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FAITHFUL MARGARET.

A Novel.

ROBERTSON'S CHEAP SERIES

POPULAR READING AT POPULAR PRICES.

BY ANNIE ASHMORE.

"Vengeance for any cruel wrong
Bringeth a dark renown;
But fadeless wreaths to her belong
Who calmly bears it down;
Who, scorning every mean redress,
Each recreant art abjures,
Safe in the noble consciousness,
She conquers who endures."

TORONTO:
J. Ross Robertson,
Corner King and Bay Streets.

1880.

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FAITHFUL MARGARET.

CHAPTER I.

A DYING WOMAN'S COMMAND.

She was dying—good old Ethel Brand, the mistress for half a century of the hoary castle which stood like an ancient cathedral in the midst of the noble estate in Surrey, Seven-Oak Waaste.

No need now of these whispering attendants, and that anxious little physician; she would not trouble them more. No need for these grim medicine vials, marshaled upon the little table near her couch; she was past mortal needs or mortal help; her face, set in cold repose, seemed glistening with supernal light, while waiting for the fatal kiss of death.

And over her bent a woman, breathless, pulseless, motionless, as if carved from stone, listening, with straining ear, for each slow, rattling breath; watching, with great, glistening eyes, for each darkening shadow over the noble face—Margaret Walsingham.

No high-born dame was she; no fortunate next-of-kin, watching with decorous lament for the moment of emancipation from her weary wait for a dead woman's shoes. Only Mrs. Brand's poor companion, Margaret Walsingham.

Four years had she ministered to the whims, the caprices, the erratic impulses of that most erratic of all creations, an eccentric old woman; and exalting the good which she found, and pardoning the frailties she could not blind her eyes to, her presence had become a sweet necessity to the world-weary dowager, who repaid it by unceasing exactions and doting outbursts of gratitude; and there had been much love between these two.

Paler waxed the high patrician face, darker grew the violet circles beneath her heavy eyes.

Margaret clasped her hands convulsively.

"Will she go before seven?" whispered she.

Old Dr. Gay stooped low and listened to the labored inspiration.

"Going—going fast," he said, with faltering lips.

A wail burst from the crowd of servants standing by the door; sobs and tears attested to the love they had borne their dying mistress.

"Hush!" whispered Margaret. "Do not awake her."

"They'll never wake her more," said Dr. Gay, mournfully.

She turned at that with terror in her eyes; she laid a small, strong hand upon the doctor's arm and clung to it convulsively.

"She must live to see St. Udo Brand," said she, in a low, thrilling voice. "She must, I tell you—it is her dearest, her last wish—it is my most earnest prayer. Surely you will not let her die before that wish is fulfilled?"

She gazed with passionate entreaty in the little doctor's face, and her voice rose into a wail at the

last words. He regarded her with helpless sympathy and shook his head.

"She can't live half an hour longer," said Dr. Gay. "She'll not see St. Udo Brand."

A fierce shudder seized Margaret Walsingham from head to foot. The blood forsook her lips, the light her eyes—she stood silent, the picture of heart-sick despair.

She had often appealed to Dr. Gay's admiration by her faithfulness, her kindness, her timidly masked self-sacrifices; she appealed straight to his heart now by her patient suffering, unconscious as he was of its cause.

"I will do what I can to keep up her strength," he said, approaching the bed to gaze anxiously again at the slumberer. "I will try another stimulant, if I can only get her to swallow it. Perhaps the London train may be here by that time."

"Thank you! oh, thank you!" murmured Margaret; gratefully. "You little know the desperate need there is for Mrs. Brand seeing her grandson before she dies."

Tears welled to her eloquent eyes, her lips trembled distressfully, she waved the servants from the room and followed them out.

"Symonds, I wish you to hasten immediately to Regis for Mr. Davenport, the lawyer," said she, when she had dismissed the other servants down stairs. "Give him this note and drive him back here as quickly as you can drive."

She dropped her note into the groom's hand, and watched him from the oriel hall window, as he hurried from the court below, out into the deepening twilight, from the road which went to the pretty little village of Regis, some two miles distant.

She stood in the waning light, watching for the lawyer's coming, and her thoughts were wild and bitter.

She had a *doom* to confront, as terrible to her as unsought martyrdom is to the quailing victim of a blinded hate; a *doom* from which she fain would court grim death himself if he would open his gates to let her escape; a humiliating and revolting *doom* from which she recoiled with vehement dislike, every nerve in her high-strung frame quivering with horror.

Ethel Brand had ever been capricious in her life, but of all the mad, impulsive freaks which her lonely heart had led her into, her last caprice was the most ill-advised, the most disastrous.

Margaret Walsingham had answered Mrs. Brand's advertisement for a companion four years previously, when she was a pale, timid girl of twenty, clad in orphan's weeds, and scarce lifting her deep, earnest eyes to the inquisitive gaze of her patroness; but her quiet, grave, soulful character had strangely fascinated the haughty old lady, and from the humble post which she had gone to Castle Brand to fill, she quickly rose to be the prime object of all its mistress' dreams, to be beloved, and indulged, and admired as no living mortal had ever been by that closely-guarded heart, save St. Udo Brand. Margaret Walsingham was a sea-captain's daughter. Up to her twelfth year she had sailed the seas in his ship and looked to him for society; and not till then was she sent on shore to be educated. Still the stout captain had been ambitious for his daughter, and had taken care that her education, when it did commence, should be thorough, comprehensive and elegant in all its branches; so that when after eight years of ceaseless learning on her part, and ceaseless voyaging on his, he proposed going home to England and retiring with his daughter upon a handsome fortune, she was well fitted to adorn the society he intended to surround her with. But the ill-starred captain went down in a Biscay gale when also within sight of home, and with him went his whole life's savings, leaving his Margaret fatherless, homeless and fortuneless.

And that was why she answered Mrs. Brand's advertisement.

St. Udo Brand was an officer in the Coldstream Guards, now in London. He was the only son of Mrs. Brand's only son, Colonel Cathcart Brand, long dead.

Cathcart Brand had been a sad rake, lawless, reckless, and a natural spendthrift. The one act of worldly wisdom which he had ever achieved was his marriage, late in life, with a lady of noble birth, whose ambitious leanings and insatiable vanity had scourged the easy colonel up into the highest social circles, and in some measure covered his *blasé* reputation with her gilded arms.

St. Udo Brand was said to have inherited his father's determined extravagance united to his mother's magnificent tastes; his father's careless, dashing, unscrupulous character, and his mother's proud, cynical, bitter temperament. At twenty he was the glory and terror of his chums, the idolized of women, and the ideal of his grandmother's fastidious soul. At thirty he was a man to be feared only, a polished gentleman with a questionable history—a universal scoffer, a world-weary atheist, with a subtle, insidiously sweet influence, a sad and embittered soul, and a heart long closed against all holy whisperings of better feelings. And still his grandmother clung to him with a pathetic belief in his nature's nobility, and ignoring his wild and hopeless life, looked forward with love-blinded eyes to a possible future for him of worthy achievements. So, because she loved this man, and trusted in the goodness of Margaret Walsingham, she had elected hers to be the strong, soft hand to lead him back from ruin and to point him a better way. She had vowed St. Udo Brand and Margaret Walsingham should marry.

"You shall lure St. Udo back from the gates of hell," quoth the grandmother, with an inspired enthusiasm. "You are just the woman to impress that high and royal heart with a true sense of

your own pure goodness; you can lead him captive by a secret power; you can lead him where you will. You shall dispute with vice and fatal atheism for that magnificent soul, and when you have routed your foes, you shall be rewarded by his life-long gratitude, and his gratitude is more precious far, my girl, than is the languid love of millions of other men. My Margaret, you are twenty-four, strong, buoyant, pure-minded; my grandson is thirty-four, world-weary and careless. Your fresh enthusiasm shall stir his withering heart-strings and wake his slumbering belief—he shall admire you, study you, and love you."

"I dread your grandson, and tremble at the idea of ever meeting him," was Margaret's shuddering answer.

"Yes, I regret not having caused you to meet before," complacently observed Mrs. Brand. "You will soon overcome these childish tremors. Would you not like to be the mistress of Castle Brand, and the owner of Seven-Oak Waaste, my proud Margaret?"

"No, madam," breathed Margaret, fervently; "never as Captain Brand's wife."

"Ah—hem! We shall see, we shall see," quoth the lady, serenely, and dropped the subject.

Soon after that she was smitten with her death sickness, and at the last she called her poor Margaret to her, and with plaintiff affection boasted to her of what she had done for her.

"You shall never be homeless again, sweet soul," murmured she, with glistening eyes. "I have willed this castle to you if St. Udo refuses your hand."

"Madam, for Heaven's sake revoke that will!" prayed Margaret, vehemently. "Do not bequeath such misery to him and to me!"

"Pooh—rubbish! He will deserve to lose all if he refuses the woman I choose for his wife," cried the autocratic dame.

"I thank Heaven that I have no beauty with which to buy his love!" cried Margaret, with proudly flashing eyes. "He will not sue for me. But, madam, you must revoke your will. I cannot live to injure your grandson so deeply."

"You are a foolish girl. I tell you, Margaret," in rising wrath, "that I will not have my estate, the richest in all Surrey, squandered away in gambling, horse-racing, and worse extravagance by St. Udo. I had much rather give it all to you than to his mad associates. He has spent his patrimony, and his mother's fortune went soon after her death. He has only Seven-Oak Waaste to stand between him and penury. So will he not, think you, mend his life, and become a man worthy of Margaret Walsingham, if it was only to come into possession of his own inheritance? Tears, my darling? Come, you give my love a poor return."

"Oh, madam—oh, madam!" sobbed Margaret, "blot my name out of your will, if you value my happiness."

Mrs. Brand watched her in bitter disappointment, then turned her face away and wept a few angry tears.

"Send for St. Udo," said she, curtly. "If he refuses your hand before my face, I shall change the will, but not unless he does so."

Margaret telegraphed to London for Captain Brand, telling him of his grandmother's sudden illness and her desire to see him.

Captain Brand wrote a polite and indifferent reply to Margaret Walsingham, expressing regrets, sympathy, and excuses, and promising to run down to Surrey some day next week.

Margaret wrote an entreating note, setting forth the urgency of the case and the certainty that Mrs. Brand was dying; and Captain Brand telegraphed a dry, "Very well, I will be at Regis to-night."

And all day long the dying woman sank lower, and forgot ere long the things of earth, and hour after hour went past, bringing only wilder grief and anxiety to the hapless Margaret.

So she was still tied to the wehr-wolf of her loathing fancy, and until St. Udo Brand chose to come to his grandmother that tie was indissoluble.

Margaret Walsingham was aroused from her hopeless meditations by the appearance of Symonds driving Mr. Davenport, Mrs. Brand's lawyer, into the court-yard, and she descended swiftly to meet him in the library.

Mr. Davenport entered—a tall, thin, wiry man, with beetling brows and irascible eyes—and cautiously shut the door.

"Is Mrs. Brand conscious yet?" he asked.

"She is asleep," said Margaret. "We fear that she will not live to see the heir. Now, Mr. Davenport, I have asked you to come here that when Captain Brand arrives you may be upon the ground to change the will legally. Dr. Gay hopes that she may awake to consciousness for a few minutes before death. Wait here, if you please, until you are summoned."

Without another word she left the library, followed to the door by the lawyer's keen eyes, and

ascended to the death-chamber.

Dr. Gay sat by the dying woman, wiping the death-dews from her brow; her eyes were open and were eagerly fixed upon the door. Margaret entered, they flickered up into a transient brightness, her cold lips faintly smiled.

"You know me, do you not?" murmured Margaret, kneeling beside her and laying her cheek fondly on the pillow beside her friend's.

The cold lips framed an eager "Yes," the groping hand sought hers and pressed it gratefully.

Margaret Walsingham's tears fell fast; she kissed the wan cheek of her dying patroness and smoothed her white tresses back from her clammy brow.

"God be with you, my good Margaret!" muttered the old lady, brokenly, "you have been a good friend to a lonely woman. You shall be rewarded when I am gone."

A wave of anguish swept over Margaret's plain, proud face, her voice grew beautiful with the soul's voiceless eloquence, her soft eyes pleaded wistfully, her shy lips quivered beseechingly. The old dowager's glaring eyes dwelt on her with gloating admiration.

"You will make a noble lady," muttered Mrs. Brand, with a fond smile. "Come, tell me you are satisfied with my arrangements for you?"

"No, no, I cannot meet St. Udo Brand—and I will not stand between him and his own property. I cannot, indeed!" cried Margaret, with a heart-rending sob.

The words rang out sharply in the hushed death-chamber, and the little doctor shifted uneasily in his chair, and stopped stirring the stimulant he was preparing, to gaze from one to the other—the lady and her companion. Twice Mrs. Brand essayed to speak, but her trembling lips refused to articulate a word, and her faint eyes sought Margaret's in dumb appeal.

"Say but one word before Dr. Gay and Mr. Davenport," pleaded Margaret, wildly. "Say that you wish the will to be canceled, and your grandson to come into his inheritance without incumbrance. For the sake of the love we have borne each other, grant my request."

"Unsay those words, my darling," wailed Mrs. Brand. "You give me a parting stab I never thought to receive from you. Oh, my darling, can't you save St. Udo from ruin for my sake?—do you grudge to do something for my sake?"

"No, dear madam, I would be glad to die for your sake," cried Margaret, lifting up a brave, love illumined face; "but not this—oh, Heaven! not this."

Mrs. Brand closed her eyes with a pang of mortal anguish.

"Have I been mistaken in my Margaret?" she uttered, brokenly. "Is she not the high, heroic soul I deemed her?"

Tears rose from the heart that thought never to feel another earthly pang, and rushed from the eyes which she thought to have closed in peace; and Margaret's tender heart accused her sternly for her own self-care in this most pitiful hour.

"Do not fear for your grandson," said she, eagerly, "I shall not suffer him to be defrauded."

Mrs. Brand turned a piercing gaze upon her.

"You must do your best to win St. Udo's love," she whispered, earnestly, "else you will defraud him of his rights, and his ruin will be at your door."

Poor Margaret's head sank on her breast, her heart grew heavy as lead. Her last supplications had been made, and vainly. Death was stealing closer to his feeble victim.

Where, where was St. Udo Brand that he came not in time to save her and himself from this fatal chain which his grandmother's death was to rivet round them both?

The trampling of horses hoofs reached her ear. She started to her feet and listened breathlessly. Yes, through the still April eve stole those welcome sounds, nearer and clearer. An arrival at Castle Brand.

Margaret took her dying friend in her arms and tenderly kissed her cold, trembling mouth, and laid her on her pillow again.

"Captain Brand has arrived," said she, softly. "I shall bring him in at once."

She stepped to the doctor's side—he was still stirring the stimulant with a nervous hand.

"Give it to her quickly," she whispered; "the heir has come."

She left the chamber, her pulses throbbed with a vague sense of evil, her limbs seemed heavy as lead; and as she crept down the great vaulted staircase, lit by pale, flickering tapers, she thought that her own tall shadow writhed and shuddered before her like the phantom of a deadly tear.

The great hall-door stood open, the servants were waiting decorously in the hall to greet the heir, and Purcell, the old steward, stood out on the threshold bare-headed, his silvery locks glistening in the broad moon's light.

Margaret Walsingham stepped beside him and eagerly looked for St. Udo Brand.

Two horsemen were cantering across the Waaste; the night wind bore the fragment of a gay *chanson* to the doors of Castle Brand. Under the Norman oaks they rode softly over the velvet turf, now snatched from view by the dense hazel coppice, anon seen plainly on the brow of this gentle curve.

Nearer, nearer—home at last to Seven-Oak Waaste. They slackened their pace as they approached, and gazed admiringly at the ancient castle, then observing a lady in the doorway, curved into the court and dismounted.

"Is this St. Udo Brand?" whispered Margaret to the steward.

A tall man had approached to the foot of the granite steps, leaving his companion standing between the pawing horses, holding a bridle of each, and serenely smoking a cigar—a tall man wrapped in a Spanish riding-cloak, who gazed about him with a dark, lowering eye.

"Can't say, Miss Margaret," muttered the steward; "if it is, he's a sight the worse for wear; but I haven't seen him for well nigh onto seven years."

The old man descended stiffly to greet the heir.

"Welcome to the Castle, captain," said he, sourly. "It's well you come at last, you're but just in time to see her alive."

The stranger removed his hat and disclosed a thin, wary face, just now wreathed in courtly smiles.

"I have not the honor to be Captain Brand," he said. "I am merely his messenger."

"What? Heh? Captain Brand didn't come after all?" cried Mr. Purcell, recoiling from the dark, smiling face.

"Yes, he came; he will remain in Regis to-night, and when less fatigued will pay his devoirs to Mrs. Brand. He made me the bearer of a note to Miss Walsingham. Can I see her?"

The steward turned; the man looked up, his black, flashing eyes rested upon her. She stood not three feet away, looking down upon him, her white, electric face startling him in the chill radiance of the summer moon, her long garments sweeping in regal folds about her magnificent person, her blue-black hair curving in rich waves under the lace mantilla she had thrown over her head—a woman to mark, to remember.

She stretched forth a long, white hand, with a vehement gesture.

"Give it to me," she said. "I am Miss Walsingham."

The man forgot his courtly smile and his wary watchfulness; his artificial polish cracked in all directions and exposed a terribly startled man. He gazed at Margaret Walsingham with arrested eye, and his hands strayed unconsciously to his wrists as if they would find spectral shackles there.

The envelope he held dropped to his feet, he stooped with a muttered oath, and recovering it, reached it to her outstretched hand.

She did not retire to read the missive, the moonlight saved her the necessity, and the man stood awaiting an answer, as she tore the note from its crested envelope, and in a moment had mastered its contents.

A blaze of indignation spread over her brow and cheek.

"Heartless trifler!" ejaculated she, bitterly, and read these words aloud to the steward:

> "St. Udo Brand presents his compliments to Miss Walsingham, and his thanks for her tearful invitations to join her in the melancholy duties of sick-nurse. Feeling that his vocation does not lie in soothing the nervous sufferings of the aged, he begs Miss Walsingham's disinterested heart to hold him excused; and confidently commends his dear grandmother to the delicate care of her pet and *protegee* until such time as she can assure him that his presence will not bring on another attack of the vapors upon Madam Brand. Hoping that you will both enjoy a good night's rest, and that you may feel justified in receiving me some time to-morrow, I remain yours,
>
> "St. Udo Brand."

"Captain Brand must come instantly," cried Margaret, and turned sharply upon the quailing ambassador. "Do you hear, sir?"

She paused with a lady's instinct—a lady's aversion to address an unknown man.

"Roland Mortlake, Miss Walsingham," murmured the stranger coming out of his fog.

"Go tell Captain Brand that Mrs. Brand is dying—that she has but a few minutes to live, and that he must come instantly if he would hear her last words. You will remember, Mr. Mortlake? And say the will must be changed, or Captain Brand will be ruined. Tell him that. Now go, for

Heaven's sake!"

The stranger turned his wrapt scrutiny of herself into a keen and crafty attention of her words. He repeated them after her, with a significant pause after each clause, as if he longed to wrest the uttermost moiety of a meaning from her scant expressions.

"Symonds shall accompany you with the carriage, and bring Captain Brand," said Margaret. "Send him, Purcell."

The steward trotted away to dispatch the coachman, and the pair were left with each other.

The man on the lowest step and the woman on the highest gazed fixedly in each other's faces. His fierce, envious, and inquisitive; hers cold, distrustful, and unflinching.

In that silent interview their souls stood forth, each revealing to the other, and doomed to future recognition under the most perfect masking which rascality could assume to compass its end, or purity devise to hide from peril.

Then Roland Mortlake bowed to the earth, and, striding back to his horse and his companion, uttered a terrible execration.

The other tossed his cigar over the low stone wall into a tulip bed, and, springing to his horse, followed his angry comrade as he galloped away.

"*Gardez-tu*, my friend," cried he, breezily. "You English take great news sourly, *ma foi!* you curse Mademoiselle Fortune herself when she smiles upon you the blandest."

His clipped English rang out gaily on the summer breeze, and those careless words, listened to by Margaret Walsingham on that eventful night with unheeding ears, came back one day through the mists of forgetfulness, and took their place in the wild drama with strange significance.

Once more Margaret returned to her dying patroness, and met her eager, questioning eyes with mute looks of anguish.

Utterly silent now, she held her poor friend's fluttering hand, and wiped the foam from her voiceless lips, and the kind old doctor turned away his brimming eyes, that he might not witness the harrowing spectacle of the woman's love and grief while performing these last gentle ministrations.

The housekeeper sat at the foot of the bed, shaking with her sobs. A few of the old retainers of the household grouped near the door, stifling their lamentations as best they might. But never a word spoke poor Margaret, as she watched her last and only friend sinking from her clinging arms into the mysteries of death.

The minutes sped; the doctor laid his watch upon the table; Margaret's eyes left the pallid face of the dying to watch its swift circling hands, with a tightening of the heart-strings.

"I give them thirty minutes to go and return from Regis," she murmured to the doctor at last. "Will she live thirty minutes?"

Dr. Gay answered nothing; but the vampire Death, fanning the sinking mortal into immortality, answered, by her convulsive face and twitching hands.

"*No!*"

Ten, fifteen minutes passed, still the shrouded chest rose and fell in intermittent respirations; still the cold fingers sought Margaret's; still the swimming eyes turned on hers with the dumb agony of the last pang. Twenty minutes, twenty-five, twenty-six, the closing eyes flew wide open, the relaxing chin took its comely place once more, the toiling breath ceased in a long, full sigh.

She looked long and tenderly at her poor Margaret Walsingham, then beyond her into the shadowy world she was entering, and a wondering smile broke dazzlingly over her whole countenance.

"Lift me up," she sighed, like a weary child.

Margaret lifted her to her breast.

"Higher," whispered she. "Ah! this is rest—rest!"

And as Margaret lifted the smiling face to her shoulder, the last thrill ran through the kind old heart, stopped, and she entered the everlasting gates.

So she went on her dim, mystic journey, not sped by the hands of her kindred; nor mourned by the hearts of her kindred; uncomforted and alone, save for the love of Margaret Walsingham—good, impulsive, generous Mrs. Brand.

Margaret laid her down and closed her sightless eyes; then arose from her finished watch and turned away.

She looked blankly about; her eyes fell upon the watch still lying upon the table, and noticed the hand resting upon the thirtieth minute, and immediately the clang of horses' hoofs and the roll of the carriage wheels stole to her ear. She put her hand suddenly to her forehead like one in physical pain; it fell to her bosom, and pressed convulsively there. She uttered a piercing cry,

flung up her hands, and fell forward like one stabbed to the heart.

St. Udo Brand had come at last, and he was too late.

CHAPTER II.

READING OF THE WILL.

Mrs. Brand, in her lead coffin, in its rosewood shell, was slumbering in the stately vault of her ancestors, and Mr. Davenport held in his hands the last will of her whose will had in her life ever been law, and glanced around to see that all the legatees were there.

St. Udo Brand, the tardy heir, was present, quietly waiting to hear the reading of the will with that decorous gravity with which we wait to bear our honors.

Dr. Gay was there, because his departed friend had requested him to do so.

It was in the library; the walls of books glittered in calf and gilt in the pleasant April sunlight; the glass door was opened upon the perfumed garden walks; and the twitter of the busy birds came sweetly over beds of crocuses and early blossoms to break the silence.

"Where is Miss Walsingham? Shouldn't she be here?" asked the doctor.

"I don't think she'll come down, sir," said the housekeeper.

Mr. Davenport cleared his throat.

"Better send for her, eh?" said he to Captain Brand.

The heir-expectant turned a dark face, disfigured by impatience, upon the lawyer.

"It cant make much difference," he answered, dryly. "She can hear her part of it again. Go on."

"On the contrary, it makes all the difference in the world," retorted the lawyer, with unexpected heat; "and I refuse to break these seals until Margaret Walsingham is present."

"Oh!"

St. Udo Brand raised his level brows and subsided into stolid indifference.

A messenger carried a line from Mr. Davenport to Miss Walsingham's room, and carried down again a message from her, which promised her presence in a few minutes.

Some time passed in irksome silence, during which the captain beat the devil's tatoo on the table, and darted mocking glances at the important Mr. Davenport.

Then the sound of a slippered foot crossing the black and brown hall floor sent the captain sauntering to the remotest window, there to watch the struggles of a sparrow caught in the wire framework which protected the espaliers; so that there was no one to welcome Margaret Walsingham in, save old Dr. Gay, who compassionately pressed her cold band as he led her to a chair, and with his heart pitied the captain's future bride.

She passed, with heavy eyes cast down, to a seat behind a bronze statue of St. George and the dragon, where the deepest shadows lurked, and kept the giant warrior between her and that distant window until the will should be declared.

Then the lawyer cleared his throat, adjusted his spectacles, and read:

> "THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF ETHEL BRAND.
>
> "SEVEN-OAK WAASTE, SURREY, 1862."
>
> "*To all whom it may concern*:—I, Ethel Brand, being on this, the twenty-eighth day of March, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-two, in infirm health, yet in possession of sound mind and memory, and all my natural faculties, hereby declare this to be my last Will and Testament, and that I revoke, rescind, and disannul any and all Wills, Testaments, or Codicils previously made by me.
>
> "To my dear grandson, St. Udo Brand, only son of my late son, Cathcart Brand, all other lawful issue being dead, I bequeath the whole of my personal property, estates, houses, and moneys as held by me and in my name, together with the Seven-Oak Waaste estate and house known as Castle Brand, on one condition:
>
> "That he shall, not sooner than one month, and not later than one year, take to be his wife, and the legal mistress of Castle Brand, my beloved and faithful friend, Margaret Walsingham, who held the cup of love to the lips of an otherwise forsaken old woman, and for four years served her without thought of reward.
>
> "Should my grandson, St. Udo Brand, fail to marry Margaret Walsingham within twelve months after my demise, I bequeath all my property, lands, houses, and moneys as

above mentioned, to Margaret Walsingham, to be enjoyed by her until the day of her death, and to descend to her children, or next of kin, forever.

"Should St. Udo Brand or Margaret Walsingham die within the year, the property shall revert to the survivor."

Then followed generous bequests to various charitable schemes, and annuities to the old servants of the castle, the whole concluding in the clause:

"I appoint, and do hereby declare Rufus Gay. M.D., my trustworthy physician, and Andrew Davenport, Esq., my faithful lawyer, to be the executors of this, my Will, bequeathing to each the sum of five thousand pounds, as an humble token of my regard for, and gratitude to them; and adjuring them to see the contents of my Will faithfully carried out.

"All of which I confirm by affixing this my signature, in the presence of these witnesses.

"Ethel Brand.

"Rufus Gay, M.D.

"Andrew Davenport, Attorney-at-Law."

The lawyer laid down the will upon the table again, and turned a searching glance upon each of the principals. Again he cleared his throat, which had grown husky at the last clause referring to himself, and it bore an admonitory, as well as a reproachful import to the ears of Captain Brand.

"Miss Walsingham," blurted Dr. Gay, rising nervously, "no one has presented you to Captain Brand. May I?"

"Sir, be pleased to lend your attention for a moment," cried Mr. Davenport, pugnaciously.

So Captain Brand was pleased to lend his attention. He wheeled from his dark reverie, and marched, with the reckless tread of the desperado going to the cannon's mouth, up to the group, and his flashing eyes boded no tenderness in their first scathing glance towards his future bride.

"Miss Walsingham, my dear, this is Captain Brand."

The doctor stepped back, and the lady glided from her shadowy nook; and the rich gold lights from the tinted panes fell full upon her.

"Ye gods, what a Medusa!" muttered the captain, staring.

"We have met," said Margaret Walsingham, panting and white-lipped, her wild gray eyes burning with red heat, and meeting his sneering gaze with loathing, "we have met, sir, by no will of mine."

A loud, insulting "Ha! ha! ha!" burst from Captain Brand.

The harsh, grating laughter, eloquent with scorn, devilish with malice, incredulity, and fury, turned the girl's outraged protest into speechlessness.

She wrapped her long crape garments about her hands, and the beautiful figure of Margaret Walsingham—her one charm, and a perfection it was—vanished from the incensed eyes of St. Udo Brand.

"Well, what think you of woman's wit after this?" cried he to the executors when the door had closed. "Who says a woman can't scheme, and cleverly, too? What fool ever called hers the softest sex?"

"I must request of you, as the executor of this will," said Mr. Davenport, slapping it loudly, "is bound to do—to apologize to the young lady whom you have just now insulted, for your treatment of her."

The captain's magnificent eyes were blazing with anger, and his brow was contracted with the scowl of a baffled demon, but at the plucky lawyer's proposition, he threw back his head and burst into another shout of laughter that made the ceiling ring again.

"What! trust my unwary heart to the red-hot fingers of a Torquemada? She would dissect it leisurely for its vulnerable spot, and probe that with spiteful blade. It needed not my insults, as you call them, to turn her venom against me. Did I not read it in the loathing eyes and shrinking figure before ever I opened my mouth? Am not I the one obstacle between her and the fortune she has lain in wait for during four years? She can afford to take insults from me; they will not hurt her. They are my tribute to her talent as a fortune-hunter."

"I must disabuse your mind of all unjust suspicions against Miss Walsingham," cried Mr. Davenport, meeting the captain's frowning eyes with as fierce a frown; "she has never schemed for this disposition of your grandmother's property. On the contrary, to my extreme surprise and disapprobation, she vehemently implored that she might be left out of the will altogether, and sent for me an hour before Mrs. Brand's decease, hoping that you might arrive in time to prevail upon Mrs. Brand to revoke the clauses concerning her."

"Save me these rhapsodies, friend," returned the captain; "those heavenly qualities to which you

direct my lover-like regards, but whet my appetite like that of the ravening wolf. Let me make a mouthful of my bliss; but I warn all officious fingers to keep out of my pie."

"You mean by that, I suppose, that you will submit to the conditions of the will?"

"I mean nothing of the kind, my good sir. To the infernal shades I consign your scheming adventuress."

He rose from his lounging attitude with another of those bitter and cynical bursts of laughter, and dashing open the glass door, stepped out upon the gravel walk to saunter, his hands behind him, past the old moss-grown fish-pool, into the shrubbery.

The sun shone on the stately form and on his purple black hair. It wavered between leafy banners on his angry face, so dark with ominous clouds, and merciless with the dance of inward passions.

And yet it was a grand picture of desolation, that lofty countenance in its wrath. The fires of a thousand passions had graved these deep curves of bitterness, and marred the once genial mouth with the never absent sneer, and perverted an intellect once pure and stately.

No wonder that the two men, who were watching him in silence as he deliberately slashed down lilies with his cane, shuddered when they thought of the poor girl who stood between him and Castle Brand.

Margaret sat in her room, dumbly enduring the first humiliation of her life. Her humble soul had been outraged—disgraced. That cruel, insulting laugh still rang in her ears. Her cheeks flamed with shame; her eyes were suffused with hot tears. She could do nothing but sit in a trance, and busy-brained, revolve it over and over until she trembled with the agony of wounded pride.

Her sense of womanly honor had been trampled upon; her unapproachable self-respect had been bandied about by impure hands. Margaret felt that she was forever disgraced. To have been thrown at his feet, to suffer his eyes to scorn her, to see the wicked mouth sneer—the reckless head thrown back—to hear the muttered "Ye gods! what a Medusa!" to be stunned by the loud "ha! ha!" to be consorted with a monster of dissipation, such as he was—and to be scorned. Oh, cruel Ethel Brand: to force a friendless girl into such a position! Why had she not rather turned her from these castle doors, four years ago, than reserve her for such a fate as this?

Margaret began to see that she was terribly in Captain Brand's power—that if he were rascal enough to propose to her, she could scarcely in honor refuse him, and keep him out of his property. She also saw, with vague, prophetic eyes, a vision in the distance, of *stealthy hands stretching toward her life in either case*.

The ruddy sun, slipping down behind the cliffs two hours later, looked in at Margaret, who, with her door securely locked, sped about with motions of nervous energy, packing a small valise of clothes to take with her upon a sudden journey.

She had determined to blot herself by her own act out of Ethel Brand's will, by disappearing alike from friend and enemy, and hiding herself in some far distant corner of England, until Captain Brand had stepped into secure possession of Castle Brand.

She believed her life to be in danger, for she had wit enough to know that there were a thousand ways of quietly putting her out of the way before the twelve months were over, provided that St. Udo Brand was villain enough to avail himself of them, and of that she had little doubt; so she made all haste to leave him master of the field.

At ten o'clock of the night she flitted down the broad oak and walnut stairs, with her valise under her cloak, and stole out of the library glass door, under the very nose of sleepy Symonds, the footman, and under the night shades of the Norman oaks.

A man met her on the broad Waaste, where the somber pines stood one by one like specters, and Margaret sharply screamed when he came close to her and peered into her face.

"I think this is Miss Walsingham?"

"Oh, yes."

He was the letter-carrier from Regis, and held a white missive in his hand.

"Special, it says, miss, so I took it over to-night, instead of waiting for to-morrow's batch, for, says I to myself, 'Young wimmen likes to get their letters.' Night, miss."

"Good-night, Mr. Wells. Thank you for taking so much trouble this dark night."

She stood listening to his retreating footsteps, and fingering the embossed seal of the letter. It seemed to be the Brand coat of arms; and yet who would use this crest when all the Brands were dead but one?

A light still burned in the lodge, down by the great gates, and she hung her valise on the iron railing and lifted the latch.

"Let me come in a moment?" she asked, putting in her pale, disturbed face.

"Lord! is that you, Miss Margaret!" cried the lodge-keeper, pushing his horn glasses upon his forehead to look at her with his watery eyes. "Come in, and welcome."

"I was out walking, and met the letter-carrier, he gave me a letter, which I cannot wait longer to read. Let me read it here?"

She sat down, with the tallow candle between her and these bleared old eyes, and opened her letter. Yes, it bore the Brand crest with its fierce inscription. There was but one surviving Brand in the world, and his name signed Margaret's letter:

> "MADAM:—Accept, with my profound congratulations, Ethel Brand's bequest of Seven-Oak Waaste, and all acres attached, and my bequest of your own choice of a master to the place mentioned. I have withstood the exquisite temptation of sharing your bliss, lest I should revive the pretty drama of 'Paolo Osini,' who strangled his wife in his first embrace; and with a pious blessing on the manes of poor Madam Brand, who likely enough got choked by a parasite, I depart to a land where oracles do say there are no fortune-hunters.
>
> "Yours, admiringly,
>
> "ST. UDO BRAND."

With this second bitter insult crushed in her hand, and terrified tears washing her cheeks, Margaret Walsingham went back, in the surging night wind, to Seven-Oak Waaste.

CHAPTER III.

EVIL FOREBODINGS.

Mid-ocean, a steamer was laboring on her way, beneath a sky like glittering pearl, arching over a waste of phosphorescent billows, and with a crispy breeze behind her.

The ladies were in their berths, the gentlemen paced the deck, and beguiled the time by discussions many-themed.

But St. Udo Brand, with his hands behind him and his back to all, gazed over the sea to the distant horizon line.

A grim satisfaction illuminated his eye, though the ever-present sneer still marred his lips, as, deep in unaccustomed reverie, he examined his position on all sides.

"Inscrutable are thy ways, oh, Fortune!" mused the captain. "Thou hast given Seven-Oaks to the humble, and cast the haughty from Castle Brand into outer darkness, where there is grinding and gnashing of teeth. Yet, wherefore, oh, sand-blind Fortune! hast thou rolled the hypocritical saint in my bank-notes, and hung golden offerings upon her Medusa head, while I, the honest scoundrel, am stripped naked to supply the ovation? Well, doubtless, she has worked harder for it than ever I could, poor devil! Now for a name and fame, and may be fortune, in yon republic behind the shoulder of this world of waters! And, who knows, I may be happy yet, with my little white cat, instead of the sorceress of yonder castle."

Back and forth the groups of promenaders passed the solitary man, who thus faced his fortunes with satiric stoicism; but no one thought of interfering with his reverie, for Captain Brand had a name for exclusiveness on board the Bellerophon. He may have had a name for some more interesting quality, too, if one might draw conclusions from the earnest scrutiny which two of his fellow-passengers were just now bestowing on him.

A little gentleman, wrapped in a cloak, lounged upon the deck, regarding the captain through his eye-glass with an air at once inquisitive and complacent; and a little behind him stood a tall, elderly man, in servant's livery, fixedly regarding the captain also.

At last the little gentleman rolled off the bench upon his little legs, which were—low be it whispered—somewhat crooked, which is, to say the least, best adapted to equestrianism, and nimbly tripping up to Captain Brand, accosted him with the sunniest air imaginable:

"*Bon jour, monsieur*, a ver' good day to you, my friend. Why vill you turn the back upon our merry company? Throw care to the dogs; so"—with a flourish of the hands—"now he is gone! Be happy, my good friend!"

Captain Brand gloomed down upon the little intruder.

"If you want anything of me," said he, ironically, "do me the infinite honor to be plain and brief."

The stranger stepped back, threw up his hands, and became dignified.

"Monsieur, you English are a vulgar people. You English do not know how to treat gentlemen of the world. *Par la meese!* You know nothing, except to drink and keep silence. No, monsieur, I want nothing of you but courtesy, and since you have it not to give, *pardieu! bon jour*."

With inimitable grace, he bowed his adieu, and was retreating, when the captain's genial laugh arrested him.

"I beg pardon, sir," cried St. Udo, "for the national want. Pray remain, that I may study you up. With such a model before them, who could remain a boor?"

"Monsieur," cried the little man, delightedly, "you are von wag. I like you, monsieur. I present myself. I am called the Chevalier de Calembours; to you I am Ludovic—at your service *mon ami*."

"Chevalier," returned the captain, "I return the confidence. I am called Captain Brand, of the Coldstream Guards—have just sold out, and to all I am merely St. Udo Brand—at your service."

They shook hands and lit cigars.

The captain felt irresistibly drawn to the little chevalier; he liked him amazingly from the first.

He was handsome; he had a square brow, brown eyes, ruddy cheeks, firm mouth, enormous nut-brown mustache, and a full, glossy beard. He was attractive; there was intelligence in the bold forehead, penetration in the beaming eye, a purpose in the closely-fitting lips, and withal a playful, airy, insolent, cheery frankness which illumined nearly the whole face.

He stood revealed, brisk, and ready for business, the nimble Chevalier de Calembours.

"You are en route for America? So am I—we will be comrades," quoth the chevalier.

"With all my heart! Yes, I go to join the army. I shall either find fame or death in the American war."

"Bah! I go to court the jade Fortune. She has jilted me of late. I would feed my wrinkled purse with American dollars, *ma foi!* that purse is famishing just now."

"You are not pure French?" demanded the captain.

"*Mon Dieu!* no," rasped monsieur, with a shrug. "I am cosmopolite, yes."

"Where is your birthplace?"

"The Hungary, *mon ami*. Have been in Vienna, in Geneva, in Turin, and for the rest—everywheres."

"You omit England?"

"Ah, I did not live in England. I saw it, no more."

"Yet you speak English well."

"I am flattered. I have the habitude of the languages; they count me an expert. Insisted on giving me the post of Professor of the modern languages in the University of Berlin."

"But it was not as a knight of the ferule that you won this mark of distinction?" laughed the captain, touching a fluttering badge which depended from the chevalier's button-hole.

"*Ma foi! non!* I am Magyar, and that is to say patriot and warrior in one. I combat under the gaze of our glorious Kossuth; but there are times when even valor himself must fly, and the sword of the brave must change, in the stranger's land, to the plowshare, the pen—anything to keep the wolf from the door. But the ferule, the pen, the pestle, I abhor. I hear the blast of the trumpet, I return to my first loves. I cross to Algiers. I fight my way up till I win my *grade*, and this bagatelle. Nothing more there to pick. I looked around; the rays of glory are beginning to gild the long slumbering west. I leave the ancient world, and sinking my illustrious personality, I forget that I am Count of the Order of Santo Spirito, Turin; that I wear the ribbon of Legion of Honor, and am to throw myself among these Republican hordes, and to fight knee by knee with the mob. Enough!" he concluded; "to you I shall be but Ludovic, *mon ami*. Come—do you play?"

"I play, chevalier. I am at your service," answered the captain.

The chevalier preceded his new friend to his state-room, and ushered him in with "effusion."

A man rose stiffly from the table, where he had been reading, and made way for the chevalier and his guest.

A tall, elderly man, in servant's livery, who stooped and slunk softly about, whose sallow, brown face grew white when the captain scanned it curiously, whose thin, gray hair and immense overhanging gray mustache showed traces of cares rather than of years, and whose shifting, shrinking eyeballs ever sought the ground, as if their depths held emotions which the man must hide on peril of his life.

A sudden shudder seized Captain Brand; a thrill ran sickening through his heart, which had never so thrilled before. He turned his back—he knew not why—in hatred upon the chevalier's valet.

Was it a perception of evil, slow creeping toward him from the gloomy future—slow, but sure to come as death himself?

Pshaw! what necromancer's dream was this? The captain, scoffing, threw it from him, and forgot the haggard old servant.

"Thoms, we play *ecarte*," aspirated the chevalier, in his rough English (he invariably spoke French to the captain). "Bring wine and cards, and wait upon us."

They plunged with zest into the game, and passed many hours in its intricacies. The chevalier protested that he had found an adversary worthy of him, and Captain Brand swore that for want of more piquant sauce a game of euchre every night with Calembours might answer to flavor the insipidity of the voyage out to New York.

But the careless captain might have noted, too, had he considered such a worm worthy of notice, that whatever he did—talk, sing, drink wine, or muse—the secret, shifting eyes of Thoms, the valet, never lost a movement, but hour after hour watched him with the unearthly intentness of a blood-hound.

While the captain slept that night in unconscious security, the Chevalier de Calembours, with a complacent chuckle and a flowing pen, wrote down in his diary, these famous words:

"'*I came. I saw, I conquered!*' Monsieur Brand promises to be excellent sport though little hope of pigeoning him, *en passant*. Yes, he has keener scent than monsieur, my patron, gave him credit for—he won't be led altogether by the nose. But pouf! who is it that will not be gulled by Ludovic de Calembours?"

Thoms, too, in secret, and with wary ear pricked for possible interruption, bent, in the seclusion of his own state-room, over a tiny green note-book, jotted down some things he wished to remember, then thrusting away his little book in a secret pocket, he rubbed his long, lean hands together in stealthy triumph, and laughed long and wickedly.

Five days passed; the airy chevalier held his own in the sour captain's esteem, and they mutually approved of each other.

They leaned over the taffrail together, Thoms a step behind, and watched the glittering city of New York, glowing in their eyes, as the steamer plowed its way between green and pleasant shores to gain it.

Crowds waited on the pier—sailors, civilians, and soldiers mixed in frantic confusion.

The chevalier examined them through his glass with smiling nonchalance; but Captain Brand looked over the scene with thoughtful brow.

"What is monsieur's programme?" chirped the chevalier. "Does he dally with Fortune's train, or does he brush by her robes and seize the treasure which she guards? Shall *mon ami* live the short and merry life of conviviality with me in New York, or shall he choose the short and beastly bad career of a soldier?"

St. Udo Brand laughed bitterly.

"What is my life worth to me without fame to gild it?" growled he. "I have no gold to make it shine."

"*Bravissima!*" shouted the chevalier, clapping his hands; then, with a smile which just showed his long teeth in a hungry arch, "I, too, will go southward, because, that to me my life is very much worth, and I will do bravely to gild it with—gold. We will be brother colonels, *mon ami*, and Thoms—what shall you do?"

Thoms' evil face beamed with intelligence.

"I'll follow you masters as long as you *live*," uttered the smooth voice, humbly.

"We shall fight, by gar, for glory!" cried the chevalier. "At least, we shall say so. But each has his motive pardieu, and a sensible motive is mine. Ah, life is nothing without illusions, as Mendelssohn says."

"Nothing indeed," smiled the silent lips of Thoms, "nothing indeed."

Thus these three chose to walk together the road which had been apportioned them by that secret Power behind the scene, bound close together by Circumstance's chain, yet sundered in soul by walls as deep as dungeon walls, and the dusty banners, and golden rewards, and whistling balls of the battle-field beckoned to each with a separate welcome.

"Here you will win glory," they cried to St. Udo Brand.

"Here you will win gold," they whispered to Calembours.

"We promise you *death*!" they sighed to Thoms.

So the three men followed the beckoning hand, and entered the contest.

Some weeks passed. It was their last evening in New York. On the morrow they would be en route for the army.

Captain Brand and the Chevalier de Calembours had staid at the same hotel, and were, of course, tolerably confidential with each other.

Thoms divided his attentions, with marked impartiality, between his master and his master's friend, and lost no opportunity of ingratiating himself with the cynical captain.

This evening Captain Brand was writing letters; the chevalier was serenely smoking on the balcony. Thoms silently plodded through the packing of their traveling-bags in a corner.

"One, two—there are three letters," said the captain, throwing down his pen. "Thoms, you dog, post these."

A scornful smile was on his lip. He picked up a photograph from his desk and pored over it eagerly. The cold, superior smile melted from his scornful mouth; the keen raillery vanished from his eyes; he regarded the pictured face almost in despair.

Thoms, creeping behind his chair to reach for the letters, took a keen survey of the card he held.

It was the face of a young and lovely girl which returned St. Udo's yearning, questioning gaze with a sweet, free smile.

Thoms took the letters, and standing for a moment in the hall, greedily scrutinized the envelopes.

"Andrew Davenport, Esq.," "Rufus Gay, M.D.," and "Lady Juliana Ducie," whispered the spy.

He passed into his own room, locked the door, and did not emerge for at least ten minutes; and when he did, he stole out with the letters in his hand, casting startled looks around, as if he fancied he had some cause to fear.

The next morning the two new colonels left New York at the head of their men, and halted not until some three days subsequently they found themselves within one day's march of the grand army.

The way lay through forests of hickory, planer, and tulip trees, between tobacco and cotton plantations, and over deep, yielding morasses, where the giant gourd sprang up to catch the bending cypress branch, and the wild vine barred the way.

St. Udo, chatting carelessly to his inferior officer, turned suddenly in his saddle to look for Thoms, and met his quailing eyes scarce two yards behind.

His head was bent to catch every word uttered by St. Udo; his eyes gleamed like glow worms in the dusk; he was the picture of a man with some dread watch to keep.

"Back, fellow!" cried St. Udo, sternly. "What do you want here?"

Thoms fell back with humility.

"Beg pardon, colonel—I was listening to some sounds ahead," muttered he.

His coolness was manifestly forced—his excuse was manifestly a lie—yet the haughty Englishman only swore at him and turned from him as one avoids the worm in the path.

He resumed his idle conversation with his officer, and passed the time away in light jests and piquant anecdotes of a life neither tame nor simple, and quite ignored the inquisitive Thoms behind him.

But Thoms did not forget to strain every faculty of hearing and seeing while he had the chance. Never did lover drink in love vows of his beautiful betrothed, as did the gray-faced valet his colonel's stories; never did the worshipers of that star of song, Jenny Lind, analyse each tone, each delicate inflection of her voice in the day of her most glorious effulgence, as did Thoms the tones of St. Udo Brand; and when the soldier, weary of speech, sank into mute reverie, the old man's glowing eyes stole over his stately figure, measuring its height, its contour, its carriage, with anxious care, as if but one man lived upon the earth for him, and that night he might be slain.

At midnight the little detachment paused to rest.

The place they chose as favorable to their purpose was the wide-spread grounds of a ruined mansion-house.

Merrily the camp-fires blazed up, paling the shimmer of a myriad of soaring fire-flies, and sparkling through the murk like a broken lava stream.

The chevalier left his company to visit his friend's tent, and the brothers-in-arms exchanged cordial jests and friendly converse, while Thoms, hovering over the camp-fires and boiling the coffee, peered inquisitively at the pocket album which St. Udo was showing his friend.

"How that old wretch listens to our conversation," exclaimed St. Udo, laughing, as the valet retreated for a moment beyond earshot, for another armful of fagots. "He is like Diggory behind his master's chair—every story moves him to laugh or cry."

"Pardieu! he will play eavesdropper, will he?" hissed the chevalier. "We shall see."

"Here he comes, hurrying back to the charmed circle," said St. Udo, "with straining ears and a face which looks 'just like a stratagem,' as Madam Noblet says. Where did you get the sorry rascal, Calembours?"

"A friend sent him to me on the morning we parted for New York," muttered the chevalier. "Peace—he is here."

His nervous tremor did not escape the vigilant eye of Thoms, who grimly took his post near the pair, and handed them their viands with obsequious celerity.

St. Udo amused the chevalier by more anecdotes, and presently in their hilarious enjoyment they forgot the haunting demon in the shadow of the tent, till St. Udo, happening to glance that way over his shoulder, stopped short and stared in speechless amazement.

There sat Thoms, leaning against the tent, as St. Udo leaned against the mossy rock by the fire, throwing back his shaggy head as St. Udo threw back his, gesticulating with his long, brown hand as St. Udo waved his, his lurid eyes fixed in a hound-like gaze upon St. Udo Brand, aping every motion like a haggard shadow of himself.

The Chevalier de Calembours, following St. Udo's stare of astonishment, caught the man's antics mid-air, and burst into a volley of oaths in every known language.

"The man's possessed! My life on it, he is a lunatic!" cried St. Udo, laughing till the tears stood in his eyes. "To see him roll his head, and wave his hand, and mouth after me my very words. Ha! ha! ha!" shouted St. Udo. "Thoms, you dog! are you rehearsing a part? What part?"

Thoms was scrambling to his feet, and standing like a scared hare in act to fly. His cheeks were white, his lips withered, his very hand trembled so that he slipped it into his bosom to hide its shaking.

"*Diable!* what mean you? Out with your excuses!" screamed the chevalier, passionately.

"I—I am—I have been an actor," stammered the old valet, with chattering teeth and a glare of hatred. "I was doing a Dromio of Ephesus with Colonel Brand for model."

"With me for your Dromio of Syracuse, you varlet?" mocked St. Udo. "Pity we are in truth not twin brothers; you might be less of a paradox to me then."

Thoms suddenly turned his convulsed face away. It was well for him he did not permit the angry chevalier a view of his half-closed, furious eyes, blazing like two corpse lights.

"Away with you to rest," ordered Calembours. "We have had enough of you for to-night, by gar! A little more might be bad for you."

Away sneaked the shivering wretch, and lay down among the soldiers at a neighboring camp-fire, and, apparently, fell fast asleep. The brother colonels abused him with mutual heartiness for a while, and then parted to seek their own slumbers.

Toward the morning a yellow mist drifted from the neighboring cypress swamp and brooded over the camp. St. Udo stirred in his sleep at the touch of its clammy breath, and opened his eyes.

And over him hung a face, its wolfish eyes fastened upon his, a thievish hand creeping into his bosom, almost touching him with his gray hair, almost stifling him with a damp hand held an inch above his nostrils. Thoms knelt beside him!

In a moment St. Udo had sprung to his feet and caught him by the throat. A book fell from the long brown hand—his little pocket-album.

"What the duce do you want, confound you?" thundered St. Udo.

Thoms lifted his weary old face supplicatingly, and held up his shaking hands for mercy.

"Are you a thief, or an assassin?" demanded St. Udo, releasing him as unworthy of his wrath, in his age and weakness.

"I—I thought you were dead, colonel," stammered the wretched old creature. "You lay so still that I—I felt your heart to find if it beat."

"Another lie, you old fool," mocked St. Udo. "What did you want with my private album? Answer me, sir."

The old man's speechless look of mock wonder at the album lying upon the ground, his thin, gray locks damp with perspiration, his abject terror and abject helplessness, all appealed to the haughty St. Udo's forbearance. He pushed him contemptuously away with his foot.

"Get up; you are merely a skulking villain. You are not worth my ire!" exclaimed St. Udo. "And mind that you never approach me again, on peril of your life."

"Don't—don't order me away. Let me stay near to watch—to save you!" whined the miserable Thoms.

"Confound safety! if I am to get it at the hands of a worm like you!" shouted St. Udo. "Why do you haunt me day and night? Why do you run upon my trail like a sleuth-hound? The next time I detect anything like this, by all the gods, I'll shoot you down!"

Away stole the trembling Thoms, and was met and stared at by the little chevalier, coming to have an early breakfast with his friend.

"Another raid into Thoms, *mon ami*?" questioned he, anxiously.

"Who is that devil?" cried St. Udo, passionately.

"Heaven knows! *ma foi*. I wish we did," quoth the chevalier.

CHAPTER IV.

A LIFE SAVED.

The letter of St. Udo Brand astonished the executors of Ethel Brand's will; and their chagrin was intense when Miss Walsingham decisively informed them that they must find means to convey the property to the rightful heir, as she would never become mistress of Seven-Oak Waaste. They earnestly tried to combat her "quixotic" resolve. But she remained immovable. She would, she said, become a teacher, a companion in some family, or even a stewardess aboard ship—anything but the mistress of Seven-Oak Waaste.

And so, at an early hour next morning, Margaret Walsingham, with all her worldly possessions in a small valise, and bearing letters of unmeasured recommendation from Dr. Gay and Mr. Davenport, entered a railway carriage. She was on her way to London, in the hope of getting a situation that would take her out of the country.

She sat absorbed in reverie until the train passed at a village station, and a lady, escorted by a young naval officer, entered the car and took the seat opposite Margaret. Then with a shriek the train dashed on again.

Margaret's eyes lingered wistfully on the blooming face, the sylph-like form, the pure golden hair of the beautiful and bright young being before her. How she loved beauty, and for its sake loved this rare creature. She gazed through a mist of admiring tenderness, and forgot her troubles.

And then a piercing shriek of engines filled the air; a few seconds' hard snorting and unsteady jolting, a mighty crash, a sense of being hurled against the sky, utter chaos and oblivion.

A bricklayer, clad in a stained smock, the color of mud, was placidly eating his dinner in the midst of his family, when a scared face appeared at the open door, and a woman in torn black garments beckoned to him.

"Please come immediately," panted the woman at the door. "Life or death depends upon your haste."

She sped away at that, and the bricklayer followed her rapid feet which scarce seemed to stir the dust of the road and breathed as if he carried his load full on his back.

They had a quarter of a mile to go before they reached the scene of disaster, and on the way John Doane elicited the following particulars from his excited guide.

The up train from London and the down express had run into each other by a few seconds on the part of one of the conductors. She knew nothing beyond the crash of the engines meeting, until she found herself upon a bank—some fifty feet upon the upper side of the track uninjured, though at first stunned. In looking for her fellow-passengers she found the carriage in which she had been, lying at the foot of the bank, bottom up, and she supposed the train had hurled on for some distance with the other carriages.

By the time she had explained thus far they had arrived upon the scene. It was melancholy enough to warrant the woman's white looks and faltering tongue.

Here and there a figure half raised itself and sank to the ground again with rolling head and helplessly outstretched hands. Detached pieces of wheels, and windows and twisted frames, and shattered roofs strewed the line. A first-class carriage lay upside down, its wheels idly revolving in the air, and a mass of golden curls were clustered on the broken frame of one of the windows.

"Force open the door if you can; that lady is crushing to death," said the young woman kneeling by the golden mass and raising a heavy head, which they shrouded.

The man found a beam and began methodically to batter in the door. It was done, the strange jumble of crushed and sleeping humanity were unlocked from their prison, and the two succorers made their way in, treading warily upon the gayly-painted ceiling, and both bent over a figure clad in silken draperies of diaphanous sheen.

"Lift that crushing head gently. Ah, it must be too late. There, there she is free. Put her head upon my shoulder—so. Now I will carry her myself; clear a way for me that I may not trip and fall with her. Spread that cloak upon the grass—so. Ah, is she dead?"

The Samaritan under orders assisted to lay the burden down, and then ran for some water, with which he quickly returned, and began to sprinkle copiously the insensible lady.

The young naval officer, who looked rather ghastly, now approached Margaret.

He knelt down and gazed with horror upon her set face.

"Good gracious! I am afraid she's gone, poor girl," he ejaculated. "Julie—Cousin Julie! Do you think she is dead, madam? Oh, Julie, dear, speak to me!"

"She is not dead," answered Margaret. "If we could have her removed to some house, there might be some help for her."

"A poor man's hut ain't for such as her," said the bricklayer, drawing his hand over his heated face; "but she's welcome to the best bed in it."

"Thank you. We shall convey her there at once," replied the young man.

They constructed a hasty litter of branches, and, calling a brawny-armed boy, Doane set off with his burden.

In a few minutes they reached the bricklayer's cottage, and a clean bed was hastily prepared for the victim of the disaster.

The young gentleman waited in the little kitchen until Margaret could give him a report of the lady's state. In a very short space of time she joined him.

"Lady Juliana is still insensible. I fear her injuries are dangerous, but I can only use my best skill until some physician comes," she said, trying to speak cheerfully.

"I will send the best one I can find from Lynthorpe, and telegraph immediately to the Marquis of Ducie. He could reach us to-night, I think. May I ask the name of the lady under whose kind charge I leave Lady Julie?"

Margaret crimsoned, and drew back. Until then it had not struck her that she would stand a better chance of getting rid of the old life by taking an assumed name.

"Margaret Blair," she faltered, at random.

"Miss Blair?"

She bowed.

"I cannot express my admiration of Miss Blair's brave conduct," said the young gentleman, with a return bow. "But my uncle, the Marquis of Ducie, shall hear that it was through you that his daughter is saved, if she should recover. Allow me to introduce myself."

He handed her a daintily embossed card, with a coat of arms upon which was engraved,

"*Lieutenant Harry Faulconcourt,*
H. M. S. Utopia."

With another profound bow he left her.

It was long before Margaret could hope that her prayer was to be answered; the beautiful face of the lady showed no ripple of consciousness, and the heart beat with muffled and uncertain throbs.

A physician called in on his way to the scene of the accident, but his examination was hurried, and his directions brief, for others were waiting, with broken limbs to be splintered, and gaping wounds to be sewed up. So Margaret and the bricklayer's wife did what they could alone.

And the first beam of the full moon stole through the cracked window pane, and silvered over the pale, set countenance until it gleamed with lustrous purity, and the faint breath of returning life parted the marble lips, and Margaret saw that Heaven had consented to her prayer.

Lady Juliana looked up fixedly, and saw a tender face bending over her, with gray eyes glimmering in the moonlight, through their burden of glad tears. Lady Juliana, in her pain and weakness, wondered what heavenly countenance this was which soared above her, and smiled in answer, thinking at first—poor little soul!—that she was with her mother in heaven.

"How did I come to be here? Tell me about it."

"There was a railway accident, you remember? Everybody was more or less hurt—I excepted—so I am taking care of you. Mr. Faulconcourt has gone to the village of Lynthorpe to telegraph for your papa. He will perhaps be here to-night."

"And who are you?" asked the innocent voice again.

"Margaret Blair," she stammered, turning away.

"Do you belong to Lynthorpe?"

"No. I was on my way to London. You remember the person who sat opposite you in the cars?"

"Oh, yes. When I began to scream and jump up, you held me, didn't you?"

"I was afraid you would dash yourself out at the door. Are you in pain?"

My lady's pretty face was a net-work of petulant lines.

"I have such a weary, crushed feeling," she complained; "and I don't like lying here in this odd place without my maid to take care of me. Of course you will be going away in the morning?"

"Not unless your father arrives to-night to take charge of you."

"Don't then, there's a dear Miss Blair," murmured the lady, coaxingly.

Margaret bent over my lady with a rush of tenderness in her manner. What would she not give to win the sweet girl's love? The innocent blue eyes seemed to hold in their depths such guilelessness; the beauty was so perfect which Heaven had bestowed upon her, that beauty-loving Margaret yearned to have her cling to her thus forever.

"I will stay with you as long as you want me," she whispered, kissing the pellucid brow of Lady Julie.

CHAPTER V.

ATTEMPT AT MURDER.

The fair dawn slid with crimson ray under the yellow mist; the breath of morning stirred the pendant leaves, and on its wings it bore the tramp of a host.

In a moment the loud *reveille* was sounding, the thundering camp was alive with voices, every man was on his feet.

"A surprise!" shouted St. Udo, marshaling his company. "Be ready to meet them! Form, men!"

The soldiers under Colonel Brand's command had come straight from their pleasant homes among the Green Mountains. Untried and but freshly trained, one might have doubted their stability in a moment like this.

Not so their colonel; he had carefully studied these intelligent faces, and he had read both sense and spirit there. His ringing voice carried confidence and enthusiasm to its utterances, and was met by a cheer from his men which reverberated from the distant forest like an echo of the sea. In a few moments the tents were struck, the baggage vans were loaded, and the small army was in rapid motion toward the point from which the alarm had sounded.

In the midst of the plain they halted; their flashing arms were presented to the wall of foliage behind which lurked the foe. They stood there awaiting the onset, motionless as if they had sprung up from the earth and been petrified in the first instant of their resurrection.

Then a roar of musketry broke from the emerald wall; a storm of lead swept into the human ranks; a wild huzzah burst from the invisible enemy, and the battle had begun. The fight was fierce and long—courage and daring were exhibited on both sides—but when it was over, St. Udo Brand and his brave band were famous forever. They were the victors.

The two colonels were smoking together before St. Udo's tent, enjoying an hour's chat, as usual, before they parted for the night, and in the welcome absence of Thoms, were served by a fine fellow from Vermont, who almost worshiped his colonel.

As the friends joked and laughed with all the reckless abandon of soldiers, a pistol-shot was heard, and simultaneously a pistol ball whistled past their ears and buried itself in the earth at a few feet's distance.

Both sprang to their feet, and rushing round the tent, came upon two men in deadly strife—one in gray, the other in blue. They rolled on the ground; each held the other's throat in a deadly grasp. It seemed impossible to decide upon which side the victory would turn, and their continual writhings and contortions rendered interference impossible. But at last the struggle ended in the Federal soldier succeeding in drawing a dagger from his breast and plunging it into his opponent's side.

