

## The Project Gutenberg eBook of Little Nobody, by Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org). If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: Little Nobody

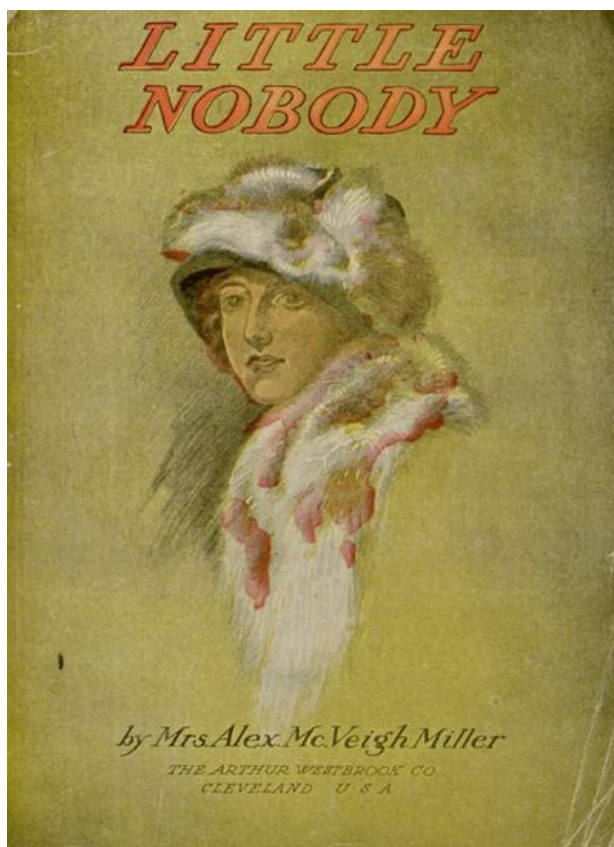
Author: Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller

Release date: September 25, 2014 [EBook #46958]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Demian Katz and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net> (Images courtesy of the Digital Library@Villanova University (<http://digital.library.villanova.edu/>))

\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LITTLE NOBODY \*\*\*



---

# LITTLE NOBODY

BY

MRS. ALEX. McVEIGH MILLER

---

HART SERIES No. 53

---

COPYRIGHT 1886 BY GEORGE MUNRO.

PUBLISHED BY  
THE ARTHUR WESTBROOK COMPANY  
CLEVELAND, O., U. S. A.

---

## **LITTLE NOBODY.**

---

### **CONTENTS**

[CHAPTER I.](#)  
[CHAPTER II.](#)  
[CHAPTER III.](#)  
[CHAPTER IV.](#)  
[CHAPTER V.](#)  
[CHAPTER VI.](#)  
[CHAPTER VII.](#)  
[CHAPTER VIII.](#)  
[CHAPTER IX.](#)  
[CHAPTER X.](#)  
[CHAPTER XI.](#)  
[CHAPTER XII.](#)  
[CHAPTER XIII.](#)  
[CHAPTER XIV.](#)  
[CHAPTER XV.](#)  
[CHAPTER XVI.](#)  
[CHAPTER XVII.](#)  
[CHAPTER XVIII.](#)  
[CHAPTER XIX.](#)  
[CHAPTER XX.](#)  
[CHAPTER XXI.](#)  
[CHAPTER XXII.](#)  
[CHAPTER XXIII.](#)  
[CHAPTER XXIV.](#)  
[CHAPTER XXV.](#)  
[CHAPTER XXVI.](#)  
[CHAPTER XXVII.](#)  
[CHAPTER XXVIII.](#)  
[CHAPTER XXIX.](#)  
[CHAPTER XXX.](#)  
[CHAPTER XXXI.](#)  
[CHAPTER XXXII.](#)  
[CHAPTER XXXIII.](#)  
[CHAPTER XXXIV.](#)  
[CHAPTER XXXV.](#)  
[CHAPTER XXXVI.](#)  
[CHAPTER XXXVII.](#)  
[CHAPTER XXXVIII.](#)  
[CHAPTER XXXIX.](#)  
[CHAPTER XL.](#)  
[CHAPTER XLI.](#)  
[CHAPTER XLII.](#)  
[CHAPTER XLIII.](#)  
[CHAPTER XLIV.](#)  
[CHAPTER XLV.](#)  
[CHAPTER XLVI.](#)  
[CHAPTER XLVII.](#)  
[CHAPTER XLVIII.](#)

---

**CHAPTER I.**

He was a Northern journalist, and it was in the interest of his paper that he found himself, one bright March morning, in New Orleans, almost dazed by the rapidity with which he had been whirled from the ice and snow of the frozen North to the sunshine and flowers of the sunny South.

He was charmed with the quaint and unique Crescent City. It was a totally different world from that in which he had been reared—a summer land, warm, indolent, luxurious, where one plucked the golden oranges from the dark-green boughs, laden at once with flowers and fruit, and where the senses were taken captive by the sensuous perfume of rare flowers that, in his Northern land, grew only within the confines of the close conservatory. Then, too, the dark, handsome faces of the people, and their mixture of foreign tongues, had their own peculiar charm. Nothing amused him so much as a stroll through the antique French Market, with its lavish abundance of tropic vegetables, fruits, and flowers, vended by hucksters of different nationalities in the Babel of languages that charmed his ear with the languorous softness of the Southern accent.

He had a letter of introduction to a member of the Jockey Club, and this famous organization at once adopted him, and, as he phrased it, "put him through." The theaters, the carnival, the races, all whirled past in a blaze of splendor never to be forgotten; for it was at the famous Metairie Race-course that he first met Mme. Lorraine.

[Pg 6]

But you must not think, reader, because I forgot to tell you his name at first, that he is the Little Nobody of my story. He was not little at all, but tall and exceedingly well-favored, and signed his name Eliot Van Zandt.

Mme. Lorraine was a retired actress—ballet-dancer, some said. She was a French woman, airy and charming, like the majority of her race. The Jockey Club petted her, although they freely owned that she was a trifle fast, and did not have the *entr e* of some of the best houses in the city. However, there were some nice, fashionable people not so strait-laced who sent her cards to their f tes, and now and then accepted return invitations, so that it could not be said that she was outside the pale of society.

Mme. Lorraine took a fancy to the good-looking Yankee, as she dubbed him, and gave him *carte blanche* to call at her *bijou* house in Esplanade Street. He accepted with outward eagerness and inward indifference. He was too familiar with women of her type at the North—fast, frivolous, and avaricious—to be flattered by her notice or her invitation.

"She may do for the rich Jockey Club, but her acquaintance is too expensive a luxury for a poor devil of a newspaper correspondent," he told the Club. "She has card-parties, of course, and I am too poor to gamble."

Pierre Carmontelle laughed, and told him to call in the afternoon, when there was no gambling in the *recherch * saloon.

"To see madame at home, informally, with her little savage, would be rich, *mon ami*. You would get a spicy paragraph for your newspaper," he said.

"Her little savage?"

"Do not ask me any questions, for I shall not answer," said Carmontelle, still laughing. "Perhaps Remond there will gratify your curiosity. The little vixen flung her tiny slipper into his face once when he tried to kiss her, under the influence of a *soup on* too much of madame's foamy champagne."

[Pg 7]

"Madame's daughter, perhaps?" said Van Zandt, looking at Remond; but the latter only scowled and muttered, under his breath:

"The little demon!"

He thought they were guying him, and decided not to call in Esplanade Street.

But it was only one week later that he saw Mme. Lorraine again at Metairie. Her carriage was surrounded by admirers, and she was betting furiously on the racing, but she found time to see the Yankee and beckon him importunately with her dainty, tan-kidded hand.

They made way for him to come to her where she sat among her silken cushions, resplendent in old-gold satin, black lace, and Mar chal Niel roses, her beautiful, brilliant face wreathed in smiles, her toilet so perfectly appointed that she looked barely twenty-five, although the Club admitted that she must be past forty.

"It is fifteen years since Lorraine married her off the stage, and she had been starring it ten years before he ever saw her," said Carmontelle, confidentially.

The big, almond-shaped dark eyes flashed reproachfully, as she said, with her prettiest *moue*:

"You naughty Yankee, you have not called!"

"I have been too busy," he fibbed; "but I am coming this evening."

"*Quel plaisir!*" she exclaimed, and then the racing distracted their attention again.

The blaze of sunshine fell on one of the gayest scenes ever witnessed. The old race-course was surrounded by thousands upon thousands of people in carriages, on horseback, and afoot. The grand stand was packed with a living mass.

The tropical beauty and rich costumes of the Louisiana ladies lent glow and brilliancy to the exciting scene. The racing was superb, and men and women were betting freely on their favorites. Gloves and jewels and thousands of dollars were won and lost that day.

[Pg 8]

The most interesting event of the day was on. A purse of gold had been offered for the most skillful and daring equestrienne, and the fair contestants were ranged before the judge's stand, magnificently mounted on blooded steeds curveting with impatient ardor, their silver-mounted trappings glistening in the sunlight, and their handsome riders clothed faultlessly in habits of dark rich cloth fitting like a glove. It was truly a splendid sight, and the Jockey Club immediately went wild, and cheered as if they would split their throats. Even Mme. Lorraine brought her gloved hands impetuously together as the five beauties rode dauntlessly forward.

"Jove! how magnificent!" Carmontelle burst forth. "But, madame, look!" excitedly. "Who is that little tot on the Arab so like your own? Heavens! it is—it is—" Without completing the sentence, he fell back convulsed with laughter.

Every one was looking eagerly at the slip of a girl on the back of the beautiful, shiny-coated Arab. She rode skillfully, with daring grace, yet reckless *abandon*—a girl, a child almost, the lissom, budding figure sitting erect and motionless in the saddle, a stream of ruddy golden hair flying behind her on the breeze, the small, white face staring straight before her as she swept on impetuously to the victory that every one was proclaiming would perch upon her banner.

Mme. Lorraine's face paled with blended dismay and anger. She muttered, loud enough for the Yankee to overhear:

"*Mon Dieu!* the daring little hussy! She shall pay for this escapade!"

But to her admirers she exclaimed, a moment later, with a careless, significant shrug of the shoulders: [Pg 9]

"She has stolen a march upon me. But, pshaw! it is nothing for her, the little savage! You should have seen her mother, the bare-back rider, galloping at her highest speed and jumping through the hoops in the ring!"

"*Vive* the little savage!" cried Remond, his dark face relaxing into enthusiasm. "She has stolen a march upon you, indeed, madame, has she not?"

Madame frowned and retorted, sharply:

"Yes, monsieur; but I will make her pay for this! The idea of her racing my Arab, my splendid Arab, that I care for so guardedly! Why, one of his slender hoofs is worth more to me than the girl's whole body! Oh, yes, I will make her pay!"

The journalist's dancing gray eyes turned on her face curiously.

"She belongs to you?"

"In a way, yes," madame answered, with a sharp, unpleasant laugh. "Her mother, my maid, had the bad taste to die in my employ and leave the baggage on my hands. She has grown up in my house like an unchecked weed, and has furnished some amusement for the Jockey Club."

"As a sort of Daughter of the Regiment," said one, laughing; but madame frowned the more darkly.

"Nonsense, Markham," she said, shortly. "Do not put such notions into Monsieur Van Zandt's head. Let him understand, once for all, she is a cipher, a little nobody."

She did not quite understand the gleam in the dark-gray eyes, but he smiled carelessly enough, and replied:

"At least she is very brave."

"A madcap," madame answered, shortly; and just then a shriek of triumph from a thousand throats rent the air. The meteor-like figure of the golden-haired girl on the flying Arab had distanced every competitor, and the applause was tremendous. In the midst of it all she reined in her gallant steed a moment before the judges' stand, then, before the dust cleared away, she was galloping rapidly off the grounds, followed by every eye among them all; while Mme. Lorraine, beneath an indifferent air, concealed a hidden volcano of wrath and passion. [Pg 10]

She stayed for the rest of the races, but her mind was only half upon them now, and she made some wild bets, and lost every stake. She could think of nothing but the daring girl who had taken her own Selim, her costly, petted Arab, and ridden him before her eyes in that wild race in which she had won such a signal victory.

---

## CHAPTER II.

Van Zandt determined to keep his promise to call in Esplanade Street that evening. He felt a languid curiosity over Mme. Lorraine's charge, the daring girl whose whole young body was worth less to madame than one of the slender hoofs of her favorite Selim.

He arrived early, and was ushered into an exquisite little salon all in olive and gold—fit setting for madame's ripe, dusky beauty. She was alone, looking magnificent in ruby velvet with cream lace garnishing and ruby jewelry, and the smile with which she received him was welcome itself.

"Ah, *mon ami!* I was wondering if you would really come," she said, archly. "Sit here beside me, and tell me how you enjoyed the day?"

She swept aside her glowing draperies, and gave him a seat by her side on the olive satin sofa. He accepted it with an odd sensation of disappointment, despite her luring beauty and the sensuous comfort and luxury of the room, whose air was heavy with the perfume of flowers in vases and pots all about them.

He thought, disappointedly:

[Pg 11]

"Am I not to see her Little Nobody?"

Apparently not, for no one entered, and madame sat contentedly by his side, talking arch nothings to him, fluttering her fan coquettishly, and laughing at his careless repartee. Not a word all the while of her whom madame had sworn should pay for her madcap freak of to-day.

By and by came Carmontelle, Remond, and Markham. They laughed at finding Van Zandt before them.

"But, madame, where is your Little Nobody?" queried the gay Carmontelle. "We are come to lay our hearts at her feet. Know that she has supplanted you in the adoration of the Jockey Club. Her victory to-day makes us all her slaves."

Madame gave utterance to a light, mocking laugh as she touched the gilded bell-cord close to her hand, and all eyes turned to the door. Five, almost ten, minutes passed, then it was softly opened, and a girl came in with a silver salver heaped high with luscious tropical fruit.

Van Zandt recognized her as the winner of the race by the wealth of tawny golden hair that flowed down her back below her slim, girlish waist. He waited, with his eyes on the strange young face, for madame to speak some words of introduction, but none came. Just as any other servant might have entered, so was this girl permitted to enter. The fellows from the Jockey Club nodded familiarly at her, and received a sulky stare in return as she dispensed her fruit among them with impatient courtesy.

When she paused, last of all, before Mme. Lorraine, with her salver of fruit, she seemed first to observe the tall, fair man by her side. She started and fixed her big, solemn, dark eyes half wonderingly upon him, and for a second they gazed silently and curiously at each other.

He saw a girl of fifteen or so, very *petite* for her age, and made to look more so by the fashion of her dress, which consisted mainly of a loosely fashioned white embroidered slip, low in the neck, short in the sleeves, and so short in the skirt that it reached the verge of immodesty by betraying much more than the conventional limit of the tapering ankles and rounded limbs. Madame had evidently aimed more at picturesqueness than propriety in choosing her dress, and she had certainly attained her point. Anything more full of unstudied grace and unconscious beauty than the little serving-maid it would be hard to imagine. The contrast of tawny golden hair with dark eyes and slender, jetty brows, with features molded in the most bewitching lines, and form as perfect as a sculptor's model, made up a *tout ensemble* very pleasing to the journalist's observant eyes. There was but one defect, and that was a certain sullenness of eyes and expression that bespoke a fiery spirit at bay, a nature full of repressed fire and passion ready to burst into lava-flame at a touch, a word.

[Pg 12]

For her she saw a man of twenty-five or six, tall, manly, and handsome in a splendid intellectual fashion, with fair hair clustered above a grand white brow, blue-gray eyes bright and laughing, a fair mustache ornamenting lips at once firm and sweet, a chin that was grave and full of power in spite of the womanish dimple that cleft it—altogether a most attractive face, and one that influenced her subtly, for some of the sullenness faded from her face, and with brightening eyes she exclaimed, with all the freedom of a child:

"Oh, I know you at sight! You are madame's handsome Yankee, *n'est ce pas?*"

He rose, laughing, and with his most elaborate bow.

"Eliot Van Zandt, at your service," he said. "Yes, I am the Yankee. And you?"

He saw the sullen gleam come back into her eyes, as she answered curtly, and, as it seemed, with repressed wrath:

"Oh. I am Little Nobody, madame says. I have always been too poor to have even a name. Have some fruit, please."

[Pg 13]

Madame tittered behind her elaborate fan, and the members of the Jockey Club exchanged glances. Eliot took an orange mechanically, and then the girl put the salver down and turned to go.

But Mme. Lorraine's dark eyes looked over the top of her fan with sarcastic amusement.

"Remain," she said, with cold brevity; and the girl flung herself angrily down into a chair, with her hands crossed and her tiny slippers dangling. With uplifted eyes she studied intently the face of the stranger.

"Handsome, is he, madcap?" at length queried Carmontelle, full of amusement.

The large eyes turned on his face scornfully.

"Handsome than any of the ugly old Jockey Club!" she replied, with decision.

"We shall all be very jealous of this Yankee," said Markham. "Here we have been adoring you ever since you were a baby, ma'amselle, and you throw us over in a bunch for the sake of this charming stranger. You are cruel, unjust." He began to hum, softly, meaningly:

"Do not trust him, gentle lady,  
Though his words be low and sweet;  
Heed not him that kneels before thee,  
Gently pleading at thy feet."

The song went no further, for the girl looked at him with large eyes of sarcastic amusement and said, curtly:

"If I had such an atrocious voice as yours, I should not try to sing."

A sally of laughter greeted the words, and the sulky countenance relaxed into a smile.

Van Zandt studied the young face closely, his artistic taste charmed by its bright, warm beauty, full of Southern fire and passion.

"How came she, the nameless child of a circus-rider, by her dower of high-bred, faultless beauty?" he thought, in wonder, noticing the dainty white hands, the [Pg 14]

"Delicate Arab arch of her feet,  
And the grace that, light and bright as the crest  
Of a peacock, sits on her shining head;  
And she knows it not. Oh, if she knew it!  
To know her beauty might half undo it."

Mme. Lorraine, at his side, watched him with lowered lids and compressed lips. At last, tapping his arm with her fan, and smiling archly, she said, in an under-tone:

"Beautiful, is she not, *mon ami*? But—that is all. Her mind is a void, a blank—capable of nothing but the emotions of anger or hatred, the same as the brute creation. I have tried to educate her into a companion, but in vain; so she can never be more than a pretty toy to me—no more nor less than my Maltese kitten or my Spitz puppy, although I like to see her about me, the same as I love all beautiful things."

He heard her in amazement. Soulless—that beautiful, spirited-looking creature! Could it be? He saw the dark eyes lighten as the men began to praise her dauntless riding that day. They were very expressive, those large, almond-shaped eyes. Surely a soul dwelt behind those dark-fringed lids.

Some one proposed cards, and madame assented with alacrity, without seeing Eliot Van Zandt's gesture of disgust. He refused point-blank to take a hand in the game, and said, with reckless audacity:

"Do not mind me; I am always unlucky at play; so I will amuse myself instead with Little Nobody."

Her eyes flashed, but when Mme. Lorraine vacated the seat upon the sofa, she came over and took it, not with any appearance of forwardness, but as a simple matter of course. Then, looking up at him, she said, with child-like directness:

"And so you are a Yankee? I am surprised. I have always hated the Yankees, you know. My father was a Confederate soldier, madame says. He was killed the last year of the war, just a month before I was born." [Pg 15]

Mme. Lorraine looked around with a dark frown, but Van Zandt pretended not to see it as he answered:

"Do you mean that you will not have me for your friend, ma'amselle, because I was born in Boston, and because my father fell fighting for the Stars and Stripes?"

"A friend? What is that, monsieur?" she queried, naïvely; and Markham, to whom the conversation was perfectly audible from his corner of the card-table, looked around, and said, teasingly:

"It is something that you will never be able to keep, ma'amselle, by reason of your pretty face. All your friends will become your lovers."

"Hold your tongue, Colonel Markham; I was not talking to you, and it's ill manners to break into a conversation," said the girl, shortly.

She broke off a white camellia from a vase near her, and held it lightly between her taper fingers as she again addressed herself to the journalist:

"I like your word 'friend.' It has a nice sound. But I don't quite understand."

"I must try to explain it to you," he replied, smiling. "I may tell you, since Markham has broached the subject, that the poets have said that friendship is love in disguise, but the dictionary gives it a more prosaic meaning. Let us find it as it is in Webster."

"Webster?" stammeringly, and Mme. Lorraine looked around with her disagreeably sarcastic laugh.

"Monsieur Van Zandt, you bewilder my little savage. She can not read."

But a light of comprehension flashed instantly into the puzzled eyes. She pulled Eliot's sleeve.

"You mean books. Come, you will find plenty in the library." [Pg 16]

He followed her into the pretty room beyond the olive satin *portière*, where they found plenty of books indeed. She pointed to them, and looked at him helplessly.

He found Webster on the top shelf of a rich inlaid book-case, and was half-stifled with dust as he drew it down from the spot where it had rested undisturbed for years. He sneezed vigorously, and his companion hastened to dust it off with her tiny handkerchief.

"Now!" she said, anxiously, spreading the big book open on a table before him.

---

### CHAPTER III.

The leaves fluttered with her hasty movement, and a folded sheet of parchment fell out upon the floor. As he turned the pages to the F's she picked up the paper and held it in her hands, looking curiously at the bold, clear superscription on the back, and the big red seal; but it told nothing to her uneducated eyes, and with an unconscious sigh, she pushed it back into the dictionary, her hand touching his in the movement and sending an odd thrill of pleasure along his nerves.

He read aloud, in his clear, full tones:

"FRIEND.—One who, entertaining for another sentiments of esteem, respect, and affection, from personal predilection, seeks his society and welfare; a well-wisher, an intimate associate."

She stood by him, her hands resting on the table, trembling with pleasure, her face glowing.

"It is beautiful," she exclaimed. "I thought the word sounded very sweet. And—you—you want to be my friend?"

The most finished coquette might have envied the artless naïveté of her look and tone, yet she was [Pg 17]

"Too innocent for coquetry,  
Too fond for idle scorning."

Touched by this new side of her character, he put his hand impulsively on the little one resting close by his on the table with a gentle pressure.

"Child, I will be your friend if you will let me," he said, in a gentle tone, and not dreaming of all to which that promise was swiftly leading.

"I shall be so glad," she said, in a voice so humble, and with so tender a face, that the people in the other room would scarce have recognized her as the little savage and vixen they called her.

But Pierre Carmontelle, always full of mischief and banter, had deliberately sauntered in, and heard the compact of friendship between the two who, until to-night, had been utter strangers. He gave his friend a quizzical smile.

"Ever heard of Moore's 'Temple to Friendship,' Van Zandt?" he inquired, dryly. "Let me recall it to your mind."

He brought a book from a stand near by, opened it, and read aloud, with dry significance, in his clear voice:

"'A Temple to Friendship,' said Laura, enchanted,  
'I'll build in this garden—the thought is divine!'  
Her temple was built, and she now only wanted  
An image of Friendship to place on the shrine.  
She flew to a sculptor who sat down before her  
A Friendship the fairest his art could invent;  
But so cold and so dull that the youthful adorer  
Saw plainly this was not the idol she meant.

"'Oh, never!' she cried, 'could I think of enshrining  
An image whose looks are so joyless and dim;  
But you, little god, upon roses reclining,  
We'll make, if you please sir, a Friendship of him.'  
So the bargain was struck; with the little god laden,  
She joyfully flew to her shrine in the grove;  
'Farewell,' said the sculptor, 'you're not the first maiden  
Who came but for Friendship and took away Love!'"

[Pg 18]

He shut the book and laughed, for he had the satisfaction of seeing a warm flush mount to the temples of the young journalist, but the girl, so young, so ignorant, so strangely beautiful, looked at him unabashed. Evidently she knew no more of love than she did of friendship. They were alike meaningless terms to her uncultured mind. Frowning impatiently, she said:

"Carmontelle, why did you intrude upon us here? I wanted to talk to Monsieur Van Zandt."

"And I, ma'amselle, wanted to talk to you. Madame Lorraine was very angry with you for racing Selim to-day. What did she do to you?"

The large eyes brightened angrily, and a hot rose-flush broke through the creamy pallor of her

oval cheek.

"Beat me!" she said, bitterly.

"No!" from both men in a shocked tone.

"But yes," she replied, with a sudden return of sullenness. With a swift movement she drew the mass of hair from her white shoulders, which she pushed up out of her low dress with a childish movement.

"Look at the marks on my back," she said.

They did look, and shuddered at the sight. The thick tresses of hair had hidden the long, livid marks of a cruel lash on the white flesh. There were a dozen or so of stripes, and the flesh was cut in some places till the blood had oozed through.

The girl's eyes flashed, and she clinched her little hands tightly.

"I hate that woman!" she muttered, fiercely. "Oh, it is cruel, cruel, to be nobody, to have no one but her, to be nothing but a pretty plaything, as she calls me, like her Spitz and her cat, her parrot and monkey! I mean to run away. It was for that I rode to-day—to win the gold—but—"

[Pg 19]

"But—what?" said Van Zandt, huskily.

She answered with passionate pride:

"When she beat me—when she flung my poverty in my face—when she said I should be starving but for her bread—I flung the purse of gold down at her feet—to—to—pay!"

The hard glitter of the dark eyes dissolved in quick tears. She dropped the golden tresses back on her lacerated shoulders, flung her arms before her face, and hard, choking sobs shook the slight, young form. The two men gazed on her, pale, moved, speechless.

Eliot Van Zandt thought of his fair, young sisters, scarcely older than this girl, on whose lovely frames the winds of heaven were scarce permitted to blow roughly. Why, if any one had struck Maud or Edith such a blow, he should have sent a bullet through his heart, so fierce would be his anger.

He looked at Carmontelle.

"Monsieur Lorraine—does he permit this?" he asked, indignantly.

"Lorraine had been in a mad-house fourteen years—sent there by the madness of jealousy," was the unexpected reply.

Madame's gay, shrill laugh rang out from the salon where she was winning golden eagles from her friends. The journalist shuddered and wondered if the brilliant woman ever remembered the man gone insane for her sake.

Ma'amselle's hard, bitter sobs ceased suddenly as they had begun. She dashed the tears from her eyes, and said, with bitter resignation:

"*N'importe!* It is not the first time—perhaps it may not be the last. But, *mon Dieu*, it is better to be only her plaything, petted one moment, whipped the next, as she does her mischievous monkey and snarling puppy. She says she should make me live in the kitchen if I were ugly instead of being so pretty. She wants everything about her to be pretty. But, say nothing of all this, you two," lifting a warning taper finger. "It could do no good—she would only beat me more."

[Pg 20]

"Too true!" assented Pierre Carmontelle, sadly.

---

## CHAPTER IV.

They returned to the salon, and Mme. Lorraine flung down her cards and arose.

"Messieurs, I will give you your revenge another time. Now I must give some attention to my Northern friend. Come, Monsieur Van Zandt, let me show you my garden by moonlight."

She slipped her hand through his arm and led him through a side-door and out into a tropical garden bathed in a full flood of summer moonlight. Carmontelle drew Little Nobody out by the hand. Markham and Remond followed.

To Van Zandt's unaccustomed eyes the scene was full of weird, delicious splendor. Fountains sparkled in the moonlight, watering the stems of tall, graceful palm-trees and massive live-oaks, whose gigantic branches were draped in wide, trailing banners of funereal-gray moss. Immense green ferns bordered the basins of the fountains, white lilies nodded on tall, leafy stems, roses vied with orange-blossoms in filling the air with fragrance, and passion-flowers climbed tall trellises and flung their large flowers lavishly to the breeze. Madame, with her jeweled hand clinging to Van Zandt's arm, her jewels gleaming, walked along the graveled paths in advance of the rest, talking to him in her gay fashion that was odd and enchanting from its pretty mixture of broken French and English, interlarded here and there with a Spanish phrase. She was bent on subduing the heart of the young journalist, his coldness and indifference having roused her to a fatal pique and interest—fatal because her love was like the poisonous upas-tree, blighting all that it touched.

[Pg 21]



She had brought him out here for a purpose. In the soft, delusive moonlight she looked fair and young as a woman of twenty, and here she could weave her Circean spells the best. She became soft and sentimental with her light badinage. Bits of poetry flowed over the crimson lips, the dark eyes were raised to his often, coyly and sweetly, the jeweled hand slipped until her throbbing wrist rested lightly on his. Every gracious, cunning art of coquetry was employed, and the victim seemed very willing indeed to be won.

But when they bantered him next day he laughed with the rest.

"*Ad nauseam!*" he replied, boldly.

---

But he went again that night to Esplanade Street, drawn by an indefinable power to the presence of the cruel, beautiful woman and her fawn-like, lovely dependent.

"Madame Lorraine was engaged, but she would come to him soon," said the sleek page who admitted him to the salon, which a quick glance showed him was quite deserted.

He waited awhile, then grew weary of the stillness and silence, and went out through the open side-door into the charming garden.

The quiet walks gave back no echo of his firm tread as he paused and threw himself upon a rustic bench beside a tinkling fountain, but presently from beyond the great live-oak with its gray moss drapery there came to him the sound of a clear, sweet voice.

"The little ma'amselle," he thought, at first, and deemed it no harm to listen.

"It is a bargain, then, monsieur. You take the girl, and I am a thousand dollars richer. *Ciel!* but what a rare revenge I shall have for yesterday;" and Mme. Lorraine's low laugh, not sweet and coquettish now, but full of cruel venom, rang out on the evening air. [Pg 22]

The night was warm, but Eliot Van Zandt shuddered through all his strong, proud frame, as the voice of Remond answered:

"Revenge—ha! ha! Mine shall be gained, too. How I hate and love the little savage in one breath, and I have sworn she shall pay for that slipper flung in my face. It is a costly price, but to gratify love and hate alike I will not stop at the cost."

"You are right. Once I refused when you asked for her because I prized my pretty, innocent, ignorant toy. But yesterday the fires of hell were kindled in my breast. She is no longer a child. When she rode Selim there amid the plaudits of thousands, she became my rival, hated and dreaded, and I swore she should pay for her triumph at bitter cost. Last night did you see her with Van Zandt, her sly coquetry, her open preference? In her sleep, as she lay coiled on her cot, she murmured his name and smiled. It was enough. I swore I would hesitate no longer. I would give you your will."

Rooted to his seat with horror, Van Zandt sat speechless, his blood curdling at Remond's demoniac laugh.

"You have a *penchant* for the quill-driver?" scoffingly said the Frenchman.

"He is a new sensation. His indifference piques me to conquer him"—carelessly; "but to the point. I will drug her to sleep to-night, and you shall carry her off. Bring a carriage at midnight—all shall be ready."

"Done! But when they ask for her—for the Jockey Club has gone wild with admiration over the little vixen—what can you say?"

"I overheard her last night threatening to run away. She was in the library with Carmontelle and the Yankee. What more easy than to say she has carried out her threat?" [Pg 23]

Their low, jubilant laughter echoed in the young journalist's ear like the mirth of fiends. There was a promise of money that night, injunctions of caution and secrecy; then the conspirators swept away toward the house, and Van Zandt remained there, in the shadowy night, unseen, unsuspected, brooding over what he had heard uttered behind the drooping veil of long, gray moss.

Carmontelle had said, laughingly, that a visit to madame and her little savage would furnish a spicy paragraph for his paper. He thought, grimly, that here was the item with a vengeance.

Oh! to think of that heartless woman and man, and of the simple, ignorant, lovely child bartered to shame for the sake of a fiendish revenge! The blood in his veins ran hotly, as if turned to fire.

"My God! I must do something," he muttered, and then started with a stifled cry of alarm.

From among the shrubberies close by something had started up with a sobbing cry. It ran toward him, and fell down at his feet; it was poor Little Nobody.

"You have heard? I saw you when you came!" she gasped, wildly.

"Yes, poor child!" he answered.

"Sold! sold, like a slave, to the man I hate!" she cried, fearfully, her dark eyes distended in terror. "Oh, monsieur, he kissed me once, and I hated his kiss worse than madame's blow. I flung my slipper in his face, and he swore revenge. Once in his power, he would murder me. Oh, you promised to be my friend"—wildly—"save me! save me now!"

It was a strange, picturesque scene there in the starlit garden, with its stately palms, its immense rough cactuses, its fountains, and flowers. The man sat there with doubt, trouble, and sympathy looking out of his frank eyes at the girl who knelt before him, her delicate, tapering hands pressed together, her white face looking up piteously, the tears raining from her splendid eyes, and the long veil of golden hair sweeping loosely about her slender form, that passionate appeal thrilling over her crimson lips:

"Save me! save me!"

"Poor child, what can I do?" he uttered, almost unconsciously, and she answered, wildly:

"Only tell me where to fly for refuge! I am dazed and frightened. I know not where to go unless to the deep, dark river, and fling myself in. But I do not want to die. I only want to get away from this terrible place to some happier spot! Ah! *certainement, le bon Dieu* sent you here, monsieur, to help me, to save me!"

All her trust was in him, all her confidence. He had promised to be her friend, and in a simplicity and innocence as complete as a child's, she claimed his promise. Nay, more, she claimed that God had sent him to her aid in this dark hour of distress.

His mind was a chaos of contending emotions. That he must help her he had decided already in his mind. But how?

No answer presented itself to the vexing question. His thoughts were in such a tumult that clear, coherent thinking was an impossibility.

A moment, and he said, gently:

"Yes, I will help you, my child. I were less than man could I let this thing go on and make no attempt to rescue you from so dark a fate. But—"

He paused, and she waited anxiously with her straining gaze fixed on his troubled face.

[Pg 25]

"But," he went on slowly, "I can not see my way clear yet; I must think, must decide. And it is not safe to remain out here longer. They may come out here and find me at any moment. Little one, can you trust me to go away and think it all over, and then come back to you?"

A moment of silence, then she rose and stood before him.

"Yes, yes, I will trust you," she said, gently; then, with sudden desperation, "Should—should you not come back I will never be taken by him. There—is—still—the—river!"

"Do not think of that," he said, quickly; "I will soon return. Trust me wholly. Have I not promised to be your friend?"

"Yes, yes," eagerly.

She put out her hands as if to clasp his arm, then suddenly withdrew them. Frank and child-like as she was, she was coy and shy as a fawn. She clasped her delicate hands before her, and stood waiting.

"Now, tell me, is there not some way by which I can gain the street without returning to the house?" said Van Zandt.

"Yes, monsieur. Follow me," said the girl, turning swiftly and going across the garden to a small gate in the wall that opened on the street.

She turned a key in the lock and opened it wide as he came up, thrusting shyly into his hand some dewy rosebuds she had plucked from a vine that clambered to the top of the wall.

"Do not fail me, *mon ami*," she breathed, softly.

"You can trust me," he said, again. "Now go back to the garden or the house. Be as natural as you can. Do not let them suspect your dangerous knowledge."

She nodded her bright head wisely, and the next moment he was out in the street, the gate shut against him, alone with the thronging thoughts awakened by the occurrences of the last hour. He pulled a cigar from his breast-pocket, lighted it, and walked slowly along the wide and almost deserted street, under the shade of the tall trees that bordered the walk, his calmness gradually returning under the influence of the narcotic weed.

[Pg 26]

Within the flowery garden the little ma'amselle, so strangely lovely, so ignorant and innocent, with that deadly peril menacing her young life, flung herself down upon a garden-seat and gave herself up to impatient waiting for the return of her knight, her brave Sir Galahad.

"How sweet are looks that ladies bend  
On whom their favors fall;  
For them I battle to the end  
To save from shame and thrall."

## CHAPTER VI.

Van Zandt had gone but a few squares, with his eyes cast down and his mind very busy, before he stumbled up against a man coming from an opposite direction. Both being tall and strong, they recoiled with some force from the shock, each muttering confused apologies.

But the next moment there was an exclamation:

"Van Zandt, upon my word!" cried the musical voice of Pierre Carmontelle. "Why, man, what the deuce ails you, to go butting up against a fellow in that striking fashion?"

"Carmontelle!"

"Yes—or, at least, what is left of him after your villainous assault. Where were your eyes, *mon ami*, that you run up against a fellow so recklessly? And where have you been, anyway—to madame's?"

Eliot Van Zandt laughed at his friend's droll raillery.

"Yes, I have just come from Madame Lorraine's," he said. "And I came away in a brown study, which accounts for my not seeing you. And you—you were on your way there?" [Pg 27]

"Yes."

The word was spoken in a strange voice, and an odd little laugh followed it. Then the big, handsome Louisianian suddenly took hold of Van Zandt's arm, and said:

"Come, I have a great mind to make a confidant of you. Let us go and sit down yonder in the square, and smoke."

When they were seated, and puffing away at their cigars, he began:

"The fact is, I was in a brown study, too, Van Zandt, or I should not have run against you. I was going to Madame Lorraine's, and I found myself thinking soberly, seriously about the beautiful madame's wretched little slave and foot-ball, the Little Nobody you saw there last night."

"Yes," Van Zandt answered, with a quick start.

"By Heaven! it is a shame that the poor, pretty little vixen has no friends to rescue her from her tormentor!" exclaimed Carmontelle, vehemently. "For years this cruelty has been going on, and the girl, with her immortal soul, has been made a puppet by that charming, heartless woman. Would you believe it, the girl has never been given even the rudiments of an education? She is ignorant as a little savage, with not even a name. Yet I have seen this go on for years, in my careless fashion, without an effort to help the child. I can not understand what has roused me from my apathy, what has made me think of her at last—ah, *mon Dieu!*"

This exclamation was called forth by some sudden inward light. He went on, with a half-shamed laugh:

"What a speech I have made you, although I do not usually preach. Van Zandt, am I getting good, do you think, or—have I fallen in love with that Little Nobody?" [Pg 28]

There was a minute's pause, and Eliot Van Zandt took the cigar from between his lips, and answered, quietly:

"In love, decidedly."

"*Parbleu!*"

After that hurried exclamation there was a moment's silence. Carmontelle broke it with an uneasy laugh.

"I am forty years old, but I suppose a man is never too old to make a fool of himself," he said. "I believe you are right, *mon ami*. I could not get the child out of my head last night. I never noticed how pretty she was before; and those lashes on her sweet, white shoulders. I longed to kiss them, as children say, to make them well."

