

A TERRIBLE SECRET. A Novel.

MAY AGNES FLEMING

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To
CHRISTIAN REID,
AUTHOR OF
"VALERIE AYLNER," ETC.,
AS A
TOKEN OF ADMIRATION AND ESTEEM,
THIS
STORY IS DEDICATED.
MAY AGNES FLEMING.
BROOKLYN,
September, 1874.
PART I.

CHAPTER I. BRIDE AND BRIDEGROOM ELECT.

Firelight falling on soft velvet carpet, where white lily buds trail along azure ground, on chairs of white-polished wood that glitters like ivory, with puffy of seats of blue satin; on blue and gilt panelled walls; on a wonderfully carved oaken ceiling; on sweeping draperies of blue satin and white lace; on half a dozen lovely pictures; on an open piano; and last of all, on the handsome, angry face of a girl who stands before it—Inez Catheron.

The month is August—the day the 29th—Miss Catheron has good reason to remember it to the last day of her life. But, whether the August sun blazes, or the January winds howl, the great rooms of Catheron Royals are ever chilly. So on the white-tiled hearth of the blue drawing-room this summer evening a coal fire flickers and falls, and the mistress of Catheron Royals stands before it, an angry flush burning deep red on either dusk cheek, an angry frown contracting her straight black brows.

The mistress of Catheron Royals,—the biggest, oldest, queerest, grandest place in all sunny Cheshire,—this slim, dark girl of nineteen, for three years past the bride-elect of Sir Victor Catheron, baronet, the last of his Saxon race and name, the lord of all these sunny acres, this noble Norman pile, the smiling village of Catheron below. The master of a stately park in Devon, a moor and “bothy” in the highlands, a villa on the Arno, a gem of a cottage in the Isle of Wight. “A darling of the gods,” young, handsome, healthy; and best of all, with twenty thousand a year.

She is his bride-elect. In her dark way she is very handsome. She is to be married to Sir Victor early in the next month, and she is as much in love with him as it is at all possible to be. A fair fate surely. And yet while the August night shuts down, while the wind whistles in the trees, while the long fingers of the elm, just outside the window, tap in a ghostly way on the pane, she stands here, flushed, angry, impatient, and sullen, her handsome lips set in a tight, rigid line.

She is very dark at all times. Her cousin Victor tells her, laughingly, she is an absolute nigger when in one of her silent rages. She has jet-black hair, and big, brilliant, Spanish eyes. She *is* Spanish. Her dead mother was a Castilian, and that mother has left her her Spanish name, her beautiful, passionate Spanish eyes, her hot, passionate Spanish heart. In Old Castile Inez was born; and when in her tenth year her English father followed his wife to the grave, Inez came home to Catheron Royals, to reign there, a little, imperious, hot-tempered Morisco princess ever since.

She did not come alone. A big boy of twelve, with a shock head of blue-black hair, two wild, glittering black eyes, and a diabolically handsome face, came with her. It was her only brother Juan, an imp incarnate from his cradle. *He* did not remain long. To the unspeakable relief of the neighborhood for miles around, he had vanished as suddenly as he had come, and for years was seen no more.

A Moorish Princess! It is her cousin and lover's favorite name for her, and it fits well. There is a certain barbaric splendor about her as she stands here in the firelight, in her trailing purple silk, in the cross of rubies and fine gold that burns on her bosom, in the yellow, perfumy rose in her hair, looking stately, and beautiful, and dreadfully out of temper.

The big, lonesome house is as still as a tomb. Outside the wind is rising, and the heavy patter, patter, of the rain-beats on the glass. That, and the light fall of the cinders in the polished grate, are the only sounds to be heard.

A clock on the mantel strikes seven. She has not stirred for nearly an hour, but she looks up now, her black eyes full of passionate anger, passionate impatience.

“Seven!” she says, in a suppressed sort of voice; “and he should have been here at six. What if he should defy me?—what if he does not come after all?”

She can remain still no longer. She walks across the room, and she walks as only Spanish women do. She draws back one of the window-curtains, and leans out into the night. The crushed sweetness of the rain-beaten roses floats up to her in the wet darkness. Nothing to be seen but the vague tossing of the trees, nothing to be heard but the sighing of the wind, nothing to be felt but the fast and still faster falling of the rain.

She lets the curtain fall, and returns to the fire.

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“Will he dare defy me?” she whispers to herself. “Will he dare stay away?”

There are two pictures hanging over the mantel—she looks up at them as she asks the question. One is the sweet, patient face of a woman of thirty; the other, the smiling face of a fair-haired, blue-eyed, good-looking lad. It is a *very* pleasant face; the blue eyes look at you so brightly, so frankly; the boyish mouth is so sweet-tempered and laughing that you smile back and fall in love with him at sight. It is Sir Victor Catheron and his late mother.

Miss Inez Catheron is in many respects an extraordinary young lady—Cheshire society has long ago decided that. They would have been more convinced of it than ever, could they have seen her turn now to Lady Catheron's portrait and appeal to it aloud in impassioned words:

“On his knees, by your dying bed, by your dying command, he vowed to love and cherish me always—as he did then. Let him take care how he trifles with that vow—let him take care!”

She lifts one hand (on which rubies and diamonds flash) menacingly, then stops. Over the sweep of the storm, the rush of the rain, comes another sound—a sound she has been listening for, longing for, praying for—the rapid roll of carriage wheels up the drive. There can be but one visitor to Catheron Royals to-night, at this hour and in this storm—its master.

She stands still as a stone, white as a statue, waiting. She loves him; she has hungered and thirsted for the sound of his voice, the sight of his face, the clasp of his hand, all these weary, lonely months. In some way it is her life or death she is to take from his hands to-night. And now he is here.

She hears the great hall-door open and close with a clang; she hears the step of the master in the hall—a quick, assured tread she would know among a thousand; she hears a voice—a hearty, pleasant, manly, English voice; a cheery laugh she remembers well.

“The Chief of Lara has returned again.”

The quick, excitable blood leaps up from her heart to her face in a rosy rush that makes her lovely. The eyes light, the lips part—she takes a step forward, all anger, all fear, all neglect forgotten—a girl in love going to meet her lover. The door is flung wide by an impetuous hand, and wet and splashed, and tall and smiling, Sir Victor Catheron stands before her.

“My dearest Inez!”

He comes forward, puts his arm around her, and touches his blonde mustache to her flushed cheek.

“My dearest coz, I'm awfully glad to see you again, and looking so uncommonly well too.” He puts up his eye-glass to make sure of this fact, then drops it “Uncommonly well,” he repeats; “give you my word I never saw you looking half a quarter so handsome before in my life. Ah! why can't we all be Moorish princesses, and wear purple silks and yellow roses?”

He flings himself into an easy-chair before the fire, throws back his blonde head, and stretches forth his boots to the blaze.

“An hour after time, am I not? But blame the railway people—don't blame *me*. Beastly sort of weather for the last week of August—cold as Iceland and raining cats and dogs; the very dickens of a storm, I can tell you.”

He give the fire a poke, the light leaps up and illumines his handsome face. He is very like his picture—a little older—a little worn-looking, and with man's “crowning glory,” a mustache. The girl has moved a little away from him, the flush of “beauty's bright transcient glow” has died out of her face, the hard, angry look has come back. That careless kiss, that easy, cousinly embrace, have told their story. A moment ago her heart beat high with hope—to the day of her death it never beat like that again.

He doesn't look at her; he gazes at the fire instead, and talks with the hurry of a nervous man. The handsome face is a very effeminate face, and not even the light, carefully trained, carefully waxed mustache can hide the weak, irresolute mouth, the delicate, characterless chin. While he talks carelessly and quickly, while his slim white fingers loop and unloop his watch-chain, in the blue eyes fixed upon the fire there is an uneasy look of nervous fear. And into the keeping of this man the girl with the dark powerful face has given her heart, her fate!

“It seems no end good to be at home again,” Sir Victor Catheron says, as if afraid of that brief pause. “You've no idea, Inez, how uncommonly familiar and jolly this blue room, this red fire, looked a moment ago, as I stepped out of the darkness and rain. It brings back the old times—this used to be *her* favorite morning-room,” he glanced at the mother's picture, “and summer and winter a fire always burned here, as now. And you, Inez, *cara mia*, with your gypsy face, most familiar of all.”

She moves over to the mantel. It is very low; she leans one arm upon it, looks steadily at him, and speaks at last.

"I am glad Sir Victor Catheron can remember the old times, can still recall his mother, has a slight regard left for Catheron Royals, and am humbly grateful for his recollection of his gypsy cousin. From his conduct of late it was hardly to have been expected."

"It is coming," thinks Sir Victor, with an inward groan; "and, O Lord! *what* a row it is going to be. When Inez shuts her lips up in that tight line, and snaps her black eyes in that unpleasant way, I know to my cost, it means 'war to the knife.' I'll be routed with dreadful slaughter, and Inez's motto is ever, 'Woe to the conqueror!' Well, here goes!"

He looks up at her, a good-humored smile on his good-looking face.

"Humbly grateful for my recollection of you! My dear Inez, I don't know what you mean. As for my absence—"

"As for your absence," she interrupts, "you were to have been here, if your memory will serve you, on the first of June. It is now the close of August. Every day of that absence has been an added insult to me. Even now you would not have been here if I had not written you a letter you dare not neglect—sent a command you dare not disobey. You are here to-night because you dare not stay away."

Some of the bold blood of the stern old Saxon race from which he sprung is in his veins still. He looks at her full, still smiling.

"Dare not!" he repeats. "You use strong language, Inez. But then you have an excitable sort of nature, and were ever inclined to hyperbole; and it is a lady's privilege to talk."

"And a man's to act. But I begin to think Sir Victor Catheron is something less than a man. The Catheron blood has bred many an outlaw, many bitter, bad men, but to-day I begin to think it has bred something infinitely worse—a traitor and a coward!"

He half springs up, his eyes flashing, then falls back, looks at the fire again, and laughs.

"Meaning me?"

"Meaning you."

"Strong language once more—you assert your prerogative royally, my handsome cousin. From whom did you inherit that two-edged tongue of yours, Inez, I wonder? Your Castilian mother, surely; the women of our house were never shrews. And even *you*, my dear, may go a little too far. Will you drop vituperation and explain? How have I been traitor and coward? It is well we should understand each other fully."

He has grown pale, though he speaks quietly, and his blue eyes gleam dangerously. He is always quiet when most angry.

"It is. And we shall understand each other fully before we part—be very sure of that. You shall learn what I have inherited from my Castilian mother. You shall learn whether you are to play fast and loose with me at your sovereign will. Does your excellent memory still serve you, or must I tell you what day the twenty-third of September is to be?"

He looks up at her, still pale, that smile on his lips, that gleam in his eyes.

"My memory serves me perfectly," he answers coolly; "it was to have been our wedding-day."

Was to have been. As he speaks the words coldly, almost cruelly, as she looks in his face, the last trace of color leaves her own. The hot fire dies out of her eyes, an awful terror comes in its place. With all her heart, all her strength, she loves the man she so bitterly reproaches. It seems to her she can look back upon no time in which her love for him is not.

And now, it *was* to have been!

She turns so ghastly that he springs to his feet in alarm.

"Good Heaven, Inez! you're not going to faint, are you? Don't! Here, take my chair, and for pity's sake don't look like that. I'm a wretch, a brute—what was it I said? Do sit down."

He has taken her in his arms. In the days that are gone he has been very fond, and a little afraid of his gypsy cousin. He is afraid still—horribly afraid, if the truth must be told, now that his momentary anger is gone.

All the scorn, all the defiance has died out of her voice when she speaks again. The great, solemn eyes transfix him with a look he cannot meet.

"*Was to have been,*" she repeats, in a sort of whisper; "was to have been. Victor, does that mean it never *is* to

be?"

He turns away, shame, remorse, fear in his averted face. He holds the back of the chair with one hand, she clings to the other as though it held her last hope in life.

"Take time," she says, in the same slow, whispering way. "I can wait. I have waited so long, what does a few minutes more matter now? But think well before you speak—there is more at stake than you know of. My whole future life hangs on your words. A woman's life. Have you ever thought what that implies? 'Was to have been,' you said. Does that mean it never is to be?"

Still no reply. He holds the back of the chair, his face averted, a criminal before his judge.

"And while you think," she goes on, in that slow, sweet voice, "let me recall the past. Do you remember, Victor, the day when I and Juan came here from Spain? Do you remember me? I recall you as plainly at this moment as though it were but yesterday—a little, flaxen-haired, blue-eyed boy in violet velvet, unlike any child I had ever seen before. I saw a woman with a face like an angel, who took me in her arms, and kissed me, and cried over me, for my father's sake. We grew up together, Victor, you and I, such happy, happy years, and I was sixteen, you twenty. And all that time you had my whole heart. Then came our first great sorrow, your mother's death."

She pauses a moment. Still he stands silent, but his left hand has gone up and covers his face.

"You remember that last night, Victor—the night she died. No need to ask you; whatever you may forget, you are not likely to forget *that*. We knelt together by her bedside. It was as this is a stormy summer night. Outside, the rain beat and the wind blew; inside, the stillness of death was everywhere. We knelt alone in the dimly-lit room, side by side, to receive her last blessing—her dying wish. Victor, my cousin, do you recall what that wish was?"

She holds out her arms to him, all her heart breaking forth in the cry. But he will neither look nor stir.

"With her dying hands she joined ours, her dying eyes looking at *you*. With her dying lips she spoke to you: 'Inez is dearer to me than all the world, Victor, except you. She must never face the world alone. My son, you love her—promise me you will cherish and protect her always. She loves you as no one else ever will. Promise me, Victor, that in three years from to-night you will make her your wife.' These were her words. And you took her hand, covered it with tears and kisses, and promised.

"We buried her," Inez went on, "and we parted. You went up to Oxford; I went over to a Paris *pensionnat*. In the hour of our parting we went up together hand in hand to her room. We kissed the pillow where her dying head had lain; we knelt by her bedside as we had done that other night. You placed this ring upon my finger; sleeping or waking it has never left it since, and you repeated your vow, that that night three years, on the twenty-third of September, I should be your wife."

She lifts the betrothal ring to her lips, and kisses it. "Dear little ring," she says softly, "it has been my one comfort all these years. Though all your coldness, all your neglect for the last year and a half, I have looked at it, and known you would never break your plighted word to the living and the dead.

"I came home from school a year ago. *You* were not here to meet and welcome me. You never came. You fixed the first of June for your coming, and you broke your word. Do I tire you with all these details, Victor? But I must speak to-night. It will be for the last time—you will never give me cause again. Of the whispered slanders that have reached me I do not speak; I do not believe them. Weak you may be, fickle you may be, but you are a gentleman of loyal race and blood; you will keep your plighted troth. Oh, forgive me, Victor! Why do you make me say such things to you? I hate myself for them, but your neglect has driven me nearly wild. What have I done?" Again she stretches forth her hands in eloquent appeal. "See! I love you. What more can I say? I forgive all the past; I ask no questions. I believe nothing of the horrible stories they try to tell me. Only come back to me. If I lose you I shall die."

Her face is transfigured as she speaks—her hands still stretched out.

"O Victor, come!" she says; "let the past be dead and forgotten. My darling, come back!"

But he shrinks away as those soft hands touch him, and pushes her off.

"Let me go!" he cries; "don't touch me, Inez! It can never be. You don't know what you ask!"

He stands confronting her now, pale as herself, with eyes alight. She recoils like one who has received a blow.

"Can never be?" she repeats.

"Can never be!" he answers. "I am what you have called me, Inez, a traitor and a coward. I stand here perjured

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before God, and you, and my dead mother. It can never be. I can never marry you. I am married already!”

The blow has fallen—the horrible, brutal blow. She stands looking at him—she hardly seems to comprehend. There is a pause—the firelight flickers, they hear the rain lashing the windows, the souging of the gale in the trees. Then Victor Catheron bursts forth:

“I don't ask you to forgive me—it is past all that. I make no excuse; the deed is done. I met her, and I loved her. She has been my wife for sixteen months, and—there is a son. Inez, don't look at me like that! I am a scoundrel, I know, but—”

He breaks down—the sight of her face unmans him. He turns away, his heart beating horribly thick. How long the ghastly pause that follows lasts he never knows—a century, counting by what he undergoes. Once, during that pause, he sees her fixed eyes turn slowly to his mother's picture—he hears low, strange-sounding words drop from her lips:

“He swore by your dying bed, and see how he keeps his oath!”

Then the life that seems to have died from her face flames back. Without speaking to him, without looking at him, she turns to leave the room. On the threshold she pauses and looks back.

“A wife and a son,” she says, slowly and distinctly. “Sir Victor Catheron, fetch them home; I shall be glad to see them.”

CHAPTER II. WIFE AND HEIR.

In a very genteel lodging-house, in the very genteel neighborhood of Russell Square, early in the afternoon of a September day, a young girl stands impatiently awaiting the return of Sir Victor Catheron. This girl is his wife.

It is a bright, sunny day—as sunny, at least, as a London day ever can make up its mind to be—and as the yellow, slanting rays pour in through the muslin curtains full on face and figure, you may search and find no flaw in either. It is a very lovely face, a very graceful, though petite figure. She is a blonde of the blondest type: her hair is like spun gold, and, wonderful to relate, no Yellow Wash: no Golden Fluid, has ever touched its shining abundance. Her eyes are bluer than the September sky over the Russell Square chimney-pots; her nose is neither aquiline nor Grecian, but it is very nice; her forehead is low, her mouth and chin “morsels for the gods.” The little figure is deliciously rounded and ripe; in twenty years from now she may be a heavy British matron, with a yard and a half wide waist—at eighteen years old she is, in one word, perfection.

Her dress is perfection also. She wears a white India muslin, a marvel of delicate embroidery and exquisite texture, and a great deal of Valenciennes trimming. She has a pearl and turquoise star fastening her lace collar, pearl and turquoise drops in her ears, and a half dozen diamond rings on her plump, boneless fingers. A blue ribbon knots up the loose yellow hair, and you may search the big city from end to end, and find nothing fairer, fresher, sweeter than Ethel, Lady Catheron.

If ever a gentleman and a baronet had a fair and sufficient excuse for the folly of a low marriage, surely Sir Victor Catheron has it in this fairy wife—for it is a “low marriage” of the most heinous type. Just seventeen months ago, sauntering idly along the summer sands, looking listlessly at the summer sea, thinking drearily that this time next year his freedom would be over, and his Cousin Inez his lawful owner and possessor, his eyes had fallen on that lovely blonde face—that wealth of shining hair, and for all time—aye, for eternity—his fate was fixed. The dark image of Inez as his wife faded out of his mind, never to return more.

The earthly name of this dazzling divinity in yellow ringlets and pink muslin was Ethel Margareta—Dobb!

Dobb! It might have disenchanted a less rapturous adorer—it fell powerless on Sir Victor Catheron's infatuated ear.

It was at Margate this meeting took place—that most popular and most vulgar of all English watering-places; and the Cheshire baronet had looked just once at the peach-bloom face, the blue eyes of laughing light, the blushing, dimpling, seventeen-year-old face, and fallen in love at once and forever.

He was a very impetuous young man, a very selfish and unstable young man, with whom, all his life, to wish was to have. He had been spoiled by a doting mother from his cradle, spoiled by obsequious servants, spoiled by Inez Catheron's boundless worship. And he wished for this “rose of the rose-bud garden of girls” as he had never wished for anything in his two-and-twenty years of life. As a man in a dream he went through that magic ceremony, “Miss Dobb, allow me to present my friend, Sir Victor Catheron,” and they were free to look at each other, talk to each other, fall in love with each other as much as they pleased. As in a dream he lingered by her side three golden hours, as in a dream he said, “Good afternoon,” and walked back to his hotel smoking a cigar, the world glorified above and about him. As in a dream they told him she was the only daughter and heiress of a well-to-do London soap-boiler, and he did not wake.

She was the daughter of a soap-boiler. The paternal manufactory was in the grimmest part of the grimy metropolis; but, remarkable to say, she had as much innate pride, self-respect, and delicacy as though “all the blood of all the Howards” flowed in those blue veins.

He wasn't a bad sort of young fellow, as young fellows go, and frantically in love. There was but one question to ask, just eight days after this—“Will you be my wife?”—but one answer, of course—“Yes.”

But one answer, of course! How would it be possible for a soap-boiler's daughter to refuse a baronet? And yet his heart had beaten with a fear that turned him dizzy and sick as he asked it; for she had shrunk away for one instant, frightened by his fiery wooing, and the sweet face had grown suddenly and startlingly pale. Is it not the rule that all maidens shall blush when their lovers ask *the* question of questions?

The rosy brightness, the smiles, the dimples, all faded out of this face, and a white look of sudden fear crossed it. The startled eyes had shrank from his eager, flushed face and looked over the wide sea. For fully five minutes

she never spoke or stirred. To his dying day that hour was with him—his passionate love, his sick, horrible fear, his dizzy rapture, when she spoke at last, only one word—“yes.” To his dying day he saw her as he saw her then, in her summery muslin dress, her gipsy hat, the pale, troubled look chasing the color from the drooping face.

But the answer was “yes.” Was he not a baronet? Was she not a well-trained English girl? And the ecstasy of pride, of joy, of that city soap-boiler's family, who shall paint? “Awake my muse” and—but, no! it passeth all telling. They bowed down before him (figuratively), this good British tradesman and his fat wife, and worshipped him. They burned incense at his shrine; they adored the ground he walked on; they snubbed their neighbors, and held their chins at an altitude never attained by the family of Dobb before. And in six weeks Miss Ethel Dobb became Lady Catheron.

It was the quietest, the dullest, the most secret of weddings—not a soul present except Papa and Mamma Dobb, a military swell in the grenadier guards—Pythias, at present, to Sir Victor's Damon—the parson, and the pew-opener. He was madly in love, but he was ashamed of the family soap-boiling, and he was afraid of his cousin Inez.

He told them a vague story enough of family matters, etc., that rendered secrecy for the present necessary, and nobody cross-questioned the baronet. That the parson was a parson, the marriage *bona fide*, his daughter “my lady,” and himself the prospective grandfather of many baronets, was enough for the honest soap-boiler.

For the bride herself, she said little, in a shy, faltering little way. She was very fond of her dashing, high-born, impulsive lover, and very well content not to come into the full blaze and dazzle of high life just yet. If any other romance had ever figured in her simple life, *the* story was finished and done with, the book read and put away.

He took her to Switzerland, to Germany, to Southern France, keeping well out of the way of other tourists, and ten months followed—ten months of such exquisite, unalloyed bliss, as rarely falls to mortal man. Unalloyed, did I say? Well, not quite, since earth and heaven are two different places. In the dead of pale Southern nights, with the shine of the moon on his wife's lovely sleeping face; in the hot, brilliant noontide; in the sweet, green gloaming—Inez Catheron's black eyes came menacingly before him—the one bitter drop in his cup. All his life he had been a little afraid of her. He was something more than a little afraid of her now.

They returned. The commodious lodgings in Russell Square awaited him, and Sir Victor “went in” for domestic felicity in the parish of Bloomsbury, “on the quiet.” Very much “on the quiet” no theatre going, no opera, no visitors, and big Captain Jack Erroll, of the Second Grenadiers, his only guest. Four months of this sort of thing, and then—and then there was a son.

Lying in her lace-draped, satin-covered bed, looking at baby's fat little, funny little face, Ethel, Lady Catheron, began to think. She had time to think in her quiet and solitude. Monthly nurses and husbands being in the very nature of things antagonistic, and nurse being reigning potentate at present, the husband was banished. And Lady Catheron grew hot and indignant that the heir of Catheron Royals should have to be born in London lodgings, and the mistress of Catheron Royals live shut up like a nun, or a fair Rosamond in a bower.

“You have no relations living but your cousin, Victor,” she said to him, more coldly than she had ever spoken in her life. “Are you master in your own house, or is she? Are you afraid of this Miss Catheron, who writes you such long letters (which I never see), that you dare not take your wife home?”

He had told her something of that other story necessarily—his former engagement to his cousin, Inez. Only something—not the bare ugly truth of his own treachery. The soap-boiler's daughter was more noble of soul than the baronet. Gentle as she was, she would have despised him thoroughly had she known the truth.

“This secrecy has lasted long enough,” Lady Catheron said, a resolute-looking expression crossing her pretty, soft-cut mouth. “The time has come when you must speak. Don't make me think you are ashamed of me, or afraid of her. Take me home—it is my right; acknowledge your son—it is *his*. When there was only I, it did not so much matter—it is different now.”

She lifted one of baby's dots of hands, and kissed it. And Sir Victor, his face hidden in the shadow of the curtains, his voice husky, made answer:

“You are right, Ethel—you always are. As soon as you both can travel, my wife and child shall come home with me to Catheron Royals.”

Just three weeks later, as the August days were ending, came that last letter from Inez, commanding his return. His hour had come. He took the next morning train, and went forth to meet the woman he feared and had wronged.

* * * * *

The afternoon sun drops lower. If Sir Victor returns from Cheshire to-day, Lady Catheron knows he will be here in a few minutes. She looked at her watch a little wearily. The days are very long and lonely without him. Looks up again, her eyes alight. A hansom has dashed up to the door, and it is her husband who leaps out. Half a minute and he is in the room, and she is clasped in his arms.

"My darling!" he exclaims, and you need only hear the two words to tell how rapturously he loves his wife. "Let me look at you. Oh! as pale as ever, I see. Never mind! Cheshire air, sunshine, green fields, and new milk shall bring back your roses. And your son and heir, my lady, how is he?"

He bends over the pretty bassinet, with that absurd paternal look all *very* new fathers regard the first blessing, and his mustache tickles baby's innocent nose.

A flush comes into her face. She looks at him eagerly.

"At last! Oh, Victor, when do we go?"

"To-morrow, if you are able. The sooner the better."

He says it with rather a forced laugh. Her face clouds a little.

"And your cousin? Was she *very* angry!" she asked, wistfully; "*very* much surprised?"

"Well—yes—naturally, I am afraid she was both. We must make the best of that, however. To tell the truth, I had only one interview with her, and that of so particularly unpleasant a nature, that I left next morning. So then we start to-morrow? I'll just drop a line to Erroll to apprise him."

He catches hold of his wife's writing-table to wheel it near. By some clumsiness his foot catches in one of its spidery claws, and with a crash it topples over. Away goes the writing case, flying open and scattering the contents far and wide. The crash shocks baby's nerves, baby begins to cry, and the new-made mamma flies to her angel's side.

"I say!" Sir Victor cries. "Look here! Awkward thing of me to do, eh, Ethel? Writing case broken too. Never mind, I'll pick 'em up."

He goes down on his knees boyishly, and begins gathering them up. Letters, envelopes, wax, seals, pens and pencils. He flings all in a heap in the broken case. Lady Catheron cooing to baby, looks smilingly on. Suddenly he comes to a full stop.

Comes to a full stop, and holds something before him as though it were a snake. A very harmless snake apparently—the photograph of a young and handsome man. For fully a minute he gazes at it utterly aghast. "Good Heaven!" his wife hears him say.

Holding baby in her arms she glances at him. The back of the picture is toward her, but she recognizes it. Her face turns ashen gray—she moves round and bends it over baby.

"Ethel!" Sir Victor says, his voice stern, "what does this mean?"

"What does what mean? Hush—h—h baby, darling. Not so loud, Victor, please. I want to get babe asleep."

"How comes Juan Catheron's picture here?"

She catches her breath—the tone, in which Sir Victor speaks, is a tone not pleasant to hear. She is a thoroughly good little thing, but the best of little things (being women) are *ergo* dissemblers. For a second she dares not face him; then she comes bravely up to time and looks at him over her shoulder.

"Juan Catheron! Oh, to be sure. Is that picture here yet?" with a little laugh. "I thought I had lost it centuries ago." "Good Heaven!" she exclaims inwardly; "how *could* I have been such a fool!"

Sir Victor rises to his feet—a curious passing likeness to his dark cousin, Inez, on his fair blonde face. "Then you know Juan Catheron. *You!* And you never told me."

"My dear Sir Victor," with a little pout, "don't be unreasonable. I should have something to do, if I put you *au courant* of all my acquaintances. I knew Mr. Catheron—slightly," with a gasp. "Is there any crime in that?"

"Yes!" Sir Victor answers, in a voice that makes his wife jump and his son cry. "Yes—there is. I wouldn't own a dog—if Juan Catheron had owned him before me. To look at him, is pollution enough—to know him—disgrace!"

"Victor! Disgrace!"

"Disgrace, Ethel! He is one of the vilest, most profligate, most lost wretches that ever disgraced a good name. Ethel, I command you to tell me—was this man ever anything to you—friend—lover—what?"

"And if he has been—what then?" She rises and faces him proudly. "Am I to answer for his sins?"

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“Yes—we all must answer more or less for those who are our friends. How come you to have his picture? What has he been to you? Not your lover—for Heaven's sake, Ethel, never *that!*”

“And why not? Mind!” she says, still facing him, her blue eyes aglitter, “I don't say that he was, but *if* he was—what then?”

“What then?” He is white to the lips with jealous rage and fear. “This then—you *should never again be wife of mine!*”

“Victor!” she puts out her hands as if to ward off a blow, “don't say that—oh, don't say that! And—and it isn't true—he never was a lover of mine—never, never!”

She bursts out with the denial in passionate fear and trembling. In all her wedded life she has never seen him look, heard him speak like this, though she has seen him jealous—needlessly—often.

“He never was your lover? You are telling me the truth?”

“No, no—never! never, Victor—don't look like that! Oh, what brought that wretched picture here! I knew him slightly—only that—and he *did* give me his photograph. How could I tell he was the wretch you say he is—how could I think there would be any harm in taking a picture? He seemed nice, Victor. What did he ever do?”

“He seemed nice!” Sir Victor repeated, bitterly; “and what did he ever do? What has he left undone you had better ask. He has broken every command of the decalogue—every law human and divine. He is dead to us all—his sister included, and has been these many years. Ethel, can I believe—”

“I have told you, Sir Victor. You will believe as you please,” his wife answers, a little sullenly, turning away from him.

She understands him. His very jealousy and anger are born of his passionate love for her. To grieve her is torture to him, yet he grieves her often.

For a tradesman's daughter to marry a baronet may be but one remove from paradise; still it is a remove. And the serpent in Lady Catheron's Eden is the ugliest and most vicious of all serpents—jealousy. He has never shown his green eyes and obnoxious claws so palpably before, and as Sir Victor looks at her bending over her baby, his fierce paroxysm of jealousy gives way to a fierce paroxysm of love.

“Oh, Ethel, forgive me!” he says; “I did not mean to wound you, but the thought of that man—faugh! But I am a fool to be jealous of you, my white lily. Kiss me—forgive me—we'll throw this snake in the grass out of the window and forget it. Only—I had rather you had told me.”

He tears up the wretched little mischief-making picture, and flings it out of the window with a look of disgust. Then they “kiss and make up,” but the stab has been given, and will rankle. The folly of her past is doing its work, as all our follies past and present are pretty sure to do.

CHAPTER III. HOW LADY CATHERON CAME HOME.

Late in the afternoon of a September day Sir Victor Catheron, of Catheron Royals, brought home his wife and son.

His wife and son! The county stood astounded. And it had been a dead secret. Dreadful! And Inez Catheron was jilted? Shocking! And *she* was a soap-boiler's daughter? Horrible! And now when this wretched, misguided young man could keep his folly a secret no longer, he was bringing his wife and child home.

The resident gentry sat thunderstruck. Did he expect they could call? (This was the gentler sex.) Plutocracy might jostle aristocracy into the background, but the line must be drawn somewhere, and the daughter of a London soap-boiler they would not receive. Who was to be positive there had been a marriage at all. And poor Inez Catheron! Ah it was very sad—very sad. There was a well-known, well-hidden taint of insanity in the Catheron family. It must be that latent insanity cropping up. The young man must simply be mad.

Nevertheless bells rung and bonfires blazed, tenantry cheered, and all the old servants (with Mrs. Marsh, the housekeeper, and Mr. Hooper, the butler, at their head) were drawn up in formidable array to receive them. And if both husband and wife were very pale, very silent, and very nervous, who is to blame them? Sir Victor had set society at defiance; it was society's turn now, and then—there was Inez!

For Lady Catheron, the dark, menacing figure of her husband's cousin haunted her, too. As the big, turreted, towered, ivied pile of stone and mortar called Catheron Royals, with its great bell booming, its Union Jack waving, reared up before the soap-boiler's daughter—she absolutely cowered with a dread that had no name.

"I am afraid!" she said. "Oh, Victor, I am afraid!"

He laughed—not quite naturally, though. If the painful truth must be told of a baronet and a Catheron, Sir Victor was afraid, too.

"Afraid?" he laughed; "of what, Ethel? The ghost of the Gray Lady, who walks twice in every year in Rupert's Tower? Like all fine old families, we have our fine old family ghost, and would not part with it for the world. I'll tell you the legend some day; at present 'screw your courage to the sticking place,' for here we are."

He descended from the carriage, and walked into the grand manorial hall, vast enough to have lodged a hundred men, his wife on his arm, his head very high, his face very pale. She clung to him, poor child! and yet she battled hard for her dignity, too. Hat in hand, smiling right and left in the old pleasant way, he shook hands with Mrs. Marsh and Mr. Hooper, presented them to my lady, and bravely inquired for Miss Inez. Miss Inez was well, and awaiting him in the Cedar drawing-room.

They ascended to the Cedar drawing-room, one of the grandest rooms in the house, all gilding and ormolu, and magnificent upholstery—Master Baby following in the arms of his nurse. The sweet face and soft eyes of Lady Catheron had done their work already in the ranks of the servants—she would be an easier mistress to serve than Miss Inez.

"If she ever *is* mistress in her own house," thought Mrs. Marsh, who was "companion" to Miss Catheron as well as housekeeper; "and mistress she never will be while Miss Catheron is at the Royals."

The drawing-room was brilliantly lit, and standing in the full glare of the lamps—Inez. She was gorgeous this evening in maize silk, that was like woven sunshine; she had a white camelia in her hair, a diamond cross on her breast, scented laces about her, diamonds on her arms and in her ears. So she stood—a resplendent vision—so Sir Victor beheld her again.

He put up his hand for an instant like one who is dazzled—then he led forward his wife, as men have led on a forlorn hope.

"My cousin," he said, "my wife; Inez, this is Ethel."

There was a certain pathos in the simplicity of the words, in the tone of his voice, in the look of his eyes. And as some *very* uplifted young empress might bow to the lowliest of her handmaidens, Miss Catheron bowed to Lady Catheron.

"Ethel," she repeated, a smile on her lips, "a pretty name, and a pretty face. I congratulate you on your taste, Victor. And this is the baby—I must look at him."

There was an insufferable insolence in the smile, an insufferable sneer in the compliment. Ethel had half

extended a timid hand—Victor had wholly extended a pleading one. She took not the slightest notice of either. She lifted the white veil, and looked down at the sleeping baby.

“The heir of Catheron Royals,” she said, “and a fine baby no doubt, as babies go. I don't pretend to be a judge. He is very bald and very flabby, and very fat just at present. Whom does he resemble? Not you, Victor. O, no doubt the distaff side of the house. What do you call him, nurse? Not christened yet? But of course the heir of the house is always christened at Catheron Royals. Victor, no doubt you'll follow the habit of your ancestors, and give him his mother's family name. *Your* mother was the daughter of a marquis, and you are Victor St. Albans Catheron. Good customs should not be dropped—let your son's name be Victor *Dobb* Catheron.”

She laughed as she dropped the veil, a laugh that made all the blood in Sir Victor's body tingle in his face. But he stood silent. And it was Ethel who, to the surprise of every one, her husband included, turned upon Miss Catheron with flashing eyes and flushing cheeks.

“And suppose, he is christened Victor Dobb Catheron, what then? It is an honest English name, of which none of my family have ever had reason to feel ashamed. My husband's mother may have been the daughter of a marquis—my son's mother is the daughter of a tradesman—the name that has been good enough for me will be good enough for him. I have yet to learn there is any disgrace in honest trade.”

Miss Catheron smiled once more, a smile more stinging than words.

“No doubt. You have many things yet to learn, I am quite sure. Victor, tell your wife that, however dulcet her voice may be, it would sound sweeter if not raised so *very* high. Of course, it is to be expected—I make every allowance, poor child, for the failings of her—class. The dressing-bell is ringing, dinner in an hour, until then—*au revoir*.”

Still with that most insolent smile she bows low once more, and in her gold silk, her Spanish laces, her diamonds and splendor, Miss Catheron swept out of the room.

And this was Ethel's welcome home.

* * * * *

Just two hours later, a young man came walking briskly up the long avenue leading to the great portico entrance of Catheron Royals. The night was dark, except for the chill white stars—here under the arching oaks and elms not even the starlight shone. But neither for the darkness nor loneliness cared this young man. With his hands in his pockets he went along at a swinging pace, whistling cheerily. He was very tall; he walked with a swagger. You could make out no more in the darkness.

The great house loomed up before him, huge, black, grand, a row of lights all along the first floor. The young man stopped his whistling, and looked up with a smile not pleasant to see.

“Four years ago,” he said, between his teeth, “you flung me from your door like a dog, most noble baronet, and you swore to lodge me in Chesholm jail if I ever presumed to come back. And I swore to pay you off if I ever had a chance. To-night the chance has come, thanks to the girl who jilted me. You're a young man of uncommonly high stomach, my baronet, proud as the deuce and jealous as the devil. I'll give your pride and your jealousy a chance to show themselves to-night.”

He lifted the massive brass knocker, and brought it down with a clang that echoed through the house. Then he began whistling again, watching those lighted, lace-draped windows.

“And to think,” he was saying inwardly, “to think of our little Ethel being mistress here. On my word it's a lift in life for the soap-boiler's pretty daughter. I wonder what they're all about up there now, and how Inez takes it. I should think there must have been the dickens to pay when she heard it first.”

The heavy door swung back, and a dignified elderly gentleman, in black broadcloth and silk stockings, stood gazing at the intruder. The young man stepped from the outer darkness into the lighted vestibule, and the elderly gentleman fell back with a cry.

“Master Juan!”

“*Mister* Juan, Hooper, if you please—*Mister* Juan. William, my old cockalorum, my last rose of summer, how goes it?”

He grasped the family butler's hand with a jolly laugh, and gave it a shake that brought tears of torture to its owner's eyes. In the blaze of the hall chandelier he stood revealed, a big fellow, with eyes and hair raven black, and a bold, bronzed face.

“What, William! friend of my childhood's days, 'none knew thee but to love thee, none named thee but to

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praise'—not a word of welcome? Stricken dumb at sight of the prodigal son! I say! Where's the rest? The baronet, you know, and my sister, and the new wife and kid? In the dining-room?"

"In the dining-room," Mr. Hooper is but just able to gasp, as with horror pictured on his face he falls back.

"All right, then. Don't fatigue your venerable shanks preceding me. I know the way. Bless you, William, bless you, and be happy!"

He bounces up the stairs, this lively young man, and the next instant, hat in hand, stands in the large, handsome, brilliantly lit dining-room. They are still lingering over the dessert, and with a simultaneous cry, and as if by one impulse, the three start to their feet and stand confounded. The young man strikes a tragic theatrical attitude.

"Scene—dining-room of the reprobate 'Don Giovanni'—tremulo music, lights half down—*enter* statue of virtuous Don Pedro." He breaks into a rollicking laugh and changes his tone for that of every-day life. "Didn't expect me, did you?" he says, addressing everybody. "Joyful surprise, isn't it? Inez, how do? Baronet, your humble servant. Sorry to intrude, but I've been told my wife is here, and I've come after her, naturally. And here she is. Ethel, my darling, who'd have thought of seeing *you* at Catheron Royals, an honored guest? Give us a kiss, my angel, and say you're glad to see your scrapegrace husband back."

He strides forward and has her in his arms before any one can speak. He stoops his black-bearded face to kiss her, just as with a gasping sob, her golden head falls on his shoulder and she faints dead away.

CHAPTER IV. "I'LL NOT BELIEVE BUT DESDEMONA'S HONEST."

With a cry that is like nothing human, Sir Victor Catheron leaps forward and tears his fainting wife out of the grasp of the black-bronzed, bearded, piratical-looking young man.

"You villain!" he shouts, hoarse with amaze and fury; "stand back, or by the living Lord I'll have your life! You scoundrel, how dare you lay hands on my wife!"

"Your wife! Yours! Come now, I like that! It's against the law of this narrow-minded country for a woman to have two husbands. You're a magistrate and ought to know. Don't call names, and do keep your temper—violent language is unbecoming a gentleman and a baronet. Inez, what does he mean by calling Ethel his wife?"

"She is his wife," Inez answers, her black eyes glittering.

"Oh, but I'll be hanged if she is. She's mine—mine hard and fast, by jingo. There's some little misunderstanding here. Keep your temper, baronet, and let us clear it up. *I* married Miss Ethel Dobb in Glasgow, on the thirteenth of May, two years ago. Now, Sir Victor Catheron, when did *you* marry her?"

Sir Victor made no answer; his face, as he stood supporting his wife, was ghastly with rage and fear. Ethel lay like one dead; Juan Catheron, still eminently good-humored and self-possessed, turned to his sister:

"Look here, Inez, this is how it stands: Miss Dobb was only fifteen when I met her first. It was in Scotland. We fell in love with each other; it was the suddenest case of spoons you ever saw. We exchanged pictures, we vowed vows, we did the 'meet me by moonlight alone' business—you know the programme yourself. The time came to part—Ethel to return to school, I to sail for the China Sea—and the day we left Scotland we went into church and were married. There! I don't deny we parted at the church door, and have never met since, but she's my wife; mine, baronet, by Jove! since the first marriage is the legal one. Come, now! You *don't* mean to say that you've been and married another fellow's wife. 'Pon my word, you know I shouldn't have believed it of Ethel."

"She is reviving," Inez said.

She spoke quietly, but her eyes were shining like black stars. She knew her brother for a liar of old, but what if this were true? what if her vengeance were here so soon? She held a glass of iced champagne to the white lips.

"Drink!" she said, authoritatively, and Ethel mechanically drank. Then the blue eyes opened, and she stood erect in Sir Victor's arms.

"Oh, what is it?" she said. "What has happened?"

Her eyes fell upon the dark intruder, and with a cry of fear, a shudder of repulsion, her hands flew up and covered her face.

"Don't be afraid, my darling," Sir Victor said, holding her close, and looking with flashing, defiant eyes at his enemy; "this coward has told a monstrous falsehood. Deny it, my love. I ask no more, and my servants shall kick him out."

"Oh, shall they!" said Mr. Catheron; "well, we'll see. Now, Ethel, look here. I don't understand this business, you know. What does Sir Victor mean by calling you his wife? It isn't possible you've gone and committed bigamy—there *must* be a mistake. You are my wife, and as such I claim you."

"Ethel, you hear that," Sir Victor cried in a voice of agony; "for Heaven's sake speak! The sight of this fellow—the sound of his voice is driving me mad. Speak and deny this horrible charge."

"She can't," said Juan Catheron!

"I can! I do!" exclaimed Ethel, starting up with flushing face and kindling eyes; "It is a monstrous lie. Victor! O, Victor, send him away! It isn't true—it isn't, it isn't!"

"Hold on, Sir Victor," Mr. Catheron, interposed, "let me ask this young lady a question or two. Ethel, do you remember May, two years ago in Scotland? Look at this picture; it's yours, isn't it? Look at this ring on my little finger; you gave it to me, didn't you? Think of the little Glasgow presbytery where we went through the ceremony, and deny that I'm your husband, if you can."

But her blood was up—gentle, yielding, timid, she had yet a spirit of her own, and her share of British "pluck."

She faced her accuser like a small, fair-haired lioness, her eyes flashing blue fire.

"I do deny it! You wretch, how dare you come here with such a lie!" She turned her back upon him with a

scorn under which even he winced. "Victor!" she cried, lifting her clasped hands to her husband, "hear me and forgive me if you can. I have done wrong—wrong—but I—I was afraid, and I thought he was drowned. I wanted to tell you all—I did, indeed, but papa and mamma were afraid—afraid of losing you, Victor. I told you a falsehood about the photograph—he, that wretch, did give it to me, and—" her face drooped with a bitter sob—"he was my lover then, years ago, in Scotland."

"Ah!" quoted Mr. Catheron, "truth is mighty and will prevail! Tell it, Ethel; the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

"Silence, sir!" Lady Catheron cried, "and don't dare call me Ethel. I was only fifteen, Victor—think of it, a child of fifteen, spending my holidays in Glasgow when I met him. And he dared to make love to me. It amused him for the time—representing himself as a sort of banished prince, a nobleman in disguise. He took my silly, girlish fancy for the time. What did I at fifteen know of love? The day I was to return home, we exchanged pictures and rings, and he took me out for a last walk. He led me into a solitary chapel, and made me join hands, and pledge myself to be his wife. There was not a soul in the place but ourselves. As we left it we met papa. We shook hands and parted, and until this hour I have never since set eyes on his face. Victor, don't blame me too much—think what a child I was—remember I was afraid of him. The instant he was out of my sight I disliked him. He wrote to me—I never answered his letters, except once, and then it was to return his, and tell him to trouble me no more. That is all. O Victor! don't look like that! I am sorry—I am sorry. Forgive me or I shall die."

He was ashen white, but there was a dignity about him that awed into silence even the easy assurance of Juan Catheron. He stooped and kissed the tear-wet, passionate, pleading face.

"I believe you," he said; "your only fault was in not telling me long ago. Don't cry, and sit down."

He placed her in a chair, walked over, and confronted his cousin.

"Juan Catheron," he said, "you are a slanderer and a scoundrel, as you always were. Leave this house, and never, whilst I live, set your foot across its threshold. Five years ago you committed a forgery of my name for three thousand pounds. I turned you out of Catheron Royals and let you go. I hold that forged check yet. Enter this house again, repeat your infamous lie, and you shall rot in Chesholm jail! I spared you then for your sister's sake—for the name you bear and disgrace—but come here again and defame my wife, and I'll transport you though you were my brother. Now go, and never come back."

He walked to the door and flung it wide. Juan Catheron stood and looked at him, his admirable good-humor unruffled, something like genuine admiration in his face.

"By Jupiter!" he exclaimed, "who'd have thought it! Such a milk-sop as he used to be! Well, baronet, I don't deny you got the upper hand of me in that unpleasant little affair of the forgery, and Portland Island with a chain on my leg and hard labor for twenty years I don't particularly crave. Of course, if Ethel won't come, she won't, but I say again it's deuced shabby treatment. Because, baronet, that sort of thing *is* a marriage in Scotland, say what you like. I suppose it's natural she should prefer the owner of Catheron Royals and twenty thousand per annum, to a poor devil of a sailor like me; but all the same it's hard lines. Good-by, Inez—be sisterly, can't you, and come and see a fellow. I'm stopping at the 'Ring o' Bells,' in Chesholm. Good-by, Ethel. 'Thou hast learned to love another, thou hast broken every vow,' but you might shake hands for the sake of old times. You won't—well, then, good-by without. The next time I marry I'll make sure of my wife."

He swaggered out of the room, giving Sir Victor a friendly and forgiving nod, flung his wide awake on his black curls, clattered down the stairs and out of the house.

"By-by, William," he said to the butler. "I'm off again, you see. Most inhospitable lot *I* ever saw—never so much as offered me a glass of wine. Good-night, my daisy. Oh river! as they say in French. Oh river!"

The door closed upon him. He looked back at the lighted windows and laughed.

"I've given them a rare fright if nothing else. She went off stiff at sight of me, and he—egad! the little fair-haired baronet's plucky after all—such a molly-coddle as he used to be. Of course her being my wife's all bosh, but the scare was good fun. And it won't end here—my word for it. He's as jealous as the Grand Turk. I hope Inez will come to see me and give me some money. If she doesn't I must go and see her, that's all."

He was gone—and for a moment silence reigned. Lights burned, flowers bloomed, crystal and silver shone, rare wines and rich fruits glowed. But a skeleton sat at the feast. Juan Catheron had done many evil deeds in his lifetime, but never a more dastardly deed than to-night.

There was a flash of intolerable triumph in the dark eyes of Inez. She detested her brother, but she could have

kissed him now. She had lost all, wealth, position, and the man she loved—this girl with the tangled yellow hair and pink and white face had taken all from her, but even *her* path was not to be altogether a path of roses.

Ashen pale and with eyes averted, Sir Victor walked back and resumed his seat at the table. Ashen pale, trembling and frightened, Ethel sat where he had placed her. And no one spoke—what was there to be said?

It was a fortunate thing that just at this juncture baby should see fit to wake and set up a dismal cry, so shrill as to penetrate even to the distant dinner-room. Lady Catheron rose to her feet, uttered a hasty and incoherent apology, and ran from the room.

She did not return. Peace reigned, the infant heir of the Catherons was soothed, but his mamma went downstairs no more that night. She lingered in the nursery for over an hour. Somehow by her baby's side she felt a sense of peace and safety. She dreaded to meet her husband. What must he think of her? She had stooped to concealment, to falsehood—would he ever love her or trust her again?

She went at last to her rooms. On the dressing-table waxlights burned, but the bedroom was unlit. She seated herself by the window and looked out at the starlit sky, at the darkly-waving trees of the park. "And this is my welcome home," she thought, "to find in my husband's house my rival and enemy, whose first look, whose first words are insults. She is mistress here, not I. And that fatal folly of my childhood come back. That horrible man!" She shuddered as she sat alone. "Ah, why did I not tell, why did mamma beg me to hide it from him? She was so afraid he would have gone—so afraid her daughter would miss a baronet, and I—I was weak and a coward. No, it is all over—he will never care for me, never trust me again."

He came in as she sat there, mournful and alone. In the dusk of the chamber the little half-hidden white figure caught his eye, the golden hair glimmering through the dusk.

"Ethel," he said, "is that window open? Come away immediately—you will take cold in the draught."

He spoke gently but very coldly as he had never spoken to her before. She turned to him with a great sob.

"Oh, Victor, forgive me!" she said.

He was silent for a moment. He loved her with a great and passionate love; to see her weep was torture, to see her suffer, misery. She had never been dearer than in this hour. Still he stood aloof, torn by doubt, racked by jealousy.

"Ethel," he cried out, "*why* did you deceive me? I thought—I could have sworn you were all truth and innocence, stainless as a lily, white as an angel. And to think that another man—and of all men Juan Catheron. No. I can't even think of it—it is enough to drive me mad!"

She fell down on her knees before him and held up her clasped hands.

There was a little sob, and her head lay on his shoulder.

"I tried to once or twice—I did indeed, but you know what a coward I am. And mamma forbade my telling—that is the truth. She said I had been a little fool—that was all over and done with—no need to be a great fool, telling my own folly. And after we were married, and I saw you jealous of every man I looked at—you know you were, sir!—I was more scared than ever. I thought Juan Catheron was dead. I never wrote to him. I had returned all his letters. I thought I had destroyed his picture; I never knew that I had done so very wrong in knowing him at all, until that day in Russell Square. But Victor—husband—only forgive me this once, and I'll never, never have a secret from you again as long as I live."

She was little better than a child still—this pretty youthful matron and mother. And with the sweet, pleading face uplifted, the big blue eyes swimming in tears, the quivering lips, the pathetic voice, he did what *you*, sir, would have done in his place—kissed and forgave her.

CHAPTER V. IN THE TWILIGHT.

"No words can be strong enough to reprehend your conduct, Victor. You have acted disgracefully; you are listening, sir,—disgracefully, I say, to your cousin Inez. And you are the first of your line who has blurred the family escutcheon. Dukes' daughters have entered Catheron Royals as brides. It was left for you to wed a soap-boiler's daughter!"

Thus Lady Helena Powyss, of Powyss Place, to her nephew, Sir Victor Catheron, just one fortnight after that memorable night of his wife and heir's coming home. The young man stood listening in sullen anger, the red blood mounting to his very temples. His Cousin Inez had managed during the past two weeks to make his existence as thoroughly uncomfortable as a thoroughly jealous and spiteful woman can. He had flown at last to his aunt for comfort, and this is how he got it.

"Lady Helena," he burst forth, "this is too much! Not even from you will I bear it. A soap-boiler's daughter my wife may be—it is the only charge that can be brought against her. I have married to please myself, and it *does* please me enormously. Inez, confound her! badgers me enough. I didn't expect, Aunt Helena, to be badgered by you."

"I have no wish to badger you. I bring no charge against your wife. I have seen her but once, and personally I like her excessively. I believe her to be as good as she is pretty. But again *your* conduct I do and will protest. You have cruelly, shamefully wronged your cousin—humiliated her beyond all telling. I can only wonder—yes, Victor, wonder—that with her fiery nature she takes it as quietly as she does."

"As quietly as she does! Good Heavens!" burst forth this "badgered" baronet. "You should live in the same house with her to find out how quietly she takes it. Women understand how to torture—they should have been grand inquisitors of a Spanish inquisition, if such a thing ever existed. I am afraid to face her. She stabs my wife in fifty different ways fifty times a day, and I—my guilty conscience won't let me silence her. Ethel has not known a happy hour since she entered Catheron Royals, and all through her infernal serpent tongue. Let her take care—if she were ten times my cousin, even she may go one step too far."

"Does that mean, Victor, you will turn her from Catheron Royals?"

"It means that, if you like. Inez is my cousin, Ethel is my wife. You are her friend, Aunt Helena; you will be doing a friendly action if you drop her a hint. I wish you good-morning."

He took his hat and turned to go, his handsome blonde face sullen and set.

"Very well," Lady Helena answered; "I will. You are to blame—not that poor fair-haired child. I will speak to Inez; and, Victor, I will try to forgive you for your mother's sake. Though you broke her heart she would have forgiven you. I will try to do as she would have done—and I like the little thing. You will not fail me on Thursday next? If *I* take up your wife all the neighborhood will, you may depend."

"We are not likely to fail. The invitation is like your kindness, Aunt Helena. Thanks very much!"

His short-lived anger died away; he gave his hand frankly to his aunt. She was his wife's friend—the only one who had taken the slightest notice of her since her arrival. For the resident gentry had decided that they couldn't—really couldn't—call upon the soap-boiler's daughter.

Sir Victor Catheron had shocked and scandalized his order as it had not been shocked and scandalized for half a century. A banker's daughter, a brewer's daughter, they were prepared to accept—banking and brewing are genteel sort of things. But a soap-boiler!—and married in secret!—and a baby born in lodgings!—and Miss Catheron jilted in cold blood!—Oh it was shameful!—shameful! No, they could not call upon the new Lady Catheron—well, at least until they saw whether the Lady Helena Powyss meant to take her up.

Lady Helena was the only sister of the young baronet's late mother, with no children of her own, and very strongly attached to both Sir Victor and Inez. His mother's dying desire had been that he should marry his cousin. He had promised, and Lady Helena's strongest hope in life had been to see that promise fulfilled. The news of his low marriage fell upon her like a thunderbolt. She was the proudest of dowagers—when had a Catheron made a *mesalliance* before? No; she could not forgive him—could never receive his wife.

But when he came to her, pale, sad, appealing for pardon, she relented. It was a very tender and womanly heart, despite its pride of birth, that beat in Lady Helena's bosom; and jolly Squire Powyss, who had seen the little

wife at the Royals, took sides with his nephew.

"It's done, and can't be undone, my dear," the squire said, philosophically; "and it's always wise to make the best of a bad bargain; and 'pon my life, my love, it's the sweetest little face the sun ever shone on! Gad! I'd have done it myself. Forgive him, my dear—boys will be boys—and go and see his wife."

Lady Helena yielded—love for her boy stronger than pride or anger. She went; and there came into one of the dusk drawing-rooms of the Royals, a little white vision, with fair, floating hair, and pathetic blue eyes—a little creature, so like a child, that the tender, motherly heart of the great lady went out to her at once.

"You pretty little thing!" she said, taking her in her arms and kissing her as though she had been eight rather than eighteen. "You're nothing but a baby yourself and you have got a baby they tell me. Take me to see him, my dear."

They were friends from that hour. Ethel, with grateful tears in her eyes, led her up to the dainty berceauette where the heir of Catheron Royals slept, and as she kissed his velvet cheek and looked pityingly from babe to mother, the last remains of anger died out of her heart. Lady Helena Powyss would "take Lady Catheron up."

"She's pretty, and gentle, and good, and a lady if ever I saw one," she said to Inez Catheron; "and she doesn't look too happy. Don't be too hard on her, my dear—it isn't her fault. Victor is to blame. No one feels that more than I. But not that blue-eyed child—try to forgive her Inez, my love. A little kindness will go a long way there."

Inez Catheron sitting in the sunlit window of her own luxurious room, turned her face from the rosy sunset sky full upon her aunt.

"I know what I owe my cousin Victor and his wife," she answered steadily, "and one day I shall pay my debt."

The large, lustrous Spanish eyes turned once more to the crimson light in the western sky. Some of that lurid splendor lit her dark, colorless face with a vivid glow. Lady Helena looked at her uneasily—there was a depth here she could not fathom. Was Inez "taking it quietly" after all?

"I—I don't ask you to forgive *him*, my dear," she said, nervously—"at least, just yet. I don't think I could do it myself. And of course you can't be expected to feel very kindly to her who has usurped your place. But I would let her alone if I were you. Victor is master here, and his wife must be mistress, and naturally he doesn't like it. You might go too far, and then—"

"He might turn me out of Catheron Royals—is that what you are trying to say, Aunt Helena?"

"Well, my dear—"

"Victor was to see you yesterday. Did he tell you this? No need to distress yourself—I see he did. And so I am to be turned from Catheron Royals for the soap-boiler's daughter, if I don't stand aside and let her reign. It is well to be warned—I shall not forget it."

Lady Helena was at a loss. What could she say? What could she do? Something in the set, intense face of the girl frightened her—absolutely frightened her. She rose hurriedly to go.

"Will you come to Powyss Place on Thursday next?" she asked. "I hardly like to press you, Inez, under the circumstances. For poor Victor's sake I want to make the best of it. I give a dinner party, as you know; invite all our friends, and present Lady Catheron. There is no help for it. If I take her up, all the country will; but if *you* had rather not appear, Inez—"

There was a sharp, quick, warning flash from the black eyes.

"Why should I not appear? Victor may be a coward—I am not. I will go. I will face our whole visiting list, and defy them to pity me. Take up the soap-boiler's heiress by all means, but, powerful as you are, I doubt if even you will be able to keep her afloat. Try the experiment—give the dinner party—I will be there."

"It's a very fine thing for a tradesman's daughter to marry a rich baronet, no doubt," commented Lady Helena, as she was driven home; "but, with Inez for my rival, *I* shouldn't care to risk it. I only hope, for my sake at least, she will let the poor thing alone next Thursday."

The "poor thing" indeed! If Sir Victor's life had been badgered during the past fortnight, his wife's life had been rendered nearly unendurable. Inez knew so well how to stab, and she never spared a thrust. It was wonderful, the bitterest, stinging things she could say over and over again, in her slow, *legato* tones. She never spared. Her tongue was a two-edged sword, and the black deriding eyes looked pitilessly on her victim's writhes and quivers. And Ethel bore it. She loved her husband—he feared his cousin—for his sake she endured. Only once, after some treble cruel stab, she had cried aloud in her passionate pain:

"I can't endure it, Victor—I cannot! She will kill me. Take me back to London, to Russell Square, anywhere away from your dreadful cousin!"

He had soothed her as best he might, and riding over to Powyss Place, had given his aunt that warning.

"It will seem a horribly cruel and inhuman thing to turn her from the home where she has reigned mistress so long," he said to himself. "I will never be able to hold up my head in the county after—but she *must* let Ethel alone. By fair means or foul she must."

The day of Lady Helena Powyss' party came—a terrible ordeal for Ethel. She had grown miserably nervous under the life she had led the past two weeks—the ceaseless mockery of Miss Catheron's soft, scornful tones, the silent contempt and derision of her hard black eyes. What should she wear? how should she act? What if she made some absurd blunder, betraying her plebeian birth and breeding? What if she mortified her thin-skinned husband? Oh! why was it necessary to go at all?

"My dear child," her husband said, kissing her good-humoredly, "it isn't worth that despairing face. Just put on one of your pretty dinner-dresses, a flower in your hair, and your pearls. Be your own simple, natural, dear little self, and there will not be a lady at Aunt Helena's able to shine you down."

And when an hour after, she descended, in a sweeping robe of silvery blue, white lilies in her yellow hair, and pale pearls clasping her slim throat, she looked fair as a dream.

Inez's black eyes flashed angrily as they fell upon her. Soap-boiler's daughter she might be, with the blood of many Dobbs in her veins, but no young peeress, born to the purple, ever looked more graceful, more refined.

For Miss Catheron herself, she was quite bewildering in a dress of dead white silk, soft laces and dashes of crimson about her as usual, and rubies flashing here and there. She swept on to the carriage with head held haughtily erect, a contemptuous smile on her lips, like anything on earth but a jilted maiden.

Lady Helena's rooms were filled when they entered; not one invitation had been declined. Society had mustered in fullest force to see Sir Victor Catheron's low-born wife, to see how Miss Catheron bore her humiliation. How would the one bear their scrutiny, the other their pity? But Miss Catheron, handsome, smiling, brilliant, came in among them with eyes that said: "Pity me if you dare!" And upon Sir Victor's arm there followed the small, graceful figure, the sweet, fair face of a girl who did not look one day more than sixteen—by all odds the prettiest girl in the rooms.

Lady Helena—who, when she did that sort of thing, *did* do it—took the little wife under her wing at once. People by the score, it seemed to the bewildered Ethel, were presented, and the stereotyped compliments of society were poured into her ear. Sir Victor was congratulated, sincerely by the men, with an under-current of pity and mockery by the women. Then they were all at dinner—the bride in the place of honor—running the gauntlet of all those eyes on the alert for any solecism of good manners.

