

KARST

THE LANCET

1861

NINA'S ATONEMENT,

AND OTHER STORIES.

BY

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

NEW YORK:

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY,

549 & 551 BROADWAY.

1873.

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NINA'S ATONEMENT.

CHAPTER I.

NINA was nineteen on the 21st day of June. It was a glorious day for a birthday, the young girl thought, as she stood on the terrace of Wyverne House, looking out over the picturesque country in the full beauty of its midsummer loveliness, the green, waving woods, the golden wheat-fields over which the soft breeze stole with a gentle, billowy swell, the stately old house standing with an air of conscious pride among its sentinel-trees, the garden abounding in summer bloom and fragrance, the shrubbery full of green depths of shadowy coolness and stretches of velvet turf. Taken just then, it would have been hard to find a lovelier place than this home of the Wyvernes; but Juan Fernandez was probably a lovely place, also, only this fact did not prevent Alexander Selkirk from finding it exceedingly dull—and scarcely less dull than Juan Fernandez was Wyverne House. As Nina stood on the terrace, she was thinking, rather despondently, of the monotonous years which stretched behind her, and of the equally monotonous ones which might lie in advance. It was not a very entrancing prospect; and, although the girl was sufficiently of an optimist to accept life as it had been given, it was impossible to avoid a feeling of blank weariness on this anniversary of birth, when one has a right to look existence in the face and ask what it has brought in the past, or is likely to bring in the future.

The answer to these questions was brief

enough, as far as she was concerned. It had brought food and raiment, and a roof to shelter her, up to this date; it offered, with lavish generosity, the same good gifts for an indefinite length of time in the future. There are plenty of people in the world—good, narrow-minded, narrow-lived people—who would have thought such gifts all she could possibly need, and that to harbor even a longing for any thing beyond, for some gleam of that brightness so dear to the eager heart of youth, was rank discontent and ingratitude. Given "a comfortable home," nothing in particular to do, and not the faintest suspicion of unkind treatment to endure, and how could a girl, who had not a shilling in her own right, venture to expect or wish for more? How could she possibly venture to indulge that desire for something beyond the dry husks of life, which is common to all forms of buoyant youth, and which, however carefully it may be repressed, can never be wholly subdued until the apathy of age comes to teach sometimes resignation, but more often the indifference that is born of hopelessness? Yet, it may be said for Nina that she did not often indulge these wishes, hopes, regrets, or whatever they might be called. They were uncomfortable, and the girl was too much of an epicurean to willingly endure discomfort, much less to seek it. She chafed a little, sometimes, against the dull stagnation in which her youth and beauty seemed stranded; but it was easier to accept things as they came, and to content herself with her novels, her music, her dreams, and the few domestic occupations that had fallen into her hands—

very few they were, for Mrs. Wyverne was a notable housekeeper, with no fancy for sharing the reins of government. "It is a pity Nina is not more domestic," this lady often said; but she had taken no pains to make Nina more domestic, even if any amount of pains would have accomplished that result—which is highly doubtful. And so the girl had dreamed and loitered her life away, until she waked with a start, on her nineteenth birthday, to the realization that this monotony was to make the sum of her existence in the future as entirely as it had made it in the past.

Such a realization is always a shock. No life can be very irksome while there is hope of escape from it; but when we once realize that there is no escape—short of that dread change from which humanity recoils—we feel as if even that with which we were moderately content yesterday had grown intolerable to-day. Standing on the terrace that fair midsummer day, some such phase of feeling came to Nina. She felt how hopelessly she was tied to the life which she had already begun to dislike, and which she would probably end by loathing—and, feeling this, a sudden longing to escape came over her—a longing all the greater because there was scarcely any thing in the world less possible or less probable for her than escape. She was not only entirely dependent on the bounty of her uncle, but she had promised to marry his son. Now, this son—the only hope and heir of the house of Wyverne—was, like all of his family, a model of domestic virtue. He was one of the men to whom it would never occur that there was a duty in life beyond his well-tilled fields, or a pleasure beyond his hearthstone, and a certain crotchet to be noticed hereafter; a man well known through all the country-side to be a walking bundle of good qualities, and eminently fitted to make the happiness of a "home-loving" woman's life. What he was calculated to be to a woman who was not home-loving, it is scarcely worth while to say. If we took the vote of the world at large on the fate of such women—such "monstrosities," Cornelia, surrounded by her jewels, is fond of calling them—not the most truthful record of suffering could alter the stern verdict "Served her right!"

Such as he was, however, Ralph Wyverne had been engaged to his pretty, penniless cousin for several months; and, as Nina stood

absently plucking at her engagement-ring, she was wondering if it was indeed true that she would be married before another moon had waxed and waned. "At least, that will be some change!" she thought. And then she yawned. After all, would it be much more entertaining to live the same old life as Nina Wyverne than as Nina Dalzell? It was a question which she did not choose to answer. "Kismet!" she said, shrugging her shoulders. Then she turned and strolled toward the house.

As she entered the hall, a servant, whom she met, told her that her cousin, who had been absent for several days, had returned. "When did he come?" she asked, indifferently, as she took off her hat, pushing her hair from her face—flushed and overheated by her walk through the sun.

"Half an hour ago, ma'am, and there's another gentleman with him," Price answered.

"Another gentleman with him!" repeated Nina, and she frowned a little. It was not probable that Ralph had brought another gentleman from the city, where he had been on business. At least, such an idea never occurred to her. It was one of the neighbors, no doubt, whom he had met as he drove over from the railroad. "How provoking!" she said, as she moved away, without giving Price any further opportunity for enlightening her. The neighbors, individually or collectively, represented to Nina every thing in the world—that is, in her world—most tiresome. She knew every one of them so well, had been bored by every one of them so often, that she sighed with a dismal sense of coming weariness, as she crossed the hall toward the drawing-room, from which the sound of voices issued.

And so, with a cloud of impatience, not so well concealed as it should have been, on her white brow, with her pretty hair carelessly pushed back from her face, and the usual color on her cheeks deepened into the loveliest flush imaginable, she entered the room, where Ralph at once sprang eagerly to meet her, and where a brown-eyed, brown-haired, brown-mustached stranger was talking to Mrs. Wyverne.

"Oh!—not one of the neighbors, after all!" Nina thought, bestowing her first glance—as was natural enough—upon such a *rara avis*, as an undoubted and indisputable stran-

ger was, at Wyverne House. "How d'ye do, Ralph?" she said to her *fiancé*. "You must have found it very warm driving over from the station. We none of us looked for you to-day. What made you come without writing?"

Now, most men arriving unexpectedly at home, even after the absence of a few days only, would scarcely have been flattered by such a welcome as this; but Ralph Wyverne was the most unexacting of lovers. Up to this time, Nina had done and could do no wrong in his eyes. He had been her devoted and unquestioning slave from the time that she first came to them, a pretty child-maiden, with the airs of a young princess.

"I thought you might not be sorry to see me a little sooner than you expected," he answered, smiling. "And then I remembered what day it was, and I came to wish you many happy returns, Ninetta."

"Did you?" said Nina. "It was very kind of you—but be good enough to wish that there may be more entertaining returns; while you are about it. I was wondering this morning whether I was most a woman or a cabbage! And pray" (lowering her voice) "who is this you have brought home with you?"

"It is Martindale!" Ralph answered, with a glow of enthusiasm. "I met him in the city. He is just back from Germany, where he has been studying chemistry, and he has come down to help me with my experiments."

"Indeed!" said Nina, in a tone which spoke volumes of polite scorn—but, whether for the experiments or for the new-comer, it was hard to tell. "So this is the Mr. Martindale of whom you talk so much!" she added, glancing again at the stranger—this time more critically than she had done before.

"This is Martindale!" said Ralph, almost triumphantly.

Then, as a lull came in the conversation between Mrs. Wyverne and the brown-mustached stranger, he addressed the latter: "Martindale, let me present you to my cousin, Miss Dalzell."

"By Jove! the one to whom he is engaged!" that gentleman thought, as he bowed to the young girl, who in truth had quite dazzled him when she came into the room. He had not been looking for any thing half so lovely, although Ralph had told him that she was "a beauty." As every one knows, how-

ever, this is such an arbitrary term, that Martindale's incredulity in the first instance, and surprise in the second, were not remarkable. Like most of us, he had heard so much of beauty, and seen so little, that he had grown thoroughly skeptical of all hearsay evidence regarding it; and so he was fairly startled by the radiant loveliness of the face before him. It will not do to describe Nina, because carping critics might have said, with a great deal of truth, that the bloom which made her so entrancing—which rested like down on the softly-rounded cheek and chin—was only that evanescent glory which Frenchmen call the gift of the devil. Evanescent or not, however, the devil certainly knows very well what he is about when he bestows it upon those whom he intends for purposes of special mischief. Assuredly, few men could have turned from that bewildering freshness and brilliance of tint, that melting grace of outline, from the challenge of those lustrous eyes, or the crisp wave of that bright-bronze hair, to rave over the very features of Helen—granting even that Helen's features were what they are generally supposed to have been.

"I think I caught a glimpse of Miss Dalzell, as we drove round the terrace," Martindale said. "At least I saw a white dress, but it did not notice us."

"It did not see you," Nina answered. Although her life had been almost as secluded as that of Miss Thackeray's "Sleeping Beauty," she had never suffered from the shyness which afflicted poor Cecilia, and which, almost invariably, afflicts all of Cecilia's prototypes. "I wonder I did not see you," she pursued; "but I suppose I was thinking of something else. I remember I fell into quite a brown study, as people say. It is not a very pleasant way of passing time; but it is useful and profitable on one's birthday."

"Is to-day your birthday?" asked Martindale. "It is Midsummer-Day—the longest of the year."

"Is that any reason why it should not be my birthday?" the young lady demanded. "I was thinking only a little while ago what a lovely day it is for the purpose—the crown, as it were, of summer richness and beauty. And then there is something of fairy romance hanging over it. Who can think of Midsummer Night without thinking of Oberon, and Titania, and Puck?"

"We will go out to-night, and look for them," said Ralph. "Don't the old romances say that fairies hold a certain power over children born on the midsummer festival? Perhaps they will bring you a gift, Nina."

"They have never done so, yet," said Nina, shrugging her shoulders. "It would be rather late to begin when one is nineteen—don't you think so, Mr. Martindale?"

"Is nineteen so venerable an age that it is the bound of all things?" asked Martindale, laughing.

But he was sorry for having yielded to the inclination when he saw Nina flush and turn away, plainly offended. There was nothing which she disliked so much as being laughed at. It is not particularly agreeable to anybody; but Nina had no great sense of humor, and a most especial dread of ridicule. "Your friend is very uncivil," she said to Ralph, who followed her to the window whither she walked.

"He did not mean to be uncivil," Wyverne said, apologetically. "I think you will like him when you know him, Nina."

"Shall I?" asked Nina, sarcastically. "It will be a remarkable fact, then, for I don't often like people, and I am sure I shall not like any chemical person. What made you bring him, Ralph? I think it was very disagreeable of you."

"He is such an old friend of mine," said Ralph, a little crestfallen. "And then the experiments, Nina! Martindale is a good practical chemist, which I am not; and he will know how far I am right and how far wrong."

"I know that you are going to blow us all to atoms before you are done with your nonsense," Nina said, impatiently. "I really think that you ought to have more sense, and more regard for my wishes."

"As for not having more sense, I can't help that, you know, dear," said Ralph, smiling; "while, as for your wishes—you will thank me for disregarding them when I make a fortune for you."

"And what good would a dozen fortunes do me *here*?" demanded impetuous Nina. "I have heard you say that you would not leave Wyverne if you were as rich as—the Rothschilds! Besides, I don't believe in the fortune—it is all stuff! You are not thinking about it. You are only thinking about your horrid experiments."

"I can't help liking them, you know," he said, with a ludicrous air of apology.

And, although the fact should not have required an apology, it was true enough. Nature has strange freaks, and she had varied the dull monotony of the Wyverne race by developing an unsuspected man of science among them. If ever there was a born chemist, Ralph Wyverne was that man. From an early period of boyhood, he had dabbled in chemistry, had many times frightened the family out of their wits by untimely explosions, had turned his room at college into a laboratory, and since his return home devoted all his spare time to experiments which the family in general regarded very much as the people of the middle ages regarded witchcraft and demonology. "The boy is crazy!" his father said, contemptuously, while Nina viewed the whole thing with unqualified impatience. "As if you had to earn your bread!" she would say, scornfully, to Ralph, and when he talked of science she only stopped her ears. Men of science in all ages have had to bear this kind of treatment, however, Wyverne consoled himself by thinking; and having a great deal of obstinacy in a quiet way, as well as a great love for his "experiments," his chemical enthusiasm managed to survive it.

It was a fact, significant of the narrow limits of his life, that the only person whom he had ever found to sympathize with him was the man he now introduced so unexpectedly into his family circle—this Martindale, who had been an erratic but brilliant student of considerable promise when Ralph knew him at college, full of devotion to science, but full also of crude theories, wild enough to have exploded the whole system of chemistry as at present held and expounded. He had gained practical knowledge since that time in the laboratory of a distinguished German chemist; but, being a shrewd and clever thinker, he still inclined rather to the theoretical than the practical school. Too visionary, and too much a man of the world, to be ever eminent as a man of science, older chemists thought; but still, for so young a man, one or two lucky circumstances had already given him an enviable reputation in his profession, and Ralph's faith in Martindale was scarcely less than his faith in Faraday. To Nina, however, his name only represented a great deal of boredom. Ralph, full of en-

thusiasm for the talents of his friend, had insisted on reading to her one or two of his scientific articles, over which she had yawned dismally. She had heard so much of him in connection with retorts and crucibles, blow-pipes and gases, that she had drawn one of those lively fancy sketches in which we are all prone to indulge—a portrait of a tall, light-haired, round-shouldered student, afflicted with shyness and spectacles. She was particularly sure of the spectacles, and was, therefore, naturally surprised when she saw a slender, handsome, well-dressed man, who scanned her coolly with clear, brown eyes, full of keen observation and a dash of humor which she did not fancy.

After the affront he had so unwittingly given, she saw very little more of him for the rest of the morning. It cannot be said, however, that this was her fault, or the fault of Martindale, either. The latter, being a man of taste as well as a chemist, would probably have liked to prosecute his acquaintance with the pretty, piquant face which had burst upon him so unexpectedly, and would certainly have preferred to spend the morning in the cool, dark, old-fashioned drawing-room, or broiling in an attic apartment which Ralph proudly called his laboratory. But he had no alternative of choice. To Nina's indignation, Wyverne hurried off on the first decent pretext to that chosen retreat of science, taking his friend along. "On my birthday, too!" she thought, angrily. Not that she honestly cared for her cousin's society—which more frequently wearied than interested her—but to be neglected at all was something which this unreasonable young lady could ill brook—and to be neglected for chemistry was insupportable indeed.

It must be recorded that she was malicious enough to feel a sensation of pleasure when she read "disappointed" legibly printed on Ralph's countenance as she met, or, rather, was overtaken by him on her way downstairs before dinner.

"I hope you have enjoyed your morning!" she said, very stiffly, as he drew her hand into his arm; but, when she looked up into his face and saw the inscription already mentioned, she was sufficiently heartless to laugh. "Dear me! I am afraid you have *not* enjoyed it, after all," she said.

"I am an ignorant fool, Nina," said poor Ralph, humbly. "It was all a mistake, dear.

My experiments have come to nothing. Martindale says the idea is a good one—I knew *that*—but the process has been all wrong. In fact, he thinks the result I wish to obtain impracticable."

"Well, I hope you are satisfied!" said Nina, in a tone of triumph. "How often have I told you the same thing! But you only laughed at me, because I was not a chemist. Now that Mr. Martindale, who *is* a chemist, has told you that it is all nonsense, I hope you will throw all your things into the fire and have done with them."

"That is asking rather too much of me," said Ralph, laughing a little, despite his sore disappointment, and the still sorer sense of how little this disappointment was to the person who represented all the sweetness and fairness of the world to him.

At dinner, nothing further regarding the matter transpired, only Nina was rather more gracious to Mr. Martindale than she might otherwise have been. She was very much obliged to him for telling Ralph that his obnoxious experiments amounted to "nothing," and that the result which he wished to obtain—though what this result was, she had not the faintest idea—was "impracticable." It showed more sense than she had expected from anybody who was "a chemical person" himself; and she manifested her appreciation by a degree of affability which astonished Ralph, and amused Martindale not a little. She was quite a piquant study, the latter thought, with her petulance, her patronage, her *insouciance*, and her really striking beauty. Nina would have been enraged if she had known how well she was entertaining this student of chemistry and of human nature, unconsciously to herself.

It chanced, however, that she was destined to entertain him still better—to give him a still clearer insight into her character—before the day was over. After the usual *siesta*, horses were always brought to the door at Wyverne House, and, as regularly as the day showed neither rain nor clouds, Nina went to ride—sometimes with Ralph, sometimes with her uncle, oftenest with both. On the present afternoon, when she came down in her habit, she found that Martindale was to join the party. This might have been said to be necessary—since it is a rule of civilized life that civilized people must go through the form of providing amusement for their

guests—but at least it was not necessary for Ralph to have selected that particular occasion for reminding his father of certain lands which were to be cleared, and upon which it was necessary to decide, involving a ride through a part of the plantation where neither Nina nor Martindale would have found any thing of interest.

"If Martindale has no objection, you can take him with you through the woods, Nina," Ralph said, good-humoredly. "We will meet at the house."

"Perhaps Mr. Martindale has an objection," Nina demurred, looking with a spark of mischief in her eyes at that gentleman.

"It is very likely," the latter answered, dryly; "I know so much about the clearing of lands, and would probably feel such a lively interest in them, that Ralph should certainly take me with him as final referee on any disputed point."

"Oh, for the matter of that," said Miss Dalzell, nonchalantly, "we have nothing of special interest in the neighborhood. I cannot promise you a single interesting object or view; so, perhaps you might find it as entertaining to hear Ralph and uncle discuss their fields, as to ride with me through the woods and back again to the house."

"Perhaps you would prefer the discussion yourself," he suggested.

But she shrugged her shoulders.

"I have listened to talk of that kind every afternoon for the last ten years," she said. "It has lost the merit of novelty, therefore, which I fancy is the only merit it could ever have possessed. I am going this way," she added, turning her horse's head. "Of course you can come if you like."

"Thanks," said he, amused by the graciousness of the permission.

They left the dusty high-road which they had been following, to enter a bridle-path, deeply arched over with shade, and looking as if it might have led into the heart of an enchanted forest.

"Since this is Midsummer-Eve, we may hope to meet a fairy or two," Martindale said, after a while.

"Let us also hope, then, that they will bring me the gift of which Ralph spoke this morning," said Nina, with a slight, wistful sigh.

Slight as it was, this sigh did not escape the quick ear of her companion. He won-

dered a little what it meant, and, being fond of studying any problem which chance threw in his way, it occurred to him that it might be worth while to discover the cause of that soft inspiration.

"I fear that you would not be a fit recipient for fairy bounty," he said, smiling. "If I met a prince, arrayed in the traditional green and gold hunting-suit, riding along just now, I should be more inclined to doff my hat in salute, than to offer him charity."

"I am stupid, I suppose," said Nina, "but I don't see the force of the comparison. How am I like the prince, or how would the fairies be like you?"

"The fairies would only be like me inasmuch as, meeting you, they would probably say, 'She was born on our festival, but what can we bestow on her now that was not bestowed at her birth? She has beauty, wit, wealth, the charm to win and to keep love—what more can we give, with all our power?'"

"That is very pretty," said Nina, coldly; "but you see the fairies—if they were fairies—would know better than that. Instead of paying me empty compliments, they would know that there is a great deal they could give—for which I should be very thankful."

"I suppose nobody is ever entirely pleased with his lot in life," said Martindale, philosophically, "but I should have been tempted to suppose that if anybody ever is satisfied, it might have been yourself."

"Whom you have known since eleven o'clock this morning!" said she, with a laugh. "Do you usually decide upon people's 'lot in life' so promptly, Mr. Martindale? If so, you must possess either exceptional powers of judgment, or exceptional confidence in your own acuteness."

The mockery of her tone pleased rather than provoked her listener. He laughed a little himself as he turned in his saddle and looked at her, admiring the graceful, stately figure—Nina was "a woman with a presence"—the bright face vivid with color, the lovely eyes full of malicious amusement. "How pretty she is!" he thought, "and what a spice of the devil she has!"

"It does not follow that I possess either exceptional powers of judgment or exceptional confidence in my own acuteness, because I have been able to read at first sight some features of your life," he said aloud.

"I should be blind as well as dull if I did not read them."

"It does not follow that, because you have read you have understood," said she, falling into his trap with a facility that gratified him.

"Nothing could be more true," said he. "It does not, of course, follow that, because I have read, I have understood; but neither does it follow that, because I have read, I have not understood."

"And yet," said she, with another laugh—this time a little bitter—"you think my life so perfect that, if I were to meet a fairy at this moment, there is nothing she could possibly need to give me!"

"Nay," said he—and in the deep, woodland stillness through which they were riding, his voice seemed full of a sudden expression which thrilled her—"I did not mean to imply that your life was perfect. I said that you had many gifts—it is true, is it not?—but one may lack as well as possess. Indeed, in lacking some things, one lacks all things; and content is one of them."

It was a shrewd guess, and one which made Nina flush up to her temples—angry with him for speaking so plainly, angry with herself for having betrayed so much.

"I fancy content is one of the things which we all lack," said she, trying to answer indifferently. "All of us find monotony unpleasant, all of us think that we should like to season our lives with a little more spice. Color, zest, perfume, as the French say—some of our lives lack all of these things horribly; but probably they will go on lacking them to the end."

"Why should they?" he asked—adding, as he turned and looked at him, "you must pardon me if I say that some people are born for a groove, but you are not one of them."

"How do you know what I was born for?" asked Nina, curtly. "I did not say I was not very well satisfied with my life. At least" (shrugging her shoulders slightly), "if I were not willing to live always at Wyverne, I should scarcely be engaged to marry with Ralph."

"And do you think that to live always at Wyverne will satisfy you in the future, even though it may"—a doubtful accent here—"have done so in the past?"

She laughed—a slightly forced effort. There was something in the tone of the ques-

tion, as well as in the intent gaze of the brown eyes looking at her, which made her a little nervous. They were riding just then through a ravine, where a green, dusky gloaming, inexpressibly full of fantastic suggestions, reigned. If she had done what was wise, if she had even done what instinct prompted, she would have waived the question which Martindale had no possible right to ask. But a sudden, reckless impulse made her answer it in words which she was afterward destined to remember and repent.

"Are you a fairy?" she said. "Fairies sometimes come under strange disguises. Have you the power to spirit me away from Wyverne if I should confess that its monotony has grown almost intolerable to me?"

"This is Midsummer-Day," and fairies, as you say, come under strange disguises sometimes. If you would believe in me, there is no telling what I might not do. I might even spirit you away to a world where you would be happy. But, in all ages, enchanters have demanded trust."

"Which I am not ready to give," said Nina, feeling that this had gone too far. It was pleasant—it had a flavor of that spice which she desired—but still she felt that Mr. Martindale's glances and Mr. Martindale's tones would not have elicited Ralph's approbation, if he had seen or heard them; and, foolish and reckless though she was, the girl meant to be honest, after a somewhat blundering and indefinite fashion.

"Perhaps you will give it after a time," the would-be enchanter said, quietly. "Meanwhile, I should like you to remember that our lives are what we make them."

"I don't believe it," said she, scornfully. "Or, if it is true at all, it is true only of men—never of women. Circumstances make us."

"That is only because you do not know how to take advantage of them," said he, coolly.

But this provoked Nina, who knew how arbitrary the circumstances of her life had been.

"You only say so because you have never known what they really are," she retorted. "I agree with the writer who said that if a letter were written to Circumstances, and subscribed 'Your obedient servant,' the vast majority of mankind could sign it with the greatest truthfulness."

"It is certainly true that we are often in-

debted to them for some very good gifts," said he. "It hung, for instance, on a turn of chance, yesterday, whether or not I should come down here with Ralph. If I had not done so—"

"You would have been spared the necessity of blasting poor Ralph's hopes about his cherished 'idea,'" said Nina, laughing.

He started. "Have I blasted his hopes?" he asked. Then he, too, laughed a little—not a pleasant laugh, the girl thought. "Such hopes are easily revived again," he said. "There is nothing on earth so hard to kill as an inventor's fancy."

Something in his tone, as well as in his laugh, struck Nina unpleasantly, but she did not answer—perhaps because they emerged, just then, out of the dusky forest to an open space, where they saw

"The flower-like sunset shed its mystic blooms" over the broad fields, the shadowy woods, a winding road in the distance where some cattle lingered, green hills near at hand melting into blue ones afar off, valleys bright with streams which caught the reflection of the gorgeous west, and purple hollows where night seemed already to have gathered. There were few sounds to break the stillness—only the soft music of falling water, the distant tinkle of a cow-bell, the note of a mocking-bird, or the coo of a wood-pigeon.

"Is it not lovely?" Nina said, leaning her elbow on the pommel of her saddle and her cheek on her hand.

"Very lovely!" her companion answered, and something in his tone made her glance quickly round. Then she saw that he was looking, not at the sunset scene, but at herself.

CHAPTER II.

"THE moon has not risen yet, Nina," said Ralph, "but the starlight is beautiful. Shall we go out and see if we can find the elfin folk?"

Tea was over, and they were gathered in the drawing-room—all somewhat dull and somewhat stiff—when he made this proposal. Mrs. Wyverne was crocheting by the shaded lamp, round which a few moths were circling; Mr. Wyverne was prosing to Martindale, who looked as much bored as a well-bred man ever permits himself to appear; Nina had

been singing, but she rose from the piano, and, walking to one of the large, open windows, stood looking wistfully out, when Ralph spoke.

"Yes," she answered, eagerly. "Let us go on the terrace. If we don't find Queen Titania and her court, we shall, at least, find freshness and coolness."

"Martindale, will you come?" said Ralph, raising his voice; and he did not understand why Nina frowned so quickly and sharply at the words.

"You will find me on the terrace," she said; and, stepping through the window, she walked away—a tall, straight, white-clad figure, soon lost to sight in the starlit gloom.

Martindale left Mr. Wyverne with a scarcely intelligible excuse, and crossed the room.

"Where is it you wish to go?" he said to Ralph, who was standing with a rather blank expression of countenance where he had been left.

"Only out on the terrace for some fresh air," the other answered. "Will you come? It is very warm, and not particularly entertaining, in here."

"Is that where Miss Dalzell has gone?"

"Yes. She said we would find her there."

"Lead on," said Martindale, cheerfully. "One certainly does prefer to enjoy summer nights *al fresco*."

They stepped out of the window and walked around the terrace for some distance, but they found no sign of Nina. The moon, as Ralph had said, was not yet risen, but the soft, clear starlight rendered all immediate objects sufficiently distinct. It was one of those glowing, brilliant nights which only midsummer gives, the purple skies ablaze with radiance arching from horizon to horizon, the earth dark, fragrant, full of mystery, yet touched with a tender, delicate lustre.

"Nina must have gone down into the garden," Ralph said, after a while.

"Never mind Miss Dalzell just now," Martindale responded, in rather a peculiar voice. "We will find her in a moment. Meanwhile, I have something to say to you about—that idea of yours. Perhaps I was a little hasty in what I told you this morning. I have been thinking it over since then. I should like to examine your notes again. Perhaps, after all, it may be possible to perfect it."

He spoke awkwardly and constrainedly—

like a man who was not certain how much he wished to say or leave unsaid—but Ralph was too full of delighted surprise to notice or attach any significance to his manner.

"My dear fellow," he answered, eagerly, "you cannot tell how glad I am to hear you say that! I am a fool, I suppose, but I have dreamed and experimented over that idea so long, that it went hard with me when you said it was impracticable. I know that I have utterly failed in working it out; but I am only a dabbler in chemistry. If you take it in hand, now—"

"I may fail as completely as you have done," Martindale interrupted, shortly and almost sternly. "You must not hope any thing from my experiments—at least, not much. I am only a dabbler, and an erratic one, myself. Still, I will take the idea, and try to work it out, if you say so."

"Of course I say so!" Wyverne said, with a ring of enthusiasm in his tone which his companion knew well. He had heard it in the voices of others, and in his own, many times. It was a token of the fever which science can beget as well as art. "You cannot tell how infinitely I shall hold myself your debtor," Ralph went on; "and, if you succeed, there is a fortune in it for both of us."

"Nature is certainly a royal paymistress," said the other; "but I have told you not to hope for success. Honestly, I think I shall fail, but I cannot be content until I have fairly tested the idea, now that you have put it into my head."

"It is a good idea," said Ralph, "I always knew that. And if we succeed in working it out—"

"But it will require time," the other interrupted again. "You must remember that. You must be prepared for labor, for failure, and for discouragements. No great discovery was ever perfected without all of these."

"I am aware of it," said Ralph, "and if you give me a grain of hope, no labor and discouragements can daunt me. As for time, it is all before us—at least, as much of it as you can spare. I am to be married next month," said he, laughing a little, "but that need not interfere with our experiments to any great extent."

"You are to be married next month, are you?" said Martindale, starting. "So soon as that?"

"There is no need for delay," answered

Ralph. "I have no fancy for a long engagement. Besides, in this instance, there would be no sense in it. Neither Nina nor I have any thing for which to wait."

"Very true," said Martindale, absently.

He said nothing more, and, having now paced the entire length of the terrace, they descended a flight of stone steps which led down into the garden—a dim, mysterious region, full of white paths, the dark outlines of shrubs, trim, old-fashioned borders, and many sweet-smelling flowers, filling the summer night with incense. "What a charming place!" Martindale exclaimed.

"I cannot imagine what has become of Nina," said Ralph, peering about through the shades.

"Who is that?" asked his companion, as a white figure slowly moved across the path, some distance ahead of them, and vanished behind a hedge.

"I did not see," said Ralph. "Was it Nina? Which way did she go?"

The other answered by indicating the direction, and, when they reached the intersecting path along which the figure had passed, they turned and followed it.

But they found no sign of the girl whom they were seeking. "She must have gone back to the house," Ralph said, after a while, taking out his cigar-case, and offering it to his companion. "There is no need that we should go," he added. "It is cooler out here."

Martindale, however, had not come into the garden to smoke a cigar, and talk chemical "shop." He declined the first by a gesture, and was on the point of cutting short the latter by saying that he, too, would return to the house, when a turn of the path suddenly brought them in sight of a building the outlines of which cut sharply against the purple, starry sky.

"What is this?" he asked, carelessly.

"It is an old-fashioned summer-house," Ralph answered. "You see every thing here is old-fashioned. This is one of the pavilions in which our grandmothers used to take a sociable dish of coffee. It is not very ornamental when you see it in daylight; but, for the sake of old association, my father has let it stay. It leaks, and the roof gave symptoms of falling in, the last I heard of it, however."

"It is not ugly," said a quiet voice, which startled them both as it spoke out of the

shadow of the building they had now approached. "It is so prettily covered with ivy. Put out your hand, Mr. Martindale, and you can feel the leaves."

"Is it you, Nina—or a fairy?" Ralph said, putting out his hand and touching the white figure which they now discerned, sitting on a flight of steps that led from the door of the summer-house to the ground.

"Are fairies ever so large?" asked Nina, laughing, and she rose as she spoke. Despite the discrepancy of size, both the young men thought that there was something elfin-like in the graceful, swaying figure, as it emerged from the deeper shadows into the soft starlight. "If the summer-house is old-fashioned, it is very pleasant," she went on, turning to Martindale. "I come and sit in here often. See! It is a regular house."

She mounted the steps and pushed open a door, as she spoke. Martindale followed her, and, being a smoker, soon found a match in his pocket, with which he struck a light. By this short-lived illumination he saw that they were in a pavilion somewhat on the Dutch model—a "regular house," as Nina had said, with two doors and two casements, also a table and chair bearing token to recent occupation. "One could be very comfortable here," he said, reflectively. Then, as the match went out, leaving them in darkness, he turned to Ralph.

"Wyverne," he said, "I wonder you have never made this into a laboratory. It is true it is not so convenient as your room in the house, but you would be more at ease in your experiments; and when such things as explosions occur, nobody's nerves need be jarred."

"More at ease in his experiments!" said Nina, quickly, before Ralph could speak. "But we are done with all such tiresome things as those. Ralph is not going to worry over chemistry any more, since you have told him that his idea is impracticable—are you, Ralph?"

"I am afraid I must say yes, Ninetta," answered Ralph, with a laugh, half pleased, half ashamed. "Martindale has retracted his severe judgment on my poor idea—at least, he thinks there is a chance for it, and of course I am anxious that he should put this chance to the test."

"A chance for it!" repeated Nina, and there was a sudden jarring quiver in her voice.

"Pray when did Mr. Martindale discover this fact?" she asked, after a moment. "You certainly told me before dinner—"

"I remember what I told you before dinner," said Ralph, "but since we came out of the house, Martindale has told me that he was too hasty, and that there may be some hope for me after all."

He spoke lightly, as if he were more amused than concerned by her possible vexation—but he was not exactly prepared for the answer that came.

"Mr. Martindale seems to know his own mind very little," said Nina, coldly. "Of course the experiments and every thing connected with them are your own affair, Ralph; but I confess that, if I were in your place, I should feel very little confidence in the opinion of a person who contradicts himself in the most positive manner within the space of a few hours."

"You don't understand, Nina," said Ralph. He was astonished, and for the moment almost angry. He was well aware that his experiments did not please this arbitrary young princess, but he had not expected that her resentment would extend to one whose only fault had been that of encouraging him. "You don't understand," he repeated. "Martindale has thought the matter over, and, on consideration, changed his mind far enough to think that the idea may be worth testing. That is all."

"I thought that changing one's mind was a frivolous thing only fit for women," said Nina. "Are chemists subject to it also?"

"It is like discontent, inasmuch as we are all subject to it more or less, I fancy," said Martindale, quietly.

Then there was a pause. They were standing in darkness, for the faint glimmer which the stars sent through the casements was only sufficient to show the vague outline of Nina's white dress. Voices have a certain intensified meaning at such a time. When our observation is not distracted by any play of feature or expression of glance, we appreciate the wonderful organ of human speech as it deserves; our ears seem more finely strung, our attention is more concentrated, and catch many subtle inflections which, in the light of day, escape our notice. Even when Martindale spoke after a minute to Ralph, his voice had still a cadence of significance under its commonplace words.

"The experiments will only require a trifling outlay of time and labor," he said, "and I cannot help thinking that this pavilion is excellently adapted to our purpose as a laboratory. I should not imagine that many repairs were needed, and the chemical apparatus can easily be removed."

"It is a capital idea," said Ralph. "I wonder I never thought of it before. That room I have in the house is very inconvenient. As you say, few repairs are needed here. I will send for Jackson to-morrow, and let him look at it. Nina, do these doors latch? I must ride over to Elkbridge for some locks."

"Is it the transmutation of metals that you have in hand?" asked Nina, in her scornful voice. "If not, I don't think you need guard your treasures so vigilantly. Nobody is likely to steal them."

"But somebody might be injured by them," said Ralph, gravely. "Many of my chemicals are deadly poisons. It is always safest to guard against accidents."

"You may at least be sure that I shall never trouble them," said she, turning away and walking toward the door.

The movement was so abrupt, that the two young men hesitated a moment whether or not to follow.

"We have seen all that can be seen in such a light as this—don't you think we'd better go?" said Ralph, after a second, in a tone of carelessness a trifle studied.

"I think I'll explore the garden a little further," the other answered. "May I trouble you for the cigar you offered a while ago? Thanks! make my excuses to your cousin, if any excuses are necessary. If I am back in the drawing-room within an hour, it will be time enough to say good-night, will it not?"

"Quite time enough," Ralph replied.

He said nothing more, and Martindale—having lighted his cigar—marched out of the pavilion by a door opposite that through which Miss Dalzell had disappeared.

That young lady was strolling slowly along a path which led toward the house, when her cousin overtook her. She was surprised to see him alone, and, before she remembered the superior dignity of silence, had asked, "Where is Mr. Martindale?"

"He has gone off to smoke a cigar," Ralph answered. "I suppose he thought it the best way of relieving you of his society. I really think, Nina," this mildest of future husbands

ventured to add, "that you might treat a man who is at once my friend and my guest a little more courteously."

"Have I treated Mr. Martindale with any want of courtesy?" asked Nina, haughtily. She was not accustomed to being taken to task by anybody, but least of all by Ralph.

"You have certainly treated him with very great want of courtesy," Wyverne answered, firmly. "You were absolutely rude in what you said a little while ago—and all because the poor fellow has encouraged me in the chemical pursuits for which you have such an aversion!"

"You are mistaken," said Nina. She did not speak angrily as he had expected, but quite gravely. "You are mistaken," she repeated, after a moment. "If I have been rude to Mr. Martindale, it was not because he has encouraged you in your chemical pursuits, but because I do not think he is sincere in doing so! I do not think that he has any better opinion of your idea now than he had before dinner."

"But what possible reason have you for thinking such a thing?" asked Ralph, surprised and displeased.

"I can scarcely tell you," said she, stopping short and looking at him. "I know you think I am prejudiced," she added, "but I had an instinct the moment I looked at him that he was not to be trusted. Ralph"—she put out her hand suddenly and laid it on his arm—"make your experiments yourself, and I will never say a word about them again—never! But don't give this man an excuse for staying an hour longer than you can help, at Wyverne House!"

"Nina, you astonish me!" said Ralph—which was certainly true. "I had no idea you could be so prejudiced and so unjust! How can you fancy that you, who have known Martindale only a few hours, can possibly judge of his character better than I who have known him for years?"

"I don't fancy it," said Nina. "I know nothing about his character—I don't care to know any thing. I only feel that he is not to be trusted, and I wish you would send him away."

"Send him away! Send away a man who is my guest, because you have an idea that he is not to be trusted!" said Ralph, quite aghast. "Nina, are you crazy, to ask such a thing?"

"No, I am not crazy, but you will be sorry if you do not heed me!" said Nina, with a sudden, passionate meaning in her voice which made her cousin fear that she really was distraught. "I am sure of that, Ralph. You will be sorry if you do not heed me!"

"Why should I be sorry?" demanded Ralph. "Such prejudice is not only absurd, but really beneath you, Nina. Can you not see that there is no reason in it? No man is deceitful without a motive. Now, what motive could Martindale possibly have for deceiving me about my idea?"

"Do you always distrust an effect when you don't know the cause of it?" asked Nina.

"When an effect is alleged, for which there is no adequate cause, I doubt its existence assuredly," he answered.

She shrugged her shoulders, and, taking her hand from his arm, gathered up the folds of her muslin dress, which she had suffered to fall unheeded on the dewy path.

"It is no affair of mine," she said. "Of course you will do as you please; but I have warned you. You may be sorry yet that you have not heeded my warning, foolish as you think it. I distrust the man and every thing about him," she went on, with a certain repressed vehemence. "Ralph, you may think me absurdly superstitious, but when he first turned to you and spoke of converting the summer-house into a laboratory, something in his manner, in his tone—I cannot tell you what it was—made that sudden cold thrill come over me which people are said to feel when standing on the place where they will die."

"I do, indeed, think that you are absurdly superstitious," said Ralph, trying to speak lightly, for even by the dim light of the stars he saw that she was shivering violently; "but I think the best remedy will be to go into the house and try to forget all this. It is thorough nonsense, and you will like Martindale as much as I do when you come to know him. I am sure of that!"

"Are you?" said Nina. She did not speak sarcastically, as she had done in the morning, but half dreamily. Then she turned, without saying any thing more, and walked with him to the house.

The next day Ralph went eagerly to work with the repairs necessary for converting the garden pavilion into a laboratory. Before

breakfast he had sent for the best carpenter on the plantation, and held a consultation with him in front of the edifice in question—a consultation which greatly excited the surprise of Mr. Wyverne, who observed it while he was dressing, and, as soon as he was in a condition to emerge from his chamber, sallied down into the garden to demand an explanation from his son. To say that he was disgusted with the explanation, would be to say very little. He did not express this disgust to any great extent, however, because he was a reasonable man, in the first place, and a man of few words, in the second. Ralph was old enough to know what he was about, and, if he had a fancy to make a fool of himself, it was nobody's business but his own. That was Mr. Wyverne's view of the matter. As for Ralph, he had not expected any encouragement; so the lack of it did not depress him. Nothing but good-natured tolerance, largely flavored with ridicule, had ever been given by the domestic world to his scientific experiments; and he looked for nothing else. Sympathy and encouragement would have surprised him as much as any attempt at arbitrary interference. Mr. Wyverne gave a long whistle when he heard for what purpose the summer-house was to be repaired. "I hope you will finish the business in two days," he said. "I can't spare Jackson longer. After all, perhaps it is a good idea. If you blow *this* up, it will be no great loss." Blowing up was, in the minds of the family at Wyverne, a necessary result of all chemical investigation.

It was more than two days, however, before the necessary repairs to the summer-house were finished, or before Jackson was allowed to return to the neglected plantation-work over which Mr. Wyverne chafed. Ralph might have chafed himself, if it had been any thing but his own crotchets which delayed the completion of certain desirable and more important buildings; but just now the chemist had a decided advantage over the planter, and he could think of nothing but his experiments. There was, of course, more to be done to the pavilion than he had imagined; and, since he had what Jackson called "his own notion" about every thing, a zealous superintendence was necessary, for, like most people, he had learned to his cost that his own notion was very apt to be disregarded unless he was present to enforce it. It fol-

lowed that he saw very little of anybody but the carpenters during these days. Not that this fact mattered very much. The different members of the household went their accustomed ways, and Martindale—who came now and then with a cigar to look on and suggest an alteration or improvement—did not seem to be suffering from the acute boredom which his friend anticipated for him. In truth, Ralph had made an appeal to Nina that somewhat averted this terrible malady from its threatened subject.

"Do be a good girl and entertain Martindale while I am about this work," he said. "I shall really take it as a personal favor if you will. What is to become of the poor fellow I don't know, he is so little used to such a vegetating life as the one we lead."

"I will do my best for Mr. Martindale's entertainment, since you desire it," Nina answered, with a reluctance upon which it would have been difficult for any one—perhaps even for herself—to decide whether or not it was genuine. "But I don't like him, and I really wonder it never occurred to you that other people besides Mr. Martindale might find our life a vegetation."

"Ralph says that I am to entertain you and keep you from being bored to death," she said to Martindale, an hour or two later. "I wish you would tell me how to do it. I never had a traveled fine gentleman on my hands before, and the novelty threatens to be overwhelming."

"If you consider *me* a traveled fine gentleman," answered Martindale, "it proves conclusively that you have never known a Simon-pure of that species. I am the farthest in the world from deserving such a reproach, or such a distinction—as you choose to consider it—and I am the most easily-entertained person in the world, besides. But if I were as exigent as possible, it would be strange if I could not loiter away a few days at this delightful old place, without incurring the penalty of *ennui*. I feel like a traveler who has found an enchanted castle and an enchanted princess," he added, smiling.

"Do you?" said Nina—and she smiled also. It was not disagreeable to be likened to an enchanted princess, and a thrill of that pleasurable excitement which she had felt when they were riding together through the summer woods came over her. At such moments, the instinct of distrust

which she felt against Martindale—it never amounted to dislike, though it sometimes amounted to repulsion—lost its force. She saw only a handsome man, full of the *je ne sais quoi* of society, who looked at her with admiration, and spoke to her with compliments—a man who seemed to bring into her life a breath of that world for which all her eager fancy, all her overflowing, sensuous vitality longed.

"But the knights who found enchanted castles usually had rather a hard time of it, had they not?" she said. "I am afraid you have chosen your comparison unfortunately—which is too bad, when you meant to be complimentary."

"They found the princess, however," he said, "and that made amends for all else. Dragons, giants, lions, tyrants—all were child's play when compared with that reward."

"Princesses must have been worth a good deal in those days," said Nina, demurely.

"Not more than in these," answered Martindale, readily. "The trouble now, as then, only is—to find them."

"One might say the same of dragons and unicorns," responded Miss Dalzell.

"Dragons and unicorns were mythical; princesses were not," said Martindale, gravely. "They exist now, as they existed then—and one finds them sometimes. If I were fortunate enough to do so," he went on, "I should tell the fair captive that, according to all rules of romance and chivalry, the discoverer should also be the deliverer."

"Allow me to remind you of Mrs. Glass's immortal recipe for dressing a hare," said Nina. "First find your princess, then decide what you will say to her. Not but that it is easy enough to predicate beforehand what that would be," she ended, with a cool shrug of the shoulders.

"Is it?" said he, smiling. "Tell me, then, what it would be? I see you are well acquainted with the ways of knights and princesses."

"Knights are very much like men now—days, I fancy," she answered. "They paid a great many pretty compliments to the princesses, who, despite the fact of their exalted rank, resembled other foolish country maidens, and, perhaps, were silly enough to believe them. Then, when the charm of novelty was

gone from these fair ladies, no more pretty speeches came, the knights, as a rule, found the enchanted castles very dull, ordered their horses and rode away, to repeat the amusement, 'with variations,' as they do in music, at the next *château*."

"But you forget that some women never lose the charm of novelty," said he. "Some of them are like the chameleon, and change while a man gazes. You remember how it was written of one woman that 'age could not wither nor custom stale her infinite variety.'"

"There was never but one 'serpent of old Nile,' however," said Nina, shaking her head.

On the whole, it was not remarkable that Mr. Martindale bore with edifying philosophy the delay about the laboratory. It was certainly more agreeable to loiter with Nina in the drawing-room or garden through the long, golden hours of a June day, than to spend the same hours in abstruse calculations and doubtful experiments, bending over chemical apparatus and chemical books. Ralph might have spared his anxiety about his friend, if he had only known how very well that gentleman was "entertained."

Meanwhile Nina, unconsciously to herself, began to experience something of that subtle intoxication which the fumes of flattery soon produce on all save the steadiest brain. This was not remarkable, since circumstances daily threw her into closer intercourse with Martindale, and the repulsion which she had at first felt for him gradually changed into an attraction in which gratified vanity played no inconsiderable part. Besides vanity, however, there was also the freshness of novelty, the glow of excitement, and that thrill of conscious power which, to many women, makes the chief fascination of that dangerous pastime which the world has agreed to call flirtation. It was unfortunate that there was no one to utter a warning, or extend a restraint over the girl. Ralph was busy with his pavilion, and thought much more of his chemical researches than of his betrothed. Mrs. Wyverne was essentially a house-keeping nonentity; Mr. Wyverne never regarded the matter at all. So, Nina went her own way, and rode, or walked, or talked with the handsome stranger without a word of rebuke, or an attempt at interference. It was after one of these rides—which had been extended far

into the lovely June woods, under the twilight June stars—that, having come home and laid aside her habit, she stood before her mirror looking with critical intentness at the exquisite face, illumined with light and vivid with color, which gazed back at her out of the shadowy depths of the glass. As she regarded it, a bright smile, half of triumph, half of defiance, curled her scarlet lip.

"How pretty I am!" she said. "It is no wonder that he thinks it pleasant to amuse himself with me. But will he think it pleasant if I turn the tables and amuse myself with him? It is only a game of skill on both sides, and promises me a little of that zest and spice which my life lacks so horribly—a little taste of that power which is said to be the sweetest draught in the world! Men of this class are not troubled with hearts to lose or break, and Ralph would not be jealous if I flirted with everybody in the world! What is it Thekla says?"

"I have lived and loved, but that was to-day; Make ready my grave-clothes to-morrow."

Only I don't mean to love, whatever else I may do, and it is not my grave-clothes, but my wedding-dress, which is to be made ready to-morrow."

CHAPTER III.

NOTWITHSTANDING other and brighter attractions, when the pavilion was at last finished and all the chemical apparatus removed thither from the attic laboratory, Martindale betook himself to the experiments with an energy which pleased Ralph exceedingly, and astonished Nina not a little. The latter had so unhesitatingly made up her mind that the young chemist's change of opinion with regard to the "idea" of her cousin, was a piece of interested hypocrisy for the better prosecution of a flirtation with herself, that she was not only surprised, but very much piqued, by the prompt desertion of her standard, which took place as soon as the laboratory was in good working order. What did it mean? she asked, a little indignantly. Had she indeed overrated her consequence so greatly as to fancy that she was the chief attraction that detained Martindale at Wyverne, when she was, in truth, only the amusement—the plaything—of his idle hours? It was in answering this question

that Nina's natural shrewdness first failed to come to the aid of her inexperience. A duller woman, who knew the world, would have understood Martindale's tactics: this bright, clever girl, with the disadvantage of *not* knowing the world, fell into his trap at once.

In the first place, she found the days intolerably dull and tame, without the flavor of excitement, the incense of flattery which for some time had unceasingly surrounded her; in the second place, the strong instinct of conquest, the strong desire to win and wield power, which makes men conquerors, and women coquettes, sprang up like a sudden flame, fanned by the weary monotony, the yearning discontent of her life. Martindale's neglect stung her, not so much because her heart or her fancy were interested in him, as because her vanity missed the homage upon which it had fed, and her life the excitement of that "fair game of skill" upon which she had so willingly entered. Being stung, she turned, like every other creature of which we know, in wrath and resolution. "If he has amused himself with me, I will do something more than amuse myself with him!" she said. "If he has made a plaything of me, I will make something more than a plaything of him. Can I do it, I wonder?"—and she laughed a little, arching her white neck proudly; "at least it will be worth while to try—to test my power—to learn, once for all, if I was made for this domestic treadmill, or if I could have been something else had Fate been kind enough to give me another life!"

Yet, if Nina had been asked to define what her "something else" implied, it is not probable that she would have found it very easy to do, though an indefinite vision of a life made up of unlimited conquests, of perpetual homage, of the power for which every instinct of her nature yearned, floated before her eyes. Left to herself, it is likely enough that the girl would have dreamed these fancies, but the enchanter who had made them to such wild life was Martindale. In word, and look, and tone, he had said: "You, who are buried here, were born for other things, and have only to enter the world to make a sensation such as few women of your generation are able to achieve!" Nina had laughed and disclaimed the flattery; but while she disclaimed she had believed. It would have been strange, indeed, if one so young, so ignorant, yet so conscious of her own rare beauty,

and her own keen wits, had *not* believed a thing so pleasant to human self-esteem. If inexperience makes us timid, it also makes us presumptuous. It is not until we have measured ourselves with others—hand to hand and foot to foot—in the great arena of the world, that we learn the true proportions of our own statures.

Meanwhile Martindale, who spent most of his days and half of his nights in the laboratory, suggested to Ralph that certain new inventions in apparatus, together with certain new scientific books, were imperatively needed. "You are behind the day, my dear fellow," he said; "every month chronicles an advance in chemistry. It will never do to shut your mind up, and imagine that what you have learned is sufficient. In this science, above all sciences, you must keep yourself *en rapport* with the progress of the hour, if you do not want to be left hopelessly behind." Ralph, replying meekly that he was aware of this fact, and that he had endeavored, as far as lay in his power, to keep himself *en rapport* with the progress of the hour, at once made a memorandum of the desired apparatus and necessary books, for which he promised to send an order by that day's mail.

Returning to the house for this purpose, he told Nina triumphantly that he had never seen anybody go into any thing with more zest than Martindale had gone into the experiments. "What a thing it is to have a scientific turn!" he said. "The fellow absolutely bends over his crucibles as if he were in love with them! And what a thing it is to have a scientific education, too! I feel as if I were the most ignorant dabbler in the world, when I stand and watch him at work."

"Chemistry must be very interesting," said Nina, musingly. A bright thought suddenly occurred to her. She felt more than ordinarily listless that morning, and since the mountain would not come to Mohammed, why should not Mohammed go to the mountain, even though it *had* taken up its abode in a laboratory? "I should like to see some of Mr. Martindale's experiments," she said, carelessly. "Do you think he would mind if I went to the laboratory for that purpose?"

"I am sure he would be very glad to see you, and explain every thing you wanted to know," answered honest, unsuspecting Ralph, delighted with this first token of interest in his beloved pursuit. "If you really care to

go, I will take you down as soon as I have finished my letter."

But this was not exactly what Nina wanted. "I thought you promised uncle to go to Elkbridge on business this morning?" she said.

"By Jove, so I did!" answered Ralph. "Thank you for reminding me of it. I'll order my horse in a minute, but, while he is being saddled, I can walk with you to the laboratory, and Martindale can give you a chemical lecture at his leisure. If you would only believe it, Nina, there is not in the world a more fascinating study than that of chemistry."

"I can readily believe it," answered Nina, a little dryly.

She left the room as she said this, and went up-stairs. But when Ralph, having finished his letter and ordered his horse, sent a messenger to announce that he was ready to go to the pavilion, she did not keep him waiting, as he had feared she would. On the contrary, her light step on the broad, shallow staircase, made him turn from the hall-door, where he was standing, before he had imagined that his message would have reached her.

"Why, Nina, you have changed your dress!" he said, even his unobservant eye being struck by the heightening effect which a cloud of transparent lawn, in tint like a blush-rose, produced on her beauty. "It is amazingly becoming; but I wonder you put on any thing so pretty when you are going down to the laboratory. If some of the chemicals should drop on it—"

"Do you make a rule of dropping chemicals on people's dresses?" asked Nina, as she drew on her gloves and took her parasol from the hall-table. "Not that it matters very much if you do. However becoming pink muslin may be, it is, fortunately, not expensive. I changed my dress because the other had a fruit-stain on it."

This was true. Microscopic observation might have detected a small fruit-stain on the skirt of the dress which had been thrown aside; but Nina did not add, that out of her whole wardrobe she had carefully selected the one she wore as the most becoming, and that when she passed the strings of her garden-hat over the rich masses of her hair, she had felt eminently satisfied with the result of her choice.

What Martindale thought when, roused

out of his study of a chemical manual by the unexpected sound of voices, he turned to see this exquisite vision framed in the open door of the pavilion, with green boughs drooping slantwise behind, and a vista of the garden beyond, it would be hard to say. For a minute he did not utter a word. He only caught his breath quickly—startled out of his usual cool self-possession by the glowing beauty of the face which looked at him. For an instant he wondered if he had ever before realized Nina's exceeding loveliness—a loveliness that might have driven an artist to despair, since the tints were never mixed on palette or laid on canvas that could have copied the abounding freshness and glory of her coloring—the satin softness and rose brilliancy of her skin, the cleft scarlet of her lips, the bronze sheen of her hair, or the liquid lustre of her eyes. It was Ralph's voice that recalled his self-possession as the cousins advanced.

"I have brought Nina down to see some chemical experiments, Martindale," he said. "I suppose you are not too busy to show her a few things—simple things, you know. I would do it myself, only I am obliged to ride over to Elkbridge this morning."

"I shall be very glad to show Miss Dalzell any thing that will interest her," Martindale answered. "But I thought you did not like chemistry," he added, looking at Nina and speaking almost abruptly.

"I do not," she answered, carelessly, conscious of feeling a little provoked by his tone. "I am only idle this morning, and idleness begets curiosity—even in things which do not usually interest one. I should be sorry to disturb your industry, however, Mr. Martindale. Your studies seem so very abstruse"—her half-mocking gaze swept over the open pages of the book he had laid down—"that it would be a pity to interrupt them. Ralph can spare a little time for my instruction, cannot you, Ralph? No doubt my curiosity will be satisfied with a very small amount of learning. By way of beginning, what is this?" and, extending her hand, she touched with one finger part of the apparatus on a table near by.

"That is a glass retort," answered Ralph, delighted to play school-master. "This gas-lamp is what we call a Bunsen's burner; and if you will observe, Nina, you will see that the action of heat is evolving a gas from the

chemical substances in the retort which the receiver here is placed to collect, and—"

"Yes, I see all about it," said Nina; "but suppose I take the stopper from the retort, will any thing occur?"

"You must not think of such a thing," said Martindale, coming forward, and, to her surprise, quickly removing her hand from the stopper, on which it rested. "The gas which is being evolved here is the most subtle and dangerous known to chemistry. You had better come away, Miss Dalzell. I will show you some of the ordinary experiments—"

"But I don't want to see any ordinary experiments," said Nina, the perverse. "I want to hear about this subtle and dangerous gas. What is the name of it? Ralph, I did not know that you were in the habit of experimenting with such things."

"This is not one of my experiments," said Ralph. "Martindale is after a craze of his own, and has been experimenting in the cyanogen compounds for some time.—It is hydrocyanic acid you are preparing now, is it not?" he added, looking at his friend.

"Exactly that," answered Martindale, "so you see you must bring Miss Dalzell away.—You have no idea how dangerous this is," he went on, turning to Nina. "One drop of the pure substance is sufficient to kill, and a chemist has always to be very careful in preparing it, since the vapor, even in small quantities, will produce fatal results."

"How terrible!" said Nina, and, looking at him, her rose-leaf color faded a little. "You should not tamper with such dreadful things," she said. "What if you killed yourself?"

"It would not matter very much if I did," he answered, carelessly. "My life is not of much importance—not like Ralph's there, for instance. You may be sure I don't involve *him* in any of my dangerous experiments."

"Very considerate of him, isn't it?" said Ralph, laughing. "But you may rest satisfied that he knows what he is about, and is not likely to poison himself. Now I must really go, for I am sure my horse is waiting. Martindale, it would be a very pretty experiment to show her about water, you know—how oxygen and hydrogen make it, and all that sort of thing.—You've no idea how interesting it is, Nina, to see gas turned into water before your eyes."

Although Nina made no reply, he left the

pavilion quite light-hearted. It was so cheering to think that she was really beginning to take an interest in chemistry at last! It would be so pleasant, he thought—for Ralph was domestic even in his love of science—to possess a wife who would share his enthusiasm to the extent of a gentle feminine sympathy, who would take an interest in his experiments, and understand intelligently what he was doing, or what he wished to do! It was true that common-sense, liberally aided by experience, might have assured him how little Nina was likely to be metamorphosed into such a wife; but men like Wyverne have an abounding faith in the power of matrimony to work any and every change in the habits, tastes, and disposition of a woman. As he mounted his horse and rode away in the golden sunlight, it did not occur to him that he had left behind, and in close proximity, materials more inflammable than any of his gases; that the passion of a man, and the fancy of a woman, may sometimes form a combination more dangerous than any chemical result. It is difficult to say whether it was well or ill for him that he realized nothing of this. If Nina had been as old as his mother, and as ugly as Hecate, he could not have felt less uneasiness concerning her. If Martindale had been Sir Galahad in person, he could not have trusted him more implicitly. It is a bitter lesson, though a necessary one, when the world first teaches us that such trust is rarely, if ever, wisely given—but it was a lesson of which Ralph Wyverne had not yet learned the initial letter.

In the pavilion, after he left it, silence reigned for a minute. For the first time in her life a sudden, strange shyness came over Nina; for the first time, also, she felt a distrust of herself and of her usually ready tongue, which half inclined her to wish herself away. Martindale's manner of meeting her had been so different from any thing which she anticipated that it had discomposed and thrown her back on herself in a most provoking manner. She had expected that he would be radiant with pleasure, and full of the ease and brightness which she liked; on the contrary, he was stiff, reserved, and almost rude. True, she was conscious that he regarded her with an admiration more eloquent than many words; but, feeling the blood deepening in her fair cheeks under his gaze, she chose to consider even this a fresh

cause of offense, and so turned away petulantly toward the door.

"Since Ralph has gone, I will not detain you any longer," she said. "Of course, you must be anxious to return to your books and gases."

She looked so *mutine* and lovely in her vexation, that Martindale could with difficulty repress a smile. He understood so well why she had come, and the disappointment in which she was going, that he felt tempted to amuse himself by adding a little more fuel to the flame of her petulance before he indemnified himself, in his own fashion, for the self-denial of the last few days. Even to look at her was such a pleasure, to a man who worshiped beauty as this student of chemistry did, that he wanted to make the most of her changing moods; to watch the sea-shell color vary, to note every play of the flexible lips, and to meet the full-orbed glow of the eyes before he won her back—as he knew a word would win her back—to her usual sparkling self.

"You cannot surely think that you detain me!" he repeated, in answer to her last words. "I must beg you to believe that I am highly honored by your visit. My studies and experiments can readily wait your pleasure."

"It is not at all necessary that they should do so," said Nina, vexed afresh, as he knew that she would be, by the formality of his words. "My pleasure is to find something more entertaining than chemistry. I told Ralph that a very small amount of knowledge would gratify my curiosity. It has been quite gratified."

"But you have not gained any knowledge at all," said he, laughing. Then he came forward to her side. "If you go, you must let me go with you," he said. "Since I have been demoralized by a glimpse of your face, I cannot return to the books and gases to which you so kindly commend me."

The face of which he spoke frowned, blushed, and smiled, all at once—the peach-blossom tints glowing into brighter beauty under his glance. But, for all that, Nina was not appeased, as her answer showed:

"I am sorry that my face should have demoralized you," she said, stiffly. "I can only make amends by removing it at once. Perhaps, indeed, I ought to apologize for intruding at all into such sacred precincts; but I

came to gratify Ralph. He thinks that, before we are married, I ought to learn a little chemistry."

"Is that a necessary preparation for matrimony?" asked Martindale. His manner did not betray the jealous pang at his heart, but he could not help wondering if she at all estimated the power of her last words to change his amused trifling into a sudden resolute determination to use to the full this opportunity which fate and caprice had given him.

"Ralph thinks so," she answered, carelessly. "He ought to be the best judge, ought not he?"

"Of what he desires—certainly. But to desire and to obtain are very different things in this highly-satisfactory life of ours."

"Not with him," she said. "He has had every thing that he ever desired—even me," she added, shrugging her shoulders—"if I am worth counting a possession."

"Do you doubt your value?" said her companion, with a slight laugh. "If you desire to test it, take your life back into your own hands, and see whether even Ralph's impassive calm will not be stirred."

"If I took it back, what should I do with it?" she asked. There was an accent of the pathos that is born of hopelessness in her voice, which was not meant for effect. She had asked herself the same question before this, and knew how dreary the answer was.

"Shall I tell you?" said he, quickly, with a cadence of passionate meaning in his tone. He would test his power, and know the best or worst at once, he thought.

But Nina drew herself up proudly.

"Why should you tell me?" she asked. "There is no possibility of such an event coming to pass." Then, with an eagerness that told its own story of self-reproach, she added: "It is a good thing to be able to trust one's life into such faithful keeping as that of Ralph. I do not think there is a kinder or truer heart than his in the world."

"Ralph is a very good fellow," said Martindale, quietly, "but, if he were the best in the universe, he could never make you happy."

"How can you possibly know what would make me happy?" she demanded, haughtily, her color deepening, her eyes expanding with the glow that he liked to provoke.

"Rather, how can I help knowing?" he

said, with a smile, as his brown eyes met her own. "Do you remember how you came into the drawing-room that first day?" he went on. "It was like a sudden delicious burst of color, or gleam of sunlight, over a gray landscape. Even then—even before you had uttered a word of the discontent which you felt for your life—I saw how little you belonged to it, how entirely Nature had fitted you for other things. Ralph had told me that you were engaged to him. Instinct told me, as soon as I looked at your face, that this engagement owed its existence to your own supreme ignorance of yourself."

"And you have been kind enough to endeavor to enlighten that ignorance!" said she, with not a little bitterness. "I owe you no thanks for it. You have fed my vanity, and fanned the discontent of which I was scarcely conscious before you came, until it renders my life miserable. And you have done this—do not fancy that I am ignorant of it—simply for your own amusement."

"Do you think so?" he said; and a sudden thrill in his voice made her start. "If I have rendered you miserable," he said, drawing nearer, and speaking eagerly, "it has been that I might in turn render you happy, that I might rescue you from the death-in-life to which you are doomed, that I might give you to the world for which you were born! Nina, it is useless for me to say that I love you—you know that already—it only remains for you to say whether you will tamely accept the life which has been made for you, or whether you will make your own life by coming with me. I have not wealth to offer you, as Wyverne has, but I have something which is better still—freedom!"

He uttered the last word in a tone which was in itself like an electric charge to the girl who listened. Her whole nature seemed to leap up in response. Freedom!—freedom to quaff to its full the elixir of life, of power, of excitement like that which filled her now! The wealth of an emperor would have tempted her less than that single word, than a single one of the hopes it embodied! Yet it was at this moment that a dim, struggling sense of right and wrong came to the girl. Face to face with the roused earnestness of the man before her, all her bright, graceful mockery, her pretty, innate coquetry seemed stricken from her command. Nothing remained but the instinctive resistance of one who feels

what is right, and who is tempted within as well as without toward what is wrong.

"You must not talk to me like this!" she said, all the bright color ebbing from her face, her breath coming short and quick. "It is unkind—it is dishonorable! You have no right—"

"No right!" interrupted he, scornfully. "Who asks for a right? Mine rests in my love for you, and my determination to rescue you! I ask no other. Do you think it matters to me that you have promised Ralph Wyverne to marry him? I would walk over a thousand Ralph Wyvernes if it were a question of winning you at last."

"But it is not a question of that!" said Nina, his imperious tone rousing a flash of defiance in her. She realized now how unwise she had been to come, but even if Martindale would have permitted her to leave him—which she felt to be doubtful, since he stood directly in her path—there was a fascination that kept her motionless. Go! How could she go? How could she leave this stir of combat, in which, if there was danger, there was also the quick breath of excitement, for the dull house which she knew so well, and her aunt's platitudes and crochet-work?

"You are right," said Martindale, quietly. "It is not a question, but a certainty—for I will win you, Nina! I have sworn to do it, and there is no power on earth or in heaven to make me swerve from my resolution!"