The wounded man's hold relaxed from the other's throat; he fell back heavily with a stifled groan, and the victor rose and turned round his haggard, white face to the brother colonels.

"*Morbleu!* it is Thoms!" cried Calembours, in accents of incredulity.

"Well fought, gray-beard," chimed in St. Udo, in equal amazement. "You deserve promotion. What was this Confederate soldier about?"

Thoms glared at the two colonels like a tiger, then down at his vanquished enemy, from whose side the blood poured hotly.

"He pretended that he wanted to offer himself as a guide to the grand army," muttered Thoms, "and we passed the pickets and came straight to your tent to speak about it. But he tried to pistol you when he came in sight of you, and I had just time to dash his arm up."

"Brave Thoms!" applauded Calembours. "Good Thoms!"

"What is it, Reed?" demanded St. Udo of the soldier, who was kneeling by the fallen Confederate.

"He is trying to speak," answered Reed. "He is saying, 'No, no.'"

Thoms bent eagerly over him, with murderous look in his eyes.

The man was dying; his half-closed eyes were glazing fast, but his bloodless lips moved convulsively, and though his life-blood welled forth at every effort, he still strove to utter some frantic word.

"No!—he—lies!" muttered he, at last.

Thoms' trembling fingers were at his throat in a moment—Thoms' tigerish eyes flashed out their rage.

"Let him alone," expostulated Reed. "Let the poor wretch speak."

"Off, Thoms!" thundered St. Udo, with a terrible frown.

Both colonels stooped over the Confederate soldier. St. Udo put his ear close to the twitching lips.

"He shot the pistol off himself," muttered the man. "Before Heaven, I swear it! He stabbed me to save himself. He did—he did!"

The life-blood oozed into his lungs and choked him; he clasped his hands and threw them up toward Heaven, as if he called on his creator to witness his innocence, and immediately expired.

The two friends rose and looked at Thoms.

Whiter in his grave he would never be. The veins stood out on his damp forehead like whipcord, but he returned their fierce gaze with a dogged firmness.

"What do you say to this charge?" demanded St. Udo.

"I say nothing," mumbled Thoms, showing his long, cruel teeth. "If you're ready to believe a rebel against your own servant, I needn't expect much fair play. What else would he say to revenge his death, I'd like to know? Of course, if you're a-going to shoot me, nothing that I can say will stop you—you're master here, as well as everywhere else."

He ground the last words out through his teeth with a venom, a fury which belonged more to a madman than to a man supposed to be in possession of his ordinary sanity, and he addressed them to St. Udo exclusively.

"You deserve to die," said St. Udo, "if you have attempted our lives."

"By gar! ve vill court-martial the rogue!" cried Calembours. "He shall be shot, the traitor!"

"If you shoot me, you shoot an innocent man," protested the old man. "Surely Colonel Brand will give me fair play? I swear I never attempted your lives!"

St. Udo scrutinized the eager face doubtfully, and frowned.

"You say that the Confederate, not you, fired that pistol-shot?" he demanded.

"I do say so," answered Thoms, firmly.

"Then we give you the benefit of the doubt this time," said St. Udo, "but warn you that you shall be well watched in future. Be off now, and beware of treachery, for you shall not escape a second time."

The haggard face lit up with evil exultation; but Thoms cringed before the haughty colonel, and muttered his gratitude in abject terms.

"No more need be said," cried St. Udo, with a cold sneer, "except this—if either Colonel Calembours or I meet death treacherously, you will be a suspected man, and will not escape, I promise you. Now, go."

Away slunk Thoms, with his head down on his breast, and the friends' eyes met significantly.

"There goes von rascal unhung," said the chevalier.

"He's mad, Calembours—mad as Malvolio," said St. Udo. "Don't annoy yourself over his vagaries. Ugh! how I detest his presence near me."

Reed, the soldier, filled the camp with whisperings against Thoms; over and over the black story was repeated by a thousand camp-fires, and wherever the wretched man slunk, he was met by suspicious looks and loathing hatred.

He saw that everybody believed in his guilt, notwithstanding Colonel Brand's clemency, and he quailed before the terrible position, and shrank into himself in dumb patience.

Some hours later the command was once more on the march, and at the dawn of day it came upon a plantation with a magnificent mansion set in the midst.

A murmur of satisfaction ran through the weary men as a halt was ordered, and ere long the verdant plain was white with tents, and the lambent air was rife with the rattle of the breakfast preparations, and fragrant with the odor of coffee and frying steaks.

Colonels Brand and Calembours looked anxiously at the pretty mansion which peeped from foliage of the jasmine, oleander, and magnolia, and in its spacious rooms they mentally saw their brave boys properly cared for and nursed by the negroes of the plantation.

"We can ask for room for our wounded here until we get a chance to send them to Washington," said St. Udo, "and leave a guard with them. Come, Calembours, let's reconnoiter."

"With all my heart," quoth the chevalier. "I like the outside of the *maison* better than the inside of my tent, and, by gar! comrade, what then will the inside of the *maison* be? Come, then."

And with this brief prologue the quaintest performance was ushered in which Colonel Brand had yet witnessed in his acquaintance with the sprightly Chevalier de Calembours.

The two colonels approached through beds of sweetest flowers, and tinkling fountains, and garden houses—the loveliest residence imaginable, swathed in roses and creamy jasmine cups, girdled with balconies in highest tracery, embellished with a row of pillars in front upholding a gilded piazza roof, and entered through an imposing portal of richest design.

There was no sign of life, however, apparent, although the upper windows were opened to their widest extent, and the snowy curtains waved out on the wall among the climbing roses; and St. Udo's peremptory rap upon the door only received an answer from its echo in the sounding hall.

"*Encore!*" cried the cavalier, "they sleep soundly! Again, *mon ami*, don't despair."

A shrill cry interrupted the little man, and sent his dilated eyes up to the window above, from which it had proceeded.

"A woman in terror!" whispered he. "*Morbleu!* I long to greet the owner of such a voice. So clear, so fresh. Sweet madam. I pray you shriek again!"

St. Udo knocked louder.

"Go, go, Vinnie," uttered a frantic voice. "It is a band of Northern soldiers. They will blow up the house if you don't let them in!"

"*Milles diables!*" muttered the chevalier, in a startled tone. "Who speaks with these accents? *Ma foi!* I want the eclaircissement."

The door grudgingly opened, and a pretty quadroon girl looked out.

"Bring your mistress," ordered St. Udo.

She fearfully retreated, leaving the door open, and rushed up a broad staircase, down which was wafted the hurried tones of a terrified consultation.

Then she reappeared and conducted the officers into a magnificent drawing-room assuring them that her mistress would see them in a few moments.

"*Machere*, whose house is this?" demanded the chevalier.

"Colonel Estvan's," whispered the quadroon.

"Where is he?" asked St. Udo, sharply.

She turned pale.

"*Pouf!* do not affright this pretty one," interposed the gallant chevalier. "Monsieur Estvan is fighting like the devil against the Northerners, is he not, *pauvrette*?"

"Yes," faltered she; "but madam forbade me to tell it."

"*Ouais*, madam is shrewd," laughed Calembours. "Now, *mon enfant*, where is madam?"

"She has not arisen yet," said the trembling maid, "but will come soon to speak with you. Madam asks will you have refreshments?"

"Ten thousand thanks. Yes, yes, *machere*, and make haste," said the hungry Hun, with alacrity.

No sooner was the girl gone when Calembours turned his attention to the examination of the elegantly embellished apartment, and, with an ejaculation of delight, extolled the pictures, statuettes, and *bijouterie* which were scattered about with such profusion; and then he burst into a gay old French song.

St. Udo, being seated within view of the hall, which he could see through the half-open door, was the sole witness of what followed, however.

A woman floated down the staircase and approached the door. Her demeanor was expressive of the wildest emotion. She clung to the door-handle, half-fainting, and listened breathlessly to the chevalier's song. She seemed a vision of wonderful grace, with her rich dressing-robe huddled up in her arms, and her long, light tresses sweeping over her shoulders, and, with her soul standing in her passion-darkened eyes, and her scarlet lips apart, she embodied the spirit of a Sabrina listening to the voice of the gods.

Suddenly the fire died out of her face, and a weary change came over it—fear, anger, and doubt struggled for the mastery—and at last she dropped her hand, wrung it in its lovely fellow, and

swiftly fled up stairs again.

"Now, who is this woman?" mused St. Udo, "and what does she know of my friend, the chevalier? Shall I interfere? No—I think he would scarcely brook my meddling. In his place, I should not."

He made no remark, therefore; and when the chevalier's song came to an end, Madam Estvan entered the room.

What a transformation!

St. Udo stood in speechless surprise.

A woman with a stout figure, keen, dark face, and pale, green eyes.

Where were the graceful, lissome figure, the dainty complexion, the passion-darkened eyes.

And madam's hair was gray as Thoms' grizzly locks—no waving tresses of serpentine gold saw he. Madam's lips were blue with fright, no longer thin, scarlet beauty-lines with a string of pearls between. Madam was old, awkward, and spoke nothing but French.

Puzzled in the extreme, St. Udo was obliged to content himself by watching the next incident of interest, Madam Estvan's behavior to Colonel Calembours.

They met—he with round, suspicious eyes snapping with eagerness, she with downcast lids and brassy brow, and each performed a charming obeisance.

"Le Chevalier de Calembours," says he.

"Madam Estvan, at your service, messieurs," returns she.

They bow again, retire a pace, their eyes meet—they both smile a little; but Calembours' color fades to a sickly yellow, and madam's face reddens under the brown.

"We are forced to request your house for a temporary hospital," remarks St. Udo, breaking the utter silence.

The spell dissolves—they both turn to him, and both become natural, and that is all St. Udo can discover in the meeting.

Madam Estvan immediately set her house at their disposal. Nothing would give her more gratification than to be of use to the Federal soldiers, for that she was not of the South they both must see.

She led them through the whole house, assisting them with charming graciousness to select the most suitable apartments, and bewailing the meagerness of her domestic force which would compel the soldiers to wait upon themselves. But do what she would, St. Udo could not divest himself of the conviction that she and the fair Sabrina figure were identical.

At last they returned to the lower hall and essayed to depart.

Madam Estvan accompanied them to the door with bland courtesy.

St. Udo was already opening the door, when a rattle of shot against the roof of the piazza startled him, and a cannon-ball immediately followed and crashed in the side of the doorway.

A fearful shriek burst from Madam Estvan; she rushed forward and clung to the little chevalier's arm.

"*Mon Dieu!* woman, let me go!" hissed he, with an ominous scowl.

"No, no, Ladislaus, save me, your poor Alice, who ever loved you! Don't desert me again!" wailed the woman, frantically.

Her voice rang out pure and flute-like in the English language; her terror tore aside the cunning mask, and plainly revealed to St. Udo the lovely vision he had seen before.

"*Sacre!* I suspected as much!" swore the chevalier, shaking her roughly off. "Away, traitress!"

He sprang across the piazza, followed by St. Udo, and the wretched woman sank, a helpless heap, upon the floor.

Looking back, each from his post, at the fairy palace, the two colonels saw a stream of fire running along the piazza roof, licking the airy balconies up, creeping serpent-like around the pillars, and so through smoking portico to the senseless woman lying on the hall floor where she had fallen.

CHAPTER VI.

ST. UDO BRAND'S FIANCEE.

The last train from London brought a physician to Lynthorpe, dispatched by the Marquis of Ducie

to attend his daughter, who brought a polite message from his lordship to Miss Blair, that an important engagement prevented his accompanying Dr. Trewin, but that he would be at Lynthorpe by the morning train.

The physician examined his patient and pronounced her severely but not dangerously injured, and proceeded to make her as comfortable as circumstances would permit, after which she ate a little, and fell into a placid slumber—Margaret keeping faithful watch, while Dr. Trewin dozed in his chair.

At ten o'clock next morning a carriage and four drew up before John Doane's humble house, and two gentlemen, a man servant, a busy-eyed young woman, a coachman and groom in magnificent liveries of gray and bronze, appeared upon the scene. These were the Marquis of Ducie, an extra physician in case Trewin should not understand his duty, a valet, my lady's maid, and the servants.

His lordship asked where his daughter was stowed, and was forthwith ushered into the bed-closet where she lay, by Margaret Walsingham.

"Haw! By Jove, this is very awkward *faux pas*! Might have been killed by these rascally railway managers! Confoundedly awkward mistake! Howdo, Julie?"

"Oh! bad enough, papa!" responded the patient, receiving the careless paternal embrace as indifferently as it was given. "I might have died ten times over before you would come. Why didn't you come to me immediately, papa?"

"Couldn't, my dear—was at Millecolonne's to meet Prince Protocoli—a political dinner which could not be avoided—sent Trewin in my place, and brought Sir Maurice Abercroft with me, so you can't complain for want of medical or paternal attention either."

His lordship, after patting her cheek, went out, saying with comfortable imperiousness that she must be ready to start in two hours—Abercroft would set her up for the drive.

Forthwith Sir Maurice Abercroft came in and minutely examined Lady Juliana on her injuries. The result was as might have been expected, considering his lordship's wishes, a decision in favor of the proposed removal; and the lady's maid was sent in to do her mistress' toilet.

Apparently my lady stood in some little awe of her father, for she submitted without further question, though a petulant cloud was on her beautiful face, as she said,

"I would rather stay in this quiet little room, with that solemn Miss Blair, if she would stay, than go home to the Park. This is a new sensation, at the least."

Margaret drew nearer and tenderly smoothed the hair back from my lady's brow.

"Dear me!" cried Lady Juliana, looking at her, "how pale and exhausted you look, Miss Blair. Why, of course you must feel so—you have been up with me all night, and—good gracious!" becoming suddenly filled with compunction, "how coolly I have taken your great service!"

Her ladyship sat upright, flushed by a sudden impulse of gratitude.

"Who are your friends?" she asked, with a bright look.

"I have none, Lady Juliana. I am looking for some situation by which to be independent of friends."

"Oh, how fortunate for me! Would you like—but perhaps you are not qualified. Are you well educated? I think you are."

"I have been eight years at a boarding-school, my lady."

"Good gracious! I suppose you are as learned as Socrates. I never was at school in all my life! I was kept with Aunt Faulconcourt and beasts of governesses. But here comes papa."

The marquis re-entered with a bow, the consolidation of courtly etiquette.

"Papa. I was too stupid before to introduce you to Miss Blair. She is the young lady who saved my life. I wish to do something for her."

His lordship advanced and held out two fingers.

"How can I most suitably thank Miss Blair for her services to my daughter?"

"Papa," interposed Lady Juliana, seeing Margaret stand pale and embarrassed before her pseudo-patron, "may she come to Hautville Park instead of Madam Beneant, whom I am so tired of? She would be a more suitable companion than that chattering widow—I am so sick of her flirtations! And I am sure I should be perfectly happy with the generous creature who saved my life."

"Shall you consider her ladyship's proposal?" asked the marquis, turning again to Margaret. "Madam Beneant has been my daughter's companion for a year and a half, but she is too old. Her salary was two hundred a year. Yon shall have two hundred and fifty if you decide to come. What do you say?"

She stood wavering between conflicting impulses. She longed to go with this dove-like creature whom she had saved from death; her heart clung to her—how could she leave her? But again,

would she be concealed from the terrible St. Udo Brand's possible persecutions at the Marquis of Ducie's residence?

Who would think to look for her in Lady Juliana's companion? Her heart pleaded.

"Stay—oh, stay!"

So, all blinded to the future stealing surely on, Margaret flung herself back into the whirlpool which, gradually circling inward, would inevitably bring her face to face with that which she most dreaded.

"I will go with you, Lady Juliana," she said.

When the bricklayer came home to dinner he found the grand people all gone, after showing but meager gratitude for his kindness.

Hautville Park was near Lambeth, within pleasant distance of London; and in due time, in the dying crimson of departed sunlight, the carriage arrived at its stately gates, and Margaret found herself introduced as companion to its spotless mistress, Lady Juliana Ducie.

She had not been there more than three weeks, when one day the maid brought in a letter to my lady's boudoir. My lady was lying *a la* convalescent on her sofa, and Margaret was reading to her. My lady had taken her time to get over her railway fright, and had taxed her companion's strength considerably, by her exactions, but she professed herself very fond of Miss Blair for all her trouble, and they agreed excellently together thus far.

"Hand me that letter, Bignetta. No, give it to Miss Blair and go away, she can read it to me."

Margaret took the letter, inserted her finger to break the seal; glanced at the seal, and withdrew her finger as if it had been stung, glanced at the writing, and slowly became stern and pale.

"Why don't you open it and read its contents?" cried my lady. "Are you tired of reading all the condolence that comes to me, or do you think it is some insolent bill?"

"Lady Juliana," said Margaret, "I cannot read this letter. I—I know the writer."

She covered her face with her hands.

"Why, what can you mean?" exclaimed my lady, getting upon her elbows to possess herself of the letter, and to look curiously at her companion. "Who is it?"

She looked at her own name on the back, and gave a delighted cry.

"Captain Brand! So he deigns to remember me at last! Ah, won't I make him suffer, for being so derelict in his duty these last three weeks! Careless creature! he never thinks of me, except when he sees me."

She laid down the letter and returned to the charge.

"How came you, Miss Blair, to be so well informed about Captain Brand's writing?" she demanded.

Margaret was eyeing her in speechless consternation.

She had thought at first that this missive was an inquiry from the writer concerning herself; she had feared she was found out. But what darker suspicion was this which was entering her mind.

"Tell me first, dear lady Julie," she exclaimed, "if Captain Brand is a friend of yours?"

"Bring me that casket, if you please."

Margaret brought the casket and placed it before her.

"Do you see this ring," rapidly tossing rare chains, jewel cases and bracelets. "Yes, here it is. I am not superstitious about such things, but I don't like to be labelled 'out of the market,' so I do not wear it often; but it is my engagement ring—is it not magnificent? This ring was given to me by Captain St. Udo Brand six months ago, and some day I shall be mistress of Seven Oak Waaste."

Margaret clasped her hands and gasped.

To think of the hungry kestrel pouncing upon this innocent bird! To fancy the terrible Captain Brand wooing the affections of her Lady Julie!

"I did not know it," was all she could articulate.

"Of course you did not; how should you? But you have not told me how you came to know Captain Brand's writing?" insisted her ladyship.

Margaret saw that exposure was coming; she expected it to be in that letter.

"Read what your fiance says, and then listen to my explanation," she murmured, turning away.

My lady, slightly irritated, tore off the seal and began to skim over the contents.

"Heavens!" she ejaculated, "what is this? He writes from New York, saying that he has left England, he hopes, forever; that he is going to get a commission in the Federal army, and win his

spurs, and he gives his reasons: 'At present, my Julie, your fiance is a penniless man, with only a pedigree, and it is to win something more substantial that I have left England. My grandmother has died, and contrary to all expectations, the estate of Seven Oak Waaste has departed out of the family and gone to my grandmother's companion. If I had been obedient to the injunctions of my hood-winked relative, Mrs. Brand, I would have married the clever adventuress, Miss Margaret Walsingham, who I firmly believe plotted to supplant me as she has done, and I would have thus shared the estate. But love, one thing held me back. I have pinned my faith in woman's purity to Juliana Ducie's sleeve, for I think, my child, you are about the best of your sex; and honor forbade me to retract my faith to you. So the future I offer you is this: Will you wait patiently and constantly for the man you swore to be true to forever? Don't say yes, without knowing your own strength. If you can be brave, patient, wise, unselfish, you will be the first woman I ever met who deserves the much travestied title of "woman." My little darling, you know that I love you, and that I would become a good man if your hands cared to beckon me, and I place my future life at your feet. Make it bright and pure by your constancy, or make it black and sullied by the universal peculiarity of your sex—treachery!'"

"What can he be thinking of?" cried the reader, with a burst of angry tears. "Why should he expect such an unheard of thing from me, if he has lost Castle Brand and Seven Oak Waaste?"

Margaret listened as in a dream.

This was a new light upon St. Udo Brand's movements. Did his character suffer by it? He had gone away and given up his lands to one whom he considered a greedy schemer; and he had flung himself into another life, for the sake of her whom he loved. How had she wronged him by her terror of him?

Quick as light her feelings underwent a change, and my lady gazed in astonishment as her quiet companion threw off the guise which she had worn for security.

"Dear Lady Juliana," panted Margaret, "do not blame Captain Brand, who has been honorable to his engagement with you where meaner men have failed. Perhaps—who knows? yours may be the hand which will lead him into a higher way. Oh, my darling, do not hold lightly your power."

"Why should you espouse Captain Brand's cause?" demanded my lady. "What can Miss Blair have to do with Captain Brand?"

Tears burst from the eyes of the quiet companion, and rushed in a volcanic shower down her cheeks, as she answered,

"I am Margaret Walsingham."

"*You!*" exclaimed my lady, after a stare of unutterable astonishment.

"My darling Lady Julie!" cried Margaret, catching my lady's hands and holding them in her own. "I am that unfortunate, that wretched *protegee* of Mrs. Brand's unwise affection; but never think that I would accept the Brand estates when obtained in such a way, or that I would willingly defraud St. Udo Brand. I thank Heaven that these hands," proudly holding them out, "are yet unsullied by such sin."

"How is it that you are here under the name of Blair."

"I left Castle Brand to win my bread, and did not wish to be traced."

"How strange! Then the fortune will doubtless revert to the rightful heir if you are sincere in refusing it?"

"I fear not. The executors will hold it for one year: and if by that time Captain Brand and I," with a bitter tide of crimson in her face, "have failed to fulfil the conditions of the will—that is, to get married—and I still refuse the property, Seven Oak Waaste will probably go into chancery."

Lady Julie gave a cry as if after the vanishing estates, and covered her face with her hands, petulantly weeping.

"Then I am done with St. Udo," she cried. "What do I want of a man who is stripped of his position?"

"He has made a great sacrifice of wealth, and that letter says it is for love of you," said Margaret, coming and taking her lady-love in her arms; "and he is a nobler man than I thought. Surely you will be true to him. Will you not, Lady Julie?"

"You are the essence of simplicity, Miss Walsingham. You will laugh at your own folly, when I communicate all this to my father, and when you hear his verdict. Please leave me now, like a dear girl; I am overcome by this sudden change in my prospects, and must give way to my natural feelings for a while."

Margaret left her, as she sorrowfully believed, to the pangs of untoward love, and walked about the gay grounds of Hautville Park, weeping and praying for her sweet Lady Juliana.

Some hours later she returned, to find quite a metamorphosis in my lady's invalid room. My lady, in high spirits, was superintending, with gusto, her own toilet, as it progressed under the skillful hand of her *femme de chambre*.

"An arrival at Hautville," she cried, turning to Margaret, "and at such an opportune time, when I am so bored. The young duke of Piermont has come from his Irish estates to see papa, and I am going to be introduced. I have heard that his wealth is enormous. His estates in the north of Ireland and west of Scotland are as rich as any in the three kingdoms. He has a rent roll of seventy thousand pounds, independent of a complete square of brick mansions in Cork. How would you like to receive letters from your Julie, sealed with a ducal coronet?"

"I don't expect to see that day," said Margaret, tenderly.

"Heigh ho! I am an unfortunate creature," sighed my lady, plaintively. "But, as I told you, my papa laughed at the idea of a further continuance of that arrangement, and he has written, and so have I, and the letter is sent. I never mentioned you in my note of dismissal."

"Dear Lady Julie, you are deceiving yourself. You think your pride will carry you through this thing, but your heart will break in the attempt."

"I suppose so. Well, it shall never be said that Ducie disobeyed her father. We are a gorgeous race, as you may have observed by the magnificence of this summer residence, so I will bury my pain and cheat my dear papa into believing I am resigned!"

CHAPTER VII.

A DUEL WITH A TRAITOR.

The foe had stolen a march upon the weary encampment in the plantation. Calmly St. Udo Brand faced the coming legions, and bravely retreated in good order upon the main army, which was soon engaged in deadly conflict with Gen. Lee's forces. It is not our intention to dwell on the battles which ensued. They are a part of history now. We have to do with but a few more incidents in St. Udo Brand's career as a soldier.

One night Colonels Brand and Calembours were shivering over their smoky fire; it rained incessantly, the tent was soaked through, their clothing was soaked through, and their wretched provisions were, besides being scanty, almost uneatable with dust and rain.

"*Sacre!*" swore the chevalier, wiping his moist mustache with a brown, bony hand, whose only remnant of aristocracy was the magnificent solitaire which still glittered upon the little finger. "*Sacre! mon comerade*, this must end. What for we remain under fortune's ban? Jade! she laughs under the hood at our credulity in hoping for golden favors. I will snap the fingers in the tyrant's face and elope with chance, by gar! I will open the eyes and seek some better position where dollars are more plentiful and blows less!"

"Silence, you rascal! What better life does a brave soldier expect? Do your duty in the field and don't growl in the camp, and when good luck comes you will deserve it," replied St. Udo, laughing.

"*Pardieu!* I shall be too old to see him when he comes!" grumbled the chevalier. "Three months of glory without gold is enough for me."

"You are a mercenary dog," cried St. Udo; "and I know you are an implacable devil. I have not forgotten Madam Estvan."

"*Diable!* nor I," hissed Calembours. "*Mon ami*, let us forget her. La! there she has vanished forever. But, Monsieur St. Udo, I have not been mercenary with you, have I?"

"Never, chevalier."

"Know you why?"

"Not I, indeed."

"I love you, *mon ami*, by gar! I could not betray you for any sum."

"Generous man. But don't ruin your prospects for the sake of honesty, who is such a lax companion of yours that he is scarce worth such a sacrifice."

"*Mon ami*, my honor is unimpeachable."

"Doubtless, such as it is. By Jove! here come letters from home. One for you, Calembours, a budget for me. Huzzah!"

Yes, letters had reached the army, and many a poor fellow that night forgot the anguish of his wounds and the gloom of his prospects in glad perusal of his loved one's words of affection.

St. Udo, too, held an envelope in a tight hand, while he hastily scanned the other missives, eager to fling them aside and to devote himself without restraint to it.

He laughed with a kind of uncaring scorn at Mr. Davenport's stiff business letter, and he frowned at good little Gay's warm-hearted persuasions to hasten back to England and settle down in Castle Brand before the year was out. He glanced with abstracted eye over the notes of

astonishment, reproach, and regrets which his movements had elicited from his brother officers in the Guards, and then he put them all away, and tenderly broke the seal of the hoarded envelope.

And as his darkening eye took in the meaning of its heartless words, and his heart realized the hollowness, the vanity, the treachery of the woman who had penned them, an awful scowl settled upon his brow, a demoniac sneer curled his fierce lip, and for a moment he lifted his blazing eyes to heaven, as if in derisive question of its existence when such an earth lay below.

"Farewell, doting fantasy!" muttered St. Udo, tearing Lady Juliana's letter in two, and casting the fragments into the flames. "So ends my faith in goodness, truth, purity, as held by women. Once, twice, have I madly laid my life under woman's heel, to be betrayed, my foolish yearning after a better belief to be laughed at, flouted at, scorned. I might have stuck to my only deity, Fate, and let these idle dreams go. I would not then have received this last sting. I was right at first—there is no created being so traitorous, so cold, so cruel and Judas-like as a woman, except the devil who fashioned her."

He scanned the polite dismissal of the Marquis of Ducie and smiled with scoffing indifference, and folding his arms, stared into the hissing embers for a long time.

At sunrise six or seven detachments, among which were those of Colonels Brand and Calembours, received orders to march to the relief of an advanced post, and on their arrival, they were at once hurried into action.

St. Udo, on his maddened horse, was coursing before the serried ranks of his detachment, shouting his commands and cheering on his men to the attack, when a blaze of battery guns opened fire upon the rushing Federals, and, sweeping their lines obliquely, turned the sally into wild confusion.

Colonel Brand galloped along the broken line, calling them on, and waving his sword to the object of attack, the horse and his rider looming like spirits through the murk, and inviting the savage aim of a score of riflemen.

Heedless of the storm of red-hot hail, he pranced onward, inspiriting the quailing men by his fearless example, till his horse staggered under him, sprang wildly upward, then fell, with a crash, upon his side.

The colonel lay face up, stunned by the fall, and pinned to the ground by the limbs under his horse, and a host of the foe rushed down the slope and charged the wavering Vermont boys.

When St. Udo was able to look up, he saw a giant Southerner making toward him with clubbed musket. He was helpless, his men were everywhere grappling with their adversaries, and the colonel gave himself up for lost, when, lo! a tall figure darted from a neighboring thicket, the blue uniform of the Federal crossed the path of the Confederate giant, and with a furious lunge of the bayonet, he attempted to beat him back from his charge upon St. Udo.

The foe met him at first with a scornful cry, but, finding it impossible to escape him, turned and closed in desperate encounter. Hand to hand they struggled, now grappling with the fury of gladiators, now retiring and gazing in each other's faces with determination.

So well matched were they, that this terrible conflict lasted for full three minutes, and many stopped to gaze in wonder upon the desperate encounter; and St. Udo, dragged from under his dead horse and mounted upon another, paused to see the end.

The Federal soldier waited until the rush of a passing sally hampered his adversary's arm, and then, raising his clubbed gun on high, he brought it down with a crashing blow upon his head.

The giant threw up his arms, with a fearful cry, quivered from head to foot for a moment, and then fell backward, like a clod, dead.

The Federal hero turned to St. Udo with a grim smile.

Heavens! it was Thoms.

The next moment he had vanished in the whirl of battle, and was no more to be seen.

"Ye gods! he has saved my life!" cried St. Udo Brand. "Thoms, the despised—Thoms, the sleuth-hound—the old maniac! What can this mean? Have we used him badly?"

St. Udo, lying in his tent, mused deeply on the strange kindness which the man whom he had spurned had done him, when a shadow flitted near—Thoms, with his intent face and wary eye.

"Gad! I was looking for you to come, Thoms," cried St. Udo, getting up and extending his hand frankly. "I cannot express my thanks to you for your gallantry on my behalf to-day, but I am grateful for it, and there's my hand on that."

The long, brown fingers clutched his as if in a vise, and wrung them hard.

"Don't mention it, colonel. You was in danger, and I couldn't abear to have you killed yet," smiled the old man, grimly.

"By Jove! you make me ashamed of my suspicions of you," cried St. Udo, with ingenuous candor. "Let me say now that I am sorry for them."

"I knowed you would change your mind about me some day," muttered Thoms; "so I were contented to wait for the time, colonel."

"I was so sure you owed me some grudge, my good fellow," said St. Udo.

"No, Colonel Brand, I owe you no grudge as long as you trust me and don't treat me like a secret felon," exclaimed Thoms, in a hoarse voice. "And now that you treat me better, I'll never leave you as long as you live—I won't by Heaven!"

His sallow face, more ghastly than ever after the day's bloody toil, whitened in the lurid gloom of twilight, and a terrible smile played about the twitching corners of his mouth.

St. Udo placed a heavy hand upon his shoulder.

"Forgive me, my friend, for all my harshness to you," said he, earnestly. "I will not doubt your good faith again. Faith, man, you almost make me believe in disinterested goodness."

He turned away in deep emotion; he could say no more.

Was it an answering thrill which, stirring the secret heart of the strange old servant, sent his eyes, filled with such an unearthly glare, over the gallant colonel? He had saved him from a certain death, with mad bravery, that day; he had come to listen to his grateful thanks; yet, if ever the fires of Pandemonium blazed in human eyes, they blazed in his in that quiet, murderous look.

Steadily, surely, the man was creeping toward his secret purpose, and if St. Udo's entire trust removed another obstacle from his path, that obstacle was removed to-night, and nothing stood between him and the end.

"*Eh bien!*" chirped the chevalier, who had been an edified spectator of this scene. "Since we are all once more the happy family, let us be merry, let us sing, talk, and scare the blue devils away. Tell me the little history of your life in England, *mon ami*."

"England be hanged," returned St. Udo, returning to his gloom. "She gave me no history but the black records of vice, treachery, and disappointment. What do you want with such a history?"

"Amusement, instruction," yawned Calembours. "Something to make gray-bearded time fly quick."

"Very well, I accede for want of other employment. What shall I tell you of? My hours devoted to finding out the world, and presided over by idiot Credulity? Or my hours devoted to revenging my injuries upon the world, and presided over by the great Father of lies? What will you have?"

"Your life," breathed the chevalier, impressively.

St. Udo placed himself in a comfortable position and began with a smile of mockery. Calembours fixed his eager eyes upon him and listened intently; and Thoms crept into the shadow behind the tent, crouched there on his knees, and held his breath patiently.

So the story was told.

Every incident worthy of note in St. Udo's life was correctly narrated, every name connected with the characters involved stated, their portraits distinctly painted, their characteristics faithfully recalled, with many a reference to the pocket-album, between; clear as if he lived it all over again, St. Udo placed his past before the eyes of the Chevalier de Calembours.

And neither the chevalier nor St. Udo Brand saw the slow-match flickering over a tiny note-book behind the tent, or heard the stealthy scrape of a pencil as long, brown fingers took down, in phonetic characters, the words dropping lazily from the unconscious man's lips.

When St. Udo had finished, the chevalier rose and stretched his cramped limbs.

"*Morbleu!* Time has fled nimbly this night. I forgot everything in your recital, *mon ami*. Thanks for your amiable complaisance; and now I retire to follow you in dreams. *Bon soir.*"

With a silent chuckle, he stepped from St. Udo's tent and disappeared to seek his own quarters.

Thoms, too, clasped up his tiny note-book, and creeping round the side of the tent, and observing that St. Udo sat absorbed in dark reverie, he wrapped himself in his blanket, and threw himself at St. Udo's feet, and soon fell asleep.

Then the night grew black and late, and silence brooded solemnly above the camp, broken only by the faint moan of the sleepless wanderer, or the picket's hollow tramp.

Twice the devoted preserver of St. Udo's life softly raised his head to look at Colonel Brand, and sank down again, and still the lonely man sat gazing into the lurid embers of the waning watch-fire, thinking his thoughts of gall.

Just before dawn he thought he heard a movement in the camp, a faint, uncertain tripping of a wary foot, a sly whistle, twice repeated.

Through the murky gloom St. Udo peered with languid interest at a spot of fire gently undulating toward his tent.

What could it be? A cannoneer's slow match! But what could bring a battery there—and at that hour?

Unwilling to alarm needlessly his slumbering command, he slid back from the glare of the camp-fire into the shadow of his tent, and rising, bent his steps to the neighborhood of the suspicious object.

A passing breeze, laden with the perfume of the familiar cigar, a brighter glow, revealing the drooping nose and pursed-up lips, declared the identity of the prowler.

"Pshaw, you Calembours again—what sets you prowling about again like a cat on the leads, or, rather a hungry jackal in a graveyard?"

"*Mai foi!* you wear your tongue passably loose, *mon ami*. A night cat? No, worse luck. No pretty little kittens to chase round here. A jackal among *les cadores*? You have too many of that sort down there already, stripping the dead and the living, too. Still, let us not scandalize the profession, the calling of the jackal is a noble one when there is genius and *finesse* to raise it from the *metier* to the art. But where the jackal points the lion pounces. You call me the jackal. *Eh, bien j'accepte*—it is mine to point, but it is for you, Monsieur le Lion, to take the leap."

"A truce to your riddles, and say what you've got to say—though why you can't come out with it openly, I can't conceive."

"Find, then, my little meaning," whispered the chevalier, impressively. "In two words, you shall be *au courant* with the affair. We have come here to push our fortune, but the jade flouts us, and ranks herself under the standard of the foe. Let us follow her thither. For you and for me there is neither North nor South, Federal nor Confederate. Soldiers of Fortune, we follow wherever glory leads the way, and victory fills the pocket. What of this last bagatelle of a victory to-day? We have escaped with our skins to-day; to-morrow we will loose them. No, *mon ami*, the South will win the day; so join we the Southern chivalry as becomes *chevaliers d'honneur*."

"Why, you precious scoundrel! I always thought you somewhat of a puppy, but to propose this to me, an Englishman and a gentleman! Draw, you treacherous hound—draw, and defend yourself!"

And the steel blade glistened like the sword of the avenging angel before the eyes of the astonished Hun.

"*Sacre, mon Dieu!* Has he gone mad?" was his sole reply, as with the practical skill of an accomplished *maitre d'armes* his ready rapier was set, and parrying the lunges of his vexed opponent.

Still, with muttered explanations, blaspheming ejaculations and apologies, intermingled with furious rallies, he sought to moderate the just wrath of St. Udo, till at last, hearing loud shouts and footsteps approaching, by a quick turn he evaded St. Udo's pass, and dashed his sword out of his hand high in the air. Ere St. Udo could stoop to recover it, the traitor dealt him a mighty blow over the head, which felled him to the ground, and the last remembrance he had was the taunting "*au revoir*" of the renegade as he plunged into the thicket and vanished from pursuit.

When St. Udo recovered, he found himself surrounded by eager faces, and Thoms kneeling in the attitude of anxiety beside him, staring at him with intentness.

"What's all this, colonel?" demanded an old officer.

"Ha, by Jove! the rascal has escaped, has he?" cried St. Udo, getting up stiffly by the help of Thoms' shoulder.

"Who—who? A Confederate?" was cried on all sides.

"No, indeed, not a brave foe, but our precious Colonel Calembours himself. He has deserted to Lee's army, and had the audacity to tell his scheme to me. Quick, Thoms, your arm, man! I must communicate with the general and set scouts on his track."

St. Udo hastened to the general's tent as speedily as his reeling head would permit him.

A pursuit was immediately made of the fugitive, and precautions taken to foil his intended treachery; but the pursuit was fruitless—Calembours had dodged misfortune successfully this time.

Lying face down in his tent, St. Udo Brand mused over the fleeting incidents of his late existence, and owned himself at fault.

He looked back upon the friends he had expected fidelity from—which of them had not betrayed his trust? Upon the humble worm he had crushed with scorning heel—his life-preserver—his only friend now.

The deserted man scanned his reckless life, and in its shapeless fragments began to find a plan, and wonderingly, as a child fits together the scattered sections of his little puzzle, St. Udo linked the parted sections of his existence into their possible plan—and lo! he discovered that Providence held the key!

The remorseful man rose, and found Thoms studying him with his uncanny stare.

"My kind fellow," said St. Udo, gently, "Since your master has left you on my hands, and since I

can't forget the noble service you have done me, perhaps you had better enter my service and see me through the war?"

"That will I, colonel," answered Thoms, with a keen smile.

"You have been a good friend to me, and Heaven knows I have need of friends," said St. Udo, gratefully.

The glittering eyes watched him as intently as if the old man were learning a lesson.

"If there's anything I could do for you, Thoms, to mark my gratitude, I would like to hear of it," said St. Udo.

"Nothing, colonel, except to let me stay by you."

"You may get shot in battle, my man."

"So may you, colonel, and more likely."

"Well, we won't dispute about that," said St. Udo, sunnily. "But wouldn't you rather go North, out of the scrape?"

"I'll never leave you!"

St. Udo, glancing up gratefully, saw that in his eye, which chilled as with the finger of death, the warm words crowding to his lips; a thrill of mortal dread, a sure premonition of evil seized his soul, and he waited, with the words frozen, regarding the man with stony stare until he turned on his heel and shuffled out of sight.

That night, when Thoms ventured back to sate his gloating eyes again upon St. Udo Brand, he sought for him in vain—his sub-officer occupied his tent.

"Where is the colonel?" asked Thoms, turning sharply on the nearest soldier.

"Gone, two hours ago."

"Gone!"

How white the sallow face blanched. How the tones quavered.

"By Heaven, I have lost him," cried Thoms, vehemently. "Where did he go?"

"On a secret embassy somewhere."

"Without me!" groaned Thoms, with a wild flash of the wolfish eyes. "He has stolen away from me —*he has found me out*!"

CHAPTER VIII.

MARGARET'S VISION.

Lady Juliana Ducie concealed her disappointed love so well that no one would have suspected, not even simple Margaret Walsingham, that she suffered from its pangs.

As the summer season wore on and she began to get over her "awkward affair" with the rail-cars, she plunged into gayety, and a violent flirtation with the Irish duke, which threatened quite to banish any lingering memories of the soldier who was fighting in other scenes, and Hautville Park became thronged with illustrious visitors.

Margaret Walsingham, in her somber black dress, mingled as rarely as possible with the flippant cavaliers who were forever hanging about my lady's drawing-rooms, or dangling after her in her saunters with her companion. She rarely lifted her eyes when they bowed to the carelessly introduced Miss Walsingham; and never by any chance engaged in conversation with them.

Yet a new world of knowledge was opening to her daily, and filling her mind with absorbing speculations.

How often she heard St. Udo Brand, the young guardsman, discussed by these London fashionables, with appropriate jest or story, they laughed at his withering flashes of wit, admired his brilliant follies, and narrated his erratic generosities, with never a sigh for the heart which, to be so reckless now, must once have been so warm and true.

Day by day, the broken image of a primal god was built up in her heart with here and there a flashing glimpse of virtue, or a suggestion of innate chivalry of soul, or high-minded honor which contrasted sadly with the wild deviltry of a rampant friend.

And each day this simple woman carried some bright gem of goodness with which to deck her demi-god, until the vision seemed so kingly, that she took to defending his defects to herself, and covering them from her own eyes.

Morning and noon, and in the midnight hours, when strains of music and the din of revelry stole

dimly up to the companion's remote chamber, she dreamed of the possible angel in this man, and her soul yearned for his welfare, and mourned over the frailty of the moth which he had burdened with his trust.

"A true brave woman might reclaim him yet," she sometimes sighed; "but the last chance most probably is past with Lady Juliana."

"You are to dine with us to-day," said my lady, one morning, turning suddenly to Margaret from under the hands of her maid. "My cousin, Harry Falconcourt, has arrived, and insists on being introduced formally to the heroine who saved me; and as I am bored to death with always saying 'she does not go into society,' I have promised him."

"Dear Lady Julie, I hope you will not insist upon this!" exclaimed Margaret, much startled. "I really have nothing to do with society."

"Well, for all that, I am not going to allow you your privilege of seclusion on this occasion. I don't like leaving you alone so much."

So my lady made her way, though this time it was rather roughly carried through the heart of her companion.

The guests of his lordship's dinner party were the resident gentry, with their portly wives and blooming daughters, come to meet the London visitors of Hautville Park; and a great many bright uniforms mingled among the masses of silken drapery, feathers, jewels, black broadcloth, and tulle.

Lady Juliana kept her small territory at her end of the table in a continual ripple of delight by her quips and coquetries. She was in surprising spirits, for was not his Grace the Duke of Piermont on her right hand, and Sir Akerat Breckinridge, who was a slain subject, on her left?

His Grace, who was an ordinary-looking young man, with a bright, wholesome complexion, and pleasantly sparkling eyes, seemed almost bewitched by my lady's rapid flippancies; and watched her face as one might watch the play of the aurora borealis, shooting and dancing in the midnight sky.

"Who is that lady in the black velvet?" asked the duke. "Strange face! Most unlike any I have ever seen before."

"Where? Oh, with Harry Falconcourt? That is Miss Walsingham, my companion, adviser, censurer, and sheep-dog in general."

"I haven't seen such a face in my life before," continued the young duke, with deepening earnestness; "and it is so wholly stripped of animal beauty that the beauty that bursts from every look and tone is so mysterious. That is a countenance graced by goodness, bravery, candor, devotion. There are faces graced by bright eyes, an arched nostril, a small mouth; a row of white teeth, or a waxen complexion. Which is the greater charm, do you think?"

"I did not know you were such a physiognomist," said Lady Juliana. "Pray read *me*, my lord."

He looked over the arch face with the plausible smile, the graceful features, the peach-like bloom, and a faint shadow crossed his brow.

"You would be sinking in the first storm, Lady Juliana."

"Cousin Julie has suddenly subsided," said Harry Falconcourt, looking up to the head of the table. "A minute since she was sparkling as champagne, now she is tame as lemonade. What do you suppose has occurred, Miss Walsingham? A mutiny between her subjects?"

"Extraordinary disposition of the Brand estates down in Surrey," said a voice opposite. "They all go to a woman as hideous as one of Macbeth's witches, and the only scion of the race must either marry her or lose them."

"Is not that captain St. Udo Brand, of the Guards?" asked a gentleman in uniform.

"The same, major."

"Fine soldier, brave man. Did you see the gallant mention of him in the latest *American War Gazette*? Cut his way through three thousand of the enemy with his handful of Vermonters."

"A daring deed, major."

"Nothing when you know the vast nature of the man. He needed such scenes as are described in the sickening records of war to stir up the lion in him, and to bring out the gentleness too. He is the darling of his company—many a cheer, and I'll not be afraid to say a blessing also has greeted him in his tender visits to his suffering boys."

"You knew him at home here?"

"Knew Captain Brand? Like a brother, sir. Sad dog, but a noble man—a noble man."

What bright intelligence was in the deep gray eyes which watched the officer's face. But he did not see them, he was so absorbed by his subject.

A pause occurred in the gossip, for the band was having a rest of forty bars, and the flageolet was

weak.

At the request of Lady Juliana, Margaret carried her careladen face to the piano and played a long time, what—she knew not, but gradually, from mechanical measure, the chords grew into solemn pulsations, and a vision rose up before her introverted eyes of a darkened battle-field, where the cannon belched forth its fiery death, the bugle sounded the retreat, the soldiers shouted, and cheered, and fell.

She saw the smoke and dust, the red blood pouring, the brave falling fast; and a shrouded moon, with three black stripes across its disk, was shining weirdly over a man lying on his broken sword, his head upon the mane of his pulseless horse, his dark, dim eyes raised supplicatingly.

And a skulker among the dead was bending over him with demoniac eagerness, and the dastardly dagger was plunged hilt-deep, and the man who had been called a "hero" sank beneath the feet of the dead—and the vision passed away.

"Miss Walsingham." She turned her electric face—her hands fell from the ivory keys.

The gentlemen had entered the drawing-room, and the Duke of Piermont stood beside Lieutenant Falconcourt, waiting to be introduced.

"I have much pleasure in this introduction," said his grace, offering her an arm the instant that their hands met. "I would like much to talk with you, so honor me by promenading with me in the conservatory. In the first place, what was that extraordinary piece which you played?"

"I do not know—was I playing?"

His grace gazed at his companion in amazement. Doubt and terror still struggled for the mastery on her pallid features; the large, mystic eyes were fixed sadly upon vacancy. Miss Walsingham was quite unconscious that she was walking through the centre of the long suite with a man who was coveted from her by half the ladies there. "Is it possible that it was an impromptu?"

"I—pardon me, your grace—I was playing without thinking."

"Do you know what it suggested to me? A battle-field—the retreat of the conquered—darkness—treachery, and *murder*."

"My lord duke, what day of the month is this?"

She stopped in her sudden waking up to horror, and in her sudden eagerness she trembled as she stood.

"The first of September."

"*The first of September.* I shall not forget."

"You are certainly distressed by something, Miss Walsingham. Let me be of service to you?"

"You can be of service to me, your grace. You can allow me to retire, and make some apology for me to Lady Julie which will not alarm her."

The young duke bit his lip.

"You will return to me?" he asked.

"Not to-night."

She vanished through a dimly-lighted rotunda, leaving his grace gazing eagerly after her.

Crouching upon her knees by her chamber window, in the cold stream of moonlight, with clasping hands and yearning eyes, Margaret Walsingham questioned the silent heavens through the long hours for the meaning of the vision.

And yet the man had been her enemy!

CHAPTER IX.

A WOMAN'S VENGEANCE.

Through the dark fens, and the yielding morass, and the spicy sycamore grove, and the mossy walnut woods of Virginia, stole a gray-faced man; panting, hunger-smitten, weary; starting at every crash of the rotten underbrush, stopping ever with dilating eye to peer from the top of every hill into the valley beneath.

And a thin, tawny shadow glided before him with his nose upon the ground, and his eyes flaming ferociously—a blood-hound upon the trail.

Thoms had deserted from the army, and was out in search of Colonel Brand, and this dog which he held in chains was guiding him foot by foot along the secret path which St. Udo had traversed to perform his embassy.

How the old man brightened when a blue curl of distant smoke promised him a speedy sight of St. Udo's watch-fire! How his limbs trembled and his haggard face blackened when the blood-hound wavered in his steady run, and sniffed about uneasily for a lost scent! How the wicked, tigerish eyes gleamed when the creature ran on again with eager haste and dripping fangs!

And the long brown fingers were ever straying toward the dagger in the bosom; and the cruel lips ever were sneering out their fell design; and the march seemed only a summer holiday to Thoms hastening to his colonel.

St. Udo Brand had been sent to Washington with dispatches, and was on his way South again to join his command.

Thus much had Thoms discovered, and he was sure of coming up with him in these pathless forests, if he trusted to the unerring instinct of his hideous guide.

It was a lovely day that first of September—so warm, and lambent, and sunny-hued that St. Udo, weary with nights and days of ceaseless exertion, ordered a halt in a cedar grove, and threw himself from his jaded horse to rest a while.

His twenty followers, who were struggling after him on foot, were overjoyed to throw themselves beside him, and soon most of the poor fellows were fast asleep on their arms.

The following day there was a slight skirmish, in which but one, a mere youth, was injured.

St. Udo was talking kindly to this youth, who lay quite still in a corner listening to the whispered words of cheer with a faint and hopeless smile, when a shadow fell across the sweet, dying face, and a woman's gasp of terror fell upon St. Udo's ear. He turned to look upon her, and started involuntarily.

There she drooped, with wild, grief-darkened eyes fastened on the boy, her fair cheeks white with horror, her shapely hands clasped in anguish; her snaky tresses lying low upon her sloping shoulders—a vision of surpassing grace and dumb sorrow—Madam Estvan.

How came she there? Where came she from, who had lain entombed in a holocaust of flame?

A spirit, was she? Ay, truly, a spirit of pity and grief, weeping over a brave boy-soldier's end.

"God bless you, madam!" burst from St. Udo's lips.

She turned her tranced eye from its shocked scrutiny of the boy, and lifted it in mute anguish to the colonel's. She did not recognize him in that supreme moment of her woe.

"Is he dying, do you think?" whispered she, pressing close.

The sweet face turned with a smile of anguish at her voice, the dark eyes opened on her lovely countenance with a far away look already in their depths.

"Yes, yes, madam, I am dying," murmured the boy.

"Oh, Edgar! Edgar!" moaned the woman, in harrowing tones, "must you go? I loved you so dearly, too—my last, my only hope on earth or in Heaven—my *son*!"

"Ah, madam, you did not treat me as your son."

"Hush!" whispered she, in anguish. "I was not to blame for that. Your father was to blame when he deserted us both, my poor boy. How could I fight against fate? In self-defence I parted from you, but I have loved you truly, Edgar."

"May God, to whom I go, forgive your cold rejection of me many times when I have besought you on my knees to let me call you mother. From place to place you have led me, keeping me at a distance all the while, and now my sad, lonely life must end here. Oh, madam, you have been cruel!"

She wept wildly, she raised him in her arms and kissed him many times, but her lips framed no excuse.

"To think that I should find you here, my boy," moaned she, "when I sent you North expressly for safety's sake. Why—why did you enter the army, Edgar?"

"To find death," said the calm, dying voice.

She laid him down upon the straw, and raised her streaming eyes to St. Udo Brand. They recognized him now, and grew hard and fierce. She rose, and clutched him by the arm.

"Where is that fiend in human shape who calls himself Colonel Calembours?" cried she, vehemently.

"I cannot tell," replied St. Udo. "He has played the traitor to the North; he must be with Lee's army."

"He has played the traitor to *me*, and to that boy, *his son*!" she exclaimed, vengefully. "He has deserted us for eighteen years, and now my boy is dying. He threw me back among the flames three months ago in Colonel Estvan's house as soon as he recognized in me *his wife*. Oh! can such a monster escape justice?"

"Did you come here to-day expecting to find Colonel Calembours?" inquired St. Udo, compassionately.

"I did. I have just come from a sickroom, which my terror drove me to after my servants had rescued me from being consumed in the flames which destroyed my only home. I hear that Monsieur Estvan was killed, and I searched in every hospital in Richmond, and every jail, for some tidings of the monster in case he might have been captured. Now, alas! I find my son in the agonies of death."

She knelt again by the boy and kissed his cold lips, smiling so stilly.

St. Udo left the hapless pair together, and strode to the doorway of the shed for a breath of Heaven's pure air; the despair, the misery behind him were wringing his heart, adamantine as he was wont to call it.

St. Udo suddenly heard the beat of hoofs, and in a moment a Confederate officer dashed in front of the tent and reined up.

"*Eh bien! Monsieur, mon ami*," chirped a familiar voice. "Well met, my colonel. *Par ma foi.* I like this extravagantly—yes."

And the Chevalier de Calembours, dismounting from a magnificent war-horse, performed a profound obeisance.

"You unhanged villain!" shouted St. Udo, scornfully.

A white face peered out from behind Colonel Brand. Madam Estvan glided out, and put a nervous hand upon the chevalier's arm.

"Come here," whispered the wan lips, sadly.

He went with her into the tent, and looked at the sweet young face, sealed with the smile of death, of a noble soldier lad.

"Colonel Calembours, look at your son," whispered madam.

The chevalier grew ghastly white. Truly this fair, smiling dead bore his own sin-coarsened lineaments; but the woman! Who was she?

Just then there were heard shouts mingled with firing, and, ere the chevalier's eyes had time to light upon that beautiful face, a random ball struck him down at her feet. Like a bolt of retribution from Heaven, it laid him across the senseless clay of his deserted son.

And, with a shriek that tingled in the shocked St. Udo's ears, the lovely woman sank beside her dead, and the dark blood of her perfidious husband oozed onto her dainty robes, and washed her trembling hands; and, turning to the battle, he saw no more.

In half an hour St. Udo led back his soldiers, and found her still there, with the senseless man's head in her lap, and her soft hands deftly dressing his gaping wound.

"He will live," said she, quite calmly. "I have snatched him back from death; he will live for me."

"Can you forgive such perfidy as his?" asked the wondering St. Udo.

"Yes, if he will take me to his heart again," she said, with a flash of ineffable yearning. "I will forget his indifference to me, his injustice to this dead boy. I will be happy to be his bond slave, if he will own me as his wife evermore, for—I love him."

How passionately she breathed the sublime words, "I love him!" How God-like was the forgiveness of such sins as his for such a plea!

St. Udo forced some drops of brandy into his unfortunate comrade's lips, and in time had the satisfaction to hear a deep sigh escape him.

"Calembours," exclaimed St. Udo, "look up and speak to this noble woman."

The chevalier opened his eyes, and strove to see her through the dim gloom, but vainly.

"My husband!" breathed the lady, with bitter tears, "will you cast me off for the third time? Ah, don't break my heart! My poor Edgar is dead, and I have not a soul but you, and after all these years of separation. Oh, Ladislaus!"

Her face sank on his breast, she clung to him with both eager hands.

He glared about him like some savage animal. He forgot his pain and his capture, in rage at such a proposition, and answered with an insulting laugh.

"Oh—ha, ha!" screamed he, with the enjoyment of a hyena. "This maniac mistakes the Chevalier de Calembours for her husband Ladislaus. Excellent! *nom de Dieu!* most excellent. Sweet madam, your troubles have crazed your brain. A chance resemblance has deceived you—*mon coeur*! You have mistaken your man."

She heard him with a gasp of horror.

She extricated herself and stood off, a dark shadow in the gray night.

"You repudiate me once more?" she cried, in a thrilling voice. "Traitor, renegade—spy! You are not worthy of a woman's love; but you shall feel a woman's vengeance!"

She snatched a stiletto from her bosom, and threw herself upon the prostrate rascal, but was caught by St. Udo and disarmed.

"Enough, madam," said he, icily; "the miscreant shall expiate his villainies by death, but not at your hands."

She submitted in silence, and without one backward look upon the man who had been her life's curse, she galloped back with her attendants, to watch over her dead boy, and to keep him from the dews of Heaven and the birds of prey for many a dread day.

There is yet another scene to paint in this series of life-pictures, gentle reader.

It is the last.

On through dim night sped the little force, under a rising moon eclipsed by drifting clouds, and met face to face a regiment in full march.

The leaders anxiously gazed at each other, hoping to encounter friends, but in the gloom their uniforms were undistinguishable.

"What regiment is yours?" demanded St. Udo, at last.

There was a pause, brief and ominous.

"What is yours?" cautiously returned the officer in command.

"The—Vermont," said Udo Brand.

"Then, in heaven's name, take it! Fire!" commanded the other.

A simultaneous flash along; each line distinctly revealed every face, and then the front ranks fell in the windrows under the murderous volley.

"Again!" shouted the Confederate leader.

Again his men stepped forward, aimed at St. Udo's handful, and again the brave Vermonters melted away like smoke before the wind.

Then Colonel Brand gave the orders for retreat, and sullenly took the rear of his diminished band. But the foe pressed close, and a chance shot killed his horse, and a flying pursuer dealt the rider a stunning blow, and left him for dead; and the battle-storm rolled away, and was lost in the distant woods.

And when the shrouded moon was shining (three black stripes across its disk) upon the man lying on his broken sword, with his head upon the neck of his pulseless horse, he heard a rustle in the dewy leaves, and footsteps soft and sure approaching, and he raised his dark, dim eyes supplicatingly, for he thought of faithful friends who might be seeking him.

But a long, lean hound was baying hoarsely, and its red eyes gleamed like chysolites, and it led, step by step, the shuffling feet of a haggard man who long had sought St. Udo.

And the skulker came to his side, and looked in his face with demoniac eagerness, and plunged the dastardly dagger hilt-deep into his breast, and stood erect with a long, wild, triumphant laugh.

So the moon rode on in clearer majesty, and the night-dews dripped upon the slain—for "the dearest tears which heaven sheds are her dews upon the dead hero's face."

CHAPTER X.

MARGARET AGAIN A WANDERER.

Heavily passed the days of Margaret Walsingham, having, as we know, that secret apprehension on her mind which the vision of the battle-field had cast, and waiting with sick anxiety for news from the war, which might explain to her what that vision might mean.

Heavily pass the days, and October's brown era came sighing down to strip the trees.

Lady Juliana was having her last ball at Hautville Park before her visitors should throng back to the city for the opening season, and for the second time she insisted upon her companion being present. She was so determined to have her way that Margaret had perforce to obey, all unconscious of the trap which was making ready for her. The mighty rooms of the chateau glittered with a thousand wax tapers; garlands of richest flowers festooned the walls; bewildering strains of music intoxicated the senses.

My lady, the loveliest being there, shimmered about here and there, the beauty of the ball, the adored of half the gentlemen.

Miss Walsingham, seeing no reason why she should be among the revelers, when her heart was so heavy with cares for the last of the Brands, soon glided into a small Saracenic cloister, which was lighted dimly by a single iron lamp, and from it watched with wistful and still tender interest the fairy-like figure of her Lady Julie.

She had not been there a quarter of an hour, when the Duke of Piermont, passing through hurriedly, as if late for some engagement, caught sight of her, and stopped short before her.

"My dear Miss Walsingham! To see you among us is a pleasure indeed. You'll waltz with me?"

"I am strictly a spectator, your grace—thanks."

"What! Not even walk through the Polonaise with me? Well, I shall forswear the mazes also. Will you come to the conservatory? I think there is some amazing flower of Lady Juliana's out—blooms once in a hundred years or so. Come and see it."

"I think that your presence is expected in the ball-room. Lieutenant Falconcourt has been dispatched to seek for you."

His grace glanced at his tablets and frowned.

"Too late to keep my promise now," he muttered, "so I may as well follow my own inclinations. I shall remain conveniently invisible, with your permission, Miss Walsingham."

"Your grace must not count upon my permission."

"Hulloa!" cried a voice "Cousin Julie is on the tenterhooks of impatience for you, Piermont. You are too late to open the ball with her. Oh, do I see Miss Walsingham?"

Lieutenant Falconcourt joined the pair with looks of curiosity, and rendered his respects to my lady's companion.

"Remain here a few moments, while I see Lady Juliana," said the young duke, hurriedly pressing her hand.

In a moment he was gone, and Harry Falconcourt was in his place by her side.

"My dear Miss Walsingham," he said, half gayly, but with a slight appearance of anxiety in his manner, which did not escape her notice, "do you know that you have cast a spell over our duke, which he seems inclined to wear under the very eyes of my Cousin Julie?"

"You cannot surely mean——"

"He is perfectly bewitched; and as I know you are quite unconscious of it, I fore warn you."

Margaret sat silent for some time, plunged in an uneasy reverie. This thing gave her a disagreeable shock for which she was not prepared. She inwardly reviewed her position at Hautville Park, and a cold chill of disappointment crept into her heart.

Must she leave her giddy darling, Lady Julie?

"I cannot believe it—I will not!" she exclaimed, with momentary fire. "His grace is not so foolish as to intend this thing. You exaggerate his emotions in regard to me."

The fairy-like form of my lady floated past the draperied door on the arm of Piermont, and as she passed, her eyes sought the pair in the cloister with visible triumph; then she turned to his grace again.

"You see," said Margaret, eagerly clinging to the first straw of hope, "they perfectly understand each other, and your warning is superfluous."

Falconcourt smiled, but dropped the subject, and applied himself with considerable relish to the task of entertaining my lady's companion.

As long as she could see his grace, the duke, and Lady Juliana amicably promenading, or revolving in each other's arms, she spoke well and admirably, but the instant that they parted, she became quite *distrait*, and nervously dreaded the appearance of the duke.

So agitated did she become with this threatened return before her eyes, that her face became white as chalk and her tones husky and indistinct.

"Excuse me if I leave you," she said, at last, desperately.

"I may return, if I overcome this faintness."

