



THE  
FIGURE EIGHT;

OR,

THE MYSTERY OF MEREDITH PLACE.

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# THE FIGURE EIGHT.

## CHAPTER I. SHADOW LIFE.

I had figure eight on the brain. I dreamed it, whispered it, saw it on the wall, on people's foreheads, counted it with the plates at table, with the stones of the pavement, the clouds in the air!

Three weeks before, my uncle had been found dead in his library, fallen on the floor beside his table, a pen grasped in his stiffened fingers. It was apparent that he had died very suddenly, it was supposed, at first, from apoplexy, but, as it was soon ascertained, poisoned with prussic acid, whether purposely or accidentally, by himself, or whether by the murderous will of another, still was an open question.

He had complained, in the morning, at table, of a slight headache, nothing serious,—or at least we had supposed not,—and later, after walking about in the garden in hopes the fresh air would dispel his slight ailment, he had gone to his library, as was his practice, for a couple of hours in the forenoon. No member of the household knew of any one's having entered the room save himself, as it was the custom not to intrude upon him while in his library. Beside him, on the table, was a small salver, holding a wine-glass which had been nearly emptied of its contents,—port, and in the port, that deadly potion which had done its work with such fearful swiftness. It *might* have been that he, being his own physician, had prescribed for himself, and, through inadvertence—for his was always a dreamy temperament, and his absence of mind a standing jest with his friends,—had dropped this horrible poison in place of the sulphuric-acid which stood not far from it upon the medicine-shelf in his laboratory. However, this, and all other versions of the affair, at present, were but conjecture.

As soon as the first great shock of surprise and consternation was over, and his dead body had been borne to an adjacent room, much attention was given to a sheet of paper discovered lying upon the table. A scrawled, illegible

line of writing, followed by a tremulous, irregular figure eight, was upon its face, as if in a hurried moment it had been seized to communicate to the living some piece of intelligence which the dying man deemed of interest or importance. This scrawl was as follows:



evidently traced by a spasmodic effort of the perishing will, even while the man was fighting for a moment of life. He had sunk and died with the pen in his hand, and this was all the record he had made. My uncle had just returned from California with sixty thousand dollars in gold—gold which had not, as yet, even passed through the mint, but which lay in dull bars of yellow richness, just as it had been melted by himself in a rude crucible, week by week and month by month of his two years' sojourn in the newly discovered El Dorado. He had, in the very pride of his conquest over the ill fortune which had banished him from home, friends, and his dear studies, opened the

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in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States, for the Southern District of New York.

iron-bound box and showed it to Lillian and myself the day after his welcome home. How Lillian had clasped her hands for joy! I, who read her sweet nature so truly, knew well enough that joy arose from no rapacious love of money, for its own sake, but from the consciousness that there lay the hardly-won treasure which was to free her dear father from the wretched embarrassments and anxieties which, for years, had rendered him miserable.

Sixty thousand dollars then was a goodly fortune, and Lillian felt that her father was restored to her, in his old self, as she flung her arms about his neck, mutely congratulating him with a kiss. Yes, when the ten thousand dollar mortgage against the old homestead was paid off, and sundry other obligations discharged, there still would be a handsome sum remaining for the use of parent and child. And, dearest thought of all, her father now could resign the distasteful hardships of a country medical practice, and devote himself to the more congenial pursuits of finishing a partially-written treatise on the Nerves, and continue his experiments in chemistry, which had promised so fruitful of interesting results, but from which he had been driven by his necessities.

But Dr. Meredith was dead—dead and buried! The whole country-side had attended his funeral, moved by curiosity and that love of excitement which all the circumstances of this singular case were so well calculated to arouse.

Why had he died? and why, in dying, had he inscribed that single character to mystify, perplex and haunt? Hundreds had asked themselves and others the question,—but no one with such terrible earnestness as I had asked it of myself, every day more searchingly. Hour by hour, minute by minute, through the solemn days, and through much of the night time when sleep refused to visit my heavy eyes, I pondered over the mystery. That there was a deep and most vital significance in the characters traced I only too well knew. Not a pen-scratch of will or devise was found among his papers—not a line to indicate his wishes and purposes—not a shadow of information to tell us where was deposited the precious treasure which was to free the dear old home from the Sheriff's order of sale. Every drawer had been ransacked, every secret place of deposit searched, but not a trace of the hardly won gold—not a hint of its existence.

Had he hidden it away, distrusting all men, in some unsuspected burial-place? or—the very thought maddened me—had some one wrested the money from him, and he, in his despair—taken poison to end his misery over the ruin which must follow?

Eight—eight—EIGHT! That was his last precious communication, written with death tugging at his heart-strings: what did it mean?

Three weeks flew by—weeks of unanswered inquiry—of the deepest sorrow to the household—of distress over the evil to come. So abstracted in my thoughts and oppressed with them had I been that I had failed to discover the danger in which I was placed. These three weeks had brought a great change in the demeanor of the community toward me. I awakened from my abstraction to read suspicion in eyes which were once kind—to feel that, in all Hampton, there were not a dozen persons who did not regard me as my uncle's murderer!

To-night I was sitting in my room, as I believed, for the last time. That day I was informed by an anonymous note—whether from friend or enemy I could not tell—that the popular feeling against me would culminate, on the morrow, in my arrest, and I was advised to fly. It must have been the advice of an enemy, yet I was about to take it. I knew such a step would be ruinous to myself; that it would be like announcing myself to be the guilty man; and, in case of my being followed and discovered, that it would hasten my condemnation. Yet I had reason for this course so powerful as to decide me in its favor.

It was midnight. At two o'clock the night express would pause a moment at Hampton on its flying journey to New York; I proposed to take it, in such disguise that the sleepy station-master should not recognize me, and before this country neighborhood began to buzz and stir in anticipation of the event of the day, I should be lost in a city wilderness, hiding myself in a crowd, safe for an hour or a day—after that all was vague.

On my table lay a letter which I had written to Lillian: "Think of me as you will, cousin Lillian. I swear to you, by the memory of your dead mother, that I am innocent. It is solely in your interest that I take the step I do. I leave you what little money I have—three hundred dollars. Your father gave it to me, as you know, to enable me to attend a course of lectures. It is yours by right. Be very saving of it, for you do not yet realize what it is to be both penniless and friendless. The knowledge, I fear, will come to you too soon, in spite of my efforts to save you from it. God give you strength to face the future and me strength to work out the dread secret of my uncle's death." The clock in the lower hall struck twelve:—no, it did not, but should have struck twelve. Its silver peal rang like an alarm through the intense stillness, and seemed such to my strained, excited ear. I

was not aware that I was counting the chimes, but when a dull silence ensued after the hammer had tolled eight strokes, my pulse stopped as suddenly as the clock.

Eight? yes, as the silence closed I was conscious that I had been counting. It struck eight and no more!

Mind and nerves being already overstrained, this coincidence gave a new impetus to my fears, or terror, or dread—whatever may have been the feeling. Only eight! I thought I should suffocate, my heart stood still for such a time. I rushed to the window for air. It was now the first of July,—a hot, breathless night, although the moon rode high in the heavens, shedding a glory only less than that of day.

The absolute serenity of the moon-flooded heaven calmed me. I began to say to myself—"The clock has run down. In the excitement of this dreadful time it has been neglected. There is nothing about that which can not be easily accounted for. I will go down and wind it up."

It was an eight-day clock. My uncle always had attended to it himself. Since his death it had been wound but once; a servant, observing that it had run down, had attended to it. Of course it was only by the merest chance that, again neglected, it had lost the power to conclude its chime, and had ceased after eight slow strokes.

When one's mind is in a state of preternatural or diseased activity, it will seize upon the slightest thread to weave into the web with which it busies itself. I was obliged to repeat several times—"It is only because the clock has run down—I will go and wind it up," before I could summon courage to cross my room, open my door, and step into the dimly-lighted upper hall.

I am sure that I expected to confront my uncle as I opened the door. I can hardly say whether I most hoped or feared to do so. Certain it is that, had he been standing there, in whatever supernatural guise, I should have saluted him with the one eager question which was burning in my brain—*should have asked him for the key to the cipher he had left.*

No spirit met me, nor mortal, as I trod the glimmering length of the shadow-haunted passage, and descended the broad stairs with a step as silent as if I had been one of the ghosts which I half-expected would rise to confront me. The lower hall was much better lighted than the upper. The wide doors at either end were half of glass, and the tall form of the old-fashioned time-piece stood fully revealed in the illumination from without. A bright rift of moonlight lay across the foot of the stairs,

as it struck through the parlor door, across the well-worn carpet. I had missed the ticking of the pendulum as soon as I opened my door, and was thus assured that my conjecture was correct—the clock had run down.

I could not reach to wind the piece without standing upon a chair, but as none was at hand I stepped into the parlor for one, with which I was returning, when a slight clicking sound arrested me and I drew back into the shadow of the door.

From where I stood I could see, without being seen. A woman came out of the library—that apartment so gloomily invested with the late tragedy—a woman whose tall figure I recognized even before the rift of moonlight fell across the pale, powerful face, with its flashing eyes and heavy brow. It was Miss Miller, Lillian's governess. She was dressed in a long white night-robe; and her black hair hung over her shoulders, as if she had been in bed and had risen therefrom. As she paused to cautiously re-close the door, her face lit up with a smile, and she muttered, half-whispering, half-aloud—"I have the key for which they would give so much."

Then she seemed to float up the long stairway, she went so noiselessly and softly, disappearing in the upper shadows. To me she had the appearance of a sleep-walker, yet I believed her to be awake and in her right mind.

Remembering many things which I knew too well, I can not say that I was so much astonished as startled at seeing her steal out of that room in the dead hour of the night. A thousand surmises stung me as with so many needles; but most I longed to know the secret of that softly breathed assertion. Did she speak of the figure eight and its unread riddle? or did she refer to some material key, necessary to unlock some drawer or case in my uncle's library, of some importance, perhaps, but insignificant, after all, as compared with the inference?

I was tempted to rush after her and seize her by the hair or the throat and demand an explanation of her self-revealed words. She and I were not good friends. It doubtless was she who first breathed the suspicion which had gathered strength as it spread, until now it was driving me from home and Lillian. At least, I gave Miss Miller credit for having done me this evil service.

I was tempted, I say, to rush after her and wring the truth from her by violence; but a moment's reflection showed me, the hour had not yet come for me to strike—would never come, except by great patience and cunning—perhaps great suffering—on my part. I must

carry out my plan of flight in order to gain liberty wherein to work. In a prison I could do nothing. It was not so much dread of confinement or ignominious death as it was the desire to keep myself free to work, which impelled me to flight. I already had tasted the bitterness of a scorned life in seeing my friends turn from me; but I had still everything to live for as long as that communication of my dying benefactor remained an enigma, and so long as my dear cousin—but of that no more here.

In a few moments I retraced my steps. I did not wind the clock, for fear that another might surprise me, as I had her; but, after waiting until she had time to regain her apartment, I went to mine and hastily finished my few preparations for departure. With a workman's blouse over my coat, and a broad-brimmed straw hat, I considered myself sufficiently disguised for the journey. If the station-master should recognize me, he had no power to detain me, and he probably would give no alarm before morning. The ride to the city would be only of about three hours duration; and, once merged in that vast sea of human beings, I hoped to avoid recognition.

In those days, photography slept undeveloped, and the one daguerreotype of my features which hitherto had graced the parlor *etigere* I had that day confiscated and destroyed, so that the police—who doubtless would be placed on my track—would have no better knowledge of my personal appearance than could be gathered from verbal description.

Long before one o'clock I was entirely ready. It would take me but fifteen minutes to walk to the station; yet I was so oppressed by the conflicting emotions which crowded upon me, as well as by the heat of that sultry but brilliant midnight, that I could no longer remain in my room. With the traveling bag which held all I cared to take with me from Meredith Place, I again descended the glimmering staircase, and, staring up at the silent clock, which seemed to have paused in its ceaseless duty to mark the hour of my flight, passing the closed library-door with a shudder, I softly unfastened the rear door of the hall and stepped out into the garden. Tiger lay on the steps, but allowed me to pass, wagging his tail just enough to betray his friendliness and his sleepiness. Brave old fellow; he was not wise enough to understand what the world was saying of me, and he loved me still.

I did not at once go out upon the road. I had an hour to spare, and "something in my feet" drew me on to the arbor at the end of the large old-fashioned garden. It was my cousin's

favorite resort in the long summer afternoons; and, too, as I sat there, I could see the muslin curtain faintly fluttering over her chamber-window. The arbor was draped with roses now in their fullest bloom; the warmth of the night called out their richest perfume, and they appeared to throb in the lustrous radiance which surrounded them as my heart throbbed in thinking of Lillian.

But this was no moment for a young man's fancies to bloom. I had nothing to do with the flush and sweetness of life—alas, nothing! All was stern and hard—an awful reality of sorrow and danger. My reputation gone, my life in peril—it was not of this I so bitterly pondered; I resolved to work, to wait, to scheme, to watch, never to let go my hold on the slender thread of one small fact until I had worried and shaken the truth from it. I had a clue—a spider's thread, indeed, but still a clue, to the mystery of my uncle's sudden death; though none whatever to the meaning of the figure eight. If I lived, both of these should be made plain as day; my cousin's fortune should be restored to her, and I exonerated in the minds of our acquaintances.

I had sat in the shadowed arbor about ten minutes when I heard Tiger give a low growl; but he did not repeat it, and I had almost forgotten it, when I saw descending the broad garden path, now in light, now in shade, as she moved beneath the mountain-ashes which lined the way, the same woman who had appeared in the hall, her tall form towering to a supernatural height as she came down the vista with her white night-dress trailing behind her and her hair sweeping beneath her waist in dark masses. Not that she was really much above the average height, but her dress, her gliding step, and the flickering light, made her appear so. My first impulse was to rise as I saw that she approached my retreat; but I could not escape her observation should I now attempt to leave it, and with a muttered word of wrath at this (to me) dangerous and unpleasant rencontre I awaited her.

Presently she stood in the open arch which admitted to the arbor. I shrank back in the shadow of the vines as much as possible, but the full splendor of the moon streamed down upon her, so that I saw her with every fold of her garments and line of her features vividly marked in the pale light. She seemed to be looking directly at me with wide-open glittering eyes, but I was soon convinced that she did not see me. Her gaze was more as if she looked through and beyond me. I saw that she was walking in her sleep. Was it her conscience, like that of Lady Macbeth, which

brought her out of what should be repose, to walk abroad with those staring eyes and features set in a strange mould of blank gloom and horror? I judged her harshly as she had already judged me.

Now, indeed, I held my breath with an intensity of interest, for it was not impossible that this somnambulistic person was about unconsciously to place in my very hand the wished-for thread.

For a time which seemed to me long, but which could not have been more than one or two minutes, she stood at the entrance, her eyes looking straight before her, seemingly at me. Her face was colorless, her brows contracted, her whole look almost fearful. Then her eyes began to wander about the place, uneasily, but still as if she saw things which were not there, instead of the objects before her. She slowly raised her hand, and with extended fore-finger made several movements, as if counting. Then she searched the floor of the arbor with her eyes, and again moved lips and fingers as if counting the stones with which it was paved.

My blood tingled in my veins as I saw a change come over her countenance—a gleam broke through its stony gloom. There grew a change in what at first seemed the meaningless movements of one who slept; I watched, with bated breath, as she advanced within, again seemed to count with fingers and lips, and suddenly dropping to her knees, began to tug at one of the flat, square stones, which, as I have said, paved the arbor. Of course, with her unaided woman's strength she could not remove it. I longed to go down beside her and assist her. I recognized an object in her efforts. I could hardly refrain from thrusting her aside and tearing up the stone in the fierceness of my own curiosity. The thought that if I were mistaken in my conjecture, all would be lost, should I awaken the governess at this crisis, restrained me. Finding she could not lift the stone she took a pair of scissors from a ribbon about her neck and slowly pried out the earth and mortar about it. The work seemed to me endless. Persistently, but with annoying deliberation, she worked away; I almost touched her where she knelt before me; I did not believe that she would succeed in loosening the block with the little instrument so ridiculously inadequate to the task she had attempted.

Cautiously I drew forth my watch—but I need not have feared disturbing her; she remained unconscious of my proximity; it was a quarter past one. She worked on; it was half past one. At two I must be at the station. When my impatience had reached a feverish height, she ran the tiny lever deep down be-

side the stone; the steel snapped as she pried up the mass; but the stone moved, and gaining a firmer hold with her fingers she pulled it slowly from its place and peered into the cavity thus made. I also stooped and peered. If ever in my life I expected anything it was to see the missing box—the box containing my uncle's gold—which had disappeared before or at the time of his death. My head almost touched hers, our breaths mingled, I gave a low cry when I beheld only the hardened, undisturbed earth,—no box, nor marks of recent disturbance. The governess did not hear my cry; she plied the broken scissors into the ground with fierce impatience, but there was nothing there save the soil which yielded to her strokes.

"That boy is cunning," she whispered, "too cunning! too cunning!" she pulled the stone back, fitted it to its place, with her handkerchief brushed away the loose gravel and dirt, arose to her feet, and looking wistfully and doubtfully around the pavement, muttered—"I must count again. I did not begin right."

That instant I heard the whistle of the approaching train, through the still night air, at the village next to Hampton, where it did not stop, and I knew that I had but six minutes to use in gaining the station. Was she going now, or would she carry her experiments farther? Yes, she turned to leave, and as she glided out into the moonlight, I darted past her, down to the gate at the bottom of the garden, out upon the road, where, running as fast as my traveling-bag would allow me, I was just in time to gain a foothold on the platform of the last car, probably unnoticed by the station-master.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE HAUNTED ARBOR.

I was no sooner seated in the flying train than all my plans were changed. Before the conductor reached me I had foregone my resolution to seek a hiding-place in the city, and contented myself with purchasing a ticket to the first stopping-place. Regarding me as some country youth, seeking employment from village to village—if he thought of me at all—the conductor gave me my ticket and change, and I had half an hour to reflect upon what was before me ere the train again paused. When it did, I descended, it whirled on, and I was left, to success or failure, as the case might be. I found myself on the edge of a large town with which I was somewhat familiar; but I had no intention of going to a hotel, or otherwise exposing myself to those who might recognize and report me. I walked up on to the main street, only to strike off again,



leave the town, cross fields and woods, to come upon a back-country road or lane where I knew I might walk all day without danger. Feeling myself comparatively safe here, as the sun came up, I chose a snug fence-corner, where, with my head on my bag, I slept away much of the fatigue of the night. I was awakened by the clear sharp whistle of a farmer, who eyed me closely as he passed by to his morning's work. It was novel to me, and not pleasant, to shrink from any one's observation; but I felt that it was something I should become accustomed to. "Mornin'," said he cheerily, as if he saw nothing very desperate in my face.

"Good morning, sir. Could you tell me where I could find and pay for some breakfast? I'm traveling cheaply, you see—by my own conveyance,—as poor men have to."

I smiled as I said it, and he, waking to sympathy with a brother workman, jerked his thumb over his shoulder, saying—

"Over yon is my house. I guess wife'll give ya somethin' to eat"—and she did.

When I was again on the road I had gone but a little way, when another farmer came along with a hay-wagon and offered to take me up, as far as he was going. I climbed to a seat beside him.

"How far is it to Hampton?" I asked.

"'Leven mile. Going there?"

"Going through there, I suppose."

"Great times there just now. I was over to Hampton yisterday with some butter'n eggs, and I heard talk of the murder of the big doctor there. 'Spose you hain't heard on't, if you don't belong in these parts. They say his own nephew pisened him to git his money."

"He must be a hard case!"

"O, awful! allays was, they say. The people talk of lynching him. You see, his uncle did everything for him, and he jist turned 'round an' murdered him, and stole the gold which ought to belong to his uncle's wife an' daughter.

"What did they do with him? and what did he do with the gold?"

"They hain't done anything with him yit,—but they will. What he's done with the gold is a myst'ry. 'Twas all in a box. He must a buried it, not thinkin' he'd be suspected, and calculating to wait until he'd a chance to make off with it. They say the Doctor died so sudden he hadn't no time to tell anything, but he tried to write somethin', they can't make out what, only there's a figger, and nobody knows what it means."

"Curious," I remarked, mechanically.

My companion continued to discuss the engrossing subject while I sank into silence, scarcely hearing what he said. My mind reverted to the calamity which had overtaken Meredith Place; to its effect upon myself and others. The rough words of the farmer brought all more vividly before me. The terrible day rolled back upon me with a crushing weight—the day of the murder. As I have said, Doctor Meredith had been home but three weeks,—busy weeks to him, as he was looking over his papers, getting ready to settle his accounts, pay off the mortgages due in July, and renovate the old place.

It was a beautiful, sunny day, the 16th of June. Miss Miller's trunks stood, strapped, in the hall, waiting the morrow's stage. I was to leave the following Monday. Lillian and I were walking back and forth on the porch, she in one of her most brilliant moods, I in one of my most stupid.

Suddenly, as she teased and jested with me on my stubbornness and silence, scream after scream rang through the house, so sharp, so wild, they filled the air with a nameless terror. Lillian caught my arm. Together we rushed into the hall. Those piercing shrieks came from the library, where, pressing in at once, we saw my uncle dead upon the floor, his young wife standing over him, unconscious of everything in the first shock, crying out in that dreadful manner.

Immediately Miss Miller, drawn by her screams, joined us, the servants came pouring in, a confused, helpless group.

"It must be apoplexy—and heart-disease," spoke Miss Miller, "bring water,—open his vest!"

"It is vain," I said, as I obeyed her, "my uncle is dead."

Let me pass over the succeeding hour. Physicians came, but they had nothing to do just then but to administer to the wildly-distressed wife and daughter. Miss Miller proved the strength of her nerves and resolution. She did all that could be done to calm the household and keep it in order. Neighbors came in; the doctors, with others, examined the body and took note of the room—soon with a minute, terrible and searching interest—for almost the first thing they found was a wine-glass, partially emptied of its contents, in the bottom of which was perhaps a spoonful of port wine, emitting an odor speaking at once to the experienced physicians of prussic acid. This discovery was carefully withheld from Lillian and Ines. The room was thoroughly investigated and placed under lock-and-key.

For the first few hours it was universally thought that Dr. Meredith had committed suicide. Those engaged in the matter looked for some written confession or explanation. As I have said, nothing was found but that tremulous figure eight scrawled upon the sheet, as if the Doctor, in the very act of swallowing the deadly draught, had felt it do its work too swiftly to allow him to finish it, and he had dropped the glass and grasped the pen, urged by an all-powerful desire to leave some message to his friends.

When they had a little more leisure to reflect upon it, the men engaged in the investigation began to ask themselves what possible motive Doctor Meredith could have for committing suicide. His affairs were in a most prosperous condition, his health was good, he was happy in the society of a young wife—how improbable that he should have flung life away at its most golden moment! They whispered together, rolled their eyes about, scrutinized every member of the household, lingering with most suspicious looks upon myself, the poor relative, and upon the little foreign lady, the bride of a few weeks, the black-eyed Cuban girl with her southern temperament of fire and honey. Probably they saw little in either of us to confirm their vague surmises, and they gradually settled down to the conviction that the doctor had poisoned himself through carelessness. His laboratory had a good store of poisons—he was always dabbling in dangerous things—making curious experiments—perhaps at last he had fallen a victim to his own curiosity or inadvertency.

In fact, at the Coroner's inquest the verdict was that Dr. Meredith had come to his death, in all human probability, from the careless use of prussic acid.

There the matter might have rested in the minds of the community, had not the tragedy been followed by the startling discovery of the disappearance of the box which contained all the treasure which the doctor had brought from California.

He had kept this box in his own bed-chamber, where Lillian and myself had examined its contents but two days previously; we knew the closet where it stood, and led the executors to the spot without a thought of the dismay which awaited us, when the door was broken open, the key being lost, and no box was to be found.

This second stroke of fate added anew to our trouble, not so much to Lillian's, for she was too wrapped in grief, and too ignorant of the uses of money, to feel the force of the blow. I comprehended all it meant. Poverty, absolute

poverty, for these two young creatures. Meredith Place would be sold over their heads in less than a month. No shelter, no support awaited them. Oh, that I had the energy, the talent, the opportunity to make and keep a home for them! I felt instinctively that if Lillian's fortune was lost, Arthur Miller would desert her, and, believing that she loved him, I feared she would sink under so much wretchedness.

"I must find that box! I must find that box!" I said to myself, day and night. "Oh, if I could unravel the mystery of that figure eight!"

In some manner I had it impressed on my mind that there was some connection between that figure eight and the missing gold. I had no earthly reason for thinking so, yet the idea was like fire burning in my brain.

As days passed I was constrained to see something new in the manner of all who approached me. Instinctively I knew the cause of it. Finally, Arthur Miller, with a cool audacity for which I knocked him down, told me that it was the general belief that I had stolen the gold and murdered my uncle. He would advise me, as a friend, to leave the country, for he looked, every hour, to hear of my arrest.

As I say, I knocked him down. He could afford to brush the dust off his coat with a smile; he was speaking truth, for once, and he left me to the bitter consciousness of it.

Of course they would suspect me! was I not an idle fellow! Had I not been an adventurer? Could any one tell any good of me? Was not my father a wicked and dissipated man before me? Did not the village still remember when I came, ragged and rough, to my uncle's,—that benevolent man, who had warmed the viper in his bosom only to be stung to death at last!

I could imagine just what they were saying and thinking. Oh, God! Lillian would hear all this, before long. Would she, too, suspect and condemn me?

They had locked up, for safe keeping, the sheet of paper with the figure eight upon it, but I saw it always, as plainly as if I held the page in my hand. Was that figure the key to the crime and mystery? I must decipher it! Ruin impended over me—aye, worse yet, it impended over her I loved—over Meredith Place!

"Dying, look"—so much of the scrawled message it had been easy to decipher. Oh, that the failing sight, the cramping muscles had but retained their vigor a moment longer, that the remainder of this solemn testament might have been made plain! Look, where?

If the box had been *stolen* by the one who poisoned him, then, of course, my uncle himself must have been unaware of its whereabouts, and the message could not have related to *that*. Still, I felt that it *did* refer to it. The doctor had been a person with many singular ways and habits; he might have taken a fancy that his fortune was not safe, and himself had hidden it in some unfindable spot, unaware of the catastrophe impending over him.

This idea was so improbable that I could never entertain it for many consecutive moments, ever returning from every speculation on the subject to the same dull feeling of despair.

So entirely was I lost in these recollections that I groaned aloud, forgetful of my companion, till he jogged my elbow inquiring if I were in pain, when I started to find myself in company with a stranger, jolting along over the rough country road.

"My head aches," I said, in answer to his question. "I took a nap on the dew this morn'ing and have neuralgia, to pay for it."

"Must be more keener of yerself, young man. You'll grow more prudent as you grow older. But I turn off, here,—yonder's the road to Hampton; you're about six miles from there now. If they catch that Joe Meredith, I'm going to bring my wife and children and come over to see him hung. It'll be satisfaction to see such a rascal got out o' the way. Good bye, stranger. Hope you'll get over your neuralgia." "He'd cure with a hempen application to my neck, if he knew who I was," thought I, as he turned his horses' heads, while I jogged on towards Hampton.

I was now in the vicinity of home, so that it behooved me to be careful in meeting people on the road; and I soon took to the fields and woods, slowly making my way, by uninhabited routes, until I found myself in the glorious old woods which bounded the north and east of the Meredith estate.

I will state my reasons for so abruptly abandoning my flight to the city and returning upon my course. The incident of the preceding night appeared to me of sufficient importance to warrant my changing my plans. I believed that Miss Miller had, or thought she had, a clue to the mystery, and I resolved to place myself as a spy over her movements. Difficult as it might seem to enact the part of spy, when I was obliged to keep myself concealed, there would also be advantages in my position. The woman was an artful and talented one; I never had, in a three years residence under the same roof, pretended to understand her; I knew that she was afraid of, while she hated me; and in my absence she might

betray herself and her purposes in a hundred ways upon which she would not venture under my observation.

However, it would be necessary for me to have an ally. In the woods where I now skulked, stood a cottage belonging to the estate, inhabited at present only by an old woman whose son had worked the farm the previous summer, but had now gone West to try his hand on land of his own. His mother was to come to him when he was fairly settled and able to send for her. In the meantime, through my good-nature, in the Doctor's absence, she had been allowed to occupy the cottage rent free; she was also the recipient of many a tid-bit from the kitchen, while I had a double claim upon her gratitude by having assisted her son to emigrate, and by assiduously nursing her through an attack of rheumatic fever. I had chopped wood and built fires for her with my own hands, had steeped many a cup of tea for her, and rubbed her creaking old joints till my own muscles ached. For all this she had been garrulous in protestations of gratitude. I was now about to test its quality.

Lingering in the vicinity until assured that she had no visitors I approached the open door to find Gram'me Hooker knitting peacefully, her old face bathed in the July sunshine.

"Doctor Joe, be that you!"

She always called me Doctor Joe, though I was hardly entitled to the dignity of the prefix.

"It's Doctor Joe, himself, gram'me."

"I heard tell you'd gone away, an' I felt powerful bad, for I said to myself, why should the innocent flee before the wrath o' men? The wicked may prevail for a time, but the Lord is mighty, and his arm is long."

"Then you truly believe me to be innocent, gram'me?"

"Doctor Joe, I know your heart. It's tender as a gal's; you could never do anythin' cruel. People may go on as they like—I shall allas stand up fer you, come what will."

"Thank you, gram'me, thank you, most heartily. You are the first who has told me so. Now I will make known my errand.—It was to ask you to hide me in your cottage, to keep my presence here a secret, so that I can keep myself out of prison while I take steps to prove myself innocent, and perhaps, to save Meredith Place to those two helpless young things."

"Poor critters!" sighed gram'me, "my heart aches for 'em. You come inside, Doctor Joe, and I'll set on the step and keep a look-out. You've no idea what a fuss it's kicked up—your clearin' out last night. The hull place

is in an uproar. Everybody says you're guilty now. They've sent the constable on to track you. I was over to the house this mornin'. Miss Lillian was a-crying as if her heart would break. That 'governess o' hern, she put her arm around her an' tol' her not to mind,—she didn't see how she could cry after a man who had killed her own father."

"What did Lillian reply?" I eagerly inquired.

"Bless her sweet soul! she don't believe you done it. She said so up an' down, in a fit of passion, I tell you; but that woman, she just smiled as if she pitied her. I felt like flyin' up, myself; but 'twarn't my place; so I only whispered to Miss Lilly that I thought as she did, an' we'd stick by it. She went herself then and brought me a strawberry-pie, and you shall have it for your dinner, Doctor Joe."

"Thank you, gram'me; I'll share it with you. Now, what I desire is to stay here quietly in the day time, and to go out nights as much as is prudent, and watch the old place, inside and out. I feel as if I should make discoveries. And I believe you can help me very much, gram'me, by keeping me informed of what happens in the village and at the house, and by doing errands for me."

I could see that she was delighted at the confidence reposed in and the service asked of her; her crooked back straightened itself with a consciousness of new responsibilities. She hobbled about and got lunch for me while I kept guard. Fortunately gram'me's visitors were few and far between; Lillian and myself comprising nearly the entire list. She spread some bedding for me on the floor of the garret, and thither I retired to prepare myself for another vigil. I slept several hours, awaking at twilight, drank the tea which gram'me Hooker had in readiness, waited awhile, impatiently, restlessly, then, between the hours of nine and ten, set forth to revisit the scene of last night's adventure.

It was still some time before I dared approach the garden. I waited until all the lights of Meredith Place were extinguished, calming my feverish mood by gazing at Lillian's window. When all was quiet within and without, I opened the gate and stole forward to the arbor. My purpose was to anticipate Miss Miller. I felt that she knew or suspected the box of bullion to be hidden beneath its pavement. Two theories were present in my mind to account for her having visited the place in her sleep. Either she was privy to the fact of the gold being hidden there, and had been so affected by the guilty secret as to be thrown into the somnambule state by an un-

easy conscience; or else, she merely wondered and conjectured, like others, and had been drawn there by some transient fancy during the restlessness of a slumber disturbed by the dark shadow which rested over the household.

It may be thought, that, in comparison with the loss of a beloved uncle, of Lillian's father, the loss of this box was trivial, and that my anxiety to decipher his dying words was disproportioned to what the result would be should success attend my efforts; but the future welfare of my young cousin depended, in many ways, upon the recovery of the treasure.

I brought with me, on this night, tools more efficient than a pair of scissors. Counting seven stones from the door-step, I pried up the eighth, with only a few moments labor;—there was nothing there. I carefully replaced it, brushing away the loose soil, as Miss Miller had done before me. Then I counted eight from the door-way to the left, and lifted the stone, with the same result:—then eight to the right—and so on, for over an hour, until almost every combination which would make an eight had been tried.

"I have come on a fool's errand," I muttered to myself, wearied and disappointed. "Building up hopes on the dreams of a sleeping woman is silly work."

I rested a few moments, strengthened myself with a look at my cousin's white-curtained casement glimmering in the moonlight, counted out eight in a new direction, and was stooping low over the stone, prying it up with my pick-axe, when a shadow fell suddenly and silently athwart the pavement, and starting up, the stone fell back to its place, and I confronted Miss Miller.

I do not know which of us was most confounded. She was not asleep this time; but was dressed in her day attire, with a veil thrown over her head, and she, too, had a pick-axe in her hand. I rather think she must have been the more startled, for she screamed aloud,—the first time I had ever known of her losing her self-possession enough to scream—and shrieking as she fled, she threw her axe into a bed of carnations, and ran toward the house.

It was not long before I saw lights moving, and heard the voices of servants; it was time for me to retreat, and stooping to keep in the shadow of the hedge, I gained the gate, closed it noiselessly after me, and made my way back into the fields.

I would have liked well to grasp and hold the intruder, to wring from her, in a moment of terror, the object of her nightly visits to the arbor; but she had eluded me too quickly, and now that others were alarmed, my safety lay

in flight. "She will not re-visit the arbor alone again to-night," I said, as if that were a solace to my own disappointment.

"I will 'leave no stone unturned,'" I continued, plunging into the ghostly woods. "But I *did* leave a stone unturned—perhaps the wrong one," jesting bitterly at my own ill-luck.

I was quite certain that the axe had struck upon something different from earth under that last stone; it was maddening to be driven from it just at the moment of suspense,—but thus it was, and I dared not return that night, while at the same time I felt how fatal it was to delay another twenty-four hours, now that one person, if not more, was aware of the nature of the attempt.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE GOVERNESS.

A few paragraphs will suffice to state all that is necessary to be known with regard to the career of my uncle, Dr. Meredith. His father had been a physician before him; a successful one, and had left this very old stone homestead and its broad acres, with considerable other property, to his son, of whom he had high hopes, seeing how fond he was of the pursuits which had always had such fascinations for himself. But, the first Doctor had been a worker and a practical man; the second was a dreamer and an impractical man in many things necessary to an outside prosperity. The plain country people among whom his practice lay, were afraid of him. He was not broad enough in his humor, coarse enough in his jests, nor quack enough in his treatment to give them complete satisfaction; so their patronage was bestowed on worthier aspirants, and my uncle lived very happily with his beautiful and high-bred wife, unmindful that the golden thread of prosperity was slipping out of his hands, glad not to be called away too frequently from his darling experiments in the laboratory, and his still more darling wife and child.

Little Lillian was the wonder and glory of the neighborhood. It was a sight worth speaking of when any one had seen her, or her mother—one the reduced image of the other. They rode out nearly every fine day, and the trim little carriage, the glittering harness, the jet-black ponies, and equally jet-black driver, never failed of awakening the same interest and curiosity, while the lady and child were regarded as only a little lower than the angels. Lillian had long, bright hair which rippled down to her waist, a fair, fair face, and splendid dark-hazel eyes which blazed like stars. You see, I describe her, instead of her mother. For, was

she not ever, is she not still, the central idea about which all others revolve?

It was Lillian who flew, like a gleam of sunshine, to meet me, when the lumbering stage left me, a penniless orphan-boy, stranded on my uncle's doorstep and my uncle's bounty. She was then ten and I fourteen. I was poor, ill-dressed, and bad. I wondered that she could be so kind to me. My father, although I, too, was a Meredith, never had been anything but a disgrace to his family. A spendthrift, with no settled occupation, he had married an uneducated woman, who yet had a heart which he could break, and who had died in poverty when I was six years old. After her death I was confided to the care of such persons as my father could induce to keep me for small compensation. When my board-bill remained too long unpaid, I would be turned adrift, and then he would find me another home, equally wretched with the last. Thus I had lived, in a city too, exposed to all the associations besetting a boy who spent the most of his time on the street, until I was thirteen, when my father, also, died, writing, on his death-bed, a letter to Dr. Meredith, which resulted in my being sent for by him, and adopted into his family.

I did not then realize how great must have been the generosity, how keen the sense of duty of my uncle, in bringing a child like me into his house, allowing me to sit at his board, to enjoy, under restriction, the companionship of his daughter, and in devoting so much of his time to my neglected education. The patience with which he strove to eradicate my vices and encourage my virtues I was then too young to appreciate. I was ungrateful. I fretted under this unaccustomed restraint. My new life would have been intolerable had it not been for the boundless passion I cherished for my cousin. From the moment my eyes fell on her I had exalted her to a niche in the neglected temple of my soul where I daily knelt before her image worshiping her as something supremely beautiful and holy.

"He is too much like his father," my uncle would say, with a sigh, when I had deserted my studies for some reckless piece of mischief, or the society of the workmen on the place. "If he has been made wrong we must remake him," my aunt would answer, bending such a gentle, pitiful regard on me, as melted me, secretly, to remorse and good resolutions.

I did mean to be good, I did try; but I was like my father, and I was the victim of a most pernicious training. If Lillian, so happy, so pure, could have dreamed of my struggles, my agonies of shame, my resolutions made only to be broken, she would, perhaps, have held out

her little soft hand to help me. But she regarded me, generally, with a shy curiosity mingled with a slight degree of aversion for the "naughty boy." Her evident natural craving for child-society and liking for me was held in check by opposing feelings of doubt and mistrust. I resented this bitterly while I worshiped her none the less passionately. My heart was softer toward Mrs. Meredith than any other living person. Alas! before I had dwelt a year under her soothing influence, she was snatched from us all, dying suddenly of a prevailing fever.

Her death was a terrible calamity. It made me very wretched; but when I looked into my uncle's face I saw a shadow there which I felt would never lighten. I was very lonely the succeeding year. Lillian and I were separated more than ever. Except at table we seldom met. Possibly the mother, on her death-bed, warned my uncle to be cautious of allowing an intimacy to spring up between us, for he seemed very jealous of his child, and evidently had placed her, and the young lady whom he had procured as governess and companion for her, under limitations as to the extent of their friendly offices towards me. He did not intend to harden me, nor to rob me of the womanly influences which I secretly craved; he but sought to protect his own, while doing no injustice to me. He did not neglect me; in all his troubles, he gave daily attention to my studies, but there was a mechanism in his instruction which taught me, instinctively, that his heart was not in his work.

In the meantime another shadow was creeping over Meredith Place—the gaunt shadow of poverty. While his wife lived, the Doctor had indulged in a liberal and elegant style suited to her habits and tastes; she died just in time to escape the knowledge that he had lived up all his means, even to selling a portion of the farm-lands properly belonging to Meredith Place, and that his income from his profession was ludicrously inadequate to the expenditures of the place.

Now, instead of seeking to enlarge his practice, he shrank more into his library and laboratory than ever. His intercourse with his own family was principally confined to the table. In vain Miss Miller, Lillian's governess, sought to entertain and amuse him, to draw him into the parlor after tea, or into a walk on the lawn with his little daughter and herself.

Young as I was at that time, I possessed a natural acumen which made me keenly sensible to the arts and graces practiced by this woman upon the unconscious master of the house. Often and often I amused myself both with

her skill and audacity, as well as with the mild, innocent indifference of my uncle. Sheathed in the panoply of an impenetrable grief, her cunning arrows glanced from him totally unfelt and unperceived. It was so now—but would it always be so? I did not like the idea of Miss Miller ever becoming Lillian's mother. The mere apprehension that this might be the result of her position in the household, made me dislike her. You may rest assured she was not slow to return this aversion: you may be equally sure that she held the best cards, and that I was powerless to gainsay her misrepresentations.

She was a young woman whom one of her own sex would never have elected to the place which she now filled,—for a woman would have read her character by intuition; while she was just the one to dazzle and deceive a man. Accomplished she doubtless was; of a good family, too, and with superior recommendations; handsome, likewise, with black eyes and hair, a sparkling smile and elegant figure. But, there was indomitable ambition written on the smooth, broad forehead and rather heavy brow, and a light deep down beneath the surface-smile of the dark eye, which was both subtle and bold. A woman not too modest, with talent for any kind of a sharp game in life, and with a restless temperament which always would be prompting to action.

Why should such a woman settle down into the quiet routine of Meredith Place?

I felt quite sure that her duties as governess to one apt and loving little pupil were not her most engrossing occupations.

However, as I have said, she held the winning cards. What could a lad, with an unhappy reputation and unpleasant manners, do, in the struggle with a person of her position? If I was too sharp; if she felt that my curious regard was upon her when she was making herself all that was attractive and sympathetic to the mourning widower; if her cheek often flushed under the wicked look I forgot to suppress, she had her revenge. I felt that my uncle liked me less with every day of my stay with him; and Lillian, that sweet, affectionate child, gradually shunned me as if I were something vile or dangerous.

I could not endure this. I had the Meredith pride, if I had not the Meredith dignity. The United States took a fancy to enlarge her possessions about that time; the Mexican war passed from rumor into reality; my long-cherished purpose to run away from a home which I enjoyed upon sufferance only, took tangible shape. At fifteen I was a drummer-boy marching in the van or lagging in the rear



of my regiment, following the stars-and-stripes to tropic-skies, my fancy gorgeous with visions of a land of flowers and beauty, my ambition sweeping upward towards the gold eagle of promotion,—the suffering and ennui of Meredith Place sinking back into the far-away, lighted by only one ray of heavenly light,—the ever-present memory of my cousin Lillian.

For *her*, I would win glory and renown; for her my name should become associated with great deeds; my enemies should rescind their opinions, and triumph *should* be mine.

In the meantime, I marched away to privations, hardships, evil company and many temptations, leaving my relatives entirely ignorant of my destiny, and thinking this crowning act of my life, this running away in the night, without farewell or word as to my purposes, only what was to be expected of me.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### MEREDITH PLACE, IN SHADOW.

Two years thereafter I re-entered the large square hall of the old stone house. The door stood open, as it always did in summer-time; the door at the rear also stood wide, and a breeze, rich with the perfumes of the flower-garden, was wafted towards me as I entered. No one had noticed my approach, which gave me leisure to observe how all things remained unchanged during what seemed to me so long, long a time. The ivy waved from the tower, the cat lay sleeping in the sun on the mat, the old settle was ranged along the wall, the pictures hung there—all as if it were only yesterday I had deserted them. A broad beam of the declining sun shot through from the back entrance, touched, it seemed to me, with the color and fragrance of the old garden which I had once loved so well, and my heart cried out, with the cry of a child for love, forgiveness, welcome. Oh, that I had a mother, or a father! oh, that Lillian were my friend—my sister! oh, that even my uncle regarded me with justice, if not tenderness!

But, the broad beam crept forward and sought me out, showing me the dust, and stains, and tatters of my faded army blue. My uncle had not approved of the war, and it was not likely that he would approve of my part in it, insignificant as that share had been. Involuntarily I turned to the mirror set into the wall, and glanced at the tall, stripling form, looking taller and thinner than it should from the emaciation of sickness and pain—the yellow skin, the hectic color on the cheek, the faded uniform, the broken arm still in its sling—my right arm, the bone of which had been so

shattered as to have been saved only by the surgeon's careful skill, and which threatened never more to be of any great service. Why had I wandered back here? I had no claims upon my relatives; I was not loved by them. It would be better to steal away unannounced—with one backward glance to give up Meredith Place forever—than to yield to that weak craving of my heart which had led me here.

I was about to turn, at this suggestion of pride, when a shadow fell athwart the sunshine filling the door, a light step sounded, a young girl advanced into the hall a few paces, when, perceiving me, standing there like a beggar or worse, she was surprised into dropping the roses from her hands, and almost into a scream. A young creature, glowing, lovely, material—not a vision unsubstantial as a dream.

I recognized my cousin Lillian only at the second glance, such a charm had those two years worked upon her. Neither a woman nor a child; indescribably fresh and radiant, like the roses she had been gathering; plenty of color in her cheeks; her eyes, so dark and bright, flashing with surprise—I can even remember the dress she wore, although our sex is said not to remark such things. But, to me that vision always has remained as a picture, perfect in all, even in tint and color. The floating lilac muslin, the rosy sash, the white shoulders gleaming from a golden cloud of curls—my heart rose up in my throat and choked me. I could not speak nor stir; while she, her alarm subsiding, gave me a searching look, and as the light of recognition dawned over her face, I saw neither anger nor dislike.

"Is it you, cousin Joe?"

I held out my left hand; still, I could not speak. I always had loved my little cousin, but this young girl was a new creation, and to hear her call me by name with that soft voice, to feel her clasp my hand with that eager pressure, sent a thrill through my veins which was like the quickening of the dead. In that moment I was born again to new resolves and aspirations; but it always was my fate to appear at a disadvantage. I could not answer; and when she glanced at my wounded arm I blushed like one guilty of some wrong.

"Poor Joe! We heard you were wounded at Vera Cruz. Is it bad?" touching lightly the sling.

"Bad enough, Lillian," I managed to say. "So you heard of me?"

"Yes, papa heard, a few months ago. Besides, we saw your name in the papers. You were reported to have been very brave."

She smiled, and I blushed yet deeper.

"Is your father very angry with me?"





"I think he will be glad to hear you have come back."

"Is he well, Lillian? is he married again?"

"Married again?" echoed my cousin, with a gay laugh—the idea was a novel one to her; the next instant her face clouded over, and she added sadly, "he will never marry, cousin Joe. He never forgets, for one hour, my dear mamma."

"Forgive me; I always blunder, you know."

Here some one stepped out from the drawing-room, a lady, dressed in black silk, with black hair and eyes, who chilled the sunshine for me—Miss Miller, looking not a day older, strong and triumphant as ever, casting upon me a glance of cool dislike and inquiry, as if I were an intruder whom she had a right to thrust from the hall.

"Miss Miller, here is cousin Joe," cried Lillian, appealingly.

"Ah," said the lady, with the slightest possible bow to me; "does Doctor Meredith know of his arrival?"

The inference was that if he knew, he would disapprove of it. Lillian and I both felt the meaning in her icy tones. I was so weak from sickness and weary with my long journey that I had no courage to renew the combat just then; I began to tremble, and the warmth and strength which had come to me with the revelation of Lillian's beauty and kindness, deserted me at the time when I needed it most.

"Sit down," said my cousin, drawing me towards the settle. "Joe is sick, Miss Miller. Look at his arm. Papa must doctor him up."

"Perhaps. If such is his judgment. In the meantime, you had better announce the arrival to him. No doubt he would desire to be informed of it, Lillie, my dear, if he knew how you were committing yourself."

I chafed at this reproof of my cousin, but she flew away, looking back with a smile, returning in a few moments with her father, and crying before he had an opportunity to speak,

"He has promised to cure you, cousin Joe—to take care of you until you are well. He looks so ill, doesn't he, papa?"

Her gay words took away all formality from the meeting, which I had dreaded even while I sought it. My uncle called me "his poor boy," and said, with a sad, weary smile, that he would kill the fatted calf, if he had one to kill, but that his fatted calves had gone long ago, and there were no new ones to take their place.

From this I gathered a hint of his poverty.

It was not many days before I learned the worst. The pretty carriage and the jet-black ponies were gone; the sable groom, along with other of the old family servants, had been sent

to look out new homes for themselves; a pinching economy reigned in the house, and, worst of all, heavy mortgages hung over Meredith Place.

Then it was I began to wonder why Miss Miller still remained. I had reason to believe that her salary was in arrears, and it could not be pleasant for her to share in the privations to which the Doctor silently submitted, and which Lillian was too young and buoyant to greatly heed. If she really loved Doctor Meredith with a true woman's love, which made her willing to serve him to her own detriment, and to share his poverty in case he should yield to her constant influence and make her his wife, I should feel more respect for her than I had yet felt. It might be that, beginning with the ambition to be the mistress of Meredith Place, she had learned to love the peculiar and interesting man, still in the prime of life—the quaint thinker, the earnest scholar, the accomplished, although old-fashioned gentleman. If noble looks, fine personal gifts, talents, and a pure heart, could win this woman's regard, without money, here was the man to gain her affections. She herself had passed that bloom of youth when a girl expects a choice of suitors; she could not be far from thirty years of age, although looking twenty-five, and with that showy style of features and manners which would keep her looking no older for some time to come.

It has been said—I do not reaffirm it—that a woman thinks more of marriage, of a home and settlement, than of any and all other advantages. Miss Miller doubtless came to Meredith Place with the purpose to find such settlement there; at first she was unaware of the debts burdening the fine old estate, or the real poverty of its owner; she knew only that it was a grand place and the family one in which it would be an honor to enter. When she slowly discovered the true state of affairs she probably had already allowed her feelings to dwell too fondly on its master. The Doctor was a fascinating man, even to his own sex who had intelligence to appreciate him, his singularity and originality adding to the interest which surrounded him.

I was so much of an invalid during the fall and winter succeeding my return as to be fit for nothing but to lounge about the house. My uncle treated me with more kindness than ever, there being a touch of fatherly tenderness in his ministrations; and I learned to love him, next to Lillian. Vacillating as were my resolves and many my faults, I had the grace to love those whom I loved with a fervor, a passion, a devotion which made up the great part of my impulsive nature. I longed for a man's strength

that I might work for him. I bitterly regretted the luck which had flung my good right arm powerless to my side. Day by day I could see the march of anxiety, the advance of trouble, yet I could not prove my willingness to take up the burden, since I could find nothing to do suited to my health and the crippled condition of my limb. The Doctor would flee from duns and the threatening aspect of creditors, deeper and deeper into the intricacies of his laboratory, which afforded him his sole comfort. Miss Miller was so very patient and very devoted that I almost forgot my suspicious dislike of her. She kept the gloomy old house cheerful with a seemingly spontaneous gayety; it rang with the music of the piano, and her own magnificent voice; and, no matter how simple and unvaried the table-fare, she presided with the same festive ceremonies. She even began to develop a taste for chemistry. When she found that she could not keep the master of Meredith Place out of his laboratory by the exercise of the natural sorcery of her sex, she followed him into that mysterious den where the practice of various black arts went on continually. With pretty little screams and starts she would combine and dispart the elements, stifle herself with gases and stir the golden fires under the crucibles, cleanse bottles, fill retorts, blow tiny bellows, glance over learned treatises, listen to long lectures, so gracefully, so bewitchingly, that I marveled at the blind composure of my dear uncle under it all. In fact, the Doctor regarded her with something of the same affection he gave to Lillian; all the passion he ever had felt for woman as lover or wife slumbered in the grave of her he had lost.

