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A SECRET INHERITANCE

A

SECRET INHERITANCE

BY

B. L. FARJEON,

**AUTHOR OF "GREAT PORTER SQUARE," "IN A SILVER SEA,"
"THE HOUSE OF WHITE SHADOWS," ETC.**

IN THREE VOLUMES
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A SECRET INHERITANCE.

BOOK THE SECOND (Continued).

IN WHICH THE SECRET OF THE INHERITANCE TRANSMITTED TO GABRIEL CAREW IS REVEALED IN A SERIES OF LETTERS FROM ABRAHAM SANDIVAL, ESQ., ENGLAND, TO HIS FRIEND, MAXIMILIAN GALLENGA, ESQ., CONTRA COSTA CO., CALIFORNIA.

VOL. III.

VII.

The investigations in the course of which Emilius related his version of what had passed between him and his ill-fated brother--I use the phrase to give expression to my meaning, but indeed it is hard to say to which of the brothers, the living or the dead, it can be applied with the greater force--took place in private, only the accused and the magistrate, with a secretary to write down what was said, being present. The magistrate in his conversations with Doctor Louis and Gabriel Carew, did not hesitate to declare his belief in the prisoner's guilt. He declined altogether to entertain the sentimental views which Doctor Louis advanced in Emilius's favour--such as the love which it was well known had existed between the brothers since their birth, the character for gentleness which Emilius had earned, the numberless acts of kindness which could be set to his credit, and the general esteem which was accorded to him by those among whom he had chiefly lived.

"My experience is," he said, "that all pervious records of a man's life and character are not only valueless but misleading when the passions of love and jealousy enter his soul. They dominate him utterly; they are sufficiently baleful to transform him from an angel to a demon. He sees things through false light, and justifies himself for the commission of any monstrous act. Reason becomes warped, the judgment is distorted, the sense of right-doing vanishes; he is the victim of delusions."

Doctor Louis caught at the word. "The victim!"

"Will that excuse crime?" asked the magistrate severely.

Doctor Louis did not reply.

"No," said the magistrate, "it aggravates it. Admit such a defence, and let it serve as a palliation of guilt, and the whole moral fabric is destroyed. What weighs heavily against the prisoner is his evident disinclination to reveal all he knows in connection with the hours he passed in the forest on the night of his brother's death. He is concealing something, and he seeks refuge in equivocation. When I accused him of this his confusion increased. I asked him whether his meeting with his brother was accidental or premeditated, and he was unable or unwilling to give me a satisfactory reply. He made a remark to which he evidently wished me to attach importance. 'There are matters between me and my brother,' he said, 'which it would be difficult, perhaps impossible, for an unsympathetic person to understand.' 'I am such a person,' I said. 'Undoubtedly,' was his reply; 'you are seeking to convict me out of my own mouth of a crime I did not commit.' 'I am seeking to elicit the truth,' I said. 'Have these mysterious matters between you and your brother of which you speak any bearing upon his death?' Observe, that out of regard for the prisoner's feelings I used the word death instead of murder; but he corrected me. 'They have,' he said, 'a distinct bearing upon his murder.' 'And you cannot explain them to me?' I asked. 'I cannot,' he replied. 'You expect me, however, to place credence in what you say?' I asked. 'I do not,' he said; 'it is so strange even to me that, if you were in possession of the particulars, I should scarcely be justified in expecting you to believe me.' After that there was, of course, but little more to be said on the point. If a criminal chooses to intrench himself behind that which he is pleased to call a mystery, but which is simply an absurd invention for the purpose of putting justice off the track, he must take the consequences. Before our interview was ended it occurred to me to ask him whether he intended to persist in a concealment of his so-called mystery. He considered a little, and said that he would speak of it to one person, and to one person only. Upon that I inquired the name of the person, saying that I would seek him and send him to the

prisoner. Emilius refused to mention the name of the person. Another mystery. As you may imagine, this did not dispose me more favourably towards him, and I left him to his meditations."

"Having," said Doctor Louis, "a thorough belief in his guilt."

"There is not a shadow of doubt in my mind," said the magistrate.

"You once entertained an esteem for him."

"True; but it only serves to prove how little we really know of each other. This mask that we wear, and which even in private we seldom remove, hides so much!"

"So much that is evil?"

"That is my meaning."

"You are growing pessimistic," said Doctor Louis sadly.

"Late events and a larger experience are driving me in that direction," replied the magistrate.

"Have you any objection to granting me a private interview with Emilius?"

"None whatever. You have but to name your own time."

"May Mr. Carew see him also?"

"If he wishes."

In this conversation Gabriel Carew had borne no share. This was due to an absolute fairness on Carew's part. Prejudiced as he was against Emilius, he was aware that he could say nothing in favour of the accused, and he did not wish to pain Doctor Louis by expressing what he felt. When the magistrate left them, Doctor Louis said, "The one person to whom Emilius is willing to confide is either you or myself."

To this view Gabriel Carew did not subscribe. In his remarks to Doctor Louis he touched lightly but firmly upon the instinctive aversion which, from the first, he and the brothers had felt towards each other, and said that this aversion, on the part of Emilius, must have been strengthened rather than modified by the opinions he had felt it his duty to express with respect to Emilius's dealings with Patricia.

"But he behaved honourably to her," contended Doctor Louis, and endeavoured to win Carew to a more favourable judgment of the unhappy man. He was not successful.

"There are sentiments," said Carew, "which it would be folly to struggle against. Emilius was always my enemy, and is still more so now. If he wishes to see me I will go to him. Not otherwise."

Shortly afterwards Doctor Louis had an interview with Emilius.

"I thought you might come to me," said the prisoner, but he refused the hand which Doctor Louis held out to him. "Not till I am free," he said, "and pronounced innocent of this horrible charge."

"You will be--soon," said Doctor Louis with inward sinking, the evidence was so black against Emilius.

"I scarcely dare to hope it," said Emilius gloomily. "A fatality dogs our family. It destroyed my father and his brother; it has destroyed Eric; it will destroy me."

"Under any circumstances," said Doctor Louis, not pursuing the theme, "I should have endeavoured to see you, but there is a special reason for my present visit. The magistrate by whom you have been examined informed me that there is a certain matter in connection with this deplorable event which you will disclose to one person only. Am I he--and should you make the disclosure, is it likely to serve you?"

"I was not quite exact," said Emilius, "when I made that statement to the magistrate, in answer to a question he put to me. There were, indeed, two persons in my mind--but you are the first, by right."

"And the other--is it Gabriel Carew?"

"Yes, it is he--though I doubt whether he would come of his own free will. He bears me no friendship."

"He is an honourable, upright man," said Doctor Louis. "Though you have not been drawn to each other, as I hoped would be the case, I am sure he would be willing to serve you if it were in his power."

"Does he believe me to be innocent?" Doctor Louis was silent. "Then why should he be willing

to serve me? You are mistaken. But it is not of this I wish to speak. What I have to disclose will be received with sympathy by you, who knew and loved my poor father, and who are acquainted with all the particulars of his strange story. Related to any other than yourself it would be regarded as the ravings of a maniac, or as a wild and impotent invention to help me to freedom. For this reason I held my tongue in the presence of the magistrate."

"Before hearing it," said Doctor Louis, "I ought to say that, though I am groping in the dark, I can understand dimly why you would not confide in an officer of the law. But I cannot understand why you should be willing to confide in Gabriel Carew. I speak in the light of your belief that Carew bears you no friendship."

"I cannot explain myself to you," said Emilius, "and should most likely fail in the attempt with Mr. Carew. But there are promptings which a man sometimes feels it a duty to obey, and this is one of them. I perceive that you do not receive these apparent inconsistencies with favour. It is natural. But reflect. Had you not, through your close intimacy and almost brotherly friendship with my father, been made familiar with his story--had it been related to you as a stranger, would you not have received it with incredulity, would you not have refused to believe it?" Doctor Louis nodded. "A wild effort of imagination could alone have invented it--had it not happened. But it was true, in the teeth of improbabilities and inconsistencies. For his sake you will bear with me, for his sake you will be indulgent and merciful to his unhappy son."

Doctor Louis was inexpressibly moved. He again offered Emilius his hand, who again refused it.

"Circumstantial evidence," he said, "is so strong against me that I fear I have played out my part in the active world. Should my fears be confirmed, I shall ask you to render me an inestimable service. Meanwhile, there is that which should not be concealed from you, my father's dearest friend, and mine. It relates chiefly to the murder of my brother. That part of my story which affects my wife, Patricia, may be briefly passed over. I have known her for nearly five years, and grew insensibly to love her. It is only lately that my poor Eric made her acquaintanceship, and surrendered his heart to her. I should have been frank with him; I should have spoken of my love for Patricia instead of concealing it. It may be that it would not have averted his doom and mine, for when men are pursued by an inexorable fate, there are a thousand roads open for its execution. Why did I not go frankly to Patricia's father, and ask him for his daughter's hand? It is a question that may well be asked, but there is some difficulty in answering it. Chiefly, I think, it was Patricia who guided me here, and who desired to keep our love locked in our breasts. She feared her father; he is a man of stern and fixed ideas, and, once resolved, is difficult to move. His daughter, he declared, should marry in her own station in life; never would he consent to her marrying a gentleman. Patricia chose to consider me one, and had a genuine and honest dread that her father would tear her from me if he discovered our love. I did not argue with her; I simply agreed to all she said. We were married in secret, at her wish; and when concealment was no longer possible, we fled. This flight was not undertaken in haste; it was discussed and deliberately planned. We hoped for her father's pardon when he discovered that his intervention would be useless. I was for an earlier revelation to Martin Hartog of his daughter's union with me, but I yielded to Patricia's pleadings. She had a deep, unconquerable fear of her father's curse. 'It would kill me,' she said; and I believed it would.

"This is the end to which love has led us. I will speak now of my brother Eric."

VIII.

"It was arranged," said Emilius, after a pause, during which he recalled with clearness the momentful history of the few short hours which had sealed his brother's fate, "that Patricia should leave her father's cottage at midnight, when her father was asleep. I was to wait for her about a quarter of a mile from Mr. Carew's house with a horse and cart, in which we were to travel to the lodgings I had taken for her. This portion of our plan was successfully carried out, and Patricia and I were journeying to our new home. It was midnight by my watch when we started, and we had ridden for less than an hour when Patricia was overtaken with a sudden faintness. I was alarmed, and upon questioning her she said that she felt too weak to bear the jolting of the cart. The fact is, she was exhausted and worn with fatigue and anxiety. With her contemplated flight in her mind she had had but little sleep for two or three nights; her strength was overtaxed, and I saw that she needed immediate rest. I proposed that we should stop for three or four hours, so that she could sleep without disturbance, and upon my assuring her that we were quite safe she gratefully acceded to my proposal. In a very short time I made preparations for her repose; some hay I had brought with me furnished her a tolerably comfortable bed, and I had also provided rugs, with which I covered her. I took the horse from the cart, and tethered it, and before this was accomplished Patricia was in a peaceful slumber.

"There was no fear of our being disturbed. We were in a secluded part of the forest, which even in daylight is seldom traversed. The night was fine, though dark. All being secure, I sat me

down on some dry moss by the side of the cart, and in a few moments was myself asleep. I awoke suddenly and in terrible agitation. In outward aspect nothing was changed. All was as I had left it but fifteen minutes ago; for, upon consulting my watch by means of a lighted match, I found that I had been asleep but a quarter of an hour. The horse was grazing quietly and contentedly; Patricia was sleeping peacefully, and I judged that she would continue to do so for many hours unless she were aroused. Nature's demands upon her exhausted frame were imperative.

"Everything being so secure, what cause was there for agitation?"

"The cause lay in myself, and had been created during the last few minutes when I was in a state of unconsciousness. It seems incredible that so much should have passed through my brain in so short a time, but I have heard that a dream of years may take place in a moment's sleep.

"I dreamt of my father and his brother, and I was living a dual existence as it were, my father's and my own; and as I was associated with him, so was my brother Eric with our uncle Kristel. There was a strange similarity in the positions; as my father had flown, unknown to his brother, with the woman he loved, so was I flying, unknown to *my* brother, with the woman to whom I was bound in strongest bonds of love, and who had inspired in *his* heart feelings akin to my own. The tragic end of my father and uncle seemed to be woven into my life and the life of my brother. It was a phantasmagoria of shadow, belonging both to the past and the present; and it was succeeded by another, which was the chief cause of my violent awaking.

"Eric was walking in the forest at some distance from the spot upon which I was sleeping. I saw him distinctly, though he was walking through darkness, and although I do not remember in my conscious moments to have ever taken note of the particular conformation of the ground and the arrangement of the trees, the scene, with all its details of natural growth, was strangely familiar to me. And behind him, unknown to himself, stalked a threatening Shadow, with Death in its aspect. Then came a whisper, 'Your brother is in danger. Seek, and warn him!'

"This spiritual whisper was in my ears when I awoke.

"'Seek, and warn him!' It was clearly my duty. Such visitations had come to my father, and were fatally realised. Dare I neglect the warning?"

"But what was to be done must be done instantly and without delay. Could I leave Patricia? I leant over her, and gently called her name. She did not reply. I softly shook her, but did not succeed in arousing her. And while I was thus engaged I continued to hear the whisper, 'Your brother is in danger. Seek, and warn him!'

"I decided. Patricia could be safely left for a little while. If I awoke her she would probably prevail upon me to remain with her, and I might have cause in all my after life to reproach myself for having neglected the spiritual warning. To be lightly regarded perhaps by other men, but not by me. I was Silvain's son.

"I wrote on a leaf torn from my pocketbook, 'Do not be alarmed at my absence; I shall be back at sunrise. There is something I have forgotten, which must be done immediately. Sleep in peace. All is well.--Your lover and husband, EMILIUS.' I pinned this paper at her breast, arranged the rugs securely about her, and left her.

"I cannot describe to you how I was directed, but I plunged without hesitation and in perfect confidence into the labyrinths of the forest, and my steps were directed aright. I walked swiftly, and recognised certain natural aspects made familiar to me in my dreams. And in little more than an hour I saw Eric a few yards ahead of me, strolling aimlessly and in a disturbed mood. I called to him.

"'Eric!'

"'Emilius!'

"But there was no friendliness in his tone.

"'It is you who have been dogging me!' he cried.

"'I have but this moment arrived,' I replied.

"'In search of me?'

"'Yes, my dear brother,' I said, passing my arm around him. 'We must speak together, in love and confidence, as we have ever done.'

"Already he was softened, and I breathed a grateful sigh.

"'Have you been followed, Eric?' I asked.

"'I do not know,' he replied. 'I cannot say. I have been racked and tormented by torturing fancies. Trees have taken ominous shapes; shadows have haunted me; my mind is distraught; my heart is bleeding!'

"It would occupy me for too long a time to narrate circumstantially all that passed between me and Eric on that our last interview. Suffice it that I succeeded to some extent in calming him, that I succeeded in making him understand that I had done him no conscious wrong; that Patricia was my wife and loved me.

"'Had it been your lot, Eric,' I said, 'to have won her love, I should have suffered as you are suffering; but believe me, my dear brother, that I should have endeavoured to bear my sufferings like a man. It lay not with us that this should have occurred; it lay with Patricia. It is not so much our happiness, but hers, that is at stake.'

"It is a consolation to me in my present peril to know that I succeeded in wooing him back to our old relations, in which we were guided wholly and solely by brotherly love. You are not to believe that this was accomplished without difficulty. There were, on his side, paroxysms of rebellion and despair, in one of which--after he had learned that I and Patricia were man and wife--he cried, 'Well, kill me, for I do not care to live!' These were the words heard by the witness who has testified against me. They bear, I well know, an injurious construction, but my conscience is not disturbed. My heart is--and I am racked by a torture which threatens to undermine my reason when I think of my wife and unborn child.

"At length peace was established between me and my dear brother. And then it was that I told him of my dream, and of the uncontrollable impulse which had urged me to seek for him in the forest. I asked him to accompany me back to Patricia, but he said that was impossible, and that he could not endure the agony of it. I put myself in his place, and recognised that his refusal was natural. But I could not entirely dismiss my fears for his safety. Eric, however, refused to share them. 'What is to be will be,' he said; 'otherwise it would not have been fated that our father and his brother--twins, as we are--should have loved the same woman, and that we should have done the same.'

"I was anxious to get back to Patricia, and I left him in the forest. I knew nothing further until I was arrested and thrown into prison."

"An innocent man?" said Doctor Louis.

"As innocent as yourself," was Emilius's reply.

IX.

Throughout this narration Doctor Louis was impressed by the suspicion that something was hidden from him. He pressed Emilius upon the point, and his suspicion was strengthened by the evasive replies he received.

"Enough, for the present, of myself," said Emilius; "let me hear something of the outside world--of the world that is dead to me."

"What do you wish to know?" asked Doctor Louis sadly.

"Of yourselves," replied Emilius. "Of your good wife, whom I used to look upon as a second mother. She is well?"

"She is well," said Doctor Louis, "but in deep unhappiness because of these terrible events."

"How does she regard me--as innocent or guilty?"

"She has the firmest belief in your innocence. When I told her I was about to visit you, she desired me to give you her love and sympathy."

"It is like her. And Lauretta?"

"I did not inform her that I was coming. She is in great distress. You and Eric were as brothers to her."

"And now," said Emilius, with a certain recklessness of manner which puzzled Doctor Louis, "one is dead and the other disgraced. But she will live through it. She has a happy future before her?"

He put this somewhat in the form of a question, to which Doctor Louis replied without hesitation: "We have the best of reasons for hoping so. But our conversation, Emilius, appears to have taken a heartless turn. Let us rather consider the chances of establishing your innocence and setting you free."

"No, let us continue to speak of your family. There may not be another opportunity--who knows? My judges may take it into their heads to keep me in solitary confinement, and to deprive

me entirely of the solace of friendly intercourse, until they have got rid of me altogether. The chances of establishing my innocence are scarcely worth considering; they are so slender. Slender! They are not even that. I see no loophole, nor do you. What is wanted is fact--hard, solid fact, such as an actual witness, or a frank confession from the murderer. Everything tangible and intangible is against me. Eric and I were rivals in a woman's love; we had a meeting, in which we reconciled our differences, and in which the horror of brotherly hatred was scotched clean dead. Who were present at this meeting? My dear brother, who is gone and cannot testify; and I, whose interest it is to say whatever my tongue can utter in my defence. To prove my innocence I can bring forward--what? Shadows. I could forgive my judges for laughing at me were I to set up such a defence. Easier to believe that I killed my brother in a dream. Could that be proved, there would be some hope for me, for it might be argued that I was not accountable. Let us dismiss it. I have told you all I know positively; for the rest, I am strong enough to keep it to myself, being aware of the manner in which it would be received."

"Surely you are not wearied of life!" said Doctor Louis, shocked at this reckless mood.

"That is not to the point. Wearied or not, it is not in my power to choose. Were I free, were my fate in my own hands, it would be worth my while to consider how to act in order that the crime might be fixed upon the guilty one. And hearken, Doctor, I am not swayed by impulse; there is something of inward direction which holds me up. I hear voices, I see visions--not to be heard or seen or taken into account in a court of justice; of value only in a prison. They assure me that, though I may suffer and be disgraced, I shall not die until my innocence is proved."

"Heaven grant it!" exclaimed Doctor Louis.

"Meanwhile, I wait and take the strokes which fate deals out to me. A crushed manhood, a ruined life, a blasted happiness! And there is a happy future, you say, before Laretta? You have every confidence in Mr. Carew? Laretta loves him?"

"With her whole heart."

"And you and your good wife approve--are content to intrust her happiness into his keeping?"

"We are content--we approve."

"May all be as you hope! Say nothing to them of me. The best mercy that can be accorded to me is the mercy of forgetfulness. I have a favour to beg of you."

"It is granted."

"You will be kind to my wife; you will not desert her--you will, if necessary, protect her from her father, who, I fear, will never forgive her?"

"I will do all that lies in my power to further your wishes--though I still hope for a favourable turn in your affairs."

"Your hope is vain," said Emilius. "I thank you for your promise."

X.