She had just sufficient strength to slip through the outer door, of the cloister into the cool hall, and to make her way to a balcony, where night breezes swept crisply over her, and the upper edge of the round, red moon smote her face with the glow of one of Raphael's angels.

There she stood, gazing down upon the dark trees, her heart a chaos of troubled reverie.

"On the first of September, at the battle of Chantilly, it is feared."

Voices of men in eager colloquy; two figures lounging on the terrace steps beneath.

"Where did you see it?"

"In the last *War Gazette*—Colonel Brand's company almost cut to pieces, and the colonel killed.

"Poor fellow! Do they know it here?"

Margaret turned and walked with a steady step to her own room, stabbed through the heart with this sudden dagger.

On the first of September!

The tidal swell of memory broke over her reeling senses with a dull admonition of something more dreadful than death.

It was not a gallant death in the midst of battle she had to mourn; it was not a brave end to a brilliant day of heroism. No—by the murk of that ghastly vision, by the shadow of the skulker among the dead, it was murder!

Late at night she was disturbed in her chamber by a visit from her Lady Julie.

"I want to say a few words to you, Miss Walsingham."

Margaret looked at the flushed face, the unsmiling lips, with wonder.

"I have been listening to an extraordinary list of your perfections from the Duke of Piermont," she commenced, trembling, "and I find from the intimate terms in which he mentions you, that you are no strangers to each other. As I never anticipated the possibility of being rivaled by my companion, I wish you distinctly to understand that I intend to brook no intermeddling of any one of that class. You came between me and my betrothed before, and drove him to his death; you shall not mar my prospects again for want of a distinct understanding on the subject. If I had known that Miss Blair was the woman who had come into possession of St. Udo Brand's property, no inducement would have betrayed me into taking her as my companion, and thus laying myself open to her machinations a second time."

"Lady Julie," said Margaret, whose face had grown terribly pale, "I am not worthy of these ungenerous imputations. Reconsider what you have said and treat me more justly."

"Did I bring you here to be my mentor?" cried my lady. "Did I ever suppose that you could meddle with my destiny? Here is the Duke of Piermont, who was ready to kiss my foot-prints, openly setting me aside and searching for a woman who acts as my private attendant or companion, and raving over her perfections. Have I employed you here to be my rival, Miss Walsingham? Have I set you over myself?"

She stood confessed at last; her grudging and jealous soul looked forth from her sapphire eyes, and recognized Margaret Walsingham as her mental superior, and consequently her enemy.

No twinges of gratitude deterred her from her jealous rage; no love, begot by her patient Margaret's goodness and devotion, stirred her small, chill heart.

The spiteful blow was struck upon the woman who had saved her life.

"As long as I could be a solace or a help to you, Lady Julie," faltered Margaret, pale as death, "I wished for no greater happiness than to be with you, and to serve you faithfully, *faithfully*, my lady, whatever you may in your anger say; but now, I see that my influence has passed away, and my duty is to leave you."

"You leave too late," cried my lady, tauntingly. "You have caught your fish and can afford to leave the fish-pond now, I suppose. Really, I think it no bad thing for a sea-captain's daughter to become the Duchess of Piermont and the mistress of Seven-Oak Waaste."

"Lady Julie! Lady Julie!" cried Margaret, turning away with an unutterable heart-pang, "I have loved you well, and should not be treated thus. I desire to be neither the wife of the Duke of Piermont nor the mistress of Seven-Oak Waaste."

She opened her wardrobe and began, with trembling hands, to array herself in her bonnet and cloak, and to arrange a few things in her small travelling-bag, tears dripping slowly all the time.

"What are you going to do?" sneered my lady, watching her movements with incredulity.

"To go away—to find another home, Lady Julie."

"What! so suddenly? Without bidding his grace farewell? How cruel of Miss Walsingham to treat her enamored admirer so."

Margaret took no further notice of my lady, but hastened her movements toward departure.

"Had you not better wait till the morning?" said Lady Juliana, fretfully, "and see my father before you go? Or are you anxious to go in this absurd manner so that you may blason to the whole world how badly I have treated you?"

"This interview is safe with me," said Margaret, turning on the stairs; "and you may smooth over my departure as you please."

"And where is Bignetta to send your boxes, and where is my father to send your salary?"

"To the Lambeth express office until I send for them. Farewell, my lady."

With a sigh in which there was no bitter resentment, though her injuries had not been slight, poor Margaret Walsingham flitted down the silent staircase, and, heedless of the servants, who were putting out the lights, and who stared curiously at her, she went out into the park.

The night wind moaned drearily among the stately trees; a Brazilian bird in my lord's aviary uttered a piercing shriek of warning, as a hoarse baying of a hound broke from the kennels.

Down by the gray stone fountain, where a laughing naiad flung jets of water from her golden comb, Margaret turned back and looked upon my lady's lighted windows as Eve looked upon guarded Paradise.

How she had filled her whole heart and fed her boundless love with this girl.

Was it Heaven's will that all whom she loved should sting her thus? She was a waif sent wandering through a world which shrank from her as if Cain's mark burned upon her brow?

So Margaret Walsingham turned again and drifted down into the world which had never a beating pulse for her, and went to find—she knew not where—a place to work in, a sphere to fill, a duty to perform.

She was friendless, and heart-hungered, and despitefully wronged; but God was her keeper.

Poor Margaret had been travelling about from place to place for the past fortnight, in the vain hope of finding a situation.

Her money had leaked away somewhere—there were plenty who were quite willing to rid her of the scant burden, and now, as she looked into her purse, she found but one silver-piece upon which to exist through as much of the murky future as her anxious eyes could pierce.

The Marquis of Ducie, with the prodigality of a great mind, had been pleased to send the sum of five pounds to the Lambeth express office for Miss Walsingham, with the promise of a payment at some future time of what salary was still due.

The five pounds had weathered fourteen days of traveling, extortion, and inexperience, but it had come to its last shilling now, and Margaret was desperately in earnest as she held the lean purse in her hand and asked herself the question, "What shall I do now?"

She looked about the smoky houses, and down at the broad river, where the forest of masts bristled between her and the dappled horizon.

She wandered down to one of the docks, and seating herself upon a coil of rope, gazed absently at the green-tinged water below. Poor Margaret's heart was so absorbed in her musings, that she did not notice that the man who was stumbling over a length of tarry chain, in his eagerness to reach her, was his grace, the Duke of Piermont.

CHAPTER XI.

UNREQUITED LOVE.

"Good gracious, Miss Walsingham! Is it possible that this can be you?"

He seized her hand with a pressure which told of his delight; his tones were thrilling with glad excitement; his face was beaming with joy at this queer meeting.

He drew her up from her rough seat, and, still retaining her hand, made her walk with him, as if he was determined not to lose her again, and he feasted his eyes upon her face, utterly heedless of the group of gayly-dressed people he had left, and rattled on with a storm of inquiries.

"Where did you disappear to? No one could give me any satisfaction about you, and I sought you in every direction. Come away from this confounded dock. What are you doing here alone? Will you walk with me, and let me have a conversation with you? Don't deny me this time, Miss Walsingham. We're not at Hautville Park."

They walked through the crooked lanes of the town, and took a road which led anon to mown fields, and to furze commons, and to holts of scrawny hazel, where the red clouds of evening could gaze upon their deeper reflections, unbroken by toiling barge, or floating timber, or stationary ships; and where pleasant willows made flickering shadows, and dipped into the rippling current.

"Now," said the young duke, when nothing but the bleating of lambs or the lowing of oxen was likely to interrupt them, "tell me why you left Hautville Park, and what you are doing here?"

"Why do you put me through such an inquisition?" asked Margaret. "When I left Hautville Park I wished to be dropped by Lady Juliana's friends. Your grace will confer an obligation by remembering this."

"I do not aspire to the honor of being Lady Juliana Ducie's friend, therefore beg to be considered exempt from your prohibition."

"On your own behalf, then, your grace, I am compelled to forbid any further interest in my movements. My sphere in life utterly removes me from your attention, and my path will probably never cross yours after to-day."

"Miss Walsingham," cried the young duke, fervently, "I will not let you away this time without hearing me. I want to tell you that I formed an opinion concerning you when my eyes first picked you out at the marquis' dinner-table, which each hurried interview since has only strengthened, and I have wished to tell you ever since that evening what a profound impression your graces of mind have made upon me. Whatever wrongs the world may accuse you of, I have the utmost confidence in you. I know that you will pursue none but a noble, unselfish course—that you are the purest, ay, and the bravest woman whom I ever met."

Margaret was quite silenced by this outburst, and walked on almost frightened by the novelty of her position.

It struck her that the man walking by her side and gazing so eagerly into her face was the only stanch friend she had on earth.

For a brief moment she had a glimpse of the sweetness which gladdens the life of a woman beloved, and then she woke to calmer reality, and put the vision from her firmly.

"I am afraid that you think all this very premature," resumed his grace, again taking up the tale, "and so I suppose it is, to you. But it is not so to me. I could not have a deeper devotion and admiration for you years hence than I have now. Dear Miss Walsingham, will you make me immeasurably happy by bestowing your hand upon me?"

"I am compelled to reject your grace's proposal."

The pair walked mechanically on for some minutes, the young man whirling his cane furiously, Margaret eyeing with tear-laden eyes the dusty turnpike before her.

"I think you had better take a rest for a few minutes," said his grace, when he had whirled the gold top of his cane and had nothing else to do; "we have been walking quite fast, and are at least a mile and a quarter from the village."

He spread his perfumed handkerchief on a flat stone, and Margaret, obeying an impulse the very opposite of that which she intended, sank down wearily upon it.

"I am not surprised that you have refused my offer so decidedly," said the young duke, returning to the attack as he paced restlessly back and forth in front of her "when I remember how utterly unknown my temper and disposition are to you, and how recent our acquaintanceship still is. I am ready to admit my own presumption in addressing you. But Miss Walsingham dear Miss Walsingham, may I hope that when you know me better, when you have studied me long enough, and have completely made up your mind about all that is bad or good in me, you will then permit me to address you as I have done to-night, and say yes or no, with more justice to me."

"Why do you come to me with this request? Have you not been paying court to the Marquis of Ducie's daughter all summer? I ask you this before I can assure myself that your avowal is an honor to me. Your answer cannot influence in the slightest my decision."

"I give you my word of honor, Miss Walsingham, that I have not been paying court to Lady Juliana Ducie; if you wish to know why, I found that her heartless desertion of St. Udo Brand, after he lost his property, outweighed with me her fascination; and, having accidentally become acquainted with the whole story, I naturally preferred to shun the fawning lip and clasping hand, and the craven heart of a Judas in woman's lovely seeming, that I might find her contrast in Margaret Walsingham."

"Do not mention the dead," said Margaret, deeply moved. "I can never, never forget that I was the unwilling cause of his early death."

She was weak and exhausted, though as yet she did not know it, and she bowed her head to weep in an abandonment of grief, which came upon her unawares and would not be set aside.

His grace stopped with folded arms to look at her. Here was the woman who was enriched by the death of a man who had insulted her, mourning his untimely end with bitter tears. A vision of the woman who had plighted him her troth rose up to confront this grief-shaken figure with decorous sighs, and shallow regrets, and heartless unconcern, and he put away the red-lipped siren from his thoughts with an execration of scorn, and clung anew to faithful Margaret.

"Should it be ten years hence that you relent, let me try my fate a second time," he cried, grasping her hand in his increased fervor of admiration.

"Leave me," murmured Margaret. "I have given you my answer—crown your acts of kindness by leaving me."

The wind swept over the flat moors with a bleaker sound; she gathered her mantle closer, and rose to face the east—sad-colored as her own future.

"And where are you going?" asked the Duke of Piermont. "Surely you are not going to hide

yourself from all your friends? You will let me know where you purpose residing until you procure the situation you are in search of?"

I wonder what his grace would have said, had he known how utterly destitute she was—that she had but one shilling at that moment in her pocket—that the only friend to whom she could or would apply was her Father in Heaven?

"I cannot answer your questions," said Margaret, holding out her hand to him; "but since you are so generous with your interest, I shall let you into the secret of my future movements, always with the understanding that the Marquis of Ducie and his friends shall not know. Now, my lord, I have nothing more to say to you, except to thank you for the intended honor which it would be ridiculous in me to accept. See, there is a shower coming up, and you will get wet before you can return to the village. Good-by."

"But you—Good Heaven! Miss Walsingham, where are you to go?"

She waved her hand toward a farm-house, and walked swiftly away as if she would seek shelter there.

And the last that he saw of her, was her black garments like a speck on the murky road, seeming to walk in between two great thunderous clouds, and to be swallowed up.

Margaret kept hurrying on, so absorbed in her musings that she passed the farm-house, where she might have found a hospitable shelter for the night, and hurried down the lonely road away from the river, where the rising wind waited for her at sudden corners, and the black clouds descended nearer with the darkening night.

And she hurried on faster, and her eyes pierced the gathering blackness, with the sad and weary gaze of one whose heart carries a secret sorrow, and tears fell slowly from them, which blurred the way, and blotted out the lowering sky.

Where had she wandered to?

There was no friendly light from any cottage window to guide her, no sheep-bell or halloo of herd-boy. Her clothes were heavy with moisture, and she was very tired and very desolate.

How her head ached, and her arms!

Oh! if she could just be so blessed as to sink upon some kind woman's bed this very moment, and sleep!

Perhaps she would fall in some lime-pit, or ditch, or into the slimy lock of some canal, and die miserably.

Who would weep for her if she died? Who cared for Margaret Walsingham?

And the thought of her utter desolation overcome her, as weariness, hunger, and storm had failed to do.

She crouched down beneath a furze-bush, and, resting her hot and beating head upon her hands, wept, poor soul!

And then came unconsciousness and utter oblivion.

"I declare, John, she knows me! Here, take a sup o' this barley-water, my lamb. Dear heart! she's sensible once more. Ain't there another drop than this, John? Mayhap it's plenty." Margaret looked with languid eyes upon the rugged figure of a man, clad in dingy red-dust habiliments, who was standing between her and a small window, with his head sunk in a curious way between his hands.

His brawny shoulders were heaving, and his rough shock of hair trembled like sea-grass in a hurricane, while a gurgling sort of noise issued from him.

Had a fit of laughter seized him, or was the man crying?

Whose bed was she lying in, hung with red calico curtains?

Where had she seen that figure in the clay-colored smock before?

And then Margaret saw a sallow-faced woman of spare figure bending over her, with a tin cup in her hand, and a glistening channel down each cheek.

"Mrs. Doane!" she breathed, in wonder.

"There I knowed it! Hark to that, John!" cried the woman, with an exultant chuckle, which threatened to be strangled by a sob.

"Didn't she call me by name, the blessed lamb?"

She raised the blessed lamb in her arms, who, truth to say, scarcely recognized herself by such an unwonted title, and held the tin cup to her lips.

Sweeter to Margaret than Lusitanian nectar such as Chianti yields was her drink of barley water.

Margaret without working out the queer problem of how she came there, fell into a deep and quiet sleep.

And between sleeping profoundly, eating morsels of food with ravenous enjoyment, lying placidly wakeful and watching without curiosity the movements of her two nurses, Margaret saw the young moon grow into a full, round orb, which glimmered in a halo through the bottle-green glass of the cracked window, and silvered her from head to foot, each long, still night; and at last strength came to her, and with it recollection.

"Did I come to you, Mr. Doane?" she asked, one evening, when that person was sitting by her bedside peacefully smoking his pipe, and listening with pride to the voice of Johnnie in the kitchen chanting his spelling lesson.

"Come to us? No, miss, you didn't but we come to you," replied the bricklayer, stuffing down the ashes further into his pipe.

"I want to know about it, please; I do not understand at all how I am at Lynthorpe."

"Where was you when you was took bad?"

Margaret pondered a long time.

"The last I distinctly remember is of being a mile and a half from Rotherhithe."

"Lor-a-musy! and didn't nobody give ye a seat in their wagon down here? Did you walk all the way, and so light of head like?" She put her thin hand to her forehead again.

"I remember of being lost on a common outside of Rotherhithe," she answered, "and I do not know what became of me after that. I sat down to rest, and I suppose I must have been there all night. Is it long ago?"

"What date was it, dear miss, that you was lost on the moor? Can ye mind that?"

"It was the seventh of October."

"Just think o' that now! It was two days after that when I found you sitting at the foot of a hay-rick in Farmer Bracon's land, a mile from here. You was a sorry sight, but I know'd yer again, and came close to yer. You was neither sleeping nor not sleeping, but whispering to yourself; so I brought you home to the wife, and she and me we've nursed ye through, thank heaven! And here's the papers as was found on ye, miss, by the wife," rising and producing them from a carefully-locked little box in the cupboard; "and here's the purse with a shilling in it, which was all that we saw with ye, and you a sending me a guinea reg'lar every quarter for Johnnie's schooling, for a kind miss, as ye are."

Margaret lay quiet for a while; her deep gray eyes were full of tears, her bleached face tremulous with smiles.

"Heaven is taking great care of me, and I have much to be thankful for. Kind John Doane and his wife, for instance."

The bricklayer puffed hard, and slowly spelled out her meaning, and arrived at it with a snort of surprised pleasure.

"Is it Betsy and me that you want to be thankful for? You as is our guarding angel, what made a man of Johnnie as can read most as well as the curate himself. And haven't every one of the nine of us, down to the babby, felt as if we had a angel under the roof for the last three weeks?"

"Have I been three weeks ill?"

"Three weeks, dear miss; seven days of 'em you wasn't in your head at all, and Dr. Ramsey weren't easy about you—weren't easy at all. It were inflammation of the brain."

"And you out of your pittance—you have nursed me through all this?"

"And proud to do it, miss."

"But if I had died, who would make up to you the doctor's bill, or your own ease?"

"Dear miss, don't!" His hard hand went up to wipe the starting tears. "If you had died, it's not us as would stop our mourning to think of the mite you cost us. You ain't like the rest of the Peerage—you comes down to we; you had a heart, so you had, and felt for we, and we never forgets that."

"Kind John Doane, how shall I repay you?"

She buried her face and wept.

The cheerful crackle of a fagot fire came from the kitchen grate, long spurts of yellow light outlined upon the wall Mrs. Doane's figure as she danced the youngest toddler on her knee, and Margaret fell asleep to the words:

"Dance to your daddy,
My bonny babby;

Dance to your daddy,
Do, dear, do-o!
You'll get a wee bit fishie,
In a wee bit dishie,
And a whirligigie,
And a buttered scone!"

CHAPTER XII.

ST. UDO BRAND NOT DEAD.

Margaret was sitting up at last in the bricklayer's doorway, muffled in shawls, and shuddering nervously at every jarring sound about her.

A chariot was approaching the bricklayer's cottage from the village of Lynthorpe, and on its panel glittered the arms of Castle Brand.

Already the coachman, Symonds, had seen the invalid at the door, and was talking to some one inside, and in the next minute the chariot was drawn up before the door, and the familiar figure of little Dr. Gay was stepping out.

"Found at last, my dear girl!" cried he, radiantly; "and a fine search we have had of it. Bless my soul, though, you aren't too strong yet! Don't be frightened, dear."

The thin, trembling hands were clasped nervously on the swelling breast.

Margaret looked piteously around, as if for succor.

"I need not be, I hope, sir," she said, faintly.

"No, I'm sure not," cried the doctor, pressing her hand; "although you have contrived to hide yourself from us for eight months, just as though you did fear your old friends. But, now that you have failed so signally in your endeavor to work for your own bread, perhaps you will see your duty plain before you, and won't refuse to fulfill the will which has been so long and uselessly withstood. Hey! my dear?"

The pale woman lifted her dark eyes resolutely, her delicate nostril quivered.

"Dr. Gay," said she, "you must see that I am in no state to discuss business matters with you."

"By the lord Harry! I should think not," cried the little doctor, "so we won't discuss 'em at all; we'll just quietly do as we are bid."

"You have sought me when I wished to be lost to you," said Margaret, "but that can't make much difference now. I have long made up my mind what I am to do. Dr. Gay, I tell you I shall not go to Seven-Oak Waaste."

"Miss Margaret," he said, reassuredly, "we sha'n't say another word about these affairs until you are stronger; but you can't stay here, you know, so just come along with me, and Mrs. Gay can take care of you for a while. Does that suit better?"

She calmed herself presently and thought over it with a forlorn feeling of helplessness.

"Thanks, you are very kind," said she, "but why can't I stay here? I hope to repay these kind friends when I am well again."

"Rubbish!" flouted the doctor, good-humoredly. "You don't feel it, perhaps, but for all that you must be an additional burden on the woman's time, which money can never repay. Come home with me, my dear, and get strong, and then talk over your affairs with Davenport and me like a sensible woman."

Her head drooped sadly on her breast, and a scarlet blush tinged her poor cheek. She felt the imputation keenly, although Mrs. Doane had crept close to her chair, and was eagerly whispering how little of a burden she had thought her dear, kind miss!

"I must be a Marplot no more," whispered Margaret to her humble friend, with a weary sigh. "I have done so much harm already to everybody that I must be very careful, dear Mrs. Doane."

The bright tears were dropping fast from her wistful, remorseful eyes, and her sensitive nature urged her hard to part from this faithful heart before she should do it a hurt; so that the little doctor had the satisfaction of gaining his point, after all, and wrapped her up from the autumn mists with a gratified glow.

How she wept as she tottered to the sumptuous close carriage and sank among the velvet cushions! Had she been leaving a prince's palace the tender soul could not have felt it more.

"Doant 'ee cry, dear miss," blurted the honest bricklayer, who had come home to dinner, and was wistfully watching the departure, "yer luck's took a fort'nate turn. Praise be blessed for't, so doant 'ee affront the Lord with them tears. God be wi' ye, dear miss, we woan't forgit ye, nor you

us—that I kin bet on."

So she was forced to leave them, though her heart turned sadly toward them in their sordid hut, and fain would have sunned itself in that sweet love which never shone in her own dim path of life.

In the dusk of that November day Margaret Walsingham entered Dr. Gay's neat residence in Regis, ostensibly to be under his immediate care.

She was with him because, poor soul, she had no other home which she would enter. He took her there because he hoped to overcome her half-sick fancies about Castle Brand, and to send her forth to take possession of the fortune which was, to all intents and purposes, her own.

For a few days the guest kept her room, and her own counsel, but at the end of a week she came out to the parlor, with a grave, firm face, and declared herself quite recovered.

The doctor was sitting in his arm-chair, by a cozy, crackling fire, and was absently trotting a bouncing baby of ten months on his knee, while he anxiously pored over a huge medical book at his elbow; and Mrs. Gay was stitching a cambric frill in her easy chair opposite, and watching the clumsy nurse with a face of long-suffering patience.

And Margaret, gliding into the room in her thread-bare black robes, and, with a gentle yet resolute face, seemed like the apparition of some tragedy queen coming upon the stage where the farce was still enacting.

"Ah! Good-evening, good-evening, my dear Miss Walsingham!" cried the doctor, jumping up and dumping the baby unceremoniously into his wife's lap. "Take this chair and this footstool. Are you better?"

"Thanks. I am well now," said Margaret, quietly seating herself. "And I would like to confer with you and Mr. Davenport upon my future prospects."

"Never mind 'em now, Miss Margaret," said the doctor, kindly. "You are far from strong yet."

"Please summon Mr. Davenport," returned she.

"Stubborn as ever, my dear," grumbled he, laughing. "You're pretty quiet about it, but you will have your way."

"Yes, I must have my way," said Margaret, with a sad smile.

So Dr. Gay bustled off, and brought the lawyer back with him, and presented their ward, sitting alone by the fire; Mrs. Gay having sighed out her regrets that her poor health sent her to bed so early, and retired thither.

"Gad! Miss Walsingham," blurted Mr. Davenport, shaking hands. "Your adventures haven't agreed well with you. Why, you're about as gaunt as my walking stick!"

"I am quite well for all that," said she, somewhat eagerly, "and am, of course, anxious to arrange my future before me."

The executors sat down opposite her, full of expectation.

"It seems that you are aware of Captain Brand's reported death," said the lawyer, briskly: "therefore that obstacle is removed from your way, and you can hesitate no longer in taking possession of Seven-Oak Waaste. Is that what you wish to say?"

"I have decided what I shall do with the property," she said, in a melancholy voice, "and I have summoned you here to announce my wishes to you."

"Are they to be taken down in legal form?" sneered the lawyer.

"Yes," she replied, humbly. "I wish to do some good while I have the power, with money which would only be a curse to me, and would drag my soul down to despair. I am resolved to sell Seven-Oak Waaste, and found a charitable institution with the proceeds."

The executors stared aghast in her face, so cold and hopeless, but they read no faltering there.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated the little doctor, in a fright, "she'll do it, you see."

"Well, madam, of course your will is law," said the old lawyer, grimly, "but you can't have it obeyed immediately for all that. The year mentioned in the will is not finished yet; and that puts obstacle number one in the way of your scheme; and St. Udo Brand's death has not been proved yet, and that puts obstacle number two in the way of your scheme. You must wait four months yet, you see."

Her face fell, and she sank immediately into apathy, which neither of the executors sought to rouse her from, and soon she bade them good-night, and went to her room.

"Obstinate as a mule," muttered Mr. Davenport, as he and his colleague sat nearer the fire, and sipped their mild punch. "By George, I never was so angry at a woman before. What does she expect to end in?"

"I expect her to end in a mad house," returned the doctor, with an uneasy look toward the door.

"She has all the symptoms of incipient insanity."

"Incipient tomfoolery!" growled the lawyer, contemptuously. "You don't catch a strong-willed woman like that turning crazy. She always was a mystery to me, you know."

Some weeks passed, the executors professed to be searching for the legal proofs of Colonel Brand's death. Davenport had written to Washington desiring particulars. In reality they were merely amusing their willful ward by these formalities, having not the slightest doubt of the colonel's decease; and impatiently hoping for some change of resolve in Margaret Walsingham.

But that aimless, hopeless period of Margaret's history quickly passed away, and it had fitted her well for the strange, pathetic, wondrous end to which she now was fast approaching with reluctant feet.

She sat with Mrs. Gay and the baby in the doctor's cozy parlor, one blustering evening in the end of November. The green curtains were drawn warmly over the misty panes, the little fire flickered cheerily in the brass-knobbed grate, and the baby crowed lustily in his languid mother's lap, almost forcing a smile from her dejectedly drooping lips in spite of her chronic melancholy, when the doctor's step was heard on the passage, and a shuffling sound, as of another arrival, and the doctor called in a strange voice for his wife.

"Harriet, will you come here?"

She slowly arose and placed the child in Margaret's eager arms, and shaking her head forebodingly, left the room. Margaret was happily unconscious of all save Franky's pretty face.

Presently the lady came back with uplifted eyebrows, and placed some wine upon the side-table, and brought her own vinaigrette and put it beside the decanter.

"The doctor has something to say to you. Miss Walsingham," said she, at last. "I will take Franky up-stairs for awhile, and Dr. Gay says that he is anxious that you should prepare your mind for a very unexpected turn of your affairs."

She took the child and vanished from the room, leaving Margaret gazing after her with a vague feeling of terror.

"What has occurred, I wonder?" thought she. "Something is wrong."

She half rose, intending to seek Dr. Gay, but he appeared at the door, and shutting it close, approached her with a manifest tremor of apprehension.

"My wife has told you that I have something strange to say to you," began the little doctor, seizing her hand and pressing it closely. "I would like you to endeavor to form some conception of it before I startle you with it."

She was watching him with a wondering eye. His perturbation, his anxiety, his eagerness amazed her—she had never seen the mild little man so violently agitated.

"I can form no conception of your meaning," said she; "be so kind as to explain it in a word."

"My dear girl, we've made a queer mistake, that's all," faltered he, smoothing her hand anxiously. "Now, do you think over every possibility, and pick out the most unlikely—I don't want to startle you."

"Nothing can startle me now that St. Udo Brand is——"

She stopped abruptly and gazed fixedly in his face where yet lingered the traces of a serious shock; and her great gray eyes grew black as midnight while her cheeks flashed forth a splendid carmine.

"You don't intend to say that he is not dead?" cried she, sharply.

The doctor continued smoothing her hand; she snatched it away and clasped both in an access of emotion.

"Tell me—tell me!" screamed Margaret wildly.

"St. Udo has come back, sure enough," said the doctor, putting his arm about her and trying to soothe her. "St. Udo Brand came home to-day and walked straight into Davenport's office."

Her great eyes drank in the assurance in his face, her parted lips quivered into almost a wild smile of triumph, and she clung to the little doctor, crying out:

"St. Udo is not dead—not dead! Oh, my heart, he is not dead!"

And then she sank on her chair and lifted her sparkling eyes, as it were, to Heaven, and whispered:

"Thank Heaven! thank Heaven! Oh, I can never grieve again."

"Come, that's a right pleasant way of taking it," cried the doctor, quite charmed. "I was so afraid that you would take up the old hatred as soon as he came back to dispute the will with you, especially as he was thought to be so well out of the way."

"Hush," smiled Margaret, with the same glad radiance. "I can think of nothing just now except my

gratitude to Providence for giving him back to us instead of branding me with the mark of Cain. Poor, erring, noble St. Udo! I shall never cross his will again. He shall learn to-night how guiltless Margaret Walsingham was of his disappointment. Now I can sign away the Brand property, although the year is not out, and St. Udo Brand shall have it all."

She rattled on thus like a happy child. Her stern will was melted to tenderness, her timid nature was forgotten in joyful excitement. Had he been the chosen of her heart she could not have welcomed him with wilder rapture than this.

"By the lord Harry! you have a magnanimous soul," exclaimed Dr. Gay, delighted as he watched her. "Who would have expected this happy deliverance out of all our troubles? He can't help loving her in spite of himself," thought the sanguine Gay; "she's so gracious and upright. She will win his heart, I could bet ten pounds, in a week."

"Now I can hear how this wonderful miracle came to pass," said she, composing herself presently; "how did he escape, and how was it that the rumor of his death got abroad?"

"It seems that it was all a mistake about his being engaged in the general engagement on the first of September. He was traveling on a secret embassy from Washington to Virginia, and was set upon by a strong force at midnight. His guard was composed of but twenty men, and they were killed to a man. The colonel was left for dead on the field. In the morning the Southern soldiers came back to strip the dead, and finding some life in this fellow they carried him to Richmond, where his wounds were looked to, and he recovered. He has lain in prison ever since, and was only exchanged three weeks ago; and being disgusted with his adventures, he has come home again to try his luck here."

Margaret could only clasp her hands again and raise her thankful eyes to heaven, while a sweet smile quivered on her lips.

"How does he look?" whispered she, at last; "is he not very weak and ill?"

"Y—es," hesitated Dr. Gay; "he's almost as lank as a grayhound, I must confess, and tolerably bronzed. But he is a fine looking man for all that, Miss Margaret, and you must let old sores drop and be kind to him."

"I will be just to him," said she gleefully.

"Not too generous though, my dear," said Gay, anxiously. "However, Davenport will take care of that. He has your interest very much at heart, although he is so rough-and-tumble in his manners."

She turned away her calm, happy face. His warnings fell on deaf ears, for, as ever, she had chosen her own path and would not depart from it.

"Now," said Gay, "perhaps we had best get through with this affair at once; you have borne it thus far with far more fortitude than I had expected. Will you see the colonel to-night?"

She started, and flashed a quick look in his face.

"Is he here, Dr. Gay?" breathed she, with emotion.

"He came in with me," said the doctor; "He asked for you, and is waiting in the drawing-room."

The thin face of Margaret flushed hotly. One cannot doubt that a flicker of memory's lamp shone out in that moment, revealing the bitter past to her shrinking soul, but she dropped the curtain over that picture quickly, and bade the doctor bring him in.

So Dr. Gay went out with a satisfied smile, and brought the soldier in.

She rose to greet him, tall, majestic as a daughter of the gods, with her scarlet shawl draping her shoulders regally; and her quivering, spirited countenance seemed to glow with a new and beautiful effulgence, as if the glad soul illuminated each plain feature with rose lights. Her dark-fringed eyelids hid the beaming eyes for a moment of timid hesitancy, and she drooped before the stranger like a conquered empress; and then she flashed a full, sweet face upon him whom she had mourned as dead.

And the gaze grew fixed and troubled, the outstretched hand fell slowly to her side—she stood speechless. How often had her faithful memory held up to her the portrait of St. Udo Brand—grand, bold, fearless as she had beheld him in that hour of his fury; when the white lights of scorn were flashing from his straightly-leveled eyes, and the wrath of a king sat on his regal brow.

How was it that he cringed in the doorway there and with a forced stare met her gaze of bewilderment? Why did his lurid eyeballs shift and shrink, and grow small and hare-like, when they had ever met hers, with the full glare of an eagle? How had these thin lines of patient waiting, and anxiety, and craft, escaped her intent scrutiny when last she had lifted her outraged eyes to that face.

Was this the hero of her dreams, this evil-faced man who looked at her so insolently?

The roses faded out of her cheeks, the rich light fled from her eyes, her heart swelled wildly in her bosom and then turned to a heavier weight than lead.

She averted a white, cold face from Colonel Brand and sank upon her chair like one whose blood has oozed to the last drop through the secret wound.

"Good heaven! she has fainted!" cried Dr. Gay.

CHAPTER XIII.

MARGARET GOES TO CASTLE BRAND.

It was about noon the next morning when, for the second time, Colonel Brand presented himself at Dr. Gay's door, requesting the honor of an interview with Margaret Walsingham.

"Shall you see him to-day?" asked the languid voice of Mrs. Gay, at the lady's bedroom door, when she had delivered the colonel's message.

Margaret opened the door and looked out. Her great troubled eyes were circled with violet shadows; she had not slept, and, if those wan cheeks did not belie her she had wept many hours of the preceeding night.

"I must meet him, I suppose; I may as well have it over to-day. I want to get rid of the whole business as fast as I can."

Colonel Brand rose as the tall, proud figure glided in, and with a quiet bow passed to a distant sofa.

"We meet, I hope, more amicably than we parted," observed he, with an intent watch on her countenance.

"On my part, yes," answered she, with a deep blush.

"I have heard how you refused to possess my fortune, feeling how you would defraud me," said he. "I feel, of course, grateful to you for your honorable conduct."

The measured tones fell harshly on the woman's high soul; she shrank from the ignoble praise,

"Sir, I could not honestly take what was by right yours," she said, looking proudly at the man, "I never meant to defraud you, or to stand in your way. I only wish to get out of your way, now that you have returned safely home. I am glad that you have come back, Colonel Brand, for I regretted your death most bitterly."

Tears came to her eyes, and through them the thin visage of the soldier seemed to narrow into a travesty of his old self, and she dashed them away, ashamed of her weakness.

"I thank you for the kindness," said the soft, wary voice. "I did not believe I had one friend in England who would mourn my death; perhaps, had I known this, I should never have left it."

She glanced incredulously at him. How could he stoop to such insincerity, who used to glory in his haughty plain speaking?

The words of kindness died upon her lips, and she turned away with a heart-sick sigh.

"I see that I can hardly get Miss Walsingham to believe that I am not the brutal scoffer who insulted her at Castle Brand, seven months ago," said he, with an ingratiating gentleness; "but I for one have lived to see my mistake, and perhaps you may soon see yours. I have come back in many respects a changed man."

"Changed?" faltered she, raising her wistful eyes to his. "Yes, you are. I should not have known you."

And the shifting, contracting eyeballs answered her by dropping to the carpet, while the olive face whitened to a deathly pallor, and the thin, secret lips twitched suddenly.

Changed? Oh, Heaven! yes; had she been blind to read such nobility in yon ill-favored face?

Changed? By all that was generous, brave, and true, this Colonel Brand had belied her mad belief; no foolish devotee had ever bowed before a more unworthy shrine than had poor Margaret Walsingham.

"One summer in the South, under such disagreeable circumstances, would alter any man's appearance," quoth he, twisting his black mustache with his long, brown fingers, and furtively reading her disdainful face. "What between exposure, wounds, swamp fever, famine, and imprisonment, personal beauty stands but a poor chance at the seat of war. But I hope that what I have lost in personal appearance I have gained in the qualities which a good woman admires most. I believe my heart is bettered, my dear Miss Walsingham."

Hypocrite!

She vowed that she would rather hear that insolent laugh and the brutal exclamation:

"Ye gods! what a Medusa!" than this silly sentimentality from St. Udo Brand.

It was not like him to crouch at her feet, the hero whom she had forgiven long ago for his roughness, exalting that roughness to the pedestal of just contempt for a successful adventuress.

Why could he not, out of that nobility of heart which she had credited him with, see that she had forgotten the old grudge long ago, and that she was ready to do him full justice?

What did he take her for? a dissembling schemer, who had not been sincere in her rejection of the Brand estate, and whom he must fawn upon in order to win his own from her greedy clutch?

"I have nothing to do with your reformation, Colonel Brand," she said, with cold formality. "My duty is plain to me, whatever you are. I shall require no prompting to do it."

His eyes sparkled.

For the first time he looked frankly at her, and seemed at ease.

"I am relieved to hear you say so, Miss Walsingham," he said, with something of the old free air; "for I was not inclined to quarrel with you about my grandmother's disposition of the property. I should be sorry to return to the angry feelings which I at first was fool enough to indulge in against you; for I must admit that I am very much more agreeably impressed with you to-day than I was that morning in the library in Castle Brand. So, suppose we let by-gones drop, and begin on a friendly footing."

"I repeat that your changed feelings have nothing to do with my duty," said Margaret, coldly. "It can make no difference whether you regard me with toleration or indifference, I shall do you justice."

He stared suspiciously at her, and one or two wary wrinkles lined his forehead.

"You don't mean to say that you are going to offer me some paltry compensation instead of submitting quietly to the terms of the will?" demanded he.

She turned a look of splendid scorn upon him.

Could he not find it in his soul to conceive of strict justice? Did he not know the meaning of generosity? How mean, then, was his heart, which ascribed such abject meanness to her?

"No; I did not think of that," said she. "You shall have every shilling of your property, Colonel Brand."

"By Jove, you amaze me!" cried he, rising to approach near her. "Then you have decided to marry me, after all, and let us both have the lands?"

His exultation shone out in his evil countenance, and sent him hastily across the room to take her hand.

But Margaret shrank back, and with a strong frown waved him away.

What had frozen the generous words on her lips?

Why did she let him rush to every conclusion but the right one?

She had come into his presence to say:

"I freely give up my claim upon your property, and place the deeds entirely in your hands, wishing no further connection with it, or with you; and so—farewell!"

But here she sat, chilled, bitter at heart, coolly asking herself:

"Is it well for me to be too hasty? Since I have been so utterly mistaken in the character of this man, may I not be mistaken in rashly following out my first impulse regarding his grandmother's property? Yes, I am rash. I will wait a while before I make my intention known."

"I must know you better, sir, before I can form a just opinion of you," said she. "Perhaps we had better defer this matter until we have each had time to decide upon the wisest course?"

"We have scarcely four months," said he, with a frown.

"They are ample for the purpose," she retorted, and rose to terminate the interview.

"When am I to see you again, Miss Walsingham?" asked the softly-pitched tones.

Without analyzing the strong impulse which prompted her, she replied:

"You are welcome to come here every evening, if you choose to make an associate of your grandmother's companion."

And the satire checked the exaggerated deference with which he was making his adieus, and sent him away with a touch of St. Udo's lofty style.

She stood long at the window, following that tall, fine figure with darkened eyes, and biting her lips fiercely.

"Oh, what a fool I have been," she groaned, when he had disappeared, "to credit that small, chill heart with noble qualities! To invest that suspicious soul with high impulses, and then to fall down and worship him for a fallen god! Does not his quailing eye speak of a vile history, of which

he is such a coward as to fear the exposure? He, the gallant soldier and invincible hero! Oh, blind world, to wear such a bandage of credulity! He is incapable of bravery. I protest that a man with such a downward eye could not look peril in the face. He fears me—*me*, Margaret Walsingham, who trembled at his voice. How can this paradox be explained? Is it possible that I have been so insanely mistaken in the man as this?"

Colonel Brand forthwith began to visit Margaret Walsingham, with a view to winning her for his wife, and at every interview her aversion increased.

She soon came to shudder if she but heard his voice, and in her heart violently contradicted every word he uttered, as if she saw the lie on his face, when she detected his petty subterfuges to trap her interest, and wily schemes to catch her love as regularly as he had recourse to them. And she knew in her soul that the man was false in all except his intention to win back his fortune.

"Where is that St. Udo Brand I mourned for?" wailed she, one evening, after a stormy interview, when he had unwittingly disclosed the foul distortion of his soul to her abhorring eyes. "Where has that great spirit fled which cried for help to save itself from ruin at the hands of Juliana Ducie? Must I accept the detestable truth that the gold which I thought I had discovered behind the vail of sin was but tinsel all the time, and tarnished with many an indelible stain of crime? Oh, St. Udo, come back to me as you used to come in my grief, and reveal your sad, heroic history once more, that I may believe in human nature again! But for that secret, wily nature, I loathe it —oh, I loathe *that man*!" she hissed, passionately. "Something rises up in my heart against him every hour I see him, and whispers: 'Crush that serpent!'"

"How could he have concealed his real nature from everybody so successfully? This wretch is not clever enough to conceal his nature from me, and I am not particularly penetrating. *Can this be St. Udo Brand? Good Heaven! What an idea!*"

Margaret suddenly relapsed into utter silence; the half-whispered thoughts died on her lips, and she grew fearfully pale. The idea had shot through her brain like a blinding flash of light; it dazzled, it distracted her. She struggled against the fast-growing conviction as the unconscious wretch from his half-fatal bath in the ocean struggles against returning life, preferring the stupor to the throes of the new life.

But it grew to her; she could not shake it off. She wondered, aghast at herself for wondering, why she had not known it in the first stunned, incredulous gaze, when all her joy at his return froze into cold repulsion, and she recognized a worm instead of St. Udo, the hero.

Then she fell into a dreadful state of excitement; she paced her room for hours, clasping her hands frantically, as if she felt her need of a tight hold on some human being, and had no friend but herself; and every dread possibility sailed slowly and with ruthless pertinacity before her shrinking eye. She never had passed such a forlorn night yet.

When her strength gave out she lay on her bed, with her sleepless gaze fastened upon the wintry sky, and thought out the ugly problem, with the winking stars for counselors.

"That man has come here, determined to marry me for the sake of the fortune I hold; and he has every hope that I will consent. He has traded upon his *extraordinary resemblance to St. Udo Brand*, and, trusting to our slight knowledge of St. Udo Brand, expects to pass without difficulty for him.

"So St. Udo Brand *is* dead, after all. Brave heart, forgive me for the wrong I did you in believing this reptile to be you. Now, am I to suffer an impostor to personate Colonel Brand, because I am a woman and feel a natural terror of the villain? No, I swear that I will not suffer the imposture. If all the world should believe in this man's identity with Colonel Brand if I did not believe it, I would try to prove his falseness. Mrs. Brand left her fortune to me, because she trusted to my honor that I would do my best to save her grandson from destruction through its agency; and, since he has perished, I will not permit any other to get it upon false pretenses. Why should I? It would be wrong for this man to get it, and, if he were my own brother, I would not give it to him when it was wrong; how much less would I relinquish it at the snarling of this hound? You wretch! I would far rather crush you than enrich you," she hissed through her set teeth, while her eyes gleamed like the stars she was gazing at.

"Thus far my mind is made up, that I will withstand the man who *calls himself* Colonel Brand. But how am I to do it? I will take possession of Castle Brand at once, that he may not get it before me. I will hold it against all his machinations. And when I am settled there I will try my best to unmask him, and ruin his infamous scheme. I need hope for no assistance from Mr. Davenport or Dr. Gay; as usual, they will call me half mad and disregard my convictions. Unaided, uncounseled, I must enter this strange conflict—where it may lead me, Heaven knows. But I dare not shrink from it; whatever befalls me. I must and shall prove this wretch an impostor."

Dr. Gay was startled at his breakfast by the apparition of his guest coming into the breakfast-room with a grave, weary face.

"You have slept ill, my dear," said he, paternally offering her a seat beside him.

"Doctor, I am going to Castle Brand to-day."

"Eh, bless me, what for?"

"To live there. Will you drive me over after breakfast, if you please?"

"But—how—what is your reason, my dear?"

"Please, do not ask it. I do not wish to reveal it as yet."

"Have we—has Mrs. Gay displeased you?" demanded the little man, growing very red.

"No, she has not," said Margaret, sweetly; "you have both been most kind."

"This is very extraordinary, after your last expressed decision that you would never enter Castle Brand—is not that what you said?"

"I have changed my mind," she said, obstinately, "and you must not feel displeased with me. I must go to Castle Brand immediately."

The doctor got up, and scurried through the room in great perturbation; he knitted his brows, he pshawed, he stumbled against things in the most provoking manner, and his wife looked after him with an air of Christian resignation.

"Strange—unaccountable!" ejaculated the doctor, turning a suspicious gaze upon Margaret Walsingham. "Pray, madam, has Colonel Brand anything to do with your change of purpose?"

Then, indeed, her grave sweetness vanished, and a hard, bitter expression crossed her face.

"I will answer nothing," she said, with a chilling reserve; "and you will be good enough to allow me my own way, unquestioned, for once."

"Oh, certainly, Miss Walsingham," returned the doctor, with satiric courtesy, and rushed from the room to order out his gig.

She was waiting for him in the little parlor when he came in, with her bonnet and shawl on, and the sight of her white, desperate face added fuel to the flame of the doctor's ire.

"My vehicle awaits your pleasure, madam," said he, stiffly; and with a start she rose and bade her hostess good-by, and followed the doctor out.

Not a word was spoken during the short drive. The chill winds met them at every turn, whirling the dun crisp leaves high overhead, and stinging the pale woman with their icy breath; but she did not seem to heed either the bitter wind or Dr. Gay's bitter silence, but sat tranced in her own mysterious thoughts, which she never asked the angry little man to share.

Once only she roused herself; it was when they were passing through the lodge-gates, when, for the first time, a fine view of the grand old castle opened before them.

She bent forward, and regarded the hoary pile from turreted roof to huge foundation stone, and a flash of scorn and hatred broke from her eyes, and wreathed her lips with the unwonted sneer.

"It is something to plot for, I suppose," she murmured to herself. "It has its fascination for such a cur."

"Beg pardon, Miss Walsingham, did you speak?" asked the doctor, sulkily.

"Yes, my friend; I was assuring myself that yonder fine building was enough to rouse the envy of a covetous nature," she returned. "But we shan't permit any foul play, shall we?"

She looked up with a strange smile; it was cruel and derisive, and the little doctor subsided into uneasy silence, and stared hard at her all the rest of the way.

When they came to the door, Mr. Purcell, the steward, and Mrs. Chetwode, the housekeeper, bustled out to welcome the heiress home, and conducted her in with the greatest deference.

She turned on the threshold and looked down at the doctor, who was sullenly mounting his gig again.

"Tell Colonel Brand that his next visit to me must take place in my castle," she said; "and that I hope to meet him suitably, and to repay his devotion as it deserves."

She vanished within the gloomy portal, and Dr. Gay carried the message to Colonel Brand, who swore a great oath that the girl had both sense and spirit, and, with her castle to boot, would not make a bad speculation.

So his next visit was paid at the old castle, and Margaret led him through the length and breadth of it, and sought to trap him into blundering over its various rooms and he answered all her questions correctly, and comported himself with perfection as St. Udo Brand, and left her in the evening, still and moody, thinking out her next secret move to snare him.

CHAPTER XIV.

WILL HE BETRAY HIMSELF?

St. Udo Brand was walking with Margaret over the rustling leaves of the Norman oaks, and beguiling the time by recounting his adventures in the American war.

How minutely he described his small part in the great wild drama of carnage! How feelingly he touched on the sorrows of war; how enthusiastically he extolled the valor of his Vermont boys!

The whole tissue of events reproduced with such marvelous accuracy, that Margaret was dumb with secret wonder.

How could one living being rehearse so faithfully the part of another?

Events which had been minutely described in his letters to the executors were now detailed with the most copious explanations; while allusions to his former life as a guardsman, and to incidents of his youth, kept her in continual mind of his genuineness.

He was constantly throwing little proofs of his identity in her way, and surrounding himself with a halo of reality, and yet—and yet——

Margaret paced over the crisp brown leaves, whirling round her footsteps in the bleak November wind, her eyes ever and anon turning upon her companion in troubled scrutiny, her ear intent to catch each syllable.

"How these old creaking oaks bring back to me my boyhood! What bright dreams of glory filled my brain! What a life mine was to be! I was to go forth and conquer; all men were to bow before St. Udo Brand; beauty was to melt and find its level at my feet. But see me, Miss Walsingham—no longer a dream-dazzled boy. A man at his prime! Where are my brilliant prospects now? My visions of fame—of love—of happiness? Lost in the quicksand of Time. Is there in the whole world a more useless, ruined wretch than myself? I am famous but for my misdeeds. My intellect has been squandered upon worthless objects; love has cheated me; I have sold my birthright for a mess of pottage."

Margaret could not respond to this half-earnest, half-bitter appeal.

How often she had imagined just such words in the mouth of St. Udo Brand, with a yearning thrill, as if Heaven itself would have been opened to her.

But now that the time had come she shrank from the man and his loneliness and his half remorse in cold sympathy.

How dare he come to her with his polluted life.

She read the false and shifting eyes with loathsome shudder, and a hardening of the lip, as if a rat had fawned upon her.

"You wretch!" thought the girl, with fiercely-clenched hand.

"How dare you think to step into St. Udo's shoes and expect to cheat me?"

"It is strange that Colonel Brand should be so dissatisfied with his laurels," she said, with cold scorn. "One would have thought that the reputation which he gained for bravery and intrepidity as a commander, would have slaked his thirst for fame. Perhaps *you* fear that the laurels of a whole army would not cover your deficiencies?"

She placed such unconscious emphasis on the "you," that the colonel turned his face upon her with broad attention.

She saw the startled eye, though it instantly wavered from hers, and she felt the lagging of his feet.

"Is there no possibility of trapping him out of his own mouth?" she thought, "Can I not force him to betray himself?"

Women are apt at resources; they cannot surmount great difficulties—their muscles are so soft, and their brains so repressed by convention and circumstance, but they can vault the slighter obstacles with lightning quickness, while the man's slower strength is culminating for the heights.

"I know but little of St. Udo Brand," pondered Margaret; "But I will traverse with this man every inch of the ground of which I am mistress, and if he is false, surely he must fall in something. Let me set *the first trap*."

"As we pass this lodge a certain association comes into my mind," she said, always with that cold scorn breaking through her enforced courtesy; "and now that I am honored by having you to refer to, I shall bring my difficulty for your solution.

"How was my dear Miss Brand choked by a parasite?"

The colonel stared blankly. An uneasy frown stole up to his forehead; once, twice, he opened his lips to speak, but checked himself and waited.

The silence became too threatening on the part of Margaret; she was forced to lead the next step,

"You seem to be utterly confounded, sir, I would not have asked you the question if I had not had your own word that such was the case."

"May I ask, my dear Miss Walsingham, may I ask to what you refer?"

"You feign forgetfulness. Fie, Colonel Brand, is it possible that the few words which have ever passed between us could have slipped your memory? Perhaps you will profess yourself unable to explain to me the term 'fortune-hunter,' as applied in connection with me, also."

The blank change deepened on the soldier's sallow countenance, then a certain film covered the wandering eyes, like those of an eagle before the too bright sun.

"Miss Walsingham, whoever informed you of my using any such invidious term in connection with you, traduced me."

"You never used the word then?"

"On my honor as a gentleman, no."

"Ha," cried Margaret, with a flash of triumph, "then you utterly deny having ever written to me?"

A scowl, withering as fire, crossed the colonel's face, and a furtive glare at his daring opponent, made her shudder though she did not see it.

"You refer to the unlucky note I was insane enough to write to you, the night upon which I left Castle Brand?" he inquired, slowly coming out of his fog. "I had forgotten its contents."

"Most extraordinary that you should forget its contents, Colonel Brand. Then you can explain nothing, and I must expect no apology for the bitterest insult which you could have passed upon one in my position."

"Dear Miss Walsingham, I—I meant no insult. Please do not take it as such."

She laughed a taunting, irritating laugh. If he had been a worm wriggling along by her side she could not have treated him with more contempt.

"So brave to bark! so timid to bite!" she jibed. "Oh Colonel Brand, that is so unlike the daring spirit of the Brands, which scorned to cringe, that I am almost tempted to *believe you some impish changeling*."

Some white indentations came upon the livid face of Colonel Brand; for an instant it seemed as if in his murderous wrath he would smite the girl to the earth, but he quailed as soon as her glittering eyes were fixed upon him, and spoke, though with a thick and husky tone.

"Is it generous thus to trample on a fallen man? You can see—all who ever met me before I left England, can see how much I have changed by these cursed months in the deadly swamps, and the pestiferous hospital, not to speak of the wounds which reduced me to a skeleton, and aged me, as five years would have failed to do. All this tells upon a man's spirits, Miss Walsingham; and I am quite ready to confess that I have lost much of my bravado, and my insolent manner of riding on fortune's neck, as if I could ever expect to stay there."

"You speak as bitterly of yourself, as if you were your bitterest enemy!"

The colonel looked up at the dim sky with that hooded stare of his.

"I have been my own bitterest enemy, I fear. If I had been less insolent, less arrogant and sneering," with a dark look of hatred up at the sky, "I might have been the heir of Seven Oak Waaste at this present moment, instead—of where I am."

Margaret looked at him in a sort of horrified fascination. That he was carried out of himself and spoke of the dead, she was dimly conscious; that the malevolent power which brought him here as a suitor, might also make him master, became to her dimly conscious too. She trembled before the depths of a hideous possibility.

"But about this letter," said Colonel Brand, coming again out of his fog, and smoothing the ugly seams out of his face. "I do not feel inclined to leave the subject until I have set myself in at least a more tolerable light before your eyes."

He pulled his handkerchief with a flourish out of his pocket, to flick a cobweb off Margaret's sleeve, which she had brushed from a bush twenty minutes since, and as he did so, a small note-book fell to the ground.

Why had he not brushed the cobweb off before?

"I am sure that you will acknowledge that under the circumstances,"—here he stopped to pick up the note-book—"disappointment might drive me to say anything,"—he idly leafed over the book as if searching for something—"and I was really so astonished at my grandmother's will that surprise seemed to take away my senses. The idea of insinuating that you had stepped in fraudulently, and been the parasite which chocked her! And that allusion to Paolo Orsini strangling his wife—upon my honor as a gentleman, I humbly beg your pardon! Ah, that is what I was looking for, the autograph of General McClellan. Can you read characters by writing, or do you care to examine it, Miss Walsingham?"

She took the book from him at arm's length, and looked silently at the name.

"The General wrote that in my memorandum-book as a password on one occasion when I was on

a secret embassy. The rough scrawl has often saved my life since."

Margaret shut the memorandum-book, looked carefully at each cover, and handed it back.

"*Trap the first has failed!*" she thought. "He is too clever for me. But, you wretch, I am not daunted yet. A green morocco cover with silver clasps, and the Brand crest in gilt. Yes I shall know it again, and some time I shall find out why you dropped it among the withered leaves, if woman's wit can match man's cunning."

"I can read characters very well sometimes," she replied to the watchful colonels last remark, "but not by their writing."

They were nearing the house, and Margaret turned aside from the main entrance to a glass door in the next wing.

"Now for *trap the second*."

"I am going into the library for a book," she said; "that is if the glass door is open."

Colonel Brand stepped gallantly to the door by which the heir-expectant had stood during the reading of the will, and shook it.

"Locked," he announced, smilingly.

"You ought to be master of the secret of that lock," returned Margaret, also smiling, but chilly as an Arctic glacier, "for if the legends of the place be not overdrawn, this suit of rooms was devoted exclusively to St. Udo Brand when a boy, and the glass entrance was used by him instead of the principal door. It is extraordinary that St. Udo when a man should have forgotten so completely the incidents of his childhood."

"I am ashamed of my stupidity in keeping a lady waiting so long in the cold wind," said the colonel, standing with his face to the door, "but before I spoke, I had remarked that the old lock of my childish memory had been removed, and some patent arrangement put in its place which resists my clumsy efforts.

"It is the same arrangement," retorted Margaret, with glittering eyes, "that has been upon the door for thirty years. Mrs. Brand said so, and Mr. Davenport can vouch for it. This is a strange mistake of yours, Colonel Brand!"

Again these spots appeared on the Colonel's livid face, like finger-marks of the devil, and he stole a look of mingled fear and fury at his tormentor. Not trusting himself to speak he shook the door savagely.

"Still wrong," said Margaret, mercilessly. "Past experience ought to have taught you that shaking it only sends the bolts surer home. See."

She pressed the spring of the disputed lock, and the glass leaves slid open.

"*Trap the second successful.*"

"Now," she said, turning within the room, and looking down on him with her pallid and scornful face, "I have a fancy to know how far this aberration of mind exists with you. Will you permit me to amuse myself with an experiment? Will you let me stand here while you stand without, and describe to me the scene which passed upon the occasion of our first meeting in this room?"

She put a hand upon each leaf of the door, and formed of herself a barrier; as if her woman's strength could shut him out of Castle Brand, and her gray eyes glowed with a new and fierce emotion which her simple heart had never known of before this man came home to his own.

"Madam," said the colonel, gnawing the head of his cane, like a dog at the end of his chain, "It is not all astonishing that I should have forgotten the peculiarities of an old glass door, even though I often used it in my boyhood; other and graver memories might easily displace such trivialities and I never professed to cherish the old associations of Castle Brand with much reverence. But the scene of our first meeting can never escape my recollection. It is cruel of you to recall the most abject moment of my life, but since you insist upon it, I cannot choose but obey.

"You came out of the shadow of St. George, after the reading of the will by Davenport, and at the polite little doctor's introduction, I was ungallant enough to indulge in unseemly laughter, and to exclaim: 'Ye Gods! What a Medusa!' at which—shall I ever forget your superb indignation!—you gathered your skirts and swept like a queen from the room. My dear madam, do I describe the scene accurately? It is not every woman who would have had the nerve to call up such a scene as that from the vast depths of memory; I must perforce admire your courage and—shall I say? your incredulity!"

He bowed sardonically. The ugly seams, so suggestive of crime and cunning, had come back upon his brow, and he doffed his hat; the twitching face bore a smile of triumph, which revealed how sure he felt of victory.

"*Trap the third has signally failed*," thought Margaret; "this part at least of St. Udo's history has been well studied. Ah, he will be too clever for me!"

She dropped her hands from the leaves of the door and stood aside, while a slight increase of palor stole up to her face.

"You have satisfied me, Colonel Brand. Come in if you please."

He silently entered, and with one accord, these two people, who were tacitly drawing together their forces for a deadly conflict, turned and eyed each other; she with stern-unflinching defiance; he with a quailing, yet impudent look of confident success.

In that dumb scrutiny, they seemed to be measuring each other's capabilities.

"Miss Walsingham?" said the colonel, after this strange pause, "I can see that you have taken a deep animosity against me, probably because of my treatment of my grandmother's will; we shall suppose it is. Now, my dear young lady, I shall try to explain myself and to set myself right with you, so that in the future we may perfectly understand each other. I have come back to my native land determined to obey, if possible, that part of the will which refers to me—determined to try my best to win Miss Walsingham's regard—determined to make it no fault of mine if the name of Brand is forgotten. Knowing these three things to be my set purposes, are you willing to forgive generously what the meaner-minded of your sex could not forgive, and to drop the past between us? Are you willing that we should be friends?"

With his head on one side, and his eyes watchfully taking note of his listener's face, he bent forward with a certain vailed significance and clasped her hand.

"Away!" cried Margaret, shaking him off as she would have shaken off a reptile, and regarding him in a perfect passion of horror, "do you dare to expect that I could enter into a compact with *you*?"

Something crept into his eyes which made her shudder.

"I have asked you to forgive my former insults, and you have refused," he said; "but remember, I asked you to enter into no compact with me. All the world is at liberty to know that St. Udo Brand repented of his foolishness, and came home to carry out his grandmother's will. If the world believes anything else of me, I shall know that Margaret Walsingham not only refused to be my friend, but cast off all obligations to the dead and became my enemy. The Brands of Brand Castle have ever been famous for their ferocity. I shall be sorry if a woman should fall a prey to it."

"I will never wrong St. Udo Brand," said the meek woman, suddenly withstanding him with blazing eyes, "but I will guard Ethel Brand's dying wishes from being fraudulently represented, whoever dares to fraudulently represent them."

"And I, deeply impressed with the conviction that Seven-Oak Waaste will fall ultimately into the possession of its rightful heir—that is myself—intend to permit no fair lady's frown to turn me from my ancestor's doors."

Again they gazed at each other—deeper horror and passionate determination in her eyes, darker folds of sin and cunning on his brow, while a smile played round his wicked mouth, fatal as the blasting lightning.

"You shall have to weather the frowns of more than me before you are master of this castle," said Margaret.

"Is that a declaration of war?"

He tried in his wrath and apprehension to catch her hand again, but she slid with a gasp out of his reach and passed through the door.

"You ask if I have made a declaration of war," said Margaret, turning when the length of the hall was between them; "and I am not afraid to say—yes. If there be a hidden page in your life which you would keep from me, tremble for your chances of Brand Castle."

She vanished from his gaze, and the fitful wind swept from door to door of the library with the howl of a hundred furies.

Mrs. Chetwode, who was busy in the glass pantry which faced the library, thought to herself that she had never seen such an evil looking face as that which looked out of the half-closed door for full five minutes.

The eyes became small and crafty; the forehead receded and narrowed to a Mongolian size; the mouth drooped with a fang-like ferocity; infinitesimal wrinkles, not often seen there, dawned into view like the folds of the deadly cobra before its spring.

