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MEDICAL DIRECTOR

THE
BRIDE OF INFELICE

A NOVEL

BY

ADA L. HALSTEAD *psued.*

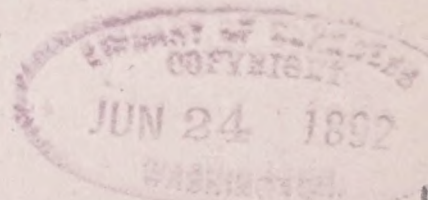
Mrs. Laura Eugenia Newhall

AUTHOR OF

35
"THE SERPENT BRACELET," "HAZEL VERNE," ETC.

—
"Is there no pity sitting in the clouds
That sees into the bottom of my grief?
O sweet my mother, cast me not away—
Delay this marriage for a month, a week;
Or, if thou wilt not, make my bridal bed
In that dim monument where Tybalt lies."

JULIET



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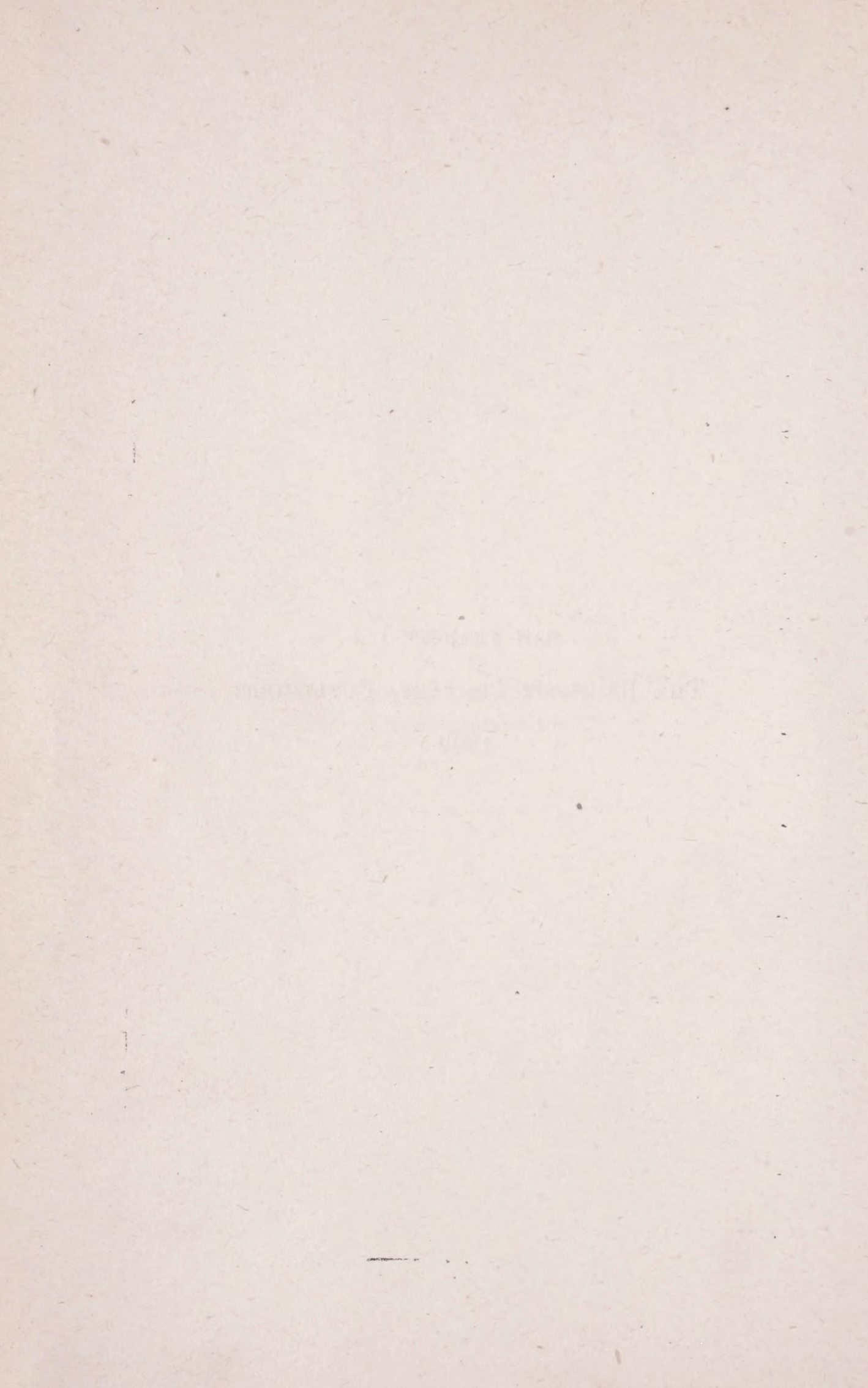
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SAN FRANCISCO

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1892



TO
CLARA BELLE AND WILBUR E. HAYES
WITH A SISTER'S MOST
FAITHFUL LOVE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
1 THE ALIEN.....	1
2 A WELCOME GUEST.....	10
3 IN FRIENDSHIP'S BOND	15
4 LADY CAMDEN	23
5 A MORNING ENCOUNTER.....	34
6 CAUGHT IN THE STORM.....	41
7 A MODERN HERCULES.....	52
8 THE HIDDEN HAND.....	60
9 IN PROSPECTIVE	69
10 VALOIS' SECRET.....	76
11 THE BUST OF "GLAUCUS".....	84
12 A WATCHWORD	94
13 BEWARE !.....	100
14 AT FESTAL TIDE.....	109
15 THE BREAKERS THREATEN.....	116
16 DEAD SEA-FRUIT	130
17 LOVE'S BEHEST.....	136

CHAPTER	PAGE
18 THE CLAP-TRAP.....	148
19 THE TALISMAN.....	159
20 BLANCHE.....	168
21 THE SPIDER AND THE FLY.....	176
22 A SUBTERFUGE.....	187
23 IN THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW.....	196
24 HER STRATAGEM.....	201
25 THE PRISONER.....	206
26 A REVELATION.....	214
27 ENGAGED.....	225
28 "THE BRIDE OF INFELICE".....	237
29 THE DIAMOND BRACELET.....	248
30 THE DENOUEMENT.....	262
31 MIDNIGHT MASS.....	283
32 THE MIDNIGHT BELL.....	290
33 THE GATE AJAR.....	306

THE BRIDE OF INFELICE

CHAPTER I

THE ALIEN

THE mid-October afternoon was drawing to a close.

The atmosphere, with its quivering transparency of azure haze, was redolent of the subtile, honied odor of late-blooming meadow flowers ; and that languorous hush which often precedes the dissolution of a New England Indian summer day seemed to encompass all living things.

The only sounds that came to break the stillness was the low, monotonous purling of a little stream that found its way through the pasture, and a confused bird-symphony issuing from the intricate vistas of birch and maple-wood which in every direction showed dazzling conflagrations of color, deviating from richest tints of vermilion to saffron, russet and gold.

Gray rocks slept beneath softly-clinging burdens of ivy and reddening brake ; groups of deer

posed recumbent on the new leaf-fall about the shallow ravines ; while at a little distance down the gently undulating strip of meadow-land a trio of velvet fawn grazed and gambolled at their sweet will.

Close along the western horizon there lay a shattered golden bar over which the sun's red disc hung for a moment in imperial victory, then disappeared. Anon a radiant flood of amaranth, rose and tawny orange spread itself over the heavens and enclosed the even.

“How glorious, how infinitely sublime !” The words were spoken by a young man who for some moments had been standing with his head uncovered, as if in very reverence of the splendid aerial pageant, watching the colors of earth and sky blend and interchange until they finally became one grand ensemble of spectacular enchantment before his rapturous gaze. He was of splendid physique, being tall, slender and broad-shouldered ; and his face, at once noble and handsome, was lit up by a pair of blue-gray eyes whose clear fathoms harbored the soul of intellect and kindness ; they were eyes that held all who chanced to encounter them rapt by their wonderful magnetic beauty, and that having once seen one could not easily forget.

His dark brown hair was tumbled into a negligent mass of burnished ringlets above a brow upon which rested the stamp of truth and refine-

ment, and his profile, clearly silhouetted against the radiantly illumined sky, his nostrils dilated, and his lips slightly parted to inhale the delightful perfume of flowers and freshly fallen leaves, looked like that of some Grecian god.

Across his left shoulder was strapped a small portmanteau, and his flushed cheeks and quick respiration bore evidence of a long and wearisome walk. As he continued to dwell silently upon the ever-changing splendor of the sky, an antler with large, swimming eyes approached and kissed, with docile mien, the tips of his dust-covered gaiters.

“Ah! you superb creature!” ejaculated the youth, letting his hand fall caressingly upon the animal’s velvet head in appreciation of his volunteered friendship. “You are a jolly fellow to bid me such an affectionate greeting to New England. What! would you turn traitor?” this as the deer retreated a few steps and lowered his antlers for a seeming hostile attack. But at the gently reproachful words he again drew near and gazed up into the stranger’s face with his soft, dark orbs full of curious wonder and approval.

When the youth at length resumed his way through the pastures, all the triumphant colors of the sky had declined into a serene, uniform opal, and the shadows of twilight were being silently drawn over coppice of birch and maple, obliterating all the brilliance of their vestures,

while noiselessly and unawares the deer had dispersed from the scene.

Following up a narrow trail he passed from tangled copse to open meadow, breathing in as he went the faint odor of wild sweet brier, and mentally commenting that the shrub diffused its incense the same as in his own dear England, and that the stars came out in their old familiar constellations in the darkening vault above, which observations, it may be said, engendered within him an involuntary sense of homesickness.

Having arrived in Boston that afternoon he had learned that his relatives were still at their summer villa several miles out of Lynn; and upon the servant's offer to telegraph for a conveyance to meet him at the station, he had said he would much prefer to walk the distance by way of exercise after his long and tiresome sea voyage; so had immediately set out for "Ivendene," the Elwood's country seat. But already the distance had seemed twice that of his impulsive reckoning and as the darkness thickened and the narrow path he was following grew almost imperceptible before him, he regretted that he had not taken a conveyance at Lynn as the servant had advised.

In the azure darkness above the stars fast gathered, yet the stranger trudged eagerly on, now whistling softly to himself to dispel the brooding sense of homesickness, now silent with anxiety lest he had missed his way.

But at last through the obscurity ahead he discerned a faint glimmer of lights, and this he hailed with a shout which bore the intonation of his great relief.

“Ivendene!”

As the echo of his voice rebounded, he heard a sound over head like that made by the flight of some ponderous night bird; and presently there came an inquisitive “too woo?” to which he responded with a soft, trilling roulade, sweet as the note of a nightingale. A moment later he had unbarred the heavy outer gates and entered the premises of Ivendene.

Up the terraced court he bounded with light, buoyant steps, despite his fatigue, and as he reached the top-most landing, he stood a moment in admiring contemplation of the gray stone structure whose turreted wings and broad facades uprose in architectural symmetry from the semi-darkness.

Here and there amid the shrubberies white statuettes gleamed, while sphinxes posed, stoical sentries, upon either side of the wide, granite steps leading up to the vestibule.

Here, under the bright rays of a crystal lantern, the young Englishman stood at length, but ere he rang the door-bell, he could not help pausing briefly to glance into the brightly lit drawing-room, the draperies of whose windows were looped aside, revealing a spacious apartment which, in

appointment, partook of the ancient style of the orient;—whose antique cabinets, delicately inlaid with pearl and malachite, whose onyx lamps, suspended from the ceiling by wrought chains of silver, whose low, carved chairs and divans might, indeed, have once belonged to some prince of the sixteenth century; whose statuettes and paintings breathed the divine inspiration of sculptors and artists, whose names will live forever in the archives of classic Italy and Greece.

As the young Englishman admiringly surveyed the rich interior of this room, suddenly his bronzed cheek flushed, while into his dark eyes there leapt a light of unmistakable rapture as they riveted themselves upon the face of a young girl, who reclined upon a low divan in one corner of the apartment with all the grace of a Cleopatra.

She wore a gown of some simple white fabric, which clung in soft, unstudied folds about her slender form, bringing out in clear relief, against a background of crimson draperies, its every graceful outline.

As the young stranger continued to regard her with suspended breath, she turned her eyes inadvertently toward the very window through which he gazed, and he named them “Mirrors of a Chastened Soul.”

Beneath the bright lamp light they flashed out like purest sapphires, and reflected in their clear depths a world of love and tenderness, while

something else which seemed like a shade of sadness, abided there.

Her hair, now russet, now gold, now softest-mellowest auburn, just as the lights and shadows touched it, crowned a brow as delicately white as alabaster, while her features, strikingly like those of Titian's "Danaë" in their fine, patrician caste, were animated by a glow of color which underlay the damask of her cheek like a blush rose, but burst in richest carmine from her full, half-parted lips.

The eyes of her unseen watcher followed her, when presently, as if impelled by some sudden impulse, the young girl rose; and, crossing the room, seated herself at the open piano. She let her fingers stray deftly over the keys in a brief and happy prelude; then her white throat swelled, and her voice throbbed out full, clear and sweet as a silver bell, to search the gloaming and to vibrate through his soul until it seemed to leap from its dwelling place to soar deliriously in the bent of the heavenly strains:—

“ My heart, my heart is like a singing bird,
Whose nest is in a watered shoot.
My heart, my heart is like an apple tree,
Whose boughs are bent with thick-set fruit.
My heart, my heart is like a rainbow shell
That paddles in a halcyon sea.
My heart, my heart is gladder than all these,
Because my love, my love has come to me.”

What had prompted Alice Meredith to sing “My Love Is Come” on that of all nights in her lifetime?

In after days she recalled the song with a thrill of ecstasy, subsequently she remembered it with a throb of anguish, bitter, unutterable.

Had she been so far removed from her surroundings that she started and uttered a low cry when, just as she ceased singing, the door-bell rang out in wild alarm? or was there a premonition in the sound that made her turn again to the instrument and with her beautiful face, recently so happy, now pale and ineffably sad, move her lips to these doleful words of presentiment:—

“Now soul be very still and go apart,
Fly to thy inmost citadel, and be thou still,
Dost thou not know the trembling, sinking heart
That feels the shadow of some coming ill?
Ah! no; 'tis not delusion; some kind care
Touches thee, soul, and whispers thee ‘Beware.’”

A liveried footman opened the door and scowlingly surveyed the belated suppliant thereat, as if to say: “Did you want to raise the dead, that you rang so loud and long?”

“I—does—are Mr. and Mrs. Elwood within?” questioned the young stranger with visible confusion.

“The Colonel hand the madam har within, sir. W’at name shall I say?” asked the man, with a broad cockney accent that caused the Englishman to smile involuntarily.

“Hand your master this,” he said, and as the servant took his card he stepped into the ante-chamber to wait.

Promptly the footman returned to say that Colonel Elwood would receive his visitor in the library at once.

With noble upright bearing the youth followed toward the apartment named, and directly he found himself in the presence of his aristocratic American kinsman, who stood in the centre of the room smoothing his iron-gray beard with fingers that trembled slightly as his strange young guest crossed the threshold and slowly, deferentially approached him. "Colonel Elwood," he said, bowing low as he spoke, "I claim the honor of introducing myself to you: I am Thayer, son of Sir Douglas Volney, England."

CHAPTER II.

A WELCOME GUEST.

COLONEL ELWOOD stood for a moment with his keen, black eyes fixed studiously upon the handsome face before him. Then he gravely reiterated :

“Thayer, son of Sir Douglas Volney, England.” Another brief pause, and he exclaimed :

“This is extraordinary, young man—*extraordinary!*”

At his words a swift flood of color surmounted the young Englishman's face.

“Oh, I perceive, I understand!” he spoke presently, and passed his fingers through his tumbled locks as the truth of the situation instinctively dawned upon him. “My father's letter has failed to reach you—you were not prepared for my advent?”

“We have received no message from Sir Douglas,” was the grave and laconic rejoinder.

“Well,” continued Thayer, and now his embarrassment gave place to an expression of palpable amusement, “in that case, uncle Howard, I cannot wonder at your inclination to regard me with mistrust. One has to guard carefully against

impostors now-a-days, as there is a vast amount of fraud practised. However, I have testimonials, which I trust——”

“Bosh!” Colonel Elwood interrupted him suddenly, and now there was a warm clasp of hands, “who said anything about impostors or testimonials? Why, bless your soul, young Briton, your face bears the very stamp of honor, sir! I want no better testimonial, and I never thought for a moment of mistrusting you. I welcome you to America and to Iwendene.”

There was a suspicious moisture in his eyes as the colonel waived his hand toward a chair in a silent invitation for his guest to be seated. He drew another chair near for himself, and after sitting a moment with hands interlocked behind his head, and his features still working with suppressed emotion, he asked: “How did you find us! Did you call at the town house? You should have sent a message upon your arrival, and we would have met you at Lynn; but of course you found a conveyance?” he ended interrogatively.

“No,” returned his nephew, “I walked from the station. Your house servant in Boston would have telegraphed, but I preferred walking after being cramped up so long on ship-board. I found your copses and meadow-lands well worth my exertion.”

“You are ambitious,” observed the colonel complaisantly, “but after such a wearisome voy-

age you should not have undertaken a seven-mile tramp. There would have been ample time for copses and meadow lands after recruiting yourself. There's the dinner bell!" he broke off suddenly, "and you have yet to be introduced to your aunt and cousin Valois. What a delightful surprise this will be for Rene! You bear a striking likeness, by the way, to your aunt. She had the same classic contour of features when I married her, which, my boy, is well nigh on to twenty-two years ago:—yes, it is nearly *twenty-two* years now since your grandfather, Sir Richard Volney, came over to America with his beautiful young daughter. He little dreamed he would be compelled to return to his native soil without her. Poor old Sir Richard! It was a hard blow for him to give her up. I remember the forlorn picture he presented on the morning he sailed, as he stood on deck, with his red silk handkerchief waving in the breeze, and big tears, which he could not check, rolling down his cheeks, as he cried out to her in a last farewell—but there, I am digressing! Stay here, Thayer, while I bring your aunt Rene and Valois."

And with this the excited colonel hastily precipitated himself from the room.

Left alone Thayer Volney sat encompassed with the happy expectation of meeting the angelic creature he had viewed through the drawing room window.

“Certainly,” he told himself, “that could have been none other than my cousin Valois.”

With a strange agitation he glanced round upon the magnificent appointments of the room.

There were tiers of book-shelves towering almost to the ceiling and filled with handsomely bound volumes. There were Parian busts of Virgil, Homer, Milton, Shakespeare, Tennyson and Longfellow, all mounted upon costly pedestals; upon a little opal stand there rested a statuette of the “Dead Pearl Diver,” after the celebrated sculptor, B. Paul Akers, while upon another was presented a remarkable bust in ebony by a gifted American artist. There were paintings—masterful creations—whose exquisite harmony of coloring he would have studied at any other time with the keenest of delight. But he turned from them now after a casual glance, letting his eyes wander to a fierce-looking bronze warrior who stood in full armor just within the deep embrasure of a window between the heavy parted portieres. Then his glance strayed above the silken hangings to a silhouette of his great-grandfather, Sir Leopold Volney, who had died chivalrously fighting for his country at Sebastopol.

Upon this picture his gaze riveted itself as, with bated breath, he listened for footsteps.

They sounded at length along the tessellated floor just outside the library, and above them he heard a mingling of glad, excited voices. The

next moment the door opened and Colonel Elwood re-entered the room accompanied by his wife and lovely daughter.

Thayer rose and advanced toward the ladies, little able to repress the keen sense of disappointment he felt as his eyes met those of his cousin, which, alas, were not those "mirrors of a chastened soul" he had been so joyously anticipating. Valois Elwood's beauty was like a summer's gloaming lit with stars; while that of the unknown one was like a golden harvest dawn-glow.

CHAPTER III

IN FRIENDSHIP'S BOND

"As high as we have mounted in delight
In our dejection do we sink so low."

—Wordsworth

"**T**HAYER! my brother's son!" cried Mrs. Elwood as she advanced toward her nephew with outstretched arms; and there were happy tears in her eyes as she kissed the young Englishman upon both cheeks, which caresses Thayer warmly returned.

After that lingering embrace, with a soft, motherly hand Mrs. Elwood brushed back the clustering curls from the youth's noble brow, and putting him from her at arm's distance, stood for some moments in silent contemplation of his magnificent type of manhood.

"My beloved Douglas' own son!" she spoke at length, and her words still bore an intonation of incredulity. "I can scarcely realize," she continued, "that you are the same Thayer whom I left at Volney Wold nearly twenty-two years ago. You were then shaking a rattle over the ramparts of your cradle."

At this moment a fairy figure glided up to the side of the young Englishman.

It was Valois who, having waited so long for an introduction, had concluded to waive the formality, and now extended a little dimpled, white hand, saying:

"I am Valois, Cousin Thayer. We have known each other from childhood, you know, through correspondence."

He repeated her quaint name as he pressed the dainty tips of her fingers to his lips. Then he detained the member in a gentle clasp as the girl, still looking into his face, observed, her face suffused in dimples:

"My aunt, Lady Marguerite, promised me, when I was a very little girl, that you should come to America when you were twenty-three. I have counted the years since then. You were twenty-three last August, weren't you?"

Thayer assented, smiling at her charming piquancy and the little lisp accompanying her accent.

"I am sure," went on the young girl, "that we'll be great friends. Ivendene has been a trifle dull to me at times without a companion. It will be different now with you here. I know you are jolly by your letters; they always amuse me they are so droll, and I love to read them over again and again."

Thayer made her some laughing rejoinder, then he was peremptorily hurried away by his aunt to prepare for dinner, and Valois went back to the

drawing-room, which apartment Mrs. Elwood entered a few moments later, just in time to hear her daughter giving Alice Meredith and her mother, a delicate-faced and refined little lady in black silk, a description of her English cousin, just arrived.

“Is he really so handsome as you have pictured him?” asked Alice, half incredulously.

“Handsome!” cried Valois, with elaborate enthusiasm, “he is like that bust of the Athenian Glaucus which Lady Camden has in her drawing-room. You remember, she brought it from Italy. His hair is dark brown and curly; his eyes—ah, Allie, such eyes!—a deep, lustrous gray, that seem to smile and talk as they look at you. Then he is tall and slender, and carries himself much like Lieutenant Carruthers of the navy. On the whole, he is *divine*, and you will fall in love with him the moment you see him.”

“Valois.”

“Oh, really! I am—” At that moment the door opened to admit Colonel Elwood and his nephew. Introductions followed, and for a moment Alice Meredith met those “deep, lustrous, gray eyes that seemed to smile and talk” as they looked at her.

Thayer Volney dwelt upon her name as if he felt an insatiable charm in its utterance which he surely did; for was not this the enchantress

who had sung those words : " My Love is Come ? " Ah, surely, surely !

" Well, what do you think of my modern Glaucus ? " asked Valois, after dinner, as the two young girls were sauntering in the moonlit garden while the gentlemen smoked their cigars in the library.

" Mr. Volney is undeniably handsome and bears himself with a superior elegance that must win him the favor of all who know him," returned Miss Meredith earnestly.

Yet Valois thought she perceived a tremor of constraint in her friend's voice, and she peered furtively in her face as they passed out of the shadows of a hemlock tree, but seeing nothing there save a pallor which she attributed to the moonlight, she went on with her lispng prattle.

" He comes of a race whose lineage is remote and noble as any in Great Britain. Sir Douglas Volney has three fine estates in different parts of England of which Volney Wold, situated somewhere in the Valley of the Thames, is said to be the finest. Thayer is sole heir-prospective to all these, and will succeed to the baronetcy. Oh, Allie ! " the girl ended seriously, " wouldn't it be just too delightful if you two were to fall in love with one another ! What a charming Lady Volney you would make ! We have the portraits of all the ladies of Volney House, and I am certain

there is none among them more gentle and distinguished-looking than you."

"Hush! Oh, Valois, dear, you were always such an unconscionable dreamer!" said her friend with gentle reproof in her words.

"Well," went on the other in the same naive, lispng manner, yet in a serious tone,

" 'Tis not impossible he
Shall command thy heart and thee.' "

before he has been here a week. I've heard of stranger things happening—often!"

"It is growing chilly. Let us return within," said Alice, and again Valois noticed that intonation of sad constraint in her voice, and saw her shiver as she drew her light mantle closer about her shoulders.

"First come with me to the conservatory," urged she, "I want to get a spray of those pink orchids for my belt; they are so delicately sweet."

So they turned at once into the narrow path leading to the hot-house, and soon Valois was bending over her coveted blossoms intent on selecting by the dim light a perfect cluster.

Meanwhile, stood her companion with her eyes full of mournful pathos fixed upon a white oleander tree near by. Her attitude was one of deep abstraction and expressed something of despair as well.

About her sweet sensitive lips there had settled a shade of seriousness strange to them, while her

cheeks were pale as the waxen flower upon which she gazed. She turned with a start as Valois touched her gently upon the arm and said :

“Come, aren't you going to pick some flowers for yourself, Allie ?”

“No, not to-night, love ; we must not enter into rivalry to-night. I shall leave you sole light of the harem, sweet Valois.”

“Ah, if I did not know you so well I should want to rebuke you for being satirical,” laughed Valois, as she drew her friend's arm lovingly within her own.

As they turned to quit the close fragrance-laden cloister, she heard the tremulous sigh which Alice strove vainly to suppress.

“I do not think you are quite well to-night, love,” she said, anxiously. “Surely, you are not grieving over your—over that—over your father's—oh, Allie ! you know what I mean,” she ended, desperately.

“I have been too happy at Iwendene, my dear, kind friend, to reflect much upon our present affliction,” returned Miss Meredith, quietly, “do not be concerned about me,” she continued, “I have only a slight headache which will wear away after awhile.”

Her words were reassuring, and they hastened at once to the drawing-room, where the rest of the household were assembled.

They made an attractive pair, these two rose-

bud girls, neither of whom had seen eighteen summers.

Valois' face, with its dark, piquant beauty, made a striking contrast to that of the Titianesque Alice, with her changeful golden hair and sapphire eyes. Thayer Volney had likened them unto the gloaming lit with stars, and the golden glow of a harvest dawn. He could not have chosen a more fitting comparison and contrast.

Valois' black eyes scintillated with mirth and vivaciousness, while they reflected the soul of love and truth and kindness.

She had the Elwood profile; her cheek bones were a trifle high for beauty, her nose was of the Roman type, and chin saucily protruding; but her mouth was her most captivating feature, and when she smiled, bringing a score of dimples into play, her face was like a bit of rare sunshine.

She sat talking with her cousin Thayer that night, while Alice Meredith played one of those sonatas from Beethoven, which is full of the sublimity, terror, pity and tenderness of that composer.

"She plays extremely well, and with great depth of feeling," observed Thayer Volney, as with breathless fascination he watched the ever-changeful expression on the beautiful face of the performer.

"Yes," answered Valois proudly, "as some admirer has written in her album after John

Keats, I believe, her fingers 'are music's golden tongue.'"

"Admirers!" Thayer repeated the word involuntarily and with a swift inward pang; but directly the shadow left his face, and he went on to say to himself, rather than to his cousin, that at the shrine of such beauty and talent as Alice Meredith possessed, many idolaters must fall.

He roused himself presently to hear Valois saying that Alice had composed a number of pieces which she would some day publish.

"And what do you think, cousin Thayer, she is going to dedicate the volume to me. We have known each other from childhood," went on Valois, "we graduated together last June, and we love each other as girls seldom love. I hope you, too, will love my friend."

CHAPTER IV.

LADY CAMDEN.

Ah, well that pale woman a phantom might seem
Who appeared to herself but the dream of a dream,
Neath those features so calm, that forehead so hushed,
That pale cheek forever by passion unflushed,
There yawned an insatiate void, and there heaved
A tumult of restless regrets unrelieved.

—Owen Meredith.

AT the time of my narrative there stood upon the banks of the Merrimac river, several miles remote from a beautiful suburban town in Massachusetts, a castellated gray stone structure, which, with its several wings, its quoined turrets, its Gothic arches and columns, its vine-mantled walls and casements bore the appellation of "Maplehurst."

The owner of this magnificent country estate was an Englishman of unknown lineage, Sir Philip Camden, who upon his marriage to one of Boston's reigning society belles, established Maplehurst as a *rendezvous* for the select "four hundred" of his and Lady Camden's world.

Hortense Ayer's alliance with Sir Philip Camden had been the outcome of that paternal ambition which almost inevitably leads to a dreaded *denouement*.

Instinctively, even in her youth and inexperience Hortense realized the unhappy future that awaited her without love—without hope of love, to exalt and brighten it; and it was with bitter rebellion in her heart that she had cried out in a last appeal to Mrs. Ayers, as that aspiring lady was adjusting over her face the bridal veil with its coronet of *fleurs d' orangee*.

“Mother, mother! I had rather you were arraying me for my burial! Oh, let me not give my hand in such a holy bond as this, when my soul is eternally crying out against it! You would not sacrifice my happiness on the altar of ambition!”

And she had looked through the delicate frosty meshes of lace, with her lovely face pale as death; its every feature quivering, and her soft, brown eyes dim with a mist of reproachful tears.

The sight of her daughter's emotion did not, however, appeal to that implacable mother-heart.

Mrs. Ayers smiled derisively and repeated her favorite platitude.

“Love, my dear child, is certain to follow after marriage. It is the natural logic of the situation! Think of the titled position yours will be as Lady Camden. You will lead a little world! Let this thought bring a tinge of color to your cheek. You are too pale—by far too pale, my love, for a bride—the most distinguished bride of the season!”

“But, mother, I always feel instinctively when

looking at Sir Philip, that behind his cool, suave exterior there is another—an evil man. I have tried to overcome the feeling, but cannot by any effort!”

“That feeling,” repeated Mrs. Ayers, lifting her hand with a gesture of keen impatience, “entertwines itself with this very simple fact. You are ungrateful. You do not respect your filial obligation toward a parent who has sacrificed everything for your future welfare!” At these words the hot tears dried instantly in Hortense’s eyes. She pressed her lips upon her mother’s flushed cheek.

“I recognize my duty,” she whispered, “I will fulfil it.” Then she had floated, in all her bridal splendor down to where Sir Philip awaited her. She did not pause once to cast a backward glance toward the horizon where she knew the sun of happiness was sinking on her life forever: but hushing her heart and accusing conscience against their never-ceasing cries, “I do not love him! I can never love him!” she took the word of the Gospel in her hand, and promised to “love honor and obey until death.” And thus her vow was registered in heaven to serve to-morrow, and to-morrow, and *forever!*

Sir Philip Camden was proud of his lovely young bride—proud of her in much the same way that he was proud of the costly statuettes that graced his drawing rooms, and the splendid for-

tune she had brought him. Few who knew him surmised the narrow and selfish nature that lay hidden beneath the complaisant exterior of this man : few guessed how insidious and full of secret cunning were his courtesies.

Fashion patronized and believed in him as a man of title and undisputed wealth. By skillful intrigue and sophistry he had achieved a foremost position in Boston's fashionable and political circles. At club dinners, before his marriage, he had entertained the wealth and affluence of the city. At the ball and opera he had been the coveted of scores of mothers with eligible daughters. And many and bitter were the *contretemps* among the latter upon his marriage with the lovely heiress and reigning belle of the season, Hortense Ayers.

Sir Philip was a man of medium height, but rather corpulent. His hair was of a dull red color, so was the somewhat spare mustache that drooped over his mouth, only partly concealing an ugly dark scar on the upper lip, which gave to his face a hard, sinister expression ; his black eyes were long, narrow, and lustrous, with a light that might have been born of craftiness or ambition ; a forehead low, and protruding over heavy eyebrows, which met above an aquiline nose ; a swarthy complexion, and a short, fat neck, upon which his head moved almost incessantly, like

that of a lizard, finishes a sketch of one who is to figure prominently in this drama.

It was early in March when Sir Philip and Lady Hortense Camden returned from their honeymoon, which had been spent abroad. The country was still barren and disconsolate looking, with the late winter snows but half thawed upon the ground, and birch and maple trees standing up in skeleton array against the cold blue sky.

There was little enough indeed in the sodden prospect to inspire or cheer the heart of Lady Hortense, as she leaned from her deep window casement upon the evening of their arrival at Maplehurst.

At her right a forest of birch and scrub maple stretched in continuous dreary monotony, their slender limbs just beginning to hint vaguely of returning foliage; while at her left hand rushed the dark torrent-waters of the Merrimac after a season of icy bondage, their loud roar making a fit accompaniment to the ceaseless restive sobbing of her heart—"I do not love him! I can never love him!"

Upon this wide, turbulent expanse gazed Sir Philip Camden's young wife in a sort of fascination, as she repeated, unconsciously aloud, a line she had somewhere read:

"Blood-dyed waters murmuring far below."

The sun went down, and the chill of twilight fell upon her silent and unpitying, where she sat, forgetful, in her loneliness and isolation, of all things save the river and those words, which seemed to bring with them a prescience of coming doom :

“ Blood-dyed waters murmuring far below.”

The silent gray had deepened into the shadows of night, when Sir Philip entered her apartments, and brought more vividly back her life's misery by the kisses which had already become intolerable to her, and to which her cold lips never responded.

Spring passed, and the first summer of her wedded life dawned—dawned in gladness to all living things, it seemed, save Lady Hortense.

Only a little time since she had been so happy in sweet, untrammelled girlhood. Then she had been grateful for the slightest gift that Nature bestowed, and even the yellow daffodils in her old home garden border, and the flashing gold-fish in the fountain basin had filled her with gladness ; whereas now, the brightest and choicest flower failed to charm her, and she visited her own little aquarium one moment only to tire of it the next, reflecting, as she left the grotto, that she would add some new species of fish to the water—something that she had never had before.

“You are pale, my dear, I trust you are well?” Sir Philip was accustomed to observe when he chanced to be spending an evening alone with his wife, which was seldom, as social and political matters pressed close upon his time.

“I am quite well, Sir Philip,” Lady Camden would invariably rejoin. But one evening it came to pass that, noting the deep sigh that followed her reply, Sir Philip supplemented his question with another which was so abruptly put that it caused her to start as with a sudden acute pain.

“Why do you sigh so habitually then? You say you are well; and are you not happy as Lady Camden?”

His long, narrow eyes sought and fixed themselves steadily upon the beautiful half-averted face as he spoke, and they were doubly brilliant as he awaited a response.

Full a moment passed, and Lady Camden’s lips were mute as chiselled stone. He saw a ghastly pallor creep over them as he repeated, calmly, yet with a deep flush upon his face which belied his voice: “I asked, Hortense, if you were quite happy as Lady Camden—as my wife?”

“Sir Philip, it grieves and humiliates me—” here her blanched lips faltered refusing further utterance; while in her eyes lived all the pent-up anguish of her soul, as they sought his hopelessly.

“I see, I understand,” at length muttered Sir

Philip, and his words were accompanied with a contemptuous sneer. "It grieves and humiliates you to acknowledge your marriage a *contretemps*."

As he spoke he rose and measured the apartment with deliberate step and with his hands firmly clasped behind him; then he came and stood before her where she sat with burning tearless eyes fixed upon the carpet.

"Am I not right, Hortense, Lady Camden?" she heard him say presently, and there was something in his voice that compelled her to look up and meet his cruel eyes.

She answered him almost without breathing between the sentences:

"Sir Philip, I shall make no attempt to undeceive you. Though I'd rather have died with my heart's secret buried away from you and all the world, I admit it; I do not love you, I have never loved you! *I am not happy!*"

An age-long silence during which stood Sir Philip still outwardly calm, and with his short, fat fingers playing indolently with the ends of his mustache.

The little bisque clock upon the bracket reminded them that the hour was nine. After the last musical stroke had declined into the silence, Sir Philip said in the same contemptuous tone and with a contortion of the scarred lip which was frightful to see:

"Then I am to understand that you married

me simply to gain a titled position? Ha! You are an exceptional artist! Society, however, would little believe its idol had descended to so common a level. You have acted your *role* with such adroitness as to escape the criticism of the scandal-loving world in which we move. I congratulate you!"

At his words Lady Camden's face flushed a deep crimson. Yet she answered him with that quiet hauteur that characterized her:

"It is not true. As Hortense Ayers I was happy beyond a desire or regret. I married you, Sir Philip, to please and gratify an ambitious mother. You are a strange man not to have conceived from the very first hour of our engagement my true feelings toward you."

"Lady Hortense—a—the appellation suits you so admirably, my dear, don't you know!" parenthesized Sir Philip with ineffable mockery. He heeded not the swift, deprecating gesture with which Lady Camden raised her hand, but after a moment's pause he went on in the same jeering tone:

"It suits your *spirituelle* beauty to be so submissive to that scriptural platitude 'Children obey your parents,' etc.; but that you are such a martyr to it had best not become known to the world. In perjuring yourself at the sacred altar of wedlock as you did, you have sunk to the lowest strata of moral degradation. Yours is a self-

imposed penance, and let it be however bitter, it could not suffice for the enormity of your crime. I am not one who would rave, tear his hair, and finally drown himself in the slums for the sake of a soulless ——.”

“Sir Philip, cease, I implore you! Leave me. I am ill!” Hereupon Lady Hortense interrupted him with a poignant cry of misery.

He stood for some moments after she had spoken, looking down on the proudly bent head of his wife, and contemplating with implacable calm the little diamond dagger ornament thrust through the thick coil of her jet-black hair, and the gems sparkling upon her hands, which were crossed listlessly and gleamed like ivory upon the folds of her rich mauve gown. He observed that her whole attitude was that of ineffable despair; but this did not appeal to Sir Philip in the least.

There was the same hard, metallic slur in his voice, when finally he said :

“Yes, I will leave you. You shall not often be afflicted with my presence. But—a—as I have said, do not lose sight of the requirements of your position in this establishment. If you do not comprehend the duties of a titled lady, I am certain your mother does. Always have Mrs. Ayers here to direct them, and I am sure my entertainments will be successful and beyond reproach.”

A moment later when Lady Hortense heard the door close and knew that he had gone, she rose languidly, and crossed the room to the large window, whose view commanded the river. With a hasty impetuous movement she threw open the casement and, leaning her head against it, wearily gazed out toward the glittering waters with hot, yet tearless eyes.

“Oh, would I had died when a happy, unsullied child,” cried she aloud in her misery. “Would I had died when a child !”

The subdued murmur of waters came to her as if in sympathetic response, and gradually the sound ministered to and soothed her somewhat.

All night she lay awake listening to the river's sad monotone, and in the early morning when she slept and Anine, her devoted maid, bent anxiously over the lovely young face, with its underlying, yet unhidden grief, the pale lips parted and the girl heard them repeat slowly the mysterious words which ever since Lady Camden's advent to Maplehurst had seemed to haunt her dreams:—

“Blood-dyed waters, murmuring far below.”

CHAPTER V

A MORNING ENCOUNTER

Have I dreamed? or was it real
What I saw as in a vision
When to marches hymeneal
In the land of the Ideal
Moved my thoughts o'er fields Elysian?

“SWEET warbler, good morning!” exclaimed Thayer Volney, as his pretty cousin, chanting these words of Longfellow, came suddenly upon him the morning after his arrival at Ivendene, where he sat half concealed behind a tuft of rushes near the swan-float, enjoying the soft, languorous sunshine and the dreamy picture of the water with its procession of gleaming white fowl floating in the shadows of the foliage.

As Valois had flaunted up the little path, under the canopy of low hemlocks, her thoughts had been full of this young man; but she started in amazement as his voice greeted her so abruptly.

“Why!” cried she joyously.

“I little dreamed of seeing you out at this early hour, cousin Thayer; indeed mamma had just enjoined me not to allow you to be awakened as she thought you required a good long rest after your tedious voyage. Did you sleep well?” she asked.

“To make a candid avowal, my dearest cousin, I scarcely slept at all,” Thayer answered. “The pleasure of meeting with my American kindred made slumber impossible, and I was so anxious for the morning to come when I would see more of them, that I rose almost at the first signal of its approach.” As he spoke he bent his eyes half guiltily upon a willow twig which he had been whittling.

“What were you singing just now?” he asked, as the young girl fluttered down beside him on the rustic seat.

“Singing? Oh! I was not singing; I was simply crowing some words which, I think, were from Longfellow,” returned Valois, flushing with embarrassment as she stripped the needles from a hemlock bough which overreached them. “I like Longfellow,” added she, “and often adapt his lines to some favorite tune; but I have no voice to sing, positively none! Mamma says she’d as soon hear my parrot croak as my funny attempts at singing.”

Thayer laughed outright at her drollery. “But,” said he, encouragingly, “you are very young. A few years may work a surprising development in your vocal talent.”

“No, I shall never be able to sing—never! it isn’t in me. Now Alice—Alice Meredith I mean—has warbled like a bird from babyhood. With her it is as natural to sing as it is to breathe: I

want you to hear her, and shall try and get her to sing for you this evening.

Thayer's heart grew restless at the mention of her name. He hesitated with the words upon his lips. "I heard her singing last night, and already do I know the beauty and magic of her voice." He would not allude to that song, "My love has come;" he would treasure the memory of it selfishly within his own bosom, that its charm might not lose any of its sweetness. Little reading his thoughts Valois chattered on volubly.

"How odd it was, your coming this morning to the very spot which I myself love better than all others, though there are many lovely nooks about Iwendene. I make regular morning visits here. I love to sit in the warm sunshine and watch the shining swans floating in precise file down the pond, and to listen to their queer, unintelligible babble. They always welcome me with a glad chorus, and the birds as well know when to look for me. See! I have brought my handkerchief full of crumbs for them;" so saying, she unfolded a bit of snowy cambric and revealed the swans' breakfast, which she began tossing towards them in dainty morsels.

