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KATE DANTON;

OR

CAPTAIN DANTON'S DAUGHTERS

A Novel

BY MAY AGNES FLEMING,

AUTHOR OF "NORINE'S REVENGE," "GUY EARLSCOURT'S WIFE," "A WONDERFUL WOMAN," "A TERRIBLE SECRET," "A MAD MARRIAGE," "ONE NIGHT'S MYSTERY," ETC.

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"——A woman's will dies hard,
In the field, or on the sward."

"There were three little women
Each fair in the face,
And their laughter with music
Filled all the green place;
As they wove pleasant thoughts
With the threads of their lace.

Of the wind in the tree tops

The flowers in the glen,
Of the birds—the brown robin,
The wood dove, the wren,
They talked—but their thoughts
Were of three little men!"

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By May Agnes Fleming.

KATE DANTON.

CHAPTER I.

GRACE DANTON.

A low room, oblong in shape, three high narrow windows admitting the light through small, old-fashioned panes. Just at present there was not much to admit, for it was raining hard, and the afternoon was wearing on to dusk; but even the wet half-light showed you solid mahogany furniture, old-fashioned as the windows themselves, black and shining with age and polish; a carpet soft and thick, but its once rich hues dim and faded; oil paintings of taste and merit, some of them portraits, on the papered walls, the red glow of a large coal fire glinting pleasantly on their broad gilded frames.

At one of the windows, looking out at the ceaseless rain, a young lady sat—a young lady, tall, rather stout than slender, and not pretty. Her complexion was too sallow; her features too irregular; her dark hair too scant, and dry and thin at the parting; but her eyes were fine, large, brown and clear; her manner, self-possessed and lady-like. She was very simply but very tastefully dressed, and looked every day of her age—twenty six.

The rainy afternoon was deepening into dismal twilight; and with her cheek resting on her hand, the young lady sat with a thoughtful face.

A long avenue, shaded by towering tamaracks, led down to stately entrance-gates; beyond, a winding road, leading to a village, not to be seen from the window. Swelling meadows, bare and bleak now, spread away to the right and left of the thickly-wooded grounds; and beyond all, through the trees, there were glimpses of the great St. Lawrence, turbid and swollen, rushing down to the stormy Gulf.

For nearly half an hour the young lady sat by the window, her solitude undisturbed; no sign of life within or without the silent house. Then came the gallop of horse's hoofs, and a lad rode up the

avenue and disappeared round the angle of the building.

Ten minutes after there was a tap at the door, followed by the entrance of a servant, with a dark Canadian face.

"A letter, Miss Grace," said the girl, in French.

"Bring in some more coal, Babette," said Miss Grace, also in French, taking the letter. "Where is Miss Eeny?"

"Practising in the parlour, Ma'moiselle."

"Very well. Bring in the coal."

Babette disappeared, and the young lady opened her letter. It was very short.

"Montreal, November, 5, 18—.

"My Dear Grace—Kate arrived in this city a week ago, and I have remained here since to show her the sights, and let her recruit after her voyage. Ogden tells me the house is quite ready for us, so you may expect us almost as soon as you receive this. We will be down by the 7th, for certain. Ogden says that Rose is absent. Write to her to return.

"Yours sincerely,
Henry Danton."

"P. S.—Did Ogden tell you we were to have a visitor—an invalid gentleman—a Mr. Richards? Have the suite of rooms on the west side prepared for him. H. D."

The young lady refolded her note thoughtfully, and walking to the fire, stood looking with grave eyes into the glowing coals.

"So soon," she thought; "so soon; everything to be changed. What is Captain Danton's eldest daughter like, I wonder? What is the Captain like himself, and who can this invalid, Mr. Richards, be? I don't like change."

Babette came in with the coal, and Miss Grace roused herself from her reverie.

"Babette, tell Ledru to have dinner at seven. I think your master and his daughter will be here to-night."

"Mon Dieu, Mademoiselle! The young lady from England?"

"Yes; and see that there are fires in all the rooms upstairs."

"Yes, Miss Grace."

"Is Miss Eeny still in the parlour?"

"Yes, Miss Grace."

Miss Grace walked out of the dining-room, along a carved and pictured corridor, up a broad flight of shining oaken stairs, and tapped at the first door.

"Come in, Grace," called a pleasant voice, and Grace went in.

It was a much more elegant apartment than the dining-room, with flowers, and books, and birds, and pictures, and an open piano with music scattered about.

Half buried in a great carved and gilded chair, lay the only occupant of the room—a youthful angel of fifteen, fragile in form, fair and delicate of face, with light hair and blue eyes. A novel lying open in her lap showed what her occupation had been.

"I thought you were practising your music, Eeny," said Grace.

"So I was, until I got tired. But what's that you've got? A letter?"

Grace put it in her hand.

"From papa!" cried the girl, vividly interested at once. "Oh, Grace! Kate has come!"

"Yes."

The young lady laid down the letter and looked at her.

"How oddly you said that! Are you sorry?"

"Sorry! Oh, no."

"You looked as if you were. How strange it seems to think that this sister of mine, of whom I have heard so much and have never seen, should be coming here for good! And papa—he is almost a stranger, too, Grace. I suppose everything will be very different now."

"Very, very different," Grace said, with her quiet eyes fixed on the fire. "The old life will soon be a thing of the past. And we have been very happy here; have we not, Eeny?"

"Very happy," answered Eeny; "and will be still, I hope. Papa and Kate, and Mr. Richards—I wonder who Mr. Richards is?—shall not make us miserable."

"I suppose, Eeny," said Grace, "I shall be quite forgotten when this handsome Sister Kate comes. She ought to be very handsome."

She looked up at an oval picture about the marble mantel, in a rich frame—the photograph of a lovely girl about Eeny's age. The bright young face looked at you with a radiant smile, the exuberant golden hair fell in sunlight ripples over the plump white shoulders, and the blue eyes and rosebud lips smiled on you together. A lovely face, full of the serene promise of yet greater loveliness to come. Eeny's eyes followed those of Grace.

"You know better than that, Cousin Grace. Miss Kate Danton may be an angel incarnate, but she can never drive you quite out of my heart. Grace, how old is Kate?"

"Twenty years old."

"And Harry was three years older?"

"Yes."

"Grace, I wonder who Mr. Richards is?"

"So do I."

"Did Ogden say nothing about him?"

"Not a word."

"Will you write to Rose?"

"I shall not have time. I wish you would write, Eeny. That is what I came here to ask you to do."

"Certainly, with pleasure," said Eeny. "Rose will wait for no second invitation when she hears who have come. Will they arrive this evening?"

"Probably. They may come at any moment. And here I am lingering. Write the note at once, Eeny, and send Sam back to the village with it."

She left the parlour and went down stairs, looking into the dining-room as she passed. Babette was setting the table already, and silver and cut-glass sparkled in the light of the ruby flame. Grace went on, up another staircase, hurrying from room to room, seeing that all things were in perfect order. Fires burned in each apartment, lamps stood on the tables ready to be lit, for neither furnace nor gas was to be found here. The west suite of rooms spoken of in the letter were the last visited. A long corridor, lit by an oriel window, through which the rainy twilight stole eerily enough, led to a baize door. The baize door opened into a shorter corridor, terminated by a second door, the upper half of glass. This was the door of a study, simply furnished, the walls lined with book-shelves, surmounted by busts. Adjoining was a bathroom, adjoining that a bedroom. Fires burned in all, and the curtained windows commanded a wide western prospect of flower-garden, waving trees, spreading fields, and the great St. Lawrence melting into the low western sky.

"Mr. Richards ought to be very comfortable here," thought Grace. "It is rather strange Ogden did not speak of him."

She went down stairs again and back to the dining-room. Eeny was there, standing before the fire, her light shape and delicate face looking fragile in the red fire-light.

"Oh, Grace," said she, "I have just sent Babette in search of you. There is a visitor in the parlour for you."

"For me?"

"Yes, a gentleman; young, and rather handsome. I asked him who I should say wished to see you, and—what do you think?—he would not tell."

"No! What did he say?"

"Told me to mention to Miss Grace Danton that a friend wished to see her. Mysterious, is it not?"

"Who can it be?" said Grace, thoughtfully. "What does this mysterious gentleman look like, Eeny?"

"Very tall," said Eeny, "and very stately, with brown hair, and beard and mustache—a splendid mustache, Grace! and beautiful, bright brown eyes, something like yours. Very good-looking, very polite, and with the smile of an angel. There you have him."

"I am as much at a loss as ever," said Grace, leaving the dining-room. "This is destined to be an evening of arrivals I think."

She ran upstairs for the second time, and opened the parlour door. A gentleman before the fire, in the seat Eeny had vacated, arose at her entrance. Grace stood still an instant, doubt, amaze, delight, alternately in her face; then with a cry of "Frank!" she sprang forward, and was caught in the tall stranger's arms.

"I thought you would recognize me in spite of the whiskers," said the stranger. "Here, stand off and let me look at you; let me see the changes six years have wrought in my sister Grace."

He held her out at arm's length, and surveyed her smilingly.

"A little older—a little graver, but otherwise the same. My solemn Gracie, you will look like your own grandmother at thirty."

"Well, I feel as if I had lived a century or two now. When did you come?"

"From Germany, last week; from Montreal at noon."

"You have been a week in Montreal then?"

"With Uncle Roosevelt—yes."

"How good it seems to see you again, Frank. How long will you stay here—in St. Croix?"

"That depends—until I get tired, I suppose. So Captain Danton and his eldest daughter are here from England?"

"How did you learn that?"

"Saw their arrival in Montreal duly chronicled."

"What is she like, Grace?"

"Who?"

"Miss Kate Danton."

"I don't know. I expect them every moment; I should think they came by the same train you did."

"Perhaps so—I rode second-class. I got talking to an old Canadian, and found him such a capital old fellow, that I kept beside him all the way. By-the-by, Grace, you've got into very comfortable quarters, haven't you?"

"Yes, Danton Hall is a very fine place."

"How long is it you have been here?"

"Four years."

"And how often has the Captain been in that time?"

"Twice; but he has given up the sea now, and is going to settle down."

"I thought his eldest daughter was a fixture in England?"

"So did I," said Grace; "but the grandmother with whom she lived has died, it appears; consequently, she comes to her natural home for the first time. That is her picture."

Miss Danton's brother raised his handsome brown eyes to the exquisite face, and took a long survey.

"She ought to be a beauty if she looks like that. Belle blonde, and I admire blondes so much! do you know, Grace, I think I shall fall in love with her?"

"Don't. It will be of no use."

"Why not? I am a Danton—a gentleman—a member of the learned profession of medicine and not so bad-looking. Why not, Grace?"

He rose up as he said it, his brown eyes smiling. Not so bad-looking, certainly. A fine-looking fellow, as he leaned against the marble mantel, bronzed and bearded, and a thorough gentleman.

"It is all of no use," Grace said, with an answering smile. "Doctor Danton's numberless perfections will be quite lost on the heiress of Danton Hall. She is engaged."

"What a pity! Who is the lucky man?"

"Hon. Lieutenant Reginald Stanford, of Stanford Royals, Northumberland, England, youngest son of Lord Reeves."

"Then mine is indeed a forlorn hope! What chance has an aspiring young doctor against the son of a lord."

"You would have no chance in any case," said Grace, with sudden seriousness. "I once asked her father which his eldest daughter most resembled, Rose or Eeny. 'Like neither,' was his reply. 'My daughter Kate is beautiful, and stately, and proud as a queen.' I shall never forget his own proud smile as he said it."

"You infer that Miss Danton, if free, would be too proud to mate with a mere plebeian professional man."

"Yes."

"Then resignation is all that remains. Is it improper to smoke in this sacred chamber, Grace? I must have something to console me. Quite a grand alliance for Danton's daughter, is it not?"

"They do not seem to think so. I heard her father say he would not consider a prince of the blood-royal too good for his peerless Kate."

"The duse he wouldn't! What an uplifted old fellow he must be!"

"Captain Danton is not old. His age is about forty-five, and he does not look forty."

"Then I'll tell you what to do, Grace—marry him!"

"Frank, don't be absurd! Do you know you will have everything in this room smelling of tobacco for a week. I can't permit it, sir."

"Well, I'll be off," said her brother, looking at his watch, "I promised to return in half an hour for supper."

"Promised whom?"

"M. le Curé. Oh, you don't know I am stopping at the presbytery. I happened to meet the curate, Father Francis, in Montreal—we were school-boys together—and he was about the wildest, most mischievous fellow I ever met. We were immense friends—a fellow-feeling, you know, makes us wondrous kind. Judge of my amazement on meeting him on Notre Dame street, in soutane and broad-brimmed hat, and finding he had taken to Mother Church. You might have knocked me down with a feather, I assure you. Mutual confidences followed; and when he learned I was coming to St. Croix, he told me that I must pitch my tent with him. Capital quarters it is, too; and M. le Curé is the soul of hospitality. Will you give me a glass of wine after that long speech, and to fortify me for my homeward route?"

Grace rang and ordered wine. Doctor Danton drank his glass standing, and then drew on his gloves.

"Have you to walk?" asked his sister. "I will order the buggy for you."

"By no means. I rode up here on the Curé's nag, and came at the rate of a funeral. The old beast seemed to enjoy himself, and to rather like getting soaked through, and I have no doubt will return as he came. And now I must go; it would never do to be found here by these grand people—Captain and Miss Danton."

His wet overcoat hung on a chair; he put it on while walking to the door, with Grace by his side.

"When shall I see you again, Frank?"

"To-morrow. I want to have a look at our English beauty. By Jove! it knows how to rain in Canada."

The cold November blast swept in as Grace opened the front door, and the rain fell in a downpour. In the black darkness Grace could just discern a white horse fastened to a tree.

"That is ominous, Grace," said her brother. "Captain Danton and his daughter come heralded by wind and tempest. Take care it is not prophetic of domestic squalls."

He ran down the steps, but was back again directly.

"Who was that pale, blue-eyed fairy I met when I entered?"

"Eveleen Danton."

"Give her my best regards—Doctor Frank's. She will be rather pretty, I think; and if Miss Kate snubs me, perhaps I shall fall back on Miss Eveleen. It seems to me I should like to get into so great a family. Once more, *bon soir*, sister mine, and pleasant dreams."

He was gone this time for good. His sister stood in the doorway, and watched the white horse and its tall, dark rider vanish under the tossing trees.

CHAPTER II.

KATE DANTON.

Grace went slowly back to the parlour and stood looking thoughtfully into the fire. It was pleasant in that pleasant parlour, bright with the illumination of lamp and fire—doubly pleasant in contrast with the tumult of wind and rain without. Very pleasant to Grace, and she sighed wearily as she looked up from the ruby coals to the radiant face smiling down from over the mantel.

"You will be mistress to-morrow," she thought; "the place I have held for the last four years is yours from to-night. Beautiful as a queen. What will your reign be like, I wonder?"

She drew up the arm-chair her brother had vacated and sat down, her thoughts drifting

backward to the past. Backward four years, and she saw herself, a penniless orphan, dependent on the bounty of that miserly Uncle Roosevelt in Montreal. She saw again the stately gentleman who came to her, and told her he was her father's third cousin, Captain Danton, of Danton Hall. She had never seen him before; but she had heard of her wealthy cousin from childhood, and knew his history. She knew he had married in early youth an English lady, who had died ten years after, leaving four children—a son, Henry, and three daughters, Katherine, Rosina and Eveleen. The son, wild and wayward all his life, broke loose at the age of twenty, forged his father's name, and fled to New York, married an actress, got into a gambling affray, and was stabbed. That was the end of him. The eldest daughter, born in England, had been brought up by her maternal grandmother, who was rich, and whose heiress she was to be. Mrs. Danton and her two youngest children resided at the Hall, while the Captain was mostly absent. After her death, a Canadian lady had taken charge of the house and Captain Danton's daughters. All this Grace knew, and was quite unprepared to see her distant kinsman, and to hear that the Canadian lady had married and left, and that she was solicited to take her place. The Captain's terms were so generous that Grace accepted at once; and, a week after, was domesticated at the Hall, housekeeper and companion to his daughters.

Four years ago. Looking back to-night, Grace sighed to think how pleasant it had all been, now that it was over. It had been such a quiet, untroubled time—she sole mistress, Rose's fits of ill-temper and Eeny's fits of illness the only drawback. And now it was at an end forever. The heiress of Danton Hall was coming to wield the sceptre, and a new era would dawn with the morrow.

There was a tap at the door, and a voice asking: "May I come in, Grace?" and Grace woke up from her dreaming.

"Yes, Eeny," she said; and Eeny came in, looking at her searchingly.

"Have you been crying?" she asked, taking a stool at her feet.

"Crying? no! What should I cry for?"

"You look so solemn. I heard your visitor go, and ran up. Who was it?"

"My brother, who has just returned from Germany."

"Dear me! Didn't I say he had eyes like you? He's a Doctor, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"Grace, I thought you said you were poor?"

"Well, I am poor—am I not?"

"Then who paid for your brother studying medicine in Germany?"

"Uncle Roosevelt. He is very fond of Frank."

"Is your Uncle Roosevelt rich?"

"I believe so. Very rich, and very miserly."

"Has he sons and daughters?"

"No; we are his nearest relatives."

"Then, perhaps, he will leave you his fortune, Grace."

"Hardly, I think. He may remember Frank in his will; but there is no telling. He is very eccentric."

"Grace, I hope he won't leave it to you," said Eeny soberly.

"Really, why not, pray?"

"Because, if you were rich you would go away. I should be sorry if you left Danton Hall."

Grace stooped to kiss the pale young face.

"My dear Eeny, you forget that your beautiful sister Kate is coming. In a week or two, you will have room in your heart for no one but her."

"You know better than that," said Eeny; "perhaps she will be like Rose, and I shall not love her at all."

Grace smiled.

"Do you mean to say you do not love Rose, then?"

"Love Rose?" repeated Eeny, very much amazed at the question; "love Rose, indeed! I should like to see any one who could love Rose. Grace, where is your brother stopping? At the hotel?"

"No; at Monsieur le Curé's. He knows Father Francis. Eeny, do you hear that?"

She started up, listening. Through the tempest of wind and rain, and the surging of the trees, they could hear carriage wheels rattling rapidly up to the house.

"I hear it," said Eeny; "papa has come. O Grace, how pale you are!"

"Am I?" Grace said, laying her hand on heart, and moving towards the door. She paused in the act of opening it, and caught Eeny suddenly and passionately to her heart. "Eeny, my darling, before they come, tell me once more you will not let this new sister steal your heart entirely from me. Tell me you will love me still."

"Always, Grace," said Eeny; "there—the carriage has stopped!"

Grace opened the door and went out into the entrance hall. The marble-paved floor, the domed ceiling, the carved, and statued, and pictured walls, were quite grand in the blaze of a great chandelier. An instant later, and a loud knock made the house ring, and Babette flung the front door wide open. A stalwart gentleman, buttoned up in a great-coat, with a young lady on his aim, strode in.

"Quite a Canadian baptism, papa," the silvery voice of the young lady said; "I am almost drenched."

Grace heard this, and caught a glimpse of Captain Danton's man, Ogden, gallanting a pretty, rosy girl, who looked like a lady's maid, and then, very, very pale, advanced to meet her master and his daughter.

"My dear Miss Grace," the hearty voice of the sailor said, as he grasped her hand, "I am delighted to see you. My daughter Kate, Miss Grace."

My daughter Kate bowed in a dignified manner, scarcely looking at her. Her eyes were fixed on a smaller, slighter figure shrinking behind her.

"Hallo, Eeny!" cried the Captain, catching her in his arms; "trying to play hide-and-go-seek, are you? Come out and let us have a look at you."

He held her up over his head as if she had been a kitten, and kissed her as he set her down, laughing and breathless.

"You little whiff of thistle-down, why can't you get fat and rosy as you ought? There, kiss your sister Kate, and bid her welcome."

Eeny looked timidly up, and was mesmerized at one glance. Two lovely eyes of starry radiance looked down into hers, and the loveliest face Eeny ever saw was lighted with a bewitching smile. Two arms were held out, and Eeny sprang into them, and kissed the exquisite face rapturously.

"You darling child!" the sweet voice said, and that was all; but she held her close, with tears in the starry eyes.

"There, there!" cried Captain Danton; "that will do. You two can hug each other at your leisure by-and-by; but just at present I am very hungry, and should like some dinner. The dining-room is in this direction, isn't it, Grace? I think I know the way."

He disappeared, and Kate Danton disengaged her new-found sister, still holding her hand.

"Come and show me to my room, Eeny," she said. "Eunice," to the rosy lady's-maid, "tell Ogden to bring up the trunks and unpack at once. Come."

Still holding her sister's hand, Kate went upstairs, and Eeny had eyes and ears for no one else. Eunice gave her young lady's order to Ogden, and followed, and Grace was left standing alone.

"Already," she thought, bitterly, "already I am forgotten!"

Not quite. Captain Danton appeared at the head of the stairs, divested of his great-coat.

"I say, Ogden. Oh, Miss Grace, will you come upstairs, if you please? Ogden, attend to the luggage, and wait for me in my dressing-room."

He returned to the parlour, and Grace found him standing with his back to the fire when she entered. A portly and handsome man, florid and genial, with profuse fair hair, mustache and side-whiskers. He placed a chair for her, courteously, and Grace sat down.

"You are looking pale, Miss Grace," he said, regarding her. "You have not been ill, I trust. Ogden told me you were all well."

"I am quite well, thank you."

"You wrote to Rose, I suppose? Where is it she has gone?"

"To the house of Miss La Touche; a friend of hers, in Ottawa. Eeny has written to her, and Rose will probably be here in a day or two, at most."

The Captain nodded.

"As for you, my dear young lady, I find you have managed so admirably in my absence, that I trust we shall retain you for many years yet. Perhaps I am selfish in the wish, but it comes so naturally that you will pardon the selfishness. Kate is in total ignorance of the mysteries of housekeeping. Heaven help me and my friends if we had to depend on her catering! Besides," laughing slightly, "some one is coming before long to carry her off."

Grace bowed gravely.

"So you see, my fair kinswoman, you are indispensable. I trust we shall prevail upon you to remain."

"If you wish me to do so, Captain Danton, I shall, certainly."

"Thank you. Is that rich old curmudgeon, your uncle, alive yet?"

"Yes, sir."

"And your brother? In Germany still, I suppose."

"No, sir; my brother is in Canada—in St. Croix. He was here this evening."

"Indeed! Where is he stopping? We must get him to come here."

"He is on a visit to M. le Curé, and I do not think means to stay long."

The door opened as she said it, and Kate and Eeny came in. The sisters had their arms around each other's waist, and Eeny seemed entranced. Kate went over and stood beside her father, looking up fondly in his face.

"How pretty the rooms are, papa! My boudoir and bedroom are charming. Eeny is going to chaperone me all over to-morrow—such a dear, romantic old house."

Grace sat and looked at her. How beautiful she was! She still wore slight mourning, and her dress was black silk, that fell in full rich folds behind her, high to the round white throat, where it was clasped with a flashing diamond. A solitaire diamond blazed on her left hand—those slender, delicate little hands—her engagement ring, no doubt. They were all the jewels she wore. The trimming of her dress was of filmy black lace, and all her masses of bright golden hair were twisted coronet-wise round her noble and lovely head. She was very tall, very slender; and the exquisite face just tinted with only the faintest shadow of rose. "Beautiful, and stately, and proud as a queen!" Yes, she looked all that, and Grace wondered what manner of man had won that high-beating heart. There was a witchery in her glance, in her radiant smile, in every graceful movement, that fascinated even her father's sedate housekeeper, and that seemed to have completely captivated little Eeny. In her beauty and her pride, as she stood there so graceful and elegant, Grace thought her father was right when he said a prince was not too good for his peerless daughter.

He smiled down on her now as men do smile down on what is the apple of their eye and the pride of their heart, and then turned to Eeny, clinging to her stately sister.

"Take care, Eeny! Don't let Kate bewitch you. Don't you know that she is a sorceress, and throws a glamour over all she meets? She's uncanny, I give you warning—a witch; that's the word for it!"

Eeny's reply was to lift Kate's hand and kiss it.

"Do witches ever eat, papa?" laughed Miss Danton; "because I am very hungry. What time do we dine?"

"What time, Miss Grace?" asked the Captain.

"Immediately, if you wish, sir."

"Immediately let it be, then."

Grace rang and ordered dinner to be served. Thomas, the old butler, and a boy in buttons made their appearance with the first course. Grace had always presided, but this evening she sat beside Eeny, and Miss Kate took the head of the table.

"The first time, papa," she said. "If I make any blunders, tell me."

"Oh, papa!" exclaimed Eeny, "I thought some one else was coming. A sick gentleman—Mr. what?—oh, Richards?"

The face of Captain Danton and his eldest daughter darkened suddenly at the question. Grace saw it in surprise.

"He will be here presently," he said, but he said it with an air of restraint; and Kate, leaning forward with that radiant smile of hers, began telling Eeny some story of their life at sea that made her forget Mr. Richards.

They adjourned to the drawing-room after dinner. A long, low, sumptuous apartment, very stately and very grand, and decorated with exquisite taste.

"What a beautiful room!" Kate said. "We had nothing half so quaint and old as this at home, papa?"

There was a grand piano near one of the tall windows, with a music-rack beside it, and the young lady went over and opened it, and ran her fingers with a masterly touch over the keys.

"That's right, Kate," said her father; "give us some music. How do you like your piano?"

"Like is not the word, papa. It is superb!"

The white hands sparkled over the polished ivory keys, and the room was filled with melody.

Eeny stood by the piano with a rapt face. Captain Danton sat in an arm-chair and listened with half-closed eyes, and Grace sat down in a corner, and drew from her pocket her crochet.

"Oh, Kate, how beautifully you play?" Eeny cried ecstatically, when the flying hands paused, "I never heard anything like that. What was it?"

"Only a German waltz, you little enthusiast! Don't you play?"

"A little. Rose plays too, polkas and waltzes; but bah! not like that."

"Who is your teacher?"

"Monsieur De Lancey. He comes from Montreal twice a week to give us lessons. But you play better than he does."

"Little flatterer!" kissing her and laughing, and the white hands busy again. "Papa, what will you have?"

"A song, my dear."

"Well, what do you like? Casta Diva?"

"I'd be sorry to like it! can you sing the Lass o' Gowrie?"

"I shall try, if you wish."

She broke into singing as she spoke, and Grace's work dropped in her lap as she listened. What an exquisite voice it was! So clear, so sweet, so powerful. The mute-wrapped stillness that followed the song was the best applause. Miss Danton rose up, laughing at her sister's entranced face.

"Oh, don't stop!" Eeny cried, imploringly. "Sing again, Kate."

There was a loud ring at the doorbell before Kate could answer. Captain Danton and Grace had been listening an instant before to a carriage rolling up the drive. The former started up now and hurried out of the room; and Kate stood still, intently looking at the door.

"Who is that?" said Eeny. "Mr. Richards?"

Kate laid her hand on the girl's shoulder, and still stood silent and intent. They could hear the door open, hear the voices of the Captain and his man Ogden; and then there was a shuffling of feet in the hall and up the stairs.

"They are helping him upstairs," said Kate, drawing a long breath. "Yes, it is Mr. Richards."

Eeny looked as if she would like to ask some questions, but her sister sat down again at the piano, and drowned her words in a storm of music. Half an hour passed, nearly an hour, Miss Danton played on and on without ceasing, and then her father came back. The girl looked at him quickly and questioningly, but his high coloured face was as good-humoured as ever.

"Playing away still," he said, "and Eeny's eyes are like two midnight moons. Do you know it is half-past ten, Miss Eeny, and time little girls were in bed?"

Grace rose up, and put her work in her pocket. Eeny came over, kissed her father and sister good-night, and retired. Grace, with a simple good-night, was following her example, but the cordial Captain held out his hand.

"Good-night, my little housekeeper," he said; "and pleasant dreams."

Miss Danton held out her taper fingers, but her good-night was quiet and cool.

Her father's housekeeper, it would seem, did not impress her very favourably, or she was too proud to be cordial with dependants.

Up in her own room, Grace turned her lamp low, and sitting down by the window, drew back the curtains. The rain still fell, the November wind surged through the trees, and the blackness was impenetrable. Was this wintry tempest, as her brother had said, ominous of coming trouble and storms in their peaceful Canadian home?

"I wonder how she and Rose will get on," thought Grace. "Rose's temper is as gusty as this November night, and I should judge those purple eyes can flash with the Danton fire, too. When two thunder-clouds meet, there is apt to be an uproar. I shall not be surprised if there is war in the camp before long."

Her door opened softly. Grace turned round, and saw Eeny in a long night-dress, looking like a spirit.

"May I come in, Grace?"

"It is time you were in bed," said Grace, turning up the lamp, and beginning to unbraid her hair.

Eeny came in and sat down on a low stool at Grace's feet.

"Oh, Grace, isn't she splendid?"

"Who?"

"You know whom I mean—Kate."

"She is very handsome," Grace said quietly, going on with her work.

"Handsome! She is lovely? She is glorious! Grace, people talk about Rose being pretty; but she is no more to Kate than—than just nothing at all."

"Did you come in merely to say that? If so, Miss Eveleen, I must request you to depart, as I am going to say my prayers."

"Directly," said Eeny, nestling more comfortably on her stool. "Did you ever hear any one play and sing as she does?"

"She plays and sings remarkably well."

"Grace, what would you give to be as beautiful as she is?"

"Nothing! And now go."

"Yes. Isn't it odd that papa did not bring Mr. Richards into the drawing-room. Ogden and papa helped him up stairs, and Ogden brought him his supper."

"Who told you that?"

"Babette. Babette saw him, but he was so muffled up she could not make him out. He is very tall and slim, she says, and looks like a young man."

"Eeny, how soon are you going?"

"Oh, Grace," she said, coaxingly, "let me stay all night with you."

"And keep me awake until morning, talking? Not I," said Grace. "Go!"

"Please let me stay?"

"No! Be off!"

She lifted her up, led her to the door, and put her out, and Eeny ran off to her own chamber.

As Grace closed her door, she heard Kate Danton's silk dress rustle upstairs.

"Good-night, papa," she heard her say in that soft, clear voice that made her think of silver bells.

"Good-night, my dear," the Captain replied. And then the silk dress rustled past, a door opened and shut, and Miss Danton had retired.

CHAPTER III.

A CHANGE OF DYNASTY.

With the cold November sunlight flooding her room, Grace rose next morning, dressed and went down stairs. Very neat and lady-like she looked, in her spotted gingham wrapper, her snowy collar and cuffs, and her dark hair freshly braided.

A loud-voiced clock in the entrance-hall struck seven. No one seemed to be astir in the house but herself, and her footsteps echoed weirdly in the dark passages. A sleepy scullery maid was lighting the kitchen fire when she got there, gaping dismally over her work; and Grace, leaving some directions for Ma'am Ledru, the cook, departed again, this time for the dining-room, where footman James was lighting another fire. Grace opened the shutters, drew back the curtains, and let in the morning sunburst in all its glory. Then she dusted and re-arranged the furniture, swept up the marble hearth, and assisted Babette to lay the cloth for breakfast. It was invariably her morning work; and the table looked like a picture when she had done, with its old china and sparkling silver.

It was almost eight before she got through; and she ran upstairs for her bonnet and shawl, and started for her customary half-hour's walk before breakfast. She took the road leading to the village, still and deserted, and came back all glowing from the rapid exercise.

Captain Danton stood on the front steps smoking a meerschaum pipe, as she came up the avenue.

"Good morning, Hebe!" said the Captain. "The November roses are brighter in Canada than elsewhere in August!"

Grace laughed, and was going in, but he stopped her.

"Don't go yet. I want some one to talk to. Where have you been?"

"Only out for a walk, sir."

"So early! What time do you get up, pray?"

"About half-past six."

"Primitive hours, upon my word. When is breakfast time?"

"Nine, sir. The bell will ring in a moment."

It rang as she spoke, and Grace tripped away to take off her bonnet and smooth her hair, blown about by the morning wind. The Captain was in the dining-room when she descended, standing in his favourite position with his back to the fire, his coat-tails drawn forward, and his legs like two sides of a triangle.

"Are the girls up yet, Grace? Excuse the prefix; we are relatives, you know. Ah! here is one of them. Good-morning, Mademoiselle."

"Good-morning, papa," said Eeny, kissing him. "Where is Kate?"

"Kate is here!" said the voice that was like silver bells; and Kate came in, graceful and elegant in her white cashmere morning robe, with cord and tassels of violet, and a knot of violet ribbon at the rounded throat. "I have not kept you waiting, have I?"

She kissed her father and sister, smiled and bowed to Grace and took her place to preside. Very prettily and deftly the white hands fluttered among the fragile china cups and saucers, and wielded the carved and massive silver coffee-pot.

Grace thought she looked lovelier in the morning sunshine than in the garish lamplight, with that flush on her cheeks, and the beautiful golden hair twisted in shining coils.

Grace was very silent during breakfast, listening to the rest. The Captain and his eldest daughter were both excellent talkers, and never let conversation flag. Miss Danton rarely addressed her, but the Captain's cordiality made amends for that.

"I must see that brother of yours to-day, Grace," he said, "and get him to come up here. The Curé, too, is a capital fellow—I beg his pardon—I must bring them both up to dinner. Are the Ponsonbys, and the Landry's, and the Le Favres in the old places yet?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'll call on them, then—they don't know I'm here—and see if a little company won't enliven our long Canadian winter. You three, Grace, Rose and Eeny, have been living here like nonettes long enough. We must try and alter things a little for you."

The Captain's good-natured efforts to draw his taciturn housekeeper out did not succeed very well. She had that unsocial failing of reserved natures, silence habitually; and her reserve was always at its worst in the presence of the Captain's brilliant daughter. That youthful beauty fixed her blue eyes now and then on the dark, downcast face with an odd look—very like a look of aversion.

"What kind of person is this Miss Grace of yours, Eeny?" she asked her sister, after breakfast. "Very stupid, isn't she?"

"Stupid! Oh, dear, no! Grace is the dearest, best girl in the world, except you, Kate. I don't know how we should ever get on without her."

"I didn't know," said Kate, rather coldly; "she is so silent and impenetrable. Come! You promised to show me through the house."

They were alone in the dining-room. She walked over to the fire, and stood looking thoughtfully up at the two portraits hanging over the mantel—Captain Danton at twenty-seven, and his wife at twenty-four.

"Poor mamma!" Kate said, with a rare tenderness in her voice. "How pretty she was! Do you remember her, Eeny?"

"No," said Eeny. "You know I was such a little thing, Kate. All I know about her is what Margery tells me."

"Who is Margery?"

"My old nurse, and Harry's, and yours, and Rose's. She nursed us all, babies, and took care of mamma when she died. She was mama's maid when she got married, and lived with her all her life. She is here still."

"I must see Margery, then. I shall like her, I know; for I like all things old and storied, and venerable. I can remember mamma the last time she was in England; her tall, slender figure, her dark, wavy hair, and beautiful smile. She used to take me in her arms in the twilight and sing me to sleep."

"Dear Kate! But Grace has been a mother to me. Do you know, Margery says Rose is like her?"

"Whom? Mamma?"

"Yes; all except her temper. Oh!" cried Eeny, making a sudden grimace, "hasn't Rose got a temper!"

Kate smiled.

"A bad one?"

"A bad one! You ought to see her tearing up and down the room in a towering passion, and scolding. Mon Dieu!" cried Eeny, holding her breath at the recollection.

"Do you ever quarrel?" asked Kate, laughing.

"About fifty times a day. Oh, what a blessing it was when she went to Ottawa! Grace and I have been in paradise ever since. She'll behave herself for a while when she comes home, I dare say, before you and papa; but it won't be for long."

Grace came in, and Kate drew Eeny away to show her over the house. It was quite a tour. Danton Hall was no joke to go over. Upstairs and down stairs; along halls and passages; the drawing-room, where they had been last night; the winter drawing-room on the second floor, all gold and crimson; a summer morning-room, its four sides glass, straw matting on the floor, flower-pots everywhere, looking like a conservatory; the library, where, perpetuated in oils, many Dantons hung, and where book-shelves lined the walls; into what was once the nursery, where empty cribs stood as in olden times, and where, under a sunny window, a low rocker stood, Mrs. Danton's own chair; into Kate's fairy boudoir, all fluted satin and brocatelle; into her bed-chamber, where everything was white, and azure, and spotless as herself; into Eeny's room, pretty and tasteful, but not so superb; into Rose's, very disordered, and littered, and characteristic; into papa's, big, carpetless, fireless, dreadfully grim and unlike papa himself; into Grace's, the perfection of order and taste, and then Eeny stopped, out of breath.

"There's lots more," she said; "papa's study, but he is writing there now, and the green-room, and Mr. Richards' rooms, and——"

"Never mind," said Kate, hastily, "we will not disturb papa or Mr. Richards. Let us go and see old Margery."

They found the old woman in a little room appropriated to her, knitting busily, and looking bright, and hale, and hearty. She rose up and dropped the young lady a stiff curtsey.

"I'm very glad to see you, Miss," said Margery. "I nursed you often when you was a little blue-eyed, curly-haired, rosy cheeked baby. You are very tall and very pretty, Miss; but you don't look like your mother. She don't look like her mother. You're Dantons, both of you; but Miss Rose, she looks like her, and Master Harry—ah, poor, dear Master Harry! He is killed; isn't he, Miss Kate?"

Kate did not speak. She walked away from the old woman to a window, and Eeny saw she had grown very pale.

"Don't talk about Harry, Margery!" whispered Eeny, giving her a poke. "Kate doesn't like it."

"I beg your pardon, Miss," said Margery. "I didn't mean to offend; but I nursed you all, and I knew your mamma when she was a little girl. I was a young woman then, and I remember that sweet young face of hers so well. Like Miss Rose, when she is not cross."

Kate smiled at the winding up and went away.

"Where now?" she asked, gayly. "I am not half tired of sight-seeing. Shall we explore the outside for a change? Yes? Then come and let us get our hats. Your Canadian Novembers are of Arctic temperature."

"Wait until our Decembers tweak the top of your imperial nose off," said Eeny, shivering in anticipation. "Won't you wish you were back in England!"

The yellow November sunshine glorified garden, lawn and meadow as Eeny led her sister through the grounds. They explored the long orchard, strolled down the tamarack walk, and wandered round the fish pond. But garden and orchard were all black with the November frost, the trees rattled skeleton arms, and the dead leaves drifted in the melancholy wind. They strayed down the winding drive to the gate, and Kate could see the village of St. Croix along the quarter of a mile of road leading to it, with the sparkling river beyond.

"I should like to see the village," she said, "but perhaps you are tired."

"Not so tired as that. Let us go."

"If I fatigue you to death, tell me so," said Kate. "I am a great pedestrian. I used to walk miles and miles daily at home."

Miss Danton found St. Croix quite a large place, with dozens of straggling streets, narrow wooden sidewalks, queer-looking, Frenchified houses, shops where nothing seemed selling, hotels all still and forlorn, and a church with a tall cross and its doors open. Sabbath stillness lay over all—the streets were deserted, the children seemed too indolent to play, the dogs too lazy to bark. The long, sluggish canal, running like a sleeping serpent round the village, seemed to have more of life than it had.

"What a dull place!" said Kate. "Has everybody gone to sleep? Is it always like this?"

"Mostly," said Eeny. "You should hear Rose abuse it. It is only fit for a lot of Rip Van Winkles, or the Seven Sleepers, she says. All the life there is, is around the station when the train comes and goes."

The sisters wandered along the canal until the village was left behind, and they were in some desolate fields, sodden from the recent rains. A black marsh spread beyond, and a great gloomy building reared itself against the blue Canadian sky on the other side.

"What old bastille is that?" asked Kate.

"The St. Croix barracks," said Eeny uneasily. "Come away Kate. I am afraid of the soldiers—they may see us."

She turned round and uttered a scream. Two brawny redcoats were striding across the wet field to where they stood. They reeled as they walked, and set up a sort of Indian war-whoop on finding they were discovered.

"Don't you run away, my little dears," said one, "we're coming as fast as we can."

"Oh, Kate!" cried Eeny, in terror, "what shall we do?"

"Let us go at once," said Kate, "those men are intoxicated."

They started together over the fields, but the men's long strides gained upon them at every step.

"I say, my dear," hiccoughed one, laying his big hand on Kate's shoulder, "you musn't run away, you know. By George! you're a pretty girl! give us a kiss!"

He put his arms round her waist. Only for an instant; the next, with all the blood of all the Dantons flushing her cheeks, she had sprung back and struck him a blow in the face that made him reel. The blood started from the drunken soldier's nose, and he stood for a second stunned by the surprise blow; the next, with an imprecation, he would have caught her, but that something caught him from behind, and held him as in a vise. A big dog had come over the fields in vast bounds, and two rows of formidable ivory held the warrior fast. The dog was not alone; his master, a tall and stalwart gentleman, was beside the frightened girls, with his strong grasp on the other soldier's collar.

"You drunken rascal!" said the owner of the dog, "you shall get the black hole for this to-morrow. Tiger, my boy, let go." The dog with a growl released his hold. "And now be off, both of you, or my dog shall tear you into mince-meat!"

The drunken ruffians shrunk away discomfited, and Eeny held out both her hands to their hero.

"Oh, Doctor Danton! What should we have done without you?"

"I don't know," said the Doctor. "You would have been in a very disagreeable predicament, I am afraid. It is hardly safe for young ladies to venture so far from the village unattended, while these drunken soldiers are quartered here."

"I often came alone before," said Eeny, "and no one molested me. Let me make you acquainted with my sister—Kate, Doctor Danton."

Kate held out her hand with that bewitching smile of hers.

"Thank you and Tiger very much. I was not aware I had a namesake in St. Croix."

"He is Grace's brother," said Eeny, "and he is only here on a visit—he is just from Germany."

Kate bowed, patting Tiger's big head with her snowflake of a hand.

"This is another friend we have to thank," she said. "How came you to be so opportunely at hand, Doctor Danton?"

"By the merest chance. Tiger and I take our morning constitutional along these desolate fields and flats. I'll have these fellows properly punished for their rudeness."

"No, no," said Kate, "let them go. It is not likely to happen again. Besides," laughing and blushing, "I punished one of them already, and Tiger came to my assistance with the other."

"You served him right," said the Doctor. "If you will permit me, Miss Danton, I will escort you to the village."

"Come home with us," said Eeny, "we will just be in time for luncheon, and I know you want to see Grace."

"A thousand thanks, Mademoiselle—but no—not this morning."

Kate seconded the invitation; but Doctor Danton politely persisted in refusing. He walked with them as far as St. Croix, then raised his hat, said good-bye, whistled for Tiger, and was gone.

The young ladies reached the hall in safety, in time to brush their hair before luncheon, where, of course, nothing was talked of but their adventure and their champion.

"By George! if I catch these fellows, I'll break every bone in their drunken skins," cried the irate Captain. "A pretty fix you two would have been in, but for the Doctor. I'll ride down to the parsonage, or whatever you call it, immediately after luncheon, and bring him back to dinner, will he nill he—the Curé, too, if he'll come, for the Curé is a very old friend."

Captain Danton was as good as his word. As soon as luncheon was over, he mounted his horse

and rode away, humming a tune. Kate stood on the steps, with the pale November sunlight gilding the delicate rose-bloom cheeks, and making an aureole round the tinsel hair watching him out of sight. Eeny was clinging round her as usual, and Grace stopped to speak to her on her way across the hall.

"You ought to go and practise, Eeny. You have not touched the piano to-day, and to-morrow your teacher comes."

"Yes, Eeny," said Kate, "go attend to your music. I am going upstairs, to my room."

She smiled, kissed her, opened the parlour door, pushed her in, and ran up the broad staircase. Not to her own room, though, but along the quiet corridor leading to the green baize door. The key of that door was in her pocket; she opened it, locked it behind her, and was shut up with the, as yet, invisible Mr. Richards.

Eeny practised conscientiously three hours. It was then nearly five o'clock, and the afternoon sun was dropping low in the level sky. She rose up, closed the piano, and went in search of her sister. Upstairs and down stairs and in my lady's chamber, but my lady was nowhere to be found. Grace didn't know where she was. Eunice, the rosy English maid, didn't know. Eeny was perplexed and provoked. Five o'clock struck, and she started out in the twilight to hunt the grounds—all in vain. She gave it up in half an hour, and came back to the house. The hall lamps were lighted upstairs and down, and Eeny, going along the upper hall, found what she wanted. The green baize door was unlocked, and her sister Kate came out, relocked it, and put the key in her pocket.

Eeny stood still, looking at her, too much surprised to speak. While she had been hunting everywhere for her, Kate had been closeted with the mysterious invalid all the afternoon.

"Time to dress for dinner, I suppose, Eeny," she said looking at her watch. "One must dress, if papa brings company. Did you see Eunice? Is she in my room?"

"I don't know. Have you been in there with Mr. Richards all the afternoon?"

"Yes; he gets lonely, poor fellow! Run away and dress."

Eunice was waiting in her young lady's boudoir, where the fire shone bright, the wax candles burned, the curtains were drawn, and everything looked deliciously comfortable. Kate sank into an easy-chair, and Eunice took the pins out of the beautiful glittering hair, and let it fall in a shining shower around her.

"What dress will you please to wear, miss?"

"The black lace, I think, since there is to be company, and the pearls."

She lay listlessly while Eunice combed out the soft, thick hair, and twisted it coronet-wise, as she best liked to wear it. She stood listless while her dress was being fastened, her eyes misty and dreamy, fixed on the diamond ring she wore. Very lovely she looked in the soft, rich lace, pale pearls on the exquisite throat; and she smiled her approval of Eunice's skill when it was all over.

"That will do, Eunice, thank you. You can go now."

The girl went out, and Kate sank back in her chair, her blue eyes, tender and dreamy, still fixed on the fire. Drifting into dream-land, she lay twisting her flashing diamond round and round on her finger, and heedless of the passing moments. The loud ringing of the dinner-bell aroused her, and she arose with a little sigh from her pleasant reverie, shook out her lace flounces, and tripped away down stairs.

They were all in the dining-room when she entered—papa, Eeny, Grace and strangers—Doctor Danton and a clerical-looking young man, with a pale scholarly face and penetrating eyes, and who was presented as Father Francis.

"The Curé couldn't come," said the Captain. "A sick call. Very sorry. Capital company, the Curé. Why can't people take sick at reasonable hours, Father Francis?"

"Ask Doctor Danton," said Father Francis. "I am not a physician—of the bodies of men."

"Don't ask me anything while the first course is in progress," said the Doctor. "You ought to know better. I trust you have quite recovered from your recent fright, Miss Danton."

"A Danton frightened!" exclaimed her father. "The daughter of all the Dantons that ever fought and fell, turn coward! Kate, deny the charge!"

"Miss Danton is no coward," said the Doctor. "She gave battle like a heroine."

Kate blushed vividly.

"As you are strong, be merciful," she said. "I own to being so thoroughly frightened that I shall never go there alone again. I hope, my preserver, Herr Tiger, is well."

"Quite well. Had he known I was coming here, he would doubtless have sent his regards."

"Who is Herr Tiger?" asked the Captain.

"A big Livonian blood-hound of mine, and my most intimate friend, with the exception of Father Francis here."

"Birds of a feather," said the young priest. "Not that I class myself with Doctors and blood-hounds. You should have allowed Tiger to give those fellows a lesson they would remember, Danton. Their drunken insolence is growing unbearable."

Dinner went on and ended. The ladies left the dining-room; the gentlemen lingered, but not long.

Kate was at the piano entrancing Eeny, and Grace sat at her crochet. Miss Danton got up and made tea, and the young Doctor lay back in an arm-chair talking to Eeny, and watched, with half-closed eyes, the delicate hands floating deftly along the fragile china cups.

"Give us some music, Kate," her father said, when it was over. "Grace, put away your knitting, and be my partner in a game of whist. Father Francis and the Doctor will stand no chance against us."

The quartet sat down. Kate's hands flew up and down the shining octaves of her piano, and filled the room with heavenly harmony, the waves of music that ebbed, and flowed, and fascinated. She played until the card party broke up, and then she wheeled round on her stool.

"Who are the victors?" she asked.

"We are," said the Doctor. "When I make up my mind to win, I always win. The victory rests solely with me."

"I'll vouch for your skill in cheating," said Grace. "Father Francis, I am surprised that you countenance such dishonest proceedings."

"I wouldn't in any one but my partner," said the young priest, crossing over to the piano. "Don't cease playing, Miss Danton. I am devotedly fond of music, and it is very rarely indeed I hear such music as you have given us to-night. You sing, do you not?"

"Sing!" exclaimed her father. "Kate sings like a nightingale. Sing us a Scotch song, my dear."

"What shall it be, papa?"

"Anything. 'Auld Robin Gray,' if you like."

Kate sang the sweet old Scottish ballad with a pathos that went to every heart.

"That is charming," said Father Francis. "Sing for me, now, Scots wha hae."

She glanced up at him brightly; it was a favourite of her own, and she sang it for him as he had never heard it sung before.

"Have you no favourite, Doctor Danton?" she asked, turning to him with that dangerous smile of hers. "I want to treat all alike."

"Do you sing 'Hear me, Norma'?"

Her answer was the song. Then she arose from the instrument, and Father Francis pulled out his watch.

"What will the Curé think of us!" he exclaimed; "half-past eleven. Danton, get up this instant and let us be off."

"I had no idea it was so late," said the doctor, rising, despite the Captain's protest. "Your music must have bewitched us, Miss Danton."

They shook hands with the Captain and departed.

Grace and Eeny went upstairs at once. Kate was lingering still in the drawing-room when her father came back from seeing his guests off.

"A fine fellow, that young doctor," said the Captain, in his hearty way; "a remarkably fine fellow. Don't you think so, Kate?"

"He is well-bred," said Kate, listlessly. "I think I prefer Father Francis. Good-night, papa."

She kissed her father and went slowly up to her room. Eunice was there waiting to undress her, and Kate lay back in an arm chair while the girl took down and combed out her long hair. She lay with half-closed eyes, dreaming tenderly, not of this evening, not of Dr. Danton, but of another, handsomer, dearer, and far away.

CHAPTER IV.

ROSE DANTON.

Next morning, when the family assembled at breakfast, Captain Danton found a letter on his plate, summoning him in haste to Montreal.

"Business, my dear," he said, answering his eldest daughter's enquiring look; "business of moment."

"Nothing concerning—" She paused, looking startled. "Nothing relating to—"

"To Mr. Richards. No, my dear. How do you ladies purpose spending the day?"

He looked at Grace, who smiled.

"My duties are all arranged," she said. "There is no fear of the day hanging heavily on my hands."

"And you two?"

"I don't know, papa," said Kate listlessly. "I can practise, and read, and write letters, and visit Mr. Richards. I dare-say I will manage."

"Let us have a drive," said Eeny. "We can drive with papa to the station, and then get Thomas to take us everywhere. It's a lovely day, and you have seen nothing of St. Croix and our country roads yet."

Eeny's idea was applauded, and immediately after breakfast the barouche was ordered out, and Thomas was in attendance. Mr. Ogden packed his master's valise, and the trio entered the carriage and were driven off.

"Attend to Mr. Richards as usual, Ogden," said the Captain, as Ogden helped him into his overcoat. "I will be back to-morrow."

Grace stood in the doorway and watched the barouche until the winding drive hid it from view. Then she went back to attend to her housekeeper's duties—to give the necessary orders for dinner, see that the rooms were being properly arranged, and so forth. Everything was going on well; the house was in exquisite order from attic to cellar. Ogden shut up with Mr. Richards, the servants quietly busy, and Danton Hall as still as a church on a week-day. Grace, humming a little tune, took her sewing into the dining-room, where she liked best to sit, and began stitching away industriously. The ticking of a clock on the mantel making its way to twelve, the rattling of the stripped trees in the fresh morning wind, were, for a time, the only sounds outdoor or in. Then wheels rattled rapidly over the graveled drive, coming to the house in a hurry, and Grace looked up in surprise.

"Back so soon," she thought? "They cannot have driven far."

But it was not the handsome new barouche—it was only a shabby little buggy from the station, in which a young lady sat with a pile of trunks and bandboxes.

"Rose!" exclaimed Grace. "I quite forgot she was coming to-day."

A moment later and the front door opened and shut with a bang, flying feet came along the hall, a silk dress rustled stormily, the dining-room door was flung open, and a young lady bounced in and caught Grace in a rapturous hug.

"You darling old thing!" cried a fresh young voice. "I knew I should find you here, even if I hadn't seen you sitting at the window. Aren't you glad to have me home again? And have you got anything to eat? I declare I'm famished!"

Pouring all this out in a breath, with kisses for commas, the young lady released Grace, and flung herself into an arm-chair.

"Ring the bell, Grace, and let us have something to eat. You don't know how hungry I am. Are you alone? Where are the rest?"

Grace, taking this shower of questions with constitutional phlegm, arose, rang the bell, and ordered cakes and cold chicken; the young lady meantime taking off her pretty black velvet turban, with its long feather, flung it in a corner, and sent her shawl, gloves, and fur collar flying after it.

"Now, Rose," expostulated Grace, picking them up, "how often must I tell you the floor is not the proper place to hang your things? I suppose you will be having the whole house in a litter, as usual, now that you have got home."

"Why did you send for me then?" demanded Rose. "I was very well off. I didn't want to come. Never got scolded once since I went away, and I pitched my clothes everywhere! Say, Grace, how do you get on with the new comers?"

"Very well."

Here Babette appeared with the young lady's lunch, and Miss Rose sat down to it promptly.

"What is she like, Kate—handsome?"

"Very!" with emphasis.

"Handsomer than I am?"

"A thousand times handsomer!"

"Bah! I don't believe it! Tall and fair, with light hair and blue eyes. Am I right?"

"Yes."

"Then she is as insipid as milk and water—as insipid as you are, old Madame Grumpy. And papa—he's big and loud-voiced, and red-faced and jolly, I suppose?"

"Miss Rose Danton, be a little more respectful, if you want me to answer your questions."

"Well, but isn't he? And Mr. Richards—who's Mr. Richards?"

"I don't know."

"Isn't he here?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Then why don't you know?"

"Because I have not, like Rose Danton, a bump of inquisitiveness as large as a turnip."

"Now, Grace, don't be hateful. Tell me all you know about Mr. Richards."

"And that is nothing. I have never even seen him. He is an invalid; he keeps his rooms, night and day. His meals are carried upland no one sees him but your father, and sister, and Ogden."

"Mon Dieu!" cried Rose, opening her eyes very wide. "A mystery under our very noses! What can it mean? There's something wrong somewhere, isn't there?"

"I don't know anything about it; it is none of my business, and I never interfere in other people's."

"You dear old Granny Grumpy! And now that I've had enough to eat, why don't you ask me about my visit to Ottawa, and what kind of time I had?"

"Because I really don't care anything about it. However, I trust you enjoyed yourself."

"Enjoyed myself!" shrilly cried Rose. "It was like being in paradise! I never had such a splendid, charming, delightful time since I was born! I never was so sorry for anything as for leaving."

"Really!"

"Oh, Grace! it was beautiful—so gay, so much company; and I do love company! A ball to-night, a concert to-morrow, a sociable next evening, the theatre, dinner-parties, matinees, morning calls, shopping and receptions! Oh," cried Rose, rapturously, "it was glorious!"

"Dear me!" said Grace, stitching away like a sewing-machine; "it must have been a great trial to leave."

"It was. But I am going back. Dear Ottawa! Charming Ottawa! I was excessively happy in Ottawa!"

She laid hold of a kitten slumbering peacefully on a rug as she spoke, and went waltzing around the room, whistling a lively tune. Grace looked at her, tried to repress a smile, failed, and continued her work. She was very, very pretty, this second daughter of Captain Danton, and quite unlike the other two. She was of medium height, but so plump and rounded as to look less tall than she really was. Her profuse hair, of dark, chestnut brown, hung in thick curls to her waist; her complexion was dark, cheeks round and red as apples, her forehead low, her nose perfection, her teeth like pearls, her eyes small, bright and hazel. Very pretty, very sparkling, very piquant, and a flirt from her cradle.

"Did you learn that new accomplishment in Ottawa, pray?" asked Grace.

"What new accomplishment?"

"Whistling."

"Yes, Jules taught me."

"Who is Jules?"

"Jules La Touche—the son of the house—handsome as an angel, and my devoted slave."

"Indeed! Has he taught you anything else?"

"Only to love him and to smoke cigarettes."

"Smoke!" exclaimed Grace, horrified.

"Yes, m'amour! I have a whole package in my trunk. If you mend my stockings I will let you have some. I could not exist without cigarettes now."

"I shall have to mend your stockings in any case. As to the cigarettes, permit me to decline. What will your papa say to such goings on?"

"He will be charmed, no doubt. If he isn't, he ought to. Just fancy when he is sitting alone of an evening over his meerschaum, what nice, sociable smokes we can have together. Jules and I used to smoke together by the hour. My darling Jules! how I long to go back to Ottawa and you once more! Grace!" dropping the cat and whirling up to her, "would you like to hear a secret?"

"Not particularly; what is it?"

"You won't tell—will you?"

"I don't know; I must hear it first."

"It's a great secret; I wouldn't tell anybody but you; and not you, unless you promise profoundest silence."

"I make no promises blindly. Tell me or not, just as you please. I don't think much of your secrets, anyhow."

"Don't you?" said Rose, nettled; "look here, then."

She held out her left hand. On the third finger shone a shimmering opal ring.

"Well?" said Grace.

"Well!" said Rose, triumphantly. "Jules gave me that; that is my engagement ring."

Grace sat and looked at her aghast.

"No!" she said; "you don't mean it, Rose?"

"I do mean it. I am engaged to Jules La Touche, and we are going to be married in a year. That is my secret, and if you betray me I will never forgive you."

"And you are quite serious?"

"Perfectly serious, *chère grogneuse*."

"Do Monsieur and Madame La Touche know?"

"Certainly not. *Mon Dieu!* We are too young. Jules is only twenty, and I eighteen. We must wait; but I love him to distraction, and he adores me! Tra-la-la!"

She seized the cat once more, and went whirling round the room.

Her waltz was suddenly interrupted.

A gentleman, young, tall, and stately, stood, hat in hand, in the doorway, regarding her.

"Don't let me intrude," said the gentleman, politely advancing. "Don't let me interrupt anybody, I beg!"

Grace arose, smiling.

"Rose, let me present my brother, Doctor Danton! Frank, Miss Rose Danton!"

Miss Rose dropped the kitten and her eyes, and made an elaborate curtsey.

"My entrance spoiled a very pretty tableau," said the Doctor, "and disappointed pussy, I am afraid. Pray, continue your waltz, Miss Rose, and don't mind me."

"I don't," said Rose, carelessly, "my waltz was done, and I have to dress."

She ran out of the room, but put her head in again directly.

"Grace!"

"Yes!"

"Will you come and curl my hair by-and-by?"

"No, I haven't time."

"What shall I do, then? Babette tears it out by the roots."

"I am not busy," said the Doctor, blandly. "I haven't much experience in curling young ladies' hair, but I am very willing to learn."

"You are very kind," said his sister, "but we can dispense with your services. You might get Eunice, I dare say, Rose; she has nothing else to do."

"Who's Eunice?"

"Your sister's maid; you can ring for her; she understands hair-dressing better than Babette."

Rose ran up stairs. At the front window of the upper hall stood Ogden and Eunice.

Rose nodded familiarly to the valet, and turned to the girl.

"Are you Eunice?"

"Yes, Miss."

"Are you busy?"

"No, Miss."

"Then come into my room, please, and comb my hair."

Eunice followed the young lady, and Ogden returned to the mysterious regions occupied by Mr. Richards.

Once more the house was still; its one disturbing element was having her hair curled; and Grace and her brother talked in peace below stairs.