"You cannot win me despite myself," said Nina, who rather liked the novelty of this masterful wooing. She looked up and met the eager, passionate eyes that were bent on her. The first taste of forbidden fruit was sweet to Eve, and alas! it has remained sweet to all of her descendants.

"I will win you even despite yourself!" he answered, in a tone of confident power. "But will it need to be despite yourself?" he added, in a softer voice. "Nina, I know you do not love Ralph Wyverne; but can you not love me?"

There was little humility in the question, but there can be no doubt that humility would not have served his cause with Nina half so well as the pride that was almost haughty in its self-confidence. He saw the lovely color flicker into her face at his last words, the white throat give a quick, nervous gasp, and the lids droop over the eyes. Never had she looked more beautiful, and never had he felt

more resolved to win her at all hazards—Even, as he had said, despite herself. Her resistance gave a charm, without which her very beauty would have lost half its value in his eyes.

"Can you not love me, and trust your life with me, Nina?" he said, taking into his own the hands which were idly clasped before her, and watching every flutter of the long, curling lashes on the rose-tinted cheek. "I can give you the things for which you long, and love, besides, such as no other man ever will give you. Nina, my beautiful darling, will you not come to me?"

"How can you ask such a question?" said Nina, almost in a whisper—somehow her powers of resistance seemed ebbing from her; she was conscious of being borne down in the strife which she had so deliberately sought, so arrogantly met—"you have forgotten Ralph, I cannot do so."

"Nay," he said, with a slight laugh of triumph, "if you will let me be your teacher, you will soon learn to forget Ralph. Nina, can you not forget him now? Look at me, sweet one, and let me read the answer in your eyes."

Even when Nina lifted her eyes, she meant to say, "You are wrong! I can never forget that my honor is bound to Ralph," but something in the glance she met, hushed the words. Every thing suddenly seemed to waver before her—the green, swaying boughs, the golden, summer day, the handsome, bending face. It was only when she felt the touch of Martindale's lips on her own, that she realized with a sudden shock all that she had implied by her silence.

CHAPTER IV.

"NINA," said Ralph, tenderly, "I am afraid there is something the matter with you, dear."

It was several days after the scene in the laboratory. The cousins were alone in the drawing-room, which Ralph had entered unexpectedly in search of a missing glove, and where he had found Nina all alone, standing by an open window, gazing out absently over the flowery terrace to the green lawn beyond. Something listless as well as absent in the girl's attitude struck him suddenly. It was strange for Nina—in whom buoyant youth and health seemed usually overflowing—to appear listless, and he remembered that he

had thought her looking pale the day before. Moved by a quick impulse of affectionate concern, he crossed the room, therefore, with the caressing words recorded above.

But he was not prepared for the startled look in the eyes which turned on him, nor the recolling movement which she made when he attempted to pass his arm lightly around her.

"Nina!" he said, surprised and pained; "is any thing the matter? Have I done any thing to offend you?"

"You!" said Nina, with a faint laugh. "When did you ever do any thing to offend me? I—I am only nervous. I have felt heavy and languid for a day or two. Perhaps I need a tonic. Don't people always need a tonic when they feel languid? Count my pulse, and see if it is all right."

She extended her delicate wrist, with a pretty tracery of azure veins showing through the transparent skin; but, instead of accepting the diversion thus offered, Ralph placed one hand under her chin, and turned the exquisite Hebe-face toward the light.

"I can judge better from your eyes than from your pulse," he said, gravely. "Look at me, and let me see what cloud has come over you."

But this Nina would not do; indeed, she felt that she could not meet the frank, tender eyes looking at her, with the gloom of unquiet deception in her own. The white, sculpturesque lids fell heavily; the slender, dark brows met in an impatient frown.

"Don't, Ralph!" she said, petulantly. "I cannot endure such a glare! There is nothing the matter with me, except that I am stupid and dull."

"Why, you were nervous and languid a minute ago," said Ralph, "and now stupid and dull—what a sudden list of maladies! And, for you, of all people! Do you know—now that I come to think of it—you have not seemed quite yourself since that day we went down to the laboratory? I wonder if you could have inhaled some of Martindale's poisonous compounds?"

"How absurd!" said Nina; but her smile was forced, and the vivid color which leaped to her face might have awakened suspicion in anybody but Ralph. He, however, blundered on:

"I must make Martindale come and prescribe for you," said Ralph. "Every chemist is something of a physician—at least to the

extent of knowing the effect of his chemicals. If you should have chanced to inhale a little poison, he must administer an antidote as soon as possible."

"Pray, don't be foolish!" said Nina, coldly—the flush on her face had faded as quickly as it came, and nothing remained now but a faint stain of color on either cheek—"I have inhaled no poison; but, if I had done so, I would not care to receive an antidote from Mr. Martindale. Ralph," she said, suddenly and passionately, "I asked you to send that man away when he first came here. It would have been better—oh, how much better—if you had heeded me!"

"Has Martindale been doing any thing?" said Ralph. "I knew somebody had offended you, Nina; but I am sorry that you have gone back to your dislike of him."

"I did not say that I had gone back to my dislike of him," answered Nina, impatiently. "Ralph, can you not understand that one can distrust a person without—without disliking him?"

"No, I cannot understand it," said Ralph, frankly. "With me, to like and to trust are synonymous terms. I could not for a moment entertain any regard for a person whom I distrusted."

"That is to say, you could not learn to regard a person whom you distrusted," said Nina, quickly. "But if you liked—loved, perhaps—already, could you not continue to like or love even if—if you had cause to distrust?"

"I scarcely think so," he answered, simply. "But, thank God, I have never been tried with a distrust of any one whom I loved!"

"I wonder how you would bear it," said she, half absently—gazing away from him out of the window.

"Badly enough," he answered. "In fact, I cannot imagine how I would bear it at all. Nothing could be more horrible—more unendurable!" Then, quickly: "Don't let us talk of such things—they are not for you and me. We trust each other, do we not?"

"Yes," answered she, quietly—if he had noticed closely, he would have seen a quick gasp in her throat—"but neither of us can tell how unworthy the other may be of that trust."

"Good Heavens, Nina!" said Ralph. He was quite confounded by this unexpected re-

ply, and for a minute could only stare at the speaker. Then, naturally enough, it occurred to him that such a surprising supposition must refer to himself. "Something certainly is the matter," he said, emphatically, "Nina; will you not tell me what it is? If I have done any thing to pain or annoy you—"

"You done any thing!" interrupted Nina, again. "Ralph, are you mad? You never did any thing in your life to pain or annoy me. It is I who have always pained and annoyed you, who have been cold and ungrateful, and—and unworthy of every kind and loving thought that you have ever given me! If you could forget me," said she, meeting his gaze suddenly for the first time, "it might be the best thing that could befall you."

"Nina, you certainly must be ill!" said Ralph. "You would never talk such nonsense if you were not. Why, I never heard any thing like it! Forget you!—I, who have never done any thing but love you since you first came to us! Here!—let me feel your pulse. You certainly must have a fever."

But, instead of extending her wrist again, Nina laid her hand on his shoulder, and looked at him with a steady, wistful air. As she faced him thus, he began to observe, for the first time, the deep shadow in her usually sunny face.

"Ralph," she said, slowly, "do you not see that I shall never be able to make you happy? Dear, we are too unlike. One can do a great deal toward controlling one's self—at least good people say that we can—but one cannot create one's self over again on another model, and that is what I should have to do before I should be able to live your life as your wife should live it."

"What on earth has put such ideas into your head?" asked Ralph, alarmed and puzzled both at once. "If I am willing to take you just as you are, without any creating over again whatever, why should you torment yourself with scruples and ideas like these? When you are married and settled, you will grow to like domestic things better than you do now—but I only desire that change for your own comfort. I love you too well as you are, to see any fault in you."

Nina dropped her hand wearily, and turned from him again toward the window. "If you knew me as I am, you would not love me for an hour," she said. "O Ralph, if you would only give me up, and—and let me sink out

of your life, you would be so much happier!"

"Nina!" said Ralph, and his voice had a cadence in it which made her start, thinking she had betrayed herself. Instinctively she drew into the shade, as he bent forward that he might read her face by the full light of the window. "Am I so dull that I have not understood you all this time?" he said, with a strange sort of tension in his tone. "Is it for yourself you have been pleading, while you talked of me? You say that I will find no happiness in our marriage—Nina, are you thinking what you will find?"

She looked up at him half piteously, the fingers of her right hand seeking the engagement-ring which her left hand wore. Now was the golden moment in which to speak, if she meant to speak at all; but face to face with the opportunity, she shrank back, feeling her inability to use it. For Nina was not only a born epicurean—a born seeker and lover of pleasure and delight—but she was also that which all epicureans essentially are—a coward. She shrank from any thing painful, as she might have shrunk from a cruel blow. Looking into Ralph's face—it had grown very pale, and, although the eyes were tender, the mouth was set and almost stern—her heart died away within her. "I cannot, I cannot!" she thought. To do her justice, it was not cowardice alone that sealed her lips. The eyes, gazing into her own, seemed to her excited fancy like an embodiment of all the love and care which had been given to her since the first hour in which the roof of Wyverne had sheltered her helpless orphanhood. Were ever parents kinder or more indulgent than her uncle and aunt, was ever brother more tender, was ever lover more devoted, than Ralph? A vision of her petted, luxurious life rose before the girl. They had given her every thing which was theirs to give. It was for her to decide what should be their reward.

Then even in this foolish and reckless heart, a mighty impulse of self-abnegating gratitude rose. "Ralph," she cried, suddenly, "I was not thinking of myself; I was only thinking of you! I will do whatever you wish, dear; but you must remember that—that I knew how it would be, when I disappoint you in every thing, and make you wretched."

"I am not afraid of that, my darling,"

said Ralph, with a great wave of gladness coming over his face. He did not exactly understand Nina, having never known her to be seized with a fit of humility before—but a load seemed lifted from him when he found that this was all she meant. Only a fear lest she should make him wretched! He laughed outright. "My pretty one," he said, with caressing tenderness, "even to look at you is enough to bring sunlight and gladness to a man's heart."

"But I shall not be pretty always," said Nina. She almost hated her prettiness at that moment. It was the root of all her trouble. But for the entrancing bloom of her skin, the moist scarlet of her lips, the liquid lustre of her eyes, Ralph would never have desired to marry her, Martindale would never have tarried at Wyverne over fruitless experiments in chemistry, the discontent and eager longing which burned within her like a flame would never have found birth. "If I had been ugly, I should have been domestic," she thought, with a momentary yearning for a sallow skin and dull eyes. "Ugly women always *are* domestic—they have no temptation to be any thing else."

Meanwhile Ralph was saying, with that air of affectionate solicitude which is so delightful when the affection is returned, but so terribly irksome when it is not: "My darling, there is something you must do for me. Did I not hear mother say that you are going with her to Elkbridge for some shopping to-day? Promise me that while you are there you will call and see Dr. Shelton. I am not quite easy about you."

"There is nothing the matter with me," said Nina—"at least nothing which Dr. Shelton can cure. If I went to see him, it could only be to ask if he could 'minister to a mind diseased.' I think my mind *must* be diseased, else I should never have been so foolish as I have been this morning. But I see the carriage coming round, and I have not changed my dress yet. I had almost forgotten that I was going to Elkbridge with Aunt Essie."

She turned away quickly—glad to escape from the eyes which had all of love's eagerness and something of love's keenness in them—and, hurrying out of the room, did not pause until she was safe within the shelter of her own chamber, a cool, bowery apartment with a delicious green light from its half-closed blinds, and a whiff of ottar of roses on

the air. On her knees beside the bed, across which a pretty light silk was lying, Nina flung herself—but not to pray. Only to bury her face in the Marseilles counterpane and smother the dry, stormy sobs that were shaking her whole frame.

"What am I to do? Oh, what am I to do?" she panted. "It would be a blacker ingratitude than even I am capable of to leave them, as *he* wishes me to do; and yet—I think I shall go mad if Ralph talks to me and looks at me again as he did a little while ago! To see the love and trust in his eyes, and to think how I have betrayed the one and forfeited the other, is more than I can bear! Oh, what am I to do? To keep my engagement and make myself miserable, or to break it and make him wretched? Yet have I indeed a liberty of choice?" She sprang to her feet and began to pace the floor. "Have they not bought me—these good, kind, tame, stupid people—and paid my value a hundred times over?" Her glance traveled from the silk dress on the bed to a set of pearls—Ralph's birthday present—on the toilet-table. "Surely my red-and-white beauty is not worth a higher price than the lavish indulgence which these things represent. But freedom!—are *they* worthy to be the price of freedom?" Her hands clasped and unclasped nervously; her impatient glance swept round the room as if its walls suffocated her; at that moment she looked like some wild thing of the forest pent within a cage. "It is a good thing that this cannot last long!" she thought, snatching from her white throat a band of velvet, which felt as if it was choking her. "It is a good thing that my wedding-day is only two weeks distant. Whatever is to be decided, must be decided soon; whatever is to be done, must be done before then. What it will be, Heaven only knows. I know nothing except that I have not courage to be either wholly true or wholly false. Every thing would be easier if I were better, or—worse!"

And little as Nina suspected it, she epitomized her whole character in those words. Every thing would have been easier with her if she had been either better or worse—if she had stood upon a higher or lower plane of action and feeling. As it was, she succumbed to a temptation which a nobler nature would have resisted, while she stood firm where a more selfish nature would have given way, and

walked over all obstacles to its end. In the vortex of conflicting circumstance thus created, it was she who was rent and torn by the struggle she had provoked, and out of which came neither victory nor defeat; it was she who learned that to pause midway between good and evil, to strive to reconcile honor and dishonor, truth and falsehood, is the most hopeless problem that a human soul can possibly attempt to solve.

When she came down-stairs to accompany Mrs. Wyverne on the shopping expedition to Elkbridge, no one would have guessed from her glowing cheeks and shining eyes what had given such bloom to the one, such light to the other. "I never saw you looking better, Nina," said Mrs. Wyverne, as they drove off. "It must be the color of your dress which is so becoming—or else the shape of your hat. We will go to the photograph-gallery while we are in Elkbridge; I have been promising your likeness to my sister for some time. She is anxious to see what Ralph's future wife looks like."

"I hope she will be satisfied with Ralph's taste," said Nina. "I am not sure of it, however, for photographs never give an idea of complexion; and you know, Aunt Essie, my nose is *not* straight."

The shopping did not include any very extensive purchases—for Mrs. Wyverne had too much regard for fashion to patronize to any great extent the shopkeepers and dress-makers of a country-town—but a little of that amusement can readily be spread over a large amount of time, especially with the aid of a few visits, and an hour or two in a photograph-gallery. Therefore, it chanced that the two ladies spent the day in Elkbridge, and that the sun was sinking when they entered the gates of Wyverne. "There is nobody at home," said Nina, glancing along the front of the house, as they approached. The next instant, however, she started back, for when they stopped Martindale appeared from some quarter, and opened the carriage-door.

"You see there is somebody at home," said Mrs. Wyverne, with a laugh.—"Are you all alone, Mr. Martindale?" she added, as he assisted her to alight. "We were just saying that the house looked entirely deserted."

"It has been deserted by every one but me since mid-day," answered Martindale. "I am to blame for my solitude, however. Ralph invited me to accompany Mr. Wyverne and

himself to what he called 'the lower plantation,' but I declined, on the score of excessive laziness and excessive heat. In fact, I hoped you would be back in time for our ride," he said, looking at Nina.

"We were detained in Elkbridge," answered she, a little coldly. She was busy gathering up the parcels scattered over the seat of the carriage, and did not look at him or notice his extended hand.

"Never mind about those, Nina," said Mrs. Wyverne, from the shadow of the portico. "I will send Ellen out for them. If you are as tired as I am, you will not care to bother about any thing of the kind. I am going to order some iced tea at once. How refreshing it is to get home after such a day!—Don't you think it is very warm, Mr. Martindale?"

But Martindale did not answer—in fact, he did not hear the question. He was looking at Nina, who at last descended from the carriage somewhat reluctantly, and without his assistance. Her delay was its own punishment, however, for, when she gained the portico, Mrs. Wyverne had disappeared into the house, and she found herself alone with Martindale.

"What is the matter?" he said, quickly, almost imperiously. "What has occurred that you are so changed? Nina, what is the meaning of this?"

"Am I changed?" asked Nina. She gave a short laugh. "If you will come into the drawing-room, I will tell you the meaning of it—perhaps it is better over at once."

She turned and led the way across the large, cool hall into the drawing-room, full just then of a wonderful sunset glow, which streamed through the wide western windows. As she paused in the centre of the floor, and turned toward Martindale, this glory seemed to surround her like a luminous atmosphere, lighting her hair into more than Titianesque richness, and giving her face a beauty that he never forgot. He almost caught his breath. At that moment he could think of nothing but the loveliness which in this very spot had first fascinated him.

"Nina!" he cried, "if I could only paint you as you stand there now, what a picture it would make! My darling, my beautiful darling, what a sensation you will create in the world!"

"I shall never go into the world!" said

Nina, bitterly. It was better to get it over at once, she thought, especially since the old wild thrill leaped into longing life at his words. "That was what I came to say," she went on, facing him with great, steady, lustrous eyes. "It must all end. I shall never go into the world. I shall stay here and marry Ralph."

She uttered the last words bravely, though a great choking wave seemed to rise up in her throat. It was as if her own hand rolled a stone to the door of her sepulchre. Stay at Wyverne and marry Ralph! A picture of what her life would be rose before her as she uttered the words. The suffocating sense which had oppressed her in the morning came back. The dreary monotony of days and years seemed stretching before her. Looking at Martindale, she felt a strange mixture of relief and anger to see that he was smiling.

"Stay here and marry Ralph!" he repeated, and her ear caught the vibration of absolute amusement in his tone. "Is that all that is the matter? *Carissima!* you startled me horribly. I feared—I scarcely knew what, from your manner. Trust to me, sweet one, and don't disquiet yourself like this. Remember that it is too late to talk of ending any thing now. You have placed your life in my hands, and I will take care of it."

"I have not placed my life in your hands," said Nina. It was impossible to say whether she felt most strongly repelled or strangely fascinated by this haughty dictation. "I was only mad enough to—to forget what I owe Ralph. But I remember it now. Such a faith as mine is poor indeed to give him, but he thinks it something, and I—I cannot undeceive him. It is better to let him be happy with an unworthy wife, than to make him miserable by telling him what I am."

"This is all nonsense," said Martindale, coolly. "I told you, before I had any reason whatever to believe you loved me, that I meant to win you, Nina. Do you seriously think that now—now that you have assured me in word, and look, and tone, of your love—that I will give you up at any bidding under Heaven?"

"You will have no choice but to give me up at my own!" said Nina, becoming haughty in turn.

But he only laughed—laughed as he might have done at the petulance of a child. "Sweet-heart," he said, "is it possible you are so

foolish as not to see that you have gone too far to turn back? It is natural that you should feel in this way—I expected it—but it is childish to imagine that, because you opened a dam, you can stop a flood. We may alter circumstances, but we cannot control them. You are mine. It is too late to talk of marrying Ralph Wyverne now."

"It is not too late for any thing I may choose to do," said Nina, with a flash of her old defiance. "I have been a fool, I know," she went on, bitterly. "I have let you amuse yourself with me to the top of your bent"—her lip curled in that self-contempt which, to a proud nature, is of all things on earth the hardest to endure—"but I am not quite ready to let you dictate what my whole life shall be. Our flirtation, or whatever you may choose to call it, is at an end."

"Our flirtation ended some time ago," said Martindale, quietly; but she caught a sudden gleam in his eyes as the handsome brows above them knitted. "Our engagement, however, will not end until you are my wife."

"I shall never be your wife!" said Nina, passionately. It was impossible to understand this girl. She scarcely understood herself—she scarcely knew what she wished, desired, or intended to do. Just then she rebelled against the power which Martindale assumed, as she had rebelled against her life and all the circumstances of it. Ralph's caressing tenderness came back to her. After all, she was not sure that she did not prefer a subject to a master. "I will never be your wife!" she repeated, with a glow of added color on her face, a flash of new light in her eyes.

"Will you not?" said Martindale. He could have laughed at the foolish coquetry which fancied that it could play fast and loose with *him*, but he was also angry—so angry, that Nina was startled by the white sternness which came over his face. "Again I tell you that this is folly!" he said. "I do not doubt that you are like all the rest of your sex—more than ready to make a fool of any man who chooses to give you his love for a plaything—but you will not make either a fool or a plaything of me. *You will be my wife!* I have told you so before, I tell you so again. You do not half know me, Nina, if you fancy that any thing can stand between us now!"

No, she did not half know him. Something like a realization of that came to Nina as she looked at the face before her—a passionate, stern face, with the resolution in it deepening as she gazed, until duller eyes might have read a determination which would heed no obstacles to its end.

"I have brought this on myself," she said. "I have no right to complain. But you have no right to speak so to me. I have forgotten a great deal for you, but I cannot forget every thing."

"And yet that is what you must do!" he said. "You must forget every thing and everybody connected with your past life, and come with me. You must not look back and try to reconcile the past with the future. It can never be!" Then he took her hands and drew her to him—more compellingly than tenderly. "Let us have done with this!" he said. "Nina, you are mine! Do you not love me well enough to be glad of it?"

But Nina drew back.

"How can I be yours," she said, "when I am engaged to Ralph? Surely" (with a bitter laugh) "I cannot belong to both of you. I say again, that I have been mad and foolish, but I never meant to marry you. You ought to know that."

"You mean that you have been deliberately trifling with me!" said he, a dark fire gathering in his eye, a red flush mounting to his brow.

"If I did mean that," said she, with a flash of spirit, "you would have no right to complain. Did you not intend to trifle with me, when you remained here after having told Ralph that his 'idea' was worth nothing?"

"No," answered he, quietly. "I never meant to trifle with you. I stayed here simply and solely because I loved you and meant to win you."

"And do you call that honorable to Ralph?" said she, indignantly.

"Ralph!" repeated he, contemptuously. "Do you suppose I thought of Ralph? I only thought of you, Nina! Ralph was merely the stepping-stone by which I reached you."

"Poor Ralph!" said Nina. She put her hand quickly to her eyes. What right had she to blame Martindale when she considered how unscrupulously *she* had used and abused Ralph's great faith in her? A flood of remorse seemed suddenly to rush over her. The hand-

some, imperious face before her vanished away; Ralph's loving eyes came back. At that moment she forgot the fair, broad freedom of the world which lay beyond these quiet shades. She only thought of the love which had been disregarded, of the trust which had been betrayed. If she walked on to the life which was awaiting her—the life whose possibilities set her blood in a glow—she felt that she must walk over Ralph's heart. Could she do that? There are many women—some of whom would doubtless think themselves much better than poor Nina—who would not have hesitated an instant over such a necessity. But, with all her faults and impulses, Nina *did* hesitate. In fact, she did more than hesitate. She cried out passionately: "We have both betrayed his trust in us—but I am the most to blame! I can try to atone by keeping faith with him; but, oh, what an atonement it will be!"

"It would be a foolish self-sacrifice that could only end by making him as wretched as it would make you!" said Martindale. "Nina, can you not recognize the folly of all this? Why should you waste your strength against the inevitable? You could as soon call back the sun, which has just set, into mid-heaven, as set aside the consequences which must flow from an accomplished fact. We can none of us escape the necessity of giving as well as of receiving pain. If we paused at every step in life to think what heart we should crush, we would never be likely to advance. You were born to crush hearts!" he said, with a proud, passionate tenderness. "Just now you must choose between mine and Ralph's. Which is it to be?"

"I do not owe you what I owe Ralph," said Nina, looking up.

But, all the same, she felt that she had failed in this first contest of opposing wills.

CHAPTER V.

But this first contest was only the keynote of a struggle to come—a struggle which grew in intensity day by day, as the time for Nina's marriage approached, and, as Martindale began to realize that it would prove more difficult than he imagined to sway her to his purpose. He found that a change had come over the girl—a change which struck below the surface, and which puzzled even while it

angered him. For a while he doubted its genuineness: it was nothing more than an impulse of generosity, he thought, or else one of those tricks of coquetry which women of all ages and all countries understand so well. But, as time went on, he could no longer treat it with *nonchalant* coolness; he was forced to believe that Nina was in earnest when she declared her intention of keeping faith with Ralph. It was then that he began to appreciate how much he had overrated his influence with her. It was then that he first began to understand that she had only meant to amuse herself—only meant to feed her vanity and test her power with his homage—and that, although she had been drawn, by the strong force of will rather than by the strong force of attraction, further than she intended, she had never seriously meant to surrender for his sake any one of the substantial advantages which opened before her as Ralph Wyverne's wife.

At least this was Martindale's way of putting it. Recognizing with a start that he had never wakened more than that flattered fancy which the impressionable heart of a girl yields readily enough to the first comer, and that in this fancy there was no element of that love which beeds no obstacles to its end, he did *not* recognize how much the girl had to resist in her eager longing for the world, and those things of the world which he embodied. Finding that she stood firm in her resolution of marrying Ralph, it would be hard to say how much of foiled desire, of wounded vanity, and outraged bitterness, gathered in his consideration of the manner in which she had "trifled" with him. No man likes his own weapons to be turned against him in such fashion; but Martindale liked it less even than most men. He had good reason for thinking that he knew the world more than ordinarily well, and he felt deeply that he had been "made a fool of" by a girl whose experience of society began and ended in the stagnant country neighborhood around her. If this pang of mortified vanity—keen as it was—had been all the trouble, however, he might have shaken the dust of Wyverne off his feet in disgust, and left Nina to the fate she had chosen. Unfortunately, however, there were graver passions in reserve—passions that began to rouse themselves in ominous sternness when he saw the beautiful prize, which he had determined to call his own, in danger

of passing from him. Never before had it seemed so well worth winning! Never had Nina seemed so well worth any sacrifice or exertion, as when she set her will against his own, and declared her intention of fulfilling her engagement! Never had his determination waxed greater than when she enraged him by an opposition on which he had not counted, by a defiance of which he had not dreamed! And, in order that this determination may be appreciated at its full value, it must be said that Martindale was troubled with singularly few scruples, and that he possessed in marked degree a resolution so indomitable that he had learned to think it invincible. Add to this, intense passions, together with a very small amount of what phrenologists call "conscientiousness," and the most tranquil ignorance might imagine that the combination could not fail to be dangerous, let it be veiled by never so much of that graceful indifference which our nineteenth-century civilization has taught its men and women to cultivate. Vesuvius is none the less Vesuvius because gardens are planted on its slope; the volcano is not extinct, and, when its lava bursts forth, the gardens fare but ill.

It is useless to say that, if Nina had known any thing of the character of the man with whom she had "amused" herself, she might have felt that he was right in telling her that it was too late to think of disowning the consequences of her folly, too late to dream of atonement to Ralph, too late for any attempt at controlling the demon of circumstance she had evoked. But she was too inexperienced to form any judgment of character in the concrete. Judging in the abstract, she conceived Martindale to be like all other men of his class of whom she had heard and read, quick enough to amuse himself with a pretty face, but ready enough also to see when the amusement was over, and to go his way with due philosophy and an unbroken heart. Strong passions and desperate deeds were quite out of fashion nowadays, she thought. It was only in old romances that men were incited to either or both by the magic of a woman's fair face. Other people besides Nina think these things. Other people, also, wake to find that this old, wicked human nature of ours is the same to-day as yesterday, the same yesterday as three hundred or three thousand years ago.

Yet, despite this comfortable assurance, these days were very terrible to Nina. The girl felt as if she moved in a vague, dreadful mist. She was living a dual life, and she sometimes stopped to ask herself which of the two existences was real. On one side was all the preparation for her marriage—that preparation which agitates the ordinary feminine mind and the ordinary domestic household so deeply—Mrs. Wyverne's animated bustle over the *trousseau*, the wedding-cards, the wedding-breakfast—every thing connected with the wedding, in fact—and Ralph's quiet but tender certainty of happiness. On the other was Martindale's fiery passion, his vehement pleading, his arbitrary assertions of power, the struggle ever renewed yet never ended, and, above all, the alluring temptation of freedom—freedom so near that she had but to stretch out her hand and take it, yet so far away, since she could not harden her heart sufficiently to stretch out that hand.

It was no wonder that the bright cheek grew pale, or that dark circles sprung for the first time into existence under the sunny eyes, even during this short fortnight. Few of us have not learned to our cost how much of emotion can be compressed into the space of a few days—nay, even of a few hours. And, epicurean though she was, Nina suffered as she enjoyed—with her whole soul. She had never mastered—it is doubtful if by any possibility she ever could have mastered—the phlegmatic impassibility which is the grand talisman of selfish happiness. Hers was a wholly different temperament—a temperament that, for all its intense love of pleasure, could not divorce its energy even from pain, and, despite its fitful waywardness, possessed impulses of generosity that scarcely hesitated at any height of self-sacrifice. "You may *make* this sacrifice," Martindale said, "but you will not have strength enough to abide by it." And, in truth, this was where Nina failed. She had sufficient enthusiasm and unselfishness for a quick martyrdom; but, for that slow martyrdom of the soul which we call the death of hope, she possessed neither courage nor strength. An observation less keen than Martindale's might have predicted that, if she married Ralph Wyverne, she would not even sink into the apathy which with many women does duty for resignation, but would rather eat out her heart in long-

ings and desires as bitter as they were fruitless.

Time, which stands still for no man, rolled swiftly on, meanwhile, and the date appointed for the marriage drew very near. During these days, the household at Wyverne saw but little of Martindale. All of the day, and most of the night, he spent in the laboratory, generally working with closed doors. Even Ralph knew little of what he was about. In fact, just then Ralph was thinking of other things. The near approach of matrimony banished even chemistry from his mind—besides which, Mr. Wyverne chanced to be "laid up" with an attack of gout; and this indisposition naturally threw an added amount of business into his son's hands. In days of well-organized labor, it was no trifle to keep the eye of a master on two large plantations; but in these days the necessity of supervision is increased by ten- if not by twenty-fold. Hence Ralph was busy, and business dulls men's faculties of observation. He had only a vague idea of what Martindale was doing, and, although he saw that Nina was looking rather pale, he thought that it would be "all right" after they were married, and had left home for that change of air which is considered beneficial for newly-married people.

"Have you seen any thing of Martindale to-day, Nina?" he asked one afternoon when he had come in tired from a ride of several miles, and flung himself at luxurious full length on a couch in the hall, where Nina chanced to be sitting.

"Very little," she answered, quietly. Her hands were clasped idly over a novel which she had not been reading, her eyes gazed wistfully out of the broad, open door to the afternoon lights and shadows that were checkering the lawn beyond. Just then it occurred to her with a thrill of relief that there were only three more days of this to be endured. Three days hence she would be married and gone—never likely, she hoped and trusted, to see Martindale again.

"I must go down and look in on that fellow," Ralph was, meanwhile, saying lazily. "He told me yesterday that he was devoting himself to my experiments, and had made some progress in them. He seems wonderfully well satisfied with his quarters. He says he has never before been able to test in a thoroughly satisfactory manner some ideas of his own. I told him I hoped he would

stay here while we were gone, and, when we come back, I shall be more at leisure, and we can go over the result of all that he has done."

"Ralph!"—it was a low, quivering cry that absolutely made Ralph start—"you surely have not done such a thing as that? You surely have not asked that man to stay here when you know how much I—I distrust him?"

"Yes, I have," said Ralph. He was quite astonished, and raised himself on his elbow. "I am sorry if you don't like it," he went on, after a moment, "but really, Nina, I had no idea that your dislike of Martindale went so far as this. I am sure he thinks very highly of you, and—"

"I did not say that I disliked him, Ralph," she interrupted, with a painful flush, "but that I distrust him. I do not think his experiments will ever come to any thing, and I am sorry there is any prospect of his being here when we return. I—I was only just thinking that it would be a relief to be alone."

"I wonder I did not think of that myself," said Ralph, looking as much discomfited as a large Newfoundland does when, by some piece of amateur sagacity, he incurs scolding instead of commendation. "It was stupid of me, but I really did not think that Martindale mattered. I thought you had grown to like him famously—and then the chemistry, Nina! I should like to go to that in earnest when we come back."

"Can't you go to it by yourself?" asked Nina. But she heaved a weary sigh. She knew that even her influence reckoned for nothing when opposed to that of chemistry.

"I don't know," answered Ralph, doubtfully. "You see I have been so busy that I have not been able to keep up with what Martindale is doing. Unless he is here when I come back, therefore, his having been here at all will have done me little good."

"Why did you bring him, then?" said Nina. Her hands wrung themselves tightly together. How lightly and idly this had been done which had changed the whole current and meaning of her life!

"I have told you all about that," said Ralph, sinking back on his cushions. "I was sorry for having brought him when I found you did not like him, and I am still more sorry for having so thoughtlessly asked him to prolong his visit; but I can't get out of it now, you know," said the honest, hospitable fellow.

"One can't ask one's guest to leave, certainly," said Nina, bitterly. "But the guest himself may sometimes have discretion enough to see that it would be well to do so."

"Not unless he perceives that his presence is disagreeable," said Ralph, adding, a little indignantly, "I would infinitely rather show a man out of my house than treat him with incivility in it."

"I was not thinking of treating him with incivility," said Nina, half absently. "You ought to know that, Ralph. No one is more Arabian in his ideas of hospitality than I am; but—did Mr. Martindale say that he would remain?" she interrupted herself by asking, looking quickly at her cousin.

"He made a sort of half promise—his movements were uncertain for the next month, he said; but he added that, if we remained as long as we intended, we should probably find him here when we returned."

There was silence for a minute after this. The drowsy stillness of a summer afternoon seemed to brood over the house; now and then a gentle snore came from the library where Mr. Wyverne was enjoying a *siesta*; a few flies were lazily buzzing about—Keeper, the great mastiff, snapped at them occasionally; the last rays of the sun were streaming across the terrace, and reddening the cedar-hedge. Nina watched it all as in a dream. She was wondering what Martindale meant, and how she could best prevent any thing so terrible as it would be to find him at Wyverne when she came back from her bridal tour.

After a while she rose. Ralph was tired, and, finding himself in a very comfortable position, he had fallen asleep with that air of supreme, restful enjoyment which we notice in the slumbers of children and dogs. With one glance at his placid, unconscious face, Nina took her garden-hat from a table near by, and went out of the open door.

She walked slowly around the terrace, pondering whether or not she was wise in seeking Martindale, as a sudden impulse prompted her to do. For several days she had studiously avoided the garden, where most of their interviews had taken place. The scenes of passionate struggle, which at first had been so exciting and pleasant, had of late wearied and torn and terrified her all at once. The old legends are right: "It is much easier to raise a fiend than to put him down again;" and there are instances around us every day

of people who, having tried the experiment, fare as badly as their incautious predecessors of the middle ages.

Nina, unluckily for herself, was one of these. The fiend which she had raised proved totally beyond her powers of management. The stormy and exacting devotion for which she had longed was not half so entertaining as she had imagined it would be. During these days, she had turned more than once with a sense of absolute relief to Ralph's quiet affection and unwavering trust. As she went her way now—down the terrace-steps and along the garden-paths—she felt a shrinking in every fibre from the scene before her. Her whole pleasure-loving nature rose up in revolt against the pain and vexation which seemed to encompass her. "It is infamous!—he has no right to torment me so!" she said, setting her white teeth and clinching her soft hands. "I will not submit to it any longer."

As she uttered these words half aloud, she turned into a path that led directly to the pavilion. It stood clearly before her at the end of the vista, a pretty and appropriate adjunct to the luxuriant, old-fashioned garden. As she strolled slowly along—her steps unconsciously growing more lagging as she approached—she saw a juvenile factotum of the establishment, black in color and Jack by name, emerge from the laboratory and advance along the path toward her, swinging something in his hand. What this was she could not distinguish until, as he drew near, it proved to be a dead cat; which no sooner did Miss Dalzell perceive, than she promptly and imperiously collared the bearer:

"Where did that come from, Jack?" she demanded. "What are you doing with it?"

"Mr. Martindale killed him, and telled me to take him and fling him away," said Jack, who had a wholesome fear of being arraigned for cruelty at the bar of "Miss Nina's" indignant justice.

"Mr. Martindale killed it!" repeated Nina. She was on the point of saying, "How dare you tell me such a falsehood?" when she remembered that the boy had come down the laboratory-steps, which gave at least a plausible air to the statement. "Why did Mr. Martindale kill it?" she asked, suspiciously. "Is it not your mother's cat? Jack, if you are telling me what is not so—"

"I ain't a-tellin' you what ain't so, Miss

Nina," said Jack, filled with a sense of virtuous innocence. "Mammy said Mr. Martindale might have old Tom for a dollar, an' he tole me to fetch him along, an' I done it, an' he killed him."

"How did he kill him?" demanded Nina. She still looked at the speaker with an air of suspicion, which Jack felt to be hard to bear.

"I dunno 'xactly how," he answered, shuffling one bare, black foot in the sand. "He never done nothin' to him. He jist put him under some kind of a glass thing, an' he dropped right down dead, as if he'd a bin shot."

"I wonder if he is dead," said Nina. She examined the lax, inanimate form with tender fingers, while Jack looked on without much wonder; he knew "Miss Nina's ways." But it was all in vain. Science had done its work. Poor Tom was hopelessly dead; so, bidding Jack give him decent burial, Nina turned and walked away.

She could not go to the laboratory after that. It was not only that she was revolted—unreasonably revolted, perhaps, after the manner of people who have not the love or the advancement of science at heart—by the cruelty of which she had just heard, but a sudden strange sense of terror came over her. She told herself that it was irrational, but she could not reason it away. Of course, she had always known what deadly forces lurked in chemistry; she had also been aware that Martindale, in pursuit of an "idea" of his own, had been experimenting for some time in poisonous gases; and she knew, as everybody knows, how ruthlessly the devotees of science sacrifice God's helpless creatures on their altar. But, despite all this, she could not drive away that chill sense of impending evil which had come so suddenly, and with which we are all familiar—which we call a presentiment when it is fulfilled, and which we forget with so much ease when it is unfulfilled. She was aware that it probably arose from her own overwrought frame of mind; yet, when she turned aside and sat down in a little rose-arbor, her heart was beating like that of some frightened wild creature. The sun was gone by this time, and the lovely, fragrant twilight had fallen over the earth. But Nina had no heed for it. "I am a fool!" she thought, angrily. "I am worse than a fool! But how terrible—oh, how terrible—for any one to hold such power as that!" Then she thought:

"He must go away! I do not trust him; I said I did not trust him, from the first. God forgive me, if I am wronging him, as we should not wrong our worst enemy—but there is something dreadful about him! I have felt that, and yet I have told myself that it was folly. But he must go—even if I have to tell Ralph the truth."

Yet she felt that, to tell Ralph the truth, would be to put out of the question the sacrifice which she desired to make for him. Dearly as he loved her, bitterly as it would pain him to surrender her, Ralph Wyverne was made of better stuff than to accept any woman's hand—even that of the woman he loved best on earth—if it were given unwillingly. If he had once known how Nina's impatient heart yearned for the freedom of the world, for a life and love such as he could not give her, he would have been the first to snap asunder the link which bound them to each other; and of this fact no one was more thoroughly aware than the girl who sat there under the roses, gazing with absent eyes and overclouded brow at the wealth of summer bloom and beauty around her.

But, despite the anxious thoughts which overshadowed her, she made a picture that stirred Martindale's heart into a tumult of admiration when he came round a turn of the path upon her. He had caught a glimpse of her white dress from the laboratory, and followed as quickly as possible; but, not looking for her just here, the sudden spell of her loveliness—framed by the green vines and hanging roses—moved him the more strongly for its unexpectedness. It is hard to define a mental sensation of any kind, but it is especially hard to define the effect which beauty produces on the soul of its worshiper, on the temperament that is keenly alive to its influence. He started and stopped for a moment, then came forward quickly. Hearing the ring of his tread on the gravel path, Nina turned toward him and they faced each other.

"I am glad to find you," he said, abruptly. "When I caught a glimpse of your dress a few minutes ago, I was thinking of going to the house in search of you. But this is better."

"You can have nothing to say to me," said Nina, coldly. "Why should you have gone to the house in search of me? But I have something to say to you," she went on, catching her breath quickly, and looking at

him with level, defiant eyes. "That is why I came into the garden. Ralph has just told me that you have promised to stay at Wyverne while we are gone, and to be here when we return. I have come to tell you that it is impossible—that I will not submit to any thing of the kind. Sooner than endure it, I will tell him every thing."

"He will not need to be told any thing," said Martindale, quietly. He looked paler than usual, and there were certain stern-cut lines about his mouth, the full significance of which Nina had not yet learned to appreciate. "He will know every thing sooner and better than words can tell him—for I have come to tell you that this must end. You must leave Wyverne with me to-night, Nina."

"Leave Wyverne with you to-night!" repeated Nina. For a minute she could say no more. His cool assumption of a proprietorship which she had repeatedly disowned, absolutely stunned her. She felt outraged and indignant even while she was conscious of a horrible sense of impotence. What could she do against a man with whom words went literally for naught? Her own folly had placed her in his power, and, although she had for a time defied its exercise, she has of late been aware of a growing fear of Martindale. Reason told her that it was impossible for him to compel her to any thing; but instinct—sometimes the wisest as well as sometimes the foolish of guides—warned her that he would probably end by compelling her to all that he desired.

"What do you mean by speaking to me in this manner!" she said, flushing angrily. "How often must I tell you that I mean to keep my faith with Ralph at any cost? How often must I repeat that I will not be so ungrateful as to leave those who have done every thing for me, for you who have done nothing save poison my life with discontent, and make me wretched? But it is useless to go over this," she said, quivering with excitement. "In three days I shall be married, and it will be at an end. All that I came to say is—you must go away from Wyverne!"

"I shall go when you are ready to go with me," he answered. His tone would have indicated to duller ears than those of the girl who listened, that the struggle between them had reached its supreme issue. His face hardened in resolution as she looked, but his eyes were full of passionate light. "Have

you learned yet that there is no power short of death which can make me leave you?" he said. "Nina, have you not yet appreciated the utter folly of all this? You are mine! I will keep you at any cost. It is for you to decide what that cost shall be."

"My experience of men is limited," said Nina, exasperated beyond all power of forbearance, "but I have never known or heard of a man who found it so difficult to understand a plain and decided refusal as you seem to do."

"Perhaps you have never known or heard of a man who himself refused so decidedly to be made the plaything of feminine caprice," said Martindale. There was no indication of ruffled temper in his tone, though she saw a quick flash in the brown eyes. "But this is sheer waste of time," he went on, "and every minute is precious. Nina, I can make arrangements for our departure to-night, if you will consent to come with me. Once for all, will you do it?"

"Once for all—no!" answered Nina. She uttered the last word with an emphasis that startled a bird in the top of the arbor. It flew upward with a shrill cry that in turn startled her. To her overwrought fancy, it sounded like a note of warning.

"No!" repeated Martindale. He took her hands almost violently into his own. "Nina, do you mean it?" he said, hoarsely. "Do you understand what it implies? Do you know that you will drive me to do any thing to break off this accursed marriage? For you love me—you cannot deny that. Neither can you deny that you long for the world which I offer and can give you. Nina, if you are wise, you will come with me now—at once!"

"If you were generous, you would go away and leave me," said Nina, with a gasp. She was touched and torn by his vehemence, by his pale, passionate, pleading face. But she stood firm. There was something more than ordinary in the girl, after all. She was more nearly in love with Martindale at that moment than she had ever been before, and a great wave of yearning for freedom and pleasure, the sweets of life and the gifts of love, seemed to rush over her. But she thought of Ralph, of those who, as she said, had "done every thing" for her; and her whole nature rose up in rebellion against the treachery of leaving them thus. "I cannot!" she said. "I

cannot! Oh, why did you come? Why did you not go away long ago? Why do you not leave me in peace? I must, I will, marry Ralph!"

"You will never marry Ralph!" said he. "Nina, I tell you again that, if you are wise, you will come with me to-night. You think that you will work harm to Ralph Wyverne by going; believe me, you may work worse harm to him by staying."

"How can I work harm to him by staying?" she asked, glancing up quickly. Something in his tone—a menacing accent hard to be described—thrilled her with a sudden, vague fear. She felt herself shiver from head to foot in the warm, summer dusk. The suspicion which had rushed upon her, without any apparent cause a little while before, came back now. What did Martindale intend to imply? How could she work harm to Ralph by staying?

"What do you mean?" she asked, shrinking back a little. "You must be more explicit if you wish me to understand you. How can I work harm to Ralph by staying?"

"You will make his life miserable," said Martindale. "The stuff of which tame, household martyrs are made, is not in you, Nina. That fiery soul of yours will pine like a caged eagle when you are once Ralph Wyverne's wife. You must come with me. For God's sake, end this miserable trifling, and say that you will do so! Nina, you must come! There is no time to lose. We must leave here to-night. To-morrow you will be my wife, and, before the week is out, we shall have sailed for Europe."

"No," said Nina. It was her one sheet-anchor—this monosyllable—and she clung to it as a drowning man clings to the spar that may be his salvation. "No—I cannot!"

"Do you mean that you will not?" he asked. He dropped her hands as he spoke, and recoiled a step, looking at her with burning, passionate eyes, and pale, set face. "Nina—stop and think! Do you mean that you will not?"

"Yes, I mean that," she answered. This last struggle was harder than she had thought that it would be—this last pang was sharper than she had counted upon—but she felt that, at any cost, "every thing" must be ended. At any cost, Martindale must learn that his further presence at Wyverne was useless. So she threw back her graceful head haughtily.

"Have you at last begun to realize that I mean it?" she asked. "Do you at last understand that I have never intended to marry you? and that I have always intended to marry Ralph?"

There was a tone of almost insolent defiance in these words, which, if she had been wise, would have been the very last she would have adopted—a tone calculated to sting Martindale's sensitive pride like the touch of a whip. Its effect was perceptible in a moment, even through his proof-armor of trained self-command. A dark-red flush surged over his face, then retreated as quickly. A gleam of dangerous fire came into his eyes, which did not retreat, and his lips set themselves quickly and sternly under the brown mustache. For a minute he did not answer; but Nina—who had by this time learned to know something of the weather-signs of his face—shrank a little. If she feared violence, she was reassured, however, by the quietness of the tone in which he spoke.

"Yes, I understand you at last," he said. "Perhaps, indeed, I have understood you all the time better than you think. That you have not at all understood me is, no doubt, a matter of much less importance. I have always thought," he went on, with a short laugh, "that the man who allows a woman to play fast-and-loose with him deserves all that falls to his share in the way of suffering and mortification. Your candor teaches me that I am quite right. Whoever has incurred contempt cannot be surprised that it is bestowed upon him. Whoever suffers himself to be made the toy of a woman must expect to receive her scorn. There are some toys that, in unskillful hands, prove dangerous, however. It is always well to remember that."

"I did not mean—" Nina began; but he interrupted her imperiously, seizing her hands again as one who claims what is his by right.

"You must mean *one* thing, or else nothing!" he said. "For the last time, Nina, will you come with me to-night?"

"For the last time—no!" answered Nina. The word rang out clearly on the dewy, fragrant stillness. By a supreme effort, she wrenched her hands out of his clasp, and turned from him. There was a spell in his face against which she could not harden her heart. "How often must I repeat it?" she demanded, bitterly. "How often must I say 'No!'"

"You need not say it again," Martindale's

voice answered out of the gloaming at her side. "I have been slow to comprehend, certainly, but I think I see at last. You have made your choice, Nina. Remember that its consequences rest with yourself."

Those words—*those words*—she did not turn her face again toward him, but she heard his quick, elastic tread crushing down the gravel as he walked away.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Nina entered the dining-room an hour later, she found that tea was over. The polished table still stood in the centre of the floor, glittering with its silver service and old-fashioned cut-glass dishes; but nobody was visible save Price, who was meditatively folding a napkin, when she stepped through one of the long French windows into the room.

"Has everybody finished supper?" she asked, coming forward, looking so much like a pale wraith of herself, as the lamplight fell over her, that even Price noticed it, when he started and turned.

"Yes'm—they's all done," he answered. "Mistis told me to keep the table standin' till you come in, but I'm afraid the coffee's cold, Miss Nina."

"I think I will take some tea," said Nina, sitting down in the first seat to which she came.

She disliked tea, as a general rule; but she remembered to have heard that it is a quicker stimulant than coffee, and she felt, just then, as if she needed a stimulant—the quicker the better.

Price was a little surprised, but he was a servant of the old school, and consequently too well bred to say any thing. He poured out the tea—which was strong enough to satisfy the most dissipated of drinkers—and carried it to Nina in a goblet half filled with ice, jingling pleasantly. It looked pretty, but Price, who held the fragrant Chinese herb in low esteem, knew that it did not taste well, and he expected an immediate demand for a cup of coffee. Instead of this, however, his capricious young mistress drained the glass, set it down with a grimace, and rose to her feet.

"Ain't you goin' to take somethin' to eat, Miss Nina?" said Price, astonished and really concerned at her appearance.

She shook her head.

"Not any thing," she answered. "I am not hungry."

She did not even give a glance at the tempting array of dainty dishes as she turned from the table and left the room.

Price watched the slim, stately figure across the hall. Then he looked at the empty goblet, and shook his head.

"There's somethin' wrong," said he, philosophically. "A woman with as good a appetite as Miss Nina ain't a-goin' to take nothin' but a little tea all of a sudden—an' look like death besides—without some good reason. I'm thinkin' we're more likely to have a spell o' sickness than a weddin' here shortly."

Meanwhile, Nina entered the drawing-room, where she found Mr. and Mrs. Wyverne and Ralph—the two former playing cards, of which Mr. Wyverne was inconveniently fond, the latter yawning and looking bored over a newspaper. At sight of his betrothed, his face brightened, however, and the uninteresting sheet was tossed aside.

"Where have you been, Nina?" he demanded at once. "I was setting out in search of you a little while ago, but Martindale said he left you in the garden just before tea, so I thought you would come in when you felt like it. What kept you so late?"

"Nothing in particular," answered Nina. "It was cool and pleasant out there, and I did not care for tea."

"I am afraid you are not well," said Ralph, getting up and coming forward; he was struck, as Price had been, by her changed appearance. "Let me look at you in the light. Why, how pale you are! Nina, something is certainly the matter. Are you sick?"

"Nothing is the matter," said Nina. She was provoked with herself for being pale, and provoked with Ralph for noticing it. "One cannot help one's looks, or account for them!" Then, impatiently: "How warm it is in here! This room is intolerable with its glare of light. Let us go out on the terrace."

Out on the terrace they went accordingly. A faint, indefinite light was shining from a lovely young moon hanging in the western half of the sky. Nina looked more like a spirit than a woman; Ralph thought, in this vague lustre, with her misty-white dress, out of which the dew-damp had taken all stiffness, clinging about her. Something in her appearance reminded him of the night when

she had risen from the laboratory steps to meet Martindale and himself, and they had likened her to a fairy; yet he felt instinctively that the difference was greater than the similarity.

birthday night—this night a month ago, was it not? Somehow you put me in mind of it as you stand there now. Do you remember how Martindale and I met you at the laboratory, and how we told you that you looked like a fairy? To-night you look like a spirit."

"Why do you speak of that?" said Nina. He was not prepared for the shrinking start which she gave. "Why do you remind me of it? Was it a month ago to-night? I had not thought of it. How strange that it should be! Ralph"—she turned to him abruptly—"do you believe in presentiments? Of course you do not, however; nobody ever does until they have felt them. But do you remember how I begged you a month ago this night not to keep that man here or trust to his experiments? O Ralph, if you had only heeded me!"

"Why should I have heeded you?" said Ralph. Even the passionate vibration in her tone did not rouse his dull suspicion. On the contrary, he conceived it to be only a fresh proof of the prejudice which is inherent in the feminine nature; and he felt inclined to indulge in a little masculine triumph over it.

"As far as my experiments are concerned, it is a very good thing that I did not heed you," he went on, with such a glow of self-satisfaction in his tone that Nina was half-prepared for what was coming. "You may take sufficient interest in them to be glad to hear that Martindale told me, only a little while ago, that he at last sees his way to a successful result; in fact, that it may be said to be accomplished. He would tell me nothing until he was certain, he said, although he had fancied as much for some time."

"When did he tell you this?" asked Nina, stopping short in her walk.

"Only a little while ago—when he came in to tea," Ralph answered. "It was quite a surprise to me, and really I scarcely know how to be grateful enough to him. His application has certainly been wonderful, and to-night he has returned to the laboratory to make some final tests, which I am to go down and see a little later."

"To go down and see!" repeated Nina.

She could say nothing more. Her whole attention became concentrated on her own mind. Was she mad or sane in the horrible fear that came to her as Ralph uttered those words? Was she distraught with the idle fancy that she had begun to appreciate—as if illumined by a flash of light—the full meaning of some words Martindale had spoken to her but a few short hours before?

"Yes, to go down and see!" said Ralph, triumphantly. "Seeing is believing, you know! I wish you would let this be a lesson to you about the folly of prejudice, Ninetta," he went on, feeling it incumbent upon him to point the occasion with a moral. "If I had been uncivil and ungrateful enough to send Martindale away, as you requested, I should never have had the great pleasure of seeing my idea brought to a practical and successful issue."

"Do you think you will see it now?" said Nina. She was sorry for the words after she had uttered them. Ralph would only think her more prejudiced; she would only lessen her power of influencing him.

"I cannot doubt Martindale's word," he answered, gravely; "and I certainly should not think of doubting his judgment. His assurance was positive with regard to the successful result of the experiments. But when I come back from the laboratory, I shall be able to tell you more positively," he added, smiling.

"When are you to go?" she asked.—Something strange and cold in her tone struck Ralph. He was surprised and pained. It is always hard to realize that our pleasure gives no pleasure to those whom we love.

"Martindale said about ten o'clock," he answered. "I suppose it is after nine now—these summer nights are so short! I wanted to go at once, but he said he preferred to be alone while he made one or two final experiments; and I did not press the point."

"About ten o'clock!" repeated Nina. She put her hand to her head. Her brain felt in a whirl. She could scarcely have given a definite expression to the fears and suspicions that thronged upon her. One thing only was clear and unmistakable—doubt! Doubt of Martindale, and doubt of his experiments! "There is no truth in him!" she said to herself; and those words which he had unintentionally let fall in the midst of

his passion in the garden, came back to her with grim, warning significance: "You think you will work harm to Ralph Wyverne by going: believe me, you may work worse harm to him by staying!"

"Why, you are resolving into an echo," said Ralph, smiling. "Is not ten o'clock as good an hour as any other?" Then he took her hand and drew it into his arm. "Dear," he said, a little wistfully, "have you no word of sympathy or congratulation for me? I know you don't like chemistry, but still—"

"I do like it!" said Nina, with a short, dry sob. "I like every thing that you like, Ralph! I am sorry that I have not given you more sympathy and encouragement, but I have been so selfish that I have thought only of myself. What a terrible thing it is to think of one's self!" she cried, passionately. "What misery it works on everybody! Ralph!"—to his surprise she threw her arms around and clung to him—"can you forgive me? I—oh, I am very sorry!"

"Forgive you, my darling!" said Ralph; "what on earth have I to forgive you for?" Well as he knew the impulses—now passionate, now tender—of this wayward girl, he did not understand her at present. "I hope we shall do better after we are married," he said, cheerfully. "You will take some interest in chemistry then, and we shall settle into a scientific Darby and Joan. But you must not excite yourself like this. Why, your hands are burning, and yet you are shivering! Nina, you certainly are not well. You must have been in the dew too long this evening. Don't stay out any longer, dear! Go to bed, and to-morrow I will tell you all about the experiments."

"I am not sleepy or sick," said Nina. "Why should I go to bed? Ralph, will you do something for me, or, rather, will you let me do something?" she went on, eagerly. "I always said that I was another Fatima, you know; that if I had married Bluebeard I should certainly have opened the closet; so nobody need ever be surprised at my curiosity. Just now I have a fancy to see the result of Mr. Martindale's experiments before you do. Won't you be obliging, and let me go down to the laboratory in your place at ten o'clock?"

"I will let you go down with me," said Ralph, smiling; "won't that do as well? We shall both see the result together, then, and I can explain—"

But Nina shook her head, interrupting him impatiently.

"That is not what I want!" she said. "I want the gratification of seeing it first. You don't understand how I feel about it. It is childish, I dare say, but you ought to have learned by this time how much of the child there is still in me."

"I hope there always will be," said Ralph. He was sufficiently in love to find it very pleasant to humor this pretty, capricious tyrant. "Of course, you can go if you like," he said. "I'll stay here or in the drawing-room, until you come back." He took out his watch and glanced at it in the faint moonlight. "It wants a few minutes of ten now," he said.

"Then I will go," said Nina. She was astonished at the feeling that came over her as she uttered those simple words. It was the strange, subtle sensation of one who is conscious of having taken an irrevocable step—such a sensation as comes to all save the most obtuse at certain important and critical moments of life, when our own words or our own acts erect a barrier between the past and the future which no after-effort can remove. It was under the influence of this feeling that she turned suddenly to Ralph. "Don't think hardly of me, dear," she said. "I don't mean to distress or pain you! I love you better than anybody else in the world, and I would do any thing to serve you, any thing to—to atone for my folly and selfishness! But there may be only one way. Don't blame me if I take that."

"Nina, what are you talking about?" said Ralph. He did not understand the drift or meaning of her words at all. She only confused and puzzled him by these chameleon changes of mood. "I am not likely to blame you for any thing unless you make yourself sick. I think you must have a fever. I told you some time ago that it would be better for you to go to bed than to stay out in this night-air. I am not sure that there is not some malaria lurking in it."

"It does not matter if there is," said Nina, with a faint smile. "Good-night."

"Of course, you'll find me here when you come back from the laboratory," said he, rather surprised at the quick, passionate kiss she gave him.

"Shall I?" she said, rather absently, and, turning away, went down the terrace-steps.

Ralph stood at the head of them, watching the slender, white-clad figure, as it walked slowly along the garden-path below. Even through his obtuseness, a sudden chill of uneasy foreboding struck, when it vanished. "By Jove, this doesn't seem exactly the right kind of thing!" he said, half aloud. "Perhaps I had better follow her, after all." He laughed the next minute, however, and, taking a cigar from his pocket, struck a match and lighted it. "Am I getting nervous, too?" he said. "Nina must have infected me. It would be a shabby kind of trick to follow her when she was so anxious to see the experiments first. Poor little darling!"—he laughed again—"she won't understand much about them."

Then he put his hands in his coat-pockets, and, with his cigar in his mouth, began to pace to and fro along the terrace. It was harder on him—this waiting to see the result of his long-cherished idea—than any one would have imagined from the quietness with which he bore it. But, in little or in great, Ralph had never hesitated over a sacrifice for Nina. He would not have hesitated over the greatest of all sacrifices, if he had once suspected that it was needed. It was merely a caprice, he thought—this fancy to go down to the laboratory—but it afforded him real and sensible pleasure to deny himself in order to gratify it. Pacing there in the faint, level moonlight, he thought more of her than of his chemistry. The spirit of her last, self-reproachful words seemed to come back to him. "My darling!" he said, with a sudden rush of passionate tenderness. He longed to take her into his arms, and answer her with loving words, as he had not answered her when she had spoken.

After a while, the consciousness came to him that she had been gone some time. He looked at his watch. The hands pointed to half-past ten. He began to feel impatient, and to wonder what she had found so interesting in the experiments. One or two more turns along the terrace—then restlessness prevailed, and he walked toward the steps. As he approached, a dark figure emerged from one of the garden-paths, and quickly ascended them. The moon sunk below the horizon at that moment, but the stars gave light enough for Ralph to recognize Martindale.

As Nina hastened through the garden to

the laboratory, her thoughts began to clear, her instinct to resolve itself into certainty. Now that she was alone, she did not hesitate to face the indefinite fear which she had thrust from her when Ralph was by, at which she had scarcely dared to look, lest horror should overpower judgment, and lead to harm instead of good. Even yet her idea of *what* she feared was of necessity vague; but there are some things that gain rather than lose terror by vagueness, and this was one of them. Facing it, as she did, with a bravery that surprised herself, one grim certainty stood out darkly and clearly through all the mystery—the certainty that Martindale's invitation to Ralph meant that which is best expressed in two short but significant words—*foul play!* Foul play of what kind, or to be accomplished in what manner, Nina did not know. She was only conscious in every fibre of the warning which Nature sometimes gives in times of danger; she only knew that all which she had felt in the afternoon rushed back on her now, intensified a hundred-fold. Of course, her interview with Martindale had much to do with this. She could not forget his reckless passion, nor his almost menacing determination. She could still less forget his look and tone when he warned her that she might "work harm" to Ralph by staying, nor fail to connect them with the false pretext by which he strove to draw the latter to the laboratory.

If it be asked how she knew that it was a false pretext, it can only be answered that she knew it as she had known from the first that Ralph's idea was wholly impracticable, and that Martindale had made of the amateur chemist's hopes and expectations mere tools to serve his own interest. That much, sagacity or instinct had told her a month before. The deception of to-night, therefore, was a sufficiently plain sequence. As for the sinister motive which was supposed to lurk behind this deception, it can at least be said for her that she had no inconsiderable foundation on which to build suspicion. In these two weeks of struggle, she had learned something of the man with whom she had so unsuccessfully "amused herself;" she had gained an idea, at least, of how little he was likely to halt at half measures, or to heed any obstacle in the path of his desire.

Feeling all this, her first instinctive impulse had been to keep Ralph from the lab-

oratory and the danger which might be awaiting him there. But, having gained this point, her next step was by no means clear. What she was to do apart from the one important item of gaining time, and judgment for herself of Martindale's mood and intention, she did not know. Certainly the prospect was not encouraging. She knew that all hope of influencing him by entreaty or defiance was useless. She had tested both too often not to be assured of that. But, if the worst came to the worst, she held one trump-card which she had girded up her strength to play. If it were a question of risking Ralph's life, or of eloping with Martindale, she meant to elope with the latter. That was what the last passionate words which had puzzled Wyverne had meant. In truth, a reckless yet awful sense of powerlessness had come over the girl. Why should she struggle any longer against the fate which she had brought on herself? Why should she endeavor to resist the man who let no barrier stand before his impetuous purpose? "It is my own fault," she murmured; "I loosed the dam—I have no right to complain that the torrent sweeps me away. But it must not harm Ralph! Whatever happens, Ralph must not be harmed!"

When she came in sight of the pavilion, and saw a light burning through the small panes of its old-fashioned lattice, she paused and looked at her watch by the faint lustre of the sinking moon. It was exactly ten o'clock. She was just in time; and yet—face to face with what she had undertaken—her heart seemed to die away within her. She shrank with absolute terror from meeting Martindale. She felt impelled to go back and tell every thing to Ralph. One consideration, however, was strong enough to deter her from this: if she were right in what she suspected, there would be no means of putting Ralph sufficiently on his guard to avoid danger. "How can I tell in what shape it might come?" she thought. Martindale's intimate knowledge of chemistry seemed to endow him with strange and terrible power over human life. Apart from her vague and somewhat fantastic terrors, Nina knew that the mere elements of this science contain much which can be turned to fearful purpose by a keen brain and an unscrupulous hand.

It was too late to turn back, therefore—too late in this, as in every thing else! That

was what she thought, as she went on slowly—along the dewy paths, past the clinging roses and a great bed of lilies that filled the summer night with fragrance—until she gained the pavilion steps. There she paused again. Her heart was beating as if it would suffocate her; her hands were burning, yet she felt herself shiver from head to foot. What was the meaning of it? "Am I going to be ill?" she thought, pressing her hands to her temples. She did not know that the nervous tension and excitement of weeks had reached its supreme height in the stormy scene of the afternoon, and the terror of the night. Standing there, she looked up at the great starry dome arching overhead; at the house with its gabled roof cutting sharply against the steel-blue sky; at the dark, silent garden, with its wealth of unseen perfume. Familiar as the whole scene was, she felt as if she were looking at it from the farther side of a great gulf; as if the ties which bound her to Wyverne were already severed. "Home of yours it will never be again!" a voice seemed to say. "As you have sowed, so must you reap! Go forth to the world for which you have longed, with a man for whom you have neither trust nor love!"

After a while she remembered that every minute of time was precious, that Ralph would be impatient, that whatever was to be done must be done at once. Although the night was warm, the pavilion-door was closed. Forcing herself, by a strong effort, she laid her hand on the lock. It yielded readily to her touch, and, opening the door, she stepped within the laboratory.

Her first sensation was one of surprise; her next, of inexpressible relief. Martindale was not there. Her glance swept round the laboratory in a second, and took in the fact. There was every sign of his recent presence, however. A lamp was burning on a table covered with chemical apparatus—retorts, tubes, receivers, a host of things of which she did not even know the names. Having closed the door, Nina paused and looked at them—looked with surprise and doubt. Were those prepared for Ralph's experiments? After all, had she suspected Martindale unjustly? Or—or was there a trap under all this specious and fair-seeming arrangement? It was significant of the distrust with which her mind was filled, that she should have asked this question, for cer-

tainly it would never have occurred to any one who entered the laboratory without prejudice, or suspicion of foul play.

Despite the apparent want of any thing to justify her high-wrought fears, the obstinate sense of danger still remained with Nina. She had scarcely closed the door, before a sudden sense of faintness came over her. It was a different sensation from that which she had felt outside; but she took it to be an effect from the same cause, and, although it did not rouse any fear for herself, it quickened her misgivings for Ralph. "I am going to be ill," she thought, "but I must see—I must know—what this means. There is something wrong. The very silence seems sinister!"

