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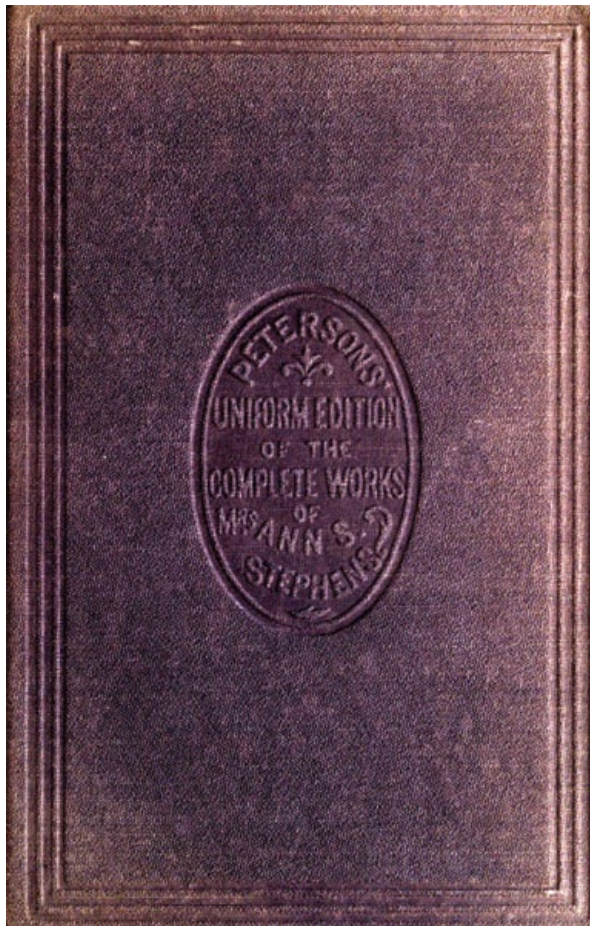
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MABEL'S MISTAKE.

BY

MRS. ANN S. STEPHENS.

AUTHOR OF "FASHION AND FAMINE," "THE SOLDIER'S ORPHANS,"
"DOUBLY FALSE," "SILENT STRUGGLES," "THE OLD HOMESTEAD,"
"THE REJECTED WIFE," "THE HEIRESS," "THE GOLD BRICK,"
"MARY DERWENT," "THE WIFE'S SECRET," ETC., ETC.

"Imagine something purer far,
More free from stain of clay,
There friendship, love, or passion
are,
Yet human still as they:
And if thy lips for love like this
No mortal word can frame,
Go ask of angels what it is,
And call it by that name."

PHILADELPHIA:
T. B. PETERSON & BROTHERS;
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TO

MY DEAR, YOUNG FRIEND,

MISS EUDORA J. HART,

OF NEW YORK,

THIS VOLUME

IS

MOST AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

ANN S. STEPHENS.

WASHINGTON, D. C., OCTOBER 17, 1868.

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MABEL'S MISTAKE.

CHAPTER I.

THE STEP-MOTHER AND STEP-SON.

IT was autumn, one of those balmy Indian summer days which, if the eyes were closed, would remind you of Andalusia when the orange trees put forth their blossoms with the matured fruit still clinging to their boughs, burying its golden ripeness among cool, green leaves, and buds of fragrant snow. Still, save in the delicious atmosphere that autumnal sunset would not have

reminded you of any land but our own. For what other climate ever gave the white wings of the frost the power to scatter that rich combination of red, green, gold and dusky purple upon a thousand forests in a single night? What other land ever saw the sun go down upon a world of green foliage, and rise to find the same foliage bathed in a sea of brilliant tints, till the east was paled by its gorgeousness?

Indeed, there was nothing in this calm, Indian-summer twilight to remind you of any other land, save its stillness and the balm of dying flowers giving up their lives to the frost. But the links of association are rapid and mysterious, and the scenes that awaken a reminiscence are sometimes entirely opposite to the memory awakened.

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Be this as it may, there was something in the landscape suddenly clad in its gorgeous fall tints—in the river so coldly transparent twelve hours before, now rolling on through the glowing shadows as if the sands and pebbles in its bed had been turned to jewels, which reminded at least one person in that old mansion house, of scenes long ago witnessed in the south of Spain.

The old mansion house which we speak of, stood some miles above that gorge in the Harlem River which is now spanned by the High Bridge. This region of Manhattan Island is even yet more than half buried in its primeval forest trees. Hills as abrupt, and moss as greenly fleecy as if found on the crags of the Rocky Mountains, still exist among the wild nooks and wilder peaks which strike the eye more picturesquely from their vicinity to the great metropolis.

At the particular spot I wish to describe, the hills fall back from the Hudson, north and south, far enough to leave a charming little valley of some two or three hundred acres cradled in their wildness and opening greenly to the river, which is sure to catch a sheaf of sunbeams in its bosom when the day fires its last golden salute from behind the Palisades. Sheltered by hills, some broken into cliffs, some rolling smoothly back, clothed in variously tinted undergrowth and fine old trees, the valley itself received a double charm from the contrast of cultivation. It was entirely cleared of trees and undergrowth, save where a clump of cool hemlocks, a grove of sugar maples, or a drooping elm gave it those features we so much admire in the country homes of old England.

In the centre of the valley was a swell of land sloping down to the river in full, grassy waves, which ended at the brink in a tiny cove overhung by a clump of golden willows.

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Crowning the swell of this elevation stood the old mansion commanding a fine view of the river, with a glimpse of the opposite shore, where the Weehawken hills begin to consolidate into the Palisades. A score of picturesque and pleasant little nooks were visible from the numerous windows, for it was an irregular old place, varying as much as an American house can vary in its style of architecture. The original idea had undoubtedly sprung from our Knickerbocker ancestors, for the gables were not only pointed, but notched down the steep edges after a semi-battlemented fashion, while stacks of quaint chimneys and heavy oaken doors bespoke a foundation far antecedent to the revolution.

But in addition to these proofs of antiquity, were balconies of carved stone, curving over modern bay windows, which broke up the stiff uniformity of the original design; and along one tall gable that fronted on the river, French windows, glittering with plate glass, opened to a verandah of stone-work, surrounded by a low railing also of stone; and if these windows were not one blaze of gold at sunset, you might be certain that a storm was lowering over the Palisades, and that the next day would be a cloudy one.

Another gable facing the south was lighted by a broad arched window crowded full of diamond-shaped glass, tinted through and through by the bloom and glow of a conservatory within. In short the mansion was a picturesque incongruity utterly indescribable, and yet one of the most interesting old houses in the world.

Whatever might be said of its architecture, it certainly had a most aristocratic appearance, and bore proofs in every line and curve of its stone traceries, both of fine taste and great wealth, inherited from generation to generation. Time itself would have failed to sweep these traces of family pride from the old house, for each century had carved it deeper and deeper into the massive stone, and it was as much a portion of the scenery, as the stately old forest trees that sheltered it.

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But we have alluded to one who sat in a room of this old mansion, looking thoughtfully out upon the change that a single night had left upon the landscape. Her seat, a crimson easy-chair, stood near one of the broad bay windows we have mentioned. The sashes were folded back, and she looked dreamily out upon the river and the opposite shore. The whole view was bathed in a subdued glow of crimson and golden purple; for the sun was sinking behind the Palisades, and shot sheaf after sheaf of flashing arrows across the river, that melted into a soft glowing haze before they reached the apartment which she occupied.

The room behind was full of shadows, and nothing but the light of a hickory-wood fire revealed the objects it contained. She was looking forth upon the sunset, and yet thinking of other countries and scenes long gone by. Her mind had seized upon the salient points of a history full of experience, and she was swept away into the past.

No, she was not young, nor beautiful even. The flush of youth was gone for ever. Her features were thoughtful, almost severe, her form stately and mature.

No, she was not beautiful. At her age that were impossible, and yet she was a woman to fix the attention at a glance, and keep herself in the memory for ever—a grand, noble woman, with honor and strength, and beautiful depths of character, apparent even in her thoughtful repose.

But this woman shakes off the reverie that has held her so long in thrall, and looks up at the sound of a voice within the room, blushing guiltily like a young girl aroused from her first love thoughts. She casts aside the remembrance of black fruited olive groves and orange trees sheeted with snowy fragrance, and knows of a truth that she is at home surrounded by the gorgeous woods of America, in the clear chill air inhaled with the first breath of her life.

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"Did you speak, James?"

She turned quietly and looked within the room. Near her, sitting with his elbows on a small table and his broad forehead buried in the palms of his hands, sat a man of an age and presence that might have befitted the husband of a woman, at once so gentle and so proud as the one who spoke to him; for even in the light produced by the gleams of a dull fire and the dusky sunset, as they floated together around his easy-chair, you could see that he was a man of thought and power.

The man looked up and, dropping his hands to the table with a sort of weariness, answered, as if to some person away off—

"No, I did not speak—I never did speak!"

It was a strange answer, and the lady's face grew anxious as she looked upon him. Certainly he had uttered some sound, or she would not have asked the question. She arose and moving across the room, leaned her elbow upon his chair, looking thoughtfully down in his face.

He started, as if but that moment conscious of her presence, and arose probably to avoid the grave questioning of her look.

"Of what were you thinking, James?" she said almost abruptly, for a superstitious thought forced the question to her lips almost against her will.

"I was thinking," said the man, resting his head against the oak carvings of his chair, "I was thinking of a time when we were all in the south of Spain."

"Of your mother's death?" inquired the lady in a low voice. "It was a mournful event to remember. What is there in this soft twilight to remind us both of the same thing, for I was thinking of that time also!"

"Of my mother's death?" inquired the gentleman, lifting his eyes to her face suddenly, almost sternly. "I was not thinking of that, but of my father's marriage."

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The lady did not speak, but her face grew pale, and over it swept a smile so vivid with surprise, so eloquent of mournfulness, that she seemed transfigured. Her hand dropped away from the chair, and walking back to the window she sat down, uttering a faint sigh, as if some slumbering pain had been sharpened into anguish by the few words that had been spoken. Twenty years had she lived in the house with James Harrington, and never before had the subject of her marriage with his father been mentioned between them, save as it arose in the discussion of household events.

Her marriage with his father, that was the subject of his gloomy thoughts. Had she then failed to render him content in his home? Had she in anything fallen short of those gentle duties he had received so gratefully from the mother that was gone? Why was it that thoughts of Spain and of events that had transpired there, should have seized upon them both at the same time?

She arose again, pale and with a tremor of the limbs. The balmy air grew sickening to her—his presence an oppression. For the first time she began to doubt if she were not an object of dislike to her husband's guest. He saw her pass from the room without turning a glance that way, and followed her with a look of self-reproach. He felt pained and humiliated. After a silence of so many years, why had he dared to utter words to that woman—his best friend—which could never be explained? Had all manhood forsaken him? Had he sunk to be a common-place carper in the household which she had invested with so much beautiful happiness? Stung with these thoughts he arose and sought the open air also.

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CHAPTER II.

OLD MR. HARRINGTON.

AN old man sat in a room above the one just deserted by its inmates. He was watching the sunset also, with unusual interest, not because it brought back loving or sad memories, but with an

admiration of the sense alone. With tastes cultivated to their extremest capacity, and a philosophy of happiness essentially material, this old man permitted no hour to pass by without gleaning some sensual enjoyment from it, that a less egotistical person might never have discovered. An epicure in all things, he had attained to a sort of self-worship, which would have been sublime if applied to the First Cause of all that is beautiful. His splendid person was held in reverence, not because it was made in the image of his God, but for the powers of enjoyment it possessed—for the symmetry it displayed, and the defiance which it had so long given to the inroads of time.

As a whole and in detail, this old man was a self-worshipper. Like all idolaters he was blind to the defects of his earthly god, and if a gleam of unpleasant self knowledge would occasionally force itself upon his notice, the conviction only rendered him more urgent to extort homage from others.

The room in which this old man sat, was a library fitted up expressly for himself. It was one of his peculiarities that his sources of enjoyment must be exclusive, in order to be valuable. He would not willingly have shared a single tint of that beautiful sunset with another, unless satisfied that the admiration thus excited would give zest to his own pleasurable sensations.

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Thus, with the selfishness of an epicure and the tastes of a savant, he surrounded himself with the most luxurious elegance. The book-cases of carved ebony that run along two sides of the apartment, were filled with rare books, accumulated during his travels, some of them worth their weight in gold. Doors of plate glass protected their antique and often gorgeous bindings, and medallions of rare bronzes were inlaid in the rich carvings of the cornices.

Over the mantle-piece of Egyptian marble, carved to a miracle of art, hung an original by Guido, one of those ethereal pictures in which the figures seem to float through the glowing atmosphere, borne onward only by a gushing sense of their own happiness.

The French windows opposite were filled, like the book-cases, with plate-glass pure and limpid as water, and two bronze Bacchantes, thrown into attitudes of riotous enjoyment, held back voluminous folds of crimson brocade that enriched the light which fell through them. A variety of chairs stood about, carved like the book-cases, cushioned with crimson leather and embossed with gold. The ebony desk upon which the old man's elbow rested, as he looked forth upon the river, was scattered over with books and surmounted by a writing apparatus of malachite, whose mate could hardly have been found out of the imperial *salons* of Russia.

Everything was in keeping, the luxurious room and the old man whose presence completed it. If the two persons we have just described seemed imposing in their moral grandeur, while they sat thoughtfully watching the sunset, this man with his keen, black eyes, his beard flowing downward in white waves from the chin and upper lip, which was curved exactly in the form of a bow, took from the material alone an interest almost as impressive.

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The old man saw his wife pass down in front of the house and descend toward the river. The black dress and scarlet shawl which she wore, rendered her a picturesque object in the landscape, and as such the old man was admiring her. Directly after, his son followed, and another stately figure was added to the view; but his walk verged toward the hills, and he was soon lost among the trees.

The old man was vexed at this derangement in his picture; but directly there came in sight a little boat, ploughing through the golden ripples cast downward by the sun, and half veiled in the glowing mists of the river. He watched the boat while it came dancing toward the shore, and smiled when his wife paused a moment on the bank, as if awaiting its approach.

"She is right. A figure upon the shore completes the whole thing. One seldom sees a picture so perfect! Claude Lorraine!—why, his sunsets are leaden compared to this! Oh, she turns off and spoils the effect by throwing the willows between us! Why will women be so restless! Now a female caprice—nothing more—has destroyed the most lovely effect I ever saw; just as I was drinking it in, too. But the boat is pretty—yes, yes, that enlivens the foreground—bravo! Capital, Ben, capital!—that stoop is just the thing; and the youngsters, how beautifully they group themselves! Hallo! upon my honor, if that young scamp is not making love to Lina! I don't pretend to know what the attitude of love-making is!"

The old man fell back in his chair, and drew a hand over his eyes with a restless motion, muttering uneasily,

"Ralph and Lina? upon my word, I have been blind as a bat. How far has the thing gone? Has Mabel encouraged it? Does she know? What hand can James have had in bringing this state of things about? These two children—why, the thing is preposterous!"

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The old man left his easy-chair, as these unpleasant conjectures forced themselves upon him, and, as if sickened by the landscape he had just been admiring, shut it out by a jerk of the hand, which brought the crimson drapery flowing in loose folds from its gilded rods, and gave the whole room a tent-like seclusion. In the rich twilight thus produced, the old man walked to and fro, angry and thoughtful. At last he took his hat and left the house.

CHAPTER III.

THE HILL SIDE ADVENTURE.

RALPH HARRINGTON and Lina French had been out upon the river, since the shadow began to fall eastward upon its waters. The day had been so calm, and everything their eyes fell upon was so luxuriantly lovely, that they could not force themselves to come in doors, till the twilight overtook them.

Old Ben—or rather our Ben, for he was not so very old, after all—who considered himself master of the little craft which he was mooring in the cove, had aided and abetted this truant disposition in the young people, after a fashion that Mr. Harrington might not have approved; and all that day there was a queer sort of smile upon his features, that meant more than a host of words would have conveyed in another person. Never, in his whole life, had Ben been so obliging in his management of the boat. If Lina took a fancy to a branch of golden rod, or a cluster of fringed gentian upon the shore, Ben would put in at the nearest convenient point, and sit half an hour together in the boat, with his arms folded over his oars, and his head bowed, as if fast asleep. Yet Ben Benson, according to my best knowledge and belief, was never more thoroughly awake than on that particular day.

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They were gliding dreamily along at the foot of the Weehawken hills, with their boat half full of fall flowers and branches, when Lina saw a tree so brilliantly red, that she insisted on climbing to the rock where it was rooted, in search of the leaves that were dropped sleepily from its boughs.

Ben shot into a little inlet formed by two jutting rocks, and Ralph sprang ashore, holding out his hand for Lina, who scarcely touched it as she took her place by his side.

"Now for a scramble!" exclaimed the youth, grasping Lina's hand tightly in his own; and away, like a pair of wild birds, the two young creatures darted up the hill.

The rock, behind which the tree stood, was scattered over with leaves of a deep crimson, brightening to scarlet on the edges, and veined with a green so deep, that it seemed like black. Among the endless variety of leaves they had discovered, these were the most singular, and Lina gathered them up in handfuls only to scatter them abroad again when a more tempting waif caught her eye.

"Wait a moment—wait, Ralph; oh, here is a whole drift of them; see how bright they look, quivering over the fleeces of moss that slope down the rocks. If I could but take the whole home, just as it is, for mamma!"

Lina was stooping eagerly as she spoke. A quick, rattling sound in the leaves struck her, and she called out, laughing—

"If it were not so late in the fall, Ralph, I should think there was a locust singing in the leaves."

That moment Ben, who had tied his boat, came scrambling up the hill. He took his place by Ralph upon a shelf of the rock, and began to sniff the air with his flat, pug nose, like a watch-dog scenting an enemy. The noise which interested Lina was over now, and he only heard her observation about the locust.

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"Ain't there a strong smell of honey about here, Mister Ralph?" he said, looking anxiously around; "something between the scent of an old bee-hive and a wasp's nest?"

"There is a singular scent I fancy, Ben," answered the young man, following Lina with his eyes. "Not disagreeable, though!"

"Do you begin to guess what it means?" inquired Ben, anxiously.

"Not at all," answered Ralph, waving his hand and smiling upon Lina, who held up a branch of richly shaded leaves she had just taken from a maple bough, laughing gaily as the main branch swept rustling back to its place. "Not at all, Ben; it may be the frost-bitten fern-leaves—they sometimes give out a delicious odor. Everything in the woods takes a pleasant scent at this season of the year, I believe."

Lina, who was restless as a bird, changed her position again, and the movement was followed by another quick, hissing sound from a neighboring rock.

"So that is Miss Lina's idea of a locust, is it," muttered Ben, looking sharply around. "If that's a locust, Mister Ralph, the animal has got a tremenjus cold, for he's hoarse—yes, hoarse as a rattlesnake—do you hear, Mister Ralph? Hoarse as a rattlesnake!"

Ben was intensely excited, and looked eagerly around, searching for danger.

"Look!" he whispered, after a moment; "the sunshine on the red leaves dazzles the eyesight—but look stiddy on the rock there, where the green moss is fluttered over with them red leaves—don't you see the moss kinder a stirrin'?"

Ralph looked, and there, about six feet from Lina, he saw what seemed at first a mass of gorgeous foliage, quivering upon the green moss, for a glow of warm sunshine fell athwart it and dazzled his eyes for the moment. But anxiety cleared his vision, and he saw that the glowing mass

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was a serpent drawn from a cleft of the rock by the warm sun. Disturbed by Lina's approach, he was that instant coiling itself up for a spring. His head was erect, his tongue quivered like a thread of flame, and two horrible fangs, crooked and venomous, shot out on each side his open jaws. In the centre of the coil, and just behind the head which vibrated to and fro with horrible eagerness, the rattles kept in languid play, as if tired of warning her.

Ralph, pale as death and trembling all over, stooped down and seized a fragment of rock; but Lina was too near, he dared not hurl it. The young girl enticed by the floating leaves which the sun struck so brightly around the serpent, had her foot poised to spring forward.

"Lina!" cried Ralph, in a low voice, "Lina!"

"In one moment," cried the girl, laughing wilfully; "wait till I get those leaves drifting across the rock there."

The gipsy hat had fallen on one side; her hands were full of red leaves, and she was smiling saucily. This unconsciousness of danger was horrible. The young man shrunk and quivered through all his frame.

"Lina, step aside—to the right—dear Lina, I entreat, I insist!"

His voice was deep and husky, scarcely more than a whisper, and yet full of command.

Lina looked back, and her smiling lips grew white with astonishment. Ralph stood above her pale as marble; his hand grasping the rock was uplifted, his fierce, distended eyes looked beyond her. Wild with nameless dread the young girl stepped backward, following his glance with her eyes. Her breath was checked—she could not scream. The glittering eyes of the rattlesnake, though turned upon another, held her motionless. A prickly sensation pierced her lips through and through, as the snake loosened his coils and changed his position so abruptly, that his back glittered in the sunshine, like a mass of jewels rapidly disturbed, making her blind and dizzy with the poisonous glow. Still she moved backward like a statue recoiling from its base.

"Now," whispered Ben, "now give it to him."

A crash—a spring—and like a fiery lance the rattlesnake shot by her, striking her garments as he went, and, falling short of his enemy, coiled himself for a new spring.

Ralph's hand was uplifted as the fragment of rock had left it; and there, within a few feet, lay the rattlesnake making ready for a second spring, and quivering through all its folds.

She uttered a wild cry, stooped quick as lightning, seized a fragment of rock,—dashed it with both hands upon the rattlesnake, and, rushing by, threw herself before Ralph. Her eyes turned with horror upon the work she had done.

"Oh, have mercy! have mercy! he is alive yet!" she shrieked, as writhing and convulsed, the rattlesnake drew his glittering folds out from beneath the stone, and wound himself up, coil after coil, more venomous than ever.

"Step behind me—behind me, Lina," cried the young man attempting to force her away.

But she threw her arms around him, and with her eyes turned back upon the glittering horror, strove with all her frail strength to push him backward out of danger.

The brave generosity of this attempt might have destroyed them both; but, just as the rattlesnake was prepared to lance out again, Ben, who had torn a branch from an ash tree overhead, rushed fearlessly down and struck at him with the host of light twigs that were yet covered with delicate maize-colored leaves.

This act increased Lina's terror, for the blows which Ben gave were so light that a baby would have laughed at them.

"Don't be skeer'd, nor nothing," shouted Ben, gently belaboring his enemy with the ash bough, "I've got the pizen serpent under, just look this way and you'll find him tame as a rabbit. Lord! how the critter does hate the smell of ash leaves! Now do look, Miss Lina!"

Lina clung trembling to Ralph, but turned her eyes with breathless dread toward the rattlesnake.

"Come close by—just get a look at him—the stiffening is out of his back-bone now, I tell you!" cried Ben, triumphantly. "See him a trying to poke his head under the moss just at the sight of a yaller ash leaf—ain't he a coward, now ain't he?"

"What is it—what does it mean?" inquired Ralph, reassured now that Lina was out of danger—"did the stone wound him?"

"The stone!" repeated Ben scornfully,— "a round stone covered over with moss like a pin cushion! Why, if this ere rattlesnake could laugh as well as bite, he'd have a good haw-haw over Miss Lina's way of fighting snakes. It takes something to kill them, I tell you. But I've got him—he knows me. Look at him now!"

Ralph moved a step forward and looked down upon the rattlesnake, towards which Ben was pointing with his ash branch, as unconcerned as if it had been an earth-worm.

The rattlesnake had loosened all his folds, and lay prone upon his back striving to burrow his head beneath the leaves and moss, evidently without power to escape or show fight.

"Wonderful, isn't it!" said Ben, eyeing the snake with grim complacency; "now I should just like to know what there is in the nature of this ere ash limb that wilts his pizen down so? Why, he's harmless as a catterpillar. Come down and see for yourself, Mister Ralph."

"No, no!" pleaded Lina, faint and trembling, for the reaction of the recent terror was upon her, and she grew sick now that the danger was over. "I am ill—blind—Ralph—Ralph!"

[38]

She spoke his name in faint murmurs, her head fell forward and her eyes closed. Ralph thought she was dying. He remembered that the rattlesnake had touched her in his first spring, and took the faintness as the working of his venom in her veins. He called out in the agony of this thought,

"Ben! Ben! she is dying—she is dead—he struck her!"

Ben gave the rattlesnake a vigorous lash, which turned him on his back again, and sprang up the rocks.

"Have you killed him? Is he dead? Oh, Ben, he has struck her on her arm or hand, perhaps! Look, look—see if you can find the wound!"

Ben gave a hasty glance at the white face lying upon Ralph's shoulder, uttered a smothered humph, and with this emphatic expression turned to watch the common enemy. The snake had turned slowly over upon the moss and was slinking away through a crevice in the rocks. Ben uttered a mellow chuckling laugh as his rattles disappeared.

"Did you see him, the sneak? Did you see him steal off?" he said, looking at Ralph.

CHAPTER IV.

LINA COMES OUT OF HER FAINTING FIT.

RALPH lifted his white face to old Ben and broke forth fiercely:

"You should have crushed him—ground him to powder. He has poisoned all the sweet life in her veins. She is dying, Ben, she is dying!"

[39]

Ben threw down the ash branch and plunged one hand into a pocket in search of his tobacco box. With great deliberation he rolled up a quantity of the weed and deposited it under one cheek, before he attempted to answer either the pleading looks or passionate language of the youth.

"Mister Ralph, it's plain as a marlin-spike, you ain't used to snakes and wimmen. In that partiklar your education's been shamefully neglected. Never kill a rattlesnake arter he's shut in his fangs and turns on his back for mercy—its sneakin' business. Never think a woman is dead till the sexton sends in his bill. Snakes and feminine wimmen is hard to kill. Now any landshark, as has his eyes out of his heart, could see that Miss Lina's only took a faintin' turn, that comes after a skeer like hers, axactly as sleep stills a tired baby. Just give her here now, I'll take her down the river, throw a cap full of water in her face, and she'll be bright as a new dollar long before we get across."

The look of relief that came to the face of Ralph Harrington was like a flash of sunshine. A grateful smile lighted his eyes, but instead of resigning Lina to the stout arms held out by Ben Benson, he gathered her close to his bosom, saying in a proud voice,

"Why, Ben, I want no help to carry Lina."

Then he bore her down the hill, looking now and then upon her face so tenderly, that Ben, who was eyeing him all the way with sidelong glances, made a hideous face to himself, as if to capitulate with his dignity for wanting to smile at anything so childish.

"Sit down there," said Ben, pointing to the stern of his boat, "sit down there, Mister Ralph, and kinder ease her down to the seat; your face is hot as fire a carrying her. Now I'll fill my hat with water and give her a souse that'll bring the red to her mouth in a jiffy."

[40]

"No, no," said Ralph, arresting Ben as he stooped to fill his little glazed hat, "don't throw it, hold your cap here, Ben, and I'll sprinkle her face. How pale it is! How like a dear lifeless angel she looks?"

Ben stooped to the water, and Ralph trembling and flushed, bent over the pale beautiful face on his bosom, closer, closer, till his lips drew the blood back to hers, and her eyelids began to quiver

like shadows on a white rose.

Ben had slowly risen from the water with the glazed hat dripping between his two great hands; but when he saw Ralph's position, the good fellow ducked downward again, and made a terrible splashing in the river, as he dipped the brimming hat a second time, while that grotesque suppression of a smile convulsed his hard features.

It was wonderful how long it took Ben to fill his hat this time. One would have thought him fishing for pearls in the depths of the river, he was so fastidious in finding the exact current best calculated to restore a young lady from faintness. When he did arise, everything about the young people was, to use his nautical expression, ship-shape and above-board. The color was stealing back to Lina's face, like blushes from the first flowering of apple blossoms, and a brightness stole from beneath her half-closed eyelids, that had something softer and deeper than mere life in it.

"It is not necessary, Ben; she is better, I think," said the young man, looking half-timidly into the boatman's face. "Don't you think she looks beauti—I mean, don't you think she looks better, a great deal better, Ben?"

Again, that grotesque expression seized upon Ben's features; and, setting down his hat, as if it had been a washbowl, he took Lina's straw hat from the bottom of the boat, where it had fallen, and began to shake out the ribbons with great energy.

"She grows pale—I'm afraid she is losing ground again, Ben," said Ralph, as the color wavered to and fro on the fair cheek beneath his gaze.

"Shall I fill the hat again?" answered Ben, demurely.

[41] "It kinder seems to be the filling on it that brings her round easiest?"

"No, you're very kind, but I'll sprinkle her forehead—she has been so frightened, you know, I dare say she thought the snake had bitten—had bitten one of us, Ben! That is right, hold the hat this way."

Ben dropped on his knees in the bottom of the boat, crushing down a whole forest of Lina's wild flowers, and held up the hat reverently between his hands.

Ralph put back the masses of brown hair from Lina's face, and began to bathe it gently, almost holding his breath, as if she were a babe he was afraid of waking.

"Isn't she a dear, generous creature?" he said, at last, with a burst of admiration. "It took a fright like this, to prove how precious she was to us all!"

Instantly, a cloud of crimson swept over Lina's face and bosom, and with it came an illumination of the features, that made the young man tremble beneath her light weight.

"Lina, dear Lina!" he whispered.

She arose from his arms, crimson again to the temples, and sat down in silence, her eyes downcast, her lips trembling, as if a great effort kept her from bursting into tears.

Ralph saw this, and his face clouded.

"What have I done? Are you angry with me, Lina?" he whispered, as Ben pushed the boat off and gathered up his oars.

"Angry! No, I cannot tell. What has happened to us, Ralph?"

"Don't you remember, Lina?"

"Remember?—yes—now. Oh, it was horrible!"

"I, Lina, I shall always remember it with more pleasure than pain."

[42] She lifted her eyes with a timid, questioning glance. The young man drew close to her, and as Ben dashed his oars in the water, thus drowning his voice to all but her, whispered—

"Because it has told me in my heart of hearts how entirely I love you, Lina."

Her maidenly shame was aroused now. She shrunk from his glance, blushing and in silence.

"Will you not speak to me, Lina?"

"What can I say, Ralph?"

"That you love me."

A little coquettish smile stole over her mouth.

"We have said that to each other from the cradle up."

"No, never before, never with this depth of meaning—my heart is broken up, Lina; there is nothing left of it but a flood of tender love—you are no longer my sister, but my idol; I worship you, Lina!"

Again Lina lifted her eyes, so blue, so flooded with gentle gratitude; but she did not speak, for Ben was resting on his oars, while the boat crept silently down the current.

"Why don't you steer for home?" asked Ralph, impatient of Ben's eyes.

"I see that ere old respectable gentleman on the bank, a looking this way, so I thought we'd lie to and refit more particularly about the upper story. If Miss Lina there'll just shake them ere curls back a trifle, and tie on her bonnet; and if you, Mister Ralph, could just manage to look t'other way and take an observation of the scenery, perhaps we should make out to pass with a clear bill and without over-haulin'."

"You are right," said Ralph after a moment, looking anxiously, toward the shore, where the stately figure of old Mr. Harrington was distinctly visible; "my father is a great stickler for proprieties. Here is your hat, Lina—let me fold this scarf about you."

[43]

As Ralph spoke, the flush left his face, and a look of fatigue crept over Lina. Ben still rested on his oars. He was determined to give the old gentleman ample opportunity to continue his walk inland, before the young people were submitted to his scrutiny. As they lingered floating upon the waters, a tiny boat shot from beneath a cliff below them, and was propelled swiftly down the river. In it was a female rendered conspicuous by a scarlet shawl, and in the still life around them, this boat became an object of interest. It was only for a moment, the young people were too deeply occupied with their own feelings to dwell upon even this picturesque adjunct to a scene which was now flooded gorgeously with the sunset. Ben, however, became restless and anxious. Without a word he seized his oars, and pushed directly for the cove in which his boat was usually moored.

Ralph and Lina went homewards with a reluctance never experienced before. A sense of concealment oppressed them. An indefinite terror of meeting their friends, rendered their steps slow upon the green sward. As they drew towards the house, Ralph paused.

"Speak to me, Lina, my heart is heavy without the sound of your voice: say you love me, or shall I be miserable with suspense?"

The young girl listened with a saddened and downcast look. A heaviness had fallen upon her with the first sight of old Mr. Harrington on the bank. True he had gone now, but his shadow seemed to oppress her still.

"Will you not speak to me, Lina? Will you not relieve this suspense by one little word?"

She lifted her head gently, but with modest pride.

"You know that I love you, Ralph."

"But not as you have done. I am not content with simple household affection. Say that you love me, body and soul, faults and virtues, as I love you."

Lina drew herself up, and a smile, sad but full of sweetness—half presentiment, half faith—beamed on her face.

[44]

"Your soul may search mine to its depths and find only itself there. I do love you, Ralph, even as you love me!"

Her answer was almost solemn in its dignity; for the moment that fair young girl looked and spoke like a priestess.

Ralph Harrington reached out his hand, taking hers in its grasp.

"Why are you so pale? Why tremble so?" he said, moving towards the house.

"I do not know," answered Lina, "but it seems as if the breath of that rattlesnake were around us yet."

"You are sad—your nerves have been dreadfully shaken—but to-morrow, Lina, all will be bright again."

Lina smiled faintly.

"Oh, yes, all must be bright to-morrow."

As they passed the iron gate that separated the lawn from the shore, Ben, who had seated himself in the boat, arose suddenly, and pushed his little craft into the river again. His weather-beaten face was turned anxiously down the stream. He seized the oars, and urging his boat into the current, pulled stoutly, as if some important object had suddenly seized upon him.

"Where can she be a going to? What on earth is she after? Has the old rascal broke out at last? Has she give way? But I'll overhaul her! Pull away, Ben Benson, pull away, you old rascal! What bisness had you with them ere youngsters, and *she* in trouble! Pull away, or I'll break every bone in your body, Ben Benson!"

Thus muttering and reviling himself, Ben was soon out of sight, burying himself, as it seemed, in the dull purple of the night as it crept over the Hudson.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE BANKS AND ON THE RIVER.

THERE are moments in every human life when we would gladly flee from ourselves and plunge into action of any kind, to escape from the recognition of our own memories. This recoil from the past seldom comes to early youth, for to that, memories are like the light breezes of April, with nothing but tender green foliage, and opening buds to disturb. With youth the past is so close to the present, that thought always leaps forward into the future, and in the first flush of existence that is invariably beautiful. But it is a different thing when life approaches its maturity. Then the spirit, laden down with events that have culminated, and feelings that have been shaken by many a heart storm, bends reluctantly to the tempest like the stately old forest trees laden with foliage, which bow to nothing but the inevitable tornado.

Mabel Harrington left the old Mansion House with a quicker movement and more rapid step than was natural to her, unless some strong feeling was aroused, or some important aim to be accomplished. At such times her action was quick, almost imperious, and all the evidences of an ardent nature, fresh as youth and strong as maturity, broke forth in each movement of her person and in every thought of her mind.

She walked more and more rapidly as the distance between her and the house increased, for the open air and wider country gave freedom to her spirit. As she walked her earnest grey eyes turned from the river to the sky and abroad upon the hills, as if seeking for something in nature to which her soul might appeal for sympathy in the swell and storm of feeling that a few simple words had let loose upon her, after a sleep of many years.

[46]

"Does he know what I have felt and how I have suffered, that he stings me with such words? His father's marriage! And was I not the spirit—nay, the victim of that marriage? Why should he speak to me thus? The air was enough—the calm sleep of the winds—the fragrance. I was a girl again, till his quiet taunt awoke me. Does he think that I have lost a thought or a feeling because of this dull heavy routine of cares? Why did he speak to me in that cold tone? I have not deserved it. Heaven knows I have not deserved it from him, or from any of them!"

Mabel uttered these words aloud, as she approached the banks of the river, and her voice clear and rich with feeling, was swept out upon the wind which bore it away, mingled with fragrance from the dying leaves.

"Does he think with common men, that the impulses of youth die out and are gone? As if the passions of youth did not become the power of maturity, and mellow at last into the calm grandeur of old age. If love were not immortal, how dreary even this beautiful world would seem, yet being so, I can but look forward to another, when the shackles of this life will fall away."

It was a relief to speak aloud. The sound of her own voice came back like the sympathy she dared to claim only of the wind and the waters, that flowed on with their eternal rush of sound, like the years of life that Mabel was mourning over. She stood upon the shore, stately and motionless, her eyes full of trouble, her lips tremulous with impulsive words that betrayed a soul at once ardent and pure. The wind rose around her, and seizing upon her shawl swept it in picturesque folds about her person, half drowning her voice, or she would not have dared to give her thoughts this bold utterance.

It was this picturesque attitude which had attracted the attention of her husband in the library, and that moment he resolved to join her on the shore.

[47]

As if this resolve had been expressed to her in words, a feeling of unrest seized upon Mabel, and long before the old man was ready to come forth, she was walking rapidly across the brow of a hill that bounded the valley southward, keeping along the bank, but concealed by the undergrowth.

She paused upon a rocky cliff that broke the hill side, breathing more freely as if conscious that she had escaped some unwelcome intrusion. A boat upon the river drew her attention, and she saw within it her son and Lina floating pleasantly down the stream together.

"How happy and how young they are!" she said with a gush of gentle affection. "No cares—no broken hopes—no wishes unexpressed—no *secrets*; oh! in this lies the great happiness of existence. Until he has a secret to keep, man is, indeed, next to the angels."

Mabel sat down upon a fallen tree, covered with a drapery of pale green moss. She watched the boat in a sort of dream, as it drifted toward her. How much of the suffering she endured might yet be saved to the young persons it contained! Was not that an object worth living and enduring for? Might she not renew her youth in them?

Renew her youth? What need was there of that? In all her existence had she ever been so full of life—so vigorous of mind—so capable of the highest enjoyment? In the very prime and glory of all her faculties—wise in experience—strong from many a silent heart-struggle, what could she gain by a return of youth? Nothing! surely nothing! Yet she watched those two young persons with a vague feeling of sadness. They had life before them, a thousand dreamy delusions—a thousand alluring hopes evanescent as the apple blossoms of May, but as sweet also.

[48] Mabel was too noble for envy, but these thoughts subdued her excitement into silent mournfulness. At first, she thought to walk slowly back and meet the young people when they landed, but something withheld her and she sat still, dreamily watching them.

She saw the boat drifting idly upon the current. The gorgeous forest leaves with which it was literally carpeted struck her eyes in rich masses of colors, as if the young people had imprisoned a portion of the sunset around their feet. She could distinguish Ben stooping forward seemingly half asleep upon his oars. All in the boat seemed tranquil and happy, like creatures of another life afloat upon the rivers of paradise; she could almost see their faces—those happy faces that made the fancy still more natural.

As she watched them a strange pain stole to her heart. She rose suddenly to her feet, and sweeping a hand across her eyes as if to clear their vision, cast long searching glances toward the boat, striving to read those young faces afar off, and thus relieve her mind of a powerful suspicion.

"Why has this thought never presented itself before?" she said with a pang of self reproach. "Has this eternal dream blinded me, or am I now mistaken? Poor children—poor Lina—is this cruel destiny to fall on you also?"

The boat came drifting toward her now in the crimson light, again enveloped in purple shadows like those fairy skiffs that glide through our dreams. Mabel watched it till her eyes filled with tears, a strange thing—for she was not a woman given to weeping, save as tears are sometimes the expression of a tender or poetic thought. Pain or wrong were things for her to endure or redress; she never wept over them.

[49] That night the interest which she felt in these young persons blended painfully with memories that had risen, like a sudden storm, in her nature. She felt as if they were destined to carry forth and work out the drama of her own life, and that this agency was just commencing. As she stood thus wrapped in turbulent thoughts, there came through the brushwood a crash of branches and a stir of the foliage louder than the wind could have produced.

Mabel Harrington was in no mood for companionship. She had fled from the house to be alone, and this approach startled her.

A little footpath led down the brow of the hill to a tiny promontory on which a few hickory trees were now dropping their nuts. She struck hastily into this path and descended to the river. Close to the bank, half hidden among the dying fern leaves that drooped over it, lay a miniature boat scarcely larger than an Indian canoe. It was a highly ornamented and symmetrical little craft, that any child might have propelled and which a queen fairy would have been proud to own.

Mabel sprang into the boat, and seating herself on a pile of cushions heaped in the centre, pushed out into the stream. There was no hardihood in this, she had been accustomed to action and exercise all her life, and could propel her little skiff with the skill and grace of any Indian girl.

Her boat ran out from the promontory and shot like an arrow across the water, for she trembled lest some voice should call her back, and urged her light oars with all the impetuosity of her nature.

[50] At last, beyond hail from the shore, she looked back and saw a man standing upon the brow of the hill, leaning against the oak that had sheltered her a few moments before. Mabel paused and rested on her oars. The distance would not permit her to distinguish his features, but the size and air might have been that of her husband had his usual habits permitted the idea. She put it aside at once, nothing could have induced the General to climb the steeps of that hill. It must be James. These two persons were alike in stature and partook of the same imposing air. Yes, it must be James Harrington, and was it from him she had fled? Had he repented of the harsh words that had driven her forth and followed her with hopes of atonement? Her heart rose kindly at the thought. She half turned her little boat, tempted back by that longing wish for reconciliation, which was always uppermost in her warm nature.

But then came the wholesome after-thought which had so often checked these genial impulses. She turned the boat slowly back upon its course and let it float with the current, watching the rise of land on which he stood, with sad, wistful glances, that no one saw, save the God who knows how pure they were, and how much the resolution to go on had cost her.

As the boat drifted downward, she saw the person turn as if speaking to some one, and directly a female form stood by his side. They drew close together, and seemed to be conversing eagerly. His look was no longer towards the boat; he had doubtless forgotten its existence.

Mabel held her breath, the color left her lips and she grasped the oars with each hand, till the blood was strained back from her fingers, leaving them white as marble.

"Oh, not that! not that! I can endure anything but that! God help me! O my God, help me! if this is added to the rest, I cannot live."

Drops of perspiration sprang to her temples as she spoke. Unconsciously she expended the first strength of her anguish on the oars, and the boat shot like a mad thing into the rapids which swept round a projection of rocks, and like some tormented spirit, she was borne away from the sight that had wounded her.

[51] There was danger now. The rush of the current, tortured by hidden rocks, sent the little craft onward, as if it had been a dead leaf cast into the eddy. Mabel liked the danger and the tumult. The rising wind blew in her face. The waters sparkled and dashed around her. The frail oars bent and quivered in her hands. It was something to brave and fight against; but for this scope of action the new anguish that had swept through the soul of that woman must have smothered her.

On the little boat went, dancing and leaping down the current, recoiling with a quiver from the hidden rocks which it touched more than once, but springing vigorously back to its flight, like a bird upon the wing.

"Oh, if this be so, let me die now. Why will it not strike? How came they to make the boat so light and yet so strong? It is true! It is true! I feel it in every throb of my pulse. After this, the life that I thought so dreary, will be a lost paradise, to which, plead as I may, there is no going back. I will know, God help me, but I must know if this is a wild suspicion, or a miserable, miserable reality!"

These words bespoke the concentration of some resolves. She grasped her oars more firmly, and with a sharp glance around, put her boat upon its course. It shot through hidden rocks; it cut across the eddies recklessly as before, but all the time a single course was pursued. At last the little craft entered the mouth of a mountain stream that came sparkling down a pretty hemlock hollow in the hills. The hollow was dusky with coming night, but the tree-tops were still brightened by a red tinge from the sunset, and there was light enough to find a footpath which wound upward along the margin of the brook.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LITTLE HOUSE ON THE HILL.

[52] MABEL left her boat and followed the path till she reached a natural terrace in the hills, narrow and green, upon which a small, one-story house was snugly bestowed. The terrace was uncultivated, save a small garden patch close to the house, where the soil was torn and uneven from the uprooting of vegetables from the rudely-shaped beds. Sweetbrier and wild honeysuckles gave a picturesque grace to the building, at variance with the untidy state of the grounds, and there was something in the whole place more suggestive of refinement than is usual to dwellings where the inmates work hard for their daily bread.

Mabel Harrington had never been in this place before. As she approached it, the cry of a whippowil came up from the hollow, as if warning her away. Everything was still within the house. There was no light; the rustle of leaves with the flow of waters from the ravine, joined their mournful whispers with the wail of the night bird.

Mabel was imaginative as a girl, and this solitude depressed her; still she moved steadily towards the house, and knocked at the door.

A woman opened it, whose person was seen but indistinctly, as she stood within the small entry, holding the door with one hand; but Mabel saw that she was dark and dressed as she had seen that class of persons in the south.

"I wish to see Miss Agnes Barker for a moment: is she in?" said Mrs. Harrington with her usual dignified repose of manner, for however much interested, Mabel was not one to invite curiosity by any display of excitement, and it must have been a close observer who could have detected the faint quiver of her voice as she expressed this common-place wish.

"She don't liv hear in dis shantee."

"I know. She lives at General Harrington's, up the river," replied Mabel, "but it is some weeks since she has been there, and I expected to find her with you."

"Missus, pears like you don't know as Miss Agnes is young lady, from top to toe, ebery inch ob her. Is you the Missus?"

[53] "I am Mrs. Harrington," said Mabel, quietly.

"Oh!" exclaimed the woman, prolonging the monosyllable almost into a sneer, "jes come in. I'se mighty sorry de candle all burnt out an done gone."

Mabel entered the house, and sat down in the dim light.

"Is Missus 'lone mong dese hills?" said the woman, retreating to the darkest corner of the room.

"Yes, I am alone!" answered Mabel.

"All 'lone in de dark wid nothin but that whippoorwill to keep company; skeery, ain't it, Missus?"

If the woman had hoped to terrify Mabel Harrington by these words, she was mistaken. A vague feeling of loneliness was upon her, but she had no cowardly timidity to contend with.

"Don't pear skeery no how," said the woman.

"I am seldom afraid of anything," answered Mabel with a wan smile. "I came to inquire for Miss Barker, if she is not here, tell me where she can be found?"

"Done gone out to de hills, pears like she could not stay away from em."

"Was she your mistress in the south?" inquired Mabel, troubled by the woman's voice.

"Pears so, Missus."

"Some one has managed to give her a fine education—I have seldom known a young person so thoroughly accomplished," continued Mabel with apparent calm, but keenly attentive to every word that fell from the woman's lips. "General Harrington informed me that she came highly recommended, but her attainments surprised us all."

"Oh yes, young missus knows heap 'bout dem books an pianers. Done born lady, no poor white trash, gorry mighty knows dat."

"Her duties are more particularly with Miss Lina, Gen. Harrington's adopted daughter, who makes no complaint against her—for myself, our intercourse is very limited, but she pleases the General. We have expected her at the house for several days, and thought it strange that she did not return."

"Ben gone ebery day dis week, sartin sure, long walk, but her's ready for it. Nebber gets home fore dark—walk, walk, walk, in de woods wid Marsa James."

Mabel arose. A sickening sensation crept over her, and she went to the open door for air.

It was true then—that suspicion was all true! Agnes Barker had been in the neighborhood of her old home for a week, without the knowledge of its mistress. That very day the girl had met James Harrington in the hills. Her own eyes had seen them standing side by side in the sunset.

"Pears like de Missus am sick," said the woman, coming toward her as she stood cold and shuddering under this conviction.

"No," answered Mabel, gathering up her strength, but pressing both hands upon her heart beneath the crimson folds of her shawl. "If Miss Barker comes to the house again she will have the goodness to see that I am informed. Miss Lina is anxious to renew her studies."

"Yes Missus."

"Give my message faithfully," answered Mabel. "I must speak with her before the duties of her situation are resumed. Good night."

"Good night to you," muttered the woman, as Mabel walked away. "I understand you, never doubt that. Agnes is beautiful, and keen enough for a dozen such as you. I thought it would work!"

Mrs. Harrington made the best of her way down the footpath which she had threaded, though the hollow was filled with gloom, and the whippowil called mournfully after her as she went.

Her boat lay where she had left it in the mouth of the creek. As she stepped into it a cry broke from her lips, and turning, she looked wildly up the hollow. A woman sprang over the boat as she stooped for the oars, and with a single leap cleared the bank, landing with a bound in the footpath above her.

One sharp glance she cast behind, then darted away as if eager to bury herself in the hemlock gloom.

The leap had been so sudden and the whole progress so rapid, that Mabel scarcely saw the woman, but she remembered after, that her dress was dusky red, and that a velvet cloak swept from her shoulders downward to the ground, half torn from her person in its abrupt movements. As she stood lost in amazement at this singular apparition, Mabel fancied that she heard the dip of oars, and could detect the dim outline of a boat making up the river.

She sat down mute, and troubled, looking after what seemed at best a floating shadow; the night had darkened rapidly, and instead of the new moon which should have silvered the sky, came billows of black, angry clouds, in which the thunder began to roll and mutter hoarse threats of a storm. Frightened by the brooding tempest, Mabel pushed her boat out from the shore, and began to row vigorously homeward; but she had scarcely got into deep water when the clouds became black as midnight; the winds rose furiously, lashing the waters and raging fiercely through the tree tops, while burst after burst of thunder broke over the hills. She could only see her course clearly when flashes of lightning shot at intervals through the trees, and broke in gleams of scattered fire among the waves, now dashing and leaping angrily around her.

Mabel was excited out of her anxieties by this turmoil. There was something in the force and

[56] suddenness of the storm that aroused all her courage. The vexed trees were bent and torn by the winds. The river was lashed into a sea of foam, over which her frail boat leaped and quivered like a living thing; but she sat steady in the midst, pale and firm, taking advantage of each gleam of lightning to fix her course, and facing the storm with a steady bravery which had no fear of death.

Still the tempest rose and lashed itself into fury from the rocky coast to the depths of the stream, and the little boat went plunging through it, keeping the brave woman safe. The oars were useless as rushes in her hands. The waves leaped upward as the wind lashed them, and at times rushed entirely over her. It was a fearful sight, that noble woman, all alone with the storm! so close to death and yet so resolute! Blacker and nearer grew the clouds torn by whirlwinds, and shooting out lurid gleams of lightning, that flashed and curled along the water like fiery serpents chasing each other into their boiling depths. So great was the tumult that another sound, which came like a smothered howl through the storm, seemed but a part of it. Thus Mabel was unconscious of this new danger, till a glare of lightning swept everything else aside, and bearing directly toward her, she saw a huge steamer ploughing through the tempest, on her downward course.

[57] Scarce had she time to recoil with horror from the danger, when it was wrapped in darkness again, and she could only guess of its approach by the cabin windows that glared upon her nearer and nearer, like great fiery eyes half blinded by the storm. Mabel nerved herself, and with a desperate effort bent her strength upon the oars. But the heave of the waters tore one from her grasp, and the other remained useless. Human strength was of no avail now. She was given up to the tempest, and could only cling to the reeling boat mute with horror, still with a thought of those she loved vital at her heart. Another sheet of lightning, blue and livid, rolled down the hills, and in it, standing upon a spur of rocks, she saw James Harrington, either in life or in spirit, looking forth upon the river. His figure took the deadly hue of the light. His garments shook to the storm. The pale flame quivered around him a moment, and he was engulfed in darkness again.

Mabel flung up her hands with a cry that cut through the storm like an arrow.

"Save me! save me! oh, my God! my God!"

Her pale hands quivered in the lightning. The shrieks that rang from her white lips were smothered in the fierce wind. The tortured boat seemed flinging her out to utter despair.

A roar that was not of the elements, now broke through all the tumult. There came a rush—an upheaving of the waters, which flung her high into the darkness—a blow that made her little bark quake in all its timbers—a plunge—a black rush of waters. She was hurled beneath the wheels of the steamer—engulfed in utter darkness. It was her last struggle with the storm.

CHAPTER VII.

THE UNEXPECTED PASSENGER.

WHILE Ben Benson was landing Ralph Harrington and Lina, he lost sight of the boat which had so effectually aroused his interest, and when he was ready to put out again, it was lost in the inequalities of the shore.

Ben put out into the river, bearing towards the opposite bank at first, but meeting with no signs of his object, he returned again, consuming time, and thus giving considerable start to Mrs. Harrington's little craft.

[58] As Ben neared the land again, he saw a gleam of crimson garments through the evergreens that fringed the rocky shore, and remembering the shawl which Mabel had on, was overjoyed to know that she had landed, and was comparatively safe from the storm, which grew more and more assured in its signs.

With his anxieties thus appeased, Ben rowed his boat more securely to the nearest point that promised a safe landing, resolved to court the recognition of his mistress, and when she was weary of her ramble, convey her safely home again.

When he reached the desired point, Ben could see that the crimson garments were moving through the undergrowth with a pace more rapid than any mere rambler would have chosen; but what surprised him was the course pursued down the river. His mistress, if frightened by the clouds, would doubtless have turned homeward.

Ben stood up in his boat and waved his tarpaulin with energy.

"Hallo—Madam—Mrs. Harrington, I say, there's thunder and war ahead, I tell you. Don't go too far. Don't go out of sight. The water's a-getting roughish now, and the woods won't be safe after

the clouds burst!"

Ben sent these words through an impromptu speaking trumpet made with one hand curved around his mouth. He was well pleased with the effect, for the red garments began to flutter, and he saw that the wearer was moving rapidly down the hill towards the point where he lay.

"That's what I call obeying signals at once!" said the honest fellow, seating himself in the stern of his boat. "But she knows as Ben Benson wouldn't take the liberty of hurrying her if he hadn't a good reason for what he's a-doin'—not he!"

And with this complacent reflection, Ben withdrew the tobacco from his mouth, and sent it far into the water, remembering Mrs. Harrington's objections to the weed, and ready to send his life after that, if it could afford her a moment's gratification.

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"Ben," said he, looking after the tobacco as it was tossed from one wave to another, and shaking his fist after it in virtuous indignation, "that's a habit as you ought to be ashamed on, Ben Benson, a habit as no dog wouldn't take from you on any account, yet you've just kept it up chawing and chawing from morning till night, till she'll catch you at it some day, and then you'll have done for yourself, and no mistake. I should like to see her a-settin' in your boat arter that. Tobackee 'll be the ruin of you yit, Ben. Grog's nothing to it."

A light step upon the moss silenced the boatman, but he kept his position, resolved to be very severe with himself for his manifold sins, this of tobacco being uppermost.

"Mr. Benson, you are kind, I am so much obliged!"

Ben started. The voice was a pleasant one, but his rough heart sunk low with disappointment—the tones were not those of Mrs. Harrington.

"I could not possibly have reached home on foot," said the same sweet voice, and a young lady sprang lightly into the boat. "I hope the river will prove safe!"

"I was waiting for Mrs. Harrington, marm, and mistook you for her—that's all," said Ben, without lifting his eyes to the singular girl that stood close to him.

"Mrs. Harrington has gone down the river long ago—she passed that point of land with the last sunbeam," said the young girl, seating herself comfortably among the cushions.

"Are you sartin of that ere?" questioned Ben, taking up his oars hurriedly. "Just give me her bearing, and I'll show you what rowing is."

"You can't possibly have a better pilot than I am," answered the lady, laughing till a row of closely set but uneven teeth were visible in the waning light. "In searching for Mrs. Harrington, you will naturally take me homeward; when she is found, I will allow myself to be set ashore."

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"The shore's no fit place for a young gal arter dark," said Ben gruffly, but pushing his boat out into the stream. "For my part, I can't make out what brings you up into the hills so often. Why don't you come home for good and all? Miss Lina don't want any more vacation, I reckon."

"Oh, my health isn't quite established yet, Mr. Benson," said the girl, looking at the boatman with a sidelong glance of her black, almond-shaped eyes, a glance that Ben was internally comparing to that of the rattlesnake, when he shrank off into a hollow of the rocks.

"I shouldn't think it very wholesome to be out so much at night!" said Ben.

"Oh, I live on fresh air, and love it best when moist with dew!" answered the girl.

"If it ain't moist with something stronger than dew afore long, I lose my guess!" muttered Ben, looking upward. "If this night don't see a reg'lar tornado, I'll give up—beat."

For a short time Ben plied his oars, casting anxious glances down the shore, hoping to find Mrs. Harrington and her boat safe in some inlet or cove, waiting for them.

"In course," said Ben, muttering as usual to himself. "In course, she'd know, as I was sure to come. What on the Lord's arth is Ben Benson good for, but to follow arter and tend on her? The king of all the Sandwich Islands couldn't have a higher business than that, let alone a poor feller of a boatman, as has circumvented his sea voyages down to a pair of oars and a passenger that's not over agreeable."

"Whom are you talking to, Mr. Benson?" inquired the young lady, wasting a smile on the moody boatman, though the threatening sky made her somewhat anxious about her own safety.

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"To an individual as calls hisself Ben Benson. He's a feller as bears with my faults better than anybody else, as I knows on, and one as is rather particular about being intruded on, when he's holding a private conversation with hisself. That's the individual, Miss Agnes, as I was a holding a council with."

"And you would a little rather have no interruption—is that it?" said the lady. "Well, well, I can be silent, you shall see that!"

"Doubtful!" muttered Ben, using his oars with fresh vigor.

The girl he called Agnes, folded her cloak about her and settled down among the cushions,

casting wistful glances at the sky. "Look," she said at last, pointing upward, "those small lead-colored clouds, how darkly they drift together! Did you ever see a flock of pigeons flying over the western woods, Mr. Benson?"

"Knew she wouldn't do it," muttered Ben, with his eyes bent on the clouds.

"See, see!" cried the girl. "The sky is black—I have seen the same thing!"

"But them was nothing but innocent birds a flying after something to eat," said Ben. "These ere clouds, Miss Agnes, has got a good many unroofed housen', and shipwrecks, and trees broken in two, and torn up by the roots, in 'em, to say nothing of this ere boat as may be upspot any minute."

The girl turned pale; her black eyes shone with sudden fear.

"Do you think there is really any danger, Mr. Benson?"

"Danger? Of course there's danger! What did I follow arter that little boat for, if there wasn't no danger?"

"Perhaps—perhaps," said Agnes tremulously, "it would be safer on shore. The walk will not be much now. What do you say to running ashore?"

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"There'll be a howling among the rocks afore you get round the first point, that 'ud take your breath; besides, when the winds begin to rush there'll be a crashing down of trees, and broken limbs will be flying thick enough. No, no—unsartain as the river is, you'd better keep still. I don't want your death on my conscience, any how."

"But can you swim if we should capsize?" questioned Agnes, growing pale and cold.

"Swim, can Ben Benson swim?" cried the boatman with a hoarse laugh. "Well, I should think that he can swim a trifle."

The girl fixed her black eyes upon him. They were large and bright with terror.

"Fast, pull fast," she said, "let me help you—is there anything in which I can help you? How slow the boat goes—pull, pull!"

"We are agin the wind, and it's getting strongish," answered Ben.

"What can we do?" cried out the girl clasping her hands. "Hear how it howls—how the trees begin to moan! Is not the storm at its height now?"

"You'll see by and by," said Ben, bowing his moist forehead down to the sleeve of his jacket, and wiping away the perspiration that was now falling from it like rain.

"Oh, what will become of us?" shrieked the girl.

"What has become of *her*?" echoed Ben, casting sharp despairing glances toward the shore, which was now darkened, and in a turmoil.

"There is my home—there, there, on the side hill. A light is just struck in the window. Set me on shore—oh, Mr. Benson, do set me on shore!"

"Not till I find *her*," answered Ben, resolutely, "you would get in, so make the best of it."

The girl grew white as death.

"Let me ashore, or it will be my death—I am sick with terror," she pleaded.

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Ben did not appear to listen. He was looking wildly down the stream, right and left, with despair in his glances.

"Where is she? What can have become of her?" he cried out at last, sinking forward on his oars, and allowing the boat to struggle for herself against the wind.

"At home, no doubt," answered the girl, struck with a selfish thought, in which there was hope of safety.

"How! What?" exclaimed Ben fiercely, "at home!"

"No doubt she left her boat in some cove and went home along the shore," persisted the girl. "She would be sure to put in somewhere!"

Ben's face lighted up, and his eyes glowed with hope.

"It may be—of course it is. She went back long ago, no doubt on it," he exclaimed, joyfully. "Why Ben Benson, what a precious old fool you was not to think of that. Miss Agnes, I'll set you ashore now anywhere you'll pint out, if the boat lives through it."

"Now, now!" cried the girl, breathless with terror, "strike for land anywhere—I know the shore. Only put me on dry land again—it's all I ask."

CHAPTER VIII.

OUT OF THE STORM.

BEN altered his course with a great effort, and forced a passage to the broken shore. He was too busy in preserving his boat from being dashed upon the rocks, to remark with what eager selfishness the girl left him, only uttering a quick ejaculation, and darting away without thanks. By the time he could look around she had plunged into a neighboring ravine, and he saw no more of her.

[64] Though the current was running high, Ben had the whole force of the wind to urge him on, and his steady seamanship made the progress up stream less dangerous than the descent had been. But the toil was great and every muscle of his brawny arms rose to its full strain as he bent all his strength upon the oars. But with his greatest anxieties at rest, Ben cared little for this. With no life but his own at stake, the tempest was nothing to the brave man.

But it grew terrible. The boat was more than once hurled out of water. The waves dashed over him; the wind carried off his hat and beat fiercely against his head, sweeping the long hair over his face. Again and again the current wheeled his boat around, drifting it back with a force he could not resist, sometimes close to the shore, sometimes out in the torrent of waters. It was impossible now to see his course, except by the lightning. The entire darkness baffled him more than the storm.

Once when the boat was seized upon and hurled backward, Ben saw innumerable lights sweeping by in the fog between him and the shore, and he uttered a shout of wild thanksgiving that the steamer had not run him down. As the water heaved him to and fro, a glare of lightning revealed this monster boat, moving downward, and—oh, horror of horrors! Mabel Harrington, just as the vortex engulfed her. Two white arms were flung upward. Her hair streamed in the lightning. The deathly white face was turned shoreward.

The might of twenty men was in his arms then. He flung back the rushing waves with his oars, and from a will fiercer than his strength, forced his boat toward her. In a minute the darkness of death was around him. Blasts of wind and great gushes of rain swept over him. He shouted aloud. He beat the waters madly with his oars. He called upon God for one more flash of lightning.

[65] It came. He saw a distant steamer, an up-turned boat and something darker than the foam heaving upon the waters.

"Hold on! Hold on!—I'm coming—I'm coming—it's Ben—it's Ben. Oh God, give me light!"

He was answered. A crash of thunder—a trail of fire—and an old cedar tree on the shore flamed up with the light he had prayed for.

It flamed up and Ben saw a man plunge from the rocks into the boiling waters. He bent to the oar, his boat rushed through the waves, and as he came one way, that white face moved steadily from the shore. The waters were buffeted fiercely around it. Some mighty power seemed to sweep back the storm from where it moved.

It disappeared, rose and sunk again. Ben pushed his boat to the spot where he had seen Mabel disappear. His bow dashed against the little boat already broken in twain, and its fragments broke upon the water. He looked wildly about. The face was gone. The dark heap which he had taken for Mabel, had disappeared. Ben's strong arms began to tremble; tears of anguish met the beating rain, as it broke over his face. Despair seized upon him. He dashed his oars into the bottom of the boat and stood up, ready for a plunge. He would never go back and say that his mistress had been suffered to drown before his face. His clasped hands were uplifted—the boat reeled under him—he was poised for the mad plunge!

No, his hands fell. A hoarse shout broke from him.

"Here, here I am! here—away!"

He seized the oars again, looking wildly around, for the voice that had hailed him by name, up from the deep, as it seemed. It came again, and close by the boat that grand head appeared struggling for life.

Ben struck out his oars.

"Do not move—do not strike, or you may kill her yet!"

[66] "Is she there? Can you hold on?" cried Ben, trembling in every limb of his stout frame.

A hand seized one side of the boat. Close to the manly head he had seen, was the marble face of Mabel Harrington, half veiled by tresses of wet hair. Ben fell upon his knees, and plunging his arms into the waves, drew her into the boat.

"For the shore—for your life!" shouted James Harrington, refusing to be helped, but clinging to the boat. "No, no—strike out; I will hold on—pull—pull!"

Ben took off his coat, and rolling it in a bundle, placed it under Mabel Harrington's head. It was all he could do. The boat was a third full of water, and he had nothing else.

"Get in—get in—or she will be drowned over again!" he pleaded, seizing James Harrington by the shoulders, and dragging him over the side. "Get down, keep her head out of water, and it'll take a worse storm than this to drive me back."

Harrington fell rather than sat down, and took Mabel in his arms, close to a heart so chilled that it had almost ceased beating. But as her cold face fell upon his bosom, a glow of life came back to it, with a pang of unsupportable feeling. It was not joy—it was not sorrow—but the warmth in his veins seemed like a sweet poison, which would end in death.

He put the numb and senseless form aside with a great effort, resting the head upon Ben's coat. Twice he attempted to speak, but his trembling lips uttered nothing but broken moans.

"Take her," he said to Ben, "take her and I will pull the oars."

"You haven't life enough in you, sir," pleaded Ben, shrinking from the proposal.

"I am strong again," said Harrington, placing himself on the seat and taking the oars. "See!"

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The boat plunged heavily shoreward. Ben held his mistress with a sort of terror at the sacrilege. His brawny arms trembled around her. He turned his face to the storm, rather than allow his eyes to rest upon her. But James Harrington had no compassion; he still kept to the oars.

At last they shot into a point of the shore, formed by two or three jutting rocks. Harrington dropped the oars, and the two men lifted Mabel Harrington from the boat, and bore her to a slope of the hill. No shelter was in sight. The sudden storm was abating, but rain still dropped in showers from the trees.

"Where can we convey her? What shall we do?" said Harrington, looking around in dismay. "She will perish before we can obtain warmth, if she is not already gone."

Ben had flung down his coat. They laid her upon it. James Harrington knelt upon the turf, and lifted her head to his knee. The face was pale as death; purple shadows lay about the mouth, and under the eyes; her flesh was cold as marble.

Again the deathly cold came creeping to Harrington's heart. He shuddered from head to foot, "She is dead—she is dead!" broke from his chilled lips.

"Oh, Mr. Harrington, Mr. Harrington, what can we do? What can we do?" groaned Ben, clasping his huge hands, and crying like a child over the poor lady. "She isn't dead—don't! That word is enough to kill a poor miserable feller, as wanted to die for her and couldn't."

His only answer was a low moan from James Harrington.

"Is there no house, no living soul near to give us help?" said James Harrington, lifting his white face to that of Ben Benson, while his voice shook, and his arms trembled around the cold form they half supported, half embraced. "If there is a spark of life left it will go out in this cold—if she is dead—"

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"Don't! oh, Mister James, don't!" cried Ben wringing his hands with fresh violence, "them's cruel words to stun a poor fellow's heart with—she ain't dead, God don't take his angels up to glory in that 'ere way!"

James laid Mabel reverently from his arms, and stood up casting anxious glances through the storm.

"There is a light, yonder upon the hill-side,—you can just see it through the drifting clouds—go, Ben, climb for your life and bring us help!"

Ben stooped down, clapped a hand on each knee and took an observation.

"There is a light, that's sartin," he said joyfully, settling himself in his wet clothes and making a start for the hill; but directly he turned back again.

"If she's so near gone as you speak on, Mister James, it wouldn't be of no use for me to go up there for help—she'd be chilled through and through, till there was no bringing her back, long afore I could half-way climb the hill!"

"I fear it, I fear it!" said Harrington, looking mournfully down on the white face at his feet, "God help her!"

"See," said Ben stretching forth his hand towards the burning cedar, "God Almighty has gin us light and fire close by—the grass is crisped and dried up all around that tree. What if we carry the madam there? I'll go up the hill with a heart in it arter that!"

Ben stooped as if about to take the cold form of his mistress in his arms, but as his hands touched her garments some inward restraint fell upon him, and he drew back, looking wistfully from Harrington to the prostrate woman he dared not raise from the earth even in her extremity.

As he stooped a strange light had flashed into James Harrington's eyes, and he made a motion as if to push the poor boatman aside.

Ben did not see this, as we have said, his retreat was a voluntary impulse. He saw James

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Harrington take up the form he dared not touch, with a feeling of deep humiliation, submitting to the abrupt and stern manner which accompanied the action, as a well deserved rebuke for his boldness.

A small ravine separated the point of land occupied by the little party from the burning cedar, and towards this Harrington bore his silent burden. His cheeks grew deadly pale from a feeling deeper than fear or cold, and his eyes flashed back the gleams of light that reached him from the burning tree with a wild splendor that no mortal man had ever seen in them before.

He held Mabel closer and closer to his heart, which rose and heaved beneath its burden; his breath came in broken volumes from his chest, and an insane belief seized upon him, that though dead he could arouse her from that icy sleep, by forcing the breath of his own abundant existence through her lips.

Fired by this wild thought he bowed his head nearer and nearer to the pallid face upon his shoulder. But the voice of Ben Benson brought him back to sanity again.

"Be careful, sir! The hollow is full of ruts and broken stones! She is too heavy—You stagger and reel like a craft that has lost her helm! Steady, sir—steady, or she'll be hurt!"

James Harrington stopped suddenly, as if a war trumpet had checked his progress. His face changed in the burning light. His arms relaxed around the form they had clasped so firmly a moment before.

"Take her!" he said, with an imploring look. "Take her! I am very weak. You see how I falter—Take her, Benson. She is not heavy, it is only I that have lost all strength!"

Ben reached forth his brawny arms, as we sometimes see a great school-boy receive a baby sister, and folded them reverently around the form which Harrington relinquished with a sigh of unutterable humiliation.

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Ben moved forward with a quick firm tread, following Harrington, who went before trampling down the undergrowth, and putting aside the drooping branches from his path.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BURNING CEDAR.

THE cedar tree stood on a slope of the bank, and had cast its fiery rain over the herbage and brushwood for yards around, leaving them crisped and dry.

Harrington gathered up a quantity of the seared grass, and heaped a dry couch upon which Ben laid his charge within the genial heat that came from the cedar tree. Then they gathered up all the combustible matter within reach, and began to kindle a fire so near to the place where she lay that its heat must help to drive back the chill of death if there was a spark of life yet vital in her bosom.

Harrington knelt beside Mabel. He chafed her hands between his own, and wrung the water from her long hair. But it all seemed in vain. No color came to those blue fingers. The purple tinge still lay like the shadow of violets under the closed eyes,—no motion of the chest—no stir of the limbs. At last drops of water came oozing through the white lips, and a scarcely perceptible shiver ran through the limbs.

"It is life!" said Harrington, lifting his radiant face to the boatman.

"Are you sartin it ain't the wind a stirring her gown?" asked Ben, trembling between anxiety and delight.

"No, no—her chest heaves,—she struggles. It is life, precious, holy life; God has given her back to us, Ben!"

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"I don't know—I ain't quite sartin yet, if she'd only open her eyes, or lift her hand!" exclaimed the poor fellow.

Here a faint groan broke from the object of his solicitude, and she began to struggle upon the ground.

"Go," said Harrington, "search out the light we saw—she will need rest and shelter more than anything now."

"I will, in course I will—only let me be sartin she's coming to."

The good fellow knelt down by Mabel as he spoke, and lifting her hand in his, laid it to his rough cheek.

"It's alive—it moves like a drenched bird put back in its nest—I'll go now, Mister James, but d'ye see I felt like thanking the great Admiral up aloft there, and didn't want no mistake about it."

"Yes, we may well thank God; she lives," said Harrington, looking down upon Mabel with tears in his eyes.