They both laughed like children at the manœuvres of the graceful fowls, as they dove, fought and struggled for the white flecks, and after the feeding was over they rose to stroll about the grounds.

They were approaching the deer park, which was hemmed in by a high rock wall, all entwined in riotous ivy, and which lay beyond the garden hedge, when Thayer asked abruptly and in a voice that was not quite steady :

“Your friend, Miss Meredith, where is she hiding herself this lovely morning ?”

“In the library. Alice is forced by present circumstances to sacrifice much in the way of recreation. She has been wont for the last two years to spend the greater part of her vacations with me here at Iwendene, when we always enjoyed our regular morning rambles together ; it is different now. She is studying ambitiously for musical examination. She hopes soon to secure a position in one of the Boston schools to teach.”

“Is your friend, then, dependent upon her own efforts for a livelihood ?” The question was put involuntarily, yet with an eager anxiety which prompted Valois to look up quickly ; but Thayer had stooped ostensibly to examine a peculiar plant growing by the side of the walk, thus she did not see the deep flush which dyed his cheeks and brow crimson. She, however, hesitated, inwardly annoyed with herself for having so inadvertently disclosed her friend’s position. Surely it would humiliate Alice to have him know.

“But then,” she reflected the next moment, “the whole world knows of it ; besides, it is no disgrace, it is simply a misfortune to which any

man of blameless character is liable to fall heir. He could not by any possible chance think the less of my dearest friend for her adversity, and he had better hear it from my lips than from those of a prejudiced world." Upon this she said to her cousin, who had risen from his half-kneeling posture and was looking at her in anxious suspense :

"Alice will be dependent upon herself from this time forward. Only two days ago the news of her father's insolvency was declared in all the papers. He was one of the wealthiest brokers in Boston and it was generally supposed that his business was one of the most substantial ; but it seems that he himself had been aware of the coming crisis for many months—as far back as last May, when he made an enormous speculation in worthless mining shares ; since then he has frittered away all his fortune in striving to regain that first fatal loss, and even their magnificent house in the city, with all its equipages, has been seized and is to be sold for debt."

She did not notice at this juncture the low outcry from Thayer, but went on sadly :

"Mrs. Meredith and her three daughters will be forced out upon the world to gain a living as best they can. Think, Cousin Thayer, how they must suffer ! think of all that they must inevitably be brought to endure in the years to come ! Oh, it almost breaks my heart when I think of

one so young, so gentle and lovely as Alice Meredith having to submit to so cruel a lot! Looking toward the vista of coming years, I seem to see her toiling, pale, prematurely aged and utterly weary of life, for the barest means to sustain it; and I pity,—oh, I pity her so!” With this the young girl covered her face with both hands, and Thayer heard her sobbing softly, and saw the tears drop from between her fingers down upon the dry leaves at her feet.

He stood by, silent and pale, waiting for her to regain her composure.

When she looked up at length, he asked, with enforced calm :

“When does Miss Meredith return to Boston?”

“On the first of next month, about the time that we go. Ah! here are my pets!” exclaimed Valois, whose sunny temperament never suffered her to harbor a grief for many moments.

They had come suddenly to the park gate.

“You see that great antler deer yonder, the largest of them all?” said Valois, as they entered, “he is my favorite. Come here, Dante!”

At this the deer approached, but instead of going up to his mistress, he approached her companion and rubbed his nose familiarly upon the tip of his gaiter.

Thayer laughed, letting his hand fall upon the creature’s head, just as we have seen him do once before.

“Dante and I have met before,” he explained to his cousin, “as I came through the pastures last evening he approached and saluted me in the same manner you have just witnessed. His volunteered friendship won my heart on the spot. I shall buy him a handsome bell and collar.”

Valois flashed him a grateful smile, and a few moments later, in obedience to the breakfast bell, they left the park and walked slowly toward the house.

Near the mammoth fountain, which was playing its crystalline sprays in the bright sunshine, they came suddenly upon Alice Meredith, who was just in the act of pinning in the belt of her simple white flannel gown a knot of daisies, fresh plucked from the dew-lit sward.

She returned Valois' kiss, and then murmured a cheerful “Good morning, Mr. Volney,” letting her eyes meet his earnest regard for an instant as she spoke, and then flushing to the roots of her bright hair, which the sunlight touched and glorified as the trio passed up the garden path and disappeared behind a trellis thickly covered with intermingled ivy and clematis vines.

CHAPTER VI

CAUGHT IN THE STORM

Such is life—a changing sky,
Sometimes shadow, sometimes bright;
Morning dawns all gloriously
And despair shuts in the night.

—*Catherine Mitchell.*

TO one who has always been accustomed to move in that serene social estate which only opens its precincts to people of great wealth and influence, it must be an inconceivably bitter experience to have, almost without a moment's warning, to surrender a position that had ever been supposed to be one that was perfectly secure and steadfast.

But Mrs. Meredith sustained the blow with great fortitude; and by degrees during the brief fortnight passed at Iwendene, her sweet, aristocratic face assumed a look which told that she was learning to accept the harsh decree of Providence with placid resignation; that she had ceased to rebel against the derisive hand. But this look was not repeated in the face of her daughter.

There was a mournfulness in the dark-blue of Alice Meredith's eyes which perpetually hinted

that her efforts to appear happy and interested were enforced. Sighing had become habitual with her, and the long, tremulous breaths seemed to whisper of the latent weight upon her heart, which every day grew heavier.

She always sang when requested, but the voice that made her the legitimate child of music was never heard to vibrate with spontaneous melody, as it had upon that evening when Thayer Volney had stood in the gloaming without watching her through the window.

She had always loved Iwendene with the surrounding intricate foliage and sloping, sunlit lea, over which one's gaze could wander far away to where the breakers dashed their white spray upon the rocky shore. She had always loved the simple gayeties indulged in at this peaceful summer house, and was never wont to weary of them ; but now there seemed something lacking in the color of the landscape which but a season ago had impressed her so deeply with its beauty; and the gayeties had all at once become monotonous and tasteless to her.

Some distinguished society people had been invited from the city for the formal house party which it was the custom of the Elwoods to give ere quitting Iwendene for the season.

Mrs. Meredith and Alice declared their intention of returning to Boston ere they should arrive, which idea, however, was so rigidly

opposed on the part of Mrs. Elwood and Valois, and also on the part of the kind-hearted old Colonel himself, that they were compelled to give it up and surrender themselves to thoughts of coming days, which they instinctively knew would be replete with bitter humiliations for them.

So, indeed, they proved.

In those few days of martyrdom, that proud mother and daughter learned how full of hypocrisy and artifice was the world in which, only a fortnight since, they had been courted and worshipped as children of wealth. They perceived the sneering contempt in all the rigid formalities offered them, and accepted the effronteries with smiling decorum, although inwardly, they writhed in bitter resentment and unutterable humiliation. Yet above this there was ever the prevailing sincerity which was lavished in the affection of their hostess and her fair young daughter, and which served them as a buoy serves a man who cannot swim.

They anchored their wounded spirits upon this, and so kept themselves above water during those long, trial days which at last came to an end.

Mrs. Elwood watched the brougham drive out of the gates of Ivendene, which was bearing her last guests away to the station, and then turned away with the incredulous words upon her lips :

“ Who would have dreamed there existed such

hypocrisy in the world ! It is inconceivable ! ”

That night Mrs. Meredith fell asleep with her face pressed against a tear-wet pillow. Alice had stolen to her room after she had retired and, kneeling by the bedside, had whispered :

“ Mother, I am glad we have been shut out from that world of falsity and shallow-heartedness. I had rather be a fisherwoman like those we saw at Nahant the other day, picking up clams in the surf, than to become such a form of deception as those women whom we have always believed in until now. Adversity is a kind friend after all, for she leads us up to that mount of truth and light from which we can view life in all its uncovered reality.”

So the tears which Mrs. Meredith had shed were those of thankfulness to Him who had given her beloved child intuition to divine that which she herself had been blinded to when young, and a purity of soul that revolted against deception.

Seldom had Thayer Volney been alone in the presence of Alice during the fortnight they had spent together at Iwendene, and he was certain that the young girl purposely avoided him ; for whenever they had been thrown in each other's society, Alice had found some pretext for a hurried withdrawal from his presence, and, unless Valois composed a third party she would not permit herself to remain for the briefest interval under the spell of his dark, magnetic eyes which

she always felt were riveted upon her.

It was late in the afternoon of the day previous to that which the Merediths had set for their leave-taking from Ivendene.

The day had been clear and wind-still ; but close upon sunset, some scattering flecks marred the sky's fairness, and these collected into a dark and glowering mass after their gorgeous tints had faded, and soon they had spread until all of the blue was hidden, except a streak on the far horizon.

Valois and her cousin had been standing on the veranda, looking toward the mist-wreathed coast, and enjoying in rapt and kindred silence the boundless beauty of the sunset. Neither of them heeded the keen southeasterly breeze which was rising.

The girl's short, jetty curls were tossed in riotous abandonment about her Gypsy face, and her wide, scarlet sash-ribbons flapped and swished and finally wrapped themselves about the legs of her companion, the bright flash of color suddenly diverting his glance from the far horizon where it had so long *distrainly* rested.

"The wind is blowing up quite a gale, Valois," said he, "are you not chilly? Had I not best bring a wrap for you?" he asked solicitously.

"I am not cold," returned his cousin ; then she turned, and with a sudden impetuosity, laid her hand upon his arm. "Where can Alice be?"

cried the young girl, with a strange seriousness in her voice.

“Where can Alice be?” the vexed winds seemed to take up the startled question and drag it through the darkling elements.

Thayer Volney looked at his cousin with mute pale lips.

The winds grew louder and the sky grew darker, and all nature seemed to put on a livery of grief for the day's death.

What was it shining out through his eyes? “Such ineffable—oh, I cannot find a word to express that look! It is something I have never seen in human eyes before,” said Valois to herself.

“Don't you know really where your friend is, Valois?” Thayer at length questioned.

“No. I was up to her rooms just before coming to the veranda an hour or more since, but she was not there. I noticed that her cloak and hat were missing, and concluded that she had gone for one of her solitary strolls. She has not returned, I am almost certain; and I fear she will be caught in the storm—there is surely a storm coming on. See! it already rains!” and she held out to him one chubby white hand, upon the back of which a solitary drop of water sparkled.

“I will get an umbrella and go in quest of her,” said Thayer, calmly.

He was turning to go when suddenly Valois cried, pointing toward the mist-wreathed meadow, "Look yonder, cousin Thayer! that dark figure moving over the lea is Alice. The storm has indeed caught her, and she is running."

Thayer cast one swift glance in the direction signified, and the next instant he had disappeared.

Valois saw him a moment later, springing at a perilous speed down the terrace steps; she watched him flying over the lowland in the direction of the lea, until the gloaming, with its thickening vista of rain, blotted him from view, when with a shiver she turned from the solitary veranda and entered the drawing-room, where all was at delightful variance with the discomfort without. Here she seated herself at her embroidery frame, with the look which she had seen in her cousin's eyes still haunting her. "What was that look?" she again asked herself; and gradually, out of the light and fragrance of the room there seemed to grow the answer to her question.

She heard it, and was glad.

"Miss Meredith, pray do not be startled; it is I; come to meet—to offer you the shelter of my umbrella. I trust you have escaped a severe wetting."

"Oh—no—I am not wet; which good fortune is due to my long waterproof," said Alice, with

visible confusion. "You are very kind. I am grateful," she added briefly, and her last words, very low-spoken, were calm, and measured with that quiet grace which he had noticed was one of her chief charms. Yet he believed he detected in them a restraint of tears.

"Take my arm," said he, "the ground has already become wet and slippery." She accepted it in silence, and in silence they moved on together, he feeling the cold from her little ungloved hand penetrate through his thick sleeve as he pressed the member warm against his heart.

At length Alice said :

"I did not realize the distance I had walked, and probably should not have stopped before reaching the beach road had not a drop of rain splashed in my face to remind me that I had gone far enough. The storm came on so suddenly," she added.

"Very ;" answered her companion, "I was standing with Valois out on the veranda, when suddenly she remembered that you were out, and liable to be overtaken by it. The elements are very capricious. One would not have dreamed this afternoon that it would rain before night."

"And yet," said Alice, "it is seasonable. Our rains usually set in early in October."

"Of course, all the foliage will be ruined in the pastures ?" said, or rather interrogated her companion.

"Very likely."

"I am sorry. As I passed through them this morning I promised myself a collection of those superbly tinted maple leaves to treasure as a souvenir of my visit to New England."

"If I had thought—" the young girl checked abruptly the sentence which had been upon her lips. "I noticed," she went on presently, hoping inwardly that he would not detect the incoherency of her words, "that Valois had a small basket of maple leaves and fern sitting in her room. She will give you these."

As she spoke the elements were lit up suddenly by a livid flash of lightning. His eyes were turned toward her, and the light revealed to him her sweet face all swollen and with tear-drops gleaming upon her down-bent lashes.

The sight of her sorrow, stung and wounded him deeply, and he cried out, hardly conscious of what he said in that moment of passionate sympathy :

"Alice! I cannot bear to see you so unhappy! Adversities must come to us all sooner or later in life, but—but the hurt of all sorrow, however keen at first, is swift in passing away. Yours can endure but for a little space of time—it is but one of the transient shadows of human experience."

"You know, then. You have been told?"

"Yes, for many days the one thought paramount in my mind has been of you, my one ab-

sorbing prayer has been that the cloud may soon be lifted from your young life. I would make you happy at any self-sacrifice; believe—trust me, Alice!”

It was the second time that he had called her by her Christian name, and his voice, so low and appealing in its fervor, entered her soul like divine music, making a momentary golden glimmer flash upon her benighted world like a promise of something undefined but beautiful, still, in its shapelessness. It vanished, however, like that recent streak of lightning in the sky, leaving the confusion more confounded than ever, and making her heart to cease its action for very wonder whence the gleam had come and whither vanished.

“You are silent. You doubt me!” her companion breathed quickly; and beneath the obvious grief in his voice there was a shade of rebuke.

“No, no,” she rejoined warmly, “do not think me so ungrateful, Mr. Volney, I beseech you! I cannot acknowledge such words as you have just spoken to me by trite terms of gratitude; but I shall treasure them always in deepest admiration and esteem.”

They had now gained the terrace wall and slowly ascended the steps, the lantern in the vestibule above sending down a golden shaft of light to them in which Thayer plainly saw the beautiful, sad face of the woman he had already come

to love with his whole young and passionate soul. Yet he could not trust himself to speak again to her—not even when, as they reached the vestibule, she suffered her eyes to meet his earnest wistful glance for an instant, and forced a smile to her lip as she observed :

“Of course, you know this is to be our last night at Iwendene ?”

CHAPTER VII

A MODERN HERCULES

AFTER breakfast the following morning as Colonel Elwood adjusted his overcoat in the hall, preparatory to driving to the station where he was to take the early train for Boston, his nephew joined him, himself well muffled for going out :

“ I am going to volunteer you my companionship to the city this morning, uncle Howard,” said he, without looking up from the glove which he was in the act of buttoning.

“ I shall be gratified, my boy,” the elder gentleman responded ; “ but,” added he, “ I thought it likely you would accompany Mrs. Meredith and Miss Alice to town this afternoon. You knew they were leaving Iwendene to-day ? ”

“ Yes,” said Thayer, changing color, “ I shall contrive to get back in time to attend them. The mail arrives this morning from England, and I am impatient for letters which I am expecting from home.”

“ Aye, certainly, of course,” his uncle conceded sympathetically.

The downpour had endured all night, but had

now subsided, leaving the air swathed in heavy vapors, with a cold, keen, wind blowing from the north and bearing the prophesy of winter in its breath.

A new sun strove vainly to warm the earth back from the stolid state it had assumed during the night ; much less, so kindly an influence, the heavy weight of iron wheels scarce left an impression, as they rolled along the solitary country road, where the dismantled birch and maple trees were grouped together in shuddering desolation over the dark and frozen residues of their once beauteous foliage.

Thayer Volney marked with an acute inward pang the disappearance of all the russet and red and gold of yesterday's autumn glory, and himself shivered at the coldness of the landscape. He thought, with a still deeper smart of pain as he looked away over the barren landscape toward the city, as the train sped thither, how many poor people there were in that mighty arena of life who were at that very moment without means to protect themselves against the cold that made him button his Russian sable overcoat closer about his throat—how many there were without clothing, without fuel, without shelter, or even a wherewith to lay their heads at night ? “ How many of them had once been the favored of wealth and affluence ? How many of them had sunk all at once from the gilded labyrinths

down through the shaft of adversity to grovel in the squalors of poverty, of degradation and infinite shame?"

As thus he questioned himself, his soul rose up in hot rebellion, and took the form of a mighty opponent against that demon which is daily enrolling the names of hapless victims upon its list, and condemning the inmates of happy homes to such lives as this, and which would dare to lift a hand against the woman who had all at once become the incentive of noble purposes in his life.

Arriving duly in Boston, uncle and nephew separated, the latter going at once in quest of the score of letters which were awaiting him, among which were two bearing the crest of Volney Wold.

Over these he lingered longest.

There were some words almost obliterated by tears which had fallen from the eyes of his mother, Lady Marguerite, as she wrote of the painful void engendered by his absence.

"But I shall strive for better endurance, my boy, my heart's idol!" said Lady Marguerite, toward the close of her letter.

"I will try very hard to bide the time which must elapse before I will see your face again. You will come back to me with that face heavily mustached and bronzed with foreign suns. Oh, I often grieve to think of losing my boy in manhood's full maturity! but I know this is unreasonable; it is inconsistent with Time,

who surely marks each day of our lives with some change; then let that change be however great in you, my own, I know in my innermost heart that you will still remain my darling, noble boy, filial and constant to the end."

His own eyes were not without tears as he folded this letter and placed it away in his vest pocket, after which he quickened his way down town.

He alighted from a street-car in the vicinity of the State House, and had passed out through the Common to Fremont street, when, upon glancing down that busy, rattling thoroughfare, he saw suddenly, a cab and pair come tearing down the street at a horrifying gait. "A runaway!" he ejaculated aloud.

There was a panic upon both sides of the busy, bustling way. The counter-marching mass of humanity were crushing their ways to places of safety; women and children were screaming; horses and vehicles were being precipitated out of their perilous course to make way for those madly plunging chestnuts as they dashed on and on.

Many in that intricate mob saw the white face which was pressed despairingly against the cab window as it passed. Many heard the prayer which now and then rose above all that terrific dim and noise.

"Save me! save me, for the love of God!"

Another moment and the foaming, plunging

steeds would pass Thayer Volney—only one golden moment between himself and the opportunity to rescue a human life from a most horrifying death.

Not once did the young Englishman reflect upon the dread hazard of that opportunity which involved his own life. Not once did the question of “self” rise up between him and chivalry.

Like a young Hercules he stood with every muscle fixed for the fray; and when the opportune instant came, he hurled himself from the pavement and, with a hand of iron, grasped the silver trappings of the horses and gave them a sudden powerful jerk. They reared, they plunged in the air for an instant, then settled their trembling fore-limbs upon the cobblestones, neighed and were still.

From the mighty multitude, which had witnessed this startling deed of heroism there uprose a storm of applause. Men waved their hats, women their handkerchiefs, and the wave upon wave of “bravos” which ran along the throng were accompanied by the thunderous clapping of hands.

He did not hear them. The swift action had cost him nearly all of his bodily strength, and his right arm had almost been wrenched from its socket. For a moment he reeled with faintness and acute pain; but by a great effort he mastered the spell, and when it had quite passed, he saw

a white face through the cab-window looking out upon him with great startled eyes which wore, above their terror, an expression of dumb gratitude. Her lips seemed to move, but if in spoken words these were not heard.

The crowd was pressing upon them, and he wished not to make himself the object of their shallow congratulations. He wished not to be the center of such a cowardly throng as this. Hurriedly throwing open the carriage door he bowed low before the beautiful stranger and said :

“Madame, you cannot risk yourself further with these animals ; they are not to be trusted. Can I assist you to alight ? There is an apothecary’s shop close by ; if you will allow me to lead you there, I will procure for you a glass of wine.”

Without a word she placed her small foot upon the step, and the next moment they were making their way together through the multitude, which fell asunder to make room for them to pass.

“Who is he ? Who is he ?” passed from lip to lip, as the many pairs of eyes riveted themselves admiringly upon the young Englishman’s noble and handsome face. But none there could answer the question.

After the rescued lady had swallowed a portion of the stimulant which was given her, she seemed greatly revived ; even a tinge of color came to her usually pale cheek as she turned her beautiful dark eyes upon Thayer and said :

“ Oh, sir, how can I acknowledge my gratitude for your service ? Such valor as you have shown passes all expression of words ! ” and now her brown eyes filled with tears of emotion.

He bowed low in deference at her fervently spoken words.

“ Madame, my act was merely human, ” he replied, simply ; and then he seemed to grow before her eyes, as they riveted themselves upon him involuntarily, into a fixed statue of Grecian ideality ; so high and straight and proud he towered above her, with his soft, luminous eyes looking into vacancy, and his full, curved lips wearing a half disdainful expression, for he was still thinking of that cowardly mob which had not ventured the eighth of an inch to save her, but had cried out with vulgar and vehement applause when he succeeded in checking her horses.

Presently he turned to her again and said :

“ There is a telephone here. I will ring for a cab and see you safely home. ”

“ No, ” said she, “ pray do not let me detain you longer. I will send a message to my husband ; he can reach me directly. But— ” she hesitated, visibly embarrassed, “ but you will honor me with your name that I may tell him ? ”

“ It is so trivial a matter, madam. Humanity—that is all. You have virtually nothing to feel grateful for. I would merely know whom I have had the honor of meeting so providentially ? ”

“Is that fair—quite?” asked she, and her eyes, which seemed to speak of some latent sorrow, dwelt upon him in momentary appeal. Then, in silence, she handed him her card. He bowed before her with uncovered head as he accepted this, then as he turned away he repeated the name to himself which he read upon the dainty white tablet :

“Hortense, Lady Camden, I have heard Valois speak of her,” he mentally observed, as he left the apothecary’s shop.

CHAPTER VIII

THE HIDDEN HAND

When thou dost alms, let not thy right hand know what thy left hand doeth.—*New Testament.*

“ALLIE, a carriage has stopped at our door and a lady is alighting. It is Hortense, Lady Camden!” cried Blanche Meredith, who for some time had been standing at the library window looking out meditatively upon the busy avenue.

Alice laid aside her pen and rose with a happy exclamation.

The next moment the servant opened the door and announced her visitor. “You see, my dear, I have waived all formalities,” cried a voice just behind him, and Lady Camden rushed in and was affectionately greeted by her old schoolfellow.

“Hortense! I knew you would be true. I knew you would not prove shallow-hearted like most of them!” Alice exclaimed, as tears of sheer happiness rushed to her eyes.

“I did not hear of your misfortune before last Friday,” explained her friend. “You see,” she went on, “Sir Philip and I have been in New York during the last fortnight and have been

careless about reading the papers. I took a cab last Saturday morning expressly to come to you, but the horses became unmanageable and ran away, causing me such a fright that I was laid up at mamma's for two whole days afterward. I thought you might have seen an account of the incident in the papers. You know they always get everything in these Boston papers. Isn't it awful to have one's name so dragged in the dirt?"

Alice assented. She had not seen the account, and so Lady Hortense minutely detailed it to her, and ended by saying :

"So here I am, my dear, left to go on to the end of the chapter without knowing to whom I am indebted for my deliverance from that horrible impending death. Oh, he was so courageous, so heroic, so handsome !" she added, with a smile upon her soft, half-parted lips, as of dreamy meditation.

"It sounds just like a romance, Lady Camden !" hereupon declared twelve-year-old Blanche, who had been listening from her post at the window. "Who knows," she went on innocently, "but your daring hero may turn out to be some royal prince, who may fall desperately in love with, and in the end marry—oh ! forgive me—*please* forgive me, Lady Camden ! I spoke heedlessly," she broke off, noting suddenly the deep flush which her words had called to Lady Hortense's face.

This was very brief-lived, but was followed by an intense pallor, and there was an obvious constraint in her voice as she turned to her friend and said :

“Now, Alice, let me hear something of yourself and your plans; during these two weeks, of course you have been planning and thinking?”

“Yes, thinking much; building far different castles, Hortense, from those which we used to build together at school. Please do not cry, dear! We have already passed through the worst, besides it is not nearly so bad as it might have been. All our days cannot be wrought with sunshine, you know.” And she repeated those familiar lines :

Into all lives some rain must fall,
Some days must be dark and dreary.

“We are so apt to count too high our summer days; so little used to adapting ourselves to the harder lessons of life that prepare us for the reverses which to every human experience are almost certain to come, sooner or later. I know that I myself have been one of the most heedless of scholars in this respect; but I have at last come to accept the lesson of adversity as one in which there is a golden text and a beautiful moral. I believe that for each sorrow there is added a rate of true merit to the soul that suffers, and suffers bravely. If ever that time should come when our former circumstances may be re-estab-

lished we will be better able to appreciate them," the girl added earnestly, and with one of her rare sweet smiles.

"What are your plans for the future?" asked Lady Camden, who had listened admiringly to the argument in which her brave friend had dealt so delicately, so leniently with the all-ruling hand which had been laid upon her and hers so ruthlessly.

"Well, to begin with," said Alice, "I have been preparing myself for a musical review. I hope to secure a position in one of the conservatories to teach the primary classes."

"Oh, Alice, such drudgery would kill you!" cried Lady Camden, lifting her small, delicately-gloved hand in a gesture of deprecation.

"But you know how I have always loved the art, Hortense. What would, indeed, seem drudgery to many will be to me only pleasant recreation," argued Alice.

"Ah, my friend, when day after day you are compelled to repeat again and again the same tiresome exercises, with rebellious children, who hate practicing—most children, you know, do hate it—when you are compelled to do this, recreation will soon lose its charm and you will find yourself worn out and old before you have been teaching a year. Now, Alice dear, listen; I have a great scheme," added she, and Miss Meredith folded her slender, blue-veined hands

over each other in her lap and leaned forward in a pretty attitude of attention.

“It is this,” went on her friend. “You are to give up all ideas of teaching for the present and come to Maplehurst instead to officiate as a kind of lady’s companion to me. I find it exceedingly lonesome and dull at Camden, and—and I love you. I want you with me !”

Her voice was very appealing, and her words had in them all the warmth and affection of generous friendship ; but Alice, although she was deeply touched by the munificence of her offer, sat long with tear-brimmed eyes fixed upon the carpet ere she answered. She was thinking thus :

“The position would involve so much of humiliation for me. I would be thrown in daily contact with people of the world ; would daily have to brook effronteries from them, as we did at Ivendene,” and her proud, true nature made her revolt against the thought. “Yet, on the other hand,” she meditated, “it would be a great triumph for me. I would exult in letting them see that we yet have left to us such friends as the Elwoods, and Lady Camden, whose influence is in itself sufficient to defend us against a whole army of enemies.”

The girl was not ambitious so far as social achievements were concerned, yet there was paramount in her, a sense of arrogance, which made her resentful against a rebuff or slight, and this,

with its blending of delicate defiance, outweighed that other pride, and decided her ; so it happened that when presently her sister Blanche looked round, wondering at the long silence which had fallen between the two, she saw a picture that brought a mist of tears to her eyes.

Alice was kneeling at the feet of Lady Hortense, with her head pillowed upon that lady's sables, and that lady's hand laid with lingering tenderness upon the bright coronet of hair.

"Will you come to Maplehurst?" she heard Sir Philip's wife say, as she bent her face low over Alice. "I will be an indulgent friend, a very good trustee, a much less exacting principal than you would find in the conservatory of music. I will be a true sympathizer and more. I will be a sister, Alice, to you."

There was a sobbing effort at an expression of gratitude, a tender lingering embrace, and Blanche waited to hear no more, but rushed out of the room to find her way through blinding tears, along the hall and up the wide flight of stairs to Mrs. Meredith's private sitting-room. Here she found her mother, and told her what had transpired between Lady Camden and Alice, and was astounded to see that Mrs. Meredith conceded willingly, nay, gladly, to the newly-conceived project.

"How can we live with *her* away from us all

through the long days and nights," cried the child in passionate grief.

She had always looked up to Alice with that worshipful attachment so often seen in younger sisters, and which sometimes amounts almost to idolatry ; and the first surprised thoughts of being separated from her were wrought with ineffable anguish, and all that day she hid herself away in a little room up in the attic, and would not be comforted.

"Of course I cannot ask you to come to me at once. You will want to see the family re-established," said Lady Camden, as she rose to take her departure.

"We are not to give up our dear old home," said Alice, wondering how she could have forgotten until now to convey the happy intelligence to her friend. "Last Saturday," she went on to explain, "upon our return from Ivendene, we found papa awaiting us at the depot, with a face so joyful that it looked almost saintly. As he kissed ma he pressed into her hand a sealed document which proved to be a new deed to our homestead, made over in mamma's name by some munificent friend, who prefers to keep his identity in the background among that order of profound mysteries which defies all light of origin. His fairy name—the one signed to the paper—is Robin St. Cloud ; aside from which we know nothing of our good Samaritan, except it

be that he is one of the limited few in this pedantic and parading world who does alms according to scriptural teaching ; but we cherish his name much as a child does that of Santa Claus, and our nightly dreams are haunted by ideal fancies of Robin St. Cloud. Last night," continued the girl, "I had such a beautiful dream ; the face of my hero was indistinct to me. I saw him as through a cloud-mist ; but his eyes shone out upon me like the sun. I saw, also, his hand, which was shapely and white as marble. In it he held a scroll, upon which I saw plainly written, in letters which seemed to be wrought of pure gold, the one word, 'Mizpah.' As I read the word, and interpreted its meaning to myself, the scroll and the hand seemed gradually to disappear. When I awakened, Blanche was standing beside me ; she said that she had heard me speaking as she lay awake, and came near to hear what I was saying. It seemed that I had repeated the interpretation of that word aloud, for she asked me if mizpah did not mean, 'The Lord watch between you and me.' Don't you think, Hortense, that the dream-scroll is in some way associable with the deed ?"

"Have you a suitor ?" asked her friend suddenly.

"No," returned Alice, then she added with a smile, half contemptuous, half amused, "you know the golden bait has fallen from my hand."

Lady Camden took her departure from the brown-stone house strangely impressed with what she had heard about the mysterious deed and the dream-scroll with its significant motto, "Mizpah."

CHAPTER IX

IN PROSPECTIVE

“MILADI, did you ring?”

“Yes. Go up stairs, Anine, to Miss Meredith’s room, and if she is not engaged, say that I am awaiting her here.”

As the maid withdrew, Lady Hortense turned from the window, where for some time she had stood looking out upon the dull, cloud-massed sky, and slowly approached the grate, where a bright wood fire was crackling cheerfully and filling the room with its resinous warmth.

She moved with an air of inertness; and as she placed one exquisitely slippered foot upon the polished fender, a palpable yawn for an instant disfigured her lovely brunette face. She was thinking, as she let her languid dark eyes stray restlessly about the rich apartment with its paintings, its bronzes, its Venitian bowls of choice cut roses:—

“Of what use is all this grandeur and display? Position! wherein lies the triumph of that for which thousands of women would to-day sacrifice themselves? I’d rather be some rustic lass like Barbara Harmon, the ferryman’s daugh-

ter, and sit with her on the riverbank from morn till night angling for fish with worm bait, than such a slave to the conventionalities of the world as I have become."

She was possessed with a sense of *ennui*—a hovering spirit of weariness and dread which made her crave to flee from the arena in which she was forced, like a rope-dancer, daily to re-act her part before an on-looking multitude. Each day seemed to increase her loathing for the fictitious *role* which she was compelled to play with a smiling face and a "fittingness" which the most critical eye could not censure. The mask was smothering her, and she craved to be free from it.

"Hortense, how unpardonably selfish you must think me! I had forgotten the flight of time in trying to solve that intricate lace pattern," said a voice of sweet contrition suddenly breaking in upon her silent reverie. Her friend had entered with a tread so noiseless that she had not heard her approach.

"It is I who am the selfish one, not you, my dear," said Lady Hortense turning quickly. "I positively have come to grudge every moment that keeps you from my sight. In the fortnight that you have spent at Maplehurst you have spoiled me as a doting mother spoils her one unconscionable child. I was just thinking what a martyrdom this place would be without you—yes,

dear, *martyrdom!*” she repeated as she saw the astonished look which came into Alice Meredith’s eyes.

“But, Hortense!” exclaimed she, “martyrdom means torment; how can you make Maplehurst synonymous with that word? In all my life,” Alice added fervently, “I have never seen so beautiful a place as this. I wondered last night, as I stood at my window looking down upon the moonlit river, if God’s serenity ever touched a scene of more surpassing loveliness than that which the golden-shining belt of the river presented, overshadowed by the castle walls. I thought what an inspiration it would have been to Whittier who so loved the Merrimac. Oh, I never should find Maplehurst dull or monotonous much less a *martyrdom,*” she ended, earnestly.

“Oh, wait; you have been here as yet but a fortnight,” said Lady Camden, derisively. “Your romanticism will crave a new subject after the Merrimac has grown a few months old to you. You would never care to circumscribe your whole life to it, as I must the greater part of mine,” she added wearily.

“I remember,” said Alice, “one day when we were reading some novel together, out in the seminary grove, and you said you would be like the heroine of that story and some day live on a remote island alone with the man you loved. Hor-

tense, have you quite outgrown that spirit of romance?"

Lady Camden's face underwent a swift pallor. A flood of incoherent memories of her dreamy, felicitous maidenhood was surging through her brain.

Her eyes had in them all the suppressed misery of her soul as she fixed them upon her friend and faltered from tremulous lips a cry so full of anguish that to Alice Meredith's dying day she never quite forgot it.

"Do not, oh do not refer to those past unsullied days! Can a heart outgrow that which is instilled within it as the flavor of the wine is instilled within the grape? No, no! but the sweetest wine, under certain conditions, can be transformed into vinegar. The fairest flower, if put from the sun's rays, will soon become a festered weed!"

There ensued a brief silence, during which Alice sat with troubled eyes bent upon the fire-lit lilies of the carpet, and her hands restlessly clasping and unclasping themselves in her lap.

Presently she looked up and said contritely:

"I am sorry if I spoke unfeelingly, Hortense. Forgive me, dear; but I—I never dreamed but that you were perfectly happy——"

"Hush, say no more," returned Lady Hortense, and she bent down and kissed her. "With you here," she went on, as she drew herself, with a

visible effort, out of her dejection, I *am* perfectly happy. Now let us speak of the coming event—our ball! I have an enormous afternoon's work before me, and shall need your assistance. There are between three and four hundred invitations to address for the ball, and others for the ensuing house party. Here is the list. I will read it over to you."

She read to the bottom of the first page, and turned the leaf:

"The Forresters, Mrs. Rossmore, the Morrisons, the Dextrells, the Arundels, the Elwoods, Mr. Volney—" She glanced up suddenly as she read the unfamiliar name.

"By the way, Alice," said she, "you must have met this young Volney at Ivendene whilst you were there last month?"

She failed to note the girl's suddenly agitated manner, and the flush that dyed her face a violent crimson.

"Yes. He arrived just the evening after mamma and I," Alice replied calmly.

"I have been told he is very handsome. Is he?"

"Yes, quite so. Valois says he is like the bust of Glaucus, which you brought from Florence."

"What is his first name?"

"Thayer."

"T-h-a-y-e-r." Lady Camden pronounced each letter as she wrote the name. "Thayer! how very rarely one hears that name," said she,

“it has always been one of my favorites. Mr. Thayer Volney, Mr. Fred Bentwell, Captain Pometer—” and she read on to the end of the list.

It was almost night ere the two ladies concluded the task of sealing and addressing the envelopes ; but at last they were all stamped and ready for the mail bag, and Thayer Volney’s name was lost among the hundreds there.

That night, as Alice Meredith stood again at her window casement, encompassed in the moon’s light, looking down upon the golden, shining belt of the river, she seemed to hear repeated, over and over again, in the subtle monotone of the flowing waters, that one sentence : “Thayer is coming ! Thayer is coming !” and her listening soul seemed to swell in deep and unspeakable ecstasy, as it took up the sound and answered back the echo, “Thayer is coming ! Thayer is coming !”

When she had sought her pillow and all the moonlight had gone, leaving her room strangely dark and still, she could not hear that name repeated more. She could not find in those chaos-deeps the pair of dark magnetic eyes whose power it was to thrill her so : the voice and that pair of eyes seemed to have vanished with the charm of the moonlight, and in their place she saw a pale, sad face, and heard the voice of her friend crying out :

“Do not, oh do not refer to those past, unsullied days! Can a heart outgrow that which is instilled within it as the flavor of the wine is instilled within the grape? No: but the sweetest wine, under certain conditions, can be transformed into vinegar. The fairest flower, if put from the sun’s rays, will soon become a festered weed.”

“Oh, can it be?” she asked her troubled heart, “can it be she does not love Sir Philip Camden? Can it be that her union with him has robbed her life of all its sun and embittered it?”

The thought dwelt with her all the night long. It would not let her sleep.

CHAPTER X

VALOIS' SECRET

I wait for my story—the birds cannot sing it.
Not one as he sits on the tree;
The bells cannot ring it, but long years, oh bring it !
Such as I wish it to be.

“SONG OF SEVEN” —*Jean Ingelow.*

THE mid-November day, which since its birth had been swathed in heavy vaporous gloom, was prematurely nearing a close.

Though it was yet scarce four o'clock, the pale, bluish glimmer of electric lights broke out here and there in the dense atmosphere, and the wary lamp-lighter had commenced his nightly round through the thoroughfares, murmuring to himself as he touched the jets into animation, that a storm was “brewin' aloft.”

True to his prophecy, the night fluttered in on wings of “eider-down,” which, even in their lightness, swept away all the heavy vapors, making the air a precinct for their revelry alone.

A young man, who for some moments had been standing in the door-way of a prominent jewelry store on Washington street, meditatively watching the dizzily-whirling snow-flakes as they fast thickened in the gloaming, at length turned, and

approaching the center of the store, where a young lady stood with her pretty face bent intently over a jewelry tray, he said :

“Valois, it has commenced to snow and the horses are getting restless. Have you about concluded as to which brooch you will take ?”

“No,” said Valois, without lifting her face from the tray, “my taste is so capricious that I cannot decide. Isn't this a fond invention ?” she asked, signifying a miniature harp which was formed of diamonds and emeralds,” and isn't this beetle unique ? Of the two, which would be your choice ?”

“The harp,” said the young Englishman, promptly, so the question was settled in his favor without further hesitation ; and a few moments later the young couple quitted the jewelers and, entering their carriage, were driven homeward through the storm.

They were both unusually quiet during that half-hour's ride.

Valois, fatigued after a tedious afternoon's shopping, reclined in her corner, luxuriously at ease among the velvet cushions, while her companion gazed abstractedly out of the window, inwardly rebuking himself for being so stupidly at loss for words to engross and entertain his fair cousin.

“Surely,” thought he, “during the last fort-

night Valois must have found me unbearably dull!"

Since coming to town the two cousins had been on a ceaseless round of pleasures. They had given liberal attention to the opera, the drama, the art-rooms, the historical building, the markets, the manufactories; yet all the while Thayer Volney had felt himself a selfish ingrate in the hands of her hospitality.

With pretty Valois Elwood at his side, any other young man would have been satisfied and happy, beyond a single desire or regret; but he, Thayer, while proud and tenderly fond of his American cousin, attended her everywhere in a half-hearted fashion, with his mind always pre-occupied with memories of another face, and other days when it had been his ecstasy to know that Alice Meredith and himself were breathing under the self-same roof. Each day had brought to him its details of pleasure since he had last looked upon the face which lived paramount in his memory from morn till night, from night till morn, and would not be obliterated by any scene, however alluring, however beautiful, however strange to him. Yet it had seemed years to him since the morning when Valois had said:

"Alice has left town—gone to sojourn indefinitely at Maplehurst,—some miles distant from L——."

"Maplehurst! oh, that is far!" he had said while looking upward at the stars that night.

But the heart they say is farther-reaching than the voice, and so, perhaps, she knew that his thoughts were of her then.

"Ah, yes," said Thayer, "I think she will feel me near her. I do not think Maplehurst is further than love can reach, but I would I could annihilate that word 'indefinitely.' How many days and nights, nay, how many weary weeks and months will be measured in that term of cruel suspense?"

Only two weeks had passed since Valois had told him this, and yet he would already circumscribe years unto the time.

"I had forgotten to tell you, Thayer," said Valois, starting abruptly from her semi-darkened corner into animation, "that I had a long letter from Alice Meredith, this morning,—"

Silence.

Valois wondered if he had heard. Thayer wondered if his fierce heart-throbs were audible to other ears than his own.

"She seems wonderfully happy and contented at Maplehurst."

Silence.

The friendly darkness kept the pallor of his face a secret unto itself.

"I think it is so much nicer for her to be there than here in town, working her very life away in

a conservatory of music. You know she is acting as a kind of companion to Lady Camden."

He essayed to speak, but realizing the commonplaceness of his words ere they were framed, he repressed them and merely shifted his position to assure his cousin that he was not asleep, that he was listening.

