and wait.

"Tell him that I have left his house! That—that he is a cruel, hard-hearted man! Tell him that there is no sort of use in his ever coming home again—for—for—— Oh, it is dreadful! Why can't people die when they want to?"

Mrs. Smith would have added more no doubt, but half these words were smothered on Ruth's couch; and when she looked up, Mr. Ross was passing through the garden-gate.

"Oh, girls, what shall we do?" she exclaimed, "what shall we do! Just say that I never ought to speak to Smith again, and I won't; no, not if he takes Jerusha Maria out of my arms, and gives her—oh! oh!—to some other woman."

"My dear friend," murmured Ruth, "go home to your child—all will be well."

"Yes, I will go!" sobbed the good woman; "but it shall be down there."

CHAPTER LVII.

IN HASTE FOR THE WEDDING.

MISS ELLEN POST was taking in the waist of Miss Spicer's white silk dress, and had altered the trimming till it really seemed as good as new. Miss Spicer, herself, had come down into the servants' parlor to examine the effect, and had brought from her own room a quantity of tulle scarcely the worse for wear, which had once covered a trained over-dress, but was quite fresh enough for the wedding veil; especially as the breadths were joined neatly by a white wreath, which had been beautifully freshened up for the occasion.

Some deeper anxiety than the wedding dress had evidently brought the young heiress into the servants' department, for she pushed aside a mass of silk tulle and fragments of lace from a couch which stood near the expectant bride, and seemed to prepare herself for a conversation of some length.

Miss Post was very busy with the bridal veil, and threw her whole energies so completely into the pleasant task, that she had little attention to bestow even on the young lady who had honored her by a visit, and from whom she expected so much.

Thus Miss Spicer was compelled to begin the subject that was resting heavily on her mind, without help from the waiting maid.

"You are quite sure, Ellen, that there is no mistake about the arrests," she said, at length.

Miss Post was holding up the wreath from which a cloud of tulle floated to the floor, and did not answer for half a minute, but she spoke at last.

"Sure, Miss Spicer, of course I am. The young man, Boyce, came round and told us the minute it was done. They first took up the boy, then walked the old woman off between two policemen. Boyce waited to see it done, then come to inform Mr. Mahone, who is anxious beyond anything, knowing that our wedding depends on their being safely locked in prison."

"Your wedding, Ellen, pray what has that to do with it?" questioned Miss Spicer, who was not entirely informed of the wheels within wheels which revolved in the kitchen department.

"Just as much as the five thousand dollars that you are to pay over for clearing these people out of the madam's path."

"Oh, you depend on that; but it will take some time before they can be safely disposed of, Ellen."

"They are in prison this minute; by to-morrow, at farthest, they will be remanded—that is the word Mr. Mahone calls it—back for trial. That ought to be disgrace enough for one family, Miss Spicer."

"But this money was to be paid on conviction, Ellen, you must remember that."

"No, I do not," answered the waiting maid, casting aside her veil and entering into the subject with spirit, "and if you take it so, it isn't too late to draw back. The young man Boyce has only to clear out of the city, and they'll have to be acquitted. Everything depends on him."

Miss Spicer changed color and gave the fragments of silks and laces around her a spiteful toss to the floor. Her love of money was almost as warm as her attachment for young

Lambert, or her dislike of Eva Laurence. She had, in fact, promised this large sum of money with a reserved hope of evading the payment after her vengeance was secured. But Ellen Post was not exactly the person to be so dealt with. She had no abiding faith in the honor of her confederate, and was resolved that the trust should not be all on one side. Another reason, still more urgent, gave her courage to be firm. Ellen had met with disappointments in her life, and she was in haste to secure herself from a mournful repetition of them by wearing the snow-white robe at the earliest possible moment. Before she could do that, the money which Miss Spicer had promised must be forthcoming. Mahone had expressed himself very decidedly on that point.

"It seems to me," said Miss Spicer, "that you and your friends are going off from the terms of our agreement, Ellen."

"Not at all," answered the bride. "Mr. Mahone is the very soul of honor. At first he declined to act without the money in hand, but a word from me was enough to persuade him into waiting till these persons were in prison. Then," says he, "dearly as I love you, Ellen, superior as you are to all other women, I must be firm; for your own dear sake. I should be prepared to support you like the lady you are. For this reason I must have the money down."

"There was no resisting an argument put in this complimentary way, Miss Spicer. It went at once to the heart."

"I should think it was rather intended to go to my pocket," answered the young lady with a short, sneering laugh. "So if I do not pay the money down your Mr. Mahone will allow these people to escape. Is that what you mean?"

"I am inclined to think that was Mr. Mahone's meaning," answered Ellen, holding up her veil again and admiring it with her head on one side like a heron looking at his shadow in the water. "But it was all for my sake, so you must not think hard of him."

"Miss Post, my Ellen!"

The voice which uttered these words came from the kitchen out of which a door opened. Then Mr. Mahone appeared.

"Your Adonis," said Miss Spicer with a short laugh.

"No," answered Ellen, innocently, "his name is Mahone."

"I beg pardon," said the footman, advancing into the room, "I thought this young lady was alone. Boyce has just come in, would you like to speak with him?"

Ellen looked at Miss Spicer, who nodded her head.

"He can come in if you desire," said Ellen with dignity, but first allow me to put these garments out of sight."

Directly the footman entered the room again, followed by Boyce, who presented himself with an air of mingled awkwardness and audacity that would have excited either anger or ridicule in Miss Spicer at any other time; now her mind was occupied with the business in hand, so she watched him with keen interest.

"This young man has brought me word that the person whom you take so much interest in is safe in prison and will be examined to-day," said Mahone, addressing Ellen, but looking at the young lady. "He has just come from the Tombs."

"Then they are both shut up, the mother and the boy," said Ellen.

"That's so," answered Boyce, seating himself on the edge of a chair and crushing his hat with both hands, "salt can't save 'em after this. They've got to go."

"Then these poor creatures are certainly in prison?" questioned the young lady, breaking out of all prudent bounds when she thought her vengeance on the fair way to completion.

"No mistake about that, Miss, you'd a thought so if you had seen how they took on—affecting, I can tell you,

enough to bring tears from a common ball. Almost snivelled myself, if you'll excuse the word, Miss."

"Then it is certain?" questioned Miss Spicer.

"As bolts and bars can make it," said Mahone. "This young man's evidence is enough to convict a born angel."

"And I have given it—and shall have to give it again—nothing but cutting loose and running away can stop that," said the youth, adding the last sentence in reply to a wink from Mahone.

"Thank you very much," said Ellen Post, dismissing the grocer's clerk as if she had been an Empress. "I took an interest in these people on account of the boy, but if they are really guilty, of course all sympathy ends."

"Guilty, I should think so," answered Boyce, getting himself up from the chair, "good morning—good morning Miss. I hope I have not intruded nor nothing?"

"Good morning," said Ellen blandly, as became a not very young lady so near the hymenial altar.

Mahone followed Boyce from the room, and the two men held some moments of eager conversation in the farthest corner of the kitchen.

"Did I do it up brown?" questioned the younger man.

"That you did," answered the other. "Jared, I always have said you were a trump."

"What is best, every word of it is true. I'm going down to the court now. The young lady has only got the news a little in advance. Good-bye, old boy. I'll come up and give you particulars when it's all over."

"Good-bye, and see that you make no blunders," answered Mahone, "they would be too costly just now."

"I say," said Boyce, coming back a step or two, "don't take the screws off from that rich girl in there. Nail her before we are in too deep."

"Oh, never fear, Ellen will do that," answered Mahone, and the two parted.

Meanwhile Ellen Post was proving herself worthy of the confidence Mr. Mahone expressed in her. The moment those two young men left the room she turned to Miss Spicer.

"Now are you satisfied, Miss?"

"Yes, that the work you undertook is half done," answered the young lady tartly.

"One thing is certain," replied Miss Post quietly resuming her work, "the money we depended on must be paid within an hour, or that young man will come up missing at the examination."

Miss Spicer started to her feet, and flushed angrily, feeling herself coarsely coerced.

"Ellen Post, I have made you a promise and it shall be performed. It seems that we cannot trust each other. Let that young man go on and I will pay you half the money now, the rest when these people are convicted, not a cent more. Take your choice, a check for two thousand five hundred now, the rest to abide the result of a trial, or nothing. Which will you have?"

"The check," said Ellen Post, still going on with her work with a leisurely motion.

Miss Spicer left the room without a word. Ellen Post worked faster, and her needle flew. This was all the sign of excitement that she gave.

Directly the young lady came down again, with a check fluttering in her hand. She flung it into the waiting maid's lap.

"Will that do?"

Ellen took the check up, and examined it closely.

"Yes, it will do," she said, "thanks!"

Miss Spicer flung herself out of the room.

The moment she was gone, Ellen Post dropped her work in a white heap on the carpet, and opened the kitchen door.

"Mr. Mahone!"

The footman answered the call of his lady love promptly.

She closed the door and held up the check. He flushed crimson with pleasure.

"You don't say so!"

"That is all we shall get till after the trial," said Ellen.

"Let me look at it," entreated Mr. Mahone, reaching out his hand.

"No, the ink is wet," answered his betrothed.

"But, but when—"

Mahone hesitated, some coward thought, which might have been conscience in another man, checked the criminal proposition he was about to make.

"Did you ask anything?" inquired Ellen, slowly folding the check which she hid carefully away in her bosom.

"Yes, I did, Miss Post. What are we a waiting for? how long will you keep this ardent heart on the fence?"

"Mr. Mahone, you speak so metaphorically that I can't quite understand."

"When—when are we to be married—to unite our fortunes and share and share alike?"

Miss Post cast down her eyes and began to roll up one of her cap strings, feeling herself to be a young lady of romance with an ardent hero before her.

"When will that confounded—that gorgeous wedding dress be done?"

"It—it can be finished in an hour," faltered the damsel, "I was just fastening flowers into the bridal veil."

"Then what is in the way? Who is to hinder us from being married this very night?" demanded the lover whom a single glimpse of that check had rendered half frantic with greed.

"To-night! Oh! Mr. Mahone!"

"Yes, this very night. The dress is ready—I have got what would amount to a basket of champagne stored away, and my heart—my heart!"

"Don't! don't appeal to me in that way; you know my

weakness, you know how impossible it is to refuse you anything."

"Is that so? Prove it then, Ellen, prove it by having that dress on at eight o'clock this evening. I will have a carriage at the back entrance, and a minister ready. Promise now; if your love for me is the genuine thing, you will."

"Oh, Mahone, I promise!"

"At eight, then?"

"At eight you will find me here waiting."

CHAPTER LVIII.

MOTHER AND SON.

WHEN Mrs. Laurence heard this wild cry from her boy, she turned suddenly and held out her arms. The poor little fellow rushed into them, and clung to her, trembling under a fierce effort to be brave and choke back the tears that rushed, hot and painful, to his eyes.

Up to this moment the old woman had been too indignant for sorrow. The grey of her eyes shone out hard and cold as steel; but now a mist stole over them and her whole frame shook visibly.

"James! James! there, there, hush! These men must not see you cry. You have done nothing. I have done nothing. Be brave then, as your mother is."

James drew his head back, and looked in the old woman's face, shaking the tears away from his own vision that he might comfort her with an effort to obey and be strong. But the sight of that pale, shocked countenance brought them back with a rush.

"Oh, mother! mother! what will they do to you?"

"How can we tell, my child?"

"And the girls, Ruthy and Eva, will they bring them too?"

The old woman shook her head.

"I don't know. How can I?"

"Where are they—oh! where are they, mother?" cried the boy, startled with a new fear.

"At home. I left them safe—don't, don't tremble so, Jimmy."

"Did I tremble? Mother, don't mind, I didn't mean to; only I was so frightened about the girls. Do they mean to kill us all?"

"Come, come, little chap. Don't you see that we're waiting? A little of this sort of thing is well enough; but you're wanted up yonder, you know."

The policeman who said this took James by the arm, not altogether unkindly, and moved toward a flight of stairs that led into the front of the most gloomy building that civilization ever invented.

Through dark corridors, narrow passages, and sparsely furnished rooms, the officers led mother and son, who, quite unconscious of crime, felt all the shame and bitter humiliation of guilt. Through those vast Egyptian pillars that seemed strong enough to bear up mountains, and whose very shadows lay like overthrown granite upon the paved floor, they went, growing more and more heavy-hearted into that stone wilderness, till, at last, they stood in a square room, with a desk running across one end, and some wooden benches along the opposite side.