"Poor child!" said Van Zandt; and then, without preamble, he blurted out the story of what had just happened.

Carmontelle listened with clinched hands and flashing eyes, the veins standing out on his forehead like whip-cords.

"The fiend!" he muttered. "*Peste!* he was always a sneak, always a villain at heart. More than once we have wished him well out of the club. Now he shall be lashed from the door, the double-dyed scoundrel! And she, the deceitful madame, she could plan this horrid deed! She is less than woman. She shall suffer, mark you, for her sin."

"But the little ma'amselle, Carmontelle? What shall we do to deliver her from her peril? Every passing moment brings her doom nearer, yet I can think of nothing. My brain seems dull and dazed."

"Do? Why, we shall take a carriage and bring her away 'over the garden wall,'" replied Carmontelle, lightly but emphatically.

"Very well; but—next?"

Carmontelle stared and repeated, in some bewilderment:

"Next?"

Eliot Van Zandt explained:

"I mean, what shall we do when we have brought her away? Where shall we find her a refuge and hiding-place from her treacherous enemies?" anxiously.

"You cold-blooded, long-headed Yankee! I never thought of that. I should have brought her away without thinking of the future. But you are right. It is a question that should be decided first. What, indeed, shall we do with the girl?"

And for a moment they looked at each other, in the starlight, almost helplessly.

Then Van Zandt said, questioningly:

"Perhaps you have relatives or friends with whom you could place her? I am not rich, but I could spare enough to educate this wronged child."

"I have not a relative in the world—not a friend I could trust; nothing but oceans of money, so you may keep yours. I'll spend some of mine in turning this little savage into a Christian."

"You will take her to school, then, right away?" Van Zandt went on, in his quiet, pertinacious way.

"Yes; and, by Jove, when she comes out, finished, I'll marry her, Van Zandt! I will, upon my word!"

"If she will have you," laconically.

"*Peste!* what a fellow you are, to throw cold water upon one. Perhaps you have designs upon her yourself?"

"Not in the face of your munificent intentions," carelessly.

"Very well; I shall consider her won, then, since you are too generous to enter the lists against me. What a magnificent beauty she will make when she has learned her three R's!" laughingly. "But, come; shall we not go at once to deliver our little friend from Castle Dangerous?"

They rose.

"I am glad I ran against you, Carmontelle. You have straightened out the snarl that tangled my mind. Now for our little stratagem. You will bring the carriage to the end of the square, while I go back to the garden and steal the bird away." [Pg 30]

"Excellent!" said Carmontelle. "Oh, how they will rage when they find the bird has flown! Tomorrow the club shall settle with Remond; for madame, she shall be ostracised. We shall desert her in a body. Who would have believed she would be so base?"

Van Zandt made no comment. He only said, as if struck by a sudden thought:

"The poor child will have no clothes fit to wear away. Can you find time, while getting a carriage, to buy a gray dress, a long ulster, and a hat and veil?"

"Of course. What a fellow you are to think of things! I should not have thought of such a thing; yet what school would have received her in that white slip—picturesque, but not much better than a ballet-dancer's skirts!" exclaimed the lively Southerner. "You are a trump, Van Zandt. Can you think of anything else as sensible?"

"Some fruit and bonbons to soothe her at school—that is all," lightly, as they parted, one to return to Mme. Lorraine's, the other to perfect the arrangements for checkmating Remond's nefarious design.

Carmontelle was full of enthusiasm over the romantic idea that had occurred so suddenly to his mind. A smile curled his lips, as he walked away, thinking of dark-eyed Little Nobody, and running over in his mind a score of feminine cognomens, with one of which he meant to endow the nameless girl.

"Constance, Marie, Helene, Angela, Therese, Maude, Norine, Eugenie, etc.," ran his thoughts; but Eliot Van Zandt's took a graver turn as he went back to the starlit garden and the girl who believed him her Heaven-sent deliverer from peril and danger.

"There is but little I can do; Carmontelle takes it all out of my hands," he mused. "Perhaps it is better so; he is rich, free." [Pg 31]

A sigh that surprised himself, and he walked on a little faster until he reached the gate by which he had left the garden. Here he stopped, tapped softly, and waited.

But there was no reply to his knock, although he rapped again. Evidently she had gone into the house.

"I shall have to go in," he thought, shrinking from the encounter with the wicked madame and her partner in villainy, M. Remond.

Madame was at the piano, Remond turning the leaves of her music while she rendered a brilliant *morceau*. His hasty glance around the room did not find the little ma'amselle.

"She will be here presently," he decided, as he returned with what grace he could Mme. Lorraine's effusive greeting.

She was looking even lovelier than last night, in a costume of silvery silk that looked like the shimmer of moonlight on a lake. Her white throat rose from a mist of lace clasped by a diamond star. In her rich puffs of dark hair nestled white Niphetos roses shedding their delicate perfume about her as she moved with languid grace. The costume had been chosen for him. She had a fancy that it would appeal to his sense of beauty and purity more than her glowing robes of last

night.

She was right. He started with surprise and pleasure at the dazzling sight, but the admiration was quickly succeeded by disgust.

"So beautiful, yet so wicked!" he said, to himself.

"You were singing. Pray go on," he said, forcing her back to the piano.

It would be easier to sit and listen than to take part in the conversation with his mind on the *qui vive* for the entrance of her he had come to save. He listened mechanically to the sentimental Italian *chanson* madame chose, but kept his eyes on the door, expecting every minute to see a *petite* white form enter the silken portals.

[Pg 32]

Remond saw the watchfulness, and scowled with quick malignity.

"Other eyes than mine watch for her coming," he thought.

The song went on. The minutes waned. Van Zandt furtively consulted his watch.

"Past ten. What if that wicked woman has already forced her to retire?" he thought, in alarm, and the minutes dragged like leaden weights.

"Oh, if I could but slip into the garden. Perhaps she is there still, fallen asleep like a child on the garden-seat."

Mme. Lorraine's high, sweet voice broke suddenly in upon his thoughts.

"Monsieur, you sing, I am sure. With those eyes it were useless to deny it. You will favor us?"

He was about to refuse brusquely, when a thought came to him. She would hear his voice, she would hasten to him, and the message of hope must be whispered quickly ere it was too late.

He saw Remond watching him with sarcastic eyes, and said, indifferently:

"I can sing a little from a habit of helping my sisters at home. And I belong to a glee club. If these scant recommendations please you, I will make an effort to alarm New Orleans with my voice."

"You need not decry your talents. I am sure you will charm us," she said; and Van Zandt dropped indolently upon the music-stool. His long, white fingers moved softly among the keys, evoking a tender accompaniment to one of Tennyson's sweetest love songs:

"Queen rose of the rosebud garden of girls,  
Come hither, the dances are done.  
In gloss of satin and glimmer of pearls,  
Queen lily and rose in one;  
Shine out, little head, sunning over with curls,  
To the flowers, and be their sun.

[Pg 33]

"There has fallen a splendid tear  
From the passion-flower at the gate.  
She is coming, my dove, my dear;  
She is coming, my life, my fate;  
The red rose cries, "She is near, she is near,"  
And the white rose weeps, "She is late;"  
The larkspur listens, "I hear, I hear,"  
And the lily whispers, "*I wait.*"

The man and the woman looked at each other behind his back. Remond wore a significant scowl; madame a jealous sneer. It faded into a smile as he whirled around on the music-stool and faced her with a look of feigned adoration.

"Last night was so heavenly in the garden—let us go out again," he said, almost consumed by impatience.

Time was going fast, and it lacked little more than an hour to midnight. He chafed at the thought that Carmontelle was waiting with the carriage, impatient, and wondering at the strange delay.

"We will go into the garden," assented Mme. Lorraine. "Ah, you cold-looking Yankee, you can be as sentimental as a Southerner. Monsieur Remond, will you accompany us?"

"Pardon; I will go home. I have no fancy for love among the roses," with a covert sneer. "Madame, monsieur, *bon soir.*"

He bowed and was gone. Van Zandt drew a long breath of dismay.

What if he should stumble upon Carmontelle and the carriage waiting at the end of the square under cover of the night?

It was impossible to follow. Mme. Lorraine's white hand clasping his arm, drew him out into the garden, with its sweet odors, its silence, and dew.

[Pg 34]

His heart leaped with expectancy.

"I shall find her here asleep among the flowers, forgetful of the dangers that encompass her young life."

He declared to Mme. Lorraine that he did not want to miss a single beauty of the romantic old garden, and dragged her remorselessly all over its length and breadth. Perhaps she guessed his

intent, but she made no sign. She was bright, amiable, animated, all that a woman can be who hopes to charm a man.

He scarcely heeded her, so frantically was he looking everywhere for a crouching white form that he could not find. There came to him suddenly a horrified remembrance of her pathetic words:

"There is still the river!"

A bell somewhere in the distance chimed the half hour in silvery tones. Only thirty minutes more to midnight!

With some incoherent excuse he tore himself away from her, and dashing wildly out into the street, ran against Pierre Carmontelle for the second time that night.

"I have waited for hours, and was just coming to seek you. What does this mean?" he exclaimed, hoarsely.

A whispered explanation forced a smothered oath from his lips.

"Be calm. There is but one way left us. We will conceal ourselves near the door and wrest her from them when they bring her out," said Eliot Van Zandt.

---

## CHAPTER VII.

But no place of concealment presented itself. The broad pavement showed a long, unbroken space of moonlit stone, save where one tall tree reared its stately height outside the curb-stone, and flung long, weird shadows across the front of madame's house.

[Pg 35]

Carmontelle looked up and down the street, and shook his head.

"I can see no hiding-place but the tree," he said.

"We need none better, unless you are too stout to scale it," Van Zandt answered, coolly, turning a questioning glance upon the rather corpulent form of his good-looking companion.

"You will see," laughed the Southerner, softly.

He glanced up and down the street, and seeing no one in sight, made a bound toward the tree, flung out his arms, and scaled it with admirable agility, finding a very comfortable seat among its low-growing branches. Van Zandt followed his example with boyish ease, and they were soon seated close to each other on the boughs of the big tree, almost as comfortable as if they had been lounging on the satin couches of madame's *recherché* salon. It was delightful up there among the cool green leaves, with the fresh wind blowing the perfume of madame's flowers into their faces.

"I feel like a boy again," said the journalist, gayly.

"Softly; we are opposite the windows of madame's chamber, I think," cautioned Carmontelle.

"She will not come up yet; she will wait in the salon for Remond. It is but a few minutes to midnight."

A step approached, and they held their breath in excessive caution.

It passed on—only a guardian of the peace pacing his beat serenely, his brass buttons shining in the moonlight.

Van Zandt whispered:

"I am not sure but we should have invoked the aid of the law in our trouble."

But Pierre Carmontelle shook his head.

"The law is too slow sometimes," he said. "We will place the little girl in some safe refuge first, then, if Madame Lorraine attempts to make trouble, we will resort to legal measures. I am not apprehensive of trouble on that score, however, for madame really has no legal right to the girl. Has she not declared scores of times that her maid died, and left the child upon her hands, and that, only for pity's sake, she would have sent her off to an orphan asylum?"

[Pg 36]

Steps and voices came along the pavement—two roystering lads, fresh from some festal scene, their steps unsteady with wine. They passed out of sight noisily recounting their triumph to each other. Then the echo of wheels in the distance, "low on the sand, loud on the stone."

"Are you armed?" whispered the Louisianian, nervously.

"No."

The cold steel of a pistol pressed his hand.

"Take that; I brought two," whispered Carmontelle. "We may need them. One of us must stand at bay, while the other seizes and bears away the girl."

"It shall be I. I will cover your flight," Van Zandt said, quietly.

Under his calm exterior was seething a tempest of wrath and indignation that made him clutch the weapon in a resolute grasp. He had pure and fair young sisters at home. The thought of them made him feel more strongly for madame's forlorn victim.

Their hearts leaped into their throats as Remond's close carriage dashed into sight, whirled up to madame's door, and stopped.

The door swung open, and Remond, muffled up to the ears, sprung out and went up to the house.

Its portals opened as if by magic, with a swish of silken robes in the hall. Madame herself had silently admitted her co-conspirator.

Most fortunately the back of the carriage was toward the tree, and the driver's attention was concentrated upon his restive horses. [Pg 37]

Silently as shadows the two men slid down from their novel hiding-place, tiptoed across the pavement, and took up their grim station on either side the closed door.

Not a moment too soon!

At that very instant the door unclosed, and Remond appeared upon the threshold bearing in his arms a slight, inert figure wrapped in a long, dark cloak. Madame, still in her diamonds, roses, and silvery drapery, appeared behind him just in time to see a powerful form swoop down upon Remond, wrest his prize from him, and make off with wonderful celerity, considering the weight of the girlish form in his arms.

She fell back with a cry of dismay.

"*Diable! Spies!*"

Remond had recoiled on the instant with a fierce oath hissed in his beard—only an instant; then he dashed forward in mad pursuit, only to be tripped by an outstretched foot that flung him face downward on the hard pavement.

Scrambling up in hot haste, with the blood gushing from his nostrils, he found his way barred by Eliot Van Zandt.

"Back, villain! Your prey has escaped you!" the young man cried, sternly.

A black and bitter oath escaped Remond, and his trembling hand sought his belt.

He hissed savagely:

"Accursed spy! Your life shall answer for this!"

Then the long keen blade of a deadly knife flashed in the moonlight. Simultaneously there was the flash and report of a pistol. Both men fell at once to the ground, and at the same moment there was a swish and rustle of silvery silk, as beautiful Mme. Lorraine retreated from her threshold, slamming and locking her door upon the sight of the bloodshed of which she had been the cause.

"Let them kill each other, the fools, if they have no more sense," she muttered, scornfully, heartlessly, as she retired to her salon. [Pg 38]

Remond's horses had been so frightened by the pistol-shot that they had run off with their alarmed driver, who had dropped the reins in the first moment of terror. There now remained only two of the six souls present a moment ago, Van Zandt and Remond lying silent where they had fallen under the cold, white light of the moonlight.

But presently the Frenchman struggled slowly up to his feet, and put his hand to his shoulder with a stifled curse.

"The dog has put a bullet through my shoulder. Never mind, we are quits, for I ran my knife through his heart," he muttered, hastening away from the scene of bloodshed.

But Eliot Van Zandt lay still where he had fallen, with his ghastly white face upturned to the sky, and the red blood pouring in a torrent from the gaping wound in his breast.

---

## CHAPTER VIII.

Carmontelle made his way with what speed he could, hampered as he was by the heavy, unconscious form of the girl, to the carriage which he had in waiting at the end of the square. His speed was not great enough, however, to hinder him from hearing the sharp report of the pistol as it went off in Van Zandt's hand, and a slight tremor ran along his firm nerves.

"Somebody killed or wounded—and I pray it may be Remond, the dastardly villain," he thought. "I should not like for any harm to come to that noble young Van Zandt."

Then he paused while the driver sprung down from the box and opened the door for him. He laid his burden down upon a seat, sprung in, and then the door was closed. [Pg 39]

"To the Convent of Le Bon Berger," he said.

"*Oui, monsieur.*"

The man whipped up his horses, and they were off at a spanking pace.

A happy thought had occurred to Carmontelle. He had a friend who was the Mother Superior of the Convent of the Good Shepherd. To her pious care he would confide the poor, helpless lamb just rescued from the jaws of the hungry wolf.

When the carriage had started off, he drew the thick wrappings from the head of the unconscious girl and looked at her face. It was deathly white, and the long, thick fringe of her dark lashes lay heavily against her cheeks. Her young bosom heaved with slow, faint respiration, but he tried in vain to arouse her from the heavy stupor that held her in its chains.

Mme. Lorraine had been more clever than any one suspected. She had given the drug to her victim in a cup of tea, before she went out to the garden. Consequently the narcotic was already working in her veins when she flung herself at Van Zandt's feet, imploring his aid, and in a very few minutes after he had left her she fell into a heavy sleep upon the garden-seat, her last coherent thought being of him who had promised to save her from the perils that threatened her young life.

Carmontelle gazed with deep pity and strong emotion on the piquant and exquisitely lovely face, realizing that that beauty had well-nigh proved a fatal dower to the forlorn girl.

Deep, strong emotion stirred the man's heart as he gazed, and he vowed to himself that however friendless, nameless, and lowly born was the girl, she should never want a friend and protector again.

"I am rich and well-born, and she shall share all I have. When she leaves the Convent of Le Bon Berger, it shall be as Madame Carmontelle, my loved and honored wife, not the Little Nobody of to-night," he mused. "I will teach her to love me in the years while she remains a pupil at the convent."

[Pg 40]

In such thoughts as these the time passed quickly, although the convent was several miles from Esplanade Street, and in the suburbs of the city. At length the carriage paused before the dark conventual walls and towers, the driver sprung down from his seat and came to the door with the announcement:

"Le Bon Berger."

"*Très bien.* Wait."

He drew a memorandum-book from an inner pocket, and hastily penciled some lines upon a sheet of paper.

"MADAME LA SUPERIEURE,—Pardon this late intrusion, and for God's dear sake admit me to a brief interview. I have brought a poor, little helpless lamb to the Good Shepherd.

PIERRE CARMONTELLE."

"Take that," he said, hastily folding it across. "Ring the bell, and present it to the janitor. Tell him Madame la Superieure must have it at once. Say I am waiting in distress and impatience."

The man crossed the wide pave and rang the gate bell. There was some little delay, then a stone slide slipped from its place in the high gate, and the janitor's cross, sleepy face appeared in the aperture. He was decidedly averse to receiving Carmontelle's orders. It was against the rules admitting visitors at this hour. The superior had retired.

Carmontelle sprung hastily from the carriage and approached him with a potent argument—perhaps a golden one—for he took the note and disappeared, while the Louisianian went back to his carriage to wait what seemed an inconceivably long space of time, restless and uneasy in the doubts that began to assail his mind.

[Pg 41]

"If she refuses," he thought, in terror, and his senses quailed at the thought. In all the wide city he could think of no home that would receive his charge if the convent turned her from its doors.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he began to mutter to himself, in fierce disquietude, when suddenly he heard the grating of a heavy key in a huge lock, the falling of bolts and bars, and the immense gate opened gingerly, affording a glimpse of the janitor's face and form against the background of a garden in riotous bloom, while beyond towered the massive convent walls.

"*Entrez,*" the man said, civilly; and Carmontelle seized his still unconscious burden joyfully, and made haste to obey.

The janitor uttered an exclamation of surprise when he saw that strange burden, then he led the way, Carmontelle eagerly following, until they reached the convent door. It opened as if by an unseen power, and they went along a cold, dimly lighted hall to a little reception-room where two gentle, pale-faced nuns were waiting with the mother superior to receive the midnight visitor. She was a tall, graceful, sweet-faced woman as she stood between the two, her slender white hands moving restlessly along the beads of her rosary.

"My son," she uttered, in surprise, as he advanced and laid the still form of Little Nobody down upon a low sofa, drawing back the heavy cloak and showing what it hid—the fair young girl in the loose, white slip, and the wealth of ruddy, golden curls.

He looked up at her with a face strangely broken up from its usual calm.

"Madame, holy mother, I have brought you a pupil," he said, "and I have to confide a strange story to your keeping." He glanced at the sweet-faced, quiet nuns. "Perhaps it were better to speak to you alone?" he said, questioningly.

[Pg 42]

"No, you need not fear the presence of these gentle sisters of the Good Shepherd. No secrets ever pass beyond these walls," the mother superior answered, with grave, calm dignity.



## CHAPTER IX.

Carmontelle saw the three nuns looking apprehensively at the pale, still face of his charge, and said, reassuringly:

"Do not be alarmed. It is not death, although it looks so much like it. The girl is only in a drugged sleep."

"But, monsieur—" began the mother superior, indignantly, when she was interrupted by his equally indignant disclaimer:

"It is none of my work. Wait until I tell you my story."

And he immediately related it without reserve. All three listened with eager interest.

"Now you know all," he said, at last, "and I will be perfectly frank with you regarding my intentions. I am rich, and have none to oppose my will. I wish to educate this unfortunate girl and make her my wife."

The superioress was gracious enough to say that it was a most laudable intention.

"You will aid me, then? You will receive her as a pupil, train and educate her in a manner befitting the position she will fill as my wife?" eagerly.

"*Oui, monsieur,*" she replied, instantly; and he nearly overwhelmed her with thanks.

"I leave her in your care, then," he said, finally, as he pressed a check for a large amount into her hand. "Now I will not intrude upon you longer at this unseemly hour, but to-morrow I will call to see how she fares, and to make arrangements." [Pg 43]

He paused a minute to anxiously scan the pale, sweet, sleeping face, and then hurried away, eager to learn how Van Zandt had fared in his valiant effort at holding his pursuer at bay. Springing into the carriage again, he gave the order:

"Back to Esplanade Street."

The mettlesome horses trotted off at a lively pace through the quiet, almost deserted streets, and in a short space of time they drew up in front of Mme. Lorraine's residence.

All was still and silent there. The front windows were closed and dark, and the clear moonlight shone upon the bare pavement—bare, where but a little while ago had lain the forms of the two vanquished contestants.

Carmontelle looked at the dark, silent front of the house for a moment in doubt and indecision. He felt intuitively that behind its dark portals was the knowledge he desired, that Mme. Lorraine could tell him how the contest had fared after his departure.

Anxiety conquered his reluctance to arouse the household at that late hour. He again left the carriage, and in crossing the pavement to the door, slipped and fell in a pool of blood yet wet and warm.

Horried, he held up his hands with the dark fluid dripping from them.

"So, then, blood has been shed!" he exclaimed, and rang a furious peal on madame's door-bell.

"Whew! that was loud enough to wake the dead!" ejaculated the attentive driver from his box; but apparently Mme. Lorraine was a very sound sleeper indeed, for repeated ringings of the bell elicited no response.

In despair, Carmontelle was forced to go away, although quite satisfied in his own mind that Mme. Lorraine had heard, but refused to respond through malice prepense.

He drove next to Eliot Van Zandt's hotel, and met the startling information that the young man had not been in that night. [Pg 44]

"*Mon Dieu!* what has become of the brave lad?" he ejaculated, in alarm; then, fiercely: "I will seek out Remond, and force the truth from him at the point of my sword!"

Fortunately for the now wearied horses, Remond's hotel was but a few squares further; but here he met the puzzling information that Remond had left an hour before, having given up his rooms, and declared his intention of not returning.

In the dim, strange light of the waning moon, Carmontelle grew strangely pale.

"There is some mystery at the bottom of all this!" he asserted.

But, baffled on every side in his efforts after information, he concluded to give up the quest until day; so was driven to his own lodgings in the pale glimmer of the dawn-light that now began to break over the quaint old city.

Weary and dispirited, with a vague presentiment of evil, he flung himself on his bed, and a heavy stupor stole over him, binding his faculties in a lethargic slumber from which he did not arouse until the new day began to wax toward its meridian.

---

## CHAPTER X.

He had given his valet no instructions to arouse him; therefore the man let him sleep on uninterruptedly, thinking that his master had been "making a night of it," in the slang phrase that prevails among gay fellows. So, when he awakened and rang his bell, the midday sunshine followed François into the quiet chamber and elicited an exclamation of dismay.

"*Diable!* François, why did you not call me?"

[Pg 45]

"Monsieur gave me no instructions," smoothly.

"True; but you should have aroused me anyhow, you rascal!" irascibly. "Now, hurry up, and get me out of this as quick as possible!"

His toilet completed, he swallowed a cup of coffee, munched a few morsels of a roll, and was off—appetite failing in his eagerness to get at Van Zandt. On his way to the hotel he dropped in at the club. No information was found there. Neither Van Zandt nor Remond had been in the rooms since yesterday.

He hastened on to the journalist's modest hotel, only to be confronted with the news that Eliot had not yet returned. Since he had dined, at eight o'clock last evening, he had not been seen by any one in the house. His room had remained unoccupied since yesterday.

Carmontelle sickened and shuddered at thought of the blood before madame's door last night.

"It is plain that Van Zandt was the one who was wounded, since Remond was seen at his hotel last night after the accident. Great heavens! what mystery is here? Is he dead, the brave lad? and have they hidden his body to conceal the crime? I must find out the truth and avenge his death, poor boy!"

He flung himself again into his carriage and was driven to that beautiful fiend's—to the home of the woman who had so heartlessly plotted the ruin of the helpless, innocent girl.

She was at home, looking cool, fair, and graceful in a *recherché* morning-robe garnished with yards on yards of creamy laces and lavender ribbons. She was twirling some cards in her jeweled fingers.

"Ah, monsieur, I have cards to the reception at Trevor's next week. Are you going? Perhaps you have come to say that you will attend me there?"

The coquettish smile faded at the scowl he turned upon her face.

[Pg 46]

"Madame, where is Van Zandt?" he blurted out, brusquely.

It was no wonder she had been such a star upon the dramatic stage. Her puzzled air, the wondering glance of her bright, dark eyes, were perfect.

"Monsieur—Van Zandt!" she repeated, in gentle wonder. "How should I know? I assure you he has not been here since last night."

"Yes, I know," impatiently. "But what happened to him last night? Did Remond kill him here, at your door, where I found the pool of blood when I came back to look for him?"

Her eyes flashed.

"Ah, then it was you, monsieur, that carried off poor Remond's bride?" with a low laugh of amusement.

"Answer my question, if you please, Madame Lorraine," sternly. "Tell me—did Remond kill our young Yankee friend last night?"

Madame threw back her handsome head, and laughed heartlessly.

"*Ma foi*, how can I tell? When I saw the two fools were fighting desperately, I ran in, locked my door, and went to bed. *Mon Dieu*, I did not want to be a witness in a murder trial!"

"And you did not peep out of the window?" cynically.

"*Ma foi*, no! I was too frightened. I did not want to see or hear! I put my head under the bed-clothes, and went to sleep."

"Heartless woman! After you had caused all the mischief!" indignantly.

"I deny it!" cried Mme. Lorraine, artlessly, fixing her big, reproachful eyes on his face. "I can not understand what all this fuss is about. I did but arrange a marriage for my pretty ward, French-fashion, with Remond, rich, in love with her, and a splendid *parti*. But the little rebel pouted, flirted, and held him at bay till he was wild with love and jealousy. She was romantic. I proposed that he run off with her and win her heart by a *coup d'état*. The priest was ready. All would have gone well but for the cursed intermeddling of that sneaking Yankee. I hate him! What did he have to do with her that he should break off the match? Do you say Remond has killed him?"

[Pg 47]

She had poured it all out in voluble French, protestingly, and with an air of the completest innocence, but she met only a furious frown.

"Madame, your airs of innocence are quite thrown away," he replied. "Your treachery is known. You would have sold that poor girl to a life that was worse than death. Your bargain in the garden was overheard," sternly. "Do you know what you have brought upon your head, traitress? Social ostracism and complete disgrace! The Jockey Club that has upheld you by its notice so many years, will desert you in a body. We can not horsewhip you as we shall Remond, but we shall hold you up to the scorn of the world."

"Mercy, monsieur!" she gasped, faintly, dropped her face in her hands, and dissolved in tears.

He had expected that she would scorn him, defy him, but this softer mood confounded him. He could not bear a woman's tears.

He sat and watched her in silence a few minutes, fidgeting restlessly, then said, curtly:

"Come, come, it is too late for tears unless they are tears of repentance for your sin."

Madame flung up her hands with a tragic gesture.

"*Mon Dieu*, how cruelly I have been misunderstood! I do not deny the plot in the garden, but the listener surely did not hear all. Remond was to marry the girl, I swear it! Poor little motherless lamb! do you think I would have allowed any one to harm a hair of her head? Oh, you wrong me bitterly! You have been deceived, misled."

[Pg 48]

She flung herself with sudden, inimitable grace on her knees at his feet.

"Carmontelle, you should know me better than this!" she cried. "I swear to you it was only a harmless plot to make her Remond's wife. It would have been better for her to have a home and protector, I—I am so poor," weeping, "I have lost so heavily at play that there is a mortgage on my home, and I could not keep the girl much longer; I must retrench my expenses. Yet only for this I am to be ostracised, disgraced, held up to the scorn of my friends. Ah, you are cruel, unjust to me. Oh, spare me, spare me! Say nothing until you can prove these charges true."

What a consummate actress! what a clever liar she was! Doubt began to invade his mind. Had Van Zandt misunderstood her words?

"Madame Lorraine," he said, sternly, "get up from the floor and listen to me. I will give you the benefit of a doubt. I will try to believe that your infamous plot went no further than the trying to force that helpless child into a hated union. Even that was infamy enough. Talk not to me of your French marriages. I despise them. But I will say nothing to the world—yet. I will not wrong you until I make sure."

"Bless you, noble Carmontelle!" she cried, seizing his hand and pressing passionate kisses upon it. He drew it coldly away, and said, dryly:

"If you really feel grateful for my clemency, tell me what you know about Van Zandt and Remond. I can not find either one, and I fear that something terrible has happened to the noble young Bostonian."

She swore by all the saints that she knew nothing, had heard nothing since the pistol-shot last night.

"I was so frightened I did not wait to see who was shot. I just ran in and went to bed. I did not want to be a witness of anything so terrible!" she shuddered.

[Pg 49]

"You swear you are not deceiving me, madame?" sternly.

"I swear by all the saints," fervently.

"Then I must search farther for my missing friend," he said, sadly, as he turned to go.

She caught his arm eagerly.

"Now tell me what you have done with the little baggage who has caused all this trouble? By Heaven, Carmontelle, if harm come to my little daughter through you, I will hold you to account!"

"Daughter!" he echoed, bewilderedly, and she answered, dauntlessly:

"Yes, my daughter. The secret is out at last, the secret of my shame! She was born before I met Lorraine. Her father was—well, no matter who, since he was a villain. Well, I put the child out to nurse, and made an honest marriage. Then the woman followed me with the child, and I had to invent a story to account for her to Lorraine. Now I am free to claim her, and you see that the law will support me in demanding her restoration to my care!"

They stood looking at each other silently a moment, then Carmontelle answered, angrily:

"Madame, I do not believe you. This is only one of a dozen different stories you have told to account for the possession of that child. Your last claim is made in order to support a claim for her return to you. The pretext will not avail you. The little ma'amselle is in safe hands, where she shall remain until she is trained and educated up to the standard necessary for my wife."

"Your wife?" she gasped, white with jealous fury.

"I have said it," he answered, coldly, and strode abruptly from the house.

Mme. Lorraine fell down for a moment on the sofa in furious hysterics. Carmontelle, her princely adorer, had scorned, defied her; Van Zandt knew her guilt and despised her; worst of all, the little scapegoat of her tempers, her beautiful slave, the hated Little Nobody, had escaped her clutches. Furies!

[Pg 50]

But suddenly she sprung up like a wild creature, tore open the door that Carmontelle had slammed together, and rushed after him. He was just entering his carriage when her frantic hand arrested him and drew him forcibly back.

"Come into the house; I must speak with you further. Do not shake your head," wildly. "It is a matter of life and death!"

He suffered her to drag him back into the salon. She turned her shining eyes upon his face with a half-maniacal gleam in them.

"The girl—had she awakened when you saw her last?" hoarsely.

"No," he replied.

She smote her forehead fiercely with one ringed white hand.

"My soul! I do not want to have murder on my hands. You must find Remond. I gave him the little vial with the antidote."

"The antidote?" he stammered, almost stupidly.

"Yes, the antidote. She is under the influence of a strange drug. I bought the two vials long ago from an old hag in the East as a curiosity, you see. One drug was to bring sleep, the other to wake at will. Without—" she paused, and her voice broke.

"Without—" he echoed, hoarsely; and in a frightened, guilty voice, she muttered:

"The one, without the other means—death!"

"Fiend!" he hissed, fiercely.

"No, no; do not blame me. I meant no ill. I gave Remond the antidote, to be used when they reached the end of their journey. How could I know you would take the girl from him and hide her? How could I know he would disappear? Find Remond quickly, or her death will lie at your door."

[Pg 51]

"You speak the truth?" he cried, wildly.

"Before God and the angels, monsieur!"

With a smothered oath he thrust her from him and rushed out again, leaped into the carriage, and gave his orders:

"Like the wind, to the detective agency."

It was two miles distant, and the panting horses were covered with foam when they set him down at his destination. Fortunately the familiar face of the most skillful detective in New Orleans looked at him in surprise from the pavement. He beckoned him into the vehicle.

In words as brief and comprehensive as possible he explained what he wanted done. He must find Remond at once—find him and bring him to the Convent of Le Bon Berger.

"A life hangs on his hands," he said, feverishly. "Tell him not to fail to bring with him the antidote he received last night."

"I will find him if he is in the city," the detective promised, ardently; and full of zeal, inspired not only by love for his profession, but genuine anxiety and grief over the startling case just confided to him, he sprung from the carriage to set about his task.

And Carmontelle, with his mind full of Little Nobody, gave the order again:

"To the convent!"

He was possessed by the most torturing anxiety over his little charge, and doubt over madame's startling assertion.

"Horrible! horrible! What possessed her to use a drug so deadly?" he thought, wildly. "Oh, it can not be true! I shall find her awake and waiting for me, the poor lamb! Madame Lorraine only invented that story to torture me."

He spoke feverishly to the driver:

[Pg 52]

"Faster, faster!"

The man replied, in a conciliatory tone:

"Monsieur, I dare not. I should be arrested for fast driving, and your speed would be hindered, not helped, by such a course."

He knew that it was true, and with a groan sunk back in his seat and resigned himself with what patience he could to the moderate pace of the horses. It seemed hours, although it was but thirty minutes, before they drew up again before the dark, grim building where he had left his charge the night before.

The janitor admitted him without any parley this time; but Carmontelle was so eager that he did not notice the solemn, sympathetic look with which the man regarded him. He rushed without delay to the presence of the mother superior.

When she saw him, her countenance expressed the greatest dismay. She crossed herself piously and ejaculated, sorrowfully:

"Oh, monsieur, monsieur, you have come at last!"

"Madame, holy mother!" he cried, agitatedly, and paused, unable to proceed further. Something in her face and voice filled him with dread.

"Oh, my son!" she uttered, sorrowfully, and speech, too, seemed to fail her. She regarded him in a pathetic silence mixed with deep pity.

He made a great effort to speak, to overcome the horror that bound him hand and foot. A terrible fear was upon him. What if she had not wakened yet?

With that awful thought, he gasped and spoke:

"Where is she?"

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* oh, holy Mother of Jesus, comfort him!" cried the good nun, piously. She advanced and touched him compassionately. "God help you, my poor son. She—she—has not awakened—yet."

He turned his pale, frightened face toward her.

[Pg 53]

"She sleeps?" he questioned, eagerly; and with a holy compassion in her trembling voice, she replied:

"Yes, my son, she sleeps—in Jesus."

"Dead?" he almost shrieked, and she answered, solemnly:

"Yes."

She thought he was about to faint, his face grew so pale and his form reeled so unsteadily; but he threw out one hand and caught the back of a chair to sustain himself, while a hollow groan came from his lips:

"Too late!"

With tears in her eyes, the good nun continued:

"The little girl never awakened from the deep sleep in which you brought her here. We made every effort to arouse her, but all in vain. She sunk deeper and deeper into lethargy, her breathing growing fainter and fainter, and at last it ceased altogether."

"When?" he questioned, huskily.

"Three hours ago," she replied.

If it had not been for her sacred presence, Carmontelle would have broken into passionate execrations of the wicked woman who had caused the death of that sweet young girl. As it was, he stood before her dazed and silent, almost stunned by the calamities that had befallen him since last night.

Van Zandt had mysteriously disappeared, and Little Nobody was dead. The one, he feared and dreaded, had been murdered by Remond in his fury; the other lay dead, the victim of Mme. Lorraine's cruel vengeance.

"Come," said the nun, breaking in on his bitter thoughts; "she lies in the chapel. You will like to look at her, monsieur."

He followed her silently, and the low, monotonous sound of the chant for the dead came to his ears like a knell as they went on along the narrow hall to the darkened chapel, where the weeping nuns lay prostrate before the altar, mumbling over the prayers for the dead, and an old, white-haired priest in flowing robes bent over his book. Carmontelle saw none of these. He had eyes for nothing but that black-draped coffin before the altar, with wax-candles burning at head and foot, shedding a pale, sepulchral light on that fair young face and form that such a little while ago had been full of life, and health, and vigor.

[Pg 54]

He stood like one turned to stone—speechless, breathless—gazing at that exquisitely lovely face, so faultlessly molded, and so beautiful even in the strange pallor of death, with the dark lashes lying so heavily against the cheeks and the lips closed in such a strange, sweet calm.

His heart swelled with love, and grief, and pity. Poor child! she had had such a strange, desolate life, and she had died without a name and without a friend, save for him who stood beside her now, his face pale and moved, as he looked upon her lying like a broken lily in her coffin, with the strange, weird light sifting through the stained-glass windows on her calm face, and the monotonous chants and prayers making a solemn murmur through the vaulted chapel.

"Is it death or heavy sleep?" he asked himself, with a sudden throb of hope; and he touched reverently the little hands that were crossed over a white lily the nuns had lovingly placed there. Alas! they were icy cold! His hope fled. "Too late! too late! If they find Remond, it will be all in vain," he muttered, and the mother superior looked at him inquiringly.

Impulsively he told her all, and the nuns, at their prayers, murmured aves and paters more softly, that they might listen; the old priest, with his head bent over his book, lost not a word. It was a romance from that wicked outer world from which the convent walls shut them in, a breath of life and passion from the "bewildering masquerade" of existence, where

"Strangers walk as friends,  
And friends as strangers;  
Where whispers overheard betray false hearts,  
And through the mazes of the crowd we chase  
Some form of loveliness that smiles and beckons,  
And cheats us with fair words, only to leave us  
A mockery and a jest; maddened—confused—  
Not knowing friend from foe!"

[Pg 55]

The mother superior gazed with dilated eyes as he poured out the moving story, clasped her long, white hands excitedly, and shuddered with horror.