"I'd imagine, though, that the position would be a trifle embarrassing to her, for Sir Philip is always having people — by the way, in behalf of Lady Camden, Alice importunes us not to make any engagements for the week after next, as they are to give a ball at Maplehurst, followed by a house-party. The invitations were all to be sent to-day, I believe. I want you to see Maplehurst," added the young girl. "It is built on a kind of bluff overlooking the Merrimac, and is one of the finest estates we have, being built after the old English castellated style, and furnished something after the custom of your continent."

"Then you will accept the invitations to Lady Camden's ball?" observed Thayer, as he feigned a yawn of indifference, and again shifted his position.

"Yes, oh, yes, I hope so! I should die of sheer disappointment if I had to miss such a social treat as this will be," cried Valois, with eager enthusiasm. "You know," she went on, "I have only been 'out' a short time, Alice and I having made our *debut* together at Mrs. Carruthers' ball

last August. The event was in honor of her son, Lieutenant Gershon Carruthers, who had just returned with his ship from India after an absence of nearly three years. Oh, cousin Thayer!" she added in an estatic undertone as she leaned forward until her face was on a level with his own, "he will be there!"

Thayer took her face between his hands and gazed into it as well as the darkness would permit.

"He will be there, eh? and, oh, Valois, you will be glad?" he asked, tenderly.

She fain would have shrunk away from him back into her corner with her secret but half confessed, but he held her closely and whispered imperatively:

"Tell me all about it. Tell me all about this naval officer whose brass buttons and epaulets have had such power to fascinate you, little coz?"

She felt her face burning hot and thought him aggressive beyond forgiveness.

"Thayer, I will not—" she commenced, rebelliously.

"Oh, yes, you shall, you *must*!" he interrupted with exasperating authority.

"Well he—he is just the very nicest man I ever met—there!"

"What else?"

"There is nothing else. Release me, tyrant!"

if you do not release me I shall never speak to you again."

"Very well ; I shall not release you, however, until you have made a full confession of your love affair—Good heavens ! here we are, home!" Thayer broke off, as the carriage stopped abruptly. He sprang out and assisted Valois to the white ground and they ran together through the almost impenetrable darkness and thickly whirling flakes up the steps to the vestibule. Here in the rays of the lantern their eyes met. Valois' shone out above her sables with shy mirth, yet she feigned a dignity ludicrously at variance with this as, for the second time she branded him a "tyrant."

"If you divulge my secret," said she, "or in any manner allude to it in the future, I shall abhor you, *positively*," but her laughter floated down to him as she reached the top of the stairs and sped along the hall toward her room ; and this told him, despite her words, that she trusted him with her secret implicitly.

Half an hour later they met at dinner. During the meal the forthcoming ball and house-party were discussed, and it was decided that a note of acceptance should be sent to Maplehurst on the following day.

Later in the evening Valois said to her cousin :

"Why, Thayer, what has come over you to make you look so happy to-night ? You have not looked so affable since we came to town. Are you

glad we are to go to Maplehurst?" She looked him steadily in the eyes as she spoke, and he read in her glance a look of intelligence that made him start; he collected himself, however, at once and answered briefly. "Yes; I am glad."

There ensued an eloquent division of survey, after which they felt they understood and could henceforth sympathize with one another profoundly.

CHAPTER XI

THE BUST OF GLAUCUS.

An image uncertain
And vague, dimly shaped itself forth on the curtain
Of the darkness around her. It came and it went:
Through her senses a faint sense of peril it sent.

“LUCILE.”—*Owen Meredith.*

THE night's darkness was so intense that the fast-driven snow fell undiscernable, and the course of the luckless country wayfarer was only defined by the fitful light shed abroad by carriage lamp, or hand-swung lantern.

Sir Philip Camden's horses made but sluggish progress on their way over the storm-swept highway toward Maplehurst; even though the driver made unremitting and merciless cuts at them with the lash, and urged and jerked their bits until the blood oozed from, and congealed upon their nostrils.

Sir Philip, alternately dozing and imprecating the fates who thus deterred him from the comforts of his fireside, at length flung open the carriage door and called out vehemently to the driver:

“Wake up those devilish horses, will you?”

“I can't make 'em go no faster, yer honor. The snow be right in their faces.”

“Snow, be ——d! Wake up those brutes, I say; wake them up, dolt! dullard!”

“Swish! crack! swish! crack!”

The exertion was a futile one. At the cruelly wielded and repeated blows only piteous neighs came from the struggling animals; the vehicle jogged along at the same dilatory gait as before, and Sir Philip was forced to slam the door shut against the obtrusive wind and snowflakes, and subside again into sullen and impatient luxury among the rugs and cushions of his carriage.

It was after nine o'clock when they reached Maplehurst and an hour later when Sir Philip, having made his toilet and dined alone, entered the drawing-room, whose only occupant was Lady Hortense.

She was seated at a small stand a short distance from the grate, engaged with a piece of antique embroidery. The bright light from the fire played upon her ruby velvet gown, giving each soft fold, as it fell about her, every separate, glowing shade of the gem from which it was named; while the tinted Dresden lamp, which sat on the stand, shed a delicate glow over her profile, making it a perfect cameo in a frame of ebony.

Sir Philip thought, as he stood for a moment on the threshold, looking at her, that she made a picture which Gainsborough, or Titian, would have given pre-eminence in their studios, “and one,”

he added, "which three months ago I myself could not have looked upon without being infatuated."

Lady Hortense glanced up listlessly as he stood thus in contemplation of her.

"You must have had a cheerless ride, Sir Philip," she said, letting her eyes return immediately to the bright threads of her embroidery. "I had dinner kept back for you till eight," she added, as she drew the golden stitch a trifle tighter.

He watched the flash of diamonds upon her moving hand for a moment in sullen silence.

"It might have been a deucedly more pleasant ride; and—a—the dinner was not improved, I dare say, by being kept back so long," he said at length, with his characteristic drawl.

As he spoke he drew an easy chair to the grate and seated himself.

There ensued a protracted silence, during which she felt instinctively his keen, cold eyes upon her, as she always felt them when alone in his presence, and her hand grew a trifle unsteady as it guided the glinting thread back and forth, and those stitches made on the wing of the touraco—a bird of the orient—were less regular than former ones.

The moments of her life which Lady Hortense had come to dread mostly, were those which compelled her to sit alone as she was now sitting,

under the fixed gaze of those cruel eyes. At such times she felt an almost overmastering desire to throw herself on her knees before him and cry out all her misery and despair, at not being capable of feeling any of that sentiment for him which a wife should feel for her husband, and which she had striven hard to learn but could not.

If he had had that power of magnetism in his being which might have drawn her to him, with even a feeling of esteem or true deference—that controlling fascination, which in some men is their very breath, and which has been known to engender love in the coldest of hearts, it might have triumphed over her in time. But Sir Philip had naught of this in his cold, egotistical temperament. Gradually had she come to find him callous and unresponsive as steel to all the finer instincts of nature, and since that night when she had laid bare to him her loveless heart even the touch of his hand had grown repellent to her ; in some vague way it seemed to contaminate her, and there were times when she shuddered inwardly at the sound of his voice, in which there was always such ineffable, though underlying contempt when speaking to her.

She had come to interpret the true nature which lay disguised under that courteousness which he invariably adopted in society, and which made him popular. She alone surmised

how narrow and mean that nature was, and how artificial were his manners. By her woman's wit she read him. She knew that he had not a single thought or impulse but what was deep-rooted with selfishness, and that his every ambition was entirely self-centered. She perceived all this, and herself imbued with a nature which made her revolt against what she divined in him, she knew that each day of their lives must divide them farther apart, instead of reconciling them to each other.

A servant came in to renew the fire and after sweeping up the hearth, withdrew noiselessly. Yet Sir Philip sat without unriveting his gaze from her profile; still Lady Hortense sat nervously drawing the bullion threads of her embroidery; still oppressive silence reigned throughout the luxurious apartment, broken only by the soft frou-frou of snowflakes as they fell against the closely shuttered windows without, or the low sougning of winds through the dismantled trees.

Lady Hortense could bear the strain no longer. She let her bullion skeins fall into the frame, and rose. The action had been impulsive and without any forethought of what her next step would be. She stood there irresolutely with one jeweled hand pressing upon the onyx stand, the other toying with a spray of stephenotis which she wore low on her bodice. Should she make some pretext to leave the room, or should she go to the

piano and play something? The first would look awkward and unconventional withal; the latter would be simply in accordance with her almost nightly habit when there were no guests at Maplehurst, as was the case to-night.

She turned toward the instrument, but had scarcely taken a step when Sir Philip's voice arrested her.

"Lady Hortense—a—pray, my dear, I do not feel in a mood for Wagner nor Beethoven to-night. I want to talk over the ball and house-party with you."

Lady Camden turned and slowly approached the grate, where she stood towering above him in all her proud loveliness, like a young queen.

She rested one arm upon the corner of the mantelpiece and directed her glance toward him expectantly.

"Well?" said she, simply, and while there was in the word a quiet submission to his wish there was also in it an intonation of austerity which made him glance swiftly up at her, and then laugh a low, noiseless, mirthless laugh which she never could hear without an involuntary shiver.

"Well," said he, when the convulsion had passed, "pray sit." He motioned toward a low *fauteuil*, as he spoke, which was convenient to her, and she seated herself on this with an obedience which was humiliating to her, yet which her

pride would not let her rebel against. Then he said, still keeping his eyes upon her, with some of their recent amusement still in them :

“Don’t you know, my dear, a—you please me amazingly to-night ; a—you affect inanimate colors so much that one is apt to come to regard you almost as a statue, or a vestal virgin ; but to-night—a—you are as brilliant as you ever were inanimate before, and I—a—am amazingly pleased—yes !”

At his words Lady Hortense’s lips curled themselves half-contemptuously. She very often heard him speak in this suave, courteous tone to other ladies, but he seldom, in fact, had never adopted it toward herself since the night when she had confessed her indifference of him, excepting at such times when conventionality required it in the all-hearing ears of the world.

“I never knew,” said she, “that you were so distinct as to preference in colors. I have always liked white, and as you say, I have worn it considerably of late months. It harmonizes with my colorless life,” she added to herself, “but,” she went on, “I will endeavor to suit my toilet more in accordance with your taste in future, Sir Philip.”

“I hope,” returned Sir Philip, “you will understand you are not to thwart your own pleasure with respect to such trivial matters. Wear what pleases you, only deport yourself properly as Lady Cam-

den. I don't want the world to say that I have made a marble image of you, or an ice-plant. Now, will you favor me with the names of those you have invited ?”

With keen bitterness within her, Lady Hortense rose to go in quest of the list, but he stayed her as she reached the door, saying :

“A—never mind the paper. I suppose you have asked no one out of the usual set we meet everywhere ?”

“I believe there are two exceptions,” said Lady Camden, “Captain Pometer, a present guest of the Dextrells, and Mr. Thayer Volney of England, a nephew of Mrs. Elwood, and only recently arrived.”

“Pometer !” repeated Sir Philip, musingly, “I know him, I believe ; but this Englishman ? a—is he very young, say three or four and twenty ?”

“I cannot say, as I have never seen him,” responded Hortense, Lady Camden.

“If he is the fellow whom I saw on the street in Boston the other day with Valois Elwood, he has certainly a most striking appearance ; he is, in fact, a—what you ladies would deify—a Greek god.”

“A Greek god.” Lady Hortense repeated almost unconsciously to herself the words ; and as she did so she lifted her eyes to the mantel upon which stood a Parian bust of marvelous beauty,

and they softened with a curious, tender light as they rested upon the faultlessly cast features, enveiled in their expression of kindness and intellectuality.

Sir Philip, watching her under his drooping eyelids, saw the look which almost transfigured her face, and an ominous frown gathered above his thick, overhanging brows.

"You are a *devoté* of the classic?" he said, and his words were rather in the declarative than questioning tone, and were spoken with sneering contempt.

Then without waiting for her to reply, he asked:

"Where did you get that bust? Who is the subject? I have never taken special notice of it before."

"I bought it in Florence when we were abroad last winter. It is of the Athenian Glaucus. The bust opposite is that of Ione," said Lady Hortense.

"I remember the subjects vaguely as those of Bulwer," observed Sir Philip.

"I remember them as two of the loveliest and noblest characters in the annals of fiction," exclaimed Lady Hortense fervently.

"Of fiction, or of love?" questioned Sir Philip, insidiously.

"Well, if you will, of love, which is the truest application, indeed."

Sir Philip pressed his lips firmly together, as

though to repress some words which might have risen to them. Then he rose and measured the room with deliberate step, with his hands clasped behind him and his head bent slightly forward. The attitude was that which he always assumed in moments of suppressed anger, and Lady Hortense watched him in some concern.

At length he returned to the hearth. "I have some letters to write," he said shortly, and then without another word he left her.

When he was gone Lady Camden once more turned her eyes upon the bust of the hero Glaucus, letting them rest upon the marble image for some moments in a fixed gaze.

Then these words came faintly from her lips :

"Once in my life have I seen a face which resembled that, both in feature and expression. Valois says her cousin is like my Glaucus. Sir Philip says he is like a Greek god. Could he by any possible chance be ——. Oh, how absurd ; how perfectly absurd ! That would be consistent with fiction only. Such a remarkable coincidence is rarely met with in real life"; and she put the thought from her entirely. But just before she turned to quit the room she bent her regal head over the image of Glaucus and touched it with her lips. "How happy," she murmured, "must Ione have been with such a hero to love her !"

CHAPTER XII

A WATCH-WORD

Our acts our angels are, or good or ill,
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still.

—*Fletcher.*

FOR several days the snow continued to fall, with short intermissions; but with the full moon came a change in the weather, and the dazzling white-mantled earth froze into a staid solidity which offered its season of exuberant sports to the pleasure-loving world.

Ere the abatement of the storm, Sir Philip had suggested to Lady Camden the postponement of their forthcoming festivities until a less inclement season; but as he saw the elements subsiding into peace, and watched the sovereign moon sail in victorious sublimity over the white-capped hills beyond Maplehurst, he rubbed his fat hands together with renewed ambition, declaring that his entertainments would prove doubly attractive with a seven-mile ride from the railway station, over a road as smooth and solid as ivory, and with an hundred silvern sleigh bells to make inspiring accompaniment for song and laughter.

Thus, with his spirit set at ease on the throne of anticipation the night preceding that appointed for the ball arrived.

He had spent two hours after dinner in looking over the *menu* card, which the caterers had submitted to him, and in an interview with those worthies—which made the last of a series of seven, in every one of which he had forcibly expressed his pedant desire that each and every dish was to be served strictly on the European, and *not* the American plan—and now it was the half hour past ten, and he sat alone in his library absorbed in the day's newspapers. He had read the stock reports, he had scanned two columns of dialogue which had taken place that day in court apropos of a noted divorce case ; he had read the latest social slander, and now his eye wandered to the column of coming society events. Over most of the items he passed after a casual glance, but about half way down the line his eye became fixed with heightened interest. The paragraph he read was this :

“*Le beau monde* is now at the threshold of the most important society event of the season : The Camden ball will take place at Maplehurst to-morrow night ; and it is expected that Sir Philip and the charming Lady Camden will entertain their guests in a manner that will be royally elaborate and splendid.”

As Sir Philip read this his usually cadaverous face flushed suddenly, and he passed his handkerchief across his brow in a gesture which further bespoke his agitation. He re-read the item, then, laying the paper aside, he folded his

arms and leaned backward in his chair, with these words of Shakespeare on his lips :

Men at sometimes are masters of their fates.
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves that we are underlings.

“*Underlings!*” he ground the word from between his teeth with a sneer in which there was a “laughing devil,” but his lips grew livid and seemed to writhe with some undercurrent of emotion as again he took up the newspaper to read, or, rather, to stare blankly at the type with eyes which seemed aflame with some nefarious fire.

For some moments he remained sitting in this *distract* attitude, then suddenly, and with an audible curse, he crushed the journal into a shapeless heap upon the table, and, rising, strode over to the bell and rang it vehemently. In a moment his summons was answered by a liveried footman.

“Send the coachman to me immediately,” said Sir Philip peremptorily, and in the brusque tone that he generally used when addressing his servants.

The man withdrew, and the master of Maplehurst filled in the interval of waiting by pacing restlessly up and down the room.

“Your honor sent for me?”

“Yes, a—did you order those trappings and bells as I commanded you?”

“Yes, yer honor ; they came this afternoon.”

“Aside from the sleigh, which Barton will drive, I wish you to have runners put to the brougham, and drive to meet the 3:40 and 5:40 trains from Boston to-morrow afternoon.”

“Oh ! yer honor, there won't be trappings or robes enough.”

“Get trappings ; get robes, dolt ! Go the first thing in the morning to Boston and get what will be necessary to complete the turn-out.”

The man bowed, then stood awaiting further orders ; but Sir Philip turned and resumed his restless promenade, whereupon he took his dismissal for granted, and started to go ; ere he reached the door, however, he was arrested by that peculiar drawl :

“A—you have not noticed a strange man lurking about the premises lately, have you ?”

“No, yer honor.”

“You are certain ?”

“Quite certain.”

“You may go.”

Left alone, again Sir Philip threw himself in the chair which he had previously occupied at the reading table, and with one elbow resting thereupon, and his forehead bowed to his palm, he remained long in motionless silence—a silence so intensely profound that when at length there came a sharp little rattling sound against the

window, he started like one abruptly awakened from sound sleep.

“What was that? What is here?” he muttered audibly; and his voice sounded strained and unnatural; while again his lips grew pale, and the muscles about them underwent a visible contortion.

The next instant, however, his composure returned as reason answered him reassuringly, saying:

“It was but an ice-clad tendril of ivy hanging pendant against the pane and made restive by the wind.”

In that small sound had some grim phantom of the past come back to haunt and mock you, oh Sir Philip Camden?

As he looked toward the window he noticed for the first time that the shutters were slightly open, and once more he rose and crossed the room to shut them with the same sullen violence that he had used a few moments since in crushing the unoffending newspaper. Then for the second time he stepped to the bell and rang it.

His servants were prompt in obeying any summons from him, and the door opened the next moment to admit his valet.

“Tate, I wish to confer—be seated—I wish to confer with you, upon a matter of confidence—*of the utmost confidence*; you understand?”

The valet bowed attentively.

“For three consecutive nights,” continued Sir Philip, “I have been shadowed the whole distance from Boston to Maplehurst.”

“Shadowed? Sir Philip!”

“Yes, shadowed; followed vigilantly and stealthily by some person whose design must be as evil as it is deep-hidden and insidious. Now, I want you to serve me.”

“If it lies within my power to serve you, Sir Philip, I can know no greater honor,” said the man, elevated in his own estimation several degrees at the thought of being taken into his master’s trust; for Sir Philip was a man of magisterial attitude toward his servants, and they all stood in awe of him.

“To-morrow at nightfall,” went on Sir Philip, “you will conceal yourself in the shrubberies near the carriage entrance, and watch there until ten o’clock to see if any strange person loiters about surreptitiously. After that hour come to me with any report, however trivial, you may have to make.”

“It will be—”

“*Chut!* some one is coming. Go, now; and remember that motto, ‘*on counait l’ami au besoin,*’ a friend is known in the time of need.”

CHAPTER XIII

BEWARE !

I cannot tell how the truth may be ;
I say the tale as 'twas said to me.

“ ‘ **M**ILADI, a messenger has just called and left this parcel for you.”

Lady Hortense, who was standing at the window of her private sitting-room looking out upon the snow-bright landscape, turned at her maid's words and glanced at the neatly wrapped and labelled package in her hands.

“It is my ball dress,” said she in a tone of relief. “I had feared that Madame would not be able to get it finished: I gave the order so late.”

As she spoke, Anine stood with a bewildered look on her pretty face.

“Why, miladi! Your ball dress? I do not understand. I have laid out the beautiful cream faille toilet which I thought you had ordered especially for to-night.”

“I forgot to tell you of my changed plan ; indeed good Anine, I have been so occupied for the past few days with the numerous details of decoration, and so forth, that I have scarcely given myself a thought. Open the box. I am certain

you will commend the new dress. I have worn white so much—you yourself have often suggested a change, and Sir Philip, I imagined, would be pleased.”

“Oh, miladi!” the girl cried, in ardent admiration, as she shook out all those shining folds of amethyst velvet, “it is splendid! It is lovely! Also, the color is well adapted to your dark style of beauty; yet, alas,” she added, with a little *moue*, “I regret the cream *faillie*. I prefer the *naïveté* of your former costumes.”

“Well,” said Lady Hortense, with a little indulgent smile, (she was very fond of her devoted maid) “I will wear the other dress on some early occasion to please you. Has mamma’s head grown any better?” she questioned, anxiously, as Anine laid the gleaming robes carefully aside.

“I have not been to madame’s apartments since luncheon; but as I came along the hall I thought I heard her talking with Miss Meredith in the back drawing-room.”

“Then she is better—certainly. I will go—Ah, mamma, dearest!” she exclaimed, turning lovingly toward a lady of middle age and dignified bearing, who at that moment entered the room through the half open door.

“My dear Hortense, I have to congratulate you upon the extraordinary taste which you have exercised in the decorations downstairs. Truly, every room is a separate dream-like conception

of Elysium !” said Mrs. Ayers, with quiet enthusiasm, as she offered her cheek to be kissed. “You see,” she added, “I have been trespassing on forbidden ground.”

“I am so glad you are pleased,” said her daughter. “I had been intending to show you through the rooms before any of the guests should arrive. Do you feel quite rested? Is your head better? Can I make you a cup of tea?”

“My child, you quite overwhelm me with your pretty sollicitudes,” gasped Mrs. Ayers, as she sank languidly into a luxurious chair. “I *do* feel rested, and am certain to be quite myself after a cup of your delicious green tea,” she replied; whereupon Lady Hortense rang for the tray and things to be brought at once.

“I wanted,” continued Mrs. Ayers, “to come out by the late train last night, but my headache grew so violent that I was forced to forego the project, and really feared that I should be compelled to abandon it altogether.”

“Oh, mamma! if you had, how then should I possibly have managed? You know how I always depend on you at such trying times as this. And Sir Philip, I am sure, would have been in despair. His chief aspiration is to make his entertainments a success; and he has always relied so upon you to manage them,” cried Lady Hortense, with unpolitic candor, which, though it exalted, also annoyed the elder lady.

"You, Hortense, forgive me, child, if I say that you, as Sir Philip Camden's wife, should be gaining more self-reliance. You do not appreciate your exceptional advantages, I am afraid," she said, with subtle rebuke.

"I am afraid not," conceded her daughter readily, and with a queer smile upon her face. "To be worldly one must have that most necessary of all incentives."

"What? I do not quite follow you, my dear," said Mrs. Ayers.

"I say, to be worldly in a truly scientific way, one must have that most necessary of all incentives—ambition! I am not ambitious, mamma."

Mrs. Ayers raised her white, very much bejeweled, hand deprecatingly.

"Not ambitious!" she repeated, and as she spoke there was a visible expansion of the blue veins about her temples. "You tell me this? which is equivalent to saying, 'I am indifferent as to the position which I have achieved, and which might render any other woman's life an hourly triumph.' Your assertion is exorbitant! It is extravagant almost to madness. Are you utterly without filial feeling? Is your stoicism so intense that during the eleven months of your married life you have not roused yourself to any sense of filial gratitude to me for having managed your alliance with Sir Philip Camden so successfully?"

Her daughter, who had been deftly arranging the tea things, looked up quickly, and now hot tears gathered in her eyes, while her lips quivered uncontrollably, as she said :

“Mamma, as Hortense Ayers was I always selfish, obdurate, stoical, unfilial? Did you find me always a disappointing child—one wanting in every sense of love and gratitude to you?”

“No, no ; certainly not ! You were to me the embodiment of tenderness and love, and obedience. Hortense, you were the one incentive of my life after your father died. My every ambition was centered in you ; that was why I played so high to secure your future welfare. But now——”

“Oh !” cried Lady Hortense, suddenly interrupting her, “You will never know how very far you fell of your mark, mamma ! You planned a blessing and there has sprung from it a curse !”

“Think,” pursued Mrs. Ayers, pretending not to have heard her, and her voice sounded again with its former implacable austerity ; “think how many mothers of our set were angling for the position which I secured for you ; and they say that pretty Louise Gardener’s decline was due chiefly to her disappointment in love—you remember Sir Philip *did* show her marked attention at one time.”

“He was engaged to her,” said Lady Hortense.

"He has boastfully told me of the cruel way in which he jilted her."

"Yes? Ah, well, my dear, there are such experiences in almost every life—romances which in the end amount to nothing."

"Nothing? And you say that in this instance a sweet, young, and innocent life was sacrificed! Oh, mamma!" Lady Hortense's voice was full of unutterable pain, and her breath came quickly as she fixed great stricken eyes upon her mother's face.

For a moment Mrs. Ayers went on sipping her tea in silence. She was a woman of diplomacy, and that she had for once forgotten to be discreet in her argument both embarrassed and vexed her.

She looked up presently.

"I did not say that Louise actually died of disappointment, Hortense. I do not think she could have loved him to such an extent. I think the immediate cause of her death was consumption. But you know, my dear, that in all such affairs the world will have its separate and various conceptions. No," she added, "I am quite sure the *affaire* with Sir Philip had nothing to do, virtually, with her death. She did not love him to that excess."

"Love him! No. I do not think that Louise could have loved Sir Philip Camden," her daughter said, and there was visible revolt in her tone.

“No, no,” echoed her experienced heart, “she could not by any possible chance have loved him.”

Mrs. Ayers noted the intonation of revolt, and again the veins on her temples expanded. She made no effort now to repress her vexation, but said derisively :

“Why! do you then find it impossible to imagine any woman as being in love with the man whom you, through what is nothing more nor less than a narrow-minded prejudice, have sealed your heart against? Your creed is malevolent in the extreme, and becomes at once an indignity to yourself and an effrontery to the man whose name you bear. Sir Philip Camden, knowing the exact attitude which you have assumed toward him, would *hate* you! Beware, oh Hortense, Lady Camden, of that day when you find yourself an object of antipathy in his eyes! When a man of his stamp hates, he hates with a vehemence which carries virulent poison in its fang.”

“I know. I—for months—I have felt a growing dread of the future; but that I have ‘sealed my heart against him,’ as you say, is not true. Night and day have I battled against my heart’s coldness. Night and day have I prayed to God to change me toward my husband—to give me a sense of wifely interest, of duty, of respect, but no answer has been granted to my supplications.

Each day we are drifting further apart, and I am defenseless against whatever may come."

There was little sympathy in the parent face opposite as Lady Hortense concluded thus hopelessly. Instead of bestowing a word of condolence in behalf of her child's sorrow, Mrs. Ayers merely said, after a few moments of silence which were filled up with the other's suppressed sobs :

"Your face, my dear, will be swollen and disfigured. I am sure you have pride sufficient to guard you against letting your *contretemps* become an open letter to the world. Hark!" she said suddenly, "I hear the sound of sleigh-bells. Some of your guests are arriving even now."

Lady Hortense rose quickly and looked at her watch.

"Yes," she cried in dismay, "it is half-past four. Mamma, you must go down and receive them, and see that they are all shown proper apartments. But kiss me before you go, dearest, won't you?" she asked suppliantly.

What parent heart could refuse such a pathetic appeal as that of Lady Hortense?

Mrs. Ayers bent and kissed twice the upturned, almost childish face; but her cheek coming in such close contact with that other tear-moist one, was distasteful to her sense of dignity, and as she turned away and descended the highly-polished stair-way, along which floated the mingled odor

of roses, lilies-of-the-valley, jessamine and various other kinds of redolent blossoms from below, she muttered to herself those words of Shakespeare :

How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child !

CHAPTER XIV

AT FESTAL TIDE

There is no armor against Fate.

—*Shirely.*

A blaze of myriad-tinted lights ; a blending of many subtle perfumes into one ecstatic and harmonious odor, which seemed to “swing the soul on a golden thread to heaven” ; a swaying of delicious music from unknown regions—music which one moment throbbed out in wildest passion—laden strains of melody, now trembled aloft in suppliant, soul-reaching pathos, now tranquilly declined into the fragrance from which it seemed to have had its origin, like a dying whisper of love.

A vast canvas gleamed like an acre of polished Ceylon ivory on the floors of the two drawing-rooms, which had been thrown into one grand and spacious apartment to serve as a ball-room, and immediately beyond which the large banquet hall was partially revealed through swaying curtains of jessamine vine, starred with their own sweet, pale blossoms, before which there stood a statue of Flora, with one arm uplifted as if about to part the trailing draperies asunder. At the other extremity of the ball-room, through a lengthening vista of tropical plants and spraying

fountains, could be seen the dimly-fluctuating, star-like lights of the conservatories ; while from the wide hall at the right, a view of the parlors could be had through the high-arched doorway, which *suite* had also been thrown into one large room for the reception of Lady Camden's guests, and were, indeed, as Mrs. Ayers had declared, a "dream-like conception of Elysium," with their various miniature mounds of flowers, flanked with shining greenery, and bowls of roses resting at the feet of statuettes, or garnishing the silken draperies in loose and graceful clusters.

Lady Camden and her mother stood within the arched doorway paying homage to the fast ingathering throng of guests, who already filled the rooms to their comfortable capacity.

Beautiful and stately as a young queen Lady Hortense appeared in her gleaming robes of amethyst with diamonds encompassing her bare arms and throat, which was white and graceful as that of a swan. Her wealth of blue-black hair was arranged high, according to the fashion of the day, and pierced with a diamond poignard,—a costly bauble which Sir Philip had given her during the first weeks of their marriage, when they were abroad.

There was a faint tinge of color upon her usually pale cheek, and just enough heightened brightness in the soft, dark fathoms of her eye to render her loveliness perfect. The cynosure of

all eyes, the secret envy of many a selfish heart, she moved hither and thither among the assembled multitude, lavishing a smile here, a compliment there, and giving the world the impression that she was the most completely happy woman in all Christendom, when, in truth, all the magnificence, the pageantry, the dazzling display and glitter combined to make for her a splendid martyrdom in which she was stifled to suffocation.

“Of what use is it all?” she asked herself, for the hundredth time, as she let her glance stray feverishly over that intricate mass of color and rest upon a large screen, which concealed the musicians from sight, and whose roses were already drooping lifeless under the strong light which fell upon them from a chandelier. She did not dream that after a little time the same scene which she now secretly loathed in her heart would be transformed into one whose every detail she would view through eyes of ecstasy.

She did not dream how near she was standing to the threshold of that realm which they say is woman's true estate, and that one glance into the enchanted kingdom would seem to her like one scarcely of earthly joy, and that

As, in a kind of holy trance
She'd hang above those fragrant treasures,
Bending to drink their balmy airs
As if she mixed her soul with theirs.
'Twould be, indeed, the perfume shed
From flowers and scented flame, that fed
Her charmed life.

But one step taken into that strange kingdom would be to her perilous as though its walks were flanked with hissing reptiles. Yet she would enter there. Nearer and nearer each moment she was approaching to the arena of Doom, just as a bird flits through the sunshine into a rose bower, there to breathe the virulence from a deadly night-shade that has stealthily crept in among the blossoms there.

“Are not the Elwoods to be among us to-night, Lady Camden?” questioned a tall, soldierly-looking fellow whom she had paused briefly to chat with, and whom I am now pleased to introduce as Gershon Carruthers, Lieutenant in the service of the United States Navy. He was a young man still on the sunny side of thirty years, whose frank blue eyes had a depth of tenderness in their light, and whose tawny hair was soft and crisp-curling as a girl’s. While not strictly handsome there was a look of distinction about his face which, with its delightful candor, made it lovable, and he was at once a great favorite among the fair sex and popular with his own.

There was a little tremor of anxiety in his voice as he thus addressed his hostess, discerning which Lady Camden smiled to herself.

“Yes,” returned she, “I am expecting them with others at any moment. They were to come by the 7:40 train.”

Even as she spoke, there was a sound of sleigh

bells without, and, after a short interval, the late arrivals made their way through the great hall, which was thronged with gentlemen, and passed upstairs to the dressing rooms. At the end of half an hour they began to pass in through the arched doorway and to mingle with the multitude.

Colonel Elwood and his wife, Thayer Volney, and his lovely cousin, Valois, were among the last to pass into the presence of their hostess.

“Lady Camden, Mrs. Ayers, I have the honor to present to you my nephew, Mr. Thayer Volney of England,” spoke the colonel, in his deep, clear tones.

With a slight backward movement of her proudly-poised head, Lady Camden raised her eyes and met his glance. Had the Parian image of Glaucus, the Athenian, come to life, and stepped down from the mantel to confront her? No, no, such a miracle had not been wrought, surely! Then what was here? Was she swooning away from all the light and heavy fragrance, and was that face an apparition, shaped from out the lengthening depths of oblivion, to haunt her as it had so oft before haunted her in her dreams? If not this, then had *he*, her hero, the brave man whose courage had saved her life, crossed her path again, to stand before her, a form of breathing flesh and not of dream-ideality? Oh joy! oh ecstasy!

Oh Fate! thou art so false, so deceptive, oft-

times in thy garb ! Thou comest now, with thy dread ordination concealed behind a mask of such heaven-like loveliness ! And the lights are jewels scintillating in a million beauteous rays ; and the dew on the flowers is pearls ; and the fragrance which floats from them is a breath that comes from Elysian fields ! Who would wish to shrink from a decree as sweet and intoxicating as this ?

“Mr. Volney, I am indebted to Colonel and Mrs. Elwood and to our dear Valois for the pleasure of knowing you,” the words came at length, and they were low and composed ; but the little hand which Thayer took and pressed for a moment in his own, was cold and trembled like a hurt bird.

“I,” Lady Hortense added, as she turned with an enforced smile of apology toward the little circle, who, in some concern, had noted her brief agitation, “I fear there is scarcely enough ventilation in these crowded rooms. I felt for an instant a slight sense of dizziness. It is gone now. Yes, Valois, dear,” in answer to a hurriedly whispered question from the excited girl. “He is here. I see him making his way toward you now. Yes, Sir Philip, the dance may as well begin at once ; everybody is here.”

Sir Philip had been standing at a short space apart from his wife, and had not failed to note her every expression when she was introduced to the

handsome young Englishman. Lady Hortense, however, was not aware of this. She did not glance upward into his face as she spoke ; had she done so she might have seen a threatening basilisk lurking there. She took his arm and they led the way to the ball room as the initiatory measures of the march floated in to them.

As they threaded their way through the laughing, fluttering, expectant crowd, she caught a glimpse of Thayer Volney, as he bent over her lovely young friend Alice, in what seemed to her to be the devotion of a lover.

What was there in the sight that made her lift her hand with a sudden spasmodic movement to her heart as though it had burst one of its fibres and were bleeding ?

CHAPTER XV

THE BREAKERS THREATEN

And love?
What was love then? not calm, scarcely kind —
But in one all intensest emotions combined :
Life and death: pain and rapture.

“Lucile”—*Owen Meredith.*

“**W**HO is the pretty girl in white with whom your nephew has just danced, Mrs. Elwood?” questioned a young brunette, resplendent in maize crepe, a little later in the evening. The speaker was by birth a creole who, seven years previous to the opening of our story, had been brought to America by one Mr Rossmore, an Englishman of vast wealth, who had claimed the beautiful Dorian de Joulés as his adopted ward and two years later had married her.

Although their advent to the New England metropolis had been unattended by testimonial bearings of any kind, by subtle *ingenuité* Mrs. Rossmore had succeeded in gaining for herself and husband a passport into the elite circles of the “Hub,” and ere she had moved therein half a season she had attained to an acknowledged belleship, at which throne men worshipped and women bowed in smiling patronage.

The fashionable world followed in the footsteps of Dorian Rossmore. Her rare elegance of person, combined with a perfect propriety of conduct, and the fact that she was fast anchored upon the sea of matrimony made her a considered model which mothers established before their daughters, and they accepted without fear of finding in her an object of rivalry in *affaires d'amour*.

But her husband ! Every one marvelled how so peerless a creature as Dorian could have linked her fate with a man so distressingly ugly !

In stature Mr. Rossmore was low, almost to dwarfishness. He had little blue beads for eyes ; he had straw-colored hair, and beard and eyebrows ; he had a florid complexion shot with pit-marks, and two rows of little sharp teeth like those of a hyena, and large ears. Oh, Martin Rossmore *was* "distressingly ugly !"

But Dorian seemed to dote on him, and he followed her everywhere like a devoted spaniel, and was content to sit in a corner of the ball-room dozing, with his chin resting upon his be-diamonded chest, and a letter A formed of his fore-fingers and thumbs, whilst she waltzed to her heart's satisfaction. Content to sit at dinner next to her bare and gleaming shoulders, sipping his champagne or claret, and admiringly listening to her brilliant repartee as she conversed with Major McCaulif, or Percy Delnorte, or young Fred Bentwell, who was just fresh from Yale and who lived

in a state of spiritual ecstasy if she smiled once upon him during an evening, or gave him a glance of approval from her gazelle-like Eastern eyes.

But there came a time when no more the form of Martin Rossmore lingered near Dorian ; when no more she felt protection in the name of husband.

Two years after their union the queer little man was stricken suddenly with paralysis and never rallied from the attack.

Poor Dorian, — beautiful, young, talented, wealthy Dorian—was left stranded alone upon the isle of widowhood !

For some months she buried herself from the world entirely as though it had never known her. Then, at intervals, just a glimpse was to be had of her face, which shone like a languishing flower behind the sweeping drapery of sable which always enshrouded it. Thus a year of her bereavement passed, after which period Dorian reluctantly persuaded herself that grief was undermining her health and she must abandon the burden of the black veil and her cloistral apartments, which were filled with memories of her dear departed, and once more seek the sunshine of the world.

So over the threshold of the great arena she again made her way, timidly at first, so timidly, indeed, that fathers of daughters, and sons, the chosen of ambitious mothers, came forward in sympathy to offer her protection and courtesy.

She was more splendidly beautiful than ever in her new advent ; and gradually it came to pass that women, seeing her in all the charms of eligibility, began to look upon her with eyes of jealousy and secret malevolence. Her manner, at first half shy and reserved, soon became gay and vivacious, as of old. Her repartee flashed with the wit and spirit inherited from her native country. Her hair was black as Erebus. Her eyes were limpid and dark as those of a gazelle and bright as African diamonds. Her skin was transparent and soft as damask. Men had always known this, but women had overlooked the full value of her charms, because of yore they gave no hint of rivalry ; *she was married*. But this splendid creature who had stepped from widow's weeds and dull jet into maize crepe and diamonds, who revealed eburnean shoulders and arms so daringly, who flashed the dark brilliance of her eyes into men's faces so boldly, who sang so divinely, and threw open her mouth so wide when she laughed that the white soundness and evenness of her teeth and contrasting pink of her gums might be fully appreciated—oh, they hated her ! and Dorian, divining their jealous enmity, was sorely pleased and did cry out in very exultation :

“ Such joy ambition finds ! ”

But to return to the question with which this chapter opened :

“ Who is the pretty girl in white, with whom

your nephew has just danced, Mrs. Elwood ? ”

“ It is Alice Meredith. How very happy she looks to-night, and how becomingly, yet simply dressed. You must remember her, Mrs. Rossmore ; she made her debut with Valois at Mrs. Carruthers’ ball, last August. You were there. ”

“ You mean—of course you mean Robert Meredith’s daughter ? ”

Mrs. Elwood assented.

“ But he has recently gone into bankruptcy ! ” whispered Dorian. “ How is it, ” she asked, “ that the young lady still has an *entree* to our circles ? ”

Her tone was incredulous and flavored with a *hauteur* which stung the other to reply :

“ It is a happy exception to the rule. Though adversity has dealt sternly with Mr. Meredith, his daughter has been spared that penalty to which the prejudiced world commonly consigns his luckless kind. A few who in the young lady’s time of prosperity patronized and professed to admire her, have proven true to their creed ; and she herself is not ashamed to lift her head above the mire in which, ah me ! how many would love to see her grovelling. ”

A faint tinge of red dyed for a moment the transparent beauty of Dorian Rossmore’s face ; but above this the disdainful curve of her lip was still painfully apparent, as, with a feigned air of apology, she went on arguing in her own defense :

“ But yet, you know, my dear Mrs. Elwood,

that money is the vital principle of social law ! ”

“ I admit the logic of your argument, but it is governed entirely by the individual. ”

Again Dorian’s colorless beauty was gently disturbed. She dexterously evaded the thrust, however, for, just at that moment, Thayer Volney passed them with the beautiful Lady Camden on his arm.

“ Ah ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Rossmore in breathless admiration, “ don’t they make a picture ? What a truly exceptional couple, indeed ! he light, like a Grecian god, and she so dark and queenly ! Mrs. Elwood, isn’t it really such a pity that Sir Philip Camden is not himself better looking ? They seem ill-matched, don’t you think so ? but then position—ah ! is this our waltz, Mr. Bentwell ? ”

Very glad to be relieved of the maize crepe, Mrs. Elwood, upon being left alone, began an eager survey of the ball-room to see if Valois was among the dancers ; look as she would, though, over that wide sea of kaleidoscopic color there was no shorn, curly-black head visible.

“ My dear Mrs. Elwood, ” said the voice of Mrs. Ayers beside her suddenly. “ I have been searching for you everywhere. I want to show you the conservatories. My daughter has just received a collection of very rare plants from India, and, knowing you to be such a botanist, I have been anxious for you to see them. Come ! ”

Mrs. Elwood rose and the two sauntered toward the dim-lit cloisters.