The woman and her son sat down on the nearest bench, while the officer leaned his back against the wall and waited.

The widow looked around with a vague feeling of curiosity. The bare room, in another place, would hardly have challenged notice; but here, in the heart of that gloomy

prison, thoughts of crime and its gloomy train of sorrows made the place desolate indeed. The Judge, who sat wearily on his bench, scarcely looked that way when the door opened to admit these two prisoners. He had become so accustomed to human suffering, so familiar with every aspect of crime, that both had ceased to shock him.

After a little, he beckoned to the officer, who came forward and answered a brief question put to him.

"It is," said he, "an old woman and her son, charged with a heavy crime, the boy with grand larceny, the woman with receiving the goods he had stolen, probably at her own suggestion."

The Judge cast a severe glance at the woman, and went on with some business that had occupied him before the officer's entrance.

But few persons were in the court-room, for scenes like this were commonplace affairs, and men had scarcely the curiosity to look twice, when the mother and son seated themselves on the same bench with some half dozen other persons, gloomy, hardened and evil-looking, who awaited examination.

After awhile, the Judge leaned back in his leathern chair, and the officer was ordered to come forward with his charge. He spoke kindly to the old woman, who arose, tall, rigid and tearless, to obey. This woman knew herself to be innocent, and felt the wrong that had dragged her before that tribunal with bitter, even fierce resentment. When her hand clutched the railing before the Judge, it was with a grasp of iron, and the eyes she bent upon him burned with smouldering fire which he took for defiance.

When the judge called Mrs. Laurence by name, the lad clung to her dress, and followed her up to the bar, with some wild idea of protecting her from the harm that threatened them both.

But there was nothing for him to do. He understood

that some wrong was intended, but had no idea of the form in which it was to come upon them. Thus he stood close to his mother, pale and bewildered.

They had given him no chance to speak to his mother, nor did he know of what she was accused. All was gloom and distrust around him; his proud young heart swelled with a sense of infinite degradation, which seemed to close in his life with sudden darkness. He turned his eyes upon the judge with thrills of dread, then lifted them to his mother, from whose face they fell away, heavy with tears.

As the mother and her boy stood before this, to them mysterious tribunal, two men came into the court-room, and James gave a start as he saw them, and uttered a faint cry, which drew his mother's attention.

The first man who presented himself was Jared Boyce, who came forward with a studied swagger, though his usually florid face was almost ashen pale, and his cowardly eyes wandered away from any look fixed upon them.

The other man was Smith; he too was pale and greatly agitated; he only cast one glance at the lad, whose face brightened at the sight of him, and turned utterly away from the woman, who searched his countenance keenly with her eyes.

"Oh, sir! oh, Mr. Smith! what does it mean? What will they do with her?" half sobbed, half whispered the boy, who still considered Smith his friend, and drew closer to him in an agony of hope.

Smith turned away with a frown; his course was taken; justice should be done; why then should he permit himself to be disturbed by the woman's stern glance, or the large, pleading eyes of the boy. Now and then, he glanced toward the door, as if apprehending something from that quarter. But the fixed resolve of his face did not change. He waved the poor lad back with his hand, but made no other reply to his pathetic appeal.

"Oh, mother, what can I do for you—what can I do?" cried the boy, creeping back to the old woman's side. "Everybody turns against us."

"Hush! be a man!" was the answer; but the old woman's voice was broken and her mouth quivered.

"Do they mean to send us back to prison, mother?" This time the boy addressed the policeman who had all along betrayed extraordinary pity for him. But another person heard it and answered,

"Not as long as I live to say that it sha'n't be done, Jimmy dear!"

James sprang forward and caught Mrs. Smith by the gown.

"Oh, ma'am, you will take her away, you will—" Mrs. Smith interrupted him.

"Yes, I will, if it kills me I will!"

Here the good woman released her dress from the boy's grasp and went up to the judge.

"Sir," said she, "now may it please your honor, I have come down here all alone to see that justice is done to these two people who are innocent as milk, yes sir, as skim milk. They are my friends, neither of them ever touched the value of a pin that I didn't give them with my own hand. They——"

The judge here interrupted an argument that would have been effective before a jury, and in its honest intensity interested him.

"Who are you, Madam? I do not understand."

"Who am I? Yesterday I should have been proud to say I was that man's wife, but now!"

Here poor Mrs. Smith cast a reproachful glance on her husband; burst into a passion of tears, and only answered the judge with her sobs.

"She is my wife," said Smith, in a troubled voice, "and won't believe in their guilt, though the goods were found in

that woman's wood-house. Some of them was in the cellar. The officers can testify to that, but she won't believe a word of it."

"No, I won't, there!" cried the woman, brushing away a fresh burst of tears, and turning upon her husband, "not if I'd seen them a doing it with my own eyes. There are things, Mr. Judge, that human nature won't take in, and this is one of them."

"Do you know anything about this charge of your own knowledge?" questioned the Judge kindly, for the woman's generous recklessness had made its impression on him.

"Know, Mr. Judge. Yes, I know that it's a shame and a disgrace that we shall never get over as long as my name is Smith. Why, sir, if you could have seen that boy tending my Jerusha Maria, his innocence would be clear as clear to you. No paid nurse was ever so careful or so handy—the way he used to hold up her two feet in them red morocco shoes for her to crow over, was a sight in itself. He steal. He rob a store—nothing but a heathen would think of it."

Here Mrs. Smith turned upon her husband, and flashed a storm of wrathful glances on him from her yet tearful eyes.

"You're a pretty man, ain't you—an honor to the name of Smith, oh yes! It would make you happy to see these two innocent creatures in States Prison, with balls and chains on their ankles. I can see you now a gloating over it, and those two girls breaking their hearts. Oh, Smith! Smith! I wouldn't have believed it of you!"

"There, there, my good lady, I can honor your feelings, but you interrupt the case. Pray step down and let me take the evidence of these persons," said the Judge.

"But you won't believe them, just promise that you won't believe them, and I'll be still enough."

"Believe me, they shall have justice," answered the judge, kindly.

"That is all any of us want," said Mrs. Smith, and

stepping down, she took her place by Mrs. Laurence, resolute to stand by her to the last.

"Young man, step this way."

Jared Boyce obeyed this order from the magistrate, and mounted the step which ran in front of the judge's seat. His face was flushed to a brick red now, and his eyes wandered away from any one who attempted to look into them. They were turned furtively aside from the judge while Boyce told his story in a hard, cruel voice, which never faltered or softened in its tone from beginning to end. We know what that story was, and how the wicked plot to ruin this brave, innocent lad had grown and perfected itself in the craft and greed of a few base creatures, who at first thought only of throwing their own guilt on him, but afterwards broadened their plot in hopes of great future gain.

It was impossible for Boyce to keep the blood from receding now and then from his face. When that stern woman's eyes were bent on him, he seemed to feel their searching fire, and grew deadly pale, though his glance never rested on her once. Two or three times the accused lad made a step or two forward, with his hand clenched, tempted to strike his fellow-clerk for the slander he was uttering; but a touch of the old woman's hand brought him back to her side, and the perjured wretch told his story to the end, without interruption of any kind.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE EXAMINATION COMPLETED.

THEN Smith the grocer took the stand. There was human feeling in this man, and he bitterly repented the step he had taken after his wife learned of it, and put in her pas-

sionate protest. But compunction came too late. His charge had been made; the case was taken out of his hands. He would gladly have softened, or withheld his own evidence; but the oath enforced upon him was a sacred obligation to speak the truth, and against his own will Smith gave in his evidence honestly.

While he was speaking a gentleman came into the courtroom, and quietly drew toward Mrs. Laurence and her son, who caught him by the hand and whispered,

"Oh, take her home! don't let her stand here to be looked at so! Feel her hands; they are cold as stones! Let them take me. I am a man, and can bear it; but a night in one of those cells would kill any woman! Please, oh, please! We haven't another friend on earth but Mrs. Smith and you, since he has turned against us."

Here James cast a look full of mournful reproach on Smith, whose voice began to falter, and once more he besought permission to withdraw the charge and let these two helpless creatures go. Guilty as they were, he did not like to see them punished.

Then the old woman advanced toward the judge and spoke. It was the first time she had uttered anything but dry, hard monosyllables, since her entrance into the courtroom.

"If you are to decide this," she said, firmly; but still with respect, "I ask that this man shall show us no mercy that can leave a suspicion of wrong on me, or on my boy. If you are a just judge, search out the truth, find the guilty persons; first and foremost wring the perjury from that young man's soul, for he is perjured."

Boyce tried to evade the long, steady finger which the woman pointed at him; but there was a force and weird fascination in her look which held him motionless. He grew coldly white to the lips, and the ruddy hair rose upon his temples like meadow-grass lifted by the wind.

"That—that is libelous," he faltered at last. "I only come to do my duty, and because Mr. Smith wanted me to."

"Well, I just wish I hadn't; that's all," said Smith, wiping his moist forehead. "I'd rather have lost twice the money, than go through with all this again; to say nothing of the awful muss at home, where I don't know as my own wife will speak to me."

"Oh, you never fear that—they always do!" said Boyce, with an uneasy attempting to shake off the impression which Mrs. Laurence had left upon him. "Shouldn't wonder if she forgives you one of these days, hard as she takes it; women are, naturally—well, suppose we say, soft."

"Silence!" said the judge, on whom the young man was fastening a vague suspicion of treachery. "Come forward, Mrs. Laurence, and make your own statement."

Mrs. Laurence laid her hand on the railing before her, looked the judge steadily in the face, and answered that she had nothing to say, except that, up to the time of her arrest she had never heard of the robbery, or known that her son was suspected.

"But some of the goods were found on your premises. How do you account for that?" said the judge.

"I do not account for a thing of which I have no knowledge. If stolen property was found there, neither I nor this child had anything to do with it."

"Then you deny all knowledge of the stolen goods found in the out-house on your premises?"

"I do!"

"And the boy? Step down. He may be able to tell us something. James Laurence!"

James came forward, pale and frightened; but in no way downcast; his eyes clear, honest, and limpid with truth, were lifted almost with confidence to the judge, whose face softened with an irresistible feeling of compassion as he bent it toward him.

"Tell me what you know of this," he said, very kindly; "but first let me caution you. If you are the guilty boy this witness makes you out, I have no power or right to make you accuse yourself. Be careful what you say; innocent or guilty, you shall have a fair trial."

"I will answer everything, only please tell me what is it you want to know?"

"You have heard the charge. You know what this young man has been saying. Is it true?"

"Yes, sir, I heard every word he said. Some of it was true, and some wasn't," answered the boy, lifting his honest eyes to the magistrate's face.

"How much of it, then, was true?"

"He did give me the store key, sir, and I was left home to take care of things."

Here the boy faltered a little, and his eyes fell, his manly little heart refused to own that he was left in care of a girl baby before all those people.

"Well, what did you do after that?"

"I tried to fasten the door inside, but the bar was gone, so I left it as it was, locked but not barred, and went up stairs."

"Who was with you then?"

"No one, that is, no one but Jerusha Maria. Kate Gorman had gone out with Jared Boyce, and we two were locked in till our folks came home from the party."

"And who is Jerusha Maria? Is she here?"

James glanced at Mrs. Smith, and answered, with hesitation, that Jerusha Maria was Mrs. Smith's little girl, and couldn't come to a place like that, not being old enough.

"But being that bright," broke in the mother, "that if she was here, she would cry ready to break her heart."

The magistrate smiled, but went on questioning James.

"Well, what did you do after that?"

"I sat down by Jerusha Maria, and tried to coax her to go to sleep," faltered the lad, blushing crimson.

"Well, what next?"

"She wouldn't do it, sir."

"Being good as gold, but obstinate, taking after her father in that respect," broke in Mrs. Smith, with a last dash of scorn at her husband.

"They had kept up a racket before going out," said James; "and that left her wide awake. It wasn't her fault."

"I'll be bound it wasn't!" exclaimed the mother, with tears in her eyes.

"Well?" said the judge, silencing Mrs. Smith with a gesture of the hand.

"Well, sir, I—I sat down by her and rocked the cradle till she fell asleep."

The poor boy confessed this with a glow of burning shame in his eyes and cheeks; it was the only thing in his young life that he shrank from making known; the great cross taken up to save his mother and sisters from starvation.

"Well, when the child was asleep—what next?"

"I drank a glass of root beer that tasted of paregoric, and went to sleep myself. It was wrong, but I could not help it."

"But you woke up again?" said the magistrate.