"Ah, *mon Dieu!* the wicked man! the cruel, heartless woman!" she exclaimed. "Shall they not answer for this crime?"

"Ay, before Heaven, they shall!" Pierre Carmontelle vowed passionately, with his warm, living

hand pressed upon the chill, pulseless one of the nameless dead girl; and in the years to come he kept that impulsive vow made there in the presence of the living and the dead.

## CHAPTER XI.

To return to Mme. Lorraine the night when Eliot Van Zandt lay like one dead before her door in a pool of his own blood, deserted by the brutal Remond, who had left him for dead upon the pavement.

She had peeped from the window as Carmontelle had charged her with doing, although she had denied the accusation, and she had beheld all that passed. If she had not conceived a passion for Van Zandt, he might have perished, for all she would have cared; but something of womanly softness stole into her heart as she gazed, and she murmured:

"Can he be dead, or only in a deadly swoon? What if I go and find out?"

Glancing up and down the street to make sure that no one was in sight, she slipped out and knelt down by the prostrate form. Pushing back his coat and vest, she laid her hand over his heart.

[Pg 56]

"There is some faint pulse. He lives, he lives!" she murmured, joyfully. "Now, now is my chance to act the good Samaritan. I will take him into my house, nurse him, tend him, and gratitude may win for me that which beauty and fascination failed to conquer."

She hastily summoned a confidential servant, a woman who had been in her employ many years, and the repository of many strange secrets. Together they managed to convey the wounded, unconscious man into the house, although the domestic expostulated with every breath.

"Hold your tongue, Mima. It is none of your business. You have only to obey my orders," madame returned, coolly. "The underground chamber, please. His presence is to be kept a secret. You and I will have the care of him—you are quite skillful enough, after your experience as a hospital nurse during the war, to attend his wound. He will be hidden here, while to the world he will have mysteriously disappeared."

They laid him down on a couch in the wide hall, and Mima took a lamp and went out.

Soon she returned, and stood before her mistress, huge, and tall, and dark, with a malignant scowl on her homely foreign face.

"Madame, your strange guest-chamber is ready," she said, with curt sarcasm. "But this heavy body—how shall we convey it down the stairs?"

"You are big and strong enough," Mme. Lorraine replied, coolly. "You may go in front and carry his body; I will follow with his pretty head in my arms."

And so, as if the fate that had stricken him down into seeming death had not been dark enough, he was borne, an unconscious prisoner, into an underground chamber beneath Mme. Lorraine's house—a luxurious chamber, richly furnished, but of whose presence no one was aware save herself and this servant, for it was entered by a door cleverly concealed among the oak panelings of the hall. The light of day never entered this secret chamber. It was illumined by a swinging-lamp, and the odor of dried rose leaves from a jar of *pot-pourri* in one corner pleasantly pervaded the air, dispelling some of the mustiness and closeness inseparable from its underground situation.

[Pg 57]

They laid Van Zandt down upon a soft white bed, and Mme. Lorraine said, coolly:

"Now, Mima, you may examine into the extent of his wound."

The large, masculine-looking woman went to work in quite a professional way on her unconscious patient, and in a short time she looked around and said, to the great relief of her mistress:

"It is an ugly wound, very near his heart, but not necessarily a dangerous one, unless a fever sets in. He has fainted from loss of blood, and I will dress the wound before I attempt to revive him. You may go upstairs, for I see you growing pale already at the sight of blood, and I don't want you here fainting on my hands."

"Thank you, Mima," said Mme. Lorraine, almost meekly; for one of her weaknesses, which she shared in common with most women, was that the sight of blood always made her very sick and faint.

She staggered out of the close room, toiled feebly up the stairs, and drank two glasses of wine to steady her trembling nerves; then she extinguished the lights in the house, and retired to her bed. She was still awake when Carmontelle returned in quest of Eliot Van Zandt, and she laughed in her sleeve at his furious, ineffectual peals at the bell.

Stealing to the window, she drew back a fold of the curtain and peered down at him, chuckling softly when she saw him take his angry departure. Then she returned to her silken couch, and slept soundly for hours.

The sun was high in the heavens when Mima's rough, impatient hand shook her broad awake without ceremony.

[Pg 58]

"Are you going to sleep all day?" she demanded. "You wouldn't if you knew what had happened. The little one's gone. I can't find her in the house or the grounds, and her bed ain't been slept in

all night."

She gazed suspiciously into madame's startled face, which was not so handsome now with the cosmetics washed from it, and that frown wrinkling her brow. She repeated Mima's word in apparently stupid amaze:

"Gone!"

"Yes, gone! Don't you know anything about it? Ain't you had a hand in it?"

Mme. Lorraine, sitting up in bed in her night-robe of soft white linen, burst out, indignantly:

"Look here, Mima, don't make a fool of yourself. If the girl's gone, it's none of my work. She threatened, the last time I beat her, that she would run away, and I suppose she's kept her word. I've noticed that some of the men that come here were sweet on her, and she's gone with one of them, no doubt."

Mima stood like one petrified, looking at her, when she suddenly burst out again:

"Oh, dear! perhaps she has taken Selim! Run, Mima, to the stables. Oh, the little wretch!—if she dared—"

Mima interrupted, harshly:

"She has not taken your idol. I knew she was in the habit of stealing him out for a wild canter sometimes, and I ran to the stables when I missed her. Selim was there all right, and the ponies, too."

"Then she has gone off with some of the men; she has eloped, the little vixen, and may joy go with her! It is a good riddance of bad rubbish," madame cried, in such violent indignation that the servant's suspicions were disarmed. Seeing the impression she had made, the wily ex-actress went on: "I dare say that was the cause of the shooting last night. I was awakened by the report of a pistol, and jumped out of bed and ran to the window. I saw a carriage in front of my door, and two men scuffling on the pavement. Suddenly one fell to the ground; the other jumped into the carriage and drove rapidly away. No doubt the wicked little baggage was in the vehicle, and the fight was over her. Let her go, the little nobody. I shall make no effort to find her. But aren't you going to give me my chocolate, when I'm so weak I can scarcely speak?" pausing in her voluble tirade, and fixing a glance of reproach on the servant's dark, stolid face.

[Pg 59]

Mima shrugged her broad shoulders sarcastically and retired, and madame sprung out of bed, thrust her feet into satin slippers, and huddled on an elaborate *robe de chambre*.

"I suppose I shall have to dress myself now, having deprived myself of my little maid's services to gratify my desire for revenge," she muttered, half regretfully. "*Ciel!* but she had deft fingers and a correct taste. I can not replace her services by another, for the secrets of this old house are not to be trusted to a stranger. Well, I am a thousand dollars the richer, although Remond let the prize slip through his fingers after he had paid the price. And what a fortune it was that cast Van Zandt into my hands! I have fallen in love with the beautiful boy. It is really love, not the *penchant* I have entertained for a score of others. Ah!" She paused in her soliloquy, for Mima entered with a tray on which glistened the gold and silver of a costly breakfast service, spread with delicate edibles. "Your patient, Mima, how is he?" she queried, anxiously.

"He is doing well, and thinks he is in a hospital," said the woman. "It is best to humor him in that delusion for several days; for if he were to find out the truth now, he would fret and chafe, and perhaps bring on the fever I am anxious to avoid. So, madame, you would do well to stay out of the sick-room until he is well enough to bear the news that he is a prisoner of love," sarcastically.

[Pg 60]

---

## CHAPTER XII.

Carmontelle stood for many minutes gazing like one dazed at the still and lovely features of the nameless dead girl. He was stunned, as it were, by the magnitude of this misfortune, and could only murmur over and over in accents of pity and despair combined:

"Too late, too late, too late!"

At length he too flung himself down before the altar with bowed head, although no prayers escaped his lips, for the stupor of despair was upon him. She was dead, poor unfortunate Little Nobody, and there was naught to pray for now.

There the detective found him, two hours later, when he came with news—news at once good and bad.

"I found Remond," he said. "He was about leaving the city by the steamer 'Ellen Bayne.' As he was about crossing the plank, I collared him and demanded the antidote. He was startled at first, and glared at me fiercely, then suddenly assumed a calmness that looked so much like acquiescence that I was completely deceived. He put his hand into his breast-pocket, and drew out a small vial of colorless liquid. I thought he was going to give it to me, and, thrown off my guard by his apparent coolness, released him and stretched out my hand. The cunning villain took instant advantage of my belief; he sprung away from me across the gang-plank, which was instantly drawn in, as the steamer was leaving the wharf. Standing on the deck, he looked at me with the leer of a fiend and immediately flung the vial into the river."

"The fiend!" Carmontelle said, hoarsely. "But it matters not. She is already dead."

And he led the dismayed and disappointed detective to the chapel, and showed him the silent sleeper there, with the cool white lilies on her breast. [Pg 61]

"How beautiful, how unfortunate!" murmured the kind-hearted detective, in reverential awe. His profession had made him familiar with all sorts of tragedies and sorrows, but this one seemed to him as sad and pathetic as any he had ever encountered. He looked with deep sympathy upon the man beside him to whom the girl's death was such a crushing blow, but words failed him. He could only look his silent and sincere sympathy.

Suddenly there recurred to Carmontelle the remembrance of Eliot Van Zandt, whose fate was still wrapped in mystery.

"Come, we can do no good here now," he said, mournfully. "The fiends have done their work too well. We must try to get at the bottom of the mystery that enshrouds the fate of my poor friend."

After promising the mother superior to return and attend to the funeral obsequies of the dead girl, he went away, taking the detective with him to assist in the inquiry for the young journalist.

It did not seem possible that they could fail in this search, but though the anxious quest was kept up for many days and nights, not a single clew rewarded their efforts. Eliot Van Zandt had disappeared as completely as though an earthquake had opened and swallowed him into the bosom of old mother earth.

The detective could form but one conclusion, which he reluctantly imparted to his employer.

"The young man was most probably murdered that night, and his corpse flung into the river, but no proofs will ever be found implicating Remond as the murderer. Nor is it likely that the Frenchman will ever turn up again in New Orleans. Fearful of detection, he will go abroad and plunge into new crimes befitting his evil nature, and the disappearance of poor Van Zandt will most likely remain forever upon the terrible list of unexplained disappearance of human beings." [Pg 62]

Days came and went, and it seemed as if he had uttered a true prophecy.

In the meantime, a tomb in the convent cemetery had received to its cold embrace the shrouded form of Mme. Lorraine's beautiful victim, and the madame herself had been apprised of the fact by a brief and bitter note from Pierre Carmontelle.

"The victim of your malice is dead and in her untimely grave," he wrote. "Remond has fled the city, and the Jockey Club has been told the secret of your guilt and his. They are wild with rage, but they spare you yet until they can make sure of your guilt, and bring your crime home to you. In the meantime, I tell you frankly that you are under constant espionage, and the task of my life is to avenge the death of poor little ma'amselle upon you and that cowardly Frenchman. Look well to yourself, for enemies encompass you and punishment awaits you."

Madame grew pale beneath her rouge, and twisted the angry note nervously in her jeweled fingers.

"A frank enemy!" she muttered. "He gives me fair warning. Like the deadly serpent, he gives forth his venomous hiss before he stings. He is very kind. Forewarned is forearmed, they say."

She reread it with a nervous contraction of her brows.

"So the little one is dead! I did not intend it, but—it is better so. Fate has removed an incumbrance from my path. Now for a call upon my guest, to electrify him with my news. Mima says he is fast recovering, and that I may venture upon a visit."

She went to her dressing-room and donned a street costume of olive cashmere and silk, with bonnet and gloves and all the paraphernalia of walking costume. Then, with a choice bunch of flowers culled from her garden, she let herself through the secret entrance to the cellar chamber, and preceded by the frowning servant, was ushered into the presence of Eliot Van Zandt. [Pg 63]

He lay, pale and handsome and restless, among the white pillows in the luxurious room. The lamp that burned night and day shed a soft, roseate glow over everything, and brightened somewhat the pallid cast of his countenance.

"Ah, Monsieur Van Zandt, my poor, dear Yankee friend, the cruel doctors and nurses have permitted me to call on you at last! And how do you find yourself this evening, *mon ami*?" she cried, fluttering up to his bedside, all smiles and sweet solicitude.

His dark-gray eyes opened wide with surprise and displeasure.

"Madame Lorraine!" he ejaculated, angrily, but she pretended not to understand the surprise and anger.

"Yes, it is I," she said, sweetly. "Did you think you were deserted by all your friends? But it was the cruel doctors in the hospital; they would admit no one until you were out of danger. I came every day and begged until they gave me leave to see you. Ah, *mon ami*, I have suffered such anxiety for your sake!" with uplifted eyes and pensive air. "But, thank the good God, you are restored to me."

The dark-gray eyes flashed with resentment, and a warm flush crept up to the young man's pale brow. He waved her away indignantly.

"Madame Lorraine, your hypocrisy is intolerable!" he exclaimed, hotly. "Leave me. Your call is in the worst of taste, and most undesirable."



With impetuous grace, she flung herself down on her knees beside him, surprise, dismay, and wounded love expressed eloquently on her mobile face.

"Ah, *mon ami*, what have I done to receive this repulse? I come to you in friendship and regard, and you order me away! Good nurse"—turning her head around for a moment to scornful Mima—"is it that your patient is delirious yet, that he thus upbraids his truest friend?"

[Pg 64]

"Get up from your knees, Madame Lorraine; you can not deceive me by your artful professions," Van Zandt cried, sternly; and looking wondrously grand and handsome in his anger, although he could scarcely lift his blonde head from the pillow. "I am not delirious; my mind is perfectly clear, and, in proof of it, listen: I was in your garden that night, and heard your nefarious plotting with Remond for the ruin of that poor young girl. She heard, too, and, distracted with terror, begged me to save her. It was I who brought Carmontelle to the rescue, while I held at bay the villain Remond. Now you understand why I loathe the sight of you—why I wish you to go out from my presence, never to enter it again."

She wept and protested, as she had done with Carmontelle, that it was all a cruel mistake. She had but made a match, French-fashion, for her ward. Remond was pledged to marry her that night. She did not find him credulous, as she had hoped. He smiled in scorn, and reiterated his wish that she should leave the room.

"Very well," she said, bitterly, "I am going, but not before I tell the news I brought; your officious intermeddling was fatal to the girl you pretended to save—it was the cause of her death."

"Death!" he echoed; and the fair, stately head fell back among the pillows, the lids drooped over his eyes. Mima believed he was about to swoon, and hastily brought restoratives.

"You should have held your cursed tongue!" she muttered, in an audible aside to her mistress; but Mme. Lorraine did not reply. She was watching that deathly pale face that looked up at her so eagerly as Van Zandt whispered, faintly:

"Dead! Oh, you do but jest! It can not be!"

"It is no jest. It is the truth. Do you want to hear how it came about? Remond had two subtle Eastern drugs, the one to induce heavy sleep, the other to awaken her at his will. Well, you and Carmontelle interfered, and so Remond ran away with the second drug, and—she died in her sleep."

[Pg 65]

"No, no!" he cried, almost imploringly.

"Ah, you regret your work when too late!" madame cried, triumphantly. "It is sad, is it not? But it is true as Heaven. Barely an hour ago I received a note from him, to say that she was dead and buried, the poor little wretch!"

"It is your fiendish work!" he said, bitterly. "May Heaven punish you! Ah, the poor innocent little ma'amselle, it was hard for her to go like that. But—better death than dishonor!"

He put his white hand up before his face, and a long, deep, shuddering sigh shook him from head to foot. Mima shook her mistress roughly by the shoulder and pointed to the door that led up the stairs to the hidden entrance.

"Go!" she whispered, harshly. "I don't know what prompted you to this devil's work. You must have wanted to kill him. I don't know how this will result now. Go, and take your hateful face out of his sight!"

Madame flung down her roses with a whimper, and trailed her rich robes from the room in a passion of disappointed love and hope.

"He loved her—like the rest!" she muttered, fiercely. "I wish she had died before he ever saw her. But I swear I will win him yet, or—he shall never see the light of day again!"

---

## CHAPTER XIII.

Van Zandt lay for a long time with his face hidden in his hands, long, labored sighs shaking his manly form, feeling as if a nightmare of horror had fastened itself upon him. It had been bad enough to lie here, bound hand and foot by the pain of his severe wound, and chafing fiercely against his misfortune, but with the inward comfort of the knowledge that by his bravery he had saved a girl, Little Nobody though she was, from a cruel fate; but—now!

[Pg 66]

Now, at the sudden and cruel news Mme. Lorraine had maliciously brought, his heart almost ceased its beating, so awful was the shock.

Dead, gone out of life in her maiden bloom, so beautiful, so innocent and ignorant, wronged irretrievably by a woman without a heart—a handsome creature, wicked enough to sell a young, immortal soul to ruin for a handful of sordid gold! Bitter, sorrowful, indignant were his meditations while he lay there, with his hand before his face, watched furtively by the big, ugly Mima, who, with all her rough ways, was a skillful and tender nurse, having spent four years of her life caring for wounded soldiers in an army hospital.

She moved nearer to him at last, and said, uneasily:

"Best not to take it so hard, sir. The girl's gone to a better place than this wicked world, where

she never saw one happy day. You'll make yourself worse, taking on like this, and it can't do any good to the dead, so cheer up and think of getting well as fast as you can, and out of this lonesome place."

He looked curiously at the hard, homely face as she spoke, for she had been shy and taciturn heretofore, wasting few words upon her patient. She had told him that he was in a private hospital, and he had not doubted the assertion, although, as days passed by, it seemed strange to him that he saw no face but hers about him. Another thing that puzzled him was, that it seemed always night in his room—the curtains drawn and the lamp burning. When he spoke of this to Mima, she answered abruptly that he slept all day and lay awake all night.

"And I never see the doctor when he comes to visit me," he added.

[Pg 67]

"You are always asleep when he pays his midday visit," she replied.

In the languor and pain of his illness he accepted all her statements in good faith, although chafing against his forced detention, and wondering what his publishers and his home folks would think of his strange silence. He had resolved only this morning that he would ask Carmontelle to write to them for him to say that he was sick—not wounded—only sick.

Now he looked fixedly at his strange, grim nurse, and said, sternly:

"Never admit that woman, that fiend rather, into my presence again. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, sir," Mima replied, soothingly; and he continued, anxiously:

"Now, tell me, has any one called to see me since I was brought to this hospital? I mean, except that woman, Madame Lorraine?"

"Lord, yes, sir; several gentlemen that said they was from the Jockey Club, and friends of yours. But the doctor's orders was strict not to admit anybody."

"How came Madame Lorraine to get admittance, then?" with a very black frown.

"Lord, sir, she wheedled the doctor with her pretty face!"

He frowned again, and said, peremptorily:

"When the doctor comes in again, you must awaken me if I am asleep. I must speak to him."

"Yes, sir," meekly.

"And if the gentlemen from the club come again, say to the doctor that they must be admitted. I am quite well enough to receive my friends, and I must get some one to write home for me. Will you do as I tell you?" looking at her with contracted brows, and a dark-red flush mounting into his cheek that alarmed her, experienced nurse that she was.

[Pg 68]

"Yes, yes, my dear sir, I will do just as you say," she replied, eager to pacify him, for she saw that what she had been dreading all the time had come to pass, through the imprudence of Mme. Lorraine—her patient had been driven by excitement into a high fever.

---

## CHAPTER XIV.

In the meantime, a strange event had taken place at the Convent of Le Bon Berger, through the curiosity of the old priest, who, while bending over his book in the chapel, had overheard Carmontelle's story of the mysterious drug and its strange antidote. Although outwardly absorbed in his devotions, he had listened with an excited gleam in his dim old eyes, and once had half started forward to speak, but checked himself quickly, and remained quiescent during the time that elapsed before Carmontelle and the praying nuns took their departure from the chapel.

When all were gone, and there remained only himself and that still form in the black-draped coffin, he started eagerly forward and stood in excited silence gazing at the beautiful face of the dead girl. Once he lifted his old, wrinkled hand and pressed hers tenderly, then withdrew it, shuddering at that mortal coldness.

It was no wonder that the old priest had been excited by the story of Carmontelle, for years ago he had been an enthusiastic traveler in Eastern lands, and an old witch—or sorceress, as she was called there—had given him two drugs to which she ascribed the mysterious properties possessed by those of which Carmontelle had spoken. He had kept them always, certainly with no intention of ever testing the strange power claimed for them, but only because they were part and parcel of the box of curiosities he had brought with him from that fascinating tour. To-day the two vials lay safely in the box, wrapped in a bit of yellow parchment on which, in a strange tongue, were inscribed the directions for their use.

[Pg 69]

It flashed over him that the hour had come when the gift of the old hag, at whose strange leer he had shrunk and shuddered, was to be instrumental in saving a human life.

But he was old and wise, and he knew that life is not always a blessing; that often and often it is but the bearing of a heavy cross, with lagging steps and weary heart, to a far Golgotha. In the dim confessional men and women, and even the young and tender, had poured their griefs and their sins into his compassionate hearing, and many had waited for death with infinite yearning, while some—and he trembled and crossed himself at the sad remembrance—had gone mad over

wrong and ruth, and in despair had cut the Gordian knot of life. It was of all this he had thought when he had restrained his impulse to speak to Carmontelle; it was of this he was thinking now, as he stood there, old and gray and holy, by the side of that beautiful bud of life in the coffin.

He was, as it were, weighing entity and non-entity in careful, metaphorical scales. He was solemnly asking himself, "Which is better—life or death?"

From the saints and angels in that bright world beyond, where his pious thoughts continually rested, seemed to come a low, eager answer:

"Death!"

He looked again, with agonized doubt, at that fair, lovely face, so innocent in its deep repose.

The mother superior had told him that the girl, had she lived, was destined to be the bride of Carmontelle.

"I know the man—rich, generous, and worldly. As his wife, she will be a society queen. Her idols will be wealth and pleasure. She will be gay and heartless, forgetful of all holy things, living only for this world. Better, far better, the bride of Heaven."

[Pg 70]

And crossing himself again, with a muttered prayer he went out of the little chapel, where presently the pale-faced nuns came again, muttering their pious aves for the dead.

That night in his cell, impelled by some irresistible force within himself, he took out the small vial from the curiosity-box, and read the strangely lettered parchment, for he was an earnest student, and versed in Oriental lore.

Great drops of dew beaded his temples as he spelled out the meaning of the parchment; and no wonder, for he read there that, although one lay as dead for three days, a few drops of the antidote poured between the lips would break that deathly sleep and restore life; but after those wondrous three days the drug could be of no avail—death must surely ensue.

In the cold and cheerless cell the old priest shivered as with a chill.

"What an awful responsibility lies upon me!" he muttered. "It is for me to decide whether to give her back to Carmontelle and the world, to be spoiled by its vanities, or leave her soul, now pure and unspotted, free to enter heaven."

After an hour of painful meditation he put away the mysterious drug and spent the night upon his knees on the cold stone floor of the cell, calling on all the saints to uphold him in his pious resolve to save the soul of the lovely girl by the sacrifice of her life.

And the next afternoon, in a shaken voice and a holy resolve written on his ashen features, he read the long Latin prayers for the dead to the assembled nuns and to Carmontelle among them, and saw the form of poor Little Nobody consigned to the grim vault in the convent cemetery.

Two days and a night had thus passed while the girl lay in that death-like trance. A few hours more and the prisoned soul would be separated from the body, and the story of her brief life be ended.

[Pg 71]

But when the shades of night again fell on the convent walls, a revulsion of feeling brought remorse to the soul of the old priest. He was haunted by the thought of the living girl prisoned in the vault among the dead. In the solitude of his cell that night a strange unrest grew upon him, and evil spirits seemed to people the gloom.

He started up in terror from his knees, the great drops of sweat pouring over his face.

"Yes, yes, it is murder!" he uttered, fearfully. "Heaven put the means of saving her in my hands, and I was too blind to understand. But I will atone, I will atone!"

A sudden thought came to him, and he hurriedly sought a brother priest and the mother superior. To them, in deep humility, he confessed his error.

"I was deceived by tempting devils, but I see my mistake in time to correct it," he said, humbly. "Several hours yet remain of the time, and I will restore her to life, by the aid of Heaven and this mysterious drug, and her return to life must be a secret."

They went with him secretly to the dark vault. They took from the coffin that unconscious form and bore it in their arms to a secluded chamber. There they poured between the pale, sealed lips a few drops of the mysterious drug, and kept anxious vigil all night over her bedside.

In a few hours they began to reap the reward of their solicitude. The appearance of the girl's face grew less death-like, a delicate moisture appeared on her skin, a faint color in her lips, and gradually a barely perceptible respiration became apparent. The drug had done its restorative work perfectly.

Down on his knees went the anxious old priest, and he thanked Heaven for the life he had saved.

When the morning light began to gild the convent spire, the dark eyes opened slowly upon the face of the mother superior, who was watching intently for this sign of life. The priests had retired, and they were quite alone. Tears of relief sparkled into the eyes of the good nun.

[Pg 72]

"Dear child, you are awake at last!" she exclaimed, gladly; but the girl made no reply. Her lids had closed again, and she had fallen into a quiet, natural sleep that lasted until the chiming of the vesper bells.

She awoke to find her slumber guarded by another nun, who had taken the place of the good mother. When the dark, puzzled eyes wandered around the room, she chirped sweetly:

"Oh, my dear, you have slept so long, you must be very, very hungry. I will bring you some food."

She came back presently with some light, nutritious broth in a bowl, and fed the girl gently from a tea-spoon. She swallowed languidly, and a few mouthfuls sufficed her appetite. Then she looked at the pleasant-faced nun, and said, languidly:

"Good sister, I do not understand. Just now I was with Monsieur Van Zandt. He was wounded. Oh, how pale he was!" shivering. "Another minute, and I am here. How is it, and where is he?"

The old priest had entered noiselessly, and the low voice was distinctly audible to his ears. He shuddered.

He had just read in a paper of the mysterious disappearance of Eliot Van Zandt, who was supposed to have been murdered, and his body flung into the lake or the river. Hence the girl's strange words struck coldly on his senses. He thought:

"Her soul has been parted from the body in that strange trance, and has taken cognizance of the man vainly sought for by friends and detectives. What if she could tell where he is hidden!"

Muttering a prayer for the girl, he came up to the bedside.

[Pg 73]

"Bless you, my daughter," he said, soothingly. "And so you have seen Eliot Van Zandt? Does he yet live?"

She looked at him gently and with surprise. Perhaps, in the strange experiences of her trance, she was inured to surprises.

"Holy father," she murmured, reverentially, then, gently. "I have seen him. He is not dead. He is not going to die. But he is very ill; he is dangerously wounded."

The little nun chirped an "oh!" of vivacious wonder, but the priest silenced her by a warning glance.

"Where is he? Where is Monsieur Van Zandt, my daughter?" he questioned, eagerly.

"Where?" echoed Little Nobody. "Why, in the next room, doubtless, good father, for a minute ago I was with him, and then I found myself here so suddenly that it seemed a little strange to me."

"Yes, it is strange," said the old priest, growing pale and hurriedly crossing himself. "But you are mistaken. He is not in this house. If you know where he is, tell me, daughter."

She shut her eyes reflectively, opened them again, and answered, dreamily:

"He was lying on a bed in a pretty room, where a lamp was burning all day. There was a red wound on his breast, and he was pale and ill. I do not know the house, but Madame Lorraine can tell you, for it was her servant, Mima, that I saw giving him a glass of water."

---

## CHAPTER XV.

The nun looked at the old priest with round eyes of wonder.

"Father Quentin, what strange thing is this?" she uttered, fearfully.

[Pg 74]

"Ask me not to explain it, my good daughter; it is a manifestation of psychic power beyond human explanation," he replied, hastily quitting the room to seek the mother superior.

As a result of his interview with her, he was soon on his way toward Esplanade Street and Mme. Lorraine.

Seldom had the footsteps of such a holy man crossed the threshold of the gay and volatile French woman. She grew pale through her rouge and her powder when she read the name upon his card, and sent word that she was not at home.

He told the little page that he would wait until madame returned, and took a seat in the quiet salon.

Angry and baffled, Mme. Lorraine came down to him.

"*Bénédicité*, daughter," said Father Quentin; but she looked at him inquiringly, without bending her lovely head.

"I have come to see Eliot Van Zandt, who lies wounded in your house," he said, boldly.

She gave a quick, nervous start, perfectly perceptible to his eyes, and her glance sought his, full of frightened inquiry.

"The girl was right; he is hidden here," he thought, with fluttering pulses; but aloud he said, with pretended authority and outward calmness:

"Lead me to his presence; I must see the young man at once."

She had recovered her calmness as quickly as she had lost it.

"Holy father, you amaze me!" she exclaimed, haughtily. "The man is not here. I read in my paper only this morning that he had most mysteriously disappeared. But come, I see you do not believe me. You shall search my house."

He was a little staggered by her assurance.

[Pg 75]

"I do not wish to seem intrusive," he said; "but my informant was very positive."

Then he mentally shook himself. After all, he had no authority for his assertion, except the strange words of a girl who had just come out of a trance-like sleep—a girl who might simply have dreamed it all.

But he followed her all over the pretty, elegantly appointed house, the little page carrying the keys and unlocking door after door until he was sure that not an apartment in the house remained unvisited.

"You have a servant-woman, Mima," he said to her, as they descended the stairs.

"Yes," she replied; "Mima is in the kitchen, preparing luncheon. You shall see her, too, holy father."

Mima, at work over a dainty luncheon, bowed her head grimly to receive his blessing.

"You have been nursing a sick, a wounded man, Monsieur Van Zandt," he said, trying to take her by surprise; but she did not betray as much self-consciousness as her mistress.

"The holy father mistakes; I am a cook, not a nurse," she replied, coolly.

And so he came away baffled, after all.

Mme. Lorraine pressed a gold piece excitedly into the hand of the little page.

"Follow the good priest, and come back and tell me where he lives," she exclaimed.

---

Father Quentin went his way immediately back to the convent, with the story of his disappointment, and concluded that Little Nobody's dream had been simply a dream, with nothing supernatural about it. The light that had seemed to shine momentarily on the mystery of Eliot Van Zandt's fate went out in rayless darkness.

For the girl, she grew better and stronger daily, and submitted, with child-like patience, to the innumerable questions the good sisters asked her of her past life. They were shocked when she told them the story of her life with Mme. Lorraine, the life that she had counted of so little value that she had never even given her little white slave a name. [Pg 76]

They went to Father Quentin with the shocking story—that the girl had no name, and that that heartless woman had called her Vixen, Savage, Baggage, Nobody, by turns. She must be baptized immediately.

The good priest was as heartily scandalized as one could wish. He chose a name at once for their charge. It was the sweet, simple one, Marie.

And that same day, in the little chapel, surrounded by the tearful nuns, Little Nobody stood before the altar and received the baptismal name, Marie.

The next day she was formally introduced into the convent school, which consisted of twenty young ladies, all boarders. She was cautioned to say nothing of her past life to her schoolmates. The priest said that she was a ward of his, and he wished the pupils to be very kind to Mlle. Marie, who, through the peculiar circumstances of her life, had not received necessary mental culture, and must now begin the rudiments of her education.

For downright, honest, uncompromising curiosity and rudeness, no class of human beings transcends the modern school-girl. The pupils of Le Bon Berger immediately set themselves to work to torture the new scholar—the little ignoramus, as they dubbed her. Such ignorance as this they had never encountered before. They teased and chaffed her in their audacious fashion, and speedily made her understand her humiliation—a great girl of fifteen or sixteen beginning to learn her alphabet like a child of five years!

She was used to being chaffed and despised, poor Little Nobody! It was the life at Mme. Lorraine's over again, and the great dark eyes flashed in sullen scorn as they did then, and the small hands clinched themselves at her sides in impotent pain. [Pg 77]

"I shall run away from here!" she thought, bitterly.

They had one habit with which they daily demonstrated to her their superior wisdom. At recess they would assemble in a great group and read aloud from the daily newspaper. Sitting apart under the great trees of the convent garden, the new pupil listened, against her will, to every word, and so there came to her one day, through this strange means, the news of Eliot Van Zandt's strange disappearance from the ranks of the living.

With dilated eyes, parted lips and wildly throbbing heart she listened, and when the reader's voice came to an end, the group was electrified by a spring and a rush and a vision of golden hair flying on the wind, as the new pupil flew, with the speed of an Atalanta, into the presence of the mother superior.

"What is the matter with Mademoiselle Marie? has she got a fit?" exclaimed the merry, mischievous school-girls.

---

## CHAPTER XVI.

Little Nobody had flung down the spelling-book that had become her constant companion, and rushed impetuously to the presence of the good mother superior.

In a few minutes more she had wrested from the gentle nun her whole story, from the hour when Carmontelle had brought her to the convent until now, when, through the fanaticism of Father Quentin, she was as one dead to the world outside, her young life solemnly devoted to Heaven.

The dark eyes flashed indignantly, the pale cheeks crimsoned with anger.

"How dared he?" she exclaimed.

"Daughter!"

The gently remonstrating tone had no effect on the excited girl. She continued, angrily:

[Pg 78]

"Do you not see that it was wicked to shut me up for life? I do not want to be a nun. I will not be a nun! I tell you frankly their pale faces and black dresses give me the horrors! I shall leave here at once to find the poor Yankee that was wounded in defending me. He is in the power of Madame Lorraine, I am sure. I dreamed of him, and he was wounded, and in the care of Mima, her servant."

The nun assured her that Father Quentin had been already to Esplanade Street, and that Mme. Lorraine and her servant had declared their ignorance of the journalist's whereabouts.

Mlle. Marie's lip curled in unmitigated scorn.

"As if their words could be taken for truth," she uttered, bitterly. "Ah, I know her falsehoods too well."

The nun knew not what to do. The demand of the girl to leave the convent frightened her. She was compelled to falter a refusal.

Then Marie flatly rebelled. Some of the spirit that had made Remond call her a little savage flashed into her eyes, and she vowed that she would not be detained.

The mother went hastily to call Father Quentin. He firmly refused to grant the girl's wish. He was persuaded that to do so would be to insure her own eternal ruin.

The passionate heart, the undisciplined temper, took fire at his flat refusal.

To the poor girl it seemed that the whole world was arrayed against her.

Why had the old priest saved her from death if she was to be immured forever, as in a living tomb, in this grim old convent? The sanguine youth and hope within her rose up in passionate protest.

She pleaded, and when entreaty failed, she flung down a passionate defiance. Go she would! Eliot Van Zandt needed her to deliver him from Mme. Lorraine's baneful power. Should she torture him, destroy him, while she who owed him so much forsook him? Ah, no, no!

[Pg 79]

The result was that the defiant, contumacious pupil was consigned to solitary confinement in a cell for the remainder of the day, until she should come to her senses and ask pardon of the priest and the good mother superior.

She flung herself down, sobbing, on the cold stone floor, too angry to repeat the prayers Father Quentin had recommended her to address to the saints. Her thoughts centered around Eliot Van Zandt in agonizing solicitude.

"He was my friend; he fought Remond to save me," she murmured; "and shall I desert him in the danger he incurred for my sake? Never, never! not if to find him I have to venture back into the spider's den, into madame's presence again."

Day waned and faded, and the soft chiming of the vesper bells rang out the hour of her release. Pale and watchful, she knelt among the nuns and the pupils in the chapel, but ere the Aves and the Pater Nosters were over, she had flitted like a shadow from the cloister, and in "the dim, religious light" made her way into the garden, having first secured her hat and cloak from a convenient rack. Breathless she made her hurried way through the thick, dark shrubberies, praying now that Heaven would aid her to escape from the half-insane old priest.

"Where there's a will there's a way." Desperation had made her bold and reckless. But one means of escape presented itself, and that was to scale the high stone wall with the bristling spikes on top. By the aid of convenient shrubberies she accomplished the feat, and, with bleeding hands and torn garments, dropped down upon the other side into the street.

Fortunately, no one was passing, so her escape remained unnoticed. Panting for breath, in her eagerness she ran the length of a square and turned down a corner, losing herself in a labyrinth of streets. She knew not where she was; but that did not matter yet. She was only intent on putting the greatest possible distance between herself and the convent where she had been so nearly immured for life.

[Pg 80]

After an hour's rapid walking through a locality of which she was totally ignorant, she came suddenly into a street with which she was familiar. From this she knew that she could make her way without difficulty to Mme. Lorraine's house.

A sudden terror and reluctance seized upon her at thought of entering that house of danger, and unconsciously her footsteps slackened their headlong speed.

"To go back into the lion's den—it is hard!" she thought; then, bravely, "But my friend risked his life for me. I can not do less for him."

## CHAPTER XVII.

Weary and footsore, she toiled on toward Esplanade Street, that was still far away.

She was but little used to walking, for Mme. Lorraine had never permitted her to leave the house, and her only excursions had been her stolen rides on the back of Selim, Mme. Lorraine's petted Arab. Her headlong pace at first began to tell on her now, and her steps grew slower and slower, while her slight figure and fair face attracted much attention from passers-by on the brightly lighted street, although her shy, frightened air protected her from insult from even the evil disposed. Her purity, so sweetly imaged on her young face, was a potent shield.

At length she emerged into Esplanade Street. She had been several hours making her way from the convent to this point.

It was nearing midnight, and the girl was vaguely frightened, although, in her almost infantile innocence and ignorance, she knew nothing of the "danger that walks forth with the night" in the streets of a great city. She had been more fortunate than she knew in escaping molestation and pursuit. Her chief fear had been of pursuit by the fanatical old priest, but her hurried glances behind her, from time to time, failed to discover any pursuer; and in a short while more she stood trembling before the dark, silent front of the house where her young life had been spent in semi-slavery as the plaything of giddy Mme. Lorraine.

[Pg 81]

A strange impulse seized her to turn and fly away; a stronger instinct rooted her to the ground.

"He is here! he must be here!" she murmured; "and I can not desert him, my good friend."

She stood there a few moments gazing at the closed door, then walked rapidly to the garden gate by which she had let Van Zandt through that memorable night. By a strange chance of fortune she had the key in her pocket.