They were passing close to a fragrant spraying fountain when, chancing to glance beyond the crystalline columns, to where a noble camelia spread forth its starred branches, Mrs. Elwood espied, by the rays which fell from a pale light above, the glitter of a frost-white dress, and in very close proximity to this, the outline of a man's form. As she continued to gaze toward the spot, half doubting, half convinced, a subdued, love-like murmur of voices came to her ; when, with something very like a throb of pain, she whispered to herself :

“ It is my baby Valois and Lieutenant Car-ruthers ! ”

Meanwhile measure upon measure of the waltz rose and fell, and the dancers glided on light-winged feet to its inspiring strains—strains which at length were destined to melt away, as all that is ecstasy must melt after an ephemeral season—as Lady Hortense's rapture melted when she found herself abruptly, cruelly transported back to earth from that beautiful dream-land through which she had madly suffered herself to stray, forgetful of all living things save *him*, her partner, Thayer Volney.

A few moments later, when the “ current offered ” for her to shrink away, unnoticed, from the crowd, and she stood alone within the deep

recess of a window which had been ingeniously converted into a kind of lover's cloister by the aid of miniature palms and various flowering exotics, and in whose high blue ceiling one single star-light light fluctuated, giving a tone of life to the bower, she looked out upon the night's sanctified beauty with a happiness such as she had never dreamed of awake within her soul, filling its citadel with those strange sounds of which poets write and music breathes.

"Oh!" cried she passionately, "if I could only die now, at this very moment, while this heavenly trance endures! Oh, guiltily, I know, the medium through which this soul-consuming ecstasy has been wrought! But—oh God! the sense which follows now and bids me die, not of living rapture, as I should love to die, but the slow-grinding death of despair!"

She trembled from head to foot, and an icy dampness broke out upon her brow. She caught dizzily at the window casement to keep herself from falling, and gradually she succeeded in mastering the dread sensation. Then came a reaction, when hot, bitter tears fell from her eyes unchecked. There was no one to witness her emotion. Why should she not give full vent to them if tears could in any degree assuage that travail of woe? When the paroxysm had spent itself she buried her face in her hands, and prayed the most fervent prayer of her lifetime :

“Dear God! help, oh help me to be stronger: Oh look into my soul to-night and see what is there that is vile! I have offended Thee, O God! but why didst Thou send *him* into my ruined life! Help me to be strong! Help me to be loyal to myself and to Thee!”

As she lifted her head there was a slight rustle of the *portieres*, and she heard a voice saying:

“Lady Camden, I have brought you an ice. May I come in?”

She turned quickly, and herself parted the silken draperies, bidding him enter.

“How did you divine my whereabouts, Mr. Volney?” she asked, smiling calmly into the fair, perfect face before her.

“Miss Meredith suggested your hiding place, after I had spent some moments in a futile search for you. Really, this ice is half melted. Lady Camden; let me bring you another.”

“No; indeed no;” she gently but firmly protested, “I quite prefer this.”

“What a fairy-like bower is this! In truth, how beautiful are all your rooms, Lady Camden. I am told you were the chief artist in arranging the decorations,” he said, as, in compliance with her invitation, he seated himself on the low ottoman opposite her.

She acknowledged his compliment with a pleased smile. Then said:

"This is your first American ball, I believe, Mr. Volney."

"Yes, and aside from that, you have honored me by commemorating the date of my departure from England. I left my native shores just two months ago to-day."

"If in that I have been the means of according to you a small degree of pleasure, I am gratified. I would in some little measure compensate you for that morning's perilous venture in my behalf."

He was silent for a moment.

"I was not certain that you had recognized me," he said at length, and with obvious confusion.

"Recognized you!" she reiterated quickly. "Think you then I could so easily forget a face associated as yours was, with a moment dreadful as was *that*?"

He shuddered involuntarily.

"It was a dreadful, a horrible moment, with so young and so beautiful a life as yours, Lady Camden, at the mercy of those mad beasts. Let us not dwell upon it."

"We will not recur to it," she said quickly. "I would not have your pleasure to-night marred in the slightest way; and you must not let me detain you here a moment longer to the sacrifice of that waltz."

He started guiltily. How could he have forgotten his engagement to dance with Alice Mere-

dith? What an unpardonable offense to have kept her waiting through one measure!

Lady Hortense, noting his discomfiture, rose, and they left the alcove together. They had proceeded but a few steps when Sir Philip intercepted them.

He said something in an undertone to his wife, who, with a conventional bow to the young Englishman, accepted his arm, and they joined the circle of waltzers.

“Why,” panted Sir Philip, as they turned to walk, after one round [Sir Philip was a man who merely danced because it was fashionable to dance, and not because he enjoyed it,] “why did you not sit out the entire dance with Volney, in—a—what you are pleased to term your lovers’ bower? How very adroitly you managed your *tete-a-tete*!”

“There was no ‘management’ of the *tete a-tete*, as you vulgarly put it. I simply sought in the alcove a moment of solitude which I felt in need of. Mr. Volney brought me an ice there, and we chatted briefly, as was only natural we should do.”

“Admit, however, in justice to him, that he is agreeable company?”

“He certainly is agreeable company.”

“And also that he is handsome—forsooth handsome as your Athenian idol, Glaucus, eh?” with a fiendish chuckle.

She paled to the very lips; but flashing him a

look of haughty defiance from her splendid eyes, she said, with a composure which maddened him :

“I concede ; he is, as I heard you say the other night, like a Greek god !”

His low laugh, demon-like in its forced mirthlessness, made a shiver of revulsion thrill through Lady Camden's veins. She made a movement as if to withdraw her hand from his arm ; but, divining her intention, he pressed the member tightly to his side and only laughed the more.

“Ah,” he mentally congratulated himself, “I am making her hate me ! I have sworn that I would. I will have no ‘cool medium’ by heaven ! —A—Mrs. Rossmore, remember the next quadrille is mine,” he said with a sudden charming courtesousness to that lady who at that moment passed them leaning upon the arm of Mr. Bentwell, whom she had kept alternately in heaven and torment ever since she had left off her widow's weeds.

“To my taste, that is the most fascinating woman in the ball-room,” observed Sir Philip to his wife, as Dorian, with a smile and nod of acquiescence, passed on.

“That adventuress !” exclaimed Lady Camden with a contemptuousness which she could not suppress.

“She is *chic* ; she is bubbling over with original wit and spirit ; she is the sort that men like and admire,” said Sir Philip.

“Some men—yes,” conceded his wife with an eloquent shrug of her bare, white shoulders.

“Oh, there are exceptions, of course ; a—Mr. Volney, for example ! he would prefer some one more *en rapport* with his own statue-like beauty. Alice Meredith’s *spirituelle* face has palpable attraction for him.”

Lady Hortense felt a convulsion about the fibres of her heart, but hushing her pain with an inward voice, she managed to answer him calmly:

“Alice Meredith is designed to attract the superior caste of men ; and to admire her, one must be ambitious.”

“Why do you so set her above the ordinary element ? ” asked Sir Philip, derisively.

“Why do I ? Because of her legitimate claim to all that is pure and beautiful in womanhood.”

“Pah ! The embodiment of virtue and beauty is well enough to wrap in a tunic and set upon a pedestal for artists to look at ; but publicity contaminates the qualities. As a ‘goddess of purity’ Miss Meredith’s legitimate position is not in the ball-room, allow me to suggest.”

There was a significant sneer in his last words which prompted Lady Hortense to again turn her flashing eyes upon him. Her lips were parted to frame some response, but they were passing the hall door, and some one called Sir Philip’s name.

He turned to see his valet standing in the passage with a world of meaning in his eyes.

"I will see you directly, Tate," he said in an undertone to the man, and leading his wife to a seat, he hurriedly quitted the ball-room.

CHAPTER XVI

DEAD SEA-FRUIT

A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king,
And eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.

—*Shakespeare.*

“WELL, what news, Tate,” questioned the master of Maplehurst, when at a signal, his valet had followed him to a chamber remote from the festive rooms.

“I have been watching at the outer gates as you bade me, Sir Philip, and have brought you some intelligence,” replied the man significantly.

“Speak quickly then,” demanded Sir Philip, “I cannot remain long away from my guests.”

“Just as the moon rose, about half an hour ago, I saw a horseman gallop into a thicket of scrub pine about fifty yards from the river bank, and dismount.

“After securing his horse well within the shadows of the trees, he commenced to creep slowly and cautiously toward the gates. I concealed myself in the shrubberies near by and allowed him to pass through them, then followed at a safe distance as he made his way toward the castle walls. I saw him approach one of the windows of the back drawing-room, whose curtains were half

drawn, and gaze within ; as he did so I heard him mutter aloud these words :

“ ‘Sir Philip Camden, right royally do you entertain ! right noble and grand-looking is the gentry gathered within your castle halls to-night ! Such pomp, I imagine, is seldom seen in the gay world this side the Atlantic. But beware, oh *Sir Philip Camden*—’ I noticed that he laid a peculiar emphasis on your name each time he pronounced it—‘Your season of triumph is in its declining days. By heaven ! I will tear the mask from your face and reveal all those foul colors lying beneath it to the world, which you have so long swindled ! Either will I declare you, or you shall henceforth pave *my* way as you have paved your own through the gilded labyrinths of society.’ ”

“Well, is that all ?” asked Sir Philip complacently, as the man paused. “By the powers ! it is an interesting legend !” he exclaimed, coolly lighting a cigar at the low candelabra. “Ha ! ha ! ‘the gilded labyrinths of society’ is a pretty phrase ! (puff). Go on.”

“As he continued to look into the apartment, still muttering his maledictions,” resumed Tate, “I stepped silently up behind him. ‘Who are you,’ said I, ‘that you steal about like a cur to spy upon and menace my master ?’ He turned upon me a face of sneering defiance : ‘If you are a servant of Sir Philip Camden,’ said he, ‘I warn

you, my friend, be not so bold ; for Philip, your master, is bought and sold.' ”

Sir Philip laughed again.

“ A ranter of Shakespeare,” he observed. “ Pursue, my good Tate, pursue,” he then said, continuing to puff at his cigar.

“ I called him a madman, whereupon he again sneered at me.

“ ‘ If I am mad, then,’ said he, ‘ out of humanity befriend me. Go to Sir Philip with a madman’s appeal. Hand him this, and return to me with his answer.’ ”

With this, Tate took from his inner vest pocket a closely folded piece of paper. He handed this to the master of Maplehurst, and stood by, watching his face as he opened and read it ; but he saw no sign of disturbance there.

Sir Philip’s features were without a quiver as he traced the lines which ran :

“ M. Alphonse Favraud, late of Paris, presents his compliments to *Sir Philip Camden*, and prays his honor for an early interview, *to-night*.”

He even, after assuring himself that there was nothing compromising to himself in the three lines, read them aloud, omitting the name, simply, which headed them ; then igniting the paper at the candelabra, he stamped the burning particle under his faultlessly slippered foot, with the deliberation that he would have used in stamping the life out of a ground spider or a caterpillar.

“Go to this—a—fool,” said he, “and, inasmuch as he simulates Shakespeare, say that I am ‘not in the vein’ for granting him an interview to-night, nor yet for several nights. Hasten now, and do you make the premises well rid of him at once.”

“But, Sir Philip, his threats? He may make a scene. His face is full of evil purpose. I like it not.”

“Threats be — ! A toothless cur can threaten with its bark. Don’t be a sop. Be gone and do my bidding—yet, stay! a—you might add that if he chooses to come to me on some night during next week, say Thursday, at this hour, I will be at his service.”

“Ah! that would imply some little fear of his bite, despite your indifference,” observed the man to himself as the door closed him from his master’s presence.

No sooner was Sir Philip left alone than he tossed aside his cigar and placed his hand to his throat, as if he might have felt there an uncomfortable tightness. Then all his latent furies burst forth to defile the silence which brooded there.

“Curse him! Curse him!” hissed this, now, demon man, as he paced the floor, with breast convulsed, and eyes emitting venom’s own lurid flame. “I would I could sear his soul with the brimstone of my curses! He threatens. Oh des-

picable consequence that he should live to spy upon and threaten me! Oh loathsome worm! would that I had seen him in his grave-shroud ere turning my face from Europe; then my future would have been secure, while now it stands on thin ice. Curse him! he lives to bring back the dead and rotten sea fruit from those forgotten shores, to cast upon my proud estate for its contamination! He shall not! I will baffle him in his accursed purpose, by heaven, I swear it! I——”

Here his frenzied soliloquy ceased suddenly as there came the sound of footsteps in the corridor without. The next instant his body-servant re-entered the room.

“The man has gone, Sir Philip. He sent you this.”

His master read the one scrawled pencil line, which ran thus:

“Look for me promptly at 11 on Thursday night.”

Then he burned the scrap of yellow paper as he had done the first, and with the same stoical countenance; after which he dismissed his servant, saying briefly:

“When I need you again, Tate, I shall not hesitate to call upon you.”

Ten minutes later he returned to the ball room, where he at once sought out Mrs. Rössmore, and bent contritely over her with suave apologies for

his absence, during which their quadrille had been danced.

These she accepted with pouting hesitation, yet would retaliate the offense by studiously avoiding him for the rest of the evening.

When all the lights of Maplehurst were out, and every sound of revelry was hushed within those halls, Sir Philip stole from his apartments out into the still grey of the early dawn, where for hours he walked with his grim tutor, Satan, along the snow-bound terrace walls above the Merrimac.

CHAPTER XVII

LOVE'S BEHEST

In peace love tunes the shepherd's reed ;
In war he mounts the warrior's steed ;
In halls, in gay attire is seen ;
In hamlet's dances on the green ;
Love rules the court, the camp, the grove,
And man below, and saints above,
For love is heaven, and heaven is love.

Scott.

MORNING dawned, crisp, cold and clear ; but ere the house party at Maplehurst began to assemble below stairs the sun had well nigh reached his zenith, and struggled vainly to shine through a rift of threatening clouds.

Sir Philip and Mrs. Rossmore were the last to enter the breakfast room, when the question of a sleigh ride was on the *tapis*. The young widow wore a becoming morning toilet of changeable green, over which there fell, in charming contrast, great billows of creamy lace, like sea-foam, and her costume was still enhanced by a large cluster of nodding *fleur de lis*, which she wore low upon her corsage.

“ My dear Lady Camden,” said she, as she noticed the quick glance of her hostess wander

first to her flowers and then questioningly to Sir Philip's face.

"We have been touring the conservatories, and see! I come back laden with sweet spoils. I, really," with a half-arch, half-guilty look, "thought it barbarous of your husband, but he would pick these for me." As she ended she touched caressingly the beautiful *fleur de lis*, and made a little defiant grimace at Sir Philip, who, smiling back at her, said, with his accustomed indolent drawl:

"I have assured Mrs. Rossmore of Lady Camden's approval. She delights especially in her conservatories, and asks no higher compliment than that which her guests pay her by enjoying them. Is it not so, my dear?" he asked insidiously, directing his glance towards his wife.

"Certainly," replied Lady Hortense, but she did not lift her flushed face from the coffee urn as she spoke, and the one low-toned word flavored of her inward indignation at an offence which she knew was a malevolent and coolly directed one on the part of Sir Philip, who was well aware of her partiality for the young iris tree, and knew that she had always guarded vigilantly against its disturbance.

"Do you take cream, Mrs. Rossmore?" she asked, as her hand fluttered over the dainty service in arranging cups and saucers for the late comers.

"Please."

"And sugar?"

"One.—Oh, Mr. Bentwell, indeed, no!" this in reply to her young admirer's eager question,

"Will you make one of our sleighing party this afternoon, Mrs. Rossmore?"

"Although sleighing is one of my hobbies," added Dorian, "I don't quite relish the idea of being caught in a snow storm."

Fred Bentwell sighed.

"Then I assuredly will not go," she read in his adoring eyes, and with a coquettish smile she turned to her host.

"Do not you think it will storm, Sir Philip?" asked she, and, without waiting for his response, she continued: "If it should, and there could be no sleighing, why not arrange for those *tableaux-vivants* that we were discussing last night?"

"Yes! by all means let us have some charades," exclaimed Fred Bentwell; then flushed to the roots of his fair hair at the rebuking eyes which Dorian flashed upon him.

"Look! it is snowing even now," cried Valois Elwood at this juncture.

They all glanced toward the windows and sure enough saw a few idly-falling flakes interspersing the somber gloom of the noontide.

Sir Philip's eyes looked away from them back into Dorian Rossmore's face:

"So we may at once veto the sleighing for to-

day, and organize the tableaux," he said with a smile of indulgence upon his sinister face which brought a wave of color to Dorian's.

"Do you not think it would be infinitely nicer, Lady Camden?" she asked.

Lady Hortense bowed with the listless concession which she gave to all of her husband's wishes. "But," said she, "of course there are always some who do not care for theatricals. You do not, do you, Leonie?" she asked, turning to a doll-faced, voluptuous girl of seventeen who sat next to Mrs. Ayers.

"No," declared Miss Leonie Dextrell, with a simpering smile, "to me they are totally without charm. Gladys loves to act—that is, recite—but give *me* out-door fun! Oh, Sir Philip!" she supplemented, "I brought my skates; *isn't* there a pond or something hereabouts to skate on?"

"Yes," returned Sir Philip, "the water is well frozen down in the lake, and I am told the skating there is excellent."

"Oh, how *perfectly* lovely!" gushed Leonie, her limpid eyes melting in tears of real ecstasy. "Will you come skating with me, Valois? You skate as swiftly as a lark flies, and so gracefully! Do come! I am sure *you* don't want to act; do you?" she asked.

Valois hesitated and directed a little shy, questioning look toward Lieutenant Carruthers. It seemed to say, "Had you rather skate or act?"

and his eyes answered back something that made her blush scarlet.

Mrs. Rossmore herself, however, settled the debate.

"Leonie," said she, "Captain Pometer will go with you to the lake. I am assured that he, like yourself, is devoted to his skates ; but Valois and Lieutenant Carruthers are to assist in supporting our entertainment," she added peremptorily.

Immediately after breakfast a meeting was called and the coming charades duly discussed and arranged.

Miss Meredith and Fred Bentwell were elected for a sketch from "Lalla Rookh." Valois Elwood and Gershon Carruthers would present an interesting scene from the "Courtship of Miles Standish." Thayer Volney was seized upon for a Pygmalion, and Lady Camden singled out by a unanimous vote to do the statuary part, as the Athenian artist's model, Galatea.

Vain were her protestations against acting this *role*. Sir Philip saw her grow pale as death when it was assigned her ; and as her eyes inadvertently met his, she shuddered at the evil triumph she saw shining in them.

With a last appeal she turned to Mrs. Rossmore :

"I thank you for the compliment, but would prefer that Miss Dextrell take the part," said she, "I will do all in my power toward making the

entertainment a success, but I do not wish to attempt a part for which I am utterly unfitted."

"Unfitted!" cried Dorian Rossmore, deprecatingly. "Why, my dear Lady Camden, one could not be more fitted to the *role* than you! You are classical. You are *reposé*. You are all that would go toward making a perfect statue. Now, Gladys here—"

"Oh *please* Mrs. Rossmore, spare me!" laughingly interrupted Miss Dextrell, who, like her sister Leonie, was "doll-faced and voluptuous," yet not so simpering nor dull. "I am, I assure you, fully appreciative of my own shortcomings; the comparison would be 'odious'; there is nothing classical nor tranquil about my composition; I should giggle outright when the calcium lights were turned on. I shall, however, be pleased to recite something."

So for a recitation she was accordingly billed on the part of Mrs. Rossmore, who graciously volunteered herself, as there was "order in variety," to contribute a Spanish solo in the costume of her mother's country.

When the programme was finished, it was voted that the afternoon be devoted to the preparation of proper costumes, and that a stage be improvised in the back drawing-room for rehearsal of the various parts on the following evening. Thus the interval was filled up with the rush and hurry of excitement that is generally attendant

upon such events, and soon after dinner on Wednesday evening commenced the rehearsal with doors strictly closed to all excepting those who composed the programme.

Alice Meredith, with her bright rippling hair and lovely face, and with her voice—

Sweet as the breath of angel sighs
When angel sighs are most divine,

promised a revelation in the character of Nour-mahal, the Arabian maid ; but, after the rehearsal of her part was over, she stole away to the darkest and remotest corner of the front drawing-room, filled with secret dislike of it. She had instinctively felt the eyes of Thayer Volney upon her all the while she had been singing ; and as Selim had clasped her, with all the assumed passion of a great love, to his breast, and her head had fallen, with seeming abandonment upon his arm, she revolted even as she had whispered the words :

Remember, love, the feast of roses.

Afterward she had glanced up to meet that pair of serious eyes, and in them she had read a rebuke which smote her to the inmost fibre of her being, like a sharp steel point. The wound still rankled within her as she sank down in the dim-lit corner ; and, as if in very self-defense, she cried in a low voice which only her own heart heard : “ Oh if he could have read my soul’s dear thought when I said those words :

'Remember, love, the feast of roses.' I was thinking of the night before last, when I sat with him in the dim conservatories amid the breathing fragrance, with his voice making sweeter music to my ear than the dreamy strains of the waltz or the fall of fountain waters. Oh, it was of that elysian moment I was thinking, and his eyes wounded me so by their look of reproach ! "

How long she remained sitting there, lost in a reverie which was full of wavering shadow-pictures, in which the image of Thayer Volney was all that to her was distinct, she did not realize.

She started at length at some uncertain sound; and looking up beheld the object of her meditations.

He came silently forward out of the gloom and sat down beside her.

"Why are you sitting here all alone?" he asked in a voice which his latent passion rendered slightly unsteady.

She was silent. The dim-lit space before her for a moment seemed to be peopled with unreal shapes. She could not speak for the strange emotion which was stirring her being to its very depths and almost stifling her.

Thayer sat gazing at her with his dark, serious eyes so full of his soul's love that they would have startled her, had she trusted herself to look up. Her silence made him deliriously happy ;

and a flood of passionate words were upon his lips ready to burst forth. Should he utter them? Would she think him officious for approaching her thus early in their acquaintance, and hate him for his presumptuous advances? No; his intuition had divined that this was no cold, incredulous and prejudiced nature that he was about to appeal to, but one whose every fibre was aglow with generous, womanly sentiment. He would find in that heart some spontaneous and harmonic echo to the love which it had engendered, which was its own true offspring.

No sooner had the last thought shaped itself than he was upon his knees at her feet, and she heard his low voice saying, fervidly:

“Alice, I have experienced to-night the first jealous pang of my life! Oh, my love, I could not bear to see *his* arms about you! The sight maddened me! I might not have told you so soon in words how completely you have enshrined yourself in my heart, but this new germ which, guiltily, I feel invading the purity of my love has prompted me to cry out: I love you! I love you! Not with that fragile self-centered passion which men oftentimes confess; but with one which combines the interest and holiest emotion of the soul and the mind! I loved you ere I knew your name; I will love you to the end of my life! No other image can ever efface yours from my heart; it shall be an incentive to all the purest actions

and noblest purposes that the future may ever know of me !”

His voice ceased, and in the interval of silence which followed, she heard his breath come quickly and felt him shivering as with a chill.

He had possessed himself of one of her hands, which gently answered to the pressure of his own; but her lips refused to frame a single word in answer to his appeal, though her eyes—he could not see them—revealed the answer which her glad soul could not disguise.

At length he looked up.

“Be kind,” he whispered. “Say but one word ! I will understand, Alice.”

One word ! in what one word could she make him understand all that she saw in her heart ? In what one word could she combine the acknowledgment of her joy and the confession of her despair ?

Oh that so felicitous a moment should be darkened by the grief of knowing that it could not last ! Already she could hear its funeral note sounding through the silence.

A voice came faintly to them ; it was calling Mr. Volney for rehearsal. Then a shadow darkened the threshold of the folding doors, and Dorian Rossmore came toward the very corner where they sat. “Mr. Volney !—is this Mr. Volner ?” she asked half dubiously.

“Yes,” he answered. “Are you ready for me,

Mrs. Rossmore? I will be there immediately!"

He waited until the woman withdrew, then in a hurried whisper, he added to Alice:

"I can better bear your silence than a hopeless word, or a rebuke that would pain me yet more deeply. But if you would merely say that you believe my avowal as sincere, and that I need not wholly despair."

She lifted her eyes to his with a sad, wistful light in them, and said brokenly: "I believe in your words—implicitly. I—I believe in them religiously, and with all my heart and soul! but oh Mr. Volney, do not—do not hope for more than this!"

His only answer was to lift her hand to his lips and kiss it reverently, passionately. Then he went away.

When he was quite gone, she pressed her lips to the spot where his own had rested, murmuring as she did so:

"Oh, my love, my love! what grim decree of destiny is this? To know that you are mine and I am thine by what seems to be the holy covenant of God, and still to know that at the hand of Providence 'like two cleft rocks, our lives are sundered wide.' Oh, is it just, dear Heaven, that such things should be?"

She went up to her room with hot tears blinding her way; and there she knelt down in the alcove beside her bed, and prayed fervently for

wisdom to see the right and for strength to offer up the sacrifice of Thayer's love if, as it seemed to her now, so bitter an obligation lay between herself and duty.

Soon after she rose there came a little tap upon her door.

"It is only me—Valois. May I come in just for a moment?" said the voice of her friend.

"Certainly, come."

She was glad there was no light to reveal her tear-stained face, and she strove to make her voice sound calm.

"Where are you? Why are you in the dark? May I kneel by you?"

"Of course, darling," Alice answered.

"Allie," throwing her arms about the slender waist and hiding her face upon the heaving bosom of her friend, "I am very, *ve-ry* happy, dear! Guess what has happened."

"Lieutenant Carruthers has proposed to you?" suggested Alice, as she let her hand stray tenderly over the shorn rings of jet.

"No; guess again.

"He has declared his love?"

The shorn head nestled closer, and Valois heaved a delicious sigh.

"Yes," lisped the young girl, "but that is not all; he—he kissed me twice."

And so, as far

As the universe spreads its flaming wall,
Take all the pleasures of all the spheres
And multiply each through endless years,
One minute of heaven is worth them all.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CLAP-TRAP

The fountain in the odorous garden cast up its silver spray in the air, and kept a delicious coolness in the midst of the sultry noon. The handmaids almost invariably attended on Ione, who with her freedom of life preserved the most delicate modesty, sat at a little distance; by the feet of Glaucus lay the lyre on which he had been playing to Ione one of his Lesbian airs.

The scene—the group before Arbaces was stamped by that peculiar and refined ideality of poesy which we yet, not erroneously, imagine to be the distinction of the ancients.

The marble columns, the vases of flowers, the statue, white and tranquil, closing every vista; and above all the two loving forms from which a sculptor might have caught either inspiration or despair!

Arbaces pausing for a moment, gazed on the pair.

THE LAST DAYS OF POMPEII.

—*Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton.*

THE curtain rose upon the garden of “Shalimar.” Overhead stretched a canopy of starry blue, while an invisible light from behind the stage fell subtly over tropical plants, flowers and statues, swathing the scene in a tranquil radiance like that of a mid-summer night’s moon.

At a short distance from a miniature fountain, which had been ingeniously contrived to play forth a shining spray into the air, and whose basin was flanked with blossoming exotic plants, the Imperial Selim reclined; while about him moved his festive guests, fair maids and radiant

lovers ; or loitered, some of them, at the spread board of fruit and wine.

In the air floated soft dream-like strains of music—song whose magic measures were accompanied by the guitar ; but suddenly above these another voice was—

So divinely breathed around
That all stood hushed and wondering,
And turned and looked into the air,
As if they thought to see the wing
Of Israfel, the Angel there.

Suddenly a thrill of delight ran through the audience, as through the foliage glided the Sultana Nourmahal with her beautiful features only half veiled, and her glorious hair falling like a cloak of spun gold, about her Oriental costume.

As Selim and his guests gazed upon her, entranced, she rested her lute and to a subdued accompaniment her nightingale-like voice rose, first low and soft, then gradually trilling to its highest pitch of sweetness :

There's a bliss beyond all that the minstrel hath told,
When two that are linked in a heav'nly tie,
With heart never changing, and brow never cold,
Love on through all ills, and love on till they die !
One hour of a passion so sacred is worth
Whole ages of heartless and wandering bliss :
And oh ! if there be an Elysium on earth
It is this, it is this !

Never before in her life had Alice Meredith sung so well, and with such a depth of genuine feeling. When she ceased her listeners were wild in their applause of delight, while one among them felt as

the true Selim had, "too inly touched for utterance." Once while she sang, Alice had let her eyes wander to Thayer Volney, and there had been an expression in them which told him that her words were directed to himself alone.

Oh why could he not have rushed forward and fallen upon his knees before her then and there, and told her that he had understood? It was only by a supreme effort that he controled the mad impulse and calmed his joy to listen as again those enchanting tones rose above the hush:

Fly to the desert, fly with me,
 Our Arab tents are rude for thee;
 But, Oh! the choice what heart can doubt,
 Of tents with love, or thrones without?
 Our rocks are rough, but smiling there
 Th' acacia waves her yellow hair,
 Lonely and sweet, nor loved the less
 For flowering in the wilderness.
 Our sands are bare, but down their slope
 The silv'ry footed Antelope
 As gracefully and gaily springs
 As o'er the marble courts of kings.
 Then come—thy Arab maid will be
 The loved and lone acacia tree,
 The Antelope whose feet shall bless
 With their light sound thy loneliness.

These stanzas the singer had directed to the rapturously listening Emperor; but there was a slight change of position and another telegraphed glance toward Thayer as she pursued:

Oh! there are looks and tones that dart
 An instant sunshine through the heart,
 As if the soul that minute caught
 Some treasure it through life had sought;

As if the very lips and eyes,
 Predestin'd to have all our sighs
 And never be forgot again,
 Sparkled and spoke before us then!

So came thy every glance and tone
 When first on me they breathed and shone
 New, as if brought from other spheres,
 Yet welcomed as if loved for years.

To the Emperor, with the same sweetness of tone, yet with that breathing pathos absent from it which had marked the foregoing verses:

Then fly with me, if thou hast known
 No other flame, nor falsely thrown
 A gem away, that thou hadst sworn
 Should never in thy heart be worn.

But if for me thou dost forsake
 Some other maid, and rudely break
 Her worship'd image from its base
 To give to me the ruined place;

Then fare thee well, I'd rather make
 My bower upon some icy lake
 When thawing suns begin to shine,
 Than trust to love so false as thine!

And so at last:

The mask is off, the charm is wrought
 And Selim to his heart has caught
 His Nourmahal, his Harem's Light!

Alice suffered her head to fall upon his arm and whispered "Remember love, the Feast of Roses" and the curtain fell upon a tableau which Thomas Moore himself would not have criticised had he been present to witness it.

During the short interval which followed, Thayer kept his eye fixed upon the stage exit fondly hoping to see his "Sultana," as he now

termed her to his rapturous heart, come down among the audience to witness the remainder of the performance, but the curtain went up again, and after a brief overture from the band of stringed instruments concealed behind the stage, the programme continued, and he was forced to reconcile himself to the thought of not seeing Alice again perhaps before the dance commenced, which was arranged to follow the charades.

And then ! Oh, the ecstasy of that prospective moment, when in the waltz he would feel her heart beating against his own ! —

He was suddenly brought back to the present by the little flutter of polite applause that greeted Miss Gladys Dextrell as she made her appearance on the stage, and recited Schiller's beautiful poem, "The Veiled Statue at Sais," with such a display of true appreciation of her poet, as to call forth a unanimous *encore* in which even Leonie, the immaculate, being roused to a sense of admiration, joined heartily.

Next came Lieutenant Carruthers and Valois in the spinning scene from "The Courtship of Miles Standish."

"Truly, Priscilla," he said, "when I see you spinning and spinning, Never idle a moment, but thrifty and thoughtful of others, Suddenly you are transformed, are visibly changed in a moment, You are no longer Priscilla, but Bertha the beautiful spinner."

Here the light hand on the wheel grew swifter and the spindle uttered an angry snarl, and the thread snapped short in her fingers; while the impetuous speaker, not heeding the mischief, continued: "You are the beautiful Bertha, the spinner, the queen of Helvetia:

She whose story I read in a stall in the streets of Southampton,
Who, as she rode on her palfry o'er valley and meadow and moun-
tain,

Ever was spinning her thread from a distaff fixed to her saddle.
She was so thrifty and good that her name passed into a proverb.
So shall it be with your own, when the spinning wheel shall no
longer

Hum in the house of the farmer and fill its chambers with music.
Then shall the mother, reproving, relate how it was in their child-
hood,

Praising the good old times, and the days of Priscilla, the spinner."

Straight uprose from her wheel the beautiful Puritan maiden,
pleased with the praise of her thrift from him whose praise was
the sweetest, and drew from the reel on the table a snowy skein of
her spinning, making answer meanwhile to the flattering praises
of Alden:

"Come, you must not be idle; if I am a pattern of house-wives,
Show yourself equally worthy of being the model of husbands.
Hold this skein in your hands, while I wind it, ready for knitting;
Then who knows but hereafter, when fashions have changed and
the manners,

Fathers may talk to their sons of the good old days of John Alden."

Thus with jest and laugh, the skein on his hands was adjusted,
he sitting awkward there, with his arms extended before him;
she standing graceful, erect, and winding the thread from his
fingers, sometimes chiding a little his clumsy manner of holding;
sometimes touching his hands as she disentangled expertly twist
or knot in the yarn, unawares—for how could she help it?—send-
ing electric thrills through every nerve of his body.

Lo! in the midst of this scene, a breathless messenger entered,
bringing in hurry and heat the terrible news from the village. Yes,
Miles Standish was dead! Slain by a poisoned arrow, shot down
in the front of the battle.

Silent and statue-like stood Priscilla, her face looking backward
still at the face of the speaker, her arms uplifted in horror; but John
Alden, upstarting as if the barb of the arrow piercing the heart of
his friend had struck his own, and had sundered once and forever
the bonds that held him bound as a captive, wild with excess of
sensation, the awful delight of his freedom, clasped almost with
a groan the motionless form of Priscilla, pressing her close to his
heart as forever his own, and exclaiming:

"Those whom the Lord hath united, let no man put them asun-
der!"

Tableau! — pronounced by one unanimous
accord—*Full of Reality and Pathos!*

After this followed Mrs. Rossmore in her Spanish song.

The curtain rose upon that lady seated on a low ottoman at the base of the statue of Chloris. Fred Bentwell lay stretched recumbent upon the sward at her feet, his head supported on his bent arm, his gaze adoringly fixed upon the black-eyed siren's face as she sang her chosen words in that soft, seductive tongue and voice so ravishingly sweet

How fascinating, how beautiful was she ! The gracefully poised head with its jet locks braided and entwined with costly jewels ; the long, white, curved throat, the bare and shapely arms, the slender, tapering fingers all a-glitter with rubies and emeralds and sapphires ; and above all, those splendid Eastern orbs, in which there seemed to live to-night, above all other lights, that of a subtle ambition.

She was fascinating—dangerously so—to such men as Sir Philip Camden, and to poor, weak, susceptible beings like Fred Bentwell ; but her beautiful face and fawning suavity of manner had gradually come to be suspected among the judicious of that circle wherein she moved as being but a mask for her stratagem and artifice ; thus, when Mrs. Elwood cautiously whispered to her husband : “ She reminds me of a beautiful serpent,” the colonel was not at all reluctant in replying : “ Yes, very cunning, very artful, I assure you, my dear.”

“ I don't like her one bit ! ” openly declared the immaculate Leonie Dextrell to Lady Hortense's mother, as the singer, after responding to an enthusiastic recall, was shut off from view.

“ My dear young lady ! ” exclaimed that matron brusquely, “ you should not be so bold in expressing your likes and dislikes ; it is exceedingly vulgar manners,” she added, with an asperity which caused the offender to turn tear-brimmed eyes toward the curtain, which was about to rise on the most important feature of the entertainment.

“ A—h ! ” That murmur of delight was followed by a hush so intense that every one seemed suddenly to have left off breathing, as Galatea, veiled behind a gleaming white transparency, stood before them. Galatea, the statuesque, the peerless ; Galatea, whose features were immobile as the features of that Greek Goddess of Flowers, sitting apart.

Every undulating curve of her perfect form was defined under the clinging tunic which swept away to her feet, leaving but one faultless arm revealed. Her face, utterly void of color, shone exquisitely beautiful and clear as Cyprian marble, and not so much as a flutter of the long, dark lashes hinted that this was a form of life and not of stone—not until above the intense hush there was heard the sound of approaching footsteps ; when the lips were discerned to move slightly

apart, and the name "Pygmalion!" issued in tremulous accents from them.

There was a brief pause; then the young Athenian sculptor appeared, arrayed also in his classical tunic, and presenting such an exquisite picture that a thrill of ecstasy ran through the assembly, and the ladies forgot themselves and exclaimed aloud:

"Beautiful!" "Divine!" "Sublime!"

The music was playing a soft symphony from Mozart, and above this his voice was heard calling in a bewildered tone:

"Who called?"

"Pygmalion," again came that calm voice from the statue, when impetuously he turned, and, tearing the veil from before it, exclaimed:

"Ye gods! It lives! It speaks! I have my prayer; my Galatea breathes!"

"Where am I?" again spoke the dream-like voice. "Let me speak. Pygmalion, give me thy hand—both hands—how soft and warm! Whence came I?" (*Descends.*)

"Why, from yonder pedestal," said Pygmalion.

"That pedestal? Ah, yes; I recollect; there was a time when it was a part of me."

Tableau.—The twain standing with clasped hands gazing into each other's eyes.

The lights went down, the music swelled to a passionate storm of melody, and slowly the curtain was rung down as they stood, still looking

into each other's faces—her eyes full of her soul which, unconsciously, he was letting the magic of his own draw from her; he wondering at the strange expression of her face, and the stranger thrill which her trembling hands transmitted through his body, like a shock of electricity.

The tempestuous applause was almost totally unheeded by Lady Hortense; but when a voice from behind them said hurriedly:

“Keep perfectly still—do not change your positions, we will have to ring the curtain up again,” they both heard and obeyed the peremptory admonition.

“The Athenian Glaucus and Neapolitan Ione: hero-lovers of the Last Days of Pompeii!” (*bell, followed swiftly by curtain.*)

“What is this?” gasped Lady Camden, as the announcement rang out and echoed back to them.

Thayer, too astounded to answer, cast a swift glance about them.

What trick was this?

True as the scene has been described in ancient Pompeii life, they both saw it now depicted before them—the maids sitting apart, the lyre lying upon the ground near them, the vases of flowers, the statue, the spraying fountain, and, standing in the background, the wicked priest, Arbaces, his black robes floating about him, his arms folded, and every feature of his countenance convulsed with unholy triumph.

In this character, who looked, indeed, more fiend than human, Lady Camden recognized Sir Philip; and forgetful of all save the evil plot which he had surprised her in, she shrieked wildly as he advanced—shrieked wildly in hysterical laughter, then fell forward swooning in the arms of—Glaucus.

Grand Tableau, finale!

(Curtain and confusion.)

CHAPTER XIX

THE TALISMAN

Confusion worse confounded.

—Milton.

THE trap had been an ingeniously devised one on the part of Sir Philip Camden, and even as his innocent victim lay crushed and stunned beneath it, he secretly gloated over his skill and the tragic manner in which his *ruse* had terminated.

Lady Camden's swoon was of long duration; and when at length she returned to consciousness her strength was so far spent that she was compelled to retire to her apartments. None, however, aside from Sir Philip himself, divined the immediate cause of her illness; none surmised that in arranging the garden scene for the theatricals he had insidiously planned so that it would also resemble in detail a Pompeian peristyle, and there would only be required the speedy adjustment of the maids and Arbaces to make it perfect for the tableau of Glaucus and Ione.

"Sir Philip," said Mrs. Rossmore, when by chance the two met alone in the library the following morning, after breakfast, "do you think

it quite fair to have inveigled me into the blind *role* which I enacted last night ?"—she had simulated the part of a maid—"There was a *double entendre* to your ruse ; although you would guard it so zealously under the rose, I am certain that you willfully and maliciously meant to tyrannize over Lady Camden."

It was a bold, though skillfully aimed thrust, and for an instant Sir Philip stood plainly disconcerted by it ; the next, however, he had collected himself, when nonchalantly flicking a mote of dust from the satin lappel of his coat, he said, with well-feigned seriousness :

"I give you my word, Mrs. Rossmore—a—I simply created the surprise as an indulgence to my wife, who has always evinced a marked preference for the Greek characters of Glaucus and Ione above all others."

"But Arbaces. Was it necessary for Arbaces to appear ?" questioned Dorian, in her shrewdest of pretty tones.

"Oh, that," laughed Sir Philip, with a shrug, "was a necessary feature, certainly ! a feature of distinction between the two similar tableaux."

"But why did *you* assume the *role* ? Her emotion, it is generally supposed, was caused from sheer terror upon beholding you, as the wicked priest."

"It would have been the same had Bentwell, or Pometer, or any other taken the part," Sir

Philip assured her calmly. "Her excitement was due to her poor health—Lady Camden is not at all well. However, I had not anticipated that splendid little piece of acting on her part; nevertheless, I was charmed with it. Now confess, yourself, Mrs. Rossmore, that it was admirably done for an amateur."

She made a gesture of impatience.

"Have you, then, no regrets on account of her illness?" she asked, almost petulantly. "The doctor says she may not leave her apartments for several days, in which event your house-party must needs be brought to an abrupt conclusion."