It was past luncheon-hour when the barouche rolled up to the door. Kate, all aglow from her drive in the frosty air, stopped her laughing chat with pale Eeny at the sight which met her eyes. Standing on the portico steps, playing with a large dog Kate had reason to know, and flirting—it looked like flirting—with the dog's master, stood a radiant vision, a rounded girlish figure, arrayed in bright maize-colored merino, elaborately trimmed with black lace and velvet, the perfect shoulders and arms bare, the cheeks like blush roses, the eyes sparkling as stars, and the golden-brown hair, freshly curled, falling to her waist.

"Oh, how beautiful!" Kate cried, under her breath.

The next moment, Eeny ran up the steps, and favoured this vision of youthful bloom with a kiss, while Kate followed more decorously.

"How do, Eeny?" said Rose. "Kate!"

She held out both her hands. Kate caught her in a sort of rapture in her arms.

"My sister!" she cried. "My darling Rose!"

And then she stopped, for Doctor Danton was looking on with a preternatural gravity that provoked her.

"When did you come, Rose?" asked Eeny.

"Two hours ago. Have you had a pleasant drive, Kate?"

"Very, and I am hungry after it. We have kept Miss Grace waiting, I am afraid; isn't it past luncheon-time? Come to my room with me, Rose. Are you going, Doctor? Won't you stay to luncheon?"

"Some other time. Good morning, ladies. Come, Tiger."

He sauntered down the avenue, whistling, and the three sisters turned into the house.

"Very agreeable!" said Rose. "Grace's brother; and rather handsome."

"Handsome!" exclaimed Kate. "He is not handsome, my pretty sister." She took her in her arms again, and kissed her fondly. "My pretty sister! how much I am going to love you!"

Rose submitted to be kissed with a good grace, but with a little envious pang at her vain, coquettish heart, to see how much more beautiful her superb sister was than herself. She nestled luxuriously in an arm-chair, while Eunice dressed her young mistress, chattering away in French like a magpie. They descended together to luncheon; pale Eeny was totally eclipsed by brilliant Rose, and all the afternoon they spent together over the piano, and sauntering through the grounds.

"Retribution, Eeny," said Grace, kissing Eeny's pale cheek. "You forgot me for this dazzling Kate, and now you are nowhere. You must come back to Grace again."

"There is nobody like Grace," said Eeny, nestling close. "But Kate and Rose won't be always like this. 'Love me little, love me long.' Wait until Kate finds out what Rose is made of."

But despite Eeny's prophecy, the two sisters got on remarkably well together.

Captain Danton did not return next day, according to promise, so they were thrown entirely upon one another. Instead, there came a note from Montreal, which told them that business would detain him in that city for nearly a fortnight longer. "When I do return," ended the note, "I will fetch an old friend to see Kate."

"Who can it be?" wondered Kate. "There is no old friend of mine that I am aware of in Montreal. Papa likes to be mysterious."

"Yes," said Rose; "I should think so, when we have a mystery in the very house."

"What mystery?"

"Mr. Richards, of course. He's a mystery worse than anything in the 'Mysteries of Udolpho.' Why can nobody get to see him but that soft-stepping, oily-tongued little weasel, Ogden?"

Kate looked at the pretty sister she loved so well, with the coldest glances she had ever given her.

"Mr. Richards is an invalid; he is unable to see any one, or quit his room. What mystery is there in that?"

"There's a mystery somewhere," said Rose, sagaciously. "Who is Mr. Richards?"

"A friend of papa's—and poor. Don't ask so many questions, Rose. I have nothing more to say on the subject."

"Then I must find out for myself—that is all," thought Rose; "and I will, too, before long, in spite of half a dozen Ogdens."

Rose tried with a zeal and perseverance worthy a better cause, and most signally failed. Mr. Richards was invisible. His meals went up daily. Ogden and Kate visited him daily, but the baize door was always locked, and Ogden and Kate, on the subject, were dumb. Kate visited the invalid at all hours, by night and by day. Ogden rarely left him except when Miss Danton was there, and then he took a little airing in the garden. Rose's room was near the corridor leading to the green baize room; and often awaking "in the dead waste and middle of the night," she would steal to that mysterious room to listen. But nothing was ever to be heard, nothing ever to be seen—the mystery was fathomless. She would wander outside at all hours, under Mr. Richards' window; and looking up, wonder how he endured his prison, or what he could possibly be about—if those dark curtains were never raised and he never looked at the outer world. Once or twice a face had appeared, but it was always the keen, thin face of Mr. Ogden; and Rose's curiosity, growing by what it fed on, began to get insupportable.

"What can it mean, Grace?" she would say to the housekeeper, to whom she had a fashion, despite no end of snubbing, of confiding her secret troubles. "There's something wrong; where there's secrecy, there's guilt—I've always heard that."

"Don't jump at conclusions, Miss Rose, and don't trouble yourself about Mr. Richards; it is no affair of yours."

"But I can't help troubling myself. What business have papa, and Kate, and that nasty Ogden, to have a secret between them and I not know it? I feel insulted, and I'll have revenge. I never mean to stop till I ferret out the mystery. I have the strongest conviction I was born to be a member of the detective police, and one of these days the mystery of Mr. Richards will be a mystery no more."

Grace had her own suspicions, but Grace was famous for minding her own business, and kept her suspicions to herself. Rose's man[oe]uvring amused her, and she let her go on. Every strategy the young lady could conceive was brought to bear, and every stratagem was skilfully baffled.

"Why don't you have Doctor Danton to see Mr. Richards, Kate?" she said to her sister, one evening, meeting her coming out of Mr. Richards' room. "I should think he was skilful."

"Very likely," said Kate, with an air of reserve, "but Mr. Richards does not require medical care."

"Oh, he is not very bad, then? You should bring him down stairs in that case; a little lively society—mine, for instance—might do him good."

Kate's dark eyes flashed impatiently.

"Rose," she said, sharply, "how often must I tell you Mr. Richards is hypochondriacal and will not quit his room? Cease to talk on the subject. Mr. Richards will not come down-stairs."

She swept past—majestic and a little displeased. Rose shrugged her plump shoulders and ran down stairs, for Doctor Danton was coming up the avenue, and Rose, of late, had divided her attention pretty equally between playing detective amateur and flirting with Doctor Danton. But there was a visitor for Rose in the drawing-room; and the young Doctor, entering the dining-room, found his sister alone, looking dreamily out at the starry twilight.

"Grace," he said, "I come to say good-bye; I am going to Montreal."

Grace looked round at him with a sudden air of relief.

"Oh, Frank! I am glad. When are you going?"

Doctor Frank stared at her an instant in silence, and then hooked a footstool towards him with his cane.

"Well, upon my word, for a sister who has not seen me for six years, that is affectionate. You're glad I'm going, are you?"

"You know what I mean; it is about Rose Danton."

"Well, what about Miss Rose?"

"I am glad you are going to get out of her way. I am glad she will have no chance to make a fool of you. I am glad you will have no time to fall in love with her."

"My pretty Rose! My dark-eyed darling! Grace, you are heartless."

Grace looked at him, but his face was in shadow, and the tone of his voice told nothing.

"I don't know whether you are serious or not," she said. "For your own sake, I hope you are not. Rose has been flirting with you, but I thought you had penetration enough to see through her. I hope, I trust, Frank, you have not allowed yourself to think seriously of her."

"Why not?" said Doctor Danton; "she is very pretty, she has charming ways, we are of the same blood, I should like to be married. It is very nice to be married, I think. Why should I not think seriously of her?"

"Because you might as well fall in love with the moon, and hope to win it."

"Do you mean she would not have me?"

"Yes."

"Trying, that. But why? Her conduct is encouraging. I thought she was in love with me."

Again Grace looked at him, puzzled; again his face was in shadow, and his inscrutable voice baffled her.

"I do not believe you ever thought any such thing. The girl is a coquette born. She would flirt with Ogden, for the mere pleasure of flirting. She flirts with you because there is no one else."

"Trying!" repeated the Doctor. "Very! And you really think there is no use in my proposing—you really think she will not marry me?"

"I really think so."

"And why? Don't break my heart without a reason. Is it because I am poor?"

"Because you are poor, and not handsome enough, or dashing enough for the vainest, shallowest little flirt that ever made fools of men. Is that plain enough?"

"That's remarkably plain, and I am very much obliged to you. My darling Rose! But hush! A silk dress rustles—here she comes!"

The door opened; it was Rose, but not alone; both sisters were with her, and Doctor Danton arose at once to make his adieus.

"I depart to-morrow for Montreal," he said. "Farewell, Miss Danton."

"Good-bye," letting the tips of her fingers touch his. "Bon voyage."

She walked away to the window, cold indifference in every line of her proud face.

He held out his hand to Rose, glancing sideways at his sister.

"Adieu, Miss Rose," he said; "I shall never forget the pleasant hours I have passed at Danton Hall."

He pressed the little plump hand, and Rose's rosy cheeks took a deeper dye; but she only said, "Good-bye," and walked away to the piano, and played a waltz.

Eeny was the only one who expressed regret, and gave his hand a friendly shake.

"I am sorry you are going," she said. "Come back soon, Doctor Frank."

Doctor Frank looked as if he would like to kiss her; but Kate was there, queenly and majestic, and such an impropriety was not to be thought of.

It was Kate, however, who spoke to him last, as he left the room.

"Take good bye from me to Tiger," she said. "I shall be glad when Tiger comes back to St. Croix."

"'Love me, love my dog,'" quoted Rose. "How about Tiger's master, Kate?"

"I shall always be pleased to see Doctor Danton," said Kate, with supreme indifference. "Sing me a twilight song, Rose."

Rose sang "Kathleen Mavourneen" in a sweet contralto voice.

Kate stood listening to the exquisite words and air, watching Doctor Danton's full figure fading out in the November gloom, and thinking of some one she loved far away.

"O hast thou forgotten how soon we must sever;
O hast thou forgotten how soon we must part?
It may be for years, and it may be forever,
Then why art thou silent, thou voice of my heart?"

CHAPTER V.

SEEING A GHOST.

Three days after the departure of Grace's brother, Captain Danton returned to the Hall. Strange to say, the young Doctor had been missed in these three days by the four Misses Danton. Even the stately Kate, who would have gone to the block sooner than have owned it, missed his genial presence, his pleasant laugh, and ever interesting conversation; Rose missed her flirtee, and gaped wearily the slow hours away that had flown coquetting with him; Eeny missed the pocketfuls of chocolate, bon-bons, and the story books new from Montreal; and Grace missed him most of all. But Eeny was the only one honest enough to own it, and she declared the house was

as lonely as a dungeon since Doctor Frank had gone away.

"One would think you had fallen in love with him, Eeny," said Rose.

"No," retorted Eeny; "I leave that for you. But he was nice; I liked him, and I wish he would come back. Don't you, Kate?"

"I don't care, particularly," said Kate. "I wish papa would come."

"And bring that unknown friend of yours. I say, Kate," said Rose mischievously, "they say you're engaged—perhaps it's your fiancé."

Up over Kate's pearly face the hot blood flew, and she turned hastily to the nearest window.

"Too late, ma soeur," said Rose, her eyes dancing. "You blush beautifully. Won't I have a look at him when he comes, the conquering hero, who can win our queenly Kate's heart."

"Rose, hush!" cried Kate, yet not displeased, and with that roseate light in her face still.

Rose came over, and put her arm around her waist coaxingly.

"Tell me about him, Kate. Is he handsome?"

"Who? Reginald? Of course he is handsome."

"I want to see him dreadfully! Have you his picture? Won't you show it me?"

There was a slender gold chain round Kate's neck, which she wore night and day. A locket was attached, and her hand pressed it now, but she did not take it out.

"Some other time, my pet," she said, kissing Rose. "Come, let us go for a ride."

Rose was an accomplished horsewoman, and never looked so well as in a side-saddle. She owned a spirited black mare, which she called Regina, and she had ridden out every day with Doctor Frank while that gentleman was in St. Croix. Kate rode well, too. A fleet-footed little pony, named Arab, had been trained for her use, and the sisters galloped over the country together daily.

Eeny and Grace, both mortally afraid of horse-flesh, never rode.

Between music, books, and riding, the three days' interval passed pleasantly enough.

Rose was an inveterate novel reader, and the hours Kate spent shut up with that unfathomable mystery, Mr. Richards, her younger sister passed absorbed in the last new novel.

They had visitors too—the Ponsonbys, the Landrys, the Le Favres, and everybody of note in the neighbourhood called. Father Francis, M. le Curé, the Reverend Augustus Clare, the Episcopal incumbent of St. Croix, an aristocratic young Englishman, came to see them in the evening to hear Miss Danton sing, and to play backgammon.

The Reverend Augustus, who was slim, and fair, and had face and hands like a pretty girl, was very much impressed with the majestic daughter of Captain Danton, who sang so magnificently, and looked at him with eyes like blue stars.

The day that brought her father home had been long and dull. There had been no callers, and they had not gone out. A cold north wind had shrieked around the house all day, rattling the windows, and tearing frantically through the gaunt arms of the stripped trees. The sky was like lead, the river black and turbid. As the afternoon wore on, great flakes of snow came fluttering through the opaque air, slowly at first, then faster, till all was blind, fluttering whiteness, and the black earth was hidden.

Kate stood by the dining-room window watching the fast-falling snow. It had been a long day to her—a long, weary, aimless day. She had tried to read, to play, to sing, to work; and failed in all. She had visited Mr. Richards; she had wandered, in a lost sort of way, from room to room; she had lain listlessly on sofas, and tried to sleep, all in vain. The demon of ennui had taken possession of her; and now, at the end of every resource, she stood looking drearily out at the wintry scene. She was dressed for the evening, and looked like a picture, buttoned up in that black velvet jacket, its rich darkness such a foil to her fair face and shining golden hair. Grace was her only companion—Grace sitting serenely braiding an apron for herself, Rose was fathoms deep in "Les Miserables," and Eeny was drumming on the piano in the drawing-room. There had been a long silence, but presently Grace looked up from her work, and spoke.

"This wintry scene is new to you, Miss Danton. You don't have such wild snow storms in England?"

Kate glanced round, a little surprised.

It was very rarely indeed her father's housekeeper voluntarily addressed her.

"No," she said, "not like this; but I like it. We ought to have sleighing to-morrow, if it continues."

"Probably. We do not often have sleighing, though, in November."

There was another pause.

Kate yawned behind her white hand.

"I wish Father Francis would come up," she said wearily. "He is the only person in St. Croix worth talking to."

The dark, short November afternoon was deepening with snowy night, when through the ghostly twilight the buggy from the station whirled up to the door, and two gentlemen alighted. Great-coats, with upturned collars, and hats pulled down, disguised both, but Kate recognized her father, the taller and stouter, with a cry of delight.

"Papa!" she exclaimed; and ran out of the room to meet him. He was just entering, his jovial laugh ringing through the house as he shook the snow off, and caught her in his wet arms.

"Glad to be home again, Kate! You don't mind a cold kiss, do you? Let me present an old friend whom you don't expect, I'll wager."

The gentleman behind him came forward. A gentleman neither very young, nor very handsome, nor very tall; at once plain-looking and proud-looking. The pale twilight was bright enough for Kate to recognize him as he took off his hat.

"Sir Ronald Keith!" she cried, intense surprise in every line of her face; "why, who would have thought of seeing you in Canada?"

She held out her hand frankly, but there was a marked air of restraint in Sir Ronald's manner as he touched it and dropped it again.

"I thought it would be an astonisher," said her father; "how are Grace and Eeny?"

"Very well."

"And Rose? Has Rose got home?"

"Yes, papa."

At this juncture Ogden appeared, and his master turned to him.

"Ogden, see that Sir Ronald's luggage is taken to his room, and then hold yourself in readiness to attend him. This way, Sir Ronald, there is just time to dress for dinner, and no more."

He led his visitor to the bedroom regions, and Kate returned to the drawing-room. Rose was there dressed beautifully, and with flowers in her hair, and all curiosity to hear who their visitor was. There was a heightened colour in Kate's face and an altered expression in her eyes that puzzled Grace.

"He is Sir Ronald Keith," she said, in reply to Rose. "I have known him for years."

"Sir Ronald; knight or baronet?"

"Baronet, of course," Kate said, coldly; "and Scotch. Don't get into a gale, Rose; you won't care about him; he is neither young nor handsome."

"Is he unmarried?"

"Yes."

"And rich?"

"His income is eight thousand a year."

"*Mon Dieu!* A baronet and eight thousand a year! Kate, I am going to make a dead set at him. Lady Keith—Lady Rose Keith; that sounds remarkably well, doesn't it? I always thought I should like to be 'my lady.' Grace, how do I look?"

Kate sat down to the piano, and drowned Rose's words in a storm of music. Rose looked at her with pursed-up lips.

"Kate is in one of her high and mighty moods," she thought. "I don't pretend to understand her. If she is engaged in England, what difference can it make to her whether I flirt with this Scotch baronet or not? What do I care for her airs? I'll flirt if I please."

She sat still, twisting her glossy ringlets round her fingers, while Kate played on with that unsmiling face. Half an hour, and the dinner-bell rang. Ten minutes after, Captain Danton and his guest stood before them.

For a moment Rose did not see him; her father's large proportions, as he took her in his arms and kissed her, overshadowed every one else.

"How my little Rose has grown!" the Captain said looking at her fondly; "as plump as a partridge and as Rosy as her name. Sir Ronald—my daughter Rose."

Rose bowed with finished grace, thinking, with a profound sense of disappointment:

"What an ugly little man!"

Then it was Eeny's turn, and presently they were all seated at the table—the baronet at Kate's right hand, talking to her of Old England, and of by-gone days, and of people the rest knew nothing about. Captain Danton gallantly devoted himself to the other three, and told them he had

brought them all presents from Montreal.

"Oh, papa, have you though!" cried Rose. "I dearly love presents; what have you brought me?"

"Wait until after dinner, little curiosity," said her father. "Grace, whom do you think I met in Montreal?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Why, that brother of yours. I was loitering along the Champ de Mars, when who should step up but Doctor Frank. Wasn't I astonished! I asked what brought him there, and he told me he found St. Croix so slow he couldn't stand it any longer. Complimentary to you, young ladies."

Kate gave Rose a mischievous look, and Rose bit her lip and tossed back her auburn curls.

"I dare say St. Croix and its inhabitants can survive the loss," she said. "Papa, the next time you go to Montreal I want you to take me. It's a long time since I have been there."

"I thought you were going back to Ottawa," said Grace. "You seem to have forgotten all about it."

Rose gave her an alarmed look; and finding a gap in the tête-à-tête between her sister and Sir Ronald, struck smilingly in. He was small and he was homely, but he was a baronet and worth eight thousand a year, and Rose brought all the battery of her charms to bear. In vain. She might as well have tried to fascinate one of the gnarled old tamaracks out-of-doors. Sir Ronald was utterly insensible to her brightest smiles and glances, to her rosiest blushes and most honeyed words. He listened politely, he answered courteously; but he was no more fascinated by Captain Danton's second daughter than he was by Captain Danton's housekeeper.

Rose was disgusted, and retreated to a corner with a book, and sulked. Grace, Kate, and Eeny, who all saw through the little game, were exceedingly amused.

"I told you it was of no use, Rose," said Kate, in a whisper, pausing at the corner. "Do you always read with the book upside down? Sir Ronald is made of flint, where pretty girls are concerned. You won't be 'my lady' this time."

"Sir Ronald is a stupid stick!" retorted Rose. "I wouldn't marry him if he were a duke instead of a baronet. One couldn't expect anything better from a Scotchman, though."

It was the first experience Kate had had of Rose's temper. She drew back now, troubled.

"I hope we will not be troubled with him long!" continued Rose, spitefully. "The place was stupid enough before, but it will be worse with that sulky Scotchman prowling about. I tried to be civil to him this evening. I shall never try again."

With which Miss Rose closed her lips, and relapsed into her book, supremely indifferent to her sister's heightened colour and flashing eyes. She turned away in silence, and fifteen minutes after, Rose got up and left the room, without saving good-night to any one.

Rose kept her word. From that evening she was never civil to the Scotch baronet, and took every occasion to snub him. But her incivility was as completely thrown away as her charms had been. It is doubtful whether Sir Ronald ever knew he was snubbed; and Kate, seeing it, smiled to herself, and was friends with offended Rose once more. She and the baronet were on the best of terms; he was always willing to talk to her, always ready to be her escort when she walked or rode, always on hand to turn her music and listen entranced to her singing. If it was not a flirtation, it was something very like it, and Rose was nowhere. She looked on with indignant eyes, and revenged herself to the best of her power by flirting in her turn with the Reverend Augustus Clare.

"He is nothing but a ninny!" she said to Grace; "and has eyes for no one but Kate. Oh, how I wish my darling Jules were here, or even your brother, Grace—he was better than no one!"

"My brother is very much obliged to you."

"You talk to me of my flirting propensities," continued the exasperated Rose. "I should like to know what you call Kate's conduct with that little Scotchman."

"Friendship, my dear," Grace answered, repressing a smile.

"Remember, they have known each other for years."

"Friendship! Yes; it would be heartless coquetry if it were I. I hope Lieutenant Reginald Stanford, of Stanford Royals, will like it when he comes. Sir Ronald Keith is over head and ears in love with her, and she knows it, and is drawing him on. A more cold-blooded flirtation no one ever saw!"

"Nonsense, Rose! It is only a friendly intimacy."

But Rose, unable to stand this, bounced out of the room in a passion, and sought consolation in her pet novels.

Kate and Sir Ronald were certainly very much together; but, notwithstanding their intimacy, she found time to devote two or three hours every day to Mr. Richards. Rose's mystery was her mystery still. She could get no further towards its solution. Mr. Richards might have been a thousand miles away, for all any of the household saw of him; and Grace, in the solitude of her

own chamber, wondered over it a good deal of late.

She sat at her window one December night, puzzling herself about it. Kate had not come down to dinner that day—she had dined with the invalid in his rooms. When she had entered the drawing-room about nine o'clock, she looked pale and anxious, and was absent and *distraite* all the evening. Now that the house was still and all were in their rooms, Grace was wondering. Was Mr. Richards worse? Why, then, did they not call in a Doctor? Who could he be, this sick stranger, in whom father and daughter were so interested? Grace could not sleep for thinking of it. The night was mild and bright, and she arose, wrapped a large shawl around her, and took her seat by the window. How still it was, how solemn, how peaceful! The full moon sailed through the deep blue sky, silver-white, crystal-clear. Numberless stars shone sharp and keen. The snowy ground glittered dazzlingly bright and cold; the trees stood like grim, motionless sentinels, guarding Danton Hall. The village lay hushed in midnight repose; the tall cross of the Catholic and the lofty spire of the Episcopal church flashed in the moon's rays. Rapid river and sluggish canal glittered in the silvery light. The night was noiseless, hushed, beautiful.

No; not noiseless. A step crunched over the frozen snow; from under the still shadow of the trees a moving shadow came. A man, wrapped in a long cloak, and with a fur cap down over his eyes, came round the angle of the building and began pacing up and down the terrace. Grace's heart stood still for an instant. Who was this midnight walker? Not Sir Ronald Keith watching his lady's lattice—it was too tall for him. Not the Captain—the cloaked figure was too slight. No one Grace knew, and no ghost; for he stood still an instant, lit a cigar, and resumed his walk, smoking. He had loitered up and down the terrace for about a quarter of an hour, when another figure came out from the shadows and joined him. A woman this time, with a shawl wrapped round her, and a white cloud on her head. The moonlight fell full on her face—pale and beautiful. Grace could hardly repress a cry—it was Kate Danton.

The smoker advanced. Miss Danton took his arm, and together they walked up and down, talking earnestly. Once or twice Kate looked up at the darkened windows; but the watcher was not to be seen, and they walked on. Half an hour, an hour, passed; the hall clock struck one, and then the two midnight pedestrians disappeared round the corner and were gone.

The moments passed, and still Grace sat wondering, and of her wonder finding no end. What did it mean? Who was this man with whom the proudest girl the sun ever shone on walked by stealth, and at midnight? Who was he? Suddenly in the silence and darkness of the coming morning, a thought struck her that brought the blood to her face.

"Mr. Richards."

She clasped her hands together. Conviction as positive as certainty thrilled along every nerve. Mr. Richards, the recluse, was the midnight walker—Mr. Richards, who was no invalid at all; and who, shut up all day, came out in the dead of night, when the household were asleep, to take the air in the grounds. There, in the solemn hush of her room, Rose's thoughtless words came back to her like a revelation.

"Where there is secrecy there is guilt."

When the family met at breakfast, Grace looked at Kate with a new interest. But the quiet face told nothing; she was a little pale; but the violet eyes were as starry, and the smile as bright as ever. The English mail had come in, and letters for her and her father lay on the table. There was one, in a bold, masculine hand, with a coat-of-arms on the seal, that brought the rosy blood in an instant to her face. She walked away to one of the windows, to read it by herself. Grace watched the tall, slender figure curiously. She was beginning to be a mystery to her.

"She is on the best of terms with Sir Ronald Keith," she thought; "she meets some man by night in the grounds, and the sight of this handwriting brings all the blood in her body to her face. I suppose she loves him; I suppose he loves her. I wonder what he would think if he knew what I know."

The morning mail brought Rose a letter from Ottawa, which she devoured with avidity, and flourished before Grace's eyes.

"A love letter, Mistress Grace," she said. "My darling Jules is dying to have me back. I mean to ask papa to let me go. It is as dull as a monastery of La Trappe here."

"What's the news from England, Kate?" asked her father, as they all sat down to table.

The rosy light was at its brightest in Kate's face, but Sir Ronald looked as black as a thunder cloud.

"Everybody is well, papa."

"Satisfactory, but not explanatory. Everybody means the good people at Stanford Royals, I suppose?"

"Yes, papa."

"Where is Reginald?"

"At Windsor. But his regiment is ordered to Ireland."

"To Ireland! Then he can't come over this winter?"

"I don't know. He may get leave of absence."

"I hope so—I hope so. Capital fellow is Reginald. Did you see him before you left England, Sir Ronald?"

"I met Lieutenant Stanford at a dinner party the week I left," said Sir Ronald, stiffly—so stiffly, that the subject was dropped at once.

After breakfast, Captain Danton retired to his study to answer his letters, and Sir Ronald and Kate started for their morning ride across the country. She had invited Rose to accompany them, and Rose had rather sulkily declined.

"I never admire spread-eagles," sneered the second Miss Danton, "and I don't care for being third in these cases—I might be *de trop*. Sir Ronald Keith's rather a stupid cavalier. I prefer staying at home, I thank you."

"As you please," Kate said, and went off to dress.

Rose got a novel, and sat down at the upper half window to mope and read. The morning was dark and overcast, the leaden sky threatened snow, and the wailing December wind was desolation itself. The house was very still; faint and far off the sound of Eeny's piano could be heard, and now and then a door somewhere opening and shutting. Ogden came from Mr. Richards' apartment, locked the door after him, put the key in his pocket, and went away. Rose dropped her book and sat gazing at that door—that Bluebeard's chamber—that living mystery in their common-place Canadian home. While she looked at it, some one came whistling up the stairs. It was her father, and he stopped at sight of her.

"You here, Rose, my dear; I thought you had gone out riding with Kate."

"Kate doesn't want me, papa," replied Rose, with a French shrug. "She has company she likes better."

"What, Sir Ronald! Nonsense, Rose! Kate is Sir Ronald's very good friend—nothing more."

Rose gave another shrug.

"Perhaps so, papa. It looks like flirting, but appearances are deceitful. Papa!"

"Yes, my dear."

"I wish you would let me go back to Ottawa!"

"To Ottawa! Why, you only left it the other day. What do you want to go back to Ottawa for?"

"It's so dull here, papa," answered Rose, fidgeting with her book, "and I had such a good time there. I shall die of the dismals in this house before the winter is over."

"Then we must try and enliven it up a little for you. What would you like, a house-warming?"

"Oh, papa! that would be delightful."

"All right, then, a house-warming it shall be. We must speak to Grace and Kate about it; hold a council of war, you know, and settle preliminaries. I can't spare my little Rosie just yet, and let her run away to Ottawa."

Rose gave him a rapturous kiss, and Captain Danton walked away, unlocked the green baize door, and disappeared.

When Kate came back from her ride, Rose informed her of her father's proposal with sparkling eyes. Kate listened quietly, and made no objection; neither did Grace; and so the matter was decided.

Rose had no time to be lonely after that. Her father gave her *carte blanche* in the matter of dress and ornament, and Miss Rose's earthly happiness was complete. She, and Kate, and Grace went to Montreal to make the necessary purchases, to lasso dressmakers and fetch them back to St. Croix.

"I know a young woman I think will suit you," said Ma'am Ledru, the cook. "She is an excellent dressmaker and embroideress; very poor, and quite willing, I am sure, to go into the country. Her name is Agnes Darling, and she lives in the Petite Rue de Saint Jacques."

Rose hastened to the Petite Rue de Saint Jacques at once, and in a small room of a tenement house found the seamstress; a little pale, dark-eyed, dark-haired creature, with a face that was a history of trouble, though her years could not have numbered twenty. There was no difficulty in engaging her: she promised to be ready to return with them to St. Croix the following morning.

They only spent two days in the city, and were, of course, very busy all the time. Grace took a few moments to try and find her brother, but failed. He was not to be heard of at his customary address; he had been talking of quitting Montreal, they told her there; probably he had done so.

The Dantons, with the pale little dressmaker, returned next day, all necessaries provided. The business of the house-warming commenced at once. Danton Hall—ever spotless under the reign of Grace—was rubbed up and scrubbed down from garret to cellar. Invitations were sent out far and wide. Agnes Darling's needle flew from early dawn till late at night; and Grace and the cook,

absorbed in cake and jelly-making, were invisible all day long in the lower regions. Eeny and Rose went heart and soul into the delightful fuss, all new to them, but Kate took little interest in it. She was Sir Ronald's very good friend still, and, like Mrs. Micawber, never deserted him. Captain Danton hid his diminished head in his study, in Mr. Richard's rooms, or took refuge with the Curé from the hubbub.

The eventful night at last came round, clear, cold, and near Christmas. The old ball-room of Danton Hall, disused so long, had been refitted, waxed, and decorated; the long drawing-room was resplendent; the supper table set in the dining-room was dazzling to look at, with silver, Sèvres, and glittering glass; the dressing-rooms were in a state of perfection; the servants all *en grande tenue*; and Danton Hall one blaze of light. In the bedroom regions the mysteries of the toilet had been going on for hours. Eunice was busy with her mistress; Agnes the seamstress was playing *femme de chambre* to Rose. Grace dressed herself in twenty minutes, and then dressed Eeny, who only wore pink muslin and a necklace of pearls, and looked fairy-like and fragile as ever. Grace, in gray silk, with an emerald brooch, and her brown hair simply worn as she always wore it, looked lady-like and unassuming.

The guests came by the evening train from Montreal, and the carriages of the nearer neighbours began coming in rapid succession. Kate stood by her cordial father's side, receiving their guests. So tall, so stately, so exquisitely dressed—all the golden hair twisted in thick coils around her regal head, and one diamond star flashing in its amber glitter. Lovely with that flush on the delicate cheeks, that streaming light in the blue eyes.

Rose was eclipsed. Rose looking her best, and very pretty, but nothing beside her queenly sister. But Rose was very brilliant, flitting hither and thither, dancing incessantly, and turning whiskered heads in all directions. They could fall in love with pretty, coquettish Rose, those very young gentlemen, who could only look at Kate from a respectful distance in speechless admiration and awe. Rose was of their kind, and they could talk to her; so Rose was the belle of the night, after all.

Sir Ronald Keith and two or three officers from Montreal, with side whiskers, a long pedigree, and a first-rate opinion of themselves, were the only gentlemen who had the temerity to approach the goddess of the ball—oh! excepting the Reverend Augustus Clare, who, in his intense admiration, was almost tongue-tied, and Doctor Danton, who, to the surprise of every one except the master of the Hall, walked in, the last guest of all.

"You look surprised, Miss Danton," he said, as they shook hands. "Did not the Captain tell you I was coming?"

"Not a word."

"I returned to-day, knowing nothing of the house-warming. The Captain met me, and, with his customary hospitality, insisted on my coming."

"We are very glad he has done so. Your sister tried to find you when we were in—good Heaven! what is that?"

It was a sudden, startled scream, that made all pause who were standing near. Butler Thomas appeared at the moment, flurried and in haste.

"What's the matter?" asked Captain Danton; and the startled faces of his guests reiterated the question. "Who cried out?"

"Old Margery, sir. She's seen a ghost!"

"Seen what?"

"A ghost, sir; out in the tamarack walk?—She's fell down in a fit in the hall."

There was a little chorus of startled exclamations from the ladies. Captain Danton came forward, his florid face changing to white; and Kate, all her colour gone, dropped her partner's arm.

"Come with me, Doctor Danton," he said. "Yes, Kate, you too. My friends, do not let this foolish affair disturb you. Excuse us for a few moments, and pray go on as if nothing had happened."

They left the ball-room together. The music, that had stopped, resumed; dancing recommenced, and "all went merry as a marriage-bell." There was only one, perhaps, who thought seriously of what had taken place. Grace, standing near the door talking to an elderly major from the city, heard Thomas' last words to his master as they went out.

"Ogden says it was him she seen, but Margery won't listen to him. Ogden says he was out in the tamarack walk, and she mistook him in the moonlight for a ghost."

Grace's thoughts went back to the night when she had seen the mysterious walker under the tameracks. No, it was not Ogden, that old Margery had seen, else Captain Danton and his daughter would not have worn such pale and startled faces going out.

It was not Ogden, and it was not a ghost; but whose ghost did Margery take it to be? The apparition in the tamarack walk must have resembled some one she knew and now thought to be dead, else why should she think it a spirit at all?

The whiskered major, who took Grace for one of the Captain's daughter's, and was slightly *ebris*,

found her very *distraite* all of a sudden, and answering his questions vaguely and at random. He did his best to interest her, and failed so signally that he got up and left in disgust.

Grace sat still and watched the door. Half an hour passed—three-quarters, and then her brother re-entered alone. She went up to him at once, but his unreadable face told nothing.

"Well," she asked, anxiously, "how is Margery?"

"Restored and asleep."

"Does she really think she saw a ghost?"

"She really does, and was frightened into fits."

"Whose ghost was it?"

"My dear Grace," said the Doctor, "have sense. I believe the foolish old woman mentioned some name to Miss Danton, but I never repeat nonsense. She is in her dotage, I dare say, and sees double."

"Margery is no more in her dotage than you are," said Grace, vexed. "Perhaps she is not the only one who has seen the ghost of Danton Hall."

"Grace! What do you mean?"

"Excuse me, Doctor Frank, I never talk nonsense. You can keep your professional secrets; I'll find out from Margery all the same. Here is the Captain; he looks better than when he went out. Where is Kate?"

"With Margery. She won't be left alone."

As she spoke, Rose came up, her brightest smiles in full play.

"I have been searching for you everywhere, Doctor Frank. You ought to be sent to Coventry. Don't you know you engaged me for the German, and here you stand talking to Grace. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, sir."

"So I am," said the Doctor. "Adieu, Grace. Pardon this once, Mademoiselle, and for the remainder of the evening, for the remainder of my life, I am entirely at your service."

Grace kept her station at the door watching for Kate. In another half hour she appeared, slightly pale, but otherwise tranquil. She was surrounded immediately by sundry "ginger-whiskered fellows," otherwise the officers from Montreal, and lost to the housekeeper's view.

The house-warming was a success. Somewhere in the big, busy world perhaps, crime, and misery, and shame, and sorrow, and starvation, and all the catalogue of earthly horrors, were rife, but not at Danton Hall. Time trod on flowers; enchanted music drifted the bright hours away; the golden side of life was uppermost; and if those gay dancers knew what tears and trouble meant, their faces never showed it. Kate, with her tranquil and commanding beauty, wore a face as serene as a summer's sky; and her father playing whist, was laughing until all around laughed in sympathy. No, there could be no hidden skeleton, or the masks those wore who knew of its grisly presence were something wonderful.

In the black and bitterly cold dawn of early morning the dancers went shivering home. The first train bore the city guests, blue and fagged, to Montreal; and Doctor Frank walked briskly through the piercing air over the frozen snow to his hotel. And up in her room old Margery lay in disturbed sleep, watched over by dozing Babette, and moaning out at restless intervals.

"Master Harry! Master Harry! O Miss Kate! it was Master Harry's ghost!"

CHAPTER VI.

ROSE'S ADVENTURE.

December wore out in wild snow-storms and wintry winds. Christmas came, solemn and shrouded in white; and Kate Danton's fair hands decorated the little village church with evergreens and white roses for Father Francis; and Kate Danton's sweet voice sang the dear old "Adeste Fideles" on Christmas morning. Kate Danton, too, with the princely spirit that nature and habit had given her, made glad the cottages of the poor with gifts of big turkeys, and woolly blankets, and barrels of flour. They half adored, these poor people, the stately young lady, with the noble and lovely face, so unlike anything St. Croix had ever seen before. Proud as she was, she was never proud with them—God's poor ones; she was never proud when she knelt in their midst, in that lowly little church, and cried "Mea culpa" as humbly as the lowliest sinner there.

New-Year came with its festivities, bringing many callers from Montreal, and passed; and Danton Hall fell into its customary tranquillity once more. Sir Ronald Keith was still their guest; Doctor Frank was still an inmate of the St. Croix Hotel, and a regular visitor at the Hall. More letters had come for Kate from England; Lieutenant Stanford's regiment had gone to Ireland, and he said

nothing of leave of absence or a visit to Canada. Rose got weekly epistles from Ottawa; her darling Jules poured out floods of undying love in the very best French, and Rose smiled over them complacently, and went down and made eyes at Doctor Frank all the evening. And old Margery was not recovered yet from the ghost-seeing fright, and would not remain an instant alone by night or day for untold gold.

The sunset of a bright January day was turning the western windows of Danton Hall to sheets of beaten gold. The long, red lances of light pierced through the black trees, tinged the piled up snow-drifts, and made the low evening sky one blaze of crimson splendour. Eeny stood looking thoughtfully out at the gorgeous hues of the wintry sunset and the still landscape, where no living thing moved. She was in a cozy little room called the housekeeper's room, but which Grace never used, except when she made up her accounts, or when her favourite apartment, the dining-room, was occupied. A bright fire burned in the grate, and the curtained windows and carpeted floor were the picture of comfort. It had been used latterly as a sewing-room, and Agnes Darling sat at the other window embroidering a handkerchief for Rose. There had been a long silence—the seamstress never talked much; and Eeny was off in a daydream. Presently, a big dog came bounding tumultuously up the avenue, and a tall man in an overcoat followed leisurely.

"There!" exclaimed Eeny, "there's Tiger and Tiger's master. You haven't seen Grace's brother yet, have you Agnes?"

"No," said the seamstress, looking out, "is that he?"

He was too far off to be seen distinctly; but a moment or two later he was near. A sudden exclamation from the seamstress made Eeny look at her in surprise. She had sprang up and sat down again, white, and startled, and trembling.

"What's the matter?" said Eeny. "Do you know Doctor Danton?"

"Doctor Danton?" repeated Agnes. "Yes. Oh, what am I saying! No, I don't know him."

She sat down again, all pale and trembling, and scared. Doctor Frank was ringing the bell, and was out of sight. Eeny gazed at her exceedingly astonished.

"What is the matter with you?" she reiterated. "What are you afraid of? Do you know Doctor Danton?"

"Don't ask me; please don't ask me!" cried the little seamstress, piteously. "I have seen him before; but, oh, please don't say anything about it!"

She was in such a violent tremor—her voice was so agitated, that Eeny good-naturedly said no more. She turned away, and looked again at the paling glory of the sunset, not seeing it this time, but thinking of Agnes Darling's unaccountable agitation at sight of Grace's brother.

"Perhaps he has been a lover of hers," thought romantic Eeny, "and false! She is very pretty, or would be, if she wasn't as pale as a corpse. And yet I don't think Doctor Frank would be false to any one either. I don't want to think so—I like him too well."

Eeny left the sewing-room and went upstairs. She found Doctor Danton in the dining-room with his sister and Rose, and Rose was singing a French song for him. Eeny took her station by the window; she knew the seamstress was in the daily habit of taking a little twilight walk in her favourite circle, round and round the fish-pond, and she could see from where she stood when she went out.

"I'll show her to him," thought Eeny, "and see if it flurries him as it did her. There is something between them, if one could get to the bottom of it."

Rose's song ended. The sunset faded out in a pale blank of dull gray—twilight fell over the frozen ground. A little black figure, wearing a shawl over its head, fluttered out into the mysterious half-light, and began pacing slowly round the frozen fish-pond.

"Doctor Frank," said Eeny, "come here and see the moon rise."

"How romantic!" laughed Rose. But the Doctor went and stood by her side.

The wintry crescent-moon was sailing slowly up, with the luminous evening star resplendent beside her, glittering on the whitened earth.

"Pretty," said the Doctor; "very. Solemn, and still, and white! What dark fairy is that gliding round the fish-pond?"

"That," said Eeny, "is Agnes Darling."

"Who?" questioned Doctor Danton, suddenly and sharply.

"Agnes Darling, our seamstress. Dear me, Doctor Danton, one would think you knew her!"

There had been a momentary change in his face, and Eeny's suspicious eyes were full upon him—only momentary, though; it was gone directly, and his unreadable countenance was as calm as a summer's sky. Doctor Frank might have been born a duke, so radically and unaffectedly nonchalant was he.

"The name has a familiar sound; but I don't think I know your seamstress. Go and play me a

waltz, Eeny."

There was no getting anything out of Doctor Danton which he did not choose to tell. Eeny knew that, and went over to the piano, a little provoked at the mystery they made of it.

But destiny that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will, had made up its mind for further revelations, and against destiny even Doctor Frank was powerless. Destiny lost no time either—the revelation came the very next evening. Kate and Eeny had been to St. Croix, visiting some of Kate's poor pensioners, and evening was closing in when they reached the Hall. A lovely evening—calm, windless, still; the moon's silver disk brilliant in an unclouded sky, and the holy hush of eventide over all. The solemn beauty of the falling night tempted Kate to linger, while Eeny went on to the house. There was a group of tall pines, with a rustic bench, near the entrance-gates. Kate sat down under the evergreens, leaning against the trees, her dark form scarcely distinguishable in their shadow. While she sat, a man and a woman passed. Full in the moonlight she saw that it was Doctor Danton and Agnes Darling. Distinct in the still keen air she heard his low, earnest words.

"Don't betray yourself—don't let them see you know me. Be on your guard, especially with Eeny, who suspects. It will avoid disagreeable explanations. It is best to let them think we have never met."

They were gone. Kate sat petrified. What understanding was this between Doctor Danton and their pale little seamstress? They knew each other, and there were reasons why that acquaintance should be a secret. "It would involve disagreeable explanations!" What could Doctor Frank mean? The solution of the riddle that had puzzled Eeny came to her. Had they been lovers at some past time?—was Doctor Frank a villain after all?

The moon sailed up in the zenith, the blue sky was all sown with stars, and the loud ringing of the dinner-bell reached her even where she sat. She got up hastily, and hurried to the house, ran to her room, threw off her bonnet and shawl, smoothed her hair, and descended to the dining-room in her plain black silk dress. She was late; they were all there—her father, Grace, Rose, Eeny, Sir Ronald, the Reverend Augustus Clare, and Doctor Danton.

"Runaway," said her father, "we had given you up. Where have you been?"

"Star-gazing, papa. Down under the pines, near the gates, until five minutes ago."

Doctor Frank looked up quickly, and met the violet eyes fixed full upon him.

"I heard you, sir," that bright glance said. "Your secret is a secret no longer."

Doctor Danton looked down at his plate with just a tinge of colour in his brown face. He understood her as well as if she had spoken; but, except that faint and transient flush, it never moved him. He told them stories throughout dinner of his adventures as a medical student in Germany, and every one laughed except Kate. She could not laugh; the laughter of the others irritated her. His words going up the avenue rang in her ears; the pale, troubled face of the seamstress was before her eyes. Something in the girl's sad, joyless face had interested her from the first. Had Doctor Danton anything to do with that look of hopeless trouble?

With this new interest in her mind, Kate sent for the seamstress to her room next morning. Some lace was to be sewn on a new dress. Eunice generally did such little tasks for her mistress, but on this occasion it was to be Agnes. The girl sat down with the rich robe by the window, and bent assiduously over her work. Miss Danton, in a loose négligée, lying half buried in the depths of a great carved and cushioned chair, watched her askance while pretending to read. What a slender, diminutive creature she was—how fixedly pale, paler still in contrast with her black hair and great, melancholy dark eyes. She never looked up—she went on, stitch, stitch, like any machine, until Kate spoke, suddenly:

"Agnes!"

The dark eyes lifted inquiringly.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-two."

"You don't look it. Are your parents living?"

"No; dead these many years."

"Have you brothers or sisters?"

"No, I never had."

"But you have other relatives—uncles, aunts, cousins?"

"No, Miss Danton—none that I have ever seen."

"What an isolated little thing you are! Have you lived in Montreal all your life?"

"Oh, no! I have only been in Montreal a few months. I was born and brought up in New York."

"In New York!" repeated Kate, surprised. And then there was a pause. When had Doctor Danton

been in New York? For the last four years he had been in Germany; from Germany he had come direct to Canada, so Grace had told her; where, then, had he known this New York girl?

"Why did you come to Montreal?" asked Kate.

There was a nervous contraction around the girl's mouth, and something seemed to fade out of her face—not color, for she had none—but it darkened with something like sudden anguish.

"I had a friend," she said hastily, "a friend I lost; I heard I might find that—that friend in Montreal, and so—"

Her voice died away, and she put up one trembling hand to shade her face. Kate came over and touched the hand lying on her black dress, caressingly. She forgot her pride, as she often forgot it in her womanly pity.

"My poor little Agnes! Did you find that friend?"

"No."

"No?" repeated Kate.

She thought the reply would be "yes"—she had thought the friend was Doctor Frank. Agnes dropped her hand from before her face.

"No," she said sadly, "I have not found him. I shall never find him again in this world, I am afraid."

Him! That little tell-tale pronoun! Kate knew by instinct the friend was "him," men being at the bottom of all womanly distress in this lower world.

"Then it was not Doctor Danton?"

Agnes looked up with a suddenly frightened face, her great eyes dilating, her pale lips parting.

"I saw you by accident coming up the avenue with him last evening," Kate hastened to explain. "I chanced to hear a remark of his in passing; I could not help it."

Agnes clasped her hands together in frightened supplication.

"You won't say anything about it?" she said, piteously. "Oh, please don't say anything about it! I am so sorry you overheard. Oh, Miss Danton, you won't tell?"

"Certainly not," answered Kate, startled by her emotion. "I merely thought he might be the friend you came in search of."

"Oh, no, no! Doctor Danton has been my friend; I owe him more than I can ever repay. He is the best, and noblest, and most generous of men. He was my friend when I had no friend in the world—when, but for him, I might have died. But he is not the one I came to seek."

"I beg your pardon," said Kate, going back to her chair. "I have asked too many questions."

"No, no! You have a right to ask me, but I cannot tell. I am not very old, but my heart is nearly broken."

She dropped her work, covered her face with her slender hands, and broke out into a fit of passionate crying. Kate was beside her in a moment, soothing her, caressing her, as if she had been her sister.

"I am sorry, I am sorry," she said; "it is all my fault. Don't cry, Agnes; I will go now; you will feel better alone."

She stooped and kissed her. Agnes looked up in grateful surprise, but Miss Danton was gone. She ran down stairs and stood looking out of the drawing-room window, at the sunlit, wintry landscape.

So Doctor Frank was a hero after all, and not a villain. He had nothing to do with this pale little girl's trouble. He was only her best friend and wanted to hide it.

"People generally like their good deeds to be known," mused Miss Danton. "They want their right hand to see all that their left hand gives. Is Doctor Frank a little better than the rest of mankind? I know he attends the sick poor of St. Croix for nothing, and I know he is very pleasant, and a gentleman. Is he that modern wonder, a good man, besides?"

Her meditations were interrupted by the entrance of Rose, looking very charming in a tight jacket and long black riding-skirt, a "jockey hat and feather" on her curly head, and flourishing her riding-whip in her gauntleted hand.

"I thought you were out, Kate, with your little Scotchman," she said, slapping her gaiter. "I saw him mount and ride off nearly an hour ago."

"I have been in my room."

"I wish Doctor Frank would come," said Rose. "I like some one to make love to me when I ride."

"Doctor Frank does not make love to you."

"Does he not? How do you know?"

"My prophetic soul tells me, and what is more, never will. All the better for Doctor Frank, since you would not accept him or his love if he offered them."

"And how do you know that? I must own I thought him a prig at first, and if I begin to find him delightful now, I suppose it is merely by force of contrast with your black-browed, deadly-dull baronet. Will you come? No? Well, then, adieu, and *au revoir*."

Kate watched her mount and gallop down the avenue, kissing her hand as she disappeared.

"My pretty Rose," she thought, smiling, "she is only a spoiled child; one cannot be angry, let her say what she will."

Out beyond the gates, Rose's canter changed to a rapid gallop. She managed her horse well, and speedily left the village behind, and was flying along a broad, well-beaten country road, interspersed at remote intervals with quaint French farm-houses.

All at once, Regina slipped—there was a sheet of ice across the road—struggled to regain her footing, fell, and would have thrown her rider had not a man, walking leisurely along, sprung forward and caught her in his arms.

Rose was unhurt, and extricating herself from the stranger's coat-sleeves, rose also. The hero of the moment made an attempt to follow her example, uttered a groan, made a wry face, and came to a halt.

"Are you hurt?" Rose asked.

"I have twisted an ankle on that confounded ice—sprained it, I am afraid, in the struggle with the horse. If I can walk—but no, my locomotive powers, I find, are at a standstill for the present. Now, then, Mademoiselle, what are we to do?"

He seated himself with great deliberation on a fallen tree and looked up at her coolly, as he asked the question.

Rose looked down into one of the handsomest faces she had ever seen, albeit pallid just now with sharp pain.

"I am so sorry," she said, in real concern. "You cannot walk, and you must not stay here. What shall we—oh! what shall we do?"

"I tell you," said the young man. "Do you see that old yellow farm-house that looks like a church in Chinese mourning."

"Yes."

"Well—but it will be a great deal of trouble."

"Trouble!" cried Rose. "Don't talk about trouble. Do you want me to go to that farm-house!"

"If you will be so kind. I stopped there last night. Tell old Jacques—that's the proprietor—to send some kind of a trap down here for me—a sled, if nothing else."

"I'll be back in ten minutes," exclaimed Rose, mounting Regina with wonderful celerity, and flying off.

Old Jacques—a wizen little habitant—was distressed at the news, and ran off instantly to harness up his old mare, and sled. Madame Jacques placed a mattress on the sled and the vehicle started.

"Who is the gentleman?" Rose asked carelessly, as they rode along.

Old Jacques didn't know. He had stopped there last night, and paid them, but hadn't told them his name or his business.

A few minutes brought them to the scene of the tragedy. The stranger lifted those dark eyes of his, and looked so unspeakably handsome, that Rose was melted to deeper compassion than ever.

"I am afraid you are nearly frozen to death," she said, springing lightly to the ground. "Let us try if we cannot help you on to the sled."

"You are very kind," replied the stranger, laughing and accepting. "It is worth while having a sprained ankle, after all."

Rose and old Jacques got him on the sled between them though his lips were white with suppressed pain in the effort.

"I sent Jean Baptiste for Dr. Pillule," said old Jacques as he started the mare. "Monsieur will be—what you call it—all right, when Dr. Pillule comes."

"Might I ask—but, perhaps it would be asking too much?" the stranger said, looking at Rose.

"What is it?"

"Will you not return with us, and hear whether Dr. Pillule thinks my life in danger?"

Rose laughed.

"I never heard of any one dying from a sprained ankle. *Malgré cela*, I will return if you wish it, since you got it in my behalf."

Rose's steed trotted peaceably beside the sled to the farm-house door. All the way, the wounded hero lay looking up at the graceful girl, with the rose-red cheeks and auburn curls, and thinking, perhaps, if he were any judge of pictures, what a pretty picture she made.

Rose assisted in helping him into the drawing room of the establishment—which was a very wretched drawing-room indeed. There was a leather lounge wheeled up before a large fire, and thereon the injured gentleman was laid.

Doctor Pillule had not yet arrived, and old Jacques stood waiting further orders.

"Jacques, fetch a chair. That is right; put it up here, near me. Now you can go. Mademoiselle, do me the favour to be seated."

Rose sat down, very near—dangerously near—the owner of the eyes.

"May I ask the name of the young lady whom I have been fortunate enough to assist."

"My name is Rosina—Rose Danton."

"Danton," repeated the young man slowly. "Danton; I know that name. There is a place called Danton Hall over here—a fine old place, they tell me—owned by one Captain Danton."

"I am Captain Danton's second daughter."

"Then, Miss Danton, I am very happy to make your acquaintance."

He held out his hand, gravely. Rose shook hands, laughing and blushing.

"I am much pleased to make yours, Mr. ——" laughing still, and looking at him.

"Reinecourt," said the gentleman.

"Mr. Reinecourt; only I wish you had not sprained your ankle doing it."

"I don't regret it. But you are under an obligation to me, are you not?"

"Certainly."

"Then I mean to have a return for what you owe me. I want you to come and see me every day until I get well."

Rose blushed vividly.

"Oh, I don't know. You exact too much!"

"Not a whit. I'll never fly to the rescue of another damsel in distress as long as I live, if you don't."

"But every day! Once a week will be enough."

"If you insult me by coming once a week, I'll issue orders not to admit you. Promise, Miss Danton; here comes Doctor Pillule."

"I promise, then. There, I never gave you permission to kiss my hand."

She arose precipitately, and stood looking out of the window, while the Doctor attended to the sprain.

Nearly half an hour passed. The ankle was duly bathed and bandaged, then old Jacques and the Doctor went away, and she came over and looked laughingly down at the invalid, a world of coquettish daring in her dancing eyes.

"Well, M. Reinecourt, when does M. le Médecin say you are going to die?"

"When you think of leaving me, Mademoiselle."

"Then summon your friends at once, for I not only think of it, but am about to do it."

"Oh, not so soon."

"It is half-past two, Monsieur," pulling out her watch; "they will think I am lost at home. I must go!"

"Well, shake hands before you go."

"It seems to me you are very fond of shaking hands, Mr. Reinecourt," said Rose, giving him hers willingly enough, though.

"And you really must leave me?"

"I really must."

"But you will come to-morrow?" still holding her hand.

"Perhaps so—if I have nothing better to do."

"You cannot do anything better than visit the sick, and oh, yes! do me another favour. Fetch me some books to read—to pass the dismal hours of your absence."

"Very well; now let me go."

He released her plump little hand, and Rose drew on her gloves.

"Adieu, Mr. Reinecourt," moving to the door.

"*Au revoir*, Miss Danton, until to-morrow morning."

Rose rode home in delight. In one instant the world had changed. St. Croix had become a paradise, and the keen air sweet as "Ceylon's spicy breezes." As Alice Carey says, "What to her was our world with its storms and rough weather," with that pallid face, those eyes of darkest splendour, that magnetic voice, haunting her all the way. It was love at sight with Miss Danton the second. What was the girlish fancy she had felt for Jules La Touche—for Dr. Frank—for a dozen others, compared with this.

Joe, the stable-boy, led away Regina, and Rose entered the house. Crossing the hall, she met Eeny going upstairs.

"Well!" said Eeny, "and where have you been all day, pray?"

"Out riding."

"Where?"

"Oh, everywhere! Don't bother!"

"Do you know we have had luncheon?"

"I don't care—I don't want luncheon."

She ran past her sister, and shut herself up in her room. Eeny stared. In all her experience of her sister she had never known her to be indifferent to eating and drinking. For the first time in Rose's life, love had taken away her appetite.

All that afternoon she stayed shut up in her chamber, dreaming as only eighteen, badly in love, does dream. When darkness fell, and the lamps were lit, and the dinner-bell rang, she descended to the dining-room indifferent for the first time whether she was dressed well or ill.

"What does it matter?" she thought, looking in the glass; "he is not here to see me."

Doctor Frank and the Reverend Augustus Clare dropped in after dinner, but Rose hardly deigned to look at them. She reclined gracefully on a sofa, with half shut eyes, listening to Kate playing one of Beethoven's "Songs without Words," and seeing—not the long, lamp-lit drawing-room with all its elegant luxuries, or the friends around her, but the bare best room of the old yellow farm-house, and the man lying lonely and ill before the blazing fire. Doctor Danton sat down beside her and talked to her; but Rose answered at random, and was so absorbed, and silent, and preoccupied, as to puzzle every one. Her father asked her to sing. Rose begged to be excused—she could not sing to-night. Kate looked at her in wonder.

"What is the matter with you, Rose?" she inquired; "are you ill? What is it?"

"Nothing," Rose answered, "only I don't feel like talking."

And not feeling like it, nobody could make her talk. She retired early—to live over again in dreams the events of that day, and to think of the blissful morrow.

An hour after breakfast next morning, Eeny met her going out, dressed for her ride, and with a little velvet reticule stuffed full, slung over her arm.

"What have you got in that bag?" asked Eeny, "your dinner? Are you going to a picnic?"

Rose laughed at the idea of a January picnic, and ran off without answering. An hour's brisk gallop brought her to the farm house, and old Jacques came out, bowing and grinning, to take charge of her horse.

"Monsieur was in the parlour—would Mademoiselle walk right into the parlour? Dr. Pillule had been there and seen to Monsieur's ankle. Monsieur was doing very well, only not able to stand up yet."

Rose found Monsieur half asleep before the fire, and looking as handsome as ever in his slumber. He started up at her entrance, holding out both hands.

"*Mon ange!* I thought you were never coming. I was falling into despair."

"Falling into despair means falling asleep, I presume. Don't let me disturb your dreams."

"I am in a more blissful dream now than any I could dream asleep. Here is a seat. Oh, don't sit so far off. Are those the books? How can I ever thank you?"

"You never can—so don't try. Here is Tennyson—of course you like Tennyson; here is Shelley—here are two new and charming novels. Do you read novels?"

"I will read everything you fetch me. By-the-by, it is very fatiguing to read lying down; won't you read to me?"

"I can't read. I mean I can't read aloud."

"Let me be the judge of that. Let me see—read 'Maud.'"

Rose began and did her best, and read until she was tired. Mr. Reinecourt watched her all the while as she sat beside him.

And presently they drifted off into delicious talk of poetry and romance; and Rose, pulling out her watch, was horrified to find that it was two o'clock.

"I must go!" she cried, springing up; "what will they think has become of me?"

"But you will come again to-morrow?" pleaded Mr. Reinecourt.

"I don't know—you don't deserve it, keeping me here until this hour. Perhaps I may, though—good-bye."

Rose, saying this, knew in her heart she could not stay away if she tried. Next morning she was there, and the next, and the next, and the next. Then came a week of wild, snowy weather, when the roads were heaped high, going out was an impossibility, and she had to stay at home. Rose chafed desperately under the restraint, and grew so irritable that it was quite a risk to speak to her. All her old high spirits were gone. Her ceaseless flow of talk suddenly checked. She wandered about the house aimlessly, purposelessly, listlessly, sighing wearily, and watching the flying snow and hopeless sky. A week of this weather, and January was at its close before a change for the better came. Rose was falling a prey to green and yellow melancholy, and perplexing the whole household by the unaccountable alteration in her. With the first gleam of fine weather she was off. Her long morning rides were recommenced; smiles and roses returned to her face, and Rose was herself again.

It took that sprained ankle a very long time to get well. Three weeks had passed since that January day when Regina had slipped on the ice, and still Mr. Reinecourt was disabled; at least he was when Rose was there. He had dropped the Miss Danton and taken to calling her Rose, of late; but when she was gone, it was really surprising how well he could walk, and without the aid of a stick. Old Jacques grinned knowingly. The poetry reading and the long, long talks went on every day, and Rose's heart was hopelessly and forever gone. She knew nothing more of Mr. Reinecourt than that he was Mr. Reinecourt; still, she hardly cared to know. She was in love, and an idiot; to-day sufficed for her—to-morrow might take care of itself.