"Then I *do* thank God, soul and body, I thanks him," answered Ben, throwing his clasped hands aloft, "and if I was commander of the stoutest man-of-war as ever floated, I'd thank him all the same."

With these words Ben disappeared in the undergrowth and proceeded in search of help.

Admonished by the throes and struggles which proclaimed a painful return of life, Harrington lifted Mabel to a sitting posture and supported her there. His heart was wrung by every spasm of anguish that swept over her; yet at each one, he sent up a brief thanksgiving, for it was a proof of returning consciousness. Still she looked very deathly, and the sighs that broke through her pale lips seemed like an echo of some struggling pang within.

"Mabel," said Harrington, catching his breath as the name escaped his lips, "Mabel, do you understand?—are you better, Mabel?"

The name once spoken it seemed as if he could not repeat it often enough, it fell so like music upon his soul.

[72] She struggled faintly—a thrill ran through her frame, and both lips and eyelids began to quiver.

"Who calls me?" she said, in a whisper. "Who calls and where am I?"

Her eyes were open now, and the refulgence falling around her from the burning cedar, seemed like the glory of heaven. In that light she saw only James Harrington bending over her. A smile bright and pure, as if she had been in truth an angel, stole over her face.

"Yes," she whispered with a sigh of ineffable happiness, "he may call me Mabel here."

He could not distinguish her words, but knew from the light upon her face, that she was very happy. His own features grew luminous.

"Mabel, have you ceased to suffer?" he said.

Her eyes were closed in gentle weariness now, but the smile came fresh upon her features, and she murmured dreamily:

"There is no suffering here—nothing but heaven and our two selves."

Oh, James Harrington, be careful now! You have heard those soft words—you have drunk in the glory of that smile. In all your life what temptation has equalled this?

For one delirious moment the strong man gave himself up to the joy of those words: for one moment his hands were uplifted in thanksgiving—then they were clasped and fell heavily to the earth, and a flood of bitter, bitter self-reproach flowed silently from his heart. Mabel moved like a child that had been lulled to rest by the music of a dear voice. She thirsted for the sound again.

"Did not some one call me Mabel?" she asked.

Harrington was firm now, and he answered calmly:

"Yes, Mrs. Harrington, it was I."

"Mrs. Harrington," muttered Mabel in a troubled tone, "how came that name here? It is of earth, earthy."

[73] "We are all of earth," answered James, strong in self command. "You have been ill, Mrs. Harrington, drenched through, and almost drowned—but, thank God, your life is saved."

"My life is saved, and am I yet of earth? Then what is this light so heavenly, and yet so false!"

"The storm which overwhelmed your boat struck this light. It is from a tree smitten with fire."

"And you?" questioned Mabel, but very mournfully. "You are General Harrington's guest, and I am his wife?"

"Even so, dear lady!"

Mabel turned her head and tears stole softly from beneath her closed lashes. How could she reconcile herself to life again? To be thus torn back from a sweet delusion, was more painful than all the pangs she had suffered.

They were silent now. For one moment they had met, soul to soul, but the old barriers were fast springing up between them, barriers that made the hearts of both heavy as death, yet neither would have lifted a hand to tear them away.

Mabel at last quietly wiped the tears from her eyes and sat up. She still shivered and her face was pale, but she smiled yet, only the smile was so touchingly sad.

"I must have been quite gone,—why did you bring me back?" she said.

"Why did we bring you back," repeated Harrington with a sudden outburst of passion, "why did we bring you back!" He checked himself and went on more calmly. "It is the duty of every one to save life, Mrs. Harrington, and to receive it gratefully when, by God's mercy, it is saved."

"I know, I know," she answered, attempting to gather up the tresses of her hair, "I shall be grateful for this gift of life to-morrow; but now—indeed I am, very thankful that you saved me."

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"It was Ben more than myself—but for him you would have been lost," answered Harrington, rejecting her sweet gratitude with stoicism. "He followed you in his boat through all the storm, and was nearly lost with you!"

"Poor Ben!" she said, "faithful always, I had not thought of him, though he saved my life."

Harrington had claimed all her gratitude for Ben with resolute self-restraint; but when she acknowledged it so kindly, he could not help feeling somewhat wronged. But against such impulses he had armed himself, and directly cast them aside.

"How strange everything looks," she said, "are those stars breaking through between the clouds? They seem very pale and sad, after the light that dazzled me when I first awoke: then there is a mournful sound coming through the trees—the waters, I suppose. After all, this earth does seem very dark and sorrowful, to which you have brought me back."

"You are ill yet—you suffer, perhaps?"

"No, I am only sad!"

And so was he. Her mournful voice—the reluctance with which she took back the burden of life, pained him, yet he could offer no adequate consolation. Commonplaces are a mockery with persons who know that there are thoughts in the depths of the soul, which must not be spoken, though they color every other thought. Silence or subterfuge is the only refuge for those who dare not speak frankly.

Thus without a word, for they were too honest for pretence, the two remained together listening to the low sob of the winds and to the rain that dripped from the leaves, long after it had ceased to fall from the clouds. This hush of the storm was oppressive more to Harrington than the lady. She was languid and dreamy lying upon her couch of dry leaves, very feeble and weeping quietly without a sob, like a helpless child who has no language but tears and laughter. In this entire prostration of the nervous system, she forgot—if she had ever been conscious of the words that filled him with a tumult of painful feelings.

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He moved a little from the place where Mabel lay, and burying his face in both hands, remained perfectly still, lifting a solemn petition heavenward from his silent heart, not that she might live—not even of thanksgiving—but a subdued cry for strength rose up with the might of his whole being, a cry so ardent and sincere, that its very intensity kept him still.

CHAPTER X.

HOME IN SAFETY.

WHILE this was going on in that struggling heart a black shadow had crept close to the man, and Agnes Barker stood between him and Mabel, leaving her in the firelight, but shutting it out from him.

He did not feel the darkness, and the girl stood by him more than a minute before he looked up.

Mabel moved with a faint expression of pain, as if she felt the shadow of some evil thing falling athwart the light; but she did not uncloset her eyes, and Agnes, who had been for some time within earshot, spoke before her presence was recognized.

"Is there anything I can do?" she said in her usual low tones.

James lifted his head, bowed almost to the dust in the humility of his prayer, and saw this strange girl standing before him, her red garments glowing in the firelight, her arms folded on her bosom, and her eyes glittering beneath their long lashes, like half-buried diamonds. She seemed so like an embodiment of the evil passions he had prayed against, that he sat mute and pale, gazing upon her.

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"You look deathly. You are hurt," she said, stooping toward him with a gesture at once subtle and fascinating. "I saw her boat engulfed—I saw you plunge into the stream—the storm was raging through the woods, but I came through it all."

Still Harrington remained silent, gazing fixedly upon her, so astonished by her presence that he did not heed her words.

"The lady is not dead," continued the girl, looking over her shoulders, while her garment grew dusky, and lurid in the waning light. "I heard her speaking, but a few moments ago."

James Harrington arose to his feet with grave dignity.

"You have come in good time, Miss Barker," he said. "If your cloak is dry throw it around her; even in this warmth she shivers."

Agnes looked back as she drew off her short cloak, and held the garment irresolutely in her hand.

"But you are wet and cold, too, wrap the cloak around yourself. What life can be more precious!"

She said this in a low voice, and moved towards him. He put the garment aside, and passing Agnes, stooped over Mrs. Harrington, addressing her in a grave, gentle voice.

"Are you stronger, now, dear lady?"

"I think so!" answered Mabel, moving uneasily, "but some one else is here—I heard speaking!"

"It was me," answered Agnes, spreading her cloak softly over Mabel; "I saw your peril, dear Mrs. Harrington, and came to offer help. My old nurse lives upon the hill—if you can walk so far, she will be glad to shelter you."

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Mabel attempted to sit up. The presence of Agnes Barker excited her with new strength. She pushed aside the cloak with a feeling of repulsion, and looked pleadingly on Harrington.

"You will not take me up there!" she said. "It is a dreary, dreary place!"

"But it is the only shelter at hand," urged Harrington.

"I know; but that woman—don't place me, helpless as I am, with that strange woman!"

"You will find a capital nurse there; I left her preparing a warm bed!" whispered Agnes, stooping toward Harrington, till her breath floated across his face; "the walk is a little toilsome, but short; between us, I think she could manage it."

Mabel heard the whisper, and sinking back on her bed of leaves, pleaded against the measure.

"I cannot go up there," she said with some resolution, "I could not rest with that woman near."

"Of whom does she speak?" inquired Harrington.

"It is impossible for me to guess; the fright has unsettled her mind, I fear," answered Agnes.

"No, I am sane enough," murmured Mrs. Harrington, "but I have been warned. No human voice ever spoke more plainly than that lone night bird, as I went up the hollow—he knew that it was unholy ground I trod upon!"

"But you are not strong enough to reach home," persisted the girl Agnes, "the river is yet rough—the wind unsettled."

"She is well enough to go just where she's a mind to, I reckon," said Ben Benson, crashing through the undergrowth, "and I'm here to help her do it."

"Thank you," said Mabel, gently, "I wish to go home!"

Ben turned towards Harrington, and, without regard to the presence of Agnes, spoke his mind.

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"I don't like the cut of things up yonder, somehow. The woman looks like a female Judas Iscariot. She's eager but not kind. The madam is better off here with the old tree to warm her."

Agnes kept her eyes steadily on Ben as he spoke; when he had finished, she laughed.

"You are complimentary to my mammy!" she said, "I will tell her your opinion. But have your own way. We have offered hospitality to the lady in good faith—if she prefers other shelter, I dare say we shall find the means of reconciling ourselves to her wishes and to your very flattering opinion, Mr. Boatman."

Ben threw back his right foot and made the young lady a nautical bow, accompanied with an overwhelming flourish of the hand.

"Delighted to hear as you and the old woman is agreeable. Now if you'd just as lieves, we'll try and get madam down to the boat; I've just bailed it out. The river may be a trifle roughish yet, but there's no danger."

Ben directed this portion of his speech to Mr. James Harrington, who stood by in silence, without appearing to regard the conversation.

He now stepped forward, and stooping over Mabel, inquired if she was willing, and felt strong enough to attempt a return home by water.

"Yes," answered Mabel, sitting up and striving to arrange her dress, "I am stronger now—take me home by all means. General Harrington will be terrified by my absence, and Lina—dear, dear Lina, how grateful she will be to have her mother back again!"

"And your son!" said Harrington gently.

"Oh, if I did not mention him, he is always here!" answered Mabel, pressing a hand to her heart, and looking upward with a face beaming with vivid tenderness; "I never knew how much of love was in my soul before."

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How unconscious the noble woman was of her dreamy wanderings of speech—how pure and trustful was the look which she fixed upon Harrington's face as she said this. A holy thankfulness pervaded her whole being; from the black deep she seemed to have gathered a world of beautiful strength.

"Come," she said, struggling to her feet and smiling in gentle derision of her weakness, as she felt her head begin to reel, "I am not afraid to try the boat again, if some one will help me."

Harrington did not move, and after a perplexed look from one to the other, Ben stooped his shoulder that she might lean upon it.

When they reached the boat, Mabel was almost exhausted, but she found strength to think of Agnes, who had silently followed them.

"Will you not get in?" she said, faintly, "I should be glad to have you with me."

"No," answered the girl, in the sweetest of all accents, "nurse would be terrified to death. I will return home."

"Not alone," said James Harrington, "that must not be."

"Oh, Mr. Harrington, I am used to being alone. It is the fate of a poor girl like me!"

There was something plaintive in her voice, and she drooped meekly forward, as if imploring pardon for having said so much.

Harrington remained a moment thoughtful; at last he addressed Ben.

"Proceed up the river," he said, "slowly it must be, for the stream is against you. I will see that Miss Barker reaches home safely, and overtake you."

Ben looked up in astonishment. "Why, Mister James, she's allers alone in these ere woods. No blackbird knows the bush better, what's the use?"

Mabel said nothing, but her eyes turned upon Harrington with a wistful and surprised look.

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"No matter, she must not go through the woods alone," answered Harrington. "Keep snug to the shore, and be ready to answer my hail; I will overtake you in a few minutes."

Harrington moved away as he uttered these words, following Agnes into the woods.

Mabel looked after them with sadness in her eyes; then, bowing her face softly upon her folded arms, she remained motionless, save that her lips moved, and broken whispers which the angels of Heaven gathered and laid before the throne of God, stole through them. They had advanced some distance up the shore, when Harrington hailed the boat; Ben did not pretend to hear him, but Mabel, lifting her face, now full of gentleness, said, with a smile—

"Stop, Ben, he is calling for you!"

"Let him call and be——" Ben caught the profane word in his teeth, and swallowing it with a great struggle, commenced again—

"Let him call till he's tired, why didn't he stay with that old Judas and the young witch. To think of going off with sich like, and madame just a dying—halloo away, Ben Benson 'll sink afore he hears you!"

Ben muttered this between his teeth, and worked away at the oars, doggedly resolved to continue his fit of deafness, and give his master a midnight walk through the dripping and rough woods, but Mabel addressed him again with a quiet firmness which he could not find the heart to resist.

"Put on shore, Ben, and take your master in."

"I begin to thing he's took us all in a little too often!" muttered Ben; but he turned reluctantly for the shore, and Harrington, without speaking, took his place in the boat.

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The moon had broken through the drift-clouds left by the storm, before the little party reached the cove below General Harrington's dwelling. The front of the house was entirely dark, but lights wandered to and fro along the hollow, and anxious voices were heard calling to each other along the bank.

"They're out searching for us!" said Ben, dropping his oars and making an impromptu speaking-trumpet of his hand. Directly his voice rang along the shore.

"Ben Benson, and passengers from down stream. All well!"

A shout answered from the shore, and directly eager voices and rapid footsteps rushed toward the little cove; first came Ralph, wild with joy, leaping downward like a panther.

"Is she safe! is she here!" he cried, pausing with dread upon the bank.

"Ralph, Ralph!"

He knew the voice. He sprang into the boat, and fell upon his knees before his mother.

"Thank God, oh mother, mother!"

He could say no more. Unspeakable joy choked his utterance. He kissed her hands, her face, and her wet robes.

"Mother, mother, tell me what has happened! You are cold—you tremble—all your clothes are wet—your bonnet is off—that dear pale face, oh mother, you have been in danger, and I not there!"

His love gave her strength. She took his head between her trembling hands, and kissed him again and again on the forehead.

"Oh, yes, my Ralph, I have been very near death—but with all this to live for, God would not let me die."

"No, no, he could not make us so wretched. Oh, mother, what would home be without you? It is only an hour or two since we missed you; but those hours were full of desolation. Tell me—tell me how it was!"

"They did it—they will tell you—I was in the depths of the river, but they drew me out."

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"They, my brother James, and that blessed old rogue, Ben Benson, did they save you, mother, while I—I, your only son—was dreaming at home? Oh, James, must I thank you for my mother, with all the rest!"

"Thank God, Ralph, for He has saved your mother!"

His voice was impressive and solemn. It seemed like a rebuke to the ardent gratitude of the young man.

"I do thank God, brother James," he answered reverently, uncovering his head. "But, to be grateful to God's creatures is, so far, giving thanks to Him! How often have you told me this?"

"You are right," answered James gently, "but see, your mother needs assistance!"

Mabel had risen, and was making ready to step from the boat. Ralph turned, flung one arm around her.

"Lean on me, dear mother. Lay your head on my shoulder; don't mind the weight; I can carry you, if needful!"

Mabel submitted herself to the affectionate guidance of her son, with a sigh of pleasure, and proceeded towards the house.

CHAPTER XI.

GENERAL HARRINGTON IS SHOCKED.

THE rigid ideas of female propriety which General Harrington enforced in his family, had been greatly outraged that day. This well-regulated home was thrown into disorder by the unaccountable absence of his wife and Lina from the tea-table. He had followed his wife to the bank of the river, and with a feeling of quiet indignation had watched her rowing her own boat down the stream like a wild gipsy. The gathering storm and the danger she was in scarcely impressed him, but the impropriety of the thing outraged all his fastidiousness.

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Still he was glad to have her away for the brief time that he was in the hills, and but for her long absence this escapade on the river might have been forgiven.

A solitary evening, added to these causes of discontent, had greatly ruffled the general's equanimity of temper, and when his wife appeared deep in the night, her clothes in disorder, her hair disarranged, and her face pale as death, he felt her return in this state as a positive insult to his house.

"Madam," he said, with that quiet irony which was the gift of his cold nature, "it is rather late, and your toilet somewhat disarranged for the presence of gentlemen; allow me to lead you to a mirror." It was not necessary; Mabel had seen herself reflected in the great oval glass opposite, and shrunk back, shocked both by her appearance and the cold insult to which it had given rise.

James Harrington remained silent, but his eyes grew bright with indignation, while Ralph flung

one arm around his mother's waist, and turned his bright face upon the general.

"My mother's life has been in peril—she comes back to us, father, almost cold from the dead."

"Indeed!" said the general with a look of cold surprise. "Surely, madam, you did not remain out in the storm? You have not been on the river all this time?"

"I have been in the depths of the river, I believe!" answered Mabel. "The boat was upset—I was dashed beneath the wheels of a steamer, but for—" She hesitated, and a red flush shot over her face; the noble woman recovered herself in an instant, "but for James, and Ben Benson."

An answering flush came to the general's cheek. He darted a quick glance at James.

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"And how came Mr. Harrington so near you, madam? They told me you had gone upon the river alone."

"And so she did," answered James, stepping forward. "I saw her put out from the shore, apparently unconscious of the coming storm, and followed the course of her boat."

"Why did you not warn her, sir?"

"I did, more than once at the top of my voice, but the wind was against me!"

"And where did all this happen?" inquired the general, more interested than he had been.

"Near a ravine, some distance down the stream. You will not perhaps be able to recognize the place, sir," answered Mabel, "but it is nearly opposite the small house in which Miss Barker resides with her mother."

The general did not start, but a strange expression crept over his features, as if he were becoming more interested and less pleased.

"May I ask you what took you in that direction, madam?"

"Nothing better than a caprice, I fear," answered Mabel; "at first I went out for exercise and solitude, then remembering Miss Barker, I put on shore."

"Surely you did not go to that house!" cried the general, interrupting her almost for the first time in his life.

"Yes, I went," answered Mabel with simplicity.

"Indeed! and what did you find—whom did you see?"

"I saw a dusky woman, rude and insolent, who called herself Agnes Barker's nurse—nothing more."

"So you found an insolent woman."

"A very disagreeable one, at least, General Harrington, but I am faint and ill—permit me to answer all farther questions to-morrow!"

General Harrington's manner imperceptibly changed; he no longer enforced abrupt questions upon the exhausted lady, but with a show of gallant attention, stepped forward and drew her arm through his.

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"You can go to your rooms, young men," he said, "I will attend Mrs. Harrington."

"Shall I have Lina called, mother?" said Ralph, following his parents, "she did not know of your absence, and I would not terrify her!"

Before Mabel could speak, the general answered for her—

"No, why should Lina be disturbed? Send Mrs. Harrington's maid," and with a gentle wave of the hand which forbade all farther conversation, the general led his wife from the room.

CHAPTER XII.

LOVE DREAMS.

LINA had slept sweetly through all this turmoil of the elements and of human passions. Beautifully as a dove she lay in her pretty white bed, with its snowy curtains brooding over her like summer clouds above opening roses. A night-lamp of pale alabaster shed its soft moonlight through the room, and when bursts of thunder shook the heavens, and the lightning flashed and gleamed around the single Gothic casement of her chamber, it only gave to this pearly light a golden tinge, and made Lina smile more dreamily in her happy slumber.

She was abroad upon the hills again, and in sleep lived over the bright hours that never return, save in dreams, to any human soul.

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She had left Ralph in the hall, and hoarding up her new found happiness she stole away to her room, kindled the alabaster lamp that no broader light should look upon her blushes, and sat down lost in a trance of thought. She veiled her eyes even from the pure light around her, and started covered with blushes, when the happiness flooding her soul broke in murmurs to her lips.

She longed to speak over his name, to whisper the words with which he had blessed her, and ponder over and over the tone of those words. She was bewildered and astonished by her own happiness. Now she longed to steal into Mrs. Harrington's presence, and tell her of the great joy that had fallen upon her life, but the first motion to that effect brought the blushes to her cheeks, and made her cover them with both hands, like a child who strives to hide the shame of some innocent joy.

At last she began to undress, softly and bashfully, as if she had found some new value in her own beauty. Her hands lingered fondly among the tresses of her hair, and gathering them up beneath her pretty Valenciennes cap, she smiled to see its gossamer shadows fall upon her forehead, giving the whole face a Madonna-like purity.

With a gentle sigh, she pillowed herself upon the couch, and looked up through the cloud of snowy lace that overshadowed it with a wistful smile, as if she expected to see stars break through, revealing new glimpses of the Heaven already dawning in her young life.

Thus cradled in her own happiness, like a lily with its cup full of dew, she laid that beautiful head upon her arm, and slept. The wind had no power to arouse her, though it shook the old house in all its gables. The thunder rolled through her dreams, like the reverberating strains of a celestial harp, and when the lightning flamed through her room, it only kindled the volume of lace over her head into a cloud of golden tissue, under which she slept like a cherub in one of Murillo's pictures.

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Thus Lina spent the night. In the morning she arose at the usual hour, and stole forth to walk. The household were astir in the kitchen, but she saw no member of the family, and went out unconscious of Mrs. Harrington's accident. When she came back, a shy terror seized upon her at the thought of meeting Ralph again in the presence of his relatives; and, evading the breakfast-room, she stole to her own chamber. But loneliness at length became oppressive, and, with a breathless effort at composure, she sought a little boudoir or private sitting-room, which opened from Mrs. Harrington's bed-chamber, and where that lady usually spent some hours of the morning. Lina unclosed the door softly and went in, trembling with a world of gentle emotions as she approached Ralph's mother.

Mrs. Harrington was seated in a large easy-chair. A morning shawl of pale blue cashmere flowed over an under-dress of French embroidery. The tint of these garments did not relieve the pallor of her cheek which would have been painful, but for the crimson glow reflected upon it from the brocaded cushions of the chair. Her foot rested upon an embroidered cushion; and she was languidly sipping chocolate from a cup of embossed parian which she had scarcely strength to hold. A beautiful Italian grey-hound stood close by the cushion, regarding her with looks of eager interrogation that seemed almost human.

Lina glided softly behind the easy-chair, and remained a moment gathering courage to speak. At last, she bent softly forward:

"Mother!"

Mrs. Harrington looked up kindly, but with a touch of seriousness. She had been wounded by Lina's seeming inattention.

Before another word could be spoken, the door opened noiselessly, and Agnes Barker hesitated upon the threshold, regarding the two with a dark glance. She stood a moment with the latch in her hand, as if about to withdraw again, but seemed to change her mind, and stepped boldly into the room.

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Mabel was looking at her adopted daughter and the door opened so noiselessly that neither of them had observed it. Thus Agnes Barker remained some minutes in the room, listening to their conversation with breathless attention.

"Mother," repeated Lina, and her face flushed like a wild rose, "I have something to say; don't look at me, please, it makes me afraid."

"Afraid, my child!" said Mabel, smiling, "afraid of your mother! Shame, Lina!"

"But I can only remember that you are *his* mother now, dear Mrs. Harrington!"

"Dear Mrs. Harrington! Why child what has come over you?"

"Something—something so strange and sweet that it makes the very heart tremble in my bosom, dear mamma, and yet—"

"And yet you are afraid!"

"Yes, mamma; you have thought so highly of him—he is so much wiser and nobler than I am—he—"

Mabel drew a quick breath, and turned her eyes almost wildly on the face of the young girl.

"Of whom do you speak, Lina?"

Lina was terrified by her look, and faltered, "of—of Mr. Harrington, dear mamma."

The Parian cup in Mabel's hand shook like a lily in the wind. She sat it slowly down, and suppressing a thrill of pain that ran through her like the creep of a serpent, remained for a moment bereft of all speech. It was the first time that Lina had ever called Ralph, Mr. Harrington, and the mistake drove the very blood from the heart of her benefactress.

"Mr. Harrington? and what of him?" inquired the pallid woman, clasping her tremulous hands and striving to hold them still in her lap. "What of Mr. Harrington, Lina?" Her voice was low and hoarse; the very atmosphere around her froze poor Lina into silence.

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"Nothing, indeed nothing at all!" she gasped at length. "I was so terrified, I don't know what I wished to say. It took me so by surprise, and—and—"

Mabel's face lighted. She remembered her adventure the night before, and again mistook poor Lina.

"Oh, yes, my own sweet child, I forgot that they kept my peril from you all night. Mr. Harrington did, indeed, save me."

"Save you, mamma? how? from what?"

"I see they have not told you how near death I was. Oh, Lina! it was terrible when that wheel plunged me into the black depths. In a single minute, I thought of everything—of my home, of Ralph, of you, Lina."

The young girl did not answer. She stood aghast with surprise and terror.

"I thought," said Mabel, still excited and nervous, "I thought of everything I had ever done in my life—the time, the place, the objects with which each act had been surrounded, flashed before me like a living panorama."

"Mother, how did this happen?" faltered Lina, trembling from head to foot.

Mabel lifted her face, and saw how pale and troubled the young girl was.

"Sit down, darling, here at my feet, and I will tell you all. Move, Fair-Star, and let your mistress sit down."

The beautiful Italian grey-hound that had been looking so wistfully at his mistress all the morning, as if he knew all the risk she had run, drew back from his place near the embroidered stool, and allowed Lina to seat herself thereon. Then he stole back to his position, contrasting the snowy folds of her morning-dress with the pretty scarlet housings, edged with black velvet, which he always wore in chilly weather.

"Why, how you tremble! how white you are, Lina! and I was but just thinking you neglectful."

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"Neglectful—oh, mother!"

"Well, well, it was all a mistake, child; but what kept you from me so long?"

"I went out to walk."

"What, after hearing of—"

"Oh! mamma, how can you think so? I have seen no one this morning."

"Then you knew nothing of this accident?" questioned Mabel, thoughtfully.

"Indeed, indeed I did not. What could have kept me from your side, if I had known? Oh, it was terrible! What must have become of us all had you never returned—of me, of *him*?"

Lina could hardly speak, the whole thing had come upon her so suddenly, but sat wistfully questioning her mother with those tender blue eyes.

Mabel told her all, even to the false illumination of the cedar tree, and the appearance of Agnes Barker, like an evil shadow in the firelight. All? no, no! The facts she related faithfully, but feelings—those haunting spirits that fluttered in her heart even yet—those Mabel Harrington could not have spoken aloud even to her God.

When Mabel had told all, Lina's face, that had been growing paler and paler as the recital progressed, flushed with sudden thanksgiving; her eyes filled with great bright drops, such as we see flash downward when rain and sunshine strive together; and, creeping up to her mother's bosom, she began to sob and murmur thanksgivings, breaking them up with soft tender kisses, that went to Mabel's heart.

"You are glad to have me back again, my Lina?"

"Glad, mamma, glad? Oh, if I only knew how to thank God, as he should be thanked!"

"I think you love me, Lina," answered Mabel, and her face was luminous with that warm, tender

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light, which made her whole countenance beautiful, at times, beyond any mere symmetry of features that ever existed. "I think you love me, Lina."

The young girl did not answer but crept closer to Mrs. Harrington's bosom. A deep breath came in a tremor from her bosom, as odor shakes the lily-bell it escapes from.

Thus, for a little time, the two remained in each other's embrace, blissful and silent. All this time Agnes Barker looked on, with a dawning sneer upon her lip.

At length, Mabel lifted Lina's face from her bosom, and kissing the white forehead, bade her sit down and partake of the breakfast that stood upon a little table at her side. She filled a cup with chocolate from the small silver kettle, and pressed it upon the young girl.

"My heart is too full—I cannot taste a drop," said Lina.

"Nonsense, child," answered Mabel, and, with a laugh and a bright look, she hummed—

"Lips, though blooming, must still be fed,
For not even love can live on flowers."

Why did the rosy blood leap into that young face at the word "Love?" Why did those eyelids droop so bashfully, and the little hand begin to shake under the snowy cup it would gladly have put down? Lina remembered now that her secret was still untold, while Mabel, startled by her blushes, thought of the first words that had marked their interview, and grew timid as one does, who has suffered and dreads a renewal of pain.

Thus these two persons, loving each other so deeply, shrunk apart, and were afraid to speak. Poor Lina, with her exquisite intuition, which was a remarkable gift, drooped bashfully forward, the roses dying on her cheek beneath the frightened glance which Mabel fixed upon them, and her eyelids drooping their dark lashes downward, as the leaves of a japonica cast shadows.

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At last Mabel spoke low and huskily, for, like all brave persons, she only recoiled from pain for the moment. Her heart always rose to meet its distresses at once, and steadily.

"Tell me, Lina, what is it? You have not heard of my escape, and yet something disturbed you."

"Yes, mamma!"

"And, what is it?"

Lina struggled a moment, lifted her eyes full of wistful love, and, dropping her head in Mabel's lap, burst into tears.

"You love some one?" said Mabel, with an instinctive recoil; "is that it?"

"Yes, yes; oh, forgive us!" burst out from among Lina's sobs.

"Forgive us—and who is the other?" There was a tremble in Mabel's voice—a premonitory shiver of the limbs. Oh, how she dreaded the answer that would come.

"You know—you must guess," pleaded poor Lina.

"No, who is he?"

"Mrs.—Mrs. Harrington, oh, don't send me away!"

There was no danger that Mabel Harrington would send the young girl away. Her nerves were yet unstrung, her strength all gone. A look of anguish, keen but tender, swept over her face. Her hand fell slowly on the bowed head of poor Lina. She struggled to sit upright and speak words of encouragement, but the brave true heart sunk back, repulsed in its goodness by the enfeebled body, and she fell back in her chair, white and still, like some proud flower torn up by the roots.

She was so still, that Lina ventured to look up. The deathly white of that face terrified her, and with a cry she sprang to her feet, looking wildly around for help.

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CHAPTER XIII.

THE BROKEN CONFESSION.

AGNES BARKER came coldly into the room, answering Lina's cry.

"Mrs. Harrington has only fainted," she said, closing the door which she still held slightly ajar, as if that moment entering.

"There is aromatic vinegar on the console yonder—do bring it, while I open the window."

Lina ran for the crystal flask pointed out, and began to sprinkle Mabel's face, sobbing and moaning all the time. Agnes opened the sash door, that led to a stone balcony full of flowers, and their breath came floating into the room.

"Shall I run? shall I call help?" questioned Lina, letting Mrs. Harrington's head fall back upon the crimson cushions of her chair, "I—I am sure Ralph would bring her to."

"Be quiet," answered Agnes Barker, dragging the easy-chair towards the window, where the fragrant wind blew clear and cold into that deathly face.

"If you call any one, let it be Mr. Harrington."

"The General?"

"No, Mr. James Harrington."

"I will go," answered Lina, eagerly.

But the name of James Harrington, even upon those lips, had reached the sleeping sense of Mabel. She made a faint struggle. Her lips quivered with an ineffectual attempt to speak. This brought Lina back.

"Shall I call help, dear mamma? Shall I call help?"

"No!"

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The monosyllable was uttered so faintly, that nothing but a loving ear, like Lina's, would have heard it. The warm-hearted girl stooped and kissed Mabel softly upon the forehead, thanking God silently in her heart.

Mabel shrunk from that pure kiss, turned her head abruptly on the cushion, and tears stole through her eyelashes, leaving them dark and moist.

"Madam, is there anything I can do?"

As she spoke Agnes bent over the helpless woman, and shed her glances over that pale face, as the upas tree weeps poison.

The unaccountable dislike that Mabel felt for this girl, gave her strength, and she sat up, stung by the reflection that her weakness had so objectionable a witness.

"You here, Miss Barker!" she said with cold dignity; "I have always held this room sacred from all, but my own family."

"I come by invitation," answered Agnes, meekly. "Yesterday afternoon you left a message with my nurse, desiring that I should seek you before entering upon my duties again. This command brought me here, not a wish to intrude."

Mrs. Harrington arose, walked feebly back to the little breakfast-table, and taking up a small teapot of frosted silver, poured some strong tea into a cup which she drank off clear. Then moving back her chair, she sat down, evidently struggling for composure.

"I remember," she said very quietly, for Mabel had controlled herself, "I remember leaving this message with a woman who called you her mistress."

Agnes smiled. "Oh, yes, our Southern nurses always claim us in some form. 'My mammy,' I think she must have called herself that. Every child has its slave mammy at the South."

"Then you *are* from the South, Miss Barker?"

"Did not General Harrington tell you this, madam?"

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"I do not recollect it, if he did," answered Mabel, searching the girl's face with her clear eyes; "in truth, Miss Barker, I made so few inquiries when you entered my family, that your very presence in it is almost a mystery to me. General Harrington told me you were well educated, and an orphan. I found that he was correct in the latter point, but was somewhat astonished yesterday afternoon to hear the woman whom I met, claim you as her mistress."

"You do not understand our Southern ways, Mrs. Harrington, or this would not appear so singular. With us the tie between a slave nurse and her child, is never broken."

"Then this woman is a slave?" questioned Mabel.

"She has been, madam, but though I had nothing else in the world, when I became of age, she was made a free woman."

"But she is not very black—at least, in the dim light, I saw but faint traces of it."

Again Agnes smiled a soft unpleasant smile, that one could put no faith in:

"Perhaps it was that which rendered her so valuable, but black or white, the woman you saw was a born slave."

"And how does she support herself in that solitary house?"

"She has a garden, and some poultry. The woods around afford plenty of dry fuel, and my own

humble labors supply the rest."

Mabel became thoughtful and ceased to ask questions. The governess stood quietly waiting. All her answers had been straightforward and given unhesitatingly, but they did not bring confidence or conviction with them. Still Mrs. Harrington was silenced for the time, and remained in deep thought.

"May I retire, madam?" said the governess at last, drawing slowly toward the door.

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Mabel started from her reverie.

"Not yet. I would know more of you, of your parents, and previous life. Where we intrust those most dear to us, there should be a perfect knowledge and profound confidence."

"Of myself I have nothing to say," answered Agnes, turning coldly white, for she was a girl who seldom blushed. All her emotions broke out in a chilly pallor. "Of my parents all that can be said is told, when I repeat that they left me with nothing but an honorable name, and this old woman in the wide world."

Her voice broke a little here, and this struck Mabel with a shade of compassion.

"But how did you chance to come North?"

"I entered a Louisianian family as governess, directly after my parents' death. They brought me North in the summer, recommended me to General Harrington, and I remained."

Nothing could be more simple or frankly spoken. Agnes, as I have said, was pale; but for this, she might have seemed unconscious that all this questioning was mingled with distrust.

Mabel had nothing more to say. The feelings with which she had commenced this conversation, were not in the slightest degree removed, and yet they seemed utterly without foundation. She waved her hand uneasily, murmuring, "you may go," and the governess went out softly as she had entered.

"Can I stay with you, mamma?" pleaded Lina, creeping timidly up to Mabel's chair.

"I am weary," answered Mrs. Harrington, closing her eyes, and turning aside her head. "Let me rest awhile!"

"But you will kiss me before I go?" said the gentle girl.

"Yes, child," and Mabel kissed that white forehead with her quivering lips.

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"Is it with your whole heart, mamma?"

Mabel turned away her face, that Lina might not see how it was convulsed. So the young girl went out from the boudoir, grieved to the verge of tears.

After they were gone, Mabel grew strong again and began to pace to and fro in the boudoir, as if striving to outstrip the pain of thinking. The accident had left her nerves greatly shattered, and it was difficult to concentrate the high moral courage that formed the glory of her woman's nature. Thus she walked to and fro in a sort of vague, dreamy passion, her thoughts all in a tumult, her very soul up in arms against the new struggle forced upon her. Sometimes Mabel wrung her hand with a sudden gush of sorrow. Her eyes would fill and her lips quiver, and she looked around upon the sumptuous objects in her room, as if seeking out something among all the elegance that filled it, which might have power to comfort her.

There was no bitter or bad passion in the heart of Mabel Harrington. She had only laid down her burden for a moment, and finding its weight doubled, shrank from taking it up again. But she had a brave, strong heart, that after a little would leap forward, like a checked racehorse to its duty. This might not have been, had she always relied upon her own strength, which so far as human power can go, was to be confided in. But Mabel had a firmer and holier reliance, which was sure in the end to subdue all these storms of trouble, and prepare her for the battle which was to be fought over and over again before she found rest.

After a time, Mabel Harrington stole gently back to her easy-chair, and kneeling down, buried her face in the cushions. Fair-Star, which had been following her up and down, wondering at her distress, and looking in that agitated face with his intelligent eyes, came and lay softly down with his head resting on the folds of her shawl, where it swept over the floor. He knew with his gentle instinct, that she was quieter now, and with a contented whine lay down to guard her as she prayed.

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While she was upon her knees, a rustling among the flowers in the balcony made Fair-Star rise suddenly to his fore feet, and cast a vigilant glance that way. He saw a hand cautiously outstretched, as if to put back the trails of a passion flower, and then a dark figure stole along behind the screen of blossoms, and crouching down, peered cautiously through the leaves into the room. Fair-Star dropped his head; he had recognized the intruder, and, not having any very definite ideas of etiquette, concluded that the governess had a right to crouch like a thief behind that screen of flowers, if her fancy led that way. For a little time her presence kept the pretty hound restless, but it was not long before Agnes had so draped the passion-flower that it entirely concealed her person, and then Fair-Star betook himself entirely to his mistress. A soul-struggle does not always break forth in words, or exhaust itself in cries. The heart has a still small voice,

which God recognizes the more readily, because it is like his own.

Mabel came with no rush of stormy passion before the Lord. The very force of her anguish was laid aside as she bowed her proud head, and meekly besought strength to suffer and be still—to struggle for the right. Now and then her clasped hands were uplifted, once the spy on the balcony caught a glimpse of her face. It was luminous and lovely, spite of the anguish to be read there.

At last she arose, and seating herself, remained for some time in thoughtful silence, her arms folded on her bosom, her eyes full of troubled light, looking afar off, as if she were following with her eyes the angels that had been gathering over her as she knelt.

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After awhile, Mabel arose, and walking across the room more composedly, unlocked a little escritoir of ebony, from which she drew forth a book bound in white vellum, and embossed with gold. Seating herself at the escritoir, she began to search among the trinkets attached to her chatelaine for a small key, which she inserted in a little heart beset with rubies, which locked the golden clasps of the book.

All this time Agnes Barker was watching each movement of her benefactress with the eyes of a serpent. She saw the tiny heart fly open, and the manuscript pages of the book exposed. She saw Mrs. Harrington turn these pages, now slowly, now hurriedly—reading a line here, a sentence there, and more than once two or three pages together. Sometimes her fine eyes were full of tears. Sometimes they were reverently uplifted to Heaven, as if seeking strength or comfort there; but more frequently she pursued those pages with a sad thoughtfulness, full of dignity.

After she had been reading, perhaps an hour, she dipped a pen into the standish on her escritoir, and began to write slowly, as if weighing every word as it dropped from her pen. Then she closed the book, locked it carefully, and securing it in the escritoir again, walked slowly toward her bed-chamber, which opened from the boudoir, evidently worn out and ready to drop down with exhaustion. A slight disturbance in the passion-vine betrayed that Agnes Barker had changed her position, and now commanded a view through the open door of Mabel's chamber. She saw the poor lady move wearily toward a bed, which stood like a snowdrift in the midst of the room, and pulling the cloud of white lace, which enveloped it aside, with her trembling hands, fell wearily down upon the pillows, and dropped away into tranquil slumber, like a child that had played itself to sleep in a daisy field.

Mabel had asked for strength, and God gave her its first tranquilizing element—rest.

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Agnes stood motionless till the lace curtains above the sleeper closed again, leaving nothing visible upon the snowy white beneath but the calm, sleeping face of Mabel Harrington, gleaming as it were through a cloud, and the folds of her azure shawl, that lay around her like fragments of the blue sky. Mrs. Harrington had evidently sunk into a heavy slumber, but Agnes kept her concealment some time after this, for Fair-Star was still vigilant, and she shrunk from his glances as if they had been human.

But the dog crept into his mistress's chamber at last, and then Agnes Barker stole from her fragrant hiding-place, and entered the boudoir again.

The escritoir was closed, but Agnes saw with joy that the key still remained in its lock, and that Mrs. Harrington had left her watch upon a marble console close by. Stealing across the room, and holding her wicked breath, as if she felt that it would poison the air of that tranquil room, she crept to the escritoir, turned the key, and stealthily drawing forth the vellum book, dropped on one knee, while she reached forth her hand, drawing the watch softly to her lap.

There was a quiver in her hands as she unlocked that little golden heart, forcing it asunder with a jerk, for the dog came back just then, and stood regarding her with his clear, honest eyes. She strove to evade him, and gleams of angry shame stole across her cheeks as she laid down the watch, and stole, like the thief that she was, through the sash door, along the pretty labyrinth of flowers, and into another door that opened upon one end of the balcony.

And Mabel slept on, while this ruthless girl was tearing the secret from her life.

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CHAPTER XIV.

RALPH'S LOVE DREAM.

IT was an uncomfortable breakfast-table to which the Harringtons sat down that morning. The lady of the house and Lina, its morning-star, were both absent, and the servant, who stood at the coffee-urn ready to distribute its contents, was a most unsatisfactory substitute.

Their absence left a gloom on everything. The very morning seemed darkened by the want of their smiling faces and cheerful garments. A breakfast-table at which no lady presides, is always

a desert—and so was this; spite of its glittering silver, its transparent china, and the warm October sunshine, which penetrated the broad eastern window with a thousand cheerful flashes, scarcely broken by the gorgeous tree boughs, or the climbing vines that waved and clustered around it.

Gen. Harrington was out of sorts, as your polished man of the world sometimes proves when his circle of admirers is a household one. The absence of his wife was an annoyance which, under the circumstances, he could not well resent, but that Lina should have been so indolent, or so forgetful, he considered a just cause of complaint. Thus in that smooth, ironical way, which usually expressed the General's anger, he began a series of complaints, that in another might have been considered grumbling, but in a man of Gen. Harrington's perfect breeding, could have been only an expression of elegant displeasure.

Ralph, radiant with his new-born happiness, and full of generous enthusiasm, strove to dissipate this gloom by extra cheerfulness; but this only irritated the grand old gentleman, who stirred the cream in his coffee, and buttered his delicate French rolls in dignified silence, into which his displeasure had at last subsided.

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James Harrington, unlike his irritable father, or the bright animation of his brother, was so rapt in heavy thought, that he seemed unmindful of all that was going on. He had cast one quick, almost wild glance at the head of the table as he entered, and after that took his seat like one in a dream.

"Let me," said Ralph, taking the second cup from the servant, and carrying it to the General, "let me help you, father."

"My boy," said the General, "when will you learn to comprehend the refined taste which I fear you will never emulate? You ought to know, sir, that a breakfast without a lady is an unnatural thing in society, calculated to disturb the composure and injure the digestion of any gentleman. As Mrs. Harrington is not able to preside, will you have the goodness to inform Miss Lina that her seat is empty?"

"I—I don't know where Lina is, father. Indeed, I have been searching and searching for her all the morning," answered the youth with a vivid blush.

"Go knock at her door. She may be ill," answered the General, "and, in the meantime, inquire after Mrs. Harrington, with my compliments."

Ralph grew crimson to the temples. A hundred times before, he had summoned Lina from her slumbers, but now it seemed like presumption.

It was strange, but James Harrington had not inquired after either of the ladies; but he looked up with an eager flash of the eyes when the General gave his message; and, as Ralph hesitated, he said in a grave voice—

"What are you waiting for, Ralph? There is something strange in Lina's absence."

"Is there? Do you think so?" exclaimed the excitable boy, and the crimson came and went in flashes over his face. "Oh, brother James, do you think so?"

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The General lowered his cup to the table, and began tinkling the spoon against its side, softly, but in a way which bespoke a world of impatience. Ralph understood the signal, and disappeared.

"Upon my word, I'd rather be shot," thought Ralph, pausing before the door he had knocked at heedlessly a thousand times during his boyish life; "I wonder what she'll think of it, so coarse and rude to present myself in this fashion after her first sweet sleep. Dear, dear Lina."

He reached forth his hand timidly, and with a pleasant tremble in all the nerves, drew it back, attempted again, and ended with one of the faintest possible taps against the black walnut panelling.

No answer came. The knock was repeated, louder and louder, still no answer. But at last the door was suddenly opened, and while Ralph stood in breathless expectation, he saw a mulatto chambermaid before him, beating a pillow with one hand, from which two or three feathers had broken loose, and stood quivering in her braided wool.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Master Ralph? Thought, mebbe, it was Miss Lina a-coming back agin. Everything sixes and sevens, I can tell you, since Miss Mabel took sick—now I tell you."

"Can you tell me where Miss Lina is?"

"Don't know nothin' 'bout her, no how—cum in here a little while ago, and didn't speak a word when I said 'Good mornin',' as pleasant as could be—but jist turned her head away and went off, as if I'd been the dirt under her feet."

With these words the exasperated damsel punched her right hand ferociously into the pillow, as if that had been in fault, and added half a dozen more feathers to those already encamped in her dingy tresses.

Ralph was troubled. What could this mean? Lina was never ill-tempered. Something must have grieved her.

"Tell me," he said, addressing the indignant girl, "was anything the matter? Did my—did Miss Lina look ill?"

"Just as blooming as a rose, de fust time I see her, and as white as this pillar when she went out, after I'd expressed myself regarding the ridicelousness of her stuck up ways."

"But where is she now?"

"Don't know. Shouldn't wonder if she's wid de madam—like as not."

Ralph went to his mother's boudoir, and after knocking in vain, softly opened the door. Fair-Star came towards him with his serious eyes and velvet tread, looking back toward the inner room, where Ralph saw his mother through the lace curtains, asleep and alone. He saw also the shrubs in motion at the window, and fancied that a rustling sound came from the balcony.

"Hist, Lina—sweet Lina, it is I!"

Before he reached the balcony, all was still there, but certainly the sound of a closing door had reached him, and the plants at one end of the balcony were vibrating yet.

"Ah, she is teasing me," thought the boy, and his heart rose with the playful thought. "We'll see if Lady Lina escapes in this way."

He opened a door leading from the balcony, and entered a room that had once been occupied by General Harrington's first wife. It was a small chamber, rich in old-fashioned decorations, and gloomy with disuse. The shutters were all closed, and curtains of heavy silk darkened the windows entirely. Still Ralph could see a high-post bedstead and the outlines of other objects equally ponderous. Beyond this, he saw a female figure, evidently attempting to hide itself behind the bed drapery.

Ralph sprang forward with his hands extended.

"Ah, ha, my lady-bird, with all this fluttering I have found you!"

There was a quick rush behind the drapery, which shook and swayed, till the dust fell from it in showers. Again Ralph laughed, "Ah, lapwing, struggle away, I have you safe."

He seized an armful of the damask drapery as he spoke, and felt a slight form struggling and trembling in his embrace. Instinctively his arms relaxed their hold, and with something akin to terror, he whispered:—

"Why, Lina, darling, what is this? I thought that we loved each other. You did not tremble so, when I held you in my arms yesterday!"

A smothered cry, as of acute pain, broke from beneath the drapery, and then, while Ralph stood lost in surprise, the curtains fell rustling together, and the faint sound of a door cautiously closed, admonished him that he was alone.

"Lina, dear Lina," he called, reluctant to believe that she had left him so abruptly.

There was no answer, not even a rustle of the damask.

He was alone. When satisfied of this, the young man found his way to the light again. But for the terror and evident recoil of the person who had evaded him, he would have considered the whole adventure a capital joke, in which he had been famously baffled; but there was something too earnest in that struggle and cry for trifling, and the remembrance left him with a heart-ache.

When Ralph came back to the breakfast-table, he found Lina seated in his mother's place. A faint color came into her cheek as she saw him, but otherwise she was calm and thoughtful. Nay, there was a shade of sorrow upon her countenance, but nothing of the flush and tumult that would naturally have followed the encounter from which she was so fresh.

Spite of himself, Ralph was shocked. The delicacy of a first passion had been a little outraged by the rude way in which he and Lina had just met, and struggled together, but her composure wounded him still more deeply. "So young, so innocent, and so deceptive," he thought, looking at her almost angrily, "I would not have believed it."

Lina was all unconscious. Full of her own sorrowful perplexities, she experienced none of the bashful tremors that had troubled her in anticipation. That interview in Mrs. Harrington's room had chilled all the joy of her young love. Thus she sat, pale and cold, under the reproachful glances of her lover.

And General Harrington was watching them with his keen, worldly glances. A smile crept over his lips as he read those young hearts, a smile of cool quiet craft, which no one remarked; but there was destiny in it.

Altogether the breakfast was a gloomy meal. There was discord in every heart, and a foreshadowing of trouble which no one dared to speak about. For some time after his father had left the table, Ralph sat moodily thinking of Lina's changed manner. A revulsion came over him as he thought of his singular encounter with her that morning, and with the quick anger of youth, he allowed her to rise from the table and leave the room without a smile or a word.

James saw nothing that was passing. Self-centred and thoughtful, he was scarcely conscious of

their presence.

Lina sought Mrs. Harrington's chamber, but found it perfectly quiet, and the lady asleep. Then she took a straw hat from the hall, and flinging a mantilla about her, went out into the grounds, ready to weep anywhere, if she could but be alone.

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CHAPTER XV.

THE STOLEN JOURNAL.

RALPH saw Lina pass, from the breakfast-room window, and his heart smote him. What had she done, poor, dear girl, to warrant his present feelings? What evil spirit possessed him to think ill of her, so pure, so truly good, as she was?

Ralph took his hat and followed Lina through the grounds, up to a hollow in the hills, where a great white pine tree sheltered a spring that sparkled out from its roots, like a gush of diamonds. It was a heavy day, not without flashes of sunshine, but sombre heaps of clouds drifted to and fro across the sky, and the wet earth was literally carpeted with leaves beaten from their branches by the storm. Amid all these dead leaves, and within the gloomy shadow of the pine, Lina sat alone weeping. She heard Ralph's tread upon the wet foliage, and arose as if to flee him, for with all her gentleness, Lina was proud, and his presence made her ashamed of the tears that her little hand had no power to dash entirely away.

"Lina," said Ralph, holding out his hand, rejoiced by her tears, for he longed to think that she was offended by his rudeness in the dusky room, "Lina, forgive me. I was a brute to wound you with my rough ways."

Lina turned away and sobbed. "It was not that, Ralph. You were only silent, not rude. But I have seen your mother this morning. Oh, Ralph, she will never consent to it—we must give each other up."

"What did she say? Tell me, Lina, tell me!" cried Ralph, full of emotion.

"She said nothing, Ralph, but her face—for a moment it was terrible. Then she fainted!"

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"Fainted, Lina!—my mother?"

"I thought her dead, she looked so cold and white. Oh, Ralph, if my words had killed her, what would have become of us?"

"Lina, you astonish me. My mother is not a woman to faint from displeasure. It is the effect of her accident. You should not have spoken to her now!"

"I could not help it. Indeed, I was so happy, and it seemed right and natural to tell her first of all."

"But, what did you tell her, darling?"

Lina looked up, and regarded him gratefully through her tears.

"I don't know—something that displeased her—that almost killed her, I am afraid."

"Don't cry, don't, Lina—it will all come out right."

"No, no—I feel it—I know it—we must give each other up. The very first hint almost killed her, and no wonder. I did not think of it before—so much kindness made me forget. But what am I? Who am I, to dare equal myself with her son?"

"What are you, Lina!" said Ralph, and his fine face glowed with generous feelings. "What are you! An angel! the dearest, best!"

Lina could not help being pleased with this enthusiasm, but she cut it short, placing her hand upon his mouth.

"It is kind of you to say this, but the facts—oh! these facts—are stubborn things. What am I but a poor little girl, who wandered from, no one can say where, into your house, a miserable waif, drifted by chance upon the charity of your parents! I have no antecedents beyond their kindness—no name, save that which they gave me—no past, no future. Is it for me to receive affection from their son—to climb ambitiously to the topmost branches of the roof-tree that sheltered my happiness and my poverty?"

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And this was the girl he had dared to think coarse and forward in not blushing at the liberties he had taken. This fair, noble girl, who, with all her delicacy, could utter such true, proud thoughts. For the moment, Ralph would have dropped on his knees, and asked her pardon in the

dust. But, beware, young man—he that doubts a beloved object once, will doubt again. When you could, even in passing thought, judge that young creature wrongfully, it was a break in the chain of confidence that should bind true hearts together. Ralph! Ralph! a jewel is lost from the chain of your young life, and once rent asunder many a diamond bead will drop away from that torn link.

"Believe me," said the youth, burning with enthusiastic admiration of the young creature before him, "These proud words slander the noblest heart that ever beat in a woman's bosom. My mother loves you for yourself. All the better that God sent you to her unsought, as he does the wild flowers. Lina, the pride which reddens your cheek, would be abashed in her presence."

"It is not pride, Ralph, but shame that such thoughts should never have presented themselves before. I have dreamed all my life; up to this morning, I was a child. Now, a single hour has surrounded me with realities. The whole universe seems changed since yesterday."

Lina looked drearily around as she spoke. The hill-sides were indeed changed. The boughs, twelve hours before, so luxuriously gorgeous, were half denuded of their foliage. The over-ripe leaves were dropping everywhere through the damp atmosphere. A gush of wind shook them in heavy clouds to the earth. All the late wild flowers were beaten down and half-uprooted. Nature seemed merely a waste of luxurious beauty thrown into gloomy confusion, among which the high winds tore and rioted.

Lina was chilled by these winds, and drew her shawl closely, with a shivering consciousness of the change. The young man's ardent hope had no power to reassure her. The subtle intuition of her nature could not be reasoned with. Sad and disheartened, she followed Ralph slowly homeward.

A few hours after the scene we have described, the governess was half-way up the hill, on which the house of her nurse stood. She had walked all the way from General Harrington's dwelling, and her person bore marks of a rough passage across the hills. Her gaiter boots were saturated with wet, and soiled with reddish clay. Burdock burs and brambles clung to the skirt of her merino dress, which exhibited one or two serious rents. Her shawl had been torn off by a thicket of wild roses, and she carried it thrown across her arm, too much heated by walking to require it, though the day was cold.

On her way up the hill, she paused, and flinging her shawl on the ground, sat down. Opening the vellum-bound book, she read a few sentences in it, with a greedy desire to know the most important portion of its contents, before resigning it into hands that might hereafter deprive her of all knowledge regarding them. But the winds shook and rustled the pages about, till she was obliged to desist, and at last made her way up the hill in a flushed and excited state, leaving her shawl behind.

The moment she rose to a level with the house, the door opened, and the woman whom she claimed as a slave nurse, came forth, advancing towards Agnes with almost ferocious eagerness. She called out:

"Back again so soon! Then there is news."

"Look here," answered Agnes, holding up the volume, from which the jewelled heart still dangled, cleft in twain as it was. "In less than an hour after entering the house I had it safe. Isn't that quick work?"

"Give it to me—give it to me. You are a good girl, Agnes, a noble girl, worth a hundred of your lily-faced white folks. Give me the book, honey—do you hear?"

But Agnes, who had again opened the volume, held it back.

"Not yet, mammy—I have only read a little—don't be too eager—I have a right to know all that is in it!"

"Give me that book. Her secrets belong to me—only to me. Hand over the book, I say!"

"But I wish to read it, myself—who has a better right?"

The dark eyes of the slave flashed fire, and her hands quivered like the wings of a bird when its prey is in sight. She clutched fiercely at the book, hissing out her impatience like a serpent.

"Take it!" exclaimed Agnes fiercely, "but don't expect me to steal for you again."

"Hist!" answered the woman, crushing the book under her arm; "here comes one of the Harringtons on horseback. Clear that face and be ready to meet him, while I go in and hide Mabel Harrington's soul!"

CHAPTER XVI.

JAMES HARRINGTON'S RIDE.

JAMES HARRINGTON left the breakfast-table with a restless desire to be alone in the free air. He had not slept during the night, but spent the silent hours in thought, which filled both his heart and brain with excitement. The deep tenderness of his nature warred terribly against its strong moral force, but only as the quick tempests of summer hurled against a rock, beat down all the beautiful wild blossoms and moss upon its surface, but leave it immovable as ever.

As he went forth from his room, Ralph passed him, looking restless and anxious.

[112] "Brother James! Brother James!" he said, "I wish to speak with you very much, but not now. I have no heart to say anything just yet!"

James smiled, very gravely, but with a look of gentle patience, that told how completely his strong passions were held in control. Few men in his excited state would have proved so thoughtful of others; for he had no idea that Ralph had any more important subject to consult him about, than some shooting excursion in the hills, or a horse-back ride with Lina.

"I am going out for an hour or two," he said; "I have been suffering with headache all night. The air seems close to me in-doors. After I come back, will that be time enough, Ralph?"

"I don't know. Yes, of course it will—there is no hurry," answered the impetuous boy, "only I'm so vexed and troubled just now."

"Well, come up to my room. It does not matter much if I go or not—this miserable headache will not probably be driven away."

"No, I can wait. You ought to ride out. How pale you are! Why, your face is quite changed! Indeed, brother James, I will not speak another word till you get back. I wonder what has come over us all this morning. Poor mother ill—the General out of sorts—you with a headache, and I, yes, I may as well own up—I have got something so near heart-sickness here, that—but never mind—I'll shake it off, or know the reason why. But one word, James, did you ever think my mother an illiberal woman?"

"Illiberal, Ralph? Your mother!"

"Well, I mean this. Is she a woman to reject beauty and worth, and everything estimable, because—" James Harrington cut the question short by laying a hand on his brother's shoulder somewhat heavily.

[113] "Your mother, Ralph, is a woman so much above question in all her actions and motives, that even these half-doubts in her son are sacrilegious."

The color rushed up to Ralph's forehead. First he had lost confidence in Lina—now, in his mother.

"If you have a doubt of your mother, speak it to her," said James more gently, as he drew on his riding gloves. "After that, I will talk with you!"

"I wonder what has come over me—James is offended; I never saw him so grave before," muttered Ralph, as his brother moved down the hall.

"Everything goes wrong. Even Fair-Star started, as if she would spring at me, when I looked in to see if my mother was up. I will put an end to this!"

Thus half-passionately, half in thought, he went in search of Lina.

James Harrington mounted his horse and rode away. He wanted the clear air and freedom of expanse, motion, anything that would distract his thoughts, and bring back the self-control that had almost departed from him. He rode at random along the highway leading to the city, down cross roads and by the shore, sometimes at a sharp gallop, sometimes giving his well-trained horse the head, till both steed and rider flashed like an arrow between the stooping branches.

In this wild way he rode, unconscious of his course, and without any absolute object, save free air and that rapid motion which harmonizes so well with turbulent feelings. The horse took his own way up hill, along shore, up hill again, till all at once he came out on a green shelf in the hills, upon which a single dwelling stood.

[114] He drew up his horse suddenly, for there a little way from the house and some distance before him, stood two women in eager conversation. One had her back toward him, but her left hand was in sight, and in it was an open book, with its leaves fluttering in the wind. The air and dress of this person reminded him so forcibly of Lina's governess, that he remained a moment looking earnestly that way; not that her presence on the hill would have been particularly remarkable, for on glancing around he recognized by its position, that her nurse's house must be in that neighborhood. But that very morning he had seen the governess passing toward Mrs. Harrington's room, and her appearance in both these places so nearly at the same time, aroused his curiosity, not to say suspicion.

The object that struck him most forcibly was the female with whom she seemed to be

conversing. The stately person, the picturesque costume, composed entirely of rich warm colors, the eager expression of features that must once have been eminently handsome—above all, the air of almost ferocious authority, with which she was speaking, struck him as strangely out of place in that solitary spot. Beyond this, he felt a vague impression, impalpable and formless, of some connection between that woman and former events of his own life. It might have been her dress so foreign to the place, or her humble mode of life. The Madras kerchief, folded in a turban over the black hair falling down each side of her face in the heaviest waves of rippling jet, and the massive earrings that gleamed beneath, were in themselves calculated to awake remembrances of an early youth spent in the South, where this picturesque costume was common among the slaves; but the woman's face fascinated his gaze more than her general appearance. Some recollection too vague for embodiment, arose on his brain so powerfully, that he was unconscious of the time thus spent in gazing upon her.

At last the woman gave a quick glance toward him, and darting forward, snatched at the book in her companion's hand, talking rapidly.

[115] There was some resistance—an attempt to ward her off—but the book was at last yielded to her impetuosity. He saw it, gathered up under the woman's arm, concealed by the folds of an orange-colored scarf, overrun with a pattern of many gorgeous colors, which she wore, and carried into the house.

Then the person whose back had been toward him, turned and looked that way. It was Agnes Barker. She saw him, evidently without much surprise, and turning, rather leisurely walked that way, as if it had been the most natural thing in the world to meet him there.

"Oh, Mr. Harrington," she said, coming close to his horse, picking the burs from her dress as she moved along, "can it be possible that you have only reached this point now? I left home half an hour after you rode away—on foot, too, and am here before you."

Harrington did not answer, except with a grave bow, but looked at her searchingly from head to foot.

"Yes," she continued, dragging her veil forward, "I found a rough walk after the storm, everything is so wet and gloomy. The only dry spot upon the shore was around the old cedar, where we had that rather interesting scene last night."

A quiet smile stole over Harrington's lip. "Indeed," he said, "I must have ridden at a snail's pace, to let you reach this spot before me—especially if the entire walk was beguiled by the book I just saw you surrender!"

A faint flush stole over Agnes Barker's forehead, and for an instant her eyes fell; then she looked up again with the pretty deprecating glance of one who had been caught in a meritorious act, which her modesty disclaimed.

[116] "Oh, you must not think me quite insane, Mr. Harrington, if I did bring out my sketch-book, in hopes of stealing some of the beautiful autumn tints from these masses of foliage. My good nurse has just been scolding me for sitting on the damp ground, forgetting my shawl behind, and all that. As a punishment, she has carried off my poor book, and threatens to burn it. I have been very imprudent, and very indecorous, you will say," she added, glancing at her dress, with a faint laugh, "but, no doubt my caprice is sufficiently punished by this time; for, if that access of smoke means anything, my poor sketch-book is ashes now."

She spoke a little rapidly, as one does in a fever, but otherwise her manner was the perfection of modest innocence. Indeed, there was no appearance of confusion, which the derangement of her dress was not quite sufficient to account for.

"Well, you come in and rest a while?" she said at last, casting a soft glance upward from her dress. "My good mammy may not be prepared for such company, but she will make you welcome."

"Yes," said Harrington, struck by a sudden wish to see more of the woman who had interested him so much, "I will go in, thank you!"

She turned, as if to precede him, but throwing his bridle over a sapling, he walked rapidly forward, and overtook her just before she entered the house. The door was partly open. Agnes turned upon the threshold.

"I know that my poor book is burned, without asking," she said, in a voice much louder than usual. "You have no idea, Mr. Harrington, how careful nurse is of my health. Do not be surprised if she is very angry with me!"

"It is very difficult to surprise me with anything," said Harrington, drawing nearer to the door, through which he saw glimpses of orange-colored drapery disappearing into an inner room.

"You must not say that, for I had expected some surprise at the view from this particular point," she answered, evidently wishing to detain him on the door step.

"Yes, it is very fine; but you will find the wind rather keen. Allow me."

[117] Harrington pushed the door wide open, and Agnes was obliged to pass into the apartment beyond. She seemed relieved to find it empty, and when her guest looked toward the opposite

door, observed; "I am in disgrace, you see, mammy has shut herself up."

"And yet I have some desire to see her, if it were only to excuse the fright we gave her last night, by allowing you to enter without knocking."

"Oh, she did not mind it in the least. It was nothing, I assure you."

"Still I would like to speak with her."

Agnes grew pale about the lips, a sign of emotion that did not escape her guest; but it passed off in an instant, and she was slowly approaching the inner door, when it opened, and the object of their conversation presented herself.

CHAPTER XVII.

THAT WOMAN.

[118] HARRINGTON was, indeed, surprised when he saw this woman. She was evidently ten years older than she had appeared at a distance, and, though that seemed an impossibility, darker too. The Madras kerchief certainly had been refolded since her return to the house, for it came low upon the forehead, and the hair visible beneath it was thickly scattered with white. She stooped somewhat, and her gait was slow, almost shuffling. Not a vestige of the imperious air that had rendered her so picturesque a few minutes before, remained. She appeared before him simply as a common-place light mulatto of rather more than middle age, who might have been an upper house servant in her day, but nothing more. On closer inspection, even the orange-tinted shawl was soiled and held around her person in a slovenly manner, as rich cast-off garments usually are by the servants who inherit them.

At first, Harrington would not believe that this was the same woman whose appearance had made so deep an impression on him, for a heavy sort of sluggishness, both of thought and feeling, lay on her features, while those that had aroused his attention so keenly, were active and full of intelligence. The woman did not sit down, but stood by the open door, looking stupidly at Agnes Barker, as if waiting for some command.

"Well, Miss Agnes, I'se here, what does the master please to want?"

It was rather difficult for James Harrington, self-possessed as he was, to answer that question. The woman had taken him by surprise. Her appearance was so completely that of a common-place servant, that he was silenced by the very surprise she had given him. But for her dress, he would not have believed in her identity with the person he had seen in the open air, and that was worn with a slovenliness altogether unlike the ease remarkable in the person whom she represented, without conveying an impression of absolute identity.

Harrington had spent his early life in the South, and was at no loss to comprehend the peculiar class to which this woman belonged. He answered her quietly, but still with suspicion:

"Nothing, aunty, except that you will oblige me with a glass of water."

[119] The woman shuffled across the room, and brought him some water, which she placed scrupulously on a plate, by way of waiter, before presenting it. Her air—the loose, indolent gait, like that of a leopard moving sleepily around its lair—convinced him that she had been nothing more than a common household slave, out of place in her cold, and almost poverty-stricken northern home. He drank the water she gave him, and handing back the glass, inquired if she did not feel lonely and chilled by the cold climate?

"I'se allus warm and comfortable where dat ere chile is," said the woman, looking at Agnes, "any place 'pears like home when she's by, and I 'xpect she feels like dat where old aunty is, if she is poor."

"She is happy in having one faithful friend," answered Harrington, more and more satisfied that the woman was simply what she seemed.

A strange smile quivered for a moment around Agnes Barker's lip, but as Harrington turned his glance that way, it subsided into a look of gentle humility.

"You will inform the ladies that I shall return to-night. It proved a chilly day for sketching, and finding myself nearer my own home than the mansion-house, I stole a few moments for poor, old, lonesome mammy here."

Harrington had arisen as she commenced speaking, and with a grave bend of the head, promised to convey her message.

The two women watched him as he crossed the rude garden, and mounted his horse; then

drawing hurriedly back into the house, they closed the door.

"What could have brought him here? Did she send him?" inquired the slave-woman anxiously, and all at once assuming the haughty air natural to her, while a keen intelligence came to her features.

"No," answered Agnes, "she is ill in bed; I am sure she has not seen him this morning. It must have been accident that brought him in this direction."

The slave-woman looked searchingly in the girl's face.

"Did he know that you came this way?"

"That is impossible."

"It should not be impossible. You have been months in his house, Agnes—I did not expect so little progress."

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Agnes was annoyed, and put aside the subject with an impatient gesture.

"What have you been doing, girl?" persisted the woman, "remember your own destiny is in this more than mine."

"But why select this man, so difficult of access, so unattainable?"

"Because he has wealth and power."

"There is some other reason, mammy. Let me know it!"

"Well, know it, then—I believe that woman loves him—I know that she loved him once."

"I know that she loves him *yet*," said Agnes, with a sinister smile. "For I witnessed a scene last night, when she came to after they had dragged her from the water, which settled that in my mind; but what do you care for that? How will it help us?"

"What do I care for that—I—I—what does the hungry man care for food, or the thirsty one for water? What do I care, child? Listen: I hate that woman—from my soul I hate her!"

"Then it was hatred of her, not love for me, that brought us here!"

"It was both, Agnes—do not doubt it. When I avenge the wrongs of my life on her, you must be a gainer."

"I do not understand you."

"It is not necessary; obey me, that is enough."

"But how has Mrs. Harrington wronged you?"

"How has she wronged me, Agnes! Be quiet, I am not to be questioned in this way."

"But, I am no longer a child to be used blindly. You have objects which I do not comprehend—motives which are so rigidly concealed that I, who am to help work them out, grope constantly in the dark. I am told to listen, watch, work, even steal, and am left ignorant of the end to be accomplished."

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"Have I not told you that it is your marriage with Mr. James Harrington, the real owner of all the property which his father is supposed to possess? Am I not working to make you the richest lady of the North, the wife of a man whom all other men hold in reverence; and in this am I not securing the dearest and sweetest vengeance that mortal ever tasted?"

"But I do not think Mr. Harrington cares for me, or ever will."

"What have you been doing, then?" cried the woman fiercely. "You have beauty, or, if not that, something far more powerful—that subtle magnetism which all men feel a thousand times more forcibly, deep knowledge; for have I not taught you what human hearts are worth, and how to dissect them, leaf by leaf? You have coolness, self-control, and passion when it is wanted. Have I not trained you from the cradle for this one object, and dare you talk of its failure?"

"Mammy, let us understand each other. Cannot we accomplish the same thing, and both be gratified? I do not love Mr. James Harrington, but there is one of the name that I do love, heart and soul."

"And who is that?" demanded the woman sharply, and her black eyes caught fire from the anger within her.

"It is the other, Ralph Harrington."

How hard and defiant was the voice in which Agnes Barker said this—a young girl expressing her first love without a blush, and with that air of cold-blooded defiance. It was terrible!

"Ralph Harrington, he is *her* son, and a beggar!" cried the woman bitterly.

"I do not understand what force may lie in the first objection, and I do not believe in the second. Ralph cannot be a beggar, while his brother holds so much wealth; at any rate, I love him."

"Love, girl! What have you to do with this sweet poison? The thing Love is not your destiny."

"It is, though, and shall control it," replied Agnes, with the same half-insolent tone; for it seemed to be a relief for this young girl to act out spontaneously the evil of her nature, and she appeared to enjoy the kindling anger of her servant—if that slave woman was her servant—with vicious relish.

The woman walked close to the insolent girl, with her hand clenched, and her lips pressed firmly together.

"Agnes, Agnes—you cannot know how much rests on you—how great a revenge your obstinacy may baffle."

"I know that I love Ralph Harrington, and if it will comfort you to hear it, he does not love me," answered the girl with a burning glow in either cheek.

"Oh, you have come back again—it is his blood on fire in your cheeks. I have no fear of you, Agnes. That blood grows strong with age like old wine, and soon learns to give hatred for unanswered love. I can trust the blood."

"But he shall love me, or, at any rate, no one else shall have what he withholds from me."

"Be still, Agnes, do not make me angry again. You and I must work together. Tell me, did you succeed in quieting General Harrington's inquiries regarding the letters of recommendation?"

"Did I succeed?" answered Agnes, with a smile that crept over her young lips like a viper. "The old General is more pliable than the son. Oh, yes, when he began questioning me of the whereabouts of our kind friends who think so much of us, you know, I put forth all the accomplishments you have taught me, and wiled him from the subject in no time. You have just questioned my beauty, mammy. I doubt if he did then, for his eyes were not off my face a moment. What fine eyes the old gentleman has, though! I think it would be easier to obey you in that quarter than the other."