She went through it all, her cheeks flushing, her eyes kindling with excitement growing prettier every moment. Her spirits rose—she would let these peoples and Inez Catheron see, she was their equal in all things save birth. She talked, she laughed, she took captive half the male hearts, and when the ladies at length sailed away to the drawing-room, Lady Helena stooped and kissed her, almost with motherly pride.

"My dear," she whispered, "let me congratulate you. Nothing could be a greater success. All the men are in love with you—all the women jealous. A most excellent beginning indeed!"

She laughed pleasantly, this kindly dowager, and passed on. It was, an unspeakable relief to her to see her nephew's low-born wife face society so bravely and well. And better still, Inez had not launched one single poisoned dart. But the evening was not ended yet. Inez's time was to come. Enter the gentlemen presently, and flirtations are resumed, *tete-a-tetes* in quiet comers recommenced, conversation becomes general. There is music. A certain Lord Verriker, the youngest man present, and the greatest in social status, monopolizes Lady Catheron. He leads her to the piano, and she sings. She is on trial still, and does her best, and her best is very good—a sweet Scotch ballad. There is quite a murmur of applause as she rises, and through it there breaks Miss Catheron's soft, sarcastic laugh. The flush deepens in Ethel's cheek—the laugh is at her performance she feels.

And now the hour of Inez's vengeance comes. Young Captain Varden is leaning over her chair; he is in love with Miss Catheron, and hovers about her unceasingly. He talks a great deal, though not very brilliantly. He is telling her in an audible undertone how Jack Singleton of "Ours" has lately made an object of himself before gods and men, and irretrievably ruined himself for life by marrying the youngest Miss Potter, of Potter's Park.

"Indeed!" Miss Catheron responds, with her light laugh, and her low, clear voice perfectly distinct to all; "the

youngest Miss Potter. Ah, yes! I've heard of them. The paternal Potter kept a shop in Chester, didn't he—a grocer, or something of the sort, and having made money enough behind the counter, has retired. And poor Lieutenant Singleton has married the youngest Miss Potter! 'Whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad.' A very charming girl no doubt, as sweet as the paternal treacle, and as melting as her father's butter. It's an old custom in some families—my own for instance—to quarter the arms of the bride on the family shield. Now what do you suppose the arms of the Potter family may be—a white apron and a pair of scales?"

And then, all through the room, there is a horrible suppressed laugh. The blood rushes in a fiery tide to the face of Sir Victor, and Lady Helena outglows her crimson velvet gown. Ethel, with the youthful Lord Verriker still hovering around her, has but one wild instinct, that of flight. Oh! to be away, from these merciless people—from that bitter, dagger-tongued Inez Catheron! She looks wildly at her husband. Must she bear this? But his back is to her—he is wilfully blind and deaf. The courage to take up the gauntlet for his wife, to make a scene, to silence his cousin, is a courage he does not possess.

Under the midnight stars Lady Helena's guests drive home. In the carriage of Sir Victor Catheron there is dead silence. Ethel, shrinking from her husband almost as much as from his cousin, lies back in a corner, pale and mute. Inez Catheron's dauntless black eyes look up at the white, countless stars as she softly hums a tune. Sir Victor sits with his eyes shut, but he is not asleep. He is in a rage with himself, he hates his cousin, he is afraid to look at his wife. One way or other he feels there must be an immediate end of this.

The first estrangement that has parted him and Ethel has come. He hardly knows her to-night—her cold, brief words, her averted face, her palpable shrinking as he approaches. She despises him, and with reason, a man who has not the courage to protect his wife from insult.

Next day Lady Catheron declines to appear at either breakfast or luncheon, and when, five minutes before dinner, Sir Victor and Miss Catheron meet in the dining-room, she is absent still. He rings the bell angrily and demands where she is.

"My lady has gone out," the footman answers. "She went half an hour ago. She had a book with her, and she went in the direction of the laurel walk."

"I will go in search of her," Sir Victor says, taking his hat; "let dinner wait until our return."

Ethel has gone, because she cannot meet Inez Catheron again, never again break bread at the same board with her pitiless enemy. She cried herself quietly to sleep last night; her head aches with a dull, sickening pain to-day. To be home once more—to be back in the cosy, common-place Russell square lodgings! If it were not for baby she feels as though she would like to run away, from Sir Victor and all, anywhere that Inez Catheron's black eyes and derisive smile could never come.

The September twilight, sparkling with frosty-looking stars, is settling down over the trees. The great house looms up, big, sombre, stately, a home to be proud of, yet Ethel shudders as she looks at it. The only miserable days of her life have been spent beneath its roof; she will hate it before long. Her very love for her husband seems to die out in bitter contempt, as she thinks of last night, when he stood by and heard his cousin's sneering insult. The gloaming is chilly, she draws her shawl closer around her, and walks slowly up and down. Slow, miserable tears trickle down her cheeks as she walks. She feels so utterly alone, so utterly forlorn, so utterly at the mercy of this merciless woman.

"Oh!" she says, with a passionate sob, and unconsciously aloud, "*why* did I ever marry him?"

"If you mean Sir Victor Catheron," answers a voice, "I think I can tell you. You married Sir Victor Catheron because he *was* Sir Victor Catheron. But it isn't a marriage, my dear—you know that. A young lady can't have two husbands, and I'm your legal, lawful-wedded spouse."

She utters a cry—she recoils with a face of terror, for there in the twilight before her, tall, black, sinister, stands Juan Catheron.

"*You!*" she gasps.

"I, my dear—I, in the flesh. Did you think I had gone? My dear Ethel, so I would have gone, if Inez had come down in the sisterly way she should. But she hasn't. I give you my word of honor her conduct has been shabby in the extreme. A few hundreds—I asked no more—and she wouldn't. What was a miserly fifty pun' note to a man like me, with expensive tastes, and who has not set foot on British soil for two years? Not a jewel would she part with—all Sir Victor's presents, forsooth! And she's in love with Sir Victor, you know. Perhaps you *don't* know, though. 'Pon my life, she is, Ethel, and means to have him yet, too. That's what she says, and she is a girl to do as

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she says, is Inez. That's why I'm here to-night, my dear. I can't go to Sir Victor, you understand—motives of delicacy, and all that—so I waited my chance, and have come to you. You may be fickle, but I don't think you're stingy. And something is due to my outraged feelings, blighted affections, and all that. Give me five hundred pounds, Ethel, and let us call it square.”

He came nearer, his big, brown hand outstretched. She shrank away, hatred and repulsion in her face.

“Stand back!” she said. “Don't come near me, Juan Catheron! How dare you intrude here! How dare you speak to me!”

“How dare I? Oh, come now, I say, I like that. If a man may not speak to his own wife, to whom *may* he speak? If it comes to that, how dare you throw me over, and commit bigamy, and marry Sir Victor Catheron? It's of no use your riding the high horse with me, Ethel; you had better give me the five hundred—I'm sure I'm moderate enough—and let me go.”

“I will not give you a farthing; and if you do not leave this place instantly, I will call my husband. Oh!” she burst forth, frantically, “between you and your sister you will drive me mad!”

“Will you give me the money?” asked Juan Catheron, folding his arms and turning sullen.

“I have not got it. What money have I?—and if I had, I say I would not give you a farthing. Begone! or—”

“You have diamonds.” He pointed to her hands. “They will do—easily convertible in London. Hand them here, or, by all the gods, I'll blow the story of your bigamy all over England!”

“You will not!” she cried, her eyes flashing in the twilight—“you coward! you dare not! Sir Victor has *you* in his power, and he will keep his threat. Speak one word of that vile lie, and your tongue will be silenced in Chesholm jail. Leave me, I say!”—she stamped her foot passionately—“I am not afraid of you, Juan Catheron!”

“And you will not give me the jewels?”

“Not one—not to keep you from spreading your slander from end to end of England! Do your worst!—you cannot make me more wretched than I am. And go, or I will call for help, and see whether my husband has not courage to keep his word.”

“You will not give me the rings?”

“Not to save your life! Hark! some one is coming! Now you will see which of us is afraid of the other!”

He stood looking at her, a dangerous gleam in his black eyes.

“Very well!” he said; “so be it! Don't trouble yourself to call your hero of a husband—I'm going. You're a plucky little thing after all, Ethel. I don't know but that I rather admire your spirit. Adieu, my dear, until we meet again.”

He swung round, and vanished among the trees. He was actually singing as he went,

“To-day for me.

To-morrow for thee—

But will that to-morrow ever be?”

The last rustle of the laurels died away; all was still; the twilight was closing darkness, and, with a shudder, Ethel turned to go.

“But will that to-morrow ever be?”—the refrain of the doggerel rung in her ears. “Am I never to be free from this brother and sister?” she cried to herself, desperately, as she advanced to the house. “Am I never to be free from this bondage?”

As the last flutter of her white dress disappeared, Sir Victor Catheron emerged from the shadow of the trees, and the face, on which the rising moon shone, was white as the face of death.

CHAPTER VI. IN THE MOONLIGHT.

He had not overheard a word, he had not tried to overhear; but he had seen them together—that was enough. He had reached the spot only a moment before their parting, and had stood confounded at sight of his wife alone here in the dusk with Juan Catheron.

He saw them part—saw him dash through the woodland, singing as he went—saw her turn away and walk rapidly to the house. She had come here to meet him, then, her former lover. He had not left Chesholm; he was lurking in the neighborhood of the Royals, and she knew it. She knew it. How many times had they met before—his wife and the man he abhorred—the man who claimed her as his wife. What if she *were* his wife? What if that plight pledged in the Scotch kirk were binding? She had loved Juan Catheron then. What if she loved him still? She had hidden it from him, until it could be hidden no longer—she had deceived him in the past, she was deceiving him in the present. So fair and so false, so innocent to all outward seeming. Yet so lost to all truth and honor.

He turned sick and giddy; he leaned against a tree, feeling as though he could never look upon her false face again. Yet the next moment he started passionately up.

“I will go to her,” he thought; “I will hear what she has to say. If she voluntarily tells me, I must, I will believe her. If she is silent, I will take it as proof of her guilt.”

He strode away to the house. As he entered, his man Edwards met him, and presented him a note.

“Brought by a groom from Powyss Place, Sir Victor,” he said. “Squire Powyss has had a stroke.”

The baronet tore it open—it was an impetuous summons from Lady Helena.

“The squire has had an attack of apoplexy. For Heaven's sake come at once.”

He crushed it in his hand, and went into the dining-room. His wife was not there. He turned to the nursery; he was pretty sure of always finding her *there*.

She was there, bending over her baby, looking fair and sweet as the babe itself. Fair and sweet surely. Yet why, if innocent, that nervous start at sight of him—that frightened look in the blue eyes. The nurse stood at a distance, but he did not heed her.

“A summons from Powyss Place,” he said; “the poor old squire has had a fit of apoplexy. This is the second within the year, and may prove fatal. I must go at once. It is not likely I shall return to-night.”

She looked at him, startled by his deadly paleness; but then, perhaps, the summons accounted for that. She murmured her regrets, then bent again over her baby.

“You have nothing to say to me, Ethel, before I go?” he said, looking at her steadily.

She half-lifted her head, the words half-rose to her lips. She glanced at the distant nurse, who was still busy in the room, glanced at her husband's pale set face, and they died away again. Why detain him now in his haste and trouble? Why rouse his rage against Juan Catheron at this inopportune time? No, she would wait until to-morrow—nothing could be done now; then she would reveal that intrusion in the grounds.

“I have nothing to say, except good-by. I hope poor Mr. Powyss may not be so ill as you fear.”

He turned away—a tumult of jealous rage within him. A deliberate lie he thought it; there could be no doubt of her guilt now. And yet, insanely inconsistent as it seems, he had never loved her more passionately than in that hour.

He turned to go without a word. He had reached the door. All at once he turned back, caught her in his arms almost fiercely, and kissed her again and again.

“Good-by,” he said, “my wife, my love—good-by.”

His vehemence frightened her. She released herself and looked at him, her heart fluttering. A second time he walked to the door—a second time he paused. Something seemed to stay his feet on the threshold.

“You will think me foolish, Ethel,” he said, with a forced laugh; “but I seem afraid to leave you to-night. Nervous folly, I suppose; but take care of yourself, my darling, until I return. I shall be back at the earliest possible moment.”

Then he was gone.

She crossed over to the low French window, standing wide open, and looked after him wistfully.

“Dear Victor,” she thought, “how fond he is of me, after all.”

The moon was shining brightly now, though the day still lingered. She stood and watched him out of sight. Once, as he rode away, he turned back—she kissed and waved her hand to him with a smile.

“Poor Victor!” she thought again, “he loves me so dearly that I ought to forgive him everything. How happy we might be here together, if it were not for that horrible brother and sister. I wish—I wish he would send her away.”

She lingered by the window, fascinated by the brilliancy of the rising September moon. As she stood there, the nursery door opened, and Miss Catheron entered.

“You here,” she said, coolly; “I didn’t know it. I wanted Victor. I thought I heard his voice. And how is the heir of Catheron Royals?”

She bent, with her usual slight, chill smile over the crib of that young gentleman, and regarded him in his sleep. The nurse, listening in the dusk, she did not perceive.

“By the bye, I wonder if he *is* the heir of Catheron Royals though? I am reading up the Scottish Law of Marriage, and really I have my doubts. If you are Juan’s wife, you can’t be Sir Victor’s, consequently the legitimacy of his son may yet be—”

She never finished the sentence. It was the last drop in the brimming cup—the straw that broke the camel’s back—the one insult of all others not to be borne. With eyes afire in the dusk, Sir Victor’s wife confronted her.

“You have uttered your last affront, Inez Catheron,” she exclaimed. “You will never utter another beneath this roof. To-morrow you leave it! I am Sir Victor Catheron’s wife, the mistress of Catheron Royals, and this is the last night it shall ever shelter you. Go!” She threw open the nursery door. “When my husband returns either you or I leave this house forever!”

The nurse was absolutely forgotten. For a second even Inez Catheron quailed before the storm she had raised; then black eyes met blue, with defiant scorn.

“Not all the soap-boiler’s daughters in London or England shall send me from Catheron Royals! Not all the Miss Dobbs that ever bore that distinguished appellation shall drive me forth. *You* may go to-morrow if you will. I shall not.”

She swept from the room, with eyes that blazed, and voice that rang. And Jane Pool, the nurse, thinking she had heard a little too much, softly opened an opposite door and stole out.

“Good Lor’!” she thought, “*here* be a pretty flare up! Ain’t Miss Inez just got a temper though. I wouldn’t stand in my lady’s shoes, and her a-hating me so; no, not for all her money. I’ll go down and get my supper, and call for Master Baby by and by.”

Mrs. Pool descended to the servants’ hall, to narrate, of course in confidence, to her most particular friends, the scene she had just overheard. There was Welsh rabbits for supper—nurse was particularly fond of Welsh rabbits—and in discussing it and Miss Inez’s awful temper half an hour slipped away. Then she arose again to see after her charge.

“Which he should have been undressed and tucked away for the night half an hour ago, bless him,” she remarked; “but I could not make up my mind to face my lady after *that* row. Poor thing! It does seem hard now she can’t be mistress in her own ’ouse. It’s a pity Sir Victor can’t turn Turk and marry ’em both, since he can’t abear to part with neither.”

Mrs. Pool made her exit and wended her way to the nursery. She tapped at the door—there was no reply—she opened it and went in—my lady had quitted it, no doubt.

No—to her surprise my lady was still there. The window still stood wide open, the white, piercing moonlight streamed in. An arm-chair stood near this window, and lying back in the arm-chair was my lady, fast asleep.

Fast asleep. Jane Pool tiptoed over to make sure. She was pale as the moonlight itself. Her lips quivered as she slept like the lips of a hurt child, her eyelashes were yet wet with tears. Sitting there alone she had cried herself to sleep.

“Poor thing!” Jane Pool said again. She was so young, so pretty, so gentle, that all the household loved her. “Poor dear thing! I say it’s a burning shame for Sir Victor, so fond as he is of her too, to let Miss Inez torment her. I wouldn’t stand her hairs and her ’aughtiness, her temper and her tongue; no, not to be ten baronets’ ladies, ten times hover!”

In his pretty blue silk, white lace, and carved rosewood nest, Master Victor lay still, sleeping also. Mrs. Pool

softly folded a shawl around her lady's shoulder, lifted babe without awakening him, and stole softly out. The night nursery was an upper room. Jane Pool carried him up, disrobed him, fed him, and tucked him up for the night. He fell again asleep almost instantly. She summoned the under nurse—maid to remain with him, and went back to the lower regions. Half an hour had passed since she left; it struck the half hour after eight as she descended the stairs.

"I'm sore afraid my lady will catch cold sleeping in the night air. I do think now I ought to go in and wake her."

While she stood hesitating before it, the door opened suddenly and Miss Catheron came out. She was very pale. Jane Pool was struck by it, and the scarlet shawl she wore twisted about her, made her face look almost ghastly in the lamplight.

"*You here?*" she said, in her haughty way. "What do you want? Where is baby?"

"Baby's asleep, miss, for the night," Jane answered, with a stiff little curtsy; "and what I'm here for, is to wake my lady. Sleeping in a draught cannot be good for anybody. But perhaps she is awake."

"You will let my lady alone," said Miss Catheron sharply, "and attend to your nursery. She is asleep still. It is not *your* place to disturb her. Go!"

"Drat her!" Nurse Pool exclaimed inwardly, obeying, however; "she's that 'aughty and that stuck up, that she thinks we're the dirt under her feet. I only hope she'll be sent packing to—morrow, but I has my doubts. Sir Victor's afraid of her—anybody can see that with half an eye."

She descended to the servants' regions again, and encountered Ellen, Lady Catheron's smart maid, sociably drinking tea with the housekeeper. And once more into their attentive ears she poured forth this addenda to her previous narrative.

"What was Miss Inez doing in there?" demanded the maid; "no, good, I'll be bound. She hates my lady like poison; Sir Victor jilted her, you know, and she's in love with him yet. My lady *shall* be woke up in spite of her; she'd like her to get her death in the night air, I dare say. I've an easy missis and a good place, and I mean to keep 'em. I ain't afraid of Miss Inez's black eyes and sharp tongue; *I'll* go and wake my lady up."

She finished her tea and left. She reached the nursery door and rapped as Nurse Pool had done. There was no reply. She turned the handle softly and went in.

The large, crystal, clear moon was high in the sky now; its chill brightness filled the room. The arm—chair still stood under the window; the small figure of my lady still lay motionless in it.

"My lady," Ellen said gently, advancing, "please wake up."

There was no reply, no stir. She bent closer over her.

"Please, my lady, wake up; I'm afraid you'll catch your death of—"

The words ended in a shriek that rang through the house from end to end—a woman's shrill, ear—splitting shriek. She had laid her hand upon my lady's bosom to arouse her; she snatched it away and sprang back in horror. Asleep! Yes the sleep that knows no waking. Sir Victor Catheron's pretty young wife lay there in the moonlight—dead.

Dead! There is blood on the white dress, blood on the blue shawl, blood on Ellen's hand, blood trickling in a small red stream from under the left breast. Ethel, Lady Catheron, lies there before her in the moonlight stone dead—foully murdered.

CHAPTER VII. IN THE NURSERY.

She stands for a moment paralyzed—struck dumb by a horror too great for word or cry. Then she rushes to the door, along the passages, into the midst of the startled household like a mad creature, shrieking that one most awful word, “Murder!”

They flock around her, they catch hold of her, and keep her still by main force. They ask her questions, but she only screams still that ghastly word, “Murder!”

“*Who* is murdered? Where—what do you mean? Good Lord! young woman,” cries Mr. Hooper, the butler, giving her a shake, “do come out of these hysterics if you can, and speak! *Who's* murdered?”

“My lady! Oh, my lady! my lady! my lady!”

She is like a creature distraught. There is blood on her right hand; she sees it, and with a gasping cry at the grisly sight, and before they know what she is about, she falls down in a faint in their midst.

They lift her up; they look into one another's pale faces.

“My lady!” they repeat, in an awe-struck whisper. “*Murdered!*”

“Here!” cries Mr. Hooper, his dignity coming to his aid, “let us investigate this here. Lay this young woman flat on her back on the floor, sprinkle her with water, and let her come to. I'm going to find out what she means.”

They lay poor Ellen stiffly out as directed, some one dashes water into her face, then in a body, with Mr. Hooper at their head, they march off to investigate.

“She was in the day-nursery,” Nurse Pool suggests, in a whisper, and to the day-nursery they go.

On the threshold for a second or two they halt, their courage failing. But there is nothing very terrifying. Only the solemn moonlight, only the motionless little figure in the arm-chair. And yet a great awe holds them back. Does death—does murder stand grisly in their midst?

“Let us go in, in the name of Providence,” says Mr. Hooper, a tremble in his voice; “it—it can't be what she says. O good Lord, no!”

They go forward on tiptoe, as if afraid of awakening that quiet sleeper whom only the last trump will ever awake now. They bend above her, holding their breath. Yes, there it is—the blood that is soaking her dress, dripping horribly on the carpet—oozing slowly from that cruel wound.

A gasping, inarticulate sort of groan comes heavily from every lip. Old Hooper takes her wrist between his shaking fingers. Stilled forever, already with the awful chill of death. In the crystal light of the moon the sweet young face has never looked fairer, calmer, more peaceful than now.

The old butler straightens himself up, ashen gray.

“It's too true,” he says, with a sort of sob. “O Lord, have mercy on us—it's too true! She's dead! She's murdered!”

He drops the wrist he holds, the little jewelled, dead hand falls limp and heavy. He puts his own hands over his face and sobs aloud:

“Who will tell Sir Victor? O my master! my dear young master!”

No one speaks—a spell of great horror has fallen upon them. Murdered in their midst, in their peaceful household—they cannot comprehend it. At last—

“*Where is Miss Catheron?*” asks a sombre voice.

No one knows who speaks; no one seems to care; no one dare reply.

“*Where is Inez Catheron?*” the voice says again.

Something in the tone, something in the ghastly silence that follows, seems to arouse the butler. Since his tenth year he has been in the service of the Catherons—his father before him was butler in this house. Their honor is his. He starts angrily round now.

“Who was that?” he demands. “Of course Miss Inez knows nothing of this.”

No one had accused her, but he is unconsciously defending her already.

“She must be told at once,” he says. “I'll go and tell her myself. Edwards, draw the curtains, will you, and light the candles?”

He leaves the room. The valet mechanically does as he is bid—the curtains are drawn, the waxlights illumine

the apartment. No one else stirs. The soft, abundant light falls down upon that tranquil, marble face—upon that most awful stain of blood.

The butler goes straight up to his young lady's room. Wayward, passionate, proud Miss Inez may be, but she is very dear to him. He has carried her in his arms many a time, a little laughing, black-eyed child. A vague, sickening fear fills him now.

"She hated my lady," he thinks, in a dazed, helpless sort of way; "everybody knows that. What will she say when she hears this?"

He knocks; there is no reply. He knocks again and calls huskily:

"Miss Inez, are you there? For the dear Lord's sake open the door!"

"Come in!" a voice answers.

He cannot tell whether it is Miss Inez or not. He opens the door and enters.

This room is unlit too—the shine of the moon fills it as it fills that other room below. Here too a solitary figure sits, crouches, rather, near the window in a strange, distorted attitude of pain. He knows the flowing black hair, the scarlet wrap—he cannot see her face, she does not look round.

"Miss Inez!"—his voice shakes—"I bring you bad news, awful news. Don't be shocked—but—a murder has been done."

There is no answer. If she hears him she does not heed. She just sits still and looks out into the night.

"Miss Inez! you hear me?"

He comes a little nearer—he tries to see her face.

"You hear me?" he repeats.

"I hear you."

The words drop like ice from her lips. One hand is clutching the arm of her chair—her wide-open black eyes never turn from the night-scene.

"My lady is dead—cruelly murdered. O Miss Inez! do you hear?—*murdered!* What is to be done?"

She does not answer. Her lips move, but no word comes. An awful fear begins to fill the faithful servant's heart.

"Miss Inez!" he cries out, "you *must* come—they are waiting for you below. There is no one here but you—Sir Victor is away. Sir Victor—"

His voice breaks; he takes out his handkerchief and sobs like a child.

"My dear young master! My dear young master! He loved the very ground she walked on. Oh, who is to tell him this?"

She rises slowly now, like one who is cramped, and stiff, and cold. She looks at the old man. In her eyes there is a blind, dazed sort of horror—on her face there is a ghastliness no words can describe.

"Who is to tell Sir Victor?" the butler repeats. "It will kill him—the horror of it. So pretty and so young—so sweet and so good. Oh, how could they do it—how could they do it!"

She tries to speak once more—it seems as though her white lips cannot shape the words. Old Hooper looks up at her piteously.

"Tell us what is to be done, Miss Inez," he implores; "you are mistress here now."

She shrinks as if he had struck her.

"Shall we send for Sir Victor first?"

"Yes," she says, in a sort of whisper, "send for Sir Victor first."

The voice in which she speaks is not the voice of Inez Catheron. The butler looks at her, that great fear in his eyes.

"You haven't seen her, Miss Inez," he says. "It is a fearful sight—but—will you come down?"

He almost dreads a refusal, but she does not refuse.

"I will go down," she answers, and turns at once to go.

The servants stand huddled together in the centre of the room. *It* lies there, in its dreadful quiet, before them. Every eye turns darkly upon Miss Catheron as she comes in.

She never sees them. She advances like a sleep-walker, that dazed, dumb horror still in her eyes, the whiteness of death on her face. She walks over and looks down upon the dead mistress of Catheron Royals. No change comes over her—she softens neither into pity nor tears. So long she stands there, so rigid she looks, so

threatening are the eyes that watch her, that Hooper interposes his portly figure between her and them.

"Miss Inez," he says, "will you please give your orders? Shall I send for Sir Victor at once, or—"

"Yes, send for Sir Victor at once." She arouses herself to say it. "And I think you had better send to Chesholm for a doctor and—and the police."

"The police!"

"A murder has been committed," she says, in a cold, hard voice; "the murderer must be found."

Something of her old calm, stately haughtiness returns as she speaks.

"This room must be cleared. Let no one touch *her*," she shudders and looks away, "until Sir Victor comes. Ellen, Pool, Hooper, you three had better remain to watch. Edwards, mount the fastest horse in the stables and ride to Powyss Place for your life."

"Yes, miss," Edwards answers, in a low voice; "and please, miss, am I to tell Sir Victor?"

She hesitates a moment—her face changes, her voice shakes a little for the first time.

"Yes," she answers, faintly, "tell him."

Edwards leaves the room. She turns to another of the men servants.

"You will ride to Chesholm and fetch Dr. Dane. On your way stop at the police station and apprise them. The rest of you go. Jane Pool, where is the baby?"

"Up stairs in the night nursery," Jane Pool answers sullenly.

"And crying, too—I hear him. Hannah," to the under nurse, "go up and remain with him. I am going to my own room. When," she pauses a second and speaks with an effort, "when Sir Victor comes, you will receive your further orders from him. I can do nothing more."

She left the room. Jane Pool looked ominously after her.

"No," she said, between her set lips; "you have done enough."

"Oh, Jane, hush!" Ellen whispers in terror.

There has still been no direct accusation, but they understand each other perfectly.

"When the time comes to speak, you'll see whether I'll hush," retorts Jane. "What was she doing in this room fifteen minutes before you found my lady dead? Why wouldn't she let me in? why did she tell me a lie? what made her say my lady was still asleep? Asleep! Oh, poor soul, to think of her being murdered here, while we were all enjoying ourselves below. And if I hadn't took away the baby its my opinion it would have been—"

"Oh, Jane!"

"Oh, Jane, as much as you please, it's the gospel truth. Them that killed the mother hated the child. When the time comes I'll speak, if she was twice the lady she is, Ellen!"

"Lor!" Ellen cried with a nervous jump, "don't speak so jerky Mrs. Pool. You make my blood a mask of ice. What is it?"

"Ellen," Jane Pool said solemnly, "where is the dagger?"

"What dagger?"

"The furrin dagger with the gold handle and the big ruby set in it, that my lady used as a paper knife. I'll take my oath I saw it lying on the table there, shining in the moonlight, when I took away baby. Where is it now?"

The dagger the nurse spoke of, was a curious Eastern knife, that had belonged to Sir Victor's mother. It had a long, keen steel blade, a slim handle of wrought gold set with a large ruby. Sir Victor's wife had taken a fancy to the pretty Syrian toy, and converted it into a paper knife.

"I saw it on that there table when I took away baby," Jane said compressing her lips; "*it* would do it. Where is it now?"

"Gone," Ellen answered. "Oh, Jane do you think—"

"She has been stabbed, you see, right through the heart, and there isn't much blood. That devilish little glittering knife has done the deed. There it was ready for its work, as if Satan himself had left it handy. Oh, poor lady—poor lady! to think that the toy she used to play with, should one day take her life!"

While they whispered in the death room, up in her chamber, while the hours of the dreary night wore on, Inez Catheron sat, crouched in a heap, as Hooper had found her, her face hidden in her hands. Two hours had passed, an awful silence filled the whole house, while she sat there and never stirred. As eleven struck from the turret clock, the thunder of horses' hoofs on the avenue below, came to her dulled ears. A great shudder shook her from head to foot—she lifted her haggard face. The lull before the storm was over—Sir Victor Catheron had come.

CHAPTER VIII. IN THE DARKNESS.

Half an hour's rapid gallop had brought Edwards, the valet, to Powyss Place. The stately mansion, park, lawn, and terraces, lay bathed in the silvery shower of moonlight. From the upper windows, where the sick man lay, lights streamed; all the rest of the house was in deep shadow.

In one of those dimly lighted rooms Sir Victor Catheron lay upon a lounge fast asleep. He had remained for about two hours by the sick man's bedside; then, persuaded by his aunt, had gone to lie down in an inner department.

"You look pale and ill yourself," she had said, tenderly; "lie down and rest for a little. If I need you, I will call you at once."

He had obeyed, and had dropped off into a heavy sleep. A dull oppression of heart and soul beset him; he had no mind to slumber—it had come upon him unawares. He was awakened suddenly by some one calling his name.

"Victor! Victor!" the voice called, "awake!"

He sat up with a bewildered face. Was that his aunt's voice, so hoarse, so strange? Was this his aunt with that white, horror-struck face?

"Victor!" she cried, the words a very wail. "Oh, my boy! my boy! how shall I ever tell you? Oh, why did I send for you this dreadful night? Ethel"—her voice choked.

He rose to his feet, staring at her blankly.

"Ethel!" he repeated. "Ethel—"

She covered her face with her hands and burst into a hysterical outbreak of tears. Edwards, standing behind her in the doorway, made a step forward.

"Tell him, Edwards," said Lady Helena. "I cannot. It seems too horrible to tell or to believe. Oh, my poor Victor! my poor, poor boy!"

Edwards came forward reluctantly, with a very pale, scared face.

"It's dreadful news, Sir Victor—I don't know how to tell you, but my lady, I'm afraid she—she's dead."

"Dead!"

He repeated the word dully, staring almost stupidly at the speaker.

"Dead, Sir Victor!" the man repeated, solemnly. "I'm sore afraid, murdered!"

There was a sudden, headlong rush from the room; no other reply. Like a flash Sir Victor passed them both. They heard him clear the stairs, rush along the lower hall, and out of the house. The next instant the valet and Lady Helena were in pursuit.

He was mounted on Edwards' horse and dashing furiously away, before they reached the court-yard. They called to him—he neither heard nor heeded. He dashed his spurred heel into the horse's side and flew out of sight like the wind.

"Follow him!" Lady Helena cried, breathlessly, to the groom. "Overtake him, for the love of Heaven! Oh, *who* can have done this awful deed? Edwards, you are sure there is no mistake? It seems too unnatural, too impossible to believe."

"There is no mistake, my lady," the man answered, sadly. "I saw her myself, the blood flowing where they had stabbed her, cold and dead."

Lady Helena wrung her hands and turned away.

"Ride for your life after your master!" she said. "I will follow you as soon as I can."

She went back to her husband's side. He was no worse—he seemed if anything, better. She might leave him in her housekeeper's charge until morning.

She ordered the carriage and rapidly changed her dress. It was about one in the morning when she reached Catheron Royals. The tall turrets were silvered in the moonlight, the windows sparkled in the crystal light. The sweet beauty and peace of the September night lay like a benediction over the earth. And, amid all the silence and sweetness, a foul, a most horrible murder had been done.

She encountered Mrs. Marsh, the housekeeper, in the hall, her face pale, her eyes red with weeping. Some dim hope that up to this time had upheld her, that, after all, there *might* be a mistake, died out then.

“Oh, Marsh,” she said, piteously, “*is it true?*”

Mrs. Marsh's answer was a fresh burst of tears. Like all the rest of the household, the gentle ways, the sweet face, and soft voice of Sir Victor's wife had won her heart from the first.

“It is too true, my lady—the Lord have mercy upon us all. It seems too horrid for belief, but it is true. As she lay asleep there, four hours ago, in her own house, surrounded by her own servants, some monster in human form stabbed her through the heart—through the heart, my lady—Dr. Dane says one blow did it, and that death must have been instantaneous. So young, so sweet, and so lovely. Oh, how could they do it—how could any one do it?”

Mrs. Marsh's sobs grew hysterical. Lady Helena's own tears were flowing.

“I feel as though I were guilty in some way myself,” the housekeeper went on. “If we had only woke her up, or fastened the window, or anything! I know the monster, whoever he was, got in through the window. And, oh, my lady!”—Mrs. Marsh wiped her eyes suddenly, and lowered her voice to an excited whisper—“I wish you would speak to Jane Pool, the nurse. She doesn't dare say anything out openly, but the looks she gives, and the hints she drops, are almost worse than the murder itself. You can see as clear as day that she suspects—Miss Inez.”

“Marsh! Great Heaven!” Lady Helena cried, recoiling in horror. “Miss Inez!”

“Oh, my lady, *I don't say it—I don't think it—Heaven forbid!*—it's only that wicked, spiteful nurse, Pool. She hates Miss Inez—she has hated her from the first—and she loved my lady. Ah! who could help being fond of her—poor, lovely young lady!—with a sweet smile and pleasant word for every one in the house? And you know Miss Inez's high, haughty way. Jane Pool hates her, and will do her mischief if she can. A word from you might check her. No one knows the harm a babbling tongue may do.”

Lady Helena drew herself up proudly.

“I shall not say one word to her, Marsh. Jane Pool can do my niece no harm. The bare repetition of it is an insult. Miss Catheron—that I should have to say such a thing!—is above suspicion.”

“My lady, I believe it; still, if you would only speak to her. You don't know all. She saw Miss Inez coming out of the nursery a quarter of an hour before we found Lady Catheron dead. She wished to enter, and Miss Inez ordered her away. She has been talking to the police, and I saw that Inspector Darwin watching Miss Inez in a way that made my blood run cold.”

But Lady Helena waived the topic away haughtily.

“Be silent, Marsh! I will not hear another word of this—it is too horrible! Where is Miss Inez?”

“In her own room, my lady. And—I beg your pardon for alluding to it again—but I think she suspects. She seemed dazed—like, stupefied at first; she is more like herself now. Will you not go in and see *her*, poor soul, before you go to Miss Inez? Oh, my lady, my lady! it breaks my heart when I look at her—when I look at Sir Victor.”

For a moment Lady Helena shrank.

“Sir Victor is in there—with her?” she faltered.

“Yes, my lady—like a man all struck stupid. It frightens me to see him. If he would only speak, or cry, or fly out against the murderer—but he just sits there as if turning to stone.”

His aunt covered her face for an instant with both hands, heart-sick with all these horrors; then she looked up, and moved forward.

“Where is she?” she asked—“in which room?”

“In the white drawing-room, my lady; the doctors brought her there. Sir Victor is with her, alone.”

Lady Helen slowly advanced. At the door she paused a moment to nerve herself for what she must see; then she turned the handle and went in.

It was one of the stateliest rooms in the house—all white and gold, and dimly lit now by wax tapers. Lying on one of the white velvet sofas she saw a rigid figure, over which a white covering was drawn; but the golden hair and the fair, marble face gleaming in the waxlights as beautiful as ever in life.

He sat beside his dead—almost as motionless, almost as cold, almost as white. He had loved her with a love that was akin to idolatrous—he had grudged that the eye of man should rest on his treasure—and now he sat beside her—dead.

If he heard the door open, he neither moved nor stirred. He never once looked up as his aunt came forward; his eyes were riveted upon that ineffably calm face with a vacant, sightless sort of stare that chilled her blood.

A TERRIBLE SECRET. A Novel.

“Victor!” she cried out, in a frightened voice; “Victor speak to me. For pity's sake, don't look like that?”

The dull, blinded eyes looked up at her, full of infinite, unutterable despair.

“She is dead,” he said, in a slow, dragging sort of voice—“dead! And last night I left her well and happy—left her to be murdered—to—be—murdered.”

The slow words fell heavily from his lips—his eyes went back to her face, his dulled mind seemed lapsing into its stupefied trance of quiet. More and more alarmed, his aunt gazed at him. Had the death of his wife turned his brain?

“Victor!” she exclaimed, almost angrily, “you must rouse yourself. You must not stay here. Be a man! Wake up. Your wife has been murdered. Go and find her murderer.”

“Her murderer,” he replied, in the same slow tone of unnatural quiet; “her murderer. It seems strange, Aunt Helena, doesn't it, that any one *could* murder her? 'I must find her murderer.' Oh,” he cried, suddenly, in a voice of anguish; “what does it matter about her murderer! It won't bring her back to life. She is dead I tell you—dead!”

He flung himself off his chair, on his knees by the couch. He drew down the white satin counterpane, and pointed to that one dark, small stab on the left side.

“Look!” he said, in a shrill, wailing voice, “through the heart—through the heart! She did not suffer—the doctors say *that*. Through the heart as she slept. Oh, my love, my darling, my wife!”

He kissed the wound—he kissed the hands, the face, the hair. Then with a long, low moan of utter desolation, he drew back the covering and buried his face in it.

“Leave me alone,” he said, despairingly; “I will not go—I will never go from her again. She was mine in life—mine only. Juan Catheron lied, she is mine in death. My wife—my Ethel!”

He started up as suddenly as he had flung himself down, his ghastly face flaming dark red.

“Leave me alone, I tell you! Why do you all come here? I will *not* go! Leave me, I command you—I am master here!”

She shrank from him in absolute physical terror. Never over-strong at any time, her worst fears were indeed true, the shock of his wife's tragic death was turning Sir Victor's brain. There was nothing to be done—nothing to be said—he must be obeyed—must be soothed.

“Dear Victor,” she said, “I will go. Don't be hard with poor Aunt Helena. There is no one in all this world as sorry for you as I am. Only tell me this before I leave you—shall we not send for her father and mother?”

“No,” he answered, in the same fierce tone; “they can't bring her back to life—no one can now. I don't want them. I want nobody. Ethel is mine I tell you—mine alone!”

He motioned her imperiously to leave him—a light in his eye—a flush on his face there was no mistaking. She went at once. How was it all to end she wondered, more and more sick at heart—this mysterious murder, this suspicion against Inez, this dreadful overthrow of her nephew's mind?

“May Heaven help us!” she cried. “What have we done that this awful trouble should come upon us!”

“Aunt Helena.”

She looked round with a little cry, all her nerves trembling and unstrung. Inez stood before her—Inez with dark, resolute eyes, and stony face.

“I have been waiting for you—they told me you were *there*.” She pointed with a shudder to the door. “What are we to do?”

“Don't ask me,” Lady Helena answered, helplessly. “I don't know. I feel stunned and stupid with all these horrors.”

“The police are here,” Miss Catheron went on, “and the coroner has been apprised. I suppose, they will hold an inquest to-morrow.”

Her aunt looked at her in surprise. The calm, cold tone of her voice grated on her sick heart.

“Have you seen *him*?” she asked almost in a whisper. “Inez—I fear—I fear it is turning his brain.”

Miss Catheron's short, scornful upper lip, curled with the old look of contempt.

“The Catheron brain was never noted for its strength. I shall not be surprised at all. Poor wretch!” She turned away and looked out into the darkness. “It does seem hard on him.”

“Who can have done it?”

The question on every lip rose to Lady Helena's, but somehow she could not utter it. Did Inez know of the dark, sinister suspicion against herself? *Could* she know and be calm like this?

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"I forgot to ask for Uncle Godfrey," Inez's quiet voice said again. "Of course he is better, or even at such a time as this you would not be here?"

"He is better, Inez," she broke out desperately. "Who can have done this? She had not an enemy in the world. Is—is there any one suspected?"

"There is," Inez answered, turning from the window, and facing her aunt. "The servants suspect *me*."

"Inez!"

"Their case isn't a bad one as they make it out," pursued Miss Catheron, coolly. "There was ill blood between us. It is of no use denying it. I hated her with my whole heart. I was the last person seen coming out of the room, fifteen minutes before they found her dead. Jane Pool says I refused to let her go in—perhaps I did. It is quite likely. About an hour previously we had a violent quarrel. The ubiquitous Mrs. Pool overheard that also. You see her case is rather a strong one."

"But—Inez—!"

"I chanced to overhear all this," still went on Miss Catheron, quietly, but with set lips and gleaming eyes. "Jane Pool was holding forth to the inspector of police. I walked up to them, and they both slunk away like beaten curs. Orders have been issued, that no one is to leave the house. To-morrow these facts are to be placed before the coroner's jury. If they find me guilty—don't cry, Aunt Helena—I shall be sorry for *you*—sorry I have disgraced a good old name. For the rest, it doesn't much matter what becomes of such a woman as I am."

She turned again to the window and looked out into the darkness. There was a desperate bitterness in her tone that Lady Helena could not understand.

"Good Heaven!" she burst forth, "one would think you were all in a conspiracy to drive me mad. It doesn't matter, what becomes of you, doesn't it? I tell you if this last worst misery falls upon us, it will kill me on the spot; just that."

The girl sighed drearily.

"Kill you, Aunt Helena," she repeated, mournfully. "No—we don't any of us die so easily. Don't be afraid—I am not likely to talk in this way before any one but you. I am only telling you the truth. They will have the inquest, and all that Jane Pool can say against me will be said. Do you think Victor will be able to appear?"

"I don't think Victor is in a condition to appear at an inquest or anywhere else. Ah, poor boy! he loved her so dearly, it is enough to shake the mind of a stronger man."

But Miss Catheron was dead silent—it was evident her feelings here were as bitter as ever—that even the tragic death of her rival had not softened her.

"He will survive it," she answered, in the same half-contemptuous tone. "Men have died and worms have eaten them, but not for love."

"Inez," said her aunt, suddenly coming a step nearer, "a rumor has reached me—is it true?—that Juan is back—that he has been here?"

"It is quite true," her niece answered, without turning round; "he *has* been here. He was here on the night Lady Catheron first came."

"There is another rumor afloat, that there was a violent quarrel on that occasion—that he claimed to be an old lover of Ethel's, poor child, and that Victor turned him out. Since then it is said he has been seen more than once prowling about the grounds. For everybody's sake I hope it is not true."

Inez faced round suddenly—almost fiercely.

"And what if I say it *is* true, in every respect? He did come—there was a quarrel, and Victor ordered him out. Since then he has been here—prowling, as you call it—trying to see me, trying to force me to give him money. I was flinty as usual, and would give him none. Where is the crime in all that?"

"Has he gone?" was Lady Helena's response.

"I believe so—I hope so. He had nothing to stay for. Of course he has gone."

"I am glad of that, at least. And now, as it seems I can do nothing more at present, I will return home. Watch Victor, Inez—he needs it, believe me. I will return at the earliest possible moment to-morrow."

So, in the chill gray of the fast-coming morning, Lady Helena, very heavy-hearted, returned to Powyss Place and her sick husband's bedside.

Meantime matters were really beginning to look dark for Miss Catheron. The superintendent of the district, Mr. Ferrick, was filling his note-book with very ominous information. She had loved Sir Victor—she had hated

Sir Victor's wife—they had led a cat-and-dog life from the first—an hour before the murder they had had a violent quarrel—Lady Catheron had threatened to make her husband turn her out of the house on the morrow. At eight o'clock, Jane Pool had left the nursery with the baby, my lady peacefully asleep in her chair—the Eastern poniard on the table. At half-past eight, returning to arouse my lady, she had encountered Miss Inez coming out of the nursery, and Miss Inez had ordered her sharply away, telling her my lady was still asleep. A quarter of nine, Ellen, the maid, going to the room, found my lady stone dead, stabbed through the heart. Miss Inez, when summoned by Hooper, is ghastly pale at first, and hardly seems to know what she is doing or saying. A very pretty case of tragedy in high life, Superintendent Ferrick thinks, pursing up his lips with professional zest, and not the first murder jealousy has made fine ladies commit, either. Now if that Turkish dagger would only turn up.

Two policemen are sent quietly in search of it through the grounds. It isn't likely they'll find it, still it will do no harm to try. He finds out which are Miss Catheron's rooms, and keeps his official eye upon them. He goes through the house with the velvet tread of a cat. In the course of his wanderings everywhere, he brings up presently in the stables, and finds them untenanted, save by one lad, who sits solitary among the straw. He is rather a dull-looking youth, with a florid, vacant face at most times, but looking dazed and anxious just now. "Something on *his* mind," thinks the superintendent, and sits sociably down on a box beside him at once.

"Now, my man," Mr. Ferrick says, pleasantly, "and what is it that's troubling *you*? Out with it—every little's a help in a case like this."

The lad—his name is Jimmy—does not need pressing—his secret has been weighing uneasily upon him for the last hour or more, ever since he heard of the murder, in fact, and he pours his revelation into the superintendent's eager ear. His revelation is this:

Last evening, just about dusk, strolling by chance in the direction of the Laurel walk, he heard voices raised and angry in the walk—the voices of a man and a woman. He had peeped through the branches and seen my lady and a very tall man. No, it wasn't Sir Victor—it was a much bigger man, with long black curling hair. Didn't see his face. It was dark in there among the trees. Wasn't sure, but it struck him it might be the tall, black-avised man, who came first the night Sir Victor brought home my lady, and who had been seen skulking about the park once or twice since. Had heard a whisper, that the man was Miss Inez's brother—didn't know himself. All he did know was, that my lady and a man were quarrelling on the evening of the murder in the Laurel walk. What were they quarrelling about? Well, he couldn't catch their talk very well—it was about money he thought. The man wanted money and jewels, and my lady wouldn't give 'em. He threatened to do something or tell something; then *she* threatened to have him put in Chesholm jail if he did. He, Jimmy, though full of curiosity, was afraid the man would spring out and catch him, and so at that juncture he came away. There! that was all, if it did the gentleman any good, he was welcome to it.

It did the gentleman a world of good—it complicated matters beautifully. Five minutes ago the case looked dark as night for Miss Catheron—here was a rift in her sky. Who was this man—*was* it Miss Catheron's scapegrace brother? Jimmy could tell him nothing more. "If you wants to find out about Miss Inez' brother," said Jimmy, "you go to old Hooper. *He* knows. All *I* know is, that they say he was an uncommon bad lot; but old Hooper, he's knowed him ever since he was a young'un and lived here. If old Hooper says he wasn't here the night Sir Victor brought my lady home, don't you believe him—he was, and he's been seen off and on in the grounds since. The women folks in the servants' hall, they say, as how he must have been an old sweetheart of my lady's. You go to old Hooper and worrit it out of him."

Mr. Superintendent Ferrick went. How artfully he began his work, how delicately and skillfully he "pumped" old Hooper dry, no words can tell. Mr. Juan Catheron *was* an "uncommon bad lot," he had come to the house and forced an entrance into the dining-room the night of Lady Catheron's arrival—there had been a quarrel, and he had been compelled to leave. Bit by bit this was drawn from Mr. Hooper. Since then, Jackson, the head groom, and Edwards, the valet, had seen him hovering about the grounds watching the house.

Mr. Ferrick ponders these things in his heart, and is still. This vagabond, Juan Catheron, follows my lady to Catheron Royals, is expelled, haunts the grounds, and a man answering to his description is discovered quarrelling with my lady, demanding money, etc., two or three hours before the murder. The window of the room, in which she takes that fatal sleep, opens on the lawn; any one may enter who sees fit. No one is about. The Oriental dagger lies convenient to his hand on the table. "Here, now," says Mr. Ferrick *to* Mr. Ferrick, with a reflective frown, "which is guilty—the brother or sister?"

He goes and gives an order to one of his men, and the man starts in search of Mr. Juan Catheron. Mr. Catheron must be found, though they summon the detectives of Scotland Yard to aid them in their search.

The dull hours wear on—the new day, sunny and bright, is with them. The white drawing-room is darkened—the master of Catheron Royals sits there alone with his dead. And presently the coroner comes, and talks with the superintendent, and they enter softly and look at the murdered lady. The coroner departs again—a jury is summoned, and the inquest is fixed to begin at noon next day in the “Mitre” tavern at Chesholm.

Lady Helena returns and goes at once to her nephew. Inez, in spite of her injunctions, has never been near him once. He sits there still, as she left him many hours ago; he has never stirred or spoken since. Left to himself he is almost apathetic in his quiet—he rouses into fury, when they strive to take him away. As the dusk falls, Lady Helena, passing the door, hears him softly talking to the dead, and once—oh, pitiful Heaven! she hears a low, blood-chilling laugh. She opens the door and goes in. He is kneeling besides the sofa, holding the stark figure in his arms, urging her to get up and dress.

“It is a lovely night, Ethel,” he says; “the moon is shining, and you know, you like to walk out on moonlight nights. Do you remember, love, those nights at Margate; when we walked together first on the sands? Ah! you never lay like this, cold and still, then. Do get up, Ethel!” petulantly this; “I am tired of sitting here and waiting for you to awake. You have slept long enough. Get up!”

He tries to lift her. Horror struck, Lady Helena catches him in time to prevent it.

“Victor, Victor!” she cries, “for the love of Heaven put her down. Come away. Don't you know she is dead?”

He lifts his dim eyes to her face, blind with the misery of a dumb animal.

“Dead!” he whispers.

Then with a low, moaning gasp, he falls back in her arms, fainting wholly away.

Her cries bring aid—they lift him and carry him up to his room, undress and place him in bed. The family physician is summoned—feels his pulse, hears what Lady Helena has to say, and looks very grave. The shock has been too much for a not overstrong body or mind. Sir Victor is in imminent danger of brain fever.

The night shuts down. A messenger comes to Lady Helena saying the squire is much better, and she makes up her mind to remain all night. Inez comes, pale and calm, and also takes her place by the stricken man's bedside, a great sadness and pity for the first time on her face. The White Room is locked—Lady Helena keeps the key—one pale light burns dimly in its glittering vastness. And as the night closes in blackness over the doomed house, one of the policemen comes in haste to Superintendent Ferrick, triumph in his face. He has found the dagger.

Mr. Ferrick opens his eyes rather—it is more than he expected.

“A bungler,” he mutters, “whoever did it. Jones, where did you find this?”

Jones explains.

Near the entrance gates there is a wilderness of fern, or bracken, as high as your waist. Hidden in the midst of this unlikely place Jones has found the dagger. It is as if the party, going down the avenue, had flung it in.

“Bungler,” Superintendent Ferrick says again. “It's bad enough to be a murderer without being a fool.”

He takes the dagger. No doubt about the work it has done. It is incrustated with blood—dry, dark, and clotted up to the hilt. A strong, sure hand had certainly done the deed. For the first time the thought strikes him—*could* a woman's hand, strike that one strong, sure, deadly blow? Miss Catheron is a fragile-looking young lady, with a waist he could span, slim little fingers, and a delicate wrist. Could she strike this blow—it is quite evident only one has been struck.

“And besides,” says Superintendent Ferrick, argumentatively to himself, “it's fifteen minutes' fast walking from the house to the gates. Fifteen minutes only elapse between the time Nurse Pool sees her come out of the nursery and Maid Ellen finds her mistress murdered. And I'll be sworn, she hasn't been out of the house to-day. All last night they *say* she kept herself shut up in her room. Suppose she wasn't—suppose she went out last night and tried to hide it, is it likely—come, I say! is it likely, she would take and throw it right in the very spot, where it was sure to be found? A Tartar that young woman is, I have no doubt, but she's a long way off being a fool. She may know *who* has done this murder, but I'll stake my professional reputation, in spite of Mrs. Pool, that she never did it herself.”

A thin, drizzling rain comes on with the night, the trees drip, drip in a feeble melancholy sort of way, the wind has a lugubrious sob in its voice, and it is intensely dark. It is about nine o'clock, when Miss Catheron rises from

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her place by the sick-bed and goes out of the room. In the corridor she stands a moment, with the air of one who looks, and listens. She sees no one. The dark figure of a woman, who hovers afar off and watches her, is there, but lost in a shadowy corner; a woman, who since the murder, has never entirely lost sight of her. Miss Catheron does not see her, she takes up a shawl, wraps it about her, over her head, walks rapidly along the passage, down a back stairway, out of a side door, little used, and so out into the dark, dripping, sighing night.

There are the Chesholm constabulary on guard on the wet grass and gravel elsewhere—there are none here. But the quiet figure of Jane Pool has followed her, like her shadow, and Jane Pool's face, peers cautiously out from the half-open door.

In that one instant while she waits, she misses her prey—she emerges, but in the darkness nothing is to be seen or heard.

As she stands irresolute, she suddenly hears a low, distinct whistle to the left. It may be the call of a night-bird—it may be a signal.

She glides to the left, straining her eyes through the gloom. It is many minutes before she can see anything, except the vaguely waving trees—then a fiery spark, a red eye glows through the night. She has run her prey to earth—it is the lighted tip of a cigar.

She draws near—her heart throbs. Dimly she sees the tall figure of a man; close to him the slender, slighter figure of a woman. They are talking in whispers, and she is mortally afraid of coming too close. What is to keep them from murdering her too?

“I tell you, you *must* go, and at once,” are the first words, she hears Inez Catheron speaking, in a passionate, intense whisper. “I tell you I am suspected already; do you think *you* can escape much longer? If you have any feeling for yourself, for me, go, go, I beseech you, at once! They are searching for you now, I warn you, and if they find you—”

“If they find me,” the man retorts, doggedly, “it can't be much worse than it is. Things have been so black with me for years, that they can't be much blacker. But I'll go. I'm not over anxious to stay, Lord knows. Give me the money and I'll be off.”

She takes from her bosom a package, and hands it to him; by the glow of the red cigar-tip Jane sees her.

“It is all I have—all I can get, jewels and all,” she says; “enough to keep you for years with care. Now go, and never come back—your coming has done evil enough, surely.”

Jane Pool catches the words—the man mutters some sullen, inaudible reply. Inez Catheron speaks again in the same passionate voice.

“How dare you say so?” she cries, stamping her foot. “You wretch! whom it is my bitterest shame to call brother. But for you *she* would be alive and well. Do you think I do not know it? Go—living or dead, I never want to look upon your face again!”

Jane Pool hears those terrible words and stands paralyzed. Can it be, that Miss Inez is not the murderess after all? The man retorts again—she does not hear how—then plunges into the woodland and disappears. An instant the girl stands motionless looking after him, then she turns and walks rapidly back into the house.

CHAPTER IX. FROM THE "CHESHOLM COURIER."

The Monday morning edition of the *Chesholm Courier*, September 19th, 18—, contained the following, eagerly devoured by every man and woman in the county, able to read at all:

THE TRAGEDY AT CATHERON ROYALS.

"In all the annals of mysterious crime (began the editor, with intense evident relish), nothing more mysterious, or more awful, has ever been known, than the recent tragedy at Catheron Royals. In the annals of our town, of our county, of our country we may almost say, it stands unparalleled in its atrocity. A young and lovely lady, wedded little better than a year, holding the very highest position in society, in the sacred privacy of her own household, surrounded by faithful servants, is struck down by the dagger of the assassin. Her youth, her beauty, the sanctity of slumber, all were powerless to shield her. Full of life, and hope, and happiness, she is foully and hideously murdered—her babe left motherless, her young husband bereaved and desolate. If anything were needed to make the dreadful tragedy yet more dreadful, it is, that Sir Victor Catheron lies, as, we write, hovering between life and death. The blow, which struck her down, has stricken him too—has laid him upon what may be his death-bed. At present he lies mercifully unconscious of his terrible loss tossing in the delirium of violent brain fever.

"Who, we ask, is safe after this? A lady of the very highest rank, in her own home, surrounded by her servants, in open day, is stabbed to the heart. Who, we ask again, is safe after this? Who was the assassin—what was the motive? Does that assassin yet lurk in our midst? Let it be the work of the coroner and his jury to discover the terrible secret, to bring the wretch to justice. And it is the duty of every man and woman in Chesholm to aid, if they can, that discovery."

* * * * *

From Tuesday's Edition.

The inquest began at one o'clock yesterday in the parlor of the Mitre Inn, Lady Helena Powyss, of Powyss Place, and Miss Inez Catheron being present. The first witness called was Ellen Butters.

ELLEN BUTTERS sworn.—"I was Lady Catheron's maid; I was engaged in London and came down with her here; on the afternoon of Friday, 16th, I last saw my lady alive, about half-past six in the afternoon; she had dressed for dinner; the family dinner hour is seven; saw nothing unusual about her; well yes, she seemed a little out of spirits, but was gentle and patient as usual; when I had finished dressing her she threw her shawl about her, and took a book, and said she would go out a few minutes and take the air; she did go out, and I went down to the servant's hall; sometime after seven Jane Pool, the nurse, came down in a great flurry and said—"

THE CORONER.—"Young woman we don't want to hear what Jane Pool said and did. We want to know what you saw yourself."

ELLEN BUTTERS (sulkily).—"Very well, that's what I'm trying to tell you. If Jane Pool hadn't said Sir Victor had gone off to Powyss Place, and that she didn't think it would be proper to disturb my lady just then, I would have gone up to my lady for orders. Jane had her supper and went up to the nursery for baby. She came back again after awhile—it was just past eight—in a temper, saying she had left my lady asleep when she took away baby, and returned to awake her. She had met Miss Inez who ordered her away about her business, saying my lady was still asleep. Jane Pool said—"

THE CORONER—"Young woman, we *don't* want to hear what Jane Pool said. Jane Pool will tell her own story presently; we won't trouble you to tell both. At what hour did you go up to the nursery yourself?"

ELLEN BUTTERS (more sulkily).—"I disremember; it was after eight. I could tell all about it better, if you wouldn't keep interrupting and putting me out. It was about a quarter or twenty minutes past eight, I think—"

THE CORONER (dogmatically).—"What you think won't do. Be more precise if you please, and keep your temper. What o'clock was it, I say, when you went up to the nursery?"

ELLEN BUTTERS (excitedly).—"It was about a quarter or twenty minutes past eight—how can I know any surer when I *don't* know. I don't carry a watch, and didn't look at the clock. I'm sure I never expected to be badgered about it in this way. I said I'd go and wake my lady up and not leave her there, to catch her death, in spite of fifty Miss Catherons. I rapped at the door and got no answer, then I opened it and went in. There was no light, but the moon was shining bright and clear, and I saw my lady sitting, with her shawl around her, in the

arm-chair. I thought she was asleep and called her—there was no answer. I called again, and put my hand on her bosom to arouse her. Something wet my hand—it was blood. I looked at her closer, and saw blood on her dress, and oozing in a little stream from the left breast. Then I knew she had been killed. I ran screaming from the room, and down among the rest of the servants. I told them—I didn't know how. And I don't remember any more, for I fell in a faint. When I came to I was alone—the rest were up in the nursery. I got up and joined them—that's everything I know about it.”

Ellen Butters retired, and William Hooper was called. This is Mr. Hooper's evidence:

“I have been butler in Sir Victor Catheron's family for twenty years. On the night of Friday last, as I sat in the servants' hall after supper, the young woman, Ellen Butters, my lady's London maid, came screeching downstairs like a creature gone mad, that my lady was murdered, and frightened us all out of our senses. As she was always a flighty young person, I didn't believe her. I ordered her to be quiet, and tell us what she meant. Instead of doing it she gave a sort of gasp and fell fainting down in a heap. I made them lay her down on the floor, and then follow me up to the nursery. We went in a body—I at the head. There was no light but the moon-light in the room. My lady lay back in the arm-chair, her eyes closed, bleeding and quite dead. I ran up to Miss Inez's room, and called her. My master was not at home, or I would have called him instead. I think she must have been dead some minutes. She was growing cold when I found her.”

“William Hooper,” continued the *Chesholm Courier*, communicatively, “was cross-examined as to the precise time of finding the body. He said it was close upon half-past eight, the half hour struck as he went up to Miss Inez's room.”

James Dicksey was next called. James Dicksey, a shambling lad of eighteen, took his place, his eyes rolling in abject terror, and under the evident impression that he was being tried for his life. Every answer was wrung from this frightened youth, as with red-hot pincers, and it was with the utmost difficulty anything consistent could be extorted at all.

“About half-past six on Friday evening, Mr. Dicksey was rambling about the grounds, in the direction of the laurel walk. In the open ground it was still quite light, in the laurel walk it was growing dusk. As he drew near, he heard voices in the laurel walk—angry voices, though not very loud—the voices of a man and a woman. Peeped in and saw my lady. Yes, it was my lady—yes, he was sure. Was it likely now he wouldn't know my lady? The man was very tall, had a furrin-looking hat pulled over his eyes, and stood with his back to him. He didn't see his face. They were quarrelling and—well yes, he did listen. Heard the man call her 'Ethel,' and ask for money. She wouldn't give it to him. Then he asked for jewels. She refused again, and ordered him to go. She was very angry—she stamped her foot once and said: 'If you don't go instantly I'll call my husband. Between you and your sister you will drive me mad.' When she said that, he guessed at once, who the big furrin-looking man was. It was Miss Inez's brother, Mr. Juan Catheron. Had heard tell of him often, and knew he had been at the house the night of my lady's arrival, and that there had been a row.”