There were no further discoveries. Doctor Louis engaged eminent lawyers to defend Emilius when his trial took place, but their case was so weak that they held out no hope of a successful issue. They pleaded hard and brilliantly, and took advantage of every vulnerable point. A great number of witnesses testified to the good character of the accused, to his consistent kindness of heart, to his humanity, to acts of heroism now for the first time made public. These efforts were not entirely without effect. Emilius was pronounced guilty, but a chord of sympathy had been touched, and he received the benefit of it. A strong recommendation to mercy accompanied the verdict, and he was condemned to imprisonment for twenty-five years. Thus he passed away, and was as one dead to those who had loved and honoured him; but it was long before they forgot him.

These events retarded for a little while the marriage of Gabriel Carew and Laretta, and even the ardent lover himself had the grace to submit patiently to the delay. During that time he endeared himself more than ever to Doctor Louis and his family, by his tenderness to Laretta, and by his charities to the poor. His mind recovered its healthy tone; his habits became more regular; he paid attention to religious duties; and when the wedding-day arrived it was a day of rejoicing in the whole village. He and Laretta departed on their honeymoon tour amidst general demonstrations of love and esteem. The sun was shining on their present and their future, and it may be truly said that never did bride and bridegroom go forth under more joyful auspices. For weal or woe the lives of Laretta and Gabriel were henceforth one.

They were absent from Nerac for between two and three months, travelling through delightful

scenes and climes, and their letters home betokened that they were perfectly happy.

"For the first time," wrote Gabriel Carew, "I recognise the sweetness and beauty of life. I have hitherto been wandering in darkness. Association with Laretta has opened windows of light in my soul; heaven is nearer to me. How can I sufficiently thank you for the precious gift of a nature so pure?"

Their honeymoon over, they journeyed homewards to Nerac. Carew had given all necessary instructions with respect to his house, and it was ready for occupation upon their return. Martin Hartog had left the village, and was never again seen in it. No one knew whither he had gone; he left no sign behind, and, having few friends, was but little missed, and was soon forgotten. Other changes had also occurred, of infinitely more importance to Gabriel Carew and his wife. The first which arrested their attention and brought fear to their hearts was the health of Laretta's mother, and Carew observed in Doctor Louis's grave and anxious face that the fear which smote himself and Laretta had found a lodgment in the doctor's soul. She had grown thin and wan during their absence; her limbs were oppressed with langour, her eyes were dim, there was a wistful trembling of her lips. This was not immediately observable, so profound was her joy in embracing once more her beloved child, but Gabriel Carew was struck by it within a few minutes of their being together. He did not, however, speak of it of his own accord to Doctor Louis. So deep was the love between those faithful souls, that Carew was fearful of referring to what might prove to be not only a separation, but a destruction of happiness. Doctor Louis was the first to mention it. He and Carew were sitting apart from the mother and the daughter, who, embracing, were at the other end of the room.

"You have had a happy time, Gabriel?"

"Very, very happy."

"Our dear Laretta is the same as ever."

"Yes. I would wish that she should never change."

"But changes come," said Doctor Louis with a sigh.

"Yes, unhappily."

"I am not so sure," said the doctor, with a trembling lip. "Yet when they do come, sooner than we expected in one we love, they are hard to bear. Faith in God alone sustains us in such a trial. To live a good life, a life without reproach, upon which lies no shame, a life in which we have endeavoured to fulfil our human duties--surely that must count!"

"Otherwise," said Carew, "the sinner would rank with the just."

"The sinner is the more to be pitied," said Doctor Louis; and then, after a pause, "Gabriel, you have been away from us for nearly three months, and are more likely to detect changes in persons and things than those who are hourly familiar with them. Do you observe anything?"

"In what--in whom?" asked Carew, in a hesitating tone.

"In the dear mother," said Doctor Louis. "Is she thinner, paler, than when you saw her last?"

"Yes," replied Carew, deeming frankness the best course; "she looks as if she had passed through a sickness."

"She has not been really ill--that is, she has attended regularly to her duties and has not complained. But she is drooping; I am filled with fears for her."

"She looks better within these few minutes," said Carew. "Her eyes are brighter, her cheeks have more colour in them."

"She has her dear Laretta by her side," said Doctor Louis, his eyes fixed upon her beloved face. "It is the delight of the reunion that has excited her."

"It may be," said Carew, "that Laretta's absence has affected her. They have never been separated before. How often has Laretta said during her travels, 'There is only one thing wanting--the presence of my dear mother and father!' Now that they are together again, the dear mother will grow stronger."

It was not so, however; the good woman drooped daily, and daily grew weaker. The remembrance of that brief time at the end of which Laretta's mother passed from earth to heaven, never faded from the minds of those nearest and dearest to her. Her illness lasted for not longer than two weeks after Laretta's return.

"She was only waiting for her child," sighed Doctor Louis.

It needed all his strength of mind and all the resources of his wise nature to enable him to bear up against the impending blow; and these would not have availed but for the sweet and tender words whispered by his wife as he sat by her bedside, holding her hand in his. Laretta

did not leave her mother. The young girl-wife suffered deeply. Even the love of her husband, it seemed, could not compensate for the loss of the dear one, whose unselfish course through life had been strewn with flowers, planted and tended by her own hands to gladden the hearts of those around her. The whole village mourned. Grateful men and women clustered outside the gates of Doctor Louis's house from morn till night, anxiously inquiring how the invalid was progressing, and whether there was any hope. Simple offerings of love were hourly left at the house, and were received with gratitude. Her eyes brightened when she was told of this.

"The dear people!" she murmured. "God guard them and keep them free from temptation and sin!"

These words were uttered in the presence of her husband and Gabriel Carew, and they learned from them how her heart had been racked by the terrible events which had occurred lately in Nerac, staining the once innocent village with blood and crime.

"She loved Eric and Emilius," said Doctor Louis to Carew, "as though they were her own sons. To this moment she has a firm belief in Emilius's innocence."

"Her nature," was Gabriel Carew's comment, "is too gentle for justice. Fitly is she called 'The Angel Mother.'"

It was a title by which she had been occasionally spoken of in the village, and now that she was lying on her death-bed it was generally applied to her.

"For the Angel Mother," said the villagers, as they left their humble offerings at her door.

In his goings in and out of the house the good priest, Father Daniel, was besieged by eager sympathisers, asking him to convey loving messages from this one and that one to the Angel Mother, and--the wish being father to the thought--inquiring whether she was not, after all, a little better than she was yesterday, and whether there was hope that she might still be spared to them. He took advantage of the sad occasion to impress moral lessons upon his flock, bidding them purify their hearts and live good lives. It was remarked by a few that a feeling of restraint had grown up between Father Daniel and Gabriel Carew since the latter's return from his honeymoon tour. Indeed, on Father Daniel's part, this new feeling must have been generated before Carew's return, and it very quickly impressed itself upon Carew. He was not slow in paying coldness for coldness; his nature was not of that conciliatory order to beg for explanations of altered conduct. Proud, self-contained, and to some extent imperious and exacting in his dealings with men, Carew met Father Daniel in the spirit in which he was received. No words passed between them; it was simply that the priest evinced a disposition to hold aloof from Gabriel Carew, and that, the moment this was clear to Carew, he also fell back, and did not attempt to bridge the chasm which separated these two men who had once been friends.

So the days wore on till the end came. With each member of her family the Angel Mother held converse within a few hours of her death.

"Be good to my dear child," she said to Carew.

There was no one else but these two in the chamber, and it was at her request that they were alone.

"My heart, my life, are devoted to her," said Carew. "So may I be dealt by as I deal by her!"

"She loves you as women do not always love," said the mother. "You have by your side one who will sweeten and purify your days. No thought but what is tender and sweet has ever crossed her mind. She is the emblem of innocence. In giving her to you I believed I was doing what was right. Do not question me--my moments are numbered. I have been much shaken by the fate of Eric and Emilius. You believe Emilius to be guilty. Be more merciful in your judgments. With my dying breath I declare my belief in his innocence. It would be disloyal to one I loved as my son if I did not say this to you."

"But why," asked Carew gently, "especially to me?"

"I would say it to all," she replied, "and I would have all believe as I believe. His poor wife--his poor wife! Ah, how I pity her! Help her, if you can. Promise me."

"I will do so," said Carew, "if it is in my power, and if she will receive help from me."

"Lauretta and you are one," said the dying woman; "if not from you, she will receive it from my daughter. Before you leave me, answer one question, as you would answer before God. Have you anything hidden in your heart for which you have cause to reproach yourself?"

"Nothing," he replied, wondering that such a question should be put to him at such a moment.

"Absolutely nothing?"

"Absolutely nothing."

"Pardon me for asking you. May no shadow of sin or wrong-doing ever darken your door! Lift

your heart in prayer. If you have children, teach them to pray. Nothing is more powerful to the young as the example of parents. Farewell, Gabriel. Send my husband and my daughter to me, and let my last moments with them be undisturbed." She gazed at him kindly and pityingly. "Kiss me, Gabriel."

He left the room with eyes overflowing, and delivered the message to Doctor Louis and Laretta, who went immediately to the chamber of death.

Father Daniel was in the apartment, praying on his knees. He raised his head as Gabriel Carew stepped to his side. The time was too solemn for resentment or coldness.

"Pray with me," said the priest.

Gabriel Carew sank upon his knees, and prayed, by the priest's direction, for mercy, for light, for pardon to sinners.

Half an hour afterwards the door was opened, and Doctor Louis beckoned to his son-in-law and the priest. They followed him to the bedside of the Angel Mother. All was over; her soul had passed away tranquilly and peacefully. Carew knelt by Laretta, and passed his arm tenderly around her.

When the news was made known, the village was plunged in grief. The shops were closed, and the villagers went about quietly and softly, and spoke in gentle tones of the Angel Mother, whose spirit was looking down upon them from heavenly heights. Early on the morning of the funeral the children went into the woods and gathered quantities of simple wild flowers, with which they strewed the road from Doctor Louis's house to the grave. The sun was shining, the birds were singing, soft breezes floated over the churchyard.

"It is as the dear mother would have wished," said Doctor Louis to Laretta. "I remember her saying long ago in the past that she would like to be buried on a bright summer day--such as this. Ah, how the years have flown! But we must not repine. Let us rather be grateful for the happiness we have enjoyed in the association of a saintly woman, an angel now--waiting for us when our time comes."

And in his heart there breathed the hope, "May it come soon, to me!"

The people lingered about the grave over which to this day the flowers are growing.

XI.

So numerous had been the concourse of people, and so engrossed were they in their demonstrations of sorrow and affection for their departed friend, that the presence of a stranger among them had not been observed. He was a man whose appearance would not have won their favour. Apart from the fact that he was unknown--which in itself, because of late events, would have predisposed them against him--his face and clothes would not have recommended him. He had the air of one who was familiar with prisons; he was common and coarse-looking; his clothes were a conglomeration of patches and odds and ends; he gazed about him furtively, as though seeking for some particular person or for some special information, and at the same time wishful, for private and not creditable reasons, not to draw upon himself a too close observation. Had he done so, it would have been noted that he entered the village early in the day, and, addressing himself to children--his evident desire being to avoid intercourse with men and women--learnt from them the direction of Gabriel Carew's house. Thither he wended his way, and loitered about the house, looking up at the windows and watching the doors for the appearance of some person from whom he could elicit further information. There was only one servant in the house, the other domestics having gone to the funeral, and this servant, an elderly woman, was at length attracted by the sight of a stranger strolling this way and that, without any definite purpose--and, therefore, for a bad one. She stood in the doorway, gazing at him. He approached and addressed her.

"I am looking for Gabriel Carew's house," he said.

"This is it," the servant replied.

"So I was directed, but was not sure, being a stranger in these parts. Is the master at home?"

"No."

"He lives here, doesn't he?"

"He will presently; but it is only lately he came back with his wife, and has not yet taken up his residence."

"His wife! Do you mean Doctor Louis's daughter?"

"Yes.

"Ah, they're married, then?"

"Yes, they are married. You seem to know names, though you are a stranger."

"Yes, I know names well enough. If Gabriel Carew is not here, where is he?"

"It would be more respectful to say Mr. Carew," said the servant, resenting this familiar utterance of her master's name.

"Mr. Carew, then. I'm not particular. Where is he?"

"You will find him in the village."

"That's a wide address."

"He is stopping at Doctor Louis's house. Anybody will tell you where that is."

"Thank you; I will go there." He was about to depart, but turned and said, "Where is the gardener, Martin Hartog?"

"He left months ago."

"Left, has he? Where for?"

"I can't tell you."

"Because you won't?"

"Because I can't. You are a saucy fellow."

"No, mistress, you're mistaken. It's my manner, that's all; I was brought up rough. And where I've come from, a man might as well be out of the world as in it." He accompanied this remark with a dare-devil shake of his head.

"You're so free at asking questions," said the woman, "that there can be no harm in my asking where *have* you come from--being, as you say, a stranger in these parts?"

"Ah, mistress," said the man, "questions are easily asked. It's a different thing answering them. Where I've come from is nothing to anybody who's not been there. To them it means a lot. Thank you for your information."

He swung off without another word towards the village. He had no difficulty in finding Doctor Louis's house, and observing that something unusual was taking place, held his purpose in and took mental notes. He followed the procession to the churchyard, and was witness to the sympathy and sorrow shown for the lady whose body was taken to its last resting-place. He did not know at the time whether it was man or woman, and he took no pains to ascertain till the religious ceremony was over. Then he addressed himself to a little girl.

"Who is dead?"

"Our Angel Mother," replied the girl.

"She had a name, little one." His voice was not unkindly. The answer to his question--"Angel Mother"--had touched him. He once had a mother, the memory of whom still remained with him as a softening if not a purifying influence. It is the one word in all the languages which ranks nearest to God. "What was hers?"

"Don't you know? Everybody knows. Doctor Louis's wife."

"Doctor Louis's wife!" he muttered. "And I had a message for her!" Then he said aloud, "Dead, eh?"

"Dead," said the little girl mournfully.

"And you are sorry?"

"Everybody is sorry."

"Ah," thought the man, "it bears out what *he* said." Again, aloud: "That gentleman yonder, is he Doctor Louis?"

"Yes."

"The priest--his name is Father Daniel, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"The young lady by Doctor Louis's side, is she his daughter?"

"Yes."

"Is her husband there--Gabriel Carew?"

"Yes; there he is." And the girl pointed him out.

The man nodded, and moved apart. But he did not remain so; he mingled with the throng, and coming close to the persons he had asked about, gazed at them, as though in the endeavour to fix their faces in his memory. Especially did he gaze, long and earnestly, at Gabriel Carew. None noticed him; they were too deeply preoccupied in their special sorrow. When the principal mourners moved away, he followed them at a little distance, and saw them enter Doctor Louis's house. Being gone from his sight, he waited patiently. Patience was required, because for three or four hours none who entered the house emerged from it. Nature, however, is a stern mistress, and in her exactions is not to be denied. The man took from his pocket some bread and cheese, which he cut with a stout clasp knife, and devoured. At four o'clock in the afternoon Father Daniel came out of the house. The man accosted him.

"You are Father Daniel?"

"I am." And the priest, with his earnest eyes upon the stranger, said, "I do not know you."

"No," replied the man, "I have never seen you before to-day. We are strangers to each other. But I have heard much of you."

"From whom?"

"From Emilius," said the man.

"Emilius!" cried Father Daniel, and signs of agitation were visible on his face. "Are you acquainted with him? Have you seen him lately?"

"I am acquainted with him. I saw him three days ago."

Father Daniel fell back with a sudden impulse of revulsion, and with as sudden an impulse of contrition said humbly, "Forgive me--forgive me!"

"It is I who should ask that," said the man, with a curious and not discreditable assumption of manliness, in the humbleness of which a certain remorseful abasement was conspicuous. He bowed his head. "Bless me, Father!"

"Do you deserve it?"

"I need it," said the man; and the good priest blessed him.

"It is, up to now," said the man presently, raising his head, "as Emilius told me. But he could not lie."

"You are his friend?" said Father Daniel.

"I am not worthy to be called so," said the man. "I am a sinner. He is a martyr."

"Ah," said Father Daniel, "give me your hand. Nay, I will have it. We are brothers. No temptation has been mine. I have not sinned because sin has not presented itself to me in alluring colours. I have never known want. My parents were good, and set me a good example. They taught me what is right; they taught me to pray. And you?"

"And I, Father?" said the man in softened accents. "I! Great God, what am I?" It was as though a revelation had fallen upon him. It held him fast for a few moments, and then he recovered his natural self. "I have never been as yourself, Father. My lot was otherwise. I don't complain. But it was not my fault that I was born of thieves--though, mind you, Father, I loved my mother."

"My son," said Father Daniel, bowing his head, "give *me* your blessing."

"Father!"

"Give *me* your blessing!"

Awed and compelled, the man raised his trembling hands above Father Daniel's head. When the priest looked again at the man he saw that his eyes were filled with tears.

"You come from Emilius."

"Yes, with messages which I promised to deliver. I have been in prison for fifteen years. Emilius joined us; we hardened ones were at first surprised, afterwards we were shocked. It was not long before we grew to love him. Father, is there justice in the world?"

"Yes," said Father Daniel, with a false sternness in his voice. "That it sometimes errs is human. Your messages! To whom?"

"To one who is dead--a good woman." He lowered his head a moment. "I will keep it here," touching his breast; "it will do me no harm. To you."

"Deliver it."

"Emilius desired me to seek you out, and to tell you he is innocent."

"I know it."

"That is the second. The third is but one word to a man you know--Gabriel Carew."

"He is here," said Father Daniel.

With head bowed down to his breast, Gabriel Carew came from Doctor Louis's house. His face was very pale. The loss which had fallen upon him and Lauretta had deeply affected him. Never had he felt so humble, so purified, so animated by sincere desire to live a worthy life.

"This man has a message to deliver to you," said Father Daniel to him.

Gabriel Carew looked at the man.

"I come from Emilius," said the man, "and am just released from prison. I promised him to deliver to you a message of a single word in the presence of Father Daniel."

In a cold voice and with a stern look Gabriel Carew said, "All is prepared. What is your message?"

"Understand that it is Emilius, not I, who is speaking."

"I understand."

"Murderer!"

XII.

In pursuance of the plan I decided upon before I commenced this recital--one of the principal features of which is not to anticipate events, in order that the interest of the story should not be weakened--a gap is necessary here, which before the end is reached will be properly bridged over. All that I deem it requisite to state at this point is that within two years of the death of Lauretta's mother Gabriel Carew left Nerac, never again to set foot in the village. He came to England, bringing with him his wife and one child, named Mildred, after Lauretta's mother. As you will understand, I have only lately gathered my materials, and had no acquaintanceship whatever with Gabriel Carew and his family at the time of his return to his native country; and it may be as well to state now that there were sufficient grounds for Carew's abandonment of his design to settle permanently in Nerac. The place became more than lightly distasteful to him by reason of his falling into disfavour with the inhabitants of the village. Some kind of feeling grew silently against him, which found forcible expression in a general avoidance of his company. He strove in vain to overcome this strange antipathy, for which he could not account. Even Father Daniel took sides with his flock against Carew. What galled him most was that when he challenged those who were once his friends to state their reasons for withdrawing their friendship from him, he could elicit no satisfactory replies. Then befel an event which decided his course of action. Doctor Louis died. The loss of the good doctor's wife had suddenly aged him; the break in the happy life weighed him down, and he went to his rest contentedly, almost joyfully, to rejoin his beloved mate. Within a few weeks after his burial, Gabriel Carew shook the dust of Nerac from his feet, and departed from the pretty village with a bitter feeling in his heart towards the inhabitants. They would have been glad to demonstrate to Lauretta their affection and sorrow, but she stood by her husband, whom she devotedly loved, and with a sad and indignant persistence rejected their advances. Thus were the old ties broken, and her new life commenced in a foreign land.