"Not till the folks came home."

"And this is all?"

"That is all I can remember about."

The magistrate hesitated; there was something so straightforward and honest in the two persons brought before him, that some intuitive feeling made him suspicious of the evidence that seemed to condemn them. But there was, in fact, nothing to contradict it; nothing that could justify him in setting the prisoners free. While he hesitated, there arose a slight disturbance at the door of the court-room.

CHAPTER LX.

AN UNEXPECTED WITNESS.

A YOUNG woman, evidently of the working classes, was talking eagerly with a policeman, stationed at the door of the court-room, which disturbed the judge, who looked that way with an expression of annoyance.

Boyce also gazed anxiously around; a deadly whiteness crept over his face, as he looked for some other door by which he might hope to escape. None presented itself. Rendered desperate by fear, he hurried toward the woman, and attempted to pass her, forcing a ghastly smile to his lips, calling her by name, and saying, with airy lightness, that he wished to speak with her.

The woman turned upon him fiercely. He saw that her eyes were heavy with weeping, and her whole face flushed with angry grief. Every nerve in his body quivered; the breath stopped in his throat. He could not have maintained that jaunty air a moment longer.

"Come along! I have lots to say to you!"

"Say it to him!" answered the woman, pointing toward the policeman. "He will go with you, I dare say. I have got business in here."

"Business! You? What? What business?"

"Come back, and you'll hear. At any rate, I'm not afraid of you going far. Make sure that you'll be wanted!"

"What do you mean, woman? Are you going back on your own husband?" gasped the frightened wretch, in a hoarse whisper. "Are you, Mary?"

"Not yet," answered the woman. "But no wonder you think so, for I'm going to do a queer thing for once!"

"What? What is that?"

"I'm going to speak the truth, and shame— Well, no matter."

"Mary!"

"Yes! That's my name. Mary Boyce. Tell Mr. Mahone that the old name is good enough for me and my baby; but then we don't wear French caps and pink streamers, and no young lady is yearning to give me five thousand dollars for disgracing innocent people! Such things don't often come in the way of a poor woman, who goes out to day's washing to support herself and her child, besides handing over her hard earnings to the man who wants to leave her."

"Mary! Mary! Listen to me! You are mistaken! Some wicked person has been telling you lies!"

Boyce caught his sister-in-law by the arm, driven frantic by her words.

She tore herself from his hold, and hurrying up to the judge, broke in upon him.

"Sir! Yer honor! I know all about this case! That young man standing there is Jared Boyce, my husband's brother. Swear me, please. Let me tell the story with my hand on the Bible."

"Let her be sworn," said the judge; and the woman who had been engaged for extra help in Mrs. Lambert's laundry laid her hand on the Bible and kissed it reverently.

"Now," said the magistrate, "what is it you wish me to hear?"

The woman answered promptly and under considerable excitement.

"It was my husband and that copper-headed scamp that robbed Mr. Smith's store. They two planned it weeks and weeks ago; but it was not till Smith took a new boy on, that they could make anything of a haul. They did it together. My own husband, who is a footman in Fifth Avenue, only he goes by another name, expects that will carry him through bigamy and burglary, and everything else bad that begins with a B. In short, sir, only this

morning, going out to my day's work, as innocent as a lamb, thinking my husband was at his place down town, where females couldn't come, though I never saw a smithereen of his money—not I. Well, yer honor, I went to me day's work in a new place, being on account of another woman's not being well, and there I finds my own husband making up to a creature that yer honor wouldn't wipe your shoes on, saving yer presence, and she calling him Mr. Mahone, and talking about a wedding-dress that stands alone with richness, and a Miss Spicer, who wants eternal and everlasting disgrace to fall on a family by the name of Laurence.

"Well, yer honor, the long and the short of it is this entirely. Jared Boyce and his brother, me own lawfully-wedded husband, robbed Mr. Smith's store, both of groceries and money, which they divided atween them, in my own room, and the groceries they packed away under my bed and in the closet, and me saying nothing, till they come one night and carried them away; so I, being put about by this, followed after them, and, with my own eyes, saw Jared and me husband hide the groceries and other things away in a woodhouse back of a little place where I afterwards saw yon woman going in and out as if she belonged there.

"Well, yer honor, I said nothing about that, but minded me work, and keeping the baby nice in hopes it might 'tice me husband home more, wondering what it all meant, when I found out behind that close-horse in the laundry what was going on in them underground rooms, where servants set up for ladies; I just wiped the soap suds from my arms, put on my bit of a hood and foregathered awhile with a policeman that stands on our corner, about the best way of telling the truth and keeping me husband from that prowling lion with the cap, and it please your honor, he told me to come down here, and never fear that your honor wouldn't give Robert a taste of Blackwell's Island which I hope you

will, just enough to set him straight and keep him out of the way of females in caps till he turns to his own lawfully married wife and child. That is all I ask your honor, and if you don't believe me, just send some one up to me little place and I'll show him a chist of tea and a box of crackers that they left with me, besides other things just to pacify me for taking off the rest, which I didn't like at all, not always having tea and such things in the house."

Here Mrs. Boyce was interrupted by the Judge, who pointed towards the door, and in a stern voice ordered the officer to stop that man.

The man was Jared Boyce, who had been making sickly efforts to slink out of sight, while his sister-in-law was giving her evidence. He had crept up to the door through which he was about to make a desperate plunge just as the Judge observed him. Terrified and shaking from head to foot, the poor wretch muttered that he wasn't meaning to go out, and retreated to the nearest bench, where his limbs shrunk together, and his face grew more and more livid, as the woman rambled on with her evidence.

"Your honor," said she, "I don't want yez to be hard on my Robert. A week at Blackwell's Island will be plenty to bring him to his sinses and make an honest man and dutiful husband of him. But as for the woman who was tempting him into unlawful bigermy, as the perliceman calls it; twenty years wouldn't be too much for her, with plinty of hard work at the wash-tub, and bread and water to live on."

Here Mrs. Boyce was preparing to step down from the witness stand but turned back again, having thought of something else.

"It was that female, your honor, that set him on to persecute this woman, that never says a word or cries a tear more an if she was made of stone, yer honor; and it was her that put him up to marrying her ownself before the

priest, so ye cannot give the crather too much punishment, which is all I have to say, that I think of now."

Having thus expressed her wishes, Mrs. Boyce came down from the witness stand with a look of triumph on the face that had been stained with tears when she went up; for she had great faith in her own eloquence, and entertained no doubt that the judge would kindly deal out justice exactly as she had recommended, for he had seemed deeply interested, and smiled more than once while she was giving her evidence.

But the woman's countenance fell when she saw Jared crouching on his bench, pale and shivering with dread of the fate her words had prepared for him. She went up to him, with a little hesitation, and was about to assure him of her protection, but he glared upon her like a wild beast, and turned his face to the wall, muttering hoarsely,

"Get out of my sight, you fool! It is in States Prison for years you've put me and your own husband this day."

The woman was struck dumb by his words; the color left her face to its natural wan misery. She looked wildly around toward the judge, who was talking with the tall gentleman who had entered the court room so quietly. She looked again at Boyce, and in a broken, piteous voice besought him to tell her the truth, would the judge be so cruel after all she had said to him."

"Cruel, you idiot! he can't help himself," answered the clerk, livid with malice and cowardly dread, "you've done for me, and you've done for your own husband."

"No, no, it's wanting to break my heart ye are, just out of spite; but I don't believe ye. It's the woman he'll send up yonder."

"The woman, he can't touch her!"

"What! what is it ye say?"

"That woman will carry her head high as ever, while you are worse than a widow, that's what I say."

"A widdy—me a widdy, whist now, Jared, it's jokin' ye are."

"Joking," repeated the clerk, bitterly, "It seems like a joke, don't it? They are making out the warrants now, but I can tell you this, for your comfort. Robert will be married before they can reach him."

"Married! To that woman?"

"To that woman."

Once more Mrs. Boyce rushed before the judge.

"Oh, yer honor—"

The judge waved her back, he was giving orders about some papers that a clerk was writing out.

"But, yer honor," persisted the distracted creature.

"You can go home now, my good woman. The officer will let you know when you are wanted again," said the judge, without lifting his eyes.

The poor woman looked wildly around the court room, but there was no one to whom she could appeal. Then struck with the thought that her husband was perhaps being married, she rushed from the room.

It was nearly dark when this poor wife, stung with regret for what she had done, and tortured with dread, reached the vicinity of Mrs. Lambert's dwelling. She dared not attempt to go in, but walked up and down the block, keeping the servants' entrance in view all the time. Once or twice she passed a police officer who seemed watching like herself, but shunned him with trembling dread. What did he want there, and who was he waiting for?

After it became quite dark, the poor woman lingered in sight of the house. She had walked all the way down to the Tombs and back again, her limbs were weary, her heart ached with apprehension. Oh, if she could only see her husband one moment to warn him of the danger her own ignorance had brought upon him.

The woman grew desperate, she could pace that sidewalk

no longer. It was quite dark and her child would be crying with hunger; at any rate she would ring at the servants' door.

As Mrs. Boyce was advancing for that purpose a carriage drove up. She hesitated and drew back into a shadow of the garden wall. The policeman was near her, but she was too much absorbed to observe him.

Directly the door opened and two persons came out. One a figure in flowing white garments that gleamed like snow across the darkness; the other a man. There was a pause near the carriage, and the woman was close enough to hear every word these two persons said. The woman drew back and seemed to hesitate about entering the carriage.

"Your friend is not here; we cannot proceed without him; there must be witnesses," she said.

"But we shall find them at the minister's," pleaded the man. "I don't pretend to know what keeps my friend Boyce, but one witness is as good as another; do step in, or we shall be late."

Ellen Post had her foot on the step and was gathering the bridal veil about her, when a strange hand was laid on her arm, and the face of Mrs. Boyce gleamed on her with the lamp-light full upon it.

"Woman, go back into the house, take off them white things and ask God to forgive you. This man is my own lawfully wedded husband."

The deep, honest feeling of the wife gave dignity to her speech. Ellen Post stepped back and stood gazing on her, pale and breathless.

"Who are you? What does this mean?" she faltered at last.

"I am this man's wife, that's what I am, and we have one child, which you can see any day if you will come to my place, Ellen Post."

"I don't believe it. Mahone, Mahone, come here and tell this woman she lies."

"Oh Robert, Robert, run for your life. Jared is in prison; they will be after you," pleaded the poor wronged wife. "Don't wait for anything, but go."

"Why don't you speak? Why don't you deny this?" demanded Ellen Post, stamping her whitely-clad foot on the sidewalk.

"The gentleman has something else to do," answered the strange voice of a man who had quietly drawn near and laid his hand on Mahone's shoulder.

"Robert Boyce, you must go with me."

"A policeman!" faltered the bride, "what does this mean?"

"A policeman," moaned the wife; "oh Robert, Robert, say you forgive me!"

Boyce turned his wild eyes from his wife to the officer, and stared a moment in the man's face. Then he made a sudden twist, wrenched himself free, and made a bound forward—one bound and the heavy hand grasped his shoulder again.

Before either of the women could speak, Robert Boyce was led off into the darkness.

CHAPTER LXI.

WAITING FOR NEWS.

THERE is not, upon the face of the earth, more harassing trouble than that which springs out of ignorance and suspense. Eva and Ruth Laurence had but a wild and vague idea of the evil that had fallen on the two most beloved members of their little household. They knew nothing of the law, and imprisonment to them was an awful blending of suffering and disgrace, to which the unchecked imagination lent unknown horrors.

They sat together for a time in dead silence, each afraid to speak, lest she should add something to the distress of the other. But, as time wore on, this stillness became intolerable. Eva sprang to her feet and began to walk the room, with the wild restless tread of a panther in its cage; while Ruth clasped both slender hands over her bosom, and let the tears run unchecked, from under her closed eyelids.

"Oh, Ruth, Ruth! what must we do!" cried out Eva, wringing her hands and wrenching them apart with impetuous force. "I cannot stay here waiting in this way; *he* ought not to ask it."

"But what can we do? Ah, me! how helpless we poor girls are!" said Ruth, opening her eyes, and wiping away the tears with her trembling hand. "Even your strength would be wasted, and I am so weak."

"Oh, if I had something to lift—some great load to carry—sister, sister, I can believe now how ready persecuted women were to walk, unshod, among hot ploughshares. I could do it to save them and bring them back to us safe. I could! I could!"

"My sister, my own, own Eva, be patient. It would be only wasted strength if you could do all this; be patient and wait!"