"Rose, *chérie*," Mr. Reinecourt said to her one day, "you vindicate your sex; you are free from the vice of curiosity. You ask no questions, and, except my name, you know nothing of me."

"Well, Mr. Reinecourt, whose fault is that?"

"Do you want to know?"

Rose looked at him, then away. Somehow of late she had grown strangely shy.

"If you like to tell me."

"My humble little Rose! Yes, I will tell you. I must leave here soon; a sprained ankle won't last forever, do our best."

She looked at him in sudden alarm, her bright bloom fading out. He had taken one of her little hands, and her fingers closed involuntarily over his.

"Going away!" she repeated. "Going away!"

He smiled slightly. His masculine vanity was gratified by the irrepressible confession of her love for him.

"Not from you, my dear little Rose. To-morrow you will know all—where I am going, and who I am."

"Who you are! Are you not Mr. Reinecourt?"

"Certainly!" half laughing. "But that is rather barren information, is it not? Can you wait until to-morrow?"

His smile, the clasp in which he held her hand, reassured her.

"Oh, yes," she said, drawing a long breath, "I can wait!"

That day—Rose remembered it afterward—he stood holding her hands a long time at parting.

"You will go! What a hurry you are always in," he said.

"A hurry!" echoed Rose. "I have been here three hours. I should have gone long ago. Don't detain me; good-bye!"

"Good-bye, my Rose, my dear little nurse! Good-bye until we meet again."

CHAPTER VII.

HON. LIEUTENANT REGINALD STANFORD.

Rose Danton's slumbers were unusually disturbed that night. Mr. Reinecourt haunted her awake, Mr. Reinecourt haunted her asleep. What was the eventful morrow to reveal? Would he tell her he loved her? Would he ask her to be his wife? Did he care for her, or did he mean nothing after all?

No thought of Jules La Touche came to disturb her as she drifted off into delicious memories of the past and ecstatic dreams of the future. No thought of the promise she had given, no remorse at her own falsity, troubled her easy conscience. What did she care for Jules La Touche? What was he beside this splendid Mr. Reinecourt? She thought of him—when she thought of him at all—with angry impatience, and she drew his ring off her finger and flung it across the room.

"What a fool I was," she thought, "ever to dream of marrying that silly boy! Thank heaven I never told any one but Grace."

Rose was feverish with impatience and anticipation when morning came. She sat down to breakfast, tried to eat, and drink, and talk as usual, and failed in all. As soon as the meal was over, unable to wait, she dressed and ordered her horse. Doctor Frank was sauntering up the avenue, smoking a cigar in the cold February sunshine, as she rode off.

"Away so early, Di Vernon, and unescorted? May I—"

"No," said Rose, brusquely, "you may not. Good morning!"

Doctor Frank glanced after her as she galloped out of sight.

"What is it?" he thought. "What has altered her of late? She is not the same girl she was two weeks ago. Has she fallen in love, I wonder? Not likely, I should think; and yet—"

He walked off, revolving the question, to the house, while Rose was rapidly shortening the distance between herself and her beloved. Old Jacques was leaning over the gate as she rode up, and took off his hat with Canadian courtesy to the young lady.

"Is Mr. Reinecourt in, Mr. Jacques?" asked Rose, preparing to dismount.

Jacques lifted his eyebrows in polite surprise.

"Doesn't Mademoiselle know, then?"

"Know what?"

"That Monsieur has gone?"

"Gone?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle, half an hour ago. Gone for good."

"But he will come back?" said Rose, faintly, her heart seeming suddenly to stop beating.

Old Jacques shook his head.

"No, Mam'selle. Monsieur has paid me like a king, shook hands with Margot and me, and gone forever."

There was a dead pause. Rose clutched her bridle-rein, and felt the earth spinning under her, her face growing-white and cold.

"Did he leave no message—no message for me?"

She could barely utter the words, the shock, the consternation were so great. Something like a laugh shone in old Jacques' eyes.

"No, Mademoiselle, he never spoke of you. He only paid us, and said good-bye, and went away."

Rose turned Regina slowly round in a stunned sort of way, and with the reins loose on her neck, let her take her road homeward. A dull sense of despair was all she was conscious of. She could not think, she could not reason, her whole mind was lost in blank consternation. He was gone. She could not get beyond that—he was gone.

The boy who came to lead away her horse stared at her changed face; the servant who opened the door opened his eyes, also, at sight of her. She never heeded them; a feeling that she wanted to be alone was all she could realize, and she walked straight to a little alcove opening from the lower end of the long entrance-hall. An archway and a curtain of amber silk separated it from the drawing-room, of which it was a sort of recess. A sofa, piled high with downy pillows, stood invitingly under a window. Among these pillows poor Rose threw herself, to do battle with her despair.

While she lay there in tearless rage, she heard the drawing-room door open, and some one come in.

"Who shall I say, sir?" insinuated the servant.

"Just say a friend wishes to see Miss Danton," was the answer.

That voice! Rose bounded from the sofa, her eyes wild, her lips apart. Her hand shook as she drew aside the curtain and looked out. A gentleman was there, but he sat with his back to her, and his figure was only partially revealed. Rose's heart beat in great plunges against her side, but she restrained herself and waited. Ten minutes, and there was the rustle of a dress; Kate entered the room. The gentleman arose, there was a cry of "Reginald!" and then Kate was clasped in the stranger's arms. Rose could see his face now; no need to look twice to recognize Mr. Reinecourt.

The curtain dropped from Rose's hand, she stood still, breath coming and going in gasps. She saw it all as by an electric light—Mr. Reinecourt was Kate's betrothed husband, Reginald Stanford. He had known her from the first; from the first he had coolly and systematically deceived her. He knew that she loved him—he must know it—and had gone on fooling her to the top of his bent. Perhaps he and Kate would laugh over it together before the day was done. Rose clenched her hands, and her eyes flashed at the thought. Back came the colour to her cheeks, back the light to her eyes; anger for the moment quenched every spark of love. Some of the old Danton pluck was in her, after all. No despair now, no lying on sofa cushions any more in helpless woe.

"How dared he do it—how dared he?" she thought "knowing me to be Kate's sister. I hate him! oh, I hate him!"

And here Rose broke down, and finding the hysterics would come, fled away to her room, and cried vindictively for two hours.

She got up at last, sullen and composed. Her mind was made up. She would show Mr. Reinecourt (Mr. Reinecourt indeed)! how much she cared for him. He should see the freezing indifference with which she could treat him; he should see she was not to be fooled with impunity.

Rose bathed her flushed and tear-stained face until every trace of the hysterics was gone, called Agnes Darling to curl her hair and dress her in a new blue glacé, in which she looked lovely. Then, with a glow like fever on her cheeks, a fire like fever in her eyes, she went down stairs. In the hall she met Eeny.

"Oh, Rose! I was just going up to your room. Kate wants you."

"Does she? What for?"

"Mr. Stanford has come. He is with her in the drawing-room; and, Rose, he is the handsomest man I ever saw."

Rose shook back her curls disdainfully, and descended to the drawing-room. *A la princesse* she sailed in, and saw the late M. Reinecourt seated by the window, Kate beside him, with, oh, such a happy face! She arose at her sister's entrance, a smile of infinite content on her face.

"Reginald, my sister Rose. Rose, Mr. Stanford."

Rose made the most graceful bow that ever was seen, not the faintest sign of recognition in her face. She hardly glanced at Mr. Stanford—she was afraid to trust herself too far—she was afraid to meet those magnetic dark eyes. If he looked aback at her *sang-froid*, she did not see it. She swept by as majestically as Kate herself, and took a distant seat.

Kate's face showed her surprise. Rose had been a puzzle to her of late; she was more a puzzle now than ever. Rose was standing on her dignity, that was evident; and Rose did not often stand on that pedestal. She would not talk, or only in monosyllables. Her replies to Mr. Stanford were pointedly cold and brief. She sat, looking very pretty in her blue glacé and bright curls, her fingers toying idly with her châtelaine and trinkets, and as unapproachable as a grand duchess.

Mr. Stanford made no attempt to approach her. He sat and talked to his betrothed of the old times and the old friends and places, and seemed to forget there was any one else in the world. Rose listened, with a heart swelling with angry bitterness—silent, except when discreetly addressed by Kate, and longing vindictively to spring up and tell the handsome, treacherous Englishman what she thought of him there and then.

As luncheon hour drew near, her father, who had been absent, returned with Sir Ronald Keith and Doctor Danton. They were all going upstairs; but Kate, with a happy flush on her face, looked out of the drawing-room door.

"Come in papa," she said; "come in, Sir Ronald; there is an old friend here."

She smiled a bright invitation to the young Doctor, who went in also. Reginald Stanford stood up. Captain Danton, with a delighted "Hallo!" grasped both his hands.

"Reginald, my dear boy, I am delighted, more than delighted, to see you. Welcome to Canada, Sir Ronald; this is more than we bargained for."

"I was surprised to find you here, Sir Ronald," said the young officer, shaking the baronet's hand cordially; "very happy to meet you again."

Sir Ronald, with a dark flush on his face, bowed stiffly, in silence, and moved away.

Doctor Frank was introduced, made his bow, and retreated to Rose's sofa.

Capricious womanhood! Rose, that morning, had decidedly snubbed him; Rose, at noon, welcomed him with her most radiant smile. Never, perhaps, in all his experience had any young lady listened to him with such flattering attention, with such absorbed interest. Never had bright eyes and rosy lips given him such glances and smiles. She hung on his words; she had eyes and ears for no one else, least of all for the supremely handsome gentleman who was her sister's betrothed, and who talked to her father; while Sir Ronald glowered over a book.

The ringing of the luncheon-bell brought Grace and Eeny, and all were soon seated around the Captain's hospitable board.

Lieutenant Reginald Stanford laid himself out to be fascinating, and was fascinating. There was a subtle charm in his handsome face, in his brilliant smile and glance, in his pleasant voice, in his wittily-told stories, and inexhaustible fund of anecdote and mimicry. Now he was in Ireland, now in France, now in Scotland, now in Yorkshire; and the bad English and the *patois* and accent of all were imitated to the life. With that face, that voice, that talent for imitation, Lieutenant Stanford, in another walk of life, might have made his fortune on the stage. His power of fascination was irresistible. Grace felt it, Eeny felt it, all felt it, except Sir Ronald Keith. He sat like the Marble Guest, not fascinated, not charmed, black and unsmiling.

Rose, too—what was the matter with Rose? She, so acutely alive to well-told stories, to handsome faces, so rigidly cold, and stately, and uninterested now. She shrugged her dimpled shoulders when the table was in a roar; she opened her rather small hazel eyes and stared, as if she wondered, what they could see to laugh at. She did not even deign to glance at him, the hero of the feast; and, in fact, so greatly overdid her part as to excite the suspicions of that astute young man, Doctor Danton. There is no effect without a cause. What was the cause of Rose's icy indifference? He looked at her, then at Stanford, then back at her, and set himself to watch.

"She has met him before," thought the shrewd Doctor; "but where, if he has just come from England? I'll ask him, I think."

It was some time before there was a pause in the conversation. In the first, Dr. Frank struck in.

"How did you come, Mr. Stanford?" he asked.

"On the Hysperia, from Southampton to New York."

"How long ago?" inquired Kate, indirectly helping him; "a week?"

"No," said Lieutenant Stanford, coolly carving his cold ham; "nearly five."

Every one stared. Kate looked blankly amazed.

"Impossible!" she exclaimed; "five weeks since you landed in New York? Surely not."

"Quite true, I assure you. The way was this—"

He paused and looked at Rose, who had spilled a glass of wine, trying to lift it, in a hand that shook strangely. Her eyes were downcast, her cheeks scarlet, her whole manner palpably and inexplicably embarrassed.

"Four, weeks ago, I reached Canada. I did not write you, Kate, that I was coming. I wished to give you a surprise. I stopped at Belleplain—you know the town of Belleplain, thirty miles from here—to see a brother officer I had known at Windsor. Travelling from Belleplain in a confounded stage, I stopped half frozen at an old farm-house six miles off. Next morning, pursuing my journey on foot, I met with a little mishap."

He paused provokingly to fill at his leisure a glass of sherry; and Doctor Danton watching Rose under his eyelashes, saw the colour coming and going in her traitor face.

"I slipped on a sheet of ice," continued Mr. Stanford. "I am not used to your horrible Canadian roads, remember, and strained my ankle badly. I had to be conveyed back to the farm-house on a sled—medical attendance procured, and for three weeks I have been a prisoner there. I could have sent you word, no doubt, and put you to no end of trouble bringing me here, but I did not like that; I did not care to turn Danton Hall into a hospital, and go limping through life; so I made the best of a bad bargain and stayed where I was."

There was a general murmur of sympathy from all but Sir Ronald and Rose. Sir Ronald sat like a grim statue in granite; and Rose, still fluttering and tremulous, did not dare to lift her eyes.

"You must have found it very lonely," said Doctor Danton.

"No. I regretted not getting here, of course; but otherwise it was not unpleasant. They took such capital care of me, you see, and I had a select little library at my command; so, on the whole, I have been in much more disagreeable quarters in my lifetime."

Doctor Frank said no more. He had gained his point, and he was satisfied.

"It is quite clear," he thought. "By some hocus-pocus, Miss Rose has made his acquaintance during those three weeks, and helped the slow time to pass. He did not tell her he was her sister's lover, hence the present frigidity. The long morning rides are accounted for now. I wonder"—he looked at pretty Rose—"I wonder if the matter will end here?"

It seemed as if it would. Doctor Danton, coming every day to the Hall, and closely observant always, saw no symptoms of thawing out on Rose's part, and no effort to please on the side of Mr. Stanford. He treated her as he treated Eeny and Grace, courteously, genially, but nothing more. He was all devotion to his beautiful betrothed, and Kate—what words can paint the infinite happiness of her face! All that was wanting to make her beauty perfect was found. She had grown so gentle, so sweet, so patient with all; she was so supremely blessed herself, she could afford to stoop to the weaknesses of less fortunate mortals. That indescribable change, the radiance of her eyes, the buoyancy of her step, the lovely colour that deepened and died, the smiles that came so rapidly now—all told how much she loved Reginald Stanford.

Was it returned, that absorbing devotion? He was very devoted; he was beside her when she sang; he sought her always when he entered the room, he was her escort on all occasions; but—was it returned? It seemed to Doctor Frank, watching quietly, that there was something wanting—something too vague to be described, but lacking. Kate did not miss it herself, and it might be only a fancy. Perhaps it was that she was above and beyond him, with thoughts and feelings in that earnest heart of hers he could never understand. He was very handsome, very brilliant; but underlying the beauty and the brilliancy of the surface there was shallowness, and selfishness, and falsity.

He was walking up and down the tamarack walk, thinking of this and smoking a cigar, one evening, about a week after the arrival of Stanford. The February twilight fell tenderly over snowy ground, dark, stripped trees, and grim old mansion. A mild evening, windless and spring-like, with the full moon rising round and red. His walk commanded a view of the great frozen fish-pond where a lively scene was going on. Kate, Rose, and Eeny, strapped in skates, were floating round and round, attended by the Captain and Lieutenant Stanford.

Rose was the best skater on the pond, and looked charming in her tucked-up dress, crimson petticoat, dainty boots, and coquettish hat and plume. She flitted in a dizzying circle ahead of all the rest, disdaining to join them. Stanford skated very well for an Englishman, and assisted Kate, who was not very proficient in the art. Captain Danton had Eeny by the hand, and the gay laughter of the party made the still air ring. Grace stood on the edge of the pond watching them, and resisting the Captain's entreaties to come on the ice and let him teach her to skate. Her brother joined her, coming up suddenly, with Tiger at his side.

"Not half a bad tableau," the Doctor said, removing his inevitable cigar; "lovely women, brave men, moonlight, and balmy breezes. You don't go in for this sort of thing, *ma soeur*? No, I suppose not. Our good-looking Englishman skates well, by the way. What do you think of him, Grace?"

"I think with you, that he is a good-looking young Englishman."

"Nothing more?"

"That the eldest Miss Danton is hopelessly and helplessly in love with him, and that it is rather a pity. Rose would suit him better."

"Ah! sagacious as usual, Grace. Who knows but the Hon. Reginald thinks so too. Where is our dark Scotchman to-night?"

"Sir Ronald? Gone to Montreal."

"Is he coming back?"

"I don't know. Very likely. If it were to murder Mr. Stanford he would come back with pleasure."

"He is a little jealous, then?"

"Just a little. There is the Captain calling you. Go."

They went over. Captain Danton whirled round and came to a halt at sight of them.

"Here, Frank," he said; "I'm getting tired of this. Take my skates, and let us see what you are capable of on ice."

Doctor Frank put on the skates, and struck off.

Rose, flashing past, gave him a bright backward glance.

"Catch me, Doctor Danton!" she cried. "Catch me if you can!"

"A fair field and no favour!" exclaimed Stanford, wheeling round. "Come on Danton; I am going to try, too."

Eeny and Kate stood still to watch.

The group on the bank were absorbed in the chase. Doctor Danton was the better skater of the two; but fleet-footed Rose outstripped both.

"Ten to one on the Doctor!" cried the Captain, excited. "Reginald is nowhere!"

"I don't bet," said Grace; "but neither will catch Rose if Rose likes."

Round and round the fish-pond the trio flew—Rose still ahead, the Doctor outstripping the

Lieutenant. The chase was getting exciting. There was no chance of gaining on Rose by following her. Danton tried strategy. As she wheeled airily around, he abruptly turned, headed her off, and caught her with a rebound in his arms.

"By Jove!" cried the Captain, delighted, "he has her. Reginald, my boy, you are beaten."

"I told you you stood no chance, Stanford," said the Doctor.

"What am I to have for my pains, Miss Rose?"

"Stoop down and you'll see."

He bent his head. A stinging box on the ear rewarded him, and Rose was off, flying over the glittering ice and out of reach.

"Beaten, Reginald," said Kate, as he drew near. "For shame, sir."

"Beaten, but not defeated," answered her lover; "a Stanford never yields. Rose shall be my prize yet."

Rose had whirled round the pond, and was passing. He looked at her as he spoke; but her answer was a flash of the eye and a curl of the lip as she flew on. Kate saw it, and looked after her, puzzled and thoughtful.

"Reginald," she said, when, the skating over, they were all sauntering back to the house, "what have you done to Rose?"

Reginald Stanford raised his dark eyebrows.

"Done to her! What do you imagine I have done to her?"

"Nothing; but why, then, does she dislike you so?"

"Am I so unfortunate as to have incurred your pretty sister's dislike?"

"Don't you see it? She avoids you. She will not talk to you, or sing for you, or take your arm, or join us when we go out. I never saw her treat any gentleman with such pointed coldness before."

"Extraordinary," said Mr. Stanford, with profoundest gravity; "I am the most unlucky fellow in the world. What shall I do to overcome your fair sister's aversion?"

"Perhaps you do not pay her attention enough. Rose knows she is very pretty, and is jealously exacting in her demands for admiration and devotion. Sir Ronald gave her mortal offence the first evening he came, by his insensibility. She has never forgiven him, and never will. Devote yourself more to her and less to me, and perhaps Rose will consent to let you bask in the light of her smile."

He looked at her with an odd glance. She was smiling, but in earnest too. She loved her sister and her lover so well, that she felt uncomfortable until they were friends; and her heart was too great and faithful for the faintest spark of jealousy. He had lifted the hand that wore his ring to his lips.

"Your wishes are my law. I shall do my best to please Rose from to-night."

That evening, for the first time, Stanford took a seat beside Rose, and did his best to be agreeable. Kate smiled approval from her place at the piano, and Doctor Danton, on the other side of Rose, heard and saw all, and did not quite understand. But Rose was still offended, and declined to relent. It was hard to resist that persuasive voice, but she did. She hardened herself resolutely at the thought of how he had deceived her—he who was soon to be her sister's husband. Rose got up abruptly, excused herself, and left the room.

When the family were dispersing to their chambers that night, Reginald lingered to speak to Kate.

"I have failed, you see," he said.

"Rose is a mystery," said Kate, vexed; "she has quite a new way of acting. But you know," smiling radiantly, "a Stanford never yields."

"True. It is discouraging, but I shall try again. Good-night, dearest and best, and pleasant dreams —of me."

He ascended to his bedroom, lamp in hand. A fire blazed in the grate; and sitting down before it, his coat off, his slippers on, his hands in his pockets, he gazed at it with knitted brow, and whistling softly. For half an hour he sat, still as a statue. Then he got up, found his writing-case, and sat down to indite a letter. He was singing the fag-end of something as he dipped his pen in the ink.

> "Bind the sea to slumber stilly—
> Bind its odour to the lily—
> Bind the aspen ne'er to quiver—
> Then bind love to last forever!"

/P "DANTON HALL, February 26, 18—P/

"My Dear Lauderdale: I think I promised, when I left Windsor, to write to tell you how I got on in this horribly Arctic region. It is nearly two months since I left Windsor, and my conscience (don't laugh—I have discovered that I have a conscience) gives me sundry twinges when I think of you. I don't feel like sleeping to-night. I am full of my subject, so here goes.

"In the first place, Miss Danton is well, and as much of in angel as ever. In the second place, Danton Hall is delightful, and holds more angels than one. In the third place, Ronald Keith is here, and half mad with jealousy. The keenest north wind that has ever blown since I came to Canada is not half so freezing as he. Alas, poor Yorick! He is a fine fellow, too, and fought like a lion in the Russian trenches; but there was Sampson, and David, and Solomon, and Marc Antony—you know what love did to them one and all.

"Kate refused him a year ago, in England—I found it out by accident, not from her, of course; and yet here he is. It is the old story of the moth and the candle, and sometimes I laugh, and sometimes I am sorry for him. He has eight thousand a year, too; and the Keiths are great people in Scotland, I hear. Didn't I always try to impress it on you that it was better to be born handsome than rich? I am not worth fifteen hundred shillings a year, and in June (D. V.) beautiful Kate Danton is to be my wife. Recant your heresy, and believe for the future.

"Angel, No. 2.—I told you there were more than one—has hazel eyes, pink cheeks, auburn curls, and the dearest little ways. She is not beautiful—she is not stately—she does not play and sing the soul out of your body, and yet—and yet——. Lauderdale, you always told me my peerless fiancée was a thousand times too good for me. I never believed you before. I do believe you now. She soars beyond my reach sometimes. I don't pretend to understand her, and—tell it not in Gath—I stand a little in awe of her. I never was on speaking terms with her most gracious majesty, whom Heaven long preserve; but, if I were, I fancy I should feel as I do sometimes talking to Kate. She is perfection, and I am—well, I am not, and she is very fond of me. Would she break her heart, do you think, if she does not become Mrs. Reginald Stanford? June is the time, but there is many a slip. I know what your answer will be—'She will break her heart if she does!' It is a bad business, old boy; but it is fate, or we will say so—and hazel eyes and auburn curls are very, very tempting.

"You used to think a good deal of Captain Danton, if I recollect right. By the way, how old is the Captain? I ask, because there is a housekeeper here, who is a distant cousin, one of the family, very quiet, sensible, lady-like, and six and twenty, who may be Mrs. Captain Danton one day. Mind, I don't say for certain, but I have my suspicions. He couldn't do better. Grace—that's her name—has a brother here, a doctor, very fine fellow, and so cute. I catch him looking at me sometimes in a very peculiar manner, which I think I understand.

"You don't expect me before June, do you? Nevertheless, don't faint if I return to our 'right little, tight little' island before that. Meantime, write and let me know how the world wags with you; and, only I know it is out of your line, I should ask you to offer a prayer for your unfortunate friend

"Reginald Stanford."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GHOST AGAIN.

Rose Danton stood leaning against the low, old-fashioned chimney piece in her bedroom staring at the fire with a very sulky face. Those who fell in love with pretty Rose should have seen her in her sulky moods, if they wished to be thoroughly disenchanted. Just at present, as she stood looking gloomily into the fire, she was wondering how the Honourable Reginald Stanford would feel on his wedding-day, or if he would feel at all, if they should find her (Rose) robed in white, floating in the fish-pond drowned! The fish-pond was large enough; and Rose moodily recollected reading somewhere that when lovely woman stoops to folly, and finds too late that men betray, the only way to hide that folly from every eye, to bring repentance to her lover, to wring his bosom, is to—die!

The clock down stairs struck eleven. Rose could hear them dispersing to their bedrooms. She could hear, and she held her breath to listen, Mr. Stanford, going past her door, whistling a tune of Kate's. Of Kate's, of course! He was happy and could whistle, and she was miserable and couldn't. If she had not wept herself as dry as a wrung sponge, she must have relapsed into hysterics once more; but as she couldn't, with a long-drawn sigh, she resolved to go to bed.

So to bed Rose went, but not to sleep. She tossed from side to side, feverish and impatient; the more she tried to sleep, the more she couldn't. It was quite a new experience for poor Rose, not

used to "tears at night instead of slumber." The wintry moonlight was shining brightly in her room through the parted curtains, and that helped her wakefulness, perhaps. As the clock struck twelve, she sprang up in desperation, drew a shawl round her, and, in her night-dress, sat down by the window, to contemplate the heavenly bodies.

Hark! what noise was that?

The house was as still as a vault; all had retired, and were probably asleep. In the dead stillness, Rose heard a door open—the green baize door of Bluebeard's room. Her chamber was very near that green door; there could be no mistaking the sound. Once again she held her breath to listen. In the profound hush, footsteps echoed along the uncarpeted corridor, and passed her door. Was it Ogden on his way upstairs? No! the footsteps paused at the next door—Kate's room; and there was a light rap. Rose, aflame with curiosity, tip-toed to her own door, and applied her ear to the key-hole. Kate's door opened; there was a whispered colloquy; the listener could not catch the words, but the voice that spoke to Kate was not the voice of Ogden. Five minutes—ten—then the door shut, the footsteps went by her door again, and down stairs.

Who was it? Not Ogden, not her father; could it be—could it be Mr. Richards himself.

Rose clasped her hands, and stood bewildered. Her own troubles had so occupied her mind of late that she had almost forgotten Mr. Richards; but now her old curiosity returned in full force.

"If he has gone out," thought Rose, "what is to hinder me from seeing his rooms. I would give the world to see them!"

She stood for a moment irresolute.

Then, impulsively, she seized a dressing-gown, covered her bright head with the shawl, opened her door softly, and peeped out.

All still and deserted. The night-lamp burned dim at the other end of the long, chilly passage, but threw no light where she stood.

The green baize door stood temptingly half open; no creature was to be seen—no sound to be heard. Rose's heart throbbed fast; the mysterious stillness of the night, the ghostly shimmer of the moonlight, the mystery and romance of her adventure, set every pulse tingling, but she did not hesitate. Her slippered feet crossed the hall lightly; she was beside the green door. Then there was another pause—a moment's breathless listening, but the dead stillness of midnight was unbroken. She tip-toed down the short corridor, and looked into the room. The study was quite deserted; a lamp burned on a table strewn with books, papers, and writing materials. Rose glanced wonderingly around at the book-lined walls. Mr. Richards could pass the dull hours if those were all novels, she thought.

The room beyond was unlit, save by the moon shining brightly through the parted curtains. Rose examined it, too; it was Mr. Richard's bedroom, but the bed had not been slept in that night. Everything was orderly and elegant; no evidences of its occupant being an invalid. One rapid, comprehensive glance was all the girl waited to take; then she turned to hurry back to her own room, and found herself face to face with Ogden.

The valet stood in the doorway, looking at her, his countenance wearing its habitual calm and respectful expression. But Rose recoiled, and turned as white as though she had been a ghost.

"It is very late, Miss Rose," said Ogden calmly. "I think you had better not stay here any longer."

Rose clasped her hands supplicatingly.

"Oh, Ogden! Don't tell papa! Pray, don't tell papa!"

"I am very sorry, Miss Rose, but it would be as much as my place is worth. I must!"

He stood aside to let her pass. Rose, with all her flightiness, was too proud to plead with a servant, and walked out in silence.

Not an instant too soon. As she opened her door, some one came upstairs; some one who was tall, and slight; and muffled in a long cloak.

He passed through the baize door, before she had time to see his face, closed it after him, and was gone.

Rose locked her door, afraid of she know not what; and sat down on the bedside to think. Who was this Mr. Richards who passed for an invalid, and who was no invalid? Why was he shut up here, where no one could see him, and why was all this mystery? Rose thought of "Jane Eyre" and Mr. Rochester's wife, but Mr. Richards could not be mad or they never would trust him out alone at night. What, too, would her father say to her to-morrow? She quailed a little at the thought; she had never seen her indulgent father out of temper in her life. He took the most disagreeable contre-temps with imperturbable good-humour, but how would he take this?

"I should not like to offend papa," thought Rose, uneasily. "He is very good to me, and does everything I ask him. I do hope he won't be angry. I almost wish I had not gone!"

There was no sleep for her that night. When morning came, she was almost afraid to go down to breakfast and face her father; but when the bell rang, and she did descend, her father was not

there.

Ogden came in with his master's excuses—Captain Danton was very busy, and would breakfast in his study. The news took away Rose's morning appetite; she sat crumbling her roll on her plate, and feeling that Ogden had told him, and that that was the cause of his non-appearance.

As they rose from the table, Ogden entered again, bowed gravely to Rose, and informed her she was wanted in the study.

Kate looked at her sister in surprise, and noticed with wonder her changing face. But Rose, without a word, followed the valet, her heart throbbing faster than it had throbbed last night.

Captain Danton was pacing up and down his study when she entered, with the sternest face she had ever seen him wear. In silence he pointed to a seat, continuing his walk; his daughter sat down, pale, but otherwise dauntless.

"Rose!" he said, stopping before her, "what took you into Mr. Richards' rooms last night?"

"Curiosity, papa," replied Rose, readily, but in secret quaking.

"Do you know you did a very mean act? Do you know you were playing the spy?"

The colour rushed to Rose's face, and her head dropped.

"You knew you were forbidden to enter there; you knew you were prying into what was no affair of yours; you knew you were doing wrong, and would displease me; and yet in the face of all this, you deliberately stole into his room like a spy, like a thief, to discover for yourself. Rose Danton, I am ashamed of you!"

Rose burst out crying. Her father was very angry, and deeply mortified; and Rose really was very fond of her indulgent father.

"Oh, papa! I didn't mean—I never thought—oh, please, papa, forgive me!"

Captain Danton resumed his walk up and down, his anger softened at the sight of her distress.

"Is it the first time this has occurred?" he asked, stopping again; "the truth, Rose, I can forgive anything but a lie."

"Yes, papa."

"You never have been there before?"

"No, never!"

Again he resumed his walk, and again he stopped before her.

"Why did you go last night?"

"I couldn't sleep, papa. I felt worried about something, and I was sitting by the window. I heard Mr. Richards' door open, and some one come out and rap at Kate's room. Kate opened it, and I heard them talking."

Her father interrupted her.

"Did you hear what they said?" he asked sharply.

"No papa—only the sound of their voices. It was not your voice, nor Ogden's; so I concluded it must be Mr. Richards' himself. I heard him go down stairs, and then I peeped out. His door was open, and I—I—"

"Went in!"

"Yes, papa," very humbly.

"Did you see Mr. Richards?"

"I saw some one, tall and slight, come up stairs and go in, but I did not see his face."

"And that is all!"

"Yes, papa."

Once more he began pacing backward and forward, his face very grave, but not so stern. Rose watched him askance, nervous and uncomfortable.

"My daughter," he said at last, "you have done very wrong, and grieved me more than I can say. This is a serious matter—more serious by far than you imagine. You have discovered, probably, that other reasons than illness confine Mr. Richards to his rooms."

"Yes, papa."

"Mr. Richards is not an invalid—at least not now—although he was ill when he came here. But the reasons that keep him a prisoner in this house are so very grave that I dare not confide them to you. This much I will say—his life depends upon it."

"Papa!" Rose cried, startled.

"His life depends upon it," repeated Captain Danton. "Only three in this house know his secret—myself, Ogden, and your sister Kate. Ogden and Kate I can trust implicitly; can I place equal confidence in you?"

"Yes, papa," very faintly.

"Mr. Richards," pursued Captain Danton, with a slight tremor of voice, "is the nearest and dearest friend I have on this earth. It would break my heart, Rose, if an ill befell him. Do you see now why I am so anxious to preserve his secret; why I felt so deeply your rash act of last night?"

"Forgive me, papa!" sobbed Rose. "I am sorry; I didn't know. Oh, please, papa!"

He stooped and kissed her.

"My thoughtless little girl! Heaven knows how freely I forgive you—only promise me your word of honour not to breathe a word of this."

"I promise, papa."

"Thank you, my dear. And now you may go; I have some writing to do. Go and take a ride to cheer you up after all this dismal talk, and get back your roses before luncheon time."

He kissed her again and held the door open for her to pass out. Rose, with a great weight off her mind went down the passage, and met Eeny running upstairs.

"I say, Rose," exclaimed her sister, "don't you want to go to a ball? Well, there are invitations for the Misses Danton in the parlour."

"A ball, Eeny? Where?"

"At the Ponsonbys', next Thursday night. Sir Ronald, Doctor Frank, papa, and Mr. Stanford are all invited."

Rose's delight at the news banished all memory of the unpleasant scene just over. A ball was the summit of Rose's earthly bliss, and a ball at the Ponsonbys' really meant something. In ten minutes her every thought was absorbed in the great question, "What shall I wear?"

"To-day is Wednesday," thought Rose. "Thursday one, Friday two, Saturday three, Monday four, Tuesday five, Wednesday six, Thursday seven. Plenty of time to have my new silk made. I'll go and speak to Agnes at once."

She tripped away to the sewing-room in search of the little seamstress. The door was ajar; she pushed it open, but paused in astonishment at the sight which met her eyes.

The sewing-room was on the ground floor, its one window about five feet from the ground. At this window which was open, sat the seamstress, her work lying idly on her lap, twisting her fingers in a restless, nervous sort of way peculiar to her. Leaning against the window from without, his arm on the sill, stood Doctor Danton, talking as if he had known Agnes Darling all his life.

The noise of Rose's entrance, slight as it was, caught his quick ear. He looked up and met her surprised eyes, coolly composedly.

"Don't let me intrude!" said Rose, entering, when she found herself discovered. "I did not expect to see Doctor Danton here."

"Very likely," replied the imperturbable Doctor; "it is an old habit of mine turning up in unexpected places. Besides, what was I to do? Grace in the kitchen was invisible, Miss Kate had gone riding with Mr. Stanford, Miss Rose was closeted mysteriously with papa. Miss Eeny, practising the 'Battle of Prague,' was not to be disturbed. In my distraction I came here, where Miss Darling has kindly permitted me to remain and study the art of dressmaking."

He made his speech purposely long, that Rose might not see Miss Darling's confused face. But Rose saw it, and believed as much of the gentleman's story as she chose.

"And now that you have discovered it," said Rose, "I dare say we will have you flying on all occasions to this refugium peccatorum. Are you going? Don't let me frighten you away."

"You don't; but I want to smoke a cigar under the tamaracks. You haven't such a thing as a match about you, have you? No matter; I've got one myself."

He strolled away. Rose looked suspiciously at the still confused face of the sewing-girl.

"How do you come to know Doctor Danton?" she asked abruptly.

"I—he—I mean the window was open and he was passing, and he stopped to speak," stammered Agnes, more confusedly still.

"I dare say," said Rose; "but he would not have stopped unless he had known you before, would he?"

"I—saw him once by accident before—I don't know him—"

She stopped and looked piteously at Rose. She was a childish little thing, very nervous, and evidently afraid of any more questions.

"Well," said Rose, curtly; "if you don't choose to tell, of course you needn't. He never was a lover of yours, was he?"

"Oh, no! no! no!"

"Then I don't see anything to get so confused about. What are you working at?"

"Miss Eeny's jacket."

"Then Miss Eeny's jacket must wait, for I want my new silk made for Thursday evening. Come up to my room, and get to work at once."

Agnes rose obediently. Rose led the way, her mind straying back to the scene in the sewing-room her entrance had disturbed.

"Look here, Miss Darling," she broke out; "you must have known Doctor Danton before. Now you needn't deny it. Your very face proves you guilty. Tell the truth, and shame the——. Didn't you know him before you came to Danton Hall?"

They were in Roses room by this time. To the great surprise of that inquisitive young lady, Agnes Darling sank down upon a lounge, covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears.

"Goodness me!" exclaimed the second Miss Danton, as soon as surprise would let her speak, "what on earth is the matter with you? What are you crying about? What has Doctor Danton done to you?"

"Nothing! nothing!" cried the worried little seamstress. "Oh, nothing! It is not that! I am very foolish and weak; but oh, please don't mind me, and don't ask me about it. I can't help it, and I am very, very unhappy."

"Well," said Rose, after a blank pause; "stop crying. I didn't know you would take it so seriously, or I shouldn't have asked you. Here's the dress, and I want you to take a great deal of pains with it, Agnes. Take my measure."

Rose said no more to the seamstress on a subject so evidently distressing; but that evening she took Doctor Frank himself to task. She was at the piano, which Kate had vacated for a game of chess with Mr. Stanford, and Grace's brother was devotedly turning her music. Rose looked up at him abruptly, her fingers still rattling off a lively mazurka.

"Doctor Danton, what have you been doing to Agnes Darling?"

"I! Doing! I don't understand!"

"Of course you don't. Where was it you knew her?"

"Who says I knew her?"

"I do. There, no fibs; they won't convince me, and you will only be committing sin for nothing. Was it in Montreal?"

"Really, Miss Rose—"

"That will do. She won't tell, she only cries. You won't tell; you only equivocate. I don't care. I'll find out sooner or later."

"Was she crying?"

"I should think so. People like to make mysteries in this house, in my opinion. Where there is secrecy there is something wrong. This morning was not the first time you ever talked to Agnes Darling."

"Perhaps not," replied Doctor Danton, with a very grave face; "but, poor child! what right have I to make known the trials she has undergone? She has been very unfortunate, and I once had the opportunity to befriend her. That is all I know of her, or am at liberty to tell."

There was that in Doctor Frank's face that, despite Rose's assurance, forbade her asking any more questions.

"But I shall never rest till I find out," thought the young lady. "I've got at Mr. Richards' and I'll get at yours as sure as my name is Rose."

The intervening days before the ball, Rose was too much absorbed in her preparations, and anticipations of conquest, to give her mind much to Agnes Darling and her secrets. That great and hidden trouble of her life—her unfortunate love affair, was worrying her too. Mr. Stanford, in pursuance of his promise to Kate, played the agreeable to her sister with a provoking perseverance that was proof against any amount of snubbing, and that nearly drove Rose wild. He would take a seat by her side, always in Kate's presence, and talk to her by the hour, while she could but listen, and rebel inwardly. Never, even while she chafed most, had she loved him better. That power of fascination, that charm of face, of voice, of smile, that had conquered her fickle heart the first time she saw him, enthralled her more and more hopelessly with every passing day. It was very hard to sit there, sullen and silent, and keep her eyes averted, but the Danton pluck stood her in good stead, and the memory of his treachery to her goaded her on.

"It's of no use, Kate," he said to his lady-love; "our pretty Rose will have nothing to say to me. I

more than half believe she is in love with that very clever Doctor Frank."

"Dr. Frank? Oh, no; he is not half handsome enough for Rose."

"He is a thoroughly fine fellow, though. Are you quite sure he has not taken Rose captive?"

"Quite. He is very well to flirt with—nothing more. Rose cares nothing for him, but I am not so sure he does not care for her. Rose is very pretty."

"Very," smiled Mr. Stanford, "and knows it. I wonder if she will dance with me the night of the ball?"

The night of the ball came, bright, frosty, and calm. The large, roomy, old-fashioned family carriage held Rose, Eeny, Sir Ronald, and Doctor Danton, while Mr. Stanford drove Kate over in a light cutter. The Ponsonbys, who were a very uplifted sort of people, had not invited Grace; and Captain Danton, at the last moment, announced his intention of staying at home also.

"I am very comfortable where I am," said the Captain, lounging in an arm-chair before the blazing fire; "and the trouble of dressing and going out this cold night is more than the ball is worth. Make my excuses, my dear; tell them I have had a sudden attack of gout, if you like, or anything else that comes uppermost."

"But, papa," expostulated Kate, very much surprised, for the master of Danton Hall was eminently social in his habits, "I should like you to come so much, and the Ponsonbys will be so disappointed."

"They'll survive it, my dear, never fear. I prefer staying at home with Grace and Father Francis, who will drop in by-and-by. There, Kate, my dear, don't waste your breath coaxing. Reginald, take her away."

Mr. Stanford, with the faintest shadow of a knowing smile on his face, took Kate's arm and led her down stairs.

"The brown eyes and serene face of your demure housekeeper have stronger charms for my papa-in-law than anything within the four walls of the Ponsonbys. What would Kate say, I wonder, if I told her?"

As usual, Captain Danton's two daughters were the belles of the room. Kate was queenly as ever, and as far out of the reach of everything masculine, with one exception, as the moon; Rose, in a changeful silk, half dove, half pink, that blushed as she walked, with a wreath of ivy in her glossy hair, turned heads wherever she went. Doctor Frank had the privilege of the first dance. After that she was surrounded by all the most eligible young men in the room. Rose, with a glow on her rounded cheeks, and a brilliancy in her eyes, that excitement had lent, danced and flirted, and laughed, and sang, and watched furtively, all the while, the only man present she cared one iota for. That eminently handsome young officer, Mr. Stanford, after devoting himself, as in duty bound, to his stately fiancée, resigned her, after a while, to an epauletted Colonel from Montreal, and made himself agreeable to Helen Ponsonby, and Emily Howard, and sundry other pretty girls. Rose watched him angry and jealous inwardly, smiling and radiant outwardly. Their fingers touched in the same set, but Rose never deigned him a glance. Her perfumed skirts brushed him as she flew by in the redowa, but she never looked up.

"He shall see how little I care," thought jealous Rose. "I suppose he thinks I am dying for him, but he shall find out how much he is mistaken."

With this thought in her mind, she sat down while her partner went for an ice. It was the first time that night she had been a moment alone. Mr. Stanford, leaning against a pillar idly, took advantage of it, and was beside her before she knew it. Her cheeks turned scarlet, and her heart quickened involuntarily as he sat down beside her.

"I have been ignored so palpably all evening that I am half afraid to come near you," he said; "will it be high treason to ask you to waltz with me!"

Alas for Rose's heroic resolutions! How was she to resist the persuasive voice and smile of this man? How was she to resist the delight of waltzing with him? She bowed in silence, still with averted eyes; and Lieutenant Stanford, smiling slightly, drew her hand within his arm. Her late partner came up with the ice, but Rose had got something better than ice cream, and did not want it. The music of the German waltz filled the long ball-room with harmony; his arm slid round her waist, her hand was clasped in his, the wax floor slipped from under her feet, and Rose floated away into elysium.

The valse d'ecstase was over, and they were in a dim, half-lighted conservatory. Tropical flowers bloomed around them, scenting the warm air; delicious music floated entrancingly in. The cold white wintry moon flooded the outer world with its frosty glory, and Rose felt as if fairyland were no myth, and fairy tales no delusion. They were alone in the conservatory; how they got there she never knew; how she came to be clinging to his arm, forgetful of past, present, and future, she never could understand.

"Rose," said that most musical of voices; "when will you learn to forget and forgive? See, here is a peace-offering!"

He had a white camellia in his button-hole—a flower that half an hour ago had been chief beauty

of Kate's bouquet. He took it out now, and twined its long stem in and out of her abundant curls.

"Wear it," he said, "and I shall know I am forgiven. Wear it for my sake, Rose."

There was a rustling behind them of a lady's-dress, and the deep tones of a man's voice talking. Rose started away from his side, the guilty blood rushing to her face at sight of her elder sister on Doctor Danton's arm.

Kate's clear eyes fixed on her sister's flushed, confused face, on the waxen camellia, her gift to her lover, and then turned upon Mr. Stanford. That eminently nonchalant young Englishman was as cool as the frosty winter night.

"I should think you two might have selected some other apartment in the house for a promenade, and not come interrupting here," he said, advancing. "Miss Rose and I were enjoying the first tête-à-tête we have had since my arrival. But as you are here, Kate, and as I believe we are to dance the German together—"

"And you resign Miss Rose to me?" said Doctor Frank.

"There is no alternative. Take good care of her, and adieu."

He led Kate out of the conservatory. Doctor Frank offered his arm to Rose, still hovering guiltily aloof.

"And I believe you promised to initiate me into the mysteries of the German. Well, do you want me?"

This last was to a man-servant who had entered, and looked as if he had something to say.

"Yes, sir—if you are Doctor Danton."

"I am Doctor Danton. What is it?"

"It's a servant from the Hall, sir. Captain Danton's compliments, and would you go there at once?"

Rose gave a little scream, and clutched her companion's arm.

"Oh, Doctor Frank, can papa be sick?"

"No, Miss," said the man, respectfully, "it's not your father; it's the young woman what sews, Thomas says—" hesitating.

"Well," said Doctor Frank, "Thomas says what?"

"Thomas says, sir, she see a ghost!"

"A what?"

"A ghost, sir; that's what Thomas says," replied the man, with a grin; "and she's gone off into fainting-fits, and would you return at once, he says. The sleigh is at the door."

"Tell him I will be there immediately."

He turned to Rose, smiling at her blank face.

"What shall I do with you, Mademoiselle? To whom shall I consign you? I must make my adieus to Mrs. Ponsonby and depart."

Rose grasped his arm, and held it tight, her bewildered eyes fixed on his face.

"Seen a ghost!" she repeated blankly. "That is twice! Doctor Frank, is Danton Hall haunted?"

"Yes; haunted by the spirit of mischief in the shape of Rose Danton, nothing worse."

"But this is the second time. There was old Margery, and now Agnes Darling. There must be something in it!"

"Of course there is—an over-excited imagination. Miss Darling has seen a tall tree covered with snow waving in the moonlight, and has gone into fainting fits. Now, my dear Miss, don't hold me captive any longer; for, trying as it is, I really must leave you."

Rose dropped his arm.

"Yes, go at once. Never mind me; I am going in search of Kate."

It took some time to find Kate. When found, she was dancing with a red-coated officer, and Rose had to wait until the dance was over.

She made her way to her sister's side immediately. Miss Danton turned to her with a brilliant smile, that faded at the first glance.

"How pale you are, Rose! What is it?"

"Am I pale?" said Rose, carelessly; "the heat, I dare-say. Do you know Doctor Frank has gone?"

"Gone! Where?"

"To the Hall. Papa sent for him."

"Papa? Oh, Rose—"

"There! There is no occasion to be alarmed; papa is well enough; it is Agnes Darling."

"Agnes! What is the matter with Agnes?"

"She has seen a ghost!"

Kate stared—so did the young officer.

"What did you say, Rose?" inquired Kate, wonderingly.

"She—has—seen—a—ghost!" slowly repeated Rose; "as old Margery did before her, you know; and, like Margery, has gone off into fits. Papa sent for Doctor Frank, and he departed half an hour ago."

Slowly out of Kate's face every trace of colour faded. She rose abruptly, a frightened look in her blue eyes.

"Rose, I must go home—I must see Agnes. Captain Grierson, will you be kind enough to find Mr. Stanford and send him?"

Captain Grierson hastened on his mission. Rose looked at her with wide open eyes.

"Go home—so early! Why, Kate, what are you thinking of?"

"Of Agnes Darling. You can stay, if you like. Sir Ronald is your escort."

"Thank you. A charming escort he is, too—grimmer than old Time in the primer. No; if you leave, so do I."

Mr. Stanford sauntered up while she was speaking, and Rose drew back.

"What is it, Kate? Grierson says you are going home."

Kate's answer was an explanation. Mr. Reginald Stanford set up an indecorous laugh.

"A ghost! That's capital! Why did you not tell me before that Danton Hall was haunted, Kate?"

"I want to return immediately," was Kate's answer a little coldly. "I must speak to Mr. Ponsonby and find Eeny. Tell Sir Ronald, please, and hold yourself in readiness to attend us."

She swept off with Rose to find their hostess. Mrs. Ponsonby's regrets were unutterable, but Miss Danton was resolute.

"How absurd, you know, Helen," she said, to her daughter, when they were gone; "such nonsense about a sick seamstress."

"I thought Kate Danton was proud," said Miss Helen. "That does not look like it. I am not sorry she has gone, however, half the men in the room were making idiots of themselves about her."

Kate and Reginald Stanford returned as they had come, in the light sleigh; and Sir Ronald, Rose and Eeny, in the carriage. Rose, wrapped in her mantel, shrunk away in a corner, and never opened her lips. She watched gloomily, and so did the baronet, the cutter flying past over glittering snow, and Kate's sweet face, pale as the moonlight itself.

Captain Danton met them in the entrance hall, his florid face less cheery than usual. Kate came forward, her anxious inquiring eyes speaking for her.

"Better, my dear; much better," her father answered. "Doctor Frank works miracles. Grace and he are with her; he has given her an opiate, and I believe she is asleep."

"But what is it, papa?" cried Rose. "Did she see a ghost!"

"A ghost, my dear," said the Captain, chucking her under the chin. "You girls are as silly as geese, and imagine you see anything you like. She isn't able to tell what frightened her, poor little thing! Eunice is the only one who seems to know anything at all about it."

"And what does Eunice say?" asked Kate.

"Why," said Captain Danton, "it seems Eunice and Agnes were to sit up for you two young ladies, who are not able to take off your own clothes yet, and they chose Rose's room so sit in. About two hours ago, Agnes complained of toothache, and said she would go down stairs for some painkiller that was in the sewing-room. Eunice, who was half-asleep, remained where she was; and ten minutes after heard a scream that frightened her out of her wits. We had all retired, but the night-lamp was burning; and rushing out, she found Agnes leaning against the wall, all white and trembling. The moment Eunice spoke to her, 'I saw his ghost!' she said, in a choking whisper, and fell back in a dead faint in Eunice's arms. I found her so when I came out, for Eunice cried lustily for help, and Grace and all the servants were there in two minutes. We did everything for her, but all in vain. She lay like one dead. Then Grace proposed to send for her brother. We sent. He came, and brought the dead to life."

"An extraordinary tale," said Reginald Stanford. "When she came to life, what did she say?"

"Nothing. Doctor Frank gave her an opiate that soothed her and sent her to sleep."

As he spoke, Doctor Frank himself appeared, his calm face as impenetrable as ever.

"How is your patient, Doctor?" asked Kate.

"Much better, Miss Kate. In a day or two we will have her all right, I think. She is a nervous little creature, with an overstrung and highly imaginative temperament. I wonder she has not seen ghosts long ago."

"You are not thinking of leaving us," said Captain Danton. "No, no, I won't hear of it. We can give you a bed and breakfast here equal to anything down at the hotel, and it will save you a journey up to-morrow morning. Is Grace with her yet?"

"Yes, Grace insists on remaining till morning. There is no necessity, though, for she will not awake."

Kate gathered up the folds of her rich ball-dress, and ran up the polished oaken stair, nodding adieu. Not to her own room, however, but to that of the seamstress.

The small chamber was dimly lighted by a lamp turned low. By the bedside sat Grace, wrapped in a shawl; on the pillow lay the white face of Agnes Darling, calm in her slumber, but colourless as the pillow itself.

Kate bent over her, and Grace arose at her entrance. It was such a contrast; the stately, beautiful girl, with jewelled flowers in her hair, her costly robe trailing the carpetless floor, the perfume of her dress and golden hair scenting the room, and the wan little creature, so wasted and pale, lying asleep on the low bed. Her hands grasped the bed-clothes in her slumber, and with every rise and fall of her breast, rose and fell a little locket worn round her neck by a black cord. Kate's fingers touched it lightly.

"Poor soul!" she said; "poor little Agnes! Are you going to stay with her until morning, Grace?"

"Yes, Miss Danton."

"I could not go to my room without seeing her; but now, there is no necessity to linger. Good-morning."

Miss Danton left the room. Grace sat down again, and looked at the locket curiously.

"I should like to open that and see whose picture it contains, and yet—"

She looked a little ashamed, and drew back the hand that touched it. But curiosity—woman's intensest passion—was not to be resisted.

"What harm can it be?" she thought. "She will never know."

She lifted the locket, lightly touched the spring, and it flew open. It contained more than a picture, although there was a picture of a handsome, boyish face that somehow had to Grace a familiar look. A slip of folded paper, a plain gold ring, and a tress of brown, curly hair dropped out. Grace opened the little slip of paper, and read it with an utterly confounded face. It was partly written and partly printed, and was the marriage certificate of Agnes Grant and Henry Darling. It bore date New York, two years before.

Grace dropped the paper astounded. Miss Agnes Darling was a married woman, then, and, childish as she looked, had been so for two years. What were her reasons for denying it, and where was Henry Darling—dead or deserted?

She look at the pictured face again. Very good-looking, but very youthful and irresolute. Whom had she ever seen that looked like that? Some one, surely, for it was as familiar as her own in the glass; but who, or where, or when, was all densest mystery.

There was an uneasy movement of the sleeper. Grace, feeling guilty, put back hastily the tress of hair—his, no doubt—the ring—a wedding-ring, of course—and the marriage certificate. She closed the locket, and laid it back on the fluttering heart. Poor little pale Agnes! that great trouble of woman's life, loving and losing, had come to her then already.

In the cold, gray dawn of the early morning, Grace resigned her office to Babette, the housemaid, and sought her room. Agnes Darling still slept—the merciful sleep Doctor Frank's opiate had given her.

CHAPTER IX.

A GAME FOR TWO TO PLAY AT.

A cold, raw, rainy, dismal morning—the sky black and hopeless of sunshine, the long bleak blasts complaining around the old house, and rattling ghostily the skeleton trees. The rain was more sleet than rain; for it froze as it fell, and clattered noisily against the blurred window-glass. A morning for hot coffee and muffins, and roaring fires and newspapers and easy-chairs, and in

which you would not have the heart to turn your enemy's dog from the door.

Doctor Danton stood this wild and wintry February morning at his chamber window, looking out absently at the slanting sleet, not thinking of it—not thinking of the pale blank of wet mist shrouding the distant fields and marshes, and village and river, but of something that made him knit his brows in perplexed, reflection.

"What was it she saw last, night?" he mused. "No spectre of the imagination, and no bona-fide ghost. Old Margery saw something, and now Agnes. I wonder—"

He stopped, there was a knock at the door.

"Come in," he said, and Grace entered.

"I did not know you were up," said Grace. "But it is very fortunate as it happens. I have just been to Miss Darling's room, and she is crying out for you in the wildest Manner."

"Ah!" said her brother, rising, "has she been awake long?"

"Nearly an hour, Babette tells me, and all that time she has been frantically calling for you. Her manner is quite frenzied, and I fear—"

"What do you fear?"

"That last night's fright has disordered her reason."

"Heaven forbid! I will go to her at once."

He left the room as he spoke, and ran upstairs to the chamber of the seamstress. The gray morning twilight stole drearily through the closed shutter, and the lamp burned dim and dismal still. Babette sat by the bedside trying to soothe her charge in very bad English, and evidently but with little success. The bed-clothes had been tossed off, the little thin hands closed and unclosed in them—the great dark eyes were wide and wild—the black hair all tossed and disordered on the pillow.

Babette rose precipitately at the Doctor's entrance.

"Here's the Doctor, Mees Darling. May I go now, Monsieur?"

"Yes, you may go; but remain outside, in case I should, want you."

He shut the door on Babette, and took her place by the sick girl's bedside.

Babette lingered in the passage, staring at the stormy morning, and gaping forlornly.

"I hope he won't be long," she thought. "I want to go to bed."

Dr. Frank, however, was long. Eight struck somewhere in the house; that was half an hour, and there was no sign of his coming. Babette shivered under her shawl, and looked more drearily than ever at the lashing sleet.

Nine—another hour, and no sign from the sick-room, yet. Babette rose up in desperation, but just at that moment Grace came upstairs.

"You here, Babette!" she said, surprised. "Who is with Agnes?"

"The Doctor, Mademoiselle! he told me to wait until he came out, and I have waited, and I am too sleepy to wait any longer. May I go, Mademoiselle?"

"Yes, go," said Grace, "I will take your place."

Babette departed with alacrity, and Grace sat down by the storm-beaten window. She listened for some sound from the sick-room, but none rewarded her. Nothing was to be heard but the storm, without, and now and then the opening and shutting of some door within.

Another half-hour. Then the door of the seamstress's room opened, and her brother came out. How pale he was—paler and graver than his sister ever remembered seeing him before.

"Well," she said, rising, "how is your patient?"

"Better," he briefly answered, "very much better."

"I thought she was worse, you look so pale."

"Pale, do I? This dismal morning, I suppose. Grace," he said, lowering his tone and looking at her fixedly, "whose ghost did old Margery say she saw?"

"Whose ghost! What a question!"

"Answer it!"

"Don't be so imperative, please. Master Harry's ghost, she said."

"And Master Harry is Captain Danton's son?"

"Was—he is dead now."

"Yes, yes! he was killed in New York, I believe."

"So they say. The family never speak of him. He was the black sheep of the flock, you know. But why do you ask? Was it his ghost Agnes saw?"

"Nonsense! Of course not! What should she know of Captain Danton's son? Some one—one of the servants probably—came up the stairs and frightened her out of her nervous wits. I have been trying to talk a little sense into her foolish head these two hours."

"And have you succeeded?"

"Partly. But don't ask her any questions on the subject; and don't let Miss Danton or any one who may visit her ask any questions. It upsets her, and I won't be answerable for the consequences."

"It is very strange," said Grace, looking at her brother intently, "very strange that old Margery and Agnes Darling should both see an apparition in this house. There must be something in it."

"Of course there is—didn't I tell you so—an overheated imagination. I have known more extraordinary optical illusions than that in my time. How is Margery—better again?"

"No, indeed. She will never get over her scare in this world. She keeps a light in her room all night, and makes one of the maids sleep with her, and won't be alone a moment, night or day."

"Ah!" said Doctor Frank, with professional phlegm. "Of course! She is an old woman, and we could hardly expect anything else. Does she talk much of the ghost?"

"No. The slightest allusion to the subject agitates her for the whole day. No one dare mention ghosts in Margery's presence."

"I hope you will all be equally discreet with Miss Darling. Time will wear away the hallucination, if you women only hold your tongues. I must caution Rose, who has an unfortunate habit of letting out whatever comes uppermost. Ah! here she is!"

"Were you talking of me?" inquired Miss Rose, tripping upstairs, fresh and pretty, in a blue merino morning dress, with soft white trimmings.

"Do I ever talk of any one else?" said Dr. Frank.

"Pooh! How is Agnes Darling?"

"As well as can be expected, after seeing a ghost!"

"Did she see a ghost, though?" asked Rose, opening her hazel eyes.

"Of course she did; and my advice to you, Miss Rose, is to go to bed every night at dark, and to sleep immediately, with your head covered up in the bed-clothes, or you may happen to see one too."

"Thank you for your advice, which I don't want and won't take. Whose ghost did she see?"

"The ghost of Hamlet's father, perhaps—she doesn't know; before she could take a second look it vanished in a cloud of blue flame, and she swooned away!"

"Doctor Danton," said Rose, sharply, "I wish you would talk sense. I'll go and ask Agnes herself about it. I want to get at the bottom of this affair."

"A very laudable desire, which I regret being obliged to frustrate," said Doctor Danton, placing himself between her and the door.

"You!" cried Rose, drawing herself up. "What do you mean, sir?"

"As Miss Agnes Darling's medical attendant, my dear Miss Rose,—deeply as it wounds me to refuse your slightest request—I really must forbid any step of the kind. The consequences might be serious."

"And I am not to see her if I choose?" demanded Rose, her eyes quite flashing.

"Certainly you are to see her, and to fetch her jelly, and chicken, and toast, and tea, if you will; but you are not to speak of the ghost. That blood-curdling subject is absolutely tabooed in the sick-room, unless—"

"Unless what?" inquired Rose, angrily.

"Unless you want to make a maniac of her. I am serious in this; you must not allude in the remotest way to the cause of her illness when you visit her, or you may regret your indiscretion while you live."