Still, Miss Miller did not despair; that I could guess from her deportment. I was glad when she took to chemistry, for it removed her Argus-eyed surveillance from me, hours at a time, when I could be happy in my arm-chair or on my lounge, looking at Lillian, listening to her singing, watching her fingers busy with the needle and her embroideries.

I had begun the study of medicine. My uncle advised it, as I was unfitted for active employment; and I would have been rash and ungrateful to throw away the opportunity to read under such an instructor. I did not like it; on the contrary I had no taste for it; but I had no other way of proving my desire to please him, and my resolution to become industrious and reliable.

Thus affairs drifted slowly on, until the world at large, and the idlers of Hampton township and village began to discuss the marvelous discoveries of gold in California. From the very first rumors which floated about, until

his final decision was made, my uncle showed more interest in this subject than he had in anything since his wife's death. All the romance of his nature took fire, as he read and mused over the accounts from that wonderful country. Being a geologist as well as chemist, he felt a keen desire to examine for himself, by the light of science, the fascinating developments of the new El Dorado. He wanted to be free from the mortifications which hampered him, to shake off debts, duns, and depressing memories, to plunge into a new life—and, to make money. He would have this longed-for adventure, and, at the same time, he would lift the shadow from Meredith Place and set it once more to glowing in the full sunshine of prosperity!

Thus he felt and thus decided. Miss Miller opposed him with dismay. But, when she satisfied herself that she had no power to keep him, she yielded, only winning this concession,—that, on no account, should he be absent more than two years. In the meantime, she would promise to remain that length of time, keeping charge of the house and continuing the studies of her young pupil.

As for me, I was to continue to abide in the house, affording it the protection (!) of my newly-sprouting beard, and making use of the splendid library of the Doctor to perfect myself, as far as mere reading could enlighten me, in a knowledge of my future profession.

A third mortgage was placed on Meredith Place, giving my uncle the means to provide for our subsistence during his absence and to pay his passage on one of the vessels which, as spring came on, began to turn their prows towards the land of gold.

Dr. Meredith was thus among the earliest adventurers, and soon becoming known as a man of science, his knowledge and services were quickly brought into requisition. His letters were of absorbing interest, though not very frequent. The wild, the mad, the strange, peculiar and astonishing aspects of the new life were pictured for us with a vivid pen. The gambling-hells, the street-murders, the incredible prices of the necessities of life, the hardships of miners, the destructive fires, the "fever" for gold, with the varying aspects of the disease, the sudden growth of the canvas city, all the novel, and wicked, and pathetic, and outrageous lights and shadows of the picture were touched for us, and we hung over his letters as over some thrilling romance. Before many months he began to announce that he was coining money almost as fast as he could desire. With a forethought for which he had his reward, he had expended a portion of his

restricted fund obtained by the mortgage, every dollar which could be spared, in the purchase of *quinine*. His supply of the much-needed and fabulously-dear drug, united with his skill as a physician, and the constant demand upon his services, for which enormous fees were paid, soon placed him on the high road to wealth.

Miss Miller felt that she was about to reap the reward of long and patient waiting. I could read it in the flushed cheek and sparkling eye. At the end of the first year came a remittance, with directions to pay up the arrears of her salary, with various small debts made in the village, leaving a surplus which enabled us to indulge in a few luxuries.

Lillian declared she would have a new silk dress made *full length* like Miss Miller's, and a bonnet like other young ladies:—no more hats for her! Her governess laughed and consented. Indeed, she took great pains with Lillian's summer toilet, causing a variety of pretty dresses and mantles to be made up, and gloves, scarfs and all the little ornaments of young ladyhood to be provided.

I enjoyed the sight of my beautiful cousin in these becoming toilettes. For the first time in my life I was really happy. Our life was most peaceful. I had the consciousness of duty performed, for I was a close student, and was rewarded for my perseverance by becoming deeply interested in and fond of my medical studies. I was regaining the use of my arm; my health was improving, and with that, my looks also, as my mirror told me. I loved Lillian quietly, with intense but calm feeling; she was pleasant and friendly with me; and Miss Miller let me alone.

Yes! I was happy, for a little, flitting time.

In the middle of the summer Miss Miller began to talk about her brother Arthur. He had been overworking himself, through this hot weather, studying law in a New York city office. She had advised him to come to the country for a two months' vacation. She had seen so little of him of late years—and he was her pet; her favorite; the youngest of the family—she felt as if she must have him near her. If she could find a boarding-place not too far away, where Arthur could be comfortable—

The young mistress of Meredith Place put on quite a matronly air, as she assured her dear governess that she should not listen to such a proposition,—Miss Miller's friends and relatives had the freedom of Meredith Place. How should we all feel with *her brother* boarding at a strange house?

Miss Miller kissed the sweet face held up with such animation, and as she finished her embrace I met her eyes darting at me a pecu-

liar, searching glance. I blushed, for I knew that I felt unwilling to have another, a stranger, a young gentleman, intrude upon our quiet happiness. She smiled as I blushed, and all of a sudden all my old distrust and hatred sprang up full-armed.

Her smile said as plainly as words, that she read me, and my foolish hopes—that she plotted against me, and that now, as ever, she held the winning cards.

In a few days Arthur Miller became our guest. From the instant I met his eye and touched his hand, I hated him a thousand times more intensely than ever I had hated his sister. I confess that my impulses are not to be relied upon; that I am not well-governed; that I was madly jealous of him,—and yet, withal, I am certain that I had true grounds for my dislike. Jealousy sharpened my glance, but, in this instance, did not discolor it.

Arthur Miller was two or three years older than myself—young enough, but at that age, giving him immense superiority in the eyes of young ladies—a superiority of which I was keenly sensible. He was very handsome, as far as features, form, and complexion could make him so. To me he was never tolerable looking, because I hated the smooth smile, the red lips formed for treacherous words, and the bold, bright eyes, so like his sister's. He dressed elaborately, was graceful, self-possessed, and his silken mustache was "sweet to see," I suppose; I could not not appreciate him. My clothes were shabby and old-fashioned, and I had even outgrown them; I was not graceful, and had little self-possession under such disadvantages. Still, I did not under-rate myself. I was handsome, too—or would be in a year or two: My face was an honest one, and his was not.

I saw that he was pleased with Lillian's exquisite beauty; I knew he had resolved, before he had been under the roof of Meredith Place one evening, that he would do his part in furtherance of his sister's desires and designs—whatever these might be.

All was plain enough to me. Doctor Meredith was coming home, rich. Miss Miller, not satisfied with the expectation of becoming the sharer of his fortune, was eager for her favorite brother to "feather his nest" also. It would be pleasant for her to bring about a marriage between him and Lillian. They could all live under one roof, enjoy together the fruits of their labors,—while I—was it reasonable to suppose that Meredith Place would be a happy home for me, when these changes had transpired?

Already I began to feel the old desolation;—already I was a wanderer, in imagination. Arthur Miller had not been our visitor a week

before Lillian neglected me for him. It was natural she should do so. He had the charm of newness, and a thousand other charms. He was gay and attractive, making the acquaintance of dozens where I would not have found time or way for one. The village young people began to find out what a charming haunt the old brown villa was. We were invited to pic-nics and evening parties made for Arthur Miller and Lillian Meredith. The pretty toilettes did good service. We gave entertainments in return. Lillian was intoxicated by this first sparkling draught of social enjoyment. She had lived so very secluded that this gayety had the power of novelty;—and then she was so lovely and so sweet in her manners that she was flattered and petted almost beyond bearing with equanimity.

I went to all the merry-makings because my cousin insisted, and because my jealousy would not allow me to stay away. It was misery to see them together; yet I could not remain at home, poring over my books, and imagining those two enjoying each other's society. My constant wish was for the two months to elapse, when Miller would return to the city.

His vacation passed, and more. Then Miss Miller announced that Arthur was so delighted with the country, his health so much better here, and it was so much easier for a young man to obtain a start in his profession in a village than in a city, he had resolved to open an office in Hampton, and remain at least for the winter.

I saw Lillian smile and blush at this intelligence. The programme was carried out, the office secured; and Arthur, although no longer a guest, became almost a daily visitor at the old mansion. I felt that Miss Miller had acted dishonorably in thus throwing her brother upon Lillian's attention, during the absence of her father. If she really believed Arthur a suitable and acceptable companion for her pupil, she should at least have waited for the sanction of her father's presence. It was hardly fulfilling her duties, as she had promised and assured, to permit and encourage such an intimacy during Doctor Meredith's absence.

Lillian yet was only touching upon womanhood—sixteen that summer—and to inveigle her into an attachment, perhaps an engagement, appeared to me, under the circumstances, the basest of treachery. If I had liked the young gentleman and approved of him, I should have felt the same. As it was, I hardly knew what course to pursue.

Putting all else aside, my own desires or hopes, I could not reconcile myself to seeing my cousin in the nets of these two spiders. It

would not do to write and say as much to Doctor Meredith, since he had more confidence in Miss Miller than he had in me.

After much hesitation, I wrote, early in the winter, begging him to come home as soon as convenient, but giving no special reason, except that Lillian had become a young lady, and Meredith Place needed a master to keep admirers in awe.

His intention was, to return in the spring, and this letter could not much shorten his term of absence.

## CHAPTER V.

### IN LIGHT.

It was May when Dr. Meredith reached Meredith Place. My letter had found him involved in business which he could not immediately desert. Probably he attached no great importance to its injunctions.

A telegram from New York informed us of his arrival and gave the ladies of the household opportunity to order a festal dinner, and to adorn themselves, as ladies will, on such occasions, to give welcome to the long-absent master.

As I sat on the porch which commanded a view of the road, looking to see the old coach rolling along the blossom-sprinkled way, pink with the apple and peach blows, Miss Miller also stepped out for an observation. For a moment she was unaware of my presence and I had full opportunity to read her face, which wore an eager, passionate, expectant look, betraying all her hidden love and hope. She was dressed magnificently, in black velvet, low on the shoulders, with brilliants clasped about her bare neck and arms. In her black braids she wore only a bunch of apple-blossoms. Her cheeks, usually rather sallow, were red as a young girl's. She must have expended all her hoarded salary on this extravagant dress so unsuited to her position. When she saw me she started, biting her lips in a momentary embarrassment.

"The stage is late," I said, rising; "where is Lillian?"

"Oh, she is at the front gateway. She will meet her father there."

I went out and joined my cousin. I knew that Miss Miller had planned to meet Dr. Meredith alone, where she would dare to betray a tender agitation at the meeting, and when, in the excitement of the moment she might involuntarily allow him to perceive not only what a splendid woman she was, but how deeply interested she was in him.

So, let it be! Since Lillian was lost to me,

the affairs of the household might quietly slip into the hands so long awaiting authority. My own plans were laid, as well as they could be, in my situation. As soon as my uncle was settled at home, and I had rendered an account of my stewardship, I would leave Meredith Place forever. I would not say that I had left it forever, but such was my resolve. I would go into some hospital in New York or Philadelphia where I could receive instruction in return for my services; I would be a good physician, an honor to the old line; while, as for the rest, heaven knew!—life appeared stale and unprofitable enough.

I trembled as I stood silently by Lillian's side. I had not been alone with her for days and weeks. He was always in the way. Today, however, he kept his distance. Miss Miller had too much tact to allow him to be too suddenly intruded upon the notice of the long-absent father.

"You are very exclusive, of late," remarked my cousin, with a half pout, as she leaned over the gate, looking up the road, and not at me. "You are not my old Joe any more."

What a fool I was to be pleased with these words! When Arthur Miller was away, she could find leisure to coquet with me! I despised myself for the thrill of pleasure which ran through me, and fighting it down, answered quietly—

"I've been very busy. When the Doctor is safely home, I expect to take my departure, and I have my preparations to complete."

"Cousin Joe, are you going away?" she asked quickly, turning and laying her rose-leaf hand on my arm.

I thought she looked grieved, that the tears sprang to her eyes, and I never could bear the way she had of saying "Cousin Joe," without losing all resentment, so I answered much less bitterly than I had felt a moment previous—

"I must go. This is no longer home to me. I must work, and I must go where work is to be found."

"But, Cousin Joe—"

Then the rattle of the wheels was heard, and Lillian sprang outside the gate, forgetful of all; a cloud of dust rose up into the pink and white blossoms which made one long bower of the country road; the galloping horses came into sight, and the driver, with a style and flourish meant to do honor to his passenger, and to Meredith Place, drew up before the entrance.

I saw the Doctor leap out, and turn to assist a young lady who had sat by his side; but Lillian had seen nothing saving her father's dear face, and she clung to him so fondly, with

tears and laughter, that he had finally to disengage her loving arms.

"Lily, my child, here is another who needs a welcome home. Call her Inez, or mother, or Mrs. Meredith—what you please—only be friends with her, for my sake."

"Father! what do you mean?"

My cousin turned, for the first time observing the one who stood there, a girl not much older than herself, small, slight, with a rich, dark complexion, purple-black hair, and eyes of dark and lustrous splendor, of which we had but a glimpse before the lids fell and the lip began to quiver. A timid, confiding, affectionate creature, one could guess from the first.

"She is my wife," added the Doctor, not without a slight embarrassment; "I will tell you all at the first opportunity, Lillian. In the meantime, she is weary with her long journey, and needs your kindness."

A moment more my cousin hesitated; the struggle was written on her face; but something in the trembling lip and downcast eyes of the stranger, overbore her surprise and pain; she flung her arms about her father's wife, as she had about him, and kissed her.

Dr. Meredith smiled on the two, children together. Then he found time to recognize and greet me, which he did with a cordiality of a kinsman in heart.

"You are tired," said Lillian, keeping her arm about Mrs. Meredith's waist; "we will go in at once. You shall drink a cup of tea before you go to your room."

"Aye," said the Doctor, preceding us to the old mansion, looking its best now, in its May dress of roses, "tea for the weary! But, where is our dear Miss Miller? She has had experience; she will know what to do for my wife."

"Here I am, Dr. Meredith, at your service," answered the governess, stepping in from the side door, opening on to the porch, from which, doubtless, she had witnessed the scene at the gate.

She shook hands with him, smilingly, and touched the little fingers of Mrs. Meredith. A change had passed over her face since I scrutinized it on the porch. I could perceive the rouge on her cheeks now, for all natural color had forsaken them. She compelled her voice from trembling, but it sounded hard and cold; her eyes glittered like steel; I did not care to meet them, after the first glance, and she avoided looking at me. She was conscious that I understood her humiliation.

She wore the velvet dress and brilliants to dinner, over which she presided with her usual majesty, having been requested to do so by Mrs. Meredith, who pleaded fatigue to excuse her

timidity at too soon assuming her wifely honors.

When dinner was over Miss Miller made the excuse of a severe headache to retire to her room for the evening.

It was not until his wife also was asleep in her chamber that he told Lillian and me the brief story of his courtship and marriage.

A few weeks before he sailed he was called to attend a Cuban gentleman very ill of fever at one of the hotels of San Francisco. He was afraid, from the first, that his patient would die, but did everything in his power to save him, even to giving him almost constant personal attendance. Won by this kindness, the gentleman, when he knew that he must die, confided to the Doctor something of his circumstances, expressing his anguish at leaving his daughter alone, without money, in that reckless, frightful city. He had been a merchant in Havana, and had lost his whole property in an unwise commercial adventure, and driven alike by despair and mortification, had taken his only child and sailed for the land of gold, expecting there to retrieve his ruined fortunes. Instead, he was stricken with illness, and about to die.

"Promise me you will be as good a friend to her as you have been to me," cried the dying man.

"I do promise you;—so far as I can prevent, by my friendship and assistance, no harm shall befall her. I will care for her as if she were my own child."

The Cuban gentleman died in peace, and the Doctor was left with this pretty, clinging, weeping girl, looking to him as her only friend. He could have taken her to Havana, on his homeward way, and restored her to her relatives, but Inez declared, with many tears, that those relatives had not treated her properly at the time of her father's misfortunes. To get rid of his embarrassing burden by marrying her soon occurred to the perplexed doctor. It was a man's way of getting out of the dilemma.

I will do my uncle the justice to say that I believe he made Inez his wife more out of regard for her welfare than from the desire to appropriate her youth and beauty to himself. He believed she would be a pleasant companion for Lillian, and that he could care for her so as to make her contented. That he ever felt for her anything beyond an admiration for her pretty ways, I do not think. She could not assume the place once held by Lillian's mother.

To see the two young creatures together, each heightening the other's beauty by contrast, was a treat. The second day had not passed before

they were like sisters. The Doctor's grave face would lighten, as he looked at them, "putting their heads together;" banded with jet and waving with gold.

On the second evening Arthur Miller ventured to call. The report that the old Doctor had brought home a young bride, had flown through the vicinity; he had heard it before he came, I knew. My uncle was friendly to him, as Miss Miller's brother; but took no fancy to him—instead, told me, next day, carelessly, that he did not like the young man as well as his sister.

"Neither do I," I said, with more emphasis than I intended, "but Lillian holds a different opinion, and it was this I was thinking of, when I wrote you, last winter. Miss Miller is ambitious, and would favor the idea of a union with your family."

"Ah," looking perplexedly at me with those bright eyes of his, which always could see everything but what was directly before them—I must take notice—I must take notice! But, don't judge Miss Miller, my boy. She is a most excellent lady, and has done much for my Lillian."

We were standing inside his laboratory, near the door, when this was said. I heard the rustle of silk a moment later, and opening the door and stepping into the hall I saw Miss Miller passing rapidly along to disappear in her own room.

A few days later Miss Miller announced her determination of leaving—her young lady was "finished" as far as she could finish her—she returned her charge to her father's hands, along with the keys of the house and all the other responsibilities she had assumed. My uncle and cousin both warmly urged her never to leave the Place, but to remain with them always, an honored member of the family."

"There is enough for all. You, who helped to carry us through the dark days, ought to remain to share our prosperity," said the Doctor heartily.

He little understood the scornful smile which wreathed her mouth in answer. She began to make her arrangements to depart; not very hastily, for, since neither the man himself, nor artless Lillian, suspected the change which had clouded over her sky, she could take her time to settle up her small affairs, without any disparagement of her dignity. I could see that Inez was glad she was going.

Her brother continued his visits; he told us that he liked Hampton; was getting into business, and had no wish to leave it.

He was determined to secure the prize for which he had come; his sister was disappointed,

but there should be better luck for himself. So I construed his thoughts.

I, too, was getting ready to leave Meredith Place. My uncle had remonstrated, but I had urged the necessity of attending lectures in the city, and he had finally consented, but forcing upon me the means for supporting myself, while doing this.

"You'll make a doctor equal to any of the Merediths yet, my boy!" he said, when he had examined me as to my progress during his absence.

Thus affairs stood at the moment when a dark night of catastrophe shut all of the light suddenly from Meredith Place.

## CHAPTER VI.

### TWO HOLES IN A HANDKERCHIEF.

I was curious to know if Miss Miller had recognized the person who so unexpectedly confronted her in the arbor; while it half maddened me to realize that she would have opportunity to return and examine the place, while I, in my enforced concealment, could do nothing. Doubtless she had returned, after her first fright was calmed, and the household had subsided into rest, and finished the work which I had begun. If truly there had been something under that last stone—if the iron-bound box had been the object against which my pick-axe had struck—I might resign myself to the disastrous fact that Miss Miller had won in the game; for she certainly would go back and discover the treasure, and dispose of it to suit herself, before the morning.

Whether, having found the box, she would deliver it to its rightful owners, or whether, being concerned in its disappearance, she would only secure its farther concealment, I could not decide.

I was too much excited to sleep, while I felt that my brain demanded rest from the constant strain upon it of conflicting thoughts and theories. Morning came slowly. Gram'me Hooker was an early riser, and when I heard her moving about in the room below, I was glad to go down.

"You haven't slept, Doctor Joe," she remarked, after scanning me for a moment with her bright, old eyes. "If you don't take keer of yourself you'll be down sick."

"Well, what then? who cares?"

"I thought you was jest for working. How kin you spy about and keep watch over them unprotected lambs, if you lay yourself up in bed with brain fever?"

"True, gram'me; I thank you for reminding me of it. After breakfast, if you will make some excuse to visit the mansion and hear the

news, I promise you I will try to sleep while you are gone. Miss Miller had a fright last night; find out what the servants have to say about it. And pray, see Lillian if you can, dear gram'me, and tell me how she looks—if she is well!—how she feels!—and if Arthur Miller spent last evening there. Can you remember all that?"

The old woman shook her head with a meaning smile.

"I want to know, myself, how Miss Lillian fares," she said, "and I'll be hoppin' mad if I l'arn that that young man is hangin' about her yet,—for I don't like him any better'n you do, Doctor Joe. Yes, yes, yes, my feet ain't so spry as they used to be, but my head's quick enough yet. If there's anythin' goin' on to the house, trust me to find it out, Doctor Joe. And do you jest stop frettin', and take a good sleep while I'm out, for I shall likely be gone some time."

I gave her some money to buy such food as was necessary now that she had a boarder, and as soon as the few dishes were put away, she took her basket and crutch, hobbling away on her various errands. As she expected to visit the village as well as Meredith Place, I knew that it must be several hours before her return, and endeavored to keep my promise about sleeping, by crawling back to my garret-bed, shutting my eyes, and beginning to count, over and over, up to a hundred and down again. The discipline proved effectual, so that, after a time, I slept. I was awakened from this slumber by a murmur of voices in the room below. Fortunately, I was sufficiently master of my perilous position as soon as I awoke, to remember the necessity for keeping quiet. At first I supposed Gram'me Hooker had returned and some acquaintances had stopped in passing. But, after a few moments, not hearing her piping treble, and believing that I recognized the voices, curiosity overcame prudence. I moved, on my hands and knees, as softly as possible over the loose boards which formed the floor of the garret; but, despite my caution, a board rattled, and the conversation below instantly ceased. "Rats!" spoke some one, with a little nervous laugh, after a moment's silence. I was right—the speaker was Miss Miller. The murmur began again; I pressed my ear to the floor, but I could distinguish nothing of what was said; I soon, however, made out the other voice to be that of her brother Arthur. The blood was rushing and throbbing in my ears, but I compelled my pulses to quiet that I might hear what was being said. The plastered ceiling beneath me effectually prevented any consecutive words



from reaching my ear; feeling assured these arch conspirators were plotting the still greater misery of my cousin Lillian,—that they were uttering in secret council, matters of overwhelming importance to me and mine, I was yet constrained by that small barrier from hearing what was said! As soon as I dared I crept forward to the narrow closed passage which led down, by a few steep stairs, to the apartment beneath. I knew that the door at its foot was closed, and I made my way down, and stooping, peered through the small aperture through which the old-fashioned latch passed. I saw the brother and sister, he, sitting in a chair by the table; she, standing before him. She was growing angry, I could tell by the red spot on her cheek, and by her raised voice.

"You are a greater fool than I took you to be, Arthur Miller," were the first words I made out. "I knew you were a coward, but I did not give you credit for being a ninny, too."

"Gently, gently, my sweet sister," he answered, meeting her fiery glance with one of his mocking smiles.

I could see only her profile as she stood between me and the open door, but I saw her mouth tremble with scorn and rage, and her black brows lower.

"You played for the stakes, and lost," continued the brother, sneeringly; "why should you be so severe upon me, who also have had the misfortune to lose?"

"But you have *not* lost! All is still in your own hands. What I am angry with you for, is for giving up, when we are so near success."

"A fellow's neck is about the most precious trifle in his possession. He would, naturally, like to keep that whole, even though his heart be broken. When the chestnuts are too hot, one must drop them. That poor dog of a cousin of hers is in a happy condition, isn't he?—excuse me from wishing to burn my mouth like that."

"Coward!" she said again.

"Oh, well, sis; I leave it all to you. You have courage enough for both. More courage than discretion, I think. To tell you the plain truth, I think you've hurried this matter too much. Why couldn't you let well enough alone?"

"Arthur, you will never understand me! As if I could have lived—as if I could have *lived*!"—she uttered vehemently, then checked herself.

"Never mind the past," she added in a moment; "what we have now to do is to consider the future. We must be prepared for any emergency which may arise. We must be cool, and above all, *courageous*, and must be united in

action. Everything depends upon our acting in concert."

"By-the-bye," said the young man, still smiling up into his sister's excited face, "if you had not such a grudge against her, I believe I should prefer the step-mother to the daughter. She's a beauty, that Spanish girl is, and has a soul of fire. Such eyes!—I dreamed of them last night. 'O, saw ye not fair Inez, she's gone into the West, To dazzle when the sun is down, and rob the world of rest.' She's *my* ideal of feminine charms. I don't wonder the old Doctor capitulated, besieged by arrows from such eyes. Bad for you, sis, but what might have been expected!"

"How dare you!" cried Miss Miller, lifting her hand. "Arthur, you must be careful! I have done a great deal for you—supported you—educated you—given you all you have. I have endeavored to take you into an equal partnership in this business,—but you must beware! Never speak of that woman to me. I will not bear it!"

"Oh-h-h! I must be discreet," laughed her companion, his eyes falling before the blaze of her own fierce orbs. "Don't look at me that way, sis, or I shall be anxiously inquiring if there is any more prussic-acid about."

He laughed at his own cold-blooded jest; as for me, I should have sprung out upon him in fury, to think that he could refer in this reckless manner, to the tragedy which had desolated Meredith Place, but was withheld by an intense curiosity to note the effect on Miss Miller.

Her upraised hand sank to her side; instead of blazing out into new anger, she spoke more calmly than she had yet done—

"What do you mean by that, Arthur?"

"Nothing at all," was the half-sullen reply.

"So it was not the box, after all?" he added, changing the subject.

"No. We were mistaken from the beginning. But I shall begin again,—I have the key. All I want is time. I wish I knew, certainly, who it was in the arbor, last night. I could have sworn it was *he*. This much is certain—some one is on the track beside ourselves. We must be a thousand times more cautious than before. I hope, and shall believe, that it was only some one who saw *me* visit the place, and who thought he would examine for himself. I don't feel easy about one thing, Arthur:—I am afraid that I walk in my sleep, as I once had a habit of doing, you remember. I have not done so for many years; but several times, recently, I have found my night-dress, in the morning, wet with dew and soiled with sand and earth, as if I had wandered about in it out-of-doors. It was so yesterday morning. I may do strange



things while in this somnambulist state, and may be watched by others. I feel the danger so great that I am like a person walking on ice so thin that it may break at any moment, and let him down. I have persuaded Lillian to sleep in my bed, for the present, on the front side; so that if I rise I shall disturb her, for she is a light sleeper. She has promised to waken me if she finds me somnambulizing. I wish I knew who that person was, in the arbor, last night."

She glanced about her, with a startled air, as she made the last remark, like one, who, having received a great fright, is still nervous and expectant of another shock. For an instant her eyes rested on the latch, and it seemed to me that she was gazing directly at me. If I had obeyed the impulse which seized me I should have thrown open the door and announced myself as the person about whom she was so anxious,—but ever arose before me, in these imprudent moments of excitement, Lillian's face imploring me to remember her wrongs and not to foolishly peril her future welfare.

"I've not so much confidence in your powers, sis, as I had once," began the young man, with a weary yawn. "I've half a mind to throw up the whole matter, and return immediately to New York. I've trifled away a good deal of time already. Perhaps I might have made it pay better. I expected some substantial results this morning."

"You are too impatient. Rome was not built in a day."

"I think I'll return to my legitimate sphere."

"Then you give up Lillian Meredith entirely?"

He laughed again.—"*Cela depend,*" he said, lightly.

"I understand. But here comes mother Hooker. Good morning, gram'me. You seem alarmed at finding your cottage taken possession of, in your absence. I was walking in the wood with my brother. Miss Lillian made me promise that, if I came near your house, I would stop and inquire how you were. Finding you gone, as I was tired, we sat down to rest ourselves, thinking you would soon be in. How is your rheumatism, this morning?"

"Easy as an old shoe. Tell Miss Lily her strawberry-pie was drefful nice, and I'm much obleeged. I've been to the house myself, but I didn't see her, as she wasn't down,—and I went on to the village for a leetle sugar and tea and a bit of smokin' tobaccy. She gives me money for that, reg'lar, Miss Lily does, though she can't abide the smell of it herself, bless her kind heart!"—rattling on with whatever came into her head to say, while she

darted furtive glances about the place to assure herself all was right.

I had to make a sudden retreat up the stairs when she hobbled directly to the door, at which I was playing the ignoble part of eaves-dropper, pretending that she wished to hang her hood and shawl inside. She saw me in my retreat, received my signal that all was right, closed the door again and began a gracious conversation with Miss Miller, to whom, usually, she said as little as possible.

"And is this the young gentleman as they say is engaged to Miss Lily?" I heard her ask, presently. "It's a blessed thing the poor child has a friend that can comfort her, and can support her, too, now that her property is all gone. She won't have a roof to cover her head many days longer, an' it seems like a stroke of Providence that she should be provided for beforehand, don't it, now?"

I leaned eagerly down to hear the reply, but a laugh from Arthur and a cough from his sister was all I heard. I knew that gram'me was playing a hypocritical part, for my benefit; it would have gone sorely against her inclinations to see Lillian mated with any one but me; but she guessed that I was wild with the desire to know if an actual engagement existed, and was trying to enlighten me. Her little ruse failed, and soon I heard the two bidding her good morning and going away.

"They're out o' sight now; but I'll jist shet and lock the door and pull down the curtain before you come down," she called, opening the stair-case door. "We shall smother, this warm day. Besides, some one might listen at our heyhole, as I did at this. Better leave the door wide, and keep a sentinel at the post," I responded, coming down. "Well, gram'me, what's the news?"

"Do you know, my heart was in my mouth when I heard talking and saw them two in here? I trembled so, I thought I should have to set down on the step. What are they about? Some mischief, I'll warrant! Did you hear anythin' they said, Doctor Joe?"

"Yes, a good deal. Nothing satisfactory, however. Just enough to convince me that I am not all wrong in my suspicions."

"Your face is as red as fire."

"I'm excited, gram'me. Besides, I had to stoop over, to look through the latch-hole. They said so much, it made me eager to hear more. But, what about my cousin? and Mrs. Meredith? and what is the news?"

"I can't never call her Mrs. Meredith," said the old woman, shaking her head. "That babyish little thing couldn't never take her place. She's sick this morning, they say—cried herself

into a fit o' sickness. Miss Lily, she's a waitin' on her, so I didn't speak with her myself. There never was nothin' more surprisin' than the way Miss Lily holds out. I 'spected she'd be the fust to break down. It's beautiful to see how bravely she bears her trouble, as sweet and patient as if her heart wasn't completely broke."

"Don't, don't," I said, the tears rushing into my eyes. "Oh, gram'me, it is too cruel that I am driven from her side at a time like this. I don't mind her suspecting me, hating me;—I only feel so sorry that I can not help her bear her misfortunes. I tell you truly, gram'me, if I believed Arthur Miller was true and noble, that he really loved her, and not the money he expected she would have—that he would step to her side like a man, care for her, provide for her, love her, marry her, I could joyfully see her his wife. All I desire is her happiness. But I distrust that man. Now that she is poor, he will forsake her. After winning her affections by the most devoted attentions, you will see, he will leave her in the hour of her sorrow. He spoke of returning to New York."

"Thank goodness, let him go; you ought to be happy, Doctor Joe, to get rid of him."

"But Lillian—she loves him—she will be so wretched!"

"If he goes, he won't deserve her, an' it will be better for her to be mis'able for a time, than for all her life. Mebbe he won't go."

"What did the servants say about the fright last night?"

"Oh, they said the Governess saw a ghost. They say she was dreffully scared. It was in the arbor; but when the men went to look they couldn't see nothin'. They asked her if it was *his* sperit she saw; she wouldn't tell, but they knew it was Dr. Meredith's ghost as couldn't rest in his grave on account of his bein' murdered. Cook says she wouldn't go into that garden at night for all the world,—nor one o' them servants wouldn't do it—not even Mike."

"All the better for me," I thought. "If they are all frightened away, I shall have the field to myself."

After the humble dinner, prepared by gram'me, she took her knitting and sat in the door, talking constantly, for her own amusement apparently, as she was neither hurt nor disconcerted by my silence. I heard no more of what she said than of the murmur of the stream that ran beneath the window; being intensely occupied with my own thoughts; and these were not satisfactory, for they brought me to no conclusion. I *had*, before the visit of those two to the cottage, arrived at a belief; but their conversation, instead of strengthen-

ing it, had thrown me back into doubt and confusion.

I took from the breast-pocket of my coat a handkerchief, which, I held in my hand and examined for the ten thousandth time, to reassure myself. It was a lady's handkerchief, a bit of hem-stitched cambric, smelling of patchouly,—at that time a new and favorite perfume,—which I had picked up from the floor of the laboratory on the afternoon of the day of Dr. Meredith's death. It lay underneath a tier of shelves along one of which were arranged bottles containing various highly concentrated acids, and two or three labeled "poison." In the cambric two small holes were burned, where a drop of acid had fallen. In one corner of the handkerchief was written the name of its owner—Annie Miller.

I had confided to no one the fact of my having found this handkerchief. I had heard, without change of countenance, Miss Miller and the servants inquiring for it, as if it were an article of some value. I knew that a dollar would buy a better one, yet I did not wonder that its owner felt troubled at its loss, and was trying to hunt it up.

I now stared at this handkerchief, mentally comparing the theory which I had adduced from it with the facts of the conversation I had overheard. They did not agree as I wished to have them. My theory had been that Miss Miller, aided and abetted by her brother, had first robbed Dr. Meredith of his gold, and then poisoned him. I believed that, taking advantage of his friendship, she had chosen the occasion of her approaching departure to ask him, playfully, to drink her health in parting, and had killed him while she smiled upon him.

My enmity to this woman gave me no excuse for accusing her of this horrible treachery and crime. I blamed myself for the conviction which had fastened upon me; and when I could not shake it off, I invented excuses for her, which should palliate her crime in my mind. I said to myself: "She did not murder him for his money; *that* would be too cold-blooded. Miss Miller is not cold-blooded—not avaricious. She is ambitious; she loves money because it confers power—and she loved the man she murdered. She killed him in a fierce paroxysm of jealousy. The shock which her pride and passion both received when he brought home his girl-wife affected her brain—rendered her, in a measure, insane,—and she committed the deed, urged by a wild frenzy of love for him and hate for her!" It was not quite so common, in those days, as it now is, for judge and jury to throw the veil of "insanity" over

every form of wickedness; but I, greatly as I had disliked Lillian's governess for the manner in which she had ignored me and my claims, misconstrued my motives, and constituted herself a spy upon my actions, could not bring myself to believe her guilty of this hideous sin, except under the impulse of a brain suddenly thrown from its balance.

Miss Miller was one of those women born to be a "queen of society." Poverty had deprived her of her empire, but the spirit of a ruler still was there, and I could understand and pity the crushing disappointment which must have been hers, when, after years of patient endurance, in the very flush and glow of anticipated triumph, she had found herself discrowned by a simple, clinging, timid girl. I could imagine the scorn with which she criticized the little Cuban wife—the hatred with which she viewed her pretty airs of fondness for a man whom she could no more appreciate than a fire-fly could measure a star.

I could picture her desperation at being driven out into the world to commence anew her dreary career as governess, after believing herself the mistress of Dr. Meredith's heart and home; and I could believe, that, urged by all this passion and fury of humiliation, disappointment, despair, and anger,—she had committed, in a wild hour of temptation, a deed for which a life of remorse must be the return.

I *had* believed this; and farther, that her brother had suggested the previous robbery, in which she had acquiesced, not only to gratify him, but to complete her revenge upon the young wife, by leaving her helpless and penniless, without friends or relatives, a stranger in a strange land, in absolute poverty, and with no resources by which she could help herself.

As for Arthur Miller, there was no reservation in my condemnation of him, and yet I did not believe that he was a party to the murder. He was too cowardly for that. Nothing so bold and decisive ever was accomplished by him. No; he had nothing to do with the death of Dr. Meredith; but I had firmly believed that the box of gold was in his possession, or concealed where he knew of it.

Now, as I pondered the conversation I had overheard, I felt that neither of them had any certain knowledge of the lost treasure. Miss Miller had boasted of a key; but it was evident that they, like myself, were vainly searching for the missing box. Neither did there appear to be any hint of the awful guilt which I attributed to her, in Miss Miller's words,—nor in her brother's, save in that brutal jest about the prussic-acid.

Thus, the more I pondered the less certain I

became of all my previous impressions; only by staring at the two holes burned in the handkerchief could I retain my suspicion of Miss Miller.

## CHAPTER VII.

### TWO GLEAMS OF LIGHT.

A week passed, during which I was shut, by day, in my voluntary prison, and by night roamed restlessly in the vicinity of Meredith Place,—a long, intolerable week,—for I made no progress in my investigations, while my confinement to the cottage, without books or other society than gram'me's, was extremely irksome.

The only thing which relieved the monotony of these days, was gram'me's visits to the mansion and the village, from which she would return with such gossip as she could glean.

One day it was that Lillian was engaged to Arthur Miller, and that he was urging her to a speedy marriage, saying that her friends would overlook haste in consideration of the need which beset her of a home and protector. Another: it was reported that I had been seen and arrested by the police, in Philadelphia or Baltimore, and was to be brought back to Hampton the following day. Again: Lillian had refused Arthur Miller, and had declared her intention of opening a small school, so soon as she felt herself able to resume any regular duties. Still again: that a ghost haunted the woods of Meredith Place, and more especially the garden. It was said to be the spirit of the Doctor, wandering about in search of the lost treasure. Now, it was said I had gone to Europe to spend my ill-gotten fortune; then, that I was hiding in New York; but never that I was in the vicinity of Hampton.

At the end of a week Gram'me Hooker came in, crying, from a visit to the house.

"To-morrow's the day of the sale," she said, in explanation.

"What will Lillian do?" I cried, wringing my hands together, as I walked up and down the narrow room like a caged panther. "Oh, how cruel it is that her only relative, her best friend, can not help her in this emergency! I am tied, hand and foot. Worse! she regards me as her enemy,—as a brute, a monster!"

"No, no," interposed gram'me, "she don't, Doctor Joe. I never heard her speak ill o' you. They try to make her, but she won't."

"Oh, if I dared to see her, gram'me! Do you think it would be imprudent to bring her here to see me? I could tell her how I mean to work for her and Inez, as soon as I can get away to a place of safety!—how I only remain here in the hope of discovering the gold of which she has been robbed, that I may have

the happiness of restoring it to her!—that I will find out the meaning of her father's message! or, if I fail, then I am ready to earn a living, somewhere, away from my enemies,—for her, if she needs it; or, if Arthur Miller has already provided for her future, then, for poor Inez." I spoke with rapid passionateness; but gram'me shook her head.

"I shan't risk it, Doctor Joe. If they should get hold o' you, they wouldn't show you a bit o' mercy. The more folks talks and goes on, the more excited they gits. A lynchin' is the least you may expect, if it gits out you're anywhere around. I tremble night an' day, at every sound. You *must* be keeful;—an' if you'll take my advice, you'll quit these parts this very night."

"Not I! Not until I have done all that can be done at present. If they discover me they can only hang me. That will hurt them worse than it will me. How I despise that selfish vagabond!" I was thinking of Arthur Miller again. "Since she has no fortune, he leaves my poor darling to her fate!—and she loves him—I know she loves him!"—and here I forgot my panther promenade, and dropped into a chair to dream over the last time I saw them together, alone, standing at the gate in the rosy light of sunset, her face upturned to his with a smile,—it was the evening before the tragedy,—and he had taken her little hand from the head of the stone lion, and pressed it, while I had shut my eyes and stumbled blindly into the hall.

"I have gained nothing at all by hanging about the grounds," I resumed, when the vision passed away; "to-night I shall enter the house; I want to examine the library once more."

"Oh, don't!" cried gram'me, too overcome at my audacity to say more.

"But I must. You know Tiger does not bark at me; and I know every door and window so thoroughly. Besides," with a smile, "if I should encounter any one, I can assume my character as ghost."

"If they should find you, poking about where you didn't belong, it would be evidence against you, don't you see!"

"Yes, yes, I see! But I am resolved upon the risk. You need not keep one eye open for me to-night. I shall take care of myself."

I went out, shortly after dark. As far as I could ascertain from Gram'me Hooker's unsatisfactory reports, it was not decided what Inez and Lillian would do after the place was sold over their heads. Miss Miller had kindly remained with them, much to her own inconvenience (!) thus far, but she was to go, the day after the sale. Arthur still was practicing

law in Hampton, and swearing every day, with a laughing oath, that he would like no better case with which to advance his legal career than the defense of a scoundrel like Joe Meredith. If Joe was ever arrested he should at once offer himself as his counsel! Fearing that Lillian might go away with Miss Miller, or something occur by which I should not see her for a long time, I went out early with the hope of catching a glimpse of her face or form if I hung around the shrubberies and porches of the old house.

This the intense darkness made it easy for me to do. There was no moon, and the stars were hidden by sultry clouds which hung low, promising rain. As familiar as the wood had grown to me, at this time, it was with difficulty that I stumbled through it, and came, by an open field, into the grounds which more nearly surrounded the old stone mansion. There were lights in the parlor, and I ventured, after reconnoitering for a time, to approach a window, and look through a curtain of honeysuckle, directly into the room. The first person I saw was Inez, Mrs. Meredith, lolling back in an easy-chair, her black garments falling about her slight form in heavy folds, as her black hair fell about her pale face; her eye-lashes rested on her cheeks as if she slept, and the hands dropped listlessly upon her knee did not stir. Like a child, she had wept herself to sleep. Presently I became aware that Lillian and Miss Miller were walking up and down the long room; the governess had her arm about her pupil's waist, who was listening to her with a look which I could not translate, but it seemed to me, of wonder and incredulity.

"Have you never had any reason to think that Inez, herself, in a freak of jealousy or anger—these Spaniards are so passionate, and so unprincipled—" spoke Miss Miller in a low voice, as both paused close by the window at which I stood.

"Oh, impossible. You do not know how she loved him,—so grateful! so fond of poor papa; and she did not know the use of such things,—don't you see?"

"She is ignorant enough, if that be all," sneered the governess. Forget what I have said, Lillian. You know we are *all* under a cloud, liable to suspicion—even *me*, or you, or any one. I meant nothing in particular."

Lillian made no response, and they moved on; when they returned Miss Miller was saying—"He loves you, ardently, but you are both too poor to marry now. My brother has his way to make, and dare not venture further responsibility until—"

"Thank God for that!" I breathed, as the

two again passed from hearing. It was like a reprieve to a condemned man. I had not heard my cousin's reply, nor seen the expression of her face; I knew not but that she might be unhappy and disappointed, but for me, it was joy to feel that she was not too quickly to become the wife of that man whom I detested. I forgot that I had said that for *her* sake I wished she might be happily married.

I felt my face flame up at the touch of the night-wind as I recalled Miss Miller's attempt to still further injure and destroy poor Inez, by creating a cruel suspicion of her in the heart of her only friend. This seemed the most malignant thing I had known of all her conduct—only that still-bitter jealousy could in the least excuse it, for I felt that the governess did not believe her own words.

"If she is so wicked as that, I have no reason to spare *her*," I thought, with a resolve to make the most of the slight evidences in my keeping.

Presently Mrs. Meredith awoke with a start, and a little cry. Lillian ran to her side and kissed her; there was a brief interval while the three talked together, and then all, ringing for bedroom candles, took their way up-stairs. At the door my cousin paused, looking mournfully about the room—at the pictures on the wall, the piano, the ornaments on the table, even the well-worn carpet.

"Ah, to-morrow these will belong to some stranger! To-morrow night we shall have no home, Inez! But, you do not love this place as I do. I was born here; I am a part of it; my mother died here, my fa—" a sudden sob choked her, and she fled up the stair-case.

"If there is a God of justice who will accept my vows, I swear to never rest from my self-appointed task until Meredith Place is again yours, cousin Lillian," I murmured,—but she, whom I fain would have comforted, heard me not.

I wandered about the well-known paths, secure in the stifling darkness, until, one by one, the lights went out in the old mansion. I could tell when the servants were in bed, when Inez had turned down her lamp to a faint spark, when the light vanished from Lillian's casement, and there was only a dim gleam from the window of Miss Miller's apartment. I supposed that Lillian slept with the governess from what I had overheard at the cottage.

Soon after the household were in bed I attempted the venturesome task of entering the house. I wished to examine again the library, hoping to find some drawer, or case, some scrap of paper, something which would aid me in interpreting the meaning of the

figure eight. It might be the number of a paper, the page of an account-book, the number of a drawer or desk—and, although I had previously thus applied it to every imaginable article, I longed to make one more trial.

It gave me a curious sensation to be thus approaching my uncle's house, like a thief in the night. A spectator might have been justified in thinking me bent on some unlawful errand, had there been one to watch my course that night. But, the darkness was favorable to me. Indeed, I should have had more difficulty than I encountered, were it not for occasional flashes of heat-lightning, which enabled me to grope my way to the points at which I aimed.

I guessed rightly that terror of ghosts and murderers would make the servants very careful about fastening up the house. Every door was locked, and all the lower windows secured.

While I stood hesitating what course to pursue to effect a noiseless entrance, a ray of light suddenly shot out from one of those lower windows which previously had been quite dark. For a moment I was startled, the light had appeared so unexpectedly, when I believed the whole house to be wrapped in slumber. The next instant all my senses were alert.

I was not the only "spook" who haunted Meredith Place, that was evident!

The window from which the light streamed belonged to my uncle's laboratory; it was on the ground floor, and adjoined the library. There was no door of communication between the two rooms, but access could be had from one to the other by stepping out into the hall. There was a broken sash to one of the shutters, and at this I took my post of observation. It commanded a good view of the interior. As I expected, I saw Miss Miller, standing, with a lamp in her hand; she was in her night-dress,—I could not tell whether or not in a somnambulist state.

Holding the lamp aloft she slowly turned, surveying every side of the room: the light was in her left hand; in her right she carried a key, and as she raised it as if to give it a careful examination, I saw that it was of curious construction. From the color I took it to be silver, of medium size and singular shape. I had seen that key once before. After completing her survey of the apartment, Miss Miller tried the locks of all the drawers and compartments, and these were many, for the laboratory was full of nooks and corners, as might be expected of a room used for such purposes. The larger number of drawers were open to observation; such as were fastened the key would not unlock. There was a little old-fashioned cupboard built high up in the wall. Miss Miller had to climb up into a chair to reach it. She



took her lamp with her, examining its recesses; she appeared to find something of interest—a cupboard within a cupboard—probably a hiding-place for the silver spoons of the first Merediths, before the wing had been added to the house, and when this was the dining-room. But the secret compartment now contained nothing of value; and descending from the chair she set her lamp on the table, walking about in a restless manner. First she paused before the black mouth of the little furnace where she had so often tended the golden fires with him. All was dark and cold, as seemed this woman's lot.

Then she stood beside the shelves on which were arranged the poisons and other dangerous compounds. I could see her distinctly now, for she was not three feet from me. She remained here several moments. As you may have noticed a storm gather swiftly and silently in the west, black, rolling clouds and brooding winds, so a tempest gathered in her face. I always had known her to be a woman of immense force of character; but the convulsion of passion which seemed about to rend her being, fairly awed and made me tremble. I saw now, that this was no sleep-walker. She stood there gazing at bottles and jars with their warning labels. The one marked prussic-acid had been taken away since the day of the accident. The sight of its vacant place was enough to shake her soul. I saw the long shudders begin in her chest and run to her feet; her interlocked fingers grew purple with their pressure upon one another; the expression of her face was dreadful;—then she bent, as if weighed down by some invisible pressure; fell on her knees, her shoulders drooping as if that unseen weight was crushing her;—her face was almost against the floor, her magnificent long black hair trailed over it. It was a spectacle of awful emotion upon which I felt that I had no right to gaze, yet I could not withdraw my eyes. Which passion predominated? grief or remorse? Of course, with my prejudiced judgment, I said that it was remorse. Yet I felt deep compassion for her—that I ought to leave the agonized soul alone with its Maker.

I withdrew from my post of observation. Let those who read these confessions not set me down as naturally deficient in honor or truth, that I assumed, so often, the character of spy and eaves-dropper. As it is necessary, in times of war, for some one to undertake these odious duties, it behooved me, by any means at my command, to trace the guilty in order that I might relieve the innocent. My grief at the manner in which my uncle had been snatched from the fruition of his labors incited me to vengeance, while my interest in Lillian would

not allow me to rest so long as there was the faintest hope that her patrimony could be restored to her. However, that night, I felt no longer any desire to enter the house. I might have done so by climbing the back porch and entering by an upper window which stood wide open; but I was so subdued by the misery I had witnessed that I had not spirit left for the enterprise.

By this time, the thunder-storm which had been gathering for hours in the sultry air, was ready for active operations. The first scattering outriders of the rain came galloping on; the flash and roar of artillery was seen and heard in the distance. This war of the elements just suited me; fevered and excited as I was I rather craved the threatened drenching, and I walked up and down the gravel path beside the mansion, Tiger marching silently by my side. The dog stood higher in my confidence than any human being. He always was with me in my midnight prowlings, assuring me of his sympathy by an occasional touch of his nose against my hand.

It was probably not later than eleven o'clock when the scene in the laboratory transpired. I remained in the garden until the light disappeared, shone a moment in the upper hall, and again went out.

Still restless, feeling as if I could not endure the close air of Gram'me Hooker's garret, I continued to wander about, reaching presently the little side-gate which admitted foot-passengers to the grounds. A flash of lightning showed me the forms of two persons standing, one on either side the gate. I immediately stepped behind an evergreen, whose branches reached to the ground, completely concealing me, made Tiger crouch by my side, and waited for another flash to reveal who these persons were. I thought of Ellen, the chambermaid, a pretty girl who had more than one beau in the vicinity; but all these had grown so afraid of "spirits" as no longer to be guilty of keeping late hours.

"Arthur Miller," I said to myself, as a voice, gaily expostulating, broke in on the low murmur of the other. Who was that other? Lillian—of course, Lillian! She was engaged to him, and had a right to walk with him to the gate, to say farewell! But I did not know that he had been a visitor at the house that evening, and I did know that my cousin had gone, or pretended to go, to her room, nearly two hours ago. Perhaps it was only the sister speaking with her brother. Miss Miller was going away the following day, and doubtless had things to say to Arthur which concerned only themselves.