"Wait, wait! that is a woman's destiny in this world," said Eva, with passionate vehemence; "but how can we—how can we? The pain of it is driving me wild!"

"Remember," answered Ruth, speaking softly in her sweet patience, "we have a strong, good man at work for us. Is there no strength and hope in that?"

"But I want to do something; I must, I must."

"Dear Eva, what can you do? Is it nothing that we have already won such a friend? have patience, sister."

"Patience, Ruth, I have nothing but apprehension and fear. Think of her, our mother, so still, so proud. Yes, yes, the proudest woman I ever saw, with all our poverty

and struggles; think of her in the hands of a policeman—in a cell of the tombs."

"I do think of it, and it leaves me weak as a child; but Eva, there is a God above."

Eva turned away from the sweet invalid with a gesture of sharp impatience.

"Yet our mother, and the dearest, brightest, noblest boy that ever lived, are forced from their homes, and innocent as angels, dragged like wolves through our streets. I cannot understand it; I *cannot* understand it!"

"Oh, Eva, Eva, have some faith in the justice of God, in the energy and goodness of this man who has already done so much for us. I am sure he will bring them back again!"

"But the time lengthens so. It is hours and hours since she was taken away! All night long that poor child has been shut up in a prison. Oh, it is terrible!"

"Ah, here is something; a carriage stops at the door. It brings us news, good or bad," cried Ruth, now as much excited as her sister. "Run to the door, Eva."

Eva had already sprung into the little entry, opened the door and met Mrs. Smith half way from the gate.

"What, what is it? Where are they?" she enquired, breathless with dread and impatience.

Mrs. Smith took the girl in her arms and kissed her, leaving a stain of tears on her cheek.

"Don't be afraid; don't be anxious. They'll both be here in less than no time; I jumped into a hack which Smith will have to pay for, thank goodness, and made the driver hurry up his horses to an extent that they will never think of."

"Then they are free? they are coming?"

"Free as birds, and coming along full split, no mistake about that. They wanted me to take the empty seat, but I had not the face to do it after Smith's conduct; though he

did melt right down and try to back out when he saw how I took on."

By the time this stream of words had heralded the good woman's news, she was in the parlor, had half lifted Ruth from her couch, and was lavishing hearty kisses on her pale face.

"What has happened? what did they do down there? No wonder you want to know all about it. Well, I went straight down to the Tombs, which is just the loneliest pile of stones inside, that you ever set eyes on; pillars like them Sampson carried off on his shoulders, and stone rooms that chill one like graves. Well, I wandered about among them hunting up your mother and that precious boy, till I found them at last in a room full of benches with a short counter along one end, and a man sitting behind it, and there stood your mother looking stern and gray as a rock in the winter, and there was little Jimmy a standing by her with his big eyes full of tears, which he kept wiping away, for fear folks might see him cry, poor darling; and that fellow Boyce had been telling his lies, and Smith was backing him up, and things looked awful cloudy till I up and had my say, though Smith was standing there wanting to stop me, and Mr. Ross, my friend Mrs. Carter's brother, come in and stood by your mother like a monument. But I would have my say, and I did."

"I haven't any doubt, girls, that this speech of mine did the business; but another woman came in and finished up the whole thing. She was Jared Boyce's brother's wife. And they did the robbing and stealing, and hid the things in your wood-house. I wish you could have seen the scamp Boyce, when the woman told on him; he was just as gray as ashes, and all skimmed up; you wouldn't have known him—anyway, I shouldn't; and Smith is just about the sheepiest man you ever set eyes on, and wants me to say how awful sorry he is, which I won't; and what a fool he has been, which I will.

"There, now! Didn't I tell you! Here they come, all in one carriage, just as good as new. Let me lift you up, Ruthy, and you can see 'em get out, Mr. Ross and all, who is a gentleman, if one ever lived. There, there!"

Trembling with joy, Ruth looked out and saw Eva darting down the front walk with her arms extended.

Little James leaped into them and clung to her neck, covering her face with kisses; then he made a bound into the house, and Ruth saw no more; for his arms were around her, and his voice filled the room with its sobbing gladness.

Directly Eva came in clinging to her mother, who moved up the walk with her usual grave step, and put aside her bonnet and shawl before she said a word. Then she came up to Ruth, knelt by her side, and laid her head upon the cushion like one who throws down a heavy burden and longs to rest herself awhile.

Gentle Ruth drew close to the old woman, and with tearful kisses, softened the stony grayness of her lips, until they began to tremble. Then her whole frame shook, and, clinging to the girl, she cried out, "Oh, God be thanked, I am home again!" in a voice that made every one in the room weep; for feelings so restrained and pent up are terrible in their force when they once break bounds.

Mrs. Smith sat down in the corner of the room and cried piteously as she took in the deep pathos of this reunion. She had begun to soften toward her husband, accepting his sin upon her own shoulders; and thus sat condemned before the family he had so grievously afflicted.

The boy James saw this, and went up to her, wiping away the tears from his radiant-eyes.

"Oh, what should we have done if you had not been our friend?" he said; "poor mother would have been there all alone with me; but you did not forget us."

"Oh, Jimmy, Jimmy! You will never want to live with us again," said the good woman.

"Won't I though!" answered the boy, eagerly.

"For a time," interposed Mr. Ross; "so long as he works for any one, Mrs. Smith; but we must put him to school and through the City College. Don't you think so, madam?"

"What me, *me!* You don't mean it, Mr. Ross?"

"But I do mean it."

"Eva, Ruth, mother! do you hear that? Hurra! This morning I was in a prison-cell that seemed dug out of a rock; and now—now I'm going to college! Why don't you stop crying and say Hurra! every one of you, Hurra!"

CHAPTER LXII.

THE MORTGAGE.

A MASTER will had been at work and removed all the principal reasons that kept Eva Laurence in the old home at the cottage. James had never been permitted to return to his work at Smith's grocery, though that repentant man would gladly have appeased his conscience and the wrathful compunctions of his wife, by giving him the position so summarily vacated by Boyce. This arrangement Mr. Ross had frustrated, by placing James, after a short examination, in the entering class of the City Academy, when his business education commenced, while Boyce, with his aristocratic brother, made a quick passage through the Court of Sessions. This precious pair of worthies were already commencing a sojourn of three years each at Sing Sing, to the infinite disgust of Miss Ellen Post, and the profound grief of the poor wife.

This ill-used woman, in the first fire of jealousy, and in the blindness of perfect ignorance, had denounced the two men, in a vague hope that the court would have power to

bring her husband back into the bosom of her family a better and kinder man. How keenly she had been disappointed, and how many bitter tears she shed over her helpless babe, no one but the unhappy drudge herself could tell.

Miss Spicer, too, suffered both in reputation and temper. Her name had been roughly handled in the trial, and her plan of disgrace for the Laurence family had recoiled on herself. But this young lady was not of a nature to feel the shame of this exposure keenly, or abandon a project which she had once set her mind upon. Of course, she denied the whole thing, and called on Ellen Post to witness that the story told by Mrs. Boyce, and confirmed by the two convicted men, was a fabrication from beginning to end. Mrs. Lambert believed this, and Ivon would not permit himself to doubt it; for to a generous and noble character like his, the undercraft and meanness of a small nature is simply incomprehensible.

As for Ellen, she was a ready witness in the young lady's behalf, for the check had been honored before Miss Spicer knew of the failure of her conspiracy, and the waiting maid was willing to make any return that did not involve the money itself.

As for the little episode of the wedding garments, Ellen passed it off with an airy declaration that she had only been altering a dress for Miss Spicer, and punished the curiosity of her fellow servants by a canard, they were all fools for believing.

But the malice of Miss Spicer was not to be checked by a single defeat. By some means she had learned that Mrs. Lambert's agent held a mortgage on the Laurence cottage, which the harassed family had allowed to sink into an almost hopeless amount by unpaid interest. This mortgage she empowered her own agent to purchase and foreclose at once. It was an act of vengeance, which she hoped would destroy all vestige of respectability which this poor house-

hold had struggled so hard to maintain. But even here she was defeated ignominiously.

Mrs. Carter happened to be in the Laurence parlor when the notice of this new calamity was served upon the family. She had called to urge once more the acceptance of her noble offer on Eva, before going out on a shopping excursion which was to terminate at Ball & Black's, where something unusually splendid, in the way of a diamond bracelet, had been offered to her attention.

"Come, now, get into the carriage, and we'll talk over affairs as we ride along," said the good-hearted woman, whose desire to have Eva with her had grown into a passion. "I've got Carter's check for the bracelet, which is gorgeous, but I want your opinion. I wish Miss Ruthy here could go too; but she shall see it when we come back. Come, dear, step about lively, or we shall have Battles sulking again."

As Eva went to get her bonnet, two important events happened. The notice of foreclosure was put in her hand by a strange young man, whose ring at the bell had drawn her to the front door, and while she was wondering what it could mean, the postman came into the yard with a letter from the establishment in which her duties lay. This letter curtly dismissed her from the situation, which was forfeited, the proprietor said, by her impertinence to Miss Spicer, a young lady who had been a most valuable customer, and had personally entered a complaint against her.

Carrying the two documents in her hand, Eva went back to the parlor with tears in her eyes and a throb of bitter pain at her heart.

"Dear me, how white you look! What is the matter?" questioned Mrs. Carter, lifting herself from the easy-chair, and laying her hand on Eva's arm. "What is there in them papers that makes you shiver so?"

Eva turned her heavy eyes upon the kind-hearted questioner.

"The letter is for me," she said. "I've lost my place."

"Lost your place? Well, I'm glad of it!"

"That is nothing. Other establishments exist; but this—this cruel slip of paper is terrible. I think—I fear it will turn us all out of doors! Oh, my poor mother! How will she bear it? After all that has been put upon her, I would rather place a serpent in her hand than this."

"Let me look at it before you do that," said Mrs. Carter, resolutely. "I understand these things better than any of you."

Without waiting for a reply, she took the paper, and read it with an eager, cheerful look, which went to Eva's heart. "It is easy," she thought, "for the rich to look on such things as trifles; but for us! She cannot understand how terrible it is for us!"

"How much does all this amount to?" inquired Mrs. Carter, with prompt energy. "Does any one know?"

"Indeed! indeed! we all know too well. Every cent, as it ran up, has been counted over and over again," said gentle Ruth. "As to the interest, I have something toward that, and might have earned more and more, if they would only have given me time; but now——"

The poor girl stopped short; tears were crowding on her speech with such bitter force, that she clasped both hands over her face, and sobbed aloud.

"There! there! None of that! It is all nonsense, you know. What is the amount? That is the question before the American people."

Eva, with her eyes seeking the floor, told the sum, in a shrill whisper; for now, when the amount was demanded, it seemed enormous, and her lips gave it forth with a spasm.

This miserable sound had scarcely left her throat, when the little parlor was filled with mellow laughter, which seemed to mock and overpower Ruthy's sobs, and her sister's anguish.

"What, only that!"

"Only that!" exclaimed Eva, kindling with astonishment. "It is more than enough to turn us all out of house and home!"

"But, my child, the lots are worth three times the money. You have no idea how property has risen since the war."

"I don't know, and if I did, what good would it do without a dollar in hand?"

"No! no! Eva; I have been saving; I have got money—not anything to what they want, but some," cried Ruth, wiping the tears from her eyes, which somehow began to kindle with vague hope.

"Oh, Ruthy! we shall want that to keep us from starving. My place is gone; James has nothing to do! Mrs. Carter, please give me that paper. Mother must know. It is only cruelty to hold it back."

"Not just yet, if you please. Bad news comes to a head soon enough, without forcing. Go and get your things; there will be time to settle that when we come back. Don't you see Battles snapping the flowers with his whip; that shows that he is getting furious—so do make haste."

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE PRICE OF A BRACELET.

Eva obeyed. Perhaps she was glad to accept the respite which Mrs. Carter offered her. Still her hands trembled as she fastened the tiny bonnet on her head, and covered her face with a veil, with a vain effort to hide all traces of the tears that still welled up to her eyes, spite of all her efforts.

"Come now, let us be off. Just keep cool, and don't fret yourself into a fever, till we come back," said Mrs. Carter,

kissing Ruth before she went out, "and not a word to the grim—I mean nice old lady in yonder. There, there, no more sobbing—she'll hear you."

Bright as a sunbeam, and full of energy, which contrasted with Eva's mournful lassitude, Mrs. Carter swept through the little yard, and for once defied Battles' evident ill-temper.

