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LITTLE GOLDEN'S DAUGHTER

by Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller



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Little Golden's Daughter

OR

The Dream of a Life Time

BY

MRS. ALEX. McVEIGH MILLER

AUTHOR OF

"Little Coquette Bonnie," "The Senator's Bride," "Brunette and
Blonde," etc.

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Little Golden's Daughter

LITTLE GOLDEN'S DAUGHTER;

OR,

The Dream of Her Life-Time.

By MRS. ALEX. McVEIGH MILLER.

CHAPTER I.

Beautiful Golden Glenalvan stood by the willow-bordered lake and looked into its azure depths with a dreamy light in her pansy-blue eyes.

She had been singing as she danced along the sunny path, but the sweet song died on the coral lips as she came to the little lake with its green fringe of willows and the white lilies sleeping on its breast.

The wind as it sighed through the trees, and the low, soft ripple of the water, always sounded sad to Golden.

It seemed to her vivid fancy that the wind and the waves were trying to tell her some sad story in a language she could not understand.

She was unconsciously saddened whenever she came to its banks and listened to the low, soft murmur.

It had a tragic story to tell her, indeed, but its language was too mysterious for her to understand. Some day she would know.

The afternoon sunshine threw the long, slanting shadows of old Glenalvan Hall far across the level greensward almost to the border of the lake.

It had once been a fine and stately mansion, picturesque and pretentious, with many peaks and gables and oriel windows. But its ancient glory had long departed.

It seemed little more than a picturesque, ivy-covered ruin now. But there still remained in one wing a few habitable apartments that were fine and large, and lofty.

Here the last of the Glenalvans—once a proud and wealthy race—dwelt in respectable, shabby-genteel poverty.

But poverty did not seem to have hurt lovely little Golden Glenalvan.

She had a wealth of beauty, and a happy heart that made her seem like a gleam of sunshine in the home she brightened. She was a careless, willful child not yet sixteen.

The plain, simple, blue gingham dress was worn quite short, yet, the beautiful, golden tresses fell to her waist in long, loose, childish ringlets. [Pg 2]

Free and careless as the birds, she roamed at will through the wild, neglected park and the green woods that lay around her ancestral home.

The dwellers in Glenalvan Hall were divided into two families. In the best and most habitable part, John Glenalvan lived with his wife and family, consisting of two daughters and a son. In a few battered rooms in the tumble-down wing, John Glenalvan's father, an old and hoary-headed man, kept house with his pretty little granddaughter, Golden, and one old black servant called Dinah.

We have digressed a little from Golden as she stands beside the lake, swinging her wide, straw hat by its blue ribbons. Let us return.

The little maiden is communing with herself. Quite unconsciously she speaks her thoughts aloud:

"Old Dinah says that Elinor and Clare will give a little party to-night in honor of their brother's wealthy friend, who is to come on a visit to him to-day. How I wish they would invite me. I should like to go."

"Should you now, really?" said a slightly sarcastic voice close to her.

She looked up, and saw her cousin, Elinor coming along the path toward her.

Elinor Glenalvan was a tall and queenly beauty of the most pronounced brunette type. She had large, black eyes that sparkled like diamonds, and glossy, black hair braided into a coronet on the top of her haughty head.

Her features were well-cut and regular, her skin a clear olive, her cheeks and lips were a rich, glowing crimson. She was twenty-one years old, and her sister Clare, who walked by her side, was nineteen.

Clare Glenalvan was a weak, vain, pretty girl, but with no such decided claim to beauty as Elinor. Her hair and eyes were not as dark as her sister's, her cheeks and lips were less rosy. She had a mincing, affected air, but was considered stylish and elegant.

Both girls were attired in the best their father could afford from his very limited income, and their little cousin's simple blue gingham looked plain indeed by contrast with their cool, polka-dotted lawns, and lace ruffles.

Elinor carried a small basket on her arm. They had come to the lake for water-lilies to decorate the rooms for the party of which they had caught Golden talking aloud.

The little girl blushed at her dilemma a moment, then she faced the occasion bravely.

"I did not know that you could hear me, Elinor," she said, lifting her beautiful, frank, blue eyes to her cousin's face, "but it is true. I should like to come to your party. You have invited grandpa's old servant to come and help with the supper, and she will go. Why do you not ask grandpa and me?"

"Grandpa is too old to come, and you are too young," replied Elinor, with a careless, flippant laugh, while Clare stared at Golden, and murmured audibly: [Pg 3]

"The bold, little thing."

Golden revolved her cousin's reply a moment in her mind.

"Well, perhaps he is too old," she said, with a little sigh, "and yet I think he might enjoy seeing the young people amusing themselves. But as for me, Elinor, I know I am not too young! Minnie Edwards is coming, I have heard, and she is a month younger than I am! The only difference is that *she* puts up her hair, and wears long dresses. I would wear long dresses, too, only I do not believe grandpa could afford it. It would take several yards more for a trail, or even to touch all around."

Clare and Elinor laughed heartlessly at the wistful calculation of the difference between short and long dresses. Then the elder sister said, abruptly:

"It is a great pity grandpa cannot keep you a little girl in short dresses forever, Golden! You will not find it very pleasant to be a woman."

"Why not?" said innocent Golden. "Are not women happy?"

"Some are," said Elinor, "but I do not think *you* will ever be."

"Why not?" asked the girl again.

The two sisters exchanged significant glances that did not escape Golden's keen eyes.

"Elinor, why do you and Clare look at each other so hatefully?" she cried out in sudden resentment and childish passion. "What is the matter? What have I done?"

"You have done nothing except to be born," said Clare Glenalvan, irritably, "and under the circumstances, *that* is the worst thing you *could have* done."

Was it only the fancy of beautiful Golden, or did the wind in the trees and grasses sigh mournfully, and the blue waves go lapsing past with a sadder tone?

"Clare, I don't know what you mean," she cried, half-angrily. "I never harmed anyone in my life! I have not hurt anyone by being born, have I?"

The sisters looked at the beautiful, half-defiant face with its rose flushed cheeks and flashing, violet eyes, and Elinor sneered rudely, while Clare answered in a sharp, complaining voice:

"Yes, you have hurt every soul that bears the name of Glenalvan—the dead Glenalvans as well as the living ones. You are a living disgrace to the proud, old name that your mother was the first to disgrace!"

Then she paused, a little frightened, for Golden had started so violently that she had almost fallen backward into the lake.

She steadied herself by catching the branch of a bending willow, and looked at her cousin with death-white lips and cheeks, and scornful eyes.

"Clare, you are a cruel, wicked girl," she cried. "I will go and tell grandpa what terrible things you have said of me! I did not believe one word!"

The tears of wounded pride were streaming down her cheeks as she sped along the path and across the green lawn up to the old hall. The sisters looked at each other, a little disconcerted.

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"Clare, you were too hasty," said Elinor, uneasily. "Grandpa will be very angry."

CHAPTER II.

Little Golden sped across the green lawn, her young heart full of pain and anger at the cruel words her cousins had spoken to her.

Flying through the long, dark corridor of the old hall, and passing through several lofty and empty old rooms, she emerged at last in the sunny bay-window where her grandfather dozed daily, surrounded by pots of fragrant roses and geraniums.

But with the breathless words of complaint just parting her coral lips, Golden saw that the old arm-chair was vacant.

She was surprised and a little dismayed; she had been so sure of finding him there.

She turned round and ran out to the sunny kitchen in the back yard, where old Dinah stood at a table ironing some simple white garments for her young mistress, and crooning to herself a fragment of a negro revival tune.

The only nurse and the best friend that Golden had ever known after her grandfather, was homely, warm-hearted, black Dinah.

Golden loved the old negress dearly. Ever since she had first lisped her name, the girl had familiarly called her "black mammy," after the fashion of most southern children with their nurses.

Now she called out quickly before she had reached the kitchen door.

"Oh, black mammy, where is grandpa?"

Black mammy turned with such a start that she dropped the flat-iron she was wielding with such consummate skill.

"Oh! honey, chile, how you skeered me," she cried, "an' I've dropped de flat-iron, and e'enamost burnt my black toes off! What for did ye come callin' me so suddent?"

"Where is grandpa?" repeated the child.

She came up to the door and looked at Dinah, and the old woman saw how pale she was, and what a strange light gleamed in the violet eyes under their long, curling lashes of golden-brown.

"Come, dearie, don't be afeard because de old man ain't a-nid-noddin' in his arm-cheer as usual. He's out a-walkin' wif his son."

"Uncle John?" asked little Golden, with a wondering look.

"Who else, honey?" said Dinah, as she vigorously rubbed a fresh iron with salt and beeswax.

"It is so strange," said Golden, momentarily diverted from her immediate grievance by Dinah's news. "Uncle John comes so seldom. What did he want, black mammy?"

"Want? De debbil, his best friend, knows better dan your poor ole black mammy," said Dinah, shaking her head. "All I know is dat he come looking black as a thunder-cloud, and ax ole massa to take a walk with him."

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"And he went?" said Golden.

"Oh! yes, he went, pore ole soul, a-hobblin' off as sweet as a lamb with that snake in the grass!"

"Oh! black mammy, grandpa would not like you to speak that way of his son," cried Golden.

"I axes your pardon, honey. I spoke my mind afore I thought," answered Dinah.

"There is no offense as far as I am concerned," replied her young mistress, readily. "There is no love lost between my uncle and me."

Then she added, with a shade of anxiety in her voice:

"Will they be long gone, do you think?"

"I hasn't the leastest idea," said busy Dinah, "but ole massa is too feeble to walk very fur."

Golden turned away silently, and went to her grandfather's nook in the bay-window to await his return. She was burning with impatience to tell him the cruel and unkind things her cousins had said to her, and to ask if they were true.

She sat down in the old arm-chair, among the blossoming flowers, herself the fairest flower of all, and leaning her dimpled cheek on her hand, relapsed into troubled thought.

The strange relations sustained by her grandfather and herself toward his son's family puzzled her as it had often done before. Living in the same house, and nearly related as they were, there was little or no intercourse between the two families and they were barely friendly.

Ever since Golden could remember, it had been so. She had questioned her grandfather and she had questioned Dinah, but they gave her no satisfaction on the subject.

It remained a pregnant mystery to the lonely child, living her thoughtless, girlish life in the ruined rooms of the western wing, and in the tangled gardens, and the wild, green wood.

A brief time of impatient waiting, then Golden heard the murmur of voices beneath the window.

She leaned her curly head out, and heard one sentence spoken in the clear, curt voice of John Glenalvan:

"You understand now, father, how important it is to us that you should keep Golden's daughter more carefully secluded?"

"The child will fret—she has been so used to an outdoor life, it will injure her health," feebly objected the old man.

"Her health is the poorest objection you could urge with me," said John Glenalvan, cruelly. "If she had died long ago it would have been the very best thing that could have happened for us all."

The father's reply was lost in the distance as they passed on. They came in at the front door, passed down the long corridor, and separated to their divided abodes.

Golden's grandfather came heavily into the quiet sitting-room, leaning on his oaken cane, and sought his favorite chair at the sunny window where the flowers bloomed and the bright-winged butterflies hovered.

He was not prepared to see Golden start up from the chair with a white face, and wild, frightened, blue eyes.

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She clutched his arms and leaned against him. He felt her frightened heart-beats plainly.

"Oh, grandpa, grandpa," she wailed, "what is the matter with everyone? What have I done that some wish me dead and others are sorry that ever I was born?"

She felt the tremulous lips of the old man pressed fondly on her drooping head, she heard a sorrowful murmur:

"Poor little Golden's daughter," then he said aloud:

"My darling, who has been saying such cruel things to you?"

"It is Clare and Elinor, and Uncle John," she sobbed. "They—the girls, I mean, now—said the worst thing I could have done was to be born; and that my mother was the first to disgrace the

name of Glenalvan. And, grandpa, I heard what Uncle John said when he passed under the window. He said if I had died long ago it must have been better for all."

Old Hugh Glenalvan's kindly blue eyes were flashing fire. He held the quivering little form against his breast with loving arms, and his outraged old heart beat fast against the girl's.

But he could not answer her. Indignant pain and grief kept him dumb.

"Grandpa, tell me what I have done to be hated by my kind," she sobbed. "Am I deformed? Am I repulsive to look at?"

"My darling, you are as perfect and as beautiful as an angel," he answered, fondly kissing the fair, innocent brow.

"Why do they hate me, then?" she wailed. "I would love them all if they would let me."

"They are cruel and heartless. If they were not, they could not help but love you, my Golden," said the old man, bitterly. Then he sat down and drew her to a seat upon his knee.

"Think no more of them, my darling," he said, brushing away the shining pearls of grief that hung trembling on her thick lashes. "They are cruel and unjust to you. Keep away from their presence and forget that the same strain of blood flows in your veins. Look upon them as aliens and strangers. Give all your love to me."

She hid her sweet face against his shoulder, her breast heaving with the sobs that she could not repress.

"I have a heart full of love," she sighed, "and it is all your own, dear grandpa. But tell me, oh, tell me of my mother! Can it be true? She did not, oh, she could not disgrace our proud old name."

"Hush, Golden, you torture me," the old man said, hoarsely. "There is a mystery surrounding you, my little one. Your history is a sad one. But you shall never know it if I can keep the blighting secret from your knowledge. Ask me no more, my darling. Dismiss it from your thoughts. You have always been happy heretofore. Be happy still. You are innocent, pure and beautiful. There is no reason why you should not have a quiet, happy life if you will keep away from those who wound you with their cruel words, and cling closely to your simple, peaceful home."

Her wild sobs had ceased. She was looking earnestly into his face, while long, low sighs quivered over her lips. [Pg 7]

"Now, listen to me, Golden," he said. "Your uncle has made a hard request of me, darling, but I have promised that it shall be done. Golden, will you trust me, and help me to keep my word?"

"Is it about me?" she said.

"Yes, dear. You know the three upper chambers which foolish people believe to be haunted, Golden?"

"Yes," she said, and he saw a slight quiver pass over the delicate lips, and her face grew pale.

"Of course you know that is all nonsense, little one," he said, reassuringly. "There are no ghosts in Glenalvan Hall. It is only foolish and superstitious people who believe that silly tale. Golden, would you be willing to remain secluded in those haunted rooms for one week, or for whatever number of days John Glenalvan's expected guest shall remain?"

The breath came a little faster over the beautiful, parted lips.

"I am almost afraid," she sighed. "Oh, grandpa, why should they wish to hide me away like a criminal? I have done nothing."

"I know that, dear. It is a heartless whim of those heartless people. They do not wish their guest to see you, or even to know of your existence. Do not mind them, pet. Perhaps they are jealous and fear that he might fall in love with you. That would never do, because they mean to marry him to Elinor and prop the fallen fortunes of the Glenalvans. You will humor their fancy, won't you, Golden?"

The pansy-blue eyes flashed with resentful fire.

"Why should I humor them?" she cried. "They are hard and cold to me. Why should I shut myself up in prison, away from the sunshine, and the flowers and the birds in those gloomy, haunted chambers for their sake?"

"It is for *my* sake, darling," he replied. "I have promised them that you will do it for me. Will you not do so, Golden?"

"I am afraid of the haunted rooms, grandpa," said the child, with a shiver.

"Not in the daylight I hope," he said.

"No, not in the daytime," she replied.

"Old Dinah could sleep in your room at night, Golden. So, you see, there could be nothing to fear. My little darling, I have loved you and cared for you all your life, and I have never asked you for a sacrifice before. Will you make this concession for my sake?"

The beautiful girl clasped her white arms round his neck, and kissed his withered cheek.

"I cannot refuse if it is for your sake, grandpa," she said. "You have been father, mother, friends and home to me all my life! I have had no one but you, grandpa, and I love you too dearly to grieve you. I will do as you wish me."

He kissed her and thanked her many times.

"You must believe that it hurts me as much as it does you, my pet," he said, "but it will not be for long—and John is so violent, I had to promise for the sake of peace. I hope you will never regret this sweet yielding to my will." [Pg 8]

"I am sure I shall not," said the child-like girl, but she gave an unconscious shudder.

His hands rested, as if in blessing, on her hair. He whispered, inaudibly:

"God bless my hapless daughter's child."

CHAPTER III.

Glenalvan Hall, like all old family mansions belonging to old and respectable families, had its reputed ghost.

It was currently reported that three rooms in the upper story were haunted by the spirit of a fair young girl who had once inhabited them, and who had pined away and died for love of a handsome man who had not known of her love nor reciprocated it.

This fair ancestress of Golden's—Erma Glenalvan, as she was called—was said to haunt the suite of rooms she had occupied in life, and credulous people believed that on moonlight nights she walked up and down, weeping and sighing, and wringing her white hands because her spirit could not retain its grave.

It was to these gloomy and dismantled rooms, haunted by the restless ghost of an unhappy girl, that little Golden was consigned for a week or more by the stern desire of John Glenalvan. It was a hard trial to the child.

She would not have consented to it but for the pleadings of her grandfather. Her love and gratitude to him made her yield an easy consent to his prayer, while she inwardly quaked with fear at the dread ordeal before her.

Old Dinah was desired by her master to transfer suitable bedding and furniture to the room Golden would occupy, and to carry her meals to that room daily and attend carefully on her young mistress. Black Dinah was furious.

"I know'd dar was deviltry afoot," she said. "I know'd it! John Glenalvan never sets his foot in ole massa's presence without some devil's broth is a-brewing!"

"Hush, Dinah," old Hugh said, sternly. "You must not speak of my son that way. Do as I bid you. No harm can come to the child. She is willing to the plan."

Dinah's loud complaints subsided into muttering and grumbling, but she did as her master had ordered.

That night when old Hugh had laid his gray head on his pillow, and old Dinah had gone into the other wing of the hall, little Golden sat down to read in the ghostly-looking chamber where Erma Glenalvan's loving heart had broken for a hopeless love.

Through the weird stillness and solitude of the haunted room, the sound of the gay dance music came to Golden's ears, softened and mellowed by the distance.

The little maiden's heart beat faster at the delicious sound, so inspiring to youthful ears. She threw down her book impatiently.

"How sweet it sounds," she said. "They are in the great dancing-hall. I should like to see them. How cruel my cousins are to me!" [Pg 9]

The sweet lips quivered, and the blue eyes darkened with anger. Golden was a spoiled, impetuous child. Her grandpa and old Dinah had always yielded to her in everything and placed no restraint on her impetuous temper.

Her little heart was swelling bitterly now, with resentment against her cruel cousins. She felt their neglect and their insults keenly, the more so because she was ignorant of any possible reason for their contumely.

"I should like to spoil their party for them," the little creature said to herself with a passionate vindictiveness, quite unusual with her. "I have a great mind to play ghost, and frighten them all out of the dancing-hall. It would not be a bit too bad for them, after their meanness to me!"

She had heard old Dinah say that Clare and Elinor were very much afraid of the beautiful phantom of Glenalvan Hall. They would not have ventured into the haunted suite alone for any amount of money.

Clare had been heard to say that the very sight of the ghost would be sufficient to strike her dead.

Beautiful Golden, who was as changeful as the summer breeze, began to laugh at the mischievous idea which had occurred to her.

"What a fine joke it would be to personate poor Erma Glenalvan," she thought. "How Clare and Elinor would fly from the festive scene when I appeared, weeping and wringing my hands."

She had heard the ghost described by Dinah, who averred that she had seen it several times.

She remembered the long, white robe, the flowing veil of golden hair, the pearl necklace, the wondrous beauty, shining, as old Dinah declared, like a star.

The beauty, the youth, the veil of golden hair she had. But the dress and the pearls. Where should she find them?

An old wardrobe which had once belonged, no doubt, to the love-lorn Erma, stood against the wall. Golden pulled the door open, not without some little fear, and looked in at the collection of moth-eaten dresses that hung on the pegs.

She could not tell whom they belonged to, for she had never looked into the wardrobe before, but she guessed that they were very old, for a cloud of dust rose from them as the door flew open, and as she touched them with her hand, some of the folds fell into rents, and showed how long they had been the prey of the moth.

But as Golden pulled one after another down from the pegs and tossed them into a rainbow heap on the floor, she came to one at last that would serve her purpose.

It was a long, white dress of rich, brocaded silk, yellowed by time, antique in style, but tolerably well-preserved.

Golden uttered a cry of delight, patting her little foot blithely to the merry measure of the dance music.

"The very thing," she cried, and then she shivered slightly. "Perhaps it belonged to poor Erma," she thought. [Pg 10]

But in a few minutes Golden's blue gingham lay on the floor, and she had slipped into the old brocade, and hooked it together. It fitted her perfectly.

The neck was low, and finished with a deep frill of fine, old, yellow lace. The sleeves were short, and the dimpled shoulders and beautifully moulded arms were exposed to the greatest advantage.

Golden then took up the comb and brush and brushed her long, yellow ringlets out of curl until they fell about her slender, graceful form like a veil of summer sunshine.

"If I only had the pearls, now, I might readily pass for the phantom," she said, looking at the reflection of herself in the glass. "How nice I look. This dress is quite becoming, I declare."

As she turned round, admiring the long, soft, trailing folds of the brocade, something rattled in what appeared to be the region of the pocket.

Golden ran her slim fingers into the pocket, and they encountered a rent between the lining and the material of the dress.

Following the rent with her fingers to the very edge of the skirt, they encountered something which she drew out and found to be a necklace of large, gleaming, milk-white pearls.

Golden uttered a cry of surprise and joy as she clasped the beautiful treasure, so strangely found, around her firm, white throat.

In the dancing-room that night they had been talking of the Glenalvan ghost. Elinor or Clare had taken a great deal of pains to let Bertram Chesleigh know how grand and wealthy the Glenalvans had been before the war, and especially they had been pleased to have him hear about the beautiful phantom of the girl, Erma, who had died of a broken heart.

Though they were afraid of her, and would not have willingly beheld her for anything, they were proud of the *prestige* of a family ghost. They considered that only distinguished families ever had such visitations.

Elinor told him the pretty legend she had heard from a superstitious old servant. She said the phantom would fly if anyone approached her, but if she could once be overtaken and kissed by a very handsome man she would rest in her grave and walk no more.

But it was confidently asserted that no one could accomplish such a feat, for the phantom flew before every pursuer as if fear lent it wings.

"If you could catch and kiss her, Mr. Chesleigh, I think the ghost would be forever laid," said Clare Glenalvan, with a simper, and affected laugh.

"Thank you, Miss Clare," said Bertram Chesleigh, with a bow, though he was inwardly disgusted. He knew that he was a very handsome man.

His mirror had told him so, but he did not admire Clare's forwardness in telling him of it so plainly. [Pg 11]

The merry dance went on. The subject of the Glenalvan ghost had passed from the minds of the dancers when suddenly the music, which had been filling the air with sweetness, came to a dead stop.

All the dancers looked toward the door where the band was stationed, for the cause of the silence.

The performers had dropped their instruments, and were staring open-mouthed at a vision in the wide, open doorway that opened from a long dark, corridor—a vision clearly outlined against the outer darkness, and plainly seen by all in the room—a girlish form in sweeping, white robes and falling, golden hair, the beautiful face, convulsed with woe and pain, the white arms extended, the small hands clasping and unclasping each other in gestures of infinite despair.

"The Glenalvan ghost!" ran from lip to lip in a murmur of awe and terror, while timid young girls clung shrieking to their partners, and the utmost confusion prevailed.

Elinor Glenalvan tried to faint in the arms of Bertram Chesleigh, but he put her hastily into a chair and said quickly:

"Miss Glenalvan, I am going to earn your everlasting gratitude. I shall kiss the beautiful Erma, and the Glenalvan ghost will be forever laid."

He sprang toward the doorway, but in that moment the beautiful phantom turned and fled precipitately before him.

CHAPTER IV.

It had not entered into little Golden's plan for the discomfiture of her scornful cousins, that anyone would have the temerity to approach her in her character of the Glenalvan ghost. On the contrary, she had confidently expected to spread fear, dismay and confusion among the festive guests, and to effect her own escape unmolested and unsuspected.

What was her surprise and dismay to see a tall, dark, handsome man start from Elinor's side, and cross the room toward her with the evident purpose of accosting her!

Beautiful Golden was filled with fear and alarm. She turned swiftly and fled down the long, dark corridor, her heart beating with dread lest she should be overtaken and identified by her pursuer.

She thought of her grandfather's grief and mortification if he should find out her girlish prank, and of her stern uncle's wrathful anger.

These swift thoughts seemed to lend wings to her light feet. She flew rather than ran down the dark hall, but her rapid heart-beats could not drown the quick and steady footsteps of her pursuer. They seemed to come nearer and gain upon her.

To gain her own rooms in the western wing Golden would be compelled to go up a wide stairway leading directly from the corridor in which she was then running.

It dawned on her mind in the whirl of thoughts that rushed over her, that it would be very unwise to return to the haunted rooms just then. She believed that she would undoubtedly be pursued and captured if she did.

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It occurred to her that her best plan would be to escape into the open air and hide herself in the belt of thick, dense shrubbery that grew below the lake.

She knew every bend and turn, and secret nook within it. Her pursuer did not. She could baffle him there.

Inspired by what seemed to her a happy thought, Golden flew past the wide staircase and gained the outer door.

She flashed down the marble steps outside, and struck breathlessly across the green lawn.

But swift and breathless as her flight had been, she had "a foe-man worthy of her steel." Bertram Chesleigh had never faltered in his swift pursuit of the supposed phantom.

If such a thing were indeed possible, he meant to capture the flying form, and kiss the face whose beauty had struck him even through its tragic expression of sorrow and despair.

He was light-footed and swift, and inspired by the novelty of the chase. He was determined to keep his word to the handsome Elinor, if possible.

He went over the marble steps at one flying bound that gained him a great advantage over Golden. As he followed her over the lawn he was so near that the frightened girl could hear his quick, panting breath, and dreaded every moment to feel his outstretched hands clutch her white shoulder.

It was a lovely night. The moon was at its full. Its white radiance touched everything with weird beauty. It shone on the leaves, the flowers, and the grass, and made the dew-drops glitter like diamonds.

Golden's white brocade shone with a silvery gleam as she fled through the moonlight, her white arms and neck gleamed like ivory through the golden mist of her streaming hair.

She had crossed the green expanse of the lawn in safety. Her light feet struck into the path by the lake. When once she had crossed that path she would be into the shrubbery. She felt sure that she might mislead the determined follower then.

But the race had been an unequal one. That flying leap over the flight of marble steps had decided the contest in the man's favor.

Scarce a minute more and the dreaded touch fell on her shoulder, two strong arms were passed

quickly around her waist, her head was drawn back against a manly breast, and to Golden's horror and consternation, she felt a pair of warm, mustached lips pressed fully and passionately upon her own.

"Lovely Erma, may your spirit rest in peace after this fond kiss of love," he cried; and Golden, trying vainly to struggle out of his clasp, lifted her eyes and saw a dark, splendid, handsome face gazing into her own, with large, black eyes that were full of eager admiration and sparkled with pleasant excitement.

"Let me go!" she cried, with her blue eyes full of angry tears, "let me go! How dared you—oh, how dared you *kiss* me?"

But the strong arms held her fast, although Bertram Chesleigh began to realize that it was not a phantom, but a real creature of flesh and blood he had kissed so warmly. [Pg 13]

He held her fast, and looked down with a smile into the girlish face that was so very beautiful even through the crimson flush of anger.

"Do not be angry," he said. "You should be glad that I have kissed you."

"Why should I be glad?" she demanded, in a sharp, imperious little voice.

The dark eyes of little Golden's captor sparkled with mirth at her indignant question.

"They told me up yonder at the hall," he replied, "that if a handsome man could catch and kiss the Glenalvan ghost its wandering spirit would be laid forever. Do you think that you can rest easy in your grave now, beautiful Erma?"

Golden wrenched herself from his clasp, but he still held her so tightly by one hand that she could not leave him. She looked at him with bright eyes in which anger and reluctant mirth were strangely blended. His quaint humor was infectious.

"Do you think yourself so very handsome, sir?" she demanded.

"A lady told me so this evening," he replied, unblushingly. "One must always take a lady's word, must not one, fair Erma?"

"I am not Erma," she replied, impetuously; "I am only Golden."

"Golden! What a beautiful name!" cried Golden's captor. "Golden—*what?*"

"Golden Glenalvan," she replied.

"That is prettier still," he said; then he looked at her more closely. "Are you any kin to Clare and Elinor?"

"Yes; we are cousins," the girl replied, frankly.

She forgot how strange it was for her to be standing there talking to this stranger from whom she had been desperately fleeing a moment ago.

But the dark, mesmeric eyes held her gaze with a luring power; the warm, soft hand that clasped her own, sent strange thrills of tingling sweetness through every nerve.

When she had looked at the dark, handsome, smiling face once she liked to look at it again. She forgot to feel afraid of him.

They were standing on the border of the lake. The moonlight made it shine like a sheet of silver; but Bertram Chesleigh had no eyes for its beauty while the fair, fresh face of that innocent girl was lifted to his.

He said to himself that in all his life he had never seen anyone half so lovely.

"And you are not a ghost, after all?" he said.

"No; I was only masquerading," she replied. "I did it to frighten my cousins and spoil their party. Do you think I have succeeded?" she inquired, with *naïve* anxiety.

He looked a little surprised.

"I do not know, I am sure," he said. "Why did you wish to spoil their pleasure?"

"Because they would not invite me to go, and said cruel things to me, besides," answered Golden, with a heaving breast. [Pg 14]

"Why would they not invite you?" he inquired, more surprised than ever.

"Elinor said I was *too young*, but I should sooner think that grandpa guessed the true reason!" she replied with innocent frankness.

"What did grandpa guess?" he inquired.

"They were afraid for Uncle John's rich guest to see me. They mean to marry him to Elinor," she replied, readily, and without a suspicion that it was the "rich guest" himself who held her small hand that moment so warmly and tightly in his own.

Bertram Chesleigh laughed long and merrily, and the little girl awoke to a sense of her imprudence.

"Oh? I should not have talked to you so," she cried. "They will be very angry. Oh, please don't tell anyone I was the ghost! Grandpa would scold me, and I could not bear that."

At that moment the murmur of voices and laughter was borne to them on the breeze from the hall

door.

"Your friends are coming to look for you," she cried. "Oh! *do* let go my hand. I must hide myself. You will not betray my secret?"

"No; I will keep it faithfully, Golden," he replied, then he kissed her small hand and released her, for he did not wish his friends to find him with her.

She darted away like a bird, and hid herself in the shrubbery. The young man lighted a cigar and turned back to meet his friends.

"Did you catch the ghost? Did you kiss her?" they asked him, eagerly.

"I was never so outwitted in my life," he replied. "Would you believe it if I should tell you that I pursued her across the lawn to the border of the lake, and that just as I might have touched her with my hand she sprang into the water and not a ripple on the surface showed where she had gone down?"

This clever and non-committal reply was accepted as a statement of facts by the credulous. The romantic story spread from one to another rapidly.

Bertram Chesleigh found himself quite a hero a few minutes after he had returned to the house. But though they praised his bravery, everyone chaffed him because he had failed to get the kiss from the beautiful phantom.

CHAPTER V.

"Father, where is Golden this morning?"

Old Hugh Glenalvan looked up with a frightened start as his son came into his presence with a stern brow and heavy footstep.

It was the morning after the Glenalvans' little party, and the old man was sitting in the sunny bay-window, thinking of his little sunbeam, as he called her lovingly in his thoughts.

Old Dinah had been in and brought him a message to say that she was very lonely and wished her grandpa to come and see her and bring her a bunch of roses. He was just thinking of doing so, when John Glenalvan came frowningly into his presence. [Pg 15]

"Father, where is Golden this morning?" he asked, sharply, and the old man trembled with fear of, he knew not what, as he replied:

"She is up in the haunted rooms where you told me to put her, John."

"Come with me. I wish to see her," he said, and the old man's face grew ashen pale as he asked:

"What is the matter? Has Golden done anything, John?"

"You will know soon enough," was the short reply; and full of apprehension the old man led the way to his granddaughter's room.

Beautiful Golden was walking up and down the dreary chamber, impatient as a captive bird. She started, and grew very pale as she caught sight of her Uncle John's stern face. She did not speak to him, but ran up to her grandfather and kissed his poor, old, wrinkled cheek.

"Good-morning, dear grandpa," she said. "I am very lonely. I miss you so much. Did black mammy tell you to bring me some roses?"

"Yes, dear, but I did not have the time," said the grandfather, with a tremulous voice, and stealing a glance at his son. For some inexplicable reason he stood in great fear of him.

"Have done with such foolish chat, girl," broke in John Glenalvan, roughly. "So you played the ghost last night, eh, miss?"

Golden gave a violent start, and clung to her grandfather. She trembled, and her sweet lips grew very pale.

"You need not deny it. Your looks betray your guilt," continued John Glenalvan, roughly.

"No, no, my Golden would not have done such a thing," cried her grandfather, warmly. "Who says that she did?"

Golden looked anxiously into her uncle's face as that question left the old man's lips. Her heart fell at the thought that the handsome man who had kissed her by the lake, had betrayed her to her merciless uncle.

But his next word relieved her from the dread.

"I say so myself," he replied. "I saw and recognized her myself, as did Clare and Elinor also. She came and stood in the hall doorway where they were dancing, tricked out like the ghost of Erma Glenalvan. Deny it if you dare, miss!"

The girl's quick temper flamed up at his harsh manner.

"I do not wish to deny it," she cried defiantly. "I did it, and I frightened all your fine company, too! I am very glad of it."

John Glenalvan sprang toward her with upraised hand as though he would strike her, but she stepped quickly out of his reach, and he said, with sullen rage:

"You hear the little Jezebel, father. Take care, take care that I do not put my long-pending threat into execution."

"John, she is but a playful child," he pleaded, pitifully. "She meant no harm, I am sure. Oh, Golden, my darling! why did you do it?"

"To spite the girls, grandpa, for their cruelty to me," she replied, "but I am very sorry now, since it has grieved you so. Believe me, grandpa, I did not think you would ever hear of it. Can you forgive me?" she pleaded, wistfully.

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"You must ask your uncle's forgiveness, not mine, my dear," was the tremulous reply.

"I will not ask his pardon," she replied, stoutly, her blue eyes flashing, and the color flaming into her cheeks, "I am sorry to have displeased you, grandpa, dear, but I do not in the least care for anyone else whether they are offended or not."

"Where did you get the fine toggery you wore last night?" demanded John Glenalvan, his fingers tingling with the impulse to slap the fair, defiant face.

"That is no concern of yours," she replied, resentfully.

"Tell me, dear," whispered old Hugh, intent on preserving a semblance of peace if it were possible.

Golden threw open the door of the wardrobe and showed him the brocade, which looked very yellow and old in the clear light of day.

"She had a necklace of pearls around her neck," said John, in an artful aside to his father.

"Did you, Golden?" asked her grandfather.

Golden went to the little toilet-table and took up the costly necklace which John Glenalvan instantly snatched from her hand and placed in his pocket.

Golden looked at him, tearful, dismayed, and excessively angry.

"Give them back to me," she cried. "They are mine! I found them—indeed I did, grandpa. They had fallen through a hole in the pocket of the dress into the skirt lining. They are mine, and you shall give them back to me, Uncle John."

"I will show you whether I will or not," he replied. "The necklace belongs to me. Everything in the house belongs to me, as well as the estate itself. You only have a home on sufferance here. Take care that you do not lose that."

"Is it true, grandpa?" asked Golden, and the old man nodded sadly.

John Glenalvan took down the white brocade, and carried it away in a compact bundle under his arm.

"I shall take this away," he said, "to make sure that you do not play any more disgraceful tricks upon us. I depend upon you, father, to see that she keeps to this room, and behaves herself for the remainder of the week. If she does not, I emphatically assure you that you both will suffer through her willfulness and disobedience!"

"I will promise for her," said the old man, putting his hand over Golden's pouting and rebellious mouth. "She will not be naughty any more!"

"See that she keeps the promise," his son replied, sternly, as he turned away.

He went to Elinor's *boudoir* where he found his two daughters quarreling over Bertram Chesleigh.

"I tell you he admires me the most," exclaimed the elder girl, angrily, just as her father threw the necklace and the brocade into her lap, and said, triumphantly:

[Pg 17]

"Here is the finery the ghost wore, my dears. Divide it between you."

The brocade was thrown down in disgust, but a pitched battle ensued over the pearl necklace.

"I am the elder, and I am determined to have it," cried Elinor, resolutely.

"I shall have it myself, if I perish in the effort," retorted Clare.

A wordy war ensued, from which John Glenalvan, to whom it was nothing new, retreated in disgust.

The contest was ended at last by the handsome Elinor's boxing the ears of her sister, and taking possession of the spoil on the barbarous principle of "might is right."

CHAPTER VI.

"Did I dream the whole thing?" said Bertram Chesleigh to himself, "or was it, indeed, only a ghost that I kissed on the border of the lake? Do ghosts have warm, living flesh and blood, and balmy lips, and blushes that come and go, and delicious little tempers, and the power to thrill one's

nerves with quivering darts of fire? Have I lost my heart to a phantom?"

He might well ask himself these questions. A day and night had gone since the Glenalvans had their little party, and so far he had been unable to learn anything at all concerning the beautiful girl whom all but himself believed to have been the ghost of the dead Erma Glenalvan.

As he had promised to keep little Golden's secret inviolate, he could of course make no opening inquiries, but his little, careless, artful speeches, and innocent inquiries all failed of effect.

He could learn nothing of the maid whose beauty and grace had literally carried his heart by storm. It seemed quite plain that she did not live in the house.

It was equally certain that she did not reside in the neighborhood, for his friend, young Fred Glenalvan, had often assured him that his father's family were the only living descendants of the once numerous race.

Mr. Chesleigh asked himself if there was indeed a mystery, or if he had been fooled by an elfish spirit from the world of shadows.

His heart and his reason answered in the negative. It was a human being, warm, breathing, living, whom he had clasped and kissed that night. His veins tingled with electric fire at the remembrance.

Alone in his room the second night after his rencontre with the ghost, Bertram Chesleigh walked up and down restlessly, half mad with himself that he should dwell so persistently on that one thought, yet finding it so dangerously sweet he would not willingly have forgotten it. It seemed to him that he had never really lived till now, when this romantic passion for the beautiful unknown fired his heart.

Elinor and Clare had been very much frightened at the appearance of the family ghost. They talked about it in low, awe-struck whispers. [Pg 18]

When Bertram Chesleigh expressed a desire to visit the haunted suite of rooms they expressed themselves as horrified, and declared that the rooms of the hapless Erma had been walled up long years before, and that all the rooms of the western wing were in such a ruinous condition that it was exceedingly dangerous to venture there at all.

They declared that their father had engaged workmen to pull down the western wing on account of its precarious condition.

But singularly enough Bertram Chesleigh's thoughts were running on the haunted rooms almost continuously to-night. Everything connected with the Glenalvan ghost had a deep interest for him.

Some impulse impelled him to visit the western wing.

He knew that the wide hall on which his room door opened had a corridor leading from it into the ruined western wing of the hall.

Some impulse stronger than his will, some "spirit in his feet," tempted him forth under cover of the silence and the night to explore the dangerous region in the vague hope of finding some trace of the mysterious ghost of last night.

To have met her again he would have dared even more threatening dangers than the settling timbers and falling roof which Fred, and Clare and Elinor were unanimous in declaring menaced everyone who entered the decaying portion of the hall.

Softly shod in his velvet slippers, he opened the door and peered out into the long hall.

It was lighted by long windows at either end, through which the moonlight poured a flood of white radiance. Putting a convenient box of matches into the pocket of his dressing-gown, he sallied boldly forth.

Whether ghost or human, he longed to encounter the beautiful girl he loved again.

He entered the long corridor and walked along softly, guided by the moonlight that entered through the windows and lay in fantastic shadows upon the floor.