As she uttered the last words with a reckless lift of the head, the slave-woman made a spring at her, and grasping the scornfully uplifted shoulder, bent her face—which was that of a fiend—close to the young girl's ear: "Beware, girl, beware!" she whispered, "you are treading among adders."

"I think you are crazy," was the contemptuous reply, as Agnes released her shoulder from the gripe of that fierce hand. "My shoulder will be black and blue after this, and all for a joke about a conceited old gentleman whom we are both taking in. Did you not tell me to delude him off the subject if he mentioned those letters of recommendation again?"

The woman did not answer, but stood bending forward as if ashamed of her violence, but yet with a gleam of rage lingering in her black eyes.

"Have you done?" said Agnes, arranging her velvet sacque, which had been torn from its buttons in front, by the rude handling she had received.

"You must not speak in that way again," answered the old woman in a low voice, "I did not mean to hurt you, child, but General Harrington is not a man for girls like you to joke about."

"This is consistent, upon my word," answered the girl with a short scornful laugh. "You teach me to delude the old gentleman into a half-flirtation. He meets me in the grounds—begins to ask about the persons from whom we obtained those precious recommendations, and when I attempt to escape the subject, persists in walking by me till I led him a merry dance up the steepest hill that could be found, and left him there out of breath, and in the midst of a protestation that I was the loveliest person he had ever seen. Loveliest—no, that was not it—the most bewitching creature! these were the last words I remember, for that moment Benson's boat hove in sight, and there sat madam looking fairly at us. If they had been a moment later, I'm quite sure the old fellow would have been down upon his knees in the dead leaves."

The slave-woman listened to this flippant speech in cold silence. She was endowed with a powerful will, matched with pride that was almost satanic. She saw the malicious pleasure with which Agnes said all this, and would not gratify it by a single glance. With all her wicked craft, the young girl was no match for the woman.

"You have acted unwisely," she said with wonderful self-command; "never trifle with side issues when they can possibly interfere with the main object. I wished to evade General Harrington's close scrutiny into our antecedents; to soothe the lion, not goad him. Be careful of this a second time!"

How calmly she spoke! You would not have believed her the same woman who had sprung upon the girl so like a tiger only a few moments before. Even Agnes looked upon her with amazement.

"Woman," she said, "tell me what you are at—trust me, and I will help you heart and soul."

"What! even to the giving up of this new-born love?"

"Even to that, if I can be convinced of its necessity."

"I will trust you."

"Wholly—entirely?"

"Entirely!"

The girl threw her arms around that singular woman, their lips met, and the subtle force of one heart kindled and burned in the bosom of the other.

"Tell me everything, mamma!"

"I will. But first, let us read Mabel Harrington's journal, it will prepare you for the rest."

They opened the stolen book, and sat down together so close that their arms were interlaced, and their cheeks touched as they read.

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It was a terrible picture, that meagre, dimly-lighted room, the tree-boughs waving against the window, their leaves vocal with the last sob of the storm, and those two women with their keen evil faces, their lips parted with eagerness, and their eyes gleaming darkly, as they drank up the secrets of poor Mabel Harrington's life.

CHAPTER XVIII.

OLD HEADS AND YOUNG HEARTS.

GENERAL HARRINGTON spent the entire day at home. After the rather uncomfortable breakfast we have already described, he went to his library, discontented and moody. All day he was disposed to be restless and dissatisfied with his books, as he had been with the appointments of his morning meal. Indignant with his whole household, for not being on the alert to amuse him, he declined going down to dinner; but ordering some choicely cooked birds and a bottle of champagne in his own room, amused his rather fastidious appetite with these delicacies, while he luxuriated in his dressing-gown, and read snatches from a new book of poems that had interested him for the moment.

This rather pleasant occupation wiled away an hour, when he was interrupted by a knock at the door. Lifting his eyes from the book, the General said, "Come in," rather hastily, for the knock had broken into one of the finest passages of the poem, and General Harrington detested interruptions of any kind, either in a mental or sensual enjoyment.

"Come in!"

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The General was a good deal astonished when his son Ralph opened the door, and stood before him with an air of awkward constraint, that would certainly have secured him a reprimand had he not been the first to speak.

"Father!"

General Harrington gave an impatient wave of the hand.

"Young gentleman," he said, "how often am I to remind you that the use of the paternal title after childhood is offensive. Can't you call me General Harrington, sir, as other people do? A handsome young fellow six feet high should learn to forget the nursery. Sit down, sir, sit down and converse like a gentleman, if you have anything to say."

The blood rose warmly in Ralph's face, not that he was angry or surprised, but it seemed impossible to open his warm heart to the man before him.

"Well then, General," he said, with a troubled smile, "I—I've been getting into—into——"

"Not into debt, I trust," said the General, folding the skirts of the Turkish dressing-gown over his knees, and smoothing the silken fabric with his hand, but speaking with a degree of genuine bitterness, "because, if that's it, you had better go to James at once—he is the millionaire. I am not much better than his pensioner myself!"

"It is not that," answered Ralph, with an effort which sent the blood crimsoning to his temples, "though money may have something to do with it in time. The truth is, General, I have been in love with Lina all my life, and never found it out till yesterday."

General Harrington gave the youth a look from under his bent brows, that made the young man shrink back in his chair, but in a moment the unpleasant expression went off, and a quiet smile stole over the old man's lip.

"Oh, you will get over that, Ralph. It isn't worth being angry about. Of course, you will get over it. I think this is a first love, hey!"

"The first and last with me, fath—General."

"Yes, yes, of course—I think I remember feeling a little in the same way at your age. It won't be serious—these things never are!"

"But I am very serious. I have told her all about it. My honor is pledged."

The young man—who, by the way, really seemed a mere boy yet to his father—was going on with some vehemence, but he was coldly cut short by the General, who sat regarding his enthusiasm with a most provoking smile.

"Of course, I supposed so—eternal constancy and devotion on both sides! Very well, what can I do about it?"

"Oh, father, I beg your pardon—but you can do everything. Your free, hearty consent is all I ask—and if you would be so kind as to exert a little influence with mother."

"Then you have told this to her, before coming to me," said the General, and his brow darkened.

"No, sir, I have spoken to no one but Lina. It was my duty to come to you first, and I am here."

"That is better; but how do you know that Mrs. Harrington will disapprove of your caprice for her protégé, if no one has spoken to her on the subject?"

"I believe, sir, that Lina said something about it; but before she could be very definite, my mother fainted. This frightened me—I mean, it terrified poor Lina, and she had no courage to go on; so we were in hopes, sir, that you would be so good."

The General sat gazing upon the handsome face of his son, with the air of a person revolving some thought rapidly in his mind. At last, his cold eyes brightened, and a smile crept over his mouth.

"It was very right to come here first, Ralph, and remember your duty goes no farther. I will only consent to your marrying this girl at all, on condition that you, neither of you, ever speak on the subject to any one. You are both very young, and a year or two hence will be time enough for a decision; but I will have no gossip about the matter. Above all, my son James must be left entirely uncommitted. I only consent to let this fancy have a proper trial. If it proves serious, of course the whole family will be informed; but till then I must have your promise not to speak of it to any one not already informed."

The young man drew close to his father, and taking his hand, kissed it.

"I promise, father!"

The General was pleased with the homage and grace of this action, and rising placed a hand on Ralph's shoulder, more cordially than he had done for years.

"Are you sure she cares for you, Ralph? I have seen nothing to suggest the idea."

"I think, indeed I am quite certain that she does not like any one else near so much," answered the young man, reluctant to compromise Lina's delicacy by a broader confession.

"Young men are always confident," said the General with a bland smile. "I think that faith in woman was the first delusion that I gave up. Still it is pleasant while it lasts. Heaven forbid that I should brush the bloom from your grapes, my boy. So you really think that mamma's little protégé knows her own mind, and that my son knows his?"

A pang came to the ardent heart of the youth as he listened. Another golden thread snapped under the cold-blooded worldliness of that crafty old man.

General Harrington looked in his face, and analyzed the play of those handsome features, exactly as he had tasted the game-birds and champagne a half hour before. The same relish was in both enjoyments, only one was the epicureanism of a mind that found pleasure in dissecting a young heart, and the other, quite as important to him, was a delicious sensuality.

And Ralph stood under this scrutiny with a cloud on his fine brow and a faint quiver of the lip. It was agony to think of Lina without perfect confidence in her affection for himself. Yet he was so young, and his father had seen so much. If he found no evidence of Lina's attachment to himself, it might be that all was a delusion.

The old man read these thoughts, and took upon himself a gentle air of composure.

"These things often happen when young people are thrown together in the same house, Ralph. It is a pleasant dream. Both parties wake up, and there is no harm done. Don't take the thing to heart, it isn't worth while."

"Then you think, sir, she really does not care for me?"

With all his worldliness, the old man could hardly withstand the appeal of those magnificent eyes, for Ralph possessed the beautiful charm of deep feeling, without a particle of self-conceit. He began to wonder how Lina ever could have fancied him, and to grieve over the delusion.

"It is strange," said the General, as if musing with himself, "it is strange, but these very young creatures seldom do give their first preferences to persons of corresponding age. Girls love to

look up to men with reverence. It is really wonderful."

The young man started, fire flashed into his eyes, and for an instant he was breathless.

"You—you cannot mean that, Lina—*my* Lina loves some one else!" he said, speaking rapidly—"Who has she known but me, and—and—?" He stopped short, looking wistfully at his father.

"You and my son James? No one, certainly, no one."

"Brother James! oh, father."

[130] "But you are satisfied that she loves you, and that is enough," answered the General, waving his hand as if tired of the discussion. "It is decided that this whole subject rests between ourselves. Come to me a year, nay, six months from now, and if you desire it, then, I will not be hard with you."

The General seated himself as he spoke, and resumed his book with a gentle wave of the hand. Ralph bent his head partly in submission, partly to conceal the flush that suppressed tears left about his eyes and went out, leaving the first pure jewel of his heart in that old man's hands.

The twilight had crept on during this conversation. General Harrington rang the bell for a servant to remove the silver tray on which his dinner had been served, and consumed considerable time in directing how the lamp should be placed, in order to protect his eyes as he read. When once more alone, he cast a thought back to his son.

"It will do him good. I wonder now if I, General Harrington, ever was so confiding, so rash, so generous,—for the boy is generous. My son, on whom so much depends, married to that girl! I was almost tempted into a scene with the first mention of it."

With these thoughts floating through his brain, the General leaned back in his chair more discomposed than usual by his late interview, for though his reflections were all worldly and commonplace, they had a deeper and unexpressed importance hardly recognized by himself.

Again there was a low knock at the door, and again the General bade the intruder come in, rather hastily, for he was in no humor for company! "Miss Barker; Miss Agnes Barker," he said, as that girl presented herself and softly closed the door, "you are too kind—I only regret that this pleasant surprise detects me en déshabillé."

"General Harrington is always General Harrington in any dress—besides, I have a preference for this sort of orientalism."

"You are kind to forgive me, and kinder to allow me the happiness of your presence. Sit down!"

[131] "No," answered the governess, with a look from her black almond-shaped eyes that brought a glow into the old man's cheek deeper than the wine had left. "I found the book open upon Mrs. Harrington's desk. She must have forgotten it there after her fainting fit this morning. I am sure she has no secrets from her husband, and so bring it to you, as it may excite her to be disturbed, and I have no key to her desk."

The General reached forth his hand, struck by the vellum binding and jewelled clasp, for he was a connoisseur in such matters, and the effect pleased him.

"What is it?" he said, opening the book and leaning towards the light, "some illuminated missal, I fancy, or rare manuscript. Oh—ha, my lady's journal—let us see."

He had opened the book at random, and with a gratified smile, but directly the expression of his face hardened, and his lips parted with surprise. He turned the open volume toward Agnes, who stood leaning upon the table opposite; placed his finger sternly upon a passage of the writing, and demanded whether she had read it.

"You insult me with the question," said the lady, drawing herself up, "I did not expect this," and before he could speak Agnes glided from the room.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LOVER'S CONFESSION.

[132] RALPH dared not confide in his brother James, as he had proposed to himself, and the elder Harrington was so occupied with his own conflicting thoughts that the momentary annoyance expressed by the youth had passed from his mind. He did not even remark that Ralph avoided any conversation with him, or that Lina was paler than usual, and from time to time looked anxiously in his face, as if to draw some reassurance from its expression that might bring her back into the bosom of the family from which she felt all at once inexplicably repulsed. The

General was absent, or remained in his own room, sending down word that he was occupied, and that the business of the day must go on without him.

Mabel was not yet well enough to leave her own immediate apartments. Thus it happened that a silent and uncomfortable meal followed every reunion of the family for some days after the storm, which seemed still brooding blackly over the household. James Harrington went forth again and again from the breakfast room, without regarding the anxious looks of his brother, or the tearful eyes of poor Lina, and both these young persons held him in that awe which is always felt when reserve and secrets creep into bosoms warmed with kindred life.

Poor Lina. She felt, in that splendid mansion, like Eve wandering through the bowers of paradise after the sentence of banishment had been passed upon her. Lonely and sad of heart, she sat hour after hour in her solitary chamber waiting for some one to summon her, or ask a cause for the tears that came trembling with every thought to her heavy eyes. She avoided Ralph, for without his parents' consent, her own sensitive delicacy rendered the old intercourse impossible, and any other wounded her to the soul with its restraints. Thus it happened that pretty, pure-hearted Lina sat in her room and wept.

But Ralph was more impetuous. After exploring every part of the old mansion, dragging out guns, fishing tackle, and other provocatives of amusement, only to put them back again in disgust—after rowing furiously up and down the river, unconscious and uncaring what course he took, the youth grew impatient under his restraints, and promptly resolved to break through them at any rate, as far as Lina was concerned. She should creep away in gentle silence and spend her time in weeping no longer. He remembered that General Harrington had not forbidden them to meet as of old, and that his prohibition of speech could not extend to the mother, who had already been to some extent confided in. In short, Ralph was young, ardent, and restive of trouble, so, after a brief battle with himself, he resolved that the General had meant nothing by his prohibition, but to prevent premature gossip in the household.

When quite convinced of this, the youth cast all other thoughts aside, and sought out Lina in her solitude. She heard his footsteps with a leap of the heart, and a brightening of the eye which no sense of duty could check. How hopefully it sounded, how bold and firm it was. What had happened? Would he stop at her door?

Yes, yes, Lina! his heart bounds and throbs even more warmly than your own! His face is radiant with hope, which, without other source, springs out of his own buoyant nature. He has cast doubt behind him, and says, in answer to the arguments that struggle to get possession of his reason, "Let to-morrow take care of itself. I will see Lina to-day!"

He knocks at her door, and a smile that she cannot help, breaks through the trouble in Lina's eyes, as she arises with a thrill of mingled joy and dread, to let him in. She opens the door, and stands before him, blushing, and all in a tremor of delight, which will not be suppressed, but which her little heart says is very ungrateful and wicked, knowing, as she did, how wrong it was for her, a poor little outcast, to think of Ralph Harrington, when his mother is opposed to it utterly, and his father almost treats the whole subject with ridicule. Ralph has told her faithfully every word that passed between him and his father, and her delicate intuition detects the uncertainty and hollowness of it all. With these honorable feelings warring against the newly-awakened love in her heart, it is no wonder that gentle Lina trembled, and grew red and white again in the presence of her lover.

"Lina, dear, dear, Lina."

She reached out her hand. How could she resist beneath that bright, hopeful look? Her lips, that had begun to quiver, dimpled into a smile, as the soft fingers yielded themselves to his clasp. She attempted to reprove his coming, but that rebellious little mouth would only say "Ralph! oh, Ralph!" with a gush of tender joy in the words, which made the heart leap in his bosom, like a prisoned bird called suddenly by its mate.

"Lina, dear, dear, Lina! you look sad. Your poor eyes are heavy. You can bear this no longer. I am a man, and strong, but it almost kills me to be away from you. The General is away. I believe my mother is in her room. Come with me. Anything is better than seeing you suffer."

Lina drew back, and tried to wrest her hand from his grasp, but he only held it more firmly.

"No, no. I do not suffer any, hardly. Go away, Ralph, dear Ralph, go away, or it will kill me."

"I do not wish to see you unauthorized. Come to my mother, Lina!"

"No, no, I dare not. It kills me to remember that look."

"But I can endure these restraints no longer, Lina. My father, at least, does not withhold a conditional consent—surely our mother, the dearest and best woman that ever drew breath, will not be less generous. At any rate, we will know the worst. Come, Lina."

The young man, with his untamed will, drew the timid Lina firmly, but tenderly, from her vantage ground in the room, and hurried her away toward his mother's room.

Mabel was sitting up, calm and pale, like one who ceases to resist, though in the midst of a storm. She arose to receive her son with a gentle smile, and glanced kindly at Lina.

Ralph, full of impetuous warmth, threw his arm around the young girl, and brought her forward

with gentle force.

"Mother, you have always loved her; now let it be more than ever, for my sake. She is all the world to me."

They were looking upward to Mabel's face—the one boldly and with honest confidence, the other shy and wistful—dreading the first glance, as if it had been a dagger. But an exclamation of astonishment broke from them both, at the sudden illumination of those eyes—at the smile that parted her lips, like sunshine forcing a red rose bud into sudden flower. Yes, the countenance of Mabel Harrington brightened into beauty then, and it was one which the heart leaped toward with gushes of tenderness.

The eyes of Ralph Harrington danced and sparkled in their joy, and Lina's brightened up, till the very tears shone like diamonds in them.

"Oh, mother, my blessed, blessed mother, how happy you have made us—how good you are!"

And yet she had not spoken a word. That eloquent face had done it all. She sunk slowly to her seat, sighing, but, oh! how pleasantly. Ralph seized her hand, which he covered with grateful kisses. Lina fell upon her knees, and burying her face in Mabel's lap, mingled soft murmurs with a world of broken sighs, as she had done many a time when a little petted child. Her gentle heart was brimful of thanksgiving, which she could utter in no other way.

"My children you have made me so happy!" exclaimed Mabel, folding them both in her arms. "I never expected to be happy again, and lo! God heaps all this blessedness at my feet."

"I thought you were offended with me," said Lina, lifting her bright face to meet the pleasant glance bent upon her.

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"Offended, darling! I misunderstood you. Why, lady-bird, did you call my son Ralph, Mr. Harrington?"

Lina blushed scarlet, and Ralph laughed, little dreaming what cruel struggles had followed this trifling change of names. Indeed, Ralph was rather proud of the new dignity with which Lina's bashful love had invested him; and Lina was greatly puzzled to know what harm there was in calling so fine a young fellow Mr. Harrington, after all.

While they were hovering around Mabel's chair, overwhelming her with the abundance of their own happiness, there was a commotion among the passion-flowers at the window, and the vine was once so violently agitated, that some of its blossoms dropped away and fell through the sash-door; but no one of that happy trio heeded it, and Agnes Barker escaped once more from the balcony unseen.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BOUQUET OF ROSES.

AND NOW Mabel was left alone, with the cup of bitter trial removed from her lips, and a flood of thankfulness gushing up from her heart. How she loved those two young people! How her eyes filled as she gazed after them!

She sat down in her easy-chair, serene and happy. The very absence of the harassing doubts that had tormented her, was in itself almost a bliss.

The day was quiet and dreamy—one of those late Indian Summer mornings, when existence itself seems heavenly. The sash was open, and the odor of heliotrope and roses came through, softening the sweet thoughts that floated in her brain, and becoming, as it were, a part of them. She became very languid and dreamy after this, for the strain upon her energies being removed, the reaction rendered her helpless as a little child. God had put aside the evil day. She was not to be wounded by those whom she had cherished closest to her heart. Ralph and Lina! How she loved to murmur over those names in her solitude! How pleasant it was to think of them, united, and still keeping the family bond unbroken.

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Ralph had forgotten to enforce secrecy on his mother, and her first thought was to talk this new promise of family union over with James Harrington. Then, all at once, she remembered that since her accident, no message had been given her from him, and though he was always admitted to her boudoir with as little ceremony as her own son, that privilege had not been once claimed since the storm.

This thought fell like a shadow amid her serene contentment. She began to wonder at this strange desertion, and have a vague consciousness that something was wrong between them. Still, how could this be? Had not Harrington saved her life at the peril of his own? Was not his

face, full of agonized hope, bending over her when she awoke from the midnight of the deep?

Mabel gave a sudden start, and her eyes took an expression of alarm. What if he were ill? What if the terrible exertions of that night had overpowered him, and all this was kept from her knowledge? Starting up under the excitement of this apprehension, she was approaching the door, when it opened, and Agnes Barker came in. The young woman looked more than usually excited that morning. The fire, which always lay smouldering in her evasive eyes, was kindled up, and a flush lay redly on her cheek, an evil flush, such as we may imagine the poison in a laurel plant to spread over its blossoms. In her hand she held a few leaves of verbena and rose geranium, encircling a white rose-bud, and a crimson rose, which had evidently been arranged with considerable care.

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Mabel moved back to her seat, overcome by that strange thrill of repulsion which always troubled her at the approach of this girl.

"Who sent them?" she inquired, with a gleam of pleasure, as she saw the exquisite bouquet, "who sent them?" and with a look half wistful, half pleased, she reached out her hand. Agnes withheld the bouquet, smiling:

"I fear to give offence were I to part with it, even to you, madam. It was intended for me, I believe."

Mabel drew back her hand, stung by the smile, and recoiling proudly from any further question. A faint flush of self-reproach stole up to her forehead, for her heart had leaped back twenty years, when rose buds buried in fragrant leaves had been the mystic language by which her heart read the pulses of another.

Agnes stood before her gazing down into the tiny bouquet with apparent unconsciousness of the feelings she had aroused, and with a smile quivering about her lips, she began blowing dreamily into the half open bud, till it fluttered apart, and took an unhealthy bloom from her hot breath.

"Don't—it will sicken and droop," said Mabel, who could never see a flower rudely touched, without a sensation that it must feel a pang.

"But I shall have it in full bloom while it lasts," answered the governess, "and when that is gone, more will come: I like things that flash into a glow and out again."

Mabel was surprised; the girl, hitherto so retiring and quiet, had all at once taken an air of authority. There was something in the speech that shocked the heart more than the ear, and the sensitive woman felt a thrill of pain as she saw Agnes tear off a leaf from the crimson rose—place it between her lips—and fasten the cluster in her bosom. The quiet self-possession with which she did all this was so unlike her usual manner, that Mabel sat regarding her in silent astonishment.

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When Agnes had arranged the flowers to her satisfaction, she looked up.

"I beg pardon," she said, "for intruding, but Mr. Harrington told me that Lina was in here, and I hurried to join her, fearing that my walk after breakfast had encroached on the hour for lessons."

"Miss Lina has just left me," answered Mrs. Harrington, coldly, but with a quiver of the voice, "you will find her with my son somewhere about the grounds, I fancy."

Agnes looked out of the window, casting sharp glances over that portion of the grounds which it commanded.

"Oh," she said, "yes, it is a heavenly day—what a pity that you cannot go out," and, with a little haste in her manner, Agnes left the room.

Mabel looked out of the window, in time to catch a glimpse of James Harrington walking slowly and thoughtfully towards the shore. Directly Agnes Barker joined him, and they seemed to enter into conversation, but moved on, and were soon out of sight.

He was not ill then, but avoided her purposely, and took long strolls with that strange girl. More and worse—no other hand could have arranged those rose buds. Years and years ago, she had worn such buds and leaves, tint for tint, upon her own bosom. Alas, that the memory gave her so much anguish.

CHAPTER XXI.

BEN BENSON GIVES AN OPINION.

MABEL went back into the room sick and faint; her heart was enveloped in shadows again.

Another knock at the door, a rambling timid knock, as if every knuckle of a great hand lent its own sound to the wood. Mabel was impatient and cried out, "come in, come in."

The door half opened and closed, opened again, and a huge foot was planted on a cluster of roses in the carpet. Another foot appeared, and our old friend Ben presented himself with a small basket on his arm, and a huge bouquet of wild flowers in hand.

"I beg pardon, marm," said the honest fellow, taking off his tarpaulin and setting it down by the door, "I begs any amount of pardons for this here intrusion, but I thought that you'd like to see these ere shiners afore the cook spiled their beauty on the gridiron; besides I found some blue asters and a tuft of golden-rod in a holler of the woods that the frost hasn't found out yet, and tied 'em up ship shape, thinking as you might like the smell on 'em, now that they've got so scarce."

The quick tears sprung into Mabel Harrington's eyes. She held out her hand with that beaming expression of face which rendered her at times more than beautiful.

"Ben, my good old friend, you helped to save my life; how can I ever thank you enough!"

Ben took the white hand in his huge grasp tenderly as if it had been a newly-fledged dove. "Don't, don't, now, I can't stand it, that ere look knocks the pins from under me, circumvents me into a lubberly boy again. What was Ben Benson—the old scoundrel about, that he didn't do the hull thing hisself? Don't hurt the poor feller's feelins by thanking him for what he didn't do—he's ashamed of hisself, and hain't done nothing but rip and tear at hisself for a sneak and coward ever since."

"Oh, Benson, don't abuse yourself in this manner—I cannot speak all my thankfulness—I can never do enough for you. Sometimes, Ben, sometimes, I think you are the best, almost the only true friend that I have on earth—that is among the old friends, Ben."

Her eyes were full of tears. She pressed Ben's hard hand with her white fingers.

"He'd die for you—that ere old weather-beaten chap—he'd die for you any minute, and never ask the reason; but don't talk to him in that ere way—it'll break his heart if you do. His eyes have sprung aleak already, and no pump rigged, nothing to help hisself with, but the cuff of his coat!"

"Well, well, I will not vex you with my thanks; but remember, good friend, I must always feel them. Now tell me what you have got in the basket. Something nice or beautiful, I daresay, for you bring the breath of the hills in your very clothes."

Ben sat down his basket, with a glow of satisfaction, and proceeded to display its contents: first, he removed a layer of crimson maple leaves, presenting a surface of bright golden tints underneath, which were daintily lifted from a bed of the softest and greenest moss in which a pair of superb speckled trout lay softly embedded. Ben looked up with a broad smile, as Mabel touched their spotted sides, gleaming up through the delicate green, as if the gorgeous coloring of the leaves which lay heaped upon the marble console had struck through, leaving prismatic stains behind.

"I thought," said Ben, peering affectionately down into the basket, "that a pair of these ere beauties might tempt you into eating something. I've been a watching 'em a good while in the holler of the rocks, just above where Miss Barker's mammy lives. The brook that comes down by the side of her house is as pure as ice, and almost as cold, and that's the kind of water for fellers like this. Ain't they smashers, now? More'n a foot long, both on 'em, and sparkling like a lady's bracelet."

"Thank you, thank you. They will be delicious. I have tasted no breakfast yet. Tell the cook to prepare one for me."

"Will you have the goodness to trust that ere to Ben Benson, marm, and he'll see that there's no mistake this time. That same awkward chap brought a pair of shiners just like these, from the brook last night, and instid of gitting in here, as he expected they would, what does he see but that ar' gov'rness a-carrying them up in a silver platter to General Harrington's room, as if he'd been sick, and not the lady. If you've no objection, marm, Ben Benson 'll sarve these ere fellows hisself, for the brook hasn't got another of the same sort, if he beat brush for 'em a week."

"You are always kind," answered Mabel, "and it won't be the first time you have turned cook in my behalf. Do you remember, Ben, doing like services for me in Spain, years ago, when you insisted on leaving the ship, and turning courier for us all?"

"Don't I, now?" said Ben, and his face brightened all over. "Didn't Ben Benson? He was a smartish youngster then. Didn't he use to scour their skillets and sasepans, to git the garlic out on 'em? But it wasn't of no use, that ere garlic strikes through and through even hard iron in them countries, and a'most everything you touch tastes on it, but the hard biled eggs that had tough shells to 'em, as I used to bile for you and the poor sick lady—they stood out agin it."

Mabel was looking sadly downward, and a troubled shadow came to her face as she murmured

"Poor lady—poor lady! How she suffered, and yet how completely her disease baffled the Spanish physicians! That was a hard death."

Ben drew close to his mistress as she spoke. A strange meaning was in his glance, as he said, impressively—

"Lady, that was a strange death. I've seen consumption enough, but it wasn't what ailed *her!*"

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Mabel lifted her eyes and looked anxiously at the honest face bent toward her. "How can you think so, Benson?" she said.

"Because I know who gave that lady her medicine o'nights, when you and the rest on 'em were in bed, and fast asleep; and I know that one time, at any rate, it wasn't of the same color or taste as that the doctor left, and she give it ten times when he told her once. I didn't think much about it at the time, but since then, it's constantly a-coming into my head."

Mabel turned deathly pale, and, yielding to a sudden faintness, sat down.

"You do not think—you cannot think that there was really any neglect?"

"I didn't say nothing about neglect, marm—there wasn't much of that, any how, for the poor lady never had a minute to herself. That ere cream-colored gal was always a-hanging over her like a pison vine, and the more she tended her, the sicker she grew—anybody with an eye to the windward, could see that without a glass."

"Benson, you surprise—you pain me!" cried Mabel, with sudden energy. "Great Heavens, what could have put this wild idea into your head?"

"It was in my head years ago, and went to sleep there," answered Ben impressively—"but the sight of just sich a face, and just sich a cretur, all but the color, prowling about this ere very house—in and out like a mouser—has woke up the idee agin, and my own mother couldn't sing it to sleep, if she rose from the dead with the old lol-lo-by on her lips. I wish something could drive it away, for it's all the time a sighing in my ear, like the sound of waves when they close over a corpse."

"It is a terrible thought," said Mabel, shuddering.

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"Now, don't go to turning pale nor nothing," said Ben, with prompt anxiety, "don't take it to heart, no how—just as like as not, it's one of old Ben Benson's sea-sarpenets, that'll float off the minute it's touched, and if it does amount to any thing, ain't that individual here with his face to the wind, and his hand on the helm? Only do be careful what you eat and drink here alone, if that ere gov'rness is turning waiter for you or the general. There's a reason for it—be sartain of that."

"How foolish all this is," said Mabel, striving to laugh.

"One would think, Benson, that we lived in Italy, when the Borgias made poison an amusement, instead of being quiet people in the quietest land on earth!"

"The quietest country on earth," answered Ben, reflecting over her words with a hand buried amid the jack-knives, bits of twine, and lumps of lead, in his deepest of deep pockets. "That ere sentiment used to sound beautiful on a Fourth of July, when I was a shaver, but it's took after my example, and out-grown itself a long shot. Why, marm, there ain't ere a day but what some poor woman goes through a post mitimus, and two or three men are found with their skulls driv in by sling shot down in the city, to say nothing of them that never git under the crouner's hands, but are put away with a doctor's pass, into the grave that somebody should be hanged for filling. I can't go out a-fishing on the Hudson now, marm, without a feeling that some gang of rowdies may set upon me and steal my boat. I can't go into the city with a sartinty that a bowie knife won't be buried in my side, before I get home. In short, marm, I don't believe in calling countries quiet where murders and amusements go hand in hand. America was a peaceable country once, but it ain't that thing no longer. Them ere Borgers, as I've hearn, did their murders softly and arter dark, and it won't be long afore we learn to do the thing genteelly, as they did. I tell you, marm, I don't like strangers a-running about this house while you and Miss Lina live in it. Ain't the old sarvants enough—What have they done to be turned out of doors?"

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"Who has been turned out of doors, Benson? No one by me," said Mabel, a good deal surprised by this harangue.

"No, marm—but they're dropping out of their places softly marm, as the leaves fall out yonder, without the least idee what wind strikes 'em. Yesterday, the old cook, as has been in your kitchen twenty years, got her discharge. To-morrow, for anything that old feller knows, Ben Benson may git his mitimus, and when he asks to see the lady as he's sarved heart and soul since he was a boy a'most, they'll tell him as they did the cook—that this ere lady is sick, and can't be troubled with such matters."

"And have they discharged my cook—poor, faithful Nancy? Is this so, Benson? Who has done it? How dare they!" cried Mabel, surprised and indignant. "Why did she not come to me? Has Nancy really gone?"

"Yes, marm, I saw her myself go off to the city, with a bandbox under her arm, and a man behind, carrying her trunk."

"But what was her offence?"

"She didn't keep the General's woodcocks quite long enough to make 'em tender—sarved 'em up too fresh and sweet—I don't know of nothing else that they brought agin her."

"And she has gone—actually gone!"

"Bag and baggage, marm; they made clean work of it."

"They? Of whom do you speak? Not of Lina, not of Mr. Harrington—who, but the General, himself, would dare to discharge my servants?"

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"In course, nobody but the old General could do it; but that are gov'rness, marm, as has been a whispering with him in his room and out on it, ever since you've been shut up here. She's been a-doing some of that ere Borger work in a new way, pizening the mind, instead of the stomach. Since that ere black-eyed pussy-cat came here and got to mousing around, there hasn't been a mite of comfort anywhere, in-doors or out. The very boat, as was as kind a craft as ever tuk to water's got to running contrary, and is allus cutting across currents, and tussling agin the wind. It ain't Christian, and as like as not, it's slandering the poor feller to say it, but my 'pinion is, that Ben Benson's a-beginning to hate that ere gal like pizon."

Mabel was so occupied with new thoughts, that she did not hear the conclusion of this speech, but sat gazing steadily on the carpet.

"What can all this mean," she reflected. "The General has not been to see me since the first day of my illness; then the half insolent air of this girl—the discharge of my old servant, what can it mean?"

"More 'an this," continued Ben, warming up, "Nelly the chambermaid is a going. She says that things don't suit her, and she's got too many mistresses, by half, for her money!"

"This is very strange," said Mabel, rising with that firm moral courage, which always prompted her to face a difficulty at once. "Say to the General, that I wish to speak with him."

"The General isn't at home Mar'm, and hasn't been since yesterday."

"Very well, Benson, I shall dine with the family; a household always goes wrong when its mistress is away."

"And shall I cook these beauties for you?" inquired Ben, gathering up the moist leaves, and laying them over the trout again, with pleasant alacrity; "the new cook mayn't know how to manage 'em; I don't want to flatter that ere conceited feller—but Ben Benson does know how to cook a trout arter he's caught it."

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"Do as you please, Benson; they will certainly taste better from your hand than if prepared by a cook whom I have never seen."

"In course they will," answered Ben, taking up his basket. "I'll go down to the kitchen, and get things under way."

CHAPTER XXII.

A RENEWAL OF CONFIDENCE.

MABEL saw him depart almost unconsciously. The morning had been one of surprises and painfully conflicting feelings. She felt that a crisis in her life had arrived, that the time for dreamy thoughts and gentle endurance was at an end, and her strength rose to meet the occasion. The lassitude and nervous reluctance to give up her seclusion which had oppressed her of late, gave way, and with that dignity which is born of womanly self-command, she changed her toilet, and passed from the solitude of her sick room.

The sitting-room which we described in a chapter of this narration was empty when Mrs. Harrington entered it. The luxurious easy-chairs stood about the floor, as if recently occupied, and the fire of hickory-wood burned brightly behind a fender of steel lace-work that broke the light in a thousand gleams and scattered it far out on the moss-like rug. Everything was as she had left it, even to the position of her own easy-chair in a corner of the bay window, but the absence of all living objects chilled her, and a presentiment of perpetual loneliness crept slowly to her heart, as she sat down, looking out of the window with that peculiar vividness of interest which we always feel in seeing familiar objects after convalescence.

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The gorgeousness and wealth of the autumn had gone by during her illness; a few red and golden trees, contrasted with the hemlocks and pines in sheltered hollows; but, on the hill-tops, half the trees had cast off their leaves, while those which clung to the boughs had lost all their vivid tints, and thrilled mournfully to every breath of wind, like humanity trembling at the approach of death.

But the calm flow of the Hudson was the same. Its hills might be stripped of their affluent foliage, the grass grow crisp along its banks, but this had no effect on the grand, old stream, that

flowed on ever the same, like that river of Christian faith that Mabel fed from the humble springs of a heart, already smitten down to its deepest waters.

She was a strong woman, that Mabel Harrington, and knew well that no trouble could fall upon her, of which she had not already tasted the bitterness, and lived.

But the flow of those waters, gliding by her ever and returning no more, filled her with mournfulness. She felt like a pilgrim who drops his scrip on the wayside for a moment's rest, and dreads the hour when he must take it up and toil on, with a patient hope of finding some shrine at which he may repose, though none is in sight.

"Well," she murmured with a patient smile, which came across her mobile features with a gleam of heavenly beauty, "Let it flow on, this earthly life; be it laggard or fast, the moments that we leave behind but send us onward with a swifter speed. The descent grows steeper every day, and years rush on impetuously, as hours did in that beautiful time of youth. The stream of life was impetuous then. Now it is slow and powerful, nor stops to foam and ripple at the troubles that are always falling, like drift-wood upon it."

[149] Thus Mabel mused within herself—confident that some stern trial was at hand, but resolved to meet it steadily, and trust to God for help. She needed such help; for, in solemn truth, the great battle of her life was at hand.

The door opened softly behind her, as she sat gazing upon the river. The back of her chair was toward him, and James Harrington saw only the garments of a female flowing downward to the carpet; and, thinking that it was Lina, he came into the room. He, too, had been gazing upon the scene without, and thoughts kindred to those stirring in Mabel's heart, and left him sad and gentle as a child.

"Lina, my sweet child," he said approaching the chair, "I am glad to find you in-doors."

Mabel started at the sound of his voice, with a quick leap of the heart; then, she arose slowly and stood up, holding forth her hand, as a sister might claim congratulations of her brother after illness.

"It is not Lina, James, but one whom you will not be less pleased to see, I am sure. How is this? You look pale and careworn, my friend; have you, also, been ill?"

For one instant, the flash that lighted up Harrington's eyes was dazzling—the next, he grew calm again; but the expression of his face was unutterably mournful.

"I had a very long walk; the fine weather tempted me too far," he said, with a faint smile, relinquishing her hand almost the moment it was taken.

He did not inquire after her health, but stood for a moment, thoughtfully regarding her.

Mabel smiled, and instantly his own features grew luminous.

"I am glad, I am very glad to see you so much better," he said, yielding to the old friendly habit; "it has been very lonely without you."

"I hope you missed me," said Mabel, the pure joy of an affectionate heart breaking over her face. "That was a fearful night, Harrington."

[150] "It was, indeed, fearful. I shudder to remember that night. It seems impossible to imagine anything more dreadful than the scene, as that steamer ploughed over your boat. When you came up, with the blue lightning quivering around you, the rocks seemed to reel under my feet. Nothing but the power of God could have saved you then."

"I remember—I knew it all," said Mabel, lifting her clasped hands gratefully upward. "The last thing that left me, was your figure on the rock; no, not on the rock, but midway between me and the bleak waves. I tried to scream, but the waters choked me."

Harrington took her hand, and wrung it with unconscious warmth.

"Thank God, it is over," he said fervently.

"I do thank God, first, that I am alive, and, then, that it was one of our own household that saved me. But this coming back from death, it is full of pain, to which the last agony seems but little. The scene around that old tree haunts me yet."

"And me," said Harrington, thoughtfully.

"You all looked so strange and wild, I could not comprehend the identity of any one. Even Ben Benson appeared like an angel luminous from Heaven, and that cedar a pillar of holy flame, around which he ministered."

"You did not know any of us, then?" inquired Harrington, eagerly.

"I did not know myself, for I, too, seemed like an angel, bound to love everything around me, as heavenly spirits do."

"Then you remembered nothing?" questioned Harrington, bending his earnest eyes upon her with a power that would have won the truth from a statue.

She did not blush; her eyes looked quietly and truthfully into his, and a pang both of joy and regret came to his heart, as he regarded the innocence of that look.

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"It was, after all, a pleasant hallucination," said Mabel, "for even the governess, whom I do not much like, seemed transformed into a seraph, as she bent over me. As for Ben Benson, he was really sublime."

"Thank God!" answered Harrington, but the exclamation was followed by a deep sigh, as if the anxiety preying upon him had been changed, not entirely removed. Still there was a relief and freedom in his manner, as he drew a chair up to the window, and fell into his old habit of talk.

"Why is it," inquired Mabel, "that you have not once been to inquire after me? It was very strange."

"I did inquire after you every day," was the rather embarrassed answer.

"I did not hear of it," said Mabel, easily satisfied, and too happy for repining at anything.

"You may not know," answered her companion, "that I have been making arrangements to go abroad?"

"Abroad? But when—why?"

"Indeed, it seems impossible to give a reason, except that my health seemed to require change."

"Your health?"

"Remember, please, that your first remark was about my looks."

"But you are not really suffering?"

"Not now—not as I have been."

"But you will leave us?"

Harrington left his seat, and began to pace the room, as was his habit, when conflicting thoughts beset him. Mabel followed his movements sadly with her eyes, which were eloquent of a thousand gentle feelings.

"And you *will* go?" she said at last, with a quiver of the voice. "You will leave us all?"

"No," answered Harrington with energy, "I will not go. Why undertake a pilgrimage when there is nothing to gain, and nothing to avoid."

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"Thank you—thank you," said Mabel, with her eyes full of tears.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE LOVE SONG.

THERE WAS a slight stir in the hall, and Ralph came into Mrs. Harrington's room followed by Lina, both brilliant and smiling, as if the conservatory in which they had loitered away the hours, had bathed them with the perfume of its blossoms.

"Oh, mamma, it is so pleasant!" cried Lina, stealing forward and seating herself on a cushion at Mabel's feet. "Isn't this a beautiful, beautiful day?"

"All days are beautiful to the light-hearted," answered Mabel, burying her hand fondly in the golden curls that fell, a perfect network of light, from Lina's drooping head. "I thought it very dull and heavy this morning; now, the air seems invigorating as old wine. Still, I think the day itself has changed but little."

"Hasn't it?" questioned Lina, looking up tenderly through the sunny mist of her hair. "But you are so much better, and look so blooming—perhaps it is that."

"Perhaps," said Ralph, stooping down and kissing his mother's forehead, "it's because we are all together again; even this room seems like a desert, when our lady mother is absent. This should be a gala day with us; what shall we do, Lina? Crown her with roses, or bring an offering of fruit and nuts from the hills."

"I will give her some music," answered Lina, springing up and taking her guitar from a sofa, where it had been lying, neglected and untuned; "mamma shall have a serenade."

Lina flung the broad, blue ribbon attached to the guitar over her neck; and, seating herself again, began to tune her instrument, with her pleasant eyes lifted to Mabel's face.

"Now, what shall it be about," she inquired, casting a half-coquettish look at Ralph, and blushing like a damask rose beneath the brightness of his eyes. "What shall I sing about, mamma?"

"Oh, love, sing of nothing but love, to-day, sweet Lina," whispered Ralph, as he stooped down and pretended to adjust the ribbon over her white neck.

"Shall I, mamma?" said Lina.

"Sing anything that pleases you," answered Mabel.

"Then it shall be some lines, mamma, that I found in an old book in the library, with the leaves of a white rose folded in the paper. It was yellow with age, and so were the poor, dead leaves. I took it to my room, learned it by heart, and found out that it went by the music of an old song which Ralph and I used to sing together. That is all I know about love," continued the rogue, with a blush and a glance upward.

"Well, well, pretty torment, begin," whispered Ralph, again busy with the ribbon.

For a moment, Lina's little hand fluttered like a bird over the strings of her guitar; then it made a graceful dash, and her voice broke forth:

Like a water-lily floating,
On the bosom of a rill,
Like a star sent back to Heaven,
When the lake is calm and still;
A woman's soul lies dreaming,
On the stilly waves of life,
Till love comes with its sunshine—
Its tenderness and strife.

Then hope grows bright and
glorious,
Her faith is deep and strong,
And her thoughts swell out like
music
Set to a heavenly song;
Her heart has twined its being,
And awakes from its repose
As that water-lily trembles
When its chalice overflows.

Then she feels a new existence—
For the loveless do not live!—
The best wealth of the universe
Is hers to keep and give—
Wealth, richer than earth's golden
veins
That yield their blood to toil,
And brighter than the diamond lights
That burn within the soil.

Oh, her soul is full of richness,
Like a goblet of old wine
Wreathed in with purple blossoms
And soft tendrils of the vine;
Its holy depths grow luminous,
Its strings are sweet with tune,
And the visions floating through it
Have the rosiness of June.

Oh, she counts not time by cycles,
Since the day that she was born!
From the soul-time of a woman
Let all the years be shorn
Not full of grateful happiness—
Not brimming o'er with love—
Not speaking of her womanhood
To the Holy One above.

Mabel gave a start as the first words of this melody fell upon her ear, and the slow crimson stole over her face; she kept her gaze steadily on the carpet, and had any one looked at her, the sadness of her countenance must have been remarked. But the young people were occupied with each other, and James Harrington sat, like herself, preoccupied and listening. As Lina broke into another and lighter air, the two looked up, and their eyes met. The blush on Mabel's cheek spread and glowed over her brow and temples. She arose, and went to the window.

"You have heard this before, I think," said Harrington, following her.

"Yes," answered Mabel, regaining self-control; "and always truthful. I remembered it at once."

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"And the author?"

Again Mabel blushed. "Oh, it was written years ago."

"Then you were the author?"

"Oh, yes; why not. I wrote a great many trifles like that at one time."

"I knew it; I was sure of it."

That instant the governess came in, followed by Fair-Star, who began to plunge and caper at the sight of his mistress. Agnes looked keenly at Mrs. Harrington's flushed face; but, the covert smile, dawning on her lip, vanished, as she saw Ralph in the chair his mother had abandoned, bending over Lina; who sat upon the cushion, trifling with her guitar, from which, in her confusion, she drew forth a broken strain, now and then.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A MEETING IN THE HILLS.

"MAMMY, this is too much. I can endure it no longer. You keep me working in the dark, and every step I take but adds to my own misery. I am baffled, defeated, almost exposed, and yet you say, go on."

Agnes Barker spoke in a harsh, angry tone. Her eyes blazed with passion. Her features had lost all their usual grace. She was not the same being whom we saw creeping softly into the family circle at General Harrington's with that velvety tread and sidelong glance of the eye.

The woman who stood before her, regarded this outbreak with signs of kindred impatience, and gathering a vast blanket shawl of crimson and green around her imposing figure, she stood with her arms wreathed together in the gorgeous folds, steadily regarding the impetuous young creature, till the fury of her first onset had exhausted itself.

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They had met upon the hill-side, upon the very spot where Mabel Harrington rested after her rescue from the Hudson, and the charred trunk of the cedar stood like a pillar of ruined ebony, just behind the woman, with the sunset playing around it, and spotting the rocks behind with flecks and dashes of golden light.

This, with naked trees, and a broken hill towering upward, formed a background to the two persons who had met by appointment, and who always came together with a clash which made each interview a mental and moral storm.

The woman remained silent for a moment after this rude assault, and fixed her dark, oriental eyes with a sort of fascination on the flushed face lifted in audacious rebellion to hers.

"Agnes," she said at last, "I am weary of this rebellion, of this rude questioning. In intrigue, as in war, there can be but one commander, and there must be implicit obedience."

"I am obedient—I have been so from the beginning," answered the girl, yielding to the frown of those eyes, "until you asked me to stand by and witness the triumphs of a rival—to see the man I love better than my own soul, better than ten thousand souls, if I had them, parading his passion for another in my very presence. Till you asked this, I was obedient, but I can endure it no longer. They are torturing me to death!"

"Not to death," said the woman with a strange smile. "Women who love as you can, and as I did, have no power to die. Tortured you may be to the verge of the grave, but never into it. Listen, girl, and learn how charitable and just the world is. When wrong stings the soul into strength, and every access of vitality brings an additional pang to it, while you would gladly call on death as a comforter, and court oblivion as a second heaven, men denounce you for the very strength of endurance that cannot succumb to trouble. The suffering that does not kill, brings forth no compassion. Struggle is nothing—endurance is nothing—it is only those who weakly lie down and perish, that can claim charity of the world, and then it comes too late. With you and I, Agnes, love is destiny. What I have been and am, you will be. Our hearts are strong to endure, sensitive to feel, and quick to resent. Time, alone, divides us two. Where you are passionate, I am strong. Where you would act, I can wait. The fire of my own nature breaks out too vividly in your girlish bosom. It must be suppressed, or quenched altogether. The woman who does not know how to wait and watch, should die of her first love, and let school-girls plant daisies on her grave."

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Agnes watched the impetuous movement of those features as the woman spoke, and her own face worked in harmony till no one could have doubted the sympathy existing between them. Her eyes lost something of their fire, and took that deep, smouldering light which springs from a

concentration of will. Her arms unconsciously folded themselves on her bosom, and she answered, with the air of a princess—

"I will learn to wait. Only give me some assurance that Ralph Harrington shall not marry that girl."

"He never shall marry her—is that enough?"

"But he loves her, and General Harrington has consented, or almost consented."

"Ha! but the mother?"

"There again you have been mistaken. His mother has not only consented, but seems rejoiced at the attachment."

"But you told me that she fainted at the very idea."

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"And so she did, but in less than twenty-four hours after we met, she sanctioned the engagement with a joy that surpassed their own."

"What! in your presence?"

"Not exactly," answered Agnes, confessing her meanness without a blush. "I took advantage of the flower-screen which you know of, and, behind the plants, with the help of a floating curtain, managed to hear every word, and to see enough—more than enough."

The woman seemed surprised. Her brow contracted, and she looked hard at Agnes, as one appears to search through an object without seeing it, when the mind resolves a new idea.

"This is strange," she said; "I had more faith in Mabel Harrington's pride. She glories in her son, you say—yet is willing to marry him to a penniless foundling."

"And is Lina a foundling?" inquired Agnes, eagerly.

The woman did not heed her.

"I would not believe it," she muttered—"and General Harrington—what can it all mean? I thought one might safely calculate on his family pride."

"If you have calculated much on that, it is all over with me, I can tell you," said the girl, sullenly unfolding her arms. "I do not think General Harrington cares much who his son marries, so long as he is not called upon for help. You tell me that Mr. James is the millionaire. Ralph will be independent of his father so long as he keeps on the right side of the richer Harrington."

"Then this thing is settled," muttered the woman, with her eyes cast downward, and her brows gathered in a frown.

"Yes, with all your management, it *is* settled."

"You are mistaken, girl. Now, I will teach you how much faith can be placed on a woman's promise. Ralph Harrington shall not marry Lina French."

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Agnes looked suddenly up. The woman's face was composed and confident; her eyes sparkled, and her lip curved proudly, as if conscious of having resolved some difficulty to her own satisfaction.

"What do you mean, mammy? How can you prevent it?"

"I will prevent it, girl."

"But, how?"

"General Harrington shall withdraw his consent."

Agnes laughed rather scornfully. "*Shall* withdraw his consent? Who will make him?"

"As a reward for your obedience, *you* shall make him."

"I, mammy? but he is not easily won upon; the General has strange ideas of his own, which one does not know how to meet. There is nothing, it seems to me, so unimpressible as a worldly old man—especially if he has had all heart polished out of him by what is called society. It takes a great deal to disturb the apathy of men who have settled down from active evil into selfish respectability; and that, I take it, is General Harrington's present condition."

"Then, the influence that you rather boasted of has failed of late, I take it," said the woman, with a gleam of the eye at once unpleasant and triumphant.

Agnes colored with mortified vanity, but she answered, with a forced laugh:

"A young girl of eighteen does not care to waste much energy on a conceited old man, at any one's command. Still, if you desire it, I will strive to be more agreeable."

"No," answered the woman, sharply, "I will control this matter hereafter myself. That affair of the journal was badly managed, Agnes."

"I did the best in my power," replied the girl, with a tinge of insolence in her manner. "But, how

was it possible to force a knowledge of the contents on the old man, after I had denied reading the book? He must have opened at some unimportant passage, or a deeper interest would have been excited."

"Are you certain that he did not read the book?" demanded the woman.

"I am certain that it lies unlocked in a drawer of his writing-desk, this moment, where I saw him place it, while I turned to close the library door after me."

"But, he may have read it."

"Impossible, for when I went to look, an hour after, one half of the clasp had accidentally been shut into the book, a thing that could not happen twice in the same way; and there it lies yet."

The woman dropped into thought an instant, with her eyes on the ground; a shade of sadness came to her face, and she murmured regretfully:

"Indeed, how he must have changed: one so passionate, so suspicious, so"—

She started and looked up, keenly regarding Agnes Barker, as if angry that these broken thoughts were overheard—angry in vain, for the gentle reminiscences of which she was ashamed had trembled away from her lips in a deep sigh; and Agnes only saw a look of tender trouble, where suspicion and anger had been a moment before.

CHAPTER XXV.

CONTINUED PLOTTING.

"MAMMY," said Agnes, with a sudden gush of sympathy, "what is there in General Harrington's family that interests you so much?"

The woman answered her with a keen glance and a single word:

"Everything!"

"And will you tell me nothing?"

"No, girl, I will not startle your nerves and confuse your intellect with a history that, as yet, you could not understand. Do not importune me again; I will not submit to it."

"Then I will do nothing more!" said Agnes, petulantly.

"I do not intend that you shall. The whole thing is, I find, beyond your management. I might have known that your first step would be to fall in love with a boy."

"Well, and if I did, has that prevented me carrying out all your directions?"

"It has blindfolded and paralyzed you—that is all!"

"It maddened me to know that he loved another, and yet I acted with coolness throughout."

"What was this penniless boy to either of us, that you should have thwarted, or, at least, delayed all my plans for James Harrington—"

"He is all the world to me!" cried Agnes, "Worth ten thousand General Harringtons and James Harringtons. I tell you, once for all, I would not marry that solemn-faced bachelor, with all his millions, if he were at my feet this instant."

"And this is why you would not obey the directions I gave, regarding your conduct toward him?"

"Obey! why, everything was done to the letter. I followed him to the conservatory, and kept him half an hour that morning talking over Miss Lina's studies. One by one I gathered the flowers so often mentioned in that journal, and tied them in a bouquet, which I offered him; blushing, I am sure, as much as you could wish, for my face burned like flame."

"Well, did he take the flowers?"

"He turned white at the first glance, and put them back with his hand; muttering that the scent of verbena and roses together, always made him faint."

"Ha!—he said that—he turned pale; it is better than I expected?" cried the woman, eagerly. "Well, what else?"

"Nothing more. He went out from the conservatory at once, leaving me standing there, half-frightened to death with the bouquet in my hand; but I turned it to account."

"Well, how?"

"Why, as it produced so decided an effect in one quarter, I concluded to make another experiment, and went into Mrs. Harrington's boudoir with the flowers in my hand. She saw them—started and blushed to the temples—hesitated an instant, and then held out her hand; it trembled like a leaf, and I could see her eyes fill with moisture—not tears exactly, but a sort of tender dew. It was enough to make one pity her, when I kept back the bouquet, saying, that it had just been given to me."

"Well, what followed? You are sure it was the flowers—that she recognized the arrangement at once?"

"It could be nothing else; besides, she became cold and haughty all at once. The blush left her face pale as snow, and she shrouded her eyes with one hand, as if to shut me and my flowers out from her sight. I saw her hand shiver as I fastened the roses upon my bosom; and when I went out into the grounds a short time after, intending to join Mr. Harrington again, a curve in the path gave me a view of her window—and there she stood, looking out so wistfully. Determined to force her jealousy to the utmost, I hurried up to Mr. James Harrington, and began to consult him regarding my pupil's exercise and lessons, the only subject I really believe that he could have been induced to speak about, for he seemed terribly depressed."

"And she stood watching you all the time?"

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"No, not all the time; for, when in the eagerness of my subject—remember I am deeply interested in Lina's progress—I reached my hand towards Mr. Harrington's arm, not touching it, though it must have appeared so from the distance, she disappeared from the window, as if a ball had struck her; and I took a short cut through the shrubberies, quite satisfied with the information those two pretty roses had won for us. Now, say if I have been altogether blind or inert?"

"Indeed, I was unjust to think it; this is an important point gained. There is no doubt that the feelings so vividly recorded in that journal exist yet; this knowledge opens everything to us."

"Then I have done pretty well for a blind girl," persisted Agnes, with a touch of sarcasm in her voice; "give me, at least, that praise."

"With one exception, child, you have done well in everything."

"And that exception—I know what you mean, but where Ralph Harrington is concerned, I will not be controlled."

"No one wishes to control you, foolish girl. Be obedient and adroit as you have been, and this blue-eyed girl shall be swept from your path like thistle downs."

"Ah, do this, and I am twice your slave!" cried Agnes, with an impulse of genuine feeling, flinging her arms around the elder woman.

"And you love him so much!" said the woman, returning her caress with a touch of sympathy—"well, child, well—since the reading of that book I have thought better of it. It may be, that your silly caprice for this boy can be indulged without interfering with more important objects. This first love is—well, well, no matter what it is, I would rather not turn it to gall in the bosom of a young girl. So trust me, Agnes, and be faithful."

"I will!"

"Now, listen, child. Have you settled about the old servants?"

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"Indeed I have. The cook is away already—the chambermaid discontented and going tomorrow. As for that uncouth boatman and factotum, I find him hard to manage—he will neither take offence, nor listen to anything I say."

"Let him pass. It will not do for us to frighten off too many at once. But the new cook—what is she?"

"Fresh from Germany, and speaks no English."

"That will do. Now listen. You must intercede with General Harrington for your poor old mammy, up yonder, as chambermaid, when this one is gone."

Agnes opened her eyes wide, and a low laugh broke from her lips, that were at first parted with astonishment.

"Mammy, what can you mean!"

The woman answered as much by the crafty smile, that crept over her face, as by words.

"The old house is cold and lonely, Agnes, and the poor old slave will be much more comfortable in a service-place for the winter, you understand. She must have the place."

"In real earnest?"

"In real earnest."

"Well, it shall be done—but you will keep your word, this time."

"Have I ever broken it to you?"

"I don't know; in fact, until the whole of this affair is made plain to me, all must be doubt and darkness. I know that my mission is to leave distrust and misery wherever my voice reaches, or my step can force itself in that household—yet they have all been kind to me, and most of all, the lady herself."

"*She* kind to *you!* I know what such kindness is. A sweet, gentle indifference, that for ever keeps you at arms' length, or that proud patronage of manner, which is more galling still. Oh, yes, I have felt it. Such kindness is poison."

[165] "I did not find it so," said Agnes, with a touch of feeling, "till your lessons began to work. Then, acting like a traitor, I felt like one, and began to hate those I wronged. But, I suppose this is always so."

The woman laughed. "You turn philosopher early, young lady. Most girls of your age are content to feel and act—you must stop to analyze and reflect. It is a bad habit."

"I suppose so—certainly reflection gives me no pleasure," answered the girl, a little sadly.

"Well, well, child, we have no time for sentiment, now. The sun is almost down, and you have a long walk before you—another week, and if you manage to get your poor old mammy a place, we need not chill ourselves to death in these damp woods. She will bring messages back and forth, you know!"

Agnes shook her head, and laughed, "Oh, mammy, mammy!"

The woman mocked her laugh with a sort of good-natured bitterness. "There now, that is easily managed, but there is something else for you to undertake; wait."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE NOTE WITH A GREEN SEAL.

[166] THE woman took from among the folds of her dress, a small writing-case of satin wood, formed like a scroll. Touching a spring, she opened it, took out implements for writing, and some note-paper, which emitted a faint and very peculiar perfume, as she began to write. After tracing a few hasty lines, she folded the paper, placed it carefully in an envelope, and proceeded to seal it. Taking from her pocket a singular little taper box of gold, covered with antique chasing, she lighted one of the tapers, and dropped a globule of green wax upon her note, which she carefully impressed with a tiny seal taken from another compartment of the taper box.

Agnes watched all this dainty preparation with a look of half-sarcastic surprise. When the note was placed in her hand, she examined the address and the seal with parted lips, as if she would have smiled, but for a feeling of profound astonishment.

"To General Harrington. The seal a cupid writing on a tablet. Well, what am I to do with this?"

"Leave it upon General Harrington's library-table after breakfast, to-morrow morning—that is all."

The woman arose, folded up her writing case, and gathering the voluminous folds of her shawl from the moss, where it had been allowed to trail, turned away. Agnes watched her as she disappeared through the forest trees with a rapid step, fluttering out her shawl now and then, like the wings of some great tropical bird.

"I wonder who she really is, and what she would be at?" muttered the girl. "Do all girls distrust so much? Now, this note—shall I read it, and learn what mystery links her with the family up yonder? Why not? It is but following out her own lessons, so it be done adroitly."

Agnes placed her finger carefully upon the envelope, and with a steady pressure, forced it from under the wax.

"Ha! neatly done!" she exclaimed, taking out the enclosed, and unfolding it with hands that shook, spite of herself, "and a fool for my pains, truly. I might have known she would baffle me—written in cypher, even to the name. Well, one thing is certain, that my witch and old General Harrington understand each other, that is something gained. If I had but time, now, to make out these characters, and—and"—

[167] She broke off almost with a shriek, for a hand was reached over her shoulder, and the note taken suddenly from her grasp, while she stood cowering beneath the discovery of her meanness. The woman whom she had supposed on the other side the hill, stood smiling quietly upon her. Not a word was spoken. The woman took out her taper box, dropped some fresh wax beneath the

seal, and smiling all the time, handed the note back again.

Agnes turned her face, now swarthy with shame, aside from that smiling look, and began to plunge her little foot down angrily into the moss, biting her lips till the blood came. At last, she lifted her head with a toss, and turning her black eyes boldly on the woman, said, in a voice of half-tormenting defiance, "Very well, what if I did open it? My first lesson was, when you and I read Mrs. Harrington's letter. If that was right, this is, also."

"Who complained? Who, in fact, cares?" was the terse answer, "only it was badly done. The next time you break a seal, be sure and have wax of exactly the same tint on hand. I thought of that, and came back. It would ruin all, if General Harrington saw his letters tampered with."

"You are a strange woman!" said Agnes, shaking off the weight of shame that oppressed her, and preparing to go.

"And you, a strange girl. Now go home, and leave the note as I directed. In a day or two we shall meet again. Almost any time, at nightfall you will find me here. Good night!"

"Good night," said Agnes, sullenly, "I will obey you this once, but remember my reward."

Again the two parted, and each went on her separate path of evil—the one lost in shadows, the other bathed in the light of a warm sunset.

[168] It did not strike the woman, as she toiled upward to her solitary dwelling, that she was training a viper which would in the end turn and sting her own bosom. Her evil purposes required instruments, and without hesitation, she had gathered them out of her own life. But, even now, she found them difficult to wield, and hard to control. What they might prove in the future remained for proof.

CHAPTER XXVII.

GENERAL HARRINGTON'S CONFESSION.

GENERAL HARRINGTON had spent a good many years of his life abroad, and no American ever went through that slow and too fashionable method of expatriation with more signal effect. While walking through the rooms peculiarly devoted to his use, you might have fancied yourself intruding on the privacy of some old nobleman of Louis the Fourteenth's court.

[169] His bed chamber was arranged after the most approved French style, his dressing-room replete with every conceivable invention of the toilet, from the patent boot-jack with its silver mountings, to the superb dressing-case, glittering with gold and crystal, everything was perfect in its sumptuousness. In his own house, this old man was given up to self-worship, without a shadow of concealment. In society the graceful hypocrisy of his deportment was beautiful to contemplate, like any other exhibition of the highest art. If benevolence was the fashion, then General Harrington was the perfection of philanthropy. Nay, as it was his ambition to lead, the exemplary gentleman sometimes made a little exertion to render benevolence the rage! His name often led in committees for charity festivals, and he was particularly interested in seeing that the funds were distributed with the most distinguished elegance, and by ladies sure to dignify humanity by distributing the munificence of the fashionable world in flowing silks and immaculate white gloves.

After this fashion, the General was a distinguished philanthropist. Indeed, humanity presents few conditions of elegant selfishness in which he was not prominent. A tyrant in his own household, he had, from his youth up, been the veriest slave to the world in which he moved. Its homage was essential to his happiness. He could not entirely cheat his astute mind into a belief of his own perfections, without the constant acclamations of society. As he grew old, this assurance became more and more essential to his self-complacency.

The General studied a good deal. His mind was naturally of more than ordinary power, and it was necessary that he should keep up with the discoveries and literature of the day, in order to shine as a savant, and belles-lettres scholar. Thus some three or four hours of every day were spent in his library, and few professional men studied harder to secure position in life, than he did to accumulate knowledge which had no object higher than self-gratulation.

Still, with all his selfishness and want of true principle, the General was, at least, by education, a gentleman, and he would at any time have found it much easier to force himself into an act of absolute wickedness, than to be thought guilty of ill-breeding in any of its forms. In short, with General Harrington, habit stood in the place of principle. He possessed few of those high passions that lead men into rash or wicked deeds, and never was guilty of wrong without knowing it.

Unconsciously to herself, Agnes Barker had wounded the old man in his weakest point, when

[170] she resented his question if she had read Mabel's journal, with so much pride. This haughty denial was a reproach to the impulse that had seized him to read the book from beginning to end. His conscience had nothing to urge in the matter, but the meanness of the thing he intended, struck him forcibly, and after a moment's hesitation, he closed the journal and laid it in a drawer of his desk. Thus, by affectation and over-acting, the girl defeated her object, much to her own mortification. The passage on which General Harrington had opened at random, was in itself harmless, a warm and somewhat glowing description of a passage up the Guadalquivir in the spring months, had nothing in it to provoke farther research, and the General seldom read much from mere curiosity. Certainly, the book might contain many secret thoughts and hidden feelings of which Mabel's husband had never dreamed, but it was many years since the old gentleman had taken sufficient interest in the feelings of his wife to care about their origin or changes, and so, Mabel's precious book, in which so many secret thoughts were registered, and memories stored, lay neglected in her husband's desk.

Fortunately, she was unconscious of her loss. Sometimes for months together, she shrank from opening the escritoir in which the volume was kept. At this period, she was under the reaction of a great excitement, and turned with a nervous shudder from anything calculated to remind her of all the pain which lay in the past.

Another reason, perhaps, why General Harrington was less curious about his wife's journal than seemed natural to his tempters, lay in his own preoccupation at the time. One of his youthful vices had grown strong, and rooted itself amid the selfishness of his heart; all other sins had so cooled down and hardened in his nature, that with most men they might have passed for virtues, the evil was so buried in elegant conventionalisms; but one active vice he still possessed, always gleaming up from the white ashes of his burnt out sins, with a spark of vivid fire.

[171] General Harrington was a gambler. Understand me—it is not probable that he had ever entered a gambling hall openly or frankly since his youth, or ever sat down with swindlers or professed blacklegs around the faro table. The General was altogether too fastidious in his vices for that. No, he rather plumed himself secretly upon the aristocratic fashion in which he indulged this most lasting remembrance of a reckless youth.

The club life of England had always possessed great fascinations for this fine old republican gentleman, and he was among the first to introduce the system in New York. Here, his naturally fine energies had been vigorously put forth, and he became not only a prominent member of an aristocratic club, but a principal director and supporter also.

At this lordly rendezvous, the General spent a great portion of his time, and somehow, I do not pretend to point out the direct process, for it was generally understood that no high play was sanctioned in the establishment, and the mysterious glances and half-murmurs which transferred five dollar notes into five thousand, as the harmless games proceeded, are not capable of an embodiment—but, it chanced very often, that General Harrington found a transfer of funds necessary after one of these club nights, and once or twice, a rather unpleasant interview with Mr. James Harrington had been the result.

But these unsatisfactory consequences seldom arose. The General was too cool and self-controlled to be always the loser, and up to the time of our story, this one active vice had rather preponderated in favor of his own interests.

[172] But a rash adventure, and a sudden turn of fortune, reversed all this in a single night; and General Harrington—who possessed only the old mansion-house, and a few thousand a year in his own right—all at once found himself involved to more than the value of his family home, and two years income in addition. Close upon this, came that fearful accident upon the river—and, worse still, the application of his son to marry a penniless little girl, whose very existence depended on his charity.

With all these perplexities on his mind, the General had very little time for idle curiosity, and thus his wife's secret remained for the time inviolate.

Like most extravagant men, the General, under the weight of an enormous gambling debt, became excessively parsimonious in his household, and talked loudly of retrenchment and home reforms. In this new mood, Agnes Barker found little difficulty in having several of the old servants discharged, before Mabel left her sick room. Indeed this girl, with her velvety tread and fawning attentions, was the only one of his household with whom General Harrington was not for the time in ill-humor.

With all his self-possession, this old man was a moral coward. He knew that James Harrington was the only person to whom he could look for help—and yet the very thought of applying to him, made the gall rise bitterly in his bosom. To save time, he gave notes for the debt, and made no change in his life, save that he was away from home now almost constantly—a circumstance which the members of his household scarcely remarked in their new-found happiness.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE NOTE ON THE BREAKFAST TABLE.

ONE morning General Harrington came forth from his bed chamber, harassed and anxious. He had slept little during the night, and the weariness of age would make itself felt, after a season of excitement like that through which he had passed.

[173] He found the Sevrés cup on his table, filled with strong, hot coffee, and a muffin delicately toasted, upon the salver of frosted silver, by its side. Indeed, as he entered the room, a flutter of garments reached him from the door, and he muttered, with a smile, as he looked in an opposite mirror.

"Faith, the little girl is very kind; I must think of this." He sat down and drank off the coffee, rejecting the muffin with a faint expression of disgust. As he lifted it from the salver, a note, lying half across the edge, as if it had lodged there when the papers on the table were pushed aside, attracted his attention. He was about to cast it on one side, when a singular perfume came across him with a sickening sweetness. Snatching at the note, he stared an instant at the seal, and tore it open.

The color left General Harrington's cheek. As he read he started up, crushing the note in his hand, while he rang the bell.

"Did you ring, General. I was going by, and so answered the bell," said Agnes Barker, presenting herself.

"Yes, I rang, certainly I rang—but where are the servants? Where is the woman who takes charge of my rooms?"

"The chambermaid? oh, she went away yesterday. I believe Mrs. Harrington has not supplied her place yet."

"Who brought up my coffee? who arranged my rooms yesterday and this morning?"

Agnes blushed, and cast down her eyes in pretty confusion. "The new cook has not learned your ways, sir; there was no one else, and I"—

"You are very kind, Miss Agnes—another time I shall not forget it: but, tell me, here is a note lying on my table near the breakfast tray; how long has it been there—who brought it—where did it come from?"

Agnes looked up, with the most innocent face in the world.

[174] "Indeed, sir, I cannot tell. A good many papers lay on the table, which I carefully put aside; but no sealed note, that I remember."

"This is strange," muttered the General, walking up and down, stopping to look in his coffee-cup, as if still athirst; but waving her away when Agnes filled it again, and would have pressed it upon him.

"Remove these things, Miss Agnes, if you please—and order some one to have the carriage ready. I must go to the city at once."

Agnes took up the salver, and moved away, hesitating, by the door, as if she wished to speak.

"Well," said the General, a little impatiently, "is there anything I can do?"

"The chambermaid, sir, I dare say Mrs. Harrington has no choice; and I should be so obliged if you permitted my old nurse to have the place. She is very capable, and I am lonely without her."

"A colored woman, is it?" asked the General, hastily.

"Yes, from the South. She is all I have left."

"Of course, let her come, if she knows her duty. I will mention it to Mrs. Harrington."

"Thank you," said the girl, gliding softly away. "It will make me so happy to have some one in the house that loves me."

The General answered this attack on his sympathies, with an impatient wave of the hand. He seemed greatly disturbed—and, as the door closed, threw himself into a chair, with something like a groan.