"Heaven preserve me!" interjected the housekeeper, turning her back upon the unholy vision; "I do think Colonel Brand the wickedest-looking man ever I saw. Heaven send poor Miss Margaret a better husband."

Meantime Margaret, struck with a mortal panic, was walking fast down the road to Regis, quite unmindful of the calls of etiquette which prescribed for her the part of hostess to the visitor.

She left the Waaste with its grim, bare trees and its battlemented towers behind her; she left the lodge, clinging to its nook of ivy wall, behind her; she tried to shake off the crawling terror which oppressed her, and drank in the freshening gusts of wind as if her throat had been constrained by an iron hand.

"What have I dared to do?" she thought. "Have I thrown the gauntlet of defiance at him? And if he

takes it up, what will become of me? But to imagine he could personate the brave St. Udo! Reptile!" she exclaimed, with a suddenly clenched hand, "I could crush you beneath my heel: You have no right to live, you monster!"

Faster she walked, although she was so thin and weak with her recent ill health that her limbs trembled beneath her; and in the urgent alarm which had taken possession of her, she marched straight through the village to the law-office of Mr. Davenport.

"My dear lady," ejaculated that functionary, arising in consternation, "what brings you here? I hope nothing annoying has occurred; but you do look very ill."

"Mr. Davenport, will you send for Dr. Gay? I have something of importance to communicate to you both."

"Certainly—certainly. I'll send immediately. No, I'll go myself. You won't object to sitting by my nice warm fire here until I come back? And I'll lock you in, if you like."'

"I don't object."

In a very short time the two executors entered, both breathing hard, and each having an anxious air about him.

"Good day, my dear Miss Walsingham," said the little doctor, drawing a chair close beside her; "I hear you have something on your mind to tell us. I think you might have sent for us, instead of walking here in your state of health; it scarcely looks well, my dear, especially—especially as it is you, my dear."

"I cannot help it. What I have to say outweighs in importance the trivial question of whether I come to you, or you visit me. You both, I have no doubt, were surprised at the manner in which I insisted on leaving your house, Dr. Gay, and taking up my abode at Seven-Oak Waaste?"

Both executors admitted that they had been surprised, very much surprised, the lawyer amended.

"I had a secret reason for my course of action," continued the ward, looking from one to the other, "which I did not feel at liberty to divulge until I had assured myself whether the motives that actuated me were just or not. I am now assured that they were, and I desire to divulge them to you, that you may prevent a fraud."

"My dear," said the lawyer, "isn't all this going to lead us to Colonel Brand?"

"It is going to lead you to the man whom I left at Seven-Oak Waaste."

"Is the colonel at Seven-Oak Waaste?"

"Yes."

"And you here?"

"In spite of etiquette—yes."

The two executors looked at each other as if prepared to hear any insanity after this.

"Have you made a deed of gift of Seven-Oaks to St. Udo, and are you here for more testimonials?" asked Mr. Davenport, helping himself to snuff.

"You have not fathomed my secret at all," answered Margaret, in a repressed tone, though she was in a state of high excitement; "when I willfully left the shelter and the protection of your house, Dr. Gay, it was to fulfil that clause of the will, which says, 'Should St. Udo Brand or Margaret Walsingham die within the year, the property shall revert to the survivor.' I left your house to take possession of Castle Brand."

The executors stared.

"But, my dear girl, St. Udo is not dead!" said Dr. Gay, imploringly.

"Good gracious, what do you mean?" sputtered the lawyer. "You may take the property by refusing to marry the colonel, or you may keep the property by quarreling with him and making him glad to leave you, but you can't take the property on the plea of his death, when he is by your own showing sitting in Castle Brand at this moment."

"That brings me to my accusation," cried Margaret, almost wildly; "I have convinced myself that the person who has come here in the semblance of St. Udo Brand, to woo me, and to be in time the master of Seven-Oak Waaste, is a villain who has weighed well the risks he runs, is, in short, an *impostor*!"

"Good Heavens!" gasped the physician.

"Your proofs, madam," demanded the lawyer, with another, and a larger pinch of snuff.

CHAPTER XV.

"My proofs are these," answered Margaret, forcing herself to speak quietly. "He acts exactly as a man would act who was personating some one else. He knows the true St. Udo's history to a certain extent, and cleverly acts upon it; but go beyond the part he has rehearsed, and he betrays the most extraordinary confusion. When first I saw him I was astonished at the change which a few months in America had made. The longer I studied him the more palpable became his disguise to my eyes; and I am now morally convinced that my suspicions are well founded."

"All this is nothing," said Mr. Davenport. "You have advanced no proofs, except to show that from the first day of his return you conceived a dislike to him."

"I made him commit himself wholly to-day," continued Margaret, anxiously. "The first time he betrayed his ignorance of the contents of that letter which St. Udo Brand wrote me upon leaving the castle; the second time he was so puzzled by the fastening of the library glass door, that he could not open it. That door, Mr. Davenport, which Mrs. Brand's grandson used exclusively."

"And would you condemn a man upon such accidents of memory as these?"

"Had St. Udo Brand that cowardly glance, that crime-darkened visage, that crawling, scheming softness?" cried Margaret, with flashing eyes. "Ugh! he is a serpent drawing his slimy folds into our midst—he is a travesty on the dead hero of yonder battle-field."

"You did not always think so well of Captain Brand," retorted the lawyer, with another exchange of glances with Gay; "and I should think that seeing him once—and that under circumstances rather damaging to him—you would hardly be capable of judging of his heroism or other good qualities, in comparison with any one."

"I am not deceived," said Margaret; "and, if you will watch this man, you cannot be deceived either."

The executors remained eying each other with a dubious frown.

This charge was leaving a very disagreeable impression on their minds. The physician remarked the gleaming eyes beside him with a speculation as to the sanity of his ward.

The lawyer ruminated over her communication with a speculation as to her honesty.

"Be careful, Miss Walsingham, not to get yourself into trouble," said Mr. Davenport.

"It might prove very damaging to your character to defame the man who was to have shared with you Mrs. Brand's estates."

"Would it not be more damaging to my character and to yours, Mr. Davenport, as retainer of the Brand estates, to allow an impostor a foothold at Seven-Oak Waaste?"

"Fair and softly, madam. He can't have a foothold unless you are pleased to accept him as your husband. Why attempt any exposure at all? Why not suffer his attentions until he proposes, and then dismiss him as if you were dismissing the veritable St. Udo. Be he who he may, he can't gain a foothold after that."

Margaret's face waxed paler.

Gazing in turn at each of the executors she might expect little sympathy from the half cajoling regards of the one, or from the impassive scowl of the other.

"If he is an adventurer, come here with the carefully-prepared plot by which he hopes to win the Brand estates," she said, slowly, "he will not be likely to stop at his efforts because a woman stands in the way. He will have worked too hard and risked too much to be lightly turned from his purpose. He will have weighed well the chances of a refusal. The woman who stands in his way will be removed if she refuses to be his stepping-stone."

"A parcel of moonshine!" cried Davenport, hotly.

"I implore you to believe otherwise. Do you think I would have come to you on mere suspicion? I am perfectly convinced in my own mind, sir."

"But you must convince others as well as yourself. You must bring proofs. Why, we can think nothing but that that ancient pique of yours against the captain has touched your brain, and made you really take up this unworthy suspicion against a man who is the same as ever he was. I see no difference in him, except that he looks the worse for wear."

"Which his hard usage makes very natural," said Dr. Gay.

"You refuse to help me, then?"

"What would you like us to do, Miss Margaret?"

"I would like you to force this man into proving his identity; confront him with such circumstances as must unmask his plot, if he has one; you have the power and I have not."

"I don't see that we are authorized to molest any man upon such crazy foundations as those you have advanced; indeed, I can't consent to take one step of an unfriendly nature against the

colonel. I have been a faithful solicitor for the Brands these many years, and it is late in the day to turn against them now. Give it up, Miss Walsingham."

"I shall not give it up," retorted Margaret rising; "if I must work single-handed, I will, but remember, you have left me to battle with a dangerous and desperate foe."

She left the office without another word, and slowly retraced her steps toward Seven-Oak Waaste.

She was imbued with as profound a sense of her own defenseless condition as any woman under the sun.

She invoked the help of her only protectors, and they had indignantly refused to be alarmed. If she would unmask a bold and determined villain, she must do it alone.

"I am going to have a hard struggle," she thought; "and it may be a struggle for my life."

No wonder that she stood still in her walk, to turn this thought about her mind with a horrible earnestness: it took its weird and awful shape from a passing memory of those murderously treacherous eyes which had surely taken her in more than once in the library that morning; it loomed larger and larger as she pondered, and the chill shadow of death seemed to be over her.

"For my life," she repeated, gazing with dilated eyes into the warning future.

Castle Brand appeared grayly before her from among its bare armed oaks; the brown Waaste stretched far and wide, and a black pool lay in a gloomy hallow, deep and inky, as if its stormy face kept impassively calm over secrets of murder and violence.

For a time the natural instinct of self was strong in the heart of the lonely girl; she quailed before the dangers of her course, and almost persuaded herself to turn and fly; but her inborn courage came to her aid; a something in the soul of this naturally weak woman rose in fierce protest against allowing an impostor to triumph; her fears faded away out of sight, as implacable anger succeeded the brief emotion.

"Let *him* wear the dead St. Udo's honors?" she ejaculated. "Let *him* be Ethel Brand's heir? No—not while I, the sworn keeper of the wishes of her who was to me a benefactress, can raise a hand to balk him. You wretch! you shall find Margaret Walsingham no coward."

The rattle of a gig aroused her, and she looked round to behold Dr. Gay approaching.

"What are you standing there for, rooted to the spot?" he asked, drawing up beside her. "Are you surveying, or inveighing?"

"The latter term is the most appropriate. I was mentally measuring my courage with that of the subject of our afternoon's consultation."

"Step up beside me; I would like a few words with you. You left us in such a hurry that I felt it necessary to follow you."

She obeyed him, and they leisurely approached the gates.

"Davenport and I have been thinking that it is our duty to warn you how you give wind to this extraordinary suspicion of yours; it may prove embracing, perhaps dangerous for you, and would create a great deal of needless scandal."

"You wish me to be utterly silent on the subject?"

"Well, yes, my dear; it is by far the safest plan."

She pondered deeply for a few minutes.

"I promise to keep my convictions to myself, until I have found such proofs against him as will satisfy you and Mr. Davenport."

"Has Colonel Brand left the castle?" asked the doctor, as the lodge-keeper opened the gates.

"No sir: there he is"—pointing under the trees—"him and his doag. It comed tearing oop from the village like a mad thing, an hour agone, and yelped like a frog until its maister comed to it."

There under the naked trees, kicking up the withered leaves in the little clouds, shuffled the colonel, with head dropped on his breast, and folded arms; so deep in reverie that he seemed unconscious of all outside of his own brain.

Round and round he walked in an idle circle upon the leaf padded park under the naked trees, and the long tan sleuth-hound glided after him with dropped nose and stealthy tread, as if he, too, were tracking game; and a malicious fancy might have suggested that the man was followed by a moral shadow of himself.

"There he lurks," spoke Margaret, with loathing scorn, as they left the lodge behind; "patient, lean sleuth-hound upon the scent, and watching for the moment to spring. Is that the gay and reckless St. Udo Brand—the brave soldier and the idol of women—the man who scorned a presumed fortune-hunter, and left all for love? Does the blood of good Ethel Brand flow in the veins of such a hound as yonder schemer? He would lick the dust of my feet for money—he whom you insult the memory of the Brands by believing in!"

"Assuredly the girl is touched," thought Gay.

They almost drove upon the colonel before he was aware of them, and so noiseless had been their approach that he appeared utterly bewildered with consternation when Gay addressed him.

"A bleak day, colonel."

"Yes, a bleak day, a very bleak day," said the wily voice, while the twitching face slowly got into company order.

"Having a walk about the oaks, sir? Rather desolate-looking at this time of the year."

"Particularly desolate up at the castle, doctor. I was glad to turn out and bear Argus company. Is Miss Walsingham sufficiently wrapped for this cold wind?"

"Oh, I hope so," answered Gay, looking in vain for a reply in Margaret's stern face.

"She has been taking a little drive with me, I picked her up on the road there."

"Little drive," repeated Colonel Brand, with a slightly sarcastic emphasis, "preceded by a little walk. Did you find our friend Davenport at his post my dear lady?"

Margaret started, and turned her flashing eyes upon the smiling interrogator.

"By what unworthy means have you ascertained my movements?" she demanded.

"Why, dear Miss Walsingham, your housekeeper informed me, when I asked her the cause of your abrupt departure from me, that you had gone to see Mr. Davenport."

The girl sat staring at him in dumb indignation. She had communicated her design to no one in the house and the colonel was telling her a lie to her very face. It was perfectly patent to her that he had dogged her footsteps.

"Are you coming up to Castle Brand?" asked Gay, nervously staving off an expected explosion.

"I—think not," answered the colonel, with a glance baleful as dead lights on a grave; "Miss Walsingham evidently is indifferent to my society. Why, do you know, doctor, I came here to-day expecting a delightful afternoon with her in the library, where first we met, and, like the lonely Marguerite of wicked Faust, she melted from my view, and I found but Mephistopheles taunting me at my elbow in the shape of old memories of years which might have been better spent—called up by the associations of the room."

"She's shy yet—she's shy," said the doctor, in a prompting tone. "Ar'n't you, dear?"

It was utterly out of Margaret's power to do anything but look at St. Udo Brand, as represented by the man among the withered leaves, with a cold stare of scorn.

"The bleak wind is injuring Miss Walsingham's complexion," said the sneering voice again. "I will release her from the freezing process, and myself from Paradise. Good-evening."

Dr. Gay drove his impassive ward up to the steps of Castle Brand, and set her down between the griffiths couchant, and she stood forlornly there clinging to his hand.

"I am afraid to stay here alone," she whispered. "Do come and stay with me, dear doctor, until that terrible man is taken away."

"I—I'm afraid Mrs. Gay might object to such an arrangement, dear; she is a person who—who generally objects—who is opposed to leaving her own home under any circumstances."

"I did not think of Mrs. Gay. Well will you please ask Mr. Davenport to come? Will you implore him to come? He has nothing to keep him, and I am so defenseless here."

"I will mention your request, but I think he will say what I feel without saying—it is a pity you left my house the way you did."

With that parting shot, the little doctor bade his adieu, stepped into his gig, and cheerfully drove away.

Oh, this horrible Waaste! Listen how the harsh wind moans over it, and rises into savage shrieks.

The old trees creak and sigh like the surge of an angry sea; the ancient windows rattle in their stone sockets; the ghostly Brands all down the gallery seem to shudder in their massive frames, as if an ominous Present were casting its shadows back to their centuried Past: the face of Ethel, the beautiful, looks down upon the companion she once loved and cherished as if she would say, in the limitless pride of her heart:

"I trust to you, Margaret Walsingham; keep my name pure, or let it die."

The candles flicker and wave in phantom gusts of wind; long shadows flit about with wide-spreading wings; the brain of the lonely girl is peopled with visions of horror.

Let her double-lock her chamber door, or pace in restlessness the echoing halls, Ethel Brand's bequest has come like a curse to poor Margaret.

A note arrived at the castle next morning from Dr. Gay, which stirred her up to feverish

excitement, and showed her a speedy crisis.

"My Dear Ward:—I write more for the purpose of giving you time to prepare your answer, and (may I presume it?) to give you a little timely advice as to the nature of your answer, than for the sake of the communication itself.

"Yesterday, upon leaving you, I had a very momentous interview with Colonel Brand (he returned to Regis with me in the gig), in which he placed himself in the most candid and open manner upon my friendship, and explained to me what he wished to be his future course.

"After commenting with a great deal of proper feeling upon his former extravagances of life, he said that it was little wonder that a highly organized young lady like Miss Walsingham should feel a distrust of him, and that he was quite conscious of a revulsion of feeling on Miss Walsingham's part which his most heartfelt apologies for his former rudeness could not remove. He then implored me to put him upon a way to do away with the bad impression he had created, so that he might win your affection.

"'For,' he declared, with tears in his eyes, 'I have learned to love her to distraction: and if I am ever to be anything, her hand must beckon me on.'

"His sincerity so invited my sympathy that I was within an ace of disclosing to him your ridiculous suspicion, but upon second thoughts concluded that it would wound him too much. However, I proposed to stand his friend with you; so henceforth look upon me in that light.

"He then informed me that he desired to win your consent to marry him purely from personal affection, and that if you would only be his wife, he should insist upon having the whole of the Brand estates settled upon you, in case any one might accuse him of mercenary motives. And, in short, he concluded by disclosing to me his determination to end his suspense by proposing to you this evening. I urged upon him that it would be too premature, but he answered, with deep emotion:

"'She hates me more and more every day. Let me touch her noble heart by my great love, and she will pity, and in time endure me.'

"I don't know whether the course he has marked out will have that effect or not, but this I hope—that you will not turn away your co-heir without due reason.

"And now for my bit of advice.

"Weigh well before the evening the possibility of your having been unjust in your suspicions of the man who is going to offer you his hand; if you do conscientiously, you will come to the conclusion that you *have* been unjust.

"Then ask yourself if it will be right, or generous, or honorable to dismiss St. Udo Brand from his rightful home and fortune, now that he is willing to bestow it upon you, and only for your love.

"Hoping that the next occasion of our meeting will be more pleasing than the last, I remain your obedient servant,

"R. Gay.

"P.S.—I mentioned last night to Davenport your desire to have him move into the castle for a while, and he utterly refuses to do anything so absurd and extraordinary.

"R. G."

Thus plainly showing that they washed their hands of their ward's vagaries, the executors not only refused her their countenance, but seemed inclined to go over to the enemy.

With what indignant scorn Margaret read the account of his presumed love for herself!

"He has taken his measures," she mused, "to force me into showing my hand, before I have taken one move against him. He is too clever for me. What shall I do?"

Pondering hour after hour, at length she made up her little plan with doubt and misgiving.

"Colonel Brand is coming here this evening, Mrs. Chetwode," she said, as the dusk slowly deepened on stone parapet and spiked rail, "and I wish you to bear me company in the library. You know I do not like the colonel, so you must be my chaperon."

When the suitor came to his lady's bower, on a horse which smoked with hard and furious riding, and when he followed the servant to the library, he found the lady of his heart standing with a demeanor in every way proper for the occasion, while the old housekeeper, in her best black satin, sat behind the statue of St. George, sedately knitting.

"May I entreat the honor of a private interview?" asked the smooth voice.

"We can be as private here as you wish," was the polite reply. "My housekeeper cannot hear anything unless you specially address her."

The colonel bowed and expressed himself satisfied, but if the angry glance which he cast among the murky shadows, where the bright needles clicked, meant anything, the colonel lied.

He took the chair assigned him, but evidently his proposed form of declaration was routed by this unexpected arrangement.

His fingers plucked at his dark mustache in a nervous and undecided manner, and he took a long time to deliberate before he could trust himself to launch upon the momentous subject.

"I am aware," at length began the lover, in a constrained voice, "that Miss Walsingham has conceived very unfriendly feelings toward me—an enmity, I might almost call it—for has she not expressed as much? And I have come here this evening with the hope of making a successful effort to come to an amicable understanding with her, and it will be my last trial."

Always sinking his tones a little lower, and bending to his listener, a little nearer, and casting watchful glances toward the corner where the bright needles clicked, the last word came to sound like a muttered threat, far more than the appeal of a lovesick adorer.

"If," continued he, "Miss Walsingham thinks better of these unfriendly feelings, and expresses herself willing to listen to reason, I will most gladly offer her my hand, if she will deign to accept it as the hand of her husband, and will do all in my power to make her not repent her choice; and if she acts faithfully by me, I will act faithfully by her. Does she consider it possible to say 'yes' to this proposal?"

Coldly avoiding the chance of coming to that mutual understanding which his dropped tones and significant looks insisted upon, Margaret answered in measured accents thus, decorously:

"I am not sufficiently acquainted with Colonel Brand to feel able to give him a decided answer with due appreciation of his virtues. If he will be kind enough to wait four weeks, by that time I shall have made up my mind."

The suitor tapped his heel with his cane and meditated. If his frowning brow and furious eyes did not belie him, this response was an unexpected one, and routed his previous plans.

"Have I checkmated you?" thought Margaret. "You dread the delay of four weeks? Yes, you do, I see it in your wicked face, and I say to myself, 'Well done, Margaret!'"

"I have no motive beyond your own welfare," responded the lover, "when I urge you to place the day of your answer a little nearer."

"Is that a threat? Shall I turn round and tell Mrs. Chetwode that Colonel Brand has threatened me because I cannot promise to accept him without deliberation?"

"You have misunderstood me, then I shall say to your housekeeper. I shall explain that your weak health reminded me of the danger of protracted anxiety, and that then I urged you, for your own welfare, to place the day of your answer a little nearer."

There was a pause, and the two antagonists eyed each other firmly.

"In spite of the danger to my welfare," said Margaret, with unmistakable emphasis, "I must insist on taking a month to consider your proposal. I shall take as much care as possible of my health meanwhile, so that you may have no reason to complain of my imprudence."

"You are determined, then?" said the colonel, rising, with cold fury in his eyes. His repressive power was almost forsaking him, and it was with difficulty that he preserved that decorous gentleness of manner which he had donned with such care.

"Yes, I am determined."

There she stood, waiting with freezing smile for him to go. No gentleman could decently stay another moment under such circumstances.

A sudden impulse, quick as thought, moved Margaret to accompany him to the door; a certain expression on his face stirred up a Babel of memories; it was gone, and they were gone, but she would sound the same waters again.

"Keep the door shut, John, because of the draft," she said to the servant, passing out under the stars with her adorer.

"I shall feel obliged if you only communicate with me through Mr. Davenport," said she, touching the stone lintel with her hand, "until the next four weeks elapse. I shall specially invite you to the castle should I wish to see you at any time, and I expect you to obey the call."

The colonel bowed silently.

A wild, wan moon came out through a riven cloud and shone on Castle Brand. The man on the lowest step and the woman on the highest, gazed fixedly into each other's faces; his, fierce, envious, and distrustful, hers, watchful, cold, and unflinching.

Waiting breathlessly for that wave of memory to beat upon the sands again, it came with the grouping of certain incidents, and with the magic spell of association.

The time had come when the false seeming of this man should drop like a garment. The time had

come when a light from the past should break upon Margaret with the suddenly shining moon. The time had come when their souls were revealed to each other and doomed to recognition despite the most perfect masking which rascality could assume to compass its end or purity devise to hide from peril.

These two had stood thus before, the moon gleaming coldly on both—his horse pawing in the shadow, a dying woman in the Brand state chamber.

Margaret turned suddenly on her heel and shut the door. She leaned against the staircase pillars and clasped her hands under the eyes of the astonished John.

"I know him now," she muttered; "he was here the night of Mrs. Brand's death. His name was *Roland Mortlake*!"

CHAPTER XVI.

UNVAILING AN IMPOSTOR.

Margaret stole to her chamber and bolted the door, and leaned her dizzy head upon her hand.

Gradually the first surprise of her mind gave way before a dreadful despondency, and she revolved the revelation in ever increasing alarm.

"He is cleverer than I am," she assured herself, "and he will most likely win the contest. He has come out of a past which I shall never be able to trace to personate St. Udo Brand, and his resemblance is the weakest instrument he uses. He has appeared like a horrible phantom in St. Udo's guise, and he defies me to tear his mask from him. He is no mere adventurer who has traded upon an accidental likeness to Colonel Brand and stepped into his shoes upon the day of his death—he is a deliberate scoundrel who probably was arranging his plot upon the night on which he came from Regis with Captain Brand's letter. He has waited for St. Udo's death to step into his place and enact his life from the point where he laid it down on the battle-field. Has he anything to do with the sudden end of that life? Has he murdered St. Udo Brand? Great Heaven! am I to unvail an impostor and find an assassin in this man?"

She clenched her hands, and faithful memory brought back the vision of the dying hero, upon his pulseless horse, and she heeded it now, though she had sternly repressed all belief of it before.

"Is Mortlake the crawling demon who crouched over the brave colonel in the dark and stabbed him? Have I met him first upon the steps of Castle Brand—second in my vision of St. Udo's death, and last in my treacherous lover of to-night? Oh, my heart! is St. Udo really dead then, and by his hand! The grand lion-hearted king, by the hand of a fawning slave?"

Wild with horror, she shuddered at the dark chasm she beheld yawning in her way, but not for a moment did she shrink from the tortuous path which led to that abyss—the path of inexorable pursuit which ended not until the man was hunted down and unmasked.

She waited until she was calm, and then she wrote her letter to the two executors, which was to expose the man who stood in St. Udo's position, well knowing the dangers of the path she had chosen, and accepting her chances without fear:

> "Castle Brand.
>
> "Dear Sirs: This is the second appeal I make to you on behalf of the true disposition of Mrs. Brand's property. If this appeal is unheeded, I will take the case in my own hands, and pursue it to the end, whatever that end may be; and if I die before I succeed, God will hold you responsible for my death.
>
> "The man who calls himself Colonel St. Udo Brand came here to-night according to appointment, and took the first step against me, and for the possession of Seven-Oak Waaste, by proposing for my hand.
>
> "Believing him to be an imposter, I declined giving him a decided answer, and bade him wait for one month. In other words (and he perfectly understood it), I demanded a month in which to discover the proofs of his villany.
>
> "He accepted my fiat, but with great reluctance because he felt his position so unsafe, before my marriage or death, that he feared thirty day's delay might ruin it.
>
> "At the moment of our parting, a sudden rush of memory revealed to me the true personality of the pseudo Colonel Brand.
>
> "I beg of you to weigh this communication well, and not to put it down as you have put down my convictions before.
>
> "On the night of Madam Brand's death, you remember that Captain Brand, in his fatal carelessness, came as far as Regis to see his grandmother, and staid there, sending a note of excuse to me by a messenger. This messenger gave his name as Roland

Mortlake, and stood waiting at the foot of the steps while I read the note.

"Mark me here! This man was so like the Brand's, that Purcell, the steward, advanced to meet him, saying:

"'Welcome to the castle, captain!'

"He explained that he was not the captain, but the captain's messenger, and he stood by all the time I was communicating the contents of the letter to Purcell. He was so close to us, that he must have heard all that passed. Under this belief, I turned suddenly to him and told him to go instantly for Captain Brand, and to tell him that the will must be changed, or he would be ruined.

"His crafty, eager look so arrested me, that I gazed fixedly in his face for some minutes; and it seemed to me that I discovered a crime-stained and guileful soul in his eyes for they haunted me long afterward.

"And I distinctly remember the words of the man who had accompanied him, as he rode away under the trees:

"'*Gardez-tu*, my friend! You English take great news sourly. *Ma foi!* you curse Mademoiselle Fortune herself when she smiles upon you the blandest!'

"I heeded these words not all then. I recalled them one by one to-night from the hidden chamber of memory, and I protest that they hold their own significance in that daring plot.

"Do you read nothing in this reminiscence beyond a woman's idle vagaries of fancy?

"Will you believe it—only, that when I swear that the man, Roland Mortlake, who stood on the castle-steps with me that night, and the man, St. Udo Brand, who stood with me on the castle-steps to-night, are one?

"I call upon you, in the interests of justice, to find the proofs of this infamous imposture.

"I appeal to you, that you may do your duty by the dead and unveil a monster of crime. What has Mortlake done with St. Udo Brand?

"Perhaps he has murdered him. Will you let a possible murderer escape you because a woman points him out? How do we know that the news of his being killed in battle was not true? And, being true, how do we know that Mortlake's hand was not the hand that destroyed the heir of Castle Brand?

"How do we know that this plot, if sifted well, would not reveal in the suitor you sent me to-night a red-handed assassin?

"Come to me in the morning and tell me what you are going to do. If you are going to do nothing, then I will carry on the contest alone, and trace the history of Roland Mortlake from the bottom step of Castle Brand, where I saw him first, pace by pace, to the foot of the gallows, where I shall see him last.

"Yours Respectfully,

"Margaret Walsingham.

"To Messrs Davenport & Gay."

Late as it was she rang for the housekeeper, and gave orders that her letter should be conveyed to the lawyer's house that night.

"Tell Symonds to give it to Mr. Davenport himself, and to trust it to no one else," she said.

The housekeeper met the feverish flash of her young mistress' eyes, and took the envelope from her hand with much uneasiness.

"My poor dear, you ar'nt strong enough for all this worrying and wearing," she observed, sympathetically. "I wish for your sake, deary, the colonel had lain quiet in his grave."

Margaret drew back with a sudden storm of grief, and shut the door, Mrs. Chetwode went down stairs, sorrowfully vowing to herself that Miss Margaret would pine to death before she wore the colonel's wedding-ring.

"He lies quiet enough in his shallow grave," moaned Margaret; "noble, proud St. Udo! Oh my heart; why was I doomed to be the Marplot of his life? He was so haughty in his abhorrence of low scheming—so constant in his love—so tender with his dying Vermont boys—so heroic, and so reckless of his own grand life that I love him. *I love him!* And he is dead!"

She wrung her hands and wept such tears as make the heart grow old, and the life wane early; such tears as are only rendered by a nature generous and effulgent in its love as tropical sunshine, whose revenge is self-immolating as the suttee of the Hindoo's widow.

Toward ten o'clock the next morning the executors made their appearance in a gig, and betook themselves to the library.

They found their troublesome ward already waiting them, with an expression of nervous defiance on her face, as if she fully expected a sound berating from each of them.

Dr. Gay looked at her anxiously, and shook his head over his own thoughts.

Mr. Davenport coughed sarcastically, and frowned to hide the effect which her blanched cheeks made upon him.

"I'm sorry to have called you out too early to begin the search," said Margaret, bitterly.

"Too early? by no means, my dear," cried the doctor, seating himself cozily near her; "it's never to early to do what's right. Now we're all ready to hear what you have got to say."

"I have told you surely enough in my letter for you to act upon," she answered, "without having to say any more. What do you say of the declaration I have made as to the man's identity?"

"Most startling!" said the physician, in a quiet tone, as if it was really not startling at all.

"What have you to say of it?" she demanded of the lawyer, with an anxious look at his impenetrable countenance.

"Consider the absurdity of your suspicions," broke in Davenport, "the childishness and impossibility of your premises. How could an imposter act out St. Udo Brand's history? How could he know Colonel Brand's most private affairs, and his friends, and write with his hand, and have the same appearance, and cheat everybody—we among the rest, who saw him when he was a boy as often as I have fingers and toes? Oh, Miss Walsingham!"

"You wish me to marry Mortlake, do you?" she asked, with scorn.

"For Heaven's sake don't call him that!" ejaculated Davenport. "If you call him that and he hears it, the Brand spirit will be very quiet for the first time if he doesn't end the slander in murder."

"It began in murder," retorted she, "that would be the fittest end, after all. But do not fear; I shall not alarm your colonel without proper cause. You really expect me to treat him as if he was St. Udo Brand?"

"Yes, until you have proofs to the contrary."

She sat with folded hands and pondered. An ashy pallor overspread her face. A mental gag was forced between her teeth; a mental rope was placed for her across a yawning chasm, and selfish hands were pushing her toward it, and selfish voices were urging her to cross alone.

"Very well," she breathed firmly, "I will bring you proofs that you will not venture to discredit. When I send for you again, come as promptly as you did to-day."

The executors were forced to depart with this arrangement, and rode back to Regis deep in discussion relating to their ward's sanity.

How long Margaret sat alone in the library she could not tell—an ominous foretaste of the grim future had shrouded her soul, and the dark hours passed unheeded by. When she roused herself, it was to instant action.

She sat down before her desk and began to write a letter—her third appeal for help.

She wrote but one passionate sentence, then her head sank between her hands.

"Who knows whether I shall live until it could be answered?" she moaned.

Bethinking herself, she tore the sheet and cast it into the heart of the fire, and took a new sheet; dashed off again but one sentence, signed her name, thrust it into an envelope, hurriedly sealing it, as if she feared her mind might change at any moment.

It was a telegram and ran thus:

> "Lady Juliana Ducie:—Come at once to Castle Brand on a matter of life and death.
>
> "Margaret Walsingham."

Then she dressed herself and drove down to Regis in the carriage, clutching the dispatch in her hand, and drawing back from view whenever she passed a wayfarer, trembling lest her enemy should detect her in this move against his safety.

After an hour of feverish impatience, an answer came which satisfied her.

> "I will come to-morrow night.
>
> "Lady J. Ducie."

She went out to her carriage with a triumphant air: she felt that she was one move ahead of the colonel.

"Lady Juliana shall strip him of his disguise," she thought, "and the executors shall be present to see the exposure."

She stopped before Mr. Davenport's office, wrote a line on her card requesting that he and Dr.

Gay would come to the castle the following evening about seven o'clock, and then she hurried home.

The next day passed with the anxious girl slowly enough; as the evening drew on, which she hoped would be the last of her enemy's imposture, her excitement became terrible; she was in that stage of over-strained endurance in which a triviality turns the brain.

She told the housekeeper to have a bedchamber prepared for a lady visitor, and heedless of her exclamations of wonder, directed her to send Symonds at a quarter to six to the railway station with the carriage, and to take whatever strangers were for the castle as secretly home as possible, so that no one in the village should know who they were.

"Lawk-a-mercy!" ejaculated Mrs. Chetwode, "what's Seven Oak a coming to! A body would think you was going to hide away a murderer, Miss Margaret dear."

"Not to hide away a murderer, but to discover one!" muttered the girl, turning from the colloquy.

She had two hours to wait for the coming of Lady Juliana, and she must live through the dreary time somehow, so, weary of the silence of the castle, she flung a large dark mantle about her, and went out for a walk upon the Waaste.

It was nearing the shortest day of the year, and the early twilight was already setting over the distant hill and forest.

The dun leaves, heaped high under the oaks of the front park, were white with hoary frost, crackled like paper under her feet, and, starting with every sound, she soon quitted the shadows of the trees, and paced over the sere turf down to the inky mere, where the long, brown flags pricked up in paper-like spikes, and the dank rushes pierced the filmy ices at the margin of the water, and the hazel shrubs clustered close about the slippery banks, and hid them from the Waaste.

She walked round and round in this dreary spot, while the dusk grew darker, and the frost fell whiter on her foot-prints; and, when fatigue began to demand rest, she chose a seat on the gnarled root of a giant willow, whose branches swept the ground on every side, or dipped into the mere at her feet.

She became completely absorbed in her thoughts, but presently a distant pattering, like rain upon the dry foliage, recalled her, with a disagreeable start.

She opened the branches of her yellow-leaf screen and looked about.

Nearer came the pattering steps, slow and soft; then she heard a long sniff, and a swifter pattering of the coming feet.

Her heart stood still with horror.

She saw a long, lean blood-hound leap into view, and circle slowly round the mere, his nose on the ground, his blood-shot eyes flaming through the dusk.

The colonel's sleuth-hound tracking her steps!

With what helpless fascination she watched the animal gliding like a phantom round and round, down to the lip of the mere, where she had bent to pluck a stalk, diverging a pace when she had diverged.

And behind the dog came Colonel Brand, with hands clasping each other by the wrists, and drooping figure, and head down on his breast, shuffling his dragging feet among the withered gorse as if weights held them down brooding along with the heavy and spiritless gait of an old man, or of one whose shoulders have been bowed thus by labor.

He looked not to right or left, but slouched on after his dog upon the bank, and, as he passed the woman in her hiding place, she saw that in his face, which no Brand of knightly English blood ever wore, since Sir Hildebrand broke his lance at Cressy.

That crafty and sinister half smile, that green, scintillating shimmer of the introverted eye, that gathered brow, seamed with the hideous lines of crime and cunning!

Could such a face belong to St. Udo, the dare-man and dare-devil? That coward's shuffle, and murderous, nervous hand clutching the empty air, or thrust into his bosom! Could such belong to the gallant soldier who had stormed the Rocky Ridge, and braved the cannon's mouth in the thickest of the fight? Thank Heaven, no! He lay in his hidden grave, and his bravery was glowing in the mouths of a hundred heroes, and his honor should be kept untarnished, if a woman's hand could uphold the proud escutcheon!

Closer stole the blood hound to the willow tree, but though she eyed his approach with curling blood, she would not utter a cry which might betray her to the man she hated.

For the nervous hand he had thrust into his bosom had brought out something which glittered with a steel-blue flash in the indistinct gloom, and he had come to a dead stand with it, and was looking at it with the glare of a hungry wolf.

He was but a few paces from Margaret Walsingham, and the sleuth-hound was gliding on her track, making his last circle round the mere. She knew it by his glaring eyes and watering fangs,

and his short, deep groans of eagerness.

"I must have recourse to you again, my tiny talisman?" hissed Colonel Brand to his stiletto. "She insists on having you, and I am going to humor her."

He hissed these words through his teeth slowly, deliberately, as if it was a sort of joy to utter them aloud, but once, and then he thrust it into his bosom again.

And the woman tore off her heavy cloak and dropped it beneath the willow tree, and, rising to her feet, she glided through the hazel copse across the Waaste, and fled for her life, just when the snarling hound sprang upon her garment and tore it into pieces, with many a wolfish bay!

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE.

Margaret soon went to her own apartment and changed her damp garments, and then she went down stairs to the echoing reception-room, to wait for Lady Juliana Ducie.

At last came the sound of carriage wheels, the great door was opened, and a gentle stir ensued in the lower hall.

Margaret rang the bell, and waited in feverish suspense to hear the issue.

"Who has arrived?" she asked, as the housekeeper appeared, arrayed in stiff black satin.

"The lady you were expecting, miss, I take it, with a lady's maid and groom. She has gone up to her room, and told me to tell Miss Walsingham she would appear in half an hour."

It was ten minutes to seven when the visitor, having partaken of a hearty dinner in her own room, and gone through the intricacies of a super-elegant toilet, with the assistance of her maid, came down to the reception-room, and was met with outstretched hands by placable Margaret.

"How kind of you to come to me!" she breathed, "and to prove a ready friend."

The lissome figure approached—beautiful, radiant as ever—and, tripping quite up to Margaret, she took her pale hand and pressed it graciously.

"Are we friends?" she queried, with her head a little drooped on one side, and eyes raised inquiringly. "Are you going to forget my naughty petulance? Papa and I have been so angry at ourselves that we let you go."

"All that is forgotten, dear Lady Julie."

"You are such a good creature, to be sure! But now tell me, what is this wonderful matter of life and death?" demanded my lady, whose eyes were roving round the massive furniture and lordly size of the old room, as if they were accustomed to take stock. "I could not resist such a tragic invitation; but I was not alarmed, for you always had such a strange way of putting things. Now do tell me, Margaret, dear!—there is nobody half as much interested as I am—are you really going to marry him after all? Such is the report."

"Nothing has been settled yet," answered Margaret, quietly. "Take a seat near the fire, Lady Juliana. I expect some visitors in a few minutes, and you may as well be well warmed before you are presented."

My lady sat down, with a meaning smile, as directed.

"Does St. Udo expect to see me?" she asked, coquettishly. "Is he aware that I was to come?"

"He is unconscious of your presence, my lady."

"Ah, ha! Too jealous to tell him! Ah, ha! Margaret, my dear, so you are afraid of his old flame! Well, it isn't surprising. Everybody gets jealous of me. I am considered so very pretty, and I vow I have become so accustomed to being envied that I don't feel comfortable unless half a dozen women are glaring at me with jealousy!"

"Heartless as ever, my Lady Julie."

"Portentous as ever, my tragic muse. Well, well, don't be so stiff with me, your Julie—why should you? I am so curious to know something about you. I think you are a most extraordinary woman. Are you going to be the mistress of Seven-Oak Waaste after all?"

"I intend to retain possession of it."

"And to marry St. Udo? Heigh, ho! my old lover. Is he much enamored with you? Inconstant wretch! he might have run up to Hautville, if it was only to taunt me with my cruelty in jilting him. I don't seem to have got on much better for having been so obedient to papa; positively I am without a matrimonial expectation; without even an *attache*, except my snip of a cousin Harry, who cant marry anybody until his uncle Henry and three sons die. The Duke of Piermont has gone

back to Ireland, and is supposed to be either mad or writing a book. My own opinion is, that he has fallen in love with some stock-jobber's daughter, or nameless orphan, and that his family have interfered, to prevent a shameful *mesalliance*."

My lady glanced spitefully at Margaret's inflexible face, but failed to read it.

The door was opened while she was examining her shallow reservoirs for more gossip, and the two executors were announced just as the pompous hall-clock struck seven.

"You are punctual, sirs," said the lady of the castle, pressing each hand gratefully in her feverish fingers; "let me present you to a friend, whose name is well known to you: Lady Juliana Ducie."

My lady bowed to each condescendingly and sank to her cushions again with raised eyebrows. The executors looked at each other and at their ward, also with raised eyebrows.

"You shall see my meaning in a few minutes," she breathed, passing the lawyer.

"Is London very gay just now, my lady?" asked the physician, understanding the face of affairs at a glance, and good-naturedly taking up his cue.

My lady, never at a loss for small talk, instantly plunged into an ocean of that diluted composition, and the minutes sped on.

At half-past seven, punctual to the second, came an imperative ring at the great door.

Margaret started up with a quivering face, murmured, "Excuse me," and glided out to conceal the terrible agitation of her features.

She took refuge in an ante-room and summoned the housekeeper.

"Show Colonel Brand in here instead of the reception-room," she said, "and stay with me while I speak to him."

"To act sheep-dog?" asked Chetwode, venturing on a pleasantry.

"Yes," shuddered the girl; "one can never depend on a wolf."

The colonel was accordingly ushered in, and the housekeeper, knitting in hand, took her seat at a distance, as if prepared for a long interview.

"How shall I get back my composure?" thought Margaret. "I dare not face Lady Juliana until I am calm, else she would jump at this man's name."

"I have come in answer to a kind invitation from Miss Walsingham," said the man, approaching her with an insolent bravado of manner.

"Yes, I have work for you to-night."

"For or against my cause, fair lady? I decline to stand in my own light."

His evil eyes were fastened tauntingly upon her; his hand was toying with the breast of his coat.

"St. Udo Brand should fear nothing," mocked Margaret.

His eyeballs quivered and fell; the veins grew black upon his brow.

"One of your silly women had a narrow escape from being torn to pieces," he said, sourly, changing the subject.

"Yes," retorted Margaret, "I hear you keep a dangerous dog—the sooner you *stab him* the safer we shall feel."

His hand dropped from his bosom as if an adder had bitten him; her meaning was unmistakable.

"Tell the woman not to venture upon dangerous ground," he growled from beneath his closed teeth. "Argus is a fierce brute, and hates a spy."

"Do not apologize for your dog's ferocity. I can well afford the loss of a cloak for the tableau I had the pleasure of witnessing."

Her pallid, daring face pointed her meaning. Colonel Brand bowed to hide his livid face as if he had received a fine compliment; those Satanic white spots were slowly disappearing when he ventured to speak again.

"Since it was my lovely hostess, and not an inquisitive kitchen-wench, who was frightened," sneered he, "Argus shall be consigned to the bottom of the mere."

"Argus knew his master Ulysses after they had been parted twenty years. Would your dog recognize you by the name of St. Udo Brand, do you suppose?"

"Sweet lady, would that my understanding could keep pace with your wit! But your prolific imagination suggested a riddle—which I have yet to find the meaning of, the word *conquered*!"

"Do not cry 'hallo' until you are out of the woods. But come with me—I have a riddle which waits your solving."

Margaret entered the reception-room with Colonel Brand, and preceding him swiftly to Lady Juliana, stood aside and waited meaningly for the result.

There was a moment of disconcerted silence, then my lady, dropping a deep courtesy, cried:

"Good gracious, Captain Brand, I did not recognize you!" and coquettishly gave her hand.

The man's face would have made a study for a demon-painter in its first blank stare at the blushing lady, and its instant blaze of fury at the merciless Margaret.

Intuitively he read her insulting intention to snare him before these witnesses. For a time blind rage threatened to choke him and help him into the pitfall.

But the filmy vail hooded his eyes, and he gazed with a transfixed smile at Lady Juliana, still holding her hand.

"Must I introduce Colonel Brand? Is his memory so short?" jibed Margaret, with goading scorn.

The colonel returned to present things; made a desperate effort to appear natural, and carried Lady Juliana's hand to his lips.

"Fair as ever," he muttered, so absorbed as to appear heedless of aught else. "Ah, Lady Juliana Ducie, what an impossible task it is to forget you."

He led her to a distant sofa, and seating her, bent over her in an attitude of devotion.

Margaret stood like a statue, and pale as marble, accepted her defeat.

She saw the flush of gratified pride, the entire credulity of Lady Juliana; she saw the half-pitying, half-contemptuous smile which the executors passed with each other. She saw the stealthy look of wicked exultation with which her enemy repaid her ruse, and with a quick failing of strength and fortitude, she burst into sudden tears, turned and glided from the room.

"He is armed at all points against surprise," she moaned, in terror; "he will win the game in spite of me. You wretch! how shall I escape your vengeance?"

When she returned to her guests, half an hour later, with a slight apology for her untimely illness, she found Colonel Brand and Lady Juliana improving the time by a desperate flirtation, eager and hopeful on her part, satiric and careless on his, as beseemed the character of St. Udo, when he met again the woman who had jilted him.

No one asked the cause of Margaret's illness, or seemed at all struck by it; all had their private belief on the subject, my lady being neither slow nor reluctant to assure herself that extreme jealousy at St. Udo's marked pleasure upon seeing herself, had driven the bride-elect from the room.

When the evening had passed, like a queer, grim dream to poor Margaret, and the executors bade adieu, their ward accompanied them to the room door, and clung to Dr. Gay's arm with a pitiful reluctance to let him go.

"I have failed," she whispered, sadly; "and he has the best of it. Don't be angry with me for bringing you here to-night on such a fruitless errand. I am unhappy enough without your anger."

"It is not anger, my dear girl; it is concern that we feel for you——"

"Pho! it is anger! How long is this farce of yours to last, Miss Margaret? Will nobody but Rufus Gay and Andrew Davenport do to make up side actors for your serio-comic tomfooleries?"

"Bear with me a little longer," sighed the orphan, humbly. And then the executors went away.

The colonel with great reluctance also tore himself from the side of his charmer, and prepared to depart.

"We are quite good friends?" whispered my lady, with an arch glance into his eyes.

"My Julie will pity her poor slave in his new chains?" murmured back the colonel.

Margaret, waiting with beating pulses for his departure, heard with curling lip both question and answer.

A sly invitation to come often to see papa, followed from the lady, was chivalrously accepted by the gentleman, and her hand was once more caressed by way of farewell.

"Thanks for the pleasant surprise you have given me," said he, bending down to look into Margaret's face with an air of devilish exultation; "it was so delicately planned and so kindly meant that I shall not forget it in you. Good night."

She turned away her loathing face and bowed him out, and then came drearily up to my lady and looked at her.

"Is this man whom you met to-night changed from the man to whom you were engaged?"

"Oh! Of course he is changed. He looks ever so much older and not nearly so nice looking, and he is as grave as an undertaker, except when I make him laugh—but heigh, ho! It is no wonder, with such a burden as his grandmother placed upon him. He would soon look himself again if he had

this magnificent castle, and the one whom he loves for his wife."

"You would be quite willing to marry *that* person, would you, Lady Juliana?"

"Why do you ask? Is it only to tease me? You know that I never left off loving him."

"And yet how ignoble was that love!" said Margaret, bitterly; "how shallow, that could so mistake its object! Oh, my lady, I might have remembered your skin-deep nature when I asked you to come here and help me."

"What now," cried my lady, fearing she had said too much and becoming alarmed. "Why should you talk that way to me? I can't help my love for St. Udo Brand."

"Try to help it, then, for the man is a villain," was the cold rejoinder.

"A villain!" ejaculated the other, thoroughly startled. "What can you mean? That's a strange way to speak of the gentleman you are going to marry. I—I think it is dishonorable!"

"I am not going to marry *him*," returned Margaret; "oh, no, my lady—no, no!"

She burst into a wild laugh which became so violent that Lady Juliana got up uneasily and moved away.

"I must say that I am altogether mystified as to your affairs then," she remarked, sullenly; "I thought that I was summoned here to be your confidential adviser, or bride-maid, or some such thing. It seems I have come here to be laughed at."

"Pardon me," said Margaret, putting a violent strain upon herself. "I am not laughing for amusement; indeed, I am scarcely in a gay mood. I summoned you here, Lady Julie, because I hoped, through you, to settle a certain question; but I now see that it is not within your power."

Lady Juliana looked at her with intense curiosity. She had a vague idea that she had allowed something to slip through her fingers by her carelessness, and she determined, vindictively, that it should not be St. Udo Brand.

"I'll have him fast as ever bound to my sleeve," she inwardly vowed: "and I am very much mistaken if this eccentric creature does not give us Seven-Oak Waaste."

My lady drove away next morning from gloomy Castle Brand, had a coquettish half-hour of farewell at the station with Colonel Brand, who was lounging there casually, did as much mischief as she could to Margaret's cause, and went back to London, her head full of new ambitions.

And that was the end of Margaret's experiment.

It was some time after Lady Julie's useless visit, and Margaret was walking on the Waaste with Mrs. Chetwode.

She had discontinued her solitary walks since the evening by the mere, and invariably begged the housekeeper's company, or had a man-servant to keep her in sight whenever she took the air.

They wandered aimlessly over the frosty snow, side by side, and scarce speaking a word, a lowering sky overhead, and a bleak wind in their faces.

Margaret had mused over her next step until her thoughts were madness to her; and, as yet, no solution had come of the way out of her position. She had not gathered bravery enough to set another snare for her enemy, and had nervously avoided seeing him since her last discomfiture; and, too, she had heard that he was away in London, basking in the smiles of Lady Juliana. But, while revolving the next step to be taken, she was doomed to meet her enemy face to face at a time she imagined him in London.

At a turn of the path the two women came full upon the colonel, shuffling along, with his head bent, and his eyes on a book.

He thrust it hastily in a breast-pocket of his overcoat, and accosted them with an insolent leer.

"How is the fair lady after her week's seclusion?" snarled he.

"Nothing bettered by this interruption to it," returned she, coming to a dead stop from sheer inability to support herself.

"Permit me," said the colonel, forcing Margaret to lean upon his arm, "this attack of agitation is so severe that I who have caused it should render my poor services in removing it."

He bent with an ogreish smile to look into her eyes.

"Leave me," breathed the wretched girl, attempting to wrench her hand from his grasp. "How dare you molest me sir?"

"Dear Margaret," sneered the man, bending near her dead white face, "why will you hold your slave at such a distance? I who hope to be co-heir of that goodly pile beyond us before this year is out? Ten days, my dearest—only ten days to wait, and then the month is out."

She could only look at him silently; her lips moved in haughty protest, but no words came to her aid; she walked by his side dumb as death.

The good old housekeeper kept by her other side and held her passive hand, comforting her in her kindly fashion by patting and pressing it, or the poor girl's terror would have overcome her altogether.

Suddenly Margaret ceased the struggle of attempting to draw her hand from his arm, and turned her averted face toward him.

Her eyes stole over him attentively, she marked his dress and his manner with a fixed intensity—an idea bad taken possession of her which she could not drive away.

Again and again her eye returned to its scrutiny of the man, and the hand which Mrs. Chetwode was caressing, closed itself convulsively as if it held something it must keep, come life or come death. Her hand which lay upon his arm quivered against his heart as if there was something there she longed to seize.

When they reached the griffins now squatting on their snow-covered pedestals, Margaret broke her bitter silence by a forced request.

"Honor me by an interview, sir."

"Whom have I to meet this time?" he asked, with a boding smile.

"No one sir. Are you afraid of meeting strangers, Colonel Brand?"

He bowed sardonically, and followed her into the hall.

John came forward to relieve the colonel of his overcoat, and Margaret remained for some moments giving some directions to the housekeeper. When the visitor was ready she accompanied him into the library, where before a glowing fire the lonely girl was accustomed to read through the long evenings, and bade him wait her return from her chamber.

"What a home-paradise we shall have," said Colonel Brand with ironical gallantry; "I know I shall be delighted by some new and strange side of my charmer's character. I always am."

"You may," answered Margaret with a strange look.

She went out, shutting the door carefully between her and the colonel, and looking round about the vast old hall.

There stood John, still hanging up the hat, cane, and coat of the visitor.

"Carry this light up to the third hall," said Margaret, pointing to a lamp in a bracket.

He took the lamp and ascended out of view. What a transformation came over the girl's countenance then.

Her eyes lit up with triumph—she sprang to the overcoat and thrust her eager hand into the breast-pocket.

She was right. The book she had seen him reading was the green morocco note-book he had referred to when she had tried to trip him in his knowledge of St. Udo Brand's letter to her—and she had it in her hand now.

She drew it forth, and fled like a phantom to her room, just as Colonel

Brand, recalling his blunder, started up and hurried to remove the damning evidence of his own imposture.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MARGARET'S PERIL.

Margaret double-locked her door, and stood listening with the book clutched fast in her hand.

Drop by drop her blood gurgled from her heart—her hair bristled.

What had she done?

She had thrown the gauntlet at him; henceforth there should be no quarter.

She thought it all out in that breathless watch for the result. She knew that she had given herself over to his sworn vengeance; that she would be cut down from his path like a noxious weed; that the battle which was coming would be a *battle for her life*.

Yes, her day of grace was past—even now her enemy knew his loss. She had—oh, galling thought!—outwitted him.

He searched his pockets—all of them; he shook the coat—in vain. His eyes stole up the staircase with the green glare of murder in their tawny depths; his lean face grew chalk-white; his hand hid itself in his bosom and griped something there. Alas, for reckless Margaret!

And yet the wretch stood scheming—scheming, wary as his own blood thirsty sleuth-hound.

It was a woman not easily brushed aside; He must be very cautious with his dark revenge, and creep with sheathed claws toward his purpose.

John, coming down stairs empty-handed, met the gaze of a face looking at him, which he thought at first was that of the arch enemy of mankind.

"Where has your mistress gone, my man?"

"To her room, your honor."

"Have you been meddling with the pockets of this coat?"

"No, indeed, sir; I hope you'll believe me, sir. I just had but hung it up when I was sent with a lamp to the upper hall. Please ask Miss Walsingham if it wasn't so, yer honor."

"Then, by Heaven! I've been robbed!"

He turned on his heel, and carried his livid face into the library, as spotted as if he had been smitten with a white plague, rummaged without ceremony until he had got himself pen, and ink, and paper, and wrote a *billet-doux* to his lady-love.

Five minutes after Margaret's whirlwind rush to her room, there came a knocking at the door.

"Who is it?"

"It's me. Miss Margaret, dear."

"Oh, Mrs. Chetwode! what is it."

"A letter from the colonel, Miss Margaret."

"Push it under the door."

"Dear me, it won't go."

"Make it go."

Presently a slip of white appeared, caught on the edge of the carpet. She seized and pulled it through.

It had got rid of its envelope in the rough transit, and came followed by fluttering rags, held together by a great wax seal, like a scarlet beacon of danger.

Still kneeling, she read it, fiercely bit her lip, and pondered.

"I give five minutes to retract your mistake. A few pencil-scrawls are not worth a life. Only five minutes, my dear Miss Walsingham."

"If I yielded, would I be safer than if I was obstinate?" she thought, crushing the scraps in her hand. "No, what are *his* assurances? Lies to lull me to sleep. Let me drive my foe to open enmity—let me goad him to his ruin, or mine, if God so forgets me, but I will never give up this evidence of his guilt." She held aloft, with wild triumph, the green note-book. "Do your worst to Margaret Walsingham, you monster, but you will not get St. Udo's right out of her faithful hands. My five minutes of grace are slipping away, and I am going to defy him. I will pray Heaven to protect me, and—I will do my duty."

She bowed her head on her hands, and, as second by second slipped by, her thoughts went up to Heaven and to God, and, with the love of a servant tried and true, to Ethel Brand.

"Mrs. Chetwode?"

"I am waiting here, miss, for the answer."

"Tell Colonel Brand that the five minutes are past, and *I defy him*."

"Oh, Miss Margaret, dearie, them same words?"

"Exactly. Change nothing."

The housekeeper went with lagging feet and this message to the snarling hound in the library, who cursed her heartily and shut the door in her face.

Margaret remained with her head sunk on her knees in that sort of trance with which the wretch awaits the too sure sentence of death. It came; a dull tremor through the massive walls—the great door was shut—Colonel Brand had left the house.

Now she knew that she was sentenced to death; no remedy—no drawing back.

A cold ooze broke over her; her natural womanly fears became rampant; her fancy pictured the form of murder which the crawling wretch she had to deal with would most surely employ. At once the dull waves of the pool where she had encountered the sleuth-hound and his monster occurred to her; its cold chill waters enveloped her heart; the weeds and mud chocked her even more than the fancied hand at her throat; that gleaming stiletto seemed driven into her bosom; for a time she lived through the agonies of actual death.

But she was naturally a brave woman, notwithstanding all her timidity; yes, a dauntless creature, whose generous blood was sure to rise before wrong and danger.

She shook of the slavish terror which threatened to overcome her altogether, and set herself to her next course of action.

"And now for my night's work," she said, glancing round the room, where a fire burned redly in the grate, and the ghostly December day faded from point to point.

She quietly made arrangements against being interrupted; rang the bell, and called to the maid through the door that she had retired for the night, and did not wish any dinner, except a cup of strong coffee, which should be brought to her by the housekeeper.

Then she carefully locked her window, and closed the massive mahogany shutters, lit her candles, drew her writing-table before the fire, swept the hearth, and saw that she had a supply of candles, matches, and pens.

By the time these arrangements were completed, the housekeeper was knocking at the door with the edge of a lunch-tray.

"Has Colonel Brand left the house?" called Margaret.

"Yes, miss, some time ago."

"Are you sure he's not lurking about your back, Mrs. Chetwode?"

"Holy mercy! I hope not."

Sounds of the tray being dumped on a hall-table ensued, and the hurried tread of the old woman showed that she was looking into various empty rooms.

"What made you think such a queer thing, dearie?" whispered she, presently, through the key-hole. "I seen him go out, plain as plain can be."

Margaret opened the door, and held out her hands for the tray.

"What did he say to my message?"

The housekeeper gave an expressive shudder.

"Ugh! He swore like a blasphemer at me, Miss Margaret, dear."

"Keep watch lest any of the doors be left open to-night, Mrs. Chetwode."

"Oh, yes, miss—though I'm sure Purcell is very careful. My goody! Miss Margaret, how wild you look! Surely you can't be well?"

"Oh, yes. Do not let any one disturb me to-night again, if you please. Good-night."

"Sleep soundly, miss. Good-night."

The door was locked again, and Margaret sat down to her cup of coffee and her ponderings.

She was quite calm, quite strong of purpose when she opened her desk, laid the note-book upon it, and began her task.

And what a story these notes, remarks, and hinted plots disclosed to her!

It commenced with, strange to say, a description of herself, her position at Castle Brand, what she said when summoned to receive St. Udo Brand's note on the night of Mrs. Brand's death. Then followed the words:

"I believe I could do it. My own perseverance tells me I could do it; the devil in the shape of Calembours tells me I could do it."

Leaf after leaf of such hints were read and laid to heart, then a paragraph which made those deep gray eyes grow black with apprehension.

"All right. Am *sure* I can do it. My chances doubled by the actors themselves. The will is in favor of M. W. St. U. scornfully washes his hands of the affair, preferring a pretty face and poverty. Stupid devil, to throw away such a birthright! Lucky dog, who is to be his successor? Let the rogue win the race. I am so tired of the dodges, the twists, the aliases, the lurkings, that I will put on the greatest disguise of all, a gentleman swell, and try what freedom is like, and the sea-captain's daughter, and Seven-Oak Waaste. St. U. sails to-morrow for the United States, and I send company with him which will twist him into shape more than the haughty dog expects. Be kind to him, oh, captivating chevalier! be attentive to him, oh, patient *Thoms*!"

Then came a complete interview between St. Udo Brand and the "Chevalier," purporting to have taken place on board the steamer going to New York, with this laudatory conclusion:

"Thoms, you are no fool. Thoms, I really think you are a genius."

Leaf after leaf again. The firm lip curved with stern determination, the brain quick and comprehending.

The copy of the farewell letter from St. Udo to herself was the next glimpse of a familiar past,

with the leaf turned down just where the cunning hypocrite had marked the place during that walk under the oaks.

Then a copy of his letter to Lady Juliana Ducie, in which he had "pinned his faith" to her sleeve, with a memorandum attached of, "Faithfully mailed by good Thoms; and thus ends St. U.'s affair with little Ducie. Now he will fight like a devil with these Yankees."

Following this was the transcription of two letters to Gay and Davenport, in which St. Udo had scornfully explained the fact of his departure from England.

Then came the secret of his ready recognition of Lady Juliana when she stood before him in the Brands' reception-room. Her photograph, painted beautifully, was pasted into a cunning little pocket, and her description was written out at full, as if the picture were not to be trusted alone.

Initials of strange names—addresses in London, scraps of information about officers in the Guards—a frequent (see private album)—carefully noted *bon mots* of different English friends of the colonel's, anecdotes of London life, all headed by the significant note:

"Brand's daily gossip.—Study well."

Then came a copy of Lady Juliana's letter of dismissal, with the comment:

"Thoms, my boy, you did well to search that vest pocket."

This grim pleasantry of the genial writer closed what appeared to be part the first in the movements of the watched man.

Let her think before she turned the leaf; let her rest her whirling brain awhile, and examine this curious idea which had slid into her mind. Who was Thoms!

In this memorandum book he purported to be a valet. Was Thoms Roland Mortlake? Could he have crawled round his purpose under the disguise of a body-servant, touching daily the man whom he meant to murder?

Put these thoughts of horror away—go on to the end.

Part the second commenced with St. Udo's first battle, and his part in it minutely described.