He found that the building was in a ruinous condition indeed. The rooms into which he looked were dismantled and bare, the papering hung in ragged, fantastic strips from the walls; huge rats scampered over the floor, frightened night-birds flapped against the windows with wild, unearthly noises. Surely, the place was well-fitted to be the abode of ghosts and shadows, it was so weird and uncanny.

But Bertram Chesleigh held on his way undauntedly. It seemed to him that he had explored every room on that upper floor, when suddenly he discovered a little passage down which he turned and found himself in front of a closed door.

The majority of the doors had stood open, swinging carelessly on their hinges.

The midnight explorer did not know why his heart beat so strangely when he stood before this closed one.

He turned the handle noiselessly, and entered, carefully closing the door behind him. [Pg 19]

In the large and lofty apartment, where he now found himself, a dim and shaded night-lamp was burning, thick, dark curtains shaded the windows, a large rug covered the center of the floor, a low, white cottage-bed stood in the furthest corner, draped in neat and spotless white.

Then the midnight explorer started, and with difficulty repressed the cry that rose to his lips.

For the soft, white counterpane thrown over the bed, outlined the curves of an exquisite, girlish form.

On the white, ruffled pillow nestled a sleeping face as lovely as a budding rose.

The round, white arms were thrown carelessly up above her head, the wealth of curling, golden hair, strayed in rich confusion over the pillow; the golden-brown lashes lay softly on the rosy, dimpled cheeks; the lips were smiling as if some happy dream stirred the white breast that rose and fell so softly over the innocent heart.

"Ghost or human?" Bertram Chesleigh asked himself, as he gazed in astonishment and ecstasy at the beautiful, unconscious sleeper.

He came nearer with noiseless footsteps and bated breath to the bedside. He bent so near that he could hear the soft, sweet breath that fluttered over the parted lips.

"It is she," he said to himself, with mingled rapture and amaze.

Then, in the next breath, he murmured:

"I must beat a quiet retreat. How frightened and angry she would be, were she to awake and find me here!"

He was one of the purest and most honorable minded men in the world.

He turned to go, but could not tear his fascinated eyes from that beautiful, child-like, sleeping face.

His splendid black eyes lingered on its innocent beauty in passionate admiration.

"If I might only touch that little hand that lies so near me on the pillow, it would cool the thirst of my heart," he said wistfully to himself, while his heart beat fast with joy that he had found her again, this lovely creature of whom he had dreamed night and day for twenty-four hours.

He looked at the sweetly-smiling, parted lips, and his pulses thrilled at the remembrance of the tender caress he had pressed upon them such a short while before.

Carried away by the force of as pure and mad a passion as ever thrilled the heart of man, the enraptured lover bent his head and pressed a kiss as soft and light as the fall of a rose-leaf on the white hand that lay so temptingly near him.

He meant to go then, but as he lifted his head, blushing with shame at the temptation that had prompted him to that wrongful and stolen caress, a sharp indignant voice fell on his ears with the suddenness of a thunder-clap.

"Oh, you black-hearted wilyun—you wicked betrayer of innercence! Get out o' this afore I kill you with my own hands, you han'some debbil!" [Pg 20]

Bertram Chesleigh turned and saw a ludicrous, yet startling sight framed in the open doorway of an inner chamber which in his agitation, he had not noticed before.

Old Black Dinah, who was the color of ebony and very tall and lean, stood before him, clad in a short night-gown of gay, striped cotton from which her slim legs and arms stuck out like bean-poles.

Her stubbly, gray wool seemed to stand erect on her head with horror, and her brandished arms, snapping black eyes, and furious face, made up a startling picture of wrath and horror, strangely combined with the ludicrous.

"You black-hearted wilyun!" old Dinah repeated, advancing angrily upon her dismayed foe, "get out o' de room o' my innercent lamb afore she wakes and finds you here, you wolf!"

"I beg your pardon—I stumbled into this room by the merest accident," Chesleigh was beginning to say, when, startled by Dinah's loud and angry tones, little Golden awoke, and flashed the light of her wide blue eyes upon their excited faces.

She uttered a cry of fear and terror when she saw the tall, manly form standing in the room.

Old Dinah ran to her instantly, and she hid her frightened face on the shoulder of the old black woman.

"Black mammy, what does all this mean?" cried the girl, nervously.

Dinah gave a prolonged and lugubrious groan, and rolled up the whites of her eyes in reply. The intruder saw that it was imperative that he should stay long enough to explain matters to the alarmed girl.

He said to himself that no one had ever been placed in such a strange and embarrassing position before.

Every instinct of delicacy and respect for the young girl prompted him to retire at once; yet he could not bear to go and leave a wrong impression on the mind of the beautiful girl whom he admired so much.

He retreated to the door, and, standing there, said, anxiously and respectfully:

"I entreat you to believe, Miss Glenalvan, that I entered here with no wrongful motive. Led by a fit of curiosity, I was exploring the ruined wing of the hall, and I entered without a dream of finding it occupied by any living being. I had been led to believe that these rooms were totally

unoccupied, and were even unsafe to enter. Will you accept my apology?"

Little Golden's head was still hidden against Dinah's shoulder, and the old woman broke out sharply and quickly:

"Honey, chile, don't you go for to 'cept dat wilyun's 'pology! Ef he done really cum in dis room by accident, he would agone out ag'in when he found dat a young lady occupied de room. But no; de first sight my ole brack eyes saw when I jumped off my pallet and come to de door was dat strange man a-kissin' you, my precious lamb."

Golden began to sob, and Mr. Chesleigh mentally anathematized the old woman's long tongue that had thus betrayed the secret he had intended to keep so carefully. [Pg 21]

His face grew scarlet as he hastened to say:

"I kissed your hand, Miss Glenalvan, and I entreat your pardon for yielding to that overmastering temptation. Can you forgive me?"

But Golden was still weeping bitterly, and old Dinah, in her fear and indignation for her darling, pointed quickly to the door.

"Go," she said. "Don't you see how you frighten the chile by staying?"

There seemed nothing to be gained by staying. The old woman was utterly unreasonable, and Golden was so agitated she could not speak.

The embarrassed intruder silently withdrew to his own apartment, where he spent the night brooding over the strange discovery he had made and the unpleasant position in which he had placed himself.

CHAPTER VII.

"Honey, chile, where did you git 'quainted wid dat ondecient man?" inquired old Dinah of her nursling, as soon as Mr. Chesleigh had quitted the room.

"What makes you think I am acquainted with him, mammy?" inquired the child in surprise.

Dinah shook her woolly head sagely.

"Don't try to deceabe your ole brack mammy, my lamb," she said. "He called you Missie Glenalvan—do you think I didn't notice that?"

Golden's pretty cheeks grew scarlet with blushes.

"I shall have to 'form your grandpa of what he done, the impident wilyun!" continued Dinah, emphatically.

"Oh, black mammy, please don't tell," cried the girl impulsively. "You heard what he said—it was a mere accident, I am quite, quite sure he meant no harm."

"Ole massa shall be de jedge o' dat," replied Dinah decidedly. "I'll miss my guess if de ole man don't put a pistol-hole frew my fine, han'some gentleman!"

"Oh, black mammy! then you shall not tell," cried Golden in terror. "Indeed, indeed, he is not the wicked man you believe him. He has kept my secret for me, and I must keep his now. That would only be fair."

"Ah, den you *do* know him," cried Dinah, horrified. "Tell me all about it dis minute, if you know what's best for you, chile."

Golden did not resent the old nurse's tone of authority. She knew the old woman's love for her too well. She dried her eyes and reluctantly related her escapade two nights before.

"He kept my secret," she concluded, "and it would not be fair for us to make trouble for him, would it, black mammy?"

Old Dinah had slipped down to the floor, and sat with her long, black arms clasped around her knees, looking up into her nursling's eager, fearful face, with a good deal of trouble in her keen, black eyes. [Pg 22]

The old woman was shrewd and intelligent in her way. She foresaw trouble, and perhaps the bitterest sorrow from these two meetings between the handsome guest of John Glenalvan and the young mistress.

"Black mammy, promise me you will not tell grandpa," Golden pleaded. "I will do anything you ask me if only you will not tell him."

Thereupon Dinah announced her ultimatum.

"If you will promise me never to speak to the strange gentleman again, little missie, I will not tell ole massa."

Golden opened wide her blue eyes. She looked very lovely as she leaned back among the snowy, ruffled pillows, her golden hair straying loosely about her shoulders, her cheeks tinted with a deep, warm blush, her little hands nervously clasping and unclasping each other.

"Black mammy, I think you are very cross to-night," she pouted. "Why should I never speak to the

handsome gentleman again?"

"Because it's best for you. Ole brack mammy knows better dan you, chile."

"But I liked him so much," said Golden, blushing rosy red.

"You had no business to like him," responded Dinah. "He's to marry Miss Elinor."

"I do not believe it," said Golden, quickly.

"He's not for you, anyway," retorted Dinah. "You'll nebber marry no one, my dear."

"Why not?" asked the child. "Will nobody ever love me?"

"Nobody'll ever love ye like your grandpa, honey, and 'taint likely dat ever he will give ye away to anyone."

Golden was silent a moment. She seemed to be thinking intently. After a moment she said gravely and sadly:

"Grandpa is old, and I am young. Who will take care of me when he is gone?"

"Your old brack mammy, I guess, honey."

"You are old, too," said Golden. "You may not live as long as I do."

"Bless the chile's heart, how she *do* talk," said the old negress. "Ah, my precious lamb, I has outlived dem as was younger and fairer dan ole black Dinah."

The old black face looked very sad for a moment, then Dinah continued:

"Little missie, it's my clair duty to tell old massa de sarcumstances of the case to-morrow morning. Leastwise, unless you promise me nebber to speak to dat man ag'in."

"That is very hard," sighed Golden.

"Hard," said Dinah. "I should think you would be so mad at the wilyun, a-comin' in and kissin' you so unceremonious, dat you would nebber want to speak to him any more."

Golden hid her face in the pillows, and a deep sigh fluttered over her lips.

"Come, dearie, won't you promise?" said Dinah. "I knows what's for your good better dan you does yourself, chile." [Pg 23]

"Must I promise it, indeed?" sighed the innocent child, lifting her flushed face from the pillow a moment to fix her big, blue, imploring eyes on the old woman's obdurate face.

"Yes, you must sartainly promise it," was the uncompromising reply.

There was silence for a moment, and Dinah saw the tears come into the sweet, blue eyes.

"Honey, chile, does you promise me?" she inquired, only confirmed in the opinion by this demonstration.

"Yes, I promise not to speak to him unless you give me leave, black mammy," replied Golden, with quivering lips.

"That's right, darling. Mammy can depend on your word. Lie down, and go to sleep, honey, and I'll fetch my pallet in yere, and sleep on de flo' by your bedside, so that no one kin 'trude on you ag'in."

The girl laid her fair head silently on the pillow, and Dinah threw down a quilt on the floor and rolled herself in it. She was soon snoring profoundly.

Not so with beautiful Golden. It was quite impossible for her to sleep again. She shut her eyelids resolutely, but the busy, beautiful brain was too active to admit of her losing consciousness again. She lay thinking of the splendid, dark-eyed stranger.

"He has kissed me twice," she whispered to her heart, "and yet I do not even know his name. I wonder if I shall ever see him again. I hope I shall."

As she remembered how earnestly he had apologized for his presence in her room, she could not believe him the wicked villain old Dinah had so loudly represented him.

"He is handsome, and I believe that he is good," the girl said to herself, "and they tell me Elinor wants to marry him; I would like to marry him myself, just to spite my cousins."

Poor little Golden! Her spite against her cousins was almost as old as her years. They had always hated her, and Golden had been quick to find it out and resent it.

She had a quick and fiery temper, but it did not take her long to repent of her little fits of passion.

She was a bright, winsome, lovable child. It was a wonder that anyone could hate her for her beautiful, innocent life.

Yet there were those who did, and it was beginning to dawn vaguely on the mind of the girl that it was so. She knew that her life was passed differently from that of the other girls of her age and class.

There were no teachers, no companions, no pleasures for her, and no promise of any change in the future.

She wondered a little why it was so, but she never complained to her grandfather. It was, perhaps, only his way, she said to herself, little dreaming of the dark mystery that lay like a deep,

impassible gulf between her and the dwellers in the outside world of which she knew so very, very little.

CHAPTER VIII.

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A week elapsed, and there seemed but little prospect of the little prisoner's release from the haunted chambers of the ruined wing.

The Glenalvans' guest lingered on, fascinated, it appeared, by the attractions of the beautiful Elinor. At least Elinor stoutly maintained this fact in the privacy of the family circle, while Clare as obstinately persisted that Mr. Chesleigh was perfectly impartial in his attentions to both.

But however doubtful was Elinor's impression, the fact remained that he was pleased with his visit.

He consented by their urgent invitation to prolong his stay another week. The girls were jubilant over his decision.

Meanwhile, old Dinah watched her secluded nursling with unremitting vigilance. She could not remain with her all day, because her housekeeping duties took her constantly into the lower part of the house, but she visited her intermittently, and at night rolled herself in a thick counterpane and slept on the floor by the side of Golden's couch.

She took the added precaution to turn the rusty key in the lock at night.

Old Dinah had never heard the familiar adage that "love laughs at locksmiths."

She was ordinarily a very sound and healthy sleeper. The mere accident of a rheumatic attack, and consequent sleeplessness, had caused her appearance the night Mr. Chesleigh had entered the room.

Usually she might have been lifted, counterpane and all, and carried away bodily without being aware of it.

Nearly two weeks after the night of her rencontre with Mr. Chesleigh, old Dinah awoke suddenly "in the dead waste and middle of the night," seized in the relentless grip of her old enemy, the rheumatism.

She rolled herself out of her quilt and sat upright, groaning dolorously, and rubbing her knees in which the pain had settled.

"Oh, Lordy! oh, Lordy!" she groaned, "how my ole bones does ache! Miss Golden! Miss Golden! my precious lam', wake up, and bid your ole brack mammy a las' far'well. I'm a-dyin', sartin, shuah!"

But Golden, usually a very light sleeper, made no reply. Dinah reared her woolly head upward and looked into the bed.

The bed was *empty*.

Then Dinah looked around her in amazement to see if Golden was not in the room, laughing at her lugubrious groans as she had often done before. But she saw no trace of her young mistress.

"Miss Golden! Miss Golden!" she called, "is you in de udder room? Ef you is, come in here! I'se berry sick, honey, almos' a-dyin'."

But her repeated calls elicited no reply. It appeared that pretty Golden was out of sight and hearing.

Suddenly old Dinah saw the dainty, white, ruffled night-dress, in which Golden had retired that night, lying in a snowy heap upon the floor. [Pg 25]

Dinah seized upon the garment and shook it vigorously, as if she expected to see the slight form of her young mistress drop from its folds to the floor.

"Um—me-e-e," she groaned, "has de sperets carried de chile off?"

She glanced up at the row of pegs where she had hung Golden's few articles of apparel. Her best dress—a dark-blue cashmere—was gone, also her hat and a summer jacket.

"She hab runned away from us," old Dinah exclaimed, with almost a howl of despair.

The thought inspired her with such grief and terror that she forgot her ailment entirely. She hobbled out from the room and made her way down stairs to her master's apartment and burst into his presence—a ludicrous object indeed in her striped cotton bed-gown.

Old Hugh Glenalvan, late as it was, had not retired to bed. Wrapped in an old wadded dressing-gown he sat in an easy-chair before an old, carved oaken cabinet.

One quaint little drawer was open, and the white-haired old man was poring over some simple treasures he had taken from it—simple treasures, yet dearer to his heart than gold or precious stones—a few old photographs, an old-fashioned ambrotype in an ebony case, a thin, gold ring and some locks of hair.

Upon this sad and touching picture of memory and tenderness old Dinah's grotesque figure broke startingly.

"Ole massa! ole massa!" she cried, wildly, "has you seen little missie? Is she here with you?"

The old man swept his treasures off his knees into the quaint cabinet and looked at his old servant in amazement.

"Dinah, what does this startling intrusion mean?" he inquired, pushing his spectacles off his brow and regarding her with a mild frown.

"Little Golden is missing. She hab runned away from us, ole massa!" shouted Dinah, desperately.

"Dinah, you must be crazy," repeated Mr. Glenalvan, blankly.

"It's de Lard's truth, ole massa. She hab done followed in her mudder's footsteps! Dat han'some man ober at John Glenalvan's has been and gone and 'ticed our Golden from us," wailed the old negress, in despair.

CHAPTER IX.

It was not long before Mr. Glenalvan had heard the whole of Golden's simple love-story from his servant. They were filled with horror and grief at its too probable termination.

"Dinah, it may be that she has stolen out into the grounds for a walk in the fresh air. She was growing very restless with the close, indoor confinement. Have you thought of that?" he said, hoping feebly against hope.

"Shall I go out and look for her, den, ole massa?" said Dinah, in a tone that plainly betrayed her hopelessness.

"Let us both go," said old Hugh.

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They sallied forth anxiously into the brilliant moonlight that lay in silvery brightness all over the sweet, southern landscape—old Hugh, bareheaded, in his tattered dressing-gown, old Dinah in her short night-dress, too ridiculous a figure for anyone to contemplate without inward mirth.

It so happened that Elinor, whom the hard exigencies of poverty compelled to be her own dressmaker, had sat up late that night to complete some alterations in a dress in which she had intended to array her fair self for the morrow.

Having stitched on the last bit of lace, she went to the window and leaned out to cool her heated brow.

"My head aches, and I am almost melted with sewing by that hot lamp," she said to herself, fretfully. "How I hate this poverty that grinds one down so! When once I am married to Bertram Chesleigh I will never touch a needle again! I will order all my dresses of Worth, of Paris. And I *will* marry Bertram Chesleigh! I swear it; and woe be to anyone that tries to prevent me!"

Her dark eyes flashed luridly a moment, and her white hand was angrily clenched.

She was thinking of Clare, who had persisted in rivaling her with Mr. Chesleigh.

At that moment the subdued murmur of voices floated up to her window from the lawn.

She glanced down quickly, and saw old Dinah and her master crossing the lawn, their grotesque shadows flying long and dark before them in the brilliant moonlight.

Quick as thought Elinor was out of her seat, and gliding softly through the door in quest of her father.

Before old Glenalvan and his servant had crossed the lawn, two dark figures stole forth from the hall and silently followed them.

On the green border of the silver lake two figures were standing in the beautiful moonlight. One was a man, tall, dark, splendid, with a princely beauty.

His arm was thrown protectingly about a slender form that clung lovingly to his side.

It was Golden Glenalvan, dressed in a dark suit and light cloth jacket, a neat, little walking-hat, set jauntily on her streaming, golden curls.

Her blue eyes were lifted tenderly, and yet anxiously to her lover's face.

"Oh, Bert," she said, giving him the tender name by which he had taught her to call him, "you must indeed let me go now. We have been saying good-bye at least a half an hour."

"Parting is such a sweet pain," said the lover, bending to kiss the tempting, up-turned lips. "Give me just one more minute, my darling."

"But I have been out so long," she objected, faintly. "What if black mammy should awake and find me gone?"

"There is not the slightest danger," said Bertram Chesleigh carelessly. "The old woman sleeps so soundly that a thunder-clap would scarcely wake her."

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But just at that moment of his fancied security, old Dinah, in Golden's deserted chamber, was

vigorously shaking her empty night-dress in a dazed attempt to evolve from its snowy folds the strangely missing girl.

Golden smiled, then sighed faintly. He kissed her lips before the sigh had fairly breathed over them.

"If you must indeed go, my darling," he said to her in a low voice, freighted with passionate tenderness, "tell me once again, my little Golden, how dearly you love me."

"Love you," echoed the beautiful girl, and there was a Heaven of tenderness in the starry blue eyes she raised to his face. "Oh, my dearest, if I talked to you until the beautiful sun rose tomorrow, I could not put my love into words. It is deep in my heart, and nothing but death can ever tear it thence."

She threw her arms around his neck, and their lips met in a long, passionate kiss. There was a silence broken only by the soft sigh of the rippling waves, while they stood

"tranced in long embraces,
Mixed with kisses, sweeter, sweeter
Than anything on earth."

On that hush of exquisite silence that brooded round them, broke hastening footsteps and angry voices.

The lovers started back from each other in dismay to find themselves surrounded by an astonished group.

Old Dinah formed a central and conspicuous figure, beyond which old Hugh Glenalvan's silvery locks fluttered forlornly in the breeze.

John Glenalvan and Elinor, his daughter, brought up the rear. Perhaps the old gentleman and his servant were as much astonished at seeing these followers as they were at the sight that met their eyes.

Old Dinah recovered her self-possession first of all, perhaps because she had vaguely suspected some such eclairsissement from the facts already in her possession.

She rushed forward and caught her disobedient nursling by the hand.

"Oh, my darlin', my honey, chile," she cried. "Come away from dat black-hearted wilyun to your grandpa and your ole brack mammy."

But to the consternation of everybody, the girl shook Dinah's hand off, and clung persistently to her lover.

He drew his arm protectingly around the slight figure, and Golden cried out with pretty, childish defiance:

"He loves me! he loves me! and I will not leave him."

That sight and those words fairly maddened Elinor Glenalvan. The blood seemed to boil in her veins.

"Loves you—ha! ha! loves you, the child of sin and shame!" she cried out, in a hoarse voice of bitter scorn and passion. "Oh, yes, he loves you. That is why he has lured you to your ruin, as a stranger did your mother before you." [Pg 28]

"Hush, Elinor," said John Glenalvan, in his sternest tone; then he looked at his father, who had crept to Golden's side, and stood there trembling and speechless. "Father," he said, harshly, "take the girl away. I must speak with Mr. Chesleigh alone."

"I will not go," said Golden, and she looked up into her lover's face with a strange, wistful pleading in her soft, blue eyes, and in her sweet, coaxing lips.

He bent down and whispered something that made her leave his side and put her small hand gently into her grandfather's.

"Grandpa, I will go home with you now," she said to him, tremulously, and he led her away, followed by Dinah, who glared angrily behind her, and muttered opprobrious invectives as she went.

If looks could have killed, Bertram Chesleigh would never have lived to figure any further in the pages of my romance.

CHAPTER X.

Bertram Chesleigh was left alone by the lake, with the angry eyes of John Glenalvan glaring upon him, while Elinor, speechless with rage, stood a little apart and watched him.

"Mr. Chesleigh, may I ask the meaning of this singular scene?" inquired his host, stiffly.

Bertram Chesleigh, standing with folded arms in dignified silence, opened his lips and said, briefly:

"It means, Mr. Glenalvan, that I have made the acquaintance of your niece and fallen in love with

her."

A threatening flash came into Elinor's eyes in the moonlight. She bit her lips fiercely to keep back the words that rose to them.

"I am sorry to hear that," said John Glenalvan, in a subdued voice. Inwardly he was raging with anger, but he allowed no trace of it to escape him. "Will you tell me where and how you became acquainted with that child?"

"I must decline to do so," said the young man, firmly.

John Glenalvan looked around at his daughter.

"Elinor, return to the house," he said. "I will join you there presently."

Elinor walked away, but she did not return to the hall as her father had commanded. Instead, she hid herself behind a clump of willows, where she could hear every word that passed between the two men.

Some excited words ensued. Bertram Chesleigh was cool and calm. He denied that John Glenalvan had any right to call him to account for what he carelessly termed his innocent flirtation with little Golden.

"From what I can hear," he said, "you have treated the girl both cruelly and wrongfully. I stand ready to answer to Golden's grandfather for any wrong he may consider I have done, but I shall make no apology to you, Mr. Glenalvan."

"Why, not?" said the man, with repressed passion. "The girl is my niece!"

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"Yet you have wickedly secluded her from all society, and even debarred her of her freedom," said Bertram Chesleigh, indignantly. "It is your fault alone that she has been driven to seek the natural delights of youth in a clandestine manner."

"It is not my fault, but her mother's," said John Glenalvan, significantly.

His face grew pale as he spoke; his eyes strayed furtively to the quiet lake, lying silvery and serene in the clear moonlight.

"How? I do not understand you," said the other, haughtily.

John Glenalvan hesitated a moment. When he spoke it was with an affectation of deep feeling and manly sorrow.

"Mr. Chesleigh," he said, "your unhesitating charge against me of cruelty to my niece forces me to the disclosure of a most painful family secret—one that I would fain have guarded from your knowledge. There is a strong reason for my course toward Golden Glenalvan."

He paused, and the listener said, hoarsely:

"A reason——" then paused, because his voice had broken utterly.

"Yes, a reason," was the bitter reply. "Mr. Chesleigh, little Golden is the child of my own and only sister, but—how shall I tell you—she has no right and no place in the world. She is a *nameless child!*"

The solid earth seemed to reel beneath Mr. Chesleigh's feet. He staggered back dizzily, and threw up his hands as if the man had struck him.

"He is proud. The blow tells fearfully," thought Elinor, watching him through the trees with vindictive eyes. "Ah, my defiant Golden, your last chance is gone now. He will never look at you again!"

"Mr. Glenalvan, you do not mean it. You are but trying my credulity," cried Bertram Chesleigh.

"Is it likely that I would publish a falsehood to my own discredit?" inquired the other.

"No, no—but, oh, God, this is too dreadful to believe!"

"Dreadful, but true," groaned John Glenalvan. "Golden is the child of sin and shame. If I had had my way she would have been consigned to a foundling asylum. But my father weakly insisted on rearing her himself, and I was injudicious enough to permit it. The only stipulation I made was that she should be kept away from the sight of the world as much as possible. I see now that all precautions were useless. Young as she is, the bad blood in her veins begins to show itself already in depraved conduct."

"Hush! do not censure her harmless meetings with me," said Bertram Chesleigh, in a voice of agony. "The child is so pure and innocent she has no idea of evil. I would die before I would wrong her!"

"I am glad to hear you say so," said the other. "If you really mean it, perhaps you will agree to relinquish your useless pursuit of her. You would not be willing to marry her after what you have heard, I am quite sure."

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Meantime little Golden walked away with her grandfather, who stumbled along like one in a painful dream, his gray head bowed as if beneath the weight of sorrow, his footsteps faltering and slow.

He had not spoken one word, and his silence impressed Golden with a sense of her wrong-doing and disobedience far more than the loudest reproaches could have done.

She clung to his hand, weeping and sighing, and shivering silently at old Dinah's muttered invectives against Mr. Chesleigh.

Hugh Glenalvan spoke no words to his granddaughter until he had led her into the house.

Then he sank into his chair, and his gray head drooped upon his breast.

Surprise and sorrow seemed to have deprived him of the power of speech.

Golden knelt at his feet and laid her golden head upon his knee.

"Grandpa, speak to me," she wailed. "Do not be angry with your little Golden! Oh, grandpa, you have been so hard and strict with me; you have kept me too secluded. If you had let me have freedom and happiness like other girls, this never would have happened!"

"Hush, little missie; you must not speak to ole massa like dat," cried Dinah, trying to pull her away. "You don't know what you talkin' 'bout. Come away till ole massa is well enough to talk to you 'bout dis fing."

She lifted the girl and would have led her away, but the old man waved his hand feebly to detain her, and so she placed her in a chair instead.

Then she brought a glass of wine and poured a little between the white, writhing lips of her old master.

"Grandpa, speak to me!" wailed Golden again.

Old Dinah looked at her almost sternly, and said abruptly:

"You must let him alone, Miss Golden, you have enamost kilt him now, with your badness and deceit."

"Black mammy, you shall not speak to me so," cried the girl, resentfully, and then the bright head drooped on the arm of the chair, and she wept bitterly, more from fright at the condition of her grandfather, than from any tangible sense of her own wrong-doing.

She loved her grandfather dearly, and the sight of his suffering stabbed her tender heart deeply.

While she wept silently, old Dinah busied herself in anxious cares for the old man.

He seemed frozen into a statue of despair, sitting with his head bowed forlornly, and his vacant eyes on the floor.

But quite suddenly he roused himself and looked around him with a heavy, hopeless gaze.

"Dinah, leave me alone," he said, with unwonted impatience. "I am not ill, or if I am it is with a sickness beyond mortal healing. Golden's disobedience and her cruel, undeserved reproaches have broken my heart."

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Golden threw herself impulsively at his feet again.

"Grandpa, forgive me," she wailed. "I shall die if you do not say that you will pardon me!"

He did not answer her. He only looked at his old black servant.

"Dinah, you may leave us," he said, sorrowfully, "I had hoped to keep the secret all my life; but the time has come when I must reveal to my grandchild her mother's story."

"Um-me-e e," groaned the old negress. "Sh, I t'ought it was a brack day when John Glenalvan kem here dat mornin' a-askin' ole massa to shut my pore chile up like a crim'nal."

"Hush, Dinah," the old man repeated, pointing to the door. She went out, and Golden turned her beautiful eyes, like blue violets drowned in tears, upon his pale, drawn face.

"Oh, grandpa," she cried, "you will tell me something of my mother at last. I have so longed to hear something of my mother and my father."

A groan forced itself through Hugh Glenalvan's livid lips.

"Your desire shall be gratified," he replied. "But the telling will cost you great sorrow, child."

Her beautiful face grew white and scared.

"Oh, grandpa," she cried, "then Elinor and Clare told the truth. My poor mother——"

A bursting sob checked the rest of her speech.

"Golden, before I tell you your mother's story, I must receive your own confession. Dinah has told me all the beginning of your acquaintance with my son's visitor. You must now give me the history of what further intercourse has passed between you. How comes it that my little Golden, whom I deemed so true and pure, broke her promise to old Dinah?"

The beautiful face drooped from his gaze, overspread with warm, crimson blushes. No words came from the sweet, tremulous red lips.

"A promise, child, no matter how humble the person to whom it is made, should be held perfectly sacred and inviolate," he continued. "I could not have believed that you, the child I had reared so carefully, could have been so ignoble as to falsify your promise."

CHAPTER XI.

Beautiful Golden sobbed wildly at the reproachful words of her grandfather.

"Grandpa, I didn't mean it," she wept. "Indeed, indeed, I intended to keep my promise to black mammy. It was quite by accident that I broke it."

"How could it have been by accident?" inquired the old man, incredulously.

"Do you remember my habit of sleep-walking?" she inquired.

"Yes—ah, yes, for it has frightened me often to see a little, white figure glide into my room at night, with vacant, unseeing eyes. I always feared you would run into some terrible danger. Your mother had the same unfortunate habit," replied the old man.

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"Grandpa, it was through that habit of mine that I broke my word to black mammy," said Golden, with an earnestness that showed how truthful was her explanation.

"Tell me how it occurred, Golden," he said, fixing his dim eyes anxiously on her face.

"Grandpa, I am almost ashamed to tell you," she replied, blushing crimson, "but it was in this way. The night after Mr. Chesleigh entered my room by accident, I was very restless in my sleep. I will tell you the truth. I had begun to love the handsome stranger. I thought of him before I fell asleep, and in my restless slumbers I dreamed of him. So I fell into my old habit of wandering in a state of somnambulism. It was a beautiful moonlight night. I dressed myself and wandered out into the grounds, and down by the lake, my favorite resting-place. Suddenly I started, broad awake in the arms of Mr. Chesleigh. I had gone too near the edge of the lake, and he had saved me from falling in."

She shuddered slightly, and resumed:

"In common gratitude I was compelled to speak, and thank the gentleman for saving me from a watery grave. Do you think I was wrong to do so?"

"It would have been cold and ungrateful to have omitted thanking him," he admitted.

"So I thought," said Golden.

"If your intercourse had stopped there, Golden, I should have had no words of blame for you. But you have carried on a secret intrigue ever since. You have stolen out to meet that man every night, have you not?"

"Yes, grandpa, but we loved each other," said the simple child, who seemed to think that was ample excuse for what she had done.

Hugh Glenalvan groaned, and remained lost in thought for a moment.

Then he bent down and whispered a question in her ear.

She started violently; the warm, ever-ready color flashed into her cheek; she threw up her head and looked at him with proud, grieved eyes.

"Grandpa, you hurt me cruelly," she replied. "Do not think of me so unkindly. I am as pure as the snow."

He seemed to be relieved by the words so quickly and proudly spoken. The next minute he said, gravely:

"My child, has this gentleman ever said anything to you of marriage?"

Little Golden remained silent and thoughtful a moment, then she answered, steadily.

"Yes."

"He wishes to marry you, then?"

"Yes," answered the girl, with a little quiver of triumphant happiness in her voice.

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"When?" he asked.

A shadow fell over the fair, sweet face a moment.

"I do not know exactly when," she replied. "But Mr. Chesleigh will see you to-morrow—he told me just now that he would—and then he will settle everything."

There was a silence for a moment. The breeze sighed softly through the trees outside; they could hear it in the utter stillness. The dim, flaring light fell on the gray head of the old man, drooping forlornly on his breast, and on the lovely, upturned face of the girl, with its tender blue eyes and falling golden hair.

"Grandpa," she whispered, "do not be angry with your little girl. Put your hand on my head and say you forgive me for my fault."

He could not resist the coaxing voice and the asking blue eyes. He laid his hand on the golden head and said, solemnly and kindly:

"I forgive you, my little Golden, and I pray Heaven that no evil may come of this affair!"

She kissed his wrinkled, tremulous, old hand, where it hung over the arm of the chair.

"Thank you," she said, gratefully. "I am so glad you are not angry with me. And now, dear grandpa, I am going to kneel right here and listen while you tell me my mother's story."

In the momentary silence the wind outside seemed to sigh more sadly through the trees; the dim light flared and flickered, casting weird, fantastic shadows in the corners of the room. Deep, heavy sighs quivered over the old man's lips as the beautiful, child-like girl knelt there, with her blue eyes lifted so eagerly to his face.

CHAPTER XII.

"You are the image of your mother, my child," said Golden's grandfather. "She had a white skin, pink cheeks, blue eyes, and shining hair. You inherit her happy, light-hearted disposition. You bear the same name also—Golden Glenalvan."

"Why was I never called by my father's name?" asked innocent Golden.

"My child, you anticipate my story," he answered, "but I will tell you. You have no right to your father's name."

A cry of terror came from the parted lips of the girl.

"Oh, grandpa, you do not mean *that*—you could not be so cruel!"

"You must remember that it is not my fault," he answered.

She sprang up and stood before him, with a look of white despair on her lovely young face.

"Now I understand it all," she said. "I know why my life is so unlike that of other girls. Oh, grandpa, grandpa, tell me where to find my mother that I may curse her for my ruined life!"

His only answer was a low and heart-wrung groan.

"Grandpa, tell me where to find her," repeated little Golden, wildly. "She must be living, for I remember now that no one has ever told me plainly that she was dead. I will go to her—I will reproach her for her sin! I will tell her what a life mine has been—how I have been hated and despised for my mother's fault, even by my kindred."

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Sighs, long and bitter, heaved the old man's breast, but he answered her not. She flung herself weeping at his feet.

"You do not speak!" she cried. "Oh, grandpa, tell me where to find my cruel mother!"

"She is with your father," said Hugh Glenalvan, in a deep and bitter voice that showed what agony he endured in the revelation of his daughter's disgrace and infamy.

Golden threw up her little hands in convulsive agony.

"Oh, not that!" she cried. "Tell me it is not true!"

Again he had no answer for her, and Golden cried out reproachfully:

"Grandpa, grandpa, why did you suffer her to be so wicked?"

"It was through no fault of mine," he answered heavily.

She looked at him in silent anguish a moment, then she asked him:

"Where is she? Tell me where to find her, if you know."

"John told me she was in New York the last time he heard of her; but that was years ago. I pray God that she may be dead ere this."

And then he wrung his hands, and the tears rolled down his withered cheeks.

"Oh, my lost little daughter, my precious little Golden," he moaned in agony. "How little I dreamed in your innocent babyhood that you were reserved for such a fate!"

Golden was regarding him attentively.

"Uncle John told you she was in New York," she said. "What did Uncle John know? Did he hate my mother as he hates me?"

He looked at her, startled.

"Hate your mother," he cried. "His own sister! No—of course not—that is, not until she fell!"

"He hated her then?" asked Golden, musingly.

"Yes, he hated her then. I believe he could have killed her."

"He should have killed her betrayer," said Golden, who seemed suddenly to have acquired the gravity and thoughtfulness of a woman.

"I would have killed him myself if I could have laid hands on the villain," said her grandfather, with sudden, irrepressible passion.

The bitter grief and impatient wrath of the girl had sobered down into quietness more grievous than tears.

Her face showed deathly white in the dim light; her lips were set in a line of intense pain; her pansy-blue eyes had grown black with feeling.

She brought a low stool and sat down at her grandfather's feet, folding her white hands meekly in

her lap, and drooping her fair head heavily.

"Grandpa, I will not interrupt you again," she said. "I will sit here quite still, and listen. Now tell me all my mother's story." [Pg 35]

She kept her word.

After he had told her all he had to tell, and she knew the whole tragic story of her mother's disgrace, she still sat there silently, with her dark eyes bent on her clasped hands.

The cloud of shame and disgrace seemed to lower upon her head with the weight of the whole world.

"You understand all I have told, my child?" he said to her, after waiting vainly for her to speak.

She put her small hand to her head in a dazed, uncertain way.

"Oh, yes, I think so," she replied. "But my head seems in a whirl. I will ask you just a few questions, grandpa, to make sure that I have understood."

And then she seemed to fall into a "brown study." When she had collected her thoughts a little she began to question him.

"I think you said that my mother eloped at sixteen with a handsome stranger whose acquaintance she had casually made in her long, lonely rambles in the woods. In a few weeks she wrote to you from New York that she was happily married. Am I right, grandpa?"

"Yes," he replied.

"And then, although you and Uncle John wrote repeatedly, you could hear no more from her until a year had passed, and she came back unexpectedly one dreadful stormy night."

She paused, and he murmured a dreary, "Yes, dear."

"She was in sore trouble," the girl went on, slowly. "She had found out that her husband had deceived her. She was not legally his wife. Their marriage had only been a mock marriage. So she left him."

"That is right," he said, as she paused again.

"And Uncle John, her only and elder brother, cursed her for the disgrace she had brought on the Glenalvans. I think you told me that, did you not, dear grandpa?" she said, lifting her heavy eyes a moment to his sad, old face.

"Yes, dear, he cursed her. John was always stern and hard, and he was always jealous of our love for his little sister. He thought we had spoiled her, and he was bitterly angry when she returned to us in sorrow and shame. He was married to a woman as hard as himself, and they were both for driving her forth like a dog. But Dinah and I—for my daughter's mother had died while she was away—were too tender-hearted for that. We cared for the poor, desolate child in spite of John's threats and curses."

"And that very night I was born," said little Golden, with the heaviest sigh in which any mortal ever cursed the ill-fated hour of birth.

"Yes, you were born in the storm and terror of that dreadful night," he answered with a heavy sigh. "And your mother almost broke her heart over you because you would never bear the name of the man she had loved so well."

"And that name, dear grandpa, tell me what it was," she cried, with repressed eagerness. [Pg 36]

"My dear, she would never reveal that name. She loved him although he had betrayed her. She was afraid of our vengeance."

A look of keen disappointment came over the beautiful, mobile face.

"But, grandpa," she said, "when she wrote you from New York, after she left you, in the first flush of her happiness, when she had not your vengeance to fear, did she not reveal her name then?"

"Not even then," said the old man, bitterly. "She hinted that there was some innocent but just cause for secrecy just then, but that she would send her true name and address in the next letter. That next letter never came."

"There is not the slightest clew for me, then. I shall never find my mother," said the girl, sorrowfully.

"Golden, why should you wish to find her? She is a sinner, leading a life of shame. She deserted you in your helpless infancy to return to the arms of the villain who had betrayed her."

"So Uncle John says," returned the girl, meaningly.

He started, more at the tone than the words.