Mr. Dicksey was here sharply reprimanded, informed that his suspicions and hearsays were not wanted, and requested to come back to the point. He came back.

“My lady wouldn't give him anything, then he got mad and said: (James Dicksey had been vaguely impressed by these remarkable words at the time, and had been silently revolving them ever since) 'Give me the jewels, or by all the gods I'll blow the story of your marriage to me all over England!’”

The breathless silence of coroner, jury, and spectators at this juncture was something not to be described. In that profound silence, James Dicksey went rambling on to say, that he could swear before the Queen herself to those words, that he had been thinking them over ever since he had heard them, and that he couldn't make top or tail of them.

THE CORONER (interrupting)—“What further did you overhear? Be careful, remember you are on oath.”

JAMES DICKSEY.—“I heard what my lady said. She was in an awful passion, and spoke loud. She said, 'You will not, you dare not, you're a coward; Sir Victor has you in his power, and if you say one word you'll be silenced in Chesholm jail.' Then she stamped her foot again, and said, 'Leave me, Juan Catheron; I am not afraid of you.' Yes; he was sure of the name; she called him Juan Catheron, and looked as if she could eat him alive. He had heard no more; he was afraid of being caught, and had stolen quietly away. Had said nothing at all about it to any one, was afraid it might reach my lady's ears, and that he would lose his place for eavesdropping. At ten o'clock that night was told of the murder, and was took all of a-tremble. Had told Superintendent Ferrick

something of this next day, but this was all—yes so help him, all he had heard, and just as he had heard it.”

James Dicksey was rigidly cross-examined, and clung to his testimony with a dogged tenacity nothing could alter or shake. He could swear positively to the name she had uttered, to the words both had spoken, if he were dying. A profound sensation ran through the room as James Dicksey sat down—a thrill of unutterable apprehension and fear.

The examination of these three witnesses had occupied the whole of the afternoon. The court adjourned until next morning at ten o'clock.

On Tuesday morning, despite the inclemency of the weather (said the *Chesholm Courier* to its readers) the parlor of the “Mitre,” the halls, the stairways, and even the inn yard were filled at the hour of nine. The excitement was intense—you might have heard a pin drop in the silence, when the examination of witnesses was resumed. William Hooper was again called to take the stand:

THE CORONER.—“You remember, I suppose, the evening on which Sir Victor brought Lady Catheron home?”

WITNESS.—“I do.”

CORONER.—“You had a visitor on that night. You admitted him, did you not, Mr. Hooper? Who was that visitor?”

“It was Mr. Juan Catheron.”

“Was Mr. Juan Catheron in the habit of visiting Catheron Royals?”

“He was not.”

“Can you recollect, how long a period had elapsed since his previous visit?”

“Mr. Catheron had not been at the Royals for over four years. He was wild—there was ill-feeling between him and my master.”

“Between him and his sister also?”

“I don't know. I—believe so.” Here the witness looked piteously at the jury. “I had rather not answer these questions, gentlemen, if you please. I'm an old servant of the family—whatever family secrets may have come under my knowledge, I have no right to reveal.”

THE CORONER (blandly).—“Only a few more, Mr. Hooper. We require to know on what footing Mr. Juan Catheron stood with his family. Did he ever come to Catheron Royals to visit his sister?”

“He did not.”

“Had he ever been forbidden the house?”

“I—believe so.”

“On the evening of Sir Victor and Lady Catheron's arrival, his visit was entirely unexpected then?”

“I don't know.”

“You admitted him?”

“I did.”

“What did he say to you?”

“I don't remember. Some rattling nonsense—nothing more. He was always lightheaded. He ran upstairs and into the dining-room before I could prevent it.”

“How long did he remain?”

“About twenty minutes—not longer, I am certain. Then he came running back and I let him out.”

“Had there been a quarrel?”

“I don't know,” doggedly; “I wasn't there. Mr. Juan came down laughing, I know *that*. I know nothing more about it. I have never seen him since.”

CHAPTER X. FROM THE "CHESHOLM COURIER"—CONTINUED.

Jane Pool was called. A suppressed murmur of deepest interest ran through the room at the name of this witness. It was understood her evidence would have the deepest bearing on the case. Mrs. Pool took the stand. "A decent, intelligent young woman," said the *Chesholm Courier*, "who gave her evidence in a clear, straightforward way that carried conviction to every hearer." "I am Jane Pool. I am nurse to Sir Victor Catheron's infant son. Early in August I entered the service of the deceased Lady Catheron in London; the first week of September I accompanied them down here. On the evening of the murder, about half-past six o'clock, or perhaps a quarter of seven, while I was busy in the day nursery over my duties, my lady came in, as she often did, though not at that hour. She looked pale and flurried, and bent over baby, who lay asleep, without speaking. Sir Victor came in while she was still there, and without taking any notice of me, told her he had received a note from Lady Helena Powyss saying Squire Powyss had had a stroke, and that he must go at once to Powyss Place. He said he thought he would be absent all night, that he would return as soon as he could, and that she was to take care of herself. He kissed her good-by and left the room. My lady went to the window and waved her hand to him, and watched him out of sight. About ten minutes after, while she still stood there, the door opened and Miss Inez came in and asked for Sir Victor; she said she wanted him. Then she stooped over and looked at the baby, calling him the heir of Catheron Royals. Then she laughed in her soft way, and said: 'I wonder if he *is* the heir of Catheron Royals? I have been reading the Scotch marriage law and after what you and my brother said the other night—' If she said any more I didn't catch it—my lady turned round in such a flame of anger as I never saw her in before, and says she: 'You have uttered your last insult, Inez Catheron—you will never utter another beneath this roof. To-morrow you will leave it. I am Sir Victor Catheron's wife, and mistress of Catheron Royals—this is the last night it will ever shelter you.' Then she opens the door. 'Go!' she said; 'when my husband returns you or I leave this forever.' Neither of them took the least notice of me; I was afraid of being seen, and kept as quiet as I could. I heard Miss Inez answer: 'Not all the soap-boilers' daughters in England shall send me from Catheron Royals. You may go to-morrow if you will, but I will never go, never!' With that she went away, and my lady shut the door upon her. I did not want her to see me there, when she turned round, so I slipped out of another door, and downstairs. I took my supper, lingering, I dare say, half an hour; I don't think it was much more than half after seven when I returned to the nursery for baby. I found my lady asleep in the arm-chair besides the open window. She had been crying—there were tears on her cheeks and eyelashes as she slept. I did not disturb her. I lifted baby and carried him up to the nursery. I left him in charge of the under nursemaid, and returned to the room my lady was in. The clock was striking eight as I came downstairs. I was going in to awaken my lady, not liking to have her sleep in the night air. My hand was on the handle, when the door opened and Miss Inez came out. She looked paler than common, I thought but she spoke just as high and haughty as usual. She asked me what I wanted there; I told her I wanted to waken my lady. She looked at me, as though she would like to bite off my head—she was in one of her tempers, I could see. 'You had better let my lady alone,' she says, 'and attend to your nursery. She's asleep still, and it isn't *your* place to awaken her. Go.' I was in a fury; I don't mind owning that, but I said nothing and I went. When Miss Inez looked and spoke like that, every servant in the house knew it was as much as her place was worth to disobey her. I went back and told Ellen Butters. Ellen was drinking her tea; she couldn't abide Miss Inez, and the minute she finished her cup she jumps up. '*I'm* not afraid of her,' says Ellen; 'she ain't *my* missis; I'll go and wake my lady up.' She went; we staid below. It might be five minutes after, when she comes flying back, screaming fit to wake the dead, 'Murder! murder!' There was blood on one of her hands, and before we could get anything more from her except 'My lady! my lady!' she drops down in a faint. We left her there, and followed Hooper upstairs. There was my lady lying in the arm-chair under the window, as I had seen her last—stone dead. We were all so shocked and frightened, I hardly know what was said or done for a while. Then somebody says—I don't know who to this minute, 'Where is Miss Catheron?' Nobody made answer. Says the person again: 'Where is Miss Catheron?' I think it frightened Hooper. He turned round, and said he would go for her. He went—we waited. He came back with her in a short while, and we all looked at her. She was nearly as much like a dead woman as my lady herself. I never saw such a look on any face before—her eyes seemed dazed in her head, like. She hardly seemed to know what she was saying or doing, and she didn't seem a bit surprised. Hooper said to her:

'Shall I send for Sir Victor?' She answered, still in that stunned sort of way: 'Yes, send for Sir Victor, and the doctor, and the police at once.' She was shivering like one in the chills, as she said it. She said she could do nothing more, and she left us and went back to her room. It was then I first missed the dagger. I can swear it was lying on the table beside a book, when my lady first fell asleep; when I looked round, the book was still there, the dagger gone."

The blood-stained dagger found by the policeman, was here produced and identified at once by the witness.

"It is the same—I have had it in my hand a hundred times, and seen it with her. Oh, my lady—my lady—my dear lady!"

The sight of the blood-incrusted weapon, seemed totally to unnerve the witness. She broke out into hysterical sobbing, which nothing could quiet. It being now noon, the court adjourned till two o'clock.

Jane Pool was then again called, and resumed her important testimony, in the same rapid, narrative, connected style as before.

"I felt dreadfully about the murder, and I don't mind owning I had my suspicions. I said to myself: 'I'll keep an eye on Miss Inez,' and I did, as well as I could. She kept her room nearly all next day. Toward night, Sir Victor was took down with the fever—wild and raving like, and Miss Inez went with Lady Helena to sit with him and watch. I was watching too, Sir Victor's room door. I don't know why, but I seemed to expect something. About nine, or a little later, as I stood at one end of the hall in the shadow, I saw the door open and Miss Inez come out. She looked up and down to see if the coast was clear, then put her shawl over her head, and walked very fast to the opposite end, downstairs and out of the side door. I followed her. It was raining and very dark, and at first I lost her among the trees. Then I heard a whistle, and following it, the next thing I saw was a tall man smoking a cigar, close beside her. It was too dark to see his face; I could just make out that he was very tall. They were talking in whispers, and what with the drip, drip of rain and the rustling of the trees, I couldn't catch at first what they were saying."

"Indeed, Mrs. Pool," the coroner observed at this point, "that is to be regretted. Eavesdropping seems to be your forte."

"I don't think it is any harm to listen in a good cause," Mrs. Pool retorted, sullenly. "If you don't care to have me repeat my eavesdropping, I won't."

"Repeat what you heard, if it bears on this case."

"The first words I heard, were from Miss Inez. She was giving him something—money, I thought, and she said: 'Now go and never come back. Your coming has done evil enough surely.' I couldn't catch his answer. He took what she gave him, and Miss Inez burst out, as she always does, in one of her tearing passions: 'How dare you say so, you wretch! whom it is my bitterest shame to call brother. *But for you she would be alive and well*—do you think I don't know it? Go! Living or dead, I never want to look upon your face again.'"

The sensation in the court [said the *Chesholm Courier*] as the witness repeated these words, was something indescribable. A low, angry murmur ran from lip to lip; even the coroner turned pale.

"Witness," he said, "take care! You are on oath, remember. How can you recall accurately word for word what you heard?"

"Are they the sort of words likely to be forgotten?" Jane Pool retorted. "I know I'm on oath; I'll take five hundred oaths to these words, if you like. Those were the very words Miss Inez Catheron spoke. She called him her brother. She said but for him *she* would be alive to-night. Then he plunged into the wood and disappeared, and she went back to the house. I hav'nt spoken of this to any one since. I wrote the words down when I came in. Here is the writing."

She handed the coroner a slip of paper, on which what she had repeated was written.

"I knew I would have to swear to it, so I wrote it down to make sure. But my memory is good; I wouldn't have forgotten."

The witness was rigidly cross-examined, but nothing could shake her testimony.

"The window," she said, "of the room where the murder was committed, opened on a lawn and flower-garden—any one could have entered by it. The knife lay on the table close by."

Dr. Dane was next called and gave his medical testimony. The dagger shown, would inflict the wound that caused Lady Catheron's death. In his opinion, but one blow had been struck and had penetrated the heart. Death must have been instantaneous. A strong, sure hand must have struck the blow.

A TERRIBLE SECRET. A Novel.

The policeman who had found the dagger was called, and testified as to its discovery among the brake, on the evening succeeding the murder.

Miss Catheron was the next and last witness summoned. At the sound of her name a low, ominous hiss was heard—sternly repressed at once by the coroner.

“Miss Catheron came in,” quoth the *Courier*, “as pale as marble and looking as emotionless. Her large dark eyes glanced over the crowded room, and dead silence fell. The young lady gave her evidence clearly and concisely—perfectly calm in tone and manner.

“On the Friday evening in question, the deceased Lady Catheron and myself had a misunderstanding. It was my fault. I made a remark that wounded her, and she retorted by saying I should leave Catheron Royals on the morrow. I answered equally angrily, that I would not, and left the room. When I was alone I began to regret what I had so hastily said. I thought the matter over for a time, and finally resolved to return and apologize. I went back to the nursery, and found Lady Catheron fast asleep. I would not disturb her, and immediately left the room. On the threshold, I encountered Nurse Pool. I had always disliked the woman, and spoke sharply to her, ordering her away. Half an hour after, as I sat in my room alone, Hooper, the butler, came up, and told me my lady was murdered. I was naturally shocked and horrified. I went down with him, and saw her. I hardly knew what to do; I felt stunned and bewildered by the suddenness of so terrible a catastrophe. I told the butler to send for Sir Victor, for the family physician, and the police. I knew not what else to do. I could not remain in the room, because the sight of blood always turns me faint and sick. I retired to my own apartment and remained there until the arrival of Lady Helena Powyss.”

* * * * *

There was one fact, the *Chesholm Courier* did not chronicle, concerning Miss Catheron's evidence—the formal, constrained manner in which it was given, like one who repeats a well-learned lesson by rote.

* * * * *

As she concluded, the coroner ventured to put a few respectful questions.

“On the night succeeding the murder, Miss Catheron, you met after dusk a man in the grounds. Do you object to telling us who that man was?”

“I do,” Miss Catheron replied, haughtily. “I most decidedly object. I have told all I have to tell concerning this murder. About my private affairs I will answer no impertinent questions, either now or at any future time.”

Miss Catheron was then allowed to retire. The jury held a consultation, and it was proposed to adjourn the inquest for a few days, until Juan Catheron should be discovered.

* * * * *

In one of the rooms of the “Mitre,” Miss Catheron stood with Lady Helena, Sir Roger Kendrick, and a few other sympathizing and indignant friends. There was but little said—but little to say. All felt that a dark, terrible cloud was gathering over the girl's head. It broke sooner than they looked for.

As they lingered there for a few moments, awaiting the issue of the inquest, a constable entered with a warrant, approached and touched Miss Catheron lightly on the shoulder.

Lady Helena uttered a gasping cry; Sir Roger strode forward; the young lady slightly recoiled. The constable took off his hat and spoke:

“Very sorry, Miss, but it's my painful duty. I have a warrant here from Squire Smiley, Justice of the Peace, to arrest you on suspicion of wilful murder.”

CHAPTER XI. "RING OUT YOUR BELLS! LET MOURNING SHOWS BE SPREAD!"

Three days after, a long and stately procession passed slowly through the great gates, under the lofty Norman archway, bearing to the Catheron vaults the body of Ethel, last lady Catheron.

A long and sad ceremonial! Why, it seemed only yesterday that that mournful, passing bell had rung out the welcoming peal; but yesterday since they had lit the bon-fires, and tossed their hats in the air, and cheered with all their hearts and souls, the gallant husband and lovely wife. For a "squire of high degree" to marry beneath him, is something that goes home, warm and true, to every humble heart. Sir Victor's tenantry had never been half so proud of him, as when he had brought among them his low-born wife. It seemed but yesterday that all the parish had seen her, walking up this very aisle, in pale, flowing silks, and with the sweetest face the sun ever shone on, leaning on her happy young husband's arm; and now they carried her dead—foully murdered—to the open Catheron vault, and laid her to sleep forever beside the high-born dames of the race who slept their last sleep there.

"All men are equal on the turf and under it," once said a famous sporting nobleman. Ethel Dobb, the London soap-boiler's daughter, took her place to-day, among the dead daughters of earls and marquises, their equal at last, by right divine of the great leveller, Death.

A great and solemn hush pervaded all ranks, sexes, and classes. Struck down in her sleep, without a moment's warning, in her own home—a deep murmur, that was like the murmur of an angry sea, ran through them as they collected together.

Who had done this deed?—the girl confined in Chesholm jail, or her scoundrel brother? They remembered him well—like Ishmael of old, his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him, the head and instigator of every poaching fray, or hen-roost robbery, every fight and evil deed done in Chesholm. Both brother and sister hated her—Inez Catheron that she had taken her lover from her—Juan Catheron that he had lost her himself. After Sir Victor he was heir-at-law. Failing the life of the infant son, he might one day write himself Sir Juan.

It was a lucky thing, croaked the Chesholm gossips, that Nurse Pool had removed the baby, else the dagger that stabbed the mother would have found its way to the heart of the child. Curse the black-hearted murderer of sleeping women and from the throng in the churchyard there rose up a groan to Heaven, and a hundred angry hearts pledged themselves to avenge it if the law would not.

"The coroner would have let the young lady escape," said one. "See how he snubbed Mrs. Pool, and how easily he let her betters off. If Justice Smiley hadn't got out his warrant, she'd have been off to the continent and clear away, long before this."

"Why don't they find Juan Catheron?" said another. "They *say* they're looking for him—why don't they find him then? Murderers don't escape so easily nowadays—the law finds 'em if it wants to find 'em. It's seven days since the murder was done, and no tale or tidings of him yet."

"And when he is found neither he nor his sister shall escape. If the law lets them clear, *we* won't. The time when rank could shield crime is over, thank Heaven. Let them hang as high as Haman—they deserve it. I'll be the first to pull the rope."

Day-by-day, the feeling had grown stronger and bitterer, against brother and sister. The Englishman's proverbial love of "fair play," seemed for once forgotten. The merciful reasoning of the law, that takes every man to be innocent until he is proven guilty, was too lenient to be listened to. The brother had murdered her—the sister had aided and abetted. Let them both hang—that was the *vox populi* of Chesholm—hanging was too good for them.

"How did she take her arrest—she was always as proud as Lucifer and as haughty as a duke's daughter?" asked the curious townfolk.

She had taken it very quietly as though she had expected it. When Lady Helena and Sir Roger had cried out in horror at her arrest, she had stood firm. A slight, sad smile had even crossed her lips.

"Dear Aunt Helena—dear Sir Roger," she had said, "there's nothing to be surprised at. Don't interfere with

this man; he is only doing his duty. I knew this would come. I have expected it from the first. It will be unpleasant for the time—of the result I have no fear. In these days, when so many guilty escape, it is not likely the innocent will be punished. Let me go with this man quietly, Aunt Helena; I,” a flush of proud pain passed over her face, “I don't want the servants—I don't want the rabble to see me.”

She held out her hand to her aunt, and her aunt's old friend.

“Good—by, Aunt Helena,” she said wistfully. “Good—by, Sir Roger. Nothing that they can bring against me will shake your faith in me, I know. You will both come to see me often, I hope, and bring me news of poor Victor. Should—I mean *when* he recovers—don't tell him of this—don't, I beg. It can do no good—it may do him harm. Good—by once more—give my love to Uncle Godfrey. Aunt Helena, don't distress yourself so; I cannot bear it.”

“Do you think I will let you go alone? No, I will go with you to the prison, if these besotted wretches persist in sending you there. But oh, there *must* be some mistake—it is too atrocious. Sir Roger, can't you do something? Great Heaven! the idea of Inez Catheron being lodged in Chesholm jail like a common felon!”

“Sir Roger can do nothing,” Inez answered; “the law must take its course. Let us end this painful scene—let us go at once.” She shuddered in spite of herself. “The sooner it is over the better.”

She shook hands again with Sir Roger. A cab was at the door—the old baronet handed the ladies in, and stood bare-headed, until they were driven out of sight. They reached the square, gloomy, black building called Chesholm jail, standing in the center of a gloomy, paved quadrangle. Miss Catheron was shown to a room. The jailer had once been a servant in the Powyss family, and he pledged himself now to make Miss Inez as comfortable as was admissible under the circumstances.

Once in the dreary room, with the heavy door closed and locked, Lady Helena suddenly fell down on the stone floor before her niece and held up her hands.

“Inez,” she said, “in Heaven's name hear me! You are shielding some one—that guilty man—you saw him do this deed. Speak out! Save yourself—let the guilty suffer. What is he, that you should perish for his sake? He was always evil and guilty—forget his blood flows in your veins—speak out and save yourself. Let him who is guilty suffer for his own crime!”

The soft September twilight was filling the room. One pale flash of sunset came slanting through the grated window and fell on Inez Catheron's face. She stood in the middle of the floor, her clasped hands hanging loosely before her, an indescribable expression on her face.

“Poor Juan,” she said, wearily; “don't be too hard on him, Aunt Helena. We have none of us ever been too gentle with him in his wrong doing, and he wasn't really bad at heart *then*. If any letter should come from him to you, for me, say nothing about it—bring it here. I don't think he will be taken; he can double like a hare, and he is used to being hunted. I hope he is far away at sea before this. For the rest, I have nothing to say—nothing. I can live disgraced and die a felon if need be, but not ten thousand disgraceful deaths can make me speak one word more than I choose to utter.”

Lady Helena's stifled sobbing filled the room. “Oh, my child! my child!” she cried; “what madness is this, and for one so unworthy!”

“But there will be no such tragical ending. I will be tried at the Assizes and acquitted. They *can't* bring me in guilty. Jane Pool's circumstantial evidence may sound very conclusive in the ears of Mr. Justice Smiley, but it won't bring conviction with a grand jury. You see it wasn't sufficient even for the coroner. The imprisonment here will be the worst, but you will lighten that. Then when it is all over, I will leave England and go back to Spain, to my mother's people. They will receive me gladly, I know. It is growing dark, Aunt Helena—pray don't linger here longer.”

Lady Helena arose, her face set in a look of quiet, stubborn resolve.

“Take good care of poor Victor, and watch the baby well. He is the last of the Catherons now, you know. Don't let any one approach Victor but Mrs. Marsh, and warn her not to speak of my arrest—the shock might kill him. I wish—I wish I had treated her more kindly in the past. I feel as though I could never forgive myself now.”

“You had better not talk so much, Inez,” her aunt said, almost coldly. “You may be overheard. I don't pretend to understand you. You know best, whether he, for whom you are making this sacrifice, deserves it or not. Good—night, my poor child—I will see you early to—morrow.”

Lady Helena, her lips set in that rigid line of resolve, her tears dried, rode back to Catheron Royals. The

darkness had fallen by this time—fallen with black, fast-drifting clouds, and chill whistling winds. Two or three lights, here and there, gleamed along the lofty facade of the old mansion, now a house of mourning indeed. Beneath its roof a foul, dark murder had been done—beneath its roof its master lay ill unto death. And for the guilty wretch who had wrought this ruin, Inez Catheron was to suffer imprisonment, suspicion, and life-long disgrace. The curse that the towns-people invoked on Juan Catheron, Lady Helena had it in her heart to echo.

Her first act was to dismiss Jane Pool, the nurse.

“We keep servants, not spies and informers, at Catheron Royals,” she said, imperiously. “Go to Mrs. Marsh—what is due you she will pay. You leave Catheron Royals without a character, and at once.”

“I’m not afraid, my lady,” Jane Pool retorted, with a toss of her head. “People will know why I’m turned away, and I’ll get plenty of places. I knew I would lose my situation for telling the truth, but I’m not the first that has suffered in a good cause.”

Lady Helena had swept away, disdaining all reply. She ascended to Sir Victor’s room—the night-lamp burned low, mournful shadows filled it. A trusty nurse sat patiently by the bedside.

“How is he now?” asked his aunt, bending above him.

“Much the same, your ladyship—in a sort of stupor all the time, tossing about, and muttering ceaselessly. I can’t make out anything he says, except the name Ethel. He repeats that over and over in a way that breaks my heart to hear.”

The name seemed to catch the dulled ear of the delirious man.

“Ethel,” he said, wearily. “Yes—yes I must go and fetch Ethel home. I wish Inez would go away—her black eyes make one afraid—they follow me everywhere. Ethel—Ethel—Ethel!” He murmured the name dreamily, tenderly. Suddenly he half started up in bed and looked about him wildly. “What brings Juan Catheron’s picture here? Ethel! come away from him. How dare you meet him here alone?” He grasped Lady Helena’s wrist and looked at her with haggard, bloodshot eyes. “He was your lover once—how dare he come here? Oh, Ethel you won’t leave me for him! I love you—I can’t live without you—*don’t* go. Oh, my Ethel! my Ethel! my Ethel!”

He fell back upon the bed with a sort of sobbing cry that brought the tears streaming from the eyes of the tender-hearted nurse.

“He goes on like that continual, my lady,” she said, “and it’s awful wearing. Always ‘Ethel.’ Ah, it’s a dreadful thing?”

“Hooper will watch with you to-night, Martha,” Lady Helena said. “Mrs. Marsh will relieve you to-morrow. No stranger shall come near him. I will take a look at baby before going home. I shall return here early to-morrow, and I need not tell you to be very watchful!—I know you will.”

“You needn’t indeed, my lady,” the woman answered, mournfully. “I was his mother’s own maid, and I’ve nursed him in my arms, a little white-haired baby, many a time. I will be watchful, my lady.”

Lady Helena left her and ascended to the night nursery. She had to pass the room where the tragedy had been enacted. She shivered as she went by. She found the little heir of Catheron Royals asleep in his crib, guarded by the under-nurse—head-nurse now, *vice* Mrs. Pool cashiered.

“Take good care of him, nurse,” was Lady Helena’s last charge, as she stooped and kissed him, tears in her eyes; “poor little motherless lamb.”

“I’ll guard him with my life, my lady,” the girl answered, sturdily. “No harm shall come to *him*.”

Lady Helena returned to Powyss Place and her convalescent husband, her heart lying like a stone in her breast.

“If I hadn’t sent for Victor that night—if I had left him at home to protect his wife, this might never have happened,” she thought, remorsefully; “*he* would never have left her alone and unprotected, to sleep beside an open window in the chill night air.”

Amid her multiplicity of occupations, amid her own great distress, she had found time to write to Mr. Dobb and his wife a touching, womanly letter. They had come down to see their dead daughter and departed again. She had been taken out of their life—raised far above them, and even in death they would not claim her.

And now that the funeral was over, Inez in prison, the tumult and excitement at an end, who shall describe the awful quiet that fell upon the old house. A ghastly stillness reigned—servants spoke in whispers, and stole from room to room—the red shadow of Murder rested in their midst. And upstairs, in that dusk chamber, while the nights fell, Sir Victor lay hovering between life and death.

A TERRIBLE SECRET. A Novel.

CHAPTER XII. THE FIRST ENDING OF THE TRAGEDY.

Eight days after the burial of Lady Catheron, several events, occurred that wrought the seething excitement of Chesholm to boiling—over point—events talked of for many an after year, by cottage fireside and manor hearth.

The first of these, was Miss Catheron's examination before the police magistrate, and her committal to jail, until the assizes. The justice before whom the young lady appeared was the same who had already issued his warrant for her arrest—a man likely to show her little favor on account of her youth, her beauty, or her rank. Indeed the latter made him doubly bitter; he was a virulent hater of the “bloated aristocracy.” Now that he had one of them in his power, he was determined to let the world at large, and Chesholm in small see that neither station nor wealth could be shields for crime.

She took her place in the prisoner's dock, pale, proud, disdainful. She glanced over the dark sea of threatening faces that thronged the court-room, with calmly haughty eyes—outwardly unmoved. Her few friends were there—few indeed, for nearly all believed that if hers was not the hand that had struck the blow, she had been at least her brother's abettor. Many were brought forward who could swear how she had hated my lady; how she had taken every opportunity to insult and annoy her; how again and again my lady had been found crying fit to break her heart after the lash of Miss Inez's stinging tongue. She had loved Sir Victor—she was furiously jealous of his wife—she had fiery Spanish blood in her veins, and a passionate temper that stopped at nothing. Jane Pool was there, more bitter than ever—more deadly in her evidence. Hooper was there, and his reluctantly extorted testimony told dead against her. The examination lasted two days. Inez Catheron was re-committed to prison to stand her trial for murder at the next assizes.

The second fact worthy of note was, that despite the efforts of the Chesholm police, in spite of the London detectives, no tale or tidings of Juan Catheron were to be found. The earth might have opened and swallowed him, so completely had he disappeared.

The third fact was, that Sir Victor Catheron had reached the crisis of his disease and passed it safely. The fever was slowly but steadily abating. Sir Victor was not to die, but to “take up the burden of life again”—a dreary burden, with the wife he had loved so fondly, sleeping in the vaults of Chesholm Church.

The fourth fact was, that the infant heir of the Catherons had been removed from Catheron Royals to Powyss Place, to be brought up under the watchful eye and care of his grand-aunt, Lady Helena.

On the evening of the day that saw Inez Catheron committed for trial, the post brought Lady Helena a letter. The handwriting, evidently disguised, was unfamiliar, and yet something about it set her heart throbbing. She tore it open; it contained an inclosure. There were but three lines for herself:

* * * * *

“DEAR LADY H.: If you will permit a reprobate to be on such familiar terms with your highly respectable name, I address I——, under cover to you, as per order. J.C.”

* * * * *

The inclosure was sealed. Lady Helena destroyed her own, and next day drove to the prison with the other. She found her niece sitting comfortably enough in an arm-chair, reading, and except that she had grown thinner and paler, looking little the worse. All that it was possible to do, to make her comfortable, had been done. Without a word the elder woman presented the letter—without a word the younger took it. She turned to the window and read its brief contents.

“Thank Heaven!” her aunt heard her fervently say.

“May I see it, Inez? What does he say? Is he coming here to—”

“Coming here!” The girl's dark eyes looked at her in grave astonishment “Certainly not. He is safe away, I am thankful to say, and out of their reach.”

“And he leaves you here to suffer in his stead, and you thank Heaven for it! Inez Catheron, you are the most egregious—. Give me that note!”

Inez smiled as she gave it. Her aunt put up her double eye-glass, and read:

“ON BOARD THE THREE BELLS,

“OFF PLYMOUTH, Oct.—.

A TERRIBLE SECRET. A Novel.

“DEAR I.:—I've dodged the beaks, you see. I bought a disguise that would have baffled Fouche himself and—here I am. In twenty minutes we'll have weighed anchor and away to the West Indies. I've read the papers, and I'm sorry to see they've taken you on suspicion. Inez, you're a trump, by Jove! I can say no more, but mind you, only I know they can't commit you, I'd come back and confess all. I would, by jingo. I may be a scoundrel, but I'm not such a scoundrel as that.

“I see the baronet's down with brain fever. If he goes off the hooks, there will be only the young 'un between me and the succession. Suppose *he* goes off the hooks too, then I'll be a full-fledged baronet! But of course he won't. I'm always an unlucky beggar. You may write me on board the Three Bells, at Martinique, and let me know how things go on in England. J.”

* * * * *

A flush—a deep angry flush reddened the face of Lady Helena Powyss, as she finished this cool epistle. She crushed it in her hand as though it were a viper.

“The coward! the dastard! And it is for the heartless writer of this insolent letter that you suffer all this. Inez Catheron. I command you—speak out. Tell what you know. Let the guilty wretch you call brother, suffer for his own crime.”

Inez looked at her, with something of the stern, haughty glance she had cast upon the rabble of the court room.

“Enough, Lady Helena! You don't know what you are talking about. I have told you before; all I had to say I said at the inquest. It is of no use our talking about it. Come what may, I will never say one word more.”

And looking at her stern, resolute face, Lady Helena knew she never would. She tore the letter she held into minutest morsels, and tied them up in her handkerchief.

“I'll burn them when I get home, and I never want to hear *his* name again. For you,” lowering her voice, “we must save you in spite of yourself. You shall never stand your trial at the assizes.”

Miss Catheron looked wistfully at the heavily bolted and barred window.

“I should like to be saved,” she said, wearily, “at any other price than that of speaking. Once I thought I would die sooner than stoop to run away—a fortnight's imprisonment changes all that. Save me if you can, Aunt Helena—it will kill me to face that horrible mob again.”

Her voice died out in a choking sob. She was thoroughly brave, but she shuddered with sick fear and loathing, from head to foot, as she recalled the dark, vindictive faces, the merciless eyes that had confronted her yesterday on every side.

Lady Helena kissed her quietly and turned to go.

“Keep up heart,” she said; “before the week ends you shall be free.”

Two days later, Lady Helena and the warden of Chesholm jail sat closeted together in deep and mysterious conference. On the table between them lay a crossed check for seven thousand pounds.

The jailor sat with knitted brows and troubled, anxious face. He had been for years a servant in Lady Helena's family. Her influence had procured him his present situation. He had a sick wife and a large family, and seven thousand pounds was an immense temptation.

“You risk nothing,” Lady Helena was saying, in an agitated whisper, “and you gain everything. They will blame you for nothing worse than carelessness in the discharge of your duty. You may lose your situation. Very well, lose it. Here are seven thousand pounds for you. In all your life, grubbing here, you would never accumulate half or quarter that sum. You can remove to London; trust to my influence to procure you a better situation there than this. And oh, think of *her*—young, guiltless—think what her life has been, think what it is now destined to be. She is innocent—I swear it. You have daughters of your own, about her age—think of them and yield!”

He stretched forth his hand and answered, resolutely:

“Say no more, my lady. Let good or ill betide—I'll do it.”

The issue of the *Chesholm Courier* four days later contained a paragraph that created the profoundest excitement from end to end of the town. We quote it:

* * * * *

“ESCAPE OF MISS INEZ CATHERON FROM CHESHOLM JAIL—NO TRACE OF HER TO BE FOUND—SUSPECTED FOUL PLAY—THE JAILER THREATENED BY THE MOB.

* * * * *

“Early on the morning of Tuesday the under jailer, going to Miss Catheron's cell with her breakfast, found, to

his astonishment and dismay, that it was empty and his prisoner flown.

“A moment's investigation showed him the bars of the window cleanly filed through and removed. A rope ladder and a friend without, it is quite evident, did the rest. The man instantly gave the alarm and aid came. The head jailer appears to be as much at a loss as his underling, but he is suspected. He lived in his youth in the Powyss family, and was suspected of a strong attachment to the prisoner. He says he visited Miss Catheron last night as usual when on his rounds, and saw nothing wrong or suspicious then, either about the filed bars or the young lady. It was a very dark night, and no doubt her escape was easily enough effected. If any proof of the prisoner's guilt were needed, her flight from justice surely renders it. Miss Catheron's friends have been permitted from the first to visit her at their pleasure and bring her what they chose—the result is to be seen to-day. The police, both of our town and the metropolis, are diligently at work. It is hoped their labors will be more productive of success in the case of the sister than they have been in that of the brother.

“The head jailer, it is said, will be dismissed from his post. No doubt, pecuniarily, this is a matter of indifference to him *now*. He made his appearance once in the street this morning, and came near being mobbed. Let this escape be rigidly investigated, and let all implicated be punished.”

The escape created even more intense and angry excitement than the murder. The rabble were furious. It is not every day that a young lady of the upper ten thousand comes before the lower ten million in the popular character of a murderess. They had been lately favored with such rich and sensational disclosures in high life, love, jealousy, quarrels, assassination. Their victim was safely in their hands; they would try her, condemn her, hang her, and teach the aristocracy, law was a game two could play at. And lo! in the hour of their triumph, she slips from between their hands, and, like her guilty brother and abettor, makes good her escape.

The town of Chesholm was furious. If the jailer had shown his face he stood in danger of being torn to pieces. They understood thoroughly how it was—that he had been bribed. In the dead of night, the man and his family shook the dust of Chesholm off their feet, and went to hide themselves in the busy world of London.

Three weeks passed. October, with its mellow days and frosty nights, was gone. And still no trace of the fugitive. All the skill of the officials of the town and country had been baffled by the cunning of a woman. Inez Catheron might have flown with the dead summer's swallows for all the trace she had left behind.

The first week of November brought still another revelation. Sir Victor Catheron had left the Royals; Lady Helena, the squire, the baby, the nurse, Powyss Place. They were all going to the south of France for the young baronet's spirits and health. Catheron Royals, in charge of Mrs. Marsh and Mr. Hooper, and two servants, on board wages, was left to silence and gloom, rats and evil repute, autumnal rain and wind. The room of the tragedy was shut up, a doomed room, “under the ban” forever.

And so for the present the “tragedy of Catheron Royals” had ended. Brother and sister had fled in their guilt, alike from justice and vengeance. Ethel, Lady Catheron, lay with folded hands and sealed lips in the grim old vaults, and a parchment and a monument in Chesholm Church recorded her name and age—no more. So for the present it had ended.

A TERRIBLE SECRET. A Novel.

PART II.

CHAPTER I. MISS DARRELL.

It had been a week of ceaseless rain—the whole country side was sodden. The month was March, and after an unusually severe January and February, a “soft spell” had come, the rain had poured or dripped incessantly from a smoke-colored sky, the state of the earth was only to be described by that one uncomfortable word “slush.” Spring was at hand after a horribly bitter winter—a spring that was all wet and slop, miserable easterly winds, and bleak, drizzling rain.

Perhaps if you searched the whole coast line between Maine and Florida, you could not light upon a drearier, dirtier, duller little town than the town of Sandypoint, Massachusetts. It was a straggling place, more village than town, consisting mainly of one long street, filled with frame houses of staring white, picked out with red doors and very green shutters. Half a dozen pretentious “stores,” a school-house, one or two churches, a town hall, and three hotels, comprised the public buildings. Behind Sandypoint stretched out the “forest primeval;” before Sandypoint spread away its one beauty, the bright, broad sea.

To-day it looked neither bright nor broad, but all blurred in gray wet mist; the surf cannonaded the shore with its dull thunder; the woodland in the background was a very black forest in the dreariness, and the roads—who shall paint the state of the Sandypoint roads? Worst of all, the weather showed no sign of relenting, no symptoms of clearing up. The new clock recently affixed to the Sandypoint Town Hall, was striking the matutinal hour of ten. The population of Sandypoint might all have been dead and buried, for any sign of life Independence street showed. Doors and windows were all closed in a melancholy way—a stray, draggled dog the only living creature to be seen.

Or stay—no! there was a girl besides the dog, almost as draggled as her four-footed companion. A girl of eighteen, perhaps, who walked along through rain and discomfort, without so much as an umbrella to protect her. She had come out of one of the ugliest of the ugly buildings nearest the sea, and walked along in a slipshod sort of way, never turning to the right or left to avoid an unusually deep puddle. She plunged right on through it all—a dark, sullen-looking girl in a shabby black dress, a red and black tartan shawl, an old black felt hat with dingy red flowers, long past being spoiled by rain or wind.

And yet she was a pretty girl too—a *very* pretty girl. Take the Venus Celestis, plump her down in a muddy road in a rainstorm, dress her in a draggled black alpaca, a faded shawl, and shocking bad hat, and what can you say for your goddess but that she isn't a bad-looking young woman? Miss Edith Darrell labors under all these disadvantages at present. More—she looks sulky and sour; it is evident her personal appearance has troubled her very little this dismal March morning. And yet as you look at her, at those big black somber eyes, at those almost classically regular features, at all that untidy abundance of blackish-brown hair, you think involuntarily “what a pretty girl that might be if she only combed her hair, put on a clean dress, and wasn't in bad temper!”

She is tall, she is slender—there is a supple grace about her even now—she has shapely feet and hands. She is a brunette of the most pronounced type, with a skin like creamy velvet, just touched on either ripe cheek with a peach-like glow, and with lips like cherries. You *know* without seeing her laugh, that she has very white teeth. She is in no way inclined to show her white teeth laughingly this morning. She goes steadily along to her destination—one of the “stores” where groceries and provisions are sold. The storekeeper smilingly accosts her with a brisk “Good-morning, Miss Darrell! Who'd have thought of seeing you out this nasty whether? Can I do anything for you to-day?”

“If you couldn't do anything for me, Mr. Webster,” answers Miss Darrell, in no very conciliatory tone, “it isn't likely you'd see me in your shop this morning. Give me one pound of tea, one pound of coffee, three pounds of brown sugar, and a quarter of starch. Put them in this basket, and I'll call for them when I'm going home.”

She goes out again into the rain, and makes her way to an emporium where dry goods, boots and shoes, millinery, and crockery are for sale. A sandy-haired young man, with a sandy mustache and a tendency to blushes, springs forward at sight of her, as though galvanized, reddening to the florid roots of his hair.

“Miss Darrell!” he cries, in a sort of rapture. “Who'd a thought it? So early in the morning, and without an umbrella! How's your pa and ma, and all the children?”

“My pa and ma, and all the children are well of course,” the young lady answers, impatiently, as though it

were out of the nature of things for anything to ail her family. "Mr. Doolittle, I want six yards of crash for kitchen towels, three pairs of shoes for the children, and two yards and a half of stone-colored ribbon for Mrs. Darrell's drab bonnet. And be quick."

The blushes and emotion of young Mr. Doolittle, it was quite evident, were entirely thrown away upon Miss Darrell. "Not at home to lovers," was plainly written on her moody brow and impatient lips. So Mr. Doolittle produced the crash and cut off the six yards, the three pairs of shoes were picked out, and the stoniest of the stone colors chosen, the parcel tied up and paid for.

"We didn't see you up to Squire Whipple's surprise party last night, Miss Edith," Mr. Doolittle timidly ventured, with a strong "Down East" accent. "We had a hunky supper and a rale good time."

"No, you didn't see me, Mr. Doolittle, and I don't think you're likely to in a hurry, either. The deadly liveliness of Sandypoint surprise parties, and the beauty of Sandypoint, and its beastly weather are about on a par—the parties, if anything, the most dismal of the three."

With which the young lady went out with a cool parting nod. There was one more errand to go—this one for herself. It was to the post-office, and even the old post-master lit up into a smile of welcome at sight of his visitor. It was evident, that when in good temper Miss Darrell must be rather a favorite in the neighborhood.

"Letters for you? Well, yes, Miss Edie, I think there is. What's this? Miss Edith S. Darrell, Sandypoint Mass. That's for you, and from New York again, I see. Ah! I hope none o' them York chaps will be coming down here to carry away the best-lookin' gal in town."

He handed her the letter. For a moment her dark face lit up with an eager flush; as she took the letter it fell. It was superscribed in a girl's spidery tracery, sealed with blue wax, and a sentimental French seal and motto.

"From Trixy," she said, under her breath; "and I felt sure there would be one from—Are you *sure* this is all, Mr. Merriweather? I expected another."

"Sure and certain, Miss Edie. Sorry to disappoint you, but that's all. Never mind, my dear—he'll write by next mail."

She turned shortly away, putting the letter in her pocket. Her face relapsed again, into what seemed its habitual look of gloom and discontent.

"He's like all the rest of the world," she thought, bitterly, "out of sight, out of mind. I was a fool to think he would remember me long. I only wonder Beatrix takes the trouble of writing to this dead-and-alive place. One thing is very certain—she won't do it long."

She returned for her parcels, and set out on her wet return walk home. Mr. Doolittle volunteered to escort her thither, but she made short work of *him*. Through the rain, through the slop, wet, cold, comfortless, the girl left the ugly town behind her, and came out on the lonely road that led along to the sea. Five minutes more, brought her in sight of her home—a forlorn house, standing bleak and bare on a cliff. One path led to it—another to the sands below. At the point where she must turn either way, Miss Darrell stood still and looked moodily up at the house.

"If I go there," she muttered, "she'll set me to hem the towels, or trim the bonnet, or make a pudding for dinner. It's wash day, and I know what *that* means in our house. I *won't* go—it's better out in the rain; the towels and the drab bonnet may go *au diable*, and my blessed stepmother with them, if it comes to that."

She turned sharply and took the path to the right. Half way down she came to a sort of projection in the cliff, partly sheltered from the rain by a clump of spruce-trees. Seating herself on this, with the grey sea sending its flying spray almost up in her face, she drew forth her letter, broke the seal, and read:

NEW YORK, March 13, 18—.

"DEAREST DITHY:—Just half-an-hour ago I came home from a *splendid* ball, the most splendid by far of the winter, and before one ray of all its brilliance fades from my frivolous mind, let me sit down and tell you all about it if I can.

"The ball was held at the De Rooyter house, up the avenue, in honor of their distinguished English guests, Lady Helena Powyss, of Powyss Place, Cheshire, and Sir Victor Catheron, of Catheron Royals, Cheshire. How grand the titles sound! My very pen expands as it writes those patrician names. Lady Helena. Oh, Dithy! *how* delicious it must be to be, 'My Lady!'

"What did I wear, you ask? Well, my dear, I wore a lovely trained green silk—gas—light green, you know, under white tulle, all looped up with trailing sprays of lily of the valley and grasses—ditto, ditto, in my hair, and just one pink, half-blown rose. A trying costume you say? Yes, I know it, but you see, the only beauty poor Trixy

can claim is a tolerable pink and white complexion, and a decent head of light brown hair. So I carried it off—everyone says I really looked my very best, and—don't set this down to vanity dear—the gentlemen's eyes indorsed it. I danced all night, and here is where the rapture comes in, three times with the baronet. I can't say much for his waltzing, but he's delightful, Dithy—charming. Could a baronet be anything else? He talks with that delightful English accent, which it is impossible to imitate or describe—he is very young, about three-and-twenty, I should judge, and really (in that blonde English way) very handsome. His hair is very light—he has large, lovely, short-sighted blue eyes, and wears an eye-glass. Now, I think an eye-glass is distinguished looking in itself, and it is *haut ton* to be short sighted. Why are they in New York do I hear you say? Lady Helena was recommended a sea voyage for her health, and her nephew accompanied her. Lady Helena is not young nor beautiful, as you might imagine, but a fair, fat, and sixty, I should say, British matron. She is the daughter of the late Marquis of St Albans, and a widow, her husband having died some time ago. And they are immensely rich. IMMENSELY, Dithy! Capitals can't do justice to it. And of course all the young ladies last night were making a dead set at the young baronet Oh, Dithy—child, if he should only fall in love with me—with ME, and make me Lady Catheron, I believe I should just die of pure ecstasy (is that word spelled right?) like Lord Berleigh's bride in the story. Fancy yourself reading it in the papers:

“On the ——th inst, by the Rev. Blank Blank, assisted by etc., etc., at the residence of the bride's father, Sir Victor Catheron, Baronet, of Catheron Royals, Cheshire, England, to Beatrix Marie Stuart, only daughter of James Stuart, Esq., banker of Fifth avenue, New York. *No Cards!*”

“Dithy, think of it! It makes my brain swim, and stranger things have happened. My twentieth birthday comes next week, and ma gives a large party, and Lady H. and Sir V. are coming. I am to wear a pink silk with trimmings of real point, and pa sent home a set of pearls from Tiffany's yesterday, for which he gave \$1,000. If the rose silk and pearls fail to finish him, then there is another project on the carpet. It is this, Lady H. and Sir V. go home the first week of May, and we are going with them in the same ship. I say *we*—pa, ma, Charley, and me. Won't it be lovely? If *you* were coming, you might write a book about our haps and mishaps. I think they will equal the 'Dodd Family Abroad.' Seriously, though, Edith dear, I wish you were coming with us. It's a burning shame that you should be buried alive down in that poky Sandypoint, with your cleverness, and your accomplishments, and good looks, and everything. If I marry the baronet, Dith, I shall take you with me to England, and you shall live happy forever after.

“I set out to tell you of the De Rooyter ball, and see how I run on. All New York was there—the crush was awful, the music excellent, the supper—heavenly! Sir Victor likes us Americans *so* much; but then who could help liking us? Oh, it has been a charming winter—parties somewhere every night. Nilsson singing for us, some sleighing, and skating no end. I have had the loveliest skating costume, of violet velvet, satin and ermine—words can't do it justice.

“Hark! A clock down—stairs strikes five, and, 'Kathleen Mavourneen, the grey dawn is breaking' over the deserted city streets. As Lady Macbeth says, 'To bed—to bed!' With endless love, and endless kisses, ever thine own.

“BEATRIX.”

She finished the letter—it dropped upon her lap, and her large, dark eyes looked blankly out over the cold, gray, rain-beaten sea. *This* was the life she longed for, prayed for, dreamed of, the life for which she would have sold half the years of her life. The balls, the operas, the rose silks and pearls, the booths and merry-go rounds of Vanity Fair. She thirsted for them as the blind thirst for sight. She longed for the “halls of dazzling light,” the dainty dishes, the violet velvet and ermine, with a longing no words can paint. She had youth and beauty; she would have suited the life as the life suited her. Nature had made her for it, and Fate had planted her here in the dreariest of all dreary sea-coast towns.

The rain beat upon her uncovered head, the cold wind blew in her face—she felt neither. Her heart was full of tumult, revolt, bitterness untold.

Beatrix Stuart's father had been her dead mother's cousin. Why was Beatrix chosen among the elect of Mammon, and Edith left to drag out “life among the lowly?” She sat here while the moments wore on, the letter crushed in her lap, her lips set in a line of dull pain. The glory of the world, the flesh-pots of Egypt, the purple and fine linen of life, her heart craved with an exceeding great longing, and all life had given her was hideous poverty, going errands in shabby hats, and her stepmother's rubbers, through rain and mud, and being waited upon

by such men as Sam Doolittle. She looked with eyes full of passionate despair at the dark, stormy sea.

"If I only had courage," she said, between her set teeth, "to jump in there and make an end of it. I will some day—or I'll run away. I don't much care what becomes of me. Nothing can be worse than this sort of life—nothing."

She looked dangerous as she thought it—dangerous to herself and others, and ready for any desperate deed. So absorbed was she in her own gloomy thoughts, as she sat there, that she never heard a footstep descending the rocky path behind her. Suddenly two gloved hands were clasped over her eyes, and a mellow, masculine voice, sang a verse of an appropriate song:

"Break, break, break,
On thy cold grey stones, oh sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.'

"I would that my tongue could utter the thoughts that arise in me, concerning young ladies who sit perched on rocks in the rain. Is it your favorite amusement, may I ask, Miss Darrell, to sit here and be rained on? And are there no lunatic asylums in Sandypoint, that they allow such people as you to go at large?"

She sprang to her feet and confronted him, her breath caught, her eyes dilating.

"Oh!" she cried, in a breathless sort of way, "it *is* Charley!"

She held out both her hands, the whole expression of her face changing—her eyes like stars.

"Charley, Miss Darrell, and if it had been the Man in the Moon you could hardly look more thunderstruck. And now, if I may venture to propound so delicate a conundrum, how long is it since you lost your senses? Or had you ever any to lose, that you sit here in the present beastly state of the weather, to get comfortably drenched to the skin?"

He was holding both her hands, and looking at her as he spoke—a young man of some five—and—twenty, with grey eyes and chestnut hair, well-looking and well-dressed, and with that indescribable air of ease and fashion which belongs to the "golden youth" of New York.

"You don't say you're glad to see me, Dithy, and you *do* look uncommonly blank. Will you end my agonizing suspense on this point, Miss Darrell, by saving it now, and giving me a sociable kiss?"

He made as though he would take it, but Edith drew back, laughing and blushing a little.

"You know what Gretchen says to Faust: 'Love me as much as you like, but no kissing, that is vulgar.' I agree with Gretchen—it is vulgar. Oh, Mr. Stuart, what a surprise this is! I have just been reading a letter from your sister, and she doesn't say a word of your coming."

"For the excellent reason that she knew nothing about it when that letter was written. Let me look at you, Edie. What have you been doing to yourself since I left, that you should fall away to a shadow in this manner? But perhaps your failing is the natural and inevitable result of my leaving?"

"No doubt. Life would naturally be insupportable without you. Whatever *I* may have lost, Mr. Stuart, it is quite evident you have not lost the most striking trait in your character—your self-conceit."

"No," the young man answered; "my virtues are as lasting as they are numerous. May I ask, how it is that I have suddenly become 'Mr. Stuart,' when it has been 'Charley' and 'dear Cousin Charley' for the past two years?"

Miss Darrell laughed a little and blushed a little again, showing very white teeth and lovely color.

"I have been reading Trixy's letter, and it fills me with an awful respect for you and all the Stuart family. How could I presume to address as plain Charley any one so fortunate as the bosom friend of a baronet?"

"Ah!" Mr. Stuart remarked, placidly; "Trixy's been giving you a quarter quire crossed sheets of that, has she? You really wade through that poor child's interminable epistles, do you? I hardly know which to admire most, the genius that can write twenty pages of—nothing—or the patience which reads it, word for word. This one is Sir Victor from date to signature, I'll swear. Well, yes, Miss Darrell, I know the baronet, and he's a very heavy swell and a blue diamond of the first water. Talk of pedigree, there's a pedigree, if you like. A Catheron, of Catheron, was hand and glove with Alfred the Great. He's a very lucky young fellow, and why the gods should have singled *him* out as the recipient of their favors, and left *me* in the cold, is a problem I can't solve. He's a baronet, he has more thousands a year, and more houses in more counties than you, with your limited knowledge of arithmetic, could count. He has a fair complexion, a melancholy contrast on that point to you, my poor Edith; he has incipient, pale, yellow whiskers, he has an English accent, and he goes through life mostly in a suit of Oxford

mixture and a round felt hat. He's a very fine fellow, and I approve of him. Need I say more?"

"More would be superfluous. If you approve of him, my lord, all is said in that. And Lady Helena?"

"Lady Helena is a ponderous and venerable matron, in black silks, Chantilly lace, and marabout feathers, who would weigh down sixteen of you and me, and who worships the ground her nephew walks on. She is the daughter of a marquis and a peeress in her own right. Think of that, you poor, little, half-civilized Yankee girl, and blush to remember you never had an ancestor. But why do I waste my breath and time in these details, when Trix has narrated them already by the cubic foot. Miss Darrell, *you* may be a mermaid or a kelpie—that sort of young person does exist, I believe, in a perpetual shower bath, but I regret to inform you *I* am mortal—very mortal—subject to melancholy colds in the head, and depressing attacks of influenza. At the present moment, my patent leather boots are leaking at every pore, the garments I wear beneath this gray overcoat are saturated, and little rills of rain water are trickling down the small of my back. You nursed me through one prolonged siege of fever and freezing—unless you are especially desirous of nursing me through another, perhaps we had better get out of this. I merely throw out the suggestion—it's a matter of indifference to me."

Edith laughed and turned to go.

"As it is by no means a matter of indifference to me, I move an adjournment to the house. No, thank you, I don't want your arm. This isn't the fashionable side of Broadway, at four o'clock of a summer afternoon. I talk of it, as though I had been there—I who never was farther than Boston in my life, and who, judging from present appearances, never will."

"Then," said Mr. Stuart, "it's very rash and premature to judge by present appearances, my errand here being to—Miss Darrell, doesn't it strike you to inquire *what* my errand here may be?"

"Shooting," Miss Darrell said, promptly.

"Shooting in March. Good Heavens, no!"

"Fishing then."

"Fishing is a delightful recreation in a rippling brook, on a hot August day, but in this month and in this weather! For a Massachusetts young lady, Dithy, I must say your guessing education has been shamefully neglected. No, I have come for something better than either fishing or shooting—I have come for *you*."

"Charley!"

"I've got her note somewhere," said Charley, feeling in his pockets as they walked along, "if it hasn't melted away in the rain. No, here it is. Did Trix, by any chance, allude to a projected tour of the governor's and the maternal's to Europe?"

"Yes." Her eyes were fixed eagerly on his face, her lips apart, and breathless. "Oh, Charley! what do you mean?"

In the intensity of her emotions she forgets to be formal, and becomes natural and cousinly once more.

"Ah! I am Charley again. Here is the note. As it is your healthful and refreshing custom to read your letters in the rain, I need hardly urge you to open and peruse this one."

Hardly! She tore it open, and ran over it with kindling cheeks and fast throbbing heart.

* * * * *

"MY DEAR EDITH: Mr. Stuart and myself, Charles and Beatrix, propose visiting Europe in May. From my son I learn that you are proficient in the French and German languages, and would be invaluable to us on the journey, besides the pleasure your society will afford us all. If you think six hundred dollars per annum sufficient recompense for your services and *all* your expenses paid, we shall be glad to have you return (under proper female charge) with Charley. I trust this will prove acceptable to you, and that your papa will allow you to come. The advantages of foreign travel will be of inestimable benefit to a young lady so thoroughly educated and talented as yourself. Beatrix bids me add she will never forgive you if you do not come.

"With kindest regards to Mr. and Mrs. Darrell, I remain, my dear Edith, Very sincerely yours,

"CHARLOTTE STUART."

* * * * *

She had come to a stand still in the middle of the muddy road, while in a rapture she devoured this. Now she looked up, her face transfigured—absolutely glorified. Go to Europe! France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland! live in that radiant upper world of her dreams! She turned to Charley, and to the unutterable surprise of that young gentleman, flung her arms around him, and gave him a frantic hug.

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“Charley! Charley! *Oh*, Charley!” was all she could cry.

Mr. Stuart returned the impulsive embrace, with a promptitude and warmth that did him credit.

“I never knew a letter of my mother's to have such a pleasant effect before. How delightful it must be to be a postman. It is yes, then, Edith?”

“Oh, Charley! as if it could be anything else? I owe this to you—I know I do. How shall I ever thank you?”

“By a repetition of your little performance. You won't? Well, as your stepmother is looking at us out of the window, with a face of verjuice, perhaps it is just as well. You're sure the dear old dad won't say no?”

“Poor papa!” her radiant face clouded a little, “he *will* miss me, but no—he couldn't refuse me anything if he tried—least of all this. Charley, I *do* thank you—dear, best cousin that ever was—with all my heart!”

She held out both hands, her heart full, and brimming over in her black eyes. For once in his life Charley Stuart forgot to be flippant and cynical. He held the hands gently, and he looked half-laughingly, half-compassionately into the flushed, earnest face.

“You poor child!” he said; “and you think the world outside this sea, and these sandhills, is all sunshine and *colour de rose*. Well, think so—it's a harmless delusion, and one that won't last. And whatever betides,” he said this earnestly, “whatever this new life brings, you'll never blame *me*, Edith, for having taken you away from the old one?”

“Never!” she answered. And she kept her word. In all the sadness—the shame, the pain of the after-time, she would never have gone back if she could—she never blamed him.

They walked on in silence. They were at the door of the ugly bleak house which Edith Darrell for eighteen years had called home, but which she was never to call home more. You would hardly have known her—so bright, so beautiful in a moment had Hope made her—a smile on her lips, her eyes like dark diamonds. For Charley, he watched her, as he might some interesting natural curiosity.

“When am I to be ready?” she asked him, softly, at the door.

“The sooner the better,” he answered.

Then she opened it and went in.

CHAPTER II. A NIGHT IN THE SNOW.

One snowy February night, just two years before, Edith Darrel and Charles Stuart had met for the first time—met in a very odd and romantic way.

Before relating that peculiar first meeting, let me premise that Edith Darrell's mother had been born a Miss Eleanor Stuart, the daughter of a rich New York merchant, who had fallen in love at an early period of her career with her father's handsome book-keeper, Frederic Darrell, had eloped with him, and been cast off by her whole family from thenceforth, forever. Ten years' hard battling with poverty and ill-health had followed, and then one day she kissed her husband and little daughter for the last time, and drifted wearily out of the strife. Of course Mr. Darrell, a year or two after, married again for the sake of having some one to look after his house and little Edith as much as anything else. Mrs. Darrell No. 2 was in every respect the exact contrast of Mrs. Darrell No. 1. She was a brisk little woman, with snapping black eyes, a sharp nose, a complexion of saffron, and a tongue like a carving-knife. Frederic Darrell was by nature a feeble, helpless sort of man, but she galvanized even him into a spasmodic sort of life. He was master of three living languages and two dead ones.

"If you can't support your family by your hands, Mr. Darrell," snapped his wife, "support them by your head. There are plenty young men in the world ready to learn French and German, Greek and Latin, if they can learn them at a reasonable rate. Advertise for these young men, and I'll board them when they come."

He obeyed, the idea proved a good one, the young men came, Mrs. Darrell boarded and lodged them, Mr. Darrell coached them in classics and languages. Edith shot up like a hop-vine. Five more little Darrells were added in the fulness of time, and the old problem, that not all the mathematics he knew could ever solve, how to make both ends meet, seemed as knotty as ever. For his daughter he felt it most of all. The five great noisy boys who called Mrs. Darrell "ma," he looked at through his spectacles in fear and trembling. His handsome daughter he loved with his whole heart. Her dead mother's relatives were among the plutocracy of New York, but even the memory of the dead Eleanor seemed to have faded utterly out of their minds.

One raw February afternoon two years before this March morning, Edith Darrell set out to walk from Millfield, a large manufacturing town, five miles from Sandypoint, home. She had been driven over in the morning by a neighbor, to buy a new dress; she had dined at noon with an acquaintance, and as the Millfield clocks struck five, set out to walk home. She was a capital walker; she knew the road well; she had the garnet merino clasped close in her arms, a talisman against cold or weariness, and thinking how well she would look in it next Thursday at the party, she tripped blithely along. A keen wind blew, a dark drifting sky hung low over the black frozen earth, and before Miss Darrell had finished the first mile of her pilgrimage, the great feathery snow flakes began whirling down. She looked up in dismay—snow! She had not counted on that. Her way lay over hills and down valleys, the path was excellent, hard and beaten, but if it snowed—and night was coming on fast. What should she do? Prudence whispered, "turn back;" youth's impatience and confidence in itself cried out, "go on," Edith went on.