It truly did. If the speaker had known any thing of the menacing quiet which precedes a gunpowder explosion, she might have likened the stillness to that—it seemed so ominous of evil. The air was full of an indefinable oppression, which made her gasp for breath as she crossed the floor to the table, and began to scan the apparatus—searching, she scarcely knew for what. This, however, was only the work of a moment. Before the second-hand of her watch could have made a quarter of its circuit, a more deadly and unutterable faintness than any she had felt before, rushed over her. Her head began to swim, a mist rose before her eyes, the tubes and glass retorts were suddenly blurred out. The awful oppression closed upon her. She made a wild struggle for breath: one hand went to her throat; the other grasped instinctively the corner of the table. Thus preserved from falling, she stood for an instant swaying like a reed, or rather like one around whom the black darkness of unconsciousness begins to close. "Am I going to faint?" she thought. After all her suspicions, no glimpse of the horrible truth came to her when she was thus face to face with it. She turned with a vague idea of reaching and opening the nearest casement. Instinct told her that there was salvation in the fresh air so carefully shut from the laboratory. But the poisonous fumes had done their work. Two—three—blind, faltering steps she made—

Then came a heavy fall!

"Ralph!" exclaimed Martindale, starting violently as he recognized the figure which

met him in the starlight. "Ralph! Is it—is it possible this is you?"

"Of course it is I," said Ralph. "Who else should it be? Are you looking for me? I was just coming down to the laboratory."

"Just coming down to the laboratory!" repeated the other. If the light had not been so dim, Ralph would have seen that he was white to the very lips. "I—I thought you had gone down," he said, after a minute.

"You thought I had gone down!" repeated Ralph, in turn—not a little surprised. "Why, where did you come from? Have you not been at the laboratory yourself?"

"Not—not for some time!" answered Martindale, lifting his hand and loosening the tie of his cravat. "I finished some tests," he went on, "and walked out into the garden. I could not see the laboratory, but I—I was sure I heard the door open and shut a little while ago."

"It is very probable you did," said Ralph, carelessly. "Nina went down about half an hour since. But I don't at all understand! You told me that I should find you—"

A grasp on his arm, the like of which he had never felt before, stopped the words on his lips. Even in the starlight he saw now the ghastly pallor of the face near his own; and the first sound of the voice, that had no cadence of its natural tone in it, startled him beyond all measure.

"Who did you say had gone there?" Martindale demanded.

"Nina," answered Ralph. He was filled with sudden, intangible alarm. "Good Heavens! Martindale, is—is any thing the matter?"

"Nina!" repeated Martindale—it was not a word, but a note of horror, such as Wyverne never forgot—"Nina!" He hurled the other from him. "Did you ask what was the matter?" he cried, half madly, half sternly. "You have sent her into a laboratory filled with poisonous gas!"

"Martindale!" said Ralph. If the heavens had fallen upon him he could not have been more astounded; he could scarcely have understood less of what he heard. He was hardly conscious of the recoil from Martindale's grasp. The next moment, however, the latter had darted down the terrace-steps, and was speeding along the garden-path which led to the pavilion.

Instantly Ralph followed. The meaning

of those last, terrible words came to him now—at least their meaning with regard to Nina. Beyond that his mind did not go. It did not occur to him, at such a moment, to question why the laboratory had been full of poisonous gas. It was enough that she had entered such a place, and that her safety—her very life—was in horrible jeopardy.

It is unnecessary to say that no word was exchanged between the two breathless runners. Only the quick fall of their flying feet smote on the stillness of the starlit night until they gained the laboratory, where Martindale—being in advance—dashed open the door and rushed in.

He was only invisible a moment. By the time Ralph reached the steps he appeared again in the door—staggering like a drunken man—but bearing Nina in his arms.

"Give her to me!" said Wyverne, hoarsely. He took the slender form—heavy now with the leaden weight of inert matter—and laid it down on the very spot where she had stood so short a time before, taking her last look of the fair earth. She might be only unconscious—stupefied, narcotized—he thought; but hope died within him when he felt the brow, the lips, the wrist—lastly, the silent heart—without finding one token of respiration or throb of life.

Yet, when Martindale brought the necessary chemical agents and means for restoring consciousness, he went eagerly to work with them. Application after application was made, test after test failed. It was a strange scene. The lamp, which had been brought from the laboratory, flung its vivid glow over the beautiful face set in the stillness of death; the quiet stars gazed down on the two men kneeling beside it in the vain attempt to restore that which had fled forever. The most unscientific looker-on might have told them that all effort was hopeless, that no power of science could recall the spark of life to the fair clay it had animated; but still, with feverish, passionate energy they persevered, though no restorative brought any flush of life to the white skin, no sigh of returning vitality to the lips, no flutter to the fallen lids.

This could not continue, however. After a while, the grim truth came home to them. They could no longer close their eyes to the fact that this which they were fighting was not unconsciousness, but death—death which holds as relentlessly its fairest as its meanest

prize. Their eyes met for a moment with the blankness of despair. At that instant, there was no other thought in the mind of either. Martindale rose slowly—swaying—to his feet. Ralph, still kneeling by the dead girl, looked up at him.

"There is no hope!" he said.

His voice was strangely quiet. In truth, the shock had been so great that, for the time, sensation was dead. An overmastering blow must always do one of two things—stun or craze. This had stunned him.

"None!" Martindale answered. His tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of his mouth; he could scarcely articulate. "I knew that when I found her," he said. "The gas in there"—he nodded toward the laboratory—"would have killed an army."

"How did it come to be there?" asked Ralph.

Even yet suspicion had not occurred to him. He scarcely remembered the words Martindale had spoken on the terrace. Every thing had merged for him in the horrible thought of Nina's danger.

"Have you not guessed that?" asked the other. To him, also, a strange, stunned, reckless feeling came. Every thing had gone wrong. His great throw had brought ruin instead of fortune. Instead of his rival, it was the woman he loved who lay dead at his feet. "She suspected this, and came in your place," he said. "I generated the gas for you!"

"For me?"

For a minute Ralph could say no more than that. Then he sprung to his feet—pale, horror-stricken, yet terrible in the aspect that transformed his face, in the gleam that came into his eyes.

"If you had not been blind, you might have seen long ago that I loved her—that I stayed here only to win her!" Martindale said, as they faced each other in the dim, uncertain light. "I swore to stop your marriage at any cost," he added, after a minute—a minute broken by no sound. "I have been as good as my word—I have stopped it, you see."

"Are you mad?" said Ralph. His own mother could scarcely have recognized the voice in which he spoke as his own. "Do you know that, if this is true, you will not live long enough to take her name on your lips again?"

Martindale laughed—the faint, scornful sound breaking the silence with ghastly significance. There was a glitter in his eye, as ominous as the lurid glow that had come to Ralph's.

"Do you think I will ask your leave when to die?" he demanded. Then he put his hand to his lips.

Ralph made one quick, tiger-like spring forward, but he was too late. In the throat on which his fingers closed the death-rattle had already sounded. With one mocking smile, the soul fled. To the baffled avenger remained only that faint, subtle odor of bitter almonds which betrays the swiftest and deadliest poison known to chemistry.

THE END.

HUGH'S VENDETTA.

CHAPTER I.

"MARGARET," said Hugh Churchill, as he came abruptly into his sister's room one morning, "who do you suppose is dead?"

The address was startling enough in itself, but there was a suppressed excitement in the speaker's face, and a suppressed tone of awe in his voice, that made Margaret Churchill turn pale as she looked up from her sewing in quick alarm.

"Indeed I cannot tell, Hugh," she said. "Not—not anybody I care about, surely?"

"Care about!" repeated her brother. "Not unless you care about knowing that he has gone to his deserts in another and—a hotter world! That is all the concern I feel in Henry Tyrrell's death, I am sure."

"Henry Tyrrell! Is he dead?"

"He dropped down with a fit of apoplexy an hour ago."

"Where?"

"On the street. I was sitting in Morrison's office about ten o'clock, and chanced to see him walk past, looking as usual; yet, scarcely five minutes later, a boy rushed in saying that Mr. Tyrrell had just fallen down dead. Of course, we ran out at once. He was not dead, however; so we carried him into the office, and sent for the doctors at once. They were all there in no time, but they could do nothing for him, and he has just died."

His voice sank a little over the last words, and a look of horror came into Margaret Churchill's face.

"Died like that! O Hugh! how terri-

ble! Surely he said something—surely he made some reparation for such an awful life!"

Her brother laughed, not mirthfully.

"Do you believe in death-bed atonements, Madge? I confess I don't, and I doubt if Tyrrell did, either. He recovered his senses toward the last, but he only uttered two names. The first was his son's—"

"And the other?"

The young man's voice deepened, and a change came over his face that hardened and altered it, as he answered gravely, almost sternly:

"The other was—our father's!"

Margaret looked up, her awe-struck eyes meeting his, and for a moment neither spoke. At last it was the girl's voice that said:

"God forgive him!"

Low as the words were, they reached Hugh Churchill's ears, and brought a dark cloud over his face.

"So that is your idea of Christianity, is it, Madge?" he asked, bitterly. "A nice place you and the like of you would make of heaven—ay, and of earth, too! If I believed that a few prayers or good works at the eleventh hour could atone for Henry Tyrrell's half a century of wrong-doing, I would fling conscience to the winds, and live as he did—perhaps die as he died, too. But that would make no difference in your liberal creed. I don't pretend to decide whether or not such opinions are orthodox, but of all the texts in Holy Writ I like best the one which says that what a man sows the same shall he reap, here and hereafter."

Margaret did not answer. Her thoughts,

indeed, seemed to have wandered from her brother's speech, and gone back to what he had said before. At least, when he finished, she went on with the other train of thought.

"And he spoke of papa. O Hugh! who can tell what he was thinking? I wonder was it the sight of you that brought back the past? Did he see you at all?"

"He saw me as plainly as you see me now," her brother answered. "Indeed, I doubt if he saw any one else. I was standing at the foot of the bed, and, when he opened his eyes, they rested full on my face. And with such a look! Madge, it was awful! I don't think I shall ever forget it. It was so solemn and yet so defiant, as if he had said, 'So you are here to see the end!' My God, what an end! Madge"—and his voice grew so tender that she knew of whom he was going to speak—"you have heard how bravely and peacefully our father died? Well, even in this world, there is such a thing as retribution. I thought that, if I thought nothing else, as I stood by the death-bed of the man who killed him."

Margaret thought it, too, as the dainty muslin she was hemming fell from her lap to the floor unheeded. She, too, remembered all that she had heard of the father whose existence had faded so early out of her own—of his stainless life and honorable death, as contrasted with the life and death of the man who had murdered him. For even the world, usually so lenient in such matters, held Henry Tyrrell as guilty of the blood of Albert Churchill as if he had stabbed him unawares in the darkness of the night. It is true that the affair had taken the form of a duel, but it had been prefaced by the most unmerited insult, and there had been enough of unfairness in its actual arrangement to set a black mark on the survivor to the day of his death.

This death caused a deep and wide-spread sensation in the community where it occurred. Unpopular as he was, Henry Tyrrell had been a man of great wealth, and consequently of great influence; hence his death could not be other than an event of importance. Nobody regretted him; nobody gave a tear, or even so much as a sigh, to his memory—but still everybody felt interested in the matter, as people will feel when there is a million or two of property in question. The dead man's wife had preceded him long before to the

other world; his only son was absent; so there was not a single kindred face around the death-bed where Hugh Churchill had stood, and this in itself is always pathetic, even when such a man as Henry Tyrrell is concerned. With regard to his heir and successor, little was known. From some cause or other, young Tyrrell had never fancied his native place, and ever since he attained to man's estate his visits there had been few and far between. People said that the father and son did not "get on" very well, but this was mere conjecture; for their intercourse, as far as the world knew, had always been cordial in the extreme, and, those who knew best said, even warmly affectionate.

Society at large, however, was rather incredulous of this, and many curious glances were bent on Roland Tyrrell as he stood by his father's grave and watched the clouds of earth falling heavily upon the coffin. He looked very pale—ghastly pale, in fact—as everybody observed; but he was resolutely composed. Not a tear sprang into the large dark eyes bent steadfastly downward, not a quiver came to the sternly-compressed lips. "He hardly assumes a decent appearance of grief!" said the majority of lookers-on, indignantly. But there were others whose gaze pierced below the surface, and more than one of these felt strangely touched by the mute suffering stamped on the young man's face. They, in turn, wondered a little, and said to each other, "Strange he should grieve so much for such a father!" But they looked at him with respectful sympathy, watching him as he turned at last from the newly-heaped pile of earth, as he crossed the church-yard, passing directly by the spot where Albert Churchill had lain for many years, and drove away alone to his desolate home.

A few days after the funeral, Hugh and Margaret Churchill were the recipients of an unexpected and startling surprise. A letter from the lawyer of the late Mr. Tyrrell formally notified them that the sum of fifty thousand dollars, having been bequeathed them by the will of the deceased, had been placed to their credit by his executor, and awaited their orders. After the first shock of amazement—of absolutely incredulous surprise—was over, it would be hard to say with how much of burning indignation this information was received by one, at least, of the parties concerned. For a time Hugh's rage was al-

most inarticulate—then it broke forth beyond all bounds.

"Was the old villain mad, or was it only the devil's own malice which made him leave us such a posthumous insult?" he cried, addressing Margaret, who sat with her eyes fixed on the letter which contained this strange and apparently incomprehensible intelligence. "My God! if he was only alive, that I might fling it back to him with words such as he should never forget! Did he think that we are likely to accept a gift from him, or did he only mean to jeer us from his grave with our poverty and need? May his money perish with him, and may the eternal curse of God—"

"O Hugh!" said Margaret, and for once her voice had something of authority in it—"O Hugh, for Heaven's sake, hush! Is Henry Tyrrell's insult—granting that he meant it as an insult—worth such passion as this? Remember—he is dead!"

"Yes," said her brother, bitterly, "but his hatred, and the acts born of his hatred, did not die with him! Think of all we owe him, Margaret—think of it for one moment! First and greatest, the death of our father; after that, and from that, what a train of ills! He—our father—was on the high-road to fortune, after years of effort, and, had he lived one year longer, he would have made his wife and children independent of the world. As it was—cut off before one of his schemes had reached maturity—you know the bitter poverty which followed, the privations which ground us to the earth, and under which our mother died; you know what a hard struggle I have had, how my life has been marred and its best hopes blasted. All of this we owe to Henry Tyrrell. And now—now in his very grave—he sends one crowning insult, one last injury, and he is so far beyond the reach of my arm that I can do nothing save appeal to God to judge between me and him!"

"God has judged," said Margaret, in a low tone. "Is not that enough? Hugh—stop and consider. Perhaps even Henry Tyrrell may have known remorse and meant this as—a reparation."

"Margaret!"

"Don't misunderstand me," said she, quietly. "Don't think that I would accept it sooner than yourself. But why regard it in a light which he—the dead man—never may have meant?"

"I would stake my existence that he

meant it!" Hugh said, fiercely. "And I would stake it, also, that his son—a worthy son of such a father—was only too glad to fulfil his bequest, and thus safely to wound and sting us! But, thank God!" cried the young man, with quickening eyes, "he is alive, and can be held to an account."

"Hugh, are you mad?" demanded Margaret, turning pale as she looked at his excited face. "What possible reason have you to talk like this? What has Roland Tyrrell to do with the acts of his father?"

"He has every thing to do with them," answered Hugh, coldly. "He is his father's representative, and as such I shall hold him. Don't be afraid that I will make a fool of myself," he went on, impatiently, as he met her eyes, full of anxious appeal. "The time has not yet come for a Tyrrell and a Churchill to reckon up scores. But, sooner or later, it will come, and then I shall hold him to a stern account. Do you remember the old Corsican custom of the *vendetta*? It was not a bad idea that, when one generation had suffered a wrong, another should avenge it. Well, I have sworn a vendetta against all of Henry Tyrrell's blood, and I will never forget or forsake it so long as God gives me life?"

"It was a custom and an idea worthy of heathens—not of Christians," said Margaret.

"So be it," answered her brother. "All the same, it is mine. Now give me some pens and paper, that I may answer this lawyer at once."

The lawyer was answered—in what spirit it is not difficult to imagine—and there Hugh supposed that the matter would end. It was not long, however, before he learned the error of this opinion. Coming home from work one evening—he was an engineer, in the employ of a mining company—he met Roland Tyrrell at the gate of the pretty little cottage where Margaret and himself lived. Advancing from opposite directions, the two men came face to face exactly at this spot.

Through the soft autumn dusk Hugh had recognized the tall figure, moving toward him with a quick, decisive tread, and he could not restrain an emotion of involuntary surprise. It did not occur to him for a second that Tyrrell might wish to see him, and it chanced that, in order to be near the mines, the cottage in which the Churchills lived was very much out of the large town of Ridgeford, and in a suburb chiefly inhabited by the manufacturing

and mining class—for, after its mines, its mills were the great boast of Ridgeford. They were very proud, these young people, and one form of their pride had ever been to wear their poverty as openly and bravely as other people make a point of wearing wealth. Hugh would have scorned himself if he had thought that he took sufficient interest in Roland Tyrrell to wonder what he was doing in such a quarter at such an hour; but, all the same, he felt surprised to see him.

This surprise was considerably augmented when—pausing as they met—Mr. Tyrrell quietly lifted his hat and spoke:

"This is Mr. Churchill, is it not?" Then, as Hugh assented, "Excuse the liberty I take in introducing myself, but I am Roland Tyrrell, and I was on my way to see you. This is your house, is it not?"

"This is my house," answered Hugh, in whose voice coldness and amazement seemed struggling for mastery. "But I confess, Mr. Tyrrell, that I am not at all prepared for the honor which you do me."

"That is very likely," said Tyrrell, smiling slightly, though gravely. "But I have something that I must say to you, and, if you will allow me, I should prefer to say it under your own roof."

What could Hugh reply to this? Plainly nothing, if he desired to keep within the bounds of ordinary civility; and being, with all his faults, a gentleman, the young fellow *did* desire that whatever he felt should be evinced, and whatever he had to do should be done, according to the letter of that courtesy which especially distinguishes the gentleman from the churl. He bowed, therefore, though very coldly, and opened the gate for his unwelcome visitor.

"Pray walk in," he said.

The other complied, and they walked together up the short path which led to the door where no latch-key was needed, for it stood open to the dying beauty of the October day, and showed the bright flicker of a wood-fire from a room within. Sweet and home-like it looked—a contrast, indeed, to the stately, gloomy house where Roland Tyrrell lived alone—and, as they entered the hall, a figure started up from a low chair in front of the sparkling blaze on the parlor-hearth.

"Is that you, Hugh?" asked a pleasant voice. "I had a fire made because I thought

it would look cheerful, and, do you know, I believe I have been half asleep."

"My sister, Mr. Tyrrell," said Hugh, in a tone of ice.

The firelight was pretty and soft with its capricious glow, but it was not very bright, and the dusk was deep in the little parlor, so nobody saw much of the surprise which Margaret Churchill must have felt. One uncontrollable start she gave, but that was all, and her only welcome to this strange guest was a silent bow.

Then they sat down—Margaret in the shade—and Hugh, who was ever impetuous, plunged at once to the point.

"I must repeat that I am at a loss to imagine what you can have to say that has gained me this visit, Mr. Tyrrell."

"Are you?" said Mr. Tyrrell, in a tone of some surprise. "Then you must have forgotten very soon a communication which you received from my lawyer the other day; or else you must consider me very careless of my father's solemnly-expressed desire if you think I could rest satisfied with the decision you returned to him."

Hugh made an impatient gesture.

"That matter was ended when I answered your lawyer's letter," he said. "If you have come here to reopen it in any manner, you have given yourself a great deal of useless trouble."

"You mean that you are determined to refuse the bequest of a man who, however deeply he may have wronged you, has passed beyond the reach of your resentment now?"

"I mean," answered Hugh, almost fiercely, "that if the man who bequeathed this insult to those whom he has so deeply injured, were only alive, I would fling it scornfully into his teeth. Since that is impossible, I cast it back into the hands of those to whom he delegated this last office of hatred, and"—his voice fairly trembled with passion here—"bid them take heed how they come to press the offer of that which has been once rejected."

Leaning forward in the firelight, Roland Tyrrell fastened his dark eyes keenly on the kindling face before him. At those last words of menace, a white hand stole out of the dusky shadows and laid itself with a gentle, warning touch on Hugh's shoulder. Tyrrell's gaze fell for a moment on this before he spoke. Then he said, as quietly as ever:

"I judged from your letter that you took some such view of my father's bequest as this, and I came prepared to find you far from moderate in feeling or expression. I see you wonder *why* I came" (the question had risen plainly to Hugh's eyes). "Simply for this: to do an act of justice to the dead. You say that, in leaving you a legacy, my father meant to leave you a posthumous insult. In this you wrong him as much as it is in the power of one man to wrong another. For many years before his death he bore about a continually augmenting sense of the great injury he once did you. It poisoned his life so entirely that his only comfort rested in the thought of some reparation, which, however inadequate it might be, would at least serve to mark his great remorse and great desire to make atonement. He knew that, besides other suffering, his act had entailed great pecuniary privation upon you, and this, at least, he wished to remove. During his life he was aware that you would accept no service at his hands, but he trusted that, after his death, you, who call yourself a Christian man, would not refuse the poor and weak atonement which he strove to make. I, his son—I, who witnessed more of his suffering than any other, save his Maker—I ask you now if you dare to do this?"

The grave, steadfast voice, with a ring of pathos in it so slight that a dull ear would not have caught it, had a certain accent of command as it asked the last question—as it seemed to plead for that poor soul gone, "with all its errors thick upon it," to the judgment-seat of God. But it pleaded to deaf ears as far as Hugh Churchill was concerned. He had listened coldly; he spoke, if possible, more coldly still:

"Once more I repeat that you waste your time when you speak on this subject, Mr. Tyrrell. I grant the truth and sincerity of all you say, but my decision is unalterably fixed. An angel sent from high Heaven could not make me consent to accept the least favor or benefit from your father, or from any of his name and blood. I must beg you to accept this as final."

He rose as he spoke, thus signifying that the interview was at an end; but, to his surprise, Roland Tyrrell did not rise also. He quietly kept his seat, still leaning slightly forward, with his eyes turned toward that region of dim shadow where Margaret sat,

like a faint, suggestive outline of a woman's form.

"You forget that your decision is not the only one, Mr. Churchill," he said, at length. "Your sister is of legal age, is she not? I have yet to hear whether she rejects my father's reparation as unequivocally as you have done."

"I spoke for my sister as well as for myself," Hugh answered, haughtily. "Margaret is here, however. If she desires, she can speak for herself."

"I don't desire it, Hugh," said Margaret's voice, trembling softly out of the shadows. "I would rather you spoke for me."

"I have spoken," said Hugh, laconically.

"But pardon me if I ask, is this right?" said Tyrrell, for the first time directly addressing Margaret. "You should think and act for yourself—not follow blindly your brother's example. I can scarcely think that you—a woman—are as utterly without compassion for the sufferings and atonement of a most unhappy man as he seems to be."

"My sister needs no schooling in her duty, sir," said Hugh, enraged at this boldness.—"Margaret, speak for yourself, and satisfy Mr. Tyrrell that, on a point of honor, we Churchills always think alike."

The young autocrat uttered this imperiously, but for a moment no answer was returned. The flickering play of the firelight rose and fell many times before Margaret spoke from her nook of shadows—spoke gravely, yet very gently:

"I think Hugh is quite right, Mr. Tyrrell, in declining to accept the bequest of which you speak. Apart from his influence, I am sure that it would never have occurred to me for a moment to accept any obligation—above all, such an obligation—from the hand that shed my father's blood. But"—her voice seemed to gather strength here—"I think Hugh is very wrong in his great bitterness of feeling, and I, having heard and believed all that you said of his remorse, would be glad if your father stood here this moment, to learn how fully and freely one Churchill, at least, forgives the crime he committed and the wrong he wrought."

There was a minute's silence after these words were uttered. Indeed, it would be hard to say which of her two listeners Margaret had taken most by surprise. Tyrrell, however, recovered his power of speech and

action first. While Hugh still glared in amazement at his sister, he rose and went over to her side. She certainly had not meant to give him her hand, but he took it in his own, nevertheless.

"God bless you!" he said, in a voice that quivered with emotion. "You have spoken as a brave, generous woman should speak, and I—I shall never cease to be grateful to you!"

More than this he could not say, even if he had desired to do so, for Hugh interfered, scornfully and coldly:

"My sister is a woman, as you remark, Mr. Tyrrell, and, after the fashion of her sex, she has introduced a purely irrelevant question into a matter of business. Since we have both agreed in declining your father's legacy, however, I believe there is nothing more to say."

This time Roland Tyrrell took the hint so curtly given. He released Margaret's hand, and, with a parting bow to her, passed out of the room. But at the door of the cottage—whither Hugh had followed him—he paused.

"Is there any reason, Mr. Churchill," he said, frankly and kindly, "why the unfortunate enmity of our fathers should be revived and perpetuated in the second generation? Is there any reason why we should hold aloof for the sake of the sins or errors of others? I confess that it would make me very happy to bury the miserable past, and to greet you as a friend."

As he spoke, he extended his hand, with a cordial grace which few men could have resisted, but Hugh Churchill drew haughtily back.

"It is very magnanimous in you, Mr. Tyrrell, to be willing to bury a past that has never injured you," he said. "But I am not yet in a position to meet your generosity on equal ground. When I have paid, to the uttermost farthing, the debt which I owe your father, and when I have gained once more the level from which my father was cast, then, if you choose to offer your hand again, I may accept it. Not before."

"Believe me, I am sorry," said Roland Tyrrell, in a low tone, "and believe, also, that you cannot readily do any thing which I shall resent. The great wrong my father wrought—the wrong for which I would freely give my life to atone—stands ever between us like a shield. Yet, I do not think I shall

be likely to offer again the hand you have once rejected. Pardon me now for having, in a measure, thrust myself upon you, and—good-evening."

He lifted his hat ceremoniously and walked slowly away in the gathering dusk. Standing at the parlor-window, Margaret Churchill saw his tall, stately figure vanish from sight as he passed out of the gate, and took a path which led through a *débris* of newly-rising houses, to where the long lines of quivering lamps marked the populous town.

CHAPTER II.

A GRAY, lowering sky overhead, the earth soaked with rain underneath, and a general air of dreariness and dampness everywhere, was what met the eye on a chill, November afternoon, three weeks after Roland Tyrrell's visit to the Churchill cottage. For a week Ridgford had suffered from rains such as had not been known within generations, and in the wake of the rains had followed a most disastrous flood. Houses had been swept away, lives had been lost, and property to the amount of millions damaged by the turbulent violence of a stream just beyond the town—the famous water-power that turned its mills and made its wealth, now transformed from a slave into a tyrant. At last, one afternoon, however, the windows of heaven seemed to have closed, the sullen clouds still hung heavy and dark, but the rain had ceased for the first time in eight days; and arrayed in a water-proof—provided also with a large umbrella—Margaret Churchill took advantage of the lull to set forth for some necessary domestic purchases.

At first she thought that she would not go far into Ridgford, but would make her purchases at some of the suburban shops that lined the way. But we have most of us known the unsatisfactory character of suburban shops, and Margaret, finding exercise pleasant after her week's confinement in the house, could not make up her mind to stop short of the establishments where she usually dealt. Walking on, therefore, she soon found herself in the heart of the town, jostling among a throng of people on the wet pavements, and finally talking across a familiar counter to a familiar dealer in teas and other groceries. The man knew her well, and liked her



"Good Heavens!" he said, seizing her involuntarily, "Miss Churchill! Is it you?"

Hugh's Vendetta, p. 47.

bright face, as every one did who came in contact with it; so, while he took down her orders, and tied up her bundles, he descanted freely and fully on the great Ridgford topic—the terrible and all-absorbing flood. Despite the papers, and despite Hugh, Margaret had scarcely appreciated the awful desolation which had been wrought until it was brought home to her by the many minute particulars—the personal hardships and losses—that go to make up the full sum of such a public calamity. These were poured upon her now in such stream that it was only when a partial lull in the garrulity of her informant came, that she was able to take up her bundles and prepare to leave the shop. As she was in the act of doing so, the proprietor stepped from behind the counter to say, by way of adieu:

"If you have seen nothing of the flood, Miss Churchill, it would be worth your while to take a look at it. You are hardly likely ever to see such another—at least, the Lord preserve us from its like in Ridgford again! If you go home by Light Street—it won't take you very much out of your way—you can get a tolerable view of the stream and the houses that are under water."

Margaret thanked him, and said that she thought she *would* go home by Light Street. She almost changed her mind, however, when she came out and saw how threatening the clouds were; but, on consideration, she found it impossible to resist the temptation of seeing the flood, now that it was at its height, so, clutching her umbrella firmly, she turned her steps toward Light Street. It was very much as the dealer in teas and other groceries had told her. From this rather elevated point, she had a "tolerable view" of the submerged quarter, and of the angry, turbid water which had broken its bonds and done all the mischief. But Miss Churchill was a young lady of ambition, and, having seen thus much, she wanted to see more. The gloomy desolation of the sight fascinated her. She was anxious, and determined to have more than a mere glimpse of it.

To obtain this was—or seemed to her—easy enough. By skirting around the suburbs of the town, she could reach home as safely, if not as speedily, as by following the direct course. It must be conceded that this was not a very prudent project, considering the gathering gloom of the sky, the lateness

of the hour—for four o'clock is late in cloudy November weather—and the fact that her path would lie through half-built suburbs, inhabited almost entirely by manufacturing operatives. But Margaret could be wilful sometimes, and she was wilful just now. "I'll not have another chance," she thought, with a glance at the clouds which should have deterred her. Then, gathering her water-proof closer around her, she fitted away.

In fifteen minutes, it began to rain; at half-past four, it was pouring torrents; at a quarter to five, a man, walking hurriedly along with his hat pulled over his brows, and his coat buttoned up to his chin, in vain defence against the sweeping blast, came first upon an umbrella scudding aimlessly along before the wind, and then upon a soaked figure of a woman standing helplessly in the midst of a rising pool of water. Night was closing over the wild scene of storm; the river, not far off, was pouring over its rapids with a sound like that of many Niagaras; the scattered houses of the neighborhood scarcely showed a light—for, in truth, they had all been forsaken by their inhabitants—and the whole picture was one which Roland Tyrrell was just thinking could scarcely be matched for complete—and it might readily prove dangerous—desolation, when, to his amazement, he stumbled upon this solitary woman, who, lifting up her face in the dying light, proved to be Margaret Churchill.

"Good Heavens!" he said, seizing her involuntarily, "Miss Churchill! Is it you?"

"O Mr. Tyrrell!" said Margaret, with a half-hysterical gasp of relief. Wet, bewildered, almost despairing, as she had been the moment before, she clung to him as she might have clung to Hugh. It was so good to have a protector—and, in truth, few women could have asked a better protector than, he who stood looking down upon her in amazement.

"Is it you?" he repeated, as if he could not realize the fact. "For Heaven's sake, what are you doing *here*?"

"I don't know," said Margaret, still unstrung by the revulsion of terror and relief. "I started from home this way," she went on, after a minute, "and I—I think I must have got lost. Do you know where we are, Mr. Tyrrell?"

"Perfectly well," answered Tyrrell. "We are close in the neighborhood of my mills—and a very dangerous neighborhood it is just

now. To think of a woman here alone at such an hour! You might have wandered into the flood, or fallen into the hands of prowling ruffians—Good Heaven! how could you be so rash?" he broke off, almost angrily.

"I—I don't know," said Margaret, again—this time penitently. "I wanted to see the flood. It is not my fault, Mr. Tyrrell—I was sure I could reach home this way."

"What madness!" he said. Then, in a lower tone, "God knows where you would have been in the morning, if I had not chanced to stumble upon you. Come this way."

"If you will only be kind enough to show me how to get home," she said, meekly, clinging to him closely, as he hurried her along through the storm and gathering darkness.

"I'm afraid that is impossible," he answered. "We are in a different quarter altogether, and you will suffer now from exposure to such a storm. We must find a refuge as soon as possible."

"But Hugh will be so uneasy," pleaded Margaret.

"Then he should have taken better care of you," was the rejoinder.

After this, nothing more was said. Tyrrell's decided manner bore down every thing, and Margaret felt that indeed any refuge would be better than the storm of howling wind and rain which beat upon them now. She did not ask where they were going, as her companion half led, half carried her over much uneven ground, and through numberless pools of water; but she felt sure that wherever that strong arm and gentle hand led her she would be safe, and with that consciousness she was wise enough to be satisfied.

At last she heard Tyrrell say "Thank God!" and, looking round, she saw the dark outline of a building close at hand. The next moment he partly released her while he opened a door, then drew her quickly within, and closed it behind her. The sense of relief was almost overpowering—the contrast between the fierce battle they had been fighting and the refuge they had gained—and, spent from her long effort, Margaret would assuredly have fallen if the same arm which had led had not now upheld her.

"Courage!" Tyrrell said, in a tone of reassurance, but also of anxiety. "Don't give way now that we are safe! Can I trust you

to stand alone one minute, while I strike a light?"

Margaret said "Yes;" but no sooner was the support of his arm withdrawn, than she quietly sank down upon the floor. There she sat, leaning her head against the wall near which she chanced to be, while he felt about a little, finally struck a match, and then lighted a lamp.

By the aid of this, she saw something of the habitation into which she had entered. Plainly a bachelor's den, for there was a bed in one corner, a cupboard in another, a table covered with books and papers, a pipe and a pair of pistols over the mantel, a kettle on the hearth, and a curious sort of masculine order—which is a very different thing indeed from feminine order—in all the arrangements. A glance at the walls and ceiling showed her that it was one of the better class of workmen's cottages which was thus metamorphosed.

Having lighted his lamp, Mr. Tyrrell's next step was to rummage in his cupboard, from which he brought forth a bottle and a tumbler.

"You must take a stiff glass of brandy, Miss Churchill," he said, bringing these up to Margaret. "It is your only hope of avoiding an attack of illness. Good Heavens, how wet you are!" he went on, touching her dress as he spoke.

"Yes," said Margaret, meekly. The hood of her water-proof had fallen back, and her hair—drenched as a mermaid's—was rolling loosely down her back. As she looked up, she certainly presented as forlorn an appearance as a woman whom Nature had made pretty could possibly manage to do. She swallowed the brandy without any demur whatever, then let him disembarass her of her cloak, and assist her into a large easy-chair, where he bade her be quiet for five minutes.

She obeyed, watching with languid yet slightly-amused interest his proceedings. Certainly he was very deft in knowing what to do and how to do it. In two minutes he had kindled a fire which was soon burning brightly, and put the kettle upon it. Then he fished a pair of dingy slippers from a recess and brought them to her.

"You must take off your shoes and put these on," he said. "I'm sorry that I have nothing else which I can offer you."

"This is all I shall need," answered she.

"The water-proof did its duty, and I'm not very wet. But you—"

"Never mind about me," he interrupted. "Come up to the fire and dry yourself as well as you can. I am going out for a few minutes."

He went out, and did not return for at least a quarter of an hour. By that time Margaret had changed her shoes, dried—at least in a measure—her drenched skirts, shaken out her hair, realized her position, and summoned back sufficient spirit to meet it. It was a very changed face, flushed half by the fire, half by excitement, and (if there can possibly be three halves to a whole) half perhaps by the brandy she had been forced to swallow, which turned round when Roland Tyrrell entered, if possible more drenched than before.

"I have been out to observe the weather, Miss Churchill," he said, sinking involuntarily into a chair. "I fear that it will make a prisoner of you for some hours to come—probably, indeed, for the night. I have never seen a more terrible storm, and the flood is rising rapidly. God pity the poor in its path tonight!" he added, half to himself.

"Are we in danger?" asked Margaret, shivering slightly, for even above the voice of the tempest she could hear the terrible roar of the river.

"Oh, no," he answered. "Do you think I would keep you here if you were in danger? This is a very elevated position. Do you know Conrad's Hill? That is where you are, and this house is one of a number which I was building for my mill-operatives. They are not likely to need them now," he said, with a shrug.

Margaret's communicative grocer had told her that among the mill-owners Mr. Tyrrell had suffered most severely—that, in fact, he was very nearly "as good as a ruined man"—so the tone of this last sentence did not surprise her. It only made her feel very sorry for him, and she looked up with her quick eyes full of sympathy.

"Is that why you are here?" she asked.

"That?" he repeated, looking a little puzzled. "The destruction of my mills, do you mean? No, I came here to be within reach of the sufferers from the flood, and to be able to relieve them somewhat. It is little enough that one can do!" he added, with a short sigh.

He seemed so utterly unconscious of hav-

ing done any thing himself—he seemed to consider it so entirely natural that he should have forsaken his comfortable and pleasant associations to come and live in an operative's cottage, and to devote his days to the aid of those who had worked for him—that Margaret really had nothing to say. One cannot well praise a man who does not know that he has done any thing for which to be praised. After a while, however, she looked at him again, and suggested that he was very wet.

"I am used to that," he said, smiling a little.

Still he drew nearer the fire, and, when she insisted that he should take his slippers—her own shoes being dry by this time—he could not refuse to exchange his wet boots for them. This, of course, made him more comfortable, and, observing that the top of the kettle was being merrily lifted off by the steam, he asked Margaret if she had had any supper.

When she replied in the negative, he went to his cupboard and brought forth a teapot and paper of tea.

"I hope you don't prefer coffee," he said, a little anxiously, "for I never drink it myself, and I have no means to make it, nor, indeed, any to make."

Margaret hastened to assure him of her preference for tea, thinking the while a little blankly of the pound or two of the best Oolong which she had lost in the struggle to retain her umbrella, and watched the process of steeping with the appreciation of a good house-keeper. But she could not remain quiet when he next produced a loaf of bread and proceeded to cut it into slices for toast.

"I can do that," she said, eagerly. "Please let me," as he demurred, and declined to resign the toasting-fork. "You have no idea how very nice my toast is. Hugh will never let a servant make any for him. Look! you are burning that piece. Pray give it to me!"

She pleaded so earnestly that he had no alternative but to let her have her own way; so she sat down to toast the bread and scorch her face in peace. She made a very pretty picture on the hearth in the flickering firelight, with her bright-brown hair loose about her shoulders; and Tyrrell, who had meanwhile brought forth a half-eaten ham from his inexhaustible cupboard, could not but pause now and then, in the business of cutting it, to

look, and wonder if he was awake or dreaming.

It was a very sociable little supper to which they sat down after a while, and by this time they had become quite sociable themselves; so that, when Margaret began plaiting her hair to get it out of the way (for she had lost all such necessary appendages as comb and hair-pins), she gave Tyrrell a recapitulation of the losses which the storm had entailed upon her.

"I have paid almost as dearly as Eve for my curiosity," she said. "I have lost an umbrella—Hugh's umbrella, and a very good one—three pounds of tea, a hat and veil which I bought only the other day, and two braids, which are incomparably the greatest loss of all."

"I should not think you needed such things as braids," Tyrrell remarked. "Your own hair is very abundant."

"So it is," she answered, threading the soft locks through her fingers; "but, all the same, one needs braids when fashion dictates that every woman shall wear exactly three times as much hair as could possibly grow on her head."

"You did not use to wear them," he said.

She looked up at him quickly, and he saw the bright blood come like a flash to her face.

"How do you know?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Do you think I have forgotten?" he said, with something which seemed like sudden passion. "My memory is not so short, Margaret." Then, after a pause which she did not break: "Sometimes I wish to Heaven it were! These five years have been little else than one long torture and hunger to me—such hunger for one sight of your face that I would often have given the best years of life to see it for one half-hour as I see it now."

"Is this kind?" she asked, looking not at him, but at the leaping blaze before them. "You know that I am here in your power—is it generous to talk to me like this?"

"No—it is not," he answered, quickly. "Forgive me for having done so. But how can I see you and not think of that happy fortnight when I saw you first—five long years ago! It seems to me," he added, a little wistfully, "that you did not think so much then of the fact that I was a Tyrrell, and you a Churchill, as you do now."

"How could I?" she asked, still avert-

ing her gaze. "I was little more than a child, and I had heard very little of—of your name. I scarcely realized, indeed, when I met you as one of that gay party at Beechdale, who you were, until I came home and—Hugh told me."

"No doubt he told you also that it was your duty to hate the son of your father's murderer."

This was so true that she could not deny it, therefore she said nothing.

"Tell me, Margaret," said Tyrrell, bending forward, "has he made you hate me? You did not use to do it, I know; for I do not think there was ever a sweeter or brighter thing on earth than your face when I saw it last. But how can I tell what five years have done?"

"Five years have not taught me to hate you, Mr. Tyrrell," she said, turning and looking at him with her soft brown eyes. "But"—and her voice had a ring of decision in it which he knew well how to interpret—"they have not taught me either to forget that I am Albert Churchill's daughter."

"And Hugh Churchill's sister," he said, a little bitterly.

"I know what you mean," she answered, coloring; "but you are mistaken. Hugh has never succeeded in influencing me to his opinions. He would gladly make me hate you as—pardon me that I must confess it—as he does; but I hope you will believe me when I say that he has never done so. Even if I did not forgive your father—and God knows that I do!—I could not be so unjust as to hold you accountable for his crime. *I could not, Mr. Tyrrell!*" she repeated, almost passionately.

"I believe you," he said. "I believe you and thank you. But for the rest—O Margaret! for the rest! Am I alone, of all men, to have no opportunity or hope to win you because my name is Tyrrell?"

"You must feel as well as I do that there is a gulf between us that nothing can bridge," she answered, gravely. "It is hopeless to talk of such a thing, Mr. Tyrrell—worse than hopeless, indeed. It seems like an insult to the dead. I am sorry—oh, what a weak word that is!—I am far, far more than sorry that it should have fallen to my lot to give you pain, but the truth must be faced; if you and I lived forever, we could never be more to each other than we are now."

"Never, Margaret?"

"Never."

She did not speak bitterly or vehemently; on the contrary, she spoke with great sadness and infinite gentleness, but Tyrrell felt to the very centre of his soul that Hugh's fiery hatred was more likely to turn into love than this decision of his sister to be moved or shaken. The young engineer had been right when he said, in his impetuous pride, "On a point of honor we Churchills always think alike," and even he might have been satisfied that Margaret remembered as deeply as himself their black and bloody debt to Henry Tyrrell.

After her last words there was silence in the room. The wind howled, the rain fell, the river roared without. There were many desolate and aching hearts in Ridgeford that night; many who had seen fortune, and not a few who had seen friends and relations, go down in the merciless flood; but none were more desolate, none ached with a more dreary sense of hopeless loss, than his who sat by that sparkling fire with Margaret Churchill's fair face opposite him.

After a while, seeing that the night was wearing on, she asked anxiously if there was no possible hope for her to get home. He answered by bidding her come to a window and drawing back the blind.

"Shade your eyes and look out," he said.

"Then tell me what you see."

She obeyed—that is, she obeyed in part. She shaded her eyes, and strove, with her gaze, to pierce the darkness of the murky and tempestuous night beyond, but in vain. Only the rain dashing against the window-panes, only the blast that seemed as if it might lift the roof from off the cottage, told her what was raging without. She looked round at him in blank dismay.

"Is there no hope, then?" she said. "O Mr. Tyrrell, must I stay here all night?"

"I am afraid you must," he answered, gravely, closing the blind again. "At least I know that if you and I ventured out in this storm, we should not be likely ever to be heard of again. Forgive me for bringing you here," he went on, as he saw the distress on her face. "I could not think of any thing else to do. It was very stupid, very thoughtless, of me not to remember—"

But she interrupted him here by holding out her hand.

"Forgive me for seeming ungrateful for such a kind shelter," she said. "You know, or you ought to know, that you did the best possible thing for me—the only thing, indeed. Of course it is awkward"—laughing slightly—"but you and I are old enough and sensible enough to disregard that. If I was only sure that Hugh was not wretched about me!"

"May he not think that, being caught by the storm, you remained in town?"

"It is likely that he may. I have some friends with whom I often do remain. Thank you for the suggestion, Mr. Tyrrell. Now, shall we make our arrangements for the night? I am so sorry to think how much I shall inconvenience you."

"Do not grudge me this little service," he said. "God knows, and you know, that it may be the last I shall ever have the opportunity to render you!"

There was some difficulty about the arrangements for the night, since the choice rested between the bed—which was, in truth, little more than a sofa—and the easy-chair. Each of them wanted to sit up and let the other rest; but, of course, Tyrrell carried his point; and while Margaret lay down, and, despite the novelty of her position, soon fell into the sound sleep of healthy youth, he sat by the fire and watched the stormy night through and the gray dawn break over the drenched earth.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN Margaret woke the next morning, she found herself alone in the room—a bright fire burning on the hearth, and a cloudy apology for daylight streaming in. It required several minutes for her to remember where she was; but then it all came back with a rush, and, rising, she walked across the floor, and drew back the blind of the window. It had ceased to rain; but the terrible ravages of the storm were evident on every side, and she could not help thinking that the waters of the deluge, abating from the face of the earth, may have presented much such a seeming as the scene on which she gazed. As she still looked, she saw Tyrrell striding along through mud and water toward the house; and, turning when he entered, she asked at once where he had been.

"To find some means of getting you home,"

he answered. "It was rather difficult, for the rain last night seems to have inundated the brains of all Ridgeford, and vehicles are in great demand for the people escaping from the neighborhood of the flood. A carriage will be here in a few minutes, however."

He looked so pale and haggard, as the morning light streamed over his face, that she was suddenly stricken with remorse to think how he had been working for her while she slept.

"How has the rain of last night affected you, Mr. Tyrrell?" she asked.

"It has made something very like a ruined man of me," he answered. "But I think very little—too little, perhaps—of that. I have only myself to care for, you know; and, when one stands alone, no blow of Fortune can be very severe."

Margaret was not by any means sure of this, but she did not contradict him. She only glanced up with a smile, and said:

"Shall I not make you some tea? You look so tired."

His face brightened as by a flash. "Yes," he said, eagerly. "Yes, if you will be so kind."

So she set to work in her cheery way—a way that had brightened her own home like a sunbeam for twenty-two years—and soon had the tea ready—such tea as Mr. Tyrrell was not in the habit, nor, indeed, capable, of making for himself. He took it from her hand as if it had been the veritable nectar of the gods; and, in truth, the poor fellow needed it badly. He had taken a more powerful stimulant at an earlier hour, but, to revive jaded energies and tired faculties, there is no power in brandy to equal that which lurks in one strong cup drawn from the fragrant Chinese herb.

Before they had finished their *impromptu* collation—*for* Margaret sat down to bear him company, not so much because she wanted any thing, as because she knew by instinct that the sight of her was pleasant to his eyes—the carriage, which had been ordered, drove up to the door. Miss Churchill rose and put on her water-proof, drawing the hood over her hatless head, and then, since this completed her preparations for departure, turned to Tyrrell.

"How can I thank you for all your kindness?" she said to him, in a low voice. "What would have become of me if you had

not found and sheltered me? Believe me, I shall never forget it. It"—she hesitated a moment, then went on, with a crimson cheek—"it has, if possible, made me regret still more deeply the manner in which you were received when you came on your errand of kindness to our house a month ago."

"You should know better than to talk like this," he said, reproachfully. "Kindness—kindness to you! It has been the greatest happiness that Fate ever gave to me, and one on the memory of which I shall live for months and years to come." He had taken, by this time, the small, ungloved hand which she offered him, and, holding it now, gazed with passionate wistfulness into her face. "Margaret," he said, hoarsely, "for the last time, the very last time, let me ask is there, can there be, no hope for me?"

She looked at him, and he read his answer in her sorrowful eyes. Then, after a minute:

"Why do you embitter our parting like this?" she asked, sadly. "You know we are not likely ever to meet again. Why not let us say farewell as friends—or, if not as friends, at least as acquaintances who have met and liked each other sincerely?"

"Then we are not even friends?"

"How can we be?" she asked, still sadly. "Do friends live as far apart as we must ever do? O Mr. Tyrrell!"—her voice broke down here into something like a wail—"let me go. For God's sake do not prolong this hopeless pain!"

"Pain! Is it pain to you?" he cried, quick to catch the new accent in her voice. "O Margaret! one word—only one word—before you go. If we had met like other people—if this horrible barrier of past crime had not been between us—could you, oh, my darling!—could you ever have learned to love me? If you can tell me *that*, Margaret, it seems to me that I can face even the desolate future with a brave heart if I know that."

But she did not answer him. Her pale lips did not move; her downcast eyes did not lift; she only suddenly drew her hand from the clasp of his, and darted toward the door.

He followed, and assisted her into the carriage; then, to her surprise, entered also, and closed the door.

"Are you coming with me?" she asked.

"If you do not object," he answered, "I

will certainly assure myself that you reach home safely."

She could not demur at this, but she winged a fervent prayer to Heaven that Hugh might be safely gone to his morning work. If he should still chance to be at home, what would he say, what would he think, to see her drive up with Roland Tyrrell! Of course she meant to tell him where and how she had spent the night; but, all the same, it must be done with caution, not with such abrupt force.

She might have spared her fears, however, for Roland Tyrrell was never a dull man, nor one likely to fall into such a blunder as this. When they were once safely in a street which led straight to the Churchill cottage, he stopped the carriage and got out.

"I will bid you good-by here," he said to Margaret, and extended his hand.

She placed her own within it, but what she said she did not know; she could not afterward remember, though she vainly tried to think that it had been something kind. It was much more likely to have been something wholly commonplace and unmeaning, for what else do any of us ever say at those decisive moments of meeting and parting which stamp themselves for good or ill upon the heart? Then she drove on, and left him standing alone.

It has been already said that the neighborhood in which the Churchills lived was principally inhabited by the class who found employment in the large mines and their adjacent works, not far distant. This part of the town had not suffered in the least from that destructive flood which had almost swept away the lower portion; yet, as Margaret drove toward the cottage, she could not but observe signs of an unusual commotion in the streets and about the doors of houses. Knots of people were gathered, talking excitedly; women ran past with terror and dismay on their faces; even the children looked wild and horror-stricken.

"What can possibly have occurred!" thought Miss Churchill; and she was not sorry that, as she stopped the carriage at her own gate, a man whom she knew well as connected with the mines came hurrying past.

"One minute, Mr. Wayland!" she cried, for he did not seem to notice her. "Pray tell me what is the matter? Something has happened, surely?"

"Nothing much is the matter, Miss Churchill," he said, turning round with a face which belied his words. "Only there's been an accident at the mines. It's all come right, I dare say. You—you better go in!"

He hurried on, but Margaret stood still, panic-stricken. She knew well what those fatal words, "accident at the mines," meant. She had not lived for years at the very verge without knowing far more than the outer world of the perils which beset the workers in earth's mysterious depths. It never occurred to her for a moment that Hugh might be connected with the accident, but yet her heart stood still at thought of the horrible possibilities of suffering so near her. She realized the agony with which every woman around her was asking, "Is it *my* husband, or *my* son?" She even realized—or thought she did—the awful despair of those who were buried alive far beneath the green surface of the world. "God help them!" she said to herself; and then, as she was turning to enter the gate, she heard two men speaking as they passed at a rapid pace.

"I thought as much!" one of them said. "It's all Churchill's fault. He insisted on pressing the work in that direction—and it was only yesterday he volunteered to direct the men himself. He was a headstrong fellow; but one can't help being sorry for him, and this will come hard on his sister!"

It *did* come hard on her, harder even than the speaker thought, from its horrible unexpectedness. She reeled back and caught the low fence, white as a sheet, and trembling like an aspen. For a moment she tried to smile—it was such utter folly! Hugh! How could Hugh possibly be in danger? Then that awful sickness of the heart—like unto no other sickness of earth—came over her, and she would have fallen to the ground if an arm had not supported her. It was only the rough, fustian-clad arm of the coachman who had not yet driven off; but, for all that, it was very serviceable, and very kindly, too.

"Hold up a bit, miss," he said, "and I'll call somebody to you. I reckon you've been taken sick-like."

"No," said Margaret, putting up her hand to her ghastly face, "I am not sick. Stop," she said, catching his arm as he was turning away, "don't call anybody, I have no time to talk. Open the carriage-door and let me in. Then drive as fast as you can to the mines."

He stared at her; but she beckoned him so impatiently to obey, that, after a second's hesitation, he did so—guessing, in part, at least, the cause of her anxiety. Perhaps he was not averse to sharing in the excitement himself. At all events, he whipped up his horses with laudable zeal, and, in a very few minutes, they reached the mines.

Driving past the large works, where the sound of machinery had, for the present, stopped, and past the deserted offices (of which Hugh's was one), they came to the opening of the principal descent into the mine. It was not here, however, that a significant and terrible scene was enacting. Farther away, to the right, a new shaft had been lately sunk, and entirely new excavations made—concerning which, as Margaret well remembered, Hugh had been full of eager interest and hope. Several older engineers had opposed the move; but he had carried every thing before him with the company, and already the most favorable results had been anticipated. He had brought home triumphantly several rich specimens of ore, and spoken gayly of the chagrin of those who had prophesied utter failure for the project. Now—was this to be the end?

It certainly looked so. Around the fatal spot was gathered a crowd of many men and not a few women; the former looking as men only look in the face of some terrible tragedy; the latter, for the most part, wailing loudly, or sobbing dry sobs with that restraint of grief which is more terrible to behold than its wildest abandonment. Margaret alighted here, and made her way through the throng to where the superintendent was standing, just at the mouth of the opening.

"Mr. Beresford," she said, touching his arm, "is it true that Hugh is in there?"

"Good Heavens, Miss Churchill!" said Mr. Beresford, turning round with a start. "Is it possible you are here? My dear young lady, this will never do. Come away instantly!"

"Is Hugh there?" she reiterated, looking at him with her pale, set face. "Tell me the truth at once. I must know."

"Well, then—yes, he is there!" he said, desperately. "Now, for God's sake, come away! This is no place for you!"

She paid no heed to his adjuration. She only caught his arm, and asked another question through her white lips.

"Is there any hope?"

"We trust so," he said, eagerly. "We never give up hope until we *know* the worst. We only fear it now. You see, it has not been an hour since the wall fell—not in the path; but, as well as we can judge, in the rear of the mining party—and we have had a large force at work ever since. Listen, and you can hear the ring of the pickaxes!"

She listened with a sickening heart; and, though her ears were not trained like his, she thought she could faintly catch a dull and muffled sound, which told of the vigorous strokes of many arms. Once more she heard him urging her to come away, but she only shook her head. No earthly power could have forced her from the spot where Hugh was buried—alive, and yet dead! There are some things so horrible that the imagination refuses to grasp them. This was one of them to Margaret. Though she sat (for her trembling limbs refused to support her, and Mr. Beresford placed her on a stone not far away), like a pale image of despair, breathing the free air of heaven while he was shut from it in the black depths of earth, she could not realize the awful horror pressing on her. They came, and went, and talked, around her, as men do under stress of great excitement; but she did not heed them. She was trying to wrest her mind from the upper world and take it into his dark prison; but it *would not* go. It reeled on the very brink of unconsciousness when she tried to picture him gasping, dying—so near her, yet, O Heaven! so far away.

She felt as if it had been hours that she had sat there, frozen into a stony stillness by the very magnitude of her anguish, yet keenly alive to every sound that bore relation to *him*, when a faint cheer from the men below (that is, a cheer which sounded faint to those above) announced that they had reached the victims of the accident. In a second, Margaret sprang to her feet; but in a second, also, a strong hand held her back.

"Wait!" said a familiar voice. "Not yet!"

She turned, not in surprise—at such moments people are rarely surprised at any thing—but with a sense of blind trust strange indeed in a woman usually so self-reliant as Margaret Churchill. Looking up into the dark eyes bent upon her—eyes full of passionate pity and passionate love—her agony for the first time broke forth into words.

"Do you go, then!" she said. "I can trust you to tell me if Hugh is—" Her white lips could not utter the word "dead." It seemed such an awful and such an unreal word to connect with Hugh's proud life and strength. "Then you will save him if you can?" she went on, with trembling eagerness. "O Mr. Tyrrell! you are so brave and kind—will you not *try* to save him? Surely you are better able than they—those men yonder; surely you can if you will!"

"God knows how willingly I would if I could," Tyrrell said. "But those men yonder understand such matters, and they have done all that human effort can do."

"But you are wiser than they," she persisted, feverishly. "You think I am childish to talk like this, but I feel—I know—that God has sent you to help and to save him. Am I mad? I don't know. But say you will try—oh, say you will try!"

"I *will* try," he answered, carried away by her appeal, yet knowing that there was nothing for him to do. "I swear to you that, if an opportunity arises, I will hold my own life for nothing in comparison with his. But will you promise me to stay here if I go?"

"I promise," she said, and she sat down again on the seat from which she had risen.

When Margaret Churchill said "I promise," he must have been blind and deaf indeed who did not trust her—even at such a supreme moment as this. Tyrrell did, fully and entirely. He gave one glance at her face—rigid with an awful look of despair—then went his way without another word.

They were bringing out the victims one by one when he reached the opening of the shaft. A terrible sight it was—with the fearful wail of some women rising now and then as a husband or a son was recognized. Most of them were dead. A few, who had been farther advanced in front, had escaped the heavy fall of the ill-supported earth, and still showed signs of life. Half hoping, yet half apprehensive, Tyrrell looked over the unconscious faces, but Hugh was not there. As he looked, Mr. Beresford approached.

"No sign of Churchill yet," he said. "He must certainly have been one of the farthest in the mine."

"That gives hopes for his safety, doesn't it?"

"In a measure," the other answered, "but

only in a measure. You see we got them out very quickly, and those men who were not immediately suffocated, may very likely recover. But every minute counts, and, the longer they are in finding Churchill, the less hope there is that he will be found alive."

"Yes, I see," said Tyrrell, thoughtfully. Then, after a pause, he added: "Can I go into the mine? I should like to see what progress they are making, unless you object to the intrusion of outsiders."

"I *do* object, as a general rule," the superintendent answered. "There are plenty of people here who would like nothing better than to go down there and stare, if they were allowed to do so; but, of course, with you, Mr. Tyrrell, it is a different matter. I'll send a man down with you if you wish to go."

Tyrrell reiterating his desire, the man was summoned, and they proceeded together into the mine. It was a strange, wild scene, and thoroughly novel to the man of the upper world, upon which they entered. The dark galleries opening away in different directions, with here and there the light of a miner's candle gleaming, the subterranean atmosphere, the smell of fresh earth from the fallen wall, the force of men working with shovels and pickaxes by the light of lanterns and torches. As Tyrrell came up, an inanimate figure was drawn forth and carried past him to the upper air. "Jackson," he heard the men saying to each other, and then somebody added, "Stone dead!"

"You see they are still taking out the men on whom the earth fell," his guide said. "There's something like half a dozen missing yet. If you are not afraid to come through this way, you'll find the place where they are looking for Mr. Churchill."

Fear did not chance to be a word in Roland Tyrrell's vocabulary, so he followed the speaker, through an opening in the fallen earth, to where the advance portion of the mining party had been found. It was very near the end of the excavation, and men were working here eagerly, expecting every moment to find Hugh Churchill as they had found the others.

"He'll never come out alive," Tyrrell's guide said, gloomily. "Not but that—steady boys! what are you after now?"

They were after another inanimate figure, upon which they had stumbled, and which they were almost sure would prove the one

so anxiously sought. "Hold up, there!" they cried to the men who were working with pickaxes in front (foolishly enough, since the end of the excavation had plainly been reached); but these did not seem to hear, for, just as the others were lifting up the unconscious face for identification, their axes went suddenly through into another and unsuspected excavation beyond—there was a quick rattle of falling earth—a crust-like wall gave way—and a blast of air rushed out which proved its noxious qualities by extinguishing in an instant every one of the lights.

The panic which ensued was neither so unwise nor so unnatural as might at first appear. If the men threw down pickaxes and shovels to fly for their lives, it was because they knew well that their lives were at stake—since, of all dangers which the miner has to dread, the most deadly by far is the subtle poison known as mephitic air. Tyrrell's guide had sufficient consideration to seize him by the arm, and hurry him away at such a breathless pace that he scarcely knew what had happened until he found himself beyond the point where the first earth had fallen.

Even here the panic had spread, and the men were retreating. "All's up now," they said. "No hope for any man left in there when *that* gets at him. The devil himself couldn't live in foul air!"

"Where is Mr. Churchill?" demanded Tyrrell, as soon as he could be heard. Then, as an ominous silence followed the question: "For God's sake, you don't mean to tell me that you are men, and that you have left a man who could not help himself, to perish in there? Is it possible—has it been done?"

It had indeed been done. No one had thought of him. Each man had blindly rushed from the danger, and left the unconscious one behind.

"He is dead," some of them said, by way of excuse.

"No man *knows* that," Tyrrell answered. "No man can dare to say that he felt either his heart or his pulse. The presumption is that he is alive—and I call upon you as brave men to go back with me for him."

There was a dead silence. Brave enough they were, the most of them; but not so brave as this. They had faced danger from the falling earth, but they could not face certain death from mephitic air. Nobody stirred. Most of them were silent; only one or two

murmured that there had been deaths enough, and that they had their families to consider.

"Very well," said Tyrrell, scornfully, "I will go alone. Give me a lantern—something that cannot be extinguished easily; and I will show you whether or not you are a set of pitiful cowards. Only"—he stopped a moment and considered—"I am afraid I could scarcely bring him out alone. Is there any one here who can be bribed to do his duty by a thousand dollars? If so, let him speak at once. There is not a second to lose, and I will write a check before I go."

His taunt stung one man at least into action. A stout, dark-browed young fellow stepped forward.

"You may keep your money, Mr. Tyrrell," he said. "I'll go with you without a bribe. It's like to be certain death; but I've nobody depending on me, so it don't matter much, nohow."

"All right," said Tyrrell, with a quick glance at him. "You'll do," he added. "Get the light we are to take—the quicker the better."

A couple of lanterns were brought, and a bucket of water for each of them, with which to dispel in a measure the poisonous gas. While these were being provided, Tyrrell heard an old miner explain the presence of the foul air. The mine was an old one, with several long-disused chambers—excavations which had been cut off by much such an accident (though in the former case harmless) as the present; and it was evidently into one of these that the new excavation led. Nobody had suspected it until the unguarded strokes of two or three men had laid bare the danger.

It certainly was a terrible danger into which Tyrrell and his companion now ventured. They felt it in the faintness which made them stagger and reel like drunken men when the first breath of the mephitic atmosphere came over them; and, as they advanced, it of course grew worse.

"We must be quick," said the young miner, in a half-stifled voice; "we can't stand this many minutes!" He set down his lantern hastily, and, raising his bucket of water with both hands to a level with his shoulder, cast the contents in showery dashes all around and over himself and his companion; then, dropping the bucket, snatched up the light and hurried forward. Fortunately

they had but a few steps to go from the entrance of the excavation to where Churchill was lying, face downward, just as he had been left by the men when they fled for their lives.

"Thank God—here he is!" cried Tyrrell.

"Put down your light!" exclaimed the miner, who had already put his own out of his hand, and, with one vigorous effort, had turned Hugh upon his back. "Dash your water over his face—now for it!" and he seized Hugh's shoulders, motioning to Tyrrell to assist. Gasping, giddy, and so faint that they could scarcely stand, they half-carried, half-dragged him along between them to the opening of the excavation. The gases had by this time been considerably diluted by the outside air finding its way in; but still the atmosphere was horrible. The lights burned dimly, and both Tyrrell and his companion felt their strength and consciousness fast leaving them. As at last they reached the bound of safety—the opening in the fallen wall—Tyrrell staggered, wavered, and fell heavily forward.

"On—on!" he gasped, as his companion paused. "Don't stop for me—come back, if you will—but keep on now—on!"

His strength had collapsed, but not so his power of command. There was something compelling to obedience in the imperious tones; and, admonished partly by them, partly by his own increasing faintness, the young miner kept on.

It was lucky for Hugh Churchill that he did so. Scarcely had he passed the opening when there came another heavy fall of earth, closing it behind him.

CHAPTER IV.

ROLAND TYRRELL'S last sight—the last, he fancied, that he should ever have of worldly things—was of that falling barrier which shut him, in poisonous darkness, from the sights and sounds of men. After that, he knew nothing more.

He knew nothing of the sensation which the news of his entombment made, nor how Mr. Beresford himself rushed down into the mine, nor how volunteers flocked to the work of his rescue, nor yet how zealously the men

labored to save him who had only a little before denounced them as cowards.

But when Margaret Churchill, who was kneeling by her unconscious yet living brother, heard the news, she uttered a cry which those around her never forgot.

"It is my fault!" she cried. "It is my fault! I urged him to go! I begged him to save Hugh! But I never feared this—I never thought that he *would* give his own life—O my God! what have I done!"

It was easier to ask than to answer. The men below worked with a will on the fallen earth, which, being light, gave way readily to their shovels; but not one of them dared to hope that they would find Tyrrell alive. They knew too well the terrible power of the agent at work within.

"I don't think there's more than a shadow of a chance for the poor fellow," the superintendent said. "But we can only do for him what he did for Churchill—give him the benefit of that.—So work away, for God's sake, boys! every second of time counts against him."

They knew that as well as the speaker did, and scarcely needed to be urged to expedition. They worked as they had seldom, even in their stalwart lives of labor, worked before. Whether it was merely the universal human sympathy for human suffering—which at such times strikes a magnetic chord to make men brothers—or whether they were moved to special interest by the courage of the gallant gentleman dying within, no one could tell. Assuredly they could not have told themselves. People accustomed to analyzing motives do not pause for such a process at moments of supreme excitement. Still less are those who have never done such a thing likely to choose such a time to begin. It did not matter what sentiment it was, when the heart sent force enough into those sturdy arms to demolish in a very short time—though time which seemed horribly long to the passive lookers-on—the awful tomb of Nature's fashioning. Then they found that he was lying immediately beyond the fallen earth, and that the two lanterns which had been left were still burning, though very dimly.