"Drive to Carter's office," she said, "and be quick about it. Don't dare to let the grass grow under them horses' hoofs, when I'm in the carriage. Get in, my dear; don't wait for me. There now, we are ever so comfortable—you and I."

Away went the carriage at full speed, for Battles, not daring to disobey orders entirely, resolved to vent his ill-temper by overdoing them. At another time the sulky coachman might have terrified the good lady within, by the reckless speed with which he crashed into the carts and omnibuses on his way toward Wall Street. As it was, this hidden motive seemed nothing more than prompt obedience.

"Tell Carter to come out; I want to speak to him," said the lady, when Battles drew up near the office-door, and the footman looked in for orders.

In a few moments, Carter came down the steps, rosy and smiling, his heavy watch-chain swinging loosely down from the pocket of his white vest, and the diamonds in his bosom glistening richly.

"Well, what is it?" he inquired, looking into the carriage, and nodding kindly to Eva. "Brought the article down for me to look at, I suppose. It is of no use; if you like it, that's enough."

Mrs. Carter took out her reticule-purse, opened the gold clasp, and took a scrap of paper from it.

"Just cut that in two, and give me half. I've changed my mind about the bracelet. It isn't much of an affair, after all, that is, considering the price asked. I've made up my

mind to invest in real estate. So, just cut down the check, and let me go."

Carter laughed till the diamonds in his bosom shook off quick flashes of light.

"Well, this is a new idea. Cut down a check half, because one's wife is going into real estate! Haven't made so much money on one job in a week. Here, come along, you fellow."

Beckoning joyously to the footman, Carter went into his office with the check in his hand. Directly the servant came out with the abridged paper neatly folded, which Mrs. Carter put into her purse, and gave another order regarding the route her carriage was to take on its way home. The good woman got out once or twice, leaving Eva alone, and at last came from a lawyer's office with a folded paper in her hand, which was hurried into her pocket, when she saw Eva looking at it.

Once more Battles drew up his horses at Mrs. Laurence's gate, and with his heavy face clouded with disgust, waited gloomily for his mistress to go into that shanty, as he was pleased to call it.

Mrs. Carter, oblivious of her servant's discontent, bustled out of her carriage. She almost lifted Eva to the ground, and opened the gate for herself, absolutely pushing the footman on one side, and bursting her delicate mauve glove in the operation.

"Now, my dears, you can call that mother of yours! Don't stop to take off your bonnet, Eva, but bring her in. That's right. Here she comes, looking as if she expected a policeman. Mrs. Laurence, my dear neighbor, my darling good woman! here is something for you; just a trifle—a little mite of a present. Take it, and chuck it, neck and heels, into the hottest corner of your cooking-stove."

Mrs. Laurence took the paper in her hand, looked at the indorsement, looked at Mrs. Carter. The color flushed

into her face; tears, that imprisonment and wrong had failed to wring from her, came, drop by drop, into her hard eyes.

"Why, why this is the mortgage!" she said. "The old mortgage, that was eating up everything!"

"Exactly. Put it in the stove, and never think of it again. It is mine, and I give it to you for a nice little bonfire. Eva, dear, come and kiss me. Ruthie, why what are you crying for, child?"

Down by the invalid's couch Mrs. Carter sank upon her knees, folded her arms around the startled girl, and began to sob like a great warm-hearted baby, as she was—God bless her!

After a little she lifted her face, all wet and smiling, like a full-blown rose, with rain trembling on it, and got up, ashamed of her own goodness, and the emotion that sprung out of it.

"You see I always was such a goose—crying when I ought to laugh, and hard as a rock when I ought to cry. Don't let anybody know that you ever saw me like this. But I tell you, girls, it isn't every day that one can get so much joy out of a trumpery bracelet, and save half the price too. You have no idea how much money that old paper has saved for Carter. I'll be bound he's chuckling over it yet."

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE ADOPTION.

EVA, whose face had changed from red to white, with a swift transition of feeling, came forward suddenly, and threw her arms around Mrs. Carter's neck.

"Oh, how good you are! How I love you! Can we do anything—anything on earth to repay all this?" she cried, in a warm outburst of gratitude. "It seems to me that I could fall down and worship you!"

"There! there! That's all nonsense, my dear. Just remember that there is only one thing you can do, and having once refused, I can never ask you again after this, not wanting to buy love."

"Oh, don't say that, Mrs. Carter. It was because they could not spare me—because they were in such trouble, and needed help so much. Even now——"

"Stop a minute, dear. Does your heart go with me?"

"Yes! yes!"

"Will you go with me now? That is, will you let me arrange this with your mother. The people down yonder don't want your help. I do. My life in that grand mansion is lonely. I haven't been brought up to reading, and music, and such things. I want some one to write my notes, do my spelling, and sing to Carter—and am ready to pay for it. If you are willing to work for men that sell goods, why not work for me at double the price? I don't mean to keep you away from home; there needn't be a day that you can't come here. Besides, I have an idea about Ruthy. You shall learn to drive the pony-carriage, and take her out every morning. I'll have an elevator put up in the house, and she shall just be lifted up to Herman's studio—in fact there'll be no break up about it. Say now, once for all, will you come?"

"Oh, if you knew how I wish it; but poor Ruthy!"

"She don't look so terribly troubled," said Mrs. Carter, glancing at the gentle girl.

"I shall like the rides so much," said Ruthy. "Then, perhaps, I might see what the Park is like."

"Of course you shall, with plenty of cushions, and a gentle horse. There can be nothing like it. There now, you see, Eva."

Eva went close to her sister, knelt down, and laying her cheek against the pale, tremulous face, whispered,

"Sister, darling, could *you* let me go."

"We should not be much apart," answered Ruth. "And she is so good."

While the girls were consulting together, Mrs. Carter went into the kitchen, where she found Mrs. Laurence pressing the mortgage down with the poker into a flaming bed of coals. The scarlet light shone on her face, giving it the glow of long-banished smiles. She closed the stove as Mrs. Carter came up, beaming with good nature, and spoke eagerly.

"You needn't ask me; I have no right to keep her from you. Eva has been a good girl, take her; but let her come home sometimes for Ruthy's sake."

After this there was a passionate clinging of arms, warm kisses, and a tearful face, looking wistfully through the carriage window, as Mrs. Carter drove away with her adopted daughter, for the whole affair amounted to that, under the guise of an agreement.

In less than a week it was known throughout the fashionable world that the wealthy Carters had adopted that beautiful girl, Eva Laurence, and intended to make her an heiress. It was also known that the whole Laurence family had been benefited by the change—that a delicate, lovely girl, who had been a great sufferer from childhood, had developed such wonderful talent for painting, that Mr. Ross had taken her for a pupil.

This was all true. From that humble cottage Eva had passed into a life so luxurious and pleasant, that it realized all her ideas of paradise. No more work, no walking up and down town in drifting snow or driving rain. Warmth, beauty and kindness, surrounded her on every hand. Her love of the beautiful was gratified to the full. It seemed to her that there was hardly a thing on earth which was not given to her wishes.

"Yes, one."

But she would not think of that; Fate had forbidden her to love; in giving her everything else, that great first boon of womanhood had been withheld. But she had in exchange that sweet, pure, fatherly affection, which seemed to have been taken away forever when Laurence died. No one could be more generally kind than Mr. Carter, but it was on the artist Ross that her heart rested with more than filial affection; his loving patience, his tender assiduity, sometimes won tears of gratitude from the girl.

Was this love? Yes, but oh how different to that which lay buried deep in her heart for the man she could not marry.

In a few weeks from this the season was at its full, and the Carters plunged into all its gayeties with a zest and brilliancy hitherto unknown to them. To own and introduce a creature so lovely, and so exquisitely refined, into fashionable life, was a crowning glory to the ambition which had urged these new people into society. They accepted invitations—they gave parties—they occupied the most prominent box at the opera, and had the glory of knowing that their protégée, in spite of her humble origin, in spite of envy and persecution, was in fact the Reigning Belle of society.

It would be false to say that Eva did not feel this change in her life as a transition into something like fairy land.

CHAPTER LXV.

IN THE PARK.

THE prettiest park phaeton you ever set eyes on, drove up to the Laurence cottage; a pair of white ponies with snowy

tails that took the wind like banners, stopped with the docility of pet kittens before the gate. An afghan on which living roses seemed to bloom, was thrust aside, and out sprang a young lady, who ran up the walk and entered the house without knocking.

"Ruthy, Ruthy dear, I have got them in training at last. Do look out of the window and see what darlings they are. Now for your first ride in the park."

Ruth sat up on her couch, thrilled throughout her feeble frame with unusual excitement.

"Oh Eva, are those the horses? am I to ride in that pretty thing? but how—how can I get there?"

"Never mind about that; I feel strong enough to carry you myself. The truth is, I—I never was so happy in my life; to think, dear, that they should give me all the pleasure of doing this, for everything is mine, Ruth. We can use it just when we please, and you shall ride every pleasant day of your life."

"And see how the country looks. Oh Eva, what a darling, fairy god-mother you have been to us!"

"Have I? Then you are glad I went away?"

"Only half away, sister. Why you are with us a great deal more now, than while slaving down in that store."

"So I am, darling, and it is delicious to belong to one's-self. They love me too."

"Yes, I should think so," answered Ruth, a little sadly. "Who could help it?"

"But we must not be talking at this rate; the day is too lovely. Where is mother? Oh, here she comes."

In the bright exuberance of her feelings, Eva threw both arms around her mother's neck and kissed her with affectionate warmth.

"Where are Ruthy's things, mother? she must be dressed at once."

"They are lying on the bed, Eva; everything is in

order," answered the old woman, fairly smiling all over her face.

Eva ran into the bedroom and came out with a sacque of fleecy, white cloth, and a hat on which some soft feather tips clustered like snow. These she put on to sister Ruth with her own hands, saying blithely as she tied the hat strings:

"Yes, Eva had a little lamb,
Its fleece was white as snow;
And every where that Eva went
That lamb was sure to go."

At which Ruth laughed like a pleased child, but said the bonnet felt so strangely on her head, it would take her a little while to get used to it. Then her curls had always wandered about in such a lazy fashion, what could she do with them?

"Oh, they're all right," cried Eva, bringing a little seven by nine mirror that Ruth might look at her own sweet face, framed in by the bonnet, which she did, blushing like a wild rose at the sight of her own delicate beauty.

"Oh Eva, I hardly know myself!"

"Of course you don't. Come, mother, are you and I strong enough to carry her out? I might have brought one of the men, but somehow I could not bear to have them touch her."

The two women were about to lift Ruth between them, for the length of the flower garden was more than she could hope to walk, when Mrs. Smith came through the gate followed by her husband, who approached the house with evident hesitation, which his wife was eagerly reproving.

"Come along, they don't hold malice, I tell you, besides, they know that you didn't mean it," she said. "No wonder you are ashamed of yourself, but that scamp might have imposed on Sampson—no, Solomon—hissself. So just walk in, as if nothing was the matter, and never seem to mind it."

Smith did walk in, looking humble and confused, but his reception was so frank and cordial that he found no difficulty in offering to carry Ruth to the carriage, which had been the object of his visit. So the girl was taken out triumphantly in the powerful arms of their old neighbor, while the other females followed smiling, chatting, and congratulating each other, like a brood of robins, when the strongest fledgling begins to fly.

Mrs. Smith shook up the cushions which formed a sort of couch in the carriage, on which the gentle girl was placed in a half recumbent position by Smith, while all the neighborhood looked on from doors and windows, wondering what would happen next to that Laurence family, and if they had really made up with Smith, after that affair about the robbery.

There would be no doubt on that subject after that dainty nest of a carriage drove away, for Eva shook hands with Smith before she raised her whip from its socket, and Mrs. Laurence stood talking with him in the most cordial manner by the gate, full ten minutes after it drove off. One of the nearest neighbors heard him say,

"You can always depend on me to carry her in and out, Mrs. Laurence. It is the least I can do."

Then all the curious people that had been anxious about the matter, saw Mr. Smith and Mrs. Laurence shake hands over the fence, and they knew that cordial relations had been established between the cottage and the corner grocery.

This pleasant thought perhaps served to deepen the exquisite sense of enjoyment that pervaded the whole being of that gentle invalid, as she found herself moving in the open air for the first time almost in her life.