Then followed letters from the executors of the Brand estates, in which Margaret saw her departure to become school-teacher freely commented on as a freak which would soon wear itself out.

Then suddenly followed, dashed down in a rough, unsteady hand, as if in the dark, five or six pages of phonetic writing.

Patiently Margaret spelled it out—the life of St. Udo Brand, as told to the Chevalier de Calembours at the midnight camp-fire. Every minute detail, every passing mention of a friend, of a place visited, of scenes, adventures, college incidents; also what made the heart burn in the breast of the woman who was reading these records—a few sad sentences which told the secret of poor St. Udo's bitterness.

"Calembours, I would have been a better man now but for one grave mistake which I made early in life. I loved a woman passionately and purely; she was my first conception of love, and would have perfected in me a noble manhood had she been worthy. She broke the trust—vilely cheated me, and fled with an officer in the artillery, a man whom all pure women would have shrunk from; and she was lost, as she might have foreseen. Since then, to perdition to the sex, say I, and their cant of feminine purity, for of all crafty, insatiable, double-faced hypocrites I have found woman to be the worst."

The next few leaves were covered with crude specimens of writing. St. Udo's name again and again, until it was a perfect imitation of St. Udo's hand, and, after this, the notes were written in the newly-acquired style, as if to perfect the cunning forger.

Then was faithfully narrated an interview between "the chevalier" and Colonel Brand, in which the former was proposing to his friend to turn traitor, and go with him to the South, and take up arms against their present comrades.

And, as a brave man would answer, so answered the honest Englishman, heaping epithets of scorn and anger on the little traitor. Attached to this was the memorandum:

"Calembours has parted with my man; not good for Calembours; he has broken the bargain. Thoms has stuck by Brand; invaluable Thoms; so will he stick by Brand while he lives. He says so. Has he very long to live? No."

On the succeeding page came a sudden change; a few wild sentences in the breathlessness of rage.

"He has given me the slip. He has slipped the noose and got away. Where? where? Have I lost him? have I lost my prize at the last trick, my Castle Brand, my good luck, my fair play, my amends for seven months of toil under his boot-heel? No, not while I have brain to plan, or body to track him. I swear to leave this book untouched until I have found him and left him a lump of clay."

Leaf by leaf is turned over; the pale hand stops and trembles down to her side.

Here is a note. If he has kept his vow, this note is a record of St. Udo's murder. She reads a date, and her eyes seem to pulsate with blind fire.

"September 1st. The deed is done. Lost in the skurry of a midnight sortie. 'Killed in battle,' his men will say; but—Thoms knows better! He tracked him with his long sleuth-hound through the swamps, and the surging morass, and the long, hot highway, the spikey groves, the dark fens, and through hunger and danger of death; and he found him! Why not keep his promise? He stole his history, habits, phrases, manners, friends; and now, the lesson being learned, Thoms may keep his promise, made to himself. He stooped this moonlit night upon the battle-field, and stole his master's life, and stood erect—not *Thoms, the ignoble valet, but St. Udo, the heir of Castle Brand*!"

Margaret paused, sick and heart-quenched.

Memory brought back the vision of the battle-field, and of the wounded hero, and of the brooding assassin, and reason stood aghast at the manifest overturn of her natural laws.

"Grant me days enough to avenge him, high Heaven!" she cried, with a passion of tears.

She would allow herself no luxury of sorrow; she repressed these tears, trimmed her candles—took up her bitter task again.

Part the third showed that the murderer had arrived in England; that he had lurked about the castle for a few days before presenting himself, and acquainted himself with as many necessary facts as possible. After this came the appearance of the pseudo-heir before the executors.

"I have stepped into the wrong man's shoes with marvelous ease, and I have seen my future wife. Could anything be more appropriate, I wonder, than for her to faint at sight of me? I am resolved to marry her. It wouldn't be fair play to silence *her* as I silenced some one who is in his grave; and when we are man and wife I will tell her where she first saw her husband."

The second entry was not quite so confident:

"The girl is going to be troublesome. Confound her! why has she taken such a dislike to me?"

Entry the third still more expressive of alarm:

"What's this I hear? The girl left Gay's house without any explanation, and gone to Castle Brand. What does that mean? Has she taken anything into her head against *me*?

"I think she has seen with those mystical eyes of hers the deep ruts on my wrists and ankles; and I think she is looking back a dozen years to the man who lay in chains and cursed her cup of cold water. Confound her! I am afraid of her."

There were other allusions to her which made her eyes blaze with indignation, intermixed with careful entries of names or localities which might be useful to the adventurer; and still, step by step, the purpose of the man slowly unfolded itself. He had expected at first to deceive Margaret Walsingham with the rest, and to win the fortune by marrying her.

"A more monstrous fate," thought the girl, "than death."

But it soon appeared that she had betrayed her distrust, and he was quietly waiting a chance to remove her. One note broke out thus:

"The girl will be my ruin, unless *I shut the hatches* on her. She has shown her hand to-day in three different attempts to make me betray myself. By Heaven, she will succeed if she tries that long; but I have made a counter plot which, clever as she is, she can't evade. I have been beforehand with her, and won the confidence of the executors. I have also announced my determination to propose to-morrow for her. If she refuses, that's a sign that I let the hatch drop; if she accepts, hold up the hatch a while, and give her another chance."

The result of his proposal showed how unlooked for her answer had been.

"She's a move in advance again—clever she devil; I am quite thrown out. Proposed according to plan; was put off for a month. I think her demand of a month's time to consider means a month's time to run me to the end of my chain. My chain would run out in a week with her at the right end of it; so I suppose it must be once, twice, thrice, and *down goes the hatch*!"

The next entry was written with the sneer of a triumphant demon:

"Thought you would trip me, did you? Silly fool, to tamper with your crazy hatch-door! Don't you know that when it drops you will suffocate? So you expected me to be caught by Lady Juliana Ducie, did you? No, no, my bride of death, I have pored over her picture too often. But for your fine intention you shall suffer, Margaret Walsingham!

"My lady is a mighty fine-feathered bird for *me* to have fluttering round me. I have a mind to marry the marquis' daughter when the watch-dog of the castle has died of her little sickness; wouldn't that be fair play all round?"

The succeeding notes described two visits to London, in which the daring wretch had penetrated into the Marquis of Ducie's residence, and had private interviews with my lady, who seemed to be

straining every nerve to win him from Miss Walsingham; and it closed with the ominous sentence:

"Little Ducie proves so much to my taste that I will go down to Surrey, and *drop that hatch*!"

The diary in the note-book had come to an end. Mortlake's secrets were hers now. Mortlake's course of crime was run, if she could live to give them to the world.

Margaret once more trimmed her candles, replenished the drowsy fire, paced up and down her room, and then sat down and commenced to copy such parts of the entries as bore directly upon the conspiracy.

Hour followed hour; the candles burned down; the fire wasted to white ashes; the wintry wind moaned without, carrying sleet on its wings.

Still the girl's strength held out; she wrote with energy the dark record which was to ruin the murderer of St. Udo Brand. Long past midnight found her at the last page, and at the last sentence:

"Little Ducie proves so much to my taste that I will go down to Surrey, and drop that hatch."

The hoarse baying of the dogs roused her to things present. She rose from her cramped position, cold and trembling with terror.

Who was lurking about so late? Her enemy?

The candles dropped into their little wells of boiling wax and expired. She stood in the pitchy darkness, listening.

The angry babel of howling dogs filled her ears again. A sudden pause; they, too, were listening. Then a yelp of canine rage and eagerness.

Margaret groped in the box for another candle and a match; fitted the candle into the tall silver candlestick, lit it, and gathered up her papers, while the flame was as yet small and sickly as a far-off star.

She hid them all in a compartment of her desk, carried the desk to a closet, locked it, and hid the key beneath a loose edge of the carpet.

"I may pay the forfeit of my life for these proofs," she thought; "but Davenport and Gay shall see them, whatever the risk, and my work shall descend to their hands if I am removed."

She was calm, but a curious pulse was beating in her ears and deadening her sense of hearing. Through it she could swear that strange noises were in the air, which were entirely foreign to any that could be caused within the house.

The bounding pulse still beat in her ears, and she stood intently waiting.

What it was she knew not, which smote her whole being into intensity—her hair bristled.

There it was again—through the thick shutter and massive window—the deep breathing of a man who has been hard at work, and stops his operations to listen.

Could it be that her enemy was at the window?

Margaret shrank back; she had been standing in profile, not two feet from the window, and her ear had caught the indistinct sounds so clearly that she was able to trace them immediately to their cause.

A man was in the balcony outside her window, and he was listening to know whether she was sleeping or waking. Perhaps a burglar? No.

Mortlake was there to retrace his false step before the morning light should place his secret in other hands.

"He's going to force an entrance and murder me," thought Margaret, who could reason distinctly in this moment of peril; "and, knowing that I only share the knowledge of his guilt, he hopes to escape suspicion. He will arrange it like a burglary—likely take away my few jewels and articles of value, and drop them in the mere. I am afraid I am lost."

These thoughts just glanced through her mind as lightning glimmers through the thunderous clouds, and, with the sudden instinct of self-preservation, she ran to the door, determined to rush into safety.

Before she had reached it, or her hand could touch the lock, a slow and gentle scratching on the window-pane arrested her, and she paused, fascinated, to understand it. Scratch—scratch—scratch—cr-ick! the tiny tinkle of falling glass.

Scratch—scratch—scratch—scratch—scratch—scratch! cr-ick—cr-ick! More glass falling, a crunching footstep, a soft tremor of the mahogany shutter!

Margaret essayed to wrench round the heavy lock of her door.

Her hand had no more strength than an infant's. She shuddered from head to foot.

One more desperate wrench!

A low snarl reached her ear! Eager paws beat at the bottom of her door!

She stood transfixed as the devil's cunning of her adversary dawned upon her mind.

The terrible sleuth-hound had been stationed outside her door, ready to tear her limb from limb when she should issue.

CHAPTER XIX.

A PRAYER TO HEAVEN.

The game had passed out of her hands. Should she trust to the blood-thirsty brute, or to the blood-thirsty man?

I think she would have thrown herself upon such mercy as the hound would show her, rather than trust to Roland Mortlake. But the time had passed even while she stood in sore doubt.

That mysterious tremor of the shutter had ceased, and now, in the ominous stillness, she saw—oh horror! what was that?

A small circular hole had been cut in the panel, and through it she caught the glitter of a *human eye* watching her.

The blood curdled in her veins, her hands fell, clasped, before her, she stood, with her head bent forward, and dilated eyes returning that awful stare.

No horror, caused by death in any form, could have equaled that caused by the mere stealthy glare of a human eye watching her, gleaming upon her, unaccompanied by the visible face.

Suddenly the eye was removed, a sharp click broke the supreme silence, a long, slender tube was thrust half-length through the aperture, and pointed with deliberate aim at her heart.

A blind haze came between her and the hideous vision. Quicker than thought she darted to one side, and sank to the floor, almost insensible.

Her sight cleared, and she looked for the pointed pistol.

It was slowly veering round, to bring her again within range.

Her eyes measured the room wildly. The windows commanded every part of it except the two upper corners. She must fly across the room or be shot like a dog.

She sprang up and flitted swiftly along the wall, and out of range.

Now she was safe for a few seconds. She might crouch upon the carpet and pray a few wild words for safety.

The pistol returned to the door and covered it, in case of attempted escape.

As long as her enemy could get nothing larger than the tube of a pistol in, she was safe in her corner; but if he enlarged the hole enough to introduce his hand with the pistol, she was lost; for there was no large piece of furniture near which she could hide behind.

"If I could but circumvent him until daylight," she thought, "this night's danger would be past."

She looked at her watch. It was two of the night.

"Three hours to wait," she pondered, with a despairing heart. "Can I possibly defy him for three hours? He is crafty and desperate; he is here to put an end to my life, and will not go away unsuccessful. I am terrified, helpless, and without resource. Which of us is likely to triumph?"

Her eyes went longingly to the old-fashioned bell-pulls hanging at each side of the fire-place.

"If I dare to rush across the room and ring a peal to awake the household, I would be shot before my hand left the bell-rope," she told herself.

Why had she lit the tell-tale candle? There it burned, white and faintly tremulous in the current of air caused by the hole in the shutter, slowly wasting away, but distinctly revealing her every movement to the watchful assassin without.

Was there no way by which she could extinguish it and leave herself in the friendly darkness?

If the thought occurred to him of enlarging the aperture and shooting her in her place of refuge, the candle would too surely guide his murderous hand.

Even while thus she reasoned, the pistol was removed, and the grating of a tiny saw against the shutter recommenced.

Horror paralyzed the terrified girl for an instant; the next, with rare presence of mind, she

snatched the cloak off her shoulders in which she had been wrapped, and hurled it with all her strength across the room.

Like a huge, ugly bat, it made for the candle, swept it off the table, and she was surrounded in a moment by darkness.

The grating sound came to an abrupt stop, and a smothered oath came through the auger-hole.

"Give up that book, Margaret Walsingham," said the hoarse voice of her foe, "for as sure as you live and breathe your life will go for it if you don't."

Margaret remained still as a statue, not daring to breathe.

"I'll make terms with you even now, if you hand me the book," said the wily voice again.

She bowed her face in her hands, and smiled even in the midst of her terror at such a proposition.

A long silence followed, then the steady sawing of the wooden panel went on.

It was done. A wintry star glimmered in through a gap large enough to admit a man's arm; then the star was blotted out, and a metallic click was heard.

She felt, with a muffled and sickening heart-throb, that her enemy was holding the pistol at full cock toward her, only waiting for the least betrayal to fire.

She raised her head and watched, in fascinated horror, for the flash which was to herald her death.

"Do you surrender?" demanded the assassin, in a voice quick and imperative.

Had Margaret possessed an atom less presence of mind, she would have answered involuntarily "No," in her scorn of the cowardly villain, but she bit her lip in time, and held her peace.

Full well she knew that her first word would be the signal of her death.

"There are two hours and a half before daylight," said the enemy. "Are you willing to have that pistol pointed at you for two hours and a half, waiting to shoot you with the first gleam of daylight, or will you give up the note-book and come to terms with me, for our mutual safety?"

Margaret would not peril her safety by a whisper.

"I don't object, even after all that has passed, to marry you, and let you be mistress of the property, if you will only say yes."

"Heaven grant me patience to keep quiet," prayed Margaret, in her soul.

"Are you there, girl, or am I talking to an empty room?" called the man, with a bitter oath. "Have you slipped, with your confounded cleverness, out by some side door?"

Not a breath answered him; his own breathing almost filled the room as he applied his ear to the hole.

A protracted silence ensued. The man at the window waited with murder in his black soul for the faintest sound within; the hound at the door sniffed with dripping fangs, and waited too, demon-like in his imitation of his master; the lonely woman crouched in the corner, defenseless, weak, affrighted, and prayed that Heaven would keep her safe.

The hours crept slowly on, but oh! how leaden were their wings. The death-watch of these three was drawing to an end.

Margaret kept her dizzy eyes still fastened upon the black line that began to be discernible at the window, and saw a crisis approaching.

"Are you dead or living in there?" said Roland Mortlake, at the auger-hole, "If you are, you're a brave girl, and I want you for my wife. Say 'yes.'"

No answer from within, save the whine of the sleuth-hound at the door.

A distant bugle call from without, from some early huntsman.

An angry hand shook the heavy shutters. Thank heaven! the bolts were the massive bars of the sixteenth century, made for feudal defense and not for beauty.

"If I break in the window, it won't be good for you, Margaret Walsingham," was the boastful threat, as a second shaking was administered to the shutters.

The clear, joyous notes of the bugle sounded nearer; the lusty holloa of the sportsman to his dogs came over the Waaste and into the hole to the ear of Margaret Walsingham, and a rush of joy swept over her and gave her hopes of life.

This early huntsman was no doubt Squire Clanridge, who, she now remembered having heard from Purcell, the steward, was to take the Seven-Oak dogs out this morning to have a run with his own.

He would pass this side of Castle Brand on his way to the kennels, and the cowardly assassin

would have either to fly or be seen.

An imprecation burst from him in a voice which betrayed his fury, his disappointment, his apprehension.

A wild smile quivered over Margaret's white face as she saw the arm withdrawn and heard the dismal moan of the night wind through the hole.

Hasty feet crunched on the sleet-covered balcony, and the scratching sound of a man swinging himself down by some rattling chain-ladder followed.

The quick gallop of the horses' feet shortly became audible, and she knew that the squire, with his groom, were clattering up to the court-yard of the castle.

Five minutes afterward a hissing whistle was answered by a snort from the patient blood-hound, which had watched so long at the door, his light feet scratched their way down the slippery oaken stairs, and once more Margaret was alone.

She had been saved through a night of peril such as turns the jetty locks of youth to the lustrous white; she had been saved to rush for aid and have the murderer arrested with the pistol still in his hand.

She was a free woman once more, and God had been kind to her this long dread night.

She rose from her paralyzing attitude and approached her little bed to sink on her knees beside it and pour out her full heart of gratitude to Heaven, but she only went a little way and fell on her face and fainted.

And the first sun-ray of another dawning smote across the weary old world, flushing its icy bosom, and stole through the hole in the shutter, and touched the ceiling, thus casting a reflected beam, like a faint smile, upon the unconscious face of the orphan girl.

CHAPTER XX.

THE IMPOSTOR FOILED.

At ten o'clock of the morning Mrs. Chetwode was knocking at Miss Walsingham's bedroom door.

"Excuse me, miss, for disturbing you, but the colonel is here, and wishes most particular to see you."

"Oh, please leave me alone," answered the young lady from within, weakly and plaintively: "I am ill and can see no one."

The housekeeper returned to Colonel

Brand, who was pacing about in the gallery, under the long lines of dead Brands, among which was not the face of the latest dead, and informed him with a lugubrious face that Miss Walsingham was wild yet as she had been last night, and seemed afraid to open the door, which was one of her meagrims, poor dear, to have it locked, and her not well.

"Keep her quiet," answered the colonel, with that crafty smile of his behind his long and stealthy hand, "she is going to have a serious illness. Keep her very quiet. Poor lady, she shows signs of insanity; keep her perfectly quiet."

Then, to be on hand, in case the young lady should consent to see him, as he informed Mrs. Chetwode, he made himself at home in a quiet way at Castle Brand, sauntering, with his hands in his pockets, through the wide rooms; smoking on the front steps, eating lunch in a room which commanded a view of the stairway, with his ugly companion by his side, whose dripping fangs and blood-shot eyes were his master's admiring study, and often slapping his own chest with an angry malediction, because a certain rawness, or hoarseness, had got into his windpipe.

No adoring lover could have expressed more anxiety concerning the lady of his heart than did the gallant colonel for Miss Walsingham. He sent up a bulletin in the shape of John the footman every hour, to listen at the young lady's door whether she was moving—not to disturb her, only to listen, and bring back word to this anxious well-wisher.

Thus passed the morning below stairs.

How fared it with poor Margaret?

Nature had suffered a complete collapse. The horror of the night was telling upon her pale, drawn face, her bloodless lips, and nerveless hands. Utter exhaustion was weighing her down.

If her enemy had been making a bonfire of Castle Brand beneath her, profound exhaustion would have compelled her to lie there and doze, even while she perished in the flames.

She lay in bed with half-closed eyes, tossing from side to side as the piercing light from the hole in the shutter worried her; dozing heavily, often waking to murmur some feverish thought,

starting up and listening—sinking back in her weakness to sleep again.

Toward the middle of the afternoon she roused herself, came to a completer sense of reality than she had done yet, and sprang from her bed. She had to sit for several minutes upon the side of it, with her hands tightly clasped upon her brow, before she could come to a decision as to what her next move could be.

"I am mad to waste the few hours of grace in sleep, instead of putting myself, under the protection of my friends!" she said.

"I must not lose another hour."

She rang the bell, and began to dress herself as hurriedly as weakness would admit of.

"Are you up, Miss Margaret, dear?" said the housekeeper, anxiously, from the hall.

She unlocked the door, held it opened fearfully, and beckoned her to come in.

The old lady's first look was at the girl's face, at which she gasped.

Her next was at the window, from which a blinding ray and a cold current of air assailed her; at which she shrieked:

"Lord ha' mercy! How came that there?"

"Ask me nothing," shuddered Margaret. "I am going to have the affair sifted to the bottom."

"But why didn't you raise the house? Wasn't it a burglar?"

"No. I can tell you nothing about it until I have put myself under the protection of Mr. Davenport and the doctor."

She spoke quite evenly, but there was a suspicious wildness about her eyes which struck a new vein in the prolific brain of the housekeeper.

"Miss Margaret, deary! you didn't surely make that hole yourself?"

Margaret burst into vehement laughter. Her brain was so tried and over-strained that a touch might turn it. To ask her if she had done it!

And then, on the other hand, to think that Mrs. Chetwode should seem to be distrusting her sanity, like the others!

Down came the tears in a rushing torrent!

"My! She's in hysterics!" shrieked Mrs. Chetwode, catching the poor girl in her arms. "Don't, dear, don't!" shaking her vigorously. "Be quiet now, deary, love! Whisht! whisht!"

Wilder grew Margaret's sobs, shriller her laughter. She writhed herself out of Mrs. Chetwode's arms, and pointed to the door.

"You have left it open!" she gasped, "and the colonel will shoot me! Shut it, for heaven's sake!"

Mrs. Chetwode locked the door, with a glance at her mistress, which said, as plain as eyes could say it:

"Poor thing! She is crazy!"

"Miss Margaret, dear, go back to your bed. You're not fit to be up at all to-day. When you feel better, we'll find out about this shutter business. Or may be you'd better come into my room. There's a dreadful draught here."

"I must go down to Dr. Gay," said Margaret, still hysterically. "Tell Symonds to have the carriage ready."

"Miss Margaret, lovey! I don't know that the colonel will like you to go out. I—I'm not sure that he'll let you.

"Is he in this house?"

"He's waited from ten o'clock, until now, nigh on four o'clock to see you when you should get up. He told me you weren't well."

"Mrs. Chetwode—oh, dear Mrs. Chetwode save me from that man! I must escape from Castle Brand without his knowledge."

"Let me send for Dr. Gay to come to you," she answered, uneasily.

"No, no!" moaned the over-tried girl. "My life is not safe here another night. I insist upon leaving Castle Brand."

Mrs. Chetwode walked to the window and employed herself in opening the shutter.

What she saw when the shutter was opened struck her dumb with surprise for some minutes.

A complete pane of glass had been removed, and set against the balcony railing. A glazier's diamond lay beside it; a chisel was dropped upon the farther end of the balcony; deep foot-prints

were in the snow, and a blackened place before the window showed where the midnight watch had been kept.

"Good Lor'!" ejaculated the old woman, "must have been a bold thief."

"It was Colonel Brand!"

Mrs. Chetwode gasped, eyed her suspiciously, backed a few steps, and took hold of the door handle.

"Poor thing!" she whispered to herself.

"Mrs. Chetwode, I told you last night to see that all the doors were locked. Did you?"

"Yes, Miss Margaret, dear! Yes."

"The library glass door?"

The housekeeper looked disconcerted.

"It went clean out of my mind, sure enough."

"Ha! That is how the watch was placed at my door."

"Good gracious! A watch at your door?"

"The colonel's sleuth-hound."

The housekeeper unlocked the door, rushed out, and went straight to Colonel Brand.

"Well, my good woman, you look disturbed," said that amiable thug, taking his cigar out of his mouth to blow a spiral curl of smoke at her; "have you been with Miss Walsingham, and is she as wild in her manner as she was last evening when I had the honor of escorting you both home from your walk?"

"Worse, sir, far worse; she's out of her mind complete as you may say. And she's had a dreadful fright through the night."

"Ah! What is that?"

"Some rank rascal has tried to break in. It's an attempt at burglary, which didn't succeed, but it have made her wild like."

"An attempt at burglary? How very extraordinary!"

"And she is raving about it, poor soul. Oh, dear me, we must send for Dr. Gay."

"Yes, you had better send for Dr. Gay instantly, Chetwode. What may the nature of her ravings be?" inquired the colonel, blandly.

"All sorts of things: that your dog there was at her door all night, and—and other fancies."

"Ah!" in a tone of sympathetic interest; "unfortunate girl! Here, Argus, good dog, speak up for your character, my boy!"

The dog blinked his small blood-shot eyes, and rose to shake himself, as if he meditated a spring upon his traducer.

"Oh, Lor', don't show me to him," exclaimed Mrs. Chetwode, shrinking out of view.

The colonel showed his long, hungry teeth, by way of grim smile, and gave the animal a kick. "Don't be afraid. Are you going to send, then, for Miss Walsingham's friends?"

"Would you say so, sir?" said the anxious creature, wavering between the desire to humor her young mistress, and the fear of disobeying the colonel.

"I would say so, certainly. The affair of the attempted robbery should certainly be followed up for one thing; her state of mind attended to for another."

Margaret's bell rang, and Mrs. Chetwode went up stairs, almost afraid to venture near her again.

"Has Symonds got the carriage ready?" cried Margaret, the instant she appeared.

She was sitting with her bonnet on, dressed for her drive, with a satchel in her hand.

"Lor', you're not fit to go out," ejaculated Chetwode, in amazement. "We're going to have Dr. Gay up to the castle, since you want him so, my deary."

"Did Colonel Brand say I was not to leave the house?" demanded Margaret.

"He thinks you're not well enough, that's a fact."

"I defy him, or any one to keep me prisoner here. You must disregard him, Mrs. Chetwode, and get me driven down to Regis."

"I'm afeard to do it, Miss Margaret."

"Then I shall defy him, and go before his eyes. Get Symonds ready silently, that there may be no

opposition. As you value my life, go."

Mrs. Chetwode, torn between two influences, and always subject to the latest, bounded out of the room as if the limbs of twenty years ago had been miraculously granted her, and went stealthily enough down the long stairs to the servant's quarters.

In fifteen minutes she ventured back with a bottle of wine under her apron.

"He's ready, miss, and at the lower door. You needn't meet the colonel at all; he's just gone into the library, and shut himself in. Now, my poor miss, you must drink something before you go to strengthen you, and eat a bite."

"Nothing in this house—no!" cried Margaret, shuddering; "I cannot be sure of even the food!"

"Don't let them put you in a hasylum, deary love; be careful what you say, now won't you?"

"No fear of that with these papers," replied Margaret, holding up the satchel exultingly.

By dint of perseverance the housekeeper prevailed upon her to drink a glass of wine.

It is doubtful if she could have walked down stairs, and borne the ordeal of her terror, but for this stimulant. But she reached the lower door, and entered the carriage safely.

The colonel, after all his watching, was strangely derelict now, when he had most cause for vigilance, and seemed quite unconscious that his enemy was escaping to her friends, out of his reach.

Margaret's eyes traveled once over the towers and battlements of gloomy Castle Brand, as they left it behind. They seemed to look a long farewell—perhaps a farewell which would last forever; and then a turn in the narrow stable-road brought a grim brick wall between her and her castle, and she sank back upon the carriage-seat.

Ten minutes after her departure Colonel Brand came out of the library, with his slouching dog at his heels, and called the housekeeper.

"Here's a note to Dr. Gay, informing him of Miss Walsingham's state. Can you send a messenger with it to the village immediately?"

Chetwode turned livid and then gray; held out her hand for the note and drew it back again.

The colonel's eyes scintillated in a way that made her blood run cold, and his boding smile was a failure as far as reassuring her went.

"What's the matter, woman? Have you the presumption to refuse to send a messenger at my request?"

"I couldn't help it," stammered the old woman, bursting into sobs; "she wouldn't hear to one word, and she—she's off to Regis."

"Who? Miss Walsingham? Have you let her leave the castle after all?"

"Lor', master, she was set to go. I thought it wouldn't make much difference whether she was took from Dr. Gay's to the mad-house or from here."

"You are right," muttered the colonel, grimly. "It makes no difference."

He tore his note in two, pushed the housekeeper rudely out of his way, and strode out to the solitary Waaste.

The Brand carriage stopped opposite Lawyer Davenport's office door, and Symonds dismounted.

"Why," exclaimed Miss Walsingham, opening the window, "I do believe the door is locked. Surely he has gone away very early in the morning."

Symonds rapped and tried the door—peeped through the dusty window, and found that Miss Walsingham was right.

"We shall go up to his house," she said, pulling up the window.

Arriving at Mr. Davenport's neat and commodious bachelor's abode, Symonds, after inquiry, reported that the lawyer had left on "sudden business this morning for Wales; they don't know where or when he's coming back, but you will hear all about it from Dr. Gay; which was the message left for you."

Again Margaret leaned back in her seat. A look of bitter disappointment and even terror was depicted upon her face.

Once more they rolled into Regis over the slushy snow, and paused at the doctor's house.

Former disappointments had made her so nervous and fearful that she dropped the window and bent forward the better to hear the report.

"Here's Miss Walsingham, to see Dr. Gay. Is he in?"

"No," answered the boy in buttons, "he's away."

"What hour will yer master be at home?"

"Dunno. He was called away very sudden, on a journey; mistress knows."

"What?" cried Margaret, shrilly.

"He says the doctor was called away, on a sudden, too, and that he don't know where."

"Heaven help me, what does this mean?" said the poor girl, alighting and confronting the boy like a pale ghost risen out of its grave.

"When did he go—you surely know that?"

"I'll call mistress," said the boy, backing. "Come in, miss, and wait."

In a few moments the doctor's wife joined her, melancholy as usual.

"Oh, Mrs. Gay, it cannot be possible that the doctor has gone away without letting me know?"

"I do not know, my dear young lady, but it is quite certain that he went away somewhere without letting me know. I had precisely fifteen minutes to pack his valise in."

"Don't you know where he has gone?" asked Margaret, the gloom of death descending upon her heart.

"Not exactly; he vouchsafed to mutter 'Wales,' as he ran down the steps, without even a farewell to his boy, far less to his wife, and for what, or what he can mean by it is a mystery to me."

"Did he leave no message for me?"

"I believe he did. I do seem to recall that he said you were to go to Mr. Davenport for explanations. Yes, that was the message."

"Good heaven! And Mr. Davenport left word that I was to come to your husband for explanations! They must have gone away together! And I am left alone to fight for my life and to stem the tide of fraud!" moaned poor Margaret, bursting into tears; "and oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?"

CHAPTER XXI.

WAS IT A RUSE?

The tide of horror was mounting higher, the waters gurgled to her lips, and her own feeble hands must raise a footway from out of the hissing waves to bear her safely over.

"Where now, miss?" asked Symonds, holding the coach door in his hand.

"Drive to the office of Seamore Emersham, the lawyer," said Margaret.

The coachman mounted to the box, turned the carriage, and rolled down the street again.

"Can it be doubted that my guardians have been purposely sent out of the way, that I may not appeal to them for protection?" she thought. "No, I am not deceived; Mortlake is too talented a plotter to leave a door of safety open for his victim. With what plausible excuse can he have duped the suspicious Davenport, and the humane Gay, that they have both left me in his power? No doubt he expected to keep me a prisoner in the castle until I had either capitulated or fallen a victim to his rage. But I have escaped him, and am free to seek protection where I please, and since my friends have allowed themselves to be cheated by the villain, I shall lay my case before this other lawyer, Mr. Emersham. I have only to disclose the outrage attempted last night, and my enemy shall be arrested. Oh! you arch fiend! you did not expect this chapter in the story, did you? No, you wretch, you do not know that Margaret Walsingham is posting to sure victory, and your certain destruction!"

Symonds drew up before Mr. Emersham's windows, and the lawyer himself looked out at this unwonted vision of a carriage at his door, and drew back with a smirk of satisfaction!

Margaret had her foot on the step, her hand on the servant's shoulder, and was about to alight, when a triviality stayed her steps, an incident changed her purpose—she sat down again and waited.

Through the drab-colored mire of the village street, a man was trudging, his scarlet coat the one object of interest in the lonely street, an envelope in his outstretched hand shining like a flag of truce—he hurried eagerly toward the Castle Brand carriage—the village postman.

Reaching the pavement before the lawyer's door, he handed Margaret a letter, and touched his hat deferentially.

"Thought I couldn't catch yer in time," panted the old man to Symonds, "and there's 'immediate' on the letter. I saw yer pass the post office, and knew it would save me the tramp to the Waaste if I could catch up. Good-day, sir."

He trudged away, and the coachman lounged about the pavement awaiting his mistress' pleasure.

The letter was written in the welcome hand of Dr. Gay, and Margaret devoured its contents with sparkling eyes.

Thus the good old doctor wrote:

> "My Dear Miss Margaret:
>
> "I am writing this from——, in Berks, where I have stopped for an hour to dine. I have been very unexpectedly called away to Llandaff, to follow out this extraordinary case of yours, and am anxious to run it through before I agitate you; hence my sudden departure.
>
> "When the worry of starting off was over, and I had time to think over your position, I realized how uncomfortable you would be under the sole charge of Davenport, who is always rather hard upon you, considering that you are in a precarious state of mind, so I thought of a very good plan for you. I require to stay in Wales for a week or so, and will stop at Caerlyon's Hotel, a very nice house, in Llandaff, where you might be quite comfortable. Suppose then, you run off from the colonel and come to me?
>
> "I hope you will be pleased with the idea, for you need a change badly. You can take Purcell with you and come by rail as far as Cirencester, where you take the coach. Depend upon it, I shall look for you every day. Think of it, and start to-morrow.
>
> "Your obedient servant,
>
> "Rufus Gay."

Margaret laid down the letter with a trembling hand, and put that hand to her forehead wildly. A dark suspicion had assailed her from the moment she began to read, and now she sat wrapped in perplexity and terror.

"Is this a snare for me also?" thought she. "Is this letter forged?"

She seized it again and pored over it with keen eyes; but its neat, cramped chirography revealed nothing. She had had many notes from Dr. Gay in precisely these finical characters.

The postmarks were all there upon the envelope, the sentences in the letter echoed the doctor's every day speech. The whole missive seemed too *bona fide* to doubt for a moment.

And yet she doubted and hesitated, and longing frantically to obey the welcome request which was couched in the familiar language of her old friend, she thrust the hope from her with suspicion and loathing.

Torn between two opinions she gazed with stony eyes into vacancy; while the sharp young lawyer eyed her inquisitively from his office window, and Symonds lounging about the pavement, ventured to whistle a few dreary notes to remind his mistress of his existence, and beat his arms across his breast, to suggest to her the bitterness of the wintry wind. She looked at him at last, with a resolute face, and commanded him to see whether Mr. Emersham was alone.

"I have nothing to hope for but death, if I stay here," mused Margaret, almost calmly, "and I can meet no worse if I obey this letter, and go away. I may as well have the benefit of the doubt, and go to Llandaff, since there is a possibility that this Letter is not forged. Yes, I can fear no worse fate than death, and that menaces me here every moment of my guardians' absence. I will obey the letter and go."

A dingy office boy, answering Symonds' knock, announced that Mr. Emersham was entirely disengaged, and Margaret alighted, and entered the office.

The lawyer hastened to salute her, and had her seated, and the door shut with much alacrity. She bestowed upon him one piercing glance; the shallow eyes answered her appeal for wise counsel in the negative; the *blasé* mouth answered her hopes for protection also in the negative. The fast young lawyer was clearly not the man to whom she could trust her secret or in whom she could place confidence.

The fast young lawyer's smartly furnished office and diamond ring, spoke of a thriving practice; but his old office-coat, his idle hands clasped behind him, his reckless swagger and his insincere face spoke more reliable of shams, and shifts, and unscrupulous quirks to fill the empty purse. Clearly, Mr. Seamore Emersham was a man to be bought with money; and Roland Mortlake was the man to buy him; no disclosures must be made by Margaret Walsingham before him.

"Dr. Gay's letter said to me 'start to-morrow,'" thought she, "but this man's countenance as I read it, warns me to start to-night."

She dropped her distrustful eyes from his, and quietly opened her business.

"I am Miss Walsingham, of Castle Brand," she said, "and in the temporary absence of my own lawyer, Mr. Davenport, I have come to you. I am going out to Surrey presently, and I wish to leave some documents in your charge until I return. They are important papers, which I must not lose, and, since some accident might occur to them or to you, in my absence, I will prefer that

you undertake the charge in company with some other person whose honor is considered unimpeachable. Can you name such a person?"

The lawyer opened his eyes very wide at his new client's strange request, but glibly ran over a list of the leading men of Regis as candidates for the honor of Miss Walsingham's confidence.

"We shall try the Rev. Mr. Challoner," she said, "and while I arrange the papers, your boy can carry him a note from me."

Mr. Emersham darted for stationery and wheeled a desk to his visitor with profuse politeness, and when the note was finished he sent his boy off at full speed to the vicarage with it.

During his absence Margaret wrote a careful account of her enemy's attempt upon her life the previous night; copied out the letter she had received that morning purporting to be from Dr. Gay, and concluded it with these remarks:

"Believing my life to be in danger so long as I remain in Roland Mortlake's vicinity, I resolve to obey the above letter, although I expect it to lead me into some trap where I shall lose my life. However, in the faint hope that I may be mistaken, I will begin my journey to Llandaff to-night at seven o'clock, Dec. 1862, and return in the seven o'clock evening train the day after to-morrow, when I shall come straight to Mr. Emersham's office, and reclaim this trust which I have put in his hands. If I do not return on the evening of the said day, I shall have met my death at the hands of Roland Mortlake, who personates Colonel St. Udo Brand, and I call upon Mr. Emersham to cause that man's arrest for my murder."

This finished, she ordered Mr. Emersham to draw up the form of her will, wherein she declared her wish that the Brand property should be sold, and the proceeds used to found a charitable institution in Regis, declaring, heedless, of Mr. Emersham's looks of astonishment, that St. Udo Brand being dead, she had resolved that an impostor should never occupy his place. In dead silence then she awaited the arrival of the vicar; the lawyer sitting opposite her gnawing the feather of his pen, and peering inquisitively at her.

Presently the blown office boy ushered in the vicar of Regis, a tall, snowy-haired divine, whose very presence diffused an atmosphere of safety around the persecuted woman.

She had already a slight acquaintance with him, and after a cordial greeting from him, she explained the favor she wished to receive, apologizing timidly for intruding her affairs upon him.

"My advisers, Mr. Davenport and Dr. Gay, are both away," she said, "and wishing to join the doctor, I feel that I must provide against any contingency which may arise. Will you, jointly with Mr. Emersham, undertake the charge of these documents for two days?"

Mr. Challoner readily consented. He had always liked the earnest-faced woman, who took her place so regularly in church, and whose praises were sounded so frequently by the lowliest of his flock.

Symonds was called in to append his name as one of the witnesses to Margaret Walsingham's will, Mr. Challoner being the other, and then the office door was shut mysteriously upon the lady and her two counselors, and gave them her instructions.

With her own hand she placed the document which condemned Roland Mortlake as St. Udo's assassin, his note-book, and her will, in an empty pigeon-hole of the lawyer's dusty drawers, locked it, and put the key in the old vicar's hand.

"Come here on Thursday evening at seven o'clock," she said, "with that key; wait until fifteen minutes past the hour, and if I do not arrive then, you must take out the document and read it. If you fail to act up to its instructions, a murderer will escape. I place the key in your hand, because foul play might be attempted upon Mr. Emersham to force him to betray my trust—foul play will not be attempted upon you."

They silently regarded the whitening face, when her womanly terrors struggled with the fixed, fatal look of vengeance, and solemnly promised to do her will.

Then the vicar shook hands and went away.

She looked at her watch. It was six o'clock. She had been nearly two hours in the lawyer's office.

He had long ago lit the gas and closed the shutters, and was waiting very patiently for her to conclude her business that he might go home to his dinner.

"I have one more letter to write, Mr. Emersham. Will you wait a few minutes longer?" said Margaret.

Again he poured out the assurance of the honor, etc.; and, with a wild smile on her lips, she wrote the following daring words:

> "Roland Mortlake, or Thoms—which name you have least right to I cannot tell—I warn you, that if I meet my death while absent from Regis upon this journey, your doom is sealed!
>
> "I warn you further, that if I return safely at the end of the time I have set, your doom is sealed, if you are here to brave it. Your only safety lies in flight before I return; and

> even then I shall do my best to convict you of the murder of St. Udo Brand, which you have confessed in your pocket-book, which has this day been placed in safe hands—which will break the seals, if I am not alive to break them when I intend to return to Regis. If I perish, vengeance shall surely overtake the murderer of St. Udo Brand and MARGARET WALSINGHAM."

She bade farewell to Mr. Emersham at last, and entering her carriage, drove straight to a hotel near the railway station, from which she sent Symonds home with the carriage, and intrusted her letter to him with directions to give it to the steward to deliver to the colonel; and warnings to Symonds not to allow himself to be questioned by Colonel Brand.

A note to Mr. Purcell conveyed her command that he would attend upon her journey; and cautioned him against giving Colonel Brand an inkling of his intentions.

In a quarter of an hour the steward of Castle Brand was ushered into her presence.

"All ready, Purcell?" demanded the lady.

"Quite ready, Miss Margaret."

"Where is Colonel Brand?"

"Still at the castle, miss."

"Did you give him my letter yourself?"

"I did, miss."

"What did he say?"

Mr. Purcell shook his head and looked disgusted.

"You must tell me what he said, Purcell?" insisted Margaret.

"He said nothing that I'd be proud to repeat, Miss Margaret," said Purcell, sourly.

"He up and cursed you like a madman, and said, 'Let her go if she dares!'"

"What else?"

"Ordered out his horse."

"Intending to find me before I started—do you think?"

"Yes, miss; but I left him cross-questioning Symonds, who wouldn't give him any satisfaction."

"Very good. Now we must hasten, or we shall miss the train."

She hurried on her traveling-cloak, and, accompanied by Purcell, descended to the station, where the train was ready to start and got on board in time.

From behind her thick crape vail she watched every passenger who crossed the platform to enter any of the long line of cars, and the flaming street-lamps revealed every face distinctly.

Porters hustled each other; newsboys shouted their papers; ladies made blind sallies to the wrong class car and lost themselves in the throng; gentlemen with umbrellas, carpet-bags and plaids elbowed their way into empty compartments; but Roland Mortlake was not among the mob.

She had slipped the chain and got free.

The train glided out of the shed and set itself to its night's work, and Margaret sank back to her seat with a sigh of relief.

"I have outwitted him," she thought. "His calculations upon my expected movements are all astray. I have taken him by surprise. I shall find Dr. Gay in Llandaff, sure enough. I did right to go in search of him."

On rushed the train through the darkness of night.

Purcell, who sat beside his mistress, spread a plaid over the back of her seat, and pinned it about her shoulders, grumbling that she would take her death of cold in the drafty car; and presently she fell fast asleep, with her head resting against the jarring panel.

Purcell, too, dozed off, and dreamed that he was in his own cozy room at Castle Brand; and only awoke with the banging of a door ringing in his ears and the soft hand of his mistress clutching his arm.

The train was gliding on again, but it had paused one minute at a little country station, and a man had entered.

He was muffled in a huge fur coat, and seated himself near Margaret, with a grunt of satisfaction that he had a whole seat to extend his legs upon.

Margaret regarded him keenly, and he returned her gaze with stolid indifference. Purcell growled out his disapprobation of the new-comer's placing his clumsy foot against his mistress'

long dress, and the man serenely changed his position, wound a scarlet muffler about his copper-colored throat, and settled himself for a nap.

He was a tall, stout man, with a heavy jaw, coarse lips turned doggedly down at the corners, and piercing steel-blue eyes; his face was red and his hands were large and brown; but stupid, dull, and sleepy, he seemed unworthy of a second thought; and Margaret sank into a deep reverie and forgot him.

On they glided; through dim villages, amid bare-branched wealds, and over creeping rivers, which shone like misty mirrors in the faint starlight, resting from time to time, for a few minutes, at the country stations.

Other cars emptied and were filled again with fresh travelers; other compartments changed their occupants from seat to seat, but the trio sat still in this, and whiled away the time silently.

Then the train entered upon an hour's stretch of country, which it must traverse without pausing.

The man in the fur coat, weary of steadying his drowsy head against the corner of his seat, sat upright and drew a newspaper from his pocket. Falling asleep over that, he produced a silver snuff-box, and refreshed himself with a generous pinch; then he looked meditatively at the old steward nodding comfortlessly before him, and proffered him the snuff-box; but looking into it, he discovered that it was about empty.

This appeared to afford him peculiar gratification, for he smiled to himself as he drew a paper parcel from his pocket, and proceeded to fill the snuff-box with its fragrant contents.

Idly Margaret watched him thrusting the diminished parcel back into the breast-pocket, and waking Purcell up by a vigorous poke, in order to offer him the replenished snuff-box.

The old man's eyes brightened, he uttered a heartfelt "I thank you kindly, sir," and inhaled a huge pinch, handing back the box with a courtly bow.

Then, sneezing with much fervor and wiping his eyes, Purcell vowed that he couldn't remember the day when snuff had smelt so queer; at which the man in the fur coat roared with laughter and boasted that his was the best; and presently Purcell's head sank down on his breast, and he took no further notice of his *vis-a-vis*.

Margaret drew out her handkerchief and covered her face with it, for a faint, sickening, drowsy odor was exhaling from Purcell's nostrils, and stealing her breath away.

She next tried her smelling-salts, and requested Purcell to open the window on his side: but he, taking no heed, she shook his arm, and, at last, gazed into his face.

It was chalk-white, a deadly perspiration bathed lip and brow; the half-closed eyelids showed the eyeballs glazed and sightless, and his breast heaved painfully, as if a ton-weight lay upon it.

Margaret Walsingham came to herself in an instant—she grew cool and calm.

She knew now that the man who sat opposite to her had been hired by Mortlake to murder her.

No more tremors of fear, no more hurried plans for escape, no more hoping for some fortunate circumstance to save her. She felt that her time had come; and she knew that she must succumb to her fate. She saw how well her destruction was planned; she traced out the tragedy with terrific distinctness, she saw herself seized by these great, cruel hands in the first tunnel whose resounding roar could drown her death-shriek, and the pistol fired off at her ear, or the silent knife plunged into her bosom; and she knew how easy it would be for her murderer to leave the car at the next station and escape forever.

Before she raised herself from her speechless examination of her drugged servant, she had foreseen her death, and accepted it with a stony despair.

She mechanically turned to pull down the window at her own side, but the rough hand of the murderer met hers and arrested the act; his steel-blue eyes gleamed into hers, and drove her back to her corner, where she sat gazing like a dumb animal into the man's face, with her arms folded over her breast, a frail shield which he laughed at.

Some minutes passed, the servant partially recovered consciousness, and was plied with a handkerchief saturated with chloroform and pressed to his nostrils; and, when he was swaying to and fro in his seat like a dead man, with every lurch of the car, the ruffian turned to the unhappy woman beside him with a mischievous, fatal look in his coarse face.

CHAPTER XXII.

PURSUIT OF A FELON.

One by one Margaret's faculties deserted her; her power of speech first of all, then her power of motion, her power of resistance, even her power of fear. All save the seeing sense left poor Margaret, and she watched with distended eyeballs and a dull, ghastly feeling of interest the

movements of the man who was to murder her.

What had he done to her that had thrown her into this helpless lethargy?

A faint, sweet odor pervaded the car.

It was the insidious chloroform stealing her consciousness from her and deadening every nerve. She saw him take a tiny vial from his pocket, fit a perforated top upon it, and direct a spurt of deadly perfume, fine as a hair, into her face.

She tried to move, but could not. The breath was cut off from her nostrils by that fatal jet; she could only gaze with a sad, anguished look into those flaming eyes opposite her.

Something in the harrowing intensity of that silent look troubled the man.

He missed his aim, and the death-giving essence streamed harmlessly upon the bosom of her dress.

Again and again he adjusted the cunning little tube so as to force her to breathe its fatal contents; but his hand trembled, his face waxed white—he quailed before the ghostly appeal of those fixed orbs.

Minutes passed. Why did not the man finish his victim.

Was ever yet a woman more completely in a murderer's power?

Her attendant drugged into a senseless clod beside her, her faculties all benumbed, no eye to watch the tragedy, no hand to seize the villain—why did he not act out his instructions?

She held him by that mesmeric gaze, where the soul stood plainly forth pleading for mercy. She was so young, so gentle, so sorrowful.

Oh! he cowered away from his fell purpose; he dallied with his chance, and that chance slipped by.

The tram glided into a station shed; the red lights glowed in at the window, palling the flickering tin lamp hanging from the roof. Strangers rushed pell-mell across the platform; and at last the door of this car was opened, and a young man looked in.

Margaret vehemently sought to cry out to him, to stretch out her hands, to moan, even, but in vain. She seemed petrified.

The young man's eyes passed aimlessly over the white-faced woman in black and her sleeping escort, and fastened doubtfully upon the disconcerted ruffian.

"Is Richard O'Grady in this car?" shouted he.

"I am the chap you want," returned the man in the fur coat.

The other handed him a telegram and vanished instantly, and the car moved on.

She saw him hold out a slip of paper to the dim flame and master its message, and the sickly pallor crept out of his cheeks and the coarse red came back.

He looked hard in her face with a sinister light on his visage, and smiled at her with a certain kind of grim admiration.

"You've overcrowded him, have you, my clever wench?" mattered he. "You must be a sharp 'un to do *him*. Curse your haunting eyes! you've all but overcrowded *me*, in spite of my leather hide. Confound you! I'll never get rid of them great eyes."

He broke out into a volley of fearful maledictions upon her, himself, and the "beast" who had given him the job, tearing up the telegram into inch pieces and tossing them insolently into Margaret's lap.

It was evident that he considered her blind and deaf, as well as paralyzed, else he never would have exposed his principal as he did in these violent imprecations.

So the train glided on upon its midnight journey, and the man turned his back to his intended victim. But she was adoring God in her heart of hearts for her dear life's preservation.

Her cold stoicism melted, the bitter fortitude with which she had looked for death fled. How *could* she have cast that reproachful thought at Heaven and believed herself forsaken?

Her heart swelled with gratitude and remorse now that she saw her mistake; and, although she could not move an eye-lash, her emotion surged higher and higher until it burst through the barriers of the spell which bound her, and great tears gushed from her eyes.

At the first station they came to, the man rose to leave the car. He glanced sharply at Margaret's wet face, and jerked down the window that she might have some air, then, with an oath, stumbled over Purcell's feet and got out.

Then the long night crept by, and gradually the lady and her servant recovered, and spoke to each other.

"Purcell, do you know me?"

She was chafing the old man's temples, and applying her smelling-salts to his nose.

"Eh? ha? My conscience! Is that you, miss?" mumbled the steward, with a thick tongue and a vacant look at her.

"Are you better?"

"Humph! not much. Tush! What's in my mouth? Fever?"

"No, no, Purcell. You've been asleep—that's all."

"I've been dead, I think—dead for years and years. I think I was in another world. Dear bless me! My legs are as heavy as lead. I say, Miss Margaret, what took me—a fit?" whispered the steward, in a fright.

"No. You were put to sleep with chloroform by that man who sat opposite. He stupefied you with poisoned snuff, and then used chloroform. You need not feel alarmed, though—you have recovered."

"Faith, miss, you look but poorly yourself," said Purcell, struck by her extreme pallor. "Was—was he a thief, miss, and did he rob us?"

"He was a murderer, Purcell, and intended to kill me," said Margaret, with tears in her eyes. "But God would not permit him to succeed."

She related the circumstances to the old man, who rose from terror into fury when he realized how completely he had been taken in through his favorite refreshment, snuff, and laid out like a corpse beside his helpless young mistress.

She soothed his wounded feelings, and directed him to use caution during the rest of his fateful journey.

At daybreak they came to Cirencester, and rested there for some hours, and at nine o'clock took a coach for Llandaff.

They had not traveled a dozen miles, when a horseman galloped past the great, lumbering coach, flashing a keen glance in at Margaret Walsingham, and then disappeared upon the winding road ahead.

She gasped and grew white.

He wore a horseman's cloak and a slouched hat. But she was not deceived in the brutal gleam of those steel-blue eyes. He was the ruffian who was hired to kill her.

Almost fainting, she communicated her fears to her servant, who grew very purple, and swore to be even with the varlet before long, and stopped the coach to tell the driver that the chap who had just passed was a villain, who ought to be arrested for attempted murder in a railway car; and the driver grew hot and excited, and leagued with three gentlemen on the outside to knock the fellow down and secure him the first minute they set eyes on him.

So Margaret and her attendant continued their journey with some sense of security; and, having the inside of the coach to themselves, could encourage each other to meet future dangers, when anything cheerful occurred to them to say.

But all through that afternoon they traveled safely, unmolested by even a glimpse of Mortlake's accomplice; and at noon they rattled into Llandaff, and stopped before Caerlyon's Hotel.

The groom was leading a smoking black horse round to the stables. Margaret whispered to Purcell, and pointed the animal out to him.

"*His* horse," she said. "Now, Purcell, see that you have him arrested. Fly! There's no time to lose. You must get a constable to go with you, I suppose."

Purcell disappeared in the bar to make inquiries, and Margaret at once took refuge in her room, and sent for the proprietor himself.

The Welsh landlord bustled in, full of politeness and good humor.

"Has Dr. Gay, from Regis, Surrey, been here, yesterday or to-day?" demanded the lady.

"No, matam, he has not."

"Is there no letter lying here for Miss Walsingham, of Regis, Surrey?"

"No, inteet, matam, nothing of te sort."

She turned suddenly, with a groan, from him, and her dark face grew darker.

"Tricked—drawn into a trap! I might have known it—oh, I might have known it!" she murmured, bitterly.

"Anyting I can to for you, my tear laty?" asked Mr. Caerlyon, attentively.

"Yes; you can send a servant to keep watch at my door until my man returns. And there is a

person whom I want arrested upon the charge of attempted murder—the man whose horse your hostler was attending to when the coach arrived. Where is he?"

"My Got! *murterer!*" screamed the landlord. "You ton't say that, matam? Oh, the peast! He must pe caught, of course. Put he took fery coot care not to come to *me*, tear laty. He went somewhere into the town, and sent his nak here to pait. I'll keep a coot lookout for him, I promise him, the sneaking scoundrel!"

Muttering vituperations, he backed out of the room, and sent a woman to attend the lady, and a great, hulking pot-boy to guard her door.

"Now, what am I to think?" mused Margaret, who had thrown herself upon a sofa, and was feverishly watching the Welshwoman setting the table for her dinner. "How am I to follow out the intricacies of that wretch's plot? It is clear that he has amply provided against my escaping from him. True enough, he is too clever to leave any door open for his victim. I fondly thought that I had taken him by surprise when I escaped the castle and threw myself on Emersham's protection; but he meets me on the flight, and turns my purpose into another channel. I leave him foiled at the castle; I fly to the executors; he has foreseen the move, and meets me with the news of their disappearance. I turn to Mr. Emersham for help. He has foreseen that, also, and meets me with a forged letter, which turns my wishes all toward taking this journey. For a moment he is taken back when he receives my letter, showing him the precautions I have taken to expose him, and allows me to go on the journey which he has already provided for, only because he has not time to prevent me. But he telegraphs to his accomplice that I must not be murdered yet, and his accomplice spares me. Instead of finishing his work, he gets out at the next station, and probably telegraphs something to his principal, and waits for a new order. That he received it, is evident from his continuing his pursuit and haunting my steps as he has done. Now why was I not murdered, according to their agreement? For what was I reserved? And what was that fresh command which the accomplice received per telegraph from Mortlake?"

Mr. Caerlyon tapped at her door, and called out that there was a letter for her, and the waiting woman brought it to Margaret, who received it eagerly, hoping that it was from Dr. Gay, after all.

But she perceived in a moment that it was not, and saw, with disgust, the large, sprawling characters on the back of the note, and the dirty wafer which closed it, in lieu of an envelope.

With shrinking fingers she opened it, and read these words:

> "Ma'am:—You knows doosed well who's a talkin' te yer by this here. If you be's the brick I takes yer for, yer won't be sulky, and throw away yer only chance, for mean spite. Come, now, jest give me yer note of hand that yer'll return that 'ere stole pocket-book to its owner whenever yer sees Regis agin, and yer'll see more of yer admirin' friend; but act ugly, and wake the devil in the col., and—ware-hawk! yer'll be awhile on the road back—that's all.
>
> "Yours to command,
>
> "Pocket Pistol."

"No, you wretch," said Margaret, "I shall not give up the pocket-book which condemns Mortlake. I simply defy your threats, and shall be well guarded in future. My doubts are answered. I know what Mortlake's new order was; there it is," she cried, tossing the villainous-looking scrawl upon the table, "and I defy it! He offers me my life in exchange for my proofs, and I scorn his offer, I would rather bring such a fiend to justice than live a happy life, knowing that I had suffered him to elude his just punishment."

She called Mr. Caerlyon in.

"Who brought that letter?" asked she.

"A ferry rakket poy, matam," returned he.

"Is he waiting for an answer?"

"Yes, inteet, matam, ant playing with a crown-piece he says the gentleman gave him to holt his tongue."

"Tell him that there is no answer, and send for a constable to follow the boy, and to seize the man who sent him."

"I'll to that, my laty," cried the landlord, with spirit, and disappeared with great alacrity.

In half an hour Mr. Caerlyon and Mr. Purcell came to announce to her that both their pursuits had been fruitless; the villain had disappeared as completely as the mirage which is lifted in air, and Purcell's warrant and police force came too late.

The fire flashed from the indomitable woman's eyes; she crested her head.

"We shall prepare for him, then," said she, with calm courage, "and meet him suitably when he intrudes upon us. In an hour we shall start upon our journey back to Regis, Purcell, so you must go and refresh yourself. Mr. Caerlyon, you shall do me the favor of calling upon the chief of police and handing him a note from me."

The steward retired to obey her command, and Caerlyon cheerfully promised to do anything for such a brave lady, and waited for her to write her letter.

It was a letter of instructions; she wished the chief of police to send two of his sharpest detectives on the road to Cirencester a half hour before she and her servant started, that they might thereafter travel in company without rousing the suspicion of O'Grady by leaving Llandaff together. She explained the case, and suggested the need of the detectives, disguising themselves, that they might protect her throughout the journey, without frightening away the ruffian, who would doubtless attempt her life once more before she reached Regis. As soon as she had finished, Caerlyon carried off the letter with all due secrecy.

In an hour the return coach from Cirencester jolted up to the hotel, and Margaret and her escort took their places inside, alone. There were some men, as before, on the top, but O'Grady discreetly kept out of sight, and since his black horse still munched his oats in Caerlyon's stable, everybody thought that the travelers were leaving their enemy behind them.

At the first inn two farmers stopped the coach and climbed in beside Margaret. A respectful bow to her and Purcell revealed them as her protectors, the detectives.

The liveliest imagination could never have discovered in these heavy-faced, slow-spoken, and comfortably muffled farmers two lynx-eyed emissaries of the law, on the track of a felon. Their disguise was admirable.

When more passengers crowded in, the two farmers grunted out agricultural jokes to each other, or read the county paper, or apprised the intrinsic value of each snow-capped barn, and white-ridged field, and huge wheat-stack they passed with a zest and eagerness positively infectious, until every one inside was drawn into the argument, and a few shrewd questions had been asked and innocently answered, which disclosed the fact that a man in a fur coat had galloped up the road three-quarters of an hour ago upon a gray horse.

"Thought Caerlyon's mare was missing when I went to his stables," muttered one detective to the other; "he has got off before we left the town. All right; we'll catch up."

But they did not catch up that night; and although the two officers slept in a room across the passage from Miss Walsingham's, in the hotel at Cirencester, they saw no one attempt either to communicate with her or to molest her.

So it remained all during the next day's cold and weary journey, the masked detectives carefully kept close by the threatened young lady, and furtively watched each passenger who entered or left the car; but the ruffian was not to be traced, his menace to Margaret was but an empty vaunt; her precautions seemed to have effectually routed him.

At seven o'clock that Thursday evening the train glided into the Regis station-house, the red lights glimmered on the platform, the crowd jostled, surged, and receded; and when the way seemed clear, one of the detectives got out to fetch a cab for Margaret before she should leave the car.

While he was gone a close carriage rolled into the shed, and the driver, touching his hat to Margaret, whom he could see at the car window, offered his services and his cab.

"This will do," said she to Purcell. "When Adams brings the other cab, our friends will need it to go to their hotel. Time is passing, and I must keep my engagement with Mr. Emersham."

The remaining detective got out and stood a yard or so in advance of the cab-driver, who was opening his coach-door; and Purcell assisted his mistress out of the car to the platform, and then turned round and stooped to pick up her traveling-bag from the planks where he had thrown it.

In a moment the long-expected crisis came, so long delayed, so startling now when they thought it was too late to fear it longer.

A man darted out of the shadow of the station-house, and sprang like a panther on his victim. He threw the stooping Purcell violently upon the ground, seized Margaret, and hurried her with a giant's strength to the door of the cab, into which he tried to force her.

"Get in with you, or I'll blow your brains out!" hissed his desperate voice in her ear.

Her shriek of terror had scarcely escaped when the detective, coolly stepping forward from his watch, dealt the ruffian a blow on the back of the head with his horny fist, which felled him like an ox, and the leveled pistol fell from his relaxing hand and snapped off with the concussion, lodging its bullet in the bottom panel of the nearest railway car and startling the cabman's horses so violently that they plunged off the platform with the cabman clinging to the reins.

A railway porter ran up to the scene of the assault, and held the half-stunned O'Grady while the detective secured him, and Purcell, having gathered himself up, with aching bones, led the agitated Margaret into the station-house.

By this time the mob had assembled, and were crushing each other unceremoniously to gain a glimpse of the prisoner, who lay cursing and blaspheming on the wooden floor, with his conquerer grimly standing over him, until Adams rattled up in the cab he had been in search of and shared the onerous duty of jailer.