Her fingers had been nervously toying with a half-blown rose, which rested carelessly amid the lace of her gown, and as she finished speaking she tore away the blossom and scattered its creamy petals broadcast over the carpet.

It was the action of a vexed child, and Sir Philip watched it with an amused smile, and with something of triumph in his narrow little eyes.

"Of course I am sorry, immeasurably sorry," he said, after his habitual pause.

"I little anticipated so unhappy an issue, and if I have been the blind medium of shortening your stay I deplore it unutterably! Believe me, Mrs. Rossmore, when, by my honor I swear that I would perpetuate your sojourn at Maplehurst were it within my power to do so!" He looked at her with his eyes full of an unrighteous fire as he

spoke, and she turned from them with apparent loathing; but not before he had noted the quick upheaval of her chest and the glittering light which leapt into the dark of her eyes, and which kindled them to a startling brilliancy.

She was moving toward the door, but Sir Philip pressed forward and intercepted her ere yet her hand was upon the knob.

“Mrs. Rossmore—Dorian, listen to me!” he said, and there was a passionate appeal in his voice which forced her to obey silently, and with her eyes bent upon the floor. She was very pale, and her bosom still heaved as with some strong inward emotion; she waited for him to go on.

“Your,” he commenced at length, “woman’s intuition must have led you to divine something of the true nature of the feelings existing between Lady Camden and myself. You will not be surprised to hear that we are by no means a felicitous pair?”

“I?” she suddenly left off regarding the interlaced leaves on the carpet, and let her creole eyes rest steadily upon his face, “—have I the slightest title to surmise anything in relation to your domestic affairs? Why do you make me your confessor?” she asked impatiently.

“Why? because I love you!”

A swift color traversed the paleness of her face.

“Oh, this is odious! You speak to me as if I were a *femme de chambre*!” she exclaimed angrily.

"No," he retorted, "I speak to you in all honor and sincerity. I love you, oh peerless amongst women! with my whole heart, and soul, and life, I love you!"

As the man spoke thus passionately, suddenly Dorian assumed a dramatic air:

"Well," said she, "if you love me, what then? Will you give out that the Lady Hortense is 'sick and like to die'? Will you inquire you out some 'mean born servant' to administer poison to her that you may marry me?"

Sir Philip made a passionate gesture of annoyance. The woman's varied moods maddened even while they charmed him.

"I am not the duke of Glo'ster," he replied, contemptuously. "I have not for once nourished so vile a thought as you would intimate. Ah Dorian, how unjust, how unkind, unworthy of you!" he added reproachfully.

Dorian bit her lip and dropped her eyes like one greatly embarrassed.

"No, no;" Sir Philip went on presently, and his voice was hardly more than a whisper now. "God forbid that I should lift a hand against my wife! She is dying surely enough without that; the burden of a disappointed, loveless life is killing her."

"Killing her?" unconsciously Dorian repeated the words, and looked up with that mysterious glitter in her eyes, which he had noticed before.

“Yes ; I give you my word it is true. Life is but a question of a few months at longest, with her. The doctor assured me only last night, that her heart was diseased, and the malady incurable. I know—oh Dorian, I know it is heinous of me to say so ; but it was your image that rose up as a barrier between my eyes and sleep after I had heard this ; it was your image that shut me out from all sense of regret, and bade me be glad that I would soon be free from the bond that has never been congenial to me. Do not abominate me for approaching you ere the title is mine to do so ; but let me place this ring upon your finger—it is all I ask—as a talisman of faith between us. If there come a time when I may see that you do not wear my gift, I shall interpret by its absence that you repel my love ; otherwise, until that day comes when I can bestow a more deserving title upon you, you shall reign the golden incentive of my hopes.”

Many flirtations and harmless love affairs could Dorian have found in her diary, but she had come out of them all unscathed—in her own eyes—and the thought of yielding to this illicit wooing was distasteful and humiliating to her Spanish pride.

Sir Philip saw her eyes fix themselves with quiet curiosity upon the circle of diamonds which he held up temptingly between his forefinger and thumb, and which was flashing all its varied and

brilliant lights under the reflection of a culprit sunbeam that glanced through the eastern window—he saw them fix themselves there, and watched their expression of curiosity swiftly change to one of admiration, then bewilderment. At last he noted a sudden spasmodic movement of the lace upon her bosom, as she shrank away from the dazzling glitter of gems, with a pallid face and eyes half closed with some new emotion which Sir Philip attributed to the revolt of accepting such a valuable gift from him.

The thought made him bolder. He possessed himself of one of her hands with a sudden action which she did not anticipate, and was adjusting the ring when they heard footsteps outside the door.

They separated quickly, she flying to one of the bookcases under pretense of examining the titles of its volumes, he coolly walking toward the window and looking out upon the mist-swathed river. Thus Alice Meredith found them as she opened the door and looked in as if in search of some one.

“Sir Philip,” said the young girl, “I wanted to say to you that I am compelled to take the 11:20 train to Boston, if I can possibly make the connection. I have just received news of the illness of my sister. Lady Camden is sleeping quietly under an opiate, and I cannot disturb her; but I have given Anine a note for her in

which I have made due explanations."

Sir Philip bowed.

"Have you heard if there are any others wanting to go by that train?" he asked.

"Yes, Mrs. Dextrell and her daughters are going; also the Elwoods and Lieutenant Caruthers."

"Well—a—if it is not too much trouble, give orders for the sleigh to be made ready at once, will you?"

Alice bowed and withdrew hurriedly, and after a few whispered words to Dorian, Sir Philip also left the library to take leave of his departing guests.

Left alone, Mrs. Rossmore plunged into an excited soliloquy which was couched in exclamatory phrases chiefly, and in the tongue of France, and during which she kept her eyes riveted upon the ring which Sir Philip had placed upon her finger, among whose twelve large stones there sparkled a single emerald of marvelous clearness and brilliancy of color.

"*Ceil!* one emerald and eleven diamonds! What a coincidence!" She ended with a strange laugh, and as she swept from the library a few moments later, she murmured the words in an ominous undertone: "Verily, then, Sir Philip Camden, *the ring shall be a talisman between ourselves.*"

Once in the hall, she turned and cast a fright-

ened glance over her shoulder, as if she half-expected to see some grim apparition following her, and the voice of Fred Bentwell greeting her abruptly, made her cry out involuntarily.

“Where have you been, Dorian?” he asked, “I have been searching everywhere for you. Everyone is leaving Maplehurst this morning, don’t you know?”

“Are you?” asked Dorian, recovering herself.

“Are you?” he asked evasively.

“No, I am going by the one-twenty.”

“I am, too. What a pretty ring! I never saw you wear it before—Dorian! *Why* do you treat me so?” this in a grieved tone as she snatched away the hand which he had made an attempt at taking, and ran softly up the stairs, not even deigning a glance back to where he stood looking after her with great wounded, almost tearful eyes.

CHAPTER XX

BLANCHE

Bright eyed Fancy hovering o'er,
Scatters from her pictured urn
Thoughts that breathe and words that burn.

—Gray.

THE letter received from her mother by Alice that morning had been brief, merely stating that Blanche was "not well" and suggesting that, though they apprehended nothing serious, she run home for a few days' visit to gratify the child who was constantly lamenting her absence.

Despite these words of reassurance, however, Alice was ill at ease and trembled with strange misgivings when at length she paused before the many gabled stone house which her heart still rejoiced in calling "home."

For an instant she hesitated outside the door to listen anxiously. A silence intense as the grave seemed to reign within. With a faltering hand she turned the silver knob and passed noiselessly into the gloom of the great hall, where she was greeted by her youngest sister, who had been on the look-out for her all the forenoon, and who burst from the library crying, "Oh Allie!

Blanche will be so glad you are come! She has been asking for you constantly to-day."

"Tell me, Olive, darling, how long has she been ailing? Is she very ill?" Alice questioned eagerly as she bent to kiss the ready lips.

"She has been sick since Tuesday, but the doctor thinks he can save her from having the fever *very* badly, if she is good and doesn't fret over her writing."

"Writing!" repeated Alice in a puzzled tone.

"Yes, she begs for her pencil and tablet, and the doctor told mamma not to let her have them. He says writing 'll make her head worse," answered the child still vaguely.

"I suppose she has been worrying too much over her school exercises," thought Miss Meredith, as she suddenly remembered Blanche's habit of pursuing her studies even through vacation weeks.

A few moments later upon entering the invalid's room she found her sister sitting up in a deep easy chair, her cheeks glowing as with inward fire, and her blue eyes looking far larger and brighter than was natural, as they fixed themselves joyously upon her.

After a lingering caress, (Blanche's arms threatened to cling forever around her neck) Alice drew a chair very close and taking one of the short quick-pulsing hands in hers she listened as Blanche spoke of the mysterious

“writing,” which she said had been her treasured secret since the day after their father’s failure. “I,” said Blanche, “commenced my story on the day that you and mamma left for Ivendene, last October. I was not certain that my first literary effort would prove a success, so I worked clandestinely until it was completed, when I took mamma into my confidence, with the understanding that she was not to hint a word to you or papa about the matter. I gave her the manuscript to examine, and the composition at once charmed and amazed her. Her words of praise made me sanguine of success, and without delay I took my story to one of our most popular editors. Unlike most journalists, he did not keep me indefinitely on the anxious seat, but at once read and rendered his opinion of it. While he was not effusive over its merits, he was not sparing in expressions of encouragement. He bade me study assiduously, gave me a list of valuable books to read, and told me at which libraries I would be certain to find them. He also explained to me the simplest and most perfect method of arranging my manuscripts and ——”

“What is it darling?” asked Alice as the speaker paused abruptly and passed her hand to her temple.

“Oh, it was only one of those shooting pains ; I have been taking quinine ; I suppose that is what causes them,” said the young girl deprecatingly,

but her voice was not quite so steady as before as she continued :

“And—what was I saying? oh, yes! and he was so good and kind and generous. What do you think he paid me for my story?”

“Ten dollars?” suggested her sister after a moment’s reflection.

“No, twelve. Wasn’t that generous of him?”

“Oh, so generous! and now my pet, you must not talk any more, it is not well for you,” said Alice gently, as she felt the little hand in hers grow hotter and its pulse quicker.

“Oh since you are come I am better, *much* better! and I have so much to say to you,” Blanche went on, heedless of that anxious admonition. “I want to tell you how I came home that evening. It was last Monday that I took the manuscript, and sat right down and studied out a plot for my next story. Oh, it will be intricate; full of passion and pathos and originality, it will compose several chapters, perhaps will lengthen into a real novel—oh, dear!”

“Blanche, Blanche, you *must* be more calm. You are making yourself worse.”

But the expression of intense pain was gone, and after that brief vacant look in the eyes, which Alice noticed had followed the previous paroxysm, the invalid continued :

“Ma says she will convert the room adjoining

the blue *suite* into a little study for me, where all the live-long day I can write, shut away from every soul and with only my books for companions."

Suddenly she paused and looked at her sister with glistening eyes.

"You are so calm, so cold, so incredulous!" she cried. "You think me raving. I know you do; but I am not! Ah no; *mine* is a perfectly rational happiness; such joy as mine ambition finds. Wait! after a few years of earnest, pains-taking labor, you will be ready enough to believe in my talent. I *have* talent, Mr. L—, the editor, says so, ma says so, pa says so; all say so, but you."

"Oh, you dear, foolish little thing! I am all that a sister could possibly be in my sentiments of love and pride and credulity. Don't you remember how I used to praise your little child essays? how I used to call you a true little idealist when you would bring me your pretty flower fables to read?" said Alice as she put back the long tangled curls from the now tearful face of her sister.

"But I—I thought you would be a—all enthusiasm over my first real story," sobbed Blanche, burying her face among the cushions of her chair and giving herself up to a violent fit of weeping.

In very despair, after she had spent moments

in vainly trying to soothe her, Alice summoned her mother.

Nothing, however, did Mrs. Meredith's presence avail. She entered the room just at the instant when her daughter sank from the hysterical paroxysm into a swoon so white and still, that "death itself seemed there;" and ere night she had passed into the most malignant form of brain fever.

"Oh, why did I not speak out all my heart's praise of her?" sobbed Alice, in frantic self-reproach, as she knelt beside the raving girl.

"In my anxiety lest any undue enthusiasm would have but added to her excitement, I suppressed my feelings, and my seeming coldness has brought about this dread issue!"

"No," said her mother, "it was to be so. It is what has been threatening from the first. The doctor has been guarding against it and we have hoped, by diverting her mind from those involving dream fancies, to subdue the brooding fever; but all my inventions proved useless. I would read to her, but no author, however clever, could detract her thoughts from those ideal labyrinths. She would always sit with her eyes fixed on vacancy, as if they were striving to pierce some uncertain vista of thought, and with her lips moving rapidly, though inaudibly. When I would not give her her pencil and tablet, she became vexed and cried for you. She was certain

that Allie would be kinder. She wanted you ; she craved for you with almost every breath, and when you came, the tension of her nerves gave way, leaving the fever to triumph."

"But if I had never gone away—if I had been here from the first, she would have been spared all that torture of longing and fretting for me. Oh, I have been cruel ! I have been selfishly heedless of all save my own pleasures !" sobbed Alice, miserably.

"Do not say that, dear child," gently remonstrated her mother. "You are unjust to yourself."

But Alice would not be comforted. She knelt there motionless—her trembling hands clasped together, her eyes full of infinite sadness, fixed upon the sufferer, and her senses paralyzed to all, save the inarticulate babble of those dry, parched lips. So the dreary hours dragged on, she now and then rising to lave anew the patient's hot forehead, only to resume her crouching posture at the bedside. Toward midnight the temperature of the weather changed, and from the eaves without, melting snow kept up a steady "drip-a-drip-a-drip," which was the only sound to be heard during the brief intervals of silence when Blanche's lips were still. Thus, when an avalanche, becoming loosened from the roof, fell with a dull, heavy thud to the ground below the window of the sick-room, Alice started suddenly

from her apathy with a terror-stricken face ; it had sounded so like the fall of earth into a new-made grave—ah, so cruelly like !—and what were those doleful, soul-stirring words which she seemed to hear now breathed through the stillness, as if born from a sepulcher ? They are old—they are the world's first story ; they have been sounded through infinite ages ; they are ringing to-day ; to-morrow will be ringing, and so on unto the end of time, as far as the “universe spreads its flaming walls.”

Earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes.

The words seemed to come now as a precursor of doom, and she shrank from them with an agonized cry.

CHAPTER XXI

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY

Tremble, thou wretch,
That hast within thee undivulged crimes
Unwhipped of justice.

—*Shakespeare.*

IT was Thursday night.

Sir Philip Camden seemed ill at ease as he glanced at the dial of the clock whose hour-hand indicated a quarter of ten.

Fifteen minutes more and he would stand face to face with M. Alphonse Favraud, his would-be assizor—the object of his life's fiercest hatred. Fifteen minutes more, and the “dead past” would be resurrected through the medium of one whose “soul he fain would sear with his brimstone curses ;” whose body he ought to have seen wrapped in its grave-shroud ere he had turned his face from Europe, seven years ago.

What page in his mysterious past record could have been so black that he shuddered and grew pale, stoical man though he was, at the thought of turning back to it, after so long ? What crime so foul impregnated his life that he grew dizzy and almost reeled, as it rose up now, in ghastly hideousness, to menace him ?

The December night was one of intensest fury. What with the steady souging of the winds, the clashing of the naked birch trees beneath them, the black sheets of rain, accompanied by lurid darts of lightning and now and then earthquaking peals of thunder, made mightier by the deep reverberations which they woke along the risen waters of the Merrimac, all the demons of inferno seemed to have been let loose in the elements.

But within the library at Maplehurst, in which apartment Sir Philip awaited the coming of his guest, all was at delightful variance with the outer tempests. A huge pine-log roared and crackled in the deep open fireplace, its red radiance putting to shame the pale light which streamed from the many-jetted chandelier, and throwing into bold relief each object of the room, from the statues of the poets to the tiers of books reaching almost to the ceiling. Near the center of the room stood a small India table, upon which were temptingly set out several decanters and glasses, and a case of choice cigars.

Here reigned the spirit of luxury in all his supremacy, and as the master of Maplehurst paced to and fro, with the restlessness of a caged beast, he occasionally lifted his eyes from the floor to take a careful survey of the apartment, at which moments his face would change its scowling look to an expression of triumph, in which was mingled a sneering defiance ; while he would move

as if suddenly inspired with new ease and self-reliance. Thus with the shadow of the Avenger and the more palpable form of Satan alternately there as his companions, minute succeeded minute until at last ten slow and muffled strokes resounded through the stillness.

Almost as the last one died, footsteps were heard coming along the tiled floor outside the library. At the sound Sir Philip hastily seated himself near the reading table, in a well-assumed attitude, as if being engrossed with the journals which were scattered about him.

The footsteps ceased, and there came the servant's conventional rap upon the door. There was nothing of their recent hatred in Sir Philip's eyes as, at the announcement of, "Monsieur, the Frenchman," he glanced up quietly as though "monsieur" had been an utter stranger.

He made a gesture for his guest to enter, without rising, or making any change whatever in his position—not even did he lay aside the paper which he held—and with a nod dismissed the servant.

As Monsieur Favraud stepped inside the room, his eyes, having been long accustomed to the darkness without, blinked as they came in contact with the strong fire-light; but there was nothing of embarrassment in his mien when he encountered all the Oriental splendor about him and Sir Philip sitting there, looking a veritable

Sultan in his robes of purple and gold (he wore his dressing gown) and with his fat feet incased in embroidered slippers and resting luxuriously upon an ottoman of gold-embossed velvet. His withered, half-starved looking face even wore an amused smile as, without a word, he advanced toward the chair indicated by his host and seated himself, crossing his legs as if in sly mimicry of Sir Philip's own attitude.

Monsieur Favraud was a man of perhaps forty years of age, and might once have been of prepossessing presence, but his face was now prematurely worn and stamped with the traces of dissipation ; his crisp black hair was streaked with grey, and clung in unkempt bits about his ears and collarless neck ; his eyes were black, and keen and bright as those of a fox ; and they floated perpetually about in their orbits with an expression half cynical, half cunning.

After they had leisurely taken in each separate piece of furniture and bric-a-brac, had carefully studied the texture of the carpet, had winked and blinked at the well-bound volumes, had squinted at the busts of Shakespeare and of Milton and of Schiller, they leveled themselves upon the countenance of Sir Philip Camden.

For full sixty seconds the two men sat staring at each other in strained silence, when each broke out simultaneously with the one word :

“ Well ? ”

Pause ; during which the Frenchman watched the face of his *vis-a-vis* grow dark as a thunderbolt under his cool, penetrating gaze—a gaze in which there was not merely coolness and penetration, but amusement, triumph and defiance as well.

At length Sir Philip spoke :

“I had scarcely expected you to keep your appointment on such a night as this, *mon ami*. By Jove ! you must have traveled through water enough to swim a ship.”

His attempt at pleasantry was accompanied by a swift glance from the dripping hair to the soaked boots of his guest ; and while he feigned indifference at sight of the muddy little stream of water which was trickling from his clothes and forming an ugly dark spot upon the crimson velvet carpet, Monsieur Favraud did not fail to see the sneer which lurked about the scarred lip under his moustache, and which belied his calm.

“Ha !” laughed the Frenchman, as he, too, glanced down upon the stain, “upon my word it is too bad that you were compelled to receive me in this sad plight, my liege. Thunder, lightning and rain did somewhat mar the pleasure of my ride,—and my fine clothes. But I am still as rugged as when last you knew me ; rugged, in fact, as the proverbial Russian bear, ha, ha ! and I would have dared to ride those seven miles through fire and brimstone, rather than have sac-

rificed this meeting. Ahem !” rising and stretching himself, “but this is what I call real luxury ! By your permission, milord, I will sit nearer the fire to dry my clothes, and (if you don’t mind waiting on me) I would not refuse one of your cheering draughts—I have not forgotten how *well* you can mix a draught—*how excellently well !*”

Sir Philip inly writhed ; but his actions being almost invariably in opposition to his thoughts, he rose and studiously arranged a chair upon the huge bear-skin in front of the fire ; then with his usual deliberation, after Favraud was seated therein, he set to work to concoct the drink, the water for which he heated upon a small alcohol lamp which sat close at hand.

Monsieur Favraud sat watching his every movement through half-shut eyelids, and when the stimulant was ready, Sir Philip moved the India stand up to the hearth, and, seating himself opposite his guest, they both sipped for a moment in silence, after which space of time, Favraud observed, nonchalantly :

“ You were surprised to learn of my being in America, doubtless, eh, Sir Philip ? ”

“ Surprised ? Well—a—yes ; but not disagreeably so. I was gratified to know—I was—”

“ Tickled to think I had escaped the noose as well as yourself, eh ? ”

“ *Chut !* not so loud—yes.”

“ Ha ! tongue as smooth as ever, old chap ! I

do not believe you; *pardon, monsieur*, I know your sly tricks and ways! I have not forgotten how you duped me once by your devilish suavity. I have not forgotten poor Julie—”

“Hush! not so loud, for God’s sake! my name and reputation are well established in America. Do not rummage among rotten leaves!”

“If I were more beast and less human I would scratch among them until I had unburied that moldy carcass which you have hidden from the world, and perdition catch my soul, if I wouldn’t prove you the hound you used *me*, and carry the rot with your name on it to the Lord High Executioner of France! Ha! you would have triumphed over my broken neck; but I cheated you. Circumstantial evidence is by no means a sure-footed ground for the law to stand on!”

With this, M. Favraud coolly selected and lit a cigar, at which he puffed away in keen enjoyment for a moment; then shifting the weed to the corner of his mouth, he went on:

“The Paris detectives are assiduous, persevering, indomitable; do not make too certain of your safety, Philip—*pardon! Sir Philip*. The world is small, remember, and it is difficult to find a secure hiding place in it.”

Again Sir Philip writhed inly, and again checked the hot curses which rose to his lips.

“But,” said he, leaning over the table, and lowering his voice to a whisper, “by what

possible chance could they be led to suspect, let alone prove *me*, unless you yourself would proclaim the *denouement* ? ”

“ I did not dupe the law without a purpose,” said M. Favraud, “ I was not insane for weeks after my imprisonment ; I had not forgotten the past completely as if it had never existed when my reason returned, all for nothing, *mon ami* ! I would have profited nothing from justice had I chosen to criminate you ; but by cheating them of an evidence which would have put them on your track I promised myself (in your name) a handsome compensation.”

“ At what price do you estimate your services ? ”

“ Fifty thousand dollars down will do to commence with, and a signed contract, which I have written out and which secures me a yearly allowance of money ; also a passport into the world that acknowledges you as *Sir Philip Camden*.”

Sir Philip sat briefly regarding his guest without responding. Then he said : “ Oh, very well ! A—Let me read the paper.”

Monsieur Favraud, after some difficulty, produced the document, and after looking it over and finding fault with the bad ink in which the clauses were written, his host signed them, and also affixed his signature to a check on his banker for fifty thousand dollars.

These he folded and enclosed, then said, as he handed the packet to his triumphant companion :

"You had better see a tailor the first thing to-morrow, permit me to suggest."

"Thanks, I shall," said Monsieur, with ludicrous humility, "and now will you tell me," he asked when the leathern pocket-book with its precious contents was safely tucked away in his inside pocket, "will you tell me, if aside from this magnificent country retreat, you support also a *maison de ville*?"

"No;" said Sir Philip, "we will occupy winter apartments at an hotel."

"I hear your wife is beautiful," observed Monsieur Favraud, but Sir Philip pretended not to have heard the allusion to Lady Hortense.

"Let me replenish your glass," said he, lifting, as he spoke, the steaming and spicy beverage from the alcohol flame over which he had been holding it. "Drink to ——"

"To the health of Maurice Dubois!" intercepted the Frenchman. "That being," he added, "the cognomen under which I desire to be recognized in my new life."

So, accordingly, the toast was pledged, and Sir Philip could scarce conceal his evil triumph as he watched the last drop disappear from the Frenchman's glass.

"You will not attempt to ride back to L—— to-night," he observed, as a few minutes later M. Favraud took up his hat, and began straighten-

ing its damp and shapeless brim, as if preparing for departure.

“Certainly I shall,” replied the Frenchman, sleepily, “Thunder and lightning, and rain, could not prevent me. I [yawn], I am a bird of all weathers, and am as [yawn], as rugged as a Russian bear. Those papers! did I put them—yes, they are safe in my pocket-book. I say Philip [yawn], how many glasses of punch have I taken?”

“I am afraid quite enough to make you tipsy,” answered mine host, laughing silently.

“Not by a jug-full am I tipsy. I believe you have drugged me again, you consummate villain!”

He rose and attempted to walk across the floor, but tottered and reeled against the table, almost overturning it.

Sir Philip made an angry exclamation as the glasses clashed together noisily. He feared the disturbance would bring one of the servants to the library, and the thought made him turn blue in the face, for it was the one thing he did not want to happen.

He waited a moment until all was silent again; then he assisted the man back to his chair.

“You had better come with me upstairs, Favraud, and go to bed,” he said, as he did so. “The storm still continues, and you are in no condition to ride seven miles alone, and with those papers

in your pocket ; come, be reasonable ! You can slip down the back stairs in the morning as early as suits you, and go quietly away from Maplehurst."

"But my horse, my horse ?" hiccoughed the Frenchman uneasily.

"I will take care that nothing troubles your horse. He shall be waiting for you."

"Oh, you—you—hic—*curse you !* I know your tricks and—hic—" the sentence was not finished. Monsieur Favraud had collapsed into a deadly stupor. Sir Philip stood over his victim possessed with a horrible feeling, which made him want to shout in his awful exultation. But no sound escaped him.

He stooped over the half-famished body of the Frenchman, and, taking it up in his strong arms, he passed with it from the room, and thence through a small corridor leading to the back stairs. Up these he toiled with his lifeless burden ; and in less than fifteen minutes he returned to the library with his villainous night's work completed. Monsieur Alphonse Favraud was a prisoner in the towers of Maplehurst.

CHAPTER XXII

A SUBTERFUGE

I had a dream which was not all a dream.

—Byron's "DARKNESS."

HOW to defend himself against his secret threatening foe, had been the all engrossing subject of Sir Philip Camden's thoughts since the night of the ball, when Monsieur Favraud had made known to him his ominous presence, and now with the successful issue of his scheming, he felt himself once more an enfranchised son of Fortune, and as he returned to the library he drew the first breath of freedom that he had known for a week.

As he sat silently gloating over the splendid success of his plot to get rid of the Frenchman, he congratulated the fates for relieving him of his *valet* by confining him to his room with quinsy ; for he had trusted Tate as far as he desired, in admitting to him that he had been watched, and in employing him as an ambassador as far as the line of discretion. From this to the end of the chapter he would rule sole master of his secret. There yet, however, remained one obstacle to overthrow in order to secure himself.

Bartholemew, the footman, who had announced his late visitor, was doubtless at that very moment awaiting in the servant's hall to be summoned to see him forth. It was expedient for Barth to be at once dismissed from service at Maplehurst.

Sir Philip arose and rang the bell. Then he went to his secretary and counted out some money in greenbacks.

While thus engaged the footman entered the library and stood waiting to be addressed.

"I rang for you ten minutes ago. Why did you not answer my summons at once?" Sir Philip demanded at length, as he lifted his scowling visage from the roll of bills and glared at the man.

"I did not hear the bell, your honor," answered the footman, paling beneath the look.

"Why didn't you hear it?"

"Guess I must ha' been asleep, y'r honor."

"Asleep, eh? For how long were you asleep?"

"I guess nigh on to an hour, y'r honor."

"Slothful puppet! Dolt! Well, my guest is gone. I have humiliated myself by performing the office of footman. You can leave Maplehurst as early as suits you to-morrow. I am done with your services. Here is your month's pay; take it and get out of my sight!"

The servant took the money and went away crest-fallen, and soon after Sir Philip, having

concluded his *role* for this night, betook him toward his own bed-chamber.

He was passing by Lady Hortense's apartments when the thought suddenly seized him :

“She or Anine may have been spying upon my movements. I will just look in to convince myself whether they are asleep.”

Stealthily he lifted the heavy silken *portieres* which divided the ante-chamber from the bedroom, and noiselessly crossed the threshold.

A dim light revealed the lilac draped bed with its sleeping occupant, lying with one white bare arm enthroned above her head and her beautiful face a trifle flushed as if with exciting dreams. Her hair, unconfined, escaped from the pillow and fell to the carpet in waves of luxuriant beauty ; while now and then her bosom rose and fell quickly, as if shaken by some strong under-current of emotion. As Sir Philip moved toward the bed cautiously, she stirred slightly and uttered a little half-gasping cry, similar to that made by a drowning person ; then as she settled back into her former position he saw her lips move and heard these words escape them :

“Blood-dyed waters murmuring far below.”

Again she moved, and now there was a perceptible fluttering of the eyelids. Fearful lest she were awakening and would become needlessly alarmed at his presence, (he hated scenes) he stepped backward into the shadow of

the alcove draperies and as he did so his foot came suddenly in contact with Anine's pallet, which since Lady Hortense's illness the girl had been wont to bring in and arrange within convenient call of her mistress.

"Milady!" cried the ever wakeful girl, starting breathlessly into a sitting posture as Sir Philip's foot touched her. "Milady—Monsieur, what is it? has anything happened to my mistress?"

The dark face bent over her; she could feel the hot offensive breath upon her face.

"Shut up!" Sir Philip whispered fiercely. "Nothing has happened. I just stepped in to see if your mistress slept well. You will waken her by your infernal gabble!"

He let his hand fall heavily upon her shoulder as he finished speaking, and thrust her back upon the pillows, where the poor girl lay tremulously watching him as he carefully withdrew from the room.

"Strange man!" she muttered to herself as she heard the ante-chamber door close behind him. "Why came he to my lady's chamber at this hour? He is a strange, strange man, and I like him not. Of late I have come to look upon him with instinctive fear and suspicion."

At this moment there came a terrified shriek from her mistress' bed.

"Merciful Heaven! Save me!" she screamed. With the agility of a fawn, Anine sprang up-

right, and the next moment was beside Lady Hortense.

“Milady, Milady,” she said gently, and at the sound of her voice Lady Hortense ceased her convulsive breathing, opened her eyes and sprang into a sitting posture.

For a moment she sat staring before her with dilated eyes, and with one hand clutched tightly over her heart, whose pulsation came so loudly that Anine heard every throe plainly.

“Milady, you have been dreaming some unpleasant dream,” said the girl as she bent over her reassuringly.

“Dreaming?—then it—it was not reality?—You are here Anine?”

Lady Hortense let her hand stray tremulously up and down the white-clad form as she spoke; and then as she convinced herself that it was not a wraith of her dream, she sank back upon the pillows and covered her face with both hands, shuddering violently.

“Oh! it was all so horrible—so *horrible!*” she gasped, and all through the remaining hours of the night she lay unable to close her eyes again in slumber, for fear it would return—that dream “which was not all a dream.”

The next morning, as she sat alone over a late breakfast, Sir Philip sent word that as soon as convenient he wished to confer with her on a matter

of moment, and would be awaiting her in the library.

"I have taken apartments in town for the winter," he said, when a few moments later she stood before him. "Have Anine pack your trunks immediately, as I want to have you conveyed to L—— in time for the 3:20 train this afternoon."

Lady Hortense, though taken aback by this sudden announcement, only said: "I thought we were not to leave Maplehurst before the holidays. However, I shall be ready."

He scanned narrowly the face towering above him, like a proud and flawless lily, the face which each day was growing more white and *spirituelle* in its loveliness, and after a moment she turned from the surveillance, thinking he had nothing more to say. But she had proceeded only a few steps toward the door, when he arrested her with that peculiar guttural sound which she had come to despise: "A—Mrs. Rossmore commences her series of 'at-homes' to-night. We will go."

At these peremptory words she turned and again faced him; and he smiled to himself as he noted the scornful curl of her lips.

"Go, you, Sir Philip, by all means," said she. Then she added resolutely, and with an arrogant backward movement of the head, "I shall not attend Mrs. Rossmore's 'at homes.' I shall not go into society at all this winter."

He shrugged his shoulders.

“Oh! that as you please, Lady Camden; however, I should advise you to reflect well before making yourself such a recluse; it would only make your misery ten times the harder to bear, and would by no means be a safeguard against *esclandre*. It is already being whispered about in our circle that your modern Glaucus will marry your *protégée*, Miss Meredith. You will make the world say that you are dying of jealousy.”

She closed her hands with a quick spasm of pain, then swiftly recovering herself, replied: “All the world may say so; but God will know the truth. He will know it is not so! He will not suffer such false accusations to prosper against the innocent!”

As she spoke she regarded him fixedly with eyes of fiery resentment. So intensely at that moment did he hate her beautiful, proud, yet scoffing image that it was only by a great effort he repressed the impulse to curse her aloud, as he had often cursed her in the secret vileness of himself.

“Heaven knows, my dear,” he said, when his angry paroxysm had passed, and now his voice was smothered in derisive laughter, “that there are a great many wrong and unjust things said in this world. How many *innocent* ones like yourself are daily branded with foulest calumny! Now, if you had only allowed yourself to love me, as I

deserve to be loved, what a safeguard you would have found the bonds of wedlock !”

At his words there rose within her a cry of bitter anguish ; a cry which she could not put in words, but which throbbed in every fibre of her being like the voice of Death.

She felt that her nerves were being strained to their utmost tension, and that to stay in his presence for another moment would be insufferable ; so with a face as white and fixed as stone she turned and left him.

In the hall she found Anine awaiting her with a letter from Alice Meredith, and not having heard from her friend since she had left Maplehurst, she eagerly opened and read the hastily penned lines :

“I write you, my dearest friend, during a brief interval snatched from the bedside of our darling Blanche, who has not spoken an intelligent word since she was stricken down with the fever, last Friday night. She is dangerously ill, but God will not let our loved one die. I do not believe He will! This time of weary watching and suspense is replete with prayer. Do you think He would turn a heedless ear to such petitions as ours? They are full of tears and heart-throes and self-sacrifices!

Do not think me wanting in love and gratitude that I left you as I did, when you were unconscious of my going. I have not heard a word from you since I left Maplehurst, and I am filled with anxiety lest you are yet ill. Will you send some one to me with a message? It would relieve this pain of uncertainty and make me stronger to endure another night's vigil beside my sister.

Dear ma is worn out with the suspense of long days and nights. Mrs. Elwood and Valois were with us all of yesterday and last night.

They are the very noblest of friends! Valois is invaluable as a nurse, and is now with Blanche trying to hush

her strange ravings with a softly tuned hymn—her voice comes to me faintly as I write—and as I listen I suddenly miss that other wailing and delirious cry. For the first time in seven days and nights Blanche is quiet! Oh, thank God! If for but one moment her ravings are subdued she must be better! In spite of all I have dropped a tear on my miserable little letter; but I know, dearest Hortense, you will overlook this and send an early reply to

Your troubled friend,

ALICE MEREDITH."

As she replaced the letter in its envelope there were tears in Lady Hortense's eyes :

"I will do better than send a message. I will attend you in your vigils to-night, my noble, sweet friend," she said to herself, as she went slowly up the stairs—ah! how slowly, pausing ever and again to recover her breath.

As she bent with Anine over her trunks, intent with preparations for their early departure, the latter heard her singing tremulously to herself, while tears fell in and wet the folded finery which had come to be, like the balls and operas and feasts by which her existence was measured off, "only dross, only dross!" and while the girl understood not the words of her song, the sad sentiment thereof she felt instinctively, and ere she could check them her own tears were falling fast.

"*Mon Dieu!*" thought the sympathetic French girl as she had thought many times of late to herself, "what has come over my dear mistress to make her so changed from the Lady Hortense who brought me from my home in the Pyrenees not a year ago?"

CHAPTER XXIII

IN THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.

—*Sterne.*

ALL day a fine drizzling mist had fallen, and at five o'clock, just as Lady Hortense and her maid reached their apartments in the heart of Boston, it commenced raining in torrents.

Sir Philip had not accompanied them to the city. He had stayed behind to see to the closing up of Maplehurst, and to impress the one servant, a negro man who was to remain to guard the premises, with his duties.

Ephriam was to sleep in the stable loft ; and right zealously did Sir Philip guard against any possible access to the interior walls of Maplehurst and the egress of his prisoner, Monsieur Alphonse Favraud, from the tower thereof.

Every window was closely shut and barred ; every door double-locked and bolted, and all the keys safely deposited in his own pockets. So, with his evil soul entirely at ease, Sir Philip now found himself rolling over the storm-rent highway toward the railroad station. He reached their town quarters at seven o'clock, and found

the rooms in profound quiet and darkness.

As he stood conjecturing, curiously rather than with any feeling of anxiety, upon Lady Hortense's unexplained absence from the nest which would have made hundreds of hearts sick with envy, she was closeted with Alice Meredith, crying with her, praying with her, condoling with her; for the crisis had come, and poor tired Blanche was lying in the adjoining room, her face void of all expression save that restful one which the Archangel bestows in saying, "Peace be still!" her breath, if coming at all, coming undiscerned, and her little transparent hands crossed over her breast in the stillness of marble.

Over her bent an anxious, white-faced mother, who gave to every breath she drew, a tear; who gave with every tear a whispered word to Him upon whose infinite mercy the fate of her darling hung; whose hearing ear and seeing eye alone divined whether this was "a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep," in Life or Death. Almost without a sound, save that doleful and monotonous one which the clock gave out, the leaden hours passed until it was night no longer.

It was that hour when all breathing nature is at its lowest tide; when prayers had ceased and tears had dried themselves in very exhaustion; when sobs and heart-throes had given place to a silence that scarcely pulsed, and when suspense

with its drooping pinions, one of hope, one of despair, seemed gradually to be sinking into lifelessness. Mrs. Meredith had not once changed her position at the bedside of her darling. The eyes which were riveted upon that still and peaceful face had grown so wild and hunted in their expression that to have glanced at her a stranger would have thought her intellect distorted. Over the bed leaned another form—that of good old Doctor Congrave, who had ministered to the Merediths through three generations.

He held to the lips of the sleeper a piece of silvered glass; and his palsied hand shook violently as he bent his grey head nearer and nearer to the pillow upon which rested the tangled golden head of his heart's dear "foster-child"—as he called the three lovely grandchildren of Marion, his once sweetheart, who was lying beneath her mossy marble slab at Charlestown—and the time seemed age-long in which he stooped there, his withered features quivering with latent emotion, his breath hushed and anxiety dimming his kindly eyes, ready at any moment to dissolve into tears of happiness or grief.

Mrs. Meredith sat with locked fingers and lips half parted, ready for the soul-staying or despairing cry that must soon come in answer to the pending verdict of that aged prophet bending there.

Oh! that silence was agonizing! At last the tension of her strained nerves gave way, causing her to cry out faintly, yet without uttering any rational word.

At the sound the doctor lifted his disengaged hand.

Surely that gesture was not born of despair!

Another moment passed; the next he looked up, and now there was a light in his face which transfigured it, making it like the face of a saint.

"She will live!" he faltered. Then as he walked over to the dawn-lit window to hide his emotion, Mrs. Meredith slipped down upon her knees beside the bed, burying her face in the coverlits, lest she should yield to the impulse to shriek out in the pain of that ecstasy which was beating its pinions wildly against her heart. Long she knelt there in sobbing prayer of thanksgiving; and all the shadows softly dispersed themselves from the room, leaving the "candle of understanding" to shed its tender light ahead of the spirit which was slowly winging its flight back from the arms of Death.

For many hours the invalid slumbered in the even respiration of perfect and dreamless sleep. When she awoke it was noon.

"Allie!" they heard her say. "I want Allie."

She came, and the two sisters clasped hands and gazed long and silently into each other's faces.

"Forgive me!" whispered the sick girl at length. "I said, a moment ago, that you were cold and skeptical. I said cruel things, for which I am very sorry. You *do* believe in my talent as a writer, don't you?"

"Of course I do, my darling"

"I am very, very tired," said Blanche, "but there is something here that makes me so happy," placing one hand over her heart, "and my fever is all gone. Did you enjoy yourself at Maplehurst? I read a full account of the ball in the papers, and they described your toilet. You must have looked beautiful!"

CHAPTER XXIV

HER STRATAGEM

For her own breakfast she'll project a scheme,
Nor take her tea without a stratagem.

—*Young.*

MEANWHILE Sir Philip Camden had been basking in the light of Dorian Rossmore's eyes, forgetful of all save the mad infatuation which they engendered, and the knowledge that she still wore his talisman.

Yes, that hoop of glittering diamonds, with the single emerald shining out like a venomous eye, and it alone had flashed from the soft fairness of his hostess' hand last night, and whatever true sentiments breathed in the breast of the beautiful creole toward himself, Sir Philip had been supremely unconscious of all save the fact that he viewed her standing on the stepping stones of his one ambition, and looking at him with her glorious eyes full of a fire which he flattered himself was love !

He did not dream what dangerous poison lurked beneath the fascination of those eyes !

A famous tenor of the day composed one of Mrs. Rossmore's guests, and as he was about to

favor the eager assemblage with some choice selections, Dorian managed, by one of her graceful manœuvres, to sit near Sir Philip, who leaned against the door casement, apart from that portion of the room where most of the guests had collected. At a signal from his hostess, showing that she was aware of his proximity, he approached and took up his station at her elbow.