"Golden, do you doubt him?" he cried.

"Yes," said the girl steadily, turning on him the full splendor of her purple-blue eyes, in which glowed a spark of indignant fire. "Yes, grandpa, I doubt it. I utterly refuse to believe such a scandalous story of my mother."

He looked at her sadly, touched by her loyal faith in the mother she had never known.

"But think, my dear," he said. "You were but a few days old when she stole away in the night and left you without a line to tell us of her whereabouts. But John's blood was up. He traced her to

New York, and learned enough to be sure that she had returned to her lover. Then he lost all trace of them, and came home reluctantly enough, for he would have shot the villain if he could have laid hands on him."

"It is a plausible story," the girl said, thoughtfully. "I might believe it if any one but John Glenalvan had told it. But oh, grandpa, that man always reminds me of a snake in the grass."

"My child, that is one of old Dinah's homely phrases," he remonstrated.

"It is a very true one, though," she maintained, stoutly.

He saw that he could not convince her, so he sighed and remained silent.

He had never thought of doubting his son's assertion himself. Golden's incredulity awakened a vague sense of uneasiness in his mind.

The girl sat silently also for a brief space of time, while the old clock in the corner slowly ticked away the moments of that momentous night.

She roused herself from her drooping, dejected attitude at last and looked up at the quiet old man.

"Grandpa," she said anxiously, as if some sudden doubt or fear had come into her mind, "what will Bert say when he hears this dreadful story?" [Pg 37]

"Bert?" said her grandfather, questioningly.

"Mr. Chesleigh, I mean," she replied. "What will he say when my story is known to him? Will he, too, hate me for my mother's sin?"

A look of pain and dread came over the sad, old face.

"My darling, how can I tell?" he said. "I have heard that the Chesleighs are very proud. It is only too likely that he will scorn you when he knows the truth. I am afraid you must give up all thought of loving him, dear."

A strange, intense look came over the beautiful young face.

"I cannot do that," she said. "I love him with my whole heart! I shall love him all my life. He loves me, too, grandpa. He cannot give me up! He will be true to me. I am not to blame for my mother's fault."

"No, dear, I know that," he answered; "but the sins of the parents are visited on the children. It is not likely that Mr. Chesleigh will care to wed a nameless girl. He is wealthy and high-born, and can have his choice from among the best in the land. Your Cousin Elinor aspires to marry him."

"He will never marry Elinor," said little Golden, decidedly. "He loves me alone. He will be true to me."

"God grant it, dear," her grandfather said, with a patient sigh, in which there was but little hope.

Then he looked up and saw the first pale gleams of the summer dawn stealing into the room through the open window.

The birds began to warble their mating songs in the broad-leaved magnolia trees outside, as if there were no care nor sorrow, nor blighting disgrace anywhere in the wide, beautiful world.

"My little one," he said to the grave, hollow-eyed child, who seemed suddenly to have grown a full-statured woman, "go to your room and rest. You look terribly ill and wretched. Do not go back to the haunted chamber again, but to your old room down stairs. Try to sleep, if you can."

He looked after her in wonder as she turned to obey him. Yesterday she had been a beautiful, charming, careless child, full of pretty, evanescent angers and quick repentances.

The bloom, the smiles, the brightness were all gone now. The gold-brown lashes drooped heavily against the death-white cheeks, the sweet lips quivered heart-brokenly, the slow and lagging step was that of a weary woman.

CHAPTER XIII.

As soon as she had reached the seclusion of her own chamber, little Golden threw herself across her bed and wept as though her tender heart would break.

Strangely nurtured as she had been, the pride of race had been as strong in her young heart as that of any Glenalvan of them all, and the shock of her grandfather's revelation had been a terrible one.

"I wish that I had died in my innocent babyhood," she wept; and her black mammy, who had been lingering near her unobserved, came forward to her and said quickly, while she smoothed the golden hair lovingly with her old black hands: [Pg 38]

"You must not say dat, honey, chile. I has great hopes in your life. I has almos' wore out my ole brack knees a-prayin' an' a-prayin' to de good Lawd dat you might be de instrument to sabe your mudder from her sinful life."

Little Golden looked at her black mammy with a kind of pathetic wonder in her beautiful, tearful

eyes.

"How could I do that, black mammy?" she said.

"By seekin' dat poor soul out, Miss Golden, and 'suadin' her to forsake dat wicked man, an' spend de balance ob her life in prayin' an' repentin' ob her deadly sins," said Dinah, devoutly and earnestly.

Golden sat up in the bed and looked at Dinah with eager, shining eyes and impulsively clasped hands.

"Ah, black mammy, if I only could," she cried; "but you forget I do not know where to find her. I do not even know the name of that dreadful man."

And she shivered at the thought of his wickedness. She remembered that he was her father, that his bad blood flowed in her veins.

Old Dinah was looking at her strangely.

"Little missie, what would you think if I could tell you his name?" she said, with a little note of triumph in her tone.

"Could you—oh, could you?" cried little Golden, impulsively.

"Jest wait one minute, darlin'," said Dinah, hobbling out of the room.

Golden waited, wonderingly and impatiently.

After a little while Dinah returned, and laid a small package, wrapped in tissue paper, in her hand.

Golden removed the wrappers tremblingly. A small bit of crumpled pasteboard fell out into her hand.

She straightened it out and devoured with eager eyes the aristocratic name printed upon it in small, clear, black type.

Then she raised her gleaming eyes to the excited face of the old black woman.

"So," she said with a long, deep, sobbing breath, "this is my father's name?"

"Yes, chile, leastways I has de berry best reason for finking so," replied Dinah, promptly.

"Then you are not sure?" cried the girl, and there was a note of keen disappointment in her voice.

"All I know is dis, honey. It fell outer your mudder's pocket de night when you was born. She was drawin' out her handkercher, an' it fell onto de floor 'thout her seein' it. I didn't say nofin' to de poor, distracted chile. I only picked the keerd up and put it away. I sabled it for you, honey, chile."

"And I am very grateful to you, black mammy," said the girl. "You had very good reason for thinking it was my father's name. But it is a wonder you never gave it to grandpa, or to Uncle John."

"Who? *Me* gib John Glenalvan anything, or tell him anything? Not to sabe his brack soul from de debbil, who's got a bill ob sale for him!" cried Dinah, flying into a rage, as she always did at the mention of Golden's uncle.

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"Black mammy, why do you hate my uncle so bitterly?" asked Golden.

"'Cause he's a snake in de grass," replied Dinah, shortly.

"I know that—at least I have always felt it," said Golden, meditatively; "but there must be some particular reason, mammy. Tell me what it is."

"Well, den, if you mus' know, dere's two reasons," said Dinah. "De first is dat he hated your pore, sweet mudder. De second one is dat he's like a human wampire fastened on your gran'pa."

"I don't understand what you mean by your second reason," said Golden, gravely.

Dinah looked at her a moment in meditative silence; then she said abruptly:

"I don't keer what dey say, I'll tell you, my chile. Your Uncle John done badgered and badgered your grandpa while you was a leetle, teeny babby until, for de sake ob peace, dat pore ole man done made John a deed to Glenalvan Hall and de whole estate. Your gran'pa ain't no more dan a beggar in the ole hall his own fader left him in his will."

"But why did my grandfather give away his property like that?" asked the girl.

"'Cause John swore if he didn't do it dat he would carry you off and put you into a foundling asylum. You was a pore, leetle, deliky babby then, and we skeecely 'spected you would live from one day to de nex' one. So to hab de pleasure ob keepin' an' tendin' you de ole man 'sented to beggar hisself."

"Grandpa did all that for my unworthy sake, and yet I reproached him for being strict and hard with me! Oh, how wicked and ungrateful he must think me," cried the girl, tearfully.

"No he don't, honey, chile," said the black woman, soothingly, "you see he knowed dat you wasn't 'ware of all what you had to t'ank him for."

"No, indeed, I never dreamed of all I had cost him," exclaimed beautiful Golden, self-reproachfully. "And so, black mammy, we are only staying at Glenalvan Hall on the sufferance of my uncle?"

"Dat's jest de way ob it, missie. And, look ye, too dat ongrateful, graspin' wilyun has done threaten your pore gran'pa, time and ag'in, to pack bofe of you'uns off to de pore-house."

"The unnatural monster!" exclaimed little Golden, in a perfect tempest of passionate wrath.

"Well you may say so," cried Dinah, in a fever of sympathy. "De debbil will nebber git his due till he gets John Glenalvan! De blood biles in my ole veins when I fink ob all de insults dat man has heaped on his own fader, 'long ob you and your pore misguided mudder."

Beautiful little Golden sat upright regarding the excited old woman in grave silence. Her blue eyes were on fire with indignation and grief. At times she would murmur: "Poor, dear grandpa, dear true-hearted grandpa," and relapse into silence again. [Pg 40]

She roused herself at last from her musing mood, and looked up at Dinah. There was a hopeful light in the soft, blue eyes, so lately drowned in tears of sorrow and despair.

"Black mammy, I have been thinking," she said, "and I will tell you what I mean to do."

"What, honey?"

"I will tell you a secret, mammy. Mr. Chesleigh loves me. We are—that is, I will be his wife one of these days."

"Miss Golden, is dat so?" cried black mammy, delighted. "I am so glad! I was 'fraid—well, nebber min' what I was 'fraid of, chile; but 'deed I is so glad dat Mr. Chesly's gwine to marry you. He is a rich man, honey. You kin snap your lily fingers at ugly Marse John, when once you is Mr. Chesly's wife."

"Yes, he is very rich, black mammy," said the girl, with a pretty, almost childish complacency. "He has told me so, and he tells me I shall have jewels and fine dresses, and all that heart could desire when I go to live with him—I mean," blushing rosy red, "when I become his wife."

"And powerful pretty you will look in dem fine tings, honey," said her black mammy, admiringly.

"But the best thing of all, black mammy, is that I shall be able to take grandpa away from this place, and love him and care for him," cried Golden, exultantly. "I shall take you, too, mammy, for you have been the only mother I ever knew. Grandpa shall have the happiest home in the world, and Bert and I will both love him dearly, dearly!"

"And your pore, lost mudder, darlin', you had forgotten her," said Dinah, a little wistfully, her thoughts straying back through the mist of years, to the lost little nursling who had fluttered from the safe parental nest, and steeped the white wings of her soul in the blackness of sin.

But Golden shook her dainty head decidedly.

"No, black mammy, I had not forgotten," she said. "When I am Bert's wife, he shall help me to seek and save my poor, lost mother. We will try to win her back to the path of right, and save her soul for Heaven," she concluded, with girlish ardor and fervency.

"May the good Lawd help you to succeed, my innercent lamb," said the good old black woman, prayerfully. "Her little soul was too white and tender for de brack debbil to git it at de last for his brack dominions."

There was a sudden tap at the door. Golden looked at it eagerly and expectantly, while Dinah threw it open.

A small black boy, a servant of John Glenalvan, stood outside with a sealed letter in his hand.

"For Missie Golden, from Mass Chesleigh," he said, putting it in Dinah's hand, and quickly retiring.

Dinah carried it silently to her mistress, who kissed the superscription, and eagerly tore it open.

The thick, satin-smooth sheet rustled in the trembling little hand as the blue eyes ran over it, lovingly and eagerly. [Pg 41]

As she read, the tender, loving eyes grew wild and startled, an ashen shade crept around the rosebud lips, the young face whitened to the corpse-like hue of death. She crumpled the sheet in her hand at last, and threw it wildly from her, while a cry of intolerable anguish thrilled over her white lips.

"Oh, mammy, mammy, my heart is broken—broken! I shall never see him again. He has forsaken me for my mother's sin!"

Then she fell back cold and rigid, like one dead upon the bed. Dinah flew to her assistance, cursing in her heart the wickedness and heartlessness of men.

But though she worked busily and anxiously, the morning sun rode high in the heavens before the deeply-stricken girl recovered her consciousness. Her grandfather was watching beside her pillow when her eyes first opened, and she threw her arms around his neck and wept long and bitterly on his faithful breast.

"You were right," she whispered to him. "You know the cruel world better than I did. He has left me, grandpa—I shall never see him again. He discards me for my mother's sin."

She wept and moaned all day, refusing all consolation. She was terrified by the coldness and cruelty of the world that condemned her for the sins of others.

Many and many a time she had chafed at the narrowness and loneliness of her lot, but she had never known sorrow until to-day.

Its horrible reality crushed her down before its pitiless strength like the fury of the storm-rain. A crushed and bleeding victim, she lay weak and stunned in its victorious path.

At nightfall she slept, wearied out by the force and violence of her deep, overmastering emotion.

Old Dinah persuaded her weary, haggard old master to retire to his room and bed, promising to watch faithfully herself by the sick girl.

She dozed until midnight, when, as Golden still slept on heavily, she permitted herself to take a wary nap in an old arm-chair. It was daylight when the weary, suffering old creature awoke. The beautiful Golden was gone.

A little three-cornered note lay on the pillow that still held the impress of the dear little head. The child had written sorrowfully to her grandfather:

"Grandpa, darling, I have only brought you trouble and sorrow all my life-time, so I am going away. Your son will be kinder to you when I am gone, and your life will be less hard; perhaps black mammy will be kind and faithful to you, so you will not miss your thoughtless little Golden very much. God bless you, grandpa, you must pray for me nightly, for I am going to seek my mother, the erring mother who cursed me with life! If indeed, she is living in sin and shame, I will strive to reclaim her and restore her to the safe path of virtue. I have nothing else to live for. Love and happiness, the delights of this world, are not for me. It shall be *the dream of my life-time* to find and save my wronged and erring mother."

CHAPTER XIV.

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From the fair southern clime where her lines had hitherto been cast, little Golden traveled straight to the great, thronged city of New York.

During her long day and night of intense suffering, the thought, first suggested to her mind by old Dinah, of seeking and reclaiming her erring mother, had fastened on her mind with irresistible force and power.

Every thought and feeling of this beautiful, unhappy child was as pure as that of an angel.

The knowledge that the young mother who had given her birth was living a life of sin and dishonor was most revolting to her mind. She could not think of it without a mortal shudder.

When Dinah fell asleep by her pillow the girl awakened suddenly and lay for a little while in silent meditation. The idea she had been silently revolving in her mind all day gathered strength in the solitude and stillness of the midnight hour.

Golden was young, buoyant, ignorant of the world, and thought not of the difficulties that would hedge the path of duty which she was marking out for her little, untried feet.

She did not know how dear she was to her grandfather's heart, and how bitterly he would be wounded by her desertion. She only thought of escaping from the life which had suddenly become so unbearable, and of filling her heart with other aims now that the love she had given so lavishly from the depths of a warm and generous heart, had been cast back to her in scorn and contempt.

In the pocket of her best cashmere dress was a little purse filled with gold pieces of which no one knew but herself.

Bertram Chesleigh had given it to her in a happy, never-to-be-forgotten hour which now it almost killed her even to recall.

Almost staggering with weakness, Golden rose and silently and cautiously dressed herself in her blue cashmere dress and hat and jacket.

She decided not to take anything with her. It would be easier to purchase new things when she had arrived in New York.

When she was ready to go, Golden knelt down a moment and pressed her fair cheek lovingly and sorrowfully to the toil-worn wrinkled hand of her old black mammy.

She loved the old negress dearly. Under that homely black breast beat the only heart that had ever given a mother's love to the beautiful, forsaken child of poor, wronged and misguided little Golden.

Then with a lingering, loving, backward glance around, the girl left the room and proceeded to her grandfather's apartment.

The kind old man was asleep with a look of care and anxiety deeply imprinted on his pale, worn features.

Golden pressed her trembling lips to the thin, gray locks that straggled over the pillow, and her girlish tears fell on them, shining like jewels in the dim gleam of the night-lamp.

Then Golden stole away noiselessly. There was one more farewell to be said ere she set forth on the mission whose only clew lay in the crumpled card hidden away securely in the little purse of gold.

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She knelt down on the banks of the tranquil little lake she had always loved so dearly, and clasped her little hands and lifted her white face in the bright moonlight.

"Farewell, little lake," she murmured to the silvery, tranquil sheet of water. "I pray God that the time may come when I shall kneel by you again, and tell you that I have reclaimed my erring mother, and that her soul has been washed as pure and free from sin as the lilies sleeping on your breast."

Was it only little Golden's excited fancy, or did a shadow, soft and impalpable as a mist wreath, and pale as the moonbeams, glide across the still water in the form of a woman, and a voice as soft and low as the sigh of the breeze murmur sadly:

"Bless you, my daughter."

She started and looked around; the voice and vision had been so real she could hardly imagine it fancy, but the phantom shape had dissolved into moonbeams again, and the voice had melted into music on the "homeless winds."

"If my poor mother was dead I should believe that her spirit had blessed me," said the beautiful girl to herself. "But she is alive, so it could not have been she, perhaps it was my guardian angel."

She plucked a beautiful, large, white lily from the lake and started on her way to the railway station, carrying the spotless flower in her hand.

Perhaps some thought of the poet, Longfellow's, verses came to her mind:

"Bear a lily in thine hand,
Gates of brass cannot withstand
One touch of that magic wand,
Bear through sorrow, wrong and ruth,
On thy lips the smile of truth,
In thy heart the dew of youth."

CHAPTER XV.

We will return to Bertram Chesleigh, little Golden's recreant lover.

All of John Glenalvan's influence had been brought to bear on the proud young man to induce him to relinquish his pursuit of the beautiful girl whose acquaintance he had so strangely and imprudently formed.

Mr. Chesleigh's own pride of birth, united to John Glenalvan's artful innuendoes, was a powerful ally in the young man's mind against his love for the lonely and beautiful little girl.

In the light of John Glenalvan's revelations, a great revulsion had taken place in his mind.

He heartily wished that he had never made the acquaintance of the lovely little creature, or that he had not followed it up with such ardor and passion.

With few, if any exceptions, men are naturally selfish. Bertram Chesleigh, who had never known a desire unfulfilled in the course of his prosperous life, was no exception to the general rule.

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In pursuing his acquaintance with little Golden, he had been actuated more by a regard for his own pleasure than by any thought of risk for her.

In the light of recent developments, he thought also first of himself. How to escape from the consequences of his headlong passion became momentarily a paramount consideration.

When his conscience reproached him he replied to it that it was only natural and right that he should think first of himself.

He had his high social station to maintain, and he was quite sure that his friends and relations would have declined to receive even as his bride, a woman of stained birth.

Golden had, it seemed, no place in the world, no social status whatever.

If he made her his bride, his troubles and embarrassments would be legion. If he left her all would go well with him, and he argued with himself that the child would speedily forget him and resign herself to her strange and lonely life.

So, under the influence of these vexing thoughts, and John Glenalvan's specious arguments and representations, that unjust letter was written to poor, suffering little Golden.

Ah, we are so careless and so thoughtless over what we write. Bertram Chesleigh was not a bad man, and never meant to be cruel, and yet he had done more harm in the writing of that letter than if he had pierced the tender heart with a dagger.

Even while writing it he felt ashamed and sorry, yet no premonition came to tell him of the dim future when he would have given tears of blood to have obliterated even the memory of that letter from the heart of little Golden which it had seared as with the breath of fire.

He never forgot a single word of that letter he had written to her, although in his haste and agitation he had kept no copy of it. It did not seem so hard to him at first as it did afterward, when he knew what suffering the writing had caused and the consequences were forever beyond

recall.

After he had written and dispatched it he made his adieu to the family of John Glenalvan and departed, feeling like a coward, while if he had truly understood the depth of tenderness and capabilities of woe in the girl he had deserted, he might have felt more like a murderer.

The Glenalvans, while terribly disappointed in their hopes for Elinor, were relieved at the departure of their guest for the present. Elinor entreated her father to make arrangements for removing Golden out of the way in case the young man should repeat his visit, and he promised, with an oath more forcible than polite, that he would certainly do so.

But before he had taken any decisive step in the furtherance of his purpose, the unfortunate girl had taken her fate in her own hands. When John Glenalvan entered the ruined wing the second day for the purpose, as he had emphatically expressed it, of "having it out with his father in cursed few words," he found the old man and his faithful old servant in a frenzy of grief and despair over Golden's farewell letter.

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John was unfeignedly glad that Golden had gone away herself without giving him the trouble and annoyance of sending her.

"It is much better as it is, father," he said to the poor, broken-hearted old creature. "I fully intended to send the girl away. She has only saved herself the ignominy of a summary dismissal. Do not fret yourself over her. She has only forsaken you to lead a life of shame with her erring mother. I hope that a lightning flash may strike her dead before she ever returns here again to disgrace and shame us yet further!"

"Forbear, John. You are cruel and impious," cried the old man, lifting his hand feebly, and his son strode angrily out of the room, muttering curses "not loud but deep," and followed by the vivid lightnings of old Dinah's black eyes.

"Oh, de brack-hearted wilyun!" she muttered. "May de good Lard hasten de time ob punishment for his cruel sins!"

CHAPTER XVI.

The first thing that happened to little Golden Glenalvan after she arrived in the city of New York, was something that not infrequently happens to simple and inexperienced travelers.

She had her pocket picked of her purse by some expert thief. Such things have often happened in the annals of New York crime, and will again, but it is probable that no one's life was ever so much affected by such a loss as was the unfortunate little Golden's.

She found herself by this totally unlooked-for catastrophe thrown into the streets of the great, wicked city penniless, friendless, and utterly forsaken. Every cent she possessed in the world had been in the little purse, together with the card that bore her father's name. The latter was not so great a loss to her. The name of the man who had wronged her mother was engraven on her mind in characters that were never to be destroyed.

Her little plans for the discovery of her mother, laid with such girlish art, were all turned away by this accident. She had meant to take cheap lodgings somewhere, and prosecute her search, but now she knew not what to do, nor where to turn.

The great, busy city, with its strange faces and hurry and bustle frightened her, even though she dreamed not in her girlish innocence of its festering sin and underlying wickedness.

Sinking down on a secluded seat in Central Park where she had been walking when she first discovered her loss, she sobbed bitterly in her grief and distress—so bitterly that a well-dressed, benevolent-looking lady who was walking along a path with a pretty poodle frisking before her, went up to her with kind abruptness.

"My dear little girl," she said, laying her hand gently on the showering, golden wealth of hair that escaped from Golden's little sailor hat, "what is the matter? Can I help you?"

Golden lifted her head and the lady who had a kind, middle-aged face, decidedly aristocratic, started and uttered a cry of surprise at the beautiful, girlish face with its tearful eyes like purple-blue pansies drowned in dew.

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In a moment the lady's quick eyes had seen from the cut and fashion of Golden's simple garments that she was a stranger in New York. She repeated kindly:

"What ails you, my child? Have you become separated from your friends?"

"No, for I have not a friend in this whole, great city. But I have lost my purse," answered Golden, with childish directness.

The lady sat down beside her and regarded her a moment in thoughtful silence. She saw nothing but the most infantile sweetness, purity and truth in the lovely, troubled young face. She was touched and interested.

"So you have lost your purse?" she said. "Have you had your pocket picked?"

"I do not know," answered Golden, forlornly. "I carried it in my jacket pocket, and awhile ago, when I felt for it I discovered that it was gone."

"Now, I am quite sure you are a stranger in New York," said the lady. "If you belonged in the city you would know better than to carry your purse carelessly in the pocket of your walking jacket. New York is full of sneak thieves who are on the watch for the unwary. You say you have not a friend in the city. Where are you from, my child?"

"From the south," replied Golden.

"Did you come to New York alone?"

"Yes madam. I am an orphan," replied the girl, not wishing to disclose her history to her interrogator.

"What do you wish for in this great city?" asked the lady.

"I want to find some employment at present. Can you help me?" asked Golden, timidly and beseechingly lifting her large blue eyes to the interested face of the lady.

"Perhaps I can," said the lady, smiling gently. "What kind of employment do you wish? What kind of work can you do?"

The beautiful, girlish face grew a little blank. She remembered her careless, idle life at Glenalvan Hall, where no one ever taught her anything but her grandfather and old Dinah. She was compelled to confess despondently that she did not know how to do anything.

The lady who was a really good woman with a decidedly benevolent turn, studied the drooping face attentively. She saw that there was some mystery about the girl, but the lovely young face was so guileless and winning that she could see no evil in it. She asked her, rather abruptly, what her name was.

"Golden Glenalvan," answered the girl, and the lady frowned slightly, and said it was too fanciful and pretty.

"If you are going to work for your living, I would advise you to call yourself by some plain and common name, such as Jones or Brown or Smith."

"Then I will call myself Mary Smith," replied Golden, resignedly.

"That will do very well. Now, my child, do you think you would like to undertake chambermaid's work?" [Pg 47]

She glanced, as she spoke, at the girl's ungloved hands, and saw that they were delicately white and aristocratic, so she answered the question negatively to herself before Golden answered, shrinkingly and timidly:

"I do not believe I would like it, madam, but I am willing to try. I must do something to support myself, and I have no choice left me since I do not know how to do anything."

The lady looked at her a little wonderingly.

"My child, if you would tell me something about yourself I might know better how to help you," she said. "It is quite evident that you have met with reverses. You are unaccustomed to labor, and you look like a born lady."

Golden was silent, and a deep blush colored her face. Not for worlds would she have told her sad story to this gentle woman.

She fancied that the sweet pity beaming from her gray eyes now would change to scorn and contempt, if she could know that she was a nameless child seeking a lost and guilty mother.

"Perhaps you have imprudently run away from your friends," she said, questioningly, and striking so near the truth that Golden burst into tears again, and would have left her but that she detained her by a firm yet gentle pressure of the hand.

"Do not go," she said. "I want to help you if I can. Perhaps I could tell you something you are far too young and innocent to know."

"What is that, ma'am?" asked Golden, looking at her questioningly.

"This, my child—that one so pretty and simple as you are should not be alone and friendless in this great city. You are in the greatest danger. Beauty is only a curse to a poor girl who has to earn her own living."

"Yes, madam," Golden answered, with perfect meekness, though she crimsoned painfully.

"So I think," continued her kind friend, "that a home and shelter in even the humblest capacity is better for you than to be wandering alone in the streets homeless and penniless."

"I know that," said Golden, "but I have nowhere to go," and the pathos of the tearful tone touched the kind lady's heart.

"My child, I have been thinking about that," she said. "I have a friend who needs a nurse for her little invalid girl. Should you like to try for the situation?"

"Oh, yes," Golden answered, gratefully.

"The little girl is the petted and only daughter of wealthy people," continued the kind lady. "She is delicate, and has been humored and spoiled injudiciously all her life, until she is, at times, quite overbearing and disagreeable, so much so indeed that her mother can scarcely keep a nurse for her more than a week or two at a time. Are you frightened at my description? Have you a good store of patience?"

"I have been impatient and self-willed all my life," confessed Golden, frankly.

"Yet you have a sweet-tempered face, if there is any truth in physiognomy," said her new friend. "It seems to me that you could not grow impatient ministering to the needs of that poor, little invalid child. Think how much happiness you could give the poor, ailing little soul if you tried. And when you are as old as I am," she added, with a faint sigh, "you will understand that the greatest pleasure in life is in giving happiness to others."

"I will try to be patient and kind to the child, if you will be so kind as to get the place for me," said little Golden, trembling with eagerness.

"Very well, my dear; I will myself accompany you to my friend's house and speak a kind word in your favor. It is rather a risk to run, this introducing and vouching for a total stranger, but I believe that your gentle, honest face will be a passport to Mrs. Desmond's favor, just as it has been to mine. You will follow me, now, my child."

Golden walked on with the warm-hearted woman some distance through the beautiful green park, when, to her surprise, her benefactress stopped before an elegant, liveried carriage, with quite an imposing-looking driver in a white hat and gloves.

"Drive to Mrs. Desmond's, John," she said, as the footman handed her and her timid *protege* into the carriage.

Little Golden felt like one in a bewildering dream as she lay back among the luxurious satin cushions and was whirled through the stately streets, past the beautiful buildings and brown-stone palaces until they stopped at last before one more splendid than all the rest, and she found herself gliding up the marble steps, her young heart throbbing fast at the novelty and strangeness of her position.

She was going to be a servant in this splendid house! She, one of the Glenalvans of Glenalvan Hall, a name that had been proud and honored in the past until her girlish mother had stained its haughty prestige with shame.

Her heart beat heavily and slow. The thought came to her mind that these proud and wealthy people would not even permit her to be a servant to their daughter if they knew that she was a nameless child.

CHAPTER XVII.

Mrs. Markham, little Golden's kind, new friend, was evidently on terms of intimacy with Mrs. Desmond.

Instead of sending her card to the lady and awaiting her appearance in the formal drawing-room, she was at once conducted up stairs to a charming *boudoir* hung with rose-colored silk and white lace.

The carpet was white velvet strewn with a pattern of pink moss rosebuds, and the chairs and couches were upholstered in a deeper shade of rose-color.

Everything in the room was costly and tasteful, and vases of freshly-cut flowers diffused delicious fragrance through the air.

Little Golden had never before been in such a costly and tasteful room, and she uttered an involuntary low exclamation of surprise and delight at which Mrs. Markham smiled indulgently.

"Does this pretty room surprise you?" she inquired.

"Yes, madam, I have never seen anything so beautiful and costly before," answered the simple child.

At that moment the heavy draperies that hung between the *boudoir* and the dressing-room were swept aside by a white, jeweled hand, and the mistress of all this magnificence entered the room.

She was a beautiful young lady, with great, velvety black eyes, dark, waving hair, crimson lips, and rounded cheeks like the sunny side of a peach. Her morning-dress was elegant, costly and becoming.

"Ah, Mrs. Markham, good-morning. I am very glad to see you," she cried, then she looked past her friend inquiringly at the little, shrinking figure of Golden.

"Edith, this is a little *protege* of mine, Mary Smith by name," Mrs. Markham hastened to say. "If you have not secured a nurse yet, will you try her for little Ruby?"

"I shall be very glad to do so if you think she will suit," returned Mrs. Desmond as they all seated themselves.

Then the handsome brunette looked patronizingly at the new applicant for her favor. The scrutiny did not seem to please her. The slender, arched, black brows met over the bright eyes in a slight frown.

"Child, why do you not put your hair up?" she asked, glancing at the bright wealth of loosely flowing ringlets. "It is not becoming to nurses to wear it in that way."

"I can put it up if you wish me, ma'am," Golden replied in a low voice, her eyelids drooping that

the lady might not see the childish resentment that flashed into them at her slightly scornful tone.

"Very well, I shall insist upon that if I engage you," replied Mrs. Desmond. "You will tuck it up and wear a nurse's cap over it. Have you any recommendations to give with her, Mrs. Markham?" she continued, expectantly.

"No, for Mary has never been in service before," replied the kind lady. "She is a young southern girl seeking employment in this city, and I should like to befriend her if possible. I fancied that her gentle, innocent face might recommend her to your favor as it did to mine."

Mrs. Desmond turned to look at Golden again, and met the gaze of the soft blue eyes fixed on her with a kind of puzzled intentness.

"Child, why do you stare at me so curiously?" she inquired.

The deep color rushed into Golden's face, making her more lovely than ever.

"I beg your pardon," she hastened to say, falteringly. "You remind me so much of someone I have known that I could not keep from looking at your face. It was very rude, I know."

"Never mind, I am not angry," answered Mrs. Desmond. "Do you think you would make a good, patient nurse for my little girl, Mary?"

"I will do the best I can," little Golden replied, in her gentle, refined voice.

Mrs. Desmond looked at her friend.

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"I am not in the habit of engaging help without recommendation. It is rather a risk to run," she remarked, "but to please you, my friend, and because I really need a maid for Ruby, I will give Mary Smith a trial. When can you come Mary?"

"She can stay now, if you like, Edith," said Mrs. Markham.

"That will suit me very well," said Mrs. Desmond. "I will engage you for one month at least, Mary, and I will pay you ten dollars a month. Will that suit you?"

"Yes, thank you," Golden answered, timidly.

"Very well, you may stay now, and you may go at once to Ruby, for I have been compelled to lend her my own maid, for a week past, and she is so dissatisfied with the position that she threatens to leave me if she is not relieved. I can assure you that you will find your position no sinecure. I hope you will try to find means to amuse the child. You must be very kind and patient with her, Mary. I allow no scolding or fault-finding, for my little girl is very frail and delicate."

Golden rose and stood waiting while the languid, fine lady talked.

When she had ended her little speech, she pointed her white finger at the dressing-room door.

"Go through the drawing-room," she said, "into my bed-chamber. You will find that it has a door connecting with the nursery. You will find my little daughter in there. You may introduce yourself to her. Mrs. Markham and I will look in presently and see how Ruby is pleased with you."

"Try and make a good impression on the little one's mind at first," said Mrs. Markham, kindly. "First impressions are everything with children."

Beautiful Golden thanked her with a grateful look, and silently withdrew to follow Mrs. Desmond's instructions.

"You do not seem as pleased as I had expected, Edith," Mrs. Markham said, in a tone of disappointment, when they were alone.

"To tell the truth, I think the girl is too pretty," Mrs. Desmond replied, with some embarrassment.

"I thought you liked pretty things about you," said her friend.

"So I do, but I do not like pretty servants," was the significant reply. "As a rule they are vain and trifling, and do not attend to their business. They are always looking out to attract admiration to their pretty faces."

"I do not believe that Mary Smith is one of that kind," said Mrs. Markham. "She seems a good, simple, innocent girl. But if she fails to suit you, Edith, you may return her to me, and I will find some other place for her. I imagined that you would be delighted with such a girl for Ruby's attendant."

"And so I am, and I am ever so much obliged to you for thinking of me. I hope that she will please Ruby better than the girls we have had lately, for I feel quite worn out with anxiety over the dear little creature," replied Mrs. Desmond, but so constrained that Mrs. Markham saw that she was only half-hearted in her pleasure, and wondered why it was that Golden's beauty, which was so attractive to her own eyes, was distasteful to Mrs. Desmond, who was beautiful herself, and liked to gather beautiful things around her.

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It is said that every family has its skeleton. Mrs. Markham did not know that the skeleton in her friend's closet was the lurking fiend of jealousy. Mrs. Desmond was a charming lady, but she secretly disliked every pretty woman she knew.

Little Golden went on through the dressing-room to the bed-chamber, which was a perfect bower of elegance and repose, and timidly opened the nursery door, for the description of little Ruby Desmond had rather intimidated her.

She found herself in a large, airy, sunny chamber, splendidly adapted for a nursery, and

luxuriously fitted up for that purpose.

In a low rocking-chair a smart French maid was indolently lounging and yawning over a French novel.

In a corner of the room a little girl of six years, small for her age, and pale and delicate-looking, was sobbing fretfully in a fit of the sulks.

She dashed the tears from her eyes and looked up curiously at the timid intruder.

"Who are you?" she demanded, abruptly.

"I am Mary Smith, your new nurse, little Miss Ruby," said Golden, in a clear, sweet voice, and with a winning smile.

The French maid threw down her novel and stared, and little Ruby came out of her corner.

"So you are my new maid, are you?" she asked, pertly. "Well, I hope you will not be as hateful as Celine here is, for if you do I shall be sure to throw my top at your head. I am very glad you are come, for I am perfectly tired of Celine, and I want her to leave me at once—at once, do you hear me, Celine?"

Celine flounced out of the room in a huff, and the little one continued:

"There is one comfort, you are not as ugly as Celine and the others! I hate ugly people, and so does my papa, but mamma likes them best. *You* are the prettiest nurse I ever saw! You look just like my big wax doll, with your blue eyes and long hair. Nurses always wear their hair under a cap, did you not know that?"

Little Golden did not answer one word to the voluble discourse of the spoiled child.

She stood silently in the center of the large apartment, her small hand pressed to her beating heart, her pale lips apart, her blue eyes upraised to a large portrait that hung against the wall in a splendid frame of gold and ebony. The dark, handsome, splendid face that smiled down upon her was the face of her lost lover, Bertram Chesleigh.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Fortunately for Golden, little Ruby Desmond did not observe the preoccupation of her new nurse. She had entered upon a voluble tirade against nurses in general, and when she had ended she remarked with a sudden change of tone:

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"But I don't believe I shall hate you as much as I did the rest. You are younger and prettier than any girl I ever had to amuse me. Come, now, Mary, lay off your hat and jacket. I want you to make my doll a new dress. That lazy Celine would not stick a needle in it, for all I stormed and scolded, and threatened to complain to mamma."

Thus adjured, Golden turned her eyes with an effort away from the portrait of Bertram Chesleigh, and proceeded to obey the instructions of her little mistress with what cheerfulness she could, although her heart was beating wildly with the shock she had received on coming suddenly face to face with her lover's portrait in this strange place.

She longed, yet dreaded to ask little Ruby what the original of the portrait was to her.

Looking from the portrait to the child she could plainly discern in Ruby's proud mouth and flashing, dark eyes, a great and striking resemblance to Mr. Chesleigh.

But she was afraid to ask the question that trembled on her lips, so she sat down mutely while Ruby brought a large wax doll and placed it in her lap, together with a large quantity of scraps of silk and muslin and odds and ends of pretty lace.

Then she pulled open the drawer of a child's bureau and brought out a garnet silk dress of her own, elaborately made and trimmed.

"I want Dollie's dress made exactly like this," she said, hanging it open over the back of a chair for Golden's inspection. "It is in the latest fashion, so Celine says. Celine thinks of nothing but French novels and fashions, so she ought to know."

"Your doll is very beautiful. Is it a new one?" asked Golden, trying to say something to please the little creature who was hovering about her, busy and excited with her important preparations for the miniature dressmaking.

"Oh, yes, it is tolerably new! Papa gave it to me last week," replied Ruby. "There was a little trunk of clothes with her, but I do not like any of the dresses. They are quite old-fashioned and shabby, I think. Mamma says herself that they must have been made at least a year ago. So I shall never be satisfied until I have a new-fashioned dress for Dollie."

She was silent a moment, watching Golden's deft finger as they slowly cut and basted, then she resumed:

"I have tried and tried, but I cannot think of a name for her. Can you tell me a pretty name for her, Mary?"

"Would you like to call her Golden?" asked the girl, feeling as if the sound of her own name would be a relief in this new, strange atmosphere.

"Golden! what a pretty name," said the child. "I like that. I will call Dollie by that name. I shall be Golden—Golden Chesleigh," she added, after a minute's thought.

The new nurse started so violently, that the doll's dress fell from her fingers. The lovely crimson color rushed into her face.

"Chesleigh! Why do you call her that?" she asked, falteringly. "Do you know anybody by that name, Miss Ruby?" [Pg 53]

The little girl laughed quite happily.

"Well, I should think I did," she said, brightly. "My own uncle is named Chesleigh—Bertram Chesleigh. There is his portrait on the wall. Look at it, Mary, and tell me if he is not me very handsomest man you ever beheld."

Golden looked up into the dark eyes that had gazed into her own so fondly, and at the proud yet tender lips that had kissed her with such passionate love, and she could barely repress the moan of pain that came from her lips.

"Yes, he is very handsome," she said faintly. "Does he ever call here to see you?"

"Oh, yes, often and often, when he is at home," said Ruby. "But he is gone away traveling in the sunny south now. He travels a great deal. Mamma calls him a bird of passage."

"Is he fond of you?" said Golden, seeing that she was expected to say something.

"Oh, yes, very fond," said Ruby, brightening up so much that Golden saw it was a favorite subject with her. "He had that splendid portrait painted expressly for a present to me. Mamma begged me to let it hang in the drawing-room, but I would not. I told her I would have it in the nursery where I could see it every minute."

"Is he—married?" asked Golden, carelessly, to all appearance, and taking up her work again.

"Oh, dear, no! and I hope he never will be! He loves me better than anyone now, but he would like his wife best if he were married," cried the spoiled child.

Golden sighed softly and made no reply, and the entrance of Mrs. Desmond and her visitor interrupted the conversation.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Markham. You see I have a new nurse," said Ruby, looking up with a faint flush of pleasant excitement on her delicate face.