It was as lonely a five-mile walk as you would care to take in an August noontide. Think what it must have been this stormy February evening. She was not entirely alone. "Don Caesar," the house dog, a big English mastiff, trotted by her side. At long intervals, down by-paths and across fields, there were some half dozen habitations, between Millfield and Sandypoint—that was all. Faster, faster came the white whirling flakes; an out-and-out February snow storm had set in.

Again—should she turn back? She paused half a minute to debate the question. If she did there would be a sleepless night of terror for her nervous father at home. And she *might* be able to keep the path with the "Don's" aid. Personal fear she felt none; she was a thoroughly brave little woman, and there was a spice of adventure in braving the storm and going on. She shook back her clustering curls, tied her hood a little tighter, wrapped her cloak more closely around her, whistled cheerily to Don Caesar, and went on.

"In the bright lexicon of youth there is no such word as 'Fail'," she said gayly, patting the Don's shaggy head. "*En avant, Don Caesar, mon brave!*" The Don understood French; he licked his mistress's hand and trotted contentedly before.

"As if I *could* lose the path with the Don," she thought; "what a goose I am. I shall make Mamma Darrell cut

out my garnet merino, and begin it before I go to bed to-night."

She walked bravely and brightly on, whistling and talking to Don Caesar at intervals. Another mile was got over, and the night had shut down, white with whirling drifts. It was all she could do now, to make her way against the storm, and it grew worse every instant. Three miles of the five lay yet before her. Her heart began to fail her a little; the path was lost in the snow, and even the Don began to be at fault. The drifting wilderness nearly blinded her, the deep snow was unutterably fatiguing. There was but one thing in her favor—the night, for February, was mild. She was all in a glow of warmth, but what if she should get lost and flounder about here until morning? And what would papa think of her absence?

She stopped short again. If she could see a light she would make for it, she thought, and take refuge from the night and storm. But through the white whirl no light was to be seen. Right or wrong, nothing remained but to go on.

Hark! what was that? She stopped once more—the Don pricked up his sagacious ears. A cry unmistakably—a cry of distress.

Again it came, to the left, faint and far off. Yes—no doubt about it, a cry for help.

She did not hesitate a moment. Strangers, who had tried this hillpath before now, had been found stark frozen next day.

"Find him, Don—find him, good fellow!" she said and turned at once in the direction of the call.

"Coming!" she shouted, aloud. "Where are you? Call again."

"Here," came faintly over the snow. "Here, to the left."

She shouted back a cheery answer. Once more came a faint reply—then all was still.

Suddenly the Don stopped. Impossible to tell where they were, but there, prostrate in a feathery drift, lay the dark figure of a man. The girl bent down in the darkness, and touched the cold face with her hand.

"What is the matter?" she asked. "How do you come to be lying here?"

There was just life enough left within him, to enable him to answer faintly.

"I was on my way to Sandypoint—the night and storm overtook me. I missed the path and my footing; I slipped, and have broken my leg, I'm afraid. I heard you whistling to your dog and tried to call. I didn't dream it was a woman, and I am sorry I have brought you out of your way. Still, as you *are* here, if you will tell them at the nearest house, and—" his voice died entirely away, in the sleepy cadence of a freezing man.

The nearest house—where *was* the nearest house? Why, this poor fellow would freeze to death in half an hour if left to himself. Impossible to leave him. What should she do? She thought for a moment. Quick and bright of invention, she made up her mind what to do, she had in her pocket a little passbook and pencil. In the darkness she tore out a leaf—in the darkness she wrote, "Follow Don. Come at once." She pinned the note in her handkerchief—tied the handkerchief securely round the dog's neck, put her arms about him, and gave his black head a hug.

"Go home, Don, go home," she said, "and fetch papa here."

The large, half-human eyes looked up at her. She pushed him away with both hands, and with a low growl of intelligence he set off. And in that sea of snow, lost in the night, Edith Darrell was alone with a freezing man.

In her satchel, among her other purchases, she had several cents' worth of matches for household consumption. With a girl's curiosity, even in that hour, to see what the man was like, she struck a match and looked at him. It flared through the white darkness a second or two, then went out. That second showed her a face as white as the snow itself, the eyes closed, the lips set in silent pain. She saw a shaggy great coat, and fur cap, and—a gentleman, even in that briefest of brief glances.

"You mustn't go to sleep," she said, giving him a shake; "do you hear me, sir? You mustn't go to sleep."

"Yes—mustn't I?" very drowsily.

"You'll freeze to death if you do." A second shake. "Oh, do rouse up like a good fellow, and try to keep awake. I've sent my dog for help, and I mean to stay with you until it comes. Does your leg pain you much?"

"Not now. It did, but I—feel—sleepy, and—"

"I tell you, you *mustn't!*" She shook him so indignantly this time that he did rouse up. "Do you want to freeze to death? I tell you, sir, you must wake up and talk to *me*."

"Talk to you? I beg your pardon—it's awfully good of you to stay with me, but I can't allow it. You'll freeze yourself."

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“No, I won't. *I'm* all right. It isn't freezing hard to-night, and if you hadn't broken your leg, you wouldn't freeze either. I wish I could do something for you. Let me rub your hands—it may help to keep you awake. And see, I'll wrap this round your feet to keep them out of the snow.”

And then—who says that heroic self-sacrifice has gone out of fashion?—she unfurled the garnet merino and twisted its glowing folds around the boots of the fallen man.

“It's awfully good of you, you know,” he could but just repeat. “If I am saved I shall owe my life to you. I think by your voice you are a young lady. Tell me your name?”

“Edith.”

“A pretty name, and a sweet voice. Suppose you rub my other hand? How delightfully warm yours are! I begin to feel better already. If we *don't* freeze to death, I shouldn't much mind how long this sort of thing goes on. If we do, they'll find us, like the babes in the wood, under the snow-drifts to-morrow.”

Miss Darrell listened to all this, uttered in the sleepest, gentlest of tones, her brown eyes open wide. What manner of young man was this who paid compliments while freezing with a broken leg? It was quite a new experience to her and amused her. It was an adventure, and excited all the romance dormant in her nature.

“You're a stranger hereabouts?” she suggested.

“Yes, a stranger, to my cost, and a very foolhardy one, or I should never have attempted to find Sandypoint in this confounded storm. Edith—you'll excuse my calling you so, *my* name is Charley—wouldn't it have been better if you had left me here and gone for some one. I'm dreadfully afraid you'll get your death.”

His solicitude for her, in his own danger and pain, quite touched Miss Edith. She bent over him with maternal tenderness.

“There is no fear for me. I feel perfectly warm as I told you, and can easily keep myself so. And if you think I could leave you, or any one else with a broken leg, to die, you mistake me greatly, that is all. I will stay with you if it be till morning.”

He gave one of her hands a feebly grateful squeeze. It was a last effort. His numbed and broken limb gave a horrible twinge, there was a faint gasp, and then this young man fainted quietly away.

She bent above him in despair. A great fear filled her—was he dead, this stranger in whom she was interested already? She lifted his head on her lap, she chafed his face and hands in an agony of pity and terror.

“Charley!” she called, with something like a sob; “O Charley, don't die! Wake up—speak to me.”

But cold and white as the snow itself, “Charley” lay, dumb and unresponsive.

And so an hour wore on.

What an hour it was—more like an eternity. In all her after-life—its pride and its glory, its downfall and disgrace, that night remained vividly in her memory.

She woke many and many a night, starting up in her warm bed, from some startling dream, that she was back, lost in the snow, with Charley lying lifeless in her lap.

But help was at hand. It was close upon nine o'clock, when, through the deathly white silence, the sound of many voices came. When over the cold glitter of the winter night, the red light of lanterns flared, Don Caesar came plunging headlong through the drifts to his little mistress' side, with loud and joyful barking, licking her face, her hands, her feet. They were saved.

She sank back sick and dizzy in her father's clasp. For a moment the earth rocked, and the sky went round—then she sprang up, herself again. Her father was there, and the three young men, boarders. They lifted the rigid form of the stranger, and carried it between them somehow, to Mr. Darrell's house.

His feet were slightly frost-bitten, his leg not broken after all, only sprained and swollen, and to Edith's relief he was pronounced in a fainting-fit, not dead.

“Don't look so white and scared, child,” her step-mother said pettishly to her step-daughter; “he won't die, and a pretty burthen he'll be on my hands for the next three weeks. Go to bed—do—and don't let us have *you* laid up as well. One's enough at a time.”

“Yes, Dithy, darling, go,” said her father, kissing her tenderly. “You're a brave little woman, and you've saved his life. I have always been proud of you, but never so proud as to-night.”

It certainly *was* a couple of weeks. It was five blessed weeks before “Mr. Charley,” as they learned to call him, could get about, even on crutches. For fever and sometimes delirium set in, and Charley raved and tossed, and shouted, and talked, and drove Mrs. Frederic Darrell nearly frantic with his capers. The duty of nursing fell a

good deal on Edith. She seemed to take to it quite naturally. In his "worst spells" the sound of her soft voice, the touch of her cool hand, could soothe him as nothing else could. Sometimes he sung, as boisterously as his enfeebled state would allow: "We won't go home till morning!" Sometimes he shouted for his mother; very often for "Trixy."

Who was Trixy, Edith wondered with a sort of inward twinge, not to be accounted for; his sister or—

He was very handsome in those days—his great gray eyes brilliant with fever, his cheeks flushed, his chestnut hair falling damp and heavy off his brow. What an adventure it was, altogether, Edith used to think, like something out of a book. Who was he, she wondered. A gentleman "by courtesy and the grace of God," no mistaking *that*. His clothes, his linen, were all superfine. On one finger he wore a diamond that made all beholders wink, and in his shirt bosom still another. His wallet was stuffed with greenbacks, his watch and chain, Mr. Darrell affirmed were worth a thousand dollars—a sprig of gentility, whoever he might be, this wounded hero. They found no papers, no letters, no card-case. His linen was marked "C. S." twisted in a monogram. They must wait until he was able himself to tell them the rest.

The soft sunshine, of April was filling his room, and basking in its rays in the parlor or rocking-chair sat "Mr. Charley," pale and wasted to a most interesting degree. He was sitting, looking at Miss Edith, digging industriously in her flower-garden, with one of the boarders for under-gardener, and listening to Mr. Darrell proposing he should tell them his name, in order that they might write to his friends. The young man turned his large languid eyes from the daughter without, to the father within.

"My friends? Oh! to be sure. But it isn't necessary, is it? It's very thoughtful of you, and all that, but my friends won't worry themselves into an early grave about my absence and silence. They're used to both. Next week, or week after, I'll drop them a line myself. I know I must be an awful nuisance to Mrs. Darrell, but if I *might* trespass on your great kindness and remain here until—"

"My dear young friend," responded Mr. Darrell, warmly, "you shall most certainly remain here. For Mrs. Darrell, you're no trouble to her—it's Dithy, bless her, who does all the nursing."

The gray dreamy eyes turned from Mr. Darrell again, to that busy figure in the garden. With her cheeks flushed, her brown eyes shining, her rosy lips apart, and laughing, as she wrangled with that particular boarder on the subject of floriculture, she looked a most dangerous nurse for any young man of three—and-twenty.

"I owe Miss Darrell and you all, more than I can ever repay," he said, quietly; "*that* is understood. I have never tried to thank her, or you either—words are so inadequate in these cases. Believe me though, I am not ungrateful."

"Say no more," Mr. Darrell cut in hastily; "only tell us how we are to address you while you remain. 'Mr. Charley' is an unsatisfactory sort of application."

"My name is Stuart; but, as a favor, may I request you to go on calling me Charley?"

"Stuart!" said the other, quickly; "one of the Stuarts, bankers, of New York?"

"The same. My father is James Stuart; you know him probably?"

The face of Frederic Darrell darkened and grew almost stern. "Your father was my wife's cousin—Edith's mother. Have you never heard him speak of Eleanor Stuart?"

"Who married Frederic Darrell? Often. My dear Mr. Darrell, is it possible that you—that I have the happiness of being related to you?"

"To my daughter, if you like—her second cousin—to me, *no*," Mr. Darrell said, half-smiling, half-sad. "Your father and his family long ago repudiated all claims of mine—I am not going to force myself upon their notice now. Edie—Edie, my love, come in here, and listen to some strange news."

She threw down her spade, and came in laughing and glowing, her hair tumbled, her collar awry, her dress soiled, her hands not over clean, but looking, oh! so indescribably fresh, and fair, and healthful, and handsome.

"What is it?" she asked. "Has Mr. Charley gone and sprained his other ankle?"

"Not quite so bad as that." And then her father narrated the discovery they had mutually made. Miss Dithy opened her bright brown eyes.

"Like a chapter out of a novel where everybody turns out to be somebody else. 'It is—it is—it is—my own, my long-lost son!' And so we're second cousins, and you're Charley Stuart; and Trixy—now who's Trixy?"

"Trixy's my sister. How do you happen to know anything about her?"

Edith made a wry face.

“The nights I've spent—the days I've dragged through, the tortures I've undergone, listening to you shouting for 'Trixy,' would have driven any less well-balanced brain stark mad! May I sit down? Digging in the sunshine, and rowing with Johnny Ellis is awfully hot work.”

“Digging in the sunshine is detrimental to the complexion, and rowing with Johnny Ellis is injurious to the temper. I object to both.”

“Oh, you do?” said Miss Darrell, opening her eyes again; “it matters so much, too, whether you object or not. Johnny Ellis is useful, and sometimes agreeable. Charley Stuart is neither one nor t'other. If I mayn't dig and quarrel with him, is there anything your lordship would like me to do?”

“You may sit on this footstool at my feet—woman's proper place—and read me to sleep. That book you were reading aloud yesterday—what was it? Oh, 'Pendennis,' was rather amusing—what I heard of it.”

“What you heard of it!” Miss Darrell retorts, indignantly. “You do well to add that. The man who could go to sleep listening to Thackeray is a man worthy only of contempt and scorn! There's Mr. Ellis calling me—I must go.”

Miss Darrell and Mr. Stuart, in his present state of convalescence, rarely met except to quarrel. They spoke their minds to one another, with a refreshing frankness remarkable to hear.

“You remind me of one I loved very dearly once, Dithy,” Charley said to her, sadly, one, day, after an unusually stormy wordy war—“in fact, the only one I ever *did* love. You resemble her, too—the same sort of hair and complexion, and exactly the same sort of—ah—temper! Her name was Fido—she was a black and tan terrier—very like you, my dear, very like. Ah! these accidental resemblances are cruel things—they tear open half-healed wounds, and cause them to bleed afresh. Fido met with an untimely end—she was drowned one dark night in a cistern. I thought I had outlived *that* grief, but when I look at you—”

A stinging box on the ear, given with right good will, cut short the mournful reminiscence, and brought tears to Mr. Stuart's eyes, that were not tears of grief for Fido.

“You wretch!” cried Miss Darrell, with flashing eyes. “I've a complexion of black and tan, have I, and a temper to match! The only thing *I* see to regret in your story is, that it wasn't Fido's master who fell into the cistern, instead of Fido. To think I should live to be called a black and tan!”

They never met except to quarrel. Edith's inflammatory temper was up in arms perpetually. They kept the house in an uncommonly lively state. It seemed to agree with Charley. His twisted ankle grew strong rapidly, flesh and color came back, the world was not to be robbed of one of its brightest ornaments just yet. He put off writing to his friends from day to day, to the great disapproval of Mr. Darrell, who was rather behind the age in his notions of filial duty.

“It's of no use worrying,” Mr. Stuart made answer, with the easy *insouciance* concerning all things earthly which sat so naturally upon him; “bad shillings always come back—let that truthful old adage console them. Why should I fidget myself about them. Take my word they're not fidgeting themselves about *me*. The governor's absorbed in the rise and fall of stocks, the maternal is up to her eyes in the last parties of the season, and my sister is just out and absorbed body and soul in beaux and dresses. They never expect me until they see me.”

About the close of April Mr. Stuart and Miss Darrell fought their last battle and parted. He went back to New York and to his own world, and life stagnant and flat flowed back on its old level for Edith Darrell.

Stagnant and flat it had always been, but never half so dreary as now. Something had come into her life and gone out of it, something bright and new, and wonderfully pleasant. There was a great blank where Charley's handsome face had been, and all at once life seemed to lose its relish for this girl of sixteen. A restlessness took possession of her. Sandypoint and all belonging to it grew distasteful. She wanted change, excitement—Charley Stuart, perhaps—something different certainly from what she was used to, or likely to get.

Charley went home and told the “governor,” and the “maternal,” and “Trixy” of his adventure, and the girl who had saved his life. Miss Beatrix listened in a glow of admiration.

“Is she pretty, Charley?” she asked, of course, the first inevitable female question.

“Pretty?” Charley responded, meditatively, as though the idea struck him for the first time. “Well, ye—e—es. In a cream-colored sort of way, Edith isn't bad-looking. It would be very nice of you now, Trix, to write her a letter, I think, seeing she saved my life, and nursed me, and is your second cousin, and everything.”

Beatrix needed no urging. She was an impetuous, enthusiastic young woman of eighteen, fearfully and wonderfully addicted to correspondence. She sat down and wrote a long, gushing letter to her “cream-colored”

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cousin. Mrs. Stuart dropped her a line of thanks also, and Charley, of course, wrote, and there her adventure seemed to come to an end. Miss Stuart's letters were long and frequent. Mr. Stuart's rambling epistle alternately made her laugh and lose her temper, a daily loss with poor, discontented Edith. With the fine discrimination most men possess, he sent her, on her seventeenth birthday, a set of turquoise and pearls, which made her sallow complexion hideous, or, at least, as hideous as anything *can* make a pretty girl. That summer he ran down to Sandypoint for a fortnight's fishing, and an oasis came suddenly in the desert of Edith's life. She and Charley might quarrel still, and I am bound to say they did, on every possible occasion and on every possible point, *but* they were never satisfied a moment apart.

The fortnight ended, the fish were caught, he went back, and the dull days and the long nights, the cooking, darning, mending began again, and went on until madness would have been a relief. It was the old story of the Sleeping Beauty waiting for the prince to come, and wake her into life and love with his kiss. Only in this instance the prince had come and gone, and left Beauty, in the sulks, behind.

She was eighteen years old and sick of her life. And just when disgust and discontent were taking palpable form, and she was debating between a jump into Sandypoint bay and running off, came Charley, with his mother's letter. From that hour the story of Edith Darrell's life began.

CHAPTER III. TRIXY'S PARTY.

Two weeks sufficed for Miss Darrell's preparations. A quantity of new linen, three new dresses, one hat, one spring sacque—that was all.

Mr. Darrell had consented—what was there he could have refused his darling? He had consented, hiding the bitter pang it cost him, deep in his own quiet heart. It was the loss of her mother over again; the tender passion and the present Mrs. Darrell were two facts perfectly incompatible.

Mrs. Darrell aided briskly in the preparation—to tell the truth, she was not sorry to be rid of her step-daughter, between whom and herself perpetual war raged. Edith as a worker was a failure; she went about the dingy house, in her dingy dresses, with the air of an out-at-elbows duchess. She snubbed the boarders, she boxed the juvenile Darrell's ears, she “sassed” the mistress of the house.

“It speaks volumes for your amiability, Dithy,” Charley remarked, “the intense eagerness and delight, with which everybody in this establishment hails your departure. Four dirty little Darrells run about the passages with their war—whoop, 'Dithy's going—hooray! Now we'll have fun!' Your step-mother's sere and yellow visage beams with bliss; even the young gentlemen who are lodged and boarded, Greek-ed and Latin-ed here, wear faces of suppressed relief, that tells its own tale to the student of human nature. Your welfare must be unspeakably precious to them, Edie, when they bear their approaching bereavement so well.”

He paused. The speech was a lengthy one, and lengthy speeches mostly exhausted Mr. Stuart. He lay back, watching his fair relative as she sat sewing near, with lazy, half-closed eyes.

Her work dropped in her lap, a faint flush rose up over her dusk face.

“Charley,” she responded, gravely, “I don't wonder you say this—it is true, and nobody feels it more than I. I *am* a disagreeable creature, a selfish nuisance, an idle, discontented kill-joy. I only wonder, you are not afraid to take me with you at all.”

Mr. Stuart sat up, rather surprised.

“My dearest coz, *don't* be so tremendously in earnest. If I had thought you were going to take it seriously—”

“Let us be serious for once—we have all our lives left for quarrelling,” said Miss Darrell, as though quarrelling were a pleasant recreation. “I sit down and try to think sometimes why I am so miserable—so wretched in my present life, why I hail the prospect of a new one with such delight. I see other girls—nicer, cleverer girls than I am every way, and their lives suffice for them—the daily, domestic routine that is most horrible drudgery to me, pleases and satisfies them. It must be that I have an incapacity for life; I daresay when the novelty and gloss wear off, I shall tire equally of the life I am going to. A new dress, a dance, a beau, and the hope of a prospective husband suffices for the girls I speak of. For me—none of your sarcastic smiles, sir—the thought of a future husband is—”

“Only vanity and vexation of spirit. But there *is* a future husband. You are forced to admit that, Dithy. I wonder what he is to be like? A modern Sir Launcelot, with the beauty of all the gods, the courage of a Coeur de Lion, the bow of a Chesterfield, and the purse of Fortunatus. That's the photo, isn't it?”

“No, sir—not a bit like it. The purse of a Fortunatus, if you like—I ask nothing more. The Sir Launcelots of life, if they exist at all, are mostly poor men, and I don't want anything to do with poor men. My marriage is to be a purely business transaction—I settled *that* long ago. He may have the form and face of a Satyr; he may have seventy years, so that he be worth a million or so, I will drop my best courtesy when he asks, and say, 'Yes, and thanky, sir.' If the Apollo himself, knelt before me with an empty purse, I should turn my back upon him in pity and disdain.”

“Is that meant for me, Edie?” Mr. Stuart inquired, rising on his elbow, and admiringly gazing at his own handsome face in the glass. “Because if it is, don't excite yourself. Forewarned is forearmed—I'm not going to ask you.”

“I never thought you were,” Edith said, laughing. “I never aspired so high. As well love some bright particular star, etcetera, etcetera, as the only son of James Stuart, Esquire, lineal descendant of the Princes of Scotland, and banker of Wall Street. No, Charley, I know what *you* will do. You'll drift through life for the next three or four years, as you have drifted up to the present, well looking, well dressed, well mannered, and then some day your

father will come to you and say gruffly, 'Charles!' (Edith grows dramatic as she narrates—it is a husky masculine voice that speaks:) 'Here's Miss Petroleum's father, with a million and a half—only child—order a suit of new clothes and go and ask her to marry you!' And you will look at him with a helpless sigh, and go. Your father will select your wife, sir, and you'll take her, like a good boy, when you're told. I shouldn't wonder now, but that it is to select a wife for you, and a husband for Trixy, he is taking this projected trip to Europe."

"Shouldn't you? Neither should I. Never wonder. Against my principles," Charley murmurs.

"There are plenty of titled aristocracy abroad—so I am told—ready to silver-gild their coronets by a union with plutocracy. Plenty Lady Janes and Lady Marys ready to sell themselves to the highest bidder."

"As Edith Darrell is?"

"As Edith Darrell is. It's all very fine talking of love and devotion, and the emptiness of life without. Believe me, if one has plenty of money one can dispense with love. I've read a good many novels, but they haven't turned my head on *that* subject. From all I've read, indeed, I should think it must be a very uncomfortable sort of intermittent fever, indeed. Don't love anybody except yourself, and it is out of the power of any human being to make you *very* wretched."

"A sentiment whose truth is only equaled by its—selfishness."

"Yes, it is selfish; and it is your thoroughly selfish people, who get the best of everything in this world. I am selfish and worldly—ambitious and heartless, and all that is abominable. I may as well own it. You'll find it out for yourself soon."

"A most unnecessary acknowledgment, my dear child—it is patent to the dullest observer. But, now, Edith—look here—this is serious, mind!" He raises himself again on his elbow, and looks, with a curious smile into her darkly-earnest, cynical young face. "Suppose I am madly in love with you—'madly in love' is the correct phrase, isn't it?—suppose I am at your feet, going through all the phases of the potential mood, 'commanding, exhorting, entreating' you to marry me—you wouldn't say no, would you, Edie? You like me—don't deny it. You know you do—like me well enough to marry me to-morrow. Would you refuse me in spite of my dependence on my father, and my empty purse?"

He took her hand, and held it tightly, despite her struggles.

"Would you, Edie?" he says, putting his arm around her waist. "I'm not a sentimental fellow, but I believe in love. Come! you wouldn't—you couldn't bid me go."

Her color had risen—that lovely rose-pink color, that lit her brunette face into such beauty—but she resolutely freed herself, and met his half-tender, half-merry glance, full.

"I would," she said, "if I—liked you so, that you filled my whole heart. Let me go, sir, and no more of this nonsense. I know what I am talking about, and what comes of marrying for love. There was my own mother, she left a rich and luxurious home, wealthy suitors, all the comforts and elegances of life, without which life isn't worth living, and ran away with papa. Then followed long years of poverty, discomfort, illness, and miserable grubbing. She never complained—perhaps she wasn't even very unhappy; her's wasn't the sort of love that flies out of the window when poverty comes in at the door—she just faded away and died. For myself I have been dissatisfied with *my* lot ever since I can remember—pining for the glory and grandeur of this wicked world. There is but one way in which they can ever be mine—by marriage. If marriage will not bring them, then I will go to my grave Edith Darrell."

"Which I don't think you will," Mr. Stuart responded. "Young ladies like you, who set out on the search-matrimonial with lots of common-sense, worldliness, selfishness, and mercenary motives, generally reach the goal. It's a fair enough exchange—so much youth and good looks for so many thousand dollars. I wish you all success, Miss Darrell, in your laudable undertaking. It is well we should understand each other, at once and forever, or even I some day might be tempted to make a fool of myself. Your excellent counsels, my dearest cousin, will be invaluable to me, should my lagging footsteps falter by the way. Edith! where have you learned to be so hard, so worldly, so—if you will pardon me—so unwomanly?"

"Is it unwomanly?" she repeated dreamily. "Well, perhaps it is. I am honest at least—give me credit for that. My own hard life has taught me, books have taught me, looking at my mother and listening to my step-mother have taught me. I feel old at eighteen—old and tired. I am just one of those girls, I think, who turn out very good or very bad women, as fate deals with them. It's not too late yet to draw back, Charley. Your mother can easily get another young lady to do the French and German business. You can tell her I don't suit, and leave me at home."

“Not too late to draw back,” he said, with his indolent smile. “Is there ever such a thing as drawing back at all? What is done is done. I couldn't go without you now, if I tried. O, don't look alarmed, I don't mean anything. You amuse and interest me, that is all. You're something of a study—entirely different from the genus young lady I'm accustomed to. Only—keep your frankness for Cousin Charley, he's harmless; don't display it to the rest of the world. It might spoil your chances. Even senile millionnaires don't care to walk into the trap, unless the springs are hidden in roses. Come, throw down that endless sewing, and let's have a walk on the beach. Who knows when we may see the sun go down, together again, over the classic waters of Sandypoint Bay.”

Edith laughed, but she rose to obey.

“And I thought you were not sentimental. One would think it the Bay of Naples. However, as we start to-morrow, I don't mind going down and bidding the old rocks and sands good-by.”

She put on her hat, and the two went wandering away together, to watch the sun set over the sea. In the rosy light of the spring sunset, the fishing boats drifted on the shining waters, and the fisherman's chant came borne to their ears.

“It reminds me of that other April evening two years ago, Dithy, when we came down here to say good-by. You cried then at parting—do you remember? But you were only sixteen, poor child, and knew no better. You wouldn't cry now, would you, for any man in the universe?”

“Not for Charley Stuart certainly—he needn't think it.”

“He doesn't think it, my pet; he never looks for impossibilities. I wonder if that night in the snow were to come again if you'd risk your life now, as you did then?”

“Risk my life! What bosh! There was no risk; and bad as I am, and heartless as I've grown, I don't think—I *don't* think I'd walk away, and leave any poor wretch to die. Yes, Charley, if the night in the snow came over again, I'd do now as I did then.”

“I don't believe it was a kindness after all,” Charley responds. “I have a presentiment that a day will come, Dithy, when I'll hate you. I shouldn't have suffered much if you had let me freeze to death. And I've a strong prescience (is that the word) that I'll fall in love with you some day, and be jilted, and undergo untold torture, and hate you with a perfect frenzy. It will be a very fatiguing experience, but I feel in my bones that it is to be.”

“Indeed! A Saul among the prophets. I shall not be surprised, however; it is my usual fate to be hated. And now, as we seem to have drifted into disagreeable and personal sort of talk, suppose we change the subject? There is a dory yonder; if your indolent sultanship can bear the labor of steering, I'll give you a last row across the bay.”

They take the dory and glide away. Charley lies back, his hat pulled over his eyes, smoking a cigar and steering. She has the oars, the red sunlight is on her face. Edith defies tan and sunburn. She looks at lazy Charley, and sings as she pulls, a saucy smile of defiance on her lips:

“It was on a Monday morning,
Right early in the year,
That Charley came to our town,
The young Chevalier.
And Charley he's my darling,
My darling, my darling;
And Charley he's my darling,
The young Chevalier!”

What Charley answers is not on record. Perhaps the aged millionaire, who is to be the future happy possessor of Miss Darrell's charms, would not care to hear it. They drift on—they are together—they ask no more. The rosy after-glow of the sunset fades out, the night comes white with stars, the faint spring wind sighs over the bay, and both are silent. “And,” says Charley's inner consciousness, “if this be not falling in love, I wonder what is?”

They linger yet longer. It is the last night, and romantically enough, for so worldly and cynical a pair, they watch the faint little April moon rise. Edith looks over her left shoulder at it, and says something under her breath.

“What invocation are you murmuring there?” Charley asks, half asleep.

“I was wishing. I always wish when I see the new moon.”

“For a rich husband of course, Edie!” He sits up suddenly. “There's the baronet! Suppose you go for *him*.”

“Go for him! What a horribly vulgar way you have of speaking. No. I'll leave him for Trixy. Have you had enough of starlight and moonlight, Mr. Stuart, on Sandypoint Bay, because I'm going to turn and row home. I've

had no supper, and I shall eat you if we stay here fasting much longer.”

She rows back, and arm in arm they ascend the rocky path, and linger one last moment at the garden gate.

“So ends the old life,” Edith says, softly. “It is my last night at home. I ought to feel sad, I suppose, but I don't. I never felt so happy in my life.”

He is holding her hand. For two who are not lovers, and never mean to be, they understand each other wonderfully well.

“And remember your promise,” he answers. “Let the life that is coming bring what it may, you are never to blame me.”

Then Mrs. Darrell's tall, spare figure appears in the moonlight, summoning them sharply to tea, and hands are unclasped, and in silence they follow her.

The first train from Sandypoint to Boston bears away Edith Darrell and Charley Stuart. Not alone together, however—forbid it Mrs. Grundy! Mrs. Rogers, the Sandypoint milliner, is going to New York for the summer fashions, and the young lady travels under her protection. They reach Boston in time for the train that connects with the Fall River boats. It has been a day of brightest sunshine; it is a lovely spring night. They dine on board. Mrs. Rogers is sleepy and tired and goes to bed (she and Edith share the same state-room), with a last charge to Mr. Stuart not to keep Miss Darrell too long on deck in the night air.

They float grandly up the bright river. Two wandering harpists and a violinist play very sweetly near them, and they walk up and down, talking and feeling uncommonly happy and free, until Charley's watch points to eleven, and the music comes to a stop. They say good-night. She goes to Mrs. Rogers and the upper berth, and Mr. Stuart meditatively turns to his own. He is thinking, that all things considered, it is just as well this particularly fascinating companionship, ends in a manner to-morrow.

To-morrow comes. It is Miss Beatrix Stuart's birthday. The great party is to be to-night. They shake hands and part with Mrs. Rogers on the pier. Charley hails a hack and assists his cousin in, and they are whirled off to the palatial avenue up-town.

The house is a stately brown-stone front, of course, and on a sunny corner. Edith leans back, quite silent, her heart beating as she looks. The whirl, the crash, the rush of New York streets stun her, the stateliness of the Stuart mansion awes her. She is very pale, her lips are set together. She turns to Charley suddenly, and holds out her hands to him as a helpless child might.

“I feel lost already, and—and ever so little afraid. How big and grand it looks. Don't desert me, Charley. I feel as though I were astray in a strange land.”

He squeezes the little hand, he whispers something reassuring, and life and color come back to her face.

“Make your mind easy, Dithy,” is what he says. “Like Mrs. Micawber, I'll never desert you.”

He rings the door bell sharply, a smart-looking young woman admits them, and Edith goes with him into a splendid and spacious apartment, where three people sit at breakfast. Perhaps it is the garish sunshine, sparkling on so much cut glass and silver, that dazzles Edith's eyes, but for a minute she can see nothing. Then the mist clears away, the trio have risen—a pompous-looking old gentleman in a shining bald head and expansive white vest, a pallid, feeble-looking elderly lady in a lace cap, and a tall, stylish girl, with Charley's eyes and hair, in violet ribbons and white cashmere. The bald gentleman shakes hands with her, and welcomes her in a husky baritone; the faded, elderly lady, and stylish young lady kiss her, and say some very pleasant and gracious words. As in a dream Edith sees and hears all—as in a dream she is led off by Beatrix.

“I shall take you to your room myself. I only hope you may like it. The furniture and arrangement are my taste, every bit. Oh you dear darling!” cries Miss Stuart, stopping in the passage to give Edith a hug. “You don't know how frightened I've been that you wouldn't come. I'm in love with you already! And what a heroine you are—a real Grace—what's-her-name—saving Charley's life and all that. And best of all, you're in time for the ball—which is a rhyme, though I didn't mean it.” She laughs and suddenly gives Edith another hug. “You pretty creature!” she says; “I'd no idea you were half so good-looking. I asked Charley, but you might as well ask a lamp-post as Charley. Here is your room—how do you like it?”

She would have been difficult to please indeed, if she had not liked it. To Edith's inexperienced eyes, it is a glowing nest of amber silk curtains, yellowish Brussels carpet, tinted walls, pretty pictures, gilt frames, mirrors, ornaments, and dainty French bed.

“Do you like it? But I see by your face you do. I'm so glad. This is my room adjoining, and here's your bath.

Now lay off your things and come down to breakfast.”

Still in a dream Edith obeys. She descends to breakfast in her gray travelling suit, looking pale, and not at all brilliant. Miss Stuart, who has had her doubts, that this country cousin may prove a rival, is reassured. She takes her breakfast, and then Beatrix conducts her over the house—a wonder of splendor, of velvet carpets, magnificent upholstering, lace drapings, gilding and ormolu. But her face keeps its pale, grave look. Trixy wonders if she is not a stupid little body after all. Last of all they reach the sacred privacy of Trixy's own room, and there she displays her ball dress. She expiates on its make and its merits, in professional language, and with a volubility that makes Edith's head swim.

“It is made with a court train, trimmed with a deep flounce, waved in the lower edge, and this flounce is trimmed with four narrow flounces, edged with narrow point lace. The sides are *en revers*, with sashes tied in butterfly bow in the centre of the back, below the puffing of the skirt near the waist. The front of the skirt is trimmed to correspond with the train, the short apron, flounced and trimmed with point lace, gathered up at the sides, under the *revers* on the train. The waist is high in the shoulders, V shaped in front and back, with small flowing sleeves, finished with plaitings of white silk tulle. And now,” cries Trixy, breathless and triumphant, “if *that* doesn't fetch the baronet, you may tell me what will! The pearls are superb—here they are. Pearls are *en regle* for weddings only, but how was poor pa to know that? Arn't they lovely?”

They lie in their cloudy luster, necklet, earrings, bracelet.

“Lovely!” Edith repeats; “lovely indeed. Beatrix, what a fortunate girl you are.”

There is a touch of envy in her tone. Beatrix laughs, and gives her a third hug.

“Why? Because I have pearls? Bless you! they're nothing. You'll have diamonds beyond counting yourself, one of those days. You'll marry rich, of course—brunettes are all the style now, and you're sure to look lovely by gaslight. What are you going to wear to-night?”

“I'm like Flora McFlimsey,” Edith laughs; “I have nothing to wear. There is a white Swiss muslin in my trunk, but it will look woefully rustic and dowdy, I'm afraid, in your gorgeous drawing-rooms.”

“Nonsense! Plain Swiss is always in taste for girls of eighteen. I wore it greatly my first season. Do you know I feel awfully old, Edith—twenty-one to-night! I *must* do something toward settling before the year ends. Let us see the white Swiss. Now there is a lovely amber tissue I have—it isn't my color. I never wore it but once, and it would suit you exactly. Lucy, my maid, is a perfect dress-maker, and could alter it to fit you easily before—Now, Edith! you're not angry?”

For the color has risen suddenly all over Edith's proud, pale face.

“You have made a mistake, Miss Stuart, that is all—meant kindly, I am sure. If my white muslin is admissible, I will wear it; if not, I can keep to my room. But neither now, nor at any future time, can I accept—charity.”

Trixy gives a little shriek at the word, and inflicts a fourth hug on Edith. She is the soul of easy good-nature herself, and ready to take anything and everything that is offered her, from a husband to a bouquet.

“Bless the child!” she exclaims. “Charity! As if any one ever thought of such a thing. It's just like me, however, to make a mess of it. I mean well, but somehow I always *do* make a mess of it. And my prophetic soul tells me, the case of Sir Victor Catheron will be no exception to the rest.”

The day wears on. Edith drives down town, shopping with Madame and Mademoiselle Stuart; she returns, and dines in state with the family. The big, brown house is lit up from basement to attic, and presently they all adjourn to their rooms to dress.

“Don't ask me to appear while you are receiving your guests,” Edith says. “I'll step in unobserved, when everybody has come.”

She declines all offers of assistance, and dresses herself. It is a simple toilet surely—the crisp white muslin, out of which the polished shoulders rise; a little gold chain and cross, once her mother's; earrings and bracelet of gold and coral, also once her mother's; and her rich, abundant, blackish-brown hair, gathered back in a graceful way peculiar to herself. She looks very pretty, and she knows it. Presently sails in Miss Stuart, resplendent in the pink silk and pearls, the “court train” trailing two or three yards behind her, her light hair “done up” in a pyramid wonderful to behold, and loaded with camelias.

“How do I look, Dithy? This strawberry-ice pink is awfully becoming to me, isn't it? And you—why, you look lovely—lovely! I'd no idea you made up so handsomely. Ah! we blondes have no chance by gaslight, against

you brunettes.”

She sweeps downstairs in her rose-colored splendor, and Edith is alone. She sits by the open window, and looks out at the night life of the great city. Carriage after carriage roll up to the door, and somehow, in the midst of all this life, and brightness, and bustle, a strange feeling of loneliness and isolation comes over her. Is it the old chronic discontent cropping up again? If it were only not improper for Charley to come up here and sit beside her, and smoke, in the sweet spring dusk, and be sarcastic as usual, what a comfort it would be just now! Somehow—“how it comes let doctors tell”—that restless familiar of hers is laid when *he* is by her side—never lonely, never discontented then. As she thinks this, innocently enough, despite all her worldly wisdom, there is a tap at the door, and Lucy, the maid, comes smilingly in, holding an exquisite bouquet, all pink and white roses, in her hand.

“Mr. Charles' compliments, please, miss, and he's waiting for you at the foot of the stairs, when you're ready, miss, for the ball-room.”

She starts and colors with pleasure.

“Thank you, Lucy!” she says, taking the bouquet. “Tell Mr. Stuart I will be down in a moment.”

The girl leaves the room.

With a smile on her face it is just as well “Mr. Charles” does not see, she stands looking at her roses; then she buries her face, almost as bright, in their dewy sweetness.

“Dear, thoughtful Charley!” she whispers gratefully. “What would ever have become of me but for him?”

She selects one or two bits of scarlet blossom and green spray, and artistically twists them in the rich waves of her hair. She takes one last glance at her own pretty image in the mirror, sees that fan, lace-handkerchief, and adornment generally, are in their places, and then trips away and goes down.

In elegant evening costume, looking unutterably handsome and well-dressed, Mr. Charles Stuart stands at the foot of the grand stairway, waiting. He looks at her as she stands in the full glare of the gasaliers.

“White muslin, gold and coral, pink roses, and no chignon. My dear Miss Darrell, taking you as a whole, I think I have seen worse-looking young women in my life.”

He draws her hand through his arm, with this enthusiastic remark, and Edith finds herself in a blaze of light and a crowd of brilliantly dressed people. Three long drawing-rooms are thrown open, *en suite*; beyond is the ball-room, with its waxed floors and invisible musicians. Flowers, gaslight, jewels, handsome women, and gallant men are everywhere; the band is crashing out a pulse-tingling waltz, and still Edith hears and sees, and moves in a dream.

“Come,” Charley says. His arm is around her waist, and they whirl away among the waltzers. Edith waltzes well, so does Charley. She feels as though she were floating on air, not on earth. Then it is over, and she is being introduced to people, to resplendent young ladies and almost equally resplendent young gentlemen. Charley resigns her to one of these latter, and she glides through a mazurka. That too ends, and as it grows rather warm, her partner leads her away to a cool music-room, whence proceed melodious sounds. It is Trixy at the piano, informing a select audience in shrill soprano, and in the character of the “Queen of the May,” that “She had been wild and wayward, but she was not wayward *now*.” Edith's partner finds her a seat and volunteers to go for an ice. As she sits fanning herself, she sees Charley approaching with a young man of about his own age, taller than he is—fairer, with a look altogether somehow of a different nationality. He has large blue eyes, very fair hair, and the blondest of complexions. Instinctively she knows who it is.

“Ah, Edith,” Charley says, “here you are. I have been searching for you. Miss Darrell, allow me to present to you Sir Victor Catheron.”

CHAPTER IV. "UNDER THE GASLIGHT."

Two darkly solemn eyes look up into Sir Victor Catheron's face. Both bow. Both murmur the *pianissimo* imbecility requisite on such occasions, and Edith Darrell is acquainted with a baronet.

With, a baronet! Only yesterday, as it were, she was darning hose, and ironing linen at home, going about the dismal house slipshod and slatternly. Now she is in the midst of a brilliant ball, diamonds sparkling around her, and an English baronet of fabulous wealth and ancestry asking her for the favor of the next waltz! Something ridiculous and absurd about it all, struck her; she felt an idiotic desire to laugh aloud. It was all unreal, all a dream. She would awake presently, to hear her step-mother's shrill call to come and help in the kitchen, and the howls of the juvenile Darrells down the passage. A familiar voice rouses her.

"You'll not forget, I hope, Edith," Charley is saying, "that next redowa is mine. At present I am going to meander through the lancers with Mrs. Featherbrain."

He takes her tablets, coolly writes his name, smiles, shows his white teeth, says "Au revoir," and is gone. She and the baronet are alone.

What shall she say to him? She feels a whimsical sort of trepidation as she flutters her fan. As yet the small-talk of society, is Sanscrit, to this young lady from Sandypoint. Sir Victor leans lightly against the arm of her chair, and looks down upon her as she sits, with flushed cheeks, half smiling lips, and long black lashes drooping. He is thinking what a wonderfully bright and charming face it is—for a brunette.

For Sir Victor Catheron does not fancy brunettes. He has his ideal, and sees in her the future Lady Catheron. In far-off Cheshire there is a certain Lady Gwendoline; she is an earl's daughter, the owner of two soft blue eyes, a complexion of pink and snow, a soft, trained voice and feathery halo of amber hair. Lady Gwendoline is his ideal of fair, sweet womanhood, turning coldly from all the rest of the world to hold out her arms to one happy possessor. The vision of Lady Gwendoline as he saw her last, the morning sunshine searching her fair English face and finding no flaw in it, rises for a second before him—why, he does not know. Then a triumphal burst of music crashes out, and he is looking down once more upon Edith Darrell, in her white dress and coral ornaments, her dark hair and pink roses.

"You seem quite like an old acquaintance, Miss Darrell," he says, in his slow, pleasant, English accented voice; "our mutual friend, the prince, has told me about his adventure in the snow, and your heroism."

"The prince?" she repeats, interrogatively, and Sir Victor laughs.

"Ah! you don't know. They call him the prince here—Prince Charlie. I don't know why, I'm sure, unless it be that his name is Charles Edward Stuart, and that he is the prince of good fellows. You have no idea how delighted I am that he—that the whole family are going across with us in May. You accompany them, I understand, Miss Darrell."

"As companion and interpreter on the continent," Miss Darrell answers, looking up at him very steadily. "Yes."

"And you will like the continent, I know," Sir Victor goes on. "You will like Paris, of course. All Americans go to Paris. You will meet scores of your countrymen in every continental city."

"I am not sure that *that* is an advantage," responds the young lady coolly. "About my liking it, there can be no question. It has been the dream of my life—a dream I thought as likely to be realized a month ago, as that I should take a trip to the moon. For you, Sir Victor, I suppose every nook and corner of Europe, is as familiar to you, as your own native Cheshire?"

The brown brilliant eyes look up at him frankly. She is at her ease at last, and Sir Victor thinks again, what beautiful eyes, brown eyes are. For a dark young person, she is really the most attractive young person he has ever met.

"Cheshire," he repeats with a smile, "how well you know my birthplace. No, not my birthplace exactly, for I was born in London. I'm a cockney, Miss Darrell. Before you all go abroad, you are to come and spend a week or two down in my sunny Cheshire; both my aunt and I insist upon it. You don't know how many kindnesses—how many pleasant days and nights we owe to our friends, the Stuarts. It shall be our endeavor when we reach England to repay them in kind. May I ask, Miss Darrell, if you have met my aunt?"

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“No,” Edith replies, fluttering a little again. “I have not even seen Lady Helena as yet.”

“Then allow me the pleasure of making you acquainted. I think you will like her. I am very sure she will like you.”

The color deepens on Edith's dark cheek; she arises and takes his proffered arm. How gracefully deferential and courteous he is. It is all custom, no doubt, and means nothing, but it is wonderfully pleasant and flattering. For the moment it seems as though he were conscious of no other young lady in the scheme of creation than Miss Darrell—a flirting way a few young men cultivate.

They walk slowly down the long brilliant rooms, and many eyes turn and look after them. Every one knows the extremely blonde young baronet—the dark damsel on his arm is as yet a stranger to most of them. “Dused pretty girl, you know,” is the unanimous verdict of masculine New York; “who is she?” “Who *is* that young lady in the dowdy white muslin and old fashioned corals?” asks feminine New York, and both stare as they receive the same whispered reply: “A poor relation—a country cousin, or something of the sort, going to Europe with them as companion to Beatrix.”

Edith sees the looks, and the color deepens to carnation in her face. Her brown eyes gleam, she lifts her head with haughty grace, and flashes back almost defiance at these insolent starers. She *feels* what it is they are saying of her, and Sir Victor's high bred courtesy and deference, go to the very depths of her heart by contrast. She likes him; he interests her already; there is something in his face, she can hardly tell what,—a sort of sombre shadow that underlies all his smiling society manner. In repose and solitude, the prevailing expression of that face will be melancholy, and yet why? Surely at three—and—twenty, life can have shown nothing but her sunshine and roses, to this curled darling of fortune.

A stout, elderly lady, in gray moire and chantilly lace, sits on a sort of a throne of honor, beside Mrs. Stuart, and a foreign gentleman, from Washington, all ribbons and orders. To this stout, elderly lady, as Lady Helena Powyss, his aunt, Sir Victor presents Miss Darrell.

The kindly eyes of the English lady turn upon the dark, handsome face of the American girl; the pleasant voice says a few pleasant words. Miss Darrell bows gracefully, lingers a few moments, is presented to the ribbon—and—starred foreigner, and learns he is Russian Ambassador at Washington. Then the music of their dance strikes up, both smilingly make their adieux, and hasten to the ball-room.

Up and down the long waxed room, in and out with gorgeous young New York, in all the hues of the rainbow, the air heavy with perfume, the matchless Gounod waltz music crashing over all, on the arm of a baronet—worth, how much did Trixy say? thirty or forty thousand a year?—around her slim white muslin waist Edith is in her dream still—she does not want to wake—Trixy whirls by, flushed and breathless, and nods laughingly as she disappears. Charley, looking calm and languid even in the dance, flits past, clasping gay little Mrs. Featherbrain, and gives her a patronizing nod. And Edith's thought is—“If this could only go on forever!” But the golden moments of life fly—the leaden ones only lag—we all know that to our cost. The waltz ends.

“A most delicious waltz,” says Sir Victor gayly. “I thought dancing bored me—I find I like it. How well you waltz, Miss Darrell, like a Parisienne—but all American young ladies are like Frenchwomen. Take this seat, and let me fetch you a water ice.”

He leads her to a chair and departs. As she sits there, half smiling and fluttering her fan, looking very lovely, Charley saunters up with his late partner. “If your royal highness will permit,” cries Mrs. Featherbrain, laughing and panting, “I will take a seat. How cool and comfortable you look, Miss Darrell. May I ask what you have done with Sir Victor?”

“Sir Victor left me here, and told me he would go for a water ice. If I look cool, it is more than I feel—the thermometer of this room must stand at a hundred in the shade.”

“A water ice,” repeats Mrs. Featherbrain with a sigh; “just what I have been longing for, this past half hour. Charley, I heard *you* say something about bringing me one, some time ago, didn't I? But I know of old what you're promises are worth. You know the adage, Miss Darrell—never more true than in this instance, 'Put not your trust in princes.'”

Miss Darrell's dark, disdainful eyes look full at the frivolous young matron. Mrs. Featherbrain and Mr. Stuart have been devoted to each other all the evening.

“I know the adage,” she answers coolly, “but I confess I don't see the application.”

“What! don't you know Charley's sobriquet of Prince Charley? Why he has been the Prince ever since he was

five years old, partly on account of his absurd name, partly because of his absurd grand seigneur airs. I think it fits—don't you?"

"And if I were Prince," Charley interposes, before Miss Darrell can answer, "my first royal act would be to order Featherbrain to the deepest dungeon beneath the castle moat, and make his charming relict Princess consort, as she has long, alas! been queen of my affections!"

He lays his white-kidded hand on the region of his heart, and bows profoundly. Mrs. Featherbrain's shrill, rather silly laugh, rings out—she hits him a blow with her perfumed fan.

"You precocious little boy!" she says, "as if children of your age knew what their affections meant. Miss Darrell, you'll not credit it I'm sure, but this juvenile cousin of yours—Charley, you told me, Miss Darrell, was your cousin—was my first love—actually—my first!"

"And she jilted me in cold blood for Featherbrain. Since then I've been a blighted being—hiding, like the Spartan chap in the story, the fox that preys on my vitals, and going through life with the hollow mockery of a smile on my lips."

Again Mrs. Featherbrain's foolish little laugh peals out. She leans back, almost against him, looks up, and half whispers something very daring in French.

Edith turns away disgusted, gleams of disdainful scorn in, her shining hazel eyes. What a little painted giggling idiot the woman is—what fools most young men are! What business have married women flirting, and how much more sensible and agreeable Englishmen are than Americans.

"Miss Darrell looks sick of our frivolity," Mrs. Featherbrain gayly exclaims; "the wickedness of New York and the falsity of mankind, are new to her as yet. You saved Charley's life, didn't you, my love? Trixy told me all about it,—and remained with him all night in the snow, at the risk of your own life. Quite a romance, upon my word. Now why not end it, like all romances of the kind, in a love match and a marriage?"

Her eyes glitter maliciously and jealously, even while she laughs. If it is in the shallow heart of this prettily-painted, prettily-powdered woman, to care for any human being, she has cared for Charley Stuart.

"Mrs. Featherbrain!" Edith exclaims, in haughty surprise, half rising.

"My dear, don't be angry—you *might* do worse, though how, it would be difficult to say. I suggested it, because it is the usual ending of such things in novels, and on the stage—that is all."

"And as if I *could* fall in love with any one now," Mr. Stuart murmurs, plaintively. "Such a suggestion from you, Laura, is adding insult to injury."

"Here comes our baronet," Mrs. Featherbrain exclaims, "bearing a water ice in his own aristocratic hand. Rather handsome, isn't he?—only I detest very fair men. What a pity, for the peace of mind of our New York girls, he should be engaged in England."

"Ah! but he isn't engaged—I happen to know," said Charley; "so you see what comes of marrying in haste, Mrs. Featherbrain. If you had only waited another year now, instead of throwing me over for old Featherbrain, it might have been for a baronet—for of course there isn't a girl in New York could stand the ghost of a chance beside *you*."

"A most delicate compliment," Edith says, her scornful lip curling; "one hardly knows which to admire most—the refined tact of Mr. Stuart's flatteries, or the matronly dignity with which Mrs. Featherbrain repels them!"

She turns her white shoulder deliberately upon them both, and welcomes Sir Victor with her brightest smile.

"And for a rustic lassie, fresh from the fields and the daisies, it isn't so bad," is Mrs. Featherbrain's cool criticism.

"And I hope, despite Sir Victor's aristocratic attentions, Miss Darrell, you'll not forget you're engaged to me for the redowa," Charley finds a chance to murmur, *sotto voce*, in her ear, as he and his flirtee move on.

"You see the poor child's jealous, Charley," is the Featherbrain's last remark—"a victim to the green-eyed monster in his most virulent form. You really should be careful, my dear boy, how you use the charms a beneficent Providence has showered upon you. As you are strong, be merciful, and all that sort of thing."

The hours go on. Edith eats her water ice, and talks very animatedly to her baronet. Balls (he has had a surfeit of them, poor fellow!) mostly bore him—to-night he is really interested. The Americans are an interesting people, he thinks that must be why. Then the redowa begins, and Charley returns and carries her off. With him she is coldly silent, her eyes are averted, her words are few. He smiles to himself, and asks her this pleasant question:

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“If she doesn't think Laura Featherbrain the prettiest and best-dressed lady in the room?”

“I think Mrs. Featherbrain is well-named,” Miss Darrell answers, her dark eyes flashing. “I understand Mr. Featherbrain is lying sick at home. You introduced me to her—while I live in this house, Mr. Stuart, you will be kind enough to introduce me to no more—Mrs. Featherbrains!”

She brings out the obnoxious name with stinging scorn, and a look toward the lady bearing it sharper than daggers. There is a curious smile in Charley's eyes—his lips are grave.

“Are you angry, Edith? Do you know—of course you do, though—that it becomes you to be angry? My charming cousin, I never knew until to-night how really handsome you were.”

She disengages herself with sudden abruptness from his clasp.

“I am tired of dancing,” she says. “I detest redowas. And be kind enough to keep your odious point-blank compliments for the 'prettiest and best-dressed lady in the room.' I don't appreciate them!”

Is it jealousy? Charley wonders, complacently. He sits down beside her, and tries to coax her into good humor, but she is not to be coaxed. In ten minutes another partner comes up and claims her, and she goes. The pretty, dark girl in white, is greatly admired, and has no lack of partners. For Mr. Stuart he dances no more—he leans against a pillar, pulls his mustache; and looks placid and handsome. He isn't devoted to dancing, as a rule he objects to it on principle, as so much physical exertion for very little result; he has only fatigued himself to-night as a matter of abstract duty. He stands and watches Edith dance—this country girl has the lithe, willowy grace of a Bayadere, and she is laughing now, and looking very bright and animated. It dawns upon him, that she is by all odds the prettiest girl in the house, and that slowly but surely, for the hundred-and-fiftieth time in his life, he is falling in love.

“But I might have known it,” Mr. Stuart thinks, gravely; “brown beauties always *did* play the dickens with me. I thought that at five-and-twenty I had outgrown all that sort of youthful rubbish, and here I am on the brink of the pit again. Falling in love in the present, involves matrimony in the future, and matrimony has been the horror of my life since I was four years old. And then the governor wouldn't hear of it. I'm to be handed over to the first 'daughter of a hundred earls' across in England, who is willing to exchange a tarnished British coronet for a Yankee million or two of dollars.”

It is Trixy who is dancing with the baronet now—Trixy who descends to supper on the baronet's arm. She dances with him once again after supper; then he returns to Edith.

So the hours go on, and the April morning is growing gray. Once, Edith finds herself seated beside genial Lady Helena, who talks to her in a motherly way, that takes all her heart captive at once. Sir Victor leans over his aunt's chair, listening with a smile, and not saying much himself. His aunt's eyes follow him everywhere, her voice takes a deeper tenderness when she speaks to him. It is easy to see she loves him with almost more than a mother's love.

A little longer and it is all over. Carriage after carriage rolls away—Sir Victor and Lady Helena shake hands with this pretty, well-bred Miss Darrell, and go too. She sees Charley linger to the last moment, by fascinating Mrs. Featherbrain, whispering the usual inanity, in her pretty pink ear. He leads her to her carriage, when it stops the way, and he and the millionaire's wife vanish in the outer darkness.

“Now half to the setting moon are gone,

And half to the rising day;

Low on the sand, and loud on the stone,

The last wheel echoes away.”

Edith hums as she toils up to her pretty room. Trixy's grand field night is over—Edith's first ball has come to an end, and the first night of her new life.

CHAPTER V. OLD COPIES OF THE "COURIER."

"Two waltzes," said Trix, counting on her fingers; "that's two; one cracovienne, that's three; les lanciers, that's four; one galop, that's five; and one polka quadrille, that's six. Six dances, round and square, with Sir Victor Catheron. Edith," cried Miss Stuart, triumphantly, "*do* you hear that?"

"Yes, Trixy, I hear," said Edith, dreamily.

"You don't look as if you did, or if you do hear, you don't heed. Six dances—two more I am certain, than he danced with any other girl in the house. That looks promising, now doesn't it? Edith, the long and short of the matter is this: I shall break my heart and die if he doesn't make me Lady Catheron."

A faint, half-absent smile—no other reply from Miss Darrell. In the handsome reception-room of the Stuart mansion, the two girls sat. It was half-past three in the afternoon, of the day succeeding the ball. In the luxuriant depths of a puffy arm-chair, reclined Edith Darrell, as much at home, as though puffy chairs and luxuriant reclining, had ever been her normal state. The crimson satin cushions, contrasted brilliantly with her dark eyes, hair and complexion. Her black silk dress was new, and fitted well, and she had lit it up with a knot of scarlet tangled in some white lace at the throat. Altogether she made a very effective picture.

In another puffy rocking-chair near, sat Trixy, her chestnut hair *crepe* to her eyebrows and falling in a crinkling shower down to her waist. Her voluminous draperies balloon over the carpet for the space of a couple of yards on either side, and she looked from top to toe the "New Yorkiest of New York girls." They made a very nice contrast if you had an eye for effect—blonde and brunette, dash and dignity, style and classic simplicity, gorgeous furniture, and outside the gray, fast-drifting April afternoon, the raw, easterly April wind.

"Of course," pursued Miss Stuart, going on with the web of rose-colored knitting in her lap, "being the daughter of the house, and considering the occasion, and everything, I suppose a few more dances than usual were expected of him. Still, I *don't* believe he would have asked me six times if—Edith! how often did he dance with you?"

"How often did—I beg your pardon, Beatrix; I didn't catch what you said."

"I see you didn't. You're half-asleep, arn't you? A penny for your thoughts, Dithy."

"They're not worth a farthing," Edith answered, contemptuously. "I chanced just then to be thinking of Mrs. Featherbrain. What was it you asked—something about Sir Victor?"

"I asked how often Sir Victor danced with you last night."

"I really forget. Four times, I think—yes, four times. Why?"

"He danced six with me, and I'm sure he didn't dance more than half as often with any one else. Mamma thinks he means something, and he took me to supper, and told me about England. We had quite a long conversation; in fact, Edith, I fairly grow crazy with delight at the thought of one day being 'My lady.'"

"Why think of it, then, since it sets you crazy?" Edith suggested, with cool indifference. "I daresay you've heard the proverb, Trix, about counting your chickens before they're hatched. However, in this case I don't really see why you should despair. You're his equal in every way, and Sir Victor is his own master, and can do as he likes."

"Ah, I don't know!" Trix answered with a despondent sigh, "he's a baronet, and these English people go so much for birth and blood. Now you know we've neither. It's all very well for pa to name Charley after a prince, and spell Stuart, with a *u* instead of an *ew*, like everybody else, and say he's descended from the royal family of Scotland—there's something more wanted than *that*. He's sent to London, or somewhere, for the family coat-of-arms. You may laugh, Edith, but he has, and we're to seal our letters with a griffin *rampant*, or a catamount *couchant*, or some other beast of prey. Still the griffin rampant, doesn't alter the fact, that pa began life sweeping out a grocery, or that he was in the tallow business, until the breaking out of the rebellion. Lady Helena and Sir Victor are everything that's nice, and civil, and courteous, but when it comes to marrying, you know, that's quite another matter. Isn't he just sweet, though, Edith?"

"Who? Sir Victor? Poor fellow, what has he ever said or done to you, Trix, to deserve such an epithet as that? No, I am glad to say he didn't strike me as being 'sweet'—contrariwise, I thought him particularly sensible and pleasant."

“Well, can't a person be sweet and sensible too?” Trix answered, impatiently. “Did you notice his eyes? Such an expression of weariness and sadness, and—now what are you laughing at. I declare, you're as stupid as Charley. I can't express a single opinion that he doesn't laugh at. Call me sentimental if you like, but I say again he *has* the most melancholy expression I ever looked at. Do you know, Dithy, I love melancholy men.”