Of the doings of Gabriel Carew for some years after his arrival in England I have but an imperfect record, but that is of no importance, as it has no immediate bearing upon my story. Sufficient to say that five years ago he and his wife and Mildred Carew took possession of Rosemullion, which had been long without a tenant. Great preparations were made for their taking up their residence in Rosemullion. The grounds and house were in sad dilapidation, no care having been taken of them for many years past, and a number of workmen were employed to set things in order. In an English neighbourhood such doings always excite curiosity, and when it became known that Gabriel Carew, the master of the property, was coming to reside amongst us, there was a fruitful wagging of tongues. I heard a great many things which not only surprised

me, but created within me a lively interest in the gentleman who would soon be my near neighbour, my house being scarcely more than half a mile from the little estate of Rosemullion. It was some time, however, before I made the personal acquaintance of Gabriel Carew. Before that took place I found myself, vicariously, in association with him through my son, and your favourite, Reginald. I can see you in fancy, my dear Max, rubbing your hands and saying, "Ah, we are coming to the kernel at last!" Wait. You have the nut before you, but your imagination must be of a miraculous order to enable you to pronounce upon the exact nature of the fruit when the shell is removed.

Among our friends and acquaintances is a lady whose name it is not necessary to mention, who has a pleasant craze for bringing young people together through the medium of "small and early" dances. Reginald went to her hospitable house frequently on these occasions. For my own part, I am not given to these vanities, being, indeed, too old for them. Old fogeys like myself are in the way of boys and girls who are called together for an enjoyment which is their special privilege. Therefore I was content that Reginald should go alone to this lady's house.

From one of these visits he returned in an unusually excited mood. He had met and danced with a young lady who, I plainly saw, had taken his heart captive. I inquired her name. Miss Carew. To be exact, he told me her Christian name. Miss Mildred Carew. Of Rosemullion? Yes. Was she alone? No; her mother was with her--a most lovely lady, but of course not the equal of her daughter in beauty. An only child? Yes.

These were some of the questions put by me and answered by Reginald. In a very short time he had acquired an amazing amount of information respecting this young lady. He had seen nothing of her father.

He went again to the house of our hospitable friend, and again met and danced with Miss Carew, and came away more deeply than ever in love with her. My affection and my duty caused me to take quiet note of my son, whose welfare is very dear to me. With a thorough knowledge of his character, I knew that he was not in the habit of contracting light fancies. He has a very serious and earnest nature.

For the third time he visited our friend, and for the third time met Miss Carew. From what passed between us I resolved to see the young lady and her mother. I made the opportunity by going uninvited to the house of my kind-hearted friend upon the occasion of her next dance party. I could take that liberty; we had been friends for twenty years. I enlightened her confidentially as to my motive for visiting her, and she received my confidence in the frankest spirit, firing at me first, however, a gun of a very heavy weight.

"It would be an excellent match," she said.

"What!" I exclaimed. "Has it gone as far as that?"

She smiled, and replied, "Well, only in imagination."

I gave a sigh of relief. I had no wish that Reginald should seriously compromise himself with a young lady who was a total stranger to me. She renewed my uneasiness, however, by saying,

"Yes, only in imagination so far as an actual declaration is concerned. But, my dear sir, the young people have settled it for themselves, without consulting wiser and older heads than their own. It is the way of young people."

She spoke rather quizzically, as though playing with me for an idle gratification, and I told her as much. She instantly became serious, and assured me that had she not approved of the more than liking that Reginald and Miss Carew had for each other, she would have taken steps to keep them apart.

"Then the mischief is done," I said.

"If you deem it mischief," was her reply. "Yes, it is done. The pair are passionately in love with each other. But I am mistaken in my opinion of them if they are not to be trusted. They will do nothing in secret; when the affair becomes so serious as to render an open declaration inevitable, they will consult those nearest to them, to whom they owe a duty. In that respect I will answer for Mildred. You should be able to answer for Reginald. Now that your eyes are opened, invite his confidence. Speak to him frankly and lovingly, and he will conceal nothing from you. I repeat, it would be an excellent match. She is in every way worthy of him, and he is worthy of her. She is a lady; her mother is a lady, and the personification of sweetness, though I fancy sometimes she has a sorrow. But what human being is perfectly happy? And Mildred's father is a gentleman."

"Are you well acquainted with him?" I asked.

"No, not well acquainted. There are few who can say that of him. He is a man whose absolute friendship it would be hard to gain. All the more precious, therefore, to him who wins the prize. It might be worth your while to try, for Reginald's sake. Should his suit be accepted, an intimacy between you and Mr. Carew is inevitable. You will find him a man of rare acquirements. You have a leaning towards men and women who think for themselves, and who have a vein of originality. Mr. Carew being of this order, you will be naturally drawn to him. A not inconsequential item in

the programme is that he is wealthy, and that Mildred is his only child. Mrs. Carew and Mildred have just entered the room. I must go to them; follow me in a moment or two, and I will introduce you."

I obeyed her instructions, and in a short time was made known to them.

XIII.

I did not agree with Reginald's estimate of their beauty. He placed Mildred first, and her mother second. My judgment reversed this order. Mildred was truly a most beautiful girl, but Mrs. Carew's beauty was of a quality which, the moment I set eyes on her, impressed me more deeply than I had ever been in my life by the sight of a woman's face. It is not only that it is physically perfect, but that there is in it a spirituality which took my heart and my mind captive. It is as though the soul of a pure woman is there reflected--of a woman who, if she ruled the world, would banish from it suffering and injustice. She is the incarnation of sweetness and gentleness; and yet I could not avoid observing in her features the traces of a secret sorrow to which the lady of the house had referred. This indication of a grief nobly and patiently borne added to her beauty, and deepened the impression it produced upon me. I am not exaggerating when I say that, standing before her, I felt as if I were in the presence of an angel. Were I a painter, my ambition would be to fix upon canvas a faithful portrait of one so pure and lovely. I should call my picture Peace.

Her daughter differs from her in appearance. Her beauty is of another type--milder, more full of expression and variety; she has opposite moods which, as occasion serves, are brought into play in contradiction of each other. This may render her more captivating to a young man like Reginald, and were I as young as he I might also find a greater attraction in the daughter than in the mother. A sweet and beautiful girl, modest and graceful in all her movements, I was satisfied that Reginald had chosen well, and at the same time I was convinced that all the earnestness of his soul was engaged in the enterprise.

"I am happy," said Mrs. Carew to me, "to know Reginald's father."

"No less happy am I," was my rejoinder, "in making the acquaintance of a lady of whom I have heard so much."

"Reginald has spoken of me?"

"Of you and your daughter--continually, from the first evening on which he had the happiness of meeting you. It was for the purpose of obtaining an introduction to you that I came here to-night, an uninvited guest."

I felt that there must be no concealment in my intercourse with Mrs. Carew. To be honest and outspoken was the surest way of winning her friendship. Reginald and Mildred had wandered away, her hand upon his arm. Mrs. Carew's eyes followed them, tenderly and wistfully.

"We shall be very happy to see you at Rosemullion," she said; and I promised to pay her an early visit.

"Well?" said my hostess, when I left Mrs. Carew's side.

"I cannot but approve," I answered. "I have never met a sweeter lady. If the daughter's nature resembles her mother's, and Reginald is fortunate enough to win her, he will be a happy man."

My hostess smiled and nodded in satisfaction. An inveterate match-maker, she was always delighted at the success of her good-natured schemes.

On the following day I visited Mrs. Carew, and made the acquaintance of her husband, Gabriel Carew. I will not waste time by giving a description of him. What you have already read will have prepared you for his introduction *in propria persona*. Sufficient to say that I was favourably impressed, and that I had not been in his company five minutes before I discovered that the gentleman I was conversing with was a man of extraordinary erudition and mental compass. I was fortunate enough to win his favour; he showed me over his library--a collection made by himself, and which could only have been gathered by one of superior attainments. That my society was agreeable to her husband was a manifest pleasure to Mrs. Carew, and once during his temporary absence to obtain a book of which we had been conversing she expressed a hope that we should be often together.

"He is too much of a recluse," she said. "I have wished that he should mix in society more than he does--indeed, he sees very little of life--but he has a distaste for it."

I replied that the distaste of a man like Gabriel Carew to share in the frivolities of the age was to be easily understood. She answered wisely, "Surely a little innocent frivolity is not to be

condemned. One may become too serious."

"Mr. Carew is a student?" I said.

"From his early youth," she replied, "he has been devoted to book-lore. His young life was lived here in seclusion, and it was not till after the death of his parents that he saw anything of the world."

Mr. Carew returned, and looked at us smilingly. He touched his wife's hand lightly, but slight as was the action, there was affection in it.

"I possess the gift of divination," he said. "You have been speaking of me?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Carew.

"And of my love of solitude," he continued. "But what is bred in the bone--you understand. There are inherited virtues and inherited vices. The question is, at what point does actual responsibility become a burden for which we can be justly called to account, and until that moment, to define its precise relation to committed acts? Is it your opinion that crime can be justified?"

"No," I said.

"Under no circumstances?"

"Under no circumstances."

"Early teaching, early habits, transmitted vices of the blood--are they not factors? A man is an entity--complete possessor of his own body and soul, which may be pure or hideous according to circumstances. But you make him arbitrarily accountable. Do not misunderstand me--I am simply theorising. Nothing of the argument applies to me except my love of solitude, which is harmless, and hurts no man. I have had experiences of the world, and have been misjudged. There was a time when I was angry, when I inwardly rebelled. I do so no longer. I am content. My wife, my child, my home, my lonely habits, make up the sum of a fairly happy life. Are you fond of tea?"

The light question, addressed to me in the midst of serious words, somewhat startled me. I answered, "Yes;" and upon a motion from her husband Mrs. Carew left the room to prepare the tea. Gabriel Carew explained.

"It is not ordered in this room because of a whim of mine. My wife has an apartment which is to me a sanctuary of rest, and there it is that we often sit and read and converse as we drink our tea. She is anxious about me, but there is really no cause for anxiety. She has an idea that solitude is affecting my health; she is mistaken; I was never stronger, never better." He broke off suddenly with the remark, "You are a physician?"

"It will be correct to say I was," I replied. "Many years ago I relinquished practice."

"So I have heard; and I have also learnt that you held a distinguished position. I have in my library your book treating of diseases of the mind, in which you avoid the common ground of demonstrable insanity. You speak there, if I remember aright, of inherited mental disease."

"I have devoted two chapters to the theme."

"And clearly confute," he pursued, "the statement you made just now that under no circumstances can crime be justified."

"I made that statement," I said, a little confused by this just challenge, "from a general standpoint."

"I speak from an individual standpoint," he remarked. "Which of the two is the more human? However, this is diverging somewhat. Can you tell me why, as twilight approaches, a change in my mood works mysteriously within me? I was gay--I become morose. I was cheerful--I am sad."

"Nerves," I said, "affected by external forces. That is the only answer I can at present give, knowing so little of you."

Twilight was upon us as we conversed, and I observed that his face was growing dark. With a strong, healthy, and decided motion he shook off the influence, and held out his hand to me.

"Know more of me," he said. "I have been informed of the mutual liking which has sprung up between my daughter Mildred and your son. We will speak of this seriously at a future time. Meanwhile, let your son visit us; my home is open to him and you. I have a horror of secretcies. We will shape our course in the light. Shall we strive to be friends?"

Apart from my inclination to be upon friendly terms with him--in the first instance born of my anxiety for Reginald's happiness--there was in Gabriel Carew's manner an irresistible charm, and I now desired his friendship for my own sake as well as for Reginald's. I met his advances cordially, and we spent a pleasant hour with Mrs. Carew and Mildred in the room which Carew

had likened to a sanctuary. Its influence upon him was an influence for good. The gloom which had gathered on his face with the approach of night faded away, and was replaced by a cheerfulness which found vent in his speech. I was more than ever surprised at the vast stores of knowledge which he had acquired. There was not a subject started of which he was not master, and upon which he was not able to throw a new light, and when we parted it was with mutual expressions of esteem, and with a mutual wish that the intimacy thus auspiciously commenced should be allowed to ripen into a close and genuine friendship. What particularly struck me was the almost worshipping love Carew entertained for his wife. We were standing in the garden, when, with a tender, personal application of a theme we had broached, Carew said:

"You know the old legend of every human being being accompanied through life by two angels, one good and one bad each striving to obtain mastery over him. My good angel is a visible one, and it is ever by my side."

He placed his hand upon his wife's shoulder, and she raised her eyes to his. They gazed upon each other like lovers, and at that moment there was not upon either face a trace of gloom or sorrow.

"True love exists between those two," I thought, as I wended my way home. "The shadows that hover round them are but idle fancies. I rejoice that a daughter of these noble people has won my son's heart."

XIV.

A general survey of the few months that followed will suffice. There are many small details which it would be pleasant to dwell upon, but these may be safely left to the imagination. They consist for the most part of the episodes which marked the progress of the love affair between Mildred and Reginald--who, without any distinct declaration from us, conducted themselves toward each other as an engaged couple. We elder people tacitly held back from entering into an express engagement, Mrs. Carew waiting, as it were, upon my movements and those of her husband. I am in a position to explain the reasons of my own backwardness in this important matter. Gabriel Carew's reasons must, for the present, be left to explain themselves. I need scarcely say that Reginald and Mildred were perfectly happy, being satisfied that they possessed our sanction to their love. No fault was theirs in this respect. If blame was due anywhere, we, their parents, were the persons upon whom it justly fell.

The hope of a binding friendship between myself and Mr. and Mrs. Carew was more than fulfilled. Not only did we become firm friends, but the closest confidential relations were established between us. So much so that I became acquainted with the history of the inner and outer lives of Gabriel Carew and his sweet wife. There was little to learn of Mrs. Carew's life which I had not already imagined; it was a record of innocence and sweetness. But what I learnt of Gabriel Carew afforded me food for grave reflection. So intimate were our relations, so perfect was the confidence he reposed in me, that he concealed nothing from me. His frankness won my admiration and greatly disturbed me. The recital of his youthful life, of his midnight wanderings, of his solitary musings, and afterwards of the death of his parents, of his entrance into Nerac, of his intimacy with the family of Doctor Louis, and of the tragic events that occurred in the peaceful village, made up the sum of the strangest record which had ever been imparted to me. I confess to being much affected by the fate of Eric and Emilius, and I asked Carew whether he had heard anything of Emilius of late years. His reply was that he had heard nothing, and that the unhappy man was probably dead.

"You have no doubt that he was guilty?" I asked.

"Not the slightest doubt," said Carew.

I was not so sure; the story had excited within me a singular sympathy for Emilius.

Now, in what I am about to say with respect to Gabriel Carew, I had, at that time, I admit, the slightest of grounds; and the powerful effect a certain suspicion had upon me was all the more singular because of the absence of reliable evidence. The study I had made for many years of the different forms in which insanity presents itself was very captivating to me, and in the course of my researches I unearthed some weird particulars, of which, were I a writer of fiction, I could make effective use. Gabriel Carew was an affectionate husband and father, a faithful mate to his wife, a wise counsellor to his daughter. He had not a vice which I could discover. He was neither a spendthrift nor a libertine. He drank in moderation, and he never gambled; indeed, he detested all games of chance. His views of men and manners were singularly correct, and denoted a well-balanced brain. It was only where his affections were concerned that he could be called in any way extravagant; but this would be accounted rather a virtue than a vice. His recreations were intellectual, and he sought pleasure and happiness only in his home and in association with books and his wife and child. What judgment would you, from a distance, pass upon such a man? What but that of entire approval? But I was in daily contact with him, and signs were visible to me

which greatly disturbed me. To speak plainly, I doubted Gabriel Carew's perfect sanity!

This was a matter of most serious moment. If Carew were not sane, his disease, so far as I could judge, was of a harmless form. The proof of this lay in his affection for those of his blood, and--which, in evidence is, in my opinion, quite as strong--in his tenderness to animals and birds. But I have to a certainty established not only that insanity is hereditary, but that what is harmless in the parent may become destructive in the child. Mildred was Carew's daughter, and to all appearance as free from any touch of insanity as the most healthful of human beings. But the germ must be in her, to be transmitted to her children--to Reginald's children if he married her.

This consideration impelled me to secret action in the way of inquiry. It would have been, useless to appeal to Reginald, and to set before him the probable consequences of such an union. My counsel would have fallen upon idle ears. My duty, however, was clear. It was for me to protect him.

Instead of listening uninterruptedly to the confidences imparted to me by Carew, I prompted, probed and asked questions, and thus learnt much which might otherwise not have come to my knowledge. Considering the motive by which I was impelled, the investigation I was pursuing was of an exceedingly delicate nature, but to my surprise, Carew met--nay, anticipated--me with a most surprising frankness. He made no attempt to avoid the subject, and the interest he evinced in it seemed to exceed my own. He spoke much of himself--not in direct connection with hereditary insanity, but as though there was that in his life before the death of his parents which it would be a relief to him to clear up. He gave me a circumstantial account of all the incidents of those early years, taking pains to recall the most trifling detail bearing upon his youth.

"It is a strange pleasure to me," he said, "to be able to unbosom myself so freely. My wife is acquainted with much I have imparted to you. There was never any need to distress her by a relation of the morbid fancies which afflicted me when I was a boy, and which, perhaps, were the foundation of the profound melancholy which, after sunset, has lately crept upon me. Perhaps I am paying the penalty of old age."

I combated this view, pointing out that he was in the prime of life, with perhaps its most useful years before him. Throughout these discussions and confidences the names of Mildred and Reginald were not mentioned--I purposely avoided reference to them, but Carew did not appear to have any thought of them while we conversed. The one person who seemed to me able to furnish information from which I could weave a rational theory was Mrs. Fortress, the nurse who for a number of years attended Gabriel Carew's mother. I asked him if any correspondence had passed between them since she left Rosemullion, and he answered, "No," and that he had not seen or heard of her from that time. I then asked him if he had any idea where she was to be found, supposing her to be still living.

"In the last interview I had with her," he replied, "she gave me an address in Cornwall." He paused here, and I saw that he was weighing some matter in his mind. "I can find this address for you," he said presently, "if you desire it. Have you any curiosity to see her?"

"Yes," I said boldly, "if you have no objection."

Again he paused in thought. "I have no objection," he said. "She may reveal to you what she declined to reveal to me, and it may assist you in your inquiry."

I looked at him, startled by his last words. They were the first he had uttered which denoted that he suspected my motive in wooing and encouraging these conversations. The expression on his face was gentle and sad, and I thought it best to make no comment on his remark. The next day he gave me an address in Cornwall at which Mrs. Fortress had told him she was certain to be found during her lifetime. He gave me also a short note to her, in which he stated that I was his most intimate friend and adviser, and that he would be glad if she would communicate to me any information respecting his parents it was in her power to impart--intimating, at the same time, that I was prepared to pay handsomely for it. At Carew's request, I read this note in his presence, and at its conclusion he empowered me to pay for the information if I could not otherwise obtain it, naming as a limit a sum which I considered extravagantly liberal. I had already made preparations for a temporary absence from home, and before the end of the week I was in Cornwall, and face to face with Mrs. Fortress.

XV.

A fine, stately, stalwart old woman, between sixty and seventy years of age, with gray hair, bright eyes, and an air of masculine vigour about her which could not fail to impress an observer. But what most strongly impressed me was the quality of power which distinguished her--the power of a firm will, which, in a lofty grade of life, would have made her a leader. I introduced myself to her, and informed her that I had obtained her address from Gabriel Carew, and had journeyed to Cornwall for the express purpose of seeing her. She evinced no surprise, and

inquired how could she be sure that I came from Mr. Carew.

"I have a letter from him," I said; and I gave it to her.

She read it quietly, and put it into her pocket.

"Is Mr. Carew well?" she asked.

"He is well," I replied.

"I have heard nothing of him since I left him in Rosemullion," she said. "He told me then, it was his intention to quit it for ever, and never again to set foot in it. I said that there was no saying what might happen in the course of life. He lives now in Rosemullion?"

"Yes."

"Then he has not carried out his intention?"

There was no triumph in her voice, indicating that she had been right and he wrong. It was a simple statement of fact simply made.

"We often commit ourselves unguardedly," I observed.

She nodded assent.

"As you have heard nothing of Mr. Carew, you are not aware that he is married?"

She gazed at me thoughtfully, and I fancy I detected a stirring of interest within her at this intelligence.

"Married!" she echoed calmly. "Lately?"

"No. More than twenty years ago. I do not know the exact year."

"Is his wife living?" she asked.

"Yes. She is with Mr. Carew at Rosemullion. Would you like to see her portrait?"

"Yes," she replied.