Margaret, glancing shudderingly out of the station-house window, saw the wretched man pass on

his way to the police station, his captors on either side urging him to hasten. His hands were tied behind him, his florid face was yellow with despair, his steel-blue eyes glared with fear; a more abject picture of crime and ruin could scarce be conceived.

And when this wretched vision had vanished, another took its place. A writhing, white face flitted, specter-like, from out of dim shadows, and peered with staring eyeballs after the arrested man, and a scowl of fury, terror, and despair descended on that devilish brow.

The next instant he, too, had melted into shadow, and was lost amid the throng.

"Roland Mortlake," whispered Margaret, who was shivering as if she had seen a phantom. "He has learned the truth. Great Heaven! he will escape."

She stepped to the door and called the steward, who had gone to open the cab-door.

"Go instantly in search of Mortlake," she cried; "he has just passed the window; you must not permit him to escape. I will drive to Emersham's law-office myself."

Away ran Purcell after two constables; and Margaret hurried into the cab, and, undeterred by one heart-beat of compunction, she set herself to compass her enemy's utter ruin.

For pitiful, kind, and great-hearted as she was, she could never suffer a murderer to escape. No, not even to buy her own safety.

Margaret Walsingham alighted from the carriage at the door of Mr. Emersham's law-office, and stepped into the room with the mien of a Semiramis, flashing-eyed, carmine cheeked, and inexorable.

One glance around the room showed her the nimble young lawyer, and the trembling old clergyman gazing white lipped into each other's faces, the folded paper on the table between them, the locked pocket-book, and the will; and the hand of the clock on the mantle-piece pointed to the fifteenth minute after seven.

"Thank God! she is here," murmured Mr. Challoner, solemnly.

"I have come back," said Margaret, "to break these seals and to expose a felon. Hasten, or the felon will escape."

CHAPTER XXIII.

CHAINS OR THE GALLOWS.

Mrs. Chetwode, sitting in her room at Castle Brand at half-past seven of the night, heard a dreadful racket of horse's hoofs on the frozen court below; and, looking down from her window, she saw the colonel throwing himself from the saddle, and striding up the front steps in red-hot haste.

A thundering knock at the door announced the humor of the gentleman, and the meek old lady hurried into the upper hall to see him when he entered the lower, murmuring to herself with mild astonishment:

"What's sent the man back in such a temper, I wonder? My! he's always ranting about one thing or another; no wonder my poor miss hates him."

The man who opened to the colonel recoiled in astonishment from his fell scowl, as he brushed past him and sprang up stairs, three at a time.

In the absence of the mistress of Castle Brand, the unwelcome guest had appropriated to himself a suite of apartments in the castle, announcing his intention of waiting there for the return of the fugitive, and had lived a short but merry season in luxury and splendor; what wonder that he loathed the brutal fates which were conspiring to thrust him out of his paradise into outer darkness.

The maid who was replenishing the colonel's fire, against his return from his ride, heard a savage oath behind her, and, favored by the darkness, slipped behind the door in a fright and stared with all her eyes at the colonel lighting his lamp, and banging down his desk upon the table.

He cursed everything he touched with the most blasphemous imprecations all the time he was removing papers and letters to his private pocket-book—all the time he was cramming his purse with gold and bank notes—all the time he was tossing his rich wardrobe into a valise.

Then he strode to the door, and turning on the threshold, sent a terrible scowl over the magnificent chamber, glittering with the flash of rich ornaments and the sheen of satin curtains. The veins swelled out on his forehead, and his pale lips twitched convulsively.

"All lost—all lost!" groaned the man in a despairing voice, and closed the door with a bang that shook the walls, and echoed through the vast halls like the report of a cannon.

Then he went into the drawing-room where the housekeeper had taken refuge. When she saw

him coming along the passage, and with a diabolical sneer of his face, he went to the marble-topped tables, mantel slabs, chiffoniers, and tiny tea-poys all laden with articles of *bijouterie*, and swept off the most costly of the ornaments into his rapacious valise; packing in paperweights of solid amethyst, vases of cut cornelian, ruby-spar, and frosted silver; pitching above them priceless gems of art in miniature, statuettes cut from topaz and chrysolites, (each cost a little fortune,) and then locking up his valise and making off with it "for all the world as if he was a traveling packman or a thief," as Mrs. Chetwode gasped out to Sally the cook, when she could seek the safety of the kitchen, for fright.

Then this eccentric colonel strode down stairs and took his ample Spanish riding-cloak off the pin and wrapping himself in it, with the startled John's help, he stepped to the dining-room door and drew a lowering glance around the majestic chamber.

There was a fine portrait of St. Udo Brand in his best days, painted upon the panel over the fire-place, and the ruddy light of the great astral lamp shone richly over the bold eyes and frank brow of the true heir of Castle Brand.

The skulking, demonized face in the doorway glared with frantic fury at the proud, high countenance on the wall, and a malediction burst from the writhing lips in a hissing whisper.

"Fool! you deserved your fate," said that strange whisper—"You had everything and I had nothing —I, the elder, the first born. Yet you threw your luck away with infernal pride, and beguiled me on to my ruin! Devil! even in your grave you put out your hand to give me the fatal push."

He turned on his heel after that and fled from the Castle as if the Avenger of Blood was at his back, and ordering out the best blood-horse in the stables, he mounted and galloped down the drive.

Between the castle and the lodge he looked behind and spied his blood-hound Argus, tearing from the kennel after him.

The old lodge-keeper, who had hobbled out to open the gate, seeing that the colonel was in such a hurry, was amazed to hear his hoarse tones raised like a madman's, while he ordered the dog home again, and threatened him in shocking language.

The dog crouched among the withered leaves until his master was riding on again, and then he slunk after him as before.

For the second time the colonel looked round at him, and catching him creeping after, he threw himself from the saddle, and seizing the hound by the collar, beat him with his weighted whip until the poor animal yelled with pain, and then he rode on again.

Still the dog dragged his bleeding limbs after his brutal master, and sought to keep him company, for he was his only friend, and had he not followed him many a weary mile?

For the third time the colonel looked behind, and caught the faithful brute following him. He drew a pistol from his breast, and leveled it full at the cowering hound, which nevertheless crawled close up to him, and whined, and licked his master's foot; he shot him through the head and rode on.

So his last friend fell dead by his merciless hand, his faithful serving had not availed to save him, his obedience had not helped him; when he was no longer of use to Roland Mortlake, and might be in his way, he crushed the creature that had loved him, and fled without him.

At the lodge-gate he turned for the last time in his saddle, and looked at the grand old castle standing in the midst of its rich domain, and looking like a Druid rock out of the chill moonlight.

A gleam of wicked envy broke from his basilisk eyes; he shook his clenched hand frantically at the stately pile, and the howl of a hungry tiger burst hoarsely from his throat.

"It's mine by rights!" he cried in a frenzy, "and yet I've lost it forever! I might have been made for life, and now there's nothing left me but the chains or the gallows."

He finished with a vehement volley of oaths, his wolfish face grew black with passion, his tall frame bowed upon his horse's mane in an access of abject fear, and plunging his spurs in his startled steed's flanks, he bounded away like the wind, but not on the road to Regis.

Mrs. Chetwode was ringing her hands over the despoiled drawing-room, and maids were crying and whispering that the colonel had gone mad, and the men were winking shrewdly to each other in token of their belief that the colonel wasn't just what he should be, when a posse of the queen's officers appeared on the scene, demanding the person of Roland Mortlake, *alias* St. Udo Brand.

Too much disgusted with the colonel's low conduct that evening to care what scrape he had got into, the housekeeper went down to the constables, and described his proceedings with a plaintive regard to truth which met with but small favor from those functionaries.

No sooner had they wrung from her a description of the clothes he departed in and from the lodge-keeper, the road he had taken, then they galloped off in chase, leaving Mrs. Chetwode in the very middle of her succinct account of the caskets and ornaments "costing no end of money, which the rogue had took off with him."

Further disgusted with the unmannerly conduct of "them low-lived police," the prim housekeeper received Mr. Purcell and his news that Miss Margaret was safe home again, with elation, that she could fairly cry with joy to hear that the dear young miss was coming back, for she had feared many a time since she has gone away, that the colonel meant that she should never come back.

In truth her life had not been very genial those two days, with the colonel tramping his rooms like a caged hyena, and pouncing out upon her whenever a strange rap came to the door, as if he was looking every minute for some dreadful message from Regis.

"Pretending to want my blessed miss back so bad," cried Mrs. Chetwode, with a snort of disbelief. "Him as always snarled like a sick dog if ever her name was spoke by the servants. Where was he all that night after she went off, I'd like to hear? Out he goes, sir, ten minutes after you left this house to join Miss Margaret, and he never came back till daylight; and he wasn't at his own hotel, for his own man came here and said so. He was after mischief, I tell you, Mr. Purcell," concluded the worthy lady.

"That he was, the rascal," assented Purcell, wrathfully. "He was telegraphing his orders to his low accomplice, whom he had sent off to keep Miss Margaret in fear of her life all the way. Well, well, his day's done, Mrs. Chetwode, and I pray to goodness that he may be caught before the morning. You are to go down to the town and stay with Miss Margaret at the office till she sets the case in Mr. Emersham's hands. She's afraid to come to the castle till the colonel is safely locked up."

Margaret was sitting by Mr. Emersham's smoking fire, pale and exhausted, but with eyes that shone with undiminished animation.

The venerable vicar sat beside her, softly pressing her hand between his own two; and the dashing young lawyer was just finishing the reading of the case he had made out of the contents of Margaret's toilfully written document.

Mrs. Chetwode came to the travel-weary girl, and burst into a fond gush of tears.

"La sakes! Miss Margaret, I can't help it," sobbed the old lady, "to see you so white and worried is enough to break one's heart."

"The would-be-colonel, where is he?" clipped in the ready lawyer.

"Gone, sir, without e'er a good-by!"

"Oh, Mrs. Chetwode, have you let him escape?" cried Margaret, springing up wildly.

"I couldn't stop him, Miss Margaret, dear. He ramped through the castle like a madman, and then went off at full speed on Roanoke."

"Oh, me—he has escaped! Oh, Mrs. Chetwode!" moaned Margaret, sinking back in her chair and bursting into a violent fit of weeping.

Incessant anxiety, apprehension, and suspense had begun to tell upon her, she could not bear up a moment longer; and this disappointment was too much for her; so she fell into a passion of tears, and sobbed, and cried out hysterically that St. Udo's enemy had got away, and that St. Udo would never be avenged now!—until the compassionate vicar supported her to her carriage and got her driven to the castle.

So Mrs. Chetwode put her to bed, and nursed her, and wept over her, and got her to sleep at last; and she did not awake for at least twelve hours.

Next day Mr. Emersham sent up his card to Miss Walsingham, desiring an interview.

Willingly she hastened down stairs to see him, burning with impatience to hear his errand.

"Is the man found?" was her first eager question.

The bustling young lawyer subsided instantly.

"Haw, no, not quite caught yet," he admitted, "but he's almost as good as ours now, my dear madam. I visited O'Grady this morning, and caused him to turn queen's evidence against his accomplice in this business, and—aw, I may say the prisoner, I mean the culprit—is done for."

He did not explain that O'Grady had been bribed by the magnificent promises of the quick-witted Emersham to leak out a little of the truth, just enough to give the detectives a fresh clue to his probable hiding-place; and that poor O'Grady was just then imprecating the dashing young lawyer from earth to a hotter place as a cheat, a liar, and a traitor, when he found out that he had used him as a tool.

Mr. Emersham also showed his client a telegram which the detectives had sent him, stating that they had got on the criminal's track, and expected to come up with him very soon now.

On the whole his visit did much to heighten Margaret's feverish impatience, and filled her with some of his own sanguine hopes.

When the young gentleman had gone, Margaret wandered through the wide, echoing rooms with a sense of freedom which she had never experienced before; a feeling of affection for these familiar chambers, for the sake of her who had owned them, and of him who should have now

possessed them.

How she had loved the tender-hearted and freakish Madam Brand, no soul save herself and that dead woman had known; and loving her as she did, could she do else than lay a like sentiment at the feet of her only kinsman, the hapless St. Udo.

Pacing through these lofty rooms the lonely girl thought over her checkered past; she breathed a sigh over the pathetic memory of her fond and foolish patroness; she gave a smile of scorn to the man who had come like a curse in the noble St. Udo's stead; the hateful impostor, whose last abject depredation had been but the type of his crawling, insatiable nature, which, sleuth-hound like, held on to the prey to the very last, and made off with a miserable mouthful of it rather than nothing.

But when she came to the portrait of St. Udo Brand, in the long crimson dining-room, the fierce flicker softened in her yearning eyes, and a sacred, tender smile dawned on her lips.

She studied the grand, passionate-speaking countenance, whose features were cast in a mold fitted to express the noblest emotions, till the soulful eyes seemed to seek hers with a living beam of gratitude; till the fine lips seemed to thrill with a gentle smile, and the souls of St. Udo Brand and Margaret Walsingham appeared to have met face to face for the first time, and to hold sweet communion together.

Great tears slowly dropped from Margaret's passionate eyes and washed her cheeks, her tender lip quivered with the thoughts that were swaying her heart; for a quick wild pang of grief smote her to think that he was in his grave.

He had scorned her, he had trampled her under foot, and she forgave him all, and wept that he was dead.

For oh, the heart of such a woman is capable of a love, which, to love of softer women, is as glowing wine to water, as the towering, scorching flame of the red volcano to the chill pale ray of the winter morn.

In the afternoon of the same day, Mrs. Chetwode came into Margaret's room with the news that Mr. Davenport was below, inquiring for an immediate interview.

"He do look raised, Miss Margaret," said Mrs. Chetwode; "he snaps round like an angry watch-dog."

He came up to Miss Walsingham's parlor and burst in, hot, red, loud, and angry.

"Ha! you have seen fit to return to your post, sir," cried Margaret, woman-like anticipating the fray.

"Return, madam!" fired the lawyer. "Am I here too soon for you, madam—how long did you want me to stay?"

"I did not want you to go, sir," said Margaret.

"Hear her, oh, hear her!" screamed the lawyer, appealing to the cornice, "if that is not upright and downright insanity, show me a maniac in Bedlam. Madam," with grim pleasantry, "shall you banish me to the top of Mont Blanc in your next letter about a mythological Colonel Brand?"

She maintained a dignified silence.

"Madam, since your little scheme to get both your guardians out of the way has succeeded so well, will you do me the favor of confessing what you have done with the colonel?"

"I have unmasked him, Mr. Davenport, and shown the world a murderer."

"What the duse do you mean, young lady?"

"He is proved an impostor, Mr. Davenport, believe me for once."

"Pig-headed as ever, I see," groaned the lawyer. "Come tell me why you sent me to Bala?" in a wheedling tone. "Be calm and give your reasons frankly."

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I did not send you to Bala."

"Confound the woman!" shouted Davenport, "she denies everything. She is mad! she'll deny the work of her own hand next, I do believe. Why did you write me this letter, Miss Margaret Walsingham?" (snatching it from his pocket and waving it like a banner of victory before her eyes.) "Your own handwriting—your own signature, madam. Please do not shock me by denying it."

She looked at the letter—her own familiar chirography started her out of countenance.

Truly, Roland Mortlake's was an accommodating genius.

Thus it ran:

> "Dear Mr. Davenport:—I have just receive an extraordinary telegram from some Dr. Lythwaite in Bala, Merioneth. I inclose it to you. Does it not convince you that my suspicions have a just foundation? If you can withstand the evidence of this stranger,

who has never heard of my suspicions, you are willfully shutting your eyes to a plain fact.

"St. Udo Brand lies ill at Bala—send Davenport to receive his instructions to Gelert's Hotel, Coventry street.'

"That is what the telegram says; now I request that for once you will obey my wish, and fly thither by the first train.

"Tell no one, not even Gay, for he is in the confidence of this wretch here. Heaven knows whether you are not the same.

"Yours, anxiously,

"MARGARET WALSINGHAM."

In the envelope was the bogus telegram; no wonder that the lawyer, suspicious though he was, had been completely deceived this time.

"I can show you as strange an epistle, which I received," cried Margaret, going to her desk for Dr. Gay's purported letter, and handing it to Mr. Davenport.

He read it and turned it over in blank surprise.

"Extraordinary!" muttered the lawyer. "Could Gay have got another telegram! Then you didn't send the doctor off, did you?"

"No, indeed, Mr. Davenport, nor you, either. Your untimely absence almost cost me my life, as you would have heard had you made any inquiries as to the state of affairs at Emersham's law office, before you came over here. We have all been infamously duped, sir, by a wretch unworthy of the name of man—but he shall soon expiate his crimes on the scaffold. All these communications have been cleverly forged by no other than Roland Mortlake, who is now flying for his life from the officers of justice."

"Extraordinary! most extraordinary!" aspirated Mr. Davenport.

He was getting very quiet, his purple face was fading into a frightened gray, his rousing tones were sinking into a soft dejection; he began to scent a mistake from afar, and to shoulder the humiliation.

And at this auspicious moment, Mrs. Chetwode opened the door and announced Dr. Gay, just arrived, to demand his explanation.

The lawyer stepped to the door to warn Dr. Gay of his error, and shook hands with the solemnity of a sexton greeting the chief mourner at a funeral.

"There's been a terrible blunder here," said he, spiritlessly; "we've both allowed ourselves to be made confounded fools of by a rascal. Have you heard anything in the town?"

"Not I," returned the little doctor, who looked as if he had not slept for a week. "I've just come home, and rushed over here as fast as a horse's legs could carry me. How are you now, Miss Margaret?"

"Well, thank you, and overjoyed to see you back again. I feel safe now," murmured Margaret, looking up in her counselor's face with a gentle glance. "There will be an end to all misunderstanding now, and we shall be friends as we used to be."

Mr. Davenport was wiping his forehead with his enormous bandanna, and looking very foolish; and Dr. Gay stared from one to the other, and got more mystified every minute.

"Have you made anything of this queer business?" asked he.

"Gad! sir, I think we have," returned the lawyer; "and more than we bargained for. We've caught a rascal in it!"

"Rascal enough!" sighed the little doctor, wearily. "He led me a fine dance of it. I suppose you want to hear what induced me to fly off at a tangent to the other side of England, don't you? A Welsh gentleman, calling himself Mr. Grayly, a tall, red-faced blue-eyed chap in a fur coat, called on me at nine o'clock on Tuesday morning, with the strange tidings that he had come from New Radnor in Wales—fancy that—and got me to believe it, too, the rogue—where the true Colonel Brand was lying sick at the country house of a brother officer in the Guards. I was struck dumb, and didn't know what to think, till a dispatch came per telegraph from the colonel himself, begging me to come and see him, and assuring me that Grayly would tell me all about him. So Grayly hustled me off on the half-past nine train, before I had time to think of anything. At —— in Berks my friend the Welshman got out, saying that he had an hour's business to transact there, but that I could go on, and he would overtake me in Cirencester; so off I went alone, thinking no evil. But I've never seen him since, the dog."

"Miss Margaret received this letter, posted in the same village," interposed Mr. Davenport, exhibiting it grimly.

Dr. Gay read it with stupefied wonder.

"St. George and the Dragon!" muttered he, "this is a cruel hoax. Who could have written that so like me. Grayly did it, I suppose, though."

"Grayly, *alias* O'Grady, posted it," said Margaret; "but he was employed to do so. Another than he wrote it, a cleverer forger. Well, how did your adventure end?"

"Oh, as might have been expected. I posted on, mad with excitement, to New Radnor in search of the sick man, and Grayly's instructions brought me to the door of a ladies' private boarding-school, where I was well stared at, and no doubt laughed at for my stupidity. So, finding that I had been cheated by a rogue who probably wanted to play off a practical joke upon my credulity —(I suppose everybody is laughing at Miss Margaret's suspicions of the colonel here, she must have mentioned them somewhere)—I came back quicker than I went, determined to sift the matter well."

"I need prepare your minds no better for the disclosures you must now hear," said Margaret, "for you will not discredit my story, after the mortifying experiences which you have had. I will not reproach you for your past injustice to me, for your desertion of my cause to the side of my enemy, or for your unfounded suspicion of my sanity. I only regret that your past inactivity has forced me to put this desperate case in the hands of a stranger who could not feel the interest in it which you should have felt. But no more of this. I shall explain all to you."

She faithfully narrated all that had happened since the night on which she had obtained possession of Roland Mortlake's pocket-book.

The two executors heard the recital; Dr. Gay with groans of horror, Mr. Davenport in meek and abject silence.

It was almost pathetic to observe the humility with which the overbearing lawyer received the intelligence of his egregious credulity and wanton obstinacy, but he did not say a word until the narration was completed, and then he dejectedly begged Miss Margaret to give him something to do for her.

They took counsel together, and at last parted with mutual good will and cordiality; Dr. Gay going back to his wife in such a maze of stupid preoccupation as submerged him in conjugal hot water for many a day; while Mr. Davenport pugnaciously burst into young Emersham's office and electrified him like a torpedo, on the subject of O'Grady's proper handling.

The days passed by—Andrew Davenport and Seamore Emersham, counsels for the plaintiff, announced their case complete; the chain of evidence which was to strangle Roland Mortlake, wanted not a link of the judicial measure required; his own confessions were there, his accomplice O'Grady was there with his secret disclosures; the witnesses were on the ground—all was complete, and nothing wanting except the criminal.

It was to no purpose, the doubling and twisting of secret detectives, many a day might pass away before they could overtake the game on that road, for he was perfect in such a part, his life had been one long race through tortuous paths, with the sword of justice pursuing him.

The hue and cry of outraged law rang wrathfully through the land; the public papers teemed with accounts of the great Castle Brand plot; the public mind execrated Roland Mortlake as a revolting rogue to murder so much better a man than himself, that he might steal his station; but the hero of the universal tongue kept discreet obscurity, and ventured not within the radius of his evil popularity.

Still O'Grady kept whispering his strange disclosures, and, under the upper stratum of wordy clamor, the sly detectives, led by Davenport, dug away at the secret lead, with hopes of coming treasure.

The dark-faced mistress of Castle Brand wore her soul out in pining for the end; and day by day she saw the wintry sun go down with a cry against the slow moving arm of justice; mingled with a piteous self-reproach when she noted the fierce spirit which had been born in her.

Her thin cheek seldom lost its feverish carmine, nor her eyes their lance-like gleam; her magnificent figure was uplifted with perpetual imperiousness; a Fulvia, a Semiramis, a black browed Nemesis, was Margaret Walsingham in those bitter days of her suspense.

Yet she could weep soft, tender tears before St. Udo's portrait, and hug the phantom chains of her supernal love to as love-some a heart as ever man won.

But passion and patience will not work in double harness, they wear the life out in their unceasing strife; and though she had lived through terrible scenes, she felt that she could not live through this.

But it is a long lane which has no turning; Margaret's turned very suddenly, and ushered her into a fairy land, whose ghost lights dazzled her eyes; whose strange, wild, awful beauty filled her soul with eternal sunshine.

Thus it fell out.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SELLING A SECRET.

On a sunny day in January, a traveling coach crunched up the drive to Castle Brand, and produced a visitor for Miss Walsingham.

The Waaste, so broad and rolling, looked well in its garb of snow, in which the late New Year had wed it; and along the drive the phinny firs and silver holly-bushes were piled with molded purity, while every creamy nymph in stone or stucco wore a crown of brightness.

The turrets even of the hoary castle were fringed with diamond stalactites, from which dropped liquid pearls upon the deep green ivy; and the griffins at the door each upheld a cone of dazzling snow upon his old stone forehead.

The visitor glanced about with many a smirk of approbation, and some wise shrugs of the shoulder; but said nothing aloud, preserving his breath for more important speech.

Margaret was sitting listlessly over her needle-work when the footman brought her a card, upon which was discernible, amid flourishes of the wildest fantasy, "*Ludovic, Chevalier de Calembours*."

She started up with a wild flush mantling her cheek, and a smothered cry of wrath.

The elegant little gentleman clad in the Hungarian velvet costume, beribboned, bejeweled, flaunting with many a badge of mystic significance, got upon his crooked little legs, and held out his white hands dramatically to the flashing, palpitating, queen-like creature who swept through the great drawing-room to greet him for the first time.

"Chevalier de Calembours! accomplice of Roland Mortlake, I have heard of you before!" she panted, not deigning to touch him.

"Mademoiselle Walsingham, champion of Colonel Brand, all the world has heard of you before!" rasped the bland-faced Hun.

"Why have you come here, heartless man!" cried Margaret.

"To see the dear mademoiselle whose actions so wise, so unselfish, so *heroique*, have won my heart?"

"Am I to accept praise from the enemy of St. Udo Brand? Never! You murdered him among you!"

"Softly, my heroine! The chevalier was not on the field when the admirable colonel was stabbed! *Ma foi!* he was lying bleeding on his litter amid his Southern friends, who had captured him for the second time. The first, the dear mademoiselle knows, the chance of fortune wooed me to the South; but the second, *mon Dieu!* no one asked me my will, but they hacked and hewed over my shackled body, and then the South won me from my captors."

"Sir, I desire to hear nothing of your history. You were paid by the murderer to dog the steps of St. Udo Brand; you were both leagued against him. Had he ever harmed you, chevalier? Was he not too brave to fall by treachery?"

Quite undaunted by her reproaches, M. le Chevalier listened to her passionate praise of his quondam comrade with sparkling eyes, and threw up his hands in ecstatic assent.

"Brave, did mademoiselle say?" he echoed; "*mon Dieu!* he was gallant, gay, free-hearted, *helas!* that the ladies should love such an Apollo."

"And you betrayed him, knowing him to be all this?" she cried, bitterly.

"*Par la messe!* mademoiselle is not just!" complained the chevalier, with tears in his eyes. "I love *mon* colonel, admire, believe in him; I spit upon Monsieur Mortlake—laugh at, revile him! Mademoiselle must have found out that I obeyed him—never; that I stuck to my colonel only because I love him; and that I left him not until fortune beckoned me away. If he had given me his dear company when I fled to Richmond, he would not have been to-day where he is; but would he? not though I prayed to him with tears in the eyes, with grief in the heart. No, no, he was doomed; he would stay with the Yankees, and—Thoms!"

"Did you not suspect who Thoms was, especially as Mortlake sent him to you?"

"Oh! I was blind. I was bewitched; the wretch was too cunning, mademoiselle. But pray, what has all the cunning ended in? Bah! simplicity, honesty for me; I still live, and walk abroad, a free man. But I am a Chevalier of honor. I scorn a crooked policy. When for the second time the South won Calembours, I found that perfidious fortune had changed her mood; from filling my pockets with gold as commissary general, she descended to thrusting me into that unwholesome residence in Richmond, Castle Thunder. All because some head of wood suggested that the Chevalier de Calembours was selling the North to the South, and *vice versa*. But the chevalier is a Knight of Industry as well as of Honor—he ever makes the honey where other bees would but starved carcasses. I make the situation palatable even in Castle Thunder, for there is a blue-coated soldier with me there. He is wounded, I nurse him; he is hungry, I feed him from my wretched pittance; we mingle our tears over the moldy crust and the muddy water—we console each other.

"When he is able to crawl, I file off his chains; together we dig our tunnel through the dungeon floor. We have no tools but we use a broken plate and a rusty key, and—patience. Night and day, mademoiselle, night and day that invalid soldier and I gnaw through the baked earth; the nails are torn from the fingers; see, *ma chère!* the clothes are worn from the bodies; *mon camerade* faints often, almost dies; but one day we see the sunny earth come crumbling into our rat-hole. *Mon Dieu!* we have penetrated beneath the wall—we are free.

"I drag him out that night—I drag him into the woods; he says he will die joyfully a free man—he cannot die a captive. But we do not let him die; we aid him day by day through the dismal swamps, cold, wet, famished, but he lives to reach Washington, and he is received in a hospital; while I, *morbleu*, they give me the cold shoulder, they point the finger, they cry, 'Renegade!' My friend whom I have aided, grows worse of his wound, and cannot speak for me; McClellan, Banks, Pope, Stanton, are all down on poor Calembours for past injuries they dream that he has done them with the South. So, mademoiselle must hear that the republican rabble hoot me from their midst with vile names, and hard usage, and ugly threats, just as the graycoats had done in Richmond, because I believe in universal suffrage, and am a mad *cosmopolite*, and see no difference between the greedy North and the hungry South. In vain I confide my need to these dogs, in vain I remind the War Department of past deeds of mine while serving under McClellan. They call my laurels tarnished with treachery, they call my past services canceled by succeeding bribery, they refuse me my little price, and order me to leave their barbaric soil.

"So I turn the back upon the dogs who snarl so loudly over their uninviting bone, and, although the tears gush from the eyes at parting from the dear friend whom I aided, I am forced to leave him behind.

"What though I have thrown behind me an illustrious life, titles, honors, pleasures, for to give these dogs my nameless services?

"Where Colonel Brand, the lion of chivalry raged, was not I, Colonel Calembours, ever at his side, the unwearied partner of the perilous speculation?

"But when I fall under the blind displeasure of the stupid bureau at Washington, justice, nay, honesty, is forgotten—they mulct me of my laurels.

"I go to New York, and turn into a dealer for horseflesh for the army. In a few weeks I fill my wrinkled purse, and get rid of the last of my consignment; and, before the wretched brutes have time to betray their many infirmities, New York in turn loses Calembours. But ere I leave I have the satisfaction of again greeting my invalid friend, who has been sent North to a better hospital, and who is gradually convalescing. He urges me to stay with him, that we may begin the world together; but I have a sacred duty to perform, a slight to remember, an insult to avenge. I am free, I have money, I have health, and I come here, to this Castle Brand, to see mademoiselle, and (for revenge) to sell to her—*a secret*."

The chevalier paused with *empressement*, and remained peering into his listener's face with a gay, encouraging smile for two or three minutes.

Whiter Margaret could not be, nor colder.

"Proceed, monsieur," she breathed at last; "do not mock my anxiety."

"Mademoiselle understands that what follows is for sale?" quoth the chevalier slyly.

"Yes, yes, you shall be satisfied. Proceed."

"*Mille mercies*, dear mademoiselle. *Eh, bien!* I will do myself the honor to keep you au courant with my history. History pleases mademoiselle; she is a good listener—*ma foi!* a very good listener.

"*Voila!* I begin at the end of the volume. I begin, as do the Hebrews, at the last page, and read from right to left, to meet this end of the little tale which you have just heard.

"Some months ago—perhaps eighteen—I, the illustrious Chevalier de Calembours, arrived at Canterbury, on business of mine.

"In time I meet a very great man there; we play *rouge-et-noir*; *mon Dieu!* he cheats me at *rouge-et-noir*. Mademoiselle, *rouge-et-noir* is my own great weapon, *ma foi!* I must have learned it in my cradle when an infant; with it I have beat the world, with it I have cheated the world—and this greatest of men cheats me!

"I stop the game, I contemplate him with exalted emotions, with admiration, with awe; tears start to the eyes, I offer him the hand.

"Monsieur," I cry, with much enthusiasm, "tell me your name. You shall be my great model in this noble game; I shall be your pupil."

"The great man glares at me through those cavernous eyes; his lips, so thin and evil, smile sourly, and his long fingers make me the gambler's sign. Ah! he is the gambler by profession, then—the sly sharper, the hanger-on upon the young of the military. I marvel no more at his proficiency in the art in which, beside him, I am but an amateur.

"'My name is Roland Mortlake,' he says, unwillingly; 'you are welcome to any hints you think I can give you; but I was admiring your play all the time. I've never seen it equalled.'

"Mademoiselle, this man had played in Germany, in Italy, in France, and he had never seen my play equalled.

"I listen to the delicious praise; the heart swells with generous pride; I rise, I embrace him as a brother.

"'You do me too much honor, Monsieur Mortlake,' I cry; 'you do the Count of Santo Spirito, Turin, too much honor.'

"We became acquaintances, friends, inseparable brothers—we became necessary to each other.

"We combine our forces, we cheat the world, and we reap a golden harvest.

"The world is *so* gullible *chère amie*. Why not glean the benefit then?

"'I must go to London,' says my friend, in March; 'better come along. We can always pigeon the subs, and they are always to be found there.'

"My friend was a great player, but he spoke ill, even coarsely at times.

"So be it, *camerade*!' I cry and we go.

"At first we do well; we enter humble circles, and we mount to higher every day; the purse is very full, the heart is very merry, when, *ouais!* hush! Monsieur Mortlake becomes mysterious, close, unjust—says:

"'Better keep out of sight for a while, Calembours; I can't be seen with a notorious harpy like you just now; the circle I'm getting into won't care for a dirty little Frenchman. They're exclusive.'

"'*Merci*, Monsieur Mortlake,' I return, 'Napoleon the brave thought Calembours worthy of the Legion of Honor; but perhaps your circle are right, and are exclusive of the nobility.'

"We part good friends, though, for are we not necessary to each other? He goes his way and I go mine, but I set myself to know the reason why.

"I discover my Mortlake hovering about a great flame in the military world—a Captain St. Udo Brand, of the Coldstream Guards, who has great expectation of a wealthy grandmother dying and leaving him the sole heir.

"My Mortlake wheels nearer and nearer this mighty captain, learns all he can about his history and habits, and becomes an acquaintance of his. What he intends to do with him I cannot tell; for he cannot pigeon *him* as he pigeons weaker men. My faith, he dares not.

"Captain Brand treats the gambling Mortlake with that lofty insolence which great men show to little men; he is indifferent to him, he forgets his presence, he turns the back upon him at the mess-table when any of the softer officers bring him there.

"My Mortlake does not like it; he grows very black when the captain is not by, and he swears a great deal against him.

"I look on and laugh; it is a gay *comedie* for me. I clasp the hands and cry *encore*!

"Presently the great captain's grandmama's malady grows worse; messages continue to arrive, and he must go to Surrey.

"Monsieur Mortlake comes to me with his curious green eyes gleaming.

"'Come Calembours,' he says; 'we may as well take a run down to Surrey to see this wonderful castle.'

"'So be it!' I cry once more, and we go.

"We are living at a hotel in Regis when the sullen captain arrives; he is accosted to his surprise by Monsieur Mortlake, who is of course quite astonished to meet him there.

"Captain Brand swears a good deal at the idea of going down to that 'infernal dull hole,' his grandmother's handsome castle, which he assures Mr. Mortlake is inhabited by old women and servants.

"'A note will do for to-night, by Jove!' vows Captain Brand, 'and I'll send it over.'

"Monsieur Mortlake protests that he has heard so much of the antiquity of Castle Brand that he would think it a boon if the captain would permit him to carry that note, if it is only for the chance of seeing such a castle.

"'By all means you shall, if that will please you,' says the captain.

"Mademoiselle, as these men stand together in the lobby, I looking down from the staircase upon them—for has not monsieur ordered me not to disgrace him by intruding upon the captain?—a very strange idea occurs to me; it strikes me very forcibly. I watch the men with amazement, with fear. As we ride away together in the moonlight, I say to my friend:

"'Monsieur le Capitaine is a most handsome man.'

"He only curses Monsieur le Capitaine.

"I say again:

"'*Mon ami*, do not execrate your own image.'

"He turns in his saddle with a savage oath—he glares like the hungry wolf.

"'What's that, you jabbering idiot!' he roars, in his brutal way.

"'Captain Brand and Monsieur Mortlake seem like as twin dogs,' I reply; 'you might change names with our haughty captain, and no one be the wiser, save that he has the *bel air* which you want—the polish, the courtesy, which those of the mob can never learn.'

"'Curse him! I have as good blood in my veins as he has any day!' hisses the furious voice of my envious Mortlake.

"Then he turns sour and silent, and is very poor company. I sing *chansonettes* to the moon; I whistle operas; I talk to my horse; he takes no notice; I rally him upon his temper, and he swears madly at me.

"So I light my cigar and smoke for company until we reach the great Castle Brand, which towers like a vast cathedral under the moon.

"Mademoiselle, a magnificent statue waits him at the door. Mademoiselle remembers the interview. Enough! My tripping tongue need not rehearse the scene.

"Back comes Monsieur Mortlake, devil-possessed, and overwhelms me with a terrible curse.

"I laugh at his slow-stepping wit.

"I have seen a pretty possibility for monsieur, even while mademoiselle is speaking.

"'Stupid Englishman!' I cry, as we ride across the Waaste, 'don't you see that you might get this fine English castle and estate to yourself some day, if you could personate brave Captain Brand?'

"My romantic fancy is captivated by this little scheme. I go on amusing myself by describing how it might be done. I give you my word, mademoiselle, that it is all in jest—a freak of imagination nothing more.

"My sour comrade listens with a serpent's guile; his clever brain is twisting a rope out of my threads of fiction; he catches my bagatelle, and transforms it into a plot—the plot which would have proved successful but for Marguerite, the heroic.

"*Eh bien*, to continue:

"We ride away to the hotel at Regis that night, and monsieur had a little interview with Captain Brand, and tells him the message which Mademoiselle Walsingham has sent to him. Then is the captain furious, and impatient, and self-reproachful for his cold-blooded neglect of the poor fond grandmama, and he gallops off to the old castle on the wings of the wind, and is too late, and remains moping at the castle, seeing nobody but red-eyed Chetwode, for the magnificent Mademoiselle Walsingham has locked herself within her room and will not see him.

"My careful Mortlake gathers all this from the footmen and servants from the castle, and makes envious remarks upon the dog that has, and wants it not, and the dog that wants, and has it not.

"In the evening of that day on which Madame Brand is interred, Monsieur le Capitaine comes back to Regis choking with rage. Monsieur Mortlake offers congratulations, and hears the whole of the will from our angry captain, who utters a scornful fanfaronade against the brave Mademoiselle Walsingham. Cries royally:

"'I won't interfere with the companion—she's free for me; I'll get out of England as fast as I can, and try my luck abroad.'

"'Try the United States,' insinuates M. Mortlake.

"'Good! and join the army,' says our captain, with a war-glance which sweeps the horizon and sees coming fame, 'and win glory, since I am stripped of my fortune.'

"'Will you go, then?' pursues Monsieur Mortlake.

"'I'll think of it,' says Captain Brand.

"And he does think of it, and to such purpose that in an hour he has left Regis and is posting back to London.

"Monsieur Mortlake comes to me and tells me all this.

"'Calembours, I have a job for you,' says my friend. His language is never refined. *Ouf!* how can it be? But I laugh, amused, and I applaud, for my perception is swifter than Monsieur's tongue; it has skipped on a mile of the plan, and turned to meet the tardy wit of my Mortlake.

"'So be it,' I cry, with smiles. 'You want me to put you in those cavalry boots of Captain Brand, that you may win his castle and his Marguerite.'

"To my surprise my friend writhes with anger—half chokes over this:

"'His castle and his Marguerite? Hang him! I have a better right than he to them.'

"And becomes immediately mysterious, close as a mute.

"When we reach London, and find that Monsieur le Capitaine is really selling his commission in the Guards, and going to America, my Mortlake reveals his well-considered plot to me.

"'Calembours, you are such a plausible rogue,' says my coarse friend, 'that you might be a great help to me in the plan I've thought of.'

"'Dear friend, you flatter me,' I, smiling, reply. 'Command me.'

"'This fellow is in love with some woman of rank here in London,' pursues my Mortlake. 'I can't find out her name, he's such a proud fellow; but that's the reason why he throws off the woman at Castle Brand and forswears the fortune. Now, d'ye see, Calembours, how we can turn his tomfoolery to account?'

"I bow; I am interested, but not admiring.

"He can go off to the war, and somebody can go off with him, to keep an eye on him that he doesn't balk, and to worm himself into all the fellow's secrets and past history. Somebody gentlemanly and taking, and with plenty of confounded jabber about 'em. You'd do first rate, Calembours.'

"'So flattered,' I smile. 'The good opinion of my dear M. Mortlake is so consoling.'

"'You could creep round him so nicely,' observed my friend; 'you could get anything you liked out of him, you've got such an innocent look, you dog; while I can't become the polished gentleman without practice, fact being that I've forgotten the talk. I was once as swell as any of 'em—was in the army, bedad! an artillery officer; but luck changed, curse it! and my company wasn't so high-flying, though we were a jolly pack for all that, especially after the day's duties were over.'

"'Was monsieur a soldier or a knight of the pen?' I ask.

"He shows his long teeth in a snarling smile.

"'I was in a government office—served my country,' he replies; 'and, getting home on furlough, I might as well feather my nest while I have a chance, and then slip the cable on 'em. Pay isn't very good there, nor victuals very plenty.'

"'Eh! prison fare?' I ask, scenting the jest.

"He scowls like an ogre at me.

"'You're a fool!' he growls. 'No; I was a Road Commissioner. Come, now, will you go with Brand, and win some cool thousands by the speculation?'

"'What are my duties?' I cautiously reply.

"'To keep close by him through all his windings, until—'

"My Mortlake stops.

"'Until?' I venture.

"'Until the dog is killed,' whispers monsieur.

"I start back—I wave the vile insinuation from me.

"'*Pardieu!*' I scream; 'I am *chevalier d'honneur*! I pride myself upon my illustrious reputation. Monsieur must seek another colleague.'

"'Idiot!' he roars, 'did I ask you to have anything to do with that? Do I suspect *you* of enough pluck to crush a snake? No, you fool, I don't. The man will be killed in battle. All I want of you is to hear his private business, so that you can post me up. If you want to make your fortune, say so.'

"Mademoiselle, my dearest wish has always been to make my fortune. *Ma foi!* shall I refuse it when it comes begging at my door?

"'So be it. *Vive l'Amerique!*' I cry. 'Give me my instructions.'

"And monsieur does give me my instructions.

"I am to be hand and glove with Monsieur le Capitaine; I am to learn his history off by heart and write it down for my Mortlake to study; and when he falls in battle I am to win my reward, but not till then. I am encouraged by every inducement to be the assassin myself. I am assured that if Captain Brand does not die in the course of twelve months, Monsieur Mortlake can do nothing for me; and I laugh to myself, and say:

"'I shall watch my Mortlake.'

"'And what will monsieur do until I return to England?' I say.

"'I'll pigeon the green hands in the gambling saloons,' he tells me, 'and have a neat little sum to carry us through the plot.'

"So we make up our plans, and I follow Captain Brand to Liverpool.

"The last act of friendship which my principal does for me is to send after me a servant to attend me.

"'A trusty fellow,' writes M. Mortlake, 'who will help you with the captain. He is an unscrupulous chap, and might do that little job for you. Thoms is a cute fellow, and won't betray us.'

"Monsieur Mortlake has changed his mind at the last moment; he doubts the villainy of his accomplice; he comes himself, in Thoms' disguise, to watch how the game goes.

"He says to himself, 'Calembours may betray my plot to Captain Brand, or, not betraying it, may fail to see him killed, and he may turn up again when I am least prepared for him; then let *me* accompany the pair as Thoms, the valet; and Thoms shall remind Calembours of his duty; and Calembours shall commission Thoms to deal the death-blow, if chance withholds it in battle, and Calembours shall ever after be tied hand and foot by that command of his to Thoms, and shall never dare to betray the cunning Mortlake. Then when Brand is dead, Thoms shall disappear; Calembours shall return to England with his report; Mortlake shall pay him much or little, as he likes, and Calembours shall be gagged for life with his share in the murder of Brand. Thus shall Mortlake cover up his traces, and win fortune without one fear of discovery. And if Calembours proves unfaithful in his compact, why then Thoms shall only have to use his dagger twice instead of once, and perhaps that would be the best way after all.'

"Was it not a wonderful plot, mademoiselle?

"So complete, so obscure, so complicated!

"And to think that I should not have been the first to conceive it!

"Bah! I told you that Monsieur Mortlake could cheat me at *rouge-et-noir*; he was my mental superior.

"Mine was the intellect quick, daring, creative; but his was the sure, silent, and wily brain that could view a scheme in all its bearings, and twist it as he willed.

"Enough; Monsieur Mortlake accompanied us to the seat of war as Thoms, and not once did I suspect the villain of being other than he seemed.

"Bah! to think of being served by such a worm!

"Mademoiselle, the soul of the knight of honor rises in wrath as he recalls these days of foolish deception, when the brother colonels, sitting by the camp-fire, laugh over poor old Thoms, and say, 'He's mad.' Mademoiselle, the blood of an honest man boils as he recalls the dastard pranks of his valet; when he rifles the pockets of brave Colonel Brand; and sitting behind us, mimics the gestures of my friend, rehearsing for his future character; and shoots at Brand and me from behind our tent, and missing fire, stabs the innocent Confederate envoy, who might betray him.

"When I forget my compact with Monsieur Mortlake, and show my affection for the great colonel, Thoms is there to menace me with meaning looks; and when I defy his hints and refuse to spy any longer upon my colonel's life, a letter comes from Mortlake quickening me by threats and promises. 'Tis penned, of course, by Thoms, and I never know it then.

"The history of those days you have discovered for yourself, mademoiselle, in that important note-book, which you seized with such high courage.

"Admirable woman! I bend the knee to you, for you rival in valor Joan of Arc. Without your heart of steel and hand of silk, the wary, lying fox might never have been lured from his hole and crushed; and the noble Colonel Brand might have lain forgotten and unavenged.

"Thus I come to the middle of the volume. The stories have met; I take up the ends of them; I twine them together, and, *voila!* an *eclaircissement*! When I have run my little race in the ungrateful republic, I come home to England.

"I am free. I have money, health; I have a sacred duty to perform, an insult to avenge; I hasten into England, and seek my principal.

"*Ouais!* are not the journals teeming with great news? '*The Great Castle Brand Plot* meets my astonished eyes in every journal. The vile imposture is divulged, the daring murderer is condemned; his serpentine guile is held up; and with passion I read that my valet Thoms and my employer Mortlake are one. I foam, I sweat with rage and shame, that he should have cheated me.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* that I should live to be cheated by *Thoms*! Why did I not saber him in those days in Virginia?

"I swear that I will have honorable satisfaction; the dog shall die for his treachery to a knight whose honor is more valued than his life.

"I know the old disguise of my Mortlake. I remember his haunts, I say. England, I will find your criminal for you, but I shall have my little account settled with him before I pass him over to you.

"I hasten to Canterbury, where I have seen him first, and in his old haunt, plying his modest profession as gambler, I find my bird-of-the-jail, with the eye upon Paris when tracked to

Canterbury, there to hide from angry England.

"I penetrate to his *cafe*, where he consorts with blacklegs, sharpers, and barmaids, and I gain a private audience of the great man in his exile.

"I snap the fingers in his face. *Tonnere!* how white it grows! I cry:

"'Monsieur, you are no gentleman—you are *un fripon*, a rogue, a speaking cur! Monsieur, I spit upon you for a cur! Will you have pistols or sabers?'

"'Calembours, by all the devils!' groans my rat in the trap. 'Why, man, I thought you were dead long ago. If I hadn't thought so, I should have had you to help me through with that accursed plot, and paid you well for it, too——'

"'Liar!' I cry, 'I don't believe you! You are Thoms, and Thoms was a traitor. *Allons*, monsieur, will you meet me in the court out there?'

"'Calembours,' whines the slave, 'why need you trample on a down man? Nobody knows me here, and I'll give you my purse, my jewels, and a fine blood-horse which I have out there in the stable, if you'll let me escape to Dover to-night.'

"I weigh the purse, not so light, considering; the jewels—*par la messe!* a million francs would not purchase them.

"But I do not falter; he has cheated me with a paltry trick, he has practiced upon my credulity—my credulity, mademoiselle, and a *chevalier d'honneur* never forgives that.

"'Dog! you think to buy me!' I screamed, in my high indignation—'you, who have played your vile trick upon me, who have laughed under the hood at me. *You*, Thoms! Never, Monsieur Mortlake; but I will have your blood! Fox! beast! you shall be honored for the first time in your plebeian life—you shall fight with Calembours!'

"The slave recoils, for he knows the accuracy of the chevalier's aim, he knows the perfection of the chevalier's passes; he loathes pistol and saber as a means of settling the dispute.

"Glaring at me, eye to eye, he casts about in his wily brain how to cheat me to my face—he was ever my superior in juggling tricks, although he had no bravery, except what paid him.

"But he is late in achieving his last throw for freedom—angry England has tracked the fugitive. A posse of *gens d'armes*—what you call police—pour into monsieur's private saloon, and advance to take my Mortlake.

"He glares at them with eyes of horror, gathers himself for a tiger's bound through their midst, and nearly gains the door.

"But he is caught—mid air; he is hurled to the floor; the shackles are on his wrists, the gyves are on his feet, and, with foam on his lips and murder in his eyes, he looks up at his captors.

"'Ha, ha! my bird!' jests a *gen d'armes*; 'you're caged at last. Your ticket of leave won't do any longer—it's out many a month ago; and, since you don't go in for road-work, in Tasmania, you can try the shortest road to glory.'

"The convict says never a word, but shuts his eyes and succumbs; and so they carry him away, and I have bade my last adieu to Monsieur Mortlake.

"*Ma chère*, there are ups in this world, and there are downs; I have seen both—I have been elevated to the highest pinnacle of fortune, and again thrown under fortune's wheel—but, mademoiselle, my honor has never been impugned, for it was above reproach.

"Yet this dog of a Mortlake had ventured to amuse himself at my expense—had outwitted me in my own game; can the depths of misfortune be too profound for such a traitor? *Pardieu!* no, a thousand times no!

"So that when my Mortlake was dragged to prison, I, the insulted man of honesty, felt only joy that there was a rogue less to find.

"Most illustrious heroine, shall I resume the chronicles?

"Your face answers with eloquence: 'Yes, my friend, and be brief;' but your great heart trembles, and shrinks from the deep cup of vengeance which I offer, although you long have sought to taste it.

"No? you deny the imputation? But, mademoiselle, you tremble and are pale as the winter moon; wherefore? Ah, you apprehend my halting meaning; you perceive the mists of possibility with those keen eyes, and you urge, 'Haste, haste, and assure me of the truth!'

"*Eh, bien!* you shall taste of a cup more mellow than this one of revenge. I hasten to hold it to the lips of Margaret *la Fidele*!

"I learn as much of my Mortlake's history as my interest in him prompts me to search out.

"I hear that he was banished to Tasmania twelve years ago for a daring act of forgery; that he has come back with a ticket of leave two years since, and, seizing the first opportunity, has presented himself with freedom, and escaped from the espionage of the law.

"That the detectives sent on the track of Roland Mortlake have met the detectives on the track of the fugitive ticket of leave man, and that O'Grady has confessed that they are identical.

"O'Grady, being a companion-convict, and having shared in that enterprise for freedom, is well qualified to put the detectives upon his track, and does so. Thus our friend Mortlake vanishes from the scene; one month ago the prosperous heir of Castle Brand—to-day, the convict waiting sentence for the murder of the true heir of Castle Brand.

"But, mademoiselle, the little tale is not complete without the *eclaircissement*; permit me to draw aside the curtain from my secret.

"You shall give the word that draws the bolt, and drop out Mortlake into a murderer's grave; or you shall raise the warning hand that stays the doom upon the felon's platform, and waves him back to Tasmania for life in the chain-gang.

"How you have that power is my secret, mademoiselle; shall I tell it you for one thousand pounds?"

Grave, keen, penetrating, the Chevalier de Calembours bent forward and waited breathlessly the answer to this momentous question.

The great eyes of Margaret Walsingham still met his in a fascinated gaze; her electric face kept its spell-bound attention. With lips apart and bosom heaving she waited for the end of the story.

"Mademoiselle, shall I tell it you for one thousand pounds, or shall I go back to America, and bury the secret in oblivion?" asked the chevalier.

"Tell me all," breathed Margaret, faintly.

"Mademoiselle will remember my modest request?"

"Yes, yes, monsieur, I will pay you what you ask!" she cried, hysterically; "go on to the end."

"*Milles mercis!*" cried he, cheerfully, "mademoiselle is magnificent! Mademoiselle does not wish M. Mortlake to escape with his life?"

"No," shuddered Margaret, "he must not live."

"So perfidious!" aspirated the chevalier; "he stole St. Udo's history, he stole his identity, and then he stole his life. Fiendish Mortlake!"

"He shall die, monsieur, be content," groaned Margaret.

"Even if he had not succeeded in killing St. Udo, his intention would make him worthy of death," remarked the chevalier.

"Ah, yes, worthy of twenty deaths!" cried Margaret, wringing her hands.

"Mademoiselle loves the brave man who was murdered?" insinuated the chevalier, in softest accents.

She grew white as death, and the great tears rushed from her eyes.

"What does it matter now?" she moaned. "I do love him—ah, I do love him!"

Then did the little man rise and expand with warm enthusiasm—then did his handsome face glow with rapture and with pride.

He put on a smile of most gracious benevolence, he drank in the rich love-light upon her eloquent countenance, and then he cried, joyfully:

"Incomparable mademoiselle! you deserve good news. We shall hang the dog, and then resurrect the master; for, *Viola! Colonel Brand is not dead yet*!"

CHAPTER XXV.

OFF TO AMERICA.

The chevalier paused with dramatic *empressement* to enjoy the effect of his announcement. But the pale woman who was sitting before him made little sign of her emotions.

With the tears still upon her cheeks, and hands clasped in her lap, she had gone a wild trip into fairyland, and its brilliant fantasies were whirling round her in all manner of rainbow tints presaging hopes of joy; and the little chevalier, glossy-bearded, pleased, and triumphant, seemed to dance round her in the many-tinted flare, like the good geni of the fairy tale.

Save the added wildness to these resistless gray eyes, and the sudden aurora gleam over brow and cheek, the demonstrative Frenchman might have doubted if she believed him.

"Admirable mademoiselle," aspired he, after a due pause; "she is brave as the Spartan boy with his more disagreeable burden, the wolf. She will not let the surprise show so much as the tip of

his nose—ah, you British know how to shut the teeth. *Mais Voila*, you shall say, 'Go on, *mon ami*, and accept your thousand pounds,' or shall I say no more of my colonel, and let the naughty convict go hang?"

"He is alive—go on," breathed Margaret to the pirouetting geni of her fairy-tale.

"What! and loose monsieur's neck-cloth, which was to strangle him?"

"Yes yes; tell me of St. Udo Brand, that we may bring him home to his own."

"Mademoiselle is magnificent. She forgives like an angel, and pays like an empress. I bow before so grand a demoiselle, the effulgence of her nature dazzles me, and *Voila!* I, also touched with enthusiasm, emulate her in magnificence. For the poor sum of one thousand pounds I give to mademoiselle the hero of her heart, and happiness, and to me darkness, after the blinding study of her perfection. Nay more, I have a turn for necromancy—I may not read man's destiny in the stars, but woman's future in her own *petite* hand I have often seen, and I see this hand, which is a lovely hand, holding out the fortune of St. Udo, my fine colonel, to him, and being taken, fortune and all, for its own open kindness; and I behold myself (in the future of this *petite* hand) placing by the revelation I am about to make, my noble heroine in the arms of another—for only one thousand pounds.

"Behold me, then, lift the cloud which has swallowed up the life of our gallant St. Udo Brand from the moment in which the renegade, Thoms, has stabbed him on the battle-field and lo! with the sweep of my magician's wand I place before you the succeeding picture, clear, truthful, and unshadowed.

"My fallen hero finds himself next—not in Heaven, where, by gar, his brave deeds have doubtless bought for him a seat in the dress-circle—but in a villainous ambulance, being jolted over an execrable wood-road in a rain-storm which kindly drenches him with sufficient moisture to keep his wounds flowing. Having ascertained as much, and doubtless feeling disgusted with the lack of courtesy which the jade Fortune has displayed, he absents his spirit once more from his body, going an experimental tour to his future quarters, and leaving that tenement to all appearances 'to let.'

"It is barely possible that his future quarters are not inviting, for the spirit comes back from a blind boxing for a place somewhere, and takes up with the poor, shattered body once more, and St. Udo wakes up to find himself a prisoner of the South, immured in Castle Thunder, Richmond.

"Mademoiselle, I have already narrated to you the trials which I, the foot-ball of the vixen Fortune, endured in Castle Thunder with my *camarade*. I pass the time of his deadly illness, when the breath flits forth like a puff, and seems gone forever—when the great wounds fever, and my friend in blue babbles at the charge, and the rally, and shouts of phantom soldiers, or turns to his pillow and whispers of woman's tender hands, when there are but the rough fingers of his faithful Ludovic. *Ma foi!* but he is a British Napoleon! He triumphs over his desperate wounds, and stifling captivity, and one day my Brand sits up and knows me, whom last he had known as a foe, by the ungraceful *contretemps* of war.

"*Mon Dieu!* but I was glad, and I was sorry! There he is for you—so thin, and so patient—waiting to accept the life that God shall give.

"My heroine, you shall not weep. It is better than the death by treachery, is it not? And *Voila!* he shall give you an English hand-grip yet—shall he not? And I shall be there to see and to bless, and to be the good *sorcier*. Ah, bravo! or what you call in England, 'Here, here!' we shall all be happy presently.

"But to resume: When I know better this man whom I have yet known as the brave soldier at the head of his company, when I see him in captivity, in trial, in sickness, eating with me the crust, drinking with me the muddy water, bearing cowardly usage from his jailers—all with that grand patience, I find in him a great man, and morally I see myself upon my knees before him to do honor and I whisper in my own ear, 'Ludovic Calembours, tell this, the only man whom you ever loved better than yourself the plot which was made by this wretch, Mortlake, to oust him from his Castle Brand!'

"And I tell him the whole story, by gar! I spare not myself at all, though he scorns me with his hand, and calls me 'blackleg,' and thanks me nothing for my story, but after that he is kinder to me, and rouses himself to scoop with me through our prison floor, with the broken plate—I with the rusty key, and when we stand face to face under the stars beyond the prison bars, his hand so thin, so bleeding, is pointed Northward, his sunken eyes gather fire, and he says:

"'My fortune is on the Federal battle-field; such life as God sends me I shall seek there; I am done forever with England.'

"*Mon Dieu!* I love my brave St. Udo like a brother. Would I let my brother drop Seven-Oak Waaste through his fingers?

"I say him neither yea nor nay, but traverse with him the dreary swamps, and we go to Washington.

"His wounds and weakness threw him sick into an hospital. I, in my efforts to have a knight of industry properly compensated, am driven with howlings from the savage place, and in the

pursuit of a virtuous livelihood in New York, lose sight for a time of my St. Udo.

"Mademoiselle Walsingham, if Dame Fortune had really frowned upon my little secret scheme, which was to punish the dastard Mortlake, and to advance my brave *camarade*, she would not have thrown St. Udo in my way so persistently, when with the tears and sorrow I had been forced to part with him, as I feared for the last time, at Washington.

"But look you! In my pursuit of purchasers for my famous war-horses, I find myself in a hospital, where a general—great man—has promised to meet me, and I meet once more my colonel. He has been sent to New York for better attendance than can be got in the overcrowded hospitals of Washington, and I find him weak as a child from wound-fever, and, by gar! I am so overjoyed that I fall upon his neck and forgot to drive my bargain with the general.

"I say to him: '*Mon ami*, I devote myself to you. I pledge myself to cancel the past by making up to you a little fortune. Forswear the sword *mon frere*, and turn it into a pruning-hook as I have done; be *camarade* with me once more, and we shall reap a harvest of greenbacks from these patriots, who must every one be officer, and to ride away to battle must every one have a brave war-horse. Let *us* mount them *mon frere*—already I have a modest little something made up wholly from the help I have given these patriots. What say you, my Brand?

"*Mon Dieu!* mademoiselle, he waxes very angry with me, and complains that I am tarnishing his honor with my villainous schemes for self-advancement. I, who am willing to share my purse with him.

"I say: 'But, monsieur, you have not heard me out yet. You have flown at me like your own obstinate bull-dogs, that bark! bark! bark! and will not hear reason. I have yet to finish my plan for your welfare, I would have said had you not interrupted me. And then, when our purses burst with greenbacks, let us go to England and see how Seven-Oak Waaste is getting on with Mortlake for a master, and the companion of the *grand mere* for a mistress. You like English fair play, my friend; and it is not English fair play to let Mortlake have Castle Brand.'

"'Mortlake!' shouts my invalid, in a passion. 'What have I to do with him, or with Castle Brand, or with Miss Walsingham? Let them make what they like of it: I am not going to soil my fingers dipping into the pot with them. I will never set my foot in England again, I tell you, and be good enough to understand me when I say so!'

"I throw out the hand in disinterested despair at his obstinacy and ask how he is to live.

"'A soldier may always live by his sword,' he says; 'and I don't mind trying if the adage is true. And if ever I meet that sneaking valet of ours, Calembours, I'll horsewhip him for the mark of attention he gave me, and if you have any love-token to entrust me with, I'll faithfully deliver it too.'

"A strange suspicion has been in my mind since ever my colonel told me of the dastardly murder which Thoms attempted upon him, which is that Thoms had been hired by my principal to do the deed after having spied on us to see that I fulfilled my contract. This is so humbling to my pride as a sharp-witted man whose motto is: 'The world loves to be gulled, and I am the one to gull them.' that I breathe nothing of it, but, *morbleu*! I promise to myself that my Monsieur Mortlake shall hear of this.

"So, generous vengeance firing me, I bid adieu to the valiant colonel, and return to the island of bull-dogs, full of indignation against the cur who will have the loud snarl at me when I pull the bone out of his teeth.

"And *ma foi!* what do I find? The papers vaunting Mademoiselle Walsingham's courage in unmasking the impostor—her wonderful integrity which refuses to accept Madame Brand's bequest—her cleverness in frustrating the attempt upon her life. Everywhere I read paragraphs pertaining to the 'Castle Brand Plot.' I begin to feel the curiosity grow to see this wonderful Mademoiselle Marguerite.

"I have told you of my meeting at Canterbury of the abject Mortlake. Having seen Him as securely entrapped as his bitterest enemy could wish, I come to you, full of my dreams for the noble Brand, burning to thank you in his name for your bravery.