“Do you?” said Edith, still laughing. “My dear lackadaisical Trixy! I must confess myself, I prefer 'jolly' people. Still you're not altogether wrong about our youthful baronet, he *does* look a prey at times to green and yellow melancholy. You don't suppose he has been crossed in love, do you? Are baronets—rich baronets—ever crossed in love I wonder. His large, rather light blue eyes, look at one sometimes as though to say:

“I have a secret sorrow here,
A grief I'll ne'er impart,
It heaves no sigh, it sheds no tear,
But it consumes the 'art!”

Miss Darrell was an actress by nature—she repeated this lachrymose verse, in a sepulchral tone of voice.

“That's it, you may depend, Trixy. The poor young gentleman's a prey to unrequited affection. What are you shaking your head so vehemently at?”

“It isn't that,” said Trix, looking solemn and mysterious, “it's worse!”

“Worse! Dear me. I didn't think anything could be worse. What is it then?”

“*Murder!*”

It was Trixy's turn to be sepulchral. Miss Darrell opened her big brown eyes. Miss Stuart's chanel-house tone was really blood curdling.

“My dearest Trix! Murder! Good gracious, you can't mean to say we've been dancing all night with a murderer? Who has he killed?”

“Edith, don't be an idiot! Did I say he killed any one? No, it isn't that—it's a murder that was committed when he was a baby.”

“When he was a baby!” Miss Darrell repeats, in dense bewilderment.

“Yes, his mother was murdered, poor thing. It was a most shocking affair, and as interesting as any novel you ever read,” said Trixy, with the greatest relish. “Murdered in cold blood as she slept, and they don't know to this day who did it.”

Edith's eyes were still very wide open.

“His mother—when he was a baby! Tell us about it, Trix. One naturally takes an interest in the family murders of one's future second cousin-in-law.”

“Well,” began Miss Stuart, still with the utmost relish, “you see his father—another Sir Victor—made a low marriage—married the daughter of a common sort of person, in trade. Now there's a coincidence to begin with. *I'm* the daughter of a common sort of person in trade—at least I was!”

“It is to be hoped the coincidence will not be followed out after the nuptial knot,” answered Edith, gravely, “it would be unpleasant for you to be murdered, Trix, and plunge us all into the depth of despair and bombazine. Proceed, as they say on the stage, 'Your tale interests me.'”

“He was engaged—the other Sir Victor, I mean—to his cousin, a Miss Inez Catheron—pretty name, isn't it?—and, it seems, was afraid of her. She was a brunette, dark and fierce, with black eyes and a temper to match.”

A bow of acknowledgment from Miss Darrell.

“As it turned out, he had good reason to be afraid of her. He was a year and a half married, and the baby—this present Sir Victor—was two or three months old, when the marriage was made public, and wife and child brought home. There must have been an awful row, you know, at Catheron Royals, and one evening, about a month after her arrival, they found the poor thing asleep in the nursery, and stabbed to the heart.”

“Was she asleep after she was stabbed or before?”

“Bother. There was an inquest, and it turned out that she and Miss Catheron had had a tremendous quarrel, that very evening: Sir Victor was away when it happened, and he just went stark, staring mad the first thing, when he heard it. Miss Catheron was arrested on suspicion. Then it appeared that she had a brother, and that this brother was an awful scamp, and that he claimed to have been married to Lady Catheron before she married Sir Victor, and that *he* had had a row with her, that same day too. It was a dreadfully mixed up affair—all that seemed clear, was that Lady Catheron had been murdered by somebody, and that Juan—yes, Juan Catheron—had run away, and

when wanted, was not to be found.”

“It appears to have been a strictly family affair from first to last—that, at least, was a consolation. What did they do to Miss Inez Catheron?”

“Put her in prison to stand her trial for murder. She never stood it, however—she made her escape, and never was heard of, from that day to this. Isn't it tragical, and isn't it dreadful for Sir Victor—his mother murdered, his father crazy, or dead, ages ago for what I know, and his relations tried for their lives?”

“Poor Sir Victor! Dreadful indeed. But where in the world, Trixy, did *you* find all this out? Has he been pouring the family history so soon into your sympathetic ear?”

“Of course not; that's the curious part of the story. You know Mrs. Featherbrain?”

“I'm happy to say,” retorted Miss Darrell, “I know very little about her, and intend to know less.”

“You do know her, however. Well, Mrs. Featherbrain has a father.”

“Poor old gentleman!” says Miss Darrell, compassionately.

“Old Hampson—that's his name. Hampson is an Englishman, and from Cheshire, and knew the present Sir Victor's grandfather. He gets the Cheshire papers ever since he left, and, of course, took an interest in all this. He told Mrs. Featherbrain—and what do you think?—Mrs. Featherbrain actually asked Lady Helena.”

“It is precisely the sort of thing Mrs. Featherbrain would be likely to do. 'Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.' How copious are my quotations this afternoon. What did Lady Helena say?”

“Gave her a look—a lady who was present told me—such a look. She turned dead white for a minute, then she spoke: 'I never discuss family matters with perfect strangers.' Those were her words—'*perfect strangers*.' 'I consider your question impertinent, madame, and decline to answer it.' Then she turned her back upon Mrs. Featherbrain; and shouldn't I like to have seen Mrs. Featherbrain's face. Since then, she just bows frigidly to her, no more.”

“Little imbecile! Trixy, I should like to see those papers.”

“So you can—I have them. Charley got them from Laura Featherbrain. What could *not* Charley get from Laura Featherbrain I wonder?” adds Trix, sarcastically.

Edith's color rose, her eyes fell on the tatting between her fingers.

“Your brother and the lady are old lovers then? So I inferred from her conversation last night.”

“I don't know about their being lovers exactly. Charley has that ridiculous flirting manner, young men think it their duty to cultivate, and it certainly *was* a strong case of spoons—excuse the slang. Pa would never have listened to it, though—*he* wants birth and blood too, and old Hampson's a pork merchant. Then Phineas Featherbrain came along, sixty years of age, and a petroleum prince. Of course, there was a gorgeous wedding—New York rang with it. I don't see that the marriage makes much difference in Charley and Laura's flirtation, though. Just wait a minute and I'll go and get the papers—I haven't read it all myself.”

Miss Stuart swept, stately and tall, from the room, returning in a few moments with some half-dozen old, yellow newspapers.

“Here you are, sir,” she cries, in shrill newsboy singsong; “the full, true and particular account of the tragedy at Catheron Royals. Sounds like the title of a sensation novel, doesn't it? Here's No. 1 for you—I've got on as far as No. 4.”

Miss Darrell throws aside her work and becomes absorbed in the *Chesholm Courier* of twenty-three years back. Silence fell—the moments wore on—the girls become intensely interested, *so* interested that when the door was thrown open and “Sir Victor Catheron” announced, both sprang to their feet, conscience-stricken with all their guilt, red in their faces.

He advanced, hat in hand, a smile on his face. He was beside Trix first. She stood, the paper still clutched in her hand, her cheeks redder than the crimson velvet carpet. His astonished eyes fell upon it—he who ran might read—the *Chesholm Courier* in big, black letters, and in staring capitals, the “TRADGEDY OF CATHERON ROYALS.”

The smile faded from Sir Victor Catheron's lips, the faint color, walking in the chill wind had brought, died out of his face. He turned of that dead waxen whiteness, fair people do turn—then he lifted his eyes and looked Miss Stuart full in the face.

“May I ask where you got this paper?” he asked, very quietly.

“Oh, I'm *so* sorry!” burst out Trixy. “I'm awfully sorry, but I—I didn't know—I mean, I didn't mean—oh, Sir

Victor, forgive me if I have hurt your feelings. I never meant *you* to see this.”

“I am sure of that,” he said, gently; “it is necessarily very painful to me. Permit me to ask again, how you chanced to come by these papers?”

“They were lent us by—by a lady here; her father is from Cheshire, and always gets the papers. Indeed I am very, very sorry. I wouldn't have had it happen for worlds.”

“There is no need to apologize—you are in no way to blame. I trust I find you and Miss Darrell entirely recovered from the fatigue of last night. The most charming party of the season—that is the unanimous verdict, and I for one indorse it.”

He took a seat, the color slowly returning to his face. As he spoke, two eyes met his, dark, sweet, compassionate, but Edith Darrell did not speak a word.

The obnoxious papers were swept out of sight—Miss Stuart made desperate efforts at ease of manner, and morning call chit-chat, but every effort fell flat. The spell of the *Chesholm Courier* was on them all, and was not to be shaken off. It was a relief when the baronet rose to go.

“Lady Helena desires best regards to you both—she has fallen quite in love with *you*, Miss Darrell. As it is a 'Nilsson night' at the academy, I suppose we will have the pleasure of seeing you there?”

“You certainly will,” answered Trix, “Edith has never heard Nilsson yet, poor child. Remember us to Lady Helena, Sir Victor. *Good* afternoon.”

Then he was gone—and Miss Stuart looked at Miss Darrell, solemnly and long.

“There goes my last hope! Oh, my, why did I fetch down those wretched papers. All my ambitious dreams of being a baro—nette are knocked in the head now. He'll never be able to bear the sight of me again.”

“I don't see that,” Edith responded; “if a murder is committed, the world is pretty sure to know of it—its something not to be ignored. How deeply he seems to feel it too—in spite of his rank and wealth I pity him, Trixy.”

“Pity him as much as you like, so that it is not the pity akin to love. I don't want *you* for a rival, Edie—besides I have other views for you.”

“Indeed! The post of confidential maid when you are Lady Catheron?”

“Something better—the post of confidential sister. There! You needn't blush, I saw how the land lay from the first, and Charley isn't a bad fellow in spite of his laziness. The door bell again. Nothing but callers now until dark.”

All Miss Stuart's masculine friends came dropping in successively, to institute the necessary inquiries as to the state of her health, after eight hours' steady dancing the preceding night. Edith's unsophisticated head ached with it all, and her tongue grew paralyzed with the platitudes of society. The gas was lit, and the dressing-bell ringing, before the last coat-tail disappeared.

As the young ladies, yawning drearily in each other's faces, turned to go up to their rooms, a servant entered, bearing two pasteboard boxes.

“With Sir Victor Catheron's compliments, Miss Beatrix, and brought by his man.”

Each box was labelled with the owner's name. Trix opened hers with eager fingers. A lovely bouquet of white roses, calla lilies, and jasmine, lay within. Edith opened hers—another bouquet of white and scarlet camellias.

“For the opera,” cried Trix, with sparkling eyes, “How good of him—how generous—how forgiving! After the papers and all! Sir Victor's a prince, or ought to be.”

“Don't gush, Trixy,” Edith said, “it grows tiresome. Why did he send you all white, I wonder? As emblematic of your spotless innocence and that sort of thing? And do *I* bear any affinity to '*La Dame aux Camellias*'? I think you may still hope, Trix—if there be truth in the language of flowers.”

Three hours later—fashionably late, of course—the Stuart party swept in state into their box. Mrs. Stuart, Miss Stuart Mr. Stuart, junior, and Miss Darrell. Miss Stuart dressed for some after “reception” in silvery blue silk, pearl ornaments in her hair, and a virginal white bouquet in her hand. Miss Darrell in the white muslin of last night, a scarlet opera cloak, and a bouquet of white and scarlet camellias. Charley lounging in the background, looking as usual, handsome of face, elegant of attire, and calmly and upliftedly unconscious of both.

The sweet singer was on the stage. Edith Darrell leaned forward, forgetting everything in a trance of delight. It seemed as though her very soul were carried away in the spell of that enchanting voice. A score of “double barrels” were turned to their box—Beatrix Stuart was an old story—but who was the dark beauty? As she sat,

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leaning forward, breathless, trance-bound, the singer vanished, the curtain fell.

“Oh!” it was a deep drawn sigh of pure delight. She drew back, lifted her impassioned eyes, and met the smiling ones of Sir Victor Catheron.

“You did not know I was here,” he said. “You were so enraptured I would not speak. Once it would have enraptured me too, but I am afraid my rapturous days are past.”

“Sir Victor Catheron speaks as though he were an octogenarian. I have heard it is 'good form' to outlive at twenty, every earthly emotion. Mr. Stuart yonder prides himself on having accomplished the feat I may be stupid, but I confess being *blase*, doesn't strike me in the light of an advantage?”

“But if *blase* be your normal state? I don't think I ever tried to cultivate the *vanitas vanitatem* style of thing, but if it *will* come? Our audience are enthusiastic enough—see! They have made her come back.”

She came back, and held out both hands to the audience, and the pretty gesture, and the charming smile, redoubled the applause. Then silence fell, and softly and sweetly over that silence, floated the tender, pathetic words of “Way down upon the Swanee River.” You might have heard a pin drop. Even Sir Victor looked moved. For Edith, she sat scarcely breathing—quivering with ecstasy. As the last note was sung, as the fair songster kissed hands and vanished, as the house arose from its spell, and re-rang with enthusiasm, Edith turned again to the young baronet, the brown eyes luminous with tears, the lips quivering. He bent above her, saying something, he could hardly have told what, himself—carried away for once in his life, by the witchery of two dark eyes.

Mr. Charles Stuart, standing in the background, beheld it all.

“Hard hit,” he murmured to his mustache, but his face, as he gave his mother his arm, and led her forth, told nothing.

An old adorer escorted Miss Stuart. Miss Darrell and her camellias, came last, on the arm of the baronet.

That night, two brown eyes, haunted Sir Victor Catheron's slumbers—two brown eyes sparkling through unshed tears—two red lips trembling like the lips of a child.

For the owner of the eyes and lips, she put the camellias, carefully in water, and far away in the small hours went to bed and to sleep. And sleeping she dreamed, that all dressed in scarlet, and wearing a crown of scarlet camellias, she was standing up to be married to Sir Victor Catheron with Mr. Charley Stuart as officiating clergyman, when the door opened, and the murdered lady of Trixy's story came stalking in, and whirled her screaming away in her ghostly arms.

Too much excitement, champagne, and lobster salad had engendered the vision no doubt, but it certainly spoiled Miss Darrell's beauty sleep *that* night.

CHAPTER VI. ONE MOONLIGHT NIGHT.

The pleasant days went on—April went out—May came in. On the tenth of May, the Stuart family, Sir Victor Catheron, and Lady Helena Powyss were to sail from New York for Liverpool.

To Edith, fresh from the twilight of her country life, these days and nights had been one bewildering round of excitement and delight. Opera, theatre, dinner and evening parties, shopping, driving, calling, receiving—all that goes to make the round of that sort of life, had been run. Her slender wardrobe had been replenished, the white Swiss had been reinforced by half-a-dozen glistening silks; the corals, by a set of rubies and fine gold. Mr. Stuart might be pompous and pretentious, but he wasn't stingy, and he had insisted upon it for his own credit. And half-a-dozen "spandy new" silks, fresh from Stewart's counters, with the pristine glitter of their bloom yet upon them, were very different from one half-worn amber tissue of Trixy's. Miss Darrell took the dresses and the rubies, and looked uncommonly handsome in both.

On the last night but one, of their stay in New York, Mrs. Featherbrain gave a last "At Home," a sort of "P. P. C." party, Trixy called it. Miss Darrell was invited, and said nothing at the time, unless tossing the card of invitation contemptuously out of the window can be called saying something; but at the last moment she declined to go.

"My head is whirling now, from a surfeit of parties," she said to Miss Stuart. "Aunt Chatty is going to stay at home, and so shall I. I don't like your Mrs. Featherbrain—that's the truth—and I'm not fashionable enough yet to sham friendship with women I hate. Besides, Trix dear, you know you were a little—just a little—jealous of me, the other night at Roosevelt's. Sir Victor danced with me once oftener than he did with you. Now, you dear old love, I'll let you have a whole baronet to yourself, for this night, and who knows what may happen before morning?"

Miss Edith Darrell was one of those young persons—happily rare—who, when they take a strong antipathy, are true to it, even at the sacrifice of their own pleasure. In her secret soul, she was jealous of Mrs. Featherbrain. If she and Charley carried on their imbecile flirtation, at least it would not be under *her* disgusted eyes.

Miss Stuart departed—not the lilies of the field—not Solomon in all his glory—not the Queen of Sheba herself, ever half so magnificent. Charley went with her, a placid martyr to brotherly duty. And Edith went down to the family sitting-room where Aunt Chatty (Aunt Chatty by request) sat dozing in her after-dinner chair.

"We are going to have an 'At home' all to our two selves to-night, auntie," Edith, said, kissing her thin cheek; "and I am going to sing you to sleep, by way of beginning."

She was fond of Aunt Chatty—a meek soul, born to be tyrannized over, *and* tyrannized over, from her very cradle. One of those large women, who obey their small husbands in fear and trembling, who believe everything they are told, who "bless the squire and his relations, and live contented with their stations;" who are bullied by their friends, by their children, by their servants, and who die meekly some day, and go to Heaven.

Edith opened the piano and began to play. She was looking very handsome to-night, in green silk and black-lace, one half-shattered rose in her hair. She looked handsome—at least so the young man who entered unobserved, and stood looking at her, evidently thought.

She had not heard him enter, but presently some mesmeric *rapport* between them, told her he was near. She turned her head and saw him. Aunt Chatty caught sight of him, in her semi-sleeping state, at the same moment.

"Dear me, Charley," his mother said, "*you* here? I thought you went to Mrs. Featherbrain's?"

"So I did," replied Charley. "I went—I saw—I returned—and here I am, if you and Dithy will have me for the rest of the evening."

"Edith and I were very well off without you. We had peace, and that is more than we generally have when you and she come together. You shall be allowed to stay only on one condition, and that is that you don't quarrel."

"I quarrel?" Charley said, lifting his eyebrows to the middle of his forehead. "My dear mother, your mental blindness on many points, is really deplorable. It's all Edith's fault—all; one of the few fixed principles of my life, is never to quarrel with anybody. It upsets a man's digestion, and is fatiguing in the extreme. Our first meeting," continued Mr. Stuart, stretching himself out leisurely on a sofa, "at which, Edith fell in love with me at sight, was a row. Well, if it wasn't a row, it was an unpleasantness of some sort. You can't deny, Miss Darrell, there was a

coolness between us. Didn't we pass the night in a snow-drift? Since then, every other meeting has been a succession of rows. Injustice to myself, and the angelic sweetness of my own disposition, I must repeat, the beginning, middle, and ending of each, lies with her. She *will* bully, and I never could stand being bullied—I always knock under. But I warn her—a day of retribution is at hand. In self-defence I mean to marry her, and then, base miscreant, beware! The trodden worm will turn, and plunge the iron into her own soul. May I ask what you are laughing at, Miss Darrell?”

“A slight confusion of metaphor, Charley—nothing more. What have you done with Trix?”

“Trix is all right in the matronly charge of Mrs. Featherbrain, and engaged ten deep to the baronet. By the bye, the baronet was inquiring for you, with a degree of warmth and solicitude, as unwelcome as it was uncalled for. A baronet for a brother-in-law is all very well—a baronet for a rival is not well at all. Now, my dear child, try to overcome the general nastiness of your cranky disposition, for once, and make yourself agreeable. I knew you were pining on the stem for me at home, and so I threw over the last crush of the season, made Mrs. Featherbrain my enemy for life, and here I am. Sing us something.”

Miss Darrell turned to the piano with a frown, but her eyes were smiling, and in her secret heart she was well-content. Charley was beside her. Charley had given up the ball and Mrs. Featherbrain for her. It was of no use denying it, she was fond of Charley. Of late it had dawned dimly and deliciously upon her that Sir Victor Catheron was growing very attentive. If so wildly improbable a thing could occur, as Sir Victor's falling in love with her, she was ready at any moment to be his wife; but for the love which alone makes marriage sweet and holy, which neither time, nor trouble, nor absence, can change—that love she felt for her cousin Charley, and no other mortal man.

It was a very pleasant evening—*how* pleasant, Edith did not care to own, even to herself. Aunt Chatty dozed sweetly in her arm-chair, she in her place at the piano, and Charley taking comfort on his sofa, and calmly and dispassionately finding fault with her music. That those two could spend an evening, an hour, together, without disagreeing, was simply an utter impossibility. Edith invariably lost her temper—nothing earthly ever disturbed Charley's. Presently, in anger and disgust, Miss Darrell jumped up from the piano-stool, and protested she would play no more.

“To be told I sing Kathleen Mavourneen flat, and that the way I hold my elbows when I play Thalberg's 'Home,' is frightful to behold, I will *not* stand! Like all critics, you find it easier to point out one's faults, than to do better. It's the very last time, sir, I'll ever play a note for you!”

But, somehow, after a skirmish at euchre, at which she was ignobly beaten, and, I must say, shamefully cheated, she was back at the piano, and it was the clock striking twelve that made her start at last.

“Twelve! Goodness me. I didn't think it was half-past ten!” Mr. Stuart smiled, and stroked his mustache with calm complacency. “Aunt Chatty, wake up! It's midnight—time all good little women were in bed.”

“*You* need not hurry yourself on that account, Dithy,” Charley suggests, “if the rule only applies to good little women.”

Miss Darrell replies with a glance of scorn, and wakes up Mrs. Stuart.

“You were sleeping so nicely I thought it a pity to wake you sooner. Come, auntie dear, we'll go upstairs together. You know we have a hard day's work before us to-morrow. Good-night, Mr. Stuart.”

“Good-night, my love,” Mr. Stuart responded, making no attempt to stir. Edith linked her strong, young arm in that of her sleepy aunt and led her upstairs. He lay and watched the slim green figure, the beautiful bright face, as it disappeared in a mellow flood of gaslight. The clear, sweet voice came floating saucily back:

“And Charley he's my darling,

My darling—my darling,

And Charley he's my darling,

The young Chevalier!”

All that was sauciest, and most coquettish in the girl's nature, came out with Charley. With Sir Victor, as Trixy explained it, she was “goody” and talked sense.

Mr. Stuart went back to the ball, and, I regret to say, made himself obnoxious to old Featherbrain, by the marked *empressement* of his devotion to old Featherbrain's wife. Edith listened to the narration next day from the lips of Trix with surprise and disgust. Miss Stuart, on her own account, was full of triumph and happiness. Sir Victor had been most devoted, “*most devoted*” said Trix, in italics, “that is, for him. He danced with me very

often, and he spoke several times of *you*, Dithy, dear. He couldn't understand why you absented yourself from the last party of the season—no more can I for that matter. A person may hate a person like poison—I often do myself—and yet go to that person's parties.”

But this was a society maxim Miss Darrell could by no means be brought to understand. Where she liked she liked, where she hated she hated—there were no half measures for her.

The last day came. At noon, with a brilliant May sun shining, the ship fired her farewell guns, and steamed away for Merrie England. Edith leaned over the bulwark and watched the receding shore, with her heart in her eyes.

“Good—by to home,” she said, a smile on her lip, a tear in her eye. “Who knows when and how I may see it again. Who knows whether I shall *ever* see it?”

The luncheon bell rang; everybody—a wonderful crowd too—flocked merrily downstairs to the saloon, where two long tables, bright with crystal and flowers, were spread. What a delightful thing was an ocean voyage, and sea-sickness—bah!—merely an illusion of the senses.

After lunch, Charley selected the sunniest spot on deck for his resting—place, and the prettiest girl on board, for his companion, spread out his railway rug at her feet, spread out himself thereon, and prepared to be happy and be made love to. Trix, on the arm of the baronet, paraded the deck, Mrs. Stuart and Lady Helena buried themselves in the seclusion of the ladies' cabin, in expectation of the wrath to come. Edith got a camp—stool and a book, and hid herself behind the wheel—house for a little of private enjoyment. But she did not read; it was delight enough to sit and watch the old ocean smiling, and smiling like any other coquette, as though it could never be cruel.

The afternoon wore on; the sun dropped low, the wind arose—so did the sea. And presently—staggering blindly on Sir Victor's arm, pale as death, with speechless agony imprinted on every feature—Trixy made her appearance behind the wheel house.

“O Edith, I feel awfully—awfully! I feel like death—I feel—”

She wrenched her arm from the baronet's, rushed wildly to the side, and—Edith's dark, laughing eyes looked up into the blue ones, that no effort of Sir Victor's could *quite* control. The next moment she was by Trixy's side, leading that limp and pallid heroine to the regions below, whence, for five mortal days, she emerged not, nor did the eye of man rest on Miss Beatrix Stuart.

The weather was fine, but the wind and sea ran tolerably high, and of course everybody mostly was tolerably sick. One day's ordeal sufficed for Edith's tribute to old Neptune; after that, she never felt a qualm. A great deal of her time was spent in waiting upon Aunt Chatty and Trix, both of whom were very far gone indeed. In the case of Miss Stuart, the tortures of jealousy were added to the tortures of sea-sickness. Did Sir Victor walk with the young ladies on deck? Did he walk with *her*, Edith? Did he ever inquire for herself? Oh, it was shameful—shameful that she should be kept prostrate here, unable to lift her head! At this juncture, generally, in her excitement, Trixy did lift it, and the consequence was—woe.

It was full moon before they reached mid—ocean. How Edith enjoyed it, no words can tell. Perhaps it was out of merciful compassion to Trix, but she did not tell her of the long, brisk twilight, mid—day, and moonlight walks she and the baronet took on deck. How, leaning over the bulwarks, they watched the sun set, round and red, into the sea, and the silver sickle May moon rise, like another Aphrodite, out of the waves. She did not tell her, how they sat side by side at dinner, how he lay at her feet, and read aloud for her, in sheltered sunny nooks, how uncommonly friendly and confidential they became altogether, in these first half—dozen days out. People grow intimate in two days at sea, as they would not in two years on land. Was it *all* gentlemanly courtesy and politeness on the baronet's side? the girl sometimes wondered. She could analyze her own feelings pretty well. Of that fitful, feverish passion called love, described by the country swain as feeling—“hot and dry like—with a pain in the side like,” she felt no particle. There was one, Mr. Charles Stuart, lying about in places, looking serene and sunburnt, who saw it all with sleepy, half—closed eyes, and kept his conclusions to himself. “*Kismet!*” he thought; “the will of Allah be done. What is written is written. Sea-sickness is bad enough, without the green-eyed monster. Even Othello, if he had been crossing in a Cunard ship, would have put off the pillow performance until they reached the other side.”

One especial afternoon, Edith fell asleep after luncheon, on a sofa, in her own and Trixy's cabin, and slept through dinner and dessert, and only woke with the lighting of the lamps. Trix lay, pale and wretched, gazing out

of the porthole, at the glory of moonlight on the heaving sea, as one who sorrows without hope of consolation.

"I hope you enjoyed your forty winks, Edith," she remarked; "what a Rip Van Winkle you are! For my part, I've never slept at all since I came on board this horrid ship! Now, where are you going?"

"To get something to eat from my friend the stewardess," Edith answered; "I see I am too late for dinner."

Miss Darrell went, and got some tea and toast. Then wrapping herself in a blanket shawl, and tying a coquettish red wool hood over her hair, she ascended to the deck.

It was pretty well deserted by the ladies—none the worse for that, Edith thought. The full moon shone with untold splendor, over the vast expanse of tossing sea, heaving with that majestic swell, that never quite lulls on the mighty Atlantic. The gentlemen filled the smoking-room, the "Tabak Parliament" was at its height. She took a camp-stool, and made for her favorite sheltered spot behind the wheel-house. How grand it was—the starry sky, the brilliant white moon, the boundless ocean—that long trail of silvery radiance stretching miles behind. An icy blast swept over the deep, but, wrapped in her big shawl, Edith could defy even that. She forgot Sir Victor and the daring ambition of her life. She sat absorbed in the beauty and splendor of that moonlight on the sea. Very softly, very sweetly, half unconsciously, she began singing "The Young May Moon," when a step behind made her turn her head. It was Sir Victor Catheron. She awoke from her dream—came back to earth, and was of the world worldly, once more. The smile that welcomed him was very bright. She would have blushed if she could; but it is a disadvantage of pale brunettes that they don't blush easily.

"I heard singing, sweet and faint, and I give you my word, Miss Darrell, I thought it might be the Lurline, or a stray mermaid combing her sea-green locks. It is all very beautiful, of course, but are you not afraid of taking cold?"

"I never take cold," Miss Darrell answered; "influenza is an unknown disease. Has the tobacco parliament broken up, that I behold you here?"

"It is half-past eleven—didn't you know it?—and all the lights are out."

"Good Heaven!" Edith cried, starting up aghast; "half-past eleven! What will Trixy say? Really, moon-gazing must be absorbing work. I had no idea it was after ten."

"Stay a moment, Miss Darrell," Sir Victor interposed, "there is something I would like to say to you—something I have wished to speak of, since we came on board."

Edith's heart gave one great jump—into her mouth it seemed. What could such a preface as this portend, save one thing? The baronet spoke again, and Miss Darrell's heart sunk down to the very soles of her buttoned boots.

"It is concerning those old papers, the *Chesholm Courier*. You understand, and—and the lamentable tragedy they chronicle."

"Yes?" said Miss Darrell, shutting her lips tight.

"It is naturally a deeply painful subject to me. Twenty-three years have passed; I was but an infant at the time, yet if it had, occurred only a year ago, I think I could hardly feel it more keenly than I do—hardly suffer more, when I speak of it."

"Then *why* speak of it?" was the young lady's very sensible question. "I have no claim to hear it, I am sure."

"No," the young man responded, and even in the moonlight she could see his color rise, "perhaps not, and yet I wanted to speak to you of it ever since. I don't know why, it is something I can scarcely bear to think of even, and yet I feel a sort of relief in speaking of it to you. Perhaps there is 'rapport' between us—that we are affinities—who knows?"

Who indeed! Miss Darrell's heart came up from her boots, to its proper place, and stayed there.

"It was such a terrible thing," the young man went on, "such a mysterious thing. To this day it is wrapped in darkness. She was so young, so fair, so good—it seems too horrible for belief, that any human being could lift his hand against so innocent a life. And yet it was done."

"A most terrible thing," Edith said; "but one has only to read the papers, to learn such deeds of horror are done every day. Life is a terribly sensational story. You say it is shrouded in darkness, but the *Chesholm Courier* did not seem at all in the dark."

"You mean Inez Catheron. She was innocent."

"Indeed!"

"She was not guilty, except in this—she knew who *was* guilty, and concealed it. Of that, I have reason to be sure."

A TERRIBLE SECRET. A Novel.

“Her brother, of course—the Juan Catheron of the papers?”

“Who is to tell? Even that is not certain. No,” in answer to her look of surprise, “it is not certain. I am sure my aunt believes in his innocence.”

“Then who—”

“Ah—*who?*” the baronet said mournfully, “who was the murderer? It may be that we will never know.”

“You will know,” Edith said decidedly. “I am sure of it. I am a firm believer in the truism that ‘murder will out.’ Sooner or later you will know.”

She spoke with the calm conviction of prophecy. She looked back to shudder at her own words in the after-days.

“Three—and—twenty years is a tolerable time to forget even the bitterest sorrow, but the thought of that tragedy is as bitter to my aunt to-day, as it was when it was done. She cannot bear to speak of it—I believe she cannot bear to think of it. What I know, therefore, concerning it, I have learned from others. Until I was eighteen, I knew absolutely nothing. Of my mother, of course I have no remembrance, and yet”—his eyes and tone grew dreamy—“as far back as I can recall, there is in my mind the memory of a woman, young and handsome, bending above my bed, kissing and crying over me. My mother was fair, the face I recall is dark. You will think me sentimental—you will laugh at me, perhaps,” he said, smiling nervously; “you will set me down as a dreamer of dreams, and yet it is there.”

Her dark, earnest eyes looked up at him, full of womanly sympathy.

“Laugh at you! Think better of me, Sir Victor. In these days it is rare enough to see men with either memory or veneration for their mother—whether dead or alive.”

He looked at her; words seemed struggling to his lips. Once he half spoke. Then he checked himself suddenly. When he did speak it was with a total change of tone.

“And I am keeping you selfishly here in the cold. Take my arm, Miss Darrell; you must not stop another instant.”

She obeyed at once. He led her to her cabin-door—hesitated—took her hand and held it while he spoke:

“I don't know why, as I said before, I have talked of this; I could not have done it with any one else. Let me thank you for your sympathy with all my heart.”

Then he was gone; and, very grave and thoughtful, Edith sought Trixy and the upper berth. Miss Stuart lay calmly sleeping the sleep of the just and the sea-sick, blissfully unconscious of the traitorous goings on about her. Edith looked at her with a sort of twinge. Was it fair, after all? was it strictly honorable? “Poor Trix,” she said, kissing her softly, “I don't think it will be *you!*”

Next morning, at breakfast, Miss Darrell noticed that Mr. Stuart, junior, watched her as he sipped his coffee, with a portentous countenance that foreboded something. What it foreboded came out presently. He led her on deck—offered her his arm for a morning constitutional, and opened fire thus wise:

“What were you and the baronet about on deck at abnormal hours of the night? What was the matter with you both?”

“Now, now!” cried Edith, “how do you come to know anything about it? What business have small boys like you, spying on the actions of their elders, when they should be safely tucked up, and asleep in their little beds?”

“I wasn't spying; I was asleep. I have no restless conscience to keep me prowling about at unholy hours.”

“How do you come to know, then?”

“A little bird told me.”

“I'll twist your little bird's neck! Who was it, sir? I command you.”

“How she queens it already! Don't excite yourself, you small Amazon. It was the officer of the deck.”

“The officer of the deck might be much better employed; and you may tell him so, with my compliments.”

“I will; but you don't deny it—you were there!”

“I never deny my actions,” she says with royal disdain; “yes, I was there.”

“With Sir Victor—alone?”

“With Sir Victor—alone!”

“What did you talk about, Miss Darrell?”

“More than I care to repeat for your edification, Mr. Stuart. Have you any more questions to ask, pray?”

“One or two; did he ask you to marry him, Edith?”

A TERRIBLE SECRET. A Novel.

“Ah, no!” Edith answers with a sigh that is genuine; “there is no such luck as *that* in store for Dithy Darrell. A baronet's bride—Lady Catheron! no, no—the cakes and ale of life are not for me.”

“Would you marry him, if he did? Will you marry him when he does? for that is what it comes to, after all.”

“Would I marry him?” She looks at him in real incredulous wonder. “Would I marry Sir Victor Catheron—I? My dear Charley, when you ask rational questions, I shall be happy to answer them, to the best of my ability, but not such absurdity as that.”

“Then, you *will*?”

“Charley, don't be a tease—what do young persons of your juvenile years know about such things? I don't like the turn this conversation has taken; let us change it, let us talk about the weather—that's always a safe subject. Isn't it a splendid morning? Isn't it charming to have a perpetual fair wind? And how are you going to account for it, that the wind is always fair going to England, and always ahead coming out?”

“England, my country—great and free

Heart of the world—I leap to thee!”

She sings, with a wicked look in her dark eyes, as she watches her cavalier.

Charley is not going to be put off however; he declines to talk of either wind or weather.

“Answer my question, Edith, if you please. If Sir Victor Catheron asks you, will you be his wife?”

She looks at him calmly, steadily, the man she loves, and answers:

“If Sir Victor Catheron asks me, I will be his wife.”

CHAPTER VII. SHORT AND SENTIMENTAL.

Two days later, and Fastnet Rock looms up against the blue sky; the iron-bound Irish coast appears. At noon they will land in Queenstown.

“Come back to Erin, mavourneen, mavourneen,” sings Charley's voice down the passage, early in the morning.

Charley can sing a little still. He is to lose Edith. Sir Victor Catheron is to win and wear; but as she is not Lady Catheron yet, Mr. Stuart postpones despair and suicide until she *is*.

She sprang from her bed with a cry of delight. Ireland! One, at least, of the lands of her dreams.

“Trixy!” she cries. “O Trixy, look out! 'The land of sweet Erin' at last!”

“I see it,” Trixy said, rolling sleepily out of the under berth; “and I don't think much of it. A lot of wicked-looking rocks, and not a bit greener than at home. I thought the very sky was green over Ireland.”

For the last two days Trixy's bitter trials had ended—her sea-sickness a dismal dream of the past. She was able, in ravishing toilet, to appear at the dinner-table, to pace the deck on the arm of Sir Victor. As one having the right, she calmly resumed her sway where she had left it off. Since that moonlight night of which she (Trixy) happily knew nothing, the bare civilities of life alone had passed between Miss Darrell and the baronet. Sir Victor might try, and did, but with, the serene superiority of right and power Miss Stuart countermanded every move. Hers she was determined he should be, and there was all the lost time to be made up besides. So she redoubled her attentions, aided and abetted by her pa—and how it came about the perplexed young Englishman never could tell, but somehow he was constantly at Miss Stuart's side and unable to get away. Edith saw it all and smiled to herself.

“To-day for me, to-morrow for thee,” she hummed. “I have had my day; it is Trixy's turn now. She manoeuvres so well it would be a pity to interfere.”

Charley was *her* cavalier those pleasant last days; both were disposed to take the goods their gods provided, and not fret for to-morrow. It would not last—life's fairy gifts never do, for to-day they would eat, drink, and be merry together, and forget the evil to come.

They landed, spent an hour in Queenstown, then the train whirled them away “to that beautiful city called Cork.” There they remained two days, visited Blarney Castle, of course, and would have kissed the Blarney Stone but for the trouble of climbing up to it. Then off, and away, to Killarney.

And still Sir Victor was Trixy's captive—still Edith and Charley maintained their alliance. Lady Helena watched her nephew and the American heiress, and her fine woman's instinct told her he was in no danger *there*.

“If it were the other one, now,” she thought, glancing at Edith's dark, bright face; “but it is quite clear how matters stand between her and her cousin. What a handsome pair they will make.”

Another of the elders—Mr. James Stuart—watched the progress of matters, through very different spectacles. It was the one dream of his life, to marry his son and daughter to British rank.

“Of wealth, sir, they have enough,” said the Wall Street banker, pulling up his collar pompously. “I will leave my children a cool million apiece. Their descent is equal to the best—to the best, sir—the royal rank of Scotland is in their veins. Fortune I don't look for—blood, sir—BLOOD, I do.”

Over his daughter's progress after blood, he smiled complacently. Over his son's conduct he frowned.

“Mind what *you're* at, young man,” he said, on the day they left Cork, gruffly to Charley. “I have my eye on you. Ordinary attention to Fred Darrell's daughter I don't mind, but no fooling. You understand me, sir? No fooling. By George, sir, if you don't marry to please me, I'll cut you off with a shilling!”

Mr. Stuart, junior, looked tranquilly up at Mr. Stuart, senior, with an expression of countenance the senior by no means understood.

“Don't lose your temper, governor,” he answered calmly. “I won't marry Fred Darrell's daughter, if that's what you mean by 'fooling.' She and I settled *that* question two or three centuries ago.”

At the village of Macroom, they quitted the comfortable railway carriage, and mounted the conveyance known in Ireland, as a public car, a thing like an overgrown jaunting-car, on which ten people can ride, sitting back to back, isolated by the pile of luggage between. There was but one tourist for the Lakes besides themselves, a large, military-looking young man, with muttonchop whiskers and an eye-glass, a knapsack and knickerbockers.

A TERRIBLE SECRET. A Novel.

“Hammond, by Jove!” exclaimed Sir Victor. “Hammond, of the Scotch Grays. My dear fellow, delighted to see you. Captain Hammond, my friend, Mr. Stuart, of New York.”

Captain Hammond put up his eye-glass and bowed. Charley lifted his hat, to this large military swell.

“I say, Sir Victor,” the Captain of Scotch Grays began, “who'd have thought of seeing you here, you know? They said—aw—you had gone exploring Canada, or the United States, or some of those kind of places, you know. Who's your party?” *sotto voce*; “Americans—hey?”

“American friends, and my aunt, Lady Helena Powyss.”

“Now, thin—look alive yer honors,” cried the car-driver, and a scramble into seats instantly began. In his own mind, Sir Victor had determined his seat should be by Miss Darrell's side. But what is man's determination beside woman's resolve?

“Oh, p—please, Sir Victor,” cries Miss Stuart, in a piteous little voice, “*do* help me up. It's so dreadfully high, and I *know* I shall fall off. And oh, please, do sit here, and point out the places as we go along—one enjoys places, so much more, when some one points them out, and you've been along here before.”

What could Sir Victor do? More particularly as Lady Helena good-humoredly chimed in:

“Yes, Victor, come and point out the places. You shall sit bodkin, between Miss Beatrix and me. Your friend in the Tweed suit, can sit next, and you, my dear Mrs. Stuart—where will *you* sit?”

“As Charley and Edith will have all the other side to themselves,” said meek Mrs. Stuart, “I guess I'll sit beside Edith.”

“Ay, ay,” chimed in her spouse, “and I'll mount with cabby. All serene, there, behind? Then away we go!”

Away they went, clattering over the road, with the whole tatterdemalion population of Macroom after, shouting for “ha' pennies.”

“Rags enough to set up a paper-mill,” suggested Charley, “and all the noses turn-ups! Edith, how do you like this arrangement?”

“I think Trixy's cleverer than I ever gave her credit for,” laughed Edith; “it's a pity so much diplomacy should be 'love's labor lost.’”

“Poor Trixy! She means well too. Honor thy father, that thy days may be long in the land. She's only trying to fulfil the command. And you think she has no chance?”

“I know it,” Edith answers, with the calm serenity of conviction.

“Sir Victor, who's your friend with the solemn face and the funny knickerbockers?” whispers Trixy, under her white parasol.

“He's the Honorable Angus Hammond, second son of Lord Glengary, and captain of Scotch Grays,” replies Sir Victor, and Miss Stuart opens her eyes, and looks with new-born reverence, at the big, speechless young warrior, who sits sucking the head of his umbrella, and who is an honorable and the son of a lord.

The day was delightful, the scenery exquisite, his companion vivacious in the extreme, Lady Helena in her most genial mood. But Sir Victor Catheron sat very silent and *distrain* all the way. Rallied by Miss Stuart on his gloom, he smiled faintly, and acknowledged he felt a trifle out of sorts. As he made the confession he paused abruptly—clear and sweet, rang out the girlish laugh of Edith Darrell.

“Our friends on the other side appear to be in excellent spirits at least,” says Lady Helena, smiling in sympathy with that merry peal; “what a very charming girl Miss Darrell is.”

Trixy shoots one swift, sidelong glance at the baronet's face, and answers demurely:

“Oh, it's an understood thing that Dithy and Charley are never really happy, except when together. I don't believe Charley would have taken the trouble to come at all, if Edith, at his solicitation, had not been one of the party.”

“A very old affair I suppose?” asks her ladyship, still smiling.

“A very old affair, indeed,” Trix answers gayly. “Edith will make a charming sister-in-law; don't you think so, Sir Victor?”

She looks up at him artlessly as she plunges her small dagger into a vital place. He tries to smile, and say something agreeable in return—the smile is a failure; the words a greater failure. After that, all Trixy's attention falls harmless. He sits moodily listening to the gay voices on the other side of the luggage, and finds out for sure and certain that he is dead in love with Miss Darrell.

They reach Glengariff as the twilight shadows fall—lovely Glengariff, where they are to dine and pass the

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night. At dinner, by some lucky chance, Edith is beside him, and Captain Hammond falls into the clutches of Trix. And Miss Darrell turns her graceful shoulder deliberately upon Charley, and bestows her smiles, and glances, and absolute attention upon his rival.

After dinner they go for a sail by moonlight to an island, where there are the remains of a martello tower. The elders, for whom "moonlight on the lake," long ago lost its witchery, and falling dews and night airs retain their terrors, stay at home and rest. Edith and Sir Victor, Trix and the Honorable Angus Hammond, saunter down arm in arm to the boat. Charley and the two Irish boatmen bring up the rear—Mr. Stuart smoking a consolatory cigar.

They all "pile in" together, and fill the little boat. The baronet follows up his luck, and keeps close to Edith. How beautiful she is with the soft silver light on her face. He sits and watches her, and thinks of the laureate's lines:

"A man had given all other bliss
And all his worldly worth for this,
To wast his whole heart in one kiss
Upon her perfect lips."

"*Am I too late?*" he thought; "does she love her cousin? Is it as his sister hints; or—"

His jealous, anxious eyes never left her. She saw it all. If she had ever doubted her power over him, she did not doubt to-night. She smiled, and never once looked toward Charley.

"No," he thought, with a sigh of relief; "she does not care for him in that way—let Miss Stuart think as she pleases. She likes him in a sisterly way—nothing more. I will wait until we reach England, and speak then. She, and she alone, shall be my wife."

CHAPTER VIII. IN TWO BOATS.

Early next morning our tourists remounted the car and jogged slowly over that lovely stretch of country which lies between Glengariff and Killarney.

Their places were as on the day before—Sir Victor in the possession of Trix, Charley with Edith. But the baronet's gloom was gone—hope filled his heart. She did *not* love her cousin,—of that he had convinced himself,—and one day he might call her wife.

Sir Victor Catheron was that *rara avis*, a modest young man. That this American girl, penniless and pedigreeless, was beneath him, he never thought—of his own rank and wealth, as motives to influence her, he never once dreamed. Nothing base or mercenary could find a place in so fair a creature; so noble and beautiful a face must surely be emblematic of a still more noble and beautiful soul. Alas! for the blindness of people in love.

It was a day of delight, a day of cloudless skies, sparkling sunshine, fresh mountain breezes, sublime scenery. Wild, bleak valleys, frowning Kerry rocks, roaring torrents, bare-footed, ragged children, pigs and people beneath the same thatched roof, such squalor and utter poverty as in their dreams they had never imagined.

“Good Heaven!” Edith said, with a shudder, “how can life be worth living in such horrible poverty as this?”

“The bugbear of your life seems to be poverty, Edith,” Charley answered. “I daresay these people eat and sleep, fall in love, marry, and are happy even here.”

“My dear Mr. Stuart, what a sentimental speech, and sillier even than it is sentimental. Marry and are happy! They marry no doubt, and the pig lives in the corner, and every cabin swarms with children, but—*happy!* Charley, I used to think you had one or two grains of common-sense, at least—now I begin to doubt it.”

“I begin to doubt it myself, since I have had the pleasure of knowing Edith Darrell. I defy mortal man to keep common-sense, or uncommon-sense, long in her company. Poverty and misery, in your lexicon, mean the same thing.”

“The same thing. There is no earthly evil that can equal poverty.”

They reached Killarney late in the evening, and drove to the “Victoria.” The perfect weather still continued, the moon that had lit their last night at sea, on the wane now, lifted its silver light over the matchless Lakes of Killarney, lying like sheets of crystal light beneath.

“Oh, how lovely!” Trix exclaimed. The rest stood silent. There is a beauty so intense as to be beyond words of praise—so sweet, so solemn, as to hush the very beating of our hearts. It was such beauty as this they looked upon now.

They stood on the velvety sward—Sir Victor with Trix on his arm, Charley and Edith side by side. A glowing mass of soft, scarlet drapery wrapped Miss Darrell, a coquettish hat, with a long, black ostrich plume, set off her Spanish face and eyes. They had dined—and when is moonlight half so poetical as after an excellent dinner?

“I see two or three boats,” remarked Sir Victor. “I propose a row on the lakes.”

“Of all things,” seconded Beatrix, “a sail on the Lakes of Killarney! Edith, do you realize it? Let us go at once, Sir Victor.”

“Will you come with me, Edith?” Charley asked, “or would you rather go with them?”

She looked at him in surprise. How grave his face—how quiet his tone! He had been like this all day, silent, preoccupied, grave.

“My very dear Charley, how polite we grow! how considerate of others' feelings! Quite a new phase of your interesting character. I'll go with you, certainly—Mr. Charles Stuart, in a state of lamblike meekness, is a study worth contemplating.”

He smiled slightly, and drew her hand within his arm.

“Come, then,” he said, “let us have this last evening together; who knows when we shall have another?”

Miss Darrell's brown eyes opened to their widest extent.

“This last evening! Who knows when we shall have another! Charley, if you're meditating flight or suicide, say so at once—anything is better than suspense. I once saw a picture of 'The Knight of the Woful Countenance'—the K. of the W. C. looked exactly as you look now! If you're thinking of strychnine, say so—no

one shall oppose you. My only regret is, that I shall have to wear black, and hideous is a mild word to describe Edith Darrell in black."

"Hideous!" Charley repeated, "you! I wonder if you could possibly look ugly in anything? I wonder if you know how pretty you are to-night in that charming hat and that scarlet drapery?"

"Certainly I know, and charming I undoubtedly must look to wring a word of praise from you. It's the first time in all your life, sir, you ever paid me a compliment. Hitherto you have done nothing but find fault with my looks and everything else."

"There is a time for everything," he answers, a little sadly—sadly! and Charley Stuart! "The time for all that is past. Here is our boat. You will steer, Edith? Yes—then I'll row."

The baronet and Trix were already several yards off, out upon the shining water. Another party—a large boat containing half-a-dozen, Captain Hammond among them, was farther off still. In this boat sat a girl with a guitar; her sweet voice as she sang came romantically over the lake, and the mountain echoes, taking it up, sang the refrain enchantingly over and over again. Edith lifted up her face to the starry sky, the moonlight bathing it in a glory.

"Oh, what a night!" she sighed. "What a bright, beautiful world it is, and how perfectly happy one could be, if—"

"One had thirty thousand a year!" Charley suggested.

"Yes, exactly. Why can't life be all like this—moonlight, capital dinners, lots of friends and new dresses, a nice boat, and—yes—I will say it—somebody one likes very much for one's companion."

"Somebody one likes very much, Edith? I wonder sometimes if you like me at all—if it is in you to like any one but yourself."

"Thanks! I like myself, certainly, and first best I will admit. After that—"

"After that?" he repeats.

"I like *you*. No—keep quiet, Charley, please, you'll upset the boat. Of course I like you—aren't you my cousin—haven't you been awfully kind—don't I owe all this to you? Charley, I bless that night in the snow—it has been the luckiest in my life."

"And the unluckiest of mine."

"Sir!"

"O Edith, let us speak for once—let us understand one another, and then part forever, if we must. Only why need we part at all?"

She turns pale—she averts her face from him, and looks out over the radiant water. Sooner or later she has known this must come—it has come to-night.

"Why need we part at all?" He is leaning on his oars, and they are floating rightly with the stream. "I don't need to tell you how I love you; you know it well enough; and I think—I hope—you care for me. Be true to yourself, Edith—you belong to me—come to me; be my wife."

There is passion in his tone, in his eyes, but his voice is quiet, and he sits with the oars in his hands. Even in this supreme moment of his life Mr. Stuart is true to his "principles," and will make no scene.

"You know I love you," he repeats, "as the man in the Cork theatre said the other night: 'I'll go down on my knees if you like, but I can love you just as well standing up.' Edith, speak to me. How can you ever marry any one but me—but me, whose life you saved. My darling, forget your cynicism—it is but lip-deep—you don't really mean it—and say you will be my wife."

"Your wife!" She laughs, but her heart thrills as she says it. "Your wife! It would be pleasant, Charley; but, like most of the pleasant things of life, it can never be."

"Edith!"

"Charley, all this is nonsense, and you know it. We are cousins—we are good friends and stanch comrades, and always will be, I hope; but lovers—no, no, no!"

"And why?" he asks.

"Have I not told you already—told you over and over again? If you don't despise me, and think me heartless and base, the fault has not been my want of candor. My cynicisms I mean, every word. If you had your father's wealth, the fortune he means to leave you, I would marry you to-morrow, and be," her lips trembled a little, "the happiest girl on earth."

"You don't care for me at all, then?" he calmly asks.

"Care for you! O Charley! can't you see? I am not *all* selfish. I care for you so much that I would sooner die than marry you. For you a marriage with me means ruin—nothing else."

"My father is fond of me. I am his only son. He would relent."

"He never would," she answered firmly, "and you know it. Charley, the day he spoke to you in Cork, I was behind the window—curtains reading. I heard every word. My first impulse was to come out and confront him—to throw back his favors and patronage, and demand to be sent home. A horrid bad temper is numbered among the list of my failings. But I did not. I heard your calm reply—the 'soft answer that turneth away wrath,' and it fell like oil on my troubled spirit.

"Don't lose your temper," you said; 'Fred Darrell's daughter and I won't marry, if that's what you mean.'

"I admire your prudence and truth. I took the lesson home, and—stayed behind the curtains. And we will keep to that—you and Fred Darrell's daughter will never marry."

"But, Edith, you know what I meant. Good Heavens! you don't for a second suppose—"

"I don't for a second suppose anything but what is good and generous of you, Charley. I know you would face your father like a—like a 'griffin rampant,' to quote Trix, and brave all consequences, if I would let you. But I won't let you. You can't afford to defy your father. I can't afford to marry a poor man."

"I am young—I am strong—I can work. I have my hands and my head, a tolerable education, and many friends. We would not starve."

"We would not starve—perhaps," Edith says, and laughs again, rather drearily. "We would only grub along, wanting everything that makes life endurable, and be miserable beyond all telling before the first year ended. We don't want to hate each other—we don't want to marry. You couldn't work, Charley—you were never born for drudgery. And I—I can't forget the training of my life even for you."

"You can't, indeed—you do your training credit," he answered bitterly.

"And so," she goes on, her face drooping, "don't be angry; you'll thank me for this some day. Let it be all over and done with to-night, and never be spoken of more. Oh, Charley, my brother, don't you see we could not be happy together—don't you see it is better we should part?"

"It shall be exactly as you wish. I am but a poor special pleader, and your worldly wisdom is so clear, the dullest intellect might comprehend it. You, throw me over without a pang, and you mean to marry the baronet. Only—as you are not yet his exclusive property, bought with a price—answer me this: You love me?"

Her head drooped lower, her eyes were full of passionate tears, her heart full of passionate pain. Throw him over without a pang! In her heart of hearts Edith Darrell knew what it cost her to be heartless to-night.

"Answer me!" he said imperiously, his eyes kindling. "Answer me! That much, at least, I claim as my right. Do you love me or do you not?"

And the answer comes very humbly and low.

"Charley! what need to ask? You know only too well—I do."

And then silence falls. He takes up the oars again—their soft dip, and the singing of the girl in the distant boat, the only sounds. White moonlight and black shadows, islands overrun with arbutus, that "myrtle of Killarney," and frowning mountains on every hand. The words of the girl's gay song come over the water:

"The time I've lost in wooing,

In watching and pursuing,

The light that lies

In woman's eyes

Has been my heart's undoing.

"Though wisdom oft has sought me,

I scorned the lore she brought me;

My only books

Were woman's looks,

And folly's all they've taught me."

"And folly's all they've taught me!" Charley says at length. "Come what may, it is better that I should have spoken and you should have answered. Come what may—though you marry Sir Victor to-morrow—I would not have the past changed if I could."

"And you will not blame me too much—you will not quite despise me?" she pleads, her voice broken, her face hidden in her hands. "I can't help it, Charley. I would rather die than be poor."

He knows she is crying; her tears move him strangely. They are in the shadow of Torc Mountain. He stops rowing for a moment, takes her hand, and lifts it to his lips.

"I will love you all my life," is his answer.

* * * * *

This is how two of the water-party were enjoying themselves. A quarter of a mile farther off, another interesting little scene was going on in another boat.

Trixy had been rattling on volubly. It was one of Trixy's fixed ideas that to entertain and fascinate anybody her tongue must go like a windmill. Sir Victor sat and listened rather absently, replied rather dreamily, and as if his mind were a hundred miles away. Miss Stuart took no notice, but kept on all the harder, endeavoring to be fascinating. But there is a limit even to the power of a woman's tongue. That limit was reached; there came a lull and a pause.

"The time I've lost in wooing," began the English girl in the third boat. The idea was suggestive; Trixy drew a deep breath, and made a fresh spurt—this time on the subject of the late Thomas Moore and his melodies. But the young baronet suddenly interposed.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Stuart," he began hastily, and in a somewhat nervous voice; "but there is a subject very near to my heart on which I should like to speak to you this evening."

Trixy sat straight up in the stern of the boat, as if she had been galvanized. Her heart gave one great ecstatic thump. "Oh," thought Miss Stuart, "he's going to pop!" I grieve to relate it, but that was the identical way the young lady thought it. "He's going to pop, as sure as I live!"

There was a pause—unspeakably painful to Miss Stuart. "Yes, Sir Victor," she faltered in her most dulcet and encouraging accents.

"I had made up my mind not to speak of it at all," went on Sir Victor, looking embarrassed and rather at a loss for words, "until we reached England. I don't wish to be premature. I—I dread a refusal so unspeakably, that I almost fear to speak at all."

What was Miss Stuart to say to this? What could any well-trained young lady say?

"Good gracious me!" (this is what she thought,) "why don't he speak out, and not go beating about the bush in this ridiculous manner! What's he afraid of? Refusal, indeed! Stuff and nonsense!"

"It is only of late," pursued Sir Victor Catheron, "that I have quite realized my own feelings, and then when I saw the attention paid by another, and received with evident pleasure, it was my jealousy first taught me that I loved."

"He means Captain Hammond," thought Trixy; "he's jealous of him, as sure as a gun. How lucky we met him at Macroom."

"And yet," again resumed the baronet, with a faint smile, "I don't quite despair. I am sure, Miss Stuart, I have no real cause."

"No—o—o, I think not," faltered Miss Stuart.

"And when I address myself to your father and mother—as I shall very soon—you think, Miss Stuart, *they* will also favor my suit?"

"*They* favor his suit?" thought Trixy, "good Heaven above! was ever earthly modesty like this young man's?" But aloud, still in the trembling tones befitting the occasion, "I—think so—I *know* so, Sir Victor. It will be only too much honor, I'm sure."

"And—oh, Miss Stuart—Beatrix—if you will allow me to call you so—you think that when I speak—when I ask—I will be accepted?"

"He's a fool!" thought Beatrix, with an inward burst. "A bashful, ridiculous fool! Why, in the name of all that's namby-pamby, doesn't he pop the question, like a man, and have done with it? Bashfulness is all very well—nobody likes a little of it better than I do; but there is no use running it into the ground."

"You are silent," pursued Sir Victor. "Miss Stuart, it is not possible that I am too late, that there is a previous engagement?"

Miss Stuart straightened herself up, lifted her head, and smiled. She smiled in a way that would have driven a lover straight out of his senses.

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“Call me Beatrix, Sir Victor; I like it best from my friends—from—from *you*. No, there is no previous engagement, and” (archly, this) “I am quite sure Sir Victor Catheron need never fear a refusal.”

“Thanks.” And precisely as another young gentleman was doing in the shadow of the “Torc,” Sir Victor did in the shadow of the “Eagle’s Nest.” He lifted his fair companion’s hand to his lips, and kissed it.

After that of course there was silence. Trixy’s heart was full of joy—pure, unadulterated joy, to bursting. Oh, to be out of this, and able to tell pa and ma, and Charley, and Edith, and everybody! Lady Catheron! “Beatrix—Lady Catheron!” No—I can’t describe Trixy’s feelings. There are some joys too intense and too sacred for the Queen’s English. She shut her eyes and drifted along in that blessed little boat in a speechless, ecstatic trance.

An hour later, and, as the clocks of Killarney were striking ten, Sir Victor Catheron helped Miss Stuart out of the boat, and had led her up—still silently—to the hotel. At the entrance he paused, and said the only disagreeable thing he had uttered to-night. “One last favor, Beatrix,” taking her hand and gazing at her tenderly, “I must ask. Let what has passed between us remain between us for a few days longer. I had rather you did not speak of it even to your parents. My aunt, who has been more than a mother to me, is ignorant still of my feelings—it is her right that I inform her first. Only a few days more, and then all the world may know.”

“Very well, Sir Victor,” Beatrix answered demurely; “as you please, of course. I shan’t speak to pa or ma. Goodnight, Sir Victor, good night!”

May I tell it, Miss Stuart actually gave the baronet’s hand a little squeeze? But were they not engaged lovers, or as good? and isn’t it permitted engaged lovers to squeeze each other’s right hands? So they parted. Sir Victor strolled away to smoke a cigar in the moonlight, and Miss Stuart, with a beatified face, swept upstairs, her high-heeled New York gaiters click-clicking over the ground. Lady Catheron, Lady Catheron! Oh, what would all Fifth Avenue say to this?

Sleep was out of the question—it was open to debate whether she would *ever* sleep again. She would go and see Edith. Yes, Edith and Charley had got home before her—she would go and see Edith.

She opened the door and went in with a swish of silk and patchouli. The candles were unlit. Miss Darrell, still wearing her hat and scarlet wrap, sat at the window contemplating the heavenly bodies.

“All in the dark, Dithy, and thinking by the ‘sweet silver light of the moon?’ O Edie! isn’t it just the heavenliest night?”

“Is that what you came in to say, Miss Stuart?”

“Don’t be impatient, there’s a dear! I wanted to tell you how happy I am, and what a delicious—de-li-ci-ous,” said Trix, dragging out the sweet syllables, “sail I’ve had. O Edie! *how* I’ve enjoyed myself! Did you?”

“Immensely!” Edith answered, with brief bitterness, and something in her tone made Trixy look at her more closely.

“Why, Edith, I do believe you’ve been crying!”

“Crying! Bosh! I never cry. I’m stupid—I’m sleepy—my head aches. Excuse me, Trix, but I’m going to bed.”

“Wait just one moment. O Edith,” with a great burst, “I *can’t* keep it! I’ll die if I don’t tell somebody. O Edith, Edith! wish me joy, Sir Victor has proposed!”

“Trix!”

She could just say that one word—then she sat dumb.

“O yes, Edith—out in the boat to-night. O Edith! I’m so happy—I want to jump—I want to dance—I feel wild with delight! Just think of it—*think* of it! Trixy Stuart will be My Lady Catheron!”