Drawn forth into purer air, they thought they detected signs of life; but no one could be sure of this. It was true there was some ground of hope in the fact that the lights

had not been totally extinguished, and that he had not been buried much more than fifteen or twenty minutes; but no man was bold enough to say, "He will live!" nor even "He is alive!"

"Get him up into the hands of the doctors as quick as possible," Mr. Beresford said. "Good Heavens! what a piece of work this has been!"

Up from the under-world into the light of God's blessed sky he was accordingly taken—a far more deathly-seeming man than Hugh Churchill had been, or even than those poor victims drawn forth, stone-dead, from beneath the avalanche of fallen earth. Under the influence of powerful restoratives, Churchill was beginning to revive a little, and to comprehend, in a measure, where he was and what had happened.

"Tyrrell!" he repeated, faintly, as he heard the name passing from lip to lip around him, for just at that moment Tyrrell was brought forth, and laid down, as it chanced, almost exactly at the feet of the brother and sister. To the surprise of all present, Margaret Churchill rose at once, and, going to his side, knelt down by him, gazing into the pallid face, feeling the pulseless hands.

"He has given his life for yours, Hugh," she said, at last, looking up at her bewildered brother, with a ghastly smile on her quivering lips. "I think you may be satisfied that your vendetta is ended now."

He had, indeed, given his life so far as the will to do so went, but not as far as the actual fact was concerned. The physicians, who now came up, told Margaret that he was still alive. "He has wonderful vital force," they said, "and it has enabled him to survive an ordeal that would have killed a weaker man. But he is not out of danger yet. He may never recover consciousness, or, if he does, an attack of illness may probably follow. We will apply all possible restoratives, and then he should be taken away from here at once. Does anybody know where his lodgings are? The Tyrrell house was rented last week."

Margaret knew where those lodgings were, but she held her peace as the men around shook their heads and disclaimed any knowledge of Mr. Tyrrell's place of abode. "Never mind about that," she said, impatiently, to the doctor who had spoken. "It is time

enough to talk of where you will take him when he is ready to be taken anywhere."

This was true enough. The process of restoring him, therefore, went on for some time at the mouth of the fatal shaft, with men and women of all kinds looking on—grief and death present in their most awful forms—and the petty, commonplace world thrusting itself forward now and then in the person of some newspaper reporter, who, having been spared from work on the flood to chronicle this new horror, came up to question the miners, the officials, the doctors, the half-restored victims—anybody and everybody, without regard to time or place.

After a while, the physicians seemed to agree that Tyrrell would very likely recover. "He will not come to himself for some time yet," they said; "but, with the liberal aid of restoratives and stimulants, he'll do now."

It was after this decision that Margaret, who had, meanwhile, exchanged a few words with Hugh, came forward and spoke.

"Our cottage is near by," she said; "Mr. Tyrrell must be taken there. He risked his life to save my brother, and I should never forgive myself if I let him pass out of my sight until he is again restored to health."

She announced this determination with so much quiet firmness and dignity that no one gainsayed her. Indeed, nobody had any right to do so. Roland Tyrrell had no relations, and but few friends, in Ridgeford. There was no one to oppose a rival claim for the possession of this weak, unconscious man, whose only sense of returning life was a terrible, giddy sickness.

He did not know where they were taking him—in fact, he didn't care. As in a dream, he was aware that people came and went about him; that masculine voices talked over him; that a gentle hand now and then touched him with the magic art of soothing which some women possess; and that, finally, he lapsed into a sleep too deep even for such dreams as these.

When he awoke, he felt as bewildered as Margaret had been on her awaking under somewhat similar circumstances. He could not remember for some time what had happened, nor why he felt so weak and faint. Even when he mastered his recollection—up to the point of the falling earth in the mine—

he could not imagine how he had been transported from that prison, dreary and hopeless as Dante's hell, to this boudoir-like chamber, with its dainty furniture and picture-hung walls.

At last, however, he gave up the effort of fatiguing his brain with conjectures, and decided to wait patiently for an explanation of the mystery. As if to reward his philosophy, it was not long before it came. The handle of the door turned softly, the door itself opened cautiously, and he heard a voice, which he would have recognized among ten thousand, saying, in a subdued key:

"Now take care and don't make a noise, Hugh. Go in very gently and tell me if he is still asleep."

Hugh! Roland Tyrrell's dark eyes opened yet wider than they had done before at sound of that name, and it was those eyes which Churchill first encountered when he entered the room with elaborate caution.

"By Jove!" he said, and evinced symptoms of beating an immediate retreat.

But Tyrrell frustrated this intention by lifting himself a little, and holding out the hand which he had once declared his intention of never offering again to Hugh Churchill.

"I am very glad to see you again alive and well," he said.

The words were not very much, but the tone was a good deal, and touched Hugh by its evident sincerity. He came forward and wrung the extended hand with an almost painful force.

"Do you think I don't know that I owe it to you?" he said. "I never thought to owe any thing—at least any thing *more*—to one of your name, Mr. Tyrrell, but, despite my will, you have made me your debtor for my life."

This did not sound like a very gracious acknowledgment, but perhaps Roland Tyrrell understood it. At least he smiled slightly.

"Don't let the obligation weigh upon you," he said. "Look upon it not as a debt incurred, but as a debt paid. I hope I should have done the same for anybody, but I was especially glad to do it for you. We got you out just in time," he went on, "and now pray tell me how they got me out, and what is the matter with my head? It surges like a rolling sea whenever I move."

Hugh having satisfied his curiosity on these points, and told him much that he himself

only knew from the report of others, Tyrrell next inquired where he was.

"It can't be," he said, remembering the sound of Margaret's voice, "that I am in your house."

"My sister thought it only fair that she should return your hospitality," Hugh said, thinking to turn off the matter with a jest. "Seriously, you did not think that we were going to send you to a hospital or a boarding-house when you had just risked—yes, and by Jove! came within an inch of losing—your life to save mine?" he added, a little indignantly.

"I—upon my honor, I never thought of it at all," Tyrrell answered. "My head—confound it!—had not been in much of a condition for thinking. But it is very good, very kind of you to have me here."

"If it had not been for you, I should not be here," Hugh said, bluntly. "I generally try to pay my debts—after a fashion, at least. Oh, I had quite forgotten!" as a knock at the door was followed by the entrance of a small servant and a breakfast-tray, "Margaret wants to know if you will be well enough to come down after you have had your breakfast. There's a couch in the parlor where you can be comfortable, and you'll find it dull up here, for I must go over to the mines."

"Of course I will come down," said Tyrrell. "What is the matter with me? I am not sick."

"A man can't inhale mephitic air with impunity," Hugh answered. "It will be several days before you are all right again. I had a turn with it once, but not like this."

Mr. Tyrrell found, indeed, that a man could not inhale mephitic air with impunity when he attempted to dress at a later hour of the morning, and, at a still later period, to make his way down-stairs, tempted beyond all prudence by the thought of that couch in the parlor where Margaret awaited him.

As he descended slowly, clutching nervously at the balustrade, and feeling so absurd that he hoped devoutly no servant was in ambush to spy upon his erratic motions, a door below opened, and Miss Churchill herself stepped into the hall.

"Is that you, Mr. Tyrrell?" she said, turning her bright face upward. "Oh, how thoughtless I am to forget how faint and sick you must feel!"

She ran up to meet him, and insisted on his leaning on her.

"I should have kept Hugh for this service," she said, laughing. "He would have made an excellent support, but I serve as a crutch. I am a good height for a crutch, am I not?"

"You are good for every thing," he said, gratefully. "How kind it was of you to bring me here!"

"Why, where else should you have gone?" she asked. "After all you have suffered for Hugh, is it not very little to bring you here and nurse you well?"

"I hope I shall not need any nursing."

"You see I have made elaborate preparations, at least."

She led him into the parlor as she spoke—that same parlor which he had entered once before in the dusk of the gloaming—and where a broad, low couch was wheeled before the fire, with cushions piled on it, and books and papers near.

"If you want to read an authentic account of your heroism, there is the morning's *Post*," she said, with a smile, as (rather against his will) she made him lie down. "Or shall I read it to you? Hugh says I read very well; and I was taught early to mind my commas and stops."

"I would much rather hear you talk," he said, looking at the chair from which she had plainly risen at the sound of his step. "I can't help thinking that I am dreaming. This is far too good to be true."

"God knows if anybody had prophesied it to me this time yesterday I should have thought that it was far too good to be true," she said, looking at him with quick-rising tears quenching the laughter in her brown eyes. Then, before he could conceive what she meant to do, she came and knelt down by his couch, laying her two soft hands over one of his.

"O Mr. Tyrrell," she said, "I know that brave men rarely like to be praised or thanked for their noble deeds; but I cannot keep silence. I must—I will thank you for giving Hugh back to me; for counting your own life as nothing in comparison to his; for daring a danger from which any man might well have shrunk, and for—for—oh, for proving to everybody that you are as brave and generous as I always knew you were!"

Her eyes glowed, her cheeks flushed, her

lips quivered. Nobody could have doubted how entirely from her heart those eager words came. Tyrrell—who usually had enough of that simplicity which accompanies true courage not to like to hear his own achievements praised—would have been something more or less than man if, in this instance, he had not listened with more than pleasure. He tried to stop her, but she would not be stopped. The generous heart was no niggard, and meant to utter all it felt—for Margaret Churchill was not a woman to do things by halves.

"Do not talk to me like this," he said at last. "I am not used to such sweet flattery. You know—or you ought to know—that I would count any loss or suffering a positive gain which enabled me to serve you. Fate has been kind to me in giving me this opportunity. I alone, therefore, am its debtor. Hence, all is said."

"No; all is not said," she answered, impetuously. "Indeed"—with smiles brimming up into her eyes again, like the April mood of a child—"I really have not an idea when all will be said. Not in a long, very long while, I am sure."

"You don't mean that you are going to talk for a very long while about me?" he asked, slightly dismayed.

"Yes, about you—and a little, perhaps, about Hugh. Do you know, Mr. Tyrrell, that if I am the happiest woman in the world this morning, it is because I was the most wretched yesterday morning? What should I have done if Hugh had been brought back to me as many another woman's best-beloved was brought back to her? How should I ever have forgiven myself if you had cast your life away in the errand upon which I had been selfish enough to send you?"

"If you had not sent me, I should have gone," he said. "This life of mine is not worth so much that I would not freely have given it to save the son of Albert Churchill—your brother, Margaret."

When he called her Margaret, she colored and drew back. Perhaps she did not approve of so much familiarity, and thought that she had better regain the safer distance of her chair. But Tyrrell's hands closed over hers, and she was captive.

"Don't go," he said, imploringly. "I repeat that I am sure this must be a dream; but, when a man has worked long and wear-

ily, do not grudge him one short hour of happiness! You talk of yesterday morning and of this morning. Think of the contrast to me! Did I not believe then that I was parting from you forever? Yet here I am in the same room where you met me so coldly, and yet where you spoke such brave, gentle words one month ago!"

"Ah, but you know you are dreaming!" she said, smiling.

"Am I?" he said, with sudden passion. "Then God knows such a dream is worth more than all my waking life besides! Yet it is a good thing to be alive!" he went on a little wistfully. "It is a good thing to come back to the earth which is brightened by such a face as yours. But, O Margaret! what shall I do when that face goes out of my life again?"

"It need not go, unless you desire it," she answered, gently. "I told you yesterday that it was impossible we could be friends. I tell you now that we shall be proud and happy to claim you as a friend—if you will let us do so."

"We! Do you mean your brother as well as yourself?"

"Yes, I speak for Hugh as for myself. 'We Churchills always think alike on a point of honor,'" she said, quoting Hugh's words, half proudly. "You have conquered him, Mr. Tyrrell; and I can assure you that, when Hugh is conquered once, he is conquered for good."

"And Hugh's sister, when she is conquered once, is she conquered for good?"

"Always," she answered, looking at him with her frank, loyal eyes. "You may count Margaret Churchill your friend for life."

"Ah, but I fear I shall never be content with Margaret Churchill as my friend for life," he said. "She must be something nearer and dearer to me than that—or else not so much. Her kindness—even such kindness as this—is too dangerously sweet if I cannot hope for more. No, Margaret, it will not do," he went on, as he met her reproachful glance. "I cannot play such an empty part as to talk of friendship with love burning at my heart. I know you think I am ungenerous to speak of this at a time when I seem to have established a claim upon you; but I am sure you will do me the justice to believe that I have no desire to obtain from your gratitude what I could not win from your love."

"Yes, I acquit you of that," she said, in a low voice. "But why not be content?"

"With your friendship? That is asking a little too much of a man who has loved you with hopeless passion for five years, Margaret. I see how it is," he went on, as she turned her face from him. "You waive the old enmity enough to admit me as a friend, but honor, pride, conscience—God only knows what—will not let you waive it enough to even think of a nearer tie."

She did not speak, but, by an impatient gesture, she seemed to deny this interpretation.

"Then it is I—the individual man, not the son of Henry Tyrrell—who have no power to please, no hope to win you," he said, with a quick sigh. "Well, there are some things that come not at one's desire, and which no man is strong enough to win. The fancy of a woman's heart, they say, is one of these. But you might have let me think that it was the old vendetta, Margaret. You would have been none the poorer, and I much the richer for that consolation."

"Did I say what it was?" she asked, suddenly flashing her face round upon him with impetuous passion burning on her cheeks and flooding her eyes. "Did I even—even say it was any thing?"

"Margaret!" he cried.

He sprang up, but, as he did so, she tore her hands from his grasp, and would have retreated if he had not caught her in his arms.

"Let me go, Mr. Tyrrell," she said. "This is not generous."

"One word, Margaret," he said. "You must answer the question now which you did not answer yesterday. Tell me only this: if you and I had met as other people meet—no barrier of past bitterness between us—could you have learned to love me then? If you can only say 'Yes'—O Margaret, trust me, no effort shall be wanting on my part that you may learn that lesson yet."

He spoke with a passion that might have touched any woman's heart to the core, but Margaret Churchill only looked up in his face and laughed.

"Do you think love is ever learned?" she asked. "If so, it must be an exotic, Mr. Tyrrell, which cannot be worth very much. I do not know, but it seems to me that the only love which is worth receiving—and doub-

ly the only which is worth giving—is that which comes as unfettered and untaught (I had almost said unsought), as the free sunlight from heaven.”

“And that love, Margaret?”

She laughed again; but something in the eager, anxious pleading of his face made her answer him without further prevarication:

“That love,” she said, softly, “I have always given you.”

THE END.

MISS CHERITON'S RIVAL.

I.

“HELEN, is it possible that you have not finished that letter yet?”

It was a weary and slightly-plaintive voice that came from one of the deep bay-windows of the library at Trefalden Manor, and made the girl addressed raise her head quickly from the table over which she was bending.

“Why, Rafe!” she said, with a little start; then added, in an ordinary tone: “I did not know that you were there, dear. Yes, I will finish in a minute. But it is such an important letter that I must be specially careful about it, you know.”

“No, I don’t know,” responded the same voice, this time a little perversely. “I can’t see any reason why you should be specially careful in addressing Miss Cheriton.”

“Consider Miss Cheriton in the light of Harry’s fiancée—is there no reason, then?”

“Less than ever, if that be possible.”

“Well, I have not time to argue with you now. I must finish the letter and take it to Aunt Maida for inspection. After that, I shall be at your service.”

Silence after this—silence only disturbed by the movement of Helen’s pen across the paper, and the soft swaying of the green boughs that drooped before the open window. A few stray gleams of sunshine only found admittance through the jealous curtain of shade, and danced and flickered about—some on the book-lined walls, some on the polished floor—as the summer breeze capriciously

tossed the rustling leaves outside. One of these golden intruders fell across the girl’s white dress, danced to and fro across her paper, and seemed to linger tenderly over the slender hand as she made a final flourish of her pen at the bottom of the page, and then pushed it from her.

When she lifted her face it looked pale and somewhat weary. Yet, even with these disadvantages, the summer sunshine might have travelled far before it would have found a lovelier face on which to rest. The complexion was stainless of color as marble, the features were exquisitely delicate, the eyes large and dark, and the hair of that rich, red gold which is at once the rarest and most beautiful tint known to Nature or to art. There was something exceedingly quaint in her style of beauty; and, notwithstanding that one glance at her face might have proved to the dullest comprehension that here was one of the exceptional women who could say with Cleopatra—

“Like the moon, I make
The ever-shifting current of the blood,
According to my humor, ebb and flow”—

there was also a childlike simplicity and grace about her which made a strange and attractive contrast to her extraordinary beauty. Indeed, the full revelation of this beauty had yet to come to Helen Trefalden. As she stood up now, and, pushing back her hair with a tired-gesture, looked into a large mirror opposite, she knew, of course—she would have been blind if she had not known—what rare loveliness was imaged there. But she real-

ized no more than the merest child what a potent power in the world—a power setting at defiance all other powers—such loveliness could be made.

"Rafe, dear," she said, "on consideration, I won't take this letter to Aunt Maida just now. She is probably asleep, and I should only disturb her. Shall I bring the German grammar, and let us study our lesson together?"

"Not to-day," was the answer. "It is too warm for German. In fact, I think we have fagged away at it long enough. Come here—let us be idle and talk."

Helen obeyed, but it was rather slowly. Her lagging step, and a slight contraction of the brows, seemed to indicate that she would rather have been left alone; but still she summoned a smile as she drew back the curtains and faced a small, delicate cripple—boy or man, it was hard to say which—who lay on a couch under the open window.

"Well," she said, "here I am. What will you have?"

"Sit down," he said. "I want to look at you."

She sat down without any demur, and returned the gaze which he bent on her. Yet this was no trifling thing to do, for many people found Rafe Trefalden's eyes exceedingly hard to meet. People, in especial, who had any thing to conceal, always grew uncomfortable when those bright, hazel eyes rested on them—eyes which looked as if they might have read, not only the face, but the heart and mind as well; which were luminous with intellect, full of a certain satirical humor, and sometimes (not always) shining with a tender beauty which made his cousin think that he had not been ill-named Raphael, after the angel of God. Although he looked so young, he had reached the full years of manhood; though, as far as practical usefulness went, manhood was to him at most only an empty name. He had been a cripple since early childhood. But for this, "he might have been any thing," his teachers always said; and his parents—whose only other son was by no means intellectually gifted—felt the disappointment so bitterly that it almost weaned their affection from the unconscious cause of it. There was no want of kindness, no want of tender and considerate care; but there was a want of that golden sympathy without which human hearts shrivel and be-

come like unto the dust beneath our feet. Into this state Rafe Trefalden was drifting when an influence which was to save him entered his life. He was fifteen when a younger brother of his father died, leaving an insolvent estate and an orphan child. The estate Mr. Trefalden handed over to the dead man's creditors; the child he brought home and adopted into his own family. "As she grows older, she will be of great service to you," he said to his wife, who was a languid invalid; and his prophecy was amply verified: for, as the little Helen grew older, she became virtually her aunt's right hand, doing every thing brightly and cheerfully which a paid companion would have done as a matter of taskwork and duty. But, above all, she was Rafe's friend, companion, pupil, and sister. The affection between these two was singularly touching in its depth and intensity. For ten years they had shared every feeling in common, until of late a slight cloud of reserve had risen between them which Rafe was plainly determined should be dissipated now.

"Helen," he said, quite abruptly, "of course nobody else could see it; but I see that you are suffering."

Helen smiled—not brightly, nor yet sadly, but with an expression between the two.

"Not much, dear," she said. "And you may trust me that it will soon be less."

"It almost kills me to think that a man like that has power to make you suffer for a moment."

"Don't blame him, Rafe," she said, with a sudden mixture of gentleness and contempt. "He is weak, you know, and easily swayed by whatever face is near him. Then it would have been hard if he had been bound by a boy and girl fancy. He went into the world and forgot it. I stayed here and remembered it. That is all."

"He is the first Trefalden whom I ever knew or heard of without a sense of honor," said Rafe, bitterly.

"That is where you do him injustice," said Helen, quickly. "I am sure he does not even imagine that he was in any manner bound to me. Don't you know how differently a man of the world looks at these things? I assure you I do not blame any thing but my own folly. I understand all the rest so well."

"And you don't understand that?"

"No, I don't understand that. However, it is not any thing which it matters about understanding. What is to be borne, I can bear, Rafe. You may be sure of that."

"I am sure of it, dear," said Rafe, gently.

"And pray remember that I am neither so weak nor so unjust as to feel any bitterness toward Miss Cheriton. Every word of that letter I wrote as willingly as Aunt Maida herself could have done. When she comes, I shall be as warmly disposed to like her as every one of Harry's kindred should be disposed to like Harry's future wife."

"Is that a cut at me, Helen?"

"Do I ever make cuts at you, Rafe?"

"It sounded like it," said Rafe, laughing a little. "You know very well that one, at least, of Harry's kindred is by no means disposed to like Harry's future wife."

"You don't know it, Rafe, but you're prejudiced."

"I prejudiced!" said Rafe, indignantly.

"How often have I told you that I am a philosopher, Helen, and that philosophers are never prejudiced! You are like all the rest of your sex. You don't understand that calm, dispassionate mode of judging which puts any bias of like or dislike entirely aside."

"No, I don't understand it," said Helen, smiling faintly; "and I am inclined to think that, notwithstanding all your pains, I never shall understand it. There is one thing, however, Rafe, that you must promise me. Meet Miss Cheriton kindly, and don't chill her as you chill some people."

"Must I promise it for your sake, Helen?"

"Yes, promise it for my sake; and remember that I shall exact a strict performance of the promise."

"I don't think I ever made a promise which I did not keep," said he, gravely. "And yet my heart misgives me about this girl and her visit, Helen. Somehow or other I am sure that harm will come of it."

"I don't see any possible harm that can come of it," said Helen, flushing. "You need not fear for me, Rafe, if that is what you mean."

"I never feared for you in my life, dear," answered Rafe. "It would be rather late to begin now."

It is one thing, however, to make an assertion, and quite another to fulfil it in spirit and letter. Rafe Trefalden would have scorned himself if he had suspected for a moment that

there was any need to "fear" for his cousin—any need to think that she was not able to guard her own dignity—but his heart yearned over her pain almost as a mother's might have done; and day by day he grew more nervous as the time appointed for his brother's return approached.

It was not more than a week after Helen wrote her letter to Miss Cheriton that this august personage arrived. He came late one night, and was not seen by any of the family until the next morning, when, descending to the breakfast-room, he found that, instead of the domestic circle he had hoped to see assembled, his brother Rafe was in solitary occupation of the field. There had never been any love lost between these two brothers, and they exchanged a very indifferent greeting now.

"So, you've got back at last, Harry!" said Rafe. "How are you, pray?"

"Very well, indeed, thank you," responded Harry, carelessly. "How are you?"

"I am as usual, thanks."

"And how are all the rest? How is my mother?"

"Much better within the last week or two, I think."

"And my father and Helen?"

"Quite well, I believe."

A few more domestic commonplaces were exchanged, and then the elder brother sauntered to the window.

"It looks pretty out on the terrace," he said. "I believe I will take a turn, until breakfast is ready. You will excuse me, Rafe?"

But, much to his surprise and not at all to his gratification, Rafe volunteered to accompany him. "You can't go far," he said; "and I am good for a short distance. Will you hand me my crutches, there?"

The crutches were handed over, and they set out together. The summer morning met them with a perfect burst of loveliness, as they stepped through the window. Roses were climbing and clustering everywhere, while beyond were the smooth lawn, park-like shrubbery, and, farther still—over beyond the orchards and meadows—a curtain of mist which marked the river, as it wound along the rich lowlands, the soft, blue hills melting away on either side. Trefalden gave a slight whistle as he stood still and looked around. It had been two years since he saw the Manor

last, and all impressions faded quickly from his mind.

"By Jove, it is lovely!" he said. "I don't believe there's a prettier place in the country. Rafe, I never saw any thing to equal it."

"It is certainly lovely," said Rafe, to whom the Manor was, next to Helen, the dearest thing in the world. "I did not know how it would strike a travelled gentleman like yourself," he went on, with an inflection of sarcasm, which his brother knew very well. "I am gratified to see that you appreciate it."

"By George! nobody could help appreciating it," said Trefalden. "I don't think it could be improved. By-the-by, are any of the country neighbors worth cultivating? We shall need to be quite gay in the course of the next fortnight, you know." (Ominous silence on Rafe's part.) "Miss Cheriton would die of the vapors, if we condemned her to a family party all the time. Have any plans for her amusement been made?"

"That is more than I can tell you. I have made none. I won't answer for the others."

"You see she leaves the gayest kind of a life in the city, to come down here; and so, of course— By Jove, Rafe! who is that?"

"Have you managed to forget Helen as well as the Manor, in the course of two years?" asked Rafe, with not a little bitterness.

But, for once, the bitterness escaped his brother's ear. He stood still and gazed in astonished admiration at the picture which a turn of the path disclosed to him. It was only Helen; but Helen was in herself a marvel, on that bright summer morning, standing among the roses like another Proserpine. She did not see the two young men, for her face was turned aside as she clipped right and left with her large garden-shears, and filled the basket which hung on her arm with roses of every hue and kind. As they paused, she was in the act of reaching after a large bud which hung just above her head. Catching the bough, she sent a shower of glittering dew and perfumed petals down upon her face, but, in spite of both, broke off the coveted blossom triumphantly, and then, turning, all in a glow, faced her cousins.

Rafe, who watched her nervously, was re-

lieved to see that she neither started nor turned pale. She looked a little surprised, then smiled, and advanced with outstretched hand.

"Welcome back, Harry," she said. "We began to fear that you had quite forsaken us."

"There was no danger of that," said Harry, a little breathlessly. "I am amazingly glad to get back," he went on, holding her hand, and gazing into her face with an admiration which enraged Rafe. "What have you been doing to yourself, Helen?" he cried, suddenly. "You were not always as pretty as this, surely?"

"One is not able to decide upon one's own looks," said Helen, smiling; "but I don't think I have improved much in these two years. Indeed, Aunt Maida says that I have decidedly gone off."

"Mamma must be blind, then. — Rafe, don't you think that she has improved wonderfully?"

But, before Rafe could reply, Helen interposed.

"You ought to remember I have not been accustomed to compliments since you went away. Besides, I can't stop to hear them now. Breakfast will be ready—I only came out for some roses to fill the vases."

"And we only came out in search of you," said Harry. "So we will go back now."

Back accordingly they went—Rafe limping grimly along, while his brother's ready compliments flowed with a facility which proved an extensive practice in this branch of social accomplishment. With this, as with every thing else, however, there is a great deal in being inspired; and no better inspiration could have been asked than Helen's face, as it looked up at her cousin. During all these years spent among women who were famous beauties and belles, Henry Trefalden had seen no face to compare with it, and the realization of this fact came to him with an amazement too deep for words.

Occasionally he had thought, with half-amused tenderness, of the pretty cousin far away in the green solitudes of the Manor, for whom he had once had a boy's sentimental fancy; but that the pretty cousin was in reality such a woman as the one before him, had never for a moment occurred to his mind. He had forgotten her face as completely as he had forgotten to how much that sentiment-



"By Jove, Rafe! who is that?"

tal fancy of which he thought so lightly had bound him. Such volatile, impressionable people are common enough in the world. No man would have stood more staunchly by a point of honor (understood as such) than Trefalden; but, what with a mind from which impressions were easily effaced, and a heart on which impressions were easily made, and a convenient habit of ignoring whatever chanced to be in the least degree disagreeable or embarrassing, he had managed to drift into a position which would have startled him if he could have seen it with—the eyes of his brother, for instance.

Fortunately, however, we do *not* "see ourselves as others see us," and so we are spared some very shocking disclosures with regard to the opinion in which we are held by our friends and relatives. Trefalden was in the best possible spirits, the best possible humor with himself and everybody else, as he sauntered along between his brother and his cousin, both of whom were puzzled, and one of whom was indignant at his light unconsciousness.

"What does he mean?" thought Helen, wistfully. "Surely he has not forgotten—every thing!"

"The insolent puppy!" thought Rafe. "He believes he can amuse himself with Helen, whenever he has nothing better to do."

Trefalden, meanwhile, was talking in the gayest and, as he flattered himself, the happiest strain imaginable.

"What delightful times we used to have, Helen!" he was saying. "They would be worth living over again, wouldn't they? Do you remember our rows on the river? By-the-by, is the boat in good order? I must certainly take you out again, and then we can talk over the old days at our leisure."

"I don't think you would find much that was worth talking over," said Helen. "Old days do well enough for sentiment, you know, but not at all for active interest.—Ah! we are just in time. Breakfast is ready, and here comes Uncle George."

Mr. Trefalden entered the dining-room door as the group of three made their appearance through the window. He was a handsome, middle-aged gentleman, of very reserved manners, who shook hands with his son as if they had met the week before, and nodded to Rafe and Helen.

"Glad to see you back, Harry," he said. "I hope you mean to spend some time with us. The country's pleasant just now, and quite a relief from the city, I should think. I trust you left Miss Cheriton well?"

"Quite well, thank you, sir," said Harry, who knew his father too well to feel at all chilled by this reception. "She sent her kind regards to my mother and yourself, and hopes to see you soon," he went on. "Her aunt and herself think of coming down next week."

"Your mother is very much pleased with her letter," said Mr. Trefalden, as if the whole affair was a matter of the most profound indifference to him. "I believe she mentioned the 20th as the date on which she will leave the city—was it not, Helen?"

During breakfast Mr. Henry Trefalden decidedly monopolized conversation, talking gayly of himself, his friends, and affairs, especially his plans for the next few weeks, *à propos* of which he announced, in an off-hand kind of way, that "Latimer" was coming down to spend some time with him.

Questioned regarding who Latimer might be, it transpired that this was a person whom not to know argued one's self unknown.

"Is it possible you never heard of him?" Trefalden asked. "So much for human greatness—and Latimer is a very great man in his own circle."

"Is it the Latimer of whom you used to talk when you were at college?" asked Helen.

"The very same."

"And in what respect has he become distinguished?"

"In his profession, for one thing. Young as he is, he has already the reputation of being one of the ablest pleaders and most brilliant speakers at the bar. His intellect is said to be so keen that even the oldest lawyers quail before him."

"I hope we shall not imitate their example," said Helen, laughing. "And is he equally a conquering hero in society?"

"Equally so. In fact, he has been the rage for a season or two; and any one who did not know him intimately could not have imagined that the indifferent hero of dinner-parties and balls was, at the same time, the hardest-working student possible to imagine. In his profession he has an amount of energy that I have never seen surpassed; but in so-

ciety you would think that his sole aim in life was to kill time and avoid being bored."

"He must be very affected."

"No, for there's a certain charm about him with it all. Women, by the scores, fall in love with him; and it is only friendly to give you a hint to look after your own heart."

"Thank you," said Helen, smiling. Then she rose from the table. "I must go to Aunt Maida now," she said. "I will send you word whether or not she feels well enough to see you this morning."

"Bring me word, please," said he, rising also, and walking with her into the hall. "Don't press mamma to see me, if she's not well enough," he went on. "You know I am good for a month at least. Indeed, I am not sure that I shall ever go away again. Every thing is so charming."

"I am glad you think so," said she, quietly; "but our monotonous life would soon grow very tiresome to a fashionable gentleman like yourself. If you support it with philosophy for a month, I shall be astonished."

"That is because you don't know—"

"What?" (as he paused.)

"Oh! a good many things. Myself for one—yourself for another."

"And Miss Cheriton for a third, no doubt. Well, I trust you may find us moderately entertaining. At least, we have every desire to be so."

"And, with the desire, the power—not to be moderately entertaining, but to be dangerously charming"—(adding, as he saw her color and draw back)—"I think I ought in consequence to write and warn Latimer."

"Do," said she, trying to speak lightly; "I give you leave to paint me in any colors sufficiently formidable to keep him away. And now a truce to nonsense, Harry—pray move aside and let me pass. Aunt Maida will wonder what keeps me."

"And when shall I see you again?"

"At dinner, probably."

"Oh, no, no!" (imploringly.) "I shall smoke a cigar on the terrace, and wait for you—as I used to do. Pray, come, Helen; I have so much to talk to you about."

"It is impossible for me to promise," said Helen, coldly. "Aunt Maida usually keeps me some time. Good-morning."

"I shall certainly look for you, and wait for you," said he.

But he looked and waited in vain. The morning passed, and no Helen came. Poor Helen! She was in her own room, fighting a battle with herself, of which that loiterer among the roses never even dreamed. His utter unconsciousness was in a manner worse than if he fully realized all that he had done. "It is I who have been mistaken from first to last," she thought; and that bitter sense of having given her heart unasked—the most bitter in the world to a sensitive woman—rushed over her like a flood. She could only soothe it by recalling words and tones which Trefalden himself had entirely forgotten, but which would certainly have startled him rudely if they could have faced him instead of those pleasant visions which curled before him with the smoke of his cigar.

II.

DURING the next week, Helen had a difficult and very trying part to play, for Trefalden was one of the large class of men who always make love to the lips that are nearest, without any regard to ties which may bind them to lips farther off. His patronizing fancy for his pretty cousin, his continual reference to those past days of which he thought so lightly, and his sublime unconsciousness of the fact that she desired to avoid him, all conspired to make this week something of a nightmare to the girl—so much of a nightmare, indeed, that she was heartily glad when the day appointed for Miss Cheriton's arrival drew near.

Punctual, for once, to an appointed date, this young lady came—her aunt and her maid and her trunks and herself—creating a sensible commotion in the Manor, which had long been unused to such fashionable incursions. Being a beauty and a belle, Miss Cheriton was well used to creating a commotion, however; and it is doubtful if she would have thought that her mission in life had been accomplished without the *éclat* and noise which invariably attended her steps. Her aunt was a wealthy and childless widow, who was chief among her loyal subjects, and whose indulgent partiality was returned by the most oppressive tyranny that can be imagined. "O Louise!" the poor lady would say when unusually ruthless demands were made upon her time, her patience, or her purse. But the force of expostulation never went further than this, and Louise never failed to come off

victor from any and every conflict that occurred. There had been some such faint show of resistance over this visit to Trefalden Manor. Mrs. Surrey had been opposed to it, but Louise had borne down all opposition in her imperious way. "If you don't want to go, auntie, you need not, of course," she said; "but I'm going, you know." In this view of the case, what could poor Mrs. Surrey do but go also? "You will be sorry, Louise, if you should not marry young Trefalden, after all," she said; "and I know you too well to be certain you'll marry him until I see you at the altar." "I'm not at all certain myself," returned Louise, carelessly; "but they say it is a beautiful old place, and I mean to go and see it."

The beautiful old place was accordingly honored by this condescension, and roused by the tide of life that rushed into it. The sober drawing-room of the Manor scarcely seemed like itself, Helen thought, as she looked round, on the evening of Miss Cheriton's first appearance. Besides the family and the two newly-arrived guests, was a third stranger who had come down to the city in Miss Cheriton's train, or, at least, on the same train as that young lady. This was Harry's distinguished friend, Mr. Latimer.

"If I had not been told that he was distinguished, I should never have suspected it," said Helen, aside to Rafe.

"Not at first, perhaps," the latter answered, "but afterward I think you would. He has more sense than I should have given the man whom Harry described, credit for. Look at his brow and at his eyes!"

"But he is not handsome at all," said Helen, half disappointed. Certainly she was right. Mr. Latimer was not handsome—thoroughly high-bred and refined in appearance, but undoubtedly not gifted with any trump cards in the way of good looks. He was small and slender, with a thin, dark face, black hair, a heavy black mustache, and eyes that should have been black also, but were, instead, of a deep violet blue, fringed by the longest and darkest of lashes—very handsome eyes, and eyes that were singularly expressive, but, unfortunately, so near-sighted that he could not have recognized his own mother at a distance of ten paces. He managed, however, to discover something in Helen which struck him as sufficiently attractive to induce him to cross the floor and make his

first effort toward cultivating her acquaintance.

"Won't the beautiful evening tempt you to follow Miss Cheriton's example and go out on the terrace, Miss Trefalden?" he asked.

"Miss Cheriton is a stranger, and has been taken out to admire the view," answered Helen, smiling. "You can imagine that it would not have the merit of novelty to me."

"But I am a stranger, too, and, though views are mostly of small importance to me, owing to my infirmity of vision, still I like to see what can be seen. Perhaps, however" (noticing that she hesitated), "you don't feel inclined to play *cicerone*?"

"Indeed, yes. I am too fond of the Manor not to be fond also of showing it off—Rafe, will you come?"

Mr. Latimer courteously seconded this request; but Rafe had sufficient discretion to excuse himself on the score of dew; so the others went off alone. The soft, fragrant evening seemed to be holding the world in a spell of beauty when they came out—the west was still glowing, and Venus alone was visible, holding her court with all the clear heaven to herself, above the golden fringe of sunset clouds.

"It is rather too late for distant effects," said Latimer, "but every thing near at hand is lovely. What an exquisite old place! Ivy and roses, and—and, as I live, a bed of lilies! Lilies are one of the few things that still retain the aroma of youth for me—I mean the aroma that every thing beautiful has for us in youth. Miss Trefalden, may I have a lily?"

"As many as you like, Mr. Latimer," said Helen, putting out her hand with a smile. She broke off one of the tall flowers, and, as she turned and held it toward him, Latimer almost caught his breath. At that moment, he could liken her to nothing save the Angel of the Annunciation. The slender, stately figure, dressed in pure white, stood outlined against the golden background of the western sky, and the whole scene, with its accessories—the hair which seemed to make a halo of glory about her head, the stainless lily in her hand—stamped themselves on his memory, and were ever afterward summoned before him by the mere fragrance of that flower, which he had said alone retained for him the aroma of youth.

"Does not this suit you?" asked Helen, who saw his hesitation, but had not vanity enough to suspect its cause.

"No other one could suit me half as well as the one you have been kind enough to choose for me," he answered, taking it as he spoke. "Now that I have it, it is like many another good gift of earth," he added, philosophically—"rather cumbersome and difficult to dispose of. What shall I do with it, Miss Trefalden? It is rather large for my button-hole, don't you think so?"

"I'm afraid I must candidly say that I do. Suppose you give it to me if you are tired of it. It will do for my hair."

"I will give it on one condition."

"What is that?"

"That I may claim it again after you have worn it."

"There must certainly be something very light about me," thought poor Helen. "Here is another man trying to amuse himself by paying me foolish compliments." Said she aloud, with very graceful dignity, "I'm afraid you forget how many other lilies there are near at hand, Mr. Latimer."

"For yourself, or for me?"

"For either or both. For me, that I may be quite independent of such an arbitrary condition—for you, that you may appreciate how much better fresh lilies are than faded ones."

"Suppose I have a fancy to prefer a faded one?"

"I decline to suppose any thing of the kind. You won't force me to the conclusion that you are a very foolish person, and that would be foolish, you know."

"Genius has its eccentricities," said Latimer, gravely. "Only shallow minds call them folly, and I'm sure you won't force me to the conclusion that you have a shallow mind."

"I should be very sorry to do so, certainly," said Helen, laughing.

In this manner they broke the ice, and advanced toward acquaintance. From the first, there was an attraction between them—a bond of sympathy, which, in the matter of friendship, is worth every thing else in the world put together. It was not so much Helen's rare beauty that struck Latimer, as the sweet, gracious charm of a character which was in truth one of the most thoroughly sympathetic that he had ever encountered.

He was a man of keen observation—a man who could read volumes where another would not decipher a line—but it was not so much observation as a certain instinct which drew him toward this girl—this fair, stainless lily, whom Henry Trefalden had once possessed, and cast aside for a pretty French rose of the finest artificial make.

"Here is our best view," said Helen, pausing at an angle of the terrace which overlooked the rolling country for a mile or two around. "It is almost too late to see it now; but, in daylight—"

"In daylight it must be lovely," said Latimer, who could barely see three yards before him. "We will certainly come out here to-morrow and enjoy it. Then we can—I beg pardon" (as a fan lightly tapped his arm)—"is that you, Miss Cheriton?"

"Don't beg pardon for not seeing me," said a silvery voice, which made Helen start in turn. "When two people are so well entertained, they don't, as a general rule, see anybody but themselves. Did I hear you really professing to admire the scenery?"

"I usually admire as much of it as I can see—which is not very much," said he. "We can afford to be incredulous of beauties that we have never seen."

"And of some which we do see—is it not so? I don't mean any thing disrespectful to the country, but I frankly confess that I much prefer animate to inanimate creation—men and women to trees and stones.—Miss Trefalden, you look quite shocked. If we are to get on at all, I must give you warning that my education has been of the most frivolous kind. I am not superior a bit—am I, Mr. Latimer? I don't care for any thing in the world except the German and flirtation—do I, Mr. Trefalden?"

Said Mr. Latimer: "When a lady abuses herself, it is a fixed article of my creed never to contradict her."

Said Trefalden: "Miss Cheriton can afford to begin an acquaintance by attempting to depreciate herself." Then, in a lower and more sentimental tone, "You care for a few things in the world besides the German and flirtation, I am sure."

"Yourself being one, of course," said she, with a laugh. "Pray don't be too sure of that—too much confidence is always unwise.—But Miss Trefalden does not say a word. I think I have certainly shocked her."

"Does candor ever shock us?" asked Helen. "Don't we rather admire it?"

"When it suits us—perhaps so. Generally, however, it is very disagreeable. If Mr. Latimer, for example, were to tell me at this moment what he thinks of me, I am sure I should find it very disagreeable."

"May I test that, Miss Cheriton?"

"Oh, pray do—your opinion is always so improving. Not in public, though" (quite hastily). "I can depreciate myself, but I will not allow any one else to depreciate me—when I can help it. We will walk back to the house, and you shall give me your dose of candor on the way."

"Suppose we defer it until we are in the house," said Latimer, who saw her drift very plainly, and had no fancy to abandon Helen for any thing so hackneyed as a flirtation with Miss Cheriton.

"That means that you are anxious to defer it indefinitely. Will the opinion be so very severe that you are afraid I cannot bear it?"

"There is but one way to answer that question."

"By letting me hear it, of course. May I take your arm? Harry and Miss Trefalden will excuse us, I am sure."

Thus unceremoniously left behind, Helen felt amused, and Trefalden not half so indignant as might perhaps be imagined. Louise was very charming, of course, and he was extremely fond of her; but there was no denying the fact that she was not half as pretty as Helen, nor—really—half so attractive. So he placed Helen's hand within his arm, took up the thread of conversation exactly where he had dropped it the evening before, and made the path to the house even longer than Miss Cheriton succeeded in doing.

Of this fact they had conclusive evidence as they neared the drawing-room, from which that young lady's voice floated out on the still night-air. She was singing to a harp-accompaniment, and, stopping at the window, Helen said, in genuine admiration, "How beautiful she looks!"

She certainly looked, if not beautiful, at least next thing to it; for where does a pretty woman appear to half so much advantage as at the most graceful instrument which the science of harmony has ever given us? With her white arms thrown across the golden strings, and her face lifted toward Latimer, so as to show off its brilliant complexion, its

large, blue eyes, and bright, brown hair, if Miss Cheriton was not exactly a sight to make an old man young, she was at least a sight to turn a young man's head; and of this fact she was completely and triumphantly conscious.

"Yes, she is extremely pretty," said Trefalden; but he said it rather coldly. "I don't like flirts, though; and Louise is a dreadful flirt."

"I fancy it is a case of Greek meeting Greek, with herself and Mr. Latimer," said Helen, laughing.

"Latimer! Oh! Latimer is a professional lady-killer. You must take care how you receive his attentions, my dear Helen" (this in a tender tone of brotherly care). "I should not like him to be able to say that he had ever flirted with you."

"I don't think there is the least probability of his being able to say so," answered Helen, coolly. "There! Miss Cheriton is calling you. Had you not better go?"

Miss Cheriton had, indeed, perceived her vassal, and did not hesitate to recall him to a due sense of his allegiance.

"Yonder's poor Harry, sulking," she said, in a confidential tone, to Latimer. And, notwithstanding that there was no trace of sulking in poor Harry's appearance, she thought it necessary to add: "I must call him, and mollify him; but, pray, don't you go."

So Trefalden was called and mollified. Where had he been all this time? They had reached the house ever so long before! Miss Trefalden was very charming, and flirting was very nice, of course; but it wasn't very proper—was it, Mr. Latimer?

Mr. Latimer replied that, in his humble opinion, it was a highly moral amusement, but he would not presume to contradict such high authority on the subject as Miss Cheriton was well known to be.

Mr. Trefalden protested against such a word being applied to his cousin and himself. They were like brother and sister; they had known each other from their earliest childhood.

"Oh, I quite understand that kind of thing!" said Miss Cheriton, gayly. "I had a cousin once—a dear, adorable fellow—and, when anybody said any thing of a disagreeable nature, I always answered: 'What! Alfred? How absurd! Why, I've known Alfred all my life.'"

"And that argument had a silencing effect, I presume?"

"Invariably. So, you see, I can appreciate the full force of it."

Helen, meanwhile, entered, and looked round for Rafe. She thought he had made his escape, until she heard him call her name from the back drawing-room, where the light was dim. Following the sound, she found him lying on a couch near the arch which divided the apartments.

"What are you doing here, dear?" she asked. "Don't you find it dull?"

"How could it possibly be dull with such admirable opportunity for observing human nature?" asked he. "Sit down, Helen. That scene at the harp is worth studying, I assure you. I am anxious to see how long Miss Cheriton will succeed in keeping both objects of her game under her hand and in full view."

"As long as she pleases, I suppose," said Helen. "No doubt, they are both anxious to stay."

"Hum!" said Rafe, "I have my own opinion on that score. However, we shall see."

In less than five minutes they saw Latimer leave the harp, and saunter up to his hostess. Ten minutes were given to the demands of courtesy. Then, by deliberate degrees, he neared the arch where Helen and Rafe were sitting.

"How delightfully sheltered you are!" he said. "May I share your retreat?"

"We are Arabian in our hospitality," responded Rafe, smiling. Then, aside to Helen: "The question is, how long will he be allowed to stay?"

That question was settled almost as soon as the other. One swift glance of Miss Cheriton's eyes took in the state of affairs. Before very long, her voice sounded a recall.

"Mr. Latimer, where have you vanished to?—Anny dear, do you know where Mr. Latimer is?—Oh" (with the most innocent face imaginable), "there you are! I beg a thousand pardons; I had no idea you were so pleasantly engaged. I was only going to say I would sing *your* song for you now; but, of course, it does not matter."

Of course, Latimer was in duty bound to rise and go to the harp, to bend over it and to listen, while his song was sung with glances that might have melted a heart of stone. Of

course, Trefalden did not find this very soothing to his feelings; so, with something of genuine indignation this time, he, in turn, sought Helen. Of course, in due season, Miss Cheriton was graciously pleased to recall him; and so the game went on, shifting its combinations, to Rafe's infinite entertainment. When Helen bade him good-night, she could not help asking what he thought of his future sister-in-law; and his answer amused her a little, for he merely shrugged his shoulders, and quoted two lines from a ballad over which they had often laughed:

"He said I kept him off and on in hopes of higher game,
And it may be that I did, mother; but who hasn't done the same?"

III.

DURING the next day Helen began to feel a little puzzled, and somewhat dismayed, with regard to Miss Cheriton. What she had expected in Harry's *fiancée*, she would have found it difficult to define; but, at least, it was certain that this young lady, so full of vivacity in masculine and so listless, in feminine society—this young lady who, engaged to one man, was jealously anxious to secure the attentions of another—did not in any respect correspond with her shadowy idea. In fact, she was a new revelation to the girl whose life had been formed on such a very different model. A certain monotonous round of duties had made the occupation of Helen's existence; and her walks, her flowers, her studies, and Rafe, its amusements. Was it singular, therefore, that she listened with surprise to the record of a life made up of visits, balls, regattas, admirers, dresses—all the light froth of that lightest kind of society which calls itself "the fashionable world?" On her side, Miss Cheriton was, if any thing, more astonished. That any one could really support an existence like that of Helen was beyond her powers of imagination. The two women looked at each other across a gulf which they had no means of spanning. There was no middle ground, no neutral territory of taste or knowledge, on which they could meet; and such a neutral ground is essential, not only to friendship, but to any thing like cordial acquaintance. They were both young; they were both pretty; and they were as different as the opposite poles! The only thing they owned in common was a cer-

tain feeling of antagonism, of which Helen was conscious in a slight and Miss Cheriton in a very marked degree.

Other days were not much better than this day; that is, there was not much more of a friendly understanding between the two women whom malicious Fate had chosen to array against each other as rivals. It was a queer game of cross-purposes which went on at the Manor during this time. Rafe, who was a quiet looker-on, perhaps understood more of its drift and purpose than any one else—either then or afterward. He had something of an interest in watching it, too, besides his interest in Helen; for he soon grew to like Latimer with a very cordial liking, and observation less keen than his might readily have perceived that to this eager, ambitious man, this man crowned with the world's honors, and panting for the world's applause, the world itself began to narrow down into that spot which was brightened by the light of Helen Trefalden's eyes. It is said that such an hour comes once at least in every man's life. Whether this be true or not, the hour certainly came to Latimer now. Indeed, it is doubtful if he had ever before known any thing more than transient fancies; so, when the flood-gates were lifted at last, and a passion stronger and deeper for the long delay rushed in upon him, his profound worldly training stood him in little stead, and he knew scarcely more than the merest boy what were the chances for and against him with the woman whom, alone of all the women he had ever seen, he desired and resolved to call his own.

Alas! the verdict against him was a short one—he came too late! There are some natures—fortunately very rare ones—which, having once given affection, are wholly unable to recall it, however cruelly it may be wasted, however thoroughly trust may fail. Helen's was one of these. Hers was a heart so gentle, so loving, so faithful even unto death, that it merited a better fate than the one which had befallen it. This heart, which some men would have died to win, or would have worn like a diamond on the breast which had won it, this heart had been given to one man who held it lightly in his hand till he wearied of it, and then flung it down in the dust of the roadside, from which not even he could ever lift it again. Rafe alone appreciated this, and groaned to himself as he per-

ceived that the power which should have made the glory and happiness of his cousin's life—her indomitable constancy—was like a sharp sword turned against herself. It would have wrecked his existence to have parted with her, he thought, but still he could have done it, he could have given her to Latimer, who was worthy of her, Latimer on whom every man's eye was turned in envy, and every woman's in admiration; and the bitterness lay in thinking that this which could never be, might have been, but for a frivolous, empty puppy (so Rafe did not hesitate to designate his brother), with neither heart nor soul worthy of the name.

It was small consolation to perceive how constant and unrelenting were Miss Cheriton's exertions to attach Latimer to her chariot-wheels, and how completely they failed! This was not only because a stronger and a deeper power was at work with him. Under any circumstances, her blandishments were too transparent, her arts were too commonplace, her object was too plain, for any hope of success. Latimer merely laughed and shrugged his shoulders, amused himself a little—not enough to give occasion for any serious triumph—and let the battery of fascination play harmlessly on his coat-of-mail. She was a pretty woman, he told Rafe, but pretty women were common, and, for his part, he had been surfeited with them in the way of flirtation. "Miss Cheriton has not even the merit of being a first-class coquette," he added. "She goes over the beaten path, and knows only the most hackneyed arts of her profession." Miss Cheriton, however, did not despair. She had that regal trust in herself, and in her own power of achieving any thing, which is said to be one of the characteristics of genius. She had long looked upon Latimer with covetous eyes, and a better opportunity than the present her heart could not have desired. A country-house, with unlimited opportunities for fascination, the field all to herself, and her only rival a girl who had never been in society—what more was possible to ask? True, success did not crown her efforts quite as rapidly as she expected. But she had time and strategy at command, so she did what many an abler general has found himself obliged to do—she waited.

Meanwhile, Trefalden—animated by Latimer's example—was veering nearer and nearer to his cousin, his fickle fancy wander-

ing daily farther and farther from the place where it was, or should have been, bound by his honor. Some men do not appreciate any thing—be it wife, or horse, or house, or jewels—until it bears the stamp of other admiration besides their own; and Trefalden was especially of this class. Helen's beauty had very nearly taken his heart (or whatever did duty for that organ) by storm, when he saw her on the terrace under the roses. But even then she had only been to him his cousin, the "little Helen" whom he had petted and patronized in boyhood. Now all this was changed. Now he saw a woman at whom he looked with Latimer's eyes, admired with Latimer's admiration, wellnigh loved with Latimer's love—only Latimer's was the real article, and his the spurious imitation. He entertained a shrewd suspicion that Louise was playing fast and loose with him, and he would not have had the least scruple in playing fast and loose with her in return. If Helen bore the least liking to him, she had only to give a sign. He, for his part, was the more ready to meet her half-way.

"What a glorious night!" said Latimer, one evening, as he stepped through the dining-room window out on the terrace, where the silver radiance of the full moon made almost the brightness, without any of the heat, of day. "Isn't it possible to do something more than merely enjoy it here? Can't we go to the river and take a row?"

"Charming!" cried Miss Cheriton, who was close behind him. "Of course we can't we, Harry? I should like nothing better."

"I see no objection," said Harry. "The boat is in order, I suppose—is it not, Helen?"

"Yes, the boat is in very good order," answered Helen; "at least it was on Saturday morning when Mr. Latimer and myself—" she paused a moment, as Miss Cheriton's eyes turned quickly upon her, then quietly went on—"when Mr. Latimer and myself took a short row."

"So rowing is one of the features of your walks with Mr. Latimer?" said Miss Cheriton, a little sharply. "It is fortunate that you were careful not to say any thing about it, or you might have had an addition to your party, and that would not have been pleasant—would it?"

"We are plainly expected to say No, Miss

Trefalden. Suppose we say it? I always like to do what is expected of me."

"Especially when it is entirely compatible with the strictest truth," retorted the young lady. "Of course, Miss Trefalden would say No if she was as candid as yourself. Pray, don't be afraid, however. We will be considerate enough to do our rowing by moonlight, so as not to interfere with yours by daylight."

"There are two boats on the river," said Latimer, with the utmost gravity. "If Harry and yourself choose to follow our example to-morrow, we will give you the full benefit and free use of the stream."

"Thanks, for myself," said Harry, indolently; "but I believe I prefer to take the full benefit and free use of it to-night.—Helen, shall we leave them to finish their discussion at their leisure?"

Helen assented; but, for once, Miss Cheriton seemed disposed to assert a claim to her vassal. "There is no discussion to be finished," said she, hastily. "Don't be so inconsiderate as to carry off Miss Trefalden, Harry. I am coming with you; but, if I go without my scarf, my dear, foolish aunt will preach about it for the next month. Wait for me a moment."

She went into the house; but Harry proved singularly disobedient to orders. "You can wait for her, Latimer," he said. "Helen and I will walk on slowly, and, no doubt, you will overtake us before we reach the river."

Helen and himself walked on slowly—who does not walk slowly on a moonlight summer night?—but the result which was to follow did not come to pass. Mr. Latimer and Miss Cheriton did not overtake them before they reached the river; nor, in fact, after they had done so. Helen negatived Harry's proposal of going on the water immediately, and insisted on waiting for the others; but waiting was in vain. They did not come. And, after nearly an hour had passed, the inference was plain that they did not mean to come.

"We had better go back," said Helen, gravely, for she stood in considerable awe of Miss Cheriton's mocking tongue. "Something must have occurred to detain them, Harry."

"Some fit of Louise's caprice has occurred to detain them," said Harry. "Nothing else, I am sure. She grows more wilful and capricious every day," he added, in a tone of

very unloverlike irritation. "We need not let her spoil our pleasure, Helen. Since we have walked down here, we must certainly have a row."

"I really think we had better go back," said Helen. She did not like to say "we must," for was not this Harry, and did it not seem absurd to think that it could possibly be "not proper" to go anywhere with him? Yet an instinct warned her against the pleasure which was as much a temptation to herself as to him, and she rose and turned away from the river as she repeated, for the fourth time, "We had better go back."

"Nonsense!" said Harry. "Here is the boat—come! I assure you I am not going back."

"But, Harry—"

"Come!" said Harry.

He sprang into the boat as he spoke, and pushed it near the shore, then turned and held out his hand to assist her into it. The great, broad river, with the moonlight silvering its current, flowed majestically by; the drooping shade, that fringed its banks, looked dark and mysterious; the little boat rocked on the water as Trefalden leaned forward, and Helen stood on the bank—hesitating, longing—unable to stay, yet certain that it was unwise to go. For a moment the soft rush of the river was the only sound that broke the stillness. Then—

"Helen," said Trefalden, in a tone strangely earnest, "won't you come? Why should you hesitate? Remember how often we have been here before."

"I remember," said Helen, in a low voice.

"Then why should you hesitate now? Helen"—pleadingly—"give me one happy hour—one hour like the dear old times. It is little to you, it is much to me—come!"

Poor Helen! Can any one blame her that she went? It seemed so little, and yet—it was so much! Why should she not taste the happy hour of which he spoke, and dream one last dream of the old time before she put its memory from her forever? It seemed so little, and Harry was only Harry, after all; her cousin, almost her brother, by right of long companionship. So she laid her hand in the one outstretched for it, stepped into the boat, and a moment later the oars had been plunged into the water, and they were gliding down the stream.

It was a night of which to dream—soft,

magical, almost unearthly in its beauty. For a long time they were both silent; then Trefalden looked at his companion, who sat opposite him, and spoke quite abruptly.

"Do you know what I wish, Helen?—what I would at this moment give any thing in the world to accomplish?"

"How should I know?" asked Helen. She did not look at him, but kept her eyes fixed dreamily on the shore past which they were gliding.

"I wish," said Trefalden, with passionate emphasis, "that you and I were cut off from every other human being, and drifting toward a home and a life of our own, far from anybody and everybody else of whom we know."

Helen started. There was that in the speaker's tone which was more than his words, and which warned her instantly that she had been unwise to come. Something made a great leap into her throat and frightened her. It was the very consciousness of her own weakness which gave her strength to answer.

"How absurd, Harry!" she said—trying, ah! so hard to speak lightly—"we are as much cut off at present as you could possibly desire. There is not the least need to wish for a desert island in which we could sigh for company and civilization to our hearts' content."

"Don't jest," said Trefalden, in a tone of absolute pain. "Don't—don't try to ward off serious truth like this, Helen! You know what I mean," he said, with sudden passion; "you don't need for me to tell you how much I love you! you must believe it, for you must see how it has mastered every thought and faculty of my whole being, until silence is beyond my power!"

"Harry," said Helen, gravely—and something in her tone reminded him of the manner in which she had often curbed his wayward humors as a boy—"Harry, it is not possible you mean to make me regret having trusted myself with you? What is the sense of such wild words as these? I am loath to think that you would willingly wrong or pain me, yet you are doing both now."

"Can I wrong or pain you by telling you how I love you?"

"Yes," said Helen, and a flash of very unusual resentment came into her eyes. "You do both, when you use such words to me! Do you think I am a toy to serve your

amusement?" she asked, with a vibration of passion deeper even than his own, stirring through her voice. "You are engaged to Miss Cheriton, and yet you venture to tell me that you love me. What am I to think of you after that?"

"To think that Miss Cheriton is nothing to me, and that you are every thing," said he, recklessly. "I fling her, and every thought of her, to the winds. I am yours, Helen, and it is for you to say what you will do with me."

"And your honor?" asked Helen, bitterly, "where is that?"

Even in the moonlight she could see that a dark flush came over his face.

"My honor is safe in my own keeping," he said, haughtily. "I break no faith in breaking with a woman like Louise Cheriton. She means to marry me only in case she cannot secure higher game. You see what she is, Helen. You cannot blame me that I put her out of my life without even a consideration."

"But I do blame you," said Helen, coldly. "What is more, I do not believe that a Trefalden can forget that a gentleman owes it to himself to keep his faith unbroken. You are talking wildly, Harry—you are not yourself. Let us try and forget this."

"You are talking the foolish common-places of a woman," said Harry, impatiently. "Forget it! A man does not forget what is written on his heart in letters of fire! Helen, you must forgive me if I speak plainly—this is no time for paltering; and, one way or another, my fate must be fixed to-night. Memories which I had forgotten, or carelessly laid aside, have come to me of late, and I—I think that perhaps two years ago, you loved me. If so, all this has come on me as a punishment for my own blind folly. Helen, was it so?"

There was a deep silence. How could Helen put herself in this man's power by acknowledging what she had hidden so carefully from every one save Rafe, and yet—how could she deny the truth when brought face to face with it? Such denial would have been easy to some women, but it was not easy to her. Truth was, and had always been, to her a grand, severe power, with which it was impossible to trifle. Her face was so pale that it looked like sculptured marble in the moonlight as she answered:

"You have no right to ask me that question."

"I have a right," said Trefalden, vehemently, "or else, by Heaven! I will make one! Helen"—he dropped the oar, and seized her fragile, passive hands—"you would not evade the point if you could deny it. You did love me, and, by that love, I claim you. My first duty is to you—was to you, when I forsook you for that vain, frivolous—"

"Hush!" said Helen; and, by a supreme effort, she wrenched her hands out of his clasp, and looked at him in the silvery moonlight with a face that was set and stern. "You lower yourself even more than you lower me by such words as these! I will not listen to them. Turn the boat around, and take me back to the shore. I demand it."

"It shall drift on forever before I turn back, unless I hear the truth," answered he. "Helen, you do right to resent the love of a man who is as fickle as I have been. But try to remember—try to be reasonable—think that I was little more than a boy when I left here, that I went into the world with a head and a heart equally ready to be turned by its follies, and that I was sufficiently unworthy of you to suffer the remembrance of you to pass from me; but, in thinking of this, that I come back from the world only to realize what you are, only to see and feel how mad I have been in leaving gold for dross, and to place my heart again where it was long ago—where, in truth, I think it has always been—in your keeping. Helen, surely it is not too late?"

The passion of this appeal seemed to shake her, for she shivered all over, then clasped her hands firmly together, and answered him gravely and sadly:

"Yes, it is too late."

"Too late!" The handsome face paled—flushed—and paled again. "You mean that you have ceased to love me, or that you have learned to love Latimer?"

"I mean," she said—and her voice seemed to thrill him with its deep, mournful pathos—"that it is too late for you, and too late for me, Harry. Too late for you, because you are engaged to Miss Cheriton; too late for me, because, if you were free as air, I would not marry you."

He looked at her steadily. It was a strange duel of conflicting resolution to take place out

there on the broad, moonlit river, between these two who had once loved each other with the tender romance of early youth.

"Why not?" he asked, huskily.

"There is no need of forcing me to tell you," she answered. "All this is very useless. Let us go back."

"Why not?" he repeated once more, and the deep, passionate resolve of his eyes told Helen that the question must be answered, that no evasion would be possible or even safe. Then, as it were, she girded up her strength and answered him—answered him in words which, to his dying day, he never forgot.

"I will tell you why not," she said. "It is because I once loved you, and, through that love, learned to know you. It is not for me to speak of what I hoped—leaning on your own promise—when you went away. It is not worth while, either, to speak of what I suffered when I realized that you had quite forgotten me. That pain, bitter as it was, is over now. But you took from me something which neither you nor any one else can ever give back." She paused a moment, and looked wistfully away from him—far over the hills softened by the misty moonlight, and the dark shadows of the drooping woods—then, very quietly, she went on: "I do not know whether or not it was that I poured out the whole treasure of love wastefully, and so have none left, but my heart lies like a stone. Your words, your tones to-night have made it ache, but that is all. I did not realize, until I heard you speak as you have done, how far removed you are from me. Once I was yours, to have done with me what you would: now I could not be more dead to you if I were in my grave. That is my answer. So long as we both live, there is none other possible between us."

The clear, chill tones—chill, and yet strangely gentle—ceased. Their last musical vibration died away, and only the rush of the river sounded in Trefalden's ears. He said not a word, his lips were parched, and he could not speak. Something like a bitter sense of the inevitable seemed weighing him down. Speak? What could he say? Man as he was, and full even to arrogance of conscious power, he felt in every fibre that the resolution of this fragile girl was like iron, that he might dash himself and all his strength vainly against it. So he uttered not a syllable. He only turned the boat

around, and began steadily rowing against the current back to the place of landing.

As they reached the bank, and as Helen was preparing to rise and step on shore, he spoke for the first time, his voice sounding unlike itself, and wonderfully distinct on the still night air:

"Helen, you need not think that I shall accept your decision as final. A man cannot surrender without a struggle the only hope which makes his life. I love you, I have always loved you, and I shall always love you. Remember this, and remember also that I am simply waiting to see what you will do with this love."

Before Helen could reply, even by a single word, there was a sound on the shore that made them both start—a suppressed exclamation, a crackling twig evidently crushed by a hasty foot, and from behind a group of trees Miss Cheriton stepped full into the moonlight, facing them both.

IV.

WHEN Miss Cheriton, after considerable delay, came out with a light scarf becomingly twined around her, and found only Latimer waiting for her, it is doubtful, to say the least, if her disappointment was very extreme.—"What, has Harry gone?" she said, in a tone of slightly-piqued astonishment. But Latimer's "I let him go because I thought you might give me this opportunity to make my peace," was sufficient to banish any cloud from her brow.

"Your peace!" repeated she, slipping her white hand through the arm which he offered, and leaning heavily upon it, as they walked down the terrace steps. "You know as well as I do that there is no peace to be made. Of course I have no right to be offended, however plainly you may show me or tell me that you prefer Miss Trefalden's society to mine."