I had brought Mrs. Carew's portrait with me, and other things which I thought might be likely to help me in my interview with Mrs. Fortress. I handed her the picture.

"A beautiful lady," she said, handing it back to me.

"Better than beautiful," I said. "An angel of goodness and charity, beloved by all who have the privilege of knowing her."

"Is she happy?"

"Very happy. She and her husband are united by the firmest links of love."

"That is good news, and I am glad to hear it. Is Mr. Carew happy?"

Slight as was the pause before I had made up my mind what reply to give, she took advantage of it.

"Then he is not happy?"

"I should like to speak openly to you," I said. "It is not out of mere light curiosity that I have sought you."

"It is," she said, "entirely at your discretion how you speak to me. You are not here at my bidding."

"True," I replied; "and I am entirely at your mercy. You learn from Mr. Carew's letter that I am on terms of confidential friendship with him, and that he places no restraint upon you. There is no person living who is better acquainted than yourself with the particulars of his young life, with its strange surroundings, its isolation, its lack of light. Dominated by such dark influences, it would not have been matter for wonder had Mr. Carew grown into a morose, savage man, believing only in evil, and capable only of it. The contrary is the case. He has faith in goodness; he has won the love of a good woman. His heart is tender, his nature charitable. When, before parting with you, he asked you to enlighten him as to the mystery which reigned in his home, there may have been some valid reason for your refusal--although, even then, as his parents were dead and he was alone in the world, such refusal was capable of a construction more hurtful than the truth might have been."

She interrupted me here by saying, "It could not have been."

"But," I urged, "might not the truth, painful though it were, have contributed to avert evil consequences?"

"To Mr. Carew," she asked, "or to others?"

"To others," I replied.

"I will wait a little," she said composedly, "before I answer that question. You have more to say."

"There can be no valid reason," I continued, "for silence now. Mr. Carew is anxious that you should speak candidly to me. An appeal to your sense of justice would probably weigh with you."

"It is not unlikely," she said. "May I ask if you belong to any profession?"

"I do not follow any at present," I replied; "but for years I practised as a physician."

"In a general way, or as a specialist?"

"Chiefly as a specialist. I have written a successful book upon certain forms of insanity, and I have a copy with me. Perhaps you would like to read it."

"It would interest me," she said. "If I had been a physician I should have devoted myself to that branch of the profession."

I gave her the book, which she placed aside. "It is not, however, solely in that capacity," I said, "that I am here. That certain indefinite impressions, springing from my professional experiences, have prompted me, I do not deny; but my strongest reasons are private ones. Is it your belief that insanity is hereditary and ineradicable?"

"That is my firm belief," she said.

"It is also mine. Mrs. Fortress, are you a married woman?"

"I married a few months after I left Mr. Carew's service. Within two years of my marriage I lost my husband."

"Have you any children?"

"One--a son."

"Who must be now approaching manhood?"

"Yes."

"That is my case. My wife is dead, and I have an only child--a son--who is deeply in love with Gabriel Carew's daughter."

This introduction of Miss Carew threw Mrs. Fortress off her guard; there was a startled flash in her eyes.

"I am sorry to hear," she said, "that Mr. Carew has a daughter. Has he other children?"

"No. Mildred Carew is, like your son and mine, an only child. I purposely brought three things with me, in the hope that they would help me in my purpose. Two you have--my book and the portrait of Gabriel Carew's wife. Here is the portrait of his daughter."

She examined it with the greatest interest, and remarked that she saw no resemblance in it to the father.

"That has struck me," I observed; "neither does she resemble her mother in any marked manner. But that sometimes happens, though it is not the rule."

"Is there an engagement between your son and Miss Carew?"

"They are courting each other, with a view to marriage."

"With your consent?"

"Yes, but it was given before I became intimate with Mr. Carew."

"And since then you have repented?"

"I have been greatly disturbed."

"Rather," she said slowly, "than my son should marry a daughter of Mr. Carew's, I would see him in his grave."

This declaration profoundly agitated me, so far did it go to confirm me in my suspicions. "I

asked you a question a few moments since," I said, "and you said you would wait a little before you answered it. Will you answer it now?"

"Your question was, 'Had a painful truth been revealed to Mr. Carew when he was a single gentleman, whether it might have averted evil consequences to others.'"

"You have stated it correctly."

"It might have done," she said. "But it appeared to me that Mr. Carew was the last man in the world to attract a woman's heart. I often said to myself, 'He will never marry.'"

"You were mistaken."

"I was; and I say again I am sorry." She took from her pocket the letter I had given her from Mr. Carew, and read it carefully and slowly, in a new light it seemed to me. Even when she had finished the perusal she did not immediately speak, but sat in silent thought a while.

"I am not a tender-hearted woman," she said, "and not easy to move when I pledge myself. Mr. Carew's father behaved well to me, and fulfilled his promise of providing for me if it was in his power to do so after the death of his wife. I, on my part, kept the two promises I made him when I entered his service. The first was not to leave his service during the lifetime of his wife; the second not to divulge, without powerful cause, the secret of the unhappy inheritance he feared his wife had transmitted to their son. When I bade farewell to Mr. Gabriel Carew in Rosemullion, I saw no such cause for divulging the secret, and I declined to satisfy my young master. It may be different now, and I may be tempted to satisfy *you*."

"Out of your sense of justice?" I observed.

"Not entirely. Mr. Carew's letter contains the offer of a reward."

I met her instantly and with eagerness. "I am prepared to pay it."

"It happens that I am in need of a sum of money. An opportunity is open to my son which will be to his advantage, but I am not rich enough to purchase it."

"How much is needed?" I asked.

She named a sum which was modest in comparison with the limit which Gabriel Carew had given me, and I at once consented to pay it to her for her information. I had money with me, and I counted out the amount she required, and handed it to her. After ascertaining that it was correct, she commenced.

"When I accepted the situation Mr. Carew offered me, I did it with my eyes open. I was at that time employed in a lunatic asylum, and was dissatisfied with my rate of pay. Mr. Carew offered me higher terms. His wife was a dangerous woman, and needed constant watching. Properly speaking, she should have been placed in an asylum, but the thought of so doing was hateful to her husband, who desired to keep his domestic affliction from public knowledge. He would have regarded such a disclosure as an indelible disgrace. There are similar secrets in many families. At the time he married her, he had no suspicion that her blood was tainted, and it was only three months before the birth of Gabriel Carew that he made the discovery. I do not profess to be thoroughly familiar with all the particulars; I am not a prying woman, and was contented with what he told me. When he made the dreadful discovery he and his wife were abroad, and the occasion of it, so far as I could gather, ran in this fashion. Mr. Carew was occupying a house in Switzerland--he was rich at the time--and was entertaining guests. Among them was a false friend who was managing his affairs in England, where Mr. Carew lived for the greater part of every year. Ultimately this friend robbed him of his fortune, which Mr. Carew never recovered, coming, however, into another later on, which enabled him to purchase the estate of Rosemullion. One evening there was a large party in Mr. Carew's house, in which his friend was stopping. Mrs. Carew was passionately fond of music, and there was a Tyrolean air for which she had an infatuation. She sang and played it again and again, and became much excited. It is not out of place to say that she was a very beautiful woman. The evening passed on, and the guests had departed. All but one--her husband's false friend, who was stopping in the house. Either his duties as a polite host or some other business called her husband away, and Mrs. Carew and this friend were left alone. He asked her to play and sing again, and she did so for him; and then he made love to her. She repulsed him indignantly, but he was not to be easily daunted, and a climax arrived when he grossly insulted her. This roused her to fury, and she caught an ornamental dagger--but a weapon capable of mischief--from the table, and would have plunged it into his heart had he not caught her wrist and disarmed her. He flung the dagger away, and then coolly told her that her husband had implicit confidence in him, and that he would invent a story that would ruin her. He told her, too, that he had her husband in his power, that she and he were at his mercy, and that he could beggar them at any moment. There occurred then a singular change in her; her excitement left her, and she became as cool as he. Deceived by this, he renewed his suit, but she held him back, and she said one word to him: 'Wait!' To wait meant to hope, and he said he would be content if she would play and sing to him again. She did so--the same Tyrolean air she had sang so many times on this evening. Her husband came in, and the scene ended. In describing it I am drawing from what Mr. Carew told me afterwards in England. But the incident was not to end there. Mr. Carew and his wife retired, and he, awakening in the middle of the

night, missed her from his side. He started up, and saw that her clothes were gone. At the moment of the discovery he heard a cry, and he ran from the room. He saw his wife approaching him; she was fully dressed, and she held in her hand the ornamental dagger, which was stained with blood. There was a smile on her lips, but although he stood straight in front of her, with a candle in his hand, she did not appear to see him. She passed by without a word or look of recognition. He followed her to their bedroom, and there she laid the dagger aside, undressed, and went to bed. She had been all the time fast asleep. When she was awoke he looked at the blood-stains on the dagger; there was no wound upon her; from whom came the blood? From whence the cry? The direction from which his wife had come was that of the room occupied by his friend. He went there, and found his guest just reviving from a state of insensibility caused by a stab in his breast while he was asleep. Mr. Carew could form but one conclusion, and his sole aim now was that the matter should be kept quiet. In this he succeeded, having invented a story which his friend professed to believe, and into which Mrs. Carew's name was not introduced. It suited Mr. Carew's friend not to dispute the invented story; his wound was not very serious, and he subsequently repaid the injury by begging the man who had reposed entire confidence in him, and whose wife he had attempted to lead to her ruin. Mr. Carew could not immediately question his wife, for the next morning she was dangerously ill. The ordinary doctors who were called in did not appear to understand the case, and eventually Mr. Carew consulted a foreign specialist of renown, who informed him that there was insanity in his wife's blood, and that it would most likely assume a phase in which there would be danger to those about her. This alarmed Mr. Carew, not for his own sake, but for his wife's. There was a law in that part of the country, which, put in force, would have removed Mrs. Carew from his care, and he made haste for England, where he would feel safe. Thus far in his wife's illness no dangerous symptoms were visible, and he flattered himself into the belief that the foreign doctor was wrong in the opinion he had given. The most marked characteristic of the disease manifested itself in a harmless fashion, being simply a sentimental passion for the Tyrolean air Mrs. Carew had sung so many times on the night when the hidden seed of insanity began to grow. Under these conditions Gabriel Carew was born. She insisted upon nursing the child, which, had I been in their service at the time, I should not have allowed. When Gabriel was two years of age, the dangerous symptoms of which the foreign doctor had warned Mr. Carew began to manifest themselves, and I was engaged as nurse. Mr. Carew had lost his fortune then, but he was not entirely without means, the largest portion of which was spent upon his wife. He paid me liberally, his one desire in life being to keep the skeleton of his home concealed, not only from the world, but from the knowledge of his son. He thought that, growing up in ignorance of his mother's condition, Gabriel might escape the contagion. I thought differently, but we had no discussions on the subject. He had engaged me to perform a certain duty, and I performed it--there it ended. I had nothing to do with consequences. After Mr. Carew took possession of Rosemullion his wife became worse; there were weeks together when no person but I could approach her with safety. I had perfect control over her. She was obedient, through fear, to my lightest word. It was certainly merciful that the sad secret, having been so long concealed from Gabriel, should remain so. If mischief were done, it was not now to be averted. This is the explanation of Gabriel Carew's lonely boyhood life, and it will possibly help to explain any strange peculiarities you may have observed in him. I do not consider I have violated the second promise I gave to his father--that I would not divulge without powerful cause the secret of Gabriel Carew's unhappy inheritance. There seems to me here to be cause sufficient for secrecy not to be any longer observed. My tongue being now unsealed, I am ready to reply to any questions you may ask."

XVI.

Mrs. Fortress's statement made everything clear to me, and also marked out for me a clear path of duty. Knowing what I now knew, it would have been an act of monstrous wickedness to allow Reginald to marry Mildred. Never could I hope to be forgiven did I not prevent the union. Better that my son should live a life of unhappiness through all his days than enter into a contract which would doom the unborn to madness--perhaps to crime. It was not only an offence against man, it was an offence against God. The task before me was difficult, I knew; but I must face it bravely and without flinching. Hearts would be broken in the struggle--well, better that than the awful consequences which would follow such a marriage. My own heart bled as I contemplated what must occur during the next few weeks.

Thus did I excitedly reason with myself in the first heat of the revelation. When I became cooler I saw more clearly the difficulties in my way. What evidence had I to produce? That of an old woman who had given me certain information--which tallied with my own suspicions--for a large sum of money. A cunning woman, to supply me with what she saw I wished. Cunning from the first. Paid liberally--nay, extravagantly--always, according to her own confession. Her one single motive in the matter from first to last--money. Was it likely, being in service so temptingly remunerative, that she should not adopt every cunning means to retain it? There was not only the immediate pay, but the prospect of a reward which would make her comfortable for life. She had so manoeuvred that she gained this reward. During the lifetime of Gabriel Carew's mother Mrs. Fortress held supreme power over her. Her son was only allowed to see her a few minutes at a

time at intervals of weeks. Even her husband, at the bidding of this clever woman, was denied admittance to his wife's chamber. What difficulty was there, in those days and weeks of seclusion, to so oppress, irritate, and torture the poor patient as to compel her to put on the semblance of madness--to drive her into it indeed? Such cases were not unknown. Even now, from time to time, the public heart is stirred by a sudden revelation of such atrocities.

These were cogent arguments which I raised against myself. With myself in my son's place I should confidently advance them, and should laugh to scorn the weak opposition which would bar my way to happiness. I sighed as I thought. The obstacles in my way were every moment growing more formidable.

These were not the only arguments against myself which occurred to me. There was Mrs. Fortress's conduct when she left Rosemullion after the death of her mistress. Gabriel Carew had made a pitiful appeal to her. How had she met him? By assuming a mysterious air, indicating that she had the key to a secret in which he was vitally interested, but that she did not intend to give it to him. Why had she done this? Who could doubt the answer to such a question? It was necessary to the *rôle* she had adopted. Any other course would have led to an exposure of her vile scheme. There was the legacy which Mr. Carew left her in his will. Were the real truth known she might be deprived of it. Therefore, the assumption of mystery in her last interview with Gabriel Carew. A cunning woman indeed.

Against evidence so flimsy there was a heavy weight of testimony. Was not Gabriel Carew a loving husband and father? No person could dispute it. He loved his wife and child, and they loved him. Was he ever known to commit a cruel act! Never. Was not his purse ever open to the call of charity? Innumerable instances that such was so could be adduced. Could even light acts of rudeness and incivility be laid at his door? What was the worst that could be said of him? That he was not fond of society, that he was a recluse. Could not this be said of hundreds of estimable men, and was it ever put forth as a distinct offence? If he did not himself go into society, did he prevent his wife and child from doing so? On the contrary. He encouraged them to seek amusement which he, a grave man and a student, possibly deemed frivolous. Fond of books, seeking his greatest pleasures in them, was not this distinctly in his favour, and did it not prove him to be of a superior nature to the common herd? The heaviest charge was that which, in conversation with me, he had brought against himself--that on the approach of night his spirits became gloomy. Slight grounds indeed for so serious an accusation as insanity. Madmen were proverbially cunning. Gabriel Carew was the soul of frankness, himself opening up discussions which would tell against him were he not mentally and physically sound and healthy. I began to despair.

These reflections did not all pass through my mind in the silence which followed the conclusion of Mrs. Fortress's statement. They are the summing-up of my thoughts at that time and during my homeward journey. Meanwhile, Mrs. Fortress was waiting patiently for me to put any questions which might occur to me.

"Beyond yourself, Mrs. Fortress," I said, "and your master and mistress, was there no person cognisant with Mrs. Carew's condition?"

"None, sir, with the exception of the foreign doctor."

"Can you tell me his name?"

"I do not know it, but a doctor of his learning would not have been a young man when Mr. Carew consulted him, and it is hardly likely he would be now living."

"True," I said.

"Besides," she added, "his experience of Mrs. Carew could have been but slight. Almost immediately after he gave Mr. Carew his opinion of my mistress, they left for England, as I have told you."

"Yes," I remarked, "and he may, after all, have been mistaken."

She shrank a little, I fancied, but she said firmly, "He may have been, I was not."

"I am not doubting you, Mrs. Fortress," I said.

She interposed here by saying, "It is immaterial whether you are or not. The facts are as I have stated them."

"I understand, of course, that you have spoken honestly, but is it not possible you may have judged wrongly?"

"I cannot admit it, sir," she replied with calm dignity. "It is not possible."

Certainly she maintained her ground. I continued my inquiry.

"Before Mr. Carew came into his second fortune he lived humbly in London?"

"Yes; in poor lodgings."

"Did the house contain other lodgers?"

"Yes."

"And did not any of them suspect or discover the mystery so close to them?"

"In my belief not another person in the house had any suspicion."

"You lived for many years in Rosemullion?"

"Yes."

"Did not Mrs. Carew have a medical adviser?"

"A doctor called and saw her from time to time."

"Was he not aware of her condition?"

"He was not. His visits were a mere matter of form, and he frequently called at the house without seeing my mistress."

"By whose directions was she denied to him?"

"By mine. It was part of my duty to preserve my master's secret."

"I am sure you did your duty, Mrs. Fortress."

Her lip curled. She did not thank me.

"Did this doctor ever see Mrs. Carew alone?"

"Never. I took care always to be present, and I always prepared my mistress for his visits, warning her to be careful."

"Did she never rebel?"

"With respect to the doctor, never. I had my difficult days with her, but that was my business, and mine alone."

"He must have been a careful and conscientious man," I said somewhat sarcastically.

She capped me by replying, "His accounts were regularly paid. Perhaps that was sufficient for him."

"Perhaps," I said, and I could not avoid a smile, though I was really indignant. "Can you tell me anything more to guide me? Do you think it was Mr. Carew's intention to keep his son in complete ignorance of this misfortune, even after the death of your mistress?"

"I am not positive. My master died during a visit to Wales, while my mistress was still living. It is probable, had he survived his wife, that he would have spoken to his son on the subject. I cannot say for certain, but, from certain words he once used I believe he left some record behind him."

This suggestion aroused me.

"Some written record?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Where would he have deposited it?"

"In Rosemullion my master had his private room, into which no one was allowed to enter. There are large safes built in the walls of that room. If the record I believe my master made is found anywhere, it will be in that room. I have nothing more to say, sir. I have told you all I know. Whether you believe me or not does not concern me. When you see Mr. Gabriel, sir, give him my humble duty."

XVII.

I returned to Rosemullion in a very disturbed frame of mind. The nearer I approached the abode of mystery the stronger grew my doubts of the truth of Mrs. Fortress's statement. All she had related was in such complete accordance with a cunningly carried out scheme, whereby the innocent were made to suffer, and she--the plotter--made comfortable for life, that I accused

myself for my egregious folly in giving her story credence, and listening to it patiently. It was, however, impossible to allow the matter to stand as Mrs. Fortress had left it. Some further inquiry must take place, and my doubts cleared up before I would give my consent to the union of my son with Gabriel Carew's daughter. I did not dare to run a risk so great until my mind was fairly at ease. It was a relief to me when I reached my home that Reginald was not there to greet me. I knew what the tenor of his conversation would be, and I wished to avoid it. He had, indeed, but one theme: Mildred; his heart and soul were meshed in his absorbing love for the fair girl to whom there was a likelihood of a most terrible inheritance having been transmitted.

I proceeded without delay to Rosemullion, and the first person who greeted me on the threshold was Mrs. Carew. She expressed her satisfaction at my return, and upon my inquiring for her husband, said that he was in his study, but that before I saw him she wished to have a few private words with me. It was then that I noted signs of trouble in her face. She led me to the apartment which Gabriel Carew had described as a sanctuary of rest, and at her bidding I sat down and awaited the communication she desired to make to me.

She commenced by saying that her husband had such complete confidence in me and she such faith in my wisdom, that, having a weight at her heart which was sorely disturbing her, she had resolved to ask my advice, as a friend upon whom she could rely. I replied that her faith and her husband's confidence were not misplaced, and that it was my earnest wish to assist her if it lay in my power.

"It is not without my husband's permission," she said, "that I am speaking to you now. He knows that I am uneasy about him, and he himself suggested that I should consult you upon your return from Cornwall."