Unlocking it softly, she let herself into the garden, and sunk down wearily on the rustic seat where she had fallen into such heavy sleep the night of her attempted abduction. Against her will her eyelids drooped, and slumber stole over her weary senses. The soft air coolly fanned her hot face, and the April dew fell heavily on her floating hair and thin summer dress; but, unconscious of the chill and dampness, she dreamed on until the first faint gray streak of dawn appeared in the east.

Then she woke suddenly, lifted her crouching figure, and looked about her. Memory rushed over her in a bewildering flood.

"I have been asleep when I ought to have been planning how to get into that house unperceived to search for him!" she thought, self-reproachfully.

She knew that there would be no great difficulty about the matter, because Mima was always very careless about fastening up the back part of the house. Being slight and agile, she made an easy entrance into the house by the united opportunities of a step-ladder and an unbolted back window.

[Pg 82]

With a throbbing heart and shining eyes, she found herself inside the house, and, as she believed, near to the kind Yankee friend in whom she took such an earnest interest.

Every one was asleep at this uncanny hour of the dawn, she knew. Lightly and fearlessly she went from room to room until she had explored the whole house in a fruitless quest for Eliot Van Zandt.

To her dismay and disappointment, her careful search was utterly unavailing, although from her knowledge of the house she was certain that she had left not a room unvisited. She had even peeped, by the aid of a hall-chair, into the transom over madame's door, and then into Mima's, too; but the sight of the latter placidly snoring among her pillows, and of madame slumbering sweetly, as if no unrepented sins lay heavy on her conscience, was all that rewarded her for her pains.

Disappointed and dismayed, she crept into an unused closet in the hall, and crouching in the cobwebby corner, gave herself up to such intense cogitation that the tired young brain succumbed again to weariness, and she drooped forward upon the hard floor fast asleep.

Day was far advanced when she roused herself, with a start, and again realized her situation. She heard steps and voices, and knew that the small family was awake and astir. Presently the hall clock chimed the hour of noon.

"I have been very lazy," she said to herself, "and—oh, dear, I am very hungry!"

She remembered then that the nuns had not given her any supper, because she had flatly refused to beg Father Quentin's pardon for her wilfulness.

"Never mind," she said valiantly to herself, "I must not remember that I am tired and hungry until I find my friend."

But hot tears came into the dark eyes, all the same. It was not pleasant to be tired and hungry

[Pg 83]

and disappointed, and even in hiding like a dreadful criminal fearing to be captured.

Suddenly the swish of a silken robe trailed through the hall met her ears—Mme. Lorraine!

The fugitive could not resist the temptation to push the door ajar ever so little, and peep through the tiny aperture at her fair enemy.

And then something very strange happened.

Little Nobody, or Marie, as the nuns had called her, saw Mme. Lorraine stop abruptly at the end of the hall and press her white and jeweled hand upon a curious little ornate knob that appeared to form the center-piece of the carvings and panelings of the wainscoted wall. Instantly a section of the broad paneling glided backward through the solid wall, like a narrow door. Mme. Lorraine stepped lightly through the opening, and disappeared as the concealed door sprung quickly back into its place.

Like one stunned, the girl fell back into her place of hiding.

She had spent all her life in this strange house without a suspicion of the hidden room and the secret door, and its sudden discovery almost paralyzed her in the first moment.

But presently her reason returned to her, and she murmured with instant conviction:

"He is down there."

Following a sudden reckless impulse, and thinking nothing of consequences, she bounded from the closet and pressed her little hand upon the knob in the wall. At first it remained stationary, but when she pushed harder it yielded so suddenly as almost to precipitate her down a short flight of steps on which it opened. Recovering her balance, she stepped softly downward, and the narrow door slipped soundlessly into its place again, and as if impelled by a ghostly hand. But the fact was, that by some clever arrangement of springs beneath the first step, the slight pressure of her foot on the boards was sufficient to close it.

[Pg 84]

She found herself now on the narrow flight of steps, in thick darkness; but the momentary light that had glimmered through the open door had shown her a narrow passage and another door at the foot of the stairs.

Thrilling with curiosity, and without fear, the girl groped her way softly downward to the passage, starting as the murmur of voices came to her from the other side of the door.

"I was right. He is here!" she thought, and flung herself down on the floor in the darkness and listened with her ear against the door.

It was Mme. Lorraine's clear, bell-like voice that was speaking. It ceased its impassioned utterances at last, and a deep, rich, manly voice replied to her—a familiar voice that made Marie's heart beat tumultuously and a sweet, warm color glow in her cheeks.

"It is he," she whispered, forgetting hunger, weariness, everything unpleasant in exquisite relief and joy.

---

## CHAPTER XVIII.

Almost a week had elapsed since the last visit of Mme. Lorraine to Eliot Van Zandt.

During that time he had been very ill from the fever brought on by his agitation at her indiscreet announcement of the death of the girl in whom he had been so warmly interested.

All Mima's skill and care had been required to ward off a fatal consequence to this relapse, and the woman had sternly forbidden any more calls from her mistress during this critical state. Mme. Lorraine was so frightened that she was very obedient to the mandate; but now the embargo had been removed, and she was free to visit the fascinating patient.

He was better. Indeed, he was rapidly convalescing, owing to Mima's good nursing, aided by his youth and a strong constitution.

[Pg 85]

So, on this lovely April morning, madame had made herself beautiful by every device of art at her command, and hurried through the secret door to visit the wounded captive whom she held in durance vile.

Pale and wan, but exceedingly handsome still, Eliot Van Zandt lay upon a velvet lounge, his fair Saxon beauty thrown into strong relief by the dressing-gown of dark-blue silk that madame's care had supplied.

At the entrance of the superbly dressed and handsome woman, his dark brows met with a heavy frown.

"I gave orders, Madame Lorraine, that you should not be admitted again!" he exclaimed, with the frank petulance of convalescence.

Madame gave her graceful head an airy toss.

"No one can debar me from the privilege of entering any room in my own house," she replied, coolly.

"Your own house?" starting.



"Precisely," with a maddening smile; and for at least two minutes a dead silence reigned in the room that, with its swinging-lamp burning brightly, presented the appearance of night, although it was midday outside.

Then he exclaimed, angrily:

"I had already become convinced that there was something mysterious in my sojourn here. I have found out that I am in an underground apartment from which there is no apparent egress. I know that no living soul but yourself and your servant has been near me since I was ill. Am I, then, your prisoner?"

Smilingly, she replied:

"Do not call it by so harsh a word. It is true that you are in my house, hidden in an underground apartment; but it was for your own good that I brought you here. You had fatally wounded Remond, and the authorities were after you. I—I love you," falteringly. "I could not give you up to justice. So you are here—a prisoner, if you will, but a beloved and well cared-for one."

[Pg 86]

"Yes, I have received skillful care and attention from your servant. I thank you," very stiffly; "but now I am well, I desire to go."

"I am suspected of harboring you. My house is watched by officers of the law. Should you go out, you would be instantly arrested. *Mon Dieu!* that must not be!"

She looked at him with tender, pleading eyes.

He answered, curtly:

"If I have hurt Remond, I am willing to answer to the law for my crime committed in the defense of the weak and the helpless. I have no wish to shirk my punishment. You understand me now, and you will let me go. I demand my release!"

Clasping her jeweled hands together in pretended despair, she exclaimed:

"But, good Heaven! *mon ami*, I can not let you be so reckless. Think a moment what will happen if they take you into custody. If the man dies, you may be—hung!"

"I take all the risk; only show me the way out of my hated prison!" he exclaimed, impatiently; and, with sudden passion, Mme. Lorraine answered, boldly:

"Then, by Heaven, I will not! There is but one way by which you can ever leave this room, whose existence is known to no human being but Mima, myself, and you."

She saw him grow deathly pale to the roots of his hair, as he asked, with pretended coolness:

"And that way, my darling jailer?"

With something like a blush struggling through the cosmetics that covered her face, she replied firmly, although in a low voice:

"As my husband."

There was an awkward silence; the man was blushing for her; the dark-red flush went up to the roots of his hair; she saw it, and bit her lips. At last he said, with cool disdain:

[Pg 87]

"You have already a husband in an insane asylum."

She interrupted, eagerly:

"No, no—not my husband. I am free—that is, I was divorced by law from him years ago."

She came nearer; she flung herself, with a rustle of silk and heavy waft of patchouli, down by his side on the sofa. Looking up into his face with burning eyes, she exclaimed, wildly:

"Do not look so coldly and scornfully upon me! Since you came to New Orleans, you have changed all my life. I never loved before. I married Monsieur Lorraine for wealth and position, without a single heart-throb for the man. But you I love, you I have sworn to win. What is there unreasonable about it, that your eyes flash so proudly? You are handsome, it is true, but I also am beautiful. You are gifted, but you are poor, while I am rolling in wealth. I can take you from your drudging life and make your existence a dream of luxury and ease. That is generous, is it not? But you have bewitched me; you have changed all my nature; you have taught me to love."

"I never tried to do so," he replied, with unmoved coldness.

"Cold-hearted Yankee! have you no feeling, no pity?" she demanded, reproachfully. "Look at me fairly," plucking impatiently at his sleeve. "Am I not fair enough to teach you to love me?"

"No," he answered, curtly, shrinking from her touch, but looking straight into her impassioned eyes with cold, unmoved gray orbs.

"Perhaps you already love some one else?" she burst forth, jealously.

"No," in a cold, incisive voice.

A low laugh of triumph broke from her, and she exclaimed:

"Then I will not give you up. You shall be my husband."

[Pg 88]

He gave her an angry stare, but she continued, unheeding:

"To-night I leave New Orleans with my servant Mima. I have my reasons for this step. *N'importe*; they concern not you. I have made up my mind to be your wife, to bear your name, to go home with you to Boston. If you say the word, a priest shall be brought within the hour to make us one.

Then we can escape together to-night and fly this fatal city which now holds imminent danger for you. Do you consent?"

He looked with his cold, disconcerting gaze full into her eyes.

"What if I refuse?" he queried.

"You are a Yankee all over—you answer one question with another," she said, with a faint, mirthless laugh. "But my alternative is so bitter I shrink from naming it. Tell me, are you going to make me your loving wife?"

"I would die first!" he responded, with passionate emphasis.

She looked up at him, pale with wrath and mortification, and hissed, angrily:

"You have chosen well, for it will come to that—to—to death!"

"You would murder me?" he exclaimed, with a start; and she answered, defiantly:

"If you can not be mine, no one else shall ever have your love or your name. If you persist in refusing my generous offer, I shall go away from here with Mima to-night; but I shall leave you in this cellar to starve and to die, and to molder into dust until the story of your mysterious disappearance that night has been forgotten of men."

"You could not be so inhuman!" he uttered, with paling lips.

"I can, and I will," laughing mockingly. "Take your choice now, monsieur—my time is limited. Shall it be love—or—death?"

[Pg 89]

With ineffable scorn, although his handsome features had waned to a marble pallor, he replied, in a voice of proud disdain:

"Such love—the love of a guilty, wicked woman like you, Madame Lorraine—leaves one no choice but death!"

---

## CHAPTER XIX.

He never forgot the glare of rage the angry woman fixed upon him for a moment.

Her eyes fairly blazed as she hissed, vindictively:

"You have made your choice, and mine is the last human face you will look upon. A few days of isolation in this dreary chamber, without food or drink, and you will go mad with horror and die of starvation. Adieu, monsieur. I wish you *bon voyage* to Hades!"

She made him a mocking courtesy, and swept to the door, tearing it open with such impetuous haste that the listener outside had no time to step aside, only to spring up wildly and confront the angry woman, who immediately uttered a shriek of horror and fled up the narrow stair-way, disappearing through the secret door in an incredibly short space of time.

In the darkness of the narrow passage she had taken the pale-faced, wild-eyed girl for a visitant from the other world, and had fled in fear and terror from the supposed ghostly presence.

In her terror she had forgotten to shut the door upon Van Zandt, and with starting eyes he witnessed the strange scene. For an instant he fancied, like Mme. Lorraine, that it was a spirit standing there in the gloom of the narrow passage, with face and form like that of the dead little Mlle. Nobody. Then reason came to his aid. He sprung from the sofa, and just as the secret door shut behind the frightened madame, he caught the girl's cold hand and drew her into the room.

[Pg 90]

"Oh, my little ma'amselle! So that wicked woman lied when she told me that you were dead!" he exclaimed.

She answered, vivaciously:

"No; for I have been dead and buried since I saw you, Monsieur Van Zandt. Don't you see that Madame Lorraine took me for a ghost? It was very fortunate for me, was it not?" and soft, sweet trills of laughter bubbled over her lips.

In her joy at finding him again, she forgot hunger, fear, and weariness.

And in her excitement and exhilaration she rapidly poured out all that had happened to her since that night, nearly two weeks ago, when he and Carmontelle had so ably prevented her abduction by Remond.

He listened in deepest interest; and if Mme. Lorraine could have seen the joy that sparkled in his expressive eyes, she would have felt like plunging a dagger into the white breast of the girl who had brought that joy there by her return, as it were, from the dead.

He laughed with her at the idea of Mme. Lorraine having fooled herself so cleverly in imagining Little Nobody a ghost.

"But you must not call me Little Nobody any longer. I am Marie now," she said, brightly.

"It is a sweet, pretty name," he replied; "but I wish I had been permitted to choose your name. It should have been something else—something unique, like yourself."

She did not know what the word unique meant. She looked at him curiously.

"What would you have called me?" she queried.

"Perhaps I will tell you some day," he replied, with an odd little sigh; and then he changed the subject by telling her how glad he was that she had been saved from death, and how thankful that she had come to save him from the tortures of death by starvation.

[Pg 91]

The dark eyes sparkled with eager joy.

"Ah, how pleasant it is to have a friend!" she said, naïvely. "First you saved me, now I am going to save you. I heard everything she said to you. Oh, how cruel and wicked she is! And it must be dreadful," shuddering, "to starve! I can fancy some of its horrors, for, do you know, Monsieur Van Zandt, I am very hungry now? I have had no supper nor breakfast."

"Poor child!" he exclaimed, and glanced at a covered waiter on a stand that contained the remains of his late breakfast. He drew off the dainty napkin, and she saw delicate rolls, broiled chicken, cold ham, preserves, fresh strawberries, chocolate and coffee, the whole flanked by a bottle of sherry.

"I had no appetite for my breakfast, and Mima did not come back to remove the tray," he said. "Dare I offer you the remains of the repast? The chocolate is cold, but I drank none of it; I preferred coffee. Likewise, the broiled chicken is untouched—in fact, I eat nothing but a roll."

"You shall see that I will do more justice to the fare than that," she laughed; and sitting down by the tray, she made a substantial meal, after which she declared herself much strengthened.

It was very pleasant to have this bright, hopeful young creature with him, in lieu of the loneliness and the cruel fate to which Mme. Lorraine had doomed him. He listened with interest to her pretty plans for his release. She told him how, in her drugged sleep, she had beheld him in this very room, attended by the big, ugly, but skillful Mima.

"Heaven must have sent you that vision," he said, with fervent gratitude. "Oh, how glad I am that I shall go free again into the world! I have sweet, young sisters little older than you, my child, who would grieve for me were I to die like this. Are you sure, quite sure, that you possess the secret of the opening of the hidden door?"

[Pg 92]

Marie started.

"It must be the same as that of the outside—must it not, monsieur?" she queried, with a confident air.

"I am not sure, but I hope it is," he replied, with a sudden dawning anxiety.

"I will go and see at once," she exclaimed, starting toward the door.

"No, no," he said, and held her back.

"But why?" she asked, turning on him her pretty, puzzled face.

With a smile, he answered:

"Do you not see that it would not be safe to venture to open the door while our enemies remain in the house? We must wait patiently here until night—until they are gone away. Then we shall be able to effect our escape unmolested."

He spoke more cheerfully than he felt. A strange dread was upon him. What if they should not be able to open the door at the head of the cellar stair-way?

What if he were indeed hopelessly immured within this prison, the life of the girl forfeited to the bravery and daring that had led her to seek and save him?

"Oh, I could bear it like a man, alone, but for her to perish under the slow agony of starvation—Heaven forbid it!" he groaned, but breathed not a word of his fears to the girl who was full of hope and eager expectancy, looking eagerly forward to the hour of their release.

In spite of his anxiety, he spent a not unpleasant day in the society of Marie. She was so lovely and so unique, in her total ignorance of the world, that she had a subtle charm for the man inured to the conventionalities of society. Then, too, she was constantly exciting his wonder by the general correctness of her language, although he knew that she was totally uneducated. But he easily accounted for this by recalling the fact that she had been brought up in constant contact with Mme. Lorraine and her visitors, and so unconsciously acquired the habit of correct speaking.

[Pg 93]

"What a contrast she is to that wicked woman!" he thought, looking admiringly at the eager, earnest, mobile face, so innocently frank, all the feelings of her pure soul mirrored in her limpid eyes. Recalling madame's story that the girl was low-born, he frowned, and said angrily to himself:

"I do not believe it. She has nothing low about her. There is some mystery about her origin, and Madame Lorraine does not choose to reveal it, that is all."

Certainly, no girl born with the blood of a hundred earls in her veins could have had better instincts or more innate refinement than this Little Nobody. She was innocently frank, but she was also charmingly shy and modest. She was child and woman exquisitely blended:

"Standing with reluctant feet  
Where the brook and river meet,  
Womanhood and childhood flee."

Although she had been overjoyed at finding the reported dead man alive, she had been very undemonstrative in her joy. She had not offered him a single caress, such as one so young might have done; she had not even seated herself near him. She contented herself with looking at him across the breadth of the room, not as one afraid, but with a perfectly natural reserve, and she preserved this frank, unembarrassed demeanor throughout the whole day, which did not seem long to either, although dinner and supper were among the things that were not. Neither one remembered it, neither one was conscious of any sensation of hunger.

"But how are we to know when night comes? It is always night down here," he said.

[Pg 94]

"It was about midday when I followed Madame Lorraine down here. Have you a watch?" she asked.

"Yes; and I have never permitted it to run down since I came here. It is now twenty minutes to four o'clock," he said.

"Then it is now afternoon. By and by, when the watch tells us it is nightfall, I will creep up the steps and listen for sounds in the hall. When I hear them go away, it will be the signal for us to open the secret door and escape," she said.

At eight o'clock, with her ear pressed against the secret paneled door, she heard mistress and maid going through the hall to the front door. It opened and shut. Marie heard distinctly the loud click of the key in the lock outside. They had gone, leaving their victim to perish, as they thought, by the slow pangs of starvation.

Van Zandt was close by her side; she turned to him eagerly.

"I have been feeling the door in the dark for a knob like that on the outside, but I can not find it," she said. "The surface seems perfectly smooth, not carved as on the outside. Will you bring the lamp, monsieur, and let us search for it?"

With a sinking heart, he obeyed her request, detaching the swinging-lamp from its bronze frame and taking it up the dark stair-way in his hand. Even then, in his eager anxiety, his artistic eye took note of the gleam of the light on the girl's picturesque masses of red-gold hair, as it waved in silken luxuriance over her shoulders.

---

## CHAPTER XX.

Marie did not see Van Zandt's eyes looking admiringly at her beautiful hair.

She was gazing with eager eyes at the narrow door that had shut her in with him whom she had dared so much to find and save.

[Pg 95]

She saw with some dismay that its inner surface was just what it had appeared when she had moved her fingers over it in the dark—perfectly smooth, without seam, knob, or lock, and no apparent way of moving it from its place.

Van Zandt gave her the lamp to hold, and put his shoulder to the immovable door, but his whole strength availed nothing against its grim solidity.

Then he spent an anxious hour trying the steps and the sides of the door in an effort to find its mysterious open sesame.

Not an iota of success rewarded his frantic efforts.

But he would not give way to despair.

"I shall have to cut our way out," he said. "But, as I have no hatchet, it will be slow work with my jack-knife. You may have to hold that lamp for hours, ma'amselle, while I whittle a hole in the door big enough for you to creep through."

"That is nothing. I shall not be tired," she replied, bravely.

But she was not called upon for this exhibition of patience.

The first few strokes of the knife revealed to him the appalling fact that the inside of the door was not of wood, but iron—iron so heavily coated with thick paint that it had cleverly deceived the superficial touch.

Then indeed she caught a gleam of trouble in his eyes—trouble that was almost despair. Her own face paled, and a sigh of dismay escaped her lips.

When he heard it, he forced a smile.

"Do not be frightened; we will find some other way," he said.

And they went back to the room and searched the walls carefully to see if there was any weak spot by which they might effect an escape. Windows there were none, and the ventilation of the room had been cleverly effected by pipes that were let into the ceiling above. The walls around were damp and cool, showing that they were built into the earth; but they were thick and heavy, and Van Zandt's jack-knife made no impression on the heavy oaken planks beneath the handsome wall-papering.

[Pg 96]

Two hours were spent in this vain quest for means of egress from their prison, and drops of dew beaded the young man's face. He was weak from his illness and from the fast that had lasted all

day, and sat down at last to rest and to think what he should do next.

"Oh, how tired and weak you must be! I am so sorry I eat your breakfast! I shouldn't have done so, but I thought we should get out of here directly!" exclaimed the girl, regretfully.

She brought him the wine and poured out a glass, which she forced him to taste. It ran warmly through his veins, and courage returned to him again.

"Now, no more for me," he said, pressing back the little hand that offered the second glass. "Drink that yourself ma'amselle, and we must keep the rest for you, for we can not tell how long it may be before we get out of this."

"I do not need it; I am strong enough without it," she replied, and replaced the untouched glass on the stand. Then she saw him looking at her with a hopeful gleam in his eyes.

"I have a new thought," he said. "Perhaps if we could make ourselves heard from down here, some one might come to our relief. Let us halloo, ma'amselle, with all our might."

It would have been ludicrous if it had not been so pitiful to hear them shouting in concert at the top of their voices. Indeed, they paused now and then to look at each other with laughing eyes, and to pant with exhaustion from their efforts, but the shouting was kept up at intervals until Van Zandt's watch recorded the hour of midnight.

[Pg 97]

Then he said, wearily:

"There is no help for it. We shall have to pass the night here, I suppose."

He opened the door and began to push his sofa out into the narrow little passage.

"What are you going to do?" Marie asked him, with large eyes of wonder.

"I am simply converting this passage into a temporary bedroom for myself," he answered. "Good-night, Ma'amselle Marie; I leave you my room and bed. Lie down and rest, and in the morning we will try to devise some new plan for our escape."

He opened and shut the door, and Marie was alone. She threw herself wearily on the luxurious bed, and in spite of hunger and thirst and terror, slept heavily for hours.

When she awakened, she felt sure that day must be far advanced. She found a large pitcher of water and poured out some into a basin and bathed her face and hands. Then she peeped out into the dark passage for Van Zandt.

He was sitting up composedly on his sofa, as if he had been awake for hours.

"Oh, dear, monsieur, I have kept you out in the dark for hours! Come in," she exclaimed; and he accepted the invitation with alacrity, pushing in his convenient sofa before him.

Laughingly, he said:

"I began to think you were a second Rip Van Winkle, Ma'amselle Marie;" and, holding out his watch to her, she saw that it was near the middle of the day.

"Oh, how lazy I have been! Forgive me!" she cried, vexed with herself. "You must have been very tired waiting out there in the dark?"

"No, for I was at work trying to find the secret spring of the iron door, but I only wasted my time and strength," he replied, sadly.

[Pg 98]

"Oh, what are we going to do?" she burst out, in sudden terror.

"That is what I was asking myself at intervals all through the night," said Eliot Van Zandt. "Oh, my child—my brave little girl! what would I not give if only you had not followed Madame Lorraine into this fatal prison! I could suffer alone with a man's fortitude, but for you to share my fate is too dreadful!"

His voice broke and his eyes grew strangely dim. She answered, with pretty gravity:

"It was through your goodness to me that you were first betrayed into her power; and if you have to suffer for it, I want to suffer, too. We are friends, you know. But we must not give up hope yet. I am more sorry than ever that I eat your breakfast; but take a little of the wine, and it will strengthen you."

"After you," he replied, seeing that she would not be satisfied without seeing him take some. He held the glass to her lips, and she swallowed a few drops under protest. He went through the same form, saying to himself that he must save it all for her, for there was nothing else between her and utter starvation.

"What shall we do next? Halloo again?" she asked, with a smile.

"I do not believe my lungs are strong enough to go over that ordeal again. The wound in my breast is not quite healed over yet," he said. "But suppose we sing instead?"

"I do not know how to sing," she answered.

"Very well; I shall have to do all the singing," he replied, good-humoredly. "And, do you know, I think it is a rather good idea to sing, for who knows but it may penetrate to the street, and if it be known that Madame Lorraine be gone away, curiosity may lead some one to investigate into the cause of the mysterious noise, and then we may be found."

[Pg 99]

"Oh, how clever you are! Do begin at once!" she exclaimed, with a hopeful light in her dark eyes.

"I will," he replied; and somehow the first song that came to his mind was a sweet, sad love song

he had been used to sing with his fair young sisters in the far-off Northern home he loved so well:

"In days of old, when knights were bold,  
And barons held their sway,  
A warrior bold, with spurs of gold,  
Sung merrily his lay:  
'My love is young and fair,  
My love hath golden hair,  
And eyes so bright and heart so true  
That none with her compare;  
So what care I, tho' death be nigh,  
I'll live for love or die!'"

"So this brave knight, in armor bright,  
Went gayly to the fray;  
He fought the fight, but ere the night  
His soul had passed away.  
The plighted ring he wore  
Was crushed and wet with gore;  
Yet ere he died he bravely cried:  
'I've kept the vow I swore;  
So what care I, tho' death be nigh,  
I've fought for love, and die—  
For love I die!'"

The girl's beautiful eyes looked at the singer, dark and grave with the strange emotions swelling at her heart. She had heard Mme. Lorraine and the men from the Jockey Club sing their best, but it had not affected her like this. A strange, sweet awe stole over her, mixed with a buoyancy and lightness that was thrilling and yet solemn. With the strange, new sensation there came to her a sudden memory of the chapel at Le Bon Berger, and the soft, murmuring voices of the nuns at prayer. She felt like praying.

[Pg 100]

He looked at her curiously, and she said, with child-like directness:

"I can not sing, but the nuns at the convent taught me how to pray. I will pray to the good God, and perhaps He will hear me and save us."

The next minute she had thrown herself down by a chair, bowed her golden head on her hands, and a low, soft murmur of prayer filled the room. He hesitated a moment, then went and knelt down by her side, and his deeper, stronger voice filled the room with a strong, manly petition for help and pity.

Then he did not feel like singing again for awhile, so sweet and deep an awe pervaded his mind. Marie sat opposite, her tiny hands folded in her lap, a lovely seriousness on her piquant face.

By and by he sung again, but this time it was one of the solemn chants, such as might be heard in the choirs of the old cathedrals.

The day wore on like this, and the night fell again, with no sign that the persistent singing had attracted any attention from the outer world.

Sadly enough, and with many grim forebodings, Van Zandt wheeled his sofa again into the narrow passage for his night's rest. As he bid her good-night, Marie said, sadly:

"The oil is getting low in the lamp. I will extinguish it to-night if you have a match to light it in the morning."

He was fortunate enough to find a little match-case in his pocket filled with matches that he carried for lighting his cigars; so Marie extinguished the lamp until morning, and they turned on a very dim light that day, for they feared that they should soon be left in total darkness. To-day, also, the last of the wine was used, Marie insisting that they should share alike, for both began to feel the deathly weakness of hunger paralyzing their energies. The singing at intervals was still persevered in, although Van Zandt's voice began to fail strangely from the weakness of hunger and illness. Hope failed him, too, as this, the third day of their mutual imprisonment waned to a close, and he regretted bitterly that he had allowed Marie to force him to take a share of the precious sherry.

[Pg 101]

Faint and fainter waxed the light, and the two victims of Mme. Lorraine's malignity began to realize that the horrors of Cimmerian darkness were about to be added to those of starvation and isolation.

"Sing something," said Marie, from the depths of the arm-chair where she was resting.

He fancied that her voice sounded strange and faint, and his heart sunk heavily. He wished again that the poor child had never ventured into this horrible trap from which there seemed to be no release but death. But he had already wished it a hundred times before—alas, to no avail!

"Sing," she murmured again, sadly. "See, the light is almost gone, but it will not seem so dreary when you sing."

He said to himself that he would be willing to sing until the last breath left his lips, could he but lighten one pang of the suffering girl whose devotion to him had brought down such a cruel fate upon her head.

So, although his throat was sore, his head dizzy, and his heart like lead in his breast, he sung feebly, but bravely, a song that yesterday she had said she liked. It was sweet; but sad. He had no heart for gay ones now:

"Out in the country, close to the road-side,  
One little daisy there chanced to grow;  
It was so happy there in the sunshine—  
No one the daisy's joy could know;  
Watching the white clouds, hearing a song there,  
List'ning in wonder all day long.  
'Oh,' said the daisy, 'had I a song-voice,  
Yonder forever I'd send my song.'

[Pg 102]

"It was a lark that sung in the heaven,  
While all the world stood still to hear,  
Many a maiden looked from her knitting,  
And in her heart there crept a tear.  
Down came the lark and sung to the daisy,  
Sung to it only songs of love;  
Till in the twilight slumbered the daisy,  
Turning its sweet face to heaven above.

"Ah! for the morrow bringeth such sorrow,  
Captured the lark, and life grew dim,  
There, too, the daisy, torn from the way-side,  
Prisoned and dying, wept for him.  
Once more the lark sung; fainter his voice grew;  
Her little song was hushed and o'er;  
Two little lives gone out of the sunshine,  
Out of this bright world for evermore."

He paused and looked at her in the dim light. The young face was very pale, the dark eyes hollow with purple rings around them.

"I would give the world, were it mine, for food for this dying child!" he thought, in bitter anguish.

With a languid smile and in childish innocence, she said:

"I like your little song, Monsieur Van Zandt. Do you know, I think it suits us two? You are the lark, and I the little daisy. And—and—we need not hope any longer, I am afraid. We will soon be gone out of life, like the lark and the little daisy."

The last words were so faint as to be scarcely audible. Her eyes had closed while she uttered them, and now the golden head fell languidly against the back of her chair.

With a cry of alarm, Eliot Van Zandt sprung to her side, and discovered, to his dismay, that she was quite unconscious.

---

## CHAPTER XXI.

[Pg 103]

"Unconscious, and not a drop of wine or water with which to revive her—not even a breath of fresh air, though the whole world is so full of it!" he murmured, in despair.

He flew to the water-pitcher in a wild hope, and found there a few spoonfuls which he had begged her to drink in the morning. She had pretended to do so, but here it was untouched. So terrible was his own thirst that his heart leaped at sight of it, but not for worlds would he have appropriated even one small drop from his companion in misery.

Hastily pouring it into a glass, he pressed it against her lips, moistening them gently until they parted, and a few drops of the precious fluid passed between them and down her parched throat. A sigh heaved her breast, and her eyes unclosed.

Eliot Van Zandt cried out in joy and relief, and laying her head back against his arm, he gently forced her to swallow the remainder of the water. It acted like a charm, for withdrawing her head from his arm, she sat upright, and said, in a weak voice:

"I kept the water for you; I did not want to drink it."

"Nonsense, child; I am strong, and did not need it," lightly. "But do you feel better now?"

"Much better; but I think I will lie down, monsieur, I feel so tired. Is it bed-time yet?" trying to smile.

He looked at his watch by the light that was so feeble now that he could scarcely see the hands moving across its face.

"Yes, it is bed-time. It is past ten o'clock," he said; then, with hesitation: "Are you not too sick for me to leave you, child? I can sit here and watch you while you sleep."

Within himself he thought sadly that the conventionalities of the world were out of place now, [Pg 104]

when both were hovering on the border of the Unknown Land. Why not sit beside the dying girl and soothe her last sad hours?

But with a pensive smile she answered:

"No; go to your rest, dear friend. I shall do very well alone, but if I feel ill again I will call you."

Thus dismissed, he wheeled his sofa, as usual, into the dark and gloomy little passage outside the door. Then, lingering to press the little hand and say good-night more tenderly than ever in the presentiment that weighed upon him, she startled him by a shrill, frightened cry:

"Oh!"

The light had given one expiring flare and gone out, leaving them in darkness.

"Are you afraid? Shall I leave my door ajar?" he asked, gently.

"No, no," she answered, quickly.

"Very well, then; but I shall not go to sleep. I shall lie awake to guard you from any fancied danger," he said; and sighed, knowing that there was nothing to fear save the grim, gaunt hunger-wolf.

He struck a match that he might smile once more, sadly but tenderly, into the pale, patient face. She smiled bravely in return.

"My good friend, good-night," she said gently; and with a sigh he left her to hold a patient, wakeful vigil outside her door.

Hours passed without a sound from the dark, inner chamber, where Marie lay huddled among the pillows in feverish sleep. At last, dizziness and weariness fairly conquered him; his head drooped to the arm of the sofa, and he, too, slept.

It seemed scarce a minute since his heavy eyes had shut before he started up with a confused cry. Had some one called his name?

Some sort of a sound certainly echoed in his ears; it resolved itself into *her* voice.

[Pg 105]

Marie's voice calling out loud and strange and incessant, with incoherent words. He tore open the door wildly and struck one of his precious matches.

She lay there among the pillows, with vacant, wide-open eyes fixed on the ceiling, babbling in wild delirium of cool springs and fountains, of summer showers, of falling dew, her parched lips panting with fever.

"Oh, my God! if the world were mine, I would give it for one draught of water for my suffering little darling!" he cried aloud, with the agony of a man's heart driven to bay.

The dim flame of the match died into darkness again, and he stood by the bed, holding her hot little hand in his, listening in agony to her delirious ravings.

"This is the cruelest hour of my life!" he muttered. "Death, when it comes, will not be half so bitter."

By the aid of another match he looked at his watch. It was five o'clock, and outside he knew that the day was near its dawn; but within the chamber where he watched by the side of the dying girl all was thick darkness and gloom, and his stock of matches was running so low that he dared not light one as often as he wished.

Agonized thoughts kept him grim company while he stood listening to her ravings for water to cool her poor parched tongue and lips.

Soon she would be dead, and her harrowing sufferings all over. Then he would be alone with the dead girl until death mercifully came to his release. Here they would lie, uncoffined and unburied for years, moldering into dust, their cruel fate forever hidden from men. In his far-off home his sisters would grieve for him awhile, then he would be forgotten.

The tiny flame of another match flared into the air at six o'clock. Her ravings had ceased, the hot flush had left her face, the little palms were cool again. She lay with wide-open eyes upon the pillow, breathing faintly—so faintly that he looked for every breath to be her last.

[Pg 106]

In the anguish of that thought, a wild temptation came to him. Somewhere he had read that debilitated invalids were strengthened and restored to health by drinking the fresh, warm blood of newly slaughtered bees.

He tore open the blade of his knife and desperately punctured a vein in his arm. The hot, red blood spurted like a fountain, and he caught it in the wine-glass until it was full.

A handkerchief bound tightly about his arm stopped the bleeding of the wound, and, with some difficulty in the darkness, and shuddering with weakness and emotion, he lifted Marie's head on his arm and pressed the glass to her lips.

---

## CHAPTER XXII.

He scarcely dared hope that she would have enough strength to swallow his strange medicine, but, to his joy, the dry lips parted and clung to the glass until every drop of the liquid had been



drained, then, with a long sigh of relief, her head fell back, and he laid it gently on the pillow.

"Have I revived her, or—killed her?" he muttered, in a fright.

Another match. If it had been the last one, he must have one glimpse of her face now.

It lay pale, with shut eyes, and apparently lifeless, on the white pillow. He felt her pulse hurriedly. A feeble, thread-like pulsation assured him that life still lingered. He sat down sorrowfully in a chair by the bed, holding the pulse beneath his finger, waiting sadly for the last.

Seven o'clock by the light of the last match, and the pulse still throbbed softly, and, he almost dared to hope, more strongly. [Pg 107]

"What does it mean? Has my experiment indeed given her a few more hours of life?" he wondered, gladly.

It seemed so, for the thread-like pulse gradually grew stronger, and bending down his head, he caught a faint but regular breathing.

"Marie," he said, softly, and a quickened breath that was almost a gasp assured him that she heard. "I am here by your side," he went on. "It is dark, and I have used all the matches, so I can not watch your face to see if you are better. Can you speak to me, dear?"

"Monsieur," she uttered, faintly, and his heart leaped with joy at the sound.

"You are better," he exclaimed, and she murmured a faint:

"Yes."

Then she seemed to fall asleep. He fought bravely against the deathly weakness that was stealing over him. A passionate prayer was in his heart:

"Lord, send us help before it is too late!"

Hours seemed to pass while he sat there in a strange half-stupor that most likely would merge into delirium, as hers had done. Oh, the gnawings of hunger, the pangs of thirst, how terrible they were!

"Yet, thank Heaven, I have lightened hers for a little while by the life-fluid I freely gave!" he muttered.

Suddenly, in the darkness, a little groping hand fell on his face.

"Are you there still?" asked Marie's voice, weak but clear.

"I am here still," he answered, taking the hand again in his own. The pulse was much better now. She continued, softly: "I feel stronger, but I was surely dying when you gave me the sweet, warm milk to drink. It put new life in my veins, but—" she paused as if a new thought had struck her mind. [Pg 108]

"Well?" he said, gently, and she answered:

"I can not imagine where you found the milk. I hope you had some, too. It is so reviving. Did you?"

"Yes, plenty," he replied, with a shudder, and she said:

"I am so glad. But how dreary it is all in the dark! Sing again, please."

It had seemed to him a minute ago that he was almost too weak to speak, but he made a great effort to please her, although he knew that it would exhaust his strength all the sooner. He sung with all the power that remained in his weak lungs. In the darkness and the gloom, the dear old hymn, learned at his mother's knee in childhood, sounded sweetly solemn:

"Abide with me! Fast falls the eventide,  
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide;  
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,  
Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me!

"Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes,  
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies;  
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain—"

There was a sudden, swift break in the voice that soared upward to the pitying heavens—his strength had not given out, but something wonderful had happened.