He spoke with a gravity that showed that he was in earnest. Rose shrugged her shoulders impatiently, and walked to Agnes' door. Grace followed at a sign from her brother, who ran down stairs.

The sick girl was not asleep—she lay with her eyes wide open, staring vacantly at the white wall. She looked at them, when they entered, with a half-frightened, half-inquiring gaze.

"Are you better, Agnes?" asked Rose, looking down at the colourless face.

"Oh, yes!"

She answered nervously, her fingers twisting in and out of her bed-clothes—her eyes wandering uneasily from one to the other.

"Wouldn't you like something to eat?" inquired Rose, not knowing what else to say.

"Oh, no!"

"You had better have some tea," said Grace decisively. "It will do you good. I will fetch you up some presently. Rose, there is the breakfast bell."

Rose, with a parting nod to Agnes, went off, very much disappointed, and in high dudgeon with Doctor Frank for not letting her cross-examine the seamstress on the subject of the ghost.

"The ghost she saw must have been Mr. Richards returning from his midnight stroll," thought Rose, shrewdly. "My opinion is, he is the only ghost in Danton Hall."

There was very little allusion made to the affair of last night, at the breakfast-table. It seemed to be tacitly understood that the subject was disagreeable; and beyond an inquiry of the Doctor, "How is your patient this morning?" nothing was said. But all felt vaguely there was some mystery. Doctor Frank's theory of optical illusion satisfied no one—there was something at the bottom that they did not understand.

The stormy day grew stormier as it wore on. Rose sat down at the drawing-room piano after breakfast, and tried to while away the forlorn morning with music. Kate was there, trying to work off a bad headache with a complicated piece of embroidery and a conversation with Mr. Reginald Stanford. That gentleman sat on an ottoman at her feet, sorting silks, and beads, and Berlin wool, and Rose was above casting even a glance at them. Captain Danton, Sir Ronald, and the Doctor were playing billiards at the other end of the rambling old house. And upstairs poor Agnes Darling tossed feverishly on her hot pillow, and moaned, and slept fitfully, and murmured a name in her troubled sleep, and Grace watching her, and listening, heard the name "Harry."

Some of the gloom of the wretched day seemed to play on Rose's spirits. She sang all the melancholy songs she knew, in a mournful, minor key, until the conversation of the other two ceased, and they felt as dismal as herself.

"Rose, don't!" Kate cried out in desperation at length. "Your songs are enough to give one the horrors. Here is Reginald with a face as gloomy as the day."

Rose got up in displeased silence, closed the piano, and walked to the door.

"Pray don't!" said Stanford; "don't leave us. Kate and I have nothing more to say to one another, and I have a thousand things to say to you."

"You must defer them, I fear," replied Rose. "Kate will raise your spirits with more enlivening music when I am gone."

"A good idea," said Kate's lover, when the door closed; "come, my dear girl, give us something a little less depressing than that we have just been favoured with."

"How odd," said Kate languidly, "that Rose will not like you. I cannot understand it."

"Neither can I," replied Mr. Stanford; "but since the gods have willed it so, why, there is nothing for it but resignation. Here is 'Through the woods, through the woods, follow and find me.' Sing that."

Kate essayed, but failed. Her headache was worse, and singing an impossibility.

"I am afraid I must lie down," she said. "I am half blind with the pain. You must seek refuge in the billiard-room, Reginald, while I go upstairs."

Mr. Stanford expressed his regrets, kissed her hand—he was very calm and decorous with his stately lady-love—and let her go.

"I wish Rose had stayed," he thought; "poor little girl! how miserable she does look sometimes. I am afraid I have not acted quite right; and I don't know that I am not going to make a scoundrel of myself; but how is a fellow to help it? Kate's too beautiful and too perfect for mortal man; and I am very mortal, indeed, and should feel uncomfortable married to perfection."

He walked to the curtained recess of the drawing-room, where Rose had one morning battled with her despair, and threw himself down among the pillows of the lounge. Those very pillows whereon his handsome head rested had been soaked in Rose's tears, shed for his sweet sake—but how was he to know that? It was such a cozy little nook, so still and dusky, and shut in, that Mr. Stanford, whose troubles did not prey on him very profoundly, closed his dark eyes, and went asleep in five minutes.

And sleeping, Rose found him. Going to her room to read, she remembered she had left her book on the sofa in the recess, and ran down stairs again to get it. Entering the little room from the hall, she beheld Mr. Stanford asleep, his head on his arm, his handsome face as perfect as something carved in marble, in its deep repose.

Rose stood still—any one might have stood and looked, and admired that picture, but not as she

admired. Rose was in love with him—hopelessly, you know, therefore the more deeply. All the love that pride had tried, and tried in vain, to crush, rose in desperation stronger than ever within her. If he had not been her sister's betrothed, who could say what might not have been? If that sister was one degree less beautiful and accomplished, who could say what still might be? She had been such a spoiled child all her life, getting whatever she wanted for the asking, that it was very hard she should be refused now the highest boon she had ever craved—Mr. Reginald Stanford.

Did some mesmeric rapport tell him in his sleep she was there? Perhaps so, for without noise, or cause, his eyes opened and fixed on Rose's flushed and troubled face. She started away with a confused exclamation, but Stanford, stretching out his arm, caught and held her fast.

"Don't run away, Rose," he said, "How long have you been here? How long have I been asleep?"

"I don't know," said Rose, confusedly: "I came here for a book a moment ago only. Let me go, Mr. Stanford."

"Let you go? Surely not. Come, sit down here beside me, Rose. I have fifty things to say to you."

"You have nothing to say to me—nothing I wish to hear. Please let me go."

"On your dignity again, Rose?" he said, smiling, and mesmerizing her with his dark eyes; "when will you have done wearing your mask?"

"My mask!" Rose echoed, flushing; "what do you mean, Mr. Stanford?"

"Treating me like this! You don't want to leave me now, do you? You don't hate me as much as you pretend. You act very well, my pretty little Rose; but you don't mean it—you know you don't!"

"Will you let me go, Mr. Stanford?" haughtily.

"No, my dear; certainly not. I don't get the chance of *tête-à-tête* with you so often that I should resign the priceless privilege at a word. We used to be good friends, Rose; why can't we be good friends again?"

"Used to be!" Rose echoed; and then her voice failed her. All her love and her wounded pride rose in her throat and choked her.

Reginald Stanford drew her closer to him, and tried to see the averted face.

"Won't you forgive me, Rose? I didn't behave well, I know; but I liked you so much. Won't you forgive me?"

A passionate outburst of tears, that would no longer be restrained, answered him.

"Oh! how could you do it? How could you do it? How could you deceive me so?" sobbed Rose.

Stanford drew her closer still.

"Deceive you, my darling! How did I deceive you? Tell me, Rose, and don't cry!"

"You said—you said your name was Reinecourt, and it wasn't; and I didn't know you were Kate's lover, or I never would have—would have—oh! how could you do it?"

"My dear little girl, I told you the truth. My name is Reinecourt."

Rose looked up indignantly.

"Reginald Reinecourt Stanford is my name; and the reason I only gave you a third of it was, as I said before, because I liked you so much. You know, my dear little Rose, if I had told you that day on the ice my name was Reginald Stanford, you would have gone straight to the Hall, told the news, and had me brought here at once. By that proceeding I should have seen very little of you, of course. Don't you see?"

"Ye-e-e-s," very falteringly.

"I looked up that day from the ice," continued Stanford, "and saw such a dear little curly-headed, bright-eyed, rose-cheeked fairy, that—no, I can't tell you how I felt at the sight. I gave you my middle name, and you acted the Good Samaritan to the wounded stranger—came to see me every day, and made that sprained ankle the greatest boon of my life!"

"Mr. Stanford—"

"Call me Reginald."

"I cannot. Let me go! What would Kate say?"

"She will like it. She doesn't understand why you dislike me so much."

He laughed as he said it. The laugh implied so much, that Rose started up, colouring vividly.

"This is wrong! I must go. Don't hold me, Mr. Stanford."

"Reginald, if you please!"

"I have no right to say Reginald."

"Yes, you have a sister's right!"

"Let me go!" said Rose, imperiously. "I ought not to be here."

"I don't see why. It is very pleasant to have you here. You haven't told me yet that you forgive me."

"Of course I forgive you. It's of no consequence. Will you let me go, Mr. Stanford?"

"Don't be in such a hurry. I told you I had fifty things to—"

He stopped short. The drawing-room door had opened, and Captain Danton's voice could be heard talking to his two companions at billiards.

"All deserted," said the Captain; "I thought we should find the girls here. Come in. I dare-say somebody will be along presently."

"Oh, let me go!" cried Rose, in dire alarm. "Papa may come in here. Oh, pray—pray let me go!"

"If I do, will you promise to be good friends with me in the future?"

"Yes, yes! Let me go!"

"And you forget and forgive the past?"

"Yes—yes—yes! Anything, anything."

Stanford, who had no more desire than Rose herself to be caught just then by papa-in-law, released his captive, and Rose flew out into the hall and upstairs faster than she had ever done before.

How the four gentlemen got on alone in the drawing-room she never knew. She kept her room all day, and took uncommon pains with her dinner-toilet. She wore the blue glacé, in which she looked so charming, and twisted some jeweled stars in her bright auburn hair. She looked at herself in the glass, her eyes dancing, her cheeks flushed, her rosy lips apart.

"I am pretty," thought Rose. "I like my own looks better than I do Kate's, and every one calls her beautiful. I suppose her eyes are larger, and her nose more perfect, and her forehead higher; but it is too pale and cold. Oh, if Reginald would only love me better than Kate!"

She ran down-stairs as the last bell rang, eager and expectant, but only to be disappointed. Grace was there; Eeny and Kate were there, and Sir Ronald Keith; but where were the rest?

"Where's papa?" said Rose, taking her seat.

"Dining out," replied Kate, who looked pale and ill. "And Reginald and Doctor Danton are with him. It is at Mr. Howard's. They drove off over an hour ago."

Rose's eyes fell and her colour faded. Until the meal was over, she hardly opened her lips; and when it was concluded, she went back immediately to her room. Where was the use of waiting when he would not be there?

CHAPTER X.

THE REVELATION.

Next morning, at breakfast, Captain Danton was back; but Reginald's handsome face, and easy flow of conversation, were missing. George Howard, it appeared, was going on a skating excursion some miles off, that day, and had prevailed on Mr. Stanford to remain and accompany him.

Rose felt about as desolate as if she had been shipwrecked on a desert island. There was a pang of jealousy mingled with the desolation, too. Emily Howard was a sparkling brunette, a coquette, an heiress, and a belle. Was it the skating excursion or Emily's big black eyes that had tempted him to linger? Perhaps Emily would go with them skating, and Rose knew how charming piquant little Miss Howard was on skates.

It was a miserable morning altogether, and Rose tormented herself in true orthodox lover-like style. She roamed about the house aimlessly, pulling out her watch perpetually to look at the hour, and sighing drearily. She wondered at Kate, who sat so placidly playing some song without words, with the Scotch baronet standing by the piano, absorbed.

"What does she know of love?" thought Rose, contemptuously. "She is as cold as a polar iceberg. She ought to marry that knight of the woeful countenance beside her, and be my lady, and live in a castle, and eat and sleep in velvet and rubies. It would just suit her."

Doctor Danton came up in the course of the forenoon, to make a professional call. His patient was better, calmer, less nervous, and able to sit up in a rocking-chair, wrapped in a great shawl. Grace persuaded him to stay to luncheon, and he did, and tried to win Miss Rose out of the

dismals, and got incontinently snubbed for his pains.

But there was balm in Gilead for Rose. Just after luncheon a little shell-like sleigh, with prancing ponies and jingling bells, whirled musically up to the door. A pretty, blooming, black-eyed girl was its sole occupant; and Rose, at the drawing-room window, ran out to meet her.

"My darling Emily!" cried Rose, kissing the young lady she had been wishing at Jericho all day, "how glad I am to see you! Come in! You will stay to dinner, won't you?"

"No, dear," said Miss Howard, "I can't. I just came over for you; I am alone, and want you to spend the evening. Don't say no; Mr. Stanford will be home to dinner with George, and he will escort you back."

"You pet!" cried Rose, with another rapturous kiss. "Just wait five minutes while I run up and dress."

Miss Howard was not very long detained. Rose was back, all ready, in half an hour.

"Would your sister come?" inquired Miss Howard, doubtfully, for she was a good deal in awe of that tall majestic sister.

"Who? Kate? Oh, she is out riding with Sir Ronald Keith. Never mind her; we can have a better time by ourselves."

The tiny sleigh dashed off with its fair occupants, and Rose's depressed spirits went up to fever heat. It was the first of March, and March had come in like a lamb—balmy, sunshiny, brilliant. Everybody looked at them admiringly as the fairy sleigh and the two pretty girls flew through the village, and thought, perhaps, what a fine thing it was to be rich, and young, and handsome, and happy, like that.

Miss Howard's home was about half a mile off, and a few minutes brought them to it.

The two girls passed the afternoon agreeably enough at the piano and over new books, but both were longing for evening and the return of the gentlemen. Miss Howard was only sixteen, and couldn't help admiring Mr. Stanford, or wishing she were her brother George, and with him all day.

The March day darkened slowly down. The sun fell low and dropped out of sight behind the bright, frozen river, in a glory of crimson and purple. The hues of the sunset died, the evening star shone steel-blue and bright in the night-sky, and the two girls stood by the window watching when the gentlemen returned. There was just light enough left to see them plainly as they drew near the house, their skates slung over their arms; but Mr. George Howard came in for very little of their regards.

"Handsome fellow!" said Miss Howard, her eyes sparkling.

"Who?" said Rose, carelessly, as if her heart was not beating time to the word. "Reginald?"

"Yes; he is the handsomest man I ever saw."

Rose laughed—a rather forced laugh, though.

"Don't fall in love with my handsome brother-in-law, Em. Kate won't like it."

"They are to be married next June, are they not?" asked Emily, not noticing the insinuation, save by a slight colour, which the twilight hid.

"So they say."

"They will be a splendid-looking pair. George and all the gentlemen say that she is the only really beautiful woman they ever saw."

"Tastes differ," said Rose with a shrug. "I don't think so. She is too pale, and proud, and cold, and too far up in the clouds altogether. She ought to go and be a nun; she would make a splendid lady-abbess."

"She will make a splendid Mrs. Stanford."

"Who?" said Mr. Stanford himself, sauntering in. "You, Miss Howard?"

"No; another lady I know of. What kind of a time had you skating?"

"Capital," replied her brother; "for an Englishman, Stanford knocks everything. Hallo, Rose! who'd have thought it?"

Rose emerged from the shadow of the window curtains, and shook hands carelessly with Master George.

"I drove over for her after you went," said his sister, "come, there's the dinner-bell, and Mr. Stanford looks hungry."

"And is hungry," said Mr. Stanford, giving her his arm. "I shall astonish Mrs. Howard by my performance this evening."

They were not a very large party—Mr. and Mrs. Howard, their son and daughter, Mr. Stanford

and Rose—but they were a very merry one. Mr. Stanford had been in India once, three years ago, and told them wonderful stories of tiger hunts, and Hindoo girls, and jungle adventures, and Sepoy warfare, until he carried his audience away from the frozen Canadian land to the burning sun and tropical splendours and perils of far-off India. Then, after dinner, when Mr. Howard, Senior, went to his library to write letters, and Mrs. Howard dozed in an easy-chair by the fire, there was music, and sparkling chit-chat, racy as the bright Moselle at dinner, and games at cards, and fortune-telling by Mr. Howard, Junior; and it was twelve before Rose thought it half-past ten.

"I must go," said Rose, starting up. "I had no idea it was so late. I must go at once."

The two young ladies went upstairs for Miss Danton's wraps. When they descended, the sleigh was waiting, and all went out together. The bright March day had ended in a frosty, starlit, windless night. A tiny moon glittered sparkling overhead, and silvering the snowy ground.

"Oh, what a night!" cried Emily Howard. "You may talk about your blazing India, Mr. Stanford, but I would not give our own dear snow-clad Canada for the wealth of a thousand Indies. Good-night, darling Rose, and pleasant dreams."

Miss Howard kissed her. Mr. Howard came over, and made an attempt to do the same.

"Good-night, darling Rose, and dream of me."

Rose's answer was a slap, and then Reginald was beside her, and they were driving through the luminous dusk of the winter moonlight.

"You may stop at the gate, my good fellow," said Mr. Stanford to the driver; "the night is fine—we will walk the rest of the way—eh, Rose?"

Rose's answer was a smile, and they were at the gates almost immediately. Mr. Stanford drew her hand within his arm, and they sauntered slowly, very slowly, up the dark, tree-shaded avenue.

"How gloomy it is here!" said Rose, clinging to his arm with a delicious little shiver; "and it is midnight, too. How frightened I should be alone!"

"Which means you are not frightened, being with me. Miss Rose, you are delightful!"

"Interpret it as you please. What should you say if the ghost were to start out from these grim black trees and confront us?"

"Say? Nothing. I would quietly faint in your arms. But this is not the ghost's walk. Wasn't it in the tamarack avenue old Margery saw it?"

"Let us go there!"

"It is too late," said Rose.

"No it is not. There is something delightfully novel in promenading with a young lady at the witching hour of midnight, when graveyards yawn, and gibbering ghosts in winding-sheets cut up cantrips before high heaven. Come."

"But Mr. Stanford—"

"Reginald, I tell you. You promised, you know."

"But really Reginald, it is too late. What if we were seen?"

"Nonsense! Who is to see us! And if they do, haven't brothers and sisters a right to walk at midnight as well as noonday if they choose? Besides, we may see the spectre of Danton Hall, and I would give a month's pay for the sight any time."

They entered the tamarack walk as he spoke—bright enough at the entrance, where the starlight streamed in, but in the very blackness of darkness farther down.

"How horribly dismal!" cried Rose, clinging to him more closely than ever. "A murder might be committed here, and no one be the wiser."

"A fit place for a ghostly promenade. Spectre of Danton, appear! Hist! What is that?"

Rose barely suppressed a shriek. He put his hand over her mouth, and drew her silently into the shadow.

As if his mocking words had evoked them, two figures entered the tamarack walk as he spoke.

The starlight showed them plainly—a man and a woman—the woman wrapped in a shawl, leaning on the man's arm, and both walking very slowly, talking earnestly.

"No ghosts those," whispered Reginald Stanford. "Be quiet, Rose; we are in for an adventure."

"I ought to know that woman's figure," said Rose, in the same low tone. "Look! Don't you?"

"By—George! It can't be—Kate!"

"It is Kate; and who is the man, and what does it mean?"

Now Rose, maliciously asking the question, knew in her heart the man was Mr. Richards. She did not comprehend, of course, but she knew it must be all right; for Kate walked with him there under her father's sanction.

Mr. Stanford made no reply; he was staring like one who cannot believe his eyes.

Kate's face shown in profile was plainly visible as they drew nearer. The man's, shrouded by coat-collar and peaked cap, was all hidden, save a well-shaped nose.

"It is Kate," repeated Mr. Stanford, blankly. "And what does it mean?"

"Hush-sh!" whispered Rose; "they will hear you."

She drew him back softly. The two advancing figures were so very near now that their words could be heard. It was Kate's soft voice that was speaking.

"Patience, dear," she was saying; "patience a little longer yet."

"Patience!" cried the man, passionately. "Haven't I been patient? Haven't I waited and waited, eating my heart out in solitude, and loneliness, and misery? But for your love, Kate, your undying love and faith in me—I should long ago have gone mad!"

They passed out of hearing with the last words. Reginald Stanford stood petrified; even Rose was desperately startled by the desperate words.

"Take me away, Reginald," she said trembling. "Oh, let us go before they come back."

Her voice aroused him, and he looked down at her with a face as white as the frozen snow.

"You heard him?" he said. "You heard her? What does it mean?"

"I don't know. I am frightened. Oh, let us go!"

Too late! Kate and her companion had reached the end of the tamarack walk, and were returning. As they drew near, she was speaking; again the two listeners in the darkness heard her words.

"Don't despair," she said earnestly. "Oh, my darling, never despair! Come what will, I shall always love you—always trust you—always—"

They passed out of hearing again—out of the dark into the lighted end of the walk, and did not return.

Reginald and Rose waited for a quarter of an hour, but they had disappeared as suddenly as they had appeared.

"Take me in," reiterated Rose, shivering. "I am nearly frozen."

He turned with her up the walk, never speaking a word, very pale in the light of the stars. No one was visible as they left the walk; all around the house and grounds was hushed and still. The house door was locked, but not bolted. Mr. Stanford opened it with a night-key, and they entered, and went upstairs, still in silence. Rose reached her room first, and paused with her hand on the handle of the door.

"Good-night," she said shyly and wistfully.

"Good-night," he answered, briefly, and was gone.

CHAPTER XI.

ONE MYSTERY CLEARED UP.

The fire burned low in Rose's pretty room, and the lamp was dim on the table. The window-curtains were closed, and the sheets of the little low, white bed turned down, the easy chair was before the hearth, and everything was the picture of comfort. She flung off her wrappings on the carpet, and sat down in the easy chair, and looked into the glowing cinders, lost in perplexed thought.

What would be the result of that night's adventure? Reginald Stanford, good-natured and nonchalant, was yet proud. She had seen his face change in the starlight, as once she had hardly thought it possible that ever-laughing face could change; she had seen it cold and fixed as stone. How would he act towards a lady, plighted to be his wife, and yet who took midnight rambles with another man? Would the engagement be broken off, and would he leave Canada forever in disgust? Or would he, forsaking Kate, turn to Kate's younger sister for love and consolation?

Rose's heart throbbed, and her face grew hot in the solitude of her chamber, at the thought. He would demand an explanation, of course; would it be haughtily refused by that haughty sister, or would the mystery of Mr. Richards be opened for him?

A clock down-stairs struck two. Rose remembered that late watching involved pale cheeks and

dull eyes, and got up, said her prayers with sleepy devotion, and went to bed.

The sunlight of another bright March day flooded her room when she awoke from a troubled dream of Mr. Richards. It was only seven o'clock, but she arose, dressed rapidly, and, before eight, opened the dining-room door.

Early as the hour was, the apartment was occupied. Grace sat at one of the windows, braiding elaborately an apron, and Captain Danton stood beside her, looking on. Grace glanced up, her colour heightening at Rose's entrance.

"Good morning, Miss Rose," said her father. "Early to bed and early to rise, eh? When did you take to getting up betimes?"

"Good morning, papa. I didn't feel sleepy, and so thought I would come down."

"What time did you get home last night?"

"I left a little after twelve."

"Did you enjoy yourself, my dear?"

"Yes, papa."

"Reginald was with you?"

"Yes, papa."

"It's all right, I suppose," said her father, pinching her blooming cheek; "but if I were Kate, I wouldn't allow it. Young man are changeable as chameleons, and these pink cheeks are tempting."

The pink cheeks turned guiltily scarlet at the words. Grace, looking up from her work, saw the tell-tale flush; but Captain Danton, going over to the fire to read the morning paper, said nothing.

Rose stood listlessly in her father's place, looking out of the window. The wintry landscape, all glittering in the glorious sunshine, was very bright; but the dreamy, hazel eyes were not looking at it.

"Rose!" said Grace suddenly, "when did you hear from Ottawa?"

Rose turned to her, roused from her dreaming.

"What did you say?"

"When did you hear from Ottawa—from M. Jules La Touche?"

Again the colour deepened in Rose's face, and an angry light shone in her eyes.

"What do you want to know for?"

"Because I want to know. That's reason enough, is it not?" replied Grace, sewing away placidly.

"I don't see that it's any affair of yours, Mistress Grace. Jules La Touche is a nuisance!"

"Oh, is he? He wasn't a month or two ago. Whom have you fallen in love with now, Rose?"

"It's no business of yours," said Rose angrily.

"But if I choose to make it my business, my dear, sweet-tempered Rose, what then? Do tell me the name of the last lucky man? I am dying to know."

"Die, then, for you won't know."

"Suppose I know already."

"What?"

"It's not Mr. Stanford, is it?"

Rose gave a gasp—in the suddenness of the surprise, colouring crimson. Grace saw it all, as she placidly threaded her needle.

"I wouldn't if I were you," she said quietly. "It's of no use, Rose. Kate is handsomer than you are; and it will only be the old comedy of 'Love's Labour Lost' over again."

"Grace Danton, what do you mean?"

"Now, don't get excited, Rose, and don't raise your voice. Your father might hear you, and that would not be pleasant. It is plain enough. Mr. Stanford is very handsome, and very fascinating, and very hard to resist, I dare say; but, still, he must be resisted. Mr. La Touche is a very estimable young man, I have no doubt, and of a highly respectable family; and, very likely, will make you an excellent husband. If I were you, I would ask my papa to let me go on another visit to Ottawa, and remain, say, until the end of May. It would do you good, I am sure."

Rose listened to this harangue, her eyes flashing.

"And if I were you, Miss Grace Danton, I would keep my advice until it was asked. Be so good for

the future, as to mind your own business, attend to your housekeeping, and let other people's love affairs alone."

With which Rose sailed stormily off, with very red cheeks, and very bright, angry eyes, and sought refuge in a book.

Grace, perfectly unmoved, quite used to Rose's temper, sewed serenely on, and waited for the rest of the family to appear.

Eeny was the next to enter, then came Sir Ronald Keith, who took a chair opposite Captain Danton, and buried himself in another paper. To him, in Kate's absence, the room was empty.

The breakfast bell was ringing when that young lady appeared, beautiful and bright as the sunny morning, in flowing white cashmere, belted with blue, and her lovely golden hair twisted in a coronet of amber braids round her head. She came over to where Rose sat, sulky and silent, and kissed her.

"*Bon jour, ma soeur!* How do you feel after last night!"

"Very well," said Rose, not looking at her.

"Reginald came home with you?" smiled Kate, toying with Rose's pretty curls.

"Yes," she said, uneasily.

"I am glad. I am so glad that you and he are friends at last."

Rose fidgeted more uneasily still, and said nothing.

"Why was it you didn't like him?" said Kate, coaxingly. "Tell me, my dear."

"I don't know. I liked him well enough," replied Rose, ungraciously. "He was a stranger to me."

"My darling, he will be your brother."

Rose fixed her eyes sullenly on her book.

"You will come to England with us, won't you, Rose—dear old England—and my pretty sister may be my lady yet?"

The door opened again. Mr. Stanford came in.

Rose glanced up shyly.

His face was unusually grave and pale; but all were taking their places, and in the bustle no one noticed it. He did not look at Kate, who saw, with love's quickness, that something was wrong.

All through breakfast Mr. Stanford was very silent, for him. When he did talk, it was to Captain Danton—seldom to any of the ladies.

Grace watched him, wonderingly; Rose watched him furtively, and Kate's morning appetite was effectually taken away.

The meal ended, the family dispersed.

The Captain went to his study, Sir Ronald mounted and rode off, Grace went away to attend to her housekeeping affairs, Eeny to her studies, and Rose hurried up to her room.

The lovers were left alone. Kate took her embroidery. Mr. Stanford was immersed in the paper Captain Danton had lately laid down. There was a prolonged silence, during which the lady worked, and the gentleman read, as if their lives depended on it.

She lifted her eyes from her embroidery to glance his way, and found him looking at her steadfastly—gravely.

"What is it, Reginald?" she exclaimed, impatiently. "What is the matter with you this morning?"

"I am wondering!" said Stanford, gravely.

"Wondering?"

"Yes; if the old adage about seeing being believing is true."

"I don't understand," said Kate, a little haughtily.

Stanford laid down his paper, came over to where she sat, and took a chair near her.

"Something extraordinary has occurred, Kate, which I cannot comprehend. Shall I tell you what it is?"

"If you please."

"It was last night, then. You know I spent the day and evening with the Howards? It was late—past twelve, when I escorted Rose home; but the night was fine, and tempted me to linger still longer. I turned down the tamarack walk—"

He paused.

Kate's work had dropped in her lap, with a faint cry of dismay.

"I had reached the lower end of the avenue," continued Reginald Stanford, "and was turning, when I saw two persons—a man and a woman—enter. 'Who can they be, and what can they be about here at this hour?' I thought, and I stood still to watch. They came nearer. I saw in the starlight her woman's face. I heard in the stillness her words. She was telling the man how much she loved him, how much she should always love him, and then they were out of sight and hearing. Kate, was that woman you?"

She sat looking at him, her blue eyes dilated, her lips apart, her hands clasped, in a sort of trance of terror.

"Was it you, Kate?" repeated her lover. "Am I to believe my eyes?"

She roused herself to speak by an effort.

"Oh, Reginald!" she cried, "what have you done! Why, why did you go there?"

There was dismay in her tone, consternation in her face, but nothing else. No shame, no guilt, no confusion—nothing but that look of grief and regret.

A conviction that had possessed him all along that it was all right, somehow or other, became stronger than ever now; but his face did not show it—perhaps, unconsciously, in his secret heart he was hoping it would not be all right.

"Perhaps I was unfortunate in going there," he said, coldly; "but I assure you I had very little idea of what I was to see and hear. Having heard, and having seen, I am afraid I must insist on an explanation."

"Which I cannot give you," said Kate, her colour rising, and looking steadfastly in his dark eyes.

"You cannot give me!" said Reginald, haughtily. "Do I understand you rightly, Kate?"

She laid her hand on his, with a gentle, caressing touch, and bent forward. She loved him too deeply and tenderly to bear that cold, proud tone.

"We have never quarrelled yet, Reginald," she said, sweetly. "Let us not quarrel now. I cannot give you the explanation you ask; but papa shall."

He lifted the beautiful hand to his lips, feeling somehow, that he was unworthy to touch the hem of her garment.

"You are an angel, Kate—incapable of doing wrong. I ought to be content without an explanation, knowing you as I do; but—"

"But you must have one, nevertheless. Reginald, I am sorry you saw me last night."

He looked at her, hardly knowing what to say. She was gazing sadly out at the sunny prospect.

"Poor fellow!" she said, half to herself, "poor fellow! Those midnight walks are almost all the comfort he has in this world, and now he will be afraid to venture out any more."

Still Stanford sat silent.

Kate smiled at him and put away her work.

"Wait for me here," she said, rising. "Papa is in his study. I will speak to him."

She left the room. Stanford sat and waited, and felt more uncomfortable than he had ever felt in his life. He was curious, too. What family mystery was about to be revealed to him? What secret was this hidden in Danton Hall?

"I have heard there is a skeleton in every house," he thought; "but I never dreamed there was one hidden away in this romantic old mansion. Perhaps I have seen the ghost of Danton Hall, as well as the rest. How calmly Kate took it!—No sign of guilt or wrong-doing in her face. If I ever turn out a villain, there will be no excuse for my villainy on her part."

Kate was absent nearly half an hour, but it seemed a little century to the impatient waiter. When she entered, there were traces of tears on her face, but her manner was quite calm.

"Papa is waiting for you," she said, "in his study."

He rose up, walked to the door, and stood there, irresolute.

"Where shall I find you when I return?"

"Here."

She said it softly and a little sadly. Stanford crossed to where she stood, and took her in his arms —a very unusual proceeding for him—and kissed her.

"I have perfect confidence in your truth, my dearest," he said. "I am as sure of your goodness and innocence before your father's explanation as I can possibly be after it."

There was a witness to this loving declaration that neither of them bargained for. Rose, getting tired of her own company, had run down-stairs to entertain herself with her music. Stanford had

left the door ajar when he returned; and Rose was just in time to see the embrace and hear the tender speech. Just in time, too, to fly before Reginald left the drawing-room and took his way to the study.

Rose played no piano that morning; but, locked in her own room, made the most of what she had heard and seen. Kate had the drawing-room to herself, and sat, with clasped hands, looking out at the bright March morning. The business of the day went on in the house, doors opened and shut, Grace and Eeny came in and went away again, Doctor Frank came up to see Agnes Darling, who was nearly well; and in the study, Reginald Stanford was hearing the story of Miss Danton's midnight stroll.

"You must have heard it sooner or later," Captain Danton said, "between this and next June. As well now as any other time."

Stanford bowed and waited.

"You have not resided in this house for so many weeks without hearing of the invalid upstairs, whom Ogden attends, who never appears in our midst, and about whom all in the house are more or less curious?"

"Mr. Richards?" said Stanford, surprised.

"Yes, Mr. Richards; you have heard of him. It was Mr. Richards whom you saw with Kate last night."

Reginald Stanford dropped the paper-knife he had been drumming with, and stared blankly at Captain Danton.

"Mr. Richards!" he echoed; "Mr. Richards, who is too ill to leave his room!"

"Not now," said Captain Danton, calmly; "he was when he first came here. You know what ailed Macbeth—a sickness that physicians could not cure. That is Mr. Richards' complaint—a mind diseased. Remorse and terror are that unhappy young man's ailments and jailers."

There was a dead pause. Reginald Stanford, still "far wide," gazed at his father-in-law-elect, and waited for something more satisfactory.

"It is not a pleasant story to tell," Captain Danton went on, in a subdued voice; "the story of a young man's folly, and madness, and guilt; but it must be told. The man you saw last night is barely twenty-three years of age, but all the promise of his life is gone; from henceforth he can be nothing more than a hunted outcast, with the stain of murder on his soul."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed his hearer; "and Kate walks with such a man, alone, and at midnight?"

"Yes," said Kate's father, proudly "and will again, please Heaven. Poor boy! poor, unfortunate boy! If Kate and I were to desert him, he would be lost indeed."

"This is all Greek to me," said Stanford, coldly. "If the man be what you say, a murderer, nothing can excuse Miss Danton's conduct."

"Listen, Reginald, my dear boy—almost my son; listen, and you will have nothing but pity for the poor man upstairs, and deeper love for my noble daughter. But, first, have I your word of honour that what I tell you shall remain a secret?"

Reginald bowed.

"Three years ago, this young man, whose name is not Richards," began Captain Danton, "ran away from home, and began life on his own account. He had been a wilful, headstrong, passionate boy always, but yet loving and generous. He fled from his friends, in a miserable hour of passion, and never returned to them any more; for the sick, sinful, broken-down, wretched man who returned was as different from the hot-headed, impetuous, happy boy, as day differs from night.

"He fled from home, and went to New York. He was, as I am, a sailor; he had command of a vessel at the age of nineteen; but he gave up the sea, and earned a livelihood in that city for some months by painting and selling water-colour sketches, at which he was remarkably clever. Gradually his downward course began. The wine-bottle, the gaming-table, were the first milestones on the road to ruin. The gambling-halls became, at length, his continual haunt. One day he was worth thousands; the next, he did not possess a stiver. The excitement grew on him. He became, before the end of the year, a confirmed and notorious gambler.

"One night the crisis in his life came. He was at a Bowery theatre, to see a Christmas pantomime. It was a fairy spectacle, and the stage was crowded with ballet-girls. There was one among them, the loveliest creature, it seemed to him, he had ever seen, with whom, in one mad moment, he fell passionately in love. A friend of his, by name Furniss, laughed at his raptures. 'Don't you know her, Harry?' said he; 'she boards in the same house with you. She is a little grisette, a little shop-girl, only hired to look pretty, standing there, while this fairy pantomime lasts. You have seen her fifty times.'

"Yes, he had seen her repeatedly. He remembered it when his friend spoke, and he had never thought of her until now. The new infatuation took possession of him, body and soul. He made

her acquaintance next morning, and found out she was, as his friend had said, a shop-girl. What did he care; if she had been a rag-picker, it would have been all one to this young madman. In a fortnight he proposed; in a month they were married, and the third step on the road to ruin was taken.

"Had she been a good woman—an earnest and faithful wife—she might have made a new man of him, for he loved her with a passionate devotion that was part of his hot-headed nature. But she was bad—as depraved as she was fair—and brought his downward course to a tragical climax frightfully soon.

"Before her marriage, this wretched girl had had a lover—discarded for a more handsome and impetuous wooer. But she had known him longest, and, perhaps, loved him best. At all events, he resumed his visits after marriage, as if nothing had happened. The young husband, full of love and confidence, suspected no wrong. He sanctioned the visits and was on most friendly terms with the discarded suitor. For some months it went on, this underhand and infamous intimacy, and the wronged husband saw nothing. It was Furniss who first opened his eyes to the truth, and a terrible scene ensued. The husband refused passionately to believe a word against the truth and purity of the wife he loved, and called his friend a liar and a slanderer.

"'Very well,' said Furniss, coolly, 'bluster as much as you please, dear boy, and, when you are tired, go home. It is an hour earlier than you generally return. He will hardly have left. If you find your pretty little idol alone, and at her prayers, disbelieve me. If you find Mr. Crosby enjoying a *tête-à-tête* with her, then come back and apologize for these hard names.'"

"He went off whistling, and the half-maddened husband sprang into a passing stage and rode home. It was past ten, but he was generally at the gambling-table each night until after one, and his wife had usually retired ere his return. He went upstairs softly, taking off his boots, and noiselessly opened the door. There sat his wife, and by her side, talking earnestly, the discarded lover. He caught his last words as he entered:

"'You know how I have loved—you know how I do love, a thousand times better than he! Why should we not fly at once. It is only torture to both to remain longer.'

"They were the last words the unfortunate man ever uttered. The gambler had been drinking—let us hope the liquor and the jealous fury made him for the time mad. There was the flash, the report of a pistol; Crosby, his guilty wife's lover, uttered a wild yell, sprang up in the air, and fell back shot through the heart."

There was another dead pause. Captain Danton's steady voice momentarily failed, and Reginald Stanford sat in horrified silence.

"What came next," continued the Captain, his voice tremulous, "the madman never knew. He has a vague remembrance of his wife's screams filling the room with people; of his finding himself out somewhere under the stars, and his brain and heart on fire. He has a dim remembrance of buying a wig and whiskers and a suit of sailor's clothes next day, and of wandering down among the docks in search of a ship. By one of those mysterious dispensations of Providence that happen every day, the first person he encountered on the dock was myself. I did not know him—how could I in that disguise—but he knew me instantly, and spoke. I recognized his voice, and took him on board my ship, and listened to the story I have just told you. With me he was safe. Detectives were scouring the city for the murderer; but I sailed for England next day, and he was beyond their reach. On the passage he broke down; all the weeks we were crossing the Atlantic he lay wandering and delirious in a raging brain-fever. We all thought, Doctor and all, that he never would reach the other side; but life won the hard victory, and he slowly grew better. Kate returned, as you know, with me. She, too, heard the tragical story, and had nothing but pity and prayer for the tempest-tossed soul.

"When we reached Canada, he was still weak and ill. I brought him here under an assumed name, and he remains shut up in his rooms all day, and only ventures out at night to breathe the fresh air. His mind has never recovered its tone since that brain fever. He has become a monomaniac on one subject, the dread of being discovered, and hanged for murder. Nothing will tempt him from his solitude—nothing can induce him to venture out, except at midnight, when all are asleep. He is the ghost who frightened Margery and Agnes Darling; he is the man you saw with Kate last in the grounds. He clings to her as he clings to no one else. The only comfort left him in this lower world are these nightly walks with her. She is the bravest, the best, the noblest of girls; she leaves her warm room, her bed, for those cold midnight walks with that unhappy and suffering man."

Once again a pause. Reginald Stanford looked at Captain Danton's pale, agitated face.

"You have told me a terrible story," he said. "I can hardly blame this man for what he has done; but what claim has he on you that you should feel for him and screen him as you do? What claim has he on my future wife that she should take these nightly walks with him unknown to me?"

"The strongest claim that man can have," was the answer; "he is my son—he is Kate's only brother!"

"My God! Captain Danton, what are you saying?"

"The truth," Captain Danton answered, in a broken voice. "Heaven help me—Heaven pity him! The wretched man whose story you have heard—who dwells a captive under this roof—is my only

son, Henry Danton."

He covered his face with his hands. Reginald Stanford sat confounded.

"I never dreamed of this," he said aghast. "I thought your son was dead!"

"They all think so," said the Captain, without looking up; "but you know the truth. Some day, before long, you shall visit him, when I have prepared him for your coming. You understand all you heard and saw now?"

"My dear sir!" exclaimed Stanford, grasping the elder man's hand; "forgive me! No matter what I saw, I must have been mad to doubt Kate. Your secret is as safe with me as with yourself. I shall leave you now; I must see Kate."

"Yes, poor child! Love her and trust her with your whole heart, Reginald, for she is worthy."

Reginald Stanford went out, still bewildered by all he had heard, and returned to the drawing-room. Kate sat as he had left her, looking dreamily out at the bright sky.

"My dearest," he said bending over her, and touching the white brow: "can you ever forgive me for doubting you? You are the truest, the best, the bravest of women."

She lifted her loving eyes, filled with tears, to the handsome face of her betrothed.

"To those I love I hope I am—and more. Before I grow false or treacherous, I pray Heaven that I may die."

CHAPTER XII.

HARRY DANTON.

A spring-like afternoon. The March sun bright in the Canadian sky, the wind soft and genial, and a silvery mist hanging over the river and marshes. Little floods from the fast-melting snow poured through the grounds; the ice-frozen fish-pond was thawing out under the melting influence of the sunshine, and rubber shoes and tucked-up skirts were indispensable outdoor necessaries.

Rose Danton, rubber-shoes, tucked-up skirts, and all, was trying to kill time this pleasant afternoon, sauntering aimlessly through the wet grounds. Very pretty and coquettish she looked, with that crimson petticoat showing under her dark silk dress; that jockey-hat and feather set jauntily on her sunshiny curls; but her prettiness was only vanity and vexation of spirit to Rose. Where was the good of pink-tinted cheeks, soft hazel eyes, auburn curls, and a trim little foot and ankle, when there was no living thing near to see and admire? What was the use of dressing beautifully and looking charming for a pack of insensible mortals, to whom it was an old story and not worth thinking about? The sunny March day had no reflection in Rose's face; "sulky" is the only word that will tell you how she looked. Poor Rose! It was rather hard to be hopelessly in love, to be getting worse every day, and find it all of no use. It was a little too bad to have everything she wanted for eighteen years, and then be denied the fascinating young officer she had set her whole heart on. For Mr. Stanford was lost again. Just as she thought she had her bird snared for certain—lo! it spread its dazzling wings and soared up to the clouds, and farther out of reach than ever. In plain English, he had gone back to the old love and was off with the new, just when she felt most sure of him.

A whole week had passed since that night in the tamarack walk, that night when he had seemed so tender and lover-like, the matchless deceiver! And he had hardly spoken half a dozen words to her. He was back at the footstool of his first sovereign, he was the most devoted of engaged men; Kate was queen of the hour, Rose was nowhere. It was trying, it was cruel, it was shameful. Rose cried and scolded in the seclusion of her maiden bower, and hated Mr. Stanford, or said she did; and could have seen her beautiful elder sister in her winding-sheet with all the pleasure in life.

So, this sunny afternoon, Rose was wandering listlessly hither and thither, thinking the ice would soon break upon the fish-pond if this weather lasted, and suicide would be the easiest thing in the world. She walked dismally round and round it, and wondered what Mr. Stanford would say, and how he would feel when some day, in the cold, sad twilight, they would carry her, white, and lifeless, and dripping before him, one more unfortunate gone to her death! She could see herself —robed in white, her face whiter than her dress, her pretty auburn curls all wet and streaming around her—carried into the desolate house. She could see Reginald Stanford recoil, turn deadly pale, his whole future happiness blasted at the sight. She pictured him in his horrible remorse giving up Kate, and becoming a wanderer and a broken-hearted man all the rest of his life. There was a dismal delight in these musings; and Rose went round and round the fish-pond, revelling, so to speak, in them.

As her watch pointed to three, one of the stable-helpers came round from the stables leading two horses. She knew them—one was Mr. Stanford's, the other Kate's. A moment later, and Mr. Stanford and Kate appeared on the front steps, "booted and spurred," and ready for their ride. The Englishman helped his lady into the saddle, adjusted her long skirt, and sprang lightly across

his own steed. Rose would have given a good deal to be miles away; but the fish-pond must be passed, and she, the "maiden forlorn," must be seen. Kate gayly touched her plumed-hat; Kate's cavalier bent to his saddle-bow, and then they were gone out of sight among the budding trees.

"Heartless, cold-blooded flirt!" thought the second Miss Danton, apostrophizing the handsomest of his sex. "I hope his horse may run away with him and break his neck!"

But Rose did not mean this, and the ready tears were in her eyes the next instant with pity for herself.

"It's too bad of him—it's too bad to treat me so! He knows I love him, he made me think he loved me; and now to go and act like this. I'll never stay here and see him marry Kate! I'd rather die first! I will die or do something! I'll run away and become an actress or a nun—I don't care much which. They're both romantic, and they are what people always do in such cases—at least I have read a great many novels where they did!" mused Miss Danton, still making her circle round the fish-pond.

Grace, calling from one of the windows to a servant passing below, caused her to look towards the house, just in time to see something white flutter from an open bedroom window on the breeze. The bedroom regions ran all around the third story of Danton Hall—six in each range. Mr. Stanford's chamber was in the front of the house, and it was from Mr. Stanford's room the white object had fluttered. Rose watched it as it alighted on a little unmelted snowbank, and, hurrying over, picked it up. It was part of a letter—a sheet of note-paper torn in half, and both sides closely written. It was in Reginald Stanford's hand and without more ado (you will be shocked to hear it, though) Miss Rose deliberately commenced reading it. It began abruptly with part of an unfinished sentence.

> —"That you call me a villain! Perhaps I shall not be a villain, after all. The angel with the auburn ringlets is as much an angel as ever; but, Lauderdale, upon my soul, I don't want to do anything wrong, if I can help it. If it is *kismit*, as the Turks say, my fate, what can I do? What will be, will be; if auburn ringlets and yellow-brown eyes are my destiny, what am I—the descendant of many Stanfords—that I should resist? Nevertheless, if destiny minds its own business and lets me alone, I'll come up to the mark like a man. Kate is glorious; I always knew it, but never so much as now. Something has happened recently—no matter what—that has elevated her higher than ever in my estimation. There is something grand about the girl—something too great and noble in that high-strung nature of hers, for such a reprobate as I! This is *entre nous*, though; if I tell you I am a reprobate, it is in confidence. I am a lucky fellow, am I not, to have two of earth's angels to choose from? And yet sometimes I wish I were not so lucky; I don't want to misbehave—I don't want to break anybody's heart; but still—"

It came to an end as abruptly as it had begun. Rose's cheeks were scarlet flame before she concluded. She understood it all. He was bound to her sister; he was trying to be true, but he loved her! Had he not owned it—might she not still hope? She clasped her hands in sudden, ecstatic rapture.

"He loves me best," she thought; "and the one he loves best will be the one he will choose."

She folded up the precious document, and hid it in her pocket. She looked up at the window, but no more sheets of the unfinished letter fluttered out.

"Careless fellow!" she thought, "to leave such tell-tale letters loose. If Kate had found it, or Grace, or Eeny! They could not help understanding it. I wish I dared tell him; but I can't."

She turned and went into the house. No more dreary rambles round the fish-pond. Rose was happy again.

Suicide was indefinitely postponed, and Kate might become the nun, not she. Kate was his promised wife; but there is many a slip; and the second Miss Danton ran up to her room, singing, "New hope may bloom."

If Rose's heart had been broken, she would have dressed herself carefully all the same. There was to be a dinner-party at the house that evening, and among the guests a viscount recently come over to shoot moose. The viscount was forty, but unmarried, with a long rent-roll, and longer pedigree; and who knew what effect sparkling hazel eyes and gold-bronzed hair, and honeyed smiles, might have upon him? So Eunice was called in, and the auburn tresses freshly curled, and a sweeping robe of silvery silk, trimmed with rich lace, donned. The lovely bare neck and arms were adorned with pale pearls, and the falling curls were jauntily looped back with clusters of pearl beads.

"You do look lovely, Miss!" cried Eunice, in irrepressible admiration. "I never saw you look so 'andsome before. The dress is the becomingest dress you've got, and you look splendid, you do!"

Rose flashed a triumphant glance at her own face in the mirror.

"Do I, Eunice? Do I look almost as handsome as Kate?"

"You are 'andsomer sometimes, Miss Rose, to my taste. If Miss Kate 'ad red cheeks, now; but she's as w'ite sometimes as marble."

"So she is; but some people admire that style. I suppose Mr. Stanford does—eh, Eunice?"

"I dare say he does, Miss."

"Do you think Mr. Stanford handsome, Eunice?" carelessly.

"Very 'andsome, Miss, and so pleasant. Not 'igh and 'aughty, like some young gentlemen I've seen. Heverybody likes 'im."

"What is Kate going to wear this evening?" said Rose, her heart fluttering at the praise.

"The black lace, miss, and her pearls. She looks best in blue, but she will wear black."

"How is Agnes Darling getting on?" asked Rose, jumping to another topic. "I haven't seen her for two days."

"Getting better, Miss; she is hable to be up halmost hall the time; but she's failed away to a shadow. Is there hanythink more, Miss?"

"Nothing more, thank you. You may go."

Eunice departed; and Rose, sinking into a rocker, beguiled the time until dinner with a book. She heard Mr. Stanford and Kate coming upstairs together, laughing at something, and go to their rooms to dress.

"I wonder if he will miss part of his letter," she thought, nervously. "What would he say if I gave it to him, and told him I had read it? No! I dare not do that. I will say nothing about it, and let him fidget as much as he likes over the loss."

Rose descended to the drawing-room as the last bell rang, and found herself bowing to half a dozen strangers—Colonel Lord Ellerton among the rest. Lord Ellerton, who was very like Lord Dundreary every way you took him, gave his arm to Kate, and Stanford, with a smile and an indescribable glance, took possession of Rose.

"Has your fairy godmother been dressing you, Rose? I never saw you look so bewildering. What is it?"

Rose shook back her curls saucily, though tingling to her finger-ends at the praise.

"My fairy godmother's goddaughter would not bewilder you much, if Cleopatra yonder were not taken possession of by that ill-looking peer of the realm. I am well enough as a dernier resort."

"How much of that speech do you mean? Are you looking beautiful to captivate the viscount?"

"I am looking beautiful because I can't help it, and I never stoop to captivate any one, Mr. Stanford—not even a viscount. By-the-by, you haven't quarrelled with Kate, have you?"

"Certainly not. Why should I?"

"Of course—why should you! She has a perfect right to walk in the grounds at midnight with any gentleman she chooses."

She said it rather bitterly. Stanford smiled provokingly.

"*Chacun à son gout*, you know. If Kate likes midnight rambles, she must have a cavalier, of course. When she is Mrs. Stanford I shall endeavour to break her of that habit."

"Did you tell her I was with you?" demanded Rose, her eyes flashing.

"My dear Rose, I never tell tales. By-the-way, when shall we have another moonlight stroll? It seems to me I see very little of you lately."

"We will have no more midnight strolls, Mr. Stanford," said Rose, sharply; "and you see quite as much of me as I wish you to see. My lord—I beg your pardon—were you addressing me?"

She turned from Stanford, sitting beside her and talking under the cover of the clatter of spoons and knives, and flashed the light of her most dazzling smile upon Lord Ellerton, sitting opposite. Yes, the peer was addressing her—some question he wanted to know concerning the native Canadians, and which Kate was incapable of answering.

Rose knew all about it, and took his lordship in tow immediately. All the witcheries known to pretty little flirts were brought to bear on the viscount, as once before they had been brought to bear on Sir Ronald Keith.

Kate smiled across at Reginald, and surrendered the peer at once. King or Kaiser were less than nothing to her in comparison with that handsome idol on the other side of the table.

Dinner was over, and the ladies gone. In the drawing-room Kate seated herself at the piano, to sing a bewildering duet with Rose. Before it was ended the gentlemen appeared, and once more Lord Ellerton found himself taken captive and seated beside Rose—how, he hardly knew. How that tongue of hers ran! And all the time Lord Ellerton's eyes were wandering to Kate. Like Sir Ronald, pretty Rose's witcheries fell short of the mark; the stately loveliness of Kate eclipsed her, as the sun eclipses stars. When at last he could, without discourtesy, get away, he arose, bowed to the young lady, and, crossing the long, drawing-room, took his stand by the piano, where Kate still sat and sung. Stanford was leaning against the instrument, but he resigned his place to the

viscount, and an instant later was beside Rose.

"Exchange is no robbery," he said. "Is it any harm to ask how you have succeeded?"

Rose looked up angrily into the laughing dark eyes.

"I don't know what you mean."

"My dear little artless Rose! Shall I put it plainer? When are you to be Lady Ellerton?"

"Mr. Stanford—"

"My dear Rose, don't be cross. He is too old and too ugly—low be it spoken—for the prettiest girl in Canada!"

"Meaning me?"

"Meaning you."

"Why don't you except Kate?"

"Because I think you are prettier than Kate?"

"You don't! I know better! I don't believe you!"

"Disbelieve me, then."

"You think there is no one in the world like Kate."

"Do I? Who told you?"

"I don't need to be told; actions speak louder than words."

"And what have my actions said?"

"That you adore the ground she walks on, and hold her a little lower than the angels."

"So I do. That is, I don't precisely adore the ground she walks on—I am not quite so far gone as that yet—but I hold her a little lower than the angels, certainly."

"That's enough then. Why don't you stay with her, and not come here annoying me?"

"Oh, I annoy you, do I? You don't mean it, Rose?"

"Yes, I do," said Rose, compressing her lips. "What do you come for?"

"Because—you won't be offended, will you?"

"No."

"Because I am very fond of you, then."

"Fond of me!" said Rose, her heart thrilling—"and you engaged to Kate! How dare you tell me so, Mr. Stanford?"

Rose's words were all they should have been, but Rose's tone was anything but severe. Stanford took an easier position on the sofa.

"Because I like to tell the truth. Never mind the viscount, Rose; you don't care about him, and if you only wait, and are a good girl, somebody you do care about may propose to you one of these days. Here, Doctor, there is room for another on our sofa."

"Will I be *de trop*?" asked Doctor Frank, halting.

"Not at all. Rose and I are discussing politics. She thinks Canada should be annexed to the United States, and I don't. What are your views on the matter?"

Doctor Danton took the vacant seat and Stanford's conversational cue, and began discussing politics, until Rose got up in disgust, and left.

"I thought that would be the end of it," said Stanford. "Poor little girl! the subject is too heavy for her."

"Only I knew you were done for, Mr. Stanford," said Doctor Danton, "I should have fancied I was interrupting a flirtation."

"Not at all. Rose and I did not get on very well at first. I am afraid she took a dislike to me, and I am merely trying to bring her to a more Christian frame of mind. A fellow likes to be on good terms with his sister."

"So he does. I noticed you and our charming Miss Rose were at daggers-drawn even before you got properly introduced; and I couldn't account for it in any other way than by supposing you had made love to her and deserted her—in some other planet, perhaps."

Stanford looked with eyes of laughing wonder in the face of the imperturbable Doctor, who never moved a muscle.

"Upon my life, Danton," he exclaimed letting his hand fall lightly on the Doctor's shoulder, "you

ought to be burned for a wizard! What other planet do you suppose it was?"

"Has that sprained ankle of yours got quite strong again?" somewhat irrelevantly inquired the physician.

Reginald Stanford laughed.

"Most astute of men! Who has been telling you tales?"

"My own natural sagacity. How many weeks were you laid up?"

"Three," still laughing.

"I was here at the time, and I recollect the sudden passion Rose was seized with for long rides every day. I couldn't imagine what was the cause. I think I can, now."

"Doctor Danton, your penetration does you credit. She's a dear little girl, and the best of nurses."

"And do you know—But perhaps you will be offended."

"Not I. Out with it."

"Well, then, I think it is a pity you were engaged before you sprained that ankle."

"Do you, really? Might I ask why?"

"I think Rose would make such a charming Mrs. Stanford."

"So do I," said Mr. Stanford, with perfect composure. "But won't Kate?"

"Miss Danton is superb; she ought to marry an emperor; but no, destiny has put her foot in it. Captain Danton's second daughter should be the one."

"You really think so?"

"I really do."

"How unfortunate!" said Stanford, stroking his mustache. "Do you think it can be remedied?"

"I think so."

"By jilting—it's an ugly word, too—by jilting Kate?"

"Precisely."

"But she will break her heart."

"No, she won't. I am a physician, and I know. Hearts never break, except in women's novels. They're the toughest part of the human anatomy."

"What a consolating thought! And you really advise me to throw over Kate, and take to my bosom the fair, the fascinating Rose?"

"You couldn't do better."

"Wouldn't there be the deuce to pay if I did, though, with that fire-eating father of hers? I should have my brains blown out before the honey-moon was ended."

"I don't see why, so that you marry one of his daughters, how can it matter to him which? With a viscount and a baronet at the feet of the peerless Kate, he ought to be glad to be rid of you."

"It seems to me, Doctor Danton, you talk uncommonly plain English."

"Is it too plain? I'll stop if you say so."

"Oh, no. Pray continue. It does me good. And, besides, I don't know but that I agree with you."

"I thought you did. I have thought so for some time."

"Were you jealous, Doctor? You used to be rather attentive to Rose, if I remember rightly."

"Fearfully jealous; but where is the use? She gave me my *coup de congé* long ago. That I am still alive, and talking to you is the most convincing proof I can give that hearts do not break."

"After all," said Stanford, "I don't believe you ever were very far gone with Rose. My stately fiancée suits you better. If I take you at your word, and she rejects the baronet and the viscount, you might try your luck."

"It would be worse than useless. I might as well love some bright, particular star, and hope to win it, as Miss Danton. Ah! here she comes!"

Leaning on the arm of Lord Ellerton, Miss Danton came up smilingly.

"Are you two plotting treason, that you sit there with such solemn faces all the evening?" she asked.

"You have guessed it," replied her lover; "it is treason. Doctor, I'll think of what you have been saying."

He arose. Lord Ellerton resigned his fair companion to her rightful owner, and returned to Rose, who was looking over a book of beauty; and Doctor Danton went over to Eeny, who was singing to herself at the piano, and listened, with an odd little smile, to her song:

"Smile again, my dearest love,
Weep not that I leave you;
I have chosen now to rove—
Bear it, though it grieve you.
See! the sun, and moon, and stars,
Gleam the wide world over,
Whether near, or whether far,
On your loving rover.

"And the sea has ebb and flow,
Wind and cloud deceive us;
Summer heat and winter snow
Seek us but to leave us.
Thus the world grows old and new—
Why should you be stronger?
Long have I been true to you,
Now I'm true no longer.

"As no longer yearns my heart,
Or your smiles enslave me,
Let me thank you ere we part,
For the love you gave me.
See the May flowers wet with dew
Ere their bloom is over—
Should I not return to you,
Seek another lover."

Doctor Danton laughed.

"'Long have I been true to you,
Now I'm true no longer!'"

"Those are most atrocious sentiments you are singing—do you not know it, Miss Eeny?"

Mr. Stanford beside Kate, Lord Ellerton listening politely to Rose, and Doctor Frank with Eeny, never found time flying, and were surprised to discover it was almost midnight. The guests departed, "the lights were fled, the garlands dead, and the banquet-hall deserted" by everybody but Reginald Stanford and Captain Danton. They were alone in the long, dimly-lighted drawing-room.

"You will take Kate's place to night," the Captain was saying, "and be Harry's companion in his constitutional. I told him that another knew his secret. I related all the circumstances."

"How did he take it? Was he annoyed?"

"No; he was a little startled at first, but he allowed I could not do otherwise. Poor fellow! He is anxious to see you now. If you will get your overcoat, you will find him here when you return."

Mr. Stanford ran upstairs in a hurry, and returned in fur cap and overcoat in ten minutes. A young man, tall and slender, but pale to ghastliness, with haggard cheeks and hollow eyes, stood, wrapped in a long cloak, beside the Captain. He had been handsome, you could see, even through that bloodless pallor, and there was a look in his great blue eyes that startlingly reminded you of Kate.

"You two know each other already," said the Captain. "I claim you both as sons."

Reginald grasped Harry Danton's extended hand, and shook it heartily.

"Being brothers, I trust we shall soon be better acquainted," he said. "I am to supply Kate's place to-night in the tamarack walk. I trust no loiterers will see us."