"Can this be true? Lina, poor little Lina, can this be real? and Ralph, my own son. Great Heavens, it is terrible!"

[175] He swept a hand across his forehead, distractedly. Then, starting up, as if stung to action by some agonizing thought, he began to pace up and down the room with a degree of excitement very unusual to him. At length he paused by the window, and, opening the note, again read it over and over with great anxiety. At last he went to a desk standing in a corner of the room, and opening one secret drawer after another, drew forth a bundle of faded letters. As he untied them,

the identical perfume that hung about the note he had been reading, stole around him; and, turning paler and paler, as if the odor made him faint, he began to read the letters, one after another, comparing them first with the note, and then with a key to the cypher in which they were all written, that he took from another compartment of the desk.

At last he drew a deep breath, and wearily folded the papers up.

"This is plausible, and it may be true," he said, locking his hands on the table. "The persistent malice of the thing, confirms its probability. She was capable of it—capable of anything; and yet I do think the poor creature loved me. If I could but see her, and learn all the facts from her own lips. Yet the note is better evidence. Who, except us two, ever learned this cypher? How else could she have known these particulars about poor Lina? But, this is terrible. I did not think anything could shake me so! Ralph, my son Ralph, I must speak with him—No, no! Let me think; it's better that Lina alone should know it."

The old man arose—tottered towards the bell, and rang it, nervelessly, as if the silver knob were a hand he loathed to touch.

Agnes answered the summons, but even her self-possession gave way as she saw the General's face, pale and almost convulsed, turned upon her.

"I have ordered the carriage—it will be at the door in a few moments, sir," she stammered forth.

"Send it back to the stables: I shall not go out. The morning has clouded over."

[177] Agnes glanced at the sunshine pouring its silvery warmth through the library window, but she did not venture to speak.

"Go," said General Harrington, in a suppressed voice, "go find your pupil, and say that I wish to speak with her a moment."

"Miss Lina—is it Miss Lina I am to call?" stammered Agnes, taken by surprise.

"It is Miss Lina that I wish to see; have the goodness to call her."

The courteous but peremptory voice in which this was said, left Agnes no excuse for delay; and, though racked with curiosity, she was obliged to depart on her errand.

The General sat down the moment he was alone—and shrouding his forehead, lost himself in painful thought.

The door opened, and Lina came in, smiling like a sunbeam, and rosy with assured happiness. "Did you send for me, General?" she said, drawing close the chair in which the old man sat. "Is there something I can do that will give you pleasure. I hope so!"

The General looked up; his eyes were heavy—his face bore an expression she had never witnessed in it till then. He looked on her a moment, and she saw the mist melting away from his glance, and it seemed to her that his proud lip began to quiver.

"Have I offended you?" inquired Lina, with gentle regret. "What have I done?"

The old man arose, and laying a hand on each of her shoulders, bore heavily upon her, as he perused her face with an earnestness that made her tremble. He lifted one hand at last, and sweeping the heavy curls back from her brow, gazed sadly and earnestly down into her eyes. Those soft blue eyes, that filled with tears beneath the sad pathos of his gaze.

[177] "Lina!" His hand began to tremble among her curls. He bent his forehead down, and rested it on her shoulders sighing heavily.

"Tell me—do tell me what I have done," said the gentle girl, weeping; "or, is it Ralph? Oh, sir, he cannot have intended to wound you!"

"Ralph!" exclaimed the General, starting up, with a flush of the brow. "Do not speak of him; never let me hear his name on your lips again!"

"What? Ralph—never speak of Ralph? You do not mean it. Indeed, I am quite sure, you do not mean it. Not speak of Ralph? Dear General, if he has done anything wrong, let me run for him at once, and he will beg your pardon—oh, how willingly! Not speak of Ralph? Ah, you are teasing me, General, because you know—that is, you guess—it would break my heart not to think of him every minute of my life."

"Silence, girl; I must not hear this," said the old man, dashing his hand aside with a violence that scattered Lina's hair all over her shoulders.

"General," said Lina, lifting up her eyes, all brimming with tears, and regarding him with the look of a grieved cherub: "don't terrify me so. What have I done? What has Ralph done? For the whole world we would not displease you, after all your kindness. Indeed, indeed we are too happy for anything evil to come within our thoughts."

"And you are happy, girl?"

"Very, very happy. It seems to me that all the earth has blossomed afresh. I thought this

[178] morning, that the sunshine never was so bright as it is to-day, and what few leaves are left on the branches, seem more beautiful than roses in full flower. Dear, dear General, it is something to have made two young creatures so happy! I thought last night, for life seemed so sweet that I could not waste it in slumber—and when the moonbeams came stealing in around me, making the curtains luminous, like summer clouds—I thought that you must have such heavenly dreams and grateful prayers to God, for giving you power—so like his own—that of filling young souls with this beautiful, beautiful joy!"

"Ah!" said the General, with a deep sigh; "all this must change, my poor child. I thought yours was but a pretty love-dream, that would pass over in a week."

"Oh, do not say that—do not say your consent was not real—that you have trilled with two young creatures, who honestly left their hearts all helpless in your hands."

"Peace, peace," said the old man, standing upright, and speaking with an effort. "I have not trifled with you. I did hope that all this might pass off as such love-dreams usually do; but, I have promised nothing which should not have been accomplished, had not a destiny stronger than my will, or your love, intervened. Lina, you can never be married to my son!"

Lina looked in his face—it was pale and troubled; his eyes fell beneath the intensity of her gaze—his proud shoulders stooped—he did not seem so tall as he was, by some inches. The deathly white of her face, the violet lips parted and speechless, the wild agony of those eyes, made him tremble from head to foot.

"Why? oh, why!" at last broke from her lips.

"Because," said the old man, drawing himself up, and speaking with a hoarse effort; "because, God forgive me, you are my own daughter!"

[179] She was looking in his face. A sob broke upon her pale lips—the strength left her limbs—and she fell down before him, shrouding her agony with both hands.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

GENERAL HARRINGTON had no power to comfort the poor creature at his feet. More deeply moved than he had been for years, the strangeness of his own feelings paralyzed his action. But the hand to which Lina clung grew cold in her grasp, and over his face stole an expression of sadness, the more touching because so foreign to its usual apathy.

"Father—oh, my heart breaks with the word—are you indeed my father?" cried Lina, lifting her pale face upward and sweeping her hair back with a desperate motion of the hand.

"Poor child—poor child!" muttered the old man compassionately.

"What can I do? what shall I do? It will kill me! It will kill us both. Oh, Ralph, Ralph, if I had but died yesterday!" cried the poor girl, attempting to rise, but falling back again with a fresh burst of grief.

The old man stood gazing to harden his heart—striving to compose the unusual tremor of his nerves, but all in vain. Sorrow, regret, and something almost like remorse smote him to the soul, for he had once been a man of strong passions, and the ice of his selfishness again broken up, the turbid waters rose and swelled in his bosom, with a power that all the force of habit could not resist. He bent down and lifted the girl from his feet, trembling slightly, and with a touch of pity in his voice.

"It is useless and foolish to take any misfortune in this manner, child."

"Child!" Lina shuddered at the word. She shrunk away from his hand, arose without his help, and staggered backward with a feeling of unutterable repulsion.

[180] He saw the quiver of pain in her features, and his soul hardened once more. She had not met the feeling of tenderness, so new, and, for the moment, so exquisite to himself, and it withered away like a hot-house blossom.

"This is a new and strange relation to us both," he said, seating himself, and regarding her gravely. "Of course it involves many important and painful questions. Up to this day you have been to Mrs. Harrington and myself a daughter in everything but the name!"

Lina wrung her hands, wildly moaning: "That name! Oh, heavens! how can I bear that name unless he should have given it to me. Now, now—just as it sounded so sweet, it separates us for ever. This unholy name of child!"

General Harrington moved in his chair with a gesture of annoyance, but Lina, growing still more impassioned, came toward him, wringing her small hands impetuously.

"You are my father—God forgive you! But there is yet another to curse or bless me with her claims—where and whom is my mother? Is Mrs. Harrington indeed the parent she has always seemed to me?"

The General waved his hand with a dissenting gesture.

"Do not question me upon a subject that must be painful to us both. This is no time to answer you."

"No time, when you uproot every hope of my life and present a future black with improbable things? Up to this day, that dear lady was enough. I had no desire to ask about father or mother. They told me I was an orphan's destiny, and overlooked by all the world, if the dear ones under this roof only loved me. I had no other place on earth, and now, what am I?—an impostor, cast upon the charity of the dear lady my birth has wronged."

General Harrington arose, and advancing toward Lina, took her hands in his. The poor little hands quivered like wounded birds in his clasp, and she lifted her eyes with a piteous and pleading look that no human heart could have withstood.

"Ah! you are trying me? It isn't true?" she said, with a gleam of hope and hysterical sobs.

"No! it is all real, far too real, Lina! Do not deceive yourself. I would not wound you thus for an aimless experiment. You are indeed my child!"

"Your child, really—really your own child? Oh, I cannot understand it! Ralph—my brother, Ralph!"

Lina started as if some new pang had struck her, and then drew away her hands with a gesture of passionate grief.

"Ralph, my own brother, and older than I am, for he is older—oh, this is terrible."

"You will see," said General Harrington, speaking in a composed voice, that seemed like a mockery of her passionate accents—"you will see by this how necessary it is that what I have told you should be kept secret from my wife and child. Your peculiar relations with my son rendered it imperative. I have intrusted you with a secret of terrible importance. You can imagine what the consequences would be, were your relationship to myself made known."

"I will not tell. Oh! thank God, I need not tell!" cried Lina wildly; "but then, Ralph?—what will he think—how will he act? Ralph, Ralph—my brother! Oh, if I had but died on the threshold of this room!"

"Be comforted," said the General, in his usual bland voice, for the scene had begun to weary him. "You will soon get used to the new position of things."

"But who will explain to Ralph? What can I say? how can I act? He will not know."

"Ralph is a very young man. He will go into the world, and see more of society. This is his first fancy—I will take care that he is more occupied. The world is full of beautiful women."

Lina turned deadly pale. The cruel speech struck her to the soul.

The old man saw it, but worldly philosophy made him ruthless. "I will crush the boy out of her heart," he said, inly, "to be rude here is to be merciful."

"You must forget Ralph," he said, and his voice partook of the hardness of his thoughts.

"I cannot forget," answered the girl, with a faint moan, "but I will strive to remember that—that he is my brother!"

The last words came to her lips almost in a cry. She shuddered all over, and the name of brother broke from her with a pang, as if her heart-strings snapped with the utterance.

"Can I go away?" she said, at last, creeping like a wounded fawn slowly to the door.

"Not yet," answered the old man. "You must first comprehend the great necessity there is for composure and silence. Not a word of this must be breathed under my roof now or ever. My own tranquillity and that of Mrs. Harrington are at stake, to say nothing of your own. I have told you a momentous secret. Let it be sacred."

"Oh! the terrible burden of this secret! Must I carry it for ever? Even now I go out from your presence like a guilty thing, and yet I am not guilty."

"No one was talking of guilt, I imagine," answered the General, with a slight flush of the forehead. "The whole thing is certainly an annoyance, and in one sense, a misfortune, perhaps. But guilt is an unfeminine word, and I regret that you could have used it."

Lina wrung her hands in desperation.

"I could not help it. This misery has found me so unprepared."

"Misery! Indeed, young lady, it seems to me that few women would consider it so great an evil

to have the blood of a Harrington in her veins," said the General, stung in the inner depths of his vanity by her words, and losing all pity in his wounded self-love.

"But I am a Harrington without a name—a daughter without parent—a beggar upon the charity of one to whom my existence is an insult! Would you have me grateful for this?" cried Lina, with all the grief and fire of her young nature in arms against the cold-blooded composure of the man who so quietly called her child.

"I would have you prudent, silent, and at all events, more lady-like in your expressions; with well-bred people, a scene is always revolting, and it pains me that a daughter of mine can be led into the intemperance of action and speech that has marked this interview."

The General glanced with a look of cool criticism at the excited girl as he spoke. Her pale, tearful face, the dishevelled masses of hair falling upon her shoulders, and the almost crouching attitude that a sudden sense of shame had left her in, outraged his fastidious taste, and the old habits of a life swept over his new-born tenderness. Feeling, if not elegantly expressed, always shocked the old gentleman, and for the moment, shame and tears had swept Lina's beauty all away. She might have been picturesque to an artist, but General Harrington was not an artist—only a fastidious, selfish old man, whose eyes always led what little of heart he possessed.

"Can I go, sir? I am faint—the room is growing dark. I wish, sir, I—I"—

The poor girl attempted to move toward the door, as she uttered this broken protestation; but the sight utterly left her eyes—and, instead of the entrance, she tottered toward the General, with her hands extended as if to catch at some support, and fell forward, resting her poor white face upon the folds of his Oriental dressing gown that fell around his feet.

"This is very embarrassing," muttered the General, jerking the gorgeous folds of his gown from beneath the head of his child, and scattering her hair, in a thousand glossy tresses, over the floor. "What is to be done now? I suppose the religious people would call this sowing dragon's teeth with a vengeance. I wish the girl had more coolness; there is no managing events against weak nerves and hysterics—but she must be soothed; at this rate, we shall have the whole house in commotion. Lina, my child, make an effort to be calm. Look up, I am not angry with you!"

The old man was so encased and wrapped in self-love, that he really believed his own severe words had alone dashed the strength from those young limbs, and that a little gentle encouragement would make all right again. So, stooping downward, he laid his soft, white hand, upon Lina's head, as the last words were uttered; and, when this failed, made an effort to lift her from the floor. But the leaden weight of utter insensibility rendered more effort necessary, and, at last really frightened, he arose and lifted the insensible girl in his arms.

That moment, as her pale face lay upon his bosom, and her loosened hair fell in floods over his arm, the door softly opened, and Agnes Barker looked in.

"Did you ring, General? I heard a bell ring somewhere."

"No, I did not ring, young lady," answered General Harrington, sharply, "but this young lady has been over-fatigued somehow, or was taken suddenly ill as I was speaking of her studies."

A faint smile crept over Agnes' lips, but she checked it in an instant, and moved forward with an air of gentle interest.

"She has studied very hard of late, no wonder her strength gave way," suggested Agnes, softly smoothing the hair back from Lina's forehead.

There seemed to be fascination in the movement of those treacherous fingers, for they had scarcely touched her brow, when Lina started to life with a shudder, as if the rattlesnake of the hill had sprung upon her unawares.

Casting one wild look upon the female, and another upon the General, she drew from his arm, with a sensation of loathing that made her faint again.

"Let me go to my room—I must be alone!" she said, with a hand pressed upon either temple. "The air of this place drives me frantic: so close—so dreary—so—so"—

She moved away wavering in her walk, but making feeble motions with her hand, as if to repel all assistance. Thus faint, pale, and almost broken-hearted, the poor girl stole away, to weep over her new-born shame.

"She seems very ill," said Agnes, softly, "very ill!"

"You have allowed her studies to prey upon her health," said General Harrington, seating himself and fixing his cold, clear eyes on the face of his questioner. "I must hereafter more directly superintend her education in person. You will have the goodness to inform Mrs. Harrington of this sudden indisposition."

Agnes changed color. The self-poise of this old man of the world, baffled even her eager curiosity. She had expected that he would desire her to keep the whole scene secret; and when he quietly told her to reveal it to his wife, and took a resenting tone, as if she had herself been the person in fault, her astonishment was extreme. The General saw his advantage, and improved upon it. After softly folding the skirts of his dressing-gown over his knees, and smoothing the silk with his palm, he took up a volume from the table, and adjusted the gold glasses to his eyes with

more than usual deliberation. Agnes looked at him steadily, baffled, but not deceived, till his thoughts seemed completely buried in the volume. As she gazed, the evil of her half-smothered passion broke out in her glance; and, as the General languidly raised his eyes from the book, they met hers.

"Is there anything you wait for?" he inquired, meeting that fierce gaze with his cold eyes. "Ah, I had forgotten, my people may drive the carriage round—please say as much."

Agnes left the room, biting her lips till they glowed again, and with her hand clenched in impatient fury. As she closed the door, General Harrington laid down his book with an impatient gesture.

CHAPTER XXX.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

LINA could not rest. She went to her room, but it seemed so changed, so unlike her old home, that a terror, that was almost insanity, fell upon her. The rich blue curtains, to her excited mind, looked sombre against their underwaves of frost-like lace, and her bed, with its snowy canopy, now overclouded with damask, had a deadly whiteness about it, that made her shrink within herself, as if some leprosy had fallen upon her, which forbade her ever again to approach a thing so pure.

Lina crept into this room sad and disheartened; looking wearily around, she cowered down on the carpet in the farthest corner, and sat watching the door, as if she expected some enemy to come in and drive her forth. At the least sound in the hall she would start and shrink back with a moan upon her white lips, but she shed no tears, and her look was rather one of affright than of the intense grief which had overpowered her while in the presence of General Harrington.

At that moment there was a hurried tread upon the staircase. Every pulse in Lina's heart throbbed wildly, and she sat leaning eagerly forward with a half-expectant, half-frightened air, as the steps paused before her door. A low, quick knock caused her to start from the floor. She looked wildly round, as if seeking some means of escape, then sunk against the wall, while her whole frame trembled with agitation. The knock was repeated, and she covered her face with her hands, uttering a low, shuddering moan. A third time that impatient summons shook her form as with a convulsion, and when a voice, whose lightest tone possessed the power to move her inmost soul, reached her ear in an eager whisper, she rose again and stood upright, transfixed by that voice, which had never before met her ear without filling her whole being with gentle pleasure.

"Lina—Lina—are you there?"

It was Ralph who spoke. Lina gasped for breath and wrung her hands desperately, like one who entreats for mercy, and feels that it is all in vain.

"Lina, answer me—are you there?"

"I am here," she replied, in a low, unnatural tone.

"Open the door, Lina—I want to speak to you."

"Ralph, I cannot!"

"Cannot! What ails you, Lina? *Do* open the door. Let me speak to you for a moment."

She staggered feebly to the door, then with a quick motion, the hurried resolve of which was strangely at variance with her previous hesitation, flung it open, and stood before the young man.

"Why, Lina, have you forgotten your promise?" he began eagerly; then, checked himself, as he raised his eyes to her face, and marked the wildness of her glance, and ghastly pallor of her cheek. "Lina, what is the matter? Are you ill? Tell me, Lina, what ails you?" He took her hands in his, with a manner in which the impetuosity of a youthful lover, and the kind, protecting air of a brother, were strangely mingled.

"Answer me, Lina, my own Lina."

But Lina had no words; when her eyes met his, the tears which during her lonely vigil had refused to flow, burst forth, and she buried her head in her hands, sobbing like a frightened child. Ralph folded his arms about her, and drew her back into the chamber, gathering her closely to his heart, as if to reassure her by his protecting presence. He did not question her again for several moments, but forcing her head gently down on his shoulder, he strove to soothe her with whispered words, until she gathered strength to check her tears, and drew herself from him, striving all the time to appear more composed.

"Now tell me, Lina, what does this mean?"

She shook her head sadly, murmuring:

"Nothing, Ralph, nothing."

"Do not trifle with me, Lina. Something must have occurred to cause this agitation. Can you not trust me?"

"There is nothing the matter! I was ill, and—and cried without knowing why."

"You cannot deceive me with an excuse like that. Has any one hurt your feelings! *do* tell me what has happened."

But Lina only shook her head, and choked back the despair which rose to her lips. He would have taken her in his arms again, but the movement and the touch of his hand roused her to the fearful consciousness that she had no longer a right to seek consolation in his companionship. She broke away, terrified and oppressed, with a feeling of guilt at her momentary forgetfulness.

"Leave me, Ralph, I wish—I need to be alone."

"You wish—you *need* to be alone! This is very strange, Lina! Will you give me no explanation? Have I offended you—tell me what I can have done? You know that I would rather die ten thousand deaths than cause you a moment's pain.

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"Do not speak so, Ralph; do not torture me by such fears. You have never wounded me by word or look—you have always been kind and generous."

"Thank you! thank you! Then tell me what pains you! Darling, darling, you cannot know how I suffer to see you in this state. I must have an explanation. Lina, you have no right to refuse it."

"I can give none! Ralph, leave me, I must be alone. Another time I may be able to converse, but now"—she broke off abruptly, wringing her hands in impotent despair, while the great tears fell over them, like the last heavy drops of a spent shower. "Leave me, Ralph, leave me!" she exclaimed, with a gesture of insane agony.

"I cannot understand this! Can this be Lina—my own dear little Lina, always so confiding and truthful? Since my earliest recollection have you not known my every thought and wish—been as familiar with my heart as you were with your own? This is the first time that the slightest shadow has fallen upon your mind against me, yet there you stand, separated from me by some fearful sorrow, to which I can obtain no clue."

"Do not speak so, Ralph! I repeat that nothing troubles me much! Will you not believe me?"

"I never doubted your word before, Lina; but now—forgive me—I feel that you are concealing something terrible from me. When I left you, this morning, you promised to walk with me, and I hurried here the moment I was free, longing to take a ramble over the hills—will you not go?"

"Not to-day. I cannot—I am ill."

"Do not seek to excuse yourself! Say at once that you do not choose to go."

"You misunderstand me, Ralph, indeed you do."

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"Forgive me, Lina; I am so maddened by the sight of your tears, that I scarcely know what I am saying. Only confide in me—can you not trust me, your lover, your betrothed?"

"God help me!" broke from Lina's white lips, but the exclamation was unheeded by the young man in his agitation.

"Have you a desire to hide anything from me—can you love, when you refuse to trust me."

"Ralph, leave me! If you have any mercy, go away, and let me be alone." In her frenzy she threw up her arms with a gesture which seemed to him almost one of repulsion. He looked at her for a moment, his heart bursting with the first revelation of its woe, then muttering—

"Lina, has it come to this?" he sprang from the room, and the sound of his flying footsteps on the stair recalled her to a consciousness of what had befallen her.

She strove to utter his name, but it died husky and low in her parched throat. She must fly—anywhere to be out in the air, for the atmosphere of that close chamber seemed stifling her. She caught up a shawl which lay on a table, and rushed from the room and from the house. A sudden thought, which seemed instinct rather than reason, had made her start thus madly away to search for old Ben, the honest protector of her childhood, hoping that from him she could gather some explanation of the secret that seemed crushing the life from her frame.

THE SLAVE AND HER MASTER.

[191] THE carriage which conveyed General Harrington, went at a rapid speed, till it entered the city. The General seemed unconscious of his unusual progress, and was lost in what seemed a disagreeable reverie, till he awoke amid a crash of omnibuses, and a whirl of carriages in Broadway. Here he checked the driver, and leaving the carriage, bade him proceed to the club, and await his return there. He paused upon the side-walk, till the man was out of sight, then turning into a cross street, he walked rapidly forward into a neighborhood that he had seldom, if ever, visited before.

The dwelling he sought, proved to be a common brick house, without any peculiar feature to distinguish it from some twenty others, which completed a block, that stood close upon the street, and had a dusty, worn appearance, without a picturesque feature to attract attention.

General Harrington advanced up the steps, after a little disgustful hesitation, and rang the bell. The door was promptly opened, and an ordinary maid-servant stood in the entrance. The General inquired for some person in a low voice, and the girl made room for him to pass, with a nod of the head.

The hall was dark and gloomy, lighted only by narrow sashes each side of the door, and the whole building so far, presented nothing calculated to remove the distaste with which the fastidious old man had entered it.

The servant opened a door with some caution, closed it behind her, and after a little delay, returned, motioning with her hand that General Harrington should enter the room she had just left.

[192] With this rather singular summons the woman disappeared, and General Harrington entered the door she had pointed out. It was a large room, lighted after the usual fashion in front, and with a deep long window in the lower end. This magnificent window occupied the entire end of the room, save where the corners were rendered convex by two immense mirrors, which formed a beautiful finish to the rich mouldings of the casement, and curved gracefully back to the wall, making that end of the apartment almost semicircular.

Hangings of pale, straw-colored silk, brocaded with clusters of flowers, in which blue and pink predominated, gave a superb effect to the walls, and from the ceilings, a half-dozen cupids, beautifully painted in fresco, seemed showering roses upon the visitor, as he passed under. The carpet was composed of a vast medallion pattern upon a white ground, scattered over with bouquets a little more defined and gorgeous than those upon the walls, as if the blossoms had grown smaller and more delicate as they crept upward toward the exquisite ceiling. The front windows were entirely muffled by draperies of rich orange damask, lined with white, and with a silvery sheen running through the pattern, while curtains of the same warm material, fell on each side the bay window, giving it the appearance of a tent, open, and yet, to a certain degree, secluded, for a fall of lace swept from the cornice, hanging like a veil of woven frost-work before the glass, rendering every thing beyond indistinct, but dreamily beautiful.

General Harrington was surprised by the air of almost oriental magnificence which pervaded this apartment.

This room was not only in powerful contrast with the exterior of the dwelling, but it possessed an air of tropical splendor that would have surprised the General in any place. Divans, such as are seldom found out of an eastern palace, but slightly raised from the floor, and surmounted with cushions heavily embroidered with gold, ran more than half around it. A few pictures, gorgeous and showy, but of little value, hung upon the walls; and there was some display of statuary, equally deficient in ideal beauty.

[193] The light which fell upon General Harrington, was soft and dreamy imbued with a faint tinge of greenish gold, like that which the sunshine leaves when it penetrates the foliage of a hemlock grove in spring. For the bay window opened into a broad balcony, open in summer, but sheeted in from the front by sashes, so arranged that the glass seemed to roll downwards, in waves of crystal, to the floor. This unique conservatory was crowded with the rarest plants, in full blossom, that swept their perfume in through the open window, penetrated the floating lace, and filled that end of the apartment with the glow of their blooming clusters.

The singular beauty of this scene—the quiet so profound, broken only by the bell-like dropping of a fountain—and the twitter of birds, hung in gilded cages, among the blossoms, had an overpowering charm even to a man so *blasé* as the General. He paused in astonishment, looking around with pleasant interest—for an instant, forgetful of the person he was seeking. But, to a man so accustomed to magnificence, this forgetfulness was but momentary, and with a quiet and almost derisive smile, he muttered:

"Upon my life, the creature is either witch or fairy, if this is really her home!"

He was interrupted by a sound, as of one moving upon a cushioned seat.

The light was so dim at the upper end of the room, that General Harrington had supposed himself alone, till the rustle of silk drew his attention to a lady rising from the divan, who came

toward him with a sweeping motion, like some tropical bird disturbed in its nest.

The General paused, and stood gazing upon her as she advanced, irresolute and uncertain; for the whole place was so different to anything he had expected to find, that for a moment he was bewildered.

[194] The lady advanced into the light, calmly and proudly, and with a gleam in her eyes, as if she enjoyed his astonishment. Her dress was of purple silk, wrought with clusters of gold-tinted flowers, that scintillated and gleamed as she moved out of the shadows; her raven hair, arranged in heavy bandeaux on each side her face, was surmounted by a cashmere scarf of pale green, which was carelessly knotted on one side of her head, and fell in a mass of fringe and embroidery on her left shoulder. The flowing waves of her robe swept the carpet as she moved, and the undulations of her magnificent person, were like the movements of a leopard in its native forest. There was neither fairness nor youth in her person, and yet the large, oriental eyes, so velvety and black, had a power of beauty in them, that any man must have acknowledged; and there was a creamy softness of complexion, a peach-like bloom of the cheek, dusky but glowing—that harmonized with the gorgeous richness of her dress and surroundings. The woman stood before her visitor, her proud figure stooping slightly forward, and her eyes downcast, waiting for him to speak.

The General gazed on her a moment in silence, but a quiet smile of recognition stole to his lips; and, with an air, half-patronizing, half-pleased, he at last held out his hand.

"Zillah!"

The woman's hand trembled as she touched his; her head was uplifted for an instant, and an exulting glance shot from those strange eyes, bright as scintillations from a diamond.

"I was afraid you would not come," she said, gently.

"Why, Zillah?"

"Because men do not often like to meet those who remind them of broken ties."

The General slightly waved his hand with a half dissenting gesture, and a gratified expression stole over his countenance, answered by a sudden gleam in that strange woman's eyes; for she read in that very look an intimation that her former power was not wholly extinguished.

"How comes it that you are here, Zillah?" he asked, glancing around the room. "This is a singular place to find you in."

[195] "You are astonished to see me here? as if I were a slave yet. Was it strange that I, a free woman, longed to leave the places which reminded me of the past, to see and learn something of the world? But, there was another and more important reason—had I not a child and a mother's heart longing to behold her offspring?"

"Zillah, tell me truly, is this thing real? is the girl we call Lina French your child?"

"Have I not said it," replied the woman, regarding him stealthily from under her half-closed lashes. "Why should I attempt to deceive you? it would gain me nothing."

"That is true; but how did it happen that you abandoned her?"

The woman lifted her face, with a sudden flush of the forehead—

"You sold me, made me another man's slave: me, me!" She paused, with a struggle, as if some suppressed passion choked her; but directly her self-possession returned; the flush died from her face, and she drooped into her former attitude, looking downward as before. "But that I always was—a slave, and the daughter of a slave. Your child, though unknown and unacknowledged, better that it died than lived my life over again, cursed with the proud Anglo-Saxon blood, debased by the African taint, that, if it exists but in the slightest degree, poisons all the rest."

"Zillah, you speak bitterly. Was it my fault that you were born a slave on the plantation of my friend; that your complexion was fair, and your beauty so remarkable, that few men could have detected the shadows on your forehead. Surely, you had no cause to complain of too much hardship as my servant?"

For an instant, the haughty lip of the woman writhed like a serpent in its venom, struggling to keep back the bitter words that burned upon them. Then her face settled into comparative calm again, and she said, in a tone of gentle reproach, "But you sold me!"

[196] "I was compelled to it, Zillah. It was impossible to keep you on the plantation. James Harrington became your owner on the death of his mother, and you know how terribly he was prejudiced against you. It was the only command that he made; everything else he left to me; but here, here he was imperative. All that a kind and obliging master could do, I accomplished in spite of him. You had your own choice of masters, Zillah; that, at least, I secured to you."

"A choice of masters!" repeated the woman, turning pale with intense feeling. "What did I care about a choice of masters, when you sold me? Had you given me to the grave, it would have been Heaven to the years that followed. You sold me without warning—coldly sent an order to the agent, and I was taken away. Your own child was the slave of another man."

"But you kept me in ignorance, Zillah; besides, I had been married again. A northern man, I was, of course, desirous to live in the North. What could I do?"

"But the other slaves were set free. Master James provided means for those who wished it, to emigrate to Liberia; a few went, more remained of choice. No servant was kept on the estate who did not desire it. I alone was sold."

"But you know how the young man detested you; he never could be persuaded that your presence in her sick room, had not an evil influence on his mother. In short Zillah, after her death he seemed to think of little else."

The woman turned deadly pale, as the sick room of her old mistress was mentioned. A shudder ran through her frame, and she sat down upon a neighboring divan, gasping for breath. General Harrington watched this strange emotion with keen interest; he did not comprehend its source, but it brought up vague suspicions that had in former years passed like shadows across his brain, when the sickness and death of his first wife was a recent event.

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"Zillah," he said, seating himself on the divan by her side, "you turn pale—you shiver—what does this mean?"

The woman sat up, forcing herself to look into his questioning eyes.

"I was surprised at your blindness, shocked at the duplicity of this man, James Harrington. So he excuses his hatred of me by this pretence, and you believe him. I will speak now—why should I be silent longer? Listen to me, General Harrington. It was because I knew his secret, that James Harrington hated me. He loved the woman you have married, for whose tranquillity I was sold to a new master."

"Very possible," replied the General, with a complacent smile. "I should have been sorry to give my name to any woman whom a man of taste could know, without loving. Of course, the young gentleman, like many others, was dying of envy when that remarkable woman became my wife."

Zillah's eyes flashed, and she turned pale, lip and forehead. A bitter laugh broke away with the words, as she said,

"But she loved *him*—adored him, rather."

The General was moved now, his self-love was all up in arms; he was evidently getting furious.

"Zillah, this is one of your jealous dreams. You have no proof!"

"Master—let me call you so once more—among other benefits which came to me through your kindness, I was taught to read and write—that was a key to much else that I learned afterwards. In a vellum covered book, which Miss Mabel always kept locked with a little golden heart, I saw more than proof of what I say. She lost the key from her watch-chain, one night, and I found it. The book is probably destroyed now, but if it existed, I should need no other proof of what I know to be true!"

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"Indeed," said the General, prolonging the word, thoughtfully, "Indeed!"

"Are you going?" exclaimed the woman, as he arose from the divan.

"Yes, Zillah, I have left some important papers in my library that may be disturbed. In a few days I will see you again."

Zillah smiled a soft, exulting smile, but she did not allow it to brighten her whole face till General Harrington had left the room.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE BOAT-HOUSE.

DOWN upon the shore, so built as to form a picturesque feature in the landscape, stood an old boat-house, in which Ben Benson made his home when out of active service at the Mansion. Here the stout old seaman kept his fishing-tackle, his rifle, and a thousand miscellaneous things that appertained to his various avocations, for Ben was not only a naturalist and philosopher at large, but a mechanic of no ordinary skill. He not only devised his own fishing-flies, wove his own shad-nets, and game-baskets, but performed the duties of a ship-carpenter whenever his boats got out of order, or a new one was wanted for the river.

On the day of Lina's great sorrow, Ben was standing in front of the boat-house, superintending a kettle of pitch that was boiling over a fire of dried logs and bark. The boat which had been almost torn to pieces on the night when Mabel Harrington so narrowly escaped a terrible death,

was now turned upside down, and Ben was preparing to calk the bottom and repair the injuries it had received.

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Lina saw him as she came down the avenue, and her pace quickened. The thin shawl she had flung about her was fluttering in the wind, but there was a fever in heart and brain, which rendered her insensible to the blast which swept the curls back from her burning forehead, and rustled through her light garments. The little Italian grey-hound, which had been for months her special pet, had followed her, unperceived, striving in vain to win some sign of attention from the distracted girl.

Lina flew down the bank, and Ben looked up as the sound of her footsteps warned him who it was that approached.

"I knowed that it was you, Miss Lina," he said, while every feature in his rough face softened, as he looked toward her. "Sakes alive! what brought ye out here such a day as this—this wind is enough to snap you right in two."

"I don't mind the cold, Ben; I wanted to talk to you."

"Wal, if there's any one thing Ben Benson kin do for you, you've only jest to mention it, and consider it done a'ready."

"I know it, Ben, and that is why I come. I wanted to ask you something."

"Why, you're shakin' worse nor a poplar leaf, and you're as white as if you hadn't a drop of blood in your precious little body. What on arth's the matter with you, Lina? See that ere dog; now, ain't he a pretty specimen of an animal exotic to be out of a hot house in such a wind as this."

Ben gathered the shivering little creature to his bosom with one hand, snugly enveloping him in the capacious folds of his pilot jacket, while with the other he seized Lina's hands, and leaning back against the boat, stood looking at her with a half-pitying, half-affectionate glance, that was indescribably comic and touching.

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"I should like to know what Mister Ralph was a-thinkin' on, to let you come out alone sich a day as this."

That name made Lina shudder, and a sudden spasm contracted her features.

"No one knew that I was coming out. Oh, Ben! I want to ask something—do not refuse to tell me, or I shall die! How came I here—where was I born—oh, who am I, Ben?"

"Sakes alive! How she goes on! One question at a time, if *you* please, Miss Lina! What on arth's been putting sich ideas into your little head? Now no circumwentin'—speak the truth, if you be a woman."

"Oh, Ben, I have always wondered and longed to know something about myself, and of late, this desire has increased. I can think of nothing else. Do not put me off—I shall die if I am kept longer in this suspense."

Ben began to hug the pretty dog more and more tenderly to his bosom, as if it was that which needed comforting, and not the poor girl before him. At last, turning himself uneasily about, like a man disturbed by a sudden recurrence of painful memories.

"Now, don't go to gettin' oneasy idees into your little head; there's nothin' wuss for the feminine constitution. When you're well enough, let yerself alone, and be satisfied."

"Oh, Ben, don't—don't! You are my friend—you have always been kind to me; do not turn from me, now, when I am tortured by these strange doubts. There is no one else of whom I can ask an explanation, and you cannot refuse it! I am so very, very, unhappy, Ben—dear, good Ben!"

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"There, there, Miss Lina!" Ben muttered, hoarsely, patting her hand with his hard palm; then, clasping it again in his huge fingers, and looking at it earnestly, as if it had been a delicately wrought sea-shell. "Don't say no more—now don't—when Ben Benson gives advice, 'taint without a reason. Now, you just listen to me, and then run away, and don't get no more tantrums in that little head o' yours. Hain't the madam, Mrs. Harrington, always been like a mother to you—hain't she treated you as if you had been her own flesh and blood—do you want to make her unhappy now, little gal, do you worry her about such things?"

"You know I would rather die, Ben!"

"I do believe you would, Miss Lina, I raly do! But there ain't no question about dyin'—you've only to be patient and good, as is nat'ral to you—take things as they come, and that's enough. I ain't a goin' to have you ask me no questions, and I know you won't do it."

"But, Ben."

"Hush!" said Ben, pressing her hands hard between his broad palms, and dropping them tenderly downward. "I can't listen to another word of this 'ere. It ain't of no use," and with a gesture of stubborn sorrow, Ben walked deliberately into his domain, and closing the door, bolted it against Lina, leaving her shivering in the cold.

Lina looked ruefully at the closed door, and her heart sunk as she heard the heavy bolt drawn

within. The last faint hope died out then; and, without a word, she turned and walked away into the woods, desolate beyond comparison with any former moment of her life. The wind grew sharp, and whistled through the light indoor garments with which she had recklessly come forth; her lips turned purple with cold; her hands were so numb, that they fell apart as she attempted to clasp them; the tears rushed warm from her eyes, and dropped away, frozen, like hail: and yet poor Lina struggled on, thinking the cold only another pang of anguish, which it was her duty to bear.

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CHAPTER XXXIII.

GENERAL HARRINGTON READS THE VELLUM BOOK.

GENERAL HARRINGTON was alone in his library. His hat and cloak lay in a heap on a sofa near the door, an indication of unwonted perturbation, for with him, a misplaced article was a proof of excitement which he was always ready to condemn. His dress was a good deal disturbed, and his hair disordered, as if he had threaded it more than once with the white fingers that now clasped the open covers of Mabel's Journal which he was eagerly reading.

It was almost painful to see the excitement under which that old man labored. The book trembled in his grasp, his lips clung more and more firmly together, his blue eyes shone vividly from under his bent brows, yet from beneath all, there stole out a gleam of triumph, as if he were weaving some crafty web of underthought out from the angry tumult with which his soul labored. There was no sorrow in his look, no feeling of sadness or regret for the greatest loss man ever experienced, that of a good woman's love. With him vanity was the grand passion. Touch that and he became sensitive as a boy of fifteen. In all things else he was invulnerable.

And yet Mabel's Journal might have touched deeper feelings than her husband was capable of knowing. Another man would have been roused to compassion by the fragments of thought, sometimes artless, sometimes passionate, that seemed to have dropped fresh from her heart upon the pages he was reading.

He opened the vellum book at the beginning, for with all his impatience, the methodical habits of his life prevailed even then, and at first, there was little to excite more than a strong curiosity. But as he read on, the perturbation we have described in his countenance, became evident. He turned over the leaves violently, glancing here and there, as if eager to devour his mortification at a single dash. The cleft heart, whose breaking had given him access to poor Mabel's secrets, struck against his hand as he closed the book, and opened it again at random. He tore the pretty trinket away, and dashed it into the grate, and a curse broke from his shut teeth, as he saw it fall glowing among the hot embers. Then he turned back to the beginning, and began to read more deliberately, allowing his anger to cool and harden, like lava, above his smouldering wrath.

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Thus it was that Mabel commenced her journal.

"A letter from my guardian. This is indeed an event. A year ago he wrote me a long letter of advice, touching my studies, and giving a world of counsel regarding my deportment. That cold, half-dictatorial, half-fatherly letter, seemed forced from his heart by a sense of duty. This is brief, elegant and kind. He is satisfied with my progress at school, and hears with pleasure, of the improvement in my person—this means, probably, that I am not near so plain as he fancied me. They tell him I have a sort of fire and animation of the countenance, more effective than perfection of outline could render me. I wonder if this be true—of course it is impossible to judge of one's self in a point which depends so much upon the feelings. There is no animation in a hurried or tedious toilet, and the beauty he speaks of is never given back by the mirror. To my vision, now, this is a rather dull and uninteresting face. I wonder if it ever does light up into anything like beauty. Some one must have said this to my guardian. Could it have been the young heir of Neathcote? He did not seem to look at me at all, when he called at the school and I was frightened to death by his great, earnest eyes; if my guardian proves half as imposing, I shall be afraid to look up in his presence.

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"There is something strange in the situation of my guardian. He is considered one of the most eloquent men in America, and by his marriage with the widow of a cousin, three or four times removed, is the master of great wealth. But every dollar of it came by his wife, on whom the son was left entirely dependent as he is now. They tell me that General Harrington is a liberal step-father and gives the young man no reason to complain, but it seems a little hard that all his father's great wealth should have been swept into the possession of a comparative stranger; for, though these two men bear one common name, and are remotely of the same blood, they met for the first time at the wedding out of which sprang these present rather singular relations.

[205] "There is another strange thing about this. Mrs. Harrington can only dispose of the property by will. She has no power to alienate it during her life, but can bequeath it where she likes. So if the General should outlive her, this young man may be utterly disinherited; a hard case it seems to me, for the lady is very gentle and yielding, so devoted to her handsome husband, that his faintest wish is a law to her. All this has been told me from time to time, leaving such an impression of injustice on my mind, that I fairly began to pity the young man before I saw him. But after that, the idea of pity never entered my mind. Millions could not enhance the nobility of his presence, or make him one shade more interesting. His mother is said to be very beautiful. She should be, she should be! But how foolishly I am writing about a person whom I have never seen but once, and who seemed to have taken no interest in that meeting, except to give me a letter from his Step-father, which will alter my whole course of life. The young gentleman himself is only passing this way on his travels westward.

"So, I am to start at once, now that my education is completed—completed; I like the term—as if education were not always progressive, rounded off by death only. Well, at least, I am grateful to leave this tiresome routine of lessons, and yet there is something of mournfulness in this abrupt entrance into life.

"I have just opened the window, and would gladly look forth upon the morning. But this screen of Cherokee roses hangs before me like a curtain, shedding fragrance from every fold. In parting its clusters with my hands, tenderly—for to my fancy, flowers are sensitive and recoil from a rude touch—the dew that has been all night asleep in their heart, bathes my hands with its sweet rain, and through the opening comes a gush of odor from the great magnolia that reaches out its boughs so near my window, that I could lean forth and shake the drops from those snowy chalices, as they gleam and tremble in the bright air.

"What a beautiful world is this. The very breath one draws leaves a delicious languor behind it, a languor that falls upon the senses and gives back to the whole being a dreamy quietude that makes the mere effort of existence an exquisite enjoyment. And yet there is a feeling of strange loneliness in it all. It is pleasant to be happy, but oh! how more than pleasant to have some one near, to whom all these charming sensations can be expressed. I think one is never quite content alone, but then who ever is really content?

"How exquisitely pure every thing seems; my little chamber here, with its delicate matting and snowy draperies, looks like the nest of a ring-dove, it is so white and quiet. The sweet visions which visit me here are melodious as the warbling of the young bird, when the early morning wakens it, as the dawn has just aroused me.

[206] "I have been now three days beneath my guardian's roof. Dear Neathcote, I love it already for its singular beauty! I shall never forget the strange feelings which crowded my bosom, as the carriage passed through the park gates and rolled slowly up the broad avenue. I threw open the window and leaned out with the eagerness of a child to catch a sight of my new home. When, as a sudden turn in the road brought the front of the mansion in full view, I shrunk into my seat again, trembling from a vague fear, which had as much of joy as pain in it.

"I grew fairly dizzy and faint with excitement, as the carriage paused before the entrance, and I saw my guardian waiting on the steps to greet me, standing up so stately and proud, with his wife by his side, her sweet face lighted up with a sort of friendly curiosity, to see what her unknown visitor would be like.

"It was not embarrassment that I felt, it was a deep, strange emotion for which I could not account. It seemed as if in crossing that threshold I was to bid an eternal farewell to the repose of my past life. Like a flash of lightning those thoughts swept in a tumult through my brain as I descended from the carriage, and went up the steps to meet my guardian, and his wife, who came forward to welcome me.

"I shall always love to look back upon that arrival!

[207] "Everything was so homelike and comfortable, in spite of the magnificence which reigned around! My guardian's rather cold face brightened into a smile that rendered him very handsome, and his wife greeted me as if I had been indeed her child, returning home after a long absence. Then I caught sight of a woman's face at the window—a servant evidently, yet there was a singular look in her great black eyes, as she raised them boldly to my face, which almost terrified me. Neither my guardian nor Mrs. Harrington appeared to see her, but I wondered how she ventured to thrust herself forward in that manner, on the arrival of a stranger.

"It was she who followed me to my chamber, when Mrs. Harrington conducted me there, yet she offered no assistance, until her mistress bade her attend to my toilet; then she obeyed, searching my face all the while from under her black eyelashes. Yet her singularity was probably an exaggeration of my own fancy, for she seems quiet and well-behaved, though a little sullen. I am glad she is not to be my attendant, for there is certainly an evil look in her eyes, whenever she regards me, and I could never feel quite comfortable at night if I knew that she were any where near.

"The girl had just left my rooms after arranging the toilet, which was already in order, as if for an excuse for the intrusion. She cannot be a slave, for though a little dark, I can trace nothing of the African blood in her face; there is a glossy ripple in the blackness of her hair, but that is a beauty which any woman might envy. No, no, she cannot be a slave. Her singular style of beauty forbids the thought; besides, she is not an uneducated person, and there is a certain subtle grace

in her movements that I cannot resist admiring, and yet loathe. This is strange. Why is the girl so constantly in my thoughts? Yesterday I spoke to Mrs. Harrington about her, for my curiosity became irresistible. She is a slave, a new purchase of Gen. Harrington's, and the personal servant of his wife. Mrs. Harrington smiled in her usual contented way, and gently complained of the girl's uselessness and studied inattention, but she seems unused to opposition of any kind, and languidly allows even her servants to control her wishes. This fiery slave—for, with all her stillness, she *is* fiery—overpowers the gentle nature of her mistress, and really seems to drink up her strength with the glances of those great black eyes.

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"How indifferent proud men sometimes are to the beauty of their inferiors! now, this girl Zillah is constantly charming even my half-repulsed admiration by her rare loveliness, yet I have scarcely seen General Harrington turn his eyes upon her face during the whole time that I have been in his house, but then, his devotion to Mrs. Harrington is so perfect, he evidently has no eyes for any one else.

"How long is it since I opened my journal? Three months, I really believe, and not a word of record. Even now, when the world becomes more real, I feel like one aroused very softly from dreaming among the angels. How would I write and see emblazoned upon paper, doomed, perhaps, frail as it is, to outlive me, thoughts that even yet are so intangible, that, like the butterflies that I used to run after when a child, they are constantly eluding my grasp, and as constantly brightening all the atmosphere around me. Is it possible that so many weeks have gone by since *he* came home? It seems like a prolonged sunset, when the summer is in prime, and one trembles to see a single tint fade from the sky, or a single flower overshadowed, lest it should depart forever. Can it be this heavenly atmosphere which imparts to the whole being a languor so delightful, mingled with that sweet unrest which only wakes you to a keener relish of existence? I have been striving to interrogate my own heart, and ask many questions which it cannot answer, because the whole world here is so new and strange, that it is impossible to discriminate between the luxurious sweetness of material life and those quieter impulses that I have known hitherto.

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"I remember the delight with which I first looked out upon this lovely scene, but with all the novelty and perfect freedom of a heart ready to enjoy the beautiful, I never before felt enjoyment so intense. I come to my room at night and lie down to rest, jealous of the sleep that swallows up so many hours of happiness. I am fond of dreaming no longer, for visions that the angels send are no compensation for the lost thoughts that sleep steal from me.

"I sat down with a determination to write of events, and as ever dwell only upon feelings. After all, what has happened? Another member has been added to the family circle, that is all, and yet, what a change his coming has made. His presence seems to pervade the whole house. The servants look more cheerful when he speaks to them. His mother brightens up, and throws off her languor as she hears his tread upon the veranda. Even the General's courtly politeness is toned down into something like affection, and all his artificial stateliness takes its natural level, when contrasted by the simple dignity of this young man's nature. Indeed, until James Harrington came, I had no idea how superficial and untrue was the character of my guardian. But now, with the pure gold of this fine heart as a test, I can more clearly see the entire selfishness which lies under his elaborate manners.

"'James will be here to-day,' he said one morning, while we all lingered around the breakfast table, 'and his company, I trust, will render your new home more pleasant than we have been able to make it.'

"'He will be like an elder brother to you,' said Mrs. Harrington, smoothing the lace ruffles over her fair arm, and turning her soft eyes upon me with a look of gentle affection, 'and you—oh, he cannot help liking you.'

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"Why did the blood rush into my face so hotly? Why did the lashes droop over my eyes, and the tears spring up beneath them? Was it that I am so completely an orphan, that this loving hint of brotherly companionship made me more lonely than harshness could have done? I cannot tell; but at this word 'brother'—utterly strange to my life hitherto—my heart made a sudden recoil, and I could scarcely keep from weeping outright. General Harrington lifted his eyes to mine, with evident surprise, while the little white hand of his wife crept into my lap, and softly pressed mine. That moment a horse dashed up to the door, and young Harrington came into the breakfast-room; his fine eyes full of eager affection; his cheeks in a glow, and with the most beautiful smile I ever saw on mortal lips breaking over his mouth.

"'Mother, mother!' he said, coming toward Mrs. Harrington, with both hands extended. 'I rose at midnight, and have ridden fast ever since, in order to surprise you at the breakfast-table.'

"Mrs. Harrington started up; a flush stole over her face, and for once her eyes sparkled before they filled with pleasant tears. This arrival was, indeed, a surprise to her.

"As he was about to release her hands from his clasp, she drew him towards me, and said pleasantly:

"'This is Mabel Crawford—the General's ward.'

"He took my hand, and an expression of surprise or interest rose to his face as he felt my poor fingers quiver in his; while my face was burning with a consciousness of feelings more tumultuous by far, than the occasion could warrant. He held my hand a moment longer than was

necessary to a cordial welcome, and, for an instant, seemed to wonder at my perturbation; then his features relaxed into the most kindly expression I ever saw, and some words of welcome fell upon my ears, but to this hour I cannot recollect what they were; the sound entered my heart, and that was enough.

"General Harrington seemed to watch us closely, for I saw a smile creep over his face, as if my awkwardness rather amused him; while his lady stood by, regarding us with her soft, brown eyes, which were beaming with a thousand affectionate welcomes.

[211] "I think it was from that moment this strange happiness of heart commenced, which has made Neathcote seem so much like a pleasant corner of paradise to me. I never knew what companionship was before. If I wish to read, he seems ever to have the book uppermost in his mind that meets my own thought. If I am restless—and this mood grows upon me of late—he is ready to gallop by my side down to the quarters, where I am never weary of watching the queer little negroes at their play, or through the magnolia groves that envelope us with a cloud of perfume as we sweep beneath their branches. In fact, I have no wish from morning to night, which Harrington does not either share or anticipate; no brother could be more kind; and yet it gives me a strange pang to feel that all this—

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AMONG THE WATER LILIES.

"I LEFT off with a half-finished sentence. Mrs. Harrington's maid broke in upon me at the moment with a message from the young master, as she calls him. In a hollow among the hills he has found a pond of water-lilies, and I must hasten to see them unfold their snowy hearts to the morning sun, after sleeping all night upon the lake.

"Will I go? Surely one of those lotus flowers never thrilled a more grateful response to the wave that sways it, than my heart gives back to his wish—will I go? Those sleeping buds will not answer the sunbeams that kiss them into another day of bloom, more gladly than I take the happiness he offers. I have been restless and sad all night, and my heart leaps to this new prospect of pleasure, as a bird flutters forth from the shadowy leaves where it has spent the dark hours.

[212] "The lotus pond was like a fairy lake, when we reached it; the banks were festooned and garlanded with wild vines, prairie roses, and yellow jessamines, overrunning whole hedgerows of swamp magnolias, whose blended odor floated like a mist over the waters. Here and there an oak, with long, hoary moss bearding its limbs, lifted whole masses of this entangled foliage into the air, and flung it back again in a thousand garlands and blooming streamers, that rippled dreamily in the waters of the lake. As we came up, an oriole had lighted on one of these pendant branches, and poured a flood of song over us as we passed down to the boat, which lay in a pretty cove ready to receive us.

"An old negro sat in the boat, lazily waiting our approach, with his face bowed upon his brawny bosom, and the sun striking through the branches upon a head that seemed covered with crisp frost, age had so completely whitened his hair. A word from the young master roused the slumbering old man; and, with a broad grin of delight, he proceeded to arrange the crimson cushions, and trim his sails, making haste to put forth on our cruise along the shore, which was starred with opening lotus blossoms, and green with their broad-floating leaves.

"It made my heart thrill with a sort of pain, as our boat ploughed through this exquisite sheet of blossoms—for, as I have said before, it has always seemed to me like uprooting a tender thought when a flower is torn from its stem. I said something like this, as Harrington laid a handful of the open flowers in my lap. He looked at me steadily for a moment—muttered that it was a strange fancy—but plucked no more water-lilies that day. After a time, when the old man, thinking to please us, commenced to tear them up by the roots, Harrington rebuked him for his roughness, and bade him trim the boat for a sail across the lake.

[213] "I wonder why it is, that, when we feel deepest, a disposition to silence always holds the senses in thrall. I did not speak half a dozen words, as our boat sped like a bird across the lake; and yet my heart was full of happiness, for Harrington had his dark eyes fixed with a sort of dreamy earnestness on my face all the time. A consciousness so strange, and almost delirious, seized upon me, that I could neither look up nor speak, but bowed my head over the blossoms in my lap, whispering to them what had never been uttered in words, and never perhaps, may be.

"While we sat thus in mute happiness, with nothing but the ripple of the boat to break the exquisite joy of our silence, the oriole began to sing again, and his mate answered back the song from across the lake. I looked up, and met his eyes: a flush came to his forehead, and I felt the warm blood burning over my cheeks and forehead. His lips parted, and for one instant he took my

hand, but only to drop it among the cold water-lilies again, as if some distressing thought had aroused him to painful consciousness. Why was this? how came it that he relinquished my hand so abruptly? Was he shocked with my upward glances—did he think my recognition of his thoughts unmaidenly?

"The orioles ceased to sing just then, and a sullen cloud came sweeping over us, which broke upon the pond in a sudden squall of wind. Before the old man could reef his sail, it gave way, and fluttered out, like the wounded wing of a bird, bearing our boat with it. The first plunge cast me forward at Harrington's feet; he caught me to his bosom, pressing me there with one arm, while he drew in the sail with the other.

"The wind rose high, tearing in a tornado across the pond; but, I am sure—sure as I am of the beating of my own heart, that Harrington trembled from other causes than the danger we were in. Twice he bent his lips to my face, but checked himself with murmurs which the cruel wind carried from me.

[214] "I do not know how we reached the shore, or why it was that we walked in such profound silence homeward—but this I do know, another hour like that would have broken my heart with its wealth of happiness.

"I could not sleep last night, but lay quietly, with my hands folded softly over my bosom as had been a childish habit, thinking over that sail upon the lotus pond. The moonbeams stole into my room, penetrating the roses that hung around the casement, and bringing their odor softly around my couch. This rendered my happiness complete.

"The morning found me wakeful, but when it brightened into day, I closed my eyes, and turned my head upon the pillow, ashamed that the broad light should witness my happiness.

"How sudden this is. Mrs. Harrington has been fading away for a month. Her physician recommends change of climate, and in ten days we all start for Madeira, or perhaps, Spain. *He* goes with us, and I am content.

"On shipboard at last! Here I sit in my little cabin and listen to the heaving of the waves against the vessel, as it ploughs proudly along, as if full of the consciousness of its own strength, and defying the very elements to impede its progress.

"The past ten days have been one continued fever of excitement, and I have scarcely opened my journal. This trip to Europe was finally decided upon in such haste, that we have known hardly a moment of rest.

"We were on board this morning at ten o'clock, and two hours after, New York lay stretched out behind us on the shore of its beautiful bay, like some enchanted city asleep in the sunlight.

[215] "All that was dear to me stood by my side, so I had no sorrow at my departure, beyond the natural feeling of regret that all must feel on quitting their native land. I could not understand Mrs. Harrington's burst of grief, so unlike her usual quiet demeanor. She has not seemed much in favor of this voyage, although she made no opposition when certain how greatly her husband desired to go. There has been a strange unrest about her for days, that I could not comprehend, but from a few words she unthinkingly uttered this morning, I imagine her to be haunted by one of those morbid fancies, which at times seize upon the strongest mind, in the eve of a long journey—the idea that she will never again behold the land she is leaving behind.

"She has been laying down in her cabin all day, for she suffers greatly, and I spent several hours with her, but at sunset James called me on deck. We stood side by side at the stern of the ship, and saw the sun go down behind a mass of clouds more gorgeous than I ever beheld. The western sky seemed alive with molten flame—great billows of crimson rolled up against the amber waves of light the sun had left behind, streaming down over the waters, like a torrent of rainbows, until one could scarce tell which was sea and which sky.

"We stood there until the latest glories died, and then the moon stole slowly up, with only one star beside her, like the one bright hope of a human heart. We conversed but little. My soul was too full of the home we had left, and I knew, by the expression of Harrington's face, that he understood and shared my feelings. It was late when I left him, and I cannot write more. My hand is tremulous with the strange feelings which thrill at my heart; the excitement of these last few days has been too much for me, but in the quiet of this new life I shall grow calm again, perhaps. Just now something of Mrs. Harrington's fears seems to oppress me.

[216] "A month has passed. Our voyage is almost at an end, for to-morrow the captain promises that we shall be safely anchored in the harbor of Cadiz. The sun went down this evening in an embankment of clouds, shedding pale, watery gleams upon the sea, that threatened rough weather. As the darkness came on, the clouds spread upward, blackening the whole sky, and flashes of lightning now and then tore through them, like fiery chain shot through the smoke of a battle. There was consternation on board, for we were nearing the coast, and a storm like this threatened danger.

"I remained on deck till the rising wind almost swept me over the bulwarks. James Harrington was with me, and as the lightning gleamed athwart his face, I saw that it was anxious and very

pale. He strove to appear unconcerned, and went down to the cabin, with a strong effort at cheerfulness, which neither deceived me, nor checked the terrible fears of his poor mother. General Harrington had retired to his state-room, where he sat in moody silence, wrapped in a large travelling cloak. When his invalid wife joined him, trembling with nervous terror, he only folded his cloak the tighter around himself, and muttered that she need apprehend no danger.

"Young Mr. Harrington wrung my hand with more of warmth than he had ever exhibited before, when he bade me good night. He has gone on deck, while I am cowering in my state-room, unable to seek rest, and striving to write, though the storm is howling louder and louder, and every lurch of the ship flings the book from my lap."

CHAPTER XXXV.

AFTER THE STORM.

[217] "ALIVE and on land. In the country, back a little from the coast, we have found a shelter from the shipwreck. That we live at all is owing to the bravery of a seaman who superintended the making of a raft after the ship struck, and almost forced us to save our lives by risking them upon it. The other passengers refused to go, and for a long time we hesitated, but Ben Benson was so determined, that at last we trusted every thing to his frail craft, which, alas! was all of our brave vessel that ever reached the shore.

"I shudder even now, as I remember the fearful rush of waters around us when our craft was cut loose from the sinking vessel. A hundred ghostly forms looked down upon us from the crowded stern, dreading the death for us, which too surely fell on them.

"It was a terrible venture. The storm still raging, the sea rising high, and breakers howling on either hand, like hungry tigers tearing at their chains. It all seems like a hideous dream to me now, but I remember one thing that kept the life in my heart, when it seemed turning to stone. In the midst of the storm, as the raft reeled and plunged over the lightning-stricken waves, I found myself gathered to his bosom, and while the warmth of that embrace reached my heart, I heard such words as sent the blood thrilling like a gush of wine, back through all my veins. In the rage and whirl of the storm, while we were quivering in the very jaws of death, James Harrington uttered in many a wild word, the love that I had felt to be mine before. He seems to have forgotten it now, for since we have been housed safely on land, with the breath of a dozen orange groves awaking nothing but sweet emotions, he seems to have lost the passion of those delirious words, but that they are burned like enamel on my heart, I might fancy them a dream and nothing more.

[218] "Why is this? What makes him so reserved and yet so gently courteous. There is no impediment to free speech. Are we not equals in birth—and as for fortune, thank Heaven, I am rich enough for both. Why should he almost shun me then, and spend so much time wandering along the coast, looking upon the waves that have almost proved fatal to us? These thoughts make me very sad. Does he repent, or has a passion that seemed so strong when death was nigh, gone out with the storm that witnessed its first utterance."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MISTRESS AND MAID.

"WE had no particular object in touching the coast of Spain but the health of Mrs. Harrington. Strange enough, the shock and tumult of the storm seems to have done her good. She looks stronger and brighter day by day. I never saw such a change. But Zillah, that wild beautiful slave, has been ill from that terrible morning, and keeps her room. They are all very good to her. Mr. Harrington, James, and even the lady, vie with each other in offering kindness to her. These things seem to affect her greatly; last night, when Mrs. Harrington sat down by her bed, and took the feverish hand which she seemed unwilling to extend, the girl turned from her suddenly, and burst into a passion of tears that shook the bed.

"Mrs. Harrington tried to soothe her. She passed her delicate hand over the waves of purplish black hair, which was all afloat from her head, and asked in her sweet, gentle way, 'What the girl was crying for. Was she homesick?'

"Zillah turned suddenly and looked into that sweet face. Her lips parted, and some strong resolve came into those almond-shaped eyes; through her inky lashes, laden down with tears, I saw a gleam of true feeling that made me almost like the girl. But she closed her lips again, and the noble expression died out of her face, leaving it full of dusky shadows.

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"'No, I am only sick,' she said, 'something struck me as I flung myself down to the raft. All had left but me. But what does it matter whether a poor slave lives or dies? It is a thousand dollars gone—two, I remember, for a pretty slave like me—and that is all.'

"She spoke with bitterness, and her eyes gleamed angrily under the tears that still trembled on their lashes.

"'But you have scarcely been a slave, Zillah,' said Mrs. Harrington. 'It would be a shame to look upon you exactly in that light with this face, fair almost as my own, and this hand soft, and shapely as a child's. Surely no girl ever had lighter duties.'

"Zillah gave one quick glance at her mistress, and I saw the faint dimpling of a smile around her lips. She drew her hand away and hid it under the bed clothes.

"'You—you are making fun of me, searching for purple marks around the nails. There is no need of that. But for the black blood I could not have been bought and sold. That is proof enough.'

"The girl spoke bitterly, and her lips trembled with passion. Then I saw, what had never presented itself to me before, sure signs of her race. Temper brought the black blood uppermost, and stamped it for a time on the features. The lips seemed heavier, the nose flattened, the forehead lowered and grew dusky, a strange vitality stirred the waves of her hair. No serpent, disturbed in its nest, ever gave out its colors more vividly. These were thoughts to bring great repulsion with them. I never had liked the girl; now, this upheaving of the dark blood, from which all that made her kin to me revolted, even in her own system, shocked and humiliated me.

"Mrs. Harrington, born and bred in the south, felt all this less keenly, she still smoothed the young creature's hair and attempted to comfort her.

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"'You have no cause for trouble,' she said. 'Have I not always taught you that a faithful servant had all the claims of a friend, else why am I here in your sick room, Zillah?'

"'Oh, I am worth full two thousand dollars,' answered the girl, bitterly. 'General Harrington takes excellent care of his horses. Is it for love?'

"'Zillah, this is unkind, remember it is not my fault that you are a slave.'

"Mrs. Harrington arose; the insolent ingratitude of the girl had wounded her greatly. For my part, indignation forbade me to pity the creature. As we left the room I saw that she followed us with her eyes, and the African stamp grew broader and plainer on her face, till all beauty left it. As we closed the door she started up and called out with sudden dread,

"'Mistress, mistress.'

"Mrs. Harrington hesitated a moment, with her hand on the latch, but went back into Zillah's room murmuring,

"'Poor thing, poor thing, she is sorry already.'

"'Mistress, don't tell him, don't tell the master. I—I did not mean to say such things. It was the black blood burning in my heart. Don't tell him, or he will send me back.'

"Mrs. Harrington smiled.

"'No, I will not tell him,' she said kindly, 'for I think he would send you home at once if he knew how perverse you have been. You ought to remember that he never will forgive disrespect to his wife.'

"I was looking at Zillah. She half covered her face with the bed clothes, and her form writhed under them as if in pain. It might have been a sudden pang, but the look of a rattlesnake, before it springs, was in those eyes.

"Mrs. Harrington was thinking of her husband, and observed nothing.

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"'That is one great proof of his love,' she said addressing me, 'and I think he does love me as few men love their wives. Have you not observed how cheerful and happy he is since I am so much better? It was only last night he told me that no woman, living or dead, ever had or ever could touch the heart entirely mine, not even if God had taken me from him. I know it seems foolish to repeat these things, but when the heart is full, one cannot always help being boastful and silly.'

"Zillah turned rudely in the bed, and I saw her hand clench itself into the blanket, tearing at the tough fabric. Mrs. Harrington, with that feeling of household trust which has no consciousness of the intelligence listening, went on as if the girl were a thousand miles off.

"'You will not mind if I am a little egotistical. It is so pleasant to be held supreme in the one heart, to feel sure that no other woman ever has or can share your influence. If there is a woman on earth that I pity, it is one who doubts the love of her husband. Thank God I have never, never had reason to know that pang. If ever two people adored each other it is us.'

"Perhaps it was a little singular that this lady should talk of the most sacred domestic relations thus freely before her own servant, but it did not seem strange to me. A child-like, affectionate woman like her, may be excused many things that persons prouder and more reticent might properly avoid; besides, the domestic habits of the south admit of very close relationship between the mistress and her servants, unknown to other regions even of our own country. I could only smile an answer to this wifely enthusiasm, but it seemed to me genuine and so sincere, that all my sympathy went with it. As for the maid, she lay perfectly still, listening, and apparently half asleep, for she had gathered the bed clothes around her, and it was only by a quick glitter that broke through her eyelashes now and then, that I could detect the interest she took in this singular conversation.

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"'No, no,' said Mrs. Harrington, 'I would not tell the General for the world, how really perverse Zillah has been. She has never quite met his approbation I know, and the least thing would set him against her.'

"'Hush, she is listening,' I said.

"Mrs. Harrington turned and saw that Zillah was looking at her with a strange expression. Something like a mocking smile parted her full lips.

"'You must believe me, Zillah. It was in spite of the General's wish to leave you behind, that I brought you here.'

"Again Zillah smiled, this time with more of mischief than malice.

"'I know, myself, the General never liked me much. It was master James that got him to buy me; the General would do anything to please him.'

"'Yes indeed,' replied Mrs. Harrington, addressing me, 'no step-father was ever so indulgent. James has been a fortunate boy, though he does not always seem to think so. It was he who took a fancy to Zillah, and insisted that we should bring her with us, so the General gave up his prejudice against her and consented. James thinks no one can take proper care of me but Zillah.'

"I was still watching the girl. All the frowns had left her face and she was almost laughing; something seemed to amuse her very much. I said nothing of this, but the girl puzzled me greatly, and so did the conversation of Mrs. Harrington. Somehow I had got the impression that James Harrington had been opposed to Zillah as an attendant for his mother; that he had suggested an older person, and regarded this one with distrust. But surely Mrs. Harrington, his own mother, knew best."

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CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE SLAVE WE LEFT BEHIND US.

"ZILLAH was really ill, and for her sake we were detained in that little hamlet on the coast for three weeks. Even then she was unable to travel, and General Harrington resolved to move on without her. The barren little village had no attractions for him, and he certainly was not a man to sacrifice much time or convenience to a slave against whom he had prejudices.

"Why had I become so painfully interested in that girl? Why was it that my heart grew heavy, when James Harrington expostulated with his father so earnestly against the abandonment of that poor girl, as he called her, in a strange place and among people whose language was unknown to her.

"But the General was resolute. The girl could follow them to Seville, he said, when she became well enough to travel, no harm need come to her and she could be well spared. Mrs. Harrington had improved so much in her health that Zillah could have plenty of time to get well without much inconvenience to her mistress. Miss Crawford's little maid was always at her disposal.

"James Harrington did not seem satisfied with this reasoning, but he said nothing more, and the next day we went up to Cadiz, leaving Zillah behind.

"The girl was greatly distressed, and protested that she was well enough to travel anywhere with her mistress, that everything would go wrong if she was left behind, that the people were strange and would not know how to direct her. She attempted to leave her bed and put on a traveling dress, but fainted as her foot touched the floor. I was sorry for the poor creature, and my heart ached at the necessity of leaving her alone; but like her I was powerless in the hands of my guardian.

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"Just before we left, General Harrington went in to speak with her. She was acting very unreasonably, he said, and deserved chastisement for her folly. Did she expect his whole family to wait in that dull place till it was her pleasure to get well? The truth was, James had spoiled the

girl.

"He must have been harsh with the poor thing, though that was not at all like him, for she was sobbing as if her heart would break ten minutes after, when I went into her room, and said many bitter things of her master's cruelty, which in common charity I shall never repeat. Certainly the girl does seem to be terribly spoiled. I wish her no harm, poor wretch, but if she were going back home a free woman my heart would be lighter. I wonder if they would let me purchase her and give her the freedom which belongs to every one of God's creatures. She has managed to pick up a tolerable education, and in a country where hundreds of the blue blood are darker than she is, might do well; for she certainly is beautiful and has bright native talent enough to carve out a happy future for herself. As for the money, a year's income would be nothing compared with the relief of seeing her happy, free, and of all things, away from us. I will speak of this to Mrs. Harrington; no woman ever had a kinder heart or a keener sense of justice; the difficulty with her is that she spoils her servants with too much kindness. That is a thing which people just out of barbarism are apt to mistake for weakness.

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"I think this girl has been made unhappy by the education which lifts her out of the common herd of slaves. She feels the disgrace of caste with terrible acuteness, and in no strata of society can find a place for herself. In order to make the slaves useful or happy, they must be educated in masses. It does not do to lift one from among his fellows as a specimen of what they can possibly become. Open a future for the slaves, give them intelligence and freedom at the same time; but I need not go on. How many times has all this been said. But the day will come when justice shall be brought about.

"We are leaving Cadiz for Seville, where General Harrington proposes to spend the holy week. I have had no opportunity to speak with Mrs. Harrington yet, but the fate of the poor girl we have left behind hangs heavily on my spirits. James Harrington, too, seems depressed. Is it—can it be? No, no, no! A thousand times no! How dare I form it in thought? Still, she is beautiful, clever, elevated by her intelligence far above some of my own order. She has caressing ways, too, when it pleases her to assume them, and a look out of those almond-shaped eyes when she is pleased or grieved, that troubles even me with painful admiration. No, if money can buy her she shall be out of her thralldom, and happy as a bird, but only on condition that she flies away to her own country, or stays in this after we leave it. Strive as I will for charity, nothing on earth, I do think, will ever make me like that girl even as a servant.