The easy motion; for Eva kept her ponies down to a soft unbroken trot; calmed her into a state of dreamy happiness. At first she was a little frightened by the noise of heavy wheels and the rush of life all around her; but Ruth

had not won for herself such abiding faith in God's mercy without putting some trust in human strength. She wondered at the cool dexterity with which Eva guided her pretty equipage through the streets, and shuddered a little now and then, as a carriage rushed by them, so near that it seemed as if there must be a clash of wheels; but this soon wore off, for, with a graceful sweep and a swifter trot the ponies turned into the park, and Ruth found herself in paradise.

Trees just tinged with the first frost of autumn, the grass soft and green as velvet, gleams of water here and there, flowers scattered along the drive, or clustering in gorgeous masses; above all a soft blue sky with snowy clouds heaped upon it, drifted to and fro by a mild south wind. Can anyone doubt that this was Heaven itself to that fair and gentle girl who had never in her whole life looked upon a scene of such beauty before; indeed had scarcely seen a tree that was not covered with dust from a city street, or a growing flower except the humble garden plants that bloomed around her own home.

"Oh, Eva, Eva! this is too beautiful! drive slower! drive slower! I cannot bear to see all these heavenly things pass away," she would murmur, catching her breath with delight. "The water there; the water, let me look at it; let me feel the moist sweet air on my face."

Eva would check her ponies and bend her smiling eyes on the invalid with loving satisfaction whenever she made a request of this kind; occasionally she would utter a little gleeful laugh at some question that a child would not have asked. Sometimes her eyes would fill with tears, as she felt the touching pathos of all this joy springing out of her sister's utter isolation, which she in her health and beauty had scarcely comprehended before.

"What are those beautiful white creatures, Ruthy? Ah, indeed! how should you know? They are swans, dear;

there now, watch them as they clear the water with their snow white bosoms. See them arch their graceful necks and sail off toward the other shore scarcely caring to make way for the pretty boats that glide up and down with such sleepy stillness. Beautiful, you say, yes, indeed it is beautiful. I shall never get so used to it that every visit will not give me new delight."

Ruth did not answer. Her heart was too full of new feelings. She drew a deep breath and closed her eyes. It all seemed like a dream that she wanted to impress on her brain.

That moment a landeau drove by in which was a lady and gentleman. Mrs. Lambert and her step-son, Ivon.

Ruth opened her eyes suddenly.

"What is the matter, what made you start so, Eva?"

"Nothing," answered Eva, gathering up her reins. "Only you seem tired."

"No, no, I am only happy."

Mrs. Lambert had seen Eva Laurence, and the sight sent a swift thrill of pain through her bosom. She turned and spoke to her son.

"Ivon."

Young Lambert turned sharply to his mother; he also had seen the two girls in their little phaeton, and the sight brought back a keen remembrance of all that this woman's pride had made him suffer.

"Did you speak, madam?"

"You saw that young lady, and bowed coldly. I am sorry for that."

"Sorry, why, madam?"

"Because circumstances are changed, now. I no longer oppose your wish to marry her."

"Indeed, and in what has the lady changed?"

"She has become the adopted child of a man who, at least, holds a high position in commercial circles."

"And is, I am told, engaged to marry the person whom that man intends to make his heir."

"Ivon, I do not believe it!"

"If it were possible for me to doubt what is an admitted fact, my own position is the same."

"What, have you ceased to care for her?" asked the lady in a voice rendered sharp by intense anxiety.

The young man answered her with four of the most mournful words that ever brought sadness to a human heart,

"It is too late!"

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE INDIA SHAWL.

EVA had no heart to enjoy her sister's happiness after that one glimpse of Ivon Lambert seated by the woman who had so cruelly broken up the sweetest hope of her life. His cold bow and averted eyes cut her to the soul, and she drove slowly home with a chilled and disappointed feeling that contrasted forcibly with the generous and unselfish pleasure of the morning.

Perfect happiness is always a hope of the future. With all her success and triumphs Eva was haunted by this one cause of discontent. Ivon Lambert had met her more than once in her social triumphs since she had resided with Mrs. Carter, but it was always with a degree of reserve that chilled her to the heart and made success itself almost worthless. Indeed, after a few months of admiration and excitement which followed her footsteps at every turn, society began to pall upon her. One party was so like another, there was so little variety in the people she met, that the girl sometimes felt a craving for the rest and quiet of her old life.

At such times she would go back to the cottage, and strive to sink gently down into the enjoyment which graced the tranquil existence of her sister Ruth, but hers was a restlessness of the soul, and for that there is little solace either in gaiety or quiet. Hunger of the heart can only be appeased by that which it craves.

One thing seemed strange to Eva; from the time she left the cottage, Mrs. Laurence had changed completely. There was something like reserve, and even shyness in her manner when they met. This Eva could not understand, but it chilled her a little. With James and Ruth she was always welcome, and almost adored. To them she had never changed; all the pomp and wealth of her surroundings only made her the more beautiful.

Some months after Eva had settled down in her new home, like a nightingale among the roses, she entered a little reception room off the hall, and found Mrs. Carter in conversation with a sharp-eyed, cringing little man, who seemed to be urging some request with great persistence.

"I have been so long looking for the purchaser, madam. First I trace it to one party, then to another, and at last to that dealer who would not remember to oblige me. But I found a way to reach him and made an arrangement. He gave me the number of this house, and madam's name. I had great hopes that you would be willing to part with the shawl for the price you gave, as the owner wants it so much. I never, in all my experience, saw any one feel the loss of a pledge so keenly. So, as madam has a good heart, I can see that by her face, I am sure she will not drive a hard bargain with the poor man."

Mrs. Carter seemed restless and somewhat annoyed at this man's eager pertinacity. At one of the principal dealers in such expensive articles, she had purchased one of those rare and most exquisite shawls, which are manufactured expressly for eastern potentates. These rich shawls

are difficult to obtain, and precious among ordinary importations, as diamonds compared with meaner stones. She knew that there was not another shawl to compare with this one for sale in the city, and had happened to purchase it at a bargain. Now this man, whom she did not know, but who announced himself as a pawnbroker, who had once held the shawl in pledge, and sold it among other forfeited articles, was appealing to her, in a keen and pathetic way, to give it up, for the moderate price she had paid, because its former owner was driven almost frantic by the loss of it.

Mrs. Carter, being a woman, was touched by this appeal; but from the same feminine reason, found her love of a bargain, and her ambition to possess something more rare and beautiful than her neighbors, opposing the kind impulse with peculiar force. When Eva entered the room, she felt a sense of support, and was almost ready to leave the decision to her, for she had already learned to depend on the young girl in most matters of taste.

"Eva, dear, run up to my dressing-room, and bring a shawl you will find in my armoire. I want you to look at it, and help me decide about parting with it."

Eva ran up stairs, found the shawl, and came down with it falling in rich folds across her arm.

"Ah, that is it," cried the pawnbroker, eagerly rubbing his hands. "I should know the pattern among ten thousand. To think now that I should have known its value so little! It cuts me to the soul!"

Mrs. Carter had taken the shawl, and was busy opening its marvelous folds, revealing the long slender palm leaves, in which the best tints of a rainbow were wrought with the toil and art seldom bestowed on the modern fabrics that flood our market.

"Ah, it is so beautiful! I should hate to part with it," said Eva, who had learned to estimate a creation like that in her life behind the counter. "You might search years without finding one like it."

"You hear?" said Mrs. Carter, looking irresolutely at the anxious pawnbroker."

"Yes, madam, I hear; but if it is beautiful to a stranger, how much more so to the person who owned it?"

Mrs. Carter looked at Eva with distress in her eyes, and hesitation in her manner.

"What can I do? It does seem hard."

Before Eva could answer, the man broke in,

"Besides, madam will remember, that I am a poor man, and have spent much time in searching for that shawl, which time is a dead loss, if I fail to bring it back to the owner, who is ready to pay me."

"That does seem hard!" said the good woman, appealing to Eva, who was so lost in admiration of the shawl, that the man's greedy eloquence half escaped her.

"The owner has been to my shop again and again, wild to get it. At first he wanted to have it back for a little; but now he will pay anything. The last time he said, 'get it, and I will not count the cost. It is a case of life and death. I must have that shawl.' Then I went to work in earnest. This was an inducement for one who toils so hard and gets so little. After all my pains, madam will not be so cruel as to take a poor man's time for nothing."

"Eva, I think he must have it!"

"Wait a moment. Let me call Mr. Ross. He will comprehend the claim this man has better than is possible for us. He is in the study; I will find him in a minute."

Eva ran up stairs, while the pawnbroker, half-baffled and wholly anxious, stood eyeing the shawl with mercenary craving, and Mrs. Carter felt like a victim.

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE PAWNBROKER GETS HIS PRICE.

DIRECTLY Mr. Ross came down, and followed Eva into the room.

The pawnbroker stepped back to the wall, and uttered an exclamation full of trouble and surprise.

"What! The gentleman here!—here, in this very house! I cannot understand!"

Ross turned, his eyes kindled, and his cheeks flushed.

"Here at last? You have found it then? The shawl!—the shawl! Oh, sister, you have it! But how can you tell if it is the same? I must be assured of that."

"Why, Ross, what is the matter? Do you know this man? What is my shawl to you?"

"Your shawl!"

"Yes, brother!"

"And you got it of this man?"

"It seems that it came from him!"

"Yes, it is the same! I will swear to it! Oh, sir! the time I have taken to search it out is well worth all you promised."

"Perhaps. I do not know yet. Give me the shawl, sister; in half an hour I will return."

Ross was white in the face. He took up the shawl, and gazed upon it, until tears absolutely trembled in his eyes. Then he folded the garment carefully, as one handles a shroud, and went forth, carrying it in his hand.

Mrs. Laurence was busy in her kitchen, absolutely humming over an old-fashioned love-song, for the great load of a hard life had been lifted from her shoulders, and awkward gleams of cheerfulness were beginning to dawn in upon her.

All at once a man entered the back door, and came toward her.

"Why, Mr. Ross, is that you? I didn't hear the bell," she exclaimed, smoothing down her apron.

"I did not ring, Mrs. Laurence; I wished to find you alone. Look at this, and tell me if it is positively the shawl that came around that child, and that you put in pledge?"

Mrs. Laurence wiped her moist hands on a towel, and unfolded the shawl.

"Of course it's the same shawl, wherever it came from. There is no mistake about that. I can swear to the curl in every one of these long leaves."

"It is then absolutely the garment that came around the child you adopted?"

"Yes; I am ready to swear to it, if that is what you want."

"No; there is no need of that."

Again Ross folded up the shawl, and left the house, passing swiftly through the yard, and looking at Ruth, who sat at the window, without a consciousness of her presence.

Mrs. Carter and Eva were still in the reception-room. The pawnbroker had retreated to the hall, where he sat on one of the carved chairs, crouching uneasily forward, and holding a rusty hat clenched in his hand. His eyes were full of hungry anxiety; for the reward which he had hoped for seemed slipping from his grasp. Still he waited, in abject patience, determined to press his claims to the utmost.

In less than half an hour the man started, and listened with the vigilance of a house-dog. A latch-key turned in the street-door, and Mr. Ross came in. He stopped on seeing the pawnbroker, and asked sharply what he waited for? then checked himself, and muttered,

"Ah! I remember. You want the reward. How much was it?"

The man started up, and began to speak eagerly. But Ross lifted his hand.

"The amount? — name it. I ask nothing more; that which I promised you shall have."

"Without regard to the price paid by the lady?"

"Without regard to anything. I am not disposed to cavil over a thing like this."

The pawnbroker paused, calculated, and looked keenly at his victim, sorely tempted to double the original sum promised him. But there was something in the eyes fixed upon him which checked the idea, and he named what had been his most exorbitant demand.

"Wait!"

With this single word, Ross went swiftly upstairs, and came down again with a check in his hand. The man started up, seized the paper, glanced over it, and hurried from the house, with a greedy light in his eyes.

Ross turned into the reception-room, stood a moment on the threshold, pale, trembling, and with a look of wild yearning in his eyes. Eva, came toward him, smiling.

"Do tell us what makes you so anxious, Mr. Ross——"

The girl broke off with a cry of dismay, for Ross had flung his arms around her, and was straining her to his heart with wild vehemence.

"My child! My darling! My own, own beautiful child!"

The man was raining kisses upon her forehead, which was wet with his tears.

Mrs. Carter started up, and with her two shaking hands attempted to tear the man and girl apart.

"Herman! Herman! Are you crazy? And she under this roof, under my care! Give her up, I say!"

Ross still held the girl close; but lifted his head, and looked his angry sister in the face. He could not speak, though his tremulous lips moved, and his eyes were flooded. The woman's voice softened.

