

# MARGUERITE KENT.

A NOVEL

BY

MARION W. WAYNE.

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THE HISTORY OF THE

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TO MY FRIEND,  
A. C. W.

# MARGUERITE KENT.

## CHAPTER I.

"A DOCTOR'S life isn't a rose-garden," sententiously observed Dr. Lescom; "indeed, it's a sort of Penelope's web: all the good you do one day is annihilated the next. You are a bother, child—butterfly—anything rather than sensible."

"I'm not but a fly, Dr. Lescom, if you please; I am fifteen years old, and measure full five feet four inches in height,—

'Ye healers of men, for a moment decline  
Your feats in the rhubarb and ipécac line,  
While you shut up your turnpike, your neighbors can go  
The old roundabout road to the regions below.'

When I had ventured this, with a sorry attempt at a sympathetic pleasantry, Dr. Lescom turned abruptly round and looked me square in the face.

"That is a great deal better than it was a moment ago," he said, nodding his head at the tear-stains on my cheeks. "Hitherto I have given you credit for being as wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove,—which is very wise and harmless indeed; don't disappoint me again. Now I want you to indulge your woman's irrepressibility and run down-stairs for a half goblet of water."

I knew by that he wanted to be alone with papa,—a pitcher of water standing, when he spoke, beside him on the table,—and a feeling of apprehension assailed me more strongly than ever as I prepared to obey him; yet, until I had reached the entry and the door had closed between

us, I restrained the wild burst of alarm which now found vent in tears. Sitting on the lower steps of the stairs, rocking myself to and fro, with my head buried in my hands, *Mehitable*, *Miss Tabitha's* maid-of-all-work,—a poor bound-girl,—found me when she came in from the kitchen-garden with her apron full of potatoes. In another instant she had dumped them all on the ground.

"Lor, *Miss Margie*," she cried, wonderingly, "don't yer cry so, yer frighten me; ye're a good girl,—why should you cry? I cries sometimes, but it's because I'm poor and have a gnawing; ye're a lady-girl, you've got gold rings on ter yer fingers, and yer pay board,—why should yer cry, dear *Miss Margie*?"

"Papa is so sick, papa is so sick, *Mehitable*," I sobbed, despairingly. "What would I do if papa should die?"

"*Miss Goodwin*, my teacher in Sunday-school,—*Miss Tab* spares me of an occasional Sunday,—the one with the soft eyes like yers, and the hair like gold, says that when good peoples die they goes straight to the best houses in heaven,—thet's the place where everything is made of gold and silver, and the angels eat diamonds, and the nice singing is. Now, I suppose if yer pa should die, he'd be sure to go there. *Miss Goodwin* says God is very kind,—He cares just as much for poor peoples like me as He does for lady-girls like you, so I'm quite sure He'd take mighty good cotton-wool care of yer pa!"

Her untutored eloquence touched my heart; for the first time I raised my head. "I know papa would go to heaven," I answered simply; "but, *Mehitable*, he is all I have in the wide world,—all that I have to care for and love me."

A change came over her face swiftly. "Yer right, *Miss Margie*, it's dreadful hard to have nobody ter care for yer; I know it by the tears thet wet my pillow every night, by the dreadful gnawing thet is weakening my stomach and heart." Saying this with a quiet quiver in her voice, which astonished me by reason of its intense pathos and suffering, she stooped down, slowly picking up the potatoes one by one, and replaced them in her apron. "But, *Miss Margie*," she added, turning toward the kitchen, "I believe what *Miss Goodwin* says, there is a place where

there's no weeping nor gnawing, where all is bright and the weary are at rest; there's only one gate to that beautiful place, *Miss Margie*, and I may never find it, but I hope I shall before I die, which won't be long off, I hope!"

Then she went down the passage to the sunlit kitchen, where I could hear *Miss Tabitha's* quavering voice calling to her hastily to "come and pare these apples right away!" I sat on the steps, when she had gone, a prey to vivid reflection, wherein I pictured myself at once ungrateful to God, and forgetful alike of His past mercies and infinite Providence; contrasting this poor alien's lot in life with mine more highly favored; hers, which had yearned for love and been denied; while I, reveling in the tender recollections of the past, could sun myself in the glow of loving reminiscence of the long, sweet days wherein my mother's voice had fondled my name, and her soft lips had caressed me; ingrate that I was, to bemoan the future of which God alone possessed the key!

"I never complained of my condition," says the Persian poet *Sadi*, "but once, when my feet were bare, and I had no money to buy shoes; but I met a man without feet, and was contented with my lot." When I returned to our parlor, goblet in hand, it was with a tranquil face to greet papa's loving smile and *Dr. Lescom's* keen gray eyes. One glance at papa's face betrayed to me the expression of peaceful satisfaction irradiating his eyes, the annihilation of the anxious look of care which, during the past week, had shaded them gloomily.

"My little girl is a heroine," he said, as I came in, endeavoring to repay smile for smile. "*Dr. Lescom*, I leave to the world a rich heritage, if a child's pure heart is counted as gold."

"It'll take them a long while to dig for it," *Dr. Lescom* answered; "the world is dreadfully misled on gold, they prefer the sham, and God knows they get enough of that; it gives them too much trouble to rub the true metal up to a good shine. When they can pick up a piece of tinsel anywhere, as long as it shines, they don't care whether they have the shadow or substance!"

"Yet the true metal lasts through all eternity," papa said, earnestly; "it necessarily becomes polished as it



rub against the world's sharp corners, and, after all, sooner or later, commands that true appreciation which is its due!"

Dr. Lescom shook his head doubtfully. "You may be right, but if I'm gold, the world's sharp corners (the sharpest-edged tools that I ever had anything to do with) ought by this time to have polished me into an amazing state of brilliancy; whereas I'm nothing but an old jagged stick, full of queer knots,—metallic about the heart, to be sure, and with an odd conviction sticking in my old wooden pate that, as far as the world goes, it's the biggest toad in the puddle that gets the glory, and the *little toads get the mud.*"

"Yet through all the woody fibers the gold is very discernible," answered papa, smilingly, "as all the inhabitants of Blossom Village will testify. Remember that it is God's hand that sharpens the corners, and all to his own good purpose—that the puddles all reflect the face of heaven."

"And the toads in return, by way of compliment, make faces at heaven," added Dr. Lescom, hotly. "Secure in their fancied security of vaingloriousness, clammy egotisms, and pride, their cold fingers chilling into disgust all warm-hearted lovers of humanity, they dare to offend heaven with their outrageous toadyisms."

"Yet to me the faith of children like Margie make the world whole."

"And you are partially right. The faith of a little child is an exquisite idyl," Dr. Lescom responded, taking his hat from the table and preparing to go. "It is a refreshing oasis in the desert of skepticism. Mr. Kent, to children the world is at best a false-hearted apple,—it looks very fair and tempting on the outside, and the first bite is very sweet, until the natural craving for another discovers the internal corruption, the hidden deformities and decay; then, like the rest of us, the ghost of skepticism pops up, and away you go! That reminds me I must go," he added, resolutely, as he hopped in his queer way toward the door, and pausing for an instant to look back. "I shall come again this afternoon to look after that other troublesome patient

of mine, the young man sick of the brain-fever, and perhaps I'll give you a call. I've done wrong to bother you so long, but I've got the crabs on, as my father used to call his blue devils, and I couldn't help talking. I want Miss Margie to give you those powders every two hours; refrain from indulging in woman's irrepressibility, and keep you as quiet as possible. Good-day!"

I followed him into the hall and shut the door. "I want you to tell me how sick papa is, Dr. Lescom," I said, quietly.

He turned slowly round, and investigated my face very carefully. "You're a brave little girl, after all," he said, at length, very gently, "and I will tell you the truth. If you are very careful, especially not to agitate your father in the least, avoiding every possible excitement, he may become stronger by degrees, and be spared to you yet for some time to come; if, on the contrary, in his present weak state, he should become prostrated by another spasm, such as he suffered from this morning, I fear it would kill him; so, my child, you must be very careful, and remember what I say." Then, his stolid face expressing a great deal of quiet sympathy, he went down-stairs, leaving me to stand there alone, my eyes blurred with grief, and with his last words ringing in my ears sharply. It had come at last, this dreadful warning, of which, during these past weeks of my father's illness, I had so earnestly endeavored to forget the possibility,—here it confronted me, inevitable, overwhelming. Was it not almost greater than I could bear—my agony? After the first shock was past, I stood in the same spot where Dr. Lescom had left me, a prey to the most vivid apprehensions, the sharpest pain, until other thoughts came crowding upon me,—the necessity of appearing to my father hopeful, quietly controlled,—confident in God's mercy.

He was lying on the lounge, drawn up close by the window, when I went in,—having, just before I even attempted to open the door, sought to gather to myself a bit of the sunlight flooding so gloriously the outer world, to warm my lips into the semblance of a smile. As I entered, he turned his suffering face toward mine,—

"Far off from these a slow and silent stream,  
 Lethe, the river of oblivion, rolls  
 Her watery labyrinth, whereof whose drinks  
 Straightway his former sense and being forgets,—  
 Forgets both joy and grief, pleasure and pain."

"Margie, Milton is grandly consoling. Dante calls it 'the slow and silent stream,' and Dante is right,—the river of death is cooling in its slow succor,—its silence is the restful peace of heaven!" The alarm which I could not help feeling upon observing his extreme restlessness, the nervous tremors in his voice, I restrained with a powerful effort, and endeavored to tranquilize him by appearing at once self-controlled and disinclined to talk. "Margie, my life has been very imperfect; the epigraphs to the different chapters have almost invariably been fine, but the subsequent pages wanting in the necessary success. Schiller says, 'conceived and unsuccessful, there's the crime.' Schiller was a wise man; the world never forgets nor forgives!"

"Papa, I wish you were sleepy; a nap would do you so much good."

He looked now very wistfully up into my face. "Come here, my daughter," he said. Then, in obedience, as I knelt down beside the window, close to him, he took my face between his hands and turned it toward the light. "He has been telling you, then, the truth, my darling, and warning you of the danger. You listened to him; you must listen to me now. My hours are few; they must be mine to pass in my own way. Margie, you have my mother's eyes and smile,—the heritage is rich in purity. You startled me when you came in just now, the resemblance was so strong. My thoughts were over the sea. I had a vision of my mother as I saw her for the last time. Margie, I have been suffering the pangs of remorse!" I felt his hand, resting on my head, tremble—knew that he had gone back in a retrospection to his boyish days, when he had so defiantly deserted his native land,—the fond mother-heart which he should know no more; that he was suffering from a remorse which, growing stronger year by year, had now culminated in a melancholy dis-

astrous alike to his peace of mind and vitality. "Do not look so distressed, my daughter," he went on, more quietly; "it will not harm me to talk thus to you; you do not like to hear me talk of remorse; I know all that you would say. Listen! I have not lived entirely in vain. Good has been, in a measure, the offspring of evil; and I am very grateful. God will not be wroth at my weakness,—He will be merciful to the infirmities of my gray hairs,—He has shown Himself loving to me in many ways. My darling, I pray to Him that even as He has cared for me He will care for you; that when I am gone He will hold you ever in his hands. It is only when I think of leaving you alone and unprotected—almost entirely dependent upon the cold charity of the world—that I am thoroughly grieved." He did not see the tears in my eyes, but he felt the trembling of my hands, which, try hard as I might, I could not control. "It pains you, dear, to have me talk to you of death, of my approaching separation from you, we have been so long together; it is natural you should experience this pain. I tell you, my daughter, it is necessary that you should know and appreciate the danger. You understand, if we were only back in England, that I might take you to my mother, saying, 'This is my latest blessing, dear mother; receive her at my hands, that I may die in peace,' I would be content. Then I would feel assured my little girl would never suffer want or destitution, since my dear mother's heart could not be hardened to my prayer."

I choked back the tears as his voice faltered, and tried to answer him steadily, reassuringly,—“Papa, you must not despair. You must live to take your little daughter home to England, to dear grandmother, who will welcome us gladly, despite her long, cold silence and neglect. Why, papa, yesterday you had quite a voracious appetite,—such a big one that Miss Tabitha said she must raise on your board.”

His white lips smiled faintly at me when I said this, and his eyes grew brighter as he drew my face down to kiss it tenderly. "You are my *aqua vitæ*," he said, gravely; "but, Margie, the cord of vitality which, through

these long years, has been stretching with a weak elasticity, grows frailer day by day, and, when the chosen hour comes, will snap asunder, bringing my gray hairs to the pillow which Jesus has made so light,—to the peace which, once gained, shall never more be lost." Saying this, his eyes wandered away from my face to the blue hills showing through the window, afar off, languorously asleep, with the white clouds piled thickly together on their summits. The wistful questioning of his face made me grow faint with pain. Suddenly he put out his arms, drawing my head to a resting-place on his shoulder. "Darling, this long day draweth to a close in silence and in gloom; the dark bars of the prison-night will soon be melted by the fiery kiss of my morning, sure to come,—in mercy and in peace. I have felt the necessity for many days past of acquainting you with my apprehensions and desires. The thought that at any hour you might be brought to meet my departure unprepared, has rendered me restless, sorrowful, tenacious alike of life and hope. During these few past days I have been indulging in a retrospect of my singular life, of my early desertion from home, my subsequent adventures in the wilds of California, my varied fortunes and misfortunes, my boyhood in dear Old England, the fond mother-heart that I shall know no more." Here his voice choked, and his eyes wandered again from my face to the daisy-eyed meadows—the more distant hills. "If I might only live to obtain her forgiveness," he went on softly; "if only one mother-kiss might be mine, as in the old days, before I go to sleep; if I could only place you in the security of her love, the draught of sleep would be sweetened to my thirsty lips,—I would go to my little Nell joyfully,—but, dear, God's will, not mine, be done." And, saying this, he folded his hands as if in prayer.

## CHAPTER II.

THE morning light looked in upon my dying father's face. When in cold, gray dawn the birds first opened their eyes, and the moon's silver benedictions yet lingered among the hollows of the hills, he fell asleep.

Turning to me, where I stood beside him, my face white with despairing grief, his eyes growing dark and great with glimpses of eternity, his sensitive lips tremulous and weak, he whispered, "Margie, child, it has come at last; it has come soon, dear. You must think of me only as happy, thoroughly at peace. Ah, God is very true!" Lying quietly, with his eyes turned out to the hills, through the window, dusky in their depths where the morn-glory did not fall, he heard Dr. Lescom's footsteps as he came in in obedience to my hasty summons, and, turning his head, looked up at him smilingly. "Ah, doctor, you ought not to have come. My little girl is so eager to have me stay with her always,—she must not weep because I may not. She must live to meet me where I am going,—to my little Nell,—her mother. I have fought to stay with her here,—she must fight to meet me by-and-by. I have loved my little daughter so well, so well! He will forgive me all idolatry, it leads me nearer to Him!" On my knees beside his bed, my tears and kisses covering his hand, I knelt beneath the weight of the mighty agony numbing my heart, when he spoke to me softly, assuring me of his infinite peace, which, passing all understanding, ought to quicken my faith to an entire resignation to God's will. I was unable to utter a single word in answer, only with a great effort endeavor to choke back my tears, that they might not hurt him at the last. A long while he lay quiet, his wistful eyes turned out through the window to where

"The dappled gray coursers of the morn  
Beat up the light with their bright silver hoofs."

The flowers of dawn were beginning to bloom, morning-glories, violets, and roses mixed together, where the cradle of the sun, throwing off its white sheets of vapor, gave birth to a sudden ocean of light, and the aureole of the day's resurrection crowned the hill-tops with gold.

"Margie, kiss me, dear," he whispered faintly, as the flood of light irradiated the room gloriously; then, as I complied, "Sing!"

Laying my head gently down beside his on the pillow, and clasping one of his fragile hands in mine, while the other rested tenderly on my face, in a faltering voice, which grew gradually stronger and clear, I sang one of Bishop Ken's old-fashioned hymns, very soothing in its quiet pathos and peace. When I had finished, and the little birds on the maples without the window caught up the refrain, Dr. Lescom touched me gently on the shoulder, saying, "Margie, my child, his peace has come at last!" Then, rising myself hastily, with one great heart-throb of woe, I recognized the dawn of heaven in my father's dead face, and knew no more!

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— "Those first affections,  
Those shadowy recollections"—

let me do justice, if possible, to these, by writing here the story of my father's life, as I knew it at this time. Born in England, of English parents, and to a system of idolatry peculiarly grateful to his youthful appetite, Arthur Kent had lived, until he reached his fifteenth year and five feet eight inches in height, the petted darling of a mother's heart, the favorite of fortune in all its interminable phases, and a living example to that terse epigram which Shakspeare puts into the mouth of Mark Antony,— "The evil that men do lives after them." His father, a wealthy banker of London, having married Marguerite, only daughter of Francis Thorburn, an officer in the English army, after a happy married life of some ten years, during which time, with much earnestness, he had endeavored, with what success will hereafter become

patent, to foster into complete development the extreme willfulness and selfish propensities of his child's disposition, with much detriment, he it said, to his own position as head of the family. He had departed this life at the early age of thirty-five years, leaving his wife to the tender assiduities of multitudinous lovers, and a victim to the self-will of the nine-year-old Arthur. The latter difficulty, however, was, in a measure, obviated by Arthur's being packed off to school almost immediately,—the mother yielding to the felicitous representations of her friends that it was his only salvation. Arthur soon found, that with his munificent allowance of pocket-money, he had attained the ne plus ultra of school-boy popularity; justifying most conclusively that able fragment from Keats,—

"There are those who lord it o'er their fellow-men  
With most prevailing tinsel."

But, alas! already an invisible hand was tracing over the throne of his popular sovereignty those dread words, "Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin,"—and the prophecy becoming fulfilled by a letter in his mother's handwriting,—it being handed to him, as he, together with a few choice spirits of his court, were celebrating his fifteenth birthday, with a total disregard to all rules both scholastic and sanitary,—informing him that he was expected to return home during the first part of the ensuing week, to attend her marriage with a gentleman whom Arthur but a few weeks before had heard characterized as a scoundrel! Alarmed for her welfare, indignant at being treated like a child when he felt himself to be a man,—carried quite away by his passion,—this head-strong boy, by return mail, posted to his mother a letter upbraiding her with her want of confidence in him, since she had not deigned to consult him in this crisis of her life, warning her of her danger, and assuring her that under no consideration would he sympathize with or countenance her determination to ally herself to a penniless adventurer; but if she continued inexorable, defying his protest, he would take the first opportunity to run

away from her disgrace and England, and bury himself forever in the wilds of the Far West.

This boyishly, passionate epistle Mrs. Kent read with a quiet smile, little dreaming her willful darling could be really in earnest, only feeling hurt that he should show himself in such an unreasonable and undutiful light; and answering him, wrote, she knew him to be mistaken, through his great love for her, he did not really mean what he had written, that knowing this, she would forgive her dear boy entirely; in conclusion, reiterated her desire to welcome him home for the wedding in a week's time.

But, unfortunately, Arthur having indulged in numerous books treating of the exciting life to be found on the Western prairies of America, of hair-breadth escapes from Indians and wild beasts, of the fabulous gold regions, the El Dorado where the sun sets so gloriously, this last letter received from his mother only served to add fuel to the all-devouring flame,—his yearning to fight the Indians and wild beasts, to pick up himself handfuls of the loose gold, and test the truth of the stories he had read; in consequence, another week found the misguided boy acting in the capacity of a cabin-boy on an American steamer, and he had looked for the last time on his mother's face!

Suffice it to say, after this first step was taken, the boy's ready wit, intelligence, his bright face, and brave, sturdy ways, succeeding in gaining for him many friends during the passage across the ocean, ushered him into a more prosperous life in the New World than is usual in such instances. Realizing, as I do, that Arthur, according to all well-established rules of story-telling, ought to have endured, in consequence of his misdemeanor, many privations, disappointments, struggles, yet, in this instance, the usual conventionalities must be abandoned, since truth compels me to assert that Arthur Kent, in this peculiar phase of his life, as in all others, until a late period, found himself the especial favorite of fortune, the unrepentant victim to the world's fairest smiles. But five years spent in the wilds of California, among the felicities of his imaginative El Dorado, served to

modify to an alarming extent the fiery enthusiasm of the young adventurer, until, in a sudden turn of Dame Fortune's wheel, he found himself transformed into a second King Midas, that famous alchemist, his fingers transmuting into gold all that he touched. Then it was, with a deep yearning, he turned his face once more to the East. Stopping in New Orleans,—he traveled slowly toward the North, till, upon reaching Charleston, after many exposures to the climate, he found himself suddenly prostrated by a severe attack of intermittent fever. Here, as in many other instances, Cupid came close in the footsteps of an affliction. Through careful nursing by an old comrade, whom he had accidentally stumbled upon during the first day of his arrival in Charleston, he finally, after many long days and nights of wearisome pain, recovered sufficiently to enjoy the society of the two beautiful sisters who made the old house of Constant glorious with their faces,—the high-born daughters of an impoverished house. It was here, during his first hours of convalescence, that he wrote to his mother in England a penitential letter; having discovered, during the first year of his life in America, the wrong perpetrated by him against his father-in-law, the maligned man of honor, acknowledging his sin, and praying the mercy of her forgiveness, which, if granted, would induce him to renounce the land of his adoption and fly to the mother-love for which he was yearning. In vain he waited a year for a reply to his appeal; but no answer came. In the mean time, having won the love of Ellen Constant,—the fair-haired rival of her sister Honoria, who, bitterly resenting his choice, in her proud, imperious way ignored in future all claims urged by the sister upon her love, and resisted all attempts made toward a reconciliation,—he finally abandoned all hope of an English life in the devotion to his fair, young bride; a bitter conviction hardening his heart that the fond mother-love, which he once so fully knew, had turned to gall and bitterness through the treason of his own allegiance to it! Years passed away, and found him, together with his wife and child, removed to a Northern city; the former dying slowly, a victim to consumption,



the soft bloom fading in her cheek, the light of his heaven dying out from her eyes forever. A series of speculations entered upon rashly, unprofitably, had at length succeeded in materially lessening the dimensions of his fortunes, until, upon his wife's death, he found himself greatly reduced alike in wealth and vitality; dependent upon a few hundred a year for the wherewithal to live, and the tenderness of his only child for the peace which was his last and only hope, save that which awaited him in heaven! And this was the story of my father's life until we came to Blossom Village to live our quiet life to the hour of his death!

### CHAPTER III.

THE utter void created in my heart by his death troubled me with its pain both by night and by day,—it seemed as though my desolation would always continue, never to grow less, either in weight or woe,—always to be mine against my will. He was all I had, his heart the only one to hold me in its love; God had taken him,—left me desolate,—was it wonderful that resignation would not come to me all at once? Although the hours of that sorrow are long past now, the tears and the agony all put by, the thirst for oblivion quenched, the rebellion quieted, yet to-day, when wandering back, my thoughts touch the face of that struggle,—some of the old pain steals into my heart to pinch it,—some of the thirst parches my lips,—because of him—my father! A long while I struggled with my grief,—I can never tell here how earnestly,—but so unavailingly, I was fain to lie down in a desperate despair and beg God to take me also. The world seemed so dark, so cold and dreary, bereft of its flowers, sunshine, its warmth,—my eyes were shut to these,—only opened to the knowledge that they had all gone by for me; the rain from the clouds shutting out the sun, was beating about my head. I re-

member gratefully during these days of suffering how constant was Dr. Lescom in his care of me,—how devoted in his quaint attentions! Mehitabel's attempts at consolation,—her daily gift of a bouquet from Miss Tabitha's little garden,—the frequent visits paid me by the good rector of the village church,—these proving to me, in my hours of spiritual convalescence, the weight of a human as well as a divine sympathy.

One day Dr. Lescom, in his usual inexorable way, came to me, saying, "My child, you have brooded so long over your sorrow you are looking very pale and emaciated: it must go no further; I protest against your growing any thinner. I promised your father to watch over and care for you, while you remain at Blossom Village; but if you go on in this way much longer I shall have nothing to take care of but two or three bones and a pair of eyes!" Saying this, he waited for an answer, which came in tears.

"I have just come from a death-bed," he went on gently, "where a mother left a family of five microscopic children, orphans, and to the care of their oldest sister, a girl of fourteen years. Margie, I don't know how to comfort you, I'm nothing but a rough old man, with a tongue like a saw, but I wish you'd contrast your lot with hers,—only think how much better off you are!"

I found my voice at last. "Dr. Lescom, that girl has the little children to love her; while I—I am left entirely alone in the world. If I only had somebody to care for and love me I would be content,—I haven't a single face to look at and call my own; she has five!"

"That seems very well, my dear, but in the end you'll be much the better off. This woman that died reminded me of something I read in old Jeremy Taylor,—about the poor blacksmith's widow. 'She lived poor, patient, and resigned. Her heart was a passion-flower,—bearing within it the crown of thorns and the cross of Christ. Her ideas of heaven were few and simple. She rejected the doctrine that it was the place of constant activity and not of repose, and believed that when at length she reached it she would work no more, but would sit in a clean, white apron and sing psalms.' Margie, my widow

said in her very last moment, 'Betsey, keep the children scrubbed, and hear them say their prayers!'

This endeavor to distract my mind, the kindness expressed both in his voice and manner, the quaint gentleness, so unlike his usual brusquerie, touched my heart to a grateful appreciation of his sympathy. "I cannot help feeling sad," I answered, brushing the tears away that I might look up into his face bravely; "but I will try, with God's help, not to give myself up so entirely to my sorrow. You have been very, very kind to me, Dr. Lescom,—I will try to please you and be a brave-hearted girl!" When I said that, his eyes lighted up with satisfaction.

"There's some of your old spirit left," he said, nodding his head emphatically. "I have always maintained that the old principle in chemistry, agitation promotes solution, to be infallible,—it's only necessary for you to stir around, as though you had some breath in your body, and you'll be much the better off; you look now like a namby-pamby creature, devoted to slate pencils, chalk, and sentiment. I want you to play false to your face, stir round, talk,—not cackle; for although geese saved Rome, the cackling of a woman affects the world as a thunder-storm does milk." Saying this, the eccentric man disappeared in a pinch of snuff.

"Now," he continued by-and-by, settling himself very comfortably in papa's arm-chair by the window,—causing the hot tears to come into my eyes quickly,—"it is high time for us to talk business; of course you cannot expect to live on here forever, and have acknowledged to yourself the probable necessity of a change. Before your father's death, my child, he confided to me his intention of writing to your mother's unmarried brother, William Constant, formerly of Charleston, South Carolina, but since the war opened, removed to Washington, asking his kind protection for you in case of his decease. This letter, on the day preceding his death, feeling that the end was near at hand, your father gave to me, desiring me to send it to your uncle immediately upon his death,—and that I should communicate the fact of my having done so, to you, as soon as practicable thereafter.

Now, my child, it is necessary for me to tell you, that with the exception of a few hundred dollars, which, according to your father's wish, is to be expended upon your education during the next two or three years, you are penniless!"

The dreadful pause succeeding his words was broken only by my sobs, until he said, gently, "Margie, I'm a rough, old customer,—a man who has tumbled round the world in a sort of dervish dance all my life, until I came to settle down permanently in Blossom Village,—devoid of faith and charity,—and Bulwer might speak of me, as he spoke of another,—who was uglier than he had any business to be; but, Margie, although my lachrymal duct is chock-full of the world's dust now, yet I have shed tears myself in days long gone by,—and somehow I can't help feeling sympathy for you, now you're suffering. I want you to look forward, you're too young to look back,—remember that the weight of tears outweigh the length of years!"

"I will trust in God," I answered him, simply, steadying my voice and trying to look brave;—the tattoo which he was beating on the window-sill suddenly stopped.

"You're a brave little girl, Margie," he said kindly; "you're sensible and brave,—two virtues very essential to the starch in a good woman's backbone,—as a man, I have failed in both; the Arabic MS. says:—'I came to the place of my birth and cried,—The friends of my youth, where are they?' An echo answered, 'Where are they?' I am devoid of friends, with the exception of a lamentably misled few, who believe that the moon is made of green cheese, and in the fallacy of the milk in the cocoanut, despite my rough crabs, a sort of ill nature which, upon all occasions, very obstinately compels me to walk backward when it is my duty to follow my nose instead. Now, Margie," he continued, quickly, shaking himself violently, brushing his hand across his eyes, and relapsing into his usual brusquerie, "I want you to stir around; I don't want you to turn your nose up at beef-steak and potatoes any longer,—that state of mind does very well for maudlin Miss Scribles, with 'eyes in a fine frenzy rolling,' and sly appetites for raw, roast beef; but

for a sensible girl like you,—plenty of exercise (the best tonic in the world for common sense), beefsteak, and heavy draughts of good old Scotch ale is the ticket!" With these closing words of his harangue, this estimable man started up.

"What shall I do?" I queried, helplessly, his vehemence taking me quite by storm.

"I will tell you," he answered slowly,—going back to the window and to his tattoo. "In the first place, solitude begets melancholy; secondly, starving and gastric juice are antagonistic,—it is necessary for you to eschew both and to chew the cud of my advice instead; as a sovereign remedy for your misanthropy, I would recommend your being metamorphosed into a nurse!"

I stared at him in astonishment, which compliment he acknowledged by a nod of encouragement. "A nurse!" I echoed.

"Yes, a nurse, you little parrot," he repeated, laughingly; "good Samaritanism is your forte. What is the matter with your face, you are all eyes and mouth?"

But as I did not reply, and seeing that I regarded him as intently as ever, with a violent shake of his head, he finally condescended to explain.

"The young man lately victimized by a severe attack of brain-fever, and whom Miss Tabitha kindly domiciled beneath her roof in his hour of extremity, thanks to my pill-peddling,"—here he made a very grimace, very embarrassing to his sedate spectacles,—"*has finally decided, after much resistance, to become convalescent, and a disciple to the tenets of the chicken-broth and beef-tea doctrine. The poor fellow is in a bad way; his ravings proclaim him to be a victim to some woman's deviltry. Now,*" he went on, after a short pause, more gravely, "*which fact, added to his extreme prostration, and that, in all probability, he will remain a blind man during the rest of his life, prove him to be a remarkable object for sympathy and good nursing!*"

"And you want me to be his nurse?" I exclaimed, more astonished than ever.

Dr. Lescom nodded at me very pleasantly. "Yes, my dear," he replied, cheerfully; "you've had enough

of nursing yourself,—you've been too used to having somebody to watch over and care for; and if I should allow you to go on in the way you've been going since your father died, you'd swop yourself away into air. I see the necessity of a change for you as well as for my other patient, poor fellow, who is really in need of kind words and encouragement; I'm too rough to come that style, but you've a womanly little way with you that's quite taking, and honestly, I think one word from you would benefit the poor fellow in one day more than my quackery would in ten years."

He looked at me expectantly, and my heart gave a little jump. "I would like to try," I answered, gratefully; then my eyes filled with tears. "I feel so lonely, Dr. Lescom, the days are so long and dark; I would be happy to have somebody to care for; perhaps he would like to have me read aloud to him every day as I used to read to papa!"

"I think he would," Dr. Lescom answered, smiling at my wistful eyes, in a way which caused his ugly face to brighten wonderfully. "It would be a great comfort to him, my dear; he's a gentlemanly fellow,—before he was taken so fearfully ill, a perfect Hercules. I found him wandering about the depot one night, having got off the New York train, bound north, in a half-mad state,—not with liquor, but some dreadful mental agony; and of course you know that I brought him here and made Miss Tabitha give him a room in which to run through his brain-fever, with which I saw plainly he was threatened. Well, he's over it now, only it has left him blind, poor fellow,—blind, as I fear, for the rest of his life. He has given his name out to be Lester, but ignores all mention of his former history; in my humble estimation he's a poor dog, bitten by love into a mental hydrophobia, but who, after all, will come out of the fiery furnace as Abednego did out of the idolatrous king's—unscathed!"

The undertone of bitterness in this eccentric man's gruff voice betrayed itself into a sigh as he uttered these last words,—his chubby fingers beating the while a hasty tattoo on the window-sill,—his eyes looking out, as papa's



had so often looked, to the hills afar off, hidden behind their blue, sky-hemmed veils.

"I shall want you to begin playing your Florence Nightingale rôle to-morrow morning," he added presently, "and I sha'n't allow you to exercise your woman's especial prerogative of changing your mind, as all that nonsense will come soon enough without any coaxing, and you'd better stave it off as long as you can. Neither do I want you to flustrate yourself into believing that this young man is a hero; for you very well know he's only a poor lunatic, who, on his way from New York to God knows where, stopped at Blossom Village, suffering from a severe nervous prostration, and that he is as blind as a bat!"

"I will endeavor to remember your warning," I said reassuringly; "my ideas of a hero are extremely vague; I don't believe I ever read two novels in all my life; although I liked those that I did read, they were so awfully jolly!"

"Of course you thought they were jolly," retorted Dr. Lescom, taking his hat from the table and making an attempt at departure; "a woman's novel is so much riotous living,—she wastes her substance on it as did the prodigal son on his. Now, my dear, I've talked long enough to you to-day, but some time when your uncle comes, which, in all probability, will be in a week or two, we'll talk business again; in the mean time it is well you should overcome your vis inertia and stir around;—when I come in the morning, I want you to look as though you'd been eating something beside slate pencils." Then the door closed upon his bluff face, leaving me to sit quietly alone, with my hands folded together and my eyes wistfully turned out to the glorified hills.

## CHAPTER IV.

ALL night long my father's face came to me in visions. Once the dream so vivid, so tangible, suddenly awakened me, when I found myself, with outstretched arms, calling upon his name; in answer, only the cold night wind whistling about the corners of the farm-house, mocked my sobs, and the stars looked at me through the window with glittering, unsympathetic eyes. Then lying awake, Dr. Lescom's words haunted me,—“You cannot expect to live on here forever!”—forcing me to realize drearily, that even the pleasure of living near the spot endeared to me by a thousand reminiscences, where my father's love had cherished and sheltered me tenderly, would henceforth be denied me. Morning came, and with it consolation; how could I fondle despair in the face of a lovely summer morning, when the birds sang their matins, and the flowers wrote their love in letters of perfume?

The door leading into Miss Tabitha's quaint little garden, laid out with the utmost mathematical precision of triangulars, oblongs, diamonds, and polygonals, as though demonstrating a geometrical theorem, stood open, as I went, with a tranquil and resolute heart, into the breakfast-room, where the rest of the boarders were seated at table, showing the bit of blue sky winking between the rose-bushes and the branches of the dark mulberry-tree, and the sunlight lying in a long streak across the violet bed, the trailing ivy, and the nodding honeysuckles, losing itself at last in the cool dusk of the lilac-bushes. Even the homely table-cloth of mixed gray and white, the common cup and saucers, and the pronged forks,—constituting the greater part of the ménage of Miss Tabitha's household gods,—seemed to acquire a new and attractive grace as the golden light streamed in, borne on the wings of the eastern breeze, cooling the butter into

a semblance of form, waving the steam off the watery tea, and Miss Tabitha's white ringlets about her peaked, cadaverous face.

"You begin to look like yourself, dear child," was her first salutation, uttered in her usual deprecatory, quavering tones; "do you begin to feel like eating?"

I cast a doubtful glance at the delicate viands, consisting of corn-bread, cold corn-beef and potatoes, distributed in scanty profusion upon the delf plates. "Scarcely," I answered, catching Mehitable's scornful glance, where she stood bolt upright behind Miss Tabitha's chair, as I seated myself beside the apothecary's clerk, Mr. Phipps. "Dr. Lescom says, that until I take more exercise I shall have but a meager appetite." As I said this the six boarders unanimously looked very sympathetically at my black dress, while Miss Tabitha shook her head dubiously.

"Dr. Lescom is a very sensible man," she observed, benignantly, "although I differ with him in his theory that the indulgence of her material appetite is a woman's sphere; rather should they frown down the perverse excesses of this benighted age, when woman, yes, the goddesses of the poets, live for nothing but to eat and drink, instead of watching the silvery dew-drops scintillate upon the rose-leaves as the morning breaks and the coy butterflies wave o'er the golden buttercups!"

Saying this Miss Tabitha sighed and looked dreamily out of the window, evidently oblivious of the fact that I was looking at the teapot very expectantly.

"A cup of tea, if you please, Miss Tabitha," broke rudely in upon her reverie.

"My sister used to drink thoroughwort-tea for an appetite, and walk two miles every morning before breakfast," observed Mr. Phipps, the apothecary's clerk, very feebly. "I am quite sure that it did her a world of good!"

"Ah, yes," said Miss Tabitha, softly, putting a very small lump of sugar into my cup of tea, "and she grew very stout, and her cheeks and nose very red, Mr. Phipps?"

"I forgot about her nose," answered Mr. Phipps,

courageously; "but what I do know is, that her cheeks were just like blush roses, and all the boys said she was the stunningest girl anywhere round."

Miss Tabitha handed me my cup of tea, with her head very much on one side, meditatively. "Then they could not have resembled glorious Byron," she observed, regretfully. "Ah, the world degenerates sadly;—would that I had lived in his immortal age,—when a man of celestial genius disliked to see a woman eat!"

Mr. Phipps, apparently looking upon this high-bred allusion to a man of celestial genius as a clincher, relapsed suddenly into an abnormal state of subdued reflection and baked potatoes; but Miss Swasey, the young lady with the black eyes and seventeen-inch waist, ventured a protest.

"Everybody knows that Byron was a dreadful man; he wrote horrid books, and lived a horrid life; I don't believe you'd have felt good in his society, Miss Tabitha!"

"I don't know," answered Miss Tabitha, looking a little horrified at Miss Swasey's strong-minded allusions, "but I might have regenerated him; our poetic tastes at least would have assimilated; then at dinner he would have found me an agreeable companion, my naturally frail appetite etherealizing the roast beef."

As Miss Tabitha's natural propensities developed more alarmingly day by day in the matter of etherealizing the supply of roast beef to her household, this remark drew forth much appreciative warmth from her various boarders. Mr. Phipps going so far as to kick the rounds of my chair very energetically, and to swallow his glass of water in such a ravenous fashion that he came very near strangling.

"Men have such dreadful appetites," Miss Tabitha continued, looking at Mr. Phipps's inflamed face very reflectively, "and are so material in all their aspirations, that it is truly refreshing to meet with an occasional exception,—such as the young man up-stairs in the room with the dark-green blinds and yellow wash-stand. Dr. Lescom tells me that he is an object of that invidious malady, unrequited affection, and as such I can readily understand and sympathize with him in his affliction; even chicken-broth seems to possess no attraction, al-

though two weeks have elapsed since he was pronounced convalescent!"

"The poor creature is blind, isn't he?" Miss Swasey queried, pityingly, while Mr. Phipps's flushed face grew suddenly pale at the very idea of the invalid's mistaken antipathy to chicken-broth. "I used to hear him rave all night long, calling on some outlandish name, until I was sick and tired of the sound of it. He may be a hero for all we know; his coming here just as though he'd dropped from the moon, looks like it!"

"He has been very sick," Miss Tabitha said, in answer, a ring of sympathy softening her voice, "and has needed very good nursing; I did my best, and so did Mary Blodgett, the nurse Dr. Lescom sent away the other day; but he's quite lonely now, and addicted to low spirits, only natural under the circumstances," she added, with a sigh, *par parenthèse*,—"as everybody knows who has suffered from a broken heart; I've done my best at nursing, making gruel and spending a great deal of money on chicken-broth, until I'm quite worn out!"

Everybody looked very sympathetically at Miss Tabitha as she said this, and I began to entertain a vague idea that after all she must be very philanthropic, a fact that I never had dreamed possible before, condemning myself for my unjust prejudices of the past with much remorse. But after breakfast I went out into the garden, where the sunlight was tangling everything in a wonderful maze of green and gold, and *Mehitable* found me standing at the fence which separated this prim paradise from the utilitarian garden-patch of newly-planted cabbage and onions, on her way to the spring for water.

"I thought I'd go mad with all her blather about her eating nothing and the cost of chicken-broth," she said, contemptuously, swinging her pail to and fro energetically and keeping a furtive watch on the kitchen door,—  
"when she gobbles the wittals like fury when she thinks she's alone; and Dr. Lescom used ter buy chickens himself and bring 'em here for her ter make into broth for the sick un; and she used ter eat nearly all herself, without giving me the tippie of a mite, Miss Margie; lor, it's enough to make anybody gnaw!"

"Go on, *Mehitable*, don't stand loitering there," sang Miss Tabitha's voice from the kitchen, producing an instantaneous effect upon the cynical *Mehitable*, who, with a sudden dive, disappeared around the corner of the house in most extraordinary haste. The yellow *calceolaria* flamed brightly at my feet, where the box-edged paths met in a little point, side by side with the *catesby* starwort and ever-flowering candy-tuft, causing my heart to throb softly in love with all this sweetness, the prim features of this quaint garden face. Wafts of lilac odor swept by me to the meadows, lying drowsily at my feet, braided with tiny silver rivers, where the larks built their nests in shady knot-grasses. I loved nature so heartily, the incense of the hill-altars melted so sweetly on my lips, my heart throbbed so painfully with love to the Creator of all this earnest glory, that I could have stood there forever, dreaming my wistful visions, with the clouds floating overhead in little armies, and the daisies winking in the meadows at my feet.

These same daisies, the objects of my quaint childish fancy, that each morning the stars came down from the sky to sleep in their hearts all day long, and at night the angels coming down in the white mists that hid the meadows, gathered them back, to pin them in their places in heaven. The proverb says,—*"Happy is he who expects nothing, and he will not be disappointed,"*—remembering this, with a vague sense of relief I shut out from my heart all anticipations of the future, feeling that the providence of God would be my anchor among all the storm and high tides, that the sea-weed of hope from the shores of heaven would float out to me when wind-tossed on the high seas of adversity, guiding me at length to the rock of everlasting peace. Thinking this, the modernized farm-house, with its flaring yellow face and bright-green blinds, the one heritage of Miss Tabitha's spinsterhood, seemed to glow with a peculiar charm as I looked lovingly at its ugly proportions to-day, the window where papa had sat so many long hours, with his wistful eyes reading the outspread pages of the hills, standing open just above my head, showing the depths of the shady room where we had lived our happy, happy life,

bringing the tears to my eyes in a sudden passion, at the thought that I must leave it so soon forever! With these tears in my eyes but with the joy of God in my heart, I went in through the quaint box-edged paths, typical of the shades and crosses of my life to come! Looking back, I saw the gold wavering everywhere, driving the shadows away with a steady heat, smiling into the dimmest recesses of the lilac-bushes, and kissing the dark grasses into a golden peace; then the tears melted out of my eyes, leaving them dry and glorified!

"And that pale girl still is looking,  
Still is looking, still is looking  
At the cabbage plants a growing just without the kitchen door,"—

said Dr. Lescom, coming in brusquely, at twelve o'clock, startling me from my reveries and driving all my phantoms of disquiet to an arm's length. "I'm afraid you'll never have red cheeks, Margie, it isn't in your line of business somehow; you'll always be a pale-faced girl, with big, black eyes."

"Red hair and gigantic freckles," I added, quickly, and not without a little tinge of bitterness in my voice, lover of beauty as I was, to find myself forced to such an acknowledgment. "I shall always be a fright, Dr. Lescom, and when I grow old I shall look just like Miss Tabitha."

"No, you won't," contradicted Dr. Lescom, flatly. "'A pennyworth of honey catches more flies than a gallon of vinegar,' and you'll have more graces and lovers than she ever dared to dream of. But, come, I haven't time to 'waste my sweetness' on compliments this morning, for it's my dinner time; and I never could give a satisfactory answer to Owen Meredith's conundrum,— 'Where is the man that can live without dining?'" He stood at the door expectantly, looking back at me with a grim smile. "I hope you remember my advice against indulging in any rhapsodical flights of imagination about this blind man," he went on, ruthlessly, "for women are only too apt—

'To swallow gudgeons ere they're catched,  
And count their chickens ere they're hatched,'—

wearing themselves to death with chalk and moon-colic. Then, Margie, you're not handsome; there are not many men brave enough to tell a girl that, but I say, 'if you can't stand the truth you must fall,' as the boy said when he threw the Bible at his father's head!"

"I don't ever aspire to being either beautiful or romantic, Dr. Lescom," I answered, quietly, "on the principle of sour grapes."

"Well, you've one virtue that surpasses all others in my old eyes, and that is an antipathy to hydra-headed self-conceits," Dr. Lescom replied, soothingly. "As for me, I'm eaten up with self-love, and could say with Voltaire, when he was told that self-love, like coffee, was a slow poison,— 'It must be a very slow poison, for I have drank it, man and boy, for at least sixty years.' But *tempus fugit*, and it's high time that I should introduce you to your patient, and for me to eat my dinner, so come on!"

Very meekly I prepared to follow this unceremonious Æsculapius down the long, cool, corridor leading to the room of the blind man, that but a short time before had echoed and re-echoed with his incoherent ravings, and had teemed with the nauseating odors of physics and drugs. Now all the windows stood open, along one side of the wall, admitting the little draughts of air, and shaded by the persistent rose-vine that, in its infancy, had crept with clinging arms about the rusty trellis, which now, thanks to Miss Tabitha's primitive conception of the beautiful, glowed staringly in a fresh coat of glaring green paint. I could see that the sick man's door stood open at the other end, as Dr. Lescom tapped my arm with his cane warningly.

"I have hinted to him that he's to have a new nurse; he took a dreadful dislike to old Polly Blodgett, and so I promised him another, who would read to him occasionally, although he maintained that he was better left alone to himself. It is not necessary for me to tell you to be quiet and avoid all excitement, for you have the sense of half a dozen women already, and can swallow a hint without a wry face or a sugar-plum." Then he went on quickly, half dragging me along, as though

fearing each instant would prove me a renegade to his wishes. Noiselessly I followed him, soon to find myself standing in the dusky threshold of the dark room, in which the blind man was obliged to exist, in a queer maze of incredulity and wonder.

## CHAPTER V.

LIFE is a kaleidoscope: a moment, the mother of an infinite possibility of changes, producing unexpected effects, dazzling in their many-colored entanglements, and subject in the human soul, as in music, to the influence of the key-notes, *l'allegro* and *il penseroso*. Susceptible to influences acknowledged to be correct in their nature by my prematurely sensitive judgment, I readily accepted Dr. Lescom's quaint advice and friendship,—knowing him to have proved himself such a noble and constant friend to my father,—during his five years' life at Blossom Village,—so now, left alone, I became eager to win for myself the measure of his sympathy, his rude brusqueries touching me as everything else failed to touch me, breathing as they did of a disappointed life,—the scattered ashes of long-past dreams. Thus, carried quite away by his vehemence and authoritative arguments, that lovely June day, redolent of creamy roses and bright with sunshine, ushered into my life a new phase of existence—very bewildering in its gray lights—as I stood expectant on the threshold of the blind man's room.

"You are late, doctor," whispered a weak voice from out the dusk, as Dr. Lescom stepped briskly over the door-sill, carrying with him a waft of the sweet June air, "and there is somebody else with you. Who is it?"

"I couldn't get here before, my dear fellow," I heard Dr. Lescom's voice answer, soothingly, "although I came from Twitchley like a two-forty nag; now I'm as hungry as a street beggar, and can't stay long!"

"You are always in a hurry," answered the weak

voice, fretfully, "and you are bound not to tell me who you have brought with you."

"You are the one in the hurry now. I will tell you in a few words. I have brought the nurse I promised to bring you the other day. She is a very well-disposed person, and has been used to taking care of invalids."

"I thought I told you, doctor, that I did not wish to be victimized by another nurse," interrupted the voice, with a decisive ring in it now. "God knows I'm best left alone to myself, until I can get out of this horrible place alive."

"Margie, come and speak to him," was all that Dr. Lescom vouchsafed in reply, turning to me where I stood just without the door, half shy, and with a determination, steadily undermining my courage, to run away,—  
"you are spokeswoman now."

Conquering, with a mighty effort, the temptation to retreat, Dr. Lescom's cheery voice invigorating me into something like self-control, I went quietly in to where I could see Dr. Lescom, standing in the gloom, beside a couch drawn into the center of the room, and, bending down over it, I said, "Please let me stay with you, I will try and be gentle, I am so lonely myself." Then my voice faltered, and I could say no more. Quickly, in the dim light, I saw his hand groping about to touch me, felt the nervous start he gave involuntarily as he succeeded.

"It is a child's voice, a soft, child's voice. Who are you, little one?"

"I am not very little; I am tall, and fifteen years old; my name is Margie; I am an orphan, with nobody to care for. Will you please let me stay and be kind to you?" In vain I endeavored to steady my voice, so that it might sound more womanly to him. When I stopped, he had found my hand, and was holding it in a wondering way, with infinite gentleness.

"This is no place for you, child; I am a poor, mad fool, and no companion for such as you; yet I like your voice: it is sweet and comforting, like my little sister's, who died long ago. If there are angels, she certainly is one of them; but how can there be angels, if there is no



God? Sometimes I believe in nothing. Little one, tell me, is there a God?"

He flung my hand away, when he said that, and the doubting fierceness of his voice gave me a quick horror. But before I could answer in any way, Dr. Lescom interposed authoritatively.

"You ain't strong enough yet to go troubling your head about things like that. When Margie has nursed you for about a week, it will be full time enough; for the present you must hold your tongue, tie a bit of control to it. She must keep you quiet in some way, or else I shall send her traveling back in the jerk of a lamb's tail!"

This harangue proved magical in its effect. The blind man, whose face I could not see, stretched out his hand and grasped mine, saying, submissively,—

"No, let her stay; the sound of her voice will do me good; time is so fearfully long and dreary. I will do my best to be quiet."

"Stay she shall, then, for half an hour; when that has passed she must leave you until she returns to spend an hour with you this afternoon. 'Interdum stultus bene loquitur,' the Latin proverb says, and I think I verified it when I told you it was necessary for you to have a nurse. You'll get along famously now, if you'll only remember what I say. Swift, in his usual swift style, says, 'Imaginary evils soon become real ones by indulging our reflections on them;' which is as good a warning for you, young man, as a wrinkle is to an old maid." All this he said in his quaint way, eyeing his patient attentively the while. "I'm not exactly an octogenarian," he added, moving toward the door, "but I'm sufficiently well up the ladder to give you two spring chickens wholesome advice,—a dreadful physic for some people, but incalculably beneficial in its effects if swallowed promptly. I want you, Lester, to remember that Margie is a little girl, who is very kind to come and devote herself to your recovery, as she proposes to do; and you must be very careful how you talk to the child. In the matter of ears I'm quite a donkey; so, whatever you say to her, I shall hear. As for you, Margie, you must make time fly for this young man, and when

it has flown a half hour, you must take your ticket-of-leave;" and, with these parting words, he went down the passage, his cane striking the floor at each step, rat-tat, rat-tat, until the sound of it became smothered on the gravel-walk below.

A long while I stood patiently beside the blind man's sofa, after Dr. Lescom had gone, waiting for him to speak, feeling a little nervous, and wishing earnestly that the doctor's cheery face would return, that I might either beat an ignominious retreat, or else have him infuse into my heart a little of his own indomitable courage. In the gloom I could not distinguish the invalid's features, I could only see his face was covered for the greater part with a profusion of beard, and that his head was shaven bare. I had just made these investigations, when he whispered, in a very weak, exhausted way, his head moving restlessly from side to side,—

"There is a chair somewhere, child; sit down."

Very meekly I prepared to obey him, drawing the chair softly to the side of his lounge, where I seated myself, awed by the silence and gloom, and listening with a decided sense of relief to the blithe singing of the robins out among the greenery of the apple-trees in the garden.

"I'm nothing but a wreck," he whispered, at length; "even the singing of the birds drives me nearly crazy; I shall be dreadfully cross to you, child."

Laying my cool hand on his hot head, I answered him quietly, with such an assumption of calmness, that I astonished myself,—

"No; you will become stronger by degrees; you must not despair. You may be as cross to me as you please until you get well, and then you will be cross to me no longer."

"I am glad you don't attempt to pity me," he said, after a little pause, gratefully. "You're a young thing, but you possess a woman's wit already, without the usual deceit, as I can tell from your voice. How old did you say you were?"

"Fifteen."

"Are you beautiful?"

"No; I am very sorry, but I am dreadfully homely."

"So much the better for you," he said, quickly; "perhaps you will be saved the iniquitous curse of vanity. Sometimes I feel tempted to thank God that he has struck me blind, that I may never look upon a woman's face again."

"That sounds very wicked to me. I hope you say things sometimes which you do not mean."

"I mean that women avoid monotony in their penal code as scrupulously as did the medieval inquisitors, only with the lamentable distinction that, whereas the latter only murdered a poor devil's body, the former destroy their souls,—but I forgot: Dr. Lescom in the matter of ears is a donkey, and you in the matter of innocence are a child. You will not remain a child always: by-and-by all will not be gold that glitters, for you either."

"I am content to wait," I answered, quietly. "I will trust in God's mercy as implicitly as I know how; although He has afflicted me, yet I love to think He will let the sun shine on me when I need it."

"My mother used to talk to me like that, child," he whispered, more softly; "she is the only perfect woman I ever knew—God bless her; you don't know how bitter my heart is sometimes,—so bitter that I shall never be worthy to touch her hand again. The devil himself has fastened his fangs in my soul!" Then he repented. "I sometimes forget myself,—and that Lescom has donkey ears,—will you forgive me?"

Then, when I forgave him, there was another long silence, the shade growing deeper, more intense, as the sun crept stealthily around to the other side of the house, the curtain beaten against the window by the wind that, born among the daisy stars, came flowing up, alone breaking the silence.

"I think you will do me good," he whispered presently, turning his restless head toward me again, his voice grown quiet and soft; "you possess a remarkably sweet voice, and you are forbearing. I told Dr. Lescom decidedly that I would not have another nurse; the woman who left the other day took snuff and snored all day long, succeeding in driving me fairly crazy. Somehow it seems as though you had been sitting there always,—you came in so quietly and spoke so softly, like a spirit."

"Spirits don't have red hair!"

"Red hair!" he echoed, with an involuntary tinge of horror in his voice; "have you red hair?"

"Yes," I answered, choking a little, "it's abominably red. I hate it, but I can't help having it!"

"Of course you cannot," he acquiesced, conquering his momentary resentment. "I promise to like you all the same;—have you a temper?"

"I am afraid I have a dreadful one," I answered, meekly, "all people with red hair have, you know!"

"Yes; but yours must exist only in your imagination, since your voice is so sweet and your ways gentle,—two essentials in a woman, and which are worth all the golden hair in the world." Here he winced as though he had involuntarily hurt himself.

"But I have big freckles," I interposed, courageously, "and it takes a great deal of sweetness of voice to drown freckles, red hair, temper and all."

"What makes you tell me about your deformities?" he queried, laughing a little for the first time; "why don't you let me imagine you to be the most lovely little creature in the whole world?"

"That is just what I don't want you to imagine," I answered, eagerly; "I was afraid you might,—I am so tired of being homely, and I was afraid if you should ever see me you would be dreadfully disappointed."

"You poor little thing—no, you dear little thing! since I know pity must be as loathsome to your sensitive heart as it is to me. A small pebble out of a brook killed the giant Goliath, and the sweetness of your child-voice has stricken the cold shudder of my soul into something like warmth. You may never be beautiful, little one, but it may please Heaven to make you good."

"You said that like papa," I said, wistfully; "how I wish you would try and be good like him; he is with mamma and God now."

"Then you are an orphan?"

In answer, with a broken voice, faltering at each repetition of that dear name, I told him of my father's happy death, his trust in God, how dearly I had loved him, the subsequent utter desolation of my life, the weary days,

the sleepless nights; until God, stooping down, had lain his cool hand pityingly on my hot, rebellious soul. "I can't say that I am at all happy, even yet," I concluded, sadly; "for I miss papa more than I may tell you, and the world looks black to my eyes; but somehow the flowers comfort me, the little birds sing psalms to me, and then the Bible shows God's love."

His face was turned away from me as I finished, and he did not utter a single word in reply; so I sat there a long while patiently waiting for him to speak. The birds sang, the roses sent up kisses of perfume, the sunlight lying in golden squares on the entry floor just without, the threshold faded gradually white as the gold went sleepily to dream in the hearts of the buttercups growing in the meadows to the west—yet still he did not move or speak.

"My half hour is up," I said, softly rising from my chair to stand quietly beside the lounge; "I must go; I will come again, if you would like to have me, for a little while this afternoon."

"I would like to have you come; I am sorry for being so cross, but I cannot help it. I am afraid you will find me even more ill-natured by-and-by." And so I did, for when I returned, about five o'clock in the afternoon, with a bunch of rosebuds, white and red, as a little peace offering, he thanked me very nervously, all the while with his head turning restlessly from side to side, and scarcely, during all the time that I remained, vouchsafed me a single word.

## CHAPTER VI.

"THIS kind of weather catches me by the vitals," Dr. Lescom said, cheerily, when, on the following morning, he had prevailed upon me to accompany him again to the blind man's room,—the experience of the preceding afternoon having disheartened me so thoroughly as to necessitate a great amount of urging upon his part to induce

me to comply. "It smells of thyme, rosemary and clover; it makes a fool of me,—I always loved the wild flowers and herbs best,—none of your daintily-barbed fuchsias or oleanders for me; I leave those poor pot-children to the weak."

"I believe I hate everything," answered the invalid, coldly, "and always shall hate everything, since my soul is as blind as my eyes."

"You are entirely mistaken," remonstrated Dr. Lescom, brusquely; "although I acknowledge the world's cold shoulder to be an anæsthetic, yet she has a warm one too, and as the world doesn't stand still, the warm one will revolve round to you sooner or later, and then you'll find these ideas of yours to be like the needles of the old maid who, being minus a pincushion, made one of an onion, and awoke the next day to find them all with tears in their eyes,—you'll be sorry for your abuse of old Dame Grundy."

"Never!" the sick man answered, fiercely, and starting restlessly as he spoke,— "Nebuchadnezzar was much more fortunate than the hoodwinked Jacob. I would rather eat grass a thousand years than serve one hour for a woman's smile."

Dr. Lescom here laughed heartily. "I'd scold you well, young man, for your perversity, if I didn't think you scold yourself better than even I could. It's the first time I ever economized anything but the truth."

"You are not an exception," retorted Mr. Lester, sententiously, "only the harlequins sport their parti-colors differently, it is all the same the livery of Beelzebub."

"Your cynicism is as great a warning as the 'Sta Viator' on a Roman tomb. I traveled the same flinty road myself once, but I passed the Rubicon long ago. I suppose I have been as great a scarecrow in my day, but the sun still shines, and I love the old-fashioned sprigs of fennel and lavender as well as I did when a boy,—there's nothing like the odors of sensible country herbs to smother the crabs."

"You were fortunate in preserving your poetic vertebræ so entire," scornfully replied Mr. Lester; "such



frail skeleton dreams scarce ever survive a very consuming fire."

"Well, I've got a few bones left, at all events," Dr. Lescom rejoined, good-naturedly, "and I mean to hang on to them as long as I live. I can preach to you because I suffered myself from a cynic rheumatism, when Dame Grundy chilled me with a shrugging of her cold shoulder, but I'm tired of having the crabs eternally; so, when I can get a nice little gulf-stream like Margie to talk to an old iceberg like myself, I generally condescend to thaw out."

When Dr. Lescom said that, involuntarily the blind man stretched out his hand, groping about to find mine, which I gave him a little reluctantly.

"I would thaw out, if I knew how," he whispered, with a quick repentance in his weak voice. "She has been very patient,—I appreciate it; at the same time it is impossible for me to be anything but disagreeable."

After Dr. Lescom had gone, and Miss Tabitha had sent up to Mr. Lester a steaming bowl of chicken-broth by Mehitabe, as we sat together alone in the gloom, no ray of light being permitted to enter the room, with a current of fresh meadow air flowing in about us from the open windows in the entry, redolent of clover and suggestive of crimson strawberries nestling beneath the shady leaves and clover-blooms,—with one of his quick impulses, like a bit of sky winking through the deep blackness of a thunder-cloud, the rain and angry whirlwind spent,—for the first time he spoke to me of his future.

"I did not die," he said, bitterly, "and so I must live. The English philosopher says: 'There are depths in man that go the lengths of lowest hell, as there are heights that reach highest heaven.' I have fathomed hell during the past six weeks. To me heaven will be fathomless,—I may never even touch the gates."

The shades of cynicism and the substance of endurance in this strange man's character, as time wore on, seemed always to me, puzzled child that I was, to be like the confused seeds which Psyche was forced incessantly to cull out and sort apart,—as the the dry land of Pallas

yearned for rain, only to be repaid with the golden shower of Jove,—its flashing dew-drops of memory, and tantalizing visions,—so unto this man's heart, struggling for peace, seemed born only a most entire despair. In his moments of wildest raving, which, sad to relate, were not few nor far between, I gathered that,—born of his weakness, strengthened by his latent elasticity of soul, nourished by the thoughts of a consummate revenge on what he chose to consider were the hydra-headed insincerities of the world, came the thirst that, even as Hercules with the strength of his sickle-shaped sword attacked and overcame his monstrous foe,—so he, with the hot iron of his skepticism, would burn death into the root of the evil head. Perhaps now, as then, the crab of remorse might be sent to gnaw at his heels, sapping the strength of his purpose and annoying him with its importunities; yet to-day, as in the yesterday of mythology, impotent to deter him from his inevitable victory, it would only serve to spur him on more desperately to the consummation of his vengeance. Wondering and appalled, day after day, I sat and listened to his daring words,—listened with a vague deprecation of his terse eloquence, his indomitable courage and unflinching despair,—while, incapable of coping with his bitter convictions and prejudices, I could only sit quietly by and soothe him occasionally into a moment's spasm of repose through the influence of my wordless sympathy.

"Do you sing?" he asked, abruptly, one day, about a week subsequent to our first meeting, when, sitting beside him patiently, I had listened a full hour to an impetuous flow of bitter words, which, making no allusion to the past calculated to clear away the mystery enveloping his former life in the folds of an impenetrable cloud, but heightened by the weakness and almost inarticulate trembling of his voice into a weird pathos, caused my heart to throb hurriedly, in a vague horror and sympathy. Willing to conciliate him in any way possible before he should again relapse into another paroxysm of vengeful eloquence, I answered him, steadying my voice as well as I could,—

"Only a little,—I used to sing to papa sometimes."

"Will you sing to me?"

Without further preamble, my voice failing me a little as I began the opening words of that exquisite song, "The Last Rose of Summer," I acquiesced. As I sang, the tears nearly choked me, and I broke down suddenly.

"What is the matter?" he queried, with an infinite gentleness. "Why did you choose that song?"

"Papa loved it,—I used to sing it to him every evening,—it was his favorite."

"And mine, you poor little girl! You were very fond of your father?"

"God only knows how I loved him!"

Something in my voice awed him into a sudden silence.

"You possess an exquisite voice," he ventured at length, kindly; "with proper cultivation, it would develop into something truly wonderful; I hope you will have the necessary advantages; in this song your staccato notes are particularly fine. You must promise to sing to me every day, will you not?" I promised. "I am passionately fond of music," he went on,—"to me its influence is 'linked sweetness, long drawn out.' I have known artist-souls so rich in the powerful imagery of music that, like the tribute paid by Goethe to Hamlet, it was as the 'oak-tree planted in a costly jar—the roots expand, the jar is shivered.'"

I listened breathlessly to each word. "I love music too," I said, eagerly. "To me it is like the voice of Heaven in dark places. I know I am dreadfully imaginative, but it seems to me that the whole world moves to music, to which our ears are shut, on such summer days as this."

"To the music of such faith as yours, little one, undoubtedly," he answered, his weak voice grown gentle. "Let us make a compact forthwith. I know how greatly I must annoy you with my bad temper and unfortunate language,—a demon which, taking an entire and hopeless possession of me, needs only to be exorcised by the charm of your voice. If you will promise to sing to me each day when weakened to its attacks, in return I will agree to be very patient, and try to deny myself the luxury of being cross."

"If you are very much in earnest, I will try," I an-

swered, hesitatingly. "But I am afraid you will become tired of it; then you will be worse than ever."

For the first time I heard him give a little laugh, amused, with a touch of gravity undertoning it.

"You are a frank little thing," he said, good-naturedly. "You are so sincere yourself, why do you not think that I can keep my part of this iron compact also?"

"Because——" Then I hesitated point-blank.

"Because what?"

"Because," I repeated, with a little quake of apprehension at my own audacity, "you don't believe in other people, and why should they believe in you?"

"You are delectably frank now," he said, after a little horrified silence, wherein I had industriously occupied the time in braiding my fingers together, to prevent myself from rushing from the room in a sudden remorse; "but I will not treat you as the critic in *Gil Blas* was punished by his master for his obnoxious truth——"

"Truth is the tincture of a righteous man," here interrupted the voice of Dr. Lescom at the door, "but the words of a rogue, like wine in an ill-savored hogshead, taste of his impurity. What have you and Margie been quarreling about?"

"She persists in gagging me with the truth, and it's a dreadful physic," answered Mr. Lester.

"That's because your mental stomach is in such a wholesale disorder," Dr. Lescom retorted, consolingly, seating himself near the door, and fanning himself vigorously with his broad-brimmed panama. "The stomach is a sovereign whose mandates are inexorable; its cabinet ministers, unlike most government popinjays, are politically and unanimously sympathetic: the gastric juice, Minister of the Interior; the liver, Minister of War; and the Minister of State, a healthy appetite, unite in condemning modern treason. Your mental stomach is equally severe. You have been stuffing it too long with indigestible cynicisms; Margie's physic will do you good." Here he stopped, quite out of breath.

"I have no doubt of its ultimate benefit," Mr. Lester answered, gravely; "her voice is the sugar that sweetens it,—we are very good friends, I believe."

"Don't flatter her," interposed Dr. Lescom, brusquely, "for a woman's vanity doesn't need any nursing,—it's as soft as melted butter in a sycophant's mouth,—honeyed words are to her sugar-coated poisons, and are the only pills she will swallow without making up a wry face. Not that I think Margie to be quite old enough for that weakness," he added, comfortingly; "she has one virtue,—she knows how to hold her tongue when nobody wants to hear it,—it doesn't chatter like the teeth of a half-frozen vagabond from Monday morning to Saturday night with Sunday thrown in. I came to tell her that I have received a letter from her Uncle William, and that I shall be here at exactly four o'clock this afternoon for her to ride with me to the station to meet him."

"Uncle William!" I repeated, distressed. "Ah! I had forgotten almost that I must go away——" while, as I spoke, Mr. Lester stretched out his hand to touch mine, saying,—

"He is not coming to take you away, little one. I will not let my little friend go, Dr. Lescom."

"Bosh!" exclaimed Dr. Lescom, with much energy,— "you are putting soft notions into the child's head. Of course her uncle is going to take Margie away, why shouldn't he? He has a better right to her than either you or I could have, did we live a thousand years." Then he stopped short with an odd quiver in his brusque voice, and I found that I was crying softly.

## CHAPTER VII.

BUT after all Uncle Will did not come. There was a long, dusty ride to the station a half a mile distant, with the sun glowing down its heat into the roadside interstices of white daisies and tangled grass lavishly,—a final arrival at the long, rambling depot building,—with its black stretch of platform and multitudinous sticking-plasters, in the shape of advertisements, relative to the miraculous effects of divers salves, elixirs, and troches,—

"like the blotchy egotisms of a world-dried man," as Dr. Lescom expressed it, a restless anticipation of the red-cheeked cars, which ought to have arrived a quarter of an hour previous, but which had failed to do so, much to the doctor's impatient disgust. By-and-by, however, there came the sound of a sullen whirr a mile off, which, gradually increasing in volume and intensity, finally became merged into a quick puff and roar as the snakelike train came laboriously to its anchorage under the huge eaves of the station house. Another five minutes sojourn in the glaring sunlight; two pair of anxious eyes scanning the passengers as they busied themselves among their luggage, made plain to our willing hearts that no Uncle William would that day, at all events, be seen in Blossom Village. With this conviction, Dr. Lescom's face suddenly cleared.

"God knows that I don't want the poor man to be detained by any accident or illness," he said, with much grim satisfaction, "but it is comforting to know that you, you little baggage, won't go away so soon."

So back we went, by a longer and shadier road this time, round by the hills, whose faces lay asleep behind their blue veils, which coyly became drawn apart as we approached nearer and nearer, showing how green, after all, were their hearts. Through the dusky woods, bound in golden-green fetters at their feet, thick of aspen, maple, birch, and ash, with the clinging creepers swinging from their branches to and fro, embroidering the sward underneath with flickering shadows, as the sun let his yellow hair stream down through the vagrant leaves. A little brook kept us company nearly all the way, garmented with fleur-de-lis and scarlet cardinal flowers, and slipping noiselessly through rush fingers, over cowslip laps and cresses, until I grew thirsty with the sweetness of its song. We rode on in silence, my heart almost standing still in a silent ecstasy, until at length we came to the yellow farm-house, standing with a quaint grace in its framework of meadows and hills. Then, just before I entered, on the doorstep, I turned to Dr. Lescom, with a wordless gratitude in my eyes. With a brusque admonition, he answered me,—

"You mustn't stay in the house so much; you're as thin as that Lombardy poplar yonder. Promise me to take a walk every day until your uncle comes."

Before I could answer, something in the expression of my face told him that every morning I walked to my father's grave.

"That does very well, but I don't want you to mope. This ride has given you red cheeks,—you will find them any day you choose to hunt for them in the woods. Promise me to hunt for them there every day." And he was so obstinate, insisting upon an acquiescence, I promised.

So, after this, instead of prim bachelor's buttons, garden asters, geraniums, and heliotrope from Miss Tabitha's flower-patch, clematis, wild-roses, and violets made up the sweetness of the nosegay which every day found a ready acceptance to Mr. Lester's favor.

The day following our ride to the station, Dr. Lescom received a telegram from New York to the effect that a sudden illness would prevent Uncle Will from making his appearance at Blossom Village for the present, and a subsequent letter to myself, couched in very kind and sympathetic words, conduced wonderfully to the lessening of my great dread of him, and at the same time strengthened my hope that, through God's grace, "a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand," might be raised up to cool the glare of my friendlessness into a well of cool and living waters.

Through these tranquil days I remained constant to my faith with Dr. Lescom, each day finding me at my post at the blind man's side, singing to him the songs he loved best, reading to him out of Lamb, Goldsmith, or Irving, with an occasional exquisite word-picture from Ruskin; or, listening enthralled to his own powerful imagery, his quaintly-severe aphorisms, the epigrammatic terseness of his satires, thrilling me through and through with their galvanic power. Then, in some quiet hour, his weak voice resolute with much gratitude, he would assure me that even as the oil and wine of the good Samaritan cheered the gaping wounds of the fainting man of Jericho who fell among thieves, so a tender sympathy—the royal purple of my heart—had made

sweet many of the darkest hours belonging to his affliction. This gratefully he would say, but, deeper than this mere physical suffering, my sad eyes saw the aching of a cancerous wound, and from his words—wildly incoherent at times—I soon learned to know that even as that beautiful Southern city, the fairest jewel in the blue water's diadem, in its heyday of hope, was rocked to sleep in the cradle of the earth, under its blanket of seething lava,—so the fabric of a noble soul, unsuspecting of treachery, with the philosophic delight of Pliny, steadying his heart against all fear of the small cloud just rising into view, suddenly came to a dread awakening that the heart of his joy was darkly-foul, breathing forth mephitic vapors, suffocating unto the soul's death.

Still confined to his room, into which a ray of light was never permitted to penetrate, I invariably seating myself close to the door, where the sunlight through the entry windows fell, when reading aloud to him, suffering at times most acute agony in his eyes, and resenting all my little attempts to convert him either to the love of his kind or God, with much tact, I did not endeavor to flay this unskinned Marsyas with maxims of religion or cauterizing psalms; but contented my child's heart with praying fervently when some chance word betrayed more glaringly the superb asceticism of his resolves, in the solitude of my own chamber, that God would lead to a safe harbor this wrecked man's soul.

Two weeks passed by in this manner, slowly, quietly, seeming in their monotony to shut out from me all possibility of a life different from this. Making but few allusions to my future, which I anticipated would be passed in Washington with my uncle, I continued constant to my sick friend, cheering his moody spirits as well as my child-wit would allow, receiving in return no intimation of what his future life should be, he evidently shrinking from the contemplation of any change, gloomily. One day, I remember how delicately and very kindly Dr. Lescom offered to acquaint his friends with his condition, when he was recompensed only by the hot words,—

"I do not desire or require any interference. I am very well able to take care of myself," a reply which suc-

ceeded in snubbing the innocent doctor into a state of amused astonishment.

The soft mezzotint of a rainy day, the patter of rain-drops on the leaves of the apple-trees and the window-panes,—the memory of such a one comes back to me, when the clover-buds blushed and thickened, and the brooks went blinking through the meadows with their rush, and fleur-de-lis umbrellas soaked dismally through and through. Just as a silver rim began to peep over the shoulder of the hills, where a necklace of opal mist and pearl-gray clouds clasped their summits whitely, Dr. Lescom joined me in the blind man's room, saying,—

"There is a call for more troops. I'm called a Copper-head, and I'm too antediluvian to want to change my head for a cannon-ball; but if you, with the skillful treatment of some oculist, should recover your sight, you couldn't do better than to sacrifice yourself to Mars and his cold victuals. The Scythians used to offer him asses, and the people of Caria dogs; and this world, physicked with negro idolators, hasn't cured itself of that conceit yet."

"I am not an enthusiast," Mr. Lester answered, coldly, "yet I hate treason, and would like to have it by the throat a little while. My countrymen who, like the mice in Fenelon's fable, seeking safety from the carnage committed by Mitis and Rodiladus among that nation, transplant their republican gold and cowardice to foreign lands, enjoy the blue-blooded contempt of all honest men. I am a son of the flag, and although I may incur the opprobrium of old tory Dr. Johnson, who said, when he heard men prate about love of country, after they had become bankrupt in fortune and soul, 'Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel,' yet the Yankee blood in my veins hungers for one taste of cold rebel steel."

"I'm fond of the old flag myself," Dr. Lescom said, thoughtfully; "but confound the political fanatics who persist in scalding their meddling noses in the peppery broth of war!"

"Modern politics is a second Tetzels-chest,—it is only necessary to sacrifice conscience and gold, and salvation is secured. The politicians of to-day are striving to emu-

late the idiotic puppy who fired the Ephesian dome, that his name might transcend in fame the memory of the noble soul that reared it. With Madame Roland, one might exclaim, 'Oh, liberty, how many crimes are committed in thy name!' Carlyle calls democracy 'a big, black fact,' and Carlyle is right, especially when it is served up in negro patés. I am proud to acknowledge myself an old Webster Whig, and as such I love the old flag. If I was only a few steps nearer the cradle, and if an inverted torch was not waving itself within an inch of my nose, I'd be off myself to the rifle-pits, with that old fire-eater Blucher's motto inscribed on my flaglike bandanna, 'Immer drauf.'"

"I'll fight for you," Mr. Lester answered, quietly, some of the weakness fading out of his voice, "that is, if as you have intimated it is possible for me ever to see daylight again. Byron was right when he said, 'Quiet to quick bosoms is a hell.' The bread of idleness to jaundiced lips is colder and more deadly than the biggest cannon-balls of treason."

"It'll do you good,—you need some deviltry to stir the bile up. There is only one person needed to make the Spanish salad, wherein it is necessary to have a spendthrift for oil, a miser for vinegar, a counselor for salt, and a madman to stir it all up. Margie would do very well for the salt, I am a regular old vinegar-cruet, and you, you dog, are mad enough to give us all the hydrophobia."

"Your jaw-bone is incorrigible," retorted Mr. Lester, good-naturedly, "it is to be lamented that you did not live in the days of the Philistines."

"I do live in the days of the Philistines,—the nineteenth century Philistines, who are invincible,—they gag the world with fanatical hypocrisies. Speaking of hypocrisies, have you eaten your meat-soup to-day?"

"Speaking of meat-soup—so called—I have," answered Mr. Lester, grimly, "and I've been victimized for the last time,—I never was partial to flour-and-water."

"You'll do: when a man once gets his stomach back, he is all right. Two weeks ago you couldn't have told dish-water from maraschino; now you'll be content with nothing short of a Strasbourg paté or a tough sorbet Romain."



"Sweet are the uses of adversity," quoted Mr. Lester, gently; "my sovereign remedy is the sound of Margie's silver tongue,—the precepts of Francatelli and of Ude are as nothing to me." Then he turned his face toward me for the first time, where I stood quietly by the darkened window,—*"Margie, you haven't spoken once since you came; why don't you speak?"*

"I haven't had a chance before,—Dr. Lescom and you always forget me when you are scolding each other."

"We will forget you no longer," he answered, kindly; "come and sit beside me, little Silver Tongue, and give us a song that will cause us to forget everything less pure than yourself."

## CHAPTER VIII.

"THERE's a gentleman with a face just like the angel in my prayer-book, a-coming up the road with Dr. Lescom," Mehitable cried, excitedly, bursting into my room shortly after breakfast, one morning, her white head bobbing wildly, and her arms akimbo,—*"I'se afeard it's yer uncle, Miss Margie, come fur ter take yer away; but don't yer go a step,—just tell him such a thing aint possible nohow."* Then there came the sound of wheels grating against the doorstep, footsteps in the hall below, and the whispering of smothered voices. The robins warbled in the apple-trees without the window, the slanting gleams of sunlight fell wavering past the embracing leaves, the clinging vines, with their greenish favor, into the cool dimness of the room. I waited breathlessly for the sound of the first footstep on the stair,—it came by-and-by; then my heart stood still. On I could hear them coming, very slowly, and talking together in a somber undertone, inexpressibly harassing, until they finally reached the door. Then sounded Dr. Lescom's quick, cheery knock. I could not answer,—words would not come.

"You haven't exhaled in a dew-drop yet awhile, Margie, have you?" he said, opening the door. "What in

the name of fiddle-sticks are you sitting there for, child, with your eyes nailed up to the ceiling?"

I did not dare look at him, or his companion, although the smothered laugh encouraged me to do so. As I continued silent obstinately with my face turned away from the spot where they stood, somebody walked across the room to my side, and putting his hand under my chin, drew my face up to his, saying,—

"Will not my little niece bid me welcome?"

I was forced to look at him then, and was not sorry to do so when I saw how tender were his eyes, how gently smiling his mouth. "I have come a long way to see this little girl," he went on, gently,—*"this little girl who is to be my little girl hereafter, and whom I shall love very dearly, I know. You do not remember me at all, I see,—the last time we met I believe you were about four years old, so after all we are old friends,—being so, we must be very good to each other. You have your father's beautiful eyes and your mother's hair,—you must live to resemble them in many other ways."* The tears came again swiftly into my eyes, choking me so that I could not speak. Dr. Lescom walked gravely to the window and began a tattoo on the panes thereof. "You know that I am your Uncle Will," he went on, drawing me to the sofa, seating himself at my side, all the time holding my hands closely clasped in his; "I have come here to take you away from the friends you love,—yet I am selfish enough to hope that by-and-by you may not regret having left them, and will love me better still. I am sadly in need of somebody to love, and to love and care for me; I am also alone in the world,—will you try to love and care for me?"

I looked at him bravely now,—the refined, intellectual face, the tender eyes, the long, fair moustache drooping over the sensitive mouth, and felt that, try hard as I might, I could not help loving him.

"I will try, indeed I will!" I cried, impulsively; "I did not know you would be so good to me,—you look so much like mamma."

During the next few moments he continued to sit

very quietly at my side, stroking my hands gently between his, and with his face turned quite away from me.

"You are looking much stronger than I expected," he said at length, gravely, raising his head to scan my flushed, tearful face with his serious eyes; "I feared you might be ill after experiencing your great loss, in which, believe me, I have sympathized with you, my child, very, very thoroughly; you must let me comfort you now,—I will promise to do my best."

"You comfort me already, for you talk just like papa, and that would make me love anybody; then you smile just the way mamma used. You loved papa and mamma?"

"Yes," he replied, softly, "I loved them both, God knows. Your mother was my pet,—you have many of her ways, as I can see already,—she was very sweet and good,—will you try to have all her ways, dear?"

When he said that, I felt quite sure I had been conquered,—that I would and must love him, endeavoring to be good and strong for his sake. Perhaps my eyes showed him my thoughts, for he smiled a very wistful smile, half sad, but inexpressibly touching, and bending over me, gravely put his lips to my forehead.

"I ought to have arrived at Blossom Village before," he said, by-and-by, "but I have been really very ill, and the physician forbade my traveling for some time. I only received permission from him day before yesterday to start, so I thought I would take you by surprise; perhaps it is just as well that I did, for I fear otherwise you might have fretted yourself sick, anticipating, as you have, the appearance of an ogre, who you no doubt decided would swallow you whole."

"I was only afraid you wouldn't love me," I answered, smiling at him for the third time; "they have all been so kind to me here, and I am not used to strangers."

"We shall never be able to repay these kind friends," he said, warmly, "for their kindnesses to my little girl,—I shall never forget the fact of their having been good

to her,—time or distance will ever fail to affect my gratitude."

Now that the first excitement of meeting and being recognized by him was past,—the happy disappointment which so gladdened me upon looking for the first time into his face,—other thoughts came crowding back, other regrets, which caused me to grow chilly once more with pain,—apprehensions of the new life, opening its door to my feet, the annihilation of all joy belonging to these present days,—an intense longing to stay here always where my father had died—where he lay sleeping.

"I can't bear to think of going away," I exclaimed, suddenly, "I have been so happy here—and—and——"

"And what?" queried Uncle Will, smilingly.

"I don't know." Then I managed to add, "I shall never be happy anywhere else,—I can never be happy again,—if I might only, only stay!"

He looked at my appealing, agitated face very pityingly. "I am very, very sorry for you, dear,—you cannot help but feel regretful for a little while,—but by-and-by you will outgrow your sorrow, and learn to be happy in spite of yourself,—in a different way; there are many roses in life for you yet, little one,—you must not despair so early in the morning. God's world is large enough for both trouble and joy,—in some parts the joy is grand."

Although his pale face flushed with sympathy, and his voice trembled as he spoke, yet my heart refused to be comforted, growing gradually heavier and heavier with a dreadful weight; blankly I looked at the sunlight, flowing so cheerfully through the room, listened to the robin songs, tasted the breeze blowing in, sweet with the essence of clover blooms,—all the while feeling the workings of a strange pain—withering to my self-control,—making me a very puppet in its hands—within me! He must have seen the suffering in my face, as he suddenly arose, and went to the window, where he stood talking in an undertone to Dr. Lescom, leaving me to myself, to master and control. A long while I sat there, alone by myself, listening vaguely to the monotone of their voices,—trying with my whole strength to overcome my pain.

"Dr. Lescom tells me that you are quite a little philanthropist," Uncle Will said, presently, turning from the window to fix his singularly expressive eyes on my face, "how you have successfully been playing the rôle of Florence Nightingale."

Perhaps the little undertone of annoyance in his voice broke the spell of my disquiet, for although I felt the hot blood come rushing up into my face, I replied quietly,—

"I have been so desolate myself, I wanted to help him, he has suffered so much,—I did my best."

"I entertain no doubt of that, my child," he replied, his voice softening wonderfully, as if to make amends for its momentary displeasure; "and this poor stranger is grateful, of course. I am happy to know my little niece to be actuated by such good motives."

The tattoo on the window-sill suddenly stopped. "It wasn't any of your ultra philanthropy, bless your soul," here broke in the irrepressible Dr. Lescom. "Margie isn't one of your day-snoring, moon-climbing, half-starved high-flyers; she was only actuated by those sublime motives expressed in the poetic and forcible language of Mrs. Leo Hunter,—

'Can I view thee panting, lying  
On thy stomach, without sighing?  
Can I unmoved see thee dying  
On a log,  
Expiring frog?'"

The comical irascibility of the doctor's voice proved irresistible.

"A very picturesque hypothesis," Uncle Will said, laughing heartily, "and very complimentary to the object of Margie's devotion."

"I'm not given to aeronautic expeditions, or much sentiment,"—the doctor's uneasy fingers began nervously another tattoo,—"so I generally succeed in calling things by their shortest names. I don't want Margie, who is a good, sensible girl now, to grow into a sickly, nonsensical woman. A pious old hen says, 'There are only two evils in the world, sin and bile:' she must have forgotten moon-colic and bonnets."

"Very evidently you are no lover of Hannah More's sex, or else you would hesitate to indulge in so many panegyrics," Uncle Will answered, looking at Dr. Lescom quizzically; "probably you think, like a great many other geniuses in the world, that it is as great a responsibility with a woman to determine the size and stature of a bonnet or a boot as it has been for men to solve the great problems of philosophy in all ages, from Plato to Locke, or Aristotle to Kant."

"Weigh a woman according to her bonnet, and she will be found wanting," was all that Dr. Lescom vouchsafed in reply.

"You are a decided radical on this subject, but lacking a radical's acknowledged virtue of being theoretically right; you are both practically and theoretically wrong. Your arguments, being based only on prejudice, are not to be trusted,—only condemned; your cynicism wears a visage of Mephistophelian aspect, but I think, after all, it is only a mask."

Dr. Lescom uttered a little growl of defiance. "Don't drown yourself in such a maelstrom of conjecture," he retorted, half good-humoredly, half gruffly. "I've lived on it for years, and have taken it as religiously as a Russian drinks his vodka or the Frenchman his eau sucré. It propitiates the crabs. My milk of human kindness was turned into stiff vinegar years ago. I suppose I do wrong to try to open Margie's eyes to the vain conceits of the world, as though I am eager to steal her birthright in childish faith. But the best discipline for theft is an empty purse; the surest incentive for discovering other people's weaknesses, an empty stomach; and knaves like myself are apt to mistake conscience for a hungry longing after the beefsteak and boiled potatoes of our more fortunate companions."

A certain odd quiver in his voice, bravely controlled while severely deprecated, touched my heart suddenly to a knowledge of his disquiet. With a quick impulse of affection, I arose and walked across the room to his side, where he stood by the window.

"Your words do not discover to me any insincerities," I said, looking softly up into his gruff face. "You could



not hide your heart from me if you tried. All through my life I shall never forget the pure generosity and delicacy which have characterized your care of me since my father's death. You have given me cause always to believe in the honesty of the human heart."

My unexpected action and words overpowered him. Heavily he laid his hand on my shoulder, and, scowling down into my face, answered,—

"If you weren't such a naughty little girl, you might be worse." Then he turned to my uncle, with a quaint abruptness, saying, "Do you remember what the fairy said in the Christmas story?—'The hearth which, but for her, was only a few stones and bricks and rusty bars, is made, through her, the altar of home.'"

"Yes," said Uncle Will, softly, looking first at Dr. Lescom and then at me.

"Well, this little girl is made of that stuff; she'll either be a good woman or a bad one: there will be no half way in the matter. Margie," and his face scowled down into mine again, "indomitable energy, a smattering of honesty, and an inch of heart is all that is necessary to form the vertebræ of success,—remember this also, that the world, like shad, is full of bones." Saying this, he took his hat abruptly from the table, and, promising to return again some time during the afternoon, to examine, with my uncle, papa's papers, he went out of the room, leaving Uncle Will alone with me.

Well, looking back from the stand-point of these later hours to that long-ago time, I can remember how tedious this day of which I write seemed to me, how strangely inexplicable in its influence, its pain and suspense, Uncle Will's efforts to make me hopeful of the future, more forgetful of the past, our walk to papa's grave in the church-yard on the hill-side, the afternoon spent in gathering hastily together my scanty wardrobe preparatory to leaving Blossom Village in Uncle Will's care the following morning, an unexpectedly sudden departure, the thought of which made me feel homesick and desperate all day. After it was all over,—papa's papers and effects thoroughly examined and disposed of by Uncle Will, aided by Dr. Lescom,—my trunks packed

and put out into the entry to await the coming of the early morning stage,—toward sunset, as the birds chirped sharply their good-night to each other among the greeneries of the garden, the soft air grew musical with the lowing of the cattle in the pastures round about, heavy with kisses of perfume, and in the heart of the west the amber and purple clouds laid their cheeks together sleepily, I steadied myself sufficiently, after all the agitation of the day, to go into Mr. Lester's room to bid him good-by. There I found that, Dr. Lescom having been before me, the invalid did not seem at all astonished when I told him of my early departure. "I shall be very sorry to go away," I concluded, trying to speak bravely. "I have longed so much to be allowed always to live near papa's grave, that now it seems in going far away from it I am leaving behind me all happiness, all contentment. Do you believe we shall ever meet again?"

"If we both live, perhaps," he answered. "I shall hope not to be blind always. I believe Dr. Lescom begins to decide my eyes to be only temporarily affected. If I recover my sight, I shall enter the army: then,"—he stopped with a weary earnestness in his almost inarticulate voice,—“I shall not be sorry if my eyes are closed forever.”

His last words sounded like a death-knell in my ears: it seemed as though all the joys of my life were being torn from me ruthlessly one by one, that I was being cast adrift into the wide world anchorless, with only the picture of a perfect past to sustain me.

"I hope you will not die for a long while yet," I said, controlling the quiver in my voice resolutely.

"Would you care very much?"

"Yes; I would like to look forward to seeing you again." Then it was my turn to stop suddenly,—for the misery of my heart choked my voice in spite of me.

"It is pleasant to think even a child would regret me if I should go," he whispered, gently; "it is a gratification far beyond my deserts,—I am so lost in rebellion and sin. Please remember, little one, if we should never meet again, that I was not always lost,—I am only a wreck,—once I was as young in soul and in body as

yourself,—the cancer had not then begun to eat,—the cancer of a false woman's smile." The struggle in his voice here ended in a laugh of exultant despair. "Don't mind what I say," he went on, steadying his utterance. "I talk in a continual crescendo, ending in a tocsin of warning to all such innocents as yourself. My ethics are scarcely suited to your understanding. God grant that I may fight—this cancer of mine shall feed on the cold meat of cannon-balls, and no longer on the flesh of my heart;—I will sing in the same spirit that Béranger sang in 1814 to his Gauls,—

'Gai! gai! serrons nos rangs,  
Espérance  
De la France;  
Gai! gai! serrons nos rangs;  
En avant, Gaulois et Francs!'

As these last words passed his lips, he stretched out his hand to me where I sat shivering, saying, "There, the evil spirit is exhausted; he is ready to fold his black wings; don't allow me to be mad any longer. Come, little Silver Tongue, sing to me, for the last time, our dear 'Last Rose of Summer.'"

It was in a very faltering voice that I complied. As I finished, I felt that in complying I had conquered myself.

"I don't think I will ever sing it again," I said, quietly.

"Because it will make you regretful?"

"Yes; it brings back to me many, many happy hours, which I may never know again,—memories sad to remember."

"If we ever meet again?"

"Then I will sing it to you, and you only," I answered, with my heart in my voice.

"We are both very wretched," he whispered, suddenly, after a little pause,—“both very much at a loss how to face this world. You are pure and good; your evils will be but the offspring of adverse circumstances; while I,”—he stopped short, with a weary restlessness quivering in his almost inarticulate voice,—“while I,” he repeated, with a quick groan, “will live in a hornets'-nest

of unrest all my life, honeycombed with remorse, and with the perpetual snow of my despair chilling all possible joys into one long, dull miserere."

The dull ache of despair in these words made me grow faint with sympathy. "You make me very sad," I said, gently. "I cannot bear to think that you are so entirely without hope or faith. In parting from you and all my life here, I shall shut the door on my own happiness, leaving my childhood far behind among these hills. If I might only know that perhaps in the future you will begin to think of better things, which will lead you to peace, your heart purified in the effort, I would be enabled to take with me some gleams of comfort into the mystery of my new life."

"You are a daring little thing," he answered, after a moment's pause, very gravely, "to presume to speak to me of any possible softening of my wretched heart. Do you remember what Molière exclaimed of the beggar who, too honest to retain the louis-d'or given him by mistake, returned it to his benefactor?—'My God! what a lodging virtue has taken up with there!' My little girl," he concluded, mournfully, "there is no resurrection for me; all my Easter daisies have bloomed, and now lie faded forever."

"I will not believe you!" I cried, passionately. "I will pray for you daily, that you may be regenerated. God will not let you die."

"The hoary-headed iconoclast will succeed more surely than my arguments in annihilating all your hopes," he answered, quietly. "Do not attempt to martyr my stoicism; do not let your warm, tender roses exhaust their beauty over my gloomy bier; reserve them for the quickening of those who possess more heart to appreciate the sacrifice."

"Yes, your blind resignation is cowardly," I retorted, impetuously, ignoring the thrill of pain which convulsed me at his words. "You have no right to cast your manhood from you as unworthy. You must conquer your so-called remorseless fate. Remember, 'He who knows how to resist, will conquer in the end.'"

"The axioms of Machiavelli are equally powerless,"

he whispered, faintly. "I am as indifferent to the march of fate as I was years ago, when lounging from the Bois de Vincennes to the Bois de Boulogne, laughing with each 'bon vivant' over some sharp epigram of his favorite feuilletoniste, playing écarté, believing, with an emancipated school-boy's enthusiasm, that no heaven existed for me outside those famous cafés, with their inevitable round tables and green-covered chairs. Ah! those were long, happy days, little Silver Tongue,—days which I wish had never ended." The weak voice failed for a moment, but, with a quick sigh, continued by-and-by: "In those days I was wholly indifferent as to what might be; alike oblivious of the past, with its nightmare of college infinities, its Greek, Latin, and its Integral Calculus, its heavy doses of Xenophon and Horace, and the dreamy future of hasheesh joys,—content only to live in the whirling present, as enchanting in its miracles as a fairy-tale of Laboulaye. Now," he concluded, "all that folly has gone forever from my life; and this hour it is with an iron face that I defy all pangs which the future may have in store for me. Tell me, my little Silver Tongue, of your own sweet, girlish life."

"I have nothing to tell," I answered, sadly.

"Nothing to tell!" he echoed. "That is a dreadful epitaph for your youth. You are in that state of mind in which Rochefoucauld declares that philosophy, however triumphant she may be over past or future misfortunes, is but a victim to the onslaught of the present. Believe me, your troubles are but the children of a day. I predict a long and happy life for you in the fresh summer-time which opens its door to your womanhood."

"But the days will be so long, dreary, and dusty, after the cool spring-time," I answered, with a little shudder.

"Yes, very long and dusty," he whispered, pityingly, "and the sun of adversity may scorch all your beautiful life-flowers into dull, withered coffins for your joys; but I hope you will be very happy, Silver Tongue, very blessed indeed. To be so, you must do all you can to keep good and pure; remember that, child."

"Yes, I will remember," I whispered, softly.

"Repeat after me, 'I will try and be a good and pure woman, with all my strength, every day that I live,'" he exclaimed, suddenly, groping about in the gloom to touch my hand,—“repeat it after me, that it may be a solemn promise given me by you, here, in our last hour together."

"I will try to be a good, pure woman, with all my strength and heart," I repeated; "and with all my soul, God help me," I added, prayerfully.

"Yes, if there is a God, I pray him to help you," he whispered, almost sternly; "you will sadly need additional strength, you poor little neophyte. The world is an insatiable minotaur, demanding a fresh victim every hour,—beware of the rouge and tinsel of her court, the leaden bullets of her scandal, the feasts of her cannibalistic envy. Girdle your heart with iron, that you may defy her temptations,—remember above all your resolution to be pure and worthy as a woman,—let truthful expression be the first law of your life, sacrificing beauty to higher ends. There are different styles of women,—the simple, the bold, the perverse, the cold, the heartless, the conventional. They are all more or less imperfect and alluring. But, Silver Tongue, remember, you are to be pure, individually honest, originally good,—for an original woman is like a picture after Rembrandt, strikingly novel, effective in the lights and shades of her peculiar fascination, and graphically refreshing. Will you be all this, Silver Tongue?"

"I never can be as good and grand as that," I answered, very mournfully; "I have a dreadful temper, you know."

"Ah, yes, a dreadful temper and very big freckles." I resented the laugh smothered in his weak voice, so I would not answer. "You queer, naughty little girl," he went on, "I can't help being amused at you, despite the spirit of my bitter harangues, the sorrow of my miserable infirmity; you are a very funny creature, and I like you. I am glad you are not beautiful or rich: it would only prove a snare to yourself and a feast of honeyed poison to your slaves; you will escape the adulations of the world-serving sycophants, which, like diamonds, are brilliant and apparently imperishable, but

which, subjected to the fire of adversity, become resolved into nothing but the carbon of neglect: 'Chi serve in corte muore sul' pagliato,' the Italian proverb warns you,—'Who serves at court dies on straw.'"

At this moment, Miss Tabitha's tea-bell, sounding half famished, and with a wailing shriek making comical its refrain, rang out on the evening air with a melancholy distinctness.

"I have stayed too long," I cried, hurriedly. "Uncle Will must be waiting for me; I must go."

"Yes," he whispered, sadly, holding my hand fast in his, "you must go, my little girl, and I must stay; if we could only change places, how unhappy you would be!"

"Let me draw the curtain for one moment," I said, under my breath, trying to draw my hand away, but he would not let me go.

"Why?" he whispered, questioning, raising his hand quickly to pass it over my face, as a child groping in the dark might,—"why should you draw the curtain, little Silver Tongue?"

"I have never seen your face plainly, you know," I said, struggling with my voice; "I would like to see how you look just once before I bid you good-by."

Suddenly he dropped my hand, and with a quick impetuosity covered his face with his own. "Go away as fast as you can," he whispered, hurriedly; "you ask too much; from this moment I must be dead to you!"

The despair in his weak voice struck me quite still. "Good-by," I said, softly, but he did not answer. One moment I hesitated, hoping he would relent into giving me one kind word to warm my heart ere I departed, but, as he continued silent, I walked quietly to the door. Just as I crossed its threshold, he called to me, "Margie!"

"Yes."

"Don't come back," he whispered, hoarsely,—"I only wish to bid you good-by kindly. Remember your promise, dear, to be good and true—remember this above all things." Then he stopped short.

"I will remember," I answered, quietly and firmly, as with an uncontrollable impulse I walked swiftly back to his side; then, bending over him, I clasped my hands closely

together. "Try to live," I said, faltering, "and I will pray for you nightly that you may be happy,—I will pray for you with my whole heart; God will hear me. In your darkest hours remember that one heart prays for you always." Then, before he could answer, I went out of the room, leaving him to his night and desolation.

## CHAPTER IX.

THE next morning I left Blossom Village for many years. Just as the clouds began to blush redly in the west, and the hearts of the meadows, crushed under their weight of dew, sent up kisses of perfume, the brown robins woke to sing their matin songs exultantly in their swinging chambers, while the white stars of the myrtle, with diamonds twinkling in their eyes, shone clear and sweet, I found myself in Miss Tabitha's garden, weaving a wreath of mignonette, heliotrope, moss-roses, and myrtle, to lay as a farewell offering on my father's grave. The hour which I passed alone, prayerfully, almost heart-broken, in that village church-yard, is sacred. God must have been with me there,—his Spirit must have touched my soul with its cool fingers of peace,—for, strengthened and purified, invigorated and with faith, I turned my steps homeward. Once out of the woods, I walked quickly up the lane leading to Miss Tabitha's farm-house, with a nervous excitement strengthening me and rendering me tearless and firm. As I advanced I espied a yellow object swinging itself upon the gate leading into the kitchen-garden, which upon a nearer approach became defined into the person of Mehitable, balancing herself thereon with a pail of milk.

"I've been waiting for yer ever so long, and I've about gin out," she said, continuing her gyrations, thus preventing my further progress through the gate, to which I did not object, being anxious for an opportunity to bid the poor girl good-by apart from the rest,—"yer trunks

is all down-stairs a-waiting fur the stage, and breakfast's ready all but the milk."

"There won't be much of that left if you don't stop swinging," I answered, laughing, as with each fresh swing the ground was baptized with a flood of the contents of the pail.

"I forgot all about that," she cried, ruefully, jumping down and nearly upsetting herself in it. "I was only thinking of you, dear Miss Margie." Then she burst out into sobs. "I've been trying to be brave and not cry,—I've been saying texts, and all the good things I could remember, ter keep my courage up, but it's no use now; I can't help loving yer dearly, Miss Margie,—ye's been—so kind ter me—and I hate—ter see yer going away,—I've no right ter love yer so,—yer are so good, and I've so wicked."

"Don't cry, pray don't cry, Mehitable," I said, my own eyes filling with tears; "it pains me to see you cry. You must try and be a good girl, dear, and you mustn't think I am good, for I am just as wicked as you are."

"It's only the difference in people's stomachs," Mehitable answered, stoutly, through her tears, "it's the stuff that people feeds on that makes the sin; yer can't have cabbages and roses growing out of the same ground no-how. I knows I'm a cabbage,—I feeds on scraps, and yer can't make a saint out of a pipped chicken; can yer?"

I shook my head doubtfully at this view of the question, then I took both her hands in mine. "Mehitable, you mustn't be so despairing; I have been rebellious myself, and I know that our troubles only grow bigger in proportion to our rebellion. I wish I could help you in some way, but I am very powerless to do good to any one; if I can do no more, I will pray for you with my whole heart that you may grow to be happy; I like you so much I shall never forget you."

"Let me kiss yer hands for those nice words, Miss Margie," she cried, choking with tears, "ye've such a blessed tongue. I'll try hard to be a good girl for yer sake, even if it does come hard about meal-times,—when I sees the potato-skins I'll say my prayers, and when she gives me the sour milk I'll say, 'Thank yer fur Miss Margie's sake;'

and when I swallows it I'll shut my eyes and think of old Job in the Bible."

Suddenly, and with tearful eyes, I kissed her white forehead. "Good-by, dear," I said, choking, "good-by." I tried to go, but she held me fast.

"Good-by, you dear, blessed Miss Margie!" she cried, sorrowfully, "I'll be pious for yer sake, and—and—I'll pray fur yer every blessed night. Now go inter the house quick, and I'll come in bimeby, fur I couldn't stand Miss Tab nohow now."

I went first to speak to Dr. Lescom, who had been shown by Uncle Will into Miss Tabitha's asparagus-bedeked parlor. As I went in, Uncle Will arose quickly and, drawing me to him, kissed me gently. "My little girl is late."

"Late! of course she's late," growled Dr. Lescom. "Here it is half-past seven, she hasn't eaten her breakfast, and the train is due at eight."

"Don't be cross to me this of all mornings," I cried, deprecatingly; "I don't want any breakfast,—I will go with you to the depot now."

"Look at your feet," he answered, in intense disgust; "you are decked out in all the paraphernalia of typhoid fever! Go and eat your breakfast, child, or I will keep on scolding."

"Run, Margie," Uncle Will added; and so I went, laughing for the first time in many hours at Dr. Lescom's would-be irascibility. Upon entering the breakfast-room, I found Mehitable in her usual place, bolt upright behind Miss Tabitha's chair, and Miss Tabitha herself in a very evident state of repressed excitement. Quickly I swallowed a cup of coffee and a biscuit which one of the boarders kindly buttered for me, seeing my haste. Dr. Lescom called to me,—

"Come, Margie, the cars won't wait;" and then Miss Tabitha started up and, coming to my side, seized my hand.

"I've got something to say to you," she said, excitedly,—"come here into the pantry, quick!"

Wondering, and quite overcome by her unusual vehemence, I followed in passive subjection. The first thing

she did upon our entering the pantry was to shut the door.

"I've been thinking strange things were happening in my house," she said, mysteriously, seizing something white from her pocket and holding it behind her with both hands,— "and I've had my doubts about that young man up-stairs. If it hadn't been that Dr. Lescom teased me to keep him, promising he would pay his board if the stranger wasn't able to pay it himself, he would have been out of my house long ago. What are you trembling about?" she queried, abruptly, as I felt myself grow foolishly pale and cold with apprehension. I shook my head and managed to say, "Nothing."

"It's nothing to be frightened about," she went on, reassuringly, "only it's romantic and queer, and I'll excuse almost anything on the score of romance, for I was a victim to it once myself, and I just know how hard it is sometimes. You've been so kind to him up-stairs I thought you ought to know."

At this moment Dr. Lescom's impatient voice interrupted her from without: "Margie!" I trembled all over now. "Tell me quickly!" I cried, beseechingly; then she held something white—a handkerchief—toward me.

"I noticed it this morning for the first time,—it's the only piece of his linen that's marked, and it's nearly washed out; he came crazy-like, and didn't bring anything with him but what he wore on his back, and so Dr. Lescom has been lending him some of his; his name is no more Lester than yours is—look there!"

With dazed eyes I looked at the corner of the handkerchief which she pointed out to me, and there I read, in almost illegible letters, the name Cecil Throckmorton! I scarcely remember anything which happened during the next two or three minutes,—I only know that Miss Tabitha kissed me, shedding at the same time a very few sentimental tears, and then I was once more in the breakfast-room, shaking hands with the rest. I was awakened from my state of abstraction by having my arm grasped by Dr. Lescom.

"You bad, troublesome child," he said, gruffly, "it's

quarter of eight, and we have barely time to catch the train; make lachrymatories of your coffee-cups, good people, and restrain your tears until the funeral is over,—Margie can't wait here any longer."

Then everybody shouted good-by, and I was dragged to the stage waiting at the door, where my trunks were strapped on as though they were never coming off again. In the entry, however, we encountered Mehitable, who until now had remained quiescent, and Dr. Lescom relented in her favor.

"Say exactly two words," he said, warningly; and so I did.

"Good-by," I whispered, kissing her, "good-by;" but the poor girl knelt down before them all, and kissed both my hands without answering a single word. Of course I cried like a baby as the stage drove off, carrying me out of sight of that dear old house where I had lived such a happy life in my father's love,—cried until the tears burnt my face and choked me. Fortunately, during our ride to the depot we were the sole occupants of the stage, and therefore at liberty to talk unrestrained. "I wish you would be kind as possible to Mehitable," I managed to say, through my tears, to Dr. Lescom, as we jolted on, "and influence Miss Tabitha to be so also, the poor girl seems so desolate and half starved."

Dr. Lescom was busily intent upon staring out of the window, as I spoke, in a most uncompromisingly cross way, but now he relented into softening his face as he turned it toward me.

"You needn't worry about that," he answered, gravely. "I'll do the best I can, but that won't be very long; the girl is slowly dying of heart-disease."

I looked at him, when he said that, overcome.

"Why must everybody die who cares for me!" I exclaimed, my voice shaking. "It seems so hard, so cruel! I shall die of loneliness myself before long!"

Uncle Will, who, until now, had left me to conquer myself, took both my hands tenderly in his.

"How your hands tremble, my child! You must calm yourself, dear; remember, you are to live to be my comfort,—I am equally alone in the world!"



"There was never anything known like 'mens sana in corpore sano,' Dr. Lescom interposed, relapsing into his usual gruff voice. "The woes of the flesh are all hydra-headed. That poor fellow Lester, Margie's whilom protégé, is a fine text to preach from: he wasn't as wise as Ulysses; he didn't wax his ears when the siren sang, and so he went to his death. By the way, he has at length half consented to my acquainting his friends with his condition; it's the best thing in the world that he can do, now he has lost his sight. I hope to make his arrangements definite before I go West. I am not going there to live," he added, in reply to my look of inquiry, "only to settle the affairs of a sister whose husband has recently died. I would like to get Lester off my hands before I go, he seems so knocked up, apparently not caring a rush whether the world wags or not."

The stage here drew up at the platform to the station-house, and the driver opened the door.

"We are at the end of our rope now," Dr. Lescom said, jumping out, "and can't hang ourselves yet awhile. How I wish my lachrymal duct wasn't dried up!"

Then my trunks were taken from off the stage, checked to New York, and our tickets bought, just as the shrill whistle of the approaching train rang in the distance.

"You are just beginning your A-B-C's, Margie," Dr. Lescom said, cheerily, as we three stood together at one end of the platform, "and I'm afraid you'll find plenty of physic about half-way through your alphabet; but you'll get along well enough if you only will remember that the world is big enough for both virtue and sin, and take good care to hang your sign out on the sunny side of the town."

The train came puffing up, and Uncle Will held out his hand to Dr. Lescom. "She shall be happy, I promise you, God willing," he said, earnestly.

Then they shook hands together heartily. There were veritable tears in Dr. Lescom's eyes now as he turned to kiss me tenderly. "Good-by, Margie," he whispered, wringing both my hands. "You've been a good little girl, and God bless you!"

Then I could see nothing, not even his face, my own

tears blinded me so. I could only cry, "Good-by! good-by!" And at last, when Uncle Will had succeeded in seating me in the cars, I was weeping convulsively.