"I trust not," said Harry, with an apprehensive shiver. "I have been seen by so many, and have frightened so many that I begin to dread leaving my room night or day."

"There is nothing to dread, I fancy," said Stanford, cheerfully, as they passed out, and down the steps. "They take you for a ghost, you know. Let them keep on thinking so, and you are all right. You have given Danton Hall all it wanted to make it perfect—it is a haunted house."

"It is haunted," said his companion, gloomily. "What am I better than any other evil spirit? Oh, Heaven!" he cried, passionately, "the horror of the life I lead! Shut up in the prison I dare not leave, haunted night and day by the vision of that murdered man, every hope and blessing that life holds gone forever! I feel sometimes as though I were going mad!"

He lifted his cap and let the chill night wind cool his burning forehead. There was a long, blank pause. When Reginald Stanford spoke, his voice was low and subdued.

"Are you quite certain the man you shot was shot dead? You hardly waited to see, of course; and how are you to tell positively the wound was fatal?"

"I wish to Heaven there could be any doubt of it!" groaned the young man. "My aim is unerring; I saw him fall, shot through the heart."

His voice died away in a hoarse whisper. Again there was a pause.

"Your provocation was great," said Reginald. "If anything can extenuate killing a fellow-creature, it is that. Are you quite positive—But perhaps I have no right to speak on this matter."

"Speak, speak!" broke out Harry Danton. "I am shut up in these horrible rooms from week's end to week's end, until it is the only thing that keeps me from going mad—talking of what I have done. What were you going to say?"

"I wanted to ask you if you were quite certain—beyond the shadow of doubt—of your wife's guilt? We sometimes make terrible mistakes in these matters."

"There was no mistake," replied his companion, with a sudden look of anguish, "there could be none. I saw and heard as plainly as I see and hear you now. There could be no mistake."

"Do you know where your—where she is now?"

"No!" with that look of anguish still. "No, I have never heard of her since that dreadful night. She may be dead, or worse than dead, long ere this."

"You loved her very much," said Reginald, impelled to say it by the expression of that ghastly face.

"Loved her?" he repeated. "I have no words to tell you how I loved her. I thought her all that was pure, and innocent, and beautiful, and womanly, and she—oh, fool, that I was to believe her as I did!—to think, as she made me think, that I had her whole heart!"

"Would you like to have some one try and trace her out for you? Her fate may be ascertained yet. I will go to New York, if you wish, and do my best."

"No, no," was the reply. "What use would it be? If you discovered her to-morrow, what would it avail? Better let her fate remain forever unknown than find my worst fears realized. False, wicked, degraded, as I know her, I cannot forget how madly I loved her—I cannot forget that I love her yet."

They walked up and down the tamarack-walk in the frosty starlight, all still and peaceful around them—the sky, sown with silver stars, so serene—the earth, white with its snowy garb, all hushed and tranquil—nothing disturbed but the heart of man, all things at peace but his storm-tossed soul.

"I am keeping you here," said Harry, "and it is growing late, and cold. I am selfish and exacting in my misery, as, I fear, poor Kate knows. Let us go in."

They walked to the house. When they entered, Reginald secured the door, and the two young men went upstairs together. Ogden sat sleepily on a chair, and started up at sight of them. Harry Danton held out his hand, with a faint sad smile.

"Good night," he said; "I am glad to have added another to the list of my friends. I hope we shall meet soon again. Good night, and pleasant dreams."

"We shall meet as often as you wish," answered Reginald. "You have my deepest sympathy. Good night."

The white, despairing face haunted Reginald Stanford's dreams all night, as if he had indeed been a ghost. He was glad when morning came, and he could escape the spectres of dream-land in the business of everyday life. He stopped in the hall on his way down stairs, to look out at the morning, wet, and cold, and dark, and miserable. As he stood, some one passed him, going up to the upper bedroom regions of the servants—a small, pallid little creature, looking like a stray spirit in its black dress—Agnes Darling.

"Another ghost?" thought Mr. Stanford, running down stairs. "They are not far wrong who call Danton Hall a haunted house."

CHAPTER XIII.

LOVE-MAKING.

A dismal March afternoon, an earth hard as iron, with black frost, a wild wind troubling the gaunt trees, and howling mournfully around the old house. A desolate, wintry afternoon, threatening storm; but despite its ominous aspect, the young people at Danton Hall had gone off for a long sleigh-ride. Reginald and Kate had the little shell-shaped cutter, Rose, Eeny, Mr. Howard, Junior, Miss Howard, and Doctor Frank, in the big three-seated family sleigh. Amid the jingling of silvery

bells, peals of girlish laughter, and a chorus of good-byes to the Captain and Grace, standing on the stone stoop, they had departed.

Captain Danton and his housekeeper spent the bleak March afternoon very comfortably together. The fire burned brightly, the parlour was like waxwork in its perfect order; Grace, with her sewing, sat by her favourite window. Captain Danton, with the Montreal *True Witness*, sat opposite, reading her the news. Grace was not very profoundly interested in the political questions then disturbing Canada, or in the doings and sayings of the Canadian Legislature; but she listened with a look of pleased attention to all. Presently the Captain laid down the newspaper and looked out.

"The girls and boys will be caught in the storm, as I told them they would. You and I were wisest, Grace, to stay at home."

Grace smiled and folded up her work.

"Where are you going?" asked the Captain.

"To get the remainder of this embroidery from Agnes Darling. Do you know what it is?"

"How should I?"

"Well, then, it is a part of Miss Kate's bridal outfit. June will soon be here, although to-day does not look much like it."

She went out and descended to the sewing-room. All alone, and sitting by the window, her needle flying rapidly, was the pale seamstress.

"Have you finished those bands, Miss Darling? Ah, I see you have and very nicely. I am ready for them, and will take them upstairs. Are these the sleeves you are working on?"

Miss Darling replied in the affirmative, and Grace turned to depart. On the threshold she paused.

"You don't look very well, Miss Darling," she said, kindly; "don't work too late. There is no hurry with the things."

She returned to the parlour, where Captain Danton, who had become very fond of his housekeeper's society of late, still sat. And Agnes Darling, alone in the cosy little sewing-room, worked busily while the light lasted. When it grew too dark for the fine embroidery, she dropped it in her lap, and looked out at the wintry prospect.

The storm that had been threatening all day was rising fast. The wind had increased to a gale, and shook the windows and doors, and worried the trees, and went shrieking off over the bleak marshes, to a wild gulf and rushing river. Great snowflakes fluttered through the leaden air, faster and faster, and faster, until presently all was lost in a dizzy cloud of falling whiteness. A wild and desolate evening, making the pleasant little room, with its rosy fire, and carpet, and pretty furniture, tenfold pleasanter by contrast. A bleak and terrible evening for all wayfarers—bitterly cold, and darkening fast.

The seamstress sat while the dismal daylight faded drearily out, her hands lying idly in her lap, her great, melancholy dark eyes fixed on the fast-falling snow. The tokens of sickness and sorrow lingered more marked than ever in that wasted form and colourless face, and the ruddy glow of the fire-light flickered on her mourning dress. Weary and lonely, she looked as the dying day.

Presently, above the shrieking of the stormy wind, came another sound—the loud jingling of sleigh-bells. Dimly through the fluttering whiteness of the snow-storm she saw the sleighs whirl up to the door, and their occupants, in a tumult of laughter, hurrying rapidly into the house. She could hear those merry laughs, those feminine tones, and the pattering of gaitered feet up the stairs. She could hear the deeper voices of the gentlemen, as they stamped and shook the snow off their hats and great-coats in the hall. She listened and looked out again at the wintry twilight.

"Oh!" she thought, with weary sadness, "what happy people there are in the world! Women who love and are beloved, who have everything their hearts desire—home, and friends, and youth, and hope, and happiness. Women who scarcely know, even by hearsay, of such wretched castaways as I."

She walked from the window to the fire, and, leaning against the mantel, fixed her eyes on the flickering flame.

"My birthday," she said to herself, "this long, lonesome, desolate day. Desolate as my lost life, as my dead heart. Only two-and twenty, and all that makes life worth having, gone already."

Again she walked to the window. Far away, and pale and dim through the drifting snow, she could see the low-lying sky.

"Not all!" was the better thought that came to her in her bitterness—"not all, but oh! how far away the land of rest looks!"

She leaned against the window, as she had leaned against the mantel, and took from her bosom the locket she always wore.

"This day twelvemonth he gave me this—his birthday gift. Oh, my darling! My husband! where in all the wide world are you this stormy night?"

There was a rap at the door. She thrust the locket again in her bosom, choked back the hysterical passion of tears rising in her heart, crossed the room, and opened the door. Her visitor was Doctor Danton.

"I thought I should find you here," he said, entering.

"How are you to-day, Miss Darling? Not very well, as your face plainly testifies; give me your hand—cold as ice! My dear child, what is the trouble now?"

At the kindness of his tone she broke down suddenly. She had been alone so long brooding in solitude over her troubles, that she had grown hysterical. It wanted but that kindly voice and look to open the closed flood-gates of her heart. She covered her face with her hands, and broke out into a passionate fit of crying.

Doctor Frank led her gently to a seat, and stood leaning against the chimney, looking into the dying fire, and not speaking. The hysterics would pass, he knew, if she were let alone; and when the sobbing grew less violent, he spoke.

"You sit alone too much," he said quietly; "it is not good for you. You must give it up, or you will break down altogether."

"Forgive me," said Agnes, trying to choke back the sobs. "I am weak and miserable, and cannot help it. I did not mean to cry now."

"You are alone too much," repeated the Doctor; "it won't do. You think too much of the past, and despond too much in the present. That won't do either. You must give it up."

His calm, authoritative tone soothed her somehow. The tears fell less hotly, and she lifted her poor, pale face.

"I am very foolish, but it is my birthday, and I could not help—"

She broke down again.

"It all comes of being so much alone," repeated Doctor Frank. "It won't do. Agnes, how often must I tell you so? Do you know what they say of you in the house?"

"No," looking up in quick alarm.

"They accuse you of having something on your mind. The servants look at you with suspicion, and it all comes of your love of solitude, your silence and sadness. Give it up, Agnes, give it up."

"Doctor Danton," she cried, piteously, "what can I do? I am the most unhappy woman in all the world. What can I do?"

"There is no need of you being the most unhappy woman in the world; there is no need of your being unhappy at all."

She looked up at him in white, voiceless appeal, her lips and hands trembling.

"Don't excite yourself—don't be agitated. I have no news for you but I think I may bid you hope with safety. I don't think it was a ghost you saw that night."

She gave a little cry, and then sat white and still, waiting.

"I don't think it was a ghost," he repeated, lowering his voice. "I don't think he is dead."

She did not speak; she only sat looking up at him with that white, still face.

"There is no need of your wearing a widow's weeds, Agnes," he said, touching her black dress; "I believe your husband to be alive."

She never spoke. If her life had depended on it, she could not have uttered a word—could not have removed her eyes from his face.

"I have no positive proof of what I say, but a conviction that is equal to any proof in my own mind. I believe your husband to be alive—I believe him to be an inmate of this very house."

He stopped in alarm. She had fallen back in her chair, the bluish pallor of death overspreading her face.

"I should have prepared you better," he said. "The shock was too sudden. Shall I go for a glass of water?"

She made a slight motion in the negative, and whispered the word,

"Wait!"

A few moments' struggle with her fluttering breath, and then she was able to sit up.

"Are you better again? Shall I go for the water?"

"No, no! Tell me—"

She could not finish the sentence.

"I have no positive proof," said Doctor Danton, "but the strongest internal conviction. I believe your husband to be in hiding in this house. I believe you saw him that night, and no spirit."

"Go on, go on!" she gasped.

"You have heard of Mr. Richards, the invalid, shut upstairs, have you not? Yes. Well, that mysterious individual is your husband."

She rose up and stood by him, white as death.

"Are you sure?"

"Morally, yes. As I told you, I have no proof as yet and I should not have told you so soon had I not seen you dying by inches before my eyes. Can you keep up heart now, little despondent?"

She clasped her hands over that wildly-throbbing heart, still not quite sure that she heard aright.

"You are to keep all this a profound secret," said the Doctor, "until I can make my suspicions certainties. They say women cannot keep a secret—is it true?"

"I will do whatever you tell me. Oh, thank Heaven! thank Heaven for this!"

She had found her voice, and the hysterics threatened again. Doctor Danton held up an authoritative finger.

"Don't!" he said imperatively. "I won't have it! No more crying, or I shall take back all I have said. Tell a woman good news, and she cries; tell her bad news, and she does the same. How is a man to manage them?"

He walked across the room, and looked out at the night, revolving that profound question in his man's brain, and so unable to solve the enigma as the thousands of his brethren who have perplexed themselves over the same question before. After staring a moment at the blinding whirl of snow he returned to the seamstress.

"Are you all right again, and ready to listen to me?"

Her answer was a question.

"How have you found this out?"

"I haven't found it out. I have only my own suspicions—very strong ones, though."

A shadow of doubt saddened and darkened her face. Her clasped hands drooped and fell.

"Only a suspicion, after all! I am afraid to hope, seems so unreal, so improbable. If it were Harry, why should he be here? Why should Captain Danton protect and shield him?"

"That is what I am coming to. You knew very little of your husband before you married him. Are you sure he did not marry you under an assumed name?"

A flash of colour darted across her colourless face at the words. Doctor Danton saw it.

"Are you sure Darling was your husband's name?" he reiterated, emphatically.

"I am not sure," she said faintly. "I have reason to think it was not."

"Do you know what his name was?"

"No."

"Then I do. I think his name was Danton."

"Danton!"

"Henry Richard Danton—Captain Danton's only son."

She looked at him in breathless wonder.

"Captain Danton's only son," went on the Doctor. "You have not lived all these months in this house without knowing that Captain Danton had a son?"

"I have heard it."

"Three years ago this son ran away from home, and went to New York, under an assumed name. Three years ago Henry Darling came first to New York from Canada. Henry Darling commits a crime, and flies. A few months after Captain Danton comes here, with a mysterious invalid, who is never seen, who is too ill to leave his room by day, but quite able to go out for midnight rambles in the grounds. Old Margery has known Captain Danton's son from childhood. She sees Mr. Richards returning from one of those midnight walks, and falls down in a fit. She says she has seen Master Harry's ghost—Master Harry being currently believed to be dead. Shortly after, you see Mr. Richards on a like occasion, and you fall down in a fit. You say you have seen the apparition of your husband, Henry Darling. Putting all this together, and adding it up, what does it come to? Are you good at figures?"

She could not answer him. The ungovernable astonishment of hearing what she had heard, struck her speechless once more.

"Don't take the trouble to speak," said Doctor Frank, "my news has stunned you. I shall leave you to think it all over by yourself, and I trust there will be an end of tears and melancholy faces. It is ever darkest before the day dawns. Good-evening!"

He was going, but she laid her hand on his arm.

"Wait a moment," she said, finding her voice. "I am so confused and bewildered that I hardly understand what you have said. But should it all be true—you know—you know—" averting her face, "he believes me guilty!"

"We will undeceive him; I can give him proofs, 'strong as Holy Writ;' and, if he loves you, he will be open to conviction. All will come right after a while; only have patience and wait. Keep up a good heart, my dear child, and trust in God."

She dropped feebly into a chair, looking with a bewildered face at the fire.

"I can't realize it," she murmured. "It is like a scene in a novel. I can't realize it."

She heard the door close behind Doctor Frank—she heard a girlish voice accost him in the hall. It was Miss Rose, in a rustling silk dinner-dress, with laces, and ribbons, and jewels fluttering and sparkling about her.

"Is Agnes Darling in there?" she asked suspiciously.

"Yes. I have just been making a professional call."

"Professional! I thought she was well."

"Getting well, my dear Miss Rose; getting well, I am happy to say. It is the duty of a conscientious physician to see after his patients until they are perfectly recovered."

"I wonder if conscientious physicians find the duty more binding in the case of young and pretty patients than in that of old and ugly ones?"

"No," said Doctor Frank, impressively. "To professional eyes, the suffering fellow-creature is a suffering fellow-creature, and nothing more. Think better of us, my dear girl; think better of me."

After dinner, in the drawing-room, Captain Danton, with Grace for a partner, the Doctor with Eeny, sat down to a game of cards. Kate sat at the piano, singing a fly-away duet with Miss Howard. Mr. Howard stood at Miss Danton's right elbow devotedly turning the music; and in a little cozy velvet sofa, just big enough for two, Reginald and Rose were tête-à-tête.

In the changed days that came after, Doctor Frank remembered that picture—the exquisite face at the piano, the slender and stately form, the handsome man, and the pretty coquette on the sofa. The song sung that night brought the tableau as vividly before him years and years after, as when he saw it then.

The song was ended. Miss Danton's ringed white fingers were flying over the keys in a brilliant waltz. George Howard and Rose were floating round and round, in air, as it seemed, and Stanford was watching with half-closed eyes. And in the midst of all, above the ringing music and the sighing of the wild wind, there came the clanging of sleigh-bells and a loud ring at the house-door. Rose and George Howard ceased their waltz. Kate's flying fingers stopped. The card-party looked up inquisitively.

"Who can it be," said the Captain, "'who knocks so loud, and knocks so late,' this stormy night?"

The servant who threw open the drawing-room door answered him. "M. La Touche," announced Babette, and vanished.

There was a little cry of astonishment from Rose; an instant's irresolute pause. Captain Danton arose. The name was familiar to him from his daughter. But Rose had recovered herself before he could advance, and came forward, her pretty face flushed.

"Where on earth did you drop from?" she asked, composedly shaking hands with him. "Did you snow down from Ottawa?"

"No," said M. La Touche. "I've snowed down from Laprairie. I came from Montreal in this evening's train, and drove up here, in spite of wind and weather."

Captain Danton came forward; and Rose, still a little confused, presented M. La Touche. The cordial Captain shook with his usual heartiness the proffered hand of the young man, bade him welcome, and put an instant veto on his leaving them that night.

"There are plenty of bedrooms here, and it is not a night to turn an enemy's dog from the door. My cousin, Miss Grace Danton, M. La Touche; my daughter, Eveleen; and Doctor Frank Danton."

M. La Touche bowed with native grace to these off-hand introductions, and then was led off by Rose to the piano-corner, to be duly presented there. She had not made up her mind yet whether she were vexed or pleased to see her lover. Whatever little affection she had ever given him—and it must have been of the flimsiest from the first—had evaporated long ago, like smoke. But Rose had no idea of pining in maiden solitude, even if she lost the fascinating Reginald, and she knew that homely old saw about coming to the ground between two stools.

M. La Touche had the good fortune to produce a pleasing impression upon all to whom he was introduced. He was very good-looking, with dark Canadian eyes and hair, and olive skin. He was rather small and slight, and his large dark eyes were dreamy, and his smile as gentle as a girl's.

Mr. Stanford, resigned his place on the sofa to M. La Touche, and Rose and the young Canadian were soon chattering busily in French.

"Why did you not write and tell me you were coming?"

"Because I did not know I was coming. Rose, I am the luckiest fellow alive!"

His dark eyes sparkled; his olive face flushed. Rose looked at him wonderingly.

"How?"

"I have had a fortune left me. I am a rich man, and I have come here to tell you, my darling Rose."

"A fortune!" repeated Rose, opening her brown eyes.

"Yes, *m'amour*! You have heard me speak of my uncle in Laprairie, who is very rich? Well, he is dead, and has left all he possesses to me."

Rose clasped her hands.

"And how much is it?"

"Forty thousand pounds!"

"Forty thousand pounds!" repeated Rose, quite stunned by the magnitude of the sum.

"Am I not the luckiest fellow in the world?" demanded the young legatee with exultation. "I don't care for myself alone, Rose, but for you. There is nothing to prevent our marriage now."

Rose wilted down suddenly, and began fixing her bracelets.

"I shall take a share in the bank with my father," pursued the young man; "and I shall speak to your father to-morrow for his consent to our union!"

Rose still twitched her bracelets, her colour coming and going. She could see Reginald Stanford without looking up; and never had he been so handsome in her eyes; never had she loved him as she loved him now.

"You say nothing, Rose," said her lover. "*Mon Dieu!* you cannot surely love me less!"

"Hush!" said Rose, rather sharply, "they will hear you. It isn't that, but—but I don't want to be married just yet. I am too young."

"You did not think so at Ottawa."

"Well," said Rose, testily; "I think so now, and that is enough. I can't get married yet; at least not before July."

"I am satisfied to wait until July," said La Touche, smiling. "No doubt, you will feel older and wiser by that time."

"Does your father know?" asked Rose.

"Yes, I told him before I left home. They are all delighted. My mother and sisters send endless love."

Rose remained silent for a moment, thoughtfully twisting her bracelet. She liked wealth, but she liked Reginald Stanford better than all the wealth in the world. Jules La Touche, with forty thousand pounds, was not to be lightly thrown over; but she was ready at any moment to throw him over for the comparatively poor Englishman. She had no wish to offend her lover. Should her dearer hopes fail, he would be a most desirable party.

"What is the matter with you, Rose?" demanded Jules, uneasily. "You are changed. You are not what you were in Ottawa. Even your letters of late are not what they used to be. Why is it? What have I done?"

"You foolish fellow," said Rose, smiling, "nothing! I am not changed. You only fancy it."

"Then I may speak to your father?"

"Wait until to-morrow," said Rose. "I will think of it. You shall have my answer after breakfast. Now, don't wear that long face—there is really no occasion."

Rose dutifully lingered by his side all the evening; but she stole more glances at Kate's lover than she did at her own. Jules La Touche felt the impalpable change in her; and yet it would have puzzled him to define it. His nature was gentle and tender, and he loved the pretty, fickle, rosy beauty with a depth and sincerity of which she was totally unworthy.

Upstairs, in her room, that night, Rose sat before the fire, toasting her feet and thinking. Yes, thinking. She was not guilty of it often; but to-night she was revolving the pros and cons of her own case. If she refused to let Jules speak to her father, nothing would persuade him that her love had not died out. He might depart in anger, and she might lose him forever. That was the

very last thing she wished. If she lost Reginald, it would be some consolation to marry, immediately after, a richer man. It would be revenge; it would prove how little she cared for him; it would deprive him of the pleasure of thinking she was pining in maiden loneliness for him. Then, too, the public announcement of her engagement and approaching marriage to M. La Touche might arouse him to the knowledge of how much he loved her. "How blessings brighten as they take their flight!" and jealousy is infallible to bring dilatory lovers to the point. No question of the right or wrong of the matter troubled the second Miss Danton's easy conscience.

On the whole, everything was in favour of M. La Touche's speaking to papa. Rose resolved he should speak, took off her considering cap, and went to bed.

M. La Touche was not kept long in suspense next day; he got his answer before breakfast. The morning was sunny and mild, but the snow lay piled high on all sides; and Rose, running down stairs some ten minutes before breakfast-time, found her lover in the open hall door, watching the snowbirds and smoking a cigar. Rose went up to him with very pretty shyness, and the young man flung away his cigar, and looked at her anxiously.

"What a lovely morning," said Rose; "what splendid sleighing we will have."

"I'm not going to talk of sleighing," said M. La Touche, resolutely. "You promised me an answer this morning. What is it?"

Rose began playing with her cord and tassels.

"What is it?" reiterated the Canadian. "Yes or No?"

"Yes!"

M. La Touche's anxious countenance turned rapturous, but Miss Grace Danton was coming down stairs, and he had to be discreet. Grace lingered a few moments talking of the weather, and Rose took the opportunity of making her escape.

After breakfast, when the family were dispersing, M. La Touche followed Captain Danton out of the room, and begged the favour of a private interview. The Captain looked surprised, but agreed readily, and led the way to his study, no shadow of the truth dawning on his mind.

That awful ordeal of most successful wooers, "speaking to papa," was very hard to begin; but M. La Touche, encouraged by the recollection of the forty thousand pounds, managed to begin somehow. He made his proposal with a modest diffidence that could not fail to please.

"We have loved each other this long time," said the young man; "but I never dreamed of speaking to you so soon. I was only a clerk in our house, and Rose and I looked forward to years of waiting. This legacy, however, has removed all pecuniary obstacles, and Rose has given me consent to speak to you."

Imagine the Captain's surprise. His little curly-haired Rose, whom he looked upon as a tall child, engaged to be married!

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Captain Danton, naïvely; "you have taken me completely aback! I give you my word of honour, I never thought of such a thing!"

"I hope you will not object, sir; I love your daughter most sincerely."

The anxious inquiry was unneeded. Captain Danton had no idea of objecting. He knew the La Touche family well by repute; he liked this modest young wooer; and forty thousand pounds for his dowerless daughter was not to be lightly refused.

"Object!" he cried, grasping his hand. "Not I. If you and Rose love each other, I am the last one in the world to mar your happiness. Take her, my lad, with my best wishes for your happiness."

The young Canadian tried to express his gratitude, but broke down at the first words.

"Never mind," said the Captain, laughing. "Don't try to thank me. Your father knows, of course?"

"Yes, sir. I spoke to him before I left Ottawa. He and all our family are delighted with my choice."

"And when is it to be?" asked the Captain, still laughing.

"What?"

"The wedding, of course!"

M. La Touche's dark face reddened like a girl's. "I don't know, sir. We have not come to that yet."

"Let me help you over the difficulty, then. Make it a double wedding."

"A double wedding?"

"Yes. My daughter Kate is to be married to Mr. Stanford on the fifth of June. Why not make it a double match."

"With all my heart, sir, if Rose is willing!"

"Go and ask her then. But first, of course, after this, you remain with us for some time?"

"I can stay a week or two; after that, business will compel me to leave."

"Well, business must be attended to. Go, speak to Rose, and success to you!"

Jules found Rose in the drawing-room, and alone. His face told how eminently satisfactory his interview had been. He sat down beside her, and related what had passed, ending with her father's proposal.

"Do say yes, Rose," pleaded Jules. "June is as long as I can wait, and I should like a double wedding of all things."

Rose's face turned scarlet, and she averted her head. The familiar announcement of Reginald's marriage to her sister, as a matter of certainty, stung her to the heart.

"You don't object, Rose?" he said uneasily. "You will be married the same day?"

"Settle it as you like," answered Rose petulantly. "If I must be married, it doesn't much matter when."

That day, when the ladies were leaving the dinner-table, Captain Danton arose.

"Wait one moment," he said; "I have a toast to propose before you go. Fill your glasses and drink long life and prosperity to Mr. and Mrs. Jules La Touche."

Every one but Grace was electrified, and Rose fairly ran out of the room. M. La Touche made a modest little speech of thanks, and then Mr. Stanford held the door open for the ladies to pass.

Rose was not in the drawing-room when they entered, and Kate ran up to her room; but the door was locked, and Rose would not let her in.

"Go away, Kate," she said, almost passionately. "Go away and leave me alone."

Rose kept her chamber all the evening, to the amazement of the rest. The young Canadian was the lion of the hour, and bore his honours with that retiring modesty which so characterized him, and which made him such a contrast to the brilliant and self-conscious Mr. Stanford.

Rose descended to the breakfast next morning looking shy and queer. Before the meal was over, however, the bashfulness, quite foreign to her usual character, wore pretty well away, and she agreed to join a sleighing-party over to Richelieu, a neighbouring village.

They were six in all—Kate and Mr. Stanford, Rose and Mr. La Touche, Eeny and Doctor Frank. Sir Ronald Keith had departed some time previously, for a tour through the country with Lord Ellerton, and his memory was a thing of the past already.

The Captain, an hour after their departure, sought out Grace in the dining-room, where she sat at work. He looked grave and anxious, and, sitting down beside her, said what he had to say with many misgivings.

"I am double her age," he thought. "I have a son old enough to be her husband; how can I hope?"

But for all that he talked, and Grace listened, her sewing lying idly in her lap; one hand shading her face, the other held in his. He talked long and earnestly, and she listened, silent and with shaded face.

"And now Grace, my dear, you have heard all; what do you say? When I lose my girls, shall I go back to the old life, or shall I stay? I can't stay unless you say yes, Grace. I am double your age, but I love you very dearly, and will do my best to make you happy. My dear, what do you say?" She looked up at him for the first time, her eyes full of tears.

"Yes!"

CHAPTER XIV.

TRYING TO BE TRUE.

Late that evening, the sleighing party returned in high good spirits—all exhilaration after their long drive through the frosty air. Crescent moon and silver stars spangled the deep Canadian sky, glittering coldly bright in the hard white snow, as they jingled merrily up to the door.

"Oh, what a night!" Kate cried. "It is profanation to go indoors."

"It is frostbitten noses to stay out," answered Reginald. "Moonlight is very well in its place; but I want my dinner."

The sleighing party had had one dinner that day, but were quite ready for another. They had stopped at noon at a country inn, and fared sumptuously on fried ham and eggs and sour Canadian bread, and then had gone off rambling up the hills and into the woods.

How it happened, no one but Reginald Stanford ever knew; but it did happen that Kate was walking beside Jules La Touche up a steep, snowy hill, and Reginald was by Rose's side in a dim,

gloomy forest-path. Rose had no objection. She walked beside him, looking very pretty, in a black hat with long white plume and little white veil. They had walked on without speaking until her foolish heart was fluttering, and she could stand it no longer. She stopped short in the woodland aisle, through which the pale March sunshine sifted, and looked up at him for the first time.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"For a walk," replied Mr. Stanford, "and a talk. You are not afraid, I hope?"

"Afraid?" said Rose, the colour flushing her face. "Of what should I be afraid?"

"Of me!"

"And why should I be afraid of you?"

"Perhaps because I may make love to you? Are you?"

"No."

"Come on, then."

He offered his arm, and Rose put her gloved fingers gingerly in his coat-sleeve, her heart fluttering more than ever.

"You are going to be married," he said, "and I have had no opportunity of offering my congratulations. Permit me to do it now."

"Thank you."

"Your M. La Touche is a pleasant little fellow, Rose. You and he have my best wishes for your future happiness."

"The 'pleasant little fellow' and myself are exceedingly obliged to you!" her eyes flashing; "and now, Mr. Stanford, if you have said all you have to say, suppose we go back?"

"But I have not said all I have to say, nor half. I want to know why you are going to marry him?"

"And I want to know," retorted Rose, "what business it is of yours?"

"Be civil Rose! I told you once before, if you recollect, that I was very fond of you. Being fond of you, it is natural I should take an interest in your welfare. What are you going to marry him for?"

"For love!" said Rose, spitefully.

"I don't believe it! Excuse me for contradicting you, my dear Rose; but I don't believe it. He is a good-looking lamb-like little fellow, and he is worth forty thousand pounds; but I don't believe it!"

"Don't believe it, then. What you believe, or what you disbelieve, is a matter of perfect indifference to me," said Rose, looking straight before her with compressed lips.

"I don't believe that, either. What is the use of saying such things to me?"

"Mr. Stanford, do you mean to insult me?" demanded Rose furiously. "Let me go this instant. Fetch me back to the rest. Oh, if papa were here, you wouldn't dare to talk to me like that. Reginald Stanford, let me go. I hate you!"

For Mr. Stanford had put his arm around her waist, and was looking down at her with those darkly daring eyes. What could Rose do?—silly, love-sick Rose. She didn't hate him, and she broke out into a perfect passion of sobs.

"Sit down, Rose," he said, very gently, leading her to a mossy knoll under a tree; "and, my darling, don't cry. You will redden your eyes, and swell your nose, and won't look pretty. Don't cry any more!"

If Mr. Stanford had been trying for a week, he could have used no more convincing argument.

Rose wiped her eyes gracefully; but wouldn't look at him.

"That's a good girl!" said Stanford. "I will agree to everything rather than offend you. You love M. La Touche, and you hate me. Will that do?"

"Let us go back," said Rose, stiffly, getting up. "I don't see what you mean by such talk. I know it is wrong and insulting."

"Do you feel insulted?" he asked, smiling down at her.

"Let me alone!" cried Rose, the passionate tears starting to her eyes again. "Let me alone, I tell you! You have no business to torment me like this!"

He caught her suddenly in his arms, and kissed her again and again.

"Rose! Rose! my darling! you love me, don't you? My dear little Rose, I can't let you marry Jules La Touche, or any one else."

He released her just in time.

"Rose! Rose!" Kate's clear voice was calling somewhere near.

"Here we are," returned Stanford, in answer, for Rose was speechless; and two minutes later they were face to face with Miss Danton and M. La Touche.

Mr. Stanford's face was clear as the blue March sky, but Rose looked as flushed and guilty as she felt. She shrank from looking at her sister or lover, and clung involuntarily to Reginald's arm.

"Have you been plotting to murder any one?" asked Kate. "You look like it."

"We have been flirting," said Mr. Stanford, with the most perfect composure. "You don't mind, do you? M. La Touche, I resign in your favour. Come, Kate."

Rose and Reginald did not exchange another word all day. Rose was very subdued, very still. She hardly opened her lips all the afternoon to the unlucky Jules. She hardly opened them at dinner, except to admit the edibles, and she was unnaturally quiet all the evening. She retired into a corner with some crochet-work, and declined conversation and coffee alike, until bedtime. She went slowly and decorously upstairs, with that indescribable subdued face, and bade everybody good-night without looking at them.

Eeny, who shared Grace's room, sat on a stool before the bedroom fire a long time that night, looking dreamily into the glowing coals.

Grace, sitting beside her, combing out her own long hair, watched her in silence.

Presently Eeny looked up.

"How odd it seems to think of her being married."

"Who?"

"Rose. It seems queer, somehow. I don't mind Kate. I heard before ever she came here that she was going to be married; but Rose—I can't realize it."

"I have known it this long time," said Grace. "She told me the day she returned from Ottawa. I am glad she is going to do so well."

"I like him very much," said Eeny; "but he seems too quiet for Rose. Don't he?"

"People like to marry their own opposite," answered Grace. "Not that but Rose is getting remarkably quiet herself. She hadn't a word to say all the evening."

"It will be very lonely when June comes, won't it, Grace?" said Eeny, with a little sigh. "Kate will go to England, Rose to Ottawa, your brother is going to Montreal, and perhaps papa will take his ship again, and there will be no one but you and I, Grace."

Grace stooped down and kissed the delicate, thoughtful young face.

"My dear little Eeny, papa is not going away."

"Isn't he? How do you know?"

"That is a secret," laughing and colouring. "If you won't mention it, I will tell you."

"I won't. What is it?"

Grace stooped and whispered, her falling hair hiding her face.

Eeny sprang up and clasped her hands.

"Oh, Grace!"

"Are you sorry, Eeny?"

Eeny's arms were around her neck. Eeny's lips were kissing her delightedly.

"I am so glad! Oh, Grace, you will never go away any more!"

"Never, my pet. And now, don't let us talk any longer; it is time to go to bed."

Rather to Eeny's surprise, there was no revelation made next morning of the new state of affairs. When she gave her father his good-morning kiss, she only whispered in his ear:

"I am so glad, papa."

And the Captain had smiled, and patted her pale cheek, and sat down to breakfast, talking genially right and left.

After breakfast, Doctor Frank, Mr. Stanford, and M. La Touche, with the big dog Tiger at their heels, and guns over their shoulders, departed for a morning's shooting. Captain Danton went to spend an hour with Mr. Richards. Rose secluded herself with a book in her room, and Kate was left alone. She tried to play, but she was restless that morning, and gave it up. She tried to read. The book failed to interest her. She walked to the window, and looked out at the sunshine glittering on the melting snow.

"I will go for a walk," she thought, "and visit some of my poor people in the village."

She ran up stairs for her hat and shawl, and sallied forth. Her poor people in the village were

always glad to see the beautiful girl who emptied her purse so bountifully for them, and spoke to them so sweetly. She visited half-a-dozen of her pensioners, leaving pleasant words and silver shillings behind her, and then walked on to the Church of St. Croix. The presbytery stood beside it, surrounded by a trim garden with gravelled paths. Kate opened the garden gate, and walked up to where Father Francis stood in the open doorway.

"I have come to see you," she said, "since you won't come to see us. Have you forgotten your friends at Danton Hall? You have not been up for a week."

"Too busy," said Father Francis; "the Curé is in Montreal, and all devolves upon me. Come in."

She followed him into the little parlour, and sat down by the open window.

"And what's the news from Danton Hall?"

"Nothing! Oh!" said Kate, blushing and smiling, "except another wedding!"

"Another! Two more weddings, you mean?"

"No!" said Kate, surprised: "only one. Rose, you know, father, to M. La. Touche!"

Father Francis looked at her a moment smilingly. "They haven't told you, then?"

"What?"

"That your father is going to be married!"

Her heart stood still; the room seemed to swim around in the suddenness of the shock.

"Father Francis!"

"You have not been told? Are you surprised? I have been expecting as much as this for some time."

"You are jesting, Father Francis," she said, finding voice, which for a moment had failed her; "it cannot be true!"

"It is quite true. I saw your father yesterday, and he told me himself."

"And to whom—?"

She tried to finish the sentence, but her rebellious tongue would not.

"To Grace! I am surprised that your father has not told you. If I had dreamed it was in the slightest degree a secret, I certainly would not have spoken." She did not answer.

He glanced at her, and saw that her cheeks and lips had turned ashen white, as she gazed steadfastly out of the window.

"My child," said the priest, "you do not speak. You are not disappointed—you are not grieved?"

She arose to go, still pale with the great and sudden surprise.

"You have given me a great shock in telling me this. I never dreamed of another taking my dear dead mother's place. I am very selfish and unreasonable, I dare say; but I thought papa would have been satisfied to make my home his. I have loved my father very much, and I cannot get used to the idea all in a moment of another taking my place."

She walked to the door. Father Francis followed her.

"One word," he said. "It is in your power, and in your power alone, to make your father seriously unhappy. You have no right to do that; he has been the most indulgent of parents to you. Remember that now—remember how he has never grieved you, and do not grieve him. Can I trust you to do this?"

"You can trust me," said Kate, a little softened. "Good morning."

She walked straight home, her heart all in a rebellious tumult. From the first she had never taken very kindly to Grace; but just now she felt as if she positively hated her.

"How dare she marry him!" she thought, the angry blood hot in her cheeks. "How dare she twine herself, with her quiet, Quakerish ways, into his heart! He is twice her age, and it is only to be mistress where she is servant now that she marries him. Oh, how could papa think of such a thing?"

She found Rose in the drawing-room when she arrived, listening to Eeny with wide-open eyes of wonder. The moment Kate entered, she sprang up, in a high state of excitement.

"Have you heard the news, Kate? Oh, goodness, gracious me! What is the world coming to! Papa is going to be married!"

"I know it," said Kate coldly.

"Who told you? Eeny's just been telling me, and Grace told her last night. It's to Grace! Did you ever! Just fancy calling Grace mamma!"

"I shall never call her anything of the sort."

"You don't like it, then? I told Eeny you wouldn't like it. What are you going to say to papa?"

"Nothing."

"No? Why don't you remonstrate! Tell him he's old enough and big enough to have better sense."

"I shall tell him nothing of the sort; and I beg you will not, either. Papa certainly has the right to do as he pleases. Whether we like it or not, doesn't matter much; Grace Danton will more than supply our places."

She spoke bitterly, and turned to go up to her own room. With her hand on the door, she paused, and looked at Eeny.

"You are pleased, no doubt, Eeny?"

"Yes, I am," replied Eeny, stoutly. "Grace has always been like a mother to me: I am glad she is going to be my mother in reality."

"It is a fortunate thing you do," said Rose, "for you are the only one who will have to put up with her. Thank goodness! I'm going to be married."

"Thank goodness!" repeated Eeny; "there will be peace in the house when you're out of it. I don't know any one I pity half so much as that poor M. La Touche."

Kate saw Rose's angry retort in her eyes, and hurried away from the coming storm. She kept her room until luncheon-time, and she found her father alone in the dining-room when she entered. The anxious look he gave her made her think of Father Francis' words.

"I have heard all, papa," she said, smiling, and holding up her cheek. "I am glad you will be happy when we are gone."

He drew a long breath of relief as he kissed her.

"Father Francis told you? You like Grace?"

"I want to like every one you like, papa," she replied, evasively.

Grace came in as she spoke, and, in spite of herself, Kate's face took that cold, proud look it often wore; but she went up to her with outstretched hand. She never shrank from disagreeable duties.

"Accept my congratulations," she said, frigidly. "I trust you will be happy."

Two deep red spots, very foreign to her usual complexion, burned in Grace's cheeks. Her only answer was a bow, as she took her seat at the table.

It was a most comfortless repast. There was a stiffness, a restraint over all, that would not be shaken off—with one exception. Rose, who latterly had been all in the downs, took heart of grace amid the general gloom, and rattled away like the Rose of other days. To her the idea of her father's marriage was rather a good joke than otherwise. She had no deep feelings to be wounded, no tender memories to be hurt, and the universal embarrassment tickled her considerably.

"You ought to have heard everybody talking on stilts, Reginald," she said, in the flow of her returned spirits, some hours later, when the gentlemen returned. "Kate was on her dignity, you know, and as unapproachable as a princess-royal, and Grace was looking disconcerted and embarrassed, and papa was trying to be preternaturally cheerful and easy, and Eeny was fidgety and scared, and I was enjoying the fun. Did you ever hear of anything so droll as papa's getting married?"

"I never heard of anything more sensible," said Reginald, resolutely. "Grace is the queen of housekeepers, and will make the pink and pattern of matrons. I have foreseen this for some time, and I assure you I am delighted."

"So is Kate," said Rose, her eyes twinkling. "You ought to have seen her congratulating Grace. It was like the entrance of a blast of north wind, and froze us all stiff."

"I am glad June is so near," Kate said, leaning lightly on her lover's shoulder; "I could not stay here and know that she was mistress."

Mr. Stanford did not seem to hear; he was whistling to Tiger, lumbering on the lawn. When he did speak, it was without looking at her.

"I am going to Ottawa next week."

"To Ottawa! With M. La Touche?" asked Kate, while Rose's face flushed up.

"Yes; he wants me to go, and I have said yes. I shall stay until the end of April."

Kate looked at him a little wistfully, but said nothing. Rose turned suddenly, and ran upstairs.

"We shall miss you—I shall miss you," she said at last.

"It will not be for long," he answered, carelessly. "Come in and sing me a song."

The first pang of doubt that had ever crossed Kate's mind of her handsome lover, crossed it now, as she followed him into the drawing-room.

"How careless he is!" she thought; "how willing to leave me! And I—could I be contented anywhere in the world where he was not?"

By some mysterious chance, the song she selected was Eeny's "smile again, my dearest love; weep not that I leave thee."

Stanford listened to it, his sunny face overcast.

"Why did you sing that?" he asked abruptly, when she had done.

"Don't you like it?"

"No; I don't like cynicism set to music. Here is a French chansonnette—sing me that."

Kate sang for him song after song. The momentary pain the announcement of his departure had given her wore away.

"It is natural he should like change," she thought, "and it is dull here. I am glad he is going to Ottawa, and yet I shall miss him. Dear Reginald! What would life be worth without you?"

The period of M. La Touche's stay was rapidly drawing to a close. March was at its end, too—it was the last night of the month. The eve of departure was celebrated at Danton Hall by a social party. The elder Misses Danton on that occasion were as lovely and as much admired as ever, and Messrs. Stanford and La Touche were envied by more than one gentleman present. Grace's engagement to the Captain had got wind, and she shared the interest with her step-daughters-elect.

Early next morning the two young men left. There was breakfast almost before it was light, and everybody got up to see them off. It was a most depressing morning. March had gone out like an idiotic lamb, and April came in in sapping rain and enervating mist. Ceaselessly the rain beat against the window-glass, and the wind had a desolate echo that sounded far more like winter than spring.

Pale, in the dismal morning-light, Kate and Rose Danton bade their lovers adieu, and watched them drive down the dripping avenue and disappear.

An hour before he had come down stairs that morning, Mr. Stanford had written a letter. It was very short:

> "Dear Old Boy:—I'm off. In an hour I shall be on my way to Ottawa, and from thence I will write you next. Do you know why I am going? I am running away from myself! 'Lead us not into temptation;' and Satan seems to have me hard and fast at Danton Hall. Lauderdale, in spite of your bad opinion of me, I don't want to be a villain if I can help it. I don't want to do any harm; I do want to be true! And here it is impossible. I have got intoxicated with flowing curls, and flashing dark eyes, and all the pretty, bewitching, foolish, irresistible ways of that piquant little beauty, whom I have no business under heaven to think of. I know she is silly, and frivolous, and coquettish, and vain; but I love her! There, the murder is out, and I feel better after it. But, withal, I want to be faithful to the girl who loves me (ah! wretch that I am!), and so I fly. A month out of sight of that sweet face—a month out of hearing of that gay, young voice—a month shooting, and riding, and exploring these Canadian wilds, will do me good, and bring me back a new man. At least, I hope so; and don't you set me down as a villain for the next four weeks, at least."

The day of departure was miserably long and dull at the Hall. It rained ceaselessly, and that made it worse. Rose never left her room; her plea was headache. Kate wandered drearily up stairs and down stairs, and felt desolate and forsaken beyond all precedent.

There was a strange, forlorn stillness about the house, as if some one lay dead in it; and from morning to night the wind never ceased its melancholy complaining.

Of course this abnormal state of things could not last. Sunshine came next day, and the young ladies were themselves again. The preparations for the treble wedding must begin in earnest now—shopping, dressmakers, milliners, jewellers, all had to be seen after. A journey to Montreal must be taken immediately, and business commenced. Kate held a long consultation with Rose in her boudoir; but Rose, marvellous to tell, took very little interest in the subject. She, who all her life made dress the great concern of her existence, all at once, in this most important crisis, grew indifferent.

She accompanied Kate to Montreal, however, and helped in the selection of laces, and silks, and flowers, and ribbons; and another dressmaker was hunted up and carried back.

It was a busy time after that; the needles of Agnes Darling, Eunice, and the new dressmaker flew from morning until night. Grace lent her assistance, and Kate was always occupied

superintending, and being fitted and refitted, and had no time to think how lonely the house was, or how much she missed Reginald Stanford. She was happy beyond the power of words to describe; the time was near when they would never part again—when she would be his—his happy, happy wife.

It was all different with Rose; she had changed in a most unaccountable manner. All her movements were languid and listless, she who had been wont to keep the house astir; she took no interest in the bridal dresses and jewellery; she shrank from every one, and wanted to be alone. She grew pale, and thin, and hysterical, and so petulant that it was a risk to speak to her. What was the matter?—every one asked that question, and Grace and Grace's brother were the only two who guessed within a mile of the truth.

And so April wore away. Time, that goes on forever—steadily, steadily, for the happy and the miserable—was bringing the fated time near. The snow had fled, the new grass and fresh buds were green on the lawn and trees, and the birds sang their *glorias* in the branches so lately tossed by the wintry winds.

Doctor Danton was still at St. Croix, but he was going away, too. He had had an interview with Agnes Darling, whose hopes were on the ebb; and once more had tried to engraft his own bright, sanguine nature on hers.

"Never give up, Agnes," he said, cheerily. "Patience, patience yet a little longer. I shall return for my sister's wedding, and I think it will be all right then."

Agnes listened and sighed wearily. The ghost of Danton Hall had been very well behaved of late, and had frightened no one. The initiated knew that Mr. Richards was not very well, and that the night air was considered unhealthy, so he never left his rooms. The tamarack walk was undisturbed in the lonely April nights—at least by all save Doctor Frank, who sometimes chose to haunt the place, but who never saw anything for his pains.

May came—with it came Mr. Stanford, looking sunburned, and fresh, and handsomer than ever. As on the evening of his departure from the Hall, so on the eve of his departure from Ottawa, he had written to that confidential friend:

> "Dear Lauderdale.—The month of probation has expired. To-morrow I return to Danton Hall. Whatever happens, I have done my best. If fate is arbitrary, am I to blame? Look for me in June, and be ready to pay your respects to Mrs. Stanford."

CHAPTER XV.

ONE OF EARTH'S ANGELS.

Mr. Stanford's visit to Ottawa had changed him somehow, it seemed to Kate. The eyes that love us are sharp; the heart that sets us up for its idol is quick to feel every variation. Reginald was changed—vaguely, almost indefinably, but certainly changed. He was more silent than of old, and had got a habit of falling into long brown studies in the midst of the most interesting conversation. He took almost as little interest in the bridal paraphernalia as Rose, and sauntered lazily about the grounds, or lay on the tender new grass under the trees smoking endless cigars, and looking dreamily up at the endless patches of bright blue sky, and thinking, thinking—of what?

Kate saw it, felt it, and was uneasy. Grace saw it, too; for Grace had her suspicions of that fascinating young officer, and watched him closely. They were not very good friends somehow, Grace and Kate Danton; a sort of armed neutrality existed between them, and had ever since Kate had heard of her father's approaching marriage. She had never liked Grace much—she liked her less than ever now. She was marrying her father from the basest and most mercenary motives, and Kate despised her, and was frigidly civil and polite whenever she met her. She took it very quietly, this calm Grace, as she took all things, and was respectful to Miss Danton, as became Miss Danton's father's housekeeper.

"Don't you think Mr. Stanford has altered somehow, Frank, since he went to Ottawa?" she said one day to her brother, as they sat alone together by the dining-room window.

Doctor Danton looked out. Mr. Stanford was sauntering down the avenue, a fishing-rod over his shoulder, and his bride-elect on his arm.

"Altered! How?"

"I don't know how," said Grace, "but he has altered. There is something changed about him; I don't know what. I don't think he is settled in his mind."

"My dear Grace, what are you talking about? Not settled in his mind! A man who is about to marry the handsomest girl in North America?"

"I don't care for that. I wouldn't trust Mr. Reginald Stanford as far as I could see him."

"You wouldn't? But then you are an oddity, Grace. What do you suspect him of?"

"Never mind; my suspicions are my own. One thing I am certain of—he is no more worthy to marry Kate Danton than I am to marry a prince."

"Nonsense! He is as handsome as Apollo, he sings, he dances, and talks divinely. Are you not a little severe, Grace?"

Grace closed her lips.

"We won't talk about it. What do you suppose is the matter with Rose?"

"I wasn't aware there was anything the matter. An excess of happiness, probably; girls like to be married, you know, Grace."

"Fiddlestick! She has grown thin; she mopes in her room all day long, and hasn't a word for anyone—she who used to be the veriest chatterbox alive."

"All very naturally accounted for, my dear. M. La Touche is absent—doubtless she is pining for him."

"Just about as much as I am. I tell you, Frank, I hope things will go right next June, but I don't believe it. Hush! here is Miss Danton."

Miss Danton opened the door, and, seeing who were there, bowed coldly, and retired again. Unjustly enough, the brother came in for part of the aversion she felt for the sister.

Meantime Mr. Stanford sauntered along the village with his fishing-rod, nodding good-humouredly right and left. Short as had been his stay at Danton Hall, he was very well known in the village, and had won golden opinions from all sorts of people. From the black-eyed girls who fell in love with his handsome face, to the urchins rolling in the mud, and to whom he flung handfuls of pennies. The world and Mr. Stanford went remarkably well with each other, and whistling all the way, he reached his destination in half an hour—a clear, silvery stream, shadowed by waving trees and famous in fishing annals. He flung himself down on the turfy sward, lit a cigar, and began smoking and staring reflectively at vacancy.

The afternoon was lovely, warm as June, the sky was cloudless, and the sunlight glittered in golden ripples on the stream. All things were favourable; but Mr. Stanford was evidently not a very enthusiastic disciple of Isaac Walton; for his cigar was smoked out, the stump thrown away, and his fishing-rod lay unused still. He took it up at last and dropped it scientifically in the water.

"It's a bad business," he mused, "and hanging, drawing, and quartering would be too good for me. But what the dickens is a fellow to do? And then she is so fond of me, too—poor little girl!"

He laid the fishing-rod down again, drew from an inner pocket a note-book and pencil. From between the leaves he drew out a sheet of pink-tinted, gilt-edged note paper, and, using the note-book for a desk, began to write. It was a letter, evidently; and after he wrote the first line, he paused, and looked at it with an odd smile. The line was, "Angel of my Dreams."

"I think she will like the style of that," he mused; "it's Frenchified and sentimental, and she rather affects that sort of thing. Poor child! I don't see how I ever got to be so fond of her."

Mr. Stanford went on with his letter. It was in French, and he wrote very slowly and thoughtfully. He filled the four sides, ending with "Wholly thine, Reginald Stanford." Carefully he re-read, made some erasures, folded, and put it in an envelope. As he sealed the envelope, a big dog came bounding down the bank, and poked its cold, black nose inquisitively in his face.

"Ah! Tiger, *mein Herr*, how are you? Where is your master?"

"Here," said Doctor Frank. "Don't let me intrude. Write the address, by all means."

"As if I would put you *au fait* of my love letters," said Mr. Stanford, coolly putting the letter in his note-book, and the note-book in his pocket. "I thought you were off to-day?"

"No, to-morrow. I must be up and doing now; I am about tired of St. Croix and nothing to do."

"Are you ever coming back!"

"Certainly. I shall come back on the fourth of June, Heaven willing, to see you made the happiest man in creation."

"Have a cigar?" said Mr. Stanford, presenting his cigar-case. "I can recommend them. You would be the happiest man in creation in my place, wouldn't you?"

"Most decidedly. But I wasn't born, like some men I know of, with a silver spoon in my mouth. Beautiful wives drop into some men's arms, ripe and ready, but I am not one of them."

"Oh, don't despond! Your turn may come yet!"

"I don't despond—I leave that to—but comparisons are odious."

"Go on."

"To Miss Rose Danton. She is pining on the stem, at the near approach of matrimony, and growing as pale as spirit. What is the matter with her?"

"You ought to know best. You're a doctor."

"But love-sickness; I don't believe there is anything in the whole range of physic to cure that. What's this—a fishing-rod?"

"Yes," said Mr. Stanford, taking a more comfortable position on the grass. "I thought I would try my luck this fine afternoon, but somehow I don't seem to progress very fast."

"I should think not, indeed. Let me see what I can do."

Reginald watched him lazily, as he dropped the line into the placid water.

"What do you think about it yourself?" he asked, after a pause.

"About what?"

"This new alliance on the tapis. He's a very nice little fellow, I have no doubt; but if I were a pretty girl, I don't think I should like nice little fellows. He is just the last sort of a man in the world I could fancy our bright Rose marrying."

"Of course he is! It's a failing of the sex to marry the very last man their friends would expect. But are you quite sure in this case; no April day was ever more changeable than Rose Danton."

"I don't know what you mean. They'll be married to a dead certainty."

"What will you bet on the event?"

"I'm not rich enough to bet; but if I were, it wouldn't be honourable, you know."

Doctor Frank gave him a queer look, as he hooked a fish out of the water.

"Oh, if it becomes a question of honour, I have no more to say. Do you see this fellow wriggling on my hook?"

"Yes."

"Well, when this fish swims again, Rose Danton will be Mrs. La Touche, and you know it."

He said the last words so significantly, and with such a look, that all the blood of all the Stanfords rushed red to Reginald's face.

"The deuce take your inuendoes!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean?"

"Don't ask me," said Doctor Frank. "I hate to tell a lie: and I won't say what I suspect. Suppose we change the subject. Where is Sir Ronald Keith?"

"In New Brunswick, doing the wild-woods and shooting bears. Poor wretch! With all his eight thousand a year, and that paradise in Scotland, Glen Keith, I don't envy him. I never saw anyone so hopelessly hard hit as he."

"You're a fortunate fellow, Stanford; but I doubt if you know it. Sir Ronald would be a far happier man in your place."

The face of the young Englishman darkened suddenly.

"Perhaps there is such a thing as being too fortunate, and getting satiated. I wish I could be steadfast, and firm, and faithful forever to one thing, like some men, but I can't. Sir Ronald's one of that kind, and so are you, Danton; but I—"

He threw his cigar into the water, and left the sentence unfinished. There was a long silence. Doctor Frank fished away as if his life depended on it; and Stanford lay and watched him, and thought—who knows what?

The May afternoon wore on, the slanting lines of the red sunset flamed in the tree-tops, and shed its reflected glory on the placid water. The hum of evening bustle came up from the village drowsily; and Doctor Danton, laying down his line, looked at his watch.

"Are you asleep, Stanford? Do you know it is six o'clock?"

"By George!" said Reginald, starting up. "I had no idea it was so late. Are you for the Hall?"

"Of course. Don't I deserve my dinner in return for this string of silvery fish? Come along."

The two young men walked leisurely and rather silently homeward. As they entered the gates, they caught sight of a young lady advancing slowly towards them—a young lady dressed in pale pink, with ribbons fluttering and curls flowing.

"The first rose of summer!" said Doctor Frank. "The future Madame La Touche!"

"Have you come to meet us, Rose?" asked Stanford. "Very polite of you."

"I won't be *de trop*," said the Doctor; "I'll go on."

Rose turned with Reginald, and Doctor Danton walked away, leaving them to follow at their leisure.

In the entrance Hall he met Kate, stately and beautiful, dressed in rustling silk, and with flowers in her golden hair.

"Have you seen Mr. Stanford?" she asked, glancing askance at the fish.

"Yes; he is in the grounds with Rose."

She smiled, and went past. Doctor Frank looked after her with a glance of unmistakable admiration.

"Blind! blind! blind!" he thought. "What fools men are! Only children of a larger growth, throwing away gold for the pitiful glistening of tinsel."

Kate caught a glimpse of a pink skirt, fluttering in and out among the trees, and made for it. Her light step on the sward gave back no echo. How earnestly Reginald was talking—how consciously Rose was listening with downcast face! What was that he was giving her? A letter! Surely not; and yet how much it looked like it. Another moment, and she was beside them, and Rose had started away from Reginald's side, her face crimson. If ever guilt's red banner hung on any countenance, it did on hers; and Kate's eyes wandered wonderingly from one to the other. Mr. Stanford was as placid as the serene sunset sky above them. Like Talleyrand, if he had been kicked from behind, his face would never have shown it.

"I thought you were away fishing," said Kate. "Was Rose with you?"

"I was not so blessed. I had only Doctor Frank—Oh, don't be in a hurry to leave us; it is not dinner-time yet."

This last to Rose, who was edging off, still the picture of confusion, and one hand clutching something white, hidden in the folds of her dress. With a confused apology, she turned suddenly, and disappeared among the trees. Kate fixed her large, deep eyes suspiciously on her lover's laughing face.

"Well?" she said, inquiringly.

"Well?" he repeated, mimicking her tone.

"What is the meaning of all this?"

Stanford laughed carelessly, and drew her hand within his arm.

"It means, my dear, that pretty sister of yours is a goose! I paid her a compliment, and she blushed after it, at sight of you, as if I had been talking love to her. Come, let us have a walk before dinner."

"I thought I saw you give her something? Was it a letter?"

Not a muscle of his face moved; not a shadow of change was in his tone, as he answered:

"A letter! Of course not. You heard her the other day ask me for that old English song that I sang? I wrote it out this afternoon, and gave it to her. Are you jealous, Kate?"

"Dreadfully! Don't you go paying compliments to Rose, sir; reserve them for me. Come down the tamarack walk."

Leaning fondly on his arm, Kate walked with her lover up and down the green avenue until the dinner-bell summoned them in.

And all the time, Rose, up in her own room, was reading, with flushed cheeks and glistening eyes, that letter written by the brook-side, beginning, "Angel of my Dreams."

When the family assembled at dinner, it was found that Rose was absent. A servant sent in search of her returned with word that Miss Rose had a headache, and begged they would excuse her.

Kate went up to her room immediately after dinner. But found it locked. She rapped, and called, but there was no sign, and no response from within.

"She is asleep," thought Kate; and went down again.

She tried again, some hours later, on her way to her own room, but still was unable to obtain entrance or answer. If she could only have seen her, sitting by the window reading and re-reading that letter in French, beginning "Angel of my Dreams."

Rose came down to breakfast next morning quite well again. The morning's post had brought her a letter from Quebec, and she read it as she sipped her coffee.

"Is it from Virginie Leblanc?" asked Eeny. "She is your only correspondent in Quebec."

Rose nodded and went on reading.

"What does she want?" Eeny persisted.

"She wants me to pay her a visit," said Rose, folding up her letter.

"And of course you won't go?"

"No—yes—I don't know."