The prelude was ended; and now the rich, soul-stirring notes of the songster were filling the room, except for which sound that silence reigned which is so eloquent of profound and undivided interest; thus it was with difficulty that Sir Philip contrived presently to whisper to his fair neighbor, who was bending forward with ecstatic ear, for the moment forgetful of all save that powerful, magnetic voice :

“Dorian, the evening is more than half spent, and I have had scarcely a word alone with you. Cannot you manage to slip away presently to the conservatory, where we can have an uninterrupted, if brief, *tete-a-tete* ?”

She evinced no sign of having heard him; nevertheless, when the Signor had finished his measure, and all were crowding round him, clamoring for another song, Mrs. Rossmore did “manage,” and that very adroitly, to disappear; and in the midst of the distraction, none saw her go, save Sir Philip, who also, as the clapping of hands and babble of voices continued, vanished as if by magic.

The cloisters, toward which he crept stealthily, were almost in utter darkness. They had been brilliant with colored lights half an hour ago, and rightly Sir Philip guessed that his enchantress had invented the darkness as a safeguard against the exposure of their tryst, which certainly was hazardous.

Vaguely, as he entered there, he defined her tall form, standing half merged in the shadow of an oleander tree. With a quick bound he was beside her, and she shrunk not from his arm as it engirdled her waist, but greeted him with a warmth of pretty words, and listened with seeming eagerness to the words of mad infatuation which he poured into her ear—words which made her secretly think him more of a real Arbaces than he had seemed in the tableau at Maplehurst.

“How is Lady Camden, to-night?” she asked, when he had released her, and they were seated under the oleander tree. “Why is she not here?”

“I do not know,” returned Sir Philip. “Why do you choose to remind me at this supreme moment, of her existence?”

“She is one of the stern realities of life—a reality in which I am mostly interested. Do you know what people are saying?” asked Dorian, abruptly.

“No,” answered Sir Philip with laconic indifference.

“It is rumored that your modern Glaucus

rescued her from a pair of mad runaway horses some weeks before the ball. It seems she had not been aware of her preserver's identity until fate brought them again face to face on that night. One who watched the introduction pass between them had also been an eye-witness to the runaway. He had seen young Volney rush into the street and stay the beasts, then assist Lady Camden, who was all but swooning, from the coupé and lead her into an apothecary's shop. He, my authority, says that Lady Camden was greatly agitated upon being introduced to him. This makes it easy to divine why she did not want to take the part of Galatea with his Pygmalion, and yet the easier to interpret the cause of her emotion in the Pompeian tableau."

"As to that," said Sir Philip, "upon the night of the ball I perceived her sentiments toward Volney."

"You did!" exclaimed Dorian Rossmore, quickly, "and you told me you had merely created the tableau of Glaucus and Ione for your wife's gratification! I knew there was some hidden meaning to your *ruse*. I knew you wilfully designed to tyrannize over her!"

Sir Philip shrugged his shoulders.

"It was monstrous! I despise such duplicity!" averred Dorian, passionately.

Sir Philip laughed deprecatingly, then seeing the angry fire that flashed from her dark eyes

upon him, he possessed himself of one of her resisting hands and, caressing it, said seriously :

“Dorian, I have told you that there has never been any harmony of sentiment between Lady Hortense and myself. She is so prosaic, so cold, so austere, that to see her unfossilized before me for an instant I resolved to use a little stratagem, I confess.”

“And you found the issue of your labor amusing?” asked Dorian with an undertone of cynicism creeping into her badinage.

Sir Philip made some half-laughing rejoinder, after which they were both silent for a moment. Dorian was the first to speak again.

“What, then of this late-awakened passion of Lady Camden’s. Is it reciprocated?”

“No, it is reported that young Volney is in love with Alice Meredith, and will marry her. Lady Hortense’s pride is unimpeachable. She will not go into society this winter for fear of meeting Volney. This is a fatal decision with her, and one that will soon snap the frail bond of her life asunder.”

As Sir Philip spoke, there came subtly floating into them Signor M——’s notes, blended with those of a familiar contralto voice.

They were singing a measure from some Italian opera, and the strains now throbbing with passion, now wailing forth in melancholy supplication, silenced them to listen.

Mrs. Rossmore, with her hand lying coldly in that of her companion's, felt creeping over her a stronger aversion of him than she had ever yet known. She longed to flee from his presence for some undefinable reason, and when the song ceased and its cadence had died away, she suggested that they return to the parlors.

"Nonsense," said Sir Philip, as he slipped one arm about her waist. "We have not said one word about ourselves as yet. I have not even told you how happy you have made me by wearing my talisman!"

As he spoke, he turned the hoop of diamonds about on her finger.

"Did you notice that I had abandoned all my rings to the preference of yours?" asked Dorian, suavely.

"Yes," whispered Sir Philip; then after lifting the hand to his lips and kissing it repeatedly, he added: "You are kinder to me than I ever dreamed you would be, Dorian."

"Ah, do not be so conceited, *mon ami!*" laughed Dorian, "I wear it to the exclusion of all other ornaments because they look commonplace beside it. It is the cunningest type of art I have ever seen. Tell me! you certainly did not buy it in America?"

"No," Sir Philip answered shortly

"Where then?" persisted Dorian.

"In Italy," still laconically.

“Oh, what makes you so impervious?” she asked impatiently. “One would think there was some dark mystery attached to the ring!”

Sir Philip coughed.

“Do you think the single emerald particularly symbolical?” he asked, pretending not to have heard her.

“Green is venom—the best authorities have granted that nothing of that color is without its poisonous ingredients,” insidiously replied Dorian.

“Then let me exchange the stone for some other; the emerald may prove disastrous to our love!” exclaimed Sir Philip with a sudden intonation of anxiety in his voice.

It was now Dorian’s turn to laugh.

“Nonsense!” said she. “Whatever sentiments exist between us cannot be influenced by a chip of precious stone, be it red or green, blue or white. Do not be superstitious, *mon ami*. There is nothing in omens!” she ended, deprecatingly.

“I wish to believe in nothing save my beautiful Peeress—my Idol!” whispered her companion, passionately lifting her hand to his lips.

“Do you forget the first commandment?” Dorian asked, crossing herself as she spoke like a saint.

Her beauty and her mockery maddened him. Suddenly he threw himself upon his knees at her feet.

“I know no commandment, no God but thee,

Dorian !” he cried. “Thou art my sole religion ! Let me believe only in you and your love ; it is all I ask !”

He could see that she was now laughing silently to herself, and he closed his eyes to shut out the sight of her beautiful, mocking image. Thus he did not see the expression of her face swiftly change from laughter to dire aversion. He did not see the wreathed lips, the glittering eyes, in which lurked subtle design and insidious hatred.

“Come, Monsieur, Sir Philip. Let us go back to my guests,” he heard her voice saying, at length, and rising, they quitted the close, perfume-laden atmosphere without exchanging another word.

As Dorian re-entered the brilliant drawing rooms a few moments later, Sir Philip hurried, without a word of farewell or apology, from her house out into the stormy night, every feeling within him dead save the strong new passion which he felt for Dorian Rossmore. As he walked fast and fiercely through the rain toward his club, he heeded not the wondering glances that were directed by passers-by at the extraordinary picture he presented, with his pale, distorted face, and despoiled attire.

CHAPTER XXV

THE PRISONER.

* * Know ye not
Who would be free, themselves must
Strike the blow.

—Byron.

AND monsieur, the prisoner ?

When, after hours of unconsciousness, the Frenchman roused himself sufficiently to think, it was with overwhelming horror that he realized himself a prisoner, surrounded by a darkness whose intensity was that of a charnel house, and with nothing but the hard floor for his bed.

Upon this he lashed himself, hissing volley after volley of curses upon the head of him whose Mephistophelean art had so foiled and victimized him.

This crazed paroxysm ceased, and he relapsed into a stupor, which was not so much of the body as the mind—a state of lethargy which, upon the fall of some great and unexpected calamity, is almost certain to attack one addicted to the use of strong drink or narcotics.

When he returned again to consciousness it was noon.

Issuing from some unknown source, there came to his hideous vault of darkness and despair, a current of pure air, which vitalizing draught seemed to inspire him with new hope.

He sprang to his feet, and commenced groping his way about in the uncertain space, muttering to himself as he went: "If there be a medium through which air can reach me, I shall not despair, for by the aid of air and opium I can live at least a fortnight. Meanwhile, oh Philip, envoy of Satan, who knows what means of escape from your villainy may be offered me! *L'homme propose. Dieu dispose!* Why did you not search me and rob me of all means of self-defense? my opium, my knife with cunning annex of file and gimlet!—in these I may find a wonderful agency! *Ceil!* What is this?" he whispered, as suddenly his out-reaching hand came in contact with the partition wall, which was built of boards smooth-hewn from timber, hard and firm as stone.

As he sounded this wall by tapping it forcibly with his knuckles, it gave back only short staccato echoes which seemed to mock and defy him.

But Monsieur Favraud was not thus easily baffled. He moved on along the wall, making at every step that persistent rapping sound against the wood, and in this manner he had almost measured the length of the partition, when all at

once he was answered by an echo, like the dying of a curfew knell.

With hushed breath the Frenchman harkened to the sound, and when it had ceased, he said audibly : " I am in the tower of Maplehurst. The belfry is just above me ! "

That afternoon he commenced his work of cutting and filing into the wall's difficult solidity, laboring for hours, until at length the gnawing pain of hunger triumphed over ambition, and he was compelled to surrender himself to the influence of the drug to which of late months he had come to be almost a slave, and with which he had well supplied himself only the day previous to his imprisonment. Thus, with alternating strength and stupor, day succeeded day, until almost a week had passed—a week which had been to Monsieur Alphonse, one eternal night of horrors.

Repeatedly had he searched vainly for that mysterious source through which, at intervals, the air reached him, without which he could not have lived. While each day his bodily strength declined from protracted starvation, the vital element of fresh air and the regularly administered narcotic combined to support him in his labor ; and when under the influence of opium, he forgot all thoughts of food and drink, and only gave himself up to the pictures of freedom, which his inebriate fancy drew, and to the dilatory toil

of paving his way out of the infernal darkness which encompassed him.

I forbear to enter minutely into details of his work—how he whittled away sliver after sliver of the pine wood, some of which were as fine as spun thread; how he tore, strained and blistered his hands until at last the rude rent in the wall penetrated through and enabled him to see into the adjoining passage, from whose sky-light the day-beams fell, making patches of red and blue and amber upon the floor.

Oh! who can conceive his infinite joy, when he knelt gazing through that small aperture, looking first upon the vivid patches of color, then upward toward the curb where hung the iron mouth-piece of Maplehurst with its silent tongue.

And if his joy were so great, what then of his despair, when he awakened a few hours later to find his hands refused to grasp the knife for continued labor? They were paralyzed!

He cried out like a madman when the revelation of his helplessness burst upon him.

The aperture before him admitted to his bedlam a faint stream of light which revealed its utter barrenness. Nothing was there save cob-webs, where

Half-starved spiders preyed on half-starved flies,

and the old comforter which served as his only covering. Up to this he crept, sensitive for the first time during his imprisonment of the sharp

winter's cold ; and as he rolled himself shivering in its spareness, great sobs shook his defeated body. Only a moment ago and he was a very demon of defiance, with his every nerve and sinew strained in dire antagonism against the hand of Fate. Now he was an infant, writhing and whimpering in his utter helplessness. And Destiny stood at that miserable little hole in the wall looking in upon his prey with his dread countenance distorted in triumphant laughter !

A black spider swung himself down on his fine rope and played upon one of the still and senseless hands, and gluttonously sucked out the blood from one of its open wounds, leaving what little virulence its starved body retained in the oozing pores. Gradually the poison absorbed into the veins and pulsed up the vital part of the Frenchman's arm. The sensation roused him from his stupefied condition, and in his horrible pain he started upright. He viewed the swollen member of his person, and instinctively knew to what was due the aching propensity.

Should he die in the horrible agonies occasioned from a spider bite, or gain eternal oblivion through the agency of opium ?

His every sense bespoke a preference for the easier death, and thus " therein the patient ministered to himself " ; but still, it must not be supposed that because he " ministered," he needs must have died. The falcon eye of Fate still watched outside the prisoner's den, and by his decree the remedy was not death, but antidote.

CHAPTER XXVI

A REVELATION

Sudden a thought came like a full-blown rose,
Flushing her brow.

—*Keats.*

BACK from the vale of darkness and beckoning shadows the gentle spirit of Blanche Meredith slowly winged its flight ; and now instead of anxious, watchworn faces, those of the most radiant happiness hovered over the pillows where the invalid lay with answering love shining from her eyes.

More than a week had passed since that critical moment in which had come the verdict from Doctor Congrave's lips, "she will live" ; and one morning as he departed from his daily visit to the brownstone house in W—— Square, it had been with a promise that his little patient should be carried to the drawing-room on the morrow, and be permitted to sit for an hour in a large easy chair in the window from where she could see the people passing from church.

So the longed-for morrow came, and Blanche in a soft white woolen gown, and her bright hair freshly dressed, was ensconced, according to prom-

ise, in the deep window-place, with the red fire-light shedding a warm glow over the delicate transparency of her face and heightening the light in her soft and happy eyes.

Alice had gone in company with her father to the neighboring church; but beside the invalid sat Mrs. Meredith and little Olive, the latter engaged in blending together a knot of purple violets and shining leaves which she had brought from the conservatory especially for her invalid sister.

"Oh, mamma," cried Blanche, rapturously inhaling the faint and delicious perfume as Olive pinned the nosegay upon her breast, and, kissing her, stole away, "I never knew before what sweetness pervaded the odor of violets! I do not think I ever appreciated the blessing of breath to enjoy the gifts of nature as I do at this supreme moment!"

Her pale face flushed and quivered with emotion as she spoke, and tears welled to her eyes of tender blue.

Mrs. Meredith's heart was too full for utterance. In silence she lifted one of her darling's little blue-veined hands to her lips and kissed it fervently.

Blanche returned the caress, then looked out upon the broad wind-swept thoroughfare, along which the carriages had begun to clatter with their warmly-furred passengers who had been to morning service at their respective places of worship.

The sidewalks were scattered with pedestrians, some of whom carried little gilt-edged prayer books, and it was the faces of these which Blanche scanned eagerly, expecting each moment to recognize those of her father and Alice.

She was filled with a happy childish longing to make some signal ere they reached the stone-flagged steps, by which they would be sure to look up and behold her sitting there; and when at length they came in sight she cried out loudly as she tapped upon the pane:

“Papa! Alice! look up and see me!”

They both heard her cry, and signalled to her with loving gestures. As the invalid replied to these a look of startled surprise crossed her features to abruptly check the smiles that played there.

“Who is the strange young gentleman with them?” the young girl asked, turning to her mother in a sort of panic.

Mrs. Meredith, who also was looking out from her place of concealment behind the half-drawn curtains, replied:

“It is Mr. Volney, Valois Elwood’s English cousin, and the medium through whom you daily receive your flowers and books and bon-bons.”

“His face is familiar to me,” said Blanche, meditatively. “Yet where I have seen him I cannot recall. See how he looks at Allie,

mamma! and do see how she is blushing!"

Hereupon a grey head came suddenly between her face and the outward picture, while a fond voice said:

"Our little girl is getting on amazingly. How long has she been sitting up, mamma? Doctor said only an hour, you know."

"It has scarcely been half of that yet," answered Blanche. "And I feel strong—oh, quite strong enough to sit here for hours to come. Do let me, papa!" she entreated, clinging fondly to her parent.

But Mr. Meredith shook his head sternly, and pursed his lips as one might in denying one's babe some unconscionable request.

Alice now came softly in the room, not so softly, however, but that Blanche heard, and turned with mischief-lurking eyes to rebuke her for lingering so long away.

"Why did you not ask Mr. Volney in?" she questioned, as her sister said she had only tarried long enough to take leave of a friend who had walked with them from the church.

"He had an engagement to dine at two o'clock," said Alice, "but is coming to-morrow to be introduced to you—Blanche, little sister; he is very nice," she added in a low, fervid tone.

Blanche smiled mischievously.

"And as handsome as he is nice and philanthropic!" exclaimed the invalid. "I mean

to like him exceedingly and I shall have him read to me from some of the beautiful books he has sent me."

"I know he will be happy to serve you. He reads—divinely."

"Used he to read to you at Iwendene when you were there?" asked Blanche.

"Sometimes—to Valois and me."

After this the two girls sat for some moments without speaking. Mr. and Mrs. Meredith conversed apart from them in low tones, while Olive sat near the grate deeply engrossed in Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress."

Blanche's eyes were fixed thoughtfully upon her folded hands; and as her sister watched the long, down-bent lashes and the sweet pensive mouth, she wondered if ever a piece of Cyprian marble were chiselled into more classic beauty than the face before her.

Presently Blanche looked up:

"I have been trying," said she, "to remember where I have seen Mr. Volney before this morning. The moment I beheld his face I was struck with its familiarity."

"It may have figured as an ideal in one of your dreams of romance," suggested Alice playfully.

"Surely," conceded the other, "it is perfect enough for an ideal. During the week," she went on, "I have heard Valois speak often of her English cousin, and when, at different times you

told me the flowers and books came from Mr. Volney, I tried to picture him in my mind : I fancied a low, thick-set, well-dressed little fellow, with kindly blue eyes and rosy cheeks, and with hair and mustache of a tawny shade, inclined to curl. I imagined such a type of British aristocracy standing in the florist's, and saying to the connoisseur, intent on wiring buds, ' Be suah to have them—ah—as fresh and sweet as possible, and—ah—put a sprig of maiden-hair at intervals about, doncher know.' But suddenly Mr. Bountiful puts my conception to ridicule by appearing before me a veritable classic god ! ”

All that afternoon Blanche was haunted by the pair of dark luminous eyes which she had seen gazing into her sister's face, with an expression which her intuitive soul told her was engendered of something more than friendship.

That night, as Alice entered her sister's room just previous to retiring, she found Blanche lying quietly, with eyes closed as if in gentle slumber. She was about to retire without bestowing the good night kiss, lest it should awaken her ; but as she reached the door a voice said softly : “ Allie dear, I am quite awake. I was only thinking with my eyes shut. Come here ; I want to ask you something. ”

She held out both arms, and when her sister bent over her, she clasped them tenderly about her neck, and whispered so low that her listener

could scarce make out the words : " Mr. Volney loves you ! I am sure he loves you from the way in which he looked at you this morning."

Alice was silent. She did not look up lest the hot flush she felt suffusing her face should betray her.

" It must be beautiful," went on the young girl, fondling, as she spoke, the bright shining hair that fell over her sister's shoulders like a mantle, " to lie awake in the dark and have such a pair of eyes as his come before you, shining with such love as I saw in them this morning."

Her words were far-reaching, and Alice felt herself no longer able to evade them.

" It is beautiful—oh infinitely, religiously beautiful, little sister !" Blanche heard her whisper ; then looking up, that she might speak more coherently, Alice told her story. She told how Fate had so mysteriously forecast her love to her on the night of Thayer Volney's advent to Iwendene ; how, with the presentiment encompassing her like a dream, she had flown to the piano and sang " My love is come," but how afterward, when she had first looked into his eyes, she had felt an icy hand suddenly fall upon her heart, while a voice whispered to her, " You are a bankrupt's daughter ; he is a son to a baronet ; he is a nobleman ; and even though King Cophetua did love a beggar maid you must not let this thought stimulate your passion, but crush it while yet it has

scarcely budded." How she had striven to obey the warning voice, but had been overruled by an acknowledgment of love from Thayer's lips that night at Maplehurst. Then she spoke of the blank which had followed when she had knelt at Blanche's bedside and offered up all her hopes of future happiness if only God would spare her sister's life for the sacrifice, "and now that my prayer has been answered," she concluded, "I am reconciled to the thought of devoting the rest of my life to your happiness, and remembering my love only as a brief and beautiful dream."

Blanche had listened breathlessly, and when her sister ceased speaking, she cried, with eyes full of sympathetic tears.:

"No, no! it is not for such a sacrifice on your part that God has spared my life. He is kind; He knows your noble, unselfish heart, and would not ask of it such a cruel denial. I feel sure He will bless you both in your love!"

Alice's bosom heaved in a tumult of ecstasy at these words.

She looked at her sister through swimming eyes, but could not speak for the deep emotion she felt.

A few moments later she stole out, leaving Blanche fast asleep.

The next day Mr. Volney was led into the drawing-room, where Blanche was again arranged in her easy chair in the window-place.

He chatted brightly and with all the engaging grace of repartee which characterized him, but Blanche sat scarcely heeding his remarks, and, in her distractness, appearing almost dull. Her mind was wandering through the confused vista of the past, striving to single out the day on which she had first seen Valois Elwood's cousin. But the more she thought upon the subject, the more at sea she found herself, and in sheer vexation of her defeat, when she was tucked away on her couch again, she turned her face to the wall and wept.

Next morning, however, when Alice went as usual to her room, she found the invalid sitting up with a face as radiant as a summer's dawn glow.

"Allie," cried she, "I have solved the problem! I know, now, where I first saw your King Cophetua!"

Alice went and sat down by her with her eyes full of questions, but mute her lips.

"I dreamed out the enigma," laughed Blanche, "but before I explain, let me ask you a question. On what day did you return from Ivendene, last fall?"

After a moment's reflection, Alice replied: "On Friday, the first of November."

"Well, on Friday, the first of November," commenced Blanche, "early in the forenoon, I was standing at the library window looking out

upon the street, when suddenly as I glanced over to the opposite pavement, my eyes gazed straight into those of Thayer Volney's. He stood just opposite the house, contemplating it intently, but when he looked up and saw me, he seemed to be disconcerted and beat a hasty retreat down the avenue."

Alice looked at her sister with the lines about her mouth working nervously. She saw before her, as she had once seen the vision in a dream, a scroll upon which was written, in golden letters, the one word "Mizpah." It was held aloft by a visible hand; while behind, through a cloud-vista, she saw a pair of wondrous eyes shining out like stars—the eyes of Thayer Volney.

"What are you thinking about?" asked Blanche. "Do you divine why he was looking at our home with such interest?"

"Yes," answered Alice, startled and shocked at the sudden revelation. "He was the purchaser of it. Robin St. Cloud is none other than Thayer Volney himself."

"I know—I thought if I were to tell you what I suspected, you would not believe me; but my dream made it all as plain to me as the truth of day," Blanche said eagerly.

Long thereafter, Alice sat staring vacantly before her, wondering how she could ever bring herself to look into Thayer Volney's eyes again. How could she ever render the debt of gratitude

due such elaborate generosity as his had been ? He had come into her life just when it had been subject to a dread calamity, and had saved her from it. Out of the depths of his divine sympathy had sprung the inspiration which had rescued her home from the grasp of the enemy, and her family from the bitterness of relinquishing that loved roof-tree. Ah, what a friendship had his proven, indeed ! In this life of artifice, doubt and misery, where all is so cold and unsympathetic, such a friendship stands above all riches and arts ; it is a joy exalted above all powers of praise ; it is the sweetest of consolations next to heaven !

CHAPTER XXVII

ENGAGED

'Twere all one
That I should love a bright particular star
And think to wed it.

— *Shakespeare.*

To heirs unknown descends the unguarded store,
Or wanders, heaven directed, to the poor.

— *Pope.*

IT was the twenty-third of December, and again, after continuous days of hovering, vaporious gloom, the earth lay glittering resplendent in a shroud of spotless white.

Valois Elwood had been shopping all the afternoon, and when she returned home the hall lights were burning in the Florentine sconces.

She looked exceedingly pretty in her sealskins, with the crisp, dark curls fringing her forehead under the jaunty turban, and her eyes and cheeks glowing with animation, which the sharp, blood-stirring air had lent.

As she paused at the stand to examine some cards and letters, her mother came out from the reception room and, kissing her with lingering fondness, commenced to remove her boa and mantle. This accomplished, she bestowed another fervent caress, then whispered :

“My dear, your father bade me send you to him immediately upon your return. He is awaiting you in the library.”

“Is he alone?” asked Valois with eyes suddenly down-cast, and heart beating a wild tattoo.

“Yes, he is quite alone,” said Mrs. Elwood; whereupon there was a little impetuous cry of “Oh, mamma!” then for an instant a pair of soft, warm arms clung tenaciously about Mrs. Elwood’s neck, and vanished Valois swiftly down the margin of dark red tapestries toward the apartment where her fate awaited her.

Valois had never but once, to her recollection, seen her father in tears; that was upon the death of an old army comrade, but now, as she entered the library, he looked up, and she divined that he had been weeping.

“Come here, little girl,” he said gravely, and with an expression about the lips that bespoke an inner tumult.

After an instant’s hesitation, Valois approached and stood before him flushed and embarrassed.

He did not take the *petite* creature upon his knee as had been his wont to do since her babyhood, but placing one arm about her waist he drew her close to him, and after a moment asked her that one of all questions in the catechism which is hardest to answer.

“Valois, my daughter, what is Love?”

The young girl stood for a moment striving to

summon up words in which to couch an intelligent reply.

The effort was the most trying one of her life's experience. Mr. Elwood felt her tremble and saw her sweet lips grow pale as he waited for her answer which came at length. With enforced composure, she said :

"Love, papa, is an inspiration of the heart which when once awakened causes one to realize all that is most beautiful in existence and fills the soul with contentment and happiness unutterable."

"Are you certain, my dear, that you have not memorized that pretty little definition from some novel? Is it the analysis of your own heart?"

"It is, papa," answered Valois fervently.

"Then," said her father as he laid his hand reverently upon her head, "let us concede that the world holds no holier, no sweeter sentiment, than reciprocal love—a spontaneous and equally measured degree of passion existing between two human souls, what is required to make that passion enduring?"

"To render love perfect through life one must be true and devoted and tender and thoughtful; every thing constant and abiding toward the object loved," answered his daughter.

"Yes, yes! and, hem—you think that in your love for Lieutenant Carruthers and his love for you, all such qualities will exist?"

“Yes, papa, I—we have become all the world to each other—Gershon and I.”

There ensued a brief pause, after which Colonel Elwood went on in the same serious tone.

“He has been here this afternoon—your Gershon; and he has asked me for your hand in marriage,” he paused again and Valois waited with suspended breath for him to pursue. Oh, the dread uncertainty of his next words!

“My daughter, it is hardly the future we had mapped out for you. Aside from Lieutenant Carruthers’ pay he has but three thousand dollars a year.”

“I know papa, but is—is not that a considerable sum?” asked the young girl.

Colonel Elwood smiled and shook his head seriously.

“It would perhaps keep you in pin money, my dear,” he said, “but would scarcely support an establishment such as would befit an Elwood.”

Valois was certain that she detected a depreciation in his words which threatened annihilation to all her fondest dreams; and involuntarily her arms tightened about his neck in mute appeal.

“But,” went on her father presently, “your ma and I have been talking the matter over, and, seeing that the Lieutenant has a pedigree—that he is of good blood, a true gentleman and a soldier, we have concluded—hem!—we have—

that is we have conceded to him as a future son-in-law. At the event of your union, I will settle upon you the estate of Ivendene, a good town-house and a decent allowance. There! yes, of course, kiss me — now — now run away to your lover; I think he is with your ma in the reception room."

The sun never shone upon a fairer day than that which ushered in Christmas-eve in the great New England metropolis. Counter-hurrying throngs, eagerly intent on holiday purchases, massed the narrow thoroughfares. Carriages flanked the curbs, and ill-clad, bare-footed urchins pressed their little frozen noses against the confectioner's windows where were temptingly displayed bon-bons and cornucopias and old women in shoes, whose legion of children wore blue and red and yellow petticoats, all glimmering with frost.

It was from one of these bon-bon shops that Valois Elwood had just stepped, and was about to enter her carriage when she was arrested by a voice of childish distress. Looking around she saw a boy of about eight years crouching almost under the very feet of her horses.

He was sobbing piteously, and grovelling in the dirty snow and slush which had been swept from the pavement.

"Get up from there, you blubbering vagabond!

Get up if you don't want to be run over," said the coachman gruffly.

"Don't speak to him like that, Forrest;" his young mistress rebuked him gently, "he is distressed over something that he has lost, evidently. What is it you have lost, poor little boy?" she asked, as she bent low over the weeping child. He kept on plunging his blue and bleeding hands in the slush as, without looking up, he sobbed incoherently:

"My dime, my dime! it wa—was all I ha—had, and it ro—rolled away! I was go—owing to get a sug—a sugar doll for Mae — Mae—Maemie; but it ro—o—o—olled away, and I ca—can't find it, mum!"

As he finished speaking there shone from the face above him, deepest sympathy. Drawing a little hand from its warm nesting-place inside her muff, Valois opened her purse, and the lad, hearing the jingle of coin, looked up quickly. As he did so, she was almost startled by the unusual beauty of his face. His tearful eyes were of a deep dark blue; and gazed out from their up-curved lashes with wonderful truth and intellectuality. His features, from the low brow to the dimpling chin, were as delicately chiselled as a girl's; and were framed in by thick black, curling locks which ended in a soft mass of ringlets on the little sun-browned neck, destitute

of muffler or any protection against the sharp December cold.

Indeed, such a striking resemblance did he bear to Valois herself that, had he been dressed in accordance with the young girl's rich attire he might easily have been taken for her brother. Perhaps this was why Valois felt herself so instinctively drawn toward him.

After admiringly contemplating his upturned face for a moment, she held toward him a handful of nickels and coppers, and was unable to repress a smile as she watched his features kindling with incredulous joy.

"Take these," said she.

The boy sprang quickly to his feet; but as she was about to drop the moneys into his out-reaching hand, he suddenly drew back, and gazing steadfastly at her with his honest eyes, he said: "I'd rather not take the money, mum; it looks likes as I's a beggar. I ain't no beggar, mum; I sells papers, I does."

"Do you make much by selling papers?" asked the young girl, interested more and more, and paying little heed to Forrest's impatience to be off.

"I makes enough to keep mammy in tea and coal," said the lad, proudly.

"Who is your mother?"

"Mrs. Kidder, a shoe-binder."

"And your father?"

"Dead, mum."

“Who is little Maemie, for whom you were going to buy a sugar doll?”

“She is my little sister; she is crippled and ailing; but, oh mum, she is so pretty! her face is like the angel in her picture book.”

“How old is little Maemie?” questioned Valois with tears in her eyes.

“She’ll be seven, come New Year Day. I’m goin’ on nine.”

“Where do you live?”

“At D—— Place; number 14,” he answered.

Valois carefully took down the address in her memorandum book, then she said: “I am coming to see your mamma some day, now take this money—there is nearly a dollar in all—and go and get little Maemie her sugar doll and yourself some sweetmeats. Good-bye!”

She turned suddenly back, “but stay! you have not told me your first name?” said she.

“Roy’s my name, mum. Roy Kidder,” answered the lad.

“Well, good-bye, Roy Kidder! May you and Maemie spend a happy Christmas!”

With these words she stepped into her carriage and the next moment was rapidly rolled away from the wondering lad, who stood watching her vehicle until it was lost among the hundreds on the thoroughfare.

From the busy heart of the city, Valois was driven to W—— square. She was kept waiting

a long time in the drawing-room before Alice came down stairs ; and, being one of the most impatient of creatures, she flitted about, peeping into this book and that, reviewing the pictures in the photogravure, picking up and reading a stray card, which announced that "Robert Meredith, assayer of gold and silver quartz and all minerals, was established at Number — State street," and lastly, drawing off her long gloves, she seated herself at the piano and executed in a very creditable manner, Newstedt's pretty gavotte, "*de Marie Antoinette.*"

She finished this, and was in the midst of one of Chopin's tender nocturnes, when Alice stole in, and, crossing the room on tip-toe, stood behind her in smiling contemplation of the chubby hands which strayed so deftly over the keys.

Presently she stooped over her and whispered : "Oh Valois, Valois ! what a tell-tale little hand !"

Valois bounded to her feet, and the blush that dyed her face from throat to brow would have put a Jacqueminot rose to shame.

"It is so, Allie ;" she lisped softly. "My hand has told you the story that I came to tell you with my lips. We are engaged. Gershon placed this here last night."

Alice took the soft and dimpled hand in hers and pretended to examine the glittering ring ; but tears were fast gathering in her eyes and she could not see it very plainly.

“It is very lovely,” she said at length, “and I am happy to be among the first to congratulate you. Oh, my dear friend, all words seem commonplace in such a contingency ! and you know how very unclever I am at pretty sayings ; but I have always admired Gershon Carruthers above most men, and, having watched your little love affair since it first began to grow, I know it can be fruitful of nothing but the most perfect happiness.”

She ended by kissing her favorite upon both cheeks ; then leading her to a sofa, they sat down together and Valois told the story of her engagement from the beginning.

“I was so happy all night,” concluded she, “that I could not sleep. I could only lie, with open eyes, staring into the dark trying to think of some way in which I might prove my gratitude for such a love as Gershon’s. This morning I found out some poor people and mean to send them a share of the good things for Christmas.”

Valois kept her word. That night a box containing groceries and clothing for Mrs. Kidder, Roy and little crippled Maemie found its way to D—— Place. Even a few toys for the children were not forgotten ; and on the following day Roy Kidder blew his bugle and beat his drum, while little Maemie dressed her doll and set her teatable, happy as any children of the “Hub’s” prosperity.

The two young girls were so engrossed as they sat there that neither of them heard the door-bell ring, and when suddenly they were interrupted by the announcement of "Mr. Volney," Valois started up with alacrity, and before Alice could say a word to stay her she vanished, just as her English cousin crossed the threshold of the drawing-room.

For a moment he stood gazing at Alice who was standing in the center of the room swathed in a flood of sunlight which streamed in through the window. She strove vainly to bring her eyes to meet those dark, serious ones, but it was not until he approached, and of his own accord took both of her hands in his passionate clasp, that she looked up and spoke.

"Thayer," she said simply, but the one word caused his face to light up as with a halo.

Almost every day since Blanche's convalescence he had called, but this was the first time the two had been alone together since they were at Maplehurst; and each heart meanwhile had become full volumes. For one all too brief hour they sat in the sunlit parlor talking in the low, confiding tones that lovers use; and it was not until he held her hand at leave-taking that Thayer remembered to inquire after Blanche.

"She is about the same," Alice told him, with a cloud suddenly blurring the beatitude of her face. "It is strange," she continued, "that she

does not gather strength more rapidly. The least exertion seems to exhaust her."

"She requires a change of scene and air," said her lover. "We will take her to England with us in the spring. The ocean voyage will benefit her more than all medicine, while European travel and inspection of the Old World's palaces of art and history will give her wonderful inspiration for future literary work."

Alice answered him not a word, but her heart cried out in ecstasy :

"My King Cophetua ! My Robin St. Cloud ! My Happiness !"

Then she clasped the hands that he had kissed so fervently before her, and watched him depart, through a mist of blinding tears.

CHAPTER XXVIII

“THE BRIDE OF INFELICE”

* * I am weary of my part,
My torch is out ; and the world stands before me
Like a blank desert at the approach of night.

WORDS THAT BURN.

Dryden.

The incessant noise on the street below her window had grown unbearable to Lady Hortense Camden. In vain had Anine laved her aching brow with cologne, and pressed upon her a cup of tea, freshly drawn, which she simply tasted, and placed back upon the tray with an upward glance into the face of her anxious maid, which seemed to say, “I would drink for your sake, dear Anine, if I only could.”

Of late, the French girl had come to dread the look in her mistress' eyes. She had wept over that look in secret many times as she had turned from it.

“What has come over her young life to make her so silent and pale and sad? Is it Monsieur's coldness? Is he cruel to her?” she had often asked herself.

For the past week Sir Philip had been in New York.

One day after his departure Lady Hortense had been glancing over the Society Notes in one of the leading journals, and not far below the paragraph that related to Sir Philip's sojourn in the Eastern metropolis, there was one conveying the intelligence that Mrs. Dorian Rossmore, "the charming widow," was temporarily absent from town. "She has run up to her beautiful country estate in New Hampshire," said the report. But Lady Hortense's lips curled themselves in infinite scorn and loathing as she read it, and her divining heart knew the truth.

Day by day the burden of life was growing heavier, and more surely was crushing her beneath its weight ; and as she sat by the window early on Christmas afternoon, with Anine ministering to her, as I have said, she was very weary and heart-oppressed, and during one moment of her nervous melancholy she would cry out irritably at the noise of cabs and street cars, the cries and shrieks of small boys and the hideous din of their fifes and trumpets and drums ; but the next she would atone her selfishness, remembering that it was Christmas, and the time for reveling. Was not she once always happy at Christmas tide ? Ah, ineffably so ! and that "once," though it seemed an age, was only one year ago.

Only one year !

Could it be but a single year since she had looked into her mother's face and thanked her,

with a flush of girlish pride upon her brow, for the set of exquisite diamonds which she gave her as a bridal present—gems which had descended from the Chatbournes and had once adorned the beauty of her great-grandmother?

True, that was just twelve months ago; and in the interval it seemed to her that she had lived longer than the whole eighteen years which lay beyond the vista that separated her from her happy, untrammelled maidenhood.

"Oh mamma! mamma!" her hot and restive heart cried out, "Why could you not have foreseen my misery? What was your mother-love that you had no instinctive prescience of what was to follow in the train of my enforced wedlock? What is your mother-heart? Is it impervious marble, that you do not come and condole with me now? That you do not see how your ambition has cursed me and I am dying?"

There came no answer to her bitter and righteously accusing cry.

Even at that very moment, as Lady Hortense sat alone in her rooms looking out, broken-hearted, on the day's cold, bleak atmosphere, with her pent-up anguish stifling, strangling, killing her, Mrs. Ayers was at a fashionable modiste's, trying on the lace and ribbon-befangled robe, which she was to wear at a great society ball that night.

She was vaguely cognizant that it was her duty to run up to her daughter's apartments, after the draperies were properly adjusted, to leave her Christmas greetings and inquire of her health. but not once was she hurt by a passing pang of self-contrition for having been the medium of all the hopeless misery of the only offspring of her own flesh and blood. No compunctious visitings were her's. She only felt bitter disappointment, vexation, chagrin, at what she was wont to term Hortense's stony obduracy, her invincible self-will, and determination not to be happy as Sir Philip Camden's wife. "She is ungrateful and she ought to suffer," the lady was accustomed to remark when dwelling upon this very disagreeable subject.

Anine had gone to take the tray and things back to the kitchen, and Lady Hortense took advantage of her absence and lifted the window to admit a breath of the fresh cold air. She smiled down upon the happy children who thronged the pavement below, and those who saw here were haunted all day by her pale, sad face and wistful eyes.

Anine entered the room just as her mistress was about to close the window again, and hurried forward to shut the heavy sash herself.

As she did so there was gentle reproof in her eyes which seemed to say :

"You know, miladi, the doctor warned you against exposure to the cold air."

Interpreting the look, Lady Hortense said as if in self-defense, "I only looked out for an instant, Anine, I longed for one fresh, free breath of air, I have been shut up in these rooms for over a fortnight, you know."

As she spoke the footman entered the room bearing a little silver tray upon which was a card.

As Lady Hortense traced the name upon this, a ghastly hue crept to her lips, and something like a gasp escaped them.

She, however, collected herself immediately, and said to the servant: "Say to the gentleman that I will be down immediately."

As she entered the drawing-room a few moments later, the window-hangings were closely drawn, and her visitor could not distinctly see her face as he stepped forward to greet her, but he noticed that the little hand she gave him was cold as an icicle, and that it trembled in his clasp, sending that strange thrill through his being which he had experienced on the night of the charades at Maplehurst.

"I trust you are feeling better to-day, Lady Camden," he said, in his low, grave voice.

She, evading his remark, motioned to a chair, and when they were both seated she asked after Valois and his aunt who had not been to see her for several days.

He replied that they were both well. "It is in behalf of them that I have called upon you so unceremoniously," he explained. "They have commissioned me to bring you to spend the afternoon and dine with us this evening."

Lady Hortense hesitated a moment, then said :
"Mr. Volney, it would give me infinite pleasure, but I have not left my apartments for two weeks."

"I have brought an abundance of rugs, and the carriage is free from draughts," argued the young Englishman. "This," he added persuasively, "is to be a quiet little home affair. My aunt has only asked Lieutenant Carruthers and Miss Meredith, besides yourself."

"Oh, in that event," returned Lady Camden, with an effort at pleasantry, "I should only be *de trop*."

He lifted his hand with a deprecating gesture, but not heeding this, Lady Hortense continued :

"I have just heard of Valois' engagement, and must commission you with my warmest congratulations to my little friend and her *fiancé*. I think it an admirable match. They seem so fitted for each other."

"Yes, admirable ; satisfactory in every sense of the word," conceded Volney in a pre-occupied tone, then after a little hesitation he lifted his eyes from the carpet and regarded her with them, as though wishing her to see there the elation and

happiness which they reflected from his soul. She saw their expression of exhilaration, and drew a sharp, quick breath. Her heart throbbed with a wild pulsation, there was a loud buzzing sound in her head, and all seemed dark before her, yet above it all his voice came to her faintly. He was saying :

“I hope, Lady Camden, you will share your kindly wishes with me. I believe myself to be the most fortunate and the happiest man living this Christmas day. I have won the hand of Alice Meredith in betrothal.”

He had risen, as he spoke, as if in very deference of the beloved name, and Lady Hortense, vaguely conscious of his movement, also compelled herself to her feet.

I have said that the room was too dark for him to see her face plainly, but the convulsion was over and her voice sounded passive and calm as before, as she said: “In winning the love and confidence of such a woman as Alice Meredith, you are indeed blessed above the generality of men, Mr. Volney ; but I think—I know you fully merit your good fortune, and I congratulate you with all my heart and soul !”