"It would be unfortunate for me if I chanced to prefer yours," said Latimer, in his cool fashion; "considering that Trefalden has a legal claim to its monopoly."

"Not quite a legal claim yet," said she, with superb carelessness. "And it would be a wise man, indeed, who could prophesy with certainty that he ever will have. That is all nonsense, Mr. Latimer; and you know me well enough to be sure of it."

"What is all nonsense?" asked Mr. Latimer.

mer. "Your engagement to Trefalden? Poor fellow! For his sake, I hope not."

"I was not speaking of my engagement," said she. "But I was never one of the people who have severe ideas about such things. Many engagements are only made to be broken; and I am inclined to think it would be a good thing if more of them were. If I should think it worth while to dismiss Harry to-morrow, I don't flatter myself that he would suffer in any way—save, perhaps, from a little wounded vanity. His devotion to his cousin is really quite edifying." (Then, after a pause,) "I wonder *you* are not jealous."

"Of you? He might consider that presumptuous."

"I was not speaking of myself. Miss Trefalden, I am sure, will not think it presumptuous if you were jealous of her."

"Harry is a capital fellow," said Latimer, who was plainly resolved against bringing Miss Trefalden's name into the conversation. "I really don't know a better one, Miss Cheriton. I would think twice, if I were you, before I made his attentions to his cousin a reason for that dismissal of which you speak."

"You don't suppose I'm thinking of his attentions to his cousin," said Miss Cheriton, with a rising color, which shone even in the moonlight. "Of course, they signify nothing, except that he is fond of amusing himself with anybody who is good material for amusement; and *that*" (with a scornful accent) "Miss Trefalden certainly seems to be. I was thinking of myself alone when I said, or meant to say, that I should not allow myself to be fettered by any engagement an hour longer than I chose to do so."

Said Mr. Latimer, in a tone the satire of which the young lady was happily unable to appreciate, "Your sentiments, I perceive, are broadly liberal with regard to how far a woman's word may be taken as her bond."

"I think that a woman as impulsive as I am is liable to make mistakes," said she, somewhat sentimentally; "and that it would be hard if my whole life had to bear the penalty of them from a mistaken sense of honor about breaking my word. Is it possible that you would condemn me to it?"

"I!" shrugging his shoulders slightly. "I am the most amiable man in the world. I never condemn anybody to any thing—even in theory. Sometimes, however, I recommend them to remember that 'the quality of

mercy is not strained,' and that it is never more gracefully exercised than by a beautiful woman."

"Keep your well-turned periods for your speeches!" said she, tapping him on the arm. "Listen to me gravely and seriously now, for I have something that I want to ask you. Here is a pleasant place—suppose that we sit down and talk at our leisure?"

"But the boating," said Latimer, a little aghast. "Harry and Miss Trefalden will be waiting for us."

"Let them wait," with admirable nonchalance; "they are very well able to entertain each other, you may be sure. I have a fancy to sit down just here under this splendid tree."

"By all means gratify it, then," said Latimer, with an audible sigh of resignation. "I only hope we may not surprise a family party of rattlesnakes," he added, following her example, and seating himself on the branching roots of a giant oak that stood by the wayside.

But Miss Cheriton was quite insensible to any fear of rattlesnakes. Perhaps she knew that, as a general rule, they prefer less civilized haunts. At all events, she sank down in a picturesque attitude, and leaned against the massive trunk, looking certainly very lovely as the moonlight shimmered down through the thick foliage on her white dress and upturned face.

"Suppose," said she, after a while, "I were to tell you that I—I had almost made up my mind to break my engagement with Harry. What would you think?"

Latimer shrugged his shoulders. "I should probably think that you had grown tired of it," said he, dryly.

"I am in earnest," said she, a little petulantly. "Pray talk to me seriously and—as a friend. I"—a droop of the head—"I am sadly uncertain what to do, and I need the advice of a friend very much."

"As a friend, Miss Cheriton, I should be very happy to serve you; but advising you is a height to which modesty forbids me to aspire."

"I am sure no one could advise me better than yourself."

"You are mistaken"—it was doubtful whether the scene was beginning to be most amusing or most boring to him—"a man must have certain fixed ideas and principles

before he can venture to advise. Now, I have none."

"But you know what you *think*."

"I assure you that, nine times out of ten, I don't even know what I think. Sad, isn't it? But you see what a very unsafe mentor I should make."

"Still"—clinging to her point with determined obstinacy—"you must advise me! You know Harry, and—and—I think you know me. Now, tell me frankly, do you think there is any hope of happiness for us together? Do you think we suit?"

"My dear Miss Cheriton," said Latimer, laughing, "you ask me a hard question. Do I think you suit? My impression was that you suited remarkably well. But really, in that, as in every thing else, the only person able to judge is the person immediately concerned?"

"You—you think I could be happy with him?"

"He is such a good fellow, that I don't see how any woman could fail to be happy with him."

"It shows how little you know of me," said she, bitterly, and turned her face aside.

Poor woman! The pangs of wounded vanity are sometimes as sharp as the pangs of disappointed love, and she was scarcely less to be pitied because her object had been so petty, and her means so unworthy. Woman of the world as she was, she knew perfectly well how far she had stooped to this man—and, now that she had failed completely, this knowledge was very hard to bear. At that moment such a swift, sudden rage and mortification flamed up in her heart, that she could have lifted her hand and struck him as he sat beside her so cool, so quiet, so entirely beyond her power of moving. Years afterward, when their paths of life had branched far apart, she could never even hear his name without seeing again the silvery moonlight, the softly-swelling fields, the gnarled roots of the old oak, and the little scene, as brightly and vividly as she saw it that night, without feeling again the same bitter tide of emotion which she felt as she turned from him, conscious that he understood her, and that all further efforts were hopeless.

Latimer was the first to break the silence which ensued, speaking more gently and considerately than was often the case with him.

Perhaps he knew as well as Miss Cheriton herself what was passing in her mind.

"Don't you think we had better go on to the river? It is very charming and comfortable here; but, no doubt, Harry and Miss Trefalden are waiting for us."

"Certainly, by all means, let us go," said she, rising and accepting, without a word, the arm which he offered.

When they reached the river, they found, naturally enough, that Harry and Miss Trefalden were gone. One of the boats had also vanished, and Miss Cheriton declined Latimer's proposal that they should embark in the other. "We will sit here and wait a while," said she. "If they don't come soon, we can return to the house." She did not add, but Latimer was perfectly aware, that she would have gone back at once but for her determination to avoid another long *tête-à-tête* with himself. She had the desire, not uncommon with her sex when stung by one man's neglect, to turn to another of whose allegiance she was sure, to find in his homage a salve for a wounded pride, and in his appreciation recompense for the other's blindness. It would make a queer little chapter in those affairs commonly called "of the heart," if many a successful suitor could know the secret of the rebound in which he has caught his prize. "I will wait for Harry," said she, coldly. And, in truth, at that moment, she felt a positive tenderness for Harry. He, at least, was hers—hers triumphantly and alone. She had one faithful vassal, at least, and in that thought was something like balm.

So they sat down under a clump of trees and waited until round the bend of the stream the boat came in sight. Its appearance was welcome to both watchers; and, as Trefalden—who was putting all his energy into his strokes—sent it rapidly toward the bank, Miss Cheriton gave undisguised expression to her relief.

"It looks pleasant," she said, "and how well Harry rows! I think I shall make him take me out on the water. You"—an irrepressible accent of bitterness—"will be glad of that, Mr. Latimer."

"I am always glad of your enjoyment," responded Mr. Latimer, in his usual tone. "But, of course, you cannot expect me to be glad of my own desolation."

"A desolation easily consoled by Miss Trefalden. Hush, here they come! Let us

say nothing, and surprise them when they have landed."

Never was the trite phrase, that surprises are always ill-judged, better exemplified than on this occasion. The boat shot up to the shore, Helen rose to step out, and Trefalden, extending his hand, stopped her.

Now, when Miss Cheriton came forward and faced the two cousins, with all the bearing of a tragedy-queen, it was certainly only natural that they should have quailed a little. Partly from consternation, but more from sheer surprise, Trefalden uttered an exclamation, while Helen drew back a step, saying:

"Miss Cheriton!"

"Yes," said Miss Cheriton, in a tone which scarcely sounded like her own, so entirely was she overwhelmed by a flood of mortified rage, and that keen, bitter sense of betrayal which is certainly the hardest thing in the world to bear. "Yes, Miss Trefalden, it is I! You did not count on a witness to your love-scene, I suppose; but I could not resist the temptation of letting you know that I had unintentionally been one, and of expressing"—she nearly choked here—"my appreciation of that fine sense of honor which seems, in an especial manner, to distinguish your family."

"Louise," said Trefalden, hastily stepping forward, "you do not understand—you are laboring under a great mistake. You—"

"Will you be kind enough to keep back?" said she, recoiling from his hand, and looking at him with eyes of fiery scorn. "How do you presume to address me, after—after what I heard? Do you imagine that I will ever speak to you again? Do you suppose that our engagement does not end this moment? Do you think that to-morrow I will recognize you as an acquaintance? If I were a man, I might tell you what I think of you—but a woman is debarred even from the use of words!"

"Tell me, by all means," said he, drawing up his tall figure and looking at her bitterly. "Perhaps I may be able to reciprocate your good opinion. If I have talked love to another woman, it certainly has been no fault of yours if you have not listened to it from another man."

The truth of this taunt made it sting more deeply than it is possible for words to express—all the more deeply, too, because Latimer was near, and could not fail to remember the overtures made to him less than an hour before. First crimson, then pale, then crim-

son again, Miss Cheriton set her teeth, and answered through them, when she could sufficiently command her voice to speak at all:

"So you think to excuse your own treachery by insulting me! Such conduct is in admirable keeping with all the rest; but, whether or not it does you credit, I leave you to determine. As for your cousin"—turning to Helen, who stood by, white, silent, and stately, with one hand pressed on her heart—"I owe her an apology for my inopportune appearance. It seems that, having failed with Mr. Latimer, she has successfully turned her attention to yourself."

"With regard to Helen," began Trefalden, in baughty anger; but Helen silenced him by a motion of her hand. Then, taking a single step forward, she addressed Miss Cheriton.

"It is useless for me to say how much I regret that this scene should have occurred," she said, quietly. "Since it has done so, I see nothing for me but to retire from it. My justification rests with my cousin; and, under any circumstances, I decline to enter into a recrimination of charges which I have too much self-respect either to notice or resent."

Her tone, her manner, her whole bearing, was so full of rare and perfect dignity that, for a moment, she almost seemed to elevate the scene in which she chanced to play a part, and, for a moment, absolutely made the angry woman before her realize the humiliating folly of her passionate outbreak. But it was only for a moment. The calm tones had scarcely ceased to speak, when a scornful answer was returned.

"It would have been fortunate if your self-respect had asserted itself a little sooner, Miss Trefalden—let us say, for example, before you became a plaything for two men, neither of whom has ever dreamed of any thing but his own amusement."

Hardly had these words been uttered, when, to the astonishment of both Helen and Trefalden, Latimer stepped forward from the leafy screen where he had still lingered, and, taking his place by Helen's side, coolly addressed Miss Cheriton:

"You have done me the honor of associating my name with that of Miss Trefalden," he said. "I hope she will forgive me for making such a declaration in public, but, in reply to your last remark, there is nothing left me but to say that I love her as a man only loves the woman whom he wishes to

marry, and that my most earnest hope is that this love will one day enable me to win her."

For a minute these words were followed by an absolute stillness. Knowing only the artificial side of this man's character, two, at least, of his astonished listeners were unable to realize that it was indeed he who made this simple expression of frank resolution and earnest meaning. They looked at him in half-incredulous amazement, while he—well, it is doubtful whether, at that instant, he did not forget their very existence. At the conclusion of his sentence, he turned toward Helen, and met her soft, dark, pathetic eyes. For a minute, they stood looking at each other in silence. Then Miss Trefalden extended her hand, with a gesture which Latimer never forgot—extended it, not as she might have done to a lover, but rather as to a friend who had performed some generous service in her behalf.

"Thank you," she said, softly, with the graceful and gracious charm which Nature had set like a royal seal upon her. "You are very good—very kind. I understand why you have spoken, but you must try to forget—" She stopped suddenly, and pressed both hands over her heart. Something like a look of terror came into her eyes. She struggled for a moment with an incapacity to speak, then, saying brokenly, "It is too late!" fell forward.

Latimer caught her in his arms, and, kneeling with one knee on the ground, supported her figure. At first he thought she had only fainted—but, in a few minutes, the awful truth came to him. The fierce strain of emotion had done its work with merciful quickness. Too much of sharp tension had been laid on the heart, and the great organ of life had ceased its work forever. Miss Cheriton's unintentional rival lay dead before her.

THE END.

MY STORY.

I.

AS clearly as if it were yesterday, I remember that sombre November evening when I met Ross Kendall first. The luxury of a fire in my own room was an extravagance unknown in the close economy which governed the domestic arrangements of Kendall Manor. Tired, therefore, of my seat in a corner by the sitting-room fire; tired of watching Uncle Kendall's grave, rugged face, as he sat with an account-book open on his knee, running his bony finger slowly down the column of figures, and only acknowledging my presence by a frown if I made any noise; tired of seeing Mrs. Kendall (not wife, but sister-in-law and house-keeper of this autocrat) nod over her knitting; tired of the tall clock's drowsy ticking in one corner; tired of my odd, dog-eared volume of "The Days of Bruce;" and most tired of all of myself, I rose at last, slipped out of the room without eliciting any thing more than a growl from my affectionate guardian, and, bringing a shawl down from my chamber, wrapped it about me, preparatory to setting out for a walk.

Even yet I seem to feel the sharp, raw air—laden with coming rain—that rushed over me as I closed the hall-door, and stood on the broad stone steps which led down to the avenue. The sky was overcast with lowering masses of gray cloud, scudding along before some wind-storm of the upper air, and showing not a single rift in their sullen gloom. The brown earth was strewn with fallen leaves, while the gaunt, bare branches of the

tall oaks seemed pointing like spectral fingers to the lowering sky. It was not a particularly cheerful afternoon for out-door exercise; but down the steps I went, and was soon tramping along the avenue as if intent on an errand of life and death. How clearly I recall, at this moment, the peculiar, pungent odor of the dead leaves over which I trod! If I should live to count fourscore years, I think this fragrance of the autumn will always bring back with strange vividness that gray afternoon rapidly closing into twilight, the sobbing *miserere* which the bare trees seemed to be sighing over their fallen glory, and the shabby little figure in a much-worn shawl, executing a movement very like a military "double-quick" toward the gate.

Fortunately, this gate was not very distant, and I reached it before long. There I paused, and, leaning my head against the bars, looked as wistfully through them as if I had been a Peri, and the common, beaten high-road running past, a paradise. As I look, I remember that a wild desire came over me to lift the heavy latch and go forth to the freedom which lay beyond. What if I was but a girl—a homeless waif whom Uncle Kendall fed and clothed out of charity—the world was wide, and surely *somewhere* within its borders I should find the loving hearts and the happy home of which I dreamed. God knows my life has not been a bright one since that time, but something like the pity which we feel for a stranger comes over me as I think of the desolate child who stood there on that evening—burning with a fierce fever of unrest, and pondering in the vague,

wild fashion of youth, whether she should not make one desperate effort to break the dull stagnation of a life narrow and sordid beyond any powers of expression.

I had not quite decided the question in the affirmative, when I heard the sound of a horse's hoofs coming at a sharp trot along the road. I did not even turn my head in the direction whence the sound came. Some belated farmer going home, no doubt, or perhaps some one of the young gentlemen who occasionally rode past Kendall—sons of the large land-owners in its neighborhood. They were nothing to me—I knew none of them. Friend or associate, admirer or lover, I had not in the world. Shielded, therefore, by the gathering gloom, I kept my position—only starting suddenly from my abstraction when the horseman stopped.

Stopped at the gate of Kendall Manor! I could with difficulty credit my eyes as I glanced round and found a horse's nose within a few feet of me, while his rider stooped to fumble for the latch. Through the falling dusk, neither horse nor rider had perceived the human figure leaning against the gate, and both were startled when I abruptly raised my face. The horse reared backward, his rider gave the reins a sharp jerk, and a slight struggle ensued—the gentleman saying something which sounded rather forcible, but which I did not hear distinctly. Then he raised his voice and addressed me, whom he evidently took for a loitering servant.

"Open the gate, if you please. You have frightened my horse so that he is afraid to go near it."

I meekly obeyed, opening the gate and shielding myself behind it, as I pulled it back. The horseman rode sharply in—allowing his horse to look neither to the right nor to the left—and, touching his hat slightly as he passed me, said, "Thank you!" I made no reply, for I was amused by his mistake, and did not think it worth while to deceive him. After he passed, I pushed the gate back, and, while I was lifting the latch with both hands in an endeavor to replace it, I was startled to find that, instead of pursuing his way to the house, he wheeled round and again addressed me.

"I beg pardon," he said, "I should have asked before—is this Kendall Manor?"

"This is it," answered I, briefly; and, having now raised the troublesome latch to

its proper place, I turned round and faced the stranger—surely very much of a stranger who could ask such a question as *that* in Essex County, and at the very entrance of the Kendall domain.

As I have said before, it was dusk, but I saw with tolerable distinctness what my interlocutor looked like; not particularly handsome or particularly imposing, but a gentleman undoubtedly in air and manner—I had seen few enough gentlemen in my life, yet I felt certain on this point—a man who could not have been less than thirty or more than thirty-five apparently, who had an easy, well-built figure, a bronze face, with a pair of dark eyes, a firm chin, and a heavily drooping mustache.

As I turned and gave the searching look necessary to take all this in, the stranger smiled a little, apparently at the coolness and frankness of my scrutiny.

"Do you live here?" asked he, pointing slightly toward the old brown house visible through the leafless trees.

"Yes," answered I, laconically.

"Can you tell me if Mr. Kendall is at home?"

"He was at home half an hour ago."

"Thanks; good-evening."

He touched his hat again, and this time rode away without turning back.

I followed at my leisure—not particularly anxious to reach the house, since there was nothing for it *now* but the cheerless solitude of my own chamber. Once or twice a year, some stranger came to see Uncle Kendall on business, and on these occasions I was always summarily dismissed from the sitting-room. Doubtless, the same result would follow on the present occasion.

My surprise was great, therefore, when, as I opened the door half an hour later, and stepped into the hall, cold and tired, Uncle Kendall's voice sounded from the sitting-room.

"Is that you, Beryl?" he cried; adding, when I answered in the affirmative, "Come here."

With my shawl still wrapped around me, I obeyed, entering the sitting-room, where a bright fire made a most unusual illumination, and facing Uncle Kendall—seated bolt upright in his large chair—and the stranger for whom I had opened the gate half an hour before.

"Come here, Beryl," repeated my uncle,

as I paused just within the door, feeling strangely awkward and abashed. "Don't look so frightened, child; nobody is going to harm you.—She has grown up here," he went on, looking at his companion; "but she will do us credit some day—eh, Ross?"

The gentleman so addressed smiled, but, without making any other reply, came forward and held out his hand to me.

"Pardon me for having met you so unceremoniously a little while ago," he said. "I did not know then that we were cousins. My name is Ross Kendall."

Even those few words were full of so much kindness, that my sense of awkward shyness fled at once. I smiled as I gave him my hand.

"I never heard of you before," I said, "but since you are a Kendall, I suppose you must be my cousin."

"I have not had much time or inclination to instruct her in family ties and connections," said Uncle Kendall, grimly. "She'll learn about them soon enough for all the good—or harm—they can do her! You are the best of the whole, Ross" (with a short nod), "else it isn't likely I'd have you here now."

"I have been away too long to know much of the family," said Ross Kendall, gravely.

"Thank God for it, then!" said the other, sharply. "Take my word, you'll never have any thing better to thank Him for!—Beryl, did you hear me tell you to come to the fire? Sit down there!"

He pointed to the stool which I had vacated a little while before, and I obeyed the gesture, subsiding into my familiar corner, and looking curiously from one to the other of the faces before me. What different faces they were, as the firelight flickered over them, bringing out clearly the prominent traits of both! At this moment I seem to see the strange, fevered eagerness that lit up the sharpened, haggard features of the elder man, and the grave, quiet, bronzed face of the younger, with its keen, bright, kind, dark eyes.

Somehow my entrance seemed to have created a little embarrassment. They were both silent for some minutes; then Uncle Kendall spoke again.

"I told you a little while ago, Ross," he said, in his dry, measured way, "that I would wait until Beryl came in before I let you know

what business I had in view when I sent for you. I heard that you had got back from China"—Uncle Kendall was old-fashioned, and he pronounced this *Chiny*—"without having bettered yourself much; and, since I always had a liking for your father—he was the only one of all the kin I ever could bear—I thought I would take a look at you. You are like him," he went on, taking a very hard look indeed; "but I think you may do better than he did. You've got a firmer jaw. Firmness is the great thing in this world, lad. You'll know that when you are as old as I am."

"I know it now," said Ross Kendall, very grimly.

"The sooner you learn it, the better," said the other. "If you have *that*, you won't let a woman make a fool of you, as your father's wife did of him; you won't marry her for her pretty face, as he did, without caring if her heart is as black as Gehenna; and, above all, you won't be wheedled into leaving your property to her, so that she can marry again, and despoil your own son of every penny, as *you* have been despoiled. By G-d, boy!"—I had never seen Uncle Kendall so excited as when he brought his hand down on the arm of his chair with that vehement oath—"I have thought of your wrongs sometimes till I would have given every dollar I am worth to prosecute that woman, as she deserves, for robbery and plunder; but she is too clever to give us a chance for that."

"Let us rather say that my father trusted her too implicitly," said the other, coldly. "Let it pass, sir. I think of it as little as possible. In fact"—shrugging his shoulders—"I have not had time to think of much besides my business during the last ten years."

"Have you made any money out there in China?"

"A little," was the reserved reply.

"Enough to keep you from going back?—for you told me a while ago you had no liking for the place."

"So far from that, I suppose my employers will send me back next month."

"For how long?"

"Another ten years, probably."

"Humph!" said Uncle Kendall.

For a minute nothing further occurred. The clock ticked; the fire burned obtrusively; Uncle Kendall looked at the leaping blaze;

and I looked at the man who had come from China, and was thinking of going back again, until the eyes of this wonderful traveller turned on me, whereupon my own immediately sought the floor. After that I contented myself with looking at the drugget—feeling, the while, exceedingly hot and uncomfortable—until the voice which I knew so well, and (God forgive me!) disliked so intensely, spoke again, very slowly:

"I'm an old man, Ross, as you see, and I'm not a strong man, as the doctor tells me every time I meet him; so, of late, I've been thinking who's to have this old place after I'm dead. It ought to go to some one of the name; but I don't know one that isn't a mercenary, unprincipled scoundrel—unless it be yourself. Root and branch, they have been the pest of my life for years, until I have sworn that I will leave Kendall and every dollar I own to the county sooner than to any of 'em. You are the only one that has never tried to make any thing out of me, lad, and I have thought more than once of leaving it all to you; but, then, you were in China, and I couldn't tell what you might have grown into. Now that I've seen you, however, I am willing enough to make you my heir—only there's one obstacle in the way."

"What obstacle?" asked Ross. He spoke quietly, but I, who was looking at him, saw a sudden flush come to his cheek, and a sudden light to his eye. It was evident that the prospect of liberty and fortune was very pleasant to a man expecting to go back to China for another ten years. "What obstacle?" he repeated, after a minute.

"That girl!" answered Uncle Kendall, pointing his bony finger straight at me.

To say that the girl in question was astonished at this unexpected reply, would be to say very little indeed. I was so much confounded that I could not speak—I could only gaze, as if transfixed, at the finger, and wonder what Uncle Kendall possibly meant by such an assertion.

"She expects to be my heiress," pursued that amiable old person, after a minute, in a tone of great disgust.

"I don't expect it!" I cried, indignantly finding voice at this. "I never thought of being your heiress, Uncle Kendall! I don't see why you should say I did. I—I mean to be a governess, and take care of myself. I told Aunt Kendall so yesterday."

"Indeed!" said he, sardonically. "And may I ask what you mean to teach?"

The blood rushed into my cheeks like a flame, and to this day I remember the keen throb of humiliation which made me hang my head like a chidden child. I had never been sent to school, but had grown into a tall girl of seventeen, with only such little smattering of reading, writing, and arithmetic, as Aunt Kendall could give. Under the circumstances, the governess idea was certainly sufficiently absurd; but, then, why need Uncle Kendall have taunted me with my ignorance in such a tone, and in the presence of a stranger?

It was the voice of the latter which broke the silence—quiet, but with a kindness in it which I understood instinctively to be meant for me.

"Beryl is the daughter of your niece, is she not?" he asked, addressing Uncle Kendall. "Certainly, in that case, she has a better right to your fortune than I."

"She has no right at all," retorted Uncle Kendall. "She is a fool if she thinks so! I have always meant to leave the manor to a Kendall; and I should like the fortune I have spent my life in making to go along with it. But she has to be provided for, I suppose"—the scornful finger was levelled at me again—"and so I have been thinking—she is pretty enough, as women go—that you might not have any objection to marrying her, Ross. It would settle all trouble. I hope you have not been silly enough to burden yourself with a wife—eh?"

"I have been too poor a man to afford such a luxury," answered the other. He tried to speak gravely, but my sharpened ears could detect an irresistible inclination to laugh in his voice. That tone proved a drop too much in the already brimming cup of my shame and confusion. Child though I was, I could still appreciate the indignity and contempt with which I had been treated, and burning tears of rage were in my eyes as I rose suddenly to my feet.

"I am going, Uncle Kendall!" I said, in a voice which trembled from the same cause. "I—I cannot stay any longer. It is true you have fed and clothed me," I cried, passionately; "but you have not *bought* me, and you have no right to offer me along with your fortune! I don't want any of it—I would not have any of it; but I—I think you might have spared me such an insult as this!"

"Is the young fool mad?" demanded Uncle Kendall, too much surprised to be angry. "What the devil does she mean?—Take your seat again this minute, Beryl!"

But for once I was deaf to the voice of command. I rushed to the door, and it was while I was fumbling blindly for the latch that I found Ross Kendall at my side.

"Come back, Beryl," he said, as he might have spoken to a child. "Your uncle did not mean to offend you. He is plain-spoken, like all old people, but he meant no harm. Of course, his idea was absurd; but why not laugh at it instead of taking it like this? I have a better one to propose, instead," he added, laughing himself. "Won't you come back and listen to it? By Jove, if you don't"—as I still retained inflexible hold of the door—"I shall order my horse at once; for your claim to Kendall is certainly better than mine!"

"I have no claim!" said I. But curiosity, operating with the last threat, brought me back. Then, having placed me in a chair, Ross addressed himself to my uncle.

"I have ten days to spare, sir," he said, "and since your letter was very kind, I came down, meaning to spend them at the manor. Now, I propose that, instead of talking any further about estates and heirships, we devote these ten days to learning something about each other. You cannot possibly tell how much or how little you may like me or trust me on closer acquaintance, while, as for this young lady"—he turned and looked at me with a smile in his kind, dark eyes—"I trust that she may at least learn to tolerate me as a cousin. All question of any thing else we will waive at once. It is enough to say that no consideration could tempt me to offer myself to a woman I did not love honestly and for herself!"

"The more fool you!" commented Uncle Kendall, in his usual candid fashion. "There is some sense in what you say about deferring the discussion of business till we know each other a little better," he added, after a pause; "only I am opposed to delays. We never know what may happen; and I had a fancy to draw up my will to-morrow, before I go—as I am obliged to do—on a journey of five or six days. However, since you have a notion for waiting, let it be so! I only hope that when I come back you and Beryl will have made up your minds to take each other

for life. It is all nonsense, this thing of men and women talking of choosing each other for love. The only sensible thing to do is to choose the person who can make you most comfortable. If you both agree to what I propose, I'll see you safely married, and then I'll draw up a will leaving every thing I am worth to you, Ross. I don't believe in women's ever owning independent property. Married or unmarried, there's not one of 'em fit to be trusted with it!"

II.

Our autocrat was as good as his word, with regard to taking his departure the next morning. He announced at the breakfast-table that he had business which would detain him from home several days, and thus, to our dismay, Aunt Kendall and myself found ourselves burdened with the entertainment of our new-found kinsman. We looked at each other a little blankly; but there was nothing to be said, and, after breakfast, I confess that I watched, for the first time, with sensations of keen regret, the diminishing form of the tall old vehicle and raw-boned horse which conveyed Uncle Kendall to the railway town of Exford.

"Are you always so sorry when your uncle leaves home?" asked Ross Kendall, maliciously. He was standing by me on the steps, but I had not fancied that he was watching me until the tone of this question informed me of the fact. Then I started, and, feeling that I blushed, I felt also a strong inclination to be malicious in return.

"I am not usually sorry at all," I answered, quietly. "In fact, I don't think that I ever was sorry before."

"And may I ask the cause of your unusual regret on the present occasion, then?"

"Since you have asked, you have no right to be offended if I say that it is because you have remained behind!"

"I am not offended at all," he said, laughing, yet flushing a little. "But are you always so candid?"

"How could I live with Uncle Kendall and be otherwise?"

"Candidly tell me, then, why you object to my remaining? I am a most inoffensive fellow, and would not harm you for the world."

"Why should you wish to stay?" asked I, impatiently. "It cannot possibly interest you to be shut up, in a lonely country-house

like this, with a tiresome old woman like Aunt Kendall, and a silly young woman like me. There are no horses, no dogs, no guns, no books, no any thing to amuse you!"

"Suppose I would rather not be amused?" said he, smiling. "Suppose I would even rather be bored? I have not had time to be bored in a long while; and it is a luxury to a man fresh from China. So is a glorious Indian-summer day like this," he added, changing his tone, "a luxury worth coming back to enjoy! How it makes me feel like a boy again! I wonder if I might venture to ask the silly young woman to take a walk with me?"

His gay frankness would have put even a shyer person at ease. Having no excuse ready, and being, moreover, mightily tempted by the golden day, and the soft, dreamy air (not to speak of the dark eyes and the extraordinary but exhilarating consciousness of having a man for a companion), the silly young woman in question readily agreed to go. We set forth, therefore, and if it mattered—which it does not—I could recall every word, and tone, and glance, which passed between us on that bright autumn morning—that morning long past now, which I spent like a very child in showing all my chiefest and sweetest woodland haunts, and which was crowned by the wholesale rifling of a chestnut-tree upon which we chanced on our homeward route. As we walked, we talked not a little, and, by a few questions, Ross drew from me all about my own history—of which there was very little to tell—and I think it was his sincere pity for my lonely, joyless youth, which first opened my heart to him. Does anybody wonder that I did not resent this feeling, as I am told people mostly do? I can only say in reply that it should be remembered that nobody had ever before taken the trouble even to pity me. Besides which, when Ross said, "Poor child!" there was much of tenderness as well as pity in his voice; and, child or woman, she would have been made of strange material indeed, who resented any word of tenderness from Ross Kendall's lips.

Well, it was a pleasant day. It is a pleasant day to look back upon even now, for it was only the beginning of others more pleasant still. It is fortunate, perhaps, that I cannot linger over the details of a story which just here would seem, no doubt, com-

monplace enough. Once in our lives, paradise opens for all of us out of the dull earth; and days, golden with the light of tender romance, shine upon us with a radiance like unto no other radiance of time. Does it boot to count the cost of the bitter desolation which often follows? We can scarcely think that Eve would have surrendered one memory of Eden for all the joys of earth. Yet she must have dreamed many times of the deep-green bowers, the shining waters, the marvellous glistening fruits of that fair domain, and waked to weep such tears of unavailing regret as have watered this sad planet of ours most plenteously ever since.

It was in the midst of my colorless life, in the season of earth's most touching sadness, that some days like those of which I have spoken came to me. Surrounded now by sorrow and desolation—full of pain and weariness—I can thank God for them yet. Opening a drawer in the desk at which I am writing, some relics of them lie before me—changed, as the years which have passed since then have no doubt changed me, too. Brown leaves, once golden and scarlet with the burning touch of autumn—leaves gathered out on the hill-side with Ross—a sketch of me which he made one day on the blank leaf of a book, with "Little Red Riding-hood" scrawled lazily underneath; a few other trifles equally insignificant, and one short curl of crisp, dark hair. Few as they are—these tokens of the past—they open the whole treasure-house of memory to me. They bring back vividly those lovely days with their wealth of forgotten words and tones, their soft breezes and faint woodland fragrances. I seem to meet the dark eyes, to hear the frank, kind voice, and, if I lift my eyes to a present and a future which are alike desolate, I can still thank God that love—even our poor human love—stands forever chief among the Immortals.

Uncle Kendall was gone nearly a fortnight. To say that I lived an enchanted life during this time, would be to say very little indeed. For let it be remembered—in justification, perhaps, of my folly—that I had never before had even so much as a kitten to love. In my case there was no dividing and subdividing of affection into different rills—no father, mother, sisters, brothers, friends, to claim a share of my heart. All the love which was mine to give, swept into one great

channel, and poured itself—for good or ill—at one man's feet. Looking back now, I cannot regret it. It was something—nay, I am still mad enough to think it was every thing—to have lived in the light of his smile for ten long, golden days, and heard him say a thousand times in accent before he ever said in words, that he loved me.

When at last he *did* speak, it seemed like something which had been long acknowledged and believed. We were sitting on a sunny hill-side—how well I remember the golden, dreamy beauty of that Indian-summer afternoon!—with a glorious sweep of country at our feet, clad in the gorgeous robes, and draped with the lovely haze of autumn. I had gathered from the ground two or three brilliant leaves—the same which lie before me now so brown and crisp—and, with the coquetry inborn in woman, laid them against the rich masses of my hair.

"Are they pretty?" I asked, looking up at Ross with the eyes which I knew full well were like the summer sky at noonday.

He smiled a little.

"Why do you ask?" he said. "You know they are pretty—almost as pretty as you are!"

"Am I pretty?" asked I, quickly. "Do you really think so? I—I should like to be."

"Why should you like it?" he asked, in turn, looking at me with a strange intentness in his dark eyes.

"Because I am sure it must be the greatest gift a woman can possess," I answered, readily. "It must be pleasant, I think, to know that one has the power to win love anywhere and under any circumstances."

"Then you are like all other women," he said, a little bitterly. "You long not for one slave but for a thousand; you want beauty, not to gladden one man's eyes, but to give power over many. Well"—he drew in his breath a little quickly—"be satisfied. You have it! It is yours in greater degree than I have ever before known it bestowed on any one woman. If you go into the world—or, perhaps I should say *when* you go into the world—you will find men enough to tell you this better than I can."

His tone—which was almost harsh—took me so much by surprise, that for a moment I could say nothing. Then I felt hot tears rise into my eyes.

"That was not what I meant," I said,

hastily. "I was not thinking of—of other men. What do I care for them? I was only thinking that, if I were pretty, *you* would like me better."

"God forbid that I should ever like you better!" he said, quickly, "for I fear—O Beryl, I fear—that I like you too much already. Child, don't look at me in that startled fashion. I mean every word I say. I love you, God knows, better than I ever thought to love any thing on earth again; but, if you came to my heart this minute, I should be miserable through fear of losing you. I loved another woman once, who was not half so beautiful as you are, and *she* deceived and forsook me. Why should not you do the same?"

His voice, his words, seemed to cut like a knife to my heart. I have already said that I was little more than an ignorant child; forgive me, then, if I sinned grievously against all precedents of courtship. Don't be hopelessly shocked that I extended my hands to him, backed by a pair of wistful, tearful eyes.

"Ross," I said, simply, "I would never deceive or forsake you."

His only answer was to take me into his arms. I think for a moment he could scarcely speak—so deeply had those simple words touched him. Then—but my story has nothing to do with the words of fond folly and tender sweetness which were uttered out on the hill-side that day. They are buried long since—buried by the rains, and leaves, and sobbing winds of many succeeding autumns—for the seasons which come and go in their appointed course have never brought such an hour again to all my dreary life.

The sun was setting when we took our way homeward. Oh, in what bright and tender colors does memory still paint that last happy evening! I seem to see yet the glow of sunset clouds brightening the whole landscape and reflected in the streams that took their way through purple ravines and smiling valleys. Even the windows of the old manor were all on fire, as if with a brilliant illumination, when we came in sight of them. "It is in our honor!" Ross said, with a smile.

When he said this, we were standing on a hill overlooking the manor from the rear. At our feet lay the old house, with the lazy blue smoke ascending from its chimneys, and its panes of old-fashioned glass blinking redly in

the sunset glow; also in full view were the out-houses, kitchens, and stables, while farther back—out of sight from the manor, but clearly visible to us—was a small cabin, with an enclosed piece of ground attached, and a rough piazza in front—one of those establishments which used to be so common on every Southern plantation, where some old servant had been “turned out to grass” after long and faithful service.

“That is where old Sylvy lives,” said I to Ross. “Did you ever see old Sylvy? No? Well, then, you ought to see her, for I really believe she is the only person in the world who is not afraid of Uncle Kendall. I sometimes think, on the contrary, that *he* is afraid of her—he certainly treats her with more consideration than he treats anybody else, and, whenever he is sick, he sends for her to nurse him. They say that she used to be his wife’s favorite maid. Fancy Uncle Kendall ever having had a wife!”

“And, pray, why not?” asked Ross, smiling. “Uncle Kendall was not always an ogre. No doubt he was as good-looking as—as I am, for example, when he was young. He *was* married, I know; but he quarrelled with his wife, and, since her fortune was settled on herself, and her temper was as high as his own, she refused to live with him. They separated, therefore, but the law gave him the control of their only child, whom he accordingly kept until she grew into a girl, when she ran away and joined her mother. After that, he never saw either of them again.”

“Aunt Kendall has told me all about it,” said I, “and I think she was *quite* right. If I had only had anybody to run to, I should have run away long ago. Tell me what became of her, Ross. Do you know?”

“Dead long ago, I suppose,” answered Ross, carelessly. “I never made any particular inquiries, but I know that, as long as I can remember, Uncle Kendall’s wealth has been a source of speculation in the family. ‘Whom will he leave it to?’ I have heard Kendall after Kendall anxiously ask—which they would not have done, you know, if his daughter had been alive.”

“I suppose not,” said I. “It would be terrible if she *was* alive, though, would it not?” I added, with startling abruptness. “You would have to go back to China, after all, then, wouldn’t you, Ross?”

“That would depend upon circumstances,”

answered he, jestingly. “If the will was made, Kendall would be mine, let who would appear.”

“What a different Kendall we will make of it, will we not?” cried I, gayly. “Oh, Ross, it shall bloom like a garden, shall it not? Are you not happy? Do you not feel as light as the air? See if you can reach the bottom of the hill as soon as I can.”

In the overflowing lightness of my heart I started—I was as fleet as a deer in those days—and ran down the sloping hill-side, carpeted with smooth pine-straw. Of course, I reached the bottom long before Ross; and, as I paused for breath, a small black figure darted at me from some unsuspected quarter.

“Miss Beryl, granny say, will you please, ma’am, come there?”

“What does your granny want?” asked I, impatiently. I knew very well that the “granny” in question was old Sylvy, whose cabin stood near by, and I felt little inclined for an hour’s gossip over her rheumatism and asthma.

“I dunno, ma’am,” said the boy—Sylvy’s grandchild and factotum—“but she sent me to de big house fur you, and when she heard you was out in de woods, she tole me to keep watch till you come, and tell you she wanted pa’tic’lar to see you.”

“Pshaw!” said I, pettishly. “Well, tell her I will be there in a minute.”

As the boy ran off, I stopped to explain to Ross why I could not accompany him to the house. “Old Sylvy wants to tell me about the dreadful ‘misery’ in her back, and how she can’t sleep of nights, but has to sit up by the fire and smoke,” I said, with a grimace. “I’ll come as soon as I can; good-by.”

“Suppose I go in and offer her a cigar to let you off duty?” said he, laughing.

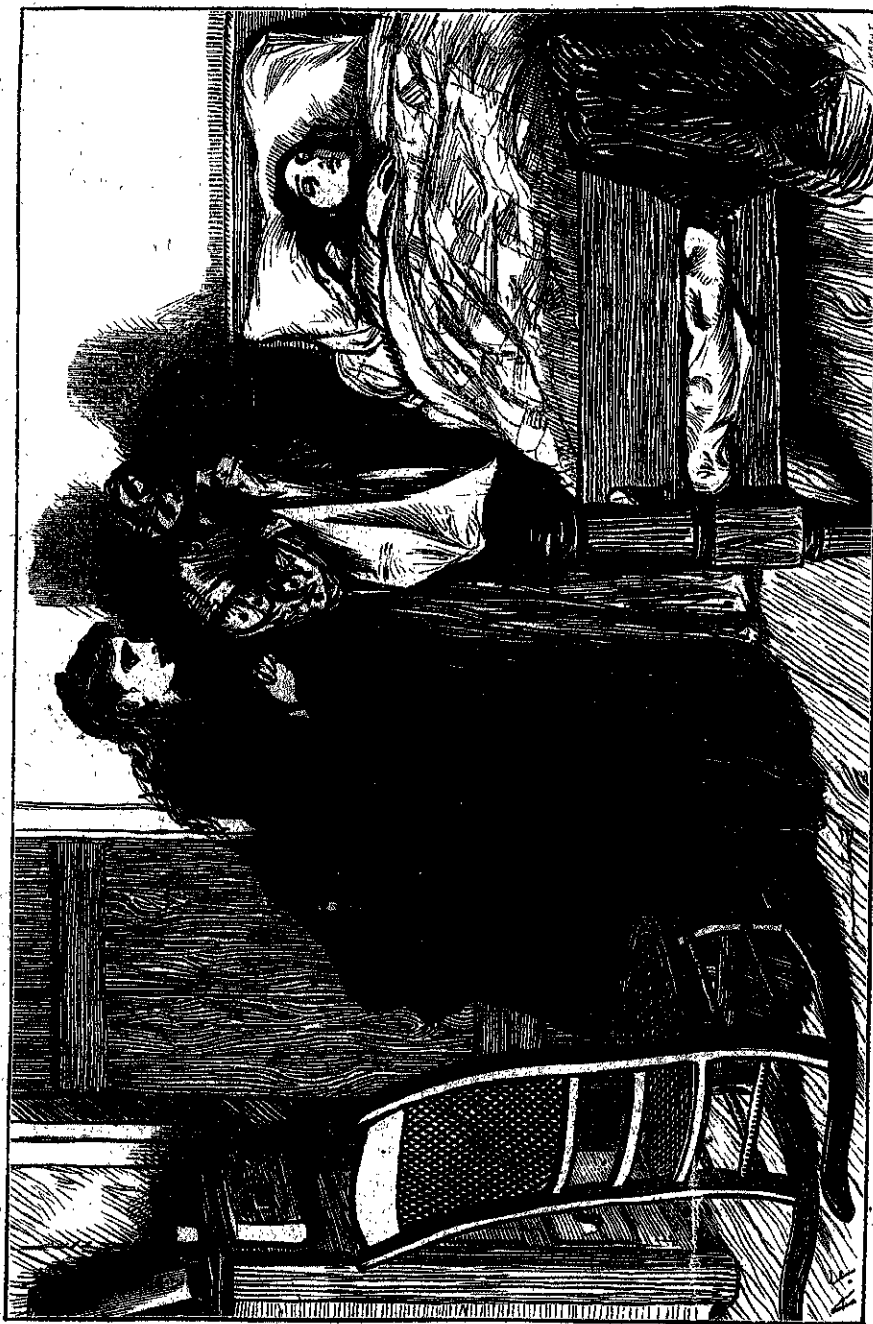
But I declined this offer, and so we parted, he going on to the house with his easy, swinging tread, whistling as he went; while I ran up the step of old Sylvy’s piazza, and tried to open her door. To my surprise, it was fastened.

“Sylvy! Sylvy!” said I, rattling it impatiently. “Let me in—it is I!”

After a minute, I heard a fumbling at the latch, then the door opened slowly, and Sylvy’s face—nothing more—appeared.

“Is that you, Miss Beryl?” she asked, peering cautiously out.

“Of course it’s me!” answered I, too im-



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"Who is she?"

patient to consider grammar. "Who else should it be?"

"I ax your pardon for keepin' you waitin', ma'am," she said, opening the door with her usual courtesy—for Sylvy was a negro of the old school, and often boasted that she had been "taught manners by her ole mistis"—"but a' body can't be too pa'tic'lar when they've got reason for wantin' no tattlers about. Walk in, ma'am. I hope your health's pretty well this evening?"

"Oh, I am always well," said I, with the boastful superiority of youth. "How is your rheumatism?"

"About as usual, thank you, ma'am," she answered, in the tone which shows that an answer is absently given.

This in itself surprised me, for Sylvy was always only too ready to talk of her ailments; but when I saw her carefully bolt the door again, I at once inquired what was the matter. "Why do you shut up your house so closely this beautiful evening?" I asked. "It is horribly warm!" Which was not surprising, since a large fire was burning in the capacious chimney.

"There's some isn't warm, if it is a beautiful evening, Miss Beryl!" said she, solemnly and mysteriously. Then she pointed to the corner where her bed stood, generally covered with a quilt of bright and wonderful device, but now occupied, as a glance showed me, by a motionless and recumbent figure. "There's *one* as will never be warm agin in this world," said she, tremblingly. "You can go and look at her, Miss Beryl. How she ever got here, and she so fur gone, the Lord only knows!"

"What are you talking about?" asked I. "Who is it? Why didn't you send for Aunt Kendall if anybody is sick?"

"Send fur Miss Kendall!" repeated Sylvy, contemptuously. "What I gwine send fur her fur? She's so afraid of ole master, she dasen't say her soul's her own. If he'd a bin at home, I'd a sent for nobody!" pursued she, defiantly. "I'd a gone as straight to him as my old feet could carry me. But he ain't here, and I'm only an ole nigger, so I thought maybe you'd knew best, Miss Beryl, what's to be done."

"I have not an idea what you are talking about!" cried I, bewildered. "What is the matter? Of course, if anybody is *very* ill, you ought to send for the doctor."

"It's too late for doctors to do any good to *her*," said she, shaking her head. "Come and look at her yourself, Miss Beryl! You ain't much of a one to judge, but you can tell death when you see it, I reckon."

I had not time to resent the slight thus cast upon my powers of judgment, for she drew me toward the bed, and, in the red light of the fire, I saw a sight which shocked and thrilled me. A woman, with a face of ghastly whiteness, lay under a heavy mass of quilts and shawls, breathing so faintly that it was difficult to tell at first whether or not she breathed at all, and with every line of her sunken face proclaiming, even to my inexperienced eyes, that Death was indeed laying his icy finger on the feeble pulses, and saying to the heart, with that power which no mortal skill can gainsay, "Be still!"

"Who is she?" said I, turning to Sylvy, who stood by wiping her eyes. "Good Heavens, the woman is dying! Who is she?"

"She's Mass Kendall's own daughter, Miss Beryl," answered the old woman, solemnly. "She's your own flesh and blood, ma'am, an' she hasn't any better place to lay her head than the cabin of an ole nigger like me!"

"*Mass Kendall's own daughter!*" That was all I heard. The rest of the speech—full of sorrowful indignation though it was—passed like the sounds in a dream.

"Why, it was not an hour ago we spoke of her!" I cried out, stunned by the coincidence as such coincidences do stun; "and Ross said that she was dead!"

"I knowed she wasn't dead," said Sylvy, grimly, "an' ole master knowed it, too. Many's the letter he's had from her, but he never tole nobody about 'em but me. 'I've had another letter from your chile,' he'd say to me, sneerin'-like. 'She's anxious to be took back, now that she's run through all her mother's fortune; but I swore, when she lef', she should never have a dollar of mine—an' she never shall.' He's a hard one, is ole master; but I've up an' tole him 'fore to-day what I think of him. He druv' my poor mistis' into leavin' him, an' then he might 'a' knowed that the chile was goin' to follow her mother. I tried to keep her from it, poor lamb! but she would go, an' ole Sylvy ain't the one to blame her. I nussed her in these arms!" said the faithful creature, sitting down and sobbing in her apron. "I was the fust one that took her after she come into this world

of trouble, an' now—O Lord, Lord! to think that she's come back to ole Sylvy to die!"

I said nothing. What could I say? A great horror seemed to come over and benumb me. I sat down on a chest near by, and stared, first at the dying woman, and then at her sobbing nurse.

"When did she come?" I asked presently, in an awe-stricken whisper.

"Not more'n three hours ago," Sylvy answered. "I was a-sittin' in my door, knittin', an' thinkin' no more of seein' her than of seein' the dead, when she come a-tollin' up the hill, an' stood afore me like a ghost. 'Mammy,' she says, 'don't you know me? I'm your chile.' Then, when I fotched her in an' made her lie down—fur she was white as a sheet—she tole me how she was a widow, an' how she had bin so sick she was afraid she would die an' leave her chile with nobody to puersect him—you see, he's her youngest, an' all she's got lef'—so she thought she'd come to her father an' see if he wouldn't promise to befriend the boy after she was gone. But, though she come, she was afraid to go up to the house, for fear he'd shut the door in her face, as he said he would; so she come to ask me what she better do, an', while she was a-talkin', she begun to spit blood, an' it went on wuss an' wuss, till it lef' her right where you see her now."

"And what are you going to do?" asked I, after another pause, and in another awe-stricken whisper.

"That's what I don't know," she answered, shaking her head. "If master was here, I'd go straight to him; but he ain't, you know, an' it's no worth while to go to ole Mis' Kendall. But I thought as how you—who's goin' to have every thing, they say—might take it upon yourself to have your own cousin carried to die in the house where she was born."

"But I am not going to have every thing!" I said, indignantly; "and I have no more right to give an order at Kendall than you have. In fact, Uncle Kendall would let you do it, before he would let me!"

"An' is everybody to say that my mistis's chile died in a nigger's cabin?" demanded she, vehemently.

Now, it must be premised that, under ordinary circumstances, Sylvy would as soon have thought of calling herself a cannibal as a "nigger;" but at present she had thrust

herself so entirely aside—her whole thoughts were so full of the wrongs of her dying "child"—that she did not hesitate to use even this opprobrious term to express her sense of these wrongs more strongly.

"I—I don't know," said I. "It is terrible—but what can I do? If there was only somebody to take the responsibility—" Then I stopped, and gave a little cry. "There is Ross!" I said. "I might ask him. He would know what to do, and he would not be afraid of Uncle Kendall either. Why did I not think of that before? I will go for Ross!"

I rose impulsively and started toward the door, but, as I reached it, a low cry from Sylvy made me stop short. She had risen, and bent over the bed.

"O Miss Beryl," she cried, with a wail, "it's too late—too late! My chile is dead!"

III.

WHEN I left Sylvy's cabin, the lovely dusk which reigned over the earth when I entered had given place to absolute night, brightened only by that tender, fairy-like lustre which we call starlight. The air came, with a cool freshness impossible to describe, to my fevered cheeks, though magically soft for the season, as I walked slowly along the path—every foot of which I knew—that led to a stile in the rear of the manor-kitchen. It was not strange that, as I walked, I felt stunned and bewildered. The startling scene through which I had so lately passed had come upon me with the force of such absolute surprise that it might have crippled, for a time, the activity of even a stronger brain than mine. The pale, set face of the dead woman—the face which I had bent over, and which I shuddered to remember that I had even touched—seemed to go with me as I hurried down the sloping path. I could not banish it, nor the flushed face of a sleeping child with a corn-colored mop of curls, at whom Sylvy had pointed sorrowfully, saying, "It's for him she come."

For him! That Kendall might be given to him, and Ross sent back to China! That was the thought that came to me like a flash—the first, instinctive comment of my jealous heart. It had been my thought, indeed—though only vaguely grasped—when I first heard who the dying woman was. Does any one think this strange? If so, let me say, once for all, that,

though I do not intend (God forbid that I should intend!) to extenuate any of the thoughts and acts which it is part of my story to record, yet it is impossible for him to judge dispassionately of this story, who does not remember that a young savage of the South Sea would have had a decided advantage over me at that time in point of moral, social, religious, or any other kind of training, and that I had grown up in such utter isolation from even the faintest affection that there was scant cause for wonder in the fact that I was ready to defend, at all costs and all hazards, the interests of the sole creature I had ever found to love.

For it had come to that. As I walked down the hill-side path, I was conscious of a wild, fierce desire to keep these intruders at bay, and to defend Ross against them—Ross, whom they had come to rob and to send back to China! I paused at the stile when I reached it, and, leaning my arms on the top, with a soft, soothing music in the pines behind, the cheerful lights of the manor-windows in front, and the great, starry sky overhead, pondered the problem—what could I do? Naturally enough, no answer came. Instead, even I had sense enough to see that I could do nothing. There was Sylvy, there was the dead mother, and there was the living child; while Uncle Kendall, who had already exceeded the time appointed for his absence, might reach home at any hour. In the face of these overwhelming odds, what hope was there that I—the most insignificant of creatures—could find any means to outwit them all, and secure to Ross his rights—I seriously considered them his rights—which were so gravely threatened? What difference did it make to me that the woman and the child in question were Uncle Kendall's direct descendants, while Ross was only a distant kinsman? I thought only of him. I fear that I should have thought only of him if the whole Decalogue had been arrayed on the other side.

It was while I still stood under the starlit sky, and still thought of many a wild, impracticable scheme—loath to enter the house, because I had promised Sylvy to bring Ross to her—that I was startled by the ring of a familiar tread advancing quickly toward the stile. Ross was coming for me! My heart gave a great leap—partly from the joy which his coming always brought, but partly also from relief, for I had been nervously dreading

his arrival all the while I was in Sylvy's cabin. That I had no high sentiments of honor myself, I think my story amply proves; but still I could understand Ross, and I felt instinctively that all the chivalry of his nature would rise up for that pale, dead mother and her helpless child, if he saw them. Therefore, my first thought was one of relief that he had not seen them.

"Ross!" said I, putting out my hand and touching him, with a soft laugh, when he came to the stile.

He had not seen me, and he gave a great start.

"Beryl!" he said. "Is it possible this is you? I was just coming after you. What are you doing here all by yourself, and what has kept you so long?"

"I stopped here as I came back from Sylvy's cabin," I answered, wondering a little if my voice did not betray what I had seen in Sylvy's cabin. "It is so beautiful I was in no hurry to go in. Did you ever see a lovelier night, Ross? Look at that splendid planet! Is it Jupiter, do you think? And there are the Pointers and the Milky-Way, and—"

"Yes," said Ross, interrupting my vague astronomical knowledge. "But I have come for you in haste, Beryl. Your uncle is very ill, and wishes to see you."

"Uncle Kendall!" I exclaimed. It was a good thing we were in the dark, and that he could not see my start, nor the pallor which overspread my face. "I—this is very strange. When did he come, Ross?"

"He was in the house when I reached it two hours ago," Ross answered. "They told me he had arrived about an hour before that. He sat down in the sitting-room alone, and when I came in I found him fallen over with a stroke of paralysis."

"O Ross!"

"I applied some remedies myself, and sent post-haste for a doctor, who came much sooner than I expected. He is better now—that is, he can speak a little, and he asked at once for his lawyer and you."

"Will he die, Ross?" I asked, in a whisper.

"So the doctor thinks," Ross answered, gravely.

After that I said nothing more. I let him help me over the stile, and walked by him in utter silence toward the house. Since that

night I have never trod that path; but I remember every turn of it better than I remember the scenes of yesterday—I remember every thing connected with that night, the stars which were brightly glowing overhead, the soft sighing of the distant pines, the crisp rustling of the dead leaves under our feet, the dark outlines of the house cutting against the steel-blue sky, the lights gleaming in the windows, even the very spot where Ross put out his hand and drew mine into his arm.

"Why are you so silent, Beryl?" he asked. "Did I shock you with my news? And you are trembling all over, poor little one? Is it with cold?"

With cold! Ah, if he could have known—if he could have seen—why I was trembling in every limb like an aspen. Robbery! It was not robbery to hold my tongue, to say nothing, to let the old man die in ignorance; and yet—I clung to him, quivering all over.

"No—I am not cold," I said. "It is because I am nervous that I cannot keep still. O Ross, do you—do you know what Uncle Kendall wants with me?"

"Can you not guess, Beryl?" Ross asked, gravely yet tenderly.

After that nothing more was said. We entered the manor in the rear, and passed to the sitting-room, where the lawyer, the doctor, and an old gentleman, a Mr. Collins, were comfortably smoking over the fire, and talking the current news of the day. They rose at my entrance, and, when Ross asked if there had been any change in the sick man, the doctor answered that there was very little *as yet*, but the sooner the business on his mind was transacted, the better. Then Ross led me straight into his chamber.

It is not likely that I shall ever forget the scene upon which I entered. Indeed, it has been one of the nightmares of my life. For years I dreaded to sleep lest I should dream of it, lest I should see again—as I so often did—the twisted, helpless figure, the awful, distorted face which met my gaze when I crossed the threshold of that room. My nerves were already unstrung, and I shrank back piteously, covering my eyes with my hands—but Ross led me on. "My poor darling, you *must* come!" he said, in a whisper.

And so I reached the bedside—so I stood shuddering and gazing into the harsh old face transformed so hideously. The mouth was

wrenched into a ghastly and horrible grin—even the eyes filled me with terror when they looked at me. I dared not scream, yet I could scarcely restrain the inclination to do so when Ross left me a moment and went to the head of the bed—bent over the lips striving desperately to speak, and uttering only inarticulate sounds terrible to hear.

"Beryl is here, sir," he said. "Will you speak to her? or shall I?"

After an effort, there came an answer which seemed to mean "You."

Then Ross held out his hand to me, and I came tremblingly nearer, and placed my own in it.

"Your uncle wishes to ask you, Beryl," he said, "whether you are willing to marry me, and to trust your interests hereafter in my hands?"

"Yes, uncle," I answered, addressing the eyes which were fastened on me, and from which I could not remove my own. "I am willing to marry Ross. I—I have promised to do so."

Then the distorted lips, the paralyzed tongue made another effort, and, after a minute, wrenched out in broken, guttural sounds, the word "Now?"

I did not understand, and looked at Ross. He seemed a little puzzled himself.

"Now?" he repeated. Then—as he seemed to catch the drift of some inarticulate sounds the helpless man was making—he added, quickly: "Do you mean to ask Beryl if she is willing to be married *now*?"

The eyes brightened and the head nodded. Evidently this was what he *did* mean.

"That is for Beryl to answer," said Ross, turning to me with a sudden flush on his cheeks, and a sudden light in his dark eyes. "I am ready, sir. If Beryl says yes—"

But I seemed to choke. I tore my hand suddenly from him, and turned away—I say yes! How could I, oh, how could I? It was not the shyness of a timid maiden which made me shrink from those tender, passionate eyes, that close-clasping, eager hand. God knows I might have been fourscore for all I thought of maiden shyness *then*. It was a sudden, horrible sense of the deceit that enveloped me—it was the memory of the dead woman and the sleeping child in Sylvy's cabin! I was willing to do *any thing* that the princely fortune, which that poor wreck on the bed had scraped and toiled and denied himself even

the luxuries of life to amass, might come to Ross—willing even to hold my tongue and let the sinful soul pass away without one opportunity to say, "Lord, forgive me as I have forgiven!"—but all suddenly I felt that my soul was stained by this silence, and that my hand was not worthy to touch the one which Ross held out to me.

I turned away, and, walking blindly across the room, dropped down upon a window-seat. Thither, in a minute, Ross followed me.

"Beryl," he said, in a tone in which pain and surprise seemed struggling together, "what is the matter? Are you angry with me? I know it is hard for you to come so suddenly and so irrevocably to one whom you know so little—and I should not have dared to ask it. But he is dying—the old man yonder—and you remember he said, on that first evening, that he wished to see us married before he made his will."

At these words, I raised my face. It came to me like a flash, that every thing hinged on the marriage. Until *that* took place, the will would not be signed which would make Ross master of Kendall. I looked up with startled eyes into the face looking down upon me.

"Don't you think Uncle Kendall would defer the marriage, Ross?" I asked. "Don't you think he might sign the will without—without that?"

"He might," said Ross, "though I should not like to ask it of him—but I am not thinking of the will. I am thinking of *you*, Beryl. Why do you hesitate?—why will you not trust me? Is it because you have not learned to love me yet? Is it because you were mistaken—out there on the hill this afternoon?"

"Mistaken!" Ah, if he could have read my heart! "O Ross, Ross," I cried, "I love you better than anybody in the world! I have never loved anybody but you in my whole life. I would *die* for you, if I could; but I—oh, I cannot marry you!"

"Do you mean never, Beryl?" asked he, growing pale.

"No—oh, no," answered I, with feverish eagerness. "I mean I cannot do it now—to-night."

"Why not, if you love me as you say you do?"

"Because—oh, because I am not worthy of you, Ross."

"Not worthy!" He smiled as he took

my hands. "My pretty, foolish darling, is that all?"

All! If he could have known what that "all" comprised! I looked at him, and wondered he did not see it in my face—surely not the face of a girl shrinking only because she loved.

"You said this afternoon that some one—some other woman—deceived you once," I said, nervously. "I—O Ross, I may be doing the same, for all you know."

"You!" he repeated, incredulously. "You—with that child-face, those angel-eyes? If you swore it, Beryl, I should not believe it."

"Not you, then; but—but some one else."

"My darling, this is nonsense!" he said, gravely. "You are tormenting yourself about some childish fancy or scruple—but there is not time for such things now, Beryl. Death will not wait for your decision. It is advancing yonder very fast. You must decide quickly what you will do."

"Ross," said I, eagerly, "if *he* died without signing any will, to whom would the property go?"

"To the heir-at-law," Ross answered, "that would be yourself. Why do you ask?" he went on quickly. "Do you think that I am urging you to marry me on account of the will? If you can do me such injustice as *that*, Beryl—"

But I interrupted him hastily. "I did not think of it for a moment," I said. "I only asked because I wanted to know—the heir-at-law means the nearest relation, does it not?"

"Yes," answered he, looking at me gravely.

"Then, if there were others nearer than I, *they* would inherit it, would they not?"

"But there are no relations nearer than you."

"Supposing, though—only supposing—that there were, could they break a will after it had been *signed*?"

"Not under ordinary circumstances," said he. "But why do you ask such questions? Beryl, if you are thinking that this fortune might be yours—"

"I am thinking that I will marry you this moment, Ross," I said, with almost feverish eagerness. "I am sorry that I have wasted so much time; but I did not know—I did not understand. If it is necessary for me to marry

you before the will is signed, I—I will do it at once. Come—quick!”

When Uncle Kendall heard that I had consented to the marriage, he seemed pleased, and desired that Mr. Collins might be summoned at once. “He is a magistrate,” Ross said, in answer to my glance. “The legal ceremony is all that your uncle desires. Of course, the religious one can be performed afterward, if you desire it.”

“I do not care,” I answered, sincerely enough. It would have been strange if I had cared, considering that at that time of my life I knew no more of religion than that it was a vague abstraction, of which Aunt Kendall sometimes predicated (mostly when she was particularly out of sorts and out of temper) that it was all the comfort she had, and which was supposed to take people to church on Sundays when they had any fine clothes in which to go. I never had; so I stayed at home, and was edified by scraps of cynical atheism from Uncle Kendall’s bitter old lips, which I carefully treasured and pondered upon.

Mr. Collins came in with the lawyer. Mr. Kendall had requested him to be in readiness for such an event (as the marriage, not the death) ten days before, I heard the latter explaining to Ross; so he had the will drawn up in readiness for signing, and the license in his pocket. “The sooner it is all over the better,” the doctor said, as he turned away from an observation of his patient.

So, in that bare, ill-lighted chamber, with the distorted face of the dying man before our eyes, with the doctor standing by counting his feeble pulse, with Aunt Kendall sniffing a little (purely because it was the proper thing to do) in the background, and with the lawyer now and then rustling his papers, Ross and I were married. Surely a ghastlier bridal never took place! Surely a bride never stood more utterly and desolately alone at such an hour! I did not think of it then, however. Never having known care or love, how could I miss it? I had Ross. That was enough for me. O my God, that would be enough for me, I am often tempted to think, even within the gates of Thy paradise!

After the marriage—after Mr. Collins had uttered those words which, even from his lips, sounded strange and solemn, “I pronounce you man and wife”—there was no rush of congratulation and compliment, such as I

have seen since then at weddings, where love had a much smaller place than with you and me, my poor Ross! Mr. Collins shook hands and muttered a few words, the lawyer and doctor did the same; I heard afterward that the latter described the marriage all over the country-side as “the most mercenary bargain he had ever witnessed.” Aunt Kendall advanced and shook her head over us. “No good’ll ever come of it,” she said. “What’s begun in sorrow isn’t likely to end in joy. I never saw the like of such a wedding in all my born days—never!”

Then certain inarticulate sounds from the bed signified to all of us that Uncle Kendall was impatient even of this delay. “The will!” we heard him trying to say, “the will!”

Then the lawyer produced and read aloud this important document. I tried to listen and to grasp its meaning—for, was it not necessary that I should do so?—but, listen as I would, the legal jargon was to me unintelligible. I could make nothing of it. My head was in a whirl. Did it give Kendall to Ross? Did it provide that he should never need to go back to China again? I put up my hand and caught his, resting on the back of the chair in which he had placed me.

“Ross,” I whispered, as he bent down, “does it give every thing to you?”

“Every thing,” he answered, quietly.