She turned of a dead white from brow to chin. She sat speechless with the shock—looking at Trixy—unable to speak or move.

“He’s most awfully and aggravatingly modest,” pursued Beatrix. “Couldn’t say plump, like a man and brother, ‘Trixy Stuart, will you marry me?’ but beat about the bush, and talked of being refused, and fearing a rival, and speaking to ma and pa and Lady Helena when we got to England. But perhaps that’s the way the British aristocracy make love. He asked me if there was any previous engagement, and any fear of a refusal, and that rubbish. I don’t see,” exclaimed Trixy, growing suddenly aggrieved, “*why* he couldn’t speak out like a hero, and be done with it? He’s had encouragement enough, goodness knows!”

Something ludicrous in the last words struck Edith—she burst out laughing. But somehow the laugh sounded

unnatural, and her lips felt stiff and strange.

"You're as hoarse as a raven and as pale as a ghost," said Trix. "That's what comes of sitting in draughts, and looking at the moonshine. I'm awfully happy, Edith; and when I'm Lady Catheron, you shall come and live with me always—always, you dear old darling, just like a sister. And some day you'll be my sister in reality, and Charley's wife."

She flung her arms around Edith's neck, and gave her a rapturous hug. Edith Darrell unclasped her arms and pushed her away.

"I'm tired, Trix; I'm cold." She shivered from head to foot. "I want to go to bed."

"But won't you say something, Dithy? Won't you wish me joy?"

"I—wish—you joy."

Her lips kept that strange feeling of stiffness—her face had lost every trace of color. Oh, to be alone and free from Trix!

"You say it as if you didn't mean it," said Trix indignantly, getting up and moving to the door. "You look half-frozen, and as white as a sheet. I should advise you to shut the window and go to bed."

She was gone. Edith drew a long breath—a long, tired, heavy sigh. So! that was over—and it was Trix, after all.

Trix, after all! How strangely it sounded—it stunned her. Trix, after all and she had made sure it was to be herself. He had looked at her, he had spoken to her, as he had never looked or spoken to Trix. His color had risen like a girl's at her coming—she had felt his heart bound as she leaned on his arm. And it was Trix, after all!

She laid her arm upon the window-sill, and her face down upon it, feeling sick—sick—that I should have to write it!—with anger and envy. She was Edith Darrell, the poor relation, still—and Trix was to be Lady Catheron.

"A pretty heroine!" cries some, "gentle reader," looking angrily up; "a nasty, envious, selfish creature. Not the sort, of a heroine *we're* used to." Ah! I know that—none better; but then pure and perfect beings, who are ready to resign their lovers and husbands to make other women happy, are to be found in—books, and nowhere else. And thinking it over and putting yourself in her place—honestly, now!—wouldn't you have been envious yourself?

CHAPTER IX. ALAS FOR TRIX!

“And after to-night we will all have a rest, thank Heaven! and *my* pilgrimage will come to an end. A fortnight at Powyss Place before you go up to London, my dear Mrs. Stuart—not a day less.”

Thus Lady Helena Powyss, eight days later, seated luxuriously in the first-class carriage, and flying along by express train between Dublin and Kingston, *en route* for Cheshire.

They had “done” the south of Ireland, finished the Lakes, spent a pleasant half-week in Dublin, and now, in the light of the May afternoon, were flying along to meet the channel boat.

Captain Hammond was of the party still, and included in the invitation to Powyss Place. He sat between Lady Helena and Sir Victor now—Miss Stuart, in charming travelling costume, in the sunny seat next the window. On the opposite seat, at the other extreme end, sat Edith Darrell, her eyes riveted upon the pages of a book.

Since that night in the boat Miss Stuart had quietly but resolutely taken entire possession of Sir Victor. He was hers—she had the right. If a gentleman is modest to a fault, mayn't a lady overstep, by an inch or two, the line that Mrs. Grundy draws, and meet him half way? There is an adage about helping a lame dog over a stile—that work of mercy is what Trixy was doing now.

Before she left her room on the ensuing morning following that never-to-be-forgotten night, Edith had entered and taken Trix in her arms and kissed her.

“I was stupid and out of sorts last night, Trixy,” she had said. “If I seemed churlish, I ask your pardon, dear, with all my heart I was surprised—I don't mind owning *that*—and perhaps a little, just a little, envious. But all that is over now, and I *do* wish you joy and happiness from the bottom of my heart. You're the best and dearest girl in the world, and deserve your fairy fortune.”

And she had meant it. Trix *was* one of the best and dearest girls in the world, and if Sir Victor preferred her to herself, what right had she to grudge her her luck. Against the baronet himself, she felt anger deep and strong still. How dared he seek her out as he had done, select her for his confidante, and look love in fifty different ways, when he meant to marry Trix? What a fool she might have made of herself had she been a whit less proud than she was. Since then she had avoided him; in no marked manner, perhaps, but she *had* avoided him. He should pour no more family confidences into her ear, that she resolved. He belonged to Trix—let him talk to Trix, then; she wanted no other girl's lover. If he felt this avoidance, he showed no sign. Perhaps he thought Miss Stuart had dropped some hint—girls, despite their promises, have been known to do such things—and this change was becoming maidenly reserve. Sir Victor liked maidenly reserve—none of your Desdemonas, who meet their Othellos half way, for him. Trixy's unremitting attentions were sisterly, of course. He felt grateful accordingly, and strove to repay her in kind. One other thing he observed, too, and with great complacency—the friendship between Miss Darrell and her Cousin Charley had come to an end. That is to say, they rather kept aloof from each other—beyond the most ordinary attention, Mr. Stuart seemed to have nothing whatever to say to his cousin. This was as it should be; certainly Beatrix must have dropped that very judicious hint. He was glad he had spoken to her.

They reached Kingston in the early twilight, and embarked. It was rough crossing, of course. Trix was seized with agonies of *mal de mer* once more. Edith waited upon her assiduously. Mrs. Stuart and Lady Helena had a stewardess apiece. Happily, if severe, it was short; before midnight they were at Holyhead, and on the train once more. Then off—flying through Wales—whirling by mountains—illuminated glass stations—the broad sea to their left, asleep under the stars, the spray at times almost in their faces. Past villages, ruins, castles, and cottages, and at two in the morning thundering into the big station at Chester.

Two carriages awaited them at the Chester station. Into one entered Mr. and Mrs. Stuart, Sir Victor, and Beatrix; into the other, Lady Helena, Edith, Charley, and Captain Hammond. They drove away through quiet, quaint Chester, “rare old city of Chester,” with its wonderful walls, its curious old streets—looking like set scenes in a theatre to American eyes—glimpses of the peaceful Dee, glimpses of Curson Park, with its stately villas; away for miles over a country road, then Chesholm at three in the morning, silent and asleep. Presently an endless stretch of ivied wall appears in view, inclosing a primeval forest, it seems to Edith; and Lady Helena sits up and rubs her eyes, and says it is Catheron Royals. The girl leans forward and strains her eyes, but can make out

nothing in the darkness save that long line of wall and waving trees. This is to be Trixy's home, she thinks—happy Trixy! Half an hour more of rapid driving, and they are at Powyss Place, and their journey is at an end.

They emerge from the chill darkness of dawning day into a blaze of light—into a vast and stately entrance—hall. A long file of servants are drawn up to receive them. And “Welcome to Powyss Place,” Lady Helena says with kind courtesy “I can only wish your visit may be as pleasant to you as you made mine in New York.”

Without changing their dresses, they are ushered into a lofty and handsome dining—room. More brilliant lights, more silent, respectful servants, a round table luxuriously spread. They sit down; forget they are tired and sleepy; eat, drink, and are merry; and it is five, and quite day, before they were shown up to their rooms. Then, hasty disrobing, hasty lying down, and all are at peace in the land of dreams.

Next day, somewhere about noon, Miss Stuart, clicking along in her narrow—soled, preposterously high—heeled boots, over a polished oaken corridor, as black as ebony, and several degrees more slippery than ice, lost her footing, as might be imagined, and came down, with an unearthly screech, on one ankle. Of course the ankle was sprained; of course every one flew to the rescue. Sir Victor was first on the field, and in Sir Victor's arms Miss Stuart was lifted, and borne back to her room. Luckily it was near, or even Sir Victor's chivalry and muscular development would not have been equal to it, for Trix was a “fine woman.” The ankle was bathed and bandaged, the invalid's breakfast brought up—everything done for her comfort that it was possible to do; and in the midst of their fussing, having cried a great deal, Miss Stuart suddenly dropped off asleep. Edith came out of the room looking pale and tired. In the slippery passage she encountered Sir Victor waiting.

“I have waylaid you on purpose, Miss Darrell,” he said, smiling, “lest you should meet with a mishap too. A carpet shall be placed here immediately. You look pale—are you ill?”

There was a solicitude in his face, a tremulous, suppressed tenderness in the commonplace question, a look in his eyes that had no business in the eyes of another young lady's betrothed. But Edith felt too fagged and spiritless just at present to notice.

“I feel well enough; nothing is ever the matter with me; but I *am* rather stupid. Stupidity,” she said, with her old laugh, “is fast becoming my normal state.”

“You will come with me for a walk, will you not?” he asked. “The park is very well worth seeing. To—morrow, Miss Stuart's sprain permitting, we will all visit Catheron Royals. Do come, Miss Darrell; it will do you a world of good.”

She hesitated a moment, then went. What difference did it make? Trix wouldn't be jealous now. What difference did anything make, for that matter? She was dull and low—spirited; she needed a walk in the fine fresh air. So they went on that fateful walk, that walk that was to be like no other in all Edith Darrell's life.

It was a perfect May day, an English May day; the grass, green beyond all ordinary greenness, the fragrant hawthorn hedges scenting the air, the thrush and the linnet singing in the trees, cowslips and daisies dotting the sward. A fresh, cool breeze swept over the uplands, and brought a faint trace of life and color into Edith's dark pale cheeks.

“This is the Lime Walk—the prettiest at Powyss Place, to my mind.” This was the young baronet's first commonplace remark. “If you will ascend the eminence yonder, Miss Darrell, I think I can point out Catheron Royals; that is, if you think it worth the trouble.”

It was all the same to Edith—the Lime Walk, the eminence, or any other quarter of the park. She took Sir Victor's arm, as he seemed to expect it, and went with him slowly up the elevation. Pale, weary, listless, she might be, but how charmingly pretty she looked in the sparkling sunshine, the soft wind blowing back her loose brown hair, kindling into deeper light her velvety—brown eyes, bringing a sea—shell pink into each creamy cheek. Beautiful beyond all ordinary beauty of womanhood, it seemed to Sir Victor Catheron.

“It is a wonderfully pretty place,” she said. “I should think you English people, whose ancestors, time out of mind, have lived and died here, would grow to love every ivy—clad stone, every brave old tree. If I were not Alexander I would be Diogenes—if I were not an American girl, I would be an English miss.”

She laughed and looked up at him, her spirits rising in the sunshine and the free, fresh air. His eyes were fixed upon her face—passionate admiration, passionate love, written in them far too plainly for any girl on earth not to read. And yet—he had proposed to Trix.

"You would?" he eagerly exclaimed. "Miss Darrell, do I understand you to say you could live in England all your life—give up America and your friends, and pass your life here?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"It would be no great sacrifice. Apart from my father, there isn't a soul in all wide America I care a farthing for, and your English homes are very charming."

The last barrier broke down. He had not meant to speak—he had meant to be very prudent and formal—to tell Lady Helena first, to refer the matter to Mr. Stuart next. Now all prudence and formality were swept away. Her hands were in his—he was speaking with his whole heart in every word.

"Then stay and share an English home—share *mine* Edith, I love you—I have loved you, I think, since I saw you first. Will you be my wife?"

Alas for Trix!—that was Edith's first thought. To burst out laughing—that was Edith's first impulse. Not in triumph or exultation—just at this moment she felt neither—but at the awful blunder Trix had made; for Trix had made a blunder, that was clear as day, else Sir Victor Catheron had never said those words.

"I meant to have spoken to Lady Helena and Mr. Stuart first," Sir Victor went on; "but that is all over now. I can't wait longer; I must take my sentence from your lips. I love you! What more can I say? You are the first my lips have ever said it to—the first my heart has ever felt it for. Edith, tell me, may I hope?"

She stood silent. They were on the summit of the hill. Away, far off, she could see the waving trees and tall chimneys of a stately mansion—Catheron Royals, no doubt. It looked a very grand and noble place; it might be her home for life—she who, in one sense, was homeless. A baronet stood beside her, offering her rank and wealth—she, penniless, pedigreeless Edith Darrell! All the dreams of life were being realized, and in this hour she felt neither triumph nor elation. She stood and listened, the sunlight on her gravely beautiful face, with vague wonder at herself for her apathy.

"Edith!" he cried out, "don't tell me I am too late—that some one has been before me and won your heart. I *couldn't* bear it! Your cousin assured me that when I spoke the answer would be favorable. I spoke to her that night in Killarney—I did not mention your name, but she understood me immediately. I told her I meant to speak as soon as we reached England. I asked her if she thought there was hope for me, and she—"

The passionate eagerness, the passionate love and fear within him checked his words suddenly. He stopped for a moment, and turned away.

"O Trixy! Trixy!" was Edith's thought; and ridiculous and out of place as the emotion was, her only desire still was an almost uncontrollable desire to laugh outright. What a horrible—what an unheard-of blunder the child had made!

She stood tracing figures on the grass with the point of her parasol, feeling strangely apathetic still. If her life had depended on it, she could hardly have accepted Sir Victor then. By and by she might feel half wild with exultation—not now.

He waited for the answer that did not come. Then he turned from her, pale with despair.

"I see how it is," he said, trying, not quite successfully, to steady his voice; "I am too late. You love your cousin, and are engaged to him. I feared it all along."

The brown starry eyes, lifted slowly from the grass and looked at him.

"My cousin? You mistake, Sir Victor; I am engaged to no one. I"—she set her lips suddenly and looked away at the trees and the turrets of Catheron Royals, shining in the brilliant sun—"I love no one."

"No one, Edith! Not even me?"

"Not even you, Sir Victor. How could I? Why should I? I never dreamed of this."

"Never dreamed of this!" he repeated, in amaze; "when you must have seen—must have known—"

She interrupted him, a faint smile curling her lips.

"I thought it was Trixy," she said.

"Miss Stuart! Then she has told you nothing of that night at Killarney—I really imagined she had. Miss Stuart has been my kind friend, my one confidante and sympathizer. No sister could be kinder in her encouragement and comfort than she."

"O poor Trix—a sister!" Edith thought, and in spite of every effort, the laugh she strove so hard to suppress dimpled the corners of her mouth. "*Won't* there be a scene when you hear all this!"

"For pity's sake, Edith, speak to me!" the young man exclaimed. "I love you—my life will be miserable

without you. If you are free, why may I not hope? See! I don't even ask you to love me now. I will wait; I will be patient. My love is so great that it will win yours in return. O darling! say you will be my wife."

Her hands were in his. The fervor, the passion within him almost frightened her.

"Sir Victor, I—I hardly know what to say. I wonder that you care for me. I wonder you want to marry me. I am not your equal; I have neither rank, nor wealth, nor descent."

"You have the beauty and the grace of a goddess—the goodness of an angel; I ask nothing more. You are the mate of a prince; and I love you. Everything is said in that."

"Lady Helena will never consent"

"Lady Helena will consent to anything that will make me happy. The whole happiness or misery of my life lies in your hands. *Don't* say no, Edith—don't, for Heaven's sake. I could not bear it—I cannot lose you; I *will* not!" he cried, almost fiercely.

She smiled faintly again, and that lovely rose-pink blush of hers deepened in her cheeks. It was very nice indeed to be wooed in this fiery fashion.

"*Fortes fortuna juvat*," she said, laughing. "I learned enough Latin, you see, to know that fortune assists the brave. People who won't have 'no' for an answer must have 'yes,' of course."

"And it is 'yes!' Edith—"

"Be quiet, Sir Victor; it is not 'yes' just yet, neither is it 'no.' You must let me think all this over; my head is giddy with your vehemence. Give me—let me see—until to-morrow. I can't answer now."

"But, Edith—"

"That much is due to me," she interposed, proudly; "remember, I have not expected this. You have surprised me this morning more than I can say. I am proud and grateful for your preference and the honor you have done me, but—I am honest with you—I don't love you."

"But you love no one else. Tell me that again, Edith!"

She grew pale suddenly. Again she looked away from him over the sunlit slopes before her.

"I am a very selfish and heartless sort of girl, I am afraid," she answered. "I don't know that it is in me to love any one as I ought—certainly not as you love me. If you take me, you shall take me at my true value. I am not an angel—ah, no; the farthest in the world from it—the most selfish of the selfish. I like you very much; it is not hard to do that. To be your wife would be my highest honor, but still I must have time. Come to me to-morrow, Sir Victor, any time, and you shall have your answer. Don't say one word more until then. Now let us go back."

He bowed and offered his arm. She took it, and in profound silence they walked back. The one topic that filled him, heart and soul, strength and mind, was forbidden—it was simply impossible for him to speak of any other. For Edith, she walked calmly beside him—her mind a serene blank.

They reached Powyss Place—they entered the drawing-room. All were there—Trixy lying on a sofa, pale and interesting, Lady Helena beside her, Charley lounging in the recess of a sunny window. All eyes turned upon the newcomers, Trix's with suspicious jealousy. If Sir Victor were in love with herself, was not his fitting place by her side in this trying hour, instead of meandering about with Dithy? And what business had Dithy monopolizing another girl's lover?

"I think I shall ride ever to Drexel Court between this and dinner," Sir Victor said. "I promised Hampton—"

Lady Helena laughed and interrupted:

"And Lady Gwendoline is there—I understand. Go by all means, Victor, and give Gwendoline my love. We shall expect you back to dinner."

The young man colored like a girl. He glanced uneasily at Edith, but Miss Darrell had taken up a photograph book of literary celebrities, and was immersed therein.

Would she understand him, he wondered—would she know it was because he could not endure the suspense at home? How should he drag through all the long, heavy hours between this and to-morrow? And when to-morrow came, if her answer were *no*? He set his teeth at the thought—it could not be *no*—it *should* not! She loved no one else—she must learn to love him.

Captain Hammond and Charley betook themselves to the billiard room. Trixy turned her suspicious eyes upon her cousin.

"Where were you and Sir Victor all day, Edith?"

"I and Sir Victor have not been any where all day, Beatrix. During the last hour we have been walking in the

grounds.”

“What were you talking about?”

“Many things,” Miss Darrell responded, promptly. “The beauty of the prospect—the comfort of English homes, and the weather, of course. If I understood short-hand, and had been aware of your anxiety on the subject, I might have taken notes of our conversation for your benefit.”

“Did you talk of *me*?”

“I believe your name was mentioned.”

“Dith!” in a whisper, and raising herself on her elbow, “did Sir Victor say any thing about—about—you know what?”

“He did not say one word about being in love with you, or marrying you, if that is what you mean. Now please stop catechising, and let me look at the pictures.”

Twilight fell—dinner hour came; with it Sir Victor. He looked pale, anxious, tired. He answered all his aunt's inquiries about the Drexel family in the briefest possible manner. His over-fond aunt looked at him a little uneasily—he was so unlike himself, and presently drew him aside, after dinner, and spoke.

“Victor what is the matter? Are you ill?”

“Ill? No. My dear aunt,” smiling, “don't wear that alarmed face—there is nothing the matter with me.”

“There is something the matter with you. You are pale, you are silent, you eat nothing. Victor, what is it?”

“I will tell you to-morrow,” he answered. “Spare me until then. I am anxious, I admit, but not even to you can I tell why to-night. You shall know all about it to-morrow.”

No glimmer of the truth dawned upon her as she left him. She wondered what it could be, but she would not press him further.

For Edith—she was in that mood of serene recklessness still. Of to-morrow she neither cared to think, nor tried to think. The tide of her life was at its flood; whither the stream might bear her after this night, just now, she neither knew nor cared. For the present she was free, to-morrow she might be a bondwoman. Her fetters would be of gold and roses; none the less though would they be fetters.

She played chess with Sir Victor—*his* hand trembled—hers was steady. Captain Hammond asked her for a Scotch song. She went to the piano and sang, never more clearly and sweetly in her life.

“Sing 'Charley he's my darling,’” suggested Trix, maliciously; “it's one of your favorites, I know.”

Charley was reposing on a sofa near—the waxlights streaming over his handsome, placid face.

“Yes, sing it, Dithy,” he said; “it's ages since you sang it for me now.”

“And I may never sing it for you again,” she answered, with a careless laugh; “one so soon grows tired of these old songs.”

She sang it, her eyes alight, her cheeks flushing, thrilling spirit and life in the merry words. Sir Victor stood beside her, drinking in until he was intoxicated by the spell of her subtle witchery.

“And Charley he's my darling—

My darling, my darling!”

Edith's contralto tones rang out. She had never looked so really beautiful, perhaps, before in her life—suppressed excitement lent her such sparkle and color. She finished her song and arose. And presently the evening was over, and it was half-past eleven, and one by one they were taking their candles, and straggling off to bed.

Edith Darrell did not go to bed. She put the lights away on the toilet-table in the dressing-room, wrapped something around her and sat down by the window to think it out.

Should she marry Sir Victor Catheron, or should she not?

She cared nothing for him—nothing whatever—very likely she never would. She loved Charley Stuart with all the power of her heart, and just at present it seemed to her she always must. That was how the problem stood.

If she married Sir Victor, rank and wealth beyond all her dreams would be hers, a life of luxury, all the joys and delights great wealth can bring. She liked pleasure, luxury, beauty, rank. For love—well, Sir Victor loved her, and for a woman it is always better, safer, to be loved than to love.

That was one phase of the case. Here was the other: She might go to Charley and say. “Look here—I care for you so much, that life without you, isn't worth the living. I will marry you, Charley, whenever you like.” He would make her his wife. Alone in darkness, her heart thrilled as she thought of it—and the intensest joy of life

would be hers for a while. For a while. They would be poor—his father would cast him off—he must, for the first time in his life, begin to work—the old story of pinching and poverty, of darning and mending, would commence over again for her, poor food, poor clothes, all the untold ugliness and misery of penury. Love is a very good and pleasant thing, but not when bought at the price of all the glory and pleasure of the world.

She turned from the life she pictured with a shudder of abhorrence. And Charley was not of the stuff the toilers of the earth are made. She would never spoil his life for him as well as her own—not if her heart broke in giving him up. But it would not break—who breaks her heart in these days? She would say “Yes” to-morrow to Sir Victor Catheron.

Then for a moment the thread of thought broke, and she sat looking blankly out at the soft spring night.

On the day she pledged herself to Sir Victor she must say good-by forever to Charley—so it began again. One house must not contain them both; her word, her plight must be kept bright and untarnished—Charley must go.

She tried to think what her life would be like without him. It seemed to her, she could think of no time, in which he had not belonged to her; all the years before that night in the snow were blank and void. And now, for all time, she must give him up.

She rose, feeling cold and cramped—she undressed with stiffened fingers, and went to bed. She would think no more, her head ached—she would sleep and forget.

She did sleep, deeply, dreamlessly. The sunlight was pouring into her room, flooding it with golden radiance, when she awoke.

She sprang up; her heart gave one bound of recollection and rapture. Sir Victor Catheron had asked her to be his wife.

Doubt was at an end—hesitation was at an end.

“Colors seen by candlelight

Do not look the same by day.”

Last night a hair might have turned the scale and made her say “No,” reckless of consequences—to-day a thousand Charleys would not have influenced her. She would be Lady Catheron.

She sang as she dressed. Not the May sunshine itself was brighter than her face. She left her room, she walked down the corridor, down the stairs, and out upon the emerald green lawn.

A well-known figure, in a gray suit, stood a few yards off, pacing restlessly about and smoking. He flung away his cigar and hurried up to her. One glance at her smiling face, was enough, his own flushed deep with rapture.

“I have come for my answer,” he cried. “O Edith, my darling, don't let it be 'No.'”

She laughed aloud at his vehemence—it was the sort of wooing she liked.

“I should like to please you, Sir Victor—what, then, shall it be?”

“Yes! a thousand times, yes! Edith, my love—my love—yes!”

She was smiling still—she looked him frankly in the eyes as no woman on earth, in such an hour, ever looked at the man she loved. She laid in his one slim, brown, ringless hand.

“Since you wish it so much, Sir Victor, let it be as you please. Yes!”

CHAPTER X. HOW TRIX TOOK IT.

It was half-past twelve, by all the clocks and watches of Powyss Place. Miss Stuart sat alone, in the pleasant boudoir or sitting-room, assigned her, her foot on an ottoman, a novel in her hand, a frown on her brow, and most beautifully dressed. In solitary state, at half-past ten, she had breakfasted, waited upon by the trimmest of English handmaidens in smiles and lace cap. The breakfast had been removed for over an hour, and still Miss Stuart sat alone.

Her mamma had called to see her, so had Lady Helena, but *they* did not count. She wanted somebody else, and that somebody did not come. Her novel was interesting and new, but she could not read; her troubles were too many and great.

First, there was her ankle that pained her, and Trixy did not like pain. Secondly, it was quite impossible she could venture to stand upon it for the next three days, and who was to watch Sir Victor during those three days? Thirdly, next week Lady Helena gave a large party, and at that party it was morally and physically impossible she could play any other part than that of wall-flower; she who was one of the best waltzers, and loved waltzing better than any other girl in New York. Is it any wonder, then, that an absorbing novel failed to absorb her?

The door opened and Edith came in. At all times and in all array, Miss Darrell must of necessity look handsome. This morning in crisp muslin and rose-colored ribbons, a flush on her cheeks and a sparkle in her eyes, Miss Darrell was something more than handsome—she was beautiful. Something, that was more the memory of a smile, than a smile itself, lingered on her lips—she was so brightly pretty, so fresh, so fair, that it was a pleasure only to look at her.

“Good morning, Trixy,” she said. “How is our poor dear ankle? It doesn't hurt much, I hope?”

She came up behind Miss Stuart's chair, put her arms around her neck, stooped down and kissed her forehead. The frown on Trixy's face deepened—it was the last straw that broke the camel's back, to see Edith Darrell looking so brightly handsome, privileged to go where she pleased, while she was chained to this horrid chair.

“It *does* hurt,” Trixy responded crossly. “I wish I had never had an ankle, sooner than go spraining it this way. The idea of horrid floors, like black looking-glasses, and slipperier than a skating-rink. Edith, how long is it since you got up?”

“Now for it!” thought Edith, and the smile she strove to repress, dimpled her sunny face. Luckily, standing behind Trixy's chair, Trixy did not see it.

“How long? Oh, since nine o'clock. You know I'm not a very early riser.”

“Did you go straight down to breakfast?”

“The breakfast hour was ten. It doesn't take me all that time to dress.”

“Where did you go then?”

“I walked in the grounds.”

“Edith!” with sudden sharpness, “did you see Sir Victor?”

“Yes, I saw Sir Victor.”

“Where? In the grounds too?”

“In the grounds too—smoking a cigar.”

“Edith!” the sharpness changing to suspicion and alarm. “*You* were with Sir Victor!”

“I was with Sir Victor. That is to say, Sir Victor was with *me*.”

“Bother! What did you talk about? Did he ask after me?”

“Ye-e-es,” Edith answered doubtfully—the fact being Sir Victor had utterly forgotten Miss Stuart's existence in the dizzy rapture of his acceptance—“he asked for you, of course.”

“Was that all? *He's* a pretty attentive host, I don't think,” cried Trixy, with bitterness, “having a young lady laid up by the le—the ankle in his house, and never so much as calling to see if she is dead or alive!”

“My dearest Trixy,” said Edith, struggling with a laugh, “gentlemen don't call upon young ladies in their chambers at break of day, even though they have a sprained ankle. It isn't *de rigueur*.”

“De rigger be blowed! It isn't my chamber; it's my private parlor; and aristocratic as we have got lately, I don't think half-past twelve is the break of day. Edith, upon your word, *did* he say anything about—about—you know

what?"

"Marrying you? No, Trixy, not a word."

She put her arms closer around poor Trixy's neck, and hid her face in Trixy's chestnut hair.

"Trix, pet, don't you think there may have been a little—just a little, misunderstanding that night at Killarney?"

"Misunderstanding! I don't understand *you*, Edith," Miss Stuart exclaimed, in increasing alarm. "For goodness' sake come round where I can see you, and don't stand there like a sort of 'Get thee behind me, Satan.' I like to look people in the face when I talk to them."

"In one moment, dear; please don't be cross. I have something that is not pleasant to say that *you* won't like. I am afraid to tell you. Trix, there *was* a misunderstanding that night."

"I don't see how; I don't believe there was. Edith Darrell, what do you mean? He asked me to marry him—at least he told me he was in love with me in a stupid, round-about way, and asked me if he might hope, and if there was any danger of a refusal, or a rival, when he spoke out, and that balderdash. He said he meant to speak to pa and ma, as plain as print. Now how could there be a misunderstanding in all that?"

"It was, as you say, awfully stupid of him, but these Englishmen have such different ways from what we are accustomed to. There was a misunderstanding, I repeat. He means to speak to your father and mother to-day, but—not about you."

"Edith!" Trix half sprung up, pale as death and with flashing eyes. "What do you mean? Speak out, I tell you!"

"O Trix." She twined her arms still closer around her neck, and laid her cheek coaxingly alongside of Miss Stuart's. "There has been a horrid mistake. All the time in that boat on Killarney lake he was talking of—me!"

"Of—you!" The two words drop from Trixy's ashen lips.

"Of me, dear, and he thinks at this moment that you understood him so. Trixy—don't be angry with me—how could I help it—he proposed to me yesterday afternoon."

"Proposed to you yesterday afternoon!" Trix repeats the words like one who has been stunned by a blow, in a dazed sort of tone. "And you—refused him, Edith?"

"Accepted him, Trixy. I said yes to Sir Victor Catheron this morning in the grounds."

Then there was a pause. The ticking of the little Swiss clock, the joyous warble of the thrushes, the soft rustle of the trees sounding preternaturally loud. Beatrix Stuart sat white to the lips, with anger, mortification, amaze, disappointment. Then she covered her face with her hands, and burst into a vehement flood of tears.

"Trix! dear Trix!" Edith exclaimed, shocked and pained; "good Heaven, don't cry! Trix, dearest, I never knew you were in love with him."

"In love with him!" cried Trix, looking up, her eyes flashing through her tears, "the odious little wishy-washy, drawling coxcomb! No, I'm not in love with him—not likely—but what business had he to go talking like that, and hemming and hawing, and hinting, and—oh!" cried Trix, with a sort of vicious screech, "I should like to tear his eyes out!"

"I dare say you would—the desire is both natural and proper," answered Edith, smothering a second desire to laugh; "but, under the circumstances, not admissible. It was a stupid proceeding, no doubt, his speaking to you at all, but you see the poor fellow thinks you understood him, and meant it for the best."

"Thought I understood him!" retorted Miss Stuart, with a vengeful glare. "Oh, *shouldn't* I like to make him understand me! The way he went on that night, kissing my hand, and calling me Beatrix, and talking of speaking to pa, and meaning you all the time, is enough—enough to drive a person stark, staring mad. All Englishmen are fools—there!" exclaimed Miss Stuart, sparks of fire drying up her tears, "and Sir Victor Catheron's the biggest fool of the lot!"

"What, Trix! for wanting to marry me?"

"Yes, for wanting to marry you. You, who don't care a bad cent for him!"

"How many bad cents did you care, Miss Stuart, when you were so willing to be his wife?"

"More than you, Miss Darrell, for at least I was not in love with any one else."

"And who may Miss Darrell be in love with, pray?"

"With Charley," answered Trix, her face still afire. "Deny it if you dare! In love with Charley, and he with you."

She was looking up at her rival, her angry gray eyes so like Charley's as she spoke, in everything but expression, that for an instant Edith was disconcerted. She could not meet them. For once in her life her own eyes fell.

"Are we going to quarrel, Trix? Is it worth while, for a man you have decided we neither of us care for—we who have been like sisters so long?"

"Like sisters!" Trix repeated bitterly. "Edith, I wonder if you are not scheming and deceitful!"

"Beatrix!"

"Oh, you needn't 'Beatrix' me! I mean it. I believe there has been double dealing in this. He paid attention to me before you ever came to New York. I believe if I hadn't been sea-sick he would have proposed to me on the ship. But I *was* sea-sick,—it's always my luck to be everything that's miserable,—and *you* were with him night and day."

"Night and day! Good gracious, Trixy, this is awful!"

"You know what I mean," pursued Trix loftily. "You got him in love with you. Then, all the way to Killarney you flirted with Charley—poor Charley—and made him jealous, and jealousy finished him. You're a very clever girl, Edith, and I wish you a great deal of joy."

"Thank you; you say it as if you did. I don't take the trouble to deny your charges; they're not worth it—they are false, and you know them to be so. I never sought out Sir Victor Catheron, either in New York, on board ship, or elsewhere. If he had been a prince, instead of a baronet, I would not have done it. I have borne a great deal, but even you may go too far, Trixy. Sir Victor has done me the honor of falling in love with me—for he does love me, and he has asked me to be his wife. I have accepted him, of course; it was quite impossible I could do otherwise. If, at Killarney, he was stupid, and you made a blunder, am I to be held accountable? He does not dream for a moment of the misunderstanding between you. He thinks he made his meaning as clear as day. And now I will leave you; if I stay longer we may quarrel, and I—I don't want to quarrel with you, Trixy."

Her voice broke suddenly. She turned to the door, and all the smallness of her own conduct dawned upon Trix. Her generous heart—it *was* generous in spite of all this—smote her with remorse.

"Oh, come back, Edith!" she said; "don't go. I won't quarrel with you. I'm a wretch. It's dreadfully mean and contemptible of me, to make such a howling about a man that does not care a straw for me. When I told you, *you* wished me joy. Just come back and give me time to catch my breath, and I'll wish you joy too. But it's so sudden, so unexpected. O Dithy, I thought you liked Charley all this while!"

How like Charley's the handsome dark gray eyes were! Edith Darrell could not meet them; she turned and looked out of the window.

"I like him, certainly; I would be very ungrateful if I did not. He is like a brother to me."

"A brother! Oh, bother," retorted Trix, with immeasurable scorn and dignity. "Edith, honor bright! Haven't you and Charley been in love with each other these two years?"

Edith laughed.

"A very leading question, and a very absurd one. I don't think it is in either your brother or me to be very deeply in love. *He* would find it feverish and fatiguing—you know how he objects to fatigue; and I—well, if love be anything like what one reads of in books, an all-absorbing, all-consuming passion that won't let people eat or sleep, I have never felt it, and I don't want to. I think that sort of love went out of fashion with Amanda Fitzallen. You're a sentimental goose, Miss Stuart, and have taken Byron and Miss Landon in too large doses."

"But you like him," persisted his sister, "don't you, Dithy?"

"Like him—*like* him!" Her whole face lit up for a second with a light that made it lovely. "Well, yes, Trix, I don't mind owning that much—I do like Charley—like him so well that I won't marry and ruin him. For it means just that, Trixy—ruin. The day we become anything more than friends and cousins your father would disinherit him, and your father isn't the heavy father of the comedy, to rage through four acts, and come round in the fifth, with his fortune and blessing. Charley and I have common-sense, and we have shaken hands and agreed to be good friends and cousins, nothing more."

"What an admirable thing is common-sense! Does Sir Victor know about the hand-shaking and the cousinly agreement?"

"Don't be sarcastic, Beatrix; it isn't your forte! I have nothing to confess to Sir Victor when I am married to him; neither your brother nor any other man will hold the place in my heart (such as it is) that he will. Be very

sure of that.”

“Ah! such as it is,” puts in Trix cynically; “and when, is it to be, Dithy—the wedding?”

“My dear Trix, I only said yes this morning. Gentlemen don't propose and fix the wedding—day all in a breath. It will be ages from now, no doubt. Of course Lady Helena will object.”

“You don't mind that?”

“Not a whit. A grand—aunt is—a grand—aunt, nothing more. She is his only living relative, he is of age, able to speak and act for himself. The true love of any good man honors the woman who receives it. In that way Sir Victor Catheron honors me, and in no other. I have neither wealth nor lineage; in all other things, as God made us, I am his equal!”

She moved to the door, her dark eyes shining, her head erect, looking in her beauty and her pride a mate for a king.

“There is to be a driving—party to Eastlake Abbey, after luncheon,” she said; “you are to be carried down to the barouche and ride with your father and mother, and Lady Helena—Charley and Captain Hammond for your cavaliers.”

“And you?”

“Sir Victor drives me.”

“Alone, of course?” Trixy says, with a last little bitter sneer.

“Alone, of course,” Edith answers coldly. Then she opens the door and disappears.

CHAPTER XI. HOW LADY HELENA TOOK IT.

But the driving-party did not come off. The ruins of Eastlake Abbey were unvisited that day, at least. For while Edith and Trixy's somewhat unpleasant interview was taking place in one part of the house, an equally unpleasant, and much more mysterious, interview was taking place in another, and on the same subject.

Lady Helena had left the guests for awhile and gone to her own rooms. The morning post had come in, bringing her several letters. One in particular she seized, and read with more eagerness than the others, dated London, beginning "My Dear Aunt," and signed "Inez." While she sat absorbed over it, in deep and painful thought evidently, there came a tap at the door; then it opened, and her nephew came in.

She crumpled her letter hurriedly in her hand, and put it out of sight. She looked up with a smile of welcome; he was the "apple of her eye," the darling of her life, the Benjamin of her childless old age—the fair-haired, pleasant-faced young baronet.

"Do I intrude?" he asked. "Are you busy? Are your letters *very* important this morning? If so—"

"Not important at all. Come in, Victor. I have been wishing to speak to you of the invitations for next week's ball. Is it concerning the driving-party this afternoon you want to speak?"

"No, my dear aunt; something very much pleasanter than all the driving-parties in the world; something much more important to me."

She looked at him more closely. His face was flushed, his eyes bright, a happy smile was on his lips. He had the look of a man to whom some great good fortune had suddenly come.

"Agreeably important, then, I am sure, judging by your looks. What a radiant face the lad has!"

"I have reason to look radiant. Congratulate me, Aunt Helena; I am the happiest man the wide earth holds."

"My dear Victor!"

"Cannot you guess?" he said, still smiling; "I always thought female relatives were particularly sharp-sighted in these matters. Must I really tell you? Have you no suspicions of my errand here?"

"I have not, indeed;" but she sat erect, and her fresh-colored, handsome old face grew pale. "Victor, what is it? Pray speak out."

"Very well. Congratulate me once more; I am going to be married."

He stopped short, for with a low cry that was like a cry of fear, Lady Helena rose up. If he had said "I am going to be hanged," the consternation of her face could not have been greater. She put out her hand as though to ward off a blow.

"No, no!" she said, in that frightened voice; "not married. For God's sake, Victor, don't say that!"

"Lady Helena!"

He sat looking at her, utterly confounded.

"It can't be true," she panted. "You don't mean that. You don't want to be married. You are too young—you are. I tell you I won't hear of it! What do boys like you want of wives!—only three—and—twenty!"

He laughed good-humoredly.

"My dear aunt, boys of three—and—twenty are tolerably well-grown; it isn't a bad age to marry. Why, according to Debrett, my father was only three—and—twenty when he brought home a wife and son to Catheron Royals."

She sat down suddenly, her head against the back of a chair, her face quite white.

"Aunt Helena," the young man said anxiously, approaching her, "I have startled you; I have been too sudden with this. You look quite faint; what shall I get you?"

He seized a carafe of water, but she waved it away.

"Wait," she said, with trembling lips; "wait. Give me time—let me think. It *was* sudden; I will be better in a moment."

He sat down feeling uncommonly uncomfortable. He was a practical sort of young man, with, a man's strong dislike of scenes of all kinds, and this interview didn't begin as promisingly as he had hoped.

She remained pale and silent for upward of five very long minutes; only once her lips whispered, as if unconsciously:

"The time has come—the time has come."

It was Sir Victor himself who broke the embarrassing pause.

"Aunt Helena," he said pettishly, for he was not accustomed to have his sovereign will disputed, "I don't understand this, and you will pardon me if I say I don't like it. It must have entered your mind that sooner or later I would fall in love and marry a wife, like other men. That time has come, as you say yourself. There is nothing I can see to be shocked at."

"But not so soon," she answered brokenly. "O Victor, not so soon."

"I don't consider twenty-three years too soon. I am old-fashioned, very likely, but I do believe in the almost obsolete doctrine of early marriage. I love her with all my heart." His kindling eyes and softened voice betrayed it. "Thank Heaven she has accepted me. Without her my life would not be worth the having."

"Who is she?" she asked, without looking up. "Lady Gwendoline, of course."

"Lady Gwendoline?" He smiled and lifted his eyebrows.

"No, my dear aunt; a very different person from Lady Gwendoline. Miss Darrell."

She sat erect and gazed at him—stunned.

"Miss Darrell! Edith Darrell—the American girl, the—Victor, if this is a jest—"

"Lady Helena, am I likely to jest on such a subject? It is the truth. This morning Miss Darrell—Edith—has made me the happiest man in England by promising to be my wife. Surely, aunt, you must have suspected—must have seen that I loved her."

"I have seen nothing," she answered blankly, looking straight before her—"nothing. I am only an old woman—I am growing blind and stupid, I suppose. I have seen nothing."

There was a pause. At no time was Sir Victor Catheron a fluent or ready speaker—just at present, perhaps, it was natural he should be rather at a loss for words. And her ladyship's manner was the reverse of reassuring.

"I have loved her from the first," he said, breaking once more the silence—"from the very first night of the party, without knowing it. In all the world, she is the only one I can ever marry. With her my life will be supremely happy, superbly blessed; without her—but no! I do not choose to think what my life would be like without her. You, who have been as a mother to me all my life, will not mar my perfect happiness on this day of days by saying you object."

"But I do object!" Lady Helena exclaimed, with sudden energy and anger. "More—I absolutely refuse. I say again, you are too young to want to marry at all. Why, even your favorite Shakespeare says: 'A young man married, is a man that's marred.' When you are thirty it will be quite time enough to talk of this. Go abroad again—see the world—go to the East, as you have often talked of doing—to Africa—anywhere! No man knows himself or his own heart at the ridiculous age of twenty-three!"

Sir Victor Catheron smiled, a very quiet and terribly obstinate smile.

"My extreme youth, then, is your only objection?"

"No, it is not—I have a hundred objections—it is objectionable from every point. I object to *her* most decidedly and absolutely. You shall not marry this American girl without family or station, and of whom you know absolutely nothing—with whom you have not been acquainted four weeks. Oh, it is absurd—it is ridiculous—it is the most preposterous folly I ever heard of in my life."

His smile left his face—a frown came instead. His lips set, he looked at her with a face of invincible determination.

"Is *this* all?" he demanded. "I will answer your objections when I have thoroughly heard them. I am my own master—but—that much is due to you."

"I tell you she is beneath you—beneath you!" Lady Helena said vehemently. "The Catherons have always married well—into ducal families. Your grandmother—my sister—was, as I am, the daughter of a marquis."

"And *my* mother was the daughter of a soap-boiler," he said with bitterness. "Don't let us forget *that*."

"Why do you speak to me of her? I can't bear it. You know I cannot. You do well to taunt me with the plebeian blood in your veins—you, of all men alive. Oh! why did you ever see this designing girl? Why did she ever come between us?"

She was working herself up to a pitch of passionate excitement, quite incomprehensible to her nephew, and as displeasing as it was incomprehensible.

"When you call her designing, Lady Helena," he said, in slow, angry tones, "you go a little too far. In no way

has Miss Darrell tried to win me—'tis the one drawback to my perfect happiness now that she does not love me as I love her. She has told me so frankly and bravely. But it will come. I feel that such love as mine must win a return. For the rest, I deny that she is beneath me; in all things—beauty, intellect, goodness—she is my superior. She is the daughter of a scholar and a gentleman; her affection would honor the best man on earth. I deny that I am too young—I deny that she is my inferior—I deny even *your* right, Lady Helena, to speak disparagingly of her. And, in conclusion, I say, that it is my unalterable determination to marry Edith Darrell at the earliest possible hour that I can prevail upon her to fix our wedding-day.”

She looked at him; the unalterable determination he spoke of was printed in every line of his set face.

“I might have known it,” she said, with suppressed bitterness; “he is his father's son. The same obstinacy—the same refusal to listen to all warning. Sooner or later I knew it must come, but not so soon as this.”

The tears coursed slowly over her cheeks, and moved him as nothing she ever could have said would have done.

“For Heaven's sake, aunt, don't cry,” he said hurriedly. “You distress me—you make me feel like a brute, and I—really now, I don't think you ought to blame me in this way. Miss Darrell is not a Lady Gwendoline, certainly—she has neither rank nor wealth, but in my sight their absence is no objection whatever. And I love her; everything is said in that.”

“You love her,” she repeated mournfully. “O my poor boy, my poor boy!”

“I don't think I deserve pity,” Sir Victor said, smiling again. “I don't feel as though I did. And now tell me the real reason of all this.”

“The real reason?”

“Certainly; you don't suppose I do not see it is something besides those you have given. There is something else under all this. Now let us hear it, and have done with it.”

He took both her hands in his and looked at her—a resolute smile on his fair blonde face.

“Troubles are like certain wild animals,” he said; “look them straight in the eye and they turn and take to flight. Why should I not marry at twenty-three? If I were marrying any one else—Lady Gwendoline for instance—would my extreme juvenility still be an obstacle?”

“You had much better not marry at all.”

“What! live a crusty old bachelor! Now, now, my good aunt, this is a little too much, and not at all what I expected from a lady of your excellent common-sense.”

“There is nothing to make a jest of, Victor. It *is* better you should not marry—better the name of Catheron should die out and be blotted from the face of the earth.”

“Lady Helena!”

“I know what I am saying, Victor. *You* would say it too, perhaps, if you knew all.”

“You will tell me all. Oh yes, you will. You have said too much or too little, now. I must hear 'all,' then I shall judge for myself. I may be in love—still I am amenable to reason. If you can show me any just cause or impediment to my marriage—if you can convince me it will be wrong in the sight of Heaven or man, then, dearly as I love her, I will give her up. But your proof must be strong indeed.”

She looked at him doubtfully—wistfully.

“Would you do this, Victor? Would you have strength to give up the girl you love? My boy, my son, I don't want to be hard on you. I want to see you happy, Heaven knows, and yet—”

“I will be happy—only tell me the truth and let me judge for myself.”

He was smiling—he was incredulous. Lady Helena's mountain, seen by *his* eyes, no doubt, would turn out the veriest molehill.

“I don't know what to do,” she answered, in agitated tones. “I promised her to tell you if this day ever came, and now it is here and I—oh!” she cried out passionately, “I *can't* tell you!”

He grew pale himself, with fear of he knew not what.

“You can, you will—you *must!*” he said resolutely. “I am not a child to be frightened of a boggy. What terrible secret is there hidden behind all this?”

“Terrible secret—yes, that is it. Terrible secret—you have said it!”

“Do you, by any chance, refer to my mother's death? Is it that you knew all these years her murderer and have kept it secret?”

A TERRIBLE SECRET. A Novel.

There was no reply. She covered her face with her hands and turned away.

"Am I right?" he persisted.

She rose to her feet, goaded, it seemed, by his persistent questioning into a sort of frenzy.

"Let me alone, Victor Catheron," she cried. "I have kept my secret for twenty-three years—do you think you will wring it from me all in a moment now? What right have you to question me—to say I shall tell, or shall not? If you knew all you would know you have no rights whatever—none—no right to ask any woman to share, your life—no right, if it comes to that, even to the title you bear!"

He rose up too—white to the lips. Was Lady Helena going mad? Had the announcement of his marriage turned her brain? In that pause, before either could speak again, a knock that had been twice given unheard, was repeated a third time. It brought both back instantly from the tragic, to the decorum of every-day life. Lady Helena sat down; Sir Victor opened the door. It was a servant with a note on a salver.

"Well, sir," the baronet demanded abruptly. "What do you want?"

"It's her ladyship, Sir Victor. A lady to see your ladyship on very important business."

"I can see no one this morning," Lady Helena responded; "tell her so."

"My lady, excuse me; this lady said your ladyship would be sure to see her, if your ladyship would look at this note. It's the lady in mourning, my lady, who has been here to see your ladyship before. Which this is the note, my lady."

Lady Helena's face lit up eagerly now. She tore open the note at once.

"You may go, Nixon," she said. "Show the lady up immediately."

She ran over the few brief lines the note contained, with a look of unutterable relief. Like the letter, it was signed "Inez."

"Victor," she said, turning to her nephew and holding out her hand, "forgive me, if in my excitement and haste I have said what I should not. Give me a little time, and everything will be explained. The coming of In—this lady—is the most opportune thing in the world. You shall be told all soon."

"I am to understand then," Sir Victor said coldly, "that this stranger, this mysterious lady, is in your confidence; that she is to be received into mine—that she is to be consulted before you can tell me this secret which involves the happiness of my life?"

"Precisely! You look angry and incredulous, but later you will understand. She is one of our family—more at present I cannot say. Go, Victor; trust me, believe me, neither your honor nor your love shall suffer at our hands. Postpone the driving-party, or make my excuses; I shall not leave my rooms to-day. To-morrow, if it be possible, the truth shall be yours as well as mine."

He bowed coldly—annoyed, amazed, and went. What did all this mean? Up to the present, his life had flowed peacefully, almost sluggishly, without family secrets or mystifications of any kind. And now all at once here were secrets and mysteries cropping up. *What* was this wonderful secret—*who* was this mysterious lady? He must wait until to-morrow, it appeared, for the answer to both.

"One thing is fixed as fate," he said to himself as he left the room, "I won't give up Edith, for ten thousand family secrets—for all the mysterious ladies on earth! Whatever others may have done, I at least have done nothing to forfeit my darling's hand. The doctrine that would make us suffer for the sins of others, is a mistaken doctrine. Let to-morrow bring forth what it may, Edith Darrell shall be my wife."

CHAPTER XII. ON ST. PARTRIDGE DAY.

As he descended the stairs he encountered Nixon and a veiled lady in black ascending. He looked at her keenly—she was tall and slender; beyond that, through the heavy crape veil, he could make out nothing. “Mysterious, certainly!” he thought. “I wonder who she is?” He bowed as he passed her; she bent her head in return; then he hastened to seek out Edith, and tell her an important visitor had arrived for Lady Helena, and that the excursion to Eastlake Abbey would be postponed. He was but a poor dissembler, and the girl's bright brown eyes were sharp. She smiled as she looked and listened.

“Did you know I could tell fortunes, Sir Victor? Hold out your hand and let me tell you the past. You have been upstairs with Lady Helena; you have told her that Edith Darrell has consented to be your wife. You have asked her sanction to the union, and have been naturally, indignantly, and peremptorily refused.”

He smiled, but the conscious color rose.

“I always suspected you of being an enchantress—now I know it. Can you tell me the future as truthfully as the past?”

“In this instance I think so. ‘You shall never marry a penniless nobody, sir.’ (And it is exactly Lady Helena's voice that speaks.) ‘Your family is not to be disgraced by a low marriage. This girl, who is but a sort of upper servant, hired and paid, in the family of these common rich American people, is no mate for a Catheron of Catheron. I refuse to listen to a word, sir—I insist upon this preposterous affair being given up.’ You expostulate—in vain. And as constant dropping wears the most obstinate stone, so at last will her ladyship conquer. You will come to me one day and say: ‘Look here, Miss Darrell, I'm awfully sorry, you know, but we've made a mistake—I've made a mistake. I return you your freedom—will you kindly give me back mine? And Miss Darrell will make Sir Victor Catheron her best curtsey and retire into the outer darkness from whence she came.’”

He laughed. Her imitation of his own slow, accented manner of speaking was so perfect. Only for an instant; then he was grave, almost reproachful.

“And you know me no better than this!” he said. “I take back my words; you are no seeress. I love my aunt very dearly, but not all the aunts on earth could part me from you. I would indeed be a dastard if a few words of objection would make me resign the girl I love.”

“I don't know,” Miss Darrell answered coolly; “it might be better for both of us. Oh, don't get angry, please—you know what I mean. I *am* a nobody, as your somebodies go on this side. My Grandfather Stuart was a peddler once, I believe; my Grandfather Darrell, a schoolmaster. Not a very distinguished descent. My father by education and refinement is a gentleman, but he keeps a boarding-house. And I am Miss Stuart's paid companion and poor relation. Be wise, Sir Victor, while there is time; be warned before it is too late. I promise not to be angry—to even admire your common-sense. Lady Helena has been as a mother to you; it isn't worth while offending her for me—I'm not worth it. There are dozens of girls in England, high-born, high-bred, and twice as handsome as I am, who will love you and marry you to-morrow. Sir Victor Catheron, let us shake hands and part.”

She held it out to him with a smile, supremely careless and uplifted. He caught it passionately, his blue eyes afire, and covered it with kisses.

“Not for ten thousand worlds! O Edith, how lightly you talk of parting, of giving me up. Am I then so utterly indifferent to you? No; I will never resign you; to call you wife is the one hope of my life. My darling, if you knew how I love you, how empty and worthless the whole world seems without you! But one day you will, you must—one day you will be able no more to live without me than I without you. Don't talk like this any more, Edith; if you knew how it hurts me you would be more merciful, I am sure. Life can hold nothing half so bitter for me as the loss of you.”

She listened in a sort of wonder at his impassioned earnestness, looking at him shyly, wistfully.

“You love me like this?” she said.

“A hundred times more than this. I would die for you, Edith. How empty and theatrical it sounds, but, Heaven knows, I would.”

She passed her hand through his arm and clasped the other round it, her bright smile back.

"Don't die," she said, with that smile, and her own rare, lovely blush; "do better—live for me. Ah, Sir Victor, I don't think it will be such a *very* hard thing to learn to like you!"

"My darling! And you will talk no more of parting—no more of giving me up? You don't really wish it, Edith, do you?"

"Most certainly not. Would I have accepted you, if I did? I'll never give you up while you care for me like this. If we ever part, the parting shall be your doing, not mine."

"My doing—*mine*?" he laughed aloud in his incredulity and happiness. "The days of miracles are over, *belle amie*, but a summer breeze could more easily uproot these oaks than that. And lest you should think yourself fetterless and free, I will bind you at once." He drew from his pocket a tiny morocco box. "See this ring, Edith: it has been worn by women of our house for the past two centuries—the betrothal ring of the Catherons. Let me place it on your finger, never to be taken off until I bind you with a golden circlet stronger still."

Her dark eyes sparkled as she looked at it. It was a solitaire diamond of wonderful size and brilliance, like a great drop of limpid water, set in dull red gold.

"There is some queer old tradition extant about it," he said, "to the effect that the bride of a Catheron who does not wear it will lead a most unhappy life and die a most unhappy death. So, my dearest, you see how incumbent upon you it is for your own sake to wear it religiously."

He laughed, but she lifted to his, two deep, thoughtful, dark eyes.

"Did your mother wear it, Sir Victor?"

He started, the smile died from his face, his color faded.

"My mother?" he answered; "*no*. My father married her secretly and hastily after six weeks' courtship, and of course never thought of the ring. 'Lead an unhappy life, die an unhappy death,'" he said, repeating his own words; "she did both, and, to the best of my belief, she never wore it."

"An odd coincidence, at least," said Edith, her eyes fixed on the diamond blazing in the sunshine on her hand.

A priceless diamond on the hand of Edith Darrell, the brown hand that two months ago had swept, and dusted, and worked unwillingly in the shabby old house at home.

"Don't let us talk about my mother," Sir Victor said; "there is always something so terrible to me in the memory of her death. Your life will be very different from hers—my poor mother."

"I hope so," was the grave reply; "and in my case there will be no jealous rival, will there? Sir Victor, do you know I should like to visit Catheron Royals. If we have had love-making enough for one day, suppose we walk over?"

"I shall never have love-making enough," he laughed. "I shall bore you awfully sometimes, I have no doubt; but when the heart is full the lips must speak. And as to walking—it is a long walk—do you think you can?"

"As I am to become a naturalized Englishwoman, the sooner I take to English habits the better. I shall at least make the attempt."

"And we can drive back in time for dinner. I shall be delighted to show you the old place—your future home, where we are to spend together so many happy years."

They set off. It was a delightful walk, that sunny day, across fields, down fragrant green lanes, where the hedges in bloom made the air odorous, and the birds sang in the arching branches overhead. A long, lovely walk over that quiet high-road, where three-and-twenty years ago, another Sir Victor Catheron had ridden away forever from the wife he loved.

With the yellow splendor of the afternoon sunlight gilding it, its tall trees waving, its gray turrets and towers piercing the amber air, its ivied walls, and tall stacks of chimneys, Catheron Royals came in view at last. The fallow deer browsed undisturbed, gaudy peacocks strutted in the sun, a fawn lifted its shy wild eyes and fled away at their approach. Over all, solemn Sabbath stillness.

"Welcome to Catheron Royals—welcome as its mistress, my bride, my love," Sir Victor Catheron said.

She lifted her eyes—they were full of tears. How good he was—how tenderly he loved her, and what a happy, grateful girl she had reason to be. They entered the house, admitted by a very old woman, who bobbed a curtsy and looked at them with curious eyes. Two or three old retainers took care of the place and showed it to strangers.

Leaning on her lover's arm, Edith Darrell walked through scores of stately rooms, immense, chill halls, picture-galleries, drawing-rooms, and chambers. What a stupendous place it was—bigger and more imposing by far than Powyss Place, and over twice as old. She looked at the polished suits of armor, at battle-axes, antlers,

pikes, halberds, until her eyes ached. She paced in awe and wonder down the vast portrait-gallery, where half a hundred dead and gone Catherons looked at her sombrely out of their heavy frames. And one day her picture—hers—would hang in solemn state here. The women who looked at her from these walls lay stark and stiff in the vaults beneath Chesholm Church, and sooner or later they would lay *her* stark and stiff with them, and put up a marble tablet recording her age and virtues. She shivered a little and drew a long breath of relief as they emerged into the bright outer day and fresh air once more.

"It's a wonderful place," she said; "a place to dream, of—a place such as I have only met before in English books. But there is one room among all these rooms which you have not shown me, and which I have a morbid craving to see. You will not be angry if I ask?"

"Angry with you?" Sir Victor lifted his eyebrows in laughing surprise. "Speak, Edith, though it were half my kingdom."

"It is—" a pause—"to see the room where your mother—Ah!" as he shrank a little, "I beg your pardon. I should not have asked."

"Yes, yes, you should. You shall visit at once. I am a coward about some things, I confess—this among others. Come."

They went. He took from a huge bunch he carried the key of that long-locked room. He flung it wide, and they stood together on the threshold.

It was all dark, the blinds closed, the curtains drawn, dark and deserted, as it had been since that fatal night. Nothing had been changed, absolutely nothing. There stood the baby bassinet, there the little table on which the knife had lain, there beneath the open window the chair in which Ethel, Lady Catheron, had slept her last long sleep. A hush that seemed like the hush of death lay over all.

Edith stood silent and grave—not speaking. She motioned him hastily to come away. He obeyed. Another moment, and they stood together under the blue bright sky.

"Oh!" Edith said, under her breath, "who did it?"

"Who indeed? And yet Lady Helena knows."

His face and tone were sombre. How dare they let her lie in her unavenged grave? A Catheron had done it beyond doubt, and to save the Catheron name and honor the murderer had been let go.

"Lady Helena knows!" repeated Edith; "it *was* that wicked brother and sister, then? How cruel—how cruel!"

"It was not the sister—I believe *that*. That it must have been the brother no doubt can exist."

"Is he living or dead?"

"Living, I believe. By Heaven! I have half a mind yet to hunt him down, and hand him over to the hangman for the deed he has done!"

"An ancient name and family honor are wonderful things on this side of the Atlantic, a couple of million dollars on ours. They can save the murderer from the gallows. We won't talk about it, Sir Victor—it makes you unhappy I see; only if ever I—if ever I," laughing and blushing a little, "come to be mistress of that big, romantic old house, I shall wall that room up. It will always be a haunted chamber—a Bluebeard closet for me."

"If ever you are mistress," he repeated. "Edith, my dearest, when will you be?"

"Who knows? Never, perhaps."

"Edith—again!"

"Well, who can tell. I may die—you may die—something may happen. I can't realize that I ever will be. I can't think of myself as Lady Catheron."

"Edith, I command you! Name the day."

"Now, my dear Sir Victor—"

"Dear Victor, without the prefix; let all formality end between us. Why need we wait? You are your own mistress, I my own master; I am desperately in love—I want to be married. I *will* be married. There is nothing to wait for—I *won't* wait. Edith shall it be—this is the last of May—shall it be the first week of July?"

"No, sir; it shall not, nor the first week of August. We don't do things in this desperate sort of hot haste."

"But why should we delay? What is there to delay for? I shall have a brain-fever if I am compelled to wait longer than August. Be reasonable, Edith; don't let it be later than August."

"Now, now, now, Sir Victor Catheron, August is not to be thought of. I shall not marry you for ages to come—not until Lady Helena Powyss gives her full and free consent."

A TERRIBLE SECRET. A Novel.

“Lady Helena shall give her full and free consent in a week; she could not refuse me anything longer if she tried. Little tyrant! if you cared for me one straw, you would not object like this.”

“Yes I would. Nobody marries in this impetuous fashion. I won't hear of August. Besides, there is my engagement with Mrs. Stuart. I have promised to talk French and German all through the Continent for them this summer.”

“I will furnish Mrs. Stuart a substitute with every European language at her finger-ends. Seriously, Edith, you must consider that contract at an end—my promised wife can be no one's paid companion. Pardon me, but you must see this, Edith.”