She gave him her cold, lifeless hand as she spoke, and he raised it reverently to his lips.

A few minutes later he had left the hotel, and Lady Camden again sat at the window in her *boudoir* with her maid beside her.

"Anine," said she, suddenly turning to the girl who was occupied with some needlework. "I crave so for the quiet of Maplehurst. The constant rattle on these streets at times almost maddens me. My nerves crave for repose."

"I know, miladi," said Anine, laying aside her work, "and I have often wished that we had not come to town at all. I think you would have been better, had you remained at Maplehurst."

At her words, Lady Hortense turned and laid her head upon the girl's shoulder, where for a moment she wept in silence.

"Oh Anine," presently she sobbed, "if I only could spend this Christmas night at home! Take me to Maplehurst for just this one night! I will wrap up warmly, and we can hire a sleigh to take us over from L——."

Who could resist that suppliant voice, and the attitude of childish abandonment and confidence? Surely not Anine, whose every thought and wish was for the happiness of her mistress. However, the girl made one frail effort to dissuade her.

"But miladi, you are so unfit for travel, and if anything should happen, I alone would be blamed."

"What could happen?" asked Lady Hortense quickly, lifting her wet face. "We would simply have a ride first on the train, then in a close, warm sleigh. Oh, to think of sleeping once more in the *Louis Quinze* bedroom, with peace

and quiet around me, makes me almost happy ! Come ! if we hasten we shall be able to catch the three o'clock train out.”

“But Monsieur, Sir Philip has all the keys to Maplehurst. We cannot get in.”

Lady Hortense laughed ; then rising, she crossed the room to a little ebony stand, upon which stood a small box of Italian mosaic.

She lifted the lid of this and took from thence a large brass key. This she held up triumphantly, saying, as she did so: “You are mistaken, my good Anine, Sir Philip has not *all* the keys. This belongs to the front door. I purloined it from the ring before Sir Philip went away, thinking I might have cause to use it. Come, now, let us lose no time.”

And seeing that it were useless to protest, Anine rose and set about preparing for their departure. They had but to pack a small portmanteau, and partake of tea, which beverage Lady Hortense now drank thirstily, even taking a second cup ; for this new ambition had suddenly restored her to artificial health.

It was a great stimulant, and as she adjusted her shawls and sables, there was a glow on her cheek and a heightened brightness in her eye which made her look like the beautiful Hortense of old.

Everything was in readiness and they were just on the point of quitting thier apartments when

suddenly and unannounced, Mrs. Ayers burst in upon them.

“Why! my dear Hortense, where are you going?” asked that dowager breathlessly, and in wide amazement, as she glanced from the muffled form of her daughter to the traveling bag, and then at Anine.

“I am going to Maplehurst, and—and mamma, dear, you really must forgive me for running away and leaving you, but we must get this train. By any other we should reach Maplehurst after dark.”

Mrs. Ayers pursed her thin lips and drew herself up to her colossal height.

“Well, I never!” exclaimed she, for once forgetting her dignity and speaking in a shrill voice. “You can ride all the distance to Maplehurst through the snow, yet you are too ill to attend the Arundel ball with me to-night? Such inconsistency amounts to madness!”

“Oh, well, mamma dear, I really have not time for argument, only kiss me good-bye, won’t you?”

The plethoric lady in broadcloth and sealskins stood like a monument of stone, and poor Hortense was compelled to print her kiss upon a pair of cold, unresponsive lips.

Oh, had that mother foreseen the morrow and the awful form that stood in the nearing vista, beckoning, beckoning, to the “Bride of Infelice!” But no prescience of the close-impending doom

came to her. She stood gazing after her daughter with the same immobile features, and when Lady Hortense and her maid had quite disappeared, she entered her carriage and was driven homeward, where the hairdresser was impatiently awaiting to arrange her coiffure for the ball.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE DIAMOND BRACELET

O Reason! who shall say what spells renew,
When least we look for it, thy broken clew!
Through what small vistas o'er the darkened brain
Thy intellectual day-beams burst again;
And how, like forts, to which beleaguers win
Unhoped-for entrance through some friend within,
One clear idea awakened in the breast
By Mem'ry's magic lets in all the rest.

—Moore's "Lalla Rookh."

The fool of nature stood with stupid eyes
And gaping mouth that testified surprise.

—Dryden.

DURING Sir Philip's sojourn in New York he was registered at a Broadway hotel, but frequently was to be seen lounging in the reading-room or about the foyer of a fashionable rendezvous in Fifth Avenue, upon the second floor of which establishment a certain young and beautiful Creole lady had apartments.

Her name was whispered by wiseacres about the hotel as "Madame de Joulés."

During her sojourn in New York Madame de Joulés had attracted considerable attention at the opera where she had occupied a proscenium box almost every evening, and was conspicuous because of the rare elegance of her toilets as well as the great beauty of her face.

Popular society men, after seeing her at the play, would seek out and introduce themselves to Sir Philip Camden, who invariably attended Madame, and through whom they fondly hoped to be presented to her. But Sir Philip, divining the bent of their compliments, only laughed at them in his sleeve, as it were, and dismissed them, each in their turn, with punctilious politeness.

“Madame de Joulés is a recluse,” he remarked in one instance to an eager suppliant who had been less politic than his fellows, and boldly declared his wish to be introduced to the beautiful stranger. “She is a foreigner, and withal averse to American society.”

On Christmas night the couple had dined at Delmonico's, and as they were quitting the restaurant they came abruptly face to face with Mr. Fred Bentwell of Boston in whose company was the identical *distingué* who had importuned Sir Philip to present him to Madame de Joulés on the night previous.

The couples passed without exchanging any words of recognition, but the eyes of Sir Philip's companion, and those of Fred Bentwell had met for an instant, whereupon the woman's face flushed scarlet, then turned to a deathly paleness, while her fingers closed tenaciously over Sir Philip's stalwart arm.

He felt her tremble violently, as they walked on. Presently she spoke, and her naturally soft,

musical voice now sounded harsh with suppressed rage and mortification:

“Why did you bring me out by the public way? You might have known it was hazardous.”

“Why, Dorian, more hazardous than for us to sit together in the opera box?” Sir Philip asked humbly—he was always humble before this creature whom he worshiped as an idol.

“It is no comparison,” Dorian Rossmore answered sharply. “Every one goes with one’s friend to the theater; but to be seen together coming out of a restaurant and by *him* of all persons!”

Sir Philip drew a sharp, quick breath.

“Good God!” he exclaimed hoarsely, “do you then care for Bentwell above all others, Dorian?”

She evaded his question.

“I have the pride of my mother, who was a Spaniard. I loathe *esclandre!*” she panted.

“If Bentwell is a gentleman of honor he will, as an admirer of yours, guard your reputation,” hazarded her companion.

“Ah, bah!” exclaimed Dorian, contemptuously. “Could not you see he was intoxicated? In such a condition a man’s tongue is a free agent. By to-morrow morning every man that haunts the foyer of my hotel, will have heard the *denouement*. Fred was with one of them.”

After this a silence fell between the two, which

lasted until Dorian's apartments were reached.

Here, after Sir Phillip had turned up the lights of the chandelier, he approached her and said, in the wheedling tone he was wont to adopt when with her: "Dorian, darling, do not let us quarrel on this of all nights."

The endearing term so familiarly used, brought something like a sneer to her red lips. She regarded him calmly, and with her splendid eyes transfused with a hauteur so coldly severe that it made him writhe inwardly.

"I have nothing more to say," she returned at length. "I simply think you insufferably stupid."

"Call me stupid—anything," said her lover, passionately, lifting one of her hands to his lips, "only," he added,

"Make but my name thy love and love that still."

Dorian Rossmore did not look up. She could not trust her eyes to meet his at that moment, lest he should see in them some of the revulsion that suddenly had taken possession of her soul.

Before her vision there was a picture that would not be banished—a dissipated face, with blood-shot, accusing eyes; within her was a dawning conception of guilt, engendered by their gaze. They seemed to say: "It was you, Dorian Rossmore, who started me on my downward path. Upon your account, therefore, shall all my sins be visited in the end." And gradually, as she stood lost in reflections of the past, there

came into her eyes an expression of tenderness and subtle pity.

She recalled the legion of times that Fred Bentwell had whispered to her passionately of his love—a love which he had said was the purest and holiest part of him. All at once came bursting upon her the knowledge that that love had been the sweetest thing her life had ever known.

“Oh, why did I not discern this in time to save myself and him?” she asked herself contritely.

“Is it too late for retraction? In ambition I have been wicked; but in action—never—unless it was in marrying the man who took me from a convent and so generously provided for me, and whose money was the only part of him that I loved. Unless it was in coming to New York by special appointment with Sir Philip, whom I have always hated. But this was all mere stratagem, and does not touch upon my virtue. I am only shrewder than most women; that is all.”

“You do not answer me Dorian!” said Sir Philip at length, stung and writhing under her austerity and her silence.

Dorian started. She had been so lost in meditation that she had almost forgotten his presence.

“No—to be sure,” said she, scarcely conscious of her own words. Then in the same absent manner she commenced to divest herself of

gloves and wrap. This done, she threw herself upon a divan, and there reclined like Cleopatra after her dream.

He went and knelt beside her, and again possessed himself of one of her jewelled hands—that upon which flashed the talisman he had placed there a little over a month ago.

“My love, my love!” he cried, “for the love of God do not treat me like this! I can bear anything, Dorian, but your contempt!”

She lifted her eyes now and met his straightway.

“Sir Philip,” she said, “pray leave me for a little time. When you return I shall—I hope—be more agreeable.”

For one moment he gazed at her in silence, then he rose and quitted the room, merely pausing, as he reached the door, to cast a backward glance toward her. But she did not see his look of mute entreaty. She lay quite still, with her face buried in the scented cushions, waiting impatiently for the door to close him from her presence.

The signal came, and then she heard his steps falling sluggishly along the corridor. When these had quite died away she rose hastily, and crossing the room to her writing desk, proceeded to pen just three hasty lines to Fred Bentwell, which she sealed and addressed to the hotel at which he always stopped when in New York. They ran thus :

“I return to Boston by first train to-morrow. Come back to me, Freddy, and let me tell you how sincerely penitent I am for the cruel manner in which I have treated you.
YOUR OWN DORIAN.”

“Deliver this immediately,” she said to the boy who responded to her bell. And as she dropped a coin into his ready palm, she knew by the sparkle of his eyes that he would serve her as bidden.

“Now,” soliloquised Dorian, as she turned back into her apartments after dismissing the messenger, “must I ‘screw my courage to the sticking-place’ and tell Sir Philip that all record of our intimacy must be wiped from the tablets of his heart. Foiled—utterly foiled has been my purpose in pursuing him here, ineffectual have proven all my sophistries to establish him the villain of my suspicions. That he *is* a villain, that he husbands a past career in which is written the dark history of this talisman upon my finger, that he did not buy it with honest means I feel *certain*—certain as though the sepulchre of my dead sister had opened its marble jaws and she had walked forth to tell me so. He tells me he has never lived in Paris—a few days subsequently we were talking of the burning of great buildings, when suddenly forgetting himself, he says, ‘But the burning of the — Theatre in Paris, in 18—, was the greatest fire! I never saw such a panic in my life.’ ‘You were in Paris at that time?’ I ask, hoping

he will not detect the swift hot glow I feel on my face. 'Merely for a day or so,' he answers guardedly. And so it has happened repeatedly, that just at the instant I find myself on the brink of a revelation, my eyes are suddenly blindfolded and the shape that began to define itself before me sinks back into the abysmal darkness, and I am left shivering in dire defeat. Is it right, is it just, O Providence, answer me! that the thorns of suspicion should so pierce and sting me, while you sit, able to relieve me of my suffering, and yet refuse to allieviate—nay, that you seem to mock me with repeated disappointments that are agonizing?" For a moment tears dimmed her splendid eyes; the next, they shone out with a resolute fire, and her fingers were quite steady as they removed the blazing talisman from her hand, and placed it upon the cabinet.

At that moment there came a gentle rap upon the door.

"*Entrez!*" she called out faintly.

What a picture she presented, standing there in her shining velvet robes, encompassed with the radiance which streamed from the chandelier, and with the golden tapestries forming a rich and harmonious background for her beautiful image. How enchanting! how superb! how divinely beautiful!

Her "*Entrez,*" as it reached the ear of Sir

Philip, thrilled him with renewed hope, for it seemed to chime out with the cadence of true welcome.

He crossed the threshold with a countenance almost transfigured in its love-light; and, misinterpreting the smile upon her lips, he bounded forward with the joyful cry of "Dorian! My love!"

She suffered him in silence to take her hand, knowing he would at once note the absence of his ring.

This he did, and dropped the member quickly, as though it had stung him.

"*Sorceress!*" he almost hissed, as taking a backward step, he measured her from head to foot with the green fury of his eyes.

She stood regal as a queen under this scorching scrutiny, and the smile upon her face deepened until dimples played there.

"Pray, *mon ami*," said she, with a little bewitching poise of the head, "do not look at me as though you would delight in strangling me. Remember woman's frailty! I am no exception to the rule, and caprice is a game which we all play at sometimes, you know."

He muttered a stifled curse; then turning swiftly, he paced the room back and forth, snapping his fingers in the very excess of fury.

Meanwhile Dorian threw herself upon the low

divan, and half reclining there, toyed with the silken fringe of the cushions.

Sir Philip at length ceased his mad parade, and went and stood before her.

She looked up and met his green, glaring eyes unflinchingly, and with a faint smile of amusement still lingering about her lips.

“You have been flitting entirely too near the flame, Mrs. Moth, and if you examine your wings closely you will find them scorched. A—you have carried your coquetry quite too far for retraction, don't you think?” he said with the same indolent drawl that he was in the habit of using when talking to Lady Hortense, and with dire significance in his words.

She hesitated a moment, and then said :

“It is never too late, Monsieur Philip, to make an effort at amendment.”

He laughed his noiseless, Satanic kind of a laugh—that laugh which Lady Hortense could never hear without feeling her blood run cold.

“The sight of that milk-sop, Bentwell, has played the devil with you !” he exclaimed. “You would let a man with an income that would not keep you in gloves, come between you and such a future as I have opened out before you ! View yourself at Maplehurst with wealth on every hand, with liveried servants coming at your bid ; with the gentry of the populace bowing before you, and calling you ‘Lady Dorian,’ or ‘Lady

Camden.' View yourself presiding over my royal entertainments. View yourself sealing your letters with the Camden coat of arms, or riding in your carriage emblazoned with the same distinguished sign. And now let this picture come to blot out the liveried servants, the Lady Dorian, the royal entertainments, the letters with their imposing seal, and the emblazoned carriage. See yourself reclining in a faded drawing-room——”

“Stop, Sir Philip, let me draw the picture!” Dorian suddenly interrupted him peremptorily, and without looking up from the fringes which she still toyed with absently, she went on with implacable calm :

“See me reclining in a modest—not a *faded*—drawing-room. I would never have anything dull or spoiled about me. See my husband sitting at my feet, gazing up into my face with gentle devoted eyes, whose love-light speaks to my innermost soul and makes it respond. See his hand clasp mine. Hear his voice calling me by the old favorite name—‘Doria!’ Now let this picture stay before me, Sir Philip. It cannot be counter-crossed! If I marry Fred Bentwell I have ample for us both. My late husband did not leave me dowerless.”

She paused and raised her resolute face to his. As she did so she noticed that Sir Philip held in his hand a small jewel case. He had suddenly

bethought him of the Christmas gift which all day he had carried in his pocket, awaiting a favorable opportunity to present it to his enchantress. He saw her eyes rivet themselves with momentary curiosity upon the case, then avert themselves indifferently.

“I had brought you such an exquisite Christmas present, Dorian,” said the suave voice of the tempter. “It is one that I bought when abroad last winter. I had intended it as a gift to my present wife. But during the past month I have been looking forward to this night when I would clasp it upon the arm of the only true love of my life—*Dorian!*”

She waved her hand with a gesture of keen annoyance as he dared, even yet, to offer her the jewel.

“At least, look at it. The sight will in no wise contaminate you. I assure you it is a marvelous piece of workmanship.” As he spoke he slowly lifted the lid of the case, and now he held before her its secret—a bracelet of diamonds.

The stones were set at close but irregular intervals upon a foundation of Etruscan gold; and the most critical observer would likely have failed to notice that they composed a series of letters.

How was it then that after the most casual glance Dorian Rossmore noticed the characters and shrieked out like one suddenly stricken mad as she sprang to her feet and clutched at the bauble?

“*Mon Dieu! Give it me!*” she cried. That sudden and frenzied shriek rendered Sir Philip spell-bound.

Without a word he yielded to her the bracelet, staggering backward as he did so, as though he had been smitten a mighty blow, his eyes meeting her staring, horrified ones, with an expression that was no less wild and startled.

“For the love of God, Dorian, do not look at me like that!” he composed himself at length sufficiently to say.

“*Where did you get this bracelet?*” panted the woman, holding the glittering diamonds up between their gaze.

“I have said that I bought it while I was abroad last winter,” he answered her quietly and laconically.

“But where? Where? *Where?* I say!” screamed Dorian Rossmore in wildest frenzy.

“At Florence,” he answered still with dogged brevity.

“But at what jeweler’s? Tell me at what jeweler’s? This is my murdered sister’s bracelet! See! Read the name formed of these stones!”

He advanced and bent over her as, with trembling fingers, she traced out the letters which he had never before noticed: “JULIE D’ARCY.”

“Julie d’Arcy!” gasped the man; then swiftly collecting himself, he met her eyes and exclaimed again:

“Oh, Dorian, for the love of God do not look at me like that!”

Her eyes were becoming fixed and stony in their gaze. She swayed helplessly to and fro. Another moment and she had fallen backward on the divan, where she lay in a death-like swoon, with the diamond bracelet clutched tightly in her hand.

CHAPTER XXX

THE DENOUEMENT

Dire combustions and confused events
New-hatched to the woeful time.

—*Macbeth.*

THE emergency was a startling one even to Sir Philip Camden who stood for some moments striving to collect his errant senses. At length he resolved, like one accustomed to philosophize from a hazardous standpoint, that it would be far the wisest plan not to summon assistance to the unconscious Dorian, so he himself set about with assiduity to restore her.

Luckily, he found upon the lady's dressing-table a bottle of cologne, which liquid he generously applied to her brow and lips, even forcing a few drops between the set teeth.

But while thus busily engaged were his thoughts and anxieties entirely of Dorian? If so, why did his narrow, evil eyes wander so often from her white features to the hand in which she still held in a vice-like clasp the diamond bracelet?

Once he made a movement as though he would, by main force, have torn the jewel from its shield, but just at that instant Mrs. Rossmore betokened signs of returning consciousness, and all that

shone in her attendant's face, when presently she opened her eyes, was the most lover-like solicitude.

"My poor Dorian!" he whispered, and his voice was soft and cooing as a wood-dove's, and bespoke naught of the agitation lying latent under his breath; but the woman felt that breath upon her face hot as if fanned from a burning furnace.

At his words, she started into a sitting posture and thrust him from her fiercely.

"Ceil!" cried she, shuddering and covering her face with both hands. "What is here? *What is this horrible revelation?*"

"Dorian, try and calm yourself to tell me something of the dark story with which these diamonds seem to be so mysteriously connected," said Sir Philip, and he dared to lay his hand upon her's as he spoke, but she shook off the member with another repulsive shudder.

"Don't touch me!" cried she, uncovering her face and flashing her creole eyes upon him, like an envenomed reptile, when about to spring upon its victim. "Do not dare to touch me, Sir Philip Camden! but tell me exactly how you came in possession of my dead sister's jewels—the ring which you gave me as a talisman, and this bracelet are stained with her blood, like unknown thousands of pounds' worth in gems and money purloined by the same atrocious hand that thrust

the fatal poignard in her breast. I would know from whence and the very moment they came in your keeping?"

Before answering her, Sir Philip threw himself quite at ease, into a chair a short space apart from where she was sitting.

"I have told you, Dorian, that I bought the bracelet at a Florentine jeweler's; the ring I purchased also in Florence," he said complacently.

Mrs. Rossmore uttered a shriek of impatience at his words.

"Why will you be so impervious? That is wholly unsatisfactory! There are scores of jewelers in Florence. What name? Who was the merchant? Upon what street was his establishment?"

"How should I remember, *ma chere*? I was in that city but two days, and took no notice of the names of firms, or streets. I was merely passing, and seeing the baubles displayed in the windows, thought them unique and pretty and bought them."

It seemed that the lurid fire from her eyes must have burned its way to his being's quickest fibre; if so Sir Philip evinced no outward sign of discomfiture. He met her gaze steadily, and without the slightest facial quiver as he thus spoke, and then sat, like an image carved from stone, under the scoffing surveillance which followed, and during which Mrs. Rossmore noted for the

first time the ugly scar which half-revealed itself on his upper lip under the thin and tawny moustache.

“His face is one of subtilty and evil. *Peste!* it is a serpent’s face! Why have I never before marked its resemblance to—”

Suddenly she seemed to feel the cold clasp of arms about her neck, and to hear a voice whisper something that made her shrink back against the cushions of the divan, ghastly pale and shivering as with a nervous chill.

At length she unriveted her dazed eyes from Sir Philip’s countenance, and fixed them upon the bracelet of diamonds. He noticed now that her bosom heaved convulsively, and believing her to be weeping, he took advantage of this softened mood to say, with a tremor of well assumed pathos in his voice: “Tell me, Dorian—for your grief’s sake, tell me the story of your past life. When did this—oh it seems too dreadful, too horrible!—this murder occur? Commence first and tell me something of your sister; I have never heard you speak of her.”

“To speak of Julie,” said Mrs. Rossmore, her gaze still riveted upon the jewel in her hand, and now her voice sounded with wonderful composure, “means also to speak of myself. I fear you will find my story tedious, but I will make it brief as possible.

“Eleven years ago,” she commenced, “upon

the death of my father, Julie and I were placed in a convent at Paris. My sister was two years my senior, and beautiful beyond expression. Almost from the very day we entered the convent the sisters began importuning her to fit herself for the adoption of the veil—to consecrate her life in behalf of the Church. Even the priest would implore her when she would go to confession to devote herself to the studies of the lives of saints and to have no other ambition beyond that of the holy faith.

“This went on for two years, during which time, instead of yielding to their supplications, Julie became more hardened each day against them. She grew almost to despise the faith, and at times, in a great passion would renounce it. One night she went to confessional, and after pleading vainly with her for a long while, the padre ended by calling upon her soul a dreadful malediction. ‘You have been branded with a fatal beauty,’ he said. ‘You will go out into the wicked world in uncovered orphanage, and your face will be your curse! May it be so, O Holy One! If she does not seal her life to the Church, may Thy curse be upon her head!’

“She came back to me from the chapel, looking in her fury, like a demented wraith. In running through the long corridors, her hair had become loosened, and hung far below her knees in shining jetty waves. Her eyes glittered wildly,

and every fibre of her beautiful face quivered with the anger that consumed her. Standing thus before me, she tore the rosary from about her neck and, breaking the beads asunder, cast them to the floor and trod upon them.

“‘I despise thee!’ she cried passionately. ‘I loathe thee, and the sisters and the Mother Superior and the priests! I loathe all connected with the Roman Catholic religion!’

“Then she turned to me and her face softened. She threw herself upon her knees beside me, and soon her whole form was convulsed with sobs. For some time she wept unrestrainedly. When the paroxysm had passed and she was calm again, she lifted her face to mine and said in a voice of terrible resolve—‘Dorian, I am sorry for what I said about the sisters and the Mother Superior. They have been very kind to us both, and I do not hate them. I hope the Holy Virgin will forgive my angry words. But I am going to escape from this prison! Oh my sister, help me! If I remain here another month my reason will forsake me—I shall go mad!’

“I saw she was in fearful earnest, and I pitied her from my inmost heart.

“The convent is not that heaven where one invariably finds the contentment of soul that is alleged, and where all the instincts of nature are appeased by the Holy Spirit;—the soul may be humble, the instincts controlled in a certain

degree, but the natural impulses and emotions must remain as long as life supports the flesh.

“Julie was beautiful, passionate, romantic, capricious. Such a nature could not be associated with the serene, inactive life of a convent any more than the soaring instinct of a bird can be assuaged.

“I realized this and promised to help obtain her liberation, if such a thing were possible. Then anxiety of her future seized upon me as I remembered suddenly that the meagre inheritance left us by my father had upon his death-day been placed in the hands of the same priest who had execrated my poor Julie, and who had been appointed our legal guardian until we became of age.

“‘What little money we have, my sister, is controlled by Father C——. It will be impossible to obtain this; and without means how will you exist?’ I asked her.

“‘I will get a position as lady’s maid until I can look about me. But my ambition has always been to become an actress,’ she said. ‘I mean to apply myself to the study of minor parts for which I hope soon to be accepted at one of the theatres.’

“I had always known that dramatic art was the bent of my sister’s mind, so I made no attempt to dissuade her in her plans.

“Now, it so happened that my daily duty at convent was to accompany a sister on charitable and missionary errands.

“I knew that at nightfall on the following day the sister would expect me to attend her on a visit of mercy to a poor, dying woman in a squalid part of the city.

“Well, I went to the Mother Superior late in the afternoon, and pleading a severe headache, suggested that Julie be permitted to accompany her in my place. Without suspicion she consented and just at dusk I kissed my darling in what I knew was a final farewell, and saw her depart with a countenance so transfigured by thoughts of her coming liberation that I feared the keen intuition of the sister would suspect and thwart her intentions. But she did not. The sister returned to the convent weeping and ringing her hands in a manner most distressing to see. She stated that in turning out of the dark, narrow street where lived the dying woman they had been to see, she had suddenly missed Julie from her side, and had called for her, loud and repeatedly, in vain.

“Father C——, our guardian, reported her escape to the authorities of Paris, but the latter would adopt no means toward recovering her to the convent, as the record proved her to be within a month of her majority.

“A few months passed and I had no news of my poor sister. Oh, I had always worshipped her so!” Hereupon Dorian was compelled to pause for a moment in order to master her emotion.

Presently she continued :

“With loneliness and anxiety I could not sleep of nights or rest through the long, toilsome days. I became stupid in my lessons and went to chapel always with my heart so empty and disconsolate that I could not pray. What made me still more wretched yet : as time went on I began to notice that the sisters looked upon me with keen suspicion, especially Sister Teresa, from whom Julie had made her escape, and who, it seemed in very malice, would, whenever an opportunity offered, assign me some disagreeable task ; as, for example, watching all night beside a sick-bed, or teaching a batch of awkward girls how to embroider. In this manner a year passed, at the end of which time I had grown to hate convent life as bitterly as Julie, only in a different way. The sisters, seeming to divine this, began to watch me closer than ever. I never left my room without I felt a pair of falcon eyes upon me ; and whenever I went beyond the convent gates it was by the side of a black-robed and vigilant monitress, who always compelled me to walk a little in advance of her, lest, I suppose, by some chance I might escape as my sister had. Oh, I assure you, mine had become the life of a convict ! Indeed, I often thought as I stood at my third-story window looking out toward the mass of domes and spires of the great city, that I had rather be an inmate of one of its darkest prison cells than go on living at

that convent. But, unconsciously to me, my term of martyrdom was nearing its close.

“One afternoon there came a party of visitors to the convent—three Englishmen. As they passed through the ward in which I was engaged with my amateur class at embroidery, I glanced up casually and met the eyes of one of them.

“He was not a man of prepossessing presence, and his close, penetrating gaze almost startled me. I felt my face burn hotly beneath it. All night long I laid awake trying to define the look which I had encountered in his eyes, and which had seemed so full of significance.

“The next day it was rumored about the convent that one of the gentlemen visitors who had recently been there, and who was very wealthy and without family ties, had seen a certain young lady—an orphan—in the school, for whom he had conceived a great fancy, and was eager to adopt as his ward. I gave the rumor no thought further than to wonder if there were any truth in it, and to feel a momentary impetuous sensation of envy toward the unknown ‘orphan’ whose good fortune it might have been destined to escape the trammels. But that night as I was preparing to retire there came a little sharp tap at my door. I opened it, and whom should I behold but the Mother Superior, who never paid a visit to our dormitories except on occasions of the most pressing moment. She entered, and, as she did so,

bade me throw a mantle over my bedgown, as she wished to talk with me.

“Wonderingly I obeyed her.

“Her keen steel-blue eyes had in them the same cold and disapproving light with which, of late, they had been wont to regard me, and which to-night I fairly trembled beneath, feeling an instinctive prescience that I was standing on the threshold of some great crisis.

“When I was ready to listen I silently placed a chair for her, but she scorned to accept it, gave me a branding look for my pains, and, crossing herself, murmured something inarticulate in Latin.

“Then she addressed me, first surveying me from head to foot, as a chief on a high seat of justice might survey a felon in the box ere he pronounced upon him some dread sentence. ‘I,’ said she, ‘care not to *sit* in the presence of Julie de Joulés d’Arcy, the *actress*’ sister!’ The words were almost hissed from her rigid lips.

“I repeated them after her; then, as I began to realize their meaning I threw myself forward upon my knees at her feet, and, kissing the hem of her garment, cried:

“‘Is it true? Is my darling then alive and well? and has she succeeded in her ambition to become an actress? Oh! I have often trembled at the thought of hearing of her lest it should be to hear that she were dead!’

“She drew her robe fiercely from my hand, and the terrible look in her face commanded me to my feet.

“‘Girl! Dorian de Joulés!’ panted the woman, ‘is your own soul, then, naturally so debased, so depraved, so devoid of all womanly instincts that it does not rise up and smite you with overwhelming shame because of your sister’s downfall? What were your parents? Were they both unabsolved in death that they left the fatal curse of Satan upon their progeny?’

“I stood, meeting her eyes with a torrent of wild passion-born words upon my lips. She had roused within me the proud, resentful, Spanish blood; but it really seemed that at that moment I could hear a sound as of the beating of ghostly wings, and I knew the spirit of my sainted mother was there to defend its own. The thought quieted me, so I only said:

“‘Holy Mother, you are cruel to speak so. My parents both died fully confessed and absolved from sin, and they are both now sainted spirits in heaven. I am sure that my sister has never yet fallen from the seat of chastity; but if she ever should it will be because the priest, into whose godly keeping my father committed us upon his death-day, gave her soul in benediction to the evil one; it will not be because of her own natural inclination to fall!’

“She stood aghast under my words, trembling

in every limb. I guessed the effort it cost her to control her passion.

“‘I did not come here,’ she said, at length, ‘to measure words with one so wicked and unchaste; I came merely to advise you, Mademoiselle de Joulés, that a gentleman who recently visited the convent has manifested a desire to adopt you as his ward. Read this! So saying, she placed in my hand a sealed envelope, upon opening which I read, like one in an enchanted dream, the few lines, which were in a cramped little hand, and which were signed merely ‘Albert A. Rossmore, London, England.’”

“Having seen me in passing through the convent he had been greatly prepossessed with my face and general appearance, and having been told, subsequently, by the Mother Superior of the convent, that I was an orphan, with but a trifling dowry, and no future protector, he was anxious to adopt me as his ward [not daughter] and future heiress. An Englishman by birth he was, and rich beyond his own reckoning. I should have every advantage that money could lavish; I should travel over both continents and choose a home from any point of either that I might desire. Seasonable to my acceptance of his offer he would settle one thousand pounds upon the Convent of The ———, previous to my departure therefrom.

“This was his letter in the abstract, and I shall

not attempt to convey the mad delight it gave me. Suffice it to say that having at once intuitively guessed Mr. Rossmore to be the Englishman who had watched me so intently the day before, and after accustoming myself to the reality of the strange situation, I sent him a note granting an early interview.

“Two days later, I quitted my convent home legally adopted as Albert Rossmore’s ward.

“Now, to continue the story of Julie :

“The first thing I did after finding myself in the free and dazzling space of the great city, was to seek out my sister. It was not a difficult undertaking. I remembered the name that the Mother Superior had applied when speaking of her, ‘Julie de Joulés d’ Arcy.’ Of course the latter was her stage name. I looked through the *Figaro* for the theater announcements, and found the beloved name heading one of the principal bills. She was playing Rosalind in ‘As You Like It,’ and the press comments which followed under the heading were of the most enthusiastic and flattering kind. I took the paper to Mr. Rossmore, and after proudly explaining who Julie d’ Arcy was, expressed a desire to go to the play that night. He took me. We occupied a box nearest the stage—so near, indeed, that I could have whispered to my darling when she appeared. Imagine, if you can, that supreme moment when in the scene with Celia, she glanced up at our

box, and, recognizing me instantly, made a sudden, impetuous movement with her arms, then paling, like quick death, recovered herself with a masterful effort and went on with her acting. Her emotion had been so swift that I do not think any in the house perceived it except myself and Mr. Rossmore. But many times she flashed her splendid eyes upward toward our box, with untold rapture in them ; and when she cried in the play her tears were so genuine that they moved the house and made her more of a paragon than ever.

“ Well, the first act over, she stole up to our box and dragged me down to her dressing-room, where we kissed and wept over each other as much as we dared for her safety. Then, while her maid dressed her for the second act—oh ! how tall and grand ; how brave and beautiful looked she in her disguise as Ganymede !—she made me go back over the sixteen months that had lapsed since we had seen each other, and tell her everything that had happened.

“ After the play was over, I went with her to her apartments in the Rue du N——, where we sat up the remaining hours of the night, rejoicing over our strange re-union. She went over her stage career, which had been one of consecutive triumphs since she made her *debut*, ten months previously, as Phebe, the Shepardsess, in the same play, which had brought her Rosalind so many laurels. She had an album filled with press

trophies—numberless lines from the pens of love-lorn critics, who extolled her beauty, her grace and rare talent as an actress to the very deities.

“Her jewels, many of which were the tribunals of peers, were a fortune in themselves, and comprised numerous pieces of unique and exquisite workmanship. This bracelet”—lovingly touching the bauble which she had clasped upon her arm while talking, “was presented her by my guardian about a month after our re-union. At the same time I gave her a circlet, composed of eleven diamonds and one emerald. I had the ring made after an original fancy. The eleven diamonds represented the letters of our first names, and the single emerald was an emblem of destiny. It made a significant and a sacred talisman, and Julie promised me that it should never leave her finger while she lived.

“I remember that she wore the bracelet behind the footlights once, then placed it in a small cabinet-drawer among the rest of her diamonds. There was a separate compartment in the cabinet for pearls, and one also for miscellaneous gems.

“She always kept her valuables under a safety-lock at her own apartments, for which hazardous practice I often remonstrated with her; but she would always laugh at my warnings, saying that if burglars should break into her rooms they would never suspect the homely little metal box.

“Among my sister’s many suitors, there was

one whose attentions had always been obnoxious to her ; but who would inflict them upon her on every possible occasion. One afternoon when I was paying Julie a visit, his name was announced, 'Philip Stanton.'

" 'I am not at home to any one this afternoon,' Julie commanded the servant to say to her visitor, but the man returned presently to say that Monsieur insisted upon an interview ; that he was to leave Paris on the ensuing day, and would not importune her again if she so willed it ; and so Julie gave a reluctant assent. But when the servant had gone she turned to me with keen displeasure and something of fear in her lovely face, and whispered supplicatingly :

" 'Dorian, do not leave me alone for one instant with this man. I fear him ! There is always a look in his eyes when they are fixed upon me that makes me recoil with instinctive dread. My soul tells me that he is a nefarious person.'

" When I saw the man a moment later, I was convinced that my sister was right in her opinion. Duplicity and cunning were written on every feature of his face, which I watched covertly from my coin of vantage in the alcove.

" Monsieur Sir Philip," Dorian hereupon parenthesised, fixing her strangely brilliant eyes upon her listener who was beginning to show signs of restiveness, "I see I am tiring you ; but I am

now upon the last chapter of my story, and will not tax your patience much longer.

“Philip Stanton was not aware of my presence in the room, as the portieres concealed me from view. But every word of their interview reached my listening ear. I heard his insolent appeal for her hand. I heard my darling’s answer, which was calm, decisive and final, and then the man’s dreadful threats.

“ ‘Mademoiselle d’Arcy,’ he said as he bowed himself from her presence, ‘you have not seen the last of me! *Au revoir*, until that moment comes when you will find yourself as entirely at my mercy as a feather is at the mercy of a hurricane. That moment will come as surely as you live, and that, too, when you least expect it.’

“A few days subsequently Julie’s engagement at the Paris theatre closed, and ere booking herself for others, she concluded to take a brief vacation, of which she stood much in need.

“Mr. Rossmore and myself had planned to go to Marseilles for a yachting trip up the Mediterranean, and as my sister had always felt an instinctive dread of the water, she declined our invitation to accompany us. So we left her in Paris with a promise to rejoin her after a fortnight. We had been in Marseilles, however, but two days, when one morning as we sat at breakfast, and my guardian was ruuning his eye along the columns of a popular Parisian journal, I heard a quick,

startled exclamation escape him. Looking up I saw that Mr. Rossmore was as pale as death and trembling with some emotion which he seemed to be striving to suppress.

“My eye, in seeking to discover the cause of his agitation, fell upon the paper which he had hastily thrown aside. Actuated by some strange intuitive impulse, I took it up, whereupon the first thing that met my eye was—was these words: ‘A Ghastly Crime,’ with the underlines running thus :

“ ‘Mademoiselle Julie d’Arcy, the beautiful and gifted young actress, foully murdered while asleep at her apartments in the Rue du N——. All her jewels and money stolen.’ ”

In quoting the terrible words a ghastly pallor crept over Dorian’s face.

For a moment Sir Philip believed she was going to faint again, but gradually she mastered the dizzy sensation sufficiently to go on :

“It was the last I knew for weeks. When I opened my eyes again in consciousness, they told me I had been at death’s door with an attack of brain fever. My first thoughts were of my murdered sister. They told me that no clue had yet been found of her assassin, except that upon the night of the crime, two masked men had been seen in the neighborhood of the Rue du N——, by a party coming out of a *café*. Later on a Frenchman, one M. Alphonse Favraud, was

arrested on suspicion and placed in prison, where he remained for nearly a year awaiting his trial, and then was found not guilty and acquitted. Meanwhile grief of my cruel bereavement was wearing my life away, and the physicians advised my guardian to take me away from the scene of my sorrow, so we at once set sail for America. Eight years have passed, and all the light that has ever been thrown upon the foul assassination which, at the time, filled all Europe with horror, is that which to-night falls from these diamonds, and that is no better than the light of an eclipsed planet—it reveals nothing, and yet it brings my sorrow back to me vividly—vividly as though it were only yesterday that I suffered the cruel agonies !”

There followed a heavy pause, during which the woman's long pent-up tears fell unrestrainedly. After what seemed an age to Sir Philip, she lifted her wet face, and, looking at him through a blurring mist, said almost bluntly :

“Please leave me now, Monsieur. I shall return to Boston to-morrow, and have yet my packing to attend to.”

He rose and stood looking down upon the ruined idol of his dreams.

“You will not drive me from you, my poor Dorian, before I have expressed my sym——”

She stayed him with a scornful sweep of her hand.

“A man,” said she, “is more the real man who does not attempt to measure sympathy with trite words. Moreover, if you were eloquent as Demosthenes, your language would fall flat when brought to bear upon such a grief as mine—and you, Sir Philip—pardon, Monsieur—were never eloquent—scarce a passable linguist, you know. Now, *au revoir*! Yet, stay—if by any possible chance you should run against Fred Bentwell again to-night, just kindly explain, will you, that I am anxious for a speedy reconciliation? I do not want him to disgrace himself by getting on a regular debauch. They would hear of it in Boston, and calumny clings to one, you know, like *the stain on a murderer’s hands*.”

With these words and another empty *au revoir*, she dismissed him.

Some one remarked Sir Philip’s face as he passed through the foyer of the hotel on his way out, and that person observed to himself: “It is like the face of King Richard the Third, after awakening from his ghost-dream!”

As he passed on down the almost deserted thoroughfare, Sir Philip muttered to himself: “I, too, shall return to Boston to-morrow from where I shall proceed at once to Maplehurst, where my French spy must by this time be well prepared for a cold dip in the Merrimac!—Then—then for a weapon against *her*!”

CHAPTER XXXI

MIDNIGHT MASS

'Twas whispered in heaven, 'twas muttered in hell,
And echo caught faintly the sound as it fell.
On the confines of earth 'twas permitted to rest,
And the depths of the ocean its presence confessed.

--*Catherine M. Fanshawe.*

WHEN Sir Philip's footsteps had receded down the corridor, Dorian sprang toward the door and locked it securely.

As she turned back into the solitude of the rooms, her eyes glittered wildly, and she pressed both hands to her temples to stay the hot blood that was surging and throbbing there, threatening to drive her mad.

She murmured some inarticulate, passionate words as she swept rapidly up and down the spacious rooms, her velvet train twisting and coiling itself behind her, like a huge serpent, her chest heaving tumultuously, her face no longer pale, but flushed with the conflicting emotions that were raging within her bosom.