Then I was satisfied. All that I desired would soon be accomplished. When the will was signed and sealed in the presence of the witnesses there assembled, all which seemed to me trembling in the balance but a little while before, would be secured to Ross. He would be rich and free, and could care as generously as he pleased—far more generously than that stern old dying man would have done—for the boy with the flushed, smiling face and tangled, curling hair, asleep in Sylvy’s cabin. I gave a sigh of relief, and laid my cheek softly against the hand resting so near. It was a very toil-worn hand; and I remember thinking, with a thrill of pleasure, that, after that night, it would never need to toil again. From first to last, God is my witness, Ross, I thought then, as I think now, only of you!

After the will was read, the signing took place. First, the paralyzed hand of the dying man was guided over the letters of his name. Then the witnesses appended their signatures. After this—which I watched breathlessly—

the lawyer gravely shook hands with Ross. “A very fine inheritance, indeed, Mr. Kendall!” he said. But Ross answered nothing. I think he felt that these congratulations in a death-chamber were out of place.

Then, while we still stood grouped about the bed—watching the flickering breath come and go, and waiting for the end—a step which I knew suddenly sounded in the room beyond. How I knew it—how I guessed that it was Sylvy, who had heard of her master’s illness, and was coming to him—I cannot tell. I only remember that I sprang suddenly away from Ross—I seem to see yet, as in a dream, his look of surprise—and rushed across the floor. With all my haste, I was only in time to meet the old woman on the threshold.

IV.

“Go back, Sylvy!” I said, catching her arm. “Go back! You are too late. Uncle Kendall is dying!”

“Dyin’ or not, Miss Beryl, I’m comin’ to him!” she answered, sternly. “You nor nobody else shall keep me back when I’ve got to speak for her that’s gone, and the helpless orphim she lef’. It’s no thanks to you I heard about him,” she added, fiercely, “an’ it’s not you shall keep me away now.”

“But he is dying—he is speechless. What good can it do?”

“Speechless or not, he shall hear ole Sylvy!” said she. “You might as well stand out o’ my path, Miss Beryl—I’m comin’ in. The Lord has sent me to speak for them that has nobody else to speak for ’em—and I am goin’ to do it!”

“No, you are not going to do it!” said I, between my set teeth. We were standing face to face in the door-way—I tall and strong, she small and frail—and, as I said those words, I put a hand on each of her shoulders, and bore her back. It was so suddenly and swiftly done, that she had not time to resist or protest. She gave way like a reed, and I whirled her—how, I have not an idea—through the anteroom in which she stood, clear across the passage, and into a sort of nondescript house-keeper’s room, where Aunt Kendall mostly sat. There I deposited her in a chair.

“You shall not go in there to disturb a dying man and make a family scandal before all those strangers!” I said then—slightly breathless myself. “The woman is dead—

you know that—and the child shall be cared for better than he would ever have done. That ought to satisfy you!”

“But it don’t satisfy me!” cried she, as soon as she could find her voice. “It don’t satisfy me—an’ it never will satisfy me! Every thing ought to belong to him—the blessed child—an’ not to you nor that sweet-heart of yours neither. It’s a sin an’ shame to see him ’at has a right to be here, turned out for them ’at has no right—an’ so I’ll say, as long as the Lord gives me breath!”

“You are a most unreasonable old woman!” said I. “Did I make Uncle Kendall leave his fortune away from his grandchild? He knew he had a grandchild, didn’t he? He hasn’t left it to me, if that will gratify you.”

“Then he’s left it to one with less right than you,” said she, sullenly.

This I did not choose to notice. “Go back to your house,” I said. “You are talking folly. The child shall be cared for, I promise you that!”

“I should like for him ’at has a right to promise, to tell me *that*,” she said.

“You shall not go near him!” I cried; but as I spoke the door opened, and Ross walked in.

At the first sight of him I felt my heart die within me. Somehow I knew what was coming then. If I had had my senses about me, I should have gone forward at once to meet him and draw him from the room; I should have told him the story first myself at any cost; but, at the moment of emergency, my self-possession deserted me—as self-possession mostly does when it is needed—and I stood pale and silent, while he crossed the floor and came up to me.

“My darling,” he said, taking my hands, “it is all over. He is dead!”

“Is he?” said I, with a gasp. Fool as I was, and horrible as it may sound to those who discreetly bury in silence the involuntary emotions of their hearts, this news came to me with a thrill of relief. I do not remember that I even tried to be sorry; that I even gave one thought to the cheerless life that had ended—to the sinful soul that had gone. I only thought of Ross. Whatever I had done, the result was gained. He was master of Kendall now. None could gainsay that last will and testament signed and witnessed scarce an hour before.

“So he is dead!” said I, shuddering a lit-

tle. Then I drew my hands from the kind clasp which held them, and walked over to where Sylvie stood.

"You hear that!" I said, in a low tone. "Now go! After a while I will speak to Mr. Kendall, and every thing shall be done that is right; but you must go!"

I could not help a certain imploring ring in my voice despite its tone of authority; and this she caught. She gave me a quick glance of mingled surprise and defiance out of her keen black eyes.

"I'm much obliged to you, Miss Beryl," she said, dryly; "but I'll speak to the new master myself, since I didn't git leave to speak to the ole one."

"Sylvie!" cried I, grasping her dress as she strove to pass me.

But she broke away and walked up to Ross, who was standing on the hearth-rug, looking surprised at this scene.

"I ax your pardon, master," said she, dropping her old-fashioned courtesy, "but Miss Beryl's bin a tellin' me that ole Mass Kendall's lef' all his property to you; an' I thought I'd make bold to come an' tell you that his daughter's a lyin' dead in my cabin, an' that his grandchile's there too, with nobody to see after him but an ole nigger like me."

"What!" said Ross. It was scant wonder that he was startled. Such news at such a time would have been likely to startle any man.

"Are you mad?" he asked, when the statement had been repeated. "What is the meaning of such a story as this?—Has she been telling it to you, Beryl?" he went on, turning to me. "If so, what does she mean?"

"I means what I say," answered Sylvie; for my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth. "Go to my house an' look fur yourself, if you don't believe me, or ax Miss Beryl here. She can tell you, fur she seen Mass Kendall's daughter afore she died."

"Beryl!" said Ross. There are no words in which I can express the mingled amazement, incredulity, and appeal of his tone. Then, after a minute's long silence, "Beryl, what does she mean? What falsehood or absurdity is this? Your uncle's daughter died long ago."

"She died this evenin'!" cried Sylvie, with energy, before I could speak. "Them that said she died long ago was liars, that wanted

what should a bin hers. She's a lyin' in my cabin dead this minute. Send old Mis' Kendall, send Mr. Collins, send Dr. Burton. They all knowed her when she was young. Let them say if it ain't true an' if I'm a liar!"

Her passionate, vehement voice carried conviction with it. I saw that in his face even before I heard it in his voice, when, after a short pause, he said, sharply:

"If this is—if this can possibly be true, why did you not come and tell it before your master died?"

"An' how was I to know that he was a dyin'?—how was I even to know that he had got back home?" she asked. "Nobody was goin' to come an' tell ole Sylvie. Miss Beryl, she knowed who was in my cabin, but instead of sayin' a word fur 'em, she turned me back from the door when I come to tell ole master myself."

"Beryl!" said Ross again. This time it was a hoarse cry, and, turning sharply away from the woman before him, he came up to me.

"Beryl!" he said, taking my hands and gazing at me with passionate, wistful eyes, which seemed to pierce my soul; "for God's sake, tell me—is this true?"

What could I say? I do not think I would have hesitated to lie, if lying would have served any purpose; but, even through the mist of my reckless folly, I had sense enough to know that facts were too strong against me for that resource. I had instinct enough to feel that if I wished to make utter shipwreck of Ross's love and respect, I had only to add deliberate falsehood to criminal silence. Therefore, I could only look at him—at the face I loved so dearly growing white and stern before my gaze—with piteous, imploring eyes, conscious the while that my heart was rising into my throat—so young a heart, O Ross, and so untaught, that I sometimes think you might have been more patient, even with its deceit!

I saw that he read my answer in my face, and that he would ask no other—then. He dropped my hands suddenly, and, turning away, walked back to Sylvie.

"Come!" he said to her in a hard, cold voice. "Let me go and prove this story of yours!"

She followed him readily enough, and they passed out of the room together—leaving me alone. For a moment I stood bewildered.

Had Ross left me like that? Ross!—for whom I had done every thing? Then I rushed after him—overtaking him in the passage beyond.

"Ross," I cried, catching his arm imploringly, "what are you going to do?—why should you care so much for this news? The will is safe. Every thing is yours!"

He turned and looked at me. I think sometimes that in my grave I shall remember that look. Then he shook off my hand.

"Go back, Beryl," he said, in a strange sort of voice. "I will come to you after a while—but go back now."

"Ross, I—I should like to come with you."

"It is no place for you," he said. Then he led me—gently, but alas! not tenderly—back to the room I had left, closed the door, and went his way.

For a minute I was stunned. Then—well, I do not remember much after that until I seemed to rouse out of a wild passion of sobs to find Aunt Kendall standing over me, a glass of cordial in her hand, and an awed, frightened look on her meek, commonplace face.

Of what she said I have little more recollection than if her words had been water and my mind a sieve. I only remember that she had been sent by "Mr. Kendall" to look after me, to put me to bed, and to see that I rested—and that I refused absolutely to be looked after, to go to bed, or to rest. I demanded to know where Ross was; but when I heard that he was superintending the removal of the dead body from Sylvie's cabin to the manor, I asked no more. I only turned with a look that hushed even the garrulous comments on her lips.

"I can hear none of that now," I said. "Go to bed. I shall wait here till Ross comes. He cannot be long."

But he was long—wearily, terribly long. Shall I ever forget the watches of that terrible night? I did not dare to seek him again after the repulse I had received; so I could do nothing but wait—pacing the floor most of the time in fevered restlessness, and listening with heart-sick expectation to every step which sounded in the passage, to every one of the sounds with which the old house seemed full, the strange tide of life which Death always brings in his train. It must have been very near daylight when, overcome by exhaus-

tion and weariness, I fell asleep in a large chair before the fire; and, when I waked with a start, Ross was standing before me.

He looked pale, haggard, and very grave, I thought, as the morning light streamed over his face; but his first words were full of concern for me.

"Beryl," he said, "is it possible that you have been here all night?"

"Yes," answered I, looking at him blankly, numbly, as it were. I remembered every thing perfectly—as perfectly as if I had not slept—but somehow my passionate emotion had all died away, and a great apathy had come over me instead.

"But why did you do such a thing?" asked he, bringing a shawl from another part of the room and wrapping it around my unresisting figure. "It is enough to make you ill. I thought you had gone to bed long ago."

"Aunt Kendall came for me," I said, "but I did not choose to go. You said you were coming back, and I—I thought I would wait."

"But did you think I meant you to wait for me all night?" he asked. "How could you be so foolish? It will surely make you ill."

"Oh, I am strong," said I, with a little weary shiver. And God knows this was true enough, else I should have died long since of sheer pain and hopelessness.

Then for a minute there was silence. Ross stood and looked at me. I sat and looked at the dying fire. The cold, gray daylight streamed in through the unshuttered windows, a cock was crowing in the yard without; I even remember that somebody walked across the floor of the room overhead, and I speculated vaguely concerning who it was. Then:

"I did not expect to find you here," Ross said, abruptly. "I came in for a little quiet—for a little time to think—but perhaps it is as well that we should understand each other at once. I have something to ask you, Beryl."

"Well!" said I, faintly. I knew what was coming, but I scarcely shrunk. Only—it is a good thing to think that there are some minutes of life which we shall never have to live over; and that is one of them.

"Well," he echoed, after a second—and his very lips seemed to grow pale with the effort of speaking—"I want to ask if it is true,

this horrible story, that you knew—you, Beryl—of the dying daughter who had come to seek her father's protection for her child, and that, standing by that father's death-bed, seeing him bequeath his fortune to a stranger, you uttered not one word to warn him of the heir who was so near—of the grandchild whom he was wronging so deeply by such a will?"

"Have you not Sylvy's word for it?" asked I, gathering myself together in the chair, and gazing steadfastly at the embers on the hearth.

"Sylvy's word!" he repeated. "What is Sylvy's word to me? What is the word of anybody in the world in comparison with, or arrayed against, yours? Beryl!"—he came suddenly forward and took my passive hands into his eager clasp—"say something to me! Tell me it is not so! Tell me that it is a lie or a mistake; tell me that it is *any thing* sooner than true, and God knows I love you so well that I shall believe you in the face of every proof against you!"

Even yet I hear the thrill of imploring passion in his voice. Even yet my tears fall heavily to realize how much he must have loved the woman to whom he spoke like that. Poor Ross! It was hard on him when my dull, mechanical answer came—spoken as if I cared so little for his pleading or his pain.

"But I cannot tell you any thing except that it is true—quite true. I knew the whole story, and I said nothing!"

"But why? Why did you not speak even to me?"

I shrugged my shoulders a little. Such a question seemed so foolish. "Because I wanted the will signed," I answered.

Then he let go my hands—suffered them to drop out of his clasp as if he had no longer need or care to hold them.

"You acknowledge that!" he said. "You—such a mere child—to love money so! You to plot for it in such a manner as this!"

This charge, from the very bitterness of its injustice, stung me out of my apathetic calm.

"I thought of you!" I cried out—"of you only, of you all the time! I wanted the fortune for you, Ross. How can you think I wanted it for myself?"

"How can I think otherwise?" he asked, coldly and hardly. "It is true you secured the fortune to me, but was it not because you

could in no other way secure it to yourself? Do you fancy I do not understand *now* why you only consented to marry me when you heard that the will depended on your doing so, and that, without a will, the property would go to the heir-at-law? I was fool enough to think you cared for me *then*. I did not understand who the heir-at-law was, you see, or how your only hope of gaining the estate was to sacrifice yourself to me. I have thought it all over until it has almost maddened me!" he went on, turning away, and beginning to pace the floor with a quick, restless motion. "It seems so impossible—and yet it is so plain! Such a child—and with the very face of an angel—to have learned the lesson of her sex so soon and so well! And I, who should have known better, to be so entrapped," he added, with a low, unmirthful laugh—"I, who had known my mother, and that other woman who looked at me with eyes *almost* as frank as yours, and jilted me to marry another man when she found that I was poor. Unhappily, you cannot do that!" he said, stopping again before me.

"Ross!" said I, hoarsely. My lips seemed dry and parched. It was like a horrible nightmare. Ross to believe that I only married him to secure the fortune! I could almost have laughed at the grotesque absurdity of the thought.

"How you shrunk from me," he went on, "when I first spoke of our immediate marriage! I cannot forget that gesture—it was full of greater significance than a hundred words. Then—afterward—how you forced yourself to the sacrifice because it was your only road to wealth! And now, with all your youth and all your beauty, you are tied to a poor man!"

"Ross," I cried, "are you mad?—what do you mean? The will!—you said the will could not be set aside!"

"*Except by the legatee*," he answered, coldly; "but I have already instructed your uncle's lawyer to draw up the necessary papers for making over the estate to its rightful heir."

"Ross!"

"You are shocked, no doubt," he said, still more coldly. "But even for your sake—though I pity you from my heart!—I cannot accept a bequest which is so palpably unjust!"

Shocked! I was stricken dumb and

motionless, rather. Such a thought as this had never occurred to me for one moment. I had fancied the will to be final and unalterable, and now—for Ross to talk of giving up all that I had secured to him! I could not speak—I could scarcely think! My very heart seemed to stand still.

"Set your mind at rest about your own condition," he said, after a minute, in a kinder tone—pitying, perhaps, my white, stunned face—"I will secure a sufficient portion out of the estate to make you independent—such a portion as your uncle would no doubt have left you—and settle it on yourself. That much, at least, I can do for you."

For me! As if I cared for myself—as if I had thought of myself in what I had done!

"Ross," I cried out, "do you know that you are killing me by such cruel words as these! What can I say to make you believe that I—I thought only of you? I don't pretend to excuse what I did. Perhaps it was very wicked; but I was never taught any better. I did not think there was any harm in being silent; but, if there *had* been harm, I should have done it for you."

"I do not doubt it," he said, bitterly, "since, in doing it for me, you did it for yourself. Nay"—almost fiercely—"do not try to make me believe any thing else! You have duped and fooled me long enough with your lovely face and your wistful eyes. My God, are women *always* false!" he cried out, passionately. "Is there not one of them true? Is there not one of them who will not make a plaything and a tool of a man's love? If one could have hoped for truth in any, would it not have been in *you*, Beryl? and yet how false and mercenary your own acts prove that you are!"

I gazed at him dry-eyed and mute. What could I say to such words as these? Looking into his white, passionate face, I felt that all was over with me—that no protestations could ever build up again his shattered trust. In his eyes, I had schemed not to enrich him, but to enrich myself; and had used his passionate love only as the means to such an end.

"I see you will not believe me," I said, piteously, after a while, "but I did not think of gaining the fortune for myself. I thought only of securing it to you—that you might not be forced to go back to China."

"You were very kind," he said, bitterly.

"It is hard on you that I shall need to go back to China, after all."

He spoke with a sarcasm which I should have been quick enough to feel, only in the terror of his words it passed me by unheeded. All my lethargy fled then. I sprang to my feet, and, going up to him, caught his arm.

"Ross," I gasped, "how can you frighten me so horribly? How can you say such a terrible thing? You are not in earnest—you cannot *mean* that you are going back to China?"

"Do you care?" he asked, suddenly taking me into his arms. "O Beryl, if I could but believe that you did! O lovely face, why are you not true? O sweet lips, why must I fear that your very sweetness is tricking me?"

"Ross, Ross, stay!" I cried, clinging to him passionately. "O Ross, my darling, say what you please to me, believe what you please of me—only stay!"

"But I am a poor man, Beryl," he said, more gently than he had spoken yet. "How can I stay?"

Then the devil prompted me to cry: "But the fortune—O Ross, the fortune! If you keep *that* you need not go. And it was left to you—Uncle Kendall left it to you! He never meant for you to give it up!"

Fool and thrice fool that I was! Looking back now, I think that, in another moment, my tearful eyes, my clinging arms, would have prevailed over his resolution to go, and that he might have consented to stay if those words had not undone all. He drew back as if they had stung him; untwining my arms, and putting me from him with a faint, scornful laugh.

"See how easily I am duped!" he said. "See how wrong your uncle was in saying that my poor father was weaker than I! A few tears, a few glances, and I was ready to believe in you again, Beryl, till you show me that you are thinking of the fortune—not of me! Till you prove that you are only intent on tempting me to dishonor, I see I must go," he said, after a minute. "I am not so strong as I thought—I cannot trust myself with you. At least, not until all is done that must be done."

Then, not willingly, but as one who yields to a temptation too great to be resisted, he took me in his arms and kissed me many times—ah, Ross, did *you* suspect, though I

never, that it was for the last time?—then, putting me into the chair where he had found me, turned, before I could utter a word, and left the room.

Left the room, do I say? Rather, passed from my life—passed so utterly that, from that hour to the one in which I write, I have never looked upon his face again.

Later in the day, he left Kendall, to accompany the lawyer to Exford, where he found a telegram from his employers summoning him on urgent business. After signing the necessary papers for resigning the estate, he obeyed the summons at once. A week later, he sailed for China. Before me lies a letter which he wrote me on the eve of his departure. It is cold and full of business detail—though breaking toward the end into a tenderness beyond his power to restrain—but, if you glance at its worn and yellowed pages, you will see that they are stained with the signs of many tears, salt as the sea and bitter as grief. Such as it is, I do well to prize it, better yet to weep over it, for it is

my sole token of the love of one who sailed away thinking that he left behind only a woman who had deceived him, and who never reached the distant Chinese port where her passionate letters—poor letters! I have *them*, too—waited for him through many a long day.

And so my story ends. At least in all save my moments of madness, I think that so it ends. But the fate of the ship in which Ross sailed was never known, and I—sometimes I am still weak enough to hope, to dream, I know not what, of wild, improbable things. Not long ago I read a poem which seemed the voice of my own heart. It is called "Returned—Missing," and is by Miss Procter, I think. One stanza I cannot forget:

"Not that I dream or fancy,
You know all that is past;
Earth has no hope to give me,
And yet—Time flies so fast
That all but the impossible
Might be brought back at last."

THE END.

THE PAINTER'S DREAM.

I.

"CHROME-YELLOW," muttered Vance Lorimer, tossing over the heap of tube-paints that lay on a table by the side of his easel. "Lake-red, burnt sienna, bistre, gamboge—why, what the deuce has gone with the thing, Travers?"

He raised his voice at the last word, and a young man who was painting at the other end of the long room, the skylight, easels, and lay-figures of which proclaimed it a studio, looked up and answered:

"Well, Vance; what is it?"

"Have you carried off the ultramarine? I can't find it anywhere?"

"Ultramarine? I—on my honor, I don't know. Probably I have."

"Well, pray be good enough to return it, then," said Lorimer, in an impatient tone. "I have been looking for a tube of it everywhere, and wasted more time than the confounded thing is worth."

"Take permanent blue."

"No. I want ultramarine. What is the reason you can't let my paints alone?"

"What is the reason you can't be friendly and obliging?" returned the other, with a laugh. "It is so much less trouble to borrow from you than to send out and buy. Here! be quick; catch it as I toss it to you."

He suited the action to the word, and, as he spoke, a small tube went flying through the air, straight at Lorimer's head. The latter caught it deftly, and, having done so, commenced mixing some of the contents on his palette. While he was occupied in this way, his friend watched him closely, and at last spoke, quite abruptly:

"What are you painting on, Lorimer?"

"On a scene," was the rather unsatisfactory reply.

"Humph! Considering the number of scenes you have on hand, that is something like saying 'on a picture.' What scene?"

"Come and satisfy yourself, if you are curious."

Apparently, from some reason or other, Travers *was* curious. He laid down his brush, and, with his palette still on his thumb, came down the room, and, walking round his friend's easel, paused in front of it. The first thing he did was to give a long whistle, then he looked up and said:

"So you are at this again?"

"Yes," said Lorimer, coolly, "I am at that again. It is impossible to help it, Frank. Every time I stop painting, I have the dream over again; and each time it seems to grow more vivid. Last night I could hardly believe that it was not reality. You may laugh if you like; but I tell you it is the strangest thing I ever heard of."

"I am not laughing," said Travers, truthfully enough. "I haven't the least inclination to laugh, Vance; for I really believe that, if this thing goes on, you'll turn clairvoyant after a while, and be dreaming dreams, and seeing visions, like the rest of them. If I had been in your place, I would have made a stand against it."

"What was the good of making a stand against it?" asked the other. "It is all very well to talk in that way when you haven't felt the thing; but, by Jove, if you had—"

"I hope I shouldn't have taken leave of my senses, as you seem to have done."

"How do I seem to have taken leave of my senses?"

"Are not all your pictures lying untouched,

and have you done a stroke of work on any but this for a month past?"

"And how could I help either the one or the other? I felt absolutely incapable of touching them, and irresistibly impelled to work on this. I have tried again and again to put it down, and there is always some strong force compelling me to resume work on it."

"That is exactly what is the matter," said Travers, thrusting his right hand deep into the pocket of his blouse, and looking at the picture as if it had been a culprit, and he had been a judge ready to pass sentence of death upon it. "That sort of talk is not like you, Lorimer; and it sounds badly—on my honor, it does. A man can do any thing he wants to do; and, if that precious picture was mine, I would cut it up into strips, and throw it into the fire."

"Is it such a daub, then?"

"A daub? Confound it, you know as well as I do that it is better painted than any thing you ever did before, and that is what provokes me. The thing has acquired such a hold on you that you have put into it the very best of your power. Lorimer, honestly, I don't think it's right."

Lorimer laughed, then looked up from the paints he was mixing, and gave a glance, half-affectionate, half-critical, at the picture.

"There's one thing certain," he said, "it has a look of reality—don't you think so?"

"It has a devilish look of reality," the other answered. "I could swear you had painted every stroke from actual sight. Vance, are you sure you never saw any thing like it?—any thing that may have been lying dormant in your brain, and unconsciously brought forth this?"

"I am perfectly sure," Vance returned, decidedly, "I never saw the scene, or any thing resembling it, in my life. And as for the people, of course I never saw them."

"You might have seen worse-looking ones."

"Yes, I think I might. Stand back now, Franzerl, I want to go to work."

Travers drew back; but still stood by, looking on with a very disapproving face, while Lorimer began touching the foreground of the picture. It was not a large or a very elaborate composition, nor was the drift of its meaning very plain; but still it was a painting at which any art-connoisseur would have paused to look, and in which the most severe critic

must needs have found much to commend. There was an earnest signification underlying it, and a dramatic power about it which irresistibly enchained attention, and made even Travers understand the hold it had gained on his friend.

The scene represented a mountain-gap, and the background of the picture was entirely occupied by scenery of the boldest yet most luxuriant character. There was no ruggedness in the grand outline of the towering hills, for they were clothed in a royal drapery of almost tropical verdure, while on one side a sunny valley stretched away, bounded by walls of living green, and flecked by a hundred vicissitudes of light and shadow. This part of the picture was inexpressibly charming, and was painted with a fidelity, a reality of treatment and strict attention to detail, which made it almost impossible to believe that it was not a faithful copy of Nature. The foreground of the piece was brightened by a small river that dashed into sight round the base of a lordly mountain, and, widening out in the sunshine, lay smooth and clear as crystal just where the bluffs that overlooked it made a break, and a narrow road led down between overhanging hills to the water's edge. And here it was that the interest of the picture centred—for here lay a small skiff which contained two figures in very dramatic pose. One was a woman, a girl whose hat had fallen off into the water, and was slowly floating downstream, while she herself, with every mark of a recent struggle in her disordered dress, her loosened hair, and flushed, resolute face, was springing forward, as if to gain the land. The other was a man who stood erect, and held her back with one arm, while with the other he was loosening the boat from its fastenings, preparatory to pushing it out into the stream. The action was very well managed, for there was nothing strained or stiff, nothing overwrought or weak about either attitude, and the faces of both the man and the woman were so strongly marked, so thoroughly individualized, that, if they had been portraits, they would have been recognizable at a glance. The girl was singularly beautiful, and as her face was upturned, and the heavy masses of golden-brown hair fell back from it, and rolled, like a tide of bronze, down her back, it was easy to trace every line of the delicate features, the clear, haughty nose, the exquisite mouth, the finely-arched brows, the deep,



"Stand back now, Franzerl, I want to go to work."

large, dark eyes, full of indignant scorn and passionate resentment, the complexion white and pure as the petal of a water-lily. Her dress was very plain; but a glance was enough to show that she was a lady. Quite as evidently, her companion was a gentleman. He was tall and well made, and a studied roughness of costume only brought out more plainly the aristocratic air stamped upon his whole personal appearance. His face was half-turned aside, showing the profile, which was very handsome and full of determined resolution—resolution different from that of the girl, inasmuch as hers was evidently hot as fire, while his was cold as steel. The mouth was compressed, the nostrils were drawn, and in the eye there was a look of such exultant triumph, that involuntarily Travers exclaimed:

"There's one thing I don't understand, Vance. How did you have the patience to paint that scoundrel without pitching him out of the boat?"

"It was hard," said Vance, laughing; "but then I had no option in the matter. You won't believe it, Frank, but there has been a strange sort of power at work to make me paint this thing. I don't deny that it has a fascination for me, but it has a strong repulsion also, especially this scoundrel, as you call him."

"The girl is a splendid creature, though, and she is making a gallant fight of it. What is to become of her, Vance?"

"How should I know, Franzerl?"

"Paint a rescuer, at least. Don't let that villain have it all his own way. By Jove! he looks so triumphant, that it is more than one can stand!"

"Whom should I paint, and where should I paint him? There was no rescuer in the dream."

"Paint him there," said Travers, pointing to a shelving bluff crowned with luxuriant foliage that overhung the river just beyond the boat. "As for who he should be—you are welcome to put me in. I'd like amazingly to have even an imaginary chance at punching that rascal's head! Or, as you are the better looking of the two—besides being the stronger—put yourself in, Vance."

Vance flushed a little. He certainly looked no unfit subject for a picture, as he stood there in all the strength and stateliness of early manhood, his well-knit figure uniting muscular power and grace of proportion in

such rare degree, that it might have served as a model for an athlete, and his frank, handsome face full of the pleasant light that had never failed to prepossess liking in any one who looked upon it. Just now the blue eyes were gazing intently at the picture so strangely suggested, so faithfully worked out, and the lips were smiling under the long, fair mustache that fell over them and matched the crest of crisp curls above the brow. He shook his head at last.

"No, no, Franzerl. You know what we used to say at Düsseldorf—'always be faithful to your inspiration.' I have never seen myself in this picture."

"Nor anybody else?"

"Nor anybody else."

"Well, it is deucedly hard on the poor girl, that is all I have to say," returned Travers, in a most sincere tone of commiseration. "I wish the thing was in the fire; for it has bewitched you. Come, Vance! let us leave work for a while, and try a tour of rustication. I am sure we both need fresh subjects; I am sick of my everlasting *genre*, and I am sure you must be sick of this. By-the-by, how often do you dream your interesting dream? Every night?"

"No. Only when I stop painting it."

"And is it always the same? Do you never see the dream at a little earlier or a little later stage?"

"I have never seen a thing beyond what I have put down here."

"And how do you feel in regard to it?"

Vance laughed a little. "I am not imaginative, or easily impressed," he said. "Primarily, I feel that it is confoundingly queer; and secondly, I feel that I should like to get my hands on that fellow!"

"I can comprehend that sensation. But you have not answered my question. Shall we go somewhere?"

"My dear Frank, 'somewhere' is delightfully indefinite. I thought, moreover, that we had decided that our pecuniary resources are too limited for us to go anywhere?"

"Anywhere where money is a necessity, of course. But I know a land of milk and honey—don't open your eyes wider than you can help—where money is next to unknown, and quite unnecessary."

"One of the dominions of Prester John, no doubt."

"No, my dear friend. A region much

nearer home—in fact, the mountains of North Carolina. The most magnificent scenery on the continent is to be found there; your travelling pest, 'the tourist,' is absolutely unheard of; the people are simple, patriarchal, and hospitable; the commodities of life are so abundant that money is positively at a discount; and, in one word, it is a modern Arcadia. Let us make a walking tour through it."

"Walk from here to North Carolina, Frank! Are you mad?"

"Not quite, *mon ami*—despite the contagion of your society. Listen to my plan—it is at once comprehensive and practical. We will take the railroad here, and follow that commonplace mode of conveyance as far as it will carry us—which is not far into the mountains, I can promise you. Then we will shoulder our knapsacks and sketch-books, and take to our feet. We shall have to rough it—there are no monster-caravanseries under the name of hotels between the Yadkin and the French Broad—and no doubt we shall sometimes have to go fasting. But still, if we can succeed in putting only a hundredth part of the beauty we shall see on canvas, we shall make our fortunes—and that's a consideration."

"It sounds tempting," said Vance, balancing his palette on his thumb. "But my picture—"

"Hang your picture! It is exactly that confounded thing I am anxious to take you away from. If we stay here, and you work at it much longer, I shall be reduced to the necessity of calling in a procession of priests to exorcise you with 'bell, book, and candle.' Come, I am in earnest—will you go?"

Vance looked irresolutely at the painting. It cost a severe struggle to resolve to leave it behind; but he knew that, if he did not go, Travers himself would never consent to leave the city, and the hot, breathless, dog-days were upon them. So, after a while, he made up his mind to the sacrifice with a sigh.

"If it must be, it must," he said. "Yes, I'll go, Franzerl. But I doubt if I shall see any thing half so lovely as this in all our travels."

He pointed, as he spoke, to the girl in the foreground of his picture—at which Franzerl shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

"The spell is in the witch's face," he said, with a laugh. "I don't think there's a

doubt, Vance, that it is; and that it has bound you, hand and foot."

II.

"THERE is no good in arguing the matter," said Mr. Rivers, regarding his wife with a frowning brow; "Marion shall never marry that man."

Now, if there was one thing more than another which his family and friends had always known of John Rivers, it was that his decisions were final, and that, if he once said of any thing it "shall" or it "shall not" be, the matter might be regarded (either negatively or affirmatively) as settled. He had never in any instance been known to change his mind; so when he looked at his wife now, and said, in the tone of a Persian satrap, "Marion shall never marry that man," Mrs. Rivers felt that all argument was useless, and, sinking back in her chair, uttered nothing save a faint, reproachful sigh.

"I can't imagine what ever put such an idea into Marion's head, or how you could ever have thought that I would consent to it!" her husband went on, in that tone of intense irritation which shows when the thermometer of masculine anger is fast approaching fever-heat. "It really seems as if I never go away from home that the household does not manage to get into some mischief. The last time, it was Jack's scrape; and now you coolly tell me that Marion wants to marry the most unprincipled scamp in the country."

"My dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Rivers, in a tone of expostulation.

"Yes," said her husband, unflinchingly. "I mean exactly what I say: I never knew a Rayford who was not an unprincipled scamp; and, from all that I hear of this young man, he bids fair to increase the family reputation. Of course they don't lie, or steal, or do any thing of that sort; but they are a set of gambling, duelling desperadoes, and I would see Marion in her grave before she should marry one of them."

"But, John, is it fair to judge in this way?" cried Mrs. Rivers, with an attempt at appeal. "This young man came back from Europe only the other day; and, indeed, he seems very different from the rest of the family. Of course, I know what the Rayfords are—but he seems very different."

"He might seem like an angel of light, and I should not trust him," said Mr. Rivers,

dryly. "Besides, I tell you that I have heard of him. I never mentioned it before, for I did not suppose the matter would ever concern us, and I am not given to spreading gossip; but Harry Armstrong was in Germany at the same time that this—what is his name?—this Alston Rayford was, and he told me of more than one scandal in which his name was prominent. You might like such a husband for Marion, but I should not."

Mrs. Rivers sighed deeply and helplessly. She knew that, to combat her husband's resolution, was to dash herself against a rock; and yet she sighed—partly for her daughter's disappointment, partly for her own. Her heart had been very much set on possessing Mr. Alston Rayford, with his handsome presence and charming manners, as a son-in-law; and she could not resign the prospect without regret. She looked at her husband, but his firmly-set mouth and determined face were not encouraging; so, after pausing a considerable time, she found nothing better to reply than—

"I am sure I don't know what Marion will say!"

"That is not a matter of much importance," answered Marion's father. "As for what she will do—she will abide by my decision, and receive no more of Mr. Rayford's visits or attentions."

"You forget that he has made an offer, John. She will have to see him, or else write to him and tell him of your—your decision."

"She will have to do neither the one nor the other. I will see him and settle the matter."

"But, John, don't you think—"

"I think that you are as absurdly infatuated as Marion herself," interrupted Mr. Rivers, impatiently. "I told you, a moment ago, that it is useless to argue the matter. My mind is made up; and I am the head of my own household, I hope. You can tell Marion what I say, or you can send her to me, whichever you please."

"I think I had better tell her," said Mrs. Rivers, meekly.

"Do so, then," said her husband, shortly. "No doubt she will think that I am a hard-hearted tyrant, and that she is an injured victim, but take care that she *don't* think that there is any hope of her being ultimately allowed to marry the man."

Mrs. Rivers made no reply; but, from the mere habit of obedience, rose and left the

room. Once in the hall, with the door closed between her husband and herself, she stopped and wrung her hands. She was a delicate, helpless-looking woman at all times, but the helplessness of her aspect came out with peculiar and almost ludicrous force just now, as she stood at the foot of the staircase, gazing absently out of the broad open doors at the summer landscape beyond, and dreading the meeting with her daughter even more than she had lately dreaded the meeting with her husband. But there was no alternative of evasion. Marion must be informed of her father's resolution without delay. "Every thing falls on me," said Mrs. Rivers to herself, in an injured tone—and, then she began to mount the stairs. Before she reached the second floor, gay voices floated down to her ear; and, when she paused on the landing, a door just in front of her was half-open, giving a pleasant glimpse of a chamber airy with light summer drapery, fragrant with the perfume of roses and honeysuckle clambering round the windows, and full of a ripple of girlish talk and laughter proceeding from two unseen mouths. Mrs. Rivers knew at once that Marion's most intimate friend, Miss Nellie Forrest, was with her. But this young lady was so entirely one of the family, that no household secrets were kept from her, and her presence did not afford an excuse for procrastination. So Mrs. Rivers advanced at once to the open door, and, as the two girls looked up, her face told her story before she had time to open her lips.

"Mamma!"

"Mrs. Rivers!"

It was an alternate exclamation; and then the first speaker hurried on:

"Mamma, something is the matter. What is it?"

"A great deal is the matter, Marion," answered Mrs. Rivers, despondently.

"Has papa come back?"

"Yes."

"And have you told him about Alston?"

"Yes."

"And what does he say?"

"He says he would see you in your grave sooner than to let you marry him."

"Mamma!"

"He absolutely refuses his consent," said Mrs. Rivers, sitting down in the chair nearest to her, and looking at her daughter with an air of appeal.

"It is not my fault, Marion. I said all I could—but you know your father. It would have done no good if I had gone on my knees to him. He says you shall not marry Mr. Rayford."

"He has no right to say so!" cried Marion, and she rose to her feet as she spoke, her face flushing and her form quivering. "You need not look at me, mamma! If he was my father a hundred times over, he would have no right to say so without some reason for it. And he has no reason. Everybody knows that there is not a thing to be said against Alston."

"His family, Marion—"

"His family are not himself—even if you believe all that has been said about them. And, for my part, I don't believe half of it."

"But your father says he has heard some unfavorable reports about Mr. Rayford himself."

"He might hear slanders and falsehoods about anybody," Marion answered. "I see he has brought you over to his opinion, mamma—of course that was to be expected. Only don't think that I am going to submit like this. If papa has any charge to make against Alston, he ought to make it explicitly, and give him an opportunity to refute it. But to stab a man's character in the dark—if it was any one else, I would not hesitate to say that it looks very much like slandering!"

"Marion!" Mrs. Rivers stood a good deal in awe of her beautiful and spoiled daughter; but really this was too much even for her patience. "Marion, you forget yourself! Your father never said a thing that was untrue in his life; and with reason, or without reason, he has a right to decide whom you shall marry."

"He has not!" said Marion; and as she stood there, with her face growing momentarily whiter, and her eyes momentarily darker, it was easy to see that she had inherited much of her father's obstinacy. "Nobody has such a right without some reason for its exercise. It would be tyranny. But I will see Alston, and—"

"You are not to see him any more," interposed Mrs. Rivers, hastily.

"Mamma! What do you mean?"

"It is very plain what I mean, Marion. Your father says you are not to receive any more of Mr. Rayford's visits or attentions; and that he himself will tell him that you cannot marry him."

Marion looked at her mother and gave a gasp. Such an arbitrary dictum seemed to her so outrageous, that it was almost incredible. But a moment's reflection showed her the folly of wasting expostulation or indignation on Mrs. Rivers, who was the mere mouth-piece of her father's resolution. So, without a word, she turned to leave the room.

"Marion!" cried her mother, hastily, "where are you going?"

"I am going to papa," Marion answered. "I must speak to him. Don't try to detain me, mamma. I must—I will go!"

Her mother caught her, but she drew away, and, before she could be stopped again, ran quickly down-stairs. Listening in mute consternation, Mrs. Rivers heard her cross the hall, knock at her father's door, enter and close it behind her. Then she looked up at Miss Forrest, who laughed and shrugged her shoulders.

"It is a case of Greek meeting Greek," the latter said. "I think we may reasonably expect there will be a tug of war."

"I am sure that Marion will be worsted, then," said Mrs. Rivers; "and, whatever happens, they are both of them sure to blame me."

Half an hour passed. At the end of that time the door below opened, and Mr. Rivers's voice was heard calling his wife's name. When she came, he pointed to his daughter, who stood in the middle of the floor, flushed, and defiant-looking.

"There is a young lady who has adopted a belief in the right of her sex to choose husbands as well as to rule them," he said, sarcastically. "She refuses to obey my command with regard to Mr. Rayford, and announces her intention of 'keeping faith' with him. Whether that romantic phrase means an elopement or not, I don't know—nor do I care. I have told her that she shall never marry him with my consent, or in my house. If she chooses to disgrace herself by eloping with him, that is her own affair. I have no intention of looking her up."

"And I have no intention of eloping," said Marion. "You know me well enough, sir, to know that. If I must submit to your commands in this matter, I shall do so. But I only submit—I do not yield. That is, I still hold myself engaged to Alston, unless he chooses to break the engagement."

"Even when I forbid it?"

"Even when you forbid it, if you give me no reason for doing so."

"That is to say, there is to be a series of clandestine meetings going on all the time?"

"No. I hope I shall never forget myself far enough to do any thing of that kind. But, if I meet Alston at the houses of our friends, I shall treat him as heretofore."

"Then I shall send you where no such interesting meetings can occur. Lucy"—this to Mrs. Rivers—"will you see that her trunk is packed? I promised George when he was here last that she should go to see him some summer. This summer will do as well as any."

"But the White Sulphur, John!" cried Mrs. Rivers, all aghast.

"The White Sulphur is not a fit place for young ladies who refuse to obey their fathers," answered Mr. Rivers, coolly. "You can go there if you choose, and take the younger girls; but Marion shall go to George's."

"O Marion! my dear child, why don't you yield to your father?" cried Mrs. Rivers, with an appeal which her daughter's face might have showed her was vain. "You will die up there, in those dreadful backwoods—I know you will."

"That is papa's affair," said Marion, in a hard voice. "If he chooses to send me into exile and virtual prison because I won't give up an honest gentleman who loves me well enough to merit some constancy from me, why, I cannot help it. The threat of being sent to Uncle George's is not going to make me do a thing I would not do without it."

"I did not expect to make you do any thing," said her father. "And it is not a threat, either—it is a certainty. I want you to be ready next week, and I will take you to the mountains myself."

He left the room as he spoke, and immediately afterward Marion broke away from her mother and ran up-stairs. The reason of this was apparent when she reached her own chamber. She was in a perfect passion of tears.

After a while the violence of the storm abated, and then the tale of her discomfiture was duly told to the sympathizing ear of Miss Forrest. It is impossible to do justice to the disgust of this young lady when she heard that, instead of the White Sulphur (for which they had been laying gay plans, and making

gay preparations that very morning), her friend was sentenced to banishment at "Uncle George's." Like most Eastern Carolinians, she had a profound ignorance and deep horror of the western part—the "up-country" in Carolina parlance—of her own State; and she would really have felt less commiseration for Marion if that young lady had announced that she was sentenced to an extended rustication in the interior of Oregon. The warmth of her friendship, and the depth of her self-sacrificing spirit, may therefore be imagined when at last she said:

"Well, if it is absolutely settled—if you are really to go, there is one thing certain, Marion, you can't go alone. As your mother says, you would really die up there. If you are not to be at the White Sulphur, it has lost all attraction for me; so, if you think I would be welcome, I will go into banishment with you."

"Nellie!" Marion looked up, and actually smiled through her tears. "You are not—you cannot be in earnest?"

"I am, though, if you will take me."

"But it would be too abominably selfish to let you do such a thing."

"Really I should think it was my concern if I choose to immolate myself on the altar of friendship. Besides, it is only changing the programme, and substituting our own mountains for those of Virginia."

"And Uncle George's for the White Sulphur! No, no, Nellie; indeed, it must not be. There is no help for me. Caesar has spoken, and I must obey. But you are different. You must go to the White Sulphur, do my flirting and dancing as well as your own, console poor Alston, write me long accounts of every thing, and—"

"And be wretched all the time, thinking of you. No, no, my dear. Spare yourself any further recapitulation of White Sulphur delights. I am bound westward. I mean to bear you company to Uncle George's. Mr. Rivers won't look upon me as a spy of the enemy, and refuse to take me, I suppose?"

"No—I can't imagine why he should."

"Then regard the matter as settled. And now let us see what dresses we shall take into banishment."

III.

In one of the most remote and wildly-picturesque of the extreme western counties of

North Carolina, the two young ladies soon found themselves safely domiciled in the house of Mr. George Rivers, and thrown upon their own resources for amusement and entertainment. As far as material comfort went, they found nothing of which to complain; for, although the whim of pitching his tent in the wilderness had seized Mr. Rivers, he had not thought it necessary to leave all the luxuries of civilization behind, and as many as were compatible with a mountain plantation, and a house built of substantial logs, had accompanied him. His wife, too, was one of the women who carry an air of refinement wherever they go; and the hardy little mountaineers who were his children, though free and frolicsome as little kids, were still full of the instinctive courtesy and winning grace of born gentlefolks. On the whole, it was a very smiling and happy home to which the exiles were welcomed; and even Marion thought she had never seen a prettier picture than this log-house, with its many wings and piazzas, its shade-trees and embowering creepers. Around in every direction stretched the grand mountain-ranges, clad in their garments of primeval forests, and before the door of the house swept a limpid mountain-river, sparkling and foaming as it dashed along on its way to join the French Broad not far below. It is creditable to the two girls to say that for a time they were so much enchanted by the exuberant beauty and overflowing vitality of this fair region, and so ready to echo Mr. Rivers's enthusiastic praise of its pure air and life-restoring powers, that they almost forgot the gay social circle they had left behind, the friends, and even the admirers who were mourning their absence. Whether one of them entirely forgot the lover who was the cause of her banishment, is a matter open to doubt; but at least she did not regret him very effusively, and threw herself with very sincere zest into the simple pleasures of their daily life. Mrs. Rivers, who had feared that she would find a moping, lovesick damsel on her hands, was delighted beyond measure with this bright creature, who took an interest in the cows and calves almost equal to her own; who went on long rambles with the children, coming back laden down with sweet wild flowers, and luscious wild fruits, and who never seemed to think it necessary to revenge herself on her entertainers for the chance which had thrown her into their care.

Still Marion and her friend were mortal young ladies, with all the tastes and desires of their age and class. The view from their new home was very magnificent; but sometimes they could not help feeling that it would be improved if there was even a glimpse to be obtained of another roof, or the smoke of another chimney—if their nearest neighbor had been at all companionable, or had lived with something less than ten miles of mountain-country between them. As it was, they were entirely isolated, and, after they had exhausted all the books and played all the music, they began to find that time hung a little heavy on their hands.

"Nellie," said Marion, after she had yawned five times consecutively one afternoon, "let us call the children and go to walk. I am tired to death of doing nothing, and even scrambling over the rocks will be an occupation."

"I am sure I am willing," said Nellie, lazily. "Only there's a very dark cloud coming up from the south, and I confess I should not like to be caught in one of these mountain-rains. They would sweep us literally away."

"I wonder if anybody would mind that?" said Marion, meditatively. "I wonder if Alston would think I had drowned myself in sheer despair, and if he would commit suicide in consequence? Dear me, Nell, it has been more than a month since we came here! Who would believe it?"

"I, for one," replied Nell, with a shrug. "Without meaning any disrespect to anybody, I have been in more lively places. Suppose we do go out and get swept away, Marion? It would make a sensation at home, and win at least a nine-days' fame for us."

"I am not sure of even the nine-days' fame," said Marion, laughing, and walking to the window. "Look!—see how that cloud is sweeping up. In five minutes the storm will be on us."

In less than five minutes, Mrs. Rivers came hurrying in, and advised that the windows should be closed. "It is no ordinary storm that is coming," she added. "That cloud, and this sudden, dead calm mean mischief. Don't stand in the open draught that way, Marion! You have no idea how dangerous it is!"

"I am not afraid," said Marion, and she kept her position, watching with interest the

premonitions of coming storm that seemed to seize all Nature. The black, livid cloud, which a few minutes before had been a mere speck on the horizon, now entirely obscured the sunlight, and was spreading rapidly over the sky, overcasting the bright day with grim determination. But as yet all was silent. The trees were hushed as if spellbound, and the only sound on the air was that of the birds which were flying about and seeking refuge under the eaves of the house, with low, distressed cries. The air was heavy and close, and, involuntarily, Marion gasped for breath. "What a dead hush there is!" she said; and, as she said it, her eyes chanced to fall on two strangers who had crossed the stream in front of the house, and were advancing up the lawn with the evident intention of seeking shelter. They were men, young, stalwart, and dressed in travelling-suits of nondescript material, and yet more nondescript color. But, although the knapsacks which they carried proved that they were foot-travellers, a single glance showed Marion that they belonged to a grade of society rarely represented in that rough region. She turned round to call Mrs. Rivers's attention to them; but, as she did so, there came a vivid flash of dazzling, blinding light, a clap of thunder that shook the house until it quivered, a crash that sounded as if the solid mountains had been rent asunder, and a hurricane of wind that tore through the chamber, filling it with din and uproar, and throwing her prostrate on the floor.

The next thing she heard, even above the tumult of the now raging storm, was a scream from Mrs. Rivers.

"Look!" she cried, "the large oak has been struck by lightning!"

Marion sprung to her feet, Nellie rushed forward, and, regardless of danger, they all three clustered and clung around the window. They saw then the meaning of the crash which had sounded so fearfully in their ears a moment before. A gigantic oak just in front of the house had attracted the electric fluid, and its mighty trunk had been literally cleft asunder—one half still standing, but the other portion lying across the lawn, and including in its downfall two or three of the smaller trees, and part of the piazza-roof. A tempest of wind and rain was sweeping by, but still they were able to perceive that a man—only one—was fighting his way to the house, and that Mr. Rivers, with two or three servants, was hurrying out to meet him. When they met, the

stranger said a few words in an excited manner, then turned and went back, pausing and steadying himself as well as he could where the boughs of the fallen oak lay wildly tossing about.

"There were two of them," said Marion, with a shudder. "One has been struck."

As she spoke, she saw two of the servants unite their strength in lifting aside one heavy limb of the tree, while Mr. Rivers and the stranger drew an apparently senseless figure from beneath it, and then, in the midst of the whirling, driving storm, they bore it to the house.

The ladies ran down-stairs, and met them in the lower hall. The injured man had been laid down, and a throng of children and servants were about him when they advanced. On one side knelt Mr. Rivers, endeavoring to discover the extent of his injuries, and on the other his companion, feeling his pulse, and anxiously calling his name.

"Vance, Vance," he said, "my dear fellow, are you much hurt?"

Marion and Nellie, who had paused in the background, exchanged glances of commiseration. "Poor fellow," whispered the former, "look how young and handsome he is! He may be only stunned by the fall of the tree, not by the lightning. I wonder if they have tried restoratives.—Aunt Sophie—"

She turned eagerly toward Mrs. Rivers, but Mrs. Rivers had left her side, and was at that moment bending over the stranger. "Salts of ammonia might restore him," she went on, quickly. "I'll go for some.—Wouldn't you, Nell?"

Before Nell could answer, she was gone, speeding away like a deer, and returning in a moment with a small *vinaigrette*. Travers, bending over his friend in an agony of fear and anxiety, was not aware that any one was near him, until a soft hand put something into his own, and a soft voice said:

"Try that. It may restore him."

Mechanically he looked down, and, seeing that it was a smelling-bottle, held it to his friend's nostrils. The salts were strong, and the effect was instantaneous. Lorimer gave a gasp, and his lids lifted—the eyes opening, as it chanced, full on Marion's face. Every member of the group saw his violent start; but only Travers understood him when he raised his head, crying, "The picture!" and then sank back fainting.

There was a great commotion. In a measure, they were reassured by perceiving that he had not been shocked by electricity; but they soon discovered that one shoulder had been dislocated by the fall of the tree. So he was carried to a chamber, and such remedies applied by Mr. Rivers (who was a very good doctor in an amateur way) as would best insure repose.

"The poor fellow jerked his shoulder—the reason he fainted," he said. "We must put it in place, and then every thing must be kept quiet."

Putting the shoulder in place was, after some difficulty, accomplished; but keeping every thing quiet was another matter, since the whole household was in a fever of excitement over this unexpected event. Indeed, considering their quiet habits, they had reason enough for excitement. A storm, almost unexampled for violence, was raging; the river was rising rapidly; the old oak was shivered; the piazza-roof was knocked off; one of the horses had been killed by lightning; and two strangers—one of them dying, or next thing to it—were in the house! In all her life, Mrs. Rivers had never had so much trouble to keep the children within even moderate bounds of good behavior. Nor was the excitement restricted to the children. Marion and Nellie shared it in no small degree, and laughingly admitted as much to each other.

"It comes of the life we have been leading," said Miss Forrest, philosophically. "We are in the condition of being 'pleased by a rattle, and tickled with a straw,' in the way of sensations. Not that I think this is either a rattle or a straw! Heavens! what a flash that was! I shall never forget it."

"I shall never forget that poor fellow's face, as he lay insensible," said Marion; "and, when he opened his eyes, he looked at me more strangely than you can imagine. He absolutely might have thought I was a ghost! And, then, his exclamation—did you hear it?"

"Yes. It was a strange thing to say."

"And he said it, looking straight at me, as if I was the picture he meant. When he sank back, I really thought for a moment he was dead."

"I wonder what put a picture in his head?" said Nelly, musingly.

"They are artists," said Mrs. Rivers, who was sitting in the room, not far from the two girls—"they are artists, out on a walking and

sketching tour. The one who was uninjured told Mr. Rivers that they were coming here to seek shelter when the storm overtook them."

"Yes," said Marion; "I saw them. I had just turned round to tell you, when the flash came, and put every thing else out of my head. The poor fellow who is hurt was well and strong then. How sad it seems!"

"It would seem much more sad if he was dead," said the matter-of-fact Nellie. "As it is, I hope he is not much hurt. Mr. Rivers says not. — O Tom, I am so glad to see that!"

She broke off in this way, as a little darkey came in with his arms full of light-wood knots, and began piling them up in the empty fireplace. After he had erected his edifice, one stroke of a match set fire to it, and in a moment a light, sparkling blaze was filling the room with ruddy cheer. The ladies gathered round eagerly—even in midsummer a heavy mountain-rain leaves the atmosphere unpleasantly cold—and they were grouped together, laughing and talking, when Mr. Rivers, accompanied by Travers, entered. Both gentlemen thought it a pleasant scene; but the young artist was especially charmed, the more so in consideration of his long exile from any thing which bore even the faintest stamp of such refinement as was plainly to be seen here. He looked at the room with its graceful furniture and pictures, its open piano and books, and at the ladies in their elegant dresses and glossy coronals of hair. Then he turned to Mr. Rivers, saying, in a tone the sincerity of which could not be doubted:

"If poor Lorimer were only well, how much he would enjoy this!"

The ladies overheard the remark, and looked at each other with a smile. Every one liked him the better for this frank unselfishness, this quick remembrance of his friend where many a man would only have thought of himself. And, when he came forward and was presented to them, they gave him such a warm and cordial welcome as Carolinians like to think that only they know how to give. They soon found that he was a thorough-bred gentleman; and, when once the ice of first acquaintance was thawed, they enjoyed his society as much as, or more than, he did theirs. He was a genial companion, and it was a very pleasant evening which ensued. In the studios of Düsseldorf, his talent as a *raconteur* had been fully appreciated; so it was

no wonder that they enjoyed the history of his adventures, and the more because, by a few happy touches, he always took care to throw the chief glory of his narrative on poor, wounded Vance. Then, at their request, he brought out his sketch-book; and, by the time its contents were sufficiently admired, the usual hour of retiring had long since passed, and it was time to say "Good-night." It was said, therefore, with many compliments on both sides, many wishes for the injured gentleman's speedy recovery, and many laughing congratulations that the storm had blown such a pleasant visitor within their doors. Marion and Nellie congratulated each other warmly on this fact when they were in their chamber, and said that a thing more charming could not possibly have occurred. Of course, if they had been at home, it would have seemed a matter of small importance; but, out in the depths of the wild woods, a pedestrian artist, who was also a polished gentleman, was a *rara avis* not to be despised. Then they talked of his companion, and wondered if he would soon be well, and if he would tell them then what he meant by that strange exclamation. They could not forget about this, but went on marvelling over it, and exhausting imagination in conjectures. It was a pity they had not been the possessors of Hassan's invisible cap; for, if they could only have entered the room of the strangers, and heard a conversation then in progress, their curiosity would have been gratified. Lorimer was wide awake, and, after Mr. Rivers had, with many directions and good wishes, left the room, he addressed himself eagerly to his friend:

"Well, Franzel, what is she like?"

"Amazingly like the picture," Travers answered; "yet not so much like as to justify your fainting away, Vance."

"It was the shoulder made me faint," said Vance. "Confound the thing—how it did hurt! But, Frank, I never was more astonished in my life than when I opened my eyes on that face—the very face of my dream. It sent a thrill through me as if I had seen a ghost."

"You looked as if you had," said Frank, dryly.

"Did anybody notice it? Did they ask you about it?"

"They must have noticed it; but they are too well-bred to ask about it. I never saw more cultivated people, Vance. And yet they

are buried here among crackers and rattle-snakes. Isn't it a strange taste?"

"They love man less and Nature more than most of us do," said Vance. "But that face! It haunts me; I cannot get over the shock the first sight of it gave me. Frank, do you think I have been brought here to meet her?"

"To get your shoulder dislocated, more likely. Nonsense, Vance! She resembles your picture, but in no extraordinary degree. The same general cast of feature, the same eyes and hair—that is all. Your fancy has done the rest."

"My fancy has done nothing," said Vance, decidedly. "I tell you it is the very face of my dream! It has a different expression—that is all the change. Frank, you cannot imagine how strangely it has made me feel."

"No," said Frank, shortly; "but I can imagine that it will put you in a fever, if you go on at this rate. Deuce take the picture, and every thing connected with it! Do stop talking, and go to sleep. There's an opiate here the old gentleman said I was to give you if you didn't. On my honor, Vance, you'll find, when you see the girl, that there is no such astonishing likeness. She is charming, however, and the other one—there is another one, you know—even more so. You had better get well, and make their acquaintance; and you won't get well, if you don't stop talking."

"It is she!" said Vance.

But he spoke softly, as if to himself, and after that he lay quite still. Perhaps Travers's last remonstrance had some effect, for he said no more, and before very long sunk to sleep. In an hour or two he woke suddenly, with a gasp and a start.

More vividly than ever before, the dream had come to him.

IV.

The next morning Mr. Rivers found his patient in a very feverish and unfavorable condition. The shoulder was worse instead of better, the bruises were exceedingly painful, the pulse was racing along at a more rapid rate than promised well for physical good, and, on the whole, he thought it necessary to issue an immediate order for close confinement and medical treatment. Vance rebelled a little at first, but was brought to terms by Mrs. Rivers, whose bright face and gentle voice worked such a magical transformation the moment she entered his room, that he

succumbed at once into her hands, and yielded himself captive without even a desire for rescue. She was light in her rule, however, and only made him keep quiet, leaving the medical question entirely to her husband, and providing, on her part, dainty invalid dishes and invalid amusement. Vance was charmed, and, if it had not been for that face, of which he had only caught a glimpse—that strange, beautiful, haunting face that had so often shone on him in his dream—he would have asked nothing better than to play invalid in this pleasant, airy chamber, with such a glorious mountain-view through the window near at hand, and such a sweet-faced, silver-voiced nurse to redeem even sickness from being dull.

This enjoyment was not of long duration, however. On the third day he was emancipated from durance, and suffered to make one of the group who with books and work were gathered on the shady lawn not far from the spot where he had been struck down. In three days Travers had managed to make himself thoroughly at home; and Vance, who knew his free-and-easy ways, was not surprised when he came out with Mrs. Rivers, and found him reading aloud to the young ladies, as if he had known them for months instead of days. Vance himself had none of this genial ease about him. He was, if any thing, a more polished gentleman than his friend, more full of inborn, stately graces, more keenly alive to shades of social courtesy, more full of social tact, but he lacked almost entirely the gay *bonhomie* and frank good-fellowship that made Travers so popular wherever he went; and, lacking this, he lacked every thing that was worth having in the eyes of a great many men and women of the world.

"We are all thoroughly charmed with your friend," Mrs. Rivers said, as they came out of the house together; and, looking at the group on the lawn, Vance answered, with a smile:

"I can well believe that, and I don't wonder at it. Travers is such a good fellow that he deserves to charm everybody. He charmed me, I am sure.—How pleasant this looks!"

"We sit here a great deal," said Mrs. Rivers; and, as they approached, she spoke to Marion, who was next her: "My dear, here is Mr. Lorimer, who, I am glad to say, is well enough at last to join us. I hope—"

What she hoped was left to conjecture,

for, as she spoke, Marion turned round, and her face, thus suddenly presented to Lorimer's gaze, made him stagger back without a word, and sit down in a chair near at hand. For his life he could not help it. He knew how strangely such conduct must appear; he knew that three pairs of eyes were regarding him with profound astonishment; he knew how he had prepared himself for this meeting, aware that it must come, but yet he could not help it, and he could not say a word. The weird feeling that we all know when any thing bordering on the supernatural comes near us seized him without any warning, and, try as he would, he found himself tongue-tied, with the face of his dream looking at him. It was Travers who spoke first, coming to his rescue with commendable quickness.

"Vance, you shouldn't have forgotten that you are still an invalid. Shall I get you some water? You look quite faint."

"Thank you," said Vance, with a grateful look. Then he glanced up at Marion. "Miss Rivers, pray excuse me. A sudden faintness—a giddiness—quite overcame me. I had no idea I was so weak."

"It would be strange if you were not," said Marion, kindly. "Do sit still. Will you not have a fan?"

He took one which she handed to him, laughing to himself the while that he, of all people, should be playing hysterical fine gentleman at this rate. Mrs. Rivers sent Travers for some water, and levied upon Miss Forrest for *sal-volatile*. With the aid of these two restoratives, he was at last allowed to declare himself recovered, and to be believed. After this small excitement subsided, Travers finished one of Aytoun's "Lays" that he had been reading aloud; and then Richard—that is, Mr. Lorimer—was himself again. Marion thought him quite as handsome as she had thought him when he lay pale and stunned on the day of the storm; but she could not help noticing—a woman of perceptions, less quick than her own, must have noticed—that, from some cause, her appearance, her manner, her voice, every thing about her, had a singular attraction for him. It was not exactly admiration—she had been too long accustomed to that to mistake it—nor curiosity, nor any thing else for which there is a definite name; but an interest that puzzled her by its singularity, and yet fascinated her by its intentness. More than once she caught those clear-blue

eyes regarding her with a gaze so keen and strange that it amused, even while it perplexed her.

"I wonder what is the matter with me?" she thought. "People don't usually look at me as if I had lost my nose, or suffered some other calamity of the sort. I must ask Nellie what the meaning of it can be."

When they went to the house, she carried this intention into execution, and Nellie, in reply, told her the history of the dream-picture which Travers had meanwhile been relating to her.

As may naturally be supposed, Marion was very much excited and interested—the more so when she remembered the exclamation Lorimer had made on first seeing her face, and understood now what it meant.

"But it cannot be!" she cried. "I must only resemble his picture. It is so strange!—Nellie, I should not like to think it was I!"

"Mr. Travers says it might pass for your portrait," Nellie answered. "Every line of the face is identical, and the only difference is in expression. I wish you could have heard him describing the manner in which the picture fascinated Mr. Lorimer. It was to get away from it that they came out here."

"And ran full tilt on the original," said Marion. "It is laughable, and yet it is awesome. It is like spiritualism or clairvoyant nonsense, Nellie. I don't—I cannot believe it!"

"I only know what Mr. Travers told me," said Nellie. "But I should like amazingly to see the picture and judge for myself."

"So should I," returned Marion, meditatively.

And there, for the time being, the subject dropped.

It was renewed again that evening when they were all assembled in the drawing-room, and, thanks to Travers and Nellie, canvassed openly. With some hesitation, Lorimer was induced to tell the story of the dream, of its persistent recurrence, of the face that seemed compelling him to paint it, of the hold it had gained upon him, and the vivid manner in which it had returned at sight of Marion's face. They were all greatly interested, and every one followed Miss Forrest's lead in professing the greatest curiosity to see the picture.

"If you had only brought it with you," said Mr. Rivers, "I would really give any thing for a glimpse of it."

"Vance, haven't you the original sketch in your portfolio?" asked the irrepressible Travers. "I am almost sure I saw it there the other day."

Vance colored, and glanced at Marion.

"I believe there is a sketch there," he said. "But it is only a crayon outline. I could not make up my mind to leave every thing about the picture behind."

"Show it to us, Mr. Lorimer—pray do," said Mrs. Rivers.

And immediately there rose a chorus of—

"Oh, yes, Mr. Lorimer, pray do!"

Lorimer hesitated. Some instinct strongly warned him not to comply with the request—but then, what excuse could he give for refusal? Three or four eager faces were looking at him in expectation of his compliance; and it would seem ungracious and churlish to deny their curiosity this small gratification. Yet it was sorely against his will that at last he said:

"I will go and look for it."

He was not long gone. The portfolio must have been very near at hand, for he soon returned with a small crayon-sketch, which he gave to Mrs. Rivers.

"I am not sure that you will see the likeness," he said. "This is very carelessly done; but it is the outline."

It might have been carelessly done, but still there was graphic power in every stroke, and the whole scene was transcribed as forcibly and clearly, if not quite as elaborately, as on the canvas left behind in the forsaken studio. Mrs. Rivers had evidently been quite unprepared for any thing like this. She uttered an exclamation of mingled amazement and admiration when her glance fell on the paper.

"What a strongly-drawn scene!" she cried. "Why, this girl is Marion herself!—Mr. Lorimer, it cannot be that you drew it before you saw her!"

Lorimer pointed to a date two months back, which was inscribed in a corner of the drawing. "This was the first sketch I made," he said. "It was drawn on that day."

"It is incredible!" cried Mrs. Rivers, using the exclamation as people do, without exactly meaning that it *was* incredible. Then she held the drawing at arm's-length, and appealed to the company in general. "Look! did you ever see a more striking likeness?"