## CHAPTER X.

"MY DEAR WILLIAM:—I met your agent, Mr. Fulham, in the breakfast-room this morning, who told me you returned from the country last evening, and are staying at the Fifth Avenue. Valerie is to be married on the twentieth of this month; her trousseau arrives next week from Paris. We came from Long Branch last Monday, and, as Mr. Hoffman joins us to-morrow, we shall return immediately to Boston. I would like to hear all you have to tell about Ellen's child; if she is with you, bring her to see us. She must be about Gertrude's age, and of course I sympathize with you in your endeavor to give her a good position in our family. We shall expect to see you some time during the day.

"Your affectionate sister,

"HONORIA CONSTANT DARE.

"BREVORT HOUSE, September 2."

This was the note, written on pale, perfumed paper, stamped with a violet-tinted crest, which Uncle Will handed me on the afternoon subsequent to our arrival in New York, as we sat together at dinner in our private parlor.

I read it, in obedience to his wordless request; then, as I gave it back to him, I could not help letting my face flush hotly.

"Well, what is it?" he asked, gravely.

"Is she my aunt who was so unkind and bitter to mamma?"

His face, which had looked pale and stern since he read this note, softened a great deal now. "She is your mother's sister, Margie; you must forget all the rest. The wisest of us are apt to be mistaken at times, and repent only too late. God forgive us!"

"You know best," I answered, softly; "but I used to see mamma cry over her picture and kiss it, as though her heart was breaking. It was a beautiful face, with coal-black eyes and vivid red-lips; but I used to think it looked like the ogress in my picture-book, only it wasn't quite as old-looking, and didn't have horns."

"She is not an ogress, by any means," Uncle Will answered, gently; "only a very proud woman,—inordinately proud, and unreasonable in her prejudices,—otherwise she is generous and kind."

"I used to hear mamma and papa talk about her beauty and her pride; I think mamma must have loved her dearly; but papa——"

"And papa what?" queried Uncle Will, busily intent upon peeling some peaches for my dessert.

"Well, he would stroke mamma's hair—she always had a fashion of sitting beside him on a low stool, just like a little child—and say, 'Honorina is a beautiful Nemesis, but you, darling, are an angel,' and then mamma would look up at him."

The words died away upon my lips, for Uncle Will's eyes were looking at me full of tears.

"Go on, dear," he said, softly; "it is like opening a sealed book to hear you speak of your mother, I knew so little of her married life,—my poor little Nell!"

The pathos in his usually quiet voice caused my own tears now to overflow. "I can see her just as she used to look then," I went on, wistfully, my voice shaking, and turning my eyes away from his face. "Although I was very young when she died, yet I remember distinctly everything she used to do or say. She had reddish-gold hair,—not half so red as mine,—which was always falling down in great bunches, when she would so often play hide-and-seek with me behind the chairs and sofas, while papa would sit by the window, pretending to read, all the time watching us out of the corners of his eyes; and then, if we happened to go near him, he would jump up, as I always thought, like the big bear in my story-book, and, catching us up together in his arms,—for mamma was such a little thing,—nearly smother us with kisses."

These last words nearly choked me: the visions, so

sweet and tender, which I had conjured up from the dull, dead ashes of the past, mocked and overcame me; a sense of my chilly loneliness assailed me with renewed power. I remember that I arose suddenly from the table, and went to bury myself behind the curtains of the window-seat, flooded with the dying glories of the day. All the strong cords of fervent love, duty, and gratitude binding me to my memories of the country village where my father's grave lay green in its slumber beneath the arch of the summer sky, seemed as though threatened to be torn asunder. A vague presentiment of a yet greater desolation than I had already suffered harassed me with its importunities; although only a few hours had intervened since I shut the pages of my child-life over, yet looking back the hours seemed lengthened into years, the moments into days, and the grasping-fingered future only too eager to seize my fresh girl-dreams and crush them into a whited sepulcher of despair.

By-and-by, in the midst of my disquiet, the curtains were parted, and Uncle Will came, coffee-cup in hand, to share my retreat. We sat there a long time together, the evening light coming in, softening the doubts of my heart, and melting over my uncle's grand, pure face, with a melodious power which bespoke a spiritual sympathy and the touch of God's hand.

"Margie," he said, at length, looking into my face gravely, "I do not like to feel your troubles possess the power to render you morbidly miserable. To-night your eyes have that far-away look, wistful in its intensity, which seems ever willing and eager to anticipate suffering, and which causes me to fear that the crosses of your life will be always heavy burdens, never lightened by an entire resignation to God's will." And then he went on, in his seriously tender way, to make clear to me the perfect peace of His paths when hedged in with the white flowers of faith and paved with the enduring stones of love. Each word which he uttered fell clothed in a complete armor of conviction, carrying with its heavy weight down into the hiding-places of my soul draughts of cool, thirst-quenching peace.

"You will go with me to see your aunt and cousins, of



course, this evening," he said, by-and-by. "They will be very kind to you, I know. They will love you very dearly, for your mother's sake first, and then for your own. Will you go with me?"

"Yes, I will go," I whispered, shivering; "but I feel as though I was going to a place cold with ice and snow, and where the sun never shone."

Upon reaching the Brevoort House, we were shown up-stairs into Mrs. Dare's parlor, and Mrs. Dare's French maid, who recognized Uncle Will with many exclamations of delight, came to tell us that "Madame and the Mademoiselles Valerie and Gertrude were at dinner, but would return directly," and then retreated into an inner sanctum sanctorum, which looked to my eyes, when its mysteries were revealed by the casual opening of the door, deluged with trunks of all sizes and descriptions. I stood at one of the windows looking out upon Fifth Avenue, in a decided state of trembling suspense. The arming for the conflict between pride and duty had proved remarkably bitter and severe. I felt that the moment had at length come when all my childish antagonism to those who I knew had embittered the last years of my parent's life must be buried forever in the cold grave of necessity; that henceforth I must live a different life,—a bitterly galling thought,—a life of semi-dependence upon the charity of those whose toleration must first be won by the wages of submission and at the sacrifice of pride. Uncle Will must have divined my misery, for he came to my side and, putting his arm about me, bade me be of good cheer and fail not.

"Margie, the first trials are always the sharpest and hardest to be borne. The first pang costs the agony. Try and be brave for my sake, dear, for I love my little niece before all the world." Then, looking up into his pure, saintly face, I promised, with my whole heart in my voice, to try and be brave for his sake.

As we stood there together, looking down into the gas-lit street, there came the sound of a childish voice, and two little white hands were laid closely over Uncle Will's eyes from behind.

"I seize you *à main armée*," cried the voice, as he

seized the hands and, throwing back his head, disclosed to my sight the exquisite face of a girl who had sprung upon an ottoman in order to make herself the requisite height to perform her blindfolding. "You are my prisoner, you great, ugly man, nolens volens!"

"Is that you, Valerie?" he answered, smilingly. Then, as she sprang down and held up her face to him in a pretty, childish way, irrepressibly winning, he bent his head to kiss her.

"This is your cousin, Valerie," he said, gently; whereupon she came to me and held her face up as she had done to Uncle Will, saying, "Mamma and Gertrude will be here directly; they will be delighted to see you. We have been expecting you all day. You are always welcome, uncle."

"More than welcome, William, as it is quite needless to assure you," interposed another voice; and, looking in the direction whence it sounded, I saw the original of the picture which mamma had so often wept over, only now grown older, the eyes if possible more black, the lips colder and more severe. So close to her, both in peculiarity of resemblance and style, came what I thought must be certainly her shadow,—a girl about my own age, tall, slight, with the same black eyes and hair.

"And this is Ellen's child?" Mrs. Dare said, when, having kissed Uncle Will, she turned to where I stood, with my breath coming close and quick. "What is your name, my dear?"

"My name is Marguerite, but I am generally called Margie," I answered, very steadfastly, for Uncle Will was encouraging me with the watchfulness of his tender eyes.

"Marguerite is a beautiful name; I had forgotten it was yours. I shall prefer to call you Marguerite." Then she kissed me very kindly, and led me to a divan, on the velvet cushions of which she seated herself at my side, until now I began to lose myself in a maze of incredulity and wonder, since Gertrude, the tall, dark girl, had also kissed me, and everybody seemed so kind and considerate.

Years have passed since that summer night when I sat

there beside my aunt, childishly tremulous, fearing the worst, yet sacrificing my forebodings to the present, subtle in its allurements of beauty, luxury, and apparent warmth, with an entire abandonment, a sudden reaction of my utter misery, which has mocked me many an hour since with a phantom of its trustful sweetness, willing to forget all the Spitzbergen atmosphere of my previous anticipations in my freshly-inspired hope that, after all, God would let these people love me. Even yet I can feel the lingering influence which controlled me then, of my cousin Valerie's face,—her lovely Greuze face, framed in its glittering halo of golden hair, the soft, peachy coloring of her complexion melting into its white margins deliciously, the exquisite violet eyes, purple in their depths and fringed with the brightly-tinted lashes, looking up into Uncle Will's face in a way which made me think of an angel incarnate. I was so interested in watching her that I did not realize I was in my turn an object of scrutiny until the magnetism of Mrs. Dare's powerful eyes made it very evident; then I turned to her as she spoke:

"You resemble your mother, Marguerite, and yet——" her face was very pale as I saw it now, very pale, with rigid lines about the mouth, which must have been lovely once, but which now had settled down into a sternness of expression anything but winning.

"Papa always said I looked like mamma," I answered, looking up into her face earnestly. "He loved her so much, he was always anxious that I should look like her."

A swift spasm contracted her face, making her eyes gloomier, her lips whiter.

"Mamma loved you very dearly," I added, softly.

"Yes, they both loved me," she said, hastily, the color coming back to her lips,—"very tenderly and disinterestedly. How old are you, child?"

"Fifteen years."

"Your mother lost one child about Valerie's third year, and you match Gertrude. You must return with us to Boston and share her studies."

"How can she," queried my cousin Gertrude, "when I am reading Schiller and Horace?"

"Gertrude is the vainest creature in all the world," Valerie came to my rescue, with a little laugh. "A true daughter of our modern Athens, she reads Greek in the original, minus the spectacles, unless they be glassed with egotism and rimmed with pedantry; explores the realm of metaphysics with the point of a caustic skepticism, and nauseates one with a dose of Alfieri, Rabelais, or Montaigne upon the slightest provocation!"

"Valerie!" exclaimed Mrs. Dare, in a voice of cold displeasure.

"At least I prefer substance to shadow," retorted her sister, her eyes looking dangerous. "'Médecin, guéris-toi toi-même!'" The angel with the hair of Laura and the face of a Greuze shook her head at her sister with a naughty air of defiance.

After all, my evening had proved a very encouraging one, for, after this first rebuff, experienced with my usual sensitiveness, Mrs. Dare had extracted its sting very subtly, by professing much interest in my past life, inducing me to give her a sketch of my father's last hours, and expressing a deep sympathy in my great and sudden sorrow. To be sure, her eyes had avoided mine persistently during the recital, and her hand had nervously toyed with her châtelain, as though impatient of its length; but, carried away by the fervor of my own words, I had adduced no conclusions doubtful of her sincerity, and it was not until later, when relieved from the powerful influence of her presence, that I began to divine its significance; and then only in a pitying way, for she had loved my father with a woman's first intense passion, as I well knew, in those long past days among the Southern roses. And can a woman's disappointed heart forget its resentment, its intensity even, although the Lethæan waters of years overflow and inundate it? She had married, during the first passionate heat of her anger, a Northern gentleman visiting in Charleston, my Uncle Dare, whom I never had seen, although I often had heard mamma speak of as being immensely wealthy, belonging to one of the proudest families of the oligarchical aristocracy of Massachu-

setts, but always in a regretful way, as though, in her sweetly-contented eyes, the wealth and dominion of all the world would prove but a poor recompense for a heart's lost love. When she bade me good-night, Mrs. Dare had spoken very kindly to me, requesting Uncle Will to allow me to return with them to Boston, if he was obliged to remain longer in New York; and Valerie made him promise solemnly that at least I should be present at her wedding, adding a hope to the effect that her unruly sister Gertrude and I might be good friends, to which expression of good-will Gertrude vouchsafed, by way of encouragement, a very ghastly smile and an extremely limp kiss. Notwithstanding the continual display of indifference as to my feelings by my black-eyed cousin, whose every expression seemed an odd mixture of spleen and fire, my heart took courage beneath the summer heat of this apparent friendliness of my aunt, venturing to hope that by-and-by, perhaps, she would really learn to love me. Unfortunately for the continuance of these happy anticipations, the next day awoke in the midst of black clouds and rain; and as I have always had the misfortune to be peculiarly susceptible to the influence of the weather, this dismal east-winded day proved anything but conducive to the maintenance of a very joyful equanimity. To add weight to my depression of spirits, Uncle Will was obliged to leave me early in the morning.

"You poor little girl," he said, on his return, just in time for our six-o'clock dinner, "I did not expect to remain away from you so long,—I can see very plainly you have not spent a happy day!"

I was dreadfully disappointed when he said that, for in truth I had not; but then, during the past two hours, I had been trying resolutely to so frame my thoughts to happy subjects that when he did return he might find them imaged on my lips and in my eyes. "I have been trying to be happy, Uncle Will," I answered, regretfully, "but the day has been so rainy and dismal."

"Yes, it has been rainy and dismal enough," he replied, with a little sigh,—then he brightened up; "but you must not be gloomy longer, dear. I am hungry; let us make friends with the mock-turtle and mayonnaise,"

and so we did. He did not mention the Dares until after dinner, when we betook ourselves to the snug retreat of the window-seat to finish our dessert of coffee and peaches; then for the first time he spoke,—

"I lunched with your aunt and cousins to-day; they inquired both particularly and affectionately after 'Marguerite,'—they seem inclined to love you very dearly."

He paused, as though expecting me to acquiesce.

"They were very kind to me last night," I assented, hesitatingly.

"Where is your winged Pegasus to-night?" he queried, gravely; then, to please him, I tried to laugh, but failed miserably. "His wings are clipped by this east wind, and he has fed too long on rain-drops, I am afraid," he added; "you are a variable little girl, and cannot live without sunshine."

"I have had so little of it lately, Uncle Will," I answered, wearily, "and to-day the clouds have been particularly black, both inside and out."

"That cannot be,—misfortunes are never double-faced with gloom," he remonstrated, with much grave sadness of voice; "your mind is sadly perverted to-night out of its usual healthy channel,—what has turned the flood?"

"The rain-drops have perverted my vision, and I can't see straight. Try to look across the street, Uncle Will, and you will find that everything looks crooked."

"It is not raining, dear," he said, quietly; "the sun will shine to-morrow,—already the clouds are showing their white faces."

And sure enough, my back being turned to the window, I had not perceived that the rain had stopped, and little rims of pearl were hemming the edges of the clouds. I felt the rebuke. "I cannot help being rebellious, Uncle Will,—I am a mere creature of circumstances, eaten up with weaknesses."

"So are we all," Uncle Will answered, laying his coffee-cup aside and possessing himself of my hands. "We all, sooner or later, fall into our Sloughs of Despond, with our souls fainting within us, the treacherous depths sinking beneath us more and more, while the wicket-gate shines afar off; from this lingering death faith alone saves us."

You are young yet, Margie, and but a fresh aspirant for the glories of that peace which passeth all understanding; you will be forced to fight for your birthright in salvation right valiantly, and with the sweetly-trusting faith of a little child."

"I could almost believe it to be papa talking to me," I said, breathlessly,—“the very sound of your voice makes me happier, while your words strengthen my heart."

He bent down, when I said that, to smooth the thick masses of hair back from my face.

"While you have your father's eyes, dear,—his truthful, honest eyes,—sometimes you startle me, the resemblance is so vivid. That you may live to be as noble and true as was your father, is the greatest blessing I can wish you."

"I love you, Uncle Will, for loving papa,—for calling him 'noble and true,'—not but what I knew him to be so, but I have always feared he was not appreciated by mamma's family."

"Hush," he whispered, quickly, "you are mistaken; he was proud,—your mother, my poor little Nell, more so,—proud of his love, his honor, his wealth, and when the latter failed, and an evil tongue kissed, Judas-like, the friendship which for years had bound us together, with a weakness born of our pride and sin, we suffered the temporary estrangement to grow and widen, misunderstanding each other with a wicked perversity, until it was too late. But it is all past now and dead, my darling," he interrupted himself, hurriedly and in much agitation,—“the record of it lies in God's hands; his reward will do justice to our sin." Then there was a long silence, which I felt was sacred and not easily to be broken. "I can never forgive myself my share in the estrangement," he went on more calmly, his face looking paler than I had ever seen it, in the gray twilight; "but, Margie, let us talk of it no longer,—my only consolation is the assurance that, in his last hours, I was freely forgiven by my noble friend in giving his treasure to my keeping to guard jealously and well; the reconciliation was complete, and now, to prove myself worthy of his faith,

I shall live." Then, bending down, he kissed me almost reverently.

"I know that papa loved you and trusted you implicitly," I whispered, softly, "and I shall love you dearly all the days of my life."

## CHAPTER XI.

A soft September sky smiled over the quaint, crooked streets of Boston, bathing the lawns of the city's heart in a mellow light, touching the waters of the little lake goldily, and flushing the whole atmosphere with a rosy vividness, as I stood alone in the broadly-arching window of my Uncle Dare's house, looking out admiringly upon the tree-shut beauty of the Common. To-morrow was to be my cousin Valerie's wedding-day. All day long the house had echoed and re-echoed to the hammers of the workmen, and the unavoidable bustle consequent upon the decorations of the different rooms for the bridal feast, until now it had settled down into quiet, until the morrow's sun should usher in another phase of confusion.

Standing there, watching the shadows lengthen into long, grotesque phantoms, I imagined how the robins must be flying home to their nests across the meadows of Blossom Village, the cattle plodding through the seas of meadow-grass, and the warm south wind rocking the branches of the apple-trees to and fro. Coming from the spring, bent almost double with the weight of the bucket which she carried slowly on her head, I seemed to see the slender figure of Mehitabe, clad in the inevitable brown calico dress, her dingy yellow hair tied in a prim knot on the top of her head, and her hungry eyes looking off into vacancy with a hopeless stare which I knew so well. Miss Tabitha's voice I heard calling her shrilly, and Miss Tabitha herself stood in the open doorway to the primitive kitchen, her sallow face flushed angrily at

the dilatory movements of the tired girl, all the miserable quaverings of her voice awaking the echoes of her little world. The dark-green curtains to the window far above where she stands, shading the light from Cecil Throckmorton's eyes—how strange it seemed to think of him by this name!—moved fretfully to the touch of the wind perfumed with the breath of the lemon, thyme, and pinks. I could smell the fragrance of the clove carnations and the sweet peas, while the mignonette ravished the air with its subtle kiss, and as it tasted to me, so it tasted to the poor, wan lips lying so white and weak in the gloom of the sunlight-shunned chamber. Dr. Lescom's gruff face shone at me from somewhere. I saw my father's grave lying green in its slumber, chained to heaven by the down-hanging links of sunshine on the hill-side, and yet my eyes clung pityingly, more longingly, to that chamber, black with gloom, but flooded with the crushed incense of the dying day. As I wandered through the homely, box-edged paths, I heard a voice calling to me again and again, but I was powerless to answer, then—"Miss Marguerite, dinner is served." It was the waiter, Murray, who stood stolidly at my elbow, and this was the third time that he had made this same announcement within the last moment. So the door shut sharply on my day-dream, to open on the hungry expanse of practical dinner. Upon joining my aunt and cousins in the dining-room, I found myself placed at table directly vis-à-vis to my embryo cousin, Mr. Hoffman, seated beside his fiancée, who appeared to-night feverishly excited and impatient, a mood in which her beauty lost half its charm, its brightness, and piquancy of expression. Mr. Hoffman looked, to my eyes, aged about forty, a huge, corpulent man, possessed of a dreadfully red face, narrow shoulders, and big, sprawly hands. From the first moment of our introduction to one another I had taken a prejudice to him, which, try hard as I might, I could not overcome.

The drawing-room was brilliantly lighted when we arose from dinner; whereupon my cousin Gertrude seized one of her abstruse books and buried herself in a corner, Valerie threw herself, with a most intense air of weariness,

upon the divan, and Aunt Honoria retired to the library, to rearrange some of the wedding-presents. By-and-by Uncle Will, Uncle Archibald, and Mr. Hoffman, wearied of their cigars, followed us, and Mr. Hoffman, who did not remain long, seated himself beside Valerie one moment on the divan, and talked to her in a feeble undertone, his red-lidded eyes gloating over the charms of the lovely victim, until she began to evince a decided antagonism to his advances, whereupon he kissed her hand and bade us all an early good-night. There were no little love-passages in the hall, everything being conducted upon the strictest principles of propriety. He went out of the room unaccompanied, leaving his betrothed to sit a long while silent on the divan, her face flushed by an emotion of which I did not know the name.

I went to bed early after this, leaving Mrs. Dare and Uncle Will together, talking earnestly of many things. As I kissed him good-night, Uncle Will drew me to him, and, looking at my aunt with those steadfast eyes, said,—

"This is my one treasure in life henceforth, Honoria. While she and I live, her father's sacred trust binds her life to mine irrevocably. If I am separated from her hereafter, I shall pray that your love will shelter her in the future, even as mine shall have done in the past."

"You must never leave me," I whispered, clinging to him, trembling at the very thought, while Aunt Honoria looked at us both, with a dull lighting-up of her eyes which I did not like.

"She shall be as my own daughter," she answered, earnestly,—*"I pledge you my word, William."*

And then Uncle Will, kissing me tenderly, bade me good-night.

I had grown to love him so dearly, this earnest, whole-souled man,—to read truth always in the purity of his eyes and the spirituality of his face,—his mind, developing to my understanding more and more each day, became to me as an inexhaustible mine, which, dig deep as I might, would only discover to be more of gold and less of earth at every endeavor.

Upon my first arrival at my aunt's house, about a

week previous to the opening of this chapter, notwithstanding my many misgivings, I had been welcomed very affectionately. Gertrude had seized the very first opportunity to introduce me as a privileged guest into the sacred precincts of a little, dark, book-lined den, where cobwebs rivaled dust in the greatest profusion, a livery of erudition in which she seemed especially to delight; and Valerie, with the loveliest impetuosity imaginable, had welcomed me to a bow-window retreat, hung with pale-green satin, where, reclining in her soft white muslin dress, elaborately outlined with Valenciennes lace, upon a low green satin divan, she looked like Venus Anadyomene floating on sea-water and shells. Here, Narcissus-like, she could lie, with innumerable mirrors flashing back the exquisite symmetry of the tableau, surrounded by Parian statuettes of Goethe's Margaret, Dante's Beatrice, on pedestals of pale-green satin, medallioned with porcelain rosebuds and ivy, while in the window stood jardinières full of flowers and malachite vases, and on the softly-tinted walls hung pictures of emerald-tinted icebergs, some spirituelle Watteaus, and a pastoral Guarini.

The next morning broke clear and cool. It was such a lovely wedding-day,—the sky one vast expanse of blue, unrelieved in its brightness save by two or three vagrant clouds sailing hither and thither like white-masted ships at sea, the atmosphere braided in and out with the sun's golden needle, and all the earth lay asleep at its hem, languorous with delight. Within my aunt's house, the rooms, shut in from the sunlight, overflowed with flowers: tea-rosebuds, daphne odoras, japonicas, lilies of the valley, and tuberose, filling each corner with their breath, while in the conservatory leading out from the library bloomed gorgeous orchids torn from the wilds of the South,—flowers royal in their rarity, which in the Old World decorate the bridal veils of princesses.

Valerie did not appear at breakfast, which was unusually late this morning. Gertrude, who was to be one of the bridesmaids, was also lazy, and Celeste, Mrs. Dare's French maid, took up-stairs for her refreshment a substantial breakfast of broiled quail, hot rolls, and chocolate.

"You passed a sleepless night, William," Mrs. Dare said, as Uncle Will came in, looking pale and worn as though with suffering. "It troubles me to see your eyes so heavy."

"I did not sleep well," he answered, briefly, as though anxious to discourage all further comments, but he could not quiet my apprehensions.

"You are ill," I whispered, in a half undertone, when I saw the deep, dark circles under his eyes, the deadly pallor of his lips; but I stopped there, for a look in his face bade me do so. By-and-by, however, when twelve o'clock came, and the carriages to convey the bridal party to church, as we stood together in the library, waiting for the bride to make her appearance, I could not help saying, "Let me stay at home with you, Uncle Will; let us stay at home together. You are really ill."

"Look at Valerie, instead, Marguerite," he answered, sturdily, at the same time deliberately drawing on his gloves, "and forget me. With your imaginative lens you magnify microscopic evils into full-limbed monstrosities!" and some tone in the decisive ring of his voice again silenced me.

My cousin Valerie, in all the shimmering glory of white satin, point-lace, and pearls, was indeed a fair sight to look upon as she came in, followed by her two bridesmaids, floating each in a cloud of white tulle, looped here and there with lilies of the valley. In the midst of my appreciation, Mrs. Dare came and spoke to us.

"You are to go in the first carriage, with Marguerite, William," she said, smiling at me more gently than she had ever smiled before. Then her face shaded anxiously,—"Heavens! how pale you are, William! Pray remain at home,—you look really very ill."

"Remember my remonstrance urged last night against all anxiety," he answered, gravely, an expression of something like annoyance changing his face; "it is your duty to indulge in nothing but pleasure to-day, Honoria,—for Valerie's sake forget everything calculated to render you distressed."

A look of care and intense anxiety darkened Mrs. Dare's countenance for one instant. I could see that



Uncle Will's quiet words possessed the power to affect her.

"The day's excitement will not cause me to forget you, William," she said, earnestly; "please do not urge that."

"I will urge nothing," he replied, quietly, as before; then it was time for us to go to our carriage.

As we entered the church a little in advance of the bridal party, we were greeted by kisses of subtle perfume, emanating from the profusion of flowers overflowing the baptismal font. I remember how closely I clung to Uncle Will's arm, with a very strong impulse to retreat agitating me as we walked up the aisle, facing crowds of gayly-dressed people who seemed intent upon staring us and each other out of countenance. It being the first time I had ever attended a wedding, after my little fright was past, my consciousness of self annihilated by the perfume, the atmosphere of repressed excitement, and the music trembling everywhere, I began to see a great deal to interest me. The slants of sunlight falling through the painted-glass windows within the chancel rails, in odd arabesque and colors, flushing the velvet surroundings of altar-cloth, chairs, and cushions, bewildered and gratified me. The music, creeping about the vast arms of the up-reaching arches in plaintive psalms of love, thrilled me through and through, until, when the doors were finally thrown open, the psalms, shorn of their simplicity, became merged into a grand exultation, and the bridal party advanced slowly up the aisle, I lost my rapture in a sudden and vivid excitement. Valerie, looking superb in her loveliness, leaning upon her father's arm, floated by; but, as she took her place beside Mr. Hoffman at the altar, a feeling of intense dissatisfaction assailed me, he was so big, so disproportionately narrow-shouldered, such a contrast in every way to the beautiful girl at his side, I was almost ready to cry with vexation.

"Poor Valerie," Uncle Will said, pityingly, as we were driven home, "she is easily satisfied! God pity her!"

It was suffocating going from the fresh, sweet air of the glowing September day into the close confines of darkened, gas-lit rooms. At first I felt stifled and stunned

by the heat, the glare and the scintillating of innumerable jewels. Valerie, with the heat and trembling fled from her face, leaving it only very pale and a little rigid, as I kissed her, returned my kiss in a way which caused my own heart to grow lighter and Uncle Will's face to brighten wonderfully.

Crowds of people continued to arrive, there sounded a great clatter of carriage-wheels and horses' hoofs in the street, and, hanging on Uncle Will's arm, finally I was crushed back into the library, where we stood for a long time watching with much interest the rapidly-increasing throng, until Uncle Dare took us into the dining-room to drink the bride's health. The rooms were full to suffocation now, and the heat had become so intense that the gas was being turned off, the windows opened, while for the first time everybody began to look comfortable. When we went into the dining-room, Uncle Will being seized upon by a crowd of gentlemen, and detained a long time, I retreated to a corner, there to devour in peace my wedding-cake and coffee, only to be espied presently by my cousin Gertrude, who came and spoke to me.

"You are having a dreadfully dull time, Marguerite, I know; so is everybody else, unless one is so fortunate as to form a part of that group of philosophers yonder. As for me, I am decidedly out of my element."

"Margie," said Uncle Will, appearing suddenly, "you must excuse me for the remainder of the day; I am going to retire. Gertrude, I leave your cousin to your tender mercies."

"Let me go with you, Uncle Will!" I exclaimed, beseechingly, terrified when I caught sight of his face grown deathly pale with suffering, but he stopped me decisively.

"Remain here, Marguerite; pray do not distress yourself unnecessarily."

And Gertrude said, "I will take good care of Cousin Marguerite, Uncle Will." Then he was gone.

The remainder of that long, long day remains in memory almost an utter blank; I only remember that my cousin Gertrude deserted me entirely just as soon as Uncle Will had disappeared, and for a long time how I

wandered about aimlessly, or sat huddled together in a corner, my heart aching dully, and my lips feverish with anxiety, forgotten by everybody, and feeling very desperate and lonely. But a shock soon came which awakened me. Sitting upon a lounge under the hall stairs, listening apathetically to the buzz of conversation roundabout, watching vaguely the shiftings of the crowd, and breathing in the fragrance of a lovely profusion of tuberose and lilies covering the table at my side, I heard Murray say to James, the under-waiter,—

"He's raly sick, all of a sudden like; they've sent for the doctor, and my lady is up with him now."

"The Holy Virgin save him," answered the other, with much Irish fervor; "he's a mild-spoken gentleman."

A mist swam before my eyes, little fiends of terror began their singings in my ears. I remember that I felt faint, sick, and desperate all at once.

"Is it my Uncle Will you are talking about?" I cried, standing suddenly before them, my hands clinging nervously together, and trembling all over. I heard them say something apologetic in answer. I was conscious of the pity expressed in their frank, Irish faces, then I was rushing up-stairs at the imminent risk of my neck.

"I want to see my Uncle Will—I must see him—let me see him!" I cried, chokingly, as his chamber-door opened and Celeste, Mrs. Dare's maid, appeared on the threshold.

Celeste came out deliberately and shut the door. "Mademoiselle cannot go in," she said, very quietly, and with a touch of something in her voice which angered me.

"Why cannot I go in?" I exclaimed, hotly; "what do you mean? Let me pass—I say I will go in!"

"It is madame's order," the French girl answered, coldly. "Madame is within; and madame's order is positive, not, under any circumstances, to allow her niece, Mademoiselle Marguerite, to enter."

### CHAPTER XIII.

DURING two long weeks my Uncle Will lay dangerously ill with hemorrhage of the lungs, the result of overexertion, the physicians in their consultation decided, which defied their utmost skill a long time, but which at length, when everybody had begun to despair, reluctantly succumbed. During all these days I was desolate, forbidden the privilege of visiting my uncle for even one instant,—although my cousin Gertrude was allowed access to his chamber at any and all hours,—refused the consolation of uttering one word of sympathy in this his hour of extreme suffering, to the man who had so generously befriended me in mine, despite my prayers to my Aunt Honoria to be allowed to do so, she inexorably answering me,—

"You are altogether too impulsive, Marguerite; a visit from you might serve to excite him too much, and retard his recovery, perhaps seriously;" at the same time denying me any individual sympathy in my hours of lonely wretchedness.

Left to myself entirely during these long days of disquiet,—my cousin Gertrude, when not a visitor in the sick-chamber, isolating herself among the cobwebs of her dust-subdued den, where I dared not enter uninvited,—I began to realize, with a gradual perception of misery, that, without my uncle to countenance and support me, the atmosphere of this gilded palace became daily, with an almost mathematical precision, colder and colder, until its leaden weight seemed greater than I could bear. But this state of suspense—grown wearisome by-and-by—incited me to rebel against the authority of Mrs. Dare to the extent of entering Uncle Will's room one day, during her absence therefrom, when Celeste was alone left to guard its door. I remember exactly my sensations when, upon opening the door, I came face to face with the French girl looking frightened and deprecatory.

"Mademoiselle does wrong," she whispered, with much metallic intonation of voice. "Mademoiselle will agitate monsieur. The door was left open à l'improvisite. Ah! mon Dieu! what will madame say?"

"Is it you, Margie, my little girl?" whispered Uncle Will's voice, almost in concert. And, looking across the room, over Celeste's shoulder, I saw him lying on a lounge drawn close beside the window, a sight which made me grow strong and defiant.

"Yes, it is I. May I come in, Uncle Will? I have longed so to come,—please say that I can."

"Yes, come here, my child." Then, before Celeste could utter a single word of remonstrance, I was past her, and kneeling eagerly by his side, with my arms about his neck.

"Uncle Will, Uncle Will, I have been so lonely without you! Let me stay; I will be quiet, indeed I will." And, to show how in earnest I was, how determined not to agitate him in the least, I began to cry softly to myself.

"Mademoiselle must not cry; she must go away. Madame would not like that mademoiselle should cry and agitate monsieur."

But still I cried on, tears of mingled hope, pain, and foreboding, while Uncle Will's hand went wandering over my head, stroking my tear-stained cheeks, pushing the tangled masses of hair out of my eyes, and soothing me irresistibly.

"I have been waiting for you so long, Margie,—I thought you would come every day. I can see by your face that you have suffered much. Have you suffered for me?"

"Yes, for you. I was so worried about you. I wanted to speak to you once, at least; to let you know how I hated to think of you as suffering. I have begged to come, and they would not let me."

"Mademoiselle Marguerite—" here remonstrated Mrs. Dare's well-trained French girl.

The hand wandering lovingly about my head suddenly stopped. "Celeste, you will be kind enough to leave the room," said my uncle's quiet voice. "I can dispense

with your future services; Mademoiselle Marguerite remains in your place."

How glad I became when he said that! how full of joy and thanksgiving! I had been so lonely during those past two weeks, so thirsty for kind words, eager for sympathy, and, behold, here I might find all. Here I would stay, to love and be loved by Uncle Will.

"They would not let me come to you," I said, eagerly, as Celeste's dress rustled threateningly through the door. "I begged that I might, time and again, only to be refused. I prayed to hear the sound of your voice once more, but they would not listen."

"They shall refuse you no more," the weak voice answered, resolutely. "I have waited for you to come very patiently, only to be each day disappointed. I did not ask for you, thinking that when you cared to come you would, until at last I had begun to imagine my little niece was forgetful."

"You did me an injustice," I exclaimed, joyfully, "and you will recompense me. I will be allowed to remain here until you fully recover." And Uncle Will acquiesced, smiling at my eager face and voice.

To my delight, that afternoon, when Dr. Raynor, the family physician, came, a tall, slightly-stooping man, with a kindly, refined face and invigorating presence, he declared Uncle Will to be convalescing rapidly, and that on the morrow, in all probability, he would be able to sit up a little while.

"Let your niece stay with you," he said, and Mrs. Dare, who was present, approved his decision with much apparent good grace.

"Marguerite has more good sense than I ever gave her credit for having," she said, very graciously, after Dr. Raynor had gone, and we three were once more alone together. "I never realized she could be quiet, she is so impulsive and excitable. I feared her presence here would provoke more harm than benefit to you in your illness, William."

This being the first time she had alluded in the slightest manner to my presence in the sick-chamber, upon her return from her drive in the morning and finding

me established there inevitably, she having ignored my disobedience and treated the fact as a matter of course, I now began to feel immensely relieved.

"In the future I trust such mistakes will be carefully avoided," Uncle Will answered, seriously; "this anxiety and suspense have been productive of more misery to Margie than I care to see. I am really distressed about her, she looks so pale and weak."

"She confines herself too much to the house," Mrs. Dare said, with decision; "she ought to take long walks, and drive with Gertrude every afternoon; she cannot expect to be well or strong otherwise."

"My cousin Gertrude never asks me to accompany her on her drives, and if I attempt to walk alone, I am afraid of losing my way, the streets are so crooked."

A slight color came up into Mrs. Dare's cold, white face. "Gertrude is only thoughtless; her mind is so absorbingly interested in the grasping of abstruse philosophical subjects that she is apt sometimes to forget the mere courtesies of life. She is thoughtless, my dear Marguerite, but she shall be so no longer."

After this conversation there was a change for the better as regarded my position of guest in my aunt's house. Gertrude, aroused from her state of mental abstraction and once again interesting herself in the fact of my existence, became daily pleasanter, more agreeable as a companion, taking me on long shopping excursions, thus affording me quite a knowledge of the city thoroughfares, when Uncle Will grew better and could spare me from his side, driving me in her pony phaeton through the lovely suburbs of Boston,—evidently striving to eradicate from my impressionable heart the effects of her former indifference. During these days of comparative peace it was impossible for me to forget entirely the pain and wretched anxiety which had so harassed me while Uncle Will lay almost in the arms of death, or how my heart, heavy with this fresh desolation, had hungered but for one breath of Blossom Village air. In my suspense I had constantly turned for consolation to the memories, tender and sweet, clustering so closely about its meadows, its sleepy hills,—until sometimes, when

driven hard by anxiety, I had longed to sleep, even as my father was sleeping, on its bosom.

One day I broached a subject to Uncle Will which lay very close to my heart. "Shall we go to Washington just as soon as you get well?" I asked, as, lying upon a lounge drawn up beside the window looking out to the green of the Common, I sat beside him, talking of many things. "I hope we shall go soon, or else go back to Blossom Village and live there forever."

"It would be the worst thing in the world for you to go back to Blossom Village, Margie; the place would drive you crazy in a lamentably short time, it would be so full of sad reminiscences and sadder realities. You are very sensitive to suffering, my little girl, and your only safety lies in a complete change, both mental and physical. For so young a girl, you have suffered much."

"Yes, but if we do not return to Blossom Village, are we not to go to Washington?"

He looked up at me inquiringly. "Are you not happy here, my child, that you are so eager to go away?"

Something in the expression of his eyes caused me to check, just in time, my impetuous answer, to speak with moderation,—something intangible, which seemed to beseech me to say that I was happy in spite of myself. "I do not know," I answered, trying to speak calmly, "I try to be happy; I pray God every night to give me strength. I wish I was not so sensitive, Uncle Will."

"Yes, you are sensitive, very sensitive," he repeated, with a little sigh of relief which affected me strangely; "you must fight to be brave instead—to forget yourself; they intend to be kind to you, only we are mistaken in our methods sometimes. Your Aunt Honoria is a proud woman, yet she will learn to love you—she cannot help it, dear."

"But we are going to Washington, are we not?—we shall not stay here always, Uncle Will?" I whispered, controlling the suspense of my voice as well as I could, and hiding my lips away from him that he might not see how they trembled.

At that moment I felt a hand laid softly on my shoulder, and, looking up, I saw Mrs. Dare's face, a great deal

agitated, bending down over me. "Hush," she whispered, hurriedly, "you agitate him; for Heaven's sake change the subject."

Uncle Will, unconscious of her presence, lay with his eyes watching thoughtfully the arms of the elm-trees waving to and fro, the leaves, yellow with age, falling in showers to the ground.

"To Washington—going to Washington," he repeated, whispering to himself. "I do not know,—God only knows the measure of my life." Then I was bending over him, smiling cheerfully, but with a dreadful pain pinching my heart, and with a mist before my eyes.

"You must get thoroughly well first, dear," I said, softly; "then we will be so happy."

"But we are happy now, are we not?" he queried, earnestly. "Marguerite, you must not be sensitive, you must be happy."

A feeling, as of suffocation, assailed me; how I longed to make clear to him, in a few passionate words, the miserable forebodings of my heart, my pain, my disquiet! it seemed as though, try hard as I might to restrain them, the words would burst from my lips involuntarily. Hungrily I watched the leaves nodding to each other and falling astray in the world, even as I felt I had fallen astray, the warm sunlight bathing all the outer world in glory, but failing to touch the inner.

"Yes, I will be happy," I answered, by-and-by, steadying my voice. Then Mrs. Dare spoke,—

"We will make her happy, William," she said, putting her arm about me and kissing my cheek; "she shall never want for anything—she shall be a daughter to me; everything will be equal between her and my other children,—she is a good girl, sometimes oversensitive, but she will outgrow that, and then we shall be excellent friends."

How his eyes kindled and his pale face warmed as he turned at the sound of her voice to behold us thus!

"And you will love her," he exclaimed, eagerly, "for Ellen's sake you will love her, and for her own, and you will forget all the rancor and bitterness."

For one instant the hand resting on my shoulder quiv-

ered convulsively. "For Ellen's sake, for her own, and I will forget all the rancor and bitterness," she repeated, as though mechanically; a moment she paused, then added, earnestly,—“and also for your sake, William,” and, bending down, kissed him.

A glorified light transfigured his face, and, reaching up, he encircled her, when she bent over him, with his arms. "We were children together, Honoria," he said, his voice shaking a little, "children in the dear old time when there were three of us playing together under the magnolia-trees in the garden looking out to the sea,—Ellen, you, and I. A little while ago I was thinking of our life then, our walks on the battery, on just such days as this, when we could see the old flag waving above the ramparts of Sumter, and Mauma Ruth would dress us up in our nicest clothes to take us abroad and create envy in the hearts of all the other nurses, as she said. But Mauma Ruth is dead; the old flag waves no longer above the desecrated walls of Sumter, you and I have grown old, and Ellen, little Nell, fell asleep long ago,—she had such winsome, sweet eyes,—do you remember?"

"Yes, William," answered my aunt, in a low, half-smothered voice.

"Nell always wore blue and you red," went on Uncle Will, dreamily, watching her face with half-shut eyes, "and Nell sang like a nightingale; this child's face reminds me of her, only it is sadder, not so bright as Nell's. I wonder if she can sing?"

"I heard her singing to herself to-day," Mrs. Dare whispered. "Her voice is very sweet."

"May her life match, then, her voice in sweetness!" Uncle Will exclaimed, suddenly and with fervor. "Honoria, I shall trust you implicitly. If you are true, God will reward you; if you fail, your sin will be great." She did not move; only by a little gesture of her hand she answered him. "Do you hear?" he queried, earnestly. Then she turned her pale face, strong in its haughty power, downward, and for an instant the proud lips quivered.

"I hear," she whispered.

## CHAPTER XIV.

THE day fell away in long slants of sunshine; the shadows crept and shuddered to the west, where a wreath of pale roses wilted over the bier of the dead day, as the moon came sailing out from the east. For the first time in many hours, Uncle Will was sleeping as I went downstairs to join the family at dinner. On my return to his room, as I passed through the hall, Mrs. Dare followed and motioned me to stop.

"Let me talk to you a little while, Marguerite," she said, gently, laying her hand detainingly on my arm; "I have something important to say." Then she led me, trembling a little with dread of I knew not what, into the music-room. Seen in the dim twilight, as she stood near the window, with her face turned partially from me, it looked drawn and pale, as though with pain. In another instant I had forgotten my dread, and was close to her, saying,—

"Aunt Honoria, you love Uncle Will,—so do I,—and he is sick, very sick." This little annunciation of sympathy seemed to touch her, for I saw the dark, strong face soften, while, bending down, she kissed me.

"Yes, dear," she said, under her breath, "he is very, very sick. God only knows his sufferings. What if he should die, Marguerite?"

"Then I should want to die also. Don't say he is dying, Aunt Honoria. Only think what a friend he has been to me; it would kill me to lose him——" The misery of my voice choked me then.

"It would kill us all. He is dear to each one. Those who love him dearly should save him, Marguerite."

"Save him?" I echoed, wondering. "How save him?"

"It depends a great deal upon you," she went on, her lips moving as though mechanically,—“almost entirely upon your prudence and self-abnegation. Your uncle feels that in the death of—of your father you became his

especially to live for, exclusive of all other claims. To this idea he would sacrifice his best interests, even his life. Shall he do this?"

"No! no! no!" I said, trembling.

"You are a good, sensible girl, Marguerite. We shall become excellent friends, I feel assured, by-and-by. In the mean time, we must make this good sense of yours practicable; by it we must save your uncle from certain death. You are naturally generous, self-sacrificing,—will you be prudent also, for his sake?"

Everything seemed whirling about me in an inextricable confusion. Her voice sounded hoarse and very far off. "For his sake?" I murmured. "Anything for his sake." Then I burst out with a little cry, "Tell me, Aunt Honoria, tell me what I must do."

Tears were blinding my eyes, tears of mingled terror and grief; but she kissed them away with her cold, white lips, as she went on to tell me, briefly and concisely as possible, as though each word stung her cruelly and she was endeavoring to conceal its pain, how that day Dr. Raynor had said Uncle Will would surely die unless he left Boston immediately, before the cold east winds came with the winter rigor, and had urged the necessity of his taking the next steamer for Europe, to pass the cold months at Nice.

Dumbly I stood and listened to each word; then, as she drew me to a seat beside her on the divan, my thoughts found vent in a passionate cry,—

"I love him so much, yet I cannot go with him; I must stay! what shall, what can I do?"

Something in the expression of her face had told me this as plainly as though her lips had clothed it in words; and although my cry was selfish,—for you must remember he was the only one I had to care at all for me now, and with him departed I should indeed be left utterly desolate,—yet she forgave me at once.

"You will stay with me, dear," she said, reassuringly, with an accent of kindness in her voice which sounded true, "and in staying you will have the consolation of knowing that you have done right. You shall be to me as a daughter, attending school or sharing Gertrude's



home-studies, as you prefer. You shall at least not be unhappy."

"But Uncle Will," I exclaimed, apprehensively, "I must take care of Uncle Will; he said I should stay with him always."

"Hush!" she interrupted me; "you will more truly serve him by doing that which is better calculated to make him happy. Dr. Raynor declares it necessary for him to start immediately for Nice, so as to become comfortably settled there by winter. He would consent, if this feeling about you did not prevent him."

"But why cannot I go with him?"

Her voice shook a little as she answered, "Because it is not best that you should; your uncle does not wish it, and Dr. Raynor has decided it better for him to go alone and untrammelled. In this isolation from all care, all thoughts of responsibility, lies his only safety. If you are brave now, he will recompense you by coming back in the spring well and strong. Then you may rejoin him."

"If I might only rejoin him in the spring," I said, more hopefully, "then it would not seem so hard to part from him now, if it is for his good. When he returns from Nice I need never leave him again, Aunt Honoria?"

"You will never need to leave him again," assented my aunt's encouraging voice, but turning her face away from my questioning eyes; "in the mean time it is only necessary to be brave, to treat yourself to lessons of self-control, to encourage him in his desire to go to Nice, and become yourself reconciled to the idea of separation. Dr. Raynor depends a great deal upon your co-operation,—remember, my child, it is a case of life and death."

"I will remember," I said, choking, and dimly realizing that life would always seem like this gray twilight, full of gloom and dreary echoes, never to grow brighter, save with artificial light, till God would send the morning by-and-by,—*"I will let him go; but it breaks my heart, after all, Aunt Honoria."*

"You must not say those things to your uncle," here interposed her anxious voice, at the same time laying her hand firmly on mine; "he might be influenced by them,

he might decide to remain here, and that would prove to him a fatal decision. He must not see you cry or give expression to your sorrow in any way; on the contrary, you must endeavor to assure him of your desire to remain under my protection during his entire absence, that he may depart happy in every way. Promise me, Marguerite, to do this."

"Oh, aunt! how can I promise? how can I let him go alone?"

"Hush! promise, Marguerite." She was trembling herself now, and her burning eyes were fastened on my face with a craving anxiety, which I was powerless to withstand.

Brushing my tears away resolutely, and choking back my grief, I answered her, as quietly as I could, "I will promise to do that which you decide is best for me to do. I give you my word, Aunt Honoria." And then, with a dull ache of despair, I felt that at last misfortune had conquered me utterly.

For some time she sat, holding my hand in hers, talking to me kindly and reassuringly, framing a picture of the future in words of decision, wherein there were aerial depths of hope—a general harmony of conviction—that Uncle Will would love me all the more for being strong for his sake now, and by-and-by would return from Nice to love me better still. All the time she talked, her words seemed to grow farther and farther away, the twilight to make her face look deadly white, until I grew myself strangely agitated and ill at ease, not at all sorry when she said, presently,—

"I am going up-stairs to talk to your uncle a little while; when you join us you must prove yourself to be strong and good, giving him occasion to feel happy and encouraged. Remember, dear child, everything depends upon you,—he must either die or live." Saying this, she had left me to my desolation.

During the next week, intervening between this conversation and Uncle Will's departure for Europe, I won golden opinions from Mrs. Dare by an exhibition of self-control of which, she many times assured me, she had not deemed me capable. Only to my own soul—weak-

ened instead of strengthened by this constant warfare—was exhibited the true agony of the struggle to do what had been so plainly shown me was my duty. Once again, after this brief respite of peace and comparative happiness, the natural sequence of my uncle's sympathy in all my little despondencies, the black clouds seemed curtaining themselves about me remorselessly, never again to be lifted or sunshined. It required all the fervor of my young strength to maintain an entire equanimity while in the presence of Uncle Will, when he would so often allude to our approaching separation, now rapidly nearing. Fortunately for the maintenance of my self-possession, Mrs. Dare scarcely left us alone together a single instant, thus fortifying the fainting weakness of my resolution by the magnetism of her will. To do her justice, during those weary days of trial her kindness to me grew and prospered warmly, developing itself in many unexpected ways, and frequently betraying her, haughtily reserved as she almost invariably appeared, into expressions of tenderness which, while they softened my distrust, served to cement my allegiance to her with an adhesive mixture of increasing affection and gratitude. It was the first time she had ever evinced a really sincere regard for me or my feelings, and its momentary display, eager child that I was for love in the hearts of those with whom I was daily thrown, proved sufficient to win me to her purpose with an entirety which charmed and touched her. If I had only broken my word pledged to her, and, throwing myself on Uncle Will's love, confessed the weight of the sacrifice, my hunger to go with him,—how subtly I felt that in losing him I was deprived of all the love which I should know for years,—at the inexorable will of this woman I was sacrificing all the hope which had so brightened my life since I first saw his face,—how changed would have been the tenor of my life!

Although she had assured me time and again, with a repetition which harassed me by reason of its frequency, that it was Uncle Will's strongly-expressed desire for me to remain in Boston during his winter at Nice, he having declared himself averse to taking me with him,

even although Dr. Raynor had decided in favor of my going, yet I soon began to dimly suspect what she said was not quite true,—rather her will than his kept us apart. About this time she had long conversations with Uncle Will, in which I was not allowed to participate, being banished from their presence during their length, and when I was allowed to rejoin them, I could not mistake the look of satisfaction irradiating his face or the expression of subdued exultation which intensified hers. Upon each of these occasions she would make a great display of tenderness toward me, drawing me to her, and promising earnestly to be kind to me always, true to her promise to him; then he would look so pleased, his eyes glowing tenderly at us both, I could not but acquiesce in everything she said, even while my heart seemed dumbly breaking. One day, after one of these long conversations, wherein a strange gentleman had participated, a tall, sedate, gray-haired man with a grave face and deep-set eyes which seemed to look through and through one, I was coming up-stairs, bringing a bouquet of roses and heliotrope to replenish Uncle Will's vase, as was my custom every day, when I met this gentleman on the landing, face to face. Just as he caught sight of me he stopped short and watched me as I came toward him, with a queer, steadfast questioning in his eyes.

"Will you give me a rose, little girl?" he said, gravely. I was small for my age,—small, pale, and thin; I can write it now without a shudder; then even a thought of my homeliness was sufficient to occasion me suffering. I gave him a rose and a sprig of myrtle. "Your name is Marguerite Kent, is it not?" he added. Then, as I acquiesced, he took the rose and myrtle in one hand, and laid the other firmly on my head. "True, honest, plain," was his verdict, uttered in a low, serious undertone, as, drawing my face up to his, he scanned it earnestly; after this, bowing a farewell in a very slow, courteous manner, he went down-stairs.

When I went in to carry my flowers to Uncle Will, I found my aunt and uncle sitting together by the window,

hand in hand. As I entered, both turned their faces to smile at me. She seemed so devotedly attached to him, and Uncle Will in return so grateful, to trust her judgment in all things, that as time wore on, although the terror of separation from him clung as persistently to me as ever, yet I began to rely more confidently upon Mrs. Dare's affection, to hope that after he was gone she would prove herself in truth a friend.

During these days, sometimes when I would wander alone through the Common, at Uncle Will's command, he insisting upon my taking more exercise, to let the sunlight fall full upon me and eat the pallor out of my face, how hungrily my eyes caught a reflection, in these stretches of grass and trees, of the freer, larger features of Blossom Village! I had not written to Dr. Lescom yet, thinking probably he had gone West on his intended visit, and that it would be better for me to wait until I could definitely make known to him my ultimate plans, or rather those formed for my benefit or otherwise by my friends; yet sometimes, when driven hard by pain or nervous forebodings, I felt such a craving eating within me, to know the welfare of those I had left behind, that I was tempted to write to him and ascertain the truth. How vividly came to me visions of hours like these in temperature of color and weather, unlike these, however, in weight of discontent, when woods put on their coats of many colors, their scarlet shrouds, and the summer lay down to die.

"How I wish, Margie, I had a few of our magnolia blooms for you; they will be blooming all winter at the South. It makes me sad to see these children of beauty so imprisoned," Uncle Will said, as, on the day preceding his departure for Nice, I took up-stairs to him a bunch of mignonette, roses, and myrtle for the last time. "If we might only go together to look at them once, or if we might live our lives in my dear Southern home, I believe that look of suffering would fade out from your face, you would grow to be happy." My aunt's warning rang then in my ears, even as it had rung through all these long, weary days, "Spare him pain."

"I am quite happy now," I replied, smiling as brightly

as I was able. "You are getting well and strong again, and everybody is so kind to me,—how can I help being happy? Don't look so doubtful, Uncle Will, for I am really in earnest."

"Are you? I love to think of you as happy, my child. I have worried about you a great deal lately; you are not looking well; all the roses in your cheeks are white roses, dear."

"When you come back from Nice," I said, in a voice which I tried to make steady, but which quivered a little, "the roses will be blooming again in my cheeks and on the sweetbrier bushes in Miss Tabitha's garden. Then you will take me into the country, perhaps to Blossom Village. We will be very, very happy there, Uncle Will."

"And in the mean time?"

"In the mean time I am going to study hard. I need the application sadly; all my attempts hitherto have proved so useless. During the entire summer I have been unable to even look into my books more than a moment at a time. You know I have scarcely ever seen the inside of a school. Mamma used to teach me, and when she died papa did his best; but I am afraid I never shall be other than an ignoramus."

"I shall depend entirely upon your aunt to decide which is the best course for you to pursue," Uncle Will replied, gravely. "She spoke to me yesterday as to the advisability of your attending a boarding-school during the next three years——" He stopped suddenly; something in the expression of my face made him do so.

"The next three years!" I echoed, in much agitation.

"During the next three years," he repeated, very steadily, yet with an increased pallor changing his countenance. Then, without further preamble, he went on gravely to express a hope that during his absence I would allow my aunt's judgment to influence me in all things, assuring me, in yielding my will to hers upon subjects concerning which she was, through her greater age and experience, calculated to be wiser, I should please him, win her love, and be all the happier myself.

During the next hour we sat alone together, talking of

that future which looked so dismal to my eyes, in favor of which he sought to encourage me, assuring me of Mrs. Dare's intention to be kind and generous to me in every way, as interested in my welfare as though I was in truth her daughter; and I, in return, promising him, with trembling lips and a full heart, to regard his wishes faithfully in all things.

"Your aunt's ideas are peculiar in many respects," he said, by-and-by, in conclusion; "her manners at times cold and repellant. Close your eyes to this latter fact, since in truth her heart is warm, her love surely yours, and endeavor to acquiesce in her decisions, which I feel assured will only be found in your favor, however blind you may be at the time to their justice;" and his words were so eagerly spoken, so hopefully uttered, I could not but catch a little inspiration of his spirit, so that when Mrs. Dare came in presently fresh from her morning drive, and kissed me, as was always her wont now, I clung to her in a half-entreating way, which made her face grow tender and Uncle Will's eyes to brighten wonderfully.

The remainder of the day passed like a dream; looking back, I can only remember the continual display of affection upon the part of both Mrs. Dare and Uncle Will,—my last opportunity for a quiet talk with the latter had passed, Mrs. Dare left us alone together no more. From this hour to that which parted us one from the other never again to meet, save perhaps by-and-by in heaven, we were not suffered to talk longer or unreservedly of the future, lying a dead, white blank at my feet, stretching its lengths into far regions of gloom, where the stars seemed never to shine, only fires of sacrifice.

"I have ordered the carriage to be at the door at ten o'clock, Archibald," Mrs. Dare said, as the next morning I joined the family at breakfast; "of course you will accompany us to the depot to see William off."

My Uncle Dare, a small man, quiet-faced and voiced, with dull, gray eyes, habitually seeking the ground, indeed I had never yet been able to look full into them, replied very hesitatingly,—

"As you please, Honoria."

Somehow I had taken quite a liking to my Uncle Dare; upon the slightest provocation, however, as far as reciprocity was concerned, he having never spoken six words to me, nor even looked at me, after the first moment of recognition, or recognized the fact of my existence subsequent to that occasion in the slightest manner. Nevertheless, a subtle essence of affinity warmed my heart toward him, and long ago I had arrived at the conclusion that I had liked him much better than I did my Aunt Honoria. He had a disheartening way, among other peculiarities, of sitting at the table very passively, neither interesting himself apparently in anything or person about him, or provoking others to interest themselves in him, and, when he was obliged to speak, using as monosyllabic words as possible, at the same time cutting them short in such a jerky way as to distress the tympanum of one's ear; but, after all, there was such a certain sincerity of expression about him, an intangible entity of earnestness pervading the quaintness of his manners, so much restrained power in the close-knit of the gray, overhanging eyebrows, that the occasional gleams of intelligence flashing forth from the dull eyes reconciled one to the unpromising whole. Fortunately, on this occasion, Uncle Will was not present to be appalled by the lukewarmness of my Uncle Dare's acquiescence in his wife's proposition. By-and-by, however, when Uncle Will comes down-stairs prepared to enter the carriage waiting at the door to convey him to the depot, I am undeceived as to the temperature of Uncle Dare's sentiments regarding him. Through the half-closed door of the library I saw them standing together hand in hand, looking straight into each other's eyes, and Uncle Dare's face suddenly grew vivified.

"Only look at papa," Gertrude whispered, in astonishment, as we stood together in the hall waiting, while Mrs. Dare, who was fastening her gloves, answered in a voice at war with itself something about "melodrama" and "flights of sentiment," then entered the library to shock her husband into his impenetrable armor, and Uncle Will into saying good-by.

"My little girl," Uncle Will said, when, having drawn me away from the rest, he stood with his arm about me and his hand laid tenderly on my head, "I shall hope to see you again in a few months; in the mean time I want you to think of me sometimes, often if you can, and try with all your might to be true to yourself in other things; then when we meet again,"—here his voice shook audibly, and a sudden fire flushed the purity of his face,— "if not here, as we hope, let it be in God's world, that beautiful, upper world where so many of our dear ones are. We must pray for this, dear, to Him in whose love I place you now in this hour of parting." It sounded like a benediction; I could not answer, for an agony of tears choked my voice and eyes. "Marguerite, I have a last charge to give you: remember to obey your Aunt Honoria in all possible things. When weakened from attacks of that sensitiveness which threatens to embitter your life with its mistakes, refuge yourself among the fastnesses of faith, both in her and God's love. Now God bless you, dear, and good-by." Then I only clung to him, longingly, passionately, until Mrs. Dare's hands unclasped mine from about his neck.

## CHAPTER XV.

THE week subsequent to my uncle's departure passed slowly and very drearily. Looking back now, with steadied nerves, through the medium of a greater yet not perfect maturity, I can only define two very acute causes for misery among the chaotic sensations of my new existence (that it was the beginning of a new existence I felt intuitively, as the last glimpse of Uncle Will's tender face faded out of my life, leaving me to the sole guidance of my own passions, and a puppet to the will of others), those of isolation and homesickness, which in this world, to me, are the most harassing and maddening of all. It must be remembered, at this time I was

but a perfect child in experience, unused to great changes, having lived so many quiet years alone with my father, at Blossom Village, never forced to rely entirely upon myself; so that now, when my last earthly prop was taken from my support, it seemed to me as though I should always be helpless and never happy again. How soon and how keenly I began to feel the need of that genuine and immediate sympathy which—all my life had been mine, to comfort me in my mighty desolation, in the cold, well-regulated atmosphere of my new home, so mathematically exact in the temperature of its warmth! But the separation from my uncle, during these early days of my bereavement, was not the only cause for suffering; if possible, a still more bitter one was in store for me,—when Mrs. Dare refused me the consolation of corresponding with Dr. Lescom. One day, feeling especially desperate, my thoughts, as was their wont when surfeited with suffering, turned irresistibly to that country home,—mine so long, so beloved,—which I had left as I began to fear now, forever, I sat down to write to Dr. Lescom, not only as a temporary refuge from pain, but for comfort and encouragement,—which feeling sure, despite his usual cynicism, he would so willingly bestow. It was at this moment that Mrs. Dare happened to enter the library where I sat, and, upon ascertaining to whom I was writing, very decisively desired me to desist.

"I would prefer you to choose your correspondents elsewhere," she said, very calmly, utterly ignoring the hot flush which reddened my face painfully. "I regret, Marguerite, that you should not yourself see the wisdom of this, occupying the altered position you do, as my adopted daughter, and refrain from encouraging an intimacy with people no longer suitable acquaintances for you. Hereafter, I must beg you to remember my decision."

In vain I strove to combat her prejudices, in vain endeavored through the power of my tears and pleadings to induce her to revoke her decision.

"Uncle Will would not object to my writing and sending this letter," I said, half angrily, half deprecatingly, as she continued inexorable, negating each prayer as

soon as uttered; "Dr. Lescom is a gentleman, a thorough gentleman, and I love him very dearly!"

"It is time we came to an understanding," Mrs. Dare said, coldly, and looking me steadily in the face, "and a thorough understanding at that. Your uncle informed me, previous to his leaving Boston, he should expect me to exact the most perfect obedience from you in all things—entire obedience, mind you—as though you were in truth my daughter. I am disappointed in what he subsequently said, relative to your being docile and good-tempered."

"I would be good-tempered if I was not treated so unkindly," I answered, determinedly. "I am not used to having my friends spoken hardly of,—people whom I love and honor, and who were so kind to me in my trouble."

"You forget yourself," Mrs. Dare remarked, with much cool compassion.

"I do not forget myself. I know very well what I am saying. I have begged you as earnestly, as humbly as I can, to be allowed to write to my kind friend Dr. Lescom."

"And I have refused you." Her voice so coolly calm, her words so deliberately enunciated, exasperated me.

"Yes, and you have refused me," I answered, choking with anger; "you are selfish,—you do not care whether I am happy or not!"

"Marguerite!"

"No, you do not care," I repeated, brushing the tears hastily from my eyes and speaking fast and vehemently, "you do not like me,—I feel that you do not; you try to make me think you do, when you do not. If you did like me, you would let me be happy in my own way; you would not exact concession to which you have no right; you would not take such a pleasure in thwarting me—"

"You mistake, Marguerite," she interrupted, very calmly. "I do not deny you this indulgence from the fact that it would be a pleasure to you. I am actuated by no such unworthy motives; let this suffice. Both your manner and language are altogether too intemper-

ate for me to attempt to reason with you longer. I do not consider it necessary to repeat the explanation offered you, and which provoked this discussion. It is only sufficient for you to understand that I do not approve your writing or posting that or any other letter to Dr. Lescom."

"It is not sufficient," I answered, hastily. "I will write to Uncle Will, and ask him if I cannot send this letter." For the first time her face changed,—her eyes grew gloomier, and her lips compressed. "I will write to him," I went on, quickly, "and tell him that I am very unhappy, that——" Her face grown very white startled me.

"And I will also write," she said, in an undertone, trembling with repressed feeling, "to inform him how you have already learned to disregard his wishes, defied my authority in a most offensive manner, and have shown yourself to be at once ungenerous, ill-tempered, and spiteful to an alarming degree!"

Her words staggered me; excited as I was by her injustice, yet this threat, affecting Uncle Will's peace, as I knew it would if carried into execution, sobered me in an instant. How I feared her, standing opposite me and watching every change in my face with her steady, black eyes.

"I do not fear Uncle Will, Aunt Honoria," I ventured at length, trying to steady my voice and to speak calmly; "I love him too much to fear him; but I would dislike to give him occasion to think I have entirely forgotten his request for me to try and obey you during his absence. I love him very, very dearly, and although I still think you unjust in exacting this obedience so stringently from me, almost before he is out of sight of Boston, yet I will obey you for his sake, and for his sake only." Then I got up and went past her out from the room, to fight my indignation alone.

Perhaps she thought she had gone too far, or an impulse of remorse actuated her, for she came to my room presently, whither I had retired, "to have a good, long talk," as she said; and a good, long talk we had. But, notwithstanding our words were softly spoken, and I had



so far conquered myself as to be able to talk with moderation, so far humbled myself as to acknowledge my intemperance of both words and manner during the former conversation, yet, in return, there was no direct lessening of authority upon her part, only a slight softening of the curb with which she held me.

"We must not afflict your Uncle William with recapitulations of our little differences," she concluded, rising to go; "it would be an unjust measure, and one productive of much anxiety to him when he has so repeatedly exhorted us to be friends,—so invariably insisted upon my authority being all-sufficient for you during his absence. I shall refrain from so annoying him as long as possible,—leaving to you the consequences of your own perversity." Her words seemed to bind me round about with strong bands of iron.

"As I said before, I will make any concession for Uncle Will's sake." And with that she was obliged to be content.

The upshot of this disagreement was my being packed off to boarding-school within two weeks' time, and in this wise began one of the happiest portions of my life. But no state of happiness is ever thoroughly attained before we have passed through an intermediate state of trial, which in developing ushers us, dulled with a sensation of continued pain, into its brighter precincts. The hardest trial was yet to be endured, and this time it came in the guise of a changed name, to my great astonishment and indignation,—a metamorphosis from that of Kent to Dare. Now began a regular series of mimic battles, in which of course I always found myself the worsted party.

"Why do you not give way at once?" Gertrude said, as one day, upon entering my room unannounced, she found me bathed in tears, consequent upon my having just retired from one of these disastrous fields, a scene of utter defeat to me; "mamma dislikes your name,—she never liked your father, I believe, and the mere sound of the name borne by him makes her antagonistic sometimes to you. Before Uncle Will went away I overheard her telling him that, in case she assumed the responsibility

of your education and final success in the world, she should insist upon your becoming hers by name as well as by adoption."

"I do not belong to you or to your mother," I replied, indignantly; "therefore, why should I be called by your name? I do not wish to be indebted to your mother for either patronage or success."

"You have a dreadful temper," observed my Cousin Gertrude, very composedly.

"I know that, very well," I answered, more gently, the quick, hurt tears filling my eyes again; "but it was never so bad before. I have never been so tried,—people have always been kind to me, not unreasonable or exacting. Where I am treated unkindly I cannot help feeling indignant."

"You are untutored," replied Gertrude, gravely; "you forget the advantages accruing from a residence in Boston and the privilege of bearing the name of one of her proudest families."

And thereupon there ensued a conversation wherein she plead the propriety of my allowing my name to be metamorphosed into that of Dare, urging that it was a very small concession to make, and that if conceded I should be no longer subjected to ill-will from her or dislike upon the part of her mother.

"I am certain Uncle Will favored the change," she added, gravely, "for when mamma urged it, he said nothing in its disfavor, leaving it to you to decide. You must remember, Marguerite, that you have no relations by the name of Kent, and there is no reason why you should not take ours, or at least be called by it while you remain with us."

"Which will not be long," I answered, hopefully; "that is the very reason why I should not change my name, for when Uncle Will comes back it won't make the slightest difference to you what my name is; he has promised that I shall always live with him." Involuntarily my voice trembled at those last words, as a subtle look changed her face suddenly, merging itself into a half-pitying smile.

"You are building your castle on sand," she said,

mockingly; "it will crumble away from before your very eyes,—do you not see it for yourself?"

"See what for myself?" I queried, under my breath; "you are cruel; why do you keep me in suspense? tell me, why am I building my castle on sand?"

"Because we all realize very well that Uncle Will will never come back."

There was a long, dreadful pause,—broken only by her rising and going to the window, where she stood with her face turned from me a long while, leaving me to master myself, to still the agony of my heart. So all my forebodings were to be realized, all my anxious pain to be increased tenfold. The thought which had harassed me so continually, half-formed, yet unexpressed even to myself, was to come true,—I would never see Uncle Will again,—his last words had been those of a parting forever! And, bitterest thought of all, I must so acquiesce hereafter in all the exactions of these people as to gain their toleration,—for to them must I be indebted henceforward for my daily bread. Well, after all, they had borne with me, humored my perversities more than most people perhaps would have done, and had striven to be kind to me, even when provoked by my hasty words to be otherwise. Perhaps if I tried to be obliging, more lovable, they would by-and-by learn in truth to love me; then, then, I would love them in return, and everything would be happy, if they would only do this,—learn to love me.

"Marguerite," Gertrude interrupted my thoughts, turning, as she spoke, from the window, "I am very sorry for you, but of course it can't be helped. The doctor told mamma yesterday it would be only by the working of a miracle that he would return to us in the spring, that if he had remained here he would not have lived two months; his only hope was in going to Nice. Uncle Will has been an invalid many years. Just before he went up into the country for you he had another hemorrhage. We all know he will never recover. The only thing left for you to do is to be grateful, and make yourself more agreeable to mamma." I could not answer her,—the words or voice would not come; I only sat and

looked at her, stunned into an acquiescence in anything she might say. "You must remember, you have been very violent sometimes, so much so as to quite dismay mamma, who has never been accustomed to such exhibitions. She told me a little while ago she feared it would be necessary to write Uncle Will about you, and beseech him to interpose his authority to prevent——"

"Ask her not to write to Uncle Will," I managed to whisper, very imploringly; "do not let me give him pain; he has been so good and kind to me."

"She does not wish to do so," Gertrude replied, turning once more to the window, and speaking in the same quick, resolute manner; "she understands perfectly that such an instance of your ingratitude, depending as he does so entirely upon your being obedient to mamma and good-tempered, would only serve to hasten the catastrophe which is so imminent, and render his last moments painful."

How I struggled with myself to be brave, to speak calmly! "Gertrude, tell your mother I will obey her henceforth,—henceforth, for Uncle Will's sake." Then, thoroughly overcome by the weight of my sorrow and pain, my last remnant of self-possession became annihilated.

Perhaps it was as well I should be awakened from my dream of independence—made sweet by the thought of living by-and-by sheltered only in Uncle Will's love—thus rudely, that the shock might be quicker over, although more terrible while it lasted, and that sooner I might humble myself beneath the Juggernaut of Mrs. Dare's inexorable will. Henceforth her will must be my law; that at least I ought to endeavor to reconcile mine to hers, acknowledge the measure of her good grace by so conducting myself, if possible, as not to endanger our future amicable relations, or give occasion for her to write Uncle Will the threatened pain-dealing letter, I began to realize very sharply. I was no longer my uncle's adopted child, to live always with him, to receive my benefits at his considerate hands, but rather a waif on the world's ocean, to be tossed hither and thither if venturesome, or, if supple in the hands of fate, to rest quietly upon some

lee shore, chained to the stony rigor of hard-hearted rocks. I could hope nothing from Uncle Will's intervention; it would be cruel to annoy him with a knowledge of my little unhappinesses; it was only left to me to so humor my letters to him, and those of my aunt indirectly, as to soften his pangs at leaving me behind, which I now felt assured he had suffered, and make blessed as possible his last days on earth.

Upon the day subsequent to this latter conversation with my Cousin Gertrude, Mrs. Dare informed me that in little more than a week's time I was to enter upon my studies at — Institute, to remain there a pupil during the next three years, or until I should thoroughly finish my education. "And upon your return," she added, very kindly, "I shall hope to find you greatly improved and well calculated to fill the position of a daughter to me. We must misunderstand each other no longer, but henceforth prove firm and fast friends." And in this way it happened that upon my entrance into the school selected for my reception, among the lovely western hills, my name henceforth was known as Marguerite Dare.

## CHAPTER XVI.

THREE years at boarding-school! How many ghosts of long ago do these five words resurrect from the ashes of memorial dust! The ferrying of the Charonic barge lapses in here between the leaves of my girlish and later woman life, carrying the burden of my dead childhood through the waters of Styx. Now my feet, only just growing in experience and awakening to the knowledge of the stones paving so jaggedly the road of life, paused for one irresolute instant upon the sharply-shelving banks of the inevitable, vocal with the thunders of the tumult. Does not Goethe say how, in this moment of transition from immaturity to strength, when the wars of the world deluged the air with flying missiles, and the cries of the

dying shuddered in his ears, he buried himself in those catacombs of scriptural idyls wherein the pastoral patriarchs sang God's glory and wrote the prestige of his beneficence in letters of white upon the Syrian plains?

During these days of estrangement from the world, shut in from contact with the breathing humanity without the closed gates of the institute-grounds by inexorable authority and terse regulations, I became each day mentally stronger and braver, jewelizing the works of my mind with precious stones of thought, which, once set, have remained thus far unimpaired. Here at school it was I formed the dearest friendships of my life, ties which have thus far continued to bind me in powerful and lasting chains of love. How true and inflexible are these chains, whereof the links are pure and unalloyed gold, time hath proved; and the end is not yet. Looking forward to the life which was to come by-and-by, after I should leave the seclusion of my studies, how fair did it seem, and how sweet the thought that perhaps my path therein might be crossed by the path of these, the truest, the best of friends!

Strengthened and invigorated as the years passed slowly on, I grew and prospered, both mentally and physically, with surprising vigor: all the scales of my childish weaknesses seemed to fall off from me disappointed and crumbling away; resurrected to me from their dust came new thoughts, fresh hopes, delighting me by reason of their constancy. All the past faded further and further away; vivified to new exertions and dreams, I seemed lifted far above myself, and freshened to each new conflict, which whether present or coming or however sharp, I would dare and conquer. Often in the twilight of the autumn days, or later, when the land lay shrouded in white and the stars peeped through their frosty rims, shivering, did I betake myself to one of the deserted music-rooms, and there rhyme my ecstasies in melody. Then softly they would come to listen to me, whispering among themselves of a power in my voice and touch which passed all understanding. Music became to me the passion of my life,—the symphonetic splendors of Bach, Graun, Haydn, and Mozart, those

German necromancers, inspired me with a most thorough and lasting devotion, the definitions of their powerful imageries seeming to explain their mysteries to my longings with a perfection of intelligence which startled me into vain attempts to follow closely in their footsteps. All the material attributes of ordinary music in the rapid development of my love, which at first had won my wavering enthusiasm, soon became drowned in the waves of this greater ocean, and when tempted, during these inspired moments to improvisation, to give renewed birth to my passion in long, dreamy madrigals, how lost I became in the consecration of my muse! how fevered with these sister-thoughts, which, leading me blindfolded through grand way-passages, left me fainting with ecstasy on the other side! Time passing on, while leaving these footprints on my soul, left others on the soil of heaven.

Within six months of my entrance upon my studies at — Institute, a letter came from Mrs. Dare telling me Uncle Will was not expected to live through the spring, —that she intended starting immediately for Nice, in order to be with him and comfort him as much as possible at the last. A letter received six weeks subsequently from Nice, where she had arrived just in time to bid him good-by, announced his death. "He passed away very quietly," she wrote, "expressing a great deal of happiness at having me with him. He had failed a great deal, was very thin and emaciated, yet his face had not changed. He appeared very happy to hear of your progress in your studies, was very solicitous as to your continued welfare, and seemed much pleased with your numerous letters, expressing, as they have, such an entire satisfaction in your school. You will feel recompensed, I know, my dear Marguerite, for your self-control and generosity in not annoying him with your many little unhappinesses." Then came additional advice, relative to my making myself agreeable to my teachers, a judicious selection of friends from among my schoolmates, and a wish that the future would restore to her a young lady refined, cultivated, and thoroughly calculated to fill the position of daughter to her and that of a sister to Gertrude. "Your Uncle Will," she concluded, at length, "was ex-

tremely emphatic on this point,—that you should endeavor to so conduct yourself as to prove a faithful and deserving daughter to me, and thus, meriting my love in return, win for yourself a position which he considered, and desired you also to consider, to be indispensable to your happiness."

I read this letter again and again, endeavoring faithfully to engrave each word indelibly upon my heart as a message from the dead. To try and please Uncle Will in every wish he had formed for me while living, I had resolved long ago; now, since he had gone, this charge would be doubly sacred. Ah, how I sorrowed for him! how a sense of his loss seemed for a time to resurrect from their graves the old, old pains and tremblings! how I had longed to see him once again before he should die, and had clung to the frail, mocking hope of having him return to me with the spring, only now to be stunned with a sharp disappointment!

Once again I became foolishly weak and troubled in spirit, mourning over this new pain and cradling it in my heart with a persistency which savored of rebellion; but, gradually growing stronger, invigorated by my later conceptions of life and its duties, this pain gradually lessened its intensity, until at length its sting became entirely removed, and only the after-essence of faith in God's mercy remained.

The subsequent years of my school-life passed quietly and somewhat monotonously; only once did I return to Boston during those long months of devotion to my studies. This happened about a year after my entrance into — Institute. I only remained there about two weeks, being treated during my visit, however, with much kindness both by my aunt and Cousin Gertrude. From that time until I left school for good, immediately after the close of the rebellion, I did not again visit Boston, not being urged to do so at first, and then the departure of Mrs. Dare and Gertrude for Europe soon after, precluding the possibility of my doing so until their return, my Uncle Dare's house being closed during their entire absence. Thus I gradually became accustomed to spending my vacations either very quietly at school or else

with my friends, Jessie Brent and Mabel Chauncy, at W——.

During my second year of school-life, I was shocked upon receiving the intelligence of Mr. Hoffman's death, Cousin Valerie's husband, from apoplexy, consequent upon his having become beggared through unfortunate speculations in gold. How I pitied the young widow with her little child left desolate! how my heart ached for her in her unwonted state of destitution! and how relieved I was when a subsequent letter from Gertrude, who, together with her mother, had returned immediately from abroad upon hearing of the catastrophe, informed me they had succeeded in saving quite a little competency for Valerie and her child from the general wreck, and that they had returned to her father's house to live! "Valerie does not appear very broken-hearted," thus the letter ran, "unless when some relic of her past grandeur overwhelms her with a flood of self-commiseration. *Sic transit gloria mundi!* How much happier she would have been, and how much better satisfied with life, if she had only laid up for herself a wealth of erudition, which neither moth nor rust doth corrupt! I am happy to learn, Cousin Marguerite, that you are endeavoring to follow in my footsteps, for, not possessing sufficient beauty for success, it is at least possible for a child to fill half the footprint of a man, and in your intellectual endeavor you may thus far be successful."

This epistle being eminently characteristic both in tone and point, it did not fail to elicit much amused laughter from me when its sentences grew epigrammatic with egotism. Few and far between these epistolary angel-visits proved, one a month being the average, either from Gertrude or Mrs. Dare. How I hungered to receive but one single line, if no more, from Dr. Lescom, telling me about Blossom Village, Mehitable, Miss Tabitha, and Cecil Throckmorton, as I had already learned to call the blind man in my thoughts! how I longed to visit once more my father's grave, to tread the sleepy woodland paths and sun myself in the sweetest sunlight in all the world to me, that which slumbered on the cradling hills of Blossom Village! The promise made to Mrs. Dare

long ago that I would not again attempt to write to Dr. Lescom without her consent, I had not broken. Sometimes the trial was great,—I could scarcely resist the impulse to write and explain to him my long, ungrateful silence, to assure him of my continued affection, and endeavor to reinstate myself in his estimation, feeling, as I did, I had so humiliated my position therein as to deserve his utmost scorn; yet, deterred from thus betraying my faith with Mrs. Dare by the remembrance of Uncle Will's exhortation to prove myself a true daughter unto her in all things, I became gradually happier in conscience as I grew less true to myself in this. But I did not achieve this self-victory without many a severe struggle, each longer and more desperate than the last, until at each recurrence of its pangs I learned to put it resolutely from me, shutting my eyes and ears to its beseechings.

Ah! but how sore I felt when, looking back, I measured this my disloyalty by the gauge of Dr. Lescom's generosity! how thoroughly humiliated and beggared in that delicacy of gratitude which he so deserved at my hands! yet I did it all for his sake,—I sacrificed all my pride and affection for Uncle Will's sake, who, through his infinite goodness to me, had won the entirety of my life's wages. "You are not pretty, Marguerite," said my particular crony, Mabel Chauncy, one afternoon about two weeks previous to our final departure from school, "but you are astonishing, that reddish gold hair is so luxuriant and unusual; then your eyes are so big, black, and dreamy, and your face peculiarly pale, I know you will be a success."

"Rare, pale Margaret, and all that Tennysonian fol-de-rol," I answered, trying to speak carelessly, but failing in the attempt. I was so happy to be assured, even by prejudiced Mabel, that the past three years had not fulfilled the prophecy of eternal ugliness.

This Mabel Chauncy could well afford to be lavishly generous in her admiration of others, being acknowledged by everybody to be the prettiest girl in school,—a chestnut-haired girl with mischievous gray eyes and the loveliest plump petite figure in the world. I think those last



two weeks of my school-life about the sweetest I have ever experienced. Feeling that the hour, swift-footed, was drawing near, when we would be forced to bid good-bye to each other, after all these long and intimate months of crony life, to overstep the threshold of the world and stand face to face with its armored wisdom, we seemed during those last two weeks to lose all consciousness of a separate existence, to vie with each other in little acts of love, to exult in the strength of a friendship at once beautiful and sincere.

## CHAPTER XVII.

*May 20, 1865.*—Six weeks ago to-day I returned home. Ah, what a precious word 'home' is,—yet what a mockery to me! I only wish I could get the stone out of my toad's head to antidote the poison of all the thoughts which have been harassing me during the last two hours. I feel like Noah's dove. I am not one mite a cuckoo in my aspirations. I have been flying on my sprouting wings of hope over all the waters of the past and present, to find just one olive-branch to carry with me into my ark of the future, which sails nearer and nearer.

I have just returned from a shopping-excursion with Mrs. Dare, who was so kind and thoughtful as to give Madame P—— a white organdy to make up into a dinner-dress for me, in time for her little party, week after next, given in honor of her nephew Murray Dare's return from Europe, who has been traveling abroad during the last three years,—for his health, as Mrs. Dare says, but, as I shrewdly suspect, to escape the danger of war-going or the opprobrium attached to the names of stay-at-home volunteers. How vividly recurs to me the conversation wherein the blind man, Cecil Throckmorton, so strongly denounced such cowardice. Ah, I wonder! I wonder! I know I shall look like a fright in this white organdy;

for I have worn nothing but black during the past three years, and—I have red hair! I am rather sorry I am not perfectly indifferent to my personal appearance. Now, vain as I am, I could never make a decent heroine; for heroines are always preferring to comb their hair with their fingers, seated on wet stones at five o'clock in the morning beside woodland fountains, to dress in the most outlandish manner, and to consider a mirror in the light of a personal insult offered by fate if by chance they find themselves reflected therein. I am afraid that I am vain. I want to be beautiful,—being subtly convinced that a pleasing whole is indispensable to the existence of sentiment. Red hair and sentiment, with poverty thrown in,—ah, there's the rub! Why cannot I be beautiful, when everybody about me is beautiful? My Cousin Gertrude is undeniably handsome; not exquisite or bewildering, like Valerie, who, despite her widowhood and numerous other afflictions, continues as fresh-looking as on that evening long ago when I first saw her in New York. But Gertrude is tall, very stately, like Mrs. Dare, with a superbly-developed figure, a dark, haughty, aristocratic face, which always seems burning the intensity of its pride out through the splendor of her dead-black eyes.

*May 24.*—Isn't there a saying that if one speaks of a certain wicked personage one is sure to see his horns? I was interrupted day before yesterday by the entrance of my Cousin Gertrude, who came to read an essay which she had been scribbling during the past week, its subject being the Homeric age and glory,—something which I neither thoroughly understand nor care about. There was a great deal in her essay condemnatory of the modern hypothesis that the Iliad was the work of several master-minds, many quotations from the Iliad and Odyssey,—a rather pointless sarcasm on the *Henriade* of Voltaire and the *Italia Liberata* of the pedantic Trissino,—satirizing them as meager and vain imitations of Homer's epic glory. I did not like her lukewarm praise of Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*, or of Dante's soul-songs; I did not sympathize in her grandiloquent sentences, generously interlarded with Latin and Greek quotations, or her abstruse exposition of the origin and characters of the Homeric



epics. "The sound of the falling walls of Troy thunder in my ears as I read," she exclaimed, enthusiastically, when, having finished reading, she laid her manuscript aside. "The dramatic harmony of Homer's conceptions holds one fast in strong hands of imagery; the grandly sustained glory of his descriptions, the mechanical effects in the supernatural volition of his characters, are magical in their expression. Ah, Marguerite, how thoroughly I appreciate all this!"

I smiled hypocritically, as though sympathizing in all she said: I was only anxious for her to get through with her rhapsodical flights and depart, for the prospect of a walk before dinner began to look very dubious. Unfortunately, my smile encouraged her to stay. "I intend sending this manuscript to one of our magazines, feeling assured they will recognize the power of my analytical genius, critical discernment, and, in addition to accepting this, will entreat me to become a regular contributor to their pages. In the mean time, I am glad to find you so interested in my success. Valerie entirely disregards all my claims upon her sympathy, I am sorry to say; and although mamma acknowledges the fact of my genius, yet circumstances prevent her from interesting herself in my progress as she ought."

"I shall be happy to assist you in any way possible," I answered, desperately.

"That will not be at all necessary," replied my cousin, looking at me in a sort of angry amazement. "You misunderstand me: I only require that when I am prompted to favor you with select readings from my different manuscripts previous to publication, you will acknowledge yourself benefited."

"Oh, Gil Blas!" I mentally exclaimed, in a paroxysm of horror; then, aloud, "Oh, yes," smiling very deceitfully. Evidently mollified, she went on in a sort of monologue to build up a skeleton for her next essay, wherein the bones of poor Boccaccio formed the vertebræ, with a skull of Dante as a frontispiece, and the finger-joints of Aretino to play a dirge. "La bellissima Beatrice," the "Vita Nuova," the "Divina Commedia," and the biographical tendernesses of Aretino and Boccaccio were

worked up into such an inextricable tangle of criticism, and what seemed to me impious disrespect, that I fairly shivered, and expected every moment to hear dead Boccaccio turn over in his coffin and groan. Fortunately for the maintenance of my mental equilibrium, the dressing-bell for dinner rang suddenly, cutting her short in the middle of one of her paroxysms of big words, just as I expected to see her soar up through the ceiling. I have heard many epigrams uttered upon the subject of Greek-loving, pedantic, modern Athenian girls, but to have the conviction of their point brought home to one's nerves in such an overwhelming manner as this is anything but agreeable.

Since my return from school my life here, in my aunt's house, has proved thus far a decidedly pleasant one. Perhaps I have grown wiser, Mrs. Dare more just, or mayhap both these facts may have a great deal to do with this change, which allows us to get along admirably together and prevents our having even a first quarrel. Valerie is all that could be expected in a cousin; she is sweet-tempered, quite unselfish, and, above everything, beautiful. Ah, yes, how beautiful she is!—one of those faces which inspired Greuze. I think we shall be capital friends by-and-by; now she seems a little indifferent, uncaring of my love, yet never exactly unkind; but then, I must not forget, she has met with so much trouble, and perhaps I ought not to think her either indifferent or uncaring. Her little boy Richard, or Dixie as he is called (a very unpatriotic nickname, *par parenthèse*), is not a handsome child: to be sure, he has eyes which match his mother's in size and color, but he is fat and clumsy. As to Gertrude I have nothing to say. I doubt if she will improve on acquaintance. She likes me just so far as I am amenable to her will: if I should rebel, how I would fall from grace! There is one thing certain, I must endeavor not to fall from any of their graces, for they are very, very kind to me, undeserving as I am. This is the only way in which I can show my gratitude!

I begin to realize very sharply that I am destined to live the life of a nobody in the world, to fill in the chinks of everybody else's vanities besides my own. I feel this

assurance in my bones. Oh, how they ache with such prophecies sometimes! I am too young to have this kind of rheumatism, but what can I do?

*May 25.*—The ——th Regiment has just passed the house, returning home from the war, and never before did I see such crowded streets, such an aspen forest of handkerchiefs. I am afraid I disgusted Mrs. Dare infinitely by betraying such a weak sentimentality, as, when the glorious fellows marched by, with bullet-eaten flags, embroidered with blood, flying above their meager ranks, a few impetuous tears came into my eyes. But how could I help them? When looking at these veterans, my thoughts reverted involuntarily to those, equally brave and noble, who sleep to-day a laureled sleep under the blood-washed sod of the South. "Those eloquent eyes of yours are weaving a crown of pearls for their graves," whispered Murray Dare, as I said something of this kind in answer to her remark relative to "mistaken sentiment" and "unappreciated enthusiasm." "Who would not envy the dead for such laurels as these?" Although I have only seen Murray Dare twice, yet I cannot help believing him to be a downright simpleton,—an egregious simpleton, in fact, and a regular Polyphemus in his cyclopean selfishness, which renders him only one-ideaed (an execrable pun, O diary), and incapable of being blinded, except by some strategic means, from sacrificing everybody else to his vanity.

During these days of vivid excitement, of victory and returning heroes, how sometimes I wonder if Cecil Throckmorton is among these victors, if he, recovered alike in spirit and flesh, has successfully fought his good fight out under the dear old flag, or whether he lies asleep—as so many others sleep—in the arms of glory! Will I ever see him again, or dear Dr. Lescom's face? Have the cruel pages of fate shut themselves in between their hearts and mine? This cruel bondage of will and body,—must it last forever? Was I born but to serve out the wages of my life under the lash of this inexorable slavery? God, thou knowest best,—I am pledged to thee; keep me from falling! A letter received to-day from Mabel Chauncy has done me an infinity of good. She writes that she is

coming to Boston soon, when she will call upon me here. How the thought of her coming warms my heart! Why is it, that during all my intimacy with Mabel, I have never mentioned Cecil Throckmorton's name, or aught of my previous life at Blossom Village? Is it because Mrs. Dare desired me so authoritatively to bury my past, and that in obedience to her will I have suffered it only to live in my own heart?

*May 26, 18* .—I have made a discovery! This morning, as I came up-stairs from luncheon, just as I reached the upper hall, I beheld a door at the farther extremity of it, which I had never before seen opened, ajar, and a curiously quaint little face pushing itself out and watching me very silently with a pair of remarkably large, brilliant, and expressive dark eyes. Just as soon as these eyes became aware that I was looking toward them, reciprocating their scrutiny, they suddenly disappeared, and the door was banged to! My following and interesting myself in the possessor of these eyes elucidated the fact that Mrs. Dare is the mother of another child, of whom I have never even heard, a poor, deformed little boy, named Archibald.

"Lor', Miss Marguerite," said Barry, the girl who takes care of him, and whose acquaintance I made some time before I left for school, but whose position in Mrs. Dare's house I had never fully comprehended, "you can't expect such a grand lady as Mrs. Dare to like a child like that, all humpbacked and crooked. What good is he to her?"

This was said, much to my pain, in the very presence of the poor child, as he stood endeavoring to hide himself behind her from me when I had followed him through the mysterious door into this dark, uncomfortable chamber in the back of the house.

"What is his name?"

"Archibald, miss, for his father,—but I calls him Archie."

"Archie, won't you let me kiss you?"

But Archie only hid himself the more, and seemed trembling all over,—whether from temper or fright I could not determine.

"He's afeared of you, miss," Barry said, apologetically; "he isn't used to strangers, nobody ever speaks to him but me and his father; he's a queer child. I am afeared his mind is a little crooked, too."

"How old is he?"

"Ten years come Christmas, miss."

I was inexpressibly astonished to hear this, for the boy did not appear over five years of age, he was so small and thin.

"I've had the care of him ever since he was born," Barry continued, seizing him firmly in her arms, where he remained quiescent, obstinately turning his face away from me and hiding it on her shoulder, "and I'm fond of him, although he is a fright. You don't know, miss, what a turn it gave my lady when she found out the baby was a crooked one,—you see she had such great ideas of what a boy should be, and was overanxious that he should be smart and take his father's name and honor. So when it came on her that, after all her planning and hoping, the boy would be humpbacked and unshapen, why, it made her quite raging-like, for my lady has a dreadful temper, as you must know, miss."

To this latter part of her speech I paid no attention. "Do you think it right to talk of his deformities so freely before him?"

"Oh, lor', miss, he doesn't mind; I dare say he doesn't understand,—you see nobody troubles themselves about him 'cept me and his pa."

"His mother," I began, very much shocked; but Barry interrupted me.

"There's nothing to be said about his mother 'cept she hates him, and that is all. You see it was a great disappointment to a fine, handsome lady like her, and of course those who has no business to blame her had better hold their tongues, as I says to myself sometimes when I feels a little wrathly about it. I can remember so well all the fine things that came from Paris for him in a big chest-like concern,—dresses like cobwebs, all covered with beautiful lace and perfumed beautifully, and bibs and cloaks embroidered to kill, and a grand christening robe that would have made your eyes water, miss, it was so

elegant; it cost three hundred dollars all by itself, they said, and my lady, who doesn't show much kindness for anything generally, was beside herself over them, saying they weren't handsome enough for her boy; for she expected it would be a boy all along, and that he should be the finest baby in Boston. And it was so beautiful to see them both—master and my lady—looking over the things together, the first time they'd ever been seen loving-like, counting on the beauty of the baby that was to come and how rich they would make him. You see, miss, we all has our disappointments."

"Yes, indeed," I said, softly, and the tears came into my eyes as I saw the poor little head lying so quietly on her shoulder.

"We all has our disappointments," Barry repeated, with a sigh, "but we all takes them differently. Some takes them like a colic, and nothing will cure that kind so quick as drink will. Then, some people has them like the fever, and gets worse and worse, till they die; and others get caked over the way the frog-pond does in winter; but my lady went regular crazy, screaming at everybody, and only got well after she had burnt the pretty clothes all up; yes, every stitch of those pretty Paris clothes, miss," Barry added, nodding her head at my astonished face, "lace, ribbon, and all, even to the beautiful thread-lace curtains to hang over the crib, she burnt all up by herself one day in her room when nobody was by."

The little head, lying so still on her shoulder, slightly moved.

"Does Archie want his dinner?" asked Barry, with much rough kindness expressed both in her voice and manner. "Will Archie stay with the lady while Barry goes down-stairs and gets his dinner for him?"

But Archie did not move again, and would not answer.

"He's dreadful timid, miss," Barry said, gravely. "It puts him almost into a fit to be spoken to by strangers; and I has to be careful about frightening him, he gets so bad sometimes; he can't help it, you know, miss, for he leads such a lonely life. None of the children will play with him; and it makes my lady so raging to have him brought where she is."

"I only wish I had known this before," I exclaimed, earnestly, trying to steady my voice, so that my hot indignation and pain would not quiver through. "I might have come here often and endeavored to make him like me. I love little children, and I am sure I would love this poor little thing."

"I am glad I didn't scold him for going to the door, then," Barry answered, evidently pleased, "as I generally do when he does things like that. I am always so afeared his mother will see him and make a row that I tries to keep him from that part of the house as much as I can."

"And I am glad that I caught him just as I did," I said, gently. "His beautiful eyes attracted me first, they are so large and expressive."

"Yes, indeed, miss, his eyes are wonderfully like diamonds and no mistake, for all he's so ugly-shaped and the children call him names sometimes in the street. Many are the ladies and gentlemen who have stopped me and told me, when I've taken him out to walk, that his eyes are the most beautiful they ever saw. I can tell you, miss, there's many a mother who would love, if they couldn't be proud of, such a child."

"You are very fond of him, Barry?"

"How can I help it, miss, when I've had the whole care of him for ten long years,—from almost the very first day he was born? Then he is such an uncomplaining child, although he's very sick sometimes with sorts of fits and strange fancies; yet he's gentle and quiet, and I doesn't like noisy children."

"I only wish I knew how to make him get used to me and love me without frightening him," I said, eagerly, as the child still lay, with his frail wee arms clasped about her neck and his face hidden in her neck.

"No, it wouldn't do to frighten him," Barry said, gravely; "and I don't see exactly how he can get used to you all at once. I'm afeared it will be some time before he'll get regular loving of you. You see he doesn't know how to take that kind of treatment. He's too used to being left to himself, and I'm afeared if you tried all at once to make up to him, it might put him into a fit."

"I mustn't do that," I whispered, awe-stricken. "I will be very gentle; he will become gradually used to me——"

"Now, if you should come every day," interposed Barry, hesitatingly, looking at me half doubtfully.

"You think I am not in earnest," I said, smiling; "that I will only like Archie a little while, and then leave him just as soon as I get tired."

"Well, young ladies are so contrary-minded and fickle sometimes, you know, miss," Barry said, apologetically; "and I shouldn't like for Archie to be treated rough that way by any one he'd get fond of. He's too queer and fanciful; and it might make him unhappy. You see, he's used to being left alone to himself, and doesn't know anything else. Now, if you should make him fond of you, and let him see how pleasant it is to be loved by other people, perhaps it would be bad for him and make him unhappy."

"Only let me try, Barry," I said, wistfully. "Indeed I am not cruel that way. Those whom I pretend to love I love dearly. I don't think I am either fickle or fanciful."

"No, I don't know as you are," Barry said, half propitiated. "Your face looks very good and sweet, and mighty handsomer to my taste than either Miss Gertrude's or Miss Valerie's, as I can't help calling Mrs. Hoffman, poor dear; but, Miss Marguerite, you see I has to answer to his father. Quiet as master is, he's mighty fond of Archie; and if I should consent to anything that would make Archie unhappy, I'd be driven away from him, and master, who I really like, miss, and honor, would never forgive me."

How womanly and true this Irish girl looked, uttering these words, with that poor child shielded in her arms.

"But his father would like to have me love Archie."

"Ah, yes, bless your heart!" cried Barry, earnestly. "He's just that anxiety to have Archie loved that it makes trouble between my lady and him. He doesn't like her treatment of him, and they used to have high words about it, for I've heard them many and many a time. But that was quite long ago, and now master has quieted down and don't say no more, for he sees it wouldn't do any good."

"I will please uncle in loving Archie dearly," I said, earnestly. "I will come every day to see him, and I will never forsake him."

"If you'd be sure not to do that," Barry answered, doubtfully. "You see, I hasn't much faith in human nature after all. There seems to be a big pound of selfishness in the world to every feather's weight of generosity. Now, I can just tell you, Miss Marguerite, what I've seen in two words. There's Miss Valerie, our young lady, who's been said to be the beautifulest young woman in the whole of Boston, with her sweet blue eyes and white skin, who has tried the game of being kind to Archie here. There was a time before she was married to Mr. Hoffman, who wasn't nice enough for her, and good riddance to him,—God forgive me for saying so!—when she was greatly in debt to the milliners and dress-makers down-town, and didn't know how to get money from master to pay them; for she'd spend a great deal over her allowance. Well, what did she do but try to get round master by being kind to Archie here. For a whole week she came here every blessed day, and was kind to him, holding him in her arms and the like of it, until master got wind of it and gave her the money to pay her debts. Then, what do you think? I'll never forgive Miss Valerie for this deceit. The very next day she met me and Archie on the street, and for all he called out to her, crying, 'sister! sister!' as though his little heart was breaking, she wouldn't speak to him or even look at him; and from that day to this she has never come to see him again." Barry stopped, out of breath, with her face grown very red and angry. As for me, I felt sick to my very soul at such a story of thorough heartlessness. "I'll never forgive Miss Valerie for that," she went on, angrily. "Although she is our young lady, yet I can't help saying it was very mean of her. I know very well that Archie is a fright, and my lady can't bear him because of it. But for our young ladies, Miss Valerie and Miss Gertrude, his own sisters, to meet him on the street nearly every day and not speak to him, I say is downright shameful." I could say nothing in reply; I was silenced. "There's no use getting mad about it

though," Barry continued, wiping her excited face with her apron, and walking backward and forward with the child in her arms; "and it's nothing to me, 'cept I like Archie and don't want him troubled. Now, Miss Marguerite, at first I was pleased at your taking a fancy to him, and thought I'd like to have you care for him; but since I've been thinking Miss Valerie's conduct over, I've lost my faith in human nature, and has changed my mind."

"But you will change it again, Barry."

"No, I don't think I shall, miss; leastwise not to-day. I mustn't have Archie troubled again; master would kill me."

"He would scarcely do that," I answered, very quietly, "when he knows that I love Archie and pity him truly, and desire with all my heart to serve him and make him happy."

Barry's face began to soften. "Well, miss, you come again to-morrow about this time, and we'll talk it over; perhaps I'll change my mind, for I'm mad now and couldn't decide right. I'll say this for you, miss,—that all the servants, from Murray down, barring Celeste (who is a nuisance), speak kindly of you, as being very mild-spoken, good, and lady-like, and that goes a good ways; for you see I has the care of Archie, and am responsible to master, so I'll decide to-morrow;" and it was useless to endeavor to combat this resolution.

"Won't you let me kiss him just once, before I go?"

"If you won't give him a fit," said Barry, greatly mollified; "somehow I like you, miss, and—but, as I said before, I'll decide to-morrow."

The child lay motionless in her arms, breathing softly; the long, fair curls hid the deformity of his shape with their lavish wealth, and the wee face, lying so still, looked very pale and spiritual, as softly I bent over him to kiss the soft, white cheek.

"Why, he is sound asleep, Barry."

"Yes, he has that way; he goes off queerly sometimes, when you least expect it; often I gets frightened, he looks so like death."

"How peaceful and sweet."



"Yes, bless your heart," Barry whispered, laying the little form on the bed with a great display of affectionate gentleness; "he always seems that way when he is asleep,—sometimes he smiles like an angel, and talks to himself, and seems so happy that I hates to have him wake up."

Lovingly I knelt down beside the child, and laid my face beside his.

"Ah, that's beautiful," whispered Barry, in a warm ecstasy, her honest Irish face flushing vividly; "you looks just like pictures of Our Holy Lady and the Blessed Child, so you do,—you've such soft, red hair, and such big, black eyes, and Archie's face looks so pale there beside yours, although you're overpale yourself. I really begin to think, miss, that you'll not be treating Archie as his sister did, after all."

"I'll promise you that solemnly, Barry," I answered, earnestly; "and you must believe me,—I haven't much to love, you know, and I am alone in the world."

"So I've heard them say," she answered, with much pity and solemnity. "I knows myself that a lone heart has always more fire in it than those that are stuffed with fatness and sweet things. Now, Miss Marguerite, you go away for to-day, and I'll think it over. Mind you, I'm stricken fond of you, I'm thinking, and perhaps it will come all right."

Tenderly I bent over and kissed the little sleeper, for my heart seemed to go out to him in one uncontrollable rush, the pale, childish face to be one that I had seen in my dreams.

"That's right," Barry said, nodding her head at me as I walked toward the door; "you're gentle and soft-hearted and no mistake. I'd let you stay, miss, but you see if he should wake up, as he does most always, all of a sudden before a body knows it, why it might frighten him, you see, for you are strange."

"I will come again to-morrow, Barry," I said; then the door leading to this other world closed on that. How stunned and bewildered I have felt ever since I came to my room after this adventure! That Mrs. Dare is to be condemned as being frightfully heartless in thus aban-

doning her unfortunate child to the entire charge of a servant, is very patent indeed. How sick my heart feels, and how hot with indignation! But this will not do,—I must steady myself, must not anger myself toward Mrs. Dare, to whom I owe everything now,—my heart must be shut to all these clamors, to this indignation, so overwhelming and severe. To confess the truth, I am in a perfect whirl, and can scarcely recognize a single legitimate thought in this bewildering category of surprises and pains. There is one thought, however, very plainly acknowledged, and that is my determination to endeavor by every means in my power, even at the risk of Mrs. Dare's intense displeasure, to alleviate the forsaken misery of this poor child's life. Ah, how my soul yearns to him already, how inspirited I feel to love and cheer him, how thoroughly I realize that God has given me this vineyard to cultivate and speed! I have been doubting and despondent, but I am punished righteously,—the picture of this child's seared life transfuses mine with contrition. Oh, God, thou art great, truly!

## CHAPTER XVIII.

*May 28.*—Why has that excellent mosaic from De Quincey's "Suspiria de Profundis"—"the night when Herod's sword swept the nurseries of Bethlehem of Innocents, and the little feet were stiffened forever, which, heard at times as they tottered along floors overhead, woke psalms of love in household hearts that were not unmarked in heaven"—been haunting me all day? Is it because of its mockery to this sad child life, whose foot-prints make no impression upon these household hearts, but shall be ever echoless and lost? Ah! was it love which condemned this Innocent to a living death? If these little feet, stiffened at their birth, had walked over these metallic hearts to heaven, would they not have left



echoes here, would not God's mercy have been greater—more infinite?

Yesterday was Sunday, and we went to hear Dr. H—— preach. How thrilling and inspired is this man's eloquence,—how terse and very true! On our return home, Murray Dare joined Gertrude and myself, and, at her solicitation, came in to lunch with us.

"The Mortimers are coming to dine with us to-morrow," Gertrude said, as walking slowly up Beacon Street, the crowd of fashionables shifted, and two rather tall and distingué-looking girls came through the gap, and smilingly recognized my Cousin Gertrude as they passed. "Beatrice Mortimer asked the other day, Murray, who you were at the concert."

"Then it is perfectly correct, I suppose, to return the compliment. Where was their original habitation? I never even heard of them until last night, when Jack Lorimer told me, among other things, that they are very parvenu and have won their position here by a scratch."

"It is true; and yet with all their struggling, their position continues very insecure. They originally came from the Southwest somewhere, with letters to a few of our families, who have been sufficiently foolish to encourage their pretenses. They have lived here three winters, but this last season was the first time they were recognized in any way. They flirt in a most abominable manner, showing themselves to be lamentably lacking in modesty——"

"And beauty," interrupted Murray Dare.

"They certainly are not beautiful," Gertrude acquiesced; "yet their stylish figures, inordinate passion for dress, and imperturbable self-assurance astonish one into a tolerance of the uncompromising whole."

"The yellow-haired one isn't so very bad-looking, but the would-be piquant expression of the shorter and darker sister is a mistake?"

"That is Beatrice, the elder. The other, Juliette, does not make half the pretensions to ingenuousness and 'sweet simplicity, oh, la!'—that Mother Goose writes about—as does her sister. Let me add, the father is a fat, apoplectic Englishman, the mother talks with a brogue, and all is said."

"And sufficient," Murray said, in much disgust. "Ma cousine, you are indefatigably severe; why do you ask these people to dine to-morrow?"

"It is one of Valerie's inconsistencies, not mine,—these Mortimers have flattered and cajoled her, so brazenly rhapsodizing her hair, eyes, and complexion, until she has awarded to them the seventh heaven of toleration, and induced mamma to ask them to dinner."

Immediately after luncheon, I prepared to visit Barry and make the acquaintance of my little Cousin Archie. To win his favor, I purloined a few violets and hyacinths from Valerie's pet vase, and went up-stairs, feeling sure they would serve as a medium of sympathy between this famished little heart and mine.

"He is sound asleep, miss," Barry said, as I opened the door leading to this dull, back chamber, and greeting me with an encouraging nod; "but it'll not last long, for he's been that way for an hour now."

The child was lying on his low cot-bed, his pure, sweet face resting on one wee hand, and with the wealth of yellow curls spreading their glitter around him lavishly. A patient, wistful face, with a hungry quivering about the lips that haunt me since.

"He's been speaking of you this morning, Miss Marguerite," Barry said, gravely, but with a great deal of quiet satisfaction, softening the coarse lines of her Irish face. "He's somehow dreamt of you lately, and last night he talked of the 'pretty lady' in his sleep, just as though you was an angel, and no mistake."

"You will let him love me, Barry?"

"Bless your heart, how can I help it? You are that mild-spoken there's no refusing you,—he'll be sure to love you; and I'm just as sure, after thinking it over, that you'll love him."

Then I knelt down on the low seat beside the bed, and looked longingly at the pale, childish face.