She spoke absently, crumbling the roll on her plate, and not eating. She lingered in the room after breakfast, when all the rest had left it, looking out of the window. She was still there when,

half an hour later, Grace came in to sew; but not alone. Mr. Stanford was standing beside her, and Grace caught his last low words:

"It is the most fortunate thing that could have happened. Don't lose any time."

He saw Grace and stopped, spoke to her, and sauntered out of the room. Rose did not turn from the window for fully ten minutes. When she did, it was to ask where her father was.

"In his study."

She left the room and went to the study. Captain Danton looked up from his writing, at her entrance, in some surprise.

"Don't choke me, my dear, what is it?"

"Papa, may I go to Quebec?"

"Quebec? My dear, how can you go?"

"Very easily, papa. Virginie wants me to go, and I should like to see her. I won't stay there long."

"But all your wedding finery, Rose—how is it to be made if you go away?"

"It is nearly all made, papa; and for what remains they can get along just as well without me. Papa, say yes. I want to go dreadfully; and I will only stay a week or so. Do say yes, there's a darling papa!"

"Well, my dear, go, if you wish; but don't forget to come back in time. It will never do for M. La Touche to come here the fourth of June and find his bride missing."

"I won't stay in Quebec until June, papa," said Rose, kissing him and running out of the room. He called after her as she was shutting the door:

"Doctor Frank goes to Montreal this afternoon. If you are ready, you might go with him."

"Yes, papa; I'll be ready."

Rose set to work packing at once, declining all assistance. She filled her trunk with all her favourite dresses; stowed away all her jewellery—taking a very unnecessary amount of luggage, one would think, for a week's visit.

Every one was surprised, at luncheon, when Rose's departure was announced. None more so than Mr. Stanford.

"It is just like Rose!" exclaimed Eeny; "she is everything by starts, and nothing long. Flying off to Quebec for a week, just as she is going to be married, with half her dresses unmade. It's absurd."

The afternoon train for Montreal passed through St. Croix at three o'clock. Kate and Reginald drove to the station with her, and saw her safely seated beside Doctor Frank. Her veil of drab gauze was down over her face, flushed and excited; and she kissed her sister good-bye without lifting it. Reginald Stanford shook hands with her—a long, warm, lingering clasp—and flashed a bright, electric glance that thrilled to her inmost heart. An instant later, and the train was in motion, and Rose was gone.

The morning of the third day after brought a note from Quebec. Rose had arrived safely, and the Leblanc family were delighted to see her. That was all.

That evening, Mr. Stanford made the announcement that he was to depart for Montreal next morning. It was to Kate, of course. She had strolled down to the gate to meet him, in the red light of the sunset, as he came home from a day's gunning. He had taken, of late, to being absent a great deal, fishing and shooting; and those last three days he had been away from breakfast until dinner.

"Going to Montreal?" repeated Kate. "What for?"

"To see a friend of mine—Major Forsyth. He has come over lately, with his wife, and I have just heard of it. Besides, I have a few purchases to make."

He was switching the tremulous spring flowers along the path with his cane, and not looking at her as he spoke.

"How long shall you be gone?"

He laughed.

"Montreal has no charms for me, you know," he replied; "I shall not remain there long, probably not over a week."

"The house will be lonely when you are gone—now that Rose is away."

She sighed a little, saying it. Somehow, a vague feeling of uneasiness had disturbed her of late—something wanting in Reginald—something she could not define, which used to be there and was gone. She did not like this readiness of his to leave her on all occasions. She loved him with such a devoted and entire love, that the shortest parting was to her acutest pain.

"Are you coming in?" he asked, seeing her linger under the trees.

"Not yet; the evening is too fine."

"Then I must leave you. It will hardly be the thing, I suppose, to go to dinner in this shooting-jacket."

He entered the house and ran up to his room. The dinner-bell was ringing before he finished dressing; but when he descended, Kate was still lingering out of doors. He stood by the window watching her, as she came slowly up the lawn. The yellow glory of the sunset made an aureole round her tinseled hair; her slender figure robed in shimmering silk; her motion floating and light. He remembered that picture long afterwards: that Canada landscape, that blue silvery mist filling the air, and the tall, graceful girl, coming slowly homeward, with the fading yellow light in her golden hair.

After dinner, when the moon rose—a crystal-white crescent—they all left the drawing-room for the small hall and portico. Kate, a white shawl on her shoulders, sat on the stone step, and sang, softly, "The Young May Moon;" Mr. Stanford leaned lightly against one of the stone pillars, smoking a cigar, and looking up at the blue, far-off sky, his handsome face pale and still.

"Sing 'When the Swallows Homeward Fly,' Kate," her father said.

She sang the song, softly and a little sadly, with some dim foreshadowing of trouble weighing at her heart. They lingered there until the clock struck ten—Kate's songs and the moonlight charming the hours away. When they went into the house, and took their night-lamps, Stanford bade them good-bye.

"I shall probably be off before any of you open your eyes on this mortal life to-morrow morning," he said, "and so had better say good-bye now."

"You leave by the eight A. M. train, then," said the Captain. "It seems to me everybody is running off just when they ought to stay at home."

Stanford laughed, and shook hands with Grace and Kate—with one as warmly as with the other—and was gone. Kate's face looked pale and sad, as she went slowly upstairs with that dim foreshadowing still at her heart.

Breakfast was awaiting the traveller next morning at half-past seven, when he ran down stairs, ready for his journey. More than breakfast was waiting. Kate stood by the window, looking out drearily at the matinal sunlight.

"Up so early, Kate?" her lover said, with an expression of rapture. "Why did you take the trouble?"

"It was no trouble," Kate said, slowly, feeling cold and strange.

He sat down to table, but only drank a cup of coffee. As he arose, Captain Danton and Grace came in.

"We got up betimes to see you off," said the Captain. "A delightful morning for your journey. There is Sam with the gig now. Look sharp, Reginald; only fifteen minutes left."

Reginald snatched up his overcoat.

"Good-bye," he said, hurriedly shaking hands with the Captain, then with Grace. Kate, standing by the window, never turned round. He went up to her, very, very pale, as they all remembered afterward, holding out his hand.

"Good-bye, Kate."

The hand she gave him was icy cold, her face perfectly colourless. The cold fingers lingered around his for a moment; the deep, clear, violet eyes were fixed wistfully on his face. That was her only good-bye—she did not speak. In another moment he was out of the house; in another he was riding rapidly down the avenue; in another he was gone—and forever.

CHAPTER XVI.

EPISTOLARY.

[From Madame Leblanc to Captain Danton.]

Quebec, May 17, 18—.

Dear Sir:—I write to you in the utmost distress and confusion of mind. I hardly know how to break to you the news it is my painful duty to reveal, lest some blame should attach itself to me or mine, where I assure you none is deserved. Your daughter Rose has left us—run away; in fact, I believe, eloped. I have reason to think she was married yesterday; but to whom I have not yet discovered. I beg to

assure you, Captain Danton, that neither I nor any one in my house had the remotest idea of her intention; and we are all in the greatest consternation since the discovery has been made. I would not for worlds such a thing had happened under my roof, and I earnestly trust you will not hold me to blame.

Six days ago, on the afternoon of the 11th, your daughter arrived here. We were all delighted to see her, Virginie in particular; for, hearing of her approaching marriage with M. La Touche, we were afraid she might not come. We all noticed a change in her—her manner different from what it used to be—a languor, an apathy to all things—a general listlessness that nothing could arouse her from. She, who used to be so full of life and spirits, was now the quietest in the house, and seemed to like nothing so well as being by herself and dreaming the hours away. On the evening of the third day this lassitude left her. She grew restless and nervous—almost feverishly so. Next morning this feverish restlessness grew worse. She refused to leave the house in the afternoon to accompany my daughter on a shopping expedition. Her plea was toothache, and Virginie went alone. The early afternoon post brought her what I believe she was waiting for—a letter. She ran up with it to her own room, which she did not leave until dusk. I was standing in the entrance-hall when she came down, dressed for a walk, and wearing a veil over her face. I asked her where she was going. She answered for a walk, it might help her toothache. An hour afterward Virginie returned. Her first question was for Rose. I informed her she was gone out.

"Then," exclaimed Virginie, "it must have been Rose that I met in the next street, walking with a gentleman. I thought the dress and figure were hers, but I could not see her face for a thick veil. The gentleman was tall and dark, and very handsome."

Half an hour later, Rose came back. We teased her a little about the gentleman; but she put it off quite indifferently, saying he was an acquaintance she had encountered in the street, and that she had promised to go with him next morning to call on a lady-friend of hers, a Mrs. Major Forsyth. We thought no more about it; and next morning, when the gentleman called in a carriage, Rose was quite ready, and went away with him. It was then about eleven o'clock, and she did not return until five in the afternoon. Her face was flushed, her manner excited, and she broke away from Virginie and ran up to her room. All the evening her manner was most unaccountably altered, her spirits extravagantly high, and colour like fever in her face. She and Virginie shared the same room, and when they went upstairs for the night, she would not go to bed.

"You can go," she said to Virginie; "I have a long letter to write, and you must not talk to me, dear."

Virginie went to bed. She is a very sound sleeper, and rarely wakes, when she lies down, until morning. She fell asleep, and never awoke all night. It was morning when she opened her eyes. She was alone. Rose was neither in the bed nor in the room.

Virginie thought nothing of it. She got up, dressed, came down to breakfast, expecting to find Rose before her. Rose was not before her—she was not in the house. We waited breakfast until ten, anxiously looking for her; but she never came. None of the servants had seen her, but that she had gone out very early was evident; for the house-door was unlocked and unbolted, when the kitchen-girl came down at six in the morning. We waited all the forenoon, but she never came. Our anxiety trebly increased when we made the discovery that she had taken her trunk with her. How she had got it out of the house was the profoundest mystery. We questioned the servants; but they all denied stoutly. Whether to believe them or not I cannot tell, but I doubt the housemaid.

The early afternoon post brought Virginie a note. I inclose it. It tells you all I can tell. I write immediately, distressed by what has occurred, more than I can say. I earnestly trust the poor child has not thrown herself away. I hope with all my heart it may not be so bad as at first sight if seems. Believe me my dear sir, truly sorry for what has occurred, and I trust you will acquit me of blame.

With the deepest sympathy, I remain,

Yours, sincerely,
MATHILDE LEBLANC.

[Miss ROSE DANTON to Mlle. VIRGINIE LEBLANC. Inclosed in the preceding.]

WEDNESDAY NIGHT.

MY DARLING VIRGINIE:—When you read this, we shall have parted—perhaps forever. My pet, I am married! To-day, when I drove away, it was not to call on Mrs. Major

Forsyth, but be married. Oh, my dearest, dearest Virginie, I am so happy, so blessed—so—so—oh! I can't tell you of my unutterable joy! I am going away to-night, in half an hour. I shall kiss you good-bye as you sleep. In a day or two I leave Canada forever, to be happy, beyond the power of words to describe, in another land. Adieu, my pet. If we never meet, don't forget your happy, happy ROSE.

[Miss GRACE DANTON to DOCTOR FRANK DANTON.]

DANTON HALL, May 21, 18—.

MY DEAR FRANK:—Do you recollect your last words to me as you left St. Croix: "Write to me, Grace. I think you will have news to send me before long." Had you, as I had, a presentment of what was to come? My worst forebodings are realized. Rose has eloped. Reginald Stanford is a villain. They are married. There are no positive proofs as yet, but I am morally certain of the fact. I have long suspected that he admired that frivolous Rose more than he had any right to do, but I hardly thought it would come to this. Heaven forgive them, and Heaven pity Kate, who loved them both so well! She knows nothing of the matter as yet. I dread the time when the truth will be revealed.

The morning of the 19th brought Captain Danton a letter from Quebec, in a strange hand. It came after breakfast, and I carried it myself into his study. I returned to the dining-room before he opened it, and sat down to work; but in about fifteen minutes the Captain came in, his face flushed, his manner more agitated and excited than I had ever seen it. "Read that," was all that he could say, thrusting the open letter into my hand. No wonder he was agitated. It was from Madam Leblanc, and contained the news that Rose had made a clandestine marriage, and was gone, no one knew where.

Inclosed there was a short and rapturous note from Rose herself, saying that she had been married that day, and was blessed beyond the power of words to describe, and was on the point of leaving Canada forever. She did not give her new name. She said nothing of her husband, but that she loved him passionately. There was but one name mentioned in the letter, that of a Mrs. Major Forsyth, whom she left home ostensibly to visit.

From the moment I read the letter, I had no doubt to whom she was married. Three days after Rose's departure for Quebec, Mr. Stanford left us for Montreal. He was only to be absent a week. The week has nearly expired, and there is no news of him. I knew instantly, as I have said, with whom Rose had run away; but as I looked up, I saw no shadow of a suspicion of the truth in Captain Danton's face.

"What does it mean?" he asked, with a bewildered look. "I can't understand it. Can you?"

There was no use in disguising the truth; sooner or later he must find it out.

"I think I can," I answered. "I believe Rose left here for the very purpose she has accomplished, and not to visit Virginie Leblanc."

"You believe that letter, then?"

"Yes: I fear it is too true."

"But, heavens above! What would she elope for? We were all willing she should marry La Touche."

"I don't think it is with M. La Touche," I said, reluctantly. "I wish it were. I am afraid it is worse than that."

He stood looking at me, waiting, too agitated to speak. I told him the worst at once.

"I am afraid it is with Reginald Stanford."

"Grace," he said, looking utterly confounded, "what do you mean?"

I made him sit down, and told him what perhaps I should have told him long ago, my suspicions of that young Englishman. I told him I was certain Rose had been his daily visitor during those three weeks' illness up the village; that she had been passionately in love with him from the first, and that he was a villain and a traitor. A thousand things, too slight to recapitulate, but all tending to the same end, convinced me of it. He was changeful by nature. Rose's pretty piquant beauty bewitched him; and this was the end.

"I hope I may be mistaken," I said; "for Kate's sake I hope so, for she loves him with a love of which he is totally unworthy; but, I confess, I doubt it."

I cannot describe to you the anger of Captain Danton, and I pray I may never witness the like again. When men like him, quiet and good-natured by habit, do get into a passion, the passion is terrible indeed.

"The villain!" he cried, through his clenched teeth. "The cruel villain! I'll shoot him like a dog!"

I was frightened. I quail even now at the recollection, and the dread of what may come. I tried to quiet him, but in vain; he shook me off like a child.

"Let me, alone, Grace!" he said, passionately. "I shall never rest until I have sent a bullet through his brain!"

It was then half-past eleven; the train for Montreal passed through St. Croix at twelve. Captain Danton went out, and ordered round his gig, in a tone that made the stable-boy stare. I followed him to his room, and found him putting his pistols in his coat-pocket. I asked him where he was going, almost afraid to speak to him, his face was so changed.

"To Montreal first," was his answer; "to look for that matchless scoundrel; afterwards to Quebec, to blow out his brains, and those of my shameful daughter!"

I begged, I entreated, I cried. It was all useless. He would not listen to me; but he grew quieter.

"Don't tell Kate," he said. "I won't see her; say I have gone upon business. If I find Stanford in Montreal, I will come back. Rose may go to perdition her own way. If I don't—" He paused, his face turning livid. "If I don't, I'll send you a despatch to say I have left for Quebec."

He ran down-stairs without saying good-bye, jumped into the gig, and drove off. I was so agitated that I dared not go down stairs when luncheon-hour came. Eeny came up immediately after, and asked me if I was ill. I pleaded a headache as an excuse for remaining in my room all day, for I dreaded meeting Kate. Those deep, clear eyes of hers seem to have a way of reading one's very thoughts, and seeing through all falsehoods. Eeny's next question was for her father. I said he had gone to Montreal on sudden business, and I did not know when he would return—probably soon.

She went down-stairs to tell Kate, and I kept my chamber till the afternoon. I went down to dinner, calm once more. It was unspeakably dull and dreary, we three alone, where a few days ago we were so many. No one came all evening, and the hours wore away, long, and lonely, and silent. We were all oppressed and dismal. I hardly dared to look at Kate, who sat playing softly in the dim piano-recess.

This morning brought me the dreaded despatch. Captain Danton had gone to Quebec; Mr. Stanford was not in Montreal.

I cannot describe to you how I passed yesterday. I never was so miserable in all my life. It went to my heart to see Kate so happy and busy with the dressmakers, giving orders about those wedding-garments she is never to wear. It was a day of unutterable wretchedness, and the evening was as dull and dreary as its predecessor. Father Francis came up for an hour, and his sharp eyes detected the trouble in my face. I would have told him if Kate had not been there; but it was impossible, and I had to prevaricate.

This morning has brought no news; the suspense is horrible. Heaven help Kate! I can write no more.

Your affectionate sister,

GRACE DANTON.

[Lieutenant R. R. STANFORD to Major LAUDERDALE.]

QUEBEC, May 17.

DEAR LAUDERDALE:—The deed is done, the game is up, the play is played out—Reginald Reinecourt Stanford is a married man.

You have read, when a guileless little chap in roundabouts, "The Children of the Abbey," and other tales of like kidney. They were romantic and sentimental, weren't they? Well, old fellow, not one of them was half so romantic or sentimental as this marriage of mine. There were villains in them, too—Colonel Belgrave, and so forth—black-hearted monsters, without one redeeming trait. I tell you, Lauderdale, none of these unmitigated rascals were half so bad as I am. Think of me at my worst, a scoundrel of the deepest dye, and you will about hit the mark. My dear little, pretty little Rose is not much better; but she is such a sweet little

sinner, that—in short, I don't want her to reform. I am in a state of indescribable beatitude, of course—only two days wedded—and immersed in the joys of *la lune de miel*. Forsyth—you know Forsyth, of "Ours"—was my aider and abettor, accompanied by Mrs. F. He made a runaway match himself, and is always on hand to help fellow-sufferers; on the ground, I suppose, that misery loves company.

To-morrow we sail in the Amphitrite for Southampton. It won't do to linger, for my papa-in-law is a dead shot. When I see you, I'll tell you all about it. Until then, adieu and *au revoir*.

REGINALD STANFORD.

[Mrs. REGINALD STANFORD to GRACE DANTON.]

QUEBEC, May 18.

DEAR MAMMA GRACE:—I suppose, before this, you have heard the awful news that my Darling Reginald and I got married. Wouldn't I like to see you as you read this? Don't I know that virtuous scowl of yours so well, my precious mamma-in-law? Oh, you dear old prude, it's so nice to be married, and Reginald is an angel! I love him so much, and I am so happy; I never was half so happy in my life.

I suppose Madame Leblanc sent you the full, true, and particular account of my going on. Poor old soul! What a rare fright she must have got when she found out I was missing. And Virginie, too. Virginie was so jealous to think I was going to be married before her, as if I would ever have married that insipid Jules. How I wish my darling Reginald had his fortune; but fortune or no fortune, I love him with all my heart, and am going to be just as happy as the day is long.

I dare-say Kate is furious, and saying all kinds of hard things about me. It is not fair if she is. I could not help Reginald's liking me better than her, and I should have died if I had not got him. There! I feel very sorry for her, though; I know how I should feel if I lost him, and I dare say she feels almost as bad. Let her take Jules. Poor Jules, I expect he will break his heart, and I shall be shocked and disappointed if he does not. Let her take him. He is rich and good-looking; and all those lovely wedding-clothes will not go to waste. Ah! how sorry I am to leave them behind; but it can't be helped. We are off to-morrow for England. I shall not feel safe until the ocean is between us and papa. I suppose papa is very angry; but where is the use? As long as Reginald marries one of his daughters, I should think the particular one would be immaterial.

I am sorry I cannot be present at your wedding, Grace; I give you *carte blanche* to wear all the pretty things made for Mrs. Jules La Touche, if they will fit you. Tell poor Jules, when he comes, that I am sorry; but I loved Reginald so much that I could not help it. Isn't he divinely handsome, Grace? If he knew I was writing to you, he would send his love, so take it for granted.

I should like to write more, but I am going on board in an hour. Please tell Kate not to break her heart. It's of no use.

Give my regard to that obliging brother of yours. I like him very much. Perhaps I may write to you from England if you will not be disagreeable, and will answer. I should like to hear the news from Canada and Danton Hall. Rapturously thine,

ROSE STANFORD.

[GRACE DANTON to DR. DANTON.]

DANTON HALL, May 30.

DEAR FRANK:—"Man proposes—" You know the proverb, which holds good in the case of women too. I know my prolonged silence must have surprised you; but I have been so worried and anxious, of late, that writing has become an impossibility. Danton Hall has become a *maison de deuil*—a house of mourning indeed. I look back as people look back on some dim, delightful dream to the days that are gone, and wonder if indeed we were so merry and gay. The silence of the grave reigns here now. The laughter, the music—all the merry sounds of a happy household—have fled forever. A convent of ascetic nuns could not be stiller, nor the holy sisterhood more grave and sombre. Let me begin at the beginning, and relate events as they occurred, if I can.

The day after I wrote you last brought the first event, in the shape of a letter from Rose to myself. A more thoroughly selfish and heartless epistle could not have

been penned. I always knew her to be selfish, and frivolous, vain, and silly to the backbone—yea, backbone and all; but still I had a sort of liking for her withal. That letter effectually dispelled any lingering remains of that weakness. It spoke of her marriage with Reginald Stanford in the most shamelessly insolent and exultant tone. It alluded to her sister and to poor Jules La Touche in a way that brought the "bitter bad" blood of the old Dantons to my face. Oh, if I could have but laid my hands on Mistress Rose at that moment, quiet as I am, I think I would have made her ears tingle as they never tingled before.

I said nothing of the letter. My greatest anxiety now was lest Captain Danton and Mr. Stanford should meet. I was in a state of feverish anxiety all day, which even Kate noticed. You know she never liked me, and latterly her aversion has deepened, though Heaven knows, without any cause on my part, and she avoided me as much as she possibly could without discourtesy. She inquired, however, if anything had happened—if I had bad news from her father, and looked at me in a puzzled manner when I answered "No." I could not look at her; I could hardly speak to her; somehow I felt about as guilty concealing the truth as if I had been in the vile plot that had destroyed her happiness.

Father Francis came up in the course of the day; and when he was leaving, I called him into the library, and told him the truth. I cannot tell you how shocked he was at Rose's perfidy, or how distressed for Kate's sake. He agreed with me that it was best to say nothing until Captain Danton's return.

He came that night. It was late—nearly eleven o'clock, and I and Thomas were the only ones up. Thomas admitted him; and I shall never forget how worn, and pale, and haggard he looked as he came in.

"It was too late, Grace," were his first words. "They have gone."

"Thank Heaven!" I exclaimed. "Thank Heaven you have not met them, and that there is no blood shed. Oh, believe me, it is better as it is."

"Does Kate know?" he asked.

"Not yet. No one knows but Father Francis. He thought as I did, that it was better to wait until you returned."

"My poor child! My poor Kate!" he said, in a broken voice, "who will tell you this?"

He was so distressed that I knelt down beside him, and tried to sooth and comfort him.

"Father Francis will," I said. "She venerates and esteems him more highly than any other living being, and his influence over her is greater. Let Father Francis tell her to-morrow."

Captain Danton agreed that that was the very best thing that could be done, and soon after retired.

I went to my room, too, but not to sleep. I was too miserably anxious about the morrow. The night was lovely—bright as day and warm as midsummer. I sat by the window looking out, and saw Kate walking up and down the tamarack avenue with that mysterious Mr. Richards. They lingered there for over an hour, and then I heard them coming softly upstairs, and going to their respective rooms.

Next morning after breakfast, Captain Danton rode down to the village and had an interview with Father Francis. Two hours after, they returned to Danton Hall together, both looking pale and ill at ease. Kate and I were in the drawing-room—she practising a new song, I sewing. We both rose at their entrance—she gayly; I with my heart beating thick and fast.

"I am glad the beauty of the day tempted you out, Father Francis," she said. "I wish our wanderers would come back. Danton Hall has been as gloomy as an old bastille lately."

I don't know what Father Francis said. I know he looked as though the errand he had come to fulfil were unspeakably distasteful to him.

"Reginald ought to be home to-day," Kate said, walking to the window, "and Rose next week. It seems like a century since they went away."

I could wait for no more—I hurried out of the room—crying, I am afraid. Before I could go upstairs, Captain Danton joined me in the hall.

"Don't go," he said, hoarsely; "wait here. You may be wanted."

My heart seemed to stand still in vague apprehension of—I hardly know what. We stood there together waiting, as the few friends who loved the ill-fated Scottish Queen so well, may have stood when she laid her head on the block. I looked at that closed door with a mute terror of what was passing within—every nerve strained to hear the poor tortured girl's cry of anguish. No such cry ever came. We

waited ten, fifteen, twenty minutes, half an hour, an hour, before that closed door opened. We shrank away, but it was only Father Francis, very pale and sad. Our eyes asked the question our tongues would not utter.

"She knows all," he said, in a tremulous voice; "she has taken it very quietly—too quietly. She has alarmed me—that unnatural calm is more distressing than the wildest outburst of weeping."

"Shall we go to her?" asked her father.

"I think not—I think she is better alone. Don't disturb her to-day. I will come up again this evening."

"What did she say?" I asked.

"Very little. She seemed stunned, as people are stunned by a sudden blow. Don't linger here; she will probably be going up to her room, and may not like to think you are watching her."

Father Francis went away. Captain Danton retired to his study. I remained in the recess, which you know is opposite the drawing-room, with the door ajar. I wished to prevent Eeny or any of the servants from disturbing her by suddenly entering. About an hour after, the door opened, and she came out and went slowly upstairs. I caught a glimpse of her face as she passed, and it had turned to the pallor of death. I heard her enter the room and lock the door, and I believe I sat and cried all the morning.

She did not come down all day. I called in Eeny, and told her what had happened, and shocked the poor child as she was never shocked before. At dinner-time I sent her upstairs, to see if Kate would not take some refreshment. Her knocking and calling remained unanswered. She left in despair, and Kate never came down.

Another sleepless night—another anxious morning. About eight o'clock I heard Kate's bell ring, and Eunice go upstairs. Presently the girl ran down and entered the room where I was.

"If you please, Miss Grace, Miss Kate wants you," said Eunice, with a scared face; "and oh, Miss, I think she's ill, she do look so bad!"

Wanted me! I dropped the silver I was holding, in sheer affright. What could she want of me? I went upstairs, my heart almost choking me with its rapid throbbing, and rapped at the door.

She opened it herself. Well might Eunice think her ill. One night had wrought such change as I never thought a night could work before. She had evidently never lain down. She wore the dress of yesterday, and I could see the bed in the inner room undisturbed. Her face was so awfully corpse-like, her eyes so haggard and sunken, her beauty so mysteriously gone, that I shrank before her as if it had been the spectre of the bright, beautiful, radiant Kate Danton. She leaned against the low mantelpiece, and motioned me forward with a cold, fixed look.

"You are aware," she said, in a hard, icy voice—oh so unlike the sweet tones of only yesterday—"what Father Francis came here yesterday to say. You and my father might have told me sooner; but I blame nobody. What I want to say is this: From this hour I never wish to hear from anyone the slightest allusion to the past; I never want to hear the names of those who are gone. I desire you to tell this to my father and sister. Your influence over them is greater than mine."

I bowed assent without looking up; I could feel the icy stare with which she was regarding me, without lifting my eyes.

"Father Francis mentioned a letter that R——"; she hesitated for a moment, and finally said—"that she sent you. Will you let me see it?"

That cruel, heartless, insulting letter! I looked up imploringly, with clasped hands.

"Pray don't," I said. "Oh, pray don't ask me! It is unworthy of notice—it will only hurt you more deeply still."

She held out her hand steadily.

"Will you let me see it?"

What could I do? I took the letter from my pocket, bitterly regretting that I had not destroyed it, and handed it to her.

"Thank you."

She walked to the window, and with her back to me read it through—read it more than once, I should judge, by the length of time it took her. When she faced me again, there was no sign of change in her face.

"Is this letter of any use to you? Do you want it?"

"No! I only wish I had destroyed it long ago!"

"Then, with your permission, I will keep it."

"You!" I cried in consternation. "What can you want with that?"

A strange sort of look passed across her face, darkening it, and she held it tightly in her grasp.

"I want to keep it for a very good reason," she said, between her teeth; "if I ever forget the good turn Rose Danton has done me, this letter will serve to remind me of it."

I was so frightened by her look, and tone, and words, that I could not speak. She saw it, and grew composed again instantly.

"I need not detain you any longer," she said, looking at her watch. "I have no more to say. You can tell my father and sister what I have told you. I will go down to breakfast, and I am much obliged to you."

She turned from me and went back to the window. I left the room deeply distressed, and sought the dining-room, where I found the Captain and Eeny. I related the whole interview, and impressed upon them the necessity of obeying her. The breakfast-bell rang while we were talking, and she came in.

Both Eeny and her father were as much shocked as I had been by the haggard change in her; but neither spoke of it to her. We tried to be at our ease during breakfast, and to talk naturally; but the effort was a miserable failure. She never spoke, except when directly addressed, and ate nothing. She sat down to the piano, as usual, after breakfast, and practised steadily for two hours. Then she took her hat and a book, and went out to the garden to read. At luncheon-time she returned, with no better appetite, and after that went up to Mr. Richards' room. She stayed with him two or three hours, and then sat down to her embroidery-frame, still cold, and impassionate, and silent. Father Francis came up in the evening; but she was cold and unsocial with him as with the rest of us. So that first day ended, and so every day has gone on since. What she suffers, she suffers in solitude and silence; only her worn face, haggard cheeks, and hollow eyes tell. She goes through the usual routine of life with treadmill regularity, and is growing as thin as a shadow. She neither eats, nor sleeps, nor complains; and she is killing herself by inches. We are worried to-death about her; and yet we are afraid to say one word in her hearing. Come to us, Frank; you are a physician, and though you cannot "minister to a mind diseased," you can at least tell us what will help her failing body. Your presence will do Captain Danton good, too; for I never saw him so miserable! We are all most unhappy, and any addition to our family circle will be for the better. We do not go out; we have few visitors; and the place is as lonely as a tomb. The gossip and scandal have spread like wildfire; the story is in everybody's mouth; even in the newspapers. Heaven forbid it should come to Kate's ears! This stony calm of hers is not to be trusted. It frightens me far more than any hysterical burst of sorrow. She has evidently some deep purpose in her mind—I am afraid to think it may be of revenge. Come to us, brother, and try if you can help us in our trouble.

Your affectionate sister,
GRACE.

CHAPTER XVII.

"SHE TOOK UP THE BURDEN OF LIFE AGAIN."

The second train from Montreal passing through St. Croix on its way to—somewhere else, was late in the afternoon of the fifth of June. Instead of shrieking into the village depot at four P.M., it was six when it arrived, and halted about a minute and a half to let the passengers out and take passengers in. Few got in and fewer got out—a sunburnt old Frenchman, a wizen little Frenchwoman, and their pretty, dark-skinned, black-eyed daughter; and a young man, who was tall and fair, and good-looking and gentlemanly, and not a Frenchman, judging by his looks. But, although he did not look like one, he could talk like one, and had kept up an animated discussion with pretty dark eyes in capital Canadian French for the last hour. He lifted his hat politely now, with "*Bon jour, Mademoiselle*," and walked away through the main street of the village.

It was a glorious summer evening. "The western sky was all aflame" with the gorgeous hues of the sunset; the air was like amber mist, and the shrill-voiced Canadian birds, with their gaudy plumage, sang their vesper laudates high in the green gloom of the feathery tamaracks.

A lovely evening with the soft hum of village life, the distant tinkling cow-bells, the songs of boys and girls driving them home, far and faint, and now and then the rumbling of cart-wheels on the

dusty road. The fields on either hand stretching as far as the eye could reach, green as velvet; the giant trees rustling softly in the faint, sweet breeze; the flowers bright all along the hedges, and over all the golden glory of the summer sunset.

The young man walked very leisurely along, swinging his light rattan. Wild roses and sweetbrier sent up their evening incense to the radiant sky. The young man lit a cigar, and sent up its incense too.

He left the village behind him presently, and turned off by the pleasant road leading to Danton Hall. Ten minutes brought him to it, changed since he had seen it last. The pines, the cedars, the tamaracks were all out in their summer-dress of living green; the flower-gardens were aflame with flowers, the orchard was white with blossoms, and the red light of the sunset was reflected with mimic glory in the still, broad fish-pond. Climbing roses and honeysuckles trailed their fragrant branches round the grim stone pillars of the portico. Windows and doors stood wide to admit the cool, rising breeze; and a big dog, that had gambolled up all the way, set up a bass bark of recognition. No living thing was to be seen in or around the house; but, at the sound of the bark, a face looked out from a window, about waist-high from the lawn. The window was open, and the sweetbrier and the rose-vines made a very pretty frame for the delicate young face. A pale and pensive face, lit with luminous dark eyes, and shaded by soft, dark hair.

The young man walked up, and rested his arm on the low sill.

"Good-evening, Agnes."

Agnes Darling held out her hand, with a look of bright pleasure.

"I am glad to see you again, Doctor Danton; and Tiger, too."

"Thanks. I thought I should find you sewing here. Have you ever left off, night or day, since I left?"

She smiled, and resumed her work.

"I like to be busy; it keeps me from thinking. Not that I have been very busy of late."

"Of course not; the wedding-garments weren't wanted, were they? and all the trousseaux vanity and vexation of spirit. You see others in the world came to grief besides yourself, Miss Darling. Am I expected?"

"Yes; a week ago."

"Who's in the house?"

"I don't know exactly. Miss Danton is in the orchard, I think, with a book; Eeny is away for the day at Miss Howard's and the Captain went up the village an hour ago. I dare say they will all be back for dinner."

Doctor Frank took another position on the window-sill, and leaned forward, saying with a lowered voice:

"And how does the ghost get on, Agnes? Has it made its appearance since?"

Agnes Darling dropped her work, and looked up at him, with clasped hands.

"Doctor Danton, I have seen him!"

"Whom? The ghost?"

"No ghost; but my husband. It was Harry as plainly as ever I saw him."

She spoke in a voice of intense agitation; but the young Doctor listened with perfect coolness.

"How was it, Agnes? Where did you see him?"

"Walking in the tamarack avenue, one moonlight night, about a week ago, with Miss Danton."

"And you are positive it was your husband?"

"Do you think I could make a mistake in such a matter? It was Harry—I saw him clearly in the moonlight."

"It's surprising you did not run out, and fall down in hysterics at his feet."

She sighed wearily.

"No. I dared not. But, oh, Doctor Danton, when shall I see him? When will you tell him I am innocent?"

"Not just yet; it won't do to hurry matters in this case. You have waited long and patiently; wait yet a little longer until the right time comes. The happiness of knowing he is alive and well, and dwelling under the same roof with you should reconcile you to that."

"It does," she said, her tears falling softly. "Thank Heaven! he still lives. I can hope now; but, oh, Doctor, do you really think him Captain Danton's son?"

"I am certain of it; and no one will give you a more cordial welcome than Captain Danton, when I

tell him the truth. Just now I have no proof. Do you know what I am going to do, Agnes?"

"No."

"Crosby is married, and living in New York. I mean to take a journey to New York shortly, and get a written declaration of your innocence from him. There—no thanks now. Keep up a good heart, and wait patiently for a month or two longer. Come, Tiger."

He was gone, whistling a tune as he went. The entrance hall was deserted, the dining-room was empty, and he ran up stairs to the drawing-room. Grace was there with her back to the door; and coming up noiselessly, he put his arm around her waist, and kissed her before she was aware.

She faced about, with a little cry, that changed to an exclamation of delight, upon seeing who it was.

"Oh, Frank! I am so glad! When did you come? I expected you a week ago."

"I know it," said her brother; "and I could have come too; but it struck me I should like to arrive to-day."

"To-day! Why? Oh, I forgot the fifth of June. It is hard, Frank, isn't it, just to think what might have been and what is."

"How does she take it?"

"She has been out nearly all day," replied Grace, knowing whom he meant; "she feels it, of course, more than words can tell; but she never betrays herself by look or action. I have never seen her shed a tear, or utter one desponding word, from the day the news reached her until this. Her face shows what she suffers, and that is beyond her power to control."

Doctor Frank walked thoughtfully to the window, and looked out at the fading brilliance of the sunset. A moment later, and Eeny rode up on horseback, sprang out other saddle on the lawn, and tripped up the steps.

Another moment, and she was in the drawing-room.

"I saw you at the window," she said. "I am glad you have come back again. Danton Hall is too dismal to be described of late. Ah! Dear old Tiger, and how are you? Doctor Frank," lowering her voice, "do you know what day this is?"

Doctor Frank looked at her with a faint shadow of a smile on his face, humming a line or two of a ballad.

"'Long have I been true to you. Now I'm true no longer.' Too bad, Eeny, we should lose the wedding, and one wedding, they say, makes many."

"Too bad!" echoed Eeny, indignantly. "Oh, Doctor Frank, it was cruel of Rose, wasn't it? You would hardly know poor Kate now."

"Hush!" said the Doctor, "here she comes!"

A tall, slender figure came out from the orchard path, book in hand, and advanced slowly towards the house. Was it the ghost, the wraith, the shadow of beautiful Kate Danton? The lovely golden hair, glittering in the dying radiance of the sunset, and coiled in shining twists round the head, was the same; the deep large eyes, so darkly blue, were clear and cloudless as ever, and yet changed totally in expression. The queenly grace that always characterized her, characterized her still; but how wasted the supple form, how shadowy and frail it had grown. The haggard change in the pale face, the nervous contraction of the mouth, the sunken eyes, with those dark circles, told their eloquent tale.

"Poor child!" Doctor Frank said, with a look of unspeakable pity and tenderness; "it was cruel!"

Eeny ran away to change her dress. Grace lightly dusted the furniture, and her brother stood by the window and watched that fragile-looking girl coming slowly up through the amber air.

"How tired she looks!" he said.

"Kate?" said Grace, coming over. "She is always like that now. Tired at getting up, tired at lying down, listless and apathetic always. If Reginald Stanford had murdered her, it would hardly have been a more wicked act."

Her brother did not reply.

A few minutes later, Kate walked into the room, still with that slow, weary step. She looked at the new-comer with listless indifference, spoke a few words of greeting with cold apathy, and then retreated to another window, and bent her eyes on her book.

Captain Danton returned just as the dinner-bell was ringing; and his welcome made up in cordiality what his daughter's lacked. He, too, had changed. His florid face had lost much of its colour, and was grown thin, and his eyes were ever wandering, with a look of mournful tenderness, to his pale daughter.

They were all rather silent. Grace and her brother and the Captain talked in a desultory sort of way during dinner; but Kate never spoke, except when directly addressed, and silence was Eeny's

forte. She sat down to the piano after dinner, according to her invariable custom, but not to sing. She had never sung since that day. How could she? There was not a song in all her collection that did not bring the anguish of some recollection of him, so she only played brilliant new, soulless fantasias, that were as empty as her heart.

When she arose from the instrument, she resumed her book and sat down at a table studiously; but Doctor Frank, watching her covertly, saw she did not turn over a page in an hour. She was the first to retire—very early, looking pale and jaded to death. Half an hour later, Eeny followed her, and then Captain Danton pushed away the chess-board impatiently. He had been playing with the Doctor, and began pacing feverishly up and down the room.

"What shall I do with her?" he exclaimed. "What shall I do to keep my darling girl from dying before my eyes? Doctor Danton, you are a physician; tell me what I shall do?"

"Take her away from here," said the Doctor, emphatically. "It is this place that is killing her. How can it be otherwise? Everything she sees from morning till night brings back a thousand bitter recollections of what is past and gone. Take her away, where there will be nothing to recall her loss; take her where change and excitement will drown thought. As her mind recovers its tone, so will her body. Take her travelling for the summer."

"Yes—yes," said Grace, earnestly. "I'm sure it is the very best thing you can do."

"But, my dear," said Captain Danton, smiling a little, "you forget that the first week of July we are to be married."

"Oh, put it off," Grace said; "what does a little delay matter? We are not like Rose and Reginald; we are old and steady, and we can trust one another and wait. A few month's delay is nothing, and Kate's health is everything."

"She might go with us," said the Captain; "suppose it took place this month instead of next, and we made a prolonged wedding-tour, she might accompany us."

Grace shook her head.

"She wouldn't go. Believe me, I know her, and she wouldn't go. She will go with you alone, willingly—never with me."

"She is unjust to you, and you are so generously ready to sacrifice your own plans to hers."

"Did you ever know a young lady yet who liked the idea of a step-mother?" said Grace, with a smile. "I never did. Miss Danton's dislike and aversion are unjust, perhaps; but perfectly natural. No, no, the autumn or winter will be soon enough, and take Kate travelling."

"Very well, my dear; be it as you say. Now, where shall we go? Back to England?"

"I think not," said Doctor Frank. "England has nearly as many painful associations for her as Danton Hall. Take her where she has never been; where all things are new and strange. Take her on a tour through the United States, for instance."

"A capital idea," exclaimed the Captain. "It is what she has wished for often since we came to Canada. I'll take her South. I have an old friend, a planter, in Georgia. I'll take her to Georgia."

"You could not do better."

"Let me see," pursued the Captain, full of the hopeful idea; "we must stay a week or two in Boston, a week or two in New York; we must visit Newport and Saratoga, rest ourselves in Philadelphia and Washington, and then make straight for Georgia. How long will that take us, do you suppose?"

"Until October, I should say," returned the Doctor. "October will be quite time enough to return here. If your daughter does not come back with new life, then I shall give up her case in despair."

"I will speak to her to-morrow," said the Captain, "and start the next day. Since it must be done, it is best done quickly. I think myself it will do her a world of good."

Captain Danton was as good as his word. He broached the subject to his daughter shortly after breakfast next morning. It was out in the orchard, where she had strayed, according to custom, with a book. It was not so much to read—her favourite authors, all of a sudden, had grown flat and insipid, and nothing interested her—but she liked to be alone and undisturbed, "in sunshine calm and sweet," with the scented summer air blowing in her face. She liked to listen, dreamy and listless, and with all the energy of her nature dead within her, to the soft murmuring of the trees, to the singing of the birds overhead, and to watch the pearly clouds floating through the melting azure above. She had no strength or wish to walk now, as of old. She never passed beyond the entrance-gates, save on Sunday forenoons, when she went slowly to the little church of St. Croix, and listened drearily, as if he was speaking an unknown tongue, to Father Francis, preaching patience and long-suffering to the end.

She was lying under a gnarled old apple-tree, the flickering shadow of the leaves coming and going in her face, and the sunshine glinting through her golden hair. She looked up, with a faint smile, at her father's approach. She loved him very much still, but not as she had loved him once; the power to love any one in that old trustful, devoted way seemed gone forever.

"My pale daughter," he said, looking down at her sadly, "what shall I do to bring back your lost roses!"

"Am I pale?" she said, indifferently. "What does it matter? I feel well enough."

"I don't think you do. You are gone to a shadow. Would you like a change, my dear? Would you not like a pleasure tour this summer weather?"

"I don't care about it, papa."

"But you will come to please me. I shall take you to the Southern States, and fetch you back in the autumn my own bright Kate again."

There was no light of pleasure or eagerness in her face. She only moved uneasily on the grass.

"You will come, my dear, will you not? Eunice will accompany you; and we will visit all the great cities of this New World, that you have so often longed to see."

"I will do whatever you wish, papa," she said, apathetically.

"And you will give Eunice her orders about the packing to-day, and be ready to start to-morrow?"

"Yes, papa."

"Ogden will remain behind," continued her father, in a lowered voice. "I have said nothing to any one else as yet about Harry. I shall go and speak to them both about it now."

"Yes, papa."

She watched him striding away, with that look of weary listlessness that had grown habitual to her, and rose from her grassy couch with a sigh, to obey his directions. She found Eunice in the sewing room, with Agnes Darling, and gave her her orders to pack up, and be prepared to start next morning. Then she went back to her seat under the old apple-tree, and lay on the warm grass in a state between sleeping and waking all day long.

The day of departure dawned cloudless and lovely. Grace, her brother, and Eeny went to the station with the travellers, and saw them off. Kate's farewell was very cold, even to Eeny. What was the use of losing or being sorry to part with any one, since all the world was false, and hollow, and deceitful? She had lost something—heart—hope—conscience—she hardly knew what; but something within her that had beat high, and hopeful, and trusting, was cold and still as stone.

The little party on the platform went back through the yellow haze of the hot afternoon, to the quiet old house. Ah! how indescribably quiet and lonely now! Some one might have lain dead in those echoing rooms, so deadly was the stillness.

There was one consolation for Grace and Eeny in their solitude. Doctor Frank was going to remain in the village. It was chiefly at the solicitation of Father Francis that he had consented.

"Dr. Pillule is superannuated," said the young priest, "and old-fashioned, and obstinately prejudiced against all modern innovations, at the best. We want a new man among us—particularly now that this fever is spreading."

A low fever had been working its way, insidiously, among the people since early spring, and increasing since the warm weather had come. Perhaps the miasma, arising from the marshes, had been the cause; but several had died, and many lay ill those sunny June days.

"Your mission lies here," Father Francis said, emphatically. "You can do good, Doctor Danton. Stay!"

So Doctor Danton stayed, hanging out his shingle and taking up his abode at the village hotel. Doctor Pillule all of a sudden, like the Moor of Venice, found his occupation gone. Every one liked the pleasant young Doctor, whose ways were so different from those of Doctor Pillule, and who sat by their fevered bedsides, and talked to them so kindly. Every one liked him; and he soon found himself busy enough, but never so busy that some time, each day, he could not run up for half an hour to Danton Hall.

July came, and brought a letter from Captain Danton to Grace. Like many others, he hated letter-writing, and, never performed that duty when he could possibly avoid it. But Kate declined writing, absolutely; so it fell to his lot. They were in New York, on the eve of departure for Newport, and Kate had already benefited by the change. That was nearly all; and it was the middle of July before the second arrived. They were still at Newport, and the improvement in Kate was marked. The wan and sickly look was rapidly passing away—the change, the excitement, the sea-bathing, the gay life, were working wonders.

"She has created somewhat of a sensation here," said the latter, "and might be one of the belles, if she chose; but she doesn't choose. Her coldness, her proud and petrified air, her strange and gloomy manner, throws a halo of mystery around her, that has fixed all eyes upon her, and set all tongues going. We are quite unknown here, and I don't choose to enlighten any one. I dare say, more than one little romance has been concocted, founded on poor Kate's settled gloom; but, beyond our names, they really know nothing. Some of the young men look as if they would like to be a little more friendly, but she freezes them with one flash of her blue eyes."

August came, burning and breezeless, and they were at Saratoga, drinking Congress water, and finding life much the same as at Newport. Kate had recovered her looks, the Captain's letters said; the beauty that had made her so irresistible had returned, and made her more irresistible than ever. There was nothing like her at Saratoga; but she was as deeply wrapped in mystery as ever, and about as genial as a statue in Parian marble.

The end of August found them journeying southward. The beginning of September, and they were domesticated in the friendly Georgian homestead; and then, Kate, tired after all her wanderings, sank down in the tropical warmth and beauty, and drew a breath of relief. She liked it so much, this lovely southern land, where the gorgeous flowers bloomed and the tropic birds flitted with the hues of Paradise on their wings. She liked the glowing richness of the southern days and nights, the forests and fields so unlike anything she had ever seen before; the negroes with their strange talk and gaudy garments, the pleasant house and the pleasant people. She liked it all, and the first sensation of peace and rest she had felt all these months stole into her heart here. And yet it had done her a world of good—she was a new being—outwardly at least—although her heart felt as mute and still as ever. Her life's shipwreck had been so sudden and so dreadful, she had been so stunned and stupefied at first, and the after-anguish so horribly bitter, that this haven of rest was as grateful as some green island of the sea to a shipwrecked mariner. Here there was nothing to remind her of all that was past and gone—here, where everything was new, her poor bruised heart might heal.

Captain Danton saw and thanked Heaven gratefully for the blessed change in the daughter he loved, and yet she was not the Kate of old. All the youth and joyousness of life's springtime was gone. She sang no more the songs he loved; they were dead and buried in the dead past; her clear laugh never rejoiced his heart now; her fleeting smile came cold and pale as moonlight, on snow. She took no interest in the home she had left; she made no inquiries for those who were there.

"I have had a letter from Danton Hall," he would say; "and they are well." And she would silently bend her head. Or, "I am writing to Danton Hall; have you any message to send?" "Only my love to Eeny," would be the answer; and then she would stray off and leave him alone. She was as changed to him as she was changed in other things. Grace stood between—an insuperable barrier.

September drew to a close. October came, and with it the time for their departure. Kate left reluctantly; she longed to stay there forever, in that land of the sun, and forget and be at peace. It was like tearing half-healed wounds open to go back to a place where everything her eye rested on or her ear heard, from morning till night, recalled the bitter past. But fate was inexorable; farewell must be said to beautiful Georgia and the kind friends there; and the commencement of the second week of October found them starting on their journey to their northern home.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"IT'S AN ILL WIND THAT BLOWS NOBODY GOOD."

They journeyed northward very slowly, stopping for a few days at all the great cities, so that October was gone and part of November when they reached Montreal. There they lingered a week, and then began the last stage of their journey home.

It was a desolate afternoon, near the middle of that most desolate month, November, when Captain Danton and his daughter stepped into the railway-fly at St. Croix, and were driven, as fast as the spavined old nag would go, to Danton Hall. A desolate afternoon, with a low leaden sky threatening snow, and earth like iron with hard black frost. A wretched complaining wind that made your nerves ache, worried the half-stripped trees, and now and then a great snowflake whirled in the dull grey air. The village looked silent and deserted as they drove through it, and a melancholy bell was slowly tolling, tolling, tolling all the way. Kate shivered audibly, and wrapped her fur-lined mantle closer around her.

"What is that wretched bell for?" she asked.

"It is the passing bell," replied the father, with a gloomy brow. "You know the fever is in the village."

"And someone is dead."

She looked out with a dreary, shivering sigh over the bleak prospect. Gaunt black trees, grim black marshes, dull black river, and low black sky. Oh, how desolate! How desolate it all was—as desolate as her own dead heart. What was the use of going away, what was the use of forgetting for a few poor moments, and then coming back to the old desolation and the old pain? What a weary, weary piece of business life was at best, not worth the trouble and suffering it took to live!

The drive to the Hall was such a short one, it hardly seemed to her they were seated before they were driving up the leafless avenue, where the trees loomed unnaturally large and black in the frosty air, and the dead leaves whirled in great wild drifts under the horse's feet. The gloom and

desolation were here before them too. When they had gone away, nearly six months before, those bleak avenues had been leafy arcades, where the birds sang all the bright day long, flowers had bloomed wherever her eye rested, and red roses and sweetbrier had twined themselves around the low windows and stone pillars of the portico. Now the trees were writhing skeletons, the flowers dead with the summer, nothing left of the roses but rattling brown stalks, and the fish-pond lying under the frowning wintry sky like a sheet of steel.

She went up the stone steps and into the hall, still shivering miserably under her wraps, and saw Grace, and Eeny, and the servants assembled to welcome them, and listened like one in a dream. It all seemed so flat, and dead, and unsatisfying, and the old time and the old memories were back at her heart, until she almost went wild. She could see how Eeny and Grace looked a little afraid of her, and how differently they greeted her father; and how heartily and unaffectedly glad he was to be with them once more. And then she was toiling wearily up the long, wide stairway, followed by faithful Eunice, and had the four walls of her own little sitting room around her at last.

How pretty the room was! A fire burned brightly in the glittering steel grate, the curtains were drawn, for it was already dusk, that short November afternoon; and the ruddy, cheery light sparkled on the pictures, and the book-case, and the inlaid table, and the two little vases of scarlet geraniums Grace had planted there.

Outside, in contrast to all this warmth, and brightness, and comfort, she could hear the lamentable sighing of the wild November wind, and the groaning of the tortured trees. But it brought no sense of comfort to her, and she sat drearily back while Eunice dressed her for dinner, and stared blankly into the fire, wondering if her whole life was to go on like this. Only twenty-one, and life such a hopeless blank already! She could look forward to her future life—a long, long vista of days, and every day like this.

By-and-by the dinner-bell rang, arousing her from her dismal reverie, and she went down stairs, never taking the trouble to look at herself in the glass, or to see how her maid had dressed her. Yet she looked beautiful—coldly, palely beautiful—in that floating dress of deep blue; and jewelled forget-me-nots in her rich amber hair. Her face and figure had recovered all their lost roundness and symmetry, but the former, except when she spoke or smiled, was as cold and still as marble.

Father Francis and Doctor Danton were in the dining-room when she entered, but their welcome home was very apathetically met. She was silent all through dinner, talking was such a tiresome exertion; nothing interested her. She hardly looked up—she could feel, somehow, the young priest's deep, clear eyes bent upon her in grave disapproval, against which her proud spirit mutinied.

"Why should I take the trouble to talk?" she thought; "What do I care for Doctor Danton or his sister, or what interest have the things they talk of for me?"

So she listened as if they had been talking Greek. Only once was she aroused to anything like interest. Their two guests were relating the progress of that virulent fever in the village, and how many had already been carried off.

"I should think the cold weather would give it a check," said her father.

"It seems rather on the increase," replied the priest; "there are ten cases in St. Croix now."

"We heard the bell as we drove up this afternoon," said the Captain; "for whom was it tolling?"

"For poor old Pierre, the sexton. He took the fever only a week ago, and was delirious nearly all the time."

Kate lifted her eyes, hitherto listening, but otherwise meaningless.

"Pierre, who used to light the fires and sweep the church?"

"Yes; you knew him," said Father Francis looking at her; "he talked of you more than once during his delirium. It seems you sang for him once, and he never forgot it. It dwelt in his mind more than anything else, during that last illness."

A pang pierced Kate's heart. She remembered the day when she had strayed into the church with Reginald, and found old Pierre sweeping. He had made his request so humbly and earnestly, that she had sat down at the little harmonium and played and sung a hymn. And he had never forgotten it; he had talked of it in his dying hours. The sharpest remorse she had ever felt in her life, for the good she might have done, she felt then.

"My poor people have missed their Lady Bountiful," continued Father Francis, with that grave smile of his—"missed her more than ever, in this trying time. Do you remember Hermine Lacheur, Miss Danton?"

"That pretty, gentle girl, with the great dark eyes, and black ringlets? Oh, yes, very well."

"The same. She was rather a pet of yours, I think. You taught her to sing some little hymns in the choir. You will be sorry to hear she has gone."

"Dead!" Kate cried, struck and thrilled.

"Dead," Father Francis said, a little tremor in his voice. "A most estimable girl, beloved by every one. Like Pierre, she talked a great deal of you in her last illness, and sang the hymns you taught her. 'Give my dear love to Miss Danton,' were almost her last words to me; 'she has been very kind to me. Tell her I will pray for her in Heaven.'"

There was silence.

"Oh," Kate thought, with unutterable bitterness of sorrow; "how happy I might have been—how happy I might have made others, if I had given my heart to God, instead of to His creatures. The bountiful blessings I have wasted—youth, health, opulence—how many poor souls I might have gladdened and helped!"

She rose from the table, and walked over to the window. The blackness of darkness had settled down over the earth, but she never saw it. Was it too late yet? Had she found her mission on earth? Had she still something to live for? Was she worthy of so great a charge? A few hours before, and life was all a blank, without an object. Had Father Francis been sent to point out the object for which she must henceforth live? The poor and suffering were around her. It was in her power to alleviate their poverty and soothe their suffering. The great Master of Earth and Heaven had spent His life ministering to the afflicted and humble—surely it was a great and glorious thing to be able to follow afar off in His footsteps. The thoughts of that hour changed the whole tenor of her mind—perhaps the whole course of her life. She had found her place in the world, and her work to do. She might never be happy herself, but she might make others happy. She might never have a home of her own, but she might brighten and cheer other homes. As an unprofessed Sister of Charity, she might go among those poor ones doing good; and dimly in the future she could see the cloistered, grateful walls shutting her from the troubles of this feverish life. Standing there by the curtained window, her eyes fixed on the pitchy darkness, a new era in her existence seemed to dawn.

Miss Danton said nothing to any one about this new resolution of hers. She felt how it would be opposed, how she would have to argue and combat for permission; so she held her tongue. But next morning, an hour after breakfast, she came to Grace, and in that tone of quiet authority she always used to her father's housekeeper, requested the keys to the sideboard.

Grace looked surprised, but yielded them at once; and Kate, going to the large, carved, old-fashioned, walnut wood buffet, abstracted two or three bottles of old port, a glass jar of jelly, and another of tamarinds; stowed away these spoils in a large morocco reticule, returned the keys to Grace, and, going upstairs, dressed herself in her plainest dress, mantle, and hat, took her reticule, and set off. She smiled at herself as she walked down the avenue—she, the elegant, fastidious Kate Danton, attired in those sombre garments, carrying that well-filled bag, and turning, all in a moment, a Sister of Mercy.

It was nearly noon when she returned, pale, and very tired, from her long walk. Grace wondered more than ever, as she saw her dragging herself slowly upstairs.

"Where can she have been?" she mused, "in that dress and with that bag, and what on earth can she have wanted the keys of the sideboard for?"

Grace was enlightened some hours later, when Father Francis came up, and informed the household that he had found Kate ministering to one of the worst cases of fever in the village—a dying old woman.

"She was sitting by the bedside reading to her," said the priest; "and she had given poor old Madame Lange what she has been longing for weeks past, wine. I assure you I was confounded at the sight."

"But, good gracious!" cried the Captain, aghast, "she will take the fever."

"I told her so—I expostulated with her on her rashness, but all in vain. I told her to send them as much wine and jellies as she pleased, but to keep out of these pestiferous cottages. She only looked at me with those big solemn eyes, and said:

"'Father, if I were a professed Sister of Charity, you would call my mission Heaven-sent and glorious; because I am not, you tell me I am foolish and rash. I don't think I am either; I have no fear of the fever; I am young, and strong, and healthy, and do not think I will take it. Even if I do, and if I die, I shall die doing God's work. Better such a death as that than a long, miserable, worthless life.'"

"She is resolved, then?"

"You would say so if you saw her face. Better not oppose her too much, I think; her mind is set upon it, and it seems to make her happy. It is, indeed, as she says, a noble work. God will protect her."

Captain Danton sighed. It seemed to him a very dreary and dismal labour for his bright Kate. But he had not the heart to oppose her in anything, let it be never so mad and dangerous. He had never opposed her in the days of her happiness, and it was late to begin now.

So Kate's new life began. While the weeks of November were ending in short, dark, dull days, and cold and windy nights, with the dying year, many in the fever-stricken village were dying too. Into all these humble dwellings the beautiful girl was welcomed as an angel of light. The

delicacies and rich wines that nourished and strengthened them they owed to her bounty; the words of holy hope and consolation that soothed their dying hours, her sweet voice read; the hymns that seemed a foretaste of Heaven, her clear voice sang. Her white hands closed their dying eyes and folded the rigid arms, and decked the room of death with flowers that took away half its ghastliness. Her deft fingers arranged the folds of the shroud, and the winding-sheet, and her gentle tones whispered comfort and resignation to the sorrowing ones behind. How they blessed her, how they loved her, those poor people, was known only to Heaven and themselves.

There were two others in all these stricken houses, at these beds of death—Father Francis and Dr. Danton. They were her indefatigable fellow-labourers in the good work, as unwearied in their zeal and patience and as deeply beloved as she was. Perhaps it was that by constantly preaching patience, she had learned patience herself. Perhaps it was through seeing all his goodness and untiring devotion, she began to realize after a while she had been unjust to Doctor Danton. She could not help liking and respecting him. She heard his praises in every mouth in the village, and she could not help owning they were well deserved. Almost without knowing it, she was beginning to like and admire this devoted young Doctor, who never wearied in his zeal, who was so gentle, and womanly, and tender to the poor and suffering. Doing the brother tardy justice, it began dimly to dawn on her mind that she might have done the sister injustice too. She had never known anything of Grace but what was good. Could it be that she had been prejudiced, and proud, and unjust from first to last?