From over their heads, and seeming to come through the small pipe provided to ventilate their darksome prison, had come the distinct sound of a human voice.

"Halloo!"

---

## CHAPTER XXIII.

In almost the last hour, when hope had deserted them, and they hourly expected death, succor had arrived. Van Zandt's singing had attracted attention at last, and now help was at hand.

When that ringing halloo came down the ventilating pipe, he almost swooned with the suddenness of his joy and relief; and it was Marie, who, with a sudden accession of frantic joy, screamed shrilly back: [Pg 109]

"Halloo!"

A voice came quickly back—a familiar voice:

"Who is down there?"

This time Van Zandt answered:

"Two prisoners—Eliot Van Zandt and a lady. We are starving, dying! For God's sake, cut a hole quickly through the floor, and come to our aid!"

"Ay, ay!" said a hearty voice that belonged to none other than Pierre Carmontelle; and then the iron will that had sustained Van Zandt through those four dreadful days gave way, and he fell in a heavy swoon to the floor.

Marie could only moan helplessly:

"Hurry, hurry! he has fallen down. I fear he is dead!"

With all the haste that several eager men could make, it was almost half an hour before a square opening appeared in the ceiling large enough to admit a man's body. Then a faint light streamed into the dark underground chamber, fairly dazzling Marie's weak eyes.

Several eager pairs of eyes looked down, but they could detect nothing yet, so intense was the gloom below.

"It is dark as Erebus," said a voice—Markham's, Marie thought. "Van Zandt, where are you?"

Marie answered, with a sob:

"He is down on the floor, but he is very still, and I fear he is dead from starvation."

A lantern at the end of a rope came quickly down the aperture. A man's body followed it quickly—Carmontelle!

He came up to the bedside and looked with amazement into the wan, sweet face of the girl.

"*Mon Dieu*, it is Little Nobody! But what does it mean? I thought you dead. I saw you entombed!" [Pg 110]

But he had to wait for his answer, for Marie very provokingly fainted dead away, and he had to halloo to Markham above for water and wine.

"I think fresh air would do better than either just now," was the reply. "*Peste!* what a hot, musty smell comes up that hole! Take her in your arms, Carmontelle, stand on a chair, and hand her up to me."

As the ceiling was low, this plan was effected without much difficulty; and Markham took the slight figure in his arms and carried her out to the cool, green garden, where the last beams of sunset were glinting on the shining leaves of the orange-trees and the tinkling waters of the fountains. The cool air and the refreshing water soon brought her back to life and hope again.

But Van Zandt was longer in recovering. He had kept up the longer, but his collapse, when it came, had been more complete. They found that the wound on his breast was still unhealed, and that there was a mysterious fresh wound upon his arm. The bandage had been knocked off in his fall, and the blood was pouring out in a crimson tide.

They stanchd the wound, and at last brought him around so that, with the aid of three men, he could be hoisted through the hole in the wall. He was too weak to answer questions at first, and it was not until the next day that they learned the particulars of his imprisonment by Mme. Lorraine.

They were inclined to chaff him considerably over the madame's fatal *penchant* for his handsome face, and he bore it with all the equanimity he could. Indeed, their mirth seemed pleasant, although directed against himself, after those four solemn days in that dark, underground prison.

But interesting as they found his romantic story, it was tame beside that of Little Nobody, who, having had a good night's sleep, nourishing food, and a good woman to watch and soothe her restless slumbers, was so much refreshed by the next morning that she could tell her strange story with far more vivacity than could Van Zandt, whose lungs, from his constant singing and hallooing without food for four days, had terribly taxed his strength and endurance. [Pg 111]

"If you had come even one hour later, I fear it would have been too late for me," he said, with a somber look in his gray eyes.

But it was owing to his persistent singing that he had been rescued at last, for, although Carmontelle had never given up the search for him, he had not dreamed that the wounded man was concealed in madame's house, although it was believed that she was cognizant of his fate.

"And this is how we chanced to find you," he said. "It was determined to arrest Madame Lorraine upon suspicion of complicity with Remond in making away with you. Markham and I volunteered to come with the officers to serve the warrant. As repeated ringings elicited no response, we thought something was wrong, and forced an entrance."

"And then?" Van Zandt queried, curiously.

"Oh, then we found not a living soul in the house, and were in a little, stuffy back room, like a servants' bedroom, debating what to do next, when the sound of your unearthly singing made the

hair rise upon our heads in terror. We thought at first that it was something supernatural, it sounded so sweet and strange, coming, as it seemed, from the bowels of the earth, but presently Markham said that Van Zandt was a fine singer, and a wild suspicion came to me. I looked about and found a pipe fixed cleverly into the wall to secure ventilation, as it seemed to me, to some cellar-like apartment. I put my mouth to the hole and hallooed down it as loud as I could."

"And thereby saved two lives that were almost ended. How can I ever thank you and bless you enough, Carmontelle!" Van Zandt exclaimed, with emotion. [Pg 112]

---

## CHAPTER XXIV.

Mme. Lorraine would have been chagrined indeed could she but have known what was transpiring in the house she had quitted so precipitately upon finding out that she was in danger of arrest upon suspicion of knowing the whereabouts of Eliot Van Zandt.

The despised Little Nobody was installed in madame's own luxurious chamber, with a capable elderly woman in attendance. Eliot Van Zandt occupied another room, equally elegant, and Carmontelle and Markham had also installed themselves temporarily in a guest-chamber. In the kitchen a temporary cook held sway until such time as the young journalist could be moved to his hotel. Just now he was prostrated on a bed of sickness, having suffered a relapse from the reopening of his wound through his exertions in hallooing and singing.

The cause of the slight wound upon his arm, which they had found freshly bleeding, he steadily declined to explain.

"It is a mere nothing—the scratch of a pen," he said, carelessly, and indeed it very soon healed. The wound on his breast was doing nicely, too, and he began to talk of leaving for home very soon—as soon as he was able to travel.

Carmontelle had written to his anxious sisters to calm their uneasy minds, and one day—it was a week after that tragic evening when he had rescued the prisoners—he held a very serious conversation with his friend over the subject of Little Nobody's future.

Van Zandt had sat up in an easy-chair that day for the first time, and Marie had come in to see him. She looked bright and well again, and the young man shuddered as he thought how near she had been to death that night in the underground prison. [Pg 113]

"But for my timely thought, my terrible experiment, she must have been dead ere rescue came," he said to himself. "But she must never know. Perhaps she would shrink from me in horror did she but know the truth."

Carmontelle had been very quiet while she remained in the room. He had watched both narrowly. When she had gone, he said, gravely:

"Van Zandt, let us speak together as good men and true. Have you taken any thought for the little ma'amselle's future?"

Van Zandt started and grew a shade paler. He scarcely understood this abruptness, this seriousness.

"Her future?" he echoed, a little blankly. "I thought—I understood—that it was all planned out that night when we saved her. You were to educate her—afterward to make her your wife."

Carmontelle frowned, and said, sternly:

"Yes—but of course you understand that the plan is untenable now?"

He looked straight into Van Zandt's beautiful blue-gray eyes with such a meaning expression that in a moment there rushed over the young man's mind a comprehension of the truth. Flushing darkly, he exclaimed:

"Say no more. I understand you now," hoarsely; "you mean that—that noble child is—is compromised by her imprisonment with me those four long days?"

Carmontelle, with a fierce throb of jealousy at his heart, answered:

"Yes."

Then, after a moment's blank silence on both sides, he added, sighing heavily:

"Such is the cruel way of the world. For myself, Van Zandt, I know you are the soul of honor, chivalrous as the men of the South; and I can pay you no higher compliment than this. For her, I know she is pure as an angel. But—there is the cruel, carping world ready to point the finger of scorn always, and I—warmly as I love the girl—I could not have a bride of whom gossip could whisper even one blighting suspicion. The Carmontelles are very proud of their unblemished honor. I must not be the first to smirch it. I could have passed over her birth, her namelessness, for I could have given her my own proud name, and lifted her to my own station; but—this shadow from her misfortune in having shared your imprisonment is too dark for me to bear. My hopes are in ashes. Instead of being her husband, I must now claim the place of a father or a brother." [Pg 114]

It was a long speech for Carmontelle, who did not ordinarily deal in long sentences. When it was finished he wiped the great drops of moisture from his brow and waited for Van Zandt to speak.

He did not have to wait long.

"I understand you," the young man said, with apparent quietude. "The generous child, by her nobility in coming to seek and to save me, sacrificed her own future. I must—marry her—to appease the properties."

With a quiver of pain and regret in his voice, Carmontelle said, gravely:

"Yes."

"I am ready to make her that poor reparation for all that she sacrificed for me," Van Zandt answered, instantly, and for a moment their hands met in a firm, close grip. Then the Southerner said sadly:

"My God, there is no other way, or I could not give up the sweet hopes that for a few hours delighted my soul. But we have talked it over at the club—my friends and hers—and have all agreed that since the whole affair was so widely known, there could be no other way out of it in honor for that poor child than by marriage with you. Van Zandt, you look strange! Do you take it so hard, then? Great Heaven! can it be that you have some prior engagement?"

[Pg 115]

"I am free—except from the claims of two young sisters, and the trammels of poverty," Van Zandt answered, quietly.

"Poverty, yes, I had thought of that; but she shall not be a burden to you. I am rich, very rich. I will pay the poor child's dowry. I will make it forty thousand dollars, and when I die she shall be my heiress."

"Stop!" Eliot Van Zandt said, with the first sternness he had shown. "You mistake me, Carmontelle; I will take no dowry with my young bride, save her own innocence and beauty."

"But I claim the right—"

"And I refuse to admit it."

And they looked stubbornly into each other's eyes.

---

## CHAPTER XXV.

Then Van Zandt said, sternly:

"I will have no one say that I was paid to take the girl of my choice. I am not rich, as you know, but I will toil harder now that I have such an object in life. She shall not go shabby or hungry, I promise you."

His voice was so full of feeling, despite its sternness, that Carmontelle was puzzled. He exclaimed:

"Your pride does you honor, Van Zandt. But—you said—the girl of your choice. I do not understand!"

Van Zandt hesitated, then said reluctantly:

"Believe me, I do not want to make you feel your loss more keenly by what I must now admit; but, Carmontelle, the reparation I must make to Ma'amselle Marie is not such that I need money to condone the sacrifice. I—I love her, although I have never dared own the truth to my own heart until this hour."

Through the breast of the elder man there went a pang of jealous pain, as he repeated, hoarsely:

[Pg 116]

"You love her?"

"Yes, since the first night I met her. But I scarcely dared own the truth to my own heart. What had I, the poor journalist, to do with that fair creature, whose beauty in itself was a rich dower? But now, when fate itself has given her to me, I can only rejoice."

"Rejoice, yes, that is best—much best," Carmontelle said, after a long, constrained pause. "It is best," he repeated again, more firmly.

"It was fate itself that gave her to me," Van Zandt said, solemnly; and in a burst of emotion he made clear the mystery of the wounded arm that had so puzzled his friend.

"She was dying, and I gave my own blood to save her life. It is my own life that leaps through her veins, that sends the light to her eyes, the color to her cheek. But it is my secret. She must never know."

"No, never; but by that noble sacrifice her life belongs to you, and I can be unselfish enough, Van Zandt, in my own disappointment, to wish that you may win her whole young heart!" Carmontelle exclaimed, lifted out of all selfish regrets by this strange revelation.

And then they planned it all out before Van Zandt lay down to rest, taking Marie's consent for granted—Marie, the simple, ignorant girl who could not have told you to save her life what those two words, love and marriage, meant.

She was as innocent as a babe over many things, poor Little Nobody!

And, to do Van Zandt justice, he revolted at the thought of taking her, as it seemed, willy-nilly;

but the world, the great wicked world, left him, as Carmontelle said, no other way.

"I should have liked to woo and win my bride in the sweet old fashion," he thought, regretfully; then, with a new idea: "And what is there to hinder? The words of the marriage service will be almost meaningless terms to her untutored mind. I will take no advantage of the claims it will give me. I will hold her as sacred as an angel until I shall win her heart as well as her hand. At home I will place her in the school-room with my sisters. She shall have culture equal to her beauty, and I will work for her and worship her in silence until the child becomes a woman and her heart awakes from sleep."

[Pg 117]

The very next day he said to her gently:

"Ma'amselle Marie, I shall be going home to Boston in two more days."

She cried out regretfully:

"Oh, I am sorry; I am afraid I shall never see you any more!"

"Will you go with me, dear, and be my little wife?"

"I will go with you, yes; but—your wife—I do not understand," she said, in a puzzled tone, just as he had expected she would.

"You would live with me always," he began. "You would belong to me, you would bear my name, you would do as I wished you, perhaps, and—"

"Ah, your slave?" she interrupted, intelligently.

Serious as he felt, he could not forbear a laugh; but he said, gently:

"Not my slave, but my love, my darling, my treasure. I would never beat you, nor scold you, nor make your life sad, as Madame Lorraine did. I would be very kind to you always. Now, will you be my wife?"

She replied, with childish frankness:

"Yes, I will be your wife and go with you to your home. Then, perhaps, I will understand better your word, 'wife.'"

He smiled and stooped to kiss her, but she drew back quickly, her innate shyness taking alarm. He did not press her, only said to himself:

[Pg 118]

"My shy little wild bird, her heart is yet to win."

It seemed to him the strangest thing he had ever heard of, this taking for a wife a young, untutored creature who actually did not understand what the words love, marriage, and wife meant.

He told Carmontelle later of his thought. The Southerner was amused at the ignorance of the lovely girl—amused and sorry in one breath, and with a sigh of regret, he said:

"Happy is he who shall have the pleasure of teaching her the meaning of those tender words."

It was arranged that the marriage should take place just prior to Van Zandt's departure from New Orleans. Van Zandt himself undertook to make Marie understand the necessity for the marriage service that would make her his wife. She acquiesced readily, and asked that Father Quentin, the old priest at Le Bon Berger, be permitted to perform the ceremony.

Her romantic fancy immediately invested the affair with a halo of romance.

"I shall be a bride," she said, naïvely. "In madame's fashion books there are brides all in white, with veils on their heads. I shall be dressed like that, and the marriage shall be out in madame's garden by moonlight. All the Jockey Club shall come to see, and the nuns from the convent, too, if they choose."

Van Zandt said it should be just as she liked. He employed Marie's good nurse to buy the simple white India muslin dress and tulle veil. Also a pretty gray serge dress and straw hat for traveling.

Carmontelle presented her with a full set of large, lustrous pearls to be worn at the ceremony, and the rest of the Jockey Club, who had, since the day of Marie's splendid riding, felt almost a proud proprietorship in her, contributed a great box full of costly wedding-gifts—jewels, costly dressing-cases, perfume sets, glove-boxes full of tiny kid gloves—everything, in short, that they could think of on the spur of the moment, even adding a big photograph-album in ivory and silver containing fac-similes of their familiar faces.

[Pg 119]

Father Quentin, only too glad to be forgiven for his treachery to Carmontelle, came to perform the ceremony and bless the wedded pair. But before this auspicious event a difficulty had arisen.

A marriage license must be procured; but what name should be written in it for the nameless girl, Mme. Lorraine's Little Nobody?

Pierre Carmontelle came quickly to the rescue.

"I adopt Marie as my daughter. I am quite old enough to be her father. Let the name be written Marie Carmontelle," he said.

And so as Marie Carmontelle she was given into the keeping of her handsome young husband.

Everything was arranged as she wished. The priest grumbled at the oddity of the whole thing, but she was married, all the same, out in the beautiful garden, by moonlight, with the sweet scent of flowers all about her, and her young face pale with excitement and strange emotion. The Jockey

Club came in a body to witness the wedding, and some brought sisters and friends, who were all agog over the romance of the affair, and said that the bride was as lovely as a dream, and that that wicked Mme. Lorraine ought to have been ashamed of herself for her cruel treatment of one so beautiful and innocent. The girl who but a little while ago had been friendless and nameless had suddenly come into a heritage of hosts of friends and one of the proudest names of New England.

There was no wedding banquet. When the bride had been congratulated by everybody, and even kissed by some of the beautiful, warm-hearted ladies who had come to witness her strange marriage, her female attendant whisked her off upstairs to change her white dress for a traveling one; then, in a few more minutes, and with the sound of kind adieus in her ears, she was in a carriage riding away from all that her old life had ever known, except Eliot Van Zandt, who sat by her side, her shy little hand in his, and called her his wife.

[Pg 120]

Soon they were on board the steamer that rocked at the wharf, soon they were sailing away on the breast of the broad Mississippi, leaving behind the glimmering lights and busy life of the quaint Crescent City, homeward bound, and Eliot Van Zandt, who little more than two months since had entered the harbor of New Orleans, careless, gay, and fancy-free, was taking home a bride to his ancestral home. He had asked himself rather nervously several times what his brother and sisters would say.

---

## CHAPTER XXVI.

He thought more and more on this subject, for Marie, her first timidity got over, began to ask him artless questions about his home.

He told her that his family consisted of five members. He had a brother older than himself, who was a lawyer in Boston. He was married, but had no children, and he lived in the old family mansion on Beacon Hill, with his two sisters, Maud and Edith, who were respectively nineteen and seventeen, and had not quit the school-room yet. The fifth person was Mrs. Wilson, their governess.

"Maud is the elder. She is quite talented, and is writing a novel," he said. "Edith is an embryo artist. My brother's wife is very pretty and fashionable. I hope you will like them all."

But a shudder crept over him at the thought of taking home a bride into that refined and cultured circle to place her in the school-room, to begin at the bottom of the ladder of learning. How shocked they would be, how his brother's wife would lift her pale brows in wonder! He dreaded her more than all the rest, for two reasons. One was that she had brought a little money into the once rich, but now impoverished Van Zandt family, and took airs on that account, and the other was that she had a pretty sister with a *dot*, and wanted to make a match between her and her brother-in-law. So Eliot fancied, and with some reason, that she would not take kindly to the new-comer.

[Pg 121]

The further he got away from New Orleans, the more he was tormented by his dread of his home-folks.

At last he made up his mind to give Marie some sight-seeing in New York, and to write to his brother, and, to some extent, prepare them for the shock they were to receive.

When the letter was written and posted, he felt better. He had explained matters and invoked their good-will for his simple child-wife. However much they were disappointed, they would respect his wishes, they would not be unkind to Marie.

So he gave himself up with a light heart to the pleasure of showing her the wonders of New York City.

Several days were spent there, and then he took her to Niagara Falls for a few days more. He judged by that time that they would have got over the shock in Boston, and be ready, perhaps, to receive Marie with equanimity.

In this hope, he took the train for Boston with his little bride.

Throughout their long journey Van Zandt had adhered to his manly resolve of treating his little bride simply as a dear friend or young sister until she should have awakened from a child into a woman and given her heart unreservedly with a wifely love.

On the steamer she had her separate state-room, at hotels her solitary suite of rooms, on the trains her comfortable Pullman sleeping-car, while the chivalrous young husband lounged away the long hours in a smoking-car with his favorite cigar. The young bride, in her ignorance and innocence, had not an idea but that this was the usual mode of procedure with husband and wife, and thoroughly enjoyed the long journey and the varied scenery through which she was being whirled. Its newness and the strong contrast to her Southern home made it all the more delightful. Eliot Van Zandt enjoyed her delight, her naïve questions, and even her utter ignorance of everything, although he sometimes caught himself wondering at the fact. But the truth was, that the girl's invariably well-chosen sentences, acquired from companionship with refined and well-bred people, made him often forget that she was totally uneducated, and that years of school-room drudgery yet lay before her ere she could take her place in the cultured world of Boston society.

[Pg 122]

"There is one comfort. She is exceedingly intelligent, quick, and receptive. She will learn very fast," he told himself.

One evening, at Niagara, when they sat together admiring the glorious falls by moonlight, she said to him, curiously:

"You said once that if you could have chosen my name, it would not have been Marie. Tell me what you would have called me?"

Turning to her with a smile, he replied:

"The name that I always fancied I should like for my wife to bear was the sweet one of Una—no sweeter, I know, than Marie, but I grew to love the name from reading Spenser's 'Faëry Queen.'"

Then he told her the pretty story, as well as he could, of the beautiful Una who personified Truth in the "Faëry Queen." She listened with sparkling eyes and eager interest.

"From this hour I shall be called Una," she exclaimed.

"But you have been baptized Marie," he said.

"It shall be Una Marie, then," she replied, in her pretty, positive fashion, and he was pleased to assent. [Pg 123]

"From this hour, then, I shall call you Una, and you shall call me Eliot."

"But, monsieur—" deprecatingly.

"No more monsieurs," he replied, playfully. "They remind me too much of Madame Lorraine."

"It shall be Eliot, then, always," answered the little bride.

---

## CHAPTER XXVII.

Bryant Van Zandt was as much surprised and displeased as his brother had expected on the reception of the letter announcing his marriage.

"Eliot had no right to do it. He promised our mother, before she died, to stay single and care for the girls until they had homes of their own!" he exclaimed, vexedly, to his wife, to whom he imparted the shocking news before breaking it to his sisters.

Mrs. Van Zandt was a blonde of the very palest type.

"Her skin it was milk-white,  
Her hair it was lint-white,  
Bright was the blue of her soft rolling eye."

She was about twenty-eight, but looked younger through her fairness. She was rather pretty and petite, and, in her tasteful garb of blue and white, looked like an animated bisque doll.

But her color took a warmer tint than usual just now, and frowning darkly, she exclaimed:

"It was a shame for Eliot to go and make such a goose of himself. It would not have been so bad if he had married a girl with money, as you did, but to go and add another burden to the family is outrageous, I declare! What ever will the girls say?"

"They will be very angry, I am sure," said the lawyer; but when it was told to them, they did not make as much ado as their sister-in-law. They looked grave and sorry, indeed, but Maud, the elder, said, sensibly: [Pg 124]

"It is very bad, but indeed, Bryant, I do not see how Eliot could have acted otherwise. *Noblesse oblige*, you know."

It was the motto that had ruled the lives of the Van Zandts for generations, and Bryant could not say one word; but his wife made a little *moue* of disdain.

"*Noblesse oblige* has nothing to do with it," she said; "or, if it had, it was the other way. He was bound to stay free for your and Edith's sake."

Pretty Edith answered quickly:

"No, no, for we shall not want him to help pay for our dresses much longer. Maud's book and my picture are almost done, and if we sell them, we shall have money of our own."

"*Châteaux en Espagne!*" Mrs. Van Zandt muttered softly, with a covert sneer.

She had no talent only for looking pretty and dressing well, and envied that of her more gifted sisters-in-law.

They were used to her sneers, and they winced, but seldom retorted. The dreamy, dignified Maud looked out of the window with a little sigh, and the more self-assertive Edith exclaimed:

"There's no use crying over spilled milk, anyhow, and Eliot's married for good and all. He has as much right to bring his bride home as you had, Bryant, so we may as well all make the best of it—there!"

"No one disputes his right, Edith, we only deplore his imprudence," Bryant answered, flushing.

"As for me, I married a woman who would be no burden upon me, but Eliot candidly owns that he has made a *mésalliance*."

"Married a pauper and a nobody!" flashed his wife.

"It is no such thing. Let me see his letter. He did not say that!" cried Edith, angrily.

[Pg 125]

"Not exactly in those words, but it amounts to the same thing," Bryant Van Zandt answered. He threw her the letter, and said impatiently: "Well, you may fight it out among yourselves. I am going down-town."

He put on his hat and went out. Edith and Maud read their brother's letter together. Its deprecatory, almost pleading tone, touched their loyal young hearts.

"Poor Eliot, he could not help it. We must not scold," said Edith. "This old house is big enough for us all, isn't it, Maud?"

"Yes," she answered; but the sweet eyes were grave with trouble as she fixed them on Mrs. Van Zandt. She burst out suddenly:

"Oh, Sylvie, do not look so glum, please. Of course, we do not like it, and neither did Eliot, I fancy; but you must see there was no other way for a Van Zandt, so we must make the best of it."

"Fancy a Van Zandt—one of the Van Zandts, of Boston—bringing home an A B C school-girl as a bride!" was the disdainful answer she received.

Vivacious Edith cried out tartly:

"You need not take on such airs, Sylvie. You are not so learned yourself. New York girls never know anything but dressing and flirting."

"We marry into poor, learned families, and so adjust the difference," Mrs. Van Zandt replied, sarcastically.

Both the sisters flushed hotly at this coarse rejoinder.

Mrs. Van Zandt had been generous with her money, flinging it about her with the lavish hand of a spoiled darling of Fortune; but she was always conscious of its importance, never more so than when twitted with her execrable French, her questionable time in music, and her outrageous flirting, that sometimes drove poor Bryant wild with jealousy.

And so to this household, with its discordant elements, its supercilious mistress, its dreamy student, Maud, its enthusiastic, artistic Edith, came Una with her impassioned soul, her shy sensitiveness, her innocence and ignorance, and her heritage of beauty, yet branded already "pauper and nobody."

[Pg 126]

When she saw all those fair young faces grouped in the handsome drawing-room to meet her, her heart thrilled with timid delight. She had had so little to do all her life with the young and gay.

All at once, as it were, she was thrown into a house full of young and handsome people, and it was most pleasant. With pretty confidence, quite untouched with self-assertion, she received their greetings, kind on the part of the girls, patronizing on that of Mrs. Van Zandt, and reserved as regarded Bryant.

It was twilight when they arrived, and a cup of tea awaited them before the late dinner. Una sipped hers shyly under the fire of the strange eyes that were steadily taking in her *tout ensemble*, the simple, tasteful gray dress, the hat with gray feathers that seemed such a Quakerish setting for the lovely unique face, with its somber, dark eyes and slender, dark brows, its perfect chiseling, and its aureole of rich golden hair.

"I shall paint her portrait," Edith whispered, in a stage aside.

---

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

Bryant's wife was quite displeased when Eliot came frankly to her to ask that a separate suite of rooms be provided for his girlish bride.

"Do you hate her so much, then?" she queried, arching her pale brows disagreeably.

He started and looked annoyed.

"Who said I hated her? You are very much mistaken in the idea, Sylvie," he said, curtly. "I love Una quite as well, I have no doubt, as Bryant loves you."

[Pg 127]

"Why, then—" she began, but he interrupted quickly:

"Simply because the love is all on one side yet. My wife is wedded, yet not won. Her heart is that of a child still, and although she bears my name, I will claim no rights save a lover's until I win her woman's love."

Mrs. Bryant had only been acquainted with Una an hour, but she could have told Eliot a different story from that. Her quick eyes had seen the wealth of tenderness in the dark orbs of Una as they rested now and then on her husband's face, but Sylvie was more angry than any one supposed over this unexpected marriage. She was not unselfish enough to open the eyes of the blind young husband.



"Oh, very well, if you choose to make a chivalrous goose of yourself, Eliot," she answered, tartly, "I suppose she can have the best suite of guest-rooms—the ones I have been fixing up for my sister. But I can write a word to Ida not to come."

"Of course you will not. There are other rooms," he said, impatiently.

Sylvie shrugged her shoulders.

"Ida's used only to the best," she said, insolently.

He regarded her for a moment in stern silence. Underneath his usual gentle, nonchalant manner slept a will that was iron when needful. After a moment he said firmly:

"See here, Sylvie, my wife has the same right in my father's old house that Bryant's wife has. You have the best suite of rooms in the house, she must have the next best. If you have put anything from your own purse into the rooms, it can be removed into another room for Ida's use when she comes. Una knows, for I have told her, that the Van Zandts are poor—that we have nothing but this big, old-fashioned house, and such a small income that barely buys our sisters' dresses, and I have to eke out the rest by hard work. She does not expect anything luxurious, but I shall see that she has the best I can afford."

[Pg 128]

So the gage was thrown down, and Sylvie picked it up at once. She had the petty meanness to strip Una's rooms of all the pretty things she had placed in them for Ida, and they looked rather bare when she finished her task of despoliation. But Maud and Edith brought the prettiest things from their own rooms to fill up the void, indignant at her petty spite.

"I know what is the matter. She is mad because she can not marry Eliot to Ida now. It's what she's been fishing for all the time," Edith said, indignantly; and the sisters made a generous compact to fight the battles for the new-comer that their clear young eyes already saw were inevitable.

There was one person who took kindly at once to Una, and that was the middle-aged governess, Mrs. Wilson. When she had come first to teach the little Van Zandts, she had been a forlorn young widow, having lately buried her husband and her only child. She had taught Eliot when a little lad, and she had taught his sisters, growing gray in patient service of her well-beloved pupils. Now, in the fair, innocent face and great, dark eyes of Eliot's wife, she fancied a resemblance to the little daughter that had been in Heaven so long.

"I shall love to teach her all that I can," she said, with a dimness in her gentle brown eyes. "I love to look at her beautiful face with those solemn eyes so much like my dead Elsie's eyes."

And loving her first for Elsie's sake, she soon grew to love her for her own. Never was there pupil so eager to learn, so thirsty for knowledge, so untiring in application as was the neglected Little Nobody, as Mrs. Van Zandt still called her contemptuously in her thoughts.

---

## CHAPTER XXIX

[Pg 129]

The first few months of Una's stay in her husband's home passed quietly and uneventfully. Fortunately for all concerned, Bryant's wife went off to spend the summer at Long Branch with her mother and sister. In the generosity of her heart, she took Bryant with her, so the household that was left was very quiet and peaceable.

The girls took their summer vacation from study, and Maud worked on her novel, Edith at her picture. In the school-room Mrs. Wilson and Una diligently climbed the ladder of knowledge through the long summer mornings. In the afternoons the four ladies took long country rides, and in the short evenings there were dinner and Eliot. They had music always to enliven them, and very often neighbors and friends dropped in and made the time pass agreeably. Often Eliot, who, as a newspaper man, had tickets to concerts, lectures, readings, and plays, took them out to pleasant entertainments. He managed, too, to buy Una a little brown pony to ride, and she had some charming morning canters by the side of her husband, who made the carriage-horse do service on his own behalf.

Sylvie Van Zandt would have said it was a humdrum life, but Eliot and Una thoroughly enjoyed it. Nay, to her it seemed an elysium, this bright home, with its kind, friendly faces and gentle words, so unlike her life with Mme. Lorraine.

Una had learned to read and write with perfect facility and surprising ease, and passed on to higher studies. Of French she already had some knowledge—indeed, as much as she had of English, having spoken either at will in her New Orleans home—so this language was very easy to acquire now. For music she developed a talent equal to that of her husband, and he was delighted to find that she had a sweet, low alto voice that blended in perfect harmony with his own.

[Pg 130]

She began to read poetry and novels now, and their strange sweetness thrilled her very soul. She learned that wonderful word, Love, and some of its subtler meanings. It grew to be the theme of her thoughts and dreams, although in the exquisite shyness that offset her child-like frankness she never even named the word to Eliot.

But, for all that, she began to comprehend its mystic meaning, and to say to herself, with deep tenderness:

"It is what Eliot feels for me and I for him."

Yet this blind young lover-husband said to himself sometimes, discontentedly:

"She is very bright over other lessons, but very slow learning the one I am trying to teach her so patiently every day."

Every day she grew more beautiful and graceful under the clever tuition of Mrs. Wilson, who delighted in her task of forming the unformed girl. They spent happy hours over the piano together, patient ones over books and blackboards.

For several months she never even heard the words "A Little Nobody," under which she had chafed so often at Mme. Lorraine's. Life began to have a new, sweet meaning, whose key-note was love.

She was so sorry when Eliot went away with his friendly hand-clasp in the morning, so glad when he returned in the evening. Sometimes she said to herself that she would not have minded kissing him now, as Maud and Edith did every morning; but, since the day when she promised to marry him, and then rejected his kiss, he had never offered another.

"I should not care for a cold, duty kiss," he thought. "I will wait for her love and her kisses together."

In the meantime, he worked very hard at his literary duties, trying to double the moderate salary he had enjoyed before his marriage, that his sisters might not feel the change. The pony had been quite an extravagance, but he had heard her express a timid wish for one, and by some severe self-denial in the matter of coats and cigars, had managed to gratify her wish. But he did not chafe against the silent sacrifices he made for her sake. Each one only made the dark-eyed girl dearer to his heart, and the memory of that last day in madame's prison always made him shudder and long to clasp her passionately to his heart.

[Pg 131]

On his strong white arm there was a slight scar made by the wound of a pocket-knife. He often looked at it when alone, and said to himself:

"To that little scar my darling owes her life."

But Una, all unconscious of the debt, still sweetly ignorant of his blindness, went on with her studies, and her music, and her poetry reading, making him the hero of all in her silent, adoring fashion.

There was one thing that touched and pleased him.

She had not forgotten one of the many songs with which he had beguiled the dreariness of their imprisonment, and she had insisted on learning each one. The two that she liked best were "The Warrior Bold" and "Two Little Lives." Mrs. Wilson and the girls noticed that she had a fashion of humming over one little verse very often to herself:

"It was a lark that sung in the heaven,  
While all the world stood still to hear,  
Many a maiden looked from her knitting,  
And in her heart there crept a tear.  
Down came the lark and sung to the daisy,  
Sung to it only songs of love,  
Till in the twilight slumbered the daisy,  
Turning its sweet face to heaven above."

She never said to her young husband now, as she had said that time in their prison, "You are the lark and I the little daisy," but she thought it all the more, and the fanciful thought pleased her well.

[Pg 132]

Maud and Edith, who had first taken Una's part out of generous loyalty to their brother, now began to like their sister-in-law more for her own sake.

At first they said: "It is not so bad as we feared at first. She is learning very fast, and she is really very good and very pretty. And even although she is of obscure origin, she is a Van Zandt now, and that is enough."

Maud used to read her whole chapters of the wonderful novel, and when Una's color rose and her eyes sparkled with mirth or feeling, the young authoress was delighted. She took it as a tribute to her genius, and was cheered and encouraged in her delightful work. Edith, on her part, appropriated the girl for a model, and made her pose for her benefit every day in the little studio at the top of the house. At last the two girls unanimously voted her a decided acquisition.

"It is very fortunate Eliot had to marry her. She is a darling, and I can see that they are beginning to fall in love with each other," said Edith.

"I am so glad that it will turn out a love-match after all," Maud replied, with enthusiasm.

The days came and went, and brought the early, bleak New England autumn. It was time for Sylvie to come home, but Bryant came alone. His wife had gone to New York with her family to stay for the beginning of the social season. Every one but her husband was secretly pleased when she stayed until after the New-Year festivities. Maud and Edith were quite sure that they had got along more happily without her, although they were too polite to hint such a thing to Bryant.

At last she came in the middle of January. Ida Hayes, her sister, a younger edition of herself, came with her, and straightway the halcyon days of Una came to an end.

Sylvie came to her room that evening, when she was putting on her simple blue silk dress for dinner, with an air of importance and anxiety. [Pg 133]

"Have you come to your senses yet—you two?" she demanded, brusquely. "If you have, I shall be glad, for I do so want these rooms for Ida."

Una, with her laces all awry, looked up blankly.

"I—don't—think—I understand," she answered.

"Pshaw! I mean, do you use the same suite of rooms as your husband?"

The pretty, wondering face did not change its color, the dark eyes only looked amazed.

"Of course not," Una said, and Sylvie's red lips curled.

"Of course not!" she mimicked, sneeringly. "Why, you silly child, you talk very strangely. Bryant and I share the same suite of rooms, do we not? All husbands and wives do who love each other."

---

## CHAPTER XXX.

Una commenced to fasten her laces with strangely trembling fingers.

"Eliot and I love each other!" she said, slowly.

"Oh, indeed?" said Sylvie, with a very incredulous giggle. "You did not when I went away. Have you done your courting since, as you had no time for it before you were married?"

The wonder, the half-dazed comprehension in the girl's pale face ought to have made her less pitiless, but it had been her dream and Bryant's to marry Ida to Eliot. She had said to herself many times that she could never forgive the Little Nobody that had thwarted her plans.

So with an angry heart and pitiless eyes she had thrust the point of a dagger into Una's heart.

But with proud, somber eyes the girl-wife said, gravely:

"You said you wanted these rooms for Miss Hayes. Very well, you can have them. I dare say Maud will give me another room." [Pg 134]

"Oh, dear no, I would not turn you out of your room for the world, child!" suavely. She knew that Eliot would not permit it. "I only thought that if you had given them up and gone to Eliot's these would suit Ida. She always had them when she came before, and it does seem foolish, does it not, for man and wife to occupy six rooms when three would be enough? I hoped you and Eliot had become reconciled to your forced marriage ere this."

Driven to bay, Una cried out, angrily:

"Mrs. Van Zandt, you are talking the wildest nonsense. There was no forced marriage."

"Then why did Eliot write such a letter to my husband? Come to my room, I will show it to you since you dispute my word."

She caught Una's cold hand and half dragged her with her to her own room, where behind locked doors she gave the ignorant wife that fatal letter to read—fatal, because in Eliot's haste and worry he had stated only the bare facts of the case, and Una could not read between the lines the love that had filled his heart.

She read it—the lovely, trusting girl—every word. She comprehended it in part. What she could not fathom Sylvie pointed out in clearest language, and when she had made her cruel meaning clear as day, she said, maliciously:

"*Noblesse oblige!*"

A gasp, and the girl's heavy eyes turned dumbly on her face—dumb with a bitter, humble humiliation. Sylvie said, half deprecatingly:

"He did not love you at first, of course. How could he? When he came he asked me to give you a separate suite. I remonstrated, but he insisted. Of course I thought you would win him while I was away, and he would get over his foolishness."

Una had folded her white arms on the dressing-table, and was looking into her face with dazed, heavy eyes. She muttered, hoarsely: [Pg 135]

"Oh, this is too dreadful! What must he, what must you all think of me?"

Sylvie replied, with cruel frankness:

"Of course we all felt angry with you at first. We were disappointed, too, for we had all expected that he would marry sister Ida. There had been no engagement, but it was understood. But there, no one blames you or him, child. As I said before, Eliot could not have acted any other way. *Noblesse oblige!*"

As if forgetful of her presence, Una murmured, sadly:

"*Mon Dieu!* what shall I do?"