"Mr. Will that's gone was very fond of Archie," whispered Barry.

"Uncle Will?" I queried, softly, looking up now with a fresh impulse of sympathy into her face; "do you mean Uncle Will?"

"That's him," answered Barry, nodding her head; "he just loved Archie dearly: that time Miss Valerie was married. Before Mr. Will was taken so sick he used to come here and spend a long while almost every morning. That's why master always loved Mr. Will; but somehow Archie has always been unlucky, he no sooner gets to loving anybody then they go away and never come back."

"I wish Uncle Will had brought me here with him to see Archie; then I would know him so much better now."

"I am thinking, miss, that perhaps he didn't want you to find out about Archie: he didn't think it would do any good; you see, he knew that my lady was very angry with any one who'd make her remember that she'd got such a child, and although I've heard tell that he often reasoned with her about it, somehow she'd stand more from him than she would from anybody else; he'd not be likely to want to get you into trouble with her, when he couldn't do no good himself."

"It was just like Uncle Will to be kind to Archie and to love him,—dear, noble Uncle Will!"

"Just like him, as you say, miss; his heart was just like a sponge that's put in water, it only grew bigger and bigger the heavier it got with other people's sufferings. God bless his memory!—he was an angel, sure."

Softly I bent over little Archie, and kissed him again and again; it seemed as though Uncle Will was near us binding our hearts together in an inevitable surety. At that moment, as if in response to the speaking pledge of my kisses, the child's great, dark eyes suddenly unclosed and looked up into mine.

"She's come back to see you, Archie," Barry said, affectionately.

"Yes, I have come back to see you," I said, laying the fragrant bunch of violets and hyacinths upon the pillow beside his face. "Please love me, Archie, for I love you!" And then I bent over him, kissing him tenderly again and again. A strange, wondering, half-fearful expression came into the child's big, sweet eyes. He tried to free himself from my arms, the pale lips quivering uncontrollably as he stretched his little hands toward Barry.

"Don't put him into a fit, miss," interposed Barry, very anxiously; "you see it'll take time for him to get used to you and your ways; he isn't used to being kissed, you know. Come, Archie, come to Barry, and then we'll talk to the pretty lady. She's your own blessed cousin, is Miss Marguerite," Barry went on, coaxingly, lifting the child in her arms, and beginning to walk to and fro the length of the room. "She means to be true to you, Archie, and not to leave you in the lurch when she gets tired of you, as she says she never will; and may God help her to keep her word." Archie lay with his face hidden in her neck as he had done the day before, neither moving nor uttering a word until I almost began to feel discouraged. "She's Uncle Will's young lady," Barry began. Then for the first time, as though spiritually vivified, the little head moved slowly and stealthily until the big eyes could watch my face furtively from between the little hands clasped so confidently about Barry's neck. "Yes, Uncle Will's young lady," said Barry, quickly following up her advantage, and encouraging me with a sharp, expressive nod of her head, and half smile; "don't you remember the little girl that I used to tell you about, who lived way up in the country, whose papa and mamma died and left her all alone among the bears, who'd eat her up if her good Uncle Will hadn't gone to save her? Well, this young lady is that same little girl, only she's grown bigger and prettier. This is the little girl that the good, rich uncle saved from the black bears and lions, and now she's grown to be a rich young lady herself, I hear; for the good Uncle Will—Holy Virgin bless his memory!—loved her that dearly." The sweet, dark eyes, dream-laden and troubled, growing bigger and bigger with each word, had now become climaxed into a concentrated stare.

"And you will love her, Archie, for Uncle Will loved her!" I cried, joyfully; then, with my whole heart throbbing for love of him, I went and put my arms anxiously about the child.

"She'll be blessed kind to you, Archie; so don't be afraid, boy," Barry interposed, as Archie, slightly shivering, sought to draw himself out of my arms. "Now

sing to him a little, miss,—he's wild about music," she whispered to me, drawing her own arms from around him, thus leaving the child alone to me.

At first he shivered in that strange, nervous way, and struggled a little as though frightened nearly to death; but just as soon as I began to sing in a soft, tender voice an improvised lullaby, wherein I strove to encourage and pacify him, the curly head went to a sudden rest on my shoulder, and before I had finished, a little, soft, frail hand, dreadfully transparent and white, had crept itself up to join the other, which meeting, clasped it about my neck. Oh, that happy, blessed, all-transfigured moment when this new love began to recognize and welcome mine, when God sent this peace to succor me! Henceforth I would live for this child alone. He had given me this vineyard, a green oasis in this desert corner of the world, to cultivate and speed,—with success would come everlasting happiness!

For a long while little Archie lay thus in my arms, rocked into a sudden peace by the slow rhythm of my song.

"You've come it over him sure, Miss Marguerite," at length said Barry, as, after about half an hour had thus passed, I stopped for one instant to take the bunch of violets and hyacinths from the mantel, where she had placed them, to lay them tenderly next the child's face where it rested on my shoulder. "Now the Holy Virgin give you strength to be faithful to the child!" The sound of her fervent Irish voice seemed to awaken Archie with a quick power. The little hands suddenly unclasped themselves from about my neck, and then were outstretched to her. "Don't feel bad about his wanting to come to me, Miss Marguerite," she said, in reply to the pain which I felt was quivering through my face, as the child grew more and more violent when she endeavored good-naturedly to make him stay with me against his will, "he can't get used to you all at once; you mustn't be in such a hurry for him to know you so soon,—just as though he had known you all his life; he's too nervous for that, bless you." Then she took the child once more in her arms, and I was left desolate; yet not exactly

desolate after all, for the past half hour had been too full of sweet promises and peace.

"It's like the rest of us," said Barry, apologetically; "we dreadful soon loses our faith in things we might be sure of, by always remembering some cruel thing that's murdered our hearts before,—the likeness frightens us. Archie is only flesh and blood, you know, Miss Marguerite, and he's been sold too many times for his good."

May 29.—But I have conquered him after all. Yesterday I came back to my room baffled and discouraged, with a dull heartache stifling me, and feeling apprehensive that, through my impetuosity, I had sacrificed all power to win his love. All the sublime hopes of an interest in life being vouchsafed me in the mitigation of this child's loneliness, though my endeavors, despite my happy wishes and eager cravings, would be denied me henceforth. All these reflections choked and discouraged me,—the day grew very dark. What was my astonishment and delight when, upon entering that little den this morning, where this soul starveling lives in such an unnatural state of ostracism, he came toward me, crying, "Goldy! Goldy!" and holding out his arms hungrily to my embrace. I believe I cried over this child from very rapture.

"That's what he's been calling you all this blessed morning," Barry said, presently, when I had sufficiently recovered my mental equipoise to understand what she was saying. "He whispered about 'Goldy' in his sleep, last night, and told me a long story about his dream this morning. I forget all he said, but somehow Mr. Will was there, telling him to love you; and the child had noticed yesterday, for all his queer ways, everything you'd done and said, and grown to love you without knowing it."

The little form, resting in my arms, trembled perceptibly as Barry spoke. Then a quaint, wistful child's voice, smothered on my shoulder, whispered "Goldy, Goldy," and then grew still.

"It's because of your hair, miss, bless you, and the Holy Virgin save you!" cried the fervent Barry, delightedly. "It's just like sweet, red gold when you move,

and the way you wear it makes you look mighty like a queen. No wonder that you've won Archie, for you got me, sure, the first time you spoke, body and soul."

And still the little form trembled on my arms. The sweet, smothered voice whispered "Goldy," and the frail arms, clasped about my neck, grew tighter and tighter, until I was full to overflowing with joy.

## CHAPTER XIX.

"GERTRUDE is an irrepressible pedant," said Mrs. Hoffman, as we sat listening to one of her sister's most elaborate displays of erudite knowledge, just before going in to dinner. "I found her reading this morning, when I chanced to enter the library, Longinus's *Treatise on the Sublime*, with Pope's *Essays on Criticism and Man* lying in her lap waiting its turn, while Young's *Universal Passion*, in close juxtaposition to Akenside's *Pleasures of the Imagination*, looked ready to be devoured on the table at her side. It gave me paralysis of the brain only to look at her; and, without indulging in the slightest hyperbole, to hear her talk is, to me, excruciating pain."

This being said in the corner of the drawing-room nearest the front windows, and out of ear-shot of the subject of this eulogium, it succeeded admirably in eliciting a sympathetic smile from the blonde Miss Mortimer.

Tall, with rather a slight, but a very stylish, figure, yellow-haired, and eyes of a dull-yellow color that almost matched her hair, small-featured, and with a colorless complexion, Miss Mortimer looked to me the embodiment of everything insincere, calculating, and enterprising.

At this moment Mr. Lorimer joined our group, leaving Gertrude to the entertainment of two remarkably thin and cadaverous-looking men. Just as Juliette Mortimer looked up at him with a welcoming smile, there came a little burst of distant music, then a general exclamation of delight from everybody in the room.

"It is the regiment!" Murray Dare said; "they are late in getting in."

"Now we shall see a host of glorious old friends,—a crowd of Harvard boys," Lorimer added, warmly, as he and Juliette Mortimer went together to the window.

Why did I remain quietly seated, far removed from the window, where, with one common sympathy, all had rushed,—even Gertrude and her two cadaverous satellites joining in the general enthusiasm? Why did my heart seem to grow spell-bound and senseless with suspense, as though eagerly awaiting the climax of some inevitable fulfillment? Looking back now, I can only remember how my hands trembled and shivered; how vague everything became to my eyes; how perverted my imagination, and how strained my hunger for the music, steadily growing and deepening with each throb of my feverish pulse! Cool and sweetly-beautiful Valerie looked, leaning against the embrasure of the window: all the lights of momentary suspense intensifying her eyes and the childish passion of her face. Somehow my soul seemed going out to her in a strange fascination. Bodily chained to inaction, my eyes watched every change of her countenance, hungrily and with a vague shadow of foreboding accepting the result. That I had lived this moment over before, that somewhere in the tantalizing past this same sunlight had died, embracing the whole world as it did now, that same group by the window had formed a like tableau,—with Valerie leaning in just that way against the curtains,—and this throbbing music had grown and wavered in the distance as it grew and wavered now, my soul, shuddering with much strangeness of recognition, acknowledged. What was to happen? why did I feel so strangely? I began questioning myself: then—

"You are looking strangely pale, Marguerite," said Mrs. Dare's voice at my side; "or is it the effect of your white dress? You ought to have worn some color; your complexion will not tolerate such an extreme simplicity." I could not remove my eyes from Valerie Hoffman's face. I could only shake my head deprecatingly in reply. "Your taste in dress is far from being perfect," Mrs. Dare went on, with a slight shade of displeasure

undertoning her voice as though reproving my apparent obstinacy. "You must not be incorrigible, Marguerite." Then she also went to join the group at the open window. How the music grew and prospered in its advance,—how heavy the air with cheers, salutations, and with tumultuous joy! and I began to quiver to each pulse of its enthusiasm. Vividly and with force a vision comes back to me,—a vision of a tree-banked sky, blue to its depths with fervid glory, white-winged to the east, a confusion of eager heads defining themselves against it sharply, and one face in the midst, pale and confused, with a sudden passion trembling, its astonishment unobserved.

"The glorious fellows!" I heard Lorimer say, rapturously, as Murray, the waiter, came in, and handed him a large flag to hang out over the hero-heads. "By Jove! only look at those battle-flags, and——"

Then somebody exclaimed,—it sounded like Murray Dare's voice,—*"There are two fine-looking officers."*

I am watching Valerie's face breathlessly. I see the quick flush die out of her cheeks, the trembling of her lips, the shuddering of her whole body, as she draws quickly behind the curtains, allowing them to fall with a sharp impetuosity between the outside enthusiasm and herself, until Lorimer kills my spell into sudden life with only a few words.

"Heavens! it is Throckmorton and Farquhar!" he exclaims, vehemently. "Cecil Throckmorton in a lieutenant-colonel's straps, and Farquhar with eagles!"

Then there is a deafening cheer, a fluttering of handkerchiefs, and I am in their midst, driven by impetuous wondering from my trance, to look once—if only but once—upon a face which I had never fairly seen, but which seemed to smile at me with vivified recognition from among the dimness of long ago. Only just in time to see two stalwart forms, tall, broad-shouldered, and erect, passing out into the distance, their heads resolutely facing to the front, not once looking back, but with the battle-flags, bullet-embroidered and blood-stained, flying their glory over them—the insignia of their bloody woes and triumphs.

"You've lost the best of it, Miss Marguerite," Lorimer

said. "Those two men, Throckmorton and Farquhar, are the heroes of the regiment. It is Damon and Pythias over again. They are sworn to live and die for one another; and I doubt whether even a woman with the utmost fascinations could sever their allegiance or affect it in the slightest way."

"Is it worth trying for?" queried Juliette Mortimer, looking softly into his face with those yellowish eyes of hers.

"Is it worth trying for?" echoed Lorimer, scornfully. "Is it worth while for the moon to chase the sun over all creation?" Then he laughed. "But that is too metaphorical altogether. All I can say is, that they were chums at Harvard, crack men in their class, very kings among the common herd of poor humanity, and during the past two years, when other men have proven their unworthiness, Throckmorton and Farquhar have lived only to drink the fire-water of rebel guns upon a hundred fields, and to go, hand-in-hand, into the very jaws of death, to come out unscathed and crowned with glory."

"Eloquence," cried Murray Dare, in derision.

"Splendid," whispered Juliette Mortimer, softly.

But Lorimer, suddenly turning round, looked full into my face.

"You at least understand me," he said, with a quick impulse. "I only wish that I need never explain——"

"Cousin Marguerite is peculiarly sympathetic," interrupted Gertrude, her cold features relaxing into a momentary smile. "It is only necessary to give her the first and last words of a sentence, and she will fill it into completion in an instant."

"Rare, pale Marguerite," whispered Murray Dare as we went in to dinner. Somehow I was always given to him to patronize and protect, however much I might rebel. "Why are you not sympathetic with me? You don't know how you tormented me there in the window, when you turned so deathly pale at Lorimer's compliment. Don't make me jealous again, please." And then this odious man gave my arm a little squeeze, looking down all the while into my face in a way that always caused me to cringe and shudder.



How stunned I was and bewildered,—how I longed to be once more alone, that I might unquestioned, and in quiet, live over again the last hour, and endeavor to decipher to my entire satisfaction its strange fancies and bewilderments! Then he was alive; he was well and strong once more. Cecil Throckmorton had fought his good fight after all, and had come forth from the fiery ordeal unscathed. So, I should see somebody whom I had known in the old, sweet days. Would he know me? Would he remember his little friend,—one who had thought of and had prayed for him so constantly? Had it all faded from his mind? Would the remembrance of those days be painful and hateful to him? Would he tolerate it if I should ever seek to remind him of them? Oh, that I might be alone to think it all over! Why should I be forced to eat, drink, and be merry when I am so famished for peace?—only for a moment's peace, to wonder and think it over and over again.

"I wish I could say something to you that would interest you to-night," Murray Dare said, looking very unsympathetically into my face. "You are dreadfully distraught. I am afraid that regiment has run off with all your romance."

"I am afraid it has," I managed to say, with a forced smile; "and the music has given me a dreadful heart-ache. It is a tender subject; so let us change it."

"Change what,—the heart? Willingly. Mine is so big, you will get the best of the bargain."

"Please don't say witty things to me to-night, Mr. Dare, I am feeling very stupid and would not appreciate them."

"What do you call witty things?"

"Misunderstanding and twisting into all sorts of hobgoblin shapes my innocent remarks."

"What are you two quarreling about, Miss Marguerite?" queried Lorimer; for the first time since we sat down to dinner interesting himself in the fact of my existence. "You are causing Dare to look very unhappy."

"Aw, really, don't trouble yourself," retorted Murray Dare, very stiffly. "Miss Marguerite and I are excellent friends. She would not say anything to displease me for the world."

"Indeed!" remarked Mr. Lorimer.

"Indeed!" echoed I; and that was all I said. I did not care how vain or egotistical he was that night. All my passion and soul were with the past, delving into its intricacies, and with my ears shut to all else.

"There is a rumor that the Warings intend giving a grand reception to the officers of Farquhar's regiment some evening next week," Lorimer said, addressing Mrs. Hoffman across the table.

Valerie was looking very pale, very quiet, with a dull light in the purple depths of her eyes, but exquisitely beautiful. I could not but notice how a fiery red spot grew and brightened in her cheeks at his words.

"I had not heard of it," she said, quietly.

"Everybody will be out of town," observed Beatrice Mortimer, regretfully.

"Oh, no, everybody is interested in this particular regiment," Lorimer answered, decidedly. "All our families are represented among the officers. How strange it is that we did not know Farquhar was in command!"

"He won his eagles before Petersburg," answered one of Gertrude's remarkably thin satellites, whose name I now discovered to be Horton.

"He will have a grand, good time squandering his money," Murray Dare said, very intent upon a wholesale demolition of Tomato De Gua; "his uncle, left him a solid million, didn't he, Lorimer?"

"I believe so; Throckmorton and he are both tremendously lucky fellows,—both as rich as Croesus, both handsome, and both heroes!"

"And we shall see them next week!" exclaimed Beatrice Mortimer, her dark eyes lighting up.

"You know Throckmorton, do you not, Miss Dare?" Lorimer asked, interrupting Gertrude in the midst of a very animated and erudite discussion with Mr. Horton's other self, the equally cadaverous Mr. Whyte; "you must have known Throckmorton at Long Branch."

"No, I have never met him. I believe Mrs. Hoffman knew him before her marriage. I was not out then. I was still busy with my studies."

"Farquhar and he used to go there together," Lorimer



said, looking at Valerie for sympathy. "They are capital fellows,—both of them; but I haven't seen either of them for at least three years."

How each word that was uttered I linked together in one long chain of evidence; how eagerly I listened to hear more that I might understand and reconcile; but I was doomed to disappointment, for here the conversation suddenly changed, and I was left helpless, with my links still incomplete, to feed upon my own thoughts and trembling suspense. The remainder of that long, supremely tiresome evening I can only remember very indistinctly. I am only aware I strove in vain to interest myself in all that was taking place about me, endeavored resolutely to answer all the badinage and worse than soft nothing which Murray Dare persisted in pouring into my ear, with a passive willingness which evidently flattered while it astonished him; yet, all the time, strong emotions—pain, thrilled with suspense—were holding me in thrall, harassing me with their importunities. At last, after much tribulation, came my deliverance, and I was free.

"Marguerite, you are wise to encourage Murray Dare," Gertrude said, not unkindly. "Good-night."

"Good-night," said Valerie, wearily, and then I went to my room; not to sleep, however, but to sit by the open window, through the long hours of night, with my hungry face turned up to the stars, trying to read there a recompense for my pain!

## CHAPTER XX.

SWELLING, rippling, and dying, only to be renewed in fresh waves of splendor, come the strains of the *Morgenblätter* of Strauss. As we come down-stairs from the dressing-room, I can see the interior of the drawing-room lit up with an infinity of beauty, which dazzles while it bewilders me. Vases of roses, myrtle, and hyacinths

everywhere, huge bouquets on glittering rock-crystal stands, exquisite cut flowers in large Oriental cups, medallioned with roses and tulips, just under that Sèvres candelabra, painted in subjects after Greuze; while the Murillo-heads smile out from the cream-tinted walls, and the Hobbema landscapes open to the gaze seeming vistas of Arcadian peace. For a moment just before we enter, as Murray Dare pushes his way through the crowd to my side, I falter and tremble.

This past week has been so full of unusual excitement and suspense. Left almost entirely to myself, I have spent it in vain wonderings and anticipations, which, while they exhausted me, have left me very thirsty and ill at ease. To-night, for the first time, I shall look upon Cecil Throckmorton's face. How long seem the days since I heard his name on Lorimer's lips,—the first time in many years! Will he know me? Shall I recognize him with one of those swift intuitions, the rightful prerogative of my peculiar sensitiveness of perception? If I could only see Dr. Lescom, too,—dear, dear Dr. Lescom, who was so kind to me!

"Follow mamma, Marguerite; you are blocking the way," whispers Gertrude over my left shoulder, as carried away by my thoughts I remain standing directly in front of our hostess, Mrs. Waring, to whom I have just been introduced, thus barring the way for Gertrude and the inevitable Mr. Horton. Then Murray Dare, drawing my arm close to him, suddenly goes off with me into the crowd, following in the wake of Mrs. Dare, who is slowly making her approach to yonder corner, overhung by Correggio's *Magdalene*.

"Will you dance this *trois temps* with me?" The music has changed, and now rolls out with a quick promptitude of melody which is at once full and inspiring. "Will you dance this with me?" repeats Murray Dare. "I see they are dancing in the next room."

We are quite alone by ourselves, shut in from everybody else by this towering group of statuary. I begin to feel a little stifled and agitated. "Not now; please don't urge me now," I manage to say, very helplessly; and, for the first time in his life perhaps, his delicacy gets the better of his vanity.

"Your face changes so. A moment ago it was excited and a little flushed; now, you look pale again, very pale, too. I hope you're not going to faint."

"Faint! Is Marguerite unwell?" Mrs. Dare interposes, coming from her corner to my relief, leaving Valerie the center of a group of men, who have been following her ever since her first entrance into the room. "You have acted so strangely all day, child, you ought to have remained at home."

"I am not ill, Aunt Honoria, only I do not feel strong enough to dance. I shall feel better if I remain quiet."

"Murray, take her to that window-seat, where there is more fresh air; we must not have a scene here."

The cool, night air flowing in about me, mellowed with the moonlight, and perfume-laden, revives me wonderfully. I begin to feel very grateful to Mrs. Dare for her solicitude, but somehow I am powerless to still the nervousness of my hands. I am so weak, after all, that even the sound of this exquisite music thrills me very strangely. I must conquer myself. I am very foolish. I shall have time here in my curtained retirement, where I can remain unobserved, yet observant of all.

"Don't lose this dance, Mr. Dare," I said as soon as possible; "I feel very nicely now,—I don't wish you to lose this dance. I can very well remain here by myself; and then by-and-by you can come back again."

"I do not like to leave you alone, Marguerite."

"You mustn't call me Marguerite,—I am not your cousin," I said, quickly, endeavoring to reprove this sudden familiarity, which causes him to bend down over me in such an expressive manner, as though claiming the right. "Remember, I am not your cousin."

"Yes you are, at least by adoption; and I don't wish you to negative the relationship." Then he goes, but not before I have reproved him severely.

How the music grows and throbs, and the rose-perfumed air floats about me, stilling my fever, and dreamily softening my strange fancies. This is my first party, my first glimpse into the gay realities of the world. Everybody is happy but myself. I am happy, very happy, indeed, only I feel nervous and out of place.

I shall soon conquer that,—I will be brave. I am just beginning to feel more quiet and composed, more at peace with myself, and encouraged when some people brush hastily by me and I catch the words "Throckmorton is late." Suddenly I am vivified once more with excitement. I forget the music; the flowers, rich and glowing in yonder crystal urn, fade out of my sight; the rose-odors die unrequited, and I am leaning out from my retreat, with a quick heat burning into the pallor of my face, to look eagerly through the shifting crowd for one glance at Cecil Throckmorton's face. I shall know him, I shall surely know him! Eagerly my eyes look through the long vista of the room, scanning each face, with a resoluteness of intuition that defies defeat, through the room again and again, only to be disappointed with each unsucccess. There are many officers in glittering epaulets and buttons present, dark men, fair men, short and tall men, all mixed together among the rainbow-hues of tulle and tarlatan heterogeneously; but I must confess myself baffled,—the conviction worries me,—I shall not know him, after all. How insignificant look all these other men, somber in the full evening dress of private citizens, how meager beside those bronze and bearded veterans, fresh from battle and glory! Ah, now the music begins the Star-Spangled Banner, and everybody looks enthusiastic; even Valerie, standing over there, just under the splendor of that large, silver-framed mirror, has grown flushed and excited; and well she may, she is a perfect queen to-night, surrounded, as she is, by those adoring men; and how royally she asserts her supremacy!

How often I have had day-dreams of what my first party should be; how the music would sound; how sweet the flowers would look, and how fragrant; and here I sit alone by myself, realizing it all: yet for all my dreamings, feeling dissatisfied and woefully disappointed. Would it have been better for me if I had discouraged Mrs. Dare's lukewarm proposition to accompany them here to-night? Am I out of place among all these gay people? I remember how indifferently she said, "Marguerite, it is time that you should see something of the world." Did she say it only because Murray

Dare asked her to bring me, and urged it all the more strongly when she appeared unwilling? I don't think she was particularly anxious to have me come; and perhaps it would have been better if I had remained quietly at home. But I was so anxious to see Cecil Throckmorton, so eager to have a pretty dress to wear, this white tulle trimmed with white rosebuds. Oh, if I could only see him! I thought I should know him at once,—and see how weak I am already,—mistaken in all my anticipations. I will keep watch though, I will discover him despite fate, *nolens volens*.

"I am so confoundedly glad to see you back, Farquhar."

Ah, this is one of the heroes!—Throckmorton's friend,—Throckmorton must be near. How strangely I tremble! Ah, be quiet, be quiet!

"And confoundedly glad am I to get back, Lorimer, old boy!"

Then, for the first time, I see Lorimer standing just without the embrasure of the next window, and another, a tall, broad-shouldered man, with eyes which look black and deep, and a proud, cold face, his hand laid familiarly on Lorimer's shoulder. Throckmorton must be near; I shall see him soon. How I tremble! how foolishly agitated I am, and uncontrolled! Quickly I lean back, allowing the curtains to fall once more between me and them. Just as they fall, however, I hear Lorimer's voice saying,—

"Miss Dare, allow me to introduce to you my friend, General Farquhar."

I cannot speak; I can only bow mutely in acknowledgment.

"Will you allow me to be impertinent, Miss Dare, and tell you that I have been watching you faithfully during the last five minutes?"

"Indeed!" I am astonished into finding my voice now.

"Don't think me rude, please; I could not help it. You looked so eagerly excited when you condescended to lean forth from this cosy retreat, as though anxiously anticipating the fulfillment of some wish. Will you forgive me, and show that you forgive me by allowing me to share this retreat with you?"

"Miss Dare is very self-sacrificing,—also accommodating," said Lorimer, as I made room for General Farquhar to seat himself at my side. "She would take me in also if it were possible."

"It is truly refreshing to meet any one self-sacrificing," General Farquhar observed, very gravely.

"It will never do to flatter Miss Dare,—she doesn't insist upon adulation," interposed Lorimer, laughingly. "She took you in out of the world's stormy approbation from sentiments of commiseration. You have been so bored during the last hour."

"And so you, with Sidney's immortal self-abnegation at Lutzen, passed this pleasure to me with the sentiment, 'Thy need is greater than mine.' You are the truly self-sacrificing one;" and then General Farquhar laughed at him, with his cold face lighted up wonderfully, and for the first time I saw that his eyes were not black after all, but gray,—a dark, changing gray,—and that the long moustache, drooping far below the square-cut chin, was of the same color,—iron-gray,—and yet he was not old. I felt strangely agitated,—more ill at ease than even I had been before. It was only by a most powerful effort I succeeded in steadying my voice and modulating it to the proper tone. It seemed as though it would break through all restraint and quiver its nervousness out in my words.

"How glad you must be to get back once more, General Farquhar," I said, merely for the sake of something to say. I felt that I was acting like such a perfect simpleton.

"Yes, I am glad to get back, now the work is done," he answered, very gravely, looking down at me with a curiously questioning look in his eyes. "But one has to go through such an ordeal when one returns to our enthusiastic cities; so much mistaken hero-worship and indiscriminate handshaking, that one is only too happy to enjoy a respite."

"Well, you have endured your share for this evening, at least; you won't be bored much longer," Lorimer said, comfortingly. "I saw Throckmorton come in a moment ago. He'll take your place. So for the present you can keep quiet."

So these abominable lace curtains, and mayhap a few walls, were all that separated me from that other world! Oh, why did Lorimer stand directly in front of me to the exclusion of all other faces, and why did General Farquhar persist in looking at me with such a half-laughing, half-curious look in his cold gray eyes? The music came to us in quick bursts of melody; its refrain seemed to envelop us in strong cords of restraint. Lorimer began to look sentimental, General Farquhar's face to soften and intensify, and, as for me, I sat there waiting.

"We are all very romantic," Lorimer said, by-and-by. "Didn't Luther say that music is the art of the prophets; it is the only other art which, like theology, can calm the agitation of the soul?"

"Yes," General Farquhar answered, gravely. "And Jean Paul also says that sadness lies in music, because it speaks to us of things that in all our life we find not, and never shall find. The touching rhythm of Beethoven, and the splendors of Gluck, Meyerbeer, and Mozart, teach us that heartfully," General Farquhar said, almost softly, looking down into my face. "I know you love music by the tone of your voice."

"I love music very dearly," I said.

"It is to me an excellent mosaic," he went on, quietly, "wherein passion, tenderness, and all the emotions of the soul engrave the measure of their immortality. The minor notes prove the excellence. It is possible for any person to strike a loud or a soft note, but the intermediate conceptions of harmony prove the true fire,—the genius; as with the astounding power of *chiaro-oscuro*, the artist combines the soft effects and magical shades of his picture, so in music the inspired, through the medium of a spirituelle sympathy, with all that is symmetrical in art, create the perfection of an individuality which is at once immortal and grand."

"And yet there are those who prefer some lively little waltz by Gungl or Michaelis or Strauss to the symphonic glory of Beethoven."

"I am one of those," Lorimer said, deprecatingly. "Miss Dare, I am afraid I am one of the world's black sheep in intellect; for the sparkling rhythm of Musard

and Auber I prefer infinitely to the grandest oratorios of Handel."

"Then you are certainly a black sheep, Mr. Lorimer; for I also heard you say the other day that a French chanson, full of spirit, you considered more entertaining than such a sleepy dose as Mendelssohn's '*Lieder ohne wörter*.'"

"I am incorrigible, yet I feel flattered that you have remembered the remark for so long a time."

"Please do not feel flattered. I only remembered it to reproach you."

"Yet I prefer to feel flattered; it is an unusual experience. Will you forgive me by-and-by, and give me a waltz before supper?"

"I thank you, but I shall not dance to-night."

"It is my turn to reproach you now. The other evening, when Mr. Horton was so emphatically condemning dancing, illustrating his argument with numerous biblical allusions, you answered by reminding him of King David's passion for dancing; and as David was always considered to be a remarkably pious young man, many chapters in the Bible being devoted to his exploits and ecstasies, you cannot refuse me wholly on the score of principle."

"I am very fond of dancing, I assure you, Mr. Lorimer, and agree with the dancing-master in Molière's comedy, that although philosophy might possibly be something, yet nothing was more important to mankind than dancing."

"Then you will give me a waltz by-and-by?"

"Not to-night; I will be very happy to dance with you some other time."

"You are very obdurate, Miss Dare," General Farquhar interposed; "not at all self-sacrificing, as Mr. Lorimer gave you credit for being a few moments since."

"He was mistaken; as you say, I am very obdurate."

"Miss Dare will change her mind by-and-by," Lorimer said, laughing, "toward the 'sweet of the night,' as Falstaff calls it."

"Toward the 'sweet of the night' Miss Dare will be going home, Mr. Lorimer."

"We shall see; in the mean time I shall not allow you to quarrel with me, as you are so inexorable. I feel im-

pulsed to ask Miss Mortimer to dance this waltz with me."

"I wonder if it is the same Miss Mortimer I knew in New York a few years since?" General Farquhar said.

"I think not; this one belongs to the genus *nouveau riche*. Dame Grundy knew her not until the past winter, when suddenly a bright, particular star appeared in the social firmament, climbing higher and higher as the season advanced, and creating in its meteoric course quite an astronomical sensation, especially when it was discovered to be crystallized with diamonds. There she stands, next that excellent reproduction of Thorwaldsen's famous group of Christ and the Apostles, dressed in white. It is to be deplored that so stylish a girl should be of so common an origin. Mia padre is an Englishman, a genuine Johnny Bull, rotund, gastronomical, cockney, and snobbish. Mortimer is described."

"The amount of chemical electro used by such people, in the vain endeavor to refine themselves, is truly ludicrous," General Farquhar observed, coolly. "After all, our modern idea of aristocracy is nothing more than a vain assumption of grandeur, wherein a few well-be-grimed portraits of improbable ancestors are necessary to the deceit, and with a curtain of rose-illusion suspended between the scenes of the past and present, inscribed with apocryphal genealogical trees. From my heart I pity these 'novi homines' struggling together as to who shall ride on the topmost wave of the world's success; when, after all, society itself is nothing but a Timonic feast, very magnificent and inviting, until the covers are removed, when all is found to be hollow and empty."

"You astonish Miss Dare," Lorimer interposed, laughingly.

Then General Farquhar, who had been looking steadily across the room, suddenly turned his face toward me: "You are astonished, not shocked, at my words," he said. "Of course, to you life looks vast, brilliant, and satisfying; to me, all the pleasures are painted and illusive coryphées, balancing themselves a moment to the music of artificial applause only to become stale and the

castaways of the subsequent hour. Society claims the fulfillment of its contracts even unto the pound of flesh. Not only does it invariably annihilate individuality, but also saps the milk of human fidelity, abandoning the fresh rind to the influence of the sunheat of conventionalities, which harden it into adamant. How foolish are those people who, in striving for social distinction, forget the thorns, the caustic recompense and pain."

"Yet people must rise," I ventured, softly; "why should they not reach for the highest places in the land, and enjoy them thoroughly, as do those who, favored alike by birth and fortune, make them into cradles for their mental infirmities? Columbus was a weaver, Niebuhr a peasant, and Cardinal Wolsey a butcher-boy."

"Ah, yes," General Farquhar said, smiling into my face, with his cold eyes lighted up; "but did not Columbus die unrequited, and did not poor Wolsey pay extravagantly for his temporary elevation? Would he not have been better off if he had confined his ambition to the fattening and killing of cows? It sounds dreadfully unromantic, I know; but then I think *que le jeu ne valait pas la chandelle*."

"What a regular *pot-pourri* of eloquence!" exclaimed Lorimer, laughing.

"I think I would have preferred a death in the Tower to one in a butcher-stall, after all," I said. "A half page of history, in one case, would at least be mine; while in the other, if I should, unlike Wolsey, remain contented with my lot, my memory would perish with my cows."

General Farquhar's face lost its expression of quiet scorn in a hearty, merry laugh. "You are incorrigible, Miss Dare; but confess, don't you think it would be a satisfaction to institute here some such custom as they have in India, where the people, when they send presents to one another, tie a piece of salt fish and some sea-weed to the parcel, and write thereon an inscription, which, translated, reads, 'Happy those who never depart from the wisdom of their ancestors'?"

I shook my head decisively.

"If the custom was instituted here," added General Farquhar, smiling at me, "how many might turn their



backs on the conflict,—the possible defeat! Our modern Corneli, Fabii, and Horatii are the grand Caryatides holding up to-day the roof of Boston's oligarchical creed. They are but isolated instances of successful *sangre azul* principles, the lesser humanity are powerless to effect such a gigantic growth; and in endeavoring to rival and displace these greater powers, the roof may fall upon their vainglorious heads, and crush their mushroom pride into ignominy."

"Do not forget that Camillus was a Furius, and afterward acknowledged to be the first of the Camillii. In this age we should brand him with the ignominious name of parvenu; in that, the Romans called such adventuresome spirits 'nobiles.' In their sensible eyes a grandfather's grandeur was not necessary to one's success. I think what Pascal says, relative to high birth's giving a man in Europe a start equal to thirty years in life, is, although possibly true, yet lamentably unjust."

"It is certainly true," General Farquhar answered, smiling at my eagerness, "and it only proves the vanity of an endeavor to overtake him. I agree with you, Miss Dare, in many of your points; to fight to become truly great, to erect a pyramid equal in solidity to that of Cheops, founded on wisdom and immortal deeds, is the divine right of every man; but when, on the other hand, dwarfed in ambition, one should seek to astonish the world with a miserable display of social importance, to blind the stars with the glitter of paste and tinsel, then a piece of dried salt fish and a bunch of sea-weed in the Indian fashion would be at once an appropriate and well-deserved rebuke."

"Cousin Marguerite," said Murray Dare's voice at that moment, "Aunt Honoria fears you will take a severe cold in that open window; you are to go with me to the other end of the room where she is sitting."

"I shall not take cold, I am sure."

Without vouchsafing a reply in words, he swept the curtain half-concealing me aside, and offered me his arm with an air which I chose to consider impertinent. "I prefer to remain here," I said, icily.

"I am in a hurry," he exclaimed, with much emphasis

on each word, "I am engaged to dance this waltz with Miss Mortimer; will you come?"

"I have answered you, Mr. Dare," I said very quietly, yet feeling the hot blood flush up into my face, then I said no more. I saw his hands fairly tremble with anger as he let the curtain fall abruptly, and, without another word, seated himself in close proximity to me, as though awaiting my pleasure. For one instant there was a dead silence, the angry blood burnt itself into my cheeks like fire, then, with an effort, I restrained myself, and arose from my seat very calmly.

"Mr. Lorimer," I said, utterly ignoring Murray Dare, who also arose as though anticipating my submission, "will you be kind enough to give me your arm to the other end of the room?" Without looking at Murray Dare,—indeed, I am afraid he saw only the back of my head the while,—and with a farewell bow to General Farquhar, I went, leaning on Lorimer's arm, to join Mrs. Dare, where she sat talking to our host, Mr. Waring.

"You did that splendidly," said Lorimer, as we slowly made our way across the room; "I don't believe your aunt sent for you at all."

But one glance at Mrs. Dare's face showed how darkened it was with displeasure. "Where is Murray?" she inquired, very coldly.

"He was disagreeable," I said, bravely, "so I came with Mr. Lorimer." This episode in the evening pleasure caused me almost to forget my nervous anxiety, and the suspense consequent upon my not having recognized Cecil Throckmorton: instead, I began to think over very earnestly everything the dark, singular General Farquhar had said, to remember how severe yet amused he had seemed, when I ventured to combat him in argument. By-and-by, when at the opposite extremity of the room I saw Murray Dare's face scowling across at me, where I sat chatting with Lorimer, I could not help realizing how thoroughly I had already learned to detest him and to resent his assumptions of authority.

"What a benevolent countenance!" observed Mr. Lorimer, as he also caught a glimpse of Murray Dare's eloquently cross face; "he is watching you like a lynx; how



can you find it in your heart to torture the poor fellow so?"

"Torture him so?" I echoed, scornfully. Somehow as I raised my eyes to his face, as though subtly magnetized, they wandered a little to where, just to our left, leaning against one side of the door leading out into the hall, negligently and with much apparent indifference, stood a tall, muscular man in uniform, yellow-haired and bronzed, with long, fair side whiskers flowing in the English fashion, and with a pair of lazy, blue eyes lighting up his otherwise impassive face, daringly,—a willful, careless face, which, as I looked at it, struck me quiet. Ah, how familiar every feature seemed, how strangely I felt, how faint and overcome! I had found him at last, after all.

"You are deathly pale, Miss Marguerite," Lorimer said, quickly; "you look at Throckmorton as though you see somebody resurrected from the dead; how you tremble!"

"I have not been feeling well all the evening," I managed to answer, in a half-stifled voice; then there succeeded an indistinct blur of faces dancing jigs about me, a dull singing in my ears, as I felt the magnetism of Cecil Throckmorton's eyes,—saw how he suddenly turned them on me, with a swift, questioning look changing them as they met mine, an acknowledgment of subtle affinity, which thrilled me through and through, causing my heart to quiver its emotion out through my face strongly. How strangely familiar was his face; not exactly familiar either, but remindful and also convincing that in him I beheld the hero of all my girlish dreams. For this moment I had waited and longed, to behold him once more restored to his full manhood and reason; for this I had prayed earnestly and with a devout heart. God had listened to me, even while seeming to close his ears; now to be recompensed in this wise appeared to me almost greater in mercy than I deserved.

"I love to see the color come back into your face," Lorimer said, with much solicitude; "you never have much, but then you were so dreadfully pale a moment ago; let me take you into the conservatory, where there is more air."

"Not quite yet," I pleaded; "I am feeling better, much

better now; perhaps I was foolish to come to-night." And still across the room, lounging against the doorway, stood that tall Viking with the yellow hair, his sleepy blue eyes grown vivified, and watching me questioningly, while I sat with my own downcast, feeling the magnetism of his, yet not daring to look for fear of betraying a more entire weakness. Ah, how excited I felt, how faint with the reaction of all my long, wearing suspense! I had found him at last! Would he recognize me fully? Would he care to be reminded of those long past days of humiliation—when his lips had been crazy with words of half-blasphemous mockery—in these fresh years of glory and reconciled bitterness? Would he not be more likely to resent such an ill-timed sentimentality, if, in declaring my identity, I shall seem to demand a recognition? Ah, I must be quiet—careful. If he should recognize me intuitively, well and good; if not, I must control myself.

"I insist upon you going with me," said Lorimer, decisively.

Then I arose passively, and in a few moments found myself among the roses and tulips, where the moonlight came down through the windows in silver showers, perfumed and very sweet. A long while we sat there, eating our ices, brought to us by the waiter, and listening to the music which, creeping about us stealthily, sounded to-night in my ears, weird and strange. After awhile we went in to supper. As we entered the supper-room, through the music-room in which they had been dancing, we passed close to where stood together Gertrude and my yellow-haired Viking, Cecil Throckmorton. How suddenly cold and stern he had grown, how changed the eagerness of his face into an expression of slighting indifference and ennui.

"Here is some pine-apple sherbet," Lorimer said, when, having ensconced me in a seat near the window, he had gone to secure me an ice and returned. "My friend, Colonel Throckmorton, begs the honor of an introduction to you, Miss Marguerite."

I had felt his eyes watching me, had seen the look of half inquiry, half intelligence, which he gave me as I passed him a moment ago, and now, of course, he was coming to

recognize me, to claim me as his little friend, to acknowledge me before all! Oh, how for an instant I trembled with excessive joy! Here at length would become mine one link to my dear, childish life, one friend in whom I might confide, one who would care at least a little for my regard! I was thinking this, with a sort of happy passion flushing the pallor of my face, when raising my eyes, there by the table, surrounded by friends, each endeavoring to lionize him at once, I saw General Farquhar standing, his gray eyes watching me, while a half smile of amused concern warmed his lips. Then there was somebody holding my hand, bending over it, and gazing down at me with eyes grown strongly daring and expressive. It was Cecil Throckmorton! I do not remember anything which he said at first. I was only vaguely aware of how full and complete his voice sounded, in strong contrast to those other days long past, when it had been so often inarticulate and weak, how my hands trembled, and I was obliged to rest my sherbet on a stand near by; the rest was all a dead blank until he awakened me by drawing a seat close beside my own, and saying,—

"I felt sure when I met your eyes a little while ago in the reception-room I had seen you before; you were sitting at the time on a divan with Mr. Lorimer; your face seems one which I have known elsewhere,—an intangible, provoking resemblance that mocks me and which I cannot grasp." Then he looked down into my face searchingly, but shook his head. "I cannot remember," he said.

A strong impulse almost controlled me to confess to him, in a few, convincing words, that in me, changed and bettered as I was, he beheld his quondam friend, Margie Kent, who, during all these intervening years, had, true to the promise made him in the hour of parting desolation, prayed for his spiritual succor and mortal success with a whole heart's entirety of fervor, and who now longed to find in him an all-enduring friend. In this brief instant of self-battle I felt as though all my wearing suspense would break itself forth in a little, passionate cry, that I could not help the words unspoken from trembling on my lips, and burning themselves into my eyes as I looked up resolutely into his puzzled face.

"I must be mistaken," he went on, unconsciously stilling me. "If I have ever known you before, it must have been in some terrestrial paradise, where only happy associations could have hallowed your memory, and where the gloom of misfortune could never have touched the affinity which attracts me."

Then, still looking up at his handsome, smiling face into the warm lighting of his eyes, mine all the while growing heavy with a chill disappointment, my heart heavier with pain, I answered him: "You must be mistaken, Colonel Throckmorton; we could never have known each other before." And with these words, under-toned with miserable despair, I put from me, willfully, mercilessly, all hopes of a happy friendship, all thoughts of humiliating him, through impetuous memories, into recollecting a life now over for him, bitter with spiritual woe.

"I regret it very much; for I might assert a better claim upon your indulgence and good nature."

"Both my indulgence and good nature are inexhaustible," I answered, controlling the quivering of my lips, and looking straight before me with hopeless, blank eyes, "at least to those who prove themselves reasonable in their demands."

"I shall certainly endeavor to be reasonable, then."

"Miss Marguerite," interposed Lorimer, "you are forgetting your sherbet."

"No, the sherbet has forgotten me; see, it has all melted away."

"At first it was cold and hard," he said, gravely, "it could not resist you; you would melt the iceberg wall of the Arctic Sea itself with only a smile."

"Mr. Lorimer, I never realized you could be so satirical."

"So sincere, Miss Dare, as Bossuet said when he was discovered writing one of his superb orations with the Iliad open at his side, 'I love to light my lamp at the sun.'"

"You are imagining yourself Bossuet; your next presumption will be that this is the Hôtel Rambouillet," Colonel Throckmorton said, laughingly: "you are at once abominably egotistical and imaginative."

"How can I help it? In my normal condition I con-

fess to being simply stupid; in his *Cours de Littérature*, Lamartine says, 'Everywhere it is, from the fireside or boudoir of a lettered, political, or enthusiastic woman, that an age is lighted up or an eloquence bursts forth.' Miss Dare is inspiring."

"Let Miss Dare inspire you to bring her another sherbet," I said, laughing in spite of myself now.

"Your arrows are all fatally feathered; you are so refreshingly incredulous," Lorimer answered, laughing back at me as he went. "I am stuck all over like a social St. Sebastian, and am a ready martyr to your unscrupulous penal code."

"It seems so natural to hear the old Germania once more," Cecil Throckmorton said, as the band began one of Strauss's most exquisite waltzes. "Do you dance?"

"We used to dance at school; since then I have not had an opportunity."

"Then this is your first party?"

"This is my first party; but it isn't half so nice as I thought it would be."

He looked down at me when I said that, with his sleepy, blue eyes grown bright and softly sympathetic. How it required all my strength to meet them firmly and unflinching.

"I don't see how you can help enjoying yourself; the world was made for such as you,—the flowers ought to grow thick under your feet; here are some roses for you," he added, smilingly, taking, as he spoke, from the button-hole of his coat two exquisite rosebuds, white and very fragrant. "They were given to me this evening, but I would like to give them to you; for in them you seem to live again. Will you accept them?" Then he bent quickly down to look into my face in a way which caused me to feel happy and at peace. How puzzled were his eyes, how noble his Viking face! Ah, yes, he was good and true,—good and true, after all: I must needs be thankful for that!

"This is your first party," he said, earnestly, "and you have not danced. Will you dance this waltz with me?"

"I have already refused Mr. Dare and Mr. Lorimer," I answered, hesitating, "so how can I dance with you?"

"By saying that you will; only think, I have not danced for three years; so let us be partial, and dance our first waltz together."

Then almost before I knew it we were in the music-room, entirely forgetful of Lorimer and my sherbet, his arm was about me, and we were waltzing to the tune of the Village Swallows. By-and-by he said to me, as tired of dancing we seated ourselves near the conservatory, where a Mexican poinsetta shone, its golden center and stray bits of moonlight fell like silver snow, "This coup d'essai has proved very sweet; it is such a relief to return home and find people looking bright and happy after these years of trouble." Then he went on to tell me, at my urging, how terribly disastrous these years of warfare had seemed, how fearful the records of the battles, written with bayonet-points dipped in the blood of brothers upon the fair-faced earth, until the angel of peace had sprung phoenix-like from the ashes of their fires to lay her cooling hand on the fevered heart of the country. "I only wish you could have seen Farquhar fight once," he went on, warmly; "he was called the 'Fire-eater,' because of his resolute daring and courage,—not the kind of daring that betrays a man into a display of reprehensible recklessness, but the cool, quiet courage that insures success by reason of its entire steadiness and promptitude under all exigencies, the quiet calculation that wins wavering battles in the very face of disaster."

"And you fought side by side?" I asked, earnestly.

"I tried to follow him," he said, smiling at me, "but to do so it was almost necessary to drink fire and eat bullets at every step."

"It must be very grand,—all this heroism and sublime patriotism,—but the blood cries out of the fathers and brothers slain, and I cannot help feeling thankful that it is all over," I ventured, softly.

"It is certainly grand," he answered, looking down at me with serious eyes; "and now that it is all over it is satisfactory to look back, and to feel that one has conscientiously endeavored to do that which was dutiful and right. This satisfaction of retrospect is a kind of elixir vitæ that Mercy carries, Paracelsus-like, in the hilt of her

mysterious sword, to assuage the some-time jealous pangs of an uneasy heart, although the next hour, in the height of one's satisfaction, the sharp edge of the weapon, subtle as it is in its providence, may cut the raw edges of the temporarily-salved consciences into fresh teeth of pain."

In vain, heretofore, had I listened for one break in this man's smiling self-possession, for one terse evidence of his former weakness to betray itself, as I felt it must, sooner or later, in some quick annihilation of his imperturbable calm, and behold, here was one pang thrusting itself out, thirsty for the freshness of God's light, after the cold gloom of its spiritual prison.

"But that one instant of pure gratification, of entire peace, is very sweet and encouraging, even although succeeded by the sharpest pain," I answered, steadily, "such a spiritual oasis in the hot toilsomeness of life—one that ought to quicken us to courageous endurance and faith."

When I said that he looked straight down into my upturned face. "What do you know of such things?" he said, pityingly, "you who are so young, so fortunate, and——"

"Young and so fortunate!" I interrupted him, blankly, then I stopped short. If I could only open my heart to him, I thought, if I could only claim his friendship as my right, I felt so desolate and ill at ease, how sweet it would be. "My father died three years ago," I added, then I looked up at him, thinking that, with these memories, however vague, tugging at his heart, after all he might recognize me, that the tone of my voice might bring back to him thoughts in which my identity would prove itself.

"Are you any relation to Mrs. Archibald Dare?"

"She is my aunt."

"How lovely are these Calla lilies," he said, the whole tone of his voice and manner changing with a singular abruptness, "so pure, so serene and lofty; do you love flowers? Only listen to that galop," he added, as the music—regenerated into a sudden fire and life—came inspiringly to us, "let us drown all metaphysical conceits in its glory,—will you dance it with me, Miss Dare?"

"Miss Dare has been sufficiently monopolized during

the last half hour," here interposed Lorimer's voice, very decisively; "not content with dispatching me on a thankless peregrination after an iced sherbet, she seizes the opportunity to run off and dance with you, when she had so peremptorily refused me a similar favor only five minutes before; I have been iron-confined with chagrin in the regular, old medieval fashion ever since, Miss Marguerite!"

"Doesn't Evelyn mention divers forward and precocious youth?" Throckmorton answered, gravely. "Miss Dare, this is an exaggerated phenomenon!"

"These peripatetic compliments overwhelm me. Miss Dare, may I have the pleasure of this galop?"

"I thought that sarcasm was a preliminary 'fe-fo-fum' of presumption," interposed Throckmorton, laughingly.

But I said, "Mr. Lorimer, I will dance this galop with you."

"Vaut mieux tard que jamais," Lorimer said, serio-comically; "but on the same principle that Goldsmith says 'an emperor in his night-cap would not meet with half the respect of an emperor with a crown,' I cannot help thinking that this galop is decidedly night-capped; if it had only been crowned with success when first requested, I should feel so much more highly complimented."

"Then I will not dance it with you," I retorted, perversely.

"I see that my frankness is rather triangular, oblong, or too mathematical in some way," Lorimer deprecated; "to be successful I ought to harangue you à la Claude Melnotte, Miss Dare; my cheeks stick out like one of Raphael's cherubs, with penitence."

"Mr. Lorimer, you are incorrigibly farcical."

"Please forgive me, and honor me with this galop."

"Miss Dare," Colonel Throckmorton said, as I went off with Lorimer, "won't you come back? I shall wait here for you."

I was so passionately fond of dancing, of pulsing my enthusiasm to the meter of this inspired music, of feeling myself floating to its inspiration and losing all my heart-aches in its languor, that for the time being I forgot all

else but the sense of being entirely at peace, of entire submission to its spiritual elixir and repose.

"There he stands like an avenging Nemesis," Lorimer said, as we stopped on the side of the room directly opposite to where Throckmorton was standing; "Miss Marguerite, you are the envy of all the women here to-night." When he said that, I looked at him in perfect astonishment. "Do not look so innocent," he went on, laughing, "you know very well that Farquhar and Throckmorton are the lions of the hour,—both heroes, both handsome, both abominably eligible; Farquhar is worth his cool million, Throckmorton his hundred thousands, and here you have been causing them to pay you more exclusive attention than any other woman has received from them to-night; Miss Dare, you have been remarkably successful." Then he made me a little bow, very comic, very eccentric, and very overwhelming.

"I presume that you remember the story about Mohammed and the mountain," here interposed Throckmorton, who unseen by me had crossed the room to my side. "Miss Dare, Mr. Lorimer has had his dance; please request his enthusiasm to requiescat in pace."

I was very angry with myself for blushing so furiously, for being so absurdly conscious and confused; for the first time I began to look about me to see what other people were doing, and to determine whether I had been making myself conspicuous, or whether Lorimer had spoken in jest after all. I felt a premonitory quake of dismay when I caught a glance at Gertrude Dare's face, where she stood at the next window, talking to her Cousin Murray and the inevitable Mr. Horton; it looked so coldly disapproving, and her eyes supercilious, as though in pity for my unconventional weakness. Mrs. Dare, seated in the reception-room, where she could enjoy a full and extended view of the dancing-room and entrance to the conservatory, also looked gloomy and dissatisfied, but Valerie was nowhere to be seen.

"How peculiarly characteristic this scene is of Boston peculiarities and Boston affiliations," remarked Lorimer, with much tact, turning to Throckmorton for sympathy; "only look yonder in the reception-room at that group of

full-blown philosophers, surrounding with their intensely-rarified gloom, our host, Mr. Waring, the Cilnius Mæcenas of our modern Athens, who rejoices in keeping open house to all literary savans, and who, as Hannah More spoke of St. Paul, is 'the paragon of a gentleman,' while around them, on the outer ridge of toleration, flutter butterfly connoisseurs in art, literature, and philosophy,—half-fledglings in the world of letters, not daring to plunge recklessly into the deeper waves of science, in which these stronger men battle, for fear of the undertow of subtle affinity which, mistaking their meager enameling of erudition for the thorough ballast of brain, would flatter them for an instant, only to carry them to the treacherous depths of outer destruction."

"Boston is the modern Oceanos," here interposed the voice of General Farquhar; "the ancient stream of that name formed the center of all power, the tributaries radiating therefrom, like the spokes of this vainglorious Hub, in all directions, with the waters flowing and ebbing thrice every day, the heavenly bodies rising and setting therein, to their utmost satisfaction. Boston, like Oceanos, rests on the waves of the sea, with its long, white beard sweeping the waters, and the dim lights of its mythological glory stimulating and whetting the exclusive vanity of its children."

"Behold the twin colossi of eloquence!" cried Lorimer. Then we all laughed together.

"You will think us extremely ungrateful," Colonel Throckmorton added, turning to me apologetically, "to be so incorrigibly farcical at the expense of all these people, who are boring themselves to make us welcome to their city; I must confess that it is very ill-natured; if you will absolve me this time, Miss Dare, I will shock you no more."

"I do not think you ill-natured," I said, smiling back at him, "but you might be more grateful."

How sweetly the music sounded after that, how it trembled and faltered with exceeding melody in my ears, and how cruel it was in them to come and break my happiness!

"Cousin Marguerite," said Valerie Hoffman, coming



to where I was sitting, looking radiantly lovely in the light-green floatings of her Undine dress, and hanging upon the arm of Murray Dare, "I am sorry to interrupt you, but mamma insists that it is time for us to make our adieus." Then, with a little start and a rich gathering of color in her cheeks, she held out her hand impetuously to Colonel Throckmorton. "I am so happy to see you back," she said, softly, "so glad," with a great deal of restrained feeling expressed in the low modulation of her voice and in the purple of her eyes!

He had been talking to me very gently before she came, and with much kind interest both in his words and manner, while General Farquhar had stood near, looking down at me from his grand height, and Lorimer had made up wry faces at the monopoly.

How exquisite Valerie looked, as she stood there, with outstretched hand, her dark, violet eyes raised half imploringly to his face, where he towered above her, looking down in reply, with a blank coldness stiffening the smile on his lips and chilling the laughter in his eyes.

"I am glad to get back once more, Mrs. Hoffman," he said, briefly; "it is a long time since I have had the pleasure of seeing you." Then he took her offered hand in his for an instant, and turned to General Farquhar.

"Of course you remember our friend Miss Dare, now Mrs. Hoffman, whom we met at Long Branch several summers ago," he went on, looking steadily into General Farquhar's face as he spoke.

"How could I ever forget you?" General Farquhar said, bending down over her hand, and smiling into her face in a way, that I saw almost entirely recompensed her for the coldness expressed in Colonel Throckmorton's greeting. "I hope that you did not deem me capable of it?"

His words, so quietly and gently spoken, seemed to bring the grateful color, which had fled with Throckmorton's display of indifference, back to her cheeks with a sudden fire,—her beautiful eyes looked into his, so gray and cool and calm, with a softness of tender sympathy shading them, and shedding a light of a greater spirituelle loveliness over all her face.

"It has been a long while," she answered, gently, "a

long, long while." Then, after a little while, she added,—  
"but I am glad that it is all past."

How dull the music had suddenly become, how perverted my sense of its glory! Why did I feel the beginning of a quick oppression and dismay, and why did Colonel Throckmorton, talking so earnestly to me, watch my cousin's exquisite face so narrowly, and with such a questioning of wonder irritating the usual quietude of his face? All this time Murray Dare stood directly in front of us, not looking at me, but as I felt conscious, aware of everything that I should attempt to do or say; to escape this intolerable espionage, I said to Colonel Throckmorton,—  
"I think I had better go now to my aunt, Mrs. Dare." Then he had offered me his arm, and we had gone off together, leaving the others to themselves. Much to my astonishment, when we went to speak to Mrs. Dare, seated beside Gertrude on a divan, the gloomy coldness had all faded from her face, leaving it unruffled, smiling, and serene.

"I remember you very well at Long Branch, during the first years of the war," she said, warmly, greeting Colonel Throckmorton. Then she went on to tell how often she had thought of him, how warmly she had been interested in his progress and success; all of which assurances quite staggered and overcame me, who, during all my intercourse with my cousins and herself, had never heard his name once mentioned in her house. That this was one of the absurd insincerities of the world I began to realize with a little chill,—a rheumatism of disapprobation, which prospered alarmingly when I saw the almost imperceptible expression of quiet scorn hardening Cecil Throckmorton's eyes and lips as he listened to all that she said.

"You have made yourself, to say the least, horribly conspicuous to-night," Gertrude Dare said, as we went up to the dressing-room,—  
"you are too unconventional altogether, and too ignorant of what is considered true etiquette and good breeding."

"What have I done?" I queried, coldly. "I was not aware that I had disgraced myself."

"Margeurite," Mrs. Dare interposed, very calmly,—



"please do not express yourself in that abrupt manner; to-morrow I will endeavor to make plain to you your mistakes and inaccuracies of judgment."

But Valerie, looking very pale, very sweet, and sympathizing, came to me and kissed me gently. "Don't mind what they say, Marguerite," she whispered,—“you've done wrong, but then you needn't mind what Gertrude says, for she is jealous."

Then I felt very grateful to Valerie for her kind sympathy, very much afraid that after all I had done wrong, since I was assured of it in such a gentle way, and a little conscience-stricken, lest I had but ill repaid them for their kindness and generosity, in having brought me with them to pass such a happy evening.

## CHAPTER XXI.

AFTER all, how bitter sweet were my reflections of the subsequent day, as they are very apt to be, in the glare of uncompromising daylight, when the strain of imaginative pleasure is once more loosed, giving greater liberty to the cool, impartial convictions of Reason! Bitter, that despite my anticipations of a speedy recognition by Cecil Throckmorton, of the beginning of a sympathy, destined to find its climax in the fervor of a friendship which should outlast all lesser ties, the hopes strengthening and invigorating me since first I had heard his name, after all the past years of trouble, had now turned to Dead Sea apples of disappointment, into the unregenerate ashes of regretful pain. For he had not recognized in me the little girl whom he had called "Silver Tongue" in those dear, old days,—that was all dead to him: the roses of oblivion were blooming for him now. Yet sweet the subtle recompense for all these pangs came the thought, open-eyed with conviction, that at least spiritually he had recognized the essence of sympathy, perhaps vague, yet existent, which might by-and-by merge itself into the

stronger fact of friendship, that all his words had been softly spoken in my ears, his eyes had sought mine among all those greater lights with a persistency which had, while flattering, bewildered me—and his lips had smiled only on me! But, after all, if friendship was to be mine, if I was to be thus far blessed, not on the sturdy foundations of old-time associations would it be built, but on the hollower sands of momentary attraction would it find its doubtful stability and lose half its promised sweetness. At least he was happy, certainly that, or else how could he appear so quietly at peace? Powerfully he had conquered his weakness; both physical and mental, how complete and praiseworthy was the victory! It was left me to be satisfied with this:—my prayers had found favor in God's hearing. Added to these bitter-sweet reflections came condemnatory remarks from both Gertrude and Mrs. Dare upon the subject of my conduct during the previous evening, expressed by the former most emphatically, by the latter with more moderation.

"Society demands a certain proportion of etiquette to each hour of pleasure," observed Mrs. Dare, very gravely, after Gertrude had exhausted her oratorical powers in a tirade against all improprieties of judgment in general, and my antagonism to social decorum in particular; "it is not customary to evince such a rapidly-developed 'penchant' for the attentions of gentlemen at the expense of all self-respect and propriety. I did not consider it necessary to inform you before starting for the reception last evening that I should expect you to remain by my side as much as possible, and be influenced by my judgment in all things. Such advice I thought unnecessary; that your own conception of propriety would control you to such reasoning."

Saying this, she regarded me closely, as though to discover whether I was perfectly conscious of her meaning.

"I was not aware, Aunt Honoria, that in following the example of my cousins, I should become the subject for so much criticism."

"Do not speak in that way again, Marguerite; it is at once very heartless and unbecoming; let me here remind

you, that what your cousins may please to do in the future will establish no precedent for you; they are used to, and thoroughly understand, the conveniences of society; while you are ignorant—fresh from school."

"Entirely dependent upon your good pleasure and charity," I added, very bitterly.

"Exactly," Mrs. Dare acquiesced, with much composure,—“if you choose to put it in that way, entirely dependent upon my good pleasure and charity. I regret exceedingly being obliged to remind you of this—in future, I hope it will be no longer necessary.”

Then she and Gertrude had left me alone and to my own bitter-sweet reflections. From these, toward evening, I took refuge in seeking the companionship of my little friend Archie, whose childish sympathy I was always sure to find ready to overflow, and whose misfortunes, intensified by neglect, served to rebuke my own rebellious discontent. Already had he learned to watch for my coming, to stand by the door, waiting patiently for it to open, whispering with plaintive lips the pet name which he had given me, “Goldy, Goldy,”—until the door opening, he would creep into my welcoming arms, and laying his little head on my shoulder, rest there contented for hours. Whether Mrs. Dare was cognizant of the existence of this intimacy, I did not know; or whether she would approve and encourage it, I did not care to inquire; sufficient was it for me to feel, that in my love the poor child had already begun to find a solace during his many hours of suffering, and that God had given me this starved life to succor and beautify, as at once, a rebuke and recompense for my unrest. Ah! how welcome was this labor, to the developing of my incomplete life, how eagerly I fitted the woes to my shoulders, and with what thirsty lips I drank at this fountain of sweet consolation! It was so helpful to feel that at least to some one in the wide world I was becoming necessary, that not all my impulses would meet with such severe misunderstandings; but here, in the gloom of this child's desolation, I could act out my own natural self and be at peace. There was scarcely light in the room save that which came flowing in through the open windows, silvered and

sanctifying, transmuting with its white fingers each material attribute of the world, and laying its length across the bed, where Archie lay with his big, dark eyes watching for me eagerly.

“He's not overwell to-night, miss,” Barry whispered; “he's nervous, and sees bad angels everywhere,—he makes my back shiver.”

“That's because you haven't any wings to keep your back warm,” Archie said, seriously. “You're good, Barry, but you are not an angel, for angels don't wear calico dresses and haven't big, red noses; my angels are like Goldy, they sit on clouds and sing.”

“Only imagine me an angel sitting on a cloud, with my feet dangling down, and a big crown on my head!” Barry cried, with much good nature. “The Lord save me from making such a bad fool of myself; I'd catch a bad cold, sure, and be after singing through my nose.”

But Archie shook his head at her pityingly and seemed to think she was meant for anything but an angel. By-and-by, I took the child in my arms, and, sitting by the window, endeavored to pacify his restlessness with singing a few hymns, which above all others he loved best. The moonlight came and trembled the measure of its beauty over his face, its pencil tinting the gold of his hair and gathering his lips into a smile of dreams; while his eyes, wistfully upturned to the hanging gardens of stars, saw among the silver embroideries strange faces which we could not see. How wan the little face looked in the whitening light—how pure and childishly sweet, and how eagerly did his nervous hands cling to mine, as though forming thus his only claim to earth! Sitting there, with my head at rest beside the child's, and following in the pathway of his eyes, up to the hanging glory, how quickly God seemed to let me conquer my thoughts of discontent, to measure the depth of this moment's peace. We sat thus together, speechless and motionless, his soft breath blowing on my cheek, his hands clasping mine, until the hour striking out rang eight o'clock; then with the last echo, Archie disengaged himself from my arms without a word. I had seen the listening in his face as the hour

sounded, the changing of its spiritual loveliness to one of more material thought, the subtle answer to some impulse unexpressed. Now through the shadows of the room he passed, pushing aside each obstacle as soon as encountered with his frail strength, until at last he came to the door. There I saw him stand, with outstretched hand, his face turned away from me, neither speaking nor seeming to breathe. Puzzled at this, I spoke to him,—

"Archie, come back to Goldy—come." But, to my astonishment, he refused to look at or answer me in any way.

"It's no good talking to him, miss," Barry whispered, mysteriously. "He's waiting for his father. You've never been here of an evening before, so no wonder you look scared-like. You see, if he's even asleep when the clock strikes eight in the evening, he regular wakes up, goes to the door, and stands there waiting with his hand put out just that same way for master to come."

At that moment, along the passage outside, we heard a footstep approaching the door.

"It's master," Barry whispered, gravely.

Then I only had time to reach the other side of the room, where the shadows lay thick and almost impenetrable, before the door opened slowly, and Archie's outstretched hand was clasped closely by his father.

Uncle Dare came in without speaking, his face looking stolid and grim in the gray light, until, quietly side by side, they had crossed the room, and he seated himself in the chair by the window, with Archie on a little cricket at his side; then, as they sat together without uttering a single word, but with their hands clasped closely together, Archie looking grave and very thoughtful, his father seemed suddenly to grow agitated. In his eyes and on his lips, compressed together, the emotion showed itself, in the hungry look which he fastened on that little upturned face.

"They'll sit that way for a long time without speaking," Barry whispered in my ear; "for, although master loves that child to death, and more too, yet he rarely speaks a word to him. It isn't my way of making love, that's one thing certain."

Then, with only one backward glance, which took in all the pathos of the grouping of that strange tableau, those two desolate faces, with an affinity of love shining out through their eyes on one another, the enveloping moonlight, and tenderer shadows, and with tears in my eyes that would gather there despite my endeavors, I went out from the room and softly closed the door.

About this time, much to my surprise, came rumors of much internal extravagance in our household; dark looks of anxiety began to change the indifference of Mrs. Dare's face, while Gertrude, who lately had seemed to avoid and mistrust me, became each day only the more disagreeable. I remember distinctly one conversation, wherein, for the first time, Mrs. Dare spoke openly of her pecuniary embarrassments in my presence, while both my cousins, Valerie and Gertrude, appeared to resent her doing so.

"The idea of our being subjected to any inconvenience of this kind is at once revolting and unnatural," Gertrude said, with much repressed anger. "To be obliged to pinch and haggle over a few dollars is our disgrace."

Then, for the first time, I became aware that she was looking directly at me.

"We will take a cottage in the country for the summer," Mrs. Dare said. "We can retrench a great deal in this way. I saw an advertisement this morning in the *Post*, of one at Wickoff's Ledge; if the terms are moderate, I shall decide to take it."

"Wickoff's Ledge!" repeated Gertrude, looking suddenly at her mother, and with the first smile on her face I had seen there for a long time.

"Wickoff's Ledge!" echoed Valerie, looking up from her novel, with a fiery spot in either cheek. "It belongs to the Trenholm estate, does it not?"

"It belongs to the Trenholm estate," Mrs. Dare answered, quietly, but looking across at Gertrude with an expression of intense satisfaction shining out from her eyes. Then Gertrude, whose eyes had begun to shine also, asked another question,—

"Throckmorton is going to visit General Farquhar this summer, is he not?"

But Mrs. Dare had suddenly grown reticent, and would say no more.

All that afternoon subsequent to this conversation, which opened to me new phases of thought and anxiety, I spent alone in my room, endeavoring to discover to my conclusive satisfaction what would be the proper course for me to pursue. One speculation tortured me above all the rest, why had Mrs. Dare, usually so reticent upon all subjects pertaining to her private affairs, so openly spoken of them upon this occasion in my presence? Was it to intimate that in the changing aspect of their fortunes it would necessitate too great a sacrifice on their part to share them with me? Had not Gertrude's disagreeable manner of looking at me and her cold words pointed conclusively to this? For a long while I remained thus in a state of much doubt, feeling a great deal hurt and sorrowful at their method of intimation, that, after all, it would be very hard to go out into the world, as I began to feel I must, to earn my bread and buffet alone and unaided against its storms. They had been so sudden, these intimations of disaster and retrenchment in this house of splendor and infinite luxury, where all the auxiliary appliances of wealth had combined to render the every-day life soft-cornered and restful; it had been so sudden, so unheralded, that now, when I faced the knowledge fairly and squarely with legitimate conviction, it overwhelmed me. That I must no longer remain an incubus upon their hospitality I began to realize very sharply; they had been very kind to me, had borne long and patiently with my shortcomings, when they might have turned me into the street so many times, provoked to the measure by my innumerable obstinacies; to testify my gratitude for their forbearance I must at once prove myself strong and thoughtful for their sakes, no longer be content to remain a clog upon their charity, but fight my own battles out in the wideness of the world. This resolution, at length arrived at after much intense deliberation and strained thought, comforted me infinitely.

Just before the dressing-bell rang for dinner I sought Mrs. Dare in her dressing-room; when I went in, I found

her sitting before a large Psyche mirror, under the artistic hands of Celeste, who was arranging her hair in the most elaborate style; I was disappointed at not finding her alone, as I desired to say my all in private, to exact a serious attention, and to prove the wisdom of my scheme, at least in words, to her utmost satisfaction. Cool, calm, and ineffably gracious, Mrs. Dare turned to me as I entered.

"You have come to talk to me, Marguerite? Sit down and wait just a moment, for Celeste is nearly finished,—she is going to dress Valerie's hair in a few moments,—those people are coming to dinner, you know,—the Mortimers, Farquhar, Colonel Throckmorton and the rest,—take that magazine and be patient."

Fifteen minutes elapsed, during which time I endeavored in vain to interest myself in the pages of the magazine, with the most entire unsuccess, however, as I was obliged to acknowledge to myself when the time had gone by; for now that the moment had been put off in which I should acquaint Mrs. Dare with my fresh resolution, my courage began perceptibly to ebb, and leave me stranded high and dry upon the shoals of dubious suspense. I had come fresh from my eager thoughts, to tell her plainly and determinedly that now, when for the first time I had grown to know the extent of her embarrassments, I had made a resolve to seek as early an opportunity as possible both to express to her my deep sense of gratitude for her many kindnesses, and to inform her that I felt it to be my duty to leave the hospitalities of her roof, to win with the might of a sturdy will those of the outer world. But how chilling and death-dealing to such warm impulses is the tardy recognition of their importance, to be kept waiting upon the very threshold of utterance! During this state of suspense, when all the pros and cons of my peculiar situation thrust themselves forward with derisive visages to laugh and mock at me, I could not help wondering whether Mrs. Dare would not so laugh and mock at me for daring to suggest the possibility of an adopted daughter of hers earning, with honest toil, whether of hand or brain, the independence of her daily bread. And yet, had not my instinct told me that

under this same roof, gilded and magnificent as it was, there existed a state of espionage upon my actions, a continual and subtle questioning in the minds of those who claimed to be my benefactors, relative to all my motives and the proprieties of anything that I might do or say? Would it not, after all, be considered more satisfactory if I should voluntarily relieve them of such a *bête noir* as my presence?

At this stage of my reflections, where I sat with my eyes mechanically following the lines of the very page at which I had opened fifteen minutes before, Mrs. Dare, leaning back, enveloped in the Valenciennes softness of her peignoir, turned the haughtily questioning of her face full upon me.

"You have something to say to me, Marguerite," she said, as Celeste left the room; "something which you evidently consider very important. I can see it in your face, my child,—speak out."

"I have almost lost my courage, Aunt Honoria," I answered, quaking a little at the very evident kindness expressed in her voice. It annihilated my courage only the more to be thus spoken to. If she had been sharp or forbidding, how glib the words which I so longed to utter would have passed my lips! "I am afraid that I shall offend you."

"Please do not do that," she said, suddenly looking down and plaiting the lace to her peignoir into little frills, very idly,—*"anything but that. We have been friends such a long time now,—ever since those naughty, rebellious days before you went to school."* Then she looked up again, this time with a relaxing smile.

"You have been so kind to me, Aunt Honoria," I tried to say calmly, but with my voice shaking a little; "more kind than I deserve, a great deal. I don't think that I am naturally lovable; I am very hot-tempered, fault-finding, and rebellious, and you have been forbearing,—more than forbearing,—generous." Softly she shook her head, looking down and plaiting the lace to her peignoir, with only the haughty outline of her profile turned toward me,—shook her head, as though deprecating the laudatory remark concerning herself. "I have tried to deserve all

this since I left school," I went on, resolutely. "Believe me, Aunt Honoria, I have faithfully endeavored to please you in everything possible, and it grieves me to think that I may have overdone the matter sometimes, or else fallen short of your expectations entirely. I am naturally impulsive, and can't help making mistakes very often——"

"We are all liable to make mistakes, Marguerite," she interrupted me, very kindly, "and the older we grow the more acutely do we become conscious of them. How much more wise does the same consciousness make us, after all! and how much more willing to be guided in our decisions and impulses by the experience of those older than ourselves!"

"Yes," I said, a little doubtfully.

"You are naturally very willful, Marguerite," she continued, laying her head back and looking at me very steadily now, "and, as you acknowledge yourself, hot-tempered and a little rebellious at times, a combination of traits that are the most potent to overwhelm a young life like yours with disaster, to ruin your later peace, and to shade your whole maturity of existence with inevitable regret. I would wish to guard you from this calamity as completely as possible. You will acknowledge yourself that, through my greater experience and age, I am well calculated to control your impulsiveness of temperament, to influence you aright, and avert the inevitable consequences of such willful proclivities to your complete satisfaction; during these first hours of your emancipation from a school-girl's natural thralldom of will, you may not be so conscious of this as you will be when looking back a few years hence through the medium of an analytical wisdom."

When she stopped, with her eyes riveted on my face questioningly, I could only nod my head at her in a mute acquiescence.

"Please do not allow your oversensitive perception to obscure or pervert the true meaning of my words," she went on, gravely, "or subject them to the annihilating fire of an intemperate judgment; I do not desire to appear to you either dictatorial or unjust; let me only prove



myself to be to you the true friend which I feel that I am in my heart, such a friend as I promised your Uncle Will to be three years ago."

Her voice seemed to soften at those last words; the tone and the words combined were powerful to touch my heart.

"Yes, you have been all that, and more, Aunt Honoria," I said, gratefully; "if I was not so peculiarly sensitive and weak I should have been completely happy while under your roof; as it is, of course it is useless to tell you that sometimes I have felt depressed and ill at ease, not through any fault of yours, Aunt Honoria, as I realize very sharply now, but through my own want of reasonable judgment and self-control; indeed, you have fulfilled your promise to Uncle Will, you have been very, very kind to me." Then I stopped short with a little quiver in my voice.

"Yes, you are peculiarly sensitive," she said, very thoughtfully, "so sensitive, in truth, that every little obstacle to your complete happiness is magnified through the microscopic lens of your imagination into a malicious, intentional, and gigantic restraint. How mistaken you are, my dear child, in your impetuous judgments."

Leaning back in all her negligent haughtiness of repose, the cold, severe face softening at me just a little, I could not but feel that, perhaps, after all, she spoke the truth, and that the swallowing and digesting of such food upon my part might do me good.

"I think you are right, Aunt Honoria," I said, bravely.

"It will benefit you immensely to realize this fully," she went on, kindly, "for we cannot live without stumbling against these obstacles with almost every step; to rebel against them only increases our discontent, whereas if we, on the other hand, laughingly defied them, the conquering of their frail importunities would prove very easy. Believe me, Marguerite, I regret exceedingly that you should be subjected to anything of the kind; it is my sincere wish that your life may be perfect to your utmost satisfaction."

"I am afraid it will never be that," I answered, shaking

my head in much doubt; "the trouble is I anticipate too much, and then when I come to realize I find myself woefully disappointed; but I think this continual chagrin may do me good; it is like swallowing a bitter tonic after having indulged in debilitating sweetmeats."

"If you swallow your disappointments in a philosophical manner," said my aunt, gravely, smiling at me, "they will be sure to benefit you;" then looking suddenly at her watch, she added, "now, Marguerite, you have not said what you came here to say, and as it is twenty minutes past seven o'clock, and we dine at eight, you must say it in exactly ten minutes; you will require the remaining half hour for your toilet."

"I scarcely know how to say it," I said, very doubtfully, as, with the smile gone from her face, she lay back once more in the depths of her chair, appearing to settle herself to listen with the utmost patience to my words, but in a way that slightly discouraged me. "I have been thinking about it all the afternoon ever since the conversation which took place here after luncheon to-day, and have at length concluded that it is my duty to acquaint you immediately with my resolution."

"Well," she said, expectantly, as I stopped.

"To tell the truth, Aunt Honoria, very plainly and briefly," I went on, courageously, "I don't feel as though I could any longer remain dependent upon your kindness of heart and charity; I have been short-sighted already too long; and now have decided the better course for me to pursue is at once to leave your roof and endeavor to seek a competency elsewhere."

I had not calculated exactly upon the expression of pain which seemed to convulse her face at my last words,—it grew so suddenly pale and agitated, as though mutely deprecating the determination so clearly expressed in my voice.

"And you would desert me now in this hour of my especial tribulation," she said, controlling her voice, but speaking very coldly; "after all my endeavors to render you happy and to benefit you in every way possible, at the very first intimation of misfortune you venture so calmly to acquaint me with your resolute determination to leave me at



once and irrevocably? Marguerite, I am disappointed in you!"

"Do not speak in that way, please," I said, agitatedly; "I do not wish to appear either heartless or ungrateful. Aunt Honoria, I would not willingly cause you a single pang of suffering, believe me; it is only that I think it my duty to leave you as soon as possible, more for your sake than mine, for to you I must appear an intolerable burden and care."

"And for a paltry idea, a mere chimera of an overwrought sensitiveness, you would sacrifice your present life of comfort for one of toil and helplessness," she replied, looking at me still more coldly, but with a growing heat in her eyes, "chase the ignis fatuus of a romantic spleen to the certain destruction of your peace, and at the expense of appearing thoroughly heartless to those to whom you owe everything. I will not assert my claims upon your gratitude to restrain you, Marguerite; if you have made up your mind decisively to desert me without relying in the slightest manner upon my affection for you, I have nothing more to say." Then with very pale lips, compressed and inflexible, with an iron self-control, and with her eyes growing gloomier and gloomier at each word, she arose from her chair.

I watched her, singularly fascinated, as haughtily she moved about the room in a quick, uncertain way, as she took her dinner-dress from the divan, and arrayed herself in it very composedly, as though oblivious of my continued presence, her proud face grown so pale and severely reproachful, the long, slender hands burying themselves among the grenadine folds nervously; then I spoke,—

"I did not know that you cared for me,—really cared for me," I said, softly. "If I only thought that, and was sure it would make you unhappy to have me leave you, I would cling to you through everything, Aunt Honoria,—indeed I would, very willingly, and with the utmost love."

"That sounds very well," she answered, cruelly,—so cruelly that it stung me,—"after I have faithfully endeavored to make plain to you my continual and increasing affection, only to be repeatedly reproached with false-

hood and deceit. Do not interrupt me," she added, haughtily, as I essayed to speak, "it would only be to add another heartlessness of language to the long category of words in which you have so effectually affronted me. To say that I am astonished at this proposition of yours, to quit my care and protection, to go out into the world and disgrace my name, would but feebly express the indignation which fills my heart at such an unprecedented temerity. You are at once ungrateful and insincere."

"I am *not* ungrateful and insincere," I said, very calmly, facing her, but with my heart sickening within me at her words; "I have *not* repeatedly reproached you with being either false or deceitful,—my manner nor my words have never intimated anything of the kind to you; for if they had, I should certainly have been conscious of it at the time, and no indignation of yours could have exceeded my own if such had been the case. As to my disgracing your name,—I think, with my father's blood in my veins, that such a thing would scarcely be possible."

She was looking straight into my face when I said that, straight into my eyes,—grown suddenly as haughty and defiant as her own,—and as she looked, the heat went out quickly from her face, the passion died off her lips, leaving them only white and pitiful.

"With your father's blood in your veins," she repeated, slowly. Then, without another word, she turned her back full upon me and walked to the other end of the room.

That one act, the quick changing of her face at the mention of my father, the vague ache of pain thrilling her voice, speaking with such a touching pathos of the long-ago dead love, caused a complete revulsion in my heart; I became instantly filled with infinite pity, with tenderness and charity.

"Marguerite," she said, turning toward me again, very calmly this time, but still pale, "I have had a great deal to annoy me to-day, and it is time for you to dress for dinner; let us hereafter forget this conversation, and never resume it, for I scarcely think that when you come to re-

flect seriously upon your resolution, that you will find it in your heart to leave me."

"If you are anxious for me to stay, Aunt Honoria," I said, going to her where she stood, with her tall figure reflected in the silver depths of the mirror, "I will endeavor to please you in this as in all things. I did not know that you loved me; and, in the future, I will try to believe those cruel words you said a moment ago did not come from your heart." Then I put my face up to kiss her.

"You must be right," she answered, quietly, bending down and pressing her cold lips to my forehead; "I did not mean them, my child,—forget them, we must be complete friends henceforth; now go and make your toilet for dinner."

Well, it had all passed quickly enough, that was one thing certain; yet, I cannot but acknowledge that I returned to my own room a little dazed and dissatisfied, wishing that it might have been settled, whether on the same basis or not, in some different way. Mrs. Dare had appeared so unwarrantably excited, so unjust in her accusations, so quickly carried away by some inexplicable feeling of anger, that I had become at once astonished and displeased. Did she really love me as she professed to love me? Was the continual restraint which always appeared to master her arrogance when speaking to me but a covering to her great affection, which she, so usually indifferent and cold, entertained for me? and in this instance had it given way before the long pent-up force of her disappointed love? Did I really hurt her when I ventured to propose leaving her,—did I seem cruel and heartless to her, in truth?

To all these questions agitating my mind during the making of my dinner toilet I could find but very unsatisfactory answers,—it seemed queer to be loved so tenderly by this apparently soulless woman, whose only guiding star seemed to be that of ambition, and whose tendernesses were but bitter lakes of cold regard at best,—scalding in their entire selfishness; and yet she must love me, after all, or else how could she be brought to display so much feeling at the bare mention

of my leaving her, or at my dead father's name? Was it not for his sake, for the sake of the man whom she had loved so desperately and unrequitedly in the long-ago, looking in my face, and daily seeing the faint spirit of his image reflected there, that with one of those quick inconsistencies which form such green oases in the thirsty sands of the souls of such forsaken ones, she had grown unconsciously to love me? If this was so, how much I ought to endeavor, even through infinite pity, if nothing else, to gratify her in all things reasonable, to lay down the measure of my submission to the guiding of her will! I owed her so much,—thus winning for myself, perhaps, the privilege of softening her heart still more, and gradually leading her to the light. Her bitter words had been the offspring of an outraged affection; I must not allow them to rankle and make my new resolution, built hastily on the shivering sands of the old one, that of being a comfort to her henceforth, sore or hotly oversensitive. They had stung me, stung me subtly and cruelly; but the sting must be resolutely removed,—the fresh valor of self-victory must inaugurate hers! Thinking it over, how glad I was, after all, that in these first days of my happy satisfaction in the companionship of little Archie I should not be obliged to desert him, as all else had done, or to merit the heated measure of the faithful Barry's anger; then with these last thoughts I went down-stairs to the drawing-room. For the nonce I had entirely forgotten Cecil Throckmorton; I remembered him again, however, when I saw him lounging against the embrasure to one of the front windows, talking to Gertrude Dare. As I paused for one moment in the hall to fasten my glove, Murray Dare, who evidently was on the lookout for my advent, and who had already recovered from the effects of his chagrined vanity, which had been so outraged by me at the Waring's reception, came out hastily to join me. Here I would make my first endeavor to please Mrs. Dare,—I would be civil to this popinjay.

## CHAPTER XXII.

"MISS MARGUERITE, we have been discussing class-day," Lorimer said, as Murray Dare and I joined Juliette Mortimer and himself where they stood together near the door. "Miss Mortimer tells me this year will be her first, yet she has already received fifteen invitations."

"While I have not received a single one," I answered, laughingly. "Only imagine me, arrayed in peacock feathers, sailing into Hollis, Stoughton, and Holworthy."

"Then you are going?"

"Of course she is going," said Murray Dare, pulling his whiskers furiously. "Aunt Honoria, isn't Cousin Marguerite going to class-day with us?"

Mrs. Dare, looking very cool and self-possessed, at that moment passing us, paused to reply. "If she chooses," she answered, smiling slightly at me.

"Then you must certainly choose," Lorimer said, gravely. "Class-day at Harvard is Boston's gala-day,—almost as dear as were the ancient games of Greece to the Hellenic tribe; only, instead of physical wrestling, boxing, and running, our modern Athenians indulge in mental contests of strength. Alcibiades may send seven chariots to the festival now as then; but they must be chariots of oratory, of erudition, and research, wheeled with brain and drawn by the fiery horses of wit!"

Then Murray, the waiter, came to announce dinner.

A profusion of rare cut-glass, medallioned silver, low-hanging rock-crystal gas-jets, roses, lilies, and myrtle; while just opposite to where I sat, beside General Farquhar, Valerie Hoffman's face looked smilingly across at me, an exquisite Greuze picture, framed between bouquets of roses and lilies. As usual, Mrs. Dare had so arranged it that I should be taken in to dinner by the inevitable Murray Dare, whose meager platitudes and wearisome attempts at sentiment I had learned so thoroughly to deprecate.

To-night, Cecil Throckmorton had thus far devoted himself exclusively to Gertrude Dare, while General Farquhar, after the first recognition had passed, had not looked at, spoken to, or taken the slightest notice of me in any way. Fortunately for the maintenance of my mental equilibrium, Lorimer had been assigned a seat upon my left hand, so that every now and then a stray gleam of intelligence would flash, meteor-like, across the desert of Murray Dare's monologue to the advancement and support of my patience. Dressed in white crape, looped here and there with blue forget-me-nots, and with her golden hair coiled loosely about her head, Valerie Hoffman, sitting directly opposite me, her violet eyes raised softly to meet General Farquhar's cooler, calm ones, looked the very inspiration of a Greuze dream or the subject for a Petrarch rhapsody.

"A penny for your thoughts, Miss Marguerite," said Lorimer.

"I was devouring my cousin Mrs. Hoffman's lovely face," I said, under my breath; "it is such a subject that if I was an artist I would be content to spend my life in the endeavor to transfer it to canvas."

"Dr. Johnson declared, you know, in sitting opposite a beautiful woman, instead of feasting his stomach he could only feast his eyes; you are similarly affected; let me break the spell by giving you some of this Romanée Conti, or would you prefer the champagne?"

"Neither at present; perhaps I will take a little champagne by-and-by."

"I am glad to know you do not advocate total abstinence either in your votaries or yourself; such a strain after propriety is nothing, after all, but a modern heterodoxy. I always make it a point to drink Chablis with my oysters, and between the entrées, Chateau d'Yquem: these are the two grand articles of my gastronomical creed."

"How fortunate it is," said Valerie Hoffman across the table, "a tin spoon was not your birthright; how you would have relished the treacle of Dotheboys Hall!"

"Our mouths are educated to the bit necessarily; if we are given straw, we must eat straw or perish; on the

other hand, in this sublime age of *pâtes de foie gras* and *entrées*, could we sympathize with Hippocrates, who preferred the flesh of puppies to that of birds? Only imagine a banquet du chien, with the antithesis, a profusion of Lafitte and Chambertin!"

"My imagination is not sufficiently vivid," Valerie answered, with a successful shudder.

"Or material," suggested Lorimer; "how deeply it is to be regretted the didactic Archestratus did not live two or three thousand years longer, that he might have written an addition to his gastrologic code of laws on the subject of the modern banquet hippophagique!"

"The prophet Elijah must have dined off the winged horse Pegasus, and the digestion thereof took him up to heaven," Miss Mortimer ventured, very irreverently.

"He must be the man in the moon," said Lorimer, gravely; "I always thought he looked like a thorough gourmet, his face is so jolly and round after he has dined off the boiled mutton of a month sauced with plenty of Endymionic capers."

"An execrable pun," observed Colonel Throckmorton, where he sat between Valerie and Gertrude Dare; "Miss Mortimer, I beg you will not encourage him."

"I only wish she would," Lorimer said, regarding Miss Mortimer's face with much mock sentiment; "I have been endeavoring to fight the Philistines of my doubting heart with the jawbone of a horse ever since she last spoke."

"Your wit is hydra-headed," retorted Valerie laughingly, "and your metaphors are farcical at the expense of elegance."

"The moon is to blame, then; it was Miss Mortimer's original idea that Elijah must have dined off the wings of Pegasus, which inspired me; I never thought the prophets were so civilized; the poet says with more metaphorical elegance than I can command,—'Phœbus drives his steeds to be foddered in the western stables;' this exploit is only preparatory to a slaughter of the innocents, and a grand banquet hippophagique, in which the man in the moon, who chases Phœbus hungrily, plays the rôle of chief gourmet."

"Why do you not write a treatise on moonological gastronomy?" Throckmorton queried, laughing at him.

"To my own satisfaction, I could work out this problem, but our tutelary goddesses are altogether too fond of imagining the man in the moon to be a mere creature of the imagination, and would resent an insinuation that all is not gold which glitters."

"We melt the pearls of our chagrin in this petit souper of severity," Valerie said, mournfully.

"But," I interposed, "don't do that, Cousin Valerie,—be patient; Mr. Lorimer looks at the moon through the prongs of his fork; wait until he has finished his dinner, and he will become at once remorseful and good-natured."

Lorimer looked at me with serio-comic eyes. "You are right," he said, gravely; "men are always at a disadvantage until they have dined. Machiavel says, 'One ought never to make half an enemy.' I agree with him, adding, on my own responsibility, 'one ought never to make half a dinner.'"

"You forget what Talleyrand said: 'The love of good living is a venial crime in men of wit!'"

"Ah, yes; but Talleyrand was a notorious gourmet, and fed his disciples on the loaves and fishes of a continual feast. Brillat Savarin insists that 'gourmandize is favorable to beauty.' Brillat Savarin is right,—dinner makes the genius, and wine the wit."

"Prophet," parodied Colonel Throckmorton, "thing of genius,—prophet, sure of beef or *pâte*! By this dinner that invites us, by that wine we both adore! Tell this soul, with hunger laden, if within the distant Aiden, it shall dine there à la Russe,—dine on salads as before, eat spiced oysters, grouse, and *entrées*, dine on *salmis* as before?"

Lorimer answered, "Quoth the raven, 'nevermore!'"

"Poe had been supping off Welsh rarebits and hors-d'œuvres when he wrote that," said Murray Dare, "and imagined he saw all sorts of animals."

"A banquet hippophagique of dreams," ventured Juliette Mortimer.

"Nightmare," suggested Lorimer.

"Another perpetration of wit!" exclaimed Colonel Throckmorton, deprecatingly; "I never realized that flesh and blood could soar so high into the realms of vacuity."

"Except when the cow jumped over the moon," Lorimer retorted.

Then Murray Dare, in a very feeble voice, added, "I never heard of the moon being cowed before;" but nobody took any notice of him.

"Miss Marguerite," Lorimer said, by-and-by, sotto voce, "I have been endeavoring in vain to make you laugh; if you must be solemn, let me give you some of this Charlotte Russe and a glass of this Muscat."

"No," interposed Murray Dare, very pompously, "she cannot allow you to do it, for she refused me a little while ago."

"Did she? how unfortunate for you! Miss Marguerite, I hope you will change your mind in the matter of this Muscat, for one ought not to eat dessert without it,—dessert is a symbol of heaven,—it comes after all else is past, you know, and leaves nothing to be desired."

"Then I will take my dessert without the Muscat."

"You are incorrigible," deprecated Lorimer, as he filled his own glass; "only imagine how our great-grandfathers used to have theirs served in Cellini cups and mediæval plate. I wonder if they enjoyed their dinners in those days any better than we enjoy ours in these?"

"Not as well," replied Cecil Throckmorton, "then they could not relish a dessert without a jaundiced plenitude of painted shepherdesses, paper cattle, and stucco palaces, to make theatrical its garniture. If heaven is served up in that style, then he is an easily contented soul who does not turn Lucifer."

When we left the dining-room, and the gentlemen to the demolition of their cigars, Cecil Throckmorton held the door open for us to pass. Then for the first time during the entire evening, that as I looked up at him when I went by, I met his eyes fully and squarely, saw them soften a little, the vague questioning stir their depths, and with this remembrance passed out from him into the drawing-room. But Gertrude Dare, following,

saw his face change, also,—saw the softening of his eyes, my involuntary response, and took the first opportunity to upbraid me. When, to escape her espionage, I had retired to a seat in the window, looking out upon the evening-shaded Common, where the stars hung high up among the leaves, and roguishly twinkled their eyes at me through their golden lashes, she came and spoke to me. I do not remember exactly what she said; it was sufficient for me to realize how hot were her words with condemnation, how white her face with excitement. By-and-by, finding no satisfaction either in my display of self-control or indifference, she left me, evidently discouraged at my imperturbability. How sweet the night air tasted to my thirsty lips, how brightly shone the twinkling of the stars! Even Gertrude's bitter, unjust words were, after the first pang had exhausted itself, powerless to affect my peace. It seemed to me that, high up over my head, in the hanging choir of His stars, I could hear Him striking out the gold-voiced notes of my life's psalm, with a steady meter, upon the moving organ of the skies. By-and-by I read on the lettered pages of the heavens,—He would deliver me from this enthrallment of mind and body; that, though transiently blindfolded to this purpose, yet He would lead me sure-footed through this path where the jagged flints thrust their points defiantly up, among the rose-leaves, to bruise my feet,—to a later peace which, in my conceiving eyes, would be perfect, and a recompense.

How the stars twinkled and shone! Ah! were these bright spots little crevices in the walls of God's heaven, the key-holes to His gates? Would everything be bright and beautiful on the other side? It must be so, since all the clouds carry their white faces looking up! How happy must we be there; how short was this life after all! Since die we must, why not endeavor to die with tolerably clean hearts? Then the door opened, and the gentlemen came in. First appeared Uncle Archibald and Mr. Waring,—following them closely, Murray Dare and Cecil Throckmorton. Although Gertrude had seated herself so that in crossing the room to where I sat whoever should choose to join me she would intercept on their way; yet,



by making a little detour, Colonel Throckmorton succeeded in reaching my side unchallenged, distancing Murray Dare, who was making a precipitate approach from the other side.

"I am so glad to know that you are going to class-day, Miss Dare," were his first words, as he seated himself beside me in the window. "As I understand it to be your first experience of old Harvard, I venture to predict that all your anticipations will be more than realized, that you will congratulate yourself upon having decided to go."

"I did not decide until this evening; I was not quite sure that I could go, although I wanted to so much; but how did you find out about my going?"

"Lorimer said something about it after you had left the table, then I also overheard all that you said when you first made your appearance this evening."

"I was not aware that I was talking for the edification of the whole room; I must control my voice hereafter."

"That would be sacrilege; don't you remember Cordelia's exceeding fascination? Your voice is equally expressive; please do not imagine, because I averred that I heard all that you said when conversing with Mr. Lorimer, that you enunciated your words either in a loud or an emphatic manner; that would have been unnecessary. I heard all that you said, because I could not help it." Then he looked down into my puzzled face, with his willful, daring eyes lighted up. "Because I wished to catch the sound and the meaning of all your words," he added, bending down, "I listened for them apart from everything else."

"And all the time you looked so cold and indifferent—a sort of Spitzbergen icicle. I couldn't help regretting it very much."

"Did you? I am so glad that you regretted it; but you were the unkind one to doubt me; you must never doubt me again, will you?"

He was bending down now, with his long, blue eyes grown quickly tender, his lips smiling gently at me, but I dared not look at him.

"I don't know; it depends upon yourself; if you never give me occasion to doubt you, then I never shall, but——"

"I don't like 'buts,'" he said, seriously, as I paused, "or, worse yet, conditional promises. I could not be conditional with you if I tried; please endeavor to be as wholesomely sincere with me."

"Am I not sincere?" I said, looking up, quickly; "you do not know me, if you think I am not sincere; but I forgot, you are doubting *me* now."

"I am throwing stones out of my glass house," he replied, laughingly, "and I did not realize it; let me assure you that I did not intend my remark should reflect upon your sincerity—your every-day sincerity—in the least, only I am exacting, and I want you to be as *particularly* sincere as I am."

"As you are!" I exclaimed, laughingly; "perhaps for all I know you are not sincere at all!"

"I wish you would not laugh or persist in being so contrary," he said, ruefully; "you are extremely variable both in voice and manner; I thought I had convinced you, and behold, you are as provokingly incredulous as ever."

"I can't help it," I answered, looking up at him, very penitently; "to believe in you all at once—I mean to understand you thoroughly; to give you credit for all your good thoughts and impulses and condemn you as well for the evil, would be impossible."

"Rien d'impossible," remonstrated Colonel Throckmorton; "'impossible' is a horrible word; I will make it possible for you to believe in me, nolens volens; I swear it by those stars you are looking at."

"You are looking dreadfully sentimental over here," interrupted Lorimer's teasing voice, "so sentimental that I feel authorized to give you a dose of my material presence. Miss Dare, Throckmorton is a most inveterate sentimentalist: you must know, that if you give him an inch of encouragement it will make a knell of peace."

"Lorimer, did you come the entire length of the room to perpetrate that?"

"No; I came here to beg Miss Marguerite to favor us with some music."

Involuntarily I looked across the room to where, near Juliette Mortimer and Mr. Horton, sat Gertrude Dare on



a divan, watching us intently, and with a half-malicious smile hiding itself in the curve of her lips. Then I knew why Lorimer had been sent.

"I never play or sing in company, Mr. Lorimer," I said, a little coldly. "I do not like to appear disobliging, but I must certainly refuse you to-night."

"Please do not do that," he pleaded. "Your cousin, Miss Dare, told me not five minutes since that she knew you sang. We can go into the music-room alone by ourselves, then those who choose to come and listen to you can find their way there by-and-by."

With each word that he uttered I became only the more and more vexed. I could see very well that Gertrude had insisted upon his asking me, for the sole gratification of seeing me humiliated and render myself ridiculous by an acquiescence. In truth, this music-passion of mine I held to be so sacred and pure that it always had seemed a trying ordeal to me to give expression to it in the presence of others, especially those whom I knew to be unsympathetic and uninspired. So strange was this reserve, so sensitive and hidden, that when forced even at school, at the command of my teachers, to make a display of my musical talent, to parade its infinity of harmony and spiritual deliciousness of inspiration to the edification of heathen critics, to lay bare the lavish love of my soul to the metallic touch of their tame approbation, I had learned instinctively to curb the passion in my voice, the power in my touch, to a mediocrity of expression that, though comprehended by them in their littleness of light, yet left me weary and dissatisfied. Twilight hours had I seized and held in the glowing hands of my inspiration,—early hours, when no one else was by to applaud with lukewarm praise or condemn with ignorant criticism,—and odd moments, sweeter for the stealth, won by me from the tiresome routine of my daily studies, to give vent to the sea of tenderness always so eager to find utterance in the waves of my voice. This reserve had held me in thrall since my return to my aunt's house; this dread of intolerant sympathy and criticism, had prevented me from indulging myself in my beloved music, except when assured that my cousins and

aunt were absent from home, and this was why Gertrude Dare, believing that I should fail ignominiously, had sent Lorimer to insist upon my singing.

"Please change your mind, Miss Marguerite," pleaded Lorimer, persistently.

"I know that you sing," Colonel Throckmorton said, earnestly. "I wish you would allow Mr. Lorimer to persuade you."

"I wish you would," said Lorimer.

"I am not hesitating for the mere sake of being teased and flattered," I said, gravely, and trembling a little, for I had begun unconsciously to yield; "but I am really afraid to sing before so many; I am not used to it; I never sang before ten people all at once in my life." Then, with only another glance at Gertrude Dare's malicious face,—a glance which decided me,—I added, quietly, "I will sing for you, Mr. Lorimer, if you desire it."

Together, followed by Throckmorton, we went to the music-room.

"What shall I sing?" I queried, when I had seated myself at the piano, looking up at Throckmorton, where he lounged against a marble bust of Beethoven, his long, sleepy blue eyes looking down at me in a way that caused my hands to tremble and waver. "What shall I sing?"

"You ought to ask me," Lorimer said, in an aggrieved voice.

"I ask you both,—what shall I sing?"

"Anything," answered Lorimer.

But Throckmorton, still looking down with questioning eyes, said, "Sing one of those old ballads that we are all so fond of; I haven't heard one for a long time,—they are always so sweet."

Uncontrollably I questioned myself, should I venture to sing the song I used to sing to him in other days,—that which he had so loved, so soothed him,—the "Last Rose of Summer?" Ah! how sacred it had become to me, how beloved and cherished,—only sung in hours most happy and inspired, and then most heartfully. Should I in just a few moments, through the force and passion of this song, annihilate conclusively the barrier

of soul separating us, throw down the gauntlet of recognition, and dare him to take it up? Ah! how handsome he looked, how noble and full of peace! In that brief moment of speculation, how sorely tried I was, how tempted to remind him vividly of that forgotten time, to humiliate him into the choking dust of self-contempt, and perhaps wrest from him the price of friendship for all this pain of suspense with only the music of a simple song and of a few simpler words! But would he not hate me for so doing,—would he not condemn me for my intolerable selfishness and want of heart? I must not risk so much, but be quiet, I must be brave—self-forgotten.

"Sing Auld Robin Gray," said Cecil Throckmorton.

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I sang that song as I think I never sang a song before,—into its depths I threw all the passion of my spirit, all the pent-up expression, which to me had always seemed sacred and to be restrained, the weight and entire pathos of its words throbbing in unison with my voice, which in this hour did not choke or falter. In its weird sadness, in the heart-broken rhythm of its devotion, I completely lost my own identity,—to its demanding aches of self-sacrifice and sorrow, I gave a ready acquiescence of sympathy,—and in the enveloping sweetness of its music I passed out from myself, and was forgotten. When I finished, as the last aching words left my lips, then for the first time looking up, I became dimly conscious that I was surrounded by many people, that Lorimer leaned eagerly against the piano near me, with his face, usually so comical and merry, grown quickly astonished and thoughtful. Valerie Hoffman had come in, and now stood afar off, watching me with subtly troubled eyes. There was quite a long pause, then everybody spoke,—some to tell me how sweet and powerful my voice was, how exquisite the words and music of the song in themselves,—but I listened in vain for the sound of Gertrude Dare's voice, it was the only one quiet, that and one other.

"I never realized the song was so beautiful before," Colonel Throckmorton said, bending down over me, and with intensified, speaking eyes looking softly into mine.

"Your voice is wonderful, it is so magnetically expressive." That was what he said, but the words were nothing.

This was my hour of triumph,—in Valerie's face I read it, in the quiet of Gertrude Dare's voice, and in the sympathetic eyes of Cecil Throckmorton.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

A BRIGHT June day, the atmosphere braided everywhere with sun-needles, and cool with breezes, which, borne among daisy-stars and meadow-sweet infinite, gathered as they flew all the fragrance of the roses to bruise the heart perfumes in our faces. We had driven out from the city, at about one o'clock, to attend the class-day festival, Aunt Honoria, Mabel Chauncy, Murray Dare, and myself in one carriage, Mrs. Hoffman, Gertrude, General Farquhar, and Cecil Throckmorton in the other, just in time to escape the "tiresome exercises in the church," as Valerie characterized the delivery of the class oration and poem, a justice of expression which I have appreciated since. Much to my delight, when Mabel Chauncy had called to see me two or three days previous,—the first time we had met since leaving school,—Mrs. Dare had insisted upon her making me a visit at her house, also upon her accompanying me to this much-talked-of and eagerly-anticipated class-day, an invitation accepted by Mabel.

"You do not seem to be very good friends with Gertrude," Mrs. Dare remarked, the day subsequent to Mabel's visit, she having returned home temporarily to prepare for class-day; "much as I regret this, I cannot fail to see that it is the truth; why such a state of feelings exist I cannot understand."

Then, as she paused, evidently desiring me to unburden my heart to her, very quietly I stated to her my various grievances, how on every possible occasion Gertrude

sought to annoy me with her suspicions, even although I endeavored daily to avoid meeting her, thus rendering my life generally unpleasant. This I felt justified in recapitulating, as I had begun to realize that in the whirl of her new anxieties, Mrs. Dare might be unaware of Gertrude's ungenerosities, and possibly that her remonstrance against their display might occasion a change for the better in my cousin's unfortunate disposition. And I decided aright: from this moment, instead of annoying me daily with petty suspicions and meager prejudices, Gertrude became to all outward appearance my friend, winning for herself much gratitude from me in the display of great consideration for Mabel Chauncy, who had become once more Mrs. Dare's guest. Astonished as I was at this change, and rejoiced to reciprocate her expressions of good-will, to accept her apologies for all the annoyances of the past, yet I could not help seeing how bitterly galling it was to her in her indomitable arrogance, to humiliate herself in the slightest measure to me. That this kind interference upon the part of Mrs. Dare, so usually indifferent, was to be received as another proof of her secret affection for me, I fully acknowledged, and the knowledge, while bewildering me, made me happy.

"Eight invitations for Holworthy, three for Gray's, besides Hollis, Stoughton, and the spreads outside," Mrs. Dare said, reading her list as we stood together just within the University grounds, having alighted from the carriages. "Perhaps we had better divide our forces. Valerie, you must take your party to Stoughton and Gray's while we visit the rest."

"My party includes Gertrude, General Farquhar, Colonel Throckmorton, and myself, I suppose. Allons." Hanging on General Farquhar's arm, she had nodded brightly at us, and, followed closely by Cecil Throckmorton and Gertrude, had disappeared in the crowd.