She asked herself the question going home one evening from her mission of mercy. The long-deferred wedding was to take place on Christmas eve, and it was now the 7th of December. She was walking home alone, in the yellow lustre of the wintry sunset, the snow lying white and high all around her. Her new life had changed her somewhat; the hard look was gone, her face was far more peaceful and gentle than when she had come. Its luminous brightness was not there, perhaps; but the light that remained was far more tender and sweet. She looked very lovely, this cold, clear December, afternoon, in her dark, fur-trimmed mantle, her pretty hat, fur-trimmed too, and the long black plume contrasting with her amber-tinted hair. The frosty wind had lit a glow in her pale cheeks, and deepened the light of her starry violet eyes. She looked lovely, and so the gentleman thought, striding after her over the snowy ground. She did not look around to see who it was, and it was only when he stepped up by her side that she glanced at him, uttering a cry of surprise.

"Sir Ronald Keith! Is it really you? Oh, what a surprise!"

She held out her gloved hand. He took it, held it, looking piercingly into her eyes.

"Not an unpleasant one, I hope? Are you glad to see me?"

"Of course! How can you ask such a question? But I thought you were hundreds of miles away, shooting moose, and bears, and wolves in New Brunswick."

"And so I was, and so I might have remained, had I not heard some news that sent me to Canada like a bolt from a bow."

"What news?"

"Can you ask?"

She lifted her clear eyes to his face, and read it there. The news that she was free. The red blood flushed up in her face for a moment, and then receded, leaving her as white as the snow.

"I learned in the wilds of New Brunswick, where I fled to forget you, Kate, that that man was, what I knew he would be, a traitor and a villain. I only heard it two weeks ago, and I have never rested on my way to you since. I am a fool and a madman, perhaps, but I can't help hoping against hope. I love you so much, Kate, I have loved you so long, that I cannot give you up. He is false, but I will be true. I love you with all my heart and soul, better than I love my own life. Kate, don't send me away again. Reginald Stanford does not stand between us now. Think how I love you, and be my wife."

She had tried to stop him, but he ran on impetuously. He was so haggard and so agitated speaking to her, that she could not be angry, that she could not help pitying him.

"Don't," she said, gently; "don't, Sir Ronald. You are only paining yourself and paining me. What I told you before, you force me to tell you again. I don't love you, and I can't be your wife."

"I don't expect you to love me yet," he said, eagerly; "how should you? I will wait, I will do everything under Heaven you wish, only give me hope. Give me a chance, Kate! I love you so truly and entirely, that it will win a return sooner or later."

"Ah! don't talk to me," she said, with an impatient sigh; "don't talk to me of love. I have done with that, my heart feels like dust and ashes. I am not worthy of you—I am not worthy of such devotion. I thank you, Sir Ronald, for the honour you do me; but I cannot—I cannot marry you!"

"And you will let that poltroon Stanford boast, as he does boast, that you will live and die single for his sake!" he cried, bitterly. "He has made it the subject of a bet in a London club-room with Major Lauderdale of the Guards."

"No!" said she, her face flushing, her eyes kindling; "he never did that!"

"He did do it. I have proof of it. You loved him so well—he boasted—that you would never marry. He and Lauderdale made the bet."

She drew a long, hard breath, her eyes flashing, her white teeth clenched.

"The dastard," she cried; "the mean, lying, cowardly dastard! Oh, if I were a man!"

"Take your revenge without being a man. Prove him a liar and a boaster. Marry me!"

She did not answer; but he read hope in her flushed and excited face.

"Besides," he artfully went on, "what will you do here? You have no longer a home when your father marries; unless you can consent to be subject to the woman who was once his housekeeper. You will have no place in the world; you will only be an incumbrance; your step-mother will wish you out of the way, and your father will learn to wish as his new wife does. Oh, Kate, come with me! Come to Glen Keith, and reign there; we will travel over the world; you shall have every luxury that wealth can procure; your every wish shall be gratified; you shall queen it, my beautiful one, over the necks of those who have slighted and humiliated you. Leave this hateful Canada, and come with me as my wife—as Lady Keith!"

"Don't! don't!" she cried, lifting her hand to stop his passionate pleading. "You bewilder me; you take my breath away! Give me time; let me think; my head is whirling now."

"As long as you like, my dearest. I don't ask you for love now; that will come by-and-by. Only give me hope, and I can wait—wait as long as Jacob for Rachel, if necessary."

He lifted her hand to his lips, but let it fall quickly again, for it felt like ice. She was looking straight before her, at the pale, yellow sunset, her dark eyes filled with a dusky fire, but her face as colourless as the snowy ground.

"Are you ill, Kate?" he said, in alarm; "have I distressed you? have I agitated you by my sudden coming?"

"You have agitated me," she replied. "My head is reeling. Don't talk to me any more. I want to be alone and to think."

They walked side by side the rest of the way in total silence. When they reached the house, Kate ran up to her own room at once, while Captain Danton came out into the hall to greet his old friend. The two men lounged out in the grounds, smoking before-dinner cigars, and Sir Ronald briefly stated the object of his return, and his late proposal to his daughter. Captain Danton listened silently and a little anxiously. He had known the Scottish baronet a long time; knew how wealthy he was, and how passionately he loved his daughter; but for all that he had an instinctive feeling that Kate would not be happy with him.

"She has given you no reply, then?" he said, when Sir Ronald had finished.

"None, as yet; but she will shortly. Should that reply be favourable, Captain Danton, yours, I trust, will be favourable also?"

He spoke rather haughtily, and a flush deepened the florid hue of the Captain's face.

"My daughter shall please herself. If she thinks she can be happy as your wife, I have nothing to say. You spoke of Reginald Stanford a moment ago; do you know anything of his doings since he left Canada?"

"Very little. He has sold his commission, and quitted the army—some say, quitted England. His family, you know, have cast him off for his dishonourable conduct."

"I know—I received a letter from Stanford Royals some months ago, in which his father expressed his strong regret, and his disapproval of his son's conduct."

"That is all you know about him?"

"That is all. I made no inquiry—I thought the false hound beneath notice."

Captain Danton sighed. He had loved his pretty, bright-eyed, auburn-haired Rose very dearly, and he could not quite forget her, in spite of her misdoing. They sauntered up and down in the grey, cold, wintry twilight, until the ringing of the dinner-bell summoned them indoors. Kate was there, very beautiful, Sir Ronald thought, in that dark, rich silk, and flashing ornaments in her golden hair.

Long that night, after the rest of the household were sleeping, Kate sat musing over the past, the present, and the future. She had dismissed Eunice, and sat before the fire in a loose, white dressing-gown, her lovely hair falling around her, her deep, earnest eyes fixed on the red blaze. What should she do? Accept Sir Ronald Keith's offer, and achieve a brilliant place in the world, or sink into insignificance in this remote corner of the earth? It was all true what he had said: in a few days her father would be married. Another would be mistress where she had reigned—another, who might look upon her as an incumbrance and a burden. She had been content to remain here while she held the first place in her father's heart; but another held that place now, and would hold it forever. What should she do in the long days, and months, and years, that were to come? How should she drag through a useless and monotonous existence in this dull place? Even now, earnestly as she sought to do good in her mission of mercy, there were hours and

hours of wretched, unspeakable dreariness and desolation. When her work was ended, when the fever was over, what would become of her then? That dim vision of the cloister and veil was dim as ever in the far distance. No ardent glow, no holy longing filled her heart at the thought, to tell her she had found a vocation. Her life was unspeakable empty and desolate, and must remain so forever, if she stayed here. Other thoughts were at work, too, tempting her on. The recollection of Sir Ronald's words about her recreant lover—the thought of his insolent and cowardly boast stung her to the soul. Here was the way to revenge—the way to give him the lie direct. As Sir Ronald Keith's wife, a life of splendour and power awaited her. She thought of Glen Keith as she had seen it once, old and storied, and gray and grand, with ivy and roses clustering round its gray walls, and its waving trees casting inviting shadows. Then, too, did he not deserve some return for this long, faithful, devoted love? Other girls made marriages *de raison* every day, and were well content with their lot—why should she not? She could not forever remain indifferent to his fidelity and devotion. She might learn to love him by-and-by.

The fire waned and burned low, the hours of the bleak winter night wore on, and three o'clock of a new day struck before the solitary watcher went to bed.

The Scotch baronet was not kept long in suspense. Next morning, as Miss Danton came down the stone steps, with something in a paper parcel for her poor, sick pensioners, Sir Ronald Keith joined her.

"I have passed a sleepless night," he said. "I shall never rest until I have your answer. When am I to have it, Kate?"

Her face turned a shade paler, otherwise there was no change, and her voice was quite firm.

"Now, if you wish."

"And it is yes," he cried, eagerly. "For Heaven's sake, Kate, say it is yes!"

"It is yes; if you can take me for what I am. I don't love you; I don't know that I shall ever love you, but I will try. If I marry you, I will be your true and faithful wife, and your honour will be as sacred as my salvation. If you can take me, knowing this, I am yours."

He caught her in his arms, and broke out into a torrent of passionate delight and thankfulness. She disengaged herself, cold and very pale.

"Leave me now," she said. "I must go to the village alone. Don't ask too much from me, Sir Ronald, or you may be disappointed."

"Only one thing more, my darling. Your father is to be married on the twenty-fourth. I am sure you will have no wish to linger in this house after that. Will you not dispense with the usual formalities and preparations, and be married on the same day?"

"Yes, yes," she said, impatiently; "let it be as you wish! What does it matter? Good-morning."

She walked away rapidly over the frozen snow, leaving the successful wooer to return to the house and relate his good luck.

CHAPTER XIX.

VIA CRUCIS.

So once more Miss Danton was "engaged;" once more preparations for a double wedding went on; once more her wedding day was named.

There was very little noise made about the matter this time. Father Francis and Doctor Danton were almost the only two outside the household who knew anything about it, and somehow these were the very two Kate herself wished most to keep it from.

She was ashamed of her mercenary marriage; in spite of herself she despised herself for it, and she felt they must despise her for it too. She shrank away guiltily under the clear steadfast, searching gaze of Father Francis, feeling how low she must have fallen in his estimation. She respected and esteemed the priest and the Doctor so much, that it was humiliating to lose their respect by her own voluntary act. But it was too late to draw back, even if she wished it; her fetters were forged—she was bound beyond recall.

Sir Ronald Keith had got the desire of his heart—Kate Danton was his promised wife, and yet he was not quite happy. Are we ever quite happy, I wonder, when we attain the end for which we have sighed and longed, perhaps for years? Our imagination is so very apt to paint that desire of our heart in rainbow-hues, and we are so very apt to find it, when it comes, only dull gray, after all.

Sir Ronald loved his beautiful and queenly affianced with a changeless devotion nothing could alter. He had thought her promise to marry him would satisfy him perfectly; but he had that promise, and he was not satisfied. He wanted something more—he wanted love in return, although he knew she did not love him; and he was dissatisfied. It is not exactly pleasant,

perhaps, to find the woman you love and are about to marry as cold as an iceberg—to see her shrink at your approach, and avoid you on all possible occasions. It is rather hard, no doubt, to put up with the loose touch of cold fingers for your warmest caress, and heavy sighs in answer to your most loving speeches.

Sir Ronald had promised to be content without love; but he was not, and was huffish and offended, and savagely jealous of Reginald Stanford and all the hated past.

So the baronet's wooing was on the whole rather gloomy, and depressing to the spirits, even of the lookers-on; and Kate was failing away once more to a pale, listless shadow, and Sir Ronald was in a state of perpetual sulkiness.

But the bridal-cakes and bridal-dresses were making, and the December days were slipping by, one by one, bringing the fated time near. Miss Danton still zealously and unweariedly continued her mission of love. No weather kept her indoors, no pleadings of her future husband were strong enough to make her give up one visit for his pleasure or accommodation.

"Let me alone, Sir Ronald Keith," she would answer, wearily, and a little impatiently; "it will not be for long. Let me alone!"

The fever that had swept off so many was slowly dying out. The sick ones were not so bad or so many now, but that Miss Danton, with a safe conscience, might have given them up; but she would not. She never wanted to be alone—she who had been so fond of solitude such a short time ago. She was afraid of herself—afraid to think—afraid of that dim future that was drawing so very near. Every feeling of heart and soul revolted at the thought of that loveless marriage—the profanation of herself seemed more than she could bear.

"I shall turn desperate at the very altar!" she thought, with something like despair. "I can't marry him—I can't! It sets me wild to think of it. What a wretch I am! What a weak, miserable, cowardly wretch, not to be able to face the fate I have chosen for myself! I don't know what to do, and I have no one to consult—no one but Father Francis, and I am afraid to speak to him. I don't love him; I loathe the thought of marrying him; but it is too late to draw back. If one could only die, and end it all!"

Her arm lay across the window-sill; her head drooped and fell on it now, with a heavy sigh. She was unspeakably miserable, and lonely, and desolate; she was going to seal her misery for life by a loveless marriage, which her soul abhorred, and she had no power to draw back. She was like a rudderless ship, drifting without helm or compass among shoals and quicksands—drifting helplessly to ruin.

"If I dared only ask Father Francis, he would tell me what to do," she thought, despondingly; "he is so wise and good, and knows what is best for every one. He would tell me how to do what is right, and I want to do what is right if I can. But I have neglected, and avoided, and prevaricated with him so long that I have no right to trouble him now. And I know he would tell me I am doing wrong; I have read it in his face; and how can I do right?"

She sat thinking drearily, her face lying on her arm. It was the afternoon of the 14th—ten days more, and it would indeed, be too late. The nearer the marriage approached, the more abhorrent it grew. The waving trees of Glen-Keith cast inviting shadows no longer. It was all darkness and desolation. Sir Ronald's moody, angry face frightened and distressed her—it was natural, she supposed. She did not behave well, but he knew she did not care for him; she had told him so, honestly and plainly; and if he looked like that before marriage, how would he look after? She was unutterably wretched, poor child; and a remorseful conscience that would give her no rest did not add to her comfort.

She sat there for a long time, her face hidden on her arm, quite still. The short, wintry afternoon was wearing away; the cold, yellow sun hung low in the pale western sky, and the evening wind was sighing mournfully amid the trees when she rose up. She looked pale, but resolved; and she dressed herself for a walk, with a veil over her face, and slowly descended the stairs.

As she opened the house door, Sir Ronald came out of the drawing-room, not looking too well pleased at having been deserted all the afternoon.

"Are you going out?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Up the village."

"Always up the village!" he exclaimed, impatiently, "and always alone. May I not go with you? It is growing, late."

"There is no occasion," she replied, looking at him proudly. "I need no protector in St. Croix."

She opened the door and went out, and walked rapidly down the bleak avenue to the gates. The authoritative tone of the baronet stung her proud spirit to the quick.

"What right has he to talk to me like that?" she thought, angrily. "If I loved him, I would not endure it; I don't love him, and I won't endure it."

Her eyes flashed as she walked along, lightly and rapidly, holding her haughty head very erect. Greetings met her on every hand as she passed through the village. She never paused until she reached the church, and stood by the entrance gate of the little garden in front of the Curé's house. There she paused irresolute. How peaceful it was—what a holy hush seemed to linger round the place! All her courage left her, and she stood as timid and fluttering as any school-girl. While she hesitated, the door opened, and Father Francis stood looking at her.

"Come in, Miss Danton," he said. "You look as if you were almost afraid."

She opened the little gate and went up the path, looking strangely downcast and troubled. Father Francis held out his hand with a smile.

"I thought you would come to see me before you left Canada," he said, "although you seem to have rather forgotten your old friends of late. Come in."

"Are you alone?" Kate asked, following him into the little parlour.

"Quite alone. The Curé has gone two miles off on a sick call. And how are the good people of Danton Hall?"

"Very well," Kate answered, taking a seat by the window and looking out at the pale, yellow sunset.

"That is, except yourself, Miss Danton. You have grown thin within the last fortnight. What is the matter?"

"I am not very happy," she said, with a little tremor of the voice; "perhaps that is it."

"Not happy?" repeated Father Francis, with a short, peculiar laugh. "I thought when young ladies married baronets, the height of earthly felicity was attained. It seems rather sordid, this marrying for wealth and title. I hardly thought Kate Danton would do it; but it appears I have made a foolish mistake."

"Thank you," Kate said, very slowly. "I came here to ask you to be cruel to me—to tell me hard truths. You know how to be cruel very well, Father Francis."

"Why do you come to me for hard truths?" said the priest, rather coldly. "You have been deluding yourself all along; why don't you go on? What is the use of telling you the truth? You will do as you like in the end."

"Perhaps not. I have not fallen quite so low as you think. I dare say you despise me, but you can hardly despise me more than I despise myself."

"Then why walk on in the path that leads you downward? Why not stop before it is too late?"

"It is too late now!"

"Stuff and nonsense! That is more of your self-delusion. You, or rather that pride of yours, which has been the great stumbling-block of your life, leads you on in that self-delusion. Too late! It would not be too late if you were before the altar! Better stop now and endure the humiliation than render your own and this man's future life miserable. You will never be happy as Sir Ronald Keith's wife; he will never be happy as your husband. I know how you are trying to delude yourself; I know you are trying to believe you will love him and be happy by-and-by. Don't indulge such sophistry any longer; don't be led away by your own pride and folly."

"Pride and folly!" she echoed indignantly.

"Yes, I repeat it. Your heart, your conscience, must own the truth of what I say, if your lips will not. Would you ever have accepted Sir Ronald Keith if your father had not been about to marry Grace Danton?"

The sudden flush that overspread her face answered for her, though she did not speak. She sat looking straight before her into vacancy, with a hard, despairing look in her dark, deep eyes.

"You know you would not. But your father is going to marry a most excellent and most estimable woman; his affection is not wholly his daughter's any longer; she must stand a little in the shade, and see another reign where she used to be queen. She cannot hold the first place in her father's heart and home; so she is ready to leave that home with the first man who asks her. She does not love him; there is no sympathy or feeling in common between them; they are not even of the same religion; she knows that she will be wretched, and that she will make him wretched too. But what does it all matter? Her pride is to be wounded, her self-love humiliated, and every other consideration must yield to that. She is ready to commit perjury, to swear to love and honour a man who is no more to her than that peasant walking along the road. She is ready to degrade herself and risk her soul by a mercenary marriage sooner than bear that wound to pride!"

"Go on!" Kate said, bitterly; "it is well to have one's heart lacerated sometimes, I suppose. Pray go on."

"I intend to go on. You have been used to queening it all your life—to being flattered, and indulged, and pampered to the top of your bent, and it will do you good. When you are this man's miserable wife, you shall never say Father Francis might have warned me—Father Francis might have saved me. You have ruled here with a ring and a clatter; you have been pleased to dazzle

and bewilder the simple people of St. Croix, to see yourself looked up to as a sort of goddess. Your rank, and accomplishments, and beauty—we are talking plain truth now, Miss Danton—all these gifts that God has bestowed upon you so bountifully, you have misused. It doesn't seem so to you, does it? You think you have been very good, very charitable, very condescending. I don't deny that you have done good, that you have been a sort of guardian angel to the poor and the sick; but what was your motive? Was it that which makes thousands of girls, as young, and rich, and handsome as yourself, resign everything for the humble garb and lowly duties of a Sister of Charity? Oh, no! You liked to be idolized, to be venerated, and looked up to as an angel upon earth. That pride of yours which induces you to sell yourself for so many thousand pounds per annum was at the bottom of it all. You want to hold a foremost place in the great battle of life—you want all obstacles to give way before you. It can't be; and your whole life is a failure."

"Go on," Kate reiterated, never stirring, never looking at him, and white as death.

"You have fancied yourself very good, very immaculate, and thanked Heaven in an uplifted sort of way that you were not as other women, false, and mean, and sordid. You wanted to walk through life in a pathway of roses without thorns, to a placid death, and a heritage of glory in Heaven. The trials of common people were not for you; sorrow, and disappointment, and suffering were to pass Miss Danton by. You were so good, and so far up in the clouds, nothing low or base could reach you. Well, it was not to be. You were only clay, after all—the porcelain of human clay, perhaps, but very brittle stuff withal. Trouble did come; the man you had made a sort of idol of, to whom you had given your whole heart, with a love so intense as to be sinful—this man abandons you. The sister you have trusted and been fond of, deceives you, and you find that trouble is something more than a word of two syllables. You have been very great, and noble, and heroic all your life, in theory—how do we find you in practice? Why, drooping like any other lovelorn damsel, pining away without one effort at that greatness and heroism you thought so much of; without one purpose to conquer yourself, without one effort to be resigned to the will of Heaven. You rebel against your father's marriage; everybody else ought to be lonely and unhappy because you are; the world ought to wear crape, and the light of the sun be darkened. But the world laughs and sings much as usual, the sun shines as joyously. Your father's marriage will be an accomplished fact, and our modern heroine says 'yes' to the first man who asks her to marry him in a fit of spleen, because she will be Grace Danton's step-daughter, and must retire a little into the background, and look forward to the common humdrum life ordinary mortals lead. She doesn't ask help where help alone is to be found; so in the hour of her trial there is no light for her in earth or Heaven. Oh, my child! stop and think what you are going to do before it is too late."

"I can't think," she said, in a hollow voice. "I only know I am a miserable, sinful, fallen creature. Help me, Father Francis; tell me what I am to do."

"Do not ask help from me," the young priest said, gravely; "ask it of that compassionate Father who is in Heaven. Oh! my child, the way to that land of peace and rest is the way of the Cross—the only way. There are more thorns than roses under our feet, but we must go on like steadfast soldiers to the end, bearing our cross, and keeping the battle-cry of the brave old Crusaders in our hearts, 'God wills it.' Your trouble has been heavy, my poor child, I don't doubt, but you cannot be exempt from the common lot. I am sorry for you, Heaven knows, and I would make your life a happy one if I could, in spite of all the harsh things I may say. It is because I would not have your whole life miserable that I talk to you like this. Your heart acknowledges the truth of every word I have said; and remember there is but one recipe for real happiness—goodness. Be good and you will be happy. It is a hackneyed precept out of a copy-book," Father Francis said, with a slight smile; "but believe me, it is the only infallible rule. Rouse yourself to a better life, my dear Kate; begin a new and more perfect life, and God will help you. Remember, dear child, 'There is a love that never fails when earthly loves decay.'"

She did not speak. She rose up, cold, and white, and rigid. The priest arose too.

"Are you going?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You are not offended with me for all this plain talk? I like you so much, you know, that I want to see you happy."

"Offended?" she answered, "oh, no! Some day I will thank you; I cannot now."

She opened the door and was gone, flitting along, a lonely figure in the bleak winter twilight. She never paused in her rapid walk until she reached Danton Hall; and then, pale and absorbed, she ran rapidly upstairs, and shut herself into her room. Throwing off her bonnet and mantle, she sat down to her writing-desk at once, and without waiting to think, took up a pen and dashed off a rapid note:

> "Sir Ronald:—I have deceived you. I have done very wrong. I don't love you—I never can; and I cannot be your wife. I am very sorry; I ask you to forgive me—to be generous, and release me from my promise. I should be miserable as your wife, and I would make you miserable too. Oh! pray forgive me, and release me, for indeed I cannot marry you.
>
> "Kate Danton."

She folded the note rapidly, placed it in an envelope, wrote the address, "Sir Ronald Keith," and sealed it. Still in the same rapid way, as if she were afraid to pause, afraid to trust herself, she arose and rang the bell. Eunice answered the summons, and stared aghast at her mistress' face.

"Do you know if Sir Ronald is in the house?" Miss Danton asked.

"Yes, Miss; he's sitting in the library, reading a paper."

"Is he alone?"

"Yes, Miss."

"Take this letter to him, then; and, Eunice, tell Miss Grace I will not be down to dinner. You can fetch me a cup of tea here. I do not feel very well."

Eunice departed on her errand. Kate drew a long, long breath of relief when she closed the door after her. She drew her favourite chair up before the fire, took a book off the table, and seated herself resolutely to read. She was determined to put off thought—to let events take their course, and cease tormenting herself, for to-night at least.

Eunice brought up the tea and a little trayful of dainties, drew the curtain, and lit the lamp. Kate laid down her book and looked up.

"Did you deliver the note, Eunice?"

"Yes, Miss."

"And my message to Miss Grace?"

"Yes, Miss."

"Very well, then—you may go."

The girl went away, and Kate sat sipping her tea and reading. She sat for upward of half an hour, and then she arose and took the way to the apartments of Mr. Richards. It was after ten before she returned and entered her sitting-room. She found Eunice waiting for her, and she resigned herself into her hands at once.

"I shall go to bed early to-night," she said. "My head aches. I must try and sleep."

Sleep mercifully came to her almost as soon as she laid her head on her pillow. She slept as she had not done for many a night before, and awoke next morning refreshed and strengthened for the new trials of the new day. She dreaded the meeting with her discarded suitor, with a nervous dread quite indescribable; but the meeting must be, and she braced herself for the encounter with a short, fervent prayer, and went down stairs.

There was no one in the dining-room, but the table was laid. She walked to the window, and stood looking out at the black, bare trees, writhing and groaning in the morning wind, and the yellow sunshine glittering on the frozen snow. While she stood, a quick, heavy tread crossed the hall—a tread she knew well. Her heart throbbed; her breath came quick. A moment later, and Sir Ronald entered, the open note she had sent him in his hand.

"What is the meaning of this folly, Kate?" he demanded, angrily, striding towards her. "Here, take it back. You did not mean it."

"I do mean it," Kate said, shrinking. "I have behaved very badly; I am very sorry, but I mean it."

His black brows contracted stormily over his gloomy eyes.

"Do you mean to say you have jilted me? Have you been playing the capricious coquette from first to last?"

"I am very sorry! I am very sorry!" poor Kate faltered. "I have done wrong! Oh, forgive me! And please don't be angry."

He broke into a harsh laugh.

"You are sorry! and you have done wrong! Upon my soul, Miss Danton, you have a mild way of putting it. Here, take back this nonsensical letter. I can't and won't free you from your engagement."

He held the letter out, but she would not take it. The strong and proud spirit was beginning to rise; but the recollection that she had drawn this on herself held her in check.

"I cannot take back one word in that letter. I made a great mistake in thinking I could marry you; I see it now more than ever. I have owned my fault. I have told you I am sorry. I can do no more. As a gentleman you are bound to release me."

"Of course," he said, with a bitter sneer. "As a gentleman, I am bound to let you play fast and loose with me to your heart's content. You have behaved very honourably to me, Miss Danton, and very much like a gentlewoman. Is it because you have been jilted yourself, that you want the pleasure of jilting another? It is hardly the thing to revenge Reginald Stanford's doings on me."

Up leaped the indignant blood to Kate's face; bright flashed the angry fire from her eyes.

"Go!" she cried, in a ringing tone of command. "Leave my father's house, Sir Ronald Keith! I thought I was talking to a gentleman. I have found my mistake. Go! If you were monarch of the world, I would not marry you now."

He ground his teeth with a savage oath of fury and rage. The letter she had sent him was still in his hand. He tore it fiercely into fragments, and flung them in a white shower at her feet.

"I will go," he said; "but I shall remember this day, and so shall you. I shall take good care to let the world know how you behave to an honourable man when a dishonourable one deserts you."

With the last unmanly taunt he was gone, banging the house door after him until the old mansion shook. And Kate fled back to her room, and fell down on her knees before her little white bed, and prayed with a passionate outburst of tears for strength to bear her bitter, bitter cross.

Later in the day a man from the village hotel came to Danton Hall for the baronet's luggage. Captain Danton, mystified and bewildered, sought his daughter for an explanation of these strange goings on. Kate related the rather humiliating story, leaving out Sir Ronald's cruel taunts, in dread of a quarrel between him and her father.

"Don't say anything about it, papa," Kate said, imploringly. "I have behaved very badly, and I feel more wretched and sorry for it all than I can tell you. Don't try to see Sir Ronald. He is justly very angry, and might say things in his anger that would provoke a quarrel. I am miserable enough now without that."

Captain Danton promised, and quietly dispatched the Scotchman's belongings. That evening Sir Ronald departed for Quebec, to take passage for Liverpool.

CHAPTER XX.

BEARING THE CROSS.

The dead blank that comes after excitement of any kind is very trying to bear. The dull flow of monotonous life, following the departure of the Scotch baronet, told severely on Kate. The feverish excitement of that brief second engagement had sustained her, and kindled a brighter fire in her blue eyes, and a hot glow on her pale cheeks. But in the stagnant quiet that succeeded, the light grew dim, the roses faded, and the old lassitude and weariness returned. She had not even the absorbing task of playing amateur Sister of Charity, for the fever was almost gone, and there was no more left for her to do.

There was no scandal or *éclat* this time about the broken-off marriage, for it had been kept very secret—only in the kitchen-cabinet there were endless surmisings and wonderings.

The wedding garments made for the second time for Miss Danton were for the second time put quietly away.

Father Francis, in all his visits to Danton Hall, never made the slightest allusion to the event that had taken place. Only, he laid his hand on Kate's drooping head, with a "Heaven bless you, my child!" so fervently uttered that she felt repaid for all the humiliation she had undergone.

So very quietly at Danton Hall December wore away, and Christmas-eve dawned, Grace Danton's wedding-day. About ten in the morning the large, roomy, old-fashioned family sleigh drove up before the front door, and the bridal party entered, and were whirled to the church. A very select party indeed; the bride and bridegroom, the bride's brother, and the bridegroom's two daughters.

Grace's brown velvet bonnet, brown silk dress, and seal jacket were not exactly the prescribed attire for a bride; but with the hazel hair, smooth and shining, and the hazel eyes full of happy light, Grace looked very sweet and fair.

Eeny, in pale silk and a pretty hat with a long white plume, looked fair as a lily and happy as a queen, and very proud of her post of bride-maid.

And Kate, who was carrying her cross bravely now, very simply attired, sat beside Doctor Frank and tried to listen and be interested in what he was saying, and all the time feeling like one in some unnatural dream. She saw the dull, gray, sunless sky, speaking of coming storm, the desolate snow-covered fields, the quiet village, and the little church, with its tall spire and glittering cross. She saw it all in a vague, lost sort of way, and was in the church and seated in a pew, and listening and looking on, like a person walking in her sleep. Her father going to be married! How strange and unnatural it seemed. She had never grown familiarized with the idea, perhaps because she would never indulge it, and now he was kneeling on the altar steps, with Frank Danton beside him, and Eeny at Grace's left hand, and the Curé and Father Francis were there in stole and surplice, and the ceremony was going on. She saw the ring put on Grace's finger, she heard the Curé's French accented voice, "Henry Danton, wilt thou have Grace Danton to be thy wedded wife?" and that firm, clear "I will," in reply.

Then it was all over; they were married. Her pale face drooped on the front rail of the pew, and wet it with a rain of hot tears.

The wedding quartet were going into the sacristy to register their names. She could linger no longer, although she felt as if she would like to stay there and die, so she arose and went wearily after. Her father looked at her with anxious, imploring eyes; she went up and kissed him, with a smile on her colourless face.

"I hope you will be very happy, papa," she whispered.

And then she turned to Grace, and touched her cold lips to the bride's flushed cheek.

"I wish you very much happiness, Mrs. Danton," she said.

Yes, she could never be mother—she was only Mrs. Danton, her father's wife; but Father Francis gave her a kindly, approving glance, even for this. She turned away from him with a weary sigh. Oh, what trouble and mockery everything was? What a dreary, wretched piece of business life was altogether! The sense of loneliness and desolation weighed on her heart, this dull December morning, like lead.

There was to be a wedding-breakfast, but the Curé, and Father Francis, and Doctor Frank were the only guests.

Kate sat at her father's side—Grace presided now, Grace was mistress of the Hall—and listened in the same dazed and dreary way to the confusion of tongues, the fire of toasts, the clatter of china and silver, and the laughter of the guests. She sat very still, eating and drinking, because she must eat and drink to avoid notice, and never thinking how beautiful she looked in her blue silk dress, her neck and arms gleaming like ivory against azure. What would it ever matter again how she looked?

Captain and Mrs. Danton were going on a brief bridal-tour to Toronto—not to be absent over a fortnight. They were to depart by the two o'clock train; so, breakfast over, Grace hurried away to change her dress. Dr. Frank was going to drive Eeny to the station, in the cutter, to see them off, but Kate declined to accompany them. She shook hands with them at the door; and then turned and went back into the empty, silent house.

A wedding, when the wedded pair, ashamed of themselves, go scampering over the country in search of distraction and amusement, leaves any household almost as forlorn as a funeral. Dead silence succeeds tumult and bustle; those left behind sit down blankly, feeling a gap in their circle, a loss never to be repaired. It was worse than usual at Danton Hall. The wintry weather, precluding all possibility of seeking forgetfulness and recreation out of doors, the absence of visitors—for the Curé, Father Francis, Doctor Danton, and the Reverend Mr. Clare comprised Kate's whole visiting list now—all tended to make dismalness more dismal. She could remember this time last year, when Reginald and Rose, and Sir Ronald, and all were with them—so many then, so few now; only herself and Eeny left.

The memory of the past time came back with a dulled sense of pain and misery. She had suffered so much that the sense of suffering was blunted—there was only a desolate aching of the heart when she thought of it now.

December and the old year died out, in a great winding-sheet of snow. January came, and its first week dragged away, and the master and mistress of the house were daily expected home.

Late in the afternoon of a January day, Kate sat at the drawing-room window, her chin resting on her hand, her eyes fixed on the white darkness. The wind made such a racket and uproar within and without, that she did not hear a modest tap at the door, or the turning of the handle. It was only when a familiar voice sounded close to her elbow that she started from her reverie.

"If you please, Miss Kate."

"Oh, is it you, Ogden? I did not hear you. What is the matter?"

Mr. Ogden drew nearer and lowered his voice.

"Miss Kate, have you been upstairs to-day?"

Kate knew what he meant by this rather guarded question—had she been to see Mr. Richards?

"No," she said in alarm; "is there anything the matter?"

"I am afraid there is, Miss Kate. I am afraid he is not very well."

"Not very well!" repeated Miss Danton. "Do you mean to say he is ill, Ogden?"

"Yes, Miss Kate, I am afraid he is. He wasn't very well last night, and this morning he is worse. He complains dreadful of headache, and he ain't got no appetite whatsomever. He's been lying down pretty much all day."

"Why did you not tell me sooner?" Kate cried, with a pang of remorse at her own neglect. "I will go to him at once."

She hastened upstairs, and into her brother's rooms. The young man was in the bedroom, lying on the bed, dressed, and in a sort of stupor. As Kate bent over him, and spoke, he opened his eyes, dull and heavy.

"Harry, dear," Kate said, kissing him, "what is the matter? Are you ill?"

Harry Danton made an effort to raise, but fell back on the pillow.

"My head aches as if it would split open, and I feel as if I had a ton-weight bearing down every limb. I think I am going to have the fever."

Kate turned pale.

"Oh, Harry, for Heaven's sake don't think that! The fever has left the village; why should you have it now?"

He did not reply. The heavy stupor that deadened every sense bore him down, and took away the power of speech. His eyes closed, and in another moment he had dropped off into a deep, lethargic sleep.

Kate arose and went out into the corridor, where she found Ogden waiting.

"He has fallen asleep," she said. "I want you to undress him, and get him into bed properly, while I go and prepare a saline draught. I am afraid he is going to be very ill."

She passed on, and ran down stairs to her father's study, where the medicine-chest stood. It took her some time to prepare the saline draught; and when she returned to the bed-chamber, Ogden had finished his task, and the sick man was safely in bed. He still slept—heavily, deep—but his breathing was laboured and his lips parched.

"I will give him this when he awakes," Kate said; "and I will sit up with him all night. You can remain in the next room, Ogden, so as to be within call, if wanted."

Kate remained by her sick brother through the long hours of that wintry night. She sat by the bedside, bathing the hot face and fevered hands, and holding cooling drinks to the dry lips. The shaded lamp lit the room dimly, too dimly to see to read; so she sat patiently, listening to the snow-storm, and watching her sick brother's face. In the next room Mr. Ogden slept the sleep of the just, in an arm-chair, his profound snoring making a sort of accompaniment to the howling of the wind.

The slow, slow hours dragged away, and morning came. It found the patient worse, weak, prostrated, and deadly sick, but not delirious.

"I know I have the fever, Kate," he said, in a weak whisper; "I am glad of it. I only hope it will be merciful, and take me off."

Kate went down to breakfast, which she could not eat, and then returned to the sick-room. Her experience among the sick of the village had made her skilful in the disease; but, despite all she could do, Harry grew weaker and worse. She dared not summon help, she dared not call in the Doctor, until her father's return.

"He ought to be here to-day," she thought. "Heaven grant it! If he does not and Harry keeps growing worse, I will go and speak to Father Francis this evening."

Fortunately this unpleasant duty was not necessary. The late afternoon train brought the newly-wedded pair home. Kate and Eeny met them in the hall, the latter kissing both with effusion, and Kate only shaking hands, with a pale and anxious countenance.

Mrs. Grace went upstairs with Eeny, to change her travelling costume, and Captain Danton was left standing in the hall with his eldest daughter.

"What is it, my dear?" he asked; "what has gone wrong?"

"Something very serious, I am afraid, papa. Harry is ill."

"Ill! How?—when?—what is the matter with him?"

"The fever," Kate said, in a whisper. "No one in the house knows it yet but Ogden. He was taken ill night before last, but I knew nothing of it till yesterday. I sat up with him last night, and did what I could, but I fear he is getting worse. I wanted to call in the Doctor, but I dared not until your return. What shall we do?"

"Send for Doctor Frank immediately," replied her father, promptly; "I have no fear of trusting him. He is the soul of honour, and poor Harry's secret is as safe with him as with ourselves. Grace has heard the story. I told her in Montreal. Of course, I could have no secrets from my wife. I will go to the village myself, and at once; that is, as soon as I have seen the poor boy. Let us go up now, my dear."

Kate followed her father upstairs, and into the sick man's room. With the approach of night he had grown worse, and was slightly delirious. He did not know his father when he bent over and spoke to him. He was tossing restlessly on his pillow, and muttering incoherently as he tossed.

"My poor boy! My poor Harry!" his father said, with tears in his-eyes. "Misfortune seems to have marked him for its own. Remain with him, Kate; I will go at once for Doctor Danton."

Five minutes later the Captain was galloping towards the village hotel, through the gray, gathering dusk. The young Doctor was in, seated in his own room, reading a ponderous-looking volume. He arose to greet his visitor, but stopped short at sight of his grave and anxious face.

"There is nothing wrong, I hope?" he inquired; "nothing has happened at the Hall?"

The Captain looked around the little chamber with the same anxious glance.

"We are quite alone?" he said.

"Quite," replied his brother-in-law, very much surprised.

"I have a story to tell you—a secret to confide to you. Your services are required at the Hall; but before I can avail myself of these services, I have a sacred trust to confide to you—a trust I am certain you will never betray."

"I shall never betray any trust you may repose in me, Captain Danton," the young man answered gravely.

Some dim inkling of the truth was in his mind as he spoke. Captain Danton drew his chair closer, and in a low, hurried voice began his story. The story he had once before told Reginald Stanford, the story of his unfortunate son.

Doctor Frank listened with a face of changeless calm. No surprise was expressed in his grave, earnest, listening countenance. When the Captain had finished his narrative, with an account of the fever that rendered his presence at once necessary, a faint flush dyed his forehead.

"I shall be certain now," he thought. "I only saw Agnes Darling's husband once, and then for a moment; but I shall know him again if I ever see him."

"I shall be with you directly," he said, rising; "as soon as they saddle my horse."

He rang the bell and gave the order. By the time his cap and coat were on, and a few other preparations made, the hostler had the horse at the door.

It was quite dark now; but the road was white with snow and the two men rode rapidly to the Hall with the strong January wind blowing in their faces. They went upstairs at once, and Doctor Frank, with an odd sensation, followed the master of Danton Hall across the threshold of that mysterious Mr. Richards' room.

The Captain's son lay in a feverish sleep, tossing wildly and raving incoherently. Kate, sitting by his bedside, he mistook for some one else, calling her "Agnes," and talking in disjointed sentences of days and things long since past.

"He thinks she is his wife," the Captain said, very sadly; "poor boy!"

The Doctor turned up the lamp, and looked long and earnestly into the fever-flushed face. His own seemed to have caught the reflection of that red glow, when at last he looked up.

"It is the fever," he said, "and a very serious case. You sat up last night, your father tells me, Miss Kate?"

"Yes," Kate answered.

She was very white and thoroughly worn out.

"You are not strong enough to do anything of the kind. You look half-dead now. I will remain here all night, and do you at once go and lie down."

"Thank you very much," Kate said, gratefully. "I can sleep when I know you are with him. Do you think there is any danger?"

"I trust not. You and I have seen far more serious cases down there in St. Croix, and we have brought them round. It is a very sad story, his—I am very sorry for your brother." Kate stooped and kissed the hot face, her tears falling on it.

"Poor, poor Harry! The crime of that dreadful murder should not lie at his door, but at that of the base wretch he made his wife!"

"Are you quite sure, Miss Danton," said the young Doctor, seriously, "that there may not have been some terrible mistake? From what your father tells me, your brother had very little proof of his wife's criminality beyond the words of his friend Furniss, who may have been actuated by some base motive of his own."

"He had the proof of his own senses," Kate said, indignantly; "he saw the man Crosby with his wife, and heard his words. The guilt of Harry's rash deed should rest far more on her than on him."

She turned from the room, leaving her father and the young Doctor to watch by the sick man all night. The Captain sought his wife, and explained the cause of her brother's sudden summons; and Kate, in her own room, quite worn out, lay down dressed as she was, and fell into a profound, refreshing sleep, from which she did not wake until late next morning.

When she returned to her brother's chamber, she found the Doctor and the Captain gone, and Grace keeping watch. Mrs. Danton explained that Frank had been summoned away about an hour previously to attend a patient in the village; and the Captain, at her entreaty, had gone to take some rest. The patient was much the same, and was now asleep.

"But you should not have come here, Mrs. Danton," Kate expostulated. "You know this fever is infectious."

Mrs. Danton smiled.

"My life is of no more value than yours or my husband's. I am not afraid—I should be very unhappy if I were not permitted to do what little good I can."

For the second time there flashed into Kate's mind the thought that she had never done this woman justice. Here she was, generous and self-sacrificing, risking her own safety by the sick-bed of her husband's own son. Could it be that after all she had married her father because she loved him, and not because he was Captain Danton of Danton Hall?

"Father Francis ought to know," she mused; "and Father Francis sings her praises on every occasion. I know Eeny loves her dearly, and the servants like and respect her in a manner I never saw surpassed. Can it be that I have been blind, and unjust, and prejudiced from first to last, and that my father's wife is a thousand times better than I am?"

The two women sat together in the sick-room all the forenoon. Kate talked to her step-mother far more socially and kindly than she had ever talked to her before, and was surprised to find Grace had a ready knowledge of every subject she started. She smiled at herself by and by in a little pause in the conversation.

"She is really very pleasant," she thought. "I shall begin to like her presently, I am afraid."

Early in the afternoon, Doctor Frank returned. There was little change in his patient, and no occasion for his remaining. He stayed half an hour, and then took his hat to leave. He had more pressing cases in the village to attend, and departed promising to call again before nightfall.

The news of Mr. Richards' illness had spread by this time through the house. The young Doctor knew this, and wondered if Agnes Darling had heard it, and why she did not try to see him. He was thinking about it as he walked briskly down the avenue, and resolving he must try and see her that evening, when a little black figure stepped out from the shadow of the trees and confronted him.

"'Angels and ministers of grace defend us,'" ejaculated the Doctor; "I thought it was a ghost, and I find it is only Agnes Darling. You look about as pale as a ghost, though. What is the matter with you?"

She clasped her hands and looked at him piteously.

"He is sick. You have seen him? Oh, Doctor Danton! is it Harry?"

"My dear Mrs. Danton, I am happy to tell you it is. Don't faint now, or I shall tell you nothing more."

She leaned against a tree, white and trembling; her hands clasped over her beating heart.

"And he is ill, and I may not see him. Oh, tell me what is the matter."

"Fever. Don't alarm yourself unnecessarily. I do not think his life is in any danger."

"Thank God! Oh, thank God for that!"

She covered her face with her slender hands, and he could see the fast-falling tears.

"My dear Agnes," he said, kindly. "I don't like to see you distress yourself in this manner. Besides, there is no occasion. I think your darkest days are over. I don't see why you may not go and nurse your husband."

Her hands dropped from before her face, her great dark eyes fixed themselves on his face, dilated and wildly.

"You would like it, wouldn't you? Well, I really don't think there is anything to hinder. He is calling for you perpetually, if it will make you happy to know it. Tell Miss Danton your story at once; tell her who you are, and if she doubts your veracity, refer her to me. I have a letter from Mr. Crosby, testifying in the most solemn manner your innocence. I wrote to him, Agnes, as I could not find time to visit him. Tell Miss Kate to-day, if you choose, and you may watch by your husband's bedside to night. Good afternoon. Old Renaud is shouting out with rheumatism; I must go and see after him."

He strode away, leaving Agnes clinging to the tree, trembling and white. The time had come, then. Her husband lived, and might be returned to her yet. At the thought she fell down on her knees on the snowy ground, with the most fervent prayer of thanksgiving in her heart she had ever uttered.

Some two hours later, and just as the dusk of the short winter day was falling, Kate came out of her brother's sick-room. She looked jaded and worn, as she lingered for a moment at the hall-window to watch the grayish-yellow light fade out of the sky. She had spent the best part of the day in the close chamber, and the bright outer air seemed unspeakably refreshing. She went to her room, threw a large cloth mantle round her shoulders, drew the fur-trimmed hood over her head, and went out.

The frozen fish-pond glittered like a sheet of ivory in the fading light; and walking slowly around it, she saw a little familiar figure, robed like a nun, in black. She had hardly seen the pale seamstress for weeks, she had been too much absorbed in other things; but now, glad of companionship, she crossed over to the fish-pond and joined her. As she drew closer, and could see the girl's face in the cold, pale twilight, she was struck with its pallor and indescribably mournful expression.

"You poor, pale child!" Miss Danton said; "you look like some stray spirit wandering ghostily around this place. What is the matter now, that you look so wretchedly forlorn?"

Agnes looked up in the beautiful, pitying face, with her heart in her eyes.

"Nothing," she said, tremulously, "but the old trouble, that never leaves me. I think sometimes I am the most unhappy creature in the whole wide world."

"Every heart knoweth its own bitterness," Miss Danton said, steadily. "Trouble seems to be the lot of all. But yours—you have never told me what it is, and I think I would like to know."

They were walking together round the frozen pond, and the face of the seamstress was turned away from the dying light. Kate could not see it, but she could hear the agitation in her voice when she spoke.

"I am almost afraid to tell you. I am afraid, for oh, Miss Danton! I have deceived you."

"Deceived me, Agnes?"

"Yes; I came here in a false character. Oh, don't be angry, please; but I am not Miss Darling—I am a married woman."

"Married! You?"

She looked down in speechless astonishment at the tiny figure and childlike face of the little creature beside her.

"You married!" she repeated. "You small, childish-looking thing! And where in the wide world is your husband?"

Agnes Darling covered her face with her hands, and broke out into a hysterical passion of tears.

"Don't cry, you poor little unfortunate. Tell me if this faithless husband is the friend I once heard you say you were in search of?"

"Yes, yes," Agnes answered, through her sobs. "Oh, Miss Danton! Please, please, don't be angry with me, for, indeed, I am very miserable."

"Angry with you, my poor child," Kate said, tenderly; "no, indeed! But tell me all about it. How did this cruel husband come to desert you? Did he not love you?"

"Oh, yes, yes, yes."

"And you—did you love him?"

"With my whole heart."

The memory of her own dead love stung Kate to the very soul.

"Oh!" she said, bitterly, "it is only a very old story, after all. We are all alike; we give up our whole heart for a man's smile, and, verily, we get our reward. This husband of yours took a fancy, I suppose, to some new and fresher face, and threw you over for her sake?"

Agnes Darling looked up with wide black eyes.

"Oh, no, no! He loved me faithfully. He never was false, as you think. It was not that; he thought I was false, and base, and wicked. Oh!" she cried, covering her lace with her hands again; "I can't tell you how base he thought me."

"I think I understand," Kate said, slowly. "But how was it? It was not true, of course."

Agnes lifted her face, raised her solemn, dark eyes mournfully to the gaze of the earnest blue ones.

"It was not true," she replied simply; "I loved him with all my heart, and him only. He was all the world to me, for I was alone, an orphan, sisterless and brotherless. I had only one relative in the wide world—a distant cousin, a young man, who boarded in the same house with me. I was only a poor working-girl of New York, and my husband was far above me—I thought so then, know it since. I knew very little of him. He boarded in the same house, and I only saw him at the table. How he ever came to love me—a little pale, quiet thing like me—I don't know; but he did love me—he did—it is very sweet to remember that now. He loved me, and he married me, but under an assumed name, under the name of Darling, which I know now was not his real one."

She paused a little, and Kate looked at her with sudden breathless interest. How like this story was to another, terribly familiar.

"We were married," Agnes went on, softly and sadly, "and I was happy. Oh, Miss Danton, I can never tell you how unspeakably happy I was for a time. But it was not for long. Troubles began to

gather thick and fast before many months. My husband was a gambler"—she paused a second or two at Miss Danton's violent start—"and got into his old habits of staying out very late at night, and often, when he had lost money, coming home moody and miserable. I had no influence over him to stop him. He had a friend, another gambler, and a very bad man, who drew him on. It was very dreary sitting alone night after night until twelve or one o'clock, and my only visitor was my cousin, the young man I told you of. He was in love, and clandestinely engaged to a young lady, whose family were wealthy and would not for a moment hear of the match. I was his only confidante, and he liked to come in evenings and talk to me of Helen. Sometimes, seeing me so lonely and low-spirited, he would stay with me within half an hour of Harry's return; but Heaven knows neither he nor I ever dreamed it could be wrong. No harm might ever have come of it, for my husband knew and liked him, but for that gambling companion, whose name was Furniss."

She paused again, trembling and agitated, for Miss Danton had uttered a sharp, involuntary exclamation.

"Go on! Go on!" she said breathlessly.

"This Furniss hated my cousin, for he was his successful rival with Helen Hamilton, and took his revenge in the cruelest and basest manner. He discovered that my cousin was in the habit of visiting me occasionally in the evening, and he poisoned my husband's mind with the foulest insinuations.

"He told him that William Crosby, my cousin, was an old lover, and that—oh, I cannot tell you what he said! He drove my husband, who was violent and passionate, half mad, and sent him home one night early, when he knew Will was sure to be with me. I remember that dreadful night so well—I have terrible reason to remember it. Will sat with me, talking of Helen, telling me he could wait no longer; that she had consented, and they were going to elope the very next night. While he was speaking the door was burst open, and Harry stood before us, livid with fury, a pistol in his hand. A second later, and there was a report—William Crosby sprang from his seat and fell forward, with a scream I shall never forget. I think I was screaming too; I can hardly recollect what I did, but the room was full in a moment, and my husband was gone—how, I don't know. That was two years ago, and I have never seen him since; but I think—"

She stopped short, for Kate Danton had caught her suddenly and violently by the arm, her eyes dilating.

"Agnes!" she exclaimed, passionately; "what is it you have been telling me? Who are you?"

Agnes Darling held up her clasped hands.

"Oh, Miss Danton," she cried, "for our dear Lord's sake, have pity on me! I am your brother's wretched wife!"

CHAPTER XXI.

DOCTOR DANTON'S GOOD WORKS.

The two women stood in the bleak twilight looking at each other—Agnes with piteous, imploring eyes, Kate dazed and hopelessly bewildered.

"My brother's wife!" she repeated. "You! Agnes Darling!"

"Oh, dear Miss Danton, have pity on me! Let me see him. Let me tell him I am innocent, and that I love him with my whole heart. Don't cast me off! Don't despise me! Indeed, I am not the guilty creature he thinks me!"

"Agnes, wait," Kate said, holding out her hand. "I am so confounded by this revelation that I hardly know what to do or say. Tell me how you found out my brother was here? Did you know it when you came?"

"Oh, no. I came as seamstress, with a lady from New York to Canada, and when I left her I lived in the Petite Rue de St. Jacques. There you found me; and I came here, never dreaming that I was to live in the same house with my lost husband."

"And how did you make the discovery? Did you see him?"

"Yes, Miss Danton; the night you were all away at the party, you remember. I saw him on the stairs, returning to his room. I thought then it was a spirit, and I fainted, as you know, and Doctor Danton was sent for, and he told me it was no spirit, but Harry himself."

"Doctor Danton!" exclaimed Kate, in unbounded astonishment. "How did Doctor Danton come to know anything about it?"

"Why, it was he—oh, I haven't told you. I must go back to that dreadful night when my cousin was shot. As I told you, the room was filled with people, and among them there was a young man—a Doctor, he told us—who made them lift poor Will on the bed, and proceeded to examine his wound. It was not fatal."

She stopped, for Kate had uttered a cry and grasped her arm.

"Not fatal!" she gasped. "Oh, Agnes! Agnes! Tell me he did not die!"

"He did not, thank Heaven. He lived, and lives still—thanks to the skill and care of Doctor Danton."

Kate clasped her hands with a fervent prayer of thanksgiving.

"Oh, my poor Harry!" she cried, "immured so long in those dismal rooms, when you were free to walk the world. But perhaps the punishment was merited. Go on, Agnes; tell me all."

"The wound was not fatal, but his state was very critical. Doctor Danton extracted the bullet, and remained with him all night. I was totally helpless. I don't remember anything about it, or anything that occurred for nearly a fortnight. Then I was in a neighbour's room; and she told me I had been very ill, and, but for the kindness and care of the young Doctor, must have died. She told me William lived, and was slowly getting better; but the good Doctor had hired a nurse to attend him, and came to the house every day. I saw him that very afternoon, and had a long talk with him. He told me his name was Doctor Danton, that he had come from Germany on business, and must return in a very few days now. He said he had friends in Canada, whom he had intended to visit, but this unfortunate affair had prevented him. He had not the heart to leave us in our forlorn and dangerous state. He would not tell his friends of his visit to America at all, so they would have no chance to feel offended. Oh, Miss Danton, I cannot tell you how good, how noble, how generous he was. He left New York the following week; but before he went he forced me to take money enough to keep me six months. I never felt wholly desolate until I saw him go, and then I thought my heart would break. Heaven bless him! He is the noblest man I ever knew."

Kate's heart thrilled with a sudden response. And this was the man she had slighted, and perhaps despised—this hero, this great, generous, good man!

"You are right," she said; "he is noble. And after that, Agnes, what did you do?"

"I dismissed the hired nurse, and took care of poor Will until he fully recovered. Then he resumed his business; and I went back, sick and sorrowful, to my old life. I can never tell you how miserable I was. The husband I loved was lost to me forever. He had gone, believing me guilty of the worst of crimes, and I should never see him again to tell him I was innocent. The thought nearly broke my heart; but I lived and lived, when, I only prayed, wickedly, I know, to die. I came to Canada—I came here; and here I met my best friend once more. I saw Harry, or an apparition, as I took it to be, until Doctor Danton assured me to the contrary. He did not know, but he suspected the truth—he is so clever; and now that he has seen him, and knows for certain, he told me to tell you who I was. Miss Danton, I have told you the simple truth, as Heaven hears me. I have been true and faithful in thought and word to the husband I loved. Don't send me away; don't disbelieve and despise me."

She lifted her streaming eyes and clasped hands in piteous supplication. There were tears, too, in the blue eyes of Kate as she took the little supplicant in her arms.

"Despise you, my poor Agnes! What a wretch you must take me to be! No, I believe you, I love you, you poor little broken-down child. I shall not send you away. I know Harry loves you yet; he calls for you continually in his delirium. I shall speak to papa; you shall see him to-night. Oh! to think how much unnecessary misery there is in the world."

She put her arm round her slender waist, and was drawing her towards the house. Before they reached it, a big dog came bounding and barking up the avenue and overtook them.

"Be quiet, Tiger," said Kate, halting. "Let us wait for Tiger's master, Agnes."

Tiger's master appeared a moment later. One glance sufficed to show him how matters stood.

He lifted his hat with a quiet smile.

"Good evening, Miss Danton; good evening, Mrs. Danton. I see you have come to an understanding at last."

"My brother—we all owe you a debt we can never repay," Kate said gravely; "and Agnes here pronounces you an uncanonized saint."

"So I am. The world will do justice to my stupendous merits by-and-by. You have been very much surprised by Agnes' story, Miss Danton?"

"Very much. We are going in to tell papa. You will come with us, Doctor?"

"If Mrs. Agnes does not make me blush by her laudations. Draw it mild, Agnes, won't you. You have no idea how modest I am."

He opened the front door and entered the hall as he spoke, followed by the two girls. The drawing-room door was ajar, but Eeny and her teacher were the only occupants of that palatial chamber.

"Try the dining-room," suggested Kate; "it is near dinner-hour; we will find some one there."

Doctor Frank ran down-stairs, three steps at a time, followed more decorously by his companions. Grace seated near the table, reading by the light of a tall lamp, was the only

occupant. She lifted her eyes in astonishment at her brother's boisterous entrance.

"Where is papa?" Kate asked.

"Upstairs in the sick-room."

"Then wait here, Doctor; wait here, Agnes! I will go for him."

She ran lightly upstairs, and entered the sick man's bedroom. The shaded lamp lit it dimly, and showed her her father sitting by the bedside talking to his son. The invalid was better this evening—very, very weak, but no longer delirious.

"You are better, Harry dear, are you not?" his sister asked, stooping to kiss him; "and you can spare papa for half an hour? Can't you, Harry?"

A faint smile was his answer. He was too feeble to speak. Miss Danton summoned Ogden from one of the outer rooms, left him in charge, and bore her father off.

"What has happened, my dear?" the Captain asked. "There is a whole volume of news in your face."

Kate clasped her hands around his arm, and looked up in his face with her great earnest eyes.

"The most wonderful thing, papa! Just like a play or a novel! Who do you think is here?"

"Who? Not Rose come back, surely?"

"Rose? Oh, no!" Kate answered, with wonderful quietness. "You never could guess. Harry's wife!"

"What!"

"Papa! Poor Harry was dreadfully mistaken. She was innocent all the time. Doctor Frank knows all about it, and saved the life of the man Harry shot. It is Agnes Darling, papa. Isn't it the strangest thing you ever heard of?"

They were at the dining-room door by this time—Captain Danton in a state of the densest bewilderment, looking alternately at one and another of the group before him.

"What, in the name of all that's incomprehensible, does this mean? Kate, in Heaven's name, what have you been talking about?"

Miss Danton actually laughed at her father's mystified face.

"Sit down, papa, and I'll tell you all about it. Here!"

She wheeled up his chair and made him be seated, then leaning over the back, in her clear, sweet voice, she lucidly repeated the tale Agnes Darling had told her. The Captain and his wife sat utterly astounded; and Agnes, with her face hidden, was sobbing in her chair.

"Heaven bless me!" ejaculated the astonished master of Danton Hall. "Can I believe my ears? Agnes Darling, Harry's wife!"

"Yes, Captain," Doctor Frank said, "she is your son's wife—his innocent and deeply-injured wife. The man Crosby, in what he believed to be his dying hour, solemnly testified, in the presence of a clergyman, to her unimpeachable purity and fidelity. It was the evil work of that villain Furniss, from first to last. I have the written testimony of William Crosby in my pocket at this moment. He is alive and well, and married to the lady of whom he was speaking when your son shot him. I earnestly hope you will receive this poor child, and unite her to her husband, for I am as firmly convinced of her innocence as I am of my own existence at this moment."

"Receive her!" Captain Danton cried, with the water in his eyes. "That I will, with all my heart. Poor little girl—poor child," he said, going over and taking the weeping wife into his arms. "What a trial you have undergone! But it is over now, I trust. Thank Heaven my son is no murderer, and under Heaven, thanks to you, Doctor Danton. Don't cry, Agnes—don't cry. I am heartily rejoiced to find I have another daughter."