"You have to thank Mrs. Markham for bringing her to you," said Mrs. Desmond, glad to see a smile on the usually sullen or pain-drawn little white face.

Ruby went forward and kissed Mrs. Markham charmingly as if she was always loving and sweet-tempered instead of self-willed and capricious as everyone represented her.

"I thank you very much," she said, "I think I shall like Mary better than the others. She is very kind and obliging. You see she is making a new dress for my doll. Celine was too lazy. She would not dress my doll at all."

Mrs. Markham gave her *protege* an encouraging smile, and Golden blushed with pleasure.

"She has given my new doll a name," continued Ruby, vivaciously. "It is Golden. Do you not think it pretty? The name would suit Mary herself I think, as she has such lovely curls, I believe I shall call her goldilocks," she added, laying her small hand caressingly on Golden's hair.

Mrs. Markham smiled indulgently, but her friend looked annoyed.

"Indeed, Ruby, you must not call her by such a silly name," she said. "She must put her hair up, and wear a little cup over it like a French *bonne*." [Pg 54]

"It is a pity to cover it up, it is so thick and long, and shines so bright. Mary is a very pretty girl, don't you think so, mamma? She looks just like my wax doll," said the child.

"Pretty is that pretty does, my child," Mrs. Desmond answered, shortly, and Mrs. Markham, stooping over Golden, put a card with her name and address upon it, in her hand, and said in her kind, patronizing voice:

"If you do not suit Mrs. Desmond, Mary, after she has given you a fair trial, you may come to me, and I will help you to another place."

The quick tears brimmed over in little Golden's eyes. She kissed Mrs. Markham's hand in silent gratitude.

"It is quite likely I shall keep her if she continues to please Ruby as well as she does now. But Ruby is such a capricious little darling there is no telling how soon this new fancy of hers may change. 'New brooms sweep clean,' you know," said Mrs. Desmond, quoting the old adage a little stiffly.

Mrs. Markham made some careless reply and took her departure. She was vaguely conscious of a chill never felt before in Mrs. Desmond's manner, and resented her lack of gratitude for the service she had done her.

"The child is so pleased and interested, it will be quite a pity if she sends Mary Smith away from her," the benevolent woman thought silently to herself.

CHAPTER XIX.

"I am quite sure that my papa will be pleased with your looks," said little Ruby, artlessly, when her mother had gone out and left them alone to the doll's dressmaking. "He likes pretty faces as well as I do. He hates Celine and the chambermaid both, because, as he says, they are 'so deucedly ugly.'"

"I suppose papa loves his little pet very much," said Golden, smiling sadly at the little one's prattle.

"Yes, indeed," said Ruby. "He gives me oceans of pretty things. But I do not see him much, only an hour after dinner. You see, papa and mamma are both very gay. They always go out in the evening to balls or operas."

Before the dinner hour Celine made her appearance with a large, white bib-apron and neat cap for Golden's use.

"My mistress sent you these," she said, not unkindly. "Shall I show you how to use them, or do you know already?"

"You will please show me," the girl answered, gently.

Celine brought combs and brushes and arranged the bright, shining hair in a thick plait which she wound about the small head and pinned securely with hairpins.

"*Ma foi*," she said, unable to repress an involuntary tribute of admiration, "you have the most beautiful hair I ever saw."

"Yes, and it's a shame to put a cap on it," cried Ruby. "I think mamma is very unkind to me, I did not want Mary Smith's beautiful hair covered!" [Pg 55]

"Fie, my little lady, what a funny-looking nurse-maid she would be without her little cap," cried Celine, as she put the last touches to the bib and cap.

"Thank you," said Golden, as she gave a timid glance into the swinging mirror.

Celine noted the little incident with feminine quickness, and smiled.

"Should you know yourself again?" she asked.

"It makes a great difference in my appearance," little Golden replied.

"But it does not make you any less pretty," declared Celine. "When your hair hung down it hid all your neck. Now I see that your ears are as pretty as sea-shells, and your neck as white as snow. You are too good-looking for your place, Miss Smith."

"And you are too ugly for yours!" put in Ruby, sharply.

"Hold your tongue, Miss Pert," said the French maid, with an ugly frown. "It's a deal better to be an ugly servant than a pretty one in this place, and so Miss Smith will find out before long. Not as I says it out of spite for the poor thing. She's to be pitied, being *your* nurse," pronounced Mademoiselle Celine as she flitted out of the room, seeing that Golden made her no answer. Indeed the poor girl did not know what to say. She was puzzled and frightened over the maid's pert innuendoes, but she did not in the least comprehend what she meant.

When Celine was gone she looked into the mirror again and then at the portrait on the wall. The hot tears came into the great, blue eyes and blinded them.

"Oh, Bert," she whispered inaudibly, "would you know me, would you love me in this strange and altered guise?"

"You must do my hair over before dinner, Mary," said the little girl. "I always dine with mamma and papa when they have no company. You will go with me and stand behind my chair while I am eating, to attend to my wants."

Golden gave a gasp of mingled pride and dread.

"Must I indeed do that?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, all my nurses do that way," said the child. "Now, Mary, I must have my hair curled over, and dress for dinner just as mamma does, you know."

Golden found that she had a most exacting little mistress. Although frail and diseased, the little creature never allowed her active mind and thin, little body one moment's rest.

She was always flying from one thing to another, and kept everyone about her attending to her whims and fancied wants. Yet, in spite of her capricious exactions, Golden could not help being drawn to the child.

The dark eyes, and the proud, sweet mouth so like those of the man she loved, won her in spite of herself.

At dinner, where she stood droopingly behind little Ruby's chair, the master of the house did not even glance toward her, so that she had a fair chance to observe him from under her heavy, curling lashes.

The scrutiny did not satisfy her, although she could not have told how it chanced, for Mr. Desmond was faultlessly handsome. [Pg 56]

He had a fair, effeminate face, full of languid passion, and those large, long-lashed gray eyes

which can shoot the most killing glances.

His hair was parted in the middle with scrupulous exactness. His dress was elegant to the verge of foppishness, and a magnificent diamond sparkled on his white hand.

His wife and little daughter seemed to regard him with the most admiring affection, which he accepted with a bored and rather patronizing air.

When the long and ceremonious dinner was over, little Ruby sprang down from her chair and caught his hand.

"Come, papa, come, mamma," she cried, "you must go to the nursery now."

They went away with her, and when Golden returned to the nursery later, she found the little girl sitting on her father's knee, and chatting volubly to him, while Mrs. Desmond was nowhere to be seen.

Ruby jumped down from her perch and ran to Golden.

"Papa," she said, evidently referring to some subject they had been discussing. "I will show it to you, and you will say that I am right."

With a quick, deft motion, she pulled the cap from Golden's head, and loosened the braid so that the curling, rippling mass of gold fell in a shower of beauty over the girl's shoulders. Then she cried out in gleeful triumph:

"Isn't it lovely, papa? Did you ever see such a pretty nurse."

Mr. Desmond looked in amazement at the blushing, shrinking girl, and murmured inaudibly:

"Ye gods, what a perfect beauty!"

At that moment the brilliant brunette, Mrs. Desmond, swept into the room with a waft of exquisite perfume, her diamonds glittering, her rich silk and laces rustling majestically, a white satin opera cloak folded gracefully around her white shoulders.

She looked at Golden so wrathfully that it froze the quick murmur of irrepressible admiration on her lips.

"Girl, what does this disordered appearance mean? Why is your hair down after my strict orders?" she demanded, angrily.

"Your daughter pulled it down, madam," Golden answered, with outward dignity and quietness, though she was inwardly chafed and deeply wounded.

Mrs. Desmond turned round in a gust of passion and gave Ruby a ringing slap on the cheek with her white, jeweled hand.

"Take that, and behave yourself better the next time," she cried, sharply.

Ruby ran, screaming, to her father, and Mrs. Desmond cried out impatiently:

"Come, Mr. Desmond, the carriage is waiting. Mary, put the child to bed. Good-night, Ruby."

She bent to kiss the child good-night, but Ruby pushed her away with an angry scream, and ran to hide her face in Golden's skirts.

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Mrs. Desmond turned away, followed by her husband, who said reproachfully as they passed from the room:

"You were needlessly cruel to the poor little thing Edith, my dear."

CHAPTER XX.

Mrs. Desmond came into the nursery the next morning with her arms full of new toys as a propitiatory gift to her offended little daughter.

She greeted Golden very kindly, feeling ashamed of her petulance of the evening before, when she saw how patiently she was ministering to the comfort of her little daughter.

Little Ruby was suffering with a headache this morning. She lay on a silken lounge, with her head propped on pillows, and Golden was bathing the hot temples with *eau de cologne*.

"Are you still pleased with your nurse, my darling?" inquired her mother.

"Oh, yes, mamma. Mary is the kindest nurse I ever had," answered Ruby, lifting her heavy eyes tenderly to Golden's sweet face.

"I am very glad to hear it," said her mother. "Does your head ache too bad for you to take your morning drive with me, dear?"

"Oh, no, I think it will be better when I get out in the air," said Ruby, with a brightening face. "Shall we take my nurse with us?"

"Not this morning, I think, as I shall drive the pony-phaeton, and there is only room for two."

"Will not papa go then?" said the child, disappointed.

"No; he has a business engagement, and cannot accompany us. You see we are going to the

seaside next week, and he has a great many things to see to first," Mrs. Desmond answered, with the child's disappointment reflected on her own beautiful face.

She loved her husband with the devotion of a strong, intense nature, and begrudged every moment he spent away from her side.

Her jealousy was as strong as her love, and Mr. Desmond was the type of man best calculated to keep this baleful passion in the fullest play.

He had been noted as a male flirt before he married Edith Chesleigh, and his conduct since their union had not been of a sort to strengthen his wife's faith in his fidelity. Beautiful as she was herself, she soon found that he was by no means blind to the charms of other women.

She turned to the nurse with a suppressed sigh, and said, quietly:

"You may dress Ruby now in a white hat and dress, and cardinal sash, while I am getting ready."

Then she kissed Ruby and went to her dressing-room. Golden hastened to follow her instructions.

"We shall go to the seaside next week and stay two months. Shall you like that, Mary?" asked the child, while Golden was brushing her dark curls over her fingers. [Pg 58]

"I dare say I shall like it, if you do," replied the girl.

"Oh, we will have a splendid time. We will go bathing in the sea in the mornings, and afterward we will stroll on the sands, and gather beautiful, rosy shells. At night they have balls and dancing. Sometimes mamma lets me stay up awhile to see them dance. Oh, it is grand fun! I wish I was a grown lady," cried the child, flapping her hands.

Golden listened in silence, and the strange loneliness and quietude of the life in which she had been reared, struck her more and more by its contrast with the bright, bustling world outside and beyond Glenalvan Hall.

When little Ruby had gone away for her drive with her mother, she sat down in the quiet nursery and resigned herself to thought.

Her thought went back to the gray, old hall in the sunny south, and the kind, old man she had deserted. She wondered if he would forgive her, and pray for her that she might find her mother.

"I shall never find her now," she thought. "I have lost my money, and it will be a long time before I can earn enough to resign my situation here, and try to find her. Mrs. Markham was so sweet and kind. I wonder if she would help me. But, no, she would scorn me like all the rest, if she knew the story of my poor, young mother's disgrace."

"Good-morning, little Mary. Where is my daughter this morning?" said a clear, musical voice.

Golden looked up with a start, and saw Mr. Desmond, standing, tall, debonair and handsome, in the center of the lofty apartment. He had entered and closed the door so softly that she had not heard a sound.

"Miss Ruby has gone out driving with her mother," she answered.

"Ah," said Mr. Desmond. "I suppose she will not be gone long, so I will wait here until she returns."

He drew forward a chair quite close to hers. Golden regarded him in surprise.

"Miss Ruby was very anxious that you should go with her, but her mother said you had a business engagement this morning and could not find time to gratify her," she remarked to him, rather pointedly.

He flushed, then laughed carelessly.

"Oh, yes, so I did have," he replied, "I only looked in a minute to bid Ruby good-morning."

"Yes, sir," the nurse replied, constrainedly, and looked out of the window. The way Mr. Desmond regarded her out of his large, bold eyes made her feel slightly nervous. She heartily wished that he would go away and leave her alone.

But Mr. Desmond seemed in no haste to fulfill his business engagement. He sat silently a moment, regarding the delicate profile of the half averted face, then said, carelessly:

"Where do you come from, Mary—New York?"

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"I am from the south, Mr. Desmond," said the girl, biting her lips to keep back her resentment at his familiar address.

"Indeed? From what part of the south?" he inquired.

"Excuse me, sir, I do not care to reveal my private affairs to a total stranger," replied Golden, with such sudden spirit and haughtiness that the fine gentleman stared.

"Whew!" he exclaimed, "I did not mean any offense, Miss Smith, I only wished to know the precise spot where such peerless beauties as yourself are reared. I would certainly immigrate instanter to that most precious locality."

Golden rose, crimson with anger, and crossed to the door.

"Where are you going?" he inquired, following her and taking hold of her hand.

"I am going down stairs, Mr. Desmond," she replied coldly, and trying to wrench her hand away.

"Are you offended at my plain speaking?" he inquired, trying to look into her flashing eyes.

"Surely you are aware that you are beautiful?"

"If I am, it does not become you to tell me so, sir," she replied, resentfully. "Such compliments belong to your wife."

"My wife is a beautiful woman, but not half so beautiful as you are, little Mary," he replied, still keeping a tight hold on her hand.

"Mr. Desmond, let me go," she pleaded, the angry tears crowding into her soft blue eyes, "I will not listen to such words from you. You are cruel and unkind. What would Mrs. Desmond say if she could see you?"

He started uneasily, then laughed.

"She would say I was only teasing you, as I was," he replied. "Believe me, Mary, I was only joking you. I did not think that you would take it as earnest or become angry. Say that you forgive me, fair one, and I will release you."

"Let go my hand, I forgive you," Golden replied, glad to be released on any terms, and shrinking from him with an utter loathing and horror.

"Thank you for your pardon," he cried, laughingly. "You must seal the sweet pledge with a kiss, my lovely girl."

He threw his arm around her struggling little form, clasping her closely to his breast, and pressed a full, passionate kiss on her loathing lips.

CHAPTER XXI.

At Golden's loud scream of alarm and anger, the door of Mrs. Desmond's sleeping apartment opened suddenly, and Celine, the maid, stood aghast upon the threshold.

She beheld the pretty, new nurse in the arms of her master, saw his handsome head bent over her as he kissed the beautiful crimson lips. At Celine's startled cry he turned upon her fiercely, at the same time releasing Golden.

"What do you mean by spying upon my actions, Celine?" he demanded angrily.

"Pardon, monsieur, I meant no offense," said the maid, as smooth as silk, "I but thought you were romping with little Miss Ruby, and looked in to behold the little one's delight." [Pg 60]

Mr. Desmond saw that it was necessary to conciliate Mademoiselle Celine.

"I did come in to see Ruby," he replied, "but she had gone to ride. So I attempted a bit of harmless gallantry with her nurse, here, such as most pretty girls would have taken with pleasure, but she was timid and frightened at my little joke. Hold your tongue about it, Celine, and here's a trifle to buy you a new cap."

He tossed a gold piece at her feet, and Celine picked it up, curtsying and smiling. Little Golden, standing apart from them, regarded the scene with horror and disgust.

Mr. Desmond, turning suddenly to her, quailed at the look of fiery scorn in the beautiful, spirited young face.

"Are you very angry with me, Mary?" he inquired in a subdued voice.

"No words can do justice to my contempt for you," she replied, in a voice of cutting scorn. "How dared you maltreat and insult me so? Shame on you for your cruelty to a poor and helpless girl!"

She was so beautiful in her anger that he could scarcely remove his gaze from her face. Her cheeks were scarlet, her eyes were darkened and dilated with anger, her lovely lips were curled disdainfully. He read the proud purity of her young soul in every haughty movement of her lithe young figure and clenched, white hands.

He regarded her in silence a moment, then exclaimed with apparent frankness:

"Mary, I will tell you the truth, and then you will be able to pardon my conduct. My wife told me that she had engaged you totally without recommendation, and we both were afraid that we had run too great a risk in intrusting our little darling to your care. I determined therefore to test you. I have done so, and I am delighted to find that your principles and your virtue are so steadfast and true. Are you willing to grant me your pardon after this explanation?"

At this specious apology the simple girl looked from the hypocrite's anxious face to that of the maid.

Celine being a woman, she reasoned, would tell her whether to accept this explanation or not.

The artful maid gave her an encouraging smile.

"Monsieur is right," she said. "He did well to test your principles, Miss Smith. Do not be so rude as to withhold your forgiveness after his manly apology."

Golden, with her slight knowledge of the wicked world, thought that Mr. Desmond and Celine had told her the truth. She answered, falteringly, after a moment of silence:

"Then I will forgive you, Mr. Desmond, if you will promise not to molest me again. Otherwise I

shall return to Mrs. Markham's protection."

"You must not think of leaving us. Ruby is so pleased with you that it would be a shame to desert her. You need not fear me. I am quite satisfied of your truth and worth, and my wife will be delighted when I tell her how nobly I have proved your virtue," said Mr. Desmond, hastily.

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Then he looked at his watch, and muttering something about his business engagement, hurried away.

Celine looked at Golden with an odd, significant smile.

"Now, Miss Smith, you understand what I meant by saying that you were too good-looking for your place," she said.

"But I thought *he* said, and so did you, Celine, that he was only testing my virtue," said poor Golden, in perplexity.

"Bah! that was only master's blarney," replied Celine, airily. "Of course I had to agree with him, or lose my situation, and I don't choose to do that, for I have a good place and lots of perquisites. But the truth is that monsieur only invented that tale of testing you because he was frightened when he found he had tackled an honest girl, and he did not wish for the madam to get hold of it."

"Then he is a wicked villain, and I shall go away to-day," cried the girl, indignantly, "I love little Ruby, but I will go away, I cannot remain."

"If you take *my* advice you will stay and say nothing about it," replied the maid. "If you go to another place you are just as likely to encounter the same difficulty. You are too pretty to be a servant. I have told you that already."

"But I cannot remain here and encounter the persecutions of Mr. Desmond," replied Golden, decidedly.

"I do not believe he will annoy you again," said Celine, confidently. "He has found out that you are honest, and he will be afraid to pursue you any further. The child is so pleased with you it would be a pity to forsake her. You may take my word for it that monsieur is too much afraid of his wife to bother you again. Why, she is so jealous that if she knew her husband had kissed you, she would want to cut your ears off."

Golden shivered at Celine's vivid words.

"It is better I should go, then," she said, with a sigh. "I would not, for the world, create trouble between husband and wife."

"You had better stay," said Celine. "I shall not tell of you, and you may be pretty sure master won't. So Mrs. Desmond need never know."

"It is better I should go," said Golden, decidedly; and then she threw herself down upon a lounge and burst into tears.

"Oh! why are women so weak, and men so cruel?" she wildly sobbed.

"It's their nature," replied Celine, but Golden made her no answer. She only continued to weep heart-brokenly.

"I am the most miserable girl on earth," she sobbed. "I wish that I had never been born!"

The maid's curiosity was greatly excited by Golden's words. She knelt down by the girl and inquired the cause of her sorrow, and promised her her friendship and advice if she would confide in her.

But in Golden's pure mind there was an instinctive distrust of Celine. Her ready acceptance of her master's bribe had excited her disgust and dislike. She answered evasively that she had nothing to confide, and only desired to be left in peace.

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"Oh, very well, miss," replied the maid, "you can be left alone, I'm sure, but you'll find that it's better to make a friend of Celine Duval than an enemy."

She flounced out of the room as she spoke, and Golden was left alone to the companionship of her own sad thoughts. She lay silently a long while looking at the portrait of Bertram Chesleigh, and weeping bitter tears over her unhappy fate. How beautiful and life-like was the picture!

The blissful hours she had spent with the original rushed over her mind, making the contrast with the gloom of the present more harrowing. She found herself exclaiming:

"Oh, that those lips had language—life has passed
With me but roughly since I heard them last."

But no sound came from the lips of the false-hearted lover, who had given her a few hours of happiness only to leave her to the darkness of despair.

CHAPTER XXII.

Golden had quite decided in her mind that she would rather leave Mrs. Desmond at once, than

risk a renewal of her husband's distasteful attentions, but little Ruby's first words on returning from her drive, dispelled the idea for the present at least from her thoughts.

"Oh, Mary!" the little one had cried, with childish directness, as soon as she entered the room. "Oh, Mary! I have heard bad news!"

"I am very sorry for you, dear," said Golden, gently.

Ruby looked up into the face of her uncle, where it hung against the wall.

"Oh, poor Uncle Bertie!" she sighed.

"Was it about Mr. Chesleigh, Ruby?" she inquired.

"Yes," said the child. "Mamma has had a telegram from some people about him. He is very sick, and he is away down south at a place called Glenalvan Hall."

Golden drew her breath heavily, and sank into a chair. It seemed as if an arrow had pierced her heart. She could not speak, but stared at Ruby with a dumb misery in her eyes, that the little one could in nowise understand.

"Some of us will have to go to him—mamma and papa, I suppose," continued Ruby. "I asked mamma to let me go, but she says it would be too warm for me at this time of the year in the south, because I am so delicate."

"Is he very sick? Will he die?" inquired Golden, speaking in a strange, unnatural voice.

"They hope not, but he is very sick," said Ruby; and at that moment Mrs. Desmond swept into the room.

Her bright eyes looked dim and heavy as though she might have been weeping.

"I am very sorry you have had bad news, madam," said Golden, trying to appear quiet and natural, though her pulse was beating at fever-heat, and her eyes were heavy and dim beneath their drooping lashes.

"Ruby has told you of my brother's illness, then," said Mrs. Desmond, more gently than she usually spoke to her dependents.

"Yes, madam," said Golden, faintly, unable to utter another word.

"He has brain fever," said Mrs. Desmond, despondently. "Mr. Desmond will leave for the south to-night, and if he is no better when he arrives, he will telegraph for me to go to him. He is unwilling for me to go if it can be prevented, as it is so warm down there at this time of year. Besides, I am unwilling to leave Ruby, and I could not run the risk of taking her."

She threw herself into a chair, and wept a few genuine tears.

Little Golden, watching her with dry eyes and pale, mute lips, wondered if the sister's heart ached half so heavily and painfully as her own did.

"Yet why should I grieve for him?" the poor child asked herself. "I should rather rejoice. He has forsaken and deserted me."

She could find no answer to that question in her heart, save that she loved him. Loved him in despite of her cruel wrongs.

Before night another telegram was received, saying that Bertram Chesleigh had asked repeatedly for his sister. So it was decided that Mrs. Desmond should accompany her husband.

"Mary, do you think that you and the housekeeper can take care of my little Ruby while I am gone?" inquired Mrs. Desmond, tearfully.

Golden promised so earnestly to give her whole care and attention to the little one that Mrs. Desmond could not help confiding in her promise.

The child herself, though half-distracted with grief at the parting with her parents, promised bravely to be a good and patient girl for Uncle Bertie's sake.

Celine was to accompany her mistress, and was in a bustle of pleasant preparation. The hours passed swiftly, and the time for the farewells soon came and passed.

Little Ruby sobbed herself to sleep dismally, with her arms around Golden's neck, unconscious that the girl shed sadder tears than her own, when her little charge was peacefully dreaming.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"The slow, sad hours that bring us all things ill," waned slowly, while Golden and Ruby waited impatiently for news of the travelers.

Ruby was very restless and capricious, besides her daily headaches grew worse as the heat of the summer season advanced. She fretted very much over her postponed trip to the seaside.

At length a telegram came from the travelers to say that they had reached Glenalvan Hall, and Mr. Chesleigh was no better. After this these bulletins came almost daily, but with no encouraging words. Very ill, and no prospect of improvement yet, was their daily burden.

In about two weeks Mr. Desmond returned unexpectedly.

Ruby was overjoyed. She laughed and wept together, as she hung around his neck.

"Uncle Bertie must be better, or you would not have returned," she cried.

But her father shook his head gravely.

"No, dear, I am sorry to say he is not improving at all. Indeed the case is so critical that it may be weeks before your mother can return. That is why I have come."

"Shall you go back, then?" inquired Ruby.

"Yes, in about a week. Have you fretted for us very much, Ruby?"

"A great deal," she replied. "Oh, papa," clapping her little hands, "now I know why you have come back. You are going to take me to mamma and Uncle Bert."

"Nothing is further from my intentions," replied Mr. Desmond. "I have come to take you to the seashore."

"The seashore—while my uncle is so ill?" cried the child, a little surprised.

"Yes, Ruby. You must remember your own health is very frail. Your mother is very anxious about you. You will go to the seashore in the care of Mrs. Markham. Will that arrangement please you?"

"Very much," smiled Ruby. "I love Mrs. Markham. Of course I shall take my nurse?"

"Yes, of course," he replied, then inquired, carelessly: "Are you still satisfied with Mary Smith?"

"Oh, yes, Mary is a splendid girl—I do not intend ever to part from her," replied the child, enthusiastically, "I am quite getting over my sulky spells since she came. Mary does not tease and cross me as the others did."

Golden, who had sat sewing quietly by the window, without ever lifting her eyes from her work since Mr. Desmond entered, crimsoned painfully at thus having his attention drawn upon her.

But he took no notice of her except to say patronizingly:

"I am glad you have found such a treasure, Ruby. I hope she will remain with you. Are you willing to accompany Ruby to the seaside, Mary?"

"Yes, sir," she answered, quietly.

"Very well, I will go and see Mrs. Markham now. If she can go by the last of the week I will accompany the party and see you all safely settled before I return south."

Golden made him no answer, thinking that none was necessary, and he went out to call on Mrs. Markham.

It was all carried out as Mr. Desmond wished. In the latter part of the week he accompanied the party to the seashore, saw them installed in comfortable quarters, and after staying two days took leave again.

During his short stay, he enjoyed himself according to his flirting tastes with the lively seaside belles. [Pg 65]

In her capacity of Ruby's nurse Golden was compelled to see him a great deal, but he treated her at all times with such subdued respect and delicate attention that the girl grew less afraid of him, and began to think that Celine was right when she said he would abandon his pursuit of her now that he had found out she was an honest girl. She did not know that Mr. Desmond's quiet respect and delicate courtesy was more dangerous than his former open advances had been. Still she was relieved when he was gone, and she was left alone with little Ruby and Mrs. Markham, who was very kind to the lonely girl though in a decidedly patronizing fashion.

When Golden and Ruby had been at the seaside a month with Mrs. Markham, the glad tidings that Mr. Chesleigh was beginning to improve, were conveyed to little Ruby in a short but affectionate letter from her mother.

"Your dear uncle has had a great fight for his life, but the doctor now says that he is likely to get well," Mrs. Desmond wrote. "If he continues to improve, we shall be able to start home with him in about two weeks, journeying slowly. We will join you then at the seaside, as the physician thinks that a month by the sea will quite restore Bertram's health."

It was Golden's task to read this letter to the little six-year-old, whose education, owing to her extreme frailty of constitution, had not yet commenced.

The child cried out noisily for joy at the welcome news, but Golden said not a word. Yet her thoughts were very busy.

"I shall see him again very soon," she said to herself. "Will he recognize, in his sister's servant, the girl that loved him so dearly?"

Then the thought came to her that he would not wish to see her again; she had no part nor lot in his life henceforth, by his own desire.

Musing sadly by the great, moaning sea, while little Ruby gathered the rosy-tinted shells along the sands, she murmured to herself those sweet, pathetic lines of Owen Meredith:

"Oh, being of beauty and bliss! Seen and known
In the depths of my heart, and possessed there alone,
My days know thee not, and my lips name thee never,
Thy place in my poor life is vacant forever;
We have met, we have parted,
No name is recorded
In my annals on earth."

CHAPTER XXIV.

In few more days Mrs. Markham received a letter from Mrs. Desmond. Her brother was so much better that she had quite recovered the tone of her spirits, and wrote, cheerfully:

"If nothing more happens, I shall be with you the first of September. Bertram will be with me, and I shall also bring a very charming young lady whom I have invited to spend the winter months with me in New York. She is the daughter of our host, and has been Bert's unwearied attendant throughout his illness. Between you and me, dear friend, she is so desperately in love with my brother, that she has neither eyes nor ears for anyone else. She has a younger sister whom I have not invited. I do not like her. She is the most abominable flirt I ever saw, and has done nothing but make eyes at Mr. Desmond since we came to Glenalvan Hall."

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"Glenalvan Hall," mused Mrs. Markham, holding the letter in her hand, and drawing her eyebrows thoughtfully together. "How familiar the word sounds! Where have I heard it?"

She puzzled over it awhile, then gave it up. In the gay whirl of fashionable society, she had forgotten the pretty name of the poor girl she had befriended.

But she carried her letter into Ruby's room and read it aloud to her, and Golden's cheeks that had grown very pale and delicate of late, grew paler still.

"Elinor is coming," she said to herself, in dismay. "What shall I do?"

She thought at first that she would go away quietly before they came.

She could not stay and face her proud cousin, Elinor, and the man who had loved her, and then despised her for the stain upon her.

But the thought came into her mind, where would she go? She had never received any of her wages from Mrs. Desmond yet. If she went away she would be utterly friendless and penniless.

She clung to little Ruby because the child loved her very dearly, and without her love she was utterly alone.

And underlying all was a fierce, passionate longing she could not still, to see Bertram Chesleigh's face once more, to hear again that musical, luring voice, whose accents she had hung upon so fondly.

A few days before the first of September, she turned timidly to Mrs. Markham, who was amusing herself with little Ruby down on the sands.

"Mrs. Markham," she said, "will you tell me this, please? Are not green glasses good for weak eyes?"

"I have heard so," replied the lady. "Are your eyes weak, Mary?"

She looked into the girl's face as she spoke, and saw that the sweet, blue eyes were dull and heavy.

How was she to guess that sleepless nights and bitter tears had dimmed their sapphire sparkle.

"Are your eyes weak, Mary?" she repeated, seeing that the girl hesitated.

A blush tinged the pearly cheek, and Golden glanced out at the foam-crested waves rolling in toward the shore.

"I think that the glare of the sun on the sands, and on the water, is very weakening to the sight," she replied, evasively.

"So it is. I have heard others complain of the same thing. If the light affects your eyes I would advise you, by all means, to wear the glasses."

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"Thank you. I believe I will try a pair," returned Golden.

"Oh, Mary, you will be a perfect fright, if you do!" cried out little Ruby, in childish disapproval. "You have covered up all your long, gold hair under that ugly cap, and now, if you cover up your pretty, blue eyes, you will be as horrid-looking as—as—I don't know what!"

"Never mind the looks, my dear," said Mrs. Markham, in her gentle way. "If Mary is kind and loving at heart her looks will not signify."

"But I do so love pretty things," said the child, "and I love to look at Mary. She looks like a picture at night when she combs out her shining hair over her shoulders. There is not a lady at the seaside this summer as pretty as my nurse!"

"Fie, my dear; you must not make Mary vain," cried the lady, half smiling.

"I want to ask you a favor, Mrs. Markham," said Golden, blushing very much.

"A favor! What is it, Mary?" asked Mrs. Markham, encouragingly.

Golden glanced down at her blue cashmere dress, which had grown very shabby and worn during the two months she had been in little Ruby's service.

"You see I had lost all my money when I went into Mrs. Desmond's service," she said falteringly, "and I have not received any of my wages yet, and—and I am getting too shabby to be respectable-looking."

That was little Golden's plea, but the truth was that she did not wish her Cousin Elinor and Bertram Chesleigh to recognize her, and so wished to lay aside the blue cashmere which had been her best dress at Glenalvan Hall.

"Oh, you poor child!" burst out Mrs. Markham, "why did you never tell me that before? I see, now; you want me to lend you the money to buy a new dress."

"If you will be so very, very kind," faltered Golden, gratefully.

"I will do it with the greatest pleasure," answered Mrs. Markham, whose purse was ever open to the needy and distressed.

So on the first of September little Golden appeared in quite an altered guise. The pretty, blue cashmere that was so becoming to her rose-leaf complexion was laid aside, and she wore a sober, dark-gray dress, so long and plain that she looked a great deal taller and older. She had pinned a dark silk handkerchief high up around her white throat, thus concealing its fairness and graceful contour. She had fashioned herself a huge, abominable cap that hid every wave of her golden hair. Dark-green spectacles were fastened before the bright, blue eyes, and with her long, tucked, white apron, little Golden made the primmest-looking nurse-maid that could have been imagined. She looked in the mirror and decided that no one who had known her at Glenalvan Hall would recognize her now.

But little Ruby exclaimed dolorously at her strange appearance:

"Oh, Mary, you have made yourself quite ugly!" she cried, "and I had been thinking how I would show Uncle Bert my pretty nurse." [Pg 68]

"Oh, Ruby, you must not!" cried Golden, in terror. "Promise me you will not."

"Will not—what?" asked the little one, surprised.

"Will not show me to Mr. Chesleigh, nor tell him that you think I am pretty," said Golden, in alarm.

"Very well, I won't," said the little one, disappointed, "but I am very sorry, for I am sure Uncle Bertie would be glad to know that I have a good and pretty nurse. He used to laugh at the ugly ones, and he said their faces were so horrid it was not strange they were bad tempered."

"There is another thing I want you to promise me, please, darling," said Golden, who was on the best of terms with her little charge.

"What is it, Mary?" inquired the child.

"When your uncle comes to sit and talk with you, Ruby, you must let me run away and stay until he leaves you."

"Why should you do that?" asked Ruby.

"I have some sewing to do," replied Golden, evasively.

"I know, but you always do your sewing with me," said Ruby.

"You see it would be quite different with a man in the way."

"Uncle Bert would not bother you one bit. I cannot see why you are afraid of him," rejoined the child.

"But I do not like men, Ruby. I do not like to be where a man is. Now, dear, will you excuse me?" pleaded Golden.

"Yes, I will, since you insist on it," answered Ruby. "But I can't see what makes you hate men! Now I like them. I like papa, I like Uncle Bert, and I shall like my husband when I grow big enough to have one. Do you ever intend to have a husband, Mary?" said the child, with a child's thoughtlessness.

CHAPTER XXV.

The beautiful color surged hotly into Golden's cheeks at Ruby's artless question. She turned her head away to hide the pain that made her sweet lips quiver.

"Mary, do you ever intend to have a husband?" repeated the child.

"Hush, Ruby. You are too young to talk about husbands," answered Golden.

"Dear me, is my daughter contemplating marriage?" cried a gay, sweet voice, and, looking up, they saw Mrs. Desmond in her traveling wraps, dusty and weary, but looking very glad and eager at seeing her child again.

Ruby sprang to her arms, and Golden looked on with sympathetic tears in her eyes at the happy reunion of the mother and child. Mrs. Desmond did not seem to see her until she had fairly smothered Ruby in kisses, when she looked up and said, approvingly:

"How do you do, Mary? That is a very nice new dress—quite suitable to you."

After a minute she said, suddenly, as if the thought had just occurred to her:

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"By the way, you have never yet received any of your wages from me. Here are twenty dollars for two months. I am very glad you have taken such good care of Ruby."

Golden thanked her and took the money, but the gold seemed to burn the delicate palm. It was hard to be receiving a servant's wages from Bertram Chesleigh's sister.

"Where is papa and Uncle Bert?" asked Ruby.

"Papa will be here directly. Bert is very tired—he has gone to his room to rest. You must not go to him yet."

"And the young lady, mamma—she came?"

"Oh, yes."

"Is she pretty, mamma? Has she blue eyes, or black?"

"She is decidedly handsome, and her eyes are black."

"Do you like her, mamma?"

"Quite well, dear. She is very charming. I will tell you a secret. Perhaps she will be your auntie some day."

"Is she going to marry Uncle Bert?" inquired Ruby, wide-eyed.

"Nothing is settled yet, dear. But it seems probable. Bert could not find a more brilliant Mrs. Chesleigh."

"I do not wish for Uncle Bert to marry. I shall tell him so!" cried Ruby.

"Fie, little selfishness, you will do no such thing! He ought to marry and settle down at home. We should not then have to be running after him in every out-of-the-way place where he chooses to fall sick. Here I have been by his sick-bed all summer, ruining my health and missing the whole season by the sea!"

"How gladly I would have exchanged places with you," moaned little Golden, to herself.

"Mamma, did you like Glenalvan Hall?" inquired Ruby.

"Oh, very much, though it is little better than a ruin. It must have been quite a grand place once. It is beautiful still in its decay. The owners were ruined by the late war."

Oh, how anxiously beautiful Golden longed to hear one word from her old grandfather and her black mammy. She listened with a beating heart to the lady's words, but she never named the two that little Golden loved so dearly, and after awhile she rose and said that Celine was waiting for her, and she must go.

Little Ruby clung to her dress.

"Mayn't I go?" she pleaded, and Mrs. Desmond yielding a smiling assent, they went away together, and left Golden alone in the room.

Alone, with her young heart full of strange, troubled joy. Bertram Chesleigh was here, under the same roof with her.

She should see him, she should hear him once again. There was a bitter, troubled pleasure in the thought.

She could not bear the tumult of oppressive thoughts that rushed over her mind. To escape them she went in quest of Mrs. Markham, and paid her the money she had borrowed from her a few days before.

Then she went back to the room to wait for little Ruby, but the child was so preoccupied with her friends that she did not return to her room during the day.

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At twilight she came flitting in joyously as a little fairy.

"Oh, Mary, I have had such a charming day! And you must dress me now in my white lace dress over the pink satin slip, and my white satin slippers, and embroidered rose-silk stockings. I am going to stay up for the ball to-night. Won't that be splendid?"

Golden looked a little anxiously at the moist, flushed face and shining, dark eyes.

"Darling, let me persuade you to lie down on the sofa and rest awhile," she urged. "You have had such a busy, exciting day, that you need rest. To-morrow you will have one of your bad headaches."

"Oh, no I am not tired one bit. And mamma and Miss Glenalvan are gone to dress now. I must be ready when they call for me," urged Ruby.

"I suppose Miss Glenalvan is very pretty, is she not, Ruby?" said Golden, as she combed and brushed the little girl's long, shining, black ringlets.

"Oh, yes, she is very pretty—she has large, black eyes, and rosy cheeks, and splendid hair, but she is not beautiful like you, Mary," was the prompt reply.

"You must not let Miss Glenalvan hear you say that," said Golden. "She would be displeased."

"Hump!" said Ruby, carelessly, then she flew to another subject, while Golden trembled nervously. "Uncle Bert is looking wretchedly ill. Ouch, Mary, what *did* make you jerk that curl so? His eyes are as big as saucers. Are you almost done? You pull my hair dreadfully. I asked him if he was going to marry Miss Glenalvan. He said that was a silly question. Mary, what has come over you? You were never so rough with my head before."

"There, it is finished now. I did not mean to hurt you; excuse me, dear," faltered Golden, as she laid out the white lace dress and satin slippers for the eager child.

"All right, I am not angry," said Ruby. "I told Uncle Bert what a kind girl you were, and he was delighted to hear it. I wanted to tell him you were pretty, too, but I didn't, as you didn't want him to know *that*. But I can tell you one thing, Mary, if he ever sees you, he will find out for himself."

"What! in this great cap and glasses?" cried Golden, alarmed.

"Yes, indeed; you can't hide your round cheeks, and your red mouth, and your dimpled chin!" cried the child, in pretty triumph.

"I can keep out of Mr. Chesleigh's way, anyhow," Golden replied, as she buttoned the pretty dress and clasped a slight gold chain around the white neck of the child.

"Now you are quite finished," she said. "You look very sweet, and I hope you will enjoy yourself very much."