Sylvie answered, with more sense than she had displayed in making these cruel revelations:

"Do? Why, nothing but make the best of it, as Eliot and the rest of us have done. What has

happened can not be altered now, so you must try to make him fond of you, so that he shall no longer regret taking you and losing Ida; and, for one thing, you ought not to be so extravagant. There is that pony he bought you. I know he could not afford it, really, for he is poor. And to-night I saw him bring you hot-house flowers. I am afraid he is running into debt just to pamper your whims. Now, if he had married Ida, it would have been different. She would have brought him a fortune, and could have paid her own bills."

Pale as she would ever be in her coffin, Una stood listening, her heart beating wildly.

"I am in his way. Oh, I wish I could die now!" she was thinking wildly.

Sylvie, who had done all this out of sheer malice, gloated over the sight of her misery.

To herself she said spitefully:

"I am paying her back, the little pauper and nobody, for Ida's disappointment."

Then suddenly she remembered that it was almost dinner-time. She said carelessly:

[Pg 136]

"You had better go back to your room and finish dressing, Una; and remember, I would not have told you what I have, only that you disputed my word. I hope you will not run to Edith with it. It will only make matters worse. I dare say he will learn to love you in time."

"I shall run to no one with it," Una answered, in a strange voice. She moved to the door as she spoke, and passed out. Sylvie laughed mockingly.

"I have paid Eliot now for his insolence. I know he loves her to madness. I saw it in his eyes when she met him so coolly this evening. Well, this will put a stumbling-block between them that he will not easily pass."

And humming an opera air with heartless indifference, she made some slight addition to her already elaborate toilet, and went down-stairs.

Una's toilet, the light-blue surah silk with square neck and elbow-sleeves, was complete but for the handsome corsage bouquet Eliot had brought her an hour ago. She did not pin it on her breast; she took it in her hand and ran along the hall, then tapped softly at the door of the apartment that she knew had been designed for Miss Hayes's use.

Ida opened it, dazzling Una's eyes with the glitter of her satin and jewels. She frowned slightly at the intruder.

"I have brought you these flowers to wear," Una said, rapidly, thrusting them into Ida's white hand. Then she turned away and went along the hall with slow, lagging footsteps, down the broad, shallow staircase, and so to the drawing-room, her young face pale with emotion, and a strange, excited glitter in her dark eyes.

---

## CHAPTER XXXI.

[Pg 137]

Eliot was sitting on a low *tête-à-tête*. He moved aside slightly to allow her room at his side.

But Una did not seem to see her husband's involuntary movement. She went to the opposite side of the room and sat down by Edith, who, with her brown hair and brown eyes, looked very pretty in garnet velvet and cashmere daintily combined into a graceful dinner-dress. Maud was buried in a book on the other side of her, but she had taken time to honor the new arrivals by putting on her best black silk with a white lace fichu to relieve its somber tone.

Vivacious Edith exclaimed instantly:

"Oh, Una, the pretty flowers that Eliot brought you—you have forgotten to wear them. Shall I run and get them for you?"

"Thank you—but no," as Edith rose. "I don't care for them. I—I have given them away."

Eliot had heard distinctly the question and answer; but there was no time for comment. Ida Hayes sailed in—a bisque doll in Nile-green silk and velvet, with Eliot's roses pinned among the laces of her V-shaped corsage.

"And to think that I went without cigars two days to buy Ida Hayes a corsage bouquet!" he said, ruefully, to himself.

But the loss of the cigars was the least part of his mortification.

He had fancied he was winning his way to his girl-bride's heart. This little incident showed him clearly his mistake.

"She is not learning to love me. Perhaps she never will," he thought, gloomily.

Ida Hayes, with the best grace in the world, sat down on the *tête-à-tête* beside him. She was a belle and a beauty—had been for seven years, ever since she left the school-room at eighteen—and she could have been married well long ago, but she had seen no one she fancied until she met Eliot Van Zandt at her sister's wedding three years ago. Since then her heart, as well as Sylvie's, had been set on an alliance with him, and his marriage had been a bitter blow to her self-love.

[Pg 138]

But she was a society woman. She did not wear her heart on her sleeve, and in the clear, pale-

blue eyes upraised to his Eliot Van Zandt read no sign of her disappointed hopes.

"I see you looking at my flowers. That dear little thing, your wife, gave them to me," she said, carelessly.

He answered as carelessly:

"Yes, and they harmonize well with your dress."

But in his heart he longed to tear them from her breast and trample them beneath his feet. They had taught him a bitter lesson—one he would not soon forget.

Dinner was announced, and he took Ida into the dining-room. Bryant gave Sylvie his arm, and Una followed with her sisters-in-law, hiding with a smile her pain at the preference Eliot had shown Miss Hayes.

"How he must hate me, for he can not help thinking that but for me he would not have lost her. It was right to give her the flowers. She had really the best right to them," she said miserably to herself.

The flowers, the lights, the china and silver of the well-appointed table flashed confusedly before her eyes. She could see nothing clearly but the pretty wax-doll face of Miss Hayes as she sat opposite to Eliot and talked to him incessantly.

Glancing up and down the long table at the fair faces of the five ladies, she said, gayly:

"Two gentlemen and five ladies! Only two have cavaliers. There are three of us too many."

Una thought, with keen shame and inexpressible bitterness:

"Only one too many, and that one is poor little me!"

She made a great effort to eat, and swallowed some food, although it half choked her; but as soon as they rose from the table she slipped away and went up to the school-room, where Mrs. Wilson, whose impaired digestion abhorred late dinners, was placidly taking some milk and oatmeal by way of supper.

"Oh, my dear, have you got a fever? Your eyes shine so brightly, and your cheeks are quite flushed!" exclaimed the good governess, anxiously.

"I am not sick; I dare say I am excited. There is company, you know, and I thought I should not be missed if I stole away up here with you," Una answered, with affected carelessness.

Mrs. Wilson smiled on her pupil, and answered, kindly:

"I'm glad you came, dear; but, of course, you will be missed. Your husband would miss you, if there was a room full of company."

Una answered in a strange tone:

"No, not to-night; for Miss Ida Hayes is there."

Mrs. Wilson put down her glass of milk and looked curiously at the speaker. She began to comprehend the cause of her strange looks and words. She said to herself:

"This pretty little girl-bride has grown jealous of some meaningless attention of Eliot to Miss Hayes. She loves her husband, and the boy is somehow too stupid to see it, or, perhaps, he does not care. I would speak to him, but I do not like to meddle in so delicate an affair."

Aloud, she said gently:

"I like to have you up here with me, but your husband and friends will think I am selfish, dear; so you had better go back to the drawing-room. Miss Ida Hayes is not charming enough to make up to Eliot for your absence."

Una turned around suddenly and looked at her gravely.

"Very well, then; I will go, since you don't want me; but I shall go to my own room," she said.

And she did, and there Edith found her, pretending to read, when she came to seek her half an hour later.

"You selfish child! put down your book. We are going to have some music, and we want your alto," she said.

"I can not sing to-night; my head aches," Una answered; and none of Edith's arguments could alter her refusal. She was obliged to go down alone and make excuses for her sister-in-law.

"She has a headache, and can not come down," she said; and Sylvie laughed in her sleeve.

"She is jealous of Ida," she thought, maliciously.

[Pg 139]

[Pg 140]

---

## CHAPTER XXXII.

The rest of the family were already assembled at breakfast when Una entered the dining room the next morning, pale and grave-looking, after a wretched, sleepless night. Her place by Eliot was waiting for her, although she had half expected it would be filled by Ida Hayes.

Eliot had been watching for her anxiously, and his glance was very tender, despite the episode of

last night.

"I hope your head is better," he said, kindly; and looking at him with a smile of wonderful sweetness, she answered:

"It is well, thank you."

In the long vigil of last night she had formed a noble resolve to win her husband's heart, and to make up to him by her womanly sweetness for all he had sacrificed in marrying her, a nameless girl of obscure birth.

Sylvie's hints had not been lost upon her. She determined that she would not allow Eliot to be so extravagant for her sake again. The brown pony must be sold, the hot-house flowers must not be bought. She would have no more new dresses. She would not be a burden on him she loved.

[Pg 141]

"Chocolate, Una?" asked Mrs. Van Zandt, who was presiding at the silver urn with graceful ease. She filled the china cup for the girl, laughing the while in secret at her pale, wistful face.

"It was a hard blow to her pride," she said to herself, exultantly; then she turned her attention again to her husband, who had been reading from the morning paper when Una's entrance interrupted him.

"Our old favorite on the boards again. It will be a treat," said Sylvie. "On what night did you say, Bryant?"

"The sixteenth; that will be three nights off," he answered.

"Exactly. We will all go. We will make up a theater-party. What do you say, girls?"

"Splendid!" said Edith.

"All right!" exclaimed Ida, and Maud added a more sedate affirmative.

"And you, dear?" Eliot said, gently, to the silent girl by his side.

She lifted her dark, mournful eyes to his face with a gentle smile, and said, wistfully, almost humbly:

"Whatever you wish, Eliot."

The sweetness of her smile and voice disarmed his resentment for her slight of last night, and leaning toward her, he said, in a tender whisper:

"We will go, then, and I will bring you another bouquet; but mind, no giving it away this time."

"Did you care?" she murmured back, with sudden radiance.

They were rising from the table just then, and Una slipped her white fingers daringly through his arm, as she murmured the coquettish words. He looked down, saw the sudden radiance on her face, and a half-light broke upon his mind.

[Pg 142]

"So you did it to make me jealous, madame?" he said, gayly. "Very well; you attained your desire. But I must be off now. Come to the library one minute. I want you."

Inside the cozy little room, he said, kindly:

"You will want a new dress for the theater-party. How much?"

She drew back from him, scarlet with shame.

"Oh, no; I have plenty of dresses—more than I need."

"Very well, but you shall have a new dress if you wish it."

"But I do not wish it," hurriedly. "And—and—oh, Eliot, I'm afraid I cost you too much money! Sell the brown pony. I do not care for riding any more, and it is a useless expense to keep it."

His fair, handsome face grew suddenly stern.

"Who has been putting such nonsense in your head?" he demanded.

"It is not nonsense," Una said, shyly but firmly. "You are poor. You told me so long ago. So I know you can not afford the expense."

"Nonsense—" he began; but the door opened, and Maud entered, followed by Edith.

"Oh, excuse us, Una. We did not know you were here with Eliot. We just came in to say good-morning to him before we go in the drawing-room with Ida."

He kissed them both, and they went out. He held out his hand to his wife.

"By-by, Una. I suppose I must really tear myself away," he said.

---

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

[Pg 143]

She put her small hand in his, and he felt the fingers curl around his own, gently detaining him.

"Well, dear?" he asked, thinking that she was about to change her mind and say she would have the new dress.

Her face dropped a little to hide the warm flush that rose over it as she stammered in desperate

confusion:

"Before you—go—I must make a confession. Last night I—I—told an untruth when I said I had a headache and could not sing. You—you will not call me your little Una, your lady of truth any more now, will you, Eliot?"

She was so close to him, the supple, girlish figure leaned so near that he daringly slipped his arm around the small waist. A thrill of rapture ran through him as he felt her nestle shyly in his clasp.

"So it was not a headache, my little Truth?" he whispered, lovingly. "What was the reason then that made you desert us all so unkindly?"

"It was—was—a fit of ill-temper," Una exclaimed, remorsefully; then she turned round, so quickly, so lightly, he did not realize it until it was over, and slipping her arm around his neck drew his face down to hers, pressed a light, bashful kiss upon his lips, then tore herself from his clasp and fled the room.

Strong man as he was, Eliot Van Zandt reeled backward into a chair, dizzy with delicious rapture at that light, shy but ardent pressure of Una's lips upon his own.

It had come so unexpectedly, that moment of bliss after the bitterness and hopelessness of last night, it was like the dawning of a new day after a night of storm and darkness.

Hope plumed her wings again in his heart.

"She is going to learn to love me," he thought, happily, too blind still to understand the full meaning of that caress that had sent such a shock of rapturous delight through his whole being. [Pg 144]

He sat still a few blissful moments, going gladly over her looks and words.

"Not a headache—a fit of ill-temper. Ill-temper over what?" he wondered, then suddenly: "Oh, my little love, my darling, you were vexed because Ida Hayes sat down by my side, because I took her in to dinner. Well, I shall bless the coming of Ida if through her coquetry my Una learns she has a heart."

Meanwhile, frightened at her own boldness, her heart beating furiously, Una rushed upstairs, seeking solitude in which to hide herself from all.

"What must he think of me?" she murmured, with crimson blushes. "I did not mean to do it. I do not know how I dared so much. Was he angry, I wonder? I could not look at him. I was so amazed at what I had done!"

Her lips burned with the touch of his, her heart throbbed with pain and pleasure commingled. Walking restlessly up and down the floor, she murmured:

"I love him so dearly that I must—I must win his heart! Then, and not till then, will he forgive me for the loss of Ida and her fortune. How shamed I felt over the proffer of the new dress! He will give me new dresses, but he will not give me his heart. He puts me away from him like a stranger. Shall I resent it? Ah, no, no; since he has sacrificed so much for me, I must sacrifice my pride for him. For his own sake, for his future happiness; I, the Little Nobody, obscure, unloved, penniless, uncultured, must make myself beloved by him until he shall bless the wayward fate that made him mine."

The dark eyes glowed, the cheeks crimsoned with emotion, as Una thought, passionately:

"I would that I could do some brave, noble, heroic deed that would challenge the world's admiration, so that he would forget my obscure origin and my misfortune that drove him to the sacrifice that saved me from the world's scorn, in sudden pride and love for me!" [Pg 145]

There was a light tap at the door. Mrs. Wilson had sent Edith to bring her tardy pupil to the school-room.

"If you are sick, or otherwise engaged, she will readily excuse you," Edith said.

"I do not want to be excused," said Una, as she hurried to the presence of the gentle governess.

But that day she found books and lessons irksome in the extreme. Her heart and mind were full of the strange facts she had heard last night from the lips of Sylvie.

She who had been wedded, yet no wife, for almost a year had only now found out that she was unloved, and the humiliation weighed her almost to the earth, in spite of her brave, sensible resolve to win Eliot yet, and make him forget that once he had sighed for Ida Hayes.

She longed to throw down the irksome books and cry out to the gentle, placid Mrs. Wilson: "Away with books! Teach me the only lesson that interests me now—how to win my husband's heart!"

She beat back the yearning impulse to claim this gentle woman's sympathy with bitter pride.

"Shall I complain of him to her, to any one?" she thought. "Ah, no; it lies between us two and God! The bitter secret shall never pass my lips! Secret, did I say? Alas! it is known to them all, has been known all along. How they must pity me, the unloved wife, the perhaps unwelcome intruder in the home to which they had hoped he would bring Ida Hayes a loved and loving bride!"

It did not look as if she was unwelcome when at the close of study hours Maud and Edith burst into the room.

"Una, we are just dying to get hold of you!" Edith cried. "We want to talk about the theater-party. What are we going to wear, for I'm sure we can not afford new dresses."

"And we want to look as nice as possible, for Ida and Sylvie will do all they can to outshine us," [Pg 146]

added Maud. "Of course they have lots of new things, so Edith and I have just made up our minds to have some of the pretty things in mamma's trunks upstairs. She gave them to us long before she died. So if you won't be offended, Una, dear, come with us, and we'll find something that we can fix over for the theater-party."

"What is it all about?" queried gentle Mrs. Wilson, and Edith returned:

"A popular actress who left the stage almost sixteen years ago has returned to it again, and they say she is as young, lovely, and spirited as when she retired to marry a rich aristocrat. All paint, of course, but Sylvie is just wild to have us go and see her play on Thursday night."

---

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

Una went with the girls to ransack the trunks, but she steadily declined to accept any of the finery they spread out on the bed and chairs.

"Eliot offered to give me a new dress this morning, and I told him I had plenty," she said, "so if I took any of these, he would think I had deceived him."

"You dear little conscientious thing, you are well named Una," cried Edith, gayly. "But Eliot would never know, and, my dear, this rose-colored satin with lace flounces would make up lovely for you, and be so becoming."

"It is too fine for me," Una answered, shrinkingly.

"Not a bit. A gold dress would not be too fine for Eliot's wife," vivaciously. "And you know, dear, at a theater-party one dresses as if for a ball. We shall have private boxes, you know, and every one will want to look nice. Now, you really have nothing fit to wear."

Una flushed sensitively, but she knew that it was true. She had nothing fine but the blue silk dinner-dress, except—and her heart throbbed painfully—the sweet, white dress with its filmy laces that she had worn for her strange marriage that starlit night in New Orleans beneath the green trees in the quaint semi-tropical garden. The dress, with the necklace of pearls, lay folded away in the bottom of her trunk.

[Pg 147]

"I have the white dress I wore when I was—married," she said, dubiously. "Perhaps it will do."

They went with her to look at it, and they were charmed with the quaint, pretty robe and the moon-white pearls.

"You will look lovely in this. Why did you not show it to us before? And you never told us you had such splendid jewels."

"Are they splendid? I did not know it. Monsieur Carmontelle gave them to me for a wedding-gift. I have more of them in a box given me by the Jockey Club."

They exclaimed with delight when they saw the lovely things in the jewel-casket. There were diamonds, rubies, emeralds, all in the most tasteful and elegant settings. Una gave them *carte blanche* to wear what they pleased, and accepting the offer in sisterly sincerity, the girls selected each a set appropriate to the costume selected for the occasion.

"You will wear the pearls with the white dress, Una, I will take the diamonds to suit the rose-colored satin, and Maud can wear the rubies with the gold brocade!" exclaimed Edith, gayly. "Oh, how surprised Sylvie and Ida will be! They will expect us to look like dowdies, knowing we can not afford new dresses. But we will keep all a secret, and burst upon them Thursday evening in a blaze of glory!"

"Agreed!" cried Maud, merrily, and Una's gentle, pensive smile added assent, although to herself she sighed apprehensively:

"Perhaps Eliot will not like for me to appear in my wedding-dress. It will remind him of his sacrifice. But I have nothing else to wear."

[Pg 148]

And when Eliot asked her that evening what kind of a dress she would wear, so that he might select her flowers in keeping, she answered, in a half-frightened tone.

"White!"

"It will suit you," he answered, kindly, but Una thought, sadly:

"He would not say so if he knew it was my wedding-dress!"

He lingered by her side, thrilled with the memory of the morning's kiss, and waiting to see if she would show him any more kindness.

Una was very glad to keep him near her, but she was full of a blushing consciousness that made her even more shy than usual. Oh, that kiss this morning!—how had she dared to be so bold?—and yet she had a passionate longing to repeat the caress.

Ida Hayes saw him lingering by his wife, and called him away to sing with her.

"That duet we used to sing, you know," she said; and her familiar tone and coquettish smile half maddened Una with pain. She drew back without a word, and let Eliot pass her, and between Sylvie and her sister he had no more chance to speak to her in the drawing-room that evening. When the music was done he was drawn into a game of chess, and as Una was ignorant of the



game she was perforce left out. She sat apart and talked to some callers who had dropped in, and when they left she was only too glad to find that the evening was over and the family were separated for the night.

She went upstairs very slowly, and along the carpeted hall to her room, with a bitter sense of loneliness and disappointment, vaguely comprehending the malice of the two women who had so cleverly kept Eliot from her side all the evening.

"They hate me for my unconscious fault," she thought, miserably.

[Pg 149]

"Good-night, Una," a voice said, suddenly, almost at her side.

It was Eliot who had followed her upstairs. As she turned round her white, startled face, he drew her hand in his arm and walked with her toward her door.

"You forgot to tell me good-night," he said, smiling. "Or—did you deliberately snub me again because of—a fit of ill-temper?"

Too truthful to deny the imputation, she said, bashfully:

"I'm afraid so. I thought Miss Hayes wasn't going to let you off long enough to say good-night, so I came away."

Pressing her little hand very close against his side, he replied, ardently:

"I should like to see the Miss Hayes that could keep me from saying good-night to my darling little wife."

They had reached her door. She paused, trembling with delight, but in the dim light he could not see the gladness in the beautiful dark eyes. He only felt the trembling of the form beside him, and thought that she was nervous and frightened.

"Do not be afraid of me, Una," he said, hurriedly, and with sharp disappointment. Then he drew the little figure close to his heart, and held her there a moment, while he pressed on her warm lips the ardent kiss of a lover. A moment more he turned away and left her to enter her room alone, with some sweet, passionate words ringing in her ears:

"Good-night, my darling, my little wife! Sleep well, and dream of your own Eliot."

"Did he mean it? Is he learning to love me at last?" she whispered to herself, sobbing wildly with hysterical delight, and trembling with bashful pleasure. She unrobed and lay down on her dainty white bed, not to sleep, but to live over and over again, in fancy, his tender looks and words and his warm caress.

[Pg 150]

But Eliot, in whom a passionate hope and longing had been stirring all day, went to his solitary room vaguely disappointed.

"Poor darling! I frightened her by my vehemence," he said, remorsefully, to himself. "Her beauty and her gentleness tempted me almost beyond my strength. Ah, she little dreamed what a struggle it cost to leave her there and to wait, still wait, although half maddened with love and longing."

For him, too, the drowsy god tarried to-night, and he tossed sleeplessly on his pillow, dreaming of Una just as Una was dreaming of him, with infinite love and yearning.

Weary with the night's restlessness, Una slept too soundly next morning for the breakfast-bell to rouse her from her slumbers. Eliot, who had to be at the office by a certain hour, fidgeted uneasily, and at last sent Edith to see if she was awake.

In a minute she came out on tiptoe.

"She is sleeping so sweetly, I had not the heart to wake her," she said. "But, Eliot, you might just slip in and kiss her good-bye in her sleep."

Her keen young eyes saw the sensitive color mount to his temples.

"Una would not like it," he replied, gravely.

Candid Edith shut the door softly behind her, and gave her brother a playful little shake as she went with him along the hall.

"Eliot, you are a great goose, that's what you are!" she cried. "Una is your wife. You have a right to go in her room and kiss her if you like, and I don't believe she would object, either!"

With a sigh, he replied:

"You must remember how sudden our marriage was, Edith. My little girl had no time to learn to love me, or get used to me. Is it not right that I should leave her in peace until I shall have won her heart as well as her hand?"

[Pg 151]

Edith stared at him in wonder.

"Eliot Van Zandt, you are as blind as a bat!" she exclaimed, and darted away without another word.

But although she would not say another word to Eliot, she made up her mind to lecture Una.

So the first thing when Una opened her heavy eyes, she saw Edith sitting demurely in the big willow rocker by the bedside.

She burst out unceremoniously:

"You lazy girl, you have slept until breakfast was over, and your husband gone down-town. Poor boy! he waited and waited outside your door for you to wake, but you just dreamed on until he had to go. I told him to slip in and kiss you good-bye in your sleep, but he was afraid you would be angry. I do say, Una Van Zandt, you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Una was sitting up in bed very wide awake indeed now, a lovely picture of amazement and distress, with her loose, golden hair falling on her half-bare, white shoulders, her eyes dilated with wonder, her cheeks flushed from sleep.

"Oh, Edith, what have I done now? I don't know what you're talking about," she faltered.

"Don't you, Mistress Van Zandt? Listen, then: I'm talking about what a tyrant you are to my brother. Here you have been married to him almost a year and I don't believe you've ever given the poor boy as much as a kiss or one fond word. Do you think he is a stick or a stone, without any feeling, that you behave so heartlessly? I tell you it made me angry to see him this morning afraid to come inside this room to tell you good-bye. Don't you know he has a right to be in this room with you if he choose, only he is too afraid of you to assert himself? There is no other man on earth half so good and chivalrous as Eliot. Fancy Bryant being afraid to put his foot inside Sylvie's door. Why, they both would tell you it was all nonsense. You treat Eliot—"

[Pg 152]

Una held out her hands entreatingly.

"Hush, Edith, don't scold me so," she begged, with quivering lips; but she did not utter a word in her own defense. She was too wretched and heart-sick, feeling that Eliot's fault, his persistent avoidance of his wife, need not be held up to his sister's condemnation.

"Far rather would I shield him by letting the blame rest wholly upon myself," she resolved, firmly.

---

## CHAPTER XXXV.

Sylvie pretended to be very anxious that day over the appearance her sisters-in-law would make at the theater-party.

"Have you anything new?" she inquired. "Because I have invited several young ladies and gentlemen, and ordered a supper here after the performance at the theater. Of course, I want you all to do credit to Bryant."

"We haven't a new thing," declared Edith, lugubriously. "You and Ida will have to uphold the honor of the family by your elegant dressing, for Maud and I will be sure to look like dowdies."

Mme. Sylvie did not seem to take the information much to heart. She said carelessly:

"And Eliot's wife?"

"Oh, she will be a dowdy, too," replied roguish Edith.

So Sylvie and Ida could scarcely believe their eyes that evening when Maud and Edith sallied in, the dark-haired Maud in gold-colored satin, red roses, and rubies, and Edith in lustrous rose-color with white lace flounces, while diamonds flashed from her throat and ears. Both girls looked as handsome in their way as the bisque dolls who were splendid in Parisian toilets and a profusion of gleaming jewels.

[Pg 153]

Sylvie stared in amaze and jealous displeasure.

"You told me you had nothing fit to wear!" she exclaimed, acrimoniously.

"I beg your pardon—nothing new," Edith replied, dimpling with mischief. "These are our mother's old dresses made over."

"But diamonds and rubies—I am sure Bryant told me that all your mother's jewels were sold to help pay your father's debts when he failed!" Sylvie exclaimed, in wonderment and displeasure.

"So they were," Maud answered. "But, Sylvie, these do not belong to us. We borrowed them from Una."

Ida Hayes broke in with inexpressible anger and spite:

"I thought Eliot was too poor to give such jewels to his wife."

Edith flashed her a glance of scorn.

"Fortunately poverty is no disgrace, Ida," she said. "But Eliot did not give them to Una. They were bridal presents from her Southern friends."

"Dear me, Sylvie! and you said she was poor and a nobody!" Ida exclaimed, insolently, turning around to her sister.

"Eliot said so," Sylvie answered; and forthwith there began a war of words that was fortunately stopped by Bryant's entrance, and his instant laying on the table of the heated subject of debate.

On his part he was glad to see his young sisters so charmingly dressed and looking so lovely. He took the exciting fact of Una's jewels with manly equanimity.

"There is no reason why Una should not have them," he said. "Her adopted father, Pierre Carmontelle, is one of the richest men in the South. If he and his friends gave her costly bridal presents, it was no more than she had a right to expect."

Sylvie and Ida dared say no more, but their thoughts were full of rancor, and the former muttered, *sotto voce*: [Pg 154]

"I suppose she will come down presently covered with diamonds!"

Meanwhile, quite a different scene was transpiring in Una's room upstairs. Fifteen minutes ago, as she had stood before her mirror, putting the last touches to her sweet, simple toilet, there had come a light, quick rap at her door.

"Maud or Edith," she thought, and called out, carelessly: "Come in!"

The door opened softly, and Eliot, her husband, appeared on the threshold, looking marvelously handsome in full evening-dress, a bouquet of pure white flowers in one hand, a long, white box in the other.

When he saw lovely Una standing there in the soft, white robe, with the pearls around her bare, white throat, and her round arms uncovered, save by the dainty white gloves, her dark eyes shining with innocent joy at her own fairness, he uttered a cry of delight:

"Oh, Una, how angelic you look! But," dubiously, "do I intrude?"

"No," she answered, with a blush and tremor; so Eliot shut the door and came to her side.

"I have brought you some flowers and an opera-cloak," he said, pulling it out of the box and dropping it on her shoulders. It was a dainty white cashmere affair, not costly but very pretty, with a shining fringe of pearl and silver beads. With the white dress and flowers, it made Una look bride-like and lovely as a dream.

"Does it suit you? Will it be warm enough?" he asked, with shining eyes; and Una held out her hands to him with sudden tears on her lashes.

"Oh, how good you are to me, who should expect so little from you! How can I ever requite your kindness?" she murmured, tremulously.

He caught the white hands in his, and drew the dainty white figure into the clasp of his yearning arms. [Pg 155]

"Only love me, my darling!" he whispered, passionately, against her crimson cheek. "That will pay all."

She lay still, trembling with rapture in the close pressure of his fond arms. She felt his kisses falling softly, warmly on her face, her lips, her hair. At last she drew herself from him, saying, with rapturous wonder:

"You really want me to love you, Eliot?"

Half smiling at her wondering tone, he exclaimed:

"What a strange question, Una! Have I not been waiting almost a year for your heart to wake from its childish sleep and respond to mine? And how else could you requite aught I have done for you? Do you not know, my darling, that love must be paid in its own coin?"

Doubting, wondering, she looked up into those glorious blue-gray orbs now full of a radiant fire impossible to describe. Something of the truth dawned on her bewildered soul. She cried out impulsively:

"Oh, Eliot, then you do love me? And I have been so wretched, so afraid, so—"

No more, for he had caught her in his arms, crushing her passionately to his breast, whispering that he had loved her always, always, and had grown so weary, so impatient waiting to win her heart.

"There was no need to wait if you had not been so blind," answered truthful Una. "For I loved you, Eliot, from the very first!"

---

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

If Edith had not come upstairs to see what kept Una dressing so long, they would have forgotten all about the theater-party in their absorption of each other. As it was, they started apart in surprise when she came softly in.

"Oh, Eliot, I did not know you were here," she said, drawing back. [Pg 156]

"Come in, Edith, and congratulate us," he said, drawing Una to his side again. "We have just found out that we are in love with each other."

"Every one else knew that ages ago," replied the saucy girl, laughing.

But she kissed both with a great amount of girlish fervor, and to hide her emotion, exclaimed:

"The carriages are waiting, and Sylvie is fuming with impatience, so you had better bring your bride down-stairs, Eliot."

They went down together, and when the spiteful Sylvie saw the two handsome, happy faces, she was more vexed than if Una had indeed been covered with diamonds, as she had spitefully said. She could not help seeing that a reconciliation had taken place between the two, and felt

instinctively that her cruel revelation to Una had precipitated the understanding it was intended to avert.

But she could not avoid one poisoned shaft of malice at the happy girl, and so, with a sneer, she exclaimed:

"Dear me! Una still posing as a bride at this late day? Your wedding-day must have been a very happy one, since you love to recall it so well."

No one replied to the impertinent speech, for all, even Bryant, understood its spleen. Una only shrunk closer to her husband, and they went out to the carriages that were waiting to convey them to the theater.

Two boxes had been taken for the evening, and there were twelve in the party, including the two ladies and three gentlemen that Sylvie had invited. Una was very glad that Sylvie and Ida did not come into the same box with herself and Eliot. Their cold, sneering looks made her shiver and feel unhappy, so she was glad when she found Maud and Edith with one other young lady and one gentleman as the evening's companions.

The house was full, and the curtain had risen on the first act—a brilliant scene with a fine setting. Mme. Leonie had not made her appearance yet, and the audience felt at liberty to turn a good many curious lorgnettes upon the handsome theater-party. Una, all in white, with her waving golden hair, red lips, and large dark eyes, immediately fixed attention. The murmur ran from lip to lip:

[Pg 157]

"A bride—a bride!"

Eliot saw what a sensation her beauty was creating, and smiled in pride; but Una was too innocent to comprehend the truth. In fact, she scarcely looked at the audience. Her eager eyes intently watched the stage.

She was anxious to see the great actress of whom the newspapers spoke in such lavish praise.

So, while the adoring young husband by her side kept his fond eyes on her face, Una watched the stage, and her eagerness was soon rewarded by a sight of Mme. Leonie.

Mme. Leonie was tall, beautiful, stately, and the black velvet robe, starred with diamonds, in which she was assaying a queenly rôle, became her well. Una gave a little gasp of honest admiration.

Mme. Leonie's voice rose on the air clear, sweet, shrill, and Eliot Van Zandt turned with a quick start toward the stage.

At the same moment, he became aware that Una's little hand had clutched tightly, spasmodically around his arm.

He looked into her face. Its usual pure, creamy pallor had deepened to ashy whiteness, her dark eyes were wild and frightened.

"Una!"

"Oh, Eliot, look!" she whispered, tremblingly. "It is she—Madame Lorraine!"

He turned his eyes to the stage, from which, a moment ago, that voice had given him such a start.

Yes, Una was right. There she stood—the beautiful, cruel woman who had doomed him to such an awful fate; who had made Una's life so bitter, whose malice and spite had been so supremely fiendish—Mme. Lorraine!

[Pg 158]

---

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

Every eye was turned to the stage, and tumultuous applause greeted the appearance of the favorite, so no one noticed the agitation of the young husband and wife who, tightly clasping each other's hands, stared with loathing eyes at the beautiful actress.

It seemed to both an evil omen—this meeting with cruel, heartless Mme. Lorraine in the first hour of their supreme happiness after the months of doubt and reserve that had held them apart.

All unconscious of the eyes that watched her—the eyes she believed closed forever in the sleep of death, the clever actress went on with her part, and, shrinking closer to Eliot's side, Una whispered with a strange, foreboding fear:

"Let us go home before she sees us. Do not let her find out that we are still living."

Man-like, he smiled at her terror, and whispered back:

"My darling, we have nothing to fear from Madame Lorraine's hatred now. Can you not trust to your husband to protect you?"

"Yes—oh, yes," the girl-wife murmured; but the chill foreboding of evil did not leave her mind, and she shrunk back into the shadow of the heavy box-curtain, praying in her heart that Mme. Lorraine's hateful glance might not find her out.

Perhaps it might not have done so, for, to madame's credit be it said, she did not ogle the boxes after the manner of some actresses. She was intent on her part, and, beyond the knowledge that

she had a large and fashionable audience, she took no particular interest in the throng of people.

But a perverse spirit had entered into Eliot Van Zandt, and seeing the woman so cool, calm, and heartless, he longed to let her know that her vengeance failed of its aim and her victims escaped her. He pictured to himself her jealous, impotent fury when she should know that both he and her Little Nobody lived, and that they were happily married and beyond the reach of her venom.

[Pg 159]

And in that last belief he made his great mistake.

He whispered his thoughts to Una. In truth, he was longing to take his exquisite vengeance on his enemy.

Una forced a smile of meek acquiescence. She said to herself that she could not let her splendid young husband know what a little coward she was, and how she feared her old tyrant and enemy.

At the close of the third act Eliot said, eagerly:

"Will you let me have your bouquet, Una? To-morrow I will bring you a sweeter one."

With secret reluctance she let him have it. He wrote hurriedly a few words on a card and attached it to the flowers.

Una looked over his shoulder. She read:

"Compliments of Eliot Van Zandt and his bride, the 'Little Nobody.'"

"Oh!" the girl cried, with a shiver; but Eliot had already thrown it upon the stage at the feet of the tragedy queen, who was bowing and smiling in response to an enthusiastic recall.

Among a dozen floral tributes she saw that pure, white, bride-like one flung from the opera-box. She took it up, lifted it to her lips, and bowed, then scanned the name written on the card, while Eliot watched her with a triumphant smile, Una with nameless fear.

Eliot was quite curious to note what effect that startling card would have upon the wicked actress. It seemed to him that she would be stunned, that she would fall to the floor in abject terror, crying out for mercy from him she had wronged.

[Pg 160]

Una, too, expected every instant that she would fall down unconscious, overcome by fear and anger.

Neither one comprehended the stoicism, the incomparable will-power of the gifted, wicked French woman.

Terrible and overwhelming as was the knowledge thus suddenly acquired, Mme. Lorraine neither by word nor sign gave any evidence that she had received a shock. She merely stood still—very still—for a minute or so with her eyes riveted upon the card, and the audience, suspecting nothing of this strange by-play, received the impression that the writing on the card was rather illegible, hence the slowness of the actress in deciphering the name.

At last, with an inward shudder, madame lifted her eyes from the bit of pasteboard upon which she had been gazing as one looks at a serpent hidden among flowers. Her glance went straight to the box where Eliot and Una, so beautiful, so happy, in their youth and love, sat with bated breath watching her face. She recognized them instantly; a subtle smile dawned on her face, she bowed profoundly.

The audience, still unconscious of the truth, applauded madame's graceful courtesy to the echo, and kissing the tips of her fingers, smiling right and left, she retired.

Una drew a long, sobbing breath of relief as the beautiful woman vanished from sight. Eliot smiled and whispered:

"She accepts her defeat with equanimity. Her self-command is admirable, enviable."

"I am so glad she took it so coolly; I dare say she does not care," Una murmured, gladly, and some of the stifling fear and dread left her heart.

If she could have looked behind the scenes into madame's dressing-room, she would not have felt so confident.

Mima had to exert all her skill to bring her mistress up to the mark to enable her to go on with the fourth and last act in the play.

[Pg 161]

Her agitation upon reaching the dressing-room had been great, and Mima for a moment had been scarcely less shaken; but her nerves were very strong, and she soon began to reassure Mme. Lorraine.

"It is nothing—pshaw! Do not let your mind be upset, madame. Be glad that the fair-faced lad lives. Your conscience is that much lighter, and for the rest, he was never worthy the passion of so magnificent a woman!"

"He was the only man I ever loved!" madame cried, obstinately. "He was splendid, whatever you say, Mima, and to think that she, the Little Nobody, has come back from the very grave to part us, to win him from me! Oh, it is bitter! I will not endure it. He was mad to fling that defiance in my face. I will make him pay dearly, dearly for that insolence!"

"Nonsense! You shall not get yourself into any more scrapes over that boy!" Mima cried, angrily.

Mme. Lorraine laughed hysterically.

"You shall see," she said. "I will come between them; I will part them. I swear it!"

"Nonsense!" Mima said again. "You do not even know where they live."

"I shall find out!" the actress cried, obstinately; and then she gave vent to a sudden cry of shrill delight.

"Oh! oh!"

"What is it, then?" curtly.

"Fortune favors me. You know I am invited to a little *petit souper* to-night after the theater. It is at the house of one of the Boston *bon ton*, and the name on the card is 'Mrs. Bryant Van Zandt.'"

Even the imperturbable Mima started with surprise.

"Well?"