“I see it,” she answered gravely. She had her own reasons for not wishing to accompany the Stuart family now. And after all, why should she insist on postponing the marriage?

“You are relenting—I see it in your face,” he exclaimed imploringly. “Edith! Edith! shall it be the first week of September?”

She smiled and looked at him as she had done early this eventful morning, when she had said “Yes!”

“As brain-fever threatens if I refuse, I suppose you must have your way. But talk of the willfulness of women after this!”

“Then it shall be the first of September—St Partridge Day?”

“It shall be St. Partridge Day.”

CHAPTER XIII. HOW CHARLEY TOOK IT.

Meantime the long sunny hours, that passed so pleasantly for these plighted lovers, lagged drearily enough for one young lady at Powyss Place—Miss Beatrix Stuart.

She had sent for her mother and told her the news. Placid Aunt Chatty lifted her meek eyebrows and opened her dim eyes as she listened.

“Sir Victor Catheron going to marry our Edith! Dear me! I am sure I thought it was you, Trixy, all the time. And Edith will be a great lady after all. Dear me!”

That was all Mrs. Stuart had to say about it. She went back to her tating with a serene quietude that exasperated her only daughter beyond bounds.

“I wonder if an earthquake would upset ma's equanimity!” thought Trix savagely. “Well, wait until Charley comes! We'll see how he takes it.”

Misery loves company. If she was to suffer the pangs of disappointment herself, it would be some comfort to see Charley suffer also. And Trix was not a bad-hearted girl either, mind—it was simply human nature.

Charley and the captain had gone off exploring the wonders and antiquities of Chester. Edith and Sir Victor were nobody knew where. Lady Helena had a visitor, and was shut up with her. Trix had nothing but her novel, and what were all the novels in Mudie's library to her this bitter day?

The long, red spears of the sunset were piercing the green depths of fern and brake, when the two young men rode home. A servant waylaid Mr. Stuart and delivered his sister's message. She wanted to see him at once on important business.

“Important business!” murmured Charley, opening his eyes.

But he went promptly without waiting to change his dress.

“How do, Trix?” he said, sauntering in. “Captain Hammond's compliments, and how's the ankle?”

He threw himself—no, Charley never threw himself—he slowly extended his five-feet-eleven of manhood on a sofa, and awaited his sister's reply.

“Oh, the ankle's just the same—getting better, I suppose,” Trix answered, rather crossly. “I didn't send for you to talk about my ankle. Much you, or Captain Hammond, or any one else cares whether I have an ankle at all or not.”

“My dear Trix, a young lady's ankle is always a matter of profound interest and admiration to every well-regulated masculine mind.”

“Bah! Charley, you'll never guess what I have to tell!”

“My child, I don't intend to try. I have been sight-seeing all the afternoon, interviewing cathedrals, and walls, and rows, and places, until I give you my word you might knock me down with a feather. If you have anything preying on your mind—and I see you have—out with it. Suspense is painful.”

He closed his eyes, and calmly awaited the news. It came—like a bolt from a bow.

“Charley, Sir Victor Catheron has proposed to Edith, and Edith has accepted him!”

Charley opened his eyes, and fixed them upon her—not the faintest trace of surprise or any other earthly emotion upon his fatigued face.

“Ah—and *that's* your news! Poor child! After all your efforts, it's rather hard upon you. But if you expect me to be surprised, you do your only brother's penetration something less than justice. It has been an evident case of spoons—apparent to the dullest intellect from the first. I have long outlived the tender passion myself, but in others I always regard it with a fatherly—nay—let me say, even grandfatherly interest. And so they are going to 'live and love together through many changing years,' as the poet says. Bless you,” said Charley, lifting his hand over an imaginary pair of lovers at his feet—“bless you, my children, and be happy!”

And this was all! And she had thought he was in love with Edith himself! This was all—closing his eyes again as though sinking sweetly to sleep. It was too much for Trix.

“O Charley!” she burst forth, “you *are* such a fool!”

Mr. Stuart rose to his feet.

“Overpowered by the involuntary homage of this assembly, I rise to—”

"You're an idiot—there!" went on Trix; "a lazy, stupid idiot! You're in love with Edith yourself, and you could have had her if you wished, for she likes you better than Sir Victor, and then Sir Victor might have proposed to me. But no—you must go dawdling about, prowling, and prancing, and let her slip through your fingers!"

"Prowling and prancing! Good Heaven, Trix! I ask you soberly, as man to man, did you ever see me prowl or prance in the whole course of my life?"

"Bah—h—h!" said Trix, with a perfect shake of scorn in the interjection. "I've no patience with you! Get out of my room—do!"

Mr. Stuart, senior, was the only one who did *not* take it quietly. His bile rose at once.

"Edith! Edith Darrell! Fred Darrell's penniless daughter! Beatrix Stuart, have you let this young baronet slip through your fingers in this ridiculous way after all?"

"I never let him slip—he never was in my fingers," retorted Trix, nearly crying. "It's just my usual luck. I don't want him—he's a stupid noodle—that's what he is. Edith's better-looking than I am. Any one can see that with half an eye, and when I was sick on that horrid ship, she had everything her own way. I did my best—yes I did, pa—and I think it's a little too hard to be scolded in this way, with my poor sprained ankle and everything!"

"Well, there, there, child!" exclaimed Mr. Stuart, testily, for he was fond of Trix; "don't cry. There's as good fish in the sea as ever were caught. As to being better-looking than you, I don't believe a word of it. I never liked your dark complected women myself. You're the biggest and the best-looking young woman of the two, by George!" (Mr. Stuart's grammar was hardly up to the standard.) "There's this young fellow, Hammond—his father's a lord—rich, too, if his grandfather *did* make it cotton-spinning. Now, why can't you set your cap for *him*? When the old rooster dies, this young chap will be a lord himself, and a lord's better than a baronet, by George! Come downstairs, Trixy, and put on your stunningest gown, and see if you can't hook the military swell."

Following these pious parental counsels, Miss Trix *did* assume her "stunningest" gown, and with the aid of her brother and a crutch, managed to reach the dining-room. There Lady Helena, pale and preoccupied, joined them. No allusion was made at dinner to *the* topic—a visible restraint was upon all.

"Old lady don't half like it," chuckled Stuart *pere*. "And no wonder, by George! If it was Charley I shouldn't like it myself. I must speak to Charley after dinner—there's this Lady Gwendoline. He's got to marry the upper-crust too. Lady Gwendoline Stuart wouldn't sound bad, by George! I'm glad there's to be a baronet in the family, even if it isn't Trixy. A cousin's daughter's better than nothing."

So in the first opportunity after dinner Mr. Stuart presented his congratulations as blandly as possible to the future Lady Catheron. In the next opportunity he attacked his son on the subject of Lady Gwendoline.

"Take example by your Cousin Edith, my boy," said Mr. Stuart in a large voice, standing with his hands under his coat-tails. "That girl's a credit to her father and family, by George! Look at the match *she's* making without a rap to bless herself with. Now you've a fortune in prospective, young man, that would buy and sell half a dozen of these beggarly lordlings. You've youth and good looks, and good manners, or if you haven't you ought to have, and I say you shall marry a title, by George! There's this Lady Gwendoline—she ain't rich, but she's an earl's daughter. Now what's to hinder your going for *her*?"

Charley looked up meekly from the depths of his chair.

"As you like it, governor. In all matters matrimonial I simply consider myself as non-existent. Only this, I *will* premise—I am ready to marry her, but not to court her. As you truthfully observe, I have youth, good looks, and good manners, but in all things appertaining to love and courtship, I'm as ignorant as the child unborn. Matrimony is an ill no man can hope to escape—love-making *is*. As a prince in my own right, I claim that the wooing shall be done by deputy. There is her most gracious majesty, she popped the question to the late lamented Prince Consort. Could Lady Gwendoline have any more illustrious example to follow? You settle the preliminaries. Let Lady Gwendoline do the proposing, and you may lead me any day you please as a lamb to the slaughter."

With this reply, Mr. Stuart, senior, was forced for the present to be content and go on his way. Trix, overhearing, looked up with interest:

"*Would* you marry her, Charley?"

"Certainly, Beatrix; haven't I said so? If a man *must* marry, as well a Lady Gwendoline as any one else. As Dundreary says, 'One woman is as good as another, and a good deal better.'"

“But you've never seen her.”

“What difference does that make? I suppose the Prince of Wales never saw Alexandra until the matter was cut and dry. You see I love to quote lofty examples. Hammond has described her, and I should say from his description she is what Barry Cornwall would call 'a golden girl' in everything except fortune. Hammond speaks of her as though she were made of precious metals and gems. She has golden hair, alabaster brow, sapphire eyes, pearly teeth, and ruby nose. Or, stay—perhaps it was ruby lips and chiselled nose. Chiselled, sounds as though her olfactory organ was of marble or granite, doesn't it? And she's three—and—thirty years of age. I found that out for myself from the Peerage. It's rather an advantage, however, than otherwise, for a man's wife to be ten or twelve years the elder. You see she combines all the qualities of wife and mother in one.”

And then Charley sauntered away to the whist-table to join his father and mother and Lady Helena. He had as yet found no opportunity of speaking to Edith, and at dinner she had studiously avoided meeting his eye. Captain Hammond took his post beside Miss Stuart's invalid couch, and made himself agreeable and entertaining to that young lady.

Trixy's eyes gradually brightened, and her color came back; she held him a willing captive by her side all the evening through. Papa Stuart from his place at the whist table beamed paternal approval down the long room.

A silken-hung arch separated this drawing-room from another smaller, where the piano stood. Except for two waxlights on the piano, this second drawing-room was in twilight. Edith sat at the piano, Sir Victor stood beside her. Her hands wandered over the keys in soft, dreamy melodies; they talked in whispers when they talked at all. The spell of a silence, more delicious than words, held the young baronet; he was nearing the speechless phase of the *grande passion*. That there *is* a speechless phase, I have been credibly assured again and again, by parties who have had experience in the matter, and certainly ought to know.

At half-past ten Lady Helena, pleading headache, rose from the whist-table, said good-night, and went away to her room. She looked ill and worn, and strangely anxious. Her nephew, awaking from his trance of bliss, and seeing her pale face, gave her his arm and assisted her up the long stairway to her room. Mrs. Stuart, yawning very much, followed her example. Mr. Stuart went out through the open French window to smoke a last cigar. Captain Hammond and Trix were fathoms deep in their conversation. Miss Darrell, in the inner room, stood alone, her elbow resting on the low marble mantel, her eyes fixed thoughtfully on the wall before her. The twinkle of the tapers lighted up the diamond on her hand, glowing like a miniature sun.

“You have been so completely monopolized all evening, Dithy,” said a familiar voice beside her, “that there has been no such thing as speaking a word to you. Better late than never, though, I hope.”

She lifted her eyes to Charley's face, Charley looking as he ever looked to her, “a man of men,” handsome and gallant, as though he were indeed the prince they called him. He took in his, the hand hanging so loosely by her side, the hand that wore the ring.

“What a pretty hand you have, Edie, and how well diamonds become it. I think you were born to wear diamonds, my handsome cousin, and walk in silk attire. A magnificent ring, truly—an heirloom, no doubt, in the Catheron family. My dear cousin, Trix has been telling me the news. Is it necessary to say I congratulate you with all my heart?”

His face, his voice, his pleasant smile held no emotion whatever, save that of kindly, cousinly regard. His bright gray eyes looked at her with brotherly frankness, nothing more.

The color that came so seldom, and made her so lovely, rose deep to Edith's cheeks—this time the flush of anger. Her dark eyes gleamed scornfully; she drew her hand suddenly and contemptuously away.

“It is not necessary at all, Cousin Charley. Pray don't trouble yourself—I know how you hate trouble—to turn fine phrases. I don't want congratulations; I am too happy to need them.”

“Yet being the correct thing to do, and knowing what a stickler you are for *les convenances*, Edith, you will still permit me humbly to offer them. It is a most suitable match; I congratulate Sir Victor on his excellent taste and judgment. He is the best fellow alive, and you—I *will* say it, though you are my cousin—will be a bride even a baronet may be proud of. I wish you both, all the happiness so suitable a match deserves.”

Was this sarcasm—was it real? She could not tell, well as she understood him. His placid face, his serene eyes were as cloudless as a summer sky. Yes, he meant it, and only the other day he had told her he loved her. She could have laughed aloud—Charley Stuart's love!

On the instant Sir Victor returned. In his secret heart the baronet was mortally jealous of Charley. The love

that Edith could not give him, he felt instinctively, had long ago been given to her handsome cousin. There was latent jealousy in his face now, as he drew near.

“Am I premature, Sir Victor, in offering my congratulations?” Charley said, with pleasant cordiality; “if so, the fact of Edith's being my cousin, almost my sister, must excuse it. You are a fortunate man, baronet. It would be superfluous to wish you joy—you have an overplus of that article already.”

Sir Victor's brow cleared. Charley's frankness, Charley's perfect good-humor staggered him. Had he then been mistaken after all? He stretched forth his hand and grasped that of Edith's cousin.

She turned suddenly and walked away, a passion of anger within her, flashing as she went a look of hatred—yes, absolute hatred—upon Charley. She had brought it upon herself, she had deserved it all, but how dared he mock her with his smiles, his good wishes, when he knew, he *knew* that her whole heart was in his keeping?

“It shall not be in his keeping long,” she said savagely, between her set teeth. “Ingrate! More unstable than water! And I was fool enough to cry for him and myself that night at Killarney.”

It was half-past eleven when she went up to her room. She had studiously avoided Charley all the remainder of the evening. She had demeaned herself to her affianced with a smiling devotion that had nearly turned his brain. But the smiles and the brightness all faded away as she said good-night. She toiled wearily up the stairs, pale, tired, spiritless, half her youth and beauty gone. Farther down the passage she could hear Charley's mellow voice trolling carelessly a song:

“Did you ever have a cousin, Tom?

And could that cousin sing?

Sisters we have by the dozen, Tom,

But a cousin's a different thing.”

Every one went to bed, and to sleep perhaps, but Sir Victor Catheron. He was too happy to sleep. He lit a cigar and paced to and fro in the soft darkness, thinking of the great bliss this day had brought him, thinking over her every word and smile, thinking that the first of September would give him his darling forever. He walked beneath her window of course. She caught a glimpse of him, and with intolerant impatience extinguished her lights and shrouded herself and her wicked rebellion in darkness. His eyes strayed from hers to his aunt's, farther along the same side. Yes, in her room lights still burned. Lady Helena usually kept early hours, as befitted her years and infirmities. What did she mean by “burning the midnight oil” to-night. Was that black lady from London with her still? and in what way was she mixed up with his aunt? What would they tell him to-morrow? What secret did his aunt hold? They could tell him nothing that could in the slightest influence his marriage with Edith, that he knew; but still he wondered a little what it all could be. At one the lights were still burning. He was surprised, but he would wait no longer. He waved his hand towards Miss Darrell's room, this very far gone young man. “Good-night, my love, my own,” he murmured Byronically, and went to bed to sleep and dream of her. And no warning voice came in those dreams to tell Sir Victor Catheron it was the last perfectly happy night he would ever know.

CHAPTER XIV. TO-MORROW.

To-morrow came, gray and overcast. The fine weather which had lasted almost since their leaving New York showed signs of breaking up. Miss Stuart's ankle was so much better that she was able to limp downstairs at eleven, A. M., to breakfast, and resume her flirtation with Captain Hammond where it had broken off last night. Miss Darrell had a headache and did not appear. And, in the absence of his idol and day star, Sir Victor collapsed and ate his morning meal in silence and sadness.

Breakfast over, he walked to one of the windows, looking out at the rain, which was beginning to drift against the glass, and wondering, drearily, how he was to drag through the long hours without Edith. He might go and play billiards with the other fellows; but no, he was too restless even for that. What was he to do to kill time? It was a relief when a servant came with a message from his aunt.

"My lady's compliments, Sir Victor, and will you please step upstairs at once."

"Now for the grand secret," he thought; "the skeleton in the family closet—the discovery of the mysterious woman in black."

The woman in black was nowhere visible when he entered his aunt's apartments. Lady Helena sat alone, her face pale, her eyes heavy and red as though with weeping, but all the anger, all the excitement of yesterday gone.

"My dear aunt," the young man said, really concerned, "I am sorry to see you looking so ill. And—surely you have not been crying?"

"Sit down," his aunt replied. "Yes, I have been crying. I have had good reason to cry for many years past. I have sent for you, Victor, to tell you all—at least all it is advisable to tell you at present. And, before I begin, let me apologize if anything I may have said yesterday on the subject of your engagement has wounded you."

"Dear Lady Helena, between you and me there can be no talk of pardon. It was your right to object if you saw cause, and no doubt it is natural that Edith's want of birth and fortune would weigh with you. But they do not weigh with me, and I know the happiness of my life to be very near your heart. I have only to say again that that happiness lies entirely with her—that without her I should be the most miserable fellow alive—to hear you withdraw every objection and take my darling to your arms as your daughter."

She sighed heavily as she listened.

"A wilful man must have his way. You are, as you told me yesterday, your own master, free to do as you please. To Miss Darrell personally I have no objection; she is beautiful, well-bred, and, I believe, a noble girl. Her poverty and obscure birth *are* drawbacks in my eyes, but, since they are not so in yours, I will allude to them no more. The objections I made yesterday to your marriage I would have made had your bride been a duke's daughter. I had hoped—it was an absurd hope—that you would not think of marriage for many years to come, perhaps not at all."

"But, Aunt Helena—"

"Do I not say it was an absurd hope? The fact is, Victor, I have been a coward—a nervous, wretched coward from first to last. I shut my eyes to the truth. I feared you might fall in love with this girl, but I put the fear away from me. The time has come when the truth must be spoken, when my love for you can shield you no longer. Before you marry you must know all. Do you remember, in the heat of my excitement yesterday, telling you you had no right to the title you bear? In one sense I spoke the truth. Your father—" she gasped and paused.

"My father?" he breathlessly repeated.

"Your father is alive."

He sat and looked at her—stunned. What was she saying? His father alive, after all those years! and he not Sir Victor Catheron! He half rose—ashen pale.

"Lady Helena, what is this? My father alive—my father, whom for twenty years—since I could think at all—I have thought dead! What vile deception is here?"

"Sit down, Victor; you shall hear all. There is no vile deception—the deception, such as it is, has been by his own desire. Your father lives, but he is hopelessly insane."

He sat looking at her, pale, stern, almost confounded.

"He—he never recovered from the, shock of his wife's dreadful death," went on her ladyship, her voice

trembling. "Health returned after that terrible brain fever, but not reason. We took him away—the best medical aid everywhere was tried—all in vain. For years he was hopelessly, utterly insane, never violent, but mind and memory a total blank. He was incurable—he would never reclaim his title, but his bodily health was good, and he might live for many years. Why then deprive you of your rights, since in no way you defrauded him? The world was given to understand he was dead, and you, as you grew up, took his place as though the grave had indeed closed over him. But legally, as you see for yourself, you have no claim to it."

Still he sat gazing at her—still he sat silent, his lips compressed, waiting for the end.

"Of late years, gleams of reason have returned, fitfully and at uncertain times. On these rare occasions he has spoken of you, has expressed the desire that you should still be kept in ignorance, that he shall ever be to the world dead. You perceive, therefore, though it is my duty to tell you this, it need in no way alarm you, as he will never interfere with your claims."

Still he sat silent—a strange, intent listening expression on his face.

"You recollect the lady who came here yesterday," she continued. "Victor, looking far back into the past, have you no recollection of some one, fair and young, who used to bend over you at night, hear you say your baby prayers, and sing you to sleep? Try and think."

He bent his head in assent.

"I remember," he answered.

"Do you recall how she looked—has her face remained in your memory?"

"She had dark eyes and hair, and was handsome. I remember no more."

She looked at him wistfully.

"Victor, have you no idea who that woman was—none?"

"None," he replied coldly. "How could I, since she was not my mother. I never heard her name. Who was she?"

"She was the lady you saw yesterday."

"Who was the lady I saw yesterday?"

She paused a moment, then replied, still with that wistful glance on his face:

"Inez Catheron."

"What?" Again he half-started to his feet. "The woman who was my mother's rival and enemy, who made her life wretched, who was concerned in her murder! Whom *you* aided to escape from Chesholm jail! The woman who, directly or indirectly, is guilty of her death!"

"Sir Victor Catheron, how dare you!" Lady Helen also started to her feet, her face flushing with haughty anger. "I tell you Inez Catheron has been a martyr—not a murderess. She was your mother's rival, as she had a right to be—was she not your father's plighted wife, long before he ever saw Ethel Dobb? She was your mother's rival. It was her only fault, and her whole life has been spent in expiating it. Was it not atonement sufficient, that for the crime of another, she should be branded with life-long infamy, and banished forever from home and friends?"

"If the guilt was not hers it was her brother's, and she was privy to it," the young man retorted, with sullen coldness.

"Who are you, that you should say whether it was or not? The assassin is known to Heaven, and Heaven has dealt with him. Accuse no one—neither Juan Catheron nor his sister—all human judgment is liable to err. Of your mother's death Inez Catheron is innocent—by it her whole life has been blighted. To your father, that life has been consecrated. She has been his nurse, his companion, his more than sister or mother all those years. *I* loved him, and I could not have done what she has done. He used her brutally—brutally I say—and her revenge has been life-long devotion and sacrifice. All those years she has never left him. She will never leave him until he dies."

She sank back in her seat, trembling, exhausted. He listened in growing wonder.

"You believe me?" she demanded imperiously.

"I believe you," he replied sadly. "My dear aunt, forgive me. I believe all you have said. Can I not see her and thank her too?"

"You shall see her. It is for that she has remained. Stay here; I will send her to you. She deserves your thanks, though all thanks are but empty and vain for such a life-long martyrdom as hers."

She left him hastily. Profound silence fell. He turned and looked out at the fast-falling rain, at the trees

swaying in the fitful wind, at the dull, leaden sky. Was he asleep and dreaming? His father alive! He sat half dazed, unable to realize it.

“Victor!”

He had not heard the door open, he had not heard her approach, but she stood beside him. All in black, soft, noiseless black, a face devoid of all color; large, sad, soft eyes, and hair white as winter snow—that was the woman Sir Victor Catheron saw as he turned round. The face, with all its settled sadness and pallor, was still the face of a beautiful woman, and in weird contradiction to its youth and beauty, were the smooth bands of abundant hair—white as the hair of eighty. The deep, dusk eyes, once so full of pride and fire, looked at him with the tender, saddened light, long, patient suffering had wrought; the lips, once curved in haughtiest disdain, had taken the sweetness of years of hopeless pain. And so, after three—and—twenty years, Victor Catheron saw the woman, whose life his father's falsity and fickleness had wrecked.

“Victor!”

She held out her hand to him shyly, wistfully. The ban of murder had been upon her all these years. Who was to tell that in his inmost heart he too might not brand her as a murderess? But she need not have doubted. If any suspicion yet lingered in his mind, it vanished as he looked at her.

“Miss Catheron!” He grasped her hand, and held it between both his own. “I have but just heard all, for the first time, as you know. That my father lives—that to him you have nobly consecrated your life. He has not deserved it at your hands; let my father's son thank you with all his soul!”

“Ah, hush,” she said softly. “I want no thanks. Your poor father! Aunt Helena has told you how miserably all *his* life has been wrecked—a life once so full of promise.”

“She has told me all, Miss Catheron.”

“Not Miss Catheron,” she interposed, with a smile that lit her worn face into youth and beauty; “not Miss Catheron, surely—Inez, Cousin Inez, if you will. It is twenty—three years—do you know it?—since any one has called me Miss Catheron before. You can't fancy how oddly it sounds.”

He looked at her in surprise.

“You do not bear your own name? And yet I might have known it, lying as you still do—”

“Under the ban of murder.” She shuddered slightly as she said it. “Yes, when I fled that dreadful night from Chesholm prison, and made my way to London, I left my name behind me. I took at first the name of Miss Black. I lived in dingy lodgings in that crowded part of London, Lambeth; and for the look of the thing, took in sewing. It was of all those years the most dreary, the most miserable and lonely time of my probation. I lived there four months; then came the time of your father's complete restoration to bodily health, and confirmation of the fear that his mind was entirely gone. What was to be done with him? Lady Helena was at a loss to know. There were private asylums, but she disliked the idea of shutting him up in one. He was perfectly gentle, perfectly harmless, perfectly insane. Lady Helena came to see me, and I, pining for the sight of a familiar face, sick and weary to death of the wretched neighborhood in which I lived, proposed the plan that has ever since been the plan of my life. Let Lady Helena take a house, retired enough to be safe, sufficiently suburban to be healthy; let her place Victor there with me; let Mrs. Marsh, my old friend and housekeeper at Catheron Royals, become my housekeeper once more; let Hooper the butler take charge of us, and let us all live together. I thought then, and I think still, it was the best thing for him and for me that could have been suggested. Aunt Helena acted upon it at once; she found a house, on the outskirts of St. John's Wood—a large house, set in spacious grounds, and inclosed by a high wall, called 'Poplar Lodge.' It suited us in every way; it combined all the advantages of town and country. She leased it from the agent for a long term of years, for a 'Mr. and Mrs. Victor,' Mr. Victor being in very poor health. Secretly and by night we removed your father there, and since the night of his entrance he has never passed the gates. From the first—in the days of my youth and my happiness—my life belonged to him; it will belong to him to the end. Hooper and Marsh are with me still, old and feeble now; and of late years I don't think I have been unhappy.”

She sighed and looked out at the dull, rain-beaten day. The young man listened in profound pity and admiration. Not unhappy! Branded with the deadliest crime man can commit or the law punish—an exile, a recluse, the life-long companion of an insane man and two old servants! No wonder that at forty her hair was gray—no wonder all life and color had died out of that hopeless face years ago. Perhaps his eyes told her what was passing in his mind; she smiled and answered that look.

"I have not been unhappy, Victor; I want you to believe it. Your father was always more to me than all the world beside—he is so still. He is but the wreck of the Victor I loved, and yet I would rather spend my life by his side than elsewhere on earth. And I was not quite forsaken. Aunt Helena often came and brought you. It seems but yesterday since I had you in my arms rocking you asleep, and now—and now they tell me you are going to be married."

The sensitive color rose over his face for a second, then faded, leaving him very pale.

"I was going to be married," he answered slowly, "but she does not know this. My father lives—the title and inheritance are his, not mine. Who is to tell what she may say now?"

The dark, thoughtful eyes looked at him earnestly.

"Does she love you?" she asked; "this Miss Darrell? I need hardly inquire whether *you* love her."

"I love her so dearly that if I lose her—" He paused and turned his face away from her in the gray light. "I wish I had known this from the first; I ought to have known. It may have been meant in kindness, but I believe it was a mistake. Heaven knows how it will end now."

"You mean to say, then, that in the hour you lose your title and inheritance you also lose Miss Darrell? Is that it?"

"I have said nothing of the kind. Edith is one of the noblest, the truest of women; but can't you see—it looks as though she had been deceived, imposed upon. The loss of title and wealth would make a difference to any woman on earth."

"Very little to a woman who loves, Victor. I hope—I hope—this young girl loves you?"

Again the color rose over his face—again he turned impatiently away.

"She *will* love me," he answered; "she has promised it, and Edith Darrell is a girl to keep her word."

"So," Miss Catheron said, softly and sadly, "it is the old French proverb over again, 'There is always one who loves, and one who is loved.' She has owned to you that she is not in love with you, then? Pardon me, Victor, but your happiness is very near to me."

"She has owned it," he answered, "with the rare nobility and candor that belongs to her. Such affection as mine will win its return—'love begets love,' they say. It *must*."

"Not always, Victor—ah, not always, else what a happy woman *I* had been! But surely she cares for no one else?"

"She cares for no one else," he answered, doggedly enough, but in his inmost heart that never-dying jealousy of Charley Stuart rankled. "She cares for no one else—she has told me so, and she is pride, and truth, and purity itself. If I lose her through this, then this secret of insanity will have wrecked forever still another life."

"If she is what you picture her," Inez said steadily, "no loss of rank or fortune would ever make her give you up. But you are not to lose either—you need not even tell her, if you choose."

"I can have no secrets from my plighted wife—Edith must know all. But the secret will be as safe with her as with me."

"Very well," she said quietly; "you know what the result will be if by any chance 'Mrs. Victor' and Inez Catheron are discovered to be one. But it shall be exactly as you please. Your father is as dead to you, to all the world, as though he lay in the vaults of Chesholm church, by your mother's side."

"My poor mother! my poor, murdered, unavenged mother! Inez Catheron, you are a noble woman—a brave woman; was it well to aid your brother to escape?—was it well, for the sake of saving the Catheron honor and the Catheron name, to permit a most cruel and cowardly murder to go unavenged?"

What was it that looked up at him out of her eyes? Infinite pity, infinite sorrow, infinite pain.

"My brother," she repeated softly, as if to herself; "poor Juan! he was the scapegoat of the family always. Yes, Sir Victor, it was a cruel and cowardly murder, and yet I believe in my soul we did right to screen the murderer from the world. It is in the hands of the Almighty—there let it rest."

There was a pause—then:

"I shall return with you to London and see my father," he said, as one who claims a right.

"No," she answered firmly; "it is impossible. Stay! Hear me out—it is your father's own wish."

"My father's wish! But—"

"He cannot express a wish, you would say. Of late years, Victor, at wide intervals, his reason has returned for a brief space—all the worse for him."

A TERRIBLE SECRET. A Novel.

"The worse for him!" The young man looked at her blankly. "Miss Catheron, do you mean to say it is better for him to be mad?"

"Much better—such madness as his. He does not think—he does not suffer. Memory to him is torture; he loved your mother, Victor—and he lost her—terribly lost her. With memory returns the anguish and despair of that loss as though it were but yesterday. If you saw him as I see him, you would pray as I do, that his mind might be blotted out forever."

"Good Heaven! this is terrible."

"Life is full of terrible things—tragedies, secrets—this is one of them. In these rare intervals of sanity he speaks of you—it is he who directed, in case of your marriage, that you should be told this much—that you are not to be brought to see him, until—"

She paused.

"Until—"

"Until he lies upon his death-bed. That day will be soon, Victor—soon, soon. Those brief glimpses of reason and memory have shortened life. What he suffers in these intervals no words of mine can tell. On his death-bed you are to see him—not before; and then you shall be told the story of your mother's death. No, Victor, spare me now—all I can tell you I have told. I return home by the noon-day train; and, before I go, I should like to see this girl who is to be your wife. See, I will remain by this window, screened by the curtain. Can you not fetch her by some pretence or other beneath it, that I may look and judge for myself?"

"I can try," he said, turning to go. "I have your consent to tell her my father is alive? I will tell her no more—it is not necessary she should know *you* are his keeper."

"That much you may tell her—it is her right. When I have seen her, come to me and say good-by."

"I shall not say good-by until I say it at Chester Station. Of course, I shall see you off. Wait here; if Edith is able to come out you shall see her. She kept her room this morning with headache."

He left her, half-dazed with what he had heard. He went to the drawing-room—the Stuarts and Captain Hammond were there—not Edith.

"Has Edith come down?" he asked. "I wish to speak to her for a moment."

"Edith is prowling about in the rain, somewhere, like an uneasy ghost," answered Trixy; "no doubt wet feet, and discomfort, and dampness generally are cures for headache; or, perhaps, she's looking for *you*."

He hardly waited to hear her out before he started in pursuit. As if favored by fortune, he caught a glimpse of Edith's purple dress among the trees in the distance. She had no umbrella, and was wandering about pale and listless in the rain.

"Edith," Sir Victor exclaimed, "out in all this downpour without an umbrella? You will get your death of cold."

"I never take cold," she answered indifferently. "I always liked to run out in the rain ever since I was a child. I must be an amphibious sort of animal, I think. Besides, the damp air helps my headache."

He drew her hand within his arm and led her slowly in the direction of the window where the watcher stood.

"Edith," he began abruptly, "I have news for you. To call it bad news would sound inhuman, and yet it has half-stunned me. It is this—my father is alive."

"Sir Victor!"

"Alive, Edith—hopelessly insane, but alive. That is the news Lady Helena and one other, have told me this morning. It has stunned me; I repeat—is it any wonder? All those years I have thought him dead, and to-day I discover that from first to last I have been deceived."

She stood mute with surprise. His father alive—madness in the family. Truly it would have been difficult for Sir Victor or any one else to call this good news. They were directly beneath the window. He glanced up—yes, a pale face gleamed from behind the curtain, gazing down at that other pale face by Sir Victor's side. Very pale, very set just now.

"Then if your father is alive, *he* is Sir Victor and not you?"

Those were the first words she spoke; her tone cold, her glance unsympathetic.

His heart contracted.

"He will never interfere with my claim—they assure me of that. Alive in reality, he is dead, to the world. Edith, would it make any difference—if I lost title and estate, would I also lose *you*?"

A TERRIBLE SECRET. A Novel.

The beseeching love in his eyes might have moved her, but just at present she felt as though a stone lay in her bosom instead of a heart.

"I am not a sentimental sort of girl, Sir Victor," she answered steadily. "I am almost too practical and worldly, perhaps. And I must own it would make a difference. I have told you I am not in love with you—as yet—you have elected to take me and wait for that. I tell you now truthfully, if you were not Sir Victor Catheron, I would not marry you. It is best I should be honest, best I should not deceive you. You are a thousand times too good for so mercenary a creature as I am, and if you leave me it will only be serving me right. I don't want to break my promise, to draw back, but I feel in the mood for plain speaking this morning. If you feel that you can't marry me on those terms—and I don't deserve that you should—now is the time to speak. No one will be readier than I to own that it serves me right."

He looked and listened, pale to the lips.

"Edith, in Heaven's name, do you *wish* me to give you up?"

"No, I wish nothing of the sort. I have promised to marry you, and I am ready to keep that promise; but if you expect love or devotion from me, I tell you frankly I have neither to give. If you are willing still to take me, and"—smiling—"I see you are—I am still ready to be your wife—your true and faithful wife from the first—your loving wife, I hope, in the end."

They said no more. He led her back to the house, then left her. He hastened to Miss Catheron, more sombre even than when he had quitted her.

"Well," he said briefly, "you saw her?"

"I saw her. It is a beautiful face, a proud face, a truthful face, and yet—"

"Go on," he said impatiently. "Don't try to spare me. I am growing accustomed to unpleasant truths."

"I may be wrong, but something in her face tells me she does not love you, and," under her breath, "never will."

"It will come in time. With or without love, she is willing to be my wife—that is happiness enough for the present."

"You told her all?"

"I told her my father was alive and insane—no more. It will make no difference in our plans—none. We are to be married the first of September. The secret is safe with her."

The door opened, and Lady Helena came hastily in.

"If you wish to catch the 12.50 train, Inez," she said, "you must go at once. It is a long drive from this to the station. The brougham is waiting—shall I accompany you?"

"I will accompany her," said Sir Victor. "You had better return to our guests. They will begin to feel themselves neglected."

Miss Catheron left the room. In five minutes she reappeared, closely veiled, as when he had met her on the stairs. The adieux were hastily made. He gave her his arm and led her down to the close brougham. As they passed before the drawing-room windows, Miss Stuart uttered an exclamation:

"Oh! I say! where is Sir Victor going in the rain, and who is the dismal-looking lady in black? Edith, who is it? *You* ought to know."

"I don't know," Edith answered briefly, not looking up from her book.

"Hasn't Sir Victor told you?"

"I haven't asked Sir Victor."

"Oh, you haven't, and he hasn't told? Well, all I have to say is, that when *I'm* engaged I hope the object of my affections will keep no secrets from me."

"As if he could!" murmurs Captain Hammond.

"I declare, he is going off with her. Edith, do come and look. There! they are driving away together, as fast as they can go."

But Edith never stirred. If she felt the slightest curiosity on the subject, her face did not show it.

They drove rapidly through the rain, and barely caught the train at that. He placed her hurriedly in an empty carriage, a moment before it started. As it flew by he caught one last glimpse of a veiled face, and a hand waving farewell. Then the train and the woman were out of sight.

Like a man who walks in his sleep, Sir Victor Catheron turned, re-entered the brougham, and was driven

home.

CHAPTER XV. LADY HELENA'S BALL.

Three days after, on Thursday, the fifth of June, Lady Helena Powyss gave a very large dinner-party, followed by a ball in honor of her American guests. When it is your good fortune to number half a county among your friends, relatives, and acquaintances, it is possible to be at once numerous and select. The *creme de la creme* of Cheshire assembled in Lady Helena's halls of dazzling light, to do honor to Sir Victor Catheron's bride-elect.

For the engagement had been formally announced, and was the choice bit of gossip, with which the shire regaled itself. Sir Victor Catheron was following in the footsteps of his father, and was about to bring to Catheron Royals one of the lower orders as its mistress. It was the Dobb blood no doubt cropping up—these sort of mesalliances *will* tell. An American, too—a governess, a poor relation of some common rich people from the States. The best county families, with daughters to marry, shook their heads. It was very sad—*very* sad, to see a good old name and a good old family degenerate in this way. But there was always a taint of madness in the Catheron blood—that accounted for a good deal. Poor Sir Victor—and poor Lady Helena.

But everybody came. They might be deeply shocked and sorry, but still Sir Victor Catheron *was* Sir Victor Catheron, the richest baronet in the county, and Catheron Royals always a pleasant house to visit—the reigning Lady Catheron always a desirable acquaintance on one's visiting-list. Nobody acknowledged, of course, they went from pure, downright curiosity, to see this manoeuvring American girl, who had taken Sir Victor Catheron captive under the aristocratic noses of the best-born, best-bred, best-blooded young ladies in a circuit of twenty miles.

The eventful night came—the night of Edith's ordeal. Even Trix was a little nervous—only a little—is not perfect self-possession the normal state of American young ladydom? Lady Helena was quite pale in her anxiety. The girl was handsome beyond dispute, thoroughbred as a young countess, despite her birth and bringing up in a New England town and Yankee boarding-house, with pride enough for a princess of forty quarterings, *but* how would she come forth from the fiery furnace of all those pitiless eyes, sharpened to points to watch for gaucheries and solecisms of good breeding—from the merciless tongues that would hang, draw, and quarter her, the instant their owners were out of the house.

“*Don't* you feel nervous, Dithy?” asked Trix, almost out of patience at last with Edith's serene calm. “I do—horribly. And Lady Helena has got a fit of the fidgets that will bring her gray hairs to an early grave, if this day lasts much longer. Ain't you afraid—honor bright?”

Edith Darrell lifted her dark, disdainful eyes. She sat reading, while the afternoon wore on, and Trixy fussed and fluttered about the room.

“Afraid of the people who are coming here to-night—is that what you mean? Not a whit! I know as well as you do, they are coming to inspect and find fault with Sir Victor Catheron's choice, to pity him, and call me an adventuress. I know also that any one of these young ladies would have married him, and said 'Thank you for asking,' if he had seen fit to choose them. I have my own pride and Sir Victor's good taste to uphold to-night, and I will uphold them. I think”—she lifted her haughty, dark head, and glanced, with a half-conscious smile, in the pier-glass opposite—“I think I can bear comparison by lamplight with any of these 'daughters of a hundred earls,' such as—Lady Gwendoline Drexel for instance.”

“By lamplight,” Trix said, ignoring the rest of her speech. “Ah, yes, that's the worst of it, Edith; you dark people always light up well. And Lady Gwendoline Drexel—I wonder what Lady Gwendoline will wear to-night? I should like to be the best-dressed young lady at the ball. Do you know, Dith,” spitefully this, “I think Charley is quite struck with Lady Gwendoline. You noticed, I suppose, the attention he paid her the evening we met, and then he has been to Drexel Court by invitation. Pa is most anxious, I know. Money will be no object, you know, with Charley, and really it would be nice to have a titled sister-in-law. 'My sister, Lady Gwendoline Stuart,' will sound very well in New York, won't it? It would be a very suitable match for Charley.”

“A most suitable match,” Miss Darrell repeated; “age included. She is ten years his senior if a day; but where true love exists, what does a trifle of years on either side signify? He has money—she has rank. He has youth and good looks—she has high birth and a handle to her name. As you say, Trixy, a most suitable match!”

And then Miss Darrell went back to her book, but the slender, black brows were meeting in a steady frown,

that quite spoiled her beauty—no doubt at something displeasing in the pages.

“But you mustn't sit here all day,” broke in Trix again; “it's high time you were up in your dressing-room. What are you going to wear, Dith?”

“I have not decided yet. I don't much care; it doesn't much matter. I have decided to look my best in anything.”

She arose and sauntered out of the room, and was seen no more, until the waxlights blazed from end to end of the great mansion and the June dusk had deepened into dewy night. Then, as the roll of carriages came without ceasing along the drive, she descended, arrayed for battle, to find her impatient slave and adorer awaiting her at the foot of the grand stairway. She smiled upon him her brightest, most beaming smile, a smile that intoxicated him at sight.

“Will I do, Sir Victor?” she asked.

Would she do? He looked at her as a man may look half dazzled, at the sun. He could not have told you what she wore, pink and white clouds it seemed to him—he only knew two brown, luminous, laughing eyes were looking straight into his, and turning his brain with their spell.

“You are sure I will do? You are sure you will not be ashamed of me to-night?” her laughing voice asked again.

Ashamed of her—ashamed! He laughed aloud at the stupendous joke, as he drew her arm within his, and led her into the thronged rooms, as some favored subject may once in his life lead in a queen.

Perhaps there was excuse for him. “I shall look my best in anything,” she had said, in her disdain, and she had kept her word. She wore a dress that seemed alternately composed of white tulle and blush-roses; she had roses in her rich, dark hair, hair always beautifully worn; Sir Victor's diamond-betrothal ring shone on her finger; round her arching throat she wore a slender line of yellow gold, a locket set with brilliants attached. The locket had been Lady Helena's gift, and held Sir Victor's portrait. That was her ball array, and she looked as though she were floating in her fleecy white draperies, her perfumery, roses, and sparkling diamonds. The dark eyes outshone the diamonds, a soft flush warmed either cheek. Yes, she was beautiful; so beautiful that saner men than her accepted lover, might have been pardoned if for a moment they lost their heads.

Lady Helena Powyss, in sweeping moire and jewels, receiving her guests, looked at her and drew one long breath of great relief. She might have spared herself all her anxious doubts and fears—low-born and penniless as she was, Sir Victor Catheron's bride would do Sir Victor Catheron honor to-night.

Trix was there—Trix resplendent in pearl silk with a train half the length of the room, pearl silk, point lace, white-camelias, and Neapolitan corals and cameos, incrusting with diamonds—Trix, in all the finery six thousand dollars can buy, drew a long breath of great and bitter envy.

“If one wore the Koh-i-noor and Coronation Robes,” thought Miss Stuart sadly, “she would shine one down. She is dazzling to-night. Captain Hammond,” tapping that young warrior with her point-lace fan, “*don't* you think Edith is without exception the most beautiful and elegant girl in the rooms?”

And the gallant captain bows profoundly, and answers with a look that points the speech:

“With *one* exception, Miss Beatrix, only one.”

Charley is there, and perhaps there can be no doubt about it, that Charley is, without exception, far and away, the best looking man. Charley gazes at his cousin for an instant on the arm of her proud and happy lover, radiant and smiling, the centre of all that is best in the room. She lifts her dark, laughing eyes as it chances, and brown and gray meet full. Then he turns away to a tall, languid rather passive lady, who is talking slowly by his side.

“Is Miss Darrell really his cousin? Really? How extremely handsome she is, and how perfectly infatuated Sir Victor seems. Poor Sir Victor! What a pity there is insanity in the family—insanity is such a very shocking thing. How pretty Miss Stuart is looking this evening. She has heard—is it true—can Mr. Stuart inform her—are *all* American girls handsome?”

And Charley—as Captain Hammond has done—bows, and looks, and replies:

“I used to think so, Lady Gwendoline. I have seen English girls since, and think differently.”

Oh, the imbecile falsehoods of society! He is thinking, as he says it, how pallid and faded poor Lady Gwendoline is looking, in her dingy green satin and white Brussels lace overdress, her emeralds and bright golden hair—most beautiful and most expensive shade to be had in London. He is thinking how the Blanc de Perle and rouge vegetal is showing on her three-and-thirty-year-old face, and what his life would be like if he listened to

his father and married her. He shudders inwardly and gives it up—"that way madness lies," and while there is a pistol left, wherewith to blow his brains out, he can still hope to escape a worse fate.

But Lady Gwendoline, freighted with eleven seasons' experience, and growing seedy and desperate, clings to him as the drowning cling to straws. She is the daughter of a peer, but there are five younger sisters, all plain and all portionless. Her elder sister, who chaperones her to-night, is the wife of a rich and retired manufacturer, Lady Portia Hampton. The rich and retired manufacturer has purchased Drexel Court, and it is Lady Portia's painful duty to try and marry her sisters off.

The ball is a great success for Miss Edith Darrell. The men rave about her; the women may sneer, but they must do it covertly; her beauty and her grace, her elegance and high breeding, not the most envious dare dispute. Music swells and floats deliciously—scores are suitors for her hand in the dance. The flush deepens on her dusk cheeks, the streaming light in her starry eyes—she is dangerously brilliant to-night. Sir Victor follows in her train whenever his duties allow him; when he dances with others his eyes follow his heart, and go after her. There is but one in all those thronged rooms for him—one who is his idol—his darling—the pride, the joy, the desire of his life.

"My dear, I am proud of you to-night," Lady Helena whispers once. "You surpass yourself—you are lovely beyond compare. You do us all credit."

And Edith Darrell's haughty eyes look up for a moment and they are flashing through tears. She lifts the lady's hand with exquisite grace, and kisses it. Then smiles chase the tears, and she is gone on the arm of some devoted cavalier. Once—only once, she dances with Charley. She has striven to avoid him—no, not that either—it is *he* who has avoided her. She has seen him—let her be surrounded by scores, she has seen him whispering with Lady Gwendoline, dancing with Lady Gwendoline, fanning Lady Gwendoline, flirting with Lady Gwendoline. It is Lady Gwendoline he leads to supper, and it is after supper, with the enchanting strains of a Strauss waltz filling the air, that he comes up and asks her for that dance.

"I am sure I deserve it for my humility," he says plaintively. "I have stood in the background, humbly and afar off, and given you up to my betters. Surely, after all the bitter pills I have been swallowing, I deserve *one* sugar-plum."

She laughs—glances at Sir Victor, making his way toward her, takes his arm rather hurriedly, and moves off.

"Is Lady Gwendoline a pill, or a sugar-plum?" she asks. "You certainly seem to have had an overdose of her."

"I owe Lady Gwendoline my deepest thanks," he answered gravely. "Her efforts to keep me amused this evening, have been worthy of a better cause. If the deepest gratitude of a too-trusting heart," says Charley, laying his hand on the left side of his white waistcoat, "be any reward for such service, it is hers."

They float away. To Edith it is the one dance of the night. She hardly knows whether she whirls in air or on the waxed floor; she only knows that it is like heaven, that the music is celestial, and that it is Charley's arm that is clasping her close. Will she ever waltz with him again, she wonders, and she feels, feels in her inmost heart, that she is sinning against her affianced husband in waltzing with him now. But it is *so* delicious—what a pity most of the delicious things of earth should be wrong. If it could only last forever—forever! And while she thinks it, it stops.

"O Charley! that *was* a waltz!" she says, leaning on him heavily, and panting; "no one else has my step as you have it."

"Let us trust that Sir Victor will learn it," he responds coolly; "here he comes now. It was a charming waltz, Dithy, but charming things must end. Your lawful proprietor approaches; to your lawful proprietor I resign you."

He was perfectly unflushed, perfectly unexcited. He bows, smiles, yields her to Sir Victor, and saunters away. Five seconds later he is bending over Lady Gwendoline's chair, whispering in the pink, patrician ear resting against the glistening, golden chignon. Edith looks once—in her heart she hates Lady Gwendoline—looks once, and looks no more.

And as the serene June morning dawns, and larks and thrushes pipe in the trees, Lady Helena's dear five hundred friends, sleepy and pallid, get into their carriages and go home.

CHAPTER XVI. "O MY COUSIN SHALLOW-HEARTED!"

The middle of the day is past before one by one they straggle down. Breakfast awaits each newcomer, hot and tempting. Trix eats hers with a relish. Trix possesses one of the chief elements of perpetual human happiness—an appetite that never fails, a digestion that, in her own metaphorical American language, "never goes back on her." But Edith looks fagged and spiritless. If people are to be supernaturally brilliant and bright, dashing and fascinating all night long, people must expect to pay the penalty next day, when lassitude and reaction set in.

"My poor Edie!" Mr. Charles Stuart remarks, compassionately, glancing at the wan cheeks and lustreless eyes, as he lights his after-breakfast cigar, "you do look most awfully used up. What a pity for their peace of mind, some of your frantic adorers of last night can't see you now. Let me recommend you to go back to bed and try an S. and B."

"An 'S. and B.'?" Edith repeats vaguely.

"Soda and Brandy. It's the thing, depend upon it, for such a case as yours. I've been seedy myself before now, and know what I'm talking about. I'll mix it for you, if you like."

There is a copy of Tennyson, in blue and gold, beside Miss Darrell, and Miss Darrell's reply is to fling it at Mr. Stuart's head. It is a last effort of expiring nature; she sinks back exhausted among her cushions. Charley departs to enjoy his Manila out under the waving trees, and Sir Victor, looking fresh and recuperated, strolls in and bends over her.

"My dear Edith," he says, "how pale you are this morning—how tired you look. If one ball is going to exhaust you like this, how will you stand the wear and tear of London seasons in the blissful time to come?"

She does not blush—she turns a trifle impatiently away from him and looks out. She can see Charley and Hammond smoking sociably together in the sunny distance.

"I will grow used to it, I dare say. 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'"

"Have you had breakfast?"

"I made an effort and failed. I watched Trix eat hers, however, and that refreshed me quite as well. It was invigorating only to look at her."

He smiles and bends lower, drawing one long brown silken tress of hair fondly through his fingers, feeling as though he would like to stoop and kiss the pale, weary face. But Trix is over yonder, pretending to read, and kissing is not to be thought of.

"I am going over to Catheron Royals," he whispered; "suppose you come—the walk will do you good. I am giving orders about the fitting up of the old place. Did I tell you the workmen came yesterday?"

"Yes; you told me."

"Shall I ring for your hat and parasol? Do come, Edith."

"Excuse me, Sir Victor," Edith answers, with an impatient motion, "I feel too tired—too lazy, which ever you like—to stir. Some other day I will go with pleasure—just now I feel like lying here and doing the *dolce far niente*. Don't let me detain you, however."

He turns to leave her with a disappointed face. Edith closes her eyes and takes an easier position among the pillows. The door closes behind him; Trix flings down her book and bursts forth:

"Of all the heartless, cold-blooded animals it has ever been my good fortune to meet, commend me to Edith Darrell!"

The dark eyes unclose and look up at her.

"My dear Trix! what's the matter with you now? What new enormity have I committed?"

"Oh, nothing new—nothing new at all," is Trixy's scornful response; "it is quite in keeping with the rest of your conduct. To be purely and entirely selfish is the normal state of the future Lady Catheron! Poor Sir Victor! who has won you. Poor Charley! who has lost you. I hardly know which I pity most."

"I don't see that you need waste your precious pity on either," answered Edith, perfectly unmoved by Miss Stuart's vituperation; "keep it for me. I shall make Sir Victor a very good wife as wives go, and for Charley—well, Lady Gwendoline is left to console him."

"Yes, of course, there is Lady Gwendoline. O Edith! Edith! what are you made of? Flesh and blood like other

people, or waxwork, with a stone for a heart? How can you sell yourself, as you are going to do? Sir Victor Catheron is no more to you than his hall-porter, and yet you persist in marrying him. You love my brother and yet you hand him over to Lady Gwendoline. Come, Edith, be honest for once; you love Charley, don't you?"

"It is rather late in the day for such tender confessions as that," Edith replies, with a reckless sort of laugh; "but yes—if the declaration does you any good, Trix—I love Charley."

"And you give him up! Miss Darrell, I give you up as a conundrum I can't solve. Rank and title are all very well—nobody thinks more of them than I do; but if *I* loved a man," cried Trix, with kindling eyes and glowing cheeks, "I'd marry him! Yes; I would, though he were a beggar."

Edith looked up at her kindly, with a smothered sigh.

"I believe you, Trix; but then you are different from me." She half-raised herself, looking dreamily out on the sunlit prospect of lawn, and coppice, and woodland. "Here it is: I love Charley, but I love myself better. O Trix, child, don't let us talk about it; I am tired, and my head aches." She pushed back the heavy, dark hair wearily off her temples with both hands. "I am what you call me, a selfish wretch—a heartless little brute—and I am going to marry Sir Victor Catheron. Pity him, if you like, poor fellow! for he loves me with his whole heart, and he is a brave and loyal gentleman. But don't pity your brother, my dear; believe me, he doesn't need it. He's a good fellow, Charley, and he likes me, but he won't break his heart or commit suicide while he has a cigar left."

"Here he comes!" exclaimed Trix, "and I believe he has heard us."

"Let him come," Edith returns, lying listlessly back among her cushions once more. "It doesn't matter if he has. It will be no news to *him*."

"It is a pity you should miss each other, though," Trix says sarcastically, as she turns to go; "such thorough philosophers both; I believe you were made for each other, and, as far as easy-going selfishness is concerned, there is little to choose between you. It's a thousand pities Sir Victor can't hear all this."

"He might if he liked," is Edith's answer. "I shouldn't care. Charley!" as Charley comes in and Trix goes out, "have you been eavesdropping? Don't deny it, sir, if you have!"

Charley takes a position in an easy-chair some yards distant, and looks at her lying there, languid and lovely.

"I have been eavesdropping—I never deny my small vices. Hammond left me to go to the stables, and, strolling under the window, I overheard you and Trix. Open confession is beneficial, no doubt; but, my dear cousin, you really shouldn't make it in so audible a tone. It might have been Sir Victor instead of me."

She says nothing. The sombre look he has learned to know is in her dusk eyes, on her dark, colorless face.

"Poor Sir Victor!" he goes on; "he loves you—not a doubt of that, Dithy—to the depths of idiocy, where you know so well how to cast your victims; but hard hit as he is, I wonder *what* he would say if he heard all this!"

"You might tell him, Charley," Edith says. "I shouldn't mind much, and he *might* jilt me—who can tell? I think it would do us both good. You could say, 'Look here: don't marry Edith Darrell, Sir Victor; she isn't worthy of you or any good man. She is full of pride, vanity, ambition, selfishness, ill-temper, cynicism, and all uncharitableness. She is *blase* at nineteen—think what she will be at nine—and—twenty. She doesn't love you—I know her well enough to be sure she never will, partly because a heart was left out in her hard anatomy, partly because—because all the liking she ever had to give, went long ago to somebody else.' Charley, I think he would give me up, and I'd respect him for it, if he knew that. Tell him, if you have the courage, and when he casts me off, come to me and make me marry you. You can do it, you know; and when the honeymoon is over—when poverty stalks in at the door and love flies out of the window—when we hate each other as only ill-assorted wives and husbands ever hate—let the thought that we have done the 'All for love, and the world well lost' business, to the bitter end, console us."

She laughs recklessly; she feels reckless enough to say anything, do anything, this morning. Love, ambition, rank, wealth—what empty baubles they all look, seen through tired eyes the day after a ball!

He sits silent, watching her thoughtfully.

"I don't understand you, Edith," he says. "I feel like asking you the same question Trix did. *Why* do you marry Sir Victor?"

"Why do I marry him?" she repeated. "Well—a little because of his handsome face and stately bearing, and the triumph of carrying off a prize, for which your Lady Gwendoline and half a score more have battled. A little because he pleads so eloquently, and loves me as no other mortal man did, or ever will; and oh! Charley, a great deal because he is Sir Victor Catheron of Catheron Royals, with a rent-roll of twenty thousand a year, and more,

and a name that is older than Magna Charta. If there be any virtue in truth, there—you have it, plain, unvarnished. I like him—who could help it; but love him—no!” She clasped her hands above her head, and gazed dreamily out at the sparkling sunlit scene. “I shall be very fond of him, very proud of him, when I am his wife—that I know. He will enter Parliament, and make speeches, and write political pamphlets, and redress the wrongs of the people. He's the sort of man politicians are made of—the sort of man a wife can be proud of. And on my wedding day, or perhaps a day or two before, you and I shall shake hands, sir, and see each other no more.”

“No more?” he repeats.

“Well, for a year or two at least, until all the folly of the past can be remembered only as a thing to be laughed at. Or until there is a tall, handsome Mrs. Stuart, or, more likely, a Lady Gwendoline Stuart. And Charley,” speaking hurriedly now, and not meeting the deep gray eyes she knows are fixed upon her, “the locket with my picture and the letters—you won't want them *then*—suppose you let me have them back.”

“I won't want them then, certainly,” Charley responds, “if by 'then' you mean when I am the husband of the tall, fascinating Mrs. Stuart or Lady Gwendoline. But as I have not that happiness yet, suppose you allow me to retain them until I have. Sir Victor will never know, and he would not mind much if he did. We are cousins, are we not? and what more natural than that cousins once removed should keep each other's pictures? By the bye, I see you still wear that little trumpery pearl and turquoise brooch I gave you, with my photo at the back. Give it to me, Edie; turquoise does not become your brown skin, my dear, and I'll give you a ruby pin with Sir Victor's instead. Perhaps, as turquoise does become her, Lady Gwendoline will accept this as love's first timid offering. The rubies will do twice as well for you.”

He stretched out his hand to unfasten it. She sprang back, her cheeks flushing at his touch.

“You shall not have it! Neither Lady Gwendoline nor any one else shall wear it, and, married or single, *I* shall keep it to my dying day if I choose. Charley—what do you mean, sir! How dare you? Let me go!”

For he had risen suddenly and caught her in his arms, looking steadily down into her dark eyes, with a gaze she would not meet. Whilst he held her, whilst he looked at her, he was her master, and he knew it.

“Charley, let me go!” she pleaded. “If any one came in; the servants, or—or—Sir Victor.”

He laughed contemptuously, and held her still.

“Yes, Edith; suppose Sir Victor came in and saw his bride—elect with a sacrilegious arm about her waist? Suppose I told him the truth—that you are mine, not his: mine by the love that alone makes marriage holy; his for his title and his rent—roll—bought and sold. By Heaven! I half wish he would!”

Was this Charley—Charley Stuart?

She caught her breath—her pride and her insolence dropping from her—only a girl in the grasp of the man she loves. In that moment, if he had willed it, he could have made her forego her plight, and pledge herself to be his wholly, and he knew it.

“Edith,” he said, “as I stand and look at you, in your beauty and your selfishness, I hardly know whether I love or despise you most. I could make you marry me—*make* you, mind—but you are not worth it. Go!” He opened his arms contemptuously and released her. “You'll not be a bad wife for Sir Victor, I dare say, as fashionable wives go. You'll be that ornament of society, a married flirt, but you'll never run away with his dearest friend, and make a case for the D. C. 'All for love and the world well lost,' is no motto of yours, my handsome cousin. A week ago I envied Sir Victor with all my heart—to—day I pity him with all my soul!”

He turned to go, for once in his life, thoroughly aroused, passionate love; passionate rage at war within him. She had sunk back upon the sofa, her face hidden in her hands, humbled, as in all her proud life she had never been humbled before. Her silence, her humility touched him. He heard a stifled sob, and all his hot anger died out in pained remorse.

“Oh, forgive me, Edith!” he said, “forgive me. It may be cruel, but I had to speak. It is the first, it will be the last time. I am selfish, too, or I would never have pained you—better never hear the truth than that the hearing should make you miserable. Don't cry, Edith; I can't bear it. Forgive me, my cousin—they are the last tears I will ever make you shed.”

The words he meant to soothe her, hurt more deeply than the words he meant to wound. “They are the last tears I will ever make you shed!” An eternal farewell was in the words. She heard the door open, heard it close, and knew that her love and her life had parted in that instant forever.

CHAPTER XVII. "FOREVER AND EVER."

Two weeks later, as June's golden days were drawing to a close, five of Lady Helena's guests departed from Powyss Place. One remained behind. The Stuart family, with the devoted Captain Hammond in Trixy's train, went up to London; Miss Edith Darrell stayed behind.

Since the memorable day following the ball, the bride-elect of Sir Victor Catheron had dwelt in a sort of earthly purgatory, had lived stretched on a sort of daily rack. "How blessings brighten as they take their flight." She had given up Charley—had cast him off, had bartered herself in cold blood—for a title and an income. And now that he held her at her true value, that his love had died a natural death in contempt and scorn, her whole heart, her whole soul craved him with a sick longing that was like death. It was her daily torture and penance to see him, to speak to him, and note the cold scorn of his gray, tranquil eyes. Jealousy had been added to her other torments; he was ever by Lady Gwendoline's side of late—ever at Drexel Court. His father had set his heart upon the match; she was graceful and high-bred; it would end in a marriage, no doubt. There were times when she woke from her jealous anger to rage at herself.

"What a dog in the manger I grow," she said, with a bitter laugh. "I won't have him myself, and I cannot bear that any one else should have him. If he would only go away—if he only would—I cannot endure this much longer."

Truly she could not. She was losing flesh and color, waxing wan as a shadow. Sir Victor was full of concern, full of wonder and alarm. Lady Helena said little, but (being a woman) her sharp old eyes saw all.

"The sooner my guests go, the better," she thought; "the sooner she sees the last of this young man, the sooner health and strength will return."

Perhaps Charley saw too—the gray, tranquil eyes were very penetrating. It was he, at all events, who urged the exodus to London.