Presently she paused near the center of the room, and, with her hand clasped tightly over the diamond bracelet on her arm, and her burning eyes uplifted toward the ceiling, she commenced

speaking in a calmer voice, as if in communion with a visible spirit :

“ At last, my beautiful, white-winged dove, there is light shining through the age-long night ! At last I stand on a pinnacle of truths from which I view thy brute-murderer through his foul disguise ! Oh, Julie ! could I but span the abysmal space of ocean which this night divides us, and go and lay my hand upon the cold stone that guards thy form in its sepulchre, it seems to me my triumphant touch would sunder wide the marble, and thou wouldst walk forth in thy white shroud to exult with me, and to head the procession that soon—ah, soon!—my sainted sister, will march to the execution of thy vile assassinator ! Soon, soon will the whole of Europe shout in a joyous exultation at his death ! Hark ! Even now methinks I can hear the bells of Paris clamoring a jubilant accompaniment to their song—*Ah !* ”—she paused suddenly, and drawing a long breath, as of ecstasy, leaned forward in a listening attitude.

“ I was mistaken,” she went on presently, as if still in communion with the dead. “ ’Tis but the cathedral bells sounding twelve. It is the signal for midnight, Christmas mass.”

She crossed over to the window, and parting the heavy silken draperies, looked down on the avenue where a few late pedestrians were hurrying through the driving sleet.

"It storms," she observed to herself in some surprise, for when they had returned from the restaurant, two hours previously, there had been a weight of icy dampness in the air, but no sleet nor wind. The storm had come on suddenly.

She turned shivering from the window and, with a look of resolution on her face, rang for a cab.

A few moments later, enveloped in a long black circular, and closely veiled, she left the hotel and entered the *coupé* in waiting at the curb.

"To the Roman Catholic Cathedral," was the order given to the driver, and the next moment she was being whirled over the cobblestones in the direction of that sacred edifice.

During that brief, cheerless drive, she was thinking of her past intimacy with Sir Philip Camden, whose touch she still seemed to feel contaminating her, like that of a serpent.

"Heavens! The thought that *his* lips have often been pressed upon my hands; that *his* blood-stained hands have fondled my hair; that *his* vile arms have rested about my waist! *Ugh!*"

She shuddered and flung open the cab-door, letting the cold night wind, with its accompanying sleet, blow in upon her.

It seemed at that moment the only thought that kept her from going stark mad was that her intimacy with Sir Philip had been on her part but a subterfuge.

From the very day that she was introduced to the man she had experienced an instinctive dislike of him ; later she had brought herself to endure him, nay, to even talk and coquette with him in the frivolous, unmeaning way that she coquetted with scores of others. But from that moment when he had placed the talisman upon her hand, she felt her aversion of him return with redoubled force. From that moment she began to suspect him of duplicity. That he was in some manner associated with the dark mystery which for years had shrouded the tomb of her sister she had believed as firmly as she believed in the stars of heaven ; and in order to penetrate into his past life and search there for a key that might unlock and open the iron door at which the law had so long been knocking in vain, she had forced herself to submit to his almost constant companionship, and had even feigned some reciprocation of his sentiments toward her, encouraging him to believe that she would succeed to the position in his life which Lady Hortense had filled so unsatisfactorily.

But all at once her fictitious *rôle* had become insupportable, and she had resolved to abandon it, even at the sacrifice of that "key" which she had so ambitiously hoped to find among those rotten leaves that Sir Philip so zealously sat upon and guarded.

At that last critical moment, however, when

she had receded but a step from her purpose, she had looked back and beheld, shining there, the monstrous revelation ! At the same instant she had seemed to feel a pair of soft arms close about her, and to hear an exultant voice whisper :

“That is Philip Stanton ! I cut the scar upon his lip with my ring—your talisman—in striving to defend myself against his uplifted dagger.”

It was true ! All at once Dorian had recognized the evil face before her as that of the man whom her sister had rejected, and who had so malevolently threatened her. The disfiguring scar, together with the intervening years of reckless adventure, had changed it almost beyond recognition ; while yet to add to this disguise his physique, which had then been slight, had grown corpulent and robust.

A shiver ran through Dorian's frame as she recalled those warning words. They had been uttered in the same dear, familiar tone that she last heard sounding in life as Julie kissed her in farewell at the station in Paris nine years previously : “*Au revoir, chère soeur !* In a fortnight, then I shall be looking for you back.”

After the ghostly whispered words and the giving way of that cold clasp about her neck, Dorian had heard a swift-rushing sound, as of vanishing wings. Then she had remembered no more until she heard Sir Philip's voice saying :

“My poor Dorian !”

Oh! the horrible sensation which at that instant she had experienced as she thrust him from her, realizing herself in the presence of her sister's murderer, could not be described! and afterwards, how she had struggled for outward calm, that he might not read all that was going on within her triumphant woman's soul, even forcing herself to tell the long story of poor Julie's life! Oh, it was terrible!

She thought back upon that age-long hour, during which she had talked to him with such seeming complacency, and wondered how she had restrained herself from hurling her revengeful tigress-self forward and burying the stiletto, which she always carried secreted in her bosom, after the custom of her mother's race, up to its jeweled hilt in his black, basilisk heart.

"But I am glad I did restrain myself," she said, as she looked out on the thoroughfare whose desolation the electric lights, hanging pale and high in the dense atmosphere, seemed only to intensify. "I," she added, "would prefer to see the expression of his face when the law lays hands upon him, which will be the moment he arrives in Boston."

They were now in sight of the Roman Catholic Cathedral. Dorian looked toward the church and saw dim lights shining from the stained glass windows. She had been filled with a sudden longing to enter that sanctuary and kneel before

the Holy Virgin in humble thanksgiving, for surely she had cause to feel both humbleness and gratitude on this dying Christmas night.

"I will be absent only for a little space of time," she said to the driver as she alighted from the equipage; and a few moments later she was kneeling before one of the brightly lighted and inflorescent altars in the church.

Very humble indeed looked the beautiful creole, Dorian, with hands crossed on her breast over her dark cloak, her head bowed upon the chancel rail, her lips moving in hurried words of prayer, the fervor of which was betokened by the glittering drops that fell thick and fast upon the carpet from her eyes.

When she rose at length, and drew the thick veil over her face to depart, her features shone as if illumined by a benediction; and as she walked slowly down the long aisle of the hallowed place the song of the choristers floated to her. They were singing "The Herald of the Angels."

CHAPTER XXXII

THE MIDNIGHT BELL

Stand still, my soul, in the silent dark
I would question thee,
Alone in the shadow drear and stark
With God and me!

What, my soul, was thy errand here?
Was it mirth or ease,
Or heaping up dust from year to year?
'Nay, none of these!'

—Whittier—"My Soul and I."

AN opalescent glow shone upon the white hills and lowlands, making the former look like pinnacles of precious stones, when Lady Hortense and her maid reached Maplehurst.

The castle, with its broad, dark, stone-shafted casements, its snow-wreathed towers and silvered spires, looked not less solemnly grand on this late December evening than some venerable fortress prison. Yet, as she came in sight of those sombre walls, albeit she confessed to herself that she had never experienced anything of happiness within them, something of peace and restfulness fell athwart the tired out soul of Lady Camden, while a flash of the old light that had in by-gone days illumined the beauty of her face, leaped into life as they passed through the outer gates and

over the snow-embedded courtyard toward the massive Gothic entrance to the castle.

When a few yards from the closed portals she paused to listen a moment to the uproarious voice of waters rushing below the terrace wall.

"Anine," said she, "the river must have swollen much during our absence, but as yet it is not frozen. Listen! do not the waters make a mighty rushing sound?"

"Yes, miladi, but I like not to hear them," answered the girl with an involuntary shiver. "I have never liked to hear the sound of the river since the—since—since I first came to Maplehurst." She had been on the eve of saying "since the time that I first heard you murmur in your sleep something about blood-dyed waters," but she checked the words by a sudden impulse, and her mistress in her pre-occupation failed to notice the incoherency with which she had substituted the others.

Old Ephriam, the guard whom Sir Philip had left on the premises, had been drowsing away the winter afternoon in the stable loft, and so had failed to hear the brisk trotting of horses' hoofs on the hard snow, accompanied by the tinkling of sleigh bells; hence the two women approached the house uninterrupted and entered by means of Lady Hortense's key.

They passed through the dark halls in which reigned a deathlike stillness and ascended at once

to the *Louis Quinze* apartments, having gained which Anine ensconced her mistress among a pile of rugs on the lounge, strictly enjoining her not to remove even so much as a glove until she had kindled a fire ; for the rooms were cold as a tomb. But ere long all the delicate gold and white appointments therein were made the play-grounds for ruddy flame-beams, and as the warmth increased, my lady was permitted gradually to divest herself of shawls and sables, and at length she stood at her favorite post in the deep window-place watching the last opal wreaths of the sunset vanish under the stars.

Below, on one side rushed the dark river with surface seething and foam-flecked, with voice thunderous and never still ; while on the other side stretched the white esplanade peopled with spirit-birch and maple trees, and looking withal like a beleaguered acre.

There was nothing cheerful in that wintry twilight picture—you or I, methinks, would have drawn the curtains over it and turned us to the glowing grate instead. But Lady Hortense loved to gaze upon it—after the ceaseless rattle and glare of the city the river's voice was as a lullaby to her soul, the empty whiteness of the landscape was as balm. It was not until her maid announced that tea was served that she turned from the scene.

“ Ah ! Anine, you are worth your weight in

pure gold!" exclaimed Lady Camden, as her glance fell upon the daintily spread little table. "I had not considered the need of food during our brief stay here," she added, smiling at her own short-sightedness.

Anine had thoughtfully provided a loaf, some freshly-dairied butter, besides many other dainty little edibles which she thought her young mistress would enjoy, and which, with a cup of fragrant tea, made up a most delightful repast; but one, to her disappointment, that Lady Hortense found herself unable to taste. In vain did Anine sit tearfully by, entreating her to "just try a bit of cold chicken-wing." No, she could only drink the tea.

"Remember, Anine," she kept repeating, "we lunched very late," at which the French girl only shook her head aggrieved, saying, "Oh, miladi, you ate nothing, *nothing!*" and her dejection robbed her of her own healthful appetite. As she cleared away the tea things her mistress rose and again walked over to the window place, and Anine followed her presently, wheeling a low *fautewil* which she placed for her close up to the uncurtained pane, and thus commanded a full view of the winter's landscape.

The transformation which had suddenly been wrought upon the early night, made Lady Camden clasp her hands in silent ecstasy.

A full moon was rising, it seemed to her, out of

the very abyss of waters, and sent a red refulgence over the broad aqua-acre, making it look like an expanse of seething silver. In the pale, translucent light the birch and maple trees seemed to beckon at each other with their phantom arms, while out beyond the white, far-reaching plain, where the hills raised their undulating brows against the horizon, there floated a gauze like transparency, which glittered like the quivering fall of myriad diamonds.

No wonder Lady Hortense sighed again and again as she sat there in rapt contemplation of the beautiful spectacle, and those words of Southey which rose to her lips and which she repeated half aloud, were very appropriately applied to it :

No mist obscures, no cloud, nor speck nor stain
Breaks the serene of heaven;
In full-orbed glory yonder moon divine
Reels through the dark-blue depths.
Beneath her steady ray
The desert-circle spreads,
Like the round ocean girdled with the sky.

One hour passed and yet another ; still she sat motionless, with her white hands clasped upon her lap, gazing forth and thinking in tearless silence—in silence communing with her soul :

What daunts thee now ? What shakes thee so ?
My sad soul ; say.

“Death? I am very young—I am only twenty. Is not that very young to die, O soul of mine ? O stars ! O tender moon ! Once as I gazed

upward at thy serenity, my heart was glad, and light and young, and shared all that was most beautiful and sublime in life! how long ago was that that my soul tells me now *I must die?* I must have wandered further than I thought into benighted space, and away from thy shining love—it must be years since my life became so cold and dark and barren of all that used to make it glad—I must be old—very old now! My soul tells me I am near the valley of the shadow—oh, it is still there—profoundly still and cold! Yet I—I do not feel afraid, for God is there! Ah, soul of mine—

What to thee is shadow, to Him is day,
And the end he knoweth,
And not on a blind and aimless way
Thy spirit goeth.

It is better as it is—better, a thousand times better to die in His all-merciful love, than to live and offend him by my iniquitous loving. Far, far better than that, dearest Alice, will be a low grave, over which you and he, my idol—(I can call him my idol away out here in this isolated spot where only my soul and the archangel hear) will stand and hear them say: ‘I am the Resurrection and the Life,’ but you will never know the secret of my heart—it will be buried with me, and the tears, my gentle friend, that may fall from your eyes upon my grave, ‘like the slow, sad dropping of rain,’ will have naught of the bitterness in them which the knowledge of my story would have engendered.”

"Miladi, it is ten o'clock," said Anine, breaking suddenly in upon her sad reverie.

Lady Camden started.

"Good Anine," said she, without looking around. "I am sure you must be tired. I have been so thoughtless! Bring in your pallet and retire at once. I will sit up yet a little while. The night is so perfect and I am not in the least sleepy."

Anine sighed and returned to the ottoman, where all the evening she had sat, reading a late Boston journal which she had brought with her from town.

The girl believed that she had read every article of interest in the paper, but there was a certain little lyric which she wished to clip out to send to *le bon homme*, in the distant Pyrenees, who wrote that ere long he was going to cross the sea to claim his *bonne petite* and bear her as his bride back to France. The stanzas flavored of the tenderest sentiment, and as she eagerly scanned the columns in search of them, her eye suddenly came in contact with a paragraph which she had previously overlooked. It was a telegram from London and was headed "A Skillful Fraud." The lines ran thus :

"News has just been conveyed to the London police that Philip Stanton, alias George Courtney, an English plebeian and a notorious scoundrel, is at present living at a magnificent country estate in America, somewhere in the vicinity of Boston, Massachusetts, and that he circulates his false person under a distinguished title.

The report, which is entirely authentic, we have every reason to believe, says that Stanton was married a year ago to an aristocratic young American lady, of rare beauty and a fine bank account, who has all these months been living under the cruel hallucination that she bears her title and the arms emblazoned on her carriage by an undisputed right. The lady will soon be advised of the true character of her husband, and Stanton apprehended and brought to England, under whose laws he will be punished for the score of criminal offenses charged against him."

This is what poor, dazed Anine read and re-read ere she would believe that she had not dreamed the terrible truth. With a tearful, whispered supplication to Heaven to deliver her young mistress from the cruel disgrace that was hanging over her, she crushed the paper into an unrecognizable mass, then throwing it into the grate she watched the flames reduce it to a pale heap of ashes, after which, with a set, livid face, she again approached that silent figure in the embrasure of the window.

"Come, miladi," urged she, "you will not be able to return to the city to-morrow if you do not sleep."

Lady Hortense made no reply, but silently suffered the girl to lead her away.

Half an hour later the lights were burning low in the *Louis Quinze* rooms, and all was wrapped in profound solitude. Yet neither of the inmates slept.

Lady Hortense lay quietly listening to the sound of which she never tired—that of the

waters rushing below the terrace—and striving to soothe her restive soul with thoughts of the great happiness that had overtaken the ones she mostly loved. She pictured their future to herself, and seemed to see Thayer Volney, the young nobleman, a rising member of Parliament—he had once confided to her his great aim, which was to become an earnest politician—and lord of a worthy establishment, wherein Alice was the beacon light and the inspiration through which his greatest and noblest purposes attained success. She saw her children, with tiny faces repeating his own ideal image, going out to meet Thayer, and their fair-haired mother standing proudly on the threshold waiting with happy kisses to exchange. She fancied many such pictures as this, and tried to convince herself that they soothed the aching void in her heart, and at last from sheer faintness, she fell into a kind of stupor with the chime of wedding bells in her ear. In her dreams she was at the church, before her rose the altar, with its lovely burden of flowers—all white, white, white; with interminglings of soft and shining green. From the stained windows above there descended the light of day, bathing all in a tender, hallowed effulgence, while subtly above the pervading hush there rose those strains of Lohengrin—those beautiful bridal strains, sweet as though sung by a chorus of angels. “They are coming now

—the bridal train! See! They enter! They pass up the long aisle toward the white, white chancel. She with her beautiful, radiant face, down bent, and her violet eyes, shining through the meshes of her long veil, dim with happy, unshed tears, and fixed upon the cluster of lilies in her hand. He, proud, handsome, tall, erect, his gaze bent straightway before him, toward the spot where they will presently kneel together and make their solemn vows—vows that will bind them until death! Aye, until, in and beyond death! The bridal chorus of the angels has ceased. All, all is silent now—only [for an instant, however, when comes the clear pronunciation, ‘Man and wife.’ A benediction, then they turn, and arm in arm pass slowly from the church. The crowd has followed. I alone am left in the holy place—with God! I weep, and God, seeing my tears, even through my thick veil, knows they are shed for very joy that they are wed, and happy! I go up and kiss the spot where his feet have been—and hers; and then, with a deep unrest engendered of the longing to make some greater manifestation of my joy, I wander—wander—wander—”

Meanwhile, as Lady Hortense lay in that dreamful stillness, Anine with her face muffled in the coverlets of her pallet, sobbed unrestrainedly as she offered up earnest supplications in behalf of her beloved mistress.

“*O mon Dieu!* if her young life is already blighted to the death, as it does seem, let Thou her grave be sealed ere falls this threatened grief upon her! She is so good, so innocent, so pure, O Holy God! so, if Thou wouldst take her, take her whilst yet her heart is unfestered by the knowledge of her husband’s vileness!”

This was the prayer Anine repeated again and again—repeated until with salt tears dried upon her virgin cheek, she, too, sank into troubled slumber.

She awoke suddenly to find herself in a sitting posture, with her heart beating wildly from some unknown cause.

“What awakened me?” whispered the dazed girl. “No sound is here, save that of the river, and the night winds murmuring by. Perhaps—*mon Dieu!* what is this!” cried she as her eyes turned toward her mistress’ bed, whose curtains were tossed aside revealing it empty!

Bounding to her feet, the now terrified girl almost shrieked:

“Miladi! Miladi!”

Only the echo of her own voice came to her in response.

She turned up the lights so that she could better search the rooms, but look as she would there was no sign of her mistress anywhere. Her white *robe de chambre*, with its accompanying silver girdle, was just where she had placed it when

she had dressed her mistress for bed, and the little embroidered slippers were in their usual place. Nothing was disturbed. As Anine stood wringing her hands and shivering from head to foot in dire distress, there rushed upon her a sudden thought. Once or twice during her stay at Maplehurst she had known Lady Camden to walk in her sleep. The thought reassured her. "Of course," thought she, "I will find her in one of the halls or corridors." She hastily adjusted her dressing gown and thrust her bare feet in slippers; then taking a candle she started forth. Just as she reached the door, however, a sound thrilled through the house that riveted her to the spot.

It was the tower bell!

Three slow and doleful strokes it sounded, then was still.

"That," whispered the newly terrified maid, "is the noise which first awakened me! Can it be my mistress has gone up to the belfry?"

Scarcely crediting the thought, she moved out into the hall, scanned futilely its rambling space, and the corridors leading from it; from one of these she passed up the narrow flight of stairs, thence along a narrow corridor to the belfry steps. Ascending these she stood upon the threshold and looked in.

Through the stained-glass skylight above, the moonbeams fell, fixing bright patches on the

floor, in the midst of which there stood a tall, slight figure, over whose sweeping, spotless robe thick masses of black hair streamed in wild abandonment. Her eyes were wide open, her lips half-parted, her face uplifted toward the swaying bell, and stamped with an awful vacancy. Up-reaching were her hands, as if about to grasp the swaying rope again.

As Anine stood, afraid to make a sound lest it should awaken her mistress in this weird and terrifying place, she heard her say :

“Thou hast chimed twice for Thayer, thrice for Alice, now toll one for the dying.”

“One —— !”

Oh, that knell was full of woe and prayer ! When the sound had quite declined into the silence, Lady Camden turned and started toward the door.

Anine now slipped noiselessly down the steps, holding the candle low in front of her, that its rays might not attract those open yet unconscious eyes, and shrinking against the wall behind the bannisters, she allowed the sleeping woman to pass half-way down the corridor before she essayed to follow her.

Now, the girl had been standing, unconsciously, against the very aperture in the wall of Alphonse Favraud's prison.

Imagine, then, if you can, her horror, when, just as she started to pursue her mistress, she felt

herself being held back by some mysterious power.

"*Mademoiselle!*" said a ghastly voice which seemed to come from the very wall behind her, "be not afraid. I am a prisoner here and am in momentary peril of death from starvation! My hands are paralyzed and helpless from striving to work a way through this wall to freedom. My body is numb and frozen. Release me! For the love of God release and give me food, that I may yet live to revenge myself upon my would-be murderer!"

The voice ceased, and Anine felt the hand release its hold of her.

She turned, and placing the candle close to the aperture gazed in upon the prisoner.

Oh! the sight that met her eyes was unspeakably frightful! — the glaring orbs; the pinched cadaverous features; the long unkempt hair and beard! They made up a thing so ghastly that any but Anine must have fled from it in wild afright. But she had become accustomed to strange and ghastly experiences by this time, and when at length she spoke to him, she was quite self-possessed:

"How long have you been imprisoned here?" she asked, calmly.

"I cannot say, mademoiselle. It has seemed like an eternal age to me, but since I first saw the light through this crevice I have counted seven days and nights," responded the Frenchman.

“Who is your jailer?”

“Who? *Peste!* Who should it be but one who styles himself Sir Philip Camden, but is a common-blood, like the veriest vagrant-hound, and a chartered envoy of Satan!”

“You are a Frenchman—one of my own country. What is your name?” the girl questioned.

“Favraud is my name, mademoiselle, Alphonse Favraud,” said the man.

“Alphonse Favraud!” repeated Anine. “I have heard that name before—Ah! were you not once arrested in Paris, and tried for the murder of a young actress named Julie d’Arcy?”

“*Oui, mademoiselle,*” the man responded promptly.

“Has that murder case anything to do with your presence here?”

“*Oui, petite ami,* it is the very key by which I entered,” answered Favraud, with smiling complacency.

“Was Sir Philip in any way implicated in *that* atrocious affair?” the young girl questioned breathlessly.

“You will know—the whole world will have heard the *dénouement* by to-morrow night. Only give me food and drink, also pen, ink and paper, that I may make a written statement in case I should die before I reach the authorities.”

“Only answer me one more question and I will serve you. What is Sir Philip Camden’s true name?”

“Stanton. He has also been known as Courtney—George Courtney.”

Anine raised her eyes heavenward, and muttered something that the prisoner did not hear, then saying :

“I will be back promptly, monsieur,” she vanished.

When she reached the *Louis Quinze* rooms, she found Lady Hortense lying quietly under the eiderdown of her bed with closed eyes and breath as gently woven in and out as though nothing had happened.

Murmuring a prayer of thankfulness for this, Anine drew the curtains closely, turned the lights down dim, then again quitted the apartments noiselessly, bearing the basket of cold stores which she had taken from the tea-table that night, and a decanter of wine.

As she went upon her mission of mercy, the alarm-clock in the hall below was tolling the first hour of the new day.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE GATE AJAR

Dead ! and she knows to-day what 'tis to ford
The mystic waters of the stream so dread;
Perhaps she, too, has seen the risen Lord
In Paradise, where dwell the sainted dead.

—S. C.

DECEMBER 26th, ten o'clock A. M. The Boston and Providence east-bound express just puffing out of the New York station. There were few passengers in the drawing-room car this morning—in truth, not more than a score in all.

In one remote corner sat Sir Philip Camden, ostensibly absorbed in the perusal of a fresh morning journal, but in truth, keeping his eyes on a direct level with the blank margin of the paper, that he might stealthily watch the young couple who occupied *vis à vis* chairs in the center of the coach, and who were engaged in low, earnest conversation which characterized them at once as lovers. Even through the thick, closely drawn veil which the lady wore the strikingly beautiful features of Dorian Rossmore were recognizable, while her *debonnaire* companion was none other than her recently slighted, but now wholly conciliated suitor, Fred Bentwell.

The latter, having gone to his apartments in the "wee sma'" hours of the morning, had found Dorian's little white-winged, lavender-scented covenant of peace awaiting him on one corner of his dressing table. Upon reading this, he had at once summoned a porter to pack his belongings, then he had passed the remaining hours, till dawn, in the hammam baths; coming out of which, like a new-bloom pansy, he had made an elaborate toilet and was seen hurrying through the streets, soon after sunrise, toward Fifth Avenue. Dorian, who was up betimes, seasonable to her impending journey, welcomed him in becoming *dishabile*. They, however, lingered but briefly over that fondest of all lover's interviews; for they had to breakfast before train time, and once on the cars they would have from ten o'clock until four to couch in octave clauses, the sentiments which they were now forced to express only by short staccato kisses and hurried exclamations.

"Curse him!" muttered Sir Philip Camden behind his screen, as he watched that intimate proximity of faces. "What madness in Dorian to squander such adorable beauty and grace as she possesses upon that consummate sop! But this is merely one of her periodical caprices; she will tire of him in less than a month, and her ambition for a titled position will be duly revived. But I hate that accursed bracelet scene!

By Heaven ! I'd give its price a hundred times over if it had never happened. And her words about the stain clinging to a murderer's hands ! Could she have recognized me as the lover of Julie d' Arcy ? *Impossible !*"

He put the harrowing idea from him as preposterous, and presently let his gaze wander from the couple far out to the sound, upon whose crested bosom white yacht masts glistened amid flaunting flags of every nationality, and where circling seagulls played and dove in wintry glee ; and, while for a time he remained lost in dark meditations, which shut out even all thoughts of Dorian and his young rival, not once was the demon within him shaken, or in any manner awed.

"Wherefor should I tremble ?" he asked himself in his self-conscious criminality. "I have escaped the law all these years ; and, ere this, Alphonse Favraud's lips are sealed in death. After the river has buried him, or its current borne him to the sea, what will there be to fear ? No other power on earth could convict me ! and in the end—oh curse the end ! Life is only one long lie, anyway ; and humanity is doomed to one ultimate and impartial fate—the grave, then rot ! Ha ! ha ! what matters it whether a man's record be white or black ?"

This, then, was his creed ; and with such to blind him, to damn his soul forever and forever, he

was hurrying straightway toward his horrible doom.

Oh, Destiny ! thou art a grim and merciless avenger.

The betrothals of Alice Meredith and Valois Elwood--those two sweet characters whom we have followed through a brief space of their lives, but from whom the current of events has separated us for a time, were celebrated in a quiet, but withal, appropriate manner ; and, albeit, there were scores of newly betrothed couples in Boston on the 26th of December, 18-- , their's were, by far, the happiest hearts among them--at least so Valois had shyly lisp'd in the ear of her soldier lover, when he called at ten o'clock ; and as Alice stood among the blossoming exotics in the window about that same hour, her soulful eyes fixed upon a tall, athletic young man who was walking swiftly up the avenue toward the brown-stone house, the worshipful light in them must have drawn him the faster to her, as a magnet draws a needle when within range, for when Thayer approached nearer, he looked up and saw her, and--shall I tell you what he then did ? You might think my "Modern Glaucus" had grown to be quite commonplace if I should ; but I am sure that when you pause to consider that actions born of such holy love as was his, are like an old-fashioned song, ever new and beautiful to the sympathetic soul, you will only say, "Wasn't he sweet, and just like a fond young lover ?" Well,

then placing his hands to his lips, he wafted his sweetheart kisses one, two, three ! and she, with infinite rapture in her fair face, returned them with the same impetuous gestures that he himself had used ; and then, as if moved by a sudden impulse, she rushed to the end of the room where the piano stood open, and began to sing:—

My heart, my heart is like a singing bird,
Whose nest is in a watered shoot.
My heart, my heart is like an apple tree,
Whose boughs are bent with thick-set fruit.
My heart, my heart is like a rainbow shell,
That paddles in a halcyon sea.
My heart, my heart is gladder than all these,
Because my love, my love hath come to me !

“ Alice ! Darling ! ”

She had heard him enter and knew that he stood behind her as she sang the two last lines ; so when the sound of her sweet, glad voice had died away, and his followed close upon it, in the two joyful—unutterably joyful exclamations, she put up her arms and clasping them of her own spontaneous will, about his neck, she whispered: “ My love ! My Robin St. Cloud ! My King Cophetua ! ” A long, rapturous kiss, and then—ah the dreams of their two young hearts as the lovers sat, wrapped in the benediction of the sunlight, were such as human, waking hearts seldom experience, and such as no earthly words can give appropriate shape to.

Alice had had her sorrows, but their seat was now usurped by love, who

Took up the harp of life, and
Smote on all the chords with might.

There was nothing awaiting her in the vista of years ahead save that essence of divine felicity which such heaven-ordained love as she had won engenders, and which she reciprocated share for share.

Out beyond the great Atlantic they would go ere long, and the years, breaking in like a succession of bright, sunlit waves upon their life, would find them realizing the dreams that Hortense, the poor, isolated and doomed "Bride of Infelice," had predicted for them. No young couple among the British aristocracy would be more popular, more loved and courted than Sir Thayer Volney, and the beautiful Lady Alice. The latter would be idolized among her tenants and dependent poor, as well as by the political world in which her husband would prove an indefatigable worker and a luminous light, of whose noble interests and traditions her sister's books would breathe chapters in unbridled eloquence, winning for her name, fame and many golden laurels which she would proudly hand down to her progeny, but which she would never prize so dear by half as the love with which God had ordained that a certain young and chivalrous nobleman should crown her to the happy end.

Somewhere on the Boston and Providence line, between Bridgeport and New London a disastrous

railway collision had occurred in which the east bound express train was wrecked.

Out beyond that heap of smoking and charred debris among a scattered mass of wounded dead and dying humanity, Sir Philip Camden lay stretched motionless upon the snow, his life-breath ebbing from him in quick, convulsive throes.

He had not spoken once since they had taken him, all crushed and mangled, from the ruins; and so hopeless, indeed, was his condition that the doctors after a brief analysis of it passed on, knowing that all attempts to revive him would be futile.

Sir Philip Camden was dying.

What need now had earthly authorities of the confessions of Dorian Rossmore and Alphonse Favraud? Though he had been the perpetrator of many dark and undivulged crimes, what need now of France, England or America's laws of punishment in his name? The soul of this accomplished criminal was passing into the precincts of the High Court of Justice, the voice of whose throned King has been, is now and shall forever be heard proclaiming: "*Vengeance is Mine and I will repay!*"

Julie d'Arcy's assassin was about to witness the book whose pages held the dark secrets of his life, closed and sealed forever. So must it lie. To investigate such a record would be futile, for

nothing is there that would gratify—nothing but what would produce horror and useless censure, hatred and bitter vexation.

A relief train had been despatched to the scene of disaster, and ere long Mrs. Rossmore and Fred Bentwell, who had both come out of the disastrous wreck miraculously unscathed, were among the passengers on their continued way to Boston.

They reached the city shortly after nine o'clock when Dorian, eager to convey to Mrs. Ayers the intelligence of her son-in-law's precarious condition—a condition in which she, Dorian, exulted with a vehemence that at times almost terrified her—went at once to her establishment where she found Hortense Camden's mother in a wild state of hysteria, caused by the report of the railway disaster which she had already seen by the latest edition of the evening papers. Among the names of the dead victims she had read that of her son-in-law, Sir Philip Camden.

"Oh, my wicked, wicked Hortense!" cried the frantic lady. "She it was who sent him to his untimely doom! Had she been other than the cold, unloving, skeptical wife toward him that she has always been, he would never have gone to New York. She has been his evil destiny! She has been all but the proud, loving and grateful wife she should have been—she has been his Doom!"

"But, my dear Mrs. Ayers, think how much .

worse it might have been. It is not as though he had left his widow penniless upon your bounty. He has left her the magnificent estate of Maplehurst. She will still be Lady Camden, and you doubtless will live with her at the castle," soothingly and generously reasoned Dorian.

"Oh, hush—hush!" sobbed Mrs. Ayers as she applied a fresh solution of *eau de cologne* to her swollen and much disfigured face. "My daughter can never be reconciled to me—never! All the mother-love that I once felt for her is cold and dead within me. She has deliberately killed it with obdurate self-will and ingratitude."

"Has Lady Hortense yet heard of her husband's death?" asked Dorian gently.

"No! She was mad enough to go to Maplehurst yesterday afternoon after being confined to her rooms for a whole fortnight. I had a telegram from her maid this morning stating that she was quite ill with a fever. It is just as I predicted her rashness would terminate, and I doubt if, in her delicate state of health—she is, you know, to become a mother in the spring—I doubt if she will leave the castle again for months. I shall take an early train to-morrow and go to her."

"I wish you had gone to-day," said Mrs. Rossmore, with a growing compassionate feeling toward the beautiful and unhappy Lady Hortense. "She may be dangerously ill; and of course there is no one with her but her maid."

“Anine can do all for her that is necessary,” returned Mrs. Ayers unsympathetically. “Besides who,” relapsing suddenly into her former state of agitation, “would then have been here to receive his—his—*corpse*? It will be here on the midnight express!”

So it happened that poor Hortense had looked vainly all that afternoon for her mother. She had fully expected that upon receiving the telegram Mrs. Ayers would hasten at once to her bedside; but the hours crept on apace and there was only Anine to soothe her pillow, and old Ephriam to come in at intervals to replenish the wood fire. She talked almost incessantly of the river that day, asking her maid to bring her Whittier’s poems from the library and read to her his verses about the Merrimac, and falling asleep just as the sun set with that poet’s words upon her lips:

O child of that white crested mountain, whose springs
Gush forth in the shade of the cliff-eagle’s wings,
Down whose slopes to the lowlands the wild waters shine,
Leaping gray walls of rock, flashing through the dwarf pine.

O stream of the mountain! if answer of thine
Could rise from the waters to question of mine,
Methinks through the din of thy thronged banks a moan
Of sorrow would swell for the days which have gone.

Twilight fell over Maplehurst, and the same moon rose again which yesternight had glorified the river and the white plains and hills beyond; but the chair at the window was vacant.

About ten o'clock Anine brought in her pallet, thinking that as her mistress still slept soundly, she herself would seek a little rest ; for what with her wakeful adventures of the previous night, and anxieties of the day, she was well-nigh worn out with fatigue.

For some time she slumbered heavily. She was awakened by the alarm clock in the hall below, sounding the hour of midnight. What was it that caused her to direct her eyes with a startled look in them, toward the bed, and encountering its white emptiness, spring to her feet with a cry of guilty alarm ?

"It is as I feared," she said, "my lady has gone to the river in her sleep !" She ran to the window and looked down toward the moonlit waters. Sure enough, on the very brink of the terrace she espied a white-robed figure standing, motionless as a spectre, gazing down into the rushing abyss. The picture was more weirdly terrifying than anything she had ever beheld, and for a moment it held her rooted to the spot.

Only a hair's breadth between the "Bride of Infelice" and—Eternity !

Collecting her dazed senses Anine rushed from the room, down the darkened stairs, out of the door which stood half ajar, and then madly on over the white court-yard toward that silent statuesque figure.

She was within a few yards of her goal—so near

it indeed that her fear-stilled heart commenced to beat again at the glad thought that in one moment more her hand would be outstretched to grasp the sleeping woman's garments and to pull her back from that awful threatening grave. But alas! ere she had spanned the little space, her foot slipped suddenly upon the hard-frozen snow, and she fell prostrate forward with a half-suppressed cry.

Recovering her feet almost instantly she fixed her eyes ahead of her, toward the spot where only a moment before she had seen that figure standing white and motionless—fixed them there to behold the spot now tenantless, and the figure just vanishing over the high terrace wall!

Oh, the awful silence that followed! Anine wondered in after days, how she ever was prevented from going stark mad in those dumb lost moments, and by what power she was stayed from following down the dark abysmal way that her beautiful, kind, and noble mistress had gone.

She remembered, to her dying day, the unearthly shriek, which was followed by a loud splashing sound, as Hortense struck the waters. She remembered the picture of that dead white face, upturned to God, and the resistless hands cleaving the dark, foam-crested waters, as all that remained of her beloved mistress was whirled away toward the sea with the rapidly-rushing current.

When Mrs. Ayers reached Maplehurst early on the next morning, Anine met her at the outer gates with a swollen, tear-stained face, and hands frantically clasping and unclasping themselves.

“Oh, *Madame!*” cried the stricken girl, “she is dead! my kind and beautiful mistress is dead—drowned yonder in those ‘blood-dyed waters!’ I saw her float away towards the sea, forever! There are officers at the castle—they are searching there, and they have found a box containing jewels, which they say once belonged to a French actress whom Sir Philip murdered; and oh, *Madame*, he was never Sir Philip Camden at all. He was only a common Englishman named Philip Stanton, and the papers say, an accomplished criminal. I read the *denouement* myself last night, but *she*, my mistress, never knew of her husband’s wickedness. I prayed God to save her from knowing it, and He has answered my prayer.”

Tremulous and pale, and encompassed by a dumb incredulity, Mrs. Ayers stood for a moment motionless after the girl had ceased speaking, then shaking herself free from the hands that had unconsciously grasped hold of her garments, she hurried across the court-yard and vanished through the open door.

[THE END]

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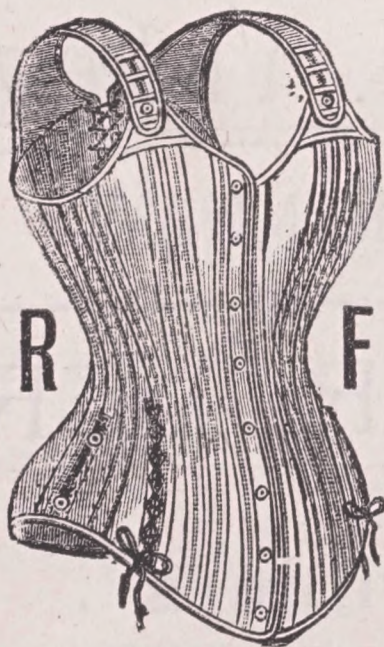
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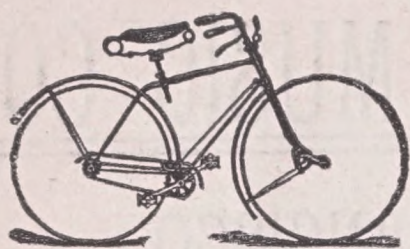
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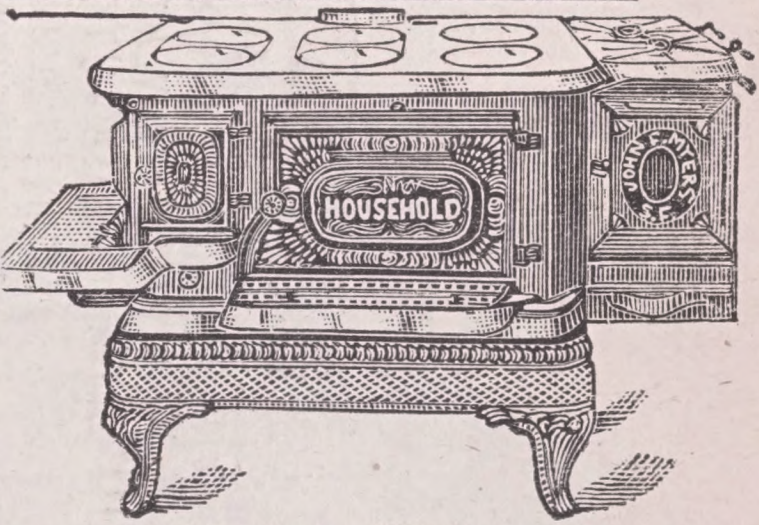
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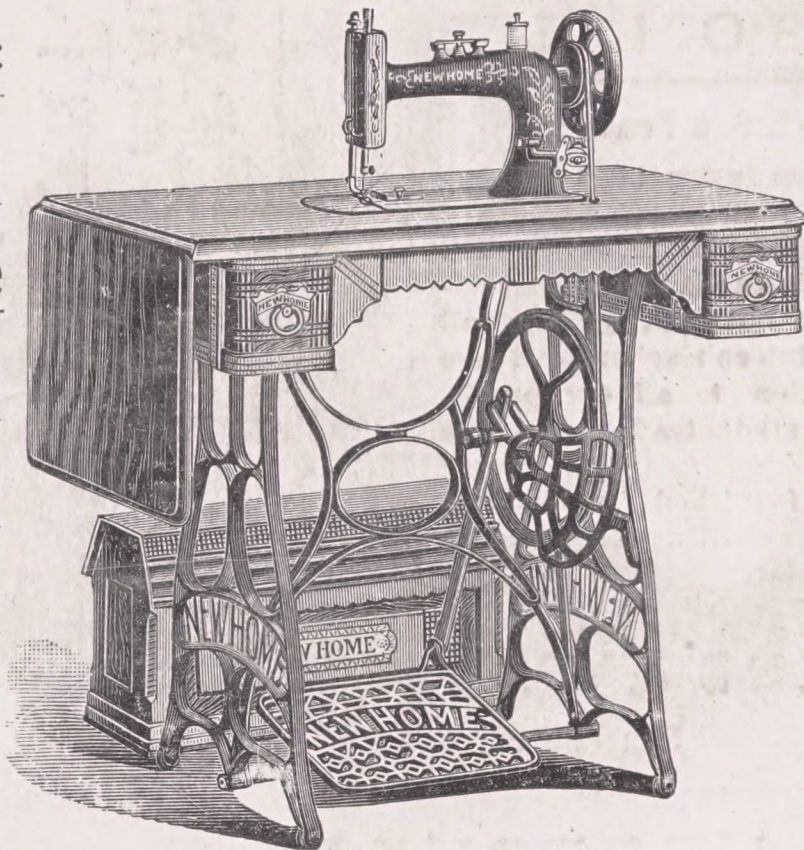
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