"Our steamboat is just now turning into the mouth of the Guadalquiver. What strange, barren-looking things are these Spanish castles! Their walls, of a dull, yellowish red, seem more like an upheaving of the soil itself, than massive stone piled up by the labor of man. They are bare, too, of the rich vines and tremulous leafage which makes the ruins of Italy so picturesque, and those of England so grand in their decay. Here is a massive building on our right, full of historic interest, I dare say, and it may be rich in Moorish embellishments if I could see the interior; but at this distance it looks bleak and barren as a prison. My own vague 'castles in Spain' are ten thousand times more beautiful.

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"I said this to James Harrington as he came and stood beside me on the deck.

"'Oh,' he answered with a sigh, 'Who of us does not build air castles only to see them vanish into mist. As you say, mine have been more beautiful than that heap of stones. After all, architecture is severely perfect, which Nature does not claim after it leaves the hand of its constructor. The struggle which she makes to draw art back into her own bosom, is always beautiful.'

"Thus he will talk to me for hours, but never of himself. What have I done that we are driven so far apart,—that he so studiously turns his eyes away when mine question him with unconscious earnestness,—unconscious till some look of his reminds me that for a moment I have been off my guard. Then I grow angry with myself, and avoid him with what must seem to him childish caprice. Does he understand all that I think and suffer? Does he know how that day among the water lilies haunts my memory?"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE EATON FAMILY.

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"THERE is an American family on board—some persons whom the Harringtons have met before in the South, and who have attempted to renew the acquaintance. The old people seem to me very coarse, common-place persons—planters from the interior of Louisiana—rich and vulgar; but the daughter is beautiful—a blonde, with lovely hair, full of sunshine, and eyes of that deep purplish blue which one seldom sees after childhood. Her figure is petite but finely rounded. She has all the health and freshness of a child, with the sweetest graces of womanhood. Yes, I can say this, and acknowledge the charm of her beauty, though she has given me the most wretched day I

ever passed in my life.

"James Harrington had known her before, and was rejoiced at the meeting. When he saw her across the deck my hand was on his arm, for we were walking together. The start he gave shook off my hold and, with both hands extended, he went to meet her, glad as I had never seen him before.

"The girl blushed like a rose, and came forward to meet him, quite half way, smiling up in his face as I had never dared to smile through all the months of our domestic intercourse. My heart turned cold. I felt a strange contraction about my mouth as if all the blood were retreating from the lips, which would not syllable a word when he brought the young lady towards me and presented her.

"She looked at me earnestly, like a child who felt itself repulsed, and stood silent as if expecting me to come out of my reticence and receive her as every one evidently did.

"At last I spoke with an effort, and I dare say brusquely, for I felt that my voice sounded forced and cold.

"You are an old friend—you have known Gen. Harrington and his family before?" I said.

"Oh yes," she answered, smiling up at James. "We are old friends. How long is it, Mr. Harrington, since you taught me to ride? Indeed, Miss Crawford, I think he has taught me almost everything worth knowing that I can boast of."

"I made an effort to smile, and answered in the insincerity of my pain, that it must have been a pleasant task to instruct so lovely a pupil.

"She laughed sweetly, and replied in her childish fashion, 'He used to say as much, but I am sure it was only to encourage me.'

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"Just then her father crossed the deck, radiant with pleasure, and shouted a greeting as he came. He was a large, heavy man, robust and genial, overshadowed by a broad Panama hat, and flourishing a large white handkerchief in his hand, as if it had been the star spangled banner, which was to open the heart of every American he met.

"Hallo! We have overtaken them at last, have we, Miss Lucy? Now I hope you are satisfied. How are you, Harrington? Did not expect to see us in this part of the world, I dare say? Is the General and Mrs. Harrington on board? Of course I might have known as much from a sight of this young lady. The General's ward, I suppose.' Here Mr. Eaton took off his Panama hat and made an elaborate bow, which I returned, striving to meet his cordiality, with some show of interest.

"Well, this is comfortable," he said, fanning himself with the broad rim of his hat, 'of all countries in the world Spain is the one where an American likes to meet an American best. I don't understand one word of their lingo, and our courier isn't much better off—hates the Spaniards so that he never would learn their language, in hopes that it might keep any one from bringing him here. But he is a good fellow, can be trusted with untold gold. Language or no language, I wasn't going to do without him. But it is awkward work trying to make these Spaniards understand. Ask what you will and they answer all alike, Kiem Sabe, as if that was the answer to an honest question. Oh my boy, I'd give twice the money we got for her, that I hadn't sold you that girl Zillah. When we took her to Cuba she pitched in and learned the language right smart; wonderful girl that; have you got her yet, Harrington?'

"She came with us to Spain," said Harrington, looking a good deal disturbed, 'but you forget she was General Harrington's purchase. I believe my mother took a fancy to her.'

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"Your mother! Why bless your soul, she never saw the girl till General Harrington took her home. He said that *you* had urged him to buy her; come, come, don't blush up like that, what the deuce do I care who fancied the girl, she was a great bargain to any one.'

"Are you speaking of Zillah?" said Miss Eaton, languidly. 'What a pretty creature she was. It seemed a shame to keep her with the other negroes. I remember often and often visitors mistook her for me.'

"But that was before they had seen you, Lucy. The girl is well enough, but no one could mistake her for you. Such coal black hair, eyes like velvet. Yes, yes, the girl was a beauty,—one good reason why I was willing to sell her.'

"James Harrington was so annoyed by the conversation, that he walked away frowning. I had never seen his noble face darken so unpleasantly before.

"Miss Eaton laughed, and followed him with a pair of sparkling eyes, that had a world of mischief in them.

"Something wrong I see. That girl will keep things stirring wherever she is; knows a heap, and far too handsome for my plantation; glad to get rid of her, if the truth must be told. Women folks were fools enough to teach her to read and write, after that she took the bits into her own mouth, and learned every thing. What do you think I would do with a fancy slave like that?'

"Father, you cannot see, but General Harrington is coming," said Miss Eaton.

"Oh, ho! my old friend, how is the lady?"

"Mrs. Harrington is quite well, the voyage has done her a world of good, long enough for a chance at health you understand. That is why we selected a sailing vessel. It isn't going to sea at all when you get into the steamers. Where is James? I thought he came this way, his mother wants him."

"Oh, I am to blame, I drove him off talking about that girl Zillah."

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"Come this way," said the General hastily, "I wish to surprise Mrs. Harrington, she will be rejoiced to know that you are here."

"They went away together. I saw General Harrington stop his friend after they got out of hearing, and talk with him earnestly as if expostulating about something. Then I saw Mr. Eaton clap his hand on the General's shoulders, nod his head half a dozen times, and move on as if some matter had been amicably settled between them. From that day, I never heard Mr. Eaton mention the girl Zillah again. Was it because James Harrington seemed so displeased with the subject?"

"I was left alone with the young lady, who seemed so sweet and good that it was impossible to look upon her with anything but kindness. Yet I never turned towards her without a nervous thrill that almost held my breath; every line of her face, and graceful curve of her form, seemed burned on my memory from the first moment I saw her. Was this jealousy? What had I to be jealous of? A fair girl whom he had known well, and was pleased to see in a strange country, where friends are few and unusually welcome, surely I am not so weak or wild as to give myself up to an unreasonable and unreasoning fancy like that."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THAT SPANISH NOBLEMAN.

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"Miss Eaton was enthusiastic about the scenery of the river, as the boat swept over its amber-hued waves, and the scenery became more and more Arcadian. She was a little romantic too, and fell into some childish affectations, that gave me a fair excuse for not thinking her perfect. Upon the boat was a tall, powerful looking man, with bold black eyes, and the carriage of a person used to power of some kind. His dress was remarkable,—the short jacket of the country, buttoned and ornamented with quantities of round golden buttons, that rattled and tinkled as he walked up and down, was ornamented with a very rich embroidery, in which gleams of crimson and brown were enwrought on the blue ground with delicate effect; a traveling cap, also richly embroidered, sat jauntingly on the side of his head. Everything about him was apparently new, and if too gorgeous, effective.

"Miss Eaton watched this man with her furtive blue eyes, as he passed us ever and again, each time fastening his gaze on her face with a look of audacious admiration that made the blood come hotly into my cheek.

"What is he, have you any idea?" she whispered, as he passed us for the fifth time, "some nobleman I am sure. Don't you think so, Miss Crawford?"

"I answered pleasantly, that as this was the first country of Europe that I had seen, it was impossible for me to judge what particular trait distinguished its nobility. While I was saying this, a little fussy woman, wearing a showy dress and lace mantilla, came up to us and called Miss Eaton by name.

"My dear," she said, giving Lucy's bonnet a jerk forward. "Have you seen him?"

"Who, mamma?"

"Why that duke, he passed here just now, and I saw him looking at you—with that bonnet stuck on end, dear me!"

"Lucy began to re-arrange her bonnet, entering into her mother's anxiety. "Was it—was it the gentleman with the buttons, mamma. How is it now? too far forward I think,—with the buttons?"

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"Such buttons!" interrupted the mother, "solid gold every one of 'em, blue blood, every drop in his veins—any one could swear to that without telling. Did you see him, Miss?"

"Miss Crawford, mamma," said Lucy, "General Harrington's ward, whom we have heard so much about."

"The woman looked at me keenly through an enamelled eye glass, which she carried fastened to a chain of gold, twisted around her wrist.

"Glad to make your acquaintance, Miss Crawford," she said, dropping the glass after a full

survey of my person. 'James has told us so much about you. Indeed, we were getting almost jealous, weren't we, Lucy? There, there he comes again. Drop your parasol, Lucy, carelessly, you know. Hush, hush!'

"The Spanish traveller came by us again, with his long sweeping walk and bold eyes, which he kept on the blushing face of Miss Eaton—impertinently, I thought.

"Mrs. Eaton gave me a little punch with the point of her parasol, after he had passed.

"'Struck! undoubtedly struck. Don't you think so?'

"'Oh, mamma, how can you! I'm sure it was Miss Crawford his Highness was admiring.'

"'But how do you know it is his Highness,' I inquired.

"'How? Why, look at him. His very tread has nobility in it. You have not been travelling abroad long enough to distinguish at a glance. In order to know the aristocracy of a nation one must have mingled with it on equal terms. Now that gentleman is a royal duke, I take it. Lucy, dear, if you could manage to be speaking French when he comes this way again. Perhaps Miss Crawford knows enough to give you countenance. I am a little—just a little—out of practice since my passion for the Spanish. Noble language, isn't it, Miss? Something so dignified—so rolling—so rich in sound. Here comes Mr. James Harrington, handsome as ever, but wanting, as I may suggest, in the grand air. See with what modest appreciation he passes the duke.'

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"The vulgarity of this woman did more to lift the cloud from my heart than a hundred arguments could have done. I knew young Harrington well enough to feel that he was safe with a woman like this, though the mother of an angel. A sense of amusement stole over me, and I awaited his approach, cured of the anxiety that had, for a time, made me so wretched.

"If I had calculated on a second exhibition of snobbery after Harrington joined us, Mrs. Eaton disappointed me. I think she held the young gentleman in too much awe for a free exercise of the vanity that was in her. She did not even mention 'the duke,' and I remarked that this personage kept on another portion of the deck while James was with us.

"How beautiful are the banks of this river, as we go nearer and nearer its source! It is strange that I, an American, born in a land which spreads the broadest prairies on earth to the breeze and the sunshine, should have caught my first glimpse of one in the heart of Spain. Here mile after mile, the Guadalquivir, spread through vast plains of tall grass and wild flowers, which sweeps away from you on either hand in a sea of billowy green touched with purple and crimson, gleams now and then where the tall flowers grow thickest, and swayed by the wind till the waving grass seems to heave and roll like the ocean itself.

"I had left my companions, and stood by the bulwarks admiring the beauty of this scene with a sense of keen pleasure. Its vastness, its soft wave-like undulations charmed me into forgetfulness of all that has made the trip unpleasant. There was no habitation in sight, yet those prairies gave one an idea of infinite life.

"'It is here,' said a voice at my elbow, 'where the people of Seville come for the wild bulls that form the great feature in their bull fights. Wandering about in that long grass are thousands of splendid animals that probably never saw the face of man.'

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"It was James Harrington. I felt that he was there before he spoke. A quick throbbing of my heart had warned me of his presence.

"'I see nothing of them,' was my answer. 'It seems one broad sea of wavy grass, more still and lonely than the ocean itself, because no ships are to be seen.'

"'Look,' he said, pointing to a long, undulating ripple in the grass, which seemed like the flow of some brook, 'a drove is coming toward the shore.'

"As he spoke, the thick wall of grass that hedged in the river was parted, and the fiery head and broad chest of a wild bull, black as jet, came into full view, while the rest of his body was still concealed.

"Rosa Bonheur would have gloried in a study like that. The great wild eyes, burning with angry fire—the long, slender horns, black as ebony, and sharp as steel, which curved out from the proud symmetry of that head, would have inspired lower genius than hers. The furious toss of those horns, the swelling nostrils, blood red with angry heat, the vehement pawing of his hoof upon the bank, were enough to terrify a bolder person than I am. But the river was deep, and our boat far enough from the shore to silence any fear of danger. Besides, the creature was so magnificent in his wild rage, that admiration overwhelmed all other feelings.

"As the boat came opposite this bull, there was commotion in the tall grass all around him, and out from the dense covert broke half a dozen kindred beasts, all drawn to the shore by the rush and sound of the steamboat. Superb animals they were, one and all; perfect creatures, fresh from the hand of Nature, untouched by fetter or lasso, untamable as the lion in his jungle. Some were ready for fight with the monster beast that had seemed to challenge combat, with its rushing wheels and the defiant snort of its engine. Others looked gravely at the passing phenomenon, and stood motionless, with the long grass closing over their backs, evidently wondering what terrible thing had come among them to torment the waters so. While we were looking, these grave old animals, who had doubtless been within sight of human beings before, wheeled slowly and were

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lost in the long grass which closed over their backs, as sea waves cover a victim. But the black bull came farther out from his covert, tearing the bank with his hoofs, erecting his tail like a banner, ripping up the earth with his sharp horns, and bellowing a defiance after us, that made me tremble where I stood. Heaven help the matador, whom fate should throw into the path of that terrible creature.

"The banks of the Guadalquivir are Arcadian, after the prairies are passed. As we approached the beautiful basin in which the old city of Seville is built, villas and country houses were seen here and there along the shores; clumps of gnarled old olive trees wound down to the water; orange and citron trees in full blossom, and fruit, perfumed the air; sometimes a single tree stood out alone large and symmetrical as a New England pear tree; then whole orchards sloped down to the river, with great golden piles of fruit heaped on the grass underneath, and the blossoms showering down so thickly, that it seemed as if a squall of snow must have swept by only an hour before. I think in the whole world, there cannot be found trees so large, so perfect, and so vivid in their greenness, as those we saw in the orange orchards, just before we came in sight of Seville. How I longed to go ashore and bathe myself in their perfume, and taste their delicious fruit!

[236] "James Harrington was standing near, and he too must have felt the influence of all that subdued me; for the scent of the orange blossoms swept over us both, the rich amber-hued waves of the river whispered the same music to him that I had listened to. We had conversed but little,—a climate like this induces reverie, rather than speech; all the sensibilities of one's nature exert themselves unconsciously, a harsh word or bitter thought would melt into forgiveness, before either could be spoken. Was he affected in this way? I cannot tell; my heart deceives me if there was not unusual tenderness in his voice, a tremor as if he feared to say what my heart paused to gather in. I dared not look at him. In my soul there lay thoughts he might shrink from reading, and I should perish with shame if he but guessed that they existed."

CHAPTER XL.

THE MANŒUVRING MOTHER.

"WE come in sight of Seville, the high tower of the Giralda, cutting against the blue of the sky, first won my attention; then a portion of the old city came in view, backed by one of the finest cathedrals in the world.

"It was just before holy week; the steamboat brought many passengers from Cadiz, who had come to witness the ceremonies in this the second city of Spain.

"Many persons, mostly ladies, were on the shore when our boat came up to its landing place. Dressed in their light flowing muslins and lace mantillas, they had a picturesque appearance quite in harmony with the place. The moment we came in sight, a hundred pretty hands gave out signals of welcome from the twinkle of their delicate fingers. There was no bustle, no confusion, but a world of welcoming smiles, and soft murmuring words, which would have filled me with a sense of loneliness, had not all that I loved been close by. How could I miss those wreathing welcomes, when the wealth of my whole existence went with me?

[237] "'You are pleased. You like Seville. I can read it in your face.'

"He had not spoken to me during the last ten minutes, and I started from the dreaming observation into which I had fallen, to answer him.

"'I was wondering if all the world could produce another spot more lovely.'

"'And I was thinking pretty much the same thing. In a scene like this the hard cares of life seem impossible. It is a place to live, love, and die in.'

"I could not answer him. Indeed, his words were spoken so dreamily that they required no response.

"We were on shore then, waiting for General and Mrs. Harrington. The Eatons joined us, full of some important intelligence, which I saw the elder lady was dying to communicate.

"'I told you so—never was mistaken in my life,' she whispered. 'The captain speaks French almost as well as I do.'

"To have saved my life I could not have helped smiling. The woman had given me a specimen of her French that day, and I could imagine how perfect any information must be conveyed to her in that language.

"'I asked him who the gentleman was, and he told me he was the greatest man in Seville, just then. No wonder I admired him—all the ladies did, not excepting the Infanta herself, who would present him with a golden key next week, in token of her high appreciation! She must be some

member of the royal family—master of the wardrobe, I suppose, by the key. They never give such offices to anything less than a duke, you know.'

"The little woman was all in a flutter of excitement. Again she made a motion that I should bend my head to listen.

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"'Would I oblige her and ride or walk with Mr. James. She would rather that the duke should not see Lucy with him just now. He might understand an engagement, and the Spaniards were so proud and particular. That was a good soul! She could trust me with all her little secrets.'

"The silly thing did not dream how willing I was to oblige her, but General Harrington broke up our plans. He had engaged a carriage, and called on me to get in with Mrs. Harrington. My maid was already seated there, so James walked to the shore alone. The Eatons had their way, for he did not offer to go with them. They lingered at the landing till the duke drove off. Mrs. Eaton told me that he had absolutely waved a kiss to Lucy from his carriage window. Of course it was not returned, 'but straws show where the wind lies,' she said. 'So many people told us before we came away, that we ought to look higher for a girl like our Lucy. I wonder if a duke would meet the ideas of our friends.'

"The woman's fussy vanity wearied me—so puerile, so ridiculous, yet there was a sting in it. Look higher for their daughter! Higher than whom? But why should I let the talk of this silly woman annoy me? The daughter is wonderfully beautiful, but what of that? Still I have heard it said that the most brilliant men often choose such women for their wives. There is repose in this companionship it is said, and so it may be for a time, but men do not live for repose. When a man wants rest for his intellect, let him sleep, not marry a pretty idiot.

"Dear, dear! how bitter I am becoming! How unhappy I am! What possesses me to think of this poor girl as an enemy? Is it because he took her to the cathedral yesterday and left me to General Harrington.

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"We went to the cathedral again this morning. I saw General Harrington talking earnestly with James just before we started. He seemed a little angry. I could not hear a word, but they both looked towards me, and I saw the blood rush into James' face when he saw that I was regarding them. He hesitated a moment after the General left him, and advanced a step towards me, then wheeled suddenly and went away. A few minutes after I saw him walking towards the cathedral with Lucy Eaton. We followed them after a little, General Harrington observing, with a laugh, that we must give the young people their chances."

CHAPTER XLI.

THE CATHEDRAL AT SEVILLE.

"THE cathedral was magnificent. All its rich properties in velvets, silver and gold, had been brought forth for its adornment. The altar was one blaze of light—tapers of snow-white wax rose in crowds from golden candlesticks, garlanded with flowers which sent their sweetness through the pungent smoke of the censers, and clothed the altar with a sacred whiteness. Reliquaires flaming with jewels, flashed out through all this noontide splendor, and two enormous tapers, six feet high, stood like sentinels on each side the altar. Yet all this was insufficient to light up the vast edifice or penetrate the chapels in the side aisles. Here all was shadowy and full of religious gloom, where any weary soul might pray in solitude, notwithstanding the priests were saying high mass at the great altar, and a grand choir of fresh, young voices filled the whole edifice with music which seemed born of Heaven.

"The gloom along the centre of the building was heightened by draperies of warm crimson velvet, which, banded at each seam with gold, swept down the vast stone pillars and fell in massive folds over the great entrance doors.

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"I could not understand all that was said, for the service was in Latin, but I did feel the solemn swell of the music in every fibre of my being, and the devotional feeling which impressed the crowd touched me with holy sympathy.

"I do not know what caused the impulse, but Mrs. Harrington took my hand tenderly in hers. Then we stole to a side altar gleaming snow-white through the shadows, and kneeling down together asked that help and blessing from God which both of us thirsted for. The whispered prayers we uttered that solemn hour, undoubtedly sanctified a friendship which has been growing deeper and stronger from the first hour of my meeting with this lovely woman. She wept that day, and I saw, for the first time, that under her soft and gentle exterior, lay feelings and passions which the world would never dream of.

"I did not appear to notice the singular emotion she betrayed at that altar, but it recurred to me afterwards, and my mind was filled with conjectures about its cause. Surely it could not be her

husband. No human being was ever more attentive and kind to a wife than General Harrington was to his. There was something almost chivalric in his devotion to her wishes. Was it her son? There my heart stood still. With only these near relatives in the world, she could have no grief which did not relate to them or one of them at least.

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"That night Mrs. Harrington came into my room, which opened upon the same verandah with her own. She sat down on the sofa I occupied, and began to talk to me of the ceremonies we had witnessed that day in the cathedral. From that she glided gradually to other subjects, and dwelt with a touch of sadness on the impolicy of early marriages. 'Her own,' she said, 'had been a happy one, and she had married at sixteen; but as a general thing she would advise no girl to undertake the cares of domestic life under two or three and twenty. Particularly she would urge this on me. With no mother to guide me in a choice, with money enough to invite venal offers, I was, she thought, liable to peculiar temptations. Besides,' she added sweetly, 'I have no daughter, and crave a little of your life, for there will come a time when I shall be very lonely.'

"I did not ask her when that time would be, or to whom it related, but sat still, mute and cold. Was James Harrington engaged? I thought of Mrs. Eaton's vague speeches regarding him, of her daughter's blushes and Harrington's attention to her that day when I seemed utterly forgotten. Was the kind lady preparing me? Had she seen my weakness! Heavens, how my heart burned within me that I had so betrayed myself to this delicate and high-minded woman, his mother too. Wounded pride made me courageous. I would answer carelessly. She should never know that I had been mute from want of speech. I arose from the sofa and drank a glass of water, eagerly, for it seemed as if I must strangle. Then I said with a laugh,

"'You have something to tell me. Who is it that is likely to enter into an early marriage! certainly it is not me.'

"'No indeed, I have little fear of that, but they have been forcing the subject on me since I came home. Why cannot people allow a family to rest in peace. I have never seen that he cared so much for the girl.'

"'Of whom are you speaking?' I asked.

"'Of my son and Miss Eaton.'

"'Is he then engaged to her?'

"'I do not understand it, but the General seems confident that it will soon come about. The Eatons are enormously wealthy, you know, and Lucy is an only child.'

"'But what of that? There is no need that Mr. Harrington should make a mercenary marriage. Are not you rich, and is not he an only son?'

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"'Why how sharply you speak, Mabel. I never observed your voice so shrill before,' exclaimed the lady, lifting up her two delicate hands as if to ward off a disagreeable sound. 'Upon my word I think we are all getting cross. When I told the General how much better I should like you,—that is, how much better I did like you than that pretty thing with the blue eyes, he asked me if I was willing to betray the young creature thrown into our protection, by giving her wealth into the hands of my own son, whom I knew—'

"She checked herself and turned her face from me like a guilty child.

"'When you knew that he did not like me?' I questioned, controlling myself.

"'No, no, he did not say that. Who could help liking you, Mabel? It was love he was talking about. She said it would be treacherous to let him entangle you for your money, when I was sure that he looked upon you only as a sister. I said that we were not sure of that by any means. Indeed, sometimes it had seemed to me—Oh Mabel, how wild you look. I did not say a thing to wound your delicacy. There is not a lady in the land who might not be proud of any preference James Harrington can give. I only thought that General Harrington was mistaken. As for my James liking or marrying anybody for her money, the idea made me quite beside myself. It is not often that I get out of temper, but this really made me angry.'

"'No wonder,' I said, 'It was unkind indeed in the General to speak of me in that way.'

"'No, no, you quite misunderstand again. General Harrington is incapable of unkindness. As for indelicacy, a more perfect gentleman never lived. His sensitive honor was touched. You are his ward, beautiful, young, rich. James is his step-son, without a dollar of his own, wholly dependent on the General—'

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"'But I thought the property came from his father.' I said this so abruptly that it brought the color into Mrs. Harrington's face, and sent the hot blood into my own.

"'So it did, but my husband loved me dearly, and in his will gave every dollar to me; knowing, he said, that I would be generous with our only child; and so I have been, Mabel. The General is liberal to a fault. James never wants for money.'

"'But he is a man now, and dependence must be irksome.'

"'Oh, he is not dependent; that feeling is impossible with a man like the General. James knows well enough that the whole property will be his when my husband has done with it—that is made sure in my will; first the General, then my son. I should be a wretched woman else.'

"I am sure you will do right in the end," I said.

"I had thought at one time that the property was so large and had increased so much in value, that it would be well to divide it and give James half; but the General fancied that it might take him too much away from us—that he might get to speculate or want to go into business,—a thing none of the Harringtons ever had stooped to, and we decided to put it off. James felt a little hurt, I know, but it was all for his own good, and because his society is so dear to us."

"I think the woman was in earnest, and had no idea how unjust she seemed in thus withholding the natural inheritance of her son, in behalf of the man she had married. The whole thing disturbed me, all the more because I dared not speak out the revolt of my own feelings. Mrs. Harrington saw this in my face, I dare say, and began to apologise about troubling me with family matters.

"Here, I came to have a little chat about that girl Lucy, and we have branched off into discussions on money, the last thing on earth that I ever care to think about," she said. "Now tell me, do you think that she is so very pretty?"

"Yes," I answered, "very pretty. I have seldom seen anything more delicately beautiful."

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"I spoke the truth, in spite of all the bitter feelings which the few last days had engendered. That girl's beauty was so patent that even prejudice must acknowledge it. Nay, in my determination to be just, her perfections were perhaps a little exaggerated.

"There, I think you are wrong, Mabel. I have seen fifty prettier girls even of her own type—necks like lilies, cheeks like the lip of a sea shell, and golden hair. But I like coloring, depth, richness. Now in my estimation you are fifty times more beautiful than Lucy Eaton, and I know James thinks so in spite of the General's belief about that girl."

"Oh, Mrs. Harrington, how partial and how kind you are."

"Well, I should like to have any one look at you now, and say if I am wrong. Why, no peach was ever so richly crimsoned as your cheeks this moment, and as for the eyes, Mabel, you have splendid eyes! That was the first thing James told me when I asked about you; 'purplish gray,' he said, with such curling lashes, their glance is something to remember when she looks up."

"Did Mr. Harrington say this?"

"Indeed he did, and a great deal more. Upon my word, Mabel, I think he was taken with you then."

"I am sure you are mistaken. We scarcely exchanged a dozen words."

"But James has his eyes."

"I must not trust my ears when you flatter so sweetly," I said.

"Well, the truth is, Mabel, I am a little disappointed. My heart, I may as well own it, was set on having you for a daughter-in-law, and I won't believe it quite impossible yet. General Harrington is so nice in his sense of honor, but women care nothing about business, and the idea of refusing a noble young fellow because you have money, is just ridiculous, especially as my son will have plenty by and by, don't you think so?"

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"It would be where love existed, certainly," I answered, ready to cast myself into this woman's arms, and tell her all that was stirring in my heart.

"Ah, it is a pity that you could not have fancied him," she answered, "seeing it would have saved him from this choice which General Harrington approves so much; but I cannot believe it yet."

"But the General should know."

"I hope not, I hope not. The truth is, dear, I never could like the girl, and as for her mother, the very idea of a connection with her makes me shiver."

"She certainly is not a pleasant woman," I said.

"Pleasant! but we will not talk of her. Mercy! that is her voice, let me escape!"

CHAPTER XLII.

A DUKE IN THE HOUSE.

"MRS. HARRINGTON gathered up the cloud-like drapery of her white dress, and glided out of the room. She was certainly a lovely woman, sweet and gentle as a child, with nerve and energy, too, as I afterwards found out; but that night she had wounded me terribly, and I was glad to see her

go.

[246] "I sat down on the couch when quite alone, and covering my face with both hands, struggled hard to free the tears that weighed down my heart. It seemed that some wrong had been done me,—that the whole Harrington family was in league to break up my life before it had really commenced. But I could not shed a tear, a keen sense of shame kept me from the relief of weeping. Shame that I, a young girl, should suffer thus from a knowledge of another's happiness. Yes, I was bitterly ashamed, and shut my face out from the mirror before me, afraid to look upon my own humiliation. Did they know it? Had that aristocratic old man guessed at my weakness, and sent his wife there to convince me how hopeless it was? Not directly—not in any way that she could recognise as a mission; that was impossible to a woman so sensitive, but was she not the unconscious instrument of his keener penetration?

"While I was tormenting myself with these fears, Mrs. Eaton came in, swinging her lilac parasol, and with her rich lace shawl trailing to the ground.

"Oh, I have come to tell you one must have confidence in some persons, or the heart would give out, you know. Guess who it was that Lucy and I met in the Court of Oranges, just now.'

"I cannot tell. Mr. Harrington, perhaps!'

[247] "Mr. Harrington, no indeed. We can meet him at any time. It was his Highness, the duke, walking quite alone, under the orange trees, with a slender little cane in his hand, that he was beating the branches with, all in a brown study, showering down the blossoms among his gold buttons—so romantic—and in his glossy hair. Lucy gave a little scream when she saw him, and clasped her hands so. The duke gave a start and came toward us, then checked himself and begged pardon in such delicious Spanish, only we couldn't quite understand it. He saw that, and broke a twig of orange blossoms from one of the branches bending over him, and gave it to Lucy with an air—I cannot describe it—but you never saw anything so princely. Lucy blushed beautifully, and fastened the orange blossoms in her bosom. He smiled then, and gave her *such* a look. There is no two ways about it, Miss Crawford, that girl of mine was born to wear the purple. Her head is just the size for a coronet. Why not? The empress Josephine was no handsomer than my Lucy. As for family, who has got anything to say against any genteel American family being good enough to marry dukes, and emperors too, providing they've got money enough?'

"The woman tired me dreadfully. I was too wretched for any enjoyment of her absurdities, or they might have amused me. I answered her with civility, and tried my best to fasten some attention on the ridiculous things she was saying, but an under current of painful thought disturbed me all the while.

"Now I tell you this in the strictest confidence, remember,' she went on to say. 'I must have some one to rely upon; but not a word to the Harringtons. You know the old adage, 'It's well to be off with an old love, before you are on with a new.' Promise not to say a word about it, Miss Crawford.'

"I shall not speak—I shall not care to speak to any one about it,' I answered almost impatiently, I fear, for the woman was tormenting me beyond endurance.

"But I did not tell you all. When we came home it happened, I really can't tell how, that the duke moved along with us, and when we got to the hotel I could not avoid asking him in. He understood my Spanish splendidly, and when Lucy ventured on a few words, seemed perfectly delighted. Miss Crawford, say nothing about it, but he's in there now.'

"What, with Miss Eaton?'

"Yes, he's there talking to her. I don't suppose she can make out all he says, but some people talk with their eyes, you know. What magnificent eyes he has. Did you notice, Miss Crawford?'

"No, I did not observe.'

"But he has. Well, good night. I mustn't stay out too long. Remember, not a word to any human being.'

[248] "With a sensation of relief I saw this silly woman leave the room. Why should she come there to mingle so much of contempt with the pain I was suffering! *Can* this be true?

"How many times during the night I asked myself this question! Each time my heart turned away humiliated and wounded. I did not sleep, I could not. All the pride of my nature was up in arms. Why did she drag up this question of money? Are such things to render every sentiment of the soul coarse and earthy, by mingling with them as the better element? What wild thoughts came over me as I lay awake that long night! How I reasoned for and against the thing I dreaded. With what keen scrutiny I criticised every word and look of his during our acquaintance!"

HOPES AND PERSUASIONS.

[249] "IN the morning my head and heart both ached with the strain of thought which had racked them so piteously. I shrank nervously from appearing before any of my tormentors. But they came to my door, wondering what kept me so late. There was to be a splendid religious procession that day. All the churches of Seville were to send forth their imaged Madonnas in great splendor, with attending priests, that their worshipers might see them by broad daylight. Great preparations had been made on this occasion, for one Madonna of wonderful potency was to be brought forth from her convent for the first time in ninety years. The convent Montes Serat being one of most holy repute, and at a distance from the city, had not, for nearly a century, joined in the procession of the holy week; but now its famous Madonna was coming forth from her sacred privacy, rich in the gifts of her votaries, resplendent with the jewels which attested her superior sanctity.

"The advent of no crowned monarch into his capital ever produced a greater sensation than this coming of our Lady of Montes Serat. It awoke a strong spirit of rivalry in all the churches of Seville. Fair devotees emptied their jewel cases in behalf of their favorite Madonnas—nothing was withheld which female pride could bestow on the object of its religious idolatry. So, for a time, all Seville was in a tumult of ambitious rivalry, and out of this was sure to come the most brilliant day of the holy week. I had not cared to go to this exhibition, but General Harrington had secured a balcony overlooking that of the Infanta and her suite. It was to be a splendid procession, they said, and I should regret it forever if they permitted me to remain at home.

"I found it easier to submit than to contend, but still hesitated, when James Harrington came up to the verandah where we were sitting, and leaning over my chair, whispered a request that I should go. His manner was almost caressing, and there thrilled through his voice such genuine anxiety, that I could hardly suppress the quick leaping of my heart, or speak at first, it throbbed so loudly. The rest had left us and we were alone.

"Do go! It seems an age since I have seen you except in a crowd,' he said, drawing a chair to mine.

"But this will be a crowd, also!'

"Not for us.'

"I looked up suddenly and felt the warm crimson leap to my face, when my eyes met his.

[250] "Let us be happy this once,' he said, 'the crowd itself will be well worth seeing. Besides, the Infanta will be there, with her husband, Le Duc de Montpensier. Then remember that the Princess Clementina, wife of the Prince of Saxe Coburg will be of the party,—quite a nest of royalty, you will find; just the persons that I for one should like to see.'

"And so would I. My heart always warms toward the children of that good man, Louis Philippe,' I answered.

"Then you will go?'

"Yes, I will certainly go; the promise of seeing all these interesting persons makes me almost impatient.'

"Ah, how bright you look; we shall have a pleasant day. Mother is getting ready. She seems to be feeling young as a girl. Did you ever see any one change as she has since we came to Seville?'

"The General was speaking of it this morning,' I replied. 'She is so well and happy,' he said, 'that I can hardly think of moving yet. The very air of Seville carries balm with it.'

"Harrington turned away and walked to a window, as if I had said something to disturb him. After a little he came back again with the air of a man who had flung aside some unpleasant burden, and began to talk of the country we were in.

"What a calm, delicious climate it is,' he said, 'I wonder people can get angry or very much in earnest here. For myself this country life seems like floating at will on some lake, with scarcely air enough to stir a sail, or ripple foam wreaths around the prow of one's boat; the very breath we draw is a luxury.'

"A sad one sometimes,' I answered, 'the very solitude and repose which steal over one, enfeebles the spirit and makes life too harmonious for improvement either of the mind or heart. Continued life in a place like this, would rob an American of his last attribute,—a love of progression. Rest and sensuous enjoyment were not intended for a people like us. Yet the place is so lovely, I feel like a traitor while saying this.'

[251] "He looked at me with unconscious earnestness, sighed gently and paced the room once or twice before he resumed the subject.

"You are right; a soul worth having would never content itself with the drowsy sweetness of a life like this. After all, the great glory of existence lies in action.'

"And the greatest happiness;' I answered, with a dreamy sense of the inaction to which I, as a

woman, was forever consigned.

"You speak with the feeling of a man, shut out from his proper career,' he said, 'there, I think you and I can have sympathy; only the life of a woman should be restful, and full of love.'

"And I of a man?' I questioned.

"You must not ask that question of a man shut out from action, and—and even from the woman's privilege of loving.'

"What was there in my expression that changed his so instantly? Could he discover in my eyes the brightness that had come over me with the sound of his voice, tender and impressive as it had been that day among the water lilies? I do not know, but in a moment a cloud crept over his face, and a chill into his voice.

"Excuse me, if I have pressed you over much,' he said. 'But it is a lovely day and the procession will be well worth seeing. If it would not be considered sacrilegious among so many good Catholics, I should say, there would be a rivalry among the Madonnas. You will go?'

"Yes,' I answered, sinking into depression again, 'as well there as here. Who will be of our party?'

"Oh, the General, and my mother, of course, with the Eatons. That will be enough to fill the balcony.'

"I felt the blood growing warm in my cheeks. Why must those Eatons forever compose a portion of our party? Could no one see how I detested this eternal companionship with persons who had not a single idea or principle in common with us?

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"Just then Miss Eaton came into the balcony—her transparent muslin dress looped up at the sleeves and throat with delicate blue ribbons, floating like a cloud around her, and a wreath of forget-me-nots relieving the snow-white chip of her bonnet. Her parasol was frosted over with soft Brussels lace, and a better dressed or more beautiful creature I have seldom set my eyes upon. James Harrington left my chair the moment she appeared. Taking the parasol from her hand, he commenced playing with it as he conversed with her, lightly, carelessly, and with such smiles as he had not given me in many a long day.

"At times one gets in love with pain, to abridge it seems like cowardice. What mattered it whether I suffered a little more or less, since suffering was so early become my destiny? This girl, with her bright beauty and soft words, superseded me every where; yet she did not seem to prize the homage for which I famished, but stood there, smiling up in his face, and dropping a sweet word now and then, carelessly, as she would have given sugar to a parrot."

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE INFANTA AND HER GUESTS.

"I WENT into my room and threw a world of bitter energy into my toilet, angry with myself for not being beautiful enough to win one heart from that pretty face, angry with him that he could not understand the depth of feeling and of thought which made my preference so much more worthy than anything that young creature could ever feel. I had a cruel pleasure in depreciating myself, and almost hated the face which looked into mine half angrily from the glass. Its large gray eyes, with their thick lashes, seemed heavy with unshed tears. There was a frown on the forehead, rendering it dark and turbulent. The mouth harmonized with this stormy look, and trembled into half sarcastic smiles, as if each feature reviled the other. Now I was larger, taller, more pronounced in face and person than the pretty fairy who could entertain him so flippantly, while I sat dumb and silent in his presence. No wonder I hated myself, yet many persons had thought me good looking, and I could recollect a thousand compliments on my talents and powers of pleasing, which came to me then like remembered mockeries.

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"I made no effort to look beautiful, but over my simple white dress threw a lace mantilla, fastening it to my head with clusters of tea roses, and allowing it to sweep over my person, black and shadowy, like the thoughts that haunted my mind. This was a common dress among the Spanish ladies, and I put it on that day for the first time, thinking to escape the observation that a foreign costume was sure to provoke. Miss Eaton gave an exclamation of delight when I went down to the parlor. If any thing could inspire her to enthusiasm it was a novelty in dress.

"Oh, how charming! And you have turned Spaniard,' she said, clasping her little hands and examining me from head to foot, in a sort of rapture. 'Ain't she splendid, Mr. Harrington! Those crimson roses look superb in the black lace. I am sick of my bonnet. Just hold my parasol while I make myself a senorita also.'

"She ran out of the room, snatching some orange blossoms from a vase as she went, and sending back soft gushes of an opera song to us.

"'What a light-hearted creature she is,' said Harrington, watching her with admiring eyes as she floated off. 'A lovely face, don't you think so?'

"'Yes, I think so, a very lovely face.'

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"Perhaps some of the bitterness in my heart found its way through my voice. Something there was which disturbed James Harrington. He turned and looked at me keenly, seemed about to make some reply, but checked himself and began to play with the coral handle of Lucy's parasol. Directly, Lucy Eaton came back more like a summer cloud than ever, for over her head she had thrown a veil of Brussels point, delicate as a mist, and white as frost. But for her canary colored gloves and blue ribbons, she would have appeared in absolute bridal costume, for she had twisted the orange blossoms into a pretty garland which held the veil or mantilla over her head, and was blushing like a rose with a sense of her own completeness.

"We started for the public square through which the procession was to pass. The streets were full of people, men, women, and children, all in their richest costume, and brilliant with expectation. Every woman had the national fall of lace on her head, almost invariably fastened with clusters of natural roses; some of these mantillas were marvels of costly work, and fell shadow-like over those soft summer dresses, giving them a graceful and cloud-like lightness. All Seville was on foot, no carriages are permitted in the street during the holy week. Poor and rich were, for the time, on a perfect level, and each came forth well dressed and radiant, to honor the most interesting spectacle known to the nation. It was like looking down on an out door opera when we entered the quaint stone balcony reserved for us, with fresh palm leaves interwoven in the carved work, and cushioned chairs waiting for our occupation. No flower garden was ever more radiant and blooming. Hundreds of colored parasols swayed towards the sun like mammoth poppies, gay fans kept the air in perpetual motion. Pretty white hands twinkled recognition from friend to friend; floating lace gave a cloud-like softness to the whole scene, indescribably beautiful. All was eagerness and gay commotion. On the outskirts of the square, horsemen with arms at their sides, were stationed like statues. The balconies were hung with gorgeously tinted draperies, crowded with beautiful women and garlanded with flowers.

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"One balcony, more spacious than the rest, was richly ornamented with draperies of crimson velvet falling from a gilded crown over head, and drawn back by cords of heavy bullion. A flight of steps led to this balcony from the street, and altogether it had a look of regal magnificence which drew the general attention that way.

"While we were occupied with this novel scene, a hum and murmur of voices drew the general attention toward one of the principal streets entering the square. This was followed by a general commotion in the crowd, through which a murmur, like that of hiving bees, ran to and fro; ladies stood up, parasols swayed confusedly, expectation was in every face.

"Directly the cause of all this excitement became apparent. The Infanta had entered the square, and was approaching the royal balcony. She was a lovely woman, very young and in the full bloom of her beauty, dark-eyed, dark-haired, well formed, and carrying herself with queenly dignity, which it is said the sovereign herself does not equal. The slanting sunbeams fell directly upon her as she passed by our balcony in full state; the train of her dress, blue as the sky, and looped with clusters of pink roses, was carried by four noblemen, all richly attired, as if the street had been some palace hall. Her dress was looped back at the shoulders with aigrette of diamonds, whose pendent sparks dropped half way to the elbow, quivering like fire from beneath the long white mantilla that swept over her person as sweeps the blue of a summer sky. The veil was fastened to her graceful head by a tiara of the same pure gems, which twinkled through it like starlight on frost. Her walk was queenly, her look full of sweet womanliness. They tell me she is prettier and more popular than the queen, and I can readily believe it, for this young creature is very lovely.

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"The steps of the royal balcony descended directly to the pavement. The Infanta mounted them, gliding upward with the grace of a bird of paradise, followed by her train-bearers. Directly after she was seated, the balcony filled from a room beyond it, into which the royal party had assembled. Le Duc de Montpensier, his sister, Princess Clementina, and her husband, the Duke of Saxe Coburg, the cousin of Prince Albert of England, and two or three pretty children, mingled with the group, giving it a domestic grace pleasant to contemplate."

CHAPTER XLV.

THE PROCESSION OF THE MADONNAS.

"Now the procession commenced. Lines of solemn monks, with their gray gowns fastened at the

waist with rope girdles, came out of their monasteries and reverently followed the particular Madonna worshipped by their order, as she was carried around, standing on a platform carpeted with velvet, dressed sumptuously, like a woman of the world. Some of these Madonnas were covered with jewels richer and in greater profusion than those worn by the Infanta herself. One, our Lady of Montes Serat, was elevated on a platform ten feet long, carried by eight stalwart priests. The platform was carpeted with crimson velvet, ornamented at the sides with heavy bullion fringe. Her black velvet robe was studded with diamonds over the whole length of its ample and flowing train. This swept back to the verge of the platform in heavy folds, while adown the front was one maze of jewels, covering the velvet so thickly that you could scarcely see it. A mantilla of such lace as cannot be bought for gold, fell over her shoulders, and in her stiff hand she carried a marvel of point lace which, with a living person, would have answered for a pocket handkerchief.

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"Six tall tapers of white wax shed their refulgence over the image, lighting up all its wealth of jewels, and its sweeping draperies into wonderful magnificence. The platform was strewn with garlands and freshly gathered roses, which perfumed the air as she passed through thousands and thousands who looked upon her with smiles of wonder and adoration.

"Just as this particular Madonna came slowly in sight, a glorious sunset poured its last beams upon us, filling the square with an atmosphere of sifted gold. In the midst of this refulgence, and just as our Lady of Montes Serat was approaching the royal balcony, a strange scene surprised us.

"The worshipers of a rival Madonna, composed of priests in sweeping robes that trailed along the street some ten or fifteen feet, and tall caps, like extinguishers, on the head—crowded so close upon our Lady of Montes Serat, that the whole procession was thrown into confusion. One priest trod on the trailing garments of another, forcing him back against his brethren. Bitter rivalry between the followers of both Madonnas was at work. The two images were crowded together and hustled before the balcony in which the Infanta sat, surrounded by her royal guests; but the priests still in confusion broke line and fell upon each other, dealing blows that might have come from prize-fighters. The guard took alarm, swords flashed from their scabbards. A wild cry arose from the crowd. The tornado of a great panic swept over it, and while we looked on terrified, a cloud of dust, a few troopers riding madly about with drawn swords, and the rival Madonnas, standing stiff and stately before the Infanta's balcony, were all that remained of the crowd, or the pageant.

"The square was empty, but every street leading to it was closed up with frightened people. The Infanta arose, knelt first to one virgin, then to the other, with impartial homage, and one of her officers gave some order from a window of the house. Instantly every lamp in the square blazed into brilliant light, and the people came crowding back rapidly as they had left. The priests fell into line, and the Infanta, sweeping down those balcony steps with her four train bearers, placed herself in front of our Lady of Montes Serat, and led the procession forward in her own person.

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"When the panic was at its height, and the rush of people underneath our balcony was like a stampede of wild animals, I felt myself growing faint, and looked around for something to rest against. That instant an arm supported me and a voice whispered, 'Do not be frightened, you are safe.'

"I started from his arms lest he should feel the quick beating of my heart, and replied quickly that I was not afraid.

"He left me then, and I could have cried with vexation at receiving his kindness so ungraciously. What must he think of me?

"While I was blaming myself and wondering how I could redeem this seeming coolness, Mrs. Eaton called James Harrington into the room from which our balcony opened, where she held an animated conversation with him. Lucy remained behind. I noticed that she leaned over the railing and seemed anxious about some one who had evidently been swept off with the crowd, which was then gathering back to the square. Directly I saw her face brighten, and looking downward for the cause saw the young man whom we had met on the steamboat, leaning against a lamp post and looking up to our balcony in an easy, familiar way, that annoyed me. Still I could not withhold some admiration from the man. He certainly was a splendid creature, formed in the perfection of manly strength, and quite handsome enough to turn the head of a vain girl like Lucy.

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"I watched the movements of these two persons listlessly, for the faintness had not quite left me, and they seemed to me like creatures in a dream. I saw Lucy take a note from her bosom and tie it to a spray of orange blossoms which she had been wearing there. This she held a moment carefully in her hands, then leaning over the railing dropped it.

"Had her mother called James Harrington away, that Lucy might be left unwatched, to give this signal to her strange admirer? All this seemed like it. How innocent she looked when James came back to the balcony! No sunshine ever touched a red rose more sweetly than the smile settled on her lips when he came and bent over her chair."

CHAPTER XLVI.

WHERE WE SAW THE DUKE.

"THE Holy Week is over, carriages once more appear in the streets. The world claims its own again. I have been to a bull fight and am even now shivering with disgust of myself. Still, it was a magnificent spectacle—that grand amphitheatre of beautiful faces, the hilarity and gay confusion, the open homage, the child-like enjoyment. Until these wild, brave animals came bounding into the arena, there was nothing in the scene which any out-door amusement might not exhibit. Indeed, the gathering of an assembly in Spain is full of spirited life. If a woman is beautiful, a hundred voices tell her so as she presents herself to the general gaze. When our party entered the amphitheatre, a general murmur of admiring comments hailed us. Beautiful—superb—fair as a lily—bright as an angel! were the exclamations that followed that lovely creature as she moved to her seat, leaning upon James Harrington's arm. No wonder he looked proud of her!

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"Mrs. Harrington did not care to see a scene so revolting, and I would have stayed at home gladly, but they refused to hear of it, reason as I might. It seems as if they were determined to chain me like a slave to this girl's chariot wheels. Well, I can endure it. There must have been thousands of persons present, for the great amphitheatre was full long before the Infanta appeared with her family and her royal guests. She was received with exclamations, and took her seat with a slight bow of recognition and a smile full of eloquent thanks for the popular favor so pleasantly manifested. Two or three lovely children were in the box, evidently eager for the fighting to commence. Soon after the Infanta was seated, a man richly dressed, and of noble presence, strode across the arena, flung his cap on the ground, and made a profound bow to the royal party. The Infanta arose, leaned a little forward and cast a golden key at his feet. This key was to unlock the door which connected the arena with the compartment outside, in which the wild bulls were kept.

"All this time the man had stood with his back toward us. When he stooped to pick up the key and turned from the presence, Lucy Eaton uttered a faint cry, and her mother caught hold of my arm with a grasp that pained me. 'Oh mercy—oh mercy! It is—it is the Duke,' she exclaimed, 'What can he be doing there?'

"'I think it is his place,' I answered in a low voice. 'Hush, I would say nothing about it.'

"I looked at Lucy. She was white as snow, and her eyes dwelt on the man with a frightened stare.

"'Why is he there?' she whispered, shivering perceptibly. 'Tell me, if you can, what it means.'

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"'What are you inquiring about?' questioned General Harrington, bending toward us with suave politeness. 'Anything that I can tell you?'

"'Who is that man?' I inquired, observing that Lucy could not speak without bursting into tears.

"'Which man?'

"'That person in the arena, who was just bowing to the Infanta.'

"'Oh that man? He is the chief matadore. The best bull-fighter in all Spain.'

"'A matadore, a bull fighter!' almost shrieked Mrs. Eaton, turning upon her daughter and snatching a moss rose from her bosom where it held the folds of her muslin dress together. 'Fling it away, child. Pitch it after him. The humbug—the impostor—the—the—'

"Here the good woman broke down for want of breath, and rattled her fan open with a vicious twist of the hand, as if she longed to box some one's ears with it.

"I saw that Lucy was troubled and that her lips were quivering. General Harrington had turned his attention to the arena, for that moment the matadore was crossing towards a door in the wall, and the first wild bull was expected momentarily. He was so absorbed that he did not heed Mrs. Eaton's angry exclamations, though her husband did.

"'What is the matter, mother. Why, you will smash that fan to flinders; it cost—'

"'No matter how much it cost,' said Mrs. Eaton; 'I don't think these Spaniards care about that, or anything else but cheating the very eyes out of your head. The impostors!'

"'Why, who has been cheating us, mother?'

"'Never you mind. Oh mercy!'

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"Lucy, too, gave a faint scream and clung to me like a frightened child. No wonder. That instant a door in the wall swung open, and a black bull rushed through. With a bound or more he plunged into the heart of the arena, tossed his head upwards, and stood motionless surveying the great concourse of people with his flaming eyes, as if making up his mind where to plunge first.

"A shout followed his appearance, for he was a beautiful savage creature, with a superb chest and head, black and glossy as a raven. Ladies clapped their hands and waved their gossamer handkerchiefs in wild enthusiasm, while the general shout rolled upward like thunder. This

terrified the creature till he tore up the earth and plunged hither and thither in his madness, bellowing hoarsely through the tumult, and leveling his horns at the crowd as if he burned to toss every one in sight.

"Then the matadores came in, closely dressed, glittering with embroidery and a profuse display of buttons. One carried a red cloak in his hand, with which he taunted and exasperated the bull into hot rage. Then the contact commenced. The Matadores, slight, agile and vigilant, fell to tormenting the noble creature into new wrath. They flung their cloaks over his eyes, they leaped on his back and away again, pricked him with their swords, taunted him from a distance, and, when he made a mad plunge upon them, slipped through some secret door in the wall and laughed at his grave astonishment.

"Lucy looked on all this, fascinated. Tears stood in her eyes, but an eager curiosity shone through them.

"'There must be some mistake,' I heard her murmur. 'He is not among them.'

[263] "She was undeceived. The bull had begun to exhaust his rage, his tormentors had done their utmost, and the people wanted more excitement. *He* came in then, splendid as an Apollo, tall, lithe, powerful. Then followed the lightning play of human intelligence and trained strength against savage impulse. The man was everywhere at the same moment. His sword flashed now here, now there, up and down like a quiver of lightning. He would entice the animal close to him, and just as his fierce horns were lowered, leap astride his neck, and land, with a bound, ten feet away. Now he darted under him, now made a flying leap over his back, cheered on, and accompanied by waving handkerchiefs, eager hands, and bursts of admiring applause.

"A new feature was added to the scene. Several horses were brought in, blindfolded and old, ridden by inferior matadores. One of these poor creatures was urged up to the waiting bull, which made a rush at his chest with both horns, tore his way to the vitals, and let the heart out, almost heaving the beast from the earth as those murderous horns rent their way out of his body.

"Oh! it was sickening; the smell of the hot blood, the overwhelming bravos, the exultation of delicate women and innocent children, as the infuriated bull plunged his horns, reddened to the frontlet, again and again into that writhing breast. I wish I had never seen it. In fact I could not see clearly, for every thing grew misty from the sick shuddering that fell upon me. I shivered down in my seat and shut my eyes, degraded and full of self contempt, that any thing should have brought me to that horrid place.

"I would have gone home, but the confusion was so great, and the crowd so dense, that I dared not propose it, especially as General Harrington joined heartily in the enthusiasm, and would, I feared, resent any interruption.

"So I sat there, with my head bowed and my face covered, loathing myself and everything around me. A shriek from Lucy Eaton brought me out of this state. Starting up, I saw the man she had called a duke, tossed high in the air, whence he came to the earth with a crash. This stunned him for a moment, but before the bull could follow up its advantage, he sprung to his feet, flung his scarlet cloak over the creature's eyes, and gave the signal for a general attack.

[264] "Out rushed the matadores in a body, armed with javelins and darts, feathered at the ends with fringes of variegated paper, and sharp as steel at the head. These were hurled at the bull, and as each struck through his jetty hide, fire-crackers concealed in the paper ornaments, gave out a storm of noisy fire;—another and another darted through the air, thicker and sharper, till the tortured animal bellowed out his agony in pathetic helplessness, and fell upon his knees exhausted. Then the matadore drew toward the Infanta and seemed waiting for some signal. She smiled, lifted her hand, closing all but the delicate thumb. This was a death signal for the poor brute, who seemed to know that his fate was coming, and staggered up from his knees ready to fight for the last breath of his life.

"Then commenced a fresh onset of death. The bull fought desperately, staggering, reeling, plunging and making fierce attacks with his horns, while the fire-crackers blazed around him, and a hundred javelins quivered in his body. The matadore became cool and cautious as his victim grew more and more frantic. He played with the creature's agony, flitted here and there in the smoke of his torment, pierced his sides with the point of his sword, and flung fresh javelins into the bleeding wounds. The Infanta lifted her thumb again. The Matadore saw it. His sword flashed in the sunbeams like a gleam of fire, fell on the animal's dripping neck, and he sank to the earth, dead.

[265] "More of this happened that day; twelve of those splendid beasts were brought forth to slaughter and be slaughtered one after another. Some, braver than the rest, were sent back alive; but that ornamented sledge dragged off twelve of the finest creatures I ever saw. At last, even the Spanish ladies became weary of this terrible work. As for me, I went home sickened, and so nervous I could not rest."

CHAPTER XLVII.

MRS. EATON'S TRIBULATION.

"WHILE I was lying in my room, shocked by the day I had spent, Mrs. Eaton came in, sun-burned, excited, and panting for breath. 'Wasn't it a terrible thing! Such an imposition. To pass himself off for a duke! I declare I could kill him.'

"'But did he deceive you?' I asked.

"'Did he, why of course, the scamp! And poor Lucy liking him so much. She wont believe it now, hardly. He looked so splendid taking up that key and swinging his sword about like a Saracen, Lucy says, just to tantalize me, when I know exactly what he is. But I come to ask a great favor, Miss Crawford. You're the only person that I breathed a word to about it. Supposing you just keep quiet, now, especially to James Harrington. It might do mischief there if you said a word, and I'm sure you wouldn't want to do that. Only think of a daughter of mine almost falling in love with one of them matadore fellows. I tell you it makes my blood boil—but you wont say a word. Poor Lucy would die of shame if you did.'

"'I certainly shall not mention the man to any one,' I answered.

"'That's a good soul. I was sure we might depend on you. Now I'll go and tell Lucy. She's been crying like a baby ever since we come home. I wonder if the fellow will have the impudence to follow us again. The Duke! The impostor, I say,—to look like a nobleman and not be one.'

"How fussy and disagreeable the woman is. But I am too weary for much thought of her or any thing else indeed, yet I cannot sleep.

[266] "Mrs. Harrington lay on the low couch which was her favorite resting place during the day, and I sat beside her reading aloud a new English novel that Miss Eaton had lent me. Presently James came in, and making me a sign not to stop, sat down near one of the windows, as if to listen to the story; but when I glanced at him, I saw by his face that his thoughts were leagues away from any consciousness of the words my voice pronounced.

"I suppose I had no right to wonder whither his fancies had strayed, but I could not help it; and when I looked at him again, I knew that it was no idle reverie which had possession of him, but stern, absorbing thought, for his face looked hard and cold as it so often had done of late.

"I almost lost the consciousness of what I was reading, in the rush of odd fancies that came over my mind. My voice must have grown careless and indistinct, for I heard Mrs. Harrington say:—

"'Don't read any more, Mabel; I am sure you are tired.'

"I felt myself start and color; I colored all the more from annoyance at feeling my cheeks begin to glow, and I could hear that I answered constrainedly:

"'No; I am not tired.'

"'I know by your voice, my dear,' Mrs. Harrington said with her usual thoughtfulness for others. 'It was selfish in me, I should not have allowed you to read so long, but I was so interested in the story that I forgot.'

"I closed the book; it was always very difficult for me to read aloud with any listener besides herself, but she seemed so troubled at what she considered her selfishness, that I said truthfully enough:

"'I did not know that I was tired, it is such a beautiful book that one forgets everything in the interest of the story.'

"'Yes, indeed,' Mrs. Harrington said, smelling at a little bouquet of roses she held in her hand, 'James,' she called in a louder voice, 'have you read it?'

[267] "He started and exclaimed quickly—

"'Did you speak, mother? I beg your pardon, I did not know you were talking to me.'

"'I only asked if you had read this new novel of Bulwer's, that Mabel and I are so delighted with.'

"'Not yet,' he replied, settling back in his chair.

"I could see his face in the mirror; and the effort he made to collect his thoughts and appear to listen while his mother went on talking about the book, was perfectly plain to me.

"'You like it,' he said, absently.

"'My dear James,' she exclaimed, laughing in her pleasant, genial way, 'where are your thoughts this morning? I don't believe you have heard one word I was saying.'

"'Oh yes,' he replied, 'you were saying how much you and Miss Crawford were interested in the

book.'

"'I had done with that,' said she, shaking her bouquet at him playfully, 'I was asking you the name of his last work.'

"'Whose? Ah! Bulwer's—I am stupid this morning, I must acknowledge.'

"I was sorry for the sort of embarrassment he displayed—something unusual with him, so strong and self-centered, and I mentioned the name of the romance that had preceded the one we were reading.

"'Of course,' said Mrs. Harrington, 'Mabel's memory never fails! Do you know, James, the faculty she has of retaining names and dates is something marvellous, especially to poor me, who sometimes can scarcely recollect my own age and rightful appellation.

"'One has the opportunity of admiring so many splendid qualities in Miss Crawford,' he answered, in the distant, ceremonious way which he so often employed toward me of late.

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"I felt absolutely hurt, silly and childish as it was to care for so slight a thing. I suppose my tell-tale face showed it, for Mrs. Harrington said, teasingly—

"'Really, James, you are very stately and magnificent, this morning! that speech sounded grand and stilted enough to have suited Sir Charles Grandison.'

"He laughed a little, but it sounded so forced that I wondered Mrs. Harrington did not observe it.

"'I told you that I was stupid,' he said, 'so you need not be severe on my poor attempt at a compliment.'

"'I assure your lordship that Mabel does not care for compliments,' continued his mother. 'Do you, my pretty Queen Mab?'

"'I think they are a very poor substitute for real kindness between friends,' I said.

"I could hear that my voice sounded somewhat irritable, but I could not resist speaking, though the instant after, I could have bitten my tongue off for showing so plainly any annoyance at his manner and words. Mrs. Harrington did not notice my little ebullition—was it wounded selfishness and pride, I wonder? She took my remark quite as a matter of course.

"'You are perfectly right,' she said. 'Please to remember that, master James.'

"I saw that he was looking earnestly at me—perhaps he thought that he had hurt me, but I was determined to make no more silly self betrayals. I forced my face to look indifferent, and sat playing carelessly with the bronze paper cutter in my hand.

"'I am sure Miss Crawford knows that I should be only too proud to be acknowledged as her friend, and that I value her intellect too highly for an attempt at empty compliments,' James observed, gravely.

"'Ah, *viola l'amende honorable!*" laughed Mrs. Harrington. 'Mabel is appeased, and I am content with your explanation.'

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"There was a brief silence; I could feel that James was still looking at me, and did not raise my eyes. Mrs. Harrington was playing with her flowers, and when she spoke again had forgotten the whole matter—the merest trifle to her, indeed to anybody possessed of a grain of common sense, but of so much importance to ridiculous, fanciful me.

"'This is so perfect a day,' she said, 'that I think we must go out to drive. Will you go with us, James?'

"'I fear that I shall be unable,' he replied, 'I have several letters to write, and the American mail goes out to-day.'

"'Then we will ask Miss Eaton, Mabel,' said Mrs. Harrington, 'she always likes to go with us.'

"I could have dispensed with this young lady's society, but of course I did not say so, and I had the decency to be ashamed of my unaccountable feeling toward her. She was so very beautiful that to anybody less captious than I had grown, even nonsense from such lips as hers would have been more graceful and acceptable than the wisest remark from almost any other woman.

"'I am sorry you can't go, James,' Mrs. Harrington was saying, when I had finished my little mental self-flagellation for all my misdemeanors and evil thoughts, and could listen to what they were saying.

"'Are you particularly anxious to have me go with you, this morning, *petite mia?*' James asked, with more animation than he had before displayed.

"'Indeed I am! I feel babyish to-day, and want to be petted! If you don't go, I shall think you are beginning to tire of this poor invalid woman who is so great a trouble to you all.'

"'My mother could never think that,' he said hastily, rising, and moving close to her sofa, where he stood gently smoothing her beautiful hair with his hand.

"Besides,' she went on, 'these women are just no party at all. Mabel's head is full of the book, and between us, poor little Miss Eaton will have a wearisome drive of it.'

"I shall go with you,' James answered, 'my letters can wait till the next mail.'

"We have conquered, Mabel!' cried Mrs. Harrington, with that air of triumph so many women show on such occasions,—a feeling which, I confess, has always been a mystery to me.

"But just now Mrs. Harrington made a sad mistake when she said that we had conquered—as if either of us had anything to do with Mr. James' change of determination! The moment she had announced her intention of inviting our beautiful neighbor, he had discovered that it was easy for him to let his correspondence lie over. Either Mrs. Harrington was very blind, or she chose to ignore a fact that was as palpable as if he had given utterance to it.

"I felt tired and moody, and half inclined to make that ordinary feminine fib, a headache, a plea for not making one of the party. I do not know what I might have said; I dare say something I should have been sorry for, because I felt strangely perverse and irritable."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

ZILLAH'S LETTER.

"ONE morning, while we were arranging a drive for the afternoon, General Harrington entered the room, bringing a letter in his hand.

"How do you find yourself this morning, fair lady!' he asked, approaching his wife and kissing her hand with his accustomed gallantry.

"Quite well,' she answered, lifting her eyes to his with that lovely smile of greeting she always had for him, and which made her face so beautiful.

"That is the most delightful news that could greet me,' he replied, with one of his courtly bows. 'How is my paragon of wards?' he continued, turning to me.

"I answered him pleasantly; he was so elegant and thorough-bred that one was insensibly forced to restrain even pettish thoughts in his presence. But I was abashed all the while, for I noticed that as the General came up to the sofa, James immediately retreated and resumed his seat in the window. He had often of late betrayed those little signs of desiring to avoid the General's society, and they puzzled me very much, for the elder man's behavior to him was always friendly and courteous in the extreme.

"I need not ask after your health, James,' the General said, good naturedly, 'because it cannot have materially altered since I made the inquiry an hour ago.'

"What is that letter?' asked Mrs. Harrington, with the curiosity that becomes habitual with most invalids, and speaking so quickly, that James' disregard of his stepfather's remark was not noticeable.

"It is for you, madam; I could not resist the pleasure of giving it to you myself, for I know how much you like to receive letters.'

"Thanks! You manage in everything to give me a double pleasure,' she said, taking the letter from his hand and tearing it open.

"From Zillah,' she said, glancing down the page.

"I saw James start. He caught me looking at him, and quieted himself at once; but I noted his agitation plainly.

"The General was busy wheeling an easy chair near the sofa, and did not catch his wife's remark.

"From whom did you say it was, my dear?' he asked.

"From Zillah,' she replied, without looking up.

"She, indeed,' said he carelessly, 'and what does the poor and rather bad tempered Zillah have to say?'

"He sat down by his wife's side, playing with the flowers that lay on her cushions, and did not observe the quick, angry, defiant look that James shot at him as he spoke.

"Poor girl,' said Mrs. Harrington, as she finished reading the hurried scrawl, 'she is pining to come and join us; she says she is much better, but so lonely and homesick that she feels it will be impossible for her to get well until she is safe with us again.'

"The General shrugged his shoulders.

"Your spoiled Zillah is seldom contented,' he said, pleasantly enough.

"Just read the letter,' Mrs. Harrington said, placing it in his hands. 'I am sure you will be sorry for her—she says she feels like a poor little Italian grey-hound left out in the cold.'

"The General read the letter and returned it to his wife, saying—

"I suppose she is lonely, and since she is well enough to travel, of course she had better come on at once—she can be of service to you, I dare say, even if she is not strong enough to resume her old duties.'

"I really want to see her, pretty creature,' Mrs. Harrington said, glancing over portions of the letter again.

"I feel quite lost without her caprices and bad temper—besides, she always knows exactly what is to be done for me, and does it in the best way.'

"Only, thanks to Miss Mabel's kindness, you have not had time to miss her,' the General said.

"Oh, there never was such a nurse as Mabel,' cried she, 'but then I can't quite make a servant of her, willing as she is to sacrifice herself to my whims.'

"I scarcely thought you regarded the girl Zillah quite as a servant,' said James, speaking for the first time. There was something so bitter in his voice, that I wondered they did not notice it.

"Indeed I do not,' Mrs. Harrington replied. 'She is faithful and loving, and so handsome that it is like having some exotic flower about me.'

"Mrs. Harrington never forgets what is due herself or others, James, whether they may be dependent or friends,' the General said, in a more reproving tone than I ever before heard him employ towards his wife's son.

"Again James' dark eyes flashed upon him that strange look of anger and defiance.

"May I see the letter, mother?' he asked, quickly.

"Certainly,' Mrs. Harrington said, stretching out her hand over the back of the sofa.

"As James took the letter, the General said—

"Zillah is not likely to have any important secrets to write to your mother.'

"I might—perhaps it was fancy, caused by the suspicion that was in my own mind—but I thought he slightly emphasized the words 'your mother.' No, I am sure it was not fancy, for James' lips shut together in the compressed way they did when he was angry, and a frown gathered on his forehead—he had caught the peculiar tone as I did."

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE GENERAL PROPOSES A TRIP TO CADIZ.

"WHILE James was reading the letter, the General said to his wife—

"I find that I shall be obliged to go back to Cadiz, so I will bring Zillah home.'

"James crumpled the letter in his hand, and called out in so loud and agitated a voice that Mrs. Harrington absolutely started—

"I will go back for Zillah, mother.'

"The General turned a little in his chair, glanced at me, then regarded James—his eyebrows slightly raised with an expression of surprise.

"Upon my word,' said he, pleasantly as ever, 'I scarcely see the necessity for your playing *preux chevalier* in this case, James.'

"Not the slightest,' said Mrs. Harrington. 'But James is always thoughtful for others.'

"Always,' the General said.

"I have nothing to detain me here—I have seen Seville thoroughly, and shall be glad to make this journey,' James said, without paying attention to what had passed.

"I felt my cheeks tingling with impatience and indignation. What did this eagerness and solicitude mean? Did he forget how unbecoming it was—did he not remember how this strange,

passionate, ill-regulated creature, in spite of her beauty, her marvelous eyes, and her bewitching voice, belonged to a race separated from us by all natural laws! Did he forget that she was a menial—a slave?

"The General was smiling still, and smoothing a long curl of his wife's hair that had broken loose from the comb and fell over the cushion in a shining wave.

"James is so full of his scheme of becoming a modern Don Quixote, that he did not even hear me say that I would bring Zillah on here,' he said.

"It strikes me that you are inclined to do Don Quixote yourself, sir,' exclaimed James, and his voice was sharp and harsh.

"Excuse me—you misunderstand,' replied the General, in a rather drawling, sarcastic tone; 'if I were inclined to emulate Cervantes, here I think my taste is sufficiently patrician for me to display it in some other quarter than toward my wife's domestic.'

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"The tone was somewhat sneering, and the speech was a little affected and fatuous, but I knew he said it as a reproof to James, and he deserved it well.

"I am sure the courier seems the proper person to send back,' Mrs. Harrington said, a little disturbed by this unusual tone between her husband and son. 'Why should'nt he go, General?'

"You are right, my treasure, as you always are,' he replied. 'But as I began to tell you, I am obliged to return to Cadiz myself.'

"If you have business there I can transact it for you,' persisted James.

"Thanks! I have the utmost confidence in your judgment, but this is a matter that I feel inclined to take in my own hands.'

"Business in Cadiz!' muttered James, ironically.

"His mother did not catch the words, but the General and I did. The General only smiled—he looked a little contemptuous now.

"Why do you have to go back, dear?' his wife asked.

"Simply because I got a letter this morning from that stupid banker, Henriquez. He has made a muddle of buying those three pictures we wanted, and that Englishman who was so crazy about them will get the lot after all, unless I go on myself.'

"Oh, I wouldn't lose that Cano for the world,' cried Mrs. Harrington; 'I have set my heart on having it in my bed room at home.'