How queer it seemed, to see all these gayly-dressed people surrounding us, mostly young girls of my own age, and students; promenading together under the shade of the venerable buildings and grand old trees! At a little distance it looked so much like a gigantic kaleido-

scope, all the colors of the rainbow mixed heterogeneously together, in a continual unrest, always shifting, with each new impulse forming fresh arabesques of magnificent effect. I would have been completely satisfied, since every face I met was a happy face, and the farther we went into the crowd the happier people looked, if I had not been given as usual to the keeping of Murray Dare for the day. Why Mrs. Dare, who evinced such a desire to make me contented in other ways, should insist so remorselessly upon my becoming a victim to this man's persecutions, puzzled me always. I was so happy a moment ago, under the influence of the sunlight, the influence of these smiling faces, and the laughing sky overhead, pleased in listening to the exultant waves of music, and feeling it to be such a pleasant world to pass a June day in,—until now, it had grown quickly dark with the sound of this man's voice. During these latter days he had learned to annoy me so incessantly by his loud flatteries, not restraining his rhapsodies even in the presence of others, dogging my footsteps with much persistence wherever I went, whether walking, driving, or shopping, until I felt although I might venture to rebel, yet that the power of resistance had passed out from me with my freshly-cemented allegiance to Mrs. Dare. She had grown to be so kind to me,—since the evening of our conversation in her dressing-room, relative to my leaving her; previous to that she had been more indifferent, less thoughtful for my welfare,—so interested in all my desires and intentions, proving herself generous in having urged Mabel Chauncy to become her guest for the summer at Wickoff's Ledge, solely, as I realized, to gratify me, that now I sought, even at the expense of my own peace, to speak kindly to Murray Dare for her sake, upon every occasion, and not to resent the continued warmth of his devotion in her presence. Yet, while feeling recompensed for this self-control in the increasing gentleness of her manner, a kindness expressed very moderately to be sure, yet sufficiently to achieve my gratitude, how belittled I felt always when encouraging him in the slightest way, how severe was the trial, and my detestation of him! To-day, when we first alighted from our

carriage, he had pushed his way to my side with an assumption of arrogant authority which had served to both anger and mystify me, while Cecil Throckmorton had moved from Gertrude's vicinity to speak to me for the first time that day.

Why had such a barrier sprung up between the latter and myself, since the night when I sang "Auld Robin Gray" to him, at Gertrude's bidding,—so subtle a barrier that it could scarcely be acknowledged as existent, and which I felt had not been erected either by his hands or mine, only by some other of which we did not know?

"Nos. 19 and 22 Holworthy," here interposed Mrs. Dare's voice, breaking in abruptly upon my reflections; "the next door, Murray. You must make more haste, Marguerite, or we shall never get through."

Then, through the crowd gathered around the door, we made our way up closely-jammed stairs where red-faced people were struggling to get up and down, pushing against each other with much good nature, yet at the imminent risk of being smothered or crushed to death, until, having reached the landing, we passed into a room near by, and behold, I was in the presence of my first spread! What a profusion of pyramidal bouquets, cut flowers, ice-cream temples, and strawberries,—and what a jam of people! Outside it was cool, free, and inspiring; here, warm, close, and crowded. This was my second disenchantment to-day,—to struggle so hard up those narrow stairs, and then, having attained this seventh heaven of apoplectic elevation, to be recompensed with not even a seat!

"You are thinking about what everybody else is thinking about," here observed Lorimer, as slowly his merry face came into view from among the crowd. "Miss Chauncy, you look pale; I must endeavor to find a seat for you at once."

"I am very tired," Mabel said, helplessly, leaning against the door for support, her pretty, white grenadine dress crushed into a mass of nothingness, and the little hat with a very unmistakable bang on one side,—“every inch up those stairs was a battle, and a victory over such disadvantages is not inspiring."

"I have achieved another victory," Lorimer said, coming back. "Mrs. Dare, there is a window-seat yonder, which I have secured for the accommodation of Miss Chauncy and yourself."

Then, as Mrs. Dare and Mabel moved off to avail themselves of it, Murray brought me a plate of ice-cream and strawberries.

"I'm not going to have that fellow Lorimer hanging round you all day, that's one thing certain," he said, in a very short, disagreeable way; "Aunt Honoria has given you into my charge, and I sha'n't allow any interference."

"Miss Marguerite," here interposed Lorimer, very quietly, "I have brought you a card for the dances, both on the green and in the hall. With your permission, I shall put my name down for at least two waltzes,—the 'Morgenblätter' comes sixth, and I shall choose that for one,—a galop and a 'lanciers.' You see I am very immoderate in my demands; but I can't resist this opportunity of proving myself so."

"And pray, sir, what have you left for me?" inquired Murray Dare, turning red and pale by turns.

"All the rest, if Miss Marguerite will dance them with you, or none at all, if she chooses to refuse you." Then he added, as a short, blonde man, with a very incipient moustache, approached, "Miss Dare, let me introduce to you our host, Mr. Conyngham;" and in this wise came my salvation from a day's insufferable martyrdom.

How bright and beautiful the world once more looked, when I went out into its sunshine, leaning on Lorimer's arm, to feel that, at least for a time emancipated from the thrall of Murray Dare's patronage, I was free! Of course it had been necessary to ask Mrs. Dare's permission before I dared accept Lorimer's engagements to dance, and although there was a momentary hesitation on her part, yet, when Lorimer seconded my request, she almost instantly acquiesced.

"We are to rendezvous in Mr. Horton's room at six o'clock," she said, as I went off, "to witness the exercises about the tree; in the mean time you must endeavor to find me, after your dances."

And I had promised to remember.

The band—stationed on the green, where lovely girls, in ravishing muslin and annihilating hats, were, together with their knights, dancing quadrilles—gave out exultant bursts of melody, as, arm-in-arm, Lorimer and I promenaded just outside the boundary to the lawn, looking at everything through the rose-medium of contented eyes, and following in the footsteps of innumerable others,—listening and happy, like ourselves. Crowds of students stood about everywhere,—freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and an occasional senior,—thronging the steps of Stoughton, Hollis, and Holworthy, watching and criticising the passers-by, or making themselves devoted to numerous pretty girls, with an abandonment of sentiment truly astonishing. A happy, picturesque, changing scene, which alike bewildered and fascinated me.

"Where is Mrs. Hoffman's division of the party?—I have been looking for them everywhere."

"I have not seen them since we first came on to the ground."

"Throckmorton is looking dreadfully quiet about something or other," said Lorimer; "it's about his mother, I believe; she is crazy,—not exactly crazy, either, but her mind has been affected, I understand, since the death of a son, years ago. It's a dreadfully sore subject with Throckmorton, so we always avoid alluding to it."

How happy that afternoon grew with its length, as the long shadows went creeping over the green, and the sky seemed to bend down lower and lower, as if in a benediction,—one of those mellow afternoons, when all the atmosphere seems but one intricate braid of yellow threads, on which, climbing up, our thoughts mount higher and higher eagerly. A long while we wandered about, away from the crowd, the restlessness, and pagantry, to secluded places, where, sitting quietly, with the leaves smiling their green faces at us, we could listen to the dreamy music-madrigals that, born afar off, came here to nestle beside us sleepily. Over against the background of old red buildings and vivid green we could see the people moving to and fro,—the various colors flashing in and out bewilderingly, or commingling with

a subtle chimerical effect, the Watteau groups, freckling the expanse of green, while my eyes grew lazy, and puzzled, and wondering.

"It is time for our *Morgenblätter*," said Lorimer, interrupting one of my reveries. "I believe you are getting sleepy; so I shall take you back, and wake you up with a waltz."

Then back we went, out from the shade of our cool retreat, to where, afar off, the world walked and talked under the shadows of the grand old trees, and the languors of this sweet June day. In the distance, we saw Gertrude coming through the crowd, leaning on Cecil Throckmorton's arm. I saw the impulse she made, when she first caught sight of us, to turn quickly aside; then also I saw him—looking fair, daring, and willful—negative the effort, and come straight on to meet us.

"What an outrageous monopoly!" were his first words, as we met face to face. "Miss Dare, I have been looking everywhere for you, that I might put my name on your card for a waltz. You are very cruel."

"If you had looked everywhere for us, you would have seen us, sitting down near those trees beyond the chapel, talking sentiment," Lorimer said, gravely.

Gertrude, looking remarkably well to-day, striking, stylish, and handsome, in her maize colors and topaz jewels, could well afford to be gracious.

"Where have you been keeping yourself?" she said, fastening her yellow glove very industriously. "I saw mamma a moment ago, and she appeared a little annoyed that she had not seen you, Marguerite. It is dreadfully warm in the hall; I would not advise you to dance much there; it is much more agreeable out here in the open air."

"Let me put my name down for the next waltz, Miss Dare," Colonel Throckmorton pleaded, holding out his hand for my card. Then, as I gave it to him, he smiled down into my eyes, his daringly lighted up and expressive, in a way that made me forget everything disagreeable.

"Mamma is sitting up at the window to one of the professor's rooms, overlooking the green," Gertrude said,

remindingly, as they passed on. But Colonel Throckmorton, looking back at me, said,—

"Remember, the next waltz is mine; I shall hunt you out and claim it. *Au revoir.*"

Then Lorimer and I went on into the hall, to have our dance and be suffocated. What a little mite of a place it was! Roped in, full of Scylla and Charybdis pillars, that if we did not run against one, it was impossible to escape the next, and overhung by those grim old portraits,—such a hot, dusty place that I was glad to get out again.

Once more in the free, pure air, under the shade of the protecting trees, just in the midst of a mental, unspoken rhapsody, wherein I was consecrating my imagination for another hour's freedom of delight, I suddenly remembered Gertrude Dare's hint.

"I have enjoyed myself ever so much all the afternoon, Mr. Lorimer; but I must try and find my aunt, Mrs. Dare, now. I ought not to have stayed away from her so long. I had forgotten all about her, my promise to seek her out, and everything, until Cousin Gertrude reminded me."

"I am not in love with your Cousin Gertrude at this present moment," Lorimer answered, with much decision. "She was unkind to remind you. I wish I could give you a draught of Lethe."

"You gave me one when we first went to sit under those trees; this is my awakening. The Elysian fields have melted into nothing but a tantalizing mirage, and Cerberus growls at me with three hungry jaws of memory, conscience, and remorse. It is time for me to find my aunt as I promised."

In vain we promenaded up and down past Stoughton and the college green, endeavoring to catch a glimpse of Mrs. Dare's face, or Gertrude, from whom we could ascertain the window where she had seen her mother sitting; past the green again and again, only to be the happier with each unsuccess. In the distance, going down one of the side paths, we saw Mrs. Hoffman, leaning on the arm of a man whom I did not know; but either Gertrude, her mother, Farquhar, or Throckmorton,

were nowhere to be seen. By this time everybody had begun to look a little tired and excited, the pretty white dresses not so fresh; but, comfortingly, a stronger breeze had sprung up somewhere out among the roses, and brought its refreshing fervor here to quicken and gratify. How sweetly the sky, high up above our heads, bent down with its dreamy blue eyes, full of sleep, and freckling clouds, wind-driven, came to pile their feathers around the dome in links of white!

"It is so easy to get lost in such a crowd as this," said Lorimer, as for the sixth time we passed Stoughton, "the old simile of the needle in the haystack—although filed down very effectually with much use—is applicable here; haven't we sufficiently appeased your conscience? hasn't Cerberus shut at least one of his jaws?"

"He gapes dreadfully now, for I see Murray Dare coming."

"Murray Dare!" cried Lorimer, in much consternation; "he has been playing the rôle of Narcissus all day,—using other people's eyes for a looking-glass to his vanity. I saw him on the green a little while ago,—a regular pirouetting Dundreary. How he will bore us and insist on monopolizing you. Shall we make our escape into my cousin's room just up here over our heads? We can sit there in the window, see everybody and everything, and have a cosy chat; above all, we shall get rid of Murray Dare!"

I was only too glad to acquiesce in this proposition, alike oblivious of Cerberus jaws and consequences, only feeling that it was worth a great amount of ultimate suffering and reproach to get rid of the *bête noir* of Murray Dare's intolerable patronage, for the nonce; to give him the slip when he was so sure of me. I had seen how exultant he looked when he first caught sight of us, how eager to push his way toward us, oblivious of all obstacles, until some people, issuing from one of the buildings, had temporarily intercepted him, and shut us out from his view. When we had strategically made our escape, looking back, we could see him discomfited, searching in every direction but the right one to capture us and revenge himself.



"How lovely the effect is from here!" I could not help exclaiming, having mounted the crooked stairs, entered the dim, scholastic den, and seated ourselves cosily in the depths of the window overlooking the green, and where below us lay spread the panorama of class-day at Harvard; but General Farquhar's quiet voice interrupted me,—

"The impulse was irresistible to follow you up into this cool retreat; I saw the entire strategy of your manoeuvre down-stairs,—it was both very amusing and successful;" then, looking quickly up, with a little quake of dismay that he should dare come and spoil my chat with Lorimer, as I felt he would spoil it, I saw him smiling down at me, with his steel-gray eyes, expressing a great deal of quiet amusement. "We are three, if Miss Dare will permit me to remain," he added, placing a chair beside me and seating himself; "according to the old pagan creed an odd number is the symbol of concord, it cannot be divided into equal parts; if Dare should come, our unity would be metamorphosed into an even number, the symbol of division."

"I hope he will not come," I said, earnestly.

The music came up to us full of richness, beating its wings against the bricks of the old red building with a resounding echo, mellowing the air and thrilling my heart through and through. It was so restful to sit there with the fresh south wind flowing in about us, remindful of meadow hiding-places, and daisy-stars, while shaded from the sunlight, which burnished all else with its transmuting fingers; the huge trees outside waved their outreaching arms to us encouragingly, and the summer sky bloomed over all. This was the first time since the evening of Mrs. Waring's reception General Farquhar had sought my society, or paid me the slightest attention, other than those of ordinary courtesy. Reserved, cold, peculiarly observing and discriminating as he invariably appeared, I had grown to feel that in me, after that first opportunity of intercourse, he had detected an alloy of character for which he had not at first given me credit, but which had effectually repelled him when discovered. Instinctively, as time wore on, I learned to deprecate his

presence upon any and all occasions, to believe that all my idiosyncrasies were misconstrued and ungenerously burnt with much caustic disapprobation in the crucible of his cynicism,—his chemical power of analysis had crystallized all the miserable weaknesses of my mind into one grand precipitate of condemnation! How I rebelled sometimes against this sort of mental tyranny, this arrogance of superiority, more arrogant to my thinking by reason of its quietness and inflexible control, which so continually harnessed me into shafts of restraint against my will. The only person to whom this pitiless Hercules seemed ever to display the slightest sentiment of sympathy was Valerie Hoffman; as naturally as Throckmorton appeared to avoid and mistrust her, as irresistibly did Farquhar seek her society; in proportion to Throckmorton's disaffection, his sympathy seemed to increase and prosper. This I had noticed on many occasions, indeed, almost I had ceased to wonder at it; and then, when Valerie, seeking to win Throckmorton to her side, with a display of innumerable little coquetties, which on her sat like the appropriate halo about the head of some Madonna, an essence of attraction, most spirituelle in its expression, yet manifestly material in its creation, he had from the very first decisively repelled her advances, with a directness of purpose which she could not fail to understand, and which, I thought, caused her to welcome General Farquhar's attentions all the more gladly. Throckmorton, lazy, fascinating, daring Throckmorton, devoted to everybody else's pleasures and most entirely to his own, kind-hearted and generous I felt him to be, with smouldering sparks of a long-ago trouble, sometimes making restless these later hours of peace, seemed ever, when drawn toward Valerie, either by circumstances or his own free will, strangely repelled, as though having scorched himself in a fire alone kindled for him. Somehow, as this peculiarity manifested itself more and more, never rudely or with loud effect, be it said, but quietly and with much directness of expression, I became reconciled to its existence, and in ceasing to wonder, learned almost unconsciously to associate his long-ago madness, when he had been blind, blasphemous and broken-hearted, with

the fact of this later disquiet, seeming ever so thoroughly to stir his manners when addressed to my Cousin Valerie. Insouciant and thoughtless as Valerie invariably appeared, beautiful to perfection, and equally matchless in self-control, I was unable to determine whether in this display of distrust he flattered or offended her; that she recognized the fact, and accepted it, I could see very well; yet sometimes when her color quickly changed at some half-admiring, half-slighting expression which would involuntarily escape him, one could see in the perfection of her face an ill-defined, imploring deprecation of look, which, while reproaching him, only served to repel him the more. That he had forgotten the past life of rebellion, pain, and infinite suffering, unless when reminded of it by some carelessness of speech in himself, or annihilating of his quiet self-control, I had begun to realize very thoroughly. Sometimes I could not help wondering at this change, this entirety of self-conquest, so conclusive and analogous to thorough forgetfulness of a former life in its calm,—discouraging to me, longing with such a whole fervor for an occasional break in its monotony, wherein he might catch an inspiration as to my identity, that, in looking back, the subtle resemblance to some other person, which he so constantly averred he saw in me, might startle him into a recognition. But as time wore on, carrying me more fully upon the equipoise of its progress, and annihilating with its iconoclastic will all those visions and possibilities of success which seem ever to make up the measure of each day's happiness, I began to resign myself to its inevitable decrees, to endeavor, instead of worrying myself with repinings, to sweeten each hour with all the honey of contentment, forgetful of its sting.

"I have been very selfish," I said, at length, as the music with one grand crash of melody expired, leaving quivering in the air an echo which went resounding everywhere, and crept with clinging sympathy up to our high retreat; "I have not seen Mabel Chauncy all the afternoon; I have been thinking of nobody but myself."

"Thank you," said Lorimer, with much reproach.

But General Farquhar reassured me. "Miss Chauncy

has been well cared for; it was not ten minutes since I was looking at her card only to find it full,—three waltzes engaged to Throckmorton and a proportion of the rest to Conyngham."

"She has a lovely face," said Lorimer.

"Everybody thinks her lovely," I acquiesced, warmly; "to me she is Tennyson's Maud."

"Maud, with her exquisite face, and the poetical antithesis, 'rare, pale Margaret,'" quoted Lorimer.

"It is appropriate," remarked General Farquhar, "queen lily and rose in one;" then he looked at me, as I thought, gravely.

"Mr. Lorimer, I never knew before you thought Tennyson worth quoting; you laughed at him the other day, saying you preferred Mother Goose!"

"I was mistaken and not sentimental then; his bonbons of sentiment equal in delicacy the sweetest morsels of Boissier or Zonache; when a man has served up his sentiment in bonbons à la Tennyson, Charlotte Russe à la Longfellow, or spiced pâtes à la Byron, and finds himself reduced to Mother Goose, it is only necessary to mount his mental Rosinante and fight the windmill of his imagination until it grinds."

"I dub you a red cross knight for the emergency."

"It would not be necessary; under the inspiration of Dulcinea's eyes my windmill of sentiment would, uncoaxed, surpass in garrulity the one-thousand-and-one efforts of Scheherezade herself; although constitutionally lazy, nothing is more certain in flight, when spurred, than my Rosinante."

"Nothing is certain but death," said General Farquhar, grimly.

"Nothing new but one's own love," added Lorimer, with much mock sentiment.

"And nothing true but Heaven," I said, quietly.

"You are both fearfully solemn in your aphorisms," Lorimer remonstrated, dryly; "mine is much more delectable; but perhaps you have been in its fire."

"Possibly," General Farquhar observed, looking thoughtfully past us out through the window to the green beyond; "but it is well when the fire has exhausted

itself, when human nature, so protean in its adaptability to the different phases of philosophy, in retrospect, rejoices to find the fuel which fed the flames of the temporary sacrifice reduced into nothing but the carbon of indifference, the ashes lying cold and scattered."

"Nothing new but one's own love," I repeated aloud, unconsciously; then General Farquhar suddenly looked at me in a half-amused, half-pitying way, as I thought, causing the blood to come up into my face hotly.

"Nothing new but one's own love," he echoed; "the infallibility of that aphorism is doubtful; there is a sensation more acute and novel than this: it is the awakening. It is more certain than death, more new to one's soul, and more true to human nature than Heaven."

"But true love?" I ventured.

"True love is a wonderful jewel,—like the lapis philosophorum, impossible to find."

"But if found?" I persisted, with a touch of defiance in my voice which I could not help.

"If found?" he repeated, looking full at me now, with a queer light darkening his eyes, "it would transmute the metallic conventionalities of life into an ocean of golden possibilities. You have forced me to answer a question negatived by fate,—the Hermetic art is lost, the followers of the imaginary 'Hermes Trismegistus' have passed away, and with them has perished the dream of 'the philosopher's stone.'"

"Your cynicism is a griffin," said Lorimer, "a cross between the lion of truth and the eagle of rhetoric."

"It is not necessary for Miss Dare to believe what I say," answered General Farquhar, gravely; "this is the ante-pre-Petrarchial age of sentiment; it is no longer possible to believe in the frightful realisms of romance,—nature is entirely abjured. Pyramus and Thisbe love exists only among the pages of mythology. The quackish sophists of to-day would term such milk-and-water infatuations euphoniously 'puppy-love,' since they do not advocate anything more tender and purifying than marital manacles, clasped with gold and riveted by society,—a monster more fatal and unseemly than Victor Hugo's devil-fish."

"According to you," Lorimer said, laughing at him, "marriage is a synonym for barter—the dame makes a courtesy and the dog says 'bow-wow,' which, Anglicized, means 'at your service.' We think more of our table garniture than of erotic transports. In this age of degeneracy we would not listen with half the eagerness to an ode of Sappho or Heliodorus as we would to a modern precept uttered by that culinary magician, Professor Blot."

"Barter your birthright in romance for a mess of pottage!" I exclaimed, scornfully, and trying to look severe.

"As Sam Weller says, 'it's the seasoning that does it,'" retorted Lorimer, while General Farquhar looked greatly amused; "who wouldn't be an Esau, with such a good appetite?"

"That is an abominable conundrum," I said, shaking my head at him, "and you still more abominable, for daring to martyr your romance on a gridiron."

"The gridiron of a gourmet St. Lawrence, a regular cannibalistic roast,—as the French cook, Ude, said, when he went to England, 'Twenty religions and only one sauce;' so you might as mournfully apostrophize me 'twenty pounds of stomach and only one man.'"

"What a hari-kari of eloquence,—a suicidal effort of brain!" I exclaimed, grimly,— "a series of didactic sentiments in which big ideas dance hornpipes and lose their equilibrium."

"That is unkind," deprecated Lorimer; "here I have been trying to make my rhetoric tread the stately steps of the minuet de la cour, arrayed in silk hose and doublets, only to awake to the fact that, instead, it has been clothed in fustian, and dancing hornpipes."

I could not bear to sit there longer, a target for General Farquhar's eyes, so I got up suddenly, and moved to the door. "I am going to find my aunt," I explained.

"It is time," acquiesced General Farquhar, coolly.

Then Lorimer, with a very wry face, offered me his arm. "We are up in the seventh heaven here," he said, regretfully; "now we must go down into Hades, where Cerberus will open his three jaws."

"He has been snapping them at me very industriously

during the last five minutes," I answered, seriously; "I have been happy too long; it must be past six o'clock, and I have broken my promise to my aunt."

"It is precisely five minutes to six o'clock, Miss Dare," said General Farquhar's voice behind us as we went down-stairs, then out into the softened glare of the dying day, where everything looked heated, eager, and bustling. The music on the green had died away, the echoes all fallen asleep, and people were hurrying to and fro, mostly in one direction, looking excited and breathless; just as we turned the corner of one of the buildings, we came face to face with Murray Dare. Much to my relief, instead of speaking to us he passed quickly by, giving me but one glance, wherein was expressed forcibly a great deal of concentrated rage.

"We have reached Hades, sure!" exclaimed Lorimer, when he saw him coming, "for behold the god of sticks!"

"The god of Styx!" I echoed when the god had passed. "Mr. Lorimer, how can you be so facetious? The lightning of those eyes ought to have annihilated you."

"I still live," he answered, laconically.

Hanging on Lorimer's arm, and followed by General Farquhar, I made my entrance into the room where Mrs. Dare, looking very calm, gracious, yet a little pale, sat in one window, surrounded by Gertrude, Cecil Throckmorton, and Juliette Mortimer, while in the other were Mabel Chauncy, Valerie, and Beatrice Mortimer. They all looked quickly at me as I entered, not unkindly, as I had anticipated, and Mrs. Dare actually smiled when I went to speak to her.

"I am glad you have enjoyed yourself, Marguerite," she said mildly; "I feared you would not get here in time to see the frolic about the tree; we shall have an excellent view from these windows. Valerie, is there room for Marguerite in yours?"

"If she will not object to being crowded."

Then, as I went to claim a seat there, I passed Colonel Throckmorton leaning against the wall near Gertrude's chair, looking very nonchalant and indifferent. With a little quake of dismay, I began for the first time

to realize that I had snubbed him; had entirely forgotten my promise to give him a waltz, and now he would feel justified in treating me coldly in consequence. I looked up at him, penitently, as I passed, but his face only grew the more cold in reply, more sleepy and impassive. Sitting in the window overlooking the space, where in the center stood the great tree, wreathed with flowers, and where immense crowds of people stood eagerly waiting for the grand finale of class-day at Harvard, how sorry I felt for having offended him, how remorseful and ill at ease!

"They are cheering the buildings!" exclaimed Valerie, excitedly, looking for sympathy up into the quiet face of General Farquhar, which grew suddenly and intangibly questioning at her words, awaking me from the sleepy thrall of a reverie into which I had fallen,—a sorrowful reverie, full of disquiet and self-reproach.

Then Lorimer bent down over my chair,—*"Wake up, Miss Marguerite, it is a sound worth hearing, and presently there will be a sight worth seeing."*

"It does not seem long since I was cheering the old buildings myself," General Farquhar said, for the first time, with a little eagerness undertoning his voice, and with a light growing in his eyes, as he turned them out to where the sun was hanging like a ball of fire 'twixt heaven and earth, as seemed to soften the cold magnificence of his face into something like humanity. "Ten years since Throck and I graduated," he went on, thoughtfully, "ten long years, long indeed, yet here at old Harvard everything seems the same, just the same eager crowd out there, waiting for the men to come in." Then somehow, instead of looking down into her face, listening and sympathetic, he looked down into mine. "You see I have turned sentimentalist after all my heterodoxy," he said, smiling at me; "my Rosinante is very hungry to-night."

Just as he said that, there came to our listening ears long-continued shouts. Everybody began to look eager and excited, and presently, into the space just under our window, where stood three rings of students, one inside the other, came a troop of nondescript-looking specimens

of humanity, rigged out in all sorts of habiliments, and with such hats on their heads as made me laugh in spite of myself. Crushed hats, banged hats, hats bereft of their crowns, brimless hats, and hats cut into every conceivable shape, with immense letters emblazoned on them most curiously, crowned the heads of these merry seniors while marching in and forming a ring within the other three, immediately surrounding the tree where, shining high up on its trunk, could be seen the wreath of bright-hued flowers. I remember so well, even now, how, hand in hand, and with stentorian voices, they sang "Auld Lang Syne," faster and faster, until I thought they would certainly choke; when, breaking the ring suddenly, they all rushed for the tree and, climbing up on each other's backs, sought to grasp the flowers high up over their heads. What a scene of struggling, jumping, and general frolic now ensued! what shouts of laughter and clappings of hands from the lookers-on, as some unlucky wight, forgetful of the principles of equilibrium, fell heavily to the earth! Then, all of a sudden, it was time for us to go,—our class-day was over!

"We have had such a nice time!" Mabel said, as we made our way down-stairs. Then she whispered, "Marguerite, how handsome your Viking is!"

But I could not answer her,—my heart was very heavy. At the door, just as we emerged into the open air, we met Mr. Conyngham, looking warm, excited, and minus his hat.

"These are for you, if you will accept them," he said to Mabel, putting into her hands a profusion of roses and myrtle. "I only wish I could have gotten more for you."

So Mabel, sweet, beautiful Mabel, alone of us all, returned home laden with flowers, which tried to rival her own flower-face and failed. Home again, in the same carriage with Mrs. Dare, Mabel, and Murray Dare, leaving Mrs. Hoffman, Gertrude, Cecil Throckmorton, and General Farquhar to pass the evening in Cambridge, to wander about under the gas-lit radiance of the college-grounds, rich with music and beauty, while we, tired and disappointed, tried to seek oblivion in sleep.

"We ought not to have come home so soon, Margue-

rite," Mabel said, decisively, as we were retiring for the night. "I think your aunt was perplexed about something, and didn't wish us to stay; she looked so pale and stern coming home in the carriage, although she tried to appear so very gracious."

And my heart could not help echoing her words, for, subtly, I began to realize that I had again disgraced myself in Mrs. Dare's eyes.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

A low, quaintly-built cottage, gray, old, and picturesque, crowding with much recklessness of architectural symmetry toward the east, where the sun bathed its queer corners in floods of heated light all the morning long, while two or three quaint gables crowned the diminutive façade, and wide, cool piazzas wandered everywhere, clasping with welcome arms its entire body,—a cosy, romantic place, in which the odds and ends of a dozen other houses seemed hastily to have been gathered and cemented together with a profusion of rough, gray stone. Not a commonplace creation at all, but one that seemed to appeal courageously to your sympathies at once, and mutely tell you, with gray, solemn eyes and stony face, how sorry it was to be so outrageously queer and old-fashioned, but that it couldn't well help itself,—being the offspring of some quaintly-romantic soul who would persist in making it a victim of his eccentricities, a monument to his greatness in fantasy. Approaching from the long, dusty road which lay inland about a quarter of a mile, and parallel to the shore, the cottage looked like an odd cottage indeed, with its queer, disjointed wing, and numberless hiding-places in the roof, where the twittering swallows built their nests in the sweet spring-time of the year, and the sea-breezes, sleepy with their long journeyings, went clingingly to find a resting-place. But it was not until, having entered the

iron gateway, set in diminutive pillars of granite, walked the entire length of the avenue, leading very irregularly and with freckling expanses of dwarf cedar-trees bordering its margins here and there, to the front door, passed around the corners of the cottage to its back-lawn, that one's ecstasy culminated in a thorough rhapsody. Then it was, as with a sudden rush, the cool sea-breeze, blowing over from yonder islands, across the breadth of immaculate blue, came beating itself into your face, tangling itself in your hair, and embracing you with much overwhelming friendliness, that one acknowledged it, with an entirety of sincere belief, to be one of the pleasantest places imaginable to pass the long, hot days of summer in. We had been here a month, and I had already arrived at this conclusion. To come to such an out-of-the-way place, where the winds could revel along the beach and among the rocks unchecked, and where the sunlight seemed to fall more sweetly and goldily over the land, was confessedly a delectable change from the hot, uncompromising aridness of the city, reeking with dust, and very forlorn. In the far offing, during these warm summer days, the tiny white sails of the pleasure-yachts and fisher-boats shone and glittered; nearer, the islands, tiny, emerald, and restful, smiled across at us with vivid green lips, and between their beauty and the strand the waves reached out with blue-veined arms to catch to themselves all the sunlight that fell, only to dash it, dripping and broken, with remorseless inevitability, against the huge red boulders piled with such consummate grandeur along the shore. The month that we had passed here at Wickoff's Ledge—so called from a ledge of that name somewhere in the interior—had proved one of intense sweetness and rest to me. Loving nature as passionately as I did, to find myself once more among its green sweetnesses, emancipated from all the intolerable brick-wall thralldom of city life, and at liberty to wander along the rocky shore, white with sea-foam and cool to the eyes, or out into the broader lands of the interior, was a continual feast of delight in which my lesser self soon lost its material and meaner identity. Here I had become accustomed to bring Archie in my arms,—Archie, grown

wasted and paler than ever of late, with a nameless piteousness in his child-face that thrilled me with its wistfulness,—a look of patient endurance, pitiful to see in the eyes of one so young,—very strange and unlanguageed.

"He's getting thinner and thinner," Barry said to me, one day shortly after our arrival at Wickoff's Ledge, "and I don't like the looks of it. I'd speak to master about it, but I hates to trouble him,—he's so full of trouble any way, as you know,—and as long as he doesn't notice it I don't exactly see the use."

And then, although my heart accepted the measure of pain, filled to overflowing by her words, which so decisively added substance to my own misgivings regarding Archie, hitherto scarcely acknowledged or tangible even to myself, I endeavored to pacify and reassure her.

What she said relative to my uncle's trouble of mind was true enough. Each night when he came, as was his invariable custom, to sit in the twilight by Archie's side, to seek in his child's companionship a sweetness of comfort to be found only there, how plainly I saw the lines of increased haggardness contracting and seaming his quiet, impassive face, the growing eagerness with which he seemed to cling upon the frail straw of this boy's life. In the somber shades of evening they would sit together, hand in hand, yet with mute lips, as I had seen them sit in the moonlight once before, their faces—his worn, stricken, dull; the child's wistful, dreary, and tender—shining on one another a fullness of supplication for love that at other times and in other scenes haunted and pained me. Ostracized from all other affection save that of Barry and myself, Archie, during these moments of wordless communion, when the infinity of his father's love seemed to flow over and passionately to envelop him, appeared lifted out of himself by the power of some invisible hand, into a state of dumb ecstasy, wherein his face grew sweet with a complete transfiguration of peace.

Whether Mrs. Dare was cognizant of and approved my affection for her deformed and neglected child, I could not determine. Owing to Barry's many and constant warnings against intruding him into her presence or mentioning his existence in any way, I had sought thus



far, while conscientiously benefiting him in every manner possible, to abstain from exciting her displeasure unnecessarily by thrusting our affection for each other too obviously before her, fearing to incense her to forbid peremptorily my intercourse with poor little Archie thereafter. That Uncle Dare tacitly acknowledged the good I was doing the child in endeavoring to lift him out of himself by many little subterfuges, to render the world more beautiful in his eyes through the influence of a human and sincere tenderness, I realized very pleasurably. It was so sweet to me to feel this, that perhaps, after all, God had vouchsafed me the privilege of doing at least a little good in the world, to lighten the gloom of His will to these stricken hearts. Whereas during our city life Uncle Dare had always treated me as he did everybody else—very distantly, coldly, and indifferently, as though living himself in a separate world, isolated from all the sunlight which beautified so constantly the rest of God's creation—in these later days of sweet sea-side life he seemed to open his heart more and more, to passively permit a liking for me to grow up and soften his indifference. Every night since we came to Wickoff's Ledge he would return from the city looking more grave, more dull, as though the burden of his life grew greater day by day, and the only hope in peace existed for him in the little room looking out to the sea, where Archie passed his hours so drearily. There they would sit the hour together, hand clasped in hand, and with hungry eyes shining on one another, forgetting all else and forgotten by all save two honest hearts, Barry's and mine.

About this time a strange gentleman came frequently to Wickoff's Ledge, the same who had visited Uncle Will before his death, and whose name I now discovered to be Mr. Trent. Very kindly he often spoke to me, taking much apparent interest in all that I had to say relative to my feelings and hopes, and, after long consultations with Mrs. Dare, to whom he appeared to act in the capacity of chief adviser and friend, invariably his counsel to me was to be very contented and happy, and, above all, very grateful to my aunt, Mrs. Dare, for her many kindnesses and protection. And this I endeavored to be; day by day,

with conscientious care, I sought to mould my thoughts and feelings to such outward expression as could not fail to win her approbation and increased affection. Since that evening in her dressing-room, when I had resolutely broached the subject of my leaving her roof to seek a competence elsewhere, her kindness to me had appeared subtly to increase and prosper, although sometimes, even now, when provoked by me unconsciously (I had begun to feel that I could not do right, however much I might try), her displeasure found vent in bitter, unkind words, so bitter that I shivered and felt their power strangely, yet very quickly her mood would change, and, controlling her voice, she would tacitly acknowledge her error by an increased kindliness of manner for many subsequent days.

Just to the west of our queer, disjointed cottage, about a quarter of a mile distant, sharply defined against the blue ether of the summer sky, rose the roof and towers of General Farquhar's inheritance, Bonnie Venture, a high-standing house of masonry, with a tower at each extremity of its façade and wide piazzas everywhere, irregularly built, with a similar contortion of countenance to that of our own habitation, and in size about three times as large. I had heard Mrs. Dare say shortly after our arrival at Wickoff's Ledge that General Farquhar had inherited all the land surrounding us from his uncle, Mr. Trenholm, some time during the war, together with large estates elsewhere, that the cottage which we had taken for the summer had also belonged to Mr. Trenholm, and here it was that General Farquhar's mother had died some time within the past two years. Very much pleased had General Farquhar and Throckmorton appeared when informed by Mrs. Dare of her intention to pass the summer months at Wickoff's Ledge, having seen the cottage advertised, and being pleased with the description given by Farquhar's agent of its many quaint attractions and healthy location, and since our arrival here they had both exerted themselves in every way to make time pass pleasantly,—Throckmorton, who seemed very much at home at Bonnie Venture, lazily and good-humoredly; Farquhar, with a sincerity of hospitality at once entire and charming. Keeping Bachelor's Hall, Farquhar had insisted upon

Lorimer's making them a long summer visit; and as within the past week the Misses Mortimer had joined our party at the cottage, Mr. Horton, Gertrude's especial protégé, and Mr. Conyngham that of General Farquhar at Bonnie Venture, our country life, which at first had proved sweetly restful and quiet, began to assume the festive proportions of picnics, boating and croquet parties, much to the apparent delight of everybody.

Declaring, with our common sympathy, it to be insufferably warm one morning, immediately after our nine o'clock breakfast, we had betaken ourselves to a shady nook of the piazza, an angle in its length formed by a sharp projection of the wing to the cottage, which, while it benevolently shut off from us all the heat of the sun, left us free to enjoy the cool breezes and the sweet glory of the summer sea. It was such a lovely day, cool, pure, and strengthening, yet with a mellow sleepiness in the air that caused everybody's eyes to grow dreamy and their imaginations speculative,—a golden languor such as half opens its eyes at you through the chiaro-oscuro of one of Claude's vagaries. High above our heads the swallows twittered and flew; higher still, the clouds lay like drifted snow over the blue width of the heavens, and afar off, when we turned our eyes once more to our own level, the white sails floated and swam, the islands smiled across at us with their green lips, the waves danced, and seemingly sang, while sea-breezes, laden with ocean-echoes, came swiftly, bringing their tonic, only to die about us inevitably. Sitting on a low seat, formed by a stone cut with some semblance to comfort and a chair, backed by one of the pillars which supported the roof to the piazza, and with my lap filled with pebbles, which, early that morning, I had picked up idly from among the huge red boulders on the beach, some white, others gray, with odd-looking speckles covering their surface with hieroglyphics; and with bits of shell interspersing them, I listened dreamily and quietly to all that they said. I could see Mabel Chauncy sitting just opposite to me, on a mossy turf-seat, her hands clasped together, and with her soft, hazel-gray eyes turned out to the sea, the light flickering down through the vine rambling so luxuriantly

and vagrantly over the roof of the piazza, and swinging its branches in every direction, burnishing into stray gleams of gold her chestnut hair.

"How I would love to be over in one of those islands to-day, lying down among the tall green grass, with the tangled vines shading the sun from my eyes, and——"

"Gnats biting you, mosquitoes singing a requiem over you, and possibly a snake warming its delightfully cool body against your face."

"How can you be so disheartening! you are just as sentimental as I am, Marguerite; you know it, only you are growing to be affected." And Mabel made a wry face at me.

"Doesn't Colonel Throckmorton call that big island 'The Hope'?" Beatrice Mortimer cried, suddenly arousing herself, throwing her book down with a yawn, and addressing everybody in general and nobody in particular. "It is such a funny idea; I heard him telling Marguerite the other evening something about having set his heart on taking her out there some day, when he would tell her why he had so named it, and——" Then she stopped suddenly and maliciously, as though quite overcome at the effect which her innocence had produced.

"Pray, do not stop," I said, smiling at her, but inwardly feeling furious at such a studied ignorance of generosity, while Mabel's face flamed up quickly with indignation, as I thought, and Juliette Mortimer looked at me with a subtly supercilious expression curling her lips, such a look as habitually lengthened her face whenever the fact of my existence was thrust upon her notice.

"Yes, pray go on," interposed the intensely-scornful voice of Gertrude Dare; "oblige us with a few more rhapsodical flights of imagination: they are far more entertaining to me than the pages of my Sophocles."

When she said that, Valerie, looking up from her novel, came to my rescue. "Don't be disagreeable, Gertrude; passez pour ceci; Marguerite, there comes Murray Dare to help you fight these Philistines!"

And sure enough, while yet my face flushed with displeasure and all eyes were turned on me noting my con-

fusion, round the corner of the house from Bonnie Venture, came Murray Dare. When she saw him coming, Beatrice Mortimer, who invariably twisted her face into a welcoming smile whenever he appeared, and who upon this occasion evidently thought it would be more consistent with her usual assumption of childishness to say something at once very annoying to me and entertainingly innocent to him, exclaimed,—

"I am glad you've come, Mr. Dare, everybody is so cross to me, just because I happened to tell something that handsome Colonel Throckmorton whispered to Marguerite the other evening."

In an instant his sallow face grew livid.

"Indeed!" he exclaimed, walking stiffly up to where I sat, and seating himself on the step to the piazza, very close to me. "Pray, what did that handsome Colonel Throckmorton whisper to Marguerite the other evening?"

Then he turned his ugly, inquisitive eyes full into my face. I had grown very calm, icy, and self-possessed now,—the sight of this man having steadied me,—and I was able to lean slightly forward and nonchalantly to say,—

"Please give Mr. Dare the benefit of Colonel Throckmorton's remark, and the consequences of your well-developed aural powers, Miss Mortimer; do not hesitate from any scruples of delicacy."

Perhaps the sarcasm expressed so coldly in my voice, or the unanticipated change in Murray Dare's face, or probably both, caused her to endeavor to retrieve the disaster of her faux pas.

"It was nothing," she answered, very helplessly; "I only thought it was funny,—that was all,—and didn't know I should make everybody look unhappy by mentioning it."

Then Mabel very sweetly endeavored to turn the subject. "You were not here to breakfast, Mr. Dare; you must have gotten up very early, earlier than you usually do."

"I breakfasted with General Farquhar at Bonnie Venture, and we had a jolly breakfast, I can tell you; that Gagliani of his is a capital cook,—knows how to make the

kind of rum omelet that sets a house on fire; as to his coffee, it's simply superb!"

"General Farquhar ought to ask us to breakfast," observed Miss Mortimer.

"That reminds me," Murray Dare said, turning to Valerie, who, to all outward appearances, remained absorbed in her book and entirely oblivious of the conversation, "Farquhar intends sending his man Morley down, Valerie, with an invitation for you all to go out on his yacht to-night; it'll be moonlight, you know, and they say we can run out about twelve miles and get home by twelve o'clock."

When he said that, everybody became electrified with eagerness, all but Valerie, who raised her eyes just for one instant very lazily, and did not utter a word in reply.

"I have so longed to go out sailing by moonlight!" Beatrice Mortimer cried, clasping her hands together childishly and making prodigiously big eyes at Murray Dare.

"Is everybody going—I mean all the gentlemen?" queried her younger and more politic sister.

"Yes, Lorimer is going," he answered, smiling at her significantly; "so you'll be sure to enjoy yourself, he has taken such a great fancy to you." A faint color came up into her cheeks, tinging their pallor at his words, and quickly they both looked at me. "I have made my choice already," he said, as he bent down insinuatingly, so that he could see the expression of my face; "we'll get the nicest corner, Marguerite, and I'll just talk the sweetest sentiment to you in the world."

"I agree with you, Murray, in thinking it to be the better plan to engage the person you care to go with beforehand," observed Gertrude Dare, regarding us both with much benevolence of countenance. "Well, Marguerite is provided for. I wonder how the rest of us will pair off?"

I sat there very quietly, with my hands clasped together to steady them, for, whenever I felt annoyed, they had a ridiculous way of trembling, and, with my eyes looking out to the blue waves glittering beyond, I endeavored to deafen my ears to their words, to blind my

perception that Murray Dare's intolerant face was looking down into mine very confidentially, the Mortimers were regarding my powerlessness of rebellion with much gratification, although there was a look of disappointment on the face of Beatrice, and that Gertrude Dare's eyes grew exultant as I made no response. Mabel, sitting just opposite, feeling very sorry and indignant for me, afterward said that my face grew pale, very pale, my eyes took on a defiant expression, and my lips lengthened into a smile,—such a smile as she did not like to see, it was so mocking, so scornful and contemptuous. Fortunately for the words which in another moment, perchance, would have been uttered, round the corner of the cottage, from Bonnie Venture, came General Farquhar's man Morley, laden with two baskets of exquisite cut flowers, and with little Dixie Hoffman, Valerie's child, coming tumbling after.

"A note and a basket of flowers,—this one with the pansies in the center for Mrs. Hoffman, with master's compliments," Morley said, giving it to Murray Dare; "this one with the Calla lilies in it is for Miss Dare, with Colonel Throckmorton's compliments." Valerie looked up at this, glanced with a look of quick inquiry at the basket containing the lilies, and received the one intended for her with a queer look in her face, a sudden compression of her lips, whether to conceal a smile of exultation or an expression of disappointment, I could not determine.

"The other is mine!" Gertrude exclaimed, half starting up and extending her hand imperiously, as Morley was about placing the one with the Calla lilies in it in my hand. "Colonel Throckmorton sent that basket to Miss Dare, did he not?"

"Yes, miss, but I thought this young lady was Miss Dare; I beg your pardon, miss." Then poor Morley, quite overcome by the angry glances which Gertrude continued to shower upon him, touched his hat confusedly as he handed the basket to her.

"Div me a power, auntie!" cried little Dixie, struggling toward Gertrude with outstretched hands, "div Ditsie a big fite power!"

I could not help watching her excited face as she re-

ceived the basket, with a quick impetuous gesture, from Morley,—all the time a pang of some subtle feeling, which I could not analyze, making my foolish heart ache, when I saw how coolly Valerie accepted her gift and the eagerness of Gertrude. There was a card lying half hidden amid the profusion of roses, mignonette, and heliotrope, a white card, which, when she picked it up and glanced swiftly at it, caused Gertrude's proud, dark face to change subtly, her angry eyes to smoulder with fire.

"Pease div Ditsie a power!" again cried Dixie, stretching out his hand toward the basket eagerly, as he saw one of the maid-servants coming after him; "Ditsie will have a power." And frantically the child, clumsy and overgrown, made a grab at the beauties which he so coveted.

"Go away, child!" Gertrude exclaimed, tearing into long pieces the card, and, having done so, gave the child a push. "Go away, I say!"

The long, white pieces of card floated around him on the floor of the piazza, and, as she pushed him, the child fell sprawling among them.

"Take Dixie away, Mary," observed Valerie, waking up suddenly, as he began to cry at his defeat and his aunt's ungentleness; "you know I am very particular about his being kept away from us; I don't wish to be obliged to remind you of it again."

Then Mary, the maid-servant, looking very sorry for the child, took him up in her arms and carried him where he could no longer annoy the delicate nerves of his mother. When he passed me, struggling in her arms, two or three of the slips of card, which he had seized when disappointed of the flowers, fell out of his hand into my lap; and as they lay there for an instant, before I brushed them away, on one I saw plainly written, in Colonel Throckmorton's handwriting, "Wear one to-night—one of the small lilies."

## CHAPTER XXXII.

I DID not make my appearance at the luncheon-table that day. Upon reaching Archie's room, which almost immediately adjoined mine in the isolated wing of the cottage, the apartments of my aunt, cousins, and those of their guests being chosen in the more central portion of the irregular house, I found the child greatly weakened from a sudden attack of his nervous convulsions, which, leaving him prostrated, also seemed to threaten the very fountain-springs of his life with annihilation. All through that long, tantalizing summer afternoon I sat by his bedside, chafing the almost lifeless hands, and kissing ever and anon the pallid lips, that trembled as though in mute supplications for a loving sympathy. Presently he appeared to grow stronger and stronger; then as the sun, bidding the world a lingering good-night, threw one long arrow of vivid gold into the dim dusk of the sick-room, and played for one instant about the child's fair head as though in a parting benediction, he fell asleep.

"You look worn out, Miss Marguerite," Barry whispered, softly, following me to the open window, where I went to breathe a long breath of the sweet evening breeze that came blowing so freshly from the sea; "you've got black rings under your eyes that I don't like; you spend too much of your time up here with Archie; it's wearing on you,—the sympathy and all that; you look mighty different from what you did when you came first from school; then you looked bright and seemed contented-like; now I can see that you've got something on your mind that you're all the time thinking and worrying about."

"I am worried about Archie," I answered, steadily.

"And something else, too," she whispered; "I've got two eyes in my head, and I can see through glass; God bless you, miss, you have too much heart."

"And a bit of a headache to-night," I whispered, smiling faintly.

"Then go straight and bathe your head, dear Miss Marguerite," she said, pointing to the door, "and don't come back here again to-night. Archie will sleep like a little angel until to-morrow morning; he always does after one of such fits, and it's no use your troubling yourself; go and lie down a bit before tea."

Then, without answering a single word, I went to my own room. I did not lie down, and I did not bathe my head; I only sat a long while at the open window, looking out on the far-reaching waters, until the moon began to show its face, and Mabel came to me. When we went down-stairs together we found everybody, including the people from Bonnie Venture, at tea in the little breakfast-room opening out on the piazza. As we entered, Murray Dare, who was standing close to the door, spoke to us,—

"I have been waiting very patiently for you here, Marguerite, during the last fifteen minutes; you'll only have time for a cup of tea,—Farquhar says it is almost time to go."

One look satisfied me as to everybody's whereabouts. I could see the rapid glance that both Throckmorton and Farquhar gave us as we entered, where they stood talking to Valerie and Gertrude, by the open window,—saw Throckmorton lay his cup down on a side-table, say a few words to Gertrude in an undertone, and then come toward us. General Farquhar was looking steadily at me with that queer, tantalizing, half-magnetic expression in his dark-gray eyes, causing the color to come wavering swiftly up into my face, as I heard Colonel Throckmorton saying to Mabel, close to me,—

"Miss Chauncy, will you allow me in the first place to bring you a cup of tea?—then by-and-by I have another favor to request."

Still I felt those gray eyes watching every change in my face,—the warm blood come tingling into my lips and cheeks,—then I was answering Murray Dare in a half-dazed way,—

"Yes, I am ready—no, I am not going to-night."

"Not going!" remonstrated Lorimer, joining us. At the same time Throckmorton was saying to Mabel,—

"May I be your knight this evening, Miss Mabel? I am inclined to be very sentimental by moonlight,—I warn you beforehand."

Then all the rest was lost. Still those pitiless gray eyes opposite,—those discerning, all-powerful eyes,—threatening so boldly to read every throb of my heart. Ah! if I could only escape for one moment their relentless surveillance!

"This room is fearfully warm," said Lorimer, "and you look feverish. You have refused my reiterated offers of tea and cake, also those of Mr. Dare; will you refuse me if I ask you to go out on the lawn with me to see the moon rise?"

"No, I will not refuse you; I will be very glad to go."

"Marguerite," interposed Murray Dare's disagreeable voice, as he laid his hand almost authoritatively on my arm, "I wish you would get ready to start, instead of going out to see the moon rise. I have been waiting for you some time."

"Yes," acquiesced Mrs. Dare, looking at me very smilingly, "Murray has been very good-natured,—most tolerant; do not try his patience too much. It is time we were starting; the moon has already risen."

"Are you going with Mr. Dare?" queried Lorimer, in an aggrieved tone of voice.

"I was not aware that Mr. Dare had asked me to go with him, or that I had accepted any such invitation," I answered, very coldly, looking questioningly into Murray Dare's confused face, but seeing nothing save two pitiless gray eyes opposite; "I am at liberty to go with whom I please."

"Then come with me just for one moment to see the moon rise," pleaded Lorimer. And, not waiting to hear Murray Dare's angry rejoinder, or to glance at my aunt's displeased face, and alike oblivious of Colonel Throckmorton's indifference and Mabel's happy eyes, I went.

"I thought you were going on the yachting-party with Throckmorton," Lorimer said, as we gained the little rustic summer-house built on a projecting rock, and where

such a magnificent view was to be had of the gold-embroidered sea, and the hanging splendor of the moon and stars; "I certainly saw him writing a note to you this morning, or at least something on a card, in the library at Bonnie Venture, which he gave, together with a basket of lilies, to Morley, to take to you. That the note contained a request for you to accompany him to-night, I considered a matter of course."

He was looking at me very quizzically now, and waiting for an answer, but I did not vouchsafe one.

So the basket of flowers which Gertrude had monopolized with so much avidity had been intended for me, after all. She had known it all the time, had seen my name written on the card, yet had persisted in the deceit and placing me in a false position.

"I see very plainly that I was mistaken, Miss Marguerite."

"Yes, you were mistaken, Mr. Lorimer."

"I am very happy to be assured of my mistake. May I hope that you will allow me to be your escort?"

I could not help smiling at him. "I am not going on this yachting-party, Mr. Lorimer."

"What a tantalizing woman you are!" he said, remonstratively. "Here, under this moonlight, and with the stars twinkling wickedly at us, you dare to smile at me with those big, dark eyes of yours, telling me at the same time something which will certainly annihilate my peace of mind for twenty-four consecutive hours. Retract."

"I cannot."

"Marguerite," said Mabel's voice, close beside me, she having gained the entrance to the summer-house unperceived by me, "we have come to find you. Everybody is waiting. Mr. Lorimer and you are wasting time sentimentalizing here, when the opportunities for everything of that nature will be so golden on the sea. Colonel Throckmorton has been telling me all about it."

"I will tell you more by-and-by," added Colonel Throckmorton's voice. Then, looking up, I saw him lounging against the entrance to the summer-house, and bending his head so that he might look full and unservedly into the fair, delicious face of Mabel Chauncy.



A little pang assailed me at the sight,—a queer little pang; perhaps born of a wounded self-love, of disappointment, or——

"I have been endeavoring to prevail upon Miss Marguerite to go with us this evening," Lorimer said; "but she is horribly obdurate and self-willed. The most provoking feature on the face of the whole matter is, that she does not seem to have any reason for remaining at home."

"You are not going to stay at home, Marguerite?" Mabel interposed, beseechingly. "What has caused you to change your mind so suddenly?"

"I have been of the same mind all the afternoon," I said, decisively, as I arose,—“ever since I went up-stairs to-day.” Then a great feeling of regret and intense longing to go with them assailed me,—a vision of the sea, with long streaks of moonlight and foam interlacing each other, a sudden hunger for the sweet purities of the ocean breeze and a quick yearning to be among all these happy hearts during their holiday hour of felicity, tormented and nearly overcame me. Then another conviction annoyed me. Unwelcome to my aunt and cousins as any allusion to Archie or Archie's sufferings would prove, how could I satisfactorily explain to them and the rest of these people my apparent perversity in declining to accompany them? Would they imagine that because Colonel Throckmorton had not asked to escort me, but Mabel instead, I had preferred to remain at home rather than accept the services of any one else? Would they misjudge me in this way, accusing me of jealousy, of spite, or weak perversity?

"I see that you hesitate," cried Lorimer, laughingly. "Come,—they are waiting."

As we walked slowly back to the cottage, not far, but far enough to allow visions of little Archie in his helplessness, and the felicities of an evening sail, and moonlight shining on the sea, and happy faces, to bewilder me, Lorimer went on, coaxingly,—

"I know you will be sweet and good, and go with us. We shall have such a good time and be so jolly. You will go, won't you?"

"Don't tease me, please," I said, very helplessly, just before we gained the piazza where they were all standing

ready to start; "it makes it all the harder to refuse. I really ought not to go."

"I want to make it hard for you to refuse," he answered, earnestly; then, before I realized it, we were passing close to where General Farquhar stood waiting, apparently, for Valerie, who had been detained in the house, to join him. "Farquhar," he added, stopping short and appealing to him, "I have a perverse child here who is set on having her own way; I am at my wits' end; what shall I do?"

"Give her a dose of moonlight and sentiment by-and-by."

"She won't swallow it; she shuts her eyes and mouth beforehand."

I felt greatly annoyed that Lorimer should have appealed to General Farquhar, who seemed so thoroughly to depreciate and condemn all my little idiosyncrasies of thought and action, to dissect cruelly each impulse and expression with the cold point of his unflinching eyes, until I had learned unconsciously to regret any interest which he might ever take in the fact of my existence. Now, when he had spoken in answer to Lorimer's appeal, how quickly my sensitive ear had been offended at the subtle tone of mocking amusement undertoning his voice! I would not endure his surveillance any longer,—I would stay at home, anywhere rather than where he might be.

"Where are you going?" cried Lorimer, following me through the window and out into the hall, "you impetuous child, what are you going to do now?"

"I am going to stay at home," I said, quickly, "to bid you good-night here, Mr. Lorimer. I hope you will enjoy yourself ever so much,—good-night!" Then I ran hastily up-stairs.

"I shall stay here until you come back," he called after me, threateningly; "I won't budge an inch till you get your hat and shawl and come down-stairs ready to start. Hurry!"

But I did not wait to listen. I shut my heart to all the passionate voices urging me to go with him out into the silver happinesses of the moonlight, where I might listen to other voices and dream other dreams, and where the

stars shining down would mirror their peace in my soul. Through the hall I ran, and through the roundabout corridor leading to my room, thinking all the while, not of the joys I was leaving behind, but of little Archie's face, lying pale and suffering, demanding my immediate love and sympathy. In the dark, I fairly ran against Barry.

"I thought I heard you coming," she whispered, softly, "and I've been waiting here to send you back again,—I've got your hat and shawl here; you may not need the shawl yet awhile, but you will by-and-by, and I just want you, miss, to turn round and go with my lady and the rest of 'em on this good time."

"No, I can't go,—in the first place, they are all gone by this time, and in the second, I must stay with Archie."

"Bother your tender heart, Miss Marguerite. Archie's sound asleep, just as peaceful as an angel, and full of happy dreams; his father's got hold of his hand, and it's all right, he and I'll stay with him; as you know yourself, the child gets over them fits mighty quick, and in the morning he's sure to be as bright as a lark."

"Don't ask me to go, Barry," I said, struggling with my voice; "it only makes it harder. I must stay at home,—if I went I should be worrying about Archie all the time."

She only answered by drawing me to the door of Archie's room; when she opened it noiselessly, I looked in and saw a moon-flooded room, a child lying quietly asleep, but with tremulous lips happy with smiles, the dreadful pallor gone from his face, leaving it only pure and angelic, and a gray-haired man sitting beside his bed, holding one childish hand in his tenderly, and with hungry eyes, unconscious to all else, watching every quiver in the boy's sleeping face. Then Barry shut the door softly.

"You see it's all right," she whispered; "he's been sitting that way ever since he first came into the room an hour ago, and he'll sit that way until I can make him understand that it's time to go to bed. Now, we'll both sit up till you come back, then we'll send master to bed, and you may have the child all to yourself, if that'll content you." But still I hesitated. "Now, Miss Marguerite, I'm getting vexed at you," she went on, more earnestly

"There's somebody waiting for you down-stairs, and here you're losing time."

"No, they have all gone," I answered, quietly.

"Don't you believe yourself, miss," she said, remonstratively; "let's go and see, anyway."

Then I followed her passively through the corridor and finally into the front hall, where all was empty, and gloomy, and still.

"They are all gone," I repeated, drearily, leaning against the window, and looking out on the driveway, where the shadow of the house was casting its black length and making everything look consonant with my thoughts.

"Am I not reckoned as anybody?" exclaimed a voice from down-stairs. "Come, Miss Marguerite, you have kept me waiting just long enough, and I am getting tired, with nothing to look at but a cross-eyed carpet and two or three cross-legged chairs."

"There, didn't I tell you so, miss?" Barry whispered, in much delight. Then my heart gave a throb of renewed joy as I went, in answer, to the head of the stairs.

"You look like some spirit, standing up there in your white dress," cried Lorimer. "But won't you please spirit yourself down here? I'm afraid we'll have to run all the way to the wharf as it is; the rest started five minutes ago."

"I have got her hat and shawl here, sir," Barry answered, as I still hesitated. "If she doesn't put 'em on she'll catch cold!"

"That is so!" Lorimer exclaimed, springing up the stairs two steps at a time. "Although the thermometer is at eighty-five, yet she will take cold if she doesn't put her hat on,—an excellent sanitary idea. Miss Marguerite, put your hat on immediately!"

And so I did.

A quarter of an hour later, we were seated together in the stern of General Farquhar's yacht, quite out of breath with our quick walk, but quite contented now to rest ourselves on the velvet cushions piled there for our accommodation, and to turn our faces up to the refreshing ocean breezes and to the silver benedictions of the moon.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

How the moon, round, chubby, and inspiriting, smiled its merry face down upon us benignantly, how the waves dashed, foamed, and glittered, and everybody began to look alarmingly happy, everybody with the exception of Gertrude Dare and Juliette Mortimer! With a little thrill of dismay, I began dimly to realize, as I sat looking at the latter's profile, cut clear against the radiance of the sea,—how severely scornful her cold mouth had grown, and how haughty her eyes!—that in accepting Lorimer's escort I had unthinkingly trespassed upon her anticipated monopoly of his attentions, had unintentionally thrown down the gauntlet for a sanguinary conflict, and that she had stooped to pick it up. How fated I seemed to tread upon the corns of everybody's patience, how doomed to win for myself, wherever I happened to look, or whenever I chanced to open my lips, instead of the love I craved and longed for, nothing save a black look, or an unkind word, to recompense me for my seeming audacities of thought and action! At length, wearied of these reflections, and willing to forget all such unpleasant speculations in opening my heart to the delicious influences of the hour, I turned my eyes irresistibly to where Mabel sat on the deck to my left, with Colonel Throckmorton talking to her in an undertone, and looking down into her upturned face in a way that caused smiles to gather on her lips and a fuller sweetness in her eyes.

It was one of those mellow, warm, yet breezy evenings, when the clouds over our heads, thin and shadowy, moved in little armies across the heavens, anon partially hiding the moon's glowing disk with their transparent curtains, or laying themselves along the horizon in long wreaths of whiteness. Just below us, the waves foamed, glittered, and fairly danced; behind us, the long track of severed waters lay, as far as the eye could reach, like a white

stretch of ribbon deep-cut in the center, with seething pillows of froth to edge its rupture; and sitting there beside Lorimer, who had grown unusually silent and meditative, my heart, thirsty, feverish, and disquiet, drank into its refreshment the elixir of the hour, my eyes grew rested and more peaceful.

"We shall make a good run," Lorimer observed, presently, as we sped swiftly through the water, the white sails stretched so wide above our heads, looking to my inexperienced eyes like the wings of an enormous bird; "we shall be out to the Light by nine o'clock."

"We will reef sail and tack coming back," replied General Farquhar, "so we won't reach home until about eleven o'clock. On our return we must have some singing."

As Valerie never sang, I knew that he intended his last words for my especial benefit; something in the tone of his voice told me as much, but I would not answer him; I only sat with my face turned persistently away, fearing that the rest, hearing him, might endeavor to prevail upon me to sing. And I felt as though I could not sing to-night.

"Ah, yes," said Lorimer, looking at me with quizzical eyes, "Miss Marguerite must sing to us by-and-by."

"Marguerite is very selfish," observed Valerie Hoffman, very sweetly; "she only sings *sub rosa*."

"And to-night *sub divo*," added Lorimer; "we must not allow her to sacrifice herself to Harpocrates on such an evening as this."

"We cannot allow that; she will sing for us by-and-by," here interposed Colonel Throckmorton's voice, causing me to turn my eyes from the waves to his smiling face, where he stood close beside me. "Lorimer, Miss Chauncy desires to speak to you one moment."

"You are the Banquo of our feast," answered Lorimer, without moving; "I entertain a Chinese dislike to strangers,—depart!"

"La Bruyère's proverb that says love springs up all at once is negatived by you, Lorimer, in this instance."

"Throckmorton, you are mistaken; I am not a Cupid; I am nothing but a poor, pachydermatous animal,—the target for everybody else's impotencies of wit; I won't budge an inch."

"I hear you, Mr. Lorimer," cried Mabel, laughingly; "I am listening to all your facetiæ at my expense."

"It was only a preliminary fe-fo-fi-fum of acquiescence, Miss Mabel," answered Lorimer; "I am coming, O sorrowful naiad." And, giving me one quizzically reproachful glance, he went.

Without a word, Colonel Throckmorton seated himself on the cushions by my side. For some time we sat there silent, not even looking at each other, but leaning together on the railing and gazing down at the glittering waters, while the moon bathed all the scene in rich floods of splendor, and the stars twinkled their eyes at us laughingly. Presently he spoke.

"You did not wear one of the lilies as I asked you," he said, in an undertone, and turning his eyes to my face; "I noticed it the very first thing when you came into the room to-night."

Then as he paused as though awaiting a reply, quickly I questioned myself, what should I venture in answer? Ought I to tell him very frankly the exact circumstances of the case—how Gertrude had insisted upon claiming the flowers as her own, had chosen, instead of allowing me to receive the gift—such a harmless gift as it was, too—to condemn me to every appearance of neglect, and to place me in an utterly false position? Would it be more than she deserved to unmask her selfishness to him, to revenge myself by so doing? I felt he was watching me narrowly and anticipating an answer; then I grew confused and troubled. "No, I did not wear your lily," I answered, softly.

"And I know the reason why," he said, under his breath, while with a hot, troubled face I leaned away from him over the railing, trying to hide my disquiet eyes from his, and with a great feeling of antagonism to my Cousin Gertrude, who had acted in such an unwarrantably provoking way, agitating me; but when he said that, astonished at his ready knowledge of all that had transpired, I could not help turning my head to look at him very questioningly. "You are a good little girl," he added, after a pause, leaning his elbow on the railing, so that his hand might support his head, and with his smiling, good-

natured eyes fixed thoughtfully on my face; "you have allowed me to misjudge you all the evening, when you very well knew the reason why I misjudged you. I am very sorry that the basket of flowers was appropriated by the wrong person, yet not exactly sorry, after all, as this unforeseen circumstance has served to open my eyes very decidedly to your merits as a mute."

"I am not kind or good-natured at all," I interrupted him, impetuously; "you may be deceived by my face; you would think differently if you could only see into my heart,—it has been full of bitterness all the evening."

"Marguerite," here observed Mrs. Hoffman, "don't make your confessions so audible, please; they are quite entertaining and charmingly childlike, I acknowledge, but I fear Colonel Throckmorton alone of us all appreciates them!"

If I felt rebuked and dreadfully hurt at her words and the covert sarcasm expressed in her voice, if astonished at this new phase in Valerie's character developing itself, in direct opposition to all my preconceived ideas on the subject, what must have been Colonel Throckmorton's sensations! His hitherto smiling and interested face grew so swiftly dark, his frank eyes so reproachful and displeased as he glanced over my shoulder at her, where she reclined among the cushions to my right, looking very fair and sweet, with the moonlight showering over her, and with the white roses in her hair shining like a coronal of stars. He was facing her; and for one moment, as the moon shone clear and animatedly on his fair, open face, I saw it grow colder, as I thought, with the expression of a sudden and intense dislike, and I almost wondered that in meeting his gaze his eyes did not strike her dead. Something in their peculiarly concentrated appearance caused me to turn round just in time to see General Farquhar avert his head very indifferently, and to catch Valerie's half-deprecating, half-mocking look.

"Souvent femme varie,  
Bien fol est qui s'y fie,"

quoted Colonel Throckmorton, under his breath, yet with his eyes still on her face.

"Defend me!" cried Valerie, looking appealingly at General Farquhar, but, as I could perceive, with a subtly troubled change in her voice. "This ungallant creature is quoting the French king to the disadvantage of my sex."

"I can only say with the Turk, 'Kismet, it is destiny,'" General Farquhar replied, smiling down into her childishly appealing face with much indulgence. "The French king was quite a philosopher."

As he finished, Valerie's lips grew pouting, displeased, and impatient. "You are all cross and unkind to-night," she said, plaintively. "Mr. Lorimer is farcical, Colonel Throckmorton melodramatic, and you, mon ami, persist in being serio-comic. I am very unhappy."

She spoke in such a childishly petulant way, with downcast eyes, and nervous fingers interlacing each other, looked so decidedly the impersonation of everything innocent and clingingly dependent, all the mockery gone quickly out of her eyes, and the disfiguring sarcasm from off her lips, leaving them only mournful and beseeching, that I could not help forgiving her those unkind words spoken only a few moments before, and did not wonder when I saw Colonel Throckmorton's lips lengthen in a relenting smile and General Farquhar lean down tenderly to whisper something reassuring in her ear.

"That is right," said Throckmorton, as, with a weary, dissatisfied feeling at my heart, I took my hat off to allow the fresh breeze to cool my head with its refreshing kisses, and leaned, tired of my own thoughts, among the cushions piled so high against the railing to the deck. "That hat of yours is a very ugly one, not becoming at all. How much more appropriate it would have been to have crowned your head with lilies!"

I tried to smile back at him, all the time conscious that it was but a mockery of a smile at best, for somehow my heart ached with heaviness to-night,—with an indescribable weight, as though clamped round about with tightening bands of cold and cruel iron.

"I don't like to see you smile in that pale, weary way," he went on, earnestly, and in such a half-tender, half-compassionate voice that it caused the tears—I was feeling

sadly weak, remember—to almost gather in my eyes. "You are always pale, but to-night you look paler than I ever saw you look before."

"I am not feeling very well," I answered, quietly.

"There is a little cousin, isn't there, to whom you devote yourself?" he queried, gravely. "A little cripple, or with something unfortunate the matter with him." Then, in obedience to my warning finger and a hasty, remindful glance backward at Valerie, he lowered his voice to a half whisper and bent lower down. "I am sure that is what is making you look so miserable. It is very sweet and kind of you, and all that, but you shouldn't forget entirely your own health in worrying about and confining your sympathies so closely to this sick boy." He was bending down toward me thoughtfully, the fair, daring face grown less smiling, but more bright; and, looking up with a little thrill of happiness at being restored once more to his good favor and friendship, I could not help letting all my gratitude and joy shine out through my eyes. His were watching me,—his blue, lazy eyes, grown here in the moonlight more animated and encouraging, but with a subtle questioning stirring their depths,—such an expression as had quickened them when they had first encountered mine, long ago, at Mrs. Waring's reception in Boston. "Do you know, Miss Marguerite," he went on, abruptly, "that frequently when looking at you, often when you are unconscious of my scrutiny, oftener still when you raise your eyes suddenly, as you did just then, I am startled at the subtle resemblance in the expression of your face to some other face which I have seen before, either in my dreams or in the flesh?"

When he said that dreamily, and with his inquisitive eyes watching me steadily, I became, with the dying embers of hope flaming for one instant ere they perished summarily, electrified with a fresh eagerness of anticipation, a quick longing to settle his doubts forever by acknowledging myself to him, by assuring him that in me he beheld the child of long ago, who had never forgotten, through all these intervening years of suspense, her promise to pray nightly and daily for his prosperity



of both body and soul. For a long while past, since I had come to this country life, which had at first rested me with its quiet peace, and which had only latterly assumed other proportions less pleasing to my taste, in the increased illness of little Archie, and the continual espionage exerted over each action and almost every thought of mine by my aunt and cousins, I had resolutely put from me all thoughts of a possible recognition, at least for the present, by Cecil Throckmorton,—had shut, locked, and barred the doors of my heart against all romance, all visionary longings and doubts. But now, with the moon, the bewildering, tender moon, shining its splendor down upon us, enveloping us in the braids of its radiance, tangling us in the meshes of its sorcery, stamping its crest upon every wave and tiny ripple of the water, and transmuting with alchemic fingers each material attribute of the every-day world surrounding us, with the waves singing in my ears their deathless madrigals, and with his face, thoughtful, dreamy, and questioning, looking down into mine, is it to be wondered that the starved cravings for the friendship of this man, who seemed so true, so chivalrous and long-suffering, should break their bonds impetuously, casting me forth upon the wide waters of reckless hope, anchorless? The moon shone clear on his face, his face looking quite pale, yet so strong and happy, it seemed to appeal to me with powerful supplications to deny myself once more,—to refrain from reminding this true, brave heart, in the hey-day hour of its peace, of a former degradation, of a former madness, which had been so wild, so severe and hopeless. Ah, could I relent? Was I not friendless and eager, full of impetuous longings for sympathy and aid? Would it be as much for this strong man to endure a momentary chagrin as for me to shut myself out from hope forever?

"Child," he whispered, gently and compassionately, "your face is as pale as death,—you look startled, bewildered. What did I say that frightened you?" I tried to return his look bravely,—to speak,—the words would not come; I could only shake my head in reply. "You are not well," he went on, taking one of my hands in

his, gently,—his felt so cool and firm,—"you are feverish. If you do not take better care of yourself, I shall speak to Mrs. Dare about you."

"I am well," I managed to say, coldly, at the same time hastily withdrawing my hand. My doing so seemed to hurt him, for he drew quickly back and looked square into my eyes very rebukingly.

"You will not trust me," he said, severely, and folding his arms; "I dare not speak to you even as a brother might, without experiencing a rebuff."

"Don't be displeased with me," I interrupted him, quickly. "Perhaps you are right, I am not well to-night; I feel a little blue,—you know we can't be agreeable all the time, even the most good-natured of us."

"But it seems to me that you are a little blue all the time lately," he answered, relenting; "you have grown to be so reserved, so cold and strange. It is not natural for you to be cold and strange, either,—you used to smile at me occasionally, and appear good-natured and merry; now you only receive my advances with a cool dignity and a supreme indifference which, while it does not flatter me, disheartens."

He was talking in a way dangerous to the maintenance of my equanimity now, in a gentle undertone of reproach which went straight to my heart.

"You should treat me in the same way, then," I answered, not looking at him, but speaking half defiantly; "then we could cry quits."

"Do you mean what you say? do you not wish me to be your friend?—are we to be antagonistic to each other?"

"No," I faltered, "no, not that; I want to be friends with you, but you mustn't expect too much. I am very variable and disagreeable sometimes, but I can't help it."

"Yes, you can," he retorted, smiling at me once more, "and you must help it, if you are to be my friend. I will not allow you to treat me coldly and in a fickle manner,—you can be very sweet if you only make up your mind to it; and, if we are to be friends hereafter, I sha'n't allow you to make up your mind to anything else." He was trying to look into my averted eyes,—trying to



make me smile at him, as he was smiling at me. "Look at me!" he said presently, and authoritatively. Then I looked. "You have troubles," he went on, by-and-by, after I had turned my head once more away from his daring, inquisitive eyes; "I can see that very plainly,—troubles which you share with nobody else, but which harass you all the time. It would be better for you if you shared them with somebody else,—Marguerite, share them with me?"

How daring it was of him to speak my name so tenderly, and in such an unauthorized way! Instinctively I looked around to see if he had been overheard. I could see Gertrude Dare sitting afar off, beside her mother and the Mortimers, but not within hearing-distance; nearer, Mabel and Lorimer, chatting and laughing together, and, close beside us, Valerie leaned indolently over the railing, gazing off across the sea, with General Farquhar close to her, apparently engrossed in watching her every expression. Ah! if they had heard!

"Share them with me, Marguerite," Throckmorton repeated, in a whisper, his voice lingering over my name, "will you not?"

"I have no troubles," I answered, laconically, shutting my ears resolutely to the tenderness of his voice and manner, and looking blankly out over the sea,—the very weakness of my heart strengthening me. If I could not have this man's entire and unconditional friendship, based upon a surer foundation than the frail sentiment of a moonlit hour, I would have none at all.

"What a perverse child you are!" he retorted, laughingly, yet with a quick annoyance undertoning his voice. "You encourage me one moment, and snub me the next,—what am I to imagine?"

I did not wish to offend him, I did not care to give him occasion to cease caring for me altogether, if I could only demand all, exact all, and be understood. Quickly, with all these thoughts concentrating themselves in my face, I looked up at him.

"Great heavens!" he cried, suddenly and desperately, "what is in your eyes,—what is in your face? There is something there that I have seen before,—I have seen it

in my dreams, perhaps, but still I have seen it. Child, tell me what it is."

The moon was shining clear on his face, as it had shone once before, and softened my heart with its appeal; it showed me his lips parted wonderingly, his face half agitated, half incredulous, his eyes watching every change in my face nervously. But all the mercy had gone out of my heart,—I felt desperate; he had questioned me directly, and had demanded an answer; he had begged my friendship, I would give it to him; the result would show whence sprung his desire, whether in his awakening he would be true to me, although the very truth might stagger him, might appall him with a resurrected woe! "Your eyes speak to me volumes, and yet withhold their secret," he said, beseechingly. "They tantalize me: let them speak, Marguerite!"

I stretched out my hands to him. "They struggle to speak. Help them!"

"What do you mean, child? what are you saying? Is it true that I have ever known you before?"

"Do you not remember," I whispered, breathlessly,— "do you not remember? Ah! think a little, just a little!" My eyes were looking up into his supplicatingly,—my voice faltered under its burden of exceeding suspense.

"Child, are you sick?" he replied, in something like terror,— "you look so strange, you talk so wildly, I am afraid you are ill."

"I am not ill, I tell you," I answered, starting back as though I had been struck, "and I am not crazy,—I am only foolish; but you, you are worse than foolish,—you dare not recognize me!"

"Where could I ever have known you?" he answered me, in a half whisper, endeavoring to pacify me, but with wide-open eyes,— "do you think we have ever met before? I fear you are mistaken, child,—it is impossible. I may have seen somebody who resembled you very strongly, but never you,—I never could have seen you before!"

"When you say that you speak the partial truth," I said, under my breath, and speaking in a quick, uncertain way. "You were blind when you knew me before; so

of course you couldn't see me; but I used to talk and read to you, and sing to you sometimes,"—here my voice faltered exceedingly. "I was very unhappy then, for papa had just died, and I was lonely,—I had nobody to care for, and so I cared for you." I stopped, struggling with my voice; then, as he did not answer, the utter silence caused me to look at him more closely. He was sitting upright, his head thrown slightly forward as though listening, but with an utterly astonished, greatly agitated expression convulsing his face, while his eyes looked past me, over my shoulder, to where my Cousin Valerie leaned negligently beside General Farquhar. "You have not forgotten Blossom Village, but you have forgotten me!" I went on, ruthlessly; but quickly he leaned forward and pressed his right hand heavily on my arm.

"For God's sake, say no more!" he whispered, huskily, still looking over my shoulder. "If you have any mercy in your heart, say no more,—that is all past and dead long ago, thank God! Let it remain past and dead forever!"

#### CHAPTER XXXIV.

*August 6, 18* .—How soon it was all over, my annunciation and his renunciation! Even now, sitting here as quietly as I am, with nothing more exciting in my surroundings than an occasional twittering of the swallows under the eaves, or a ruffling of all the pages of my diary, lying here on my desk near the window, by the restless fingers of the fresh south wind; somehow I can still hear the echo of his words ringing in my ears, can see the quick agitation of his face, burning itself through all the dull apathy of these intervening hours, the nervous workings of his lips, the beseeching impetuosity, more like terror than anything else, of his eyes. Every subsequent circumstance of last evening stands emblazoned before

me, as though the sudden annihilation of my hopes had, instead of deadening me, quickened all my perceptive faculties into an analytical fever of both observation and comprehensive power. Let me write all that transpired during the latter part of the evening, here in my diary before forgotten. I feel weak this morning,—no, not weak but listless, without much feeling either in my head or my heart, and perhaps by-and-by, when I shall want to remember everything just as it happened,—I shall never forget what happened before he spoke those last, dreadful renouncing words,—I shall not be able, so I will write it all down now. Mabel has just gone down-stairs: I sent her; I would not let her—loving and comforting as she is—stay with me. I want all the morning to myself, as I have had all the night, to think in.

After he said that,—I mean Cecil Throckmorton,—after he had spoken those impetuous words, which, while they acknowledged so conclusively a former woe, forbade my ever attempting again to resurrect its ghost, and I had turned quite dizzy with seeing the moon and stars dancing a jig over my head, there had been a long and utter silence between us. There was no longer need for words, we had exhausted their power and their significance. When Lorimer and Mabel came to join us, saying, laughingly, that we had much the better nook, much the better cushions, and much the better everything else,—here they had made grimaces at each other at the doubtful compliment conveyed in the words of this latter decision to their own society,—Cecil Throckmorton, who had been leaning back speechless and with a very white face averted from me, aroused himself for the first time, to the extent of turning his eyes once more in my direction. Whether he looked directly at me or over my shoulder at Valerie, I could not exactly determine: all that I saw was, that his lips were closely compressed as though with an iron control, and that his face, although pale, had grown much calmer and composed. The jig of the moon and stars had stopped by this time, and if I couldn't help feeling a little dazed and chagrined, yet I had quite made up my mind to be nonsensical no longer.

Not long after this, when I had grown tired of Lori-

mer's badinage, of Valerie's happy voice and face, and of all my own thoughts, we came in sight of the Light, about twelve miles at sea,—then as we started on our return, we had ice-cream, peaches, and cake to devour, and plenty of iced champagne for the gentlemen. Those who chose to eat theirs on deck had it brought to them, but I was one of a few who preferred to go into the cabin,—I had quite enough of moonlight and its sorceries for one night, and was content to eat my ice-cream off a marble-topped table, with a little silver chandelier to light the repast, and with an ache in my heart to give it piquancy. Mrs. Dare, Mr. Horton, and Murray Dare were the only ones, beside myself, who ate their ice-cream in the cabin; I know that they all spoke to me, and I answered them, and I tried to be very composed, eating all my ice-cream, even to the last spoonful, when all the while I was thinking,—thinking, oh, so hard! of what had gone before, of how cruel and unsuccessful I had been! Through the open doorway to the cabin, when I chose to turn my head in that direction, I could see the group seated in the stern of the yacht: Mabel Chauncy sitting in my former seat between Lorimer and Throckmorton, and with her pure, sweet face looking almost transfigured, as the moonlight fell full upon it,—could see her smiling up at Throckmorton joyously, could hear her merry voice ringing out in some retort to Lorimer; while Valerie sat not far off, with General Farquhar lounging at her side, both silent, thoughtful, and gazing at the sea. Presently I saw Throckmorton, who had remained hitherto very quiet and impassive, only answering Mabel smile for smile, but eating nothing, and declining to join in the conversation, spring up, slightly stretch himself as though cramped with his long inaction, then cross the deck to where I had seen Gertrude Dare sitting last. All this while Murray Dare was talking to me, and endeavoring to propitiate me, by selecting several fine peaches from the épergne, for my acceptance, and begging me to join him in a glass of champagne, all of which attentions I declined very wearily. I was not at first conscious of Mrs. Dare's close scrutiny, I was too preoccupied to notice much transpiring immediately around me,—so, when

I looked up suddenly, as I did toward the last, and caught her searching eyes fixed inquisitively upon my face, I could not restrain a little thrill of horror, as I began dimly to imagine that she was entirely cognizant of all that had happened. A subsequent reflection assured me, however, how impossible it was such a knowledge on her part could exist; that she might have watched Cecil Throckmorton and me closely, had perchance seen him talking earnestly to me, I readily believe, but that she had overheard our conversation or understood its import, I at once concluded was simply absurd. When through all the mist of my own thoughts and regrets this consciousness awoke in me, when seeing how gloomy both she and Murray Dare looked, I began to feel preliminary aches of rheumatic conscience, with a great effort I endeavored to forget myself, and my own chagrined retrospections, for the nonce, to retrieve if possible my lost claim upon Mrs. Dare's toleration. Murray Dare seemed at once astonished and delighted when I finally condescended to eat one of the peaches he had given me, and to laugh and chat with him; how I succeeded in doing this is now quite a mystery to me, I felt so desolate and unhappy, so half stunned with regretful remorse,—but that I succeeded admirably I could see by the relenting smile slowly gathering on Mrs. Dare's lips, and the manner in which she spoke to me.

During the remainder of the sail home Murray Dare and I sat together on the deck, just to the left of the cabin door, while in the stern the rest of the party gathered in a little circle, and talked and laughed and sung right merrily. Presently Lorimer came over to where we were sitting and begged us to join their circle, but I refused; then finding me inexorable on this point, urged me to sing; this I also refused, so that he was obliged finally to return to his seat discomfited, and not a little vexed and astonished at me, as I could see. All this perversity on my part served to flatter Murray Dare amazingly, to such an extent that he became unusually confidential and oppressive in his complimentary effervescences, assuring me with much empressement, both of voice and manner, he considered me the prettiest and

dearest girl in the whole world, only that he had imagined all along that I didn't like him. When through the obscurity of my own ideas I managed at this juncture in his monological remarks to comprehend what he had been so tiresomely talking about all this time, how I longed in return to assure him of my unceasing and increasing dislike, and beg him to betake himself to some more congenial paradise!

My face was turned away from the group in the stern, so I did not see Colonel Throckmorton jump up suddenly and come toward us; but Murray Dare saw him, and immediately began bending over me and talking to me in a still more exasperatingly confidential way.

"How soon shall we be at home?" I said, impatiently. "There are the towers of Bonnie Venture, and there, I can see the cottage now!"

"The tide is out," replied Murray Dare; "we shall have to go ashore in the small boat."

At that moment I felt conscious that somebody had come up behind my chair and was standing there quietly.

"Here is your hat, Miss Marguerite," observed Colonel Throckmorton's voice, causing me to look up hastily in answer. His face, once more grown so cool and composed, quieted mine. "You left it in the stern among the cushions when you went into the cabin, and Miss Mabel has been endeavoring to improve its appearance with sitting on it ever since."

"There was no room for improvement," I answered, dryly; "it was just as ugly as it possibly could be before. But I take that all back; here is an awful bang on the crown!"

"How shall I straighten it?"

"As you like it."

"Ah! that puts me in mind of Rosalind, fair, bewitching, saucy Rosalind, like you, 'more than common tall' and poetical."

"With Audrey," I stupidly exclaimed, "I do not know what poetical is. Is it honest in deed and word,—is it a true thing?"

"Miss Marguerite, you are an octave prestidigitateur on the keys of one's soul, recklessly running the gamut

from the highest notes of inspiration to the lowest contralto tones of despair."

"I will turn piano-tuner immediately, Colonel Throckmorton."

"You are bound to quarrel with me, I see," he whispered, bending down suddenly, "but I will not let you. Listen to me," as I essayed to speak. "We cannot all go ashore at the same time; there will be necessarily a division in the party; I intend waiting for the last boat: will you do me the favor to wait and go with me?"

But I hesitated point-blank; I had nothing more to say to him; he had renounced the past; I had exhausted all my romance and all my ideas,—therefore I hesitated.

"Marguerite," began Murray Dare, but Colonel Throckmorton interrupted him.

"Wait and go with me, Miss Marguerite," he said, earnestly; "I have something I want to say to you by-and-by."

"I will wait and go with you, Colonel Throckmorton," I acquiesced, trying to speak coldly, and not looking at him, I felt so sore and remorseful. Then he paused a moment as though about to say more, restrained himself, and left me to make his way back to the group in the stern, while all the time I sat with my face turned resolutely toward the shore. After he was gone, I was obliged to sit very patiently and listen sometimes to Murray Dare's tiresome reproaches.

"You have treated me very shabbily all the evening, Marguerite," he said, in what he endeavored to make a deprecatory tone of voice, "and I can't help feeling bunged up, so to speak, with despair——" But when he had worked his reproaches into this strain, my patience, stretched on a tension, snapped summarily in two, leaving me at one end quite exhausted.

"That is all foolishness, Mr. Dare," I interrupted him, decisively, and turning my head to look full into his weak but now excited face, "and I don't like to have you talk to me in that half-authoritative way, just as though you have a right to find fault with me; you know you haven't any such right, just as well as I do, and why you will persist in making it appear that you have I can't under-

stand." Perhaps he saw he had gone too far, or in reality began to comprehend how ridiculous he was rendering himself in my eyes; at least whatever may have been the reason, when I said that he suddenly began to grow very penitent and strangely humble.

"Don't scold me, Marguerite!" he exclaimed, rubbing his hands nervously together; "I'll do anything if you won't scold me, your eyes get so big and shine so when you are angry, and your face so cold and almost cruel."

At that moment the yacht came to a sudden swing round stand-still, and everybody stood up.

"There are to be two trips," somebody said,—it sounded like my Cousin Gertrude's voice. "Who is going in the first boat?"

Nobody answered at first; then Mrs. Dare spoke,—  
"Valerie, you had better go first, General Farquhar will take care of you, together with Marguerite, Murray, Miss Beatrice, and Mr. Lorimer; I will wait and chaperon the rest of the party in the second boat."

Murray Dare was elate in a moment. "Marguerite, we'll get home all the sooner; that tiresome Throckmorton can glue himself to Gertrude instead." But I did not answer him; I felt distressed; I did not wish to offend Mrs. Dare, and yet I had promised Cecil Throckmorton to wait and go with him. "It isn't far to the beach, anyway," continued Murray Dare, seeing me hesitate; "come, the boat's all ready and waiting."

Then, as I stood irresolute, Colonel Throckmorton came over to me. At that moment Gertrude's voice cried out, "Come, Murray, they are waiting for you and Marguerite!"

"Remember your promise," whispered Colonel Throckmorton, leaning his elbows on the railing at my side and looking down at the water.

Across the deck, I saw them all getting down into the boat, Mrs. Dare standing very grimly beside Gertrude, and Murray Dare all the time stood close to me, waiting.

"Are you coming, Marguerite?" said Mrs. Dare, very icily, and gazing at me with gloomy, irate eyes.

That settled the question. "I must go," I said in a rapid undertone to Throckmorton; "you must forgive

me for breaking my promise." But he interrupted me by suddenly standing erect, and, without once looking at me, marched over to where Mrs. Dare and Gertrude stood together.

"Mrs. Dare," I heard him say, very quietly, in his usual half-lazy, half-indifferent tone of voice, "I made Miss Marguerite promise me half an hour ago that she would wait and accompany me in the last trip; but, of course, the arrangement was subject to your approval; if you desire, we will consider it annulled."

"I have no desire to interfere in any of my niece Marguerite's arrangements," coldly answered Mrs. Dare, biting short her words.

Then dear little Mabel spoke up, suddenly,—  
"Let me go in her place, Mrs. Dare. Come, Mr. Dare, I am waiting for you to help me into the boat."

But Murray Dare would not budge an inch. "I sha'n't go unless you do," he said to me, viciously, under his breath, and trying to appear oblivious of the fact that Mabel was looking toward him expectantly and holding out her hand.

"Miss Chauncy is waiting for you," I answered, speaking distinctly, so that everybody could hear.

At that moment, however, Mr. Conyngham stepped forward, took Mabel's hand, and they went together down into the boat. We saw it make its way to the tiny wharf, built partly of stone and partly of wood, just within a little cove, where the waves run swift and deep when the tide is at its flood, surrounded by huge rocks that bind the water-edge for nearly a quarter of a mile in each direction, until about half-way between the cottage and Bonnie Venture they melt into a small strip of pebbly beach, where, during these warm summer days, nice bathing is to be had. Now the tide was out, and we could dimly see the huge red boulders standing high and with their peaks sharply defined against the sky,—the wharf raised above the receding waves, but with stone steps leading down to the water-level.

Colonel Throckmorton and I stood talking very quietly together until the boat came back for us,—all the while with Murray Dare standing persistently near us, listening

to every word that we uttered and watching us like a lynx. The first boat-load had been a very jovial one; standing on the deck, I had heard them chatting and bantering one another,—Valerie's half-childish, musical laugh and Mabel's sweeter, merrier one ringing out together impetuously; then Lorimer's quizzical, laugh-provoking voice inciting them to renewed outbursts. Per contra, our trip proved very melancholy; Murray Dare talked in a very nervous, absurd way, my aunt looked coldly displeased, and Juliette Mortimer sat beside Gertrude, very stark and stiff, neither of them saying a word, notwithstanding Mr. Horton exerted himself in every way to fascinate Gertrude into opening her lips by ogling her in a rapturous manner through his spectacles and saying sentimental things to her in a squeaky undertone. Upon reaching the shore, ascending the stone steps to the wharf, and then through an opening in the rocks to an open field beyond, we found that the remainder of the party had not waited for us, but had gone home. Since we landed I noticed Gertrude had kept as close as possible to Colonel Throckmorton, had forced him to talk to her and assist her up the steps to the wharf, leaving me to the tender mercies of Murray Dare, who, upon reaching the open field aforesaid, at once offered me his arm to escort me to the cottage.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Dare," interposed Colonel Throckmorton, who, at that moment, talking to Gertrude, appeared to be all ears, "Miss Marguerite has already accepted my escort; she has promised to walk home with me."

There is a narrow pathway running through the fields close to the rocks connecting the grounds of the cottage with those of Bonnie Venture. The fields, rising higher and higher as they advance inland, lie here several feet above tide-water mark, bound on the sea-side by huge boulders and rocks, that, forming a steep wall of jagged stone, seem to support the land Atlas-like upon their shoulders. As we walked together along the path, we could not help turning our faces admiringly out to the far-reaching sea, glimpses of which could be caught between the rocks, until, upon reaching the small beach

lying half-way between the cottage and Bonnie Venture, and to which the path we had been pursuing led, the vast and uninterrupted beauty of the ocean burst upon us like a new revelation. As though he had been our veritable shadow, Murray Dare had persistently followed us, listening with all his ears to our conversation, and refusing to hear anything else.

"I am about tired of having that fellow dog us," Colonel Throckmorton whispered to me, as we stood for a moment on the beach, apparently engrossed in a rapt admiration of the sea. "I do not quite understand his rôle. What is it, Miss Marguerite, spy or desperate lover? Whichever it may be, whether one or the other, or even both in one, he plays his part in our little vaudeville remarkably well."

He had begun to talk to me in the old, friendly, bantering way now, with his lazy eyes smiling down into mine, and after all my experience of harsh doubts and misgivings, since I had so rudely attempted to make him even more my friend, by awakening in him the sense of a former anguish, and had been so summarily repulsed.—after all my remorse and chagrin, it was very sweet and healing to my sore conscience to have him ignore all that had passed in such a wholesome way. I did not stop to think whether it was heartless in him so to do, or whether his indifference did not savor of selfishness and a dread of being forced to recognize my identity in any way; at first I had been inclined, even while regretting all that had taken place on board the yacht, and condemning myself for my rashness of impulse and headstrong obstinacy, to feel sore, half vengeful, at his renunciation, and a little bitter; but now, when unconsciously we had both strayed back into the old tone of friendly sympathy and quiet confidence, I was willing for the nonce to forget all this, to drown all my remorseful bitterness in this cup of peace, held so closely and tantalizingly to my lips. Just as he had spoken, the remainder of the party, who had been standing to our left, watching the effect of the moonlight on the waves, and commenting thereon, began moving once again in the direction of the cottage. I had not answered Col-



onel Throckmorton, for fear of being overheard; now, however, as they all moved off along the beach, and Mrs. Dare looked back as though admonishing me to remain there no longer sentimentalizing, while Murray Dare, very unconsciously, remained stationary four feet off from where we stood, evidently lost in a speculative maze relative to the size, force, and ebb of the waves washing up on the pebbles at his feet, I spoke.

"I am indeed tired of being watched, suspected, tormented, and having every word I may chance to utter subjected to a critical analysis and a misconstruction. Let us go on, Colonel Throckmorton."

"No, wait a moment; we must get rid of that fellow in some way," he pleaded, trying to hold me back. Then he whispered, earnestly, "I have something to say to you that I don't want him to overhear; he'll dog us all the way to the cottage if we don't find means to outwit him: he is the biggest vampire of a jealousy I ever saw."

"No, I can't wait any longer," I replied, under my breath, hastily. "My aunt would be very much displeased, and I must not offend her: I owe everything to her. Please let me go on,—if you won't come with me I must go alone."

"Can't you drop something—your handkerchief, or that ribbon tied round your neck?" he said, moving forward, as I evinced a decided resolution to join the remainder of the party, now some distance ahead. "By-and-by, when we get abreast of that rock yonder on the beach, we might make a discovery of the loss, and turn back here for a search. This Dundreary following us couldn't refuse then, with any show of decency at all, to go on and leave us to our own devices."

"He is equal to anything," I began, but Colonel Throckmorton interrupted me.

"Drop your handkerchief, please,—or, no, better still, that bit of dark ribbon,—it won't be noticeable, and he might see the handkerchief. Drop it now, while the moon is going behind that cloud." And, half hesitatingly, I obeyed him.

Turning my head slightly, I could see Murray Dare's shadow, just before I dropped the ribbon, and while the

moon was shining yet full and strong, moving along simultaneously with and about three feet behind ours on the beach. At the sight I could not help feeling a spasm of almost uncontrollable vexation contract my heart, and could scarcely restrain the impetuous words from passing my lips which should then and there denounce him to his face as an intolerable spy. But I managed to keep my lips closed and my head steady, although a feeling of desperation assailed me more strongly than ever,—a great desire to outwit him in some way, to give him the slip, even though the success of the effort might serve to incense my aunt, Mrs. Dare, only the more decidedly against me. Just as I was making up my mind to this decision, we reached the great rock lying on the beach to the right, with the waves crawling up with hungry lips to kiss its grim, cold sides. Then I exclaimed,—

"I have lost my ribbon, Colonel Throckmorton! my pretty mauve ribbon!"

Murray Dare had come up beside us now, as Colonel Throckmorton replied, "We must go back at once and find it, or else when the tide comes in it will be washed away. No, we won't trouble you to assist us in the search, Mr. Dare," he added, decidedly, as Murray Dare, stopping, irresolute, at his words, made a feint to follow us as we turned back. "You will find the remainder of the party farther on. Good-night to you. He looked as though he would have liked to strangle me with a dose of Eau de Brinvilliers," Throckmorton said, laughingly, as we walked back toward the spot where I had so innocently dropped my ribbon. Then, stooping down, he quietly possessed himself of it. "I shall keep it here, Miss Marguerite, next my heart, to remember this night by." As he put it away, there fell a silence between us.

*August 7, Evening.*—I was interrupted here by Barry, who came to ask me if I would not sit with Archie while she went down-stairs to her dinner. The servants dine here at our luncheon-time; but as I was not hungry, and did not intend going down to lunch, I very willingly acquiesced. I sat with Archie all the afternoon. The child is daily growing weaker and weaker. Ah! I do not know how it will all end. I dare not think. Every moment

when away from him I seem to feel his clinging arms about my neck, his dark, spirituel eyes shining out at me from everywhere, and hear his voice crying, wistfully, "Goldy! Goldy!"

When Barry interrupted me yesterday, Cecil Throckmorton and I were standing alone together on the beach, while the waves came rushing up with a dull wash, wash, wash, trying to reach their white lips to our feet, but, failing in this, receding back with broken hearts, only to return once more to the endeavor. The moon, sailing low down in the west, into a sea of dark purple expanse, shone full and softly on his face, as he stood quietly beside me, not looking at me, but gazing thoughtfully far out to where the waves kissed the sky, and the white clouds lay thick like snow. It was such a suggestive silence, suggestive of all that had gone before, of a long suspense, of a secret sympathy and anticipation. I was getting a little nervous,—apprehensive of my aunt's displeasure if I remained much longer there when she had passed out of sight; very eager to hear what he had to say, to assure him in return that I had not intended to so vex and appall him as I had done when I so peremptorily demanded a recognition on the yacht; I was very sorry for having done so, had quite made up my mind to promise him never to allude to it again. Then he spoke,—

"I must have seemed very hasty and cruel both in my words and manner to you to-night," he said, turning toward me, with his face looking a little white, but very composed, "and I have been anxious ever since to apologize and explain to you, or partly to explain, why I appeared so." Then he stopped, in an odd, abrupt sort of a way, as though at a loss for words. His very evident agitation touched my heart to a quick sympathy and remorse.

"Don't explain anything, please," I answered, hastily. "I don't want you to apologize for or explain anything; I am all to blame myself,—I did wrong to discover myself to you; I was feeling weak and foolish, but I have been penitent ever since. I would not make you feel badly for the world. Please, please forget it!" I had

spoken hastily and eagerly, with all my heart in my voice, feeling—oh! so humbled, so contrite, and full of remorse,—if he would only be happy again, if I could only close the wound over and have it heal! He did not answer me at once,—he only stood and looked at me quietly and thoughtfully, but with troubled eyes.

"You are a good, kind-hearted little girl," he said, presently; "you think I have suffered, and you desire to spare me unnecessary pain,—the shame of remembering a former state of almost insane woe." Then he stopped short, as before, with the same trouble in his voice; but he went on almost immediately, "I confess that I was greatly astonished and overcome at your disclosure this evening,—your words resurrected a ghost which I thought forever buried, and which I have not looked in the face for a long, long time. It was natural, Marguerite,—let me call you Marguerite, this once; it is also the name of one whom I love very dearly, one who has been very close and near to me all my life, and whom I hope you will know one of these days." Here he paused for an instant, with a little tremor in his voice, with his eyes turned dreamily out to the sea. "As I said before, it was natural that I should be so astonished and confused—you must acknowledge it yourself—at being so suddenly confronted with the truth; but let me add that, in identifying you as the little girl who so kindly took care of and nursed—the blind man, so long ago,—so long ago now,—and so many things have happened since, it seems like a dream. I only learned the more heartily to respect and esteem you, whom, since I have known as Marguerite Dare, I have always thought a great deal of." He had taken my hand now, gently and firmly, but I did not draw it away. "So you are the little girl," he added, looking down into my face very thoughtfully, "the little girl who was so kind to——"

"You, Cecil Throckmorton. I am so glad to have you recognize me; I have wanted you all along to recognize me, but didn't dare to make you. I knew you from the very first,—I knew your name wasn't Lester, because, just as I was going away with Uncle Will, Miss Tabitha——"

"Ah, yes, Miss Tabitha," he interrupted me, his face relaxing for the first time into a half smile.

"She showed me your handkerchief, and on it I saw 'Cecil Throckmorton' written very plainly; so, when I met you in Boston, I knew you to be the same, and I was so glad, for I thought if you should recognize me you would certainly be my friend."

"And you have been thinking of it all this time, and wondering why I did not recognize you," he said, seriously; "you good, patient little Marguerite, you shall not be disappointed. I will indeed be your friend."

"You don't look a bit, though, like what I thought you would," I said, presently, looking up with scrutinizing eyes into his fair, handsome face; "but of course we always used to sit in the dark,—you couldn't bear the light; but I know your head was shaved, for I bathed it once,—do you remember?"

He shook his head in reply. "No, I don't remember; it is so long ago, and so much has happened since then."

"Yes, so much has happened," I said, wearily. "Uncle Will died,—dear Uncle Will; you don't know how good and kind he was to me, and how much I have missed him. Then I have been to boarding-school, have met you once more, and we have recognized each other!"

"Yes, and I am to be your friend," he added, with his eyes, grown still more thoughtful, watching me intently.

"I am so glad of that," I said, gratefully, awed into something like composure by his manner. "I have waited and longed for that, only I am sorry I was so rude to you and astonished you so much."

"Yes, I was greatly astonished," he replied, very quietly, and with a great deal of gravity expressed in his voice, "and I can't get used to the idea, even yet; it is a very sore subject, a ghost with a very ugly face."

"It shall trouble you no longer," I said, feeling with a quick apprehension that perhaps he was suffering torments in thus being forced to speak of it longer; "now that you have recognized me, I am content,—you who are so intimately connected with the dear old life at Blossom Village. I am happy in having you promise to be my friend,—you promised me then you would be my

friend if we should ever meet again, and, although it was very cruel to remind you of it in such an abrupt way, yet I am almost glad I did it, for you will truly redeem your promise now."

"Yes, I will be your friend," he assented, with infinite gentleness.

"Now we must go home," I went on, suddenly awakening to the fact that we had been standing there some time, and that Mrs. Dare would have a right to be horrified, and to scold me on the morrow. "We have stayed here too long already. I won't ever speak to you again about that time at Blossom Village, I know it must be painful to you—only——"

"Only what?" he queried, as I hesitated, in a troubled voice.

"Only one thing more," I said, quickly and eagerly, "I want to know about Dr. Lescom,—dear old Dr. Lescom; he was so queer and odd, you remember, but so good-hearted. Do you ever hear anything from him?"

"No;" then he hesitated point-blank.

As we walked slowly along the beach, from which Murray Dare had disappeared, I went on to tell him how Mrs. Dare had forbidden my ever writing to Dr. Lescom without her consent, and how much contrition of conscience I had endured ever since in consequence. "It has relieved my heart so much," I concluded, speaking very fast and warmly, "being able to talk to you about these things,—my heart has been full of them ever since I saw you in Boston, and now I can't help letting them all come out at once."

The moon was setting fast, shining round and low in the west, the heavy night shadows, throwing off the silver chains of her captivity, began to rise grim and stealthily, as quickening our steps we gained the other extremity of the beach from that by which we had come, and ascending the path leading once more to the open fields, left behind us the long stretch of restless waves, their dull beauty and the music of the returning tide, lapping in on the pebbles. In absolute silence we traversed the pathway leading to the cottage, until just as we reached the stone wall, the boundary-line between the fields and the grounds

of the cottage, and through an aperture in which the path we had been pursuing led, we came face to face with all the Bonnie Venture men, headed by General Farquhar, on their return from escorting Valerie and the rest home. I felt the hot blood rush up into my face when we saw them coming, for with a decided quake of internal dismay I began to realize fully and for the first time that I had been guilty of an impropriety in thus remaining alone with Colonel Throckmorton on the beach at such a late hour, and that they would be justified in judging me very unkindly. We did not come face to face with them until just as we reached the stone wall; then as I went through they all stood at one side to allow me to pass.

"Miss Marguerite," observed Lorimer, very grimly, "don't you remember, in the fable all good little boys and girls ought to read, the footprints that were all leading in the direction of the lion's den?"

"I play Daniel to her angel," retorted Cecil Throckmorton, speaking for the first time. "Go home, Lorimer, to the Abrahamic bosom of your Bible, and forget *Æsop*."

It was not until we reached the veranda of the cottage that he spoke again. All during the walk from the beach he had looked so thoughtful, so earnestly quiet, I had not dared to speak to him, but had waited patiently to hear what he might say by-and-by. Something in the set expression of his face, so usually careless and lazy, made apparent to me that his parting words that night would be at once decisive and well considered, the result of a long and severe reflection. The cottage, as we approached it, looked dark and cheerless: one or two lights were twinkling from the upper windows here and there, and these were the only signs of life anywhere apparent.

"They have all gone to bed!" I exclaimed, involuntarily. "Ah! I have done wrong; I am always doing wrong somehow; my aunt will have a right to be offended." But he did not seem to hear.

"Marguerite!" he exclaimed, suddenly, coming close to me where I stood on the veranda, thus bringing his face on a level with mine,—"*Marguerite*, you are merciful, kind-hearted; you would not willingly add one pang to those which I have already suffered, which I do suffer

whenever I think of that existence at Blossom Village; that degradation of soul, the renunciation of all manhood, all nobility of thought, the desperate blasphemy which blackened each hour, and all the wretchedness entailed thereby! Ah! little one, it is not a pleasant memory for you to cherish, either. Your simple heart may cling eagerly to all the glamour in which the romance of your girlhood has ever enveloped its woe, to the sympathy connecting your tender heart to that unhappy past with such a fervor and purity of purpose; but it is all wrong;—it is better for both you and me, I think, to cut our hearts asunder here, cruel as it may seem to you, as regards that past life, and on the ashes of its fire, lying quenched forever, build up a purer and a more substantial friendship, in the happiness of which there shall be no shade of a former disquiet, no intimation of a grim, cold ghost, no possibility of further retrospection."

His eyes were looking straight into mine now, his careless eyes grown earnest, beseeching and very grave,—his whole face, suddenly aged with anxiety and robbed of its usual lazy indifference, appealed to mine mutely,—his voice trembled as he spoke, while mine sprang to my lips with an impetuous sympathy, responsive to the pain and suspense in his.

"You have spoken truly," I managed to say, as quietly as he had spoken, "when you say that my heart has clung to the memory of you in your unhappiness long ago,—romantically, perhaps, but nevertheless with a pure fervor of sympathy, comforting me often with its sweetness when I have been alone in the world or felt desolate, and laying its healing fingers of hope on many a wound of my child-life; but that is all past and dead now," I added, gently, looking gratefully back into his softened eyes. "I am no longer a child, I have no longer need to feel either desolate or alone,—you have promised to be my friend, that is all-sufficient; there shall be neither a ghost to weary our friendship with its importunities, a disquiet to undermine its strength, nor the slightest possibility of future retrospection."

"God bless you, child!" he answered, impetuously; "you have closed the door of my soul on many a doubt

and misgiving that have been threatening me during the past two or three hours with their ugly faces. You will make me a promise?"

"That depends upon what the nature of the promise is," I said, half smiling at him.

"Don't tease me," he pleaded, hastily; "I am dreadfully in earnest; I want you to assure me—it is not necessary for you to promise—you will try to forget all that has passed between us to-night, that you will drink with me this draught of Lethe,—the first step toward the consummation of our friendship——"

"Don't say any more," I interrupted his eager voice; "I promise."

"Let me ask you one question before we bid good-by to this subject, I hope forever," he said, presently, looking at me very intently, and with a renewed agitation succeeding the expression of intense relief which had so brightened his face at my last words: "have you ever spoken to any one—your aunt or—your cousins—concerning this past interest of yours in that wretched existence at Blossom Village?"