Madame laughed, and the laugh was not good to hear.

"I have no doubt they are relatives of my Yankee friend," she said. "Perhaps, even they live in the same house. I shall be sure to go, and then—*che sarâ, sarâ!*" Her voice had a fiendish threat in its angry cadence.

[Pg 162]

She went back on the stage, smiling, insolent. She looked once or twice into the box from whence the white flowers had been thrown to her, and smiled whenever she looked. And Una's blood ran cold whenever she met that smile. She instinctively felt that it was one of menace.

She was very, very glad when it was all over, and she could nestle by Eliot's side in the carriage with her cold little hand in his.

Maud and Edith rode with them, but they did not utter one word to even hint to them that Mme. Leonie, the actress, was Mme. Lorraine, the wicked woman who had been so cruel to them in New Orleans.

Both said to themselves that it did not matter now. Let her enjoy her fame, if she could, since out of her cruel plans had come their wedded happiness.

She would leave Boston to-morrow for Philadelphia, where she was to play next, and in all likelihood her path would never cross theirs again.

So, dismissing the wicked woman from their minds, Eliot and Una waited with the girls in the drawing-room for the coming of the rest of the party who were a little late.

At last there was a bustle, a murmur of voices and laughter in the hall—then entered Sylvie, Ida, and their guests—lastly Bryant Van Zandt, on his arm—Mme. Leonie!

"Ah, girls! ah, Eliot!" Sylvie cried out, in pretty triumph. "See what a charming surprise I have brought you. Madame Leonie will honor us by taking supper under our roof."

Not a tremor on the part of the actress betrayed the fact that she had ever seen before the two to whom she bowed with stately grace. For them, they were too amazed by her matchless impudence to even remind her of the past, and bowed coldly in acknowledgment of the introduction.

[Pg 163]

Turning away with Sylvie, they heard her say, in clear, full tones:

"Ah, Madame Van Zandt, what an aristocratic-looking young beauty is Mrs. Eliot Van Zandt! She is no doubt of one of the finest old families of Boston."

Sylvie's cruel voice answered maliciously:

"On the contrary, a little nobody that Eliot picked up somewhere on a Southern tour."

The eyes of the young husband and wife met, his indignant, hers wet with tears.

"After all, it is true, I am a little nobody," she said, faintly. "Oh, Eliot," with sudden animation, "what if we should force Madame Lorraine to tell us the truth to-night—to own frankly who and what I am?"

"You are Una Marie Van Zandt, and my wife. The past need not matter, my darling," he replied, tenderly.

But the idea had taken complete possession of Una.

"Eliot, it maddens me to hear your brother's wife always flinging that slur upon me—a little nobody! Let us force Madame Lorraine to tell the truth to-night. She is in your power, for although her conspiracy against your life failed, she is amenable to the law for the wicked attempt. Let us seek a private interview with her, Eliot. Let us threaten her, frighten her into the confession of my origin, however humble," pleaded Una, with impassioned fervor.

---

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Mme. Lorraine wormed Una's story out of Mrs. Van Zandt with the greatest ease, Sylvie's spite making it an actual labor of love to place her sister-in-law in the worst possible light before the great actress who had deigned to express admiration for her beauty.

In a little while the wicked woman knew that which thrilled her with cruel joy—that beautiful Una, living in the same house with Eliot and bearing his name, had never been aught to him but

[Pg 164]

his wife in name only.

"He never loved her, and would be glad if he had never seen her," Sylvie said, lying unblushingly in her hatred of Una.

Mme. Lorraine condoled with her in politest phrases, hiding her exultation under an appearance of calmness. She said to herself:

"His wife in name only! It is not so bad as I thought. It will be easy to part them now."

Her opportunity soon came without an effort of her own, through Una's eagerness to find out the secret of her origin.

Eliot had consented to Una's wish, and immediately after the elegant supper, which had been provided by the best caterer in Boston at Sylvie's expense, he sought an opportunity to speak to her alone.

"Will Madame Leonie permit me the pleasure of showing her through our little conservatory? We have a rare plant in bloom there—a night-blooming cereus," he said.

Madame protested she would be delighted; slipped her jeweled hand through his arm, and glided from the drawing-room by his side.

The night-blooming cereus was not a feint. It was really there, but so also was Una standing by its side, pale and agitated, yet withal so lovely, that madame said to herself, with something like contempt for her companion:

"He must be cold-hearted, indeed, to withhold love from one so beautiful."

Eliot began abruptly:

"Madame Lorraine, of course you know we recognized you immediately to-night?"

The beautiful actress bowed mockingly.

"Of course."

He continued gravely:

"Then, perhaps you can guess why I have brought you here?"

Glancing maliciously from the pale, grave face of Eliot to the agitated one of his wife, madame said, scoffingly:

"To congratulate you and your bride on your happiness, no doubt, monsieur!"

"No; nor to reproach you with your wickedness," Eliot answered, sternly, his handsome face pale and set, his splendid eyes full of scorn. "I brought you here, madame, to say that in return for my leniency in not denouncing you to the law for your attempt upon my life, I demand at your hands one simple act of justice."

"Justice!" she echoed, vaguely.

"Yes, to me," said Una, drawing nearer. "Oh, Madame Lorraine, the time is come at last when you must tell me who and what I am. You have denied to me even a name, but however poor and obscure my origin, I surely have a right to some name, and I can no longer bear Mrs. Van Zandt's sneers at the mystery that infolds me. Speak, madame, and dissipate the cloud that veils the past."

"Speak!" Eliot echoed, sternly.

Then there was a moment of terrible suspense and silence.

Madame had drawn back hurriedly from the two with an expression of alarm and trouble on her mobile white face. At last:

"Oh, you know not what you ask!" she faltered, with emotion.

Growing ashen pale, Una cried out hoarsely:

"I am ready to hear—even the worst."

Eliot came to her side and drew her cold hand gently through his arm.

"Do not look so frightened, Una, my love," he said, gently. "If madame speaks the truth, she will say you are well-born and of noble parentage."

Madame gave him a look of fierce wrath and scorn.

"Are you so sure?" she sneered. "Better let me go, then, with your fatal question unanswered, and hug that vain delusion to your breast."

Eliot answered dauntlessly:

"Most willingly, only for Una's sake. She has some natural curiosity on the subject, and I have promised her it shall be gratified."

The beautiful face of Mme. Lorraine grew positively fiendish with the evil smile that flashed across it.

"A true daughter of Eve," she said; "but your Una, as you call her, if she persists in her curiosity, may purchase her knowledge at as bitter cost as did the adventurous lady of Eden."

"I am not afraid of the truth, if you will only speak it and have done, madame," Una cried out, impatiently; and Eliot felt her tremble violently as she leaned against him.

[Pg 165]

[Pg 166]

Then both looked at the clever actress in surprise.

Her face had changed its expression, as if by magic, from hate and scorn to softness, gentleness, and poignant regret. Her splendid orbs were dim as with a mist of tears. Claspng her jeweled hands together in strong agitation, she faltered, pleadingly:

"Do not press me so hard, for—oh, how can I tell you what you ask?"

"Do you mean that there is shame, disgrace, linked with—my birth—my parentage?" Una demanded, almost wildly.

Mme. Lorraine gave her a cunning upward glance full of a sort of contemptuous pity.

"Listen to me, both of you," she said; "I have wronged you both, but Heaven knows how I repent of my evil deeds. I do not want to cause any more sorrow to either of you, as I must do if I tell Una what she asks. Therefore, let me go away, in silence, and be sure that in her case ignorance is bliss."

[Pg 167]

"I will not believe you, Madame Lorraine, if you assert that aught of shame belongs to the parentage of my wife," Eliot said, hotly, and she uttered a long, long sigh.

"Whatever it is, I have a right to some name, however humble," Una said; but Mme. Lorraine preserved a silence that was significant.

Eliot drew his arm tenderly about Una's waist, as he said:

"Dearest, you have a right to one of the proudest names in Boston. Why trouble your little head about the past?"

But Una was obstinate. Sylvie's sneers had made her bitter and determined.

She looked with dark, impatient eyes into the face of the woman who hated her with relentless hate.

"Speak, madame," she said, icily. "Do you not see that you must reveal the secret now, whatever it be, that has thrown its stigma over my life?"

"I am in your power, monsieur; you can denounce me for my attempted crime, if I refuse to answer you," madame said, looking at Eliot. "Do you still insist?"

He looked at Una; she murmured "Yes" through pale, determined lips, but she did not see the covert triumph in the eyes of her foe.

"Very well, then," said the actress, with a heavy sigh. She looked at Eliot with grave eyes. "Monsieur Van Zandt, I must make at least one condition," she exclaimed.

"Yes?" he said, inquiringly.

"It is this: you will leave me alone with your wife while I reveal to her her name and true identity. It will be best thus. The secret will then be her own, and it will be optional with her whether she should reveal it to you or not."

He bowed affirmatively.

"I have no objection to your plan, madame, and small curiosity over your secret. Whatever you may reveal to Una, it will in nowise lessen my regard for my wife."

[Pg 168]

He went out and left them together.

Mme. Lorraine turned her vindictive eyes upon Una hissing fiercely:

"Do you not know that you are very foolish in this matter? Would I have treated you as I did for fifteen years, if you had not been—"

"What?" asked Una, impatiently, as she paused significantly, and regarded her with angry, scornful eyes.

Bending forward until her writhing lips almost touched the small, pink ear of the girl, Mme. Lorraine finished her broken sentence in a hissing voice like that of a serpent.

It was as if Mme. Lorraine had struck the girl upon the face. She reeled backward with a low, gasping, terrified cry, and sunk to the floor.

---

Eliot waited almost an hour in the drawing-room for madame to return, and Mrs. Van Zandt grew angry and impatient at the detention of her guest by that Little Nobody. Eliot made all the excuses he could. They were talking about the flowers; Mme. Leonie loved them so dearly, etc. At last he went in search of the two.

Madame was just emerging from the conservatory with a smile of triumph on her handsome face. As he would have passed her, she detained him with a hand laid heavily on his arm.

"Do not go to her yet. She desired me to keep you away from her a little while until she can collect her thoughts and decide whether it is best to share her terrible secret with you or not."

"But surely she needs me now," he said, quailing at the words. "Her terrible secret!"

"She prefers to be alone, she said," madame returned, so positively that he decided, against his sense of duty, to humor Una's whim. He guessed it was not a pleasant revelation madame had

[Pg 169]



made among the warm, sweet odors of the dim conservatory.

The actress returned to the drawing-room, made her adieus, and departed. Then the rest of the party broke up, and the family retired to their several apartments. Eliot went to the conservatory for Una.

"I can not leave her alone any longer in her trouble, poor child!" he thought, with a heart full of tenderness.

To his surprise, the flowery retreat was quite deserted.

"She has stepped out unperceived in the confusion of the leave-takings, and gone to her room," he decided, and a yearning impulse led him to seek her there.

He knocked at first softly on the door, and receiving no reply, entered quietly, feeling that she needed him in the distress she was enduring over madame's revelation.

But the room, like the conservatory, was deserted.

Over the dressing-table the gas was burning brightly. Eliot's eyes quickly detected an envelope lying just beneath the light that bore in large characters his own name.

---

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

He stood staring with frightened eyes at the white envelope, with its large black letters formed in Una's crude handwriting, dreading to touch it, for a swift instinct told him the truth.

She had left him, he felt quite sure—left him almost in the very hour when the discovery of their mutual love for each other had paved the way to their wedded happiness. Mme. Lorraine, like the serpent crawling into Eden, had brought woe and pain where love and joy had reigned.

All this flashed over him instinctively as he took the letter in his hand and tore it open, devouring in fierce haste the brief, sad note Una had written such a little while ago that the ink was scarcely dry upon the page.

"This is my farewell to you, Eliot," it said. "I have learned the secret of my identity. Forgive me that I shrink from revealing it to you. I can only say that it comes between us, and divides us as effectually as the grave itself. I have left you forever. Do not seek to trace me, for nothing can ever induce me to live with you again. Give up the thought of me and obtain a divorce (it will be easy, for, thank Heaven, I have never been your wife, save in name only), then you can marry Ida Hayes, whom you loved before you ever saw me. God bless you for all your goodness to me. If you had known who I was that time in New Orleans, you need not have sacrificed yourself for my sake. God bless my—yes, I will presume to call them sisters this once—Maud and Edith! I have left them the jewels they wore to-night in memory of Una, to whom they were so kind. Forget me, Eliot, as soon as you can, for I am all unworthy of your name and your love.

"LITTLE NOBODY."

She had deliberately signed the name she hated so much, and he knew that her humility must have been great to drive her to such an act. With a groan he sunk into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

"How could she, with her beauty and innocence, her high-bred air and noble soul, be lowly, even shamefully born, as this letter would have me believe?" he exclaimed. "No, no; it is only another of that wicked woman's falsehoods. She has taken Una with her, out of hatred for my darling and envy of our happiness. There can be nothing strong enough to come between us, my little love and I. Oh, why did I leave them alone together? I might have known that serpent's wiles. But I will follow and bring them back! Fortunately it is not too late."

But he was mistaken, for when he reached madame's hotel, half an hour later, he was told that she had left Boston by the 1:30 train.

"Just thirty minutes too late!" he muttered, wildly, and the sleepy night-clerk of the hotel looked at him in contemptuous amazement. He thought he must be some demented admirer of Mme. Leonie.

Eliot knew that madame's next engagement was in Philadelphia, and he determined that he would follow by the next train.

"Will she have the temerity to take Una with her, or will she try to hide her from me? The latter, most likely," he thought, sadly, and a presentiment grew upon him that his lovely girl-wife was lost to him forever.

But he followed the actress by the next train to Philadelphia, only to learn that she had never arrived there. At a heavy cost, she had made her manager cancel her engagement, and neither herself nor the manager could be found there, nor a clew obtained to their whereabouts.

Just as suddenly as she had returned to the stage, she disappeared from it, and the mystery of her disappearance was the topic of newspaper paragraphs for some days.

Only one of the journalistic fraternity had any idea of the cause of her flight, and he was too

[Pg 170]

[Pg 171]

proud and bitter to give it to the world.

To his own family, under strict bonds of secrecy, he confided the truth, and Maud and Edith were indignant at the thought that wicked Mme. Lorraine had dared come beneath their roof, and loud in their protestations of disbelief in the story that there was a stain on Una's birth.

But Bryant, Sylvie, and Ida preserved a significant silence that told more plainly than words their belief that all had happened for the best. They hoped secretly that Eliot would get a divorce, as Una had told him to do.

---

## CHAPTER XL.

After the space of five years, let us look in again upon the Van Zandts.

Eliot Van Zandt has a guest.

[Pg 172]

Pierre Carmontelle!

For five years the noble Louisianian has been a wanderer in foreign lands. He has returned at last cured of his passion for the girl he had loved, strong enough now to witness her happiness with another.

Not since the day when he bid farewell to Eliot and his bride has he heard aught of their fate until now, when, strong in the consciousness of his conquered love, he goes to Boston, determined to visit the happy pair before his return South.

"I shall see Van Zandt grown portly and important, the Little Nobody of old matronly and magnificent," he said to himself, with a smile.

Fancy the shock of the reality when he found Eliot a grave, sad man, old beyond his years through the influence of sorrow for the young wife lost so strangely out of his life.

It was several minutes after Eliot had told him his story before he could utter a word, so greatly was he affected by what had been told him. Then he called down the vengeance of Heaven on the head of the wicked woman.

Eliot's grave, sad face, with its lines of suffering, told plainer than words all that he had endured.

"Surely you pursued them?" cried Carmontelle.

"As long as my means lasted—yes," said Van Zandt. "But that was such a little while. You know I had so little beyond my salary, and—there were my two sisters."

"You should have written to me."

"I did—your letter was returned to me—you had sailed for Europe."

"And not a clew in all these years?"

"None."

"I need not ask if you have taken Una's advice and procured a divorce?" Carmontelle said, with quiet comprehension of the other's pale, grave face that flushed slightly, as he answered:

[Pg 173]

"I am bound to Una while I live, although I have given up all hope of ever seeing her again."

Carmontelle's steady eyes went over the worn sheet of paper on which Una had traced her pathetic farewell to her husband.

"And Miss Hayes, whom she says here you loved before your marriage?" he said, abruptly.

"I can not tell how she fell into such an error. Miss Hayes is my brother's sister-in-law. She visited here often, but we were never more than friends," Eliot answered, quietly, all unsuspecting of Sylvie's treachery.

Then the ladies of the house came in, and the conversation drifted to other subjects.

Sylvie was the same exquisitely dressed doll; but five years had changed Maud and Edith from pretty, vivacious girls to quiet, dignified young ladies. In Maud there was a greater change than in Edith, and the secret lay in the failure of her beloved novel.

Three years ago the cherished book had been given to the world, and the cruel critics had ridiculed the immature work of the girl, saying that the wild flights of fancy, so fresh, so buoyant, could have emanated from none but a young, inexperienced brain knowing nothing of the hard, cruel world.

Pretty, tender Maud did not have the spirit of a Byron to retort on her critics and write, despite their sneers, so she laid down her pen, as she said, forever, and nearly broke her heart in bitter humiliation over her cruel failure. So there lay the secret of the beauty so ethereally frail that one fancied, in looking at her, that the spirit would soon plume its wings for another world.

Edith was made of different metal. When the picture on which she had spent so much time was voted as great a failure as Maud's book, she shed a few bitter tears, brushed them away, and began again.

[Pg 174]

On her easel had stood, for some time, an unfinished portrait of Una. Turning to this now, she made a fancy picture of it, and boldly called it Una.

Upon this portrait rested Edith's fame. When exhibited, it created a great sensation. She had many offers for it, but she rejected all to present the portrait to her brother. He was deeply moved, and declared that the gift of a fortune would not have pleased him so much.

So Edith's fame was established. A few copies of the beautiful "Una" found ready sale. Then there came in orders for portraits. She had her own beautiful studio now, and made money enough to buy her own dresses, and Maud's, too; so Eliot was free now, but he had never begrudged the manly aid he lent to his sisters. Even now he spent very little for himself, but went on laying up his small savings carefully for Una, if she should ever come back.

Pierre Carmontelle, who had traveled five years to get cured of an attack of the *grande passion*, fell straight into Cupid's net again when he encountered Maud's pensive beauty. She, on her part, was attracted to this noble man of forty-odd years as she had never been to younger ones who had bowed at her shrine.

Never did anything come about more suddenly; for the Southerner, who had expected to remain in Boston only a day, stayed a month, and at the expiration of that time Maud was his promised wife.

Of course they had talked to each other about Una, and when Maud wanted to defer the bridal-day six months, Carmontelle said, artfully:

"Do not make it so long as that, my darling, because you and I want to go in search of Una just as soon as we are married, do we not?"

"Yes," she answered eagerly; and thereupon agreed to get ready to be married in two months.

[Pg 175]

Sylvie said that it was all hurried up in the worst of taste. She had not believed Maud would be so ready to snap up a rich man; but—ah! well, your romantic, novel-writing folks had an eye to the main chance, like everybody else.

Edith answered daringly:

"Why not say at once, Sylvie, that you're envious because Maud is going to be as rich as you are? Goodness knows, I'm glad one of the Van Zandts will be rich at last, so that you will not be able always to fling our poverty in our faces!"

---

## CHAPTER XLI.

Maud declared that the trousseau must be a very simple and quiet one, since almost everything must come from the pockets of Eliot and Edith.

But the brother and sister overruled her objections.

"As if we had any other use for our savings!" cried Edith. "We are going to spend every penny. Do you think we are going to let our sister go to her rich husband plain and shabby?"

So the order was given for several very handsome dresses, among them an ivory white satin, veiled in lace, for the bridal-dress.

But before the bills came in from milliners and modistes the young authoress was able to pay them out of her own purse.

And it came about in this wise.

About four weeks after her engagement to the rich Southerner she received a visit from her Boston publisher.

He put into her hand a check for several hundred dollars, the receipts from her novel which until now had not paid for the first costs of its publication.

"I congratulate you, Miss Van Zandt," he said. "Your novel is suddenly becoming popular. The book-sellers report numerous calls for it, and in consequence I have large orders."

[Pg 176]

Maud's lip quivered, and her blue-gray eyes, so like Eliot's, dimmed with happy tears.

"At last!" she exclaimed, joyously. "Oh, I had ceased to hope or expect anything!"

"I have taken pains to inquire into the cause of your success after the unfriendliness of the critics had so long injured its sale," he said; "and I have found out that the real merits of your novel have at last been discovered and revealed by a friendly critic."

"I thought they were all my mortal foes!" she exclaimed.

He smiled, and answered:

"Not this one, at least, for he or she has been very frank, as well as very just. While the defects of your book are plainly acknowledged, its many beauties and merits are enthusiastically dwelt upon, and the fact of the author's tender youth is eloquently dilated on in excusing its faults."

The girl's sweet eyes dilated wildly.

"Who could have known that?" she asked him.

"I can not tell. I understood that the writer is a reviewer of books for a noted New York magazine. I have not learned the name, but I will find it out for you, Miss Van Zandt," promised the genial

publisher.

"Pray, do so, if possible; and also please get the magazine containing the friendly review of my poor book. It will make me so happy to read it, and to write a letter of thanks to my good angel!" she exclaimed, fervently.

Smiling at her enthusiasm, and promising to gratify her desire, the publisher took leave, and the very next day sent her the magazine.

How gladly, how happily the young heart beat as her eager eyes devoured the column of reviews, and at last fell on "The Fatal Roses," her own romantic and high-flown novel, over whose non-success she had shed such bitter, burning tears. [Pg 177]

But they were tears of joy that glittered on her lashes now, as she went eagerly over the two full columns that had been given to "The Fatal Roses" by one who signed the, to Maud, startling name of "Una."

"Una!" she cried out, wildly, and ran to seek Eliot, who was in the library with her intended husband.

"Eliot! oh, Eliot, look! Our own darling Una!" she exclaimed, wildly, pointing with her taper finger at the startling name.

Scarcely less agitated than herself, he took the review and read it hurriedly, then passed it to Carmontelle.

"Can it be my Una?" he exclaimed, pale and agitated, his heart beating wildly.

But the face of Pierre Carmontelle looked calm and grave.

"Dear Eliot, dear Maud, do not give yourself up too ardently to hope," he said. "This may prove but a coincidence. The name may have been chosen as a *nom de plume* by the writer."

"My publisher promised to find out the name of the critic, if possible," Maud said; and to him Eliot went at once in a fever of anxiety.

Mr. Dudley could not give him any satisfaction. He had written to the New York publisher, asking for information, but had not yet received his reply. As soon as it came, he would be happy to lay his letter before Miss Van Zandt and her brother.

It was almost a week before the reply came, and Mr. Dudley forwarded it at once to Maud.

The New York publisher wrote that he was unacquainted with his able critic, save by the name of Una. All his business with her was transacted through a Boston banker, whose name he gave, and whom the Van Zandts knew as the head of one of the most influential banks in the city. [Pg 178]

"She is here, then, in this very city, my lost Una—so near and 'yet so far!'" groaned Eliot. "But I shall go at once to Mr. Chesterton, with whom I have long had a friendly acquaintance."

He went and elicited simply nothing. The great banker would give him no information.

"I am not at liberty to speak one word on the subject, although I would gladly oblige you, Van Zandt, were it in my power!" he cried, affably.

"At least tell me if Una is young, and if it is a real name, or a *nom de plume*," pleaded Eliot.

"I regret that I am not at liberty to answer your questions," repeated courteous Mr. Chesterton.

Baffled, but almost convinced by all this mystery that Maud's friendly critic was none other than his lovely, lost Una, Eliot went away in despair, and found a comforter in Carmontelle.

"Leave it to me, Eliot, and I will find out all about the little runaway," he said, confidently.

He went to a directory and found out the residence of Mr. Chesterton, a stately brown-stone residence in a fashionable and aristocratic street.

A day or two later he said to Van Zandt:

"I have found out all about the members of Mr. Chesterton's family. He has a handsome young wife, three small children, and a beautiful young governess."

"Una!" Eliot cried, with a start.

"Perhaps so; but we must not be too sure. I have not seen her yet," said Carmontelle.

"But you will do so soon?" anxiously.

A week later he came to Eliot where he sat with his sisters in the library, their favorite room, for here Sylvie seldom obtruded her presence.

Maud, so lovely and happy now that she did not look like the pensive girl of a month ago, sprung up impetuously and caught his arm. [Pg 179]

"Oh, you look so happy, you surely found our darling girl!"

Taking Eliot's and Edith's indulgence for granted, he pressed a light kiss on her pure brow.

"You have guessed aright," he answered, "I have seen Mr. Chesterton's governess. She calls herself Mademoiselle Lorraine, and teaches French to the little Chestertons, but she is indeed no other than our Una."

"Thank Heaven!" Eliot cried, springing up, "I will go to her at once."

"Nonsense! She will not receive you," said his friend, and Eliot flung himself down again with a

groan.

"Listen," said Pierre Carmontelle, "Mademoiselle Lorraine goes out every afternoon to walk with her little charges. She is always closely veiled, and sometimes she walks past this very house, and looks up at the windows with eyes full of sadness. I saw her myself to-day, and recognized her in spite of her thick veil. I followed her, and when near the gate, I spoke to her; but afterward I was almost sorry I had done so, she was so terribly frightened."

"Frightened!—but why?" cried Maud.

And Eliot echoed bitterly:

"Why?"

"I can not tell you, I only know that she did not accord me any welcome. She only looked sorry and frightened and cried out sharply: 'Oh, you have hunted me down! This is cruel, cruel; but, oh, Monsieur Carmontelle, for God's sake, do not betray me to Eliot—to Mr. Van Zandt.'"

"And then?" cried Edith, breathlessly.

"Then her little pupils came around her and hurried her inside the gate. She looked back at me, waved her little gloved hand imploringly, and cried out again, 'Do not betray me to Eliot, or any one.' Then she vanished inside the banker's door."

[Pg 180]

They sat looking sadly, and yet gladly, at one another. At least she lived, poor darling, and was out of the power of the wicked woman whose malice had lured her from home and love.

"If I could only see her, only speak to her, my poor little Una, I am sure I could win her confidence!" Eliot exclaimed, passionately.

"You are right; and indeed you must see her now," answered his friend. "Una must give you her confidence, must come home to you. It is not right that she, your wife, and my adopted child, should be slaving her young life away like this through some fancied duty."

"I must see her. I will go to Mr. Chesterton since she denies me a sight of her. I will tell him my story, I will ask him to plead my cause with Una," Eliot exclaimed, in strong agitation; and just a little later he stood before the banker's mansion ringing the bell, and looking up in the darkness at the front of the great house, thrilling with the thought that his loved, lost bride was so near to him at this moment, that it seemed almost impossible but that they must soon come face to face.

"And if she loves me still, as she said she did that happy night before she left me, I swear that no earthly power shall ever tear her again from my arms!" he vowed to himself.

Mr. Chesterton was at home, and received his guest in the library with courteous surprise; but when the young man poured forth his agitated story, the banker became greatly interested and excited.

"You are right. She is, she must be your wife. She came to us two years ago from the Convent of Le Bon Berger in New Orleans. My wife was once a pupil there, and wrote to the mother superior for a French teacher for our little ones. She sent us Mademoiselle Lorraine, who is as gifted and clever as she is lovely and winning. But I have always seen that she lay beneath the shadow of some sorrow. Wait, my young friend, and I will go upstairs and beg this proud young wife to give you an immediate interview," concluded the good man.

[Pg 181]

---

## CHAPTER XLII.

Eliot waited in the large, elegant library with eager impatience, never doubting that Mr. Chesterton would succeed in his kindly mission. Una could not be so cruel as to refuse him an interview.

"And once in her presence I will combat every objection she can raise until I persuade her to go home with me," he said to himself, firmly, and his heart began to beat lightly, happily, with the thought that soon Una would be with him, never to be torn from him again.

"It is five years since I saw her. She was scarcely more than a child then. Now she is a woman, beautiful, gifted, intelligent. Oh, how I long to be wealthy, for the sake of my fair young wife!" he thought.

Then it dawned upon him that the banker was staying a long time. The bronze clock on the mantel had chimed the quarters of an hour twice while he had sat there all alone.

"He finds her hard to persuade," he exclaimed, rising from his chair and beginning to pace restlessly up and down the floor.

Five, ten minutes elapsed. Then there came a step at the door. The handle turned. Mr. Chesterton entered—alone.

Eliot turned to him in unutterable dismay.

"Una!" he exclaimed, hoarsely, then paused, speechless. He saw a folded slip of paper in the banker's hand, and on his genial face disappointment and regret.

"Van Zandt, I am sorry for you, upon my word!" he said, feelingly. "I used all my eloquence, but I have failed. She gave me this note for you," he added, thrusting the slip of paper into Eliot's

[Pg 182]

hand.

He took it in a dazed, lifeless way, opened it slowly, and read the words written in an elegant flowing hand, very different from the cramped, childish one in which Una had penned her farewell to him five years ago.

"Oh, forgive me," it ran, "but I can not see you now, or ever again in this world. What I wrote you when I left you five years ago remains unchanged. There is a barrier between us cruel as the grave. You must seek freedom from the nominal tie that binds you to me. Then you will forget me and find happiness with some woman more blessed by fate than I have been. For me, I shall convince you that our separation is irrevocable by returning at once to New Orleans, there to enter a convent and take the veil for life.

UNA."

The cruel letter fell from his hand, and staggering heavily forward, Eliot dropped into a chair and bowed his face on the table.

"Van Zandt!" exclaimed the banker.

There was no reply.

Rushing to Eliot's side, he lifted his head from the table, and it fell again heavily. The young man's overwrought feelings had culminated in momentary unconsciousness.

A sharp peal of the bell brought the servants rushing to the scene, but not so soon but that Mr. Chesterton heard a gasp of terror from behind the curtains that divided the library from a pretty little parlor. Poor Una had crept in there for one stolen glimpse of the face of her beloved.

The banker saw the lovely, frightened face peering around the curtain, and said, sharply:

"Mrs. Van Zandt, I fear you have killed your husband!"

With a stifled wail, she rushed forward and flung herself on her knees beside Eliot's unconscious form, catching his limp hands in both her warm, trembling white ones. [Pg 183]

"Dead! Oh, no, no, Mr. Chesterton, do not charge me with such cruelty!" she cried, gazing with straining eyes into that pale, handsome face. Her touch, her voice, her gaze, seemed to recall him to life, for suddenly his eyes opened wide on that lovely face. A cry of dismay broke from her lips, and dropping his hands, she rushed through the curtains and disappeared just as two servants entered at the other door.

"Bring water and wine," said the banker. "This gentleman is ill."

Both disappeared at once, and Eliot Van Zandt struggled up to a sitting posture, gazing wildly around the room.

"Una—she was here!" he murmured, faintly.

"She has gone," Mr. Chesterton answered, gravely. "Drink this wine, Van Zandt, it will revive you."

"No; the water, please."

He swallowed a few drops, and rose to go in spite of Mr. Chesterton's entreaties that he would stay until he was better.

"I am all right. It was but a temporary faintness. Heaven bless you for your kindness to a miserable man, Mr. Chesterton," said Eliot, wringing his friend's hand fervently.

Then he repossessed himself of Una's note that he had dropped on the floor, and went out of the room with a ghastly face. Mr. Chesterton, alarmed at his looks, followed him at a discreet distance until he saw him enter a car that would take him straight to Beacon Hill, then bethinking himself of an engagement he had for that evening, he hurried back home to don evening-dress and escort his beautiful wife to a soirée.

Returning home in the small hours, he concluded to make a confidante of his wife and enlist her sympathies in Eliot Van Zandt's case. [Pg 184]

"What a romantic story!" exclaimed Mrs. Chesterton. "But I always thought there was something very interesting hidden in the past of our gifted governess. So she is a Van Zandt—one of the oldest, proudest names in Boston. My dear, I will speak to her in the morning, and see if I can not untangle the strange web of fate that has been woven around her life by that wicked Madame Lorraine."

"I knew your sympathies would be drawn to this unhappy pair, Constance!" exclaimed the banker, fondly.

But, alas! his story had been told too late. Morning found the young governess gone.

She had left the house during their absence, and taken her trunks with her, flying like a thief in the night, not from pursuit, not from shame, but from a husband's love, the deepest, fondest, most passionate that ever thrilled a manly breast.

"I must take the veil, then he will understand that all hope is indeed ended," she said, resolutely to herself. "I had no business returning here. Father Quentin told me it was wrong, but in my mad yearning to see his face, I would not listen. Now I must go back and stay there forever. Eliot will soon forget me, for it was more pity than love that he felt for me. When he realizes that all is irrevocably at an end between us, he will seek his freedom that he may return to his old love, his

first love, Ida Hayes."

With the thought of her rival, all the old-time bitter jealousy rushed over Una's heart, and she told herself that Eliot had never really loved any one but Ida, and that he could not but rejoice some day that fate had freed him from the incubus of Little Nobody.

"I have spoiled his life for years, but at last he will be happy," she said, thinking bitterly of that year in which she had lived with Eliot, less to him, as she thought, than his sisters, or the governess even, wearing his name because it had been given not in love, but through an instinct of tender pity.

[Pg 185]

She was older, wiser, now than she had been before Sylvie made that cruel revelation to her that winter night, and she chafed with shame at remembering the position she had filled in Eliot's home—that of a wife in name only, unloved and barely endured.

"How they must have pitied and despised me!" she thought, with hot tears in her dark eyes as the express train rushed along through the night. "Ah, it is better, better for us both that things fell out as they did. I have a very jealous mind. I should never have forgotten that he loved Ida Hayes first, that he married me for pity's sake, so I never should have been quite sure of his heart. Ah, I wish—wish," with a choking sob, "that we had died together in madame's underground prison!"

And in this wretched frame of mind, bitter and despairing, Una went away from Boston and her husband, back to the South and the Convent of Le Bon Berger.

---

## CHAPTER XLIII.

Before the wedding-day rolled around Maud and her betrothed had persuaded Edith and Eliot to accompany them on their wedding-journey South. In fact, they were not hard to persuade, for Eliot, in a mood of desperation, felt almost ready to storm the convent walls and carry away his beloved, obdurate Una, while Edith was charmed at the idea of rushing so precipitately from the icy streets and freezing wind of Boston to the sunshine and flowers of a warmer clime.

So, one bright March morning, about six years from the time of Eliot's former visit to New Orleans, the party found themselves driving through the streets of the Crescent City to the palatial home of Pierre Carmontelle, which, during the two months of his betrothal to Maud, had been elegantly refitted for his bride.

[Pg 186]

New Orleans was in a great stir and bustle then, for it was the first year of the Southern Exposition. The city was crowded with visitors from all parts of the United States.

Maud and Edith were charmed with the quaint old city, and the warm, sweet air, and took the greatest pleasure in threading the Exposition grounds, exclaiming with delight when now and then they encountered the familiar faces of Northern friends, sight-seeing like themselves.

They were so busy daily "doing" the Exposition, that Eliot and Carmontelle did not get time to go down to the club, or they would have heard news that would have surprised them.

It came upon them suddenly one day, when, on leaving the Exposition grounds, the four came face to face with an entering couple—M. Remond, the wicked Frenchman, and the no less wicked Mme. Lorraine.

Madame was clinging to the arm of the dark-faced, elegant-looking Remond. She was in a tasteful Parisian costume, smiling and insolent, and looking not a day older than she did six years ago.

When she met the startled regard of those four pairs of eyes, she uttered an exclamation of amazement, and her cheek momentarily whitened through its rouge. The next instant her insolent courage returned. She smiled a bright, cold, conventional smile, bowed, and passed quickly on with her companion.

The others looked at each other with startled eyes.

"What does it mean?" queried Eliot Van Zandt, hoarsely.

"Let us call at the club to-night, and perhaps we can find out something," answered his brother-in-law.

They went accordingly, and great was the sensation created among their old friends by their reappearance after the lapse of years. Markham, the bachelor, was there, with some crow's-feet about the eyes and gray hairs in his brown locks to attest the flight of time. When questioned about Remond and Mme. Lorraine, he replied, laughing:

[Pg 187]

"Fancy their hardihood in coming here for their wedding-tour. They are married, you know."

"No!"

"Fact! It was announced in our papers two months ago. Married in Paris, and came here a week ago. I am told that they are staying at madame's house on Esplanade Street, but none of the Jockey Club has called on the wretches."

"One there is who will call," Carmontelle said, boldly. "What say you, Van Zandt? Shall we go to Esplanade Street and have it out with that fiendish woman?"

Eliot looked rather mystified, but he signified his assent.

"I will go, but—when?" he asked, and his friend answered:

"Now."

"Oh, I say, lads, put it off till to-morrow," cried the gay Markham. "I should like to go and back you up in the row, but I have an engagement for this evening."

"Sorry, but can't wait," Carmontelle answered. "Come, Eliot. Markham, adieu. You and the club will call at the Magnolias? Introduce you to my bride and her sister. Handsomest girls in Boston, and both geniuses."

"Thank you—only too happy to accept your kind invitation," Mr. Markham said, genially; and then they were out in the street, bound for the presence of the woman who had wrought such woe to Eliot Van Zandt and his lovely bride.

"Your object?" Eliot asked his friend, dubiously.

"Can you not guess? She shall tell us the tale she told Una that night in Boston, and we shall be the judges as to whether the barrier is great enough to separate you and your wife forever. Who knows but that Una, in her strange commingling of pride and humility, may have exaggerated the trouble?"

[Pg 188]

"I have always thought so—always believed that I could overthrow all her objections, and win her back if only I could have an interview with her again," Eliot said; then, sighing, "But I shall never have the chance. She will never come out of that grim convent again."

"Who knows? We will hope so, anyhow;" and then they were silent until their carriage drew up before the front of madame's well-remembered house, once so familiar to the club in the days when she was such a fascinating siren and kept all her wickedness carefully hidden in the background.

Lights glimmered brightly in the front of the house. The prim, ugly Mima opened the door to them and frowned darkly.

Was Mme. Lorraine at home? She took their cards and said, curtly, that she would see if Mme. Remond was in.