"Precisely the reason I made up my mind to go, dear lady,' said the General, lifting her pretty hand to his lips with exquisite gallantry. 'I am a foolish man, and I cannot bear to have you disappointed in anything—be it of importance or the veriest trifle.'

"Oh, how good you are,' said Mrs. Harrington, with the grateful tears swimming in her eyes. 'Far—far, far too good to me.'

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"I could not equal your deserts, my best one,' he answered. 'Besides, those three pictures are very valuable—worth double what I can get them for, and as a man who likes to further the cause of art in our new country, I should not feel justified in neglecting this opportunity. Am I not right?'

"Perfectly,' she said.

"Miss Crawford thinks so too, I hope!' he asked politely.

"I bowed—I was too much shaken by a world of strange, inexplicable emotions, to trust my voice just then.

"I can attend to that business easily enough,' James added; 'and you profess to hate travelling.'

"I shall be upheld by a consciousness that I am performing my duty,' replied the General, laughing. 'No, James, I am convinced that unless I go myself, we shall lose those pictures. I really have, what superstitious people call a premonition, in regard to the matter.'

"It is useless to prolong the discussion,' exclaimed James, angrily, rising from his chair.

"Oh quite,' replied the General, 'I am an indolent man, but a perfect Spartan in the cause of duty—pray give me some credit, ladies.'

"I can only think how I shall miss you,' exclaimed his wife.

"My dear friend, we shall both have one pleasant anticipation amid the pain of separation—that of meeting soon again.'

"James was walking up and down the room, moody and preoccupied.

"When shall you go?' Mrs. Harrington asked.

"This very day—I must lose no time.'

"And when will you be back?"

"Within the week; I shall make all haste, you may be sure."

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"But you will stay in Cadiz long enough to rest," she said anxiously; "you must not make yourself ill."

"Always thoughtful—always kind!" he half whispered. Then he added aloud—"I shall send for Zillah to join me there, and will bring her on; so you see everything arranges itself admirably."

"James paused suddenly in his impatient march up and down the room, and said more quietly than he had spoken during the whole conversation—"I will go with you, General—I shall be glad of a little change."

"My dear friend, few things could be pleasanter to me than to have your society, but you forget that it is quite out of the question here; you would leave your mother and Miss Crawford alone."

"I could not keep silence a moment longer—if I had died for it, I must have spoken."

"We have plenty of friends," I said; "we should do very well. Mr. Harrington could have a pleasant trip, and leave us quite satisfied that Zillah would not be carried off by bandits on the road."

"I did not look at James as I spoke. I felt that I neither colored or showed any emotion—it seemed as if I was only surprised and slightly disgusted at so much discussion concerning a servant."

"Oh, you must not go, James," his mother said. "I should die of fright in twenty-four hours."

"I see that it would be out of the question," returned he, in a voice that wavered between vexation and trouble.

"The General cast another quick glance toward me—that strange fleeting look which I had detected several times before, and which proved to me that the suspicions in my own mind, to which I could scarcely have given a name, in fact but vaguely understood, had a place in his."

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"James turned to leave the room; the General had risen and was standing at a little distance from me, bending over a vase of flowers and inhaling their perfume with that love of all beautiful things which was one of his most prominent characteristics."

"In leaving the room, Mr. Harrington had to pass near him, and I distinctly heard the General say—"You surprise me! Imprudent, most imprudent."

"James passed on as if he had not heard the words, but I saw his face, and I knew by the pale wrath that locked his features and glittered in his eyes, that not a syllable of that quiet remonstrance upon the glaring impropriety of his behavior, had escaped him."

"The General had evidently forgotten that I sat near enough to have overheard his remark, but as he turned and looked at me, I suppose he saw by the expression of my countenance that I had done so. He seemed troubled. I knew that he divined the vague suspicions that disturbed me, and was annoyed to think that any words of his should so clearly have shown me that he shared my ideas in regard to James' singular conduct."

"I left Mrs. Harrington and the General together, for I knew that she would wish to be alone with him to receive his farewell; for it was so seldom that he left her, and her nerves were so fragile and excitable from long illness, that this brief separation and journey were matters of painful import to her."

"But whatever the General's decision in any case might be, it was seen to be right in her eyes; and it was not wonderful that she trusted him so implicitly, for his manner to her was always perfect, his care and attention to her unvarying; besides all, his judgment was seldom at fault."

"I went away to my room; as I passed through the corridor, I heard Lucy Eaton's voice on the landing above, and I hurried on, for I was in no mood to listen patiently to her girlish chatter."

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"I was alone for a long hour, and it was a sad, dark watch that I kept there by myself in that gloomy chamber. The very fact that so many varying suspicions disturbed me, that they were all so vague and shifting, made my reflections full of unrest. But I could settle upon nothing—could form no conclusion."

"Only the other day I had believed that he loved Lucy Eaton—at least that he was captivated by her golden curls, blue eyes, and her pretty childish ways; the weak fascinations that seem to possess such strange power for the strongest men."

CHAPTER L.

MISS EATON MAKES MISS CRAWFORD A VISIT.

"THE next morning there came a knock at the door; it was my maid. She came to inform me that the General was ready to start, and desired to bid me good-bye.

"I went down stairs and met him coming out of his wife's room.

"'Pray go and comfort her,' he said in a tremulous voice; 'I would not have undertaken this journey if I had thought that she would have felt it so much, though she insists on my going; she is very cheerful now, but I am afraid she will break down when I am gone.'

"'I will do all that I can to comfort her,' I said.

"'I am sure of that! I could not leave her if you were not here. James is fond of his mother—but—well, young men will be young men.'

"I did not attempt to return his smile—I was too indignant with young Mr. Harrington to aid in glossing over his conduct.

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"'Believe me, my dear ward,' said the General suddenly, 'only a grave reason has made me start on this journey. Good bye—God bless you. Let me find you well and happy when I return.'

"He touched my forehead gently with his lips, and was gone.

"I was about to knock at Mrs. Harrington's door, when I saw James coming down the corridor, evidently going there, too. I turned away and went into the salon. I did not wish even to exchange a word with him then.

"It might have been half an hour after, when Lucy Eaton tapped at the door and opened it before I could speak.

"'I knew you were here alone,' she said, 'may I come in?'

"How pretty she looked, standing there in her dress of thin blue muslin, her golden hair falling about that lovely face which, probably, had never in her whole life been disturbed by a single thought or fancy that could cause pain to another.

"'So the General has gone to Cadiz,' she said, as she came into the room and flung herself in a graceful attitude on the sofa near me. 'How lost dear Mrs. Harrington will be;—we must all try to console her.'

"I was so unreasonable and bad tempered that I fear my first impulse was to ask her what possible right she could have to offer the lady consolation; but I managed to keep back that little ebullition of temper, and answered, instead—

"'He will only be gone a few days; Mrs. Harrington will not have a great deal of time to be lonely.'

"'And then she has you with her, and I can't fancy anybody feeling solitary, dear Miss Crawford, while they can have your society.'

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"'Dear Miss Crawford,' was in no mood to accept compliments patiently—they would have had a false ring to my ear at that moment, coming even from those whom I knew well and loved, so they were not likely to be accepted with good grace from this comparative stranger. I suppose she would have thought me unkind for considering her so, but I never found it easy to get up the girlish enthusiasm necessary for cementing sudden and violent friendship.

"'That is a very pretty speech,' I said bluntly, 'but it doesn't mean anything at all.'

"Lucy dropped her tiny hands and went off into a peal of laughter that, I must confess, was sweet as a chime of silver bells.

"'You do say the oddest things!' she exclaimed. 'I never knew any one so original as you are, but dear Miss Crawford, though I like it exceedingly myself, do you think—'

"She hesitated, and as I saw she never would finish her sentence unless I asked the desired question, I inquired—

"'Do I think what, Miss Eaton?'

"'That—that gentlemen quite like it. Young girls have to be so particular, you know, or they displease them.'

"'Really,' I said, 'I have never taken the trouble to think about the matter; and to tell you the truth, I fear I should not much care, even if I had.'

"'Ah, to be sure, you are differently situated from so many girls—with your beauty and your great fortune, whatever you say or do will always be thought charming—Oh, dear Miss Crawford, I did not mean that—indeed I did not! Now you are vexed with me, I am sure.'

"'I am not quite bad tempered enough to take offence where none is meant, Miss Eaton.'

"Bad tempered? Why, I think you have the sweetest disposition I ever knew! Mamma was saying only this morning, that you had a face like an angel."

"I doubted that, for I was confident Mrs. Eaton had no great prepossession in my favor, but of course I let it pass.

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"I am so heedless," moaned Lucy; "I say everything that comes in my head—mamma says she wishes I could acquire a little of your dignity—but I never shall be like you—never."

"The glance of self satisfaction which she cast in the mirror where her pretty figure was reflected gracefully curled up among the sofa cushions, was extremely amusing to me.

"I think," I said, "that you may congratulate yourself on there being no resemblance between us."

"Oh, that was not what I meant," she replied. "You are very beautiful, and I am sure nobody would ever say that of poor little me."

"I thought I had now talked all the nonsense that the most exaggerated idea of courtesy could require, so I said—

"You must not think me unkind, but—"

"Unkind?" she repeated. "I never knew you to have an unkind thought. Whatever you do or say would always be considered charming."

"More pretty speeches," said I, trying to laugh, for I had the grace to feel a little ashamed of my ill humor. "You quite overwhelm me with them to-day—let me try my skill. Do you know that your dress is particularly becoming, and that you are looking your very loveliest to-day?"

"Oh, my! no," returned she, glancing at herself in the opposite mirror. "I don't think the dress pretty at all—it's mamma's taste—and I am sure I am looking horribly. I told mamma I would not come in, only I was certain there was nobody here beside you."

"I have not seen Mrs. Harrington since the General left," I said, by way of trying to bear my part in the conversation more than from any other reason; "but her son is with her."

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"Mr. Harrington is so devoted to his mother," exclaimed Lucy. "Mamma says that he is a model, and that so good a son could not fail to make—"

"She broke off with a little attempt at embarrassment, that was rather a failure.

"Would make a good husband, you mean, I suppose," returned I. "That is the old proverb, I believe."

"Yes—but I hesitated—I'm so foolish. It always seems immodest to name such things outright."

"I am sorry that I am immodest," said I, "but straight-forward words are natural to me, and I utter them abruptly sometimes."

"I suppose I really ought to go and see if I can do anything for Mrs. Harrington. She is probably alone by this time."

"At that moment the door opened, and James looked into the room. He did not see Lucy Eaton where he stood, and said coldly enough—

"Miss Crawford, if you have leisure, my mother would like to see you."

"Certainly," I said, rising.

"And I must go back," cried Lucy, springing up in a flutter. "Mamma will positively think I am lost."

"Good morning, Miss Eaton," James said; "pray excuse me. I supposed Miss Crawford was alone. I beg pardon of both for having interrupted you."

"Oh, there was no interruption," said Lucy, moving toward him with her thin dress sweeping out like a cloud. "We were through talking, and what do you suppose it was all about?" she added coquettishly.

"I really have no idea," he answered, with a degree of indifference that I wondered she did not notice.

"I am sure I shall not tell you," she said, tossing her curls. "We'll not tell, will we, Miss Crawford?" I was busy putting away some books that had been lying on a chair, and so had an excuse for being conveniently deaf.

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"Since you are so determined, it would be useless for me to attempt to persuade you," James replied, and I knew that he was trying to be polite in order to hide how it bored him to stand there and talk nonsense.

"I think that a few days before it would have pleased me to have this proof that Mr. Harrington did not care so much for pretty Lucy Eaton, but it brought me no satisfaction now. Straightway, as if something had whispered it in my ear, came the reason for his indifference. His mind was so completely engrossed by thoughts of our conversation about the girl Zillah, that there was no

room for other ideas to find a place.

"The bare idea turned me faint with indignation and disquiet. The worst thing of all—the hardest to bear—was to lose my respect for him; and he was forcing me rapidly to do that.

"If he had loved Lucy Eaton, it would have been an honorable affection, such as every man has a right to choose for himself; but in this entanglement, which I was more and more convinced fettered his feelings and movements, there could be nothing but secrecy and dishonor.

"I wanted to go away—to get beyond the sight of his face—the sound of his voice. As I stood there listening to their idle conversation, I felt that I almost hated the man. With his wicked secret on his soul what right had he to bring himself into the presence of innocent women, and assume a position of equality with them. I knew how foolish it all was—I tried to think that the meanness was in my entertaining such suspicions, but I could no more change my feelings than I could banish my doubts.

"I walked to the door; as James stepped aside to allow us to pass, I caught one strange, troubled look from his eyes, which I could not understand. Did it mean that he believed I had divined his secret, and was appealing to my generosity for silence?

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"There was no time to think about it. Lucy was holding me by the sleeve and saying—

"I don't believe you have heard a syllable Mr. Harrington has said. His mother wants us to go out driving with her toward sunset."

"So Mrs. Harrington told me this morning."

"But you did not mention it."

"No, because she spoke before she knew of her husband's journey, and I thought she might not feel inclined to go out."

"I am sure I shall be delighted," Lucy said. "Do you mean to take the other seat, Mr. Harrington?"

"If you permit."

"Oh, my! I'm sure it's not for me to say! But I know your mother never half enjoys herself unless you are present, and really, one feels so much safer driving when there's a gentleman along. One never knows what these dreadful Spanish coachmen may do."

"I believe ours is very trusty," James replied. "Please don't hint your fears to my mother, or she would not drive again while she is here."

"Oh, of course not! Any way, I did not mean anything—I always speak without thought! Mamma says my head is no better than a feather. Isn't that cruel of her, Mr. Harrington?"

"You can console yourself by being certain that she does not mean it."

"Oh, I don't know! Mamma has a great admiration for dignified, stately creatures, like our dear Miss Crawford. She says I will be nothing but a spoiled little kitten all my days."

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"James looked so impatient of all this nonsense, that I was amused in spite of myself. I went away to his mother's room, and left him to free himself from Miss Eaton the best way he could."

CHAPTER LI.

CONTINUED MISUNDERSTANDING.

"MRS. HARRINGTON was lying on her sofa when I entered. She looked up and smiled cheerfully, but I could see that she had been crying.

"I sent for you, dear, because James wanted to go out for a while," she said. "Some way I don't just like being left alone—you don't mind sitting with me?"

"You know I like it, Mrs. Harrington."

"You're a dear, good girl, Mabel! I never can be grateful enough to you for all your kindness and patience with me."

"I kissed her forehead but did not answer.

"Toward evening we'll go out to drive," she said, "and take that little Lucy with us."

"Yes; Mr. Harrington gave her your invitation. Shall I go on with our book now?"

"Oh yes, do; I am wonderfully interested in it."

"I had left the novel in the *salon*, and went back to get it. As I opened the door, James was pacing up and down the room, and the face he turned toward me was pale and troubled.

"I came for my book," I said, and began searching for it among the volumes on the table.

"Can I help you?"

"Thanks—no—here it is."

"How different it all was from the days—so far off and faded they seemed now—when we had conversed like friends, with neither restraints or concealment between us!

"Now he was reserved—distant, and I could feel that my manner was absolutely cold and haughty. I had reached the door when he came hurriedly toward me, saying—

"Miss Crawford!"

"I stopped.

"What is it, Mr. Harrington?"

"I knew my voice sounded icy—he looked at me, and the odd, troubled look came over his face again.

"I only wished to ask if you were going to my mother," he said in a hesitating, embarrassed way, very unusual with him.

"It was not true; he had meant to speak of something entirely different. I have wondered since if my frigid manner and lack of sympathy prevented him. Yet what could he have said—there was no possibility of his bringing even the slightest allusion to his trouble before me.

"Certainly I am," I said.

"I have to go out," he continued; "I will be back by the time you wish to drive."

"Very well; but I assure you as far as I am concerned, I have no fear that the coachman cannot manage the horses without difficulty."

"He colored slightly—offended, I suppose, by my tone and my indifference.

"My mother desired me to accompany her," he said, coldly, "so I shall be obliged to force myself upon your society."

"Are you not too modest in your estimate of yourself?" I asked with a laugh, that even to my own ears, sounded so harsh and mocking, that I scarcely recognized it as my own.

"He gave me another of those quick, strange glances. It was too late to attempt to soften my judgments or opinions now, by looks or words. While hating myself for the thoughts that tormented me, I could neither return to my old faith or believe in the evil that disturbed it.

"I fear I hardly appreciate satire," he said, gravely.

"No!" returned I, laughingly. "You must cultivate a taste for it—read the old English humorists."

"Certainly Miss Crawford seems to have been studying the art lately with great diligence, if one may judge from the results."

"That is a somewhat doubtful compliment, still I must take it for granted that you meant it to be one," said I. "But I cannot wait to listen—Mrs. Harrington is wondering what I am about, I dare say."

"And we are not friends any longer?" he asked with a sudden change of manner, extending his hand as he spoke.

"The best of friends, certainly," I answered, "only I have not time just now to talk about the matter."

"I pretended not to notice his offered hand, and ran away down the corridor. I glanced back as I reached his mother's door. He was still standing where I had left him—he was looking after me. All this seemed needless duplicity, and only made me feel more harshly toward him. I would not have touched his hand then for the world. Why did he wish to keep up the farce of trying to make me believe that my opinion was of consequence to him? Perhaps from that absorbing vanity which so many men are said to possess, which makes them unwilling to suppose that any woman in the world is absolutely indifferent to them.

"I went back to Mrs. Harrington, and sat reading to her for a long time. Then my maid came to help her dress—we had both forgotten how late it was. The carriage was already at the door.

"Lucy Eaton was ready when we sent for her, and in the *salon*. Mr. Harrington joined us, so we went out for our drive. It was almost sunset, one of those glorious days that it seems to me only Spain can show in their full perfection. Italy even falls short. There is a softness, a witchery, an absolute intoxication about them, which must be felt in order to be understood; but any one who has enjoyed them would say with me, that no words could be found to express their wonderful

charm.

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"A rather dull, silent drive, though Lucy Eaton talked a great deal; and James, who was sitting beside her, of course, made an effort to talk and to appear interested. But it was evident that it was an effort—so evident that I wondered how she could help seeing it.

"Mrs. Harrington was in one of her most quiet moods, and as for me, I leaned back in the carriage and kept my mouth resolutely shut. I am sure I must have looked both obstinate and disagreeable, but I could not help it—in fact, I am afraid that I did not much care.

"I was mortally tired; I could not tell why. Certainly a few hours of reading aloud could not have reduced me to a state of such extreme weariness, and I had made no other exertion; but body and mind I felt utterly prostrated, as if I should never be rested or strong again.

"I was glad enough when the drive was over. I must have shown in my face something of the lassitude, for even Lucy, who was the most thoughtless and unobservant of human beings said, as we got out of the carriage—

"'You look so pale, Miss Crawford; I am sure you cannot be well.'

"'Only dreadfully tired,' I said; 'I shall have a cup of tea and go straight to my room.'

"Mrs. Harrington was inclined to be anxious about me, but I succeeded in convincing her that there was no occasion.

"I only want a long sleep; I was wakened very early this morning, and there is so much of the dormouse about me, that if I am cheated out of a single half hour of my usual allowance, I am fit for nothing all day.'

"I knew James was to stay with his mother; and as Lucy Eaton seemed inclined to spend the evening too, I drank a cup of tea and went away to my room.

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"I undressed myself and lay down on my bed, too thoroughly worn out to sit up longer, but I could not sleep. I felt as if I would give the world to have fallen into a slumber so heavy that it could not have been disturbed even by a dream, till the new day came in.

"But not even a sensation of drowsiness would come. There I lay and watched the full moon soaring up the purple heavens—thinking—thinking, and yet so longing to be free from thought—and oh, so tired, so tired.

"Many a time I have passed a week that did not seem so long as that night! I had a horrible feeling that it would never come to an end. I felt as if time had ceased suddenly, and I had been flung into the pulseless hush of eternity, and was to be left alone there forever, with my dreary meditations for company and punishment."

CHAPTER LII.

GENERAL HARRINGTON RETURNS WITH ZILLAH.

"OF the remainder of that week, while we were waiting for the General's return, there are no events to record. The time passed quietly enough; Mrs. Harrington, in spite of her pining somewhat over her husband's unexpectedly prolonged absence, improved in health every day. It was a great pleasure to notice how each morning she seemed stronger and brighter, taking a new interest in everything that went on about her, and so cheerful and kind that I grew to love her very dearly.

"I suppose I may as well own the truth; Lucy Eaton was a great trial to me. I have no doubt that I was cross and irritable. I used to reproach myself twenty times each day, for being so captious and unreasonable; but really, that pretty, childish creature fretted me almost beyond all powers of endurance.

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"I got so weary of hearing about dress, that I felt that I should never care again whether I had anything pretty or not. As for young men, and marriage, and the pleasures of society, I heard them discussed until I wished that neither of them had ever had an existence.

"But I have no doubt it was all greatly owing to the state of feeling into which I had fallen, and I knew it was wrong, but at that time I could not exercise the least control over myself.

"At last the General returned, bringing Zillah with him. I was out of the room when he arrived, so that I did not witness the meeting between him and his wife; but when I joined them soon after, one glance at Mrs. Harrington's face was sufficient to show how happy his return had made her.

"The General greeted me in his usual cordial, gallant manner. I was very glad to have him with us once more.

"James cannot know you have come,' Mrs. Harrington said, 'or he would be here.'

"He is quite well, I hope,' the General said.

"Quite. Oh dear, how glad I am to have you back.'

"You may know by your own pleasure, how glad I am to return,' he answered. 'Nothing would have induced me to go but that I felt it right. I did not approve—I may speak before my dear ward,—I thought James quite too young to be entrusted with the business of bringing back so pretty a girl as Zillah, even if she was only a servant.'

"I must send for her,' Mrs. Harrington said. 'Poor thing, she will take it dreadfully to heart if she thinks I am not glad to see her.'

"She rang the little bell that sat on the table, and asked the man to send Zillah in. Just as he went, James entered. I looked with a little curiosity to see the meeting between him and his step-father.

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"The General's manner was the same as ever—that exquisite blending of courtesy and kindly feeling which always characterized his communications with his wife's son. But young Mr. Harrington was constrained, almost cold. I knew that he had not forgiven the General for the course he had taken regarding that journey.

"When I saw that, I fairly hated him. He exchanged a little conversation with the General, talked for a moment with his mother, and after a frigid salutation to me passed on to a window, and stood there looking out into the court.

"In a short time the door opened again, and Zillah entered. The creature fairly bounded toward Mrs. Harrington like some beautiful wild animal, and fell at her feet, kissing her hands, and pouring out a torrent of delighted exclamations.

"The slave was more gorgeously lovely than ever; somewhat paler and thinner, and her great eyes beamed with more eager light.

"Mrs. Harrington was touched almost to tears by the girl's manner, but to me it was fairly repulsive. Her gladness was so exaggerated that I could not help thinking it all acting from beginning to end.

"I am so glad, so glad!' she kept repeating. 'Dear mistress, I thought I should die and never see you again! It broke my heart! Oh, I am so happy.'

"And I am very glad to have you back, my pretty Zillah,' Mrs. Harrington said. 'I have missed you very much.'

"Zillah kissed the fair hands again, but it seemed to me—oh, how suspicious I had grown—that the evil light I had so often noticed in her eyes deepened till, in defiance of her beauty, she looked absolutely fiendish.

"See,' said Mrs. Harrington, 'you have not spoken to Miss Mabel.'

"The girl rose from her knees and came toward me, dropping a graceful curtsy that seemed to me fairly insulting, instead of a mark of respect.

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"I am glad you are quite well again, Zillah,' was all I could bring myself to say.

"She murmured something—I do not know exactly what—at the same moment she caught sight of James standing in the window. The color rushed in a torrent to her face, then as suddenly receded, leaving her pale and trembling with excitement.

"She went timidly toward him. He did not stir—did not even look round. Was it because he was afraid to let us see his face?

"Zillah stopped in the recess, and I heard her say in a faltering voice—

"Mr. James, Mr. James! Everybody else is glad to see poor Zillah back, but you will not even speak to me.'

"He turned then. He was very pale, and his features were set and hard. I was certain this arose from a violent effort to conceal his feelings.

"I am very glad you are well again,' he said; 'my mother has missed you.'

"The girl made a quick, angry gesture, and I saw—yes, I could swear that it was not fancy—I saw James Harrington make a little sign with his hand, as if to caution her.

"She checked herself at once, and with a few broken words about her love of her mistress, she turned away and went hastily out of the room.

"Poor Zillah,' said Mrs. Harrington, 'she could not bear it any longer; she has gone away to have a good cry all by herself. She is the most sensitive, affectionate creature I ever saw in my life. I must go after her or she will be getting into one of her desperate fits, thinking nobody is

pleased to have her back.'

"Better leave her to herself,' the General said, carelessly; 'I think the girl is a good deal spoiled already—better not add to it.'

"James darted a perfectly furious glance at him as he spoke, then turned and looked out of the window again.

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"Perhaps you are right, dear,' Mrs. Harrington said; 'I do spoil the child, but she is so pretty, I really cannot help it.'

"A reason that answers with women,' said the General, smiling, 'and young men,' he added to himself, but I caught the words, low as they were spoken.

"I suppose my face betrayed that I had heard him, for he gave me a little deprecatory bow and smile, half playful, half apologetic.

"James moved suddenly from the window and was leaving the room.

"Are you going out, dear?' his mother asked.

"Not yet,' he answered, 'Have you any commands, *madre mia*?'

"None, I believe,' she replied with her happiest smile. 'Perhaps Mabel has, though.'

"Miss Crawford has only to express them,' he replied, half turning toward me, his voice changing so quickly, growing so cold and indifferent, that I wondered even his mother, unobservant as she was, did not notice it.

"You are too kind,' I answered, and if his tone was cold, mine certainly, was haughty enough. 'I have none with which I need trouble you.'

"The General, whom nothing escaped, looked curiously from one to the other, but did not speak.

"You will not be gone long, James?' Mrs. Harrington asked, with the unconscious spirit of exaction which is apt to grow upon those who have been ill and suffered a good deal.

"Not long enough for you to miss me, dear,' he replied, and his voice was kind and gentle as ever.

"I must do him that justice at least—his manner to his mother never varied. Whatever the secret was that disturbed him, however much preoccupied he might be—and sometimes he looked worn and troubled, as a man might who was struggling with evil spirits—he had always cheerful words and smiles at his command for her.

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"He went up to her now, kissed her and said something in a low voice—some pleasant, affectionate words, I knew by the light that came over her face.

"Good morning, James,' said the General kindly.

"Good morning, General Harrington,' returned he in a hard, steely voice, bowed to me, and quitted the room abruptly.

"The General shrugged his shoulders, looked somewhat impatient, and a little amused.

"I had withdrawn to the window, and the General, walking up and down the room, passed me, and stopped a moment.

"I gave up being astonished a good many years ago,' said he, 'but I confess the conduct of that eccentric young gentleman almost surprises me.'

"I am afraid my smile expressed something like contempt.

"Wasn't it Rochefoucault who said, a woman is happiest when most deceived?' he asked, with a glance towards his wife. 'Either he or some other misanthropic old Frenchman; but whoever it was, master James has evidently read and remembered the maxim.'

"What conspiracy are you and Mabel hatching?' laughed Mrs. Harrington from her chair.

"Just at this instant,' returned the General, 'I am telling Miss Mabel that she looks a little pale and out of spirits.'

"She has been kept in the house too much since you went away,' his wife said. 'Mabel, dear, James must take you and Miss Eaton to drive.'

"I dare say he has engagements,' I answered carelessly. 'The courier can go with us perfectly well, and with him we can take the liberty of changing our minds as often as we please, about what we shall do.'

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"And that, I suppose, is a great happiness to young ladies,' said the General, playfully.

"At all events, it is the charge made against us from time immemorial,' I replied, trying to speak in the same tone.

"I am sure Mabel is not given to changing her mind,' said Mrs. Harrington.

"No," said the General, "there are many subjects upon which her opinion, once formed, she would never change, I fancy," and he smiled with a significance which I thoroughly understood.

"I murmured some unintelligible excuse, and left the room. I heard Mrs. Harrington say—

"See Miss Eaton, dear, and settle about going to ride." But I did not promise to do so."

CHAPTER LIII.

ZILLAH IS ANXIOUS ABOUT THE HEALTH OF HER MISTRESS.

"As I passed the *salon*, the door was open, and I saw the girl, Zillah, standing before James, talking eagerly, and evidently in a fierce state of excitement. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes blazing—she raised her hands with a quick, Southern gesture of entreaty. I thought she was about to lay them on his arm.

"That moment he caught sight of me, and made a little sign—she checked herself at once. He looked disconcerted, but the girl's assurance was not so easily shaken. She followed me at once, and as she overtook me, said—

[297] "Oh, Miss Crawford, I am so near crazy with joy at finding myself with the mistress and all of you, again, that I don't know what I do or say. I was just telling Mr. James how happy it made me to see my dear mistress looking so much better. She is better, Miss Mabel, you are certain sure of that."

"Her look was eager; her eyes searched mine with keen scrutiny.

"She is greatly improved," I replied, coldly.

"I was very sick, too, Miss Mabel," she went on; "at one time I thought I should die, and never see her again, or the master; master James, I mean, or any one. Oh, it seemed as if heaven was cruel to me, as if everything I saw was cruel."

"That is absolutely wicked, Zillah," I answered, almost harshly.

"I know it. I am sorry now—but I could not help it. We cannot always put down wicked feelings. But you are sure that the mistress is better—getting well?"

"I was a little conscience-stricken by the thought that there had been slight Christian feeling in the admonition I had given her, and so found nothing to say, except that I was sure Mrs. Harrington was almost quite well.

"Are we going to stay here long, Miss Mabel?" she asked, following me, "now that she is so much better—quite well—did you say quite well, young mistress?"

"I don't know—perhaps, since Mrs. Harrington seems so much benefited by the air. The doctor considers her almost cured—there is only the weakness to overcome now. You can see how the color has come back to her face, yourself, Zillah."

"Zillah gave a little groan, and staggered back against the wall, pressing her hand on her heart. She was deathly white, and her face was convulsed with pain.

"Are you sick?" I demanded, really frightened, "What is the matter, Zillah?"

[298] "Nothing—nothing," she gasped. "Let me sit down a minute—only a pain. I'm not very strong yet, young mistress."

"She sank on a lounge that stood in the corridor, and covered her face with her hand. We were near my room, so I ran in there and got a glass of water and carried it to her.

"Drink a little," I said.

"The creature's hand shook so that she could scarcely hold the goblet, but the tremor passed quickly.

"Thank you, young mistress," she said, with a humility that displeased me, because it looked like acting. "It is not the thing for you to wait on me."

"Are you better?" I asked.

"Yes—yes—well now! I think it was only joy—my dear, dear mistress! I have this queer pain lately when I am taken of a sudden. It will go away by and by; I'm going to lie down—mayn't I, Miss Mabel?"

"It was absurd to ask the question—the girl had always done just as she pleased.

"You know that you can," I said.

"If my mistress wants me, I'll come at once—I want to do everything for her now. I'm quite well—quite strong."

"She got up from the lounge and walked down the corridor, but her step was unsteady and faltering. I was sorry for her, but my repugnance, my absolute repulsion toward the beautiful creature was only increased, though I could not have told why.

"Even her affection for her mistress seemed so exaggerated, that I could not believe it. Oh, I was growing very hard and wicked. I reproached myself bitterly, but the strange distrust would not be overcome.

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"There is a fair in Seville, where many curious and beautiful things are offered for sale. This morning the Eatons were urgent that we should go. Some of the Rommany gipsies, from Grenada, had camped on the ground, and Lucy was dying to have her fortune told. Did the silly wish affect me? Was I weak enough to cover a latent desire to consult these strange people under the pretence of obliging Lucy Eaton? I fear so. In the restless state of mind which disturbed me, I was willing to fly even to absurdities for relief. Mrs. Harrington, greatly to my astonishment, consented to go with us. James protested a little against this, for she had not been so well for a day or two, and he feared the fatigue; but she, too, had a curiosity to see the gipsies, and protested that she could do well enough. If they had any fears, Zillah should go with us; and if she got weary, the carriage could take them back to the hotel, and return.

"No one objected to this arrangement, which delighted Zillah inexpressibly. The girl had been out a good deal since her arrival, especially after the fair commenced. Once or twice I had seen her come in with traces of strange excitement in her face and manner. She gave no account of herself, when questioned, more than to say she had been out to see the town; but I, who watched her closely in spite of myself, saw that she was pale, silent and preoccupied, for hours after these excursions.

"This morning she came to me in a quiet, mysterious manner, which seemed to spring out of suppressed excitement, and hesitating like a bashful child, asked me to give her a little money. She wanted to buy some ribbons for her hair, she said, but hated to ask the master or mistress for money. The Spanish servants had a way of braiding the hair down the back, and knotting it with bows of ribbon. She wanted to surprise the mistress by the length of her own hair, that was why she came to me for money.

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"I gave her a napoleon, and in doing so my hand touched hers. It was cold as snow, and shook nervously as I laid the gold in her palm. This agitation surprised me, and I looked suddenly in her face to read the cause there; but her eyes were cast down, and, but for a cold whiteness about the mouth, I should have seen but little difference from her usual manner.

"Zillah," I said, "what is the matter that you look so white?"

"She started and cast a frightened look upon me, while a rush of crimson swept her face like a stormy sunset.

"So white?" she stammered. "Do I look white?" Then she added quickly, with a faded smile, so evidently forced that it was unpleasant to me, "Miss Mabel forgets how ill I have been; I am not strong yet, and it doesn't take much to tire me—I suppose I ran down stairs too quick."

"She slipped the gold I had given her into her bosom, and thanking me again for it, started away down the corridor. I had risen and was moving to the door, intending to go to Mrs. Harrington's room to speak to her for a moment, when Zillah came back.

"Miss Mabel," she said, speaking like a person who had been running, "I want to say something to you—don't be anxious, may be it is only my foolishness—but I'm afraid the dear mistress isn't so well as you have all thought."

"What makes you think that, Zillah?"

"This morning, when I was dressing her, she had one of her old faint attacks, but she made me promise not to tell. Oh! Miss Mabel, I was so frightened—that was what made me look so strange when I came up. I can't bear to think of it! My mistress, my dear mistress!"

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"She was wringing her hands in a wild agitation that was not feigned, and I did all that I could to comfort her, though this sad news unnerved me almost as much as herself."

CHAPTER LIV.

BEHIND THE GIPSIES' TENT.

"SOON after Zillah left me, a servant came to announce that the carriage was ready. I found the whole party assembled in the salon, Zillah waiting outside the door. I never remember to have seen Mrs. Harrington in such spirits as she was that morning; she looked so young and pretty, too, that it seemed impossible that she could be the mother of that handsome, proud-looking man. We drove through the streets, away out of the town, to the place where the fair was held. It was an odd, picturesque sight, with the gaily decorated booths, the crowds of quaintly dressed men and women, the noise and laughter.

"There was a throng gathered about a puppet-show, somewhat like the English Punch and Judy, shrieking with laughter like so many children; a group of girls consulting an old fortune-teller; pretty peasant girls from the hills slyly listening to compliments from the town gallants, evidently to the great indignation of their country swains; in short, every way we turned, some picture that would have been a treasure to any great artist, met the eye, and all so strange and picturesque, that I became more interested than I had thought possible.

[302] "The Gipsies were grouped in a green lane just on the outskirts of the fair. I had seen persons in my own country who claimed to be these people, but they were as unlike the pure Rommany gipsies as races of men could be. These people were thin, wiry and keen; their features, in most instances, finely cut, and the expression of their countenances full of sharp intelligence. They had pitched a double line of tents, where the elder women were busy selling drinks, and frying cakes, which they sold hot from an iron cauldron full of simmering fat, out of which the smoking cakes were lifted with a skimmer, as customers wanted them. The young girls of the tribe hovered around the doors of the tents, or were grouped in a larger tent, dancing for money, at the behest of any stranger who cared to amuse himself by their wild and eccentric movements.

"We were told that these dances were not always such as ladies would care to witness, and so avoided the great tent, and gave ourselves up to the swarms of women who were eager to tell our fortunes, or steal our purses, as the case might be. In the midst of this confusion, Mrs. Harrington took hold of my arms in a wild, agitated way, whispering that she was tired, and would like to go home.

"I looked around for Zillah, but she had disappeared, and the gentlemen, just at the moment, were out of sight.

"'Sit here,' I said, leading Mrs. Harrington into one of the tents, 'while I go in search of some one who can tell me where the carriage is.'

"Mrs. Harrington sat down, white and faint, both Mrs. Eaton and her daughter came to her and offered help. I left Lucy fanning the gentle lady, and went into the lane in search of Zillah, though her mistress, made a faint effort to prevent it. As I turned a corner of the lane, two women who stood a little apart from the road, near the back of one of the tents, struck me as familiar. They stood upon the turf, and were talking earnestly. One held something in her hand, which she looked down upon, now and then, as she talked. After a moment, I became sure that one of these persons was Zillah, and went toward her. The turf on which I walked gave forth no sound, and I moved close to the girl before she could be aware of my presence. That moment a small phial passed from the hand of that old gipsy woman to that of Zillah, who held the little flask up to the light, and examined it curiously, speaking in a quick, abrupt way, in Spanish.

[303] "I could not distinguish the meaning, she spoke so rapidly. When the gipsy answered, I caught the word *Droa*, uttered under the breath two or three times. The woman seemed to be giving some directions; she spoke almost in a whisper, and I saw the long bony hand clutch Zillah's arm, as if to impress what she was saying more forcibly upon the girl's attention. Then I saw Zillah hand the piece of gold I had given her that morning, to the woman, while she asked other questions in a whisper.

"'Zillah!'

"The girl fairly leaped from the ground, and uttered a sharp scream, as if I had struck her to the heart.

"'Zillah, what is this? Why are you so terrified?' She had drawn back towards the tent, grasping the phial close in her hands; then with her wild eyes on my face, and her features locked in gray whiteness, she stood a full minute staring at me in dumb terror. At last, she faltered out, 'Miss, Miss Crawford, how—how you frightened me. I—I am so nervous.'

"'But there is nothing to make you nervous, Zillah. I only came to say that your mistress wishes to go home.'

"'Oh! I am ready—I am ready, but—but when did you get here? We—we were talking—'

"'About something you had in your hand. What is it, Zillah?'

"I saw the girl's slender fingers close spasmodically on the phial, and the dead whiteness returned to her face.

"'Oh! it is—'

"Then the gipsy broke in. 'It is a love philter—something that will make her sweetheart tender and faithful—would the senorita like to buy one?'

"I turned my eyes on Zillah; she was still pale, and trembled visibly. With her magnificent eyes

cast down, and her whole figure bowed as if by some invisible power, she seemed to deprecate my scorn or anger. I was angry. What did she want with the philter in her hand—to whom was it applicable?

"Foolish, ignorant girl,' I said. 'So it was for this poor fraud you wanted money. Zillah, I thought you had more sense?'

"The girl stood up more firmly. It seemed as if a load had dropped from her shoulders. She gave a sharp laugh, and said 'I know it, young mistress. It is a folly—but I could not help it—the gipsies have such power—and I may never see them again. Don't tell of me, they will laugh so?'"

CHAPTER LV.

BURDENED WITH A SECRET.

"I TURNED away without answering, only ordering Zillah to have done with such nonsense, and go to her mistress. She walked on a little behind me, with more meekness than was natural to her; but I was troubled with a sort of dread, which nothing in the circumstances could explain.

"It was all natural enough. In the name of heaven, what had I suspected? I did not know—I do not now! but I felt faint and sick with some horrible dread, to which I could give neither name or reason.

"Miss Mabel,' said Zillah, coming to my side. 'I suppose you think I told you a story this morning.'

"Yes,' I said, 'I saw you give that money to the old woman.'

"I was ashamed to tell you what I really wanted, for fear you would laugh at me,' she replied, 'I never do tell the least bit of a fib that I'm not found out.'

"That ought to teach you not to tell any,' I said, rather severely.

"Indeed I don't, Miss Mabel—unless it's about some foolishness like this. I'm not a big story teller—don't think I am.'

"I shall not unless you force me to,' I answered. 'Come, we must find your mistress now.'

"I walked quickly on, and she followed me in silence. Once I glanced back at her—there was an expression on her face which puzzled me, yes, almost made me afraid. I could imagine Clytemnestra holding her midnight watch, with a face like that—Lady Macbeth waiting for her husband's return, with eyes like those—oh, I had grown so fanciful and silly during those past days.

"We found Mr. James Harrington with his mother, who was just driving away in the carriage.

"When it came back, I saw him return to the Eatons, who seemed to occupy him entirely. Feeling myself completely unregarded, I wandered off by myself, interested in the strange people that surrounded me.

"I looked about and found that I had lost sight of the whole party. I was not frightened, because the fair grounds were in full view, and I could find my way back easily enough, but I was a little amazed to think that my presence had been of so little consequence to the gentlemen of the party, that I had been permitted to steal away unnoticed.

"I walked on among the tents—nobody looked at me unpleasantly or spoke rudely to me, and when my first feeling of pique had subsided, I was not sorry to have an opportunity of examining more closely these strange and incomprehensible people who, during so many ages, have kept up their distinctive manners and customs, as much a mystery now as when they first made their appearance among the inhabitants of Europe.

"Such picturesque looking men, lazily basking in the noon-tide sun—such groups of lovely children, that would have sent Murillo into ecstasies—such beautiful girls, whose every movement had a willowy, sensuous grace that the women of no other people ever possessed—weird, witch-like old crones, with such depths of wickedness in their fiery eyes, that in looking at them one could easily have believed in the old-time evidence of those who made bargains for their souls with the Evil One. On I wandered, sometimes stopping to admire the children, or speak a few words to the young girls.

"While I was thus occupied, James Harrington joined me, and began speaking of his mother.

"She is getting worse,' he said, 'and I can do nothing for her. It seems as if the presence of this slave girl has a baleful influence on every one she approaches!'

"I looked at him wonderingly. Why had he opened that subject with me. I had no wish to discuss it, even in reference to his mother. Before I could answer him, General Harrington and the Eatons joined us, and we all walked back to the hotel together.

"I went at once to Mrs. Harrington's room. She was lying on a couch near the window, with her hands clasped, and her eyes closed; but I saw the lids quivering, and discovered heavy tears dropping one by one, on the cushion beneath her head.

"'Are you so ill,' I said, sitting down on the edge of the couch and kissing her troubled forehead.

"'Ill!' she sobbed, lifting both arms toward my neck, like an unhappy child, 'Oh Mabel, my heart is broken. I shall never, never be well again!'

"She trembled all over, and seemed ready to go into convulsions in my arms.

"'What is it,' I said. 'What could have happened to distress you so?'

"She looked into my face so helplessly, that my soul yearned toward her.

[307] "'Tell me, oh tell me of the trouble, for it *is* trouble, and nothing else,' I said, holding her close in my arms, for I felt that we were fellow-sufferers, and that my heart must ache with something more painful than sympathy.

"She began to tremble again, and clung closer to me.

"'It was foolish. I did wrong, but who would have thought what would follow. I—I saw him going toward that large tent, where the music was. Zillah had gone in just before, while I was buying some embroidery of a woman. You had all walked on—I wanted to speak with Zillah, and followed him.'

"'Go on,' I said, as well as the pain at my heart would permit of speech—for she stopped suddenly, and made a faint effort to leave the clasp of my arms. 'Go on, you cannot feel this more than I do.'

"'Ah, you love me so, thank God for that.'

"'And you can trust me, I would not speak of this, dear friend, to a living soul, not to save my own life.'

"'It is not that, Mabel, but I have loved him so,—been so proud of him. Never, till this day, have I known what it was to suspect any one dear to me. Now it is not suspicion, but certainty. He loves her, Mabel! My own servant! I saw her clinging to his arm, while those wild girls were dancing before them. I heard him tell her how much more beautiful she was than any woman he had ever seen. Don't look at me so wildly, Mabel! I cannot repeat the words, but they are buried in here.'

"'And you heard this, there is no mistake.'

"'Mistake, oh if there could be!'

"'Still this man is—'

"'I know it—the shame and disgrace must be buried here. I dare not speak of it, dare not reproach him—for there is one who loves me so dearly that he would take revenge, and there might be bloodshed as well as perfidy. Oh Mabel, I am glad you did not make yourself a slave by loving as I wished. All this is terrible.'

[308] "'Yes,' I said hoarsely, 'It is terrible, but it does not take me by surprise.'

"'Then you have suspected something—oh Mabel, keep that girl away from me. I will be silent, I will do anything a good woman ought, but the sight of her will be too great a torment.'

"I promised to keep Zillah away if that were possible, without giving a reason, and again pledged my word to hold all that she had said, secret as the grave. But I went to my own room, fell upon the bed, and passed into an agony of jealous shame.

"During the last two weeks Mrs. Harrington is much worse. All her old complaints have come back, and she lies upon her sofa all day long, weary and languid. Nothing can equal the devotion of her husband; as for the son, his attentions are unremitting; does he guess why she is so much worse, and is he striving by kindness to silence her unspoken reproaches? She gives no sign of the trouble that is sapping away her life, not a word has passed between us since that day. The Eatons have left us. The atmosphere of a sick room disturbs them. Worse and worse—alas! I greatly fear this gentle lady will never leave Seville alive. The last remnant of strength seems to be dying out of that fragile form.

"Zillah is most attentive—always by her door—always ready to be of service, yet I loathe and fear the girl. There are times when her eyes have a look that makes me shudder, and I long to remove that pale, gentle creature from her care. But, strange enough, General Harrington has taken a singular liking to the girl, and insists upon it that no one can prepare his wife's medicines, or soothe her, so well. Poor lady, she must submit, or destroy all her husband's respect for the son who has wounded her so.

"Weaker and weaker—alas! poor lady, she seems to have no real illness, but fades away calmly

and softly, like a flower that the frost had kissed to death.

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"Harrington watches the gentle decline with silent anguish, that I can feel, while I bitterly condemn him. How cold and distant this trouble renders me! He speaks sometimes of his fears as she grows worse and worse, but it is with mournful restraint, and when I lift my look to his, or attempt those broken words of comfort that spring naturally to the lips, he turns away without reply, as if my attempt at consolation had only deepened his remorse. Was that wild confession on the raft all a dream? Had terror and privation rendered me delirious? Could these words, so deeply written in my memory, have been only a wild hallucination? Is this man the same being I almost worshiped then?

"She is dead—oh, heavens! She died last night, with no one near but the slave, and, as the girl Zillah said, without a struggle or a sigh.

"The slave came to my room just at daylight, weeping and wringing her hands in such distress, that she fairly terrified me, when I saw her standing in the open door.

"'Oh,' she said, tossing her arms on high, 'she is gone, she is gone.' I watched her, young mistress, just like a mother hangs over her sick child. She made a motion with her hand,—I thought she wanted more drink, but she turned her face on the pillow, and looked at me so wild, I couldn't turn my eyes away, but sat watching, watching, watching till her face turned gray under my eyes, and I could see the white edges of the teeth, between her lips, as they fell more and more apart. I reached out my hand to touch hers. It was cold as snow, but her eyes were wide open, looking straight into mine, dull and heavy, as if they had been filling with frost.

"In the gray light of that morning, I went down to the death chamber. General Harrington and James received me in mournful silence. I had no heart even for unspoken reproaches, there. If ever forgiveness was glorified, I saw it on that sweet, dear face.

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"We passed a gloomy day. The shock has been terrible to James, terrible to us all—for the General is greatly disturbed, and, as for the slave-girl, her grief is fearful; she raves rather than weeps, and trembles like an aspen at the mention of her dead lady's name.

"With the solemn burial services of the Catholic Church, we have consigned the remains of this lovely woman to her grave, and now my loneliness is complete. My own poor heart seems to have partaken of the chill that has quenched her life. I am weary of this beautiful land—wary of everything—alone and unloved; for now I am almost sure my own wild brain coined the words that seemed to come from his lips in the storm—alone, unloved—what remains for me but—

"A great disappointment has fallen upon General Harrington. A will is found, and every dollar of his wife's property is left to her son. All this seems incomprehensible. I pity the proud old man.

—"It is all over now! Oh, Heaven, that I should have so deceived myself! Harrington loves another—Lucy whom he has known almost since childhood, and from whom a series of untoward circumstances separated him. There is, there can be no doubt—no room for a single hope—the General himself informed me of it to-day.

"I cannot write—I cannot even think! There is a strange confusion in my brain—a fever in my heart which give me no rest. I long for some one to advise me—some one to whom I can look for sympathy—but I have no counsellor. Kindred—mine are in the grave! Friends—the last one sleeps in the cemetery yonder—in the wide world I am utterly alone. The General grows kinder to me daily, but to him how could I speak of all these things? No! I must bury the secret deep, deep in my own heart—must endure this suffering in silence and alone.

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"I have but one wish now—could I but be the means of uniting James Harrington with the woman he loves. The only consolation left to me, would be to know that he was happy, and that it was to me he owed that happiness. But I can do nothing; the General only hinted at some mysterious history, and he requested me to consider all that he had revealed as sacred. Is this the secret? Does Lucy Eaton suspect the unworthiness which it kills me to know?

"Six months in a convent. It is too late to look back, or to retract anything I have promised. I have consented to become General Harrington's wife—to fill the place of one who took me to her heart as if I had been her own child, bestowing upon me the fondness which I could have no right to claim, except from a mother.

"The change I had remarked in the General's manner was not fancy, as I strove to think. He desires to make me his wife. He alluded to it yesterday for the first time, and to-night I gave him my answer. I can but confess that the arguments he employed were just; a young girl could not remain in the house with a man no older than he without being connected to him by a nearer tie than that which binds us. He spoke to me very kindly, more gently and tenderly than I had thought he could do. He believes that I have formed no other attachment, or, if not entirely heart free, it was but a girlish fancy, which had no real basis. He assures me that I shall be happy as his wife, but my heart answers how impossible that is! I do not ask happiness—let me but find quiet and contentment—I seek no more.

"A year has gone by. We are in America again. General Harrington will join me to-morrow. Ay, it is better thus—I would have it over. Perhaps, in the peaceful home I shall find in my native land, I may learn to still this poor heart to rest. I long to return.

"*He* is not here. He left us when we reached Madrid, for the purpose of entering France

through the Basque countries; but this month the General received another letter from him—he is staying in Italy. The General, it seems, had written that he had obtained my consent to become his wife, and the answer is—'Whatever will conduce to your happiness, and that of the lady, must be acceptable to me.'

"Nothing more—not even an expression of astonishment! Yes, it is better thus! I will marry General Harrington—he is the only being on earth who cares for me—the only one who would seek to render me happy. In a few years he will be an old man, and the trust and friendship I now feel, will be sufficient to his contentment. This firm and trusting friendship I shall always be willing to give. If I do not accept him, where am I to turn for a protector—of what avail is my great wealth, since it cannot win for me a home in any human heart?

"I marvel at my own calmness—pray Heaven that when too late, I do not find that it has been only the apathy of despair. I *will* be calm—my hushed and trembling heart shall at least be silent—by-and-by it will, perhaps, be numbed into insensibility. I can expect nothing more; for I know that the uprooted flowers of a love like mine can have no second-blossom, the sweet fountain of affection once wasted, its waters may never flow again.

"I will write no more in my journal for a season—why should I make this record of my weary life—this plaint of my troubled soul?

"I have suffered the one terrible grief of a lifetime; of what avail to inscribe upon these pages a memento of a lasting wretchedness!"

CHAPTER LVI.

TOO LATE, TOO LATE.

"A YEAR to-day since I became a wife, a year into which has been crowded an eternity of sorrow and regret; can I never learn to endure in silence! Did my husband mean to deceive me when he told me that James Harrington was plighted to another. I spoke of it to-day trembling as the words left my mouth. My husband laughed pleasantly, and answered 'oh, child, that was a love ruse. I had a vague fancy that the young fellow might be in my way, and so disposed of him poetically. There was nothing in it. The fellow has not spirit enough to win a beautiful woman.'

"Great Heaven! did he know how faint and cold those words left me—how I almost loathed him for this awful fraud. God help me—God help me to forgive him! It seems now as if I never could. How this portion of my life has passed I hardly know; seldom have I made a record of its secrets. Much of the time has been spent in the gay world, for my husband—how strangely the word husband sounds even now—seems to grow every day fonder of its pleasures. The months thus spent have been most wearisome to me; I like better the calm retreat where I have spent my summers, with only a few servants to disturb the quiet of the house, and faithful Ben Benson, who has never left us, to gratify, as if by magic, every wish of his capricious mistress. But there is to be a change—henceforth we are to reside wholly at the North, and *he* is coming home to live with us.

"A new blessing has been granted to me! Forgive me my God, that I have dared thus to repine and forget that Thy protecting care was over me! I am a mother! My baby sleeps in his cradle by my side, and one glance at his face makes me forget all the misery I have endured. James returned during my illness. My heart was too full of its new bliss for any other feeling. With my child folded over my heart, I could meet him without one of its pulses being stirred—there is a sacredness in the duties God has now given me, which I should not have dared profane by one human regret.

"He looks ill and careworn—would that I might speak of his affairs, but I can do nothing, though it is fearful to see him thus; to know that he suffers and feel that I have no power to relieve him. He seems to love my baby. Heaven bless him for that! The General's indifference has pained me, but the nurse says men never like children—when he grows older and his father sees him all that is noble and good he will love him; how could he do otherwise?—my precious, precious child.

"This little girl, poor, forsaken, young, innocent, she seems to have been sent to be the companion of my boy. How he loves her already; bending over the cradle where she lies to touch her little face with his dimpled hands, his great eyes lit up, and his whole countenance aglow with feeling, such as one seldom witnesses in a child. This is only another kind act for which I have to bless Ben Benson. He found the infant wandering away from some unknown home in a fearful storm, almost perished, and unable to tell even her name.

"It is a beautiful child, and the nurse pronounces her a very healthy one. The General seems quite willing that I should adopt her; so I have now a daughter—the word sounds sweet, very

sweet to me. James looks at me strangely as I sit with Lina in my lap, and little Ralph by my side, there is a mournfulness in his face which wrings my very heart; doubtless he reflects upon the happiness denied him—ah! he need not envy me a few blessings which have been bestowed upon me.

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"Am I happier now! My children are growing all that I could wish. I have wealth, kind friends—say, am I happy? I would not repine nor be ungrateful, but, oh! were it not for the little ones Heaven has confided to my care, how gladly would I seek a quiet resting place in the grave!

"I know now that time cannot alleviate suffering, that nothing can teach the heart to forget or still it into quietude, save for a little season. Yet my existence is not wholly vain, and while those youthful creatures need my care I am willing to live, but there are times when the burden forced upon my soul seems harder than I can endure. When I fling myself down in utter despair, feeling unable to tread longer the weary path which lies before me.

"It seems to me that I should suffer less could I but see James happy, but his sad silence increases my own pain. He is always gentle and kind, devoted to the children; full of respect and quiet attentions for me; but how changed from the bright youth of former years. How distant that season—through what a fearful gloom I look back upon the brightness of those summer years! How often I ask myself if I am indeed the dreaming girl who, in her chamber at Neathcote watching the stars out in a vigil which was like a charmed vision, believing that life was to be one long fairy dream of delight.

"I have been thinking of that sail upon the lake. I could not help it! Ralph brought me some water lilies that he and Lina had gathered; as if the odor of those flowers had possessed a spell to conjure up the past, the fleeting happiness of that summer day came back to me.

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"Ralph left me alone, and for a long hour I gave myself up to the feelings which his simple offering had aroused. I had not thought there could be so much of passion in my suffering now—the tears I shed burned my cheek like flame; and, when the storm gust had spent its might, I lay back on my couch, weak and faint.

"I was roused from those haunting memories by voices beneath my window—it was *his* voice; he was conversing with Ralph. I leaned forward, and looked down upon them—then I realized how fearful was the change which had passed over him. I had been dreaming of him, as he appeared upon that blessed day, and the being I beheld beneath my casement looked like the ghost of the happy-eyed boy of my vision.

"O, had he but confided in me—would he but have trusted me as his sister—hush! am I not a wife? Whither have my mad thoughts led me! My God, have mercy upon me, stay the terrible tempest which has desolated my whole being, and now breathes its deadly simoon through the sepulchre which was once a heart. I will neither write, nor think more—there must be an end of this weakness—how unlike the fortitude I had promised myself to acquire.

"Yet it seems strange that I have no right to indulge in these memories of an era in my existence gone forever! How few and fleeting were those moments of unshadowed sunlight; the brightest twin memories which my soul can recall, were given to me under such different auspices. Of the first sweet hour, I have just promised my soul never again to think—upon the gloomy waters of my existence, no lilies are blossoming now—the last withered flowers have been torn from their roots, and swept idly down the current to perish, leaving only a faint perfume in my heart, which is but an added pain.

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"Now I know that its very bliss was a delusion of my fancy, like the words, I believed to have heard, wrung from Harrington's breast during that fearful tempest, when we stood upon the deck of the ill-fated vessel, and death seemed so near us. Could I have died then, died with his arms enfolding me, his manly heart against my own, the measure of my existence had been complete—it began beneath the sunlight of his smile, it would have ended with the last life-pulse within his noble bosom.

"Now I will lay this book aside nor shall my hand again turn its pages, until I have taught myself something of the quiet I have so long striven to attain. If in the sight of Heaven I have sinned, cannot my sufferings atone for it?—the evil, if evil there has been, was involuntary; the penitence has been deep and earnest; surely the angels watching over me will not let it be without avail.

"Great heavens! will this heart never have rest—will years do nothing for me? Ralph is now a man; Lina, one of the most lovely creatures I ever saw. These two children, whose infant kisses seem, even now, upon my lips, have sprung up into sudden youth, and seem ready to escape my love. Yesterday, Lina came to me with a world of innocent blushes, and hung about my chair, as if longing to whisper some secret into my ear, yet without the courage to speak. I wondered what the child wanted, but would not force her confidence.

"I thank God, oh! I thank my God that I am alive. The terrible shock of that night is still through my frame. I have been so close to death, that the vitality at my heart seems unreal. Last night I was hurled into the depths of the river, that is even now rushing onward to the ocean so near to my window, that the eternal sweep of its waters haunt me like a threat of death.

[318] "He saved me—or rather they—for Ben Benson was in the midst of the storm, resolute, like the other. I must have been dead for a time, for, when my memory came back, it seemed as if I had forgotten all these miserable years of married life, and was upon that heaving raft again, with his arms around me, and whispering those low, passionate words in my ear. Why did that dream come back then? Was it to lay my heart open, and reveal to me how little prayer and time have done to wrest this first and last love from my heart?"

CHAPTER LVII.

ZILLAH.

[319] As General Harrington hurried through his wife's journal, his eyes grew bright and cold, like steel when the sun strikes it; his lips, always so soft and sensual in their expression, became rigid with passion, and clung together hardened by the silent rage that burned in the depths of his heart. Had Mabel proved herself vicious or unprincipled in the book so cruelly purloined, he might have forgiven it; but here the struggle to love him had been so great, that it wounded his self-love in every fibre. The struggle to love him—General Harrington, the invincible, the adored of so many hearts! "He would soon be an old man, and then the friendship, which was all her heart could ever give, would content him. *He* an old man—he who had solemnly determined never to know what age or infirmity was." The insult was too much. His outraged vanity hardened into absolute malice. For the first time he positively hated the man who could be loved better than himself. He forgot the self-sacrifice, the wealth given up to his use—the sublime devotion which had made James Harrington a guardian angel to Mabel's son. He forgot everything save that the noble girl he had married for her wealth—wealth even on her wedding-day half squandered at the gaming table, by an unfaithful guardian, had give the preference of her taste—he cared little for a deeper feeling—to one younger than himself, and that one the man to whom his first wife's wealth had descended in one vast property.

Was it not enough that the young man had stepped into his place on the death of his mother—that when he fancied himself in the untrammelled possession of her fortune, a will, undreamed of during her life, should have been found, transmitting every dollar of her property into the uncontrolled possession of a son—was not this disappointment enough? Must his self-love and pride be swept into the same vortex? Had both wives proved their treason against him where he was most sensitive?

The old man would not remember that James Harrington had not only allowed him to remain the ostensible possessor of this large fortune, undoubtedly his own just inheritance, but that more than two thirds of the annual income had for nearly twenty years been surrendered to his unquestioned disposal. He forgot that Mabel's fortune had melted away at the gaming-table without inquiry or protest on her part, and that, in fact, his own luxurious life was fostered only by their magnanimous bounty. All these things were ignored in his rage at the secrets revealed in that unhappy journal, and he really believed himself the most wronged and outraged of human beings—wronged because the woman whom he had first married for her wealth alone, had divined the truth, and left all that she possessed to her son, which seemed a new offense to him then—and outraged that any woman honored by his preference, should ever have given another place in her thoughts. His grounds for anger went no deeper than this at the moment, for even his stony heart would not give birth to a thought of wrong against Mabel, beyond the erring love so feelingly regretted in every line of that book; but there was a tempter at hand, ready to infuse venom into even his selfish nature.

[320] General Harrington sat with the book open before him. One hand, on which was a costly seal-ring, had, in unconscious warmth, grasped a dozen of the leaves, and half-torn them from the cover, while his eye read on, fascinated, and yet repulsed by the secret thoughts thus torn with unmanly violence from poor Mabel's life. All the craft and coolness of his nature had disappeared for the moment. His whole being was fired with disgust and bitter rage. Still, in his soul, he felt that these two persons had in reality suffered a deadly wrong from himself; that, after encouraging the attachment which he had hoped might spring up between them before his wife's death had swept her great wealth out of his hands, he had ruthlessly, and without questioning the state of these two souls, severed them for the accomplishment of his own interests. It had not once occurred to him that any lasting attachment for another could exist, while he condescended to solicit a woman's preference; and that which had for a time made itself manifest between the two young people, only gave a fresher zest to his conquest. To win a woman from one so much younger than himself, was even then, a triumph almost as agreeable as the possession of Mabel's fortune.

But now, when he was beginning to feel the approach of age, and to wither under the preference given to younger men—a preference rendered each day more decided in a country where statesmen are jostled aside by beardless boys, and the senseless giggle of pert school girls might drive Sappho into a second watery grave, sickened with disgust. His personal vanity

became almost a monomania, and he sat there, clutching Mabel's book, pale as death, and with flecks of foam gathering upon his lips, longing to appease his mortified vanity by tearing fiercely at something, as a baffled hound digs his claws into the earth when his prey is beyond reach.

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As he sat there shaking with silent rage, a door, not used for years, opened in his bed-chamber, and a woman came through, leaving the dark and dusty room which had for a short time been occupied by the first Mrs. Harrington, before her fatal voyage to Europe, in total darkness again. She stood for a moment, concealed by the crimson curtains, and keenly watched the old man, as he sat trembling before her in the first rage of his humiliation. Then, having satisfied herself that her hour was propitious, she stole softly into the library, and dropping one arm softly over General Harrington's shoulder, stooped down and kissed his forehead. The old man started, looked up, and a faint laugh, almost childish in the sudden reaction from which it sprung, broke from his lips.

"Zillah, my beautiful, my true-hearted, is it you?"

The woman dropped on one knee, trembling from head to foot. Some endearing epithet, uttered in French, which converted the laugh on his lips into a smile, broke as it were, unconsciously from her; and he felt the arm upon his shoulder shiver like the wing of a bird just as it settles after flight.

He answered her in French, and his eyes, full of gratitude for the balm her emotion brought to his vanity, sought hers.

"Zillah, you loved me. I am at least sure of that!"

"Loved!" said the woman, lifting her black eyes, to his face. "Loved my master. You speak as if such feelings were not eternal; to say that your poor slave loved once, is nothing; turn over every leaf of her heart, and you will find the same record upon them all. Thank Heaven, I am not entirely white! There is enough of tropical fire in my blood, to save me from burying my soul under the ashes of a dead love."

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"How beautiful you are still," muttered the old man, passing his palm over the black waves of her hair, with a light caress. "Your presence kindles the very atmosphere. This is to be worshipped worthily. You loved me, and I sold you for her sake. I bartered you off for so much money to another; it was a cruel act, Zillah; but your love surmounted even that, while hers"—

"She never loved you; never—never!" cried the woman, passionately. "I, I alone of all the women on earth, really loved you. As for her"—

"Hush, Zillah, hush! I know all. I have read that book. I know all her treachery; and he, ever a serpent in my path, ever a restraint upon my actions, he has in this point also assailed me."

"But there is revenge!" said the woman, with a fierce gleam of the eyes; "revenge on him and her!"

"No!" answered the General, gloomily. "To anger him, would be to make myself a beggar. I must bear this in silence."

"Not if he loves her yet."

"But, does he? What man ever remained faithful to a first love twenty years?"

A faint moan broke from the woman's lips, and dropping her face between her hands, she cowered at his feet, as if he had stricken her down with a blow, instead of those cruel words that no physical pain can equal, when they fall upon a woman's heart.

"What is the matter, Zillah? Why do you moan and droop in this fashion?" said the General, quite unconscious of the pang he had given.

The woman looked up; her eyes were heavy with pain, and a scarcely perceptible quiver stirred her mouth.

"He sold me, and I lived; this cannot kill me either," she murmured drearily.

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"Oh," said the General, smiling, for he began to divine the cause of her stricken attitude. "But remember, Zillah, you were not my *first* love. I was no boy when we met, and it was of boyish dreams that I spoke."

CHAPTER LVIII.

GENERAL HARRINGTON'S TEMPTATION.

ZILLAH drew a deep breath, and raised herself up, like a panther which a ball has grazed. A wild

illumination shot over her face, and seizing the General's hands, she kissed them passionately.

"Foolish creature," said the General, soothed in the depths of his vanity by this devotion.

"You did love me," she said, with a wistful look; "you did love me?"

"Yes—yes."

"And, it is all over?"

He looked down into her face. No girl of sixteen, in her first love quarrel, ever wore a look so full of anxiety, so tremulous with hope and doubt.

"Oh, I cannot say that, Zillah. There is something piquant, even picturesque, about you, that one does not readily forget, or ever dislike; besides, real earnest love is better worth having, after the domestic treason which I have just discovered."

Again the woman's eyes blazed forth their sudden joy. She arose from his feet, restless and eager.

"She has wronged you—she has embittered my life. I was your slave—let her become so. Then shall we both have vengeance!"

"And beggary with it," answered the General, bitterly. "No, no, Zillah, I am not so fond of vengeance as that; besides, hers is only a sin of feeling, and she seems to have suffered for it."

The woman turned white, till the dusky shadows under her eyes seemed black by contrast.

"A sin of feeling!" she almost shrieked, seizing the vellum book, and turning over the crushed leaves rapidly with her trembling hands. "You have not read all. You have only glanced at passages, perhaps!"

"And they have been sufficiently unpleasant. I do not care to search farther!"

Zillah still turned over the leaves, tearing them more than once in her rude haste. Her fierce eyes glanced from passage to passage. At length, like a hawk pouncing upon its prey, she opened the book wide, and pressed her hand hard upon a page which seemed more hastily written than the rest, for it was blotted and broken up, evidently full of exclamations and bursts of passionate thought.

"Read that!" said the woman, pressing her finger upon the page till the blood was strained back to the wrist, leaving the hand pallid as marble. "Read that!"

The General took up the journal, and read. Again that expression of white rage crept over his face, and a smile rose up to his mouth, coiling around it like a viper.

"Yes," he said, hoarsely. "This means something. It is her own confession."

"It is enough to crush her forever!" cried the woman.

"Yes, yes, that society may laugh at me as a dupe; vengeance is sweet, but I cannot afford it. To assail her, would be to arm him against me."

"And you will submit to this wrong?" cried the woman, while her eyes flashed fire and her lips writhed in scorn.

"Submit, no—my fiery Zillah; but the richest enjoyments of life should be tasted daintily—a noisy revenge is not to my taste."

"But you will live with this woman yet?"

The General smiled meaningly.

"She will, perhaps, remain under my roof."

"And you will not take away the name she has disgraced?" persisted Zillah, pale with suspense.

"You are a little too fast there, my friend. A name is never dishonored by anything kept secret within the bosom of a family. Disgrace is the scorn of society, and how can the world scorn that which it does not know?"

"But it shall know. I will myself proclaim this infamy!" cried the woman, clenching her hand, and shaking from head to foot with internal rage.

The General cast on her a look half-surprised, half-amused.

"Ah, Zillah, and who on earth of our world can you know, or—if that were possible—what would your word be against the life of a woman so universally admired and beloved, as my wife has been?"

"But, I will prove what I say by that book."

"Which is just now in my possession, where it is likely to remain. Be content, beautiful Zillah. The fate of Mabel Harrington rests with me. I shall not trust her to your jealous rage."

"To my jealous rage!" repeated Zillah, hardening down in her passion till she seemed turning to

marble from a single effort of will. "I thought of your honor, not of my own wrongs. I struggle against contempt for the man whom I have so long and so miserably loved."

"Contempt, Zillah?"

"Yes, sir, contempt. Even your slave has a right to despise the man who connives at his own dishonor."

"Woman, are you mad!—but no matter. I am too weary for much anger. You should have remembered of old that I hate scenes. This has been gotten up with too much intensity. I am tired of it."

"I see, I see!" replied the woman, resuming her slave-like submission. "You are tired, with no one to care about it. Let me serve you once more."

Zillah went to a marble console in another part of the room, poured out a glass of wine, and, sinking gently at his feet, presented it after the Oriental fashion which he had taught her years before.

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He took the wine and drank it off, dropping his hand carelessly upon her shoulder as he returned the glass. The woman sat gazing into his face, her brow knitted, and her eyes full of thought.

"Then you shrink from a public exposure in this matter?" she said at last, bending her head on one side and touching his hand with her lips, which fell upon it cold as ice, so deep was the craft and so cruel was the passion that prompted this caress.

"I shrink from purchasing revenge at the cost of everything that renders life worth having. Once for all, Zillah, to quarrel with James Harrington is to give up all that I enjoy. Of my wife's fortune, nothing but this old mansion, and some fragments of real estate, remain. My first wife, as you know, left every dollar of her property to James, else the marriage which has created all this turmoil would never have taken place. Up to this hour, the young man has given me almost the entire control of his income. Mrs. Harrington has no idea that her property has not always supplied our income. To assail them, is to expose my own losses at the gambling-table—both while I was her guardian and her husband—I only wish the accursed book had never reached my hands. So long as she was acknowledged the most correct and splendid woman in society, what was her heart and its secrets to me? I tell you, I am tied to silence in this matter, and your interference can but annoy me."

"Not if I point out the way by which the vengeance you pant for may enrich yourself," said the woman, arising from her thoughtfulness.

"Oh, that would be a discovery, indeed."

"James Harrington loves the lady."

"I am not so sure of that; but, suppose it so, what then?"

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"Legal separations are easy in this country. Let her go to one of those States where incompatibility of temper, absence, or caprice, is deemed sufficient reason for divorce. This will be generous, and they must be grateful for a forbearance that she has no right to expect. Half his fortune—nay, the whole of it—will be little to ask in return."

"Woman, has a fiend or angel put this thought into your head?"

"Both; if love is an angel, and hate a fiend."

"And, what can you expect from this?"

"Nothing!"

"Nothing! This is not true, Zillah!"

"Is it hoping much, when I only wish to be a slave again?"

"My poor Zillah; and did you, indeed, care for me so much?"

The woman fell down upon her knees, buried her face between both hands, and burst into a passion of tears.