I was startled at learning that she was not ignorant of my visit to Mrs. Fortress; I imagined that the affair was entirely between me and Mr. Carew. I asked her if she was acquainted with the precise object of my visit.

"No," she replied; "only that you have been on a visit to a nurse who was in the service of my husband's family before the death of his parents. I did not seek for further information, and my husband did not volunteer any. Neither is he acquainted with the details of the matter I am about to open to you. I thought it best to keep it from him until I obtained counsel from a near and dear friend."

I inclined my head, and she continued:

"My husband informs me that he has related to you the fullest particulars of his life, and that he has unbosomed himself to you with an unreserved confidence, such as no other person in the world has been able to inspire."

"It is true," I said, "and I hold his confidence sacred, to be used only for our good."

"And for the good of our children," she said.

"Yes," I said, conscious of a strange note in my voice as I repeated the words, "and for the good of our children."

She detected the unusual note, gazed steadily at me for a moment, and proceeded, without commenting upon it.

"Knowing so much, you are familiar with my husband's nightly wanderings in the woods when he resided here with his parents?"

"Yes."

"He was aware of these nocturnal rambles?" she said. "He undertook them consciously?"

"Certainly."

"He was always awake when he left the house and returned to it?"

"Always," I replied, surprised at the question.

"He has given me full permission to put any questions to you with respect to the confidence he has reposed in you. 'If I have kept anything from you,' he said to me this morning, 'it has been done to save you from uneasiness;' and he added with a smile that he had concealed nothing from me for which he had reason to reproach himself. Certain habits, contracted during a lonely youth, had left their impress upon him, and unusual as they were, there was no harm in them. 'Of one thing be sure,' he said; 'I have lived a pure and blameless life.' I did not need his assurance to convince me of that. As Reginald's father, you should be glad to know it."

"I am glad to know it," I said, and again I was aware of the strange note in my voice, "as Reginald's father and your husband's friend."

"I will explain," she said, "why I asked you whether my husband had any reason to believe that occasionally he walked abroad at night when he was not awake. He has done so for some years

past at certain times and under certain circumstances. He did so last night."

"Is he not now aware of it?" I inquired.

"No, I have never informed him that he is a sleep-walker. My reason for keeping this knowledge from him is that I am convinced it would have greatly distressed him; but what occurred last night has so disturbed me that I can no longer be silent."

My suspicions of the truth of Mrs. Fortress's statement began to fade. Here was confirmation that the son had inherited one phase, at least, of his mother's disease.

"You remarked," I said, "that Mr. Carew has walked in his sleep for some years past at certain times and in certain circumstances. Were these circumstances of a special nature?"

"Yes--and all of one complexion; when something was known from which he feared danger."

"To himself?"

"I think not. To me and Mildred. I recall three occasions, which will supply you with an index to the whole. Once there were reports in the papers of a number of burglaries being committed in the neighbourhood, accompanied by deeds of violence. The burglars--there were three, as was subsequently proved--were at liberty, and the efforts made to discover and arrest them met with no success for several weeks. During that period my husband rose regularly every night from bed, dressed himself, and went out of the house, always returning, dressed as he left the room. On one of these occasions I followed and watched him, and discovered that his aim was to guard us from danger. He remained in the grounds around the house, holding a pistol. His actions were those of an earnest, watchful guardian, and were guided by the most singular caution. Sometimes he would hide behind a tree, or crouch down, concealed from view. When he was satisfied that there was no longer any danger, he returned to the house, stepping very softly, and examining the fastenings of the doors and windows."

"Did he rise in the morning with the appearance of a man who had passed a disturbed night?"

"No; he was always cheerful, and appeared to be quite refreshed by what he believed to be a good night's rest. At length, when the burglars were arrested he left the house no more for many months, until a workman whom he had employed, and whom he had reason to discharge, uttered threats against us. Then he again commenced his nightly watch, which did not cease until he received information that the man had left the country. After that he enjoyed a long period of repose. The third occasion was when there was a report of the escape of a dangerous madman from a lunatic asylum three or four miles from Rosemullion. Until this man was once more in safe custody, my husband never missed a night's watch during his sleep. You will gather from this explanation that he was always actuated by a good motive--to guard and protect those whom he loves."

"That seems clear," I said, "and what you have related is especially interesting to me as a specialist, apart from my sincere friendship for you and yours."

"As a specialist!" she exclaimed. "Of what kind?"

Fortunately I arrested myself in time. The words which immediately suggested themselves to me in reply, remained unspoken. The truth would have been too great a shock to this sweet lady.

"As one deeply interested," I answered, with an assuring smile, "in psychological mysteries. What occurred yesterday to excite Mr. Carew?"

"He and I had been out riding. Upon our return one of our gardeners informed my husband that a man had been seen lurking about the grounds. The story told by the gardener is this: The stranger, a foreigner, although he spoke good English, did not wait to be accosted by the gardener, but himself opened a conversation. He asked if this was Rosemullion. Yes. Did a family of the name of Carew live here? Yes. Was Mrs. Carew alive? Yes. Was Mr. Carew alive? Yes. Did they have any family? Yes, a daughter. What was her name? Miss Mildred. Could he see Mrs. Carew? Mrs. Carew was out driving. When would I return, and was there any possibility of the stranger seeing me alone? The gardener could not say. It was not I, but my husband who put these questions to the gardener. Then Mr. Carew asked sternly what was the bribe that induced the gardener to answer the inquiries of a stranger, and he forced the truth from him. The stranger had given the gardener a foreign coin, which my husband insisted upon seeing. It was a piece of French money. This part of the affair is completed by the admission of the gardener that the stranger was apparently in poverty, as his poor clothes betokened--and yet he had given the gardener money to answer his questions! When the gardener was gone my husband said that the circumstance was very suspicious, and I thought so myself; that the stranger had some bad motive in thus intruding upon private property, and that he would go in search of him. I asked to be allowed to accompany him, and after a slight hesitation he consented, saying if the stranger came with innocent intent and we met him, that he could say what he had to say to me in my husband's presence. We strolled all round the grounds of Rosemullion, but saw no stranger. Then my husband said he would go into the woods, and that I had better leave him; but I, fearing I knew not what, begged to be allowed to remain with him. Together we went into the woods, and for a long while met no person answering the description given by the gardener; but after a while

we saw a stranger a few yards in front of us. It happened that I was a little ahead of my husband at that moment, and the stranger, turning and seeing me, thought that I was alone. He was about to hasten towards me when my husband stepped to my side. Without hesitation the stranger abruptly turned from us, and, plunging into the woods, was immediately lost to view."

Something in Mrs. Carew's manner at this point--which I should find it difficult to explain--some premonition that this man she called a stranger was really not so to her--caused me to ask,

"You saw his face?"

"Yes." And at this answer, tremblingly spoken, my premonition became a certainty.

"You recognised it?"

"Unless I am much mistaken--and with all my heart I pray to heaven I may be!--it was a face once familiar to me."

It was not now for me to pursue the subject; it was for her to confide freely in me, if such was her desire. There was a silence of a few moments before she resumed:

"My husband, having hidden nothing from you, has told you all that occurred in my dear native village, Nerac, before we were married?"

"He has told me all, I believe," I said.

"Of my beloved parents--of friends once dear to me--Eric, murdered, and the unhappy Emilius?"

"I am acquainted with all the particulars of that tragic event."

"Sadly changed, worn, haggard, and travel-stained, in the man we met in the forest I recognised Emilius."

XVIII.

This, indeed, was startling news. Emilius alive, his term of imprisonment over, or he an escaped convict, seeking an interview with Mrs. Carew, the wife of the man whom he regarded as his bitterest enemy! To what was this to lead?--in what way was it to end?

"Did Mr. Carew recognise him?" I asked.

"I cannot tell you," replied Mrs. Carew. "Not a word passed between us respecting him. I did not dare to speak. It would but have been to reopen old wounds, and after all I may have been mistaken. Not for me to bring back to my husband the memories of a past in which he was so cruelly misjudged. Besides, this was the one and only subject upon which my husband and I were not in harmony. He most firmly believed and believes in Emilius's guilt; I as firmly believed and believe in his innocence. The years that have flown have not softened my husband's judgment nor hardened mine; and until this hour the name of Emilius has never passed my lips since we settled in Rosemullion. No, it was not for me to utter it in my husband's presence; it was not for me to bring pain to his kind heart. I said nothing, nor did my husband, nor did he attempt to follow the stranger. In silence we walked back to the house, and the evening passed as usual. Reginald came, and we had music and conversation. On the part of Mildred and your son converse was cheerful and unconstrained, and I also strove to be cheerful. I was so far successful as to deceive the children, but my husband was not so easily blinded. And yet he made no allusion to the subject which engrossed my thoughts, and weighed like a dark cloud upon my heart. The hour grew late, and I sent Reginald home. Young people in love have always to be reminded. Then my husband and I retired to rest. Troubled as I was, sleep was long in coming to me, but at length Nature was merciful, and I sank into slumber. I awoke at the soft chiming of our silver clock, proclaiming the hour of two. Never do I remember being awake by the chiming of this clock, so low and sweet is it; and that I should awake now as it struck two may have been simply a coincidence. I sat up in bed. I was alone. My husband was not in the room; his clothes were gone, and he had doubtless gone out fully dressed. In great fear I rose and dressed, with the intention of following him, but when I tried the door I found it had been locked on the outside. Powerless to do anything but wait, I sat, trembling, till daylight began to peep in at the windows. Then I heard my husband's footsteps in the passage, which would not have reached my ears had not my senses been preternaturally sharpened. He trod softly, and turned the key in the door very gently in order not to disturb me. He entered the room, and I almost fainted as I saw in his hand the bright blade of an ancient dagger which usually lay upon his study table. His face was turned towards me, his eyes were open, but he did not see me. He took from his pocket a sheath, in which he placed the dagger, and then he undressed. Before he lay down to that more healthful sleep in which his mind would be at rest, he listened two or three times at the locked door, and going to

the window, drew the blind a little aside and looked from the window. Then he stretched himself in bed, and his eyes closed. Not by the least sign did he show any consciousness of the fact that I was standing, dressed, in the room, and that we were often face to face. I soon retired to bed, but I slept no more. I lay awake, listening to my husband's breathing, praying for the hour to arrive at which we generally rose for the day--praying for that, praying that the night would not come again, praying for a friend to counsel me. It were vain for me to disguise from you that I am in dread of what may happen should my husband and Emilius meet. And there is still something more----"

I waited, but she left the sentence uncompleted. Startled as I was by what I had heard, I was even more startled to see this good and gentle woman suddenly cover her face with her hands, and burst into a passion of tears. I turned from her in commiseration, powerless to relieve or console her. Even had I words at command, it was better that her grief should be allowed to spend itself naturally. When she had recovered, I asked,

"Has Mr. Carew made any reference to what passed in the night?"

"Not any," she replied.

"Did you?"

"I simply asked him if he had slept well, and he answered 'Yes,' and that his sleep had been dreamless."

"Will you pardon me for the question whether you believe that to be really so--whether his answer to your solicitous inquiry was not prompted by his desire not to trouble or distress you?"

"I am certain," said Mrs. Carew, "that my husband said what he believes to be true. Dear friend, what am I to do?"

She seized my hand, and clung to it as though to me, and to me alone, could she look for help in her sad position.

"Does Mildred know anything, suspect anything?" I asked.

What was the meaning of the timid, frightened, helpless look in her eyes at the mention of Mildred's name? No mental efforts of mine could fathom it.

"Nothing," she replied, and then seemed to drift, against her will as it were, into distressful thought. I devoted a few moments to consideration, and when I spoke again had resolved upon a course of action.

"Would you wish me to become your guest for a few days?" I asked.

"Ah, if you would!" she exclaimed.

"I shall be willing if Mr. Carew has no objection. I will see him presently and ascertain. But first I have a little scheme to carry out which I think advisable for all our sakes."

I asked her if I could write a letter in her room, and despatch it at once to my house, and she opened her desk for me. My letter was to my son Reginald, and the effect of it was to secure his absence from Rosemullion during my stay in Mr. Carew's house. There was really a matter of business which Reginald could attend to, and which rendered it necessary for him to take his immediate departure for London. When my letter was written, I explained its purport to Mrs. Carew, and she acquiesced in the wisdom of my plan. She herself added a few words to the letter, to the effect that she regretted not being able to see him before he left, and that Mildred was well and sent her love. She gave me a flower, and asked me to enclose it in the envelope.

"He will think it comes from Mildred," she said, "and it will send him away happy. It is an innocent deceit."

The letter was despatched, and with a few assuring words to the sweet woman, I went to her husband's study.

XIX.

I observed a change in him. Something of his inner life was reflected in his face, the expression upon which was stern and moody. It softened a little when he shook me by the hand. I asked him if he was well, and he answered yes, but troubled by a strange presentiment of evil. He remarked that he was on the eve of momentous circumstances in his life which boded ill. I did not encourage him to indulge in this vein, but proceeded to relate as much of my interview with Mrs. Fortress as I deemed it wise and necessary to impart. He listened to me patiently and

reflectively, and when I had finished, said:

"You have given me food for reflection. I have in you a confidence so perfect that I place myself unreservedly in your hands. I will be guided completely by your counsels; my confidence in myself is much shaken. What do you advise?"

"This is the study," I said, "which your father used to occupy?"

"It is," he replied; "and no person was allowed to enter it without his permission."

"After his death you searched in it for his private papers?"

"I did, and found very little to satisfy me. I hoped to discover something which would throw light upon the strange habits of our life and home. I was disappointed."

At my request he showed me the method by which the safe was opened, and the ingenuity of the device caused me to wonder that he had found nothing of importance within its walls. I was, however, convinced that there was in the study some clue to the mystery of Carew's boyhood's home--although I could not help admitting to myself that it needed but faith in Mrs. Fortress's statement to arrive at a correct solution. But I required further evidence, and I resolved to search for it.

"As you have placed yourself in my hands," I said, "you will not object to comply with two or three slight requests."

"There is little you can ask," was his response, "that I am not ready to accede to."

"Invite me to remain here as your guest for a few days."

"I do."

"Allow me to occupy this room alone until I retire to bed."

"Willingly."

"And promise me that you will not leave the house without first acquainting me of your intention."

"I promise."

A little while afterwards he left me to myself, saying that if I wished to see him I should find him with his wife. When he revealed to me the secret method by which the safe was worked, he did not close the panel; it remained open for my inspection, and I now made an examination of the interior without finding so much as a scrap of paper. This was as I expected; if Gabriel Carew's father left documents behind him, they must be searched for elsewhere. A careful study of the room led me to the conclusion that the massive writing-table was the most likely depository. The working of the safe was a process much too tedious for a man who wished for easy access to his papers; the writing-table offered the means of this, and I turned my attention to it. I do not wish to be prolix, and I therefore omit a description of the painfully careful examination of every point in this massive piece of furniture. Suffice it that, after at least an hour's search, my endeavours were rewarded. In one of the legs of the table on the inner side, quite undiscoverable without a light, I felt a depression just large enough to receive the ball of my thumb. I pressed hard, and although there was no immediate result, I fancied I detected a slight yielding, such as might occur when pressing upon a firm spring which had been disused for many years. I pressed harder, with all my strength, and I suddenly heard a sharp click. I found that this proceeded from the skirting of oak immediately above the leg I was manipulating. I had carefully examined the skirting all round the table without being able to discover any signs of a drawer. Now, however, one had started forward, and I had no difficulty in pulling it open. My heart beat more quickly as I drew from it a manuscript book and a few loose sheets of foolscap paper. The writing was large and plain; ink of such a quality had been used that the lapse of years had had but a slight effect upon it. In less than a minute I satisfied myself that the handwriting was that of Gabriel Carew's father.

The book first. I read it attentively through. It was a record of the circumstances of the married life of Gabriel Carew's parents, and such of it as bore upon Mrs. Fortress's statement confirmed its truth in every particular. Before I came to the end of this record I heard Gabriel Carew calling to me outside. I hastily concealed the book and papers, and went to the door.

"I would not come upon you unawares," he said, "but it has occurred to me that to leave you even partially in the dark would not be ingenuous, and might frustrate the end we both have in view. Before I was married I wrote what may be regarded as a history of my life up to that period. There are in it no reservations or concealments of any kind whatever. Not alone my outer but my inner life is laid bare therein; it is an absolutely faithful and truthful record. Since I wrote the last words of this personal history I have not glanced at it. I hand it now to you with one stipulation. So long as I am alive you will not reveal what I have written. Should I die before you I leave it to your discretion to deal with it as you please. Another thing. I ought to more frankly explain why I put you in possession of secrets which no man, unless under unusual and extraordinary

circumstances, would impart to another. I have been all my life animated by a strong spirit of justice to others as well as to myself. By this inclusion of myself I mean that I should be as ready to condemn myself and to mete out to myself a penalty I may consciously or unconsciously have incurred as I would to any ordinary person. I am also animated by a sincere and devoted love for my wife and child. Were I asked to express the dearest wish of my heart I should answer, the wish for their happiness. But even this must not be purchased at the expense of a possible wrong to another human being. There exists between your son and my daughter an affection which has been allowed to ripen into love. Whether we have been wise time will prove. You have, equally with myself, the welfare of your child at heart. You have doubts; let them be fully resolved. I need say no more than that I am convinced that these feeble words of mine--which to strangers would be inexplicable--will help us to understand each other."

He left me alone once more, not waiting for me to speak, and I felt for him as deep a sentiment of pity and admiration as had ever been excited within me. He had also magnetised me into sharing his belief that momentous circumstances were about to occur in his life which would affect mine and my son's. It could not be otherwise in the light of the love which Reginald bore for Mildred.

I did not resume the perusal of the record made by Carew's father; I held my curiosity in check both as regards that and what was written on the two sheets of foolscap paper. Commencing to read the personal history which Gabriel Carew had composed, I became so fascinated by it that I could not leave it. Mrs. Carew sent to ask me to join them at dinner, but I begged to be excused, and wine and food were brought to me in the study. I remained there undisturbed, engrossed in Gabriel Carew's narrative, and it was late in the night when I reached the end. Then with feelings which it is impossible for me to describe, I turned to the record made by Carew's father, and finished it. No opinions were therein expressed; there was no indulgence in theory or speculation; it was a simple statement of fact. The conclusions arrived at by Carew's father were set down on the sheets of foolscap, which next claimed my attention. They ran as follows:--

XX.

"It is my intention, as an act of justice, before I die, to make my son Gabriel acquainted with the mystery of my married life. It is due to him and to myself that he should not pass his life in ignorance of the sad events and circumstances which shadowed his home. The journal which I have written, and in which he will find a record of facts, will put him in possession of the melancholy circumstances of his parents' lives. Without additional words from me he would understand the explanation I have given, but something more is necessary from me to him.

"When I married his mother I had no knowledge that there was in her blood an inherited disease. Had I suspected it I should not have married her. It would have been a transgression against the laws of God and man. To bring into the world human beings who are not responsible for their actions, and who are driven to crime by the promptings of a demoniac force born within them and growing stronger with their own growth to strong manhood, is to be the creator of a race of monsters. It matters not how fair and beautiful the outside may be; simply to think of the evil forces sleeping within, urging to sin and crime and cruelty, is sufficient to make a just man shudder. Madness assumes many phases, but not one more dreadful than the phase in which it presented itself in my wife's nature. Her conscious, waking life was a life of gentleness and kindness; her unconscious, sleeping life, but for the restraints I placed upon her, would have been a life of crime. The fault was not hers, but it fell to her lot to bear the burden of her curse. I, at least, by rendering her existence a misery to herself and those around her, kept her free from crime. One she committed before my eyes were opened, but its consequences were not fatal. To this hour she does not know that she attempted the life of a human being, and it is possible, because of my treatment of her, that she thinks of me as a monster of cruelty. It is for me to bear this burden, in addition to others which have come to me unaware. I do not bemoan, but my life might have been bright and honoured had I not married my wife. The one consolation I have is that I have endeavoured to perform my duty. My son Gabriel must perform his, though his heart bleed in its performance. Should the worst befall, all that I can do is to implore his forgiveness for having been the cause of his living. There have been times when I have debated with myself whether it would not be the more merciful course to put him out of the world, but I have never had the courage to execute the sentence which my sense of stern justice dictated. There is, however, one chance in life for him, although I most solemnly adjure him never to marry, never to link his life with that of an innocent being. If his heart is moved to love he must pluck the sentiment out by the roots, must fly from it as from a horror which blanches the cheek to contemplate. Our race must die with him; not one must live after him to perpetuate it. I lay this injunction most solemnly upon him; if he violate it he will be an incredible monster--as I should have been had I married his mother knowing what taint was in her blood. For his guidance I may say that I have consulted the most eminent authorities in Europe, and this is their verdict. Let him pay careful heed to it, for in my judgment it is incontrovertible.