I waited impatiently for the lightning again to hold its flickering lamp. As if to gratify my

necessity, there came a succession of tremulous gleams, one melting into another, making a brief day of that midnight darkness. Every leaf and rain-drop grew distinct. I saw the handsome, insincere face of Arthur Miller, looking curiously pale or green in the livid light,—and I saw another face upturned to his, smiling, flushed, with parted lips glowing as if they had just been kissed—a fair face—a young face—but not Lillian's:—I almost wished that it was!

"You are getting wet—you will take cold. Good-bye for to-night, I will see you again soon—to-morrow—every day! How delicious the roses are to-night,—or is it your breath? who can tell? Take care of yourself, and again—good night."

"Adieu, señor; pleasant dreams."

The next moment the black folds of her mourning garments touched me as she went by.

"Ah, you bad dog, you surprise me," she cried, under her breath, as her hand came in contact with Tiger's damp coat, who trotted away by her side.

Yes, there could be no mistake! The woman who met Arthur Miller, alone, and at an unreasonable hour, was Inez, the widow of a month; for whose sad fate as orphan, exile, and widow, hundreds of eyes daily grew dim with sympathy. If I had seen a sweet babe rise from its cradle, with all the passions and disfigurements of mature life suddenly stamped upon its face, I should not have been more astonished.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### IN A NEW CHARACTER.

In our quiet village there was little speculation in real estate; the crowd in attendance at the sale of Meredith Place was large, but the bidding was tame, and the old homestead was finally bought in by the creditor who held the largest claims against the estate, at a sum much below its value. He took the property because he got it for two-thirds its worth; but he would gladly sell it at the first fair offer, and, in the meantime, felt something as if he had an elephant on his hands. All the well-to-do people of Hampton had places of their own; no strangers were coming in, just then, and the poorer class, who rented houses, did not wish so expensive an establishment. The new owner decided to advertise it in the New York papers as for rent for the remainder of the summer, or for sale as a country-seat. He did so; but kindly insisted upon Mrs. and Miss Meredith remaining until the place was let. This they were glad to do, as their plans were not yet fully arranged.

It was Lillian's intention to open a private

school. She had reserved her piano from the sale, that she might be able to give lessons on it. Inez was to give instruction in vocal music and on the guitar.

They were looking about for a suitable house; one small enough to match their purses, yet with a room which could be spared to the prospective pupils. Lillian went about with a subscription paper securing the names of her pupils. I heard all this through Gram'me Hooker, and was obliged to submit to it. Lillian soliciting pupils! I should as soon think of two humming-birds settling themselves to teaching, as of her and Inez bound down to onerous duties. Yet I gave Lillian credit for real strength of character and for unusual intelligence. I knew that she acted from a sense of duty; that no hero ever displayed more bravery than she in the manner in which she had borne the events of this terrible summer.

Miss Miller had returned to the city; her brother continued, for the present, the practice of the law in Hampton,—at least his "shingle" hung over his office-door, and he sat within and smoked choice cigars.

I should have been away—had designed to be, ere this,—away in some Western city, where, under an assumed name, I hoped to earn money by honest toil, which I could send to my cousin. I sometimes smiled when I thought of her as a teacher, consoling myself with the thought that her experience would be brief, for, my life was devoted to her! I should not work without returns; and all that I had should be hers. I would find means to convey it to her.

In the meantime I made the best use I could of my enforced idleness, by frequent intrusions into the library, from whence I supplied myself with books, which served both to increase my stock of knowledge and to fill up the wearisome pauses in the play of life.

I could not always have escaped unnoticed from these marauding expeditions, for the most absurd stories circulated in the vicinity concerning the ghost which haunted the garden and the house, at Meredith Place. This restless spirit was thought to prefer the arbor and the library as its haunting-places. It was no delusion of the ignorant;—intelligent people had laid in wait for it, and seen it. It visited, most frequently, the scene of the murder. Books had been placed in certain positions, and marked; and had been found, in the morning, to have been displaced, sometimes actually disappearing. These were sure to be the Doctor's favorite authors. Hence, some formed the theory that disembodied spirits are not above the use of material means for their intellectual amusement or improvement.

All this impressed upon me the necessity for being more cautious in my movements. By this time active search for me had ceased. The police of the various cities had a written description of my person and habits, and were instructed, generally, to be on the look-out for as heartless a scoundrel and bold a criminal as ever eluded their arts.

What I wondered at was, that the two girls,—for what more than a child was Inez?—should have the courage to remain in that lonely place, after Miss Miller was gone, and all the servants dismissed but one elderly woman, who had served the first Mrs. Meredith, and who would not desert her daughter, if she worked without other reward than love. It was a small household to fill so large a place; but courage was one of the new virtues which Lillian was developing.

"What should we fear?" she asked Gram'me Hooker, when spoken to on the subject; "every one knows that we have scarcely money enough to buy our daily bread,—so we shall not be troubled by robbers. As to the ghosts, gram'me, I tell you, truly, if I thought my dear father still visited the place which was so dear to him while he lived, it would only add another and deeper charm to it. I was not afraid of him in life, why should I be in death?"—then she burst into tears; and gram'me wept in telling me of it.

They were not entirely without friends, these two lonely children: people who had long known and respected Dr. Meredith were anxious to manifest sympathy to his family; but the young folks of the village did not feel at liberty to intrude their gay company upon the mourners, so that Arthur Miller was almost the only young gentleman who visited at Meredith Place. He spent nearly every evening of the week there; so that it came to be a settled belief that he and Lillian were engaged.

But I have not told why it was that I still lingered and skulked about this spot, instead of making a bold effort for liberty and work. I was engaged in a study so absorbing as, for the time being, to leave me no choice of action. Others might not have judged Mrs. Meredith so severely, but to me there was something appalling in the fact that she had already engaged in a flirtation with a young gentleman. Since that night of the thunder-storm I had asked myself many painful questions as to the imprudence of my uncle marrying this young stranger, and bringing her into his family. He was a man most easily imposed upon by any one who had a fair face or an innocent look,—he revered women—as well he might have done had they all been like Lillian's mother—and did not look for duplicity or

baseness in them. Spanish women, as a rule, were not notoriously good; this pretty Cuban girl had never been trained, in all probability, to the practice of those high and stern principles of honor and right which were regarded as the natural heritage of my countrywomen.

I soon satisfied myself that Arthur Miller's visits were for Inez, not for Lillian; it was by her side he sat; to her he read; to her he brought flowers; her music that he turned, when, occasionally, she would sing one or two Spanish songs. Lillian must be aware of his desertion:—was it adding the last drop to her overflowing trouble? I could not decide. She was always so sad, so quiet in the dignity of her sorrow, that even I, who knew her so well, could not tell how much notice she took of the little drama being played in her presence. Sometimes the whole three came to Gram'me Hooker's cottage, in the course of an afternoon stroll—Lillian always sad, patient, waiting on the movement of the others,—Arthur gallant, gay, Inez leaning on his arm, turning her great black eyes to his, calling upon him for a hundred little attentions. I could see them from my hiding-place. Inez' manner was that of a petulant, spoiled child. I could not make up my mind that there was anything bad in her. She seemed to me impulsive, selfish, fond, timid, accustomed to self-indulgence. I believed that her imprudent and heartless conduct was the result of untrained feelings always allowed to run riot. She found grief wearisome, solitude oppressive, and threw off both to bask in that sunshine of gay society which her shallow nature craved. Ah! what a pity that Dr. Meredith had taken this butterfly to his bosom, who could flaunt her airy wings as brightly as ever before a single flower could spring on his grave!—what a pity that my cousin should be condemned to such companionship! I saw then that it might have been better for her, and for all concerned, if my uncle had married that other woman who had loved him with a passion which mocked the foolish fondness of this young thing, and who would have been a counselor and support to Lillian in this crisis of her experience.

About the first of August, a gentleman came out from the city to look at Meredith Place; was delighted with it, and at once engaged it until the first of November. I did not know, until his family arrived, that Miss Miller was a member of it. She had gone to Mr. Chateaubriand's as a governess immediately upon leaving Hampton; and it was she who induced that gentleman to look at Meredith Place when her physicians ordered his wife away from the sea-air.

Whether Miss Miller wished to be near her brother, or to look after the welfare of her former pupil, or whether she had interests of her own to serve, no one save herself knew. Here she was; and here was the old mansion, so gloomy and silent, so overshadowed by a dark tragedy, suddenly transformed into a scene of incessant gayety, life, and festivity. My poor Lily was driven forth into the world. Quite ready to go, she declared herself anxious to begin her career as a day laborer. Mrs. Chateaubriand, who knew her history from Miss Miller, and who was wealthy enough to gratify all her pretty fancies of this kind, insisted that neither Lillian nor Inez should stir from under that roof as long as her family remained; she would be only too glad to have them for visitors, in that secluded village,—the house had many vacant rooms, and they must help to fill it;—all this so prettily and urgently said, that Inez was delighted, and wished to accept the offered hospitality. When Lillian positively, but most gratefully, declined,—“Let me stay, then,” pleaded Inez; “you know I can never earn my own living.”

“Then I will earn it for you—for both of us, dear Inez,” said Lillian. And her companion yielded, as usual, to the stronger will, though not without petulance and a full complement of tears.

A kind neighbor assisted Miss Meredith to move her few household goods and gods to the small dwelling just out of the main street of Hampton, where she was to set up her new Lares and Penates. She was not to open school until the middle of September, so that she had ample time to arrange her tiny household, and to look over her old school-books with a view to some practical use of the knowledge she had gained from them. Urged by me, Gram'me Hooker made her almost daily visits; if they were tedious inflictions, my cousin may now set it down to my account; I was selfish—I could not live without some hint of how my darling fared from day to day. I inferred that Inez was a great drag upon Lillian, instead of an assistant; that she was homesick, wanted to return to Cuba, wanted to visit Mrs. Chateaubriand, wanted to have more company, to go out more,—everything, in short, but to really make herself useful, or patiently to bear the hard circumstances which had come upon her.

Meredith Place was a scene of long-continued gayety. Although its present mistress was something of an invalid, she was accustomed to see a great deal of company; she had two beautiful daughters, of an age to go into society, and there was a constant coming and going of friends from the city. Fashionably-dressed

young ladies promenaded the prim old walks; foppish gentlemen made bouquets for them out of the old-fashioned flowers—even flowers may be in and out of style! Any quantity of flirting was going on in the arbor; the music of a grand piano shook the honeysuckles at the windows at all hours of the day and nearly all of the night; the stables were full of horses; glittering carriages dashed about the drives; silver and cut-glass shone in the dining-room; the novels of the day lay carelessly on the very table where my uncle, in dying, had left that illegible scrawl.

Little room, now, for ghosts to haunt the old place! The laboratory remained the least changed of any of the rooms,—there was little in it to interest these gay idlers, and as the room was not required for other purposes, it was allowed to stand as it was left,—the retorts, the crucibles, the furnace, all the little instruments and chemicals, idle now, with the dust gathering over them from week to week.

In the midst of this excitement Miss Miller led a secluded life. She had taken her place in this fashionable family simply as the governess of the three younger children; she made no attempt to gain unusual privileges; instead, she shrank from having her accomplishments displayed for the pleasure or amusement of these summer idlers. When she was not in the school-room, she sat in her chamber, or walked alone through the garden and woods. Many an evening I saw her sit for hours, immovable, her head leaning against the casement of her window.

Sometimes her brother Arthur called to see her. He was always welcomed by the ladies of the house. He knew how to make himself attractive; the Misses Chateaubriand, like all well-trained flirts, never had a superabundance of cavaliers,—“all was fish which came to their nets,” in the way of gentlemen attendants, where morning-parties and picnics, as well as evening gatherings, were the order of the season. A young man like this, graceful, self-possessed, toned down by the amenities of civilized life to a respectable figure, was likely to be doubly appreciated in the country. That his sister was their sister's governess made no especial difference with this appreciation on the part of the young ladies, since the young gentleman was “only for the summer,” and not for “all time.”

I had a good view of the elder Miss Chateaubriand a few days after her arrival. I was perched among the branches of a hickory tree, across the way from Gram'me Hooker's house. It was a retired place, and had the advantage of being more airy than my garret; I changed to it for variety, and many had been

the hours I had spent in that "leafy and murmurous" chamber. As I say, I was perched in my secluded tower, with a book for company, when a party of ladies and gentlemen came trooping out of a narrow bridle-path which they had followed, idly, to find whither it would lead. They were in high spirits, laughing, singing, and jesting, as they passed along. I thought some of the girls very pretty as their ponies ambled by, but when Miss Chateaubriand (as I heard her escort address her), brought up the rear, all the other figures and faces seemed tame in comparison with hers. She was one of those women who look well on horseback; tall, of full figure, with a slender, supple waist; her black velvet riding hat and plume contrasted with the bright gold of her braided hair; her eyes were a very dark blue, looking black at times under the shelter of lashes and brows many shades darker than her hair. She was undeniably handsome, yet there was more in her superb manners and witty conversation than in her beauty, to attract and fascinate her companions. All this, of course, I did not discover, during my brief observation as she passed by; but I, like others, was dazzled at the first glance.

I saw what gentleman of the party elected himself her escort, kept nearest to her side, bent oftenest to listen or to speak. It was Arthur Miller; nothing less could be expected of his time-serving and capricious nature, but that he should be in the suite of the newest beauty and most promising heiress. I felt at once that the inmates of the white cottage would see but little of him the remainder of the summer.

Here let me remark that much of what I have to relate did not pass in my presence, and was not known to me at the time; many things came to me afterwards in the course of explanations and repetitions, which ensued before the drama of which I am the historian reached its denouement.

The village talked much of Miss Chateaubriand's popularity; her less brilliant but pretty sister, Sophie, was also well liked; soon there was gossip about Arthur Miller, in connection with them. It was remarked that he was neglecting Lillian Meredith, and that it was not to be taken for granted that it was his sister who called him so frequently to the old homestead.

No one suspected who it was who felt most keenly his growing neglect; that is, no one save I and perhaps one other. Miss Miller had not returned to Hampton without an object. It might seem natural enough that she should think of recommending Meredith Place to her employers; I alone thought it singular that she should be willing

to return under such circumstances, and at once set myself to find out what her object was. I made up my mind that she was watching some one; that she, too, was playing the part of spy, and I was not long in determining that both of us kept in view the same person.

Once had I confronted Miss Miller, as several times I had felt urged to do, I should have pointed my finger at her, and said: "Thou art the woman!" Now I was divided in my opinion, racked by contrary theories, absolutely laughed at by conflicting facts.

About the first of October the Chateaubriands gave an evening entertainment of a more pretentious character than usual. The house was filled with guests from the city, and all their acquaintances in and about Hampton were invited. There was to be dancing in the upper hall, with music by the two colored fiddlers which our village boasted. Gram'me Hooker told me that the housekeeper had inquired of her where she could engage an extra couple of waiters whom they should want on the evening of the ball. A rash desire took possession of me. I was so completely tired of my summer's restrictions that it seemed to me that I must have a change of some kind. I wanted to see those persons together whom I had watched from a distance—to have them immediately under my eye, acting in concert and unaware of my vicinity. I resolved that I would go to the ball. I felt assured that I could act the character of a mulatto waiter and escape recognition. I was so mad to go that I was willing to incur all risks. I told gram'me to report to the housekeeper that she had secured one waiter, who would be promptly at his post in time to receive her instructions on the night of the party.

Sheep strayed at pasture in the woods of Meredith Place. There was one black fellow in the flock, and I think I may take to myself credit for the ingenuity with which I converted a portion of his fleece into a wig, and a mustache of which the most dandified Adonis of the colored race need not have been ashamed. Gram'me Hooker lent a large red silk handkerchief, which I metamorphosed into a flaming cravat; the walnut trees gave the wherewithal to dye my skin a handsome brown.

When I dressed myself for my part in the evening's drama, I did not smile at my ridiculous figure; I never felt more solemn, more sad, than when I set out upon my adventure. This was no farce, but an awful reality in which I was engaged. I might pay with liberty and life for my hardihood in running the risk of detection, but this was not what I thought of.

I was to see Lillian; to have the sweet priv-



ilege of watching her, hour after hour; of stealing near to her unaware. I should hear her voice, meet the glance of her eye, her sable garments might sweep across my feet, perchance, for I should certainly put myself in her way. I knew that she would attend the party, and the reason why. Inez had insisted upon accepting the urgent invitation which they had personally received. Mrs. Chateaubriand herself had come to them and said that they need not dance, nor sing, nor play, nor in any way make themselves prominent; but she would love to have them come and look on; they should have a quiet corner—it would do them good, etc., etc. Lillian had refused, with that gentle firmness which was one of her most admirable qualities; but, after their visitor had departed, Inez had burst into tears, stamped her foot on the floor, and declared that *she* would, and should, and must go—she could not endure this sort of life any longer. Then my cousin, thinking it wiser to cover the imprudence of her father's widow by keeping her company, consented to go for a few hours if Inez would be very quiet and be sure to refuse all attentions of the gentlemen. Poor Lily! she already had accepted her place as mentor and guardian of one who should have been *her* adviser and protector.

As I was reporting myself to the housekeeper, on the important evening, Miss Miller came into the dining-room for a glass of water. She wore the velvet dress which she had had prepared for that other never-to-be-forgotten occasion, but the jewels were foregone, except a small brooch. She looked pale, almost haggard, ten years older than on that April day when she had bloomed into a second girlhood in anticipation of meeting the man she loved. I think she was ill and agitated; her hand trembled as she took the glass, which I hastened to hand her from the salver. I always did things audaciously, by bold strokes of impulse. I was willing to test my disguise then and there; for I had reason to believe that if *her* sharp eyes did not detect it I need fear no other. She did start, when, on returning the glass, she looked at me as she said, "thank you!" but I inferred that the thought or suspicion which might have momentarily occurred to her as speedily passed away. I forgot that others might be as subtle as myself, or have their own reasons for keeping the peace.

Supper was not to be served until eleven o'clock; but I had opportunities for observation. I hung about the halls and doors after the manner of colored waiters when they have nothing else to do, and was very attentive to the wants of the guests.

I saw Lillian sitting by a table in the parlor, turning over a book of engravings. Many came and spoke with her, and she answered them all in a low voice, with a faint smile, and hardly lifting her eyes. I knew that she was trying to keep from crying. What a young thing she was to be so desolate! Only seventeen, and looking so childish with her floating curls and fair forehead. How heavy and unnatural was that black dress on one who had always worn pink and blue and white! My heart throbbed so that I thought the people about me must hear it; and I went away, only to come back again and gaze as before. Inez stood near, her cheeks crimson and her dark Southern eyes blazing with excitement. I could see her little foot patting the floor to the music of the violins; but she refused the few offers which were made her to be taken to the ball-room. The larger part of the company were up-stairs; she grew restless as she found her companions deserting her.

"I promised you not to dance," she said, when they were almost alone, to Lillian, "and I will not. But I would like to go up and look at them. Arthur Miller is there."

"Come, then, I will go with you," said my cousin, speaking as to a child whom she must indulge in order to avoid a scene, and the two passed out. I manufactured an errand which answered my purpose; making my way to the head of the hall, I spoke to one of the musicians, then leaned against the stand and looked on at the dance. Opposite me, in the first set, stood Miss Chateaubriand and Arthur Miller. Both were looking their best, danced superbly, and were very animated. Lillian and Inez were on a sofa near by. I was curious to note how they regarded the scene before them. My cousin was as calm, as sad as ever; but Inez' eyes burned with an intolerable light. Her gaze never swerved from that gay couple, following their motions, even the movement of their lips, with a fiery glance, betraying the smoldering fury within. Jealous! yes; almost beyond control. I wondered that Miller did not feel her eyes scorch him. He noticed her after a time, and was not quite so easy in his gallantries after that; as soon as that dance was over, he came to the sofa and bent over Inez:

"I am so sorry you can not dance," he said.

"So am I."

"I am sure you dance beautifully; I have heard of the grace of you Southern ladies."

"Not so well as Miss Chateaubriand."

"Perhaps not," he answered, laughing; "I will not swear to either until I see you dance."

"Si!" she suddenly hissed between her shut



teeth; "but beware! it is dangerous to trifle with me!"

Both spoke so low they did not expect to be heard by others, and were probably entirely oblivious of the colored servant leaning near by.

"I know you are dangerous," he returned, coolly—"there are those who have had experience of that."

She grew white, and red, and white again; her hand closed over the arm of the sofa, the flashing eyes fell. He continued:

"Don't make yourself disagreeable, Inez; you ought to be willing I should enjoy myself."

"No, no—not without me!" she whispered, passionately. "I'm not good, like *her*," motioning towards Lillian; "I can not bear neglect—it sets my blood on fire. If you dance with that girl again I shall be angry. I tell you I can not but be jealous." Her syllables, broken by the difficulty with which she spoke our language, were soft and pleading; her resentment was merged for the time in anxiety.

"I like to see you jealous—it makes your eyes so bright," and with a smile, half mocking, half careless, he bowed and went away. The very next five minutes he was floating by in the waltz with Miss Chateaubriand, and his laughing eyes met the fixed gaze of Inez, as the pair whirled deliciously on in a glamour of perfumes, lights, and music, which mingled together as they moved.

## CHAPTER IX.

### CARTE AND COUNTER CARTE.

It was near eleven o'clock, and I went down to the supper-room. For the next hour I was busied with my legitimate duties. I saw Miss Miller and Inez standing together, waited upon by Arthur, who seemed to have repented of his up-stairs flirtation.

Lillian was not in the supper-room at all. As soon as the first bustle was over, my desire to know where she was induced me to forsake my post and go out along the halls. Presently I found her in the library, which was entirely deserted save by her. Her head was bowed upon the table; large tears welled and dropped in silence from her eyes. I struggled then with the fierce desire to betray myself to her, to tell her how I pitied her, to kiss away those mournful tears; but I was not certain that, should I disclose myself, she would not shrink from me in horror. I went back and secured a salver, which I filled with the choicest delicacies of the feast, and brought and placed on the table by her side.

"O! not here," she said, looking up quickly, "you do not know;—I could not eat here.

Thank you, waiter," she added, as if afraid she had hurt my feelings by refusing.

I took the food away, angry with myself at my blunder.

Presently, the three in whom I was most interested left the supper-room in search of Lillian. I was in the butler's pantry, from which a small slatted window opened on the back porch, and I saw, through the slats, Inez and Arthur walking in the porch. Her voice was so loud as to make me fear that she would be overheard by strangers; then she stopped abruptly in her walk, turned upon him, and struck him in the face. He attempted to soothe her, but she grew more and more excited. I was impressed with the painful absurdity of her conduct; she might have reason for anger, but this was not *our* woman's way of showing it. Finally her companion turned his back upon her, tired of attempting to parry her accusations. Something flashed in her hand, but a firm grasp seized her arm, and Miss Miller's voice, low, but stormy with command, said:

"Go to Lillian, Mrs. Meredith; she is tired, and wishes to go home." She led Inez to the hall door, almost pushed her in, then returned to her brother. The two stood directly under my window.

"Arthur, I must know what you are about! Do you intend to marry Mrs. Meredith?"

"If she were not so confounded poor I would. I admire the little panther immensely."

"Is she poor?"

"What under the sun do you ask *me* about it for?"

"I have half an idea that she may have means after all?"

"Sis, what do you mean?"

"I have not watched you two all summer without results."

"Hang me, Annie, if I know what you are driving at."

"Arthur, you shall not trifle with *me*. Whatever you may have done, or contemplate doing, it is safer for you to confide in me. If I knew all, I might be prepared to assist, if difficulties arose."

"Speak more plainly, sis; no beating about the bush, please."

"Well, then, do you know if Mrs. Meredith has possession of the money supposed to have been stolen?"

There was silence; I strained my ear for the answer.

"Confound it, sis; I might as well ask if *you* knew who put that quietus in the Doctor's wine, or what it was done for."

"Arthur!"

"Well, don't tease me, then. I know nothing of the old fellow's precious box, as I have told you again and again. Things have come to a pretty pass when one's own sister—"

"Never mind, Arthur; I did not know but you might have been taken into the confidence of others. I do not like you to be so intimate with Mrs. Meredith—she's an unprincipled, undisciplined young thing, quite unfitted by nature or education to make a good—even a tolerable wife. If you are willing to marry poor, why do you give up Lillian?"

"I'm not willing to marry poor."

"Then cease flirting with Inez; it is not safe to play with fire."

"It is she who is flirting with me; don't blame me for it. She began it before the Doctor's mishap. I thought nothing serious of it; I should not like, now, to believe that his accident was owing to the power of my attractions."

"Don't!" Her voice was a groan as she said it.

"Beg your pardon, Annie, but I really shouldn't; I should not rest well. I don't profess to read your sex very easily; you know I have guessed somebody else might have been jealous—"

He hesitated, but she made no remark.

"Do you think Joe Meredith is enjoying the proceeds?" he asked.

"Why do you ask me?" It seemed as if she were impressed (as I was) with a feeling of untruth in all her brother did or said.

"You were down upon him hard, at the first."

"That might have been policy; a person who is threatened will turn in time. If I had not directed attention to him, he would have directed it to me. He has my handkerchief."

A plate on which my hand rested snapped under the weight.

"Good heavens!" cried Miss Miller. She had not noticed the window before.

I knew that she would come straight to the pantry, to find who, if any one, had been a listener to their conversation.

Other servants were passing in and out of the pantry, and I immediately slipped out, leaving them in possession.

When Miss Miller came into the supper-room, I was on the opposite side, with my back to the pantry, busily arranging dishes on a side-table. Being a member of the family, it was not thought strange that she should have an errand here. She passed quickly to the pantry: if there were an enemy there, or a person who had possessed himself of a dangerous secret, she wished to confront him at once. There was not

a grain of indecision in her make-up; she might commit a crime, but she could face the consequences. Presently she came out, walking leisurely about the room; when she reached me, she said:

"Waiter, I was so busy attending to the guests, I forgot my own wants. Will you give me an ice, now?"

I brought her the ice, and handed her a chair. She sank into it heavily; her paleness and haggardness had increased, but she did not tremble or appear nervous.

"Where do you live?" she asked. "I knew of no such person in this neighborhood;—Watson, they said your name was?"

"Yes, 'm."

Glancing around, and finding that no one was in our vicinity, she continued, in her ordinary tone:

"Your disguise is not as perfect as you might wish, Mr. Meredith. Let me advise you to leave here immediately, if you would consult your own safety."

"If you recognize me, why do you not raise the alarm?" I said, quite calmly, after my first start of surprise.

"I have no desire to take an active part in events; I would rather let them rest, if that were possible; indeed, I would like to see you go away before it is too late—I have been fearing all the evening that you would be recognized, and—I hate scenes!"

"Why are *you* at Meredith Place?"

"My business brought me here; I came here in the most legitimate way, but you—"

"Have never left it."

"That is no news to me, Mr. Meredith. Since the night when I met you in the arbor, I have had no doubt of your vicinity—I knew what ghost haunted this place. Are you watching me alone, or do others share in the honor of your regards?"

"Since you are so well advised, you ought to know."

"You stop with old Mrs. Hooker."

"That is true; pardon me, Miss Miller." With a movement too sudden for her to anticipate or prevent, I snatched at a slender gold chain about her neck, and pulled the charm which was attached to it from its hiding-place.

"I have been very curious about this key," I said, holding it in my hand, with a piece of the broken chain.

She dared not struggle with me for it, for fear of drawing the attention of the servants. Her first thought was to look about to find if my action had been noticed.

"Give it back to me!—you shall not have it! How do you dare to rob me of my property?"

"Is it your property?"

"I found it," she answered, without reflection.

"Where?"

"No matter—it is mine! It will do you no good."

I examined the key by the lamp which stood near. It bore the mark, "Madrid, 1800,"—an ancient affair, of silver, and of unique shape.

"I remember it now!" I exclaimed, so loud as to cause some of the servants to look round; "I remarked it at the time, but had forgotten it. *It is the key to that box!* When my uncle showed us his treasure, I remember that key was in the lock!"

"I know it; I found it after the—his death. If I could find the box, too, you might have both to restore to their rightful owners."

"I believe you were the first to insinuate that I had the box; that I was the ingrate—the serpent which stung the bosom which warmed me!"

"I did—I thought so then; what else could I think?"

"Then you can not complain that I entertained a similar opinion of you. You thought avarice prompted me; I believed jealousy prompted you; we have a right to our opinions, and to prove their truth if we can. About this key: what further good can it do you—you have tried everywhere to make it of use?"

"That is why I acquit you of knowing where that money is—because I have seen you looking for it."

"Oh! but I am sharper than that—my suspicions reach farther. I have seen you looking for it, *apparently*, which may be all a pretense, to cover up your knowledge."

"Why don't you denounce me, then—I could scarcely escape from all these people!"

"I am not ready."

"I will borrow this key for a time; if I find it of no use, I will return it to you in a year or two."

"In a year or two this tragedy will pass from the memory of men. One or two lives are blasted, but the world will forget!"

"I shall never forget, nor rest. Know, that so long as I live, I am not resting nor forgetting!"

I placed the key in my pocket.

"It is not the key which is of value," she said, bitterly.

Just then Arthur, with five or six young gentlemen, came in to look for an extra bottle or two of champagne; they called upon me to furnish it.

"For shame!" I heard Miss Miller whisper to her brother; "you have had more than

enough already"—a fact which I had suspected, when he so recklessly annoyed Mrs. Meredith.

I do not know what it was betrayed me, but as I silently brought the wine, Arthur grew very quiet to watch me; this disconcerted me, I made an awkward movement; before I could defend myself, he sprang upon me, pulled my false hair from my head and face—

"Joe Meredith, as I'm alive! Secure him, boys!"

"Let him alone, brother Arthur!—do let him go!" pleaded Miss Miller, catching him by the arm, and speaking in an agonized whisper.

"Let him go? No, indeed! Why should I? The infernal scoundrel! The whole country has been looking for you, Joe!"

He thought he had me, backed up as he was by half-a-dozen men; but I had no intention of being taken then. Retreating down the room until I came opposite a door which led into the kitchen hall, I sprang over the table, knocked down the half-stupefied waiters who faintly opposed me, and, to the music of crashing china and the shouts and cries of men and women, dashed down the passage and out into the darkness. By daylight I could not have escaped; as it was, I easily concealed my flight, and looking back, as I plunged into the forest, saw lights glimmering hither and thither in the grounds, and heard excited cries.

Mrs. Chateaubriand's ball was more of a sensation than she had anticipated.

## CHAPTER X.

### DR. MILTON

The next day the whole village of Hampton turned out to look for the desperado who had ventured under its very nose, but the village was too late,—that day I was sleeping off my fatigue in a small room of a miserable boarding-house in one of New York's quasi-respectable streets. I had decided that, since Miss Miller knew of my being secreted at Gram'me Hooker's, it would not be safe for me to linger there, only long enough to gather up my slender purse and small effects; I was fortunate enough to reach the night train, which my pursuers were not;—they thought of that train a little too late—and I was off.

I felt that this incident would revive the search for me; for some time I remained very quiet in my lodgings, enacting the part of a gentleman in poor health, recovering from an attack of typhoid fever. My looks were sufficiently wretched to support this character; I had grown thin during that exciting summer, pale with confinement and want of exercise, and haggard with anxiety.

My erst boyish face began to be covered with a beard which I allowed to grow as it would. I took on the name of John Milton, that the initials might tally with those on my clothes and carpet-bag—a liberty of which I hope the great poet was unconscious,—and was known as Doctor Milton by my landlady and fellow-boarders. It was generally understood that I had contracted fever by visiting hospital-patients, and that as soon as I was recuperated I expected to set up an office and begin the practice of medicine.

This was my intention, which I soon carried into effect. I had abandoned my plan of going West, for the present.—I could not place such a distance between myself and Lillian, especially while that which concerned her interests remained in such deep mystery.

I did not much fear detection, if I avoided places of public amusement, and kept "my eyes about me." I was in a quarter of the city which once had been aristocratic, but was now given over to moderate-priced boarding-houses and unfashionable renters.

I had no difficulty in getting an office in the basement of a very decent house adjoining that in which I took my meals, with "John Milton, M.D." in gilt letters, displayed in the window. All the boarders of our house promised me their patronage. One old lady, living on an annuity which left her, sometimes, fifteen or twenty dollars over her expenses at the end of a year, seeing how poor and forlorn I evidently was, was so benevolent as to feign a cramp in her foot and a loss of appetite, as an excuse to call me in and pay me three dollars for as many visits.

The old lady loved me, I know, from a resemblance, real or fancied, which I bore to her son, drowned at sea years before, and I was grateful for any one's love in those days. I passed some quiet, pleasant evenings with her; but I did not take her into my confidence.

My great need, in these times, was to hear from Lillian. I could no longer watch my darling from a distance. I could not even know if she were sick, or in want. Gram'me Hooker was no expert with the pen, and I, of course, could write to no one. Many times I wrote long letters to my cousin and then placed them in the fire instead of in the post,—the expression of my anxiety and longing in words was a relief, though I destroyed the sheet the next hour.

Miss Miller was now in the city. She returned, with the Chateaubriands, in November, and was still governess in their family. What interested me more, and gave me something to do in the way of speculation, was the fact that

Arthur was also in New York, having bidden Hampton farewell, and resumed his practice in a Wall street office. He had not brought Lillian with him as his bride,—nor Inez. Instead, I discovered, by dint of much hovering in that vicinity of evenings, that he was a constant visitor at the Chateaubriand's in Madison Square. More, he visited there, mornings, like a gentleman of leisure; he sent costly flowers, and came in expensive carriages to take the young ladies out.

I made myself familiar with his habits; I knew the price he paid for his board at a stylish hotel; what stables he patronized, and what billiard-tables. I was not long in discovering that his income from his practice would not equal the tenth part of his expenditures. There was "a screw loose" somewhere. It might be that he won money in gambling, but I did not think it.

I observed no such change in his sister's habits. I saw her, oftentimes, accompanying her charges, or going with the young ladies to drive or shop. She was always dressed with great plainness, and her demeanor was quiet and sad. The haughty ambition which once spoke in every look and gesture was no longer there. Still, she was a woman who made her presence felt. The Chateaubriands treated her with the greatest respect, and were anxious that she should be contented in their family.

I knew that she corresponded regularly with Lillian. Sometimes I was tempted to betray myself to her, and ask for news. I should have been foolish to do so, not knowing how much her mood might have changed since our curious interview in the dining-room at Meredith Place.

It was said that Arthur Miller and Miss Chateaubriand were engaged, with the consent of her parents, the young man, under Mr. Chateaubriand's skillful direction, having recently gone into some operations in stocks, which had proven highly successful, and given him at least the beginning of a fortune to match with that of his betrothed.

I could easily credit that he had attained to this promising position. False, fickle, and of no distinctive talent, he was one of those who wear the gilt all on the outside. He could make his way where more modest and more worthy men were not admitted.

Poor Lillian! she had lost her lover when she lost her prospects of wealth. What if this man had her money, without even such poor salve to his conscience as sharing it with her might be?

About this time one of those circumstances occurred, which, trifling in themselves, are yet of great importance when fitted into a mosaic

of evidence; and are sometimes startling in the appearance which they have of being ordered by a special Providence.

One dull December day I was sitting in my office, about as miserable and unoccupied as a man can be, when I was aroused from my reverie by the sight of a span of runaway horses dashing down the street, dragging a light sleigh or cutter in which were two gentlemen. I just had time to observe the danger, when they ran against another stouter vehicle, and their egg-shell conveyance was crushed into twenty pieces, the occupants were thrown out, and the maddened horses flew on, scattering robes and fragments on the way. One of the gentlemen struck in a pile of snow which had been shoveled from the walk, and was not at all hurt; the other, less fortunate, was thrown against a lamp-post, and so badly bruised that he was insensible when taken up. He was carried into my office and laid on my threadbare sofa. His head was bleeding from the blow which had stunned him, but he was not otherwise much injured, and I was enabled to assure his alarmed friend that the consequences would not be serious. By the application of stimulants he soon revived, when the crowd dispersed, and his companion, leaving him with me to still farther recover, went to look after the horses. He was gone some time. Meanwhile, my patient lay comfortably on the sofa, bearing his misfortunes like a philosopher. We talked together, when he began to feel like it, and I saw, what I had before conjectured from his features and dress, that he was a Cuban. He was wrapped, almost to his eyes, in rich furs, and his dress was elegant and foppish. He was young and fine-looking, with the yellow complexion, fine silken mustache, and glittering eyes of his countrymen; jewels sparkled in his wristbands and on his slender hands; he glanced about my poor room, half humorously, as if drawing a contrast between it and myself,—for he seemed to accord me all the respect I could demand, and to be interested in my conversation.

In the midst of our chat, I drew my handkerchief from my pocket. Something came with it, and fell, ringing, upon the floor. It was the silver key! I hastily picked it up, but before I could return it to its receptacle, the stranger's hand was outstretched:

"I beg your pardon; may I look at that?"

Handing it to him, he turned it over, looked at the date and lettering, and remarked—

"It is a curious key; may I ask where you got it?"

He had put his question in the shape most difficult to answer.

"It belonged to a friend of mine," I said, not without a hesitation which he must have noticed, "why do you ask?"

"I did not know there were two such in existence. My uncle had one precisely similar to this, which had been in his family since they came from Spain. It belonged to a box, made of mahogany, banded with iron, with steel rivets, in which he, and his father before him, kept their money and jewels. The key was manufactured by a locksmith in Madrid, especially for that box,—yet here is another so much like it I could almost swear the two were one."

"Perhaps they are," I said, "or could that not be?"

"Really, I do not know. My uncle lost his fortune two years ago, by mercantile speculations into which he entered. Being very proud, he took his losses much to heart, finally emigrating to California in the hope of retrieving them. I have not heard what his success has been,—I should think he might do well there; but the sight of this key makes me uneasy. I have neglected him too long. I shall write, as soon as I get to my hotel, ask him to forgive my remissness, and to allow me to hear from him occasionally. But you have not told me the friend's name who owned this. Perhaps it was my uncle. Have you been in California?"

"No. And this key was given to me by an American lady. I think she had it from a gentleman who is now dead, a doctor, who had returned from California but a short time before."

"Ha!" ejaculated the young Cuban, deeply interested.

He remained thinking for a moment, which gave me a chance also to reflect. If I told him that his uncle was dead, his cousin married and a widow, he would at once demand her place of residence; would doubtless visit her, when he would make known the news by which he had ascertained her whereabouts, and I should no longer be safe in my new locality. The fact that I had in my possession the key to the box would add to the strong presumptive evidence against me. My own safety demanded that I should keep silence. It must be months before, by inquiries which he might institute in that distant city on the Western shore, he would be able to trace his cousin, and in those months the end to which I had pledged myself might be attained.

"A doctor," resumed my visitor, after a pause; "that looks bad! Can it be that my uncle is dead; that this physician attended him, perhaps receiving, as his only fee, this empty box, which was once always so crowded with the riches of a proud family?"

I remained silent. He sat up, now, forgetful of his aching wound, in the interest of the subject:

"If so, I wonder what has become of Inez," he continued, more to himself than me. "She must be a woman now. I used to fancy the child, little spit-fire though she was. She had so much spirit! bright eyes, too! It is a shame for our family to have neglected her so. I hope her father has not died and left her alone in that wicked city. It would be terrible, though, doubtless, she is married before this. She was a coquette from her cradle—little Inez was—a cunning child;" then to me: "You say the friend is dead who possessed this. Then, I can not seek information in that quarter. I must curb my impatience until I shall hear by letter. Have you any objection to parting with the key?"

"I should not like to, unless you have a stronger claim upon it than I."

"I don't know that I have any—the least—only as a clue to my uncle, who certainly once owned it. If you prize it, I will not ask it; but if you see the lady soon who gave it to you, pray inquire if she knows its history. I will call upon you again before I leave the city."

Here his friend returned with word that the horses had injured themselves badly, and that he had sent them to the stable, jested about the accident, and the cost of a sleigh-ride—"a novelty," he said, "with which he was now sufficiently acquainted." It seemed they had turned off the main routes, because the sleighing was better in our quiet avenue.

"Supposing I should obtain information which I thought you would like to receive?" I asked, as they prepared to leave.

"Call on me at the New York Hotel; I shall be there for the next four weeks. Farewell, and many thanks for your attention."

He laid his card on the table, along with a gold piece quite too large for the slight service which had been rendered; but I did not see the money until, after they had left, I raised the card.

"Don Miguel de Almeda"—quite a grand name," I mused, smiling at the pompous sound as I read. "I wish his Donship had not left so much money. It looks too much like bestowing alms!" I, too, was proud, with the pride of an American, who, while he laughs at titles, likes well to preserve his independence. "If he comes again, I'll give him his gold piece; if he don't, why, it seems as if fate had made me a present of the means for a journey to Meredith Place."

My desire to return to Hampton was like the

longing and restlessness of a fever-patient; and the first use which it occurred to me to make of the money was to spend it in a secret visit to the Place.

I did not feel quite at ease about allowing Don Miguel to go away with no tidings of his cousin. I had boasted to myself my intention of supporting Inez, if Lillian should marry. It is true that my feelings towards the young widow had changed very much since the night I had detected her in a stolen interview with Arthur Miller; I now knew her to be fickle, imprudent, and selfish, if nothing worse. Still she was young, scarcely more than a child, and never had received training to make her otherwise than what she was—the creature of every impulse. I did not mean to be too severe in my condemnation of her conduct. If this cousin of hers really felt any interest in her, it would probably be very greatly to her advantage that he should be allowed to know where she was. He was rich and liberal. It was natural to suppose that he would take her with him to her relatives in Cuba, if she would consent to go. This would be much better for her than giving lessons on the guitar. It would certainly be a hundred times better for Lillian. I knew as well as if I could see their daily life, how Inez' petulance and complaining wore upon my cousin, and that the burden of the work must rest upon her shoulders.

It would be cowardly in me to place my own convenience in the way of the interest of either of those two girls.

I was not long in making up my mind that I would call upon the Don and inform him where his cousin Inez could be found. But, before taking such a step, it was evident that I must be prepared to quit my present name and locality, and that so prudently as to leave no trace of my flight; for Don Miguel would of course relate by what means he had discovered his cousin, when it would at once be surmised who had the key of the missing box, and I should be arrested in less than three days.

"It will be a month before he leaves the city," I said to myself. "In ten days it will be Christmas. I will take my holiday then. One brief visit, under cover of night and darkness, to the old place; one stolen look at Lillian's face—then, if nothing occurs to give me farther hope of a speedy resolution of the problem, I will return, place Don Miguel on the track of his cousin, and myself fly to some more distant city, where I can go to work with a will, to do something for my darling's ease and comfort. Inez will be provided for; perhaps, also, Lillian, for the Don —" Here a spasm of jealousy shook my heart-strings. The

Cuban gentleman was young and attractive in every way—he could not meet Lillian without being enchanted by her! what was to be expected but that they should love one another?

If Lillian's affections were not hopelessly fixed upon Arthur, nothing, I argued, could prevent those two from becoming interested in each other. The Cuban, accustomed to the darker charms of the South, would be doubly alive to the exquisite type of my cousin's beauty; while he, so gallant, so graceful in every movement, full of pride and high spirits, would appear to her as if one of the heroes had walked out of a poet's story to meet her.

Well, why should it not be so? This would furnish for her all that I craved for her welfare—love, protection, and wealth. Ought I not, poor as I was, resting under a cloud, compelled to work under every disadvantage, to be glad to throw such a chance in her way? I had not the least idea that my cousin ever thought of me, except as a cousin, and a vagrant one at that. She no more guessed the passion I felt for her than that she had a lover in the moon.

I said to myself that I should like to know that she was mated with one who struck me as favorably as this young gentleman. But my heart gave the words the lie. It would make me unutterably miserable to know it. Was unutterable misery too great a sacrifice to make for her? No, it was not! I would make it. My plan should be carried out.

Perhaps better days were in store for all but me. I can afford to smile sadly now as I look back and recall with what a brave struggle I nerved myself to send a suitor to the feet of the girl I loved—a lover to my own darling.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A HEART-VAIL THROWN ASIDE.

Christmas eve was passing into Christmas morn as the midnight train dropped me at Hampton station. A slouched hat and thick overcoat were all the disguise needed at that lonely hour; I felt no apprehension of being recognized, even if I should encounter acquaintances. The train went roaring off into the distance, and I turned to my solitary walk.

The moon hung directly in the zenith, the snow lay in dazzling whiteness everywhere; it was the perfection of a winter night,—calm, brilliant, cold. The station was between Hampton and Meredith Place; between the station and the latter place was the cemetery of the village. As I passed it, its white tomb-stones standing solemnly in the whiter moonlight, look-

ing so desolate as they rose out of the drifted snow, my heart urged me to go in and linger a few moments by the graves of my relatives—by *his* grave, dearest friend I ever had, save one. For I had loved my uncle as I loved no other human being except his daughter. Mine was not one of those natures to love swiftly and warmly—to forget quickly and coldly. With me, love was deathless.

Opening the smaller gate, I passed along the untrodden road until I came to the path which led off to two mounds rising side by side, one crowned with a slender marble shaft, the other as yet unmarked. The path to these graves bore the print of feet which had come and gone more than once; and as I knelt beside them, I saw myrtle wreaths laid on both, while on Dr. Meredith's was a garland of the most fragrant and costly hot-house flowers, so fresh that I could guess that it had not been there many hours. I knew who placed it there. I had informed myself of Miss Miller's intention to spend her fortnight's holiday with Lillian in her humble little home. Lillian was to have a brief vacation, like the rest, and her former governess was to visit her, not only for the enjoyment of her society, but to clear up some of the difficulties in the path of the young teacher. From a dark corner of the New York depot I had watched Miss Miller depart, six hours earlier than myself, and in her hand she had carried this wreath; I could guess that she, too, had paused, in coming, at this cemetery, and had left here, under the shadow of the twilight, this token of remembrance, unseen by mortal eyes.

Would a murderess deposit flowers on the grave of her victim?

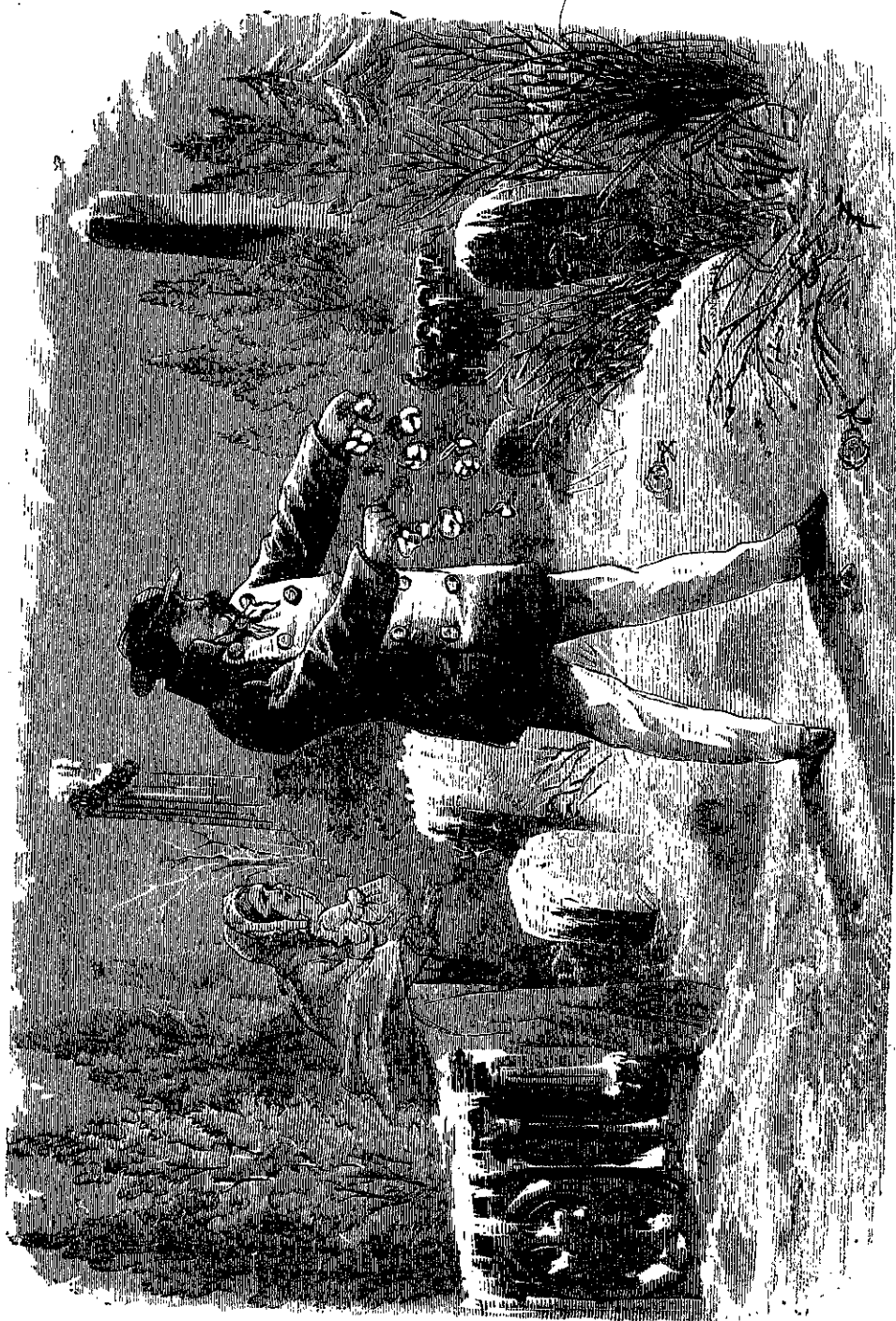
The thought struck me there with the force of something new. Still, many a woman has murdered the man she passionately loved, giving up her after-life to remorse and despair. But flowers! O, how could she bring them to mock this cold and glittering mound, if she had anything to do in bringing the sleeper here?—tearing him away from life, when at its fullest and best, to bind him here an untimely prisoner! To think of it made me furious. I caught the wreath, and tore it in a hundred parts, which I threw as far from the grave thus desecrated, as my arm had strength to hurl them.

"Murderess! murderess! murderess!" I kept hissing between my shut teeth, as I did so.

"No! do not call me by that dreadful name."

I started as the unexpected voice said this, close at my side,—deep, trying to be firm, but trembling with pathetic weakness,—started as if a ghost had risen from the tombs about me.





"You, Miss Miller, here, at this hour of the night!"