The General was annoyed; there was something too much like a scene in the attitude and tears of his former slave. He leaned back in his chair, regarding her with a glance of cynical impatience. She caught the look, as her hands fell apart; and the hot blood that rushed over her face seemed to burn up her tears. She broke into a smile, and arose, sweeping a hand across her eyes fiercely, as if to punish them for weeping.

"There, there, I will go now. It is a long time since I have been so foolish."

General Harrington smiled; the flush of her face and the brilliant mist which tears had left in her eyes, reminded him of past years, when he had, from mere wantonness, provoked those passionate outbursts, in order to kindle up the beauty of her face.

"But you have forgotten to say how you obtained entrance into my private apartments. I trust no one saw you come in."

"No one that could recognize me. I became too well acquainted with the house when we stopped here with my old mistress, on our way to Europe, for any need of a door. The balconies are too near the ground for that."

"And how long had you been waiting in my bed-chamber, then?" continued the General, pleased with the prompt return of her cheerfulness.

"All the time that you were reading. I only sought to look on you again from a distance, and would have escaped without disturbing you, had it been possible."

The General smiled complacently. After the outrage suffered by his self-love, this devotion soothed him greatly.

"My poor Zillah!" he said, with a sort of compassion in his voice, "poor Zillah!"

She did not answer him, and when he turned a moment after to learn the cause, her place was empty. Like some gorgeous wild bird, she had lighted at his feet a moment, and flown away. But the vellum-book was in his hands, and her wicked counsel lay folded close among the evil things in his heart.

CHAPTER LIX.

A STORM IN THE WOODS.

AND Lina wandered off, deep, deep into the woods—her head aching with overcharged thought, her heart lying wounded and cold in her bosom. Hour after hour she toiled on, wild with the pain of her new sorrow. It seemed to her that intense action could only bring rest. Thus, she clambered hill after hill, drew herself up the steep face of many a rock that, at another time, would have defied her efforts, and waded, knee-deep, in drifts of dead leaves that choked up the hollows. Sometimes she would stop suddenly, out of breath, and panting with the fatigue of her aimless exertions. But after looking wildly about, as if in fear of pursuit, she would dart off again, perhaps retreading the rough path she had left. At last, she sat down, exhausted, at the foot of a tree, and looked around in bitter despair as she saw the woods darken overhead, and felt a soft storm of snow flakes floating dreamily over her.

The poor child was numb and cold. Her very breath seemed turning to ice upon her lips. But for the little hound that crept up to her bosom, and lay patiently there, with its slender head laid upon her shoulder, and its limbs trembling with the cold, she would have perished. But the warmth from this little animal's body kept the vitality in her poor heart, and instead of death, a drowsiness fell upon her, which would perhaps have ended in a wakeless sleep. But just as she was sinking away into that deathly torpor from which few are aroused, a female figure came, floating like a dark bird of prey, through the storm, now obscured by the thick interlacing of naked branches, and again dimmed in her approach by the veil of virgin snow-flakes that filled the air.

The hound lifted its slender head, gave a faint whine and lay down again motionless, but with his vigilant eyes on the shadowy figure that approached. That pale face was evidently known to the dog, or he would not have rested there so peacefully, though it moved through the falling snow, like a phantom which might disappear with the slightest sound.

Close to the prostrate girl it came—that sinister, white face—and the figure stooped from under the folds of its black and ample cloak, to whisper in the cold ear of Lina French.

"Go to the house upon the hill-side. There your mother is waiting for you."

Lina struggled like one aroused from the thrall of a nightmare. The word mother had broken up the ice at her heart. She pushed the hound from her bosom, and staggering to her feet, looked to the right and left. No one was near. The pale quiver of the snow flakes, and the naked tree boughs, trembling and sighing together, was all that she could make out. But the word mother still sounded in her ear, and the sentence uttered to her sleep grew trumpet-toned, and seemed wailed back to her by the storm.

"The house upon the hill-side! where is it?" she cried. "Which way shall I go? Answer me, thou voice of the storm! is it north or south, to the right or left? Answer me—or if I am indeed mad, be silent and let me die!"

Then, through the drifting snow flakes that settled down heavier and heavier, there came a voice clear and musical, like the low tones of a flute, half-singing, half-speaking, which might have been the disguise of some voice that feared detection.

"To the southward—to the southward, where a hearth gives forth its white smoke, and your mother awaits her child."

Then, with a wild laugh, ending in sobs that wasted themselves on the silence, Lina sprang away southward, always with the storm beating in her face, and the snow weltering like a shroud around her feet.

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Sometimes she would pause in a rift of the hills and look wistfully upon the bed of sere leaves and feathery snow, tempting her to sink down and die, with the grim hemlock boughs, plumed with snow wreaths drooping over her, and lulled by the gurgle of unseen waters wandering to the river, under their jewelled network of ice, but she resisted the impulse, and still bent her way to the south, while the little dog, so delicate and yet so faithful, rushed after her without a whine, as if he knew, gentle creature, that a cry of pain, added to her own sorrow, would be enough to smite away all her insane strength and leave her prostrate upon the white earth.

At last she came out of the woods upon a hill-side covered with the tangled undergrowth that follows a fire upon the hills. The trunk of an old cedar tree, blackened and charred to the roots, warned her of a close approach to the river, and in the distance she saw a wreath of dim smoke curling up through the snow. Leaving the cedar-tree on her right, Lina toiled up the hill, and crossed a ravine darkened with great white pines and spruce trees. At the bottom, a mountain stream broke through ten thousand fairy chains of ice, and melting the pearly foam of the snow as it fell, sent it leaping downward in a torrent that seemed half diamonds, half pearl drifts, under which the pure waters went singing softly on their way to the river.

Lina did not heed the gentle warning of the waters, but sprang forward in wild haste. Her step shattered the glittering ice right and left, and the cold water gushed over her feet and garments, but she moved on without pause, climbing up the banks of the stream till a smooth platform of snow, and a house whose windows were fitfully revealed by pale gleams of light, evidently from a half buried fire, stood before her.

She drew near to the house, standing there in the darkness, and began to stagger, for now the unnatural strength which had nerved her, gave way. The icy waters of the brook froze into fetters, around her ankles, and she fell, without a sigh or moan, with her face toward the earth.

The poor little hound, after pulling at her garments with piteous whines, set up a howl that rang mournfully over the snow waste around. Lina did not move. She was sensible, but utterly strengthless. All that she had suffered was lost in a single desire to be still, and sleep or die.

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The howl of her poor, shivering companion, so sharp and plaintive in reality came to her ear as if from a great distance, and for once she struggled to call Fair-Star by name, and tell him where she was, but her lips gave forth no sound, and when the dog set up another cry, Lina did not hear it.

CHAPTER LX.

THE DARK-HOUSE.

IN less than an hour after Lina French fell so helplessly upon the snow drifted around that old house, the storm swept by, and forcing the leaden clouds aside, came the moon, followed by ten thousand stars, that shone calmly and pure in the frosty atmosphere. Directly, bright scintillations of frost arose upon the white waste of snow, and the whole earth seemed crusted with diamond dust. The midnight was supremely beautiful, and the stillness around that old house had something that seemed holy in it, but now and then a faint howl broke over the glittering hills, which gave warning that sorrow, pain, and, perhaps, death were near.

A woman coming up from the shore heard the cry, and stopped to listen. She, too, was weary and panting from a toilsome struggle with the storm. But a cloak of soft Russian sables and a hood of crimson silk protected her as far as it was possible from the weather. Still her feet sunk heavily in the snow at each step, and her footprints filled with shadows as she passed on, blackening her way over the universal whiteness that covered the earth. Thus it had always been in her life—that woman never moved without leaving shadows and darkness behind her.

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She came forward, guided by the wail of Fair-Star, tramping down the snow and breathing heavily, from her up-hill toil.

At last her searching eyes detected the black sleeve, which fell away from an arm flung upward, as if its owner had made a vain effort to prevent herself falling. And there prone upon the earth, her garments frozen stiff, till they rattled to the touch, and covered with a slight sprinkling of snow, which had fallen off in waves during her struggles to rise, the woman found Lina French.

A cold, half-sneering smile at the easy success of her own schemes, stole over the woman's face, but as she stooped and touched the cold hand with her finger, the smile gave way to a look of affright, and bending down, she raised the prostrate girl in her arms, tearing her garments up

from the ice, and wrenching open a little gate, before which Lina had fallen, bore her into the house.

Fair-Star followed, shivering and whining, with a piteous attempt at joy, and, after a moment, both the mistress and her hound lay upon a mattress the woman had dragged from the next room, and spread upon the hearth-stone, which a bed of hot ashes had kept warm. With a look of wild apprehension, the woman whom we have seen in her rooms at New York, and later, in General Harrington's library—proceeded to divest the cold form before her of its frozen garments.

She took the fur mantle from her shoulders, and folded it over the insensible girl; then dragging blankets and quilts from the next room, heaped them over her, burying poor little Fair-Star up with his mistress, while she proceeded to rake open the fire and throw armful after armful of dry wood upon it. The woman was evidently well prepared for this task of humanity, for, as the fire blazed up and went roaring in a volume of flame through the chimney, she began to chafe the small hands and feet buried in those blankets, and from time to time rubbed the pale lips with brandy.

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It was long before the half-perished girl began to feel the warmth, great as it was. The woman kept on her labor patiently, but she grew paler and more anxious each moment, fearing that the young creature was really dead. At last, the little hound, revived by the warmth, crept up to the pale bosom of his mistress, and began to lick her face. Either the animal warmth so close to her heart, or some more powerful impulse of nature followed this act with a thrill of life. Lina did not open her eyes, but softly, as the limbs move in a dream, her arms folded themselves over Fair-Star, and a tear stole from under her trembling lashes, chasing away those that had melted on her cheeks.

Zillah regarded her with a look of profound satisfaction. She had placed a cup of spiced wine on the hearth, ready for use, and with her soft voice and caressing touch, now bent over the girl.

"Take this," she said, holding the spicy draught to Lina's lips. "Drink, it is warm and invigorating—after that you can sleep."

Lina opened her eyes and looked dreamily at the woman, but her hands wandered as she attempted to take the cup, and she had no power to lift her head.

Zillah put her arm softly beneath the drooping head, and raised it to her bosom. Then with gentle words of persuasion she lifted the cup, and Lina drank off the wine with thirsty eagerness. Her eyes were open and lifted to the strange face bending over her with a glance, half wonder, half content, as we often remark in an infant when its hunger is satisfied, and it lies with drops of milk trembling like pearls upon the red of its lips.

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"My child—my child!" whispered Zillah, pressing her lips down upon the forehead of the passive young creature, "my child!" As the kiss touched her forehead, Lina uttered a sharp cry, for, with that keen intuition, which is a rare and sometimes fatal gift, she felt the moral poison of that kiss in all her veins, and began to struggle in the woman's embrace, but without the power to cast it off.

Zillah's brow blackened, and her eyes shot forth gleams of anger, but the hushing tones of her voice were unbroken, and she made a gentle effort to cradle the restless head once more upon her bosom. Lina ceased to resist. Some narcotic had evidently been mingled with her drink, for the white lids fell drowsily over her eyes, and she surrendered herself more and more helplessly to that evil embrace, dropping at last into a heavy slumber, that seemed like death.

The woman soon wearied of her position, and after a little, thrust the sleeping girl from her bosom with a degree of loathing quite equal to that Lina had suffered under her first kiss.

"There is no danger that she will be found dead on my hands now," she muttered, huddling the blankets rudely over the prostrate girl, "let her sleep while I take a little care of myself. This awful night has almost killed me. I wonder the girl is alive."

The woman drew a chair close to one end of the hearth after preparing a fresh cup of the spiced wine, which she sipped with thoughtful slowness while her eyes were fixed on the pale face at her feet.

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"This snow has proved unfortunate," she muttered. "I fear that no carriage will be able to cut through it, and in this place she will prove very troublesome. Still, Agnes may be trusted, even against the storm; the girl has a spirit that will conquer anything, when her passions are concerned. Heavens, how cold it is! I can hear the snow crack, the frost crusts it so suddenly over; the window-panes seem curtained over with lace, which the moonbeams are turning to silver; it is a bitter cold night. I fancy half an hour more would have settled all things for the young lady. How she sleeps; but there is unrest about her yet. She knits her brows and moans in her dreams, as if some enemy were near. Oh, ha! ha! my pretty hound, what is the matter now?"

Fair-Star had provoked this question by thrusting his head out from under the blankets, and giving a low bark, as if disturbed by something that he disliked.

"Hush!" said the woman, sharply. "Hush, sir!" and she listened keenly for the noise that had disturbed him.

It was a quick footstep on the snow-crust—a fluttering sound near the window; and then the keen eyes of the woman saw a hand softly brushing away the frost traceries on the window, and a human face looking through. Zillah arose with an eager look, and opened the door.

"Agnes, is it you?"

"I should like to know what other person you expect?" said the girl in a whisper.

"She is sound asleep, of course; trust you for that."

"Yes, yes," said the woman; "but, have you brought the carriage? Can anything penetrate this depth of snow?"

"Not a carriage, certainly; but I have a sleigh and two good horses outside. It will be a hard drag, but she must be out of his reach before morning."

"And you expect me to go out again, this bitter cold night?" said the woman, shuddering. "I would rather run some risks than attempt it."

"Nonsense, nonsense!" exclaimed the young woman, speaking more boldly as she saw the deathly nature of Lina's slumber. "The whole thing must be arranged before sunrise, and I safe at home again. This has been a terrible night; I almost despaired of reaching you!"

"And who comes with you?"

"Your own people; no one else."

"But the cold!"

[337] "It is nothing, with cushions and plenty of buffalo robes. An hour will take you safely into the city. I must be let out on the way, and get home on foot. Come, are you ready?"

"In a moment—in a moment!" answered Zillah, gathering up her furs, and putting on a warm hood. "But, how can we get her dressed and out to the sleigh? Her clothes are like ice; they were absolutely frozen down!"

"Here, here!" cried Agnes, going into the inner room, and coming forth with some dark garments across her arms; "fortunately, I left these things at home. We must get them on, as she sleeps. There is no fear of waking her, I suppose?"

"No, no! Make haste, if it must be to-night!"

The two women lifted Lina from her couch upon the floor; arranged her in the garments that Agnes had selected; and, wrapping her in a large cloak, bore her between them out to a sleigh that had been drawn up near the house.

The driver appeared quite prepared for the singular appearance of a girl evidently insensible, for he flung back the fur robes without any appearance of curiosity; and, when the women had taken their places, drove away as rapidly as the drifted snow would permit.

CHAPTER LXI.

STRANGE PLANS.

[338] WHEN Lina awoke, she was alone in a chamber that seemed both unfamiliar and unpleasant, though sumptuous objects met her on every side. The atmosphere was stifling, as if some pastilles had just been burned in it, and a heavy pain in the head flung a mistiness all around. She was surprised to find herself dressed in garments strange as the room; but the heavy aching of all her limbs, and the glow of coming fever in her cheek, rendered connected thought impossible. She dropped asleep again, but only to be aroused by a soft tread that stole through her room, and the breath of some person bending downward, which made her shudder, as if it had been the poison of a upas tree floating across her mouth.

"Are you better, Lina? are you awake?"

"Who speaks?" cried the girl, starting wildly up. "Where am I—and who calls me Lina?"

"It is your mother who speaks—it is her house that shelters you."

"My mother? oh, Father of Heaven! now I remember: take me hence—take me hence!"

"My child," said the woman Zillah, stepping out from the curtains that had half concealed her; "let me look into your eyes, and see if they dare turn in scorn or rebukingly from mine. Sit up, girl, and let me read your face!"

"I cannot, I cannot; my head reels—my heart aches with a pain that will never go away;" cried the poor girl, bending forward and striving to shut out the woman's face with both her clasped hands. "God help me; I would rather die now!"

The woman went softly up to that excited young creature, and, placing one hand on her forehead, pressed her gently back upon the pillow from which she had started so wildly.

"I am your mother. Look at me—I am your mother!"

Lina lifted her feverish eyes, and looked in that face, so repulsive and yet so beautiful, with a strained, wild gaze, that burned with a brilliancy more terrible than fever.

"I do not know you!" she cried, dashing the woman's hands aside. "Let me rest—I do not know you!"

"But, I am your mother."

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"Well, go on and tell the whole story!" cried Lina, with insane vehemence. "I know who my father is—he told me himself; but you, madam—you with those strange eyes, and that proud stoop of the head, how came you to be my mother? Don't you know that General Harrington has a wife, and that Ralph is her son. What are you, then, and what am I?"

"I was General Harrington's slave, and you are my daughter. You need not look at me, with those great wondering eyes. I would have broken this more kindly, but you receive me as if I were your slave—not his. You reject me—so be it; but my blood is in your veins, and my shame on your forehead. You cannot shake it off; it will cling around you like a curse, forever and ever. Now sleep if you can!"

A shrill cry broke from the poor young creature, who had fallen forward grovelling in the bed. She struggled to get up, but her limbs were numb, and refused to move. She flung her clasped hands wildly out, and the prayer that she strove to utter broke forth in a sound, that bore with it the last sane thought that she was to know for weeks.

CHAPTER LXII

THE TEMPTATION.

"GEN. HARRINGTON wants to see you!"

A new chambermaid had been introduced into Gen. Harrington's household, and it was this woman who addressed James Harrington as he sat in the remote chamber which had fallen to his lot in a wing of the family mansion.

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Harrington looked up as the mulatto presented herself, startled by the southern accent and appearance of the woman, which struck him disagreeably; when she moved away, with her indolent walk and indifferent air, he watched her with a sense of relief of which he was himself unconscious.

"The General am in his own room," she muttered in answer to his question, turning back as she spoke, "something don't seem to 'gree with him somehow this mornin', 'pears like he ain't right well."

The unpleasant impression left by this woman passed but partially away; trifles sometimes affect sensitive characters with a feeling of unrest long after the cause is displaced from the memory; disturbed by this shadowy feeling, James arose and sought General Harrington's room, wondering a little in his mind what the business might be which occasioned this unusual request for an interview. He passed the mulatto woman in one of the passages, who retreated to the wall and stood with her gaze bent on the floor as he passed, but the moment his back was turned the sleepy lids rose suddenly from over her black eyes that flamed out with evil passions, and a repulsive smile stirred her mouth till it worked like a nest of reptiles. Again an unpleasant sensation crept over James Harrington, and he hurried forward with an unconquerable desire to escape her presence.

He found General Harrington alone, surrounded by the luxurious appointments which distinguished his apartments above all others in the house; but the old man was restless and even pallid, as if some unusual moral force had been necessary to urge on this interview with a man against whom he meditated a temptation so atrocious.

For the first moment these two men stood regarding each other in silence. General Harrington stood up at his visitor's approach, but all his self-possession was insufficient to keep his limbs from trembling and the color from fleeing his face. The painful compression of his lips grew more rigid, and a cold glitter stole into his eyes as they met the calm questioning gaze fixed upon them.

"You desired to speak with me, sir," said James Harrington at length, with that gentle respect which had become a habit of self-control, rather than a genuine impulse of reverence for the man before him.

"Yes, sit down," said the General, with a cold harshness of tone so at variance with his usual bland insincerity, that James Harrington looked at him in grave surprise, as he drew a seat toward the library table. For a moment there was profound silence between the two; then the General turned stiffly in his chair, placed one hand on a book with broken clasps that lay before him, and spoke. There was something more than bitterness in his voice; it was harsh with poisonous malice.

"Mr. James Harrington, you loved my wife before I married her," he said, with rude abruptness, that made his auditor rise from his chair, pale and aghast.

"Sir, sir!" broke from his white lips.

"Before and since; before and since! Do you understand, sir, your hypocrisy is at last exposed? I say again"—

"Stop!" said James Harrington, lifting his hand with authority, though it shook like an aspen. "Stop, sir; you are dealing with things that only God himself has power to scrutinize. For my acts, sir, you have a right to arraign me; and there I will answer you with the frankness of a little child, for as childhood they are innocent."

James Harrington stood upright as he spoke, with one arm folded across his chest, guarding the secret which that old man was attempting to wrench from his heart with such ruthless cruelty.

"Innocent!" sneered the old man; "innocent! But I do not blame you, sir! Among men of honor, it is a gentleman's duty to lie broadly and boldly where a lady's reputation is at stake. You have enough of the Harrington blood in your veins to deny this woman's guilt with sufficient indignation; but I, sir, am not mad or blind enough to believe you."

The very might of his emotions kept James Harrington still as he listened to these scathing words. He sat down very quietly, and gazed into the old man's face, shocked to the soul, yet unable to comprehend the reality of a charge so atrocious.

"Will you explain?" he faltered.

"I have explained sufficiently, sir! You loved the lady, and she"—

"Hush! sir; say what you will of me, but do not dare to utter Mabel Harrington's name in this connection. The angels of Heaven are not more blameless than that woman."

"Indeed!" sneered the old man again, dashing open the book before him, and clenching his hand fiercely among its leaves. "Read, sir, read!"

James Harrington reached out his hands, and took the volume held toward him; it had been opened at random, and the passage that met his eye contained a pathetic appeal to Heaven for help to conquer the passion which Mabel confessed to herself as a grievous fault.

The blood rushed athwart James Harrington's forehead as he read; for through the mist that floated over his eyes and brain, he recognized Mabel's handwriting, and felt how coarsely her unhappiness was being revealed to his own heart, which had hardly dared to suspect it before. He was bewildered by the suddenness with which this subject had been forced upon him, and for a moment sat like one fascinated, gazing in pale wonder at the written characters that proved how much he had been beloved.

"Read on!" said the old man. "It is a book which makes research pleasant. Read it through, sir, and then, if you can, repeat the gentlemanly lie which contradicts her own written confession."

James closed the book reverently, and laid it down.

"I have been surprised into reading a few words that should have been kept sacred—it was not my fault, I was bewildered; but no power on earth could induce me to open that book again, though I am very certain nothing can be found in it which an angel need condemn; for, if an honorable and upright woman lives on earth, it is the lady who bears your name."

"You dare not read the proofs of her dishonor, and yours!"

"I deny that such proofs exist, or can exist!"

General Harrington opened the book, and glanced at the passage which had just been read.

"Even here, she confesses her love; you have seen it in her own handwriting—the whole world shall see not only this passage, but the whole book. I will scatter its pages broadcast over the country. See, then, if your denial will shield her from universal scorn."

"You could not do this!"

"I can!"

"She would die under the first bitter sneer."

"Let her die, then! The woman who marries a Harrington, should at least learn not to commit herself."

James Harrington shrunk back in his seat, appalled by the vision of humiliation that opened itself before him. He saw Mabel's name bandied from lip to lip with pity or sneers, by the very society in which she had been held in so much honor. He saw her reputation, so spotless now, consigned to a thousand reckless presses, each tearing her secret forth with its cruel iron fingers, crushing it into some slanderous shape between its ponderous cylinders, and hurling it, blackened with lies and coarse jests, scoffingly to the world.

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He saw the effect of this murderous publicity upon Mabel herself, when it should recoil back to her. She, so generous, so kindly, and yet so proud—how would she endure this outrage upon feelings held secret almost from her prayers—feelings struggled against and forced back without a word of utterance, save when they broke forth in the pages of a journal locked so vigilantly from all eyes but her own; that luckless journal to open which seemed like pillaging her proud heart.

Would she yield at once to the extreme delicacy of her nature, and shrinking away from notice, perish under this rude publicity?—or, struggling against it, go mad, and die like an eagle striving to keep its wings poised on high, though pierced with a thousand arrows. He knew that she would resist to the last. The exquisite sensitiveness which rendered her so unlike ordinary women, was matched with a strength of will which would give suffering its keenest power. It would not be death—that is the relief of weaker natures—but relentless life—life full of those torturing agonies that trample every upspringing joy from the heart. Compared to this life, poisoned in all its sources, death would be a sweet dream to a woman like Mabel. The intense vitality of her own nature, would be its torment.

As this picture rose upon his brain, James Harrington shrouded his face, silent and appalled. His strong heart was racked to the centre—a tortuous strain closed in upon his nerves, and for the time, that stout, brave man was helpless as a child.

"You love this woman yet, I see."

General Harrington's voice had resumed its usual slow intonation. The first anger had left it with a harsh, cold attempt at composure; his eyes moved from object to object, and his soft white fingers worked nervously with the tassel of his dressing-gown: if at any moment of his life this old man could have been awkward, it must have been then, for he was too keen-sighted not to feel his own meanness, but not honest enough to crush it beneath his feet.

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"You love this woman yet?"

James Harrington dashed the hands away from his pale face, and sat upright.

"Ask me that, or anything else that appertains only to my own feelings, and I will answer. I did love the woman you married with every power of my soul!"

"And now?"

"Now, sir, and from the day she took your name, she has been sacred to my thoughts, as an angel in Heaven."

General Harrington smiled incredulously.

"I have answered the simple truth, sir," said James, in reply to the smile.

Instead of being pleased with the honest simplicity of this answer, the old man looked disappointed; his brow clouded, and his eye fell.

"You would gladly have married her at the time, though?"

James again shrouded his eyes. These questions were so coldly put—so rudely forced upon him, that he could only answer by an inward shudder of repulsion.

"You are not a man to change in anything," continued the General. "You loved the woman once—I knew it at the time."

"Knew it, and yet married her!" cried James, with bitterness.

"You seemed to be playing a dog in the manger part—this might do for young fellows who were too timid for speech, or too certain for doubt. The lady was young, beautiful, rich, and appeared to give me the preference. You did not speak. I did; that is all."

"I was not selfishly silent, sir. Before my mother's unhappy death, I was dependent entirely on her bounty, and that you controlled. Mabel was an heiress. I was not mercenary, and hesitated to appear so. My mother loved her. She was very young, and your ward. It would have seemed like taking an unfair advantage of her inexperience, had I used my mother's hospitality as a means of reaching her favor. After that came a more painful reason for silence."

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"And what was that, sir?" demanded the General, sharply.

"I learned that her fortune had disappeared; that, large as it was, her guardian, unable to control more than the income of his wife's property, had staked this poor orphan's wealth at the gaming-table, and lost it."

General Harrington half rose from his chair, and sat down again, looking at James in pale astonishment.

"To have declared my love under circumstances so disgraceful to my family, would have been to expose you, sir, both to my gentle mother and to the world. The will which gave Mabel her wealth, provided that a full settlement should be made on the day of her marriage. I had not the courage to hurry on an event that would brand my mother's husband with dishonor."

Still the General sat mute and pale, looking steadfastly on the floor; he seemed for a time unconscious that James had ceased to speak, but at last raising his head slowly, he cast a look that was almost fiendish on the younger Harrington.

"Go on, go on!" he said, hoarsely.

"I will, sir! Heaven knows it was my wish to bury this secret forever, but you force me to speak. My poor mother's sickness added new pain to my unhappy situation; she died"—

"And left me a beggar—you a rich man!" said the General, hoarsely. "I have not forgotten it!"

"Then," continued James, "I was free to marry the lady on equal terms—free to replace her fortune from my own inheritance, and keep your secret still from her knowledge—but it was no time for selfish affection, just as my angel mother was laid in a foreign grave. It required time before I could control so large a portion of the property that had been hers. I left you in Spain, sad, but hopeful, a few months would have brought me back prepared to save your honor and my own happiness. You know the rest!"

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CHAPTER LXIII.

JAMES HARRINGTON'S GREAT STRUGGLE.

GENERAL HARRINGTON arose, slowly, for his limbs trembled with intense rage, and it was with difficulty that he stood up.

"We know each other!" he said, shaking his finger at the younger Harrington, and drawing closer and closer, till it almost touched his face. "You have been the traitor in my household—plundered my closest secrets—alienated my wife; talk of dishonor, sir, what was mine compared to yours?"

But James Harrington had regained all his strength, and stood up firmly before the infuriated old man.

"I have said before, that from the hour this lady became your wife, the place of my sainted mother enshrined her. As I would have studied that mother's happiness, I gave myself and all that I possessed to her welfare and yours. My own tastes were simple, and I had no hopes. The larger portion of my income, you have always controlled."

"And always will command, or this woman's name shall become a by-word from Maine to Georgia!" exclaimed the General, resuming some control over his rage. "We comprehend each other now, and can talk plainly. You have learned some of my secrets, and shall know more. I have other debts of honor, and no ward's fortune to pay them with: her reputation or mine is at stake—one must save the other."

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"I do not understand you, sir."

"You can very well comprehend that the contents of this precious book, will render anything like affection for Mrs. Harrington impossible to me. Indeed, the unhappy position in which your mother's death left me, not only penniless, but frightfully involved, enforced this second marriage. I can afford to forgive an outrage on affections that never existed. So while the lady's faithlessness does not affect my interests or my honor, I can endure it with self-complacency."

"I am shocked—astonished, sir, to hear you speak in this way!" said James, indignantly.

The old man smiled.

"You are a dreamer, sir, which I am not. Scenes and excitements are my abhorrence; we hold unpleasant relations toward each other. You are my step-son. The only child of my very distant cousin, a Harrington like myself, to whom, but for your birth, I was the direct heir. The property, a vast one, which might have been justly divided, fell to his widow, your mother, by will. I married the lady, thus, as any sensible man would have supposed, ensuring the inheritance which should have been mine, and which undoubtedly would have been mine, but the lady took it into her head to get jealous one fine day"—

"Stop, sir!" said James Harrington. "I guessed too well the cause of her death—the bitter

sorrow which haunted my mother to her grave. She died a broken-hearted woman; do not take her name irreverently into your lips, or I shall forget myself."

[349] "You *are* forgetting yourself, sir!" answered the General, waving his hand with gentle deprecation. "This is neither time nor place for heroics. I did but attempt to impress you with the fact, that your mother's unjust will had caused all this domestic turmoil. You took the property from me—I won the lady from you. Let us look upon the thing like sensible men, and make restitution."

"Restitution, sir! Restitution of a wasted life!"

"Do be composed—I am tired of storms. You love the lady—I do not. I want money—you care nothing for it."

"Well, sir, well?"

"Really, it is difficult coming to the point, while you look so excited; but, if you will listen tranquilly, all this may be settled."

James sat down, with one hand pressed to his forehead.

"Go on, sir. I am listening."

"It is but just, as I said before, that you disburse the bulk of a property which originally came from the Harrington family. Give me a deed, conveying two-thirds of that property to my unrestricted control during life—I have no ambition to make wills—and the secrets of this book are safe. The west is broad, and most conveniently accommodating when marriage ties become irksome. Mabel can take that direction for her summer travels, while I remain here. In three months the fashionable world may thank us for a week's gossip, which I can very well endure. The world is large—there is California, Australia, or Europe—her second marriage in any of these countries would never be heard of."

James Harrington started up, shaking from head to foot; and so white, that the General half-rose, tempted to flee his presence.

"Tempter, hoary-headed fiend, how dare you!" broke from his white lips.

The old man faltered a little as he went on, and an anxious restlessness of the eye betrayed more emotion than he cared to make apparent.

[350] "I neither tempt nor persuade. We have done each other great injury; this lady has been the cause, and in some sort the victim. After reading that book, it is impossible for this household to contain us all. I will not submit to be turned out a beggar, nor to live an hour longer on your munificence. The plan I offer is the only one that can be peaceably acted upon."

"And the lady, Mrs. Harrington, does she know this?"

"Not a syllable. I have no fancy for hysterics, protestations, or fainting fits. The *rôle* of an injured husband, is not to my taste; and I should prefer that she base her complaints on my indifference, abandonment, infidelity, or whatever faults of that nature she pleases. I will take a trip to Paris, if that promises to facilitate matters."

"And, if I refuse?"

"Then the lady shall be quietly waited upon by my lawyer, and invited to leave my house. This book will not only be placed in evidence against her, but every line it contains shall be duplicated by thousands, and spread far and wide."

"Give me time—give me air. I cannot think or breathe!" answered James, struggling with himself amid a whirl of contending feelings, like a drowning man engulfed by a flood. "A few minutes, and I will speak again."

He arose, and walked unsteadily towards the library window, threw it open, and stepped out upon the balcony. There he strove to look the difficulty before him in the face—to meet the terrible temptation with courage. He dared not turn his thoughts, even for a moment, toward the possibility of the proposed divorce, but crushed it back resolutely, as if it had been a serpent attempting to charm his soul away. If a glow of delight had touched his heart with the first certainty of Mabel's love, it was gone now, quenched by a consciousness of the terrible dangers that were closing around her.

[351] It was a bitter cold morning; all around him the earth lay sheeted with deep snow. The river was frozen over from shore to shore. Not a green thing was near, save the spruces and pines upon the shrouded lawn, and they drooped and moaned under a burden of cold whiteness, which the wind might disturb but fail to sweep away. The balcony was littered with slender icicles which had fallen from the gables above, and flashed out like shattered jewels from his impetuous footsteps as he trod them down, walking to and fro in the wild excitement that seized upon him. At another time he must have shuddered beneath the sharp wind that filled his hair and clothes with frost. But now, the fever in his blood burned too hotly not to feel the biting cold as a relief.

He leaned against a pillar of the balcony, shocked to the soul, and yet so indignant that the frozen particles that filled the air, flashed athwart his eyes like sparks of fire. The hand with which he strove to force back the painful rush of thought from his forehead, fell upon it like ice,

but in a moment that too was burning. He tore off his cravat, and in vain exposed his bosom to the frost. He gathered handfuls of snow from where it had lodged in ridges on the stone balustrade, and pressed them to his forehead, hoping thus to slake the fever of his wild thoughts. A little time, and this fierce struggle must have killed him; for, not to have found some means of saving Mabel Harrington from the dangers that encompassed her, would have been a thousand deaths to him. Oh! how his bad angel toiled and struggled to fix that divorce upon his mind, as the best and only means of saving her. But the heart that swelled so tumultuously in his bosom, was honest and unselfish. He took hold of the temptation, firmly wrestled with, and hurled it aside, facing the right with heroic courage.

[352] At last, his restless footsteps ceased; some new idea contracted his features, sweeping all the fire away. Slowly and steadily, like the beams of a star, thought followed thought, till his face grew luminous with generous resolution. The red fever had burned itself out on his forehead, leaving it pale and calm, while across his lips stole an expression so much more beautiful than a smile, that I cannot impress it upon the reader.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE LIFE DEED.

JAMES HARRINGTON turned from the balcony, and entered the open window, composed and firm, but paler than before he went out.

General Harrington looked sharply up as James came forward, but did not speak; there was a force and dignity in his aspect that filled even that worldly old man with respect, amounting almost to awe. They sat down face to face; James leaning heavily against the table, General Harrington retreating far back in his chair, to avoid the firm glance of those eyes.

"There is another way of settling this matter," he said, plunging at once into the depths of the subject. "I have wealth which you desire. To obtain it you will sell your revenge on a helpless woman whose hand you have obtained, but whose love you have never sought. Your offer is specious, but to accept it would be wickedness in me, degradation to her. I know well that she would die rather than escape your vengeance on such terms. I reject them utterly!"

"It is well," said the old man, pale and trembling in his turn, "I have at least this left;" and gathering up Mabel's book, he seemed preparing to go out.

[353] "But," said James Harrington, still with great self-possession, "I am ready to purchase the tranquillity of your wife on other terms. Give me that book—pledge your solemn word of honor that its contents shall never be mentioned again to mortal being—leave Mabel Harrington in the entire enjoyment of her home and station, exactly as she has received them during her married life, and I will at once give you entire control of my income during your natural life, only reserving for myself enough for a bare subsistence. I will leave this house to-morrow. Henceforth, I will hold no communication with you or your family. As you said, the world is broad—any place will answer for one who has no hopes."

The old man was so taken by surprise that he could not answer, but sat searching the face before him with eager scrutiny.

"And you will do this?"

"I will."

"Without entering into explanation with her, or any one else?"

"Explanations are impossible. The family will understand that I am suddenly called away; after that, any prolonged absence can be accounted for. But remember, sir, this lady's tranquillity must be assured beyond a chance of revocation; on that rests the validity of any deed I shall draw. The day and hour in which her position is in the slightest degree impaired, no matter from what cause, and I return, though it were from the uttermost ends of the earth, to resume my own and protect her."

"Have no fear," answered the general, with an impatient wave of the hand. "The shelter of my roof, and the protection of my name, will ensure all; these I promise never to withdraw."

"And that book?"

"Shall be kept secret as the grave!"

"It must be burned before I leave the room!"

[354] The old man was about to hesitate, and demand the life-deed before he surrendered Mabel's journal; but there was a stern dignity in his step-son that checked the mean impulse. He knew

well that no bond would be held more sacred than that man's word. James read the thought with a smile of contempt, and turned to leave the room.

"In half an hour I will return with the deed; keep the book till then!"

"No, no, it is here!" cried the General, flushing with shame.

But Harrington had gone, leaving him in a state of humiliation which no self-complacency could soften or conceal. After he had been left a little time, the old man went out upon the balcony, for a brilliant fire made the heat oppressive, cold as the day was; and there was a sensation of shame at his heart, that made his breath come heavily.

He was gone scarcely more than a minute, but that was long enough for the mulatto chambermaid to steal out from the bed-chamber, tear half a dozen pages from Mabel's journal, and creep back again, grasping the crushed paper in her hand as she glided through the door which opened behind the curtains of General Harrington's bed. The drapery was yet rustling from her sudden retreat, when the old gentleman returned to the library. He found the book as he had left it, and sat down with something of triumph but more of self-contempt, to await the return of his step-son.

Directly, James came back with the deed in his hand. The General took it, read it carefully section by section, folded it with studied deliberation; and taking up the journal, placed it in Harrington's hand with a forced smile and a scarcely perceptible bow.

As the book touched his hands, James Harrington grasped it with violence; a trembling fit seized upon him, and he shook like an aspen tree while carrying it to the fire. Opening the covers wide, he laid the fluttering pages down upon the flames, which darted through them like a nest of fiery vipers, and in an instant devoured poor Mabel Harrington's secret, over which the vellum covers writhed and curled like living things given up to torture.

Till the last fragment was consumed, James Harrington stood looking on, with the light falling upon his pale face, which revealed a depth of mournful tenderness that touched even that selfish old man with reverence. It seemed as if Mabel's heart had been given to the flames by his own hands. When all was consumed he turned away like one in a painful dream, and without speaking a word, left the room.

Two hours after, he quitted the house.

CHAPTER LXV.

WHO WAS LINA FRENCH?

JAMES HARRINGTON and Lina left the same roof within a few hours of each other, without warning or explanation. Was it strange that Mabel should be tortured with wild doubts, or that her son should believe the step-brother whom he had looked up to with such honest devotion, and the girl he had loved so truly, domestic conspirators who had been deceiving him all the time?

Poor Ralph! these doubts fell with cruel force on his generous nature. His confidence was all swept away—the best jewel of his life had fallen off. To him, love had no longer the holiness of truth. Household trust—faith in human goodness—all was disturbed. He was wild with indignation, torn with a thousand conflicting feelings; sometimes heart-broken with grief—again, reckless and defiant; then a spirit of bitter retaliation seized upon him. What was Lina, with her gentle affections and pretty reserves, that he should waste a life in regrets for her, while another, ardent, impassioned, and loving him madly, was pining to death for the affection he had thrown away so lavishly for nothing? What, after all, was there to charm more in one woman than another? Lina was false; why should he remain faithful?

These were wild, rash thoughts; but Ralph was young, tortured in his first love, and tempted by an artful, impassioned woman, whose perverse will carried the strength of fate with it.

Still, it was only at times that his heart rose hotly against its old nature. There was more of scorn and rage, mingled with the certainty that Agnes Barker loved him, than of real passion, but it assuaged the humiliation of Lina's falsehood, and the consciousness of her attachment diverted the grief that would otherwise have consumed him. Though maddened by all these conflicting passions, the young man had sought desperately after the lost girl from the moment her absence was discovered on the morning after the storm, but she seemed to have disappeared like a shadow from the earth; for from the hour when she left Ben Benson's boat-house, not a trace of her movements could be found.

For the third time, Ralph went down to the boat-house to question the old sailor, whom he found housed up, as he called it, in a fit of sullen grief, which it required some tact to break in upon.

Ben was sitting in his domicile before a rousing fire, which he now and then stooped to feed with hickory logs, till the whole room was filled with a warm glow of light. So many additions and ornaments had been added to the boat-house, that it took the appearance of a ship's cabin more than anything else. The fire revealed a trap-door in the centre of the room, which answered for a gangway, while coils of rope, carpenters' tools, cans of pitch, and bits of iron, all in their place and ship-shape, as Ben would have said, gave both a busy and maritime look to the premises.

Everything was very comfortable in the boat-house, but Ben kept piling on wood and raking out the coals with an iron bar, as if the heat and light were still insufficient, when in fact he thought nothing of either, but was making desperate efforts to work off the anxieties that had beset him like so many hounds, ever since his interview with Lina.

"What can a feller do now?" he said, looking wistfully up to the models of gun-boats, brigs, and clippers, that occupied the rude shelves and brackets on the wall, as if taking counsel from them. "I have sarched the woods from hill to hill, and nary a sign of her. She 'caint a gone and fell through the ice, for it's friz two feet thick; and, as for running away, or going for to kill herself, it wasn't in the gal to do no sich thing. Ben Benson, you was a brute, beast, and two or three sarpenets to boot, not to tell the gal all she wanted to know. You obstinate old wretch, you've gone and done it now, and no mistake. It's as much as I can do to keep from knocking you on the head with a marlin-spike, you sneakin' old sea-dog! What if she was dead now, friz stiff agin a tree, or a lyin' in the bottom of the river, what would you think of yourself, I'd like to know?"

Thus half in muttered breath, half in thought, Ben gave forth the burden of his anxieties, till at last self-reproachful beyond endurance, he seized a fragment of pine wood, and opening his jack-knife with superfluous energy, began to whittle, as if his life depended on sharpening the stick to a point.

He was interrupted by the crunching sound of snow beneath footsteps that came in haste toward the boat-house. Ben cut a deep gash into the wood, and sat motionless, with his hand on the knife, listening.

"It's too heavy—she never trod down the snow-crust like that, poor bird!" and, resuming his work, Ben kicked the shavings he had made into the fire, and flung the mutilated pine after them.

"Is't you, mister Ralph?" said Ben, rising as the door opened, and seating himself moodily on a bench, that his guest might come to the fire. "You look flustered, and out of sorts, but this isn't no place to get ship-shape in. It's awful lonesome here, sin' that night."

"Then, you have heard nothing!"

"No, not a whisper. That fool, Ben Benson, has been sarching and sarching, like an old deserter as he is, but it ain't no sort o' good; the gal may be dead for what he cares—a toasting hisself before a fire, while she—may be Mr. James has hearn something."

"Mr. James Harrington has gone also," answered Ralph, bitterly. "It's no use searching further. They have fled together. James Harrington, the man whom I have looked up to all my life, the saint, the angel; he has disappeared as she did. They cheated me from the beginning. He has taken advantage of his wealth, and she—what chance had a poor fellow like me against his millions? It was hardly worth while to deceive me so shamefully though; but craft is natural to the sex, I believe." There was a struggle between grief and rage in the young man's voice, and while his eye blazed his lips began to quiver.

Ben slowly stooped forward, and resting an elbow on each knee, touched his fore-fingers thoughtfully together, while his eyes, clear and honest as those of a Newfoundland dog, were bent on the young man's face. At last he burst forth.

"Ralph Harrington, I should say, that next to that mule-headed feller, Ben Benson, as isn't worth the husks he sleeps on—you was the consarnedest fool that ever sot hisself up with an opinion. You talk agin wimmen afore the moustachoes are black on your upper lip, because there's something about one on 'em, as you can't make out. Then, there's Mister James, a man as that ere shark Ben Benson ain't afeared to swear by through thick and thin, the most gentlemanliest Harrington as ever drawd breath, you set up to speak again him, it's enough to agravate a British admiral."

Ralph had scarcely heeded this speech, but stood with one elbow resting upon the rude shelf, that served as a mantelpiece, sullen and thoughtful.

"I was in hopes you would tell me something. Oh! Ben, it seems impossible to believe that fair, young creature so false," he said, at length giving way to the feelings that oppressed him, "what faith can one have in human nature after this?"

"Mister Ralph Harrington, you ain't no sailor, to talk in that ere way. There's many a stout ship as goes down in a storm, with its timbers sound and its masts standing. Then, agin, there's others as give themselves up to the storm, and lead off hither and yon, but get back to their reckoning, and do good sarvice arter all. Wimmen are like ships—some get unriggered—some founder—some go agin wind and weather, right in the teeth of the world, and some drift like poor little boats, without compass or rudder, but yet, the generality cast anchor in deep, clear water at last, and for one wreck, thousands and thousands come in with all sails set—only Mister Ralph, remember this. The craft that ales goes steadily and safe, cuts a still wake; but your leaky vessels makes any amount of whirlpools as they go down. It's only boys," continued Ben, taking the tobacco from his

mouth, and casting it indignantly into the fire—"It's only boys as knows nothing, and men as knows too much, that ever speak in this ere wholesale way about wimmen. Ralph, you're young, that's all."

"I am distracted, Ben; Heaven knows how gladly I would believe her blameless, but her manner changed toward me so strangely, she was evidently premeditating this abandonment; but that she should go off—and with him, of all men upon earth. Oh! Ben, what man, not a fool, could persist in his faith, after that."

"I tell you, it wasn't that as driv the gal away. She wanted to know something as I wouldn't tell her. Something more'en Ben Benson reckoned on, was in her mind; she got discouraged because he wouldn't tell her."

"If I'd told her, she'd a been here now." Here Ben covered his face with both hands and cried out, "God forgive me! God forgive me!"

CHAPTER LXVI.

THREATS AND PERSUASIONS.

DIRECTLY after James Harrington left the General's room, the waiting-woman Zillah entered cautiously, and with breathless eagerness. She stood some moments partly behind the General's chair, before he regarded her. When he did look up, a faint color swept over his face, and he made a gesture of annoyance.

"You are not pleased to find me here so soon," she said quickly, for impatience had for the moment disturbed the wonderful self-control with which her interviews with General Harrington were invariably conducted. "Is it a sign this woman, who has outraged the name of wife, is to triumph over me always?"

"Zillah!" answered the General, angrily, "my relations with my wife are beyond your interference."

"Your wife!" exclaimed the woman with a fiendish sneer. "You can still call her that!"

"Zillah, be careful. I have permitted you to go in and out of my house in this surreptitious fashion unmolested, from regard to old attachments; but you shall not again interfere in my family arrangements. The charges that you have, I see now, been the means of making against Mrs. Harrington, are groundless. I will not have a word spoken—mark me—against that excellent lady."

"What!" said the woman hoarsely; "what does this mean?"

"It means, Zillah, that I am perfectly convinced not only of Mrs. Harrington's rectitude, but of her entire attachment to myself. As for Mr. James Harrington, his conduct has been unexceptionable—nay, magnanimous. We are a happy and united family, Zillah."

"A happy and united family!" almost shrieked the woman. "And has it all come to this—am I again spurned, again hurled back to the earth—Hagar thrust forth to wander forever and ever with her child in the broad desert—the world. I tell you, General Harrington, this shall not be!"

"Shall not—slave, how dare you?" cried the old man, rising haughtily.

"Slave, slave! Yes, I am your slave, for I love you, my master, love you with a madness this cold white lady never dreamed of. Do not crush me beneath this woman's feet—do not. For years and years I have lived on this one wish, to be your slave again. She, your wife, is faithless, false, cold as marble; put her away—send her forth, as I have been. The same God made us both, and should punish us both alike. I have been tortured long enough; take me home, master, take me home—a servant, a slave, anything; but send this woman from beneath your roof. She has had her life, I have a right to mine! Give it to me—give it to me for my love's sake, for our child's sake!"

The woman fell upon her knees as she spoke; her locked hands were uplifted, and wrung madly together—her eyes were full of wild, passionate tears. She looked, indeed, a Hagar coming back from the desert, where she had left her youth buried.

"Master, master, send her away, send her away!" she pleaded, in a burst of pathetic entreaty. "What has she been to you, that I was not? She is the mother of your child—so am I. She was your wife—I was your slave. She claimed rights, station, wealth, power, and returned nothing. I gave my soul, my being, every breath of my life, every pulse in my heart, and claimed only bonds. You fettered her with flowers—me with iron. I loved these chains, for they bound me to you—they have drawn me to your feet again. I will not give way to that woman a second time!"

The old man had been growing calm amid this passionate appeal. Strong feeling always

annoyed him, and the woman seemed actuated by a species of madness, that filled him with repulsion. He turned from her with a look of quiet contempt.

"Why, Zillah, you should go on the stage. These wild paroxysms, half-pathetic, half-demoniac, tell splendidly with the public: a little dash of blasphemy now, and you are perfect. The best society would run wild about you—ladies, most of all, especially if they knew exactly who and what you were, Zillah."

The woman sprang to her feet, white as death; her eyes closing, her lips specked with foam. She attempted to speak, but the words writhed themselves to death on her lips without a sound.

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How still intense rage can sometimes appear! The woman stood mute for more than a moment, in which General Harrington held his breath, awed, in spite of himself, by a force of passion he had never witnessed before.

"Zillah," he said at last, half-terrified, "Zillah, control yourself; this rage will injure you. Come, come, let us talk together more reasonably. You know how I dislike these wild flights of temper, and how little good they can effect. Take that hand from your bosom, girl; if you have a poniard there, let it stay sheathed. I do not fear you, at any rate."

"You need not," said the woman, in a hoarse whisper. "I could not strike, even while you were mocking me."

Her hand fell slowly downward as she spoke, leaving the hilt of a dagger just visible under her dress.

The General stepped toward her, took the dagger from her bosom, and cast it contemptuously on the fire.

"Have done with this acting, girl, and talk like a sensible woman, if you have really anything to say."

Zillah smiled scornfully, as he had done, while her eyes followed the dagger to its lodgment in the fire.

"It is the purpose, not the instrument, which is dangerous," she said, with pale self-possession, still speaking in hoarse undertones; "and, in order to reach that, you must clutch here."

Zillah pressed one hand hard on her heart as she spoke, and the old man could see that concentrated passion shook her from head to foot, still as she seemed.

"Zillah, this passion will prevent me ever seeing you again. I am no boy, to be terrified into concessions; as for violence, attempt it, and I will have you dealt with like any other house-breaker. In the North we have heavier chains than you have ever worn. You will find that the slavery which springs from crime, is a reality that you have not yet known. No more threats, then, if you ever hope to see your master again."

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"I was wrong," said the woman, standing before him with the downcast look learned in her early bondage. "It was wounded love, not anger, against you, my master, that tortured me into this rash language. I came to tell you of L——of our child; she is very, very ill."

"What, Lina? poor child, no wonder she is heart-broken. Heaven knows I would have kept this miserable secret from her, but for Ralph! Where is she now?"

"In my own house, raving with brain fever!"

"And have you told her all?"

"Yes, and she, too, spurned me—every one repulses and scorns me, while that woman"—

"Hush! Zillah, you are getting fierce again, and that I will not submit to."

"No, no, master, it was grief for my child, not anger," said the woman, checking herself. "She is ill, very ill. The doctor thinks she must die."

"Indeed, I am grieved to hear it. Let her have every care; have a dozen physicians, if it is needful. Poor child—poor child!"

"You love her, then, this daughter of a slave?" said Zillah, with a fierce gleam in her eyes, as if jealous of his very love for her own child.

"Love her? Why she has always been a pet in the house—a beautiful, sweet-tempered creature, whom everyone loved. I think she is even dearer to me than Ralph himself."

Again the woman turned white.

"And you love her so much?"

"Again, Zillah: you are hard to please; but take good care of the child—in a day or two I will come to see her!"

"Indeed, to see her—her only."

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"Have done with this paltry childishness, I am tired of it!" answered the General, with authority. "This comes of allowing you a foothold here. Remember I cannot have my privacy

intruded on in future by these mysterious visits; they will become known to the family, and Mrs. Harrington may think them a just cause of complaint—a thing above all others to be avoided. I tell you, Zillah, this rash passion, which at your age should be controlled, inconveniences me very much; indeed, as a man of honor, I cannot encourage it farther."

Zillah's lips writhed, as if she were repeating over his last words in the scorn of her heart; but she stood immovable and silent, with her eyes bent on the floor.

"If money is needed for you or Lina, whose future I will liberally provide for, that can at any time be supplied to the extent of your wishes."

"I shall not need your money," answered the woman coldly.

"But you cannot be rich!"

"The master to whom you sold me left his property to be divided between some half dozen slaves, who received their freedom and the legacy together. I am spending mine; when it is gone, I can work."

"Then you reject all help from me?"

"I was your slave, General Harrington—twice bound, first by your laws, again by the will of my own heart, but I am no beggar; even when you loved me, I worked for my own bread."

"I am glad that you are so well provided for: now let this romance come to an end. We are no boy and girl, remember, Zillah; and, though it is very pleasant to feel that one heart at least proves faithful to the end, I cannot, in justice to Mrs. Harrington, admit you under the same roof with herself. Her peace of mind is important to me, very important, and her tranquillity must not be endangered by these wild visits. I will withdraw, now, and give you an opportunity to leave the house; be careful that no one sees you, especially Mrs. Harrington. Adieu! In two or three days, at most, I shall be able to see you and Lina."

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The old gentleman waved his hand, in token of a friendly adieu, as he went, leaving his singular visitor standing in the middle of the room, so numbed in feeling or lost in thought, that she seemed unconscious of his departure.

It was more than a minute before the woman lifted her head; then her face was pale, and a deep smouldering purpose burned like fire in the depths of her eyes. She looked around wildly, as if searching for the man who had just left the room; then her recollection seemed to come back, and she went up to the table, examining everything upon it with eager haste. The journal was no longer there, but in its place she found a folded paper placed in a small portfolio, which bore the General's initials.

The paper shook in her hands as she unfolded it, for all her former agitation had come back; and, in her haste to read, the fire seemed to leap from her black eyes over the writing. It was the life-deed which had just passed between General Harrington and his son-in-law.

The woman laughed as she folded up the paper—a laugh of such bitter mockery that it started even herself, as if some other person had been reviling her.

"And has it ended in this, after years of plotting and privations that would have killed a common person? Have I ended in binding them more firmly together. This accounts for his solicitude for her welfare. This is why these visits of mine trouble him. They might break the compact which secures repose and reputation to Mabel Harrington, for so much money—and she is to triumph a second time! I am nothing—a weed, a bit of miserable night-shade that has poison in it, and nothing more."

As she muttered over these thoughts, more and more slowly, the woman folded her arms, and stood immovable for several minutes; her brow grew dark as midnight, and a strange, settled expression came up to her face, as if the poison she had just spoken of were diffusing itself through her entire system. At last she heard steps approaching the library, and hurried away through the disused entrance.

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CHAPTER LXVII.

THE EVENING RIDE.

As Ralph Harrington was returning from Benson's cabin one night, he met Agnes Barker. It was yet early in the evening, but the sharp, frosty air rendered it singular that a young girl should have ventured into the cold, without some important object to urge her forth. Ralph had been touched, and a good deal subdued, by his conversation with Ben; and he would gladly have avoided this rencontre with the governess, who invariably left him excited and wretched with

fresh doubts whenever he conversed with her. But Agnes came directly towards him, and he remarked that her manner of walking was excited, and like that of a person who had some important object to pursue.

"Mr. Ralph Harrington, you have been unjust to me. When I told you that Lina French was still in the neighborhood quietly domesticated, where your saintly step-brother could visit her at will, you disbelieved me, and cast discredit on my word. Since then, James Harrington has disappeared mysteriously as she did. I now say that he, also, is in the city, making preparations to take the girl South; in a few days she will leave it with him."

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"Why should he take this course, Miss Barker, if it is true? My brother was wealthy, free, and has been for years his own master. If he loved Lina, there was no need of concealment—nothing but my own mad passion stood in the way, and Heaven knows that I was ready to take the heart from my bosom, could that have made him or her happier. There is a mystery in all this that I cannot fathom. My brother, so noble, so more than generous, could not have lived the life he has, to prove this traitor to himself and us at last."

"Then you still have faith in this girl?"

"I will not believe so ill of her as you seem to desire, until some farther explanation is had. She may love my brother, and he, I cannot well understand how any man could help loving her, for she was the purest, the most lovely character I ever knew."

"She *was* that character, it is well you say was," answered Agnes, with a dash of scorn in her voice; "for I am about to offer you proof of what she is."

Ralph turned white, and recoiled a step back. "Proof—proof, have you heard something, then?"

"Yes, I have heard from Miss Lina—she has sent for me. A private message, of which no one is to be informed."

"And, when are you going?—where is she now?" inquired Ralph, in breathless astonishment.

"Now," answered Agnes. "She has sent a conveyance from the city, which waits at a curve of the road. I may not return to-night—may never return. My occupation here is gone, and no one will regret me. I came unloved, and I go away the stranger I was then!"

It was dark, and Ralph could not see her face distinctly, but the sound of tears was in her voice.

"Not so—not so!" said he, impetuously. "You will be regretted—we, at least, are not strangers; I will go with you. If this girl is in the city, I will convince myself of the fact; then, if your suspicions were correct, she shall never occupy a thought of mine while I have existence."

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"Go with me if you wish," said Agnes, mournfully; "it will be a few moments taken from the desolation of life that must follow; after that I shall be alone."

Ralph scarcely heeded her; a wild desire to see Lina, and convince himself of her falsehood, drove all other thoughts from his mind; but the words and voice which bespoke so much tender sorrow, were remembered afterward.

"Come, let us begone at once," he said, folding his paletot closely, and drawing her arm through his. "I thank Heaven this suspense will be ended to-morrow. I shall be a man again."

Agnes leaned heavily on his arm; the deep snow made walking difficult, and this was her excuse. Ralph only noticed it to lend her assistance; his thoughts ran wildly toward Lina French, the gentle, kind-hearted girl who had been so long a portion of his own life, and whose unworthiness he could not yet wholly realize.

A two-horse sleigh, crowded with buffalo robes, evidently the equipage of some wealthy establishment, stood on the highway where it swept down to General Harrington's mansion. Ralph helped his companion in, and they dashed off noiselessly as lightning, and almost as swift.

No word was spoken between the two during the ride. Agnes shivered now and then, as if with cold, and this aroused Ralph for an instant from the painful reverie into which he had fallen; but he only drew the fur robes more closely about her, and sunk into perfect unconsciousness of her presence once more. Thus, in profound silence they reached the city, and dashing onward, they drew up before the house to which Lina had been conveyed only a few weeks before.

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"This is the house," said Agnes, pushing the fur robes from around her; and, without waiting for help, she sprang out, and mounted the steps just as the door was opened by some one from within. A single word passed between her and the servant, just as Ralph reached her side; but he only heard her inquiring in the ordinary way for the young lady who had just taken up her residence there.

The door was flung wide open, as if she had been expected, and the servant led the way into what, in the dim light, seemed a small drawing-room. The bland, warm atmosphere that filled this room would have been most welcome, under other circumstances, after the severe cold of the night; but now Ralph was hardly conscious either of the warmth, or an atmosphere of blooming plants which floated luxuriously around him. Rich jets of gas burned like fairy beads in the lower end of the room, dimly revealing the small conservatory from which this fragrance came, and affording a glimpse here and there of rich silk hangings and pictures upon the wall, whose gorgeousness forced itself upon the observation even in that dim twilight.

Ralph looked around with surprise; the place was so unlike anything he had expected to find, that for the moment he lost sight of the object of his coming. All at once he became conscious of a third presence—a soft flutter of garments, and the movement of some person advancing towards that portion of the room in which those tiny stars seemed burning. Directly a glow of light burst over the whole apartment. The stars had broken into brilliant jets of flame, and a tent of blossoms rose before him, like some fairy nook flooded with radiance.

Half-way between this background of plants and the place he occupied, stood a female, so gorgeously attired and so singular in her whole appearance, that the young man uttered an exclamation of surprise, which was answered by an angry start and an abrupt movement of the woman, who was evidently both astonished and displeased by his presence there.

"What is this?" she said, haughtily; "I gave no orders for the admission of strangers here."

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Before Ralph could speak, Agnes Barker came forward, and stood for a moment looking steadily in the woman's face, thus concentrating her entire attention on herself.

"Madam, if you are the mistress of this house," she said, with great self-possession, "you will not consider this an intrusion, for it must have been with your knowledge that I was sent for to attend Miss French—the young lady who has lately taken up her residence here."

The woman stood for a moment as if struck dumb with astonishment, then a faint smile dawned on her mouth, which was at once displaced by angry glances cast upon Ralph Harrington.

"And this young gentleman, certainly he was not sent for?"

Again Agnes interrupted the explanation Ralph was ready to give.

"Your message, madam, was a strange one, and reached me after dark. Surely a young girl coming so far from home, might be expected to bring an escort."

"Besides," said Ralph, impetuously, "if Lina—if Miss French is here, I have a better right to see her than any one else; and if she is in this house, I must and will know her reasons for coming here."

"The young lady is in her room, and will receive no one at this time of night," answered the woman, firmly; "if you wish to see her, let it be at some more proper hour."

"But I, madam, have been summoned here by Miss French herself!" said Agnes, with that firmness which had marked her conduct since she entered the house. "Permit me to desire that you lead me to her room."

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The woman looked keenly in her face a moment, as if about to contest the wish, but some new thought seemed to spring up; and answering abruptly, "Come, then," she left the room.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

RALPH FINDS LINA.

RALPH had been alone only a moment when Agnes came back, apparently in breathless haste.

"Be ready," she whispered, "follow me after a moment—the room is dark next to hers; be cautious and you can both see and hear what passes."

Before he could accept or reject her proposition, she was gone.

"It is but right," he reflected, controlling the first honorable impulse which revolted at this secret method of gaining information; "there is some mystery which can never be fathomed by straight-forward questions. I will not listen meanly; but proper or not, if Lina French is in this house I will speak with her!"

Obedying the impulse urged by these thoughts, he passed through the half open door, and following Agnes by the rustle of her dress, paused in the chamber she had designated, reluctant to enter the room beyond; for he saw at a glance that the bed which stood at one end was occupied. A white hand fell over the side, working nervously among the folds of the counterpane, as if the person who lay there was awake and ill at ease.

Breathless with emotions which crowded fast and painfully upon him, the young man sunk into a chair, and covering his face with both hands, strove thus to gain some portion of self-control; but the first tone of Lina's voice set him to trembling from head to foot, and it was a moment before he could see objects distinctly enough to recognize her in her white robe and among those snowy pillows.

"So you have come at last," she said, rising on one elbow and holding out her hand to Agnes,

with a look of eager delight, which flushed her cheeks and kindled her blue eyes with a wild brilliancy the young man had never seen in them before; "tell me, oh, tell me how they all are—my dear, dear mamma, is she well? does she pine about my absence—does she talk of me?"

"Mrs. Harrington is grieved and very anxious," said Agnes Barker, gently, "why did you leave them so abruptly, Miss French?"

"I could not help leaving them. It was time. My presence there was sure to bring trouble and—and—don't ask me about it. Let me rest. Don't you understand that it has nearly killed me. It was great love that drove me away—nothing else. Still I did not mean to go just then. A few days would not have made so much difference, and they would have been heaven to me; oh, such heaven, such heaven, you cannot guess how precious every moment was at the last!"

"But why did you send for me?" questioned Agnes, gently. "Is it that you wish to go back?"

"Go back!" cried the poor girl, starting up with a flush of wild delight that faded away in an instant; "oh why did you say this cruel thing? It is too late—it is impossible; I can never go back, never, never, never!"

Lina fell back upon her pillows, and began to moan piteously, but made a brave attempt to stifle her sobs on the pillow.

"No, no, I did not send to you with that hope, only it was so hard to sit in this room day after day and hear nothing—not even that they hated me. I think that would have been better than this dull uncertainty. I only wanted to hear just one little word; my poor heart has asked for it so long, and now you tell me nothing."

"What can I tell you except that your flight has filled the whole household with grief and consternation."

"I knew it—I was sure they would feel the gloom, but that was better than remaining a curse and a shame to them all, you know."

"A curse and a shame, Miss French!" said Agnes, with dignity; "these are harsh words applied to one's-self. I hope you do not deserve them."

"Did I say shame?" cried Lina, starting up in affright; "well, well, if I did, it cannot reach him or wound poor mamma; as for me, why, it is not much matter, you know; the world does not care what becomes of a poor little girl like me."

A shade of compassion stole over Agnes Barker's face. She took Lina's hand in hers, and pressed it softly to her lips.

"You look grieved. I hope it is for me," said the gentle girl, and her eyes filled with tears. "It won't hurt you or any one to be sorry for a poor child who is so very, very miserable."

Ralph would endure this touching scene no longer; he started up and rushed towards the bed, with both trembling hands extended, and his chest heaving with emotion.

"Lina, Lina!" he cried, falling on his knees by the bed. "Stop, Lina, you are killing me—oh, girl, girl, what had I done that you should bring this ruin on us both?"

Lina uttered a wild cry at his approach, half rose in the bed with her arms outstretched, and flung herself upon his bosom, covering his hands, his face and his hair with kisses, then as if struck to the soul with a sudden memory, her arms fell away, her lips grew deadly white, and she sunk back to the pillows, shuddering from head to foot.

"Lina, Lina, say that you love me yet—in the name of heaven tell me what this means—never before have you seemed to love me entirely, and now"—

"Now," she said, rising feebly to a sitting posture, "now sweep those kisses away, sweep them utterly away, I charge you—there is shame and sin in every one; would that my lips had been withered before they gave such kisses, and to you, Ralph Harrington!"

"Lina, Lina French, is this real?" cried the young man, rising slowly to his feet, pale as death, but checking the tears that had at first rushed tenderly to his eyes. "May the God of heaven forgive you and help me, for I had rather die than meet the pang of this moment."

"I know, I know it is dreadful—see what it has done!"

She lifted up her pale hand that had fallen away till it looked almost transparent, like that of a sick child, and held it trembling towards him. Then she besought him, with mournful entreaty, to go away, for her heart had ceased to beat. She wanted time for prayer before the death-pang came.

There was a depth of despondency in her voice, and an utter hopelessness of speech that touched every kind feeling in the young man's heart.

"No, Lina, I will not leave you in this unhappy condition," he said; "your words have shocked me beyond everything; nothing but your own avowal would have convinced me that one so good as you were, Lina, could have—have—oh! Lina, Lina, this is terrible."

"I know it," she answered faintly, "I know it, but we must be patient."

"Patient!" exclaimed the young man, "but if I can be nothing else, one thing is certain, I have the right of a wronged, outraged brother to protect you, this specious hypocrite shall answer for the ruin he has brought upon us all!"

Lina started up wildly, "Ralph, Ralph, of whom are you speaking?"

"Of the man who has wronged you, Lina—who has disgraced the name of Harrington, and who, so help me God! shall yet render you such justice as the case permits."

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Lina gasped for breath, "you know it then—who told you, not my—not him?"

"No one told me, Lina: he is not so base as to boast of the ruin he has made; heaven forbid that one who has a drop of my blood in his veins should sink low enough for that; but the facts, your presence here, this cruel desertion of your friends, the insane tenacity with which you cling to this miserable fate—is it not enough?"

"Then he knows nothing—oh! thank God for that," gasped Lina, with a faint hysterical laugh.

"I know enough to justify me in demanding an explanation, and avenging you after it is made," said Ralph, sternly.

"No, not that, I charge you, Ralph Harrington, not to ask this explanation of any one. It will only deepen and widen the ruin that has so far fallen on me alone—promise me, Ralph, promise me, if you would not have me die before your eyes!"

CHAPTER LXIX.

AGNES BECOMES PATHETIC.

RALPH took Lina's hand and spoke to her in a sad broken voice, "On one condition, Lina; go home with me now—my mother will receive you joyfully. This miserable absence has not been made public. Take back the protection you have abandoned. I will not ask your confidence, only be honest and truthful with my mother. She loves you. She is forgiving as the angels. Her beautiful virtues will redeem you, Lina. She is too magnanimous for severity, too pure for cowardly hesitation"—

Lina began to weep on her pillow, till the pale hands with which she covered her face, were wet with tears.

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"Oh! she is good—she is an angel of love and mercy; but this is why it is impossible for me to go back—don't ask me, oh! Ralph, Ralph, you are killing me with this kindness. Go away, go away! perhaps God will let me die, and then all will be right."

"Lina, this is infatuation; you *shall* return home with me; have no fear of my presence; in a week after you accept the shelter of my father's roof, again I go away."

For an instant Lina brightened up, then a still more mournful expression came to her eyes, quenching the gleam of yearning hope, and she shook her head with a gesture of total despondency. "Don't, don't, my heart is breaking. I could tell her nothing; *he* has forbidden it."

"*He!*" repeated the young man, furiously, "great heavens, can you plead such authority, and to me?"

"Forgive me, oh, forgive me; I am so feeble, so miserably helpless, words escape me when I do not know it. Do not bring them up against me. Oh, Ralph, I am very unhappy. The lonesomeness was killing me, and now you have come upon me unawares, to turn that dull anguish into torture. How could you ask me to go home? it was cruel—ah, me, how cruel!"

"What can I do, how shall I act?" cried Ralph, appealing to Agnes Barker, who stood earnestly regarding the scene.

"Leave her at present," said the girl, softly smoothing Lina's tresses with her hand. "Reflection may induce her to accept your noble offer; certainly, at present, she is too ill for any attempt at a removal."

"I will consult my mother," said Ralph, looking mournfully down upon the unhappy girl, whose eyelids began to quiver from the weight of tears that pressed against them, when he spoke of her benefactress; "Lina, promise me not to leave this place till I have consulted with her."

Again Lina struggled for energy to speak, but her voice only reached him in a hoarse whisper.

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"Ralph, don't; please never mention me to mamma, it can only do harm—promise this, Ralph. I cannot plead, I cannot weep, but if this is my last breath it prays you not to mention that you saw me, to your mother."

Ralph hesitated till he saw Lina's eyes, that were fixed imploringly upon him, closing with a deathly slowness, while her face became as pallid as the linen on which it rested.

"Lina, Lina, I promise anything, only do not turn so white!" he exclaimed, terrified by her stillness.

She opened her eyes quickly, and tried to smile, but the effort died out in a faint quiver of the lips. She was too much exhausted even for weeping.

"Come," said Agnes, laying her hand on the young man's arm; "this excitement will do her more injury than you dream of. Go down stairs a little while, and wait for me there."

Ralph took Lina's poor little hand from its rest on the counterpane, and, with a touch of his old tenderness, was about to press his lips upon it; but a bitter memory seized him, and he dropped it, murmuring, "Poor child, poor child, it is a hard wish, but God had been merciful if this stillness were, indeed, death!"

A pang of tender sorrow ran through Lina's apparently lifeless frame, as a broken lily is disturbed by the wind, but she had no strength even for a sob; she heard his footsteps as he went out, but they sounded afar off, and, when all was still, she fell into total unconsciousness.

Then the woman who had received Ralph and Agnes came in from an adjoining room, and, bending down, listened for the breath that had just been suspended; when satisfied that the poor sufferer was totally unconscious, she turned with a fierce look upon Agnes.

"Now, Agnes, tell me the meaning of this intrusion. How dare you bring that young man here without my permission?"

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"I brought him, madam, because you were resolved to leave my share of the compact half-performed. Did I not warn you in the beginning that his alienation from this girl must be complete? Nothing would convince him that she was utterly lost, but the sight he has just witnessed. It was a dangerous experiment, but I have conquered with it."