"Reference to my journal will show him that the first visible manifestation of his mother's disease was exhibited about five months before he was born. We were then inhabiting a house in Switzerland, and on the night her fatal inheritance took active shape and form we had been entertaining a party of friends--one of whom was a foul villain--and my wife had been singing many times a Tyrolean air of which she was passionately fond. I copy the music of the air here, praying to God that my son may not be familiar with it."

(Here followed a few bars of music, which I had no doubt formed the air to which Mrs. Fortress had referred in her statement, and mention of which will also be found in the record of his life made by Gabriel Carew.)

"After the almost tragic events of that night my wife was continually singing this air; I have heard her hum it in her sleep. When my son was born she suckled the child--an error I deeply deplore. The physicians I consulted are of one opinion. If my son Gabriel inherits in its worst form his mother's disease, the ghost of this air will haunt him from time to time. It may not be so clear to his senses that he could sing it aloud, but he would indubitably recognise it if he heard it by accident. It is for a test that I copy the music; it is for my son to apply it. Should the air be entirely unfamiliar to him, should it fail to recall any sensations through which he has passed, the inheritance transmitted to him by his mother--if it ever assume practical shape--will exhibit itself in a milder and less ruthless form. The physicians aver that at some time or other, if Gabriel live long, some such manifestation will most surely take place, and that if it occur in its worst phase, the key-note to the occurrence may be found in the affections.

"This is as much as I can at present find strength to set down. I shall take an opportunity to confer with my son upon this gloomy matter, but I have a reluctance to approach the subject personally with him during the lifetime of his mother. It will need an almost superhuman courage on my part to speak of such a matter to my own son, but I must nerve my soul to the task. If he reproach me, if he curse me, I must bear it humbly. Once more I implore his forgiveness."

XXI.

The papers lay before me, and I was still under the spell of the fatal revelation when the clock struck two. The chiming of the hour awoke me as it were, and my mind became busy with thought of my own concerns. Reginald's doom was pronounced. Never must he and Gabriel Carew's daughter be allowed to wed. Death were preferable.

The house was very still; for hours I had not heard a sound, even the chiming of the clock falling dead upon my ears, so engrossed had I been in the papers I had perused. But now, surely, outside the room I heard a sound of soft footsteps--very, very soft--as of some one creeping cautiously along. I do not know why, when I opened the study door, I should do so quietly and stealthily, in imitation of the caution displayed by the person in the passage; but I did so. The moment, if not propitious, was well timed. As I opened the door Gabriel Carew reached it. He was completely dressed; his eyes were open; upon his face was an expression of watchfulness so earnest, so intent, so thorough, that it was clear to me that his mental powers were on the alert, and were dictating and controlling his movements. In his hand he held a dagger.

His eyes shone upon me, and had he been awake he could not have failed to recognise me, and would surely have spoken. But he made no sign. He paused for scarce an instant, and passed on, brushing my sleeve as he crossed me. Here before me was the fatal proof of the working of his unhappy inheritance.

My first impulse was to follow him, for the dagger in his hand boded danger; and I should have done so had it not been for another occurrence almost as startling.

With a loose morning gown thrown over her, Mrs. Carew glided to my side, and put her hand upon my arm. Her feet were bare, there was a distressful look in her eyes, she was trembling like an aspen. So pallid was her face and her lips were quivering so convulsively, that I feared she was about to faint; but an inward strength sustained her.

"You saw him?" she said.

"Yes," I answered, and then said "Hush! Draw aside."

He was returning. The open door of the study, and the lights within, had produced an impression upon him, and were evidently the cause of his return. He entered the study, and traversed it, examining every corner to convince himself that the person upon whom his mind was intent was not in the room. Satisfied with the result of his search, he left the room slowly and walked onward to the stairs which led to the front door of the house.

"I must follow him--I must follow him," murmured Mrs. Carew.

I restrained her. "You are not in a fit state," I said. "Let me do so in your place."

"Yes," she said, "it will be best, perhaps. You are a man, and have a man's strength. How can I thank you? Go--quickly, quickly!"

"A moment," I said, my head inclined from her; I was listening to the sounds of Carew's movements; "he has not yet reached the lower door. There are bolts to draw aside, locks to unfasten, a chain to set loose. What do you fear?"

"If he and Emilius meet there will be murder done!" She spoke rapidly and feverishly; it was no time for evasion or disguise. "Since Mr. Carew left you in the study," she said, "he has been greatly excited. The gardener brought us news of Emilius. He has been seen prowling about the grounds and examining the doors and windows of the house to discover a means of entering it when we were asleep."

"That is not the conduct of an honest man," I said, shaken by the information in the opinion I had formed of Emilius.

To my astonishment she cried, wringing her hands, "He is justified, he is justified! We have been denied to him, and he has come here with a fixed purpose, which he is bent upon carrying out."

"And you wish me to understand that he is justified in so doing?"

"Yes, I have said it, and it is true. Were you he, you would do as he is doing. Unhappy woman that I am! Do not ask me to explain. There is no time now. Hark! I hear the bolts of the door being drawn aside. Go down quickly, if you are sincere in your wish to serve me. For my sake, for Mildred's, for Reginald's!"

She was exhausted; she had not strength to utter another word. It may be that I was not merciful in addressing her after this evidence of exhaustion and prostration, but I was impelled to speak.

"I shall be down in time to prevent what you dread. You ask me to serve you for the sake of Mildred and Reginald. My son is all in all to me; he is my life, my happiness, and knowing what I now know I see before him nothing but misery. It is this fatherly concern for his sake that urges me to extract a promise from you that you will explain at a more fitting moment the meaning of your words. You will do so?"

She nodded, and I left her and went down the stairs. Carew had opened the door, and was peering out. It was a clear night; there was no moon, but the stars were shining. I was quite close to Carew, but he took no notice of me; he was not conscious of my presence. Had he left the house and closed the front door behind him, he would have been unable to re-enter it unobserved; the door could not be opened from the outside. With singular foresight he stooped and selected a stone, and fixed it at the bottom of the door so that it could not close itself of its own volition. Having thus secured an entrance, he went out into the open.

I followed him at a distance of a few yards, neither adopting special precautions to keep concealed, nor taking steps to obtrude myself on his notice. Had it not been that I was wound up to a pitch of intense excitement I might have risked a rude awakening of him, but I was impressed by a conviction that there was still something for me to learn which, were he awake, might be hidden from me. Therefore, I contented myself with watching his movements. It was a wonder to me that he made no mistakes in the paths he traversed, that he did not stumble or falter. He walked with absolute confidence and precision, avoiding low-hanging branches of trees which would have struck him in the face had he been unaware of their immediate vicinity. Nothing of the kind occurred; there was not the slightest obstruction that he did not intelligently avoid; he did not once have occasion to retrace his steps. And yet he was asleep to all intents and purposes but one--that upon which his mind was fixed. When I saw him two or three times pause, with a slight upraising of the dagger, which he clutched firmly in his hand, I knew what that purpose was--I knew that, had he seen Emilius, he would have leapt upon him and stabbed him to the heart, and that then, unconscious of the crime, he would have returned to his bed with an easy conscience. Strange indeed was the double life of this man--the life of sweetness, kindness, justice in his waking moments, of relentless, cruel purpose while he slept. In alliance with the proceedings of which I was at that time a witness, came to my mind the pronouncement of the skilled authorities whom Carew's father had consulted--that should the fatal inheritance transmitted to him take its worst form, the key-note might be found in the affections. It was demonstrated now. Emilius, his enemy, had found his way to his home; the safety and happiness of his wife and child were threatened; and he, prompted by his love for them, was on the watch to guard them, animated by a stern resolve to remove, by an unconscious crime, his enemy from his path. I thought of the tragic occurrences which had taken place in Nerac while he was courting the pure, the innocent maiden Lauretta, and I was weighed down by the reflection that justice had erred, and that the innocent had suffered for the guilty. It was a terrible thought, and it was strange that it did not inspire me with a horror of the man whose footsteps I was following. I felt for him nothing but compassion.

For quite an hour did Carew remain in the grounds searching for his foe without success. To

all outward appearance only Carew and I were present. He saw no stranger, nor did I. On three occasions, however, he paused close to a copse where the undergrowth, more than man high, was thick. On each occasion he stood in a listening attitude, passing his left hand over his brow as though he were doubtful and perplexed, and on each occasion he moved away with lingering steps, not entirely convinced that he was not leaving danger behind him. The bright blade of his dagger shone in the light as he stood on the watch; there was something of the tiger in his bearing. Short would have been the shrift of his enemy had he made his presence known on any one of these occasions. A fierce, sure leap, a thrust, another and another if needed, and all would have been over.

At length the search was ended, at length Carew was satisfied of the safety of his beloved ones. He returned slowly to the house.

Had I been aware of his intention I should have slipped in before him, but I was not conscious of it until he stood by the door, and I a dozen yards in his rear. It was too late then for me to attempt to precede him. He stooped and removed the stone which he had fixed in the door to keep it free, stood upon the threshold for the briefest space, confronting me, and, with a sigh of relief, passed in and closed the door behind him. I heard the key slowly and softly turned, heard the bolts as slowly and softly pushed into their sockets, heard the chain put up. Then silence.

What was I to do? There was, within my knowledge, no other way into the house. To knock and arouse those within would have brought exposure upon me. There was nothing for me to do but to wait for daylight. Disconsolately I walked about the grounds, disturbed by the thought that I had left the study open, and the papers I had read loose upon the writing-table. I found myself by the copse at which Carew had three times paused in doubt, and was startled by the sudden emergence of a man from the undergrowth. By an inspiration I leapt at the truth.

"You are Emilius," I said.

"I am Emilius," was his reply.

XXII.

Despite his rags and haggard appearance, his manner was defiant. He had been twenty years in prison, but he had not lost his sense of self-respect; degraded association had not stamped out his manliness. He bore about him the signs of great suffering--of unmerited suffering, as I knew while gazing upon him for the first time, but it had not turned him into a savage, as has been the case with other men who have been wrongly judged. Through the rough crust of habits foreign to his nature which a long term of imprisonment had laid upon him, I discerned an underlying dignity and nobility which bespoke him gentleman. I discerned also in him the evidence of a tenacious purpose from which death alone could turn him. That purpose had brought him to Rosemullion, and, connected as I was with Gabriel Carew and his family, it was necessary that I should learn its nature.

"Do you accost me," asked Emilius, "as friend or enemy?"

"As friend," I replied. "I ask you to believe me upon my honour, from gentleman to gentleman."

His face flushed, and he looked searchingly at me to ascertain if I was mocking him.

"When I saw you," said Emilius, "standing apart from that fiend in human form, and saw him watching here by the copse in which I lay concealed, I supposed you were both in league against me."

"I at least am guiltless of enmity towards you," I said. "It is truly my wish to serve you if you will show me the way and I deem it right."

"What I have suffered," he said with a pitiful smile, "has not embittered me against all the world. It would not ill become me to disbelieve the protestations of a stranger, but I prefer the weaker course. I have only two things to fear--irredeemable poverty, from which I could not extricate myself--(I am not far from that pass at the present, but I have still sufficient for two months' dry bread)--and death before I achieve my purpose. May God so deal with you as you deal honestly by me. I have not lost all comprehension of human signs, and there is that in you which denotes a wish to know me and perhaps to win my confidence. Sorely do I need a friend, a helping hand; and like a drowning man I clutch at the first that offers itself. Yet bitter as is my need, I ask you to turn from me at once if your intentions are not honest."

"I will stay and prove myself," I said.

"Why have you remained out in the open," asked Emilius, "while that monster, who for a brief space has put aside his murderous intent, has re-entered his house?"

"It was an accident, and may be providential. At first I deplored it, but now am thankful for it. I am thankful, too, that you made no movement while Mr. Carew was standing on this spot."

"I am no coward," said Emilius with pride, "and yet I was afraid. As I have told you, I do not want to die--just yet. He was armed; I am without a weapon. But had it been otherwise I should not have risked a conflict with him; my life is for a little while too precious to me. My liberty, also, which he, a gentleman, against me, a vagrant, might with little difficulty swear away. He has done worse than that without scruple. Therefore, it behoved me to be wary. Were my errand here an errand of revenge I should have a score, a terrible score, to settle with him; but there is something of even greater weight to be accomplished. I have said that I will trust you; in prison my word was relied on, and it may be relied on here. It is not in doubt of you I ask why the fiend who inhabits that house and you came out in concert at such an hour?"

"We did not come out in concert," I replied. "Mr. Carew did not see me; he was not aware of my presence."

Emilius gazed upon me in wonder. "I am to believe this?"

"It is the truth, I swear. I have no object in deceiving you. Yet it would be strange if you did not doubt and wonder. For the present let the matter bide; you have much to learn which may temper your judgment."

"A foul wrong can never be righted," responded Emilius. "The dead cannot be brought to life. If you expect my judgment of that fiend ever to be softened, you expect a miracle. What is the nature of your connection with him? Pardon me for asking questions; I will answer yours freely."

"An angel lives in that house," I said, "and I am bound to her by ties of affection and devotion, inspired by her sweet nature and spotless purity."

"Lauretta!" he murmured. "She loved me once as a sister might love a brother, and I loved her in like manner. She was the incarnation of innocence and goodness."

"And is so still. She whom you once loved as a sister claims now your pity. Find room in your heart for something better than revenge."

"You misjudge me," he said softly; "it is love, not revenge, that brought me here. But you have not completed your explanation."

"I have an only child," I said; "a son, grown to man's estate. Love grew between him and Mrs. Carew's daughter----"

"Stop!" he cried, in a suffocated voice. "I cannot, cannot bear it!"

He leant against a tree for support; his form was convulsed with heavy sobs. His profound grief astonished me; I could find no clue for it. I turned aside until he was master of himself again, and then he resumed the conversation.

"You seem to know the story of my life."

"I am acquainted with it."

"You know that I was tried for the murder of my brother?"

"Yes."

"There are moments in life when to lie will damn a man's soul and condemn it to eternal perdition! This in my life is such a moment. I call Heaven to witness my innocence! Now and hereafter may I be cursed, now and for ever may the love for which I yearn be torn from me, may I never meet my wife in heaven, if I do not stand before you an innocent man! I was condemned for another's crime. The murderer lives there." He pointed to the house, and continued: "My brother was not the only one who died by his hand. In the happy village of Nerac, whither a relentless fate directed that monster's steps, another man was murdered before my beloved Eric fell. This man's comrade suffered the penalty--while he, the murderer, looked on and smiled. I do not question the goodness and mercy of God; for some unknown reason these atrocities have been allowed, and no thunderbolt has fallen to smite the guilty. Had I been other than I am I should have turned blasphemous, and raised my impious voice against my Creator. As it is, I have suffered and borne my sufferings, not like a beast, but like a man. You hint at some mystery in connection with that monster which I cannot fathom. Time is too precious for me to waste it by groping in the dark. I will wait patiently for enlightenment. Heaven knows I, of all men living, should lend a ready ear to howsoever strange a tale, for I am associated, through my father and his brother, with a mystery which the majority of men would reject as incredible. This extends even to my statement that I have sure evidence of that monster's guilt, although I did not see the deed perpetrated. You may enter into my feelings when I tell you that the first few weeks of my imprisonment were weeks of the most awful torture to me. I wept. I could not sleep, my heart was torn with unspeakable anguish. Night after night in my lonely cell I passed the hours praying to my murdered brother, and calling upon him to give me a sign. My prayer was answered on the anniversary of our birthday. Eric and I, as I assume you know, were twins, as were my father

Silvain and his brother Kristel. Between them existed a mysterious bond of sympathy. So was it, in a lesser degree, between Eric and me. On that birthday anniversary, spent in prison, peace for the first time fell upon my soul, and I slept. In my dreams my brother appeared to me; he did not speak to me; but I saw the enactment of his murder. I had left him in the forest to join my wife. He was alone. He paced to and fro in deep anguish. Tears streamed from his eyes; his heart was wracked with woe. In this state he continued for a space of time which I judged to be not less than an hour. Then gradually he became more composed, and he knelt and prayed, with his face buried in his hands. Stealing towards him stealthily, holding a knife, as to-night he held a dagger, I beheld the monster, Gabriel Carew. I saw him plainly; the moon shone upon his face, and though he walked like a man in sleep, his fell intent was visible in his eyes. I tried to scream to warn my brother, but my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth. I could not utter a sound. Nearer and nearer crept the monster--nearer and nearer, noiselessly, noiselessly! Not a leaf cracked beneath his feet; all nature seemed to be suddenly stricken dumb in horror of the deed about to be done. To my agonised senses seconds were minutes, minutes hours, until the monster stood above the kneeling form of my beloved Eric. He raised the knife--the blade was touched with light; for a moment he paused to make his aim surer, the stroke more certain. With cruel, devilish force the knife descended, and was plunged through my Eric's back, straight into his heart. He uttered no cry, but straightway, as the knife was plucked from him, fell forward on his face. My brother was dead! Slowly, stealthily, warily, the murderer stole through the woods, casting no look behind. A darkness rushed upon me, and my dream was at an end. When I awoke I knew that I had witnessed a faithful presentment of the scene, and it would need something more powerful than human arguments to convince me that I was the victim of a delusion. The natural sentiment which from that night forth might be supposed to animate me was that I might live to revenge myself upon the murderer. It was not so with me. I lived, and live, for another purpose, with another end in view. Not for me to shed blood, and to stain my soul with sin and crime. I leave my cause to heaven. Having heard thus much, will you aid me, will you serve me, as you have promised?"

"I will do my best, if my judgment approves."

"The end is just, and I cannot endure long delay. I must see Mrs. Carew-- *must!* There is a matter between us which must be cleared up before another day and night have passed. Tell her that my errand is not one of revenge. Not a word of reproach shall she hear from my lips. I am here to claim what is mine--my inalienable right! She will understand if you represent it to her in my words. Tell her she has nothing to fear from me, and that the faith I have in her will not allow me to believe that she will conspire to rob my life of the one joy it contains for me. Will you do this?"

"I will do what you desire, in the way you desire."

"I thank you," he said, and the courteous grateful motion of his head bespoke the gentleman.

"How shall I find you," I asked, "if I wish to see you to-morrow?"

"Leave that to me," was his reply. "I shall be on the watch--and on my guard. Good-night."

"Good-night," I said, and I offered him my hand. He touched it with his, and saying again, "I thank you," left me to myself.

I remained in the grounds until the servants--who were early risers-- unfastened the front door. Then I entered the house, and made my way to the study. As I reached the door Mrs. Carew came out of her room to meet me. She placed her finger to her lips, and whispered,

"My husband is there."

"Your husband!" I exclaimed in consternation, forgetting Emilius, forgetting everything except the papers I had found in the secret drawer, and which I had left loose upon the writing-table.

"Yes," said Mrs. Carew. "When he came in alone he had to pass the study on his way to our room. The door was open, and he went in. I did not dare to disturb him. All is so still within that I think he is asleep. Tell me, dear friend--has anything happened outside?"

"Nothing of the nature you dread," I replied.

"Thank you," she murmured.

I opened the study door and entered, and sitting at the writing-table, with his hand upon the revelation made by his father, was Gabriel Carew, in a profound slumber.

"He has slept thus frequently," whispered Mrs. Carew, who had followed me into the room, "until late in the day."

"Leave us together," I said.

She obeyed me, and I stood by Carew's side and gazed at him and the papers. There was deep suffering on his face, strangely contrasted with an expression of resolution and content. What this portended I had yet to learn.

XXIII.