"Thank you," said the little girl, impulsively kissing her; then she added, a little pityingly: "It is a pity *you* cannot be dressed in white, and go to the ball, too, Mary. Do you never wish to?"

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"Sometimes," admitted Golden, with her sweet frankness, and a soft, little sigh.

Ruby studied her attentively a moment, her dark head perched daintily like a bird's.

"I should like to see you in a ball-dress," she said. "It should be a white lace over blue satin, and looped with violets. You should have large, white pearls around your neck, and your hair hanging down and a *bandeau* of pearls to bind it. It is a great pity you are not rich, Mary. People say that you are too pretty to be a servant."

Something like a sob rose in Golden's throat and was hardly repressed. They had told her this so often.

She was beautiful, but it had only brought her sorrow. To her, as her mother, had been given—

"The fatal gift of beauty which became
A funeral dower of present woes and past."

"I am very sorry I am so pretty, Ruby," she said, sorrowfully, and the child answered, quickly:

"I would not be sorry if I were you, Mary. Some good man will fall in love with your pretty face some day and marry you."

Golden made no reply to this well-meant solace, for the door opened to admit Mrs. Desmond, followed by her young lady guest.

Golden retreated shyly to the furthest corner of the room. She was face to face at last with her haughty cousin Elinor. She drooped her head a moment sadly, while a flood of memories rushed over her, then bravely lifted it again and looked at the young lady through her disfiguring green glasses.

Elinor Glenalvan only glanced with careless indifference at the prim-looking figure of the nurse, then her large, black eyes turned away again, so that Golden had time to observe her with impunity.

The Glenalvans had exerted themselves to the utmost to secure an outfit for Elinor. The result did credit to their efforts. The girl was certainly dazzling.

She wore cream-colored *moire*, trimmed with rich Spanish lace and cardinal satin. Great clusters of Jacqueminot roses burned on her bosom and in her shining, raven hair.

The costly pearl necklace that John Glenalvan had taken from Golden was clasped around her white throat.

A throb of resentment stirred the young girl's breast as she observed it.

Mrs. Desmond wore white lace looped with diminutive and richly-colored sunflowers. Her jewels were diamonds, and she was as usual brilliantly beautiful and graceful. Golden caught her breath in awed admiration of the two beautiful women.

"Are you ready, Ruby?" inquired Mrs. Desmond.

"Yes, mamma," said the child, blithely.

All three went out then, and Golden threw a dark shawl over her head and went out upon the seashore.

She sat down, a quiet, forlorn little figure on the lonely sands, and watched the great foam-capped waves rolling in to her feet.

Something in the immensity and solemnity of the great ocean seemed to calm the turbulence of the fevered young heart and whisper a gentle "peace, be still," to the passions that racked her wronged and outraged spirit.

CHAPTER XXVI.

As Golden had feared, little Ruby's day and night of excitement proved too much for her. She was unable to rise from her bed the next morning, being prostrated by one of her nervous headaches.

To add to her ill-feeling, damp, rainy weather set in during the night, spoiling all the pleasant plans of the newly-arrived party for the day.

Golden darkened the room, lighted a fire on the hearth, and carefully tended the little patient who dozed fitfully until mid-day, when she awakened and declared herself better.

"Has no one been in to see me, Mary?" she inquired, and Golden answered:

"Yes, your mamma came to the door while you were sleeping, but went away again, saying that she would not disturb your rest."

"You may go and tell her to come now, Mary."

"I think she is with your uncle just now, dear. Cannot you wait a little while?" said Golden. "She said she would go to him a little while, as you were asleep."

"No, I cannot wait," replied Ruby fretfully. "Tell mamma to bring Uncle Bert with her."

"If you have too much company your head will ache again, Ruby."

"No, it will not. It is ever so much better. Why don't you do as I ask you, Mary?" cried the spoiled child.

Golden went out without any further objection. She asked Celine, whom she met in the hall, to deliver Ruby's message to her mother and her uncle.

Celine looked into the sick-room a minute later to say that they were engaged just at present, but would come in about fifteen minutes.

"Oh, dear," fretted the ailing little one, "that is a long time to wait. Give me my dolls, Mary. I'll try to amuse myself with them."

Golden brought the miscellaneous family of dolls and ranged them around Ruby on the bed, chatting pleasantly to her the while in the hope of lessening the weariness of waiting.

"You must keep your promise and let me go out when they come," she said, presently, feeling that she was growing so nervous she could not possibly remain in the same room with Bertram Chesleigh.

"Very well; you may go into the next room," replied the child.

"You may leave the door just a little ajar that I may call you when I want you."

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"I hope you will not want me until they are gone out again," replied Golden.

When the expected rap came on the door, the girl opened it with a trembling hand. She did not look up as Mrs. Desmond and her brother entered, but softly closing the door after them, glided precipitately from the room.

Bertram Chesleigh saw the little, retreating figure in the huge cap and gray gown, and laughed as he kissed his little niece.

"I suppose that was Mary Smith, the prodigy?" he said.

"Yes, and you must not laugh at her," said Ruby, a little resentfully. "She is very good and sweet, and I love her dearly."

There was an element of teasing in Bertram Chesleigh's nature, and Ruby's words roused it into activity.

"She looked very prim and starched," he observed. "She must be an old maid—is she not, Ruby?"

He expected that the little girl would grow indignant at this comment on her favorite, but instead of this she puckered her little brows thoughtfully.

"I don't quite know what you mean by an old maid," she replied.

"You are caught in the trap, Bert. You will have to define yourself," said Mrs. Desmond, laughingly.

"I don't know whether I can," he replied as gayly. "But I think, Ruby, that an old maid is a person who—who doesn't like men, and grows old and never marries."

"Then my nurse is an old maid. You guessed right, Uncle Bert," said the child, with perfect

soberness.

"Why do you think so, my dear?" inquired her mother, very much amused at the child's notion.

"Because I know it, mamma. Mary Smith hates men. She told me she did. She does not like to be where men are. That is why she went out just now. She says she will always stay out of the room when Uncle Bert is with me."

"That is very sensible indeed in Mary," said Mrs. Desmond, with decided approval, while Bertram Chesleigh only laughed and said that men were not ogres, and he would not have eaten Miss Smith even if she had remained in the room.

Meanwhile Golden had retreated to the sitting-room, leaving the door ajar as Ruby had bidden her.

Every word of the conversation which had so strangely turned upon herself was distinctly audible.

She listened in fear and trembling to Ruby's disclosures regarding her antipathy to men, dreading to hear some further revelation that would draw suspicion upon her, but the child had no idea of imparting anything she had promised to keep a secret, and the conversation gradually turned upon indifferent subjects, so that Golden, whose heart was beating wildly at the sound of her lover's voice, ventured at last on a sly peep at him through the open door.

The breath came thick and fast over the sweet parted lips as she gazed—hardly as he had used her, the ineffable love and pity of a woman's heart came up to the beautiful blue eyes, and shone out upon the unconscious ingrate who dreamed not whose eyes were yearning over him with all the pain and pathos of a loving, yet outraged heart.

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"Oh, how pale and ill he looks," cried the poor child to herself. "He looks sad and altered, too. He has suffered almost as much as I have. Was it that which made him ill, I wonder? After all, he loved me dearly. But if he had overlooked the shame of my birth and brought me here, his sister would have scorned me. Ought I to blame him so very, very much?"

As she asked herself the piteous question, the memory of some words rose into her mind—solemn words not to be lightly forgotten.

"Will you, forsaking all others, cleave only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?"

By the light of those words, Golden answered her own question. With a tearless sob she turned her eyes away from the too dear face of the false one.

But though she would not look at him, she could not help hearing his voice as he answered little Ruby's voluble chatter.

Presently the child showed him her great, wax doll, and when he had admired it sufficiently to please her, she said with an air of mystery:

"You could not guess dollie's name if you tried all day, Uncle Bertie."

"It is something high-flown, no doubt," he laughed. "It is Queen Victoria, or Princess Louise, or something like that."

"You are quite wrong," she replied, with sparkling eyes.

"Am I? Well, I have it now. You have called her Mary Smith, after your old-maid nurse."

"No, I have not," said the little one, merrily. "I have called her Golden—Golden Chesleigh."

In the next breath she added, quickly:

"Oh, Uncle Bert, what made you start just as if someone had shot you?"

"Did I start?" he inquired. "It must have been because I am very nervous since my illness. Well, and what did you say your elegant doll was named?"

"Did you not understand me before? It is Golden Chesleigh—Chesleigh after you, Uncle Bert. Is it not a pretty name?"

"Very!" he rejoined, pale to the lips. "Did you think of it yourself, Ruby?"

"Not at all; I asked Mary for a name, and she said Golden. Then I added Chesleigh."

Some curiosity came over him to see the good nurse who loved Ruby and was kind to her, but who hated men, and who had chosen for the pretty wax doll, the sweet and unusual name of Golden.

There came a light tap on the outer door. Mrs. Desmond rose to open it. Golden peeped again and saw her cousin Elinor coming in.

"May I come in and see the invalid?" she asked, brightly, and Bertram Chesleigh answered:

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"Yes, do, Miss Glenalvan. Ruby is better and is holding a levee of her humble subjects."

Elinor kissed the child and sat down as near as she dared to Mr. Chesleigh.

She looked very bright and blooming, and her dress was as usual fashionable and becoming.

Golden could see that Mrs. Desmond regarded her with a real fondness. Elinor had found out the

lady's weakness and played upon it skillfully.

She saw that she was jealous of her husband, and immediately affected an indifference to, and an utter obliviousness of the fascinations of the handsome Mr. Desmond, that delighted his wife and drew her heart to Elinor.

Clare, on the contrary, had an uncontrollable propensity for flirting, and took a malicious pleasure in witnessing the grand lady's silent rage at her walks and talks, and careless enjoyment of her flippant husband's society.

The result was that Elinor received a charmingly worded invitation to return to the north with Mrs. Desmond, while Clare was silently and chillingly ignored.

She was bitterly angry at missing the trip, and sorely repented her weakness, but too late for the repentance to avail, while Elinor was transported with delight.

Surely, she thought, a whole winter in New York, with beautiful Golden out of the way, would be sufficient for the accomplishment of her designs upon Bertram Chesleigh's heart.

Sweet Golden read her cousin's purpose plainly in the tender glances she gave Mr. Chesleigh now and then, from beneath her black-fringed lashes, and the heart of the innocent girl sank heavily.

"She will win him from me," she said, drearily to herself. "Elinor is so beautiful, and graceful, and brilliant, it is a wonder that he ever liked me better than he did her. It was but a light fancy after all, perhaps. He will forget it and turn to her."

The thought gave her inexpressible pain.

She sank upon the floor and hid her face in her hands, weeping silent and bitter tears while the hum of gay talk and laughter flowed on unheeded in the next room.

So it is ever in the busy, jostling world. Sorrow and joy go side by side.

The bridal train meets the funeral procession. Life is mingled sunshine and shadow.

Ah, if Bertram Chesleigh could only have known what true and faithful little heart was breaking so near him.

After awhile the brightness died from Ruby's eyes, the little face looked tired and wan. She said, almost petulantly:

"Now I shall send you all away. Miss Glenalvan laughs so much she makes my head ache."

"Fie, my darling," cried her mother.

"It is the truth, mamma," cried the willful little girl. "I want you all to go now and Mary shall bathe my head until I get better." [Pg 76]

"Who is Mary? I feel quite jealous of her," said Elinor, sweetly, but inwardly raging at the spoiled child's "whims" as she termed them to herself.

"Mary is my nurse," said the child, and her uncle laughingly added:

"A person with antipathy to me, Miss Glenalvan. You should cultivate her. She must be a *rara avis*."

"Do you suppose that all women admire your sex, sir?" retorted the young lady, spiritedly, and they left the room exchanging lively *badinage*, while Mrs. Desmond looked inside the other door for Golden.

She saw her sitting quietly, her sweet face bent over some sewing, no trace apparent of the heartache she was silently enduring.

"Mary, you may come to your charge now," she said with so much more than her usual kindness of tone that Golden's delicate lip quivered. Mrs. Desmond had been pleased to hear that Ruby's beautiful nurse disliked men and was not willing to remain in the room with one.

She laid aside her sewing and went in to Ruby. Mrs. Desmond bent to kiss her pet, and said, fondly:

"Shall I stay and bathe your head, love?"

"No, mamma, I would rather have Mary," she replied.

"I shall be jealous of Mary. You are so fond of her," the mother rejoined as she left the room.

Golden put the dolls away and bathed the brow of the little sufferer until she fell into a deep and quiet sleep.

Then she sat near the window and watched the gloomy September rain pattering drearily down, and the white mist rising from the sea.

The door opened and Celine came in softly, and sat down.

"I want to talk to you a little, Mary," she said, in her low voice. "Shall I disturb the child?"

"Not if you talk softly," replied Golden, hoping that Celine would tell her something about Glenalvan Hall.

She was not disappointed, for the maid said at once:

"I want to tell you about a queer old black woman I saw at that place where Mr. Chesleigh was ill

—Glenalvan Hall," watching her narrowly.

Golden started and looked up eagerly.

"Yes, tell me about her, Celine," she said, with repressed excitement.

"Well, to begin with," said Celine, "she was a most ridiculous-looking old creature, full of grumblings and complaints. This old creature when she found I was from New York, came to me secretly, and asked me the oddest question."

Golden, chancing to look up at that moment, met Celine's eyes fixed upon her with such a strange expression that her heart gave a frightened bound. It was evident that the maid had some suspicions of her.

She forced a calmness she did not feel, and replied carelessly:

"The blacks, you know, Celine, are very ignorant. Their questions appear quite ridiculous sometimes to intelligent and well-informed people." [Pg 77]

CHAPTER XXVII.

Celine looked cunningly at Golden, as she made her confused explanation.

"You seem to be well acquainted with the character of the negroes," she said. "Perhaps you have been in the south."

"I have," replied Golden, with sudden, pretty defiance. "It was my birth-place."

"Where? Glenalvan Hall?" asked Celine, thinking to catch her.

"I did not say that," replied Golden, coolly.

"No? Well, I will tell you what that old woman—Dinah, she was called, asked me about a young lady."

Golden lifted her eyes and regarded her bravely.

"Well?" she said.

"She asked me," continued Celine, "if I had seen a young girl in New York of about sixteen, with large, blue eyes, and long, golden curls, dressed in a blue cashmere dress, and hat and jacket, I told her yes, for her description of the lady's appearance corresponded exactly with yours."

Golden remained perfectly silent, her eyes turned resolutely from Celine.

"She asked me," the maid continued, "if the young girl had found her mother."

Golden could not repress a sudden, violent start.

"Aha," cried Celine, quickly. "You see I am acquainted with your whole history!"

"You know nothing about me whatever, Celine," replied Golden, warmly, "and I cannot see by what right you pry into my affairs."

"Oh, well, if we are so hoity-toity, we can keep our secret," returned Celine, scornfully, "but somebody will find that it was better to have made a friend than an enemy of Celine Duval!"

With these ambiguous words, Celine bounced out of the room, leaving poor little Golden terribly frightened and distressed.

She silently resolved that she would leave Mrs. Desmond the next day, proceed to New York, and make an effort to find her mother.

Meanwhile the irate maid had gone to Elinor's room. Mrs. Desmond had kindly promised to allow Celine to superintend her toilet while they remained at the seaside, and she was waiting now for the Frenchwoman to arrange her hair.

Celine had become possessed of Golden's secret, and she was determined to make capital out of it for herself.

Elinor was quite chatty and confidential with the skillful French maid. In a very few moments while she was braiding the young lady's hair she had dropped a few artful hints and innuendoes that made Elinor start up half wild with fear and terror.

"Oh, no, Celine, you must have imagined it. It is too incredible to believe!"

"I do not ask you to believe *my* simple word, Miss Glenalvan," replied Celine. "Look at the girl yourself, ma'am, and then you can tell me if my suspicions are well founded." [Pg 78]

Elinor looked at her blankly for a moment. The maid returned her gaze with unruffled serenity.

"Only take a good look at her yourself, miss," she repeated.

"How am I to do so without exciting her suspicions?" demanded Elinor.

"Easily enough," replied the wily French maid. "Go back to the room and pretend to have lost some trifle. Get her to go down on her knees to find it and you can obtain a good look into her face."

Elinor Glenalvan waited for no more. Clenching her small hands vindictively, and with an evil

look on her handsome face, she hurried out into the corridor and made her way to Ruby's room.

She turned the handle softly and looked in. The child lay on the bed sleeping peacefully, and Golden remained at the window peering out through the half-open blind at the dismal prospect, her red lips quivering grievously, her sweet blue eyes dim with unshed tears.

She started up nervously as her cousin came in abruptly and closed the door.

Elinor looked into her face and her heart gave a great, frightened bound. She recognized the beautiful face instantly in spite of the disfiguring cap and glasses.

Controlling her rage by a violent effort, she observed with comparative calmness:

"I have lost a gold cuff-button, Mary, and thought perhaps I had dropped it in here. Have you seen it?"

Golden answered her with a shrinking negative, and Elinor continued:

"I am almost certain that I dropped it in this room. Perhaps it has rolled beneath the bed. Will you get down and look under it, Mary?"

Golden complied without a word, and Elinor had the desired opportunity of looking at the girl's face.

In another moment, half beside herself with jealous rage, she caught the cap and glasses from Golden's head and face, and cried out in low, hoarse accents of intense passion:

"Golden Glenalvan, you shameless creature, what are you doing here?"

Golden sprang to her feet and looked at her heartless cousin in momentary terrified silence.

"What are you doing here?" Elinor repeated, in a voice of raging scorn. "Did you wish to advertise your disgrace to Bertram Chesleigh's sister?"

"Disgrace?" faltered the poor, heart-broken child.

"Yes, your disgrace. It is plain enough to be seen!" cried Elinor, pointing a scornful finger at her cousin, who had dropped into a chair and hid her blushing face in her small hands. "Did you come here that Mrs. Desmond might learn the full measure of her brother's sin?"

Golden looked up with tear-wet, blue eyes into the blazing orbs of the angry girl.

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"Elinor, I did not know she was his sister until after I came," she murmured, pleadingly.

"But when you found it out, why did you not go away?" Elinor demanded, sharply.

"I had nowhere to go—I was friendless and penniless. What could I do but stay?" moaned Golden.

"You should have drowned yourself. You are not fit to live, you wicked, deceitful girl. So you were Mr. Chesleigh's mistress after all, although you swore that you were pure and innocent!" blazed Elinor.

"I am innocent! I was never Bertram Chesleigh's mistress!" Golden cried. "I am his own true——" she stopped with a moan of anguish. "Go, I must not tell—I must keep my promise! Oh, Elinor, you are my cousin. Do not be so hard and cruel!"

"How dare you claim me as your cousin?" cried Elinor, angrily, "Get up from the floor and stop making a simpleton of yourself. You have got to go away from here. Do you understand me?"

Golden rose to her feet and looked steadily into Elinor's face with flashing blue eyes.

A spirit was roused within her that quite equaled her cousin's.

"Elinor," she answered, "I understand you, but let me tell you here and now, that I defy your commands. You have no authority over me, and I am the mistress of my own actions. I shall remain in Mrs. Desmond's service as long as I choose to do so. Your whole treatment of me has been such as to merit no consideration at my hands, and it shall receive none."

If angry looks could have killed, little Golden would never have survived her defiant speech, for Elinor's dark eyes glared upon her with the deadly fury of an enraged tigress.

"You will not go," she hissed. "Perhaps you think to stay here and resume your old sinful relations with Bertram Chesleigh."

Before Golden could reply to the cruel taunt, there was an unthought-of interruption.

Little Ruby, awakened by Elinor's angry tones, sprang upright in the bed, and cried out in the utmost surprise and resentment.

"What is the matter? Why are you scolding my nurse, Miss Glenalvan?"

Elinor turned to Ruby with an instantaneous change of manner.

"Why, you little darling," she cried, with honeyed sweetness, "what an absurd idea! You must have dreamed it all. I was only asking Mary about a gold cuff-button I had dropped on the floor. I am very sorry I disturbed you in your refreshing sleep."

She left the room before the child could challenge her plausible excuse, and returned to Celine.

"I was right, ma'am," the maid cried, triumphantly. "I see it in your face."

Elinor dropped into a chair, and the change in her face was quite striking enough to have excited the woman's exclamation.

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She was as white as death, her black eyes gleamed with vindictive rage, her thin lips were set in

a cruel line.

"Yes, you were right," she said, in a low, intense voice, "Celine, that girl must go away from here."

"Did you tell her so?" asked the woman.

"Yes, and," helplessly, "she defied me. Oh, what am I to do?"

"She would not go for you?"

"No she is determined to stay. But," passionately, "she must go, and go this very day. If she remains, and Mr. Chesleigh sees her, all is lost. He will recognize her instantly."

"I expect you would give a great deal to get the girl out of your way," said the maid, artfully.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Elinor lifted her flashing eyes, and looked at the maid, struck by her significantly-uttered words.

"Yes," she answered, boldly, "I would give anything I possess to anyone who would remove her from my path without my agency being known in the matter."

"You would not care by what means?" asked Celine.

"No," declared the young lady.

Celine turned the key in the lock, and coming nearer to Elinor, whispered softly:

"What will you give me, Miss Glenalvan, if I will have the girl driven out under a disgraceful ban this very night?"

"Can you do it?" inquired Elinor, eagerly.

"Easily," was the confident reply, "if you will make it worth my while to do so."

Elinor revolved the words a moment in her mind. She saw that Celine's services would have to be amply requited, otherwise the selfish creature would not trouble herself to help her out of her difficulty.

"You know I am not well off, Celine," she said, "but father has promised to send me some money this month to buy my winter outfit. To tell the truth I shall need every cent of it, for I've scarcely a decent thing to wear this winter, but if you will get the girl away before Mr. Chesleigh sees her, I will divide my allowance with you."

"How much money has your father agreed to send you?" inquired the rapacious woman.

"Three hundred dollars," replied Elinor, "and I will give you one-half of it if you will do me this service."

She felt as if she making a very liberal offer, and was surprised when the Frenchwoman shook her head.

"A hundred and fifty would not pay me for the trouble," she said, conclusively.

Elinor looked at her a little blankly.

"But don't you understand. Celine, that I cannot spare any more?" she said. "I must keep enough to buy a decent dress and hat and cloak for the winter." [Pg 81]

"That matters not to me," replied Celine, with the utmost indifference. "You must either give me the whole three hundred or I will not help you."

Elinor was angered and amazed at the woman's shameless rapacity.

"I will not do it!" she exclaimed, "I dare say Golden will go away of herself; anyhow, I do not intend to be fleeced so shamelessly."

"As you please, miss," replied the maid coolly. She had the game in her own hands, and was insolently aware of the fact. "I'm not anxious to accommodate you, I dare say I could make more by selling my secret. Don't you think Mr. Chesleigh would give me a thousand dollars for telling him where to find his missing sweetheart?"

Elinor grew frightened and acquiescent all in a moment at Celine's baleful threat.

"Oh, Celine, don't do that," she cried, "I was only joking when I said I would not do it. You shall have every dollar of the money if you will get Golden away to-night as you said you would."

"I thought I should bring you to your senses," muttered Celine, then she added aloud:

"Thank you, miss. Are you sure that your father will send the money?"

"He promised to do so without fail," replied Elinor.

"And you will really hand it over to me as soon as received?"

"Yes."

"Then you may consider the little marplot gone. In less than an hour you will see her leaving this hotel followed by Mrs. Desmond's curse," replied Celine, with perfect confidence in her power of

executing the task she had undertaken.

"What do you mean? How will you accomplish it?" inquired Elinor.

"Never mind about that, I will do as I said, never fear. Are you done with me now, Miss Glenalvan? If you are I will go to Mrs. Desmond. She will need me to do her hair."

"You may go, Celine," replied the young lady. "Now be sure," a little nervously, "that you do not implicate *me* in the affair."

"Trust me for managing everything all right," was the airy reply.

She went out and made her way to the dressing-room of her mistress.

Mrs. Desmond was sitting before the dressing-table with a small jewel-casket open in her lap.

She was turning over some pretty rings with her white fingers.

Celine went up to the table and began to get out the combs and brushes.

"Are you ready for me to do your hair?" she inquired.

"In a moment," replied Mrs. Desmond. "I am looking over my rings now. I want to select one of the neatest and plainest for a present to someone." [Pg 82]

Celine simpered and coughed. She fully expected to become the fortunate recipient.

"I must confess that I have been mistaken for once," continued Mrs. Desmond, half to herself. "When the girl came here first, I was prejudiced against her, partly because she was so pretty and childish-looking, and again because we had had so many hateful nurses, I thought she must necessarily be like them. But I was for once happily mistaken. She has been so humble and unobtrusive, and endeared herself so much to my little girl, that I must really reward her for her good care of my darling during my absence."

"Of whom are you speaking, ma'am?" inquired Celine, green with envy, as the lady paused, having selected a plain, gold band, set with a single, shining, white pearl.

"Of Mary Smith," Mrs. Desmond replied, "and I am going to give her this ring in token of my respect for her good character, and my gratitude for the really motherly care which she has taken of my dear, frail, little Ruby."

CHAPTER XXIX.

At Mrs. Desmond's kindly-spoken words, Celine heaved a deep sigh and remained silent. The lady glanced up at her in some surprise.

"What is the matter, Celine?" she inquired. "Do you not think I am right to acknowledge my appreciation of her valuable services?"

The maid only sighed more deeply, casting down her eyes as if in great distress.

"I hope you are not jealous, Celine," continued her mistress. "You know I have given you many such testimonials of my favor."

"Yes, that you have, and I'm not jealous—not a bit, dear mistress," cried Celine; "but, oh, dear, oh, dear! that you should have been so cruelly deceived and betrayed."

"Celine, what do you mean?" asked the lady, disturbed.

"Oh, my dear lady, I hate to grieve you, but I can't bear to see you imposed upon any longer by that shameless girl! Oh, my dear mistress, where are your eyes that you can't see her disgrace? Oh, how I wish I had told all I knew at first!" cried Celine, wringing her hands, while tears fell from her eyes.

Mrs. Desmond sprang up and caught her by the arm excitedly.

"Speak! What is it that you know?" she cried, passionately. "Have I been deceived in Mary Smith?"

"Yes, my dear lady—most cruelly deceived!" exclaimed Celine.

"But she has certainly been kind to the child. Else Ruby would have complained," said Mrs. Desmond in perplexity.

"Oh, yes, she was kind to the child, I admit, but it was all for a blind. And all the—all the while—oh, Mrs. Desmond, if you could only understand without my telling it," cried Celine, breaking off abruptly, with an appearance of grief and reluctance.

The passionate, jealous heart of the listener caught the artful bait instantly.

She gasped for breath, her brilliant face whitened to a marble pallor, and she caught at the back of a chair to steady herself.

If Celine had not been utterly selfish and pitiless she must have retracted her cruel lie in the face of that utter despair on the beautiful face of her mistress. But the greed of gold overpowered every other consideration in her base mind.

"Celine," the startled woman broke out, "do you mean to say that—my husband——" she paused, [Pg 83]

and her blazing eyes searched the woman's face.

"Your husband loves her—alas, yes, my poor, deceived mistress," cried the maid. "The deceitful creature has won his heart from you."

There was a moment's silence while Mrs. Desmond groped blindly in her mind for some tangible proof on which to pin her faith in her beloved husband.

"Celine, you must be mistaken," she exclaimed. "You know we have been away from home almost the whole time since the girl came to us. She has had no chance with my husband."

"Alas, Mrs. Desmond, you force me to tell you," sighed Celine. "Know, then, that it all began before you went south to Mr. Chesleigh. The very day after she came I caught Mr. Desmond kissing Mary Smith, with his arms around her waist."

"Celine, will you swear to this?" gasped the unhappy wife.

"I will take my Bible oath to its truth," was the emphatic reply.

"Then God help me," moaned the stricken woman. "Celine, why did you not tell me all this before?"

"I was afraid of master's anger," she replied. "He threatened me and I promised not to tell. Oh, my dear lady, will you promise to shield me from his wrath? I could not see you so imposed on any longer."

"So the affair has been going on from bad to worse, Celine?" inquired her mistress, faintly.

"Yes, my dear mistress. You remember how anxious he was to return to New York and take little Miss Ruby to the seashore. It was all an excuse to get back to the nurse. And since we came back yesterday—well, I've told enough already. Are you angry with me, my dear, injured lady?" inquired Celine breaking off, artfully, just where she really had nothing more to tell, unless she had fabricated a wholesale lie.

Mrs. Desmond shook her head and remained silent. The maid was disappointed. She had expected a wild outpouring of anger from the jealous wife, but instead she preserved an ominous quiet.

Her head drooped on her bosom, her face was colorless as death, her wild, burning, dark eyes were the only signs of life in her.

Celine was a little startled at the effect of her wickedness. She brought some *eau de cologne*, and tried to bathe the face of her mistress but was quickly motioned away.

"Go, Celine, send that girl here to me," she said, speaking in a dry, hard, unnatural voice.

The maid went out, and Mrs. Desmond waited but a moment before the door unclasped and little Golden entered. She paused in the middle of the room, and said in her gentle voice: [Pg 84]

"You sent for me, Mrs. Desmond?"

Mrs. Desmond lifted her eyes and looked at the beautiful girl whom she believed to be the wicked destroyer of her happiness. Golden shrank before the withering scorn of that look.

"Oh, madam, is anything the matter?" she faltered.

Mrs. Desmond rose and towered above her in all the dignity of her insulted wifedom.

"Oh, no," she said, in a low, deep voice of concentrated passion, "there is very little the matter—only this trifle. You have shamelessly robbed me of my husband."

"Madam!" cried Golden, in alarm and consternation.

"You need not pretend innocence—you cannot deceive me," cried the outraged wife. "You have won his heart, you have stolen him from me, and you have forever ruined my life."

"Oh, madam, who has told you this dreadful tale? It is not true. I would sooner die than wrong you," cried Golden, with pitiful earnestness.

"Hush, do not lie to me," exclaimed Mrs. Desmond, lifting and pointing a scornful finger at the shrinking form. "Your looks declare your shame. Go, leave the house this moment wretched creature, before in my madness I lay violent hands on you!"

But Golden did not go. She knelt down before her angry accuser, and looked up at her pleadingly.

"Oh, Mrs. Desmond, you are mistaken! You wrong me bitterly by such a suspicion!" she cried, with the tears streaming down her fair cheeks.

"Wrong you!" Mrs. Desmond cried, "are you not then—" she bent and fairly hissed the remaining words into the girl's ear. Golden threw up her hands with a cry of dismay.

"Oh, my God, this is too horrible!" she wailed, "how can I bear it?"

"Did I not speak the truth?" Mrs. Desmond demanded.

"It is true, madam, I cannot deny it," replied the girl, crimson with burning blushes, "but I—oh, I call Heaven to witness my truth, Mrs. Desmond, I am nothing to your husband, I was—was—married before I came to you."

"Then where is your husband?"

"I cannot tell," faltered the white lips.

"That is strange," said Mrs. Desmond, scornfully. "Has he left you?"

"Yes, madam," with a pitiful droop of the fair head.

"Why did he do so?" inquired the lady

"I cannot tell you," Golden murmured, sorrowfully.

Ah, if Mrs. Desmond had only known the truth, that it was her brother's wife kneeling there ashamed and dejected before her. But she did not dream it, and her anger rose at the girl's unsatisfactory replies to her questions.

"I will not ask you any more questions," she said, "I do not wish to hear more of your weak falsehoods. Get up from there, and go. Leave the house now and at once, before I publish your conduct to everyone. You need not go to Mrs. Markham for sympathy. I shall go to her at once and tell her what you are."

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Golden stood still, staring at her blankly a moment. She was dazed and frightened at the shameful suspicion that had fallen upon her, and she did not know how to convince Mrs. Desmond of her innocence.

"Oh, madam, if I could only induce you to believe that I am not the vile creature you think me," she cried in anguish.

"Hush; leave the room!" Mrs. Desmond answered stormily. "Go, and take with you the bitterest curse of an injured woman. May the good God speedily avenge my cruel wrongs!"

She crossed to the door, threw it open, and pointed silently to it.

Golden obeyed the mute sentence of her lifted finger and glided out, a forlorn, little figure, feeling almost annihilated by the vivid lightning of Mrs. Desmond's angry eyes.

The door slammed heavily behind her, and she walked along through the brightly lighted hotel corridor, for the twilight had fallen long ago.

The rain was falling heavily, and Golden shrank and trembled at the thought of encountering the black, inclement night. The thought came to her—why should she go?

She was ill, friendless, almost penniless. It was her husband's right to protect her.

And here she was passing his very door. Should she not appeal to him for comfort in this terrible hour?

Her trembling limbs refused to carry her past his door. She turned the handle with a weak and trembling hand and stepped over the threshold.

CHAPTER XXX.

When Golden on the impulse of the moment had entered the room that she knew was Bertram Chesleigh's, she stood frightened and trembling inside the closed door, afraid to look up at first at the man who had treated her so cruelly.

Gathering courage at the shuddering remembrance of the terrors that awaited her in the darkness of the gloomy night outside, she looked up at last, determined to make at least one appeal to her husband.

The gas had been lighted and it threw a flood of brightness over every object in the room.

On a sofa at the further end Bertram Chesleigh lay sleeping in a careless position, as if he had just thrown himself down, wearied and overcome with fatigue.

The jet-black hair was tossed carelessly back from his high, white brow, and the thick, dark lashes lay heavily upon his cheeks, as if his slumber was deep and dreamless.

A small table was drawn closely to his side, littered with writing materials, and a pen with the ink scarcely dried upon it, lay beside a letter just stamped and sealed, and addressed to:

RICHARD LEITH.

No. — Park Avenue, New York.

As Golden glided across the room, and paused, with her small hand resting upon the table, the superscription of the letter caught her eyes by the merest chance. She started, caught it up in her hand and scanned it eagerly.

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"Richard Leith," she read, and her voice trembled with eagerness. "How strange! Why is he writing to Richard Leith?"

She glanced at the sleeper, but not the quiver of an eyelash betrayed disturbance at her presence.

She drew a slip of paper toward her, and neatly copied the address from the letter, placing it securely in her little purse.

Then she paused, turning another wistful glance from the letter which she still held in her hand, to the pale, handsome face of the husband who had discarded her because she had been born to a heritage of shame.

She wondered again if Bertram Chesleigh knew Richard Leith, and why he had written to him, but no thought of the truth came into her mind, or how gladly she would have flown to the quiet sleeper and folded him in her loving arms, and sobbed out her gladness on his broad breast.

Instead she stood gazing at him a few moments in troubled silence, the tear-drops hanging like pearls on her thick, golden lashes, her breast heaving with suppressed sighs.

Then she turned and went out of the room, her first impulse to awaken him having been diverted into another course by her opportune discovery of the address of the man whom she believed to be her father.

"Bertram would only despise and defy me if I appealed to him, perhaps," she murmured, "I will seek my misguided mother instead."

She gave him one sad, reproachful glance and hurried out of the room.

As she closed the door it inadvertently slammed and awakened the sleeper. He started up, confusedly passing his hand across his brow, and looking up for the person whom he supposed had entered the room.

"I distinctly heard the door slam," he said to himself. "Someone either entered or left the room."

But as no one appeared, he concluded that someone had entered, and finding him asleep, had gone out again.

He crossed to the door and looked out into the lighted corridor.

No one was visible, and he was about to close the door again, when his sister Edith came suddenly in sight.

He waited until she came up to him, her dark silk dress rustling as she moved hurriedly along.

"Come in, Edith," he said. "I am sorry I was asleep when you came in just now. Why did you not awaken me? I was only dozing. The closing of the door awakened me instantly."

She looked up at him in surprise, and then he saw that her brilliant face was quite pale, and her dark eyes had a strange, unnatural glare in them.

"I have not been in your room since morning," she replied. "What made you think so, Bert?"

"Someone must have come in and gone out again, for I was awakened by the closing of the door, and I thought at first it must have been you. Doubtless it was only a servant. It does not matter. But, Edith, has anything happened? You look pale and strange." [Pg 87]

She threw herself down into a chair, and her unnatural calm gave way to a flood of tears.

Mr. Chesleigh was shocked and distressed. He bent over her and entreated her to tell him the cause of her grief.

Checking her tears by a great effort of will, Mrs. Desmond told him all that had passed.

"I will never live with Mr. Desmond again," she said, passionately, when she had finished her story. "Ever since we married he has outraged my love and my pride by his glaring flirtations, but this last affair is too grievous and shameful to be tamely endured. I hate him for his falsehood and infidelity, and I will never live with him again!"

"Edith, think of the scandal, the notoriety, if you leave your husband," he remonstrated.

"I do not care," she replied, her dark eyes blazing with wrath and defiance; "let them say what they will; I will not tamely endure such a cruel insult! You must make some arrangement for me, Bertie, for I will never, never live with Mr. Desmond again!"

And Bertram Chesleigh, with his heart on fire at his beloved sister's wrongs and his brain puzzled over the best way to right them, little dreamed that his own weakness and wrong-doing had been the sole cause of her sorrow. His fiery indignation was spent upon his brother-in-law when it should have been bestowed upon himself.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"I will not go in to bid little Ruby farewell," Golden said to herself sadly, as she left the room of Bertram Chesleigh. "The little one loves me and I could not bear her grief at parting with me. I will slip into the next room without her knowledge, get my hat and jacket, and go away quietly. When I am gone, perhaps Mrs. Desmond may become reconciled to her husband."

She did not dream that the proud woman's anger and resentment against her husband would carry her to the length of a separation with him.

She donned her hat and jacket, and tied her few articles of clothing into a compact bundle. Taking them in her hand, she stole noiselessly out, and made her way to the lower portico of the great hotel.

She paused there, a little dismayed, and looked out at the black and starless night with the chill September drizzle falling ceaselessly. She would be obliged to walk two miles through the storm to take the midnight train for New York.

It would have been perfectly easy to have hired a conveyance but she had only nine dollars left in

her purse after discharging her debt to Mrs. Markham, and not knowing how much her fare to the city might be, she was afraid to waste a penny in hack hire. [Pg 88]

She decided that she must walk, so, unfurling her small sun-umbrella as some slight protection against the beating rain, she plunged with a shiver into the wet and darkness of the untoward night.

She groped along wearily in the dreary road, scarcely conscious of her physical discomfort and peril in the agonizing pain and humiliation that ached at her heart. She had been driven forth under the ban of cruel shame and disgrace.

Bertram Chesleigh would hear the story of Ruby's wicked, deceitful nurse, and would hate her memory, little thinking that it was his own wretched wife, and that she had borne Mrs. Desmond's angry charge without defending herself, and all for his sake, because he was too proud to acknowledge her claim on him.

The weary walk was accomplished at last, and Golden waited several hours in her wet and draggled garments in the fireless room at the station for the train that was to take her to New York.

It came at last, and in a few more miserable hours she was safe in the city. She found, after paying her fare, that she had enough left to pay for a bed and breakfast at a hotel, and gladly availed herself of the privilege.

Wretched and impatient as she felt, her overstrained mind yielded to the physical weakness that was stealing over her, and she slept soundly for several hours. Rising, refreshed and strengthened, she made a substantial breakfast and sallied for No. — Park Avenue. She hardly knew what she would do when she arrived there, but the conviction was strong upon her that she must go.

She had no difficulty in finding the number. The house was large and elegant, with a flight of brown stone steps in front. Golden climbed them a little timidly, and rang the bell.

The servant in waiting stared at her cheap attire a little superciliously as he opened the door, but when she inquired if Mrs. Leith were at home his aspect changed.

"Oh, you are come in answer to the advertisement for a maid," he said. "Yes, my mistress is at home, and she will see you at once. Come this way."