"I throw my money about like the grand seigneur. I make all haste—I penetrate to your presence and find, not as St. Udo had believed, a cunning adventuress, but empress of love, generosity, soul.

"I wave the hat again, and shriek *brava! bravissamo!* for I know that my great news will bring the joy to your great heart, and I see that *lettle* compensation already slipping into my pocket. Eh, mademoiselle?"

Margaret rose and turned her face from the chevalier. As yet she could grasp nothing but the knowledge that St. Udo Brand was alive; and oh, the whirl of joy which danced its wild measure in her heart!

He had risen from his shallow grave to a second life of purity and mayhap of happiness.

"So good and so patient—waiting—waiting to accept the life that God shall give."

Ah! might *she* not hallow to him his resurrection by bands of love?

He was alive! Sweet Heaven! to think that he was alive!

The mighty rush of feeling broke its bands at last—she sank upon a chair, shaken by her sobs, and her heart, quaking at its own great hunger, opened to take in its joy, and all was forgotten save her tumultuous vision of bliss.

But monsieur, the chevalier, had no relish to witness any scene of which he was not the hero; so, after five minutes of decorous silence, he swaggered to her side, with hands thrown up in deprecatory fervor.

"*Ma foi!* Mademoiselle Marguerite!" he exclaimed, "accept the consolation of your devoted admirer! Command me, your slave!"

"Leave me," murmured Margaret, gently. "Ask a servant to show you—somewhere—the picture-gallery—I will summon you."

Monsieur Calembours protested that her tender heart did his eloquence high honor, and slid, with many obeisances, to the door, leaving the overwrought girl free at last to suffer the burden of her joy, and to throw herself in an attitude of devotion, and to weep such tears as form the specks of celestial blue in the drab cloud of life.

When in half an hour the French gentleman was conveyed back to Miss Walsingham, he found her calm, serene, and happy-eyed, ready to consult with intelligence and spirit equal to his own upon the course she meant to pursue.

"You will scarcely be surprised to hear," she said, greeting him with, a beaming smile, "that I purpose retiring wholly from my position of heiress of Seven-Oak Waaste, and of offering it to Colonel Brand. I am well aware of the pride which impelled him to scorn fighting for his rights with an adventuress, and knowing this, I am sure that no letter from the executors, or myself, would lead him to accept, amicably, his rightful position. So, in order to leave him no room for misunderstanding me, I propose going with one of my advisers to New York and personally urging my determination upon him. He is weak and in bad health, you say"—here the woman's yearning heart spoke out in her glowing eyes—"and I think it in a measure my duty to go and take care of him until he is safe at his own Castle Brand. What do you say to this, sir?"

"Magnificent, Marguerite!" sighed the chevalier; "but, mademoiselle, let me be your counsellor in this little thing. Duty before pleasure."

"What duty chevalier?"

"We must give our convict his dose of oakum sweet, *mi ladi*, before we dig the murdered man out of his grave."

"No, no!" exclaimed Margaret, with a shudder. "How could you, when St. Udo was not really slain by him?"

"Nothing easier," replied the young man, with a dull shrug. "We know not this thing that Colonel Brand is alive until the murderer is no more, and then we discover our mistake and the heir of Castle Brand at one and the same time. Eh, mademoiselle?"

"Would you cause an innocent man to lose his life?"

"Innocent—*pouf!* So is the weasel of rats! His *intention* was not innocent, *m'amie*, and it is too well for him that he should have the return trip to Tasmania for nothing, and make some chain-gang miserable for life. Bah! you Thoms, why did I not kick you oftener? *Mon Dieu!* how blind we are."

"I scarcely suppose you are really in earnest with such a proposition," said Margaret, fixing her clear eyes incredulously upon him, "so I shall proceed with my plans. I hope you will not object to my letting this strange communication which you have made be fully known to the executors, and putting myself wholly under their protection through all my movements? My life has been so cruelly attempted, that, though I have no misgivings with regard to you"—she smiled kindly upon her good fairy—"I have been taught too severe a lesson to desire acting without the express protection of my guardians, Mr. Davenport and Dr. Gay."

"Confide everything to your guardians, mademoiselle," rejoined the chevalier, with a flourish of his hands outward, as if he was bailing his heart dry, "and have them both with you if you wish—only do not exclude me from the dear privilege of standing beside to see the hand-grip of reconciliation, and to bless at the proper moment, and to be the good *sorcier*."

"You shall accompany me," said Margaret, with bright tears in her eyes, "and perhaps you shall see the reconciliation."

"By gar! you are von angel. Now, my satisfaction would be superb if you would but wait until that leetle game was played out with Monsieur Handcuff, and that I should stand by him at the proper moment to see the noose grip, and the drop, and the juggling trick which turns a villain into a human tassel. Hah!"—rubbing his hand with relish—"I think I see him, the dog!"

"You will go to Mr. Seamore Emersham, who is counsel for the prosecution against Mortlake and tell him, first, that the man has been arrested as a runaway convict; second that his attempt to murder Colonel Brand has proved a failure, and that Colonel Brand is now at New York. Then invite him up to the castle this evening, where you and he will meet the executors, and a

consultation can be held upon the subject."

The chevalier seeing that the young lady was quite deaf to his rather swindling plan of vengeance on Mortlake, smothered his inclinations as if they had been expressed in joke, and agreed to her arrangements; and after a very cordial interview they parted.

In due time the executors were put in possession of Calembour's story, and, made wiser by former mistakes, they gave no signs of incredulity to the florid narrator's wildest flight by which to enhance the value of his services, but treated him as a gentleman; and even agreed in the readiest manner to reward his kindness by the gift of a thousand pounds, as soon as they should obtain St. Udo Brand's consent.

As this involved the speedy unearthing of that heroic treasure, the chevalier became proportionally eager for them to start on their journey of recovery.

Mr. Emersham, with almost a hideous knowledge of how deceitful and desperately wicked the human heart can be, refused to give up his case against Roland Mortlake for the murder of St. Udo Brand, until it was proved beyond all doubt that the latter still lived.

One part of the chevalier's story was found to be quite true, namely, the fact of Roland Mortlake's arrest as a runaway convict, at Canterbury; and presently the rest of his story began to crop out in the general press, and became the theme of conversation at every fireside throughout the country; and the glad *furor* that got up among the tenants of Seven-Oak Waaste, and the farmers, and the resident gentry, and the houses of rank, sounded in the ears of Margaret Walsingham, and became to her sweet as music.

A fortnight after the chevalier's first appearance at the castle, Miss Walsingham, accompanied by Davenport and the Frenchman, took passage at Liverpool for New York.

CHAPTER XXVI.

UNEXPECTED MEETING.

Margaret Walsingham kept her own state-room so exclusively that the passengers, many of whom had heard of the heroine of Castle Brand, had no opportunity of meeting her; and to all their overtures she responded with the same timid reserve, until it became a sort of ambition with the ladies to become the friends of so retiring a creature.

Her state-room became a morning resort of such of the fair dames as were impervious to sea-sickness; all kind, officious, and eager to be considered her intimates.

They found nothing very singular, however, in the quiet, sweet-faced girl to furnish an index of that bravery of which she had become celebrated, but they all agreed that they felt more charmed by her modesty and gentleness of demeanor than if she had the dash of an Amazonian queen.

There was one young lady who came in frequently with a talkative old dowager, and was wont to regard Margaret with keen but silent interest.

This young person, who was called "Dora dear," by old Mrs. de Courcy, and "Lady Dora," by the other ladies, was a peculiarly blooming, black-haired young damsel, whose eyes black as sloes, examined Margaret for several interviews with an eager and scarcely friendly scrutiny. But in the fourth visit Lady Dora threw off her reserve, and constituted herself Margaret's chosen friend.

The day before their arrival at New York she came into Margaret's room, and calmly shut the door as a hint to the stream of ladies who were following her down the narrow passage.

"There, that's done!" she said laughing genially, "and now maybe I'll be having you all to myself for a while without even a gossiping prig to be the wiser of what we say. So now, Miss Walsingham dear, give me room on the sofa there beside you, and well have a snug little chat together."

Margaret looked up at the pleasant, honest face, and made room as requested.

"Of course you don't know what this friendly move of mine is meaning at all. I'm an embassy from ——no, that's wrong end first. There's a young man on board the steamer who is desperately in love with you, and, poor fellow, he's so worn to skin and bone about you that just to keep the body and soul of him together I've come to plead his case.

"He says to tell you that it's not unmanly of him to hanker after you now, seeing that circumstances have thrown you together without any of his seeking, and it looks as if this thing was foreordained to be. I'm afraid you'll say you're not, but don't if there's the ghost of a chance when I ask you—are you open to offers?"

"What does all this mean?" inquired Margaret, whose hands were being vehemently squeezed and patted by her Irish friend; "I have not even seen any gentleman since I came on board except my friend Mr. Davenport, and one occasion Colonel Calembours, who certainly did not appear to

be reduced by any visible passion."

"Pooh! little beast, he's gambling all the time. No, it's not he; it's a brother of mine—there I've let the cat out of the bag, and I wasn't to do it. We'll drop that and begin at the other end. I understand all about your position in the Brand will, and I know exactly that you want to do the thing that's generous, and I hear that you are on your way to lay the whole of the fortune that you've been named heir for at the feet of St. Udo Brand, and then you'll turn round and earn your bread. Now, I say that that isn't the fate for a woman like you, and I'm here to tell this message. Give every spick and span of the property to Colonel Brand and then put these two dear hands in the outstretched hands of this lover of yours, and say you will be his since he loves you still—that's the message."

The warm-hearted girl threw her arms round Margaret and hugged her with equal strength and warmth.

"Who is this generous man?" asked Margaret, much touched.

"Wait until I set his excellencies fair and square before you. In the first place he's as steady a boy as ever put foot to ground, which nobody ever said of St. Udo Brand."

"Why compare him with St. Udo Brand?" asked Margaret, with a sudden flush overspreading her cheeks, vivid as carmine.

"Sure and is it St. Udo Brand I would compare with the likes of him!" exclaimed Lady Dora scornfully, "and is it you, mavourneen, that I see with the blush of shame on account of him? You don't mean to be so insane as to marry him, Miss Walsingham, darling?"

"I don't expect to marry him," answered Margaret, gravely.

"He's not worthy of you," cried Lady Dora, holding her off at arm's length and looking at her with dubious eyes. "I'll grant that he was a gallant soldier and a handsome man but he's old in sin, and it's not for you, my white dove, to nestle in the vulture's nest, and you won't—you won't!" snatching her to her bosom and straining her close.

"I will hear nothing against St. Udo Brand," said Margaret, withdrawing herself and standing erect so that the generous fire in her face and voice invested her splendid figure with a dignity most queen-like; "I cannot expect the world to believe in the true nobility of his character, but I know it. Desperate he may have been—reckless, scorning, but the crisis of his sinning has passed, and the man is noble still; and Heaven will bless immeasurably the woman who marries him."

She clasped her hands in her generous excitement, and stood, a resistless and passionate conqueror, confessing the greatness of her forgiveness for the first time.

"Faith, I see how it is that you haven't a thought for poor Alfred," sighed Lady Dora, looking at her with tears in her bright black eyes; "because of the fellow's misfortunes and on account of keeping his castle for him from another impostor who was worse than himself, you have fallen in love with St. Udo Brand in spite of his evil reputation."

"I would give up anything—my life—to make amends to Colonel Brand for the misfortunes I have brought upon him," said Margaret, with burning cheeks and distressed eyes, "but I never expect, or wish him to prize my love. I owe him much, for being the marplot of his life"—she paused, and the tears rolled sadly down her cheeks—"but I never dreamed—not once, that he would care for my love!"

"A better man cares for your love then," retorted Lady Dora, "and it's not throwing yourself away you would be if you gave it. Now, Miss Walsingham, darling, won't you take a friend's advice and wear a ducal coronet? Won't you have me for a sister?"

"Your brother does me too much honor to propose such a thing," returned Margaret, simply.

"Not a bit of it! I'll tell you candidly I thought so myself at first, and that's why I was so long in making up to you, for a simpleton as I was, and poor Alfred tearing at me every day. But I couldn't help liking you at the last, mavourneen, and I'd be the happiest woman in the three kingdoms to call you the Duchess of Piermont, and—there, it's out!"

Margaret gazed in considerable surprise at her enthusiastic friend.

"I had not heard that the Duke of Piermont had a sister," she faltered; "I am altogether astonished that you should advocate such a union—of course you are aware that I have not a drop of noble blood in my veins."

"Alfred says you have?" rejoined the lady, laughing enjoyably at her evident astonishment; "he has told me as often as there are legs on a centipede that you're the noblest woman he ever met in all his born days. And you must know that Alfred is a boy of penetration; he has been years on years traveling and doing every London season, (he's got rid of his Irish tongue entirely—more shame to him)! and he has had plenty to choose from. And I'm quite willing to take his taste in the matter of the duchess of our house, dear, so you can't ever fling up to me that I didn't welcome you body and bones, mavourneen."

"Is his grace on board then?"

"Yes. The boy has been in shockingly low spirits for some time, and I made him shut up bonny Glenfarron House, and take me out to America for a tour; and sure I found that we had left the old sod and its troubles, to accompany the trouble across the water. We hadn't been a day on board until he was thrown into lockjaw, or fits, by that little vision of a Chevalier, or whatever they call him, jabbering about Miss Walsingham; and since then it's a queer life I've led walking the deck, under the stars, with him, for all the world as if he was my lover, only that his talk's about you. I'll tell you what it is, Miss Margaret, darling! he's bound to you, body and soul, and I'll think it a burning shame if you turn from him to any other man that breathes."

"I thank you both for this generous proposal," murmured Margaret. "But what I told him before, I can only repeat now—our paths lie in different directions, and cannot be brought together. Let him keep to his higher station, as I intend to keep to my lower one."

"A fig for all the stations in Christendom! The boy doesn't care *that* for them," snapping her fingers. "He wouldn't look at Lady Juliana Ducie, although she was as good as offered to him by the old marquis two or three times. But Alfred is a boy of old-fashioned notions, and won't look at a pretty face, though backed by lands and titles, that can't show him something better than that. Faith! I thought the boy was demented when he told me that the lovely Juliana Ducie, that everybody was so pleased at, was a 'false-tongued, smooth-faced hypocrite, who would ruin her best friend for her own advantage.' I was sure enough he'd have to eat his own words some time, but sure, now, what will ye say to hear that he was right?

"Didn't the minx, thinking the impostor who went to Seven-Oak was the colonel, try to renew her engagement, and did it, too. And didn't the old marquis come home from yachting, at Southampton, to find my lady in receipt of a letter from the jail-bird, which he insisted on seeing, as she was in hysterics over it? And wasn't my fine gentleman bidding his 'dear little Julie' good-by, as circumstances over which he had no control—an unavoidable engagement—had sent him to the Canterbury jail for a season. And if she still entertained the idea of an elopement, would she meet him on board the convict-ship which took him back to Tasmania? Or, failing that, had she any objections to come and see his hanging, which was the only entertainment of a public character he could ever hope to afford her?'

"Fancy my dainty lady's feelings at getting a letter like that! And from the man whom she was so anxious to marry! Why, everybody's laughing at her folly; and her father is so angry that he has carried her off to Hautville Park for the rest of the winter, to hide her until he is less ashamed of her.

"Now, don't you see how penetrating Alfred was, to find her shallowness out when she was trying her best to captivate him? He's the best brother in the world—the wisest and the kindest; and I wish you agreed with me, my darling, and would send me to the poor, quaking fellow with the word he longs to hear."

"He deserves the love of a good wife," answered Margaret, with tears in her eyes. "But, dear Lady Dora, indeed I cannot marry him. Had all other things been equal, I do not love him as well as he ought to be loved."

"That's enough, then," rejoined Lady Dora, rising wrathfully; "and if it's for the reason that ye've stated ye find it in your heart to be so hard, I'll not be grieving for me boy's sake, but for your own, with what's before ye, whether ye know it or not, with a man that'll find a way to break your heart for ye, hard as it is."

Having finished with some tearful quaverings, she rushed out of the state-room, and the conference was at an end.

Poor Margaret, with her usual humility felt much distressed at this unexpected episode, and cast about anxiously in her mind how she could best soothe the wounded feelings of the young duke and his warm-hearted sister. But she did not meet them until the next day, as they were steaming up the Narrows within sight of New York.

While Margaret, with Davenport by her side, stood on the crowded quarter-deck, gazing at the beautiful city which was now the shrine of her devotion, the Duke of Piermont stood not far away among the throng of passengers, gazing, with his yearning love plainly speaking in his eyes, at the woman who had decreed to him his fate.

He did not attempt to come near her, nor did he yield to the wrathful twitch of Lady Dora, who wished to keep him away from such a stony-hearted enslaver; but, with envious looks, watched the changes come and go on that face, which seemed to him purer and more lofty than he had ever beheld on earth.

"*Sacre!*" rasped Calembours, touching Davenport's elbow. "There is a man who must be, as you call it, 'smashed,' by your ward. They say he is the young duke, *par dieu*. I hope he will not be the *fiance* of mademoiselle, instead of my *camarade*."

The next moment Margaret, glancing for a moment that way, saw his grace, and started forward, with a frank look of pleasure beaming in her eyes.

"I would have regretted deeply missing this pleasure," she said, meeting the brother and sister half way. "You have both been so kind to me—so kind!"—with a look of deep and gentle gratitude toward his grace—"that I can scarcely express my sense and appreciation of it."

A mortal pallor had overspread the young man's face. His hand trembled as it touched hers, and his tongue trembled, too, when he essayed to speak.

"I would have known Miss Walsingham among a thousand, and yet illness and trials have robbed her even of the delicate roses she possessed. I—I think she is more frail than, perhaps, she is apt to imagine."

"Your grace is considerably changed, too. Have you been ill?"

He turned and looked imploringly at his sister, who was wringing Margaret's hand, and patting it in a very ardent manner.

"You don't deserve me to speak to you," said Lady Dora, in a vehement *sotto voce*. "So I'll be looking for my opera-glass down below, while you have a chat with the boy."

Away she tripped with all haste, leaving Margaret standing silent by the side of her admirer.

"Will you honor me with a word or two?" faltered his grace. "Perhaps you will not object to walking with me where there is less of a crowd."

"I pray you not to enter again upon a subject which I thought was at an end," murmured Margaret, reluctantly pacing the long deck with him, followed by the chevalier's jealous eyes.

"Circumstances have thrown us together again so strangely," returned the young man, leaning in a dejected attitude across the taffrail, "that I could not resist the hope that entered my mind of being more successful this time. You wished me not to seek you out, and I have been firm in obeying you, hard as it was to avoid your vicinity while all these extraordinary trials were besetting you. Oh, Miss Walsingham, how I have longed to take you away from the miserable position in which that will has plunged you, and to guard you with my name and love from what you have suffered! But I did not seek you because you had exacted from me a promise to leave you unmolested. But, now, has not heaven thrown us together in the most marked manner by sending us three thousand miles across the sea in the same steamer? It seems as if we were destined for each other, does it not? And that Providence is pointing out, for the second time, the path we ought to pursue?"

"There is one obstacle to your grace's rather superstitious fancy," rejoined Margaret, "one which Providence is not likely to overlook. I do not entertain for your grace that regard which Heaven has decreed should be between husband and wife, and if Lady Dora has rightly reported our interview of yesterday, you know that such a regard is out of the question."

Piermont bowed his head on his hands and bore his disappointment in silence.

"I am glad that I have had this opportunity," resumed Margaret, in a gentle voice, "of thanking you again for the generous love you offer me—a love which the noblest lady would be richly honored in receiving, and though I must refuse it, it is with a keen appreciation of its value. I shall always remember your grace with gratitude—ay, with affectionate solicitude, and your whole-souled sister also."

"I wish you every happiness," muttered the young man, lifting his haggard face and trying to smile; "and may your love be placed upon a man worthy to receive it. But, beloved Miss Walsingham, if ever circumstances throw you free and untrammeled upon the world, and if you can send one thought of affection to me, give me a chance to try my fate a third time."

He pressed her hand for a moment to his fond and foolish heart, which was throbbing like to burst for the simple girl before him, and then he went away.

"By gar!" ejaculated the chevalier, plucking Davenport's sleeve, "the *tete-a-tete* has broken its neck off short—so, in the middle. Here comes a man all ready for a dose of prussic acid, or a duel with his rival. Bravo, mademoiselle! You are one trump to stick to the colonel, and to send the coronet away. And there is the *charmante* demoiselle with the black eyes; see how she does pounce upon our duke and walk him away. Aha, you don't like it, *miladi*, do you? Would you not love to pull the eyes out of Mademoiselle Marguerite with those pretty *leetle* nails?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

Arrived in New York, the three travelers speedily were located in a hotel, and the chevalier proposed going to the military hospital in which he left Colonel Brand, for news of him.

"There will not be the shadow of a doubt, my dear mademoiselle," said the sanguine little man, "that our hero is still in the same domicile, convalescing, we shall say, by this time, but still unable to resume his deeds of valor, as six weeks only have passed since I parted from him."

But Margaret by this time was in such a state of excitement and suspense, that they decided that all three should repair to the hospital with as little delay as possible.

Dashing rapidly through the snow-beaten streets, they paused at last before a stately building,

and Margaret lifted her famished eyes in a long, a yearning gaze, from window to window, as if, perchance, she might see the man whose face had never beamed upon her the smile of kindness.

She sat immovable while Davenport and Calembours were in the hospital, and her heart rose in the wild triumph of conviction that he was there, they staid so long.

When they reappeared Margaret clutched her hands tightly, and waited until they should come close—something had happened; the chevalier never wore a grave face when a smiling one would do better.

"Do not tell me," gasped Margaret, with white lips, "do not tell me that he is dead!"

"No, no, *m'amie*, it is not so bad as that; but it is almost as bad. He has gone away from the hospital a week ago, recruited they say, but not quite; and whither he has gone, not one of the doctors or attendants can tell, with their skulls empty as their own skeletons."

Margaret set her teeth hard, that she should utter no cry, and sank back in her seat. All the light of tenderness died out of her eyes; all the bloom of hope faded from her cheeks; a pitiful grayish pallor deadened the brilliance which joy had lent to her; the pale, fixed look of melancholy stole into her eyes and hardened her mouth.

It came to her with a dull sense of conviction that this thing was not to be; that she was never to install St. Udo Brand within his rights; that she was truly the Marplot who had ruined him. They would meet never more on the golden sands of time, that she might point to him the better way, and be his joy. Oh! vain dream, and harshly wakened from.

She uttered not a word, but turned from her now silent companions, and covered her face.

When they reached the hotel Margaret retired to her room, and the lawyer and the illustrious chevalier commenced a systematic search for the English colonel, which, to judge from its success, seemed likely to last forever.

And poor Margaret wore the days away in sick dismay over her suddenly clouded fairy-dream; and her strange face grew thinner, sharper, more unearthly in its transparency than ever; and her superb form passing so often drearily to and fro in the walled-up hotel garden among the snow-laden shrubs and trees, arrested many a curious eye at the hotel windows to dwell upon the lonely British lady, with compassionate interest.

Some weeks after their arrival, Margaret noted a new face at the hotel table.

Not that new faces were much of a novelty in that everchanging scene, but the face of this woman was so attractive that every eye round the lunch-table fastened on her as she sauntered in, dressed in a driving habit, and seated herself *vis a vis* to Margaret.

"*Mon Dieu!* that's a fine creature!" muttered the chevalier in his beard; "what a glorious head she has—by gar!"

"Humph," grumbled Davenport, at Margaret's other side; "bad egg."

Margaret met the full gaze of a pair of fascinating eyes, green-tinged, and yet chameleon-like, changing with every ripple of the soul from green to flashing black, or tender gray, or handsome brown.

The small and well-shaped head which had awakened such rapturous admiration from the chevalier, was poised delicately upon a neck round and white and bending as a swan's. The hair, a light, gold-brown, shone sometimes molten in the sunlight, sometimes flaxen. It seemed to possess the chameleon-powers of the eyes, and took to itself all shapes and tinges, as the bird-like creature flashed a look from side to side; and one long snake-like tress floated carelessly beneath her vail down her back, and was suffered to ripple and twist itself into tiny ringlets, or waves, or coils, just as its willful nature impelled it.

Margaret looked once and fully into the beautiful stranger's face, and she was forced to admit to herself that with all her fascinating blithesomeness and would-be innocence and frankness—she did not like it.

"She hides a history!" was her conclusion.

But the chevalier seemed actually entranced; he bowed profoundly, the instant their eyes met, and listened with eagerness to every low-toned direction she gave to the waiter, and with great gallantry passed whatever she required over to her, for which attention the fair woman only bowed with the most distant, though the prettiest air imaginable.

She often looked at Margaret, however, as if anxious to make her out, and paused in her dainty nibbling whenever Davenport spoke to his ward, with her ear bent to catch the reply; and at the last she contrived to meet Margaret's eyes, and to smile in a sweet, engaging manner, as if she longed to make her acquaintance; and Margaret, without in the least knowing why, crimsoned and dropped her eyes instead of responding to the overture.

The lady did not finish her lobster-salad, but soon rose and swept to the door, which the gallant chevalier sprang to open.

Scarcely acknowledging his politeness, she cast a glance over her shoulder at Margaret which

haunted her all the afternoon.

It seemed to say as plainly as if the lady had spoken it:

"You do not like me, but I am determined to win you over in spite of yourself."

And in spite of herself, her thoughts wandered toward the lovely stranger for hours, and she grew quite impatient for the dinner hour to arrive, that she might see her again.

When it came, Mr. Davenport being absent, receiving or sending some telegrams to a village near the seat of war, in which there seemed some reason to believe the missing colonel was with a detachment of Vermonters, the chevalier, with great politeness, appeared at Margaret's door to escort her to the dining-room.

Poor Margaret was by this time so inured to petty and daily disappointments, that when her friends returned at night rarely asked what success they had had in their search, though she clung with a fond belief to the chevalier's often vaunted integrity, and would not allow the lawyer's suspicions to enter her mind.

"Did you notice the pretty madam, your *vis-a-vis* at *dejeuner*?" asked Calembours, as they descended together.

"Oh, yes, I have been thinking of her all the afternoon."

"*Ma foi!* and so have I! General Legrange, who knows everybody, tells me she is Madame Hesslein, a young widow, whose husband was Plenipotentiary from the French Court to Austria; and I have been fortunate enough to find out also that she is a Frenchwoman—by gar! she is a Venus di Medicis! Ah!" roughly aspirated monsieur, and became silent with admiration.

There under the blazing gasalier, whose strong light might have brought into too bold relief the imperfections of other women, sat the fair stranger, serenely pecking at her viands, and seemingly unconscious of the general sensation which her beauty created, in fact, so absorbed in thought that she paid no heed to anything outside of the small circle formed by her own plate.

She was dressed in a dark green velvet evening dress, whose white lace bertha was carelessly pinned with a magnificent solitaire.

Her hair was combed out like a fleecy vail down her back, and glittered with diamond powder until it resembled the gorgeous plumage of a tropical bird.

She formed so bright a center to the room that every eye instinctively wandered that way to admire her glittering clothing and fascinating face; and yet again, Margaret took her seat opposite with some uneasy feeling weighing upon her now which had weighed upon her before.

Almost immediately the extraordinary green orbs were lifted from their meditative study, and Madame Hesslein bowed her recognition, and smiled with honeyed sweetness.

"She has some special purpose in making my acquaintance!" thought Margaret.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

NEWS OF ST. UDO BRAND.

Dinner over, the ladies scattered, some to their rooms, some to go walking—Margaret and Madame Hesslein simultaneously entered the drawing-room. They turned to each other, the glittering bird of Paradise, and the gentle ring-dove, with a resistless impulse of attraction, and each examined the other keenly.

"You are Miss Margaret Walsingham, a celebrity, even in America," quoth madame, blandly. "Your colonel was much talked of here for his bravery. I am quite delighted to meet the woman who has fought so spiritedly for the colonel's rights."

Margaret gazed earnestly at her; she was reading that artful simplicity of madame with regret, and pitying the fine woman whom the world had spoiled.

"Your praise is very disinterested, Madame Hesslein," returned she, simply. "I thank you for it. I am very strange here, and can't tell what the people say about my affairs. I had hoped that they knew nothing about me."

"Pshaw! my good lady, you can't expect to pass through life with your history and not excite remark," retorted Madame Hesslein, with a flirt of the jeweled fan. "No heroine does, be she a good or a bad one. Men must talk—give them something to talk about."

Margaret watched her spirited face with secret fascination.

"You are reading me," laughed madame, clanking her golden bracelet on her dainty wrist. "You are wondering what a woman of the world like me wants with a saint like yourself, are you not?"

"I am thinking that no doubt you have a purpose in view," said Margaret, struck by the unlovely

shrewdness of the lady's speech.

Madame Hesslein waved her dainty hands in graceful protest.

"Quite wrong, Miss Walsingham," she cried. "I have no purpose as yet, save the pleasant one of studying a nature which I cannot imitate. I have been celebrated in my day, but not as you; women are your worshippers; women cry, 'Noble, generous creature!' Women only envied me, and presumed to criticise; 'twas men who gave me homage."

"Don't jest, madame, upon my history; it may yet end in a tragedy!" said Margaret.

"Ah, ah!" breathed madame, warningly, "you are one of those great hearted, soft souled women who suffer affairs of the heart to trouble them. Don't suffer affairs of the heart to trouble you. Griselda the patient. When one hope dies, pursue another, and have a new one every day. Ha! ha! Joliffe (my husband) used to say, 'Honoria sees no trouble, for her heart is never at home to grant an interview.'"

"Your husband is dead?" asked Margaret, coldly.

"Yes, and no. Dead to me these five years, though. Fact is, Miss Walsingham—don't feel horror-stricken—that Joliffe was intolerably prosy; we had a quarrel, and I ran off. Why not? Since then we have got comfortably divorced, and I can marry as soon as I like again. Joliffe was so jealous. I must not drive to the general's, I must not walk with a senator, I must eschew the military, and the best wits of the day are military men. Horrors! I must devote myself to Joliffe, and he only on the embassy at Washington."

Madame appealed impressively to the icy Margaret.

"General Legrange here declares that you are the widow of a Plenipotentiary of the French Court!" she said.

"Does he indeed?" cried madame, with the gusto of habitual vanity. "Then I sha'n't contradict him—don't you, Miss Walsingham. They must always talk about me wherever I go. I am accustomed to it; I let them say what they choose. I please myself, and the world gives me my way, I've been North and South, East and West, and although I have seen trouble, I have ever trodden over it; no woman has ever got into the wrong box so often and come out of it to a higher grade; no woman has ever borne so much scandal, and been popular in spite of it. I survive it all; I eat, drink, make merry—am feasted, courted, and adored, and all because I don't let affairs of the heart vex me. I don't mope, and muse, and turn melancholy as you (a good creature, too), are doing."

The fine, small face of Madame Hesslein shone with wicked animation; her thin, scarlet lips parted in two beauty curves with a string of pearls between, with small, glittering head poised on one side, the gorgeous parakeet studied the plain, tender creature before her, and laughed at such a contrast.

"Do you know why I am here?" queried Margaret, tremulously.

Madame Hesslein smiled and nodded.

"All New York knows why the sombre English dame is here," she jibed, "for your stupid lawyer has bored the city for news of your Colonel Brand."

"Mr. Davenport only does his duty."

Madame grimaced charmingly.

"Duty!" she mocked. "Oh, Juggernaut of good people's lives, what unwilling victims do ye crush beneath your wheels in your heavenward march?"

"Have you been crushed?" asked Margaret, smiling.

"Oh, no; Mr. Davenport is too pompous to expect anything of a woman. Stupid wretch!"

"Had you known St. Udo Brand," cried Margaret, blushing, "you could not laugh at his destruction. He was bitterly proud, but he was true as steel."

"Was he so?" breathed madam—and her green eyes grew black—"I should have liked to meet him, then. I have yet to meet the man who is as true as steel. Griselda, you are one who should win back a man—but, oh, you'll never do it! never!"

A wild change swept over her fine face, her wondrous, globular eyes grew deep and passionate, and her beautiful hands were clasped in covert anguish.

"I pity your sad life, madame, if you have proved all false," said Margaret, with feeling, "for there are good men on earth, I doubt not."

"The best die; the fairest, the most loved," said madame, faintly. "Miss Walsingham, I had one son—ah!"—she shivered and closed her eye—"and he died miserably. I loved him, I did love him, and he was my only consolation for many years." She dashed her tears away and looked up sternly. "You make me talk to you, with your soft, true face," she exclaimed, bitterly, "and I must not talk. But mind, I have told you nothing; you can't say that I have narrated any of my history to you."

"I had not thought of saying so," replied Margaret.

"Ah, you are a good soul, and I like you," murmured madame, patting Margaret's hand with a touch like falling rose-leaves. "So sweet, so heroic, so humble! You remind me of myself many years ago in old Austria, when I was in love with—my destroyer!"

Her face hardened, her green eyes glimmered with the deadly light of hate.

She turned off her momentary remorse with a heartless laugh, and rattled her *collier* of golden lockets.

"Each of these lockets," sneered madame, "contains a victim to my power of fascination, [there were at least a dozen,] and the whole string of them was presented to me by an old vice admiral who fell in love with me at Barbadoes last winter, and escorted me to the Bermudas when I went there. My good lady, that first foolish passion of mine has so destroyed my powers of mercy that I love to torture mankind and madden them with false expectations, if only I might be revenged."

The beautiful lips of the lady suddenly compressed with a cruel expression, and looking up, Margaret beheld the Chevalier de Calembours hurrying across the room to join them.

"The Chevalier de Calembours wishes to be presented to you," said Margaret.

Those gleaming, chrysolite orbs flashed a full upward glare in the chevalier's face. He recoiled, he changed color, and became strangely silent.

"So glad to meet the chevalier," murmured madame, with an inimitable elegance of manner.

Monsieur's face relaxed; he drew near her, dazzled as with the eye of a rattlesnake.

"Incomparable madame, where have we met before?" inquired he, with soft insinuation.

She honored him with a glance of astonishment and an artless smile.

"Indeed I cannot say, chevalier," she minced, "unless we've met in dreams."

"Pardon the presumption, madame, *mon amie*," persisted the chevalier, growing very pale, "but I think we are not strangers."

Another change swept over Madame Hesslein's ever-changeful face; all resemblance of her late self disappeared, and a bold, brilliant, haughty creature sat in her place, smiling with supercilious amusement at the little Bohemian's blunder.

"I should indeed feel honored if monsieur would recall the circumstances of our acquaintance," she said, blandly; "for I am frequently accosted by strangers who vow that I am known to them, and who afterward discover that my resemblance to the person they took me for was owing solely to the Protean expression of my face. I can't help my face being like twenty other people's in a breath, can I, Miss Walsingham? But I would like to think that Chevalier Calembours had known me previously, for I always have a warm side to Frenchmen for a special reason."

The chevalier was himself again: his doubts had fled, and he was laughing at himself for his momentary illusion.

"Madame has explained the sweet hallucination," he said, hand on heart. "We have not met except in dreams. Ah! that we had been friends in those days of glory when I was the favorite of the Hungarian court, the Count of Calembours, owner of diamond mines! *Mon Dieu!* my homage was worthy of its object then!"

Monsieur launched into his loftiest braggadocio, and madame listened well, and drew him out with skill.

"So monsieur was born in Hungary?"

"In Hungary, madame."

"Have you seen the pretty river Theiss?"

"Hem! Yes, madame. I lived in Irzegedin."

"Ah!"—with a mocking smile—"the residences of the counts are particularly magnificent in that city, are they not?"

"Madame is right. Madame must have been there."

"Oh, no, my dear chevalier, else I should have heard of Count Calembours, without doubt. And Chevalier de Calembours left his princely fortune behind when he came here to fight?"

"Madame is a good listener."

"Brave chevalier! but you will return to your estates?"

"Without doubt, madame, when I am weary of glory."

"Admirable man!" cried madame, with a silvery laugh. "What an enviable lady your wife is."

"Dear friend, I have no wife," complacently.

"Is that credible? A young and handsome man without a wife? Oh, chevalier!"

"My wife,"—with a frown—"my wife is gone long since."

"Alas! how sad. You must have been adored by her," breathed Madame Hesslein.

"Ah, *pauvrette*, yes. She wearied me with that grand passion of hers."

Madame's smiling face hardened into a stone-mask, but her eyes seemed to pulsate with smothered fire.

"Wearied monsieur, did she?" (with a threatening smile into his eyes). "Silly, clumsy wretch!"

"No, no, madame," laughed the chevalier; "she was a pretty Venus, but unsophisticated, unformed, somewhat vulgar."

"And your indifference broke her heart—she died for love of you?" questioned madame, wickedly.

"No, no, madame," laughed the chevalier again. "She consoled herself. She ran away with a cotton lord from Manchester, and I heard of her no more."

"She was mad—she was a fool!" cried madame, blandly mischievous. "She should have polished her dull luster, and recaptured the errant heart of her noble chevalier. I should have done so."

"You, exquisite madame?" sighed the chevalier, *con amore*. "Ah, but my wife was not clever like you, nor beautiful."

"She was only affectionate?" whispered madame.

"Only affectionate," and monsieur bowed.

Again their eyes met, hers streaming forth a bewildering fire, his wistful and adoring, and though her words stung the Chevalier de Calembours, the victim could not choose but hover close, and closer to admire the serpentine grace of his tormentor.

Presently, becoming weary of the amusement, the siren sent him for a chess-board, promising him a game of backgammon for reward, and turning to Margaret, with a laugh of derision, her excitement burst forth.

"See how that man throws himself down to be trampled over by me," she whispered, exultingly. "See how he licks the dust from my feet. Ah, if I could only spurn him into ruin I would do it."

She thrust her lovely foot of Andalusian grace from out of its velvet folds, and contemplated it with a smile.

"I am more beautiful than that creature who loved him long ago on the banks of the Theiss, am I? Then by virtue of my beauty, I shall avenge her cause, and my own. I shall humiliate our noble count."

She whispered it gayly to her sumptuous bracelets, turning and clanking the golden shackle on her shapely wrist; but her fine, small face was wild with malice.

"You hate my friend, the chevalier, with a strange perversity," remarked the disapproving Margaret. "Doubtless that hapless woman was as much to blame as he."

"Ah, was she?" breathed madame, turning pale. "I think he said that her only fault was her passionate love, which his shallow soul wearied of. Oh, Heaven! how cruel you can be! Her case, Miss Walsingham, is like my own—how keenly I can understand such wrongs. Pshaw! I shall moralize no more. I have long, long ago left these stormy waves behind, and now float on a glassy sea, lit by rays of golden ambition. I have buried the god of luckless youth, poor Cupid, and set upon his grave the god of the Thirties—yellow-faced Pluto. My motto is, 'No heart and a good digestion,' and taking heed to its warning, I expect to live, handsome as a picture, to the age of old Madame Bellair, who

> "'Lived to the age of one hundred and ten;
> And died from a fall from a cherry-tree then.'"

The chevalier returning with the chess-board, madame and he enjoyed several hours of their game, she played more games than that of backgammon, although all her faculties seemed to be concentrated in winning the chevalier's golden dollars from him, which she did with marvelous relish, and keeping her accounts, which she did with marvelous precision.

She ended her game of backgammon by transferring the last piece in the charmed chevalier's purse to her own, and she ended the game of hearts by dropping the net of bewilderment completely over poor Calembours, and then she thought of tightening the cord.

"Poor Miss Walsingham!" said madame, with a rippling laugh of wicked glee; "I shall chase away that look of stern dislike which has settled upon your face ever since you discovered that I added gambling to my other sins—I shall make you like me in spite of yourself. Come, chevalier, turn my music."

She strolled gracefully down the long drawing-room, attended by the elated chevalier, who had never been so happy in his life, and, followed by the wondering and admiring eyes of a score of

both sexes, took her seat at the piano.

But Margaret turned her back, and shut her heart against the bold and erring creature, whose beauty was but the fatal bewitchment of clever wickedness, whose spasms of grief were the last expiring gleams of a better nature which she sedulously quenched.

Madame played some air, fairy nonsense, that her little hands might glamour the rapt chevalier in their bird-like glancings here and there; and then, with a defiant glance over her shoulder at cold Margaret Walsingham, she stole into a theme with sentiment, with soul in every chord.

Ah, those strains of tender sadness! how they rose and fell in persistent plaint! how they mourned, and whispered of hope, mourned again in homeless accents! Then these waves of stronger passion—how they surged from grief to fury! how they gushed from beneath the glancing hands in menacing strains and conquering thunder!

It was as if a Frederic Chopin sat before the keys, instead of that small Circe.

Then these songs, so wild, so caroling, so purely joyous—could Sappho sing more burningly of happiness and love?

Margaret forgot her chill disdain of the perverted nature, forgot her own heart-trouble, even forgot St. Udo Brand in her trance of ravishment; and unconscious that she did so, rose and stood beside the wondrous St. Cecilia.

Madame raised her mock-simple eyes—they were not disappointed—Margaret was bending over her with a fascinated face, and the chevalier was wrapped in his study of the fair musician.

"Thanks for that act of homage," said Madame Hesslein, gravely, to Margaret; then dropping her tones, and rising, "I thought I could make you like me. I came here, to this hotel, to make you like me, because I had something pleasant to tell you; and I never do a favor for any one who presumes to criticise me unfavorable. Griselda, patient soul, come to my room, and we shall talk."

She drew the astonished Margaret's hand within her arm, gave a majestic bow to the flushed chevalier, and led the unresisting girl out of the drawing-room to her own luxurious apartments.

"Now, my good lady," observed Madame Hesslein, airily. "I have conceived something like appreciation of your humdrum goodness, and since I see a good deal of intellect at the back of it, I am disposed to do you a good turn, hoping that, charity-like, it may cover a multitude of my sins."

"What is it that you have to communicate?" asked Margaret, earnestly. "How can it be that you, a stranger have become acquainted with my concerns?"

"Pshaw! English exclusiveness again!" mocked madame. "But I do know somewhat of your affairs, gentle Griselda. For instance, I hear that you are searching for Colonel Brand, that you may make over your fortune to him. Margaret Walsingham, how can you be so foolish?"

"Madame, I only do my duty."

"Ugh! You horrify me with your crucifixion of the flesh, you devotee of Duty."

"Colonel Brand is worth sacrificing life itself for," said Margaret, with glowing eyes.

Madame watched her with sudden interest.

"Ah! I thought so," murmured she, sadly; "You care for this man—you love him."

"Madame!" deprecated timid Margaret, coldly.

"Yes, I see it. Poor creature, you should not love anything, do you know that, said madame, pityingly.

"You are right," replied Margaret, with a meek, quiet despair. "My plain face and manner will never win me love."

Madame Hesslein looked at her with a curious smile—at the spiritual face, the soulful eyes, the tall, magnificent figure—and she patted Margaret's hand with dainty tenderness.

"Your humility is very prettily done," said she, "and would really look well on myself, for I have none of it. But you mistake me; I meant that since love is eternally being met with treachery, why do you waste it, and especially upon such a poor *parti* as a colonel? Heavens! she troubles her digestion about a colonel! Why are you not more ambitious? If I were you, I wouldn't look below a major-general. I don't intend to give myself to any man who can't give me a lift in life. I am going to marry Vice-Admiral Oldright, who followed me to the Bermudas. I have worked hard to entrap him, and I have succeeded, I crossed the Atlantic five times for his sake, and I mean to get him; because when he is an admiral, and I am his wife, I shall take precedence of all other women in my circle."

"Ambition is not worth a true woman's pursuit," said Margaret.

"Well said, St. Griselda—such an apothegm deserves applause. Ah, well, Miss Walsingham, perhaps you are right, but you are not wise. You will stick to your colonel in spite of my advice? You will give him your fortune, and live on your wits in future? Poor creature! However I will not

reproach you; for, as St. Chrysostom wrote to Pentadia, 'I know your great and lofty soul, which can sail, as with a fair wind through many tempests, and in the midst of the waves enjoy a white calm.' You will depart on your Utopian enterprise, contented with the white calm of an approving conscience in the midst of the waves of starvation. Men are such beasts, they prefer the bold and grasping Kestral like myself to rewarding the fidelity of a ring-dove like Miss Walsingham."

Margaret was gazing breathlessly in the brilliant, heartless woman's face, and her voice faltered, as she asked:

"Can you send me on that enterprise? Do you bring me news of Colonel Brand?"

And madame, with a glance of pity in the passionate eyes, replied:

"Yes, I can. When at Key West, a month ago, I saw Colonel Brand driving out with a friend. Does that please you?"

Margaret's face was quivering with joy—with a noble triumph; she turned it from those scoffing eyes, and whispered a quiet "Thank God!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

FOUND AT LAST.

Three days afterward a steamer was entering the harbor of Key West.

Margaret Walsingham, Madame Hesslein, Mr. Davenport, and the Chevalier de Calembours stood on deck, watching the fair white city grow larger, and breathing the lambent air, which brought upon its wings the perfume of wild roses, orange-trees, and tropic herbs, although the month was yet February.

Madame Hesslein had come, she told Margaret, to meet her husband at Key West; but if that were so, she chose a singular method to prepare her mind for the gentle thrill of matrimony.

She was drawing the meshes of her secret net slowly round the unwary chevalier, even as yon secret reef enclasped the beautiful isles of summer, and lay in wait to wreck the unsuspicious ship that might carry future cheer to the prisoner.

Her witchery, her diablerie was maddening the little man; his customary caution had forsaken him, his intuitive presence of danger was unheeded—he loved the splendid siren.

The steamer anchored mid-stream, and waited for the usual fleet of little boats to dart out from the city and to carry the passengers ashore—not a sign of life appeared.

At last a signal-gun was fired in answer to their salute; and what was that tiny, fluttering beacon which mounted to a tall flagstaff in the dock-yard?

The captain gazing through his glass, grew suddenly silent; his face fell. The passengers, curiously watching the limp, yellow rag, wondered much what it might presage.

Presently tiny boat shot out from the cedar-fringed shore, with one man at the oars—a painted toy which moved upon the glassy water like a tiny bird and the man climbed aboard.

He was tall, and lank, and yellow-faced; his limbs trembled as he followed the captain to the cabin, and he shunned the passengers with half-fearful looks when they would have questioned him.

In three minutes the captain and the stranger emerged from the cabin, and the passengers pressed forward to hear what catastrophe had befallen the city.

"We must just right-about face, and get back to New York," said the captain, ominously. "Not a soul can go ashore."

"What's up?" asked the gentlemen.

"Is it the *plague*?" whispered the ladies.

"Yellow fever," said the captain; "the whole city is raging, half the people are escaped to the main land, and the other half are dying."

Madame Hesslein's small, eager face grew pale; the chevalier burst into a heartfelt imprecation, and Mr. Davenport clutched the white Margaret's hand with a shocked, "Heaven preserve us!"

But she tore her hand away, and ran to the gaunt stranger, who had brought such dire news.

"I am going ashore with you," she said.

He looked at her wild face, and shrank from her touch; he hurried to the stern to gain the boat.

"Don't come nigh," whispered he. "I've had it."

But she seized his arm and clung to him; she would not let him go.

Murmurs rose from her fellow-passengers; Mr. Davenport's eyes threatened to start from their sockets; but the captain interfered.

"No soul can leave the steamer," said he, resolutely.

"I must go!" returned Margaret, in a frantic voice.

"Miss Walsingham, you can't go," said the captain, sternly. "You would only fall a victim; and mind, I couldn't take you aboard again to carry the infection here."

"I won't come back!" she cried; "but I must go."

"Miss Margaret, I beg of you not to throw your precious life away," entreated Mr. Davenport next. "You can't find the colonel just now; most likely he's gone, poor fellow."

"God forbid!" ejaculated she, raising her passionate eyes to heaven. "Surely I am not so wretched as that. Ah, sir, don't listen to them," she implored the man. "I will give you any money to put me ashore. There is a gentleman in Key West who may be dying for help, and he is a stranger there."

"Did you ever hear of a fellow called Brand being here?" demanded the lawyer, suspiciously.

"Oh, yes," smiled the man. "I know him well."

"Is he here?" whispered Margaret, looking piteously up at him.

"Yes, he is, at least he was three days ago, for he was nursing me, and left me last Tuesday. I am just getting about again, and haven't been in the town yet."

"There, do you hear that?" cried Margaret, turning to the lawyer with a wild smile. "Kind as ever, noble as ever. Surely you believe now that we have found him?"

"Yes," groaned Mr. Davenport; "but three days make a difference. He may be dead now."

"I will find him, and see," said Margaret.

"The woman's mad," blustered the captain, and left her to her fate.

"Nobody escapes, Miss," said the stranger, warningly.

She never listened. She wrapped her cloak about her, and brought her travelling-bag from her saloon.

"Good-by, Madame Hesslein."

She held out her steady hand, the calm light of heroism in her eyes; and madame, trembling and beseeching, saw that there was no remedy, and wept a last "Farewell, Miss Walsingham."

She held out her hand to the little chevalier, who cast an agitated glance from mademoiselle to madame, and swore that it tore his heart-strings to part from either, but that vile fortune had decreed that he was not to see "the hand clasp" and the "happy hour," and kissed her hands in adieu.

And then she offered her cold hand to Davenport, who kept it close, and walked with her to where the little boat lay.

"You must not blame me if I never return," said she, eagerly, as he bent to button her cloak for her. "You know that it is my place to care for St. Udo for his grandmother's sake. You will wait in New York for news of me, won't you?"

Mr. Davenport took her in his arms and handed her into the boat, and swung himself after her.

"Think I'd send you off alone, Miss Margaret?" asked he, with glistening eyes. "By gad, you must think meanly of me."

For the first time her resolution was shaken; she looked at him doubtfully.

"Go back! go back!" she cried, beseechingly. "You must not peril your life for ours."

The old man shook his head and sat down in the thwarts, and the boatman rowed away.

So they went to meet the peril which was worse than the battle-field; and the crew on the deck of the steamer gave them a cheer of admiration; and the passengers waved them a dubious "God-speed;" and the men sitting in the pretty bark raised a feeble "huzzah!" in return, which however, sank into hopeless silence ere it was half expressed; and they melted from the straining eyes which followed them, and went their way.

The boatman rowed into a wharf of the deserted town, secured his craft, and lifted Margaret out.

"D'ye see that great house among them trees?" he asked, pointing to a large mansion on the brow of the hill, perhaps a quarter of a mile distant.

"Them's the officers' quarters, miss, and we'll go there first. There were a score or more of sick soldiers there for their health. I came here myself after the battle, where they most killed the colonel."

"Were you with the colonel the night he was stabbed?" asked Davenport.

"Yes, sir. I never left him when I could manage to be with him. Maybe you've heard of Reed, who served the colonel for a while?"

"Yes," sighed Margaret, "he mentioned you in a letter to Dr. Gay. Hasten, kind friend, and bring us to him."

They sped through the deserted streets, where every window was barred and every door jealously locked, and a few famished dogs broke the silence by long, wild, and ominous howls.

A cart, covered with a white canvas cloth, rumbled heavily by, and then Reed took the lady's hand, and dragged her to the opposite pavement, whispering:

"Muffle your face in your handkerchief, miss, for Heaven's sake!"

And with bated breath they let the dead cart rumble by with its ghastly burden.

A funeral emerged from a court hard by—a funeral which was composed of the clergyman, an old man weeping over his dead, and tottering feebly after, and four negroes carrying the bier. They flitted by like phantoms, casting apathetic glances after the old man, the boatman, and the young lady who were mounting the hill to that lonely house on its brow.

They entered the grove, and with one accord paused and gazed toward the house, and listened, and looked in each others faces for encouragement. The door was ajar, the windows all open, and the fair white curtains, fluttering low adown among the climbing grapes and budding roses, were limp and yellow with nights of dew and days of rust, but not a living face looked out through the silent panes, not a sound broke the deep and breathless silence.

These men were brave men, but which of them would venture within these desolate walls where death triumphant reigned.

Suddenly Margaret slipped her hand from the lawyer's clasp, and fled like a spirit into the silent house—fear, hope, and love giving her the courage which these others could not summon.

She traversed the passages, where all was wild confusion, she looked into every room, but the drivers of the dead carts had been there before her—each bed was vacant, each chamber that used to echo to the careless jests of the soldiers was dull and lifeless as they.

She fled up the staircase, she opened another chamber-door—it was the last.

It was a wide, dim chamber, whose close-drawn curtains banished all the light, and between her and the window loomed a great white object—a bed with the hangings drawn close about it.

No breath, no sound—oh, Heaven! is he not here? Is he dead and gone forever?

A long sigh breaks the blank silence: a moan steals helplessly from the great white mausoleum which entombs the man.

She glides forward and draws back the shroud-like folds from window, then from bed, and the yellow light falls upon a flushed and foam-flecked face, and upon two toiling, twitching hands.

And, blessed be Heaven! this is surely St. Udo Brand, and there is life in him yet!

The lawyer enters and tries to drag her back, and fills the room with his beseeching clamor; but she breaks wildly from him, and returns to St. Udo Brand.

And, Heaven be praised! she thinks that she is in time, and that this dear soul may yet be held on earth.

So she lifts the hot head to her arm, and lays her loving hand upon the heart that is almost still, and she kisses tenderly the shrunken forehead where death fain would print his seal.

And she whispers from her noble heart:

"Oh, God! give me back his life! oh, God! give me back his life!"

And the old lawyer weeps, and repeats after her the half-articulate prayer.

One glance of anguish she casts at her poor old friend, and past him, up into Heaven, it says:

"Man cannot help us, but God will!" and then she turns again to the beloved one.

He has wronged her, hated her, maligned her; no single throb has his hushed heart ever beat for her; but she has forgiven him long ago, if she has anything to forgive. She is warming that chilling heart against her own; she is watching that disfigured face which can never be disfigured to her; she loves him faithfully.

When Reed comes back from his search for a doctor, they find the old lawyer sitting by the window, with his wet eyes covered by his hands, and the woman kneeling by the bed, with the sick man's head on her breast.

"You must leave this place," says the doctor, in affright.

"No, I will nurse him best," she smiles.

So she has her way, good, faithful Margaret.

CHAPTER XXX.

A REVELATION.

Madame Hesslein, standing on the deck where Margaret had bidden her adieu—weeping in her lace handkerchief until it was wet, and waving it after her until it was dry, seemed so well worth losing a thousand pounds for, that the Chevalier Calembours quickly overcame his sincere regrets at the mad Margaret's departure into the jaws of death, and, flinging all uncomfortable emotions into the limbo of forgetfulness, he abandoned himself to the care of this fair creature who was left upon his hands.

"There they go, these doomed ones!" sobbed madame, with a great gush of tears. "Farewell, farewell, poor devoted Griselda."

"Be content, dear madame, I do not forsake thee—take comfort of thy slave!"

"Oh, chevalier, is there ever a man on this stale old globe who can show a heart like faithful Margaret's?"

"*Mon Dieu!* I know such a man."

"I do not. I have yet to meet the man who is content to love without one hope of recompense; who counts it joy to lay his all at the feet of the one who has scorned him—who rushes with a willing soul to brave death in the service of his enemy."

"Madame is skeptical, madame is cruel. Ah—could she read the heart of Calembours——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" mocked madame, wildly, "perhaps I can. Perhaps I have met with such before, and sifting it well, found it the heart of a fiend. But enough, 'tis a long time since I have believed in love, and faithfulness, and such mawkish sentimentality; now, do you know what I believe in, monsieur?"

"*Pardieu*, no—cruel that thou art."

"Ambition is my god," breathed madame, tauntingly. "I will climb to the highest step of the social ladder, and there I'll feel content."

The chevalier grew pale with envy.

"If madame would accept my poor help to raise her to her throne," sighed he.

"*Yours!*" she interrupted, scornfully.

"Madame, I am not what I seem."

"Faith, I don't think you are."

"Madame, on the honor of a chevalier, I possess some fine titles and estates."

"Foolish man, to cloak your royalty with this disguise!"

"I am Count de S. S. Turin."

"I salute you, count."

"I am Knight of the Three Sicilies."

"Receive my obeisance, knight."

"I possess fine vineyards in Hungary, and a jewel-mine."

"My congratulations, illustrious sir."

"And I am your devoted slave, Madame Hesslein." The luring, mocking, maddening face of the lady lit up with fierce joy. She averted it quickly. "I will resume these titles so dignified," cried the chevalier, "I will return to my fatherland; ver' good, *mon ange*, you shall accompany, you shall be my wife. You shall rule over nine hundred vinedressers, and seven vineyards, *ma chère*; they are worth seventy thousand florins in the year; and you shall wear the gems of agate, of jasper—of diamonds as you wear this leetel ribbon—madame, all I have shall be yours."

She heard with a cool smile, but a bitter pulse beat in her throat.

"You are flattering, chevalier," she remarked, "and I shall think of it."

He seized her fair hands, and pressed them to his lips, but she snatched them away with a flash from the smoldering fire in her eyes.

"But first," said madame, with a keen glance, "you must assure me that the station you offer me is not gilded by imagination unassisted by gold."

Monsieur sighed in heart-rending despondency.

"Incomparable woman, you doubt what is to the Hungarian noblesse dearer than life—my honor.

But come, I will give you my proofs."

He escorted her to her state-room where waited the two maids of the charming lady, who always traveled with a complete retinue of servants, and going to his own cabin, presently he returned holding solemnly in his hands an elegantly silver-mounted coffer which he placed upon the table.

Unlocking it, he drew from thence various parchments of official aspect, with huge seals appended, and displayed them to the smiling inamorata.

"These are the rewards with which my country has honored my poor services," he said, with humility. "These papers attest to my right to wear these titles you have just heard, madame. *Voila!* 'To the Count of Santo Spirito, Turin,' and 'To the Knight of the Order of Three Sicilys.' *Mon ange*, what more can I say?"

A wicked smile was playing around her mouth.

"I accept your statements, chevalier—and yourself!" she murmured, with an exquisite side glance.

The little chevalier beamed with triumph, and bowed low over the lovely hand which she extended, and then she snatched it quickly from him, made a queenly obeisance, and vanished like a spirit from his sight.

Madame Hesslein was seen no more until the steamer entered New York; she was either ill or coy; in reply to the chevalier's tender reproaches she declared for the first named, although her flashing eyes and healthy appearance emphatically contradicted the assertion.

What a dream of joy tinctured with horrible doubts the succeeding month was for poor little Calembours! To-day she was amiable, gay, bewitching; to-morrow she would be locked in her room, and would send down a frantic entreaty to the good *fiance* to leave her in peace; presently she would reward his importunities by flitting into his presence, white, vengeful, and torturing him with covert taunts and maddening allusions to his forgotten past.

And yet she was so beautiful, and so changeful, and so reckless that the wild Bohemian fire blazed up in the poor little man's soul, and he could not help loving her with a devotion worthy of a better object.

He expended his hoarded gains in loading her with costly gifts; and with mad prodigality assumed a splendor of estate which drained his finances to the lowest ebb; anxious only to win her for his own and calmly leaving the *denouement* until after the happy day, when madame could not help herself.

How he hoped to obtain her forgiveness when she discovered all, Heaven knows; but love not seldom infatuates men and goads them on to their complete ruin.

Not true love, though of a worthy object; 'tis ofttimes the only savior of a sinking man.

Presently the illustrious foreigner, loaded with his titles, penetrated to the upper circle of society where Madame Hesslein moved, a solitary queen among shrinking ladies of *haut ton*, who with one accord admired, and hated, and courted her because she was the attraction, and it was "the thing" to say, "we had little Madame Hesslein here last night."

What her beauty and refinement did for her, the chevalier's *applomb* and versatility of genius did for him. Every one talked of the clever, polished Frenchman—in good society monsieur spoke only French, and wore his Legion of Honor flauntingly—every one raved about the dazzling witch he paid such faithful court to; every one vowed that such a pair were expressly created for each other, none else.

On the last evening of this intoxicating dream the chevalier attended a brilliant assembly which madame held at her hotel.

Magnates of the highest rank were there to give homage to their resistless hostess; and belles of tried skill were there, to waste their ammunition upon the enthralled chevalier; but Romeo and Juliet had no eyes for any but themselves, although their smiles were showered on all.

Madame Hesslein, gorgeous as an Eastern houri, convened her little court about her ottoman, singled the happy Calembours out from all his vexed competitors, and threw him into raptures by addressing her next remarks more particularly to him.

Fascinated, the gay throng watched that set, cruel face, its glimmering, chrysolite eyes, its wreathing, quivering lips, and its wild mischief as the fair dame told her little story to the Chevalier de Calembours:

"Dear Monsieur, your latest anecdote puts this good company in your debt, so I shall do myself the honor of paying that debt with a narrative which is new, true, and pertinent.

"There was living in the town of Raleigh, some twenty years ago, a remarkable girl called—shall we say for the present—Dolores? for that indeed was her fate.

"She was very pretty, they said, but execrably poor. Her father was a blacksmith, you see, and her mother was glad to obtain laundry work from her richer neighbors; so that poor Dolores started in life with the disadvantages of an undeniable beauty and a penniless purse.

"When sixteen, she considered it quite a lift in life to be promoted to the position of waiting-maid to the wealthy Mrs. Maltravers, instead of trudging round the town with her mother's baskets of clear-starched garments to the various houses which patronized her labor.

"Mrs. Maltravers was old, and fanciful, and she good-naturedly taught the girl how to speak well, and how to dress neatly, and gave her that perception of the true value of elegance which only the rich can give.

"Dolores liked to be well dressed, and to sway her humble court by the cleverness of her conversation, and Mrs. Maltravers was surprised and amused at her aptness in such branches, and taught her with pleasure.

"So Dolores thankfully made the most of her position, and became much too fine a lady for the rough home she had left, and was flouted at by her rude brothers and awkward sisters, until she cut herself adrift from them all.