"Why do you persecute me?" she continued, reproachfully, with a manner so totally unlike her usual haughty self-possession, that I was touched in spite of myself. "My poor flowers, even, are not allowed to warm his icy grave—I, who loved him with a love which put to shame the tamer and more selfish affection of all his other friends! Lillian, poor child! she truly appreciated him. I love her. I would do anything for her; but that other—that soulless, heartless *thing*! neither woman nor child, without feeling, save for herself! without power to understand what happiness was hers! she, young tigress!—I have no word of scorn and hate to express her. It is time we understood each other, Joseph Meredith. Let us no longer play this silly game of hide-and-seek. Denounce me to the Authorities, if you will. Go boldly to Hampton village, and tell them you have found the woman who did the deed. Call me, in the face of the world, as you called me now, to those deaf ears of the dead—murderess. Give them what proofs you have,—the key, the handkerchief. Relate my midnight wanderings. Or I, if I so determine, will denounce you!—will point out your little office where John Milton practices medicine when he can find a patient! You see I know all. I am, at least, as sharp, and have as set a purpose, as yourself. Let us no longer treat each other as secret enemies; let us be open in our warfare. So, if you wish it; as for me, I would rather enter into a league with you. I admire your subtlety and your perseverance. I believe if we enter into a compact to serve each other, that both will sooner arrive at the truth. Both have the same object in view. Why not join forces?"

"My object is to discover and punish my uncle's murderer," I replied, coldly, although intensely surprised at her excited words, especially at her last request. "To punish that murderer, without show of mercy, be it man or woman; and to restore, if possible, to my beloved cousin, the patrimony of which she has been so relentlessly robbed."

"Our aims are identical; then why not enter into a partnership? I know, perfectly, that for a long time, you believed me—me only—to be the guilty person; that at times, even yet, though you have seen things which have shaken your first impressions, they return upon you at intervals, as they did to-night. I acknowledge, also, that for some time, I believed you were the criminal; but I now exonerate you in my own mind, from the slightest suspicion. I have satisfied myself by watching

you. If I were called to the witness-stand to-morrow, I should swear my conviction of your innocence. You think me hard and designing, but I try always to do justice. You disliked me, because you thought I had designs upon your uncle. I had, if to love a man as I loved Doctor Meredith, can be called having a design upon him. I appreciated him; I enjoyed studies which he enjoyed; the bent of our tastes was similar. I felt, that, should he be drawn to love me, we should be very happy together. I acknowledge that, during his absence in California, I was upheld in our loneliness and almost absolute poverty, to do my duty to his child, and take care of his house, by the hope that, on his return, he would see what I was to him, and we should be married. Was there anything selfish or vile in that? You are young, sir, and youth, let me tell you, is ever critical and exacting in proportion to its own inexperience and vanity. Had you been older, better read in the world, you would not have been so free in launching your arrows of scorn at a woman, the depth of whose nature yours could not fathom."

She paused a moment, in a superb attitude of passion and tragic grief, the frosty moonlight increasing the pallor of her face, her eyes blazing, her lips quivering; I was silent, for I felt the force of what she said, and remorse for the many wicked opinions I had indulged against her.

"You must be aware," she went on, "that I was sacrificing much in remaining, as I did, at Meredith Place,—and if I expected my reward, what was that more than others, than you, yourself, would do? I did look forward to a union with Doctor Meredith, but I should not have cherished this expectation had I not felt myself entirely capable of being his friend and helpmeet as well as his wife. God knows I was selfish, in that I expected to be so blessed, after a lonely and desolate life,—but not entirely selfish, for I looked, also, to his happiness." She paused again.

"It was not pleasant for me to feel that you were always watching me, nor that you laughed at my feeling, setting me down as a woman too old to be romantic,—only you could truly love, beardless boy that you were! It is never agreeable for a woman to have her love suspected before she is certain of its return; hence, I did not like you to play the spy upon my heart. I did not like you, your antecedents, nor the promise you gave for the future. I was willing that Lillian should have opportunity to see other young men, before she became entangled with you, and I brought on my brother Arthur, and introduced her to the young society

of the village, with the purpose of giving her freedom of choice. You put the worst construction on all my actions; so be it,—I forgive you for it, if only you will work with me for an object in which we have equal interest.

"When Dr. Meredith brought home that silly creature, you alone guessed the effect it had upon me. The first few hours I was stunned by the blow. Pride enabled me to keep up appearances, but I was wretched, most wretched for my own sake. But, when I grew calm enough to look upon her, I began to be miserable for his sake. I saw the mistake he had made—a mistake which one of his generous and unworldly nature would be sure to make under the circumstances."

She was silent, apparently lost in painful recollections.

"You have called her a silly creature, a child, and a tigress," I remarked, after a moment; "do you speak at random?"

"No, she is all three:—a child in want of discipline; silly by the narrowness of her mind and smallness of her ideas; a tigress in passion, when her Southern blood is aroused."

"Then why have you permitted your brother to be so attentive to her?"

"Some things must be permitted that others may be accomplished. O, to think of her, allowing her wayward fancies to run after other men, when he, her benefactor and husband, lies here with the snow above him—the cold snow!"

Her last words were sobbed out, and she made a movement as if to throw herself on his grave, but restrained herself, wiped the icy drops which were freezing on her cheeks, and went on—

"Tell me, truly, Mr. Meredith, have you not reversed your decision with regard to me? Have you not been forced to conclude that I am not the guilty party?—(as if I would have harmed a hair of his head!)" in an undertone to herself. "Is there not another person whose conduct really gives rise to more suspicion than mine?"

"There is," I said, after an instant's hesitation

"Would you spare her any more than me, if she should be found guilty by you and me in our researches?"

"No, I would not," I answered, shuddering.

She noticed the shiver, and seemed to think I was cold.

"I will not keep you here any longer," she said. "Possibly, too, we might be observed. How long did you expect to stay in this vicinity?"

"Only twenty-four hours."

"Will you be at Gram'me Hooker's? I ask, because I would like to see you again, to compare notes with regard to a certain person."

"I do not know. Is there a tenant now, at Meredith Place?"

"Lillian told me there was none. The house is entirely empty. If you wish to go there, no place will be safer,—for the stories of its being haunted keep all intruders away. I came out to-night, after Lillian and Inez were in bed. I wished to visit this place alone. I had little thought of your being here. If you were the murderer you would fly from, instead of to, this grave."

"Perhaps,—though I have heard of guilty consciences which forever urged their owners on to the lonely hollows or the deep wells where the bodies of their victims lay concealed. Miss Miller, I will not pretend a friendship which I do not wholly feel. I have been too deeply prejudiced to change my opinion suddenly; but this I will say, that I am ready to coöperate with you in any scheme to discover the cause or motive of my uncle's death, and the whereabouts of his fortune. Has it never occurred to you that he might have been driven to suicide by unpleasant discoveries with regard to his young wife?"

"It has," she said quickly; "but the idea is always controverted by the probability that, in such a case, he would have left his dying message, before he drank the fatal draught. We should have known the meaning of that mystery—the figure eight."

"True."

"We must not linger here. I will talk with you about these matters to-morrow. In the afternoon, just before tea, I will walk out to Meredith Place. Are you not going?"

"In a moment."

She turned away, and I, stooping, plucked a spray from the myrtle which Lillian had twined for her mother's grave. Kissing the dry, senseless leaves, I placed them in my note-book, and struck off into the woods which fringed one side of the cemetery. No leaves now on the bare and glittering branches, which swung with melancholy and mysterious moans, above me, while the crisp snow crackled under my feet. By a circuitous route through the familiar forest, I gained Meredith Place, deserted now even by Tiger. The mansion loomed up in the night, huge and desolate; the ivy waving from the stone tower seemed the only living thing there.

I was greatly agitated as I approached it; so much had been done and suffered in that house, I could not behold it again, after an absence, without emotion. I soon found a window which yielded to my efforts, and opening it, I

entered, closed it behind me, and was alone in the shadowy, dimly-moonlighted, chilly house, which, one year ago, had been so warm and bright with love, hope, and gay young life.

Too much agitated to feel sleepy, I walked through all the familiar rooms, in which the old furniture still kept its place. The clock was silent now, in the silent hall. In a freak of fancy I climbed to the face and wound it up. "If visitors should come here within the week, they will swear the place is haunted, sure enough," I thought, as I turned the key and set the pendulum to swinging.

Immediately the voice of the old clock pealed out loud and clear, ringing through the empty mansion with startling distinctness. Again, as once before—*eight!*

I can not describe how solemn and powerful the effect upon my excited mind. Did the time-piece always pause at that precise point, when it run down,—or was this a chance coincidence? Doubtless the first; but it did not seem thus to me, as I stood alone in the deserted house, long bars of moonlight and black groups of shadows dividing the hall. That startling peal, ringing out for my ear alone, seemed to me my uncle's voice. It said—"You are sleeping;—you are letting the months go by; my body is mouldering into dust, my friends are forgetting me—while you rest upon your promise. Work! work! Do not grow discouraged—do not be fooled by a woman's art, nor give way to compassion, nor be deceived by one or the other, until the pledge you gave is redeemed: Remember the figure eight!"

As if I ever thought of anything else!

## CHAPTER XII.

### TWO STEPS IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

I awoke, the next morning, in a broad blaze of light, the cloudless sun shining on the crusted snow. The village bells were calling to church, and I found, by consulting my watch, that it was ten o'clock. I had slept well in my old bed in my own old room, despite of its want of airing; and if I now felt rather stiff in the joints, a few minutes exercise got rid of that. The wallet which I brought with me was filled with provisions, for I anticipated being my own provider. A loaf of bread, some crackers and cheese, dried beef, and a small package of tea, promised me sustenance for more than one day, should any circumstance arise to detain me.

I felt the necessity for something warm to drink, and for a fire; but I did not intend to commit the imprudence of kindling a fire in the kitchen, whose smoke would betray me. I recalled to mind the furnace in the laboratory,

and the charcoal ready to my hand, and, having obtained a covered saucepan from the dresser, I betook myself to the room which I could not visit, even for this homely purpose, without strange sensations. Taking the precaution to turn the key in the door, I busied myself preparing my simple breakfast.

Having obtained water from a well under cover of the laundry, and dusted a shelf on which to spread out my food, I turned my attention to the small furnace which my uncle had caused to be placed in the laboratory, to assist him in his experiments. I proposed to kindle a few coals in its mouth, sufficient to steep my cup of tea: but I no sooner took down the little iron door before it, than I saw that some person or persons had been here since my last visit to the room. This was not surprising, as the summer tenants had remained several weeks after my flight. Some member of the family might have had occasion to use a fire and a crucible, if only to mend some piece of furniture; but, as I lifted the crucible to give the saucepan its place, something which gleamed in the bottom caused me to carry it to the window—to forget my charcoal and my tea; everything but the fact that a few grains of gold clung there to the bottom of that vessel.

They had not been there when I went away! My thought leaped instantly to one conclusion: this was Doctor Meredith's gold; some one had discovered it, or had known its whereabouts from the first, and, afraid to use it in the shape of bullion, was surreptitiously smelting it, as opportunity offered.

For a few moments the blood ran as molten in my veins as if I had been tried in that furnace; but I soon grew calm enough to consider the situation.

The first question which presented itself was, whether the gold had all been disposed of, or whether the party was still engaged in the work. If the latter, all I had to do was to cover all trace of a visitor having been to the house, and patiently, tirelessly watch, until I detected the surreptitious operator at his work.

Forgetting all about my breakfast, I commenced investigations in the room. But the inference that others visited Meredith Place—that I was not the only ghost, made me very careful. I closed the blinds to the window, hung something before the key-hole of the door, and proceeded cautiously in my examination. It was, as I have said before, a room in which one had rich opportunities for concealment, full as it was of nooks and crannies, cupboards, shelves, drawers. It was more than an hour before I reached the ash-hole—a little iron box under the furnace, where refuse was

thrown. It looked very innocent in its dust and ashes, but as I poked about with a pair of long pincers, they struck against something hard beneath the little heap of ashes, and in another instant I held in my hand the dies for coining the gold eagles of the United States! I felt then, as children say, when playing hide-and-seek, that I was "warm"—very near the objects of weary months of "seeking." The sweat broke out on my forehead; my first impulse was to thank God that this much had been accomplished!

Now, I must set the trap to catch the rat! I replaced the dies exactly as I found them, threw back the ashes in the same careless heap, removing every trace of disturbance. I was even sorry that I had dusted the shelf, for I could not replace the dust, and, gathering up my breakfast, I betook myself to an upper chamber, content to eat it cold. When I had satisfied my hunger, I made my bed, locked myself in my chamber, that no one might too suddenly surprise me, and placed myself in a window-recess with a book which I had brought with me to help pass the time. I dared not venture to Gram'me Hooker's by daylight, and many hours must intervene before the interview appointed with Miss Miller.

But I did not much enjoy reading. In the first place, I was cold, and I remembered how merry were most homes on that festival day. I pictured the children with their gifts, and their elders, sitting down to tables laden with choice feasts. I was lonely—homeless—nameless—an outcast, and unutterably sad.

I thought of Lillian. My longing eyes turned ever in the direction of the little white dwelling, which I could not see, but of which my fancy made a picture. I was so afraid my darling was not comfortable—that she suffered actual want, and I felt that she must be sorely tried by this first recurrence of the Christmas festival since her affliction. It was cruel that I could not go to her and offer her my sympathy; that I was driven, by the persecutions of those who were perhaps themselves the criminals, from her society.

Flinging my book down, I walked back and forth to prevent numbness from the cold, pondering upon how I should conclude to receive Miss Miller's overtures, which had so surprised me.

While her tone and manner were those of a sorrowful and truthful woman, I did not forget that duplicity wears all colors, and that she might be seeking my friendship in order to get possession of the key and handkerchief, and perhaps to make a tool of me to work out her own designs.

Yet I had no longer any reason to suppose

that she had the least knowledge of the stolen property. My brain was dull and heavy with the everlasting pressure of the subject; yet a horror, to which all previous dread was light, crept over me—chilled me, thrilled me, when I saw that the finger of fate pointed towards her of whom the governess and myself were now both suspicious!

The weary day crept on—a doleful Christmas to me, with only one glint of brightness in it—the feeling that I was near to Lillian. The afternoon shadows were growing long, when I heard the clash of the closing gate, and approaching voices. Peering between the curtains, I saw Miss Miller, Lillian, and Inez, coming up the avenue. Miss Miller talked a little loud, I could infer, with the purpose of warning me to conceal myself, and, as they drew near, looked up and flirted her handkerchief.

Her face was anxious, which led me to believe that the girls had insisted on bearing her company against her wish. I could only stand there, like a man in a trance, drinking in the consciousness of Lillian's presence. It is well the curtains concealed me, or I fear I should not have had the sense to withdraw. I had a good look at her, as she came slowly up the walk, the great key of the hall-door in her hand. They had asked permission to visit their old home, that there might appear nothing hidden about it. She looked eagerly from side to side, as if recalling every bush and shrub. Not even the ghastly shadow of this tragedy could wholly obscure the bloom and roundness of her youthful face: time alone could complete the work which sorrow had begun; but she was pale, for her, and the enchanting gayety of expression was gone.

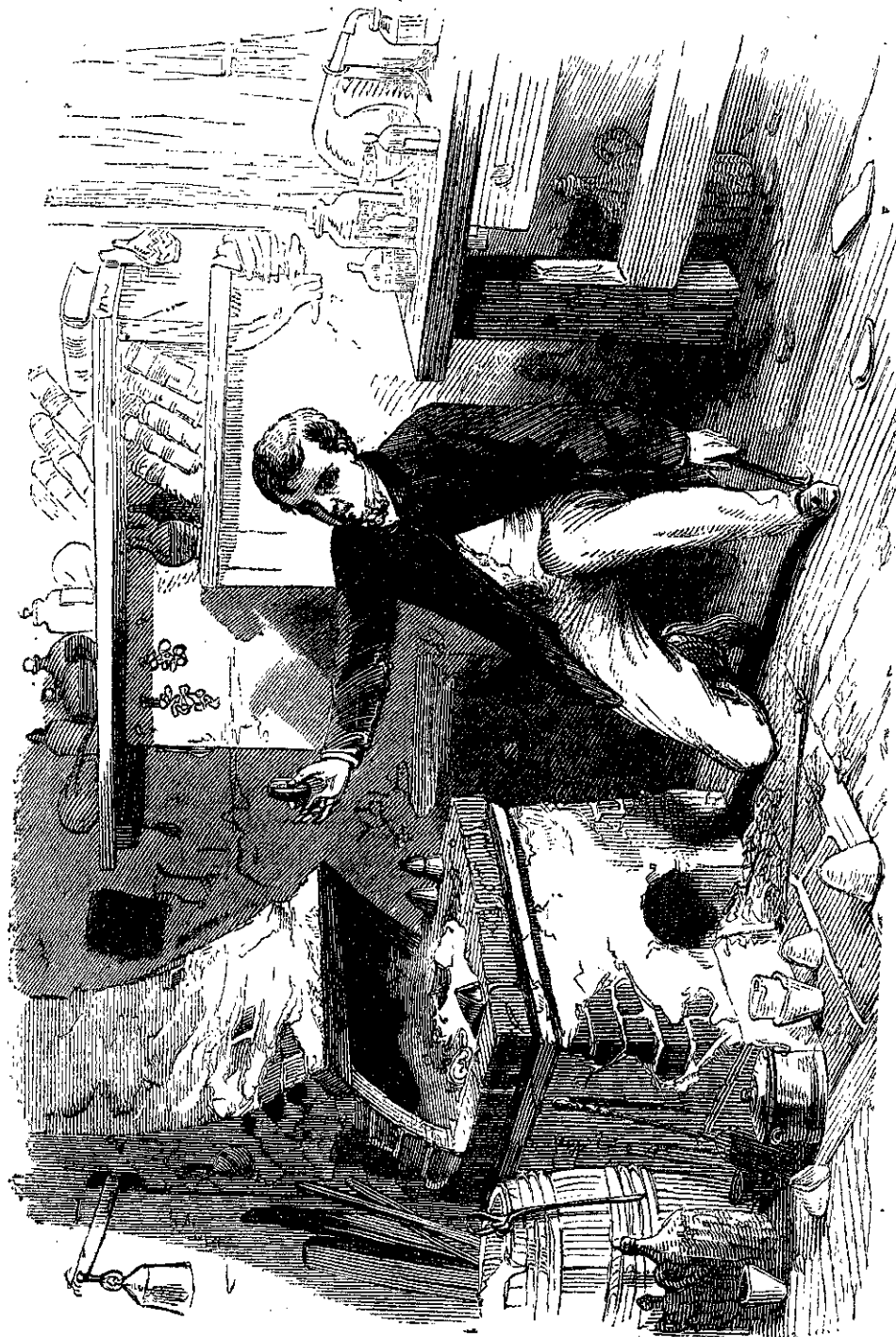
My door was fastened, and, as I knew that the governess would take the precaution to precede the others and divert their attention, I gave myself no uneasiness about being discovered. I heard Inez give one of her little shrieks as she entered the hall, and I thought about the clock which I had set going.

"I must stop that," I thought.

"I will not stay one moment. I know the house is haunted," I heard the Cuban girl cry, while the others, with lower voices, strove to pacify her alarm.

Presently they came up stairs, Miss Miller, as most courageous, taking the advance, looking into all the chambers as they passed along. She laughed lightly, when, trying mine, she found it locked.

"I told you, Inez, the owners had been about the place. Of course, they take care of their property—probably visit it every few



days. For all I know, they keep the clock wound all the time. They have fastened up this room,—bed-linen in it, probably, or something they are afraid might be carried off."

"Oh, let us go down. I don't like it up here at all. I'm sorry I came; but Lillian would have her own way."

I longed to hear my cousin's voice.

"This morning you said you would like to come," she spoke, soft, clear, as she always spoke.

"Oh, but I changed my mind. If the house was full of company it would be different; but it is so cold, so gloomy! I wonder if the Chateaubriands will be here next summer?"

No one answered. The other two were not dreaming of summer festivals. Soon they made the round and descended the staircase. Presently, I heard the sound of weeping in the next room, which had been Dr. Meredith's sleeping-chamber, the death-room of the first wife, the bridal-chamber of the last. I knew that Lillian had gone there to give way to her sorrow. Every sob she uttered struck to my heart.

In a few moments some one else rushed in, and I heard Inez cry:

"Miss Miller went off to the laboratory, and left me entirely alone, as if she did not know I would be frightened to death. I ran up here to find you. I would not stay alone for the world. What are you crying for, child? Oh, I know."

There was a brief silence; even Inez could forget herself for an interval, in this place. She was the first to speak again.

"Lillian, I should think you might answer me, now! You know what I asked you this morning. I don't see anything to prevent, now that Miss Miller has come; I could go home with her, do my shopping, and come back. You must have money to spare, now that your quarter's pay has come in."

I did not hear what was said in answer; but Inez spoke up in the shrill voice which was hers when she was in a passion.

"My clothes are dreadfully shabby. I did not have opportunity to replenish them, after the sea-voyage, which spoiled what few I had, before—before you know what. And we had only enough to do at the time we made up our mourning. I wish now the doctor had stopped on our way here, in New York, and bought me the jewels he promised me. I should have them, at least. But he was in such a hurry to get home! He promised to take me to the city soon. I think now, Lillian, you ought to keep your father's promise. I must go to New York!"

Again the unheard reply, and again the passionate voice.

"Avaricious? Yes, I did not think it of you! Some of that money is mine. I gave guitar-lessons to two pupils. I ought to have a great deal for that! Never mind, Lillian Meredith, I shall not long be your slave; I shall not long hide myself in this dull village. I am accustomed to a different life. If I had known to what I was coming, I would have staid in California. I will go to New York, I tell you. I must see Arthur Miller!"

"Oh, Inez!" burst from my cousin's lips, "can not you wait until he comes to see you? Such conduct would not be proper."

"Proper? I hate propriety! He will not come to see me. I hear he is engaged to Miss Chateaubriand; and I must see him and ask him if he dares coquette with her, after he has told me that he loved me."

"So soon? Oh, Inez!"

"It is not so very soon. I did not propose to marry him until after my year of mourning has expired."

"And you have already forgotten my father?"

"No, I have not forgotten him. He was my good friend. But I never loved him! You did not suppose a young girl like me could love an old man like that! He was kind to me, like a father, and I married him because there was nothing else for me to do. He was very fine—a gentleman—but not like Arthur Miller! You must acknowledge there was a difference, Lillian."

"I say it is more natural for me to love a person of my own age and tastes," continued the Cuban, when she gained no reply, "just as you will when you have a suitor. Perhaps you are jealous?" with a mocking laugh. "I believe he fancied you before I came. Ah! all I am afraid of is that he is a coquette. Lillian, if we could find that box of gold, I think he would marry me. It is because I am poor and Miss Chateaubriand is rich. But he loves me best; I know that."

Poor Lily sighed a sigh so much of a groan that I heard it where I stood. Poor child! I could only pray that a marriage, or something else, might quickly free her from such companionship. Presently, Inez began, in a coaxing voice, putting aside her passion:

"Lily, sweet, I'm going to tell you something which I have never before mentioned. I knew the doctor hid that gold the night before he died. I complained of having it in the room with us; said I was afraid we should be murdered if we kept so much gold in our closet. I got up such a panic about it,—you know how timid I am, Lillian!—that, at last, he indulged me by removing it. He said he



knew where there was a very safe place where burglars would never think of looking for it, and he tugged and rolled the box away and came back, after almost an hour, when I was actually asleep, and woke me up by saying, laughingly, that 'I was safe now.' Why do you look so surprised?"

My cousin's voice was inaudible.

"At first, I was too frightened. I was afraid they would think strange of it after what happened. Afterwards, I thought, if I told of it so late, it would look stranger still. Indeed, indeed, I have tried very hard to find it. If we could only find it, Lily, we should be rich. You could give up that dreary school, and Arthur would marry me. Oh, I wish we could, now, before it is too late."

I think my cousin asked if she had never told any one, for Inez answered:

"Never—that is—nobody but Arthur."

"You should not have told him!" exclaimed Lillian, quite loudly.

"Don't you think if you and Miss Miller and I were to search *everywhere*, we might find it? I can not tell you how I have looked,—hours and days in all. But, there she comes. Don't speak of it to-night; it is getting too late. But to-morrow or some time."

The voice of the governess now mingled with theirs; presently they went down, and looking out, I saw Lillian and Inez walking rapidly away. It was nearly dark. I wished to see gram'me before the old creature was in bed, and I desired my interview with Miss Miller to be brief. I had decided *not* to confide to her at present the important discovery I had made. If she were not honestly anxious for the truth, it would be placing the weapon in her hand with which to defeat me.

She came to the door and knocked, and we descended to the parlor together.

"I sent my companions away," she said. "They wished to come, and, to avoid suspicion, I was obliged to allow them. Did you see Lillian? You must have had a cheerless day of it here. Do you go back to-night?"

"Probably,—but I will not say certainly."

"Do you find traces of other spirits haunting this house besides ourselves?"

"I think there have been others here."

"Is my cousin well? is her school a success?"

"She is well, but very sad. I think the care of that Cuban girl more onerous to her than the charge of the school. Both united will soon tell, even on her young vitality."

"I think your brother has made love to Inez, Miss Miller. I shall be glad when they can be decently married,—for Lily's sake."

"He shall never marry her," she cried.

"Do you think I would submit to that? I would rather see him dead. He is engaged to Miss Chateaubriand, and they will be married early next summer."

"Then he is a villain," I said, coolly, "for I *know* he has made love to Inez."

"Well, how could he help it? Say rather that she made love to him—that will be nearer the truth. Still, I want you to understand that I do not defend Arthur. He is vain, frivolous, without any fixed principles; and, I am afraid unless he soon marries and settles down, will become dissipated. I do not like the new habits he is forming. I do not know how he continues to make so much money, though he talks largely of his stock operations. I do not entirely approve of Miss Chateaubriand,—but she is good enough for him. I should desire to see him marry Lillian, only he is not worthy of her. I know it as well as you. I have done what I could for him, as a sister; I have been sister and mother to him. He no longer respects my advice. Henceforth he must make or break his own fortunes."

She spoke sadly, and I pitied her.

"He ought to be advised of one thing," I said; "that it is not safe to trifle with a person like Inez Meredith. Her impulses carry her judgment quite away. She is revengeful, too."

"I know it,—but as he makes his bed, so he must lie in it; I have warned him."

"I think I know of a way of disposing of her, which will relieve Lillian, yourself, and all concerned," I said, after a little hesitation.

I saw no reason for keeping from my companion the fact of Don Miguel de Almeda's relationship to Inez, since it now appeared that Miss Miller was aware of my residence in the city, and of my assumed name. I could ask her not to allow the affair of the silver key to be made public, and she would have as much object as I in preventing it.

"How is that?"

I answered her by telling her of the Don, his recognition of the silver key, and his apparent interest in his cousin.

"I am quite certain he would take her to her friends in Cuba," I concluded, "and that she would be glad to go. She imagines herself in love with your brother, because, for the time being, he is the only object upon which her roving fancy can conveniently settle; but, once let her have the opportunity to pass into a sphere where she can throw off all memory of her distasteful life here, and she will eagerly accept it."

"I think so," responded Miss Miller, evidently gratified. "We can ask nothing better than that,—it is far better than she deserves,"

she added, bitterly; still, I don't know that it is for us to pass judgment upon her, or to punish her. She will get her deserts in the next world, if not in this."

I then told Miss Miller what I had overheard Inez confess—that Doctor Meredith had himself taken the box from the closet and concealed it, the night before his death, at her instigation. "Now," said I, "this is a fact of the utmost importance. It makes one of two theories certain. Either Inez is herself both murderer and robber—and, heartily as I despise her, I do not conceive that she has either cunning or courage to execute these desperate crimes—or else some inmate of, or visitor to, this house, happened, or purposely watched, to see the doctor dispose of that box, and formed the resolution to compass his death in order to secure the tempting treasure. It would seem as if only one of the family could have poisoned him in the manner it was done. Who else would bring him wine, and from what hand, except the hand of a friend, would he accept it?"

We looked each other full in the face. It was deep twilight now, but the eyes of both were blazing, and we each looked the more pale for the dusky shadows about us. I was trying to read her inmost soul, and she was thinking, no doubt, strange thoughts of me. It was as if circumstances compelled us to suspect each other. Had there been any servants whose conduct made them liable to suspicion, then our speculations would not have taken so narrow a range. For the moment, all the vague impressions we had received of the Cuban girl's wickedness faded out—nothing seemed more improbable than that she should have had anything to do with the catastrophe: with eager, piercing gaze, we searched each other.

The governess was the first to break the spell.

"In vain," she said; "man by man was never seen. Let us not foolishly anger each other. All we can do is to discover the truth by patient investigation. How soon, after your return to the city, shall Inez have reason to expect her cousin?"

"As soon as he chooses to seek her. I shall see him within one or two days of my return. I must first give myself time to settle my own small affairs, for I shall not remain in New York after I have sent Don Miguel to Hampton."

"I shall be sorry to know you are driven away for this cause. Why do you change again? I pledge you my word of honor that you shall not be molested from any cause arising out of this, or which I can prevent."

"Nay, you can not promise for others. I shall not rashly place my life in any one's hands."

Don Miguel, when he comes here and hears the story of his cousin's widowhood, will at once see that the young man who had the key, was the runaway and suspected nephew of the doctor. He may feel it his duty to denounce me."

"I will persuade him to a different course."

"You could hardly give good reasons for doing so, without causing him to think strangely of you. I shall again change my place and name. And I may as well bid you farewell here and now, Miss Miller, as I wish to run over and see my old friend, Gram'me Hooker, before she is in bed."

"Yes, it is time I was going. Well, good-bye."

She held out her hand, I touched it, and she was gone. If it had not been for her and her brother, I felt that I should not have been the nameless wanderer which I was; my bitter enmity could not change into friendship in an hour; though I had reversed many of my first opinions, I still felt harshly towards the governess.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE NEW YEAR'S CALL.

On the afternoon of New Year's day, three women sat around the cheerful fire in Lillian's little parlor. A small table in one corner held a loaf of cake and bottle of wine, for such friends as were intimate enough to be permitted to call,—the pastor, and a few others, were expected in the course of the day or evening, but the family was not at home to general visitors. For some time there had been silence. Miss Miller sat in the arm-chair, her elbow resting on the arm, her chin in her hand, the heavy square brows drawn down, and the deep eyes shining underneath with unshed tears; she was gazing into the bed of coals, while the flush of the fire-light playing over her stern, sorrowful face, gave it a bloom which was no longer its due.

Inez was on an ottoman, restless as usual, now thrumming her guitar, then getting up and going to the window, only to resume her seat with a sigh and a querulous word. She wore almost her only ornaments, a brooch and ear-rings of pearls; a few white flowers were placed in the heavy braids of her purple-black hair. Lillian sat opposite Miss Miller, dressed with her usual plainness, a few geranium leaves lying in their fragrant greenness amid the glossy gold of her curls, being her only attempt at keeping holiday. Some kind of embroidery occupied her fingers, and if she sometimes made a misstitch from the tears which dimmed her eyes, she patiently wiped them away and began

again. The slumberous spell of the silence and the warm fire quieted even Inez at last; she sat full fifteen minutes without speaking or moving, looking listlessly out at the people who passed.

I did not see the group which I so boldly describe; as I said once before, the links of my story, needed to fill up the gaps, were supplied by others. But I afterwards felt the influence of that day and hour on my own life.

"Don't you think Arthur will come to see us to-day?" Inez finally broke the silence by inquiring. "Didn't you say, Miss Miller, that he would be here during your visit?"

"He said he might come to escort me home. But I'm quite positive he will not be here to-day. He has a great many friends in the city, and this, as you know, is a great day there. He is too fond of pleasure to follow me out to this dull village before his New Year's calls are made."

"We are dull, I know," said Inez, bitterly. "You don't flatter us, Miss Miller. You are not as great a flatterer as your brother. Of course he has troops of beautiful lady friends who are dressed in jewels and flowers, and stand in their grand parlors to receive him. He would be foolish to think of us at such a time. Once I had all these things, and I mean to have them again! No one cares for you unless you are able to keep up style. It is worth making an effort to get it. I am as handsome as any of them, I know, when I can dress myself properly. Oh, I am so tired of this village! Do you really think he will come at all, Miss Miller?"

"I am nowise certain about it."

"There!" cried Inez, "there is some one on the steps now. Perhaps it is he! The train came in a short time ago."

Miss Miller was also thoroughly aroused. She had been, for two or three days, expecting a visitor to inquire for Mrs. Meredith—but not her brother Arthur.

"How slow your old servant is growing, Lillian," exclaimed Inez, impatiently. "He has had to knock the second time."

"Don't find fault with her," said Lillian, softly. "What should we do without her? Here she comes with a card."

The old woman handed it to Miss Meredith; she never would acknowledge the other as her mistress, and had given the card to Lillian, although Inez had been particularly inquired for.

"Don Miguel de Almeda," read the young girl, aloud.

"My cousin," cried Inez, flinging her guitar to one side, springing to her feet and clapping her hands with the joy and excitement of a

child. She was about to rush to the door, then hesitated, changed color, trembled, and hung back.

"Shall I tell her to show him in?" asked Miss Miller.

"Oh, yes. I am so glad," murmured Inez, recovering from the check, whatever it was, which had embarrassed her feelings. "Lillian, you will like him so! There is no one here to compare with him."

The next moment the young gentleman entered, and the Cuban girl, springing forward, threw her arms about his neck with a little cry. He spoke with her a moment or two in Spanish; Lillian did not understand it, but Miss Miller did; they were words natural to the occasion of greeting, to affection and surprise.

"My little cousin grown up, married, and a widow!" he exclaimed, after the first welcome. "How strange it seems to me!"

"Yes," said Inez, bursting into tears, "a widow, Miguel. Could you believe it?" and she looked piteously at her black dress.

Then she remembered others enough to wipe her eyes and introduce her friends.

"My little cousin's step-daughter! the quaintest thing of all!" he said, smilingly, as Lillian gave him her hand; and his dark eyes, warm with the tropic glow of his nature, rested admiringly on her fairest face.

"I too, am a relative—remember that!" he continued, still with a gayety that was charming because so natural, and releasing the little hand, he turned to bow to Miss Miller.

Summer seemed to have come into the small, low room. Lillian could but look at him more than she wished. It was her first meeting with one of the opposite sex in every way fitted for her companionship. Utmost ease of manner, ready, agreeable conversation, a grace, partly inherent and partly the result of cultivation and constant intercourse with the world—a dark, glowing beauty—he lighted the little sitting-room with a brightness it never before had worn. He apparently noticed no want of the luxuries to which he was accustomed, giving of his best to these three ladies in return for their hospitalities.

When Lillian went out to give orders for tea, Miss Miller followed, knowing that Don Miguel would desire to ask his cousin many questions which he could not ask in their presence.

The two were alone together nearly an hour. When they were summoned to the tiny supper-room, Inez came out in a blaze of splendor, which caused Lillian to look at her in astonishment.

She had never seen her so brilliant, not even before the doctor's death. Her sallow cheeks were like roses, her whole face sparkled.

"My cousin is so good," she cried. "He has invited me to go to the city for a fortnight or more. He says he will engage a private parlor for me at the New York Hotel, and I shall go every evening to an opera, or the theatre. It will be perfectly delicious, after this dreary, moping winter! He is going to write to Uncle Juan about me. I expect I shall go back to Havana next spring."

"It will add greatly to Inez' pleasure, I am sure, if Miss Meredith will consent to accompany her. She requires a more sedate friend to keep her raptures in check. I only dare to ask it in her name; but it would make us both very happy."

"O, thank you. But I am one of that class, who are bound to their necessities. Next Wednesday my school re-opens."

"Your school. Truly, my cousin did tell me that you two young ladies were engaged in earning your own living. But I did not realize. It's terrible! Why, I can not yet understand it. All I know is that it must come to an end. My cousin giving lessons, and you, Miss Meredith?"

The Don did not know the other lady was a teacher by profession, or he would have been less demonstrative in his indignation.

Lillian laughed, almost gayly, as she replied:

"That horrifies you, I have no doubt. But, here, we do not think it so frightful. I think work really has been to my benefit. Inez, perhaps, can not say as much. A very little is too much for her."

"Oh, yes! Cousin Miguel, you can not imagine what a slave I have been!—two lessons, twice a week, on the guitar, to the stupid little girls. What would my father have said to that? In Havana we would not do such things. But now I am going to the city with you, and can forget all this sadness. Lily, you can tell the children I will not teach them any more."

"How, after the two weeks pleasuring are over?" asked Miss Miller.

"Ah, I suppose—I'm sure I don't know—but cousin Miguel—"

"Will take care of his little girl, hereafter. Certainly, Miss Miller, now that we have found her we shall try to keep her. I shall write at once to my father and mother; and, unless there is something strong enough to hold her here, shall take her back with me when I return, in February. How is it, Inez? are you not homesick for your bowers of orange-flowers and ease?"

She glanced at him, blushed, and looked down at her plate.

"I shall decide before the end of the fort-

night," she answered, attempting to cover her confusion with a laugh.

Miss Miller and Lillian both knew that she thought of Arthur. If he was irrevocably lost to her, she would return with her cousin; but it might be that this propitious change in her circumstances, this favoring of titled and wealthy relatives, would draw him back to her. Place her in a worldly position equal to Miss Chateaubriand's, and she would engage in the rivalry, with spirit. The Don did not particularly notice his cousin's embarrassment. Familiar as he was with her frivolous nature, he did not anticipate that the widow of a few months had already engaged in another *affaire de cœur*.

The New Year's day closed more brightly than it began. There is something contagious in the buoyant happiness of a gay and care-free spirit. Don Miguel endeavored to tone himself down to a seriousness which should express his sympathy, yet he could not be otherwise than delightful. Miss Miller, herself, was not oblivious to his powers of pleasing, while Lillian appeared more like her old gay self than she had since her father's death. He sang the newest songs, accompanying himself on the piano; then he and Inez gave the other old Spanish songs to the guitar.

As several neighbors called, during the evening, all Hampton knew, the next morning, that a Cuban gentleman had come in quest of the dark-eyed stranger whom the doctor had brought into their midst. His wealth, and the general splendor of his dress and demeanor, were not dwarfed in the describing.

Don Miguel might have remained several days, but his cousin was so eager for her holiday excursion that she fairly coaxed him into taking the afternoon train into the city.

"O, Lily," she went on, as the other assisted her in her hurried preparations, "I am so sorry you can not come along! But I tell you, in confidence, I have planned it all out, so as to change this gloomy school-teaching. You shall marry my cousin! He is handsome and rich, and I know you can easily make him love you, for I saw, last evening, how he admired you. I shall praise you to him all the time I am gone, and when I come back, I shall bring him with me,—that is, if I come back at all, which I suppose I shall for a few weeks. Don't you think him magnificent?"

"Yes," said Lillian, "I think him very agreeable; and he must have a kind heart to indulge you as he does. But his destiny and mine are not cast in the same mould; he is deserving of some one brilliant and world-wise, like himself. He would not think of me,—and then, Inez, it is not our custom, here, to

choose a lover so quickly. I do not like to have you say such things. Don't speak so again to me; and I pray you don't breathe such a foolish thought to him. It would destroy all my pleasure in his society."

"I promise you I will say nothing then," said Inez, who seldom kept her promises. "But I know he liked you,—he could not remove his eyes from you. It would be so nice!—I thought of it over an hour, last night. I could visit you in Havana, during the winter, and you could spend your summers at the North with me."

"Hush, Inez, I will not listen. If you do not change the subject I will leave you to do your own packing. But, as to your remaining at the North, is that settled?"

"You remember what I told you Christmas Day. If Arthur marries that girl, I suppose I shall have to go home to my uncle. But I do not think to go down to New York for nothing. Ah, I will be revenged yet! I have half a mind to tell Arthur that we have found our box of gold, that you have divided it equally with me, and that you will probably marry my cousin. You will see, if I tell him that, how he will run after us."

"Inez, Inez, how recklessly your tongue runs. If you knew how it hurt me to hear you, you would not talk so. Shall I put your Spanish veil and mantilla in the trunk?"

"Yes, I shall wear them to the opera. Lillian, don't you think I might venture to lay aside my mourning occasionally now? The doctor has been dead more than half a year."

A heavy sigh was her only answer.

"You won't decide for me. Then I must decide for myself. You know, Lily, *cara*, there is so much at stake with me—and I look so well, in the evening, in rose-color. Will you lend me that pearl necklace of your mother's? I suppose, really, it ought to be mine, but, since she gave it to you herself, we will not quarrel about it. I will be very careful of it, and it just makes out my set."

Without a word, Lillian went to her room and brought the little casket containing her greatest treasure; she scarcely expected ever to have it returned to her, and she placed it in the trunk with dim eyes. She had loved Inez so much when her father brought her home and asked her to give his wife a place in her heart, she had abandoned herself to all the pleasure of a friendship with one of her own age; but now, day by day, she was being alienated from a person so selfish and exacting, and above all, so untrue to her revered father's memory. She could but feel, as she tied Inez' bonnet-strings and kissed her good-bye, that it

would be a relief to be free for a time from her complainings and freaks of behavior.

"A good riddance!" spoke Miss Miller, with emphasis, as the village hack rolled away from the gate with Don Miguel and his companion. "If he can endure her exactions for a fortnight, you will have quite a rest, my dear. I wish you were never to see her face again."

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### IN VINCLUM.

"I shall be quite alone when you, too, go away," said Lillian, trying to conceal from her friend the glow which had risen in her cheeks under the young Don's lingering gaze. "I wish we could live together always, you and I."

"So do I, my darling. And there is nothing in the world to prevent, except the probability that no sooner would we be cosily settled together, than some envious man would come along and steal you away from me."

"But I should not go, Miss Miller. I shall never marry. I love you better than I ever shall any one who will ask me."

"Nay, I do not place much confidence in such assertions made by an untried girl. It is to be expected that your time will come to love, and marry. I hope it may. In the meantime, if you wish it, and Inez deserts you, I will come back to you. There will be enough for both of us to do, if your school grows with the village. We will have a model school,—teach all the possible and impossible accomplishments, be fashionable, and ask a large price. Don't you think we can manage it?"

"My dear friend," replied Lily, clasping her about the neck; "it is you who are my second mother in heart. O, how I love you!"

She did not understand why the bosom to which she clung heaved with such force, as if great sobs were strangled within; she did not understand the emotion, but she knew it was there by the tumult of the panting breast, and she drew the pale face down, covering it with kisses, as forgetful of Don Miguel as if his dark eyes had never lingered upon hers.

Miss Miller closed her visit with the understanding that when her year's engagement had expired with the Chateaubriand's she would return to Hampton and to Lillian. This promise was comfort, almost happiness, to the poor child, whom she left weeping on the threshold of her lonely little home. Ever since her mother's death Lillian had relied on her governess; to have that faithful friend always to share her cares and enlighten her inexperience, was the best thing she could ask; and, with this hope to brighten the winter, she returned quite cheerfully to her work.

It was an absolute relief to have Inez away, since she was probably in good hands and enjoying herself; that the trip was prolonged from a fortnight to three weeks gave Lillian no uneasiness; especially as she received a polite note from Don Miguel, saying that his cousin was too indolent to write, and deputed him to the duty of letting Miss Meredith know that she was well, and so pleased with her visit that she proposed extending it to another week.

At the end of that time Inez came home, and Don Miguel with her.

"Inez had led him such a round," he declared, "that he was tired of dissipation. He came to Hampton to refresh himself with a little quiet,"—and, taking a room at the village hotel, he endured, without murmuring, such accommodations as were provided for him, spending all his evenings with "his relatives," taking them out to ride, always, on Saturdays, and grumbling because he could not do it every day.

"That terrible school!" he said one day; "it is a perfect ogre, Cousin Lillian. I could not catch a glimpse of your face, while that rules regnant,—no, not if I were perishing of *ennui*."

"I am sure you have Inez altogether to yourself. Since she gave up her guitar-lessons, she is enabled to devote herself to you. I think you have nothing to complain of."

"Inez is well enough; she keeps me busy, to say the least; but, between you and me, I like my northern cousin the best."

"Treason—rank treason!" laughed Lillian. "Inez, did you hear that?"—a little art of hers to call another into the group, for something in the Don's voice and look warned her not to prolong a duet with him.

"Never mind, Inez, stay where you are. I was just telling Cousin Lillian that I preferred the northern snow-drop to the southern rose. Only," dropping his voice, "you are too much of a snow-drop, cousin,—you are ice—frozen to the heart's core!"

"I believe I am," replied Lillian, willing he should think so.

"If I only dared hope that the fervor of southern skies would melt you," he went on, playfully, but with a tremor in his voice under all.

Miss Meredith did not hear him; she had drawn aside the curtain and bent to watch the "resonant steam-eagle" (*resonant* eagle, think of that!) mark "upon the blasted heaven the measure of her land,"—or what used to be her land before Meredith Place was sold away from her. The last wreath of vapor had melted in the rosy frost of sunset before she turned again,

with a careless remark on an entirely different subject:

"My mind is made up about the school," he continued, determined to advance, now that he had taken the first step. "It must be dismissed—not for a night, but all time."

"Per contrary," responded his companion, "Miss Miller's plans and mine are laid to extend it, improve it, and cause it to flourish like the green bay tree. I see plainly now, that I was created for no other purpose, save to teach the young idea how to shoot."

"I wish they were all shot," muttered Don Miguel.

A little silver ring of firmness in her voice warned him to say no more at present; but he was a man with a will, as might be seen by the outline of his thin red lips.

Inez had returned from New York in high spirits, which did not lose their buoyancy in a long time. The world was an entirely different world to her since her cousin's appearance on the scenes. She kept Lillian up and awake half the first night, discoursing upon the excitements of her visit, and displaying the presents her cousin had purchased for her.

"I did buy a few dresses which were not mourning," she said, speaking a little rapidly at first, knowing she introduced an unpleasant subject. "No one there was acquainted with my circumstances,—those who saw me did not know but I might have laid aside mourning a year ago. I will not wear these things here; at least, not yet, but there I saw no objection; do you? Look! here is the rose-colored silk! I ordered it and had it made within twenty-four hours after reaching New York. I wore it the first time I went to the opera, with my pearls. Miguel provided me with a superb fan and bouquet, and I wore my Spanish mantilla and veil, with white flowers in my hair. Oh, Lily, I was magnificent! I knew that before I left my room; but if you had seen the glasses leveled at us all the evening, you would know that I did not flatter myself. Miguel, you see, is very handsome, too, and his foreign air and my foreign dress, made us so conspicuous. I was willing it should be seen we were Spanish,—dark eyes and hair look so well with the veil. Miguel himself told me I was the star of the house. And oh, Lily, do you know, Arthur came in late with the Chateaubriands, and took seats not far from us! When he saw that all the lorgnettes pointed in one direction, he turned and gazed with the rest. He was really pale with surprise. I gave him a very slight, careless bow, which he might share with Miss Chateaubriand, who was staring, too. It was a most delicious evening; the music turned my

head, and my blood danced as I felt how colorless and *passive* that girl looked in comparison with myself. She had on a blue dress, and it was not becoming to her.

"The next day I sent him my card, and Don Miguel's. He called on us at the hotel; so did the Chateaubriands. She tried to vex me by saying how surprised she had been to see me at the opera, not knowing I was in town. She scarcely recognized me at first, not supposing I would be out of black so soon! Spiteful, wasn't it? I told her I was not out of mourning, but I had laid it aside for an evening, to please my dear cousin, Don Miguel. You should have seen how agreeable she made herself to him, and how urgently the family invited me to visit them, for even if the elder one is engaged to Arthur, there is Miss Sophie yet to provide for! I was quite willing to reciprocate, for I knew there was not the slightest danger to my cousin from the charms of any one: he had given me to understand that his heart was already taken captive."

"Did Arthur say nothing positive to you during your stay?" Lillian asked; "you certainly ought to know before this, if he has any intention of returning to you."

"He had already committed himself to her, I know that; but he does not love her—he is going to marry her to secure his position in society. But he did love me, and does yet—I can see it in every look; he is ashamed to say so now, for fear I will despise him—but I can see it: it is my revenge to see how he regrets his falsehood. I begged him, last autumn, to be patient about our finding the money, but he was not, and now he is nicely entangled. Bertha Chateaubriand shall never marry him! I can win him away from her yet—and I'm going to do it, out of revenge!"

"I should think you would scorn a lover like Arthur Miller too deeply even to seek to triumph over him!"

"I don't scorn him," cried Inez, passionately. "I know if it were you, you would despise him; but I love him still, and I can't be cruel to him; it is her I hate! I shall get him away from her yet. They are not to be married until midsummer, and they are coming out the first of May—the Chateaubriands are—to Meredith Place again; that will give me all the opportunity I want. I shall try to coax Miguel not to return to Havana in the spring; and I do not think"—archly—"that he is as anxious about it as he was when he first came."

All Inez' private conversations were in the same strain, until Lillian avoided her company as much as possible during those hours when they were alone.

But she could not shake off the torment, and she could not get rid of Don Miguel. Perhaps she did not wish to. Her life was far brighter than in the old desolate days. No heart is so self-sustained as not to feel the pleasure of another's devotion. There always was a vase of hot-house flowers on her desk—Don Miguel brought them when he came from the city, where he usually visited once or twice a week. Then he always brought fresh music, and they must go over it together. She could not resist or put aside his constant delicate attentions, of which Inez received her share, and which seemed to originate simply in his care for her—of course his other cousin could not be left out of all these. One thing she did refuse, which was, to receive any other gift than flowers, music, or a book. His own sense of propriety induced him to accept her decision, yet it was plainly to be seen how the generous and gallant young Cuban fretted under the restriction. Inez had no modesty about accepting unlimited stores of pretty things; her severest trial was the concession she made to Lillian's feelings in keeping on black dresses; and every day she feasted her eyes on the treasures she had accumulated for the "better time coming."

Inez, in her somber silks and velvets, moved about in state; but her friend never diverged from the plain garments befitting her income and occupation. In these she appeared more lovely to the fiery-hearted Don than all the fair ladies whose habit it was to display their fine dresses for his admiration.

It was so unusual to find so much dignity of character in one so young and beautiful as Lillian, that this moral charm, even more than her fair and exquisite features, fascinated one accustomed to finding women impulsive, selfish, and trifling, after the manner of his own cousin. The feeling grew upon him until it might be noticed he hesitated in expressing opinions which might in any way displease her.

"Lily would make a Puritan of him," Inez said, in her scornful way.

It is a fact, that men may jest about, and stand in awe of Puritans like Lillian, but when they have their best and most enduring love to offer, they are apt to lay it upon such spotless shrines.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE GOLD COINER.

John Milton, M.D., had vanished utterly from the face of the earth; his landlady knew him no more; his few forlorn patients looked up other young doctors, who would attend to their ailments and charge moderate fees. He had concluded to emigrate to the far West, and had taken a through-ticket to Chicago, then

the rising city on the outskirts of commercial progress—at least, his landlady was instructed to say so to such as might inquire for him, and this was the answer Miss Miller received when she called at his whilom residence a few days after her return from Hampton.