"It is perfect," said Mr. Rivers, looking over her shoulder. "Every feature, every line.—Mr. Lorimer, I would never have believed this excepting from actual sight. And that man! Surely, I have seen his face somewhere."

"I have never seen him," said Vance, quietly. "I can believe any thing, however, after meeting Miss Rivers."

"Let me see," said Nellie, crossing the room. She took the sketch, and the next moment gave a scream.

"Good Heavens!" she cried. "There is something uncanny about this! The girl may be like Marion, but the man is Alston Rayford!"

"What!" cried Mr. Rivers, while his wife looked quickly at Vance, and Marion came forward quite pale.

"Give it to me," she said, in a low voice. And, while she took the sketch and stood looking intently at it, there was not a sound audible in the room. Instinctively, the two strangers felt that something awkward had occurred, or was about to occur; and the others all held their breath, gazing at Marion's face. It was not an encouraging face by any means, for it hardened and whitened while they gazed, the sunny beauty fading out of it, and a stern, settled resentment like her father's coming over it. After a minute or two, she laid down the drawing, and looked at Vance.

"I suppose Mr. Lorimer means us to believe that this also was part of the dream?" she said, in such a cold and haughty voice that Vance colored and drew himself up, as almost any man would have been apt to do.

"It was certainly part of the dream, Miss Rivers," he answered, as coldly as herself. "That is the first sketch I ever made of it—exactly as it appeared to me then, and has appeared to me always."

"And you never saw Mr. Rayford or myself before drawing this?"

"I never saw yourself, and, as for Mr. Rayford, I never even heard of him before. If that resembles him, it was from no intention on my part of drawing a likeness of any face save the one seen in my dream."

He spoke proudly; for he saw that the incredulity on Marion's face deepened, instead of disappearing at his words. She glanced at the sketch, and then back at him, with a significance that hardly needed the aid of language to express its indignant disbelief.

"I am sure Marion does not mean—" began Mrs. Rivers, eagerly. But Marion interrupted her, coldly.

"Excuse me, aunt, but I think Mr. Lorimer understands what I mean. This is a day of marvels," she went on, looking at the young artist; "and wonders of all kinds abound; but I do not know that I have ever heard any thing like the story you propose to our belief. I am a matter-of-fact person, and this must excuse my incapacity to credit that you drew these striking portraits of Mr. Rayford and myself without ever having seen either of us. Why you should have shown them to me, I cannot imagine. But of one thing I feel sure—that you did well in selecting me, for he would be even less credulous than I have proved."

Then she turned, and, without another word, walked out of the room.

The group left behind looked at each other as if they had been thunderstruck. Mrs. and Mr. Rivers, together with Miss Forrest, hardly knew what to say; Travers was overcome with astonishment, and Lorimer was burning with indignation. The latter was the first to speak—walking across the room, and taking up the sketch, while he addressed himself to his host.

"I am sorry that, after having made such a charge, Miss Rivers should have gone away without hearing my reply," he said. "I hope, sir, that you will do me the justice to believe that I never saw her until I entered this house, and that I have never seen the gentleman to whom she alludes. In fact, it is impossible that I should have done so. I am a Georgian by birth, but I have spent many years in Germany; and, since my return to America, I have lived entirely in Baltimore. With Carolina, and Carolinians, I am wholly unacquainted. As regards the dream, I am unable to offer the least explanation. It has been a mystery to me from the first; and I need not say that it has grown even more mysterious since I saw your niece. As she objects to even an accidental likeness of herself remaining in my possession, I can do this—" he rapidly tore the sketch into fragments—"and I must beg you to assure her that the painting shall share the same fate when I go back to Baltimore."

"My dear Mr. Lorimer," began Mr. Rivers—but Mrs. Rivers took the matter of reply into her hands, and quite bore him down.

"Marion is very much to blame, Mr. Lorimer," she said, eagerly; "but I am sure she will be very sorry for having spoken so. It is some excuse for her that your drawing placed Mr. Rayford in a very equivocal position. He is a gentleman to whom she is engaged—or, I should say, would be engaged, if her father had not refused his consent. She is staying with us now on account of this; and of course she is very sensitive about any allusion to him.—Yes, my dear, I know these are family matters—" this to Nellie, who had entered an aside remonstrance—"but I think Marion's friends owe Mr. Lorimer an explanation of her conduct."

"And an apology," said Mr. Rivers, finding an opportunity to speak, and embracing it without loss of time. "Mr. Lorimer, I am truly sorry that my niece should have forgotten the most common rules of courtesy in this way. If the picture was a likeness of young Rayford—"

"It was a most astonishing likeness," interposed Nellie.

"I only saw him once, and my wife never saw him at all," went on Mr. Rivers. "But if it was a likeness, I don't see that it justifies Marion. In fact, the only thing about it is that it makes the dream more astonishing—so astonishing, that it would puzzle a modern Joseph to read it."

"I am not a modern Joseph, but it puzzles me," said Lorimer. "I have had only one decided impression about it from the first—that it would bring me either very good or very bad luck. It has already brought me a measure of both, in granting me the pleasure of your acquaintance, and being the cause of my unintentionally offending your niece. I wish very much that she had given me an opportunity to explain—but then, perhaps, an explanation supported only by assertion would have done no good."

"Not with an angry woman, and a woman in love," said Mr. Rivers, shrugging his shoulders. "Now, I have one favor to ask—that you will not let this *contre-temps* shorten your stay with us."

Lorimer looked at Travers, and there was the same unspoken resolve in both pairs of eyes. Then he glanced back at Mr. Rivers.

"My dear sir, you are very kind, but there is no question of shortening our stay. It has already prolonged itself further than it should have done; and we must leave to-morrow

morning. There is nothing for us but to thank you for your hospitality and make our adieux."

Mr. Rivers, seconded by his wife and Nellie, said all that it was possible to say against this decision; but the two friends remained firm. No argument or entreaties had any effect on them; and the next morning, bright and early, they took their departure, exchanging many cordial farewells with the rest of the family, but not even seeing Marion, who kept her own room.

V.

THREE weeks passed. By the end of that time, the summer was drawing to a close, and Marion and Nellie were ready to hang themselves from sheer *ennui*. The weekly mail was the only thing that still retained interest for them; and they watched for this anxiously—hoping each time for the welcome news of a summons home. The summons home did not come, but one day a letter from Mr. Alston Rayford did. Nellie, who opened the post-bag, knew the writing on the envelope, and watched Marion anxiously when it was handed to her. Miss Rivers had a good deal of self-control, however, and she did not betray emotion by any sudden start or blush. She only pocketed the missive very quietly, and after a while went up to her own room. When her friend followed, in a flutter of excitement, she found her sitting in an attitude of deep thought, with the letter open in her hand. Miss Forrest was hardly in the room before she broke into eager questioning.

"Well, Marion, what is the news? Has your father at last consented?"

Marion looked up—pale as she always grew when other people would have flushed. "Consented!—Papa?" she said. "You might as well ask if the river had flowed backward. No, he has not consented. On the contrary, he has again refused Alston, in the most insulting manner."

"Did Mr. Rayford ask his consent again?"

"Yes. He grew impatient. He could not bear the suspense and the long waiting—men never can, you know—and so he went to papa. He was repulsed—Nellie, I cannot tell you how he was repulsed."

"I can imagine," said Nellie, with a significant shrug.

"Yes—I suppose you can. Well, he was repulsed, and now he has come to me."

"Come to you! Not up here?"

"Yes, up here. I am sorry, very sorry for it—I have a contempt for any thing like clandestine proceedings—but he has come, and I cannot refuse to see him."

"Mr. Rivers will spare you that trouble," said Nellie, dryly. "I can tell you beforehand that he will never allow Mr. Rayford to meet you in his house."

"I have no intention of asking his consent, nor of meeting him in this house," said Marion, haughtily. "Alston is staying, or will be staying soon—this letter was mailed in Morgantown—at a farmer's near here. I shall meet him in the woods."

"Marion!"

"Well, what is the matter?"

"That seems so—so clandestine, and unworthy of you."

"And am I not forced to it?" said Marion, flushing; "when Alston has travelled hundreds of miles merely to see me, can I send him back without a word? And where should I meet him, excepting in the woods? The hillside is just as free to him as to us."

"I cannot think it is right; but if it must be—when is he to make his appearance?"

"That I do not know. Mountain travelling is very uncertain, and he may be in the neighborhood now, or he may not arrive for several days. He has been here before, however, and he appoints a place of rendezvous."

"I hope it is a place we know."

"Yes. It is the Old Ferry. We can walk there easily, and he can come by the river. It is a lonely place, and there is no danger of meeting anybody."

"There never is danger of that in this delightful region. And do you want me to bear you company?"

"Of course," said Marion, flushing again. "You don't suppose I want to go alone? I know you disapprove of it, Nellie; and so do I, for that matter. But I cannot refuse—and it is only for once."

"I hope it may prove only for once," said Nellie, anxiously. "Do we go this afternoon?"

"I think we had better do so."

So that afternoon they donned their hats and set forth, disappointing the children very much by declining to take them along, but otherwise going as if for one of their usual rambles. They followed a path round the hills, and soon came to the place of rendezvous—a beautiful nook of the river where a disused

road swept down to what had once been a ferry, and which still retained the distinction of the name, though it had long since lost the distinction of the fact. Here they sat down to rest, with very little expectation of seeing Mr. Rayford that afternoon. They were destined to a surprise, however; for they had hardly finished agreeing that he would not come, and begun talking of views and perspective, and the lovely mountain-scenes before them, when there was a dash of oars in the water; a small skiff shot round a bend of the stream, and, in another moment, Mr. Alston Rayford had sprung on shore and stood before them.

He looked as eager and handsome as a man should look when he is engaged in a romantic love-adventure; but he came forward and made his greetings with a graceful deference which quite ignored the fact that this meeting did not take place on a drawing-room carpet. He was a very fine gentleman, there was not a doubt of that; and his manners and appearance were unexceptionable. Yet, strangely enough, Marion's first sensation was one of disappointment—such disappointment as many a girl has felt when, after long absence, the hero of her dreams is suddenly brought before her in his own proper person. It is clearly impossible to guard against such revulsions, since all women create illusions for themselves, and all illusions must sooner or later be broken. So perhaps it is as good a test as any for true love, whether or not it can survive the inevitable hour when glamour fades and sober daylight comes in. This test was now to be applied to Marion's love; but such things are not decided in a moment, or in many moments—only it was unpromising, to say the least, that her first sensation was not of joy, or welcome, or pride, but of sudden, chill disappointment. Yet, what disappointed her she could not possibly have told. The Alston Rayford she had known, the Alston Rayford she had wished and even promised to marry, stood before her, unchanged by even so much as a shade; and yet, something was gone. The glamour of fancy had faded, daylight had come in, and it remained for the future to show whether himself and the love he had inspired would stand the searching test of that daylight.

Before long, Miss Forrest wandered away on a professedly botanical excursion, and left the lovers to themselves. The conversation which ensued was very animated, and some-

times even verged on excitement. She could see that, though she could hear nothing from the hill-side perch where she had established herself, and where her botanical researches consisted of poking at a bunch of ferns with the point of her parasol. She was not at all romantically inclined, and she could not help wishing, for her own sake as well as for Marion's, that Alston Rayford had stayed at home, and had not forced this "highly-improper" proceeding upon them. It was tiresome—very tiresome—this sitting on a stone, with nothing but her own thoughts and a bunch of ferns to amuse her, while Mr. Rayford talked on and on, in the most unconscionable manner, and seemed urging Marion to something which Marion plainly refused. Miss Forrest yawned, and wondered how long she would have to watch this discussion in dumb show. "It is as good as a pantomime," she said to herself; but, somehow, it was not as amusing as a pantomime. Then she caught a profile view of Mr. Rayford's face, and something about it recalled the crayon-sketch which Vance Lorimer had torn up, and set her at work considering what a perfect likeness it had been, and how she scarcely blamed Marion for being incredulous (as Marion still continued) of the dream-story which purported to excuse it. Then her thoughts wandered away, following the erratic footsteps of the two young artists who had come so suddenly into her life, and gone so abruptly out of it; and she was punching at the ferns more vigorously than ever, and smiling to herself over a remembrance of Frank Travers's hazel eyes and pleasant voice, when the rattle of a chain made her look up, and to her great relief she saw that Mr. Rayford was entering his craft and pushing off. "Indeed, it is high time," thought she, with an indignant glance at her watch, and then at the sinking sun. She stood up, however, and waved her hand in answer to his farewell gesture; then, while he pulled lazily out of sight, went down to meet Marion, who was walking toward her.

Marion looked vexed and overclouded, and not at all as a girl might be expected to look who had just parted from her lover. There was no tinge of sentimental sadness in her aspect, no token of the regret that is in itself a pleasure; but rather annoyance of some very practical and decided kind. Miss Forrest saw this at a glance, and her first remark was a question.

"What is the matter, Marion? You look worried."

"I am worried," said Marion, briefly.

"About your father?"

"No—about Alston."

"Indeed! What has he done?"

"He is foolish and inconsiderate enough to urge me to elope with him."

"O—h!" Miss Forrest shrugged her shoulders. "Well, my dear, I don't know that you have any right to be worried or astonished at that. Of course, it is what you might have expected."

"What I might have expected!" repeated Marion, with her color rising. "I don't know what you mean, Nell. I think that I might have expected some respect from Mr. Rayford. I consider this next to an insult."

"And I consider that you are very unreasonable. Mr. Rayford wants to put some definite end to this very indefinite state of affairs, and I am sure I cannot blame him. Pray tell me what you seriously expect of him? Your father absolutely refuses to accept him as a legitimate suitor, and you are insulted at the mere mention of an elopement. Where is the middle ground between these two things?"

"Can he not wait? I am willing to do so. And patience conquers all things."

"My dear child, some good might come of waiting if Mr. Rayford was a paladin, and you were an angel. But, as it is, nothing but unpleasant complications would come—and he has sense enough to see it. It is easy for you to say 'wait.' You are a woman, and the slightest part would fall on you; but he is a man, and, naturally, he does not fancy the prospect of an engagement which fetters him without giving any assured good, either past, present, or to come, in return."

"What is the drift of all this, Nell? I confess I don't understand. Are you, too, urging an elopement?"

"No, I am only excusing Mr. Rayford for having done so. I am only saying that it is what any man would do."

"He might have more regard for me."

"My dear, men are selfish; and he has some regard for himself."

Marion walked on in silence for a time—her brows bent, and her lips compressed. Evidently she was forming some resolution; and, when once formed, Marion's resolutions were very much like her father's in the

item of steadfastness. At last she looked up.

"You are right, Nell," she said; "and you need not talk of the selfishness of men, for I am sure no man was ever more selfish than I have been. I forgot entirely that all the burden of a prolonged engagement would fall on Alston; and I have held him bound, when I ought to have set him free long ago. I will make amends in the only way I can, and that at once."

"By eloping?" asked Nell, in sudden alarm.

"No. By putting a final end to our engagement. Why should you look so surprised? I am sure you have shown me that it is the only right thing to do."

"But, Marion! You—you are in love with him!"

"Not much," said Marion, coolly. "Not enough to break my heart about setting him free. But, if it *did* break my heart, and it was right, it should be done."

"But you will not see him again?"

"Yes. He insisted that I should meet him to-morrow afternoon. I refused, but I am very sure he will come to the ferry. When I parted from him, I did not mean to go; but now I shall."

"He will think you are coming to elope with him."

"He will be mistaken, then."

This sentence ended the conversation; for, just here, the children came unexpectedly trooping from a by-path, and were all so full of a wonderful nest of snakes that one of the servants had discovered, and into which he had carried wholesale destruction and ravage, that their tongues did not once cease running until the party reached home.

The next day Miss Forrest was confined to her chamber with a headache, which she declared was solely the result of the unusual mental exertion to which she had been driven on the preceding afternoon.

"You see, I had nothing to do but think while I was out on the hill-side punching at those ferns," she said; "and, not being used to so much thinking at one time, it has made my head ache as if—really, as if it would split!"

Under these circumstances, it was of course clearly impossible that Marion could ask her to submit to the same ordeal again. So, reluctantly enough, she resigned herself to the

necessity of meeting Mr. Rayford at the Old Ferry quite alone. When the afternoon wore on, and the sun began to cast long shadows across the green turf, she took her hat and a book, and set forth unchallenged to keep her tryst.

It was not a long walk to the appointed place, and, when she reached there, she found Mr. Rayford's boat made fast to the bank, and Mr. Rayford himself pacing to and fro in all the impatience of mingled doubt and expectation. When he caught sight of Marion's white dress, he rushed forward to meet her, and poured forth his thanks so warm and fast, that at last she was forced to check them.

"Please don't thank me any more," she said, "at least not until you hear why I have come. You may feel obliged to me when you do hear; but then, again, you may not."

"I feel obliged to any thing that gives me a sight of your face, Marion, even if you mean to refuse again the prayer I have come to urge."

"I don't mean to discuss that," she said, hurriedly. "I gave you my answer—the only answer I have to give—yesterday afternoon. No, Alston. I have come to do something much more kind. I have come to release you."

"To do what, Marion?"

"To give you your freedom from bondage," said she, trying to smile and speak lightly. "I ought to have done it long ago; but indeed it never struck me, until after I parted with you yesterday, how selfishly I have been acting in keeping you bound. Papa will never consent, I am sure; and I—I cannot elope. Alston, dear Alston, will it not be better for us to part?"

She looked up at him with her eyes full of half-sad appeal—when is any thing that deals with parting not sad?—and she met in return a simply incredulous surprise.

"This is not like you, Marion," he said. "Some women make nothing of such words as these; but you are not one of them—and it is not like you. There is not—there never can be—any question of parting between us."

"You are mistaken," said Marion, who was not likely to be borne down in this sort of way. "There is a question, and a very serious question of it. Alston, what do we gain by holding on as we have been doing?"

"We gain the prospect of happiness, Marion; and we might gain the certainty, if you would only yield to me."

"You mean if I would elope?"

"I mean if you would marry me, without waiting for a consent that your father will never give."

"And would you be willing to marry a woman who could do such a thing, Alston? I should think you would distrust her, even where you were concerned. I can never do that. So the only thing left us is to part."

"You say that very coolly, Marion. Has absence, then, worked its usual effect? has it taken your heart from me?"

"If that were so, Alston, do you think I would be standing here now? No. I love you as much as I ever did; but I have grown a little older, and a little wiser, since I promised to hold fast for a lifetime, if need be; and I see that it would be more selfish than kind to do so. If you only knew—"

"I know this," he interrupted, passionately, "that while you talk, I feel; and that I will not give you up at the bidding of a thousand fathers—nor at your own, either. I have never yet surrendered any thing that was mine once; and you are mine now, Marion!"

"I am yours only as long as I do not claim my freedom," said Marion, a little haughtily.

"You are mine until death comes between us," repeated her lover; and over his handsome face there came the "Rayford look"—a look well known wherever the desperate, fearless Rayford blood had planted itself; and which had never yet boded good to any one who crossed their path, or disputed their reckless, determined will. "You are mine, and, once for all, I will not give you up!"

Marion drew back proudly. It was a question whether she had ever really loved this man, but at least it was certain that she had never loved him well enough to submit to such language as this from him.

"You forget yourself," she said. "If I choose to dissolve our engagement, you will have no alternative but to give me up."

"And do you mean to choose to do so?" said he, in a quiet, steady tone—a tone which, if she had known much of the Rayfords, would have warned her that nothing moderate was coming.

"Yes, I mean it," answered she, coldly—and then, breaking down into pathos, "Alston, dear Alston, it is for your sake more than mine. Believe me, it is best!"

He smiled slightly, and bent his head down until his face was on a level with her own.

"Tell me one thing, Marion," he said. "Do you love me?"

"You know that I do," she answered, simply.

"Then throw these miserable scruples to the winds, and give yourself to me. See! All that you will need to do is to step into this boat. I have a license in my pocket; six miles below here a magistrate lives. Before the sun goes down, you can be my wife—so that all the fathers in the world cannot part us again."

"You might spare me this," she said, half-indignantly, half-reproachfully. "If you argued forever, Alston, you could not make me do such a thing."

"Then I must try something besides argument," said he, coolly. "Forgive me, Marion; but you have only your own obstinacy to blame; and I have sworn that I will never give you up!"

Something in his voice, something in his eyes, made a sudden fear rush over Marion. She remembered the loneliness of the spot, and the desperation ever synonymous with the Rayford name. What was coming she hardly knew, but she drew back with an instinct of alarm.

"I do not understand you," she said. "What do you mean?"

"I mean this," said Rayford, quietly, "that if you will not go with me I shall be forced to take you!"

"To take me! Are you mad?"

"No; I am only determined not to be played with in this way. It depended upon yourself whether or not you would promise to marry me. You *did* promise, and now it depends upon me whether or not you fulfil it."

He spoke in a tone of ordinary composure; but, by a single step, he cut off all chance of escape by placing himself in her homeward path.

One glance at his face showed her how fully he meant every word he had uttered; how worse than useless any thing like argument or entreaty would be; and all the love she had ever felt for him sunk down and died in that instant. She forgot the peril of her position—she only remembered the burning sense of outrage that rushed over her.

"You are a coward!" she said, bitterly.

"It is only a coward who would endeavor to intimidate a woman by threats, or force her by compulsion, to become his wife. And you

need not think that you will force me. I would throw myself into the river there before I would marry you after this. I see now that my father was right—right to withhold his consent—right to say that I should never marry you! I thought you were a gentleman. He knew all the time that you were a rascal!"

Rayford answered not a word; perhaps because he could not trust himself to do so; but his lips set themselves like steel, and into his eyes there came a gleam which made even Marion's brave heart sink within her. He bent down—still without a word—and lifted her in his arms. She struggled violently; but her strength was like a child's compared to his, and he bore her into the boat. Then he held her back with one arm, while he loosened the little craft from its anchorage, and pushed out into the stream. When several yards lay between them and the bank, he turned and looked at her, with a flash of triumph on his face.

"You may resign yourself, Marion," he said. "You will not go back there until you go as my wife."

"We will see about that," she answered, as haughtily and as steadily as if she had not been shaken by a perfect storm of emotion. Then she gathered her dress about her—made one spring—and was in the river.

VI.

INSTANTLY Rayford followed, and the whirling splash of eddying water rendered him quite unconscious that there was a spectator of the drama—that a man, who was seated on a bluff overhanging the stream, had witnessed the whole scene, and that he now manifested his presence by springing into the river almost as soon as Marion herself had touched its surface.

Owing to his haste and agitation, Rayford plunged into the water just where he was standing, which chanced to be at the end of the boat opposite that from which Marion made her reckless leap; and, as the boat immediately swung round and came between them, he had some difficulty in reaching her. Meanwhile she sunk, and, in rising, was swept by the current gently down-stream, straight into the arms of the stranger, who was making with quick, sure strokes toward her. She thought that he was Rayford; but there is nothing like a cold bath for curing heroics;

and, with this terrible rush of water in her ears, this frightful sense of helpless danger, she was glad to be rescued—even by him.

So she made no resistance when he supported her with one arm, while, with the other, he struck out rapidly for the boat, which, in the course of floating lazily down-stream, was now quite near them.

Having reached it, he laid her in the bottom of it, and then climbed in himself. After accomplishing this, he left her unattended for a moment, while he took up an oar, and, with one vigorous stroke, put two or three yards between themselves and Rayford, who was swimming toward them. The latter, seeing this, raised himself in the water, and gave an angry shout.

"Stop!" he cried. "What are you about? Don't you see that I am trying to reach the boat?"

The other raised his hand, and pointed to the shore.

"You had better try to reach that," he said, coolly. "You are not coming in here. Keep back! By the Heaven above us, if you even so much as lay your hand on the boat, I will break this oar over your head!"

It was not necessary to look in his face to see that he meant what he said; and, the oar uplifted by that stalwart arm, was such a far from pleasant sight, that Alston Rayford had no alternative but to do as he was bidden, and keep back. He was fairly divided between astonishment and indignation—as his next words showed.

"You insolent rascal!" he cried; "do you know that you are in my boat; and what the devil do you mean by such conduct?"

"I mean that if I allowed you to enter here, it would only be for the satisfaction of pitching you out again, and letting you feel that no man in my presence insults a woman with impunity," was the stern reply. "Take yourself to the shore as best you can, and remember that if you are seen or heard of again about here, it will be the worse for you."

"I will be seen and heard of long enough to make you answer for this, you infernal scoundrel!" Mr. Rayford's language did not improve as his excitement increased; and there was a tinge of the ludicrous in his position which added tenfold to his rage. "Who are you, and what right have you to interfere in a matter which does not concern you?"

"It makes no difference to you who I am,"



"The other raised his hand, and pointed to the shore."

the other answered. "As for my right, it is that of any honest man to defend a woman against a villain. Now go; I shall waste no more words on you."

He rowed away as he spoke; and Rayford, seeing that he was indeed hopelessly left behind, sent one last shot after him:

"You shall answer for this; remember that!"

The other raised his hand in ironical salute.

"I shall be very happy to answer—with a horse-whip," he replied.

Having made this rejoinder, he turned and glanced at Marion. To his surprise and relief she was sitting up, and, although she might have passed for a mermaid in the item of drenching, she did not look at all the worse for it in the way of physical well-being. She was not even pale, as people are apt to be after a drowning escapade, but, on the contrary, a tide of color swept over her face the moment those bright-blue eyes fell on it. Before she could speak, she held out her hand.

"You have done me an inestimable service, Mr. Lorimer," she said. "The only return I can make is—to beg your pardon."

"I am very glad—more than glad—that I was near," said Lorimer, earnestly. "As I don't want you to think me an eavesdropper, I will explain in a moment how it chanced. But, first, you must take a restorative." He drew a small flask from his pocket, and gave it to her. "I don't suppose that you like French brandy," he went on, "but there is no help for it; you must drink this, or take a cold."

"Of course, then, I will drink this," said Marion, with unusual meekness. And she drank it accordingly—in a homœopathic amount.

Vance laughed, and shrugged his shoulders when the flask was returned, apparently containing the same quantity as when he had given it to her. But he did not urge the matter any further; he only swept the boat round and began rowing vigorously against the stream. After a little, he asked Marion if she knew how to use an oar. She answered in the affirmative, and he pointed to one that lay in the bottom of the boat.

"Then you had better take that," he said.

"We ought to reach Mr. Rivers's as soon as possible."

"What!" (She could not help a slight start.) "Are we going there?"

"Of course. Where else should we go? It cannot be far off either. Do you know how far?"

"About a mile, I suppose—by the stream, that is; not half so far by land."

"We will reach there soon, then; and, if you can row, the exercise will keep you from taking cold."

"I can try," she said. And she did try. She was not very skilful, however; and it is doubtful whether her unaided exertions would have brought them very speedily to their bourn; but Lorimer was a first-class oarsman, and his swift, steady strokes sent the little boat fairly dancing over the water. They swept by the Old Ferry in gallant style, and both of them looked instinctively to see if Rayford was there. But he had vanished. In his stead, a slight, graceful figure was seated on a fallen tree, sketching, and whistling pensively; and Lorimer laughed as Marion exclaimed, "Mr. Travers!"

"Shall we take him in?" asked Vance. And then he answered himself, with promptitude: "No. I have a good deal to say to you, and he can easily walk.—Frank, old fellow, meet us at Philippi," he shouted; and Travers started, looked up, and immediately became so transfixed with astonishment that they shot by and out of sight before he was able to say a word.

"Now," said Vance, "I have my explanation to make, and it must be done quickly. First, however, Miss Rivers, I must ask a question, and beg a candid answer. Will you tell me if you are still incredulous of my dream?"

Marion started, and blushed scarlet. But, nevertheless, she lifted her eyes and answered at once:

"I thought you understood what I meant when I begged your pardon, Mr. Lorimer. It was for my incredulity, as well as for my rudeness, that I did so. Did you witness the whole of the scene?"

"Yes, the whole of it."

"Then you can, perhaps, believe that I thought of you and your picture at the very moment when that—that man laid hold of me. At the very moment when your scene was realized, the scene itself rose up as unexpectedly and vividly as if it had been held before my eyes. I saw it as clearly as I see you this moment; and I felt—ah! you cannot even imagine what I felt."

"I know what I felt myself," he said,

quickly. "I ought to explain at once that I was sitting just above you on that bluff which is covered with such luxuriant foliage. Frank and I have been over into Tennessee since we left your uncle's house three weeks ago, and we meant to go round through South Carolina on our way home. But—well, we could not do it. I don't know what made him anxious to return this way; but I am perfectly sure that it was the fascination of the picture—the same fascination which has made me dream of it every night since we left here—that brought me back, whether I would or no. We did not mean to call at your uncle's; but still we found ourselves to-day wandering almost within sight of the house. Suddenly, in the course of our rambles, we came upon this nook on the river. I cannot tell you what a shock it gave me, for I recognized at once the scene of my dream!"

"That is why it has seemed so strangely familiar to me," said Marion. "It was like something I had seen, and yet, until this afternoon, I could not tell what it was. O Mr. Lorimer, how unaccountable—how terrible it is!"

"I climbed up to that bluff," Lorimer went on; "and after a while Frank wandered away and left me. I had been there some time, and, in the drowsy afternoon heat, I went to sleep. I was waked by your voice, and the first words told me what kind of a discussion was going on. I looked down, and I saw the boat and the man! After that, I don't think I could have stirred or made a sound if my life had depended on it. I hope you will forgive me for listening to much that no third person should have heard; and I hope you will also believe me when I tell you that there was some strong influence at work to make me do so. I could not shake off a power that seemed to hold me nerveless. The very scene, the very figures of my dream, were before me. I felt sure of what was coming, and, as you know, it *did* come."

"Yes," she said, under her breath.

"If you had waited only one second, you would have been spared a cold bath, for I was all ready to swim after the boat, and I would have gained it. Even as it was, I think our plunges were simultaneous; and I still feel as if I had been defrauded of a just enjoyment, since I did not take that scoundrel by the neck and pitch him headlong into the water."

"I think you punished him enough," said she, coloring deeply and painfully. "To such a man there is no punishment like failure. And, if you add ridicule, I am sure you make something which will prove almost too bitter for his endurance."

"At least, he will not be apt to trouble you again."

"No; for he only troubled me through my own headstrong folly; and he will never have that aid again. But when I think of all I owe to you, Mr. Lorimer, and of all that I said to you—"

"Nay," said Lorimer, interrupting her with a smile, "we will not think of that at all. My story was certainly strange enough to excuse incredulity. I myself can offer no explanation of it, unless"—here his voice sunk—"I was chosen in this way that I might have the happiness of serving you."

"Then I never can be grateful enough that you were chosen," said she, looking up, with a warm light in her eyes. "I am sure—But here we are at the lawn, and yonder is Uncle George! What can we possibly say to him?"

"I shall say that you were imprudent enough to fall into the river, and that I was fortunate enough to pass by and pick you up," said Lorimer, laughing. "Trust to me, and keep your countenance.—My dear sir, I am delighted to see you again.—Now, Miss Rivers, you had better go to the house and change your dress."

"Good Heavens, Marion! what have you been doing?" cried her uncle, with astonishment.—"Mr. Lorimer, I am truly delighted to see you again; but why, bless my soul! you are wet, too!"

"Mr. Lorimer will tell you the whole story, uncle. It is too long for me," said Marion, laughing. Then she waved her hand, and darted away to the house.

It was a long story, certainly; but, nevertheless, it was all poured into Miss Forrest's eager ears before the supper-bell rang, and great was the wonderment which it caused that young lady. She worked herself into such a passion of indignation against the defeated Rayford, and such a fever of excitement about the victorious Lorimer, that she quite cured her headache; and, when several noisy shouts from the children informed her that Travers had arrived, she even got up and began to make a toilet. "It would be too

discourteous not to see them," she said. "Besides, I am dying to talk it over with Mr. Lorimer, and this is my only chance, for no doubt they will leave to-morrow."

She was mistaken, however. The two young artists did not leave on the morrow. From some cause, the hospitable freedom of Mr. Rivers's household threw quite a spell over them, and they lingered, and still lingered, for pleasant walks, and rides, and talks, until the gold of September burned on the chestnuts, and her royal color glowed in the scarlet of the maples—until the mellow haze of autumn rounded and softened the grand mountain outlines, and the chill mountain nights made them draw closely around sparkling fires; lingered, in fact, until Mr. Rivers, hearing that Alston Rayford had sailed for Europe, came for his daughter, and, to his utter consternation, had another suitor thrown, like a petard, at his head.

It was all the worse, since there was no reasonable ground for refusal in this instance. There was no better blood between the Potomac and the Rio Grande than that which flowed in Vance Lorimer's veins; and, although a practical man like Mr. Rivers looked rather askance at "a painter," still he was also a sensible man, and he saw stuff in the young

artist which promised well for future effort and future distinction. So, with some reluctance, he gave his consent, declaring, as he did so, that if a woman were shut up in an underground dungeon, or condemned to roost in the top of a pine-tree, she would find ways and means to compass a love-affair.

It had long been an agreement between Marion and Nellie that whichever was married first should claim the services of the other as bridesmaid. But circumstances occurred to prevent the fulfilment of this engagement, and, instead of wearing the orange-wreath by turns, they wore it on the same day. In other words, there was a double wedding; and people say yet that there never were two prettier brides than Mrs. Lorimer and Mrs. Travers.

Vance did not fulfil his threat of cutting up the Dream Picture. It hangs in his private room, where strangers never see it; but sometimes it is shown to an intimate friend, and the story of it is told. At such times Vance always concludes by assuring them of the exact truth of every particular, and declaring (in which we can most of us agree with him) that "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy."

POWELL VARDRAY'S LIFE.

I.

THERE are few people who have attained any moderate length of years, and possess in any moderate degree the higher sensibilities and deeper passions, which are by no means the common heritage of the common race, who do not feel and will not acknowledge that existence is far from being synonymous with life. The former state begins at birth and ends at death, extending over many a level of stagnant days, including all the sluggish periods of inaction, and all the weary intervals of dead calm, as well as the stirring breezes and the blinding storms that come to the mental as to the physical world. The latter is thronged with action, filled to the brim with keen emotions, and whetted with eager strife, burning with passion, abounding in vitality, and freighted with issues that in result, at least, extend beyond the earth we tread. Sometimes these two states of being go hand in hand through man's pilgrimage. But this is rare. Few people live always; the vast majority live but seldom; and there are many who, from birth to death, never live at all. The woman whose name stands at the head of this story, belonged to the second class. Once, for a brief space, her pulse changed from the dull, even beat of existence, to the full, quick throb of life; once only—

"All thoughts, all passions, all delights,
Whatever stirs this mortal frame,"

waked within her, and, sweeping into one great current, roused her soul to the very centre, stirring it, filling it, teaching it the lesson which is old as time, yet which every new-born child of Time must learn for itself—the lesson that delight is twin-born with pain, and that to live is to suffer.

At last the weary term was over, and the welcome two-months' vacation came—came to the long class-rooms, outside the windows of which heavy tropical foliage drooped, and into which fragrant tropical breezes swept, even as it came to other class-rooms under paler skies, where lighter foliage drooped, and fresher breezes played, far away in the fair temperate zone. Some smiling, some sighing, yet all glad to go, the pupils took their departure. Most of the teachers followed their example as speedily as possible, and, after a day or two of bustle and confusion, the great *pensionnat*, which was usually such a busy hive of life, sank into strange silence, and the half-dozen teachers and pupils remaining, moved about the wide dormitories, the long galleries, and vacant "classes" like unreal shadows of what had been. In all the British West Indies there was no school so popular as this which had been established in Kingston, by an enterprising Frenchwoman, and the pupils thus stranded on its shore, were from the neighboring islands, and either meant to spend the vacation in the school, or else were awaiting the first opportunity to go home. The teachers were all foreign. There was a middle-aged German with a painfully-long neck, and painfully short-sighted eyes, who taught music, wore spectacles, ate sour-kraut, and played like Liszt. There was a vivacious Frenchwoman, a cousin of the principal, with the sal-lowest skin and blackest eyes in all Jamaica, with a love of toilets next to insanity, and a talent for arranging them next to miraculous. And, finally, there was a young American from the State of Georgia, a stately, handsome girl who had been in the school only one session, who talked very little about herself, but who bore the stamp of gentle blood and gentle

rearing, and whose name was Powell Vardray.

It was near sunset on the third day after the school had formally closed, that the latter was alone in one of the large dormitories through which at this hour the first welcome breath of the land-breeze began to sweep. She had spent the long, sultry afternoon there—the afternoon which in the tropics has more than the stillness of our midnight—and now that various sounds proved that the universal trance of *siesta* was at last broken, she left unfinished a letter which she had been writing, and went to one of the windows. As she leaned out, the day-god sank into the distant ocean, and almost immediately the city below her waked into life. Windows that had been barred against the fierce rays of a vertical sun, opened wide at the first stirring of the breeze among the plummy leaves without; streets that had been deserted by all save a few lounging negroes and busy laborers began to be filled with carriages and pedestrians; sounds of passing feet, hum of voices, laughter and strains of distant song, floated up to the young foreigner; and, from the shade that came over her face, it seemed as if these things had more power to sadden than to cheer. Even the *pensionnat* at last roused in some degree. She heard the chatter of voices as the French teacher and two or three girls assembled on the flat roof over her head; and from below there came the notes of a piano which resolved into the strange, wild beauty of "Walpurgis Night" as the German teacher found that she had the grand *salon* all to herself. The royal harmonies were rising fuller and fuller on the dying day, when suddenly there came a clatter of horses' hoofs down the quiet street, a flush that even the twilight could not hide on Powell Vardray's face, and a gallant-looking rider who swept by at a sharp canter. In passing the school, he reined in his horse a little, and looked eagerly upward. The eyes above were looking down—frank, tender eyes that had no "cunning to be strange" in their soft depths—and the two glances crossed like swords. It was only momentary. The cavalier smiled, uncovered his head, bent low, and then was gone. The girl drew back with the flush already faded from her cheek; and when, a moment later, her name was called by a servant near by, she turned and spoke in the quiet, harmonious voice known so well in the school.

"Here I am, Rose. What is it?"

"A note for you, ma'am," said the servant, presenting, as she spoke, a dainty white missive as if it had been a bayonet. "The messenger is waiting, ma'am," she added, after a minute, as the young teacher sat with the envelope unopened in her hand, her brow slightly bent, and a faint reflection of the flush that was gone rising in her cheek.

"Yes—I know," she said, with a start. Then she broke the seal, drew forth the enclosure, leaned forward, and, by the last light of day, read these lines:

"DEAR MISS VARDRAY: We leave Kingston to-morrow for our residence in the hill-country. Knowing how unpleasant the city is at this time of year, and how lonely you must be in the school, we shall be delighted if you will accompany us and spend your vacation there. Alicia, in particular, is very anxious that you should do so; and I hope sincerely that you will not disappoint her by a refusal. If you say yes, I will call for you at nine o'clock to-morrow morning.

"Yours truly, E. M. MURRAY."

Miss Vardray read this brief epistle twice over; then she knitted her brows again, and gave a moment to reflection; then she smiled slightly, and finally she looked up and spoke.

"You may go, Rose, and I will bring the answer down myself. Be sure and make the messenger wait for it, though. Where is madame?"

"In her own room, ma'am. She is going out, I think, for she was dressing when I came up."

"Going out! Then I must see her at once."

With the note in her hand, she left the dormitory, ran down a flight of stairs to the second floor, followed a corridor, and came to that part of the building where the private apartments of Madame Girod, the principal, were situated. Here she knocked, and was at once admitted to the chamber where this august personage—a handsome and decidedly sallow specimen of the Parisienne—was engaged in the mysteries of the toilet. She gave a cordial greeting to the young girl, and, when the nature of her errand was explained, she smiled benign consent.

"There are no better people in Jamaica than the Murrays," said she, approvingly. "They are at the head of fashion, and live in

most elegant style. Of course, *chère amie*, you must go. We shall miss you immeasurably, and I am sure I shall die of that stupid Madame Schaffer, and that chatterbox of a Victorine, but still I dare not be so selfish as to keep you. Be sure and present my affectionate remembrances to Alicia—she was always my favorite pupil, you know. *Bon soir, ma belle*. Go and enjoy yourself."

Dismissed in this hasty and benedictory fashion, Miss Vardray went to her room, and wrote an affirmative reply to Mrs. Murray's invitation. After this reply was sent, and while a loud bell was summoning her to the light evening meal, she stopped and asked herself if she had done wisely. These Murrays chanced to be friends of her family, and when she came to Jamaica to enter as teacher the school where Alicia Murray was a pupil, they had had the grace to pay her some faint show of social attention. She had been invited to several of their entertainments, and at one of these had the good or bad fortune to meet a certain Captain Romeyne, of the governor's staff, who, being much attracted by her beauty, had devoted himself to her with more *empressement* than was at all expedient. After that she had never received another invitation to the Murray house. Alicia, however, who was a frank school-girl not yet broken into the traces of social life, and very fond of her teacher, carelessly betrayed the secret of this sudden reserve. Despite their wealth and fashion, the Murrays, it seemed, had not been very fortunate in matrimonial disposal of their daughters—partly owing to the fact that in the West Indies, as in a good many other places, eligible suitors are scarce, and young ladies are plenty. The eldest daughter had married a planter of Trinidad, who, in five years, gambled away his fortune, drank himself to death, and returned his wife on her father's hands a penniless widow. The second daughter was, in a moderate way, a beauty, and flew therefore at higher game than any the islands in themselves could furnish. Learning that Captain Romeyne might, by the death of a sickly elder brother, become the heir of one of the largest fortunes and oldest titles among the baronetcies of Great Britain, the Murray family in general, and Miss Ellinor Murray in particular, had made him the object of much attention and the centre of many hopes. There had been no vulgar matrimonial scheming—they were both too wise and too well-bred for

that—but there had been a good deal of finesse and really creditable intrigue which proved its ability by its success. Step by step the young man was led on until there is little doubt but that the object in view might readily have been compassed, if the fair face and dark eyes of Powell Vardray had not crossed his path, and dashed at once into insignificance the commonplace beauty he had admired before. And as Powell Vardray stood before her mirror now, looking at this face, and gazing into the depths of those eyes, she asked herself what this invitation meant. Had they given up the pursuit as hopeless, and were they willing that she should taste one short draught of happiness? Young as she was, the girl was worldly wise enough to return a negative to this question. Did it mean some plan to draw her out of his way, or to place her before him in some unfavorable light? Again she bent her brows, and again the question was too deep for her. At last she shook her head. "I cannot tell," she said aloud; "but whatever it be, I am ready to face it. I am no child, to fall into an open trap. I think my wit is as quick as theirs; and if strife must come, it shall be strife *à l'outrance*. Let them mean what they will, this is my only road to happiness, and I shall take it. They cannot harm him, and for me—I am not rich enough in any gift of earth to fear for myself. The destitute can afford to be brave. I will go."

Years afterward Powell Vardray thought of these reckless words, and looked back on this resolve as the turning-point of her life. Whether she ever regretted it, was known only to herself and God; but it is hardly probable that she ever did—it is more than probable that she held the purchase of one brief taste of life none too dearly made even at the price she was forced to pay for it.

Punctually at nine o'clock the next morning, a carriage, well known in Kingston, drove up to Madame Girod's door, a brown-eyed girl sprang out, rushed past the portress *sans cérémonie*, fled up-stairs with the careless ease of one who treads familiar ground, and burst into Miss Vardray's room like an electric flash.

"Alicia!—how you startled me!" said the teacher, with a laugh; and more than that she could not say, for Alicia's arms were around her, precluding speech, and almost threatening suffocation.

"Oh, I am so glad you are going with us!"

cried the girl, eagerly, "and it was so good of mamma to ask you! I did not think she would—on account of Ellinor, you know—but she did; and all of her own accord. That is, I said nothing to her; but I believe Maud told her she ought to do it. I did not think Maud was such a friend of yours—did you?"

"I had no idea of it," said Miss Vardray, smiling. "Don't choke me, Alicia; and pray let me tie my bonnet-strings. Is not your mother in the carriage?"

"Yes, certainly; but it don't matter about keeping mamma waiting; she is so good-natured. She only gets vexed when I say things about Ellinor's admirers—to tease Ellinor, you know. By-the-by, Miss Vardray, Captain Romeyne has gone—did you know it?"

Gone! What a dark mist it was that came without any warning over Powell's sight, and what a strange, sudden choking rose in her throat! She gasped for breath a moment, but so slightly that the careless girl beside her heard nothing, saw nothing—not even the swift pallor that passed over her face. Then she spoke quite as usual:

"No, I did not know it—how should I? But, if so, he must have gone very lately, Alicia, for I saw him pass here yesterday afternoon."

"That is very probable," said Alicia, coolly, "for he only left this morning. He dined at our house yesterday evening, and bade us all good-by. There was some friend of his here in a yacht, and he is going to spend the next three or four months in cruising about with him among the islands. They left this morning. Ellinor was on the top of the house with an opera-glass, and she saw Captain Romeyne go on board the yacht, and saw the yacht put out to sea. So he is off; and that is an end of the matter. I am sorry for Ellinor, but I really believe I am still more sorry for Maud."

Silenced at this, Miss Vardray went on tying her bonnet-strings, and asked no questions. She never encouraged Alicia's family revelations, but, on the contrary, was often forced to repress them. In this instance, however, she said nothing, and the unreserved young lady soon continued:

"You see, Ellinor was willing enough to become Mrs. Romeyne, but I don't think her heart was terribly set on it. Now Maud's was. Maud thought that, if Ellinor were once well married in England, she could go there and secure a grand fortune for herself. She

has had enough of West-Indians, she says—and, indeed, I don't wonder. She is dreadfully aggravating, though. I wonder sometimes if she didn't aggravate poor Dering into drinking and gambling himself to death."

"I believe I am ready now," said Miss Vardray, in reply to this observation. "If you will come, Alicia, we will bid the teachers and the girls good-by." Then, under her breath, "Oh, if I could but stay—if I could but stay!"

It was too late for this, however, so adieus were made, and in half an hour the Murray carriage was rolling out of Kingston, bearing as its freight Mrs. Murray, her guest, and her two unmarried daughters—the third daughter, Mrs. Dering, having preceded them with her father.

Any one who has ever been in the charming hill-country of Jamaica will understand why it was that, in the course of the next few days, Miss Vardray ceased to regret her change of quarters. In the burning heat of Kingston, existence had been something nearly approaching to a torment—in her new abode it was a delight. Every hundred feet of mountain-elevation was equivalent to a degree of latitude; and, though the luxuriance of tropical vegetation crowned these lovely hills, the air that fanned them was fresh and pure as an elixir of life. The sultry heat of the coast was a thing incredible in the airy villa that was perched on the mountain-side like an eagle's eyrie, while far below a wilderness of glowing landscape stretched to the sea, and the roofs of Kingston, together with the magnificent harbor of Port Royal, lay clearly visible in the distance. The young Georgian had been so closely confined since her arrival in Jamaica that the prodigal loveliness of all things was to her a revelation. Child of the South as she was, her own South was like a faint, cold outline to the glowing beauty of these fairy regions where

"Droops the heavy-blossomed bower, hangs the heavy-fruited tree—
Summer Isles of Eden lying in dark-purple spheres of sea."

Very swiftly the days flew by. There is not in the world a more delightful society than that of the planters whose country-seats occupy these mountains, and the headquarters of all the gayety afloat was that very house in which Miss Vardray was a guest. Rides, drives, excursions, parties, dinners, constant

visits from plantation to plantation, made up the sum of daily life for these gay daughters of the tropics; and into this she was drawn almost without a protest. She had come to be happy—she ended by being gay; and, oh, what a wide distance there is between the two! After a while, she began to be grateful to the Murrays, and to think that they had simply been glad to give her this pleasure without incurring any risk to themselves thereby. But her heart beat sorely whenever she thought of the man who had gone away without one word of farewell—gone just when he might have known that her brief period of freedom had come. Still, she laughed, and sang, and danced, and did all things so charmingly, that she fascinated women as well as men, old as well as young, with whom she came in contact. She made quite a *furor* during her short season of questionable enjoyment. People forgot to patronize her with the condescending patronage which was due her social position. They even forgot this social position altogether, and, only recognizing the native nobility stamped upon the woman, the grace of person, and the gifts of mind that made so fair a hold, grounded arms in a salute more valuable because unconscious.

Suddenly, however, into the midst of this there came a jar. Suddenly Powell waked to the knowledge that all was not so smooth as it appeared, and that, in truth, she was the centre of a scheme, common enough in society, yet, to some people, none the less revolting on that account. Among her many admirers was one whom a little encouragement would soon have transferred into a serious suitor, and this encouragement was given not by herself, but by Mrs. Dering. The person in question was a young planter of moderately good birth, moderately good fortune, and moderately good appearance, who had once been in Ellinor Murray's train, but whose pretensions were not considered of sufficient importance to warrant a formal dismissal, and who was now handed over to the young teacher with an understanding on all sides that it was an admirable thing for her, and a settlement in life she would do well to accept. That the girl herself looked at the matter from a different point of view, may have been foolish, but, at least, was not remarkable. In many respects, life had been hard lines to her; but it had never taught her—it never did teach her—that lesson of the world which most

women learn in their cradles, and the alpha and omega of which is—a husband. Faults, and to spare, she had; but all of them put together did not suffice to make up the sum of that one virtue, entitled reasonable prudence, which, in matters of this kind, the world is never weary of commending. Therefore, when Mrs. Dering signified that a word would be enough to place Mr. Covington at her feet, it would be hard to say whether this clever lady was most astonished or mortified by the courteous but decided repulse which she received. It was so unexpected that she could scarcely contain her chagrin within moderate bounds. She had laid her plans so well, she had brought them by careful degrees to such a successful issue, that now to be foiled like this at the very last was hard—almost too hard to bear.

"She is either a deeper schemer or a greater fool than I possibly imagined," said this charming lady to her mother. "I knew that Arthur Romeyne had been amusing himself with her to a shameful extent, and, of course, I knew also that she was flattering herself with the hope of marrying him; but I never really believed that she would carry her game to the length of refusing Covington. And I assured him, too, that his success was certain. What can I say to him now?"

"Oh, Covington is not a person of any importance," said Mrs. Murray, in a tone of quiet contempt that would have annihilated its object, if he could have heard it. "You know you can say any thing to him, and dispose of him in any way. The serious matter is, that this girl's refusal looks very badly—looks as if she had some assured ground of hope—to believe—about Captain Romeyne, you know."

"It looks as if she were either scheming very deeply, or hoping very absurdly," said Mrs. Dering. "That is what I told you a moment ago. But, as for Captain Romeyne, it proves nothing. Of course, he has been foolish; but I have no idea that he has been, or intends to be, any thing more; and it takes little or nothing to set an adventuress of this kind to castle-building."

"We must get rid of her, though, Maud. It was against my wishes that she was invited; but you were so sure that she could be disposed of in this way. Now, you see how right I was; and Captain Romeyne may come back any day—and find her here."

"I see that I have failed in my plan," said Mrs. Dering, coolly; "but, at least, I have

done no harm. Matters only remain as they were before—no better, certainly; but no worse, either."

"I don't see how you can say that, when the girl is still here. I don't like it, Maud. I honestly confess that it makes me uneasy, and I don't like it."

"I don't like it, either, mamma; but we must find some decent excuse for sending her away. I will drive into Kingston to-morrow, and see Madame Girod. No doubt, she can be induced to send a message that will recall her. There can be no danger in her remaining for a day or two longer, you know."

In the course of the next twelve hours, Mrs. Dering had cause to alter this opinion, and to lay up, for future consideration, the important lesson that a policy of procrastination is always a policy of loss. That evening a large party dined at Flamstead—the name of the Murray seat—and, after dinner, Powell was called to the piano. She sang more than ordinarily well, for she had a fresh, flexible voice, of excellent training and great expression; so, after a while, by special request, she gave the "Adelaide" of Beethoven. Although she never sang it afterward, the tender, passionate strain seemed sometimes breathed into her ear by unseen lips, and they always brought back, like a vivid picture, the memory of that scene—the brilliant room with its gayly-dressed groups, the broad windows open to the fragrant tropical night, and the luminous tropical heavens, the faces at her side, and the very scent of the flowers drooping in her hair. Suddenly, the golden tide of melody wavered and almost stopped; suddenly, a sharp discord came into the sweet tone-idyl, and suddenly, also, a wave of color swept over the singer's face, as a tall, handsome man entered the room, and, despite the "Adelaide," was greeted by a chorus of welcome.

"Why, Captain Romeyne, is this you?"

"What an unexpected pleasure!"

"My dear fellow, where did you drop from?"

"Captain Romeyne, this is charming—and all the more charming because such a surprise. We thought you far enough away."

It was Mrs. Dering who came forward with an impulsive rush, and said this. It was with her that Captain Romeyne first shook hands, and to her made an explanation of his unexpected appearance. Powell did not hear him; but she learned afterward that, having

chanced upon some nautical misfortune, the yacht had been obliged to put back into Kingston for repairs, and that, without giving warning of his intention, he had ridden out to Flamstead, and so surprised them.

"Mamma will be delighted," said Mrs. Dering, taking his arm. "She was talking of you only to-day. Come and let me give her a pleasant surprise. As for Ellinor—but then I must not tell tales out of school, and her first look will be apt to assure you whether or not she is glad to see you. We have quite a charming party here, and we mean to make you prisoner, now that you are in our hands. —"Mr. Latimer, do you know where my sister is?—Why, Mr. Covington, I am surprised that you are not at your usual devotions!"

Mr. Covington was quick enough to follow her glance, and move at once toward Miss Vardray. Observing the direction of his steps, Captain Romeyne first looked surprised, and then laughed.

"So Covington has found a new shrine!" said he, lightly. "I hope Miss Murray did not prove very cruel?"

"Oh! it is merely a case of mutual accommodation," answered Mrs. Dering, with a shrug. "Ellinor really likes the poor fellow, and, having the kindest heart in the world, she was very glad to dispose of him by handing him over to this girl—one of Alicia's teachers, whom mamma invited here to please the child, and who, of course, is delighted with such an establishment as Mr. Covington offers her."

Captain Romeyne's eyes—and very keen ones they were—followed Mr. Covington, and rested for a moment on Powell, over whom the gentleman was just then bending.

"She does not look delighted," said he, as he saw the girl turn almost haughtily from some speech of her admirer's.

"Women's looks are very deceptive," answered Mrs. Dering, with a glance of feigned indifference and real vexation in that direction. "Perhaps she thinks she can play with her fish, having safely landed him. Of course, the subject cannot interest you; but it is an understood thing that they are engaged. Here is mamma now.—Mamma, look what a charming surprise I have brought you—Captain Romeyne in person!"

How wearily, after this, the hours went by to Powell! He was there in the room with her; but oceans and mountains might have

intervened, for all the satisfaction that his presence gave. He was monopolized by the Murrays; she was guarded zealously by Mr. Covington; and even glances were forbidden, since glances, unfortunately, are as intelligible as words even to bystanders. It was life that throbbed in the girl's feverish pulses—but such bitter life that just then she would willingly have taken instead the dead calm and stagnant quiet that, unstirred by joy, is also untroubled by pain. Unfortunately, however, the choice between these two states is never granted us. Without intermission, the strain went on, until at last the effort to talk easily and laugh gayly became more than she could bear. Then she seized a favorable opportunity—a moment when no one was observing her—and, stepping through an open window, slipped away into the friendly shadow of the night. Once outside, she did not linger in the neighborhood of the drawing-room, but took her way to the farther extremity of the grounds, where an abrupt height overlooked the sleeping ocean—a lonely spot, where the only sound which broke the silence was a monotone of surf on the beach far below. There she knelt down, and laid her cheek on the cold stone of a balustrade that guarded the dangerous descent. The holy and ineffable peace of Nature soothed her as nothing else could have done. The great mother seemed stretching soft arms of love around her, and sending sweet messages in every breath of odoriferous air and every echo of the waves below. By degrees, a sort of lethargy crept over her. How long it lasted, she had no means of knowing. It was broken, at last, by a step on the gravel walk, a presence at her side, and a voice she knew only too well, saying:

"How devout you look! Have you stolen away here to say your prayers?"

She glanced up without changing her attitude, looking rarely lovely in the silver starlight.

"I came away for quiet," she said. "Is that very strange? No; I have not been saying any prayers—unless they were to the ocean."

"And did it hear you?"

"Yes, in a degree. I have been very much at rest for a time."

"So you came here for rest?"

"I thought I told you that a moment ago. Quiet and rest are synonymous terms—are they not?"

"Hardly, I think. There is a difference between them; but—well, I did not follow you to split hairs over verbal distinctions. Look at me again, please. I want to see your eyes, while I ask you a question. There—that is it. Steady now! don't start if I am outrageously impertinent. Tell me—are you engaged to Covington?"

He spoke quickly, almost sharply—spoke as if suspense irked him, and yet as if he feared to end it—but the astonishment that sprang at once into her eyes answered him without any need of words. He first smiled, then laughed, at her look of blank amazement.

"I am satisfied," he said; "don't trouble yourself to speak; your face has done that for you. I was a fool to believe it for a moment."

"You believed that I was engaged to Mr. Covington? Ah! I can guess—Mrs. Dering told you so."

"And if she did?"

"Then she might have told you, also, that it is no fault of hers I am not, that she did her utmost to draw me into an engagement, and that it was plainly for this purpose that I was invited here."

Romeyne started slightly, then recovered himself and laughed again.

"Was it, indeed? Well, it matters very little about the purpose. The result is that we are once more face to face, as I almost feared we never should be again. This is enough for me. Powell, is it not enough for you also?"

His gay, careless tones softened over the last words, and the girl beside him quivered from head to foot. She knew that the crowning issue of her life had come; yet through the midst of her sudden joy there pulsed one sharp throb of pain. She could not seize or analyze it, for in a second it was gone; but she remembered it afterward, and wondered if it had been a premonition. She did not speak, though Romeyne waited for her answer, and in that moment the very voices of the night seemed hushed, as if listening for her reply—only far below were heard the soft rustling of the stately palms and the murmur of the tide upon the beach. Then the young man knelt down beside her, and bent his face to a level with her own.

"Powell," he said, "have I vexed you? Will you not even speak to me? It is true

that we have known each other a very short time; but I hardly think words are needed between us. We know all—we know that we love each other. Why, then, should we stand apart, when life is so short and every minute is so precious? I came to this place only because I heard that you were here, and because I thought that at last—"

He stopped, caught his breath sharply, and listened. The silence of the night had been all around them a moment before; but now the soft breeze was laden with other sounds—with footsteps, with voices, with laughter that jarred on the solemn quiet of Nature. Romeyne muttered one impatient exclamation, set his teeth, and then turned.

"I must go," he said, hurriedly, "they will find me here, if I don't. Remember this—we belong to each other, and before this time to-morrow night your own lips shall tell me so. Now—good-night!"

He caught her hands, kissed them passionately, and, before she could utter a word, was gone. A minute later, she heard him meet the advancing party, heard their exclamations and inquiries, heard his careless answers, and knew that they turned and began to retrace their steps. Gradually, the gay voices died away, the calm Oreads of the hushed solitude came back, and, as she knelt, still motionless, she could scarcely tell whether that brief interview had been a dream or a reality.

II.

THE next morning Mrs. Dering felt that the departure of the young teacher could not in safety be longer delayed; so, putting all other engagements aside, she drove into Kingston for the purpose of seeing Madame Girod. Since it was impossible to return before evening, she left the reins of management in her mother's hands, and for a time Mrs. Murray proved equal to the important responsibility. As the day wore on, she kept Romeyne and Powell very cleverly apart; but, in the afternoon, a riding-party was proposed, and, after her sanction had been given, she found, to her consternation, that no one but the young Georgian was bold enough to ride a certain beautiful mare which belonged to Romeyne, and the rider of which would be honored with his attendance. As in courtesy bound, he had offered the animal to Miss Murray; but that young lady's neck was dearer

to her than even a prospective baronet. She looked at the royal creature, who was championing her bit and tossing her head with such fiery impatience, and, after counting the chances for and against her safety of life and limb, declined to run the risk. Then Romeyne turned to Powell, who was standing near.

"Are you afraid to ride her, Miss Vardray?" he asked.

The girl looked up with a gleam of rapture in her eyes that answered him before her lips said:

"No."

"Will you ride her, then?"

"Yes, gladly."

She had not meant to be so frank, but nature is sometimes stronger than conventional-ity, and the smile that came over his face was the reward of her candor. In five minutes she was mounted, and in another five the party was in motion. They started without any definite point of destination, and so it was not strange that the different couples were soon widely scattered, having taken whatever direction chance or the inclination of the moment prompted. Romeyne and Powell were among the first of these deserters. They brought up the rear of the party, and, when a road branching off among the hills seemed beckoning them into a region of enchantment, there was nothing more easy than to heed the invitation. They looked at each other, smiled, and turned their horses' heads. After that they saw no more of their companions. They wandered on and on, and, when at last the silence of the scene and the lateness of the hour made them pause, they found themselves in the midst of the mountains, with wild, tropical forest stretching around on every side, and hardly a path beneath their horses' feet. What was their position, whence they had come, in what direction lay their homeward road; neither of them knew. They only realized that, in the delight of mutual companionship, in the glory of heaven and the beauty of earth, they had recked little of their course, and so—lost it.

When they came to their senses, the sun was going down, and they knew that night would fall upon them as soon as his broad red disk had disappeared. Just then, however, the scene was of paradise. The air was full of myriad perfumes; the sky was a vault of sapphire, the distant ocean a plain of azure; the broken, picturesque peaks of the moun-

tain-range were crowned with plummy sentinels and girdled with a wealth of foliage, while heavy palms drooped over their heads, and the rocks and glades about them were enamelled with a thousand shrubs, each of which, in less favored climes, would have been a rare exotic. Everywhere opened the broad, succulent leaves that abound in the tropics; everywhere shone the golden and crimson glories for which botany has no name; and through the deep green of a jungle on one side was caught the sheen of flashing water, as a swift mountain-stream leaped down a height of some eighty feet into a rocky bed below, and sent up a shower of spray like a silver mist. The whole was so heavenly that, when they paused, Powell scarcely noticed the gravity of her companion's face, or his anxious look around him. She was drinking in a deep draught of the beauty lavished before her, when he spoke:

"I am very much afraid that we have lost our way. This is no road at all that we have been following, and I really have very little idea of our bearings."

"We shall have to turn back, I suppose," said she, carelessly. "It is a pity, for we shall be late in reaching Flamstead. We can turn back—can we not?" she added, with a sudden accession of interest and concern, caused by a glance at Romeyne's face.

"I—am not sure of it," said he, slowly, as, turning in his saddle, he looked in the direction from which they had come. "I am afraid that, if we do turn back, we shall not be able to reach the road," he went on. "Unfortunately, I hardly noticed the way at all, and there are no landmarks in my memory. The scenery is so much alike that we may have wandered Heaven only knows how far."

"What are we to do—keep straight on?"

"I dare not do that, with the night so near at hand."

"Where is the middle course, then? We cannot stand here until daylight."

"No—not if we can help it. Will you hold my horse a minute? Perhaps, if I climb that hill yonder, I may see something to guide us."

He dismounted as he spoke, and, bringing up his horse, gave her the rein. As she took it she could not forbear urging him to haste, for she had been long enough in the tropics to know that the sun would sink in a few minutes, and that darkness would almost instant-

ly follow. He did not need the recommendation, but went off at once, breaking through the luxuriant undergrowth, dashing over the torrent, and springing up the precipice down which the cascade tumbled. Soon she lost sight of him; but she could hear his voice when he spoke, and now and then a large stone fell crashing along the hill, making her tremble for his safety. Suddenly the sun went down, sinking like a shot into the distant expanse of ocean, and, simultaneously, the fan-like foliage began to stir with the breath of the land-breeze, while a chorus of insect voices made all Nature animate with their rejoicing. At this moment, Powell heard a shout that made her look eagerly upward. She saw Romeyne on a point of rock far above her head; but he was dwarfed to almost pigmy dimensions, and his voice, as it floated down, sounded strangely distant.

"I can see nothing," he said—"nothing but the mountains and the sea. I fancy that Flamstead is in that direction" (he pointed southeast), "but I cannot tell, and the country is too broken for sight."

"But is there no other house to be seen?" Powell asked, anxiously, for the situation began to break upon her in a far from pleasant light.

He looked round in every direction, using his hand as a telescope, then answered, slowly:

"None."

"Do you see any road?"

"Not even a path."

"Oh, what shall we do?"

"We must keep up our spirits, in the first place, and, if necessary, we must bivouac out all night, in the second. Would you be afraid to do that?"

"I should prefer to go back to Flamstead."

"Ah! so would I. Well, it is growing dark, and I may be some time in reaching you—so I had better come down. I think I see a way out of our difficulty. I recognize a landmark over yonder, and, if we can only keep straight and reach it, we shall be all right in an hour or two."

"Do you mean to come down where you went up?"

"Necessarily—since that is the only practicable point of descent. It is confoundedly slippery, too. I only hope I sha'n't break my neck—that would be unpleasant for you."

"Don't talk so heedlessly; and pray take care."

"Can you see me?"

"Yes, quite plainly."

"Kiss your hand to me, then; and now—*en avant!*"

He waved his own hand gayly, and then swung himself over a point of rock. After this, Powell could not see him any longer. The luxuriant foliage hid him from her sight, and, though she strained her eyes to pierce through the dusk, it was impossible to follow his movements. Then the horses grew restive, and she had some trouble in quieting them. Before she entirely succeeded in this, there came a sound that chilled her blood—a sharp exclamation, an ominous crashing of a heavy body through the dense undergrowth, a dull fall, a deep groan, and then an awful silence.