It was not till at least an hour afterwards that I remembered the promise I had given to Emilius. Carew still slept, and had not stirred from the position in which I had found him. Two or three times I made a gentle effort to remove from beneath his hand the papers I had found in the secret drawer, but as my design could not be accomplished without violence, I abandoned it. There was no doubt in my mind that he had read them, and his tenacious hold upon them denoted that he had formed some strong resolution with respect to them. With the intention of fulfilling my promise to Emilius, I softly left the room.

Mrs. Carew, sitting in a room above with Mildred, heard my movements, and swiftly and noiselessly glided down the stairs. In a low tone I made her acquainted with what had passed between me and Emilius, and I perceived that she was not unprepared for Emilius's demand for an interview. When I repeated to her Emilius's words, "Tell her she has nothing to fear from me, and that the faith I have in her will not allow me to believe that she will conspire to rob my life of the one joy it contains for me," she clasped her hands across her eyes, and remained so for a little while.

"It is his due," she said, but though she strove to speak calmly she could not control her trembling voice and quivering lips; "I must see him."

"When?" I asked.

"I cannot at this moment decide," she replied. "I must have time to reflect. Meanwhile, there lies our first care."

She pointed to the study in which her husband slept.

"You understand that he is determined to see you before another day and night have passed?"

"Yes, I understand."

"How is Mildred?"

"Bright and well, with the exception that she is concerned about me. She suspects nothing."

"It is better so. Trouble comes soon enough."

"Indeed, indeed!" she murmured, with a strangely pathetic note in her voice--as though she were pitying herself. "If we but knew--if we but knew! But to do everything for the best--what can one do more? A heavy punishment is about to fall upon me, and yet I thought I was acting right. Go to my husband. He may need you when he wakes."

She glided up the stairs to Mildred's room, and I re-entered the study. Carew still slept, and I remained at my vigil till noon without observing any change in him. In addition to my position being one of embarrassment, I found myself labouring under a feeling of exhaustion. I had had no rest; and had passed a long and anxious day and night. Insensibly my eyes closed; I struggled against Nature's demand, but it was too imperative to be successfully resisted, and at length I fell asleep. So thoroughly worn out was I that it was evening before I awoke.

Carew, also awake, was gazing at me as I opened my eyes.

"I would not disturb you," he said. "You appeared to be thoroughly exhausted."

"I am not so young as I was," I observed, with an attempt at lightness. "Have you been awake long?"

"For some hours," he replied.

I glanced at the table; the papers were still there; his eyes followed the direction of mine, and he nodded gently.

"Have you remained with me the whole time?" I asked.

"Oh, no. I left the room two or three times. My wife looked in occasionally to see if you still slept." He motioned with his hand to a corner of the table, and I saw bread, and meat, and wine there. "Eat," he said; "you must be hungry."

I was glad of the food, and the wine gave me strength. Carew himself drank two glasses.

"We are but poor, gross creatures," he said, "dependent upon a crumb of bread for the life we think so wonderful. Is the scheme which created it monstrous or beneficent? Is it the work of an angel or a devil? Have you finished?"

"Yes."

"Something is necessary between you and me, something which must not remain unspoken."

The time for concealments, evasions, self-delusions, torturing doubts (now cleared up, fatally), is at an end."

"One question first," I said, thinking of Emilius; "has Mrs. Carew left the house during the time I have slept?"

"No; I forbade her. I have still for some few hours a will of my own." He touched the papers written by his father. "After I left you here yesterday, you discovered these?"

"I discovered them before you gave me the record of your life to read."

"You have read it?"

"Every word."

"Had my father's record been discovered when I was a young man, had he dealt by me justly instead of mercifully, what evil might have been averted! I have no intention of wasting time by idle words, by vain regrets. I have fixed my course. I seek some enlightenment from you. Tell me all that passed within your knowledge since I spoke to you last night at the door of this room. Keep nothing from me. Absolute frankness is due from you to me, and I claim it. Believe me, I am animated by but one supreme desire--a desire for justice. All lighter sentiments are dead within me, except pity for the lady who has the misfortune to be my wife. I loved her with a very pure and complete love. I dare not wrong her by saying I love her still--and yet, and yet--You see, I am still human; that is the worst of it. Tell me all."

I did so, concealing nothing, softening nothing. I faithfully, mercilessly described the events of the night that had passed--his leaving the house, his wife's entreaties that I should follow him to prevent the committal of a dreadful deed, my doing so, his movements in his search through the grounds dagger in hand, the strange intelligence which, asleep as he was, directed those movements, fortunately unsuccessful, his return to the house, locking me out, my discovery and interview with Emilius, and finally my entrance into the study, where he sat asleep, his hand firmly guarding the papers I had found in the secret drawer.

He listened quietly and attentively, and did not interrupt me by a word. It was with a feeling of apprehension that I approached Emilius's description of his dream, in which had been pictured the murder of Eric, but no outward sign was visible in Carew to denote agitation. The only question he asked was with reference to Emilius's desire for an interview with Mrs. Carew. Could I discover a reason for it? I answered that I could not, but that there must be some powerful reason that Emilius, free from prison, should journey to England for the special purpose of the interview.

"I have no remembrance of leaving the house last night," said Carew, "and upon other evidence than that which is furnished to me, should scout the tale as a monstrous invention. But it is not for me to doubt. I was born into a fatal inheritance, and I must suffer for it."

"How?" I cried. "The past is past; there is no undoing it. If you think of invoking the law, you may banish the idea; it cannot touch you."

"From the hour that I read my father's confession," said Carew, "I became a law unto myself. I will not pain you by asking whether you believe me guilty or no; you cannot do otherwise than look upon me as a monster, as I look upon myself. The law cannot touch me, I believe; and well do I know that not only what has been done cannot be undone, but that it cannot be atoned for. But the future must be secured. My father wrote that the one consolation he had was that he endeavoured to perform his duty. He did not so endeavour. His duty was to enlighten me, an innocent being while my parents lived, as to the nature of the inheritance transmitted to me. Then I might have done what it is incumbent upon me to do now. At least, if I had not the courage for that, I should not have cast a blight upon the life of a pure and white-souled lady. You are an authority upon the disease of insanity, and the different forms in which it presents itself in human beings; and you must be aware that it would be a difficult task to find doctors who would declare me to be mad. Setting aside the sufferings of regret, my mind is as clear and logical as your own or any man's. My reason--is it crooked, warped? No, it is clear as a lake, and I can see straight on to the end. In my sleep I am another being. Granted. But what crime can human evidence bring home to my door? None. What guilt is mine, others have suffered for, and the law is satisfied that it did not stumble. Emilius can come forward and say, 'That monster killed my brother.' They will ask for evidence, and he will relate a dream. 'You are a madman,' they will declare. You saw me last night prowling round my house in search of whom? In search of an enemy who long years ago was my enemy, and who, having endured the punishment inflicted by the law for a crime which he was proved to have committed, comes now to England to injure and rob me. So sensitive am I respecting the safety of my wife and daughter that even in my sleep I protect them. A subject I for admiration. No hand, no voice, would be raised in horror against me; I should be lauded, praised, set up as an example, while Emilius would be regarded with loathing. Yet he is a martyr, and I am a devil. Who is to punish me? Are there other men as I am? If so, there should be a law to destroy them while they are young, before they are ripe for mischief. It would be a simple safeguard."

As he had sat in silence listening to me, so now I sat in silence listening to him. There was not

a trace of passion in his voice; it was calm and judicial. Even when he called himself a devil there was no deviation from this aspect of absolute composure.

"What wrote my father?" he continued. "What wrote he--too late? I most solemnly adjure him never to marry, never to link his life with that of an innocent being. If his heart is moved to love he must pluck the sentiment out by the roots, must fly from it as from a horror which blanches the cheek to contemplate. Our race must die with him; not one must live after him to perpetuate it. I lay this injunction most solemnly upon him; if he violate it, he will be an incredible monster." In making this quotation he did not refer to the written pages; word for word, he repeated it by heart. It was a proof how deeply upon his mind and heart were graven his father's fatal confession.

"Thus said my father, but he said it not in time. He failed in his duty, and led me into worse than error. Well do I now understand the mystery of my early home, of my boyhood's life. Why did he not kill me? God and man would have applauded the deed."

Had it not been that he paused here, as though he had finished what he had to say, I doubt whether I should have spoken, so overwhelmed was I by this merciless self-analysis and self-condemnation. But the silence enabled me to recover myself, to think of other matters than himself.

"You told me," I said, "that you forbade your wife to leave the house. Then she has not seen Emilius?"

"No. She will see him to-morrow."

"He says he must see her this day or night. He expects me to acquaint him with the result of his message to Mrs. Carew."

"Go to him and implore him to leave it till to-morrow. Then there will be no difficulty. It is but a few hours--and he has waited so many years. His mission cannot be so urgent."

"He declares it is."

"He is possessed by a just fury. It is his intention, I suppose, to denounce me to my wife. The one joy in life that remains to him is the joy of making the woman who loved me shrink from me as from a pestilence. That joy shall be his--to-morrow; and it then he is not content, I will submit myself to him as he shall dictate. You can assure him of my honesty in this."

"You forget," I urged. "He desired me to tell your wife that his errand was not one of revenge."

"He is justified in using any subterfuge to obtain an interview with her. If she had reason to believe that he came to injure me she would not see him. Go to him, and tell him to-morrow. Tell him also that I have pronounced judgment upon myself."

I had no choice but to comply. He spoke with a force and a decision there was no gainsaying.

XXIV.

I have omitted to mention that a letter was delivered to me from my son Reginald. It was written in London, almost immediately upon his arrival there. There were in it about twenty words in relation to the business I had entrusted to him, for the purpose of securing his absence; the remaining three and a half pages were filled with rhapsodies upon Mildred. It was Mildred, Mildred, nothing and nobody but Mildred. She was the light of his life, the hope, the joy of it; nothing else but Mildred was worth living for. Not even I, his old father, who never thought, who never would think, any sacrifice too great to make for his son's happiness. I did not complain, and I do not; it is the way of things, and we old ones must stand aside, and be humbly grateful that we are allowed to witness the happiness which we have done our utmost to bring about. Not that this was the case with Reginald and myself. The duty devolving upon me was to prevent, not to assist in, the accomplishment of his dearest hopes. How would the lad take it? Would he look upon me as his enemy? Would he thrust me aside, and rush wildly to a fate I shuddered even to contemplate? Would not the example before him serve as a warning? I could not say. The more I thought of the matter the more disturbed I became. Certainly, he could not marry Mildred without Carew's consent, and that, I knew, would be withheld. The true story of her husband's life could not be concealed from the knowledge of Mrs. Carew; and knowing it, she would not allow Mildred to wed. If necessary, Mildred herself must be told how impossible it was that she should ever think of marriage, and she would refuse my son. And Reginald's heart would be broken! Of that I was convinced. It would be a blow from which he would never recover.

These were my reflections as I went out into the grounds of Rosemullion to seek Emilius. I had not long or far to seek. Near the copse in which he was concealed the previous night he suddenly

presented himself.

"I have been looking and waiting for you all day," he said. "Can you realise the torture I am suffering?"

I did not answer his question, but gave him an account of what I had done, and then I conveyed Gabriel Carew's message to him.

"To wait till to-morrow!" Emilius exclaimed. "He asks, he implores me to wait till then?"

"I have told you," I said. "It seems to me not unreasonable."

"It seems to you--it seems to you!" he repeated, in petulant excitement; and the next moment begged my pardon for speaking so to me, who had proved myself his friend. "But you do not know this fiend--you do not know of what he is capable! You believe what I have told you of the eternal wrong he has inflicted upon me--a wrong for which he can never hope to be forgiven in this world or the next. You believe it, and yet you say he is justified in asking me to wait till he has had time to carry out the secret design he has formed to prevent me from obtaining justice! You believe it, and yet you justify him! O God in Heaven! Is there, has there ever been, justice on earth? And I am to wait, who have waited for twenty years, who have suffered unjustly for twenty years! And I am to stand aside while he completes his work and dashes the cup of happiness from my lips! No! Again and again, no! This night is my limit. Before it passes I will see Mrs. Carew, and she shall right me. You can tell this to the monster yonder who has juggled you so successfully."

I endeavoured to argue, to reason with him, but he would not listen to me. So I left him, his last words being that nothing on earth should move him from his resolve.

XXV.

The clock struck nine as I re-entered the house. A servant accosted me with a message from Mrs. Carew, requesting me to go to her in the little room in which Carew was in the habit of taking tea with her--the apartment he had described as a sanctuary of rest.

Mrs. Carew was alone.

"My husband is asleep," she said, "and asked me to see that he was not disturbed. He told me that you had gone out to see Emilius, who was to come here to-morrow morning. Have you seen him?"

"Yes, but he declares he will not wait. He insists upon seeing you to-night."

"Poor Emilius! It is but a few hours longer. He must have patience till tomorrow. Deeply as I pity him, I am grateful for the delay, for it gives me time to make a confession to you. I do not know whether it should have been made before--but now it is imperative. I have been praying for strength. My husband prayed with me. In the days of our courtship, when he and the good priest of Nerac were friends, Mr. Carew was in the habit of accompanying me and my dear parents to church; but for many years he has not entered a place of worship. I do not ask you to betray his confidence, but was he not more composed when you left him?"

"It seemed to me that he had made up his mind to a certain course--he did not explain it to me, nor did I ask him to do so--which might be the means of atoning for the errors of the past. I am not at liberty to say more; what passed between us I regard as in sacred confidence."

"I am glad he has you to rely on," said Mrs. Carew. "He came to me voluntarily an hour ago, and the conversation we had has done me good. He was wonderfully gentle and humble--but indeed, Mr. Carew was never arrogant--and I gathered the impression that he had in some way discovered that he was in the habit of walking abroad during the night and causing me distress of mind. He spoke kindly, too, of poor Emilius, and said he hoped to be forgiven for any wrong he had done that unhappy man in the past. The air is very sweet to-night, is it not?"

"I have been in some anxiety myself," I said haltingly, scarcely knowing how to reply to the question, which appeared to me a strange one at that moment, "and have scarcely noticed; but there is a soft air blowing, and the night is fine."

"You are anxious about Reginald," she said, "and Mildred?"

"Yes," I said, surprised that she should approach the subject.

She pressed my hand. "Mr. Carew, when he was here with me, said the air was peculiarly sweet, and I gather the impression from him. It is always so with one we love. I questioned myself whether I should impart to him what I am about to impart to you, but he appeared to be so much in need of rest that I decided not to agitate him. I trust he will forgive me when I make my

confession to him to-morrow. To-night you will counsel, you will advise me?"

"Command me entirely," I said.

"I thank you. I have wished Mildred good-night also, and we shall be quite undisturbed. She has received a letter from your Reginald, and is replying to it. A loving task to a young girl in her position." I winced, and determined that the night should not pass without my acquainting Mrs. Carew with my views respecting the impossibility of a marriage between Mildred and Reginald. A knock at the door here caused Mrs. Carew to call "Come in."

A servant entered with keys, which he handed to his mistress.

"All the doors are securely fastened?" she asked.

"Yes, madam," replied the servant.

"Come to me," she said, "in the morning for the keys."

When we were alone Mrs. Carew said that before she commenced she wished to see that her husband was sleeping well, and I accompanied her to his room. He was lying on his right side, breathing calmly and peacefully. There was a certain intentness in the expression of his features, as though even in his sleep his mind was bent upon some fixed resolve, but otherwise I was surprised, after what he had gone through, that he should be so quiet and composed. I had never before realised how powerful was the face I was now gazing on; the firm lips, the large nose, the broad forehead, were indications of intellectual power. No sign of weakness was apparent, none of indecision or wavering. He was a man capable of a great career.

"My dear father used to say," said Mrs. Carew, "that Mr. Carew's mind was the most comprehensive he had ever met with."

She stooped and kissed him lightly on the forehead, without disturbing him. We trod gently out of the room.

"He will have a good night," she said. "I must go up to Mildred's room." The light was shining through the crevices of the door.

"Not asleep, Mildred?" said Mrs. Carew softly.

"No, mamma. I shall be, soon."

"Don't remain up too long, my dear."

"No, mamma."

"Good night, Mildred."

"Good night, dear mamma. Mamma?"

"Yes, child!"

"I have just given Reginald your love."

"That is right, my dear."

"And I have told him not to remain away too long."

"That is right, my dear."

"Good night, dearest mamma."

"Good night, my dearest."

"Alas for Reginald!" I thought, as we descended the stairs. "Alas for the hopes of that young girl!"

In her own apartment Mrs. Carew informed me that it was by her husband's wish the lower doors were securely fastened, and the keys given to her. "In order," she said, "that it might not be in his power to leave the house in his sleep. He did not say so, but that was his thought."

XXVI.

I relate in my own words the strange story Mrs. Carew imparted to me. Although she had erred, her confession was like a rift of sweet light in the dark clouds which hung over

Rosemullion. It brought more than hope and comfort to my old heart--it brought joy. In a very few moments you will understand the meaning of my words.

Transport yourself back to the village of Nerac, a year after the marriage of Lauretta and Gabriel Carew. Business of a particular nature took Carew from Nerac for a space of three months; he was absent that time, much against his will, for his wife was near her confinement. This took place safely two weeks after his departure, and he was duly informed of the event. All was well at home; Lauretta and her baby girl were thriving. The days and the weeks passed until two months went by. Carew, in his letters to his wife, expressed the profoundest joy at this precious home blessing. Smarting as he was during that period from the growing coldness of the villagers towards him, and chafing at the injustice of the world, he placed an extravagant value upon this baby girl, who would be, he said, a charm against all evil. He longed for the time when he could hold this blessing in his loving arms; now his happiness was complete; he asked for no greater treasure. In the growth and development of the new young life he would find solace and consolation. His wife was enjoined to take the most tender care of their child. "You and she are one," Carew wrote. "Each is incomplete without the other. I cannot think of you now apart. Were I to lose one my life would be plunged into darkness." Then befel an event which brought horror and grief to Lauretta. It happened that her nurse had fallen sick, and was compelled to go to her own home; there was no other female servant in the establishment capable of undertaking a nurse's duties, and Lauretta therefore took them cheerfully on herself. Two months, as I have said, had passed after the birth of the baby girl. Carew was expected home in a fortnight.

In the dead of night, when all in the house were asleep, with the exception of Lauretta, she, watching by the cradle of her baby, heard a sound of moaning without. She listened intently; it was her own name that she heard uttered in accents of deepest pain and suffering. It was a wild night; heavy rain was falling, the wind was raging; and through the sounds of the storm came the wailing of her name, with half-choked sobs and entreaties for help and pity.

It was but an hour before that Lauretta, awaking, had heard proceed from her baby-girl lying in the cradle by her bedside, some light sounds of difficult breathing which had alarmed her. She got up and dressed, and tended her baby, who, after a while, seemed a little easier; but with the natural anxiety of a young mother Lauretta remained awake watching her child.

The moans for help outside appeared to be especially addressed to her and to her alone, and she seemed to recognise the voice. She crept softly down, and unfastened the door.

"Who is there?" she asked, during a lull in the storm.

The answer came--"Patricia! Help me! Oh help me, and let no one know!"

It was Emilius's wife.

Lauretta assisted her indoors. The poor girl was in a pitiable plight. Famished, ragged, penniless, with a baby in her arms. Both were wringing wet. The pelting rain had soaked them through and through.

Throbbing with sympathy and compassion Lauretta quickly undressed Patricia's baby, and put it in her own warm bed. They had by this time reached Lauretta's bedroom, in which her own child was lying. Lauretta wished to call the servants, but Patricia sobbed that she would fly the house if any eyes but Lauretta's rested on her. It appeared, according to the poor girl's story, that her father was in pursuit of her, and had vowed to kill her and her baby.

"He will kill me--he will kill me!" moaned Patricia. "No one must know I have been here but you--no one, no one!"

And then she rocked herself hysterically and cried, "What will become of my poor baby-girl--what will become of her? I heard that your husband was not here, and it gave me courage to crawl to you. Not that it matters much. It isn't for myself I care. My father may kill me--I have not long to live--but my baby, my baby! Oh, save my darling, save her for the sake of my innocent Emilius!"

It was then that Lauretta noticed for the first time, signs in Patricia's face which, interpreted by her fear and the poor girl's words, seemed to be signs of approaching death. And still Patricia insisted that she would not remain in the house; no force or entreaties could make her.