"Never!" I said, energetically; "indeed, why should I? I have never linked your name with the past in the slightest way; it has been a sacred memory; why should I have shared it with them?"

"You prudent little girl!" he began. But I interrupted him at once.

"It was not prudence; that is a horrible, cold word; don't call my romance hard names: it is a privilege I claim alone for myself."

"You silly child!" he said, with a quick lightening of his voice, "how sensitive you are! Will you be sensitive for me too? will you close your lips against all future mention of the past either to me or any one else? will you share your sensitiveness with me thus far and sincerely?"

"I will promise you sincerely never to mention the past—this past of yours and mine—to any human being until your lips bid me; will that content you?"

He did not answer me in words; he only stood there, erectly quiet, with his eyes smiling into mine once more.

"See!" I exclaimed, suddenly, pointing to the west, where the moon was just hiding its head, "the moon is bidding us good-night, reminding me that I have disgraced myself by this night's proceedings forever in the eyes of my aunt and cousins,—at least I can provoke them no further. Good-night, Colonel Throckmorton." But before I could move an inch he had seized my hands.

"Good-night, Marguerite," he said, pressing them warmly in his; "you are a sweeter girl than ever I imagined you to be; with all my heart, I say God bless you!"

Then without venturing another word he released me, and I went away from him, leaving him to stand there looking after me until I turned the corner of the cottage on my way to the front door. Just as I was passing the library window, on the south side of the house, it was softly raised, and as I turned my head toward it I saw Mrs. Dare's figure standing within.

"It is one o'clock, Marguerite," she said, very quietly, opening it wider that I might enter; "I have been sitting up waiting for you here, as the house was locked up and I was afraid you would have some difficulty to get in."

Something in the sound of the intense quiet in her voice appalled me,—I could not see her face in the dark, but I knew just how it looked for all that.

"I am very sorry, Aunt Honoria," I began; but she cut me short.

"Don't apologize," she interrupted me, quietly as before; "there will be time for that in the morning; go to bed now, for you must be tired."

Then she shut the window down, and locked it, while I managed to get through the room in the dark without a broken neck, wondering all the time at her forbearance, and beginning to feel very sorry for having given her occasion to exercise it. But when I had got up-stairs, taken off my dress, put on a wrapper, and joined Barry in little Archie's room, where the child lay restlessly sleeping, I was too much in a maze—what with self-reproaches at having left Archie for so long a time, and the remembrance of all that had passed between Cecil Throckmorton and myself haunting me—either to feel very much dismayed



at this new development of forbearance on Mrs. Dare's part or to fear the lecture sure to be in store for me on the morrow. Somehow through all the watches of that night, after I had sent Barry to lie down and Archie had once more wakened up only to fall restlessly asleep again, even when Cecil Throckmorton's words were ringing in my ears, and the night grew darker and darker, a face would come and shine out at me from all the dusky corners and spaces of the room,—a cold, proud, magnetic face, with dark, impenetrable gray eyes, and a gray moustache drooping over the grave mouth,—the face of General Farquhar as I had seen it last when he stood aside to allow me to pass through the opening in the stone wall, grown strangely questioning and softened, and with the dying moonlight casting level gleams across its mystery.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

*August 12, 18* .—Archie has been very ill during the past two or three days,—so ill that Uncle Dare has brought Dr. Raynor down with him from the city three evenings in succession. How the sight of Dr. Raynor's good, kind face brings back to me visions of those last days of Uncle Will's illness in Boston, just before he went to Nice,—there to die and leave me doubly orphaned! Dr. Raynor did not remember me at once,—not for some time, until last evening, as we were standing around Archie's bedside, Uncle Dare told him who I was. Then he smiled at me so kindly and spoke so generously in praise of Uncle Will, he won my heart at once. When he went downstairs from Archie's room to take the carriage to the depot in time for the return-train to the city at nine o'clock, I followed him. I have been so distressed about Archie during the past week, have passed so many sleepless nights watching by his bedside, with an aching heart full of dread and suspense, I felt as though I must know

the truth,—must demand his verdict,—even if his words in answer should seem a dagger of cruelty.

"I must know the truth, Dr. Raynor," I said, quietly, as we stood together in the open door, while the carriage stood in front waiting, and I could hear Cecil Throckmorton's voice as he promenaded up and down the back veranda with Mabel; "I am strong and able to bear it; anything would be better than this horrible suspense and anxiety; I must know just how sick Archie is!"

"You had better be asking how sick you are yourself," he answered, looking at me very gravely and scrutinizingly; "you are wasting your strength unnecessarily, Miss Marguerite; you are very pale and big-eyed; it is the result of overanxiety; if you do not take proper care of yourself I shall have another patient before long. How many nights have you sat up with the child during the past week?"

"Three nights and two half-nights."

"Three nights and two half-nights too many," he retorted, decisively; "it's all wrong, my child; that big daughter of Erin up-stairs is the proper person to sit up with Archie, and you are the proper person to go to bed."

"Ah, but Barry does sit up with him night after night,—she is very devoted and constant in her attentions to Archie,—the child would have been dead long ago if she hadn't been. Last week she was up with him nearly every night, and she never said a word about it until I chanced to find it out; if one of us didn't sit up with Archie, Uncle Dare would; we have a dreadful time every night trying to get him to go to bed."

"As I said before, it is Barry's place to sit up with the child," Dr. Raynor replied, unconvinced, "and not yours; she is as strong as a horse, and can bear it; you are frail, and it will kill you. You will do well if you take heed and remember my warning. Good-night."

"But you have forgotten to tell me about Archie," I said, laying my hand anxiously on his arm.

"I have nothing to tell you, my child," he answered, kindly; "he is in no immediate danger; he will rally from this attack, I think, in a few days, and be quite strong again; these unfortunate children seem ever to cling to



life with longing hands. Archie will not live years, Miss Marguerite,—we cannot hope for that; but he will live months, I think, without doubt.”

After that I went up-stairs with a comparatively light heart. Just as the carriage drove off and I crossed the hall to the stairs, I heard the quick rustle of a dress within the parlor to the right, a hasty rustling of a muslin dress as though in flight, and something in my heart told me, with a convincing voice, it was Mrs. Dare, who standing there had listened to Dr. Raynor's words. She has been so strangely kind to me within the past two or three days,—no lecture has been the offspring of that hour alone with Cecil Throckmorton on the beach, no condemning words have passed her lips relative to my having remained out so late that night,—she has only sought in every way possible to evince an interest in me, of which I had never deemed her apparently cold, proud heart capable. Every day since the yachting-party, there have been late in each afternoon either croquet-parties on the lawn, boating-parties across the water to the islands, or long drives at sunset-hour into the interior. In these pleasures I have not participated,—bound to Archie's bedside by every strong tie of love, sympathy, and anxiety, I have scarcely had time or inclination to even think of these things. I have been content, even with the happy voices from down-stairs or out on the lawn ringing in my ears, to sit there day after day, either holding the child hour by hour in my arms, or bathing the fevered head into a cool, sweet rest. These intervening days of intense suspense and anxiety have served to dull my heart against all memories of the past. I seem to myself to have grown older, some way, more indifferent, and at rest in my mind relative to all else in the world save Archie. I look back now to that evening of the yachting-party with feelings of almost amused wonder, of self-commiseration, and regret, to think that I could be so foolishly romantic as to be betrayed into the extravagance of discovering myself to Cecil Throckmorton! It is all past now: I am nothing more to him than a friend of to-day; the friend of yesterday, which I so longed to be, is a creature merely of the imagination,

a monstrosity and a nightmare to all common sense,—such a being never existed,—we have sealed the doors of its tomb forever, the ashes of its life lie cold and unmourned in the urn of utter oblivion! I have just been reading over my diary,—those parts treating of this subject,—and how I commiserate them! such a romantic fool of a girl wrote them,—oh, poor foolish Marguerite!

August 13, 18 .—Early before breakfast this morning Mabel and I went down to the beach for a plunge into the salt water. Just before we came to Wickoff's Ledge General Farquhar caused two bathing-houses to be built on the beach, a fact which we discovered soon after our arrival here, and which we have appreciated nearly every morning since we came. By the time we reached the beach the sun had been up nearly an hour. What a pure, exhilarating morning! The invigorating breeze came blowing in little wafts of cool delight from across the sea, the waves, crawling high up on the beach with clinging lips of foam, shone and sparkled right merrily, while overhead the sea-swallows wheeled in circling coveys, and the sun, slowly riding higher and higher in his golden state, smiled into a yellow ecstasy the face of the broad, blue sea. Hand in hand, Mabel and I ran down from the bathing-house, across the beach, and with a shout of anticipation plunged headlong into the breakers.

“If this isn't jolly!” cried Mabel, ducking once more. “Let's stay here all day, Marguerite.”

“And get parboiled,” I answered, laughing at her as I went paddling out into deeper water,—I couldn't swim very well, so I paddled. “Imagine us going home with wizen faces and big red noses!”

“Ugh!” cried Mabel, coming up behind me suddenly and upsetting my mental as well as bodily equilibrium by precipitating me on my face downward into the water, where I lay struggling some time, with the salt water rushing into my eyes, nose, and mouth in a most aggravating manner; then, as I arose sputtering, she added, maliciously,—“I always did admire water-colors; oh, Marguerite, how jolly and red your nose is already! Don't you remember

'Her hair drooped o'er her pallid cheeks,  
Like sea-weed on a clam'?"

That was adding insult to injury, so I made a dive at her, seized her by the hair, ducked her two or three times in succession, until she cried for mercy. Then peace was declared for the nonce. After that we had a grand frolic, floating, diving, and trying to swim, until we both came to the conclusion that it was time to go home.

"It has done you good," Mabel said, decisively, as we were once more en route for the cottage; "your face has flushed up amazingly; it is awfully becoming for you to have color, Marguerite!"

I did not see Murray Dare sitting on the steps to the veranda until we had entered the cottage-grounds; then, as he saw us approaching, he came toward us with a bunch of heliotrope, mignonette, and chrysanthemums in his hand.

"I brought them from Bonnie Venture, late last night, for you, Marguerite," he said, holding them toward me, looking half sheepish, half supplicating, the while. "I have kept them in water ever since; won't you accept them?"

Somehow I was feeling very good-natured this morning,—more tolerant in my feelings toward everybody in general, and everybody ordinarily disagreeable in particular. My plunge into the salt water and frolic with Mabel had done me good, brightened me up and provoked me into being light-hearted and amiable for the nonce,—so I accepted Murray Dare's flowers, trying to thank and smile at him the while.

"Breakfast isn't ready yet," he added, looking very much elated, "won't be ready for some time; let us sit here under this cedar-tree till Murray calls us."

So Mabel, he, and I seated ourselves on the rustic bench, beneath the shade of the gigantic cedar-tree, while Beatrice Mortimer cast lingering and vexed glances at us from where she stood on the veranda, together with her sister and Gertrude, talking about the people under the cedar-tree in a most engrossing manner. Since that evening on the beach, when he had been so unmercifully

snubbed, Murray Dare had refrained from annoying me in any way,—indeed, I had scarcely given him an opportunity so to do, having been so closely confined to Archie's room, Barry bringing my meals to me there; but when I had chanced to meet him once in awhile here and there, he had seemed so penitent, so abjectly in earnest, that my feelings of desperate antagonism gradually became more modified, until now I had so sufficiently softened as to be able to receive his flowers kindly and to talk to him here, in Mabel's presence, with my usual feeling of entire and utter indifference. Then my treatment, since that evening, at Mrs. Dare's hands, had also served to render me more contrite and willing to appease her in any way possible,—she had been so strangely kind to me, so willing to forget and forgive my many little offenses against her notions of propriety,—those offenses which I felt assured would, months before, have extorted from her lips bitter words of crimination and reproof,—that now I was eager to repay her in some manner for her forbearance, to assure her of my appreciation of her good-will; and how could I more significantly make this apparent to her than by being kind and good-natured to this Murray Dare, whom she seemed so desirous to make me like and tolerate?

Everybody looked so sweet and airy in fresh muslin morning dresses, when we went in to breakfast: even Gertrude, although she couldn't help showing how cordially she hates me,—the hate will shine out of her eyes, however much she may try to conceal it,—appeared softer in some way, and more amiable. My poor white dress makes a miserable contrast to theirs. It is fortunate that I am philosophical, and can bear darns, for my solitary Swiss, which Barry washes and irons for me at odd moments, that I may appear at least decent, has fifteen darns in it, to my knowledge; and this is my only summer dress, with the exception of my white organdy, that I only wear on state occasions, and a lavender-spotted calico. If it wasn't for Barry, I don't know what I should do,—she washes first my white Swiss and then my calico; so between the two I manage somehow to keep clean. What I shall do when they are worn out is

a metaphysical problem quite beyond me,—I have no money, and Mrs. Dare seems to close her eyes to my destitution. Every day Valerie, Gertrude, or the Misses Mortimer appear in some fresh toilet, rivaling each other in point of extravagance and taste. Valerie, however, usually distances all competitors in the matter of taste, everything she wears is so airy, floating, and Undineish, so subtly in accordance with her half-childish, exquisite face. Mabel is very kind; she is continually trying to make me accept presents from her own little wardrobe,—Mabel dresses in a very becoming, rich, but simple way,—all to no purpose, however; I am obdurate, I will wear my darns and my faded calico until Barry has annihilated them in the wash-tub; then I will go begging, and not before. If it was not for Archie, my own little helpless Archie, I would not remain a day longer in this house; I know I am disliked here, and barely tolerated. I am flesh and blood,—I feel the red-hot, pinching slights, the continual sneers, seasoning the daily food of my existence. However much my aunt may strive to conceal this from me, however diligent she may be in her reproofs to Gertrude and her efforts to conciliate me, yet I am not blinded,—I sharply realize the dislike and sentiments of bare toleration which both my cousins and their guests extend to me. For Archie's sake I endeavor faithfully to forget this consciousness, to blunt the sensitiveness of my heart against their subtle cruelties,—the child clings to me so, he has grown to be so dependent on my love and tenderness. Barry says it would kill him to have me desert him,—how could I leave him, how could I bear to go from him in these his hours of extreme suffering?

"Marguerite," said my aunt, as we arose from the breakfast-table, "will you give me a half-hour by-and-by in my dressing-room?"

Before I had gone with Mabel to the beach I had first looked in at Archie's room to see if he was comfortable, and was pleased to see him lying on his little bed sleeping sweetly and soundly; now, when I went up-stairs once more, I found that Barry had drawn a lounge close to the window, where the sea-breeze came blowing in

freshly, and Archie was lying thereon, with an intensely satisfied expression irradiating his pale, mignon face. I sat some time with him, talking and laughing, my heart momentarily growing lighter and lighter when I saw how quickly he was convalescing, how magically eased he was of his sufferings, and how much he seemed to love and depend upon me. We were a happy trio, Barry, Archie, and I; now that the child was feeling better and brighter, we had our little jokes, our chats and laughs all by ourselves, with nobody to trouble or reprove us. Our three rooms occupy this isolated wing of the cottage, mine on the extreme end, Archie's next to it looking out to the sea, and Barry's directly opposite fronting on the driveway; so here we are at liberty to indulge our several fancies unmolested. Archie can play on his pet concertina, Barry can scold us to her heart's content or sing her Irish songs for our edification, and all is merry and unrestrained now that the child is better.

*Evening.*—Let me write here before I go to bed to-night all that transpired in Mrs. Dare's dressing-room, when, in obedience to her summons, after having given Archie his chicken-broth and made him comfortable for the day, I joined her there at about eleven o'clock this morning.

Mrs. Dare's room is in the more central part of Cedar Cottage (the name given our crooked habitation by Valerie), just to the left of the front hall, up-stairs, a large, square room with a dressing-room adjoining, which is in the immediate corner of the cottage and looks out toward Bonnie Venture. To reach this I was obliged to pass through her bedroom, and found it a nondescript, five-shaped sort of a retreat, just over the library, full of odd corners, cupboards and niches, ending in an abrupt bow-window—a bow-window, deep-seated, and hung with pale-yellow chintz, directly opposite the door by which I had entered and commanding a fine and uninterrupted view of the towers of Bonnie Venture. In its recess, with a writing-desk drawn close to her side, sat my aunt, Mrs. Dare, apparently deeply engrossed in the writing of a letter.

"Sit down, Marguerite," she said, glancing up at me

as I entered and smiling at me very kindly. "I shall be at liberty in one moment,—I am anxious to get this letter off by this noon's mail."

Then I seated myself very patiently to await her pleasure, in a cosy bamboo lounging-chair, drawn up in front of the window looking toward the gateway to the avenue, seen dimly between the confused assemblages of dwarf cedar-trees flecking the lawn here and there in patches of dark, somber green. Some time I sat there, listening dreamily to the scratching of her pen, lulled into a quiet sense of peace by the half-somnolent influences of the sweet summer day, with my eyes turned out to the cloud-speckled sky, watching the zigzag sailings of the multitudinous swallows writing their airy hieroglyphics on the blue fervor of the heavens; a bird language of motion indescribably graceful and which lifted my thoughts out of myself irresistibly. While yet my eyes lingered out among all the golden gladnesses of the day, hearing above the dull scratching of my aunt's pen the sharp chirp of the crickets, the singing of the locusts, and the hum of innumerable insects, the minor notes in the grand *Te Deum* of praise, a little wren flew out from under the roof overhanging the window and perched its tiny self on the tip-top spray of a spruce-tree standing like a sentinel in the circular grass-plat immediately in front of the cottage. There he hung for several moments, trilling out his notes of thanksgiving, fluttering his wings, and seeming to exhaust his whole little bird heart in this effort of his to thank God. When he flew away, somehow I felt as though this little wren had carried some of my heartache with him. Presently the monotonous scratching of my aunt's pen ceased, and, when almost unconsciously I turned my head toward her, I saw that she was narrowly watching me, with an anxious, half-haggard look seaming the usual tranquillity of her face. I do not intend writing here, I am too tired, our entire conversation, her opening words, or mine in reply,—hers, so cool, well reflected upon, and clearly enunciated; mine, quickly astonished, impetuous, and decided. Suffice it to say that these same words of hers made as plain as possible to my understanding the fact of Murray

Dare's having selected her as a mediatrix between him and me, to assure me of his love and his desire to make me his wife. I must confess I was a great deal staggered at first, both at his presumption in daring to address me thus, even through her, and her own peculiar manner of making patent to me the fact of his having done so. While she spoke those few well-chosen opening words, wherein she seemed desirous to impress upon my mind the feasibility of his suit, the sympathy with which she herself regarded it, and the utter powerlessness of my own heart to combat this joint resolution of theirs, I could only sit quite still, stunned into an apparent acquiescence in all that she might say, and staring at her with two very astonished eyes.

"Let me tell you, Marguerite," she went on, by-and-by, after I had recovered from my astonishment and told her how impossible it would be for me ever to regard Murray Dare with other feelings than those of utter indifference, "how deeply concerned I am in your welfare, both present and future, how responsible I acknowledge myself to be for your success in life; you are young, thoughtless, and as yet unstable in your ideas and unformed as to your mind,—in fewer words, you do not understand yourself; you may imagine now that you do not and never can love Murray, the bare idea of marriage may seem very averse to you, but I realize, my child, that the entire settling of all these questions will come with time. Murray can afford to wait; his love will outlive suspense; at the end of two years—you are now nineteen, are you not?—he will be as ready to take you as his wife as he is to-day."

"He is very kind," I said, controlling my voice to a steadiness which astonished my own ears; "but I shall not ask him to wait; my mind will be the same two years hence."

"I could not think of allowing you to be married until your twenty-first year," observed Mrs. Dare, looking at me thoughtfully, and apparently deaf to my last words; "your Uncle Will impressed upon my mind, before he left us for Nice, his desire for you to remain under my absolute protection until you should attain your twenty-first

year; on your twenty-first birthday you will be at liberty to leave the protection of my roof for that of any husband you may choose."

"I shall not choose Murray Dare," I said, with much decision.

"Pray, do not be so hasty, my child," she answered, regarding me with a sort of gloomy astonishment; "you are so impetuous; you try my patience sadly; be more quiet, please, and wise. Marguerite, I want you to be happy; I want you to be engaged to Murray during these intervening two years; on your twenty-first birthday you will be at liberty to give him then a decided answer; in the mean time,—you are so passionate, so headstrong and self-willed,—it will be of great benefit to you in your immaturity to have his strength to rely upon, his manhood to encourage you, his love to protect you in all things!"

When those last suggestive words passed her lips, I shuddered involuntarily. "You say that you wish me to be happy, Aunt Honoria," I answered, quietly; "I believe you to be sincere; you have been very kind to me, very gentle when I have offended you, and you have just used Uncle Will's name to assure me that your love and protection are promised to me until I shall have gained my twenty-first birthday. It is generous in you to give me this assurance; it pleases me to think I am not quite homeless or loveless; if you will only truly love me, Aunt Honoria, if you will only rely henceforth upon my faithful affection for you, if we could only perfect this understanding between us, without dragging Murray Dare's name in to pervert our friendship and destroy its harmony, I should indeed be happy!" I had spoken very eagerly and warmly; I did so long to be friends with her—to be at peace.

"You are a silly child," replied my aunt, trying to smile at me and to soften her eyes; "you are a romantic, unthinking child; you know very well how much I love you, how partial I have been and indulgent; Murray Dare has nothing to do with my affection for you one way or the other, only so far——"

"Don't let us have any 'onlys,' Aunt Honoria," I exclaimed, encouraged by the softening of the face and the

half-tenderness of her voice; "let us leave Murray Dare's name entirely out of the question, I am so tired of it. I do not wish to be loved by him ever; let me be your child; I will try and be so obedient to your slightest wish, so self-controlled; I would rather be this to you than aught to any one else, for to you I owe everything."

"That sounds very well, remarkably feasible,"—she replied, with a subtle something undertoning her voice which hurt me, for I had spoken those words with my whole eager heart,—“when, while assuring me of your desire to be obedient and self-controlled, you make both the subject of a condition. I am not willing to accept any such allegiance, Marguerite; your gratitude goes for naught; you defy my love by opposing your will obstinately to mine in this one instance, which, if I should allow it to pass quietly, would prove but one instance of many such. Marguerite, it would be wronging you for me to shut my eyes to your perversities of thought and judgment, when feeling assured that you are being led astray by this rash impulsiveness of yours which seizes in its thoughtlessness upon any object chancing to appeal strongly to your imagination.” To what or to whom did she refer? Was it Archie? Her voice, modulated to such a cool precision of utterance, quite appalled me,—I stared at her, wonderingly. “I refer to Colonel Throckmorton,” she said, coolly; “I have reason to believe you imagine yourself to be in love with him.”

Did she intend to be cruel, to sting me into being confused,—pliant in her hands, and at war with myself? Was this her trump card, played at hazard after all else had failed? For one instant, as all these thoughts ran riot through my head, the color came wavering up into my face; how I hated myself for it, although I kept my eyes fixed resolutely on her face,—myself otherwise calm and composed!

"You are not mistaken, Aunt Honoria," I answered, as coolly as she had spoken, feeling the while how a hot vexation was chasing all the softness out of my heart; "I do love Colonel Throckmorton,—I love all that is lovable and noble in him, as I do in all the rest of God's creatures,—I believe him to be true, noble, and chival-



rous, and I love him for it; but I am not quite a fool, let me add. If I am thoughtless and rashly imprudent, as you have so repeatedly given me credit for being within the last ten minutes, my heart is my own yet, thank God!"

"I am glad to be assured of this," observed my aunt, quietly; "I was quite worried about you; I feared that some infatuation about Colonel Throckmorton might lead you to look coldly on Murray's suit; you have indeed relieved my mind." The very sound of Murray Dare's name was becoming obnoxious to me; I sat there wondering what would come next, feeling sore, hurt, and very indignant. "I feared Colonel Throckmorton was trifling with you," added my aunt, after a slight pause, musingly; "he has the reputation of being heartless." Still I sat quiet, without answering. "Do not look so vexed and impatient, Marguerite," she went on, earnestly; "you have such a tell-tale face; I see very plainly how offended you are at my plain speaking. Can you doubt my love now, my child, when I dare to warn and reason with you on such a delicate subject, even at the risk of being considered cruel, and at the expense of incurring your most intense displeasure?"

Her voice sounded so sincere, she was looking at me in such an anxious, half-distressed way, I could not help feeling softened, remorseful, and assured that after all she had not intended being cruel in thus dragging Colonel Throckmorton's name into the question, only perhaps I had given her occasion to be solicitous for my welfare in this one thing as in all others; for had I not been imprudent in disclosing to other eyes the interest which I have felt in him, through my rash desire to be acknowledged by him as his little friend of long ago? may I not have appeared to these people, blind to my secret, at once infatuated by his attentions and forgetful of my own heart's health? With these thoughts harassing me, I could not help feeling humiliated and distressed, for both her words and manner suggested to me the probability of this weakness of mine having been canvassed and subjected to grave misapprehensions by my cousins, and their guests also. Ah! how thoughtless I had proved myself to be, to lay my weak thoughts open

to their pity! what a recompense was this for all my romantic anxiety and suspense! My aunt was narrowly watching me.

"Marguerite," she said, softly, "if you have not spoken truly because of your pride,—if your lips give the lie to your heart,—if you have unconsciously learned to rely upon the possible love of this man, so notoriously insincere, out of your weakness there may come strength,—the shelter of Murray's love invites you!"

For one unworthy instant the thought flashed through my mind, here at least I might refuge myself from their everlasting misjudgments and sneers, that in promising to try and love Murray Dare I might win for myself, during the two years to come, less of suspicions and discourtesy, more of toleration and peace. My next thought was one of intense disgust at my aunt for having suggested this alternative, at myself for my weakness in having entertained it even for an instant.

"I can bear being misjudged,—I am getting used to that," I answered, bitterly; "but it is impossible that I should ever become Murray Dare's wife, or used to loving him." And when I had said that, I felt relieved, less ashamed of myself, and once more strong to do battle in my own defense.

"I do not ask you to love him all at once, Marguerite,—at least,"—correcting herself with a vain attempt to control her voice to a pleasant medium of utterance,—“he does not anticipate any such concession on your part: you have scarcely flattered him lately to such a presumption. To the contrary, I believe you have eagerly availed yourself of every opportunity to encourage the attention of others at the expense of an insult to his pride,—you must acknowledge yourself that is scarcely the way to encourage a lover's heart!"

"Then why has he dared to address me, Aunt Honoria,—your own words absolve me from all suspicion of having encouraged him,—why has he dared to ask me to be his wife?"

When she had last spoken, it had been in a half-hasty, angry way, which I could see she endeavored to control; now, although she grew very pale about her lips, and her



hands trembled visibly as they played nervously with a silver paper-cutter on the writing-desk, her voice sounded very gentle and conciliatory.

"Because he loves you, Marguerite."

"Then he must love me no longer, Aunt Honoria," I cried, provoked beyond all patience. "I will have none of his love." Saying these words, I arose quickly, and stood resolutely before her. "Don't let us talk about these disagreeable things any longer," I pleaded, more gently; "it will only provoke more discord and unpleasant controversy between us; I am so tired of displeasing you, and I can't help displeasing you when we talk about Murray Dare. Please believe me, when I say how earnest is my wish to be loved by you, how I try to make myself worthy of your love——"

"Do you try very hard, Marguerite?" she interrupted me, looking up into my face with a smile which seemed half threatening.

"Do I not," I answered, emboldened by this same smile to speak very plainly, "do I not day by day endure slights, constant sneers of both words and manner from my cousins, for your sake? Is this no small task for one whom you acknowledge yourself to be so hot-tempered and impulsive? do you think I am so fond of eating the bread of dependence that, when suffering thus, it does not stick half-way down my throat, to be melted on its way only by tears?"

"There, Marguerite, there!" cried my aunt, shaking her hand at me gravely, "you accuse yourself; have you eyes in your head, and do you not see how you provoke this treatment at their hands by a freedom of speech and manner in yourself, an unconventional levity of action, so offensive to persons brought up as strictly as my daughters have been?"

"What do you mean?" I exclaimed, passionately, quite beside myself now, I felt so sore, so defiant and indignant; "you mean to insinuate that I am a disgrace to you and yours?"

"You call things by hard names, the harder the truer sometimes," she answered, very concisely. "You certainly have acted in a peculiar manner since you have

known Colonel Throckmorton. Eyes are made to see with, Marguerite, and ears made to hear with, and it would be unnatural to blame your cousins if they have not shut them upon all occasions. Until you gave me your assurance a few moments since to the contrary, I certainly have thought you in love with Colonel Throckmorton, a weakness not only to be commiserated but remonstrated against, for Colonel Throckmorton is and always has been a notoriously insincere man where women are concerned. Now, Marguerite, you must not blame me for feeling worried about you."

"I am grateful to you," I managed to say, very quietly; "I only hope I may never give you occasion to so worry yourself again."

"Both your words and manner intimate to me, my child, how meagerly you appreciate my motives or my affection for you; it is very ungenerous, when I have so conscientiously striven to do what I considered a plain duty. That I have done right in talking thus plainly to you, however much you may blame me for so doing, I feel assured; that I have had reason to so concern myself in your behalf I believe yet. What else besides my suggested cause could account for your decided predilection for Colonel Throckmorton's attentions?"

"Am I not at liberty to receive the slightest attention from a gentleman without feeling obliged to fall in love with him, or exposing myself to censure and misapprehension?"

"Now, Marguerite, you are becoming very angry and passionate again. Sit down, my child, and control yourself——"

"I will control myself thus far," I interrupted her, very quietly, "to make plain to you in as few words as possible my present determination, the result of this conversation; you intimate, indeed you very plainly assert the fact, that I am a disgrace to your family, my word is not to be depended upon,—furthermore, that I am in love with a man who in return is utterly indifferent to me;—three acknowledgments on your part very flattering to me, and which I appreciate fully. I begin, through the haze of this revelation, to realize what a fearful eye-

sore I must have been, and am, to you and to my cousins, surrounded as you are by the rarefied atmosphere, the especial prerogative of such a heaven of propriety as that in which you exist. From this alien state in which I manage to survive you think it possible to exalt me into a higher state of existence through the instrumentality of Murray Dare,—his love, thrust upon me, is to measure out my salvation. Let me tell you, I refuse to have my salvation dealt out to me in such a pitiful measure; I decline the honor of being made the puppet to Murray Dare's vanity and to your prejudices; I will seek elsewhere a better recompense for all the slights I have endured beneath your roof!"

#### CHAPTER XXXVI.

*August 14, 18* .—I could not write any longer in my diary last night, I felt so tired, so disturbed and ill at ease,—my head ached in such a harassing way that I was obliged to go to bed earlier than usual, hoping the additional rest would serve to make me feel better this morning. Upon awakening at about six o'clock, after many hours spent in restless dreams and intervals of entire wakefulness, I found, however, my headache clinging to me yet with longing pains; so, when Mabel came in, as is her custom every morning before she goes down to breakfast, she forced a promise from me to stay in bed, allow her to stay with me and bathe my head in cologne-water. She had been with me about a half-hour when Murray the waiter appeared, bearing a breakfast-tray, on which daintily, in some odd, old-fashioned china tête-à-tête set, were broiled chicken for two, spiced salmon, French rolls, and iced tea, together with a most tempting dish of peaches, pears, and plums laid in ice.

"My lady fixed everything with her own hands," Murray observed, as Mabel took it from his hands at the door; "she begged me to tell Miss Marguerite she hoped she

would be better presently, and that the iced tea might do her good."

Last evening, when I did not go down to tea, but preferred having Barry bring mine to Archie's room, where I had remained with the child ever since I left my aunt's dressing-room, Mabel rushed up-stairs, feeling assured something unusual had happened, since I refused to fulfill my promise made to her in the morning, to take tea with the family that evening, the first time in a week. The Bonnie Venture people were below, she said, and all inquiring for Miss Marguerite,—all with the exception of General Farquhar, who, stupid man, never did inquire for any one; then I had taken her into my own room, away from the ears of Barry and Archie, and, out of the fullness of my heart,—I did so long for sympathy and the sound of a true friend's voice,—told her everything, how Murray Dare had dared to ask me to become his wife, how determined my aunt had seemed to press his suit, and how determined I had been in my resistance.

Now, after Murray, the waiter, had gone down-stairs, and Mabel made me drink some of the iced tea, which certainly refreshed me greatly, while she discussed her own breakfast, we resumed the subject of the previous evening's conversation.

"Why Mrs. Dare, worldly as she is, should be so desirous for her nephew to marry a girl as penniless as you are, Marguerite," Mabel said, "is quite beyond my comprehension; and if I understand Murray Dare's character aright, it is equally a wonder that he should patiently allow himself to fall in love with any such one."

"I have quite given up wondering about that," I answered, wearily; "I am content to know I shall never marry him; I only wish I could dismiss him forever from my thoughts and his name from my lips with these words. Mabel, there must be necessarily some hidden spring actuating the mechanism of Mrs. Dare's worldliness in her treatment of me, she appears at once so suspicious, yet politic, even when greatly vexed at me,—so conciliatory, almost apologetic. I feel there is a strange motive underlying all this, which is at once a mystery and a torment to me."

"From what you told me last night, you poor, dear child," said motherly Mabel, suspending for an instant the wholesale demolition of a peach, "I suspect you possess an influence over your aunt of which you are wholly unconscious, and which, while she proudly deprecates it, yet she is powerless to resist; whether this influence extends to your cousins I do not know: suffice it to say, the whole affair is a jumble."

"She spoke so unkindly, so ungenerously to me yesterday," I said, gravely, "in such a cool, restrained way, as though she was holding herself in with strong reins of rigid self-control, which at any moment might snap asunder swiftly,—all the while watching every expression in my face with a pair of gloomy eyes,—until, when at last driven to the wall, I turned upon her, telling her my determination never to sacrifice myself to Murray Dare's vanity or to her prejudices, but elsewhere to seek a better and a nobler life,—the change from an expression of anxious suspense to one of almost terrified perplexity, visible in her face, was wonderful to behold!"

"There, dear," Mabel interposed, sympathetically, "don't begin worrying yourself over it again, it will only make your head ache harder and you more uncomfortable."

"No, it does me good," I interrupted her quietly. "I have been dreaming about it and living it all over again during the night, so now it helps me to be able to talk to you about it and have you sympathize with me; to tell the truth, I am more perplexed this morning almost than I was yesterday, for now I am free from all excitement and abler to think. I used to think my aunt loved me, that some strange prompting of affection induced her to urge and insist upon my remaining a member of her family,—even when feeling unhappy I have hinted to her my intention of remaining no longer a dependent on her bounty. Again yesterday, when I told her this more plainly, she appeared so nervously excited, so eager to control herself, yet unable to do so, starting up restlessly, taking my hands warmly in hers, begging me to forget all that had passed between us there, assuring me indeed

she had not intended wounding me, only she had allowed her imagination to delude her into thinking me unhappily in love with Colonel Throckmorton, and that my pride would gratefully accept Murray Dare's love to protect and strengthen it!"

"She may love you after all, Marguerite," Mabel said; "you know she is very strange, any way,—so haughty, high-spirited, and intolerantly proud,—in her anxiety for your welfare her passion may have carried her away, even against her will; then there is another possibility, your affectionate Cousin Gertrude, in her solicitude for your well-being, may have carried tales."

"You may be right; she has hitherto, at least since we came to the beach, been so very kind and considerate to me, even forgetting to avail herself of such a fine opportunity to lecture me as occurred when I stayed out on the beach so late that evening with Colonel Throckmorton, apparently so desirous to blunt all the sharp edges of Gertrude's intolerant hauteur, when directed against me, that now I cannot but feel assured she was actuated almost entirely by somebody else's will,—unconsciously perhaps, but still powerfully. I was not suspicious of this yesterday,—I was too much annoyed, too deeply distressed, to allow myself much time for speculation, I only felt conscious of her cruel words, of their uncompromising severity."

"And she seemed remorseful by-and-by?"

"Ah, yes, she begged me earnestly to forget the conversation, reminded me of Uncle Will's expressed desire for me to remain under her immediate protection until my twenty-first birthday,—wished me to remember this, to be influenced by it, to retract my last words of determination, and to believe that it was her earnest desire only to further my happiness in all things. But I was at first obdurate; I listened very patiently and quietly to all she said,—I was very cool by that time,—and when she had finished, I withdrew my hands from hers, telling her at the same time how impossible it would be for me to reconsider my expressed determination, even although she had used Uncle Will's sacred name to influence me, for I knew Uncle Will would never willingly have bound me

to her roof if in doing so he had realized how bitter the bread of dependence would taste to my lips."

"Straightforward Marguerite."

"Mabel, I had forgotten little Archie," I went on softly,—“his clinging arms about my neck, the sound of his voice calling on my name, his sweet, wistful eyes,—oh, Mabel! for a short time it was all dark to me as it used to be before I had him to love; then suddenly, in the midst of my hot annoyance and thoughtless obstinacy, a vision came swiftly to me of him lying bereft of all my love and care, sick and suffering on his bed, with his frail arms, those childish arms, which, encircling my heart, ease it of half its sufferings, clasping nothing but the empty air, his wan lips calling my name, to be answered only by dreary echoes, to be kissed only by drear, hollow space! I couldn't stand that, Mabel: my whole heart seemed turned in a moment,—God seemed to have laid his hand on it,—I felt assured that in deserting Archie I was losing hold on my last straw of love in this world, that my tenderness for him was the one saving article in my worldly creed acceptable to God, and which should serve to measure out my salvation when all else is lost.” My voice trembled greatly as I spoke; I have learned to love this child so passionately, the whole sweetness of my life seems centered in him.

“And you will not go away, darling?” Mabel said, bending down over me and kissing me very fondly; “and if you stay, you will not forget my love is yours always; you won't forget that, Marguerite?”

“How can I forget it, dear, when you are so kind to me and thoughtful? I do think of your love always, it is a great comfort to me.”

“I am glad of it. I am also glad to know you will stay with that strange, shy child. The other day, in seeking for you, I happened to open the door to his room,—he was lying on the lounge by the window,—and I know he thought it was you, his face was so eager, and it changed so, just as though he was about to go into a fit with fright, when he caught sight of me. Now, Marguerite, what would the poor child do if you left him quite alone, after he has learned to depend upon you?”

“I dare not think,” I said, under my breath. “I will not allow myself even to think of such a possibility. I am so worried sometimes lest he should die and leave me instead,—every day I seem to see something growing in the expression of his eyes which frightens me,—a look so spirituel, so far away, as though the gates of heaven were ajar and he was looking in. If I left him and he should die, I believe it would kill me. I will not leave him, I will bear everything for him, every slight, every unhappiness in store for me: I will cling to him as long as God will let me!”

“And you will do right,” Mabel answered, softly. “I believe God has given the care of Archie to you to soften your heart, to make you a nobler and a better woman. Marguerite, you are one to improve with trouble,—I don't know how to express it exactly, but I feel that you will come out all right by-and-by: through the present darkness light will grow.”

“It is also my comfort to feel this,” I said, earnestly, “to imagine that Uncle Will foresaw how it would all be, that he asked me to bear it all for the sake of pleasing God, and, through Him, having my redemption made perfect by-and-by. Yesterday, when deadening my heart to my aunt's beseeching voice, somehow, although I closed my ears obstinately to her pleadings, a strange power was working its throes within me, until at last, when Archie's face came to me suddenly in a vision, my whole identity seemed as though annihilated; I felt another's will controlling me. Then I broke down all at once in a way that must have astonished Mrs. Dare, telling her that I had quite changed my mind; if she willed it so, I would still longer remain a dependent upon her bounty, I would endeavor henceforth to shut my eyes to all unpleasantness, and to accept Uncle Will's word as my law. No sooner had these words passed my lips, Mabel, than she seemed also to break down; her voice fairly shook as she told me how happy this assurance made her feel, her eyes seemed to grow bigger and brighter, as though with relief. Then, just as I was about leaving the room, she called me back.

“‘Marguerite,’ she said, bending down suddenly and

kissing me in a quick, abrupt way, 'I may have appeared cruel to you many times and in many ways; I am sorry indeed; let us be friends henceforth.' And so I left her."

"You remember 'tis human to sin, 'tis divine to forgive," Mabel said, gently. "Marguerite, I can't help feeling somehow that you have done right to decide to remain; since this conversation with your aunt you may be happier."

"I will be happier in my own way, then; I will not trouble her or hers; I will live my own solitary life up here with Archie; she shall be no longer troubled with my face as a specter at her feast."

"Marguerite——"

"I mean every word I say. I will be sincere at least,—henceforth I devote myself to Archie; of course I must not subject either Mrs. Dare or my cousins to the suspicion of ill treating me in any way. When Archie is well, I will appear at their table among their guests as heretofore, denying myself the excitement of playing the rôle of injured heroine before the Bonnie Venture people, as I know they will be afraid I will be tempted to do; I will meet Murray Dare and be civil to him, even if every word should stick in my throat, gagging me with its smothered contempt. So far I will go and no farther,—they shall not be troubled longer with my thrusting myself forward as a participant in their pleasures,—the lesson from Mrs. Dare's lips has been severe, but it will prove a decisive one at least,—she may compliment herself on its efficacy."

"Don't speak in that bitter way, Marguerite: it isn't like you, it spoils your voice; you shall not make a misanthrope of yourself,—you will change your mind by-and-by."

"You are mistaken; I may be weak in many things, but I do not think it possible for me to change my mind in this instance; henceforth, you will be the one to bear the brunt of Gertrude's jealousy,—at least if Colonel Throckmorton is as devoted to you as he has shown himself during the past week."

August 19, 18 .—Since I last wrote in my diary not

much has happened; among the most remarkable circumstances, the lawyer, Mr. Trent, has come often to Cedar Cottage. Whenever he comes, he is always closely closeted with Mrs. Dare during all the hours that he is not sleeping or eating. He only appears among the family at dinner. It is very strange, but this grave, silent man seems to take a particular interest in me; very often when chancing to raise my eyes at table, they encounter his looking at me so searchingly, yet in such a kindly way, that somehow I feel assured he is very much my friend,—that this impulse to scrutinize me is the offspring of a hidden sympathy. Last night he came down again to Cedar Cottage to pass the night, and after tea, as the family were quite alone,—the Bonnie Venture people not being present, having gone off on some bachelor spree of their own,—I dared to go out on the veranda to walk up and down there by myself for a little while, it being the first time I had been out of the house that day. I was not there long before Mr. Trent joined me. His first words were a remark upon the sultriness of the evening, his next, an observation on my personal appearance.

"You are looking wretchedly, Miss Dare," he said, very earnestly; "every time I come to Wickoff's Ledge you seem to look thinner and paler. I have just been speaking to Mrs. Dare about it, inquiring as to its cause,—she does not seem to understand it herself; can you enlighten me?"

Before I answered, as we were passing the room where tea had been served, I saw Mrs. Dare seat herself close to the window.

"I haven't taken much exercise lately," I answered, gravely, "the weather has been so warm during the days, and the evenings so damp,—these dog-days are very debilitating. I never feel half so well during the summer as I do in the winter."

"You looked so well before you left the city, so fresh and healthy, as fresh and healthy as a frail creature like you could look; I scarcely think this pure sea air could debilitate you."

I saw him watching me in the dim light of the stars, and when he spoke those last words as though question-



ingly, his voice sounded very soft and low; I did not want to answer him, for my reply would either necessitate a falsehood or an explanation. He did not seem satisfied with my silence, however, for when in our promenade we had again reached the end of the cottage farthest from the window where my aunt sat, he stopped me as I was about retracing my steps, by laying his hand gently on my arm.

"Are you not happy, Miss Dare?"

It startled me a little to have him ask me that question in such an abrupt, earnest way; I felt as though this mysterious conduct on his part savored of treason to Mrs. Dare. Accordingly I was impelled to speak evasively.

"Have I not every reason to be happy?"

"I hope you have, my dear," he said, dropping his hand at once and walking beside me as I went back toward the window where Mrs. Dare sat listening; "I did not know,—you must pardon me,—I thought I saw trouble in your face, and I wanted to help you."

For one instant I could not help regretting having answered him as I did,—deceiving him into thinking me happy when I was so far from it; then, in the next thought, I blamed myself for being tempted even momentarily to waver in my allegiance to Mrs. Dare, an allegiance which has become strengthened a great deal during the past few days. That evening I saw no more of Mr. Trent, for after this he and Mrs. Dare retired to the library together, and I went up-stairs to Archie.

I have been comparatively happy since that conversation with Mabel on the morning succeeding my row with Mrs. Dare, and all because Archie is gradually getting better and stronger, and I have been permitted to live my life in my own way since then, unmolested. Somehow within the past week or ten days, I have grown to be strangely unlike myself, as though I am being wizened up,—dried up, with this feeling of indifference to all else save Archie and Mabel all the time petrifying my heart. The future is a thick fog; the past a dead, white blank; I live only in the present. I am afraid I have stayed too much in the house, have taken too little exercise, and confined myself too closely to Archie. Even during these

nights I do not forget him; I dream about him continually, and am wakened up by strange visions, as though huge monsters surrounded me on all sides, clamoring loudly, wrangling among themselves, striving with fierce claws to snatch him out of my arms, and are only frightened away by my prayers. Oftentimes when waking thus I spring out of bed in a half-dazed state and creep stealthily through the dark to the door of his room, which always stands open, go in, and am only satisfied as to his safety by feeling of him with my hands, or kneeling by his bedside, putting my arms around him. Last night Barry, who is a very light sleeper, heard me from her room opposite, where during the night she hears every movement of Archie, creeping through the dark, followed me, and found me, only half awake, kneeling by his side, clasping his hands, and crying softly to myself. I did not know her at first when she spoke to me,—I was talking unintelligibly to myself, she says,—and she only succeeded in getting me back to bed by almost carrying me in her arms. During the entire remainder of the night the dear, faithful creature sat by my bed, watching lest I should again attempt to get up and bring harm to myself. This morning she threatened to tell Dr. Raynor about it when he comes again to Cedar Cottage, and I have only succeeded in buying her off by promising to take more exercise in future, to try and worry myself less.

*August 23.*—Last evening, just about sunset-time, as I awoke from a short nap,—having begun reading aloud to Archie immediately after lunch, and finally succeeded in reading us both asleep,—I heard voices out on the croquet-ground, just beneath the window, between the cottage and the rocks bordering the sea; standing in the shade of the muslin curtain to the window of Archie's room, a big, wide window, with a deep seat in its embrasure, I could see the owners of the voices, Mabel, Lorimer, Gertrude, and Colonel Throckmorton, trying a four-handed game. It was such a glorious evening, the sky just one vivid sea of amber, rose, and violet hues, with huge banks of pearl-colored clouds flushed with crimson flecking the zenith, while in the west, where the day's golden

heart was laying itself to rest, the horizon seemed to swim in a mellow sleep. It had been a very warm day, but now the sea brought over to the land fresh breezes, salt to the taste but very refreshing, and the waves, rushing playfully upon each other's backs, scrambling in eager haste to see which should be the swiftest to reach the land, were all rose-tipped and violet-hearted, mirroring the fervid colors of the sky. Overhead, the swallows twittered and flew; under the eaves to the cottage, where some had built their nests when the cottage had lain deserted and quiet in the sweet spring-time of the year, I heard happy bird-voices welcoming each other to a cosy rest after the day's journeyings. All was peaceful, sweet, and serene; and below, all the faces on the croquet-ground were happy faces, making me pleased even to look at them, although I might not join them, or show my sympathy in any way. By-and-by I saw Murray Dare step out from the veranda to the cottage, say a few words in an undertone to Beatrice Mortimer, seated on a rough stone seat, watching the game, then they went together to sit in the summer-house built on one of the rocks overhanging the water. Since that conversation with Mrs. Dare, wherein she made known to me his desire to have me become his wife, I have only met Murray Dare at table, and there we have rarely spoken to each other. He seems much altered; his manner toward me, instead of being so confidently assured as formerly, is more deprecating and half nervous; a change perhaps not exactly calculated to render me more tolerant in my feelings, but a change more acceptable to me, since it insures my being no longer annoyed by his advances. This was not the first time I had watched those glad faces on the croquet-ground during these summer afternoons; but to-day somehow, although my first impulse as usual had been to rejoice with them, by-and-by I began to feel dreadfully weary, more longing to be out in the open air myself, half stifled and uneasy. Going down-stairs two or three minutes later, I found nobody in front of the house, either inside or out, no sound, no voices, although all the doors stood wide open, and the fresh evening air rushed through the hall from one door

to the other in one big draught. As I stepped out on the front piazza the whole blazing west lay before me. Walking down the crooked avenue leading to the gate, I could hear behind me, coming from the rear of the cottage where they were playing croquet, Mabel's merry laugh ringing out and Lorimer's bass chiming in,—but even these sounds died away gradually, leaving me unmolested to quiet my heart and pursue my own way tranquilly. How balsamic each breath of air seemed with the odor of the cedar-trees, how subtly impregnated the whole atmosphere with its richness! Eagerly did I taste it after the long hours passed within the close confines of the cottage, and looking upward as I walked along, with all my heart softening within me, responding to the pure influences of the sunset hour, while the trees began to lay their lengths eastward in evening shadows on the grass, I saw with loving eyes how glorified the heavens seemed to grow, as though writing their prestige in cloud-letters of magnificence. With all my senses grown intensified, I came, in the midst of my quickenings and adoration, to a sudden death in the spirit from chagrin when, upon reaching the gate and pushing it open to allow myself to pass through, I came suddenly face to face with General Farquhar. I had not seen him at first when I approached the gate; my eyes and thoughts had been wandering everywhere save to the spot where he stood patiently waiting, watching me as I came toward him. He had been smoking, but as I pushed the gate partially open, he threw his cigar away, and raised his straw hat.

"I agree with you, this is the loveliest hour in the whole twenty-four for a walk," he said, smiling at my very evident irresolution whether to advance or retreat. "Allow me to hold the gate open for you." Then very quietly, but with his gray eyes still fixed on my face, he laid his hand beside mine on the top rail of the gate.

"I thank you," I answered coolly, bowing to him slightly as I walked past him into the road; then, without more ado, I turned my back on him, going in the direction of the opening leading into the woods. I had not gone five steps before I heard him coming after.

"Won't you allow me to go with you?" he queried, as he gained my side. "I am in just the mood for a walk,—I know it is very rude to impose my society upon you in this manner, especially as you do not look very good-natured this evening,—but I feel capable of doing some outrageous thing, so I shall continue to walk with you until you send me back."

I know I was looking very much annoyed, with the tell-tale color coming up into my face, but I couldn't help it, neither exactly did I wish to help expressing my displeasure, it seemed so unkind in him to insist upon spoiling my walk.

"Are you going to be very obdurate?" he said, very gravely, by-and-by. "Won't you say something to me besides that freezing 'Thank you' back there at the gate?"

"They are playing croquet at the cottage," I answered, with much calmness both of voice and manner, ignoring the fact that his gray eyes, those powerful eyes, were watching my face in a strange way, to my uttermost internal confusion,—*"they are expecting you there."*

"I can play croquet any day I choose. Allow me,"—stooping down and extricating the folds of my poor, washed-out muslin from the claws of a persistent brier. "I felt sleepy this afternoon after our billiard-match, and while Throckmorton and the rest were preparing to go down to the cottage, fell asleep, awakening about an hour since, to find myself a victim to a fearful headache; in order to dissipate this if possible I chose this longer walk by the road to the cottage; I am partial to trees, and we never get any trees on the beach."

It seemed so strange to have this proud, silent man condescend to talk to me in such a half-familiar manner, so unlike his usual cold reserve, I could not help letting some of my astonishment look out through my eyes. At first I had been sincerely vexed at him for daring to thrust himself upon me in this way, to presume upon my good-nature so far,—even now, the blood was hot in my face, and I felt almost distressed. What if Mrs. Dare or either of my cousins should see me, should imagine I had inveigled him into walking with me! When I arrived at

this stage of reflection, I thought to myself, "I must certainly get rid of him before we reach the opening leading into the woods."

"I used to live in the country when a small boy, so the sound of the cowboy's co-bos, co-bos is very familiar to me. Do you hear that voice far off in the woods, calling?"

Yes, I heard it, and I told him so.

"Miss Dare," he said, very gravely, stopping short with much abruptness, "I believe you think I am an ogre."

I did not trouble myself to contradict him, but continued to walk on in the same leisurely manner. Presently he followed me.

"I love all these evening noises,—the ringing sound through the woods, the smothered twittering of the birds in their nests just before they go to sleep; to-night it sounds to me just the way it used to when I was twenty years younger, before you were born. That belated sparrow yonder, hopping along on the stone wall, somehow appeals to me; I have quite a liking for sparrows, they are such cheerful little creatures; Buffon calls them 'idle gluttons,'—only think of there being sixty-seven varieties of idle bird gluttons in the world!"

Only about ten yards off I could see the opening in the stone wall, the entrance to the woods. "I am not at all interested in bird statistics, General Farquhar."

"Miss Dare, in Siberia the windows to the houses are paned with ice; the firelight shines through. Windows paned with ice always possess a peculiar fascination for me."

"They reflect well; you like to play the rôle of Narcissus?"

"I have also heard of cannon being made of ice; they melt after the tenth fire, however. Miss Dare, this is your second shot, is it not?"

"General Farquhar, I have only appreciated the word ice, it sounds refreshing this warm evening. Let me keep this word to myself in my walk, while you will find plenty of the real article mixed with lemonade back at the cottage,—I saw Murray carry a big cooler of it out on the croquet-ground."

"I am tired of ice; for the nonce I turn fire-worshiper

instead,—a Ghebir, in fact. Miss Dare, see how the sun burns through yonder pine grove, how each branch stands forth transfigured; doesn't such a vista of woodland scenery suggest to you a Thoreau-like sympathy?"

We had reached the opening to the wood, which lay before us, with the shadows creeping in among the tangles of ferns, weeds, and briars, while the level rays of the dying sun came glinting through the branches of the trees, bidding the world a good-night; but instead of entering the path leading so irregularly into the recesses of the forest,—although General Farquhar stood looking at me, as though expectantly,—I stood defiantly in the middle of the road, feeling very much vexed, very determined to snub him into going back to the cottage and leaving me in peace.

"Please do not look so defiant," he said, presently, after we had stood there looking at each other for a little while speechless. "I would much rather have you say something severe than look at me in that way. Won't you speak?"

"Douglas Jerrold told a young man eager for literary fame, 'Don't take down the shutters before there is something in the window.' On the same principle, I dislike to open my mouth when I have nothing to say."

"Miss Dare, your realisms are appalling. Heretofore I have imagined you a sort of devotee to Queen Mab's dream-work——"

"And awake only to discover that my mind is a patchwork quilt of commonplaces," I interrupted him, quickly.

"Please don't interrupt me," he answered, grimly; "I was going to add, not only imaginative in your ideas but even inspired at times. Even now, although you endeavor to blind me, I am not at all discouraged. If, with Little Red-Riding-Hood, I could only draw the bobbin the latch would go up,—but the truth is, I can't find the bobbin, a wolf of perverse pride guards it." Here, as I glanced quickly up in the utmost astonishment at his boldness of discernment, he smiled back at me, with a lighting up of his face that I had never seen before. "As with the astounding power of *chiaro-oscuro* the artist combines soft effects and fascinating shades, so an original woman,

through the subtle medium of her sympathies, creates around her the atmosphere of a delicate and bewitching individuality."

"Your *chiaro-oscuro* deceives you. All women are as much alike as the Noahs, Hams, Shems, and Japheths of a toy ark."

"I have surprised your wit en *deshabille*; to liken your sex unto such painted imbecilities! Miss Dare, I pride myself upon being quite a virtuoso in the preserving of sundry odd prejudices and ideas; in my mind I have a little gallery of images closed to all other eyes save my own; I will make an exception of you, I will give you one peep. In a niche isolated from the rest, behold yourself placed as the representative of Goethe's Lotte. You have read the 'Sorrows of Werther,' of course; Werther loved Lotte, but she married his friend." Here, as I again irresistibly looked up at him, half in wonder at his words, forgetting for the moment my own resolve to appear to him defiant and displeased, his eyes warned me of my inconsistency, recalled me to myself,—they were so strangely darkened from their wonted gray to almost black. Then he added, by-and-by, "I look at you through a stereoscope of imagination which renders the double image to my eyes as though one in reality."

"General Farquhar, do you remember what Martineau says of some men 'who endeavor to atone by microscopic accuracy for imbecility in fundamental principles'? Substitute the word stereoscopic for microscopic, and you will acknowledge yourself your inability to make a goddess out of clay."

"I will not accept your result, the precipitate of such a crystallization of ideas; it is too far-fetched. I assure you, I am quite capable of creating a goddess out of clay; I will be a second Phidias: whether born of ice, clay, or marble, my idol, like his, shall breathe the breath of life."

"Per-Phidias, your idol may be stony-hearted, it may breathe for somebody else."

"I will take the risk, however great,—but that pun of yours, 'perfidious,' I ignore."

"General Farquhar, you are an egotist."

"Shall I venture something equally severe? In my eyes the egotist and non-committalist are almost synonymous evils; at least the injury they inflict is nearly proportionate: the one by his absurd avowals prejudices the credulous, while the other abandons them to their mistakes without a reactionary opinion. You are a decided non-committalist: do you appreciate my rhetoric?"

"A fine example, on the whole,  
Of rhetoric, which the learned call rigmarole."

"Miss Dare, you are very severe; perhaps I ought to emulate Cæsar, and not only close my eyes, but wax my ears as Ulysses did."

"I wish you would wax angry instead, and go back to the cottage, where they are waiting for you to play croquet with them."

"Miss Dare, the Italian proverb warns you, 'Beware of vinegar made of sweet wine.'"

"I will profit by your proverb. Good-evening, General Farquhar."

"Good-evening, Miss Dare," he answered, raising his hat very courteously. Then I went alone into the wood.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

HERE I have given extracts from my diary, written at that period of my life which I am endeavoring to render faithfully to my readers,—feeling assured that by so doing they will more thoroughly understand the tenor of my life and thoughts at that time, than though at this late day, when retrospectively, I should attempt to present to them a minute picture of myself as I then was. In my diary at that time I did not hesitate, in black and white, to make palpable to my own eyes my many inaccuracies of judgment, my weakness and temptations; in writing on the white leaves of this monitorial book a complete summary of all the main incidents of my summer life at

Wickoff's Ledge, I seemed to myself to be bulwarking my heart against all subsequent pitfalls, to be building an impassable wall to divide the right and wrong of my impulses from all future collision. How futile and useless were these precautions, this meager *chevaux-de-frise* of defense, the subsequent pages of my book will show.

My "*summer life*" at Wickoff's Ledge!—summer life only in the name, however; for during those long weeks, when all the world seemed bursting with a fullness of joy, and Summer, abjuring the skeletons of her winter chains, lying hidden for the nonce at her feet, among the shining leaves of the dewberry and under brakes of ivy, ferns, and hazel-bushes, arrayed herself in flower-bedecked robes, trailing their lengths over hills, valleys, and intermediate meadows, I lived my quiet, monotonous life, a stifled calm, without any sun to shine its fervor into my soul, without any ferns or ivy or dewberry leaves to sepulcher the skeleton of my unrest. Day after day, while the inhabitants of Cedar Cottage, all save Archie and myself, reveled together in the summer rhapsody,—the long mornings sweetened with the sea-breezes, the delicious sunset hours and later dusk,—while my cousins and their guests spent lazy days of picnicking among the green fastnesses of the islands across the bay, or indulged in walks and drives into the interior, with an occasional fête champêtre at Bonnie Venture, I sat hour after hour in the seclusion of Archie's room, trying to shut my ears to their glad voices, to the pleadings of my heart begging for a freer life, a fuller recompense for my self-denial. It seemed so hard to be obliged to counterfeit contentment day by day, before the faces of all these people, to work my lips in a lying smile that I might defy their pity, to stifle my young heart, eager to partake of the continual feast of pleasure so constantly and tantalizingly presented to my eyes; for now, since Archie had grown quite strong again, freer from pain, more at peace, sometimes I could not help thirsting for one little draught of their felicities, only one moment among them, out under the sky, to listen to the glad voices of Mabel, Lorimer, or Throckmorton, to pass one hour at least among the beauties of Bonnie Venture, which Mabel had so eloquently described, its



wonderful pictures, its statuary, its flowers, the inheritance of General Farquhar. But Mrs. Dare and my cousins, seeing, as they must, since they had eyes, how I grew paler and paler, more listless and weary, as the days went by, never failed to ignore any invitation I might receive from the others to participate in their pleasures. Often when going to the table—as I scarcely ever failed to do, now that Archie no longer required my close attention at meal-hours—I met the Bonnie Venture people, and some one of them, in canvassing the subject of a proposed picnic or boating-party, asked me, nay, urged me, to go with them,—Throckmorton seconding all such requests, whether made by another or himself, with beseeching eyes, and General Farquhar usually watching me narrowly, as he always did now, while I invariably refused all such solicitations,—obstinate in my determination to be influenced only by Mrs. Dare's will. Mabel blamed me for this,—saying how wrong it was, how unnatural, to exile myself from all relaxation, all sympathy and companionship save of Barry, my Uncle Dare, and Archie, while insisting upon her—Mabel's—joining in all the pleasures, without my being willing to do so also.

But I had proved in this instance, as in all others, obstinate. I would not thrust myself forward in any way save at the bidding of Mrs. Dare's voice; sooner than subject myself to further suspicion or reproach, I would grow old and gray with the weight of misanthropy crowding all the joy out of my heart; I would live my life up in those close rooms with Archie, his love my only recompense. To do Mrs. Dare justice, at this time I used to endeavor to think as kindly as possible of her, to ignore her apparent antagonism to my indulging in the everyday relaxations of her daughters, to imagine she thought I did not really care to so indulge myself; for in other ways she was very kind to me, urging me to pass much time with her in her own room, giving me all the interesting books she could find to read, and, when confined to my room by any little indisposition, sending me delicate dishes prepared by her own hands, accompanied oftentimes by little notes of condolence. Never by any

chance did she on these occasions come near my room, but I knew very well that the fear of meeting her neglected child, little Archie, the eye-sore to her indomitable pride, was alone the cause. Outside of this longing of mine—a weakness, perhaps, but one scarcely unnatural, considering my age and temperament—to go, if but once, to Bonnie Venture, to see with my own eyes the loveliness of its interior, so graphically described to me by Mabel, or else to some other spot, with these happy hearts, where this dreadful apathy, numbing me to all the outside world, might for a moment be warmed into something like hope, I was still very happy in my love for Archie, very pleased to minister to his wants and little happinesses,—poor child, he had not many,—to feel blessed in so doing; only sometimes, instead of sitting up in that close room, where the child, even in growing free from pain, seemed to waste away more and more, I longed to take him boldly in my arms, go out among all those people, and demand the right to give him daily one glimpse of God's world, to warm him with one ray of His sunlight, one taste of His pure air! Once in awhile, but rarely, when they had all gone off on some excursion, I dared to do this, to take the child out in my arms,—he was very frail now, and I could carry him easily,—among the rocks, or, sitting under the trees, sing him into a quiet ecstasy. But, unfortunately for the recurrence of these indulgences, Mrs. Dare did not always accompany her guests; they rode horseback a great deal, the horses being furnished from the Bonnie Venture stables; the fear of meeting her deterred me from benefiting Archie in this way as frequently as I would have liked. Once or twice when he appeared especially strong, I had taken him as far as the woods, and there enjoyed with him a quiet hour all by ourselves; but now he was rarely able to be carried thus far, even in my arms,—the look in his eyes, which I so dreaded and feared, as though God was showing him things I could not see, grew greater day by day, and with its growth he wasted.

Only once or twice since we parted that evening of the yachting-party had Cecil Throckmorton and I seen

each other five minutes alone, and this had happened when, in taking my walks toward evening, he had met me, as though accidentally, and insisted upon walking with me. Although I so summarily repulsed a similar attempt on the part of General Farquhar a short time previously, yet I had given way to this other's pleadings. But I had soon put a stop to this meeting, to all chance of encountering him again in this way, for here also I felt obstinate in my determination to try and not provoke either Mrs. Dare or my cousins into further misapprehensions regarding the propriety of my conduct. After this, my only exercise was taken either early in the morning, before there could be any possibility of my meeting the Bonnie Venture people, or else late in the evening, when they were engaged in the entertainment of my cousins and their guests at the cottage. On each occasion of my meeting Colonel Throckmorton alone we always entirely ignored the subject of Blossom Village; indeed, my own silly romance in regard to it I had learned to look back upon as a mere dream of the past,—to cease to regret, as I at first regretted, ever having endeavored to awaken in him the consciousness of a former acquaintance, the knowledge of my identity with the little girl he had known so long ago. We were friends now, as I had so long hoped to be,—not friends of yesterday, but of to-day. The memory of yesterday was a shame to him; he had said so. Why, then, should I continue my cruel attempts to afflict him with its ghostly memory?

One morning,—it was about the second week in September, a cloud-dimmed, breezy morning,—upon going down to luncheon, I found all the Bonnie Venture people seated at table.

"I am glad you have come at last, Miss Marguerite," Lorimer exclaimed, as I appeared in the doorway. "I have been watching for you during the last five minutes, and was beginning to despair. We are talking about a carriage-party for this afternoon, and, as I have secured a small dog-cart all to myself, I want you to do me the honor to ride with me."

"Yes," exclaimed my Cousin Gertrude, with a very flushed face, "Marguerite can go in my place; there will

not be room for us both; the carriages are already crowded. I will stay at home."

"You proposed the party yourself, Gertrude," said Juliette Mortimer; "of course you ought to go. If you stay at home I shall stay with you."

"And I," added her sister, decisively.

Very quietly I seated myself at the table.

"There will not be the slightest necessity for any one to remain at home," here interposed the voice of General Farquhar. "My seat in the phaeton will be at the disposal of you ladies, as my man of law is coming down to Bonnie Venture from the city in the two o'clock train, and he will detain me until quite late. I will endeavor to overtake you on horseback."

"I hate men of law!" pouted Valerie.

"Then you will certainly go with us, Miss Marguerite?" Lorimer said, earnestly, and looking as serious as his comical face would allow; "we are going to see an old hermit who came over in the Ark to Ararat and brought the dove with him; he's got the dove stuffed and fixed in a cage, olive-branch and all; indeed, he stuffs all kinds of birds, and is a rare old bird himself. We went shooting with him the other day, and I think he is the best shot I ever saw; from his shanty I believe he could pop a goose on the top of Bunker Hill Monument."

"Then I don't want to see him; the temptation of a nearer shot might prove too much for his humanity," I said, gravely; "he is a monstrosity."

"No, he is a delightful old bachelor," remonstrated Lorimer; "Scott's Antiquary was nothing to him: he's gray as an owl and about as solemn, has got a beak like a flamingo, while his head is as bald as that of a well-razored bald eagle."

"Quite an ornithological phenomenon!"

"He's got some dogs over there stuffed, too," said Murray Dare, my right-hand neighbor; "he stuffs animals."

"Boars?" queried Lorimer, very innocently. "You'd better look out lest he should try and gobble you up for his collection." But Murray Dare took the hint without the kick.

"I don't know about boars," he said, choking himself with a big mouthful of deviled crab, "but when we were over there the other day I thought I saw a pig with a long snout."

"It must have been old Reid himself," said Colonel Throckmorton.

"You've got the wrong pig by the ear," began Lorimer; but Murray Dare, who hated Throckmorton, and could not help saying broad things, looking straight at Throckmorton, interrupted him,—

"There was a looking-glass hanging up in the old man's show-room. Didn't you look into it?" Then he gave me a little nudge under cover of the table-cloth, to point his joke, laughing sardonically.

Colonel Throckmorton, sitting directly opposite, between Mabel and Gertrude, saw the nudge, but ignored the impertinence.

"La petite misère!" exclaimed Lorimer, in mock horror.

"Don't be Frenchy," cried Valerie, who never was anything else herself. "What is it all about?"

"A pig with a long snout. The French was M. Honoré de Balzac's: he calls the thoughtless (?) rudenesses of such gentlemen as Mr. Dare *les petites misères*."

"You will go with us, Miss Marguerite?" queried Colonel Throckmorton, across the table; "this old hermit is quite a curiosity; everybody who comes to this part of the world goes to see him; he is one of the sights; his skill in preserving the different birds is really wonderful, and among his quite extensive collection he has some very rare specimens of the South American species. I hope you will decide to go, for I think it would interest you."

"The phaeton is at the service of you all," here observed General Farquhar's quiet voice, before I could answer, "so there will be room for everybody." He was not sitting opposite me exactly, but more to my left, with his back to the window, his grand head clearly defined against the light, which, as I faced it, quite blinded me.

"I am very sorry, but it will be impossible for me to visit this wonderful old hermit to-day," I answered,

steadily. "I have something else to do." When I said that, Mabel made up a wry face at me, Throckmorton looked reproachful, but Lorimer became loquacious.

"I don't believe a word of it, Miss Marguerite," he said, determinedly. "You have exhausted that excuse thoroughly; to my own knowledge, within the past month you have imposed it upon our credulity at least daily, and that is thirty times too often; it has lost its efficacy. Charles Lamb sang, 'High-born Helen, round thy dwelling these thirty years I've paced in vain.' Now, my name isn't Charles, and I'm not a lamb, but with equal propriety I could sing, 'Cruel Miss Dare, to each hour's despair these thirty days I've plead in vain.'"

Presently we all arose from the table, I still continuing, much to Lorimer's displeasure, very obdurate in my determination not to accompany them, especially as Mrs. Dare did not see fit to second his remonstrances. As I left the room by the door by which I had entered, leading into the hall, leaving the others to their own devices, Cecil Throckmorton followed me. At first I pretended not to see him, but walked quietly to the stairs and began to ascend. I had taken only the first step, however, before he was leaning over the balusters, stretching his arm across the stairs to bar my further progress, and bending down that he might look full into my face.

"I scarcely know what to think of you, Miss Marguerite," he said, "you seem so perverse, so unreasonably obstinate in your avoidance of me. During the past two weeks, since the last evening when we walked together in the woods, you have not spoken to me one word that has not been absolutely necessary. You cause me to feel very badly, little friend."

"It will not kill you; you will survive," I answered, smiling at him, endeavoring at the same time to continue on my way up-stairs, but he wouldn't let me. "Do let me pass, Colonel Throckmorton."

"No, I will not let you go until you promise to be kind and go with us this afternoon. You are very pale and thin, growing more so day by day. You live in the house all the time, nursing that sick child up-stairs, and your secluding yourself so from the rest of us is un-

natural. Do be good this once, and go with us." But I shook my head, although, in answer to his beseeching voice, my starved heart clamored loudly for the indulgence. "You make me almost angry," he went on, soberly, "as angry as I could ever be with you, to see you sacrificing yourself so unnecessarily to other people's prejudices. Indeed, I am quite out of patience with you. Having eyes, do you imagine I don't see? ears, and don't hear? You are unhappy,—my eyes tell me this every day, for all you are so brave and undaunted. You mustn't try to deceive people when you have such a face to betray you; it is a traitor to all your assumed cheerfulness, a naughty, traitorous book, which anybody can read who—anybody who is your friend." Then he stopped short.

"What a simple face I must have! quite a Mother-Goose book of a face!"

"Don't treat my words lightly, little friend," he remonstrated, earnestly. "You know I am sincere, don't you?"

"Sometimes I think you are, and sometimes I think you are not."

"We talked about it once before, long ago, in Boston. Wasn't it the evening of the dinner-party at your house, when we sat looking at the stars,—the night you sang 'Auld Robin Gray' for me?"

"No,—for Mr. Lorimer."

"Ah, then you remember, too. So we are both sincere, aren't we?"

"Sometimes I think we are, and sometimes I think we are not."

"What a tease you are!" he said, disconsolately. "Why won't you be serious and good? Your little face is serious and good, but your words torment me."

"Then let me torment myself up-stairs."

"I will, if you will promise to go with us this afternoon to see the old hermit."

"I can't promise that," I said, in distress. "Don't urge me, please. You don't know how cruel you are." Then, by a quick movement, his arm having relaxed from its elevation, I sprang by him and ran up-stairs. Having gained the upper hall, I turned round to look at him.

"You wicked Daphne!" he exclaimed, shaking his head at me. "I only wish I could get even with you!"

"I hope you will have a nice time," I answered, laughing back. "Only be careful, and don't let the old hermit stuff you all, as a lot of geese." But he pretended not to hear.

"Give me that chrysanthemum you have pinned in your hair," he said, quickly. "Throw it down; or shall I come up after it?"

For fear he should attempt to come up after it, I took it from my hair, and, saying, in a mock-theatrical way, "There, Romeo," leaned forward and threw it at him. It fell nearly at his feet; he picked it up, held it for an instant in his hand, looked up at me where I stood laughing, then, pressing it suddenly to his lips, he kissed it.

"Now we are even," he said.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

At about four o'clock in the afternoon I heard the carriage-party drive off. Just before they started, Mabel rushed up-stairs, begging me even at this last moment to relent.

From a window overlooking the driveway I watched them start,—Mrs. Dare, Mabel, Mr. Conyngham, and Mr. Horton in the first carriage; Beatrice Mortimer, Murray Dare, and Valerie in the second,—there being an empty seat in it, which I knew was being reserved for General Farquhar, if, upon their return, he should prefer to occupy it; while Gertrude, Juliette Mortimer, Throckmorton, and Lorimer occupied the last. Just before they got into the carriages I saw Throckmorton speak to Mabel, where she stood leaning against one of the pillars supporting the roof of the piazza, looking very sweet in her white muslin and rose-tendre ribbons, saying something to her in his negligent, half-devoted way, his eyes gazing down into her face in a way that I saw plainly brought a vivid color to

her cheeks; but in answer she only shook her head re-monstratively. Then I knew he was asking her to ride with him; but wisely, for the peace of the party, she had refused, since it was evident Mrs. Dare had constituted herself the arbiter of each person's destiny for that afternoon at least, having taken Mabel under her own immediate protection, and given to him her daughter Gertrude to escort and make happy. As Throckmorton, the other carriages having driven off, turned to assist Juliette Mortimer and Gertrude into the phaeton, pinned into the button-hole of his coat I saw my chrysanthemum.

"Now Goldy will take me down-stairs, make some music, and sing," Archie said, wistfully, as I went back into his room; "won't you, dear, dear Goldy?"

Coming back from watching those happy faces out of sight, my heart had seemed hardened and very heavy; now, as the child's expectant eyes looked eagerly up into mine,—the poor wee face grown so wan and delicately lovely, with the yellow hair falling about its pallor in long curls of beauty, such a face as was the child Raphael's, only more suffering, more appealing, growing brighter at the sound of my voice,—I could not help feeling softened, almost happy, as though his frail fingers had opened my eyes to more sunlight than I had seen before that day. A cloud-dimmed, breezy day, not cold or raw, but with the soft, cool air whirling in little eddies everywhere, filling one's lungs with its elixir, washing one's tired face in its salt refreshment and laying its strengthening hands mysteriously on one's heart. In my arms I took Archie down-stairs, out on the lawn, to the rocks, thence, after a little while, to the summer-house perched among them, where we sat laughing and loving each other very happily.

"I didn't know I was so thirsty, Goldy," Archie said, by-and-by, as he lay in my arms with a faint color coming and going in the pallor of his childish face; "I haven't had such a good time for ever so long, have I? I wish we could have this good time every day."

"We must speak to Dr. Raynor about it," I answered, gently,—not letting him see the tears gathering in my eyes, the tone of his voice and the look in his face were so pitiful. "Papa told me last night that the good doc-

tor was coming down to see our little darling; then Goldy will ask him about it."

"I know the gentlemen and ladies don't like to see me," began the child, quietly, but I stopped his lips with a kiss.

"Ah, yes, they would like to see my little boy ever so much," I said, gravely; "they ask after you a great deal; my friend Mabel, whom you are so afraid of, loves you dearly, only you won't let her come near you."

"I don't want any one but Goldy," cried the child, looking up at me with his eyes grown big with love; "you taught me to say my prayers, you know, and told me about the dear Christ who loves all little children. I told papa about this the other night when we were alone, and I was afraid he was going to cry."

"Papa loves his little boy so much."

"Yes," the child answered, softly, "he is a dear, good papa,—he will be one of the dear Christ's biggest angels, I know,—he'll sing the loudest and have the biggest harp." Then there was a long silence, broken only by the breaking of the waves on the rocks at our feet, the sound of the rushing breeze, and the songs of the birds among the trees on the lawn. By-and-by, he had been looking out to the sea, Archie turned his eyes once more to my face. "Goldy," he whispered, earnestly, "will I be straight there?"

"Yes, darling."

"And will my mamma love me?"

"Yes, darling," I answered, with the tears hot in my eyes.

"Then I hope the dear Christ will straighten me soon," he said, softly; "only I hope he won't cut my hair off."

"Oh, Archie!" I exclaimed, in consternation.

"Don't be angry, Goldy,—my hair is pretty, you know,—the only pretty thing I ever had; I would like to be straight and have my pretty hair too, then my mamma couldn't help loving me."

"God's angels are all beautiful and love each other," I said, kissing the upturned, wistful eyes passionately; "you will not think of your pretty hair then, your wings and His love will satisfy you."

"I am so glad," answered the child.



By-and-by, after we had sat there quite a long while, he asked me to take him into the music-room, there to sing and play to him. My own heart had been aching for some music all day; my state of starvation had been of such a long duration that now I gladly acquiesced. It was so long since I had touched the piano—nearly three weeks; for I never allowed myself this indulgence when my cousins or their guests were at the cottage, the sensitiveness of my passion for music forbidding my opening the doors of my soul to their meager criticism—that now, when the tension of my long suspense was relaxed, it seemed as though God was lifting the weight of my subjection to Mrs. Dare's will off the slenderness of my shoulders; as though His love was permeating all the tissues of my soul and body with a subtle warmth, which, reaching its power to my fingers, gave them a language of inspiration that on ordinary occasions was denied them. In this moment of my freedom from all restraint my powers of improvisation fairly reveled; I cannot describe here all the acute sensations of rapture which thrilled through and through my heart, blinding my eyes for the nonce to all the material attributes of this everyday world, lifting me out of myself in grand strains of harmony, wild lingerings of sweetness in the upper notes, that seemed to go floating through the air in flying phantoms of ecstasy. I was alone conscious of Archie's face; there it lay before me, pale, serene, angelic, the delicate eyelids drooping sleepily over the big, soulful eyes, the mouth, with its quiverings stilled, lighting up the whole countenance with a dreamy smile, a child-angel's face, framed in the aureole of his yellow hair. By-and-by I began to sing a German patois lullaby which I had learned at school, a little gem of a song, irresistibly soothing and sweet. How my heart sang through those words! how eagerly I watched the child's eyes grow sleepier and sleepier, until at last I saw the first dream flit its shadow over his face! Then I began singing to myself,—I do not remember what I sang, its words or its music; only today, somehow, a haunting memory comes to me of an improvised song, very wild, beseeching, and disquiet, praying for strength and for hope,—such a song as I could have

sung then, and such a one as I probably did sing. When I had finished, or at least paused for a moment ere I began again, with my hands trembling nervously and my lips quivering, I heard a slight sound at the window just to my right, where steps led down from it to the lawn. In another moment I had sprung from my seat, reached the window, and confronted General Farquhar, standing quietly on its threshold. It seemed to me ages that we stood there and looked at each other.

"How dared you?" were my first words.

"Don't you remember what Luther said, 'Music is the art of the prophets; it is the only art which, like theology, can calm the agitation of the soul and put the devil to flight?'"

The room was dusky, and so, in comparison, the outer light seemed all the more vivid. Against it, sharply defined, stood the tall, muscular form of General Farquhar, his broad shoulders looking very strong and square, his grand head very erect; there he stood, firmly confronting me, his gray eyes mocking my defiant ones with their quiet power. But I did not answer him; I could not help feeling vexed and chagrined. It was more than my philosophy could stand to have this man, who I so acutely realized saw and condemned all my weaknesses at one glance, break in upon my quiet hour, the only wholly happy one which had been mine for such a long while, in such a cool way, too! Then, had I not sung out my whole soul to him in that last song? Had I not discovered all my heart-sores to his cauterizing eyes, his cynical eyes, which never saw good in any one or anything?

"You ought to have exorcised your evil spirit in that last song," he said, gravely; "but I see that Luther's receipt won't answer for you; you look very much afflicted at this moment. Say, 'Get thee behind me,' and his satanic majesty may obey."

When he said that, I turned my back quickly toward Bonnie Venture, and, pointing backward with my finger in the same direction, I looked straight at him. "Get thee behind me," I said. Unfortunately, as I stood with

my back toward Bonnie Venture, the middle of the music-room was also in my rear.

"I will," he answered, smiling at me. And as he spoke he walked calmly past me and stood behind. I could have cried with vexation. "Won't you turn around, Miss Dare?" he said, presently, when I persisted in standing with my face still turned toward the window, wondering to myself what I could do to make him leave me in peace. I felt the angry blood come flushing up into my face at the tone of his voice, half command, half mocking entreaty.

"No!"

"I will make you," he said. Then, before I knew it, noiselessly and quietly he had seated himself at the piano, just to my right, and began playing a monotonous melody, full of odd effects and haunting echoes. Still I continued to stand there, in my defiant vexation, trying to shut my ears to his music, to steel my heart against all premonitory symptoms of softening, to close my eyes to the very evident fact that this man meant to conquer my prejudices, to shame me into civility, by the exercise of a sublime patience. After awhile, although I tried to deafen my ears, I could hear a change in the temper of his improvisation, a growing power of touch and expression, a thrilling, appealing voice, trembling an entreaty through and through its triumph; a subtle intensity of tone and passion, which seemed to vivify the chords of the piano with life and fire. I could not shut my ears, my eyes, or my heart any longer to such music as that; it haunted, pained, thrilled, and overcame me. The air was not beating or echoing half so wildly as my heart when he stopped, and the echoes of the music wandering everywhere died gradually away, all save those tangling my soul in a mesh of sorcery.

"Look at me," he said. And, irresistibly, controlled alike by his voice and his will, I turned my listening, wondering face toward his. His looked pale, thoughtful, almost stern. Even through the maze of my astonishment and unrest I could see how completely the half-mocking, half-amused expression which had so vexed me at first had fled from his eyes and mouth, leaving them

only gravely quiet. "You mustn't blame me," he said, presently. "I heard your music as I was riding by the cottage; the wind brought it down to the road very distinctly; it forced me to open the gate, to ride up to the cottage, and, when dismounted, to come round to this window, where I might listen to you unobserved. Your genius for improvisation is wonderful."

"And yours," I answered, quite conquered.

"Then why should we not be friends,—at least sympathizers in this one great passion of ours? Music is your love, as well as mine. With its eyes, glowing and all-powerful, we can probe down into the dimmest recesses of our souls, tearing open to the light, with a subtleness of mental analysis truly wonderful, the intricate meshes of self. You are cruel; you starve your love; let me help you to feast it. Shall we not be friends?"

"We cannot be friends," I answered, earnestly. "Our music sympathy would prove but a frail bridge, at best, to cover the gulf of our antagonism." When he last spoke, he had left the piano and come close to me.

"What do you mean by antagonism? Why will you persist in looking at me with such eyes of dislike and defiant questioning. Am I the *bête noir* of your imagination,—the salamander sporting in the flames of your hot prejudices?"

"You have stayed too long; they will be greatly disappointed if you don't overtake them, as you promised you would. Is your horse fast?" I answered him.

"Yes, quite a Dexter; but he will not go very far or fast to-day." I did not dare to look up at him again, his face had seemed so strangely changed, but I wondered at his last words.

"If you will not let me stay here and talk to you a little while, I shall go back to Bonnie Venture."

"You mustn't do either," I said, quickly; "if you don't go to the hermit's, Valerie and the rest will be greatly vexed,—you have your choice between that and Bonnie Venture: you certainly shall not stay here."

"Do you remember how cruel you were the afternoon I wanted to walk with you, two or three weeks ago?"

I shook my head. "No, I don't remember."

"Well, I do,—that afternoon was one of the exclamation-points in my summer life at Wickoff's Ledge,—this afternoon is another."

"Then it is the end of the chapter," I answered, gravely. "If you don't go away I shall wake Archie and take him up-stairs; I wish you would be generous and go, for we don't have an afternoon like this often, and I want to spend it pleasantly."

Instead of answering by words, he stood one or two moments looking down at me very quietly; then, as I refused to respond in any way, but kept my eyes fixed resolutely on Archie's sleeping face, by-and-by he went again to the piano and seated himself.

"I dare you to awaken the child," he said, deliberately, "and I dare you, after I have once more spoken to you with these music words of mine, to continue cold and obstinate to me." And, saying this, he began to play.

When tired, weary, and dissatisfied, have you not, my reader, often listened with eager ears to one of Beethoven's half-sensuous, half-spirituos symphonies, feeling all the while a subtle fire running through each vein, warming your whole being with its restfulness, annihilating all your materialism of thought with its iconoclastic power, and leading you blindfolded, a very puppet in its magnetic hands, through many by-paths to a perfect peace beyond? Such was this man's power as he sat there, drawing from the piano such subtle strains of melody, rich in fantasy, mellifluous and thrilling, the kind of music which appeals to every chord of one's being, the *l'allegro* expression chasing *il penseroso*, almost magically, and vice versa, while I stood quietly and half defiantly near the divan on which Archie lay sleeping, with the shadows of happy dreams flitting across his features, feeling the while General Farquhar's eyes watching every change in my face. I fought and strove against it, at first angrily, then almost passively,—the enervation of my obstinacy, which seemed at every fresh note to increase at the command of this man's wonderful will,—the softening of my heart and defiance which had at first rebelled so strenuously against his power of voice and eyes. Now, as the music went wandering on, clasping me

round and round with its embracing sweetness, while its entreating voice whispered in my ears, and its thousand echoes went ringing through my soul, insensibly, all my strength of will seemed to falter under the burden of its exceeding suspense, this lengthened musical agony of enervation.

"I can stay," said the voice of General Farquhar, breaking the deathly silence after the last echo had died away; "I dare you to tell me I cannot!" Almost helplessly I looked at him, and shook my head. His face was pale, but his eyes were triumphant; his lips smiled at me in a way which seemed a lingering part of his dead melody. "Come here," he said, gently; "let us sit together in the window, where we can talk quietly without disturbing Archie. Do not let us quarrel any longer; I have no heart to quarrel with you, only you will persist in making me, against my will." But I shook my head again. "I do not wish to appear authoritative, but I must insist upon your coming here; see, I have arranged this seat so nicely for your accommodation, and another for myself. I intend to stay here and talk to you during the whole of the next hour."

"I ought not to stay," I answered, half entreatingly; "please don't ask me; my aunt will be very much offended; at least," I corrected myself, "they will think you ought to have tried to overtake them, as you promised you would."

"I did make the effort," he said, "but you negated it."

With my heart misgiving me, and hating myself cordially for my many inconsistencies of thought and action,—dreading the while the consequences of this weakness on my part, in thus giving such a ready subjection to this man's will,—I seated myself in the window by which he had entered, in obedience to his voice. After the next fifteen minutes had passed, however, I ceased to remember these regrets, these misgivings and self-condemnations, for here also was his power magical. We talked of music, art, and literature, of Beethoven, Meyerbeer, and Mozart, of Rabelais, Montaigne, and Shakespeare, of the symmetrical conceptions of Raphael, of

Michael Angelo's fierceness, and the astonishing power of Correggio's chiaro-oscuro. Every word of his seemed to burn its ineffaceable stamp of perfect analysis upon the face of each subject.

"You are correct in your conception of that which is great and good in music," he said, by-and-by, as we sat there together, all the unrest gone out of my heart, leaving the doors wide open for this later satisfaction to enter in. "I like to see women a little æsthetic, imaginative, and original, for, as genius is distinguished from talent by a wise limitation of expression, by a reserve power of imagination, effectively betrayed into life by a delicate hint here and there, a subtle analysis of cause and effect, as the poet limns his word-picture by the use of an idea too spirituelle for direct or rough-shod expression, so the soul of a refined woman breathes its nobility in a chance betrayal of an artistic passion or the quaint sweetness of a sudden word."

"We are turning the leaves of Cornelius Agrippa's book of magic. How I wish I could find myself metamorphosed into a poetess, or a creature with inky fingers who writes books!"

"Have you ever tried to write?"

"Only in my diary, a Mother Goosey trash."

"You must not abuse Mother Goose," he answered, smiling at me, "for Mother Goose's simplicity is charming; in literature what Tait's charming chickens are in painting,—true to juvenility. Your eyes tell me, Miss Marguerite, you could write poetry if you should try. Your improvisation of songs and music is really wonderful."

"A nineteenth-century Corinne. I would rather write a book of prose; I don't like 'eyes in fine frenzy rolling;' I hate poetesses."

"Did you ever know one? They are a greatly abused set of people. It is much easier to write poetry than prose: the poet succeeds where the prose writer would fail. To the former is vouchsafed the privilege of advancing sentiments which he is not obliged logically to explain, while the latter must confine himself almost exclusively to recognized philosophic systems of thought, to the cramped confines of legitimate result."

"Then I could never write a book; those big necessities of diction would frighten me from the attempt."

"Yet what would the æsthetic taste developing with such an astonishing rapidity—as civilization giving birth to a psychological character or individuality in this country gives an impetus to literature and the fine arts, which are becoming recognized and appreciated by all—do without the foundation laid with such stones of necessity as these?" He paused for a moment, as though anticipating a reply. As I did not vouchsafe one, he went on, thoughtfully,—“To-day the iron fingers of railroads, the fiery links of electricity, which girdle the earth in chains of sympathy, and the decrees of progress, unite in constituting the whole civilized world in an appreciative brotherhood; our American genius is a true genius,—seizing upon every trifle in the world's progress, and, by an analogical power of inference, deductive reasoning, and synthesis, giving birth, through the vigor of his own individual expression, to a consummate produce of truth, which, while it convinces and astonishes the Old World, establishes the immortality of his name. Miss Dare, I am a true American; I am proud of my country, a phoenix risen to-day, blinding with its glory all eyes, from the fiery ashes of a mighty war!"

As he spoke, the wind, coming round the corner of the cottage in a sudden gust, lifted the gray-tinted hair from off his forehead, showing plainly the deep saber-cut traversing his head diagonally,—I had seen it often before, but it never had looked to my eyes as it looked now. He was sitting almost at my feet, on one of the steps leading down to the lawn, while I sat on a cushion which he had placed for my accommodation upon the threshold of the window. He had spoken very earnestly, but now he looked up at me smiling gravely.

"Am I asking hard conundrums and talking in a heroic style? Well, you must forgive me, for you are the cause; as Vittoria Colonna, the Diva of Italian poetry, inspired the fierce Michael Angelo, so you inspire me. Like him, 'I was born a rough model; it was for thee to reform and remake me.' Vittoria Colonna affected the whole gamut of Angelo's genius; she crystallized all the

royal and varied possibilities of his genius into a pure precipitate of gold. Will you be my Marchese di Pescara?"

"General Farquhar, Voltaire says, 'people use language to conceal their thoughts,'—'*ils n'emploient les paroles que pour déguiser leurs pensées.*'"

"You are becoming cold and resentful again. What can I do to propitiate you? I wish I could play an inspired Pygmalion to your statuette and melt you in a sea of lava poetry."

"Mother Goose would be much more effective," I answered, trying to smile at him; "I am not inspiring, and you are not a poet, your eyes don't 'roll,' so let us refrain from drowning ourselves in such a maelstrom of affectation." And, in obedience to the vexation expressed in my voice, he changed the subject. We talked of literature, of modern literature, and I was entranced. I told him how I loved our Irving, and in return he held Victor Hugo up to my eyes to bewilder them.

"Victor Hugo is my poet, my mentor, my favorite friend,—three in one; he is the grand Proteus of literature. In his '*Travailleurs du Mer*' he has given the world indisputable evidence of genius; in his chimerical phantasmagoria of moral antithesis, dramatic truisms, brain-definitions of all that is glorious and true alike in poetry or romance, he makes plain to us a sharp individualism of genius which bewilders while it enthralls by reason of its quick metamorphosis of diction."

"He is not of our modern demi-gods."

"No; his intellect, like the existence of the allegorical Proteus, is dug deep with philosophic knives; the bleeding of human hearts is caught tenderly in the cup of his humanity, the groanings of the wounded in life's conflict find responsive echoes among the steadfast rocks of his towering sympathies; his metaphorical fluctuations of colossal passion, of inveterate purpose and sublime imagination are but so many *Te Deums* of prayer, that climb up to heaven on the stairs of inspiration, to sit among the crowned heads of song forever." His voice was very earnest as he spoke,—his whole face more softened and expressive than I had ever seen it before; his grand,

proud features worked by the power of his own eloquence.

"If we could only all be great and inspired," I said, softly, my heart thrilling within me to each word that he uttered. "Sometimes I long so for the power to give a fitting expression to my thoughts, to try and help my own strength in so doing; then, when I make the endeavor, I fall so short of my expectations."

"One has to be very patient in order to be successful," General Farquhar answered, looking at my eager face with his own lighted up. "Language is the constellation of thought, words form the architecture of prose, ideas of poetry, and both together form the vertebre of success in literature."

"All that sounds so impossible to ears of mediocre," I said, encouraged by both his voice and manner to speak my thoughts unreservedly. "Often when I read books, their features seem so familiar to me, just as though I had written them myself,—and when I think of it, it seems such an easy thing to write. I see my plot, my characters, and all the main incidents in vivid color; but as soon as I touch a pen all is blank. I think it would be much easier to write good prose than good poetry."

"On the science of Mnemonics, that is, arrangement and classification, depends the logical success of prose; the caryatides supporting its entablature of result are reason, definition, analogy, analysis, talent, system, and philosophy. Don't look frightened, please, at those big words, for they express exactly what I mean. In poetry, many fall in the gutter while gazing at the moon,—through a contempt for the material confines of rhythm; for even poets must live on bread-and-butter sometimes, and must shoe the flighty feet of their Pegasi with strong nails of individuality, good sense, propriety of diction, and sentiment."

"In short, must have a 'method in their madness.'"

"Yes; but, on the other hand, Pegasus should not be too tightly reined; this invariably creates a didacticism of style which is at once wearisome and heretical to all the catholicism of beauty in verse. The essentials to the success of poetry are originality, conception, expression,



rhythm, both of ideas and words, and, above all, the interpretation of nature through the medium of a healthy imagination."

"Such merits as immortalize the muse of Shakspeare," I ventured, gravely. "And yet the greatest are not exempt from criticism; the Bard of Avon has been accused of a half-crazy genius and an extravagance of style."

"Yes, but Coleridge comes to his rescue; according to his wisdom, these attacks are but 'the mere dreams of pedantry, that arraigned the eagle because it had not the dimensions of the swan.' Miss Marguerite, have you ever read much of Milton or Spenser?"

"No; I do not like such long poems; I do not think my taste is sufficiently cultivated to appreciate their sublimities and allegorical splendors."

"Do you not remember what Keats said, 'Do not the lovers of poetry like to have a little region to wander in, where they may pick and choose, and where the images are so numerous that they may be forgotten and found new in a second reading?'"

"Yes, but I do not like to forget faces; it is nicer to remember, to have a short, pithy story, with two or three strongly-drawn and individualized characters, that when one thinks of them it is as old, familiar friends."

"Like the concentrated force and sharply original conceptions of Tennyson or of Browning."

"No, I do not understand Browning; but I love 'Maud,' 'The Princess,' or the exquisite 'Lucile' of Owen Meredith."

"I agree with you in your love for 'Lucile.' I entertain for Owen Meredith the warmest feelings of admiration for his entire nobleness of purpose, self-confidence, and originality. His muse, so graceful in expression, so original in fantasy, is fevered neither with a morbid affectation, a shallow servility of diction, nor didacticism of style."

"Our own Longfellow touches my heart," I said, gently. "Whenever my heart is heavy, if I go to him I can always find an echo of sympathy to comfort me, a tender word here and there to soften me, a subtle warmth

of individual tenderness, all the sweeter for its simplicity of expression."

The sky grew gradually darker and darker, the wind-clouds massed themselves in armies of gloom over our heads, the sea, dashing against the rocks, threw its spray high in the air while we sat there during the next hour, with the sea-breeze beating its salt elixir into our faces and the day nearing to its close.

"You are all coming to Bonnie Venture to lunch next Wednesday, day after to-morrow; Mrs. Dare has accepted our bachelor invitation," General Farquhar said, watching me attentively as he spoke. "You have never been to Bonnie Venture yet,—you will come?"

I shook my head at once. "You mustn't ask me."

At that moment the sound reached us of carriage-wheels coming up the avenue, and of merry voices and laughter. I sprang quickly to my feet.

"They are coming," I exclaimed, hurriedly. "I must take Archie up-stairs; I have done wrong to stay here so long——" but his voice stopped me.

"You are coming to Bonnie Venture on Wednesday?" he said, quietly looking into my face. "I warn you not to forget it, my Marchese di Pescara."

But, instead of answering him, I went to the divan and took Archie tenderly in my arms. When I reached the door I looked back at him where he stood in the window. "Good-by," I said, softly; but he answered me, "Au revoir." Going swiftly up-stairs, I encountered Celeste, Mrs. Dare's maid, coming down.

"Mademoiselle has enjoyed herself," she said, smiling sweetly and showing her teeth.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE next morning at the breakfast-table the subject of the lunch on the morrow at Bonnie Venture was discussed in my presence.

"Horton and Conyngham are going to leave Bonnie Venture in a few days," Murray Dare said. "They intended to leave last week, but Farquhar prevailed upon them to stay longer. Lorimer says he must go too; I only wish he would; he's the biggest ass with a lion's skin on I ever saw."

"Poor Mr. Lorimer!" Mabel exclaimed, mock-pityingly, but Murray took it in earnest.

"Yes, he is to be pitied. He shows what he is when he tries to be a wag, and wags those ears of his through his lion's hide, just the way the other ass did in Æsop's fable. I always feel like giving them a pull."

"Why don't you?" Valerie asked, lazily sipping her chocolate.

"There is one thing about this lunch-party," Gertrude here broke in. "If to-morrow should be as warm as it is to-day, I haven't a single thin dress to wear. I would melt in my grenadine; Celeste ripped all the ribbon off the flounces of my white muslin the other day, to have the dress washed, and now, although it's done up nicely, yet it looks shabby without the ribbon. I don't know what I shall do; everything else is soiled, and if you insist upon having Celeste spend her time in trimming your organdy, Valerie, she won't have a minute to do mine in."

"Literary people ought not to think so much of dress; it isn't consistent," retorted Valerie. "You have no cause to grumble, Gertrude, for Celeste has done nothing during the past two weeks but trim and retrim your dresses. It is my turn now."

"But you have Mary to do your things," snapped Gertrude, tempestuously, as she always did when thwarted.

"Mary has all she can do to keep Dixie quiet and out of my way," answered Valerie, calmly.

Then ensued a discussion—one of many such—between these two sisters, wherein Gertrude strove to impress upon Valerie's mind a sense of her ingratitude and her entire dependence upon her mother, and Mrs. Hoffman, answering, accused her sister of jealousy and an all-absorbing selfishness. It was very tiresome, sitting quietly by and listening to this tirade; so it was a relief when Mrs. Dare interposed.

"Valerie is right; you have quite monopolized Celeste during the past two weeks; it is your own fault, Gertrude, if you have not a dress to wear."

"As for your prinking to please Throckmorton," added Murray Dare, in his usual coarse way, smiling maliciously at his Cousin Gertrude, who was already sufficiently angry, without his adding another firebrand to her vehemence, "it's no go; he's a conceited jackanapes, who never sees any one but himself. You make too dead a set at him. You can't catch him that way; he's used to being flattered. Only try Marguerite's dodge, and you'll come in a whole length ahead, sure."

The effect of his words was electrical.

"Why am I always having Marguerite thrown at my head?" she exclaimed, hotly, her black eyes staring at me in a very expressive manner indeed; "Marguerite's dodge, forsooth,—sweet, simple, artless Marguerite,—innocent child, who spends most of her time in romantic rendezvous, who, when other more ingenuous people invite her to spend the afternoon pleasantly riding, prefers to remain at home, and play Circe."

This was the first time she had ever so malignantly and openly attacked me; I felt my face growing paler and paler, when Mrs. Dare interrupted her sharply.—

"Gertrude, I insist upon you controlling yourself; you are crazy. Miss Juliette, allow Murray to pass your cup for chocolate."

During the next moment there was an intense silence.

"Well, I have made up my mind to one thing," presently observed Gertrude, more quietly, "I am not going to this lunch-party to-morrow if I am obliged to look like a fiend; Celeste must retrim my white muslin, or I shall not go a step."

"Stay at home, then," said Valerie.

When I went up-stairs from this scene of domesticity, Mabel followed me.

"You are going with us to-morrow, Marguerite?"

"No, I shall stay at home," I answered, quietly.

"Marguerite, I am going home next week."

When she said that we had reached our room, so now I turned round and put my hand on her shoulders. "Mabel!" was all I could say, for the tears were in my eyes and a choking in my voice.

"Don't look at me in that hopeless way," she cried, putting her arms about my neck; "it seems years since I last saw you smile; this life is too much for you, Marguerite."

"Not more than I can bear," I said, softly; "we are all God's children, you know; He will not kill me with trouble; it is only for my good by-and-by; this thought strengthens me."

It was a long, dreary day, dismal even, although Archie was better than he had been for a long while past, and Mabel insisted upon petting and making love to me. By-and-by I went to seek Celeste, found her busy at work in Valerie's dressing-room, and then asked her to get and bring to me in my own room Gertrude's white muslin; that if she would do so, without mentioning it to any one, I would retrim it and complete it in time for my cousin to wear on the morrow. This the French girl was very glad to do, Gertrude having that morning threatened to force her to sit up all night, after she put Valerie's work aside, that she might finish it in time. So all that day I sat in Archie's room, sewing busily,—sometimes reading aloud to him or telling him stories,—and by evening the dress was finished. It really looked lovely. I trimmed it in a quaint, odd way which I thought would please her; then, knowing she was down-stairs, I took it into her room, or rather her book-crowded den, and laid it on her bed. Late in the afternoon there was croquet on the lawn, and later, all the Bonnie Venture people came to dinner. Although Mabel teased me to go down, I would not. I was obdurate,—somehow I was feeling unusually weary and forlorn. After they had all gone—the Bonnie Venture people I mean—Mabel flew up-stairs to me.

"You ought to have heard them,—Lorimer, Throckmorton, and Farquhar teasing Mrs. Dare to induce you to go to Bonnie Venture to-morrow; General Farquhar didn't tease so much as the rest, only as he was going away he said to your aunt, 'Mrs. Dare, I may expect to see Miss Marguerite to-morrow?' and then she promised. I am so glad, Marguerite."

## CHAPTER XL.

THE next morning, immediately after breakfast, Mrs. Dare sent for me to come to her dressing-room, and, when I obeyed, asked me very kindly if I would not like to spend the day with my cousins at Bonnie Venture. "It will make you feel brighter to go, my child," she added, as I demurred a little; "you are not looking well, and I must insist upon having you accompany us; the carriages sent by General Farquhar for our accommodation will reach here about two o'clock; I shall expect you to be prepared to go with us at that time." Then I thanked her very gratefully, telling her that since it was her expressed desire for me to go to Bonnie Venture, nothing would give me more pleasure than to comply.

At first, although my heart pleaded loudly and urgently for the indulgence, since Archie seemed unusually strong and happy, and Barry urged me to go, telling me the change would do me good, promising, at the same time, to devote herself all the afternoon especially to Archie's entertainment, that he might not miss me, I had felt loth to go. Vaguely I felt annoyed that Celeste should have been cognizant of my sitting so long the other afternoon alone with General Farquhar in the music-room,—more so that she had told my aunt and cousins of the circumstance; for I felt assured that now I would only be subjected to renewed suspicions if I should dare to speak to him or allow him to interest himself in my entertainment

to-day, that in steering clear of the Scylla of Cecil Throckmorton's attentions I had run foul of General Farquhar's Charybdis. Until about twelve o'clock that noon, all the morning since my aunt asked me to go with them to Bonnie Venture, I remained undecided whether to accompany them or remain quietly at home; the consciousness of a probable espionage on the part of my cousins and the Mortimers, which would serve to mortify all the anticipated pleasure of the day, compelling me one way, and an intense desire to see Bonnie Venture, and to spend one day at least among all these happy, pleasure-seeking people the other; finally Mabel's persuasive voice triumphed, and about one o'clock I decided to go.

Just before daybreak that morning the country had been visited by a most vigorous thunder-shower, which, while it had deluged the land in fire and water, and worked the sea into grand billows of unrest, had left everything in a very renovated condition, the grass looking greener than it had looked for a long while past, the air tasting more purely fresh, and the sea bearing a more vivid blue face. If it had not been for the blessing of this past shower it would have proved an intolerably warm day; even now, although the wind blew from the southeast, bringing strong draughts of sea air to refresh the land, and the ground still remained cool from the effects of the storm, the sun—hot, molten, and unclouded—rained down his beams, piercing everything with his sharp arrows. In Mrs. Dare's carriage, under her immediate protection, with Mabel and Murray Dare as companions, I was driven to Bonnie Venture. By the road, which was very irregular in its approach to Bonnie Venture, the ride seemed quite long,—long enough for me to enjoy the unwonted pleasure of riding, to feast my eyes on all the lovely vistas of sea and the interior meadows,—a summer scene, which knocked with its sweetness of touch authoritatively at the doors of my starved heart for sympathy.

As we rode along, the conversation having flagged, and we sat each thinking our own thoughts, I made up my mind to two resolves,—first, that in order to gratify my aunt and to prevent any perversion of the day's pleasure

for my cousins, I would no longer subject myself to the possible infliction of either General Farquhar's society or that of Colonel Throckmorton, but, on the contrary, would endeavor to avoid them in every quiet way, refuging myself for that day at least under the protection of Lorimer's jovial eccentricities,—a resource which I knew, however much it might serve to vex Juliette Mortimer, would not incur the displeasure of either Mrs. Dare or my cousins,—since Lorimer was not an acknowledged eligible parti, being only a dear, good fellow, with a few hundred a year, and a big brain for law. My second resolve was to the effect that, on the other hand, I would not endure passively Murray Dare's attentions either; that sooner than subject myself to them, I would displease my aunt in endeavoring to avoid and repulse them. That Murray Dare purposed so to annoy and persecute me I had seen very plainly when I first got into the carriage, he had seemed so officious in making me comfortable, and had insisted upon my talking to him. Until recently, ever since I had so plainly confessed to Mrs. Dare, in response to the acknowledgment of his love, a most thorough aversion to his interesting himself in my existence in any way, he had seemed more deprecatory and less offensive; to-day, however, it soon became patent to me that he had taken a summary leave of all this unusual self-denial, and now intended to make plain to me at once and conclusively his determination to force me to acknowledge his preference and attentions. While thinking all this over to myself, beginning, in spite of the day's joyousness, to feel the old distressed feeling of vexation and aversion, I was aware of his eyes, his weak, treacherous eyes, being fastened watchfully on my face. If I could have turned back then, without annoying my aunt or disturbing the peace of the party, I would willingly have done so; rather than subject myself to the intolerance of this man, I would gladly have returned to the seclusion of the cottage, there to pass the day at least in comparative peace. Fortunately for my relief, we came at last in sight of Bonnie Venture, and entered its grounds. I had never been so near Bonnie Venture before, never nearer than on the evening of the yachting.

party,—as in my walks I had invariably chosen an opposite direction; so now the whole effect of the odd, irregular beauty of the house burst upon me like a fresh revelation. From the windows of the cottage, it had always looked to my eyes like a big stone house with two towers springing out of the masonry in some inexplicable manner, leaving the remainder of the structure to take care of itself as best it might. Now, on a nearer approach, standing, as the house did, on an eminence overlooking the sea and the surrounding country for miles, it seemed to develop itself into something like shape,—a fantastic shape, to be sure, but all the grander and more beautiful for its very fantasy. The avenue skirting the base of the hill on which it stood wound irregularly to its front, where, seated in bamboo lounging-chairs on a flagged terrace in the shade of one of the towers, were all the Bonnie Venture men, smoking. Upon first catching sight of us they all threw away their cigars and stood up; then, as our carriage gained the steps in front of the house leading up to the terrace, General Farquhar came forward to welcome us.