For a moment the girl sat stricken with horror, then she raised her voice and called Romeyne's name; but no answer was returned. She waited a moment and called again—still no answer. Then she sprang from her saddle, left the horses to go where they would, and, plunging recklessly into the thicket, made her way to the spot where he had ascended. It took her some time to do this, for her long habit was much in her way, and the water-course intervened; but on she went, recklessly, through the prickly shrubs, over the foaming cataract, forward despite all obstacles, despite her torn dress and bleeding hands, until at last she reached her point of destination—the foot of the hill. Then she paused, and gazed earnestly around. Even at noonday, the spot where she stood was dim and dark with the shade of overhanging trees; now, in the dusky gloaming, the shadows that gathered there were almost unfathomable. Still, after a moment, her eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, and she could distinguish, in form at least, the objects surrounding her. On one side was the silvery sheen of the water-fall; on the other, a gigantic banana rose like a sentinel over the heads of the lesser trees, and flung its broad leaves against the treacherous rocks of the steep ascent. The trunk of this tree was not three feet from the cascade, and, as Powell stood beside it, a spray of the falling water came like rain in her face. Once again she called, and now a faint groan answered her. Guided by this, she sprang forward, and in a moment was kneeling by a prostrate figure that lay on the verge of the stream, half in, half out of, the foaming water. The silent depths of forest echoed with weird distinctness

the wailing sound that broke from her lips as she bent down and lifted in her arms that stricken head.

"My love! my love!" she cried, in tones that might have waked the dead, "can you not speak to me? My God! are you killed?"

No sound answered her, not even a groan. The head which she supported fell heavily over her arm, and the strong young form lay helpless and motionless with the leaden weight of insensibility. After a moment, she bent down and laid her ear over his heart. At first she could not tell whether it beat, but gradually she caught the slow, deep throbs, and knew that life still held the citadel. That knowledge was like an elixir of vitality to her, and seemed to fill her with a strength and energy that must have been lent from Heaven for the time. She strove to draw him up from the water; but the first movement brought forth such a moan of pain that she was obliged to desist from this attempt. Then she looked round; cordial there was none, but Nature's great restorative was near at hand, and she sprinkled his face with water until it was evident that he would revive. When this was apparent, a thought suddenly struck her, and she plunged her hand into his pockets, searching for what she found at last—a small flask, containing French brandy. She first tasted this, then held it to his lips, and poured a slender stream down his throat. In an instant, the effect was visible. He drew a deep, gurgling breath, opened his eyes, strove to raise himself, fell back with a sharp cry of pain, and lay still for a moment, panting heavily. After a while, he said, slowly:

"Powell, are you there? are you near me?"

"I am here, my love, my poor darling," said the girl, whose arms were round him, and whose sobs were choking her, as she kept them back, and strove to answer calmly.

"How did you"—a pause and a gasp—"reach me?"

"I don't know. I heard you fall, and I came—that is all. Are you much hurt? Oh! do you think you are much hurt?"

"I cannot tell. Wait a moment—let me lift myself and see. Sweetheart, hold my shoulders—help to raise me if you can. There—now—O my God!"

It was no mere exclamation, this last, no mere utterance of an ordinary appeal, but a soul's great shuddering cry over an agony too

great for endurance. After it there followed a stillness, and Powell knew that he had fainted.

She did not faint herself, she did not even shed a tear. Indeed, in that moment she proved the heroic nature of her love, by the strength it gave her above her own weakness. She knelt by him, chafing his hands, bathing his face, pouring brandy as well as she could between his clinched teeth, and striving, by every means in her power, to revive him: but no sound came from her lips, no throb of her anguish found outward expression. Once only, she paused and looked upward. Through the drooping, plume-like foliage, the brilliant constellations of the southern heaven gazed down, shedding their mellow splendor even into this dark spot, and shimmering fitfully over the silver cascade. Save the rush of water, all around was full of the strange awe and silence of the night—that silence in which we seem to hear the great heart of Nature deeply beating. Sounds there were, but they could scarcely be analyzed or described—distant fitful voices of the forest that deepened rather than lessened the significance of the solitude. Powell felt that she was utterly alone—alone with none but God to aid—and out of the very desperation of despair came courage. The great soul rose up bravely to face the exigence, and after that she never faltered, even to the end.

At last Romeyne slowly came back to consciousness, and once more opened his eyes into those that, full of wistful pain, gazed so tenderly upon him.

"Sweetheart," he said, faintly, "bend down."

She bent down, and he kissed her thrice as passionately, but more softly, than he had kissed her hand the night before. Then he told her to lay his head gently on the ground.

"Why?" she asked, much pained at this.

"Why should I not hold it?"

"Because you must go back to Flamstead," he answered. "When I was up there"—he glanced to the hill over his head—"I saw what our best path would be, and I think there is light enough for you to follow it. I cannot move. You must leave me here, and send for me. Listen now, and let me tell you the route—"

But she would not listen—she cried out at once on the cruelty of this.

"I will not go," she said. "If I could find the way a hundred times over, I would not go. How can you bid me do such a thing?"

How can you think I would leave you here suffering and alone? If I could bring help, it would be different; but it would require hours at least, and you all alone—oh, I would die sooner than go! You are cruel—cruel to try to send me from you like this!"

"My darling, it is for—he stopped as he was about to say "your own sake." He knew this was the last argument in the world to move her; so after a moment he added—"it is for the best. Do you think it is not happiness to me to know that you are here, to feel your arms around me, and your hand upon me, but—but it must not be. Powell, my own, my own, you must go!"

She understood him. She understood how he thought of her even in his great extremity; and how, for her own sake, he was willing to send her from him. She knew, too, that he wished to spare her what might be a vigil of death, and in a moment her soul nerved itself for any endurance.

"You are thinking of me," she said, calmly, "but there is no need for it. Here—now—the world is less than nothing to me, and you are all. If I could help you by going, I might force myself to leave you. But there is no question of that. The best help I can render you is to stay by you, and I shall stay. Arthur, my own love, be merciful—let me do it in peace."

He smiled faintly. He had said his say, and was too weak to urge her further.

"Stay, then," he murmured. "But it will be very, very bitter to you."

After this the hours wore slowly on—broken only by such strong wrestlings with pain as would have torn the girl's heart if she had seen the veriest stranger suffer them, yet on which she looked without a murmur. She held the quivering form, wiped the streaming brow, moistened the parched lips, and gave the brandy as he directed—all without a single falter. Then in the intervals, when he could talk faintly and brokenly, she listened and answered more like an angel than a woman. Love made her, for the time being, almost divine, endowing her with a strength, a wisdom, and a tenderness, that in herself she could not claim. In these few hours of mingled agony and bliss, she lived her life—all that was ever granted her. He was dying; the summons had come in the full glory of his manhood, and he was going, he was almost gone, into that realm of dark shadow where only

faith can pierce and love can follow. She knew that, but she also knew that he was all hers—that the world put no claim between them here, that heart was bared to heart at last, and that out of her arms no human power could take him now. They belonged to each other. He had told her that the night before, but the sense of it did not come to her till now—now that he was dying in her arms, all alone in the wild forest. Gradually his mind began to wander, and he talked of an English home that his eyes would never see again.

"If I could only have taken you there, my darling," he said, with a sudden return to consciousness. "But this may be best. We have tasted all the sweetness of the cup of love, and we are spared any of its bitterness. Bitterness might have come, you know—even to us. I wonder if I am going, Powell? I wonder if it is because I am not myself that I feel so strangely content—so strangely sure that it is all right?"

"God only knows, love. God grant that indeed it may be all right—for you!"

"Sweetheart, you won't forget me soon?"

"Forget you!" What a low, pitiful cry it was. "Arthur, my only love, if I could go with you, I would—even into the arms of death."

"Thank God, you cannot, then, for life is sweet, and you are young. Darling, I shall not see you when you are old."

"No one ever will," said she, with strange calmness.

"You think so now—but ah!"

It was one of the fierce paroxysms—the very fiercest that had been—and Powell almost thought it was the struggle of dissolution; but after a while it passed, and then she heard him whisper under his breath a fragment of the grand old "Dies Irae." "*Salva me, fons pietatis*," he murmured, and she caught the words. For the first time—and yet she was not a heathen—they made her think of his soul.

"O Arthur," she cried, "shall I not pray for you?—shall I not ask God to have mercy on you?"

He murmured something unintelligible, but which sounded like assent; and, without changing her position, she poured forth her soul in a tide of passionate supplication. The whole strength of her undying love went into it, and never before had the silent forest hearkened to such an appeal as now went forth, piercing the infinite spaces of eternity to the

very throne of God. Suddenly she stopped, for there was a change which even in the darkness she perceived. What it was she could not analyze, but she felt at once that the end was at hand.

"Arthur, Arthur," she cried, wildly, "are you going?"

He muttered something brokenly, and lay for a moment in a stupor. Then he started, and a smile swept over his face—a smile which even in the faint starlight Powell caught—and he murmured something of which she heard only one word—her own name. With that name still on his lips, a strong shiver seized him, the breath fluttered—ceased—the eyes closed—and the girl knew that she was desolate.

When Powell came to herself out of the awful blackness and blankness that followed, she was lying in her own room at Madame Girod's. Every thing around looked so quiet and so familiar, that for a moment she almost believed that she had waked from a horrible dream—but it was only for a moment. The next instant memory rushed over her—rushed not singly and by degrees—but suddenly, and in one awful whole. In a second, she remembered every thing, felt every thing, and, with a low, moaning cry—a protest, as it were, against life—she turned her face from the light, and buried it in the pillows.

At that cry, the German teacher rose quietly from a seat behind the bed-curtains, and advancing laid her hand on the girl's brow. She started, for it was cooler than she expected. Then she leaned over and spoke:

"*Liebchen*, do you feel better?"

The voice was very sweet, and Powell opened her eyes. She had never fancied this woman much—indeed, she had taken quite a dislike to her, in the quick, impatient fashion of youth—but now she read such earnest kindness in her eyes, that the sore heart opened at once to receive it.

"Better!" she cried—then, with a burst, "Oh, why did you make me well again? Why did you not let me die?"

"Child," said the German, gravely, "life and death are in God's hands. Were you so ready to go to Him, that you can talk like this?"

"I shall never be more ready; and I would have gone anywhere with him. Oh, Fräulein, tell me where he is buried."

The Fräulein looked grave; but she also looked sad and infinitely pitiful. "Do you mean Captain Romeyne?" she asked, at length.

"Whom else should I mean? Oh, my poor love! He died in these arms, and I—I must live on, and never see him again."

"Died! My poor child, are you sure of that?"

"Am I sure? Fräulein, what do you mean? Did I not see him die?—did I not feel the last quiver of life that passed over him?—did I not—oh, why do you ask me such a question? Why do you look at me so strangely? Fräulein, it cannot be—" She raised herself, and caught the teacher's arm, gazing the while passionately and wildly into the eyes that regarded her with such infinite compassion. "Speak!" she gasped. "It cannot be that he is *alive*?"

"Yes, he is alive."

The girl strove to speak, strove to question, strove evidently to say "Thank God!" but strength failed. Her hand relaxed its grasp on the teacher's sleeve, her eyes closed, her head sank back—she had fainted. Weeping softly, the German applied the usual remedies; and, as the swoon was slight, before long it yielded to them. Then, when the dark eyes once more opened, there was a question in their depths, and, when the lips unclosed, it came rushing forth at once.

"Fräulein, will he recover? Oh, God bless you for such news! But tell me—if he will ever be himself again?"

"He will recover certainly; it is said, indeed, he is much better now."

"And where is he? When can I see him?"

The teacher toyed nervously with the tassels of the bed-curtains, and looked away, avoiding Powell's eyes, and gazing out of the window.

"You can't see him at all," she said, at last. "He is gone."

"Gone!"

"He sailed yesterday for England."

This time no swoon was kind enough to come. On the contrary, the startled eyes opened wider and wider, with incredulity in their gaze. It seemed, indeed, as if they could not take themselves from the teacher's face, until the expression of that face repeated the news so sharply told. Then there was a cry—a low, pitiful cry, as of one wounded unto

death—and the girl once more sunk back and buried her face from the light. This time she tasted the full bitterness of desolation, and, tasting it, cried out for death as a release.

But death came not at her desire. Slowly and by degrees, life flowed into her veins, and beat in her languid pulses. Slowly the duties of existence thronged back upon her, and she rose up to meet them. She did so with a strange, stunned quietude, a sort of dead apathy, the feeling and the bearing of one in whom Fate had spent its last blow. She did not think she could ever suffer another pang, and so went on her weary round, until one day all this false quiet was suddenly shattered, when the news came that the vessel in which Arthur Romeyne sailed for England, having met with adverse winds and storms, had gone down at sea.

Not long after this, Alicia Murray came one day to see the young teacher, and from her Powell received an assurance which she would gladly have gone in sackcloth and ashes all her life to gain—the assurance that the man, for whom she had suffered so much, had not deserted her willingly, or even knowingly. When he was found helpless and insensible, a message had immediately been dispatched for a cousin of the Romeyne family, who was acting as British consul in one of the neighboring islands. When this man arrived, his first resolution was to take Romeyne at once to England. Mrs. Dering, who inspired the idea, supported him in its execution, and the young man was removed to the vessel while yet unable to oppose, or even to understand, any thing that was in progress. In this state he sailed; and it was due to Mrs. Dering again, that all Kingston, having heard of his wonderful recovery, believed that he had gone of his own free-will. The plan was well enough laid; but, whether it would have succeeded in its final result, was never known. God stretched forth His arm of power, the winds and the waves rose up to do His bidding, and all was over. The good ship went down, the ocean-tides swept over the heart that might have been so true, and yet again might have been so false; and all love, all hope, all suffering, was at an end forever.

Here, also, ended Powell Vardray's life. In all the years of her existence, she never lived again. Yet these years were quiet enough, and in one sense—the sense of duty fulfilled and work performed—even happy. She never

murmured at their length or their sameness. She had lived her life, and that seemed to suffice. Yet, as she once told Arthur Romeyne, she did not live to grow old. Before that time, the summoner, who comes to all, came to her. A terrible fever decimated the island, and, in the midst of panic and dismay, she nursed the sick, tended the dying, and even

helped to bury the dead. She gave herself no rest, either night or day; and, when all was over, when the pestilence passed, and health came back to those whom death had spared, she sickened and died. By her own request, one side of the stone which marks her grave bears this inscription:

"Ich habe gelebt und geliebet."

THE END.

BERNARD'S INVENTION.

I.

TWELVE o'clock.

Not midnight, but bright, soft noonday—the noonday of lovely April—in the old-fashioned garden of an old-fashioned house, located in the very midst of the business portion of the large and flourishing town of W—. It had once been a very elegant residence, this old house, and had stood on the outskirts of the town, with pleasant hills and valleys, waving woods and green fields, sweeping up to the very verge of the garden. But now, all around it, flowed a busy tide of trade; warehouses of cotton and tobacco rose on either side; wagons and drays rattled past unceasingly; in the rear, a car-shop belched forth black smoke; while engines screamed, and trains rumbled heavily back and forth, at all hours of the night and day. Still, even amid these discordant surroundings, the old house held its own bravely, and, wrapping itself about with a mantle of dignified reserve, looked down with the pride of conscious antiquity upon all these new-comers of the later time. It had a right to do this, since its own recollections went back to the time when the Georges were kings, and when, at intervals, the red-men gathered strength to sweep down upon the dove-cots of their invaders. It was pointed out by the W—ites as the place where Cornwallis had established his headquarters, and where he and his courtly staff had once given a ball, and with the fair Tory ladies of the place danced a summer's night through. Life and death, and joy and sorrow, had each had its own time within its dark old walls; yet, still it stood, a memorial of the stately past, and, in some wise, a rebuke of the flippant present. It was not a pretty house, as beauty is reckoned now—no-

body could for an instant compare it to the elegant villas which were scattered to the westward, and monopolized all that fair outlook of rolling country which had once been its own—neither was it a very comfortable house, according to modern ideas of comfort. But you rarely find, nowadays, such work as that of the panelled walls or richly-carved chimney-pieces, and there were nooks and corners about it, odd rooms stored away in all sorts of unaccountable places, and closets almost as large as rooms under the strange, dark, winding staircases, which gave it a charm that the most commodious and thoroughly-ventilated houses oftener lack than possess. Then, there was the back piazza, all latticed in and covered with green vines, until it had the seclusion, and more than the coolness, of a drawing-room. And beyond this piazza was the gem of the whole establishment—the old-fashioned garden, shut in from the outer world by a high wall, through which no one could peer, and over which no one could climb, occupying nearly a square, full of fruit-trees, fragrant with flowers, and abounding in shrubs that half a century before had been trimmed into the formal regularity of art, but had now overgrown every thing with the wild luxuriance of Nature.

It was in this garden that the flickering April sunlight marked twelve o'clock on a sundial that occupied the middle of a green plat, round the borders of which bright-hued flowers of the spring were blooming, while just in front of it was an arbor draped all over with that fragrant darling of the Carolina woods, the yellow jasmine. Within this arbor, framed, as it were, by the green tendrils and golden bells, sat a young girl, busily engaged in drawing, at a small table. Seen

under favorable circumstances, she might have been, and no doubt was, exceedingly pretty; but just now she looked pale and weary; her dress was careless; her hair was hastily pushed back, and gathered in a rough, loose knot behind; while her forehead was drawn into a frown that ill became its pearly whiteness. On the table before her lay open a case of mathematical-drawing instruments, and it was with these that she worked, tracing out intricate designs of an apparently mechanical character on a large sheet of card-board, and now and then noting down certain numerical results on a sheet of paper near at hand. It was weary work, and when, at last, she glanced up, and saw that it was twelve o'clock, she threw down her pencil with an air of unmis-takable relief.

"I must go and see about dinner," she said, half aloud; and, as she said it, she took up a large portfolio from the ground beside her chair, and began to put the drawing away. While she was thus occupied, a clear, fresh voice suddenly called, "Annie!" A quick, ringing step sounded on the gravel walk, and round a group of shrubs that formed a perfect cloud of tinted bloom, a young man of the most frank and cheery presence imaginable came into sight. He was not particularly handsome, but he had a graceful, well-knit figure, and an open, pleasant face, while his whole manner diffused such an air of moral sunshine that it was no wonder the gloom parted and fled from the girl's brow at once.

"Louis!" she cried, eagerly; and then smiled, and added, in a tone of absurdly-weak reproof, "You provoking boy! how you startled me! What on earth brings you here at this hour of the day?"

"Kiss me, pretty one, and I'll tell you," said the new-comer, gayly. Then, having taken this favor, without incurring any rebuke thereby, he added, more gravely: "Annie, darling, congratulate me—my fortune is made! If your father agrees, we can be married this day two months."

"Oh!" said Annie, with a gasp; but the color came into her face, and made her absolutely lovely. "O Louis! how? what? Tell me what you mean—tell me all about it!"

The young man kissed her again. He was evidently glowing with triumph, and found it hard to contain his exultation within moderate bounds.

"I mean just what I say," he answered;

"but, as for telling you all about it, I can't do that, dearest, for I am bound to secrecy. I can only tell you this: my fortune—our fortune—is made, and you are mine."

"I was always that!" she cried, with something between a laugh and a sob. "But, surely, Louis, you can tell me a little more than this. If it is to be *our* fortune, surely I have a right to know how it is made."

"Can't you trust me, Annie?"

"Trust you! Indeed, yes—ever and always. But, then, you know we are pledged not to keep any secrets from each other."

"Only such as honor demands; and this is a case of honor. However, I can tell you a little, the general outline of the matter. Here, let us sit down and talk at our leisure. Now, that is better. Well, to begin rather far from the point, and not so far either, you know I have always had a decided mechanical talent, and, thanks to your father's kindness, I have acquired some aptitude in turning it to account."

"Yes," said Annie, with a rueful glance at the portfolio; "yes, I know you have, and I know you will end by being as bad as he is, if you do not stop yourself in time."

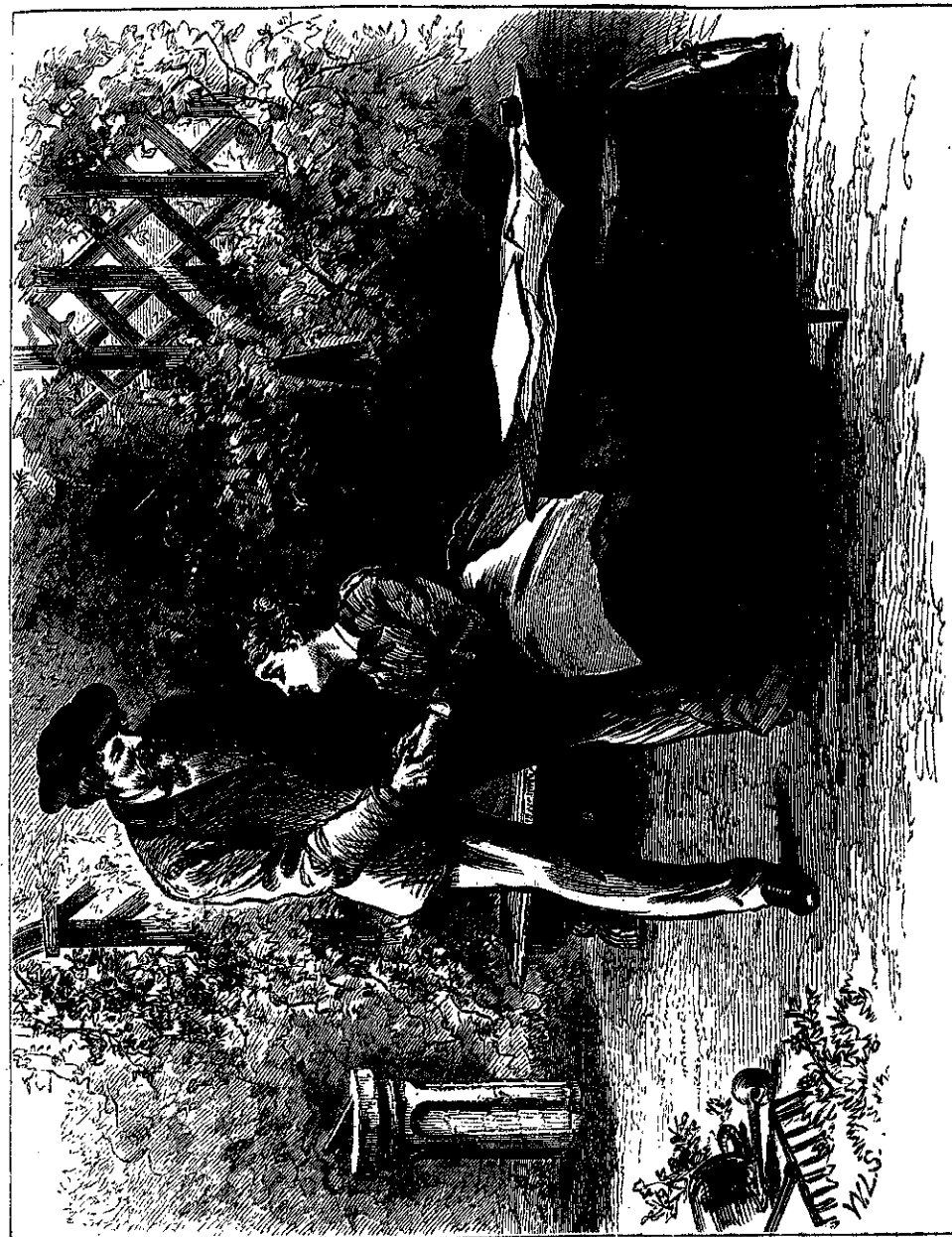
"Stop myself!" repeated the young man, with a laugh. "Why, little simpleton, the science of mechanics is the lever of the world nowadays, and in all the world there is no better or more direct road to fortune than that which it opens. If we are married two months hence, it will be thanks to mechanics."

The girl's face fell a little; but she did not utter any thing, excepting the simple interrogative—

"How?"

"By means of a great invention," answered the young man, with color rising to his face, and light flashing in his eyes—"an invention which will be the greatest since steam, and which will go far to revolutionize the whole system of mechanics, as known to the world at present. I wish I could show it to you, Annie darling; I wish I could tell you. —But what is the matter? Why do you look at me as if—as if you were disappointed?"

"Because I *am* disappointed!" cried the girl; and, before her lover knew what she was about, she had laid her head down on the table and was sobbing bitterly. Poor things! It was hard on both of them. Hard on the triumphant bearer of good news to see it so received. Harder still on the girl who had been



"Annie, darling, congratulate me—my fortune is made!"

so flushed with hope to have it dashed by that word, to her, of fatal omen—"invention."

"I thought you meant something real—something to be relied on," she sobbed. "O Louis, how could you disappoint me so cruelly! Oh, I am so sorry, so very sorry, that this fever—God knows I am almost tempted to call it this madness—has seized you, too! Louis, for Heaven's sake put it from you! Trust to the steady results of honest labor, and not to these wild schemes of a fortune to be made at one stroke. Look at my father! let him be a warning to you. See how his life has been spent in the service of this wretched science—how many inventions, that were to benefit the world, he has made—and where and how he is to-day! Oh, I had so hoped that with you I should be free from this weary toil that comes to nothing, this eager counting on dreams that are shadowy as air! And now—Louis, Louis, you will break my heart!"

"Dear love, I hope not," said Louis, half concerned, half amused. "You don't appreciate your father, Annie. You don't know what a great man he is—what a great man he yet will be in the face of that world which has treated him as from the beginning it has always treated genius—has robbed him, and laughed at him, and refused to hear him! But it will hear him yet. There never was a great mind that did not have to pass through this ordeal; there never was a great discovery that was not met by this opposition; there never was a great achievement that did not have to triumph over these difficulties. It has been hard on you, my poor pet; but I hope the hardest is over at last. Apart from my good fortune, your father tells me that he is working on an invention, which he thinks the greatest he has ever made, and the patent-right of which he does not mean to put out of his own hands."

"Yes, he is working at it," said the girl, wearily, and once more she glanced at the portfolio. "I have been making out some of the drawings," she added; "but he forbade me to show them, even to you. He has been robbed so often, that he has grown very suspicious now. Sometimes, I think he is reluctant to trust even me. O Louis, it is so sad! And to think that you have started on the same path!"

"I have only made a beginning, dear, and as for my being a great inventor, you may set

your mind at rest on that point. Nature did not favor me with the rare gift of original conception. I can only work out other men's thoughts, and sometimes bring them to a practical issue. This is all that I have done now. A gentleman, a friend of mine—I cannot tell you his name, because he desires that it may be kept secret—conceived a new idea in mechanics, but, lacking practical knowledge of the science, he could not work it out in practical form. So he brought a rough draught of the invention to me, and told me that, if I could perfect it, I might take out the patent, and share half the profits. I saw at once what a magnificent thing it would be if it *could* be perfected; so I fell into the idea forthwith, and went to work. O Annie, how I worked! I saw fortune and you before me, and I never drew rein night or day. But, after a while, the inventor's fever came over me, and the fascination of the science overtook me. Then I forgot all about fortune, I even forgot all about you, and worked on and on, only that I might reach the result which seemed ever before me and yet ever eluding me. It eluded me for a long time, and no one but an inventor can imagine the fever in which I lived during that time. Waking or sleeping, I thought of nothing else—saw nothing else; and when, at last, one day the solution of my difficulties came to me like a flash of inspiration, I shouted until my neighbors thought that I was mad. I wanted then to throw down pencil and paper and rush to you; but Mr.—, I mean the original inventor, held me bound to absolute secrecy, and he did not relax this requirement even when all the specifications were made out and forwarded to the Patent-Office. It was not until this morning, when he came and told me that the patent was finally issued, that he also told me I might announce the fact to my friends, provided I didn't divulge his name. Heaven only knows why he should wish to give me all the credit, as well as half the profits; but one thing is certain, my darling—our fortune is made, and you are mine!"

He caught the girl in his arms at the last words, and kissed her again and again, while she could only lay her head down on his shoulder and indulge in an hysterical combination of laughter and tears.

"I am happy, Louis, and grateful—oh, so grateful!" she said, as well as the laughter and tears aforesaid would allow; "but, dear

love, I should be still more happy, still more grateful, if the fortune had come to you in any other way. It seems to me like gambling—like something that means prosperity for a little while, but ruin in the end. I may be very foolish, but that is the way it seems to me, and then—O Louis, I feel sure that, in some way or other, it will bring us ill-luck!”

Louis smiled at this; but he did not attempt any thing like reason in reply. On the contrary, he changed the subject, and asked the foreboding girl if her father was at home. “I did not see him as I came through the house,” he said; “and I am on thorns until I tell him my good luck, and hear him assure me that I may take you as soon as I please.”

“He is not likely to give you that assurance to-day,” said she, nodding archly.

“Is he not? Well, let us go and see.”

They went accordingly, sauntering side by side down the garden-paths bordered with rows of tall box, and enlivened here and there by fragrant lilacs and sweet purple wisteria, until they reached the latticed piazza. From this they entered a narrow, dark passage, made still darker from the fact of the front door being closed, and thence passed into a room that resembled an amateur machine-shop more than any thing else. Mathematical and mechanical designs lined the walls; models, in miniature, of all machines, in connection with which steam has ever been used as a motive power, occupied every available space—excepting that which was filled by a large locked cabinet—and in the midst of this apparent disorder stood a table, littered over with paper and drawing-materials. Annie looked round the apartment and shook her head.

“Papa is not here,” she said. “You must remain on thorns a little longer, Louis.”

“May he not be in the house somewhere?”

“No, he has gone out. Don't you see his hat is missing? He has gone to the machine-shops, I am sure. He often goes there for what he calls ‘practical suggestions.’ Come, let us sit on the piazza. This room is so dark and cold that it makes me shiver.”

II.

VERY much like the fortunes of the old house were the fortunes of the man who at present inhabited it. He was a gentleman of good descent, as his name—the noble Scottish

name of Gordon—amply testified; and he had once possessed a more than moderate amount of wealth; but, having been blessed, or rather cursed, with the gift of invention, this wealth had melted away to satisfy the insatiate demands of scientific experiment, until little or none of it remained. After his fortune was gone, he soon exhausted the long-suffering patience of his friends. They were all practical, worldly-wise people, and, regarding him as a half-mad visionary, troubled themselves very little about the manner in which they expressed this opinion. Naturally enough, Mr. Gordon resented its expression, and, naturally also, a formal break was the result. Being a widower with only one child, he took this child, and the yet dearer children of his brain—his inventions—and went forth into the world to conquer fortune. Instead of conquering, however, he was speedily conquered. Men laughed at his inventions, and then stole them; patent-rights, of his own discoveries, were taken out before his eyes; and he fell a victim to the countless modes of swindle and legal robbery that, from first to last, lie in wait for the inventor, and filch from him both the glory and the profit he has toiled to gain. After a time, he drifted to W—, and became an inmate of the rambling old house already described. Here he lived an eremite sort of existence, working with feverish energy at an invention, which was to revolutionize the whole system of mechanics, and make not one, but a dozen fortunes for himself. Here, also, he made the acquaintance of Louis Bernard, a young civil engineer of unusual promise and talent. Despite this promise and talent, however, the young man was poor as a church mouse. But, in Mr. Gordon's eyes, this fact was any thing but a disadvantage. He was so very eccentric—so very crazy, his friends said—that he looked upon poverty somewhat in the light of a badge of merit; and, when he found that a love-affair was developing between his pretty Annie and young Bernard, instead of turning the penniless suitor out-of-doors, he told him that he might marry the maiden as soon as he could support her in a respectable manner. Encouraged in this way, the love-affair became an authorized engagement, and was of six months' standing on that bright April morning when our story opened.

Now, while the two lovers sat on the trel-lised piazza, and, with the glory of sunlight and fragrance of flowers around them, laid

countless plans for their blissful future, Mr. Gordon, as his daughter had rightly surmised, was peering in and out among the machinery of the engine and car-shops, located near his house. These car-shops formed quite a large establishment, for the railroad, to which they belonged, was very flourishing, and it was here that most of its rolling-stock was constructed. Consequently, the latest improvements in machinery were always to be found here, and consequently, also, it was a great resort of Mr. Gordon's. The employes knew him well, and, although they considered him a little “touched,” liked him amazingly. The authorities, however, looked at him askance, and it was only the master-machinist who ever went out of his way to do him a kindness, or show him a civility.

This man, though only thirty-five, ranked high in his calling, and had entire control of the works. His name was Liddell; he was gentlemanly, though not a gentleman, and had for some time assiduously cultivated Mr. Gordon's acquaintance. To accomplish this was not difficult, since there was that best possible foundation for acquaintanceship, a common taste, between them. But the most natural things frequently excite gossip in a country-town; and unscrupulous news-mongers did not hesitate to say that the bright eyes of Annie Gordon possessed more attraction to the master-machinist than did her father's discourses on cog-wheels and piston-rods. However that might be, Mr. Liddell was one of the few visitors who ever crossed the threshold of the old house; and, in a quiet way, both father and daughter liked him cordially.

On this morning, as Mr. Gordon stood attentively regarding the action of a certain new-fangled cylinder, the master-machinist came out of his office and walked up to him.

“I am glad to see you, Mr. Gordon,” said he, after the first salutations were exchanged, “to congratulate you on young Bernard's good luck. What a fortunate thing it is for him!—and I suppose I may congratulate Miss Annie, too.”

Mr. Gordon looked up, and, with his head full of the cylinder, did not understand the drift of this remark.

“Bernard's good luck!” he repeated. “I have not heard of any special luck of his. What has he fallen upon? A good position?”

“Something much better than a good position,” answered Liddell, shrugging his shoul-

ders. “I wonder you have not heard—everybody is full of it—he has made a fortune by a patent.”

“A fortune!—by a patent!”

“A fortune, undoubtedly, and by a patent. Why, I am astonished you don't know any thing about it. I supposed, of course, Bernard had been consulting you all this time. And in fact I thought—I felt sure—that you had a hand in the matter. The idea looks like you—at least I fancied as much.”

“What is the idea?” asked Mr. Gordon, all in a fever, immediately. “The scamp has told me nothing whatever about it—very shabby of him, I think! I always knew he had sense, however—I always knew he would make his fortune sooner or later—only I did not look for it quite so soon! What is the idea, Mr. Liddell? Bless my soul!—to think of a patent!”

“The idea is something quite new, at least in machinery,” said Liddell. “I don't know that I can explain it—I'm not a good hand at description—but if you'll step into my office I can show you a design that Bernard made out to show me what it was, and how it worked. That fellow has a most capital head.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Gordon, assenting most sincerely about the head; but he hesitated, and evidently did not like to inspect the design. “If Bernard had wished me to see it—” he began, with some dignity, but Liddell interrupted him.

“My dear sir,” he exclaimed with a laugh, “don't you see why Bernard said nothing to you about it? He was afraid the thing might not succeed, and he wanted to spring a success and not a failure upon you. No doubt he is at your house now, telling the good news to Miss Annie, and, meanwhile, where is the harm of taking a look at the design? The patent being all safe, anybody and everybody may see it.”

“I suppose there is no harm,” said Mr. Gordon; and, the temptation being too strong for his dignity to resist, he forsook the cylinder, and followed the machinist to his office.

This office was a small box, with a table, two chairs, and a desk, in it. Placing one of the chairs beside the table, for his visitor, Liddell opened the desk and busied himself in extracting a particular paper from a crowded pigeon-hole. After some trouble, this was accomplished, and then he unfolded and spread it out—a large sheet covered with India-ink

designs—before the eyes of the eager inventor.

The latter rose and bent forward—trembling with excitement. Any thing that related to inventions or patents interested him deeply, but the present matter came home to him almost as if it had been one of his own. Bernard's invention! He was eager to see what the boy had managed to accomplish; so eager, indeed, that for a moment this very eagerness defeated its own object. The paper swam before his eyes, the diagrams danced to and fro, and he saw nothing. After a second, however, the mist cleared, and then, as his glance fell on the principal design, the idea showed itself clear and distinct. He saw it, caught it, suddenly gasped, and fell back into his chair almost fainting.

Liddell, who was looking at him, was seriously alarmed, for he thought he had at least a case of apoplexy on his hands. Seizing some water that chanced to be near by, he sprinkled it over the pallid face, and, snatching up a newspaper, fanned the swooning man vigorously, loosening his cravat at the same time. In a few minutes these remedies had their due effect. Mr. Gordon recovered himself, looked up, and finally spoke—with a strangely-pitiful quaver in his voice:

"Let me see it again. I—I must have been mistaken."

"My dear sir, what is the matter?" cried Liddell. "Is there any thing?"

"The design! the design!" interrupted the inventor, with feverish energy. "My God, man! don't talk to me when I am almost mad! Show it to me instantly!"

The tone was so peremptory that the other obeyed at once. He held it up, and Mr. Gordon leaned forward, examining it intently. He said nothing; but the naturally pale hue of his complexion grew almost ashy, and his hands clasped and unclasped themselves convulsively, while more than once his lips quivered as if with unspoken words. At last he motioned it away, and rising, without a syllable, tottered, rather than walked, to the door. By this time, however, Liddell had somewhat recovered from his first surprise, and thought it time to interfere; so he followed and caught his arm.

"Mr. Gordon, pray sit down," he said. "You are not fit to go out in this state. Take some water—try to compose yourself—Good Heavens, sir! what is the matter?"

"Nothing is the matter," said Mr. Gordon, faintly, but he sat down and took the water—indeed, it was a matter of necessity to do so. "Nothing is the matter," he repeated, wearily; adding in a lower tone—"nothing—nothing but the old story."

"I hope you are not vexed with Bernard for not letting you know. I assure you—"

Something in the face before him stopped the machinist at this point. Involuntarily he ceased speaking, and said nothing, even when, after several minutes had elapsed, Mr. Gordon rose and silently left the office.

He walked down the street toward his own house like one stunned. The people who met him looked in his face, shrugged their shoulders, and said to each other, "The man grows more crazy every day." But when he reached home, when he opened and closed the front-door, crossed the passage and stood in his own room, this unreal quietude gave way. He looked round on the darlings of his heart, the mute children of his brain; he gazed pitifully at that jealously-locked cabinet, where the toil of so many weary months, of anxious days, and sleepless nights, was drawing to a successful issue; he glanced at the table where long lines of abstruse calculation met his eye; then, with one deep groan, he sank into a seat, buried his face from the light, and sat a picture of stricken desolation.

In this state his daughter found him, when she entered, followed by her lover. Her eyes were so dazzled by the bright sunshine, from which she had come, that for a moment she did not see the relaxed figure bent forward over the useless papers; but the next instant she caught sight of it, and rushed forward, with her whole heart in her voice.

"Papa! what is the matter?"

Mr. Gordon raised his face, and the mere sight of it seemed to petrify her, for she stopped suddenly, and stood motionless. Never in all her life before had she seen a face so set and bloodless, and never had she met such a look as gleamed on her now from her father's eyes. "Papa!" she cried again, with a startled appeal in her voice—and as she paused Bernard spoke.

"Something has happened, Mr. Gordon! Something is the matter! What is it?" he said, hastily.

In a moment, as it were, the inventor was himself—indeed, more than himself. Few people who knew the abstracted devotee of

science, the pale scholar whose mind was habitually absent from the earth he trod, would have recognized him in the man who faced around upon the speaker, his face glowing with passionate energy, and his eyes flashing with indignant fire.

"You ask me that!" he said. "You dare to enter my room, side by side with my daughter, and speak to me—to me whom you have so shamelessly betrayed? Your audacity almost equals your villany, and I have but one answer for you—leave my house!"

There is no exaggeration in saying that if a thunder-bolt from heaven had rent the solid walls asunder, neither Bernard nor Annie could have been more confounded than by this unexpected and unprecedented outbreak. "Oh, my poor father!" cried the girl, under her breath, for she thought the veritable madness had come at last; but the young man, after one gasp of astonishment, saw that there was nothing of insanity in the steady face fronting him, and, as well as he could command himself, answered:

"I don't understand this. I am so little conscious of having offended you, that I must ask you to be more explicit. What have I done? What do you mean by accusing me of villany—by saying that I have betrayed you?"

"Answer me one question," said the elder man, sternly. "Have you not patented an invention?"

"An invention!" Bernard started; then added more quietly, "I came this morning to tell you that I had done so."

"To tell me!" It is impossible for words to express the indignant scorn that was in those three words—"To tell me! Well, in return, I will tell you that you are a thief!"

"Papa!"

It was Annie's voice that rang through the room with this cry of indignant reproach, but, for a full minute, Bernard made neither sound nor movement. When those bitter words fell on his ear, he took one quick, unconscious step forward; but the next he remembered himself, and fell back. In the minute that followed, he fought a fierce fight for self-control, and gained the victory. When at last he spoke, the veins were standing out on his forehead like knotted cords, but his voice was steady and firm.

"I have only one reply to make, sir—substantiate the charge."

"That is easy enough to do, if you will be kind enough to describe the nature of your invention."

Coldly and concisely the young man complied with the request. He described the nature of the conception which he had worked out to a successful result, and briefly added the explanation which he had already made to Annie, a statement that the original invention was not his own, and an account of the difficulty he had encountered in bringing it to practical operation. Mr. Gordon heard him out, without interruption of any kind, and was silent for a moment. Then he said frigidly:

"Do you decline to give the name of the original inventor?"

"I have no option but to decline, so long as he chooses to hold me bound to secrecy."

"Is he likely to hold you bound to secrecy if your good name is at stake in the matter?"

The young man threw his head back haughtily.

"My good name is not likely to be at stake, sir, with any one who knows me."

"Is it not?" said the other, with a short, hard laugh. "Then it is only because men will believe your word in preference to that of the mad old inventor. Perhaps you counted upon this, however. If so, the calculation did you credit."

"Papa!"—Annie broke in, with a wail, "why do you say such cruel things? Louis does not understand them, and neither do I. Speak plainly, for Heaven's sake! Tell him—tell me—of what you suspect him."

"I suspect him of nothing," said Mr. Gordon, sternly; "on his own evidence I convict him of basely stealing my invention, the invention at which I have labored so long—the invention which was dearer to me than you, my child of flesh and blood—and of patenting it for his own use, and in his own name."

"Papa!"

"Look at him," said the inventor, rising and pointing with an almost tragic gesture at the young man. "Look at him! Tell me if that is the face of an innocent man."

And in truth, at that moment, Bernard's face was scarcely that of an innocent man. The very nature of the accusation had stricken from him all means of defence, while its suddenness so completely overwhelmed him, that he stood in the centre of the floor, a pale,

silent picture of what seemed detected guilt. Not so thought Annie, however. She gave one glance at his face, and then sprang to his side.

"Louis, Louis, dear love, don't take it so!" she cried. "He does not mean it! he will be sorry for it yet.—Oh, it is cruel!" she exclaimed, turning round upon her father. "You outrage him; and you outrage me! Papa, papa, how can you—how could you?"

"Perhaps you have a share in it, too," said the inventor, bitterly, as her voice broke down in tears. "I was a fool to trust you—to trust anybody. I might have known that treachery and robbery would be the end. With or without your connivance, he must have obtained the design from you."

"From me!" cried the girl, with a startled gasp—for she had not expected this. Then she turned to Bernard and held out her hand. "O Louis, see how little he is himself! see how little he means it! see how little you can resent a charge in which I am included!"

"I resent it only thus far," said Bernard, looking at Mr. Gordon. "I ask now, as I asked before, to hear the evidence on which I am condemned."

"You shall see it," answered the other, briefly. He went to the cabinet, unlocked the door, and took out a large portfolio. Bringing this to the table, he opened it, and bade the young man come forward. When he came, several designs were spread before him. He took them up, one by one, and examined them closely. This occupied some time, and after putting down the last one he still remained silent—his face deadly pale, and his eyes bent downward in deep thought. It was only when Mr. Gordon asked what he had to say, that he looked up and spoke.

"I have only to say this—that Fate is against me," he answered. "I cannot refute the evidence of these papers. I am, indeed, astounded at it. I can only assert my own innocence—and of course that assertion counts for nothing with you. I do not believe that the man who applied to me stole the invention; for, in the first place, he is a man of honor; and, in the second place, he had no opportunity to do so. Therefore, I can only believe that it has been a strange coincidence of thought. God knows how much I regret having had any part in it; but of one thing you may be sure—until of your own accord you retract the accusation made this day, I

will never touch one cent of the profits. I have not much hope of such a thing—but the truth may come to light some day. Until then, sir, I return you many thanks for your past kindness, and bid you good-by. Of course, you know that I shall not enter your doors again. Annie—darling—"

His voice broke down here; but he held out his hands, and in a moment Annie came to him with a rush. She was weeping bitterly, and in the midst of their parting embrace only two or three words were exchanged. "Don't forget me!" sobbed the girl. "Trust me!" whispered the young man, and that was all. Then they tore themselves apart, and Bernard went hastily out. When the heavy front-door closed upon him, a bitter pang shot through his heart. He was dreadfully conscious that it was for the last time.

III.

It was near the close of a soft October day, when Annie Gordon sat in the garden quite alone. She was not drawing, or reading, or even sewing, though some of the latter work lay on the ground by her side; but she sat quite motionless on a low seat under a brilliant crape-myrtle, with the air of listless languor which is always so sad a sight—especially in a young person. Her hands were loosely clasped in her lap, and her eyes, all unheeding the gorgeous roses blooming near by, and scenting the air with their fragrance, were turned to the western sky, where, instead of the usual glories, a long, low bank of violet cloud had received the sun. She did not even turn when a step sounded on the path behind her, and when, with his head bent forward, and his hands crossed behind his back, her father slowly came into sight. He was absorbed in thought, evidently, and did not see her until he was close upon her. Then he started and spoke almost sharply.

"What are you doing here, Annie? I thought you said that you were going to see Mrs. Holt?"

"I did go," said Annie, in a tone as listless as her attitude, "but Mrs. Holt was not at home. When I came back you were engaged with Mr. Liddell, so I did not disturb you."

"You might have come in to see Mr. Liddell. His visits are meant for you as much as, or more than, they are for me."

"Are they?" said the girl, carelessly, and

then she added, "I should be sorry to think so."

Her father frowned a little. "Why?" he asked, shortly.

"Because—oh, papa, surely you know why. It may be foolish to talk of such a thing, but I have thought once or twice that Mr. Liddell admired me—and if so, I would rather that he never came."

"Do you mean to say that if he asked you to marry him, you would refuse him?"

"I hope he will never ask me; but, if he did, I should be obliged to refuse him."

"And why?"

"O papa, what a question!" cried the girl, with her languor giving way at once, and her bosom rent with sobs. "Because I don't love him! Because I shall never, never love any one but my poor, injured, outcast, ill-treated Louis. Don't—don't mention him to me again."

"I must mention him to you," said Mr. Gordon, and as he said it he sat down by her side. "You are not a child, Annie," he went on. "You are old enough to know that many things have to be done in this world which are not what we would desire for ourselves or others. I am old; I am broken in mind, in health, and in fortune. What will become of you when I die?"

"God will take care of me."

"God takes care of those who care for themselves. God will not work a miracle to put bread into your mouth or a roof over your head. Many, as young and helpless as you, He leaves every day to die of want and starvation. My child, you must do something for yourself—you must marry the man who has just been telling me how much he loves you."

"Papa!"—she gave a low cry—"papa, surely you will not ask me to do this!"

"You must do it!" said he, beginning to grow excited. "Child, child, do you not see that I cannot last much longer, and then—what will become of you?"

"I would sew for my daily bread, sooner than marry one man when I love another!"

"Perhaps you will wait and marry the thief who robbed me?"

"Papa, I don't deserve this!"

"Marry Liddell, then. He is a good fellow. Let me see you safely settled before I die—let me tell him when he comes again that he may take you."

"Oh, no, no!"

"This is nonsense," said Mr. Gordon. "What more do you expect than he offers? He may not be as fine a gentleman as a Gordon has a right to marry; but we are poor—so poor that our social equals do not recognize our existence; and he is comparatively wealthy. It is true that you would be the richest heiress in the country, if my inventions had not been stolen from me, but now—Annie, there is no help for it. You must marry him."

For at least an hour the discussion went on; but it came to no more definite point than this. At last both father and daughter returned to the house; and then, wearied and exhausted, Annie went up to her own room. She felt heartsick and hopeless at the prospect before her. Not that her resolution was at all shaken, or that she had any fear of being eventually forced to marry Liddell; but she knew that persistence was the most striking trait of her father's character, and she also knew that, for days and weeks and months to come, she might expect to hear and to combat just what she had heard and combated that evening. There can hardly be a prospect more dismaying than this, so it was no wonder that she sat down and covered her face with her hands. When Bernard went away, she had felt sure that he would soon clear himself, and return to claim her, but now six months had gone by, and the stain on his name was as dark as ever, her father was as obstinately persuaded of his guilt, and her own faith and hope began to waver. "He has forgotten me!" she thought. "Why should I not forget him, and try to marry some one else?" But she had hardly asked the question before she veered round as quickly as if some one else had proposed it. "Even if I never see him again, I will be true to him—and true to myself!" she cried; then burst into tears, and settled herself to sleep.

Her fears proved to be well founded. The next day, and for many days after, Mr. Gordon rang the changes on Liddell's suit with an obstinate persistence that would have shaken any resolution less thoroughly grounded than his daughter's. He did not storm, or threaten, or command—none of these things were according to his nature—but he went over the same position again and again, repeated the same statements, and made the same predictions, with a patience that was

both marvellous and exhausting. It told at last, even on Annie. She was driven from point to point, until, from sheer inability to continue the strife, she yielded thus far: she agreed that Liddell should be allowed to come to the house on trial, that there was to be nothing of an engagement, but that she was to see how she liked him, and, if she found it possible (but she did not fail to protest here that she was sure she never would find it possible), she might enter into an engagement at the end of six months. On this anomalous sort of footing, therefore, the master-machinist was received in the Gordon household; and, since he had sense enough to appreciate the point he had gained, and tact enough to use his advantage well, he soon became a daily visitor, nor was it long before he perceived that not only Mr. Gordon, but Annie herself, welcomed him with pleasure.

Matters went on in this way until Christmas came. The gayety of the season—and W—was very gay—sent not even an echo into the dark old house where the inventor and his daughter lived, and yet in all W—there was not a fairer face than Annie Gordon's, as she leaned against one of the high, narrow windows on Christmas evening, dressed in her best, with a spray of holly in her hair, watching listlessly the carriages that dashed by, and the pedestrians that filled the streets. Liddell had dined with them, and his present—one of the costly gift-books of the season—lay in her lap, but she hardly noticed it. Her languid eyes were on the street, when suddenly something occurred that took all the languor out of them. A figure came in sight, a face looked up at her, and she knew—she would have known in a thousand—Louis Bernard! There was no time for a word, or even a gesture, on either side. There was only time for a start, a gasp, a long, hungry look, and all was over. The young man passed on, and the girl, turning from the window, came and sat down by the fire. Liddell and her father were deep in plans of machinery—it was Mr. Gordon's only mode of recreation—and they paid little attention to her, so she leaned back in a corner quite silent, and the stream of mechanical talk flowed past her unheeded. She caught a fragment of it now and then, but it bore little significance to her ear. She only knew that there was some point at issue between her father and the machinist—some point there seemed no definite

mode of settling—and that Liddell proposed to refer to some book of designs he had.

"I will send it over to-morrow," he said. "You can examine it at your leisure, and perhaps Miss Annie will be good enough to take care of it for me. It is a very valuable book, and reliable, too. You will find this idea of the cylinder developed there in just the way I have described. It was patented by Verdot in '49."

"I don't care whom it was patented by, it might be improved," said Mr. Gordon; and so the discussion went on, until Liddell ended it by asking Annie to sing. She complied at once; and, after a reasonable number of songs, he rose to go. He had sufficient discretion not to obtrude the lover-like part of his rôle, and not to pay long visits; and his reward was Annie's constantly-increasing kindness. To-night she was so cold, absent, and almost unapproachable, that he thought he must have offended her, for, of course, he could not know that it was the mere sight of Bernard that had turned her heart against him.

"O my poor love!" she was saying to herself all the time, even when he came up to shake hands and bid her good-night.

"Will you take care of my book?" he said, again, with a sort of wistful look in her face. "I should be very glad if you would, and if—and if you would make one of your beautiful drawings for me of Plate XL? I want it for constant use, and I had rather have one of your drawings than the finest engraving in the world. Will you do it for me?"

"Your taste is very bad, to prefer my drawing to an engraving," said Annie, gravely. "But, of course, I will do it for you if you want it. I have nothing else to do."

"Thank you, and good-night."

She gave him her hand and said good-night; but it was very coldly, and he went away chilled, thinking almost that he would never succeed in winning her. As for Annie, she went up-stairs and cried for an hour or two before she sank to sleep. Weeping had latterly become quite a favorite amusement of hers, and the effect was any thing but beneficial to her personal appearance.

The next day the book came, and, after her father had finished examining it, he handed it over to her keeping. It was a volume of mechanical designs, not very interesting to her; but she took it to a window, and began making preparations for copying Plate XL.

She copied for some time, then grew tired, and, leaning her elbows on the table, carelessly turned over the leaves. As she did so, a piece of paper fluttered out from between two of the pages, and fell to the floor. She stooped, picked it up, and was returning it to the book, when something about it attracted her attention. It was merely an ordinary piece of drawing-paper, on which was traced the rough outline of a design. But the paper itself struck her as familiar. She had seen, she had handled it, she felt sure; and, on looking more closely, she found she was right, for in the corner her own private mark—a curiously-interlaced monogram of her name—was written with ink. It was a sheet of her own paper, and had been taken from her own portfolio. This, which seemed at first sight a slight-enough mystery, puzzled her exceedingly. In consequence of her father's suspicious fears, she always kept her portfolio carefully put away; and, as far as her own knowledge extended, no one, not even Bernard, had ever been permitted to examine it. How, then, had this paper, with her own mark upon it, been extracted therefrom? She looked at the design. That was certainly not of her drawing. She shook her head, and was about to put down the paper and dismiss the subject with a "Very curious!" when a few faint, half-effaced lines on the back attracted her eye. She looked at these for a moment with her brows bent, then suddenly rose, pushed back the table, and went nearer to the light. Even this, however, was not sufficient for what she wished to decipher, and she hastily took up a magnifying-glass. By the aid of this, she soon discerned that a design on the back of the paper had been carefully rubbed out, leaving only a few lines visible. These few lines, however, were to her of immense significance, for they showed her that the effaced drawing had been her own, and that it had been one of the designs of her father's invention.

At this point her breath came fast, her hands trembled, her color varied every instant, and, if any one had been looking on, he would certainly have thought her beside herself with excitement. Still, she controlled this excitement, and, though she was tingling in every nerve with the importance of the discovery just made, went steadily on to follow it up as well as she could. Thanks to the magnifying-glass, she soon found what she was now espe-

cially in search of—a number in the corner of the sheet. When this was deciphered, she laid the paper down and left the room, returning in an instant with her portfolio. Now it chanced that, having been trained by a man, she had much of masculine precision about her, and in the different pockets of this receptacle were carefully numbered and filed away, in their proper order of date, the designs she had made for the now useless invention. Owing to the number she had just deciphered on the effaced drawing, she knew exactly where to look for the information needed to verify her suspicions. Opening the portfolio with quivering fingers, she drew forth the contents of a certain pocket, and ran over the numbers. For three or four sheets, all was regular and in order; then, suddenly, she stopped, and again caught her breath. There was a break. Hastily she went on to the end and then came back, looked again, examined again, and finally raised her face with a half-frightened assurance on it—*three sheets were missing! and one of those sheets she held in her hand.*

For a moment the conviction almost stunned her. Mr. Gordon was right, then! The idea had been stolen. Up to this time she had believed with Bernard that it was a singular but entirely accidental coincidence of thought. Now she knew it had been a robbery. But a robbery made by whom? She was too young and inexperienced to be able to answer this question. Those who have never known treachery are slow to suspect, and slower yet to believe it. The stars might have fallen before she would have credited Bernard's guilt, and she was almost as unwilling to attach even a moment's suspicion to Liddell. Yet, plainly, the matter lay between those two. No one else had even possible access to her portfolio, and the possession of that sheet, the effaced design, the whole array of circumstances, all seemed to point—

She paused and sat down, faint and shuddering. Treachery seemed to come so near, to touch her so closely, when it was brought home in this way to a man whom she had liked, respected, trusted, almost promised to marry! It was all a hideous seeming; it could not be, she cried out—yet, even as she exclaimed thus, there came to her a memory which would not be put aside. She remembered a certain evening in the early spring, when she had been drawing in the arbor, how Bernard had come in upon her, and she carelessly left her port-

folio on the table and strolled with him to the other end of the garden. She remembered that, when she came into the house, her father told her that Liddell had been sent to the arbor by him, but failed to find her, and she also remembered—good Heavens, how clearly!—that, on opening her portfolio, she had found several things strangely out of place, though she never once thought of looking at the designs. What if this meant—what if it proved— But here the full nature of the discovery came over her so strongly that, but for the recollection of Bernard, she would have thrust away the tell-tale paper, and never thought again of the dark suspicion it had brought forth. As it was, however, she could not do this. His face, as she had seen it only the evening before, rose up before her, and seemed bidding her clear his name. He could do nothing for himself; but, if indeed she held the means to prove his innocence, should she fail to use it? If Liddell was guilty, surely his double treachery—treachery to Bernard, as well as to her father—deserved to suffer the penalty of detection; and, if he was innocent, an explanation could not harm him. At all risks, she was determined to go on—to follow the path thus unexpectedly opened for her. Without giving herself time to think, she seized a pen and wrote a short note—the first in eight long months—to Bernard:

"DEAR LOUIS: Forgive me that I write to you. I only do so, because I have made a discovery which, it seems to me, you ought to know, and which may be of importance to you. What it is, you shall hear when we meet. I must, however, ask one question. Am I right in supposing that Mr. Liddell was the original possessor of the invention which you patented, and that it was he who brought the design to you? If so, do not hesitate to come here this afternoon, and bring all his original draughts with you. Yours ever,

"ANNIE GORDON."

About four o'clock, that afternoon, there was a knock at Mr. Gordon's door, and, when Annie flew down from an ambuscade on the staircase and opened it, she stood face to face with Bernard. The young man stepped within the passage without a word, and the next moment would have taken the pretty portress into his arms, if she had not drawn away, put her finger to her lips, and beckoned him in

the direction of a certain odd little room which no one but herself ever invaded. Once safely inside this sanctuary, she turned and held out her hands, saying:

"O Louis, you cannot tell how glad I am to see you again!"

"And I you, my darling!" said Louis, warmly. But, after a minute, he went on more gravely: "I don't like this, Annie. I did not know that I was to come here clandestinely. I thought I was summoned openly."

"And so you are, dear love," said Annie, eagerly; "only have a minute's patience. I want you to myself for a little while—I want to tell you every thing, and then, if you say so, I will take you to papa. Louis—answer me the question I asked in my note. Was it Mr. Liddell who brought you that invention?"

She came close to him, and asked the question breathlessly, her eyes full of excitement, and her voice fairly quivering. She felt how much depended on his answer, how one word might overthrow all her tower of fancied proof, and she trembled even while she waited eagerly to hear that answer. After a moment it came—very slowly:

"I cannot answer that question, Annie, until I know why you ask it."

"Tell me, then, if you have ever suspected that this man—whoever he was—might really have stolen the invention, and been playing you false?"

Bernard looked disturbed, and tumbled his hair about in a way she well remembered before he answered.

"It is hard to suspect a man," he said, at last; "and I have been the more loath to do it, since I myself have tasted the bitterness of undeserved suspicion. But, since you ask the question, I must confess that doubts have come to me, doubts that, despite myself, have grown stronger since—"

He stopped abruptly, and Annie finished the sentence for him.

"Since you heard that I was to marry Mr. Liddell. Oh, don't start! It was not so—I am sure that I never would have done it—but that is what you meant, and now I know that he was the man. Stop, don't say any thing, Louis.—Look at this."

She put the drawing and the magnifying-glass into his hand, telling him, at the same time, how she had obtained the former. His eager astonishment was even greater than she had expected. It fairly startled her, as he



Bernard's Invention, p. 153.

"I dare him to deny that he took three designs."

Shepherd

turned, full of breathless impatience, and bade her tell him all—every thing. Necessarily, it did not take her long to do this, since the "every thing" was in itself very little. Then he caught her in his arms and kissed her as he kissed her on that April day when he came upon her with the news of his good fortune.

"You have saved me!" he cried. "You have given me the evidence I could never have gained for myself; you have cleared my name, and made me a free man once more. O Annie, Annie, how can I ever love you enough?"

"It is true, then?" she cried. "Was it indeed he? O Louis, I can hardly believe it! Oh, dear love, how could he be so wicked?"

"I have no doubt it was principally because he wanted to take you from me," said the young man, all in a glow. "But, however that may be, it was Liddell himself and no other, who brought me this invention as his own. See, Annie, I have done as you bade me—I have brought his original draughts, and we will show them, and this effaced drawing, to your father. Do you think he will believe me then?"

"Heaven only knows—but we will go and see."

Without giving their courage time to ebb, they gathered together the papers and crossed the passage to Mr. Gordon's room. When Annie knocked, her father's voice bade her "Come in," and, when she opened the door, she found, to her consternation—for she had neither planned nor wished any thing half so dramatic—that Liddell was with him.

There was a moment's pause on both sides—a pause of surprised and awkward uncertainty—before Mr. Gordon rose and addressed his daughter, his face flushing with anger, and his voice trembling with indignation.

"What is the meaning of this, Annie? How dare you insult me by bringing that—that thief into my presence?"

Now Annie had not meant to speak—that was to have been Bernard's part—but this address naturally roused her, and, before the former could interfere, she had answered:

"Mr. Bernard is here at my request, papa. He wished to answer the charge which you made against him eight months ago. It is now in his power to prove his innocence."

"Let him take the proofs of it elsewhere, then," said her father, coldly. "I have no interest in him or in them."

"What! you refuse to hear him?"

"Yes, I refuse to hear him. I have no desire to be duped by him again. I tell you what I told you eight months ago—choose between him and me. If you take him you lose me—that is all.—Mr. Liddell, shall we go on now with our business?"

Annie looked hopelessly at Bernard, but Bernard did not return the glance. On the contrary, he stepped quietly forward, and laid his papers on the table.

"Since you refuse to receive any proofs of my innocence," he said, addressing Mr. Gordon, with calm dignity, "I must ask you to examine these evidences of another man's guilt. You may remember that I spoke of a person from whom I received the original invention. In these papers you will find sufficient proof where he obtained it."

Mr. Gordon looked up. Apparently he was about to answer as he had done before, but something in the steady eyes of Bernard changed his purpose. He extended his hand and took the papers—hesitated a moment, and laid them down.

"It is quite useless to bring me proofs against a man whose name I am not to know," he said, frigidly. "He may be merely an abstraction, invented to shield yourself."

"You are mistaken," said Bernard, quietly. "This man is no abstraction. He not only lives, but you know him intimately. In robbing you, he betrayed not only his own honor, but your friendship. Sir, examine these papers, and, when you have examined them, I will refer you to Mr. Liddell for the name of their author."

Again there was a pause—a pause in which all of the four might have heard the beating of their own hearts; then, not quite unexpectedly, Mr. Gordon broke forth, violently:

"So, you come here to clear yourself by insulting my friend under my own roof? There is the door, sir! Never let me see your face in this house again! If I had ever doubted your guilt, I should be sure of it now."

"Papa," cried Annie, suddenly springing forward, "you must—you shall hear him! This is more than unjust—it is outrageous!—it is what you have no right to do! As for Mr. Liddell, I dare him to look me in the face, and say that he is innocent! I dare him to deny that he took three designs of the invention from my portfolio, and that this is one of them!"

She laid her hand, as she spoke, on the erased drawing, and turned like a tragedy-queen upon the trembling man, who was forced to clutch a corner of the table, to save himself from falling. In exactly the same spot where Bernard had stood eight months before, when Mr. Gordon accused and condemned him, the really guilty man stood now, and strove in vain to steady himself—strove in vain to speak. Mr. Gordon was about to answer his daughter as he had already answered Bernard, when his eye followed hers, and, falling on Liddell, he stood confounded, and could not utter a word. Indeed, he gasped for breath, and felt for a moment as if the solid earth was sliding from beneath his feet. He was glad, just then, that Bernard placed a chair, and said, in something of his old voice, "Sit down, sir." Unconsciously he sat down, and, as he did so, Liddell looked up and spoke—hoarsely and with effort:

"You need not carry the thing any further, Bernard; I admit your proofs, and that is an end of the matter. I have no motive for concealment now. Mr. Gordon might believe me, but she"—he nodded toward Annie, but did not look at her—"is all on your side. I don't mind saying that I did it to win her

from you, and, of course, I don't care about putting a bold face on it after—after what she has said. It was a dishonorable thing, I suppose; but it may be some excuse to say that I cared nothing about the money. I did it simply to get rid of you, and I think I would do it over again, with any hope of success. You may as well throw those papers into the fire, and you need not trouble yourself to pay any more of the profits to my account. I have touched my last dollar of the money; and the only regret I have in the affair, is—that this is all my fault."

With that, he turned and left the room—not one of the three uttering a word. Mr. Gordon was too much aghast; Annie was too full of indignation; and Bernard, who was now master of the situation, felt too much contempt. So he went out in silence—an object more fit for pity than scorn; and, when the trio left behind looked at each other, they forgot him and all that he had caused them to suffer, in their sudden realization of happiness—happiness that had come as a free, bounteous gift from the same gracious Hand that can scatter the darkest clouds in a moment, and bring forth the golden sunlight undimmed.

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