I did go as far as Buffalo, for I did not like the fact, that thus far the governess, at least, had kept track of me—knew my habits and whereabouts, and might be, at most unexpected times, a spy upon my movements. I resolved to escape her farther observation, if possible; should I wish to confer with her, of course I could do so at any time—for the present, I desired only opportunities to prosecute my own plans.

Thus, when I reached Buffalo, I turned and came back to Hampton, taking care, as usual, to arrive in the night. I now took up what I may call my permanent residence at Meredith Place. The deserted and gloomy old house was my abiding-place; I slept there, and there took the most of my meals—generally, however, stealing over to Gram'me Hooker's, in the twilight, for the warm supper which she always prepared for me, and carrying back provisions for the next day.

That my life was one of real hardship may be comprehended. Gram'me's cooking was not after the style of Francatelli's, and the only fire I allowed myself, was a little charcoal in the grate of my chamber. I was obliged to use the utmost caution, and to maintain that "eternal vigilance" which is the price of success. Above all things I desired to prevent rumors of any one haunting the place; for my whole hope was that I might, sometime, surprise the guilty party at his or her work. To one young and active like myself, such a life was dreary enough; but I never once thought of abandoning it, as long as there was any prospect that I might track to his haunt, and catch in the very act, the person engaged in coining my uncle's gold into money. I had the library as a resource, and I studied the old poets and old scholars with an interest due not so much to my tastes as my idleness; I do not now regret that enforced course of reading, but I would then gladly have exchanged it for the pleasures of liberty and young society.

The owner of the place came, once or twice, while I was in the house, to give it a cursory examination, but he saw nothing to arouse suspicion, and probably would have been incredulous, had he been informed that a tenant was living, rent-free, in the old mansion. Once I was under the bed in my chamber, in considerable fear of a little terrier who was snuffing about the room; the other time, I was driven

to the darkest recesses of the cellar; but I escaped detection, and was thankful.

I was very careful of Gram'me Hooker, during the January thaw and February cold. I caused her to clothe herself in red flannel and to wear two pairs of stockings when she went out; for I did not forget that she was liable to be laid up with rheumatism, and upon her depended not only my daily food, but all information concerning what transpired in Hampton. I say Hampton, but I mean one little dwelling in that village, around which all my interest centered.

The good old creature knew that I wanted to hear her talk of nothing but Lillian, and she gratified me by going over, in minutest detail, all she could glean of what was said and done and rumored. If to gossip was any pleasure to her, she must have passed a cheerful winter, for I did not stint her in the strength of her tea nor the length of her story-telling.

The burden of her narrative rang with two names—Lillian and Don Miguel. As much as she loved and commiserated me, I do believe gram'me secretly favored the fine Spanish gentleman. Gay manners, handsome features, and plenty of money, are seductive to all,—my only friend was not proof against their charm, but forgot what I suffered in listening, while she expatiated on his numberless perfections, how popular he was in the village, how all the girls were crazy about him, how fond he was of Inez, and how generous to her,—and, above all, how any one could see with half an eye, that he was perfectly wrapped up in Miss Lillian.

"But does she return his love? Do you know if they are betrothed? Do you know if he has declared himself?"—I suppose I asked these questions a hundred times.

Gram'me was not quite certain; but the child was looking more like herself,—she certainly seemed happier,—and, indeed, it would be a fine thing for Miss Lily. Still, she hardly thought any engagement had taken place, for Miss Lily had told her, more than once, that in June Miss Miller was coming back, and they were going to organize a Young Ladies' Seminary.

"Lillian is not one to give up her heart at a glance," I said to myself; "but long before June she will change her mind. God bless my dearest, my darling, in her choice. Even I, who love her, can not but like Don Miguel,—and, surely, her happiness ought to be more precious to me than my own."

I have not said much, have I, in this record, of my own personal unhappiness and misfortunes. Loss of character, home, and friends, did not fall upon me without wounding me almost to the death; but, the resolution to which



I so steadily held, to discover the really guilty, was so powerful as to eclipse all else in my mind. And in this I was not moved so much by the desire to clear myself, as the hope to restore her inheritance to my cousin, or at least to bring punishment on those who had deprived her of her father.

Now, Don Miguel became my torture. As I say, I rejoiced that my darling was thus provided for, but for myself I did not rejoice. I suffered the fiercest pangs of jealousy. Without disliking him, or refusing to do him fullest justice,—on the contrary, exaggerating his good qualities—I dwelt on his perfections as devotees kneel on peas. O, happy Don Miguel! Every evening he could bask in the sunshine of my darling's eyes,—while I was banished to this lonesome darkness. Sometimes, through the intense stillness of my prison, it seemed to me I could hear her rippling laughter, or her voice blending with his in some sweet love-song. I—I could not even look upon her face! Ready as I might be to act the spy upon those I suspected, in the interest of truth and justice, I never took the liberty of stealing to her windows to watch the brightness of her smile which shone for him. I was wild just to look upon her and near her speak—but I never went near the cottage where she lived.

It was strange, the life I led in that old house, so solitary, yet so intense. I could see that my image, reflected from the tall mirrors standing high in their antiquated frames, grew daily more pale and shadowy—daily more like the colors in the brocade curtains and Turkey carpets, which were slowly fading out. How much like a living thing a mirror is! When I go into a deserted mansion they face me like guards, and startle me. I did not dare to cheer myself with a fire in the chimneys; I did not dare to soothe myself with my old violin, which still hung in my chamber; but, cold, silent, and melancholy, flitted about the darkened rooms, beholding myself dimly in those ghostly mirrors, or with locked door and feet to the little charcoal brazier, hung languidly over my books, waiting for night to come, that I might gossip with gram'me about Lillian—waiting for night to come, that I might resume my wearing and ceaseless vigil.

Unhappy love and gnawing suspense were telling fearfully upon my youth and health. I was becoming nervous, from want of proper sleep, and from the habit of being everlastingly on the watch, with ear intent to catch every sound, by day or night. My eyes acquired a wild, bright look, almost like that of insanity; my complexion was bleached like that of a plant growing in a cellar; my clothes were

shabby and hung upon my shrinking limbs; my hair grew in thick masses of curls down my neck. I suppose if I had confronted all Hampton in the open day, scarcely two persons would have recognized me, and if any had surprised me in my retreat they would have been more alarmed than I.

"What a dangerous rival I should prove to Don Miguel de Almada, if I were to present myself, now, to my cousin!" I would say to myself, in mockery.

Sometimes I thought that my endurance might fail me utterly before the hour of triumph came; I might grow too ill to take care of myself, when, unless I could be sheltered at gram'me's, I should be detected, and all results of my long labors would be lost. This fear made me as careful of myself as circumstances would permit.

It was about the middle of March that an event occurred which partially rewarded my ten weeks of unceasing watchfulness. I had been driven to the conclusion that the robber must have disposed of the whole sixty thousand dollars worth of bullion before I made the discovery of the crucible, and that I had wasted time in this idle waiting; and had resolved to leave the spot before the first of April if nothing transpired. If the Chateaubriands were coming out on the first of May, I foresaw that the month of April would be given over to repairs and house-cleaning, so that my time was necessarily short. I had resigned expectation of any result of my vigils, and was in that despondent mood which amounts to indifference, when, making my way to Gram'me Hooker's, through a drizzling rain, one Friday evening, she told me that she had been at Lillian's that morning, who had spoken to her of receiving a letter from Miss Miller, announcing that she would arrive that afternoon to spend Sabbath with her, and that her brother Arthur would accompany her.

"She's as strange a creature as ever I saw," muttered gram'me, when she had bolted the door, and pulled down the green paper blind, preparatory to placing my supper of fried pork and roasted potatoes on the table before me.

"Who is strange? Miss Miller?"

"No, no, t'other one."

"I don't know who you speak of, gram'me."

She placed the dishes before me, and poured out my tea; as she handed me the cup, she said, a little impatiently:

"Why, that Spanish woman, of course. What under the sun an' airth Dr. Meredith ever married her for, beats me. He might know her ways wouldn't be like ours. But, men of his age allers makes fools of themselves in their

second choice; and the more they knows, and the more book-l'arned they be, the greater simpletons!"

"What set you to thinking of that, just now?"

"She was by when Miss Lily mentioned that Mr. Miller was comin' along. You oughter have seen her cheeks redden up an' her eyes blaze! The minute before, she looked as saller and pale as a bowl of cream, and all of a sudden she colored up like a rose. I don't deny she's as handsome as a picter when she's pleased or flattered—an', my, how she does dress! To be sure, she wears black, but it's velvet and all kind of rich things, an' she lays back on the sofa an' flirts her fan or tinkles her guitar, while poor Miss Lily is just fagged out with teaching and keeping house and all."

"Do you think it is injuring Lillian, gram'me?"

"Wall, I jest do, to say truth. If she had her hull strength I don't know as 'twould, but she was too young to be very strong, you see; she hadn't settled arter gettin' her growth."

"Oh, gramme! But then Don Miguel will soon put an end to that! Yes, he will take care of her!"

"I think he will," was the dry reply, and I swallowed my hot potato as if it were so much ashes. "Yes, I never did see a young man more completely bound up in a girl. He's like her shadder. I shouldn't be surprised if a wedding was to take place as soon as the season of mournin' had ended. Not before—no; Miss Lily wouldn't permit that."

I pushed away my plate and cup.

"Have another tater, Dr. Joe? I do believe you're gettin' tired of 'em. I wish I had suthin' better to offer you. You're drefful thin and holler-eyed, Doctor Joe. You'll kill yourself, if you don't quit mopin' round that old place and settin' up nights so much. I wish you'd go to Wisconsin, where my boy is. He says he's fatted up wonderful, and 'll send fur me this summer. Couldn't you go along? Ain't much sickness there; but there ain't no doctor either, and you'll have the first chance."

"I shouldn't be at all surprised if I went with you, gram'me."

"Dear me! how tickled I shall be! You'll forget your troubles there, and feel like another person. I make no doubt you'll grow rich and be a great man."

"Thank you, gram'me, for the prophecy."

"That brings me back to that Spanish woman ag'in, said gram'me, settling her elbows on her knees, her chin in her hands, and staring hard into the fire.

"What does?"

"Speakin' of prophesying and sich like witchcraft. I'm goin' to tell you what she did to-day, Doctor Joe. She put on her bonnet when I came away, and said she was going to walk with me as far as the woods, to see if she couldn't find some wild violets. It was threatenin' to rain, then, and I was rather surprised at her goin', for she don't trouble to be very polite to an old body like me; but she walked along by my side, very friendly, till we come to the woods, and then she pulled a few violets, and asked me, with a very red face, if I was wise about plants and medicines and sich things. I told her I knew the use of herbs pretty well, and could stew up a mess that was good for liver complaint; likewise, I could cure a sore throat and the bite of a copperhead. Then she asked me if I ever made love-philters. 'What,' said I, 'do you believe in that stuff?' 'Yes,' said she, 'all the young girls where I come from use love-philters. Sometimes they pay a large price for them.' Come, gram'me,' she said, very coaxing and soft, 'I believe you know how to fix 'em. I want one of the most powerful kind, and I will come an' git it in the mornin', and she took a gold piece out of her pocket and slipped it in my hand."

"Then you must tell me what you want it for, and who, or I can't make the charm work," I said, not because I wanted the money, Doctor Joe, but jest to see what was in that girl's head. 'I didn't know we had to tell who,' she said, kinder sot back. 'Oh, no matter, then, but I'll guess. It's the young gentleman that's comin' here to-morrow with his sister, ain't it?' She whispered 'yes,' and then I asked her what particular charm she wanted the philter to have, and she said she wanted one as would make a false heart true; as would win a lover back, whom a handsome girl had stolen away from her."

"Fool—little idiot!" I muttered, in contempt; "can she really be so silly, gram'me?"

"She was in dead 'arnest, Doctor Joe. And now I want you to give me a little powder, that'll do no harm. You can get some out o' the doctor's office, can't you? an' I'll go over to the house with you, when you go back, and bring it, so's to have it ready in the mornin'."

"I don't wish to have anything to do with such ridiculous folly."

"Indeed, it ain't the money. I shan't take much from her; but I've a curiosity to see how that woman will carry on."

"There may be something in that," I answered, after a little reflection. "A girl so artful and so ignorant might become dangerous—" here I paused, for I was choked by the sudden leaping of my heart into my throat at a thought

—"might become," perhaps *had been* dangerous! Doubtless this Cuban compound of jealousy, passion, art, and ignorance, had played similar tricks before.

It *might* be—but no; the idea was not credible.

"Here's a scrap of paper she took out of her purse with the money,—it fell on the ground, but she didn't see it, an' I picked it up. As near as I can make out, it shows she's on the look-out for magicians and sorcerers."

The old woman laughed heartily as she handed me the paper—a few lines cut from a New York daily, reading something after this fashion:

"ASTONISHING! The Turkish Charm of Eden, warranted to fascinate, and never fail. Also, Love Secrets, Beautiful Arts, etc. Try it. Send 25 cents, and receive by return mail, etc."

"I knew she was superstitious and narrow-minded, but I did not suppose her given over to anything so absurd. Well, gram'me, we will exercise all the might of our intellect and power of our education in concocting a philter which shall win the false knight from the little feet of Miss Chateaubriand back to the soft chain of the lady's guitar-ribbon, which he shall wear, henceforth, about his neck forevermore. I must go back now. I feel as if something were going to happen. I shall begin, presently, to believe in fore-warnings as well as love-philters.

'Fetch me that flower—the herb I showed thee once;

The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid,  
Will make a man or woman madly dote  
Upon the next live creature that it sees.  
Fetch me this herb: and be thou here again  
Ere the leviathan can swim a league.'

We must find this 'little western flower' for our fair Inez."

"What's that I'm to fetch, Doctor Joe?"

"Nothing, gram'me. I was only quoting from a play I was reading to-day," and I drew on my overcoat. "There is a certain little flower,—blue, not purple—I would like to squeeze the juice from, for this dainty lover. They don't call it 'love-in-idleness,' but lobelia, gram'me. What do you say to a dose of that?"

She laughed till her sides shook.

"I'll warrant it would do him lots of good,—specially if he's threatened with fever,—love fever or bilious, it don't matter which."

Rather coarse jesting; but the best to be had under the circumstances, and a good laugh might be the salvation of me, my nerves had been so long strung to the highest. I did laugh at the idea of lobelia for a false lover; but I was half in earnest, too, my dislike of Arthur Miller increasing the temptation.

"However, gram'me, I shall be prudent, and put up nothing which will betray the foolish

girl's more foolish arts. It is too wet for you to go out to-night. Stay you at home, and I will place the powders between the shutters of the kitchen window; you can get them, as you go by, in the morning. Good night."

I stepped out into the darkness from the cheerful little room; the rain pattered on the dead leaves over which I walked; the air was close, but balmy with the damp breath of the woods; not a star shone, but I was too familiar with the oft-trodden path to be at a loss; I knew when I came to the brook and when to the broken fence. An overpowering melancholy took possession of me, as I slowly glided forward in the musical darkness, so intense that it wrapped me about like a garment. No longer upheld by the hope which had so long supported me, life was objectless. Why not lie down on the dead leaves and perish like them, since I had dropped from home and love like the leaf from its branch? It appeared to my sense, that, if I would lie down and let the warm rain fall on me all night, in the morning I should be oblivious to all which now troubled me—dead—and at rest.

I resisted the temptation, pushed on wearily, found the gate, the garden, the unfastened door, which I opened and closed with the noiseless movement that had become habitual with me, and glided up to my room. I had decided not to look for the material for those silly "powders" in the evening, as I should have to strike a light, which I did not care to do. The fact that Miss Miller had probably arrived in Hampton was enough to renew all my old caution. Taking off my damp clothing, I bolted my door, crept into bed, and sank into deep slumber. It was not usual for me to sleep before midnight, but this evening the droning of the rain acted on my restlessness like an opiate.

I must have slept several hours, when I suddenly awoke, with every faculty on the alert. I do not know what aroused me so completely; I raised myself silently in the bed, and listened. I was certain I heard retreating footsteps, very light, as if the person was walking in stockings. It might have been only the pattering of a mouse—I was not positive; many a time I had been falsely alarmed; I did as I had previously done an hundred times, slipped out upon the floor and dressed myself. I waited fifteen or twenty minutes. I might have returned to my slumbers thinking I had deceived myself, but a door slammed, as if a current of outside air had driven it shut. It sounded like thunder in the empty, silent house, echoing through every hall and corridor. I can not describe how it affected me—who had waited so long. For a few moments I trembled; then



grew calm and perfectly self-controlled. Probably the intruder was alarmed at the noise himself had made. I would wait a little until his assurance was restored; yet not long, for I was afraid he might be going away.

I slipped the bolt of my door without making the least noise, opened it a little—all dark, all still. I passed on to the stairway, down it; still, all was rayless darkness. I glided through the parlors, listened at the library door—not a sound! On to the laboratory. The door had stood open when I left to go to my tea; now it was closed! I stooped to look through the key-hole, but it must have been stuffed, for not a beam of light was visible. I longed to try the knob, to find if the door was fastened on the inside, but hardly thought it prudent until I had further investigated. I heard movements within—the clinking sound of metal—and the soft roar of the current of air which was being forced into the furnace to bring the fire to an intense heat.

I suppose I was terribly excited, but I did not realize it so much until the reaction came. Making my way to the back hall-door, which I found unfastened, I went out to the window which belonged to the laboratory, and cautiously unclosed the slats a little way. I found I need not be so careful, for a newspaper had been pinned up inside, which effectually prevented my looking into the room; but the dull red glow of the furnace shone inside, and I could faintly discern a shadow on the opposite wall, stooping and rising, as the person at the furnace stooped and rose.

What should I do? All winter long I had waited for the hour, and now that it was upon me I could not decide what step to take! If I should go to the village and arouse the sheriff, and bring him here, all might be over before our return, when I should have exposed myself to arrest, given warning to the thief, and accomplished nothing! He might have been at work hours before I knew it, and be nearly through with his night's labor. If there was one person only, better for me to wait until he attempted his exit, and then throttle him; or dog his steps, and ascertain from whence he procured the secreted gold. If I once ascertained *who* the person was, I could more easily arrange matters for his detection and arrest.

As there was no conversation. I made sure that only one was engaged in the work. I felt a senseless anger at the paper, which alone interposed between me and a sight of the operator at his toils. If that were away, I might watch him at my leisure!

O! now if I had Lillian with me, how pure as the daylight could I be made in her eyes!

I even wished that I had brought Gram'me Hooker with me to act as witness. I need not say that in my mind a connection arose between the visit of the Millers to Hampton and this midnight adventure at Meredith Place.

It was still raining lightly and softly, and I was glad of it, as the murmur served to hide any faint noise of footsteps or breathing which I might make. After some hesitation, I went back, armed with a heavy cudgel with which I had previously provided myself, and took up my station by the laboratory door.

The darkness was absolute; all my senses were concentrated in the one of hearing; I could make out the whole process of the work inside. More than an hour passed. Did you ever *feel* the approach of an object in the dark? Standing here, I fancied some one crept down the hall, though I heard nothing; paused, as I had paused; was listening, as I was listening—*stood at the opposite side of the doorway*. I was tempted to stretch out my hand and grasp, to see if some one were really there; but even the singular fact of another person being on the watch, if fact it were, was second to the necessity of discovering the robber within—to whom any noise might give the alarm.

Yes, I heard breathing, repressed, and consequently, hurried. I softly reached forward my hand, but it touched nothing; and again I felt, as I had once before, as if some soul were here without its body. There was something awful about the silence and the waiting.

All things must have an end,—my vigil had. I noted the clearing up and the putting in order which was going on in the laboratory; then some one came to the door, cautiously turned the key, opened the door. There was no light, for lamp and furnace-fire had been extinguished. I raised my weapon, and brought it down heavily; there was a cry—a fall—some one uttered a shriek and stumbled! Was there more than one? I thought not, and resolved that this one should not escape me. I stooped to the fallen figure, and closed my vise-like arms about it. Good God! it was a woman's! I dragged her into the laboratory, shut and locked the door, and relighted the lamp which I knew stood on the table.

I hesitated before turning the light of the lamp on the woman, for two reasons: I was afraid I had killed her, and I dreaded, after all, to convince myself of *who* it was.

It was Miss Miller!

## CHAPTER XVI.

### BROKEN AND MENDED.

I saw that she was dead or unconscious, and catching the lamp, I ran out to find if she had

any confederates lurking about. The more I thought of it, the more it seemed to me as if two persons had cried out at the moment I struck; but I found no one in the house, or about the porches. I immediately fastened the back hall door, which, as I said, had been unlocked when I first came down, and then searched every room, even to the cellar. No one was in the house save us two, and I made sure that no one could get in. As I came back to the laboratory, close by the door lay a small bag, which I must have passed over without notice as I went out. I knew what was in it before I examined it,—it was heavy with the newly-coined gold. Taking it with me into the room, I now gave my attention to the woman, who lay on the floor, prostrated by my own hand. She had on a hood and a waterproof cloak, both drenched with rain. As I took off the hood, the heavy waves of her jet-black hair rolled down either side of the marble face—a face so pale that I felt, hurriedly, for the faint pulse at her wrist, which assured me that she was alive. I shrank as I touched her wrist. Helpless and wounded as she lay before me, all my old dislike sprang up anew at thought of the consummate acting of which she had been guilty—of the heartless, bold, and wicked character which could execute the scheme of wrong and robbery, while pretending to be Lillian's best friend.

However, the first impulse of a physician is to save life. I could not let her die before me; no, rather bring her back to the punishment which must await her. I had been her assailant, now I must be her surgeon. I was glad to find that the tremendous blow which I had dealt had not fallen on her head; there was a blood stain on her cheek where she had cut it in falling; but my weapon had struck her shoulder and arm, and the latter was broken midway between the shoulder and elbow. She moaned as I handled the injured limb.

Going to the laundry, I procured cold water; then I fastened myself and my patient in the laboratory, which,—having always served Dr. Meredith as a sort of office and drug-shop combined, for the benefit of poor country people—was still supplied with everything needful. Cold water on her forehead, and a spoon-full of brandy between her lips, soon caused Miss Miller to open her eyes and stare at me silently.

"I have broken your arm, and I'm going to set it," I said, as I cut the sleeve from it with my knife.

"Thank you," she answered, in a voice as cold and firm as my own, though not, perhaps, as strong.

It was a beautiful arm, perfect in its propor-

tions, with flesh firm and smooth as flesh could be, except where the ugly bruise was already beginning to swell and discolor. I could not handle it as I would have handled a man's arm, greatly as I disliked its owner; I thought once or twice my nerves would fail me; but her own firmness aided me to bring my task to a successful end. She never groaned while I forced the bones into place and applied the splints; but when I turned to give her some water, at the close, she had slipped off again into insensibility. More brandy;—then I went for pillows and a mattress, which I spread on the floor, adjusting her as comfortably as possible, with plenty of cold water bandages on her shoulder and arm; but no sooner had she entirely recovered consciousness than she sat up, saying—

"I must go back now, before it grows light."

"No, Miss Miller, you are my prisoner."

"Let me go back to Lillian before the day breaks. You can not wish to get up such a scene at Meredith Place as will follow our being found here."

"Do you think yourself in condition to walk a mile?"

"Yes, yes! you need not doubt that. My arm pains me a little, but I am strong as ever."

Her face was like the linen it rested on, and her pulse already rising. I regarded her with something like compassion.

"You could not do it, Miss Miller."

"I must. There is so much at stake." Rising to her feet, she staggered to the door, but found it locked, and the key in my possession; she sank into a chair beside it, looking so strange in her disheveled dress, with her bandaged arm and white face—

"You were always my enemy, Joseph. Oh, do be merciful now, and let me go away from this before the day breaks."

For answer, I turned out on the table the hundred gold eagles, scarcely hardened from the mould—glittering witnesses, telling of guilt and shame.

"Dr. Meredith's gold—Lillian's inheritance."

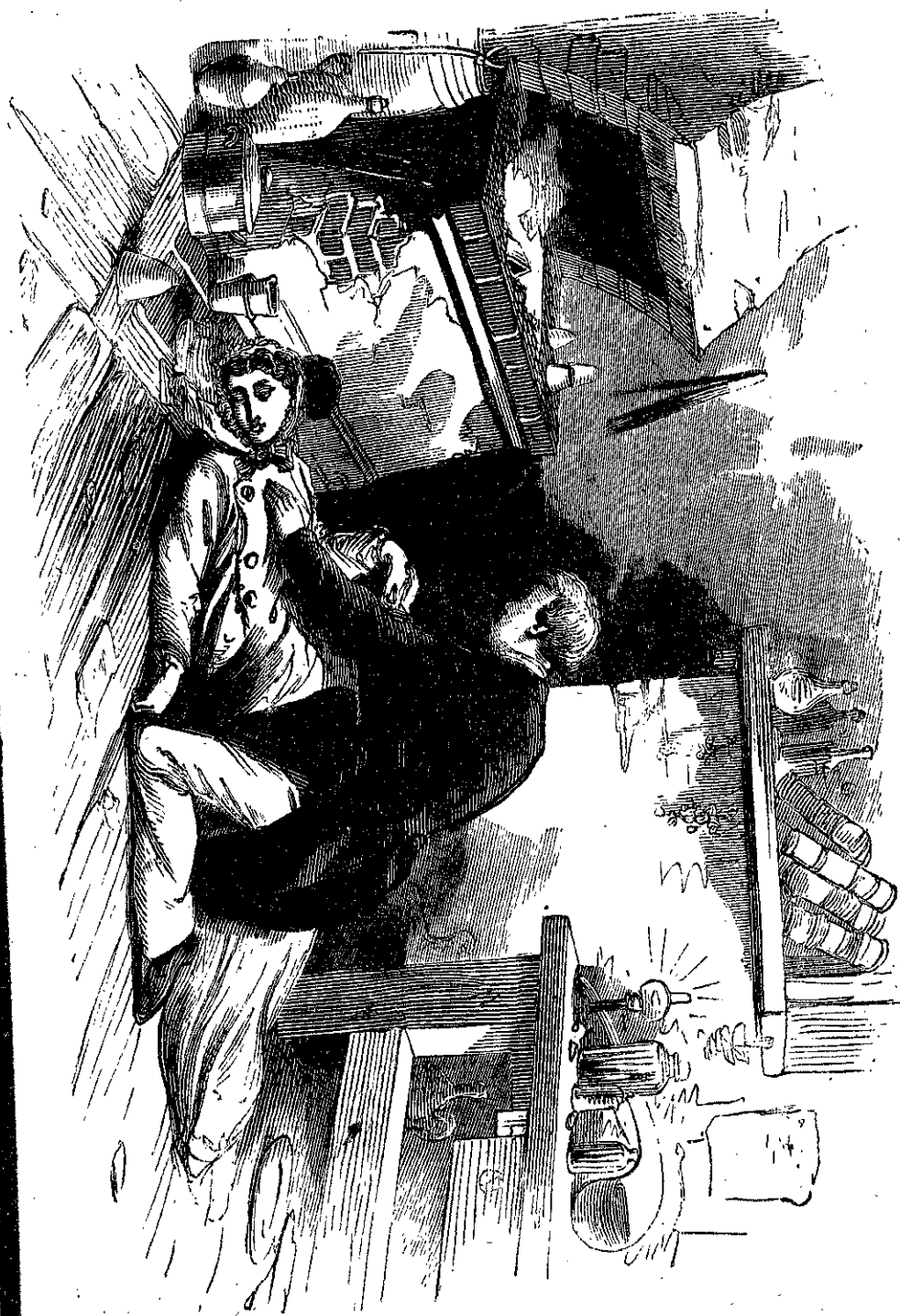
I thought to speak sternly, but my voice was hollow and trembling with emotion,—two burning tears ran down my thin cheeks at sight of this reminder of all that had occurred.

"Poor boy," she murmured pitifully; "poor Lillian! I am so sorry for all—and for myself. If I knew what was right for me to do, I would do it."

"You can not restore the dead to life; you can not—"

"Ah! don't! don't!"

"You can not restore the money already squandered, perhaps; but you can give over what remains, to the rightful owners. You can





cease to furnish your brother with means to keep up appearances which his own fortune does not warrant, while she whom you pretend to love and befriend suffers all the hardships of poverty. Because you did not succeed in obtaining the lead in Dr. Meredith's family, you have turned your ambition, I suppose, in the direction of the Chateaubriands. Your brother's alliance with that family will be a great honor, will it not? It *does* seem cruel to nip this fair prospect in the bud!"

"You have not the power to blast us," she defiantly returned. "Am I in your power? No!—we two are here, each to witness against the other. Whose word will be most readily received? Have you thought of that? You swear you found me here engaged in coining money. I swear that I came here because I had reason to know that you were haunting this house, and had been all winter secreted here. I came and found you at your task of melting your uncle's gold into coin, and when you discovered that I was on your track you struck me down, probably with intent to kill me, and put the inconvenient witness out of the way. Whose story will be most easily believed? My path has been straightforward since the day of the doctor's death, in the broad daylight, so that all might see it; yours has been covered by all manner of deceptions and secreties. Your course, from first to last, is enough to condemn and convict you, a dozen times over. Don Miguel will swear that you had the key to your uncle's treasure-box, while practicing your profession under an assumed name. Come! let us compromise."

"Never! I can die in a good cause. But I will not permit you longer to impose on my cousin Lillian your false friendship, as far as words of mine have power to warn her."

"Your words will have no power against me. You forget the light in which she views you. She would sooner listen to the hissing of a viper than to your voice, whom she regards as her father's murderer!"

"You told me that she never believed me guilty!" I cried, stung by her cruel words the more deeply that I felt them true.

She laughed,—you know how maddening a laugh can be, how much harder to bear than any sarcasm or angry epithet! I felt the impulse to punish her in some frightful way, but she had overtasked her strength, and again grew faint.

I could not strike a helpless woman—so I brought the camphor instead of the cudgel; but she was obliged to lie down, and give up, for the present, the hope of going home.

"Is it growing light?" she asked, after a short time.

I took down the newspaper and looked through the slats of the shutters; the rain had ceased, a rosy streak lay along the horizon, the black mist in the garden began to lighten into gray. By some chance, I bethought me to look at the date of the paper—it was an evening New York daily of the previous day!

I seated myself at the table with pen, ink, and paper. Miss Miller lay quite still, watching me. Suddenly she asked:

"May I look at that bag?"

She referred to the one which had held the money. Her question caused me to take it up and examine it. It was of brown linen, more like a lady's reticule than the canvas-bags which are made for coin; and in the top, just under the hem, was worked in red letters, A. M. It was soiled, and wore the print of money, plainly showing that this was not the first time it had served the purpose.

"You can not look at the bag. I have taken possession of it."

"Who are you writing to—the sheriff?"

I made no answer, but went on with my writing by the dimly burning lamp, feeling those black eyes fixed on me with no loving glance. Presently I was interrupted with—

"I meant to tell you, since you really feel so badly about your cousin's loss of fortune, that you hardly need bear such an onerous burden of care any longer. She will soon marry Don Miguel, who is able to replace what she lost, five times over."

Perhaps she saw the blot made on my letter; if so, doubtless it gave her a malicious pleasure in the midst of her pain.

The dawn was beginning to overpower the waning lamp-light as I finished and folded the sheet on which I had written. It read:

LILLIAN:

I told you, when I deserted name and fame, that it was in order to keep free to work for you. Probably you did not believe me;—I scarcely hoped you would. Since then I have never ceased to wait and watch. To-night my investigations have culminated in the arrest of the person who has made use of her knowledge of these premises, as well as her chemical knowledge, and familiarity with the laboratory, to coin the bullion which was in the missing box, into money.

Whether the same person prepared the fatal draught which deprived you of your father, I have not positively discovered. You must draw your own inferences. She is familiar, as you know, with the nature and uses of poisons. I came here at Christmas and found gold in a crucible. Since then I have kept watch for the coiner. To-night I heard her at the work, surprised her as she came from the laboratory, and struck her down, in the darkness, unknowing who it was. Had I guessed that the offender was a woman, I should have been less savage in my assault.

She laughs now, and declares that the cards are still in her own hands. She will assert that I am the guilty one, and that she discovered me. I quite expect

that you will give her statement the preference. All the proof I can offer in my own favor, is this paper, and this bag, which held the money. Perhaps you will recognize the bag as hers;—the paper was pinned up at the window. You can see that it came from the city yesterday afternoon, and Gram'me Hooker will tell you that I have not left this vicinity for over ten weeks.

I believe, too, that I will send this handkerchief. I picked it up in this room, on the afternoon of my uncle's death. It lay upon the floor, under the shelf containing poisons. You will observe that it has two holes eaten in it by a drop of acid.

I did not show it to you, while I remained in the family, for I did not like to shock you, and I had then no other proof. Now, I know it to be my solemn duty to warn you against one in whom you repose every confidence. I leave the whole matter in your hands. You can keep it secret, or expose it to those who will assist you in compelling her to divulge where the remainder of your father's fortune is. You can believe me, or weakly submit to be farther deceived by one who has preyed upon you without mercy. I hope that the larger part of your inheritance will be restored to you;—also, that you will be happy, and prosperous, as I hear there is every prospect of your being. Having done all that I could for the restoration of the gold, I leave it to you to command it. There is nothing more for me to do, in your service, and so, farewell.

J. M.

A formal epistle, meet for the eye of Don Miguel's betrothed. I had scarcely any hope that Miss Miller would fail to smooth the whole affair over to Lillian. I regretted, angrily, that I had failed to secure a witness, which had left me, still, so much at her mercy. I would have given much if Gram'me Hooker had been there, through the curious proceedings of that night, to bear her testimony.

To remain longer in Meredith Place would be unnecessary, for, of course, the coining would never be repeated; and I suspected that the box of gold would be delivered to my cousin, either openly or surreptitiously. However, I determined to make one more effort to render the matter certain. I turned down the lamp, flung open the shutter, and, as the gray morning light fell on the pallid face, I said, abruptly—

"You knew, then, from the beginning, the mystery of the figure eight?"

"Before God, I do not, Joseph Meredith!"

"Tell me where the box is."

"I do not know."

"Where did you get the gold?"

"Why should I tell you? You have no right to it."

"If I promise to keep the matter perfectly quiet, to conceal it, even from Lillian, allowing you to make such excuse as you choose for your broken arm, will you tell me where the box is?"

"I told you that I do not know. I have looked for it, as earnestly as you, and have never found it."

I turned away in disgust; why could she not content herself with simply denying my request, without adding this falsehood to it?

"Good bye forever," I said, turning a last contemptuous look on the governess, as she lay there, helpless. I could not but admire, even then, the haughtiness, the dignity, which never deserted her.

"She would die on the scaffold, like a queen going to be crowned," I muttered, as I turned the key, and locked her in.

I had previously folded a few squares of white paper containing some harmless powders of bi-carbonate of soda and powdered sugar,—with these, the newspaper, letter, handkerchief, and linen bag, I departed from Meredith Place; the gold I left lying on the table, as I had turned it out.

Walking rapidly to Mrs. Hooker's, I found her preparing breakfast.

"Give me a good, strong cup of coffee, gram'me. I am about to set forth on the journey of life to-day, and I shall need that to sustain me."

"What do you mean, Doctor Joe? Be you ral'y goin'?"

"Yes, quickly, and, I think, forever. Perhaps I shall turn up in Minnesota before long, and then you will hear from me through your son," I added, as she began to cry.

"If you must go, do go there," she urged, and I thought favorably of it myself; though my first anxiety was to get out of Hampton as speedily as possible.

"And now, dear, good, kind gram'me, good-bye," I said, as, having drank my coffee, put a crust of bread in my pocket, and made up my small bundle of linen and placed it in my traveling-bag, I started on this new journey.

"If the world was a desert island, and I a Robinson Crusoe, just wrecked, I should not feel half so desolate. Remember, take this package immediately, and deliver it into my cousin's own hands. Be certain that she has it within an hour. Give it to her yourself. Do not allow any one else to act as messenger. Here are the love-phillets, too, for Inez. Don't disappoint her! If Arthur Miller only remains over Sunday, they will have to do their work of fascination speedily! Again, farewell, and God bless you!"

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE TOWER CHAMBER.

The retired village of Hampton was changed, in a season, into a fashionable resort. The Chateaubriands had so faithfully praised it to their friends during the winter, saying always to those who wondered "where they should go next summer," to "do as they expected to do, go to Hampton," that when May came, all the quiet old farmers were besieged with applications for board; and what few houses were to be

had, were rented to such "high-flyers" as had never before graced these modest dwellings.

The one hotel-keeper, seeing that this was "the tide, which, taken at its flood, leads on to fortune," repaired the large, rambling shell which went by the name of Hampton House, re-papered, re-whitewashed, re-furnished, sent to the city for a cook who could fry potatoes à la Mountain House, laid in stores of young chickens and fresh eggs, hired half-grown boys to rifle the trout-streams, and set himself up in a flourishing business with summer boarders. There were young men, now, to keep Don Miguel company in fishing, hunting, and driving; for the Spanish gentleman had not yet returned to Havana. He was waiting the pleasure of his cousin, he said, who had not decided whether she preferred the North or the South. As for Inez, she hardly thought it prudent to return to Cuba in the hot season, now that she had become, in a measure, acclimated here.

Even if she had had no deeper reason for desiring to remain in Hampton, the prospect of gayety was enough to bewitch her; her cousin was so popular and so admired, that the overflow of the attention he received quite deluged her and Lillian. And, indeed, with some one to dress her, indulge her, wait upon her, and "bring out her good points," she would have been a belle anywhere. The fact of her having been the bride of a few weeks and the widow of a few months, only added to the interest felt in the beautiful Cuban, the dark splendor of whose eyes was supposed to borrow its deepest charm from the pensive fall of eye-lashes which knew well when to droop. Doubtless, it would have put the finishing-touch to her attractions, if it could have been announced that the mystery of Meredith Place had been solved by a discovery of the missing gold; Don Miguel, who was as worldly-wise as he was polite and fascinating, smiling in his sleeve when certain elegant youths, who hardly knew how to pay their board-bills, endeavored to draw from him, in confidence, how much of a settlement he intended to bestow on his favorite cousin.

The Chateaubriands were the leaders in all in-door gayeties, as Don Miguel was in all outdoor excursions.

The young ladies commanded almost as many followers as they could have done at Saratoga, which, in these days, was the watering-place; and, for once, Miss Sophie, the younger, had her full share of attention, for it was, by this time, pretty well understood that the elder was affianced to the young broker and lawyer who came out every Saturday from the city, and remained until Monday morning.

Yes, Bertha Chateaubriand, in the midst of

picnics, rides, drives, and evening reunions, had to take time to prepare her trousseau, as her wedding-day was set for the 20th of July, after which a six-weeks bridal tour was to follow.

Her parents had consented to her marrying Mr. Miller, seeing that she obstinately declared her purpose to do so, with or without their consent; but they were far from satisfied with the alliance. They had expected their eldest and handsomest daughter would make a more brilliant match—some foreign diplomat, or leading politician among our own distinguished men, being the least to which they had aspired, Mr. Chateaubriand having quite intimate relations with great people in public life, and being more ambitious for power than money. It was a disappointment of very annoying character to find that Bertha preferred this unknown lawyer, whose sister actually earned her own living; but, the family had been wealthy in Miss Miller's younger days; they liked her, and Arthur evidently was acquiring money—he appeared well at a dinner-party, or in the waltz—would sometime be a wealthy old broker, as his expected father-in-law was before him, and with this they were obliged to be content. Having once yielded, they had the good sense to refrain from irritating Miss Bertha with complaints or sarcasms, and furnished money for the trousseau almost as liberally as if her fiancée had been a member of the French Legation, or a German count.

It might be thought that Arthur Miller would have preferred the Chateaubriands to have taken almost any other than Meredith Place, where he had once desperately flirted with Inez, if not with Lillian also, and where he would have to meet, continually, the fiery and jealous gaze of the Cuban. But, for reasons of his own, he was well satisfied.

Everything went merry as a marriage-bell. Inez had plenty of cavaliers, and, if she cherished resentment or revenge, she hid it, for the present, deep in her heart. She and Sophie Chateaubriand grew to be great friends, and were together almost daily and hourly. According to Sophie, Inez was one of the most childish, artless, and exquisitely delightful beings that ever lived—a little pettish and exacting, flying in a passion to get over it in a minute: but even this high temper was one of her charms—she indulged it in such an open, infantile way.

Sophie bore it with the utmost *sans froid*, when Bertha, whose choice was already made, remarked, pungently, that it was plain the lady was only a faint reflection of the perfections of her cousin, Don Miguel de Almeda.

"I don't deny it," laughed Sophie, going to the great mirror of the boudoir where they sat

—the little east chamber which had once been Lillian's—and drawing her pale, flaxen ringlets through her fingers out to their full length, while she studied the contour of her slender figure, the poise of her head, the turn of her nose, and the shade of color in her blue eyes—"that if I were as handsome as you, Bertha, I should make a tremendous effort to conquer the Don. You must acknowledge he's far superior to Arthur. Wouldn't mamma's eyes dance, if I could bring that splendid cavalier to her feet as a suitor for her second daughter's hand!"

"Why don't you set yourself seriously to the work, then?" queried Bertha. "Papa would be pleased to have a live Don in the family. He has never been fully Americanized—papa has not. The noble blood of his French father still runs in his veins too freely to allow of his being a good republican. Catch the Don, Sophie, and make him happy for life."

"Who?—the Don, or papa?"

"Both, if you can. Why not? Don Miguel is remarkably good-tempered, for a Spaniard. If I had not been already promised to my dear Arthur, I'm not certain what the effect would have been upon me, of his magnificent manners, dress, and all that. Dazzling, I dare say!"

"It's fortunate I'm not so impressible, since the current report in Hampton is, that he is a perfect slave to Lillian Meredith. I'm not beautiful enough to engage in a rivalry with her."

"Nonsense! You've grown very modest all at once. Your style is the same as hers—a blonde, blue eyes, light hair, rosy cheeks; and certainly you have every advantage of dress, air, and manner, as well as your father's position in society."

"Advantage of dress I acknowledge, and of family—that is, of money, for I believe Dr. Meredith was a gentleman, and a man of talent; for the rest, I give up, without competing. I've tried to find fault with her, and I can not, and what more can a rival say than that? However, don't think I utterly despair. Inez confides to me that Lillian has refused Don Miguel—would you believe it? She tells him that her spirits are so broken by the tragedy of her father's death, that she would not be such a wife as he deserves—that she can not even think of love, as yet; that she never expects to marry! Did you ever? Throws away this brilliant opportunity—probably her only one—and clings to that tiresome little school! I hardly know what to make of her!—though I'm much obliged to her, I'm sure, for refusing the Don. It seems he is not greatly discouraged by her coyness, as he persists in waiting until she has changed her mind."

"In the meantime, do your best, my love, to make him change his mind. It would be such a balm to the wound I have inflicted on the family pride!" And the beauty went on with her interesting task of basting a piece of yellow Chateaubriand lace around the neck of a salmon-colored satin evening dress, whose tint was scarcely deeper than that of the lace.

Sophie turned from the mirror, and threw herself indolently into her favorite seat—the low and deep embrasure of the window, close beside which, on the outside, rose the tower which gave to Meredith Place its distinguishing feature of dignity. The house was one of those to which such an adjunct was not inappropriate, being built of solid blocks of smooth gray stone, and the tower rising out of its eastern and northern angle, clothed from head to foot with the glorious old Irish ivy, whose dark green leaves glistened in the June sunlight.

A joy forever that ivy had been in the eyes of Lillian, from her babyhood up, and her wistful gaze turned often towards it now in the days of her exile. Perhaps Sophie felt some of the weird, magnetic influence of the place—for, as she sat in the window, gazing out at the tower, and breathing the breath of the roses which swung at her own casement, her face took on an awed expression, and she spoke, after a time:

"Bertha, do you know sometimes I feel afraid in this solemn old house! All the neighbors hold to the unshaken belief that it is haunted; every old farmer will have a story to tell you about it. They say the doctor's spirit is wandering about it, searching for his lost gold; some think that nephew who murdered him is still lurking about, living in caves, or dens, or what not, and that he visits the place whenever he dares. Ugh! the very thought makes me shiver! Fancy that demoniac young man coming in at windows of nights, and looking at us as we sleep! I'm certain, Bertha—certain, that some one was in that queer room they call the laboratory last Saturday night! I sat up reading a novel until very late, and I went to the dining-room for a glass of ice-water—about two o'clock, it must have been—and I heard a noise in there—a curious noise, which I could hardly explain; it sounded like some mysterious miser counting out his money!"

"Nonsense! You had been reading a ghost-story, I suppose."

"No: nothing worse than Jane Eyre. I did hear something, as truly as I see you now!"

"Mice running amongst the bottles, I suppose."

"Perhaps; but I don't think it. It had a very supernatural sound, I assure you. By the way, you and Arthur keep very late hours."

"Do you call eleven o'clock 'late hours'?"

"Oh, no, puss; but I happen to know better than that. I heard some one pass, in the upper hall, while I was undressing, and I was so nervous about our being haunted, that I screwed my courage to the sticking-point, and peeped out, just in time to see Arthur close his room door. It was half-past two by my watch."

"Well, I don't know what he may have done, but mamma sent me to bed at eleven. Perhaps he, too, had a copy of that fascinating Jane Eyre. I have heard of its keeping several people up until the 'wee sma' hours.'"

There was a pause, while Bertha finished off the neck of the dress and turned her attention to the sleeves. Then the younger, whose thoughts had run on in the same channel, resumed:

"Inez often talks with me about the Doctor's missing money. She firmly believes that it is still somewhere about this house or garden; for she says her husband himself secreted it the night before his death."

"Oh, all the world knows that the theory is, that he was followed by his nephew, who saw where the box was placed, and then resolved to get his uncle out of the way, that he alone might enjoy the concealed riches."

"Yes, I know it. But still Inez persists in believing that he did not succeed in getting off with the gold. She says he could hardly have escaped detection had he carried so much with him. Perhaps he is still keeping watch over it, awaiting an opportunity to convey it away."

"They have searched everywhere, even to digging up every foot of the garden."

"I know it. Still, who knows but what we may stumble over it sometime? Inez is always looking. I have a fancy now, that it is in the very top of that tower!"

"Do be quiet, Sophie. You make me nervous."

"Here comes Inez. I was just saying, my dark-eyed darling, that perhaps your fortune lay concealed in some cobwebby nook in this old tower."

"Oh, every beam and rafter has been investigated long ago,—the loose boards of the garret-floor all lifted. No, no, it's not there! I wish I could find it. I'm tired of being poor!"

"You do seem rather poverty-stricken," remarked Bertha, scanning with laughing eyes Inez' costly morning-robe, and the jewels which she wore, with southern taste, by day as well as evening."

"My cousin is generous enough; he can afford to give me what I want. But that is not all one wants money for,—to buy clothes!"

"To buy a husband is it, then?" Bertha was on the point of saying, when prudence as well as delicacy checked her; she had heard that her own promised husband had been not insensible to the lady's attractions; and as she now glanced up she met a strange look in the black eyes.

"I wonder if she is jealous," she thought, as her own eyes fell. "Arthur told me that she was, but that he had never given her any reason to be,—that it was her natural state of feeling towards all women save herself."

"Why do you wear amber?" cried Inez, the next moment, as if no more important thought ever crossed her mind, with a disdainful examination of the satin dress. "Do you not know that it is a color for brunettes?—my color!"

"It is becoming to brunettes, and not unbecoming to dark-haired blondes, like me. Arthur likes it, and that settles the matter."

"He likes it, does he?" murmured Inez.

"Yes. This belongs to my *trousseau*. I shall not wear it until after the 'important occasion!'"

"That will be—"

"The twentieth of next month."

"And this is—"

"The twentieth of June. Ah me! Time flies too quickly!"

"Yes it does," assented Inez, "but a great deal can be accomplished in a month, after all."

If her tone was significant, the two girls did not notice it. Arthur Miller might have remarked it, had he been present; for he never felt quite at ease about the Spanish woman, with whose passionate nature he was only too well acquainted. It is true she had made the first advances, since advances can be made by a look as well as a word; but he knew that she was very young, and a creature of untrained impulses, and that nothing could justify his trifling with her as he had done.

If any one could have seen into the heart of the young man, he would have discovered that his fancy and his imagination still were held captive by the willful, spirited Cuban; that it was only the preponderance of Bertha's substantial charms which had outweighed her in the balance; but, as his love, either way, and at the best, is not worth mentioning as a motive power, we will let it pass for what it is worth.

Women will love such men just as devotedly as those of deeper natures, and prize their poor, selfish preferences just as highly; and Inez felt as bitterly, as humiliated, as revengeful about the desertion of this insincere and shallow man

as if his heart had been something worth retaining.

"You have not told me if I am to be one of the bridesmaids," she said, presently.

"But you have been married; it would scarcely be *en regle*."

"No one will think of that, I am so young yet. Sophie and I will make such a fine contrast. If you say 'yes,' it must be in time for me to order a suitable dress."

"Oh, do consent, Bertha! I should like it extremely; and, as Inez says, no one will think, at the time. We must have Lillian, too—she is so lovely!—and one more. Who shall it be?"

"I don't care," answered the bride-elect, indifferently; "only, I trust it will not be ominous to have a widow among the bridesmaids."

Again that light quivering out of Inez' eyes.

"Inez, supposing we go up in the tower-room. I've not been there since the first week we came out. The view is beautiful. I mean to have a carpet put down, and my painting and embroidery carried up there. Then I can sit there the long summer afternoons, and imagine myself the Lady of Shalott, or the betrothed of a troubadour who has gone to the wars."

"Better be securing some nice *bona-fide* beau, and leave off dreaming of troubadours," called Bertha, as the two went away, linked arm in arm, in search of the narrow, dusty stairway leading up to the "tower-room," a small, square chamber, unfurnished, save by an old map of Meredith Place, made by the surveyor of the first purchase, and hung in the tower for safe-keeping and reference—this old map, a wooden settle, where those who climbed here for the view, might rest themselves—and a store of old magazines and papers, which Lillian Meredith had brought here, probably, from time to time, to read and muse over.

"Some one comes here, if we do not," remarked Sophie, as they held up their delicate dresses from the dusty stairs; "here are the prints of a man's boots, going up and coming down, more than once. Possibly some of our visitors have discovered the beauties of this location. Oh, how entrancing! clouds and blue ether above us! this beautiful country below! I'm in love with this room! absolutely in love with it. I mean to live and die here. But first, I must have it cleared out! Betty shall attend to it this very day. And to-morrow I shall bring my things here, and take up my residence."

"You don't mean to sleep here?" inquired Inez, with a shudder. "I wouldn't stay here alone for all the world."