"What, then, can I do for you?" asked Lauretta; she had already given Patricia food and money.

"Take care of my child," replied Patricia. "Bring her up as your own. Let her never know her father's disgrace, her mother's shame. It will be an angel's deed! For pity's sake, do not deny me! You are rich, and can afford the charity--and if, in your husband's life there has been guilt, this act of charity will atone for it. See here--look on her innocent face. Having the power, you have not the heart to deny me. Ah, if your angel mother were alive, I should appeal to her, and should not appeal in vain! She loved Emilius, and believed in his innocence--yes, to the last she believed in it. I know it for a certainty. You, too, loved my poor martyred husband, and he loved and honoured you and yours with all the strength of his faithful heart. He is innocent, innocent, I tell you! God forbid that I should accuse any one of being guilty--I am too desperate and despairing, and my child's life, the salvation of her soul, are at stake. When your sainted mother died, did all

goodness die out of the world? Ah, no--it is not possible; you live again in her. In you she lives again, and all her mercy and sweet kindness which caused us all, from the highest to the lowest, to worship her, to look upon her as something holy. For her sake, if not for my own, you cannot, cannot deny me this charity, you who have it in your power to grant it!"

All this, and more. To say that Laretta's heart was touched is inadequate; it overflowed; it yearned to assist the suffering mother, so near to her through her young motherhood, through the old ties with Emilius and Eric. A choking cry from her own baby-girl caused her to rush to the cradle. Within the hour a fatal circumstance occurred. Laretta's baby drew her last breath.

It has nearly all my days been my belief that everything in human life is to be accounted for by human standards. I am shaken in this belief. In this death of Laretta's baby I seem to see the finger of fate.

Vain to attempt to describe the agonising grief of the young mother. So overpowering was it that she lost consciousness. She recovered her senses when the storm had passed and the morning's light was shining on her. When she awoke to reality, what did she see?

Her husband had suddenly and unexpectedly returned home. She was in bed, and he was sitting by her side.

"Gabriel, Gabriel!" she cried, and, overcome by the terror of her great loss, she would have lost consciousness again but for an unaccountable joyousness in his manner, which mingled strangely with the sympathy he must have felt for her suffering condition.

"It was, doubtless, the storm," he said soothingly. "It raged so fiercely for an hour and more, that I am told it exceeded in violence anything of a like kind that has been experienced in these parts for the last fifty years. No wonder it has had such an effect upon you. Half the trees in our garden are uprooted. It hastened my steps home, for I know how these convulsions of nature affect you. But as you see, the danger has passed; the sun is shining brightly; but not more brightly in the heavens than it is shining in my heart."

She listened to him in amazement, and raising herself in bed she looked around for Patricia. She saw no sign of the hapless woman. The cradle in which her baby-girl had died was by the side of the bed. Carew bent over it and said in a tone of ecstasy:

"Mildred--Mildred! Our Mildred--our dear ewe lamb! How sweetly and soundly she sleeps! Oh, my darling wife! What care I for the injustice of the world now that this treasure is ours? My sweet--my sweet! You recompense for all. Do you know, Laretta, as travelling home I neared the beloved spot which contained you and our treasure, my heart almost stood still at the fear that I should not find you both well. And now--how can I be sufficiently grateful? Of no account to me is all that transpires outside the circle which contains you and my dear one in the cradle here? I set great store upon our child, Laretta. She is to me a guarantee of all that is worth living for in the present and the future. When I arrived home and found you prostrate I was at first overwhelmed, but I soon discovered that you had fainted, and I judged rightly, did I not, dear wife of my heart, that, not being strong, you kept it from me while we were apart, in order not to distress me? But now all is well--all shall be well. See, Laretta, she opens her eyes, our darling. The question is, can I raise her safely and place her by your side? Yes, it is done, and I am the happiest father in the world!"

Was she dreaming? In the clothes in which her child died rested this child of Patricia's, smiling, blooming, laughing and crowing as Laretta drew her to her breast. Carew's delight, his gratitude, his worship of the babe he believed to be his own, the superstitious store he set upon her young life, were so unbounded, that Laretta did not dare to undeceive him. She feared, if she told him the truth, that it would unsettle his reason, and produce between her and him a gulf which could never be bridged over. She accepted the strange combination of circumstances, and held her tongue. Her own dear babe was dead, but this new Mildred, whom she grew to love truly as if she were her own, remained, and grew to what she is, a flower of beauty, goodness, and sweetness. Nothing more did Laretta hear of Patricia; whether she died or lived was not known to her. It is but a detail--but necessary to complete the story--to state here that Patricia lived but a few months after the occurrence of this strange event. More important is it to state that, in some unexplained way, Emilius learns that his daughter lived, and that the Carews were bringing her up as if she were a child of their own. His term of imprisonment over, he had come now to claim her.

It would be impossible for me to give expression to my feelings of gratitude at this wonderful revelation. The despair into which I had fallen at the contemplation of the wrecking of my dear son Reginald's happiness vanished. A fair future lay still before him, and the most cherished hopes of his heart would be realised. I was sure that Emilius would not mar them. A nature so noble as his, so strong in suffering, so heroic in the highest form of human endurance, could not lend itself to the committal of a petty act of selfishness whereby the child upon whose memory he had lived during his cruel and unjust imprisonment would be rendered miserable and unhappy. To this martyred man I was ready to bow my head, ready to give him my friendship, my sympathy, my heart's best fruits of confidence and esteem. Thinking of him, I was awed that a man could live through the anguish that had been his portion, and still retain the inherent dignity and nobility of a great and noble nature.

XXVII.

"Hark!" whispered Mrs. Carew, her story told, and before we had time to debate upon the wisest course to pursue. "What sound is that?"

It was the sound of footsteps on the stairs. In this sound there was no attempt at concealment. The footsteps were those of one who desired his presence to be known. I divined instantly who it was who, by some means unknown to me, obtaining an entrance into the house, was now approaching the room in which Mrs. Carew and I were sitting. I could not, and did not blame him. In his place I should have acted as he was acting.

The silver clock chimed the hour of twelve.

"You will see him," I said, rising to my feet and advancing to the door.

"See whom?" asked Mrs. Carew, with her hand at her heart.

"Emilius. It is he and no other man who is coming here. He has a great stake in this house. He is justified."

"My husband?" she gasped.

"Is safe, if you will only be guided by me. It is your duty to be brave and strong. Never was courage more needed than at this moment. And not only courage, but wisdom. Decide quickly. There is no time to lose."

"I will be guided by you," she said faintly.

I threw open the door, and saw Emilius standing in the passage, uncertain which direction to take.

"Enter," I said in a low tone. "Mrs. Carew is here. For the sake of others be gentle, and do not alarm the house."

He entered, and Mrs. Carew and he stood face to face.

The native dignity of the man instantly asserted itself. He removed his ragged cap and stood bareheaded before her. But there was no cringing in his attitude. It was perfectly respectful--something, indeed, more than that; it was the attitude of a man who once was this sweet lady's equal, and who, despite the judgment of the world, still knew himself to be her equal, and worthy of the esteem she once accorded to him. But as he gazed upon her, and she upon him, in silence for a few moments--a silence which I did not dare to break--his stern mood melted. He saw and recognised her, as he had always seen and recognised her in the time that was gone, when he was entitled to hold up his head among men--but never more so in truth and honour than now--a gentle-mannered lady, in whose face shone the reflex of a sweet and womanly nature. Remembrances of the past rushed upon him and softened him.

"Forgive me," he said humbly.

And then--tears filled my eyes as I saw it, and knew the suffering she was bravely enduring--she held out her hand to him. He bowed his head over it, as for a moment he held it in his.

"I could not wait any longer," he said, softly. "I have entered like a thief into your house--but I have waited so long!"

"It is I who should ask for forgiveness," she said. "Emilius, be merciful to me and mine!"

"I have no thought of revenge," he said, in a voice as soft as her own. "I am a broken-down man, with one sole hope. But I could not stand before you, the Laretta I loved with the pure love of a brother, if I did not know myself unstained by crime or any taint of dishonour."

"I believe you, Emilius," she said.

"You believe me, Laretta!" he exclaimed, advancing a step towards her.

"I believe you, Emilius," she repeated.

Had he come with savage intent she could not more surely have disarmed him.

"It is more than I dared hope for," he said. "How often, Laretta, in the gloom of my prison, have I thought of you and your dear parents, of the home of innocence and love in which I was ever a welcome guest, of the once happy village in which I was honoured and respected. Some crumbs of comfort fell to my lot, some gleam of light shone through the darkness. Had it not been so, and had I not been animated by another hope, I might have gone mad. Good Father Daniel visited me regularly, at permitted intervals, until he died. He had the firmest faith in my innocence, and he brought me messages which fell like heavenly balm upon my wounded spirit. Your sainted mother believed in my innocence, and she bade him tell me so, and that her love for

me was unchanged. And now, you! But your mother's soul shines in your eyes. It could not have been otherwise." He paused a moment or two, reflecting what to say. "On one of Father Daniel's visits he brought me a letter, securely sealed. It was against the prison rules, but that did not deter him from doing what he deemed to be right. I hastily concealed it, noting first, however, with a beating heart, that it was addressed to me in my wife's handwriting. I asked him if he knew what it contained, and he answered 'No;' and then, with a grave face, he bade me prepare for solemn news. I felt at once what was coming. Can you divine my purpose, Laretta, in telling you this?"

"I think I can," she replied. "Go on."

"It was while the good priest was on a mission of mercy that a villager came to him and said that in a hut hard by a woman was dying, and, hearing that he was in the neighbourhood, begged him to come to her. Father Daniel went, and discovered that the woman was Patricia, my wife. She was very near to death, and she had only strength to entreat him to deliver to me, secretly, a letter she had written. He promised to do so, and in a few minutes after he received it from her she drew her last breath. Before she died he asked her after her babe--for Patricia was quite alone--but she did not seem to understand him. Subsequently, however, he learnt from the villager that Patricia had said her baby was dead. This was the mournful news which Father Daniel conveyed to me in prison. Despite his attempts at consolation, I felt when he left me that I was truly alone in the world. Brother, wife, child, all dead! I prayed to God to send death to me soon. What had I to live for? But there was my wife's letter, and before twenty-four hours had passed I found an opportunity to read it. Laretta, that letter informed me what had become of my child, and it laid upon me an obligation of secrecy for so long a time as I was in prison. Patricia solemnly adjured me not to breathe to a living soul that our child lived in your care; but I was to be released from this obligation when I was a free man. Then I was to act as it seemed to me right to act. Is there any need, Laretta, for me to enter more fully into the particulars of Patricia's letter?"

"There is no need, Emilius."

"Except, perhaps, to say that when you were lying senseless before her, and your tender blossom lay dead in its cradle, it was only then that the idea entered Patricia's mind of changing the children's clothes, and leaving her baby with you. It was done, and Patricia stole away with your dead child at her breast, herself to die, as she well knew, before many weeks had passed. I have something to tell you, Laretta"--and here Emilius's voice was charged with a new note of tenderness. "When Father Daniel next visited me I begged him to discover where the dead babe was buried, and to put a few flowers on the grave. The good priest did more. He paid a village woman to attend to it, and he left a small sum of money to be spent in beautifying the grave of your child. Flowers have grown upon it and around it from that day to this. I visited the grave before I set forth on my journey here, and I knelt and prayed there. I prayed a blessing upon you, Laretta, and I prayed that I might live to see the hope fulfilled which shone like a star upon me through the long years of my prison life. Laretta," he cried, stretching forth his trembling hands, "my child--my child"--

"She lives," sobbed Mrs. Carew, "in goodness, health, and beauty--a flower of sweetness!"

He fell upon his knees before her, and kissed her dress, and it was then I heard a sound without which, for a moment, transfixed me with terror. They, overwhelmed by emotion, were deaf to this sound. It was that of a man creeping stealthily from his chamber--and that man Gabriel Carew. Quickly recovering myself, and feeling the necessity for immediate and prompt action, I addressed Emilius and Mrs. Carew.

"Attend to me," I said impressively. "All is well with you. You, Emilius, have gained a daughter, and will embrace her at sunrise. You, dear lady, have not lost a daughter, for Mildred will be to you as she has ever been. I have proved myself your friend. Answer quickly--have I not?"

"Yes," they both replied.

"Do not, therefore, ask me for the reasons for my present action. I demand from you both a sacred promise--that you will not leave this room till I call for you, till I give you permission. It shall be given at the latest by sunrise. I must have this promise--I must!"

My voice, my manner, Mrs. Carew's fears for her husband, and confidence in me, compelled assent.

"We give it," she said.

"We give it," said Emilius.

"I accept it, and bind you to it. What I do is for the good of all--for your future, for Mildred's future--and to avert disaster. Only I can do this. Whatever you hear, you will not open this door without my permission, after I leave it. When I am gone, turn the key, and admit no one unless I desire it. It is understood?"

"Yes," they said, "it is understood."

As I closed the door behind me I heard the key turned in the lock.

XXVIII.

The sound of soft footsteps proceeded, as I supposed, from Gabriel Carew, but to my surprise he was not coming towards the room I had just left, but was stealthily ascending the stairs which led to Mildred's room. His eyes were open, and his movements were dictated by intelligent caution, but he was asleep. In his left hand he carried the naked dagger.

I ran up the stairs softly and swiftly, heedless of danger to myself, and walked by his side. He took no notice of me. Standing by the door of Mildred's room he paused, and was about to put his hand to the handle when I seized his wrist.

"What are you about to do?" I whispered, my lips close to his ear. "Speak low, the house must not be disturbed."

To my horror, he replied, in a whisper as low and distinct as my own: "'Our race must die with him; not one must live after him to perpetuate it. I lay this injunction most solemnly upon him; if he violate it he will be an incredible monster.'"

They were the words written by his father which he had already quoted to me earlier in the day.

"Your daughter is not in that room," I said, not raising my voice, grateful that we had as yet attracted no notice. "If you enter, your purpose will be frustrated."

"Who speaks to me?" he asked.

"The spirit of murder," I said. "The Devil who is leading your soul to perdition. Come with me. I will direct you aright."

He shuddered, but he did not hesitate. With my hand still firmly grasping his wrist, he allowed me to lead him from the room. We descended the stairs, slowly, stealthily, until we reached the landing upon which the study was situated. I led him into the room, and with lightning motion locked the door and plucked out the key. Then, uncertain how next to act, I took my hand from his wrist, and retreated a few steps. He, also, was now uncertain of his movements. He stood still a while, then tried the door, and finding it fast, took some halting steps this way and that, and finally fell into the chair in which he had been accustomed to write.

As I gazed upon him I was sensible of a gradual change in his appearance. A pallor crept into his face, a film seemed to come across his eyes. Alarmed, I grasped his shoulder with rough strength, and shook him violently.

"Mr. Carew!" I called.

He trembled in every limb, closed his eyes, and clasped them with his hands--in one of which he still held the dagger. Presently he removed his hands from his face, and looked confusedly at me.

"Are you awake?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied faintly. "Give me a glass of water."

I gave him a full glass, and he drained it. I observed as he did so that it was only by an effort he prevented it from slipping from his hand. Then he spoke again.

"How came I here?" he asked. "Skilful as you are in your profession, you can do nothing for me. How came I here?"

"I conducted you hither," I said, "from the door of Mildred's room. You have a dagger in your hand."

Until this moment he seemed to be unconscious that he held the weapon, and now he started and allowed it to drop to the ground.

"Give thanks to God," I said solemnly, "that I stepped forward in time to save the life of an innocent child."

"Great God!" he murmured. "It is fit that I should die!"

The silver chimes of the clock proclaimed the hour of two. He smiled piteously and gratefully, and said, "It is almost time."

"There is a hidden meaning in your words," I said. "What have you done?"

"Doctor, you are wrong. There is no hidden meaning in my words. All is clear and plain. What should I do to myself? What should be done to such a man as I? You are not deceiving me. You found me, you say, at the door of my daughter's room, with the dagger in my hand?"

"It is true."

"Then my purpose was murder. What further confirmation is needed of the truth of my father's revelation? Be thankful, doctor, that your son Reginald has escaped from my daughter, my miserable, unhappy child. Ah, me! Whose fate is the heaviest, hers or mine, or the innocent flower I married?"

"I can give you some comfort," I said. "In one respect I can set your heart at ease."

"Impossible, impossible!" he cried.

"Not so. I have that to relate which though at first it may cause you pain, cannot fail, upon reflection, to make you grateful. If I were to tell you that you have not transmitted to an innocent girl the fatal inheritance which has weighed like a curse upon your life, how would it be with you?"

"It would be heaven--it would be light! Unconscious sinner as I am, it might mean forgiveness!"

"I have been closeted with your wife, from whose lips I have heard what you should hear. You will listen to me?"

"Will you be long?" he asked, with a strange smile.

"I will be as brief as possible--and receive it from me, as I received it from your wife, that every word I utter is true."

I told him the story of Mildred, who until now he had believed to be his daughter. Perceiving that he was ill, I shortened it as much as possible. Once or twice I paused in my recital, and asked him if he was in pain.

"In pain!" he cried. "When you are bringing heaven to me! The agitation you observe in me proceeds from joy. Do not linger. Finish quickly, quickly!"

At the chiming of the half-hour my story was done. There was a happy light in Carew's eyes. White as his face had grown, peace had stolen into it.

"Oh, God, I thank Thee!" he murmured, raising his arms; and then he suddenly fell forward on his face.

"I raised his head, and assisted him into a recumbent position.

"Tell me, for heaven's sake, what you have done?" I cried.

"You shall know all," he gasped, with pauses between his words. "First, though ... about Emilius . . . you went to seek him, did you not? . . . He was to be here to-morrow ..."

"He is here now," I said, "in this house. It was to recover his daughter that he came to England."

"Do not leave me.... When I went to bed to-night ... and kissed my angel wife ... for the last time ... I thought never to wake again.... It is painless.... In my old wanderings I came across a man we talked of death ... how easy ... I kept it by me ... through all these years.... It will defy you, doctor ... no trace remains ... the subtlest poison, the easiest death.... It has served me well. Go quickly, and bring Emilius.... Not my angel wife.... There is no pain.... Thank God, my life is ended! Go ... Emilius!"

I flew from the room, and returned with Emilius. Gabriel Carew lay back in his chair, motionless. The terror of death was not in his face. But he was dead!

* * * * *

It was popularly supposed that he died from heart disease. There were in him no indications of having died from other than natural causes. What I knew I kept to myself. Not alone what I gathered from his own lips as to the manner of his death, but of the last incident of his dream-life, and of my providentially saving him from the commission of an awful crime.

* * * * *

A great number of mourners stood about his grave. Until that time, it was not known how wide and large had been his charities. Even his wife had been in ignorance of countless deeds of

goodness which he had done in secret. There were men and women there whom he had snatched from poverty and despair, and who now brought flowers to drop into the last resting place of their benefactor. Children, too, were lifted up to look into the grave of the master of Rosemullion.

Emilius stood bareheaded by my side.

"God forgive him!" said Emilius.

* * * * *

The disclosure of Mildred's real parentage made no difference in the relations between her and Mrs. Carew. It was mother and daughter with them, as it had always been, and even some additional and subtle tie of new tenderness was added to the feelings of love for each other which will animate their hearts till the last hours of their lives.

No one in the county, with the exception of ourselves, is acquainted with the story of Emilius. A dignified, gentle-mannered gentleman, he quickly won the esteem of all who came in contact with him. There often reigns in his face a strange expression of sadness, and he sometimes speaks to me of Eric; but there is joy in his life, and he is grateful for it.

The marriage of Mildred and Reginald was postponed for a decent time, and then these young people were made happy, and sent upon their honeymoon, accompanied by blessings and tears and heartfelt wishes for good.

As I prepare to end my task I see in my mind's eye the form of one who, in every act of her life, in every gentle word that falls from her lips, has sanctified for me the name of Woman. Not only in idea, but in deed. "God bless Mrs. Carew!" is said by many out of her hearing, and if to live a good pure life will earn God's blessing, she has earned it, and it is hers.

THE END.

**Richard Clay And Sons
London And Bungay.**

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A SECRET INHERITANCE (VOLUME 3 OF 3)

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