"You are delightfully punctual, Mrs. Dare," he said, as he, together with Throckmorton, assisted us to alight. "It has relieved my mind, as I feared the heat of the day might prevent your venturing out so early. Mrs. Sutton," he added, turning to an elderly lady, evidently a house-keeper, dressed in a prim widow's-cap and black silk dress, who at that instant appeared in the wide, arched entrance to the house, "will you be kind enough to take Mrs. Dare and the young ladies where they can lay aside their hats?" Then, as our carriage drove off in the care of a groom to the stables, Valerie's phaeton came up to the steps, and I saw him smile at her as he had not smiled at me. He had seemed very cold and distant in his reception of me, in fact, had scarcely spoken to me at all, only to bid me good-morning; but Throckmorton, instead, had pressed my hand warmly, and said a few welcoming words to me,—words which at once I had regretted, for Murray Dare stood close by, listening, and Gertrude's jealous eyes had watched us from the phaeton.

If the exterior of Bonnie Venture looked odd and beautiful, the interior surpassed in every point its utmost excellence. The hall across which Mrs. Sutton led us, ran straight through the heart of the house,—the other end being finished by a wide window, reaching from the floor nearly to the ceiling, and opening out on to another terrace, flagged with blocks of marble. To my eyes this hall looked more like a picture-gallery than anything else; in the center of which a painted glass dome, high up in the roof of the house, sent its amber and violet light down through all the intermediate space to lay its glorified hues on the tessellated floor. From the floor of the hall to the high roof of the house, immediately under this dome, there was an open space, broken only about half-way up the walls by a gallery, broad, and with carved balusters, the same as those of the grand staircase, oak, and rich with quaint carvings, supporting slabs of marble, as a railing. Upon following Mrs. Sutton up the staircase opening out from the hall to the left as we entered, and which I found was built in one of the towers,—a broad, oaken staircase, very gradual in its ascent,—she ushered us into a chamber, on the second floor leading out from this gallery, the walls of which gallery were also covered with paintings.

"Isn't it a fascinating house?" Mabel said, as we laid off our hats; "so big and odd. If General Farquhar ever gets married, won't Mrs. Farquhar have a jolly time?"

This last in a stage-whisper, which, unintelligible to the ears of Mrs. Sutton, who was busily conversing with Mrs. Dare, caught Valerie's as she entered.

"Mrs. Farquhar will invite you all here for a good, long visit next summer," she whispered, smiling at us in a peculiarly suggestive way. "Will you trust my promise?"

"I'll take good care you shall not forget it," Mabel answered, merrily, but I did not reply, although she looked at me very inquiringly. Somehow I began to feel assured—I had often surmised it before—that General Farquhar was indeed in love with this beautiful cousin of mine; he no longer had the right to look at me and talk to me as he had looked and talked lately,—



and thinking this, I felt relieved to have found him so distant in his manners to-day, despite a little feeling of regret which I strove to conquer but could not. By-and-by we went down-stairs, and were ushered into a small room leading out from a side hall,—a breakfast-room, furnished in chestnut and light pearl-colored damask, with a high buffet of chestnut, mirrored, rich in bronze medallions of fruit, fish, and game. On the table in the center of the room were innumerable glasses of iced sherry-cobblers and mint-juleps, awaiting demolishment. Murray Dare possessed himself of one or two of these, but the feminine portion of the party devoted themselves to iced lemonade, which tasted very refreshing after our warm drive.

"I can scarcely believe the testimony of my own eyes, Miss Marguerite," Lorimer said, coming to my side as soon as I entered the room. "I am real glad you came though, nonsense apart, for this house is awfully jolly, full of eccentricities, and I have crowds to show you. You haven't seen the 'old curiosity shop,' as I call it, yet,—will you go with me now if you have had enough lemonade?"

"Gladly," I said.

As we crossed the hall, we paused to admire some of the paintings,—above all, par excellence in my eyes, a Murillo gypsy, an original, Lorimer said, bought at a fabulous price in Spain, by General Farquhar's uncle, Mr. Trenholm, who, during his lifetime, had devoted himself to this collection of paintings, and to the gathering together of fragments of curiosities belonging to all ages; old china, bronzes, marbles, and bits of armor, which he had picked up here and there in his extensive travels.

"Mr. Trenholm was a Midas," Lorimer said, as we stood together before the Murillo gypsy, admiring its dark-eyed and rag-clad beauty,—the eyes so dark, so dreamy and passionate, the dusky loveliness of the olive complexion, with the wondrous sunlight with which Murillo so loved to lighten the misery of his beggars and pariahs, mirroring its warmth in her eyes, and laying its yellow lengths among the shadows of her night-black hair; "he transmuted into gold everything he touched,—

he was a wondrously rich man. What a lucky dog Farquhar is to have been his favorite nephew!"

"Don't let us go yet," I said, as he made a movement to leave the hall; "I love pictures so; have heard so much about these; and this is the coronation-feast of my anticipations. Isn't it a pity we can't have coronation-feasts without Banquos? And what a hideous Banquo yonder is!"

"It is one of Doré's extravagant delirium tremens of inspiration," Lorimer answered, laughing at me; "I forget what it is meant to represent; but I agree with you it is a horrible specter of genius; Doré's genius is fiendish,—a regular Pandemonium of ideas. Turn your eyes for relief to that glowing Giorgione,—it is only a copy, but an excellent one,—or this Beatrice Cenci."

Some time we wandered together about the hall, or, more properly, the picture-gallery, admiring the different pictures so well hung, so well lighted, and so rare; here and there we nearly stumbled against huge bronzes of knights in complete armor, statuary groups of the Sabines and mutilated goddesses dug from the classic ground of Athens and Rome, or immense vases of Algerine onyx of Oriental workmanship, medallioned with flowers in a quaint old style. In the center of the hall, immediately beneath the dome, stood a colossal figure in bronze of Hercules strangling the Nemæan lion,—a magnificent creation, the master-piece of all. I drew a long breath of rapture as I stood and looked at it, standing there in all its magnificence among the surrounding débris of centuries, with the colored light from the dome above startling into vivid contrast each face—man and beast—as they fought their deadly fight, and with the whole outlines of the bronze sharply defined against the bright light of the open window beyond. We left the hall just as the remainder of the party entered it from the other side.

"This is the old curiosity shop, Miss Marguerite," Lorimer said, as he ushered me into a big octagonal room, built in the back of the house, looking toward the sea, and the windows of which opened out on the

back terrace, where the shade of the house lay coolly; "isn't the name apropos?"

I could not but admit that it was. At first, the room being dusky and the different corners much in shadow, I was scarcely able to distinguish the different objects scattered so heterogeneously around on the tables and in the cabinets, but presently, my eyes becoming more accustomed to the light, the appropriateness of the name given the room by Lorimer gradually grew to my mind clearer and clearer.

"This room was Mr. Trenholm's especial pride—his pet hobby that he rode to his death. Here, in this octagonal point of the room, is the armorial collection. Look at this old battle-axe, this cinque-cento shield of finest steel, inlaid with gold, showing how Richard Cœur de Lion fought the Saracens, this old Huguenot arquebuse, Chinese matchlock, bits of coats-of-mail, and more oddities than I can give names to; yonder are the Venetian glass, the Turkish narghilés, and odd Viennese pipes. I want you particularly to examine this candelabrum of Sèvres, made glorious with paintings after Greuze, this Faenza cup, Cellini dish, and these Etruscan and Grecian vases. Old Trenholm was a virtuoso, and his craziness for collecting curiosities has afforded me many a pleasant hour; I have my own little ideas on such subjects, and I like to come here and indulge them."

"These old oak cabinets are fascinating," I said, walking to one of them, and looking at a vast array of ceramic ware, Majolica, and some Henri Deux; "does General Farquhar interest himself in these curiosities?"

"He can't help feeling proud of such a collection," Lorimer answered; "it is in exactly the same condition as when Mr. Trenholm died, about two years ago, while Farquhar was at the war; I don't know as Farquhar would himself go to the trouble of getting all these things together and arranged; but since it has come ready-made to him, he seems enough interested in it. Only look at these cases of shells, corals, and lava specimens from Pompeii; this frame full of bugs, and this of butterflies; there is a little of everything here, and one never wearies; I have a little of the naturalist

in my composition, and I like the bugs and butterflies best."

"And I the china."

"That is real woman. If there were nothing but bugs and china here, we could have a good time à la Jack Sprat and his wife; as it is, we must compromise on these lovely carvings, said to be the offspring of Albert Dürer's genius."

"No, on luncheon," I said, as at that moment the footman Morley appeared on the threshold of the door, announcing that it was ready; then Lorimer offered me his arm, and, following Morley, we were ushered into a big dining-room in the front of the house, from the broad windows of which one could see the cottage nestling among its cedar-trees afar off.

"I know that Lorimer has been showing you the octagon-room and all its treasures," Cecil Throckmorton said, addressing me, as Morley seated me on his left hand, and Lorimer next, in a vacant space which I saw had been especially reserved for us, thus bringing me vis-à-vis to Gertrude, who had been taken in to lunch by Throckmorton and placed at his right,—he heading the table at one end and Farquhar the other; "I can see old china, bronzes, pictures, and corals written in your face very plainly; Lorimer has been infusing into you some of his own ardor; it is only necessary for him to see a dish a hundred years old and he fairly gallops with delight."

"A galloping consumption of china, or another melancholy instance, besides that of Mother Goose's, when the dish runs away with the spoon," Lorimer said, good-naturedly; "but we have had quite a sufficiency of empty dishes for to-day; let us create a diversion in favor of full ones. Miss Marguerite will thank you for some of that salmi."

"One word for Miss Marguerite and two for yourself. What a genius you are for an appetite, Lorimer! Will you take some salmi now, or wait till you get it?"

"I don't like conundrums, and I do like salmi," Lorimer said, plaintively; "what is the use of having a genius for anything? Paul Borghese had fourteen trades, yet

starved with them all; and I have fourteen appetites, and can't get anything to eat, either." Then Throckmorton relented and gave him some salmi.

As I sat eating my salad, and by-and-by an iced chocolate pâté, I could not help letting my eyes wander about the room admiringly. It was a long room, at one end finished by two large windows, deep-seated, and hung with mauve velvet, while at the opposite extremity, directly beneath the painted glass window lighting the room from the hall, stood an immense open buffet, ornamented with bronze bas-reliefs and medallions, and holding magnificent beakers, vases, and bowls of silver crowded upon it. Around against the walls stood tables inlaid with Pyrenean marble and bordered with bronze bas-reliefs, on which was displayed the most beautiful variety of glass I ever saw,—huge punch-bowls, Bohemian glass in all styles, and colored goblets, finger-glasses and jars, looking to my eyes very old and quaint. Between the windows stood a closed cabinet with plate-glass doors, full of all kinds of drinking-glasses, of all ages and descriptions, for every kind of wine or liquor, the cabinet being surmounted by a bronze figure of Bacchus. The floor of the dining-room was of highly-polished oak, carpetless. Opposite to where I sat, with my back to a Landseer, was the oaken mantel, carved with wonderful skill to represent Diana hunting, surrounded by her attendants, over which hung a bronze bas-relief, very antique, and the fire-place of which was closed for the summer by a plate-glass mirror. Here, as everywhere else in the house, or at least those rooms which I had seen, the walls, paneled with oak half-way to the ceiling, were hung thick with paintings,—hunting-scenes from Alken, lifelike Landseers, and an occasional Bonheur. It was a merry lunch-party, everybody seeming to be so enlivened, Lorimer growing each moment more comical,—not so much in conversation as in his irresistibly original manners,—keeping all the table convulsed with laughter, while Throckmorton became more talkative than usual, and Gertrude eclipsed herself,—she appeared so thoroughly happy and good-natured. I had heard Throckmorton complimenting her on the becoming-

ness of her dress, and as he had hitherto devoted himself quite exclusively to her entertainment, now, as her dark cheeks flushed through their olive a bright color, and her haughty eyes grew more softened at each word of his, I knew the reason why. Warm as it was without-doors in the sunlight, in the house the temperature was very comfortable, huge blocks of ice on fire-gilt stands keeping it delightfully cool, as we sat there intent upon a wholesale demolition of *Italien cream*, iced *Charlotte-russe*, and sherbets. At the other end of the table sat General Farquhar, Mrs. Dare on his right hand, Valerie on his left,—Valerie looking flushed and triumphant, as he, looking down into her eyes, smiled into them in that way of his which lighted up the cold gravity of his face as though touched with a transformation. I could readily perceive that everything was going to Mrs. Dare's utmost satisfaction, she looked at me so benevolently and nodded her head in such an encouraging manner. As for me, I felt quite at peace here under Lorimer's protection, secure from Murray Dare's impertinences or any possible attention from either Farquhar or Throckmorton; indeed, the latter seemed intuitively to realize that I did not want him to pay me the slightest attention. Only once, when looking up suddenly in reply to one of Lorimer's characteristic remarks, I caught General Farquhar watching me,—so steadily and intensely that I felt my face grow pale and my heart still as though with a quick suffocation; only for an instant, however, as he almost immediately transferred his scrutiny from my face to that of Valerie, and I began hotly to hate myself for my weakness in showing him thus plainly he possessed the power to confuse me. On the flagged terrace looking out to the sea, on which the huge window to the hall opened, and where the shade of the house lay eastward, dark, and cool, after luncheon, all the party gathered, all save Lorimer and myself; we preferred to wander about in the different rooms, examining the statuary, bronzes, and pictures with which the house seemed overflowing.

"I love a mystery," Beatrice Mortimer was saying, as we joined the others on the back terrace, where the sea-

breeze blew in sudden gusts and the sun could not scorch. "Do tease him, Valerie, for he really ought to gratify our curiosity."

"I have teased till I am tired," pouted Valerie, sitting on the threshold of the window and looking reproachfully at General Farquhar where he lounged beside her, "and I have no more faith in any of his promises."

When she said that, and just as Lorimer and I seated ourselves on a rustic bench not far off, General Farquhar looked up into her face suddenly.

"Faith and unfaith can ne'er be equal powers.  
Unfaith in aught is want of faith in all;  
Then trust me not at all or all in all."

"You shouldn't butcher Tennyson, Farquhar," Lorimer exclaimed, remonstratively. "You left out the best part."

"In love, if love be love, if love be ours," quoted Throckmorton, lounging on the turf, just outside the terrace, where Gertrude sat talking to him. "Yes, that is the best part."

"You are very unsentimental this afternoon, Miss Marguerite, a little cold and indifferent. I am going to quote something pretty myself now, and see if there won't be 'a best part' to mine too," Lorimer said, with much ludicrous sentiment expressed both in his voice and manner. Then, softening and lowering his voice semi-tragically, he quoted,—

"Man's life's a vapor and full of woes;  
He cuts a caper and down he goes."

Quite a caper-sauce of dissolution——"

"That is silly," interrupted Murray Dare, contemptuously. "We were talking about something more sensible when we were interrupted so inopportunistly. There's lots more china in the house, Lorimer."

"Dare, you are the bull in the china-shop of my fragile sensibilities. For Heaven's sake, look out for the cups and saucers, and don't put the noses of the pitchers out of joint."

"You two men are the bother of my life," Valerie

here interposed, desperately; "you are always agreeing to disagree and making my head ache. Let us imagine this hour to be a lovely midsummer day's dream; be poetical, and not so horribly matter-of-fact."

"Let us first find a hirsute head-dress for Dare to play sweet Bully Bottom to your Titania," Lorimer began, gravely. But Murray Dare interrupted him rudely,—

"And a lion's skin for you, Lorimer; only you'd have to be careful and not let your ears stick out of the hide, as your cousin's did in *Æsop*."

"Wouldn't it be a jolly masquerade?" Lorimer said, smiling back at him in a most angelic manner. "I would put my head through the lion's hide and say, 'For all my roaring, I am no lion at all, but only Snug, the Joiner.'"

When he said that, Murray Dare looked more disgusted than ever, while everybody else laughed at Lorimer's nonsensically expressive face.

"A regular Pandemonium of ridiculousness," Valerie interposed. "I won't allow you to quarrel any longer. Why don't you go and play croquet?"

"We would get awfully freckled," Juliette Mortimer said, with much energy of decision, "and look like fiends."

"We look much better here," her sister acquiesced. She was sitting beside Dare on the steps leading down from the terrace to the croquet-ground, seeming well content to remain where she was. "This shade relieves the complexion."

"While the sun makes an alto-rilievo of the imperfections of one's face," Lorimer said, laughing at her. "The sun and 'lait virginal' are antagonistic."

"It is no wonder that Madame Tallien was such a beauty, when she bathed in strawberries-and-cream," Gertrude said, as Throckmorton, lounging at her side, looking very lazy and handsome, played tenderly with a flower which she had at that moment given him. "Milk baths are so beautifying to one's complexion."

"What a complexion Poppæa must have had, then!" Throckmorton answered, "when five hundred asses were kept to supply her bath! You American women are so afraid of a temporary exposure to the sunlight; the

Frenchwomen add *pâte d'amandes* to their ablutions; but our Englishwomen think less of their faces than they do of their physiques; they don't wear Xavier Jouvin kid gloves when they play croquet, and don't walk the one-hundred-and-sixty-fifth of a mile every day for exercise."

"Read Hawthorne and Jean Paul," Lorimer retorted,—"the criticism of the first on English beauty, the latter when he calls every Englishman an island, an island of insular prejudices. Your English girls live on Stilton cheese, roast beef, and London stout,—such stout appetites inspire respect,—while the delicacy of our American women teaches us to love. Festus says,—'Respect is what we owe, love is what we give,' and men would mostly rather give than pay."

"I am vanquished," Throckmorton exclaimed, submissively. Then, as I turned my eyes from watching the sea to his face, he added, softly, "*Pâleur qui marque une âme tendre, a bien son prix.*"

"Don't talk like Tasso and pull my fuchsia to pieces," Gertrude remonstrated; "it is a sacrilege."

"Then I won't," he answered. "Don't you remember how Tasso was often plunged into the depths of woe and poverty? Well, I am like Tasso at this moment."

## CHAPTER XLI.

As the afternoon advanced in age, the air grew purer and cooler, until, about five o'clock, when the sun went behind some clouds,—huge masses of which lay piled high up in the west,—everybody decided that it was cool enough to play croquet. Previous to this decision, however, we were favored with an entertainment in the music-room, Mr. Conyngham singing, in a delightful tenor voice, the "*Il Balen*" from *Trovatore*, Valerie a gay little French chanson, and Juliette Mortimer the sentimental song, "*Shall I, Wasting in Despair,*" making prodigious eyes at Lorimer the while.

"You are dreadfully affected, Marguerite," Gertrude said, rising from the piano, where she had been executing very brilliantly some of Jullien's and Musard's dance-music, as Lorimer, leaning on the piano at my side, begged me also to sing; "there is no earthly reason why you should not sing, unless it is your desire to create a sensation by your originality in remaining silent."

I realized very well and sharply at that moment she did not expect me to comply with Lorimer's entreaties, and took this method of imputing to me a motive for my obstinacy in resisting them other than the true one,—so now, when I saw everybody looking at me,—Throckmorton, where he stood talking to Mabel in the window, with beseeching eyes, and Farquhar lounging against the mantel not far off, gravely and questioningly,—willing to disappoint my Cousin Gertrude, and to avoid appearing ridiculous in these other eyes, in answer to her remark, I seated myself very calmly at the piano, although my heart and voice quite failed me as I began the first words of Lady Nairn's touching '*Land o' the Leal.*' I did not sing with much feeling, I know; the words slipping out of my mouth in a way inexplicable even to myself; so that I was not at all astonished when, rising from the piano, I overheard Juliette Mortimer saying in a stage whisper to Lorimer,—

"Her voice is powerful, but, unfortunately, wanting in expression. She ought not to have chosen that song."

"You will gratify our curiosity before we play croquet?" Valerie said, coaxingly, to General Farquhar, just before we quitted the music-room, looking up into his cold face with hers grown softened and pleading. "Only think, this will be your last opportunity to relent; we are not coming again to Bonnie Venture this summer,—everybody is going away next week, you know—"

"What is your curiosity about?" Lorimer interposed, as Juliette Mortimer, her sister, and Gertrude also crowded around General Farquhar eagerly. "Perhaps I can satisfy it."

"Don't interrupt," Valerie said, shaking her finger at him; "be more proper, please."

"Papa, potatoes, poultry, prunes, and prisms," quoth Lorimer, submissively.



Then General Farquhar said, half smiling at Valerie's eagerness, "Not before we play croquet, Mrs. Hoffman; I cannot promise that."

"Before we go home, then?" she exclaimed, gayly. "You will promise to show us the Blue-beard closet before we go home?"

"Valerie!" interposed Mrs. Dare, reprovingly.

"It is such a delightful mystery, mamma," Valerie replied, laughingly, "I can't help being pertinacious. Every time we have come to Bonnie Venture this summer he has partially promised to show us this mysterious room,—the mystery only enhances and intensifies the anticipation,—it is real Blue-beardish."

"Remember, Roy, your motto, like Murat's, is 'Tout pour la dame,'" Throckmorton here interposed, joining the group and adding his voice to the general clamor.

"I wonder how you got yourself into this fuss, Farquhar?" Murray Dare began, standing, mallet in hand, and looking very stupid; but Lorimer interrupted him,—

"And George the Third, stupid, wondered how the apple got in the dumpling. Dare, you are a wise man walking through the world in disguise, like Haroun al Raschid through the streets of his capital. You ought to shine out in your true character once in awhile."

"If I am to play Blue-beard I must have a Fatima," General Farquhar said, relaxing into a decided smile, as Valerie began to pout and look vexed. "It wouldn't be nice to have the play one-sexed. I will promise you to choose my Fatima by-and-by, and show you the mysterious room before you go home this evening." Then a bright color stole swiftly into Valerie's triumphant face and the Mortimers clapped their hands.

"Now for croquet!" shouted Murray Dare, and croquet it accordingly was. Left to myself,—all the rest of the party having betaken themselves to the croquet-ground,—I began to wander, aimlessly at first, then more interestedly, about the different rooms, admiring once more the beauties which Lorimer had previously shown me, until finally, straying into the library, I found "Elia" lying loose upon the table, and immediately possessed myself of it. The library was the grandest room in the house, I thought to

myself, as I stood looking at the painted glass windows,—representing Dante and Beatrice, Shakspeare, Petrarch and Laura,—one oriel window finishing the end of the room opposite to that by which I had entered, built in a deep recess, and looking out to the south,—a side of the house I had never seen before, as the cottage lay to the north. A cabinet bookcase running around the sides of the room, richly carved and inlaid with marble, met the yellow satin portière covering the entrance to the library on either side; while above it hung many pictures in carved-oak frames, also inlaid, with marble of a light-yellow hue; indeed, all the framework of the furniture was of this description,—the lounging-chairs of yellow satin, having arms formed by the heads and necks of lions, diminutive in size, to be sure, but exquisitely carved. A white-and-gold console, standing just within the recess, close to the oriel window, held upon its cabinet-brackets a collection of old coins, some quaint terra-cotta ware and cameos, while over it hung a perfect copy of Correggio's Magdalen, and fresh flowers in an Etruscan vase bloomed under. Here, on the window-seat, I ensconced myself, the oriel being open, allowing the cool air, beating around the corner of the house, to flow in about me, stilling the fever in my face, the dull ache in my heart. The day had been a happy one, happier even than I had dared to anticipate. I had not been annoyed by Murray Dare's attentions, or thrust in the way of those of either Throckmorton or Farquhar; my aunt, whenever she had addressed me, seemed pleased and gracious, and not a single unkind word had been spoken to me all day, save those uttered by my Cousin Gertrude, which had provoked from my lips the sacrilegious "Land o' the Leal," and everybody else had seemed very, very happy! I was so glad to think the whole day had passed without my once having given my aunt cause for displeasure; that I could, through this obedience of mine, show her how grateful I was to her for the day's indulgence, for having permitted me to see with my own eyes the glories of Bonnie Venture. While we still sat together on the terrace, just before we went into the music-room, somebody—I think it was Lorimer—had proposed a picnic, to take place the

following Friday. "The last one of the season, you know," he said, remindingly; "so everybody must go, nolens volens." Then everybody had acquiesced in the proposition, and when appealed to by Lorimer, Mrs. Dare had assured him, very smilingly, "that Marguerite should certainly go," and Marguerite had also, then and there, signified her favor. When the picnic was first suggested, my eagerness to acquiesce had been great, and also my happiness when assured of Mrs. Dare's ready sympathy in my being allowed to go with them; but now, in this later calm, as I sat quietly in the oriel window, turning my thirsty face out to the breeze, and my eyes thoughtfully to the meadows lying low at the foot of the hill, and stretching so far inland, bound on the farther edge by the cloisters of green-cowled pines, somehow I began to feel a subtle unrest stirring my heart at the prospect, to hear a small voice whispering, that perhaps, after all, I would be happier if I did not go,—the anticipated pleasure might turn upon my lips into Dead Sea apples of regret. Sitting there watching the far-away tree-tops swaying restlessly to and fro, looking in the distance like a vast ocean of surging green, the broad meadows sloping, brown with stubble and thick with shocks of corn, to the edge of the forest, and the hills, faintly blue in their mists, shutting the horizon, I grew very grave, very thoughtful, and wondering. It was the first time during all the summer I had enjoyed such a sensibly good time, when everybody had seemed kindly disposed toward me, and I had behaved myself—even according to Mrs. Dare's judgment—with the utmost propriety. And yet, and yet,—thinking it all over, I could not understand the feeling of uneasiness which kept stealing its fingers into my heart, to pinch and worry it, or the little heat of disquiet which would persist in coming up into my face to warm it. Was it because I had left Archie longer than I had permitted myself usually, or anxiety lest he should miss me and worry about me, or the excitement of coming to this place, whose beauties were so dazzling to my eyes? Would these reasons suffice to explain the strangeness of my sensations? Questioning myself thus, the meadows and the restless tree-

tops grew irksome to my eyes, unlanguageed as they were, in proportion to my longings to be answered, looking so playful and at peace, so unsympathetically obtuse to my nameless pain, that, by-and-by, growing tired, my eyes wandered from them wearily to the sea, from the sea to the garden stretching beneath the oriel window, and not finding my riddle solved even here, thence to the dreamy face of Correggio's Magdalen overhanging my head.

"Let me help you," said a voice just outside the window-ledge. Then somebody laid a spray of heliotrope on my hand resting there. I shook my head decisively as General Farquhar came close to where I was sitting and leaned against the embrasure to the window. "Let me help you," he repeated.

"To be disagreeable?" I retorted, hating myself for the color in my face and my unsteady voice. "You always help me to be that. This heliotrope is lovely; its breath reminds me of Amythont and Guidos."

"Do you know its symbol?"

"No, I don't know anything about flowers, except that they are pretty—some of them—and grow in the ground."

"Then you don't understand that this bit of heliotrope of mine is languageed with 'blood, bones, passion, marrow, feeling,' as Byron says?"

"I don't understand anything that Byron says; every word of his is possessed of seven blue devils."

"You understand the 'seven blue devils' part of his genius, then? You are strong-minded in that idea; you have been looking at my Magdalen."

"Yes, I have been looking at your Magdalen," I answered, more softly.

"I am glad you have," he said, smiling at me a little; "it is worth looking at,—I can tell from your face you think it is. We are very sympathetic."

"Are we?"

"Yes, even although you defy my words and bite your own in two. You have chosen this oriel window as your favorite retreat; it is also my especial corner of delight, where, with my Magdalen, my flowers, and 'Elia,' I luxuriate through many an hour. 'And the children

of Alice call Bartrum father.' You have opened 'Elia' at the 'Dream-Children.' How did you know my preference?"

"It was mere chance; I have not read a word."

"You are heretically un-Lamblike in your replies this afternoon. If you will pardon that perpetration, I will do penance."

"Will you? Then please go away."

"You are too eager in asking an impossibility. I would rather you prescribed a bag of beans or an 'iron coffin,' in the good old mediæval style."

"I knew you were not to be trusted."

"Let me quote Tennyson to you, as I quoted it to Mrs. Hoffman a little while ago; only with this difference,—I will not behead it to you,—

"In love, if love be love, if love be ours,  
Faith and unfaith can ne'er be equal powers.  
Unfaith in aught is want of faith in all;  
Then trust me not at all or all in all."

When he finished,—I don't know how he did it, but he made me look at him. The light mezzotint striking down upon his cold face vividly showed me the expression of his eyes and mouth, the intense determination expressed in every feature. "My Marchese di Pescara," he said, gravely, as, looking at him, half startled, I felt the blood leave my face and beat itself about my heart, "the Scythians said to Alexander the Great, 'Between the master and the slave there can be no friendship; in the midst of peace the rights of war subsist.' Let us substitute the word mistress for that of master, and the Scythic homily would express your thoughts exactly."

"I don't understand you."

"Don't you? At this moment, if I was an alchemist, I would transmute the language of your face into words."

"Perhaps, then, it is fortunate you do not possess the power; it might result in a disadvantage."

"We are only playing at bagatelles; let us play at bagatelles no longer. I want you to look at my Magdalen and let your heart be eased from its perversity; this Correggio is one of my hymns and inspirations; let it be

the same to you. Correggio's pictures, to my eyes, are purer in all the attributes of what perfect painting should be than others; his chiaro-oscuro is perfection itself, as his Magdalen will testify; its tone, aerial depths, graphic execution, and perspective, show how consummate his genius was—Where are you going?" he interrupted himself, suddenly.

"You are trying to make me forget that it is time for us to go home and that my aunt may be looking for me," I said, going away from the window and leaving the spray of heliotrope beside his hand on the window-ledge. "I cannot stay any longer; I will meet you on the croquet-ground."

He was standing, leaning against the embrasure to the window, as I began to speak, following me with his eyes, and half smiling, in a way that annoyed me. But as I finished, with one spring he was through the window and at my side.

"It would have been more dignified to have come in through the door," he said, gravely; "but you have shut all the doors in my face. It may please you to know that in my aeronauting I crushed the bit of heliotrope, possessed of some of Byron's seven devils, unmercilessly." He stopped short, as though commanding me to say something in reply; but I did not, I only walked very composedly toward the portière. "There is a nearer way to the croquet-ground than that," he said, quickly; "will you not avail yourself of it? I am going the shorter way, and I have something to show you,—come!"

I was just about to pass through the portière, feeling very determined in my resistance to the power of this man's will, desirous of once more gaining the shelter of the croquet-ground, and to be out of all danger of offending Mrs. Dare in any way, when his voice, modulated to that intensity of utterance which I so dreaded, made me irresolute once more.

"Come," he repeated, and smiling slightly at me as I turned my head involuntarily to look at him where he stood waiting in the center of the library. "This is a nearer way, and a more interesting one to me; I want you to go with me."

"Through the window?"

"No, through the door; the only one you did not shut in my face," he retorted, smiling now very decidedly at my puzzled face. "Come here and I will show you." But instead of obeying him, I made a quick move to the other side of the portière; almost before I knew it, he had come to my side and interposed himself between me and any further progress. "I will not let you go," he said, under his breath, and looking straight into my defiant eyes; "unless you go my way, you shall not go at all. Do you understand me?"

At that moment, before I could answer, but while my face was growing flushed at the tone of both his voice and manner, a door, which I had not before noticed,—an oaken door partially concealed by a small portière,—suddenly opened, and the housekeeper, Mrs. Sutton, stood on the threshold.

"I have opened the room, Mr. Royal," she said, looking at us both in a way that made me grow hot and cold by turns; "if you come in now you will see how I have regarded Mr. Philip's wishes in everything."

Then, before I knew it, somebody had taken my hand authoritatively, and I was led past her into a room, the beauty of which quite overcame me. It was built in the tower looking to the south, and which I had seen projecting from the main house, as I sat thinking in the oriel window,—a medium-sized room, with the palest blue-tinted walls, furnished in light-blue satin and silver, and with silver-framed mirrors reflecting its loveliness everywhere. Such a room as I had often dreamed about, but had never seen. On the walls hung exquisite paintings in silvered frames, on the mantel stood quaint silver candelabras, frosted and pure, and on the floor lay a light-blue carpet, scattered with white roses, while in the projection formed by the tower, which looked to my eyes like one vast window, satin and lace hung, and from which, the center French window being open, marble steps led down into a garden beyond, stood some Sevres jardineères, painted in subjects after Greuze and Watteau, a dainty, porcelain-topped table, which was crowded with a multiplicity of French trifles, among the rest, an exquisite

work-basket, monogram emblazoned, and a paper-weight, gemmed with sapphires.

"The room is just as Mr. Philip left it, sir," Mrs. Sutton remarked, as I stood by the porcelain-topped table, trying to fix my eyes on some one object, and to keep them there, I felt so disturbed and ill at ease; "even to the spool in the work-basket and the winding of the clock. The day before he died, sir, he sent for me up-stairs, and bade me, in almost the last words that he spoke, never to let any one but myself take care of this room,—until Mr. Royal should see fit to bring his wife home. He was mighty fond of you, Mr. Royal; he used to talk about you a good deal and your blessed mother together——"

"You have been very faithful, Sutton," General Farquhar interrupted her; "as the appearance of this room will testify. Miss Dare, would you believe that since my possession of Bonnie Venture I have never been inside this room until now?" He was standing leaning against the mantel, his arm resting thereon, and his hand supporting his head; for the first time since I entered I looked at him. "You may not know," he went on, watching my puzzled face steadily the while, "that a year or two previous to his death, my uncle, Philip Trenholm, came very near being married to a French girl, whom he met while crossing the Atlantic on his return from abroad. She had relations in America whom she was on the way to visit, and shortly after their arrival in New York they became engaged; this room was fitted up as a boudoir for Mademoiselle De Grèvy. Unfortunately for Mademoiselle De Grèvy, a discovery was made prior to the marriage which very materially altered all prospects of her ever becoming the mistress of Bonnie Venture. It is perhaps needless to add, since you have already guessed the sequel,—I read your face, *mon amie*,—my uncle, Philip Trenholm, scarcely survived this disappointment. He was in very ill health at the time, and Mademoiselle De Grèvy returned to

'O ma patrie  
La plus chérie,'—

unmarried."

"There is the young lady's picture, Mr. Royal," Mrs. Sutton added, pointing to the portrait of a very French-looking girl hanging over the mantel, and which I had thought was a fancy picture. "Mr. Philip never looked at it after the disappointment came, and indeed never came into this room; he ordered it to be shut and locked up, and shut and locked up it has remained until to-day,—only opened by me early each morning, as he bade me in his last moments to open it, in order that it might be kept neat and pretty-looking for the wife which Mr. Royal should choose after he was gone."

Just beyond the marble steps, leading down from the window near which I was standing, on the brow of the hill, extending the entire south side of the house, and terraced some distance down the slope, lay the garden, planted with shade-trees, and looking to me like a quaint, old-fashioned garden, brilliant with patches of dwarf Duc Van Tholl tulips, scarlet and white fuchsias, and the scarlet leaves of the Mexican poinsetta, with its lovely golden center. Near the French window bloomed, on either side the steps, bushes of Guelder roses, the ground round about scattered with their crumbled balls, and the breeze flowing in, filled the room with the bruised fragrance of the Cape jasmines and mignonette. At the moment when Mrs. Sutton ceased speaking, and I had transferred my eyes from the French girl's portrait to the French girl's garden outside, and I was thinking this pause would serve as a sufficient opportunity for me to go, to leave this room which so choked me with its sweetnesss, the sound of voices approached from the direction of the croquet-ground, nearer and nearer, and in another moment, while I stood there with my heart beating fast and unevenly, Valerie rushed up the marble steps, followed by the Mortimers and the rest of the party, and stood on the threshold of the window. In one brief instant her quick eyes seemed to take in the situation,—Mrs. Sutton's interested face, my pale one, and General Farquhar's composure. Then she came in, in her pretty, insouciant way, and began asking questions.

"So this is Blue-beard's closet! Which is Fatima—you, Mrs. Sutton? Have you often played the rôle? Why didn't you come and tell us, mon ami, the play was on

the boards and the curtain up? Oh, what a lovely Blue-beard's closet! Is it the French-room of Marie Antoinette, or of La Vallière?"

"Of Marie Antoinette, of course," Beatrice Mortimer answered, fingering the jeweled paper-weight industriously. "La Vallière died in her bed, didn't she? Blue-beard's closet ought only to be filled with the murdered."

"Where is her head?" cried Valerie, rapturously.

"Monsieur De Paris has put it in that picture-frame," Lorimer answered, pointing to the French girl's portrait, which indeed only showed her head with a string of carbuncles encircling her throat. "Farquhar, what made you open this room? It is commonplace, compared with the mystery."

"La reine le veut," Farquhar answered, looking down into Valerie's face as she approached where he stood by the mantel, with that look in his eyes which never failed to bring the color to it swiftly.

Then, as they all began chattering together, admiring the different beauties of the room, and questioning Mrs. Sutton, who looked greatly shocked at this invasion, while Farquhar and Valerie stood apart from the rest, talking to each other, I made my escape through the window, thence to the terrace on the east side of the house. As I passed the oriel window, I saw my bit of heliotrope lying on its ledge crushed. When Throckmorton had followed Valerie so unexpectedly into the French girl's boudoir, I had caught his eyes as they sought my face, with a half-anxious, half-thoughtful expression stirring their lazy depths; now, just as I gained the terrace looking to the sea, I heard his firm step coming after.

"Why did you not play croquet with us?" he asked, as he gained my side; "I expected to see you appear every instant, until Murray Dare came out, saying he saw you talking to General Farquhar in the library, and that Farquhar had taken you into the closed room. What were you talking about?"

"I forget; quarreling, I believe." Then, as we came full upon Mrs. Dare sitting alone, reading, I went immediately and seated myself near her, despite the look in his eyes which forbade my doing so.



## CHAPTER XLII.

THE next morning broke dull and gray. The sky looked like a leaden sea of gloom, and the waves of the sea crisped with foam. When I opened my window, just before going down to breakfast, the east wind blew sharply in, biting my face with its kiss and pinching it black and blue. Much to my own astonishment, however, I stood there and passively allowed my face to be kissed and pinched in this manner for some little time, indeed until Mabel came and dragged me away, saying she did not and never could like red noses. To tell the truth, I had passed a most restless, visionary night, and this east wind, bleak and knifelike, seemed to cut some of the fever out of my face and heart. All night long I had dreamed about my old life at Blossom Village,—Dr. Lescom, Mehitable, and Miss Tabitha dancing jigs through my brain, and the whisper of the blind man's weak voice, almost as inarticulate as it used to sound long ago, faltering out its incoherencies. Toward morning, after I had awaked from one dream only to fall helplessly into another, my Cousin Valerie's face became jumbled up with these other faces in a most bewildering manner.

Frequently since we came to Wickoff's Ledge I had been sorely tempted to tell Mabel of my Blossom Village life and interests, a subject which I had never even broached to her; and now, after we had eaten our breakfasts and returned up-stairs to my room, I longed to relate to her my dreams, to have her endeavor to explain them, and then ask her if she thought, as I had begun long ago to think, that my Cousin Valerie was in truth the woman who in those days had so embittered Cecil Throckmorton's life! But, tempted as strongly as I was to do this, eager as I felt myself to be to listen to another's opinion on the subject, yet my lips were silenced by the remembrance of my promise, made to him

in the first moments of our recognition, never to mention that former life of his to any one, until his lips should bid me. While at school, intimate as I was with Mabel there, actuated by some strange impulse of reticence I had never even mentioned to her the fact of my having known such a person as the blind man; indeed, controlled alike by my own reserve and Mrs. Dare's wishes, I had learned to speak of Boston as my one home, while the sensitiveness of my love for all the memories of Blossom Village, sacred as they had grown to my romantic heart, closed my lips to all possible mention of the same.

Outside the influence of this dream of the previous night on my existence to-day, although the day, as it advanced in age, grew gloomier and gloomier, until about eleven o'clock the rain came drizzling down, I felt very, very happy.

"You seem more like the Marguerite I used to know at school than you have seemed since we parted there, six months ago," Mabel said, as we sat chatting together by the window in my room, looking out to the sea, while Archie was sleeping through his morning's nap. We watched the rain spatter itself over the window-panes tearfully, and the spray from the waves beating so wildly against the rocks flew over the lawn. "Yesterday did you good. I only wish I could take you away with me next week, to freshen you up with a change; it is this life which you have been leading here, week after week, that is killing you." And I realized that every word she uttered was the truth. It had been so sweet, so strangely exciting, that yesterday at Bonnie Venture,—I had so enjoyed wandering alone by myself among its rooms, admiring their chaste elegance and sympathizing with the taste which had so becomingly dictated their beauties. Then everybody had seemed so kind and considerate of me! Even Valerie, this morning at the breakfast-table, had spoken in a most unwonted kind way, telling me that I was looking much better for the dissipation, as she laughingly called it, and there had been no undertone of bitterness to her voice,—her lips had smiled at me sweetly. If, on the other hand, she had seemed mocking or half sarcastic, as she sometimes appeared lately when provoked at some

trifle, my dream of the previous night, in which her face had figured so prominently, would have clung to me with persistent hands all day; the consciousness of a possible antagonism on her part might have added its bitterness to my already full cup. But happily now, since her whole manner of both speaking and looking assured me of a most entire friendliness, even although I might have annoyed her yesterday when found alone with General Farquhar and Mrs. Sutton in the room which he had opened especially to please her, I began to condemn myself for allowing my speculations to trouble the past in any way, to close my eyes and ears to its retrospection.

And Gertrude also had appeared unusually gracious that morning. She thanked me quite condescendingly, just as I was passing through the hall on my way to breakfast, for having trimmed the dress which she wore the day previous to Bonnie Venture. "You have so much time to do such things," she added, graciously, "it is no wonder you do them nicely. You won't mind being victimized with another, will you? I want to wear my maize-colored organdy to the picnic, and Celeste is so busy she won't have time to finish it."

While Mabel sat chatting with me in my room after breakfast, Celeste appeared suddenly in our presence and laid a dress, minus the flounces, on my bed. "Mademoiselle Gertrude has sent the dress to mademoiselle, with her compliments," the French girl said, suavely. "The flounces are to be sewed on bias and to be bound, top and bottom, with this yellow ribbon; then the dress is to be gathered on the belt and a pocket put in. Ah, mon Dieu! look,—this ribbon is to go on the waist, whichever way as pleases mademoiselle. These buttons also are to be sewed on. If mademoiselle cannot make the button-holes, mon Dieu! I must sew them myself."

"And you are going to bother yourself with that dress, Marguerite Dare?" Mabel exclaimed, energetically, as Celeste disappeared, leaving a pyramidal confusion of yellow ribbon, organdy, and buttons on the bed. "Oh, what a Christian you are! and how heartily I abominate you for being such a Christian!"

"I must pay my board," I answered, laughing at her.

Through the long, gloomy day,—gloomy without, but cheery and unusually bright within,—Mabel and I sat together, I sewing continuously, and she reading aloud extracts from the "Lucile" of Owen Meredith and scraps from Lowell and Longfellow, while Archie, brought in by Barry, lay cosily on my bed, looking very peaceful and happy. At first Archie had been inclined to resent all advances made by Mabel to win his favor, resisting all her little efforts to conciliate him, her sweet smiles and loving ways, until latterly he seemed to have grown more yielding, less nervous, when approached by her to open his heart to her affection, little by little. "She's got music in her voice, Goldy," he said, one day; "it sings to me whenever she speaks; it's almost as fine as my concertina." And after this, the music in her voice had quite conquered his reserve. Instead of going down-stairs to luncheon, Barry brought ours up to us on a tray, so that Mabel, Archie, and I had quite a little frolic all by ourselves, a nicer frolic than we had had for a very long time. We were very, very happy. Ah, it was such a long, dreary while before I again enjoyed a thoroughly happy day, that now it pleases me to linger over its hours, to finger its memories tenderly with my pen, until I seem to hear the rain beating tearfully on the window-panes, the sound of the wind blustering in the chimneys, the roar of the waves fighting the rocks, and the music of Archie's childish voice thrilling through all! As the gloom deepened, while the skies grew darker and darker, and the sea lashed itself on the rocks in a white fury, the swallows lay quietly in their nests under the eaves, and the patter of the rain sounded chilly and monotonous, my heart grew only the more strangely glad. I sewed, I laughed, I said silly things, I teased Mabel, astonished Barry, and delighted Archie,—my whole heart seemed brimming over with this exquisite sense of excitement. As the day wore away, and the maize-colored organdy rapidly approached a very successful completion, the rain began to grow fainter in sound and less gusty, the wind ceased to howl so continuously down the chimneys, and about six o'clock, just as we began dressing for dinner, the clouds in the west, which all day had lain there in huge banks of

gloom, grew thinner, more feathery, until, when sunset time came, a little rim of yellow shimmered spectrally along the horizon.

"The wind'll change by-and-by, and it'll be pleasant enough in the morning," Barry said, comfortingly, as Mabel and I were speculating on the chances of the morrow's being a pleasant day, and the probability of a picnic; "I'll do up your white muslin this evening in time for you to wear it to-morrow, Miss Marguerite, for it's sure to be pleasant." And we had taken heart at the confident tone of her voice.

I could not help feeling interested in this proposed picnic, eager to have it take place on the morrow, and to be myself a participant in its pleasures. I was teased with a queer anxiety to have the morrow arrive; I dreaded to think that the following week would find Bonnie Venture and the cottage almost entirely deserted, to realize the approaching departure of Mabel, the quiet so certain to supersede this continual excitement of pleasure, in which, although hitherto debarred the privilege of joining, I had learned unconsciously to sympathize. Yesterday had been so new, so sweet,—so sweet,—what would the morrow bring forth?

"Marguerite," said my Cousin Valerie, as on my way down-stairs to dinner I met her in the upper hall just coming out of her own room; "Marguerite," she repeated, and then stopped short. I had also stopped at the sound of my name, and looked back at her; now she came quite close to me and essayed to detain me by laying her hand on my arm in such a pretty, hesitating way that made me wonder what was coming next. "Don't look at me with those big eyes," she cried, laughing nervously, half supplicatingly; "they quite frighten me,—they are so big and beautiful; they put me in mind of 'Oh, grandmamma, what big eyes you've got!' I never could tell you anything if you looked at me; you would have to turn your head away. I have got something to tell you, Cousin Marguerite." She had decided to lay her hand on my arm now, and to come close to me—so close that her beautiful yellow hair lay against my shoulder. "You're strong and sympathetic, Marguerite," she went on, softly; "you see,

I have studied you when you did not know. You would give any one good advice—such good advice as I am sadly in need of to-night." Then she stopped short again, in her pretty, nervous way, and put both her hands on mine; "I want you to help me, Marguerite."

She had taken me quite by surprise; I suppose, in consequence, I must have acted very awkwardly and in a discouraging manner; but I could not help it; for this was the first time she had ever appealed to my sympathies, or, indeed, shown the slightest desire to have me enlist them in her behalf; so now I was astonished, somewhat apprehensive, and speechless with wonder, all at once.

"Won't you speak, Cousin Marguerite?"

"I don't know what to say."

"Say that you care for me just a little, only a little, if you can't care for me more—enough to feel interested in my happiness."

"I do care for you enough to feel interested in your happiness," I said.

The rim of yellow shimmering low down in the western heavens was very bright now, brighter in contrast with the dull clouds floating swiftly across the zenith, and the sun, bidding the world a good-night, seemed to sweep the hills and meadows with his golden lashes ere he closed his eyes in sleep, laying them for one moment among the yellow luxuriance of my cousin's hair. She was standing close to me, as close as she could get, between my eyes and the light of the window beyond, through which the glinting rays came, until her head seemed to lie against the horizon in a transfiguration, a halo of broken sunset-arrows, making her eyes grow soft, the violet tinge dark with feeling, and her whole face wistful with pleadings for a fuller sympathy.

"Please don't be cold; I can stand anything but that; it freezes the words on my lips, and the warmth in my heart. Please don't be cold, Cousin Marguerite."

"I will try and not be cold," I answered, succeeding in my efforts to smile at her. "I will try and be every thing you want me to be."

"How silly I am to keep you standing here, when

dinner is ready, and we can talk so much better by-and-by. It has been such a dreadfully dismal day, and I have been feeding on myself, am gorged with stupidity in consequence; will you come up into my room with me after dinner and talk to me? I am so much in need of a good, sensible talk, and you are the only one who can give it to me."

Then I promised to give her all the sensible talk I was capable of giving, and after that, we went down-stairs to dinner. I do not remember very distinctly anything that passed at the dinner-table; I only have a dim recollection of a most miserable appetite, of Murray Dare's solicitude in my behalf, to which I submitted very passively, and of encountering my Cousin Valerie's eyes, as often as I looked up from my own plate, fastened thoughtfully on my face.

"Am I selfish to intrude my confidences on you?" she said, gently, as, dinner over, and going up-stairs once more, she joined me. "Don't let me trouble you, Marguerite, if you would rather I should not; you are not well; you look worried yourself."

When she said that, half caressingly, half deprecatingly, I felt stung into a quick nervousness of answer. "I am not worried at all, neither are you selfish in seeking my sympathy, if you have need of it; I am very willing to give it to you."

By this time we had reached the upper hall, and she had half led me to the door of her room.

"Will you come in?" she asked, eagerly; and I went in. It was dark now; the clouds had shut over the western horizon long ago, and the mists, thick and damp, almost like rain, hid the lawn completely and shrouded the cedar-trees in gloom.

"Let us sit here by the window in the dark," said my Cousin Valerie: "you shall have the big arm-chair and I this ottoman. Isn't it a gloomy evening?—a little Tennysonian, I think; I could easily imagine myself to be Mariana." Then, in a slightly tremulous voice, she repeated the verse beginning, "After the flitting of the bats."

There was a pause after that, a long, dreary pause,

in which the wind shook the window-panes a little, and the echoes of Mariana's heart-broken lament seemed to go creeping stealthily through the room and my heart at the same time.

"I wonder at myself for having indulged in such a long quotation," she said at length, with a little laugh which seemed to cut through the gloom to my ears like a knife. "I don't care anything for poetry,—indeed, I think it a bore; I regret sometimes my inability to appreciate it, for Royal is fond of such things, you know. He said yesterday you were very sympathetic about poetry and music; I only wish I was, for his sake." She had crept now from her ottoman, and, kneeling close to my side, had put her arms about my waist. "Marguerite," she whispered, softly, "I am so happy!" Her face, upraised to mine, looked weird and almost ghastly in the spectral gloom; her voice, sweetly pleading for my sympathy, sounded almost sharp in my ears, as I sat there quietly, so quietly that I could hear the beats of my heart, heavy with a subtle pain, and with the words of answer choking in my throat. She waited a little while, as though anticipating a reply; when she found me disinclined to vouchsafe one, she went on presently, turning her head to look thoughtfully out the window, and my eyes, following hers out wearily, saw a dead white blank of mist only. "I have so longed for sympathy to-day, to open my heart to some one who could appreciate its happiness with me! I don't know how to talk sentimentally, or to express myself well, when I feel as deeply as I do to-night, and perhaps I would only weary you if I should try to talk in this way to you; but I can tell you, in words which I know you will understand, that although I may always have seemed heartless and self-sufficient to you,—Royal says I appear so to everybody who judges me by the surface,—yet I am not wholly so in reality; my heart is very soft underneath." There was another pause, wherein the wind shook the window-panes again and again, and, beating around the corners of the cottage, whistling its wild music, took up the refrain of her voice shrilly. "Gertrude isn't sympathetic, you know, nor mamma; they are very much alike, I think,

in this, as in a great many other things," she went on, gravely. "I have been educated in the same school, under the same lash of conventionalism, and perhaps I have taken more readily to the rules of their ethics and made myself to fit more closely in their moulds than is pardonable; sometimes, when I think about this and worry at my own worldliness, I comfort myself with the conviction that the mould, although shaping the outside of my life, and hardening its edges, hasn't affected the middle of the putty much; often it feels very soft, and is malleable, as the hearts of all human putties ought to be. Am I talking tiresomely to you and in a silly way? you make me, somehow, open all my heart, whether I will or no; I have never talked to any one but you and Royal in this way; he told me yesterday that if I was ever in trouble I must go to you, for he knew you would prove a sincere friend through all necessities."

Then, before I knew it, she had lifted her arms, put them about my neck, and, drawing my face down to hers, kissed it. Her kiss scorched my cheek through and through, her arms about my neck choked and worried me, but I could not help myself; I was as weak as a child to-night. "You don't answer me," she said, regretfully; "here I have been talking to you steadily for the last ten minutes, while you haven't said a single word." She drew slightly away from me as she spoke, in a little, hurt way, which opened my lips.

"I am listening to you," I answered, quietly; "I came here for that. The best listeners can't talk much, you know; I have heard every word you have uttered. I am glad you are happy, and that you are not as heartless as I have judged you."

"You are solemn," she said, raising herself suddenly from her knees. "I am going to light a candle and show you what I brought you in here to see. Will you remember," she added, more softly, bending down and laying her hand on my shoulder, "that to you only I show it? I trust you implicitly; you have drawn my confidence to you in a strange, magnetic way which I cannot understand at all. After I have shown you this—my showing it to you is a pledge of friendship, Cousin Marguerite—

we must be better friends. We have not been friends heretofore,—I realize it as much as you do. We never should be friends if I was thoroughly worldly and if I did not have a soft spot in my putty somewhere, for such women as you are only born to be friends in need,—the friends indeed. We must be friends henceforth, you and I, for I need you." Saying this, she kissed me again. Somehow, this time her words had touched my heart a little, and her kiss did not scorch.

While she hunted for a match to light the candle, I sat with my face turned out to the mist and black skies, hungrily. In that brief moment how I lamented that the day was past and the night come! the dear, happy day past forever, and the night sure to stay! If I could only go out in the cold wind a little while, to have it still the feverish regret of my heart, consequent upon this sudden annihilation of all my light-heartedness, which had so brightened the hours since morning; this nervousness, which would persist in making me faint and thirsty! How cool the mist looked! how it would shroud my fever in, in its white embrace, if I could only go out where it was, instead of sitting here behind these shivering window-panes, with the chilly wind creeping in underneath! What had she to show me? Was it something to make my heart tremble and my thoughts unsteady? Was she hunting for a knife to plunge into my heart,—a cold something, which would catch hold of my hope and crush it,—my sweet little hope, which had lain on my heart all day? I must hide it from her, I must shut an iron door over its coffin, that at least she should not crush it knowingly!

"I have lit the candle, Cousin Marguerite," said my Cousin Valerie's voice, "and the something I have to show you is here. You must not look out that dismal window any longer; it will make you solemn, and I don't want you to be solemn. Can you see to read there?"

"Yes, very nicely; leave the candle there, please; it hurts my eyes. I will try and not be solemn."

"You must be faithful; you must not betray my confidence; I trust you implicitly." Then she gave a letter



into my hands, a letter written in General Farquhar's handwriting, and which read thus,—

"I have been thinking and dreaming about it all night, Valerie, and still the reality refuses to shape itself, to develop its sweetness entirely. You are to be my wife,—my own little wife,—to love, to love,—ah, how full of taste these words are!—to love for ever and ever, with my whole devotion and all my hopes of heaven centered in you! Are those last words blasphemous? am I growing wild and wicked in my happiness? If your lips condemn me, your rebuke must incite your hands to the endeavor to mould my heart anew. I will promise to be very pliant, very malleable, in your hands a very child. The unconsciousness of your mother to our love is amusing, also the blindness of all others to its existence,—all save Throckmorton, who suspects it, who would love you, I know, if I did not! We must not be too premature in disclosing our love to others; we can afford to wait for the happiness by-and-by; our To-day happiness is so great! Moses, after his forty years of patient tribulations, died in full sight of the promised land; Jacob served seven years and was mocked. You will not let Fate either kill or mock me, will you, my darling? I am jealous of this paper, which will so soon touch your hands; of my own words, written here in meager ink, which will meet your eyes sooner than my lips may! I said my prayers last night, for the first time in many years. I asked God to keep you tenderly in his hands until the hour should come when I might claim you from them. I will see you either to-day some time or this evening; I send this, in the mean time, to you as a 'good-morning.' I love you passionately, wholly,—so passionately and wholly that the words seem weak!

"ROYAL."

The paper was stamped with the Farquhar coat-of-arms and the Farquhar motto, "*Noli me tangere.*" "Thursday" was written hastily beneath.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

SINCE we came to Wickoff's Ledge, I had often seen little notes, in General Farquhar's handwriting, sent almost daily to the cottage, relative to some proposed picnic or boating-party; so now, despite the fact of this one's having been written hastily, as though under the influence of an excitement, yet I readily recognized the handwriting as his. My Cousin Valerie, while I read it, stood just a little way from me, leaning against her pretty dressing-table,—scattered with a profusion of perfume-caskets, delicate mouchoir- and glove-cases, and on which the candle burned unsteadily,—with her hand supporting her chin, and her eyes fixed thoughtfully on my face. I had taken the paper very calmly from her hand, and read the greater portion of its contents with absolute composure outwardly,—very quietly, until I came to those last few lines; then a mist, as though some from without had crept in to blind me, swam dizzily before my eyes, rendering everything else a blur, and I felt my hand tremble a little, my lips grow parched and white.

"See how I have crumpled it," she said, softly, as I gave the letter back into her hands without a word. "I have read it so many times to-day since I received it, over and over again; and I am not even tired of it yet." Then, before she laid it away out of sight, she kissed it once or twice passionately.

"Marguerite,"—and she crept once more to the ottoman at my feet, the fitful light of the candle flickering and burnishing into stray gleams of gold her hair knotted so simply high up on her perfectly-shaped head, and the black dress making her face look a little wan in its loveliness, as though tired with much feeling,—"*I am almost frightened at Royal's intense love; a woman can't help being frightened at such a big, strong love, especially when she knows herself to be not capable of returning it entirely. Marguerite, do you think I love Royal well*

enough to marry him?" She had folded her arms now, her pretty, plump, white arms, and laid them on my knees; her face was upturned to mine, and her eyes, so soft, so wistful and dark with feeling, watched mine for an answer beseechingly. "You know I am so frivolous sometimes," she added; "I don't know whether I am sincere; and it would be dreadful to marry Royal, who is so exacting and desperate, if I did not love him enough."

"It would be a sin to marry him if you did not love him; (ah, how, by-and-by, those words came back to me with an accusing significance!) he would be worse off than either Moses or Jacob. He warns you against that, remember, Valerie; you would not—you could not—be so cruel; you must love him, you can't help it, when he loves you so dearly."

"It frightens me, this desperateness of his,—how strange the flickering of the candle-light makes you look, Cousin Marguerite!—when he says all his hopes of heaven are centered in me, for I'm nothing but putty, you know, and putty isn't very heavenly in its composition. I know my own faults, and I know Royal's; it would be dreadful to have him find mine out."

The candle flickered its uncertain light very ghostily on the white muslin of the curtains, on the walls and straw carpet; the gloom outside was black and impenetrable now, even the mist having slunk away from the window, driven by the wind; still I turned my face toward it thirstily, wishing I was free to follow it out.

"I am weary, weary,  
I would that I were dead!"—

crept into my thoughts unrebuked, as the weight of this moment's cross seemed greater than I could bear. I felt her eyes, her soft, beseeching eyes, scorching their inquiries into mine subtly, her lips working a sharp pain through the pride and strength of my heart. If I might only go away, away from these cruelties, where I might be quieted, close my eyes to her happy face, my ears to her voice, with the sweetness of another's love intensifying and blessing them. It was so nice and cool outside,

so strengthening, so voiceless except of the wind, ah,—if I might only go!

"I was fond of Paul," she continued her monologue, gravely and earnestly, "my first husband, you know; he was very kind and gentle to me always, but I did not love him as I could love Royal if I tried, as I do love Royal now without trying. Don't look at me so reproachfully, so strangely, Cousin Marguerite, for I love him, I tell you. Paul wasn't so willful as Royal, or so exacting. I think I like willful and exacting people the best." Thus she wandered on during the next five minutes, occasionally interrupting herself to appeal helplessly to me upon finding herself involved in some tangle of self-analysis.

Very quietly I sat and listened to it all resolutely, with my eyes turned from the gloom outside,—her pretty self-condemnations, her little bursts of happy love confessed, her bewildered attempts to measure the strength and magnitude of her lover's passion, and her fears lest she should allow herself to marry him without loving him as much as he loved her.

"How selfish I am, and how tired you must be, listening to my foolishness, when I brought you up here for a sensible talk!" she cried, at length, awakening suddenly to a consciousness of this other life, just as a rap sounded at the door, which, opening in obedience to her voice, showed Murray the waiter standing on its threshold.

"General Farquhar was below," he announced, "with all the other gentlemen from Bonnie Venture, inquiring for Mrs. Hoffman and the young ladies."

"How nice of Royal to come down to see me such a disagreeable night!" Valerie said, springing up as Murray closed the door again, and rushing immediately to her toilet-table, where she gave her hair a few preliminary pulls and twists. "You will go down with me, Marguerite?"

"No, not quite yet; I shall be busy for a little while; you may see me wandering down by-and-by."

"Say you haven't been bored, Cousin Marguerite," she exclaimed, quickly turning round, to face me, where I stood just behind her, watching the lovely reflection in the depths of the mirror, the Greuze face looking to-night

a little pale and nervous, all the lovelier in my eyes by reason of this very pallor, at the same time putting her hands tenderly in mine,—“you have been so good and patient, better and more patient than I could ever be listening to the sillinesses of other people. You won't think I am a goose, after I have gone down-stairs?”

“With all my heart I will promise you that,” I answered, smiling now, softened at the almost childish appeal, I felt so much older than she, as we stood there together,—she, bright, blessed, happy,—I, pale, weary, hopeless. “I am pleased to think you are so happy, Cousin Valerie, and better pleased at your having shown me your heart,—your little, warm, hidden heart, that you have been starving so long.” Then, silenced by a queer choking in my throat, I bent down, and kissed the beautiful, thoughtful face.

“And you will never betray my confidence?” she said, earnestly, very earnestly, with her eyes grown big, and her hands clasping mine impressively; “you won't tell mamma or Gertrude, or even mention it to any one else, until I tell you you may? I know you won't, so you needn't promise, you are so true and strong,” returning my kiss fervently.

She was just about to open the door, I to return to Archie, she to go to her lover,—her hand was on the knob, and the door was drawn already partially open,—when, actuated by a strange, quick impulse, I laid my hand detainingly on her arm.

“Valerie,” I whispered,—my voice sounded queer even to myself,—then I stopped short, and drew away my hand as quickly as I had before laid it on her arm.

“How you frightened me!” she cried, nervously drawing back. “Why, Marguerite, your face is very strange to-night, so strange, as though you had been shown a ghost. What is it? Let me help you, as you have helped me!”

“I only wanted to ask you a question,” I replied, laughing slightly, but in a way which I saw shocked her, a laugh which I tried to render indifferent, but which aroused the echoes of the room sharply,—“and I don't know how to ask it.”

“What is it?” she exclaimed, apprehensively.

“It is this,” I said, quietly, steadied myself now by the very evident nervousness expressed both in her voice and manner; “will you tell me if four or five years ago you were not well acquainted with Cecil Throckmorton,—before he went to the war, I mean?”

When I said that, she leaned against the door, which shut with a sharp click, looking as though she had been struck, all the color gone out of her face, all the life out of her eyes, leaving in them only a dead blank of despair. There was no further need for words of proof; I knew then, as well as though her lips had told me, her share in the long-ago wreck of Cecil Throckmorton's peace.

We stood there a little while, staring straight into each other's faces, a hunted, defiant look growing deeper and deeper in the expression of her wide-open eyes, her lips white and parted as mine had been awhile since, her hands working nervously together.

“What do you know?” she whispered, by-and-by, in a short, half-gasping way, repeating it eagerly. “What do you know?”

“Nothing,” I answered, pitying her agitation, her sudden despair, this annihilation of all her former brightness, and condemning myself for my heartlessness in so cruelly afflicting her with the ghost of her forgotten sin. “I know nothing; I only surmised the existence of a former acquaintance between you,—that was all; he has never told me a word about it, he nor any one else.”

When I said that rapidly, eager to atone for my cruelty, her face changed as I spoke, and a short, rattling, uncouth laugh burst from her lips. “What an ogress you are!” she cried, giving me a playful shake, “with your big, owl eyes and white face! This room is awfully dull, and with you in it it's ghostly. I have been nervous all day, fearfully nervous, seeing and hearing all sorts of strange things; it's no wonder you upset me, you grabbed me so unexpectedly; it was enough to make any one act foolish. I will go down-stairs and tell Royal; he will scold you well for it, I am sure.” Then she opened the door and ran out into the hall, as though heartily glad to get out of the room.

"Come down as soon as you can, you ogress!" she called back to me, as she ran down-stairs. But I did not answer her; I only went to Archie's room, where I found him sleeping soundly, and Barry sitting in the dark by the window.

"He's sleeping as peaceful as an angel, miss," Barry whispered, as I entered. "Do you go down-stairs now and enjoy the evening like a Christian, instead of sticking up here, as you do night after night."

"No; I am not feeling well," I answered, wearily. "I wish you would go down, Barry, for awhile; it is dreary for you up here; I would rather stay alone. Have you finished doing up my muslin?"

"All but the ironing; I'll do that by-and-by. Miss Marguerite, it isn't natural-like for a young lady as you to like staying up here in the dark better than going down where your friends and the light is. You was cheery enough to-day, cracking your jokes, and better-spirited than I've seen you this many a day; you got sick, miss, all of a sudden."

By-and-by, after much remonstrance on her part and resolution on mine, I induced her to join the other servants in the kitchen below, telling her I really felt quite ill; would prefer remaining quietly alone by myself; that if I did not keep myself quiet to-night, in all probability I would be unable to go to the picnic with my cousins on the morrow; and this convincing argument had at length prevailed.

How somber it seemed, and how dreary, after she had left me alone, despite the lamp-light in her room across the entry, which cast its cheery gleams on the walls of Archie's room through the wide-open door! How quiet, how voiceless the night, broken only by the dull washing of the waves on the rocks, the wind shaking the window-panes a little now and then, and the sound of happy voices from the distant portion of the cottage! Sitting there in my desolation, how vividly I lived over again the past hour,—every word, every look of my Cousin Valerie, every sentence of that letter, the rightful heritage of her love, mocking my eyes in letters of fire! Why could I not flee away from these tormenting retro-

spections, these scorching memories, kissing my pride with such hot lips? escape from these fingers of pain, pinching my heart so cruelly? I was so weak, so weak to-night! It was the desolation of my own life, in comparison with her brightness of anticipation, my own ostracism from all the sweets of love, my hungry cravings for a fuller peace, mocked by her surfeited ones, which here, in my hour of weakness, hurt and worried me. She was so happy, so blessed, the child of fortune,—I, the orphan, the dependent, the outcast of sympathy, denied even a crust of the world's consolation! It was the general differences in our every-day fortunes that saddened me; the rich sunlight always showering itself so lavishly over and round about her, and which, passing me by, left me ever in shadow, mocking my chills of hope; that was all,—not the especial blessing which was now intensifying the bloom of her peace; this did not affect me one way or the other, thought I; I could not envy her that,—it was hers by right, hers by power of loveliness, hers because he had given it to her! I was leaning on the window-sill, with my face buried in my hands, forgetful of everything save my own wild thoughts, when Mabel came softly in and laid her hand on my shoulder.

"I thought I would find you here," she said. "I came up once before, but Barry told me she saw you going into Mrs. Hoffman's room. Barry promised to send you down as soon as she saw you. Why did you not come?"

"I did think of coming, but my head began to ache, so I sent Barry down into the kitchen, instead. It is very dull for her, sitting up here all the evening alone. If I keep quiet, my head doesn't ache so much."

"What ails your voice, Marguerite, and what is the matter with your head? What has your cousin been saying to you?"

"Nothing I can tell or that would interest you. Mabel, I want to go with you to the picnic to-morrow; Barry says it will be pleasant; she is weather-wise, you know; but if I don't keep quiet and go to bed early I shall be unable to do so. Please don't worry or tease me now, but go down-stairs,—there's a dear girl; when Barry comes up, I shall go to bed. Is Lorimer down-stairs?"

"Yes, and everybody has inquired for you, all save General Farquhar, who is besieged by Mrs. Hoffman in a corner. You are suffering, darling,—I wish I could help you; won't you let me sit here beside you if I will promise not to say a word?"

"No, you must go down-stairs. Go now, before you awaken Archie." Then she kissed me,—even her caress seemed to hurt and smother me,—hung about me lovingly a little, and went regretfully.

After she had gone, the silence seemed to grow denser and more appalling. Before she came, my unconsciousness to all outward influences had been great; her coming, her breaking in upon me so unexpectedly,—had quickened my senses to some life and more acute suffering. The same thirst which had so parched my lips and face while sitting in my cousin's room, listening to her confessions, while the candle-light flickered fitfully, showing the sweet pallor of her face, and lit up the violet darkness of her eyes into sparkles of joy, began here to assail me once more, strongly and cruelly. The sound of the wash of the salt waves on the rocks outside mocked me; the window-panes rattled in a horrible, monotonous way, causing my temples to throb nervously at each rattle, while the cold wind, stealing in underneath through little cracks here and there, stung me into a renewed thirst. I could not think again in here; the silence and the heat of the close room stifled and clamped my head in tightening bands of iron. Ah! if Barry would only come, that I might go out for a moment into the fresh night-air to cool my face in its damps, the fever of my thoughts in its mist, its sweet, cold mist, where I might hide me almost from myself!

When Barry came, by-and-by, she found me kneeling motionless at Archie's bedside, holding the child tightly clasped in my arms, my face pressed to his dreaming one, close and so eagerly; then, when she spoke to me, I did not answer her at first.

The wind was dying away in fitful gusts, the rain had ceased long ago, as I went softly down-stairs, out at the front door, and closed it softly after me. To my left as I stepped out on the piazza lay a broad light across its

floor, falling through the window of the library, where my cousins and their guests were seated, chatting and laughing together, with a wood-fire blazing cheerily on the hearth, and the window leading out on the piazza, and through which the lamp-light fell, drawn partially open. Standing just outside the window, in the shade, I could see each occupant of the library distinctly,—Murray Dare whispering to Beatrice Mortimer by yonder bookcase, Throckmorton playing cribbage with Mabel, Lorimer making-believe sentimental to Juliette Mortimer, seated on the divan, Mrs. Dare and Gertrude talking literature to Mr. Horton and Conyngham, close to the cribbage-board; while Valerie, standing quite near the window, was showing a picture of herself to General Farquhar. How happy she looked, and how softened!—with her lovely eyes looking up into his graver ones, and his down into hers smilingly, as all true lovers should look in their moments of happiness, thought I.

I did not stand there and torment myself long. I went past the window, round the corner of the cottage, off the piazza, across the lawn, to the path leading down to the beach. The ground was damp, but I did not care; the mist was cold, it settled my fever; the night-wind tasted good to me. Ah! how refreshing the break of the waves on the beach sounded, as I drew nearer and nearer to them! Their music was different from that of the breakers beating on the rocks at the cottage, sounding, when the wind drove them, so hoarse and vindictive. Here they came scrambling upon each other's backs, unseen now in the night, but playfully, as I knew, baptizing the beach round about in showers of fresh, crisp foam. I could not see the water far out at sea; the curtain of fog hung too low, too impenetrable, and the night was black. I could not see even the light, the mariner's beacon, shining across, nor the outlines of the islands lying near me; only a dark line at my feet and the wash of the waves showed that the sea was there.

The pebbles were wet, and the sand loose. I came at length to the big rock lying midway on the beach,—indeed, I nearly stumbled against it, as I went groping on, with nothing to guide me but my outstretched hands. The



tide was half-way out, breaking here on the outer base of the big rock in splashes of farewell. I did not get my feet wet, although I barely escaped it, as I climbed up the cold sides of the rock to seat myself on its top, a cosy shelf, where I rested, comfortable and content.

Upon leaving Archie's room I had thrown a shawl hastily about my shoulders; now I wrapped myself more securely in its folds, settling myself down on my damp seat, to think, to breathe the chilly air and get cold. Here, with the fever in my head growing easier, more convalesced, I was abler to think,—able to remember how Valerie had trembled at the sound of Cecil Throckmorton's name, how her face had changed when I betrayed my suspicions relative to an acquaintance having existed between them three or four years ago. While sitting within the close confines of Archie's room, with the window-panes rattling at me and the first effects of Valerie's confessions still heating the tenor of my reflections, I had forgotten this circumstance, or if not exactly forgotten, among the wilderness of more tormenting recollections it had refused to shape itself definitely to my bewildered eyes, until here, with the fever in my head lessening and the tension of my nerves relaxed, I was able to think it all over industriously during the five consecutive minutes subsequent to my settling myself on the rock, to the exclusion of all other thoughts.

Confirmed in my suspicions—so long entertained, yet scarcely expressed to myself—that in Valerie I knew the woman who had proved herself such a stumbling-block in Cecil Throckmorton's life, who had wrecked his faith in womankind and had left him a bankrupt in every hope, a very puppet in the hands of despair, I could not help letting a feeling of condemnation steal its ice through the heat of my sympathy for her in her new great happiness. True, his manhood, his nobility of purposes and soul, had in these intermediate phases of endurance, on the battle-field and elsewhere, been resurrected, phoenix-like, from their own ashes of woe, and she, Lethe-drunk, had shown me her heart to-night, her warm, palpitating heart, starved so long and unprofitably; and, remembering this, my heart whispered, perhaps 'twere better to

pray for her than to condemn; I knew not how great her own punishment had been; only God knew that! The look which so changed her face at the mention of his name and the suggested possibility of a former acquaintance between them, had been one of guilt,—a stare of guilt and defiance, which I had not failed to interpret to the extent of all possible significance. She had loved him in that forgotten life,—had loved him, sold herself, and betrayed him. I saw it all clearly now, as plainly as though her lips or his had confessed the same to me. How happy I felt in the assurance that in this later life his noble heart had outgrown all the weakness consequent upon her betrayal of him, that each day he could meet her, touch her hand, look into her eyes, without suffering a single pang of regret to show its trouble, that his victory was so signally complete over her falseness and the threatened death of his own soul! Did General Farquhar know of what had gone before between these two, his love and his friend? did he really believe, in his blindness of idolatry, if he did not love her, Throckmorton could? Were his eyes willfully shut to the slighting indifference betrayed in every tone of Throckmorton's voice, every expression of his manner, when addressed to her? Was she worthy of this great love so humbly laid at her feet, the devoted passion of such a strong man as General Farquhar?—he was strong, I knew, strong even in his cruelty sometimes. If to-morrow deprived of his wealth, his position, his glorious Bonnie Venture, would she not measure out to him the death of Moses or the mockery of Jacob? would she, could she be so cruel? was she the Lorelei of whom I dreamed last night? "How he loves her! how he loves her!" I whispered over and over again to myself,—“wholly and passionately, so wholly and passionately that the words seem weak;” then I hated myself for remembering these words so well. Daily slighted by my Cousin Valerie in many ways,—perhaps not intentionally, but thoughtlessly, and with much careless indifference,—why had she to-night chosen me, of all others, in whom to confide the secret of her successful love? Had she dared to think,—to think—There I stopped short,

whilst the plashing of the waves against the base of the rock on which I sat alone completed the sentence. The fog lay down close to the waves; the skies overhead were invisible; all around and above lay the impenetrable gloom; the wind had died away completely; the silence was only broken by the ringing of distant fog-bells, and the breaking of the waves round about. The cold chill of the fog was beginning to penetrate its damp through even the thick fold of my shawl; my hair was almost wet from its touch; my feet had begun to feel a little numb, warning me to return soon to the cottage, since a more dangerous malady awaited me in a longer embrace of this damp air than in the feverish disquiet of a mere night-dream,—when suddenly, as I aroused myself from my lethargy of will and body, I heard another sound, other than that of the waves washing on the beach, a sound growing every instant nearer and nearer, as of footsteps crunching the wet, pebbly sand. A strange, wild impulse to hide myself somewhere, to plunge into the sea and crawl under its waves for protection, agitated me as the footsteps came gradually nearer, a quick yearning to find myself once more safe beneath the shelter of the cottage-roof,—away from the fog, my defenselessness, and these footsteps so remorseless in their approach. I did not jump into the water or crawl under the waves for protection; I only sat quietly where I had sat during the past ten minutes, with my face turned to the sea, hoping that if I remained perfectly still I would be unmolested.

"How much longer do you intend remaining here?" said a voice, coming close to the rock. "It is ten o'clock, very damp and cold. Are you ready to go home?" The voice was familiar; I recognized its tone of quiet authority at once. I did not vouchsafe an answer, I did not move, but sat petrified into silence, scarcely able to breathe, my heart beat so fierce and hurriedly. "You must not seek to deceive either yourself or me," again spoke the voice, this time almost severely, as I thought; "the night-air is fraught with danger to you; you are taking your death. You must listen to me." Then he stretched up his hand and laid it on my arm. "What are you doing here?"

"Enjoying myself," I answered, concisely.

"Indeed! how warm and comfortable your voice sounds, and how equatorial in heat is your shawl! You are playing Lorelei under most advantageous circumstances. May I ask the nature of your song to-night?"

"At present I am inspired to sing,—

'Rock of ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in thee.'

"With the fog for a chaufferette, you are at once a fire of wit and an iceberg of retort. Will you go back with me to the cottage, or will you not?"

"Not with you, certainly. If you will go first, I will follow."

"And if you do not come down to me off that rock," he answered, as decisively, "I shall certainly come up after you."

When he said that,—fearing that he would almost immediately suit the action to his last words,—very noiselessly I slipped down the side of the rock opposite to where he stood, and favored by the darkness, escaped past him, across the beach. It was not long before I heard him coming after, his heavy footsteps crunching the pebbles as he came, seeming to mock the heavy beats of my heart, which choked my breath in my endeavors to elude him.

"These exploits are of that nature which

'Dazzle when the sun is down,  
And rob the world of rest,'"

he said, overtaking me very suddenly, just as I began fondly to imagine that I had given him the slip. "What is the matter with you to-night?" Saying this, he came very close to me, just in time to save me from breaking my neck over a rough, jagged stone. "Let me lead you," he added, taking forcible possession of my hand.

"I came here without breaking my head," I answered, withdrawing my hand and wrapping it defiantly within the folds of my shawl; "I can return unassisted in the same manner. You walk so close to me, I have my choice

between stumbling either over you or these ugly stones,—I prefer to break my head on the stones.”

“I beg your pardon,” he said.

I did not stumble again. It was dark, very dark, requiring all my caution to find the path leading from the beach up to the cottage grounds. At first, upon leaving the rock, I had walked very hastily, hoping to escape the vigilance of my companion; now, however, finding him disposed to allow me the privilege of pursuing my way unmolested by proffers of assistance or advice, I advanced more deliberately, and, in consequence, with more success. How sincerely I regretted, as I went groping on, hearing his footsteps echoing mine as he walked a little distance from my side, having again encountered him alone!—the foolishness of my impulses, that had betrayed me into such an exploit as this, the recompense of which was so much pain. How had he known of my being here, of my seat on that night-hidden rock? why had he dared to follow? Up the path leading from the beach to the higher ground, where I could see the cottage lights twinkling out here and there, I made my way, leaving behind me the black sea-fog, while overhead the clouds began to grow lighter somehow, as though the stars were trying to peep their faces through, and I could feel that the wind had changed from the east to the southwest. How happy the lights shining out from the cottage windows made my heart,—how sure of a speedy deliverance from this companionship, so voiceless yet felt, the attentions of this man, who no longer possessed the right to intrude them upon me. Nearer and nearer grew the cottage lights, eager and breathless my haste to once more gain their shelter, closer and closer the steps of my companion. In absolute silence had we come from the beach. However, just as we gained the opening in the stone wall through which the pathway led, and where, weeks before, he had stood aside on the evening of the yachting-party to allow me to pass,—with the level gleams of the dying moonlight transforming the haughtiness of his face into something like tenderness,—here, interposing himself directly in my path, he broke the silence between us for the first time. Behind him lay the cottage lights, on his

either side the stone wall, high and impassable. When he stopped, I also stopped, for he had come close to me, so close that he might have heard the vehement beats of my heart distinctly. At first he did not speak, but only stood directly in my path, barring my farther progress,—a silence so suggestive, so intense, that I became quickly alarmed, and endeavored to escape past him through the opening in the stone wall to the cottage beyond. As I groped for the stone wall with outstretched hands,—it was very dark,—he seized them both, and spoke.

“Marguerite, my poor little girl,” he said.

“How dare you?” I cried, under my breath, frightened at both his voice and the manner in which he held my hands,—“how dare you stop me in this way? Let me go!”

“How can I let you go, when you are miserable and in trouble?” he answered, in a low, stern voice, still holding my hands clasped in his. “It is asking too much. You must not be fierce or angry with me; you must let me comfort you. I saw you when you passed the window, your face looking white and troubled; I followed you as soon as I could. I could not let you stay out in the dark alone, so I went out into the dark too,” then there was a little pause,—“and I found you,” he added.

“You had no right to follow me, you have no right now to detain me. Will you allow me to pass? I am tired of standing here in the damp.”

“No, I will not let you go until you tell me,”—here he stopped abruptly, and sought to draw me even closer to him, “until you tell me——”

“You must let me go,” I cried, hastily interrupting him; “you must not detain me another instant. I insist upon your allowing me to pass. You are ungenerous to take advantage of me in this way. Have you ears? I insist upon your releasing my hands!” Finding him implacable, I tried to wrench my hands from his grasp: it was fighting against iron; I turned sick, faint, and angry all at once. “I hate you!” I said, under my breath.

He only answered by drawing me closer, closer,—I was a very puppet to his strength,—until his arms, his

big powerful arms, clasped me round, till his breath, hot, quick, uneven, was on my face, his lips near mine; then he whispered, "I dare you to say that again, my little Marguerite," and, as his arms grew tighter, his voice deepened into a hoarse tenderness; "you shall mock me no longer: I have you here in my arms, fast and close, so fast and close perhaps I will not let you go again. I will not let you hate me——"

He did not finish his sentence. I do not know how the strength was given me, but—in my agony, I felt sure God sent it—I was out of his arms in an instant, and on the other side of the stone wall. There I stopped suddenly. "I despise you, General Farquhar!" I cried, passionately, "with all my heart and soul I despise you!"

#### CHAPTER XLIV.

"HALLECK's wild rose, a daisy such as inspired Burns, Longfellow's fennel sprig, and Bryant's fringed gentian," Lorimer said, throwing himself lazily at my feet. "Put the rose in your hair, give the daisy to Miss Mabel. Miss Marguerite, your hair would have driven Titian mad."

"And given to all his inspirations the hydrophobia. Please don't spoil the day by apostrophizing my hair. Be inspired by Mrs. Hoffman's."

"The hair of Poppæa Sabina, of the Borgia, and of Helen," Colonel Throckmorton interposed. "Golden hair on a woman always reminds me that Judas was fair-haired;" then he looked across to where, with the sunlight showering its warm rays over and about her, sat my Cousin Valerie on an improvised moss seat, with General Farquhar lounging on the carpet of pine needles at her side.

"Yours is not the hair of Judas," Gertrude Dare said to him, in an undertone, "but rather that of the troubadours, of Tasso, Camoens, and Alfieri."

"And yours," he answered, smiling up at her very lazily, "according to Alexander Dumas, is *bleu à force d'être noir*." Miss Chauncey's is neither one thing nor the other; it is a tantalizing medianm."

"Gray," Mabel said, laughingly. "I caught Time by his forelock last night, and gave it a big pull, I was so vexed at finding a gray hair among my crimps."

"Of all dramas a woman can represent on earth, the most cruel of all is the first white hair seen. Why ought we to be lotus-eaters to-day of all others?"

"What an incongruity of inspiration, Mr. Lorimer!" exclaimed Mabel,—"*Jules Janin* and a conundrum! The answer to the latter is, because I before-locked Time last night, and intend to keep him under four locks all day." Then everybody applauded her, of course.

It was such a lovely day,—mellow, golden with languorous light, Claudish in its vistas of softened shades and dreamy repose, with a breeze rich of pine and cedar odors sweeping restlessly through the undergrowth of sweet fern, briars, and thyme. Overhead, the sun shone clear and bright, the sky seemed one vast sea of blue,—speckled here and there vagrantly with clouds; while around this forest glade, rock-strewn and moss-carpeted, stood armies of trees, larch, pine, and cedars, and underneath their branches the pine needles pranked the rocks and strewed the mossy turf abundantly. The morning had broken misty and cool; there had been during the night a slight frost,—not the first of the season, let it be said,—which had left the sward laced intricately with white dew, and all the rocks black with wet. Out of this frosty state, later in the morning, the sun resurrected a warmer world, dried the turf carefully, and made the air mellow and more sweet. The ride from the cottage to this forest nook had proved quite a long one,—five miles at least, past farm-lands brown with stubble, threaded by timid quail-coveys, where on the roadsides lay thick patches of chestnut-burs and acorns, and the wild pigeons hovered over, frightened from their repast,—by farm-houses, old-fashioned, sloping-roofed, and brown, where the well-sweep stood sentinel over hundreds of yellow pumpkins, smiling a prophetic welcoms to Thanks-

giving dinners,—through narrow woodland paths, richly balsamic of pine and cedar, the wagon-ruts built over by a growth of moss, that the carriage-wheels crushed rudely as we advanced,—sheltered and dusky, shadowed by the branches of the forest-trees. I had felt a decided touch of autumn's breath in the air,—had seen a semi-changing of the maple-trees and hickories, a fuller blush on their leaf-faces, the echoes of a chill in my own heart.

It was such a merry lunch, such a bright day, so many light hearts to enjoy it and so many appetizing things to eat,—game pies, deviled crabs, fresh sandwiches, *pâtés de foie gras*, olives, iced fruits, and *éclairs*, spread in a tempting profusion upon the mossy face of the rock,—while everybody seemed hungry, unromantically so, and desirous of forgetting, at least for the nonce, that this day was to be the last of the summer's merry-making, the last hours of happy sea-side life.

"It has been such a delightful summer!" Juliette Mortimer was the first to allude to their approaching departure from Wickoff's Ledge. "I know when I get back to Boston and settle down, regular humdrum fashion, I shall be abominably homesick; it will be so stupid after this picnic life,—this summer's *vie de Bohème*."

"You must all come down again next season," remarked General Farquhar, speaking for the first time, very slowly and distinctly; I did not look at him, although I knew he was looking and speaking to Valerie; "Bonnie Venture will be glad to welcome you; we will try to be children once more together."

"If we could only go to sleep, like Rip Van Winkle, and wake up in about an hour's time to find the winter past and summer just beginning again," my Cousin Valerie said, softly, "it would be so nice! I don't like to think of the long, cold winter. I hate anticipation; I live only in the present."

"With nothing before and nothing behind, with sleeves of the same, as Rabelais says. For my part, I like to have the past and the future all clothed."

"In victuals," added Murray Dare; "these are the only ducats that would ever buy your pound of flesh, Lorimer."

"Good for you, Dare! the brightest thing you've ventured yet,—you see, I like to patronize and encourage incipient genius. We are told that Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked. Look out for the traces of your wit, my friend, for if you pound Jeshurun's flesh too much,—driving him up all the hills that flesh is air to,—he might snap your traces even, and away he'd kick and go!"

"How far-fetched!" groaned Murray Dare, looking around for sympathy; "his bread-and-butter has gone to his head,—to his jaw-bone; isn't it a pity flesh is so weak?"

"What's bred in the bone won't go out of the flesh, you know," Lorimer replied, deprecatingly. "Please don't grind me into such a mince-meat of annihilation with your molars of sarcasm, Dare; the man all tattered and torn was clad in ermine, compared with me; grind the hand-organ of a crab instead, I beg of you." Then Lorimer hid his face behind a glass of sherry-cobbler, and everybody smiled.

"I wash my hands of you, Lorimer," Murray Dare exclaimed, in deep disgust. "Every man thinks his goose is a swan, and I suppose you think everything you say is wit. I don't think it is! so I wash my hands of you."

"Washing his hands with invisible soap  
In imperceptible water."

"Your sentiments do you honor: they are dumplings fat with excellence," Lorimer answered, smiling at his red face benignly. "With Coleridge's dinner-companion, I exclaim, 'Them's the jockeys for me!' No; let us shake hands, Dare, and cry peace!"

"A piece of my mind," exclaimed Valerie, energetically. "You shall have it: you are two of the most tiresomely quarreling men I ever saw. Do be quiet during the next half-hour, and let somebody else have a chance to talk."

"Requiescat in pace," Lorimer whispered, meekly, relapsing into another onslaught on the remains of a game pie.

"We have been visiting at Cedar Cottage six weeks,"



Beatrice Mortimer said, looking up into Murray Dare's face in her usual would-be piquant manner! "they have been the shortest six weeks I ever spent; I do hope, Valerie, you will ask us down again next summer."

"I hope mamma will take the cottage next season again, with all my heart," added Gertrude Dare. "I didn't anticipate quite such a nice summer."

"It has been one of the happiest I ever spent,—the happiest for a long, long while," Mrs. Hoffman said, softly. She was looking even more lovely than usual to-day, so lovely that I could scarcely keep my eyes off her face, sitting as she did now, just where the shade of the trees softened the brilliancy of her complexion, and with stray gleams of sunlight powdering their gold into the thick masses of her hair,—so fair, so delicately beautiful, that my eyes and heart ached as I looked. "I love the sea-air so dearly; it is my elixir vitæ; I am always more myself when in it."

"In memoriam," here observed the voice of Colonel Throckmorton, very deliberately.

When he spoke, I was looking at Valerie, hungrily watching the varying changes of her expressive face, how a subtler expression transformed the careless insouciance of her eyes and lips into one of hasty annoyance and ill-concealed confusion. He was not looking at her as he spoke, only peeling a peach very industriously for Mabel Chauncey; but I saw her eyes, her lovely, violet eyes, seek his eagerly and deprecatingly, until, as though magnetized, he raised his slowly to meet hers, for one instant, so coolly, so deliberately, that she grew slightly pale, even to her lips.

"I don't see why it cannot always be summer," she began again.

But Colonel Throckmorton, leaning now on one elbow, looking past Mabel and General Farquhar to where she sat at the corner of the rock, on General Farquhar's right hand, interrupted her. "Don't you remember what De Musset wrote?—'Two destroying angels sweet and cruel walk invisible at her side: they are voluptuousness and death.' Summer is a *petit-souper*, where strange dishes are served; everybody knows that a *petit-souper* doesn't

agree with the digestive organs of Rizzios and Mark Antonys: the Marie Stuart of Schiller and Alfieri is a different person from the Semiramis of Chastelar." Then he smiled slightly at her, and shook his head.

For the first time that morning, when Throckmorton said this, General Farquhar, who had confined his attentions exclusively to Mrs. Hoffman, scarcely vouchsafing a look or a smile to any one else, here began to look amused; and I saw his dark, proud face light up as he encountered Throckmorton's eyes, a strange, intense look of amusement, which seemed to annoy Throckmorton. Only one instant did I watch his face, however, and that hastily, dreading to see him turn his eyes once more tenderly to the face of his betrothed. How I hated myself, as I sat there, frozen into a state of quiet self-possession outwardly, forcing myself to eat and be merry, my lips to utter thoughtless words and to wreath themselves in lying smiles, while the warm sunlight touched my cold face as though beseechingly, and tried to force some of its heat into the repellant recesses of my heart, for remembering, for daring to remember, how his arms had been about me last night, his lips near mine, his traitorous, mocking lips, so cruel in their power! All night long, while the fingers of the mist still seemed to clasp my hot heart round and round, and I could feel the foggy night-air beating its fever in my pulses, through each hour of the long, sleepless night, and the breaking of the day when the world had burst forth from its chrysalis state of fog into a grand resurrection of sunshine, while its fresh face seemed in a language of supplication to beg me to forget all unhappinesses and to drown my pangs in the sparkling cup of the present,—my heart had been heavy with bitterness, senseless almost with its weight of pain. All night long, my stung pride murdering each effort to sleep as soon as born, I kept continually crying to myself, Why had he dared to so molest and offend me? by what right had he dared to follow me, to thrust his companionship upon me, to insult me, to think I would suffer him to do all this passively and without resistance? I, who always so invariably had resented his advances, eager to make

apparent to him my deprecation of them,—could he not see that I hated him?—yes, I felt now that I hated him with all my heart,—was he willfully blind to the expressions of my aversion?

That morning upon awakening and finding it to be just the best day imaginable for a picnic—bright, exhilarating, and warm despite the dampness of the ground, which everybody said would be thoroughly dried by noon—each occupant of Cedar Cottage had decided that the picnic must and should take place, I being as eager as the rest to spend the day in the woods—to face this *man once more, my Cousin Valerie's lover, and show him conclusively, and without fear of any possible misapprehension on his part, that instead of deigning to remember his ungenerosities of the evening previous, with all my heart I ignored both him and them.* That this would be the better course to pursue to the strengthening of my own pride, and to the utter annihilation of any idea he might entertain relative to my attaching an undue and mistaken importance to either his words or manner of tenderness, I felt assured. I would make plain to him, by a quietly indifferent demeanor, a dignified sense of his impropriety, a knowledge of his love for my cousin, a desire in future to ignore any similar advance he might make. If I remained at home he might be led to imagine me deceived, and brooding wistfully over these evidences of a preference, these daring professions of a lying tenderness, so offensive to my pride; possibly he might be tempted to pity me, to a confession of his momentary tenderness, poured remorsefully into the ear of my Cousin Valerie, who, listening and forgiving him, would add the measure of her pity to his—a bitterness of reflection which stung me into a quick decision to face him at once and brave it out.

"Marguerite," Mabel said, as the carriages were waiting at the door, and she and I were going down-stairs together to join the remainder of the party, preparatory to starting on the picnic, "before the day is over, mark my words, you will be the victim of a headache; your face is so feverish, and your eyes so bright. You are either very happy or very miserable—which is it, dear?"

Then, in answer, I told her that my headache had already begun, but I hoped the drive and a few hours spent in the woods would serve to dissipate it. "As to my being unhappy," I added, trying to laugh lightly, "that is all *fol-de-rol*. You know I have nothing to be unhappy about but the thought of your leaving me so soon, you silly, dear little girl." But Mabel would look wise, and would shake her head.

I should not have gone to the picnic—despite this intense desire of mine to show General Farquhar how sincerely I disliked him, this gnawing anxiety lest from the fact of my remaining at home—not an unusual thing for me to do, but which to-day I was eager to avoid—he might adduce an acknowledgment on my part that I knew myself to be weak, as well in my own eyes as his—if Archie had not been especially well and comfortable. The very first remark Barry made that morning to me was to the effect she had not seen Archie so well as he had been during the past week—so free from all suffering, so happily peaceful in his thoughts, blessed with such a good appetite and strength; and Archie himself had urged my going with my cousins, eagerly telling me it would make him very unhappy to have me stay at home, to feel it was he who had spoiled my pleasure. So, eased in my mind regarding his comfort, and encouraged in my own desire by both Barry and Mabel, I decided to go.

The ride through the country roads, and finally into the cool shade of the forest, seemed at first to ease my head of many of its troubles; but the alleviation of the pain had proved short; upon alighting from the carriage the fever had returned in even greater force, until its pangs had compelled me to seat myself quietly a little apart from the group with whose conversation this chapter opens.

"I know you are suffering, Miss Marguerite," Colonel Throckmorton said, sympathetically, following me, as, luncheon demolished, Mabel, Lorimer, and I wandered away from the rest of the party, across the glade to where moss-covered logs formed quite a comfortable row of seats, under the shade of the pine branches lying thick

and cool. "You are deathly pale; your face changes so, as though you were fighting a battle with yourself continually. It was bright with color a little while ago. Tell me, won't you, about your trouble?" He was bending down, in his half-tender way, and trying to look into my face, so I turned it toward him quietly, trying to smile at him.

"Nothing but a headache," I said.

"A very first-class headache, then," he answered, shaking his head at me very gravely; "a slight pain wouldn't give you that strained, suffering look about your eyes. Come with me, little friend, and let me bathe your head; there is a fine, cool brook here, just behind this knoll,—not out of sight," he added, quickly, and laughing a little, as I drew back involuntarily, "but where Mrs. Dare can see us plainly and matronize you with her eyes to her heart's content."

Then, leaving Lorimer and Mabel to seat themselves and sentimentalize on the moss-covered logs, I allowed Cecil Throckmorton to lead me passively to a rock-strewn nook, carpeted with moss rugs, green-tendriled and deep, where the brook came dashing noisily along, flinging its waters over the miniature dams impetuously.

"It makes me thirsty to look at it," I said, seating myself on a rock on the bank of the brook, in full view of Mrs. Dare. "You brought me here to be tantalized."

"I brought you here to be cured. You are very feverish," he answered, throwing himself on the moss rug at my feet. "Give me your handkerchief, that I may quench the thirst of your eyes."

When I gave it to him, he leaned over to where the brook-waves ran in a deep, sheltered pool, and wetted the handkerchief thoroughly. I had not realized how fearfully my head had been aching, until now, as he gave me back the handkerchief and I began to bathe my hot temples with it, the cold touch of its wet folds seemed to startle me into a vivid sense of what I had before unconsciously suffered in proportion to this relief. A long while I sat there, Cecil Throckmorton lying among the mosses at my feet, his face supported by his hand, his eyes watching my face, the sunlight flickering through the branches

above, falling on his fair head, softening the careless expression of his face into something like interest, only shifting his attitude ever and anon, to take the handkerchief from my hands gently, to wet its folds anew. This in full sight of Gertrude's jealous eyes and Mrs. Dare's condemning ones. If I had not been suffering so much, really suffering, for the strain this day on my nerves had been great, I would have given more thought to this untoward circumstance, have endeavored to avoid this tête-à-tête and to refuge myself from all possibilities of suspicion under the protection of Mrs. Dare's wing; but in this moment of almost blind suffering, of pangs and throbbing temples, I seemed to forget my usual caution, to long to stay here alone with this man, whose sympathizing eyes and gentle attentions served to so alleviate my pain. It was such a relief, cried my weary heart, to be away for a little while at least from the sunshine of Valerie's happy eyes, or the more searching ones of her lover, to feel the tension of my nerves relaxed from their long strain in proportion to my isolation from them, to allay the fever of both my head and heart in the cool quiet of this retreat.

"It is doing you good," Cecil Throckmorton said, after a long silence, only broken by the noise of the brook, and the voices of our companions laughing and chatting together where Lorimer, seated on the logs, read aloud from some book, the comicalities of which seemed to excite the risibilities of the listeners. "I think I could thoroughly cure you in half an hour."

"It has been already half an hour," I answered, smiling at him,—"half an hour too long. We ought to go and listen to Lorimer."

"No, we ought to stay rather and listen to the brook: it sings the very same words that Tennyson's brook sings. Yonder is his Talking Oak, nearer me his Margaret."

"Still nearer his Sir Galahad." When I said that, he was looking up into my face, his eyes and lips smiling at me. I saw them change subtly.

"I am not made of the Sir Galahad flesh and blood," he answered, shaking his head; "my quest of the Holy Grail is more worldly in its nature. Let me wet your hand-

kerchief again. How quiet the woods are to-day," he added, by-and-by, "and how purely fresh the breeze! Do you see the maple-leaves yonder? they are beginning to blush; and the oak-leaves too. I think autumn about the pleasantest season of the year to spend in the country."

"I love to see the leaves turn, although I hate to have summer go by so quickly; I like the warm weather better. Are you going to leave Bonnie Venture on Monday, with Mr. Lorimer and the rest?"

"No; Farquhar wants me to remain with him yet a few weeks longer. You don't know, Miss Marguerite, how nice it is to settle down in such a delightfully country place as this, after three years spent at the war. Farquhar was brought up at Bonnie Venture, you know, or rather at the Cottage where his mother died a year or two since, so it is home to him, and he can't help feeling contented. We talk of going abroad together by-and-by; we were abroad, both of us, several years ago."

"You have known him a great many years, haven't you? They say constant association makes people resemble each other. If you were not so light-complexioned, or General Farquhar so dark, you would look very like one another; you have the same style of features and figure."

"Mine is the English type—his more the pure American. How I wish, Miss Marguerite, you could see my mother!"

It was almost the first time he had ever spoken to me of his mother—never so openly before. I knew intuitively that in some way he felt sensitive in regard to mentioning her name, so now I looked sympathetic, and said, "I certainly shall hope to see her some day."

"Miss Marguerite," and now his face had grown very grave and thoughtful—the lazy eyes a little stirred,— "how I wish I could conquer my habitual reserve, and open my heart to you! I know you could say something comforting to me. I am fearfully sensitive, and am misjudged in consequence oftentimes, although God knows I sin enough, and am prodigal in my selfishness always I must seem very heartless to you to be able to stay here and enjoy myself so much, when my mother is——"

then he stopped abruptly, and, looking away from my face, grew troubled. "If she was only well and strong again," he went on, very earnestly, "I could bear the past better; if she could only be once again as I remember her long ago—she has been an invalid many, many years—life sometimes would not be so hard." Here he stopped entirely.

"Don't tell me if it hurts you," I said, gently, as his face grew a little pale, and his eyes gloomy.

"I want to tell you, and yet I cannot," he answered. "I long for sympathy so sometimes, for all I may appear to you, as I appear to everybody else, so self-sufficient and lazy. I know you could give the sympathy I want."

"Marguerite, my child," here interposed the calm voice of my aunt, Mrs. Dare, and her shadow fell athwart the sun-mosaicked moss as she spoke, "are you not feeling well?" We had not seen her coming; we were not warned of her approach in any way; I was leaning a little forward, listening eagerly—my own troubles quite forgotten—to his voice, while his eyes were upturned to my face half wistfully, half saddened—his softened eyes, where now his heart looked through—until we both started apart, interrupted quickly by her voice.

"I am feeling better now," I replied, looking up at her. "I have been bathing my head in this cold brook-water, and it has done me good. Take this seat, Aunt Honoria; it is the most comfortable I know." So, after this, Cecil Throckmorton did not mention his mother's name again that day.

Quite a long while we sat there talking together, Mrs. Dare condescending to be unusually gracious—her thin lips smiling at me—and Throckmorton, startled from his momentary sadness, relapsed into his more usual indolence; while, now that she had come, somehow my headache seemed to return, clinging to me with sharper and more longing pains. The brook sang, flashed, danced over its pebbly bed, which seemed, with the sun shining down into it, to be here and there strewn with yellow chrysolite; its waves fretting against banks green with mosses and fresh-scented willow-herb, until afar down in the hollow the sedges clasped it round and round, the

water-flags waved, the cat-o'-nine-tails grew abundantly, and the woodcock sat cuddled upon his hidden nest the long day through. It was quietly restful sitting there listening to the brook, feeling the soft air creeping its pine elixir into one's lungs, and the cool, yielding moss under one's feet; but now, since my headache had come back, I was not sorry when Mrs. Dare by-and-by insisted upon our rejoining the remainder of the party seated on the logs under the trees, especially as my Cousin Valerie and General Farquhar had wandered away by themselves. I could see readily that Cecil Throckmorton did not acquiesce in this proposition of my aunt very warmly—looking at me half reproachfully as I arose and prepared to follow her; but finally, although he hesitated at first, he decided to accompany us; then, upon our joining the rest of the party, and my seating myself in their midst, on the end of a log where I could lean my back against the trunk of a tree, he came after me, throwing himself determinedly on the carpet of pine needles at my side. Here he would persist in monopolizing my entire attention and conversation, talking to me in a half undertone, forcing me to reply, even although at each word I could see my Cousin Gertrude's eyes, where she sat on an opposite log watching us, growing gloomier and more angry. It must have been a full hour that he lounged thus at my side, evidently resolute to make plain to every one else his desire to talk only to me, although once in awhile, as Mabel's laugh burst forth in its irresistibly merry fashion, sympathizing thus in some of Lorimer's sallies, I saw him turn his head to look at her, not smilingly, but very grave. All this while I was suffering silently, the most excruciating pain; my temples throbbing hotly, my lips were parched almost stiff, my hands trembled so, from nervous weakness, that I hid them under my hat, until by-and-by I grew quite blind from excessive agony. How hot the sunlight began to look—how cruelly to vibrate! How sickening the breath of these pine needles! How I longed to go back to the brook and bathe my head in its cold waters!—I would feel better if I could, but I could not. These suspicious eyes would accuse me of so many unjust impulses

if I should go and Cecil Throckmorton should follow me. Ah, I must stay here and suffer! How stifling the breath of these pine needles tasted! how thirsty it made me! Why had I come? Why did I not stay at home? If I could only go home, where I might hide my sufferings from these uncaring eyes, lay me down on my bed, and let the sea-breeze blow in on me freshly, I might get better. How foolish had I been to come! How weak my fancied strength!

By-and-by Valerie came back with her hands full of blushing maple-leaves, and with an oak-leaf girdle about her waist. My eyes blurred a little as I looked at her, at her happy face. I did not look at her lover's.

"There are some lovely trees down in the hollow," she said, seating herself a little apart from us, General Farquhar following her. "The chestnut-leaves are quite yellow. We ought to come here again in another week: our spoils would well repay the trouble."

"It is stupid here! let us go and try our luck," her sister exclaimed, in reply. "Let us all go; I want to find some Virginia creeper, if I can." Then everybody stood up,—everybody but Colonel Throckmorton and myself.

"Do you wish to go?" he queried, looking up at me in his half-tender, half-lazy way. "Isn't it better staying here? we are so comfortable, and I have so much to say to you." I know she heard every word, by the rough way in which she bit her lip, and the fire came into her eyes.

"Come, let us go, all of us," she cried again, impatiently. Then, although I felt deathly sick and I so longed with all my heart to remain quietly at rest, I answered Cecil Throckmorton by standing up and putting on my hat. If I had not leaned quickly against the tree as I did so, I believe I should have fallen. As it was, I felt my face grow pale, and I pulled the brim of my hat hastily down to hide it.

"You mustn't go if you would rather stay here," Throckmorton said, coming close to me, mistaking my faintness for irresolution, as I leaned against the tree trying to steady myself and grow strong. "Let us stay here, you and I; I am not an enthusiast on the subject of autumn leaves."



"What is the matter, Marguerite?" said my aunt's voice, approaching; "are you ill?"

"Yes, I am not feeling well," I managed to say. "Please let me stay here quietly alone with you, Aunt Honoria. My head aches very badly: I would rather stay here alone with you." Then I sat down again quickly, for if I had not done so I should have fallen.

"You poor little girl!" Cecil Throckmorton said, kneeling down on the pine needles at my side, forgetful of all the curious eyes confronting us; "you have been suffering all this time without saying a word to tell me." He laid his hand on mine in an impulsively compassionate way. "Your hands are fearfully hot: let me take you back to the brook and bathe your head, won't you? It did you so much good before." He was trying to look into my face, and speaking very tenderly. "I don't like to see you suffer, little one!"

"Marguerite is a whole head taller than I," laughed my Cousin Valerie's voice. "What a little one I must be!"

"No, go away, go away," I said, quickly, her laugh stinging me as I saw also it stung him, for he half arose; "please go away; go with the rest. I am better alone. I will stay with Aunt Honoria."

"Are you coming, or are you not coming?" Gertrude's impetuous voice here questioned; and I knew—although I could not see, for my eyes ached so—just how her face looked.

"Please go; do go," I whispered, as he bent down over me.

"Yes, go, Colonel Throckmorton," said Mrs. Dare, quietly; and I reiterated again, as he continued irresolute,—

"Go, go." Then I leaned my head wearily against the trunk of the tree behind me, not opening my eyes again until they had all disappeared.

During the next five minutes I remembered nothing that happened, my head buzzed so, I felt so weak and faint; then gradually I awoke to sufficient consciousness to find that Mrs. Dare had seated herself on the log at my side, that Murray the waiter stood in front, holding a cup of cold water, and that General Farquhar was begging Mrs. Dare to allow him to give me a little wine.

"I am well; I do not need anything," I said, sitting up straight. "Thank you, Murray, just one swallow of that water, please. I have been awfully silly, Aunt Honoria, and am heartily ashamed of myself." Then I tried to smile at her, and to drink some water, succeeding in both attempts.

"I did not know, my child, you felt so ill," Mrs. Dare said, gently, as, without looking up, I saw General Farquhar walk leisurely back to where Valerie sat among her maple-leaves. "You look very pale, but better than you did. I am really quite worried about you. You ought not to have come."