"Herman, what does this mean?"

"It means, my sister, that as God has been merciful, I believe this girl to be my own child!"

The man was trembling from head to foot. He put Eva's face back from his bosom, and looked tenderly down upon it.

"Have you never felt this, my darling? Did your soul never tell you the secret that has so long filled mine?"

"I have no breath to answer," faltered the girl. "Your words strike me dumb! How can the things be that you speak of?"

"I cannot tell; yet I know. Wait a little while, and you shall both be convinced that I am not out of my mind; let the rest prove as it will."

CHAPTER LXVIII.

MISS SPICER RECEIVES HER DISMISSAL.

A NEWSPAPER was in Mrs. Lambert's hand. In the listlessness of a mind utterly prostrated, she had taken little heed of passing events, and of the little drama which had been enacted against the Laurence family, almost under the sanction of her own name, was entirely ignorant.

It was an old paper which had been wrapped about some parcel at which the lady was looking. Just as she was about to lay it down, her own name, with that of Miss Spicer, astonished her into sudden interest. The article she read was an account of that trial which had sent the Boyce brothers to Sing Sing.

Mrs. Lambert knew that Eva had been adopted by the Carters, and that her success in the fashionable world was something marvellous, but of the underhand machinations that led to it, she had never dreamed till now.

Ivon Lambert had informed himself of the main features of this disgraceful transaction at the time, but never mentioned them to his step-mother, who was suffering, and so ill that no unpleasant thing was permitted to come near her. She knew in a general way that the man Robert Mahone had left her service; but under what circumstances, every person admitted into her presence was interested in concealing.

Thus it happened that this statement in the paper took the proud woman completely by surprise, and aroused the sensitive pride in her nature so completely, that Ellen Post, when she answered the sharp pull of her lady's bell, was startled by the vivid fire that lighted up those sad features.

"Ellen Post, is this thing true?"

Mrs. Lambert held the paper out in one hand, pointing to the report with the other.

Ellen caught one glimpse of the hateful sheet, recoiled a little, then gave her head a toss, and said, with a degree of careless contempt that did honor to her nerve:

"Oh, that was Miss Spicer's little job. My name was dragged in promiscuous. That about me is all lies, from beginning to end; but Miss Spicer and that Mahone was awful thick for awhile. She was always giving him money, being so malicious against that handsome Laurence girl, that she was willing to plot with any one against her. I'm pretty sure she *was* in the scrape, because she once offered me anything I'd ask just to join in with them; but, of course, I never had a word for her, but no. I want to marry that Mahone! The idea! I hope, marm, you think better of me than that."

Mrs. Lambert was a woman of the world, whom airs, such as her maid put on, were not likely to deceive. She simply folded the paper, drew forth her portemonnaie, and paid Ellen Post a month's wages in advance.

"I cannot give you a recommendation," she said, very

quietly, "and probably shall never have occasion to mention your name. Perhaps you had better put on your things, and go at once. The express man will come for your trunk."

Ellen Post turned her half-scared, half-insolent face on her mistress. It had turned to a dull grayish-white, and her eyes gleamed with gathering malice.

"Perhaps, marm, you had better think twice. Some girls are blind as to what is going on around them, and can be sent off meek and broken-hearted; but I ain't one of that sort. Just take a second thought, marm. You'd better, I can tell you."

"I never take a second thought, Ellen. Go! I am engaged!"

The slender finger that pointed toward the door belonged to a fragile, but firm little hand, which scarcely seemed strong enough to support the diamonds that blazed upon it; but a revolver could not have more effectually silenced the impudent servant. Ellen walked backward, step by step, until she almost fell against a footman, who stood in the door with a card in his hand.

Mrs. Lambert took the card, giving no further heed to the retreating maid, and read the name upon it.

"Miss Spicer! Tell her to come up."

There was a rustle of silk flounces, a clatter of high heels, as Miss Spicer came up the stairs. There was also a strong scent of the last fashionable perfume left floating in the hall, as she entered her friend's boudoir, closing the door behind her.

Fifteen minutes after this Ellen Post glided down the back stairway, with an evil look on her face, and a satchel in her hand.

Then all was still, and only a faint murmur of voices disturbed the sumptuous quiet of that lady's boudoir. Voices, did I say? Only the quick, rattling sound of Miss Spicer's

tongue was heard; the firm, even tones of Mrs. Lambert never penetrated beyond the room in which she sat. Once, when the door was open, and Miss Spicer stood upon the ermine mat, biting her lips, and beating her flounces with the end of her cane parasol, the clear ringing tones of that voice penetrated into the hall.

"No, Miss Spicer, I will take leave of you now; for this is the last time that you will ever be admitted into a house of which I am mistress."

Miss Spicer turned upon the mat like a little fury.

"Well, madam! I suppose it is just possible to live without coming into your house! Heaven knows, it's been dull enough since that girl cut you out with Ross, the painter! This is the gratitude one gets for paying off your debts. I'm thankful for one thing, though! She'll marry him, and leave you to break your mean old heart; while Ivon will hate you forever and ever for breaking up his little matrimonial game. Good-by, Mrs. Lambert. If you can stand it, I ought to, having nothing very dreadful to look back upon, and plenty of youth, which you will never have again!"

As Miss Spicer was flying down stairs in her hot wrath, Ivon Lambert came into the hall, and stood aside for her to pass. She stopped suddenly, and held out her hand with a hysterical laugh.

"There; let's shake hands, and say good-by. Your lovely mother has just turned me out of doors; but see if I don't pay her off! If that fellow, Ross, don't marry your old lady-love, and I for one have no idea that he ever thought of it, I'll marry him myself, and ride over the old woman rough-shod. With his genius and my money we could do it—for people are beginning to talk about her awfully; I can tell you; something about the conservatory, and fainting dead at the artist's feet. Ellen Post knows all about it. She's just been sent away, and won't the

story ring. Of course I shan't help it forward. Oh, no! she hasn't insulted me!"

Before Ivon could even comprehend this rude speech, the young lady had turned the latch and door-knob with a force that tore her gloves, and hurried down the pavement.

Ivon, who had intended to visit his mother, went to her room, where he found her pacing up and down the carpet, flushed with suppressed excitement, and with unusual fire in her eyes.

"My son!—my dear son! I am glad, very glad that you are here. Something, no matter what, has disturbed me. I have been hard and selfish with you; my own wretchedness has made me cruel."

"Your own wretchedness, mother!"

"There, there, Ivon! Do not question me; but generously accept my atonement, without explanation. I have been very, very unhappy of late; but I am not speaking of myself. You are dear to me as any son could have been. When I die, all that I have shall be yours, without restriction. From this day out the world shall know you as my heir. Another thing, once more I say to you, seek out that girl and marry her, if you can. I will accept her with all my heart. Carter has made her his heiress—be it so! I make you my heir. Go, ask her to marry you."

"Mother! Mother! how can I? She has refused me once," cried the young man.

"But that was after I had trodden on her pride, when she thought herself worse than poor. Now you go to her with my full consent. I will call upon her, and urge your case, if that is needful. Go, my boy—go now. I shall not be at rest till your fate is settled."

Astonished, bewildered, and like a man in a dream, Ivon Lambert went to his own room. Was his step-mother in her right mind? Had she placed him in a condition to approach Eva once more, now that she was an heiress? If

so, mercenary motives could not be imputed to him. Yes, yes, there was yet a chance of such happiness as he had given up in despair.

CHAPTER LXIX.

THE TRUTH.

ANOTHER ring brought a servant to the front door, where a gentleman with a package in his hand, stood waiting. The man reached out his hand for the parcel, but in its place, received a card, with directions to carry it at once to his mistress.

There was no question about Mrs. Lambert's being at home; no seeming doubt that she might refuse herself; all of which was strange; but the servant did not think of that till long afterward, for obedience seemed natural to that voice of quiet command.

"My lady will see you in her own room—walk this way," said the man, returning promptly, after delivering his message. He ushered the stranger up stairs with great deference, and opened the door with a bow, altogether forgetting the package which the man carried.

Mrs. Lambert was struggling to compose herself; but she had been greatly excited, and every nerve in her frame quivered. She tried to speak, but the effort only brought tears into her eyes.

Ross did not take the hand held out to him with such timid hesitation; but laid his bundle on a chair, then turned a sternly agitated face upon the trembling woman.

"Elizabeth, I have come to ask you a question."

"I will answer it, Herman! There is nothing you can ask that I will not reply to. But first,—do not misunder-

stand me; I ask it for—for the sake of my step-son. Answer the one question that I asked you. Is that girl, I mean Eva Laurence, anything to you?"

"Anything to me—and you ask this? Yes, everything!"

"You love her, then?"

"Yes, better than my own soul."

"But—but you cannot marry her. It would be——"

The woman's lips turned deadly white, and what she might have said died upon them.

"Marry her! Woman, I wonder the heart does not sicken in your bosom at the thought."

"It does! it does! Then you never thought of it. I had not wronged you so deeply that you meditated that awful blow, that wicked, wicked crime."

"I never thought of it, Elizabeth!"

The woman clasped her hands, and a wild sob heaved her bosom.

"Still you loved her! Ah, me! it was only the impediment! If I were dead, now!"

The woman held out her clasped hands, and her face was wet with a rain of tears. For the first time, a look of almost yearning tenderness filled the sad eyes bent upon her, and a touch of compassion quivered in the man's voice.

"Sit down, Elizabeth. I have a few questions to ask, and for once you and I must have truth between us."

Mrs. Lambert dropped to the sofa, near which she stood, and Ross drew his chair in front of it. The curtains hung low, and the light fell dimly around them, so dimly that they seemed like ghosts questioning each other.

"Elizabeth, when we first met, and I found you Lambert's widow, there was too much of passion and reproach in our interview for a clear understanding of events, which seem to me vague and unsatisfactory. Quiet yourself, now; be-

calm, if that is possible, and let us thoroughly understand each other."

The woman made a strong effort, and hushed her sobs.

"When we married, I was a wild, passionate youth, penniless, almost friendless; but I loved you, God only knows how dearly!"

"And, oh heavens! how I loved you!"

"Had I been older or wiser in this world's wisdom, it would have been an act of treachery when I won you to that private marriage; but I was an enthusiast, possessed of some genius, and more wild hopes. Perhaps in the arrogance of these untried feelings, I held your father's wealth in too much scorn. Certain it is, I never craved it, never wished for it."

"I know that, Herman; yet it was this very wealth that drove us apart."

"I asked you to go away, and share my fate——"

"I could not; remember how young I was. An only child, loving my father, whose forgiveness you refused to ask—loving you better than my own life, but afraid to follow the hopeless path you were resolved to tread. Why did you leave me then? Was I angry—was I unreasonable in that struggle, so hard upon a young girl, pampered, as I had been; did I say things which were altogether beyond forgiveness?"

"If I left you in anger, bitter and keen as it was, my great love conquered it, before I was half across the ocean," said Ross. "But what came after? My letters were unanswered."

"I never received them. Some one, my father, I think, kept them back. Oh, Herman! you will never know how I waited, how I longed for one line!"

"Elizabeth, give me your hands. On your life, on your honor—as you hope for salvation, did you never hear from me, never see a line of my writing after I left you?"

"As God shall be merciful to me, I never did!"

The woman felt the two strong hands that clasped hers shake like reeds.

"And you thought me dead?"

"I did! I did!"

"Then, and not till then you married this other man?"

"Oh, Herman! It was only my hand and wealth that I gave him. When love perished in my heart I had only ambition left."

"Then all love for me had perished?"

"Herman! There never has been a time when the very memory of our love has not been dearer to me than the adoration of any living man."

The hands which Ross still clasped were tightened painfully. For half a moment he was silent. When he did speak, it was almost in a whisper, and his voice was hoarse.

"Elizabeth! What have you done with our child?"

Mrs. Lambert wrenched her hands from the passionate grip fastened on them, and stood up in wild agony.

"Our child! Oh, Father of heaven! is there no mercy for me? Have I not suffered enough?"

The woman had no strength to stand. As grass goes down beneath the scythe, her limbs gave way, and her face fell forward on the cushions of the sofa.

Ross bent over her.

"Elizabeth!"

"Leave me! You have torn the vulture from my heart—let it bleed to death; for, in a little while, I, like my child, will be beyond human reach! God knows all that I have done, and all I have suffered."

Ross knelt down by the woman, and laid his hand on her shoulder. Her suffering overpowered all sense of wrong in his bosom. The thing which she had done seemed less hideous when her grief filled the room, as with the wail of a mother bereft.