"Oh, take me to Harry!" Agnes pleaded. "Let me tell him I am innocent! Let me hear him say he forgives me!"

"Upon my word, I think the forgiveness should come from the other side," said the Captain. "He was always a hot-headed, foolish boy, but he has received a lesson, I think, he will never forget. How say you, Doctor, may this foolish little girl go to that foolish boy?"

"I think not yet," the Doctor replied. "In his present weak state the shock would be too much for him. He must be prepared first. How is he this evening?"

"Much better, not at all delirious."

"I will go and have a look at him," said Doctor Frank, rising. "Don't look so imploringly, Agnes; you shall see him before long. Miss Danton, have the goodness to accompany me. If we find him much better, I will let you break the news to him and then fetch Agnes. But mind, madame," raising a warning finger to the sobbing little woman, "no hysterics! I can't have my patient agitated. You promise to be very quiet, don't you!"

"Oh, yes! I'll try."

"Very good. Now, Miss Danton."

He ran up the stairs, followed by Kate. The sick man lay, as he had left him, quietly looking at the shaded lamp, very feeble—very, very feeble and wasted. The Doctor sat down beside him, felt his pulse, and asked him a few questions, to which the faint replies were lucid and intelligible.

"No fever to-night. No delirium. You're fifty per cent. better. We will have you all right now, in no time. Kate has brought an infallible remedy."

The sick man looked at his sister wonderingly.

"Can you bear the shock of some very good news, Harry darling?" Kate said stooping over him.

"Good news!" he repeated feebly, and with an incredulous look. "Good news for me!"

"Yes, indeed, thou man of little faith! The best news you ever heard. You won't agitate yourself, will you, if I tell you?"

Doctor Frank arose before he could reply.

"I leave you to tell him by yourself. I hear the dinner-bell; so adieu."

He descended to the dining-room and took his place at the table. Captain Danton's new-found daughter he compelled to take poor Rose's vacant place; but Agnes did not even make a pretence of eating anything. She sat with her hands clasped tightly in her lap, her eyes fixed steadily on the door, trying with all her might to be calm and wait.

The appetite of the whole family was considerably impaired by the revelation just made, and all waited anxiously the return of Kate. In half an hour the dining-room door opened, and that young lady appeared, very pale, and with traces of tears on her face, but smiling withal.

Agnes sprang up breathlessly.

"Come," Kate said, holding out her hand; "he is waiting for you!"

With a cry of joy Agnes hurried out of the room and upstairs.

At the green baize door Kate restrained her a moment.

"You must be very quiet, Agnes—very calm, and not excite or agitate him."

"Oh, yes! yes! Oh, let me go!"

Miss Danton opened the door and let her in. In a moment she was kneeling by the bedside, her arms around his weak head, showering kisses and tears on his pale, thin face.

"Forgive me!" she said. "Forgive me, my own, my dear, my lost husband. Oh, never think I was false. I never, never was, in thought or act, for one moment. Say you forgive me, my darling, and love me still."

Of course, Kate did not linger. When she again entered the dining-room, she found one of those she had left, gone.

"Where is Doctor Frank?" she asked.

"Gone," Grace said. "A messenger came for him—some one sick in the village. Do take your dinner. I am sure you must want it."

"How good he is," Kate thought. "How energetic and self-sacrificing. If I were a man, I should like to be such a man as he."

After this night of good news, Harry Danton's recovery was almost miraculously rapid. The despair that had deadened every energy, every hope, was gone. He was a new man; he had something to live for; a place in the world, and a lost character to retrieve. A week after that eventful night, he was able to sit up; a fortnight, and he was rapidly gaining vigour and strength, and health for his new life.

Agnes, that most devoted little wife, had hardly left these three mysterious rooms since she had first entered them. She was the best, the most untiring, the most tender of nurses, and won her way to the hearts of all. She was so gentle, so patient, so humble, it was impossible not to love her; and Captain Danton sometimes wondered if he had ever loved his lost, frivolous Rose as he loved his new daughter.

It had been agreed upon that, to avoid gossip and inquiry, Harry was not to show himself in the house, to the servants, but as soon as he was fully recovered, to leave for Quebec, with his wife, and take command of a vessel there.

His father had written to the ship-owners—old friends of his—and had cheerfully received their promise.

The vessel was to sail for Plymouth early in March, and it was now late in February.

Of course, Agnes was to go with him. Nothing could have separated these reunited married lovers now.

The days went by, the preparations for the journey progressed, the eve of departure came. The Danton family, with the Doctor and Father Francis, were assembled in the drawing-room, spending that last evening together. It was the first time, since his return to the Hall, Harry had been there. How little any of them dreamed it was to be the last!

They were not very merry, as they sat listening to Kate's music. Down in that dim recess where the piano stood, she sat, singing for the first time the old songs that Reginald Stanford had loved. She was almost surprised at herself to find how easily she could sing them, how little emotion the memories they brought awoke. Was the old love forever dead, then? And this new content at her heart—what did it mean? She hardly cared to ask. She could not have answered; she only knew she was happy, and that the past had lost power to give her pain.

It was late when they separated. Good-byes were said, and tender-hearted little Agnes cried as she said good-bye to Doctor Frank. The priest and the physician walked to the little village together, through the cold darkness of the starless winter night.

At the presbytery-gate they parted, Father Francis going in, Doctor Danton continuing his walk to the distant cottage of a poor sick patient. The man was dying. The young doctor lingered by his bedside until all was over, and morning was gray in the eastern sky when he left the house of death.

But what other light was that red in the sky, beside the light of morning? A crimson, lurid light that was spreading rapidly over the face of the cloudy heavens, and lighting even the village road with its unearthly glare? Fire! and in the direction of Danton Hall, growing brighter and brighter, and redder with every passing second. Others had seen it, too, and doors were flying open, and men and women flocking out.

"Fire! Fire!" a voice cried. "Danton Hall is on fire!"

And the cry was taken up and echoed and reëchoed, and every one was rushing pell-mell in the direction of the Hall.

Doctor Frank was one of the first to arrive. The whole front of the old mansion seemed a sheet of fire and the red flames rushed up into the black sky with an awful roar. The family were only just aroused, and, with the servants, were flocking out, half-dressed. Doctor Frank's anxious eyes counted them; there were the Captain and Grace, Harry and Agnes, and last of all, Kate.

The servants were all there, but there was one missing still. Doctor Frank was by Grace's side in a moment.

"Where is Eeny?"

"Eeny! Is she not here?"

"No. Good Heaven, Grace! Is she in the house?"

Grace looked around wildly.

"Yes, yes! She must be! Oh, Frank—"

But Frank was gone, even while she spoke, into the burning house. There was still time. The lower hall and stairway were still free from fire, only filled with smoke.

He rushed through, and upstairs; in the second hall the smoke was suffocating, and the burning brands were falling from the blazing roof. Up the second flight of stairs he flew blinded, choked, singed. He knew Eeny's room; the door was unlocked, and he rushed in. The smoke or fire had not penetrated here yet, and on the bed the girl lay fast asleep, undisturbed by all the uproar around her.

To muffle her from head to foot in a blanket, snatch her up and fly out of the room, was but the work of a few seconds. The rushing smoke blinded and suffocated him, but he darted down the staircases as if his feet were winged. Huge cinders and burning flakes were falling in a fiery shower around him, but still he rushed blindly on. The lower hall was gained, a breeze of the blessed cold air blew on his face.

They were seen, they were saved, and a wild cheer arose from the breathless multitude. Just at that instant, with his foot on the threshold, an avalanche of fire seemed to fall on his head from the burning roof.

Another cry, this time a cry of wild horror arose from the crowd; he reeled, staggered like a drunken man; some one caught Eeny out of his arms as he fell to the ground.

CHAPTER XXII.

AFTER THE CROSS, THE CROWN.

The glare of a brilliant April sunset shone in the rainbow-hued western sky, and on the fresh, green earth, all arrayed in the budding promise of spring.

Grace Danton stood by the window of a long, low room, looking thoughtfully out at the orange and crimson dyes of the far-off sky.

The room in which she stood was not at all like the vast old-fashioned rooms of Danton Hall. It was long and narrow, and low-ceilinged, and very plainly furnished. There was the bed in the centre, a low, curtainless bed, and on it, pale, thin, and shadowy, lay Grace's brother, as he had lain for many weary weeks. He was asleep now, deeply, heavily, tossing no longer in the wild delirium of brain-fever, as he had tossed for so many interminable days and nights.

Grace dropped the curtain, and went back to her post by the bedside. As she did so, the door softly opened, and Kate, in a dark, unrustling dress and slippers of silence, came in. She had changed in those weeks; she looked paler and thinner, and the violet eyes had a more tender light, a sadder beauty than of old.

"Still asleep," she said, softly, looking at the bed. "Grace, I think your prayers have been heard."

"I trust so, dear. Is your father in?"

"No; he has ridden over to see how the builders get on. You must want tea, Grace. Go, I will take your place."

Grace arose and left the room, and Kate seated herself in the low chair, with eyes full of tender compassion. What a shadow he was of his former self—so pale, so thin, so wasted! The hand lying on the counterpane was almost transparent, and the forehead, streaked with damp brown hair, was like marble.

"Poor fellow!" Kate thought, pushing these stray locks softly back, and forgetting how dangerously akin pity is to love—"poor fellow!"

Yes, it has come to this. Sick—dying, perhaps—Kate Danton found how dear this once obnoxious young Doctor had grown to her heart. "How blessings brighten as they take their flight!" Now that she was on the verge of losing him forever, she discovered his value—discovered that her admiration was very like love. How could she help it? Women admire heroes so much! And was not this brave young Doctor a real hero? From first to last, had not his life in St. Croix been one list of good and generous deeds?

The very first time she had ever seen him, he had been her champion, to save her from the insults and rudeness of two drunken soldiers. He had been a sort of guardian angel to poor Agnes in her great trouble. He had saved her brother's life and honour. He had perilled his own life to save that of her sister. The poor of St. Croix spoke of him only to praise and bless him. Was not this house besieged every day with scores of anxious inquirers? He was so good, so great, so noble, so self-sacrificing, so generous—oh! how could she help loving him? Not with the love that had once been Reginald Stanford's, whose only basis was a fanciful girl's liking for a handsome face, but a love far deeper and truer and stronger. She looked back now at the first infatuation, and wondered at herself. The scales had fallen from her eyes, and she saw her sister's husband in his true light—false, shallow, selfish, dishonourable.

"Oh," she thought, with untold thanksgiving in her heart, "what would have become of me if I had married him?"

There was another sore subject in her heart, too—that short-lived betrothal to Sir Ronald Keith. How low she must have fallen when she could do that! How she despised herself now for ever entertaining the thought of that base marriage. She could thank Father Francis at last. By the sick-bed of Doctor Frank she had learned a lesson that would last her a lifetime.

The radiance of the sunset was fading out of the sky, and the gray twilight was filling the room. She rose up, drew back the green curtains, and looked for a moment at the peaceful village street. When she returned to the bedside, the sleeper was awake, his eyes calm and clear for the first time. She restrained the exclamation of delight which arose to her lips, and tried to catch the one faint word he uttered:

"Water?"

She gently raised his head, her cheeks flushing, and held a glass of lemonade to his lips. A faint smile thanked her; and then his eyes closed, and he was asleep again. Kate sank down on her knees by the bedside, grateful tears falling from her eyes, to thank God for the life that would be spared.

From that evening the young man rallied fast.

The Doctor, who came from Montreal every day to see him, said it was all owing to his superb constitution and wondrous vitality. But he was very, very weak. It was days and days before he was strong enough to think, or speak, or move. He slept, by fits and starts, nearly all day long, recognizing his sister, and Kate, and Eeny, and the Captain, by his bedside, without wondering how they came to be there, or what had ailed him.

But strength to speak and think was slowly returning; and one evening, in the pale twilight, opening his eyes, he saw Kate sitting beside him, reading. He lay and watched her, strong enough to think how beautiful that perfect face was in the tender light, and to feel a delicious thrill of pleasure, weak as he was, at having her for a nurse.

Presently Kate looked from the book to the bed, and blushed beautifully to find the earnest brown eyes watching her so intently.

"I did not know you were awake," she said, composedly. "Shall I go and call Grace?"

"On no account. I don't want Grace. How long have I been sick?"

"Oh, many weeks; but you are getting better rapidly now."

"I can't recall it," he said, contracting his brows. "I know there was a fire, and I was in the house; but it is all confused. How was it?"

"The Hall was burned down, you know—poor old house!—and you rushed in to save Eeny, and—"

"Oh, I remember, I remember. A beam or something fell, and after that all is oblivion. I have had a fever, I suppose?"

"Yes, you have been a dreadful nuisance—talking all day and all night about all manner of subjects, and frightening us out of our lives."

The young man smiled.

"What did I talk about? Anything very foolish?"

"I dare say it was foolish enough, if one could have understood it, but it was nearly all Greek to me. Sometimes you were in Germany, talking about all manner of outlandish things; sometimes you were in New York, playing Good Samaritan to Agnes Darling."

"Oh, poor Agnes! Where is she?"

"Taken to the high seas. She and Harry had to go, much against their inclination, while you were so ill."

"And Eeny—did Eeny suffer any harm that night?"

"No; Doctor Frank was the only sufferer. The poor old house was burned to the ground. I was so sorry."

"And everything was lost?"

"No, a great many things were saved. And they are building a new and much more handsome Danton Hall, but I shall never love it as I did the old place."

"Where are we now?"

"In the village. We have taken this cottage until the new house is finished. Now don't ask any more questions. Too much talking isn't good for you."

"How very peremptory you are!" said the invalid, smiling; "and you have taken care of me all this weary time. What a trouble I must have been!"

"Didn't I say so! A shocking trouble. And now that you are able to converse rationally, you are more trouble than ever, asking so many questions. Go to sleep."

"Won't you let me thank you first?"

"No, thanks never would repay me for all the annoyance you have been. Show your gratitude by obedience, sir—stop talking and go to sleep!"

Perhaps Doctor Frank found it very pleasant to be ordered, for he obeyed with a smile on his face.

Of course, with such a nurse as Miss Danton, the man would be obstinate, indeed, who would not rally. Doctor Frank was the reverse of obdurate, and rallied with astonishing rapidity. His sister, Eeny, and Kate were the most devoted, the most attentive of nurses; but the hours that Captain Danton's eldest daughter sat by his bedside flew like so many minutes. It was very pleasant to lie there, propped up with pillows, with the April sunshine lying in yellow squares on the faded old carpet, and watch that beautiful face, bending over some piece of elaborate embroidery, or the humble dress of some village child. She read for him, too, charming romances, and poetry as sweet as the ripple of a sunlit brook, in that enchanting voice of hers; and Doctor Frank began to think convalescence the most delightful state of being that ever was heard of, and to wish it could last forever.

But, like all the pleasant things of this checkered life, it came to an end all too soon. The day arrived when he sat up in his easy chair by the open window, with the scented breezes blowing in his face, and watched dreamily the cows grazing in the fields, and the dark-eyed French girls tripping up and down the dusty road. Then, a little later, and he could walk about in the tiny garden before the cottage, and sit up the whole day long. He was getting better fast; and Miss Danton, concluding her occupation was gone, became very much like the Miss Danton of old. Not imperious and proud—she never would be that again—but reserved and distant, and altogether changed; the delightful readings were no more, the pleasant *tête-à-têtes* were among the things of the past, the long hours spent by his side, with some womanly work in her fingers, were over and gone. She was very kind and gentle still, and the smile that always greeted him was very bright and sweet, but that heavenly past was gone forever. Doctor Frank, about as clear-sighted

as his sex generally are, of course never guessed within a mile of the truth.

"What a fool I was!" he thought, bitterly, "flattering myself with such insane dreams, because she was grateful to me for saving her sister's life, and pitied me when she thought I was at death's door. Why, she nursed every sick pauper in St. Croix as tenderly as she did me. She is right to put me back in my place before I have made an idiot of myself!"

So the convalescent gentleman became moody, and silent and generally disagreeable; and Grace was the only one who guessed at his feelings and was sorry for him. But he grew well in spite of hidden trouble, and began to think of what he was to do in the future.

"I'll go back to Montreal next week, I think," he said to his sister; "now that the fever has gone, it won't pay to stay here. If I don't get on in Montreal, I'll try New York."

Man proposes, etc. That evening's mail brought him a letter that materially altered all his plans. He sat so long silent and thoughtful after reading it, that Grace looked at him in surprise.

"You look as grave as an owl, Frank. Whom is your letter from?"

Doctor Frank started out of his reverie to find Kate's eyes fixed inquiringly upon him too.

"From Messrs. Grayson & Hambert, my uncle's solicitors. He is dead."

Grace uttered a little cry.

"Dead! Frank! And you are his heir?"

"Yes."

"How much has he left?" Mrs. Danton asked, breathlessly.

"Twenty thousand pounds."

Grace clasped her hands.

"Twenty thousand pounds? My dear Frank! You have no need to go slaving at your profession now."

Her brother looked at her in quiet surprise.

"I shall slave at my profession all the same. This windfall will, however, alter my plans a good deal. I must start for Montreal to-morrow morning."

He rose and left the room. Grace turned to her step-daughter.

"I am afraid you must think us heartless, Kate; but we have known very little of this uncle, and that little was not favourable. He was a miser—a stern and hard man—living always alone and with few friends. I am so thankful he left his money to Frank."

Doctor Frank left St. Croix next morning for the city, and his absence made a strange blank in the family. The spring days wore on slowly. April was gone, and it was May. Captain Danton was absent the best part of every day, superintending the erection of the new house, and the three women were left alone. Miss Danton grew listless and languid. She spent her days in purposeless loiterings in and out of the cottage, in long reveries and solitary walks.

The middle of May came without bringing the young Doctor, or even a letter from him. The family were seated one moonlight night in the large, old-fashioned porch in front of the cottage, enjoying the moonlight and Eeny's piano. Kate sat in a rustic arm-chair just outside, looking up at the silvery crescent swimming through pearly clouds, and the flickering shadows of the climbing sweetbrier coming and going on her fair face. Captain Danton smoked and Grace talked to him; and while she sat, Father Francis opened the garden gate and joined them.

"Have you heard from your brother yet?" he asked of Grace, after a few moments' preliminary conversation.

"No; it is rather strange that he does not write."

"He told me to make his apologies. I had a letter from him to-day. He is very busy preparing to go away."

"Go away! Go where?"

"To Germany; he leaves in a week."

"And will he not come down to say good-bye?" inquired Grace, indignantly.

"Oh, certainly! He will be here in a day or two."

"And how long is he going to stay abroad?"

"That seems uncertain. A year or two, probably, at the very least."

Grace stole a look at Kate, but Kate had drawn back into the shadow of the porch, and her face was not to be seen. Father Francis lingered for half an hour, and then departed; and as the dew was falling heavily, the group in the porch arose to go in. The young lady in the easy-chair did not stir.

"Come in, Kate," her father said, "it is too damp to remain there."

"Yes, papa, presently."

About a quarter of an hour later, she entered the parlour to say good-night, very pale, as they all noticed.

"I knew sitting in the night air was bad," her father said. "You are as white as a ghost."

Miss Danton was very grave and still for the next two days—a little sad, Grace thought. On the third day, Doctor Frank arrived. It was late in the afternoon, and he was to depart again early next morning.

"What are you running away for now?" asked his sister, with asperity. "What has put this German notion in your head?"

The young man smiled.

"My dear Grace, don't wear that severe face. Why should I not go? What is to detain me here?"

This was such an unanswerable question that Grace only turned away impatiently; and Kate, who was in the room, fancying the brother and sister might wish to be alone, arose and departed. As the door closed after her, Captain Danton's wife faced round and renewed the attack.

"If you want to know what is to detain you here, I can tell you now. Stay at home and marry Kate Danton."

Her brother laughed, but in rather a constrained way.

"That is easier said than done, sister mine. Miss Danton never did more than tolerate me in her life—sometimes not even that. Impossibilities are not so easily achieved as you think."

"Suppose you try."

"And be refused for my pains. No, thank you."

"Very well," said Mrs. Grace with a shrug; "a wilful man must have his way! You cannot tell whether you will be refused or not until you ask."

"I have a tolerably strong conviction, though. No, Mrs. Grace, I shall go to Germany, and forget my folly; for that I have been an idiot, I don't deny."

"And are so still! Do as you please, however; it is no affair of mine."

Doctor Frank rode over to the new building to see how it progressed. It was late when he returned with the Captain, and he found that Kate had departed to spend the evening with Miss Howard. If he wanted further proof of her indifference, surely he had it here.

It was very late, and the family had retired before Miss Danton came home. She was good enough though, to rise, very early next morning to say good-bye. Doctor Frank took his hasty breakfast, and came into the parlour, where he found her alone.

"I thought I was not to have the pleasure of seeing you before I went," he said, holding out his hand. "I have but ten minutes left: so good-bye."

His voice shook a little as he said it. In spite of every effort, her fingers closed around his, and her eyes looked up at him with her whole heart in their clear depths.

"Kate!" he exclaimed, the colour rushing to his face with a sudden thrill of ecstasy, and his hand closing tight over the slender fingers he held. "Kate!"

She turned away, her own cheeks dyed, not daring to meet that eager, questioning look.

"Kate!" he cried, appealingly; "it is because I love you I am going away. I never thought to tell you."

Five minutes later Grace opened the door impetuously.

"Frank, don't you know you will be la—Oh, I beg pardon."

She closed it hastily, and retreated. The Captain, standing in the doorway, looked impatiently at his watch.

"What keeps the fellow? He'll be late to a dead certainty."

Grace laughed.

"There is no hurry, I think. I don't believe Frank will go to Germany this time."

CHAPTER XXIII.

LONG HAVE I BEEN TRUE TO YOU, NOW I'M TRUE NO LONGER.

Far away from the blue skies, and bracing breezes of Lower Canada, the twilight of a dull April day was closing down over the din and tumult of London.

It had been a wretched day—a day of sopping rain and enervating mist. The newly-lighted street-lamps blinked dismally through the wet fog, and the pedestrians hurried along, poising umbrellas, and buttoned up to the chin.

At the window of a shabby-genteel London lodging-house a young woman sat, this dreary April evening, looking out at the cheering prospect of dripping roofs and muddy pavement. She sat with her chin resting on her hands, staring vacantly at the passers-by, with eyes that took no interest in what she saw. She was quite young, and had been very pretty, for the loose, unkempt hair was of brightest auburn, the dull eyes of hazel brown, and the features pretty and delicate. But the look of intense sulkiness the girl's face wore would have spoiled a far more beautiful countenance, and there were traces of sickness and trouble, all too visible. She was dressed in a soiled silk, arabesqued with stains, and a general air of neglect and disorder characterized her and her surroundings. The carpet was littered and unswept, the chairs were at sixes and sevens, and a baby's crib, wherein a very new and pink infant reposed, stood in the middle of the room.

The young woman sat at the window gazing sullenly out at the dismal night for upwards of an hour, in all that time hardly moving. Presently there was a tap at the door, and an instant after, it opened, and a smart young person entered and began briskly laying the cloth for supper. The young person was the landlady's daughter, and the girl at the window only gave her one glance, and then turned unsocially away.

"Ain't you lonesome here, Mrs. Stanford, all alone by yourself?" asked the young person, as she lit the lamp. "Mother says it must be awful dull for you, with Mr. Stanford away all the time."

"I am pretty well used to it," answered Mrs. Stanford, bitterly. "I ought to be reconciled to it by this time. Is it after seven?"

"Yes, ma'am. Mr. Stanford comes home at seven, don't he? He ought to be here soon, now. Mother says she wishes you would come down to the parlour and sit with us of a day, instead of being moped up here."

Mrs. Stanford made no reply whatever to this good-natured speech, and the sulky expression seemed to deepen on her face. The young person, finished setting the table, and was briskly departing, when Mrs. Stanford's voice arrested her.

"If Mr. Stanford is not here in half an hour, you can bring up dinner."

As Mrs. Stanford spoke, the pink infant in the crib awoke and set up a dismal wail. The young mother arose, with an impatient sigh, lifted the babe, and sat down in a low nurse-chair, to soothe it to sleep again. But the baby was fretful, and cried and moaned drearily, and resisted every effort to be soothed to sleep.

"Oh, dear, dear!" Rose cried, impatiently, giving it an irritated shake. "What a torment you are! What a trouble and wretchedness everything is!"

She swayed to and fro in her rocking-chair, humming drearily some melancholy air, until, by-and-by, baby, worn out, wailingly dropped off asleep again in her arms.

As it did so, the door opened a second time, and the brisk young person entered with the first course. Mrs. Stanford placed her first-born back in the crib, and sat down to her solitary dinner. She ate very little. The lodging-house soups and roasts had never been so distasteful before. She pushed the things away, with a feeling of loathing, and went back to her low chair, and fell into a train of dismal misery. Her thoughts went back to Canada to her happy home at Danton Hall.

Only one little year ago she had given the world for love, and thought it well lost—and now! Love's young dream, splendid in theory, is not always quite so splendid in practice. Love's young dream had wound up after eleven months, in poverty, privation, sickness and trouble, a neglectful husband, and a crying baby! How happy she had been in that bright girlhood, gone forever! Life had been one long summer holiday, and she dressed in silks and jewels, one of the queen-bees in the great human hive. The silks and the jewels had gone to the pawnbroker long ago, and here she sat, alone, in a miserable lodging-house, subsisting on unpalatable food, sleeping on a hard mattress, sick and wretched, with that whimpering infant's wails in her ears all day and all night. Oh! how long ago it seemed since she had been bright, and beautiful, and happy, and free—hundreds of years ago at the very least! She sighed in bitter sorrow, as she thought of the past—the irredeemable past.

"Oh, what a fool I was!" she thought, bursting into hysterical tears. "If I had only married Jules La Touche, how happy I might have been! He loved me, poor fellow, and would have been true always, and I would have been rich, and happy, and honoured. Now I am poor, and sick, and neglected, and despised, and I wish I were dead, and all the trouble over!"

Mrs. Stanford sat in her low chair, brooding over such dismal thoughts as these, while the slow

hours dragged on. The baby slept, for a wonder. A neighbouring church clock struck the hours solemnly one after another—ten, eleven, twelve! No Mr. Stanford yet, but that was nothing new. As midnight, struck, Rose got up, secured the door, and going into an inner room, flung herself, dressed as she was, on the bed, and fell into the heavy, dreamless sleep of exhaustion.

She slept so soundly that she never heard a key turn in the lock, about three in the morning, or a man's unsteady step crossing the floor. The lamp still burning on the table, enabled Mr. Reginald Stanford to see what he was about, otherwise, serious consequences might have ensued. For Mr. Stanford was not quite steady on his legs, and lurched as he walked, as if his wife's sitting-room had been the deck of a storm-tossed vessel.

"I s'pose she's gone to bed," muttered Mr. Stanford, hiccoughing. "Don't want to wake her—makes a devil of a row! I ain't drunk, but I don't want to wake her."

Mr. Stanford lurched unsteadily across the parlour, and reconnoitred the bedroom. He nodded sagaciously, seeing his wife there asleep, and after making one or two futile efforts to remove his boots, stretched himself, boots and all, on a lounge in the sitting-room, and in two minutes was as sound as one of the Seven Sleepers.

It was late next morning before either of the happy pair awoke. A vague idea that there was a noise in the air aroused the gentleman about nine o'clock. The dense fog in his brain, that a too liberal allowance of rosy wine is too apt to engender, took some time to clear away; but when it did, he became conscious that the noise was not part of his dreams, but some one knocking loudly at the door.

Mr. Stanford staggered sleepily across the apartment, unlocked the door, and admitted the brisk young woman who brought them their meals.

Mr. Stanford, yawning very much, proceeded to make his toilet. Twelve months of matrimony had changed the handsome ex-lieutenant, and not for the better. He looked thinner and paler; his eyes were sunken, and encircled by dark halos, telling of night revels and morning headaches. But that wonderful beauty that had magnetized Rose Danton was there still; the features as perfect as ever; the black eyes as lustrous; all the old graceful ease and nonchalance of manner characterized him yet. But the beauty that had blinded and dazzled her had lost its power to charm. She had been married to him a year—quite long enough to be disenchanted. That handsome face might fascinate other foolish moths; it had lost its power to dazzle her long, long ago. Perhaps the disenchantment was mutual; for the pretty, rose-cheeked, starry-eyed girl who had captivated his idle fancy had become a dream of the past, and his wife was a pale, sickly, peevish invalid, with frowsy hair and slipshod feet.

The clattering of the cups and saucers awoke the baby, who began squalling dismally; and the baby's cries awoke the baby's mamma. Rose got up, feeling cramped and unrefreshed, and came out into the parlour with the infant in her arms. Her husband turned from a dreary contemplation of the sun trying to force its way through a dull, yellow fog, and dropped the curtain.

"Good-morning, my dear," said Mr. Stanford, pouring out a cup of tea. "How are you to-day? Can't you make that disagreeable youngster hold his confounded tongue?"

"What time did you get home last night?" demanded Mrs. Stanford, with flashing eyes.

"It wasn't last night, my dear," replied Mr. Stanford, serenely, buttering his roll; "it was sometime this morning, I believe."

"And of course you were drunk as usual!"

"My love, pray don't speak so loudly; they'll hear you down stairs," remonstrated the gentleman. "Really, I believe I had been imbibing a little too freely. I hope I did not disturb you. I made as little noise as possible on purpose, I assure you. I even slept in my boots, not being in a condition to take them off. Wash your face, my dear, and comb your hair—they both need it very much—and come take some breakfast. If that baby of yours won't hold its tongue, please to throw it out of the window."

Mrs. Stanford's reply was to sink into the rocking-chair and burst into a passion of tears.

"Don't, pray!" remonstrated Mr. Stanford; "one's enough to cry at a time. Do come and have some breakfast. You're hysterical this morning, that is evident, and a cup of tea will do you good."

"I wish I were dead!" burst out Rose, passionately. "I wish I had been dead before I ever saw your face!"

"I dare say, my love. I can understand your feelings, and sympathize with them perfectly."

"Oh, what a fool I was!" cried Rose, rocking violently backward and forward; "to leave my happy home, my indulgent father, my true and devoted lover, for you! To leave wealth and happiness for poverty, and privation, and neglect, and misery! Oh, fool! fool! fool! that I was!"

"Very true, my dear," murmured Mr. Stanford sympathetically. "I don't mind confessing that I was a fool myself. You cannot regret your marriage any more than I do mine."

This was a little too much. Rose sprang up, flinging the baby into the cradle, and faced her lord and master with cheeks of flame and eyes of fire.

"You villain!" she cried. "You cruel, cold-blooded villain, I hate you! Do you hear, Reginald Stanford, I hate you! You have deceived me as shamefully as ever man deceived woman! Do you think I don't know where you were last night, or whom you were with? Don't I know it was with that miserable, degraded Frenchwoman—that disgusting Madame Millefleur—whom I would have whipped through the streets of London, if I could."

"I don't doubt it, my dear," murmured Mr. Stanford, still unruffled by his wife's storm of passion. "Your gentle sex are famous for the mercy they always show to their fairer sisters. Your penetration does you infinite credit, Mrs. Stanford. I was with Madame Millefleur."

Rose stood glaring at him, white and panting with rage too intense for words. Reginald Stanford stood up, meeting her fierce regards with wonderful coolness.

"You're not going to tear my hair out, are you, Rose? You see the way of it was this: Coming from the office where I have the honour to be clerk—thanks to my marriage—I met Madame Millefleur, that most bewitching and wealthy of French widows. She is in love with me, my dear. It may seem unaccountable to you how any one can be in love with me, but the fact is so. She is in love with me almost as much as pretty Rose Danton was once upon a time, and gave me an invitation to accompany her to the opera last night. Of course I was enchanted. The opera is a rare luxury now, and la Millefleur is all the fashion. I had the happiness of bending over her chair all the evening—don't glare so, my love, it makes you quite hideous—and accepted a seat beside her in the carriage when it was all over. A delicious *petit souper* awaited us in Madame's bijou of a boudoir; and I don't mind owning I was a little disguised by sparkling Moselle when I came home. Open confessions are good for the soul—there is one for you, my dear."

Her face was livid as she listened, and he smiled up at her with a smile that nearly drove her mad.

"I hate you, Reginald Stanford!" was all she could say. "I hate you! I hate you!"

"Quite likely, my love; but I dare say I shall survive that. You would rather I didn't come here any more, I suppose, Mrs. Stanford?"

"I never want to see your hateful, wicked face again. I wish I had been dead before I ever saw it."

"And I wish whatever you wish, dearest and best," he said, with a sneering laugh; "if you ever see my wicked, hateful face again, it shall be no fault of mine. Perhaps you had better go back to Canada. M. La Touche was very much in love with you last year, and may overlook this little episode in your life, and take you to his bosom yet. Good morning, Mrs. Stanford. I am going to call on Madame Millefleur."

He took his hat and left the room, and Rose dropped down in her chair and covered her face with her hands.

If Kate Danton and Jules La Touche ever wished for revenge, they should have seen the woman who so cruelly wronged them at that moment. Vengeance more bitter, more terrible than her worst enemy could wish, had overtaken and crushed her to the earth.

How that long, miserable day passed, the poor child never knew. It came to an end, and the longer, more miserable night followed. Another morning, another day of unutterable wretchedness, and a second night of tears and sleeplessness. The third day came and passed, and still Reginald Stanford never returned. The evening of the third day brought her a letter, with Napoleon's head on the corner.

/P "Hotel Du Louvre, Paris, April 10. P/

My Dear Mrs. Stanford:—For you have still the unhappiness of bearing that odious name, although I have no doubt Captain Danton will shortly take the proper steps to relieve you of it. According to promise, I have rid you of my hateful presence, and forever. You see I am in brilliant Paris, in a palatial hotel, enjoying all the luxuries wealth can procure, and Madame Millefleur is my companion. The contrast between my life this week and my life last is somewhat striking. The frowning countenance of Mrs. Stanford is replaced by the ever-smiling face of my dark-eyed Adèle, and the shabby lodgings in Crown street, Strand, are exchanged for this chamber of Eastern gorgeousness. I am happy, and so, no doubt, are you. Go back to Canada, my dear Mrs. Stanford. Papa will receive his little runaway with open arms, and kill the fatted calf to welcome her. The dear Jules may still be faithful, and you may yet be thrice blessed as Madame La Touche. Ah, I forget—you belong to the Church, and so does he, that does not believe in divorce. What a pity!

"I beg you will feel no uneasiness upon pecuniary matters, my dear Rose. I write by this post to our good landlady, inclosing the next six months' rent, and in this you will find a check for all present wants.

"I believe this is all I have to say, and Adèle is waiting for me to escort her on a shopping expedition. Adieu, my Rose; believe me, with the best wishes for your future happiness, to be Ever your friend,

"Reginald Reinecourt Stanford."

CHAPTER XXIV.

COALS OF FIRE.

One afternoon, about a fortnight after the receipt of that letter from France, Rose Stanford sat alone once more in the shabby little parlour of the London lodging-house. It was late in April, but a fire burned feebly in the little grate, and she sat cowering over it wrapped in a large shawl. She had changed terribly during these two weeks; she had grown old, and hollow-eyed, a haggard, worn, wretched woman.

It was her third day up, this April afternoon, for a low, miserable fever had confined her to her bed, and worn her to the pallid shadow she was now. She had just finished writing a letter, a long, sad letter, and it lay in her lap while she sat shivering over the fire. It was a letter to her father, a tardy prayer for forgiveness, and a confession of all her misdoings and wrongs—of Reginald Stanford's rather, for, of course, all the blame was thrown upon him, though, if Rose had told the truth, she would have found herself the more in fault of the two.

"I am sick, and poor, and broken-hearted," wrote Mrs. Stanford; "and I want to go home and die. I have been very wicked, papa, but I have suffered so much, that even those I have wronged most might forgive me. Write to me at once, and say I may go home; I only want to go and die in peace. I feel that I am dying now."

She folded the letter with a weary sigh and a hand that shook like an old woman's, and rising, rang the bell. The brisk young woman answered the summons at once with a smile on her face, and Mrs. Stanford's baby crowing in her arms. They had been very kind to the poor young mother and the fatherless babe during this time of trial; but Mrs. Stanford was too ill and broken down to think about it, or feel grateful.

"Here, Jane," said Mrs. Stanford, holding out the letter, "give me the baby, and post this letter."

Jane obeyed; and Rose, with the infant in her lap, sat staring gloomily at the red coals.

"Two weeks before it will reach them, two weeks more before an answer can arrive, and another two weeks before I can be with them. Oh, dear me! dear me! how shall I drag out life during these interminable weeks. If I could only die at once and end it all."

Tears of unutterable wretchedness and loneliness and misery coursed down her pale, thin cheeks. Surely no one ever paid more dearly for love's short madness than this unfortunate little Rose.

"Marry in haste and repent at leisure," she thought, with unspeakable bitterness. "Oh, how happy I might have been to-day if I had only done right last year. But I was mad and treacherous and false, and I dare-say it serves me right. How can I ever look them in the face when I go home?"

The weary weeks dragged on, how wearily and miserably only Rose knew. She never went out; she sat all day long in that shabby parlour, and stared blankly at the passers-by in the street, waiting, waiting.

The good-natured landlady and her daughter took charge of the baby during those wretched weeks of expectation, or Mrs. Reginald Stanford's only son would have been sadly neglected.

April was gone; May came in, bringing the anniversary of Rose's ill-starred marriage and finding her in that worst widowhood, a day of ceaseless tears and regrets to the unhappy, deserted wife. The bright May days went by, one after another, passing as wretched days and more wretched nights do pass somehow; and June had taken its place. In all this long, long time, no letter had come for Rose. How she watched and waited for it; how she had strained her eyes day after day to catch sight of the postman; how her heart leaped up and throbbed when she saw him approach, and sank down in her breast like lead as he went by, only those can know who have watched and waited like her. A sickening sense of despair stole over her at last. They had forgotten her; they hated and despised her, and left her to her fate. There was nothing for it but to go to the alms-house and die, like any other pauper.

She had been mad when she fancied they could forgive her. Her sins had been too great. All the world had deserted her, and the sooner she was dead and out of the way the better.

She sat in the misty June twilight thinking this, with a sad, hopeless kind of resignation. It was the fifth of June. Could she forget that this very day twelvemonth was to have been her wedding-day? Poor Jules—poor Kate! Oh, what a wretch she had been!

She covered her face with her hands, tears falling like rain through her thin fingers.

"I wonder if they will be sorry for me, and forgive me, when they hear I am dead?" she thought. "Oh, how I live, and live; when other women would have died long ago with half this trouble. Only nineteen, and with nothing left to wish for but death."

There was a tap at the door. Before she could speak it was opened, and Jane, the brisk, came rustling in.

"There's a gentleman down-stairs, Mrs. Stanford, asking to see you."

Rose sprang up, her lips apart, her eyes dilating.

"To see me! A gentleman! Jane, is it Mr. Stanford?"

Jane shook her head.

"Not a bit like Mr. Stanford, ma'am; not near so 'andsome, though a very fine-looking gentleman. He said, to tell you as 'ow a friend wanted to see you."

A friend! Oh, who could it be? She made a motion to Jane to show him up—she was too agitated to speak. She stood with her hands clasped over her beating heart, breathless, waiting.

A man's quick step flew up the stairs; a tall figure stood in the doorway, hat in hand.

Rose uttered a faint cry. She had thought of her father, of Jules La Touche, never once of him who stood before her.

"Doctor Frank!" she gasped; and then she was holding to a chair for support, feeling the walls swimming around her.

Doctor Frank took her in his arms, and kissed her pale cheek as tenderly and pityingly as her father might have done.

"My poor child! My poor little Rose! What a shadow you are! Don't cry so—pray don't!"

She bowed her weary head against his shoulder, and broke out into hysterical sobbing. It was so good to see that friendly familiar face once more—she clung to him with a sense of unspeakable trust and relief, and cried in the fullness of her heart.

He let her tears flow for awhile, sitting beside her, and stroking the faded, disordered hair away from the wan, pale face.

"There! there!" he said, at last, "we have had tears enough now. Look up and let me talk to you. What did you think when you received no answer to your letter?"

"I thought you all very cruel. I thought I was forgotten."

"Of course you did; but you are not forgotten, and it is my fault that you have had no letter. I wanted to surprise you; and I have brought a letter from your father breathing nothing but love and forgiveness."

"Give it to me!" cried Rose, breathlessly; "give it to me!"

"Can't, unfortunately, yet awhile. I left it at my hotel. Don't look so disappointed. I am going to take you there in half an hour. Hallo! Is that the baby?"

Reginald Stanford, Junior, asleep in his crib, set up a sudden squall at this moment.

Doctor Frank crossed the floor, and hoisted him up in a twinkling.

"Why, he's a splendid little fellow, Rose, and the very image of—What do you call him?"

"Reginald," Rose said, in a very subdued tone.

"Well, Master Reginald, you and I are going to be good friends, aren't we, and you're not going to cry?"

He hoisted him high in the air, and baby answered with a loud crow.

"That's right. Babies always take to me, Rose. You don't know how many dozens I have nursed in my time. But you don't ask me any questions about home. Aren't you curious to know how they all get on?"

"Papa is married, I suppose?" Rose said.

"Of course—last January. And Danton Hall was burnt down; and they have built up another twice as big and three times as handsome. And Mr. Richards—you remember the mysterious invalid, Rose?"

"Yes."

"Well, Mr. Richards turned out to be your brother Harry, who lived shut up there, because he thought he had committed a murder, some time before, in New York. And Agnes Darling—you have not forgotten Agnes Darling?"

"Oh, no."

"Agnes Darling turns out to be his wife. Quite a romance, isn't it? I will tell you all the particulars another time. Just now, I want you to put on your bonnet and come with me to my hotel. Don't ask me why—I won't tell you. We will fetch the baby too. Go, get ready."

Doctor Frank was imperative, and Rose yielded at once. It was so indescribably delightful, after all these weeks of suspense and despair, to see Frank Danton's friendly face, and to listen to his friendly voice, commanding as one who had the right. Rose had her hat and shawl on directly,

and, with baby in her arms, followed him down stairs. A hansom stood waiting. He helped her in, gave the cabman his orders, took his place beside her, and they rattled off.

"When am I going home?" Rose asked, suddenly. "Have you come to fetch me?"

"Not precisely. You are to return with me, however."

"And when are we going?"

"That is not quite decided yet. It is an after-consideration, and there is no hurry. Are you particularly anxious to be back to Canada?"

"I am tired of being lonely and homeless," poor Rose replied, the tears starting. "I want to be at rest, and among the dear familiar faces. Doctor Frank," she said, looking at him appealingly, "have they forgiven me, do you think?"

"Whom do you mean by they, Mrs. Stanford?"

"Papa and—and Kate."

"I have reason to think so. Of course, it must have been rather disagreeable to Kate at first, to have her lover run away and leave her, but I really think she has got over it. We must be resigned to the inevitable, you know, my dear Rose, in this changeable world."

Rose sighed, and looked out of the window. A moment later, and the cab drew up before a stately hotel.

"This is the place," said the Doctor. "Come!"

He helped her out, gave his arm, and led her up a long flight of broad stairs. It was quite a little journey through carpeted corridors to the gentleman's apartments; but he reached the door at last. It opened into a long vista of splendour, as it seemed to Rose, accustomed so long to the shabby Strand lodgings. She had expected to find the Doctor's rooms empty; but, to her surprise, within an inner apartment, whose door stood wide, she saw a lady. The lady, robed in bright silk, tall and stately, with golden hair twisted coronet wise round the shapely head, stood with her back to them, looking out of the window. Something in that straight and stately form struck with a nameless thrill to Rose Stanford's heart; and she stood in the doorway, spell-bound. At the noise of their entrance, the lady turned round, uttered an exclamation of pleasure, and advanced towards them. Doctor Frank stood with a smile on his face, enjoying Mrs. Stanford's consternation. Another second and she was clasped in the lady's arms.

"Rose! Rose! My dear little sister!"

"Kate!" Rose murmured, faintly, all white and trembling.

Kate looked up at the smiling face of the Doctor, a new light dawning on her.

"Oh, he has never told you! For shame, Frank, to shock her so! My darling, did you not know I was here?"

"No; he never told me," Rose said, sinking into a chair, and looking hopelessly at her sister. "What does it mean, Kate? Is papa here?"

"I leave the onerous duty of explaining everything to you, Kate," said the Doctor, before Kate could reply. "I am going down stairs to smoke."

"That provoking fellow!" Kate said, smilingly, looking after him; "it is just like him."

"Is papa here?" Rose repeated, wonderingly.

"No, my dear; papa is at Danton Hall, with his wife. It was impossible for him to come."

"Then how do you happen to be here, and with Doctor Frank?"

Kate laughed—such a sweet, clear, happy laugh—as she kissed Rose's wondering face.

"For the very best reason in the world, Mrs. Stanford! Because I happen to be Doctor Frank's wife!"

Rose sat, confounded, speechless—literally struck dumb—staring helplessly.

"His wife!" she repeated. "His wife!" and then sat lost in overwhelming amaze.

"Yes, my dear; his happy wife. I do not wonder you are astonished, knowing the past; but it is a long story to tell. I am ashamed to think how wicked and disagreeable, and perverse, I used to be; but it is all over now. I think there is no one in all the wide world like Frank!"

Her eyes filled as she said it, and she laid her face for a moment on her sister's shoulder.

"I was blind in those past days, Rose, and too prejudiced to do justice to a noble man's worth. I love my husband with my whole heart—with an affection that can never change."

"And you forgive me?"

"I forgave you long ago. Is this the baby? How pretty! Give him to me."

She took Master Reginald in her arms, and kissed his chubby face.

"To think that you should ever nurse Reginald Stanford's child! How odd!" said Rose, languidly.

The colour rushed into Mrs. Frank Danton's face for a second or two, as she stooped over the baby.

"Strange things happen in this world. I shall be very fond of the baby, I know."

"And Grace, whom you disliked so much, is your mother and sister both together. How very queer!"

Kate laughed.

"It is odd, but quite true. Come, take your things off; you are not to leave us again. We will send to your lodgings for your luggage."

"How long have you been married?" asked Rose, as she obeyed.

"Three weeks; and this is our bridal tour. We depart for Paris in two days. You know Frank has had a fortune."

"I don't know anything. Do tell me all about it—your marriage and everything. I am dying of curiosity."

Mrs. Doctor Danton seated herself in a low chair, with Reginald Stanford's first-born in her lap, and began recapitulating as much of the past as was necessary to enlighten Mrs. Stanford.

"So he saved Eeny's life; and you nursed him, and fell in love with him, and married him, and his old uncle dies and leaves him a fortune in the nick of time. It sounds like a fairy tale; you ought to finish with—'and they lived happy forever after!'"

"Please Heaven, we will! Such real-life romance happens every day, sister mine. Oh, by-the-by, guess who was at our wedding?"

"Who?"

"A very old friend of yours, my dear—Monsieur Jules La Touche."

"No! Was he, though? How did you come to invite him?"

"He chanced to be in the neighbourhood at the time. Do you know, Rose, I should not be surprised if he accomplished his destiny yet, and became papa's son-in-law."

Rose looked up, breathlessly, thinking only of herself.

"Impossible, Kate!—What do you mean?"

"Not at all impossible, I assure you. Eeny was my bride-maid, and you have no idea how pretty she looked; and so Monsieur La Touche seemed to think, by the very marked attention he paid her. It would be an excellent thing for her; he is in a fair way of becoming a millionaire."

A pang of the bitterest envy and mortification she had ever felt, pierced Rose Stanford's heart. Oh! what a miserable—what an unfortunate creature she had been! She turned away, that her sister might not see her face, and Kate carelessly went on.

"Eeny always liked him, I know. She likes him better than ever now. I shall not be at all surprised if we find her engaged when we go home."

"Indeed!" Rose said, trying to speak naturally, and failing signally. "And when are we going home?"

"Early in November, I believe. Frank and I are to make Montreal our home, for he will not give up his profession, of course; and you shall come and live with us if you like the city better than St. Croix."

Rose's slumbers that night were sadly disturbed. It was not the contrast between her handsome bedroom and downy pillows, and the comfortless little chamber she had slept in so long; it was not thought of her sister's goodness and generosity: it was the image of Eeny, in silk and jewels, the bride of Jules La Touche, the millionaire.

Somehow, unacknowledged in her heart of hearts, there had lingered a hope of vengeance on her husband, triumph for herself as the wife of her deserted lover! There would be a divorce, and then she might legally marry. She had no conscientious scruples about that sort of marriages, and she took it for granted Monsieur La Touche could have none either. But now these hopes were nipped in the bud. Eeny—younger, fresher, fairer, perhaps—was to have him and the splendid position his wife must attain; and she was to be a miserable, poor, deserted wife all her days.

I am afraid Mrs. Stanford was not properly thankful for her blessings that night. She had thought, only one day before, that to find her friends and be forgiven by them would be the sum total of earthly happiness; but now she had found them, and was forgiven, she was as wretched as ever.

The contrast between what she was and what she might have been was rather striking, certainly;

and the bitterest pang of all was the thought she had no one to blame, from first to last, but herself.

Oh, if she had only been true! This was what came of marrying for love, and trampling under foot prudence, and honour, and truth. A month or two of joy, and life-long regret and repentance!

Doctor Danton, his wife, and sister, took a hurried scamper over London, and departed for Paris.

The weather in that gay capital was very warm, indeed, but delightful to Rose, who had never crossed the Channel before. Paris was comparatively familiar ground to the young Doctor; he took the two ladies sight-seeing perpetually; and Mrs. Stanford almost forgot her troubles in the delights of the brilliant French city.

A nurse had been engaged for baby, so that troublesome young gentleman no longer came between his mamma and life's enjoyment. Her diminished wardrobe had been replenished too; and, well-fed and well-dressed, Rose began to look almost like the sparkling, piquant Rose of other days.

The Dantons had been three weeks in Paris, and were to leave in a day or two en route for Switzerland. The Doctor had taken them for a last drive through the Bois de Boulogne the sunny afternoon that was to be their last for some time in the French capital. Kate and Rose, looking very handsome, and beautifully dressed, lay back among the cushions, attracting more than one glance of admiration from those who passed by.

Mrs. Danton was chatting gayly with her husband, and Rose, poising a dainty azure parasol, looked at the well-dressed Parisians around her.

Suddenly, the hand so daintily holding the parasol grasped it tight, the hot blood surged in a torrent to her face, and her eyes fixed and dilated on two equestrians slowly approaching. A lady and gentleman—the lady a Frenchwoman evidently, dark, rather good-looking, and not very young; the gentleman, tall, eminently handsome, and much more youthful than his fair companion, Rose Stanford and her false husband were face to face!

He had seen them, and grown more livid than death; his eyes fixed on Doctor Danton and his beautiful wife, talking and laughing with such infinitely happy faces.

One glance told him how matters stood—told him the girl he had forsaken was the happy wife of a better man. Then his glance met that of his wife, pretty, and blooming and bright as when he had first fallen in love with her; but those hazel eyes were flashing fire, and the pretty face was fierce with rage and scorn.

Then they were past; and Reginald Stanford and his wife had seen each other for the last time on earth.

The summer flew by. They visited Switzerland, Germany, Italy, and were back in Paris in October. About the middle of that month they sailed from Havre to New York, and reached that city after a delightful passage. It being Rose's first sight of the Empire City, they lingered a week to show her the lions, and early in November were on the first stage of their journey to Danton Hall.

CHAPTER XXV.

AT HOME.

Late in the afternoon of a dark November day our travellers reached St. Croix, and found the carriage from the Hall awaiting them at the station. Rose leaned back in a corner, wrapped in a large shawl, and with a heart too full of mingled feelings to speak. How it all came back to her, with the bitterness of death, the last time her eyes had looked upon these familiar objects—how happy she had been then, how hopeful; how miserable she had been since, how hopeless now. The well-known objects flitted before her eyes, seen through a mist of tears, so well-known that it seemed only yesterday since she had last looked at them, and these dreary intervening months only a wretched dream. Ah! no dream, for there sat the English nurse with the baby in her arms, a living proof of their reality. One by one the old places spun by, the church, the presbytery, with Father Francis walking up and down the little garden, his soutane tucked up, and his breviary in his hand, all looking ghostly in the dim afternoon light. Now the village was passed, they were flying through wide open gates, and under the shadow of the dear old trees. There was Danton Hall, not the dingy, weather-beaten Danton Hall she knew, but a much more modern, much more elegant mansion; and there on the gray stone steps stood her father, handsome and portly, and kindly as ever; and there was Grace beside him—dear, good Grace; and there was Eeny, dressed in pale pink with fluttering ribbons, fair and fragile, and looking like a rosebud. A little group of three persons behind, at sight of whom Kate uttered an exclamation of delight.

"Oh, Frank! there are Harry and Agnes! To think papa never told us! What a charming surprise!"

That was all Rose heard; then she was clasped in her father's stalwart arms, and sobbing on his breast. They all clustered around her first—their restored prodigal—and Grace kissed her lovingly, and Eeny's soft arms were around her neck. Then the group in the background came forward, and Rose saw a sunburned sailor's face, and knew that it was her brother Harry who was kissing her, and her sister Agnes whose arms clung around her. Then she looked at the third person, still standing modestly in the background, and uttered a little cry.

"Jules! M. La Touche!"

He came forward, a smile on his face, and his hand frankly outstretched, while Eeny blushingly hovered aloof.

"I am very happy to see you again, Mrs. Stanford—very happy to see you looking so well!"

So they had met, and this was all! Then they were in the drawing-room—how, Rose could not tell—it was all like a dream to her, and Eeny had the babe in her arms, and was carrying it around to be kissed and admired. "The beauty! The darling! The pet!" Eeny could not find words enough to express her enthusiastic rapture at such a miracle of babydom, and kissed Master Reginald into an angry fit of crying.

They got up to their rooms at last. Rose broke down again in the seclusion of her chamber, and cried until her eyes were as sore as her heart. How happy they all looked, loving and beloved; and she, the deserted wife, was an object of pity. While she sat crying, there was a tap at the door. Hastily drying her eyes, she opened it, and admitted Grace.

"Have you been crying, Rose?" she said, tenderly taking both her hands, and sitting down beside her. "My poor dear, you must try and forget your troubles, and be happy with us. I know it is very sad, and we are all sorry for you; but the husband you have lost is not worth grieving for. Were you not surprised," smiling, "to see Mr. La Touche here?"

"Hardly," said Rose, rather sulkily. "I suppose he is here in the character of Eeny's suitor?"

"More than that, my dear. He is here in the character of Eeny's affianced husband. They are to be married next month."

Rose uttered an exclamation—an exclamation of dismay. She certainly had never dreamed of this.

"The marriage would have taken place earlier, but was postponed in expectation of your and Kate's arrival. That is why Harry and Agnes are here. M. La Touche has a perfect home prepared for his bride in Ottawa. Come, she is in Kate's room now. I will show you her trousseau."

Rose went with her step-mother from her chamber into Eeny's dressing-room. There was spread out the bridal outfit. Silks, in rich stiffness, fit to stand alone; laces, jewels, bridal-veil, and wreath. Rose looked with dazzled eyes, and a feeling of passionate, jealous envy at her heart. It might have been hers, all this splendour—she might have been mistress of the palace at Ottawa, and the wife of a millionaire.

But she had given up all for love of a handsome face; and that handsome face smiled on another now, and was lost to her forever. She choked back the rebellious throbbing of her heart, and praised the costly wedding outfit, and was glad when she could escape and be alone again. It was all bitter as the waters of Marah, to poor, widowed Rose; their forgiveness, so ready and so generous, was heaping coals of fire on her head; and at home, surrounded by kind friends and every comfort so long a stranger to her, she felt even more desolate than she had ever done in the dreary London lodgings.

But while all were happy at Danton Hall, save Captain Danton's second daughter, once the gayest among them, the days flew by, and Eveleen Danton's wedding-day dawned. Such a lovely December day, brilliant, cloudless, warm—just the day for a wedding. The little village church was crowded with the rich and the poor, long before the carriages from the Hall arrived. Very lovely looked the young bride, in her silken robe of virgin white, her misty veil, and drooping, flower-crowned head. Very sweet, and fair, and innocent, and as pale as her snowy dress, the centre of all eyes, as she moved up the aisle, on her father's arm. There were four bride-maids; the Demoiselles La Touche came from Ottawa for the occasion. Miss Emily Howard, and Miss La Favre. The bride's sisters shared with her the general admiration—Mrs. Dr. Danton; Mrs. Stanford, all auburn ringlets, and golden brown silk, and no outward sign of the torments within; Mrs. Harry Danton, fair as a lily, clinging to her sailor-husband's arm, like some spirit of the sea; and last, but not least, Captain Danton's wife, very simply dressed, but looking so quietly happy and serene. Then it was all over, and the gaping spectators saw the wedding party flocking back into the carriages, and whirling away to the Hall.

Mr. and Mrs. La Touche were to make but a brief tour, and return in time for a Christmas house-warming. Doctor Frank and his wife went to their Montreal home, and Mrs. Stanford remained at St. Croix. The family were all to reassemble at Ottawa, to spend New Year with Madame La Touche.

Rose found the intervening weeks very long and dreary at the Hall. Captain Harry had gone back to his ship, and of course Agnes had gone with him. They had wanted her to stay at home this voyage, but Agnes had lifted such appealing eyes, and clung in so much alarm to Harry at the bare idea of his leaving her, that they had given it up at once. So Rose, with no companion except Grace, found it very dull, and sighed the slow hours away, like a modern Mariana in the Moated

Grange.

But the merry New Year time came round at last; and all the Dantons were together once more in Eeny's splendid home. It made Rose's heart ache with envy to walk through those lovely rooms—long vistas of splendour and gorgeousness.

"It might have been mine!—It might have been mine!" that rebellious heart of hers kept crying out. "I might have been mistress of all this retinue of servants—these jewels and silks I might have worn! I might have reigned like a queen in this stately house if I had only done right!"

But it was too late, and Mrs. Stanford had to keep up appearances, and smiles, though the serpents of envy and regret gnawed at her vitals. It was very gay there! Life seemed all made up of music, and dancing, and feasting, and mirth, and skating, and sleighing, and dressing, and singing. Life went like a fairy spectacle, or an Eastern drama, or an Arcadian dream—with care, and trial, and trouble, monsters unknown even by name.

Mme. Jules La Touche played the rôle with charming grace—a little shy, as became her youth and inexperience, but only the more charming for that. They were very, very happy together, this quiet young pair—loving one another very dearly, as you could see, and looking forward hopefully to a future that was to be without a cloud.

Mrs. La Touche and Mrs. Stanford were very much admired in society, no doubt; but people went into raptures over Mrs. Frank Danton. Such eyes, such golden hair, such rare smiles, such queenly grace, such singing, such playing—surely nature had created this darling of hers in a gracious mood, and meted out to her a double portion of her favours. You might think other ladies—those younger sisters of hers included—beautiful until she came; and then that stately presence, that bewitching brightness and grace, eclipsed them as the sun eclipses stars.

"What a lucky fellow Danton is!" said the men. "One doesn't see such a superb woman once in a century."

And Doctor Frank heard it, and smiled, as he smoked his meerschaum, and thought so too.

And so we leave them. Kate is happy; Eeny reigns right royally in her Ottawa home; and Rose—well, poor Rose has no home, and flits about between St. Croix, and Montreal, and Ottawa, all the year round. She calls Danton Hall home, but she spends most of her time with Kate. It is not so sumptuous, of course, as at Ottawa, in the rising young Doctor's home; but she is not galled every moment of the day by the poignant regrets that lacerate her heart at Eeny's. She hears of her husband occasionally, as he wanders through the Continent, and the chain that binds her to him galls her day and night. Little Reginald, able to trot about on his own sturdy legs now, accompanies her in her migratory flights, and is petted to death wherever he goes. He has come to grief quite recently, and takes it very hard that grandpa should have something else to nurse besides himself. This something else is a little atom of humanity named Gracie, and is Captain Danton's youngest daughter.

THE END.

By May Agnes Fleming.

NORINE'S REVENGE.

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