"I realize that thoroughly. I have been condemning myself for my foolishness during the whole afternoon," I answered. "I thought it would do me good to come. You mustn't worry about me, for I am feeling a great deal better; I would feel still better if I could only go home."

"You can go home if you choose," she said, quickly. "Murray is to drive the chaise and take the hampers home in time to arrange dinner at the cottage. The Bonnie Venture people dine with us to-night. He is about starting now; there he goes with the last hamper. You will just have time to overtake him; it is a quite a walk to the lane where the horses are tied. Do you really wish to go?"

"Yes, I would much rather go. I shall feel better if I can only get home and to bed. Don't you come, Aunt Honoria; I feel much stronger now, and I know where the carriages were left." Then, eager to avail myself of this opportunity to return home, I left her sitting alone on the log under the trees, and went as quickly as possible across the glade in the direction where Murray the waiter had disappeared. As I walked across the glade, feeling the same faintness assailing me insidiously, the same oppression of breath, the same hot thirst, yet I steadied my steps resolutely, conscious all the time of those eyes behind me watching each falter, perhaps pitying me and assigning all sorts of causes to my sudden indisposition. I did not draw a long breath until I had gone some distance away out of sight of these eyes; then, as I paused a moment to lean wearily against a tree

and to turn my face up to some of the sunshine dripping through its branches, I drew a long breath of relief, of intense relief, which parted my lips, and left my heart quieted as though a soft cool hand had been laid on it. Some time I stood there, gratified into a sense of peace by the quiet of the woods, the absence of all human companionship, the total eclipse of all other eyes save those blue smiling ones looking down from heaven at me through the tree-branches. Then, by-and-by, after I had grown a little strengthened, I walked down the path across the rough log bridge spanning the brook to where the horses were standing tied to the trees and Murray was preparing the chaise for a drive home. I sat down on the bank of the brook to watch and wait. It seemed to take him an unconscionable long time to arrange the hampers and harness: so presently, growing tired of watching the adjustment of each strap, the placing of each basket, I allowed my eyes to wander away to more pleasant objects for scrutiny, to the long cool shadows of the wood, the plashing of the brook-waters, which here flowed deeper and more quietly, and the patches of moss seeming everywhere to carpet the forest. A wood-thrush was singing high up among the plummy tree-tops, swaying in the warm south wind restlessly to and fro; and afar off the hoarse cawing of the crows made the nearer music sound more sweetly. I was aroused from my reverie by the sound of a quick "Get up!" in Murray's voice and the creaking of the chaise-wheels as they crunched the sward. It was already slowly making its way down the wood-road.

"And sure I wasn't thinking ye intinded to be after going with me, miss," Murray exclaimed, as, in obedience to my call, he stopped the chaise so as to allow me to overtake him. "And now I don't see how we'll manage it, as here I be, as high as the top of Boston State-House, on these baskets, six in all, miss, barring the big hamper under the seat and the silver ice-pitcher between my legs." And, sure enough, my hopes for a speedy return home went instantaneously down to zero when I saw how Murray sat perched high up on a pile of hampers, looking more like a red turkey-cock than anything else in the matter of

countenance, as every slight tilt of the chaise threatened to launch him forward either to a lowlier seat on the horse's back or to a still lowlier one under his feet. "I'll tell you what, miss," Murray said, evidently touched to the devisement of some expedient when he saw how my face changed; "it wouldn't do for such as ye to be perched up here like a disappointed crow on a sour apple-tree, with naught between your nose and the ground but a pair of kicking heels; but praps we might take a basket off,—that ud make your seat a little less risky,—and I'd trudge home alongside, with the basket under my arm."

But I would not listen to that.

"Ye look sick, miss; praps ye'd better go home with me. I'd be sure to get a blessing from the old owl Barry if I left ye here to suffer when ye wanted to go 'long; I'd do my best to make a seat fit for a queen for ye, and five mile is nothing of a walk to me, miss." Saying this, he made an attempt to get down from his perilous seat to terra firma, a hazardous undertaking, and one which I immediately vetoed.

"No, Murray, don't get down; it wouldn't do any good. I will stay here, and go home when Mrs. Dare goes: so drive on, please." Then I walked away from the chaise, and did not look back again until I heard the creaking of its wheels die away into the distance.

To say that this was a bitter disappointment would but feebly express the feeling of intense regret which, after Murray had passed out of sight, and nothing living was near, save the horses champing their bits under the trees, forced me to sit down on the bank of the brook once more and bury my face hastily in my hands,—forgetful of all the growing peace of a few moments before, the sympathetic murmur of the brook, the throat-bursting exultations of the wood-thrush up nearer heaven. Sitting there, thinking it all over, how adverse Fate seemed, how prejudiced in the harshness of her decrees, in her tantalizing promises and subsequent denials! If I could only have gone home, away from these people who all were so glad to-day, where I might grow well and strong! How could I go back to those eyes, those cruel, searching eyes, whose power made me hot and faint all at once,

whose pity was a scorpion's kiss, withering to my pride and strength? Ah! I could not go, I felt so miserable,—so almost desperate! why could God not be kind and gentle to me once? I had borne my sufferings all day as bravely and uncomplainingly as flesh could allow; flesh when surfeited with suffering could not bear another straw laid ever so lightly on the camel's back of cauterized woe. The last straw on my camel's back would be the obligation to go back into the midst of all those people, in their happinesses caring little for my pain, or, if making a show of sympathy, pitying what they should not pity, singling out the hidden aches only, and pinching them. I could not bear it: God would love me this once, and show me a way out of my pain. Still sitting there, hugging my misery with tight arms, cramming its hands, outstretched for consolation, ruthlessly back into the cramped confines of my heart, hating myself hotly, hating all the rest of the world more hotly still, and longing—oh, so eagerly!—to go where this bright sunlight might mock me no longer and the bird-voices would be stilled, suddenly I heard a sound which stung me, of laughing voices approaching along the path skirting the base of the hill on the summit of which we had eaten our luncheon,—the voices of Mabel, of Gertrude, of the Mortimers, and of Cecil Throckmorton. In another moment I had fled from them, across the brook, through the forest, through a dense under-brush,—whose briars pricked and stung me even as the sense of a human companionship had pricked and stung me,—across a swampy hollow where the wild marsh-marigold looked at me with its hot eyes and the sword-grass and bulrushes caught my feet in their snares. I walked,—walked,—ran,—anywhere to get far away from the sound of those voices, the singing of that happy thrush. I could not escape the smiles of the sunlight; they would chase me, scorch me, and pinch me. How glad I would be to have night come!

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Night did come,—slowly, coolly,—so coolly that the leaves shivered, the pine needles rustled, and the birds went to bed early. The bull-frogs croaked, the tree-toads sang, the trees whispered solemnly together, while

I sat, huddled up in a disconsolate heap, on the same moss-covered log, with my back against the same tree, where I had sat in my misery that afternoon. After I fled from those voices—which had quickened a feeling of antagonism within me, they sounded so gay and joyous—away through the forest, eager to escape alike from them and my own disquiet thoughts, I wandered on, little caring or noting how far I went, along zigzag forest-paths, where the tree-branches met over my head, shutting out the hot sunlight, and the stillness of the woods grew more and more intense. After a while, feeling quieter with every step I took, eased from some of my wilder thoughts, and succumbed to the influence of more peaceful ones, resolutely I again lived over each moment of the day since morning, remembered Cecil Throckmorton's attempts at devotion, Gertrude's jealousy, the continual happiness shining out of Mrs. Hoffman's eyes, the cold, mocking indifference expressed in every shade of General Farquhar's manner when addressed in the slightest way to me. In all my anticipations of how the day would pass, in what manner of recognition he and I should meet for the first time after the event of the previous evening, his daring and unlawful expressions of tenderness which had so affronted me, I had decided only upon my own course of conduct, upon being calmly indifferent in my demeanor, to ignore the past as a precedent for the future, little thinking of what in return his manner would be, or, if allowing myself to conjecture this, indistinctly imagining he would appear deprecatory, remorseful, anxious to make clear to me his regret, whereupon I should be gravely merciful, forgiving him by-and-by, if assured he would never be tempted to err again in the same way! Instead, however, of appearing remorseful, deprecatory, or in the slightest degree conscious of having transgressed, his expression of both speech and manner had proved one of unmitigated indifference, of a quiet composure, which, stunting in growth my own, forced me to acknowledge the fact that his desire to forget the past surpassed even mine in power. How coldly he had looked at me, with what an impassive face, and such quiet eyes, unlanguage

in aught calculated to express a sense of having erred, an intense calm of oblivion which had stung and bewildered me! How had he dared to offend me? and, having offended me, how dared he ignore having done so?

A long while I wandered aimlessly about, through a labyrinth of paths, cool, shaded, and still, until at last I came to a spring bubbling out from among some lichen-covered rocks, where money-wort and adder's-tongue were tangled abundantly together on its margin, and among the browse the water-mint grew! I sat down here, patiently to think and wait for the time to pass until I should be obliged to return to my aunt to join her and my cousins on their ride home. I had heard them say they intended returning to the cottage about sunset-hour. I decided to rest here awhile; I could not go back now and suffer during the intermediate hours as I had suffered in the past; I would rest here until sunset-hour. Sitting there, watching the spring bubble and the wind creep through the browse, I grew stronger, quite steadied in the tenor of my thoughts, more willing to endure, less rebellious toward God. The shade was so grateful to me, the pine odors did not here stifle me as they had stifled me an hour before; by the time I rejoined my cousins my headache would be quite gone, and my heartache too. I stayed there about an hour, then began to retrace my steps. It proved no easy matter to do so. I soon found that, instead of retracing my steps, I was tracing new ones: the paths were labyrinthine, and my ideas regarding their identity were vague. A long, long while I wandered about, growing, proportionately as the sunlight grew fainter, nervous and in doubt,—eager to find the brook, which I felt if I could only discover its whereabouts would prove the thread to guide me out of this mystery, each fresh endeavor proving unsuccessful, as I attempted to stray aside from the path into the tangled wilderness round about, where I fancied I heard the brook-waters singing. It was long past sunset-hour, the dusk was growing thicker, the wood-silence more grim, when at last I nearly stumbled headlong into its waters, which, flowing quietly across my path, gave no warning of its vicinity, only escaping an embrace of its here

muddy arms by clinging to a benevolent elder-bush growing on its bank close to me. I knew that the spot where I left my aunt must lie to the west; so westward I followed the brook, keeping close to its side, heedless of muddy places, tangled wildernesses, and swamps, until at length, with a joyful sense of relief, I came full upon the spot where that afternoon I had sat and watched Murray harnessing his horse into the chaise. I had hoped against hope that the horses would still be champing their bits under the trees. There were no horses there, the laughing voices were stilled, and the tree-toads had silenced the thrush. In this one moment of startled conviction, of keen regret and self-condemnation, I acknowledged myself righteously afflicted. I had imagined myself suffering,—here indeed was a real, tangible misfortune; I had upbraided God,—here, in this fuller measure, He was now showing me the meagerness of my former discomfort; I had been foolish,—here was my recompense. Ah, what should I do? what could I do? The night was growing black, and the silence, broken only by the tree-toads and bull-frogs, frightful. Should I attempt to walk home, I might get lost, since I knew not the road. Would it not be better to try and forget the black night and silence, and go up to the picnic-ground, where whoever came to find me by-and-by would be sure to seek me first? They would not leave me here all night,—dreadful thought! they would certainly miss me, and, questioning Murray, he would tell them I had been left behind! So up I went, groping, with a frightened sense of the night's gloom, through the wood-path leading to our whilom picnic-ground, until I succeeded in reaching the open glade lying shut in by the black wall of trees, over with the expanse of heaven studded thickly with stars, and where the ground was growing cold and damp. I found the moss-covered logs presently, and there I seated myself, trying to steady my nerves to wait patiently for some one to come back and take me home! My headache was quite frightened away by this time; I had forgotten some of my pains; I was conscious only of the cold wind coming creeping up the sides of the hill, chilling me through and through, the

heavy gloom, and the solemn whisperings of the pines round about.

Would they never come? It seemed ages, ages, and ages piled upon ages, that I sat there, huddled up in a heap, trying to keep warm, with the skirt of my thin muslin dress tightly pulled about my shoulders, feeling appalled at the consequences of my own foolish impulses,—very contrite, and imagining how censured I would be, how Mabel would wonder, Gertrude would sneer, and the Mortimers arch their eyebrows! If I could only get home again, away from these solemn trees, those star-eyes, the grim silence, I would never be foolish again; I had been foolish, and I knew it; if my foolishness had been great, at least my recompense had been greater. What if I should be obliged to stay here all night alone, away from Archie, my own little Archie? Oh, he might be grieving for me even now——

A dull sound afar off, a smothered, monotonous sound as of horses' hoofs,—nearer, still nearer growing; a fuller echo in the hollow below; a delightful sense of deliverance close at hand; yes, certainly horses' hoofs,—I heard them quite plainly now, more plainly,—undeniably here at last. There was a murmur of voices down in the hollow by the brook, a voice calling, then hasty steps up the wood-path.

"Are you here?" cried a voice across the glade.

"Yes, I am here."

"Indeed! And pray where are you?"

"Sitting on a log, with a dreadful cold in my head for company."

"Throckmorton," the voice called out, hastily, "there is a young lady sitting here on a log, with a romantic cold in her head." Then other steps came up the wood-path, and in another instant Cecil Throckmorton was at my side.

"Thank God!" he said. "I feared you were lost and frightened to death somewhere out in the woods. You poor little girl, I am so glad I have found you!" And I was even more glad than he.

## CHAPTER XLV.

THE ride home was very dreary, and not in the slightest degree a cheerful one. After we had sat there quite a while on the logs, I explaining to him how I had wandered far away in the woods and finally found myself lost, he in return stating how Mabel was the first to discover my absence from the cottage,—General Farquhar walking to and fro restlessly across the glade, where the pale light of the stars fell, during our entire conversation,—we heard the sound of carriage-wheels, and, upon descending into the hollow, found Morley, General Farquhar's man, waiting there with a carriage.

Instead of riding home as he had come, on horseback, Cecil Throckmorton insisted upon Morley's exchanging situations with him—upon a tête-à-tête with me—so that during the entire drive home we were quite alone, with no other evidences of companionship than the monotonous tramp of General Farquhar's horse following. I could not help noticing how unusually thoughtful Colonel Throckmorton seemed,—how taciturn,—speaking only rarely, and then in a gentle, half-compassionate way, which, while it annoyed me exceedingly, I could not understand. Just as we came in sight of the cottage lights, he suddenly explained the mystery.

"I did not like to worry you back there in the woods," he said, earnestly, "your fright at finding yourself left behind was a sufficient tribulation for your nerves, but I must tell you now, little friend, that Miss Mabel only discovered your absence from the cottage through Barry, who came to her in tears, saying you were sadly needed——"

"Archie!" I interrupted, with a little cry. "Drive fast! drive fast! Why did you not tell me? I deserve it all,—all,—all." Then after that I don't remember anything more that happened; I only have a faint recollec-



tion of wild words of remorse on my lips, comforting ones on his, until we drew up in front of the cottage, where on the piazza a great crowd of people were standing,—the Mortimers, my cousins, and the rest. The carriage had scarcely stopped before I was out of it, through the crowd, and rushing up-stairs, half mad with apprehension. In the corridor leading to Archie's room I ran into Barry's arms.

"The Holy Virgin be praised!" she cried, softly, holding me tight. "I heard you coming, and my heart was glad. Don't try to get away, miss; for the love of God, be quiet, or you'll do harm. Listen to me, miss: he's quieter now, and mebbe by the time the doctor gets here—master sent up for him on the last train—he'll be all right. How you tremble, poor dear!" Then the honest creature's hand was laid on my head as gently as my mother's used to be. "There's been sad doings since the gentlemen went after you. Celeste came to me not five minutes ago, with her arms black and blue from the pinches Miss Gertrude's been giving her; she gives notice to-morrow."

"Don't! Let me go; I want to see him!" Then, in answer to the pain of my voice, she let me go, and I went in to find the child lying as though dead. Close to the bed on which the frail form lay, with the dim lamp-light flickering ghostily over his rugged, care-seamed face, sat my Uncle Dare, unconscious to everything save the pallid child-face lying near his on the pillow. Such a hungry look in the usually dull eyes; such a livid compression of his lips,—to this day my Uncle Dare's face haunts me as it looked then! I did not speak to him. I felt my grief would seem but a mocking shade to his. I sat down quietly on the other side of the bed, to wait patiently, with dumb lips and a heart full of agony, the doctor's coming. Two hours I sat there. At eleven o'clock Dr. Raynor came. Even now, at the sound of his voice, Uncle Dare did not move,—not until Dr. Raynor laid his hand powerfully on his shoulder; then, for the first time, he betrayed a sign of life.

"Go away!" he muttered. "He's mine yet; I want none of your interference!"

After that I could stand it no longer; I went out of the room into my own.

"Marguerite!" Mabel's voice whispered out of the gloom. "Marguerite!"

"Don't!—don't speak to me; I have a fight! I must fight it out alone!" But Mabel would not let me alone; she would take me tenderly in her arms, would fight my despair right valiantly, to proclaim herself victor at last. I was stronger, much stronger, when Barry came in by-and-by.

"The doctor says, if he lives through the night he'll live many days; he may get well. You mustn't go fussing yourself into a fever, Miss Marguerite, thinking your leaving him made him sick, for it's no such thing. He was as bright as a lark all day long, talking happy and reading the book you give him,—just as bright as well could be, until, just as I come up-stairs from getting his supper, I found him on the floor, struck all of a sudden with one of his fits. I thought sure once he was dying, and when you didn't come I run down-stairs, as frightened as I could be, to Miss Mabel, asking where you was."

"Yes, if it hadn't been for Barry," Mabel said, "you would have stayed some time longer out there alone in the woods, as we all thought you came home with Murray, and I didn't come up-stairs to your room when I got home, thinking you were busy with Archie and would be down presently; I didn't know even that Archie was sick until Barry told me. Then, when the people down-stairs found you were left behind, Lorimer, Throckmorton, and Farquhar began to make immediate preparations to go after you. General Farquhar was frightened to death, nearly; his face grew so pale when I told him, his eyes so fierce, I thought he was going to eat me up——"

I did not wait to hear more, but crept away from them to Archie's room, where Uncle Dare still sat close to his child's bedside, in the same stolid fashion, and Dr. Raynor was talking to him in his gentle way. I never shall forget that long, dreadful night, the anxious hours, the horrible suspense, the ghostly silence causing my nerves to vibrate and cringe, the sharp pain stabbing my heart through and through. I could not help feeling that in

some way I was accountable for Archie's illness; he might have worried about me all day without letting Barry know; if, instead of braving fate and my own heart, I had stayed at home, all might have been well. What had I gained by going? what recompense for all my foolishness, my mistaken courage, my sufferings? Nothing—God pity me!—but future sneers and heavier condemnation. If Archie should die, I would never, I could never forgive myself; I could bear anything but that. I would not call God cruel again if He only would spare him to me,—my darling, my only love and comfort. Ah! I had before imagined myself suffering; a paltry headache, a little heartache, an alarm at being left alone in the dark, had made me call God cruel. He was but just. I deserved to be shown my wickedness; by this greater light He was proving my blasphemy. Would He forgive me? would He listen to my prayers?—were not prayers like mine, selfish, short-sighted, the outcasts of Heaven? He was love, He was mercy; He would not shut his ears to my cry; He would sift the grain from the chaff, the grain would be his, the chaff mine. Yet He would be generous; a little grain would bless my chaff measure. He had listened to me; He had sent a hope; Dr. Raynor had said if my darling lived the night through, he would live longer yet. I would know if I was forgiven.

The light, placed so that Dr. Raynor could plainly see any change in the child's white face, made grotesque waverings on the wall to and fro as the draught from the half-open window swept it gently; the silence throughout the cottage was intense; the waves on the rocks sounded the same wild music as they sounded last night when I sat here in my other misery. The child's face seemed to grow whiter and whiter, the sweet, pure face, eaten by those hungry eyes of the father.

The time went by slowly, so slowly that it mocked me and set fire to my nerves. The silence, broken only by the sound of the waves breaking on the rocks, stuffed me full and smothered me. Ah, life would be like this always without Archie,—my little boy, who had so sweetened my life, so lightened its gloom. God would be merciful, He would pity me, I prayed.

Twelve o'clock—a deathlier silence, a rush of salt air through the room, a change in the boy's face, a little quivering of the hitherto stiff lips, a heavier breathing. One o'clock—the same. Two o'clock—the same. Three o'clock—a half-haggard look on Dr. Raynor's face. Four o'clock—an intense quiet. Uncle Dare looks as though he was frozen stiff. Archie's eyelids tremble a little; he breathes more softly and regularly. Dr. Raynor looks across at me, and half smiles. I am ready to fall down on my knees, overcome by thanksgiving and joy. I can scarcely bear it, the joy is so great. Five o'clock—the child sleeping sweetly. Dr. Raynor whispers to Uncle Dare, "He is saved." Uncle Dare's face looks changed, as though he saw heaven.

Just as the day breaks and the white light comes glimmering in, cooling the hot lamp-light with its pallor, with a little sigh, Archie opens his eyes. They look straight up into Uncle Dare's face. "Papa," he whispers, and, in answer, Uncle Dare hides his face from everybody but his child.

\* \* \* \* \*

"The doctor says he'll get along splendid if he is kept quiet," Barry said, coming into my room by-and-by, where I had gone to thank God. "Lor', Miss Marguerite, I never saw you cry before: you're the kind that swallows their tears and keep bleeding inside. Praise be to God for leaving Archie to us! Breakfast will soon be ready, miss. What shall I get for you?"

"Nothing."

"That's folly, Miss Marguerite! Never a bit did you eat last night, all day yesterday nothing but that mess of sweet stuff; that's enough to give you the sight of your grandmothers seven generations back, for a year to come. I'm going down to the cook now and have her broil a nice bit of steak for you."

Then Barry went, and I was alone again. Yes, it seemed easier to cry hot tears in thanksgiving than in suffering. Sometimes in the past, when driven hard by pain and everything had looked black to my eyes, I had so longed for this relief, and had been denied, my pain seeming

to crush back the tide in proportion to its weight. Now God laid his hand on the rock, and the waters, quenching the thirst of my eyes, came. "Archie would live! Archie would live!" I kept crying over and over again to myself, each time the words sounding sweeter and sweeter. I sat down, in my thanksgiving, beside the open window, and let the fresh sea-air beat all the rebellion out of my heart.

When I heard Dr. Raynor go down-stairs to breakfast, I went into Archie's room, where the child lay sleeping sweetly, with a little red tinging the pallor of his lips. I knew he would live. I read it in Uncle Dare's changed expression, where he sat as he had sat all night, clasping his child's hand closely in his, his eyes devouring the beautiful pale face!

"Lor', and there are dreadful doings about the house, miss," Barry whispered, beckoning me out of Archie's room to my own, where on a table she placed a trayful of good things to eat. "Miss Gertrude's about crazy about something—been pinching and slapping Celeste again this morning, and Celeste has given warning. My lady is begging hard of her to stay, for my lady can't get along without Celeste, as we all knows. Now eat that bit of steak, please, Miss Marguerite, as I did my best with it, and I made this omelet and fried the potatoes just as I thought you'd be liking them." Then, to please Barry, I attempted to eat a bit of the steak and omelet—a miserable failure, judging from the expression of her countenance when she came by-and-by to remove the tray.

During all the morning Archie lay peacefully sleeping, not a sign of pain in his face, not an evidence of it remaining; so that Dr. Raynor decided to return to the city on the noon train, promising to come back to Cedar Cottage the next-day evening.

"He must be kept quiet, very quiet," he said, in parting from me. "Let him sleep as much as he can, and when he awakens give him the drops. If he can eat some gruel by-and-by, let him eat it."

"You will be sure to come down to-morrow, Dr. Raynor?"

"Yes, if for nothing else, to look after you. You look now as though you had been parboiled with suffering."

"Please don't flatter me, Dr. Raynor; parboils are too much for my equanimity. I am not used to admiration."

"Or to sleep," he added, shaking his head at me as he stepped into the carriage. "If you don't look better when I come down to-morrow evening, I will attend to your case, I promise you." And with this threat, emphasized by another shake of his head, he was driven off.

After he had gone, I went down into the kitchen to make gruel in a particular way which Archie preferred,—against Barry's method he invariably rebelled,—and here I was refreshed by inquiries concerning Archie's welfare, from both the cook, who was scrubbing the tables, and Murray, cleaning the silver. Here, for the first time, the reaction of my past excitements, since two days ago, commenced. Now that the tension of my nerves was relaxed since assured of Archie's safety, I began, unconsciously almost, to have a weary lassitude undermine my fictitious strength, some of my yesterday-headache to return, a rapidly-increasing weakness, which made me feel faint and sick. I had occasion to return up-stairs a moment during my gruel-making, and scarcely succeeded in ascending the stairs, my body seemed such a strange burden I was carrying about, as Christian did his, against my will. On my way up I encountered the sisters Mortimer coming down; they neither looked at nor spoke to me,—a cordiality of recognition which failed to affect me one way or the other. Returning to the kitchen, just as I passed through the upper hall, close to the door of Mrs. Dare's room, I heard voices, as though in dispute, that of my Cousin Gertrude exclaiming, in a high treble key,—

"You may talk to me about policy, you may urge prudence, or any other virtue you please; I will shut my eyes, I will listen to you no longer. My day has come——"

"Gertrude, Gertrude!" cried another, in reply, so changed from its usual even utterance that I scarcely recognized it as Mrs. Dare's. "For Heaven's sake, be controlled; the stake is so great, my child——"

Then I did not hear any more ; I ran away from it as quickly as I could. Ten minutes later, on my way to the breakfast-room for a bowl,—a peculiar bowl, out of which Archie loved best to eat his gruel,—I almost ran against Mrs. Hoffman, who had come out and just closed the door behind her.

"Marguerite," she said, putting out her hands to lay them on mine, "how pale you are looking, dear ! I do not like to see you so miserable. You have been sitting up all night with that unfortunate child. You are killing yourself."

"No, I am not killing myself," I answered, quietly. "I shall live to be an octogenarian. I am stronger than I look." Then I endeavored to pass her, to open the breakfast-room door. She was standing between me and it ; she would not move.

"You must have had a frightful time out there in the woods," she continued, quickly, laying her hand detainingly on my arm. "I felt so alarmed about you,—even Royal was very much worried. If I had been in your place, I should have gone crazy. They say you were very calm and not at all frightened. Don't, Marguerite," she added, hastily, as I now reached past her, laying my hand decisively on the knob of the breakfast-room door ; "don't go in there, please."

"Why not ?"

Her face was slightly pale as she looked at me very supplicatingly. "Gertrude is in there. She is very violent this morning. Mamma has been doing her best to quiet her, but with not the slightest effect. I am really afraid of her myself when she gets into one of her tantrums ; her temper is something fearful when provoked. Don't go in, Cousin Marguerite ; you may excite her still more, and then she may be very bitter and violent to you."

"I am not afraid of my Cousin Gertrude," I answered, quietly ; then I opened the door and entered. There were but two occupants of the room,—Juliette Mortimer and Gertrude Dare, the former arranging a dish of flowers on the table, the latter standing with her back to the door, looking out through the window to the sea. When Valerie had spoken to me in the hall, inexplicably

the sound of her voice, the beauty of her face, had stung me into renewed sensations of pains, such pains as I had wrestled with yesterday, fled from only to have them recur again and again, bitter memories, which during the greater anxieties of the night I had passed by, hoping never to face them again. I was really suffering in a half-dumb, half-unconscious way, heart-weary of fighting myself, when I opened the breakfast-room door. At the sound of its opening, Juliette Mortimer glanced up from her flowers, and my Cousin Gertrude turned round.

"So I have you at last, my pretty innocent," she exclaimed, coming toward me in an impetuous way, "my sweet cousin, my Circe,—no, not my Circe ; I am not a man, to be blinded by you, thank Heaven ! I understand you perfectly, more perfectly than you imagine, more than a man ever could ; besides understanding, I hate and despise you."

At first, involuntarily, I had faced her, knowing, from the way her face changed at sight of me from an expression of moody irritability to one of intense anger, that she was about to attack me ; now I walked away from her across the room to the sideboard, on which stood the bowl I was seeking. When I had possessed myself of it, as deliberately as I came I walked back toward the door ; before I could reach it, however, she had crossed the room and leaned herself against it.

"Let me pass, Cousin Gertrude !" I said, coming close to her and looking straight into her hot eyes.

"So you find your tongue only to command ! You dare to command me ! me ! You, who are so false, so unmaidenly, so indelicate——"

"Let me pass, Cousin Gertrude !" I reiterated. "It would be better for you not to say those things ; you know they are untrue, and you may be sorry for having said them, by-and-by."

"Yes, Gertrude," interrupted Mrs. Dare, entering at that moment through the library door ; "you will be sorry for having forgotten yourself. Let Marguerite pass. Do, my child, be reasonable." Saying this in a

half-supplicating way, which sounded oddly in my ears, she came between us and laid her hand on her daughter's arm. "Gertrude, listen to me,—be reasonable this once!"

"Did I not tell you what you might expect?" Gertrude exclaimed, shaking off her mother's hand hastily; "have I not been silent long enough? have I not offered both cheeks? I tell this upstart, as I have told you, she shall no longer defy me, no longer presume upon my good nature,—this adventuress who dares malign my father's name with her improprieties of conduct. You shall no longer close my lips. I will tell her I hate her——"

"Marguerite," said Mrs. Dare, turning to me, "for Heaven's sake leave her; go out through the window, or through the library; do go, my child!" But I would not; I would return through the door by which I came, or none at all.

"If my Cousin Gertrude has accusations to make," I added, as steadily as I could, which was not very steadily, I know, since my heart was so sick, my soul so weary of conflict, "let her make them here at once. I am ready to listen, ready to refute. But let her confine her violence to accusations; she may abuse me in this way and in no other; she must not indulge in invectives or opprobrious terms; she has no right."

"No right!" Gertrude retorted, fairly glaring at me now. "How dare you say I have no right, you ingrate, you adventuress? You need not start in that tragic way; Colonel Throckmorton is not here to applaud,—the man at whose head you have thrown yourself, you, the child of nobody!"

I had endured everything else. I could not stand that. "Remember that you are speaking of my dead father," I said, almost inarticulately, my voice trembled so.

"Of your dead father! And who, forsooth, was he?" she cried, laughing at me, cruelly, harshly. "Ask whom you may, who could tell you?"

"Gertrude, I insist upon your being quiet!"

"Mamma, I am tired of having you tell me to be quiet. I am quiet; see how calmly I speak; my voice does

not tremble as does the voice of my pretty cousin, my innocent cousin. The child of nobody—nobody, do you hear? The child of nobody! Don't look so tragic, I beg of you, sweet cousin. The curtain is down, and the rehearsal, void of the usual auxiliaries, insipid. Your heroics will not prove to-day, as they proved yesterday, of benefit. Colonel Throckmorton is not here to pity and despise you; no woods, in which to play with him hide-and-seek; no excuse to faint into his arms. Have I not justly called you an adventuress, the worthy child of an adventurer? I pity you; you cannot help the taint in your blood. I am not the only one who pities while condemning you. Colonel Throckmorton condemns you, pities you, despises while he plays with you."

Her mother had been in vain endeavoring to restrain her. I still stood facing her, for all I tried with mighty efforts to quiet and control myself, hotly desperate with suffering, all my whilom peace forgotten, all the sweet composure of the morning's thanksgiving pinched out of my heart by her words, her cruel, stabbing words, feeling I could not endure more,—God himself would not give me the strength,—when, looking back into her eyes, mine grown now as hot as her own, I saw her avert them from my face, just as Juliette Mortimer behind me uttered a little cry. Something in my Cousin Gertrude's face—a miraculous change, the white pallor chasing the angry heat out of her cheeks, a blank look of stupefaction the passion from her eyes—caused me, even in the midst of my intense suffering, to look quickly round. There, on the threshold of the library door, stood Cecil Throckmorton, pale, agitated, with a strange excitement in his face. There was a dead silence; then Gertrude controlled herself as well as she could, which was very well indeed.

"I have been scolding my Cousin Marguerite," she said, quickly, but with whitened lips, "and trying to frighten her with a bugaboo. She is a wicked, naughty girl sometimes, and I can't help telling her so. I will forgive her this once. Now go," she added, leaving the door, and pointing at it with her finger; "go, Marguerite; remember my scolding, and try to be a better girl in future."



It was very well done; in the very heat of my pain, I could not but acknowledge this. If he had not come, I would no longer have remained silent; I would have talked to her very plainly. I felt so sore, so hurt, so sick of her persecutions; my heart was so heavy—ah Heaven, it ached so! it seemed as though, try hard as I might, I should never achieve peace, never in this world earn any but the wages of hate! His coming closed my lips; her last words signing my defeat to him staggered me. Feeling, oh, so weary, so tired of this weight on my heart, this cramped fever of thought, eager to be alone, for even a semblance of peace, I walked to the door. Before I could open it, however, Cecil Throckmorton had crossed the room, laid his hand on the knob instead, and stood there looking down at me.

"I heard those last words of your cousin unintentionally, unwillingly, Marguerite, having come suddenly in through the library window unannounced, to bid you all good-by. I am on my way to New York by the one o'clock train. My mother is very sick; I received a telegram an hour since. I have only time to say a very few words. Your cousin has told you false. I do not despise you; I do not condemn you; I may pity you—a dog would pity you, seeing you lead the life that you lead in this house; I love you. Marguerite, will you be my wife?"

He had spoken fast and vehemently, looking nowhere but down into my face. My heart beat as fast and as vehemently as he had spoken. I dared not look at him,—I could not answer! I was miserable,—grown selfish with suffering. I seemed to see a gate of heaven thrown open to me, wherein all this strange pain, this bitterness of despair, these achings of an outraged pride, would be closed out; no longer an alien,—a laughing-stock, I would be the chosen of love; no longer deceived, but assured, at least refuted, from a greater woe!

"Marguerite," he said, gravely, "speak! I am waiting for your answer. Let these be our witnesses. Tell me, my little, suffering girl, that you will be my wife!" Then he bent down over me, with his voice grown softened and low. I was selfish! I was driven hard! I looked

heaven and hell straight in the face then. I chose heaven!

"I will be your wife," I answered, looking up at him.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

*September 15.*—I have been industriously striving to bathe myself in the waters of Lethe, to-day; but the stains of the past conflict seem ineffaceable. St. Matthew says, "Where the carcase is, there the eagles will be gathered together." Those whom I have despised prove this: the Mortimers are to-day at my feet. I walk, as the Roman captors did, over flowers rich with "a savor of death unto death." I am tempted to throw my inkstand at my ghost of disquiet, as Luther threw his at the devil. It seems as though I am signing my own death-warrant of peace, with the bloody pen of Faust.

Even Mabel cannot sympathize with me; she is pale, paler even than I, for I have a bright spot on either cheek. She has been pale—well, ever since I came up-stairs yesterday. How long ago yesterday seems! How gray my thoughts are,—gray with the ashes of a past fire!—yet not past, but superseded by this new fire, which quite eats me. My heart is a salamander! If Mabel was not so strange to-day, she would say something to comfort me. Sympathy, I used to think, was a sort of Paracelsus, carrying concealed in its hilt, spiritual remedies condensed from the elixir vitæ into pills of balm for the magical restoring of hearts like mine. But I am glad, after all, Mabel does not speak; her sympathy might mock me,—like Van Helmont, who, impotent to discover the true elixir, resurrected a ghost from Spa water!

*September 17.*—The cottage and Bonnie Venture are deserted. Saturday afternoon, two or three hours subse-

quent to Colonel Throckmorton's departure, Mrs. Dare received a note from General Farquhar, stating that he had, a few moments prior to the writing of this note, also received a telegram, demanding his immediate presence in Washington, to attend to some business connected with the War Department, relative to his past services in the army; that it was of an urgent nature, requiring him to take, if possible, the evening express train from Boston to Washington, and precluding the possibility of his calling in person to bid adieu to the inmates of Cedar Cottage. This note being read aloud at the tea-table, my first knowledge of its contents was vouchsafed by Mabel when she came up-stairs by-and-by, I having taken tea in Archie's room.

Yesterday the Mortimers, Mabel, also Lorimer and the rest of the Bonnie Venture men, who had been entertaining themselves as best they might since deserted by their host, left Wickoff's Ledge in the noon train. In some way, they had all heard of my betrothal to Colonel Throckmorton. As I was bidding Mabel good-by in the library, just before the carriages took them to the station, Lorimer came in and congratulated me.

"I am not at all astonished, Miss Marguerite," he said; "only it leaves me out in the cold." Then I laughed at him as well as I could,—which was not well at all.

The cottage seems very strange and silent now that they are gone. I miss Mabel more than this paper may ever show. I have a strange aching whenever I think of her. "Marguerite," she said, in parting, her face looking very solemn and pure, "I know you will be happy, dear,—very happy. God has been good to you; you must never say again He has not!" Then she clung to me lovingly, passionately, my dear, noble Mabel, while I could not answer her. This was the first time she had spoken of my engagement; it nearly broke my heart to have her speak of it.

*September 20.*—My first letter from Colonel Throckmorton came to-day. It is a very tender, kind letter, and I am grateful for it. I feel it is sweet to be loved,—a rest to be cared for,—a hiding-place for all disquiet. Mabel has truly said, "God has been good to you." I must think

of this always, now. I must try and be quiet, very quiet, thinking only of him! In it he writes he found his mother quite ill, but very, very happy to see him once more. During all mention of his mother there is a singular tone of restraint characterizing it, an unwillingness to enter into any explanations regarding her delicacy of health, a deprecation of any interest which I might naturally be tempted to profess. Lorimer has hinted to me that Colonel Throckmorton's mother is insane. I wonder if it is true! If it is true, how much I pity Colonel Throckmorton! It might have helped him to have told me about it, as he made the attempt to tell me, that day of the picnic, when Mrs. Dare so inopportunistically interrupted us. I might have comforted him in some way. Oh, I wish I had!

*September 21.*—A week to-day since—well, since I promised to be Cecil Throckmorton's wife, a long week—seeming years, yes, more years than I can tell. Life will always be the same hereafter, I suppose; a long, long quiet, broken only by heartaches. He loves me! he loves me! God grant that I may think only of this!

*September 24.*—It is a sin to think of it and to be at peace! Did I promise to love him? No. Did I promise to be his wife? Yes! How can I promise one without the other? He was strong, true, noble; I was weak, driven hard, anchorless; I was desperate. I am glad he is not coming back until by-and-by. God will show me in the mean time His purpose. I am blind to-day!

*September 26.*—Barry says I look as though I was in a consumption, my cheeks are so red, my eyes shine so; and then, ever since I was so foolish sitting out there in the fog on that damp cold rock, I have had a little cough. Perhaps God will let us, Archie and me, go hand in hand together. If we are both to go, I hope He will let us get home soon!

Dr. Raynor says my darling will leave me behind; he will shut the gate in my face. I have closed my eyes to it, but I know it, I know it now; he will get home sooner than I. After he has shut the gate I will hear his voice calling, but it will be useless; the latch will be so heavy I shall not be able to raise it!

God's fingers begin to cover his face already. He has no pain; his moments are moments of peace. He goes to God as trustingly as we ought all to go, as I hope to go by-and-by. Day by day he lies on his bed, helpless, yet content, his eyes growing brighter and brighter, his face paler and purer, until he seems to melt away before my very eyes. I may snatch at him, but I may not keep him. While even He takes my last mite, God recompenses me: He sends into my heart a strength I have dreamed not of; while He lashes me with cypress, He gives me a bit of heart's-ease also. It is more than I deserve.

*October 9.*—When I went out of Archie's room this morning suddenly, in the corridor leading to it I was confronted by my aunt, Mrs. Dare,—the first time I had ever seen her so near Archie's room. Her face was as pale as it well could be; her eyes glowed at me so, I could scarcely look at her. She did not let me look at her long; she went away quickly, as though the sight of my face hurt her. Lately I have seen little of her or my Cousin Gertrude, only at table, and that rarely,—as Barry generally brings my meals up-stairs to me, Archie insisting upon my not going where he cannot see me. Since that afternoon nearly a month ago, the day she drove me to sin, my Cousin Gertrude has been submissive indeed, so submissive that the next day she came to me penitent, begged my pardon, beseeching me to forget her injustice, to try and not blame her. I took her submission for what it was worth: she is a puppet in the hands of her mother, as I am, as I have been all along. Although she has humbled herself to me, yet her eyes betray her whenever I look into them, they hate and defy me so! If it was not for Archie, I would have gone away from their dislike long ago; as it is, I must stay, I must stay,—how long? The staying is bitter-sweet; when the time for going comes, the bitter will have murdered the sweet.

"I appreciate you," Valerie said, the day she left the cottage; she has gone to Boston to pass the week, and to meet her lover there. "I have appreciated you all summer, more than you have imagined. You are brave: I like you for it. I am so glad you have beaten Gertrude

and are to marry Colonel Throckmorton; she never deserved him; you do. I only wish I deserved Royal half as much." Then she kissed me so fondly, in her pretty, childish way, I could not but forgive the sting of her words.

I think only of Archie now. I have fought my other trouble and put it away until the time comes: I only wish I could fight it into a corner and keep it there forever! The cottage is very still; only Mrs. Dare and Gertrude are left. Murray Dare has gone away. I am so glad! I am braver with the quiet!

*October 12.*—Every day I find Mrs. Dare in the corridor; every day her face is pale and her eyes glow at me. Perhaps she knows Archie is going.

*October 13.*—I am nineteen to-day. I found two dresses on my bed to-day, laid there by Barry, a present from Mrs. Dare. I am glad of them, for I have been shivering in my calico: they are warm.

*October 14.*—Dr. Raynor came down to the cottage to-night. He has just told me that the end is near. Uncle Dare does not know: he sits in Archie's room, looking more happy than he has in a long while, for Archie is brighter; his face mirrors heaven's.

*October 15.*—See how steady my hand is, how clear my brain! I will write here all that has happened. I must not be selfish; I must not mock the gate shut in my face, it is all so welcoming, all so peaceful on the other side. I am not worthy; his little hands were worthy, so God heard his knock. My time may come soon. How glad I will be! The waves are beating on the rocks to-night noisily, and the wind howls; I think Archie must hear them too, must be clasping me round and round still with his love, I feel so warm in the midst of my misery, my agony, so aged already!

It has been a lovely October day, warm, sunny, serene, until towards night the wind changed, and this angry sea came up. Through it all I held my darling in my arms by the window, showed him the far smiling sea, the sky overhead, the rocks basking in the sunlight, the bright October light not brighter than the glory of his eyes.

"I feel so happy and quiet, Goldy," he whispered, by-

and-by, "so happy, so happy, you hold me so nicely! If papa was here to hold my hand, I think my heart would be full up then. I must not go to sleep before papa comes, must I?"

"Not if you can help it, dear," I answered, controlling my voice bravely. "Papa loves his little boy so much." Then, although I tried, I could not say any more.

"It is so nice to be loved; it's warming: I used to be cold when I was a very little boy. I've grown bigger since I've had you,—more straightened in my ideas. Goldy, you're fat with love."

"Am I?"

"Yes, not on the outside, for you're quite thin, almost as thin as I am," and here he held up one of his wee hands, so wee and transparent that I could almost see through; "but I can see the fat shining through, just the way the peaches look when they are dead ripe."

"I cannot be fat with love if I have a stone for a heart."

"Oh, yes, you can. You told me once about the rock that wept water at the cryings of the thirsty; then peach-stones have meat inside."

"Mine is meet for repentance," I said, softly. Then, after this, he lay quietly in my arms a long while, neither of us speaking, his eyes turned out to the sunlit sea, mine devouring the sweet purity of his face, his dying face, where heaven looked through.

"I am so, so sleepy," the child said, wearily: "I wish papa would come. What did Jesus say about us?"

"Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

"Then I'll have lots of playmates there," he cried, opening his eyes wide at me. "I'll be straight, and the other children won't mock me or call me names. I shall choose the Christ-child for my dearest friend; wouldn't you?"

"Yes, dear."

"Will you be a little child when you die?"

"I hope so."

"Will papa?"

"If he tries."

"If he is a little child, how shall I know him?"

"The Christ-child will tell you."

"If he grows to be a little boy again, and loses his gray hair, I know God will let me get straight. My hair isn't gray; it's pretty,—the only pretty thing I ever had. I wish the Christ-child would let me keep it; then when you die you wouldn't have to ask any questions; you'd know me by my hair, Goldy."

"Yes, yes."

"Goldy, how your face trembles! Oh, Goldy, I do love you!" the frail arms sought to encircle my neck, but they dropped helpless; I bent down to kiss the precious child-face once or twice passionately. "I am so sleepy, I can't keep my eyes open." Then I saw God's fingers touching his eyes and mouth. "Tell papa I waited for him, I kept my eyes open, I tried to forget I was sleepy. Uncle Will is a little child," he whispered, by-and-by, lying white and still in my arms, with the sunlight stealing its fingers in to lay them tenderly on his face; "you will be a child too. I will tell—the dear Christ-child—all—my—secrets——" At that moment Barry, standing close to us, awe-stricken, tearful, uttered a little exclamation—— "No—more gruel, Barry," he went on, opening his eyes sleepily; "it's so nice to be well——Tell papa—I—waited——"

On the threshold of the door leading into the corridor stood my aunt, Mrs. Dare. I had looked up, at Barry's exclamation, with a heart beating, oh,—so heavily!—and dry, stony eyes, incapable of tears, to look into stonier ones than my own, into a set, rigid face, whose pallor only equaled its anguish. She stood there a moment, speechless, devouring me and my darling with her eyes, her hands clutching nervously at her dress. Then, as the last words died on the child's lips, she came in.

"Is he dead?" Her voice, words, and manner gave me a shock. I looked involuntarily down at the face lying on my arm, the sweet child-face, the shut eyes, the smiling mouth, the tangles of yellow hair rustled by the sea-air, with the sunlight breaking gloriously over it; then I showed it to her.

"He is asleep," I answered, quietly.

"Go away! Lay him down here on the bed; I want—to look at him! Go away!—you and Barry!—go! go!"

"Don't drive me away, Aunt Honoria! Let me stay! See, I am quiet! I am quiet! Let me keep him here in my arms a little longer!"

"Go! go! You have had him; he isn't yours! Go away with your condemning face! Oh, my God! don't you hear?"

Barry took him gently out of my arms and laid him on the bed. "Come, Miss Marguerite," she whispered in my ear, "come away,—it is best,—she is crazed like; God has sent her her heart too late."

Then I followed her mechanically. We went out, and Barry closed the door, shut them in together,—my dead darling in with his mother.

Well, she stayed in there alone until sunset-hour came.

I sat in my own room, listening, but no sound I heard. Last night Dr. Raynor told me Archie might live a day or two days longer. When Uncle Dare went up to the city this morning, he was deceived,—Archie was so bright, so happy. I let him go without telling him. I ought to have told him, I know, but I did not,—somehow I could not. I tried to think Archie would live; he would not go quite so soon! If I did not tell, perhaps God would let him stay longer. My darling! my darling! Ah, if I could only cry! By-and-by Uncle Dare came home. I heard the depot carriage drive off, his steps slowly coming up-stairs. The ears that have listened to the sound of his coming so often will hear it no more; never again till his feet touch the floors of heaven,—till the Christ-child, hand in hand with his darling, shall meet him half-way.

"You must tell him, Miss Marguerite!" Barry came in, looking frightened and appealing. "The Holy Virgin knows I couldn't!"

Then, steadying myself, I went out into the corridor to meet him. I went close up to him. "Uncle Dare," I said, under my breath. "Uncle Dare!"

"That will do!" he answered, looking blankly at me. That was all he said, but his face and his voice were

heart-broken. He had seen the shut door; he had read my face! He was very quiet, so quiet that I almost forgot my own trouble. He walked by me to the closed door. As he gained it, I remembered suddenly who was in there; before I could tell him,—just as I laid my hand detainingly on his arm,—he opened the door. In an instant all the quiet fled out of his face. "Honoria!" he exclaimed, hoarsely. She was sitting close to the bed, her black hair pushed back from her white face, bending over the child, with a dreadful look in her eyes. At the sound of the opening door, and his voice, she started up.

"Archibald!" she cried, stretching out her hands to him. "Archibald!"

Then he went in, and I shut the door.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

October 22.—A week! See how passionless I am, how self-controlled. This shows how long and quiet the past week has been,—since my darling went,—was lost from our daylight in God's hands! This is the first time I have opened my diary during the past week. These seven days, the footprints of which lead up to heaven. I am not as bitter as I was. He has stilled the waters of my soul; they have grown cold and voiceless! Barry and I sit and look at each other the long days through, across a void which seems to lengthen and deepen as time goes by,—they drown us! We may not touch a single article in the room where he fell asleep; Uncle Dare forbids it. Every night when he comes home from the city, after first visiting the little grave under the cedar-trees, during all the remainder of the evening, until midnight, he sits alone, where he has so often sat hand in hand with his child, by the window looking out to the sea. Archie's



little shoes lie beside the bed; Archie's concertina, where his hands last touched it,—everything looks so natural, so remindful. Uncle Dare is happier in their midst. The little chair is in its old place,—empty! My darling! my darling!

Just such another night as that other one,—I mean the night of the day the gate was shut in my face; the waves break noisily on the rocks, and the winds howl. The silence throughout the cottage is intense; it stifles me.

I wish the winds would stop howling! They are full of voices!

October 24.—I have not been troubled by other thoughts; I have ignored them; in my desolation they have passed me by on the other side, all Levites. There has been not one comforting Samaritan among them. Now they push and scramble for a recognition. Colonel Throckmorton returns to Wickoff's Ledge next week.

October 25.—Mrs. Dare has grown to be strangely dependent upon me. She can scarcely bear me for a single instant out of her sight, since the day when she became reconciled to her husband over the dead body of their child. She is wonderfully tender in her treatment of me. What passed between the husband and wife in that hour of reconciliation has never transpired. I can only judge its temper by its effects, by the quiet sympathy expressed in every word and manner of hers when addressed to him. Whether he appreciates this change, I cannot tell,—his face is so dull, so desolate, so heart-broken; no word of mine can comfort him. When I essay it, he only looks at me in that dreadful, blank way, as though he saw nothing! She never mentions Archie's name, or alludes to him in any way. Her silence to-day is as entire as it was before he died; only she has shown me a bit of her heart as warm and palpitating as my own.

This afternoon a trunk came from Boston, containing a full suit of mourning for me. When I attempted to thank her, she silenced me by a look in her eyes, so grave, so sad, the words died away on my lips.

"Wear them, Marguerite," she said, calmly; "but do not speak."

Then, although she had quieted my lips, my heart

would thank her, would grow softened and warmed with gratitude. It is so strange to see her proud, usually intolerant face so changed, so troubled, as though some hidden anxiety is eating it through. Since Gertrude went away to Boston to join Mrs. Hoffman, the day before we laid Archie under the cedar-trees, I imagine I see less trouble in her eyes. I do not quite understand whether it is wholly imagination or not. For the first time since I promised to be Cecil Throckmorton's wife, she spoke to me yesterday of him.

"I was not mistaken, after all," she said, with a faint smile. "You resented my suggesting the possibility of such a consummation once, Marguerite," which was not quite true, since she had not in that long-ago conversation suggested the possibility of such a consummation, but rather that of my proving a victim to Colonel Throckmorton's trifling,—a fact which, for her sake as well as my own, I did not resent, now when reminded of it, but passed by. "I shall not allow you to marry for a long while yet," she added, presently,—"not until you attain your twenty-first birthday. Then you will be at liberty to marry whom and when you please. In the mean time, I hope you will regard your Uncle Will's last wishes faithfully."

"I am in no haste to be married, Aunt Honoria," I answered, promptly, and with my whole heart. I was so happy in giving this assurance; the first sensation of peace I have experienced for many long weeks. I have been pleased ever since to think Uncle Will's last wishes so entirely accord with my own: it is a little bit of light, which serves to alleviate the gloom of my desolation. If he loves me, he will wait—he *will* wait. How I love to write these words! how I love to linger over them!

October 26.—I have rambled in the woods this afternoon, for the first time since that—that dreadful picnic-day, among the fires of sacrifice, under the sheets of gold, where through the maple and chestnut aisles the cool autumn winds blow. I found one linden-tree clothed in orange scales; the leaves of the birches, elms, and chestnuts golden-hearted; the ash-leaves royal in their purple. I trod waysides thickly carpeted with fallen

leaves, playing hide-and-seek all the day long with the strong south wind, their faces turned up to the glorious sunlight, begging to live a little longer. I came home with my basket full of red-tipped Virginia creeper, of scarlet maple, and wild grape-leaves, to cover all over my darling's grave. I have a foolish fancy they will keep him warm,—the hot, red leaves. Just as I came in sight of the cottage gate, I heard a step coming up the road behind me, and, on looking round, I faced the lawyer, Mr. Trent. I have not seen him before since that summer evening when he sought to win my confidence. He has a good, quiet face, which I like; it seems to say, "Let me help you all I can." I did not let him help me then; I might now.

"I have walked from the station across the fields," he said, raising his hat, as I turned around. "It does me good to get out into the country air such an autumn afternoon as this. It is changed since I was here last."

"Yes," I answered, softly, looking down at my hot, red leaves.

"I see you have met with trouble: in the loss of your little cousin, is it not?"

"Yes, in the loss of my—little cousin." Then I could say no more.

"I am sorry for you," he continued. Then, as we reached the gate, instead of opening it to allow me to pass through, he laid his hand on it, and stood looking at me very thoughtfully.

"You look very badly! I thought you looked badly enough when I was here last; you look much worse now. I am your friend. Tell me, are you happy?"

Something in the sympathy of both his voice and manner touched me. "I cannot be very happy now," I answered, quietly. "I have lost everything I ever had,—I mean, I have lost my little cousin, who was very dear to me, very dear!"

"Yes, I know. Are you happy other ways?"

"Yes, quite happy; everybody is kind to me. My aunt does all she can to make me happy, and—well, life isn't very long, after all." Then I looked up at him and

smiled. He shook his head at me when I said that, and his eyes, scrutinizing me, were solemn.

"You must remember one thing," he replied, slowly. "Above all things, remember this,—I am always your friend. If you are ever in trouble, come first to me; I will help you. Promise me this."

At these words I felt impulsed to tell him the thoughts which have been stirring me all day,—my desire, during these intervening years between this and my twenty-first birthday, to earn for myself an independence; instead, deterred by an inexplicable feeling of doubt, I only laid my hand in his outstretched one. "I promise," I said.

Mrs. Dare was seated in the library window as we walked together up the avenue. She smiled at us pleasantly and beckoned us in. Mr. Trent went in alone. I walked around the corner of the cottage, where, under the cedar-trees, close to the rocks, my darling is sleeping; the sea sings his lullaby, the sky covers him over with smiles, my heart, betwixt the two, holds him fast! Mr. Trent is a good, strong man; I know he is. His eyes are so kindly; his mouth so fine, yet sympathetic. He might help me! I have slept long enough! I must awaken, even although it be midnight! No stars shine! no light in the east! and, yet, is it not always blackest before day? It is sweet to stay here where Archie's little grave is; the sea out yonder is the sea his eyes loved. It will be better to go away; I must go! At such a cost my freedom is horrible! and yet I must countenance its inevitabilities; I must no longer remain a dependent upon Mrs. Dare. My letters received from Colonel Throckmorton almost daily are very tender,—so tender, so sympathetic that they rest and comfort me. If he could only stay away always, sending me these letters once in awhile, I could be happier. As it is—ah, well, I must face his coming; I am quite passionless now. I shall be stronger for it. When he comes, I will tell him about the two years,—the blessed two years!—then, if he truly loves me—he says he loves me—he will wait patiently. I will work patiently; work will do me good, and by-and-by—he is so true, so gentle, so deserving—perhaps God, in His goodness, will let me love him. I am selfish! I must not

be an outcast all my life! I will love—I will love him by-and-by!

*October 27.*—To-day is Sunday. On Wednesday, Colonel Throckmorton writes, as his mother is much better, he will come to Wickoff's Ledge to pass a few days. He adds, since he left Bonnie Venture he has received not a single letter from General Farquhar,—a circumstance mystifying to him. His mother is anxious to see me. How fond he is of his mother, in a protecting, tender way which touches me much! Perhaps when he comes he will tell me more about her. I love her already for his sake. I have been praying for strength to-day. God has blessed me. He has quieted me; I will be enabled to meet him, whose wife I have promised to be, in a full fashion of control. If he loves me greatly, I must not break his heart,—his big, true heart. I have been rash, I must bear the yoke; the yoke is not very hard to bear. I was never before loved by one stronger than myself, since Uncle Will died; this man's love rests me as his did. The two years will teach me. It is a very quiet Sunday; the sea is still, the wind is asleep; all is quiet, save Uncle Dare, who wanders about the cottage like a lost spirit journeying for peace. I wish I could comfort him in some way; he will not let me; he avoids everybody. A little while ago he was sitting in Archie's room, looking at Archie's little shoes; now past the window I see him going to his child's grave, to break his heart over it. It is very sad; my own grief is great, but it is only a shadow to his. I have not yet hinted to Mrs. Dare my intention of soon seeking another life, of earning my own bread. When the time comes for me to tell her, I shall not allow her arguments to affect my resolution in any way. I feel assured that Uncle Will would rather I should serve myself than the world in this matter; he would not bid me sacrifice my independence to a whim of hers. If she condemns me, if I am hedged in, I will open my heart to Mr. Trent in some manner: he loved Uncle Will,—he will help me, I know.

In three days Colonel Throckmorton will be here. How many thoughts I will have to think before that day comes! It is nearer morning than it was. He is so good,

I cannot but decide that my folly is past; I love to think it all closed over. I was burnt so quickly, so inexplicably, the scorch is dying out; God has laid his cool hand on it, He gives me an eclipse. They are also coming back in a few days,—my cousins, Valerie and Gertrude. I am so quieted I can bear that, even. Colonel Throckmorton will tell me of Valerie, of his long-ago love; and I will pity her for having passed it by. She little dreams the unworthiness of her later love,—the dishonor, his perfidy, his—

*October 28.*—"Set, gray life, and apathetic end." This is my handwriting on the wall. Long ago it was written in the midst of my thoughtlessness; I was powerless then to decipher its "Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin;" to-day it is made plain: my kingdom hath passed away; the waters of my life are perverted aside from their natural channel, and on its dry bed innumerable foes have entered in. I am tired. Let me write here plainly, in letters of blood, my truth. Early this morning Mrs. Dare went up to Boston, to make arrangements for the reopening of her city house; she returns to-morrow, bringing my cousins with her. Thus I was left quite alone,—alone with the servants, until Uncle Dare came home toward evening. It has been a drear, cold day,—the sea covered with white-caps, the sky a mass of hurrying clouds driven by the northeast wind. Nevertheless, although the cottage has seemed strangely silent and gloomy, with nobody to speak to but dear old Barry, I was more at peace than I have been in a long while. I began to think mayhap the tide of my unrest had turned, to bring me in a flood of quiet hope, to melt the rocks of cold despair which encompass me. If I could bear much now, I might bear more by-and-by; my prayers should climb to heaven, and, kneeling at His feet, He would reach down and cover them.

The day passed away quietly. I could see the rain beating on Archie's grave, beating against it as my heart beats always. Toward night the sea and winds fought wildly together, and the gloom coming down eased my eyes of their watching. Uncle Dare and I had our dinner served to us tête-à-tête in the breakfast-

room. I was glad when it was over,—it was such a ghostly meal, my uncle rarely speaking, and then in that dull blank way which always makes me suffer,—and I could betake myself to the music-room, where I found a bright wood fire blazing on the hearth, built there at Barry's thoughtful instigation. The cottage had been cold all day; yet I scarcely had been conscious of it. Here, however, the bright blaze did me good; it warmed and melted me all over. Outside I could hear the sound of the mad sea dashing noisily against the rocks, the hoarse winds beating about the corners of the cottage; their conflict served only to enhance the sense of comfort enervating me, the conceptions of peace which here almost insensibly softened and overcame me. For the first time since Archie's death, tears came into my eyes, tears of eager longings, of hope, of thanksgiving. In the life to come, I would fight a good fight, God willing; I had been weak, I was gaining my triumph; the dross of a temporary madness had been transmuted into gold; if my suffering had been great, so also was my recompense! Also for the first time since that day—that day when General Farquhar so surprised me here, when he so peremptorily demanded a recognition of his power—I found myself in this room. Then my heart had beaten swiftly, in a subtle intoxication; now, I was proud to think, my quiet was complete, the measure of my peace grown full! The firelight flickered over wall and ceiling, on bright-framed pictures, on the sofa where Archie had lain that day asleep, an image of the child Raphael, with his dreaming face nestled in the luxuriance of his yellow hair,—my darling, my darling, calling me from behind the gate, if I might only go! How empty life has seemed since he fell asleep in my arms! how somber and full of disquiet! If he had stayed, it might have been sweeter, its burden not so hard to bear. Thinking these thoughts, I knelt down on the rug in front of the fire, stretching out my hands to its blaze. When Cecil comes back,—it was the first time I had called him Cecil, even in my thoughts,—perhaps the void would not seem so big; his love would rub all the sharp edges of memory smooth; I would forget everything in him; at least I would try to, bravely;

I had promised to be his wife, I would live to make myself worthy! In his letter received to-day, he wrote, among other things, that when he comes to me on Wednesday he will tell me all about Blossom Village, his connection with it, everything, in fact, I may desire to know; no longer will his lips remain closed, but opened at my bidding, since our troth is plighted to one another. Thinking this over, I knew that his disclosures would only add conviction to my suspicions that in my Cousin Valerie I recognize the woman he loved so long ago; these suspicions, which I have so long kept rigidly secret, I would acknowledge to him, for the first time I would utter them!

The fire toasted my fingers, burnt my face, and by-and-by drove me away to the piano. I opened it, and, thinking of Cecil Throckmorton, began to play. I heard the wind howling, I allowed my music to mock it; the noise of the sea caused my fingers to grow exultant; my lover was so true, so noble in comparison with—ah, well, with all other men; I could not but grow to love him by-and-by, in two blessed years. Thinking this, for the first time in many months I began almost unconsciously to sing our old song, that which in those long-ago days at Blossom Village had so comforted him;—"The Last Rose of Summer." It seemed strange to be singing it, yet so sweet, my whole heart sang. I no longer heard the wind, the moans of the sea, or the crackling of the fire-logs on the hearth; my eyes were blind to the waverings of the candle-light on the walls, the bright cosiness of the whole room; instead, I saw the hills, the meadows of Blossom Village, I heard the blind man's voice whispering "Silver Tongue," I felt the touch of his hand on mine! Was it all a fancy? Was not somebody bending over me, a listening, impassioned face? were not hands, strong, close-clasping hands, laid on mine in reality?

"Silver Tongue," repeated the voice, "little Silver Tongue, wake up. I am here!"

I had not heard the opening or the closing of the window leading down to the lawn. I was not aware of his presence until I looked up now into his proud, still face. I could not believe the evidence of my own eyes; I could

not accept the conviction of my own ears; I only sat there staring up at him, with all my old trouble come back at the sound of his voice, fired into life at the asking of his eyes.

"My little Silver Tongue," he repeated, earnestly, "do you not hear me?—Ah, how you have suffered!" Then he bent low down over me. It was plain now; why had I been so deceived? The very sound of his voice was the same; this was its power, in this lay its subtlety of control over me. I had been blind, I had denied it so long, I must acknowledge the truth at last. I was stunned; I could not speak; I sat there helpless, robbed of all my boasted control. "You are cold," he said; "you tremble. Come here to the fire. I have astonished you, have I not?—as greatly as I astonished you that other night I found you on the beach. I should have told you then. I intended doing so, but you would not permit me. You were cruel. You must be cruel no longer."

"I do not understand you." I found my voice at last, as he drew me authoritatively away from the piano to the fire. I could not resist him. "I have been deceived. It was Cecil Throckmorton, and yet it was not; I am all astray."

"Willfully astray," he said, smiling at me a little. "Sit here on this lounge, and let us talk it all over. Tell me, why have you so decisively insisted upon thinking Throckmorton to be the poor devil you nursed nearly four years ago at Blossom Village?" I did not sit down. I only stood and looked at him.

"Miss Tabitha told me," I faltered.

"And pray how did Miss Tabitha know?"

"She saw the name on your handkerchief. She showed it to me the day I left Blossom Village; then——"

"Miss Tabitha was a romantic soul," he interrupted me,— "like all romantic souls, mistaking upon every possible occasion the shadow for the substance. She deceived you as well as herself. Then Throckmorton, generous dog, in these later days has been heightening the color of your conceit by allowing you to judge him as a fool. I was a fool; I take the consequences. I was blind; I am blind no longer, little Silver Tongue!" He

came and stood close to me, where I leaned against the mantel-piece, listening eagerly, powerless to combat the power of his voice and eyes, confused, rebellious, wondering, all at once. He was pale and determined, as I could see. I sought safety in avoiding his eyes; I could do nothing, be nothing, while looking into them. "Will you listen to my story? I have a story to tell, a foolish, miserable story. Do not condemn me now; condemn me by-and-by, if you will."

"I will listen."

"Ah, but I want you to listen in my way, not in yours: yours is cold, defiant; mine is—well, I want you to sit here beside me on the lounge!"

"I can listen here as well,—better."

"You are merciless," he said, presently; then he leaned his arm on the mantel, and, resting his head on his hand, stood looking down at me. "This is my recompense. I have come here against my will, my Vaucluse has only served as a furnace, wherein a fresh fire has been built. Do you remember what Petrarch says? 'Fool that I was, not to have remembered the first schoolboy lesson, that solitude is the nurse of love!' I have tried to forget you. You were cruel that night you affronted me. I have now been away from you six weeks, is it not? I have sought to bury you each day. Look at me; tell me the result! Will you not at least look at me?" he added, by-and-by.

"General Farquhar, you have no right to talk to me in this way, I have no right to listen. Tell me, if you will, your story; I will listen patiently. If you have deceived me, if you have no story to tell, I must go away."

"I will tell my story. Years ago—seven years, I think—I met your Cousin Valerie Dare at Long Branch. I loved her: it is a weak word, yet I possess no other. She was very young, beautiful. I—well, I was a fool; it is a concise word, it expresses all; we were secretly engaged three years; even her mother did not know. At the end of the three years, which she passed abroad, when I sought her on her return from Europe, she gave me an invitation to her wedding with Mr. Hoffman. He was rich, I was poor. Do you understand now my state of



invalidism at Blossom Village?" He had spoken abruptly, hoarsely. The tone of his voice hurt me, as though he was touching me with fire. "Is my story sufficiently concise?" The light of the candles, of the fire, waved sharply before my eyes, crossed by lines of black; I was almost blind with consternation, with the light pouring in from all sides. I dared not look at him; a feeling as of death, of utter despair, was annihilating my last remnant of self-control. "At least, if you may not look at me," he said, by-and-by, more quietly, "speak at least one word, to tell me you are not quite deaf."

"I hear!"

"I will not weary you. I was desperate. I had trusted her so implicitly! It is the old story, and I have promised not to weary you. The day she so kindly extended to me an invitation to her wedding,—it was in New York city,—I was staying with Throckmorton at his rooms. Instead of returning to him that night,—I was crazy, indeed,—I preferred to offer my service as a passenger on a train of cars going,—only God knew where,—that I might rush away from the scene of my disaster. Blind with pain, overcome by despair, I succeeded. Being regarded as a maniac, sans money, sans wit, the conductor of the train, on which I was so successfully playing the rôle of madman, humanely put me off at Blossom Village, to take care of myself as best I might. I took care of myself remarkably well. It was in the middle of the night, and a damp, marshy place: so I decided to take a half-typhoid, half-brain fever, by sleeping there all night on the ground. After a day or two had passed in this manner, Dr. Lescom finally found me out, and carried me to the hospitable shelter of Miss Tabitha's roof. Have I wearied you?"

"No, no!"

"You know what a pleasant madman I was there; or have you forgotten?"

"No!"

"Look at me once, Silver Tongue, and tell me you do not quite despise me!"

I did not look at him, but I said, "I do not despise you."

"Your voice is cold; it belies your words! I dare you to look at me!" He did not attempt to approach me, he only stood looking down at me in that way I knew so well. Although I kept my eyes fixed resolutely on the fire at my feet, yet I felt how his eyes were watching my face,—his powerful, all-searching eyes. "I dare you to look at me, Silver Tongue." Then he drew my eyes up to his. I could not resist him! I could not help it! I was so famished! I loved him so!—his were grown dark, softened here in the firelight. I could see how white his face was, how intense his self-control. "My darling! my darling!" he said, under his breath. Then he stretched out his arms to me: "Marguerite!"

Ah, Heaven!—well, I suffered, as we all have to suffer at times, but God knows it is hard. To help me, Valerie's face came up between his and mine; her portrait was hanging just over his head. Instead of answering him with words, I pointed to it.

"Yes, she is beautiful," he said, mockingly, turning his head to look, "but her beauty for me has passed away. She sold my love for gold; does she imagine I will turn the other cheek also? Marguerite, how hard your eyes are! Ah! now your face changes; it looks now as it must have looked during those blind, miserable days of mine when I could not see you. You were a good, pious little girl, I remember, talking Bible, and lamenting over your red hair and freckles, you queer child! I will make a confession: for a time after I left Blossom Village, in Throckmorton's care,—he only stayed over one night there, Dr. Lescom having, before he went West, made all arrangements complete for my removal,—while I was undergoing a course of treatment for my eyes, I forgot all about you; indeed, I never mentioned the fact of your existence to Throckmorton until casually, one night, while bivouacking on the field, I spoke to him of a little girl who had been kind to me during my illness at Blossom Village, and who, upon leaving, had promised to pray for me. I had forgotten your name,—they used to call you Margie, I believed,—so I did not enter into particulars; consequently, he must have forgotten all about you until you astonished him so on the yacht that night.

Then," he added, smiling at me a little, "that was the first time I recognized you as the little girl who nursed me so kindly long ago. I overheard something you said, Throckmorton's reply, and my suspicions were aroused. The tone of your voice had always affected me as one I had heard before; now the riddle was solved: before, I had regarded you as a very impulsive, fascinating child; since, although you have endeavored to be haughty, indifferent on all occasions, I have meant to conquer you,—to——"

"He deceived me," I faltered.

"Do you mean Throckmorton? Yes, he deceived you, for my sake, to shield me. He fancied me sensitive, easily wounded, a victim to ugly scars; he took upon himself the consequences of my long-past madness; he wished to prevent you—romantic little girl that you are—from afflicting me with the ghost of my former degradation. He was generous, self-sacrificing. The play amused me; I watching it from afar off; I allowed you to be deceived, to imagine him the fool. As for him, he has never known my cognizance of the mistake. He is also deceived, as you have been."

"Yes, I have been deceived!" I whispered, with trembling lips.

"Willfully deceived, as I before told you. On every occasion since, when we have been alone, the words undeceiving you have hung on my lips, only to be choked back by your indifference. Ah, child, how cruel you are! To-night I stood on those steps, where we sat together that afternoon,—do you remember?—looking in at you. Well, I can never tell you what my heart held. Did you not promise you would sing that song only to me? It all came back to me, the remembrance of your promise, as I stood there watching you,—your pale, beautiful face,—listening to your inspired voice, until something bade me accept it as an omen. I would tell you my story; perhaps then there might be peace between us, after all." His voice sounded low, restrained, full of suspense; it went straight to my heart; my agony seemed greater than I could bear. I bowed my head on the mantel to hide my face, my quivering lips. "Throckmorton has

been deceived in many ways," he went on, more steadily. "He has imagined me again blinded by Mrs. Hoffman's beauty, her—— I will not use harsh words, since she is a woman, and your cousin; in a few words, he has feared the worst, that, after all, I would again seek to make her my wife. I am not so threadbare as I was. The past three years, besides bringing me peace, has also given me wealth. To offer the annihilation of both to her, would prove me a fool against my will!" There was a silence, broken only by the fight of the wind and sea,—by the crackling of the bright, mocking fire; in my anguish it seemed to mock and laugh at me. I prayed to God to pity me! "Marguerite," and he came close to me as he spoke, "have you also thought I could do this thing,—false to my manhood and myself? Ah, well, you were deceived; you did not know I was the one who had so loved her. You told me that night, 'I despise you with all my heart and soul!' I did not believe you then; I do not believe you now; but your words affronted me. You have given me the only unrest I have known during the past three years; you have tormented me, mystified me!—have you loved me?" I did not answer; I scarcely heard; the truth was so great, so appalling, and I was so unprepared, I felt that each word of his was a nail driven remorselessly into the coffin of my peace. "You will not answer!—Surely, if in the past you have ever imagined me in love with your cousin, you will absolve me now from all suspicions of that nature, will you not?"

"She showed me a letter,—it was in your handwriting,—that night,—that night I hated you so. In it you told her you loved her,—she was to be your wife——"

"A letter written seven years ago! Mrs. Hoffman is more sentimental than I have judged her, to pet a repudiated letter seven years. And you believed it, you trusted her,—you dear,—my darling, my darling. If you had known the truth that night,—if you had read her false heart aright,—would you have been as cruel as you were? would you have said to me, 'I despise you with all my heart and soul'? Speak, for God's sake, Marguerite!" he added, hastily, as I continued silent; "you are more

cruel than you know. I came here because I love you; I go away only if you love me not. I have seen love in your face many times, unless your face speaks falsely. I love to think your face is true!" The firelight mocked and dazzled me, even as the truth did. Where was all my whilom peace fled?—my sweet hopes, my control? Was life always to be as black as this,—a thirsty waste? Was deceit ever to be my daily food, I but a puppet in the hands of Fate, a miserable nothing in God's sight? "Look at me once, Marguerite; see how patient I am. It is the work of devils to be patient! I have shown you my heart; show me yours!" Words choked in my throat, my heart beat in a sudden suffocation! I could not let my hopes of heaven go from me like this! I had been deceived, wickedly, wrongfully deceived, and God had permitted it. He was crushing my heart in His strong hands! I grew reckless, desperate; the devil tempted me. "You tremble; you are not cruel, after all." Then I looked up at him helplessly,—up into his eyes, dark with tenderness and suspense. He came close to me,—so close that I could hear his heart beating as strongly as my own; his iron-gray mustache touched my hair; his firm hands took mine away from my face. "Your face is true, after all!" he said, under his breath, "your little, suffering face. Looking into my eyes thus, I defy you to tell me you do not love me!—you have mocked me, you will mock me no longer,—you will promise to be my child-wife, my darling." Then, with a half-fierce eagerness, he bent down over me. "Ah, how I love you! how I long to kiss you! I will kiss you—for the first time,—you are so dear to me, Marguerite!" His arms were about me as they had been that night before, that night when my cousin had told me her lies. I was weak. I loved him so; if I might only let him love me forever, if God would only let me be his wife, his little child-wife. "My darling, my darling!" he whispered, and his lips were near mine. Before he could touch them, before the fatal weakness sapping my strength could wholly overcome me, I had shaken myself free. We stood looking straight into each other's faces, a long while, speechless. "Well, what is it?" he said, presently, with white lips.

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

*October 29.*—I sit here, and look at the blue, sunlit sky, at the islands laughing across at me. The strong southeast wind taps at my window and rattles its panes boisterously; the sea comes breaking in, frothy, green with light, dashing its spray against the rocks and far over the lawn. The silence throughout the cottage is intense, ghostly. My cousins return to Wickoff's Ledge to-night; until then, there will be nothing bright in the house, save the sunbeams dancing about its rooms. It is a glorious October day, yet its glory is not for me; the sea may break, break, break, on its stones out yonder, but the day is dead, its tender grace will never come back to me! It was so dark, so desolate, last night; I am more used to the night now; the daylight startles and mocks me. If it would only go-by, if I might sleep away! I will live over again here those last dreadful moments, for the last time,—for the last time, I pray God!

His face was so pale, so startled, so stern, I could not speak to him; I could only stand there looking into his eyes, speechless, despairing, trying to steady myself to be brave, for his sake as well as my own. It was a hard battle: heaven seemed so near, yet I might not grasp it, I must turn my back; be hungry and thirsty through all the remaining days of my life. I thought of Cecil, of his love, my promise, our betrothal, all the maddening consequences of my Cousin Valerie's lie, my credulity, her triumph. Cecil's lazy, gentle face thrust itself up before my despairing eyes, demanding a recognition, a sacrifice; it shut out that other face, that beseeching, fiercely tender face, so beloved, so near; I could have fairly cried with pain, dying within sight of the Promised Land!

"Well, what is it?" he repeated. "My God, you torture me more than any other woman ever could. Tell me, what does that dreadful look in your face mean, Marguerite?" I essayed to speak, but the words would not

come "My child," he said, stretching out his arms to me hastily, "you suffer. I love you; let me help you,—I will help you, gladly, with all my heart, you little, cruel girl. Come here; let me comfort you, let me shelter you!"

"You can never shelter me; I have promised—I am betrothed to Colonel Throckmorton!"

I said it at last. I put my devil out of countenance; I triumphed for Cecil's sake. When I said it, I was forced to hide my eyes from his,—from his white, stricken face. I thought he would look pained, astonished; I was not prepared for either the agony of his face or the stern despair of his eyes. I could not bear it; I forgot then my own death in his. There was a long, fearful silence.

"Our little vaudeville is over, and you have played your rôle remarkably well," he said, by-and-by, folding his arms, and leaning heavily against the mantel, his head almost touching the frame of Mrs. Hoffman's portrait above. "My only regret is that I cannot cry an encore. A French philosopher says, 'Truth always peeps out at some place; sooner or later we pass for what we are.' Fénelon was right; but I do not feel flattered at having made a discovery in support of his axiom. You are the second woman who has played Phryne to my Phidias. Women are charnel-houses of deceit; their transparent virtues are all worn on their sleeves. Congratulate yourself upon your fresh success. I acknowledge myself a fool, a clown. For fear of proving myself yet a greater one, I will wish you a very good-evening."

The scathing sarcasm of both his voice and manner, the intense scorn of his face, made me grow faint, sick; it seemed hard to let him go away believing me false, and yet—and yet, if he stayed, if I should attempt to undeceive him, I might forget Cecil's face, grow little in strength, a puppet to my own despair! It would be better to let him go, even believing me false. I could stand that better than his tenderness. I did not look at him; instead, I stood staring into the fire, dumb with pain and woe, realizing that in this moment my last hope of happiness was departing from me. I saw the fire leaping and crackling

joyfully; I heard his heavy steps approach the window leading down to the lawn, by which he had entered: he was going,—my love, my love! he was going, believing me false! His hand was on the window, yet he did not open it; he stood there a long while silent.

"Marguerite, there is a dreadful mistake; there must be. I have thought you pure, honest. Devils do not mask themselves in faces like yours. If you have spoken the truth, if you are to be dear old Throckmorton's wife,—God bless him!—instead of mine, let me go away from you at least knowing you to be not thoroughly heartless. Speak one word to undeceive me!" The noise of the sea and wind alone answered him, the crackling of the logs on the hearth. "I came here to-night," he went on, in a stern, hard voice, "direct from the station; I have been away from you so long. I could not even go to Bonnie Venture without first looking upon you. You are right, it was folly; I ought to have accepted your repulse that night when I was so daring as to love you. Will you not speak at least one word, Marguerite?" I shook my head; I clasped my hands tightly together, that he might not see how they trembled. If he would only go before he should make my agony greater than I could bear! If Cecil was only here,—yes, I must think of him,—if he was only here to help me! "Did I not once call you Werther's Lotte? I was beginning to love you then, indeed, I think I wholly loved you, even while I thought you loved Throckmorton, and you were always so cold to me; I saw how glad you invariably appeared to meet him, how willing to listen to his voice. This was for a time. By-and-by something told me you did not love him, since your manners toward him were so frank, so friendly, so entirely free from all tenderness, all sentiment. Do you remember that afternoon we sat here just where I am standing, together,—when I called you my Marchese di Pescara, and we talked such wise trash? For the first time that day, looking back into your eyes, I imagined, fond fool that I was, you loved me, that my own intense passion was at last winning from you a sympathy of which you were wholly unconscious yourself, but which by-and-by you would awake one day to find as full-grown

as my own. I was patient. I watched you. I was deceived. I thought I saw under all your assumption of indifference, of avoidance, a little light, growing broader and deeper day by day, the light of a reciprocating love. I watched you, I was patient,—what a devil's needle-work it is to be patient!—until that night I found you on the beach I could be patient no longer, I loved you so dearly, Marguerite!" He had left the window, and now stood close at my side; I rested my hands on the mantel to steady them, to hide their tremblings; my face I turned away from him. "Marguerite, do not be afraid; I am quiet, very quiet. I will not seek to molest you again. I was savage to you a little while ago; God knows I am penitent. You are good and sweet, not false; you have not sought to deceive me, you have repulsed my advances always. I have deceived myself. It seems hard to me, of course, but I must bear it. If you cannot love me, I am glad you love Throckmorton; I have known him many years: he is true; he will be kind to you." His voice sounded hoarse; he stopped abruptly. "I shall go away after this. When I see you again, we shall be friends; I shall not come back for long years. I have thought of going abroad for some time past; it will not be so hard to go now. When I come back you will be—dear old Throck's wife. Will you bid me good-by kindly, Marguerite?" I stretched out one hand to him mechanically. I did not turn my face; I dared not. "How you tremble, poor child! I have been rude to you, I have frightened you; I will be more controlled. Look at me once, will you not? Only think how long it will be before we look at each other again. Look at me once, this once!"

"No, it will do no good. Say good-by, and go, go!"

"Marguerite, for God's sake look at me!" I could not; I dared not. There was a deathly silence; then he spoke again, hoarsely as before. "There is some mistake, some horrible mistake; I will not go until you look at me. Hear me: I swear I will not go one step until you show me your face. I have a right to demand it; I have a right to know the truth. I am quiet; do not be frightened; I will be gentle to you; Throckmorton is my friend; I will not touch you. Show me your face." I felt that I could

not bear much more, God would not give me the strength. If he stayed much longer, I could not help showing my weakness; if he went, I might be saved. I was pledged to Cecil, I must remember him; he loved me. I must not break his heart, I must break my own instead. This other man was inexorable, he would not go unless I told him the truth; I would tell him the truth. Slowly I turned my face, my miserable, suffering face, round to his. He devoured it with his searching eyes, his white face grew paler still. "There is some mistake; I knew it. You are not false, you are mine after all. Ah, God, how hard this is! Your little, patient, suffering face, how I love it, how I long to comfort you! You are not false, only suffering. Tell me, Marguerite, tell me the truth!"

"I will tell you. I was driven to it; Valerie deceived me. I thought you false to her that night; I hated you for it. I went to the picnic,—I was lost. Gertrude thought I was throwing myself at Colonel Throckmorton's head. She told me so, he overheard her, he was on his way to New York. He stopped just long enough to tell me he loved me, to ask me to be his wife. I was desolate, I was weary, selfish. I promised—to be his wife. He loves me!" I had spoken incoherently, almost roughly. When I finished, his face, which grew at my every word infinitely tender, transformed, looked down into mine now, impassioned. I could see how he was fighting himself.

"I may not touch you," he said, under his breath, "yet we love each other, all because of that woman's perfidy, her baseness; that I ever loved her is a shame, a degradation. I must expiate it with my life; I must drag you down, my darling, to share my torture. Ah, Heaven, how beautiful you are, how pure, how womanly! How I long to take you in my arms, and hold you there forever; and yet I may not. I may not even touch you, my darling! I am quiet, very quiet; we are both quiet, you and I. God only knows——"

Well, it was very hard, how hard He only knows who gave it to me to fear. I was glad when it was over, when my love—I write it here for the last time, only this once—went out from my sight into the cold, dark night beyond. He was controlled to the last,—his face



never looked to my eyes so grand, so noble as at that dreadful moment when he bade me farewell; this is one sweet thought. He loved me so purely, so honorably; he left my lips pure,—pure for Cecil.

"God bless you, little one," he whispered. "God bless you and old Throck. Don't forget me, quite; remember always, that to me you are the purest, the most thorough woman God's light ever shone on!"

See I kiss these words written here; these poor illegible words, as I never, never shall kiss him!

October 29.—They came home last night,—Mrs. Dare and my cousins,—bright, happy, overflowing with affection for me. They sought me out at once, telling me how glad they were to see me once again, and hoping I had not gone crazy with ennui.

"I thought of you a thousand times," Valerie said, taking both my impassive hands in hers, "and I hated to think of you here alone in this gloomy house,—although, since you are engaged, you won't mind being quiet so much; as for me, I enjoyed myself ever so much, only I missed Royal more than I can tell." And by these words I knew she was entirely ignorant of General Farquhar's return to Bonnie Venture. She did not remain long in ignorance of this fact, however, as I think Celeste, who had not gone to the city with her mistress, but who in some way finds out invariably the whys and wherefores of every action of mine, did not fail to learn, in this instance, of General Farquhar's visit paid to me the previous evening.

This morning, soon after breakfast, Mrs. Hoffman came up to my room, the first time she has ever entered it. "I have brought you a little present, Marguerite; a little thing to wear with your mourning. You have such a pretty white neck, this jet cross will be very becoming." Then she laid a package on my lap. "I hear that Royal was here last night, did you see him?"

"Yes, I saw him."

"Did he stay long? did he know that I was away when he came?"

"He did not stay long. I do not know if he was aware of your absence when he came."

"How did he appear?"

"You are asking more questions than I may answer, Cousin Valerie; for a minute analysis of his appearance, I refer you to your informant, Celeste." She grew very pale at my words,—pale to her lips.

"I suppose he will come down to the cottage just as soon as he hears of my return," she said, trying to smile at me. "I will write him a note and let him know. When I last saw him he did not intend returning to Bonnie Venture so soon. You are so cool, so uncommunicative, you exasperate me, Marguerite. You did not tell him what I told you about our engagement, did you? You promised you would not, you know."

For one instant I was tempted to humiliate her,—to make plain my knowledge of her duplicity,—his, of her double-dealing also, but I controlled myself: suspense would more surely punish her, more fully revenge this utter wreck of my life. Ah, Heaven! how desperate I felt sitting there, outwardly calm, looking up into her fair, lying face. "Did I promise you, Cousin Valerie? When you see him you must ask him whether I told him." Then I took up the package which she had laid on my lap, but which I had not touched, and held it toward her: "I cannot accept it," I said; that was all I said, but she understood me.

"You are very strange, Marguerite," she replied, mechanically taking the package from me into her own hands,—"melodramatic to say the least. If you have played traitor to my confidence, all is over between us." Her voice, which she endeavored to render playful, sounded nervous, uncertain; her face and lips were very pale, brightened only by the shining of her teeth and eyes. I did not answer; I sat still, with my hands clasped together, waiting patiently for her to go. "If you have betrayed to Royal Farquhar my confidence," she reiterated, deliberately, and watching my face, "you must tell me!" At the sound of his name, well controlled as I was, I started a little; I could not help it. I could not bear to have her profane it with her lips. "You start and tremble even at the mention of his name; there is more concealed by you than even I imagined,—you love him!"

I now started fairly up from my chair to confront her. "Cousin Valerie, you forget two things: one, that there is a limit to all patience,—the other, that I am the pledged wife of Colonel Throckmorton. In future, I must insist upon you remembering both!" Then I sat down again, robbed of my bravery, and turned my face away from her just in time to hide its misery.

"I will remember," she said. "I had forgotten for awhile. You must forgive me, Marguerite; I did not wish to hurt you!—I was foolish! You are to marry Colonel Throckmorton, of course."

Then she went away. After she had gone, I shut the door after her and locked it. I was alone once more with my wounds, my despair! The next hour was a dreadful one.

October 30.—St. Matthew says: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand." Is this a warning to me?—to my rebellion? I have been reading my Bible this morning—trying, rather, to read it—somewhere to find comfort, peace, and I cannot. I am wicked: all the words are a blur, the sentences a maze! This text alone remains with me, to my uttermost confusion, dazing my brain, and leaving me a puppet in the hands of disquiet. One overwhelming thought encompasses me: he comes to-night,—my friend, the man whose wife I have promised to be. At least one mite of success is mine,—I have quieted myself sufficiently to be able to meet him kindly, calmly! He loves me so, I must be generous! He came to me in my trouble, when all others fell off; I must recompense him! My kind friend! my noble Cecil! It is necessary that I should remember this: I no longer possess the right to repine, or to make heavy unto myself my sacrifice; it is no longer honorable to think of the past, to dwell on its sweetnesses, its cruelties, its despair! God give me strength to shut it over,—to purge my heart of its infidelities! These past hours since—since he went, have been hours of intolerable anguish, of exquisite pain; in their fire I have grown proportionately, in age as in sorrow. If, as the past lies far back, long and bitter, the future might stretch near, short and sweet, I would think

God good! I have one little thought, I nurse and fondle it; one small sparkle to light my way: he was true through all! He loved me! I hide it away,—it is mine!—it shall be no other's! It will not be sinful to keep it, will it, my Father?

*Evening.*—The new moon peeps at the sea, across the rim of the hills; the sea sings back its answer in letters of foam. I sit betwixt the two; cold, quiet,—more cold than the rocks yonder, more quiet than the hills; this is another life, the old one is shut over, as night shuts over the day. It was dark this morning. Toward afternoon the sun shone, until, by-and-by, they told me the sun was setting in a magnificent confusion. Mrs. Dare took me to the window to look at the purple, red, and golden clouds. I tried to see them, but I was blind, quite blind to their glories. When Cecil came, I was out walking on the beach, the gray, cold beach, with the night winds whistling shrilly about me, the lights of Bonnie Venture shining afar off. Valerie watches those windows by day and by night. Her punishment is begun, he comes not,—he has gone away I know, I read it in her face to-day. By-and-by I went back to the cottage, away from the sea-noise, the cruel lights, the laughing winds, to Cecil. Just as I entered the cottage grounds I heard the carriage-wheels driven off; then I knew he had come, he was waiting for me! I believe I stopped and prayed, just where he, my other friend, caught me in his arms that night. Oh, God, that I should remember! Yes, I stopped and leaned against the stone wall, praying, forgetting everything but my prayer to be strong and self-forgetful, to pass by all other thoughts for his sake, to be false no longer. The winds whispered horrible things in my ears, the sea moaned at me, the night frowned at me; but I triumphed,—for his sake, I laid myself low. He was standing in the library, as I passed the window, talking to Mrs. Dare and my cousins, close to the fire, holding his hands out to its blaze. He looked so fair, so gentle, so kind, I hated myself for daring to be false to him. He heard me enter the hall, and he came out to meet me, shutting the library door behind him. I waited under

the hanging lamp in the center of the hall, trying to smile at him, to be brave.

"Marguerite, my dear child," he said, softly, taking both my hands closely in his, "I am with you at last. I have thought of you so much in your trouble, have so longed to try and comfort you. You are pale, little one; you have suffered more than you have let me know." Then, bending down, he kissed me. The kiss hurt me, pained me; I wanted to speak, I made the effort, but I could not. "You are cold," he went on, laying his hand on my head; "your hair is wet; where have you been?"

"I was nervous, not feeling well, I went down to the beach for a little while."

"I ought to scold you, I know, but I have not the heart. I am sorry that my little girl is so imprudent. I must take you immediately to the fire." Saying this, he led me to the library door, opened it, and ushered me into the presence of my aunt and cousins. "Here is the truant," he said, gravely, "very cold and very wet; I shall scold her to-morrow." He took me to the fire, and standing there beside me, chafed my hands between his, all the while looking thoughtfully down into my face with his tender, blue eyes.

It was a sore trial, but I stood it bravely. They sat by and listened to every word he spoke,—Mrs. Dare and my cousins watched every gesture, every look; I knew it, but I did not care, since our words were so few, his manner so quiet, so undemonstrative. Our meeting was not so hard as I had thought, as I had feared; his sympathy expressed so delicately is very sweet, his gentleness a rest. I am nearer peace than I was, I will let him lead me if he can! If I did not know the truth, if I was still deceived, as I was a little while ago, I might grow warmer to him; this cold would be melted out of my heart, he is so tender, so kind. Will God soften my heart even yet, by-and-by, after he has served his two years? Two years! There is a sweet sound in the words, a touch of salvation. I will work my peace in that time; I must not look back, God help me!

"Good-night, Marguerite," he said, following me to the stairs when I came up,—"you suffer yet; you must let

me help you, now that I have come; I will try with all my strength. We are to help each other all our lives now, dear." And he said it so gently, so helpfully, it gave me a dim consciousness of comfort at once.

The moon has gone by, the night is black; across the waters of the bay shines the mariner's beacon. My moon is gone by, my night is black, yet across the waters of my soul my beacon shines out of God's face.

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## CHAPTER XLIX.

*October 31.*—See this bunch of heliotrope interspersed with heart's-ease which Cecil brought me on his return from Bonnie Venture this morning; the sentiment of the heliotrope is "devotion," of the heart's-ease, "think of me." Can I accept the one without complying steadfastly with the pleading of the other? It is warm to-day, soft and balmy; there is a golden haze everywhere; the hills seem to float afar off in a sort of mirage in the air; there is a taste of Indian summer. I was sitting on one of the rocks, by the sea, in a cosy nook shielded from the cottage by the summer-house, making a wreath of evergreen to lay on Archie's bed yonder under the cedar-trees, on the turf pillow they have raised above him, when Cecil came noiselessly behind me and laid his hand on my shoulder. His voice sounded very strangely when he spoke.

"Marguerite, I want you to help me." I looked up at him and stretched out my hand, while something in the trouble of his face bade me also to prepare strength for my own defense. "I went up to Bonnie Venture this morning hoping to hear tidings of Farquhar. I found this letter awaiting me; I thought him still in Washington; I find that he only left Bonnie Venture day before yesterday. I did not know of his return. His silence during my absence in New York I have endeavored to explain to my own satisfaction in many ways; it is explained now: my letter sent to him in Washington was mis-

directed; those which I sent since to Bonnie Venture, in anticipation of his speedy return, and in which I told him of our engagement, Mrs. Sutton tells me he found awaiting him there on his return Monday night. This was his first knowledge of our engagement, I think. In this letter, evidently written late that night, and left with Mrs. Sutton to be delivered to me, while he congratulates me, at the same time he bids me farewell." He was not looking at me, but at the islands far across the bay; he did not know that my hands, even as his voice, trembled, how blurred everything became to my eyes. He stood close to me: now he bent down and laid the bunch of heliotrope and heart's-ease on my lap. "It is a rare circumstance for men to love as Roy and I love each other, as we have loved each other since we were boys together,—rarer still, that nothing has ever possessed the power to occasion a moment's antagonism between us, never but once, and in this instance the occasion came in the form of a woman, a woman beautiful as false, such a one as mocks you sinfully out of pages found in 'Laus Veneris,' as Vivien might have proved to Merlin the fooled. I warned him, he shut his ears; I showed him, he would not see; I bade him taste the truth, he closed his lips. Men are puppets pulled by the string of a woman's smile. He shut his ears, eyes, lips, persistently to all save her voice, her beauty, her poison dealt out generously to him, a hemlock cup of death, which, in draining, he seemed to long for the more! I loved Roy better than she ever professed to love him; he was my friend, my other self; her plaything, grand, strong man that he was, her victim! God alone knows her sin. I loved him, I love him still, more than I can tell you, child. Behold my recompense!" His eyes, usually so lazy, so insouciant, were stirred now, stirred to their very depths. Actuated by some concealed pain, some restrained anxiety, he talked more to himself than to me,—he did not look at me once. "I deceived you once, Marguerite," he went on, seating himself on the rock at my side, and laying his hand gently on mine, "for his sake; you thought me the blind man whom you nursed so kindly at Blossom Village; I allowed you

to so consider me, for his sake, to shield Farquhar, the real sufferer, from all possible retrospection, from all consciousness of a former woe; he is so truly great, so noble, I did not wish to see him humbled even in thought. You are so impetuous, little one, I feared to discover him to you; I hoped he would manfully outlive his weakness, never again be tempted to fall at her feet, at the feet of your cousin, Mrs. Hoffman. You are pale, Marguerite, you tremble, perhaps I did wrong to deceive you; forgive me, it is no longer necessary for me to act a lie, since"—here he started up restlessly, to pace to and fro at the side of the rock—"since he has again fallen, has once more forgotten his manhood in her!"

The sea sang in my ears the words "false, false;" the little waves, lapping up on the gray sides of the rock, seemed to tell me how wicked I was, to sit there so quietly and listen to the pain of his voice, his mistaken estimate of his friend's manhood, without making an effort to undeceive him. I hated myself vigorously, sharply, and I remained dumb.

"Seven years ago, Marguerite, Roy spent the summer months at Long Branch,—usually we spent our summers together,—that season I was unable to leave New York, my mother being very ill, and requiring me to be constantly at her side. Toward the latter part of August, my mother becoming quite convalescent, I ran down to Long Branch at Roy's solicitation to pass a week with him there. During the entire summer his letters had contained nothing but extravagant expressions of rapture upon the subject of Miss Valerie Dare's beauty, her grace, fascinations, and accomplishments, until at length, thinking him wise, upon my arrival at Long Branch I was prepared to find a good woman, an angel in my friend's fiancée—only, I will not use soft words to cushion her deceit, to find a devil! I was at Long Branch exactly five days. Not content with sacrificing him, she sought to win me also; she loved him as well as she was able, she loved my dollars better still. I never told Roy this, I spared him all I could, even as I would spare him now; I only sought in every other way to make plain to him her unworthiness, her utter want of prin-

ciple. He was perverse, he would not listen; for the first time he defied my love! At this time he told me they were secretly engaged. When taxed with it, during one of her many attempts to turn my head, she absolutely denied the existence of any betrothal between them; until at length, finding me utterly averse to all sentiment, totally blind to her fascinations,—she was young to be so false,—and upon my telling her of Roy's being heir to his Uncle Philip Trenholm's millions,—a fact which she had not before discovered,—she became gradually more temperate in her denials, more succumbed to the authority of his love! The rest is soon told. When they parted at Long Branch at the end of the season, knowing they could expect no toleration from Mrs. Dare in the matter, they decided to keep their engagement secret even from her, until such time should come when to acknowledge it would be to demand success. After this parting, Roy came to New York to try his hand at law; we lived together there, and your cousin went abroad. When I heard that she had gone, bound to him by no other tie than that of her frail love, her secret engagement, I felt assured if, while traveling in Europe, she should chance to meet another more certainly possessed of wealth, in sympathy with the old adage, 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,'—she would not hesitate mercilessly to throw Roy over. She continued faithful to him, much to my astonishment, through all the three years passed by her abroad, until, on her return, she met the man whom she subsequently married, Paul Hoffman. The day of her arrival in New York prevented me from meeting her at the steamer when she landed,—Roy called upon her at the hotel. Poor fellow, that night he was mad with love; while I, for the first time, since she had returned home to him apparently as faithful as she had gone, began to give her more credit for heart than ever before I could have deemed possible. He came home to me by-and-by, beside himself with disappointment. She was not feeling well; had sent word to him she would not be able to see him; he, in return, left word he would call again on the morrow. He called again on the morrow, but he did not return to me that night, he was

as dead to me during the next three or four months. I went to her, I taxed her with her heartlessness; she made a pretty moue at me, shook her head at me defiantly, gave me an invitation to her marriage with Mr. Hoffman. At first I feared the worst,—that he had committed suicide. His mother and Uncle Philip Trenholm wrote to me wild letters of entreaty to discover his fate. I did my best. By-and-by I gave up in despair, until suddenly a letter from Dr. Lescom came, the reading of which nearly killed me with joy. He lived; the thought made a woman of me; I believe I cried like a baby. I wrote a letter to his mother, to his uncle, which metamorphosed them into babies for the nonce also. That day of his betrayal, fearful of my pity, crazy with woe, he had fled to the country, eager to hide his despair, to lose himself in strange scenes, unfamiliar faces. You know the rest: his sickness, his degradation of soul,—I cannot speak calmly of it even yet. Suffice it to add, from that day to this your cousin, Mrs. Hoffman, to me has been the incarnation of every false principle, every shameful deceit of which a woman is capable——" He paused, but the fire did not go out of his eyes, or the pain from his face. "This is the reason why I have so disliked to see him touch her hand, to hear him address her in any but the most thoroughly indifferent manner. Marguerite, I could not bear to have him offer to marry her again!"

"You said,—you said he was going away; he had bade you farewell."

"You dear child, have I appeared melodramatic, or Macbethic, that you should tremble so? I could not help astonishing you, dear,—I could not refrain from speaking of your cousin, Mrs. Hoffman, plainly as she deserves. Forgive me if I have offended you. This letter of Roy's has quite overcome me, it is an enigma; I can solve it in only one way." I did not ask him what way, but, unasked, after a moment's deep thinking, he went on to explain. "Roy wrote this letter late the night of his return to Bonnie Venture,—it is written legibly, coherently, with the utmost precision. I know Farquhar so well, I understand so thoroughly his every form of expression, mode of construction, and detail of penmanship, that



I, immediately upon the reading of this letter, discovered, under the mask of its precision, the cramped fire of a hot unrest, which, endeavoring to ignore, to hide from me, he has shut over with this cool-temperated cover of words. I know he wrote this letter while fighting a strange devil,—I know it, I am certain that it is the truth. Added to this certainty of suffering, the fact that he informs me of his intention to take to-morrow's steamer from New York to Liverpool, at the same time calmly bidding me farewell for an indefinitely long time, I solve the enigma but in one way: his strange avoidance of me, his sudden decision to travel abroad, without first vouchsafing a satisfactory reason for his vagabondage of impulse, might all be explained, if she so willed, by your cousin, Mrs. Hoffman."

He did not look at me, I was thankful he did not; I was fairly sick with dread, with a sense of my own knowledge, my own complicity. I hid my hands and eyes in an attempt to form my evergreen wreath into a satisfactory shape. I longed fervently to have the trial over, to have his lips cease this mistaken estimate of his friend's strength, to hear the pain, anxiety, go out of his voice. He did not know the truth,—how could he? Would not its knowledge, if vouchsafed by me, more fully, more sharply overcome him, than this mere vague speculation, which, as time goes by, may go by with it? Sitting there, in the midst of the reproachful murmurs of the sea, the encompassing warmth of the sunlight, while he walked, in his anxiety, restlessly to and fro at my side, I felt as though I must tell him, confess all,—as though the words undeceiving him would burst involuntarily from my lips, against my will. And yet,—and yet, he loved me; I was his promised wife. I must not assert my own happiness as superior to his; I must be generous to him: silence would be more generous, I thought, than words.

"The only portion of this letter wherein he shows his heart at all is that alluding to our engagement; it is a touch of fire out of ice. He God blesses you and me; he writes little about it, but that little reads much; it is a small door,—when opened, showing a big fire within. It is Roy who wrote that; it was not Roy who wrote the

greater portion of that ice-blocked letter; it was a devil standing at his elbow, and stretching him stiff with pain. I have one bit of comfort, however: I do not think Mrs. Hoffman has had an opportunity to refuse him, she would not refuse Bonnie Venture backed by a million. There is a bit of flesh hidden somewhere in her composition, and I think, to do her meager virtue a meager justice, this bit of flesh belongs exclusively to Roy. She loves him as well as she is able; rather Farquhar has discovered something fresh to her disadvantage, a new deceit, or a more wholesale want of principle, than even in his most bitter moments of condemnation he has given her credit for; she is beautiful, she may again have bewitched him. During the first month of our return from the war he promised me he would never again seek to marry her, fearing to be more wholly enslaved; and remembering his pledge, made to me in a wiser moment, he may have decided to conquer his most thorough foe himself by a summary retreat. During the latter part of the summer he has appeared to me uncommunicative, strangely averse to confidence, avoiding with the utmost persistence all personal subjects. Before we parted, I scarcely gave the circumstance a second thought; now I am prepared to reconcile that fact with this other fact of his having witten me this abrupt farewell letter, and to conclude that at length I have arrived at the true secret of his mysterious departure for Europe." His voice had grown gradually lighter and lighter, until now it climaxed in a ring of quiet satisfaction. After a moment's pause he added,—  
"If my surmises prove correct, I am glad he has gone; I will no longer seek to distress myself with further anxieties on his account. If he is beginning to love her again, he will be better off there than here; he is strong, able, self-controlled in everything save his strange infatuation for this woman. I am glad that he is gone, if he loves her. It will be a sad blow to her when she learns he is gone,—all the glorious Chateaux d'Espagne, which she has been so busily erecting this past summer, will crumble at a touch. She deserves it; she deserves all the blows he can give her. I was greatly troubled when Mrs. Sutton gave me that letter this morning; the reading

of it mystified and annoyed me. I begin to see light now,—your listening so patiently has helped me, Marguerite.” He looked so gentle, all the trouble lost in the tenderness of his eyes, his mouth softening from its stern lines at me; that is, he seated himself again on the rock at my side,—I did my best to smile at him. “What a white, suffering face you have, little one! a brave, strong face too, only you are weak, the least excitement affects you. I must be very careful of my little girl; you have endured more this summer than any one has imagined. You must tell me about it some time, and that will help you; you are too young to have suffered so much.”

*November 2.*—Am I brave, self-forgetting, well controlled? Does not Cecil read in my face a strange language, an incomprehensible expression of suspense? God knows, I pray hourly for strength, fervently, longingly. I do my best to smother the ghosts deep down in my heart, that they may not resurrect their shadows in my face, for his sake, my noble, gentle Cecil. He is noble, he is gentle, tender, unthinking of himself, devoted to me,—he loves me. These words control me,—they are the death-knell of my peace; I try to face death steadfastly, thinking of these. All day long I act a lie; when night comes I write the truth here,—it helps me. I cannot keep it choked in my heart always without giving it a breath of air now and then. I love to have night come to succor me. I cannot endure the conflict without the dust,—the conflict is past, I am his, his pledged wife. See how calmly I write it; the blows and the weapons are all put by, the dust alone remains, it encompasses me on all sides, it chokes and strangles me! Why did he not love Gertrude instead? Her eyes follow him everywhere, half fiercely, longingly. They follow and watch me, blackly, jealously. Ah, well, is not life one long cross-purpose? I am afraid he sees the ghost in my face,—its blank whiteness, for all I so constantly endeavor to cover its nakedness with smiles. He is gentle, tender, devoted; yet, I can see he is not satisfied; he watches me quietly with troubled eyes, his own face grows paler day by day. I must not let him suffer,—if I might only love him.

*November 3.*—I have been confined to my room all day

with a most fearful headache; consequently I have not seen Cecil. It is Sunday; he has passed the greater portion of the day at Bonnie Venture. This evening he came back, and sent up-stairs to me, by Murray, a most exquisite bouquet of rosebuds, gathered from the conservatory there. I must be well to-morrow, to bid him good-by; he goes back to his mother. I have not told him about the two years, or about my intention to work in the mean time. Indeed, I have had scarcely an opportunity. We are rarely left alone together,—never unless we seek it, and I am very careful not to seek it. Intuitively he seems to understand every thought of mine,—naturally to anticipate every wish; inexplicably, he rests me,—he is so gentle, so thoughtful.

*November 4.*—The Indian summer is here earlier than usual; her veil hides the hills behind a golden gauze, and all the world is languorous with light. After luncheon to-day Cecil bade me get my hat for a walk, and when I had obeyed him, we went together to the beach. My yesterday's seclusion has done me good. I was braver to-day, more quiet, more ready to smile at him, some of the day's sweetness seemed to steal its warmth into my soul to make wholesome and purify it. We walked slowly down to the beach, neither speaking, both thinking deeply, until we came to the big rock lying midway on its side; then, as he helped me to a seat on its top,—ah, how sharply and unwillingly I remembered the circumstances under which I last sat there!—he said,—leaning against its side and looking up at me,—

“Marguerite, this life is killing you, slowly, slowly, but inevitably killing you; your face, when I go away from you, haunts me continually. I cannot endure to see you suffer as you do. Do you remember the night I first met you at Mrs. Waring's reception?”

“I shall never forget it, it seems ten years ago; I was beside myself with romance, half-crazy to meet the man whom I had known at Blossom Village as Mr. Lester, later as Cecil Throckmorton, now——”

“Now, you are a very different girl. Neither shall I ever forget that night; the moment I first caught sight of you sitting beside Lorimer on a divan, dressed in white,

with such a startled, intense expression in your big, dark eyes. The contrast of your hair and eyes first attracted my attention, as being very peculiar, as peculiar as beautiful. By-and-by, I saw that you were also quite tall, plump, graceful, that your profile was faultless——"

"Now," I interrupted him, laughing a little at his solemnity.