"Our child is not dead, Elizabeth! I come to tell you so!"

The woman lifted her face.

"Not dead!"

"Let that awful thought haunt you no longer. The child is alive. Not an hour ago I held her in my arms. God spared her life, and you, wretched woman, a great crime."

The woman shuddered.

"God help me! God forgive me! I was sorely tempted."

CHAPTER LXX.

OUR CHILD.

A MOMENT after these words left her lips, Mrs. Lambert started up. The idea that her child lived had seized upon her with force; for the first time, her face, still colorless, was radiant.

"She is alive!—your child and mine! Alive! and you have found her for me! A child given to my bosom—a sin lifted from my soul! Man! Angel! Husband! Let me fall down and worship you!"

"First thank God that an awful sin has been lifted from your conscience."

"I do! I do! But the child—where is she? Who is she? Will you let me see her—touch her—bless her? Oh, will you?"

"You have seen her."

"Where? When?"

"At my sister's house. She is known as Eva Laurence." Once more the woman sunk to the sofa mute and pallid.

"Laurence was the policeman you spoke with just before

you turned down to the river. He followed you. He saw you leave the infant upon the rock, where you had carried it; watched as you crept away through the woods; reluctantly, he thought, but still you went, leaving the child to its fate."

"No, no! I did not. In less than an hour, oh! much less, for I was hardly out of the shadow of the trees, I went back, resolved to bear everything, suffer everything, rather than part with it—but the rock was bare; the moonlight lay upon it, cold and white. I searched eagerly, but my child was gone. I sought for it everywhere—in the hollows, among the ferns, in the water. All night I wandered up and down on the shore—but my child was gone. I had left it wrapped up, warm and asleep. No human being was nigh. The rock sloped downward; it had rolled into the water! I thought this—I have always thought it. Oh do not look on me with those searching eyes, Herman. I was mad, wild—driven to desperation—a child-mother fleeing that night from shame and a father's wrath.

"My father had been absent almost a year. He had placed me in a school in New England, which I left, as if for home, but hid myself in New York. When my baby was but a few weeks old I learned that my father was coming home. If I was not there, he would search for me at the school, and learn how long I had been absent. You had left me; I had not heard from you. Consider, I was so young—all alone, a wife, a mother—but without a husband. All this drove me mad. No doubt I was absolutely insane."

Here Mrs. Lambert's passionate excitement began to exhaust itself. She lifted a hand to her forehead and went on.

"I remember, in a vague way, wandering off in search of a river, with the child in my arms, longing to hide myself and it in the water. If I had any purpose, it was to

go beyond the reach of my father's wrath, and take my baby with me."

Here the woman, seized with infinite self-pity, began to moan and weep.

"I remember nothing, except that the black water frightened me. I think it was not for myself, but the child. I was wondering if it could be kept dry and warm when I was asleep down there. Then I grew afraid for myself, and fled into the woods to escape the dull, heavy lapping of the water, which both lured and repulsed me. I have told you. It was gone when I came back, gone forever and ever; I had come back, clear in my mind, resolved with half insane courage, to take it in my arms, and tell my father the whole truth. But it was gone. It was gone!"

When the woman ceased speaking, Ross knelt by her side, and heavier sobs than hers filled the room.

"My poor girl! My wronged young wife! God forgive me the rashness of my youth—the injustice of my manhood!"

She lifted her face, radiant under the storm of tears that had passed over it.

"You pity me! There is no longer suspicion in your eyes. Sometimes you will perhaps think that I was not all to blame, that in wresting the child from my bosom, God punished me enough. Ah, you did not know how I loved it, how I pined for it! How gladly I would have taken it in my arms and followed you to the ends of the earth!"

"Elizabeth, Elizabeth!"

There was no theatrical outbreak; but those two hearts, that had been separated one-third of a life-time, seemed breaking with a great fullness of joy.

"Ah, my Elizabeth! There is something in life for us yet."

She took his hand between hers, and kissed it.

"Oh, Herman! I never, never expected to be so happy again."

"But there is greater joy than this in store."

"I know! I know! Our child! That beautiful girl. I was so jealous of her, Herman. Only this very day did I consent that Ivon—Do you know that Ivon loves her dearly? Well, only an hour or two ago I promised to make him my heir if he could persuade her to marry him. That was half because I pitied his disappointment, and half because people said that you loved her," said the poor woman with a laugh, that reminded Ross of her girlhood.

"And so I did from the very first. Now I understand why. She is very like you. That was what struck me."

"Was I ever so beautiful, Herman?"

Ross bent down, and kissed her forehead.

"But you have not told me how you found all this out. We must have good proof; a doubt would kill me now. Ah, me! how strange this happiness seems."

"I did not come to you, Elizabeth, without proof, though the very face of our child is enough. Come here, and see if you remember this!"

Ross took the shawl from a table, where it had been laid and shook out its folds.

Mrs. Lambert uttered an astonished cry and stood gazing on it, shrinking back a little as one retreats from the touch of a shroud.

"It was my mother's," she said at last. "I remember wrapping the child in it, praying her to pity me if angels in Heaven could feel pity. Oh I remember it so well.

"When our Eva—"

"Our Eva," whispered Mrs. Lambert, clasping her hands so softly that he went on, without heeding the pathetic interruption.

"When our Eva was found on the bank of the river, this shawl was wrapped about her. There was some coral too."

"Pink coral from Naples; I remember it!" But what did they do with my child? How was she made the lovely creature we find her?"

"Laurence was a gentleman in his habits, and educated the girl well. He left me a letter, which you shall read. There can be no doubt that she is our child; Mrs. Laurence admits it, and no girl ever did her parents more honor."

"And this policeman brought her up?"

"As his own child, with his own child; and no two young ladies could possess more refinement."

"And I could look down upon them with scorn."

"You did not know them. But now?"

"Now I have but one wish; for—for you have forgiven me, Herman?"

Mrs. Lambert held out both her hands; the passionate tenderness of girlhood swept over her face, as it fell upon his bosom, drawn there by the strong arms that she knew would enfold her evermore.

"Now let me see my child, and die of happiness," she said, lifting her radiant face from his bosom.

"In less than an hour Eva shall be with you," said Ross.

"An hour! how long it will seem, Herman."

"The happy can afford to wait," he answered. "Now I will go and tell them everything."

"Must this be?" asked Mrs. Lambert, with a touch of shrinking pride.

"Five persons *must* know the truth, Elizabeth. Beyond them, our unhappy past need never be known."

"And those five?"

"My sister, her husband, Ruth Laurence, Ivon, and our child."

"Be it so. We can trust them; for all have been kinder to her than her own mother."

"Beyond them we will have no explanations. There must be a public wedding, and that will silence all questions."

A soft, rosy color came into the woman's face, and for a moment her eyes sunk.

"When the young people are married, Eva will be your daughter, of course. Chance has arranged everything for us," Ross went on.

"But she has refused Ivon."

"I tell you she loves him."

"I am sure that he loves her."

"And where love is, what power can keep two souls apart! I tell you, Elizabeth, it will be a double wedding, and after that a double household."

"Go—go and bring Eva!"

CHAPTER LXXI.

A DOUBLE WEDDING.

MRS. CARTER and Eva still remained in the reception-room. The passionate words of Herman Ross had filled them with amazement if not alarm. They could not believe the thing he had so wildly stated.

"If it should be now," said Mrs. Carter, "if you really are his daughter and my niece, I shall just believe a special Providence sent you under this roof. Only to think how I took to you from the very first."

"I cannot understand, it all seems so unreal. Not Ruthy's sister—not related to little James. It is impossible!" answered Eva, in sad perplexity. "Still there was something from the first that made me turn to him. Love, yet not love; such tenderness as brings tears into one's eyes. Is that the way a child feels towards its father?"

"Well, as I never had a father since I was six years old," answered Mrs. Carter, "perhaps you'd better ask some one

else, but that is a good deal like my own feelings toward brother Herman; for I just worship him."

"When will he come back? I am so restless," said Eva going to the window.

"So am I. It's of no use to attempt anything; my heart jumps into my mouth at every noise. What if it should prove true? Come and kiss me, child!"

Eva threw her arms around the good woman's neck, but she was so nervously restless that her very kisses were tremulous.

"I am so anxious," she exclaimed.

"He is coming! that is his step!"

It was Herman Ross, walking up to the door with the light tread of a boy. His face was radiant when he entered the room. He advanced to Eva and took her tenderly in his arms.

"It is true, my child; my own, own child!"

Eva looked at him wonderingly; the whole thing seemed so marvellous, that she could not at once return his caress.

"But how? tell me more!" she faltered.

Ross sat down on the couch, and drew Eva to his side. Mrs. Carter moved her chair closer.

He told them all, with the brief passionate eloquence which perfect joy inspires. Before half his narrative was over, Eva had crept into his arms, and Mrs. Carter was sobbing like a child.

"And this lady is my own mother?"

Ross leaned forward and kissed Eva's forehead.

"Yes, Eva, your unhappy, bereaved mother."

"Poor lady!"

"She is waiting for you now."

Eva arose agitated and trembling.

"I am ready; take me to my mother. Oh! how strangely the word seems; but my mother that was! how can I give her up!"

"There is nothing to give up, Eva; but everything to accept."

"You—you have always been my father!" cried the girl with a sudden outburst of affection, "from the first moment I have loved you."

"And you will love me?"

"Dearly, papa."

The girl gave a little joyous laugh.

"Oh, what a dear, dear word, papa, papa!"

"But there is one dearer yet, Eva."

"Yes, by and by I shall get used to it; but will she let me, I hardly dare."

"My sweet child, how little you know her. She is counting every moment till you come. I left her crying like a child."

"Poor lady, poor mamma."

The girl's face brightened all over, as the word fell from her lips. She looked shyly at Ross, and whispered it again and again as if to familiarize herself with the sweet sound. He smiled and passed his hand over her head.

"Come now, your mother is waiting."

Eva left the room and then Ross saw that his sister was crying bitterly.

"What is the matter! Why are you distressed?" he asked.

"Oh! I loved her so! She was like my own child. Now—now that other woman will take her from me."

"That she never will! Elizabeth understands too well all that you have done for her child."

"After all," said the kind woman, brightening up like a child, "she is my niece, and that is something."

"Besides, you forget that Elizabeth is your sister," said Ross.

"Mrs. Lambert my sister—mine! How strange it seems—such a beautiful, lovely lady."

Before Eva came down stairs, Mrs. Carter had begun to console herself; after all, it was something to have a niece like Eva, and a sister-in-law who had been for years a leader in society.

Mrs. Lambert was indeed waiting with passionate impatience for a sight of her child. The flood of her own happiness fairly transfigured the woman. Her pride was all swept away; the calm force of her character had disappeared with the secret that she had guarded so well. She walked the room; she flung herself on the couch and wept the sweetest tears that had ever visited her eyes. She went to the window and looked longingly out.

Would they never come? surely, surely more than an hour had passed.

A dozen times she walked to the window; a dozen times she seated herself, resolved to wait in patience. When she heard footsteps coming, a sweet faintness crept over her, and reaching forth her arms, she saw everything in a mist. Then the kisses rained on her face, seemed coming through a dream; but above it all came that one sweet word that she had so longed for when that girl was a helpless babe, lost to her as she thought, forever.

"Mother, mother!"

Two weddings astonished society within a month of that day. Ross the artist, and Mrs. Lambert were married on the same morning with Ivon Lambert and Eva; of course the fashionable world was thrown into a state of excitement; but Mrs. Lambert had controlled public opinion too long for any fear of losing social power under any circumstances.

Mrs. Carter was very lonely and desolate in her grandeur for some weeks, but it was not long before Ruth Laurence was almost as much at the house and as welcome there as Eva had been. The park carriage was by no means given up, though it frequently happened that young James handled the white ponies in place of sister Eva, and sometimes

Mrs. Laurence was seen by his side, sitting prim, upright and vigilant, as if she fancied that some one might suspect her of putting on airs, because of the great prosperity that had settled on her family.

It often came to pass in the after time, that Mrs. Carter took her tea-dinner in Mrs. Smith's upper rooms without much household scandal; but when her carriage began to stop at the corner grocery on its way to or from the cottage, the cup of Mr. Battles' indignation was full, and he loftily gave warning.

After all, that diamond bracelet came from Ball & Black's in full splendor, and lying on its purple satin cushions, was among the most conspicuous of Eva Lambert's bridal presents.

THE END.

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