In another moment she came back and ushered them into the pretty salon. Remond was present, but retreated with a scowl upon their entrance.

The bride, all in silvery white silk cut *décolleté*, with diamonds shimmering on arms and breast, rose smilingly and bowed.

"This is an unexpected honor!" she said, with insolent *empressement*.

"You know to what cause to attribute the honor," Pierre Carmontelle said, icily.

"No," with a puzzled, inquiring tone; then, with a roguish ripple of laughter, "Ah, to congratulate me on my marriage, I suppose?"

---

## CHAPTER XLIV.

[Pg 189]

"Scarcely," answered Carmontelle, dryly, for Eliot Van Zandt seemed to have no words at his command. He could only gaze in horror at the vindictive woman. The former went on curtly, and in tones of calm authority: "We are here, madame, to hear from your own lips the strange story with which you sundered two loving hearts five years ago."

A sneer curled the lips of the handsome, heartless woman.

"You use romantic phrases, monsieur," she said.

"But true ones," he replied.

"Well?"

"We are waiting to hear the story you told Mr. Van Zandt's wife—the story that parted them," he answered again.

She shot a quick, inquiring glance at Eliot's agitated face.

"But you—you are divorced and married again, monsieur, are you not?"

"No," he answered; "I shall never have any other wife but her whom you drove from me by your treachery that night."

Madame was genuinely puzzled this time, for she exclaimed:

"But Mrs. Bryant Van Zandt told me you hated Little Nobody, and would have married her sister Ida, only for the circumstances that forced you into a hated marriage."

"It is false! I never loved Ida, nor one but the girl I made my wife!" exclaimed Eliot, indignantly; and his brother-in-law added:

"He loved Una from the first time he met her here, and when she was imprisoned with him in your secret cellar, she must have died of starvation but that he opened a vein in his arm and fed the dying girl with his own blood. Does not that prove the love he had for his wife?"

[Pg 190]



A bitter, ghastly change came over madame's rouged face, with a gasp, she reeled backward into a chair, and lifted her heavy eyes to Eliot's face.

"You loved her like that?" she cried; "and I—oh, I believed that you hated her! I was so glad, so glad! But—yes, it is better so; my revenge is more complete, for I have made you both suffer where I believed that it was only her heart I broke!"

"Fiend!" exclaimed Eliot.

And Carmontelle echoed:

"Fiend!"

The angry woman only laughed mockingly, as she said:

"Revenge is sweet! You scorned me, Eliot Van Zandt, for that slip of a girl, and now I have my pay!"

And throwing back her handsome head against the silken back of her chair, she laughed low and exultantly.

"We did not come here for recriminations, Madame Remond. We came, as I explained just now, to hear the story you told Una."

"*Oui*, monsieur; but your friend there will be sorry when he hears it. In fact, his Una wished him never to know it," madame said, maliciously.

"I have no doubt it was something very horrible, but doubtless it was an untruth. We wish to hear and judge for ourselves," was her opponent's undaunted reply.

She glared at him, and muttered something uncomplimentary beneath her breath, but he continued, coolly:

"Go on and tell us, please. We do not wish to detain your *estimable* husband much longer from his amiable bride!"

"Very well, then, since you will have it, here is Una's history in a nutshell: She is a child of shame."

"You told me that once before; also, that she was your child, but I did not believe you," answered Carmontelle. [Pg 191]

She glared at him angrily, and said:

"Well, part of it was untrue, but so much the worse for the girl. She might better be my child than the offspring of a slave with a taint of African blood in her veins!"

"Woman!"

Eliot had sprung at her fiercely and clutched her white shoulder in a grasp like steel. He shook her wildly in a tempest of rage.

"Unsay that lie!" he hissed, fiercely, with blazing eyes. Madame turned, shrieking, to Carmontelle.

"Make him take his hands off me!" she panted, in terror. "Do not let him kill me for telling the truth!"

It looked indeed as if her life was in danger, for Eliot's face worked with fury, and sparks of fire seemed to flash from his angry eyes. It was with the greatest difficulty that Carmontelle dragged him away from the frightened woman and forced him into a seat.

"Be calm," he said. "Do not let her lies put you into a passion."

"Prove them lies if you can!" she screamed, losing her self-possession in anger at his incredulity.

"I shall certainly endeavor to do so," he replied, calmly. "But go on; finish the details of your story. So our Una was a slave's child, you say? Who, then, was her father?"

"You force me to disgrace the dead!" she flashed. "Very well, then, it was Monsieur Lorraine."

"Lorraine dead?" he exclaimed.

"Yes," sullenly.

"I remember Lorraine well. He was an exceedingly homely man. Una does not resemble him in the least," said aggravating Carmontelle.

Flashing him a fiery glance, she retorted:

"No, but she resembles her mother, the beautiful quadroon whom he gave me for a maid when I came to this house a bride the last year of the war. Una was a pretty little infant then, and the young quadroon, in a fit of jealous fury, told me all. Lorraine whipped her cruelly, and in her rage she stabbed herself to death. The world says that I made him jealous and drove him mad, but it is untrue. Remorse over the quadroon's death drove him inside the walls of a lunatic asylum." She paused a moment, then added: "I have told you now the simple truth, the same that I told the girl in Boston. She is the daughter of Monsieur Lorraine and his beautiful slave, and was in infancy a slave herself, until the failure of the Southern Confederacy freed her in common with all the other slaves." [Pg 192]

She laughed aloud at the white horror of Eliot Van Zandt's face as he crouched upon a sofa at the further end of the room.

"A slave's child the bride of one of the proud, highly born Van Zandts! I am well avenged!" she exclaimed, fiendishly.

## CHAPTER XLV.

Carmontelle turned to his friend.

"Poor Una!" he said; "it is no wonder she fled in dismay, after hearing such a tale of horror. Come, let us go. We have heard all that madame's malignity can invent to torture two loving hearts, and the only task that remains to us is to prove it false."

"Which you will never do!" she exclaimed, with triumphant malice.

"Time will prove," he retorted, as he led the agitated Van Zandt out of the house, ignoring the ceremony of adieus to its mistress.

But his face grew very grave once they gained the darkness of the street. To himself he said, in alarm:

"Can her tale be true? It sounded very plausible."

[Pg 193]

To Eliot he said:

"I shall put this affair in the hands of one who will sift it to the bottom. Then, if Madame Remond has lied to us, she shall suffer for her sin."

"Poor Una! my poor little Una! How she must have suffered, bearing this bitter knowledge alone!" Eliot said, and a bursting sigh heaved his tortured breast.

"She was a wise little girl, at all events," Carmontelle answered, gravely. "Of course, if madame's tale be true, there was no other way proper for either, cruel as it seems to say it."

Eliot had no answer ready, but in his heart he knew that his friend spoke truly. Better, far better, that he and Una should suffer than to throw the blighting disgrace of his wife's parentage upon unborn descendants of the proud name of Van Zandt.

He could hardly share the incredulity of Carmontelle. Madame's story had been so plausible it had shaken his doubts. Now, indeed, it seemed to him that all hope was over. He and Una were indeed parted forever.

He went back to the Magnolias with his friend, and excusing himself from all society, went up to his room alone. He spent some time leaning from the window, his sad gaze roving over the moonlit city, thinking of Una, his lost bride, so near him that an hour's rapid walking would have borne him to her side, but sundered so widely apart from him by sorrow.

There came to him in the stillness a memory of the song he had sung to her so often, and which she had loved so well, "The Two Little Lives." How well it fitted now!

"Ah! for the morrow bringeth such sorrow,  
Captured the lark was, and life grew dim;  
There, too, the daisy torn from the way-side,  
Prisoned and dying wept for him  
Once more the lark sung; fainter his voice grew;  
Her little song was hushed and o'er;  
Two little lives gone out of the sunshine,  
Out of this bright world for evermore."

[Pg 194]

"Poor little daisy!" Eliot sighed; then, bitterly, "Ah, if we had but died in prison that time, how blessed we should have been—never having this cruel knowledge to break our hearts!"

He flung himself down on the bed and tried to sleep. A disturbed slumber, mixed with frightful dreams, came to him. His head was hot, and his thirst was excessive. He rose several times and groped his way to the ice-pitcher, drinking greedily, until at last he had drained it all. In the morning they found him there delirious.

The old doctor shook his head.

"Brain fever!" he said. "He has had some terrible shock, I think, from the symptoms. I shall send you a trained hospital nurse, Carmontelle, for there must be careful nursing here if we bring the poor fellow out alive."

The nurse came, and was duly installed in his position, aided and abetted by Maud and Edith.

Carmontelle, after a day or two, stole away from the house long enough to consult his family lawyer on the subject of ferreting to the bottom the story the wicked Mme. Remond had told him of Una's birth.

At an early period of the narration of his story the lawyer became visibly excited.

"Go on. Tell me everything," he said, nervously, and Carmontelle obeyed.

When he had finished, Mr. Frayser cried out, eagerly:

"Upon my soul, Carmontelle, I believe the good Lord himself has sent you to me. You know I was

Lorraine's lawyer?"

"I did not know it," was the answer.

"Yes," said Mr. Frayser; "and my client died a few months ago, in an insane asylum."

[Pg 195]

"So I was told by Madame Lorraine—or, as I should perhaps say, Remond."

"Yes, she married that wretch some time ago, and they came on here after Lorraine's death, to look after his property."

"Yes," said Carmontelle, rather indifferently. He was not much interested in the dead man's property.

"Lorraine was immensely rich, you know," continued Frayser. "Madame thought she would step into the money without let or hinderance. She wanted to sell all the property in New Orleans and get away with the spoils."

"Yes," absently.

The little lawyer smiled.

"Monsieur, you don't look much interested," he said; "but listen: Monsieur Lorraine left a box of private papers in my safe when he first employed me as his lawyer, at the time of his marriage to the actress. When I examined these papers, after his death, I found that the greater part of his wealth did not belong to him, but was held in trust for another person."

"Another person!" Carmontelle echoed, brightening up with sudden curiosity.

"A little child," continued Frayser, his little black eyes twinkling with fun at Carmontelle's eagerness.

"Go on, go on."

"It seems that Lorraine had an only sister who was married during the war to a very wealthy man, a colonel—*mon Dieu!* Carmontelle, what a coincidence! it was your own name—he was a Colonel Carmontelle!"

"And lived in Alabama—and was killed in battle just before the close of the war. He was my cousin!" exclaimed Carmontelle, excitedly.

"The same," replied the lawyer. "Well, his death was such a shock to his young wife that, when her little one was born, a month later, she died—of heart-break, or, at least, so say the letters of her friends, that were written from Alabama to summon him to come for the little orphan heiress."

[Pg 196]

"Una!" exclaimed Carmontelle, radiantly.

"Most likely," said the lawyer, smiling. "But permit me to go on with my prosaic story. According to these private papers, some of which are in the form of memorandums, Lorraine brought the babe to New Orleans with its negro nurse, and very soon afterward married, more for the child's sake than his own, and went to housekeeping on Esplanade Street."

"All is clear as day. Thank the good God, Una's stainless parentage is established, and I will go this day and bring her to the side of her suffering husband," Carmontelle exclaimed, joyously.

"I think you may safely do so," smiled the delighted lawyer. "But I have still more to tell you. The physician in charge at the asylum where Lorraine died wrote to me to come and make preparations for his burial. I went and heard a strange story. Lorraine, in his last illness, had recovered his reason and memory. He had dictated and signed a paper to be given to me. You shall read it yourself."

He brought out from his desk the paper, and Carmontelle eagerly ran over the contents.

Briefly, it was to the effect that Lorraine, just previous to the insanity that had overtaken him, had found out that his wife was false to him, and that she had married him only for the money which she believed to be his own. Realizing suddenly that he had made no arrangements by which his little niece would receive her inheritance, should he be suddenly stricken by death, and fearful of Mme. Lorraine's treachery in the matter, he had executed a will in which he left to the little Mary Carmontelle the whole of his own small patrimony, together with the wealth of her dead father. He had hidden the will in the library, intending to place it in Frayser's care, but his mind had suddenly gone wrong with the stress of trouble, and his removal by his wife to an insane asylum had put a sudden end to everything.

[Pg 197]

"Madame knows all this?" Carmontelle queried, looking up from the paper.

"Yes; for I confronted her with it when she came to me to settle up the property. She was as bold as brass, and declared that the child had died in infancy. I made a search in the library, all the same, for the missing will, but it could not be found. Doubtless that wicked woman has destroyed it. I would not take her word that the little heiress was dead, as she could offer no proof at all except the word of that grim maid-servant of hers, so I have been advertising in a number of papers for the child or young lady, as she is now, if living. You will see from that paper that I am appointed her guardian until her marriage."

"She has been married nearly six years. Dear little Una! she is my cousin, and the name I gave her when I adopted her as my daughter was really her own. It is the oddest thing, too, that the nuns at the convent baptized her Marie, her own name, but in the French form. Fact is certainly stranger than fiction!" exclaimed Maud's husband, in wonder and delight.

"It is wonderful, certainly," agreed Frayser, "and your visit to me to-day is one of the most wonderful things about it. I was beginning to give up all hope of finding the missing heiress, and Mme. Remond and her rascally husband were pressing me so furiously that I was beginning to fear I must make some concessions to them. But now all is made plain, and I can lay my hand on Lorraine's niece and heiress and oust her enemy from the place she has usurped so long. But I must tell you one thing, unless that missing will can be found, the ex-actress will make us trouble yet over Mrs. Van Zandt's inheritance."

[Pg 198]

"Never mind about the will now. What is money when it lies in our power to reunite the crushed hearts of that long-parted husband and wife. Let us get into my carriage and go and fetch Una away from her convent to the side of her sick husband!" cried Carmontelle.

"Agreed with all my heart!" answered Frayser.

---

## CHAPTER XLVI.

Carmontelle found, as once before, his old acquaintance with the mother superior at the convent of good avail in securing admittance. The good woman met him in some wonder, and bowed stiffly to the little lawyer, who was looking about him in a good deal of curiosity.

"What is the meaning of this visit?" she inquired, with calm dignity, although perfectly certain that it related to Una.

She was not mistaken, for he immediately asked for her, and was told that Una would receive no one.

"She is constantly engaged in devotion, fitting herself to retire forever from the world."

"She will have to let the devotions go, and return to the world," Carmontelle answered, bluntly.

"Monsieur!" reproachfully.

"I mean what I say," he replied, earnestly. "I have to-day made discoveries that prove her the daughter of honorable parents—also heiress to a large fortune. There is nothing now to prevent her return to the world and to her husband, who has suffered so much from their separation."

Madame, the superior, was unaffectedly happy at hearing this news.

"Thank *le bon Dieu* that it is so!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, how the poor little one has suffered, believing the falsehood of wicked Madame Lorraine."

[Pg 199]

She went hurriedly to seek Una with the joyful tidings, but it was some time before she returned.

In truth, Una had been almost overcome by the shock of joy after the long night of sorrow and despair.

"I am not the child of infamy! The blood that flows through my veins is noble and untainted! Heaven, I thank Thee!" cried the tortured girl, falling down upon her knees and hiding her face in her hands as she leaned forward upon her low cot bed.

To the good nun's announcement that she was an heiress, she had paid no attention, everything else being swallowed up in the glad news that her birth was honorable.

After the sorrow and despair she had experienced such a revulsion of feeling, such intense happiness rushed over her that her senses for a moment succumbed to the shock, and the nun, bending forward to look at her, presently found she had quietly fainted.

The application of a little cold water soon revived her, and the mother superior exclaimed, cheerfully:

"Oh, fy! my dear, I did not know that you would take my good news so ill, or I would have broken it to you more carefully."

"Tell me more. What is my name? Who are my kinspeople, and why was I left so long to the cruel mercy of Madame Lorraine?" exclaimed Una, eagerly.

"Come with me. Our old friend, Pierre Carmontelle, is down-stairs. He will tell you all."

"Monsieur Carmontelle! He has always been my friend," cried the girl, thinking remorsefully of the way she had snubbed him that day in Boston when he had followed her to the banker's gate, frightened because she feared he would betray her to Eliot.

Now she ran joyfully to his presence, and he started in surprise at her wondrous beauty that shone star-like from its setting of simple convent black.

[Pg 200]

"Heavens, Una! how lovely you have grown!" he exclaimed, gayly. "I may take the privilege of praising you, although you are a married woman, since you are my kinswoman by two distinct ties."

"Your kinswoman!" the girl echoed, amazedly, and he explained, laughingly:

"You are my cousin's daughter for one thing, and for the other you are my sister-in-law."

"What can you mean?"

"I married Maud Van Zandt two weeks ago," he replied.

The warm color came rushing into Una's pale cheeks.

"Oh!" she cried, "how happy you make me. And dear Maud—is she here?"

"She is at my home, the Magnolias. Have you any one else to ask about, *belle cousine?*" chaffingly.

"E—dith?" falteringly, and blushing up to her eyes.

"Edith is at the Magnolias, too. Ah, I see your eyes asking me about some one else. No wonder you are ashamed to speak his name after the shameful way you have treated him. Well, I will be generous, Mrs. Van Zandt. Eliot—ah! now I see how you can blush—is also at my home, and presently I am going to take another guest to the Magnolias—even yourself."

"Not—not until you tell me all!" the girl faltered, trembling with such happiness that she could scarcely speak.

So, then and there he told her all the story of Mme. Lorraine's treachery and cupidity—told her everything, except the story of Eliot's illness that might possibly terminate fatally, and so wreck the happy ending of their checkered love story.

When he had finished the story, with the aid of the little lawyer, who was charmed with the beauty of the young heiress, he said, kindly: [Pg 201]

"Will you come with me to the Magnolias, now, Una?"

She looked radiantly at the nun, who answered, with genuine happiness:

"Of course she will, monsieur, as soon as she retires to her room and assumes her worldly garb. I am sorry to lose our sweet Una, but not selfish enough to regret her good fortune that has made it possible for her to be happy once more in the world. I see plainly that Heaven did not intend for her to be a nun."

Father Quentin began to believe this, too, when she withdrew to acquaint him with the startling news, and when Una came down, after laying off her convent dress forever, in hat and cloak, to depart from Le Bon Berger, the old priest's aged hands were laid solemnly on her golden head a moment, and his quavering old voice tenderly blessed her and commended her to the care of Heaven.

All the nuns and convent pupils were assembled to bid her adieu, and followed by their tears and blessings, Una went away with Carmontelle, her new-found kinsman, to the Magnolias.

---

## CHAPTER XLVII.

No one met them in the library, to which he conducted Una. Maud and Edith were upstairs in close attendance upon Eliot. Carmontelle saw that the girl was trembling with nervous excitement, and brought her a sedative to drink.

"No one knows anything yet?" she asked him.

"No; and I am going to let you rest and recover yourself first, before I bring Maud and Edith to you; and Eliot you shall see last of all."

He left her waiting there, and went upstairs to break the news to his young wife and Edith. Eliot was still delirious, and carefully watched by his attentive nurse. He beckoned the girls into another room, and told them everything, then stood smiling at their tears of joy. [Pg 202]

"Eliot will get well now with his wife come home to him," he said. "So run down to the library like good girls now, and kiss your sister Una, and break the news of Eliot's illness to her as gently as you can."

They needed no second bidding, but flew softly to the library, and Una soon found herself in danger of being smothered in the energetic clasp of four round white arms, while dual tears and kisses fell on her golden head and lovely face.

Una was glad, more glad than words could tell, at this happy meeting, but when the first joy was past, her dark eyes wandered eagerly toward the door. The two sisters understood.

"You are looking for Eliot, dear," said Maud. "He can not come to you now, dear. You see, the poor boy is sick—he has had such trouble over losing you, Una—but now he will get well. You shall help us to nurse him back to health."

And so, in gentle tones, they broke to her the news of Eliot's illness, and presently carried her off with them to look at him where he lay, with burning eyes and crimson face, among his pillows. But he did not recognize the fair young wife who looked at him with eyes full of love and grief, and pressed passionate lips on his hot brow. He only smiled vacantly, and turning from her, began to talk in his restless delirium, strange, disconnected, meaningless phrases that struck dismay to Una's heart, and chilled the blood in her young veins.

"He will never get well; he will die, my love, my darling, my husband!" she cried out, shrilly, in sudden terror and despair.

And Eliot turned his heavy head toward her, as if some chord of memory had been struck by her voice, and began to babble of other things—of the dark days of imprisonment in the cellar-room [Pg 203]

of the house on Esplanade Street, of the beloved little companion who had shared those horrors, and whose life he had saved by that desperate deed of self-sacrifice.

She stood listening with dark, dilated eyes, hearing for the first time how her life had been saved that night.

Carmontelle was standing close by her side.

She turned her dark, amazed, tear-wet eyes on his face, and murmured hoarsely:

"Is it truth, or the ravings of fever and delirium?"

"It is truth," he answered; and, with a wild, remorseful cry, Una ran out of the room.

He followed her into the next apartment. She had thrown herself into a chair, and was sobbing wildly.

"Una, why do you take it so hard?" he expostulated. "Surely, no wife could object to such devoted love!"

She looked up at him with agonized entreaty in her eyes.

"Was it love, or—pity?" she cried. "I—I thought—Sylvie Van Zandt told me so—that he loved Ida Hayes before he ever met me, and would have married her but for that—trouble—that forced him to make me his wife."

"It was a fiendish falsehood!" declared Carmontelle, emphatically. "Eliot never thought of Ida Hayes. He loved you from the first moment he saw you."

"Ignorant Little Nobody as I was?" she exclaimed, in wonder.

"Yes; ignorant Little Nobody that you were!" he replied, smiling. "He told me before he married you how glad he was that a strange fate had given you to his keeping. You were destined for my bride, you know, and Van Zandt, being poor, would not tell his love until that happy accident gave you to his arms."

She exclaimed remorsefully:

"Oh, what a wretch I was to believe Sylvie and doubt my noble husband! I thought, when I ran away, that he would get a divorce and marry Ida. But he loved me all the time, my noble darling! Oh, if I had known before that it was his precious life-current he gave me to drink, that time when we both believed I was dying, all would have been so different. I could not then have doubted his fidelity. No wonder I could not keep from loving him all the time, when it was his own life flowing in my veins and keeping me faithful to my husband."

[Pg 204]

"Do not blame yourself for doubting him; it was but natural, my dear," said her cousin. "Mrs. Bryant Van Zandt is the only one to blame. She hated you because you spoiled her match-making. But now you will have your revenge on that treacherous doll. You will be much richer than she is, and can queen it over Sylvie and Ida in royal fashion."

She smiled through her tears, but answered:

"I do not care for the money, only to make dear Eliot rich. Oh, cousin, do you think he will get well? Heaven would not be so cruel as to take him from me now!"

"I trust, indeed, that he will be spared to us," Carmontelle answered, evasively, for he was secretly alarmed at Eliot's condition.

But he would not communicate his fears to the alarmed wife and sisters, only enjoined them to be careful and watchful over Eliot. Indeed, he himself often shared the vigils of the nurse, who was a rather old-looking man, and inclined to resent the aid he received from the family, declaring that he could care for his patient better alone.

Una had taken a distaste to the nurse from the first, and her unaccountable aversion increased as Eliot grew no better with the lapse of days, and showed no sign of recognition of the dear ones who surrounded him.

Carmontelle spoke to the doctor about the cross nurse, but he only laughed, and said that nurses were always jealous of interference with their patients, and that the man was splendid in his vocation; so Una tried to dismiss her antipathy to him as unjust and unfounded.

[Pg 205]

But one night the physician declared that he saw a change in his patient—a crisis was approaching, and he hoped the change would be for the better. He left, promising to return at midnight, and enjoining the utmost quiet and care in the sick-room, so that Eliot might not be aroused from the deep slumber into which he had fallen.

When he had gone, Johnson, the nurse, declared that he must have the sick-room alone with his patient.

"The crisis is all-important," he said. "When he awakens it will be to life or death, and in spite of Doctor Pomeroy's flattering words, I fear it will be death. When he wakes, I must be alone with him that he may not be excited and frightened by your anxious faces. I hope you will all go to your rooms and rest. I will call each one immediately upon the slightest change in the patient."

They all promised, but Una's pledge was most reluctant. She looked pleadingly at Johnson, and he returned her gaze sullenly, as it seemed to her, through the goggle glasses he wore.

She went to her own room, just a little lower down the hall, and sat down at the window, consumed with suspense and restlessness. The hours passed slowly, drearily, and at last she

could bear the torture of her thoughts no longer.

"I will go to the room next to Eliot's and wait. No one will see or hear me, and it can do no harm," she thought.

Wrapping a dark shawl about her shoulders, for the midnight hour was chilly, Una glided like a spirit along the dark corridor until she gained the little ante-chamber next to the sick-room. The outer door was ajar, and also the one that opened into Eliot's room. The anxious young wife moved softly across the soundless carpet and peered around the door.

[Pg 206]

Then her shriek of terror, fear, and agony rang shrilly through the house.

---

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

That agonized shriek brought Pierre Carmontelle rushing from his room, followed by Maud, while Edith came from another direction, and men-servants and maid-servants came flying up the stairs, all with one thought in their minds. The sufferer was dead, and that bitter cry had come from the lips of the bereaved young wife.

But when they rushed into the room, a tragic scene greeted their eyes.

Una, in the center of the floor, was struggling heroically with a man, who was holding a pillow over her face and head, and on the floor lay a gray wig and beard and goggle glasses. Una's assailant was Louis Remond. One fierce blow from Carmontelle's fist knocked the villain down, and before he could rise, an emphatic kick temporarily relieved him of consciousness. Two men-servants, comprehending the scene with uncommon rapidity, dragged the wretch out into the corridor and speedily bound him hand and foot. In the meantime, Una, from the bedside to which she had instantly flown, was explaining, through hushed sobs:

"I peeped in at the door, and Johnson was holding a pillow down over Eliot's face. I screamed, and he rushed at me with the pillow, and would have smothered me in another instant but for your entrance."

"The hound!" Carmontelle said, fiercely; then, kicking the disguises into view, he said: "These must have been knocked off in the scuffle. Johnson was Louis Remond in disguise."

Una shuddered, then turned toward the bed. She stifled a cry of unutterable joy.

[Pg 207]

Eliot was unharmed, for at that instant he opened his eyes naturally, like one awaking from a long sleep, and their calm, steady gaze rested on that lovely, agitated face with its dark, loving eyes and the golden hair shadowing the wan temples.

"Una, darling!" he said, not as one surprised or excited, but gently and quietly, as one who has been very sick always accepts even the strangest things as a matter of course.

The crisis had passed, and Eliot and Una had escaped the malignancy of the two enemies who sought their lives, for a plot was unearthed that night that led to the conviction of Mme. Remond as well as her husband.

She was found in the house, in the guise of a female servant, and had arranged to take Una's life that night, by means of poison in her drinking-water, while Remond, who had bribed the hospital nurse, and so usurped his place, was to smother Eliot with a pillow.

Fortunately, the cruel conspiracy was discovered and averted, and the two conspirators were soon tried, convicted, and sentenced to a long term in the penitentiary. Madame died before her term expired, but Remond escaped from prison and made his way out of the country, never returning to it, through fear of apprehension.

At Mme. Remond's trial, when she found that everything was going against her, she sullenly confessed that she lied when she tried to palm off upon Una the story that she was of shameful parentage.

"I thought, when I married Lorraine, that all the money was his, and I hated him and the heiress, too, when I found out the real truth. I only wish I had killed her when she was a baby, then all this trouble had been avoided," she said, with vindictive frankness.

Eliot convalesced very fast, to the great delight of Una and the family, and one day, when the little lawyer had fretted over the missing will of M. Lorraine, she said to her husband:

[Pg 208]

"Tell me what a legal document looks like?"

He described it to her, and her eyes grew bright with excitement.

"Eliot, you remember the great dictionary in which you showed me the definition of Friend, that first night we met? Well, there was just such a paper in that book, and if it has escaped madame's search, is there yet, and may prove to be the missing will."

Her surmise was correct, and the lawyer was very happy when he got the legal document into his hands. It proved Una, beyond a doubt, Colonel Carmontelle's daughter, and the richest heiress in New Orleans.

"But you loved me, Eliot, when I was only Little Nobody. I shall always be prouder of that, darling, than of my wealth," said happy Una.

## THE HART SERIES

Laura Jean Libbey	Miss Caroline Hart	Mrs. E. Burke Collins	Mrs. Alex. McVeigh
	Miller		
Charlotte M. Braeme	Barbara Howard	Lucy Randall Comfort	Mary E. Bryan
	Marie Corelli		

Was there ever a galaxy of names representing such authors offered to the public before?  
Masters all of writing stories that arouse the emotions, in sentiment, passion and love, their books excel any that have ever been written.

### NOW READY

- 1—Kidnapped at the Altar, Laura Jean Libbey.
- 2—Gladiola's Two Lovers, Laura Jean Libbey.
- 3—Lil, the Dancing Girl, Caroline Hart.
- 5—The Woman Who Came Between, Caroline Hart.
- 6—Aleta's Terrible Secret, Laura Jean Libbey.
- 7—For Love or Honor, Caroline Hart.
- 8—The Romance of Enola, Laura Jean Libbey.
- 9—A Handsome Engineer's Flirtation, Laura J. Libbey.
- 10—A Little Princess, Caroline Hart.
- 11—Was She Sweetheart or Wife, Laura Jean Libbey.
- 12—Nameless Bess, Caroline Hart.
- 13—Della's Handsome Lover, Laura Jean Libbey.
- 14—That Awful Scar, Caroline Hart.
- 15—Flora Garland's Courtship, Laura Jean Libbey.
- 16—Love's Rugged Path, Caroline Hart.
- 17—My Sweetheart Idabell, Laura Jean Libbey.
- 18—Married at Sight, Caroline Hart.
- 19—Pretty Madcap Dorothy, Laura Jean Libbey.
- 20—Her Right to Love, Caroline Hart.
- 21—The Loan of a Lover, Laura Jean Libbey.
- 22—The Game of Love, Caroline Hart.
- 23—A Fatal Elopement, Laura Jean Libbey.
- 24—Vendetta, Marie Corelli.
- 25—The Girl He Forsook, Laura Jean Libbey.
- 26—Redeemed by Love, Caroline Hart.
- 28—A Wasted Love, Caroline Hart.
- 29—A Dangerous Flirtation, Laura Jean Libbey.
- 30—A Haunted Life, Caroline Hart.
- 31—Garnetta, the Silver King's Daughter, L. J. Libbey.
- 32—A Romance of Two Worlds, Marie Corelli.
- 34—Her Ransom, Charles Garvice.
- 36—A Hidden Terror, Caroline Hart.
- 37—Flora Temple, Laura Jean Libbey.
- 38—Claribel's Love Story, Charlotte M. Braeme.
- 39—Pretty Rose Hall, Laura Jean Libbey.
- 40—The Mystery of Suicide Place, Mrs. Alex. Miller.
- 41—Cora, the Pet of the Regiment, Laura Jean Libbey.
- 42—The Vengeance of Love, Caroline Hart.
- 43—Jolly Sally Pendleton, Laura Jean Libbey.
- 44—A Bitter Reckoning, Mrs. E. Burke Collins.
- 45—Kathleen's Diamonds, Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller.
- 46—Angela's Lover, Caroline Hart.
- 47—Lancaster's Choice, Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller.
- 48—The Madness of Love, Caroline Hart.
- 49—Little Sweetheart, Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller.
- 50—A Working Girl's Honor, Caroline Hart.
- 51—The Mystery of Colde Fell, Charlotte M. Braeme.
- 52—The Rival Heiresses, Caroline Hart.
- 53—Little Nobody, Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller.
- 54—Her Husband's Ghost, Mary E. Bryan.
- 55—Sold for Gold, Mrs. E. Burke Collins.
- 56—Her Husband's Secret, Lucy Randall Comfort.
- 57—A Passionate Love, Barbara Howard.
- 58—From Want to Wealth, Caroline Hart.
- 59—Loved You Better Than You Knew, Mrs. A. Miller.
- 60—Irene's Vow, Charlotte M. Braeme.
- 61—She Loved Not Wisely, Caroline Hart.
- 62—Molly's Treachery, Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller.



- 63—Was It Wrong? Barbara Howard.  
64—The Midnight Marriage, Mrs. Sumner Hayden.  
65—Ailsa, Wenona Gilman.  
66—Her Dark Inheritance, Mrs. E. Burke Collins.  
67—Viola's Vanity, Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller.  
68—The Ghost of the Hurricane Hills, Mary E. Bryan.  
69—A Woman Wronged, Caroline Hart.  
70—Was She His Lawful Wife? Barbara Howard.  
71—Val, the Tomboy, Wenona Gilman.  
72—The Richmond Secret, Mrs. E. Burke Collins.  
73—Edna's Vow, Charlotte M. Stanley.  
74—Heart's of Fire, Caroline Hart.  
75—St. Elmo, Augusta J. Evans.  
76—Nobody's Wife, Caroline Hart.  
77—Ishmael, Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth.  
78—Self-Raised, Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth.  
79—Pretty Little Rosebud, Barbara Howard.  
80—Inez, Augusta J. Evans.  
81—The Girl Wife, Mrs. Sumner Hayden.  
82—Dora Thorne, Charlotte M. Braeme.  
83—Followed by Fate, Lucy Randall Comfort.  
84—India, or the Pearl of Pearl River, Southworth.  
85—Mad Kingsley's Heir, Mrs. E. Burke Collins.  
86—The Missing Bride, Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth.  
87—Wicked Sir Dare, Charles Garvice.  
88—Daintie's Cruel Rivals, Mrs. Alex. McV. Miller.  
89—Lillian's Vow, Caroline Hart.  
90—Miss Estcourt, Charles Garvice.  
91—Beulah, Augusta J. Evans.  
92—Daphane's Fate, Mrs. E. Burke Collins.  
93—Wormwood, Marie Corelli.  
94—Nellie, Charles Garvice.  
95—His Legal Wife, Mary E. Bryan.  
96—Macaria, Augusta J. Evans.  
97—Lost and Found, Charlotte M. Stanley.  
98—The Curse of Clifton, Mrs. Southworth.  
99—That Strange Girl, Charles Garvice.  
100—The Lovers at Storm Castle, Mrs. M. A. Collins.  
101—Margerie's Mistake, Lucy Randall Comfort.  
102—The Curse of Pocahontas, Wenona Gilman.  
103—My Love Kitty, Charles Garvice.  
104—His Fairy Queen, Elizabeth Stiles.  
105—From Worse than Death, Caroline Hart.  
106—Audrey Fane's Love, Mrs. E. Burke Collins.  
107—Thorns and Orange Blossoms, Charlotte Braeme.  
108—Ethel Dreeme, Frank Corey.  
109—Three Girls, Mary E. Bryan.  
110—A Strange Marriage, Caroline Hart.  
111—Violet, Charles Garvice.  
112—The Ghost of the Power, Mrs. Sumner Hayden.  
113—Baptised with a Curse, Edith Stewart Drewry.  
114—A Tragic Blunder, Mrs. H. Lovett Cameron.  
115—The Secret of Her Life, Edward Jenkins.  
116—My Guardian, Ada Cambridge.  
117—A Last Love, Georges Ohnet.  
118—His Angel, Henry Herman.  
119—Pretty Miss Bellew, Theo. Gift.  
120—Blind Love, Wilkie Collins.  
121—A Life's Mistake, Mrs. H. Lovett Cameron.  
122—Won By Waiting, Edna Lyall.  
123—Passion's Slave, King.  
124—Under Currents, Duchess.  
125—False Vow, Braeme.  
126—The Belle of Lynne, Braeme.  
127—Lord Lynne's Choice, Braeme.  
128—Blossom and Fruit, Braeme.  
129—Weaker Than a Woman, Braeme.  
130—Tempest and Sunshine, Mary J. Holmes.  
131—Lady Muriel's Secret, Braeme.  
132—A Mad Love, Braeme.

The Hart Series books are for sale everywhere, or they will be sent by mail, postage paid, for 30 cents a copy by the publisher; 4 copies for \$1.00. Postage stamps taken the same as money.

**THE ARTHUR WESTBROOK COMPANY**

**Cleveland, Ohio,**

## Transcriber's Notes:

Added table of contents.

Cover image may be clicked to view a larger version.

Several instances of the word "eat" being used where "ate" would seem more appropriate have been retained from the original.

Page 14, changed "beauiful" to "beautiful."

Page 59, added missing quote before "*Ciel!*"

Page 69, changed "thinkng" to "thinking."

Page 73, changed "and" to "an" in "chirped an 'oh!'"

Page 83, changed "soemthing" to "something" ("something very strange").

Page 92, corrected end punctuation from period to question mark and added missing quote after "opening of the hidden door."

Page 95, changed "sight" to "sigh" in "sigh of dismay."

Page 126, corrected "Eilot" to "Eliot" in first line of chapter XXVIII.

Page 130, corrected "he" to "she" in "under which she had chafed."

Page 132, corrected "ready" to "read" in "read her whole chapters."

Page 133, removed duplicate "the" from "the the dark eyes only looked."

Page 135, changed "more sense that" to "more sense than."

Page 136, changed "went down-staris" to "went down-stairs."

Page 146, removed extraneous period after "too fine for Eliot's wife."

Page 148, added missing period after "half-frightened tone."

Back cover advertisement, normalized punctuation. Corrected "Barabara" to "Barbara" in #57. Corrected "Gorvice" to "Garvice" in #90.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LITTLE NOBODY \*\*\*

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE  
THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE  
PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase "Project Gutenberg"), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at [www.gutenberg.org/license](http://www.gutenberg.org/license).

### **Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works**

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project

Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org). If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a

format other than "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, "Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation."
- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain "Defects," such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this

work is provided to you 'AS-IS', WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

## **Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™**

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org).

## **Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation**

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at [www.gutenberg.org/contact](http://www.gutenberg.org/contact)

## **Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation**

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit [www.gutenberg.org/donate](http://www.gutenberg.org/donate).

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: [www.gutenberg.org/donate](http://www.gutenberg.org/donate)

## **Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works**

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org).

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.