"I'm not as superstitious as you, little darling. Still, I don't know that I care to sleep here. I can enjoy enough of my tower by daylight and sunset, I dare say. Ah, how splendid the sunset must be up here! Now, Bertha hasn't a particle of romance in her nature. But I am full of it, trifling as I appear. I could be happy here weeks at a time, without the excitement of any society. I do wish papa would buy Meredith Place, and make it our home altogether, in the summer season. I must coax him to do so. What does this yellow old map say? two hundred and eighty acres,—and here it is, marked out, hill and dale, meadow and upland, forests and cleared fields; this pretty trout-brook where we took the gentleman the other day, you remember, and your cousin caught a trout on a hook made of a pin. I wonder if we can see it from the tower! Yes, there it is, glimmering a moment out of its shadow in that field by the wood:

'I wind about, and in and out,  
With here a blossom sailing,  
And here and there a lusty trout,  
And here and there a grayling.'

Isn't it perfect, Inez?"

"What?" queried her companion, with indifference,—“the brook? I suppose so. But, I don't care for such things. I wish Meredith Place was mine—as it should be—as it ought to be”—her voice rising with excitement as she thought of it; “I would gladly sell it to your father, and see no more of it. I don't like the country, and I don't like this place. We were so unhappy here,” she explained, “Lillian and I. And then to be robbed, as we were.”

"You have had a great deal of trouble," replied Sophie, soothingly. "It must have been so hard for you two young girls to be left helpless. I can not imagine what I would do without papa, and without any money. I suppose I should have to teach school, as Miss Meredith does; but, oh, dear, I should pity my pupils! I suppose Miss Miller was a great comfort to you, in your first desolation."

"No, not to me. I detest her!"

"Why, is it possible? We all think so much of her."

"I beg your pardon, Sophie. I forgot that her brother was to marry your sister. Lillian thinks the world of her; but I never did. She was jealous of me when I first came here; I could guess that she did not like my marrying the doctor, but you must not mention it, please, Sophie. Her eyes look straight through any one. I never like to meet them. If you really like Meredith Place so much, you must make yourself agreeable to Miguel. He tells me he is negotiating for it, himself. I do believe he intends giving it back to Lillian, whether she

marries him or not. He need not buy it on my account, as I told him, for I would never live here again.

I wish Miguel would marry you instead of Lily; then I might be induced to visit her occasionally. I suppose, in that case, you would spend your summers here."

"How ridiculous!" cried her friend, blushing, "to be speaking of such things, when he has never thought of me. You speak, too, as if Don Miguel had only to choose in order to be chosen."

"Well, Sophie, you couldn't help loving him, you know, if he should try to make you! There are not many men like my cousin."

Sophie said nothing; but there was a shadow on her fair face, as the two turned and went down the staircase. Frivolous as their mode of life naturally made her, she had more real feeling than three such girls as Bertha, and it is not impossible that she admired Don Miguel more than was consistent with her happiness. However, she was by no means one of the desponding and melancholy kind; her interest, at present, fixed itself on the tower-chamber, and she gave the household no peace, until Betty had swept down the cobwebs, laid a carpet on the floor, scoured the stairs, and carried up a little table to hold her water-color paints and work-basket. Then, with the ivy curtaining the narrow and lofty windows, and the June breezes wandering up from the beds of roses below, Sophie declared it the region midway between heaven and earth where she most delighted to dwell, and made every one come up and acknowledge how charming it was.

She was not tired of talking of her tower-chamber, when Saturday evening came, and with it Arthur Miller, as usual, to spend Sunday with his betrothed. There were half-a-dozen other guests about the tea-table, eating strawberries and cream to their hearts' content, when Sophie, sitting opposite Arthur, suddenly exclaimed in her animated way:

"I have not told you yet, of my great discovery."

"What is that?" he asked, with his pleasantest smile.

"Of the tower-chamber!"

His spoon fell crushing into his plate, causing all eyes to turn in his direction. His face was pale and his hand trembled, but he laughed, constrainedly, as he said "he believed he had had something resembling a sunstroke, as he walked down to the cars, and he did not feel just right yet." Bertha wanted to be anxious about him, but he assured her the tea would be the best remedy, and when the attention he had attracted was again diverted, he said to Sophie:

"What about the tower—anything new?"

"Oh, no, nothing new—only we never discovered it before."

"Discovered what?"

"Why, how charming it is up there, of course. I shall no longer give it over to spiders and bats. I have had the chamber furnished and furnished, and have taken possession in my own name, by right of discovery. I call it 'The Lady's Bower.'"

"Is that all?"

"I should say it was enough. Did you expect there was another continent to be discovered? Since you speak so slightly of my bower, your punishment shall be to ascend and explore it immediately after tea. It is then in all its glory."

"Arthur is fatigued. Do let the bower rest until to-morrow." Bertha was a little impatient.

"By no means," said Arthur, quickly. "I should like nothing better than to explore it this very evening. I have been up once or twice when the doctor's family was here. The view is very fine, if I remember aright."

And as soon as they left the table he reminded Sophie of her promise, and the two went up to the tower, just then illumined with the roseate reflections of a summer sunset.

"It is, indeed, charming. I can not too much admire your discrimination, little sister. Oh, dear! here is the old map of the original estate—quite a curiosity! Don't disturb that, Miss Sophie; it may be of importance to purchasers sometimes."

"Oh, no! I shall not meddle with the map," said his companion, and after that, although he was warm in praise of her bower, he seemed ready to forsake it for the company of the young lady who awaited him below, and Sophie was left to a twilight reverie in her tower-chamber.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A FEW THREADS.

Miss Miller sat in the little low chamber of Lillian's house which she had occupied since the day of the accident, which had disabled her from returning to the city for such a length of time that she decided to have Lillian write to Mrs. Chateaubriand to procure another governess, her engagement coming to a close in a few weeks, at best.

It was now the first of July, and a period of rest to be enjoyed; to her, from physical pain, to Lillian, from the cares of her school—this being the first day of the summer vacation. Miss Miller leaned back in her arm-chair, looking idly out of the window and listening to a murmur of voices coming up from the parlor be-



neath; she could distinguish nothing that was said, and did not try to; but she knew who were there, and the probable topic of their conversation. Her face, paler and thinner than its wont, bore the look of mental trouble. Bodily suffering might bring pallor and loss of flesh, but it had not here, for the woman's courage was great, and her splendid physique enabled her to bear the pain of a broken arm without flinching; that was not what had changed her and given that settled contraction to the black brows and drawn lines about the firm mouth. The low fever which had kept her a prisoner from April until July was entirely a mental malady.

There had been no gossip whatever in the village about the accident. When Lillian received my messages by Gram'me Hooker, she had gone alone to Meredith Place, unlocked the door whose key I had left on the outside, sat down by the bed where her friend lay looking up at her with defiant eyes, asked and received an explanation.

Whatever that explanation was, it was of a character not to entirely break the existing friendship; when the two had had "their talk out," Miss Meredith called gram'me and sent her to the hotel, with a penciled message to Arthur Miller to come, quietly, with a carriage, for his sister had been injured by a fall at the old house, and needed assistance to return to her (Lillian's) home.

Arthur had responded speedily to the call. He must have been very much alarmed, for he was trembling visibly, and was whiter than his sister when he came into the laboratory.

"Good heavens, Annie! What—how—"

"Never mind the what or how, Arthur. I fell and broke my arm. A physician has already set it. What I want of you is to convey me home before the neighbors get a hint of what has occurred and come crowding in."

He gave a sharp glance about the room. Lillian, at Miss Miller's request, had previously gathered up the money in the bag and placed it in a little basket on her arm, yielding to the former's suggestion to keep matters quiet by concealing from the public what had been discovered.

"You must have been out early," remarked Arthur, when his survey was completed. "Was Miss Meredith with you?—and how did you contrive to fall in that awkward style?"

"I was out early; Lillian was not with me; and you know I am always awkward. I don't feel much like indulging in long explanations."

Something in her tone brought the blood into his face, which was now as red as it had been pale.

"I am glad you are hurt no worse, Annie," he said, after an instant's hesitation; and for

once in his life there did really seem to be a touch of genuine feeling in his tones. "My state of mind was not enviable when I received the message, not knowing how serious the accident might have been."

And, indeed, he still looked haggard.

"I have the easiest carriage I could get at the livery. Come, sis, shall I help you up now? And who set your broken arm?—has old Doctor Smith been here?"

"Never mind about the doctor. It is set, and that suffices. Now."

She walked firmly enough to the carriage, but its motion, as they drove over the country-road, was a pretty severe trial; and when they helped her out at the cottage, she was quite ready to go to bed.

That night she insisted on her brother staying with her, and lying on the couch in her chamber, saying that she was feverish and should want occasional attention, and that Lily should not be broken of her rest;—Sabbath night the same, it would be time enough for Lillian to take her turn when Arthur was no longer there. He had submitted quite meekly, and, altogether, was so attentive to his sister, so obedient to her caprices, so really anxious about her, as to rise considerably in Lillian's esteem, who usually had small respect for him.

Inez could hardly feel sorry at Miss Miller's sufferings—she was thereby given so fine an opportunity for trying the charms with which the old woman of the forest had supplied her; and, whether the spell worked, or whether it were simply that the black eyes were present and the blue ones absent, Arthur was at her feet as in the days before he met Bertha, begging for Spanish songs, and smiling to see the light glow in those wonderful, lustrous eyes.

But the greatest change which the events of the last two days had worked was in the mind of Lillian Meredith. Any one, knowing her well, as Miss Miller did, would have said that she had found relief from some pressing and constant care. It could not have been the acquisition of the thousand dollars which had come so strangely into her possession, which thus lightened her steps and brightened her eyes. What Miss Miller had told her, only themselves knew. My letter could not have had the effect I desired, since her governess still was her dear friend, and no viper, as I had informed her she ought to consider her. Had I been where I could have observed the effect, I should have told myself that the consummate art of that woman had carried her safely through this disaster, and left me lower sunken than ever in the opinion of the only person on earth for whose opinion I cared.

But I was far away from there at length, considering that my intermeddling had accomplished all it ever would; and as Gram'me Hooker's education had never reached to the height of inditing and directing a letter without assistance, and as I had forgotten to arrange with her to address me under an assumed name, I was entirely without means of knowing how the story of life was unfolding, leaf by leaf, at Meredith Place.

Unfolding, rosily enough, under the apple-blossoms of May and the flowery bowers of June, as far as any human eye might read. For, as has been written, there was an unusual amount of gayety; youth, leisure, and wealth, held high holiday, not only at the old mansion, but all around the pleasant village. It was to be taken for granted that the bride elect was happy; Sophie had her beaux and Inez her cavaliers, while Lillian was followed by Don Miguel as by a shadow.

And now, as said at the beginning of this chapter, summer had come, bringing with it the beginning of a holiday for Lillian.

Miss Miller sat, thinking and listening, while the murmur of voices went on below. At last, her thoughts over-ran her lips:

"I do pray that she will decide in his favor. If she accepts him, this dark, dark night of doubt and sin will begin to break. If she refuses him, what is there for any of us but suffering, suffering, disgrace! Ah, me! if I could quiet the voice of conscience—as I can, as I will, if she marries the Don. She will be rich, then, rich and happy; hers will be a brilliant destiny, and I need mar no other to make hers."

Again she relapsed into reverie, until the sound of a hasty step, of some one going out the little gate, startled her, and she leaned forward eagerly—

"He has gone! She has refused him!"

"You are the picture of despair," cried Lillian, breaking into her room. "What has happened to give you such a desperate expression?"

Her own face was flushed and the tear on her cheek was not dry.

"It is you who must tell me that, child. You knew my heart was set on your accepting Don Miguel, and you have refused him. I can tell it by the manner of his leaving the house. And of course he will never speak to you again. This is the third time."

"He should not have persisted."

"O, Lily, he loves you so, and is in every way a gentleman. I do not know what you can be thinking of, to throw away such an opportunity."

"Opportunity, for what?"

"Getting settled in life."

"So a husband is only to be viewed as a means of getting settled for life! Now, I thought you had more enthusiastic views, my dear friend. And as for the settlement—are not we, you and I, settled for life? I thought you liked it as much as I."

"You dear, heroic darling! do you suppose I wish to devote you, in your youth and beauty, to the same shrine upon which I was sacrificed? If you can do no better, stay with your old friend. But, here is a vista of splendor opens before you; even your vivid imagination could never have pictured anything better. I need not go over the list of the Don's good qualities; he loves you sincerely, wants you for his wife, and you strangely refuse him. Lillian, what is the matter with you?"

The pure blue eyes met the stormy, troubled ones of her friend.

"I do not love him,—that is all. He is a foreigner; our tastes and habits are not in sympathy. I admire him more than any man I ever met; but I do not love him—never shall. I do not care for the gay life he leads. My native woods and country walks are dear to me. I love this village, and I love you, Miss Miller, and wish to spend my life with you. I thought we should 'live happily ever after,' as they say in novels, and here you are doing your best to drive me away from you."

"There's an obstinate grain in your temper, Lillian."

"Perhaps there is. If so, I ought to be glad of it; for surely I shall need a mind of my own, since I have my own way to make in the world."

"But, you need not make your way; another stands ready to care for you, and that is what I desire to see done."

"Please, say no more about it," pleaded the young girl, kissing the other's cheek; "I'm wearied out with my argument with him. He is not as mild as an angel, I assure you; though he has far, far more self-control than Inez. He went away deeply offended, despite of the tear with which I asked him to forgive me; but if anger will make his disappointment any easier to bear, I shall not be sorry. I suppose he will leave Hampton, taking his cousin with him, as soon as the wedding is over. It is only three weeks until then, and I believe Inez will wish to remain."

"Since you persist in this folly of throwing away all that is joyous and bright in your young life, I must say that the sooner those two go away the better. I would give much to have Inez away from here before the marriage."

"Why?"

"To tell you the truth, I am afraid of a scene. She imagines yet that she has an interest in Arthur."

"I hope you are mistaken, Miss Miller. She has seemed very happy, lately,—entirely taken up with her engagements to pleasure-parties and in planning her dress for the coming occasion."

"Inez is not what you think her, child; I am glad she is going away from you."

The tears welled into Lillian's eyes.

"She has been rather of a trial, in some respects, I acknowledge,—but, after all, she was my father's wife."

A shudder which she could not repress ran through Miss Miller's frame.

"She was—she was, Lily—that is the worst of it!"

"Do you think her so bad, then?"

"Totally unfit to have been *his* wife. She is good enough for Arthur, though. I wish he had married her!"

"Why, what is the matter with you, this afternoon? I thought Arthur was the apple of your eye. I shall believe you are a little insane, you talk so at random."

"Don't say that!" with a horrified air; "you may be touching very near the truth. Sometimes I think I am losing my reason. What would you think, Lillian, of a woman thirty-five years of age, of keen intellect and good moral cultivation, who could not tell right from wrong?"

"Could not tell right from wrong?"

"Yes, if the plainest question of right was put to her, she distorted it, twisted it to suit a glaring wrong,—wouldn't you say that her mind must be diseased?"

Lillian looked up into the deep, dark eyes, whose troubled gaze turned away from hers, wondering at the anxious, wrinkled brow, and the sad voice.

"I don't know what you are talking about, Miss Miller; but this I know, your mind is sound as a judge's ought to be, and your heart—is only too tender to a clinging orphan, who has no other friend,"—and she laid her head on the other's knee, who made a movement as if to push it away, but restrained herself.

Neither spoke, for some time, then Miss Miller repeated:

"I wish you would recall Don Miguel."

"I can not."

"If I could see you happily married to him, I believe my perplexities would be at an end."

"You are as bad as some match-making mammas."

"Yes, I suppose so. I want you to do well, my child, in a worldly sense,—to see you in possession of at least as much fortune as you would have had had Dr. Meredith lived. That would content me, I think," with a sigh.

"And I think the sooner we return to an ordinary state of existence the sooner we shall be content. We will regard Don Miguel, hereafter, as a brilliant meteor flashing across our Northern sky; now we must be satisfied with the 'cold light of stars.'"

"Well, Lillian, I can only say that you have disappointed me, and made great trouble. If you only *could*!"

"But I *could not*, Miss Miller; and I don't like to feel that I am making trouble, or being obstinate. Perhaps you do not care to have me to live with you. Perhaps you are tired of me."

"Lillian, I love you better than anything on earth; say no more; I have hurt your feelings;—let it pass. That is not the worst. You will know, soon enough. Justice shall be done, as soon as I have conquered the last weakness of my nature. Do you know what has become of Inez this afternoon?"

"She went to walk in the direction of Gram'me Hooker's."

"Alone?"

"I think so. She has taken quite a fancy to Gram'me; they have long talks together now-a-days."

"What sort of person is Mrs. Hooker?"

"You have seen her often enough to judge for yourself."

"I mean is she a conscientious, reliable woman; or is she one of those who would do anything for money?"

"Oh, she is a good woman,—I wish I were as good."

"Then no great harm can come from Inez's visits."

"Of course not. But, I am surprised that Inez is so interested in her, when she used only to ridicule her."

"Some one else pays long visits, too. Gram'me must be a very entertaining old lady."

Lillian blushed. "Gram'me and I have been friends ever since I was old enough to remember. I go there to talk over old times with her and to see to her wants, and—" she paused.

"So I suppose," remarked Miss Miller, dryly.

"I do believe you are in a fault-finding mood to-day," said Lillian, her voice trembling slightly. "I do not know how I shall put you in a better humor unless I go and provide something very nice for tea," and with that sweetness of disposition which made her what she was—so lovable to all—she conquered the resentment

she felt at her friend's manner, and went down to the little kitchen to suggest something appetizing for the invalid.

When she had gone, Miss Miller sprang to her feet and raged about the little room like a lioness in her den. She was not one to give way easily to outside demonstrations of emotion, so that, had Lillian seen her, as she now appeared, with clenched hands and teeth set in her under lip, she would have been both surprised and shocked.

"It shall be done! If the old house tumbles about their ears, *it shall be done*! If I had possessed courage from the first, fewer friends would have been involved in the ruin. I have seen the golden stream wasting—wasting, and my life-blood has wasted with it. I will keep silence till the twentieth of July,—until after,—until it is too late—O, what a miserable compromise! How am I punished!"

## CHAPTER XIX.

### A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DRAMA.

You have heard of hearts caught in the rebound? This threatened to be the fate of Don Miguel's, and Sophie was the happy maiden who had the chance of catching it. Sophie always had been pretty enough, but so colorless and inert beside her magnificent and spirited sister, as to scarcely receive due appreciation. She was like a pink rose beside a scarlet geranium, or Madame Pauline's blue dress in one of Josephine's green chairs.

Now, however, the excitement of hope and expectation,—and, too, we will do her the justice to confess—the development of all the imagination, passion, and romance, of which she was capable, combined with country air and the joyous business of preparing for her sister's wedding, were acting upon her far more efficaciously than any cosmetic she had ever tried. Her lady-mother looked upon her with admiring surprise, while Bertha condescended to approve and encourage, now that no danger existed, of their interests clashing. Sophie's hair was flaxen, not golden, like Lily's, and she trained it into flossy ringlets, very becoming to her fair, delicate face; she wore roses in her hair, too, after Lillian's fashion, and put on little shy, graceful airs that were not in her usual style.

To look in at Meredith Place on any of these golden, languorous July days, no one not previously informed could dream of the tragedy which had darkened it a little over a year ago, nor that the icy shadow of that tragedy had only withdrawn itself a little while, and was creeping, creeping slowly and surely back, with a double darkness in its chill. One soul there

knew of the approaching shadow, and felt the premonitory gloom, but all others were basking in the brightest sunshine of their lives. Inez and Lillian were at the house almost constantly, there were so many consultations to hold, and so many pleasant tasks to perform; while Miss Miller could not refuse the urgent solicitations of Mrs. Chateaubriand to stay with them a few weeks and take upon herself a portion of the responsibilities weighing down the matron—cares no heavier than the ordering of refreshments, the arrangement of rooms, and the small details of invitations, cards, etc., so that she was now an inmate of the mansion, and would remain there until after the wedding.

A troupe of beautiful girls—lighting up the old place with their sunny faces, exciting themselves delightfully all the long mornings over new dresses, and wreaths, and the bridal veil, allowing themselves to be entertained by ambitious young gentlemen through the later hours of the afternoon—at evening filling the old hall, the porches and parlors, with sweet laughter, murmuring asides, music and song—cast the witchery of their youth and loveliness over the ruins of the past.

Mrs. Chateaubriand was busy and satisfied, now that her second daughter promised to do so well, overlooking the mesalliance of the first, and making a great pet of Lillian, who had been such a little goose as to resign Don Miguel in Sophie's favor. Not that any one was by any means certain that the Don would so easily change his affections; he was less gay than formerly, and his gaze often lingered upon Lillian with more of sadness than anger; but, pride prompted him to the effort of being attentive to some other lady, and his attentions fell, by chance, upon Sophie. Even this was much to hope from,—only the time was short; for, directly after the marriage festivities, Don Miguel was to take his cousin away on a round of the fashionable summer resorts,—and then, in the autumn, back to Havana.

Miss Miller was the only one who did not improve under the sunny influences of the time. Pale, wrapped in thought, nervous, easily startled, with no appetite and no spirits, her illness had left her in a state which gave serious alarm to Lillian, who hoped the visit at Mrs. Chateaubriand's would do her friend good, but who noticed that she daily grew more absent-minded, walking about like one lost in dreams. In fact, Miss Miller's old habit of sleep-walking had returned upon her, in the present state of her health, and many nights she moved like a ghost amid the garden-walks and along the halls of Meredith Place. Mrs. Chateaubriand

wished some one to share her room in order to care for her, and break up, if possible, this dangerous and inconvenient habit of sleep-walking, but Miss Miller was so averse to having a servant, or even one of the young ladies in her apartment, that the suggestion was dropped.

Her brother Arthur manifested real uneasiness at her new freaks of somnambulism, and was urgent, almost to anger, that she should have some one sleep with her, but she persistently refused. He came up a fortnight before the wedding, and took rooms at the Hampton House. Don Miguel, and the other young men, laughed at his nervousness and his impatience at the lagging steps of time. The bride-elect may well have felt flattered at this eager count of the lessening days.

One evening—the tenth of July—the gay party gathered in the parlor were startled by the sudden bursting of a thunder-storm overhead. It was an awful storm, lasting several hours, and when it had subsided somewhat it did not entirely give over raining, so that the visitors were glad to accept the invitation to remain over night. Inez, who staid with Sophie more than half the time, shared the room of the latter, as usual, while Lillian accepted Miss Miller's rather reluctant offer of hers.

As soon as they reached the chamber Lillian began to undress, being wearied out with the sultry day; but Miss Miller sat by the open window watching the tremulous play of the distant lightning, and listening to the mournful cry of a whip-poor-will, which pierced the darkness with its melancholy complaint.

"Are you not coming to bed, Miss Miller? You are so pale, I am sure you must be fatigued."

"Yes, I am tired, Lily,—very, very tired, with a weariness which sleep will not remove."

She spoke so languidly, so hopelessly, that the young girl turned and came to her side, noticing more than ever before, the hard, rigid lines which were settling upon the face of her best friend—a face square and powerful for a woman's at its best, and now fixed in a stern, sallow harshness, which would have repelled any one but her companion.

"Miss Miller, you have some trouble, which you do not tell me."

"Let me alone—let me alone a few days. You will know soon enough."

"You are not going away?"—that was the worst thing Lily could think of.

"No, child—not unless you send me."

"You do not mean—it can not be that you—have learned—know—have discovered anything about poor papa!" exclaimed Lily, falling on her knees, and gazing up with a wild look at the stony face before her.

"Nothing new, darling Lily; why do you question me? If I have anything to tell, you shall know it in due time. Go to bed;—you are exciting yourself too much. I will come in a few moments," and she kissed the young girl, gently pushing her away,—“not that I expect much rest to-night. I shall walk in my sleep, I dare say. I always do when there is a thunder-storm,—and I always feel wearied the next day, as if I had kept watch.”

"I waken so easily; if you stir I shall hear you, and then I will not let you leave the room," said Lillian, and creeping into bed, she laid with wide-open eyes fixed on the pale face of her governess, relieved against the blackness of the open window. She meant to be very wakeful and to take excellent care of the somnambulist, but, presently, the drowsy lids drew together, the flush of sleep warmed in the delicate cheek, she just turned with a soft breath, when her friend laid down beside her and knew no more for hours.

When Lillian awoke the hall clock was striking three. She reached out her hand, and finding the bed vacant, sprang out upon the floor. A night lamp was burning dimly; through the casement she could see the stars breaking through flying and ragged clouds; the door of the chamber was half-way open. Throwing a dressing-gown over her night-robe, and thrusting her feet into slippers, she went softly but quickly out into the hall, where a light always was kept burning, by order of the mistress of the house. Finding no one in the lower hall she ran lightly down the stairs, and proceeding towards the back door, she almost ran against some one crouching down by the laboratory-door.

"Is it you, Miss Miller?" she whispered, not caring to awaken the household by speaking more loudly.

At first there was no answer, but, upon her pressing more closely, the figure straightened itself and she made out Inez.

"What do you want?" she whispered defiantly.

"I am looking for Miss Miller; she has gone out, in one of her trances again. Have you seen her?"

"No," replied Inez, evidently relieved, and coming forward, "but I heard her pass my door, and slipped out to look for her. I fancied she might have gone in here, but all is dark and still. She may be in the garden. Do not go out in those thin slippers. As for me, I'm going back to bed. If she will walk in her sleep, walk she must,—I shall not run the risk of a cold."

Darting noiselessly up stairs, Lillian heard

her close the door of Sophie's room; she tried the outside doors, but, as they all were fastened, decided that the somnambulist could not have gone out; so she passed through the parlor and library, and on up to her room, just in time to see the one of whom she was in search glide into it in advance of herself. Lillian followed and closed the door.

"Lily, Lily," said the sleeper, walking up to the bed and speaking in a sharp whisper, "Where are you?"

"Here I am. I have been looking for you."

"The figure eight!" continued the somnambulist, turning and coming towards her with staring, stony eyes, and one arm extended. "I have found it, Lily,—look here!"

As she approached the other saw something glitter in the out-stretched hand, which, as she held it up, clutching it tightly, Lillian perceived was a handful of ingots.

"See, Lily, see, THE FIGURE EIGHT!"

Lillian turned very faint with surprise, excitement, and the terrible thrill which ran through her at sight of the stony face, and the eager hand clutching her father's gold.

"Where did you get it? Oh, Miss Miller, awake, awake, and tell me where you have been and what this means!"

"I followed him," said the governess, still in the same hollow whisper. "Him! the wicked, the ungrateful. Oh, how he makes my heart ache."

"Who?"

"You know, Lily! why should we speak his name?" That is my secret,—that is what is killing me by inches. But the whole world will know now. No, no! I have found the box now, and all is well. All is well—well! I need not betray—need not disgrace. I have looked so long for that box now, Lillian, that you might have your own, and yet not ruin him. Take them—feel of them, then you will be sure!"

Lillian, with a nervous shudder, took the dull, slender, heavy bars in her fingers, looked at them, and laid them on the table.

"Have you found the box?" she asked, beginning to tremble as if with cold.

"Yes, I followed him. I stood behind him, and he did not see me. When he was gone I took a few to show you."

"Where is it?"

"Come, we will go there, right away, before I forget."

She opened the door and glided out, followed by Lillian, pale as the shadow of a phantom following the phantom which led, going along the upper hall to the side passage which branched to the east, straight to the door

which led up to the tower. This she opened, and was about to place her foot on the stairs, when she paused, put her hand to her forehead, and murmured—"No, it was down—was it up?—no, down."

Hesitating a moment, she began to ascend, but in climbing the steep and narrow stair she made a misstep and came to her knees, with a shock which awakened her.

"Where am I?" she exclaimed, looking wildly about, and then finding herself on her knees at the foot of the tower staircase, and poor Lillian bending over her with a distressed expression, she burst out laughing and went off into a hysteric fit.

Though much frightened, for she had been told that the shock to the system from too sudden awakening was dangerous, Lillian had presence of mind to coax and drag her into the main hall, before she summoned help; then, calling Mrs. Chateaubriand's maid, who was also quite a nurse, the two conveyed Miss Miller back to her bed, where the maid administered one of her mistress's favorite nervines, while Lillian hastily concealed the ingots in her bureau. Nearly all the household were awakened by the convulsive laughter of the somnambulist, but when the matter was explained to them they retired again—all save Arthur, who dressed himself, or was already dressed when the alarm occurred, and who, pale and restless, wished to watch with his sister.

But, as he could not very well force himself into a young lady's chamber, and as the nurse avowed herself equal to the occasion, he was obliged to leave the patient in other hands.

In the course of two or three hours Miss Miller grew calm and fell asleep under the effects of the anodynes given; Lillian then dismissed the maid, who said to her—

"Better take an hour's rest yourself, Mademoiselle. It's a long time yet till breakfast, though it's broad daylight."

She did lie down on the lounge, but the scene of the night had been too exciting, and she could only act it over and over in thought, as she lay there, sleepless, watching the wan face on the pillow.

"How she has changed in a year! She used to be so handsome—and so strong. She worries far more about that miserable money than I. I wish she would give it up—as I have! But no, she has found it at last—there is the proof! Oh, how can I wait for her to waken and explain? Now I shall send for Cousin Joe. Yes, if he will not come to me, I will go to him and tell him the truth. My poor, brave, faithful governess! She told me, at the time her arm was broken, that some one was here who knew

where the box was, but who dared not convey it away, but that she had not yet discovered *who* this person was. Now, doubtless, she had seen and recognized him. This wretched mystery will be at an end."

She waited impatiently, but the patient slept on heavily, and the watcher's thoughts varied, although always centering about the same subject, tears dropping as the image of her father came back vividly, and a blush drying them on her cheeks as another picture arose, embodying some scene in the future.

When the rising-bell rang she dressed herself, seeing that Miss Miller was not disturbed; she was one of the first to enter the breakfast room, and had to answer the inquiries of all. Inez gave her a singular look as she came in with her fair double, but asked not a question, nor referred to her little part in the night's performance. Arthur took a seat by Lillian, making several inquiries about his sister. She really pitied him, he was so anxious, and had so little appetite for his breakfast; and making an effort to show her friendliness, she evidently succeeded in lightening his uneasiness, so that he appeared less restrained as the meal progressed. Inez' eyes continued to flash lightnings across the table; Lillian noticed something peculiar in her manner; but, as the Cuban was in the habit of letting her feelings be known without delay, and as she said less than usual, Lillian concluded that she must have misread her expression.

When she returned to her room, too eager to find her friend awake to care to linger with the pleasure-seekers below, Miss Miller lay quietly staring at the wall.

"If you had not disturbed me, last night," she said, listlessly, "I suppose I should have got along well enough. It is the sudden shock which affects the nerves."

"I did not waken you. It was your stumbling which did it. Will you have anything, dear Miss Miller?"

"A cup of coffee, as strong as they please to make it."

Lily rang the bell and made her request; the coffee came, with a slice of toast; was drunk, and the servant sent away; then the patient appeared disposed to sleep again.

Lillian hesitated whether to broach the subject, and, ever considerate of others, finally concluded to keep silence until the other spoke of her own free will.

"If you feel inclined to rest, I will go down."

"Go, if you wish, child; I do feel more quiet than I have in days. Doubtless rest is what I most need."

She went out to find all the ladies of the house

gathered in Bertha's room, in a high state of excitement over the arrival, that morning, by express, of the wedding dress and bonnet. The dress was of white *moire-antique*, rich, heavy and lustrous; the bonnet as "lovely a thing" as the female heart could desire. All were lavish in their praises. Nothing would do but Bertha must try on the robe, which she did, and found the fit as perfect as the material. Drawing her fine figure to its full height, the bride-elect looked at the beautiful image reflected in the glass, with a smile half-proud, half-tender. She could hardly have been otherwise than satisfied, which her expression confessed her to be.

"What a charming bride she will make," murmured Lillian, turning to Inez for sympathy in her admiration.

The Cuban was watching Bertha so intently that she did not hear the remark. Lillian was surprised at the expression of Inez' countenance, whose usually rich brunette color had taken on almost a greenish tinge; her eyes had grown small and dull,—the lids lay across them in a straight line, from under which gleamed a single sparkle of light:—if ever malice and jealousy were written so that "he who runs may read," they were written there. Lily, poor child, could think of nothing but a serpent the moment before it strikes; she felt terrified, and laid her hand on Inez' arm, who started, turning to her with an unpleasant laugh.

"I asked you if you did not consider her a beautiful bride?" repeated Lily, embarrassed, she knew not why.

"Yes, certainly—she will make a beautiful bride—if she ever becomes one! I wish Arthur could see her now!" and she turned away,—and went to the window to avoid the subject of Bertha's perfections.

"I wish Inez was not so illy-governed," mused Lillian, not for the first time. "She keeps herself unhappy. Why did she say—'If she ever becomes one'?"

Once or twice in the course of the morning she stole back to look at Miss Miller, who had fallen asleep the second time, and, although very pale, was enjoying a profound and refreshing slumber. Her interest in the finale of the sleep-walking story was so keen as to tempt her to rouse the sleeper, but she restrained herself each time and went away; however, being too agitated by suspense and painful memories, to enjoy any society, she went the second time, down the deserted garden, blooming under the full warmth of high-noon, in search of a shaded nook in the old arbor, where she could be alone. She had been seated but a little while over a book which she held, but did not read, when Arthur Miller came sauntering along, and en-

tered the arbor. He started when he found it occupied, removed the cigar from his lips, asked permission to share the bench, and when she had given it, threw himself down with a weary sigh.

"Is it the heat?" asked the young lady, with a smile.

"I believe it is, in part. Life is very unsatisfactory, taken as a whole. It is too warm, or too cold; too bright, or too dull; too wet, or too dry, and as the weather is, so is everything else. Poor human-nature is *ennuied* to death half the time."

"I hardly expected such a view of life from your lips, just at present, Mr. Miller."

"Oh, I'm not without my due share of troubles, I assure you. I am marrying a woman richer than myself,—and that's not the most charming arrangement for a man of any spunk."

"Then why do you do it?" his listener was about to ask, but checked herself, betraying her surprise by her expression.

"People won't give me credit for any real love in the matter, you see. If Miss Chateaubriand were twice as beautiful and twice as lovable, I should have the credit of marrying her for her money."

"Which you certainly have, in my mind," thought Lillian, saying nothing.

"And then, there is Annie. She's not the woman she used to be, Miss Meredith. And these somnambule tricks of hers worry me more than I am willing to confess to any one. I heartily wish she had not come to Meredith Place before the wedding. It would have been better for her at your quiet cottage. She adds to the excitement inseparable from the 'coming event,' and which reacts upon her in a very unpleasant way. I wish you would persuade her to go home with you this afternoon."

"She is staying at Mrs. Chateaubriand's particular request, whom it will disappoint if she leaves at this hurried time. Still, if you think her health demands it, I will propose it to them."

"I do wish you would, Miss Meredith. You can't imagine how she worries me;" then, as Lillian looked up, at the pettish, ill-humored tone, adding, "I am so afraid that she will come to serious harm. She might have killed herself, last night. I am getting so nervous, at night, I start at every sound, imagining Annie has stepped out of a second-story window, or fallen off the roof," and he forced a laugh.

Lillian had remarked this very nervousness, and sleepless look in him, and now attributed it to the cause he gave.

"I will propose to her to go home with me, if she feels as if she should rest better there,"

she said. It is but a few days now, at all events, till the great affair will be over; then I shall try and persuade her to try a change of scene for a month. We shall not open our school until the twentieth of September."

"A few days, I know,—but supposing she should break her neck in the meantime?"

Lillian did not like his hard tone, nor ill-concealed impatience,—it looked far more to her as if he did not wish to be annoyed by his sister's exploits, than like any deep interest in her health. So she remained silent, and he sat there moodily, until the lunch-bell summoned them to the house, when he immediately resumed the gay manner which had won him his way in society, offered her his arm, and conducted her to the dining-room as airily as if the weather was always paradisaical.

His sister came down to lunch looking better than she had in some days, was congratulated on her recovery, made some brilliant suggestions regarding the ornamentation of the rooms for the approaching festivities, and made, as she always did, the power of her talent felt, whatever she said or suggested.

"I am as jealous as I can be of Lillian Meredith," said Bertha, "and I give you fair warning, that when I get to keeping house, I shall quarrel with you for the possession of your treasure. I should never have ventured to promise to marry if I had not supposed you could be coaxed to live with us, Miss Miller."

"Perhaps I can, in due time—that is, if you and Arthur do not quarrel. I could never exist under the same roof with a matrimonial couple who brought their differences to me to settle."

"If he is good, and mild, and always lets me have my own way, I shall not quarrel with him," said Bertha.

Lillian listened to the badinage without hearing it; she was waiting for the hour of the afternoon *siesta*, when she should have her opportunity of speaking to Miss Miller alone.

It came at last, when the two again were in their chamber.

"You were broken of your rest so much last night, Lily, you ought to take a long sleep this afternoon."

"I am going back home, you know, before dinner. I shall start as soon as the sun is a little lower. But O, Miss Miller, how can you think I can sleep until you have told me all?"

"Told you all?"

"Yes,—where the box is—where you got the gold."

"Where I got the gold?"

"And who it was that was taking it! Now



that you know all, surely, this fearful mystery must come to the light.

"What are you talking about, my child?"

Each looked at the other in doubt and surprise.

"Miss Miller, when you came back to this room, last night, your hand was full of bars of gold, precisely like those my father once showed me. You called me and told me you knew the meaning of the figure eight!—that you had found the box, and brought those ingots in proof."

"Lily, I remember no more of it than as if it had never been."

"Then you can not lead me to the box!" cried Lillian, dismayed, overwhelmed with disappointment.

"I can not, I remember nothing. Tell me all I said, please, my darling child, this moment."

Lillian recounted what had passed.

"Did I not mention the name of the person whom I followed?" eagerly.

"No, not once."

"Let me look at the ingots, Lily."

Lillian went to her bureau, lifted the laces she had hastily thrown over the gold, but the ingots were not where she had hidden them!

"Some one has been here, and taken them," she cried, as she hastily examined the drawer, taking out every article.

Then she went to the next, although positive she had placed them in the upper drawer; so on, through the bureau, and every nook and corner, possible and impossible, as persons will, when they have lost things, in the vain hope that memory is at fault, and that they will "turn up" somewhere. But the ingots had disappeared utterly,—strangely as they had come, they had vanished still more strangely, and the two women could only look at each other with vague speculation in their faces.

## CHAPTER XX.

### "CHECKMATE TO YOUR KING."

"Perhaps you dreamed the whole matter," suggested Miss Miller, as she and Lily stood at the window of the tower, looking over the broad landscape despondently.

They had taken advantage of the quiet presiding over the house at the hour of the afternoon siesta, to ascend to the tower-room and search for anything which might prove a clue to what had happened the previous night. A more innocent looking place never was subjected to such close scrutiny. The plain, small, square room had no nook where a thimble could be hidden—at least, none such appeared to the eye. They raised the carpet, which

Sophie had caused to be spread, looking for some trap-door, or board which had been cut to lift from some cavity between the floors; but nothing rewarded the examination. There were windows on three sides,—on the fourth hung the map of which we have spoken, against a plain, bare wall of common plaster laid directly upon the squared stones of which the tower was built.

"You said, just before you awoke, that you were not certain whether it was up or down you ought to go."

"In the cellar, I suppose, under the coal,"—the governess spoke lightly, to cover her chagrin.

"Oh, what if you had come here alone, and fallen from this open window!" said Lillian, with a shudder, looking down at the green grass and graveled paths below.

"I tell you, solemnly, that if I had, and had been dashed to death in an instant, I could ask for no happier fate."

"Why, my dear, dear Miss Miller, don't speak in that manner! I thought I was very sad, and that I could never be happy again, when my dear father—when, you know,—how terrible it was!—and I am very wretched still, at times,—and have a great weight on my mind about—about poor cousin Joe. But, I can not say that I covet a death like that,—ah, no! you make me tremble when you speak and look so."

"The young can bear anything," said the governess, drearily; "like the springing grass, they bend to rise again; but when it is ripe and brittle, once crushed, it rises no more."

"I know, dear friend, you loved poor papa, and you will never, never get over his dreadful death. Why should Fate ordain that he should meet that foolish, willful girl, who had not the heart, nor the sense to love him as he deserved? If he had come home unmarried, all would have been so different! The other thing might not have happened—and he would have been certain to—to—"

"The other thing *might* not have happened—*would* not have happened," said the governess, slowly; you are right, there, Lillian."

The subject, usually so carefully avoided, was too much for the self-possession of the orphaned girl, who clung to her friend's waist, and wept softly such tears as do good to those who shed them; but, the single icy drop on the lids of the older woman were of those which, pressed from the heart, leave it dry.

"I must go home," said Lillian, when they had stood some time,— "will you return with me, as Arthur wishes?"

"I think not,—at least, not to-night. I

have promised Mrs. Chateaubriand; and I may not have another of these attacks in some time. Arthur is too easily fretted about his dear sister."

Was she speaking in sarcasm? Her companion looked up, but could not tell; she was half afraid of her governess, at times, such a change had lately come over her.

"Well, I must call Inez, as I go down. She ought to go home with me. She is here too much, I think,—seeing we are not placed so as to return these hospitalities."

"Oh, she does not regard herself from that standpoint any longer. She is Don Miguel's cousin, and if Sophie should be successful in her butterfly-hunting, they will be relatives."

"The Don is not a butterfly, Miss Miller."

"Truly, I believe he is something a trifle better. I dwell on his perfections, while there was any hope of your appreciating him. But I hardly think you will take Inez home with you. There she goes across the fields, in the direction of Gram'me Hooker's."

"Alone, too?"

"She is so benevolent that she is going to do the old woman a service, and her modesty prevents her bringing along her left hand to know what her right hand does."

"I do wonder what errand takes her there so frequently."

"Are you sure Mrs. Hooker is a conscientious woman?"

"Quite; but why do you ask?"

"Don't puzzle your poor little tired brain about that, child. Come, we will go down, and I will walk with you a little on your way home. I need the air to get rid of those indolent anodynes."

The two walked along the quiet road, sweet from last night's rain, across which long shadows were beginning to stretch. As they slowly sauntered towards the village, one of Mr. Chateaubriand's buggies passed them, with Arthur Miller and his carpet-bag on the back seat.

"I'm going to the five o'clock express," he said, as the driver paused a moment at his bidding. "Will be back to-morrow at the same hour. Better stay with Miss Meredith to-night, Annie."

"I did not know you were to go down again before the twentieth."

"Oh, yes. I've not selected my wedding-present yet for the bride. That is a very important matter. I shall give to-morrow to its selection. Shall it be a diamond bracelet, Annie?"

"Better suit you gifts to your means," she said, coldly.

"Precisely. I made a thousand dollars by a

lucky stroke, the week before I came out. Would that be too much to expend on an article of so much importance?"

"I advise you to be prudent," was the response, and Arthur, laughing and brilliant, drove on, the envied of all who saw him.

"It feels to me as if there was a storm in the air," remarked Miss Miller, stopping in her walk, a little later, and looking about her with a wandering glance.

"We had the storm last night. The air, now, is like crystal, and the sky a cloudless blue."

"But I feel it, I tell you. Since my health is in this peculiar state I am a perfect barometer. My spirits have fallen a good many degrees in so many minutes. Something is going to happen. Perhaps there will be an accident on the railroad to-night."

"Oh, I often feel that way,—and nothing ever comes of it. Don't go any farther with me, or you'll lose your dinner."

The friends parted. Miss Miller returned to Meredith Place, ate her dinner in the most hum-drum fashion; spent the evening in giving countenance to folly, as usual; retired to her room, and slept a dreamless sleep, from which she did not arise to midnight excursions. The next day her brother returned from the city, and was welcomed with delight by the affectionate and anxious darlings who knew what his errand had been. No storm had broken the serenity of the summer sky, and no rail had broken on the road to startle the world with an accident. Something had happened, nevertheless, during that brief trip, of great import to the most of that joyous company. They did not perceive it now, however,—least of all was it suspected by him whom it most concerned.

That evening, when the bride-elect came to dinner she found a parcel under her napkin; she untied the little box, and brought to light a bracelet of diamonds and emeralds fit for a princess' acceptance.

"Allow me," said Arthur, clasping it about the snowy wrist, and, as the lady pursued her dinner, the light of the jewels flashed little rainbows about her plate.

"I declare, Inez, your eyes are as green as these emeralds," exclaimed Bertha, as, trifling with her dessert, she chanced to look up at Mrs. Meredith, sitting opposite.

"I supposed they were black," answered Inez, dropping them. "You are blinded by what you have been looking at. No one, I dare say, would give as much for my eyes as for your emeralds."

"A mistake, I assure you, Mrs. Meredith,"

simpered a youth, who, being selected to attend the third bridesmaid, had nothing to do in the meantime but to pay her compliments. "Tiffany has nothing at all to be compared with those starry orbs—"

"Hear, hear," cried Don Miguel; "starry orbs! fine! Where did you find that rare and original comparison?"

"In my head," responded the youth, putting a spoonful of ice-cream in his mouth.

"What a pity we are not all engaged," remarked Sophie, pouting at Arthur, but not without a swift glance at Don Miguel.

"I suppose it is the bridal presents and the new dresses that induce half of you to place yourselves in that enviable position," said the Don.

"Of course. The little god would kneel in vain, if he did not come with his hands full of jewels and 'promises to pay.' If he could not order a bouquet, select an ornament, and had no ear for opera music, he ought to be banished to the days of Phillis and Corydon."

"It is better to have a cousin than to be engaged," said Inez, and, letting the white muslin of her flowing sleeve fall back from her brown, but smooth and exquisitely shaped arm, she betrayed a bracelet much finer than Bertha's—a costly gift—which Don Miguel had brought with him, when he made his last declaration to Lillian, as a betrothal bond, if she should accept him. He was thinking, now, that one woman, at least, had withstood the temptations of wealth and ease, and her image arose before him all the more attractively, in contrast with these gay creatures who were telling the truth about themselves, with the prettiest air of being only in sport.

"Oh, Inez," cried Sophie, "you never showed us that before! You little darling, how becoming it is to your arm! I always told you your hand and arm were perfect."

The Don had been watching her to mark the impression made by the ornament; if she had shown envy or malice, he would have turned lightly from Sophie, as he had from so many other young ladies, but, her evident freedom from covetousness, her good nature in admiring Inez, and pleasure in the latter's possession of the jewel, raised her many degrees in his respect. She was not Lillian; she was not his ideal; but, she was an amiable as well as a pretty girl, and he gave her a glance that had a thought in it, as he said:

"Inez must not claim the bracelet forever. I told her it was only lent to her. I intend to imitate Mr. Miller in my final use of it."

"I may wear it until I get tired of it, before

you claim it," responded his cousin, while Sophie felt a glow in her heart and a blush on her cheek, she hardly knew why.

Miss Miller leaned back in her chair and looked at Inez. She was thinking of the time when a certain handsome, ambitious, passionate woman, with an intellect kindled by communion with that of a man of genius, and a heart alive with the best love which such a man can draw forth, decked herself in velvet and jewels to welcome him home,—it hardly seemed to her as if that eager woman, with the flushed cheek and sparkling eye, was this self which sat here now, sallow, stony, and indifferent. She recalled the moment when the slender, dark-eyed Cuban girl had emerged from the stage and she heard Doctor Meredith introduce her as his wife. Oh, but she had reason to hate even more than she despised! Yet, as she sat and watched her, at the table, darting those looks at the bride-elect, which Bertha had declared were "green," a cold fear of her crept through her contempt. It grew upon her that Inez held some secret power to injure, over which she exulted.

Lillian had not, in describing the events of the night when she stayed with her, mentioned having found Inez in the lower hall, for the incident had been of so little importance to her as to pass out of her mind. Had she mentioned it to Miss Miller, the latter would have had some clue to the power held by the woman with whom her brother had trifled.

"She is plotting mischief," thought the governess. "Can it be possible that she knows what I know? There is not reticence enough in her to keep it one hour, should she have discovered it. It is more probable that she will stab him with the little poignard which I saw her raise on him once, than attempt a more complicated revenge. I can not stay here. I shall suffocate in the midst of these triflers. I believe I will go and see Mother Hooker."

Stealing from the dining-room without attracting particular attention, she threw a veil over her head and wandered off, in the growing twilight, through the garden, on into the field path which led through the woods to gram'me's. Her head was hot; the cool air felt grateful to her burning face; she walked rapidly on into the dim woods, where she could hardly track her way through the murmurous shadows. The secret she carried, which pressed ever heavier into her heart, was almost unbearable this evening. Those gay and thoughtless friends whom she had left behind were to her like children playing on the brink of a precipice; and, as the awful danger arose vividly before her imagination, she shrieked aloud. A

thousand piercing echoes answered her, and she screamed again, shrilly and long.

"It is a relief,—I am afraid of insanity, some days," she muttered. "Who would think me deficient in courage? They call me strong-minded, a natural leader,—yet, here I shrink like the veriest coward. If I had confronted the danger at first, seized it by the throat, choked, silenced it, I should not now be overmastered. Every day I concede and concede, while the wrong grows. Oh, Arthur! oh, Lillian! I am afraid now that a hand less kind and more just than mine has taken the rein and is driving me on to ruin!"

She sat a little while on a log beside the path, listening to the last twittering notes of sleepy birds, the mournful cry of the whippoorwill which had answered her wild scream, and the rustle of the tall trees moving lightly in the western wind; then resumed her walk, urged by the fear that gram'me would be in bed if she delayed her call any later.

Gram'me was studying out her evening chapter of the New Testament by the light of a tallow dip, when Miss Miller surprised her by appearing in the open door.

"Is it too late for callers? It was so warm in the house I wanted to get out of it; and as I strolled this way I made up my mind I would come and ask you a question which I have wanted answered for some time."

"Take a chair, Miss Miller. I'm glad to see you, but I reckon you'd better be keeful about trampin' about alone arter dark. I'm nigh about sartin I heerd a painter screech in them woods just a leetle while ago,—though they do say there's been none seen in these parts for twenty year."

"Thank you; I'll sit on the door-step, gram'me. I dare say it was a screech-owl which disturbed you. There are no panthers in Meredith wood—unless they be human panthers," *sotto voce*.

"Them screech-owls do make a drefful noise; they sound awful lonesome in the woods at night. It may be. It may be. But you ain't so timid as most women-folks, Miss Miller. 'Pears to me you don't look well lately; better let me fix you up some herb-tea or bitters, hadn't ye?"

"You can't medicine to a mind diseased, gram'me," replied the lady, sadly.

"Nay, that's so. What is it you want me to tell you that you don't know better'n I, Miss Miller?"

"The object of Mrs. Meredith's visits to you."

"Oho! Well, sartin, they're skasely wuth inquirin' into," and gram'me laughed.

"It's nothing very bad, if you laugh about it."