"And for what purpose? I tell you, girl, all this craft and perseverance is exhausted for nothing. You are constantly crossing my purposes, and only to defeat yourself in the end."

"It is useless reasoning in this fashion," answered Agnes, insolently; "half-confidences always lead to confusion. The truth is, madam, you have not at any time really studied my interests; there is something beyond it all that I have had no share in from the first. I have been frank and above-board, while you are all mystery. My love for the young gentleman below was confessed the moment my own heart became conscious of it. Nothing but his lingering trust in this frail thing kept back all the response to that love that I can desire. This visit has utterly uprooted that faith. The way is clear now. Another month, and you shall see if I am defeated."

The woman smiled derisively.

"Poor fool," she said, "a single sweep of my hand—or a word from my lips, and all your romantic dreams are dashed away. I have separated the miserable girl from her lover to gratify the wildest delusion that ever entered a human brain. This very night I sent for you, that this game of cross-purposes might have an end. The confidence you have so often asked for, would have been yours but for this rash introduction of the young man into a house he should never have seen."

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"Give me that confidence now, and it may avail something!" answered Agnes, always insolent and disrespectful to the woman before her; "that I have some of your precious blood in my veins, you have taken plenty of opportunities to impress upon me, but it shall not prevent my seeking happiness in my own way!"

"Then you are resolved to entice this young man into a marriage, Agnes?"

"I am resolved that he shall desire it as much as myself."

Again Zillah covered the girl with her scornful glances.

"I tell you, girl," she broke forth passionately, "this is a subject that you shall not dare to trifle with. I desire you to leave General Harrington's house; it is no safe home for you. Obey me, and, in a little time all the fragments of my legacy shall be yours."

"I should fancy those fragments were pretty well used up, if all the finery in this house is paid for," said Agnes, with a scornful laugh. "Even as a speculation, my own project is the best."

"Then you are determined to stay in the house with this young man?"

"Why, am I not well protected, and is it not the most natural thing in the world? Mrs. Harrington has lost her companion—I fill her place. Then, there is the precious old chambermaid; she might have more dangerous people in the house than I am."

"True," muttered Zillah, thoughtfully. "Well, girl, take your own way a little longer; but, remember, I must have a promise that no engagement shall be made with Ralph Harrington without my previous knowledge. A few weeks, Agnes, will bring our affairs to a crisis—when you and I shall be all-powerful or nothing. As for this wild—but hush!"

Zillah pointed warningly toward the bed, where Lina was struggling into consciousness again. "Are you better, love?" she inquired, gently bending over the pale form.

But Lina faintly turned away her head, without even an attempt at speech.

Taking advantage of the moment, Agnes left the chamber, and glided down into the room where Ralph sat waiting, harassed with painful thoughts.

He did not notice Agnes as she came gliding up the room, and took her place on the sofa by his side; but directly the clasp of soft fingers on his hand, which fell listlessly on the cushion, made him look up, and the large, compassionate eyes of Agnes Barker looked into his. Unconsciously he clasped the fingers that had sought his. "How is she now? I am sure that you were kind to her, poor young thing."

Agnes did not answer; but, as he looked up, astonished at her silence, the sight of her dark eyes flooded with tears, and a broken sob that struggled up from her bosom, took him by surprise. In all his acquaintance with her, he had never seen Agnes shed a tear till that moment.

"You are ready to cry," he said, gratefully. "Heaven knows a better reason for tears never existed—poor, lost girl!"

"You give me too much credit," said Agnes, in a low voice; "from my soul I pity the unhappy young creature up-stairs—but, indeed, indeed I envy her, too!"

"Envy her?"

"Indeed, yes, that so much love—such heavenly forgiveness can outlive her fault; that she has even now the power to reject the compassion withheld from deeper and purer feelings in others. Oh, yes, Ralph Harrington, it is envy more than anything else that fills my eyes with tears."

"Agnes!" exclaimed the young man, breathlessly.

The girl bent her head, and made a faint effort to withdraw her hand from his tightened clasp. Directly Ralph relinquished the hand slowly, and arose.

"Miss Barker, you pity me. You feel compassion for the tenacity of affection which clings around its object even in ruin. I understand this, and am grateful."

Agnes clenched the rejected hand in noiseless passion, but Ralph only saw the great tears that fell into her lap. He stood a moment irresolute, and then placed himself again by her side.

"Do not weep, Miss Barker; you only make my unhappiness more complete!"

He looked up, and again their eyes met.

"If it were so, you can at least give me pity in exchange for pity!" she said, with gentle humility; "faith to the faithless cannot forbid this to me."

Ralph was silent; in the tumult of his thoughts he forgot to answer, and that moment Zillah entered the room.

CHAPTER LXX.

MABEL HARRINGTON AND HER SON.

BEN BENSON was never at home now; he went into the woods daily to snare partridges, and set box-traps for rabbits, he said; and the inmates of General Harrington's mansion were too sad and disheartened even for smiles, at the idea of rabbits or partridges on New York island. Indeed, the old fellow was too unhappy for his usual avocations. He would not force himself to sit down at his nets, or touch the carpenter's tools with which the boat-house was garnished. A strange belief haunted him night and day, that Lina was somewhere in the wood, frozen to death, and buried in the snow drifts—or worse, perhaps, had fallen through some air-hole in the ice, and perished, calling in vain for help! The idea that she had deliberately left her home, never found a place in his belief for an instant.

Sometimes, in these wanderings, the old seaman saw Mabel Harrington taking her own solitary way through the woods, but he had no wish to address her; and, if she passed near him, would shrink behind some tree, or pretend to be busy with his traps; for the mere sight of her face, rigid and stern with a continued strain of thought, was enough to strike him mute.

Thus it was that Mabel appeared to her family now. The strength and the sunshine had departed from beneath that roof, and a dull, heavy depression lay everywhere about her. General Harrington rather made the old mansion a convenience than a home; half his time was spent at the club-house. He had of late taken rooms at one of those aristocratic up-town hotels, so foreign in all their appointments, that they might as well be in the Boulevards of Paris as in New York, and often remained in them all night; thus, without any apparent abandonment of his wife, he in

reality made the separation between them more complete than it had yet been.

Did Mabel never inquire of herself the reason of all this? Alas! it is difficult to say what anxiety or idea fixed itself uppermost in that disturbed mind. The period was one of continued and heavy depression with her. She had ceased to struggle with her own heart, or with the dead, heavy weight of misery that settled each hour colder and more drearily about her life. She took no interest in the household, but left everything to the management of Agnes Barker. The very presence of the young woman was oppressive to her, yet so drearily had her high spirit yielded itself to the one numbing thought of James Harrington's absence, that she had no power even to repel this repulsion, much less cast its object off.

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For a time, Ralph had broken up the monotony of this dead life, with his wild conjectures and bitter complaints. He spoke of his half-brother in wrath the more stern and deep, that his love for him had once been so full of tenderness. He was like a man whose old religious faith being once uprooted, believes that no other can exist, and that the Deity is unstable. In his wrath against this brother—in his weak distrust of Lina, the young man had recklessly cast away the brightest jewel of his nature, because they appeared faithless; he believed that all humanity was frail. Alas! when such gems of the soul drop away in youth, it is only with hard experience and keen suffering that they can be gathered back from the depths of life again.

But, during the last few days, Ralph had seen little of his mother. His interview with Lina, and his promise of silence, had effected this. The dead certainty that fell upon him of her utter unworthiness, had buried all the fiery passions of his heart into a smouldering desire for revenge on the man who had smitten her down from the altar of his esteem. Formerly he had raved, and argued, and out-run his own belief of her faithlessness—hoping, poor fellow, that out of all this storm some proof would be wrung that his suspicions wronged her. His mother's sweet attempts at defence—her broken-hearted efforts to explain away the disgraceful appearances that hung around the departure of Harrington and her protégé at the same time, only exasperated him. He wanted her to condemn his suspicions—contradict, trample on them. He would have gloried in any injustice against himself, if she had only stood up stoutly against his bitter suspicions. But Mabel was too truthful for this. The proud heart recoiled in her bosom, as from a blow, at every harsh word against either Harrington or her adopted daughter. The strong sense of justice, which was her finest attribute, kept her from those impetuous bursts of defence, which a single gleam of doubt would have brought vividly to her lips.

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Mabel did not for an instant believe in the coarse interpretation which others might have given to the elopement; had that been possible, the keenest of her pain might have been dulled by contempt. No, no! The worst that she thought was that Harrington, for some inexplicable reason, had withdrawn Lina from her home to marry her in private; but this was enough. It had broken up that confidence, unexpressed, but always a holy principle in both, which had so long held those two souls together, spite of everything that ought to have kept them apart, and did keep them apart, completely as the most rigid moralist could have demanded.

But we suffer as often for our feelings as our actions; and, in the bare fact that a woman like Mabel Harrington—so capable of deep feeling, so rich in all those higher qualities that ripen to perfection only in the warm atmosphere of love—had married a man whom she never could love, lay a bitter reason for her unhappiness; the one sin that had woven its iron thread through what seemed to others the golden coil of her life.

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Mabel saw all this; for years the knowledge of her own rash act had coiled the snake around her heart, which was eating away its life, had been the shadow around her footsteps which nothing could sweep away, not even her own will. She was a slave, the slave of her own deadly sin; for a deadly sin it is which links two unloving hearts together, even in so brief a period of eternity as this world. And Mabel was too good, too great, too kindly of heart to be the bond slave of one sin forever and ever, to feel her soul eternally dragged back by the chain and ball which she had fastened to it in one rash moment of her early youth. Had she been otherwise, some thought of escape would have presented itself to a mind so full of strength and vivid imagination as hers. On every hand the law, and society itself, held out temptations, and pointed to the way by which she might cast off her bonds, and, as thousands do, escape the penalty of one rash act by a cowardly defiance of the laws of God, under the mean shelter of human legislation.

In a country where venal statesmen make "marriage vows as false as dicers' oaths," by reducing a solemn sacrament into a miserable compact, Mabel Harrington might have escaped the evil of her own act, and taken a dastardly refuge in the law, but the thought had never entered her mind. It is a hard penalty for sins, which the world will not recognize as such, when every hour calls for some atonement—when each household step is made heavy by loveless thoughts; Mabel was conscious of her own wrong, and even these small doling atonements never regarded by the world, yet which tell so fearfully on the life, had been patiently performed. She had given way to no sentimental repinings—nor striven to cast the blame upon others that justly belonged to herself; but, like a brave true-hearted woman, had always been willing to gather up the night-shade her own hands had planted, with the flowers that God had still left in her path, without appealing to the world for sympathy or approval.

This had been Mabel Harrington's life—a coarse woman would, perhaps, have contented herself with its material comforts, and, without loving, ceased to desire the capacities of love; the world is full of such. A wicked woman would have skulked out of her fate through the oily-hinged portals of the law—a feeble woman would have pined herself to death; but Mabel was none of these, else my pen would not love to dwell upon her character, as it does now. She had gone

through her life honestly, cultivating all her good feelings with genial hopefulness, seizing upon the bad with a firm will, and crowding them back into the darkness, where they had little chance to grow.

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But, sin is like the houseleek planted upon a mossy roof,—after one fibre has taken root, you find the tough heads springing up everywhere, fruitful of harsh, thorny-edged leaves, and nothing else. You work diligently, tear them up by the roots, trample them to pieces, and, when you think the evil of that first planting is altogether eradicated, up from the heart of some moss-flower, or creeping out from the curved edge of the eaves, comes a fresh crop; and you know that the one fibre is spreading and entangling itself constantly with a hold that you little dreamed of in the outset.

Mabel had planted her one houseleek, and it was with faithful exertion she kept it from covering her whole nature. At times it seemed that every beautiful thing of life would be eaten up and choked to death in this one tough growth, and at this period of her life, Mabel felt like sitting down in apathy, while she watched the evil thing thrive.

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE MISSING BOOK.

MABEL sat, hour after hour, week after week, passive, still, and sad, with a world of sorrow in her face, looking back upon the jewels that had dropped away from her life, mournfully, but with little wish to gather them up again. Her husband never asked an explanation of this strange mood in his wife, but at times he seemed perfectly conscious of it, and to feel a hidden pleasure in her depression; for, though he did not love this woman, the old man's vanity was as quick as ever, and it pleased him to see that her own soul was taking the vengeance on itself that he had bartered off for a price. Miserable, selfish, old man! All the gold of his life had turned to paltry tinsel years ago.

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At another time, Mabel was too quick of thought not to have remarked the singularity of General Harrington's silence regarding the departure of his step-son, but now she was only thankful to shrink away from the subject; and, during their brief interviews, nothing but the most bland inquiries, and polite common-places, marked his behavior. He seemed in high good humor—more than usually lavish of money, and altogether one of the most charming, antique gentlemen in the world. Shallow worldlings would tell you that this decorous old rebel was happier than his victims, and point to his rosy cheeks, his eyes twinkling with sunshine, and his handsome, portly figure, as the proof. Let worldlings think so, if they like; for my part, I would rather have the pain of a fine nature like Mabel's, than the smooth, selfish sensuality, which some men honestly call happiness. Shallow and frozen waters are never turbulent, but who envies the ice over one, or the pebbles under the other? Happiness! Why, one little word in that handsome, old man's ear, would make him shiver, and tremble, and look the coward, as Mabel would never do, woman though she was—the one word *death*; just speak it! Mark how the color will flee from his frightened face! Speak that same word to her, and you will see her features, so sad before, light up with a pearly glow, like that shed through an alabaster lamp when its perfumed oil is alight.

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But Mabel is just beginning to awake from the thrall in which her mind has been held, and wonder a little at Ralph's changed manner—his look is so grave and stern now—he utters no complaint, and says but little in any way; these moods shock his mother less than the old one, but it lifts her out of her dreams, and makes her thoughtful once more. But, Ralph is no longer communicative—he is sometimes seen holding long conversations with Agnes Barker in the now deserted breakfast-room, but he avoids honest old Ben, and talks cautiously and under restraint with his mother. This is a new phase of Ralph's character which Mabel regards with something like surprise; but her energies are all prostrated for the time, and in these vague surmises there is not shock enough to arouse them into life again.

There was one thing which Mabel, with all her thinking, had never yet been able to solve—why had James Harrington found it needful to persuade that inexperienced girl away from her home? There existed no reason for it. He was wealthy—his own master—accountable to no one; surely it was not fear of his younger brother, who would have given the very heart from his bosom, had James desired it. If he loved Lina, a single appeal to the noble young fellow's generosity would have been enough—then why wound and insult him by a course so unnecessarily cruel?

Mabel revolved these questions over and over in her mind, till they threw her thoughts back upon herself. Had she anything to account for—had James suspected the secret of her own weary life, and, fearing to wound her by his love for another, fled to be alone with his happiness?

This thought broke up the apathy into which she had fallen, with a sudden shock, as we hear sheets of ice crack, and shoot a thousand silver arrows over what has been a smooth surface the

moment before. A new thought seized upon her—a fear that made her tremble from head to foot.

[390] Mabel was alone in her boudoir, when this new terror fell upon her. She arose suddenly, and going up to her escritoire, unlocked it, and searched for the vellum book. It was nowhere to be found. She tore the papers out in pale eagerness, opened drawers, unlocked secret compartments, searched in other cabinets, till every nook and corner of her apartments had been examined. Then she sat down, breathless, and so pale that the face which looked back on her from the opposite mirror, seemed that of another person. Where had the book gone—who had dared to remove it from the place where, for years and years, it had been kept sacred from all eyes, as the pulses of her own heart?

Breathless with anxiety, desperate with apprehension, determined to question every servant of the house, she rang the bell.

Agnes Barker presented herself in answer to this summons. The girl had, of late, seemed to find pleasure in forcing herself upon Mabel, and would frequently make an excuse to seek her room in place of the servant, whenever one was summoned. Though her presence was generally unwelcome, Mabel was glad to see her then. Excitement had, for the moment, swept away the nervous recoil with which she always regarded her.

"Miss Barker, I had a book in this escritoire, bound in vellum, and filled with manuscript notes. It had a curious gold clasp. You cannot mistake the description. That book is missing."

"Well, madam!" answered the girl, with cold composure; "is it of me you demand that book? I have not seen it. This is the first time I ever saw your desk open. I believe the key has always been in your own possession!"

"I thought so," answered Mabel, feeling once more among the charms attached to her watch, to be sure the key was still there; "I thought so, but the book is gone."

"Shall I call the servant, madam? The new chambermaid possibly knows something of it; she has taken charge of this room lately."

[391] "Indeed, I have not observed," said Mabel. "Yes, send her here."

CHAPTER LXXII.

FRAGMENTS OF MABEL'S JOURNAL.

AGNES went out quietly, as if there had been neither anger nor suspicion in Mrs. Harrington's voice. The poor lady sat trembling from head to foot, still searching the room wildly with her eyes, till the mulatto chambermaid came in.

"What's de matter wid de chile; she's white as snow, and seems a'most as cold; 'pears like something 'stresses her," said the woman, casting a sidelong glance at the lady from under the half-closed lids of her eyes, which never seemed capable of opening themselves fully in Mabel's presence.

"Woman!" said Mabel, sharply, for her anxiety was like a pain. "Woman, I have lost a book from my escritoire yonder—a white book, clasped with gold—what has become of it?"

"Goodness knows, missus! I don't know nothin' 'bout no book, praise de Lor'! I dussent know one kind of readin' from t'other. Books ain't no kind o' use to dis colored pusson, no how; so t'ain't I as has gone and tuk it."

"No, no, but you may have seen it. Possibly the desk may have been left open, and you, not knowing it from other books, have put it away among those of the library. See, it was filled with writing like this."

Here Mabel took up a pen, and hastily dashed off a line or two on a loose sheet of paper. The woman took the paper, turned it wrong end up, and began to examine it with serious scrutiny, as if she were striving to make out its meaning.

"'Pears like the inside was like this, miss?" she said at last, with another glance at the pale face of her mistress.

[392] Mabel took the paper impatiently from her. "No, like this," she cried, reversing the page. "You should be able to understand the peculiarities of the marks, even though you cannot read."

"Like dis is it—de high marks shootin' up so, and the long one running out scrigly scrawley like dis one; 'pears 's if I'd seen 'em afore, but 'twasn't in a bounden book, golly knows."

"You have seen the writing—very well—where was it?"

"Up in Master James' room, the day he went off. Them's the same marks, Lor' knows."

"In Mr. James Harrington's room!" exclaimed Mabel, white as snow.

"Please, missus, tell jus' what the book was outside and in."

Mabel held up the sheet of paper on which she had written, but it trembled like a plucked leaf in her hand.

"This size, with a white cover, edged with gold. The lock was clasped with a trinket like this on my watch, only larger, and with red sparks set in it."

"Like dis, with little red stuns—the cover white, and shut wid a thing like this. Yes, missus, Master James had a book jus' like de one you mean in his room, de berry morning afore he done and went off!"

"Go," said Mabel, shivering, "go search for it!"

The woman shuffled herself out of the room; directly she returned, with several leaves of crumpled writing in one hand, and some small object clenched in the other.

"The book's done gone, missus; but here's something dat I found on his table, 'sides dis what I sifted out of de ashes."

She handed Mabel some crumpled pages of her journal, evidently torn from the book; the half of a broken heart, dulled with fire, and the corner of what had once been a vellum cover, burned almost away, but with a gleam of the tarnished gold and white upon the edge.

"Sakes alive, how white you is, missus!" exclaimed the woman, and a disagreeable gleam broke from under her half-shut eyelids, as she saw Mabel stagger and sink faintly back into her chair, grasping the fragments of her journal as she fell.

"No, no!" she gasped, repulsing the mulatto with her hand: "I am not white—I am not ill. These—these—you found them in Mr. James Harrington's room!"

"Them papers was on his table wid his cigar-case, an' pipe, an' dem tings. De gol' heart, and dat oder, dis chile fished out o' de grate, for de Lord just as 'tis dare."

"Go!" commanded Mabel, hoarsely. "I know where the book went to; that is enough!"

"'Pears like you is goin' to faint," answered the woman, who seemed reluctant to leave her.

"No, I am well—very well. Leave me."

The woman turned away, and, as she went forth, the disagreeable smile we have before mentioned, crept slowly across her mouth.

As the door closed, the fragments of her journal dropped from Mabel's hand; her arms fell loosely downward, and shrinking to a pale heap in the chair, she fainted quite away.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE TWO BROTHERS.

RALPH had been away from home since the day before Mabel was taken ill. He had left suddenly, after a conversation with Agnes in the breakfast-room; and, though the governess sat up till late at night, anxious and watchful, he did not return. Thus it happened that Mrs. Harrington was, for the time, left completely in the hands of her servants.

But, where had Ralph gone, and why? To indulge in one strong passion, and escape the meshes of another, the young man had left home. Spite of her craft, and that consummate self-control that seemed incompatible with her evil nature, Agnes had at last madly confessed her love to the young man. It is possible that some kindly expression on his part might have led to this unwomanly exposure, for Agnes had an amount of sullen pride in her nature which would have kept her silent, had not some misinterpreted word or action led her astray. Ralph's unfeigned surprise, joined to the cold restraint with which he met her outgush of passion, fell like cold lead upon her fiery nature. All that was bitter and hard in her soul, rose up at once to resent the indignity which her own uncurbed impulses had provoked. But, she was tenacious of an object once aimed at; and, instead of the hope that had filled her life till now, came a firm resolution, at any cost of truth or conscience, to win a return of her love, even though it were to cast it back in bitter retribution, for the shame under which she writhed.

This was a new source of distress to the young man, and he left home really without any definite object, but to escape the society of a person whose presence had become almost a

reproach to him. He did not speak of his departure to Mrs. Harrington, because its object was indefinite in his own mind, and he had spent one night from home before she was aware of his absence.

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By some attraction, which we do not pretend to explain, the young man went first to the house where he had seen Lina. He had no wish to enter it, and shrunk painfully from the thought of seeing her again; but still he lingered around the dwelling—left it—returned again, and could not tear himself away, so tenacious and cruel was his object.

His object—true it was not love; now the very word seemed enough to drive him mad. The unwelcome passion of one woman heaped upon the wrongs done him by another, was enough to make the very remembrance repulsive. No, love was lost to him, he madly thought, forever. But there is yet a fiercer and more burning passion and that urged him forward. He would be revenged on the man who had torn all the joy from his life. He would meet that false brother face to face, beyond that Ralph had calculated nothing. It seemed to him that the very glances of his eyes would be enough to cover the traitor with eternal remorse. So he watched and waited before Zillah's house, hoping, burning with impatience, that Harrington would pass in or out while seeking the presence of his victim, and thus they might meet. But he watched in vain.

Already had Ralph inquired at every hotel where James Harrington would be likely to stay, and now weary and full of smouldering rage, he resolved to go home, and there await some news of him.

On his way up town, a hotel carriage passed him, filled with passengers from some newly arrived train. In that carriage Ralph saw his brother.

The carriage stopped after a little. James Harrington, dusty, pale and travel-worn, stepped out, and stood face to face with his young brother.

For one instant his fine eye lighted up, and he grasped the youth's hand.

"Ralph!"

Ralph wrenched his hand away, and James saw that his eyes were full of lurid fire.

"What is this, Ralph? You look strangely!" he said.

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"I feel strangely," answered the youth, shuddering under the rush of tenderness that surged up through his wrath. "I have been searching for you, sir, waiting for you"—

"Why, it is not so long since I left home, Ralph."

"It seems an eternity to me," answered the boy; and spite of his wrathful manhood, tears sprang up, and spread like a mist over the smouldering fire of his eyes.

James looked at him with grave earnestness, his own face was pale and careworn, his eyes heavy with a potent sorrow, but it took an expression of deeper anxiety as he perused the working features before him.

"My dear boy, something is amiss with you; come into the hotel. I have a room here yet. Cheer up, it must be a bitter sorrow, indeed, if your brother cannot help you out of it."

Ralph ground his teeth, and the word "hypocrite" broke through them.

But James did not hear it, he had turned to enter the hotel. Ralph followed him, growing paler and paler as he walked. The bitter wrath that had been for a moment disturbed was concentrating itself at his heart again.

They entered James Harrington's room, a small chamber in the highest story of the hotel, and both sat down.

"Now," said James, kindly, "tell me why it is that you are so changed. I scarcely know you with that look, Ralph."

"I scarcely know myself with these feelings," cried the youth, smiting his breast in a sudden storm of passion. "Oh! James, James! how could you be so generous, so kind to a poor fellow only to plunder and crush him at last? What had I done that you should tear up my youth by the roots, just as it began to feel the warmth of life?"

"Ralph, are you mad?"

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"It is not your fault or hers if I am not mad," was the bitter reply.

"Or hers!" repeated Harrington, turning deathly white, "or hers—who are you speaking of?"

"Of the woman we both love. I cannot speak her name to you. How dare you brand that noble creature with shame, after using the privileges of my father's house to win her love? Was it not enough that you had stolen her heart from me—from us all? Could nothing but her disgrace content your horrible vanity?"

"Ralph, Ralph, in the name of Heaven, what is this?" cried Harrington, starting up with an outcry of terrible agony, which whitened his face to the lips.

"What is this!" thundered Ralph, "are you detected at last? arch hypocrite, that you are—"

desecrating the roof that you should have upheld, leaving traces of your wickedness on every thing that ever loved you. I ask you again, why did you seek her love? why, having won it, did you leave her to shame?"

"Ralph, speak briefly and clearly—what is it you mean? has your father put this cruel charge against me into your mind? No more hints, no more vague upbraidings—out with it at once—what do you charge me with?"

Ralph did not speak, there was a grandeur of passion in the man that held him silent.

"In the name of God, speak!" cried the brother, "you are killing me."

He spoke truly; no human strength could long have withstood the strain of anxiety that cramped his features almost into half their size, and made his strong hands quiver like reeds.

"In the name of God, speak!" he cried out again; "of what do they charge me?"

"I charge you," said Ralph, in a faltering voice, for the power of that man's innocence was upon him as he spoke; "I charge you with the ruin of the purest and noblest"—

"Ruin!—who dares"——

"Yes, ruin—has she not left my father's roof, followed you into this miserable city—left us all, refusing to go back"——

"Boy, boy, she has not—she has not. God help us all, she has not done this. Your father is pledged, solemnly pledged against it. Ralph, my dear boy, there is some mistake here; she cannot be so desperate."

"She left home on the very day with yourself, in the storm, when the snow and the ice cut one to the heart."

"Yes, I remember; the storm seemed of a piece with the rest; a hopeful heart would have frozen in it. I remember that storm well."

"But she has greater cause to remember it, for in its drifts was buried her good name forever; if it could have whitened over the infamy that fell on our house, I should have prayed the snows to be eternal!"

"Ralph, Ralph, this is terrible!"

"Terrible!" repeated the young man, "you should have thought how terrible before tempting that poor young creature to her ruin. The house is desolate as the grave. My mother wanders through it like a ghost; she is worn to a shadow mourning over the ruin of her child, for Lina was dear as her own child could"——

James Harrington struggled for voice; his pale features began to quiver; his lips parted; he grasped Ralph by the arm.

"Brother, brother, is it Lina who has left home?"

"Lina—yes."

James Harrington dropped into his chair without uttering a word; and, for the first time in his life, Ralph saw great tears rush to his eyes.

"Oh, my God! make me, make me grateful!" he cried, and a great shudder of joy shook his soul. "Ralph Harrington, you will never know how great a blessing your words have been to me."

Ralph stood by, amazed. The face of his brother looked like that of a glorified saint. There was no guilt in him; the young man felt this in the depths of his soul; wrong there certainly was somewhere, but not in the great-hearted man before him.

"Brother," said James, arousing himself, and reaching forth his hand, "now, tell me what this trouble is. I can listen like a man—has Lina left her home? poor child, she loved you, Ralph—what drove her away?"

"I do not know—till now"——

"You thought it was me. Shame on it, Ralph, I did not think you would believe ill of me." The tear that quivered on that young cheek, proved that at least "lost faith" had been restored to him. "Come," said James Harrington, warmly shaking the hand in his, "let us search out this good child, and save her."

"She will not be saved—she refuses to go home," answered Ralph, sadly.

"Not so, not so—have more faith, my boy. There is something here which we do not understand, but not guilt, certainly not *her* guilt—did not your mother guide her up from the cradle almost? besides that, does she not love you with her whole heart, and that is not a little? Tell me where to find her, and I will soon tear out the heart of this mystery. I am strong now, Ralph, and feel as if mountains would be nothing in my way. Come."

And Ralph went hopefully forth with his brother.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

GENERAL HARRINGTON'S SECRET.

HARRINGTON and Ralph stood opposite Zillah's house, pausing for a moment's conversation before they went in.

[400] "No," said Ralph, earnestly, "do not ask it; I will not give even this evidence of a doubt which I never can feel again. Go yourself, and see her alone. Learn, if possible, by what evil influence she has been wiled from her home. If she has fled to escape the importunity of my love, tell her to fear it no more; I will leave the country—do anything rather than stand in the way of her return to my mother."

Harrington wrung the hand which Ralph had in his earnestness extended.

"Wait at the hotel," he said; "in an hour expect me with news. I will not leave the poor child till her secret is mine. Be hopeful, Ralph, for I tell you Lina is an honest, good girl, and a little time will make it all clear."

"God grant that we do not deceive ourselves!" said Ralph, hopefully. "I will wait for you, but it will be a terrible hour, James."

"But such hours go by like the rest," answered Harrington, with a grave smile; "you will learn this in time."

With these words, James Harrington crossed the street, and entered Zillah's house.

Ralph watched him till the door closed, and then walked slowly back to the hotel.

Harrington was right—such hours do go by like the rest; those that are tear-laden toil on a little slower than such as are bright with smiles, but the eternity which crowds close upon them receives both alike, and they float away into the past, mistily together.

In less than the given time, James Harrington came back, but his step was heavy as he mounted the stairs, and a look of haggard trouble hung upon his brow. Ralph felt his breath come painfully; he dared not speak, for never in his life had he felt such awe of the man before him. At length he drew close to James, and whispered:

"One word, only one: is she lost?"

[401] "Ralph" said Harrington, drawing a hand across his forehead once or twice, as if to sweep away some pain that ached there, "I am at a loss what to say!"

Ralph turned white and drew back.

"No, no, it is not as you think. The sweet girl is blameless as the angels, but she is bound by promises and obligations that even I cannot feel free to fling aside: yet this secrecy can only end in pain. It is my duty, at any risk, to free her name from reproach. Ralph, I have something very distressing to tell you, and it must be told."

"If Lina is innocent, if she loves me, all else is nothing!" answered Ralph, with enthusiasm. "Oh, James, you have made a man of me once more!"

"This hopefulness pains me, Ralph."

"How? Did you not charge me to keep hopeful? did you not tell me that Lina was blameless? While I can respect, love—nay, adore her—what else has the power to wound me?"

James Harrington shrank back, and his face flushed.

"Hush! hush! these words are too ardent—they wound, they repulse me! If you guessed all that I know, your own heart would recoil from them."

"Guessed all that you know!—well, speak out. It must be something terrible, indeed, if it prevents me loving her, after what you have already said."

James Harrington hesitated; looked wistfully at the eager face turned full of inquiry to his, and at last said, in a low, almost solemn voice:

"Ralph, Lina is your father's daughter."

"My father's daughter?" cried Ralph, aghast; "my father's daughter!"

"He told her so with his own lips, binding her by a promise not to reveal the secret to us. Poor thing, it was too weighty for her strength; she grew wild under it and fled to the woman you saw, who claims to be her mother."

[402] "Claims to be her mother! That woman—it is false!"

"I fear not, Ralph! I myself recognized that woman as a beautiful slave whom your father owned

when my own poor mother died. She has changed but"—

"A slave—Lina, the child of a slave? I tell you it is false; the dews of heaven are not more pure than the blood that fills those blue veins; there is some fraud here!" cried Ralph, impetuously.

"I fear not. She is certain of it; this cruel conviction is killing her. But for her feeble state, I never could have won her secret. Poor child, poor child, what can be done for her?"

Ralph walked the room impetuously, beating the air with his hand: all at once he stopped—the cloud upon his brow cleared away—his lips parted almost with a cry.

"I tell you, brother James, this is a fraud, to which Lina's face alone is enough to give the lie! Ask Ben Benson—only ask Ben, he is truthful as the sun; he has known her from the cradle. Ben Benson told me with his own lips, that Lina's mother was dead!"

James Harrington became excited; his eye kindled.

"Did Ben Benson tell you this?"

"He did, indeed; but why waste time in guessing? Let us go home; the old fellow will help us to put this right."

James hesitated, and shrunk within himself; the look of pain came back to his face, and he answered with some constraint, that the steamer sailed for Europe on the morrow, and his passage was already taken.

Ralph looked astonished and distressed.

"Would you leave us now?" he said, reproachfully.

James remained thoughtful a moment, and then answered with a touch of mournfulness:

"No, I will remain for a little time. So long as I am wanted, it must be so."

"Then, let us go home at once."

"Yes, it is a duty; I will return with you," said Harrington, with gentle concession; and, spite of himself, a gleam of pleasure broke into his eyes.

"Come, then, come!" cried Ralph, impetuously. "I cannot breathe till old Ben has spoken. Come!"

"Have patience, Ralph; let us talk this matter over more quietly. We are not at liberty to tell this painful secret to your mother, it would shock her too much; besides, I pledged my honor to the poor child that it should not be done. Let me find General Harrington, and learn the whole truth from him. If Lina proves to be your sister—do not turn so pale, my dear boy—if she proves to be this, you must go with me to Europe, and learn to regard her with that gentle affection which becomes these new relations."

"I tell you, Lina is *not* my sister; every feeling of my soul rises up to contradict it!" cried the youth, impetuously. "General Harrington will not say it."

"Is the General at home now?" inquired Harrington, with a gentle wave of the hand.

"No; he seldom is, of late. He almost lives at the club-house."

"I will seek him there," said Harrington; "come with me."

"Not on this errand, James; I could not see my father, and maintain that self-control which is due from a son to his parent. His sins have fallen too heavily on me for that."

"You are right, perhaps," answered James, thoughtfully. "It will be a painful interview; but for her sake I will undertake it, though I had thought all subjects of this kind were at an end between General Harrington and myself."

Ralph wrung the hand extended to him, and the two went out, each taking his own way.

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE DESERTED CHAMBER.

MABEL had been very ill; the sense of humiliation, the outrage on every feeling of delicacy that had beset her after the fragments of that vellum book were placed in her hand, fell upon her strength with terrible effect. To herself, she seemed disgraced forever; the holiest portion of her life was torn away, to be trodden down by the feet of the multitude. No sin, however heinous, could have fallen upon her with more crushing effect. The very maturity of age, which should

have so far removed her from the romance of love, embittered her grief by a sense of self-ridicule. At times, she felt like reviling and scoffing at affections that up to this time had been hoarded away from her own thoughts. For a train of wrong feelings, unaccompanied by a single false act, save that of her marriage, she was suffering the most terrible humiliation before God and her own conscience.

Is it strange that her nerves, so long excited and so delicate in themselves, gave way at last, prostrating her to the earth, strengthless as a child? She did not leave her room, she scarcely looked up when the servants entered it, and was so broken and bowed down by the weight of her shame, that even the absence of her son was disregarded. No criminal ever shrank from the face of man more sensitively than this high-souled woman.

[405] It annoyed Mabel to see any one enter her apartments. When the mulatto chambermaid came there, in the ordinary course of her duties, she would shrink back in her chair and shade her eyes, as if some hideous spectre had crossed her path; but, if Agnes Barker entered, this nervous shock became unendurable, and it was with the greatest effort that she could refrain from rushing madly into the next room, and holding the door against her intrusions.

One night—it was that on which James Harrington went out in search of an explanation from the General—Mabel was more terribly oppressed than ever; all the bitter recollections of a most tedious life crowded upon her at once. She longed to flee away into some new place, where human intrusion would be impossible—and yet Agnes Barker would enter the room; again and again she saw the poor woman wince and shiver at her approach, but with malicious servility insisted on arranging her cushions, and performing all those little services which are so sweet when love prompts them, yet which fall upon us like insults when rendered by those against whom our natures are in repulsion. To save herself from this officious tending, Mabel inquired for the mulatto woman, preferring her presence to the endurance of attentions so oppressive.

Agnes smiled sweetly at the inquiry: "but the chambermaid had gone out," she said, "and might not be back till late; meantime, it was a happiness to attend madam—was the cushion comfortably arranged? should she move the footstool?"

The girl sank upon her knees, and, in moving the ottoman, touched Mabel's foot with her hand. The excited woman sprang up with a shudder, as if a rattlesnake had crept across her ankles, and, unable to endure the presence of her tormentor a moment more, hurried out of the room.

"Is there no place," she said, moving wildly forward, "no place in which I can hide myself, and snatch a moment's rest? Will these creatures trail themselves in my path forever and ever!"

[406] The unhappy woman did not even think that she possessed the right to send the offensive persons at any moment from her presence; for, since the discovery of her secret, Mabel no longer felt that she was the mistress of these people, or that she held a power of command anywhere. All that she wished was to hide herself from every one. Influenced only by this unconquerable desire, she hurried up the stairs, and taking a bronze lamp from a statue that occupied a niche in the first landing, went forward till she came to the door of a chamber that had been occupied by James Harrington. Here a gleam of intelligence shot over her pale face, and she eagerly tried the lock. It yielded, and, drawing a quick breath, she crossed the threshold, turning the key which had been left inside with an impatient violence, and looked round exultingly at the solitude which she had thus insured.

"It was here," she said, looking around on the grate and on the table, while her pale brow darkened and her lips began to tremble; "it was here that he burned my poor journal—here that he tore the secret from my soul, while I lay sleeping below. After this cruel pillage of my life, he fled to hide the—No, no! Scorn he could *not* feel—hate, pity, anything but scorn! Let me search if any vestige remains."

She bent over the empty grate, peering through the polished bars with keen glances, but it was bare and cold; not an ember remained, nor a grain of dust. The very ashes of her book had been cast forth with the common refuse. The table was empty, not a paper littered it: a bronze standish, in which the ink was frozen to a black ice and a useless pen or two, alone met her search; all was in cruel order. The bed, with its unpressed pillows smooth as iced snow—the easy-chair wheeled into a corner of the room—the closed shutters without—everything was desolate.

[407] Mabel sat down upon the bed, the most dreary thing there; she looked mournfully around. The wild eagerness died out of her features, and lowering her face upon the cold pillow, she began to cry like a child. Directly the chill of the night struck through and through her. She shivered till the teeth chattered beneath her quivering lips; what with grief, cold, and exhaustion, the poor lady had become helpless as infancy. Forgetting where she was, and careless of everything on earth, she gathered the bed-clothes slowly around her, and shuddered herself to sleep.

THE UNEXPECTED RETURN.

As General Harrington was dining at his club that day, a note was sent up to him; and, as his meal had reached the last stage of a luxurious dessert, he quietly broke open the envelope, and read:

"James Harrington has found means to see Lina, and she has told him everything. I shall await you here during the next hour.

ZILLAH."

The General crushed this note slowly in his hand, a quiet smile stole over his face, and sipping his wine with great complacency, he murmured:

"Well? but the life deeds are safe, what is his anger to me?"

But, directly a less pleasant thought forced itself on his mind; he remembered that the deeds he exulted over, were only binding so long as Mabel Harrington remained contentedly beneath his roof. What if James should take advantage of the knowledge obtained from Lina, as a counterbalancing power against him? What if Mabel should at once use that knowledge to protect herself, and by suing out a divorce, cast all the shame he had threatened to heap upon her, back upon his own head? Certainly, James Harrington would not fail to inform her of the powers of retaliation that lay within her grasp; perhaps even now she knew everything.

He started up from the table, calling for his furred paletot, and gave orders that his sleigh and horses should be brought round. The well-bred waiters, whose duty it was to be surprised at nothing, were evidently astonished at these signs of agitation in the most urbane and reposeful visitor at the club-rooms. With a hurried step he descended to the street, stepped into his sleigh, buried himself to the chin in furs, and the driver dashed off with a ringing of bells and a flourish of the whip around his horses' ears, that made them dance like Russian leaders.

The day was growing dusky, and General Harrington urged the driver on, for he was eager to reach home and have an interview with his wife, before the younger Harrington could reveal his secret. Trusting much to Mabel's noble powers of forgiveness, and more to the allurements of his own eloquence, which should so word his contrition that it would be sure to touch a nature like hers, he was only anxious to forestall her anger by what would appear to be a frank confession of his fault; thus, by throwing himself upon her mercy, and challenging the generosity which had never yet failed him, he hoped to retain control of the wealth which had become doubly important from the lavish expenditure of the last few weeks.

Thus, full of anxiety and terror regarding a revelation that James Harrington would have died rather than make to Mabel, the old gentleman dashed on toward home, eager to be in advance with his disgraceful news.

The house was very still when he entered it; faint lights broke through the library windows and from the balcony in front of Mabel's boudoir, but the rest of the house was dark and quiet as death. General Harrington had left his sleigh at the stables, which were some distance from the house—thus the noise of his arrival was lost on the inmates; and, as he let himself in at the front door with a latch-key, no one was aware of his presence.

Flinging off his wrappers in the hall, he looked into the usual sitting-room to assure himself that it was empty; then going to his own room long enough to change his boots for a pair of furred slippers, he went at once to Mabel's boudoir. A fire burned dimly on the hearth, and over the table hung a small alabaster lamp, that seemed full of imprisoned moonlight, but was not brilliant enough to subdue the quiet shadows that lay like a mist all around the room. Mabel was not there, and the General sought for her in the bed-chamber adjoining, but all was still; the faint light that stole in from the alabaster lamp, revealed a snowy night-robe laid upon the bed, and everything prepared for rest, but the lady was absent.

"Well, well," muttered the old gentleman, drawing Mabel's easy-chair to the hearth, and warming his hands by the pleasant fire, "she cannot be gone far, and, at any rate, my hopeful step-son will find himself too late for an interview to-night; so I will quietly await her here. What a dreamy place it is, though; I did not think that she possessed so much of the philosophy of life; but the strangeness reminds me that I have been rather too negligent of late. No matter, she will only be the more ready to welcome me; for, with all her romance and journalizing, the woman loves me: I was sure of that, even while pushing the hard bargain with her cavalier. Faith," he continued, rubbing his velvety palms together, and leaning toward the fire, "I am glad she did not happen to be present! A little warmth and calm thought will do everything towards preparing me for the interview."

With these thoughts running through his mind, the old man—for he was old, spite of appearances—began to feel the effects of a long ride in the cold. The bland warmth of the fire overcame him with luxurious drowsiness, and he would have dropped to sleep in his chair, but that it afforded no easy rest for his head, which fell forward, whenever he sank into a doze, with a jerk that awoke him very unpleasantly.

"I wonder Mrs. Harrington does not select more comfortable chairs for her room," he muttered, looking around uneasily for something more commodious to rest in. "I will call at King's to-

morrow, and order one of his latest inventions—a Voltaire or Sleepy Hollow; no wonder she wanders off for better accommodation. The fire is down in my library, so I must wait for her here. Let me see if there is anything more promising in the next room."

He went into the sleeping chamber as he spoke, and threw himself upon a couch near the window; but it was so remote from the fire that he soon grew cold, and started up again. Removing Mabel's night robe from the bed, he flung himself upon it, gathering the counterpane over him, and burying his head in the frilled pillows.

"She cannot come in without waking me, that is certain," he murmured, dreamily; "so this is the best place to wait in. I did not think the cold could have chilled me through all those furs. Ah! this is comfortable; I can wait for madam with patience now, with, wi"—

Spite of his anxiety, the old gentleman dropped off to sleep here, with a luxurious sense of comfort. That was a quiet and profound sleep, notwithstanding the old man had many sins unrepented of.

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CHAPTER LXXVII.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

ABOUT an hour after General Harrington drove up to his stables, with such a clash of bells, and stole from it so noiselessly, there came another sleigh along the high road, the very one which had borne Lina French to her wretched city home. Noiselessly as it had moved that stormy night, the sleigh crept toward General Harrington's dwelling. At the cross of the roads it made a halt, and out from the pile of furs stepped a female, mantled from head to foot, who set her foot firmly upon the snow, and, with a wave of her hand, dismissed the sleigh, which, turning upon its track, glided like a shadow into the darkness again.

The woman stood still till the sleigh was out of sight; then gathering the cloak about her, walked rapidly towards the house. As General Harrington had done, she opened the door with a latch-key, and glided into the darkened vestibule. Her tread left no sound on the marble, and she glided on through the darkness like a shadow, meeting no one, and apparently so well acquainted with the building that light was unnecessary. At length she paused opposite a door, opened it cautiously, and entered a dusky chamber, lighted only by a small lamp that was so shaded that a single gleam of light shot across the floor, leaving the rest in darkness. A bed stood in this room with a low couch, on which Agnes Barker was sleeping. The woman took up the lamp, allowing a stream of light to fall upon her face, at the same moment it revealed that of the holder, which shone out hard as iron, and with a grey pallor upon it.

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"Is it you?" exclaimed the girl, starting up and putting back the hair from her face. "Have you found him? Has he returned? Why can't you speak to me? Where is Ralph Harrington?"

"Agnes!"

"Well," answered the girl, impatiently.

"It is useless pursuing this infatuation longer. The time has come when you must learn to command yourself. You are my daughter!"

"I don't believe it!" answered the girl, angrily.

"Have you ever known any other parent?"

"I never had any parent!"

"Who placed you at school? who paid for your education?"

"I don't know—your mistress, I dare say, who was ashamed of my birth, and made you her agent. I have always believed so and believe it yet."

"Agnes, you are my own child. I call on Heaven to witness it!"

"I am not fool enough to believe you."

"You would have the poor thing separated from young Harrington, and I had no other way of appeasing your unreasonable demands, being your mother."

"Well, at any rate they are separated, and I am not married to James the millionaire, which was your wish; so, after all, I do not come out second best in a fair trial of strength, you see."

"I do not wish your marriage with James Harrington, and Ralph you can never hope for."

"You think so!" answered the girl, with a vicious sneer. "You fancy that one rebuff will crush

me. I neither know nor care who told you that he has met my love with scorn, fled my presence as if I were a viper on his father's hearth. I tell you he shall return. I have a will that shall yet bend his love to mine though it were tougher than iron. Woman, I say again, Ralph Harrington shall yet be my lawfully wedded husband!"

"Girl, I tell you again, and with far better reasons, it can never be!" cried Zillah, towering over her as she sat upon the couch.

"It shall be!" almost hissed the girl, meeting the black eyes bent upon her with glances of sullen wrath.

"Not till the laws permit brothers and sisters to marry!" answered Zillah. "For I call upon the living God to witness that you are General Harrington's child!" Her face hardened and grew white, as the secret burst from her lips; for she saw the shudder and heard the shriek that broke from her child.

"His and yours?" questioned Agnes, pale as death.

"His and mine!"

"And you were a slave?"

"*His* slave."

Agnes started up, tossing her hands wildly in the air.

"A noble parentage—a thrice noble parentage!" she cried out, hoarse with pain and rage. "The child of a villain, and his slave! Woman, I could tear you into atoms, for daring to pour your black blood into my life!"

Zillah drew back, pale and aghast. She could not speak.

"Ah, now I know why this flesh crept, and the blood fell back upon my heart, when that vicious old man was near! My life rose up against the outrage of its own being. I tell you, woman, if this man is my father, I *hate* him!"

"And me," faltered Zillah, shuddering.

"And you, negro-slave that you are."

"I am neither a negro or a slave," answered Zillah, recovering a portion of her haughtiness; "the taint of my blood has died out in yours. Look on me, unfeeling girl, and say where you find a trace of the African—not in this hair, it is straight and glossy as Mabel Harrington's—not on my forehead, see how smooth it is—not in my heart or brain, for when did an African ever have the mind to invent, or the courage to carry out, the designs that fill my brain? I tell you, girl, your mother has neither the look nor the soul of a slave; but she has will, and power, and a purpose, too, that shall lift her child so high, that the whitest woman of her father's race will yet be proud to render her homage!"

"Dreaming, dreaming!" exclaimed Agnes, scornfully.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

A STORMY PARTING.

ZILLAH drew her tall form to its full height.

"Dreaming!" she said. "No. This is the time for us to act; no, not us—you shall have nothing of this but the advantage. You are my child, his child, and I love you; therefore, let all the risk, and sin, and pain be mine. You shall have nothing but the power and the gold. Listen, girl, you should not marry James Harrington, now, though he wished it; he is no match for you—he is penniless as this boy Ralph, your half-brother. Do not shrink and look at me so wildly, but learn to hear the truth. This boy is your brother, and his son; for that reason he must not want, when you and I have our rights; out of the property which was once James Harrington's, we must persuade the General to give the young man a few thousands; as for James, let him remain the beggar his romantic folly has left him.

"Agnes, your father, General Harrington—your father! impress the word on your soul, child—your father is now master of everything; while he lives, James Harrington is penniless. Tomorrow, we shall reign in Mabel Harrington's house. You look surprised, you ask me how all this has been brought about. Listen: you remember the vellum book which you stole for me, out of her escritoire. Well, it contained many secrets, but not the one I wanted most—not enough to make Mabel Harrington an outcast. I lived with her in her youth, and knew how much she loved this

priestly Harrington—and, when his mother died, hoped that he would marry her; but she was too wealthy. The General wanted her money, and, in defiance of my anger and my tears, made her his wife. I rebelled, threatened, grew mad, and to save himself, this man, whom I loved better than my own soul, persuaded me back to the plantation, and sold me! You turn pale, even you look shocked. For a time, I could have torn him to atoms, like a tiger when food is scarce; for the love that had been so deep and fiery, turned to hate: but wrong does not uproot a passion like mine. He had sold me into a double bondage—his child was the slave of another man; yet every wish of my soul struggled to his feet again—in that I *was* a slave.

"Yes, bend your eyes upon me, and curve your lips with that unspoken taunt; at least, I was not the slave of a boy! Sit still, sit still, I say! it is no use flinging your tiger glances at me; I have no time for quarreling. While I was his slave, General Harrington's liberality had no bounds, and, dreading the time when it might cease, I hoarded a large sum of money, more than enough to buy myself a dozen times over. I was about to enter into a bargain with my new master for myself and child, when he died, setting us free by his will.

"I waited, worked, saved, adding gold to gold, till years came between me and the man who had owned and sold me; dulling the influence of that woman, and turning my passion into a power.

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"At first, I intended to introduce you into this house, and marry you to James Harrington—thus ensuring a high position to my child, depriving Mabel of a protector, and sweeping away General Harrington's sources of wealth at the same time. Then, while stripped of the luxuries he loves so well, my hoarded gold would have paved my way back to his favor; but you, ever perverse, ever disobedient, became infatuated with this boy, Mabel Harrington's son, and thus defeated a plan that this brain had been weaving for years. You had stolen the book, that was something; but your perverse fancy rendered new complications necessary, and, to keep you quiet, I was compelled to cumber myself with that poor girl, to lie, and almost betray myself.

"Be quiet, and listen. The book was incomplete, but I had studied Mabel Harrington's writing well in my youth; she had left blank pages here and there in her journal; *I* filled them up; he read them; all would have gone well—she would have been degraded, turned out of doors, but for the mad generosity of James Harrington. I listened, and saw that all was lost; that the journal would be given up to him, and the falsehood of those pages made known. I tore them out, and with them other pages that have since served a good purpose. Listen, still, for I have no time. To-day, James Harrington came to the house in my absence, and had a conversation with Lina; what it was, I do not know, but it may put us in this woman's power. Before morning, this battle must be over."

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Agnes, with a fresh burst of passion, so absorbed by her own thoughts that she disregarded the purport of Zillah's words. "*His* child, *his* sister, and the tool of a slave,—a noble burden this, to carry on through life!"

She arose and walked toward the door, pale as death, and with her teeth clenched.

"Where are you going?" inquired Zillah.

"Into the cold, where I can breathe. Do not speak. Let me go!"

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"But not down stairs—not into her room!"

"I tell you," answered the girl, hoarse with passion, "I tell you that it is air, space, a storm, a whirlwind that I want; nothing else will give back the breath to my lungs!"

She went out fiercely, like the tempest her evil heart evoked.

For an instant the woman Zillah stood still, looking after her; then she rushed to the door, and called out in a loud whisper,

"Agnes, Agnes, come back!"

But the call was too late. Like a black shadow, Agnes Barker had passed out of the house.

Zillah reëntered the room, looking so white that you would not have known the face again. She turned the gas full upon her, and, taking a bowl from the cabinet, poured some colored liquid into it. She placed the bowl upon the floor, and, kneeling by it, began to lave her hands, neck, and face in the liquid, leaving them of a nutty darkness. Then she opened the window, flung out the dye she had used, and proceeded to put on a front of woolly hair, tangled with grey, over which a Madras kerchief was carefully folded. One by one she removed her rich garments, and directly stood out in dress, gait, and action, the colored chambermaid who had for months infested Mabel Harrington's home.

The woman went out from the room, locking the door after her. She must have been very pale, though the color upon her face revealed no trace of this white terror; but her limbs shook, her knees knocked together, and her wild eyes grew fearful as she paused in the hall, looking up and down, to see if it was empty, before she moved away.

The moment Zillah left her chamber door, all became dark in the hall, for she concealed the light in passing, and moved away as her daughter had done, still and black, like a retreating cloud.

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When Zillah's face was again revealed, it was far down in the coal vaults under the house. She was upon her knees, filling a small iron furnace with lumps of charcoal, which she dropped one

by one on a handful of embers that glowed in the bottom, as she had found them after late use in the laundry. As she dropped the coal, Zillah looked fearfully about from time to time; and once, when a mouse scampered across the floor close by her, she started up with a smothered shriek; but, even in her terror, blew out the lamp, which rattled in the darkness some moments after, notwithstanding the efforts that she made to still her shaking hands.

At last she struck a match, and kindled the light once more, and fell to work again. A minute sufficed to heap the little furnace, and a faint crackling at the bottom gave proof that the living embers underneath were taking effect. When satisfied of this, she put out her lamp, took up the furnace, and, though it was still hot from recent use, placed one hand over the draft, that the fire might not ignite too rapidly, and crept out of the cellar. Any person awake in the house, might have traced the dark progress of this woman by a faint crackle, and the sparks that shot now and then up through the black mass of coal, which was kindling so fast, that the hand which she still kept upon the draft was almost blistered.

She moved along the hall, noiselessly and rapid as death. The sparks that leaped up from the furnace, gave all the light she had, and more than she desired; for many a time before had she threaded the same passage, rehearsing the terrible deed she was enacting. She paused directly in front of Mabel Harrington's boudoir, and laid her hand upon the latch without a moment's search, as if it had been broad daylight.

She did not pause in the boudoir, but stole through, shuddering beneath the pale light of that alabaster lamp, as if it had distilled poison over her.

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There was no stir in the chamber when she entered it. The low regular breathing of some one asleep upon the bed which stood entirely in shadow, was all the sound that reached her when she paused to listen. From without she could hear nothing, not even the sharp whisperings of the wind; for that day her own hands had calked the windows with singular care, and besides that, rich curtains muffled them from floor to ceiling.

Zillah dared not look toward the bed, but with the stealthy movements of a panther she crept to the fire-place sealed up with a marble slab, and placing the furnace on the hearth, slunk away from the chamber and through the boudoir, closing both doors cautiously behind her.

After that, she staggered away into the darkness.

CHAPTER LXXIX

UNDER THE ICE.

AGNES BARKER rushed into the cold night so wrathfully that even the shadow that followed her seemed vital with hate. On they walked together—the girl and this weird shadow—blackening the snow with momentary darkness as they passed; the one tossing out her arms with unconscious gesticulation, the other mocking her, grotesquely, from the crusted snow.

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She descended from the eminence upon which the house stood, into the hollow where Lina and Ralph had paused on the first day of their confessed love. Over the spot made holy by the feelings of this beautiful epoch, she trod her way in mad haste, reckless of the cold, which, but for the fiery strife within, must have pierced her to the vitals; Zillah had aroused her from sleep but half-robed—her dress had been loosened as she lay down, and the sharp wind lifted particles of snow with every gust, sweeping them into her bosom and over her uncovered head. Neither shawl nor mantle shielded her, but thus all exposed as she had risen from her sleep, she rushed on, mad as a wild animal which save in form, for that fatal moment, she was.

The snow upon the hills, drifted its white carpet out upon the Hudson, and even in the day time practised eye only could tell where the shore ended, and the water commenced. Agnes had no motive for crossing the river, and, for a time, she kept along the bank, going nearer and nearer to Ben Benson's boat-house, but perfectly regardless of that or anything else.

As she came out from among the evergreens close by Ben's retreat, a light, gleaming through its window, made her halt and swerve toward the river. Any vestige of humanity was hateful to her then, and she was glad to plunge into the cold winds which swept down the channel of the stream, that, lacking all other opponents, she might wrestle with them.

Out she went upon the sheeted river. It was white some distance from the shore, but in the centre lay a space of blue ice, with a surface like polished steel, and a deep, swift current rushing beneath. This frozen channel took an unnatural darkness from the gleam of snow on either side. Toward this black line the girl made her way, trampling down the snow like an enraged lioness, and laughing back a defiance to the winds as they drifted cutting particles of snow into her face and through the loose tresses of her hair.

It was in her face, this keen wind, beating against her, and closing the eyes which rage had already rendered blind. She left the snow and struck out upon the ice. That instant a cloud swept over the moon. Her shadow forsook her then—even her shadow! A step, a hoarse plunge, and a piercing cry rushed up from that break in the ice, a cry that cut through the air sharper than an arrow, piercing far and wide through the cold night! Then the moon came out, and revealed a ghastly face low down in the blackness, and two hands grasping the ragged edges of the ice, slipping away—clutching out again, and still again, so fiercely, that drops of blood fell after them into the dark current beneath. Still the white face struggled upward through masses of wet hair, and the baffled hands groped about fiercer, but more aimlessly, till both were forced away beneath the ice, sending back a shriek so sharp and terrible that it might have aroused the dead!—no, not the dead, for up in that stately mansion, frowning among the snows a little way off, a human soul had just departed—nor paused to look back, though the existence, which was its own great sin, followed close, till both stood face to face before the God they had offended!

But, in the stillness of the night, and in the depths of his honest sleep, Ben Benson heard the cry. He started from his bed, hurriedly dressed himself, and went out in great alarm, listening, as he went, for a renewal of that fierce cry; but, though he reached the ice, and bent over the yawning hole, nothing but the wail of the winds, and the rush of waters underneath, met his ear. Still, as he peered down into the darkness, a human face weltered up through the waters. Instantly, Ben threw himself upon the ice, plunged his arms downward, and rose staggering to his feet. In the grasp of his strong hands, he drew a human form half-way upon the ice. He had paused for breath, but horror gave him double strength; and, gathering the pale form in his arms, he laid it upon the ice, parting the long, dark hair reverently with his hands, and leaving the marble face bare in the moonlight.

"Lord a mercy on us!" he exclaimed, stooping over the cold form. "It's the young governess, dead as a stone! How on earth did she get here? Not a purpose, I hope to mercy; it wasn't a purpose. Poor critter, if it hadn't a been that the ice broke just here in the eddy, her poor body would a been miles down stream 'fore now. Instead of that, she was sucked under, and has been a whirling and a whirling the Lord of heaven only knows how long—how long—Ben Benson, be you crazy? Wasn't it her scream as woke you up? Ma' be there's a spark of life yet, and you a talking over her here. Go home, you old heathen; go home at 'onst. Poor young critter, I didn't like you over much, but now I'd give ten years of my old life to be sarten there was a drop of warm blood in this little heart!"

Ben knelt over the governess as he muttered those feeling words, and laid his great kind hand over the heart, but the touch made even his strong nerves recoil.

"It ain't a beatin'—it doesn't stir—she seems to be a freezing now under my hand. But, I'll try. God have mercy on the poor thing! I'll try."

Ben took the body in his arms, and carried it to the boat-house; but with all his earnestness and strength, he had no power to give back life, where it had been so rudely quenched. Pure or not, the blood in those veins was frozen to ice, and though Ben heaped up wood on his hearth till the flames roared up the wide-throated chimney, there was not heat enough to thaw a single drop. At last, Ben gave up his own exertions, and laid the dead girl reverently on his own couch; kneeling meekly by her side, and then he began repeating the Lord's Prayer over her again and again: for, when the boatman was in great trouble he always went back, like a little child, to the prayer learned at his mother's knee.

CHAPTER LXXX.

WHO WAS LINA?

THE sound of sleigh-bells stopping suddenly and a sharp knock at his own door, aroused Ben from his mournful prayers. He got up and turned the latch. To his astonishment, it was broad daylight. The persons who had aroused him were James and Ralph Harrington.

"Ben," said Ralph, stepping eagerly forward, "tell us—repeat to James what you refused to tell Lina. On your life, on your honor, dear old Ben: tell him whose child she is."

"All that you know about her. I am sure there is something you can explain. If you ever loved her or care for me, speak out now. You said that she had gone off because you refused to tell her something."

Ben had been praying in the presence of death, and there were both power and pathos in his voice as he clasped those rough hands and said:

"As the great God aloft is his witness! Ralph Harrington, Ben Benson spoke nothing but the truth when he said that ere."

"But you will tell us, for her dear sake, you will tell us."

"Yes, Master Ralph I will. Jist ask what you want to know, and I'll tell it."

"Who was she, Ben? I've asked my mother often, but she always answered, that the child, while a mere infant, was seen one day wandering on the banks of the river, quite alone. At night, she came up to the house, and was found asleep on the door-step—from that day to this, she has never been inquired after, but dropped into the family naturally as a pet-bird. I loved her the better for having no friends—for belonging entirely to us."

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Ben drew the back of one hand across his eyes and dropped into his lounging attitude again.

"But, yet, she had one friend, Mister Ralph."

"And, who was that?"

"Ben Benson—as carried her up to that ere identical door-step, and laid her down like the babes in the woods—a knowing in his heart all the time, that Mrs. Harrington would take her in the minute she sot her eyes on her purty face."

"You know who she was, then?"

"I ought to," answered Ben, "for she was my own sister's child."

"Your sister's child!"

"You wouldn't a belaved it; for the mother of that gal was like a water lily, fresh from the pond, when I run away from hum and went to sea."

"Well," said Ralph, breathless.

"The old man died a little while after I ran off, and so the poor little thing was left alone, to fight her way through the world. She had more larning than ever could be driv into my brain, and went into a rich man's family to larn his children their letters. There was a young feller in that house, as was likewise given to larning, a sickly, pale chap, just a going into consumption. This chap loved the orphan gal, and as her hard-hearted brother had deserted the helm, he stepped in and took the craft amost without a summons."

"They got married somewhere down in York, and in less 'en three months arter, the poor, young feller died—neither on 'em had plucked up courage enough to tell the proud, old father, and the young man was took off so suddenly at last, that he hadn't no chance."

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"Lizzy was obliged to speak out arter this, but the certificate was amongst his things, and the old folks pretended that it never could be found. She didn't know where to find the minister as married 'em, and so her husband's own father turned her out of doors. When I came ashore two years arter, no one could tell me where she had gone; but a few months arter I cast anchor in this ere land-craft, my poor sister came here one night, leading a toddling little girl by the hand. That gal was Lina. My sister's face was white as foam, when she came in. I asked her about the child, and she told me what I have been a telling you. In the night she went away. I had fell asleep, leaning against the wall, and didn't know she was agoing. The baby was left behind on the husk-bed.

"The next thing, my sister wandered back to the lonesome place, where she and her baby had lived together, and without telling any one that she was sick, lay down and died.

"Ben Benson sat in his cabin all that day, and the little child went out and in like a lonesome bird, now a picking posies from the bank and agin crying by the cabin door. That miserable old feller never had but one guardian spirit on arth, and that ere night he thought of her, while the baby lay hived up in his bosom. So he took the child up as if it had been a little helpless lamb, and laid it down where that ere angel could find it."

"And this was Lina!" exclaimed Ralph, with tears in his eyes. "I thank you, Ben."

"You know this—you are certain of her identity?" said James Harrington.

"I am sartin that she's my own sister's darter, and can swear to it afore God and man," was Ben's solemn reply. "But where is the gal? Is she found—will she come back—does she know as this ere old chap is her uncle?"

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"She knows nothing," said Ralph, shaking the hand which Ben extended while propounding these eager questions. "She is yonder in the sleigh, Ben—no, not yet; she is ill, and the least excitement may do harm. Go and find us an entrance to the house; we have tried the doors, but no one seems astir—my fa—the General, is not home, I suppose"—

"No," answered Ben, believing what he said; "I haven't seen the General about these four days."

"And my mother?" inquired Ralph.

"She's sartain to be there, poor lady," answered Ben, shaking his head sorrowfully.

"Yes, yes, she's pining about Lina, but that will soon be over—bless the dear girl—on second thought, if my mother is ill, I had better go myself; some of the servants must be up by this time. See, there she is, Ben, in the sleigh, muffled up in furs, poor little birdie. Go speak to her, but

remember she is feeble as a babe, so be very quiet."

"You can trust old Ben Benson for that ere," cried the boatman, looking eagerly towards the sleigh; but with the first glance great tears came chasing each other down his cheeks, and all unconsciously he held out both arms, shouting, "my own, own little gal!"

There was a struggle in the sleigh, and with low murmurs of delight, Lina held forth her hand.

"Remember and keep cool," said Ralph; then turning towards James, he said, "drive to the door, I will soon rouse the household."

With these words he strode towards the house, eager to carry glad tidings to his mother.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

THE MANIAC.

[427] ALL night long the slave woman crouched down in the middle of her bed, with the blankets drawn over her like a tent, and her eyes looking out into the darkness, waiting for the morning, and yet shrinking with terror whenever a gleam of light appeared. At last, when the morning broke, grey and cold, she crept forth in her clothes—as she had been all night—and stood for a time listening as if she expected some unusual sound. But all was still, no servant was yet abroad, and she sat down upon the bed, waiting with a dull heavy gleam of the eye that had something awful in it. At last she was aroused by a loud ring at the hall door, which brought a smothered scream to her lips; but she arose and went down stairs, opening the door with a sort of mechanical composure. Ralph Harrington stood upon the threshold, and a little way off winding up the circular carriage sweep was a sleigh, in which she discovered James Harrington and the pale face of Lina. The sight made her tremble in every limb, and her eyes were terrible to look upon.

"Is my mother up yet?" said Ralph, without regarding the woman, who did not answer, for her teeth chattered when she made the attempt.

"Well, then we must arouse her; of course the fires are kept up such nights as this; take Miss French to the breakfast-room while I inquire for Mrs. Harrington."

But Lina would not be restrained: joy at the sight of that dear old home gave her temporary strength; she ran up the steps, passing James and Ralph, in the speed of her love.

"No, no, I *cannot* wait. Let me go to her room. I will awake her as of old with my kisses—they will not frighten her."

[428] Before the sentence was finished, Lina had reached the door of Mabel's boudoir, and throwing it open, flew into the bed-room. A close stifling vapor enclouded her as she entered, but in the ardor of her love she rushed through it, flung back the bed-curtains, and throwing her arms over the sleeper there cried out—

"Mamma, awake! it is Lina—your own Lina come back to live at home, mamma—mamma"—

The last word died away in an exclamation of horror, for the face she touched was cold as marble, and she fell forward struggling for breath.

Ralph had followed her to the door, and lingered there, waiting for his mother to summon him, but there was something in the atmosphere which crept through into the hall that awoke his apprehension, this was increased by Lina's sudden silence.

With a quickened beat of the heart he went in, but a stifling haze filled the room, which was so dark that he could only see Lina, lying motionless across the bed. He rushed to the window and tore back the curtains, filling the room with a dull luminous fog, through which he saw Lina, pale as marble, and gasping for breath, but with her eyes wide open, and fixed on the face of his father.

"My God—oh, my God! what is this?" he cried, staggering forward.

"It is your father, Ralph, cold as death."

[429] Ralph uttered a cry so sharp and piercing that it reached James and Benson, who came in alarm from the breakfast-room—nay, it penetrated farther, and aroused Mabel from her comfortless sleep in the chamber above. She arose with a thrill of unaccountable awe, and glided down the stairs, passing the mulatto chambermaid, who stood motionless as a bronze statue outside the door. As the woman saw her she gave a cry and her eyes dilated with unspeakable horror; slowly, as if she had been forced into motion by some irresistible power, she turned and followed after Mabel, step by step, till both stood in the room of death. The eyes of those two women fell on the dead body of General Harrington at the same moment; Mabel burst into tears.

The mulatto seemed turning to stone—she did not breathe, she did not move, but stood with her lips apart, helpless, speechless, stricken with a terrible horror.

James Harrington saw the furnace standing on the hearth with a handful of white ashes at the bottom.

"It is the fumes of charcoal—he has been smothered—who brought this here?" he exclaimed, looking at the woman.

If he expected to see that ashen grey upon her cheek, which is the nearest approach to pallor that her race can know, he was disappointed. She neither changed color nor moved, but a gleam of horrible intelligence came into her eyes, and as her lips closed, a faint quiver stirred them.

She did not heed his question, but turned in silence and went out.

Half an hour after, when the first great shock was over, and James Harrington sent to have the movements of this woman watched, she was nowhere to be found. The servants had seen a handsome and richly dressed lady pass through the front door, and walk swiftly toward the highway. The chambermaid could not have passed without being observed. Yet no human being ever saw her afterward.

* * * * *

The day on which General Harrington was buried, the funeral procession passed by the house in which Lina had lived during her painful sojourn in the city. As it went by, a woman rushed to and fro in the house, uttering the most piteous cries, and tearing at everything within her reach. From that little fairy-like conservatory she had torn down the blossoming vines, and broken the plants, crowning herself fantastically with the trailing garlands, and trampling the blossoms beneath her feet with bursts of wild laughter, alternated with groans, that seemed to rend her heart asunder. As the funeral cortége went by, these groans and shrieks of laughter aroused the neighborhood. Some members of the police entered, and took the maniac away.

* * * * *

It was a year after General Harrington's death, a steamer was passing through a channel of the East River, leaving Blackwell's Island on the left. Sitting upon the deck was a bridal party: that morning had made Lina, Ralph Harrington's wife. James Harrington had given her away, having first richly endowed the young couple, and Mabel made one of the wedding party.

Upon the shore near the end of Blackwell's Island, stands that most painful appendage to a lunatic asylum, the mad-house; looming over the water like a huge menagerie, in which wild animals are kept. Through the iron lattices, which gird in the granite walls of this building, you may at any time see the maniacs roaming to and fro, sometimes in sullen silence, sometimes shrieking out their fantasies or their rage to the winds as they whistle by, and the waters that flow on forever and ever, unconscious of the miserable secrets given to their keeping.

As the boat containing the bridal party swept by the mad-house a beautiful but most fiendish face looked out between these bars; a clenched hand was thrust through, and a storm of terrible curses hailed after Mabel and her newly married children. But the boat swept calmly by, leaving them behind. Mabel saw the clenched hand, but the curses rushed by her in one confused wail, which touched her only with gentle compassion; for she little thought that Zillah, the woman who, in seeking her life, had murdered her husband, was hurling these fiendish anathemas after her.

So in her happiness, for Mabel was happy then—she turned away from the mad-house, touched with momentary gloom and, taking James Harrington's arm moved to the other side of the boat, and leaning upon him watched the sun go down. Thus, with the rich twilight falling softly around them, these two noble beings drifted into their new life.

THE END.

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