Golden followed him in silence to the lady's dressing-room. The thought came to her that this would be an admirable pretext for making the acquaintance of the Leiths, so she did not deny that she was seeking a situation.

A beautiful, golden-haired lady opened the door at her timid knock. The girl's heart gave a great, muffled throb.

"My mother," she thought.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"Mrs. Leith, this is a young woman who has answered the advertisement for a maid," said the man, respectfully, as he turned away.

The beautiful lady nodded Golden to a seat, and looked at her with careless condescension. [Pg 89]

"What is your name?" she inquired.

"Mary Smith," answered the girl in a low, fluttering voice.

"Have you any recommendations?"

"Not as a maid, as the occupation is new to me. I have been a nurse heretofore, but if you will try me I will do my best to please you," said Golden, anxiously.

"I am very hard to please," said Mrs. Leith.

She did not tell Golden that she was so very hard to please that no one could suit her, leaving her to find that out for herself, as she would be sure to do if she remained.

There was a moment's silence, and Golden gravely regarded Mrs. Leith. She was *petite* and graceful in form, with large, blue eyes, waving masses of golden hair, and beautifully-moulded features. She was barely thirty years old in appearance, and was richly and becomingly attired.

Yet Golden shivered and trembled as she regarded the fair, smiling beauty. How could she look so bright and careless with the brand of deadly sin upon her? There was neither sorrow nor repentance on the smiling, debonair face.

"And this is my mother," Golden thought to herself, with a strange heaviness at her heart. "She seems utterly indifferent at her wickedness. Ah, she little dreams that the poor babe that she deserted so heartlessly is sitting before her now."

Mrs. Leith's light, careless voice jarred suddenly on her mournful mood.

"Well, I will try you, Mary, for I need a maid. My last one was so incapable I had to discharge her. You may do my hair for me now. I am going to drive in the park with Mr. Leith, if his troublesome

clients do not detain him. My husband is a lawyer, Mary, and his time is almost wholly engrossed by his business."

"Her husband," Golden repeated to herself, as she wound the shining tresses into braids. "So they keep up that farce before the world. Poor mother! how she must love my father to remain with him on such humiliating terms. Is she really happy, or does she only wear a mask?"

But there was no apparent sorrow or remorse on the complacent face of the lady as she gave her orders and directions to the new maid.

The uppermost thought in her mind was how to make the most of her beauty.

Golden had to arrange her hair twice before she was suited, and she tried several dresses in turn before she decided on one. She was inordinately vain and fond of finery, and Golden thought pitifully to herself:

"Her beauty is the only hold she has on my father, and she is compelled to make its preservation the sole aim of her life."

She wondered a little that no yearning throb had stirred her heart at the sight of her beautiful mother, but she told herself that it was simply because her mother's sin had wholly alienated the natural affection of her purer-hearted daughter.

She pitied her with a great, yearning pity, but no impulse prompted her to kiss the dewy, crimson lips, she had no temptation to pillow her head on the fair bosom that had denied its shelter and sustenance to her helpless infancy.

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Mrs. Leith did not look as if she would have made a tender mother.

"Have you any children, madam?" she asked, suddenly, and Mrs. Leith answered:

"No," rather shortly, but added a minute later: "And I am glad of it, for I do not love children. But Mr. Leith does, and is rather sorry that we have none."

"He is justly punished for his sin," thought his unknown daughter, while she secretly wondered why he had never claimed the child his wife had heartlessly deserted to return to him.

"Perhaps she told him I was dead," thought Golden, looking at the beautiful woman with a strange thrill of repulsion. "Perhaps he would have loved me and cared for me, had he known I lived."

A thrill of pity, half mixed with tenderness, stirred her heart for the father who had been cheated of the child he would have loved.

She became conscious of a burning desire to meet her father—the man who had wronged her mother, and who had been wronged in turn, in that he had never beheld the face of his child.

There was a manly step at the door, and it opened, admitting a tall, handsome man in the prime of life.

Golden's heart gave a quick, wild throb, then sank heavily in her breast.

She retreated hastily to the shade of a window-curtain, where she could observe the new-comer, herself unobserved.

Richard Leith was tall, dark, and very handsome, though there were iron-gray threads in his dark, waving hair, and in the long, magnificent beard that rippled down upon his breast.

He looked like a man who had known trouble and sorrow. His face was both sad and stern, and his dark eyes were cold and gloomy.

Mrs. Leith looked up at him carelessly, and his grave face did not brighten at the sight of her beauty, enhanced as it was by the rich, blue silk, and becoming white lace bonnet with its garland of roses.

"Are you ready for your drive, Mrs. Leith?" he inquired, with punctilious politeness.

"Yes, I am just ready," she replied, carelessly. "You see I have a new maid; she is rather awkward, but I shall keep her until I can do better."

Mr. Leith gave an indifferent nod toward the gray gown and white cap that was dimly visible at the furthest corner of the room, then he went out with his wife, and Golden sank down upon the carpet and wept some bitter, bitter tears, that seemed to lift a little bit of the load of grief from her oppressed bosom.

After all, she had found her father and mother, and it was possible that she might bring them to see the wickedness of their course, and to seek reformation.

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She determined not to reveal her identity just yet.

She would stay with them a little and learn more of them before she made her strong appeal to them in behalf of truth.

She would not reproach them just yet for the blight they had cast on her innocent life. She would patiently bide her time.

It was a strange position to be placed in.

Under the roof of her own parents, unknown and unacknowledged, with her whole life laid bare and desolate through their sin.

A hot and passionate resentment against them surged up into Golden's wounded heart.

What right had her mother to be so fair and happy when she had sinned so grievously?

Perhaps she would be very angry when she knew that the child she had so pitilessly deserted had hunted her down to confront her with her sin.

"I will wait a little. I will not speak yet," she said. "I shall know them better after awhile, and I shall know how to approach them better."

So the days waned and faded.

Golden began to become very well acquainted with the beautiful woman whom she believed to be her mother. She was vain, frivolous, heartless.

The pure-hearted girl recoiled instinctively from her. But she could not understand Mr. Leith so well.

He was a mystery to her. Some settled shadow seemed to brood heavily over him always.

He was engrossed with his studies and business. Golden wondered if it was remorse that preyed so heavily on him. She had never seen a smile on the stern, finely-cut lips.

There was one thing that struck her strangely, Richard Leith and his so-called wife did not appear very fond of each other. The gentleman was studiously courteous, polite and kind, but Golden never saw on his expressive face that light of adoring tenderness she had loved to see on Bertram Chesleigh's whenever he looked at her. Mrs. Leith was totally absorbed in her dresses, her novels, and her daily drives, during which she excited much admiration by her beauty and her exquisite toilets. But love and passion—these seemed to be worn-out themes between the strangely-mated pair. They addressed each other formally as Mr. and Mrs. Leith, but Golden had noticed that the lady's clothing was marked "G. L." She knew, of course, that the letter G. stood for Golden, but when she asked her about it with apparent carelessness one day, the lady answered that it was for Gertrude.

"She has discarded even her name," her daughter mused bitterly. "Perhaps she has even forgotten her old home and her deserted father and her little child."

And in spite of herself Golden felt that she heartily despised the woman whom she should have loved in spite of all her faults because she was her mother. But some strange and subtle fascination drew her nearer and nearer to Richard Leith.

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Her anger and scorn which she had tried to foster at first began to dissolve in spite of herself into a yearning and sorrowful tenderness.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Several weeks went by, and Golden wondered very much if the Desmonds had returned to the city, and if the lady still held her unjust suspicions and jealousy against her.

She often wondered as she looked at Richard Leith's stern, set face, why Bertram Chesleigh had written to him, and for what object.

One day she heard Mrs. Leith remark to her husband that she had seen Mr. Desmond driving in the park alone that morning.

"He looked pale and dejected—quite unlike himself," she added, "I wonder if his handsome wife and little daughter are at the seaside yet."

"Did you not know," said Mr. Leith, "Mrs. Desmond and Ruby have gone to Europe with Chesleigh."

"Gone without her husband," cried the lady. "How strange! Do you not think so?"

"Not strange when you hear the circumstances," Mr. Leith replied, gravely. "The truth is Mrs. Desmond became violently jealous of a pretty servant girl, and declared she would leave him—even threatened a divorce. To save publicity her brother persuaded her to take a trip with him to Europe, hoping that time might soften her anger. You understand that these are not public facts, Mrs. Leith. They came to me personally as the Desmonds' lawyer."

"I shall not repeat them," she replied, taking the gentle hint, good-humoredly. "Do you think she will ever be reconciled, Mr. Leith?"

"I scarcely think so. Mrs. Desmond is perfectly implacable at present. Mr. Desmond employed me as a mediator between them, but I could accomplish nothing. He swears that she was unjustly jealous, and that there was nothing at all between him and the girl. But I could not induce Mr. Chesleigh nor his sister to believe the assertion."

"What became of the girl?" inquired Mrs. Leith.

"Mrs. Desmond drove the wretched creature away. It is not known what became of her," replied the lawyer; "altogether it is a very sad affair. Chesleigh has acted on my advice in taking his sister out of the country for awhile. I pity Bertram Chesleigh. He has had a bad entanglement himself lately which he has been compelled to place in my hands. But, poor boy, I fear I can do nothing for him."

"He is trying to get a divorce from me," thought Golden, with a dizzy horror in her mind, and the

bitter agony of the thought drove the color from her face, and the life from her heart. With an exceeding bitter cry she threw up her arms in the air, staggered blindly forward and fell heavily upon the floor.

"What is that?" cried Mr. Leith, looking round with a great start.

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"Why, it's Mary Smith! I had forgotten that she was in the room," cried Mrs. Leith. "Oh, look, she is dead!"

She began to wring her hands excitedly, but Mr. Leith said quietly:

"Do not alarm yourself. She has only fainted I suppose. Bring some water and we will soon revive her."

She ran into the dressing-room, and Mr. Leith bent down over the prostrate form and lifted the drooping head compassionately.

The ugly, concealing cap and glasses had fallen off, and as his gaze rested fully on the lovely, marble-white face, a cry of surprise and anguish broke from his lips.

"My God, how terribly like!" he muttered. Then, as Mrs. Leith returned with water and *eau de cologne*, he applied them both, without the slightest success, for Golden still lay cold, white and rigid, like one dead, upon his arm.

"Is she dead?" Mrs. Leith whispered, fearfully.

"I cannot tell. Ring for the housekeeper. Perhaps she may know better how to apply the remedies," he replied, still holding the light form in his arms, and gazing with a dazed expression on the beautiful, unconscious face.

The housekeeper came, and declared, in a fright at first, that the girl was dead. Then she turned Mr. Leith out of the room, loosened Golden's clothing, and rubbed her vigorously.

In about ten minutes the quiet eyelids fluttered faintly, and a gasping sigh parted the white lips.

The housekeeper beckoned Mrs. Leith to her side.

"She lives," she whispered, softly, "but she had better have died."

"I do not understand you," Mrs. Leith replied.

"I have made a discovery," continued the old housekeeper. "The girl has deceived you, madam. She is a bad lot, for all her sweet, childish, innocent face."

"Deceived me—how?" Mrs. Leith demanded.

"She is not an innocent maiden, as she appeared. Oh, Mrs. Leith, can you not see for yourself? The wretched creature is likely to become a mother in a few short months."

"You are jesting. She is barely more than a child," Mrs. Leith broke out, incredulously.

"It's the Lord's truth, madam. Faugh! the wicked little piece! A pity I hadn't let her die!" sniffed the virtuous housekeeper, with a scornful glance at the reviving girl.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Mrs. Leith drew back her trailing silken skirts from contact with poor Golden's recumbent form as if there were contamination in her very touch.

"I have been terribly deceived," she said, "I had begun to like the girl very much. She suited me more than any maid I have had for a long while, and I thought her quite pure and respectable. Do the best you can for her, Mrs. Brown, for I shall send her away as soon as she is able to walk."

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Heedless of Golden's large, blue eyes that unclosed and fixed themselves reproachfully upon her, she swept from the room and sought Mr. Leith, to whom she confided the housekeeper's discovery.

The grave-faced lawyer looked shocked and distressed, unaccountably so, the lady thought.

"I can scarcely credit it," he said. "She has such an innocent and child-like face."

"Such faces are sometimes deceiving," remarked the lady. "This instance proves the fact."

"What do you intend to do with the poor child!" Mr. Leith asked, with an unconscious sigh.

"I shall send her away, of course," Mrs. Leith replied, decidedly.

"Oh, *cruel, unnatural mother!*" said a faint, reproachful voice, behind her.

She turned with a start and saw that Golden had followed her.

The poor child stood trembling in the doorway, her dress in disorder, her beautiful hair broken loose from its fastenings, and streaming over her shoulders, her great, blue eyes blazing like stars in her lovely, pallid face, her sweet lips curled in scorn as she pointed her finger at Mrs. Leith, and exclaimed:

"Oh, cruel, unnatural mother! Is your life so pure that you can afford to sit in judgment on me?"

"Is the girl mad?" Mrs. Leith exclaimed, recoiling from her.

"No, I am not mad, although my wrongs have been bitter enough to madden any human being," Golden retorted, passionately. "I am not mad, although your terrible sin has ruined my life and broken my heart."

"*My sin, mine!*" retorted Mrs. Leith, in apparent bewilderment. "What do you mean, girl? I am nothing to you!"

"Nothing to me, oh, my God," moaned Golden, wringing her white hands. "Then you deny that you are my mother?"

"*Your* mother, girl, when I have never had a child in my life. Mr. Leith, do you not see that the wretched creature is raving mad?" cried the lady, retreating to his side apprehensively.

Golden turned her flashing blue eyes on the white, startled face of the man.

"She denies that she is my mother," she said. "Perhaps you will deny that you are my father."

She saw a quiver pass over the man's pale face.

"I do not understand your words," he replied, in a voice shaken with emotion. "Explain yourself."

"I am the child Golden Glenalvan deserted at Glenalvan Hall in its helpless infancy, that she might return to New York and lead a life of shame with you," she cried out bitterly.

Richard Leith's dark eyes turned on her face with a lurid gleam in their shadowed depths.

"Hold!" he cried. "Whoever you are, you shall not malign the memory of poor, little Golden. She was pure as the snow."

"Pure!" the girl repeated, blankly. "She was never your wife. They told me she lived with you in open shame." [Pg 95]

A startling change came over the face of Richard Leith. There was a glare, like that of madness, in his eyes.

He fell backward into a chair, and the labored breath came from between his parted lips in strong, shuddering sighs.

Mrs. Leith flew to his side, and bent anxiously over him.

"Mr. Leith, what is it? What does all this mean? I am mystified," she cried.

His heavy, dark eyes full of sorrow and despair, lifted gloomily to her wondering face.

"It means," he replied, "that I have had a secret in my life, and that the time is come for you to know it. If this girl speaks truly she is indeed my daughter, though not yours."

"Not hers!" echoed Golden, in bewilderment, as she looked at the beautiful woman whom she had for long weeks believed to be her mother.

"Not hers," he replied, "for long before I met and married this lady, little Golden Glenalvan was dead."

A startled cry came from Golden's lips.

"Dead," she shuddered; "no, no; you are deceiving me."

"Not so, as God is my judge," he replied. "But sit down, child, and tell me all your story. Then we may be able to understand each other."

Golden glanced half-fearfully at Mrs. Leith, who stood leaning against her husband's chair, pale and silent, and anxious-looking. The lady quietly and gravely motioned her to a seat.

She thankfully obeyed the gesture, for she felt ill and weary, and the sudden shock of learning that her mother was dead, had been a terrible one to her, and had almost stricken her senseless again.

In low, pathetic tones, and with many tears, Golden told Richard Leith all that she knew of her mother, and as much as she could of her own lonely life, without revealing the tragic story of her unfortunate love.

He listened in silence, although she could see that he was terribly agitated.

His white brow was beaded with great drops of sweat, his eyes stared wildly, he bit his lips till the blood started to keep back the groans of pain.

When she had finished he went over to her, knelt at her feet, and gently kissed her cold, little hand.

"You are my daughter," he said, "and you are the living image of your mother. But until this moment, little Golden, I believed you dead. I wrote to John Glenalvan when my wife ran away from me, and asked him if she had returned to her father. He wrote back that she had done so, that she had given birth to a little daughter, and that the mother and child had both died. Then he added his curse, and threatened, if I ever came near Glenalvan Hall, to shoot me down like a dog."

His voice broke huskily a moment. Golden looked at him eagerly.

"You said your wife," she faltered. "Was my mother, then, legally married to you? Am I not a——" [Pg 96]
her voice broke huskily over the word, "a nameless child?"

"Your mother was my legal wife, little one. You are my own daughter, born in lawful wedlock. God only knows what crafty and wicked enemy of mine wrote that lying letter to my poor, young

wife, telling her that I had deceived her by a mock marriage. She was too credulous, and believed the lie too easily. It was not true. I can give you every proof that your mother was my lawful wife, little Golden."

She fell on her knees, and with upraised hands and streaming eyes, thanked God for those precious words.

Her mother had been pure and noble. There was no shadow of stain on her daughter's birth.

Then, with a sudden, startling thought she confronted him, her white hands clasped in agony, her voice ringing wild and shrill:

"John Glenalvan told you that my mother died. He lied! She disappeared very suddenly the night after I was born, and that villain declared that she had deserted me and returned to her sinful life with you. She did not die, and she did not return to you. Oh, my God, where is she now?"

She saw that terrible question reflected on her father's face.

It whitened to the awful hue of death, and he reeled backward like a smitten man.

A faint cry came from Mrs. Leith, who had dropped heavily into a chair.

"Oh, Heaven, if she is yet living, what, then, am I?"

Richard Leith went to her side, and looked down at her white, scared face, pitifully.

"Gertrude," he said to her gently, "we have both been the victims of a terrible wrong. When I married you several years after the loss of my first wife, won by your beauty, which reminded me of my poor, little Golden's, I honestly believed that she was dead. There is some terrible mystery here, and John Glenalvan is at the bottom of it. But I will wring the truth from his false lips, and if my lost little Golden has come to harm at his hands, his life shall pay the penalty of his sin!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

"Oh, father," cried little Golden. "Why did you lure my poor mother from her home. She was so young, so trusting. Why did you persuade her to desert her parents?"

The man's pale, handsome features quivered all over with vain remorse and penitence.

"You do well to reproach me, little Golden," he sighed. "There is no excuse for my sin. But I will tell you how I came to act so imprudently.

"I was a struggling young lawyer, poor and proud, when I first met your beautiful mother during a business trip to the south. Her family, though reduced to comparative poverty by the late war, were proud and aristocratic people, and I felt quite sure that they would have refused me the hand of their petted darling. [Pg 97]

"I had heard so much of the pride of the southerners that I was afraid to ask the Glenalvans for their beautiful child. So I acted the part of a coward and stole her from them. The dear girl loved me well, and went with me willingly when I promised to take her back to them after we were married.

"I took her to New York, and made her my true and lawful wife, but so afraid was I of those haughty Glenalvans that I refused to allow her to write my name and address to her friends. I was waiting till I should have acquired a fame and fortune that would make me acceptable in their eyes. Oh, God, how terribly my sin has found me out after all these years."

He paused and wiped away the cold dew that beaded his high, white brow. After a moment he went on, sadly:

"I was fast gaining prominence and a competence in my profession, when some base enemy of mine—as a lawyer I had some of the blackest-hearted enemies that a man ever had—wrote my darling a letter, defaming me in scandalous terms, and averring that I had deceived her by a mock marriage.

"Poor child, she was very simple and credulous. She fell an easy victim to the liar's tale. She fled from me, leaving that cruel letter behind her, the only thing there was to hint at the reason of her hurried flight."

"Oh, if only you had followed her then," moaned beautiful Golden.

"If I only had!" he echoed. "My first impulse was to do so; but I had on hand a very important case, which I had staked everything on winning. If I managed it well my success was assured as one of the leading lawyers of the day. My speech for the defense was anticipated anxiously by many. So I suffered my ambition to overrule my first instinctive resolve to follow my wife, and instead I wrote to her brother. He sent me that lying letter that almost broke my heart."

He broke down and sobbed like a woman, or rather, unlike a woman, for those great, convulsive moans of agony that issued from his breast seemed as if they would rend his heart in twain.

Golden stole to his side and laid her small hand kindly on his gray head, that was bowed in sorrow and remorse.

"I am sorry for you, my father," she said. "You have been weak and imprudent, but not sinful, as I thought. But, oh, my poor mother! My heart is torn over her wretched fate. She must have

perished miserably, or we should have heard from her ere now. Oh, father, what shall we do?"

They looked at each other with dim, miserable eyes, this strangely reunited father and daughter, the awful mystery of the wife and mother's fate chilled their hearts.

He took her hand and drew her gently nearer to him.

"My child, I shall go to Glenalvan Hall and confront John Glenalvan with his sin. I believe the whole key to the mystery lies in that villain's hands."

"I am almost sure of it," she replied. "He hated my mother, and he hated me. I will go with you. What joy it will be to stand up proudly before him and tell him that my birth was honest and honorable, and that my father is a good and true man, who is glad to see me, for you *are* glad, aren't you?" she asked him, pleadingly.

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"Yes, dear, I am very glad. I have always longed to have a child of my own to love. It seemed as if my heart was always yearning for the daughter I believed to be dead. But Golden," he looked at her anxiously and pleadingly as he clasped her little hand, "you have a story of your own to tell me before we go on the quest for your mother. The great mystery of love has come to you already in your tender youth. Tell me, my daughter, are you a wife?"

The crimson color flushed into her cheeks, then receded, leaving her deathly pale again.

Tears rose into the great, blue eyes, and trembled on the long-fringed lashes.

Her lips parted and closed again without a sound.

"Tell me, Golden," he urged, anxiously; "are you a wife, or has some artful villain deceived you? If so——" he clenched his hand, and the lightnings of passion flashed from his somber, dark eyes.

A moan of pain came from the girl's white lips.

"Oh, father, I cannot tell you now," she sighed. "Only trust me. Do not believe me vile and wicked. Perhaps I may be able to tell you the truth some day."

As she spoke, some strange, new light flashed into his mind.

She saw the startled gleam flash into his eyes.

"Tell me," he cried out, hoarsely, "are you the girl that was dismissed from Mrs. Desmond's employ under the stigma of a disgraceful suspicion?"

She covered her face with her hands and faltered "yes," in a voice of agony.

"Was that terrible accusation true?" he demanded, in a voice so changed she could scarcely recognize it.

"No, never! It was false, I swear it before Heaven. My trouble came to me before I entered Mrs. Desmond's employ," she replied.

"Golden, you must tell me the name of the man who has wronged you," he said, sternly.

"I cannot," she answered, sorrowfully.

"You mean you will not," he said.

"I cannot. I am bound by a promise," she answered.

"It was a foolish promise. The time has come when you must break it," he answered, steadily. "You must clear yourself in Mrs. Desmond's eyes, and reconcile her to her husband. Do you know that they are separated on your account?"

"I heard you say so," she replied.

"It is true, and I am their lawyer. Will you let me write to Mrs. Desmond, and tell her the name of the man who is really in fault, and for whose sin she has deserted her innocent husband?"

"I cannot," she moaned again, in a voice of agony. "I am bound by a sacred promise. Bitter as the consequences are, I must keep it!"

It seemed incredible to him that this frail, slight girl should hold her secret so resolutely in the face of the trouble it had caused.

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"But, Golden, think a moment," he began.

"I have thought until my brain is almost wild," she interrupted, pitifully. "But I can see no possible loophole out of my solemn vow of silence."

"You were wrong to take such a vow, Golden, and it is almost wicked for you to keep it. Do you see how much is at stake? Through your silence a man and his wife are divided in anger and shame, and a cloud of the blackest disgrace is lowering over your own head. Do you know that it is a fearful thing to come between husband and wife?"

"I feel its enormity in the very depths of my heart," she replied, shuddering and weeping.

"Then surely you will speak; you *must* speak," he urged.

But she only shook her head.

"Not if I command you to do so?" he asked.

"Not if you command me," she replied, with mournful firmness.

There was a moment's silence, and Richard Leith gazed upon the girl with a sick and shuddering heart.

A vague suspicion was beginning to steal into his mind.

What if Golden was deceiving him, and Mrs. Desmond's belief were true?

He reeled before the sickening horror of the thought. The dread suspicion seemed to float in fiery letters before his eyes.

He looked at the bowed figure of the sobbing girl, and steeled his heart against her. She was no child of his if she could let the shadow of suspicion tamely rest upon her head.

"Golden," he said, "think of what I must endure if you refuse to declare yourself. Would you have me acknowledge a child who has covered my honorable name with shame? Shall I take you by the hand and say to the world that honors me as a stainless man: 'This is my daughter. She has disgraced herself, and brought ruin and despair into another's home.'"

She shrank and trembled before the keen denunciation of his words. She threw herself at his feet and looked up with frightened, imploring eyes.

"Father, do not disown me," she cried. "I have not disgraced you—you will know the truth some day. Tell the whole world my piteous story. It may be—it may be that the telling will bring you joy, not sorrow. For," she said to her own heart, hopefully, "if Bertram Chesleigh should hear the truth, and know that I am not a nameless child, surely he will claim me then. He can no longer be ashamed of me."

She felt that the happiness of her whole future hung trembling in the balance on the chance of her father's recognition of her. If in his anger at her obstinacy he should repudiate her claim on him, nothing was left her but despair.

Richard Leith could be as hard as marble when he chose. His pride and his anger rose in arms now against the thought of receiving this branded girl as his own daughter.

"Golden," he said, "what if I say that I will not receive you as my daughter unless you consent to clear up this disgraceful mystery that surrounds you?" [Pg 100]

"You will not tell me so—you could not be so cruel," she cried, fearfully.

"Only one word, Golden. The name of the man who has wronged you. Tell me, that I may punish him."

"You must not, for *I love him*," she moaned, despairingly.

"You force me to believe that Mrs. Desmond was right, and that you are a lost and guilty creature," he said scathingly.

A long, low wail came from her lips, then she bowed her head and remained silent.

"Do you still persist in this obstinate silence?" he asked.

"I must," she answered faintly.

"Go, then," he thundered at her, "you are no child of mine. I refuse you the shelter of my home, my name, and my heart. I cannot believe that you are the child of my innocent little Golden. Go, and never let me see your face again."

And with the cruel words he turned and left the room.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Little Golden stared at the closing door through which her father had vanished, with blank, terror-filled eyes. To have found him and lost him like this was too terrible.

She sat gazing before her like one dazed, with the angry words of her father still ringing in her ears, when a low and fluttering sigh recalled her to the fact of Mrs. Leith's presence which she had forgotten for the moment in her anguish of soul.

She looked around shrinkingly at the fair woman who had taken her mother's place, and her mother's name, dreading to meet a glance of scorn, even transcending that which her father had cast upon her.

Instead she met the beautiful, troubled eyes of her step-mother fixed upon her with tenderest pity.

Mrs. Leith had been vain, careless, and frivolous all her life. She had never known a care or sorrow in the whole course of her pleasant, prosperous existence.

The hard crust of selfishness and indifference had grown over the better impulses of a nature that at the core was true, and sweet, and womanly.

The last hour with its strange revelations had been the turning point in her life.

She realized with a shudder the dreadful position in which she was placed. She was married to a man who, in all probability, had a wife living.

It was possible that she herself was almost as much an outcast as the wretched girl who crouched weeping on the floor, homeless, friendless, and forsaken, in the hour of her direst need.

Never before had Mrs. Leith been brought face to face with a real sorrow. She gazed

So it happened that when Golden looked timidly up expecting to be immediately annihilated by her scornful glance, she met only the gentlest pity beaming from the large, blue eyes of the unhappy woman.

"Come to me, Golden," she said, and as the young girl advanced she asked her in a strangely saddened voice:

"Are you angry with me, child, that I have filled your mother's place and worn her name for twelve, long years?"

"No, I am not angry," Golden answered, gently. "It was through no fault of yours—you did not know."

"No, I did not know," Mrs. Leith murmured, putting her hands to her eyes while the tears fell through her fingers. "I did not know, and now it is too late."

"What shall you do now?" Golden asked her wonderingly.

"I shall go away," Mrs. Leith replied, sadly.

"Are you angry with my father?" asked the girl.

"No, Golden, he sinned ignorantly," replied Mrs. Leith. "Therefore I cannot blame him. But I must go away from him, and never see him again until he learns the truth whether or not his first wife was living when he married me."

Then there was a brief silence. The two women, so lately mistress and maid—now placed upon the same level by the equalizing hand of sorrow, sat still a little while looking out upon the unknown future with dreary, hopeless eyes. Then Mrs. Leith roused herself with an effort.

"And you, Golden—where will you go? What will you do?" she asked.

"God knows," the girl exclaimed, hopelessly. "I am so stunned by the revelations of to-day that I know not where to turn. For weary months the dream of finding and reclaiming my guilty mother has filled and occupied my thoughts. Now that I know her innocent and pure, the terrible mystery of her fate chills the blood in my veins. Where shall I look for her? How shall I find her?"

Mrs. Leith looked at her compassionately.

"Poor child!" she said. "You are too ill and weary to seek for anyone now. Leave that sorrowful quest to your father, and place yourself in my care."

The tears brimmed over in Golden's beautiful eyes at the kindly spoken words of her step-mother.

"Oh, madam," she cried, "you offer to befriend me. Then you do not believe that I am the lost and guilty creature they would fain make me out."

Mrs. Leith's beautiful face beamed with sympathy as she answered:

"No, Golden, I do not believe you are a sinner. I have a strong conviction that you are a deserted or discarded wife, and I will care for you in your forlorn situation with the tenderness of your own mother."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Richard Leith went down to his office, and threw himself heavily into a chair, bowing his gray head dejectedly on his hands.

His brain was almost crazed with the agony of the last hour's discovery.

The sealed book of the past had been roughly torn open again, and in agony of soul he repented the selfish course he had pursued with the fair, young wife he had stolen from her home and friends.

Where was she now, his beautiful, golden-haired darling?

What fate had kept her from her home and friends, and from the little child that had come to such bitter grief in the absence of the mother-love that might have shielded her from harm?

He sprang from his chair, and paced impatiently up and down the floor, while he hurriedly settled his plans. He would leave for the south that night.

He would seek out John Glenalvan, and charge him with his sin.

He would force him to unfold the mystery of little Golden's disappearance. Perhaps, oh, God, the villain had murdered her.

If he had, he should suffer the dire punishment the law meted out for such wretched criminals.

"But before I go," he said to himself, grimly, "I will go and see Desmond. If he has lied to me heretofore, woe be unto him. The base betrayer of my poor child's innocence shall receive no mercy at my hands."

He threw on his hat and directed his steps to the hotel where Mr. Desmond was staying in

preference to the grand, deserted dwelling, which was closed and left in the solitary care of the housekeeper during the absence of the family.

Mr. Desmond was smoking in his luxurious parlor, carelessly habited in dressing-gown and slippers.

His handsome, debonair face looked pale and worn, and melancholy. A hopeful gleam came into the listless eyes as his visitor was admitted.

"Ah, Leith, so glad to see you," he cried, throwing away his cigar, and eagerly advancing. "You bring me news—Edith has relented?"

"There is nothing more unlikely," Mr. Leith returned, with grim truthfulness; then he broke out with fiery impetuosity: "Desmond, for God's sake tell me the truth. Have you deceived me as well as your wife? Are you guilty of this monstrous sin?"

Mr. Desmond was startled by the almost agonizing entreaty of the lawyer's look and voice.

On the impulse of the moment he caught up a small Bible that lay upon a table close at hand, and pressed his lips upon it while he exclaimed in the deep, convincing tones of truth:

"Leith, I solemnly swear to you that I am innocent of the crime laid to my charge, so help me God."

Something in the man's deep earnestness, and in his look of suffering, staggered Richard Leith's doubts and fears, and made him feel that he had been a brute to doubt his daughter's agonized declarations of innocence. He exclaimed with sudden fervor and earnestness:

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"Mr. Desmond, it is but fair to tell you that I have found the girl, Mary Smith, and that she exonerates you, too."

"I was sure she would, although she despises me," cried Mr. Desmond. "I admit that I behaved despicably to her. I tried to get up a flirtation with her, but she scorned me with the pride of a queen, and the affair went no further. I believed her as pure and cold as the snow. No one was more amazed than myself when I learned the truth through my wife's causeless jealousy."

"You say 'causeless jealousy,' Desmond," Mr. Leith remonstrated, gravely, "but you forget that ever since your marriage you have persistently wounded your loving and sensitive wife by the most open and flagrant flirtations, thus giving her the greatest cause to doubt your fidelity."

Mr. Desmond looked thoroughly ashamed and penitent at the perfectly truthful charge.

"You speak the truth, I have behaved shamefully," he replied. "But I have had my lesson now. I never knew how much I loved and honored my sweet and beautiful wife until in her righteous wrath she deserted me. But if she will believe me this time and return to me, I will never offend her again by my foolish propensities. I will never even look at another woman. I am quite cured of flirting."

He spoke so soberly and earnestly that Mr. Leith was fain to believe him, but he answered gravely:

"Your wife is so thoroughly incensed against you, that she will never believe even your sworn word without additional proof."

"But how can I prove it to her?" cried the anxious husband. "She would not believe Mary Smith's denial, and she refuses to credit mine."

"There is only one way out of the trouble," the lawyer said, gravely.

"And that?" Mr. Desmond asked, anxiously.

"Is to find out the man who is really in fault, and obtain his sworn statement," Richard Leith replied.

"The girl will give us the necessary information, of course," Mr. Desmond exclaimed, his spirits rising.

"On the contrary, she obstinately refuses to do so. She makes a most perplexing mystery of her unhappy situation."

Mr. Desmond looked uneasy and perplexed a moment, then he exclaimed, confidently:

"It is only a question of blackmail then. She will tell the truth if a golden bribe is offered her. Depend upon it, she is only waiting for that."

"You are mistaken," Richard Leith returned, gravely. "You do not understand her motives. I will tell you a harrowing secret, Desmond. I have discovered that that unfortunate girl is my own daughter!"

In a few eloquent words he told Mr. Desmond the story of his strange marriage, and its tragic *denouement*—the lost wife, the ruined daughter.

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In his own despair and agitation, it did not seem strange to the lawyer that his excitement was reflected on the face of his listener, but when he had finished his story, Desmond sprang wildly to his feet, exclaiming:

"Good God, Leith, I can lay my hand on the destroyer of your child. It is my wife's brother—it is Bertram Chesleigh!"

"Heaven, how blind I have been!" Richard Leith exclaimed, with lurid eyes, and a deathly-pale face.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

There was a moment's silence, then Mr. Leith said, huskily:

"Tell me how this fact came to your knowledge, Desmond."

"Do you remember the sudden trip my wife and I took to Florida last summer?"

"Yes, I heard of it," the lawyer replied.

"I will go back a few months previous to that trip." Mr. Desmond said.

"It was this winter a year previous that Bertram Chesleigh made the acquaintance of young Frederick Glenalvan in New York and was invited by him to visit his far-away Floridian home.

"About the first of last June Bert accepted the invitation, and spent about two weeks at Glenalvan Hall.

"He wrote to my wife from there, hinting vaguely at having lost his heart to a perfect 'pearl of beauty.'

"Edith, who is excessively proud, and mortally afraid of a *mesalliance*, replied to him coolly, discountenancing the idea and begging him not to marry out of his own state.

"Between you and me, Leith, I believe she had a great heiress booked for the young fellow in New York."

He paused for breath, but at Richard Leith's look of impatience, went on hastily:

"Bertram did not reply to his sister's letter, but in the latter part of the same month Fred Glenalvan wrote us that Bertram was lying ill with brain fever.

"We went to him at once and found him not expected to live, He was delirious, and through all his illness he called incessantly on one name. Morning, noon and night it was always, 'Golden, Golden, Golden.'"

A groan forced itself through Richard Leith's rigid lips, but he did not speak, and Mr. Desmond continued:

"That cry for Golden was always coupled with a wild appeal for forgiveness for some wrong, the nature of which we could not determine.

"My curiosity and that of my wife were powerfully excited, and we wondered who the Golden was that he called upon, and why she never came.

"It was quite evident that the Glenalvans did not care to divulge the secret, so we never presumed to ask, but when Bertram grew convalescent Edith inquired of him, and he told her the truth." [Pg 105]

"Let me hear it," said Richard Leith, gaspingly, while the knotted veins stood out like cords on his forehead.

"It was the same story your daughter told you—that of a fair young girl kept aloof from her kind, slighted and scorned for no visible fault."

"Bertram met and loved her. They had some secret meetings by night in one of which they were discovered, and in the scene that followed, the fact was disclosed that the girl was illegitimate."

"Oh, my weakness, my sin!" groaned the wretched listener. "Curses upon John Glenalvan for his horrible villainy."

"Bertram declared that he had only entertained the most honorable feelings toward the girl," said Mr. Desmond, "but he confessed that the knowledge of her parentage so staggered him that he was induced to forsake her. He left Glenalvan Hall before daylight without seeing her again."

"The cowardly cur!" Richard Leith exclaimed, clenching his hands until the purple nails sunk into the quivering flesh.

"Hear me out," said Mr. Desmond, quickly, "before you judge him too hardly."

"I am listening," answered Richard Leith, trying to master his surging passions beneath an appearance of calmness. "I am listening, but what more can there be to say, Mr. Desmond?"

"This, Mr. Leith: Bertram went away, determined to forsake the hapless girl, but his love and remorse, and the overpowering cause of shame, urged his return so powerfully that in three days he returned to Glenalvan Hall with the full intention of marrying the girl at once, and taking her abroad with him where no one knew her unfortunate story.

"When he reached there she was gone—none knew whither. John Glenalvan told him that she had gone away with the boldly-avowed intention of leading a life of sin with her mother. Poor Bertram had suffered so much that he could not bear that crowning blow. He staggered and fell like a log at the villain's feet. A brain fever followed that nearly cost him his life."

"One more score is added to my terrible list against John Glenalvan," Richard Leith muttered darkly.

"I have no more to say," continued Mr. Desmond, "except that all the circumstances point unerringly at Bertram Chesleigh as the man who wronged your daughter."

"You are right," groaned the unhappy father. "Oh, God, if only she had remained at Glenalvan Hall that he might have made reparation for his sin!"

"Did not Bertram write to you in relation to the unfortunate affair? He mentioned an intention to do so," said Mr. Desmond.

"Only a letter so cautiously worded that I could gain no clew to the real truth," replied Richard Leith. "No names were mentioned. He only described the girl who was supposed to have entered some one of the many nameless houses in this city. He wished me to reclaim her, if possible, provide her a home, and he agreed to make her a generous allowance."

"Poor Bert," said Mr. Desmond, "and all the while she was in his sister's employ, and in reach of his hand, if he had only known it." [Pg 106]

There was a moment's heavy silence; then Richard Leith rose hastily.

"I must go home now," he said. "I—may God forgive me—I was so maddened by my child's wrongs and my own suspicions that I refused to own her; I drove her away from her rightful home. Pray God that she be not gone. If she has, I must bring her back and tell her that I know her whole sad story, and I must make the best I can of her poor, blighted life."

"Shall you write to Bertram Chesleigh?" inquired Desmond.

"Yes, for they must know that they have wronged you, and that you are innocent," replied the lawyer. "And, Desmond, you must write to your wife. I will inclose your letter with mine, otherwise, in her pride and anger, she might return it unopened. I thank God that your fidelity is vindicated, and that your reunion is now insured."

"I have a better plan than writing to her," said Desmond, blushing like a school-girl. "I will follow your letter to her brother, and plead my cause in person. I cannot wait, Leith; I am too impatient. I long to meet my wife and child again. You will give me their address? The *Europa* sails to-night. I must go with her."

Mr. Leith saw no objection to the plan. He was sorry for the impatient husband who had received a lesson that would last a life-time.