"I do not like to think of your face as it is now," he said, looking up at me and shaking his head; "your eyes sometimes are too wild, your face too pale, your lips more rigid than I like to see. Your headache yesterday did you good, you are looking more like yourself to-day!" Then he smiled up at me and I smiled back at him. "You need a change, not a change by-and-by, but an immediate one," he added.

"Yes, and I am going to have one," I answered, softly. He looked up at me again quickly when I said that, in such a peculiar way that the expression of his face sent the blood beating about my heart, and brought some of the old war back. "I am going away from here," I went on to explain, hurriedly, "to work; I have been thinking of it a long while,—it kills me to be dependent; work will do me good. Don't look so incredulous, please, for I am dreadfully in earnest!"

"Did I look incredulous? Forgive the muscles of my face. What is your definition of work?"

"I can teach music; that won't be work exactly, as I love it so dearly. I wish you would encourage and not laugh at me; I am fearfully in earnest, and have been a long while."

"How long since?"

"Ever since Archie died," I answered, turning my head away from his amused face. "Life hasn't been the same since I lost him; he was all I had, you know, and it seems so empty and just like night all the time since he went away. Well, I can't stay here always. My aunt is very kind to me, but I feel that it is proper and right that I should no longer remain dependent upon her. They are going up to the city in about two weeks for the winter, then I shall leave them. I should have left long ago if it had not been for Archie." My voice trembled so, I paused.

"He was everything to you, Marguerite."

"More than I could tell; the void aches and pinches me all the time. It seems so hard! so hard, sometimes, to bear! It will be three weeks to-morrow, since he went,—it seems years!—ah, so many years!" A little sand-piper, red-backed and agile, was playing far off on the beach, chasing the waves, pecking the sand, jerking its tail and crying faintly to itself; while above, two or three belated swallows were whirling about, and higher still, farther inland, a flock of wild geese sailed over. Far out to the sea, where the white lips of the clouds kissed its foam, past the islands into the deep, bright blue beyond, I searched, thinking how Archie might be patiently waiting for me there, longing for my coming, begging God to let me die, and, as I looked, hot, unmanageable tears came into my eyes,—such tears as always make me wince with pain.

"Marguerite,"—he laid his hand on mine and leaned up against the rock, so that he could look full into my face,— "let me suggest a change. You have suffered much; day by day, as the summer went by, I have watched you growing paler, thinner,—the natural sequence of your cousins' persecutions,—their jealousy! I can bear to see you suffer no longer: be my wife soon, dear; let me take you away from this life,—this atmosphere which stifles you so,—I will do my best to make you happy!"

"I am braver and stronger than you imagine. You are very generous, Colonel Throckmorton."

"Call me Cecil; you have never called me Cecil yet."

"In my thoughts, many, many times," I answered, smiling at him. "I want you to understand I am able to work,—it will do me good. I must occupy the next two years in some way. I cannot marry any one before my twenty-first birthday."

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed, abruptly.

"It is quite a story. I was left an orphan four years ago; my father died at Blossom Village. A brother of my mother,—Uncle William Constant,—compassionated me, left almost entirely destitute as I was, and, just before you reached Blossom Village, took me away,—while he lived, to do everything in his power to cause

me to forget I was an orphan and desolate. He went to Nice—I, to boarding-school—the autumn following my departure from Blossom Village, and I never saw him again. It is unlucky to care for me; everybody who loves me is sure to die."

"I care for you so much, I ought to drop dead, then. Everybody is sure to die, of course. Tell me the rest,—that is not all the story."

"Almost all; the rest is soon told. He left me to be adopted by Mrs. Dare; to assume her name, to live with her, and not to be married until my twenty-first birthday. I loved him so dearly; he was so good to me, I feel I must obey his last wishes. I cannot marry for two years!" I had spoken hastily, eagerly. I saw his face grow a little pale when he turned it thoughtfully to the sea.

"What will you do in the mean time?"

"Work! I love the very sound of the word. I cannot remain longer dependent upon Mrs. Dare. I will try and find a chance to teach music; it will be a pleasure to me: it will do me good!"

"Your uncle, when he formed that wish for you to remain unmarried until your twenty-first birthday, most certainly thought you were to remain a member of Mrs. Dare's family up to that time,—this was a foregone conclusion;—he based the other wish upon this, I feel assured, Marguerite. If you disregard his wish in this matter, why should you so zealously obey the letter and not the spirit of the other?"

"He thought I would be happy,—contented as a member of Mrs. Dare's family. She promised him, sacredly, she would be kind to me,—make no difference between her own daughters and myself. She is kind to me now; she has not been kind to me always. I am not happy as a member of her family; I am very unhappy. Uncle Will did not know the bread of dependence would taste so bitter to me. Please encourage me in my desire to be happy,—free!" I looked at him beseechingly, laying my hand, at the same time, on his shoulder. He started a little, turned abruptly toward me, and, raising his strong arms, put them about my waist.

"My dear little girl," he said, gravely, "you want to

be happy and free in the most impossible way.. Work is not for you, it would kill you; you are nearly dead now with struggling, your little wings are broken, your heart bruised. I can help you to be free from this life only in one way." He paused, and looked steadily into my face. His eyes were so true, so steadfast; mine, so false, troubled. I could not meet his, but turned mine away over his shoulder, to where the sea sparkled and laughed and the sun touched goldly each wave.

"It is so warm," I said, under my breath, and the blood hot in my face, "so very warm. The sun makes my head ache; let us walk back to the cottage." Then I moved hastily out of his arms, and jumped down from the rock to the beach. The next instant I knew I had hurt him; he walked slightly away from my side, saying, coldly,—

"You will not let me help you; I do not understand you, Marguerite."

We walked in silence a little way across the beach,—I, repentant, ill at ease, until, as we reached the pathway leading up through the fields to the cottage, I went close to him and laid my hand humbly on his arm.

"I never can do right, however much I may try; I always stumble on the wrong; please forgive me, Cecil." His face, which looked pale, greatly troubled, and which he had kept persistently averted from me, softened now, when he smiled and took my hand between both of his.

"You are an enigma, Marguerite; we must not play at cross-purposes, you and I; you must let me understand you better. Will you make me one promise?"

"If it isn't a hard one."

"It is an easy one, I think; it is this: that you will not seek to leave Mrs. Dare's protection until I return to Bonnie Venture next week, when we will talk it all over again together."

"Next week! are you coming back so soon, and to Bonnie Venture?"

"Did I not tell you that in the letter left by Farquhar with Mrs. Sutton to be given to me, he begs me to bring my mother to Bonnie Venture?" I shook my head decisively. "After alluding to our engagement, feelingly and in his noble way, Roy added a wish for me

to bring my mother to Bonnie Venture,—that the change might benefit her, and, under the circumstances, she might like to be nearer the cottage,—a suggestion in which I sympathize with all my heart. My mother is very anxious to see you, Marguerite; she is much stronger now than she has been for years. This recent illness seemed to leave her better than it found her, and I think she could bear the journey, taken by easy stages, very well. Her physician recommended a change just before I left New York, and we decided she should have one upon my return. It will please me to accept Roy's thoughtful suggestion, to bring my mother to Bonnie Venture. You would like to see her, Marguerite?" We were in full sight of the cottage now, of my cousins seated on the back piazza. I did not hesitate, however, to go close to him and to slip my hand through his arm.

"I would love to meet your mother," I said, softly. "I love her already,—I can almost see how she looks."

"You will be friends, I know," he answered, smiling down at me, with his eyes lighted up. "She will help you, dear, in any of your troubles; she knows so well what trouble is herself. I have often sought an opportunity to tell you about it,—how the death of her son, a dreadful death, dealt her such a blow that it affected her mind. I never speak of it to any one; not even to Roy. It has seemed so hard to bear, to have her sometimes not quite herself. She is better now, thank God, almost well. I will bring her to Bonnie Venture,—then I will tell you all about it, dear." He stopped, as we reached the cottage, just where, on the night of the yachting-party, he had exacted that promise of silence from me regarding Blossom Village and the existence of the blind man there. He remembered the circumstance as quickly as I did.

"It seems so long ago," I said.

"Yes, very long ago," he answered, thoughtfully.

"You kept that promise very faithfully, more faithfully than most women could: will you keep this other promise as religiously until my return?"

"You will come back before Mrs. Dare returns to the city for the winter?"

"I will be back here in about a week's time; this In-

dian summer at the seaside would do mother an infinity of good; I would like to get her here before it is over; she will enjoy Bonnie Venture also. Promise, Marguerite, that you will wait to hear her arguments and mine together." And he was so earnest, so beseeching,—little caring what became of me during the next week, I promised.

## CHAPTER L.

*November 6.*—In promising Cecil not to attempt to leave Mrs. Dare's protection until his return next week, I did not sacrifice my freedom of thought, the liberty to plan my future life, to build up for myself a castle of hope, wherein dreams of independence, of work, make sweet the day, and longer my sleep at night. Is it not God-given, this hope, this little longing sure to be filled by-and-by, to have my eyes not always filled with the dust of a mighty desert? My little oasis,—my sweet, desert-heart, wood-hemmed and hung thick with leaves,—where the grass grows green, the birds sing and hover, and the waters flow pityingly to one's thirsty lips. It is mine, this hope,—it is tangible; I can grasp it, feel it, exult over it. Two years of liberty! I love Mrs. Dare for reminding me of this,—Uncle Will's final wish: it is mine to live for and enjoy. I feel God has sent me this bit of sunshine to lighten the dark; a touch of His fingers on my future. It did me good to open my heart to Cecil, to tell him how resolved I am to be dependent hereafter only on myself. Resolved is not the word: I am determined to face the world, to fill my blessed two years with work. If Cecil only knew, he would not seek to dissuade me,—he does not know my fight, how this quiet is full of images, of retrospections; a frozen poetry of despair, in which I grope about hungrily for a little light. If he will only encourage me, perhaps God will let me be his, by-and-by; more his than I ever may be without. I am so weary of fighting myself, I get tired sometimes,



and then dreams come ; such dreams as I dare not think of in the daylight. If he would only help me in the right way, God might shut the past over, and lift the future up !

Murray says it was only a touch of Indian summer that we had the other day,—it will come back again in a little while more beautiful than before. It has been cold since Cecil and I sat together on the beach ; so cold that Mrs. Dare threatens to take us up to the city next week for the winter, just as soon as the carpets are down again in her city house, and everything ready for her reception. Yesterday, Mrs. Hoffman received a letter from Murray Dare, telling her of his engagement to Beatrice Mortimer,—a fact which was speedily communicated to each member of our cottage family, eliciting a different sympathy from each.

"She was always dead in love with him," Gertrude remarked, sourly.

But Valerie said, "More fool she." A remark echoing my own sentiments with an astonishing precision.

My Cousin Valerie is evidently laboring under a decided weight of nervous depression ; she neither eats, sleeps, nor talks, only once in awhile becomes unnaturally gay, saying sharp, bitter things, seasoned with a plenitude of spasmodic laughter. Sometimes I find her watching me stealthily, strangely, with a daily increasing ghost of despair scowling at me out of her eyes. I do not show her that I notice it in any way : I am indifferent, quiet. I spend my time reading, sewing, taking long walks every day, far, far into the interior, where the sea cannot shout its memories at me, and only the gray branches of the trees make a new literature to my eyes ; russet-leaved and lettered by their brown faces, a strange quiet of decay. The music-room I never enter ; I have shunned it since that night—that night which God, I know, has wrapped in a cotton-wool of mercy and put by, up in His heaven, for us to look at by-and-by, when He gives us both a recompense for our death here. It is the sepulcher-room of my heart ; my peace has been lying there a long while. He raised Lazarus, will He raise it ? \* \* \*

Mrs. Dare is strangely kind to me ; I know that she constrains my cousins to be so outwardly also. I will not

trouble them long. In the mean time, the days pass quietly, monotonously, but they do not bring warmth, they are all cold and gray like the rocks yonder. Barry is the only one here who really loves me,—I think Uncle Dare loves me, but not like Barry ; he treats me as though I am a child, always to be fed with the sugar-plums of indulgence,—to live a sweetmeat life of idleness. Since Archie went she clings to me all the closer,—her love reaches to me over the void longingly,—the dear, simple creature ! It would be selfish to wish him back, I suppose ; yet I cannot help being cruelly selfish sometimes, the void seems so big, the ache so great, that often it almost drives me wild. The little grave is all I have,—the wee dear grave, wept over by the sea, encompassed by rocks, overlooked by this window ; this is all I have, yet I must leave it all winter to the white snows, the death-arms of ice, as I leave everything else,—and I am only nineteen years old ! I wonder how much longer God will make me live !

*November 8.*—I awoke this morning to find it very clear and cold, full of sunshine, frost, and with the ground and rocks covered thickly with white dew. I started early for a walk through the bleak, gray woods, feeling very restless, at war with myself ; until at length, after having crunched the russet leaves under foot for about three consecutive hours, I came home much better both in mind and body with the exercise. Mrs. Dare did not come down-stairs to luncheon, but, as I passed her door, on my way to my own room to lay aside my hat and shawl, she opened it and looked out at me.

"Will you come here by-and-by, Marguerite ?" she said, gently. "I want to talk to you."

Then I promised, and she shut the door. Since I first entered it I have learned to deprecate all invitations to enter my aunt's dressing-room, a retreat which has become associated, in my mind, with everything inquisitorial, politic, and disagreeable, to such a degree that I never even think of it without a preliminary shiver of apprehension. For a long while I have been intending to broach the subject of my no longer continuing a member of her family to Mrs. Dare, so I was nothing

loth to avail myself of this very excellent opportunity. That day when she so persistently advocated Murray Dare's obnoxious suit, was still fresh in my mind as I knocked at her door to-day; and sharply I remembered, against my will,—since now she is so invariably gracious and kindly disposed toward me,—her violence of insinuation upon that occasion, her suspicions and later attempts at conciliation.

"Sit here, Marguerite," Mrs. Dare said, pushing an easy-chair toward me as I entered. "I am glad to see you looking so well, my child,—better to-day than I have seen you for a very long time; you can never know how anxious I have been, indeed am yet, in regard to your health."

There was a bright wood fire crackling on the hearth, a woolen rug spread over a greater portion of the cold, straw carpet; the room did not look at all inquisitorial now, with the vivid sunshine bathing all its corners in a luxuriance of light. She was seated near me, leaning on her writing-desk, whereon was strewn a multiplicity of papers, envelopes, and pens; now she smiled at me slightly, as she turned to look at a sheet of letter-paper lying on the desk, with the ink yet fresh upon it.

"I am writing to Paris for winter outfits for both Valerie and Gertrude," she said, presently. "I asked you here to consult you in regard to your own. I have decided on a purple velvet walking-dress; it would also do very well for a carriage or visiting toilet, and I think would be very becoming to your complexion; also I have mentioned here, green satin to be trimmed simply with pearls, a tulle dress with train of light-blue poult de soie, and a cuir-colored gros grain for demi-toilet. Your dinner dresses are to be of your own choosing, or these others may be changed, if you wish."

"You are very kind, Aunt Honoria," I managed to say,—thoroughly overcome by this sudden munificence of thought,—"too kind. I am grateful, as much so as though I already possessed them, but——" She looked at me now for the first time since she had referred to her Paris letter.

"You certainly do not intend to wear your mourning

all winter," she said, gravely. "I appreciate fully your desire to do so; but let me remind you, Marguerite, this is to be your first winter in society; you are young, beautiful,—it is quite needless for me to repeat the daily language of your mirror,—you are the affianced wife of Colonel Throckmorton; it is necessary that you should see the world and be seen by it. You owe to him an endeavor to forget yourself, your own feelings, in an attempt to win a fitting position. He is rich, of a fine family; he will look to you for sympathy in these things."

"Colonel Throckmorton will be disappointed if he looks to me for this sympathy, Aunt Honoria; my ambition is higher than that. You partially mistake the reason of my opposition to your generosity in sending to Paris for a winter outfit for me. I certainly intend to wear my mourning throughout the winter; I also propose to honor it by wearing it as a livery—of work!"

"Are you still afflicted with quixotic notions, Marguerite?"

"More grievously than ever before. I am eager—restless for work. Until I become free, independent, I shall not be happy. I owe it to myself as well as to you, the decision to remain no longer dependent on your generosity. I am really in earnest,—thoroughly in earnest; have nothing now to keep me back."

"You have a great deal,—among other things, my love," she said, gently, shading her face from the fire and me with her hand. "Your Uncle Will left you to be a daughter to me,—you defy his last wishes. Is it just, is it grateful, in you to do this, my child?"

"You know, Aunt Honoria, how much I loved Uncle Will,—how dearly, to-day, I love his memory. I would do nothing, willingly, to defy a wish of his,—a wish formed by him, according to his judgment, for my ultimate good; but I feel that the nature of his desire for me to remain a member of your family was, in some way, different from this; knowing my headstrongness, he would not seek to bind me to a life of dependence when I so long to be free. As though I heard his voice telling me to go, I must obey my own heart. I believe Uncle Will would love me better for doing so."

"My child, you hurt me when you talk so persistently of dependence. I am fond of you; you are to me as a daughter. I have looked upon you as a daughter since the day William gave you to me: I accepted you at his hands. Gertrude possesses as entire right to talk of dependence as you. I have many anxieties,—more than you even imagine; when laboring under their weight, I may have appeared, frequently, hard, unsympathizing; this may have led you to imagine yourself an unwelcome incumbrance. If you are influenced now by this surmise, please be influenced instead by me. You are my daughter; I regard you as such. I will do all in my power to render you happy, contented, until the time comes for your marriage. Do not be headstrong, my child, but reasonable. You are not fit to work. Think of Colonel Throckmorton; you certainly told him about the two years?"

"Yes. I told him, also, about my desire to work."

"He did not encourage you?"

"I cannot say that he did. He made me promise that I would not attempt to leave your protection until his return. Believe me, Aunt Honoria, I am grateful to you; I dislike to appear otherwise. I love you for your many, many kindnesses,—your desire now to give me a home,—the protection of your care. Indeed, I am grateful for each and all of these favors. Being grateful, I must not seek to deceive you: nothing can shake my resolution during these two years to be dependent only on myself."

"Marguerite, you are very, very foolish!"

"According to all lights but my own. I am at least happy in my foolishness, more happy than I can tell."

"My child, my child!" she exclaimed, in a half-smothered way; then, looking at her, I saw tears trickling thick and fast from between her fingers concealing her face. "God only knows how cruel you are!"

It always pains me to see any one shed tears. The sight of this proud, strong woman so humbled frightened, and almost overcame me; her tears touched me as all her arguments had failed to do. I grew cold with apprehension; I felt the citadel of my will rudely weakened by this unexpected onslaught; I was so astonished I could

not speak. That I possessed no right to so humble my benefactress I realized sharply; to her at least I owed a better recompense for her many and constant efforts to make me a contented member of her family; she has seemed at times cruel,—true; dictatorial,—true again; but were these apparent unkindnesses not the rightful prerogatives of her greater age and wisdom?—dependent as I am, have I possessed even the shadow of a right to criticise these?

"Aunt Honoria, pray do not let me afflict you in this way," I said, humbly, leaning over to touch her hand. "You show me conclusively that I am cruel, ungrateful. I am thoroughly ashamed of having given you cause for tears. Hard as we may try, God seems adverse to our understanding each other."

"Stay with me, Marguerite," she answered, clasping my hand between both of hers, and turning her agitated face to mine; "let us understand each other in future simply as mother and daughter. Do not leave me, when I am grown so fond of you, when I owe you so much for your devotion to——" Then she stopped abruptly, and I knew she alluded to my love for Archie. "You are strong, noble, self-sacrificing: let me require the exercise of these virtues at your hands; you know very thoroughly how meager is the sympathy extended to me by either of my daughters. Stern, hard as I undoubtedly appear at times, I am always sadly in need of rest, of a kind companionship; I would be happier, not so hard or stern, if I possessed them. My child, be influenced by me in this decision. Stay with me; be a daughter to me. I will so endeavor that not even by a shade will you be ever reminded that you are not my child in truth; if you choose, you shall write my letters and assist me in my accounts; in this way you shall work as it pleases you." Her eyes burned their eagerness at me, her white lips trembled as she spoke. I became almost faint with irresolution, with the feeling that she was exacting of me but her right. I seemed to see all my sweet hope of a two years' freedom—of an oblivion in work—slipping stealthily away, never to return; the ashes of its fire lying scattered at my feet, blown hither and thither by her words. She watched my face narrowly, so closely that

she seemed to stifle even my thoughts. By-and-by she arose and came to stand at my side. "Marguerite," she said, "be kind, generous, as I have tried ever to be. Promise me, my child, that you will not seek to leave me." Then she laid her hand heavily on my shoulder, and stood looking down at me with an intense look in her black, gloomy eyes.

The touch of her hand on my shoulder unnerved and disconcerted all my determined ideas; the agitation of her haughty face, beseeching me so humbly to become oblivious of self, a betrayer to my own peace, made me faint, irresolute. I had not been prepared for this emergency; all my defense had been piled up on the other side. She struck hard at my sense of honor when she appealed to me in this way; the iron portion of my will had bravely resisted all attacks, the flesh now called aloud for pity; I became a puppet to its cry.

"I will make no promises yet, Aunt Honoria," I said, a little unsteadily, as I stood up. "I am not at liberty to make any promises until I consult Colonel Throckmorton. He returns to Bonnie Venture next week. I owe everything to you and to him. I will abide by his decision, whatever that may be." Then, sick at heart with the reaction from my other joy, the hope of a fuller life to be compassed within the length of the next two years, I walked toward the door. Just as I opened it, she said,—

"You are a brave, good girl, Marguerite. You shall be happier for staying with me, if I can make you happy and contented. I pledge myself to do it."

## CHAPTER LI.

*November 11.*—A rainy, blustering day; the wind full of hollow voices, the clouds of tears, the sea of deep, angry dimples; the rocks are black with wet, the lawn and cottage walls are bathed constantly in spray, and Archie's grave, lying yonder, appeals to me strongly for

a warmer covering than that of the turf and cedar branches. I am cold, too, so cold that I shiver to feel the rain of my tears beating pityingly on the grave of my peace, my young, little peace, dead already! A letter from Mabel arrived to-day. About two weeks since, in my extremity of doubt, I wrote, asking her if I could obtain any position, as music-teacher or governess, in W——, feeling assured she would help me gladly, if she could. This letter comes in answer, saying that as soon as I choose to go to W—— she has secured six pupils to be taught music by me. "And you are to make me a good long visit, my dear girl," she adds, with much underlining. "Mamma is resolved as firmly on this as I: we are to have a jolly, old-fashioned, school-girlish time together. Then, by-and-by, after we grow tired of being idle, I will let you work a little, and I will help you: you know what that means,—I will be a bore, and bore holes in all your self-sacrificings, if you come to W——. I am glad your Uncle Will made that wish for you to remain unmarried during the next two years. If you stay away, I shall regret it. I am selfish, you see: I want to try and make you happy here, or else let somebody else. If you stay away, you ought to marry Colonel Throckmorton directly; but there must be no talk of your staying away; you must come to me. I will rest you."

This is my vulture,—this possibility of disappointment. If I am doomed to a longer life in this atmosphere, if Cecil decides in favor of my remaining with Mrs. Dare, here where my cousins dislike to see me, among these faces, so remindful of my great despair, God only knows whether I shall go mad or not. If I might only leave them, their antagonisms, far behind—go to Mabel, and, rested in her love, forget a little of my misery, antidote my poisonous thoughts with her tendernesses, the end might be gained gloriously,—I might be led to the goal of the victor, portioned evermore with peace. Does Mrs. Dare truly love me?—am I necessary to her happiness,—the sight of my white face, my woeful eyes? Must I put my head through the yoke of her will, and be driven helplessly within the shafts of the next two

years, day after day, never to rest, never to forget, always to have the long, dark road before me, imaged with the ghosts of my unrest, struggles, despair? I have promised her to abide by Cecil's decision. I prided myself on my invincibility, and, behold, she conquered me. I was strong; she found the vital spot in my heel. All the days since I made her that promise, have been dark, wearisome, like this—more dreadful than I can tell. It is almost greater than I can bear—this suspense, disquiet, if it would only kill me outright!

*November 12.*—A letter from Cecil; he arrives together with his mother at Bonnie Venture to-morrow. Somehow, the very thought of Mrs. Throckmorton rests me, I can almost see her. I will love her for his sake. They come to-morrow. How near to-morrow seems! I have a little hope. Cecil may listen to my pleadings—he loves me, he has a tender heart; I will tell him how fervently I long to go away—to a place where I have never been before, for quiet, a new life. I will tell him this much, not of the oblivion I crave. I will be brave until he comes, unflinching in my hope,—knowing him to be wise. I do not like to think of his already expressed dislike to the idea of my attempting to work; he may have thought me not entirely in earnest, quixotic, anything rather than serious. I will show him the contrary. I am no longer a free agent. Having committed myself to the chain of two promises, I must gather myself together for a good fight.

The towers of Bonnie Venture rise on the hill to the south, clearly visible from the cottage and the surrounding country miles about, yet for many, many days I have not once looked at them. My Cousin Valerie has watched them enough for us both; her eyes grow more longing, more full of despair, as the hours go by. I have not looked once at the towers of Bonnie Venture since—ah, well, it does not matter since when; yet if Cecil's mother comes I must not only look at them, but pass beneath, enter them. If I do this calmly, indifferently, it will be my first victory; it will prove the possibility of a greater victory by-and-by! How long ago the day seems, that day we spent there, since the oriel window stood open,

and, seated in its embrasure, the nameless unrest pinched my heart, and my eyes sought far and wide for an answer to its pain, among the sloping meadows, the nearer sea. It is closed now, of course, the oriel, and the bit of heliotrope is withered and swept away, as I try to sweep all memory away from me!

The original intention of my aunt was to return to the city next week. My cousins are eager to be gone; but Mrs. Dare, since aware of Mrs. Throckmorton's coming to Bonnie Venture, has decided to remain until her visit is over. The Indian summer is here to-day, and Murray, who professes to be weather-wise, predicts a continuance of its glory many days hereafter. I have a thought,—an extravagance for me: when Cecil comes I will show him Mabel's letter; in it he will read how easy it will be for me to work when cheered and encouraged by her, how sweet my freedom will be also.

*November 13.*—We were all sitting on the back piazza, Mrs. Dare, my cousins, and myself, watching the effect of the sunset on the waves, tipping them with gold, and giving their deeps each a shining heart, when we heard a step, and, looking around, saw Cecil standing just behind us. He stood and smiled a little while at our astonished faces.

"I came down by the road," he said, as he took my hand, "it is such a glorious afternoon, and I felt in the mood for a long walk. During the past week the weather in New York has been simply outrageous, cold, bleak, dull: I have been at Bonnie Venture only three hours, and yet I am already a different man. You are not looking well, Marguerite," he added.

I answered him, as he seated himself on the steps of the piazza at my feet, by an inquiry about his mother's health.

"She is quite an invalid, I believe," Mrs. Dare said, gently. "This sea air and Indian summer together, I feel assured, will benefit her greatly."

"She has borne the journey much better than even the physician or I dared to expect," Cecil said, looking up at me for sympathy,—“a fact which proves her much stronger than she has been for many, many long years,



since I was a mere child. I left her at Bonnie Venture, in Mrs. Sutton's care, and ran down here to let you know we had arrived." Then he smiled up at me, and I smiled back at him in sympathy.

A long while we sat chatting together on the piazza, Valerie appearing more natural, Gertrude less gloomy, Mrs. Dare unusually gracious,—while we watched the blue sea-faces break their lips whitely on the rocks, the scarlet and gold embroideries of the sky crowding their features into a blush on the mirror of the sea, which, answering, twisted its broad face into a love-knot of smiles.

"I hope mother will be able to receive you to-morrow, Marguerite," Cecil said, as, when the stars began to shine, he went back to Bonnie Venture. "I have described you, and told her all I know about your life; and now she will not be satisfied until she sees yourself. So hold yourself in readiness to pay her a visit."

Then, smiling back into his gentle eyes, I told him how gratified I would be to meet one whom I had already grown strangely to love.

Here I sit wondering,—while the moonlight, always to me the silver bath of the angels, swims everywhere, the torchlight procession of night marches over my head from the eastern gate to the west, and the clouds lie with their heads asleep on the hill-pillows yonder. The waves cross themselves and sing pater-nosters; on the ladders of moonlight their voices climb up,—I follow!

*November 14.*—Cecil came down to the cottage this morning, greatly disappointed to tell me that his mother, suffering from the reaction of her yesterday's fatigue, would be unable to receive visitors to-day. "If she rests quietly now, to-morrow she will be strong enough to have you pass the morning with her at Bonnie Venture," he added. "She was very determined upon your being allowed to visit her this morning, but I was obdurate: anxious as I am to have you meet each other, yet I cannot run the risk of her again being ill, if exposed to an unusual excitement."

I have been longing, ever since he came, for an opportunity to show him Mabel's letter and endeavor to make

him sympathize with me in my efforts during the next two years to be dependent only on myself. Last night I sat by my window many long hours, thinking it all over, my scheme, the probabilities of either its success or failure, until I went finally to bed: even then I scarcely closed my eyes, so nervous were my thoughts, full of suspense, only comforted by the anticipation that the morning surely would serve to solve the enigma of my doubts. Behold my defeat! Immediately upon Cecil's making his appearance at the cottage to-day, Mrs. Dare scarcely allowed him a moment in which to bid me good-morning, before she bore him off in triumph for an hour's confidential confab in the library. During its continuance I became a prey to the most vivid apprehensions; I walked the piazza restlessly, grew feverish, almost beside myself with suspense, until when he came out by-and-by to seek me I was fairly grown faint and sick.

"You dear, excitable child," he said, smiling at me very gravely, "how beautiful you look, with that nervous color coming and going in your cheeks, that strange light in your eyes——"

"Don't tell me about my cheeks or my eyes; tell me what——"

"I will tell you nothing now," he interrupted me, seriously. "My mind is not quite made up. I am going back to Bonnie Venture, to remain with my mother all day. Among other things, I must write a letter to Farquhar. This evening I will come down again and take you for a romantic moonlight walk on the beach; then we will talk your troubles all over, and find them a grave somewhere; in the mean time, you must not distress yourself, dear."—Then he looked at me so kindly, so tenderly. With a great sensation of relief filling my heart to the brim, I felt assured he would decide in favor of that which will make me the happier.

Cecil looks pale, a little harassed. I am cold to him, when I ought to be loving. I try hard to be warm to him. It is a constant struggle. He is so noble, I ought to love him: God help me to do so.

*Evening.*—Behold, God hath worked a miracle! In

my night, He encompassed me with clouds; the vine of my soul He dressed against my will: the cane, which was my delight, the bud of my love, which I considered the fairest of all, He cut off the one, nipped ruthlessly the other; the leaves he plucked off also, leaving me seemingly naked with woe, exposed to the rigor of cold winds, a victim to decay. The wind blew; my vine shivered,—it was night, my vine looked no farther: it saw not God's fingers writing a promise on the silver page of the clouds, which carry their white faces looking up! The morning hath come; the sun shines, showing the face of a wise Providence. My vine flourishes bravely because of God's pruning-knife, the clusters grow luxuriantly, and all that was straggling is hedged in.

Without further preamble, let me write here the day's wonder. It has been a long, anxious day, one of many such,—my aunt more than usually kind to me, my cousins gracious, myself nervous, ill at ease longing fervently to have night and Cecil come. With the moonlight he came.

"It is a little damp," he said, joining us where we sat together on the back piazza, enjoying the balmy evening air, the arrows of silver piercing the heart of each seawave, the whole glory of the Indian summer night,—“more like a September evening than anything else. If we are to take our walk, Marguerite, I must insist upon your getting a thick shawl.”

"It would be more prudent to remain here, under the shelter of the piazza roof," Mrs. Dare interposed. The sea and moonlight are as enjoyable here as they would be on the beach."

But when she said that, I went immediately up-stairs to get my hat and shawl. Coming down a few minutes later, I saw Cecil and Mrs. Dare, who had walked together from the back piazza to the front, standing just outside the hall-door, talking. Before they were aware of my approach, I heard Mrs. Dare, whose hand was laid on his arm, say, rapidly, "Remember, it is for her good; she would be happier with me. I will do everything." Then she stopped abruptly, and took her hand off from his arm, as I went out to join them.

The atmosphere was one delicate veil of mist when we gained the beach and walked slowly up its length toward Bonnie Venture. Afar off, the hills lay white-aproned in its pallor; the moon swam in it, the sea swelled, kissed by it, and, looking up, the stars seemed falling down and on their way caught loosely in its rents.

"You tremble, Marguerite," Cecil said, presently, when we paused in our walk, to look out to the far sea, where the distant light-house flung back at us through the mist a cheery gleam. "Are you cold, dear?" His voice sounded pitying; it helped me to say the words eager to pass my lips.

"No, I am not cold,—only nervous. Oh, Cecil, I do so long to go away from here. I try so hard to be content, and I cannot. Not only away from this place do I want to go, but from these faces. I only love one thing here, and that is Archie's grave: everything else has trouble in it for me!"

"You shall go away, my child; let me take you, Marguerite, to my mother; she will love you very tenderly, and we will do everything to make my wife happy."

"Did Aunt Honoria not tell you how impossible it will be for me to marry any one before my twenty-first birthday?"

"Yes, she told me, but I did not choose to believe her. She insists upon your not marrying before two years have passed, and spending the intermediate time as a member of her family. Marguerite,"—and here he looked down at me steadily, searchingly,—“I have a queer suspicion, which I have been nursing all day.”

The waves did not beat half so noisily on the beach, as my heart seemed to beat when he said that; whereas before I had been eager, breathless with anticipation, I now grew faint, apprehensive, disquiet, all at once. I began hastily to question myself. Had my coldness opened to him a hitherto closed door of speculation?—my want of tenderness, of warmth in my manner when addressed to him, a value of doubt? Fearing the worst, that he had guessed my secret, I only stood quietly beside him, unable to reply, looking helplessly up into his face, grown so gravely thoughtful.

"You pale little girl," he said, softly, "how miserably wretched you are! Do you imagine because you do your best to appear brave, self-controlled, my eyes have failed to decipher all the enigma of pain underneath?" Then, drawing me to him, he put his arm compassionately about me, my head to a rest on his shoulder. "You must let me decide for you, Marguerite, in your trouble: if you do not go away from here as my wife, you must stay with your aunt; work is not for you."

"Oh, Cecil, don't say that! My heart cries for work. It will kill me to stay among people who dislike and barely tolerate me. Do let me go, Cecil; please let me go. I have been dependent on other people all my life,—ever since papa died. I don't know what it is to be free! Let me taste it, Cecil!"

"What is it that you dislike so much, Marguerite?"

"Dependence!" I said it hastily, almost loathingly, as I started away from his side, it had grown to be such a hateful thing in my sight. It almost angered me to have him stand there, watching me with an amused smile about his lips.

"Work, you silly child! What have you to do with work?"

"My happiness has everything to do with it. Surely you would not care for me the less, because my hands grow tired of being lazy. Aunt Honoria told me the other day you are rich and belong to a fine family. I am poor; I am taunted with the suspicion of having been born the child of an adventurer; you know these things, and you do not resent them in me, yet you discourage my desire to work. Is it because you think music-teaching a degrading occupation, incompatible with respectability? Ah, when we return home I will show you Mabel's letter. Here it is: take it, read it; there you will find how sweet work will be with her to encourage me." His face lost its amusement at my concluding words, grew softened instead,—strangely changed, as though in doubt. He looked away from me out to where the moon hung over the water, 'twixt heaven and earth, a ball of molten silver. He kept his face turned persistently away from the searching of my eager eyes, until I spoke again.

"Please look at me instead of the moon: she is a great deal happier than I am to-night. I want you to think me worthier of sympathy, Cecil. Listen to me. The other day I was happy in the thought of an emancipation from this life, the sight of these faces; to-day I am miserable because I gave two promises, one to you, the other to Mrs. Dare,—this last that I would abide by your will. See what a puppet I am! It is you who hedge me in! Let me work, Cecil; I am dreadfully in earnest. I can never tell you how eager I am for your consent. Dependence is killing me."

"I have not told you my suspicion, Marguerite!" I shook my head doubtfully, apprehensively, as he now came close to me. "Let me ask you a question, little one. Was your Uncle Will, of whom you were so fond, a rich man?"

"I believe he was,—very rich and very charitable; he was always doing good to poor people, and, above all, he loved little Archie better than any one else."

"Better than he loved you?"

"I do not know. I am sure he loved me very dearly; but I am not able to measure his love for Archie and myself together, since I was not aware even of Archie's existence while Uncle Will was alive. Barry says he was devoted to the child. I used to love Uncle Will, I thought, as much as I possibly could; but now I love him a worldful more for being kind to my poor little boy."

"You told me, once, that when your father died, your Uncle Will took you away from Blossom Village. Did you remain with him until his departure for Nice? Did he ever appear desirous of constituting an especial claim upon your love?"

"When he went to Nice, I went to boarding-school. I have always thought Mrs. Dare managed in some way our separation; she insisted upon my not expressing the slightest desire to accompany him to Nice, rather an indifference to what my future life should be. Uncle Will often told her in my presence how fond he was of me,—mamma was his favorite sister,—and his desire to keep me happy and free from trouble. Many, many times I

have heard him, in impressive words, beg her—after it was decided, the necessity of his going to Nice—during his absence to love me, to treat me as her own daughter.”

“Were you ever told to whom or in what way he left his money?”

“Never. I have always thought he left it to Mrs. Dare. Mr. Trent was his lawyer; he came to visit him two or three times during his illness in Boston, just before he went to Nice. Mr. Trent is also Mrs. Dare’s lawyer; he comes often to the cottage from the city.”

“Are you tired of your cathecism, big-eyes? Ah, well, I have only a very few more to ask; among others is a vital one. In what manner does Mr. Trent treat you, when you chance to meet?”

“Mr. Trent, when we meet, appears invariably kind,—rather grave,—inquisitive, and asks queer questions.”

“For instance?”

“Whether I am happy, contented. The last time I saw him, he begged me to remember that at least I possess one friend in the world; also exacting a promise from me to seek him out and appeal to his sympathy if trouble should ever come to me.” Cecil’s face had grown clearer and clearer, until now it climaxed into a most decisive smile.

“One more question. Does Mrs. Dare appear to discourage your meeting each other, when he comes to the cottage?”

“I cannot exactly determine whether she is adverse to our encountering one another or not; once or twice I have imagined that she is. I remember one evening Mr. Trent joined me where I was walking on the piazza, and I noticed that Mrs. Dare seated herself very close to the window by which we were obliged to pass and repass.”

“Marguerite, would you seriously object to my consulting your friend, Mr. Trent, relative to this quixotic desire of yours?”

“Cecil, you do not mean,” I stammered,—“surely you do not mean that,—that,—you do not think Uncle Will—”

“I do not intend to tell you what I mean or think, to-

night, Marguerite; not until I have seen Mr. Trent. You are in trouble. You promised if you were ever unhappy to appeal to him; let me do this for you, dear?”

“If you think best,” I answered, in a half-dazed way, blinded with the light crowding in upon me,—the substance of suspicion which never, even in shadow, had troubled me before. Cecil’s face seemed to dance before me, as I looked up into it helplessly. He had been smiling,—amused; now his eyes and lips grew blank with some emotion, the nature of which I was unable to determine. The moon, shining full upon him, showed how he stood staring down at me, mystified and in doubt.

“Marguerite,” he exclaimed, “your face fairly startles me sometimes. When you are anxious, suffering, or beseeching, and you look up in that way, your eyes seem so strangely familiar,—just the way my mother looks when in pain or begging for sympathy. It was this expression which first attracted me to you; then, you quite won me when I also discovered you bore my mother’s sweet name,—Marguerite.”

“You promised to tell me about your mother,” I answered, softly. “I am longing to hear; I am glad I bear her name. Marguerite was my Grandmother Kent’s name also; I never saw her, but papa gave—” Something made me stop abruptly; some inexplicable influence, whether of his will, manner, or face, I do not know. When I paused, he came very close to me, so close that I could hear distinctly the beats of his heart,—as mine had throbbed a little while ago. Laying his hand heavily on my shoulder,

“What is that you said?” he queried, a little hoarsely. “What did you say, child?”

I grew as agitated as himself then. I had been watching the waves crawling upon the beach, their white lips nearly kissing my feet, by-and-by breaking into teeth of foam, and washing back only to return fresh to the endeavor. Now, startled into wonder, I looked up, to find his face deathly pale, lowering over my own, his lips working nervously together.

“What was it you said?” he repeated, as I remained dumb.

"Don't, Cecil; you frighten me. I did not intend to say anything distressing to you, indeed I did not."

"Forgive me also for frightening you," he said, more quietly. "You said something about your grandmother. What did you say was her name?"

"Her name was Marguerite also."

"Her surname?"

"Kent. Papa's name was Arthur Kent. He was an Englishman." Then I cried hastily, when he drew back as though I had struck him, his eyes showing their astonishment in the moonlight, his lips closely compressed. "Did you know papa? did you know my grandmother? You are English; did you know papa?"

"I always understood your name to be Dare, Marguerite."

"It has been Dare ever since Uncle Will went away. My real name was Kent; but Aunt Honoria made me change it against my will. She hated papa, the very sound of his name, because he wouldn't love and marry her instead of mamma."

"Your father——" then he stopped short.

"He was an Englishman. He ran away from his mother when he was a little boy, because he was angry with her for marrying a man whom he thought was a villain. He went to California, and made a great deal of money. Oh, Cecil, tell me, did you know papa? What makes you look so strange, Cecil?"

"To tell the truth, child, I was never so utterly dumb-founded, astonished, and overcome as I am at this moment. Don't tremble so, dear; I will tell you presently. In the mean time, answer me one question: do you remember the name of the gentleman who, subsequent to your father's flight from England, married his mother?"

"No; I only heard papa say once or twice when I was a little girl, and, as I never expected to see grandmother, I did not take especial pains to remember. It began with 'M,' I believe,—Merton, or Morton. Why do you ask, Cecil?" I held out my hands eagerly, begging him to speak. "Do not keep me in suspense longer; tell me, Cecil, what you know."

"I will tell you in a very few words," he answered,

taking both my hands closely in his. "You must not tremble so, dear, but control yourself. It is bringing the dead to life again: truth is truly stranger than fiction. Arthur Kent's mother came to the United States over twenty years ago, to seek her child. She traced him to California. In that wild place, then the resort of cut-throats and thieves, she learned that a year prior to her arrival there he had been murdered in a gambling-hell. Don't tremble so, my child, my dear, little, astonished girl; you and I know Arthur Kent was not murdered in any such dreadful place; but his mother does not know. It is the thought of his dreadful death which haunts her both by night and day, which troubles her in visions and during all these intervening years has served to make of her life one long agony." When he said that, his voice trembled greatly. "The enigma of your face is at last solved, Marguerite," he added. "You have your grandmother's glorious eyes, her sweet white face."

"Cecil, help me, help me to think." I clung close to him, trembling uncontrollably. "It is dark, Cecil. Show me, I am so tired of trying to get to the light."

"I will show you the light to-morrow," he said, tenderly,— "the light of your grandmother's face; you shall look in my mother's eyes—there you will read more truth than even you ever dreamed. You poor, trembling child, I have awakened you too rudely. Sit here on this stone, and, while I wrap this shawl closely around you, we will talk this wonder over." He led me to a seat, and, when I had seated myself, he stooped down to wrap me warmly in the folds of my shawl. "It is not cold," he said, "but damp. How weak you are, dear! I would take you back to the cottage, if our opportunities there for a private conversation were at all respectable."

The sea, moonlit and solemn, swam before my eyes; the world seemed going round and round visibly, the moon to hop hither and thither. Fairly dizzy with astonishment,—a little faint also,—thoughts, wild and confused, came crowding thick upon me; the past, present, and future jumbled together in an inextricable tangle. I seemed to myself to be groping about in a kaleidoscope,



—the figures of which, surrounding me on all sides,—grew more vivid and intricate with the passing of each instant. I do not remember anything that happened for a little while; I only have a dim consciousness of resting against Cecil's shoulder, his anxious, troubled face watching mine, his hands chafing my fingers tenderly.

"Oh, Cecil," I whispered, by-and-by, "my thoughts are so jumbled! I wish I wasn't so weak! The least excitement makes me tremble now; I used to be stronger."

"You are weakened with suffering, dear. There, be quiet! Do not attempt to talk quite yet; you will feel better presently."

There was trouble in his voice; trouble in his eyes as well,—controlled agitation,—changing his whole face from its usual insouciant expression to one of anxiety. My thoughts began to grow clearer now, my perceptions in sharpness more defined. At first, overcome by my astonishment, I had wondered only at the results of this strange dénouement to myself, quite forgetting Cecil; now, however, when his agitation became patent to me, for the first time I began to think of him,—to question myself. Did he love me? was he suffering, secretly? was he enduring torture because of this sudden discovery? would his renunciation of all claim to my love, all hope of my ever becoming his wife, entail upon him suffering, the intensity of which, under similar circumstances, I so well understood? It could not be helped,—this suffering,—if he loved me. Of course we could not marry now, since his mother was my grandmother,—why, then, of course, Cecil was my *uncle*! When I arrived at this stage of my reflections,—even in the midst of my distress at the thought of inflicting cruel pain upon the man who had so bravely come to my succor in the hour of trouble,—I could not help laughing a little, the idea of his being my uncle seemed such a queer one.

"You certainly are better, if you have begun to laugh, Marguerite," he said, scrutinizing me very closely. "What food for merriment do you find among your thoughts?"

"Why, you are my uncle, if all this is true; aren't you?"

"I am Arthur Kent's half-brother," he answered, seri-

ously, looking down at me with a queer questioning in his eyes. "I was born a year or two after he left England. My father, Colonel Throckmorton—it is singular that father and son should have borne the same title—died when I was a mere child. You don't seem very sorry, Marguerite, to have me metamorphosed from the sublime position of a lover, into the more prosaic one of uncle."

"Oh, Cecil, I am your niece!" I cried, laughing, irresistibly. When I said that, and smiled up at him, his face changed in a way wonderful to behold.

"My God! if I only thought you didn't care!"

"Oh, Cecil! what would you do? You wouldn't kill yourself, would you?" It was his turn to laugh now, in a strange way, sounding almost exulting in my ears.

"No, I would not kill myself," he answered, by-and-by, more soberly; "I would only be the happiest man in the whole world!"

I sat upright; looked to see whether the moon was in its proper place; the world the same one in which I have lived ever since I can remember; the man before me, made of veritable flesh and blood; the evidence of my own eyes and ears to be depended upon.

"Why, Cecil, I thought you loved me desperately!"

"And I thought you loved me desperately also, Marguerite!" A great light broke in upon me, deluging everything with an ineffable glory: the moon began to hop again, the world to turn round, but Cecil's voice steadied both. "Then you have been trifling with me, Marguerite."

"Then you have been trifling with me, Cecil!"

"No, I have not trifled with you, dear, only I have not loved you as much as I ought to love a woman whom I desired to make my wife. That is plain talk, is it not? Well, plain talk is the best now. Let us speak frankly to one another. I was fond of you; I admired you exceedingly; in you I saw many of my mother's beauties,—I can never tell you how dear to me is my mother; you were suffering, desolate. That day I overheard your Cousin Gertrude maligning you so cruelly I was quite

beside myself with antagonism to her, and the compassion making my heart soft toward you. You know the rest,—no, not quite the rest, since my thoughts have been so full of pain——”

“Pain?” I queried. Then a sense of my own former agony came back to me, and I could not help wondering if he had been suffering even as I had suffered since that day. “You thought I loved you desperately, Cecil?”

“Yes, I have been blinded by vanity; often you have appeared cold to me, I fancied it but a reflection of my own want of tenderness. I have suffered untold agonies in not being able to love you more, when I thought you loved me so much. Ah, God, what a relief it is! You are quite sure you are not in love with me, Marguerite?”

“Quite sure.” Then I smiled up at him joyfully. “What a play of cross purposes it has been, and a pair of vain fools we! Cecil, I thought you were dreadfully in love with me. I wanted somebody to love me, I was so desolate, I was driven so hard, so I promised to be your wife when you asked me. Oh, Cecil, I have been miserable too, because of this promise. God is good to let us find out the mistake before it was too late!”

“God is indeed good,” Cecil said, reverently.

We were so happy, all the rest of the world couldn't help being happy too. The moon laughed at us, the sea trilled, the light far out at the entrance of the bay twinkled merrily across, and the moonbeams, falling over our faces, showed their excited smiles and thanksgiving. Sitting there listening to his explanations, vouchsafing mine in reply, I became fairly intoxicated with all the thoughts thronging in and about me! I was free, free once more, honorably, blissfully free; the words rang in my ears, the waves whispered them incessantly, the whole air held their music, echoing, “He did not love me. All my pains and strugglings worth nothing, after all, only as a punishment sent by God, as a righteous recompense for my many murmurings. He was also glad to be free; perhaps he had murmured even as I had, blindly, impotently, against God's will. Was not God good to forgive and bless us both?”

We sat together a long while, listening gladly to one

another's voices, only too happy to listen, he telling me of his mother's many sufferings, her agony consequent upon learning the intelligence of her son's dreadful death many, many years ago, from which she had never recovered; in return, I relating all my knowledge of my father's life after he left England, to the hour of his death.

“He believed that his mother had forgotten him,” I concluded, at length. “Through his disobedience he had entailed upon himself her lasting displeasure and renunciation. This was the one bitter reflection of his last moments; the dregs of a cup which meekly he had drained at the bidding of God's will.”

“If he had lived, how blessed both my mother and he would have been!” Cecil said, thoughtfully. “When I went to Blossom Village, in answer to Dr. Lescom's letter to remove Farquhar to New York, probably if your father had lived I should have met and recognized you both there. Instead, I only remained over one night, just long enough to take Farquhar away, and, as Dr. Lescom at the time was gone West, and my conversation with Miss Tabitha was restricted to the confines of inquiring as to the magnitude of Farquhar's board-bill, no mention of your name was made; indeed, I was never aware of your existence, until one night while in the field Roy spoke of a little girl who had been kind to him during his illness at Blossom Village, and who had promised to pray for him every night when she left. Desirous of obliterating entirely from his mind all remembrance of his former state of degradation, I never encouraged him to allude to it in any way; so from that hour henceforward—intimate as we are—no allusion has ever been made to that woeful epoch, either by him or myself, save in the one instance when, during the first days of our return from the war, he promised me never again to seek to marry your cousin, Mrs. Hoffman.”

“Was he—did he remain blind long after he left Blossom Village?”

“Only a very few months. Upon reaching New York I placed him immediately under the care of the most eminent oculist, renowned alike for his skill and suc-

cesses, who in a remarkably short time succeeded in restoring to Roy his sight. From that day to this, the hour in which God opened his eyes again, Farquhar has seemed a different man. You tremble, dear. I cannot allow you to sit here longer; let us walk up and down the beach once more,—then we will return to the cottage."

"Cecil, it is remarkable that you never mentioned the secret cause of your mother's malady to any one, not even to your friend General Farquhar."

"The friendship of men is essentially different from that formed by women: men are not so prone to confide to each other mere personal thoughts or anxieties. Besides this reason, my mother's name has always been a peculiarly sacred one to me,—not even to be made the subject of sympathy or condolence. Roy has always understood, I suppose, that I lost a brother in a strange way, and this circumstance has served to affect my mother's mind. I judge this from the delicate manner in which he has invariably avoided all mention of her. She has been an invalid ever since she returned from California,—many, many years, haunted by the vision of her son lying dead at her feet, murdered by her hand, having on herself taken the consequences of his rash flight, his life in this country, and subsequent death. I remember when I was a little child how she used to weep and sob, as though her heart was breaking, over a picture taken of your father when aged about eleven years, and beg my father, Colonel Throckmorton, to allow her to come to this country in search of her child. I must confess my father to have been a hard, stern man, devoted to, but jealous of, his wife, her every impulse, every desire, connected with aught but himself; most inexorable in his decrees. So it was but natural in him to peremptorily refuse such a wish of hers as soon as formed. When I was still young, my father died, and my mother became free to seek her child whenever and in whatever manner she pleased. She chose to leave England as soon as was compatible with her sense of decorum, to come to this country, to trace her son to California, only to be recompensed with the intelligence, on making her

inquiries there regarding his whereabouts, of his death in a miner's broil. When my mother came back to me,—she had left me in New York during her absence in California,—crazed with grief and an intolerable remorse, child though I was, I saw the dreadful ravages the shock had already made. She had left me, brave, hopeful, young, and fair; she came back, white-haired, bent, hopeless. From that day to this I have never known the mother who went away." He paused, for his voice shook audibly; but he continued after a moment's silence. "Marguerite, this hour with you has given me the taste of a new life. My mother may yet live to become a thoroughly well woman; when told the truth, she may grow happy, bright, and young once more. You will be a link between her and the dead; in you your father will seem to live again. She will love you so tenderly. My God, I can scarcely believe the truth!"

How excited his face looked now, as he turned it full upon me; a mysterious eagerness of expression, the meaning of which I could not determine. In response, however, I let my own glow and quiver all over with smiles. "I have been wicked, Cecil. Sometimes I have thought God wasn't good, and, see, he puts me to shame. I am so glad you and I don't love each other very much,—as lovers, I mean!"

When I said that, he looked at me a moment in silence, then he bent down to kiss me very, very gently, as a brother might. "I thank God with all my heart," he said.

On our way back towards the cottage, I felt as though I was walking on air, up among the clouds the moon was making so bright and the stars were spangling about. Where had fled all my ghosts of dread, my substances of present woe? Where the hoarse voice of despair which ever incessantly the sea had sung in my ears during these last few weeks? Was it not almost greater than I could bear, my redemption? Just as we reached the path leading up through the fields to the cottage,—a path which I have trod under such diverse circumstances,—Cecil turned to look back at Bonnie Venture, rising dark and grand, lit only by one or two lights flick-

ering out from its masses of masonry here and there, on the hill to the south.

"It may be a new life to her," he said, gravely. "I used to think—often enough—there could be no God, since He would let her suffer so; or if there was. He was cruel, unloving, and I never wished to know Him. It was blasphemy, of course, and He shows me in this way my sin. Marguerite," he added, when we had gained the field next to the cottage grounds, and where we could plainly see the cottage lying bathed in the sea of moonlight, "what a blessing you will be to her,—a daughter in truth,—to me, a sister! No more sentimentalizing; no more moon-gazing,—our little comedy is played out. From lovers we find ourselves metamorphosed into a humdrum brother and sister."

"Uncle and niece," I corrected him, grimly. "It is a peculiar idea, is it not? What will your mother—papa's mother—say?"

"I will break the truth to her very, very gently," Cecil said. "Joy never kills; she will only be greatly astonished and thoroughly happy. Marguerite, are we dreaming, or are we not?"

"I have been pinching myself industriously during the last half-hour, until I am black and blue with conviction; if we are dreaming, I hope we will never wake up. Oh, Cecil, I wonder which is the happier! you or I?"

## CHAPTER LII.

*November 15.*—The sun laughs,—I laugh; the sea sings,—my soul whispers hymns. The mists also have guessed my exultation; they carry up to heaven on their white lips my wordless prayer of thanksgiving. If my darling was only here to rejoice with me; if he had not fallen so fast asleep, he would awaken now, surely, to say one word of sympathy, to call me blessed among women.

Is he looking through the bars of the gate? Is God giving to him strong cords of love wherewith to tangle me roundabout, and lift me up nearer to the gate that, putting his hand through its bars, he may touch and purify me? All night long my thoughts have been glorious,—of peace, thanksgiving, prayer. My eyes have not closed once; but, sitting by the window, the night has told me many things, written the prestige of a new life across the sea in words of foam, while the moon shook in its silver hands the sands thereof, until, behold, they have grown white with moon-kisses, quickened and saved! The truth is such a strange truth,—so dazzling, so unexpected! I have been afraid to shut my eyes, through fear that it might flee away, leaving to me only the ashes of a wild dream. Cecil does not love me! He is my brother,—nothing more; he is happy in calling me sister,—not wretched.

I am verily eating myself up with thanksgiving. I have thanked so much, it doesn't seem to me that Heaven can have any ears left.

Barry has just come up to tell me that luncheon is ready, and Colonel Throckmorton is waiting below. "His face shines like yours, miss," she adds, solemnly. "I hope, dear Miss Marguerite, you won't marry yet awhile; his face is so bright I didn't know but what you'd consented to be married to-morrow."

*November 16.*—When I went down-stairs I found him waiting in the library; one glance sufficed to make patent to me the satisfaction of his face, the meaning of the words trembling on his lips.

"I told you joy would not kill," he said, simply.

"Then you have told her?"

"Yes; this morning, very gently, I broke the truth to her; at first I was a little frightened, she appeared so overcome, but by-and-by she grew calmer, and eager to have you come immediately to Bonnie Venture. When I left her about fifteen minutes since, her last words were, 'Bring her to me, Cecil; I shall not believe the truth until I read it in her face.' How soon will you let her read it there, Marguerite?"

"As soon as you wish, Cecil."

Mrs. Dare looked at me apprehensively, as I imagined, when I requested her permission to take a short ride with Colonel Throckmorton.

"You look strangely excited this morning," she said, gravely; "I fear you took cold on the beach last night; and, under the circumstances, I think it would be more prudent for you to remain at home, or at least wait until we go to Bonnie Venture this afternoon to visit Mrs. Throckmorton."

"I believe Colonel Throckmorton intends taking me to visit his mother this morning; it is the object of my ride, Aunt Honoria."

"Indeed! then, while you put on your hat, I will speak to Colonel Throckmorton regarding it." Saying this, she left me to join Cecil in the library.

The hills lay asleep, the clouds floated high and white, the sun swam in a golden haze, and the sea sparkled and foamed right merrily when Cecil and I drove out through the cottage gateway toward Bonnie Venture. After arraying myself in my hat and a little crape sack, a gift from Mrs. Dare,—upon joining her and Cecil where they stood talking together in the library,—I had not been slow to perceive the look of restrained anxiety seaming the usual cold tranquillity of her face, or the enigmatical quiet of his.

"My aunt has been talking to you again about my being compelled to remain longer with her,—her persistence is so wonderful, Cecil; for I really do not think she loves me; do you think she does?"

"She may love you, dear, but not half so well as she loves herself. I am taking you now to one who will love you as you have never been loved before." Then we both grew silent, thinking of this one who was to love me so dearly.

This was the same drive which I had taken, in company with Mabel, Murray Dare, and my aunt, that long-ago September day, when we were on our way to Bonnie Venture along this same winding road, under the overarching branches of the trees, past these woodlands,—then green and shadowy, now drear, hollow, dun,—when I had wondered so as to the future, blinded to its pos-

sibilities, at a loss for a solution of its enigma, losing myself in a labyrinth of doubt. To-day, grown wiser, more hopeful, I began to imagine what the future might grow to be, to read the enigma conclusively to my own satisfaction; to find its answer stretched out beyond my feet, a show of God's handwriting. Was the suspicion engendered by Cecil's inquiries the night before, relative to Uncle Will's wealth, to be confirmed by Mr. Trent by-and-by? Had Mrs. Dare played me false all these long weeks, months, years, since Uncle Will went away? How well I remembered my limited pocket-money while yet a school-girl, my later distress as a member of her family, when restricted in my wardrobe to a patched, washed-out muslin, a faded calico! If she had played me false, how great was her sin, how strange the awakening! A miracle just as I needed it most. Then, most blessed thought of all, I would be free, free in the sight of God and man, since Cecil was no longer my lover, free from sin in loving. I grew strangely happy thinking this, and of her, papa's mother, who had so loved and suffered for him, waiting to accept me, his child, and love me henceforward. Ah, was I worthy, acceptable? was not God leading me with mercy beyond, far beyond my deserts?

"It is strange, Cecil, we never before found out our relationship," I said, presently. "The reason has been, I suppose, I am not inquisitive or you committal; fate has invariably seemed adverse to your ever having a complete opportunity to tell me about your mother. Only think, if Mrs. Dare had not interrupted us that day at the picnic, all might have been explained then."

"Yes, all would have been explained then," he repeated, gravely; "however, we must rest satisfied, now that it was all for the best. This pain which I have been forced to endure during these few past weeks, has done me good, much good; before it came upon me I was rapidly becoming lazy, self-sufficient, thoughtless, to an alarming degree; the shock, like an earthquake to the sea, stirred up all the depths beneficially. As for you, Marguerite, you will also come out of the fire regenerate."

"Like Shadrach, Abednego, and that other man, who



were put into a furnace by the idolatrous king, we have had One other with us always to save us from death. Cecil, it is nice to have a grandmother come to me the way the fairy godmother did to Cinderella in her hour of need, and sweet to feel that somebody belonging to papa will love and care for me." Anything to forget that I was once more going to Bonnie Venture!

I looked everywhere save in the direction of its towers, which, drawing nearer and nearer, seemed to me exclamation-points in the book of memory. I trembled so strangely as we drove through the gateway, I was afraid Cecil would notice the fact and question me. How complex were my sensations, wonder, memory, anticipation, all mixed heterogeneously together, the same grandly irregular house, broad terrace, sunshined and sea-viewed, where, on that long-ago day, I had acknowledged myself perplexed, a victim to disquiet, the secret of which it had been impossible for me then to determine! As we drove up the broad avenue leading to the front of the house, I strove to think only of the present, of papa's mother eager to take me to her heart, to shut my eyes to the past, my ears to its voice; here lay a new life, a strange development, I grew longing, impassioned, to accept its measure.

"You tremble, dear," Cecil said, as he assisted me to alight, and led me up the steps to the terrace. "Do not be more agitated than you can possibly help; be calm, remember, for her sake."

Across the terrace, through the arched door, into the broad hall, tessellated and dim, where the light from the painted glass dome fell in fanciful colors on the marble, the pictures hanging everywhere smiled down at us, and the bronze Hercules and knights in armor stood in their splendor, he led me.

"Wait here," he said, ushering me into the library opening out from the hall to the right. "Roy asked me, in his letter, to offer the use of the blue morning-room to my mother, since it is cosier and more sunny than the others. His uncle, Philip Trenholm, left it to Roy's wife, if he should ever marry, especially as a boudoir; but I am afraid Roy will remain a bachelor to the end of

the chapter, he having insisted so emphatically upon my mother's enjoying the use of it during her visit to Bonnie Venture,—it leads out from this room, you know; so if you will remain here one moment, I will tell mother that you have come."

Opposite to where I stood leaning upon the back of one of the heavy, oaken chairs, shone the oriel window—pushed open as it had been that day—admitting a strong taste of the mellow autumn breeze, showing beyond the stretch of far-reaching meadows, the distant cloisters of green-cowled pines; there lay the same brown stubble, the shocks of corn; there hung the same round sun. The breeze, coming in, rustled the leaves of Elia, lying open yonder at the "Dream Children,"—sang through the room cruel hints of exultation,—sang through my heart sharpest of all! Strangely fascinated, I stood there quietly, and looked at everything,—the place where the heliotrope had lain that day; where he had stood and watched me with grave, proud eyes, stirring my depths; at my seat in the window; at the Magdalen hanging over! Ah, how sweet the agony of loss, of desolation, since it was no longer false, no longer condemned in God's eyes; mine to keep if I chose,—in honor, all my own! I was glad Cecil did not come back until some of the first pain had left me. When he did return through the small portière leading from the library into the blue-room, where I had been told by him, my love, of Mademoiselle De Grèvy's disappointment, her return to

"O ma patrie  
La plus chérie,"—

unmarried,—I was grown once more self-controlled.

"I am glad to find you quiet," he said, smiling at me a little; "come." Then, even as he, my love, had led me, he took me by the hand through the portière into the room beyond. As we entered, a figure seated in an easy-chair by the window looking out to the deserted garden, among the Sèvres jardinières and lace curtains, and dressed in mourning, turned a face toward us eagerly,—an old face framed in silver hair, yet young with the fire of two great, dark eyes. As Cecil led me toward her

gently, I shall never forget the lovely picture which she made. "Mother," he said, "I bring to you our Marguerite."

I had been controlled just before I came in; religiously determined upon displaying a composure by which she, in her state of nervous excitement, might, through sympathy, be strengthened; but now, as papa's look came into her face,—so vividly expressed in the thoughtful eyes, the tender mouth,—like Cecil's, too,—I grew suddenly tremulous with longing, blind almost with tears.

"Be brave, Marguerite," whispered Cecil, looking down, warningly, into my face. And steadied by this,—resolute upon forgetting myself,—as she half arose, and, without a word, stretched out her arms to me, I went close to her and knelt at her feet. She held me there in her arms a long while,—speechlessly, nervously,—as though each moment she feared I might slip away and be lost to her, as all her peace has been lost to her these many long years. Soft kisses were rained on my face; tender hands took it between their palms, and hungry eyes looked at each feature separately and with longing tears.

"The same eyes and mouth," she whispered to herself, by-and-by; "Arthur come back,—come back in his child. Ah, how good Thou art, oh, God!" Then again her arms were closely put about me, the silver hair touched my cheek even as the sound of her voice touched my heart. Presently, Cecil, who had been standing with his face turned away, near by, came and knelt beside me at her feet; then, with a little sob, she put her arms about us both, eagerly,—“Both my children, both my children come back to stay with me,—Cecil, and Arthur's child!” and tears fell even as the kisses fell on our faces. Well, I know that I cried, too; I couldn't help it,—tears of very joy and thanksgiving—all the ice of my past despair melting away—forced an outlet through my eyes. It seemed sweet to have the winter past and spring come,—the spring-time ruddy with the sunlight of this fresh, sweet love.

"What a big baby am I!" Cecil said, after she had held us clasped together in her arms a long while, looking up

into her agitated face with his lazy eyes grown big with love. "I have always been your baby, mother; Marguerite will be an usurper."

"I have never been any one's baby since papa died," I whispered, as I stretched up my arms suddenly to put them about her neck. "I am so glad to be your baby, dear, dear grandmother!" How her face quivered and her eyes shone when I said and did that.

"I shall get well now," she answered, softly; "God will let me. I have tried to get well for Cecil's sake many times. He is a dear boy, and I tried hard; but God would never let me forget that I had two boys once!" Then, bending down hastily, she hid her face in my neck.

*November 17.*—I have been sitting here by the window a long while, trying to realize the truth, this strange, strange truth, which, try hard as I may, I cannot. I begin to wonder if this is the same world in which I have been living during the past summer. How many, many times I have sat by this same window, trying to understand myself and other people, only to be baffled at each endeavor! Now it is clearer,—God has turned the other side of things to my eyes, I see the white faces of the clouds smiling at me.

We had a long talk yesterday, grandmother,—how I love to write this name!—Cecil, and I; a talk of two or three hours in length, and two or three hearts in love; and grandmother bore the excitement better even than Cecil thought she could. Every word she spoke, every expression of her face, while listening to my detailed account of his life and death, showed how dearly she had loved my father.

"The shock I suffered from, when told of his dreadful death in San Francisco, turned my hair gray," she said, as I finished. "Since I came back from that dreadful place, where I saw nothing but murderous-looking men and knives, I have not slept one night without a vision coming to me of my boy lying stabbed through the heart at my feet. On myself, I have taken all the consequences of his flight from England,—since the hour in which a big, swarthy miner told me his false story, until this morning when Cecil undeceived me, my conscience has

been one saw of remorse, constantly cutting my soul, through and through."

"How both my father and you have suffered from this mistake!" I whispered, softly. "He loved you so, and so longed to be blessed with your forgiveness before he died. The one thought troubled him incessantly that, since you had not deigned to answer his humbly repentant letter, written during his engagement to mamma, when, I suppose, you were in California, you had ceased to love him, was inexorable in your condemnation of his sin!"

"The letter miscarried," said my grandmother, with trembling lips,— "I never received it,—I must have been in California at the time; and although I had ordered all my letters to be forwarded from England, in following me to California, and on my return thence, his letter was lost. My poor, proud Arthur, my headstrong boy! Ah, Marguerite, you look like him, some of his temper is in your face!"

"Yes, indeed," here interposed Cecil, cheerily, "Marguerite's temper is not of the weakest. Look at mother, Marguerite, and you, mother, look at Marguerite, then you will see how your eyes match each other's. The resemblance, so vivid sometimes, has often troubled me greatly. Do you remember, Marguerite, how strangely I was drawn toward you at Mrs. Waring's reception? It is all explained now; in looking at you I looked at my mother's face."

"And how strangely was I also drawn to you," I answered, gravely. "Your resemblance to my father is provoking, it is so intangible. When first looking at you, something told me that somewhere I had seen you before. Then I was blind, and ascribed the resemblance to another cause; we have indeed played at cross-purposes." And then some of the old ache came back, in the midst of my thanksgivings, to think of the pain I had suffered, and which another had suffered in consequence.

"God be praised, we are out of the dark'ess at last," Cecil said, fervently. "This light will be a new life for mother, a happier one for you, and for me——"

"And for you?" I queried, as he stopped short, abruptly.

"I will tell you that by-and-by," he said, smiling at me with a mystery in his face.

November 18.—I have been spending the day at Bonnie Venture, a happy, blissful day, full of joy and hope. Grandmother is so fond of me, can scarcely bear me to be an instant out of her sight, her eyes follow me everywhere, and Cecil says she is ten years younger than she was a week ago. At least six times to-day have I been obliged to repeat my story of my father's life and death; and a picture taken of my father immediately after his marriage, which I took to Bonnie Venture to show her, since yesterday has not left her hands. Everything has been explained, everything related, even my school-life at — Institute, in which Cecil seems strangely interested; and I am growing to think life very sweet, God blessed in His mercy! Grandmother and Cecil both insist that their home is to be mine henceforth,—I am no longer to remain a member of Mrs. Dare's family. When Cecil brought me home this afternoon to the cottage, in parting, he bade me break the intelligence of their decision to her at once.

"Your windmill is fought, and will never grind again, I hope," he said, laughing at me; "your mania for music-teaching put by for the present. Did I not tell you work was not for you? The money belonging to your father, and which he ran away from, will make you quite a little heiress. Isn't it a pity I am your uncle?"

Wednesday afternoon, when I came back from Bonnie Venture, I went immediately to tell Mrs. Dare of our strange discovery, and ever since I have been haunted by her white, frightened face, the shining of her excited eyes, the trembling of her lips; so now, as I essayed to break this fresh news to her, it was with a quaking heart, despite my efforts at control. I was disappointed, however, in finding her prepared to rebuke me, in a very cool, stern, implacable manner, for my presumption in venturing even to repeat to her my grandmother's decision, denying at the same time her right to make it, when I have been filling, as she said, the position of an adopted daughter to her during the past three years.

"You are mine," she concluded, calmly; "deny your

Uncle Will's last wishes if you dare. He gave you with his last breath to me; remember, your father gave you also with his dying words to your Uncle Will, therefore you are mine."

Appalled at her implacable voice and manner, prepared as I had been for the antithesis, affected by the bare mention of Uncle Will's name as I always am, now I became astonished into silence, having no argument to urge in opposition to this. Somehow I am strengthened for the conflict, I am not to be influenced now either by her tears or commands as I have been during the past three years. Cecil's vaguely-expressed suspicion has given an impetus to mine; I will wait for the light patiently. In the mean time I cannot help being a little staggered at her tone of quiet authority. My only hope of a speedy deliverance lies in telling Cecil all she said; he may help me, he is so strong and knowing!

*November 19.*—I have told Cecil, although Mrs. Dare, in her subtle way, did all she could to prevent my seeing him this morning. All last night Celeste was busy packing the trunks of the family, assisted eagerly by my cousins; and just before I went to bed Mrs. Dare called me into her dressing-room and bade me prepare myself immediately to go to the city with her in the early morning train.

"It is getting cold here, and our house is all ready for our reception," she said. "I have decided not to give you up; you are mine wholly until you shall have attained your twenty-first birthday, then you will be free; my claim upon you is as great as is that of Mrs. Throckmorton; strengthened by the power of your Uncle Will's death-bed wishes, remember, Marguerite, your father gave you to him, my claim is tenfold greater. My child, let us avoid scenes and words in this matter: I love you, you are dearer to me than you could ever be to these other friends of yours. I love you even as I love my daughters. Listen to me: continue to be my daughter, I will do anything, everything for your happiness; I will take you abroad; together we will visit the Old World, you shall never experience a moment's pain if I can prevent it!" Her arms were about me now, in such a half-

frantic, imploring way, all the stern lines of decision gone out of her face, leaving it only tearful and piteous, frightened, and almost overcame me. "Stay with me, say that you will stay with me; promise, Marguerite."

But I could not, I dared not. "Don't ask me, Aunt Honoria, please don't ask me to promise this, for I cannot, and it is so hard to refuse you."

When I said that, she let me go and her face grew hard and stern again.

"Pack your trunk to-night," she said, steadying her voice; "we remove to the city in the seven o'clock morning train. Do not fail to be ready." Then she suddenly paused, and, as I turned to leave the room, she came close to me again, and, with a very white face, bent down to kiss me. "You are a very naughty, cruel girl, but we must be friends; if I lost you I should lose everything. Good-night, my child." And I went out of the room.

I did pack my trunk, but, as I hoped, not for Boston or my aunt's city house. Before I packed it I sat down—although it was ten o'clock—to write a note to Cecil, telling him of Mrs. Dare's sudden decision to leave the cottage, and begging him to come to me at daybreak on the following morning, to save me from being forced to accompany her, if he thought she had no right to so force me. This note Barry gladly offered to take to Bonnie Venture, even at that late hour of the night, saying,—

"I'll be pleased to see you free from Celeste's watching and spying, miss; it's no state for you to be in, sure. I'll be after going down-stairs for a bit of a candle, and for all she's bobbing in and out of the entry every minute to watch what we're both doing, I'll give her the neat slip." Which she accordingly did.

Just as Barry returned from Bonnie Venture, so quickly that I scarcely could be convinced of her having in reality been there,—she had given the note to one of the servants to carry to Cecil, and had returned without waiting for an answer,—and as I was about undressing myself, there came a knock at my door, which opening in obedience to my reply, showed Mrs. Dare standing on the threshold.

"So you are packed," she said, smiling at me; "you

have been expeditious. I have come to bid you good-night again." And when she did so, her lips felt so hot and dry I wished instead she had not.

All night long Celeste kept wandering about the house; sometimes close to my room, up and down the corridor and afar off, until I began sharply to realize that Barry had indeed spoken the truth when she called the French girl a spy. All night long her footsteps echoed through my room, troubling my nerves sadly, and rendering sleep impossible, until a faint light began to glimmer in the black east, and Barry came to tell me breakfast was to be served by candle-light that morning. Upon going down-stairs, much to my astonishment,—although it was not six o'clock and very gloomy,—I found my aunt and cousins already seated at the breakfast-table. As I entered the room, they all smiled at and spoke to me graciously.

"You look pale, my dear child," said Mrs. Dare.

"You are a dear, prompt girl; I hated to get up," said Valerie.

"I wonder if you are as glad to leave this place as I am," concluded my Cousin Gertrude.

Well, it was a horrible, unnatural sort of a breakfast, served hastily,—everybody trying to eat and failing miserably. My Uncle Dare had not passed the night at the cottage, but in the city. And with the passing of every moment I grew gradually more nervously apprehensive. Would Cecil come? had he received my note? or had the servant decided to wait until the morning before giving it to him? After all, would I be forced against my will to accompany Mrs. Dare to the city? Steadily lighter grew the east, more visible the sea, heavier my heart with disquiet.

"Are you cold, Marguerite, that you tremble so?" queried Mrs. Dare, as we stood together in the library, where Murray had kindled a hasty fire, waiting patiently for the carriage to take us to the depot. "Do not stand there by the window, come nearer the fire." But before I did so I looked once more anxiously toward Bonnie Venture, only again to be disappointed.

Ah well, I suffered dreadfully during the next few

minutes, quite beside myself with suspense and anxiety; until, just as hope was about to forsake me entirely, just as I was about to abandon myself to a stupor of despair, and as the carriage drove up to the front door, come to take us to the depot, there came the sound of footsteps on the piazza outside nearest to Bonnie Venture. Although it was a gray, dull morning, yet it was light now, the cedar-trees flecking the lawn plainly visible; and I saw Mrs. Dare, standing with her face to the window, grow suddenly white with consternation.

"Colonel Throckmorton!" she exclaimed, hastily turning her eyes to my face. Then, before she could say more, and as I flushed hot with this exquisite sense of relief, the library door was quietly opened and he came in.

"Mrs. Dare," were his first words, spoken very distinctly but courteously, standing still by the door, "may I request a few words in private with you this morning?"

I was not looking at her, my eyes were devouring the fire at my feet, but by the sound of her voice I knew exactly how her face looked.

"I am sorry to be obliged to deny you, Colonel Throckmorton; the carriage is waiting at the door; we are already belated; I shall be happy to afford you an opportunity in Boston." Saying this, she took me gently by the hand, and, followed by my cousins, led me past him out into the hall. "Get into the carriage, my daughters," she added; "we are already late. I am sorry to deny you, Colonel Throckmorton, and I wish you a good-morning."

But instead of getting into the carriage I stood waiting, quietly, for deliverance. Just as my cousins said something to me in a sharp undertone, and took my hands as though to lead me to the carriage, I heard Cecil say a few words to Mrs. Dare in a low voice where he stood behind us, which, unintelligible to me, caused her to turn around abruptly to face him. Then he said a few more words, rapidly but determinedly, and turning, walked back into the library; she followed him and shut the door. They stayed there a few moments, talking, as I could hear, in smothered voices; then, by-and-by, the door was again opened, and she came out. I don't know what



he said to her, he has not told me yet; but I saw a mingled spasm of fear, chagrin, and dismay changing the usual cool hauteur of her face into a quick agitation.

"Marguerite," she said, abruptly, shutting the door behind her, between him and us, "Colonel Throckmorton desires, nay, insists upon your accompanying Mrs. Throckmorton and himself to your father's grave in Blossom Village. I have given my consent; instead of accompanying me to Boston you will return with him to Bonnie Venture." Then she stopped, as though she was choking. "Come, my children, bid your cousin adieu." Saying this, she bent down to kiss me herself. "Good-by, my child, you have been a good girl."

I saw them get into the carriage: it drove off; but before it started Mrs. Dare sank back on its cushions in such an exhausted way as to make me almost, through an indefinable feeling of pity for her, become oblivious of the fact that my Cousin Gertrude's face was scowling at me darkly, and that Valerie had grown contemptuous as she looked at me in the expression of her eyes and lips. How faint with this sense of deliverance did I become as the last sound of the carriage wheels died away in the distance, very weak with the strength of conviction that never again would I be forced to live the life of a dependent on Mrs. Dare's charity,—I had been rescued through God's mercy!

"You dear, trembling child," Cecil said, when coming out from the library into the hall he found me leaning, dizzy with this reaction from all my anxiety, for support against the hall-door. "God knows you have had enough trouble; I will take you now to one who will never let it touch you again; we will both shield you, mother and I."

BLOSSOM VILLAGE, November 25.—The same old-fashioned room, with its big fire-place, not filled with asparagus tops as when I last saw it, but with a big roaring wood fire, such a one as papa used to love to look at; the same carpet, chairs, and tables; and grandmother sits in papa's pet arm-chair by the window! How happy and dreamy her dear face looks,—a bit of papa's nose, mouth, and eyes in hers, until the likeness

becomes so vivid, my heart gets so soft with love, I have to go to her, and, kneeling at her feet, put my arms about her neck.

"That is just the way my boy used to do," she whispers, with tears in her beautiful eyes. "You are so much like him, child, I can't help getting well and strong again." And when she says that, Cecil, who is a big baby himself, laughs long and merrily, with tears of very joy shining also in his big, lazy, blue eyes.

We, Cecil and I, have both visited the room where he —I mean Mr. Lester, the man I knew as such, was so ill. But we scarcely recognized it as the same, the window-curtains being pulled high, letting the sunlight stream in; and as Miss Tabitha now uses it for her own bed-chamber, it is full of queer odds and ends of spinster-hood,—knitting-needles, caps, and herb-bags.

Yesterday afternoon we visited papa's grave, and a sad, sad visit it was,—the heap of sear turf lying out there under the gray November sky incited my eyes to such hot, scorching tears! As for grandmother, I thought she would go crazy with sorrow,—but Cecil held her all the time clasped roundabout by his arm, and talked to her in such a tender, consoling way, that, by-and-by, she grew quieter. While she stood by my father's grave, I wandered a little way apart, in search of what I had been told I should find here, another heap of sear turf, headed by a bit of marble put there by Dr. Lescom, on which was simply engraved—

"MEHITABLE PROUDY,  
Aged sixteen years."

Poor, hungry Mehitable,—no longer to famish or thirst, always to exult and be full! I had hoped always, when thinking of a possible return to Blossom Village, to find her here to welcome me; here I found instead this bit of marble and these five convincing words! At least she died happy. I have been told this, being treated very kindly by Miss Tabitha, and devotedly by Dr. Lescom. The latter says, "Her last words were, 'Tell Miss Margie, if you ever see her again, I never forgot her.'

The thought that somebody cared for me, has made me try hard to go to heaven; for it showed me how nice heaven might be." I am glad to know this,—that she tried hard to go to heaven. I was standing on the front porch the morning subsequent to our arrival here, thinking of my long-ago life here, forgetting that it was cold and I had no shawl on, when an old-fashioned gig, which I recognized at once, came creaking up the road, entered the gate, and stopped directly at my side.

"So you have come back, have you?" growled a voice from underneath a big felt hat. "I've got the rheumatism, and if you want me to get out, you've got to come and help me." Then, as I went to help him, he put both his arms about me, and gave my cheek a hearty kiss. "There, that's the first time I've kissed a woman since I was veal. Why don't you speak, you baggage? is your voice changed as much for the worse as is your face?"

"You are heartless, Dr. Lescom, to abuse me the very first thing, when I've tried so hard to obey your last injunction. Do you remember?—to hang my sign out on the sunny-side of the town."

Then up-stairs we went, he growling at every step, I laughing at him with tears in my eyes; and there, in the room where he had so often reasoned with me in my first hours of affliction, I introduced him to grandmother and Cecil. How astonished he was when the truth came out that I was Cecil's niece! He growled, he puckered his face, and played a tattoo on the window-sill, all the while looking very savage indeed.

"Well," he said at length, finding his voice, "I'm glad of it, I never like to think of Margie's knocking about the world without any one to care for her especially."

Then I told him convincingly the reason why I had never written to him, and forgiving me, his face softened. Dear, warm-hearted Dr. Lescom, how I have enjoyed seeing him again and listening to his gruff eccentricities of speech, while grandmother and Cecil are growing to like him almost as much as I do. Already has he told grandmother all he saw or knew about papa at least half a dozen times, over and over again; he is very patient and

she never tired of listening. I was astonished to find that he treated her so gently, in such a half-reverent way,—it only shows me the more conclusively how soft his heart is underneath. Cecil has told him all about General Farquhar: how entirely recovered he has become; how nobly he fought during the rebellion; his accession to wealth; everything in fact save the secret of his love for my cousin, Mrs. Hoffman.

"I always liked him," Dr. Lescom said, in reply, "for all he had such a mental hydrophobia; there was a twang of determination about him that I liked. I'm glad to know he's thawed out. When I first heard your name to-day I knew you must be the friend I wrote to at his request to take him away. About a year ago I received an anonymous check on a New York bank for a thousand dollars. I have been puzzled as to who sent it; I begin to suspect now who it was."

To-morrow we, grandmother, Cecil, and I, start for New York, not for Boston. There are reasons why I do not care ever to go to Boston again. On the day subsequent to Mrs. Dare's abrupt departure from the cottage, and her permission yielded to me so strangely to return with Cecil to Bonnie Venture, instead of insisting upon my accompanying her to the city, as hitherto she had so peremptorily demanded, we, grandmother, Cecil, and I, went to Boston, it having become very cold at Bonnie Venture, the weather gray and foggy. On the day succeeding our arrival in the city, Cecil, with my consent, went to consult Uncle Will's friend and lawyer, Mr. Trent, regarding Mrs. Dare's right to insist upon my remaining a member of her family against my will.

"It is as I have suspected for some time past," Cecil said, when on his return thence grandmother and I became eager to know the result. "Your aunt, Mrs. Dare, has no legal claim upon you whatever, indeed, no other claim, since she has been playing you false from the first moment in which you looked upon her face. Let me make a confession, Marguerite, here. A few days before your aunt and cousins left the cottage, feeling assured of the existence of false play somewhere, and anticipating a catastrophe, such as actually occurred when she insisted

so obstinately upon your removing with her to the city, I wrote, without your knowledge, a note to Mr. Trent, stating the circumstances of the case and requesting to know whether Mrs. Dare possessed the right, legal or otherwise, to insist upon your remaining with her against your wish; in reply, he wrote a brief letter, assuring me to the contrary, and begging me to come immediately to the city and have the matter explained, if she should seek to force you thereto. This reply I received the evening on which you sent me that appeal to come to your rescue; so the next morning I went to your rescue, armed with this, his reply, and which, upon finding her implacable, I placed in her hands to read. Now you may know why she so suddenly changed her mind, and instead of accompanying her to Boston, you returned with me to Bonnie Venture."

"Cecil, I am so glad I will never have to go back."

"Never again, you poor, tortured child. This is the truth: your Uncle Will was a rich man, and in his will—made without Mrs. Dare's knowledge, before he left Boston for Nice, indeed before he was taken so ill, I believe—he left to you, his niece, Marguerite Kent, his entire property, amounting in all, so says Mr. Trent, to about two hundred thousand dollars, the principal of which to become yours on your twenty-first birthday, while in the mean time the income alone was left to be expended by Mr. Trent and Mrs. Dare, your joint guardians, for your benefit during your minority."

"Two hundred thousand dollars!" I exclaimed, bewildered; "the income of two hundred thousand dollars! Why, Cecil, papa left a few hundred to be devoted to my education; this is all the money I ever saw."

"You must ask your aunt, Mrs. Dare, what has become of the many thousand dollars intrusted to her by Mr. Trent every year," rejoined Cecil, gravely. "You have been dreadfully wronged, Marguerite; Mrs. Dare, to the use of herself and family, has appropriated year after year these thousands."

When he said that, I was struck dumb, and could do nothing but sit and stare at him with two wide-opened eyes.

"I think Mr. Trent must be also to blame," said grandmother, warmly.

"To blame for neglect, perhaps, but not for criminality," replied Cecil. "He has paid the money to Mrs. Dare every year, on her representation that she was expending it exclusively for Marguerite's benefit, either for her schooling or investing it in stocks and bonds at her husband's advice, which, knowing Mr. Dare to be a shrewd man of business, Mr. Trent did not object to. Indeed, during the past summer, when fearful of Marguerite making too deep an impression upon our bachelor hearts, she has obliged her to wear dresses unbecoming her station, and Mr. Trent has remarked her wearing such when possessed of an income equal in extent to his own, and upon which he supports handsomely a wife and three children, Mrs. Dare has even represented to him that Marguerite was penurious, avaricious,—preferring to hoard in the bank, or her trunk, the thousands which, instead, ought partly, at least, to have been expended in decent clothes. This and many other false statements she has made to him at different times, until, thinking her to be truthful and just, he had become thoroughly misled."

"If I had only opened my heart to him when he asked me to,"—I found my voice now,—"he so often used to ask me if I was happy,—all might have been explained, and so much pain averted."

"Mr. Trent never thought you an avaricious person, excepting—knowing your resources—in the matter of dress. Mrs. Dare's position in society is so assured, her manners imposing, her arguments convincing, that when tempted to suspect all was not quite as it was represented to be, your own reserve, taken in conjunction with her reiterated assurances of the truth of her disclosures regarding your habits, he learned gradually to mistrust his own suspicions—you—and to rely only the more implicitly upon Mrs. Dare's honor."

"How cruel she has been! She never loved me; I realize it now. All her tears and beseeching were but influences exerted to keep me still blind—a member of her family—that during the next two years she might unmolested continue her spoils. During the past two

years Uncle Dare has lost a great deal of money; he is honorable, I know, and would not for an instant countenance any attempt to defraud me of my rights; without his knowledge she has used Uncle Will's money for her own and her children's benefit. I would not mind this, Cecil; she would be entirely welcome to the money if she had not so thoroughly deceived me, so heartlessly made of me a puppet. She pretended to love me, she played upon my feelings, she twisted me first one way and then the other, telling me that Uncle Will had insisted upon my living with her yet two years longer! I feel assured now that he never insisted upon this if it should be against my will."

"You are right, fiery eyes! How indignant you look, child! I asked Mr. Trent to-day especially regarding this; he replied that in your uncle's will, opened immediately upon your aunt's return from Nice, there was nothing making it obligatory for you to remain a member of your aunt's family. His only wishes relative to this were expressed either verbally to Mrs. Dare or not at all. Indeed, he once said to Mr. Trent before leaving Boston for Nice (it would seem that intuitively he mistrusted your aunt), if ever, through any unforeseen circumstances, you should choose to leave her family, he hoped Mr. Trent would take you into his own; this Mr. Trent promised to do, and this is the reason why, in seeing you at Wickoff's Ledge growing daily paler and more miserable, he made you promise if ever in trouble to appeal at once to him."

"And Mrs. Dare did not know that Uncle Will had made a will before he went to Nice?"

"No, she certainly did not. Mr. Trent says she was violently affected; although she endeavored to control herself when, on her return from his death-bed, he assured her of the fact, and showed to her the contents of the will. Desirous of avoiding scenes and exciting words, Mr. Constant had made it just before he was taken so ill, when assured by his physician of the danger of another hemorrhage, which he felt himself might end his life. It appears that your Uncle Will was remorseful about some trouble which had existed years before between your

parents and himself, and took this method—at that time he thought, probably, neither your aunt nor cousins would ever be in need of pecuniary assistance—to antidote his remorse. Mr. Trent thinks that in separating you from Mr. Constant previous to his death, and promising to care for you, even as her own daughter, to devote herself entirely to your happiness, and to interest all her energies in the completion of your education, she sought to influence him to leave either his entire property to her, to be divided, at her death, between her own children and you, or else at his decease, equally between you and herself; if he died intestate, the law would do this latter, or if, after going to Nice, impressed with her desire to be true to you in all things, he would make a will, leaving it entirely to her. This is the reason why she desired your separation; and assured of her kind intentions, in parting from you, he begged you so earnestly to reciprocate her endeavors with as willing an obedience as possible."

"I am glad she was disappointed," here interposed grandmother, with much decision of both voice and manner. "She has been cruel to Marguerite, and deserves a retribution. I did not like her the day she called at Bonnie Venture, her eyes were so black and piercing, and her style so coldly assured. I will never forgive her for being false to my child."

I was standing close to her, stroking gently her profusion of white, silky hair, and, as she reached out her hands, I knelt down at her feet, while her arms clasped me roundabout, as though eager to shield me against all future assaults.

"It is all past, grandmother," I whispered, softly. "God meant it for the best. I am so happy now, to think of staying with you and Cecil always, I can almost entirely forgive her; perhaps if she had not been false Cecil and I might never have come to an understanding. I am now only determined upon one thing relative to all this trouble: from this day I repudiate the name of Dare!"

"She had no right to insist upon your assuming it," grandmother replied, decisively, as before. "She was actuated alone by a spite against your father, my poor

boy, who never did harm to any one but himself; if you had only retained your own name all might have been well, Cecil would have recognized you at once. The mistake has been dreadful in its consequences."

"It will all be explained to-night," Cecil here interposed. "Trent is coming to see Marguerite after dinner and settle the question decisively; while condemning himself for his own neglect and want of wisdom in the matter, he declares that legal proceedings ought to be instituted against Mrs. Dare, or at least an inquiry made regarding the disposal of the many thousands which have passed through her hands."

"I will never consent to that," I said, quietly. "Hereafter let by-gones be by-gones; the past is horrible, it must never be disturbed,—she is welcome to the money; and her conscience, its voice will teach her more conclusively than our lips ever could the measure of her perfidy. Let us live only in the future, Cecil,—grandmother, you, and I."

### CHAPTER LIII.

*August 5, 1867.*—This morning I have been delving down into the depths of my old school-trunk, in search of curiosities to show Mabel, where, tightly packed in between Ollendorf and Hume, I found this old, old diary, of which I had quite forgotten the existence. Since I put this away I have had two or three other diaries, happier, nicer ones, and it was with a startled sense of recognition I dragged it to the light to-day, to read over again some of the almost illegibly-written entries, in some such frame of mind as Macbeth might have been if he had tried to pinch the ghost of Banquo. There are a few blank pages close to its back cover, and I am going to write here on them. How in looking over the first and middle of the diary my heart has ached over some pages and laughed over others, especially those treating

of my girlish romance on board the yacht that night, when I was so impulsed to make a hero of dear, lazy Cecil! This part is indeed a curiosity, and by-and-by I will take it down-stairs to Mabel, who will laugh over it with me. How well I remember that night, just two years ago exactly, the moonlight, the sea, Lorimer's eccentricities, Cecil's attempts at sentiment, Murray Dare's platitudes, our walk home, Cecil's and mine, how, in passing through the opening in the stone wall, he, General Farquhar, stood aside to let me pass, and my heart beat roughly as he looked down into my face! There are bits of photograph in everybody's life, I suppose, struck abruptly into existence by some inexplicable power, which, framing the bit in mystery, yet lets each feature, each color, stand out alto-rilievoed, never to fade, while the background swims in gloom. This is my bit, framed in my heart always, my first awakening to a conception of what love might be; and looking back through the camera of two years, I see my picture: the level rays of the sinking moon startling into passion the cold hauteur of his face, the questioning of his eyes gazing down into mine, the half smile parting his lips! Ah, well, I might judiciously shut the cover over, since that world has passed away; for when long ago I put this blotted diary deep down in the corner of my school-trunk, as though eager to hide it from the light forever, piling in my ardor all those heavy books on its back, as I have tried to pile resignation on myself, a new life began for me, a shorter, sweeter life, full of quiet satisfaction, save when some bit of photograph like this latter, steals its features into my mental retina to burn and disquiet it. Since that night—ah, God, how long and dreary an ago it has been!—when he left me to my despair, my later redemption, to go out himself into the black night beyond, I have never looked upon his face; I do not like to think he has gone entirely out of my life, I loved him so, I love him yet! I wait patiently, hoping with all my might that God, who has been so good to me in other ways, will let him come back to me by-and-by. During the entire two years since he went, only two letters have been received by Cecil from him,—brief, hurried scrawls,—



one written at Constantinople, the other at Damascus, neither giving the slightest clue to his future whereabouts, only saying he was well, and would be home again by-and-by. During the past year and more he has been as dead to us all; I cannot help it, I get weary of hoping sometimes, as I used to get when this diary was my confidant, a little hot with despair with the continual fight of suspense. But God is good, He lets me have a bit of the cross to hold in my heart, and it comforts me.

Cecil has bought the cottage of General Farquhar's agent, and we are spending the summer here. It seems at once so natural and yet different. The sea sings the same songs, the cedars breathe the same balsamic odor, the rocks alternately bask white, and blacken with wet, and Archie's grave—my precious boy angel—lies yonder, covered with myrtle and roses, under the trees.

"You shall have your old room, Marguerite," Mabel said, when we decided to come here, "where you suffered so much; for although you suffered there, I know its four walls are endeared to you."

And so they are, and Archie's four walls also; between which, sitting by the window, I sometimes believe I hear him whispering to me in the wind, his wings beating about my head. Mabel is Cecil's wife, and little Roy, tumbling out there on the lawn in Barry's arms, is Cecil's child. I never knew, until Mabel and Cecil were engaged,—almost immediately upon our return from Blossom Village to New York, when, leaving grandmother and me mysteriously one day, he went to W——, and found Mabel "willing,"—how much he had loved her, almost from the first moment of their meeting,—unconsciously for awhile, until the trial of being engaged to me, whom he did not love, taught him the measure of his sacrifice.

"And I always loved Cecil," Mabel confided to me, shortly after her engagement, when she came to New York to visit us, "from the very first; but I thought it was no use, since I had long ago decided him to be in love, desperately in love, with you. He sometimes appeared tender and strangely devoted to me, and when tempted to believe him in earnest, I always tried to make

myself remember that men often had these manners when they never meant anything serious. I was so glad I was mistaken." And not only then did the mistake make her happy, but every day since her happiness and satisfaction keep growing.

About the same time of Mabel's and Cecil engagement, one day who should make her appearance in New York but honest Irish Barry.

"I went to Mr. Trent," she said, when I wondered at her, "to find out where you'd gone, miss; master told me most likely he would know, for I couldn't stay longer with my lady Mrs. Dare; for there was nothing to do but mend the stockings, since Archie and you, miss, went away, and I got homesick after you. Both master and me got homesick together; he was as bad to know about you as I was, and I gave him my word if I found you to ask you to write him that I got here safe; for although master is mighty queerlike, yet his heart is on his left side, and it's got blood in it."

And since this hour in which she sought me out so eagerly, Barry has never left me. Not only do I have her face to remind me of Archie,—how he suffered and died, how his love used to lighten my heart when burdened with woe,—but Uncle Dare also is here every Saturday night to spend Sunday. Mabel and Cecil love to have him come, he is so quiet, and longs to be near his child's grave. Even grandmother sympathizes with him, and urges him to come, for the intense dislike with which she regards Mrs. Dare and her daughters does not extend to him. As for Mrs. Dare and my cousins,—the latter remaining still respectively a widow and maiden,—they continue to reside in Boston. Since the gray November morning long ago, when we parted so abruptly here, we have never met, and I rejoice that it is so. My silence on all points relative to Mrs. Dare's perfidy remains complete,—never has she been accused by me of it; I have been willing to shut that part of the past over forever. I hear occasionally of Valerie's beauty, her conquests; of Gertrude's increasing pedantry and self-will,—this is all. I love to think our paths may never cross again, that God has lifted me up. The Mortimers also

have remained thus far unmarried,—the engagement existing at one time between Murray Dare and Beatrice having been broken off summarily, she discovering, I believe, that it was her money alone which he wanted. Even Lorimer is not married. "I prefer to be in the fashion," he said, laughing at me, the other day. Alone of us all, Mabel has found a mate. How happy is our cottage family! Mabel, Cecil, grandmother, and I live together, always harmonious, full of content. I must not forget little Roy, or Lorimer, who is here two or three times a week. Even as I sit here, watching Barry out yonder under the big cedar-tree tossing little Roy in her arms,—she is devoted to the child heart and soul,—the sea sparkling and glowing as it used to sparkle and glow when I held Archie in my arms, before God took him, the south wind, rich of cedar balm and salt elixir, comes enveloping me about, trying to rinse my thoughts free from all dregs of discontent, and the swallows, fluttering their wings under the eaves, tell me how happy I ought to be, this is my query: Am I happy? is my fight accomplished? do not my weapons turn back to cut me after every victory? I have tried to be patient, hopeful, content in the quietness of my immediate life,—I have begged God so much to let me have faith. Sometimes, when I go into the music-room, Mabel asks me why I sing with so much feeling the "Last Rose of Summer,"—why I linger over its music and grow so pale. I never tell her the truth,—I could never tell any one my secret. I only reply that I am sentimental, getting to be an old maid, and in consequence cannot help feeling like a "Last Rose." I have been reading Tennyson this morning, as all "Last Roses" do when they are left fading alone. "In Memoriam" has some strings in its harp which vibrate in my ears all the time. To-day this string vibrates—

"Whether trust in things above  
Be dimmed of sorrow, or sustained;  
And whether love for him have drained  
My capabilities of love."

I am tired of waiting, of wondering; my thoughts are all worn threadbare, and I have no others.

"Marguerite," Mabel is calling from the piazza, "Roy wants you to sing him to sleep."

August 7.—Mabel had proposed a picnic for to-day, over on the biggest island; grandmother, who, despite her age, is quite a botanist, insisting upon visiting it, since she has heard such wonderful stories about its flowers and grasses; but this morning Cecil awoke with a raging headache, and grandmother and Mabel both decided emphatically, and at once, that a picnic would not be a success without him.

"You look pale and worried about something this morning, Marguerite," Mabel said, at luncheon, as she arranged with much wisely devotion a cup of tea and some toast on a tray to take up-stairs herself to Cecil, who is always a big baby when sick, "and Roy has been cross all the morning, so that Cecil is quite distracted; it will be nice to get rid of you both. Why don't you let Morley take Barry, Roy, and you over to the island to spend the afternoon? It is lovely there; you could bring me back perhaps something for my aquarium."

And having declared my sympathy in this proposition, it being an unusually comfortable day for August, two o'clock found Barry, Roy, and myself seated in the boat, beneath an improvised awning, being rowed by Morley across the bay to the island, long ago sentimentally called "The Hope" by Cecil, and which I had never visited before. When I took Roy up-stairs to let him kiss his father and mother good-by, I found Mabel huddled up in a little heap on the bed at Cecil's side, her eyes grown very big with sympathy, while she bathed his head very tenderly in cold water. When I laughed at her, and said something saucy to Cecil, making the attempt to appear less spiritless than I knew that I had appeared all day, he replied with a little groan.

"I am glad you are going, you two,—what with Roy's yells, and your white, suffering face, life isn't a joke to me to-day."

"You are a baby," I said; "Mabel is a goose, she is spoiling you. Roy is the man of the family; life has been a joke to you just long enough."

"Put her out the room, Mabel," whispered Cecil, feebly.

And then grandmother, who also was not feeling well, interposed anxiously,—“Don’t stay long, Marguerite, the island may be damp.”

“Stay long enough to get rid of your crabs, as Dr. Lescom calls his blue devils,” Cecil added, warningly, “for Lorimer is coming down to-night, and you will have to entertain him; I intend to be selfish and keep my little wife all to myself.”

“That is nothing unusual,” I remarked, as I left the room. I had been nervous all day, unusually ill at ease, and anchorless in my thoughts, finding, when I made the effort, no consolation in my music, nor entertainment in my books, living over, as had been against my will hitherto, some of the long ago. When I refuged myself in the music-room, I found it full of ghosts; when I attempted to play, my music thick with echoes; my voice, in singing, thrilled through and through with disquiet. I was glad when luncheon-time came, and Mabel planned my afternoon for me; I could not have done it myself, my mind to-day was irresponsible and complete with chaos. The splash of the oars lazily dipping into the sea, coming up fringed with sparkles, the rocking of the boat, the song of the wind, and the sound of Roy’s childish voice in its attempts at exultation, for the first time to-day made me grow quieted, as though the rays of the sun were clipping off all the sharp corners of my thoughts. Looking back, I saw the cottage lying nestled in among the cedar-trees, its distorted gray face growing more quaintly beautiful as the distance increased, and grandmother standing on the piazza straining her eyes after us anxiously. Afar off to the south, rising sharply defined against the blue ether of the sky, its gray towers gloomy with desertion, its terrace steeped in sunshine but void of life, rose Bonnie Venture. In the little space between my last look at grandmother’s white figure and the grating of the boat-keel on the island beach, I had thoroughly lived over again the day passed beneath those towers two years ago, when I had been doubting, at war with myself and everybody else.

“You look to-day as you used to look when Archie was dying, Miss Marguerite,” Barry said, as we jumped

ashore from the boat, and wandered together up the beach to where we saw the grass shining; “it makes me ache to see you look like that.”

“These flowers will cure me,” I answered, trying to smile at her. Having gained the wilderness of grass, I stooped to gather some pimpernels and baby pansies. “I will make a wreath for Roy the first thing out of these coral weeds and dewberry leaves.” But Barry would shake her head.

It was a long afternoon, cool with saline breezes, sweet with the breath of innumerable flowers, and gloriously bright with sunshine. By-and-by, after we had grown tired of searching among the rocks edging the island to the east for samphire and sea-weeds left behind on the beach by the outgoing tide, we sought a rest under the shade of the patriarch of this flowery kingdom,—a pine-tree growing on a little knoll, from which we could see the cottage afar off, and where the sea-breeze blew freshly, the sun-rays could not pierce, and the plovers piped their sweet, weird music roundabout. From one island to another, flecking the expanse of the bay, I saw myriads of sand-pipers swiftly flying, sea-swallows circling everywhere, while the sea underneath lay vastly asleep, kissed here and there into ripples by the lips of the soft, south wind. This island had well been called a flowery kingdom. Here it was that two years ago Mrs. Dare held her picnics; here, mayhap beneath this very tree where the ground lay thickly spread with mushrooms, the mitchella showed its scarlet berries, and the pyrola suspended in air its purple blooms, Valerie used to sit, the seeming purity of her face only rivaled by the tender blush of yonder wild rose, and he, my friend, might have looked into her lying eyes with his nobler ones. It seemed so hard to me sitting there, my face turned resolutely to the east, where the ocean stretched vast and solitary, oblivious alike of Barry’s puzzled face and little Roy’s attempts to distract my attention, to think that, God willing, all might have gone smooth, our lives to-day been complete. A long while I sat without stirring, while little Roy, tired of play, fell asleep in Barry’s arms, and the afternoon growing intenser in color and silence, died slowly

away toward the west. Then I turned my face wearily to look at Bonnie Venture, backed by long stretches of pale amethyst and amber clouds, where the day's heart, beating yellow blood, dyed all the world in gold. How sweetly restful looked the sea, quaint and disordered the cottage among its cedars afar off,—how grand the masonry of Bonnie Venture! Then I grew longing. Would he ever come back, my friend? would his lips tell me he had lived these years for me,—for a recompense? Ah, had I not served long enough and faithfully for a bit of God's mercy? Would He keep me starving always?

"There's a boat pushing off from the shore, miss," Barry said, as I arose, hastily, and walked slowly down the knoll; "there's a gentleman in it."

"It is Mr. Lorimer; tell him I have gone to the other side of the island." Then, unable to say more, my voice was so ill controlled, I went away from her, out of sight, anywhere to let these hot, miserable tears no longer choke me. I was so tired of fighting myself, so desperate with suspense,—even Cecil had begun to worry about his friend,—and these last few days had seemed singularly trying, this summer-weather at the cottage remindful of another summer two years ago. I went as far away from Barry as I could go,—to the northeastern part of the island, where the rocks lay piled even as at the cottage, thickly spread with samphire and sea-weeds. At the sea coming softly lapping in against the rock-faces, I looked,—at the long stretches of shadow here interlacing the sward. The whole air, while growing musical with the sunset hum, caught up all sorts of perfume to bruise it into my face. I would wait here for Lorimer, then I would go back again to the old life, to Mabel's happy face, to grandmother's solicitude, and to eternal suspense. I heard voices. I wept a few more passionate tears; I could not help it. Then, as the voices became silenced, and I heard a noise behind me, that of a footstep coming hastily across the wilderness of ferns and moss, I brushed my tears hastily away, and bit my lips to keep them from trembling. Lorimer would laugh at me, I thought, if he should find me staring at the sea or looking sentimental. I would not be sentimental! I would shut my heart hard

down on memory, at least to-night. Thinking this as the steps grew nearer and nearer, the sunset silence more intense, I sat down on one of the rocks and tried to make my face grow composed, my eyes free from pain. How lovely looked the sea, how fervid the sky! Now that I tried hard to let some of their comfort steal its elixir into my heart, I was grown very quiet as the footsteps came close, stopping at my side. I did not turn around or look up;—I waited mischievously for him to speak first.

"Marguerite," he said. Then I looked up, not at Lorimer, but at a face I had so longed and prayed to see these two years past; a strong, quiet face,—quiet sometimes, not now—but with a passionate energy stamping each feature with an increasing agitation. "Marguerite," he repeated. Then he came close to me and knelt down on the rock at my feet. I was grown faint with the shock at the sound of his voice, the sudden reaction of all my hopelessness; I sat staring at him, rigid with feeling, unable to utter a word. "I have come back to you," he said, under his breath, "not as I left, full of despair, but of hope. I would have come before, but I thought you were another's wife, and I could not stand that yet. I have been in the East,—as far as possible away from you,—I received no letters there. I found one from Throck on my return to Paris; I need not repeat what it told me; it brought me back. Speak, Marguerite!"

I found a little of my voice now. I loved him so! "I am so tired! I have waited so long, so long,—it has been tiresome!"

"Has it, my darling? My little one, I will never let you get tired again! I have suffered also,—the measure God only knows; it is past now, my tired little girl, my Marguerite!" Then, by-and-by, he called me something sweeter still.

THE END.

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