"That's so, child; you're right. She'll never do any harm, that little simpleton won't—she's too foolish. I don't know as I ought to tell on her, though, as she's come to me in confidence."

"If you think it will do no harm, and that you are justified in keeping it, I shall ask no more."

"O land! I reckon it makes no difference, one way or t'other. She jest comes to git me to make love-powders for your brother, and I humor her, to keep her from going to the 'pothecary's, or somewhere, where she'll make herself ridiculous."

"I surmised as much, gram'me, and I'm obliged to you for being so discreet with her. She has her foreign ways, and we must humor them, I suppose. Her cousin will soon take her off with him, which will be a relief to us. Did she ever ask you for anything really dangerous?"

Mother Hooker hesitated; her eyes fell before the keen glance fixed upon her, but she raised them again as she said:

"If she had, you might know she wouldn't git it here,—nor I wouldn't tell of her, neither, but jest lectur' her on her sin an' danger. She's most like the heathen, that poor child is, and I tell you I've preached to her *powerful*."

Miss Miller was just as well satisfied with this answer as if it had been more explicit. After a little more chat on the old woman's wants and ailments, she bade her good-night, and returned upon her lonesome route. The faint glimmer of a moon in its first quarter straggled through the wood, making weird shadows across the path, but marking it so that she had small difficulty in finding her way back. She was no coward, as far as being out alone was concerned, and crossed the field as carelessly as if it had been broad daylight. Entering by that back gate, through which so many of my adventures had been made the previous summer, she strolled on to the arbor, and still feeling dislike to the prospect of company, she turned aside and entered. As she did so she was startled, almost into an exclamation; but her long habit of self-control stood her in good stead, and she said nothing. The low beams of the sinking moon shone almost horizontally into the arbor against the face of a man sitting there as if waiting for somebody. The lady could see him with sufficient clearness to know that he was a stranger. Before she could decide whether to turn away or to accost him, he arose, saying—

"I guess it's all right, ma'am. We're on the right track now, certainly. I followed him all day yesterday, as you advised, and I found out what you said I would."

"Found out what?" Miss Miller's lips trem-

bled, but she steadied her voice and tried to disguise it; the other, however, immediately detected his mistake.

"Beg your pardon, ma'am," said he; "I misook you for the housekeeper. There's a fellow been stealing the berries and vegetables, and she set me on to watching him."

With that he passed by her, and went whistling on over the lawn, to the front gate, and out upon the road. Miss Miller would have taken his story for granted, but as she went up the rear steps to the porch, she met Inez coming down, and knowing how superstitious and timid she was, wondered at her going out alone.

"Would you like company?" asked the governess.

"Oh no, thank you. I'm only going for a rose-bud for my hair. Mr. Beckwith has stolen the one I was wearing," and she hurried on towards the rose-bushes beyond which stood the arbor.

Miss Miller then decided to go to the housekeeper with an account of the stranger in the garden.

"He's a thief himself, you may be sure," said that personage, when she had told her story. "I never authorized nobody to watch for thieves. It's like he's after the fruit himself; or worse—maybe he's a burglar, a studyin' of the situation. I'm goin' to send Mick out to hunt him off the place, or I shan't close an eye this night. Like as not he's from the city, or he's come as a body-guard over that silver which mistress was so foolish as to send for. I told her it wouldn't be safe in this country place, where there isn't a policeman to save your life."

"Don't worry too much; he will not be apt to come back to-night, especially if he sees Mick hunting him out with a lantern. He will naturally suppose that we are on our guard. I think, if I were in your place, I would not disturb the family with it; there is probably not much in it, and if Mick goes out and looks about the place, and you fasten up carefully, it will be all that is necessary."

"All right," assented the housekeeper, but with the lady who gave the advice it was not all right.

When she entered the parlors Inez was there flirting with Mr. Beckwith, who was to be one of the groomsmen; Arthur and Bertha were at the piano, Sophie and Don Miguel walking up and down the room, arm-in-arm, Mr. and Mrs. Chateaubriand playing chess;—the terrors which beset her, and which gave her the haunted, nervous, expectant look, becoming habitual to her, did not come with her in full force into this cheerful company. Yet she knew they

were there, like wolves at the door, ready to spring upon her the moment she went forth, and she was almost surprised that every one was not as aware of their ugly existence as she was. She gazed at the festal groups about her as one does at a fairy spectacle which he knows will soon dissolve.

"Oh you are here, are you?" said the master of the house, looking up as she sighed. "I've been wanting you to play a game with me. You understand chess much better than Mrs. Chateaubriand."

"Yes, please do take my place, Miss Miller. The idea of playing chess with the thermometer at ninety!"—the lady arose from the table, and dropped languidly into an arm-chair.

"One game, then, Mr. Chateaubriand," said Miss Miller, "and let it decide my fate!"

"In what way, madame? Has any one been proposing for, or disposing of, you? If so, you must play cautiously. It won't do to be reckless in these matters."

"No, it will not. I shall play my best." She did not smile; on the contrary, she seemed very much in earnest, and the host, who was distinguished for his skill, and a great lover of the game, set to work to arrange the men, with a keen enjoyment in the consciousness that he was to have an opponent worthy of his steel.

The delicate lady of the mansion grew tired of watching the board, fell asleep, woke up, and excused herself from the parlors, with a warning to her daughters to be in their beds by eleven o'clock.

Eleven o'clock came, and the gentlemen went away, the young ladies retired, laughing at papa and Miss Miller, still bent over their first game—one wary, watchful, designing—the other obstinate, fighting long on the edge of every lost field.

The house had been long silent when the old clock struck twelve, and the gentleman, rising from his seat, cried with a smile—

"Checkmate to your king, Miss Miller!"

## CHAPTER XXI.

### A WOMAN'S REVENGE.

The day preceding that appointed for the wedding was an extremely busy one at Meredith Place. No matter how much time has been taken to prepare, or how perfect the arrangements may be supposed to have been made, at the last hour an hundred unexpected things are to be done. The bride-elect alone remained throned in royal indolence, while all her subjects were doing something in her honor. She did not intend to fatigue herself or discompose herself; all the pretty trifles of the toilet had been tried, pronounced upon, and disposed of; the wedding dress and veil had been donned

for a private rehearsal and doffed until the arrival of the auspicious hour; her trunks had been packed by her maid, under the direction of Miss Miller; now, all she had to do, was to sit and observe, while a troop of gay girls decorated the long parlor, the hall and library, and the dining-room, with such an aggregation of flowers that one would have supposed a county, at least, had been rifled of its bloom to adorn this one old mansion. Only one apartment escaped the general garlanding; the laboratory remained, as usual, closed, gloomy, and silent. The abundance of room in the house was such as to have prevented any necessity for putting the laboratory to use, and it had been allowed to remain as it had stood since Dr. Meredith's death. The longer it was avoided and abandoned, the more it took upon itself a weird and repelling air, that is, to strangers; while, to Lillian, it was so eloquent of the very life and spirit of her murdered father, that she never yet had felt like bearing the pain and shock of a visit to it. It had been a great comfort to her that the present tenants had allowed it to remain as he had left it; she knew that, when permanent occupants bought or took the place, that room would be the first to call for renovation and repair, and she shrank from the desecration, far away though it might be, as she would have shrunk from the idea of disturbance to his grave. Only Miss Miller occasionally spent an hour there alone, coming away from these visits with the compressed lips, the weary, jaded air of one who grieves without a right, and expects no sympathy. In the midst of the joyous clamor of this busy day, she turned the key which stood always in the lock, and passed out of the light and perfume and sounds of merry voices, into the chill of this dim, deserted region. Throwing herself into the leather-covered arm-chair which had been the Doctor's favorite seat, she leaned her forehead on her hand, sitting so motionless and silent, that she was like a part of the neglected furniture. She was thinking of many things, but at the end of all her thoughts chimed in the refrain—"one day more, and the worst will be over!"

As she sat there, muttering this to herself, the door very softly unclosed—it made no more noise in opening than as if its hinges were always kept carefully oiled—and Mrs. Meredith entered. At first she did not see the occupant of the arm-chair, but stole softly forward towards the shelf containing the more dangerous drugs and chemicals which it had been the Doctor's habit to keep in one quarter under the general head of "Poisons," which appeared in a printed label over the shelf. Her observer

would have given a year of her own life to have been invisible for the next five minutes; and she waited in breathless suspense while Inez passed on down the other side of the darkened room. The intruder looked pale in the shadowy atmosphere, and her lids were drawn together, so that her glittering eyes emitted only a single line of light; her movements were cat-like, velvety; she reached the shelf, unaware of the observation she was under, and reaching up, took down and examined one after another of the glass-stoppered bottles which held various degrees of danger and death.

"If I could read in some book just how they acted, I should run less risk," she murmured, in her own language, which she always used when much excited; her watcher was familiar with it, however, and comprehended what was said.

Turning, with a perplexed air, as if to look for a treatise on the subject before her, Mrs. Meredith met the soul-piercing gaze which was fixed upon her, and the bottle in her hand fell, with a crash, to the floor.

"I did not see you,—how you frighten me."

"Do I? What are you looking for, Mrs. Meredith?—perhaps I can assist you."

"Oh, no! I don't think you can. I was not looking for anything in particular,—something—I don't know what! Sophie told me that arsenic would improve my complexion, and I was wondering if there might be any amongst this trash. Not that I really thought of taking any, but just out of curiosity, you know. She says she knows a beautiful woman who takes it regularly." Inez had recovered her self-possession, nearly, and was talking smoothly, though pale, and with fingers which trembled a little as she stooped to pick up the broken glass.

"Don't!" cried Miss Miller, springing to her side—"don't touch the glass, it may be injurious. What is it you have broken?"

"I don't know. It's eating holes in my dress. My pretty grenadine is ruined! I'm so sorry! What do you think it is?"

"Nothing worse than elixir vitriol, this time, I believe."

"What a pity, to spoil my dress! But you frightened me so! I did not expect to see anybody in this dusty old place."

"Nor I."

Inez looked about, as if to discover the other's errand.

"I did not come here for beauty-lotions," said Miss Miller, with a cold smile. "I came here because I was tired of so much confusion, and desired to be alone."

"Oh! I thought perhaps you came for medicine. I knew you were not well. I came here

once for laudanum, when my tooth ached. I happened to remember where the Doctor kept it."

"The Doctor!" repeated the governess, mechanically. She did not know why the words came from her lips, but they were forced out, even as her deep-set, steady eyes were fastened upon those of the widow, who shuddered at the solemn voice, and tried to look away and could not.

"Yes, yes!" said Inez, pettishly, when the momentary spell had dissolved, "he was in here so much, you know. It was tiresome."

"Was it?"

"To have one's husband always about something one could not understand—yes! That was my misfortune. I should not have married as I did"—half crying,—“if it had not been for papa's death, and such unpleasant circumstances. I ought not to have married such a learned, middle-aged man,—if I had had a chance to make a suitable choice; but I could do nothing else. You must own that I could do nothing else, under the circumstances?”—her words running on unwittingly, drawn out by the power of the steady eyes which she feared and dreaded, but could not rid herself of. "I should have chosen a younger man, fashionable, you know, fond of society, who would have taken me out."

"The Doctor would have done that; he would have dressed you superbly, petted you as no younger man would have done. You were in too great haste; too impatient. You should have waited."

"Waited? He died, did he not, Miss Miller? I am not to blame for that. I wish I had been more fond of him—that I—that he had not gone so soon. Doubtless I should have grown attached to him, and, as you say, he would have petted me, let me do as I pleased. Now, no one loves me! Miguel is good to me, but he is only my cousin. Oh, I wish the Doctor were alive!"

She dropped into a chair and began to sob. The other regarded her, as she sat there with her face covered, with a scorn too great for expression. She could not pity Inez, knowing that she loved, with all the passion of her selfish nature, her brother, who was about to marry a woman as beautiful, and also rich.

She did not believe that grief for the dead moved those easy-flowing tears, but jealousy of the living. She might have compassionated even the errors of one so young and untrained, but when she would have pitied, horror froze all softer emotion. The indifference, the heartless apathy which the widow felt in a death which became to her only as a door which re-

leased her to the liberty of seeking better things, curdled the blood of this other woman who had made herself the soul-mate of the murdered man.

"What shall I do with the broken glass?" asked Inez, presently ceasing to sob, and looking for help even in this trivial difficulty. "I would rather it should not be known that I was in here."

"I will sweep up the fragments; leave them; it is not safe for you to meddle with such things."

"But how long do you intend remaining in this gloomy place?" asked Inez, uneasily. "I don't see what you can possibly have to do here; and I heard them asking for you before I came in."

"The world will go on, if I absent myself a little while."

"No, but about Lillian's dress. She insists on the lily-of-the-valley wreaths, because she is in mourning, and wishes to wear nothing but pure white. We want her to wear blue; else she will look too bride-like. Bertha will be white enough for all."

"I will see to it, in time."

"Do, Miss Miller. It would be a great pity if anything were neglected. The event of tomorrow ought to be a perfect success. Arthur and Bertha are quite sure it will be; so that any humble prophecies of mine would be impertinent."

"Why should you prophesy anything ill? Stop a moment," cried Miss Miller, as the other was going away. She, herself, had felt ill at ease, anxious almost to wildness—she had brooded over coming danger—she had calculated chances—but what did Inez know of these things? Was it the consciousness of her own unhappy secret which gave to the other's tone a meaning which it did not possess?

Inez came back playing with the bracelet on her arm.

"All is going on smoothly, the weather promises beautifully,—do you know of any reason why to-morrow should not be all that we expect of it?"

Inez laughed, moving away again. There was malice, and more, in the light laugh; Miss Miller arose, her dark face flushing redly—

"Stay a moment, Mrs. Meredith. I want to advise you against the use of cosmetics,—especially such dangerous ones. It was fortunate that I was here, to-day, to prevent your doing anything so rash. Let me warn you not to attempt it."

"I did not think of it. You are mistaken if you suppose I need such uncertain aids. I dare say to-morrow will be a beautiful day. I, for

one, expect to enjoy myself," and humming "Gentle Zitiella," she slipped away.

"An enemy," said the governess, "who will attack by surprise. But I must not sit here, fearing and trembling. Work, work, is the best medicine for feverish spirits."

A breath of sweetness was wafted towards her as she came out of the dark room whose damp air was like that of a charnel-house in comparison with the warmth and redolence of perfume. The wide old hall was like a fairy bower. The ancient clock stood, with smiling face, the center of a pyramid of flowers. She glanced up at it,—“three o'clock. Will all be as fair and promising at this hour one day hence?"

Lillian came out of the parlor and laughingly drew her in, to criticise or admire the effect, according to the voice of her conscience. Sunlight, flowers, gayety everywhere! Even Lily was more like her girlish, radiant self, than she had been for fourteen months,—so absorbed in the hopes and pleasures of others as to forget, or lay aside, her habitually pensive air. She, with the rest of the bridal party, were to remain at Meredith Place over night, so as to be ready for the duties of the morning. Several guests were to arrive by the evening train.

It was arranged for the wedding to take place at eleven o'clock, in the village church; then a breakfast at noon; the newly married pair to take the afternoon train to the city, from whence they would proceed, at their leisure, upon the wedding tour.

"Everything is faultless," pronounced the judge; "now, young ladies, away to your rooms for an hour's rest, then dress, for tea and company. Lily, Sophie, Inez, you must come with me,—your rooms have been appropriated to guests," and she martialed her graceful forces as gayly as if no heavier care pressed on her mind.

The evening was a festival one—fit prelude to the happier expected day. A large number of guests sat down to the sumptuous supper; there was music and dancing, afterwards, in the parlor, while Bertha walked back and forth on the moonlit porch, listening to the whispers of the man whose wife she was so soon to be, and Inez, in the pauses of the waltz, stood in the rose-draped window, watching them with a dull burning glow at her heart that lighted her eyes with an unpleasant brightness.

"Bertha, you are magnificent, standing thus, flooded by showers of moonlight. If you look half as beautiful to-morrow, I shall behave like a wild man."

"The hot sun will not be as becoming to me as this silvery light, I dare say. We ought to have been married at this hour, on this porch,

by the light of the moon. It would have been so romantic!"

"Why not? It is not too late. Shall we?"

"Where is the minister? We shall certainly be compelled to wait for him, and he will not be here until ten to-morrow."

"How provoking!"

"And then the disappointed Hamptonites, and the superfluous elegance of the dress, and the wedding breakfast, and all that! I'm not romantic enough to waste so much display and expense."

"I rather like a grand wedding myself," said Arthur; "they'll describe it in the papers, you see. But really, Bertha, you are looking your handsomest. There will not be such a woman at the Springs, I'll wager."

"Thank you!"

"Mrs. Meredith is beautiful; but you quite excel her. She's too petite."

"In fortune as well as in figure," exclaimed Inez, laughing, as she stepped through the window. "Alas! what a hard fate is mine. But your mother says we must all retire to rest in due season. It is now approaching midnight, and she has spoken the word."

"Yes, we must, indeed, be prudent," said Arthur. "Is it so late? I have two or three letters to write yet, to-night, and some articles to pack. Dear Bertha, I must say good-bye until to-morrow."

He kissed her, bowed to Inez, to the friends in the parlor, and ran lightly up to his room. This was the signal for retiring. All were weary, and glad to seek their apartments. In less than an hour profound silence reigned where mirth and music so lately ruled.

"Come to bed," called Miss Miller, as the three girls who shared her room continued to chatter and laugh, as girls will, about the waning light of their bed-room candle.

"Yes, yes, I'm in bed now," answered Sophie, creeping on to the sofa, which was to be her improvised couch.

Inez had a cot-bed put up on the other side of the large chamber.

"Are you through with the light, Lily?"

"Yes,—will you put it out?"

"Certainly."

The next instant the room was in darkness; Inez pulled the shade to keep out the too bright light of the moon, opened while seeming to close the door which led into the corridor, slipped into bed, and apparently sank to sleep, for she was quiet at once.

However, when the others had really fallen into slumber, she crept out, put on her dress and shoes, went noiselessly down stairs, to the laboratory door, listened there some time, and



then, proceeding to the back door, admitted three men, officers of the law.

"It is all right," she whispered. "Station yourselves at the door of this room, and please make no noise, until I summon Mr. Chateaubriand. Is there a guard at the window I mentioned?"

"Yes'm. Two men there, armed with guns."

"I do not want him to escape; that is why I have arranged this matter so cautiously. You get the proof of the crime and the criminal at once, don't you see?"

"Mighty clever, for a woman," chuckled one of the constables.

"Hush! I will not be five minutes in bringing the master of the house."

The lady, as she went, lighted the hall-lamp and the bracket-lights on the stair-case, making everything as bright as possible; the men stooped, listening at the darkened key-hole, and hearing, with that fine tingling which goes to the fingers' ends when detecting the nature of the sound, the soft roar of the blow-pipe, and the stirring of a person in the laboratory.

"For heaven's sake, my dear madam, what do you want of me?" queried Mr. Chateaubriand, coming out into the upper hall, dressed, but in a state of dazed astonishment, shortly after Mrs. Meredith had called him. She had sent the maid to the doors of several of the gentlemen, and also to Miss Miller's, with word to dress and come out, as there was danger impending.

Most of the guests thought some part of the house might be on fire, and obeyed the summons with alacrity. All pressed together down the staircase, in confusion, but not making any great outcry.

"What is it?" again queried Mr. Chateaubriand,—"robbers in the house?"—as he caught sight of the three men surrounding the door of the laboratory.

"I wish to introduce you to your son-in-law in a new character," and Inez, stepping in front of the sheriff and his aids, threw open the door. All pushed forward into the room, not knowing what to expect,—all, save the trio on guard at the door, who merely closed up together, forming a dark barrier.

At the moment in which the interior was disclosed by the action of Inez, a man was bending in front of the furnace, looking within at a crucible whose contents he was testing; the glow, flameless, but intense, to which the fire had been urged by the assistance of a blow-pipe, revealed the outline of his figure with even more distinctness than daylight could have done; so absorbed was he in his occupation that nothing had arrested his attention, of all the whisperings and footsteps, until the noiseless hinges

moved and the company pressed into the room. Even then he did not perceive them, until he turned to go to the table where a small lamp was burning, beside which lay some articles whose meaning was not at once fully comprehended by those who observed them. Then, and not till then, the busy worker became aware of the fatal position in which he was placed—saw the crowd which filled the lower end of the room, the many eyes of those who had been his friends fixed upon him with varying expressions of grief, anger, and amazement. It was the bridegroom of the morrow who thus confronted them, dumb, and after the first startled movement, quite still.

"Arthur!" cried Bertha, pushing through the little crowd at the door, and making her appearance, with a dressing-gown thrown over her night attire, her unbound hair flying,—she had heard the alarm, and thought, like others, that Meredith Place was on fire. When she saw her affianced standing by the furnace, like one at bay, she stopped, with that one cry, and hung back.

"What is the meaning of all this?" again demanded the master of the house. "I can not say that I understand it. If Mr. Miller wishes to pursue his chemical experiments at this unreasonable hour, why should any trouble themselves to interfere with him. Arthur, for God's sake, what are you about?"

There were two, among the surprised group, besides Mrs. Meredith, who needed no explanation, after the first glance—Lillian and Miss Miller. The latter leaned against the wall, her face, pale with shame and despair, dropped into her hands, while Lillian clung to her, beginning to cry. But as soon as a soft, mocking voice began to speak, silvery-clear and exulting, the governess raised her head and fixed her eyes on the speaker:

"I will tell you, Mr. Chateaubriand. He is coining the gold which was stolen at the time of my husband's death—coining it into money, by midnight toil, to spend it at other times, in keeping up those appearances which deceived you and your daughter into believing him a young man rising into wealth. He has made money, indeed! literally made it, from the gold of the orphan and widow, and on the strength of this robbery, has ingratiated himself into the affections of your family. I have suspected him for some months, and been positive of his guilt for some weeks. I discovered the dies and who it was that used them, some time ago; but I have failed to trace him to the fountain from which he obtains his supplies—the box which disappeared at the time of the murder.

"Two of these officers have followed him continually the last month, ascertaining that the money he spends is always gold, of the coinage of 1847, as you will find on these dies. He gave a thousand dollars, the other day, for a bauble for his bride—a munificence she will appreciate when she knows that it was Lillian's gold and mine, which paid for it."

The stinging clearness of the voice, with its soft foreign accent, made every word more impressive, and as she ceased for a moment, her triumphant glance swept the circle, falling away from the fixed gaze of the unhappy sister to rest on the sinking lids of the brother.

"If you knew this, why did you not mention it before, Mrs. Meredith?"

"Well, sir, I should be very foolish to make a charge before I could substantiate it. I desired my proofs to be absolute. I will not deny that I had also some personal feeling in the matter. Mr. Miller sought my hand before he did your daughter's; but finding that he could enjoy my wealth without the burden of its owner, he concluded to make it available in securing him the prestige of an alliance with your family, as well as a second fortune. My Spanish blood rebelled at this treatment, and I acknowledge that I enjoyed the prospect of his humiliation."

"But my malice does not reach to your family, sir. I was willing and anxious to save Miss Chateaubriand the mortification of becoming the wife of a robber and—no! I will not say the other word! I have no positive proof that that crime is to be charged to him. I only say that these circumstances warrant us in entertaining a suspicion. Who, but the man who knows where that box is secreted, and who has constantly used its contents, since they came into his possession—who else can be the—"

"Don't speak that word, Mrs. Meredith," interrupted the governess, harshly, while Lillian cried out as if struck.

"Aye!" continued Inez, turning towards Miss Miller, and growing more excited, "she knew of his guilt. She also should be arrested as an accessory."

"Did you?" asked Lillian's mute eyes, as well as the cold voice of Mr. Chateaubriand.

"Yes," said the governess, standing erect and speaking with the courage of which nothing had ever deprived her, except her fear and love for another,—"*I have known it for some time. God knows I have not been an accomplice. It has broken my heart. Friends, you have seen me wasting before your eyes, in the struggle between duty, and love for this erring brother, who is like a child to me. I have been very ambitious for him,—the desire to see him do well has been the dearest wish of my heart.*"

When I found that he was sinning—robbing my poor child here," turning to Lily, "of her patrimony, I could not bring myself to expose him, for fear he would be accused of a still more terrible crime, of which *I know he is innocent.* I have said to myself, I will wait,—wait until he is married,—then I will compel him to return, by degrees, as he can, all the money of others which he has spent. By that time he will be so well established in business that he can do it without injury to himself or others. O, I know I have been weak—a coward—done wrong. But I could not make up my mind to ruin my brother."

"Dear Miss Miller," spoke Lily, caressingly, "if others could excuse you as I do. I don't care for the miserable gold. Oh, Inez, how could you be so cruel to all of us?"

"Why not keep this a secret?" pleaded Bertha, looking pitifully at one and another. "If he can restore the money, there will be no harm done. It will be so mortifying, to me, to you, papa! Let him leave the country, if he wishes. I will give up the foolish trinkets he wasted on me, and make good to Mrs. Meredith her losses. Anything to save this disgrace!"

For the first time, Arthur raised his eyes, looking at the beautiful girl who was to have been his bride, and from her to her father, to note the effect of this appeal.

"O, do let it be so," cried Lillian, "for my friend's sake."

"Never!" said Inez. "You have had your triumph, Bertha, and I will have mine. And then—a murderer! How dare you?"

"It is our duty to arrest him," interposed the sheriff, and stepping within, leaving his two men to guard the door, he advanced to lay his hand on the shoulder of his prisoner.

With a bound like that of a panther Arthur sprang to the window, which it chanced his sister had raised to free the room from the odor of the acid which Inez had spilled. The sash was up, but the shutters were closed, as usual,—with one blow of his fist he sent them flying, and leaped through the opening to the ground beneath. So quickly was the feat accomplished that the two men on guard beneath had no time for thought or action, before the flying man was on his feet again, and away, down the garden with the speed of a deer.

"Fire!" shouted the sheriff, leaning from the window, perceiving that the fugitive was otherwise certain of present escape.

One of the men raised his musket and aimed it at the dark figure flitting from bush to tree, under the tell-tale light of the calm moon, a sharp report rang upon the perfumed silence of the

summer night, the flying figure leaped, stumbled, and fell.

"He's hit," muttered the officer, looking back upon the pale faces of the now hushed group; "it's bad, but couldn't be helped! When a fellow runs, he must take the chances."

He and his aids went out, followed by Mr. Chateaubriand and two or three gentlemen. In five minutes the master of the house returned and whispered to his wife: "Take Bertha up stairs with you. She must not see this!"

They carried the bride-elect up stairs, shrieking hysterically, not so much from the agony of her bereavement as the terrible shock to and sudden revulsion of feeling. No one thought particularly of the sister, except Lillian, who still clung to her hand, and tried to persuade her to go up stairs.

Then the heavy shambling feet of the men were heard outside, at the door, in the hall, and there in that bower which had been decked for his bridal, in the midst of all those arches and pyramids of bloom, they laid their burden down. The old clock, though half smothered in flowers, ticked as loudly, as gayly as ever—but the heart of the young man beat no more.

"He is quite dead," said the constable.

Then the woman who had accused and betrayed him, realizing that her revenge had been too complete, threw herself beside the body with a wail which told her love even more loudly than her remorse.

Impulsive, unreasoning, and unprincipled, she had triumphed over those of whom she was jealous, only to feel that she had wounded herself. Her moans and screams were such as to melt the stern hearts of men who already felt appalled at the too sudden punishment which had overtaken the erring young man.

The guard who fired the fatal shot was walking back and forth out-of-doors, endeavoring in vain to quiet his aching conscience by the whisper of duty. The scene in the hall became unendurable, and servants were ordered to carry Mrs. Meredith to her room, and forcibly detain her there.

In the meantime, Miss Miller, who had fainted at the first cry that her brother was hurt, lay on the floor of the laboratory, her head pillowed in Lillian's lap, looking almost as ghastly as the dead. Sophie's maid was chafing her temples and hands, while Lillian, frightened to see her so long remain insensible, dreaded the moment when she should arouse to a full consciousness of what had happened.

Thus the brief summer night brightened into dawn, and the sun arose upon the bridal day which but yesterday Arthur had gayly apostrophised in the words of Tennyson—

"Move eastward, happy earth, and leave  
Yon orange sunset waning slow;  
From fringes of the faded eve,  
Oh, happy place, eastward go!  
Ah, bear me with thee, smoothly born,  
Dip forward, under starry light,  
And move me to my marriage morn,  
And 'round again, to happy night."

The marriage morning had dawned, and his sun had set forever, in a darkness and a coldness far away from the "happy night" he had anticipated. His was the crime and error of a weak and pleasure-loving nature. Others, beside his wretched sister, made many excuses for him, as he lay there, dead, in the midst of the garlands which had been wreathed for his wedding.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### CONSCIENCE MAKES COWARDS OF US ALL.

The excitement following upon the frightful drama of the night set Hampton township wild. Alas! when one's griefs or misfortunes are of a character which gives the public a right to make free with them! Trouble, under such circumstances, is far more unendurable than when it can be kept sacredly in the privacy of our own homes. Such was the tragedy which once before had filled Meredith Place with curious and whispering throngs, and which now again crowded it with inquisitive strangers.

Mr. Chateaubriand soon gave orders to have the gates closed against all except those who had business there. A coroner's jury was empaneled, and a verdict rendered of justifiable homicide by the hand of an officer in the execution of the law; then the doors were closed against all but friends, the signet of mourning placed upon them, and rumor left outside to go insane over her own conjectures.

It was very natural that people should believe that the robber was also the murderer. It was at once decided that Arthur Miller had taken advantage of his sister's position in the family, to rob Dr. Meredith, and make way with him.

It must be borne in mind that Inez' declaration that the doctor had himself secreted the treasure the night before his death, was known only to her friends; and even if the public had known it, it would be easy to surmise that Arthur, lingering about the place, had chanced to observe the doctor in the act, and had then and there resolved to murder him in order to enjoy the money with whose place of deposit he only would be acquainted.

From this predicate, the world went on to assert that Miss Miller, if not equally guilty with her brother, of the murder, was an accessory to the robbery, and to loudly demand her arrest. At first, she heard nothing of this,

from that dark chamber of the old house, where she lay in a stupor more painful to combat than the unreasoning and querulous ravings of Inez, or the silent tears of the bride. The Chateaubriands knew that a warrant was out for her arrest; and that the delay in serving it was owing to the compassion felt for one of her sex in her ill and helpless condition. As long as her friends would pledge themselves to guard her from escape, she should remain unmolested until sufficiently recovered to bear the change without detriment to her health.

The haughty Chateaubriands, chafing at the unpleasant notoriety in which they had been involved, still conducted themselves with a propriety which came very near being Christian. They insisted that the funeral should take place from their house, and paid every possible honor to the departed, as if he had been, indeed, their son. If they felt that they had been deceived in and wronged by Miss Miller, they made no exposition of their feelings while she lay beneath their roof, stunned by the calamity which had crushed her.

They resolved, as soon after the funeral as possible, to take Bertha away from scenes which hereafter could only be distressing to her; they would spend the remainder of the season in traveling with her. They would have liked much to invite Don Miguel to make one of their party; but if they did so, they must also invite Inez, and they had a distaste to her society, since her talent for melodrama had been so unpleasantly displayed.

Bertha could not endure the sight of her; and, altogether, her position was not enviable. However, she did not seem to realize it; sensitiveness, of a delicate kind, was not one of her attributes; she clung to every one near her, complained, bewailed, and was hysterical, as inclination moved. The Don was very patient with her, though he could not conceal the contempt which mingled with his affection. His acquaintance with a woman of Lillian's dignity of character had opened his eyes to the fact that all of her sex were not like his wayward cousin. He was anxious to remove Inez at once from the neighborhood; but his courtesy to the family prompted him to remain to the funeral, the preparations for which went forward speedily.

Lillian spent her time beside Miss Miller's bed. She had not a thought or word of complaint of one whom she loved and honored. She understood, now, all that had been mysterious about the scene at the laboratory door on the occasion of the broken arm; the governor had told her that she, too, as well as myself, was suspicious of a person, and had fol-

lowed him to the place, not dreaming that I, also, was on the watch. It was her breath I had heard, her approach I had detected in the darkness, and which had sent thrills over me, as if a disembodied spirit had approached. She had waited, as I was waiting, and when the door unclosed, instead of striking down the transgressor, I had smitten her, and given him opportunity for escape. She would not explain this to me, because she would not criminate her brother. She had explained it to Lily, with the reservation of the guilty man's name; and Lily had been so blind as never once to suspect Arthur.

Looking back upon it now, Lillian could see how the sad secret had worn out the health and spirits of her friend. She did not doubt that Miss Miller intended the fullest restitution, as soon as she could bring it about without ruining her brother,—and she loved her all the more tenderly that her love for him had betrayed her into a weakness which she would not allow was a crime.

Beyond this she hardly dared allow her thoughts to go. The great probability that Arthur had been the one who tore her father from his hold on life, continually forced itself upon her, and was as constantly resisted. Because Arthur was her friend's brother, she did not like to admit the possibility,—yet some one had done the deed, and who else—who else could it be? All the first horror was brought back by the second tragedy which had grown out of it;—she was shaken, soul and body, and felt, if possible, a desolation greater than when her father was first taken away. Then she had Miss Miller, and her cousin Joe,—now, one had fled, unjustly accused,—the other lay prostrate, a burden, who had been so strong to bear.

In the meantime, Hampton, too, had recalled memories of the poor cousin who had been driven ignominiously from its midst. A reaction set in, in my favor, and if one reflects upon the natural course of such a reaction, heightened by remorse at the consciousness of false accusations, he may estimate how high the tide of popular feeling now ran in my favor.

Had I made my appearance at that crisis, doubtless I should have been overwhelmed with hand-shakings and love-feasts. The good Hamptonians felt very uneasy as they wondered into what possible despairs and dissipations they had driven a young man, whose worst fault, after all, was in having had a bad father, and who was, come to think of it, a most studious, retiring, harmless young fellow, who would not hurt a fly except in the way of surgi-

cal experiments. Some young ladies even recalled that I had given promise of being good-looking when my mustache had acquired body, and I got able to dress a little more fashionably.

There was much regret, too, for the sake of Lillian Meredith, that the hiding-place of her fortune still remained a mystery. Whatever inroads Miller might have made upon it, with his reckless expenditures, doubtless a considerable portion remained. It did seem like a strange fatality, that, amid all the discoveries made—by Miss Miller, in her somnambulist state, by Mrs. Meredith, in ferreting out the habit of the young man of visiting the laboratory at midnight hours, the actual hiding-place of the box remained unrevealed. Lillian thought less about it, perhaps, than any one else; she had found that she could support herself; and steady employment seemed almost desirable, as forcing her to put aside the veil of morbid melancholy in which she was tempted to wrap herself.

Mr. Chateaubriand considered it his duty to look more closely after her interests. With the consent and cooperation of Don Miguel, acting as Mrs. Meredith's counsel, he at once instituted the most thorough investigation of the premises, in hopes of unearthing the treasure. Out-buildings and gardens, cellar and attic, underwent a probing which would have done credit to the French police. The result remained as unsatisfactory as ever. The people of Hampton resolved that Doctor Meredith's bullion had become a myth, to be sought after, vainly and with infatuation, as several generations had sought after the buried riches of Captain Kidd.

On the third day after the death the funeral took place. The flowers had not yet completely withered, which were gathered for the bridal; reversing the order of which Hamlet complained, the wedding banquet furnished forth the funeral baked meats; an immense concourse followed the body to the grave; the ceremonies were performed by the clergyman who was to have united the young couple; the groomsmen were the pall-bearers; the man who was sent to death—

"With all his imperfections on his head,"

was not denied the poor tribute of outward respect.

None of the ladies of the family went to the cemetery. Inez plead and wept to be allowed to go; but Don Miguel had no idea of permitting her to get up a scene at the grave, for the edification of curious hundreds; his commands were imperative, and she reluctantly obeyed them. The chief mourner, the sister of the dead, still continued in that stupor which was so like unconsciousness, that Lillian, watching beside

her, doubted if she knew that the day and hour of the burial had come and gone.

On account of the intense heat of the day, the last rites were postponed until the sunset hour. When all was over, the pall-bearers, including Don Miguel and other friends who had remained to the funeral, gathered once more in the dim parlor of the old mansion. On the morrow, the most of them returned to New York, including the Don and Inez, who were to go to Canada to while away the time until it would be safe to re-visit Havana. Within a few days it was the purpose of the master of the house to leave Hampton.

Although none of the company could be said to feel any violent sorrow for the death of Arthur Miller, and would doubtless be glad, in the morning, to shake off the gloom under which they had sat for the last three days, still there was a shadow on every face, and the most careless felt awed by the solemn events which had occurred in place of the festivities which they had anticipated. The day deepened into twilight, and the lights were lit in the long dining-room, when the party was summoned to supper. Sophie had insisted upon Lillian's coming down and joining the family at this meal; and as her charge appeared to be sleeping, she consented. Inez also was present; she could rave, but not in solitude—solitude was the worst trial a nature like hers could bear, and she had gladly stolen down at the first summons, and placed herself by Don Miguel's side.

When the meal was about half through with, an apparition appeared at the door leading from the hall into the room. Inez sat near the head of the table, at the opposite side, so that her face was towards the door, and she was one of the first to perceive the intruder, who advanced slowly up the room. It was Miss Miller, in her night-dress, which was loosely trailing about her tall, commanding figure. Don Miguel, looking up, murmured involuntarily:

"Lo, you, here she comes! This is her very guise; and upon my life, fast asleep. Observe her; stand close."

Indeed, none who beheld her had power to do otherwise; no one could have moved, nor made an attempt to prevent her, as she walked feebly up the room, her eyes, in which there was no speculation, wide open, her brow pale and beaded with drops of sweat, to which the dark tresses of her hair clung damply. Lillian saw at a glance that she had risen from her bed and sallied forth on one of her somnambulist excursions; but she, like the others, sat powerless, fascinated by the expression of that

dead-alive face. Miss Miller did not carry a taper, like Lady Macbeth, but she bore a small salver, on which was a wine-glass filled with wine. Unerringly, but very slowly, she glided up the long apartment, around the head of the table, and down again, until she came to where Inez sat, when she placed the salver on the table before her, and, lifting the glass, presented it, with a sweet smile breaking most strangely over the marble countenance, and said, softly, in almost a whisper, but so that all present heard—

"You look pale, mio caro sposa, you do, indeed. Don't you think a glass of wine will do you good?"

Inez, pushing back her chair, arose, recoiling from the proffered glass.

"I did not say that! I did not say that!" she stammered.

"Our Spanish doctors always order port for your complaint; but I suppose you think yourself wiser, eh, my darling old doctor!" continued the sleep-walker, still proffering the wine.

"I tell you I did not say that! go away! go away!" screamed Inez.

"Well, well! I will set it here, and you can drink it when you like," went on the other, setting the glass on the salver.

"What does this mean?" asked Don Miguel, sternly, grasping his cousin's arm.

Inez looked up at him piteously, and back at the white-robed phantom whose deep set eyes met hers.

"Because I brought him wine," she exclaimed, frantically, "is that any reason for suspecting that I put poison in it?"

Her loud voice had the effect to somewhat disturb the somnambulist, who rubbed her hand across her forehead with a perplexed air,—the observers waited breathlessly, believing her about to awaken, but her countenance took on again that half-vacant, half-spiritual pallor and radiance, as she fixed her gaze on Don Miguel, and murmured:

"I heard the words, Arthur, as I was under the library window, pulling some roses. I never told of them, for, you know, she was such a baby. I could not believe my own ears,—besides, she might have brought him the wine and others might have poisoned it—don't you see? and I would not be unjust—even to her! But now they say you are the murderer, brother,—I can't bear that! I shall tell all—all! I shall accuse her! I shall point to her and say,—you did it! you did it!" and stretching out her arm, the speaker pointed with fixed finger, and an awful intense gaze at the shrinking and quivering girl, who cowered before the finger and the eyes, and fell on her knees, sobbing.

"Don't look at me so, Miss Miller, don't!

Indeed, I did not mean to kill him! I never dreamed that one drop—one little drop—would hurt him. Who could suppose it would? I only gave it to him for a charm—just to see—to try because—oh, what am I saying? You must remember how I screamed when I came in and found him dead,—you must acknowledge that I was surprised—horried. I only meant to give him a drop a day, to see how it worked. Oh, what am I saying again? Miguel, cousin, you are not going to desert me? I don't want to go to prison—to die! when I did not mean it,—when I only dropped one drop, or two, perhaps, for my hand trembled."

She looked about upon the company. Don Miguel had drawn away, and was gazing at her, with folded arms, and a look of horror,—the faces of all the others were as the faces of ghosts. Lillian had risen to her feet and stood with clasped hands.

"Her fondness for you was not in your honor, Arthur," continued the somnambulist, "you ought not to have been flattered by it. I have excused much in her, but any human being, not an idiot or insane, would not be justified in indulging such fancies,—and she a married woman, married to such a man!"

"I loved him the first time I saw him," went on Inez, distractedly, "he was so much more suitable in years and tastes. But I did not mean to let him see it,—and I never meant to harm my husband, who was so good to me;" and here she began to shed alligator's tears.

"Wicked! incredible!" murmured the Don, stepping back, as she turned, on her knees, to him.

"I'm not wicked, cousin! Indeed, I didn't mean the worst. Oh! you won't let the officers take me, will you? I wish to go away from here, back to Havana, with you, and be a better woman. I am too young and delicate to die—to have a rope put about my neck!" and she put up her little jeweled hand and felt of her slender throat, with a movement which would have been sufficiently pathetic could the spectators have rid themselves of the knowledge that they were gazing upon as heartless and selfish a woman as ever breathed.

Even as it was, the influence of youth and beauty was powerful. She looked so childish, with her face upraised, and so graceful, and so lovely, in the abandonment of fear, it seemed impossible to credit her with her own confessions. Mr. Chateaubriand was the first to speak.

"She is, indeed, too frail to be handed over to the law. I believe that she never meant to kill Dr. Meredith. It resulted from her lawless fancies and her ignorance. I do not know if I do right, but I am agreed, if the rest of you are, to allow Don Miguel to take her from the

country, before this thing becomes known outside the walls."

For a moment no one responded.

"If it were not for the disgrace," said the Don, bitterly, "I would leave her to her fate. I hardly feel as if I wanted anything more to do with her,—certainly not to assume the responsibility of her future conduct."

"Take me to a convent," pleaded Inez, "I believe I would rather live with the nuns, than to be hung, or to live in prison," with a shudder.

"So be it, then, if no resistance is made to your going. In a few hours there will be a train passing,—go, gather your effects. I shall be ready."

Inez rose and went out alone; none of the ladies offered to assist her.

"Arthur," continued the sleeper, "*since you are buried, and since he sleeps there also, I believe I will make my bed to-night, in the grave-yard.*"

So saying, she resumed her slow walk, passing out of the room, followed by Lillian and Mrs. Chateaubriand; she would have gone out of doors, in her bare feet, had they not gently barred her way and led her back to her chamber.

Scarcely had they seen her safely in bed when Don Miguel knocked at the door to bid them a gloomy adieu; he held Lily's hand a moment with a nervous pressure, dropped it and turned away, with his emotions, whatever they were, unuttered.

"Don't trouble yourself to go to the cottage to-night," he said, "I will see that she has what she needs," and thus, without look or word, Lillian and Inez parted, and their ways thereafter led in widely-differing directions.

When the night-express thundered in and out of Hampton, it bore her away whose coming had wrought such changes at Meredith Place; whose inmates shuddered and sighed as the echoes died away, at the thought of what she had been and done, and that they should probably never know more of one whose future promised so illy.

"I am afraid I did wrong to allow her to escape from the grasp of the law," said Mr. Chateaubriand, walking uneasily about the chamber, unable to sleep.

"We did, I know; but who could have the heart to punish her?" responded his wife, shivering. "She seems to me, even yet, like an infant who lights a match and throws it down, innocent of the consequences. Nature seems to have denied her a conscience, while giving her that sweet face and childish manner. I can not realize it! I seem to have been dreaming a hideous dream."

"It is a night-mare from which I wish there

was an awakening. Poor Don Miguel is cruelly punished in having such a relative thrust upon him. He seemed very much dejected when he went away,—and yet he was not harsh with her. I suppose he will bury her in some Spanish nunnery, and we shall never hear of her again. I propose that we keep silence until the warrant is served against Miss Miller, when we shall be obliged to declare what we know, in order to protect her. I shall not be sorry to get away from all this!"

"Poor Lillian! that child's courage is surprising,—I wish we could take her with us. I can not think contentedly of going away, leaving her so solitary. I would like to adopt her."

"My good little madame, so would I. She is a gem. But she will never consent. She has the pride of all the Merediths under her demure modesty. Good heaven! how she must feel this night! I can't sleep, for thinking of it. I should think it would kill her. That scene would have shaken the nerves of the stoutest stranger. How awful the majesty of that accusing specter! Inez could not escape her. All the guilt which was written in her heart appeared upon her fair face under the flame of those penetrating eyes, as concealed writing comes out when exposed to the heat."

"I shall never forget it, to my dying day!"

"None of us will, I think. Probably not twice for us will the curtain rise upon such a tragedy."

Nor for any others who witnessed that strange supper-table scene. None who were present but acted it over in dreams through many a haunted night thereafter,—shrinking as if themselves were doomed, when the slow finger of the sleep-walker pointed at the shrinking girl who trembled at her feet.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### COME HOME! COME HOME!

I sat in my little out-west office, looking out the open door, at the bright-colored leaves which dropped and loosened and dropped dreamily through the haze of the soft September day. I could see, also, the great river which rolled in front of the straggling village in which I had settled; there was a rude dock opposite my log shanty; a store and warehouse beside it, a few barrels and hogsheds on the dock, men fishing from the edge, a flat-boat in the distance,—all that men had done, primitive, rough; all that nature had done, beautiful, boundless. My prospects were good. All I had to do was to cook my own pork and cornmeal, and invest the sum and substance of my fees as a physician, beyond what was necessary to purchase these necessary articles, in real

estate—the land which lay about the landing—the town-lots which ran, in a state of nature, boldly along the bank of the stream; all I had to do was to lay hold, by hook or crook, of a goodly number of these, and in due time, say ten, fifteen, or twenty years, my fortune would have made itself. I should be a millionaire.

I sat thinking of it. The more I thought of it, the more brilliant appeared my future, the more gloomy I became. There was one thing which was making life intolerable to me. The name, chalked in red chalk upon the shingle beside my door, was not my own. A tragic destiny had driven me from home and friends, and, worst of all, from my own name. In a moment of weakness, of blinded judgment, I had resolved to throw away what had only been a curse to me, and to begin my new life under a new cognomen. I would shake off every association which belonged to Meredith Place. So I had come among these people under a false title. What of that? Had I not the right? Who was wronged by my doing so? I would be a man and a worker; I would fight with fate and conquer; would become rich and respected; would make the wilderness blossom like the rose; would build a fine home in place of this hut of logs; would bring a sweet wife to it, and rear fair children. Aye, and some day, perhaps on my wedding-day, or when those children were old enough to wonder at it, some hated man or woman of that old home and old life would happen along, would recognize me, and cry out—"Why, this man is a pretender and a liar! I know him. This is not Joseph Pillmaker, M. D., but Joe Meredith, of Hampton, who murdered his uncle and ran away with his gold!"

I might deny the murder and the robbery; but the fact of the false name would be fatal to me. Already the cloud grew and darkened, casting a gloom and chill over my new sunshine. Already I started, looking up nervously when strangers suddenly hailed me. And this thing would grow and grow, becoming more and more unendurable; and I would acquire the hang-dog look of a guilty man, or the bleached complexion of a plant that lives ever in the shadow. There would be no relief,—time would but make the disease more incurable—every dollar earned, every honor gained, would but make the fall heavier. O, what a fatal mistake! O, what a wretched prospect! Better "pull up stakes" again, as the rough settlers about me said when they changed their local habitation—better pull up stakes and tramp still farther West, and when I found a stopping-place, resume my own name. Less danger in that than the other. An enemy might come along and

say, "This man is a murderer, who fled from his native place;" but I could make my honest defense, or, if arrested, stand my trial and fight for my rights. I should breathe easier if this were done.

I felt, too, that I no longer run any great danger of arrest. From the facts which I placed in Lillian's hands at the time of my last visit, she must exonerate me from all participation in the crimes which had wrecked her prosperity. Ah, Lillian! What sense in imagining a sweet wife and fair children, when I knew, and felt more truly every day, that the only woman I loved or ever could love, was this dear cousin, from whom circumstances had torn me? A mad longing took possession of me to see her, hear her speak, know what was happening to her. Was she married to her noble and admirable lover, Don Miguel? Was she happy? Was she working beyond her strength? I had to fight against such longings often and faithfully.

While I sat, thinking and dreaming, the little steamer, whose tri-weekly visits were the event of the season, puffed up to her dock, and the storekeeper went out for the mail-bag, and the idlers and business men gathered about to attend to the discharge of cargo, hear the news, and take part in the small excitements of the hour.

I did not stir. Why should I go down to the boat? Some passing traveler might recognize me, should I do so. I was already growing morbid, you see. I sat there gazing gloomily at the cheerful scene in which other men were taking an active part. After a time the shoemaker came up from the store, and, as he passed, looked in with a neighborly nod, and threw me my paper.

"Thought I'd bring it along, secin' you didn't come down for't."

"Thank you,—much obliged," and he continued on his way, while I eagerly seized upon the only reading matter which I could command in that far region,—the weekly New York paper to which I was a subscriber.

I read it to the last item, and then turned to the advertisements for amusement and instruction. A constant reading of advertisements tends to the general improvement of the reader. I passed down several columns until I came to "To whom it may concern." It concerned me, as I discovered, with flushing cheek and a pulse which rose like that of a fever-patient, as the letters danced and glimmered before my vision:

"If this meets the eye of Joseph M., who left Hampton village in March last, he is begged to come home immediately, by his cousin, L. M. Circumstances have occurred which make it important for him to



do so, and he is assured that his return will be to his own best interests.

There was that sweetest name, so sacred, so dear to me. Doubtless she had signed it, instead of an initial, not only as a peace-offering, but as being more likely to arrest my attention.

"Circumstances had occurred." In vain to question myself, and to grow dizzy with conjecture. I could only know by answering the advertisement in person,—and that would take ten, twelve days—and I must wait until the return of that fussy little steamer from the ports above at noon to-morrow, before I could make a beginning. And then, there was my business to settle up! This consisted of collecting my fees for some twenty or thirty visits, paying up the two months rent due on my office, selling out my stock-in-trade to "the other doctor," who would jump at the chance of getting my office-chair, saddle-bags, and medicine-chest.