He gave him his wife's address in Italy, with his cordial good wishes and went away to seek his wronged, unhappy daughter.

"She cannot have gone yet. She was too weak and ill to have gone to-day. She would have waited until she was better," he kept whispering to his reproachful heart as he hurried along.

Then he thought of the beautiful, fashionable woman who had taken the place of little Golden's mother, and worn her name for twelve long years.

"Poor Gertrude," he murmured sadly. "I wonder how she bears it. Perhaps she will not grieve much. She does not love me as she did when I first made her my wife. Perhaps I am to blame. I have chilled her tender nature by my carelessness or coldness, for I have never loved her as I did my lost little Golden."

He hurried up the marble steps and ran impatiently along the hall, stumbling against the housekeeper, who was pacing sedately along with a little basket of keys.

As he was rushing past her she stopped and called to him.

"Mistress and her maid are gone away, sir."

"Where?" he inquired, pausing and looking back in bewildered surprise.

"I cannot tell you, for I do not know," the woman replied, respectfully. "But she bade me say that she left a letter for you on her dressing-table."

He ran up to Mrs. Leith's dressing-room, and found it in some slight disorder, as if traveling bags had been hurriedly packed.

Amid the dainty litter of the dressing-table he saw a square envelope addressed to himself, and hurriedly tore it open. [Pg 107]

His gaze ran over the few pathetic words daintily penciled on the perfumed, satiny sheet.

"Richard," she wrote. "I have gone away from you. I have long felt that I had but a small share in your heart, and now I know that I have, perhaps, no right to your name, and no place in your home. So it is best that I should leave you. I have taken little Golden with me. There is one thing, at least, that I can do. I can be a mother to the child whose father has disowned her, and whose mother is so tragically lost.

"You were wrong, Richard. The child has been wronged, but I believe that she is innocent. I have loved you more than you knew; perhaps more than you cared, and for your sake I will care for your forlorn child. You will not seek for us. We are companions in misery, and you will respect our grief. I cannot tell you where we shall go. But if you find little Golden's mother I shall know it, and the mother shall have her child."

With the simple name, "Gertrude," the letter ended; Richard Leith reread it slowly, filled with a great surprise and wonder.

"She will care for the child I treated so heartlessly," he murmured. "God bless her. I did not know that Gertrude could be so true and noble. I have wronged her indeed, and she has worn the mask of carelessness and frivolity over a wounded heart. Oh, God, if I only knew where to find them."

He almost cursed himself for his cruelty to his wronged and miserable daughter.

He remembered how young she was, and how ignorant of the world when Bertram Chesleigh had won her heart. Perhaps she was not to blame. His wrath waxed hot against the man who had betrayed her guileless innocence.

He went down and asked the housekeeper if Mrs. Leith had gone away in the carriage, and she answered that the lady had walked, and the maid had accompanied her.

"I cannot go south until I have found them," he said to himself, sadly. "Poor little Golden, poor Gertrude."

Before the next day he had visited every depot and every wharf by which they might have left the city, but he had learned nothing. The next day after he inserted a personal in the *Herald*:

"To GERTRUDE:—Return with Golden. Her true story is known and she is freely forgiven.

Anxiously,

R. L."

But the two for whom that yearning cry was written were fated never to behold it. And the dreary winter days came and went while he waited for tidings, filled with the heart-sickness of a great despair.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

While the winter snow still whirled in blinding drifts through the streets of New York, the sun shone, the flowers bloomed, the birds sang around old Glenalvan Hall in far-away Florida.

Old Dinah crooned her quaint revival hymns in the sunny doorway of the kitchen, and her old master dozed in the bright, bay-window among the pots of fragrant flowers.

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It was February, and hints of the nearing spring were in the air that sighed softly among the flowers, and lifted the thin, white locks from the brow of old Hugh, as his weary head lay resting on the back of his easy-chair.

Very thin, and sad, and mournful looked the old man as he sat in his easy-chair, with his lonely thoughts fixed ever on the past. He was old and weary. Life held no charm for him now.

One thought of the last lonely sheaf waiting for the reaper as he sat with his withered hands folded, and that look of patient grief on his thin, white, aged face.

"Oh, my lost little Golden," he murmured aloud: "She tarries long. The quest for her mother is a weary one. Oh, that God would give me back the mother and child, both innocent and pure as when I lost them."

A sudden shadow fell between him and the light. He looked up and saw a man standing before him, a man with a pale, worn, troubled face, and dark eyes that held the story of a tragedy in their somber depths.

"Pardon," he said, "I have ventured unannounced into your presence. My name is Richard Leith."

The old man stared at him with dim, unrecognizing eyes. That name conveyed no meaning to his mind. He had never heard it before.

"You are a stranger," he said.

"Yes," Richard Leith answered, and stood silent a moment.

How should he tell Hugh Glenalvan that he was the man who had stolen his daughter from him and desolated his life?

It was a hard task. His voice quivered and broke as he said:

"I am a stranger, but I am also your son-in-law."

"I have no son-in-law," the old man replied, gazing blankly at him.

"Your daughter was my wife," said Richard Leith.

"Little Golden?" said the old man, like one dazed.

"Yes," answered the lawyer. "I stole her from you sixteen years ago, and made her my darling wife. Oh, sir, can you ever forgive me the sorrow I have caused you?"

"A wife! She was a wife! Thank God for that," the old man murmured, with trembling delight. "And you have brought her back at last. Where is she, my darling little Golden?"

"Oh, God!" murmured the conscience-smitten man before him.

"Let me see her, my sweet child," cried Hugh Glenalvan, feebly rising. "It was cruel to keep the little one from me so long. Oh, Golden, Golden, come to me, my darling."

Richard Leith put him back with gentle hands into his chair. He knelt down at his feet and told him all his sorrowful story, throwing all the blame on himself, and pleading humbly for pardon from the father whom he had robbed of his darling.

"I loved her," he said. "She was dearer than my own life. I would have brought her back to you in time. I was only waiting for the fame and fortune that came to me soon. But treachery came between us. I lost her, and henceforth I have lived hand in hand with sorrow and despair."

The soft wind sighing past the window seemed to echo that heavy word "despair."

"At the door of John Glenalvan lies your sorrow and mine," continued Richard Leith, "I am come to call him to account."

"Who are you that dares arraign John Glenalvan?" exclaimed a harsh, blatant voice, as the speaker strode rudely into their presence.

Richard Leith sprang to his feet and confronted the intruder. His dark eyes blazed with wrath as he answered:

"I am Richard Leith, the husband of Golden Glenalvan, whom you falsely reported dead to gain some wicked end of your own. Liar, I have found you out in your sin! I demand my wronged wife at your hands."

John Glenalvan glared lividly at the daring man who thus boldly confronted him with his sin.

The blood retreated from his face and lips, and his eyes were wild and startled.

"Answer me," cried Richard Leith, advancing upon him. "Where is Golden, my wife?"

"You lie! She was never your wife," John Glenalvan retorted, furiously.

"Shame upon you, John, to malign the fair name of your sister," cried his father, indignantly. "Rather rejoice that she is proved innocent at last."

"Let him prove her so, if he can," cried the wretch, maliciously.

"I can do so. Here is the certificate of my marriage to Golden Glenalvan in New York sixteen years ago, replied Richard Leith, unfolding a yellowed paper and holding it open before the eyes of the father and son.

"Then she was really your wife," John said, with unwilling belief.

"Of course she was my wife. How dared you think evil of your own sister?" demanded the lawyer, scornfully.

"I do not answer to you for my thoughts, sir," replied John Glenalvan, angrily.

"But you must answer to me for the deed which has deprived me of my wife and child for fifteen years," cried Richard Leith. "John Glenalvan, where is my wife?"

"How should I know?" he retorted.

"It is too late to fence with me," answered Richard Leith. "You, and you alone, are at the bottom of my wife's mysterious disappearance. You have either shut her up in solitary confinement, or you have murdered her!"

"Murdered her! How dare you hint at such a thing?" John Glenalvan thundered, growing white with fear.

"I dare do more," cried the lawyer, driven to desperation. "If you do not tell me what has become of my wife I will have you arrested for her murder."

At these warning words John Glenalvan threw himself upon his accuser with the cry of an infuriated wild beast. [Pg 110]

Richard Leith was weak and ill. He had risen from a sick-bed, on which wasting anxiety and grief had thrown him, when he came to Glenalvan Hall.

He went down like an infant before the strong fury of his opponent, and the old man's wailing cry pierced the air.

"John, hold your hand! For God's sake, do not murder the man!"

CHAPTER XL.

John Glenalvan did not heed his father's frightened remonstrance.

He continued to rain furious blows on his feeble but struggling foe.

The fell instinct of murder was aroused within his soul, and Richard Leith would have fallen a sure victim to its fury, but that suddenly the slight form of a woman rushed into the room, and, with a wild and piercing shriek, sprang upon John Glenalvan's neck, clutching it with frantic fingers in the endeavor to tear him from his almost dying victim.

Almost strangling in the fierce tenacity of her grasp, the wretch released Mr. Leith, and springing upward with a savage bound, threw his frail assailant from him into the middle of the room.

The terrible shock hurled her prostrate on the floor. She lay there stunned and bleeding, and the wretch, after one horror-struck glance at her, rushed from the room.

"Golden—it is Golden! and he has killed her" wailed her grandfather, falling on his knees beside

her; and Richard Leith, where he lay, half dying, comprehended the anguished wail, and crawled on his hands and knees to the side of his hapless daughter.

It was little Golden, indeed, but she lay still and silent, with the blood oozing from her nostrils and a slight cut on her temple.

As he reached her side, old Dinah rushed into the room.

"Little missie, little missie!" she cried; then she stopped short in terror. "Oh, my Hebenly Master, who has done dis t'ing?"

"Dinah," her master said quickly, "go and send Fred Glenalvan to me."

She hobbled out obediently, and in a moment returned with the handsome young dandy, who glanced at his grandfather with haughty indifference.

"Fredrick," the old man said, with strange sternness, "here are two people whom your father has nearly killed. You must go and bring a doctor for them."

Frederick started at the sight of the bleeding forms upon the floor, but in an instant his countenance hardened into marble.

"If my father has hurt them," he replied, "I doubt not that he had good reason for doing so, and they may die before I will fetch a physician to them."

With that insolent reply he turned on his heel and left the room.

"Vipers!" muttered the old man, indignantly, then he looked at Dinah sadly.

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"My faithful old soul," he said, "you must do what you can for them. I must go and seek for help myself."

He went feebly from the room and across the lawn. Outside the gates he encountered a carriage waiting. The driver stood on the ground by the horses' heads, and a lady sat on the satin cushions with a troubled look on her lovely, blond face. She sprang out impulsively and came up to him.

"Oh, sir," she cried, "I *know* you are Mr. Glenalvan. Have you seen little Golden? She went into the hall a few minutes ago."

"I have seen her, I fear she is dead, and I must bring a doctor," the old man wailed, heart-brokenly.

She caught his arm and turned to the driver.

"Drive into town at your highest speed and fetch a physician," she said, throwing her purse at his feet, then she took the old man's arm and hurried him in.

"I am your little Golden's friend," she explained to him as they went along. "I came here with her and was waiting outside while she paid you a visit."

Old Dinah was bathing the wound of her unconscious mistress when they entered, and Richard Leith lay upon the floor watching her with dim, despairing eyes.

"Oh, Heaven, who has done this terrible deed?" Mrs. Leith cried wildly, as her eyes took in the dreadful scene.

"Gertrude," her husband cried out at the sound of her voice, and she knelt down by him weeping wildly.

"Oh, Richard, who is it that has killed you and your child?" she sobbed in anguish.

"It is John Glenalvan's dreadful work," he replied, then he looked into her face with dim, yearning eyes.

"Gertrude! I believe I am dying," he said faintly. "Will you forgive me before I die?"

"Forgive you?" she said. "Ah, Richard, do not think that I blamed you. You sinned ignorantly."

"Yes, ignorantly," he echoed, and a spasm of pain crossed his face an instant, then he said sadly: "But I did not mean *that*, Gertrude. I meant you must forgive me that I was careless and blind, that I did not prize your true heart more."

She put her white hand to her heart, and a look of pain came into the large, blue eyes, then she said with mournful pathos:

"For all the heartaches I have borne. Richard, I freely forgive you."

"Thank you," he murmured, then his eyes dwelt on her gratefully. "It was so noble in you to care for my poor child," he murmured, "but Gertrude, I repented in an hour. I came back to tell her so, and she was gone, both were gone. I sought you everywhere, my heart nearly broke; I fell ill, and lay for weary weeks fevered and maddened by my impatience and anxiety. At last I grew better and came here!"

"Have you found *her*?" she murmured, anxiously, while the red blood suffused her fair cheeks.

He shook his head mournfully, and his eyes closed languidly. She believed that he was dead, and started up with a cry of woe, but when the physician came a little later he decided that he was only in a deep swoon.

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Golden recovered consciousness, and the hapless father and daughter were removed to adjoining rooms, the physician veering anxiously from one room to another.

He believed that Mr. Leith's life might be saved by his medical skill, but he shook his head

ominously over the beautiful, golden-haired child, whose shrill wails of agony pierced every heart, for in the agitation of her mind, and the fearful shock of her heavy fall, the pangs of premature motherhood had come upon her.

John Glenalvan had fled from the scene of his villainy with a speed to which sudden fear and remorse had lent wings. He believed that he had killed Richard Leith and his unfortunate child, and in the fear of punishment for his crime he did not even stop to apprise his family of what had occurred, but hurried away to seek a hiding-place for himself.

Too late he regretted the blind rage that had forced him into the commission of such a desperate deed. The cries of his victims seemed to pursue him in his hurried flight.

His son reported his cowardly deeds to his mother and sister, and they remained lost in fear and wonder.

To do them justice, wicked as they were, they had no idea of the enormity of John Glenalvan's sin. They honestly believed that his sister Golden had disgraced the family. They dreamed not of the dread secret locked in his breast.

Clare made a stealthy tour of discovery into the western wing, and soon finding out how matters stood, returned to her mother in a frenzy of wrath and anger against her hapless cousin, little Golden.

"Oh, mother, such dreadful goings on," she said. "That shameless girl sick in one room, a strange man dead in another, and a doctor, and old Dinah, and a strange woman tending them. If I were you, mother, I really should not stand it. I would turn the whole tribe out of doors—should not you, Fred?"

But Frederick, who, despite his defiant manner to his grandfather, looked pale and uneasy, vetoed the proposition as imprudent.

"I do not know what provocation my father had to maltreat them so," he said, "but certainly, they have a bad case against him; and if the man is dead, as you say, Clare, and if our cousin dies, too, they can indict him for murder."

Mrs. Glenalvan and her daughter were so frightened at that grim word, murder, that they broke into hysterical tears and sobbing, while the hopeful son and heir sat silent, overwhelmed by the dread of evil that had fallen upon them all, to which was added the terrors of doubt and suspense.

"That strange man and woman—who can they be, Fred?" inquired his mother.

"I cannot tell; but I have my suspicions," he replied. "I believe they are the parents of Golden." [Pg 113]

"It is no wonder, then, that papa was goaded into attempting murder," cried Clare. "Only think of the impudence of our wicked aunt in coming back to Glanalvan Hall. I should think father must have been maddened at the very sight. And yet, mother, she is one of the fairest women I ever saw. She does not look like a lost woman. She has a very innocent appearance."

There were others beside these three, who wondered over the beautiful, strange woman who claimed to be little Golden's friend.

Old Dinah and her master gazed upon her wonderful beauty, which reminded them so powerfully of the missing Golden's, and they wondered what her name could be.

Old Dinah asked her at last what she should call her, and she answered simply, though with a burning blush:

"My name is Gertrude."

"Mrs. or Miss?" asked the inquisitive old negress, and again the lady's face grew crimson as she answered:

"Mrs."

"They must not know that I was his wife," she said to herself, resolutely. "I could not bear to have them know it. Perhaps they would hate me and judge him unjustly."

But her tears fell heavily as she looked at the deathly white face laying on the pillow, and she wondered to herself if it would not be less hard for her to see him die then and there, than live to find his lost wife again.

"God forgive me for my weakness and selfishness," she cried, starting at her own thoughts. "May he live to find the happiness of which he has been cheated so long."

The long, weary night, filled with mortal agony to poor little Golden, slowly wore away.

At the earliest peep of dawn a messenger arrived from the town with a telegram for Mr. Leith.

He lay barely conscious on his pillow, breathing heavily and slow, and the physician read the message to him cautiously.

It was from Mr. Desmond, and ran briefly:

"We arrived in New York this hour. Is Golden with you? Bertram is half-crazed with anxiety."

And across the lightning wires the fatal message flashed back to their anxious hearts:

"Golden is here. Her child is dead and she is dying."

Dying! This was the end of that brief dream of love, those weary months of supreme self-sacrifice.

Whiter than the pillow on which she lay, beautiful Golden was breathing her sad young life out in heavy sighs and moans, while hidden carefully out of sight beneath its white linen sheet, "There lay the sweet, little baby that never had drawn a breath."

CHAPTER XLI.

Into that splendid home in New York where the Desmonds had just arrived from Europe, that terrible telegram came like a thunder-clap. Bertram Chesleigh's repentant soul reeled in agony before it. [Pg 114]

"I am justly punished for my cowardly desertion of my darling," he groaned to his sister, to whom he had confided his sorrowful secret. "But, oh, God! how terribly I have suffered for the weakness and folly of an hour!"

Edith, whose heart had been strangely changed and softened since her reconciliation with her husband, wept with him over the dreadful news.

"Bertram, we must go to her," she said. "In death, if not in life, we must lift the shadow from the poor girl's memory. Elinor Glenalvan is going home to-day. Shall we accompany her?"

"Yes; but do not tell her why we go. She hated my poor, little Golden," he answered, sighing heavily.

Elinor wondered secretly over their going, but rejoiced also. She had gone abroad with them, had had a most delightful time, and she sighed to think that the end had come at last.

But one thing grieved her most of all. All her arts and her beauty, added to Mrs. Desmond's influence, had failed to win Bertram Chesleigh.

She almost hated him when she thought of going home to hear her mother's lamentations over her failure, and her sister's taunts.

Her spirits rose at the welcome news that he was going south with her.

Perhaps she might triumph yet. It was a hopeful augury that he was not willing to lose sight of her yet.

Poor vain and artful Elinor! She did not dream of the real truth.

She believed that Golden had been thrust out of her way forever.

Strangely enough, though she had known the true cause of the Desmonds' separation, she had never been able to ferret out the reason of their reconciliation.

Immediately after Mr. Desmond reached Italy his wife had summarily dismissed Celine.

No hints, nor careless appearance of wonder on Elinor's part could elicit the reason for the maid's dismissal.

She only knew that the Frenchwoman had gone away in insolent triumph, taking with her the money she had wrested from her in payment for her treachery to poor little Golden.

Mrs. Desmond's generous impulse to accompany her brother was frustrated by the sudden illness of her little daughter, so Bertram was forced to go on his sad mission without her, and Elinor was jubilant over the prospect of a long, delightful trip under his exclusive care.

Anticipation and reality are different things, however, as Elinor was fated to learn.

Never was there a more gloomy or self-absorbed cavalier than the handsome and entertaining Mr. Chesleigh on this occasion.

Elinor bit her ruby lip and looked daggers as he lounged in his seat, pretending to be absorbed in a newspaper, but with lips compressed beneath his dark mustache, and a strange, somber light in the large, black eyes that puzzled Elinor, who had not the key to his mood. [Pg 115]

Indeed she began to be conscious of a vague feeling of dread and anxiety.

She asked herself over and over why he had chosen to bear her company on her homeward way.

Evidently it was through no tenderness for her. Though scrupulously polite and attentive, he preserved the appearance of distant friendliness in too marked a fashion to be misinterpreted.

When at last, after traveling without delay or rest, they found themselves seated in the carriage that was to convey them to Glenalvan Hall, Elinor felt a certain sense of relief mingled with her chagrin and disappointment. She loved Bertram Chesleigh, but his moodiness and silence were strangely oppressive.

"Why did he come with me?" she asked herself for the last time as the carriage rolled along the breezy, wooded drive, and her strange companion lay back among the cushions, his hat tilted over his eyes, his face pale, his lips working convulsively. "What will Clare say when she sees how disdainfully he treats me? How she will triumph at my disappointment."

Her heart sank at the prospect of returning to the quietude and dreariness of Glenalvan Hall

after the gay, easy, luxurious life she had led for the last few months.

For a moment her love for the indifferent man beside her was transformed to hate.

Why had he slighted her beauty, and her fascinations to turn to that doll-faced child whose life was a disgrace to the Glenalvans?

She hated Bertram Chesleigh because he had not rescued her from the poverty of which she had grown so weary, and from which his love might have delivered her.

"At least I have the satisfaction of knowing that I removed that little vixen, Golden, from his pathway," she thought, with vindictive triumph. "If she had remained who knows what might have happened? I should like to know what became of her when she left Mrs. Desmond's. I sincerely hope she drowned herself in the sea!"

The carriage turned a sudden bend in the road, and Elinor, leaning idly forward to note the old, familiar landmarks, gazed intently one moment, then uttered a stifled cry of terror.

Bertram Chesleigh started, like one awaking from a dream.

"What is it? Has anything alarmed you, Miss Glenalvan?" he inquired, courteously.

"Look there," she cried, fearfully, pointing her hand through the window.

He followed the direction of her finger and saw—oh horror, that they were passing the burial-ground of the Glenalvans.

He saw a little band of black-robed mourners grouped around a narrow mound of freshly-thrown-up earth.

He saw the minister standing at the head of the grave with his open book, and fancied he could hear him repeating the solemn, beautiful words with which we consign "ashes to ashes, and dust to dust."

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"Pray tell the driver to stop," Elinor cried out, excitedly, "I must get out. Someone of my own family must be dead."

He made no answer. He was handing her out with hands that trembled as nervously as her own. One terrible, blasting thought was in his mind.

"It is Golden, my wronged, little wife, and my babe that I never saw, whom they are hiding beneath that little mound," he said to himself, in agony. "Oh, God! that I should have come only in time for this!"

He opened the little, white gate that led into the green burial-place, with its glimmering, white stones, and Elinor silently followed him.

The little group about the grave fell back as they approached, and they saw the men throwing up the earth upon the new-made grave. Its dull, awful thud fell like the crash of a great despair upon his heart.

"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust," murmured the minister's solemn voice, and the conscience-stricken man fell on his knees and hid his face in his hand, afraid and ashamed, for that deep voice seemed to condemn him for the evil he had wrought.

A weak and trembling hand fluttered down on his shoulder, and a thin, quavering voice sounded reproachfully in his ear:

"So you have come to exult over your wicked work, Bertram Chesleigh."

The wretched man looked up into the streaming eyes of old Hugh Glenalvan.

At a little distance he saw old black Dinah regarding him with looks of horror and loathing. A beautiful, golden-haired woman stood apart, weeping silently, and Elinor Glenalvan had gone to the minister and was speaking to him agitatedly.

Bertram sprang up desperately.

"Oh, sir, for God's sake," he cried to the dejected old man, "tell me whom they have buried here!"

And the answer came in broken tones:

"Golden Glenalvan and her babe."

Bertram Chesleigh, kneeling in the dust that was heaped above the dead heart that had loved him so devotedly, lifted his hands and eyes to Heaven, and cried out, in a broken, contrite voice:

"I call God to witness that it is Golden Chesleigh, not Golden Glenalvan, you have buried here. This dead girl was my wife, made so by a secret marriage last summer. It is my wife and my child you have hidden from me in this low grave. May God forgive me for the wrong I did them."

Then, unable to bear the strain upon his nerves and his heart any longer, the wretched man fell forward heavily, and lay in a deep swoon across the mound that covered little Golden and her child.

A terrible punishment had been meted out to him for the pride and selfishness that had made of his innocent child-wife an outcast, and a creature at whom to point the finger of a seemingly just scorn.

The deathless flame of that deep "remorse that spurns atonement's power" had been kindled in his heart, never to go out save with the breath of life.

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CHAPTER XLII.

For a few moments all believed that Bertram Chesleigh was dead. Elinor Glenalvan, filled with astonishment and deadly rage, devoutly hoped that he was.

Her love had turned to hate, and as by a sudden flash she understood fully the passion of remorse and despair that had brought him to Glenalvan Hall.

The vindictive wish came over her that he had died before he had spoken the brave words that had cleared the stain from the memory of the girl she had hated with such jealous fire and passion. She had yet to learn that every shadow had been cleared from Golden's name.

While she stood like a statue, and angrily regarded the striking scene, the others busied themselves with the restoration of the unconscious man.

Dinah brought cold water from a little spring, and bathed his face and hands. Gertrude held her smelling-salts to his nose.

In a short time he revived and looked about him with an agony of sorrow in his pale, drawn face. His first conscious thought was of his loved and deeply-wronged wife.

"She is dead," he groaned. "I shall never hear her sweet lips pronounce my pardon. Oh, God, did she leave me no message? Did she not curse me in dying for the woe I had wrought?"

They all stood aloof from him except Gertrude. She told him what he asked in a grave and gentle voice.

"She made no mention of you, Mr. Chesleigh. She was patient and brave to the last. She kept her vow of silence to the bitter end, and died with the story of her innocence untold."

"I, coward that I was, bound her to secrecy," he said, "but I did not dream then of what would happen after. I wish to God that she had spoken and vindicated her honor."

And again an expression of the deepest sorrow convulsed the dark, handsome face.

"She was too true and loyal to break her vow," answered Gertrude, tearfully. "I believe that the shame and sorrow of it all killed her. She was a martyr to her love."

He groaned and dropped his head upon his folded arms. There was silence, and every eye but Elinor's rested tearfully upon the low mound beneath which slumbered the poor girl who had died with the brand of the erring upon her, but who in this hour was proven guiltless and pure, as Gertrude had said, a patient martyr to affection.

"Oh, that I might have seen her even once," groaned Bertram Chesleigh, turning instinctively for comfort to the sweet, sympathetic face of Gertrude. "Oh, tell me, did she suffer in dying? Was she conscious?"

She shook her head.

"No, she passed from a quiet slumber into death. The change was so gradual we scarcely knew when she was gone." [Pg 118]

"Gone!"

The word thrilled him with a keen and bitter pain. The sweet, child-wife he had loved so dearly was lost from his life forever. She was gone from a world that had used her harshly and coldly, to take her fitting place among the angels.

The soft wind sighing through the trees and the grass seemed to murmur her requiem: "*Requiescat in pace.*"

He rose and stood among them, his heavy eyes turning to the sad, old face of the grandfather whom he had bereaved of his darling. He held out his hand to him humbly.

"*She* is gone from us, and I cannot sue for her pardon," he said, wistfully. "But will you not forgive me, sir, for the sorrow my weakness and pride brought upon her and you?"

But old Hugh Glenalvan's kindly blue eyes flashed upon him with a gleam of their youthful fire, and his voice quivered with anger and despair as he replied:

"I will never forgive you unless *she* should rise from the grave and forgive you too!"

"Ye must forgive as ye would be forgiven," said the gentle, admonitory voice of the man of God.

But the indignant old man shook off his suppliant hand.

"She was his wife, and he discarded and deserted her. There is no forgiveness for such a sin," he said, with fiery scorn, as he turned away.

They went away and left Bertram alone with the wronged and quiet dead.

Gertrude, in her gentle, womanly pity would fain have persuaded him to go home with them, but he refused to listen.

"Leave me to my lonely vigil here," he said, sorrowfully. "If her gentle spirit is yet hovering about she may accept my bitter grief and repentance as some atonement."

When they had all gone and left him he bowed his head with a bitter cry.

"Oh, Golden, my lost, little darling, only six feet of earth between us, and yet I shall never see you, speak to you, nor hear you again!"

A low, respectful cough interrupted the mournful tenor of his thoughts.

He glanced up and saw the old grave-digger leaning on his spade and regarding him wistfully.

"What are you waiting for, my man?" he inquired, feeling impatient at this seeming intrusion on his grief.

"If you please, sir, I have not yet finished throwing up the earth and shaping the mound," said the man, with some embarrassment.

A bitter cry came from Bertram Chesleigh's lips.

"What! would you bury her still deeper from my sight?" he cried. "Oh, rather throw off this heavy covering of earth and suffer me to look upon my darling one again."

The man stared at him half fearfully.

"Oh, sir, your sorrow has almost crazed you," he said. "You had better return to your friends and leave me here to finish my necessary work." [Pg 119]

But a new thought, born of his grief and remorse, had come into the mind of the mourner.

"My man, look at me," he said, earnestly; "I want you to open this grave and let me see my wife again. You cannot refuse me when I pray you to do it. Only think! They have buried my child and I have never even seen its face. I must kiss the babe and its mother once, I cannot go away until I have done so."

"Oh, sir, surely you are going mad," the man cried, alarmed. "I have never heard of such a thing. I could not do it if I would. I could not take the coffin out alone."

"Let me help you," said the distracted mourner.

"What you wish is quite impossible, sir," faltered the man, anxiously; "let me beg you to go on to the hall, and leave me to finish my sad duty."

"You must not refuse me, it will break my heart," Bertram Chesleigh cried, "I will pay you well. See," he drew out a handful of shining gold pieces. "I will give you a hundred dollars if you will show me the faces of my wife and child."

The dull eyes of the grave-digger grew bright at that sight. He was poor, and a hundred dollars were wealth to him.

"I am sorry for you, sir, I wish I could do what you wish. That money would do my poor wife and children a deal of good. If you could wait until night," he said, lowering his voice and glancing significantly around him, "I might get help and do the job for you."

Some whispered words passed between them: then Bertram Chesleigh rose and passed out of the green graveyard, casting one yearning look behind him at the low grave that held his darling.

He bent his lagging footsteps toward old Glenalvan Hall, whose ivy-wreathed towers glistened picturesquely in the evening sunshine.

Bertram went in through the wide entrance, and crossing the level lawn walked along the border of the beautiful lake.

"It was here that we parted," he murmured to himself, in his sorrowful retrospection. "How beautiful, how happy she was, how full of love and trust. Oh, God, what dark spell came over me, and made me for twenty-four terrible hours false to my love and my vows? That old man was right. There is no forgiveness for such a terrible sin!"

Frederick Glenalvan saw him from the house, and came down to meet him.

"Chesleigh, I have heard all," he said, with pretended sympathy, "Elinor told us. My dear friend, how sorry I am for you. I was about to go and seek you. You must come up to the house and take some refreshment. You look ready to drop."

"I feel fearfully ill," said Chesleigh, staggering unsteadily, and putting his hand to his head. "I need something, but do not ask me to accept the shelter of your roof, Fred. I have a quarrel with your father. He has bitterly deceived me, and must answer to me for his sin."

"Father is not at home. He has been absent for several days," said Fred, confusedly. "But if you will not come up to the hall sit down here on this bench, and I will bring you some wine." [Pg 120]

Bertram obeyed his request almost mechanically. His head ached, and he felt dull, lifeless and inert.

The grief and excitement under which he had labored for several days were beginning to tell heavily upon his overstrained nerves. With the murmured name of Golden, his head drooped on his breast and he relapsed into semi-unconsciousness.

He was aroused by a hand lifting his head, and starting into consciousness, saw Frederick Glenalvan by his side, and Elinor standing before him with a small tray on which were arranged a glass of wine and several slices of cake. He did not notice how white and strange she looked, nor how steely her voice sounded as she said:

"You are faint and ill. Drink this—it will revive you."

She put the wine to his lips, and he drank it thirstily. A fire seemed to run through his veins, new

life came into his limbs. He arose and thanked her, but refused the cake.

"I am better, but I cannot eat; it would choke me," he said, and Elinor did not press him. She turned away, and as she passed the lake she furtively tossed the wine-glass in, and the cake after it.

"So father had deceived him, and must answer to him for his sin," she said to herself, bitterly, as she walked along. "Well, well, we shall see! Oh, how I hate him! Yet once I loved him, and hoped to be his wife. I might have been if that little jade had never come between. Oh, how I hate her even in her grave!"

She went back to the hall, walking like one in a dream, with lurid, blazing eyes, and a face blanched to the pallor of a marble image, muttering wickedly to herself.

CHAPTER XLIII.

When Elinor had gone, Frederick Glenalvan turned curiously to Chesleigh.

"So you were really the husband of Golden Leith, and not her betrayer, as everybody believed?" he said.

"Yes, she was my lawful wife; but why do you call her Golden Leith?" Bertram Chesleigh inquired, curiously.

"Did you not know," said Fred, carelessly, "that she had found her father? He is a New York lawyer, and his name is Richard Leith. It seems that her mother was really married to him after all."

"Thank God! Then there is really not a shadow of disgrace upon my poor, wronged wife," cried Bertram Chesleigh, gladly. "Oh, God! if only she had lived."

He was silent a moment, then asked, suddenly:

"Where is Richard Leith now?"

"He is lying ill in the western wing of Glenalvan Hall," Frederick replied, with some embarrassment at the inward consciousness of who caused that illness.

"Is it possible? I must go to him at once," cried Bertram, starting up. "I am an old friend of Richard Leith. Will you accompany me, Fred?" [Pg 121]

Frederick walked with him across the grassy slope of the lawn, but left him in the wide corridor that separated the divided dwellings of the strangely sundered family.

"I can accompany you no further," he said, confusedly. "The truth is, Mr. Leith and father have had a little difficulty, and we are not on the best of terms."

He turned away, and Bertram knocked nervously on the door before him, and was admitted by Dinah, who scowled blackly when she saw whom the visitor was.

"I wish to see Mr. Leith," he said, and the old woman silently motioned him to follow her into the sick man's room.

White as the pillows on which he lay, was Richard Leith, but there was a smile of peace on his face, for Gertrude was sitting in a chair by his bedside, and she had been telling him of the strange scene at Golden's burial that evening; how Bertram Chesleigh had claimed her as his wife, and the child for his own.

"Thank God! she was innocent and pure. Oh, how could I ever have doubted the child of my precious Golden," cried the bereaved father, in a passion of remorse and grief.

"You know the whole truth, now. Can you ever forgive me?" inquired Bertram, advancing.

"You here, Bertram Chesleigh? Oh, how could you have been so cruel?" exclaimed Mr. Leith, excitedly, as he rose on his elbow, and looked at the pale face and gleaming eyes of the intruder.

"I will tell you all the truth, and perhaps you will understand me better," began Bertram Chesleigh, eagerly, but before the words were ended, a terrible change came over his face. It was distorted by contortions of pain, and with a shrill cry of agony he fell to the floor in strong convulsions.

Gertrude sprang from her chair with a frightened shriek that brought Dinah rushing into the room with her old master close at her heels, followed by the hired nurse who had the care of Mr. Leith.

"This man is dying—bring a doctor at once!" cried Gertrude, shrilly.

"The doctor is here, madam," said the pleasant voice of the physician himself, who had just entered the door on his usual daily visit to Mr. Leith. "Why, what have we here?"

He bent down over the tall, superb form that lay upon the floor writhing in a violent fit.

There were a few moments of busy silence while he worked over the patient, then he looked up with a dark frown on his broad brow.

"Who is this man, and how came he here?" he inquired.

"He is my son-in-law, doctor, and he had barely entered the room when he fell in a fit," said Richard Leith. "What ails him?"

Another dire contortion of the prostrate form, and the busy physician answered, sternly:

"He has all the symptoms of arsenical poisoning."

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The hovering night fell rainy, dark, and cheerless. The skillful physician worked steadily, anxiously, and patiently, trying to save from the grasp of the fell destroyer the writhing victim of Elinor Glenalvan's deadly hate and wicked revenge.

Everyone was filled with grief and sorrow. All warring passions, all human resentments were forgotten in the anxiety with which they watched the wavering balance in which Bertram Chesleigh lay fluctuating between life and death.

Arsenic had been administered to him in a draught of wine, declared the physician, and the wonder arose who had given it to him.

Someone started the theory that he had taken it himself, with intent to commit suicide.

Then they searched him, but not a grain of the deadly drug was discovered on his person. It was all a baffling mystery.

They had left him mourning despairingly over little Golden's grave, and they had seen him no more until he had come to them in this awful condition.

"If I had not come in at the moment I did, no earthly power could have saved him," declared the physician; "As it is, I hope—mind, I only say hope—that I may save his life."

At midnight Gertrude stole to the outer door for a breath of fresh air. She felt faint, weary and dispirited.

The death of Golden, whom she had learned to love very deeply, had deeply grieved her saddened heart.

"Poor child," she moaned, sitting down on the marble steps and gazing sadly at the silver crescent of the young moon as it struggled through a bank of clouds; "she has had a fate as tragic and sad as her poor young mother's."

The sound of muffled footsteps on the grass caused Gertrude to start up with a sudden cry.

A youth was coming toward her, and his low, entreating "stay, madam," arrested her contemplated flight.

He came close to her side, and as his rough garments brushed the stone ballustrade, the cool, moist smell of newly thrown up earth came distinctly to her senses.

She shivered and thought of that new-made grave lying in the silence and calm of the dewy night.

"Will you tell me if Mr. Chesleigh is here, ma'am?" he inquired, respectfully.

"Yes, he is here. What can you want of Mr. Chesleigh at this unseemly hour of the night?" she inquired, in wonder.

"I have important business with him," said the youth, and Gertrude thought she detected a trembling, as of fear, in his voice. "Can I see him a moment, if you please?"

"No, you cannot, for he is ill and unconscious, and we fear that he is dying," she replied.

A smothered exclamation escaped from the youth's lips.

"Oh, this is dreadful!" he said, as if unconscious of having a listener. "What shall we do now?"

"Can I help you?" asked Gertrude, gently.

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He bent toward her eagerly.

"Oh, madam, you are a friend of the poor lady that was buried this afternoon?" he said, almost fearfully.

"Yes," she answered, with a quickened heart-beat.

"Then come with me, for God's sake. There is not a minute to lose. Don't be afraid. No harm shall come to you."

So impressed was Gertrude by the youth's strange eagerness that she followed him without a word across the green lawn, through the wide gate, and along the winding road.

"Not here!" she said, aghast, as he paused at the white gate of the Glenalvan burying ground.

"Yes, even here," he answered, solemnly; and the gate-latch clicked softly beneath his hand. "Follow me, lady. No harm shall happen you."

CHAPTER XLIV.

When Bertram Chesleigh came to full consciousness again he found himself lying on a couch in

Mr. Leith's bedroom.

The curtains were drawn at the windows, but the light of the full day glimmered through, and he saw the grave-faced physician sitting beside him, while Richard Leith, from the bed opposite, regarded him with an intent expression. He struggled up feebly and pressed his hand to his brow.

"I have had a shock," he said, with an air of strange perplexity, as he looked into their anxious faces. "What was it? What has happened to me?"

"You have been near to death's door," replied the physician, gravely, "but you will recover now."

"I wish that I had died!" the young man burst out, with such passionate realization of his misery, that the doctor exclaimed, incautiously:

"So, then, you *did* try to commit suicide?"

The brilliant, dark eyes looked at him in amazement.

"Suicide! suicide!" he repeated, blankly. "Who dares to say that of me?"

The doctor regarded him thoughtfully.

"My dear sir," he said, quietly, "I happened in here very opportunely last evening and found you suffering all the terrible symptoms of arsenic poisoning. Your friends feared that your grief had unhinged your mind, and that under temporary aberration you had attempted the destruction of your own life."

"They were wrong. I could never have been such a coward," Bertram answered, in such a tone of convincing truthfulness that no one could doubt him. "Indeed, doctor, you must have been mistaken. I have taken no drug recently."

"I am not mistaken," the physician asserted, confidently. "You had most certainly had arsenic administered to you in a draught of wine."

A startled gleam came into Mr. Chesleigh's eyes, his face whitened, a cry of horror came from his lips.

"Doctor, are you quite, quite sure?" he exclaimed.