"Mr. and Mrs. Maltravers went to Europe to travel for two years, and the waiting-maid went with them.

"Dolores liked the strange life, and learned more and more every day.

"At last the travelers came to Austria, and pleased with the rich, warm summer of the plain they stopped in Hungary for six months.

"The name of the town was—Szegedin; you have some acquaintance with it, count; you will take especial interest in a narrative that unfolds its climax in your birthplace.

"Our pretty Dolores had here the fortune to fall in love with a man of the barbarous name of Ladislaus Schmolnitz; and when you learn that, added to his shocking name, he followed the profession of a tailor, you will only wonder at little Dolores' infatuation.

"But this little man, so handsome, clever, and bland, met her often on the banks of the Theiss, and talked sentiment, and poetry and other pretty nonsense in the shocking language of Hungary to simple Dolores, and made her forget that he was a wretched little tailor.

"And he taught her to prattle in Hungarian, and then he asked her to love him, and she did love him—ah, friends! so passionately, so heroically, that I only wonder that her splendid love did not ennoble his.

"Ladislaus Schmolnitz, the Szegedin tailor, ran off with Dolores, the waiting-maid, and laughed at the pursuit of the shocked Maltravers, who grudged the girl to a little rascal of a Hun.

"But Madame and Monsieur Schmolnitz lived together for two years and were very happy.

"Very happy, dear friends, notwithstanding the poverty-stricken shifts which they were at to keep the wolf from the door.

"So happy, dear friend, that foolish Dolores wished for no other heaven than the heaven of the little tailor's love, and toiled, my heart how she toiled, to keep the treasure safe.

"At last, Monsieur Schmolnitz saw a chance to rise in the world, and took his wife and baby-boy to Paris, where he energetically began to teach languages, having a clever turn that way.

"He began also to neglect his Dolores, and to prove an indifferent spouse; even to accuse her of unfaithfulness, alas! she loved him far too wildly for such madness.

"But he disappeared from little Dolores one day, and never came back to her, and the silly girl's heart broke, she despaired.

"Homeless, nameless, incumbered with a boy twelve months old, what could the poor wretch do?

"She went away with the man who had roused the perfidious tailor's jealousy, a cotton manufacturer from Manchester, and became a wealthy woman, and quite forgot what cold and hunger were, although, good luck! she could not forget what true love had been to her.

"She loved the boy, she nurtured him with care, and he was her only consolation when her heart was crushed with pain and what she then called—guilt.

"When her protector died, she married an American who took her out to Washington; but by this time her heart was so old, and cold, and weary of beating that it could hold no love for any man, and she devoted herself to the pretty boy, and brought him up a little gentleman, although she never dared treat him as her son for fear she should hate him some day for his wicked father's sake.

"She sent the boy to the North to gain a finished education, and lived very wearily with her jealous husband, finding her only amusement in attracting the homage of the men she met, and repaying it with scorn.

"At last she grew too restive under the yoke, and having had experience before of the evils of jealousy in a husband, she declined rehearsing her part a second time, and forestalled the humiliation by eloping with a Virginian planter.

"Hapless wretch! Can you blame her, dear count? no, no, we shall blame it all on that perfidious

little tailor who broke her heart at first.

"She liked the sumptuous life on the fine plantation passably well, her mansion was admirably arranged, her *menage* was fine, her slaves numerous and docile; Dolores reigned royally.

"But her malevolent destiny could not leave her long in comfort, poor soul; it swooped upon her when she was almost contented, and with inflexible hand pushed her into misery once more.

"The war broke out, the slaves fled, monsieur, her kind friend went to Richmond and got a company, and Dolores was left in the great house with only one quadroon girl and a couple of old negroes to protect her from danger.

"In the second year of the war, her fate was sealed.

"One day a detachment of Federal soldiers encamped in the plantation, and two colonels came to the mansion to demand shelter for their wounded.

"The terrified Dolores was hastening down stairs to see them, when a voice which she had not heard for eighteen years sang a gay French *chanson*, which she last had heard from Ladislaus Schmolnitz, on the pretty banks of Theiss.

"Friends, this wretched woman recognized that voice as belonging to her once loved little tailor.

"Ah! her heart was not dead after all, it stirred in its long death-sleep, and thrilled with joy. Oh, Heaven! why is love so deathless in a woman's breast when it is ever her curse, her ruin?

"Well, she fled to her room again, and disguised herself as well as she could, for she yearned to meet her renegade husband, and to converse with him unsuspected. She did so. She concealed her pretty figure with clumsy padding, she browned her white face, she covered her yellow hair with a wig, and entering, she bowed low to her renegade husband and spoke only French, which he had never before heard her speak.

"But he could not feel at ease, he gazed suspiciously again and again at her, her eyes recalled the old love story by the banks of the Theiss—he feared the French madame of middle age.

"What her emotions were, it is scarce worth telling. She was happy to know that he was alive, she exulted that she had seen him, but she was bound to the kind planter and feared to betray herself to Schmolnitz, she let him go, not intending to reveal herself.

"But, at the moment of parting, a volley of shot was fired at the front of the mansion by some Confederate troops, who had surprised the encampment, and a cannon ball crashed in the doorway, almost in the midst of the little group in the hall.

"Dolores was startled out of her disguise and clung madly to the little tailor, crying out that she was his Dolores, and that she loved him still.

"Simple idiot! when she could live in palaces if she chose!

"Dear friends, that abject little tailor had the brutality to shake her off, to swear at her; to protest that he had suspected as much, and to fling her from him in a dead faint in the hall and escape with his comrade.

"Ah! count, could you believe that a fiend in man's form could be so dastardly?

"But Dolores did not fall a victim to the cruelty of the small Mephistopheles; her servants carried her out of the house, which was in flames, and she soon escaped to Richmond, where she fell ill, and on recovering learned that her friend, the planter, was killed in battle.

"Some months had passed, but this insane creature was so enslaved by her passion for that unworthy man that no sooner was she recovered from her illness than she determined to search out the little tailor, and display her true beauty, which was singularly heightened by the years which had passed since they parted.

"She seriously hoped to win back his worthless heart, and dreamed of nothing but of endowing him with the wreck of her fortune, which was still quite a handsome possession.

"So she took to visiting the hospitals and prisons, fancying that he might have been wounded or captured; but without success.

"No wonder, for the ineffable rascal had long since deserted from the North to the South, and was plying the profession of spy, under the ostensible one of commissary-general for the stores for the wounded.

"At last, Dolores chanced to ride out to a station where she had heard there were some Northern soldiers lying wounded; and there she came upon her own son, the dear consolation of her wretched life, lying starving on a handful of straw, and the place surrounded by Northern soldiers, who had just come to rescue their comrades.

"The unfortunate woman was just in time to see her brave boy die, and then, indeed, she thought that her cup of misery was full—but no, Heaven is prodigal of its punishments to such as she.

"While mourning over her boy, the renegade commissary rode up with his staff, intending to remove the invalids to Richmond, and was instantly attacked by the Federals; Dolores filled with

mad grief, drew her old-time husband into the shed and bade him look upon his son, and the next moment beheld him struck down by a ball at her feet.

"She thought him dead, poor wretch, and lifted his head to her lap, and told him that she loved him with a love that could never die, and swore that she would water the graves of her husband and her son with her own heart-blood.

"When the skirmish was over the Northerners moved on with the wounded man as their prisoner, and this woman rode beside him, leaving her dear son dead in the shanty.

"At midnight, when the party stopped to rest, it was found that Schmolnitz was not dead, and he soon recovered enough to speak.

"Dolores bent over him, his head in her lap, and hoped that he would recognize her; but he did not, in the gloom, until she spoke, entreating him for the sake of her love years ago to take her back to him.

"Most brutally he repudiated her, assuring her that she could not be his wife, and that he would never own her as such.

"Then, indeed, she sounded the shallow waters of his soul, and desired revenge.

"She would have stabbed him to the heart even then, if she had not been prevented, but she swore beside the heartless wretch that she should have vengeance; then she and her attendants rode back to Richmond.

"Months passed, all trace of the man was lost to her; but patiently she searched for him until she found a clew.

"After many adventures, she found him in this city, and what think you were the titles which this little tailor had assumed?

"Dear count, will you not make a guess?

"Friends, I believe our honored count is indisposed—how pale he has become! Little wonder, for he sympathizes with every word I say.

"Do not, good Count de Calembours, forsake us until my story is completed.

"You must go? Then I shall hasten.

"Friends, the miserable little tailor, this renegade, dastard and spy, had entered the highest circles in New York under the title which this man wears—the Count de Calembours!"

She swooped forward, she seized the arm of the retreating chevalier, and wheeled him round until he faced the company.

He was frightfully pale, his eyes flickered ominously, he glared helplessly at his tormentor, the beautiful bride-elect.

"What! has my *fiance* nothing to say?" jibed madame, with flashing eyes, green as a tigress. "Is he choked by a skein of thread? Felled by a thimble? Stabbed by a tailor's needle? Fie, fie! Ladislaus Schmolnitz, to let the coat fit you so well! To stand dumb as your own goose! Oh, cowardly little tailor!"

Shrilly the scoffing denunciation rang out; stepping back a pace she pointed her finger in his face and laughed wildly; and the good company, suddenly catching the resistless drollery of the farce, burst into a long, convulsive, mocking peal of merciless laughter, till the room rang again, the glasses jingled, and the poor little tailor threw himself on his knees before the ferocious Nemesis and begged for mercy.

But the good company pointed their fingers in the wretch's appalled face and hissed him down; and the air seemed alive with ten thousand serpents, and the room swam around with eyes of mockery and ire; and deafened, horror-stricken, and utterly routed, the poor little tailor fell forward on the carpet in a dead swoon.

When he recovered his senses, the room was deserted, the lights were out, and one small, airy figure stood at a distant door with a taper in her hand and looking on the fallen hero.

"Better, good Monsieur Schmolnitz?" mocked Madame Hesslein.

He rose unsteadily, and held by the back of a chair.

"Beast! traitress! you are my wife, are you?" hissed he, in a furious whisper. "I had my doubts of you all the while. But this shall ruin you."

"Oh, no, my excellent tailor, I am above your puny attacks. So, now that we have squared accounts, I will bid you a long adieu."

She bowed to the floor, rose, and gave him one long, fierce, taunting glance.

He drew a pistol from his breast, took deliberate aim, and fired it full at her face, just as she closed the door. It missed her by a hair-breadth.

She looked in again with a diabolical laugh, and vanished; and he, too, fled by the opposite door,

just as the hotel servants rushed in to quell the tumult.

CHAPTER XXXI.

BRAND PLUCKED FROM THE BURNING.

"Circles and circles of brightening light breaking over me; a faint, but delicious sense of comfort; a swift vanishing of the distorted phantoms which have left me here for dead—a kind and dear awakening.

"What tender face is this that is bending over me? What soft bosom is this upon which my head is lying?

"Have I bridged at last the chasm of mortality, and is this my fate in the immortal world?

"I smile, if this be so, at the idle fears of those who prophesied for me a hell. This is Heaven! What seraph is this who is bearing me upon her bosom after my fight with the throes of death? How soft and cool her hand, which bands my brow! Her wings are folded close, and she will not fly away; her breath wafts my weary eyelids like the zephyr born at the gates of Paradise.

"It was worth that long battle with the writhing furies, who would have chained me to Charon's boat, midway in the awful river, to be stranded here within these clinging arms.

"O spirit pure and tender! is this Christ-like care for me at your King's command? Am I done with earth and sin, and entered into rest upon your hallowed heart?

"Yes, the dark obscurity of earth no longer blinds me; I am reading the face of one who has gazed upon the Incarnate, and caught from Him beatitude past utterance.

"How pure and above all earthly beauty are these holy lineaments! the essence of eternal love seems to shed from these eyes upon my languid soul; her rich tresses seem enwreathed with beams from the Fount of Joy; I am dazzled with the vision."

The worn, white face of the sick man sinks more heavily upon the gentle bosom which supports it; but there is a fixed smile upon the blue lips of wonder and of triumph; there are tears stealing from the eyes which have been darkly fixed upward. The trembling soul who has been looking into the realm of Heaven, turns back at the yearning pressure of those arms, and new circles of brightening light and consciousness break over him, and St. Udo Brand looks up.

A damp, cool perfume breathes around him of flowers; he seems to be surrounded by those sweet comforters; flowers upon his breast, against his fevered face, upon his pillow; and soft arms are truly around him, and his head is lying upon the yielding breast of a woman.

"How is it that I am here?"

"Did my darling try to speak?"

"How strange! she is then some one to whom I am dear. I am indeed in Heaven, and this heavenly seraph is to be my guide and teacher. What made me suppose for an instant that I was back to earth?

"It is so much better than I deserve, pure spirit—so much better."

"Did you say you felt better?"

"This vision is a woman? her heart seems bounding with joy; she bends closer with a sob of rapture; these holy eyes are dropping tears!

"'There are no tears in Heaven.' Is it possible that I come back to earth and find some one weeping tears of joy for me!

"Tell me who you are?"

"You have whispered something again. Oh! love, you are so faint and weak that I can scarcely see your lips move. But I think you know me."

"No, no. I left no such angel as you on earth when I died."

"Do you say so? Wait until I bring my ear close."

"No. Tell me."

"Don't you know your nurse, who has been with you for two weeks? the nurse that you have clung to, and moaned for when your glazed eyes could not see me? Don't you remember how you made me hold you—just so—when the fever-phantoms were chasing you? Surely we are old friends by this time?"

"My Perdita?"

"Why, darling, do you know me, then? Now I shall dare to hope. Oh, thank Heaven!"

"How strange that she should look so joyful at any good befalling me! Am I St. Udo Brand, who was at odds with all the world? or have I been changed into a man with a human heart, to be prized by a noble woman? Is this a revised and improved edition of St. Udo? Have I got out of that bitter, reckless being, and, after ages of toiling in a black, demon-crowded abyss for my sins have I re-entered the world to be simple, and beloved, and happy? O Thou who saved me from annihilation, will that this be true!

"Lady, will you not tell me your name?"

"You called me 'Perdita' when I thought the pest was drifting you from my arms farther—farther, and yet the closer into my heart—call me Perdita still. Oh, my darling, to think that after all I have won you from the gates of death!"

"How long have we loved each other, Perdita? Why do these deep gray eyes hide themselves from me? Why does that flush creep to brow and gentle cheek? What a dear face! what a holy face! I hope that it will beam upon me until I die! What is it that she says?"

"I found you smitten with the plague, and, taking care of you, because there was no one else who had such a right, as the Marplot of your life, you came to think me some one whom you loved, and to call me Perdita. It was one of your fancies."

"I hope it will develop into a reality. I shall pinion your wings, bright seraph, to keep you by me."

"Hush! hush! You are wandering away again."

"Keep by me, my love—Perdita! oh, keep by me!"

"As if I would ever leave you, while I could make one moment lighter for you."

"Ah, well! Remember you have promised that."

He sinks softly down among his pillows with a sigh of ineffable peace; his Perdita wipes the tears of joy from his face, and rearranges the light coverings.

A soft wind is blowing through the half-closed windows, from over the quiet water clasped within the arms of the coral reef, and the dreamy strains of a military band creep from a gallant war-ship out in the bay; and in the beautiful twilight the graceful boats are shooting in and out from cedar groves to the white huts standing on the edge of the reefs like Grecian temples, and the lovely scene is calm as the smile on the face of the sick man.

The mosquito-net is drawn close around the invalid's bed, and his nurse sits within the fold, and watches him until he sinks to sleep. And then she bends her head until it touches his lissom hand, and, weeping much in her deep thankfulness, she too sinks to slumber—well earned and long denied.

The same hour next evening St. Udo Brand comes to himself again from the mystic depths of fever, and sorrow, and importunate desire, to see the same tender vision watching over him, and to breathe the same sweet perfume of fresh-culled flowers, and to feel the same restful joy which broke the darkness of his weary trance before.

And then he is so glad to find this dream staying by him when so many others have slipped away, that he stretches out his hands, and beckons with a cry of welcome.

"My Perdita, I feared I had lost you! Where did you go?"

"I have never left your side."

"I could not find you, and I have been wandering, wandering everywhere. How was it you got away from my hand?"

She, bending her ear to catch these feeble accents, glows with a look of wonder and joy; all the lines of weariness pass away from her face; for the moment she is quite beautiful.

"Dear one, was it really *me* you were trying to hold in your sleep?" she asks, softly. "I saw your brow gather, and your lips move, and an anxious expression come over you in every little slumber: but when I held your groping hand you clasped mine tightly, and became happy in your dreams. Was it Perdita whom you wished so much to keep by you?"

"Yes, yes; that was it. You express my thoughts so smoothly for me that I wish you would try again. Something has got away from me after all. Let me hold you while I try to remember."

She gives him her hand, and she gives him also her faithful bosom. Gladly she lifts him in her frail arms, and clasps him close, close, and she presses her lips upon his sunken eyelids with kisses as soft and healing as the flowers of Paradise.

"It is coming back, I kept it so long, in spite of the whirling goblins and demons who tried to snatch it from me, but when I came to you just now I found that it was gone. Did you take it from me, and give it back to me now when you laid my head upon your bosom?"

"What was it, my darling?"

"Your promise, Perdita."

"What promise, dear love?"

"That you would never leave me. Don't you remember saying that?"

"What would you care for me when you were strong and well?" falters the nurse, with quivering lips.

The sick man tries to set his poor paralyzed brain in thinking order at this contingency, but the effort is far beyond him, and he relapses with an anxious sigh.

"I do not want to drift away and be pushed back into the cruel world I have left," he murmurs, earnestly, "and it lies with you to keep me in this pure place. I lost you ages ago, you know—ages ago, when I was pure and loving as yourself; and see what I am now for want of you, Perdita?"

"You will soon enough be glad to part from me again," answers the nurse, turning aside her swimming eyes.

"Must you go, Perdita, after your promise?"

"I must go when I have ceased to make one moment lighter for you. I promised that I would stay until then."

"Promise it again—you will stay until you cease to be desired by me."

"Until I cease to be required by you," she amends, straining him to her yearning and foreboding heart.

"I shall always require you," said the sick man, with exultation; "I could not take one step in this pure atmosphere without you. Oh, you don't know how I shall hold to you, my lost Perdita."

So wandering on—dreaming on, he fancies she is his lost good, which was dropped out of life long ago; that she personates the faith, the hope, the innocence of his early years, ere sin set the searing mark of death upon his heart, and bitter wrongs stole from him his primal purity, and fused in the alembic of his burning hatred, all noble tendencies into bitter infidelity.

And wandering on—dreaming on, day by day, drifting on from riotous fancy to feeble reason, he comes to know that there is a puzzle in the kindness of this woman, who morning, noon, and night cares for him as woman never cared for him before; and, grasping the puzzle at last, he looks at it with comprehending eyes.

He will ask this tender, holy-faced watcher by his bedside why this heavenly care for him. Perchance she is repaying some former service of his, done in the days of health; for St. Udo Brand has done his deeds of generous kindness to the widows and orphans of his brave Vermont boys, and forgotten the acts by scores.

"Lady, why have you been so kind to me?"

"Not kind—only just."

"The service which you thus repay must have been a great one. You have risked your life nursing me through this infectious plague; what have I ever done to you that could merit such repayment?"

She has been fearing these questions for some days, and she has been clinging all the more fondly and passionately to the sweet dream which she has never once in all her passion of unselfish devotion dreamed could last. Again and again she has put aside the cruel end; for, oh! she cannot give him up yet—her king!

By the couch of deadly peril and pain, when his manhood is low beneath the scowl of death—when the divinity of his intellect is swallowed up in frenzy—in his weakness and despondency—the most royal days of Margaret's life have come to her, gold-tinged, and crowned with joy—the days of her love.

"You are not strong enough for this," she answers, wistfully. "Wait until you are a great deal stronger before you ask questions."

"But"—a bewildered line is knotting the sick man's brow like the faint ripple on the glassy waters of a stream—"I have seen you before in such different circumstances, and I would like to know where."

"I am Perdita, you know," with an anxious smile. "You met me in your delirium often enough, don't you remember?"

"Yes, yes—was that it? When did you find me?"

"Three weeks ago. You were in the first stages of yellow fever. You would have died if God had not providentially sent me here in time."

"So strange that you should risk your life for me—a tender lady."

"It was a pleasure to me, sir. I was not afraid of the risk."

"The very physicians fled from the smitten wretches by scores, for fear of sharing their fate. We had but few doctors in the city for a fortnight who were brave enough to stay, and we had to take turns and do what we could for each other. The very negroes could not be bought with money to stay with us, but fled, panic-stricken, and left us to die unattended. Nineteen bodies were carried

out of this house in one day, and the last I can remember before I crawled into this room away from the groans to die, were the ghastly bodies of poor Major Hilton and the commandant of the forces lying waiting for removal. I held out longest, but had to succumb at last. It is so strange to wake up from death, and to find a lovely lady at my bedside, breathing my poisoned breath, and wooing me from my companions' fate with such devotion."

"A lovely lady!" How she glows over with surprised blushes and smiles! How she stoops again to catch the feeble accents and to read the upraised orbs.

"Lovely! Yes, yes; more than lovely—better than beautiful. When I looked up from my dream of death I thought yours the face of an angel. I think so still."

"Hush! hush! If you talk so wildly, dear, I shall think you are wandering again."

"I am not wandering, my Perdita. If ever I do, your beloved hand has but to touch mine and I will come back. Sometimes I have thought of late——"

"Go on, darling. You have thought of late——"

"That you were getting weary of your invalid, and regretting your promise."

"How could you ever think that of me?"

"There. I love to see those gray eyes deepen and flash through generous tears. I will take that back, for I see it is not true."

"Have I ever been forgetful of you?"

"No, no, no. If ever woman had the heart of an angel of mercy, you have one, my Perdita. It was not that you missed one atom of your wonderful care for me, but lately you have been reserved. You have denied me your hand so often to help me back to myself, or your bosom when my head ached; and the sweet words of endearment rarely come from you, except when once or twice you have thought I was sleeping."

"You are getting so well and strong that you do not require such excessive tenderness. It was only while you were helpless as a child that I felt for you as if you were one."

"You are but a child yourself, my poor, fragile darling; and yet, child as you are, I *do* require your motherly care, your motherly words of love. I have had them once, and they were so heavenly sweet that I cannot do without them."

"I will be your mother, then, until you can do without me. I shall take care of my child until he is able to take care of himself."

"Little mother, why do you weep?"

"Hush! hush! we have talked long enough; go to sleep."

"In yours arms, then Perdita."

She gathers him to her heart. Recklessly she strains him close while yet she may, heedless of the lonely days when heart and soul will hunger gnawingly for this blessed moment.

And so time fares on with this Brand which has been plucked from the burning.

Little by little he takes back to him life and strength; little by little he spells out this strange, sweet, new life, and analyzes it, and basks in the lambent sunshine. Not little by little grows his love for the Perdita of his fever dreams; she has taken the tide at its lowest ebb, and it has swept her into his deep, strong heart, which nevermore can shut her out.

He watches her beaming eyes with wistful constancy; he clings to her garments; he kisses her light hands, which touch him in gentle ministrations. The hard man is conquered, and by a woman.

But when he grows fearful that, after all, she may be wearying of this toil and care for him; when, with anxious eyes, he looks into the future, and pictures life without this gentle comforter, he almost wishes that health would turn her back on him forever, so that he might ever have Perdita; and he worries himself into continual fevers, which prove a great drawback to his convalescence.

She, also, has her secret load of anxiety. A crisis is approaching which she may not longer stave off. She must make herself known anon, and finish her duty with regard to him, and go away; and oh! heaven knows how she is to turn her back upon this great passion of her life, and him!

In her perfection of humility, she never hopes for reward for these great services of hers; she counts them but a feeble recompense for the evil she—his Marplot and ruin—has wrought him, which no recompense can atone for. She has not had the vanity to probe into his heart and weigh his gratitude toward her, or to count upon it for a moment. His daily evidences of love are to her but the wayward fancy of an invalid, which time and strength will sweep away, as surely as the ripple would blot her reflection from yonder smooth lagoon.

And at last the burden grows so heavy on the heart of each, that he, the least patient, breaks silence, and recklessly put his hand to the wheel which may revolve and crush him.

"You have always put me off when I was at all inquisitive about you," he says to her, one day; "but since I am getting well so rapidly, I think it time that I should assume a little of the responsibility of my own affairs. I have an appallingly heavy debt of gratitude to pay a kind lady, whose only name to me is Perdita, and I wish to be more particularly acquainted with my deliveress."

"If you would only wait until you were strong enough to travel," answers Margaret, becoming very pale, "it would be for the best."

"Why, where are we to travel, my Perdita?"

"You must prepare your mind for a journey, sir—a journey which will be for your good and happiness."

"With you?"

"Without me."

The desolate tones come quietly enough, but the invalid gives a great start, and clutches at his thin hands, and turns away his face.

Lying so still and so long that she almost thinks him sleeping, she bends timidly over him, and meets his dark eyes full of mournful tears.

"I feared it would come to this," he says, turning almost passionately to her; "and yet I have foolishly and selfishly clung to the hope that you would never seek to leave me. Have I been meddling much with your family duties by this long monopoly of you?"

"I have no family duties to attend to."

"No family ties to break, should I wish, if it were possible, for you to stay with me always?"

"Oh, sir, you would not speak so if you—if I could be honest and brave with you."

"My child—oh! my child; I cannot bear to see those tears. If you knew how dear you are to me, you would think well before you cast anything between us."

She buries her face in her hands; for a sacred space her heart throbs in its joy, and she feels that it were well worth the coming years of hunger to taste the sweet bliss as she tastes it now; and then she meekly looks her situation in the face.

"There are no family ties keeping me from you," she murmurs, as firmly as she may; "but it would not be honorable for me to accept any gratitude from you, or to accede to any such request as you have made, because—I did not come here and find you out with any craven hope of reward. I have barely done my duty toward you, and have had no thought of buying your love."

"I do not understand. I love you, Heaven knows, most fervently, Perdita; but whether you have bought it or not, I cannot say. It is yours, and cannot be recalled."

"And I cannot take it under such circumstances as those in which I won it. When you understand fully your affairs, you will then see how mercenary I would be to accept your love now."

"Mercenary? My poor child? I offer you this poor, wasted hand, and a broken constitution, and penniless prospects wherewith to be happy; and it is a part of my native selfishness to imagine that my great love could compensate for all drawbacks, but there is not the smallest room for suspecting you of mercenary motives—not the smallest."

"I have heard it said"—this with piteous hesitation—"that Colonel Brand was to be reinstated in his rights—that a great estate in England was going to be offered to him."

The invalid half raises himself on his elbow, and laughs heartily.

"Dismiss that rumor from your mind," he says, in a relieved tone; "for, if that is all the basis you have upon which to found mercenary expectations, it is as slight as the mirage in air. I would not go back to England to meddle with that property if I begged my bread for want of it. I will toady round no woman's shoes."

"But if she didn't wish it?" trembled Margaret; "if she insisted on giving it up to you, and rejecting all claim to it?"

"Not she."

"But if she did?"

"I hope she never may, darling. If she did, and if I were ever base enough to accept it, I should have in honor to propose to her by way of gratitude, and because my grandmother's will said so; and I would rather be an organ-grinder, with a monkey tied to my girdle, than be the heir of Castle Brand with Margaret Walsingham for my wife."

"Perhaps you misjudge her. Perhaps she was as unwilling to be the obstacle between you and your property as you were that she should be so."

"You are generous, my little mother, to defend one of the greediest *kestrels* who ever struck claw into carrion; but you are not just. I have no doubt that if she ever brought herself to try such an experiment as offering her booty to me, it would be with the assurance that I would refuse it, or

with the hope that common decency would urge me to marry her."

"She would never marry you," is the quiet and sad rejoinder.

"Well, we sha'n't give her the chance. Let us turn from a very groveling subject (to my mind), and get over your next objection to me. We have sent the mercenary one a-flying—now for the next."

"That is the only one. Let us leave the subject altogether. You will know more fully what I meant to-morrow."

She leaves him hastily—never without a sweet backward glance before—and he is left alone for hours.

When she returns it is evening, and the long shadows lie athwart the room, and she flits across the ladders of gloom to him as if innumerable bars were holding them apart.

But when they are all passed, and she is close by his side, he scans his Perdita's countenance with a conviction growing within him that bars are yet between them which she cannot pass, and he seizes her hand in sudden foreboding.

"What is this, dear child? Why are you so pale and troubled? Have you been weeping?"

"Oh, nothing of consequence. Have you been comfortable?"

"Everything is of consequence which brings these marks of sorrow to my Perdita's face. Who has been vexing you, child?"

"No one—no one, sir."

"Who has been grieving you, then?"

"I—it is no one's fault. I have only been a little foolish—that is all."

She averts her pallid face, and will not be questioned more, but leads him utterly from personal subjects.

She has been dear and kind before, but never precisely with the yearning, smothered passion of this last evening; she almost seems to cling to him, as if invisible hands were driving her away, and her pathetic face grows tremulous at every word of tenderness from him.

And St. Udo has an indistinct memory of burning tears flashing somewhere while he sleeps, and of soft lips touching his in one meek kiss, and of tender words of blessing and of prayer; and then a shadow falls upon him gray and sad, for the door had shut him in, and the girl is gone.

CHAPTER XXXII.

SWEET RECOMPENSE.

The next morning St. Udo Brand lay impatiently waiting for his dear young nurse, and scowling at the stupid negress, who was putting his room to rights, when a visitor entered, and made his way up to the sick man.

A haggard-looking old gentleman, with pale, yellow cheeks, pendulous and flaccid—eyebrows which bristled like furze on the brow of a beetling crag, and lack-luster eyes, which glistened like the dull waters at the foot of it.

"My service to you, sir," said he, with an old-fashioned bow; "I am Andrew Davenport, if you remember."

"I do remember Andrew Davenport, if you are he; you are so changed that I need scarcely beg pardon for not recollecting you sooner."

"Same to you, sir. Gad, sir, yellow fever is no joke, and you took it worse than me by a long chalk."

"How comes it that you have had yellow fever? When did you come here?"

"About a month ago. Came here with a face as red as a lobster, and as broad as that. Look at it now. I don't begrudge it though, when I see you looking so much better than ever I thought to see you when first I looked at you in this bed. We have much to be thankful for, Colonel Brand."

"I fail to understand. What brought you to Key West, and what have you to do with me?"

"A good deal, my young sir. I have to escort you home to your castle, for one thing."

"I am astonished that you should come all this way to waste words upon such a subject. I thought that by this time Miss Walsingham would be married, and that I could go on my way rejoicing."

"Married to that impostor, who hoped to fill your shoes? Pho! what do you take us all for? Well, after all, I needn't take any share of the glory. It was Miss Margaret herself, who found out the whole conspiracy, and set off like a brave young woman as she is, taking me for company, to find

you, sir."

"Heavens! What did she want of me?"

"Gad! sir, if you really don't know, all I can say is that she's the first woman I ever saw who could hold her tongue! It was to find you out and give you the property of Seven-Oak Waaste, the lands, houses, etc., attached, that she came while the plague was literally raging, to this confounded rat-trap, where, if one gets in they can't get out."

"Is Margaret Walsingham in Key West?"

"She is."

"Then it is she who has been troubling my poor darling with this wretched story."

"In Key West, and I leave you to judge whether she makes a good sick nurse or no."

"Has she been my nurse?"

"To be sure? Nice place you've got here, sir! Everything as dainty as a lady's boudoir; and what a magnificent bunch of flowers! Think of that in March!"

"Miss Walsingham—my Perdita! The girl who risked her life for me!"

"Even so. Precious short were her visits to my bedside, for watching at yours; and between us she's had a wearing time of it, the dear, kindly girl!"

"Good Heaven—is my own darling, that Miss Walsingham?"

"Yes, and I thank Heaven to hear that from you. You love her, so it's all right."

The lawyer here dropped his jocund air, pressed the hand which had nervously clutched his, and retired to the window for a while.

A silence fell upon the pair; the rescued man was turned face downward to his pillow, with his hands clasped tightly.

Her bravery, her generosity, her devotion came up to gild her gentle worth; and he could well judge now how great had been that bravery, that generosity, that devotion.

Taking in by slow degrees, the greatness of this woman's soul, whom falsely and bitterly he had maligned; comprehending the grandeur of humility in one whose garments he in his high-handed pride felt unworthy to touch, the time had come when St. Udo Brand could pray; when he could plead that Heaven would bless him with Margaret Walsingham's love, and bestow on him her hand, as the richest gift of earth.

Presently Davenport resumed the conference by recounting all the particulars of the Castle Brand plot, and you may be sure he lost no opportunity of adding luster to his admired Miss Margaret's laurels, by unstinted praise, which brought tears, one by one, into the eyes of young Brand.

"And here's the formal relinquishing of every rood of Seven-Oak Waaste, drawn up and signed," said the lawyer, unfolding a parchment and spreading it out triumphantly on his knee; "and she has even made provision against your refusing to accept it. In that case, it is all to go, on the 28th of March (one year from the date of the will), toward building a Charitable Institution for sick seamen, (I suppose from her father having been a sea-captain), and she is going as governess into Mr. Stanhope's family here. What do you think of all this, eh?" chuckled the old gentleman, with the air of being vastly amused.

"She will do it," said St. Udo, gazing with consternation at the parchment.

"But will you allow her to do it?"

A keen pang struck to the heart of St. Udo; his merciless scorn of her came back to him as expressed only the day before; her mournful words; "She will never marry you," recurred like a death-knell to his memory.

Now he understood the cause of her gentle tears—of her clinging wistfulness, of her sweet and humble timidity; he comprehended all, and covered his eyes with a remorseful moan.

"I have ruined all, and lost her!" he thought. "Where is the noble girl?"

"Gad! I thought you'd soon be asking that! It's likely she's taking a rest, poor dear; but I'll send her to you."

"No—let her have her rest; I would never be so selfish as to disturb her, while I can wait. But, Davenport, I will be candid with you, and say that I have no hope of winning her. I have insulted her too deeply."

"Did she think of your former insults when she came here at the risk of her life to find you, and to nurse you out of the fever?"

"No, bless her—all that was forgiven!"

"And will she think of your former insults when you say, 'Margaret, I won't accept one penny

piece of the Brand property unless you be my wife?'"

"Her own words—that, in that contingency, Margaret Walsingham would never marry me—her own words."

"You believe in your Perdita's love?" cried the lawyer, throwing his last ball with triumph straight at the bull's eye.

"If noble tenderness, and devotion such as hers, is love, I do, most solemnly."

"Then she'll do as your Perdita, what she wouldn't do as your enemy, Margaret Walsingham. She'll even lower her pride to marry you, if she thinks it necessary to your happiness."

But Mr. Davenport was forced to modify his satisfaction, when, on seeking an audience with his ward, the old negress who had that morning taken Margaret's place in the colonel's sick room, brought from her chamber a note from the young lady.

"She's been and gone," said the woman; "and this is for Massa Davenport." It said to the staring lawyer:

> "Dear Mr. Davenport:—I have thought it best at once to proceed to the Stanhopes', as the situation might become filled up, and all danger of infection has passed from me by this time.
>
> "You will see that the colonel is taken excellent care of until the English steamer arrives, when I am sure he will be able to travel; and you will accompany him to Seven-Oak Waaste, and be as useful to him and as faithful as you have been to me.
>
> "I am going without bidding you good-by. Perhaps you will be a little angry; but, dear Mr. Davenport, it was far better than if I had. I have been a great bother to you from first to last, haven't I? But you will forgive me, now that our ways lie so widely apart.
>
> "Tell Colonel Brand that I wish him to forgive the deception I have practiced upon him; but that I shall never regret the four weeks in which I watched him from the brink of the grave, and that if he can accept a message from Margaret Walsingham, it is that he may always think kindly of his Perdita, and try to keep her apart from his remembrance of a presumed adventuress.
>
> "Your affectionate ward, M. W."

"Here's a pretty to do!" cried Davenport, bustling into the invalid's room with the little double sheet of note paper fluttering in his hand. "Of all queer dodges, this is the last. She's gone, sir, this morning to her situation at the Stanhopes', and here's the note that she's obliging enough to write by way of good-by to you."

St. Udo took the note and scanned each pretty character, while his cheeks became bloodless as snow. It was blistered with tears, and it seemed to breathe in every line its quiet and patient sorrow, and to have become resigned to it, as if there was no remedy.

What the colonel's emotions were, to read this little note of his Perdita's, no one may know. He sat up in bed, and looked wildly round him, while the lawyer glared, and dumbly bit his nails.

"Let us drive instantly to the Stanhopes'."

"You? Humph! You look like a man going driving!"

"I tell you I shall drive there if I should faint every mile of the way."

He sprang from the bed, and signified the sincerity of his intention by fainting on the spot.

Three days afterwards, Colonel Brand was lying quite alone on his sofa—his first day up—reading, or rather telling himself that he was reading. Every sound startled him, causing him to relinquish his book and listen with deepening eyes; and sometimes a fancied voice in the street below would send flames of excitement shooting across his pallid face.

Three days since the lawyer had left him; three days of doubt, and hope, and despair.

Had she loved him? Was that calm good-by to him from a heart indifferent? or did it hide beneath its cold exterior the smoldering passion which sometimes her eyes had seemed to express?

Dear Margaret! Generous girl!

And memory took up her virtues one by one, and fondly turned them over, while fancy told him what his life might be with such a wife as she.

And even while he mourned with fading hopes over the memory of her whom he had passionately loved as his Perdita, his chamber-door was briskly opened, and in walked Lawyer Davenport.

"Good-morning, sir! Glad to see you up! In honor of the day, eh?"

"Have you seen her?"

"Ha! first question. Nothing about how I enjoyed my trip, or stood it after my illness; only 'Have you seen her?' No thanks to you for your polite inquiries after me—I *have* seen her."

"And—what have you to tell me?"

"Come, now—what do you expect? You, who have such a poor opinion of the fair sex, shouldn't look for much from 'em."

"Little enough would I expect from any other woman under the sun, but from Margaret Walsingham, all that makes a woman pure, right in heart, grand in spirit."

"I found her at Mr. Stanhope's, ill and sorrowful——"

"My poor child!"

"Quite prostrated, and unfit for her duties—Mrs. Stanhope full of concern, the children out on the beach with their black nurse. You should have seen her, when they sent her down from her room to me."

"I wish I had."

"Her eyes couldn't have been fuller of love and pleasure if it had been you, instead of me; I never received such a beauty-glance in all my days! And her first words were twice as polite as yours, sir—they expressed her delight in seeing *me*, not inquiries about a third party. 'Oh, Mr. Davenport, I never thought of this kindness. Have you come to bid me good-by?' Not a word you see, about you, colonel; nor a thought either, I'll be bound. Ten to one if she would have brought you in at all to the conversation, if I hadn't asked her plump and plain, if she didn't mean to give the colonel his property, after all?

"'Why,' says she, flashing a glance at me, to see if I meant it, and then turning her face away, 'have I not intrusted you with it, to give over to him? What obstacle can there be?'

"'You don't do his fine character much justice in this transaction, though you always vaunted it up to Gay and me,' I said. 'If he had been a paltry money-hunter, you couldn't have served him much worse.'

"'He is satisfied, is he not?' cried she.

"Then I drew a horrible picture of your despair upon finding that she had gone, and how you fainted in trying to prepare to follow her, and—trust, me for making up a case! The last of it was her hanging on my shoulder, and crying over my broadcloth, and sobbing:

"'Take me back to him, Mr. Davenport; how could I have been so cruel as to leave him in his weakness, uncared for! Take me back again.'"

"And so——"

"Well, now, I rather enjoy the mighty interest with which you survey me! And so Mrs. Stanhope granted me an interview, in which I told her to look out for another governess, as Miss Walsingham had been sent for on very particular business, to go home to England, and Miss Margaret and I had a very nice little trip back. I have, you may be sure, spared no eloquence in keeping Miss Margaret's alarms up about you, and she is waiting below, doubtless with her heart in her mouth, to know whether you're dead or alive."

"What! Is she here? Let me go for my fair girl this——"

"Fair and softly, my young sir. I have a proposition to make, before I let you out of my power. What day of the month is this?"

"Twenty-fifth."

"And what must be done before the twenty-eighth? Eh? Don't you know? Miss Margaret must be wooed and won before the twenty-eighth. And why? Because Madam Brand's will was written on the twenty-eighth of last March, and the year in which you were to marry your co-heir passes in three days, and after that, according to the will, you can't have one inch of Seven-Oak Waaste. What does that necessitate, then? (Oh, young people, what would you do without me!) Why, you must marry her, colonel—by Heaven! you must—before the twenty-eighth! What do you think of that for a little romance?"

"Too much of Heaven's brightness—too little of earth's shadows. You see I don't deserve that she should love me."

"Humph! no. I can't say that you do. But that's nobody's business if the lady's pleased. Now, having given your memory a jog about the flight of time, I'll send her up to you."

"Let me go to her."

"Stay where you are, sir; don't stir, I beg. I don't profess to know much about woman's curious little idiosyncrasies, but I'll bet a dozen of claret, that this humdrum chamber of yours where she nursed you day after day for four weeks, is the dearest place to her of all the world, and I'll go farther and say that so long as she lives the memory of this same room, sir, will have power to send the rush of fond tears up to her eyes, be she happy or miserable. You see she found you here, and got your life from Heaven, as it were, by dint of unwearied prayer, and its hallowed to

her like a little sanctuary. Women are strange creatures, sir and I advise you, if you want to sway her heart to your wishes, to see her here."

Lying face downward and alone, with his hands clasped in grateful thanksgiving, all the wicked recklessness and the unbelief and the cynical fatalism slipped forever from St. Udo's soul, and he turned after long years to the idol of his youth—hope crowned with Heavenly faith; and in that sweet hour of supreme humility the sheath dropped from the fruit, and the noble works of Heaven's hand turned to adore its Creator.

So it came to pass that when Margaret Walsingham, standing at the doorway, too timid to approach—too womanly soft to go away, now that the man was dying for her—heard the low entreaty,

"Bless me with her love—ennoble me with her love, O Heaven!"

Her whole face became transfigured with joy, and she stood there a breathless and a lovely vision, listening to what she dared not believe before.

"Is that my darling, standing on the threshold? Come."

Folded heart to heart, her head upon its place for the first time, his arms about her in a band of love—her hour of sweet recompense has come at last, and with unutterable thrills shooting through her tremulous frame, she whispers, smiling:

"I have won my own dear lord of Castle Brand."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MARGARET'S HAPPY DESTINY.

"By gar! *mon camarade*, and do you call yourself a man, prying into Madam Fortune's good graces? Why, she has starved you, the jade, she has given you the prison fare, she has been a vampire to you, *mon* colonel. What for you wear that face of parchment when I come to preside over the hand-grip, and to bless, and to be the good fairy? Ah, bah! Your future may be very good, but your past has been execrably bad. I drop the tear of friendship to your *mal-de-grain*."

Monsieur, the chevalier, had just arrived from New York per steamer, breezy, brisk, jocund as a stage harlequin, and rushed in upon our colonel to congratulate him after having hunted up all particulars connected with him in the little town, and had the gratification of finding affairs so much better than he feared.

"Ah, Calembours, it's some time since we met. You look so flourishing that I need scarcely express a hope that you are well. Thanks for your sympathy. Don't waste it, though. I'll soon be all right, if I'm not done brown in Fortune's frying-pan. But what brings you to Key West? A consignment of tough beef?"

"*Ma foi!* you take a man up sharp, *mon ami*. I have not the affliction to see the last of the Brand spirit, gone out of you, for all the sugars and panadas of this illness. Do you suppose a consignment of anything could bring me to this *inferno* of yellow fever and negroes? Why not sooner suggest pleasure, duty, or what say you to friendship for you, *mon camarade*?"

"Pshaw! Calembours, you and I know that your capabilities of friendship could be bought at a ransom of five shillings."

"*Mon Dieu!* but you are hard on your Ludovic. Did I not squander all my little gains for to get your rights in England? Did I not give up the grand demoiselle. Marguerite, to you, when she might have been the countess, when she might have loved me? Ah, *mon* colonel, you have me to thank for all your good fortune, and yet you will not lift the eyes to thank me."

"Brag was an impudent dog; still, there's my hand, comrade, and in virtue of my present happiness, which you helped to bring about, take a hearty squeeze."

The chevalier squeezed it, and declared, with tears in his eyes, that he was the luckiest dog out of Paris in possessing such a fine *camarade*.

"You shall now hear my little plan in having ventured to this infectious place," he cried. "Your glorious mademoiselle had struck such frenzy of admiration into my soul that the instant Madame Hesslein released me from attending upon her—curse Madame Hesslein"—his visage grew pale with uncontrollable rage—"I determined to follow Mademoiselle Walsingham here, and to find if the plague had spared her, and if she was left without protection, (for I must tell you, *mon ami*, that I had no hope of seeing you alive again), to offer her my poor help and escort back to her home and friends in Surrey, and to be the friend in need to her until she turned me away.

"I come full of these glorious plans of benevolence which might well ennoble any man, and find—hey, presto! the romance has turned the other way! My colonel still lives, being conjured back to life by undiluted fidelity; the lawyer with the knotty head has argued the plague out of conceit of him, and the glorious mademoiselle is a *fiancee*; so I bury my too fond plans for mademoiselle's

welfare, and I crucify the flesh, and say to myself:

"'I will be the good fairy for these two people; will be the mason to build the steps to their summit of bliss; I will be the porter to carry them thence.'

"So I fly to you—behold me—I am here to act as manager—I glow with the eagerness of friendship."

"And in return, what do you expect?"

Calembours shrugged his shoulders and grinned.

"*Vive l'Anglais!*" he cried, "they can make a good bull's-eye can the John Bulls. You see this *bourse*? Bah! how wrinkled are its sides, how flattened under hard pressure of poverty! *Mon Dieu!* did not the jade, Madame Hesslein, take the bread out of my mouth in the amplitude of her revenge? Very well. You who offer me the hand of friendship in return for that leetle favor, and also for the other not leetle favor of sending your Marguerite to save your life, shall take her fingers in yours, kiss them, and say: "Have you forgotten the small souvenir which you promised to my friend, the chevalier?" *Ma Mignonette*, now is the time to remember it. And she will remember it—my word upon it, she will, and will also urge upon you to let her souvenir me with a leetle more of her pin-money. And with the proceeds of your joint munificence I shall float again on the ascending tide of fortune, in my tight little bark, in spite of the *grande* she devil who has ruined me."

"Ah, your funds have run low, and you are here to replenish them?"

"By gar! that is so, *mon ami*."

The two men eyed each other; St Udo with raised eyebrows and slightly scornful amusement; the ex-tailor of Szegedin with an ingratiating impudence which showed that monsieur knew his man very well.

"I have told you often that you are a greedy dog," said the colonel; "but I have no wish to see you under the feet of your favourite goddess, though I had much rather you had left your services to speak for themselves to our pockets. How much did Miss Walsingham agree to give you? Davenport, it seems to me, mentioned something of this to me."

"Only one thousand of your pounds, *cher ami*, only one thousand; she was going to insist upon doubling it, but I implored her: 'Admirable lady, press no more upon me. At that time I little dreamed the days were coming when necessity should compel me to accept."

"You shall have fifteen hundred to give you a start. I think you will manage upon that, you are such a man of resource." Said the colonel, admiringly, who had heard Davenport's grumbling account of the money arrangement with the chevalier, and remembered it very well.

Whereupon monsieur got up, flung his arms around St. Udo, gave him a French embrace, vowed he was a lord, and then coolly announced himself the *attache* of the little party, he rushed off to hunt up his quondam antagonist, Davenport, and discuss the management of affairs, with much impudent triumph, over that worthy gentleman for his former suspicions of the honor of a French chevalier.

The white moonbeams poured brilliant as diamond lights into the porch of the old church of Key West.

The spicy odor of the citron trees and of the orange groves filled each passing breath; the boom of the far-off surf against the reefs made endless sounding, like the dull roar of a conch-shell at the ear.

The robed figure of a clergyman stood in the low-browed church doorway, and his hands gently chafed each other as he gazed down the white road after a quiet cortege, which was gliding slowly toward the town.

Into the flickering shades of a branching palm-tree out to the vivid moonbeams, bright as day, quietly moving farther and farther from the man who had bound them together, for a peaceful or a turbulent life.

And the good pastor, softly chafing his hands, and thinking of the bride's soft, holy face, and of the bridegroom's beauty, which had reminded him of Antinous, grave, yet not severe, breathes a blessing upon these strangers, who this night will leave forever behind them his fairy isle.

"May their wedded life be as serene and smooth as these shades are light, and these bursts of moonlight translucent. May the sky ever be clear for them—the sea of life ever be unruffled, as yonder crystal channel, to which they are hastening."

Then he, also, leaves the glistening temple behind him, and goes his way among the down-dropping shrubs and spicy blossoms to his home among the bananas.

Standing on the deck of the steamer, which was to convey him to his long-forsaken home, with his arm around the Venus-like figure of his wife, and his eyes upon the swiftly vanishing roof of

the isle, St. Udo Brand, who had spoken but little since repeating the vows which had made his darling by his side his own, now found speech, and half playfully apostrophized the dreamlike scene before him thus:

"Farewell ye coral isles, wherein I found my Pearl and happiness. Blessed be your coraline foundations, your lazy inhabitants, and your fever-breeding climate. You have been to me a world of passion, of hope, of purity. Oh, my Lost Good, who has been sent to me in mercy"—his playful accents changed to the gravity of deep emotion, as he drew yet closer to him his "Perdita"—"I turn to you henceforth to be what you would wish me, and to study your secret of how to live. I have been wandering on the burning sands, and pressing forever onward to reach a glittering lake of the desert, which, ever rippling and vanishing, beckoned me farther from the cool, calm shades of rest. Now I come, a wearied pilgrim to your pure heart, my wife, for you have opened it to let a weary, dusty wanderer in. Your purity, my simple Margaret, reminds me of the immaculate heights of snow-capped Gaurisankar—serene, majestic, while I, a lava-crusted, thunderous, calcined volcano, lashed by the fires of many passions, come to cool my fevered blood by your chill radiance."

"Hush, St. Udo! If you knew how intensely happy I am with my destiny——"

She paused, for her glad eyes were filling fast, her fond tones faltering.

"Oh, my soft-souled Perdita! my simple darling!"

And then sweetly swooped the rush of joy to them, and they were dumb, for some one who has read the human heart says, "The most exquisite of all emotions is utter silence, with a being in whom we feel entire sympathy."

"Ah, *par ma foi!* but I am the good fairy, after all!" muttered the chevalier, hugging his fancy little self, and pacing about near them, with a protecting air, as if they were his especial *proteges*. "I feel like Guardian Angel of their fortunes. Saint Ludovic—*par la messe*, it sounds well!"

"Thank Heaven! Ethel Brand's incomprehensible will has explained itself at last!" mused Davenport, laying down his crumpled *Times*, "and it has proved itself to be the wisest will ever the Brands made. Married in spite of themselves, and as happy as love can make them in spite of a plain face, on the one side, and a reputation that the dogs wouldn't pick up once, on the other. He's a saved man, and she's a happy woman—dear, faithful Margaret. What glorious news for old Gay."

When Mrs. St. Udo Brand came home to Seven-Oak Waaste, she found a letter awaiting her, and in its many pages she found at last the true history of the man who had been the Sleuth-Hound of Castle Brand:

> Convict Ship Fearless, March —, '63.
>
> "Miss Walsingham:—As you are a remarkably clever woman, and I have always been an admirer of fair play, I will give you your dues, and own that in our little game you had the best of it, and deserved to have.
>
> "I don't bear you malice for this cursed mess which you've pushed me into, although I have you only to blame for it, for perhaps I didn't go the right way to work with you and I was a confounded fool for my pains.
>
> "Yes I've been a lover of fair play all through my dodging life, ever since I was big enough to run at my father with a knife for making my mother cry; and since in our desperate little game together you won, I think it but fair play to own it, and to show you the few trumps with which I fought against your full hand.
>
> "I'm sent back to banishment for life, and you are, I hear, a happy bride, coming home with St. Udo Brand; but if I know the practical good sense you possess, you won't toss this into the fire till you've read it all, and wasted a few good-hearted regrets on the wretch whose luck was so infernally poor.
>
> "Forty years ago, Colonel Cathcart Brand, only son of Ethel Brand, Dowager of Seven-Oak Waaste, went to Cuba, which was a military station then as now, and fell in with a splendid-looking Cuban girl called Zerlini Barelli.
>
> "Of course, the man took her in, and ruined all her worldly prospects through her love of him. In five years he was ordered back to England again, and coolly proceeded to take leave of the girl who had been more to him than many a wife is to her husband, and had nursed him through more than one, almost fatal attack, of fever. In vain she pleaded that he would take her with him, and own her boy as his legal heir. The colonel swore he couldn't, and offered her any money if she would not follow him.
>
> "She agreed to this, and when I was four years old, they parted, never to meet again.
>
> "I inherited all my mother's deep, patient ferocity, added to my father's outward appearance; and was called Brand Bareilli, at St. Kitts, where I was sent to school, I not having the remotest idea of my parentage.

"When I was ten years of age I was sent to England, probably at the colonel's instigation, and I was put into a training academy to fit me for the army.

"At twenty-one I received my commission as lieutenant in the artillery, through the influence of Colonel Brand, who from time to time took a certain care of my fortunes.

"About this time, noticing a great resemblance between the colonel and myself, a suspicion seized me that I had found my father.

"I once hinted as much to him, and was furiously ordered to hold my tongue, and to beware how I insulted my benefactor.

"From that day I lost favor with him; he treated me when we met with such cold contempt that my blood boiled; and all the while he was raising a fiend of hatred in my heart against him, he continued to pay over to me an annuity, which kept my suspicions on the alert.

"At last I wrote to my mother, who sent me the whole story, asking me whether I had ever seen the colonel's son, St. Udo Brand, who was five years younger than I.

"Colonel Brand, upon returning from Cuba to England, had married a lady of birth, whose one son had absorbed all the affection which was truly mine by priority or birth, and from the moment in which I heard of his existence, I hated him with furious hatred, and longed to visit my wrongs upon him.

"Three years after this I first saw St. Udo Brand, then just twenty. He was an ensign in the Guards, and mightily admired for his good humor and wit. He, too, was extremely like his father, which made me chary of his acquaintance for fear he would make me out what I was, and taunt me with it before my companions; so we never knew each other in the slightest.

"But a devil of envy possessed me, for I knew that this chap had no more business to be happy, rich, and respected than I had—nor so much, for I was his elder brother; and I was neither happy, nor rich, nor respected—everybody giving me the name of a sullen dog, etc., which was scarce fair play.

"So I watched my man till I saw an opening for spoiling his smiling fortunes, and then I cut in cleverly.

"I found out that St. Udo was madly in love with a young lady of fashion, and that some had it they were to be married whenever he attained his majority. I knew the girl myself, as luck would have it, and was rather fond of her, too; so, rather than let him, of all others in the world, cut me out of anything more which was mine by rights, I set myself cunningly to winning her affections.

"How often I've watched till the coast was clear of the dashing young ensign, and then got in for my visit to Genevieve Carlisle. So cleverly did I manage the thing, that not once did St. Udo contrive to meet me, although I was there every day as regularly as he himself was.

"At last I induced her to fly with me, and we went to Paris, and they lost all trace of us, for I was always good at a dodge, and had been bred to it for many a year.

"She was discontented and moping as might have been expected, after a few months; she had been used to luxury and fashion, and plenty of approving friends, and now she hadn't enough to eat or wear, nor a friend in the world; for, of course, when I was in hiding, my father couldn't send me my annuity; and as for her family, they cut her dead when she eloped with a nameless adventurer, as they were pleased to call me.

"She also took into her head to repent of her bargain, and to take a dislike to me, and I consider that this wasn't exactly fair play, seeing that she had been ready enough to fall in love with me when I was fawning about her in London.

"Well, we got on miserably enough, until her continual reproaches sent me off to hunt up some money, and I had the misfortune to be caught in a forgery, which had it succeeded, might have left me a prosperous man to-day.

"But the sharp dogs detected me, and had me convicted and booked for twelve years penal service in Tasmania, and the news killed the woman; she never held her head up after she found out what company her treachery to St. Udo Brand had brought her into.

"I can't blame myself for anything in the affair; was it my fault that I was born with a wrong to avenge? Was it my fault that my father gave me opportunity to hate him and his, by his unjust treatment of me? And was it my fault that St. Udo chose to fall in love with a girl whom I had my eye on, or that she should be false to him, and prefer me, after all her vows to him?

"As for the forgery business, if either of us were to blame, it was she, who should have stood in my chains, for her eternal harping and carping sent me oft in a fury to do anything I could for funds.

"Still, it was I that suffered, all throughout; strive as I might, my cursed ill-luck met me

at every turn, and balked me.

"As we went out in the beastly convict ship, we took on board an old sea-captain and his daughter, who were going part of the way with us.

"I used to see the little girl walking the deck, and peering down into the hatch at us poor devils, each chained like a dog to his log, and her great eyes used to brim over with tears whenever she looked up; and she would sit at the mouth of the hatch, crying for us, till we began to watch for her.

"Do you remember all that, Margaret Walsingham?

"You were the little girl, and I was that half-crazy convict who always tried to drive you away with curses, and to frighten you with beastly threats. But back you would come next day, with your solemn eyes beaming with pity, and drop an apple, or an orange, or even a little book down among us, and sit watching us for hours, like a spirit, as if our misery burdened you so that you could not rest without sharing it with us.

"Once when I took fever, and could not speak for thirst, you climbed down the ladder, and fearlessly approached me with a cup of pure, cold water.

"How eagerly I drank it you may well remember, and also how ill I repaid it by a fierce oath the instant my tongue was loosened.

"But you only flitted away with a sorrowful face, and great tears standing on your lashes; and I felt such a queer, wrenching pain about my heart whenever I thought of it afterward that I vowed I would repay you, if I ever had the chance, for that little act of kindness.

"When I had been ten years out, I and a comrade of mine, O'Grady, got home on a ticket of leave.

"We were bound to have our freedom, and not many months passed after our return before we had it. Doubling, and dodging, and slipping through their fingers like eels, at last we slipped the chain, and came out, I as a gentlemanly gambler, he as the keeper of a gambling saloon, and we soon filled our pockets.

"Then I took a trip over the Continent for the purpose of perfecting myself in my profession; and then, coming back to England, circumstances sent Calembours in my way, and we joined in partnership.

"Then came my good luck, as I thought, and drove me against St. Udo Brand once more, and I wondered night and day whether I couldn't get any of the fortune which he so confidentially expected from his grandmother.

"The colonel, my father, was dead, so was his wife, and my brother was the only one living to whom I owed a grudge for my downfall: so I soon found out a way to make him pay up old scores.

"No sooner did Calembours suggest to me that I was like enough to St. Udo to pass for him, than I thought out the whole plot which it has been the business of Margaret Walsingham to explode.

"I compliment you on your infernal cleverness, and only blame myself for giving way to the only weak sentiment I have ever felt in my life, namely, mercy toward you for the sake of your kindness to me twenty years ago. If it hadn't been for that mistaken feeling, I could have wiped you out in the beginning of the game, and not a soul been the wiser.

"But I didn't and I heartily regret it now.

"With this sincere assertion, I close, remaining yours, humbly, BRAND BAREILLI."

Before we bid our friends good-by, let us cast a farewell glance on each whose fortunes yet do hang in the balance.

Do you wish your picture taken?

Step into this magnificent establishment in Picadilly, London, whose excellencies appeal to you from placards on every wall within three miles of London Bridge.

You will enter an apartment carpeted with a web of Turkish loom, and strewn with ottomans of Oriental gorgeousness, and blazing with the splendid framings of fine paintings.

Ladies of rank and fashion throng here, gentlemen of taste and purse, artists of cynical aspect, diletantes of enthusiasm, and all the world wags its tongue about the prodigies of art to be viewed in that salon.

You will presently be conducted by a deferential man in elegant livery up two flights of marble steps into a studio, where you will meet the great French artist, Ludovic, the Chevalier de Calembours.

His bright eyes beam pleasantly, his handsome face glows with welcome, his white, shapely hand

waves you gracefully into a velvet chair.

You look at the little man in the black velvet Hungarian dolman, embellished with those glittering badges, which catch the eye so much; you mark the glossy beard and mustache, trimmed to the last degree of Parisian taste, and as retentive memory suggests to you the once wretched little tailor, toiling over his small clothes on the banks of the Theiss, you feel that you are in the presence of a great man.

And when he has, with that charming smile of *naivete* and indifference, shown you his cases of photographs, and his paintings colored and executed by ten of the first living artists in the world —all of whom are in his employ—you follow him into the crystal dome, and are photographed at eight guineas a dozen, with much the feeling you might experience were you one of those honored old women who have their feet washed once a year by the Empress of the French.

"The world likes to be gulled, then let us gull it."

In due time Madame Hesslein, of happy memory, married Vice-Admiral Oldright, who, as she had shrewdly calculated upon, soon got the post of admiral, and she was able to take precedence of all haughty ladies of her set, let them be ever so bitterly proud—she the blacksmith's daughter, a little tailor's wife.

I do not know whether she has yet quite forgotten that dying boy in the wretched shed, or those simple happy days by the river Theiss, but I hear that it is still her favorite waltz:

"Have no heart and a good digestion!"

Knowing the simple soul of my heroine; having a vague conception of the possible grandeur of my hero, feebly, but earnestly portrayed, need I assure you that happiness shed its golden light upon their future path, and that, hand clasped in hand, they paced through each small grief or joy, fanning in each other that bright and Heaven-born spark which leads us at last to Heaven?

Thus, gentle companions of these tortuous wanderings. I release you from your patient chaperonage. I think we part friends, and gratefully I press your hands, and say *au revoir*!

THE END.

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