In all, I hoped to realize about forty dollars, which would pay my way to Hampton, and then?—a blank. What would be filled in that dreary blank I dared not imagine,—I, who was naturally so hopeful; but who felt that disappointment, now, would be so unbearable.

I had tough work compelling the settlers to pay cash for doctor's bills,—they expected time, and to pay in grain, lumber, and town-lots, but I was imperative. I had been sent for to go home, and a man could not travel on town-lots. By dint of argument like this, I had worked my way through the settlement, and back to the little wharf, by the time the steamer arrived on her return trip, and with a little of the hard-earned contents of my wallet, I bought my ticket, waved my hat good-bye to the storekeeper, the shoemaker, and "the other doctor," as well as to the storekeeper's pretty daughter, who had come down to the window of the warehouse which overlooked the water, with very red eyes, to say farewell. My conscience was clear as to never having given reason for those tears, which were probably due to the fact that I was the only marriageable young man in Podunk.

I had a wearisome time upon that ten days journey, my heart flying forward in advance of the crawling boat and train, only to come back wearied with the vain effort to satisfy itself before the day and hour appointed.

In the crisp and frosty twilight of an autumn day I stepped out of the cars at Hampton station. I was glad that the growing darkness hid my identity from the prying eyes of the loungers about the place. I would not even question the station-master as to the residence of Miss Meredith, preferring to seek it for my-

self. Two thoughts were throbbing in my heart as I strode along the quiet streets,—like the ticking of a pendulum in my ears they swung—"my cousin Lillian! the figure eight!" "my cousin Lillian! the figure eight!"

Was the mystery unveiled?—how fared she whom I loved? But why pause for such questioning, when here, at last, was the little gate, the modest walk, leading up to the white cottage, and I had but to knock, enter, and learn all?

You all know what it is to hesitate on the brink of certainty. The shade had not been dropped over the front window of the small parlor. I shall be pardoned when I confess that once more I acted the part of spy, so far as to glance within before venturing so much. There was no light in the room, except the glow of an open fire, which the chill of the autumn evening made particularly pleasant. She was there—no one else. She sat in her little rocker beside the hearth, her eyes watching the castles rising and falling in the coals, her cheek flushed with the heat and rosy light of the fire, her hair glittering in waves of gold and brown,—the somber black dress making her fairness and youth all the more apparent. She could not be married to Don Miguel, or she would not be here alone, and dressed in mourning!

Silently I opened the entry-door, softly I stepped forward into the rosy dim room:

"You called me, cousin Lillian, and here I am."

She turned, with a little cry, and when she saw me standing there, did not stir or speak for a long minute.

"You sent for me, Lily?"

"Yes, I did. Oh Joe, I am so glad you have come."

"You don't appear very glad."

She arose, holding out her hand.

"You astonished me so much," she said, and then I saw that she was quite pale, but as I pressed her hand the color came back to her face—neither of us knew just what to say.

"Oh cousin," began Lily a second time, but broke down and began to sob.

"What is it?" I asked, gently; I wished to draw the fair head to my shoulder, to kiss away the tears, but I had no right,—I should not have done it with a cousin's love, and she looked upon me only with that affection.

"It is all discovered," she exclaimed—"I have so much to tell you."

"The figure eight?"

"Oh no, not that. I expect I must teach school forever, Joe. But that is nothing. Did you know that Arthur Miller was dead?"

"I know nothing of what has happened since I wrote that letter."

"Sit down, Joe; I will tell you all."

She drew a chair beside her own. She did not think to ask if I were hungry or thirsty, or to light the lamps. What was in her heart found voice, and I, in listening, was unconscious of anything but the strange, surprising story. My cry of horror when she came to the supper-table scene caused her to ask—

"Did you, then, never suspect her during all your watchfulness?"

"I did and did not. I could not help it, and still I fought against the evidence of my own senses." And then I told her how I had seen Inez meet Arthur at the gate that stormy summer night, and the shock I had experienced to realize that she

"or are these shoes were old,

With which she followed my poor (uncle's) body,"

was carrying on a flirtation with this gay young man. I told her of the love-philters, of my own suspicions of Miss Miller from the first day.

"Poor Annie," sighed Lillian; "you were as unjust to her as others were to you. Her worst fault was to love my father—to expect to become his wife. She is arrogant, I know; ambitious, I know; suspicious of others, because her life of self-dependence has made her so; she did not like you, cousin Joe. She did wish her brother to marry me, and after she had discovered his guilt, she could not at once denounce him. But I love her—she is my best friend—my second mother,—and oh, Joe, she has suffered so much and changed so much you would hardly recognize her."

"I am sure she has my full forgiveness for any ill-will she has cherished towards me."

"She regrets it now," said Lily, softly.

I told her, too, about the handkerchief and key. She informed me that Miss Miller had picked up the key from the floor of the upper hall where some one had dropped it, and thought it best to say nothing about it, while making every effort to discover the box or the loser of the key. As to the handkerchief, she had gone, almost as quickly as the nature of Dr. Meredith's death was revealed, to the laboratory to examine for herself the shelf with which she was nearly as familiar as the doctor had been. There was a drop of acid on the outside of the bottle, which she had wiped off with her handkerchief, which she afterwards dropped; but, being unable to recover it, said but little about it, knowing how liable all were to suspicion upon the smallest evidence, under the circumstances. Her reason for never betraying her knowledge that Inez had carried the wine to the doctor, was her reluctance to involve the

young wife in danger, unless she was actually guilty of his death, and upon this point her convictions changed and wavered. In the first place, she esteemed it incredible that Inez could execute so daring a deed, even if capable otherwise of the crime; and as, by watching and observation of the strictest kind, she satisfied herself that Mrs. Meredith knew nothing of the missing box, she persuaded herself either that the doctor, learning something perhaps very bad with regard to his wife, had committed suicide, or that I, or some other enemy, for some unknown purpose, had contrived his death for plunder or revenge.

When she found that Inez was going to Gram-me Hooker's for love-powders, and that she was foolishly infatuated with Arthur, a comprehension began to dawn on her, of the mingled folly, ignorance, and superstition to which the husband had fallen a victim. Still, she would not denounce her, without further proof, especially at the critical time when Arthur had become involved in the robbery; but after his cruelly sudden death, she would have made known all she suspected or had overheard, in order to clear his memory from the stain of murder. Illness prevented this being done on the instant; meantime, it worked on her sick fancy, until it came about that she did, in her somnambulant condition, what she had intended, with more effectiveness than she could have done it waking. Inez' guilty conscience could not withstand the soul-glance of the sleeper, and she fell.

"Since then," Lillian concluded, "Annie has been slowly recovering from the exhausting effects of all this excitement. The people show her every attention; feeling that her brother's death was too great a punishment for his sin, they try to atone to her as far as possible by lavishing kindness upon her. She stays with me; and has been almost well to-day. She just retired to her room before you came. And now," with a smile, "I believe the good villagers are only anxious to atone to you for their persecutions. I've no doubt they will make Hampton a very agreeable place to you."

"It may be," I said; "but it will take more resolution than I possess to enable me to stay here."

"Why," she queried, innocently;—I thought, too, she looked disappointed.

"Are you teaching?" I asked, answering her question with another.

"Oh, yes. We are doing very nicely, too. When Miss Miller gets able to take her share of the responsibility, all will be well; I would not be idle for anything,"—sadly.

"Did the shocking discovery of Inez' guilt

break off the match between you and Don Miguel?" I asked, presently, trying very hard to make my voice natural and careless, but jerking out the words with a ridiculous hoarseness.

She looked into mine with those blue, beautiful eyes—

"We were never engaged. He is a good man, though; and I hope he will come back to New York and marry Sophie. She loves him, and I could not."

"Why?" I asked bluntly; "he had every quality to render you happy. You will never have another such a chance, Lily."

"Well, I am in no haste to marry."

She said this with great dignity, lifting the proud little head, and darting a glance of fire at me; but the next moment her lip trembled, and she turned towards the hearth to hide her face from me.

I never knew whether it was the flash of pride, or the tremble of her lips, which betrayed her secret to me. I only asseverate that I never before had suspected it,—no, not once.

Now, I saw it plainly, all of a sudden, blinding sudden. The blood rushed hotly to my cheeks, warm tears rose and dimmed my eyes; I took no thought of what I did or said, but leaped forward, crying—"Lily! Lily!"

She turned to me, reading all the meaning in my voice, and not daring to look up, said archly:

"Cousin Joe, there are none so blind as those who will not see."

"Darling Lily," I answered, leaping from my chair, and dragging her up too, for I had seized her hand, "if you really mean that, put your arms about me this moment, look me in the eyes, and say it again." Of course the shy child wouldn't put her arms about such a bear as I had grown, but she looked in my eyes, after a time, and I saw into her soul, as into a well, and myself at the bottom of it.

And how long we might have stood there in a heavenly rapture such as is only allowed us once on earth, I know not. Moments fled into a sweet, swift hour,—and then the old housekeeper came in with a lamp, and I dropped Lily's nestling hand, trying to look like a stranger and a traveler, instead of an angel just out of Paradise.

"My sakes, so your cousin's come, has he? I'm right glad on't, for you've nigh about looked your eyes out. Why didn't you tell me, Miss Lily, so's I might be makin' a cup o' tea. Railway travelers is mostly beat out at the end o' their journey."

"Time enough yet," I answered, gayly,—and Biddy made the tea, and Lillian went with me to the dining-room and poured it out for

me, and I sipped I knew not what of ambrosia, the drink of the gods, while her eyes lighted the table, and her sweet face beamed on me as I felt that it was evermore to beam:—blessed be His name who made my Lily to bloom, and me to gather its sweetness.

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

##### THE FIGURE EIGHT.

It was on one of the sweetest and last of May days that I walked with Lillian, arm-in-arm, towards Meredith Place—Lillian Meredith still, but Lillian, my wife! Aye, that morning we had gone to the village church and been made one in the presence of the whole township, all wishing us joy as heartily as ever bride and groom were wished it, and with a sort of affectionate enthusiasm, too; for that reaction of which I have spoken had set in, in my favor, from the moment it was known that I had returned to Hampton. Everybody had sought to atone for the bad things he or she had said about me; and it being found, on trial, that I was really a thoroughly-bred physician, no sooner did I choose my office and put my name on the door, than old ladies began to consult me about their neuralgias, and young mothers about their teeth-cutting babies, and I grew, in an incredibly short space of time, (owing to a lack of competition and the grand law of compensations), into that envied and enviable being, the popular young doctor.

Then Hampton took a start to grow about that time, the influx of strangers the previous summer proving greatly to its advantage, as calling attention to the fact that it was one of the most charming spots outside of New York.

All the new comers, having first heard the interesting history of the young doctor, were drawn by curiosity and the example of others, to patronize him; and thus it came about that before the first winter was over I found myself in a position not only to take care of myself, but to support a wife. Happy and envied fellow, I may well say.

Lily's school had also flourished like a green bay tree, and the only regret felt by the villagers at the announcement of our intended marriage, was that she would relinquish it. When assured that Miss Miller had purchased her interest, and would carry the school forward in its plans of advancement, they were well satisfied. This was Miss Miller's own doing. We had pleaded and argued with her to induce her to come to our home, and share our cares and pleasures through life, but she thought she saw her future marked out for her in the school, and told us lovingly, but with that firmness of hers which sometimes looked like hardness, that

we should see enough of her if our homes were half a mile apart.

I have boasted my own popularity, as it seemed needless to mention that Lily,—who had always, from a child, when she first rode out in the carriage with her mother, been an object of admiration and delight to Hampton, and whose strange, sad experiences for the last two years, had touched and won all hearts—it seemed needless to mention that she had the tearful congratulations of all.

Because she was my bride, need I hesitate in saying that she was the fairest, and the purest, and the best who ever stood in that old church to receive the marriage benediction?

O, what a day that had been! the crown of life!—and now we were walking arm-in-arm, as simply as two children, towards our home, which our good old housekeeper had all in order for us, and where the simple feast of the evening was spread, awaiting our arrival. For we had repurchased Meredith Place, and it was to be ours, should success still wait on our efforts. With the thousand dollars which I had sent her that night from the laboratory when I laid in wait for the coiner, and by the sale of the bracelet and other trinkets which Bertha Chateaubriand had returned to her as the true owner, Lily had been able to make a payment down of two thousand dollars, and the owner was willing to receive the rest in two and three years, knowing that my profession was lucrative, and there was no risk in mortgages.

Thus the dear old place promised to be kept in the family, to future generations I hoped, though I had not said so as yet to the happy girl who clung to my arm, looking with eager glance forward on the flowery road. For once again, as on that lovely day when the apple-blossoms showered down on the old stage-coach which held her father and his bride, the last of the apple-blossoms dropped about our feet, and the first of the roses swung their offerings of perfume before the bride, turning sweet faces of pink and white, which were not more fresh nor fair than her own.

Boldly, out of the trees and verdure of Meredith Place, arose the square gray tower, warmed with the rich, dark green of its glistening ivy. As we approached it, it happened that we saw first that side of the tower which fronted on the roof of the house, and looked towards the north. Certainly I know not how I chanced to observe it, and to think of it, now, for the first time out of all the thousands in which I had looked on it, but it flashed into my mind, and I spoke out to Lillian:

"There are two windows on the north side of the tower."

"Certainly, Joe; is that new to you?"

"I never thought of it before."

"There are no real windows there, of course; for, if you remember, in the tower room there are but six, two on the east, south, and west. These must be imitated for symmetry."

"Of course. How would the wall look, unrelieved by any break?" I said, carelessly; but still a thought had entered my mind, which caused the blood to rush to my face, and gave me, I fear, for a few minutes, an air of preoccupation not flattering to the new-made wife.

These double windows were long and narrow, softened by shutters painted only a shade lighter than the gray-stone; and over the shutters on the north side, which, being made to cover false windows, were, of course, never opened, the ivy had clambered until they were nearly concealed. As I say, I never could account for their having so particularly drawn my attention at that time, of all others, when one would have supposed the fair woman by my side would have engrossed soul and sense.

"How lovely the world is, Lillian," I said, presently; "this day was made for lovers to wed in. How beautiful Meredith Place looks. I never saw it so perfect in all its aspects. The lawn is like velvet, the distant woods are mantled in the delicate green of half-expanded leaves. It will not be the tea-hour yet for some time. After we have looked through the lower rooms and complimented Biddy on their appointments, why not ascend to the tower and spend a half-hour? I suppose it is just as Mademoiselle Sophie left it."

"I should like it, of all things," responded Lily; and so we wandered on.

Once safely inside the gates, we went hand-in-hand instead of arm-in-arm, stopping to pull a rose here and a violet there, on to the pleasant, spacious portico, where the vines were weaving light shadows, through the open, breezy hall, the parlors, newly garnished, and with windows open and curtains looped with flowers, up the wide staircase, through the perfumed chambers, on, to the narrow passage and stairs leading up to the tower. We climbed the steep steps bravely, for we knew the reward which awaited us.

O, Beautiful! When I threw wide the closed shutters and pushed back the sash, what a world of loveliness lay beneath us! The glittering, winding brook, the level pastures, the glorious woods, the pleasant gardens and lawns, the distant hills! And here we were, alone, together, wedded, standing, as it were, between heaven and earth, the blue ether around us, the holy heaven above, the fair landscape beneath.

"Lily, are we in heaven or on earth?"

I pressed her close to my side; her bright head lay on my shoulder, and in that hour of fruition I felt that all I had suffered since the hour of my birth was compensated for.

Presently we sat down on the chintz-covered lounge which Sophie had placed in the little room for her comfort. The thought which had occurred to me on the road returned with a power which held my heart still a moment, only to send it bounding wildly when it regained its freedom. I looked around upon the windows,—the carpenters, in fitting them; not supposing any particular finish would be required in this tower-room, had left their chalk figures boldly on the unpainted walnut wood. The casements were numbered, one, two, etc., up to six. I looked at the blank wall at the north;—there hung the map of the first survey of Meredith Place. A sort of phrensy or inspiration seized me. I sprang and tore it from its place, flinging it to the floor. Lily gave a cry;—no wonder. Two little recesses or cupboards, with doors, and numbered seven and eight, appeared in what it had been taken for granted was solid wall. I pulled open the door numbered eight.

There stood the curious, iron-bound box, with the steel rivets! The unnatural tension to which, even in my happiest moments, my mind had been strained for almost two years, gave way, and I staggered and sank back upon the lounge. I was far more disturbed than Lillian,—perhaps because I had made the unraveling of the mystery of the figure eight the object of my life.

I lay there so cold and stupefied that Lily was alarmed, and was about to descend and call the housekeeper. I motioned her back. She sat and held my hand, waiting for me to recover my composure. Suddenly a burst of glory from the setting sun filled the tower-room with a piercing radiance.

"Be comforted, be calm, dear Joe; there is the good omen of our future."

In truth, I had no cause for anything but rejoicing!—only, the sudden revelation overpowered me.

When my strength returned I lifted down the box, which, now that it was partially empty, I could just manage to do. The doctor, in placing it there, must have made more than one journey up and down those steep stairs.

"There is treasure enough here, still," I said, "to last us a lifetime."

"Oh, my poor father!" cried Lily, as she saw the gold.

We both recalled that happy night when he had shown us the result of his hard work in California. I did not chide my darling for

weeping long and sadly; I only felt happy to know that I was permitted to soothe and cherish her. After a time, she started up and wiped away her tears.

"I must look in those little cupboards," she said; "I remember them, now. Look, Joe, at this and this,—these were made by my father when he was a boy. He used to keep his pencils and drawings here, and his tools. This was his workshop. He often told me, when I was a little girl, about the happy hours he spent in the tower; but I never saw these shelves, for the map was hung here, for safe keeping, before I could remember. Dear papa! here's the very broken jack-knife and the little saw and the file—and this toy-table I dare say he whittled out with this knife," and she wept afresh, but now softly.

It did seem most marvelous that neither Sophie, in her renovations, nor Lillian or Miss Miller, in their investigations, had chanced to push aside that yellow old map. But thus it had been. It hung there, apparently, on the blank wall, and, further than a dusting at the hands of Sophie's servant, had never been disturbed.

We heard the old housekeeper calling us down to the little feast she had prepared, and which we were to enjoy, alone, together. Lillian's afflictions had been such that no one expected a merry-making at her wedding, and after the ceremony at the church, and cake and wine at the cottage, we had been left to take possession of our home in quiet.

We locked the door leading up to the tower, locking up with it, as far as possible, all exciting memories of our discovery. We wished to think only of each other during this, our first home-feast, to which not even our honored and loved friend, Miss Miller, would consent to be present.

The next day we sent for her, and together we went up, and counted the contents of the precious box, ascertaining that not over a third of the gold had been abstracted. It was a terrible duty to the sister of the dead robber, but she went through with it bravely.

I thought much, for some time thereafter, upon the probable manner in which Arthur had discovered the box. It was hardly credible that he could have been in the house at the time, and followed the Doctor to the tower; it must have been, that, walking along the road, his attention was attracted by the glimmering of a light in the tower, which would naturally excite his curiosity; also, one or more of the windows may have been open, enabling him to make out some of the movements of the master of the house, perhaps to see the map removed

and replaced. He may have thought nothing of it until after the mysterious death of Doctor Meredith, and the excitement over the missing gold. Then, he had at once the key to the hiding-place. Yielding to temptation, instead of making his knowledge public, he kept it for his own benefit—doubtless, (for "hell is paved with good intentions") excusing himself with the resolution to marry one or the other of the rightful owners, and thus, in a manner, flatter himself that he was not really a robber. Lillian refused him. Saying nothing about his having offered himself to her, he then turned his attentions to Inez, who was only too eager to accept them. For a time he fully intended to marry her; but the temptation of Bertha's family and fortune were too powerful for one of his weak principles to resist.

The investigations of the authorities were so searching that he had never ventured to convey away the box, nor the bullion in the bars in which he found it. If it should become known that he sold ingots, or was seen with them in his possession, suspicion would at once settle upon him. He had the caution which would have made a very successful scoundrel. With much difficulty he succeeded in obtaining the dies, and thereafter took advantage of the existence of the laboratory to coin money as he had opportunity, and of carrying it away with him in small quantities.

Miss Miller, whose determination to sift the matter had been as fixed as mine, learned enough to suspect her own brother, and was upon his track, though still not positive of his guilt, the night in which I broke her arm. How Inez also detected him, we never knew, but supposed that her burning jealousy had prompted her to an observation of his movements, which led to a discovery which she herself did not expect. Whether she or he had been cognizant of the somnambulist's visit, at the time she carried the ingots to her room, and had afterwards entered and taken them from the bureau, was never definitely ascertained, but his sister inclined to the belief that it was Arthur.

The reader will easily infer that the possession of the box made still more sure our worldly

prosperity; the claims were swept from Meredith Place, the world smiled, and we, being happy in our own hearts, had not a cloud in our heaven, save the memory of our dear father's untimely death.

The following winter we received cards for the wedding of Sophie and Don Miguel. Lillian could not think of attending; the dark tragedies of the past were yet too recent to be thus vividly recalled; but I took the opportunity to see the Don, not only to show him that we bore him no ill-will on account of his infamous cousin, but to acquaint him with the fact that such portion of the recovered property as belonged to her by law, he could claim in her name if he saw fit.

He bade us keep what was ours, by every right, merely saying that Inez had escaped from her convent and married an unfortunate sugar-planter, whose safety he, Don Miguel, had insured by a quiet threat to the wife to be prudent if she did not wish to draw down the vengeance of her relatives upon her head. How far that beautiful and unprincipled woman may have been a murderer at heart, her Maker only knows. We, who suffered most by her, always believed that she had no intention of killing her husband—at least not so suddenly—but was trying these same arts upon him which she afterwards tried upon Arthur Miller—not, however, to enchant, but to disenchant him. We never sought or heard tidings of her, after my interview with her cousin at the time of his marriage.

Don Miguel appeared so happy, and so well-mated with his pretty and stylish wife, that if my dear Lily had a shadow on her conscience with regard to him, she might thereafter disperse it.

I told her so, on my return, and she smiled and said she had drawn such an inference long ago, from a general observation of mankind. But, whether other women have more than one true love, or other men can choose and choose again, it is a grave and certain truth that Lillian and I have never even fancied she but one man, I but one woman.

THE END.

# SYBIL CAMPBELL;

OR,

## THE QUEEN OF THE ISLE.

### CHAPTER I.

#### CAMPBELL'S ISLE.

"The island lies nine leagues away  
Along its solitary shore  
Of craggy rock and sandy bay  
No sound but ocean's roar,  
Save where the bold, wild sea-bird makes her home,  
Her shrill cry coming through the sparkling foam."  
—R. H. DANA.

About six miles from the mainland of M——, with its rock-bound coast washed by the waters of the broad Atlantic, was an islet, known in the days of which I write as Campbell's Isle.

The island was small—about two miles in length and the same in breadth, but fertile and luxurious. The dense primeval forest, which as yet the destroying axe had scarcely touched, reared itself high and dark in the northern part of the island. A deep, unbroken silence ever reigned here, save when some gay party from the opposite coast visited the island to fish or shoot partridges. Sometimes, during the summer, pleasure-parties were held here, but in the winter, all was silent and dreary on the lonely, isolated little spot.

This island had been, from time immemorial, in the possession of a family named Campbell, handed down from father to son. The people of the surrounding country had learned to look upon them as the rightful lords of the soil, "to the manner born." The means by which it had first come into their possession were seldom thought of, or if thought of, only added to their reputation as a bold and daring race. The legend ran, that long before Calvert came over, a certain Sir Guy Campbell, a celebrated freebooter and scion of the noble Scottish clan of that name, who for some reckless crime had been outlawed and banished, and in revenge had

hoisted the black flag and become a rover on the high seas, had, in his wanderings, discovered this solitary island, which he made the place of his rendezvous. Here, with his band of dare-devils—all outlaws like himself—he held many a jolly carousal that made the old woods ring. In one of his adventures he had taken captive a young Spanish girl, whose wondrous beauty at once conquered a heart all unused to the tender passion. He bore off his prize in triumph, and without asking her consent, made her his wife at the first port he touched. Soon, however, tiring of her company on shipboard, he brought her to his island home, and there left her to occupy his castle, while he sailed merrily away. One year afterward, Sir Guy the Fearless, as he was called, was conquered by an English sloop-of-war; and true to his daring character, he blew up his vessel, and, together with his crew and captors, perished in the explosion.

His son and successor, Gaspar, born on the isle, grew up tall, bold, and handsome, with all his father's daring and undaunted courage, and his mother's beauty, and torrid, passionate nature. He, in the course of time, took to himself a wife of the daughters of the mainland; and, after a short, stormy life, passed away in his turn, to render an account of his works, leaving to his eldest son, Hugh, the bold spirit of his forefathers, the possession of Campbell's Isle, and the family mansion known as Campbell's Lodge.

And so, from one generation to another, the Campbells ruled as lords of the isle, and became, in after years, as noted for their poverty as their pride. A reckless, improvident race they were, caring only for to-day, and letting to-morrow care for itself; quick and fierce to resent injury or insult, and implacable as death or doom in their hate.



Woe to the man who would dare point in scorn at one of their name! Like a sleuth-hound they would dog his steps night and day, and rest not until their vengeance was sated. Fierce alike in love and hatred, the Campbells of the Isle were known and dreaded for miles around. From sire to son the fiery blood of Sir Guy the Fearless passed unadulterated, and throbbed in the veins of Mark Campbell, the late master of the lodge, in a darker, fiercer stream than in any that had gone before. A heavy-browed, stern-hearted man he was, of whose dark deeds wild rumors went whispering about, for no one dared breathe them aloud, lest they should reach his vindictive ears, and rouse the slumbering tiger in his breast. At his death, which took place some two or three years previous to the opening of our story, his son Guy, a true descendant of his illustrious namesake, became the lord and master of the Isle, and the last of the Campbells. Young Guy showed no disposition to pass his days in the spot where he was born. After the death of his father, Guy resolved to visit foreign lands, and leave Campbell's Lodge to the care of an old black servant, Aunt Moll, and her son Lem, both of whom had passed their lives in the service of the family, and considered that in some sort the honor of the house lay in their hands. Vague rumors were current that the old house was haunted. Fishermen out, casting their nets, avowed, that at midnight, blue, unearthly lights flashed from the upper chambers—where it was known Aunt Moll never went—and wild, piercing shrieks, that chilled the blood with horror, echoed on the still night-air. The superstitious whispered that Black Mark had been sent back by his master, the Evil One, to atone for his wicked deeds done in the flesh, and that his restless spirit would ever haunt the old lodge, the scene, it was believed, of many an appalling crime. Be that as it may, the old house was deserted, save by Aunt Moll and her hopeful son; and young Guy, taking with him his only sister, spent his time in cruising about in a schooner he owned, and—it was said, among the rest of the rumors—in cheating the revenue.

Besides the lodge, or Campbell's Castle, as it was sometimes called, the island contained but one other habitation, occupied by a widow, a distant connection of the Campbells, who, after the death of her husband, had come here to reside. The cottage was situated on the summit of a gentle elevation that commanded an extensive view of the island; for Mrs. Tomlinson—or Mrs. Tom, as she was always called—liked a wide prospect at least, if nothing else could be obtained on the lonely island.

The most frugal, the most industrious of

housewives was Mrs. Tom. No crime in her eyes equaled that of thriftlessness, and all sins could be pardoned but that of laziness. Unfortunately for her peace of mind, she was afflicted with an orphan nephew, the laziest of mortals, whose shortcomings kept the bustling old lady in a fever from morning till night. A wild young sister of Mrs. Tom's had run away with a Dutch fiddler, and dying a few years after, was soon followed to the grave by her husband, who drank more than was good for him one night, and was found dead in the morning. Master Carl Henley was accordingly adopted by his only living relative, and, as that good lady declared, had been "the death of her" every day since.

A young girl of sixteen, known only as "Christie," was the only other member of Mrs. Tom's family. Who this girl was, where she had come from, and what was her family name, was a mystery; and Mrs. Tom, when questioned on the subject, only shut her lips and shook her head mysteriously, and spoke never a word. Although she called the old lady aunt, it was generally believed that she was no relation; but as Christie was a favorite with all who visited the island, the mystery concerning her, though it piqued the curiosity of the eurious, made them like her none the less. A big Newfoundland dog and a disagreeable chattering parrot completed the widow's household.

Mrs. Tom's business was flourishing. She made a regular visit each week to the mainland, where she disposed of fish, nuts, and berries, in which the island abounded, and in return brought back groceries and such other things as she needed. Besides that, she kept a sort of tavern and place of refreshment for the sailors and fishermen, who sometimes stopped for a day or two in the island; and for many a mile, both by land and sea, was known the fame of Mrs. Tom.

Such was Campbell's Isle, and such were its owners and occupants. For many years now it had been quiet and stagnant enough, until the development of sundry startling events that for long afterward were remembered in the country around, and electrified for a time the whole community.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE MAGIC MIRROR.

"I turned my eyes, and as I turned surveyed  
An awful vision."

The sun was sinking in the far west as the little schooner Evening Star went dancing over the bright waves toward Campbell's Isle. Captain Guy Campbell stood leaning negligently over the taffrail, solacing himself with a cigar, and conversing at intervals with

a slight, somewhat haughty-looking young man, who stood beside him, watching the waves flashing, as they sped along. No two could be more opposite, as far as looks went, than those two, yet both were handsome and about the same age.

Like all of his race, young Campbell was very tall, and dark as a Spaniard. His short, black, curling hair shadowed a forehead high, bold, and commanding. Dark, keen, proud eyes flashed from beneath jetty eyebrows, and the firm, resolute mouth gave to his dark face a look almost fierce. His figure was exquisitely proportioned, and there was a certain bold frankness, mingled with a reckless devil-may-care expression in his fine face, that atoned for his swarthy complexion and stern brows.

His companion was a tall, elegant young man, with an air of proud superiority about him, as though he were "somebody," and knew it. His complexion was fair as a lady's, and would have been effeminate but for the dark, bold eyes, and his dashing air, generally. There was something particularly winning in his handsome face, especially when he smiled, that lit up his whole countenance with new beauty. Yet, with all, there was a certain faithless expression about the finely-formed mouth, that would have led a close observer to hesitate before trusting him too far. This, reader, was Mr. Willard Drummond, a young half-American half-Parisian, and heir to one of the finest estates in the Old Dominion. The last five years he had passed in Paris, and when he was thinking of returning home, he had encountered Captain Campbell and his sister. Fond of luxury and ease as the young patrician was, he gave up, all after that, for the attraction he discovered on board the schooner Evening Star. And Captain Campbell, pleased with his new friend, invited him to cross the ocean with him, and spend a few weeks with him in his ancestral home, whither he was obliged to stop whilst some repairs were being made in his vessel—which invitation, Willard Drummond, nothing loth, accepted.

"Well, Campbell, how is that patient of yours, this evening?" inquired Drummond, after a pause.

"Don't know!" replied Captain Campbell, carelessly; "I haven't seen him since morning. Sybil is with him now."

"By the way, where did you pick him up? He was not one of your crew, I understand."

"No; I met him in Liverpool. He came to me one day, and asked me to take him home. I replied that I had no accommodations, and would much rather not be troubled with passengers. However, he pleaded so hard for me to accommodate him, and looked

so like something from the other world all the time, that I had not the heart to refuse the poor fellow. Before we had been three days out at sea he was taken ill, and has been raving and shrieking ever since, as you know!"

"What do you suppose is the matter with him?"

"Well, I haven't much experience as nurse myself, but I think it's brain fever or something of that kind; Sybil, however, thinks that bitter remorse for something he has done is preying on his mind; and girls always know best in these cases."

"He is, if I may judge by his looks, of humble station, rather!" said Mr. Drummond, in an indifferent tone.

"Yes; there can be no doubt of that, though he appears to have plenty of money!"

"Has he given his name?"

"Yes; Richard Grove."

"Hum! Well, it would be unpleasant to have him die on board, of course!" said Drummond.

"Oh, I think he'll live to reach our destination; he does not appear to be sinking very fast."

"We must now be quite near this island—home of yours, Captain Campbell; I grow impatient to see it!"

"We shall reach it about moonrise to-night, if the wind holds as it is now."

"And what, may I ask, do you intend doing with this—this Richard Grove, when you get there? Will you take him into your Robinson Crusoe Castle, and nurse him until he gets well, as that enterprising canoe-builder did Friday's father?"

"No, I think not. There is an old lady on the island, who is never so happy as when she has some one to nurse. I think we'll consign him to her."

"Then there is another habitation on the island beside yours?" said Drummond, looking up with more interest than he had yet manifested.

"Yes, old Mrs. Tom, a distant connection of our family, I believe. And, by the way, Drummond, there is a pretty little girl in the case. I suppose that will interest you more than the old woman!"

"Pretty girls are an old story by this time!" said Drummond, with a yawn.

"Yes, with such a renowned lady-killer as you, no doubt."

"I never did see but one girl in the world worth the trouble of loving!" said Drummond, looking thoughtfully in the water.

"Ah! what a paragon she must have been. May I ask what quarter of the globe has the honor of containing so peerless a beauty?"

"I never said she was a beauty, *mon ami*.

But never mind that. When do you expect to be ready for sea again?"

"As soon as possible—in a few weeks, perhaps—for I fear that we'll all soon get tired of the loneliness of the place."

"You ought to be pretty well accustomed to its loneliness by this time."

"Not I, faith! It's now three years since I have been there!"

"Is it possible? I thought you Campbells were too much attached to your ancestral home to desert it so long as that."

"Well, it's a dreary place, and I have such an attachment for a wild, exciting life, that I positively could not endure it. I should die of stagnation. As for Sybil, my wild, impulsive sister, she would now as soon think of entering a convent as passing her life there."

"Yet you said it was partly by her request you were going there now?"

"Yes, she expressed a wish to show you the place." A slight flush of pleasure colored the clear face of Drummond. "I don't know what's got into Sybil lately!" continued her brother. "I never saw a girl so changed. She used to be the craziest leap-over-the-moon mad-cap that ever existed; now she is growing as tame as—as little Christie."

Drummond's fine eyes were fixed keenly on the frank open face of Captain Campbell; but nothing was to be read there more than his words contained. With a peculiar smile he turned away, and said, carelessly:

"And who is this little Christie, to whom you refer?"

"She's the protégé of the old lady on the island—fair as the dream of an opium-eater, enchanting as a houri, and with the voice of an angel!"

"Whew! the bold Captain Campbell, the daring descendant of old Guy the Fearless, has lost his heart at last!" laughed Willard Drummond.

"Not I!" answered Guy, carelessly. "I never yet saw the woman who could touch my heart, and, please Heaven, never will!"

"Well, here's a wonder—a young man of three-and-twenty, and never in love! Do you expect me to believe such a fable, my good friend?"

"Believe or not, as you will, it is nevertheless true!"

"What! do you mean to say you have never felt a touch of the *grande passion*—the slightest symptom of that infectious disorder?"

"Pooh! boyish fancies go for nothing. I have now and then felt a queer sensation about the region of my heart at sight of sundry faces at different times; but as for being fatally and incorrigibly in love—never, on my honor!"

"Well, before you reach the age of thirty,

you'll have a different story to tell, or I'm mistaken!"

"No; there is no danger, I fancy, unless, indeed," he added, fixing his eyes quizzically on Drummond's handsome face, "I should happen to meet this little enchantress you spoke of a while ago."

A cloud passed over the brow of his companion; but it cleared away in a moment, as a quick, light footstep was heard approaching, and the next instant Sybil Campbell, the haughty daughter of a haughty race, stood bright, dazzling, and smiling before them.

No one ever looked once in the face of Sybil Campbell without turning to gaze again. Peerlessly beautiful as she was, it was not her beauty that would startle you, but the look of wild power, of intense daring, of fierce passions, of unyielding energy, of a will powerful for love or hate, of a nature loving, passionate, fiery, impulsive, and daring, yet gentle, winning, and soft.

She might have been seventeen years of age—certainly not more. In stature she was tall, and with a form regally beautiful, splendidly developed, with a haughty grace peculiarly her own. Her face was perfectly oval, her complexion, naturally olive, had been tanned by sun and wind to a rich, clear, gipsyish darkness. Her hair, that hung in a profusion of long curls, was of jetty blackness, save where the sun fell on it, bringing out red rings of fire. Her large Syrian eyes, full of passion and power, were of the most intense blackness, now flashing with sparks of light, and anon swimming in liquid tenderness. Her high, bold brow might have become a crown—certainly it was regal in its pride and scorn. Her mouth, which was the only voluptuous feature in her face, was small, with full, ripe, red lips, rivaling in bloom the deep crimson of her dark cheeks.

Her dress was like herself—odd and picturesque, consisting of a short skirt of black silk, a bodice of crimson velvet, with gilt buttons. She held in one hand a black velvet hat, with a long, sweeping plume, swinging it gayly by the strings, as she came toward them. She was a strange, wild-looking creature, altogether; yet what would first strike an observer was her queenly air of pride, her lofty *hauteur*, her almost unendurable arrogance. For her unbending pride, as well as her surprising beauty, the haughty little lady had obtained even in childhood the title of "Queen of the Isle." And queenly she looked, with her noble brow, her flashing, glorious eyes, her dainty, curving lips, her graceful, statuesque form—in every sense of the word, "a queen of noble Nature's crowning."

And Willard Drummond, passionate admirer of beauty as he was, what thought he of this dazzling creature? He leant negligent-

ly still against the taffrail, with his eyes fixed on her sparkling, sunbright face, noting every look and gesture as one might gaze on some strange, beautiful mind, half in fear, half in love, but wholly in admiration. Yes, he loved her, or thought he did; and gazing with him on the moonlit waves, when the solemn stars shone serenely above him, he had told her so, and she had believed him. And she, wild, untutored child of Nature, who can tell the deep devotion, the intense passion, the fiery, all-absorbing love for him that filled her impulsive, young heart?

"Love was to her impassioned soul  
Not as with others a mere part  
Of her existence; but the whole—  
The very life-breath of her heart."

As she advanced, Willard Drummond started up, saying, gayly:

"Welcome back, Miss Sybil. I thought the sunlight had deserted us altogether; but you have brought it back in your eyes."

"How's your patient, Sybil?" said Captain Campbell—who, not being in love, found Mr. Drummond's high-flown compliments very tiresome sometimes.

"Much worse, I am afraid," she answered, in a peculiarly musical voice. "I do not think he will live to see the morrow's sun. His ravings are frightful to hear—some terrible crime seems to be weighing him down as much as disease."

"After all, the human soul is an awful possession for a guilty man," said Captain Campbell, thoughtfully. "Things can be smoothed over during life, but when one comes to die—"

"They feel what retributive justice is, I suppose," said Drummond, in his customary careless tone; "and *apropos* of that, somebody will suffer terrible remorse after I die. I am to be murdered, if there is any truth in fortune-telling."

He spoke lightly, with a half smile; but Sybil's face paled involuntarily, as she exclaimed:

"Murdered, did you say? Who could have predicted anything so dreadful?"

"An old astrologer, or enchanter, or wizard of some kind in Germany when I was there. The affair seems so improbable, so utterly absurd, in short, that I never like to allude to it."

"You are not fool enough to believe such nonsense, I hope," said Captain Campbell.

"I don't know as it is nonsense. There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in philosophy," you know."

"Yes, I was sure you would quote that—every one does when they advance some absurd doctrine; but it's all the greatest stuff, nevertheless."

"But did he tell you who you were to be—"

Sybil stopped short; even in jest she could not pronounce the word.

"Murdered by?" said Willard, quietly finishing the sentence for her. "No, he told me nothing. I saw it all."

"Saw it! How? I do not understand."

"Oh, the story is hardly worth relating, and ought not to be told in the presence of such a skeptic as Captain Guy Campbell," said Drummond, running his fingers lightly through his dark, glossy locks.

"Heaven forbid I should wait to be inflicted by it!" said Captain Campbell, starting up. "I will relieve you of my presence, and allow you to entertain my superstitious sister here with your awful destiny, of which she will doubtless believe every word."

"I should be sorry to believe anything so dreadful," said Sybil, gravely; "but I do think there are some gifted ones to whom the future has been revealed. I wish I could meet them, and find out what it has in store for me."

"Let me be your prophet," said Drummond, softly. "Beautiful Sybil, there can be nothing but bliss for an angel like you."

Her radiant face flushed with pride, love, and triumph at his words.

"Do you believe in omens?" she said, laughingly. "See how brightly and beautifully yonder moon is rising! Now, if it reaches the arch of heaven unclouded, I shall believe your prediction."

Even as she spoke, a dense cloud passed athwart the sky, and the moon was obscured in darkness.

The dark, bright face of Sybil paled at the dread omen. Involuntarily her eyes sought Drummond's, who also had been gazing at the sky.

"Heaven avert the omen!" she cried, with a shudder. "O Willard! the unclouded moon grew dark even while I spoke."

"And now the cloud is past, and it sails on brighter than ever," he said, with a smile. "See, fairest Sybil, all is calm and peaceful once more. My prediction will be verified, after all."

She drew a deep breath, and looked so intensely relieved that he laughed. Sybil blushed vividly, as she said:

"I know you must think me weak and childish; but I am superstitious by nature. Dreams, inspirations, and presentiments, that no one else thinks of, are all vivid realities to me. But you promised to tell me the German wizard's prediction concerning your future; so, pray, go on."

"Well, let me see," said Willard Drummond, leaning his head on his hand. "It is now three years ago that a celebrated Egyptian fortune-teller visited the town in Germany where I resided. His fame soon spread

far and wide, and crowds of the credulous came from every part to visit him. He could not speak a word of any language but his own; but he had an interpreter who did all the talking necessary, which was very little.

"I was then at a celebrated University; and with two or three of my fellow-students, resolved, one day, to visit the wizard. Arrived at his house, we were shown into a large room, and called up one by one into the presence of the Egyptian.

"Our object in going was more for sport than anything else; but when we saw the first who was called—a wild, reckless, young fellow, who feared nothing earthly—return pale and serious, our mirth was at an end. One by one the others were called, and all came back grave and thoughtful. By some chance, I was the last.

"I am not like you, bright Sybil, naturally superstitious; but I confess, when the interpreter ushered me into the presence of this wizard, I felt a sort of chilly awe creeping over me. He was the most singular-looking being I ever beheld. His face was exactly like that of one who has been for some days dead—a sort of dark-greenish white, with pale-blue lips, and sharp Asiatic features. His eyes, black and piercingly sharp, looked forth from two deep caverns of sockets, and seemed the only living feature in his ghastly face. There were caldrons, and lizards, and cross-bones, and tame serpents, and curious devices carved on the walls, ceiling, and floor, like all other such places, and the white, grinning skulls that were scattered about formed a hideously-revolting sight in that darkened room.

"The Egyptian stood before a smoking caldron; and, drawn up to his full height, his size appeared almost colossal. His dress was a long, black robe, all woven over with scorpions, and snakes, and other equally-pleasing objects, that seemed starting out dazzlingly white from this dark background. Altogether, the room looked so like a charnel-house, and the wizard so like a supernatural being, that I am not ashamed to own I felt myself growing nervous as I looked around.

"The interpreter, who stood behind, opened the scene by asking me my name, age, birthplace, and divers other questions of a like nature, which he wrote down in some sort of hieroglyphics, and handed to the Egyptian. Then bidding me advance and keep my eyes fixed on the caldron, and not speak a word, the interpreter left the room.

"My heart beat faster than was its wont as I approached this strange being, and found myself completely alone with him in this ghostly, weird place. He took a handful of what I imagined to be incense of some kind, and threw it on the red, living coals, muttering some strange sounds in an unknown tongue

as he did so. Presently a cloud of smoke arose, dense, black, and suffocating, filling the whole room with the gloom of Tartarus. Slowly, as if endowed with instinct, it lifted itself up and spread out before me. And looking up, I beheld—"

Willard Drummond paused, as if irresolute whether to reveal the rest or not; but Sybil grasped his arm, and in a voice that was fairly hoarse with intense excitement, said:

"Go on."

"I saw," he continued, looking beyond her, as if describing something then passing before him, "the interior of a church thronged with people. Flowers were strewn along the aisles, and I seemed to hear faintly the grand cadences of a triumphal hymn. A clergyman, book in hand, stood before a bridal pair performing the marriage ceremony. The features of the man of God are indelibly impressed on my memory, but the two who stood before him had their backs toward me. For about five seconds they remained thus stationary, then it began to grow more and more indistinct: the forms grew shadowy and undefined, and began to disappear. Just before they vanished altogether, the faces of the wedded pair turned for an instant toward me; and in the bridegroom, Sybil, I beheld myself. The vapor lifted and lifted, until all was gone, and nothing was to be seen but the black walls of the room, and the glowing, fiery coals in the caldron.

"Again the Egyptian threw the incense on the fire, and again mumbled his unintelligible jargon. Again the thick black smoke arose, filling the room; and again became stationary, forming a shadowy panorama before me. This time I saw a prison cell—dark, dismal, and noisome. A rough straw-pallet stood on one side; and on the other, a pitcher of water and a loaf—orthodox prison-fare from time immemorial. On the ground, chained as it were to the wall, groveled a woman, in shining bridal robes, her long midnight tresses trailing on the foul floor. No words can describe to you the utter despair and mortal anguish depicted in her crouching attitude. I stood spell-bound to the spot, unable to move, in breathless interest. Then the scene began to fade away; the prostrate figure lifted its head, and I beheld the face of her whom, a moment before, seemed to stand beside me at the altar. But no words of mine can describe to you the mortal woe, the unutterable despair in that haggard but beautiful face. Sybil! Sybil! it will haunt me to my dying day. I put out my hand, as if to retain her, but in that instant all disappeared."

Once more William Drummond paused; this time he was deadly pale, and his eyes were wild and excited. Sybil stood near him, her great black, mystic eyes dilated, every

trace of color fading from her face, leaving even her lips as pale as death.

"The third time this strange enchanter went through the same ceremony as before," continued he; "and, as in the previous cases, a new scene appeared before me. Now, the time appeared to be night; and the place, a dark, lonesome wood. A furious storm of lightning, and thunder, and rain was raging, and the trees creaked and bent in the fierce wind. On the ground lay the dead body of a man weltering in blood. A dark crimson stream flowed from a great, frightful gash in his head, from which the life seemed just to have gone. As the white face of the murdered man was upturned to the light—cut, bloody, and disfigured as it was, Sybil—I recognized myself once more. As Heaven hears me, I saw it as plainly as I see yonder pale, fair moon now. A white ghostly form, whether of woman or spirit I know not, seemed hovering near, darting, as it were, in and out amid the trees. Even as I gazed, it grew thin and shadowy, until all was gone again.

"For the fourth and last time, the Egyptian threw the strange incense on the fire, and 'spoke the words of power,' and a new vision met my horrified gaze. I seemed to behold an immense concourse of people, a vast mob swaying to and fro in the wildest excitement. A low, hoarse growl, as of distant thunder, passed at intervals through the vast crowd, and every eye was raised to an object above them. I looked up, too, and beheld a sight that seemed freezing the very blood in my veins. It was a scaffold; and standing on it, with the ignominious halter round her white, beautiful neck, was she who had stood beside me at the altar, whom I had seen chained in her prison-cell, doomed to die by the hand of the public hangman now. Her beautiful hands were stretched out wildly, imploringly, to the crowd below, who only hooted her in her agony and despair. The executioner led her to the fatal drop, a great shout arose from the crowd, then all faded away; and looking up, as if from an appalling dream, I saw the interpreter beckoning me from the door. How I reeled from the room, with throbbing brow and feverish pulse, I know not. Everything seemed swimming around me; and, in a state of the wildest excitement, I was hurried home by my companions. The next day the Egyptian left the city, and where he went after, I never heard. Such was the glimpse of the future I beheld. It was many months after before I completely recovered from the shock I received. How to account for it, I do not know. Certain I am that I beheld it, truly, as I have told it in every particular—for the impression it made upon me at the time was so powerful, that everything connected with it is indelibly engraven

on my memory. It may seem strange, absurd, impossible; but that I have nothing to do with: I only know I saw it, incredible as it seems. But, good Heaven! Sybil dearest, you are ill—fainting!"

Pale, trembling, and excited, the once-fearless Sybil Campbell clung to his arm, white with vague, sickening horror. Superstitious to an unusual degree, an awful presentiment had clutched her heart; and, for a moment, she seemed dying in his arms.

"Sybil! Sybil! my dearest love!" he said, in alarm, "what is it?"

"Nothing—nothing," she answered, in a tremulous voice; "but, O Willard! do you believe the prediction?"

"Strange, wild girl that you are! has this idle tale frightened you so?" he said, smiling at her wild, dilated eyes.

"If it should prove true," she said, covering her face with a shudder. "Willard, tell me—do you believe it?"

"My dark-eyed darling, how can I tell whether to believe it or not? It has not come true, and there seems no likelihood of its ever doing so. Do not think of it any more; if I had thought it would have unnerved you so, I would never have told you."

"But, Willard, did any of his other predictions prove true?"

"I had rather not answer that question, Sybil," he said, while a cloud darkened for a moment his fine face.

"You must tell me," she cried, starting up, and looking at him with her large, lustrous eyes.

"Well, then—yes," said Drummond, reluctantly. "Young Vaughn, one of those who accompanied me, saw a funeral procession, and himself robed for the grave, lying in the coffin. Five weeks after, he was accidentally shot."

She put up her arm in a vague, wild sort of way, as if to ward off some approaching danger.

"O Willard! this is dreadful—dreadful! What if all he predicted should come to pass!"

"Well, I should be obliged to do the best I could. What will be, will be—you know. But I have no such fear. Nonsense, Sybil! a Campbell of the Isle trembling thus at imaginary danger!—the ghost of Guy the Fearless will start from his grave, if he discovers it!"

The color came proudly back to her cheek at his bantering words, as she said, more coldly and calmly:

"For myself, I could never tremble; but for—". She paused, and her beautiful lip quivered.

"For me, then, dear love, those fears are," he said, tenderly; "a thousand thanks for

this proof of your love; but, believe me, the cause is only imaginary. Why, Sybil, I had nearly forgotten all about the matter, until your brother's remark to-night recalled it to my memory. Promise me, now, you will never think of it more, much less speak of it."

"Tell me one thing more, Willard, and I promise—only one," said Sybil, laying her hand on his shoulder, and looking up in his face earnestly, while her voice trembled in spite of all her efforts.

"Well," he said, anxiously.

"Did you recognize the face of the person whom you saw beside you at the altar, and who afterwards died on the scaffold?"

He was silent, and looked with a troubled eye out over the shining waters.

"Why will you question me thus, dearest Sybil?"

"Answer me truly, Willard, on your honor."

"Well, then, dearest, I have."

Sybil drew her breath quick and short, and held his arm with a convulsive grasp.

"Who is she?" she gasped.

Willard turned, and looking steadily in her wild, searching eyes, replied, in a thrilling whisper:

"You, Sybil—you!"

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