"I would swear to the drug," was the instant reply. "Do you admit the wine?"

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"Yes," came the grave reply; "I drank a glass of wine before coming in here yesterday evening, but I did not dream it was drugged," and an expression of almost incredulous horror swept over the handsome face.

"Who gave you the wine?" inquired the doctor and Richard Leith almost simultaneously.

But Bertram Chesleigh shook his head.

"Do not ask me," he said. "It is terrible, yet I will not betray my would-be destroyer."

"It was one of the Glenalvans," asserted Richard Leith, seeing the truth as by a flash of light.

"Do not ask me," the young man replied again. "I must not tell you. It is too terrible. I can scarce believe the dread reality myself."

But though he refused to reveal the secret, Richard Leith felt morally certain that it was to some of the family of John Glenalvan the young man owed the attempted destruction of his life. He had heard that Elinor had "set her cap" at him.

This, then, was the dreadful revenge she had taken for her disappointment.

The physician went away and left them together. Then the lawyer told his son-in-law his whole sad story. Bertram's indignation knew no bounds.

"May the curse of an offended God rest upon John Glenalvan's head!" he exclaimed. "It is to him and his family that my poor Golden owes the bitter sorrows of her brief life. My sister's maid, Celine, confessed that it was Elinor Glenalvan who discovered Golden's identity, and bribed her to send her away under a ban of disgrace. Oh, God, Leith, could I only have known that the girl little Ruby loved so dearly, and who shunned me so persistently, was my deserted wife, how joyously would I have taken her to my heart and claimed her for my own."

"Yes, if you had only known," Richard Leith replied, with mournful emphasis. "My poor young daughter, hers indeed was a hard lot. Scorned by her kindred, deserted by her husband, despised and disowned by her miserable father! How glad she must have been to creep into the kindly shelter of the grave! Ah, Heaven, Chesleigh, I never can forget my own wretched share in breaking that tender heart."

His head sank back on his pillow, and almost womanly tears coursed over his pale cheeks.

"But she forgave me before she died," he continued, pathetically, after a little. "She was an angel, Chesleigh. I can never forget how sweet and patient she was. The day before she died they carried me into her room. I lay on a couch by the side of her bed. They showed me the beautiful little waxen image—the babe that had never drawn a single breath of life in this world, and I could not keep from crying when they said her terrible fall had killed the child. The minister came, and told her that she must die in a few hours, too. But was it not strange, Chesleigh? She smiled sadly and shook her head."

"'No, you are all mistaken,' she said. 'I should not be sorry to die, but my time has not come yet. I cannot die until I know whether I shall meet my mother in Heaven, or whether she is still on earth.'"

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"But that night she passed away peacefully in her sleep. It was so calm and gradual we did not know when the end had come. It was like those sweet lines of Hood:

"We watched her breathing through the night,
Her breathing soft and low,
As in her breast the wave of life
Went heaving to and fro.
Our very hopes belied our fears,
Our fears our hopes belied;
We thought her dying when she slept,
And sleeping when she died."

He ceased, and there was a heavy silence in the room. Bertram Chesleigh broke it in a hushed, low voice.

"Poor, martyred child! Was she, then, so anxious to find her mother?"

"She declared that it was the one dream of her life-time," Richard Leith replied.

"And there is no clew save that which John Glenalvan holds?" inquired Bertram, thoughtfully.

"None, and the villain has fled. I do not believe his own wife and children know aught of his whereabouts."

A look of grave determination swept over Bertram's handsome, pallid face.

"Then I will take up the quest where it dropped from Golden's little hand in dying. I will track the villain, if it is to the end of the world. It shall be my task to vindicate her mother's memory," he said, gravely and earnestly.

"It is *my* task rather," said Richard Leith.

"We will join hands in the effort," his son-in-law answered.

Old Dinah came in with a note for Mr. Leith. It was from Gertrude.

"I have gone away," she wrote. "I can leave you no address, but I shall be cognizant of all that transpires at Glenalvan Hall, and I may see you again ere long. You will soon be well enough to go about again, and that you may be enabled to solve the distressing mystery of your lost wife's fate, is the earnest prayer of

"GERTRUDE."

"Surely no man was ever placed in such a terrible position," said Richard Leith. "For aught I know, I may have two wives living."

"It is through no fault of yours," replied Mr. Chesleigh; "but it is most distressing. Your second wife appears to be a very beautiful and winning woman."

"She is both, but I never discovered her worth until it was too late to love her," Mr. Leith replied, sadly. "Her noble conduct to my helpless daughter first opened my eyes to her lovable character."

"God bless her!" Bertram Chesleigh uttered, fervently.

They had some further conversation, and then Mr. Chesleigh announced his intention of going away. [Pg 126]

"I will not trespass further on Mr. Glenalvan's hospitality," he said decidedly. "I do not forget how much reason he has to hate the sight of me."

CHAPTER XLV.

The twilight hour found Bertram Chesleigh wending his way to the green graveyard where his hapless wife lay buried. As he had hoped, he found the old grave-digger waiting for him.

He had been sodding the mound with velvety green turf, and planting lilies and immortelles upon it.

"Why have you done this?" he said. "Did you not know I would come to-night? I was at death's door last night, or I would have come as I said. Did you do what you promised?"

"Yes, sir, and waited a long time for you," said the man, doffing his cap respectfully. "I even sent my son to look for you. He learned of your bad condition, and then we were compelled to put the coffin back in the ground again."

There was a strange, repressed excitement in the man's manner, but Mr. Chesleigh, absorbed in the bitterness of his own despair, did not observe it.

He counted over a hundred dollars into the man's hand, and then said, with a tremor of hope in his voice:

"I will double the amount if you will do your work over to-night. I *must* see her. I am mad for one last look at my darling's face!"

The grave-digger shuddered.

"Oh, sir, it is too late," he said. "Have you forgotten how soon death's touch blasts everything human? And the little babe—*that* was dead long before *she* was. I know you could not bear to see them now."

"Hush, hush!" the mourner cried, in a voice of agony. "I will hear no more. Go, now, and leave me!"

"Cheer up, sir," said the man, with a strange gleam in his eyes, as he turned to go. "The Lord may have some blessing in store for you yet, sir."

His only answer was a hollow groan from the wretched man. He threw himself face downward on the green grave, crushing all the sweet lilies and immortelles beneath his shuddering frame, and cried out to Heaven to kill him because he had blighted Golden's innocent life.

He lay there an hour or two, musing sorrowfully over the hapless fate of his beautiful girl-bride.

He recalled their brief, happy love-dream from which they had been so rudely awakened.

Over and over again he cursed himself for that first impulse of pride and selfishness that had made him false to his bride in the hour when he should have protected and shielded her.

A passionate, despairing longing to see her again filled his soul.

"I will go back and wander by the lake again," he resolved, in the madness of his despair. "It was there that we spent our sweetest, most blissful hours. In the calm and silence of the night I will dream them over again."

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He went to the lake, but the very spirit of unrest was upon him.

The stars came forth and shone weirdly in the sky, the perfume of spring flowers sweetened the air. He grew restless and fanciful.

Such a brief while ago she had stolen nightly from the haunted rooms to meet him here beside the silvery lake.

It almost seemed that she would come to him presently, gliding like a fairy across the green lawn to the glad shelter of his arms.

Some impulse prompted him to seek the haunted rooms, to spend an hour of solitary musing in their quiet shade.

He knew of a retired stairway by which he could make his way unperceived, and following the blind fate that led him, he went up to the hall and up the narrow, secluded stairs which little Golden had shown him, and by which she had obtained egress to her lover.

He went along the dark corridor with a strangely beating heart, and paused before the closed door of the haunted room.

He placed his hand on the knob, but to his surprise it refused to yield to his touch.

Disappointed, he was about turning away, when a heavy step crossed the floor inside, the key clicked in the lock, and the door was cautiously opened.

A flood of light streamed out into the corridor, and showed Bertram Chesleigh the tall form, and dark, saturnine face of John Glenalvan.

There was a moment of complete astonishment on the part of each of the two men.

Both recoiled from each other in the first suddenness of the shock, and then an angry oath burst from John Glenalvan's lips.

"I thought it was Elinor!"

"Luckily you were mistaken," returned Mr. Chesleigh, quickly recovering his wits. "This *rencontre* is most opportune for me, sir. I have wished to see you."

He stepped into the room as he spoke, and boldly confronted the villain, who glared at him with a mixture of defiance and dismay.

"You wished to see me. I feel flattered," he said, with an attempt at cutting sarcasm. "May I ask why?"

There was a moment's silence while Bertram Chesleigh rapidly reviewed the situation in his mind. Then he spoke:

"You may ask, and I may answer," he said. "Mr. Glenalvan, I might heap the bitterest reproach upon your head, if by so doing the cruel work of your life might be undone. But the past is past. My wife is dead, and no reproaches and no lamentations can bring her back to me. But there is one issue between you and me. I have taken up my dead wife's quest where she left it. I demand that you shall tell me where to find my little Golden's deeply-wronged mother."

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The dark face before him whitened to the awful pallor of death, the man's eyes blazed luridly, his hands were clenched as they hung at his sides.

"What if I refuse to answer your question?" he inquired, in a low, tense voice.

"I will find means to force you to confession," Bertram Chesleigh replied, unhesitatingly.

"I defy you to do so," John Glenalvan replied, with an imprecation. "I am not afraid of you."

"You have caused my wife's death, and nearly murdered her father. I will have you arrested for it," exclaimed Mr. Chesleigh.

"Do so, and I will prove that I only acted in self-defense," was the instant reply.

"I will charge you with the murder or abduction of Golden Leith, your own sister," pursued Mr. Chesleigh.

"And I will swear before any court in the land that she is the inmate of a nameless house in New York," was the taunting answer of the villain.

They gazed at each other a moment, then Bertram Chesleigh exclaimed, in wonder:

"What a black and unnatural heart you must have, John Glenalvan. How can you thus malign the fair fame of your own sister?"

"Do not call her my sister. I hated her, the blue-eyed, doll-faced creature. She stole the love of my parents from me. It was all lavished on her, there was none left for me. But I have had a most glorious revenge," he laughed, wickedly.

"Yes, you have had a most terrible revenge," said Bertram Chesleigh, with a shudder. "You have blighted her life and that of her child. Four lives—perhaps five—have been ruined by your sin. Is it not time that vengeance should cease?"

"No!" thundered John Glenalvan, harshly. "For sixteen years the taste of revenge has been sweet on my lips. It is sweet still."

"And you will not speak?" asked Bertram Chesleigh.

"Never!" with triumphant malice.

"I have one card yet to play," began the other, slowly.

A light step suddenly crossed the threshold, and Elinor Glenalvan appeared in the room, bearing a waiter with a substantial supper arranged upon it.

"Papa, were you growing impatient?" she asked; then her startled eyes fell on Bertram Chesleigh, meeting a glance of fiery scorn.

"*You here!*" she gasped.

The waiter fell from her nerveless hands, and its contents crashed upon the floor.

CHAPTER XLVI.

"Yes, Miss Glenalvan, it is I," was the answer, as his burning eyes devoured her pale, frightened face. "Did you take me for a ghost?" [Pg 129]

"Why should I take you for a ghost?" she faltered, trembling, but trying to brave it out with an air of defiance.

"Because you tried to murder me last night, and came very near succeeding," he replied.

"It is false. How dare you accuse me of such a crime?" she broke out, passionately, flying to her father's side, as if for protection.

"How dare you?" echoed John Glenalvan, furiously.

Bertram Chesleigh lifted his hand imperiously.

"Listen," he said, "I told you I had one more card to play. Your fair daughter there attempted to poison me last night with drugged wine. The physician who saved my life declared that I had taken arsenic in a draught of wine. Do you see where you stand *now*?"

"Do not believe him, father; it is false!" cried Elinor, furiously; but John Glenalvan, turning to look into her wild, frightened face, read the signs of guilt too plainly to be mistaken.

The sight forced a groan even from his hardened lips.

"You see where you stand," repeated Bertram Chesleigh, with stern brevity. "How will you bear to see your cherished daughter dragged into court on such a dreadful charge?"

"You will not dare do such a thing," Elinor flashed out, quivering with rage.

"That will be as your father says," was the firm reply. "If it pleases him to reveal the secret of Golden Leith's fate, I'll spare you and him; if not, you need expect no mercy from me."

The grim *ultimatum* was spoken. Elinor and her father knew by that flashing eye and stern-set lip that there was no appeal from the calmly-spoken decision.

"Coward, to threaten a girl," she cried, taking refuge in vituperation now that denial had failed.

But Mr. Chesleigh regarded them in silent scorn, and her father sternly silenced her. He was furious with wrath, and it seemed to him that not even for his daughter's sake could he forego his dear revenge.

"Elinor," he said, with a dark frown, "if indeed you have done this thing you must prepare to face the consequences. I will not accede to his demand. Nothing shall balk me of my revenge."

Abject terror and despair filled Elinor's soul at those threatening words. She knew too well how guilty she was. She was filled with terror at the too probable punishment of her wickedness.

Falling on her knees, she caught her father's hand in hers, and bathed them with her frightened tears.

"Oh, father, do not sacrifice me to your revenge," she cried, wildly. "Remember that I am your own child. I should be dearer to you than your revenge. Oh! for mercy's sake, make terms with the wretch, and save me from his wicked vengeance."

Mr. Chesleigh did not even notice her. He stood with folded arms and curling lips awaiting his enemy's reply.

The sullen determination on John Glenalvan's face softened as she continued her anxious pleading. [Pg 130]

"Father, I cannot live if that wretched story becomes known," she wailed. "If you do not save me I shall drown myself."

A slight shudder convulsed his frame at the words. He looked down at the frightened, tear-wet face.

"Elinor," he said, "if I have to sacrifice my revenge for your sake, I shall hate you every moment of your future life."

"Anything but exposure," she wailed. "Oh, father, save me."

His dark brow lowered like a thunder cloud.

"So be it," he said, "but, mark me, girl, I shall hate you forever after."

"Then you will speak?" Bertram Chesleigh cried, gladly.

John Glenalvan hesitated a moment, then answered, gloomily:

"Yes, to save that wretched girl I will reveal the secret that has been locked in my breast for sixteen years."

CHAPTER XLVII.

There was a moment's silence, then Bertram Chesleigh said, quickly:

"Come with me, Mr. Glenalvan. Let the secret you have kept so long be revealed in the hearing of your father and Richard Leith."

The guilty man recoiled from the demand. He said, hoarsely:

"I refuse to do so. I will reveal it to you, and you may bear the news yourself to them."

Bertram Chesleigh considered the reply a moment, then answered, firmly.

"I prefer that they should hear it from your own lips."

John Glenalvan regarded him with furious eyes.

"You wish to humble me all you can," he said.

"Not so," replied Mr. Chesleigh. "But I consider that they have too decided a right to hear your confession, for me to exclude them from this momentous interview."

The angry man regarded him silently a moment, then said, with a sigh of baffled rage:

"So be it. I am not now in a position to dictate terms, and must obey your will. You swear to keep Elinor's secret if I do this thing?"

"Yes," Bertram answered.

"I am ready to accompany you, then. Elinor," he turned a furious gaze on his daughter who was weeping nervously near the door; "go to your mother, now. Tell her that you have ruined all my plans, and that I forever curse the hour in which you were born."

She turned away, casting one last look of fiery anger and hatred on the man she had tried to murder, and left the room.

The two men went down together to Richard Leith's room. The lawyer was sitting up in an easy-chair, talking to old Hugh Glenalvan who occupied a chair near the window.

They both looked up in surprise at the unexpected sight of John Glenalvan, whom they had supposed to be far away in hiding somewhere. [Pg 131]

Bertram spoke at once, quietly:

"You will pardon this late intrusion, Mr. Glenalvan. This gentleman has an important communication to make to you, and I ventured to bring him at once."

"A communication?" faltered the old man, looking blankly at his son.

"Yes," answered Mr. Chesleigh, with the flush of joyful triumph on his handsome face. "He will solve for you the strange mystery of your daughter's disappearance, sixteen years ago."

A cry came from Richard Leith's white lips. The old man echoed it feebly, as he rose and went to his son, but John waved him rudely back.

"Do not come near me," he said, harshly; "I have always hated you because you loved my sister best."

"I could not help it, John. She was more lovable than you," the father faltered, feebly.

"And so she stole your love from me and earned my hate. But I have had a great revenge," said the relentless wretch, grimly.

"Oh, John, John!"

The wailing cry came from the old man's lips; he looked at his son in surprise and horror.

"Yes, revenge," repeated John Glenalvan, seeming to take a malicious pride in his wickedness now that its revelation was forced upon him. "I hated her, and when my opportunity came, I seized upon it. I knew she was a wife, yet it was my hand that sent her that lying letter that made her leave her husband."

"Devil!" Richard Leith muttered, making an effort to spring upon him, but Bertram Chesleigh held him back, and the villain who had so wronged him laughed mockingly.

"She came home," he went on, after a minute, "came home, and her child was born. The following night came her mysterious disappearance which I accounted for by declaring that she had returned to her deceiver, unable to exist away from him."

All eyes were fixed on his dark, demoniac face as he proceeded. Every heart hung trembling on his further words.

At last the fearful mystery of little Golden's fate would be known to those who loved and mourned her.

Old Dinah had stolen silently in, and sat crouching in a corner, her beady, black eyes fixed intently on the face of the man whom she had always distrusted.

"Speak," Richard Leith thundered, almost mad with impatience. "Speak! You know she never came to me. Where is she now, my poor, wronged darling?"

"Is she dead or living?" echoed the wronged woman's father.

"*She is dead!*" John Glenalvan answered, coldly.

"Dead!" they echoed, despairingly.

"She has been dead these sixteen years," he answered.

"Vile wretch, then you murdered her," cried Richard Leith, struggling frantically in Bertram Chesleigh's strong hold.

The villain laughed heartlessly.

"Not so," he replied. "I hated her, but I would not have risked hanging for her sake. It was no fault of mine that she came to her death so tragically."

"Dead and buried these sixteen years," old Hugh moaned, wringing his feeble hands, and weeping as if the bereavement were but of yesterday. "John, tell me where to find my darling's grave."

"*She lies in the bottom of the lake!*" he replied, and those who watched him saw him shudder and turn pale for the first time.

"How came she there?" broke out Bertram Chesleigh.

"My sister was a somnambulist, Mr. Chesleigh. You will not deny that fact, father. She wandered from the house in her sleep, and walked deliberately into the lake."

"You saw her?"

"Yes, I was the only witness to the tragic deed," he replied, and again they saw a shudder shake his strong frame, and the chill dew beaded his forehead.

"Devil, you lie! You pushed her in!" cried Richard Leith, wild with rage and grief.

"Did you, John? Oh, tell me the truth," moaned his father.

"No, I did not, as there is a Heaven that hears me. I hated Golden because you and my mother loved her best, and because half of your property would go to her, but the thought of murder had not entered my head. I was out late that night, and returning with my mind full of envious thoughts toward my sister, I saw her crossing the moonlighted lawn, and on coming nearer saw that she was asleep. Keeping near to her, I followed her down to the lake, and she walked on straight, without pause or backward glance, into the water."

"And you put out no hand to save her—murderer!" cried Bertram Chesleigh, in terrific scorn.

"I did not know what she would do until all was over," he replied.

"You might have saved her even then," Bertram Chesleigh said.

"Yes, I might, but I hated her, and the devil whispered to me that this was my opportunity, so I watched the water close over her head, and then I walked away," he replied.

"Oh, my God, is de vengeance ob Hebben asleep dat such debbils roam de yerth?" wailed old Dinah.

They echoed her cry. Surely the vengeance of Heaven slumbered that such demons walked the

earth unsmitten.

"Then temptation entered my soul," he continued. "I did not think it was right for Golden's child to inherit her share of the property when I needed it so much for my own growing family. So I fabricated that slander, and eventually forced my father to make over the remnant of the Glenalvans' possessions to me, and I transferred my hatred from Golden to her child. Now you know all."

Old Hugh pointed to the door with a shaking finger.

"Go, now, before I call down the terrible vengeance of God on your guilty head!" he cried. "Go, and leave me to weep for my murdered darling!" [Pg 133]

CHAPTER XLVIII.

The next day men were set to work to drag the lake for Golden Leith's body.

A poor, bleached skeleton, partially petrified by the action of the water, and therefore in a good state of preservation, was all they found.

The broad, gold band of a wedding-ring still clung to the fleshless finger, and the name within was all that remained to assure them that this was she whom they sought—the hapless girl whose bright life had been blasted by a brother's sin, and whose name had been covered with ignominy and shame for sixteen years.

They placed the precious remains in a coffin, and prepared to give them Christian burial the next day.

All night and all day it stood on trestles in Hugh Glenalvan's sitting-room, with mourners at head and foot—the husband and father, so tragically bereaved of their darling, sat there dumb and tearless in their great affliction, and old Dinah stole in and out, with the corner of her apron pressed to her streaming eyes, her old black face convulsed with grief.

Only a few days ago the daughter's coffin had stood there where the mother's rested now.

Both her nurslings were gone, and the faithful, old creature's heart was almost broken.

Throughout the night and day not a member of John Glenalvan's family was visible. The curtains remained drawn at the windows, the doors closed, there was no sign of life within the house.

The time came when poor little Golden's remains were to be consigned to the kindly shelter of the grave.

It was a beautiful evening about the first of March. The grass was blue with violets, the birds twittered softly in the orange and magnolia trees, the sun shone brightly as it slowly declined in the western sky; Dinah had been in and deposited some beautiful wreaths of flowers upon the bier.

The friends who had loved the dead woman long ago had come to know her mournful fate at last, and had sent these sweet testimonials of their sympathy and grief.

They were waiting in the graveyard to pay the last outward tokens of respect to the lost one, but they would not venture to the house to intrude on the privacy of the bereaved ones.

So the gentle minister came and told them that they must bid a last farewell to the loved one, and Bertram Chesleigh stood ready to support the still feeble footsteps of Richard Leith with his strong young arm.

"Oh, my daughter, my daughter, how cruelly God has afflicted me," moaned the bereaved father, laying his white head down upon the coffin-lid, while the first heavy tears splashed down his cheeks.

"Do not arraign your Maker. Rather thank Him that your child has at last been proven pure and innocent," said the minister, to whom Golden's whole history was known. [Pg 134]

"Thank God," Bertram Chesleigh uttered fervently, then, with a sigh that was almost a sob, he added: "Ah, if only my wife had lived to see this day!"

"She lives—she is here!" said a low, clear voice in the doorway.

All looked around, startled. Two figures were entering the room. Both were clothed in deep mourning.

One was Gertrude Leith, pale and grave-looking, the other was alight, and deeply veiled. She clung to Mrs. Leith's arm tremblingly. They crossed the floor and stood by that long, dark, solemn object that occupied the center of the room. Mrs. Leith raised her companion's veil.

All started and uttered a cry of incredulous surprise.

Little Golden's daughter, pallid, beautiful, tearful, was standing there, looking at them across her mother's coffin.

"Thank God!" she said, in her sweet, clear voice, with a sound of tears in its sweetness. "Thank God, my mother was pure and innocent! The dream of my life-time is fulfilled at last."

"Does the grave give up its dead?" they cried, and Bertram Chesleigh went to her side and

touched her white hand, half-fearfully.

"My wife," he said.

"Yes, your wife," she answered, lifting her violet eyes to his face with such deep reproach in their tragic depths, that he was awed into momentary silence.

Then she turned from him, and went to her grandfather, who was gazing at her with dazed eyes full of grief and dread. She put her arms around his neck, and kissed his poor, withered cheek with her sweet, quivering lips.

"Grandpa, you must not take me for a ghost," she said. "It is your own little Golden come back to live and love you again. I was not dead, after all. Did I not tell you I could not die yet? But I cannot tell you all the story of my rescue from the grave now. Let us give all our thoughts to our martyred dead."

She looked up and saw her father and old Dinah waiting to greet her.

It was a strange scene beside that flower-wreathed coffin.

There was passionate joy over the living girl, and bitter sorrow over the dead.

Mrs. Leith had beckoned Bertram Chesleigh away. Behind the heavy hangings of the bay-window she said to him, gently:

"Do not press your wife yet, Mr. Chesleigh. Remember you have wronged her deeply, and she does not yet know how you have repented and atoned."

"I can never atone," he said, heavily.

"Perhaps she may think differently when she knows all," said Mrs. Leith. "Women are very tender and forgiving, you know."

"If she never speaks to me again, I shall still rejoice that she is living," he said, with a beam of gladness in his large, black eyes. [Pg 135]

"Do you wonder how she was saved?" she inquired.

"Yes."

"I will tell you, then, briefly," she answered. "You remember how you bribed the grave-digger to open her coffin for you that night?"

"Yes, and then I was too ill to keep my appointment," he answered.

"That wild fancy of yours was the means of her rescue," said Mrs. Leith. "When the man opened the coffin to be in readiness for you, he discovered slight signs of life in Golden. Growing alarmed and impatient at your tardiness, he sent his son to look for you, and the youth encountered me. I went with him, and we removed her to the man's little cottage near by. Little by little we fed the signs of reviving life, and you see the result."

"For which I bless and thank you forever," he said, kissing her hand respectfully.

"I have but little more to say," she went on, smiling a little sadly, "and it is this: Golden is very weak and exhausted yet. She is not strong enough to bear the excitement of her mother's burial. I will remain here with her while they are bearing Mrs. Leith to the grave, and I will tell her your whole story. She shall hear how you came back here to seek her in two days after your ill-considered desertion of her, and found her gone. I will tell her how nobly you vindicated her honor beside her grave. She shall know that you forced John Glenalvan to reveal the hidden story of her mother's fate. When you come back I think she cannot fail to forgive you."

"You will do all this for me?" he said, with a strange moisture in his eyes. "I cannot thank you sufficiently. You are an angel."

"No, only a very faulty and sad-hearted woman," she replied, with a pensive sigh, and then they went back to the mourners.

She kept her promise nobly. While they bore the poor remains of Richard Leith's first wife to the grave, his second wife sat with his daughter and tried to turn the swelling current of her grief by relating the story of Bertram Chesleigh's repentance and atonement.

"Golden, if you could have heard his noble vindication of your honor beside your grave; how proudly he claimed you for his wife, and your child for his own, you could not fail to pity and forgive him for the one great error into which he was led by his own pride and John Glenalvan's evil counsel."

"I have suffered so much through his fault," said the wronged wife, with mournful pathos.

"Yes, dear, but you must show your own nobility of soul now," said the step-mother, gently. "You must remember:

"To err is human,
To forgive divine."

The beautiful, pale face grew very grave and troubled.

"If only I could forget his cruelty," she said. "Ah, my friend, I was hurt so cruelly by that letter he sent me! I trusted him so fully. I believed in his truth as I believed in my God. I was almost maddened by the suddenness of my sorrow. Every word is branded upon my memory. See! I can repeat every sentence: [Pg 136]

"Though it almost kills me to forsake you, Golden, I must go away. The disgrace of your birth is so terrible that I can never claim you for my wife. Pride and honor alike forbid it. You must see for yourself, poor child, that your terrible misfortune has wholly set you apart from the world, and as you have sworn to keep our private marriage a secret until I give you leave to reveal it, I must beg you to hold the story unspoken in your breast forever."

She paused and looked at Mrs. Leith with a whole tragedy of sorrow in her violet orbs.

"Were they not cruel words to write to his own wife?" she said pathetically. "But I obeyed him. Through all the shame and sorrow that came afterward I kept my promise. Do you think I did not suffer more than death in keeping it? When Mrs. Desmond drove me out in such terrible disgrace do you think I did not long to say to her: I am as good and pure as you are; I am your brother's wife! And what did I not suffer when I knew she was separated from her husband on my account? Then when my own father disowned and despised me, how my heart ached to answer, I am Bertram Chesleigh's own wife! Oh, Gertrude, is it right and just that I should forgive him for all that I have suffered and made others suffer for his sake?"

"Yes, dear, because his repentance was so quick and his remorse so deep," said the gentle monitor. "You must remember, Golden, that if you had not gone away that night you would have escaped all that suffering; your husband returned in twenty-four hours to claim you, and John Glenalvan told him that you had gone away with the deliberate intention of leading a sinful life. Do you wonder that it threw him on a bed of sickness that almost cost him his life? You must forgive him and love him again, dear, because he is so penitent and devoted now."

And when the mourners returned from that sad funeral, Mrs. Leith sent him in to his wronged wife.

He knelt down before the pale, golden-haired girl, and begged her to forgive him, not that he deserved it, but because he loved her so dearly.

With the meek tenderness of woman, she forgave him and there was peace between them.

Several hours later he had led her out to old Hugh Glenalvan who was dozing sadly in his easy-chair.

"Mr. Glenalvan," he said, "you see my darling has risen from the grave to forgive me. Will you keep the promise you made, and forgive me too?"

"Yes, grandpa, you must forgive him, for I love him dearly," said little Golden.

So the old man forgave him, and solemnly blessed them as they knelt before him, one withered hand resting kindly on the dark, bowed head, and the other on the golden one.

CHAPTER XLIX.

[Pg 137]

Gertrude Leith having done what she could for the happiness of others, prepared to take her own departure.

"You will not leave us, my dear, true friend, my second mother," Golden exclaimed, as she came in veiled and bonneted, to bid her good-bye.

"Yes, dear, it will be better for a time, at least, that I should go away. I shall return north and go back to those quiet quarters in Brooklyn, where you and I spent those peaceful weeks before we came south. When you come to New York with your husband you will find me there."

"I will certainly seek you out," Golden replied. "But surely you do not intend to forsake my father. The doubt and perplexity are all over now. You know that you are legally his wife, my own mother being dead before he ever knew you."

"Yes, I know, dear," she answered, gently. "Yet it is best I should go away for a time. Your father must have time for his grief. After awhile, if he desires it, I may return to him."

Her words were too full of wisdom for anyone to gainsay them, so she went away.

Richard Leith's grief and remorse over his lost little Golden was as deep and passionate as if she had died yesterday instead of more than sixteen years ago.

He was too sorrowful to remember the fair woman he had put in the dead wife's place in the vain hope of stilling the fever and pain that had ached ceaselessly at his heart for sixteen years.

The time came later on when the first wife's memory became a sweet and chastened dream to him, and his second wife's new loveliness of character won its place in his heart.

Some years of quiet happiness and mutual love came to them after they learned to know each other better, but there was no year in which Richard Leith did not return south once, at least, to spend a few solemn hours by the low grave under the whispering cedars and broad-leaved magnolias, where the broken marble shaft bore the fond inscription:

"IN LOVING MEMORY OF GOLDEN,

WIFE OF RICHARD LEITH."

There was one other to whom that green grave became like a shrine, a holy Mecca, to which his poor, faltering footsteps were daily bent.

It was old Hugh Glenalvan, whom old Dinah daily guided to the sacred spot, where he would sit for hours, his gray locks fluttering in the gentle breeze, meditating, or perhaps holding spirit communion with the sainted dead.

It was discovered on the day of Golden Leith's burial that John Glenalvan and his whole family had secretly left the house the night previous.

A week later a letter came from the villain to Bertram Chesleigh, offering to sell Glenalvan Hall on fair terms, and stating that he should never live in the south again.

A bargain was closed at once, and Bertram Chesleigh became the possessor of the old hall, which was speedily repaired and remodeled under the supervision of himself and his lovely young wife. [Pg 138]

Before the work was completed a chance newspaper chronicled the fact of a distressing railway accident and among the list of killed appeared the name of John Glenalvan.

Bertram and Golden destroyed the newspaper, and old Hugh never knew that his wicked son had gone suddenly and without preparation into the presence of his august Maker.

The old man's life flowed on in sweet serenity. All his happiness was centered in the living Golden, and beside the grave of the dead one.

While he lived, Golden and her husband made their home at Glenalvan Hall, but after several years of quiet peace the white soul of the noble old man took on the wings of immortality, and soared to its Heavenly home through the open gates of the sunset.

They made him a grave by his daughter's side, and when the grass was growing green upon his grave they took old Dinah with them and turned their faces northward.

Black mammy had become reconciled to Mr. Chesleigh when she saw how happy he made her little missie. Her kind and wrinkled old visage reflected the radiant happiness that shone on Golden's beautiful face.

She waited on her kindly and devotedly as ever, declaring that no starched-up French maid should ever take her place while she lived, and Golden, with a shuddering remembrance of the wicked Celine's treachery, always assured her "old mammy" that she need never fear such an intruder on her privileges.

The day came when one of the most beautiful and palatial homes in New York opened wide its doors to receive Bertram Chesleigh's fair wife as its honored mistress.

Though Golden had seen some of the stately homes of New York she was astonished at the luxury and magnificence of her own.

Mr. Chesleigh smiled indulgently at her pretty, childish delight as he led her through suite after suite of the sumptuous, luxurious apartments the day after their arrival.

"I am glad you are so pleased with your new home," he said, "but now, my darling, you must run away and let black mammy dress you. I have invited a few guests to dinner."

"Strangers?" she asked, with a shy pretty blush on the exquisite face that was fresh and sweet as a rosebud with only that pensive droop of the golden-brown lashes to hint at the sorrow through which she had passed.

"Not exactly," he replied with a smile. "Lawyer Leith and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Desmond, and little Ruby. I think you will be glad to see her, though she must have tyrannized over you dreadfully in the old days."

"A dear little tyrant she was," laughed Mrs. Chesleigh. "I shall be very pleased to see her again."

She went to her dressing-room, and a loving remembrance of some things the child had said to her once, caused her to choose a lovely dress of white and blue, with large, gleaming white pearls for her neck and wrists, and knots of fragrance-breathing violets fastened among her creamy laces. [Pg 139]

Bertram uttered a cry of delight when she came to him in the drawing-room in the beautiful dress with the golden curls framing the perfect face in a halo of light.

She looked beyond him and saw her father and his wife gazing at her with eyes full of love and wonder, and she sprang joyfully to their embrace.

Mrs. Leith released her after some low-murmured words of love and praise, and she saw her husband's sister by her side.

Mrs. Desmond had grown more brilliantly lovely than ever. Happiness and contentment had lent new radiance to the lovely face, but there was a wistful air, almost amounting to humility, about her as she extended her jeweled hand, and said, sweetly:

"My dear little sister, can you ever forgive me?"

"Freely," she said, clasping the offered hand, and proffering the kiss of peace.

"And me, too—I am deeply repentant," said a low voice beside Mrs. Desmond, and looking up, Golden saw Mr. Desmond, debonairly handsome as ever, but so humble and ashamed that even a harder heart than our little Golden's must have pardoned his folly.

Then Ruby took possession of her and gave her a bear-like hug.

"Oh, you darling," she cried, "I have missed you so much, and to think you were Uncle Bert's wife all the while. It is just like one of mamma's novels that she is always reading. I warn you, Uncle

Bert, that I shall make you jealous, I shall stay with her so much. And I do so want to see that dear old black mammy I have heard about."

Her childish curiosity was gratified, and the New York child, after her first surprise, grew very fond of the good-natured, old negress who had been Golden's nurse from babyhood up.

"I do not have a nurse any more," she confided to Golden. "They have hired a governess for me, and I like to study. It improves my temper."

"Which was never very bad," smiled Golden, kissing the pretty little brunette.

"When you go into society you will be surprised to meet Elinor Glenalvan again," Mrs. Desmond said to her after awhile. "She has picked up a rich, old man somewhere, and is Mrs. Langley now. Six months ago she burst upon society in a blaze of glory, and at present she is considered the handsomest woman in New York. But her star will fade when you are introduced to the social world."

Soon afterward the two cousins met at a brilliant reception. Both looked their best, Elinor in Ruby velvet and diamonds, Golden in misty, white lace and pearls, Elinor just touched with the tips of her fingers the arm of her decrepit old spouse, Golden clung lovingly to her princely-looking and devoted husband. As they passed each other Mrs. Langley cast one look of bitter hatred and envy upon her fair, angelic-looking rival.

It was as Mrs. Desmond had predicted. Elinor's star paled before the superior loveliness of Golden, and in bitter anger and chagrin, the eclipsed beauty retired from the field, and removed to a distant city, where she was seen and heard of no more by those who had formerly known her. [Pg 140]

Little Golden was glad when her enemy was gone, but she felt no vanity over her brilliant social successes. Her chief joy and pride was that she reigned queen over her husband's adoring heart.

Transcriber's Note:

This story was originally serialized in the *Family Story Paper*, where it ran from June 5, 1882 to September 4, 1882. This e-text is derived from a later reprint as No. 218 in *The Favorite Library* published by The American News Company. The reprint edition also included two filler short stories: "A Mock Idyl" by Percy Ross and "Farewell" by W. H. Stacpoole. The filler stories are not included here.

A table of contents was added for the convenience of the reader.

Some inconsistent punctuation was retained (e.g. "Life Time" vs. "Life-Time" in title; "upturned" vs. "up-turned").

Some inconsistently italicized text was retained (e.g. "rencontre").

Some unusual spellings were retained (e.g. "exhult," "ballustrade").

Accent marks to match original were omitted (e.g. "protege").

Page 3, changed "herelf" to "herself."

Page 4, changed "to hasty" to "too hasty."

Page 6, added missing quote before "Oh, grandpa."

Page 13, changed "strangly" to "strangely."

Page 17, changed "recounter" to "rencontre."

Page 22, changed "neverspeak" to "never speak."

Page 24, changed "augh" to "laughs."

Page 27, added comma after "Oh, my darlin'."

Page 29, changed "founding" to "foundling" and changed ? to ! after "the girl is my niece."

Page 31, changed "furthur intercourse" to "further intercourse."

Page 37, changed "matin" to "mating."

Page 38, added missing quote after "Jest wait one minute, darlin'."

Page 42, changed "struggled" to "straggled."

Page 48, changed "greatset" to "greatest."

Page 54, added missing quote before "He likes pretty faces."

Page 55, changed "flirted" to "flitted."

Page 56, changed "you hair" to "your hair."

Page 60, changed "must not thing" to "must not think."

Page 61, changed "signficent" to "significant."

Page 66, changed "thoughfully" to "thoughtfully."
Page 75, removed extra "the" from "It is the the truth."
Page 80, changed "Your know" to "You know" and "father as" to "father has."
Page 83, changed "distress" to "mistress."
Page 84, changed ? to ! in "you are mistaken!"
Page 85, added missing quote before "Go, and take."
Page 87, changed "her her husband" to "her husband."
Page 91, changed "idendity" to "identity," "Lieth" to "Leith," "Bestram" to "Bertram," "maked" to "marked" and "cousse" to "course."
Page 97, changed "cempetence" to "competence."
Page 101, changed "gazedw onderingly" to "gazed wonderingly."
Page 102, changed "perference" to "preference," "you wife" to "your wife," and "guilty of his" to "guilty of this."
Page 104, changed "delerious" to "delirious."
Page 106, added missing open quote before "I wonder how."
Page 107, changed "bess" to "bless."
Page 110, changed "prostate" to "prostrate."
Page 111, added missing quote before "I *know*."
Page 112, changed "Lieth's" to "Leith's," "Lieth" to "Leith" and "idict" to "indict."
Page 113, changed "as last" to "at last."
Page 116, adding missing comma after "for God's sake" and changed "unable so bear" to "unable to bear."
Page 117, added missing quote after "seen her even once."
Page 118, changed "requim" to "requiem."
Page 120, added missing quote after "absent for several days."
Page 124, changed "Lieth" and "Keith" to "Leith."
Page 127, changed "queit" to "quiet."
Page 128, changed "No?" to "No!"
Page 129, changed "belive" to "believe."
Page 130, changed "hated" to "hatred."
Page 139, changed "uncle Bert" to "Uncle Bert."

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LITTLE GOLDEN'S DAUGHTER; OR, THE
DREAM OF A LIFE TIME ***

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