"Let us see a little London life in the season, governor," he said. "Lady Portia Hampton, and *that* lot, are going. They'll introduce us to some nice people—so will Hammond. Rustic lanes and hawthorn ledges are all very pretty, but there's a possibility of their palling on depraved New York minds. I pine for stone and mortar, and the fog and smoke of London."

Whatever he may have felt, he bore it easily to all outward seeming, as the men who feel deepest mostly do. He could not be said to actually avoid her, but certainly since that afternoon in the drawing-room, they had never been for five seconds alone.

Mr. Stuart, senior, had agreed, with almost feverish eagerness, to the proposed change. Life had been very pleasant in Cheshire, with picnics, water-parties down the Dee, drives to show-places, lawn billiards, and croquet, but a month of it was enough. Sir Victor was immersed in his building projects and his lady-love; Lady Helena, ever since the coming and going of the lady in black, had not been the same. Powyss place was a pleasant house, but enough was enough. They were ready to say good-bye and be off to "fresh fields and pastures new."

"And, my dear child," said Lady Helena to Edith, when the departure was fixed, "I think you had much better remain behind."

There was an emphasis in her tone, a meaning glance in her eye, that brought the conscious blood to the girl's cheek. Her eyes fell—her lips quivered for an instant—she made no reply.

"Certainly Edith will remain," Sir Victor interposed impetuously. "As if we could survive down here without her! And, of course, just at present it is impossible for me to leave. They don't need her half as much as we do—Miss Stuart has Hammond, Prince Charley has Gwendoline Drexel; Edith would only be in the way!"

"It is settled, then?" said Lady Helena again, watching Edith with a curiously intent look. "You remain?"

"I will remain," Edith answered, very lowly and without lifting her eyes.

"My own idea is," went on the young baronet confidentially, to his lady love, "that they are glad to be gone. Something seems to be the matter with Stuart *pere*—under a cloud, rather, just at present. Has it struck you, Dithy?"

He had caught the way of calling her by the pet name Trix and Charley used. She lifted her eyes abstractedly now, as he asked the question.

“Mr. Stuart? What did you say, Sir Victor? Oh—under a cloud. Well, yes, I have noticed it. I think it is something connected with his business in New York. In papa's last letter he alluded to it.”

“In papa's last letter,” Mr. Frederick Darrell had said this:

“One of their great financial crises, they tell me, is approaching in New York, involving many failures and immense loss. One of the most deeply involved, it is whispered, will be James Stuart. I *have* heard he is threatened with ruin. Let us hope, however, this may be exaggerated. Once I fancied it would be a fine thing, a brilliant match, if my Edith married James Stuart's son. How much better Providence has arranged it! Once more, my dearest daughter, I congratulate you on the brilliant vista opening before you. Your step—mother, who desires her best love, never wearies of spreading the wonderful news that our little Edie is so soon to be the bride of a great English baronet.”

Miss Darrell's straight black brows met in one frowning line as she perused this parental and pious epistle. The next instant it was torn into minute atoms, and scattered to the four winds of heaven.

There seemed to be some foundation for the news. Letters without end kept coming for Mr. Stuart; little boys bearing the ominous orange envelopes of the telegraph company, came almost daily to Powyss Place. After these letters and cable messages the gloom on Mr. Stuart's face deepened and darkened. He lost sleep, he lost appetite; some great and secret fear seemed preying upon him. What was it? His family noticed it, and inquired about his health. He rebuffed them impatiently; he was quite well—he wanted to be let alone—why the unmentionable—to—ears—polite need they badger him with questions? They held their peace and let him alone. That it in any way concerned commercial failure they never dreamed; to them the wealth of the husband and father was something illimitable—a golden river flowing from a golden ocean. That ruin could approach them never entered their wildest dreams.

He had gone to Edith one day and offered her a thousand-dollar check.

“For your trousseau, my dear,” he had said. “It isn't what I expected to give you—what I would give you, if—” He gulped and paused. “Things have changed with me lately. You will accept this, Edie—it will at least buy your wedding—dress.”

She had shrunk back, and refused—not proudly, or angrily—very humbly, but very firmly. From Charley's father she could never take a farthing now.

“No” she said, “I can't take it. Dear Mr. Stuart, I thank you all the same; you have given me more already than I deserve or can ever repay. I cannot take this. Sir Victor Catheron takes me as I am—poor, penniless. Lady Helena will give me a white silk dress and veil to be married in. For the rest, after my wedding—day, whatever my life may lack, it will not lack dresses.”

He had replaced the check in his pocket—book, inwardly thankful, perhaps, that it had not been accepted. The day was past when a thousand dollars would have been but as a drop in the ocean to him.

The time of departure was fixed at length; and the moment it *was* fixed, Trix flew upstairs, and into Edith's room, with the news.

“Oh, let us be joyful,” sang Miss Stuart, waltzing in psalm time up and down the room; “we're off at last, the day after to—morrow, Dithy; so go pack up at once. It's been very jolly, and all that, down here, for the past four weeks, and *you've* had a good time, I know; but I, for one, will be glad to hear the bustle and din of city life once more. One grows tired doing the pastoral and tooral—ooral—I mean truly rural—and craves for shops, and gaslight, and glitter, and crowds of human beings once more. Our rooms are taken at Langham's, Edie, and that blessed darling, Captain Hammond, goes with us. Lady Portia, Lady Gwendoline, and Lady Laura are coming also, and I mean to plunge headlong into the giddy whirl of dissipation, and mingle with the bloated aristocracy. Why don't you laugh? What are you looking so sulky about?”

“Am I looking sulky?” Edith said, with a faint smile. “I don't feel sulky. I sincerely hope you may enjoy yourself even more than you anticipate.”

“Oh—you do!” said Trix, opening her eyes; “and how about yourself—don't you expect to enjoy yourself at all?”

“I would, no doubt, only—I am not going.”

“Not going!” Thunderstruck, Trix repeats the words.

“No; it has been decided that I remain here. You won't miss me, Trix—you will have Captain Hammond.”

“Captain Hammond may go hang himself. I want *you*, and you I mean to have. Let's sit down and reason this

thing out. Now what new crotchet has got into your head? May I ask what your ladyship—elect means to do?”

“To remain quietly here until—until—you know.”

“Oh, I know!” with indescribable scorn; “until you are raised to the sublime dignity of a baronet's wife. And you mean to mope away your existence down here for the next two months listening to love—making you don't care *that* about. Oh, no need to fire up; I know how much you care about it. And I say you shan't. Why, you are fading away to a shadow now under it. You shall come up to London with us and recuperate. Charley shall take you everywhere.”

She saw her wince—yes, that was where the vital place lay. Miss Stuart ran on:

“The idea of living under the same roof for two mortal months with the young man you are going to marry! You're a great stickler for etiquette—I hope you don't call *that* etiquette? Nobody ever heard of such a thing. I'm not sure but that it would be immoral. Of course, there's Lady Helena to play propriety, and there's the improvements at Catheron Royals to amuse you, and there's Sir Victor's endless 'loving' to edify you, but still I say you shall come. You started with us, and you shall stay with us—you belong to us, not to him, until the nuptial knot is tied. I wouldn't give a fig for London without you. I should die of the dismal in a week.”

“What, Trix—with Captain Hammond?”

“Bother Captain Hammond! I want you. O Edie, do come!”

“I can't, Trix.” She turned away with an impatient sigh. “I have promised. Sir Victor wishes it, Lady Helena wishes it. It is impossible.”

“And Edith Darrell wishes it. Oh, say it out, Edith,” Trix retorted bitterly. “Your faults are many, but fear of the truth used not to be among them. You have promised. Is it that they are afraid to trust you out of their sight?”

“Let me alone, Trix. I am tired and sick—I can't bear it.”

She laid her face down upon her arm—tired, as she said—sick, soul and body. Every fibre of her heart was longing to go with them—to be with him while she might, treason or no to Sir Victor; but it could not be.

Trix stood and looked at her, pale with anger.

“I will let you alone, Miss Darrell. More—I will let you alone for the remainder of your life. All the past has been bad enough. Your deceit to me, your heartlessness to Charley—this is the last drop in the cup. You throw us over when we have served your turn for newer, grander friends—it is only the way of the world, and what one might expect from Miss Edith Darrell. But I didn't expect it—I didn't think ingratitude was one among your failings. I was a fool!” cried Trix, with a burst. “I always was a fool and always will be. But I'll be fooled by you no longer. Stay here, Miss Darrell, and when we say good—by day after to—morrow, it shall be good—by forever.”

And then Miss Stuart, very red in the face, very flashing in the eyes, bounced out of the room, and Edith was left alone.

Only another friend lost forever. Well, she had Sir Victor Catheron left—he must suffice for all now.

All that day and most of the next she kept her room. It was no falsehood to say she was ill—she was. She lay upon her bed, her dark eyes open, her hands clasped over her head, looking blankly before her. To—morrow they must part, and after to—morrow—but her mind gave it up; she could not look beyond.

She came downstairs when to—morrow came to say farewell. The white wrapper she wore was not whiter than her face. Mr. Stuart shook hands in a nervous, hurried sort of way that had grown habitual to him of late. Mrs. Stuart kissed her fondly, Miss Stuart just touched her lips formally to her cheek, and Mr. Charles Stuart held her cold fingers for two seconds in his warm clasp, looked, with his own easy, pleasant smile, straight into her eyes, and said good—by precisely as he said it to Lady Helena. Then it was all over; they were gone; the wheels that bore them away crashed over the gravel: Edith Darrell felt as though they were crashing over her heart.

That night the Stuarts were established in elegant apartments at Langham's Hotel.

But alas for the frailty of human hopes! “The splendid time” Trixy so confidently looked forward to never came. The very morning after their arrival came one of the boys in uniform with another sinister orange envelope for the head of the family. The head of the family chanced to be alone in his dressing—room. He took it with trembling hand and bloodshot eyes, and tore it open. A moment after there was a horrible cry like nothing human, then a heavy fall. Mrs. Stuart rushed in with a scream, and found her husband lying on the floor, the message in his hand, in a fit.

* * * * *

Captain Hammond had made an appointment with Charley to dine at St. James Street that evening. Calling

upon old friends kept the gallant captain of Scotch Grays occupied all day; and as the shades of evening began to gather over the West End, he stood impatiently awaiting his arrival. Mr. Stuart was ten minutes late, and if there was one thing in this mortal life that upset the young warrior's equanimity, it was being kept ten minutes waiting for his dinner. Five minutes more! Confound the fellow—would he never come? As the impatient adjuration passed the captain's lips, Charley came in. He was rather pale. Except for that, there was no change in him. Death itself could hardly have wrought much change in Charley. He had not come to apologize; he had not come to dine. He had come to tell the captain some very bad news. There had been terrible commercial disasters of late in New York; they had involved his father. His father had embarked almost every dollar of his fortune in some bubble speculations that had gone up like a rocket and come down like a stick. He had been losing immensely for the past month. This morning he had received a cable message, telling him the crash had come. He was irretrievably, past all hope of redemption, ruined.

All this Charley told in his quietest voice, looking out through the great bay window at the bustle and whirl of fashionable London life, at the hour of seven in the evening. Captain Hammond, smoking a cigar, listened in gloomy silence, feeling particularly uncomfortable, and not knowing in the least what to say. He took out his cheroot and spoke at last.

"It's a deuced bad state of affairs, Charley. Have you thought of anything?"

"I've thought of suicide," Charley answered, "and made all the preliminary arrangements. I took out my razor-case, examined the edges, found the sharpest, and—put it carefully away again. I loaded all the chambers of my revolver, and locked it up. I sauntered by the classic banks of the Serpentine, sleeping tranquilly in the rays of the sunset (that sounds like poetry, but I don't mean poetry). Of the three I think I prefer it, and if the worst comes to the worst, it's there still, and it's pleasant and cool."

"How do your mother and sister take it?" Captain Hammond gloomily asked.

"My mother is one of those happy-go-lucky, apathetic sort of people who never break their hearts over anything. She said 'O dear me!' several times, I believe, and cried a little. Trix hasn't time to 'take it' at all. She is absorbed all day in attending her father. The fit turns out not to be dangerous at present, but he lies in a sort of stupor, a lethargy from which nothing can rouse him. Of course our first step will be to return to New York immediately. Beggars—and I take it that's about what we are at present—have no business at Langham's."

Captain Hammond opened his bearded lips as though to speak, thought better of it, replaced his cigar again between them in moody silence, and stared hard at nothing out of the window.

"I called this afternoon upon the London agent of the Cunard ships," resumed Charley, "and found that one sails in four days. Providentially two cabins remained untaken; I secured them at once. In four days, then, we sail. Meantime, old fellow, if you'll drop in and speak a word to mother and Trix, you will be doing a friendly deed. Poor souls! they are awfully cut up."

Captain Hammond started to his feet. He seized Charley's hand in a grip of iron. "Old boy!" he began—he never got further. The torrent of eloquence dried up suddenly, and a shake of the hand that made Charley wince finished the sentence.

"I shall be fully occupied in the meantime," Charley said, taking his hat and turning to go, "and they'll be a great deal alone. If I can find time I'll run down to Cheshire, and tell my cousin. As we may not meet again, I should like to say 'good-by.'" He departed.

There was no sleep that night in the Stuart apartments. Mr. Stuart was pronounced out of danger and able to travel, but he still lay in that lethargic trance—not speaking at all, and seemingly not suffering. Next day Charley started for Cheshire.

"She doesn't deserve it," his sister said bitterly; "I wouldn't go if I were you. She has her lover—her fortune. What are we or our misfortunes to her? She has neither heart, nor gratitude, nor affection. She isn't worth a thought, and never was—there!"

"I wouldn't be too hard upon her, Trix, if I were you," her brother answered coolly. "You would have taken Sir Victor yourself, you know, if you could have got him. I will go."

He went. The long, bright summer day passed; at six he was in Chester. There was some delay in procuring a conveyance to Powyss Place, and the drive was a lengthy one. Twilight had entirely fallen, and lamps glimmered in the windows of the old stone mansion as he alighted.

The servant stared, as he ushered him in, at his pale face and dusty garments.

“You will tell Miss Darrell I wish to see her at once, and alone,” he said, slipping a shilling into the man's hand.

He took a seat in the familiar reception-room, and waited. Would she keep him long, he wondered—would she come to him—*would* she come at all? Yes, he knew she would, let him send for her, married or single, when and how he might, he knew she would come.

She entered as the thought crossed his mind, hastily, with a soft silken rustle, a waft of perfume. He rose up and looked at her; so for the space of five seconds they stood silently, face to face.

To the last hour of his life Charley Stuart remembered her, as he saw her then, and always with a sharp pang of the same pain.

She was dressed for a dinner party. She wore violet silk, trailing far behind her, violet shot with red. Her graceful shoulders rose up exquisitely out of the point lace trimmings, her arms sparkled in the lights. A necklace of amethysts set in clusters, with diamonds between, shone upon her neck; amethysts and diamonds were in her ears, and clasping the arms above the elbows. Her waving, dark hair was drawn back off her face, and crowned with an ivy wreath. The soft, abundant waxlights showered down upon her. So she stood, resplendent as a queen, radiant as a goddess. There was a look on Charley Stuart's face, a light in his gray eyes, very rare to see. He only bowed and stood aloof.

“I have surprised you, I am sure—interrupted you, I greatly fear. You will pardon both I know, when I tell you what has brought me here.”

In very few words he told her—the great tragedies of life are always easily told. They were ruined—he had engaged their passage by the next steamer—he had merely run down as they were never likely to meet again—for the sake of old times, to say good-by.

Old times! Something rose in the girl's throat, and seemed to choke her. Oh, of all the base, heartless, mercenary, ungrateful wretches on earth, was there another so heartless, so ungrateful as she! Poor—Charley poor! For one moment—one—the impulse came upon her to give up all—to go with him to beggary if need be. Only for one moment—I will do Miss Darrell's excellent worldly wisdom this justice—only one.

“I see you are dressed for a party—I will not detain you a second longer. I could not depart comfortably, considering that you came over in our care, without informing you why we leave so abruptly. You are safe. Your destiny is happily settled. I can give to your father a good account of my stewardship. You have my sincerest wishes for your health and happiness, and I am sure you will never quite forget us. Good-by, Miss Darrell.” He held out his hand. “My congratulations are premature, but let me offer them now to the future Lady Catheron.”

“Miss Darrell!” When, in all the years that were gone, had he ever called her that before? She arose and gave him her hand—proud, pale.

“I thank you,” she said coldly. “I will send Lady Helena and Sir Victor to you at once. They will wish to see you, of course. Good-by, Mr. Stuart Let us hope things may turn out better than you think. Give my dearest love to Trix, if she will accept it. Once more, good-by.”

She swept to the door in her brilliant dress, her perfumed laces, her shining jewels—the glittering fripperies for which her womanhood was to be sold. He stood quite still in the centre of the room, as she had left him, watching her. So beautiful, so cold-blooded, he was thinking; were all her kind like this? And poets sing and novelists rave of woman's love! A half smile came over his lips as he thought of it. It was very pretty to read of in books; in real life it was—like this!

She laid her hand on the silver handle of the door—then she paused—looked back, all the womanliness, all the passion of her life stirred to its depths. It was good-by forever to Charley. There was a great sob, and pride bowed and fell. She rushed back—two impetuous arms went round his neck; she drew his face down, and kissed him passionately—once—twice.

“Good-by, Charley—my darling—forever and ever!”

She threw him from her almost violently, and rushed out of the room. Whether she went to tell Lady Helena and Sir Victor of his presence he neither knew nor cared. He was in little mood to meet either of them just then.

Five minutes later, and, under the blue silvery summer night, he was whirling away back to Chester. When the midnight stars shone in the sky he was half way up to London, with Edith's farewell words in his ears, Edith's first, last kiss on his lips.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE SUMMONS.

The sun was just rising over the million roofs and spires of the great city, as Charley's hansom dashed up to the door of Langham's hotel. He ran up to his father's room, and on the threshold encountered Trix, pale and worn with her night's watching, but wearing a peculiarly happy and contented little look despite it all. Charley did not stop to notice the look, he asked after his father.

"Pa's asleep," Trix replied, "so's ma. It's of no use your disturbing either of them. Pa's pretty well; stupid as you left him; doesn't care to talk, but able to eat, and sleep. The doctor says there is nothing at all to hinder his travelling to Liverpool to-day. And now, Charley," Trix concluded, looking compassionately at her brother's pale, tired face, "as you look used up after your day and night's travelling, suppose you go to bed; I'll wake you in time for breakfast, and you needn't worry about anything. Captain Hammond has been here," says Trix, blushing in the wan, morning light, "and he will attend to everything."

Charley nodded and turned to go, but his sister detained him.

"You—you saw her, I suppose?" she said hesitatingly.

"Edith do you mean?" Charley looks at her full. "Yes, I saw her. As I went down for the purpose, I was hardly likely to fail."

"And what has she to say for herself?" Trix asks bitterly.

"Very little; we were not together ten minutes in all. She was dressed for a party of some kind, and I did not detain her."

"A party?" Trix repeats; "and we like this! Did she send no message at all?"

"She sent you her dearest love."

"She may keep it—let her give it to Sir Victor Catheron. I don't want her love, or anything else belonging to her!" Trix cries, explosively. "Of all the heartless, ungrateful girls—"

Her brother stops her with a look. Those handsome gray eyes of Charley's can be very stern eyes when he likes.

"As I said before, that will do, Trix. Edith is one of the wise virgins we read of—she has chosen by long odds the better part. What could we do with her now? take her back and return her to her father and step-mother, and the dull life she hated? As for gratitude, I confess I don't see where the gratitude is to come in. We engaged her at a fixed salary: so much cleverness, French, German, and general usefulness on her part; on ours, so many hundred dollars per annum. Let me say this, Trix, once and for good: as you don't seem able to say anything pleasant of Edith, suppose you don't speak of her at all?"

And then Charley, with that resolute light in his eyes, that resolute compression of his lips, turned and walked up-stairs. It was an unusually lengthy, and unusually grave speech for him, and his volatile sister was duly impressed. She shrugged her shoulders, and went back to her pa's room.

"The amount of it is," she thought, "he is as fond of her as ever, and can't bear, as he has lost her, to hear her spoken of. The idea of his scampering down into Chester to see her once more! Ridiculous! She *is* heartless, and I hate her!"

And then Trixy took out her lace pocket-handkerchief, and suddenly burst out crying. O dear, it was bad enough to lose one's fortune, to have one's European tour nipped in the bud, without losing Edith, just as Edith had wound her way most closely round Trixy's warm little heart. There was but one drop of honey in all the bitter cup—a drop six feet high and stout in proportion—Captain Angus Hammond.

For Captain Angus Hammond, as though to prove that *all* the world, was not base and mercenary, had come nobly to the front, and proposed to Trixy. And Trixy, surprised and grateful, and liking him very much, had hesitated, and smiled, and dimpled, and blushed, and objected, and finally begun to cry, and sobbed out "yes" through her tears.

Charley slept until twelve—they were to depart for Liverpool by the two o'clock express. Then his sister, attired for travelling, awoke him, and they all breakfasted together; Mr. Stuart, too, looking very limp and miserable, and Captain Hammond, whose state would have been one of idiotic happiness, had not the thought that the ocean to-morrow would roll between him and the object of his young affections, thrown a damper upon him.

He was going to Liverpool with them, however; it would be a mournful consolation to see them off. They travelled second-class. As Charley said, "they must let themselves down easily—the sooner they began the better—and third-class to start with might be coming it a little too strong. Let them have a few cushions and comforts still."

Mr. Stuart kept close to his wife. He seemed to cling to her, and depend upon her, like a child. It was wonderful, it was pitiful how utterly shattered he had become. His son looked after him with a solicitous tenderness quite new in all their experience of Charley. Captain Hammond and Trixy kept in a corner together, and talked in saccharine undertones, looking foolish, and guilty, and happy.

They reached Liverpool late in the evening, and drove to the Adelphi. At twelve next day they were to get on board the tender, and be conveyed down the Mersey to their ship.

Late that evening, after dinner, and over their cigars, Captain Hammond opened his masculine heart, and, with vast hesitation and much embarrassment, poured into Charley's ear the tale of his love.

"I ought to tell the governor, you know," the young officer said, "but he's so deucedly cut up as it is, you know, that I couldn't think of it. And it's no use fidgeting your mother—Trixy will tell her. I love your sister, Charley, and I believe I've been in love with her ever since that day in Ireland. I ain't a lady's man, and I never cared a fig for a girl before in my life; but, by George! I'm awfully fond of Trixy. I ain't an elder son, and I ain't clever, I know," cried the poor, young gentleman sadly; "but if Trix will consent, by George! I'll go with her to church to-morrow. There's my pay—my habits ain't expensive, like some fellows—we could got along on that for a while, and then I have expectations from my grandmother. I've had expectations from my grandmother for the last twelve years, sir, and every day of those twelve years she's been dying; and, by George! she ain't dead yet, you know. It's wonderful—I give you my word—it's wonderful, the way grandmothers and maiden aunts with money do hold out. As Dundreary says, 'It's something no fellow can understand.' But that ain't what I wanted to say—it's this: if you're willing, and Trix is willing, I'll get leave of absence and come over by the next ship, and we'll be married. I—I'll be the happiest fellow alive, Stuart, the day your sister becomes my wife."

You are not to suppose that Captain Hammond made this speech fluently and eloquently, as I have reported it. The words are his, but the long pauses, the stammerings, the repetitions, the hesitations I have mercifully withheld. His cigar was quite smoked out by the time he had finished, and with nervous haste he set about lighting another. For Mr. Stuart, tilted back in his chair, his shining boots on the window-sill of the drawing-room, gazing out at the gas-lit highways of Liverpool, he listened in abstracted silence. There was a long pause after the captain concluded—then Charley opened his lips and spoke:

"This is all nonsense, you know, Hammond," he said gravely, "folly—madness, on your part. A week ago, when we thought Trixy an heiress, the case looked very different, you see; then I would have shaken hands with you, and bestowed my blessing upon your virtuous endeavors. But all that is changed now. As far as I can see, we are beggars—literally beggars—without a dollar; and when we get to New York nothing will remain for Trixy and me but to roll up our sleeves and go to work. What we are to work at, Heaven knows; we have come up like the lilies of the field, who toil not, neither do they spin. It is rather late in the day to take lessons in spinning now, but you see there is no help for it. I don't say much, Hammond, but I feel this. I hold a man to be something less than a man who will go through life howling over a loss of this kind. There are worse losses than that of fortune in the world." He paused a moment, and his dreamy eyes looked far out over the crowded city street. "I always thought my father was as rich as Crow—Crae—the rich fellow, you know, they always quote in print. It seemed an impossibility that we could ever be poor. But we are, and there is an end of it. Your family are wealthy, your father has a title; do you think *he* would listen to this for a moment?"

"My family may go—hang!" burst forth the captain. "What the deuce have they got to do with it. If Trixy is willing—"

"Trixy will not be willing to enter any family on those terms," Trixy's brother said, in that quiet way of his, which could yet be such an obstinate way; "and what I mean to say is this: A marriage for the present is totally and absolutely out of the question. You and she may make love to your heart's content—write letters across the ocean by the bushel, be engaged as fast as you please, and remain constant at long as you like. But marriage—no, no, no!"

That was the end of it. Charley was not to be moved—neither, indeed, on the marriage question, was Trix. "Did Angus think her a wretch—a monster—to desert her poor pa and ma just now, when they wanted her most,

and go off with him? Not likely. He might take back his ring if he liked—she would not hold him to his engagement—she was ready and willing to set him free—”

“So Jamie, an' ye dinna wait
Ye canna marry me,”

sang Charley, as Trix broke down here and sobbed. Then with a half smile on his face he went out of the room, and Trix's tears were dried on Angus Hammond's faithful breast.

Next day, a gray overcast, gloomy day, the ship sailed. Captain Hammond went with them on board, returning in the tender. Trix, leaning on her father's arm, crying behind her veil; Charley, by his mother's side, stood on deck while the tender steamed back to the dock. And there under the gray sky, with the bleak wind blowing, and the ship tossing on the ugly short chop of the river, they took their parting look at the English shore, with but one friendly face to watch them away, and that the ginger-whiskered face of Captain Hammond.

* * * * *

Edith Darrell left Charley Stuart, and returned to the brilliantly-lit drawing room, where her lover and Lady Helena and their friends sat waiting the announcement of dinner. Sir Victor's watchful eyes saw her enter. Sir Victor's loving glance saw the pallor, like the pallor of death, upon her face. She walked steadily over to a chair in the curtained recess of a window. He was held captive by Lady Portia Hampton, and could not join her. A second after there was a sort of sobbing gasp—a heavy fall. Everybody started, and arose in consternation. Miss Darrell had fallen from her chair, and lay on the floor in a dead faint.

Her lover, as pale almost as herself, lifted her in his arms, the cold, beautiful face lying, like death on his shoulder. But it was not death.

They carried her up to her room—restoratives were applied, and presently the great dark eyes opened, and looked up into her lover's face.

She covered her own with her hands, and turned away from him, as though the sight was distasteful to her. He bent above her, almost agonized that anything should ail his idol.

“My darling,” he said tremulously. “What was it? What can I do for you? Tell me.”

“Go away,” was the dull answer; “only that—go away everybody, and leave me alone.”

They strove to reason with her—some one sought to stay with her. Lady Helena, Sir Victor—either would give up their place at dinner and remain at the bedside.

“No, no, no!” was her answering cry, “they must not. She was better again—she needed no one, she wanted nothing, *only* to be left alone.”

They left her alone—she was trembling with nervous excitement, a little more and hysterics would set in—they dared not disobey. They left her alone, with a watchful attendant on the alert in the dressing-room.

She lay upon the dainty French bed, her dark hair, from which the flowers had been taken, tossed over the white pillows, her hands clasped above her head, her dark, large eyes fixed on the opposite wall. So she lay motionless, neither, speaking nor stirring for hours, with a sort of dull, numb aching at her heart. They stole in softly to her bedside many times through the night, always to find her like that, lying with blank, wide-open eyes, never noticing nor speaking to them. When morning broke she awoke from a dull sort of sleep, her head burning, her lips parched, her eyes glittering with fever.

They sent for the doctor. He felt her pulse, looked at her tongue, asked questions, and shook his head. Overwrought nerves the whole of it. Her mind must have been over-excited for some time, and this was the result. No danger was to be apprehended; careful nursing would restore her in a week or two, combined with perfect quiet. Then a change of air and scene would be beneficial—say a trip to Scarborough or Torquay now. They would give her this saline draught just at present and not worry about her. The young lady would be all right, on his word and honor, my dear Sir Victor, in a week or two.

Sir Victor listened very gloomily. He had heard from the hall porter of Mr. Stuart's flying visit, and of his brief interview with Miss Darrell. It was very strange—his hasty coming, his hasty going, without seeing any of them, his interview with Edith, and her fainting—fit immediately after. Why had he come? What had transpired at that interview? The green-eyed monster took the baronet's heart between his finger and thumb, and gave it a most terrible twinge.

He watched over her when they let him into that darkened chamber, as a mother may over an only and darling child. If he lost her!

“O Heaven!” he cried passionately, rebelliously, “rather let me die than that!”

He asked her no questions—he was afraid. His heart sank within him, she lay so cold, so white, so utterly indifferent whether he came or went. He was nothing to her—nothing. Would he ever be?

Lady Helena, less in love, and consequently less a coward, asked the question her nephew dared not ask: “What had brought Mr. Charles Stuart to Powyss Place? What had made her, Edith, faint?”

The dark sombre eyes turned from the twilight prospect, seen through the open window, and met her ladyship's suspicious eyes steadily. “Mr. Stuart had come down to tell her some very bad news. His father had failed—they were ruined. They had to leave England in two days for home—he had only come to bid her a last farewell.”

Then the sombre brown eyes went back to the blue-gray sky, the crystal July moon, the velvet, green grass, the dark murmuring trees, the birds twittering in the leafy branches, and she was still again.

Lady Helena was shocked, surprised, grieved. But—why had Edith fainted?

“I don't know,” Edith answered. “I never fainted before in my life. I think I have not been very strong lately. I felt well enough when I returned to the drawing-room—a minute after I grew giddy and fell. I remember no more.”

“We will take you away, my dear,” her ladyship said cheerfully. “We will take you to Torquay. Changes of air and scene, as the doctor says, are the tonics you need to brace your nerves. Ah! old or young, all we poor women are martyrs to nerves.”

They took her to Torquay in the second week of July. A pretty little villa near Hesketh Crescent had been hired; four servants from Powyss Place preceded them; Sir Victor escorted them, and saw them duly installed. He returned again—partly because the work going on at Catheron Royals needed his presence, partly because Lady Helena gravely and earnestly urged it.

“My dear Victor,” she said, “don't force too much of your society upon Edith. I know girls. Even if she were in love with you”—the young man winced—“she would grow tired of a lover who never left her sight. All women do. If you want her to grow fond of you, go away, write to her every day—not *too* lover-like love-letters; one may have a surfeit of sweets; just cheerful, pleasant, sensible letters—as a young man in love *can* write. Come down this day three weeks, and, if we are ready, take us home.”

The young man made a wry face—much as he used to do when his good aunt urged him to swallow a dose of nauseous medicine.

“In three weeks! My dear Lady Helena, what are you thinking of? We are to be married the first week of September.”

“October, Victor—October—not a day sooner. You must wait until Edith is completely restored. There is no such desperate haste. You are not likely to lose her.”

“I am not so sure of that,” he said, half sullenly under his breath; “and a postponed marriage is the most unlucky thing in the world.”

“I don't believe in luck; I do in common-sense,” his aunt retorted, rather sharply. “You are like a spoiled child, Victor, crying for the moon. It is Edith's own request, if you will have it—this postponement. And Edith is right. You don't want a limp, pallid, half-dying bride, I suppose. Give her time to get strong—give her time to learn to like you—your patient waiting will go far towards it. Take my word, it will be the wiser course.”

There was nothing for it but obedience. He took his leave and went back to Cheshire. It was his first parting from Edith. How he felt it, no words can tell. But the fact remained—he went.

She drew a long, deep breath as she said good-by, and watched him away. Ah! what a different farewell to that other only two short weeks ago. She tried not to think of that—honestly and earnestly; she tried to forget the face that haunted her, the voice that rang in her ears, the warm hand-clasp, the kisses that sealed their parting. Her love, her duty, her allegiance, her thoughts—all were due to Sir Victor now. In the quiet days that were to be there, she would try to forget the love of her life—try to remember that of all men on earth Sir Victor Catheron was the only man she had any right to think of.

And she succeeded partly. Wandering along the tawny sands, with the blue bright sea spreading away before her, drinking in the soft salt air, Edith grew strong in body and mind once more. Charley Stuart had passed forever out of her life—driven hence by her own acts; she would be the most drivelling of idiots, the basest of traitors, to pine for him now. Her step grew elastic, her eye grew bright, her beauty and bloom returned. She met hosts of

pleasant people, and her laugh came sweetly to Lady Helena's ears. Since her nephew *must* marry—since his heart was set on this girl—Lady Helena wished to see her a healthy and happy wife.

Sir Victor's letters came daily; the girl smiled as she glanced carelessly over them, tore them up, and answered—about half. Love him she did not; but she was learning to think very kindly of him. It is quite in the scope of a woman's complex nature to love one man passionately, and like another very much. It was Edith's case—she liked Sir Victor; and when, at the end of three weeks, he came to join them, she could approach and give him her hand with a frank, glad smile of welcome. The three weeks had been as three centuries to this ardent young lover. His delight to see his darling blooming, and well, and wholly restored, almost repaid him. And three days after the triad returned together to Powyss Place, to part, as he whispered, no more.

It was the middle of August now. In spite of Edith's protest, grand preparations were being made for the wedding—a magnificent trousseau having been ordered.

“Simplicity is all very well,” Lady Helena answered Miss Darrell, “but Sir Victor Catheron's bride must dress as becomes Sir Victor Catheron's station. In three years from now, if you prefer white muslin and simplicity, prefer it by all means. About the wedding—dress, you will kindly let me have my own way.”

Edith desisted; she appealed no more; passive to all changes, she let herself drift along. The third of October was to be the wedding—day; my ladies Gwendoline and Laura Drexel, the two chief bridesmaids—then three others, all daughters of old friends of Lady Helena. The pretty, picturesque town of Carnarvon, in North Wales, was to be the nest of the turtledoves during the honeymoon—then away to the Continent, then back for the Christmas festivities at Catheron Royals.

Catheron Royals was fast becoming a palace for a princess—its grounds a sort of enchanted fairy-land. Edith walked through its lofty, echoing halls, its long suites of sumptuous drawing-rooms, libraries, billiard and ball rooms. The suite fitted up for herself was gorgeous in purple and gold—velvet and bullion fringe—in pictures that were wonders of loveliness—in mirror-lined walls, in all that boundless wealth and love could lavish on its idol. Leaning on her proud and happy bridegroom's arm, she walked through them all, half dazed with all the wealth of color and splendor, and wondering if “I be I.” Was it a fairy tale, or was all this for Edith Darrell?—Edith Darrell, who such a brief while gone, used to sweep and dust, sew and darn, in dull, unlovely Sandypoint, and get a new merino dress twice a year? No, it could not be—such transformation scenes never look place out of a Christmas pantomime or a burlesque Arabian Night—it was all a dream—a fairy fortune that, like fairy gold, would change to dull slate stones at light of day. She would never be Lady Catheron, never be mistress of this glittering Aladdin's Palace. It grew upon her day after day, this feeling of vagueness, of unreality. She was just adrift upon a shining river, and one of these days she would go stranded ashore on hidden quicksands and foul ground. Something would happen. The days went by like dreams—it was the middle of September. In little more than a fortnight would come the third of October and the wedding—day. But something would happen. As surely as she lived and saw it all, she felt that something would happen.

Something did. On the eighteenth of September there came from London, late in the evening, a telegram for Lady Helena. Sir Victor was with Edith at the piano in the drawing-room. In hot haste his aunt sent for him; he went at once. He found her pale, terrified, excited; she held out the telegram to him without a word. He read it slowly: “Come at once. Fetch Victor. *He* is dying.—INEZ.”

CHAPTER XIX. AT POPLAR LODGE.

Half an hour had passed and Sir Victor did not return. Edith still remained at the piano, the gleam of the candles falling upon her thoughtful face, playing the weird "Moonlight Sonata." She played so softly that the shrill whistling of the wind around the gables, the heavy sighing of the trees, was plainly audible above it. Ten minutes more, and her lover did not return. Wondering a little what the telegram could contain, she arose and walked to the window, drew the curtains and looked out. There was no moon, but the stars were numberless, and lit dimly the park. As she stood watching the trees, writhing in the autumnal gale, she heard a step behind her. She glanced over her shoulder with a half smile—a smile that died on her lips as she saw the grave pallor of Sir Victor's face.

"What has happened?" she asked quickly. "Lady Helena's dispatch contained bad news? It is nothing"—she caught her breath—"nothing concerning the Stuarts?"

"Nothing concerning the Stuarts. It is from London—from Inez Catheron. It is—that my father is dying."

She said nothing. She stood looking at him, and waiting for more.

"It seems a strange thing to say," he went on, "that one does not know whether to call one's father's death ill news or not. But considering the living death he has led for twenty–three years, one can hardly call death and release a misfortune. The strange thing, the alarming thing about it, is the way Lady Helena takes it. One would think she might be prepared, that considering his life and sufferings, she would rather rejoice than grieve: but, I give you my word, the way in which she takes it honestly frightens me."

Still Edith made no reply—still her thoughtful eyes were fixed upon his face.

"She seems stunned, paralyzed—actually paralyzed with a sort of terror. And that terror seems to be, not for him or herself, but for *me*. She will explain nothing; she seems unable; all presence of mind seems to have left her. No time is to be lost; there is a train in two hours: we go by that. By daylight we will be in London; how long before we return I cannot say. I hate the thought of a death casting its gloom over our marriage. I dread horribly the thought of a second postponement—I hate the idea of leaving you here alone."

Something will happen. All along her heart had whispered it, and here it was. And yet the long tense breath she drew was very like a breath of relief.

"You are not to think of me," she said quietly, after a pause. "Your duty is to the dying. Nothing will befall me in your absence—don't let the thought of me in any way trouble you. I shall do very well with my books and music; and Lady Gwendoline, I dare say, will drive over occasionally and see me. Of course *why* you go to London is for the present a secret?"

"Of course. What horrible explanations and gossip the fact of his death at this late date will involve. Every one has thought him dead for over twenty years. I can't understand this secrecy, this mystery—the world should have been told the truth from the first. If there was any motive I suppose they will tell me to–night, and I confess I shrink from hearing any more than I have already heard."

His face was very dark, very gloomy, as he gazed out at the starlit night. A presentiment that something evil was in store for him weighed upon him, engendered, perhaps, by the incomprehensible alarm of Lady Helena.

The preparations for the journey were hurried and few. Lady Helena descended to the carriage, leaning on her maid's arm. She seemed to have forgotten Edith completely, until Edith advanced to say good–by. Then in a constrained, mechanical sort of way she gave her hand, spoke a few brief words of farewell, and drew back into a corner of the carriage, a darker shadow in the gloom.

In the drawing–room, in travelling–cap and overcoat, Sir Victor held Edith's hand, lingering strangely over the parting—strangely reluctant to say farewell.

"Do you believe in presentiments, Edith?" he asked. "I have a presentiment that we will never meet again like this—that something will have come between us before we meet again. I cannot define it. I cannot explain it. I only know it is there."

"I don't believe in presentiments," Edith answered cheerfully. "I never had one in my life. I believe they are only another name for dyspepsia; and telegrams and hurried night journeys are mostly conducive to gloom. When the sun shines to–morrow morning, and you have had a strong cup of coffee, you will be ready to laugh at your

presentiments. Nothing is likely to come between us.”

“Nothing shall—nothing, I swear it!” He caught her in his arms with a straining clasp, and kissed her passionately for the first time. “Nothing in this lower world shall ever separate us. I have no life now apart from you. And nothing, not death itself, shall postpone our marriage. It was postponed once; I wish it never had been. It shall never be postponed again.”

“Go, go!” Edith cried; “some one is coming—you will be late.”

There was not a minute to spare. He dashed down the stairs, down the portico steps, and sprang into the carriage beside his aunt. The driver cracked his whip, the horses started, the carriage rolled away into the gloom and the night. Edith Darrell stood at the window until the last sound of the wheels died away, and for long after. A strange silence seemed to have fallen upon the great house with the going of its mistress. In the embrasure of the window, in the dim blue starlight, the girl sat down to think. There was some mystery, involving the murder of the late Lady Catheron, at work here, she felt. Grief for the loss of his wife might have driven Sir Victor Catheron mad, but why make such a profound secret of it? Why give out that he was dead? Why allow his son to step into the title before his time? If Juan Catheron were the murderer, Juan Catheron the outlaw and Pariah of his family, why screen him as though he had been the idol and treasure of all, and let the dead go unavenged? Why this strange terror of Lady Helena's? why her insufferable aversion to her nephew marrying at all?

Yes, there was something hidden, something on the cards not yet brought to light; and to the death-bed of Sir Victor Catheron the elder, Sir Victor Catheron the younger had been summoned to hear the whole truth.

Would he tell it to her upon his return, she wondered. Well, if he did not, she had no right to complain—she had *her* secret from him. There was madness in the family—she shrank a little at the thought for the first time. Who knew, whether latent and unsuspected, the taint might not be in the blood and brains of the man to whom she was about to bind herself for life? Who was to tell when it might break forth, in what horrible shape it might show itself? To be the widowed wife of a madman—what wealth and title on earth could compensate for that? She shivered as she sat, partly with the chill night air, partly with the horror of the thought. In her youth, and health, and beauty, her predecessor had been struck down, the bride of another Sir Victor. So long she sat there that a clock up in the lofty turret struck, heavily and solemnly, twelve. The house was still as the grave—all shut up except this room where she sat, all retired except her maid and the butler. They yawned sleepily, and waited for her to retire. Chilled and white, the girl arose at last, took her night-light, and went slowly up to bed.

“Is the game worth the candle after all?” she thought. “Ah me! what a miserable, vacillating creature I am. Whatever comes—the worst or the best—there is nothing for it now but to go on to the end.”

Meantime, through the warm, starry night, the train was speeding on to London, bearing Sir Victor Catheron to the turning point of his life. He and his aunt had their carriage all to themselves. Still in dead silence, still with that pale, terrified look on her face, Lady Helena lay back in a corner among the cushions. Once or twice her nephew spoke to her—the voice in which she answered him hardly sounded like her own. He gave it up at last; there was nothing for it but to wait and let the end come. He drew his cap over his eyes, lay back in the opposite seat, and dozed and dreamed of Edith.

In the chill, gray light of an overcast morning they reached Easton station. A sky like brown paper lay over the million roofs of the great Babylon; a dull, dim fog, that stifled you, filled the air. The fog and raw cold were more like November than the last month of summer. Blue and shivering in the chill light, Sir Victor buttoned up his light overcoat, assisted his aunt into a cab, and gave the order—“St. John's Wood. Drive for your life!”

Lady Helena knew Poplar Lodge, of course; once in the vicinity there would be no trouble in finding it. Was he still alive, the young man wondered. How strange seemed the thought that he was about to see his father at last. It was like seeing the dead return. Was he sane, and would he know him when they met?

The overcast morning threatened rain; it began to fall slowly and dismally as they drove along. The London streets looked unutterably draggled and dreary, seen at this early hour of the wet morning. The cab driver urged his horse to its utmost speed, and presently the broad green expanse and tall trees of Regent's Park came in view. Lady Helena gave the man his direction, and in ten minutes they stopped before the tall, closed iron gates of a solitary villa. It was Poplar Lodge.

The baronet paid the man's fare and dismissed him. He seized the gate-bell and rang a peal that seemed to tinkle half a mile away. While he waited, holding an umbrella over his aunt, he surveyed the premises.

It was a greusome, prison-like place enough at this forlorn hour. The stone walls were as high as his head, the

view between the lofty iron gates was completely obstructed by trees. Of the house itself, except the chimney-pots and the curling smoke, not a glimpse was to be had. And for three-and-twenty years Inez Catheron had buried herself alive here with a madman and two old servants! He shuddered internally as he thought of it—surely, never devotion or atonement equalled hers.

They waited nearly ten minutes in the rain; then a shambling footstep shambled down the path, and an old face peered out between the trellised iron work. “Who is it?” an old voice asked.

“It is I, Hooper. Sir Victor and I. For pity's sake don't keep us standing here in the rain.”

“My lady! Praise be!” A key turned in the lock, the gate swung wide, and an aged, white-haired man stood bowing before Lady Helena.

“Are we in time?” was her first breathless question. “Is your master still—”

“Still alive, my lady—praise and thanks be! Just in time, and no more.”

The dim old eyes of Hooper were fixed upon the young man's face.

“Like his father,” the old lips said, and the old head shook ominously; “more's the pity—like his father.”

Lady Helena took her nephew's arm and hurried him, under the dripping trees, up the avenue to the house. Five minutes brought them to it—a red brick villa, its shutters all closed. The house-door stood ajar; without ceremony her ladyship entered. As she did so, another, door suddenly opened, and Inez Catheron came out.

The fixedly pale face, could by no possibility grow paler—could by no possibility change its marble calm. But the deep, dusk eyes looked at the young man, it seemed to him, with an infinite compassion.

“We are in time?” his aunt spoke.

“You are in time. In one moment you will see him. There is not a second to lose, and he knows it. He has begged you to be brought to him the moment you arrive.”

“He knows then. Oh, thank God! Reason has returned at last.”

“Reason has returned. Since yesterday he has been perfectly sane. His first words were that his son should be sent for, that the truth should be told.”

There was a half-suppressed sob. Lady Helena covered her face with both hands. Her nephew looked at her, then back to Miss Catheron. The white face kept its calm, the pitying eyes looked at him with a gentle compassion no words can tell.

“Wait one moment,” she said; “I must tell him you are here.”

She hurried upstairs and disappeared. Neither of the two spoke. Lady Helena's face was still hidden. He knew that she was crying—silent, miserable tears—tears that were for *him*. He stood pale, composed, expectant—waiting for the end.

“Come up,” Miss Catheron's soft voice at the head of the stairs called. Once more he gave his aunt his arm, once more in silence they went in together.

A breathless hush seemed to lie upon the house and all within it. Not a sound was to be heard except the soft rustle of the trees, the soft, ceaseless patter of the summer rain. In that silence they entered the chamber where the dying man lay. To the hour of his own death, that moment and all he saw was photographed indelibly upon Victor Catheron's mind. The dim gray light of the room, the great white bed in the centre, and the awfully corpse-like face of the man lying among the pillows, and gazing at him, with hollow, spectral eyes. His father—at last!

He advanced to the bedside as though under a spell. The spectral blue eyes were fixed upon him steadfastly, the pallid lips slowly opened and spoke.

“Like me—as I was—like me. Ethel's son.”

“My father!”

He was on his knees—a great awe upon him. It was the first time in his young life he had ever been in the presence of death. And the dying was his father, and his father whom he had never seen before.

“Like me,” the faint lips related; “my face, my height, my name, my age. Like me. O God! will his end be like mine?”

A thrill of horror ran through all his hearers. His son strove to take his hand; it was withdrawn. A frown wrinkled, the pallid brow.

“Wait,” he said painfully; “don't touch me; don't speak to me. Wait. Sit down; don't kneel there. You don't know what you are about to hear. Inez, tell him now.”

She closed the door—still with that changeless face—and locked it. It seemed as though, having suffered so

much, nothing had power to move her outwardly now. She placed a chair for Lady Helena away from the bed—Lady Helena, who had stood aloof and not spoken to the dying man yet. She placed a chair for Sir Victor, and motioned him to seat himself, then drew another close to the bedside, stooped, and kissed the dying man. Then in a voice that never faltered, never failed, she began the story she had to tell.

* * * * *

Half an hour had passed. The story was told, and silence reigned in the darkened room. Lady Helena still sat, with averted face, in her distant seat, not moving, not looking up. The dying man still lay gazing weirdly upon his son, death every second drawing nearer and more near. Inez sat holding his hand, her pale, sad face, her dark, pitying eyes turned also upon his son.

That son had risen. He stood up in the centre of the room, with a white, stunned face. What was this he had heard? Was he asleep and dreaming?—was it all a horrible, ghastly delusion?—were they mocking him? or—O gracious God! was it *true*?

“Let me out!” They were his first words. “I can't breathe—I am choking in this room! I shall go mad if you keep me here!”

He staggered forward, as a drunken man or a blind man might stagger, to the door. He unlocked it, opened it, passed out into the passage, and down the stairs. His aunt followed him, her eyes streaming, her hands outstretched.

“Victor—my boy—my son—my darling! Victor—for the love of Heaven, speak to me!”

But he only made a gesture for her to stand back, and went on.

“Keep away from me!” he said, in a stifled voice; “let me think! Leave me alone!—I can't speak to you yet!”

He went forward out into the wet daylight. His head was bare; his overcoat was off; the rain beat unheeded upon him. What was this—what was this he had heard?

He paced up and down under the trees. The moments passed. An hour went; he neither knew nor cared. He was stunned—stunned body and soul—too stunned even to think. His mind was in chaos, an awful horror had fallen upon him; he must wait before thought would come. Whilst he still paced there, as a stricken animal might, a great cry reached him. Then a woman's flying figure came down the path. It was his aunt.

“Come—come—come!” she cried; “he is dying!”

She drew him with her by main force into the house—up the stairs—into the chamber of death. But Death had been there before them. A dead man lay upon the bed now, rigid and white. A second cry arose—a cry of almost more than woman's woe. And with it Inez Catheron clasped the dead man in her arms, and covered his face with her raining tears.

The son stood beside her like a figure of stone, gazing down at that marble face. For the first time in his life he was Sir Victor Catheron.

CHAPTER XX. HOW THE WEDDING-DAY BEGAN.

Six days later, Sir Victor Catheron and his aunt came home. These six days had passed very quietly, very pleasantly, to Edith. She was not in the least lonely; the same sense of relief in her lover's absence was upon her as she had felt at Torquay. It seemed to her she breathed freer when a few score miles lay between them. She had her pet books and music, and she read and played a great deal; she had her long, solitary rambles through the leafy lanes and quiet roads, her long drives in the little pony phaeton her future husband had given her. Sometimes Lady Gwendoline was her companion; oftener she was quite alone. She was not at all unhappy now; she was just drifting passively on to the end. She had chosen, and was quietly abiding by her choice; that was all. She caught herself thinking, sometimes, that since she felt so much happier and freer in Sir Victor's brief absences, how was she going to endure all the years that must be passed at his side? No doubt she would grow used to him after a while, as we grow used and reconciled to everything earthly.

One circumstance rather surprised her: during those six days of absence she had received but one note from her lover. She had counted at least upon the post fetching her one or two per day, as when at Torquay, but this time he wrote her but once. An odd, incoherent, hurried sort of note, too—very brief and unsatisfactory, if she had had much curiosity on the subject of what was going on at St. John's Wood. But she had not. Whether his father lived or died, so that he never interfered with her claim to the title of Lady Catheron in the future, Miss Darrell cared very little. This hurried note briefly told her his father had died on the day of their arrival; that by his own request the burial place was to be Kensal Green, not the Catheron vaults; that the secret of his life and death was still to be kept inviolate; and that (in this part of the note he grew impassionedly earnest) their marriage was not to be postponed. On the third of October, as all had been arranged, it was still to take place. No other note followed. If Miss Darrell had been in love with her future husband, this profound silence must have wounded, surprised, grieved her. But she was not in love. He must be very much occupied, she carelessly thought, since he could not find time to drop her a daily bulletin—then dismissed the matter indifferently from her mind.

Late in the evening of the sixth day Sir Victor and Lady Helena returned home.

Edith stood alone awaiting them, dressed in black silk, and with soft white lace and ruby ornaments, and looking very handsome.

Her lover rushed in and caught her in his arms with a sort of rapturous, breathless delight.

"My love! my life!" he cried, "every hour has been an age since I said good-by!"

She drew herself from him. Sir Victor, in the calm, courteous character of a perfectly undemonstrative suitor she tolerated. Sir Victor in the role of Romeo was excessively distasteful to her. She drew herself out of his arms coldly and decisively.

"I am glad to see you back, Sir Victor." But the stereotyped words of welcome fell chill on his ear. "You are not looking well. I am afraid you have been very much harassed since you left."

Surely he was not looking well. In those six days he had grown more than six years older. He had lost flesh and color; there was an indescribable something in his face and expression she had never seen before. More had happened than the death of the father he had never known, to alter him like this. She looked at him curiously. Would he tell her?

He did not. Not looking at her, with his eyes fixed moodily on the wood-fire smoldering on the hearth, he repeated what his letter had already said. His father had died the morning of their arrival in London; they had buried him quietly and unobtrusively, by his own request, in Kensal Green Cemetery; no one was to be told, and the wedding was not to be postponed. All this he said as a man repeats a lesson learned by rote—his eyes never once meeting hers.

She stood silently by, looking at him, listening to him.

Something lay behind, then, that she was not to know. Well, it made them quits—she didn't care for the Catheron family secrets; if it were something unpleasant, as well *not* know. If Sir Victor told her, very well; if not, very well also. She cared little either way.

"Miss Catheron remains at St John's Wood, I suppose?" she inquired indifferently, feeling in the pause that ensued she must say something.

“She remains—yes—with her two old servants for the present. I believe her ultimate intention is to go abroad.”

“She will not return to Cheshire?”

A spasm of pain crossed his face; there was a momentary contraction of the muscles of his mouth.

“She will not return to Cheshire. All her life she will lie under the ban of murder.”

“And she is innocent?”

He looked up at her—a strange, hunted, tortured sort of look.

“She is innocent.”

As he made the answer he turned abruptly away. Edith asked no more questions. The secret of his mother's murder was a secret she was not to hear.

Lady Helena did not make her appearance at all in the lower rooms, that night. Next day at luncheon she came down, and Edith was honestly shocked at the change in her. From a hale, handsome, stately, upright, elderly lady, she had become a feeble old woman in the past week. Her step had grown uncertain; her hands trembled; deep lines of trouble were scored on her pale face; her eyes rarely wandered long from her nephew's face. Her voice took a softer, tenderer tone when she addressed him—she had always loved him dearly, but never so dearly, it would seem, as now.

The change in Sir Victor was more in manner than in look. A feverish impatience and restlessness appeared to have taken possession of him; he wandered about the house and in and out like some restless ghost. From Powyss Place to Catheron Royals, from Catheron Royals to Powyss Place, he vibrated like a human pendulum. It set Edith's nerves on edge only to watch him. At other periods a moody gloom would fall upon him, then for hours he sat brooding, brooding, with knitted brows and downcast eyes, lost in his own dark, secret thoughts. Anon his spirits would rise to fever height, and he would laugh and talk in a wild, excited way that fixed Edith's dark, wondering eyes solemnly on his flushed face.

With it all, in whatever mood, he could not bear her out of his sight. He haunted her like her shadow, until it grew almost intolerable. He sat for hours, while she worked, or played, or read, not speaking, not stirring—his eyes fixed upon her, and she, who had never been nervous, grew horribly nervous under this ordeal. Was Sir Victor losing his wits? Now that his insane father was dead and buried, did he feel it incumbent upon him to keep up the family reputation and follow in that father's footsteps?

And the days wore on, and the first of October came.

The change in the young baronet grew more marked with each day. He lost the power to eat or sleep; far into the night he walked his room, as though some horrible Nemesis were pursuing him. He failed to the very shadow of himself, yet when Lady Helena, in fear and trembling, laid her hand upon his arm, and falteringly begged him to see a physician, he shook her off with an angry irritability quite foreign to his usual gentle temper, and bade her, imperiously, to leave him alone.

The second of October came; to-morrow would be the wedding-day.

The old feeling of vagueness and unreality had come back to Edith. Something would happen—that was the burden of her thoughts. To-morrow was the wedding-day, but the wedding would never take place. She walked through the glowing, beautiful rooms of Catheron Royals, through the grounds and gardens, bright with gay autumnal flowers—a home luxurious enough for a young duchess—and still that feeling of unreality was there. A grand place, a noble home, but she would never reign its mistress. The cottage at Carnarvon had been weeks ago engaged, Sir Victor's confidential servant already established there, awaiting the coming of the bridal pair; but she felt she would never see it. Upstairs, in all their snowy, shining splendor, the bridal robe and veil lay; when to-morrow came would she ever put them on, she vaguely wondered. And still she was not unhappy. A sort of apathy had taken possession of her; she drifted on calmly to the end. What was written, was written; what would be, would be. Time enough to wake from her dream when the time of waking came.

The hour fixed for the ceremony was eleven o'clock; the place, Chesholm church. The bridesmaids would arrive at ten—the Earl of Wroatmore, the father of the Ladies Gwendoline and Laura Drexel, was to give the bride away. They would return to Powyss Place and eat the sumptuous breakfast—then off and away to the pretty town in North Wales. That was the programme. “When to-morrow comes,” Edith thinks, as she wanders about the house, “will it be carried out?”

It chanced that on the bridal eve Miss Darrell was attacked with headache and sore throat. She had lingered

heedlessly out in the rain the day before (one of her old bad habits to escape from Sir Victor, if the truth must be told), and paid the natural penalty next day. It would never do to be hoarse as a raven on one's wedding-day, so Lady Helena insisted on a wet napkin round the throat, a warm bath, gruel, and early bed. Willingly enough the girl obeyed—too glad to have this last evening alone. Immediately after dinner she bade her adieux to her bridegroom-elect, and went away to her own rooms.

The short October day had long ago darkened down, the curtains were drawn, a fire burned, the candles were lit. She took the bath, the gruel, the wet napkin, and let herself be tucked up in bed.

“Romantic,” she thought, with a laugh at herself, “for a bride.”

Lady Helena—was it a presentiment of what was so near?—lingered by her side long that evening, and, at parting, for the first time took her in her arms and kissed her.

“Good-night, my child,” the tender, tremulous tones said. “I pray you make him happy—I pray that he may make *you*.”

She lingered yet a little longer—her heart seemed full, her eyes were shining through tears. Words seemed trembling on her lips—words she had not courage to say. For Edith, surprised and moved, she put her arms round the kind old neck, and laid her face for a moment on the genial old bosom.

“I will try,” she whispered, “dear, kind Lady Helena—indeed I will try to be a good and faithful wife.”

One last kiss, then they parted; the door closed behind her, and Edith was alone.

She lay as usual, high up among the billowy pillows, her hands clasped above her head, her dark, dreaming eyes fixed on the fire. She looked as though she were thinking, but she was not. Her mind was simply a blank. She was vaguely and idly watching the flickering shadows cast by the firelight on the wall, the gleam of yellow moonlight shimmering through the curtains; listening to the faint sighing of the night wind, the ticking of the little fanciful clock, to the pretty plaintive tunes it played before it struck the hours. Nine, ten, eleven—she heard them all, as she lay there, broad awake, neither thinking nor stirring.

Her maid came in for her last orders; she bade the girl good-night, and told her to go to bed—she wanted nothing more. Then again she was alone. But now a restlessness, as little to be understood as her former listless apathy, took hold of her. She could not lie there and sleep; she could not lie there awake. As the clock chimed twelve, she started up in bed in a sudden panic. Twelve! A new day—her wedding day!

Impossible to lie there quiet any longer. She sprang up, locked her door, and began, in her long, white night-robe, pacing up and down. So another hour passed. One! One from the little Swiss musical clock; one, solemn and sombre, from the big clock up in the tower. Then she stopped—stopped in thought; then she walked to one of her boxes, and took out a writing-case, always kept locked. With a key attached to her neck she opened it, seated herself before a table, and drew forth a package of letters and a picture. The picture was the handsome photographed face of Charley Stuart, the letters the letters he had written her to Sandypoint.

She began with the first, and read it slowly through—then the next, and so on to the end. There were over a dozen in all, and tolerably lengthy. As she finished and folded up the last, she took up the picture and gazed at it long and earnestly, with a strangely dark, intent look. How handsome he was! how well he photographed! that was her thought. She had seen him so often, with just this expression, looking at her. His pleasant, lazy, half-sarcastic voice was in her ear, saying something coolly impertinent—his gray, half-smiling, half-cynical eyes were looking life-like up at her. What was he doing now? Sleeping calmly, no doubt—she forgotten as she deserved to be. When to-morrow came, would he by any chance remember it was her wedding-day, and would the remembrance cost him a pang? She laughed at herself for the sentimental question—Charley Stuart feel a pang for her, or any other earthly woman? No, he was immersed in business, no doubt, head and ears, soul and body; absorbed in dollars and cents, and retrieving in some way his fallen fortunes—Edith Darrell dismissed contemptuously, as a cold-blooded jilt, from his memory. Well, so she had willed it—she had no right to complain. With a steady hand she tied up the letters and replaced them in the desk. The picture followed.

“Good-by, Charley,” she said, with a sort of smile. She could no more have destroyed those souvenirs of the past than she could have cut off her right hand. Wrong, you say, and shake your head. Wrong, of course; but when has Edith Darrell done right—when have I pictured her to you in any very favorable light? As long as she lived, and was Sir Victor's wife, she would never look at them again, but destroy them—no, she could not do that.

Six! As she closed and locked the writing-case the hour struck; a broad, bright sunburst flashed in and filled the room with yellow glory. The sun had risen cloudless and brilliant at last on her wedding-day.

CHAPTER XXI. HOW THE WEDDING-DAY ENDED.

She replaced the desk in the trunk, and, walking to the window, drew back the curtain and looked out. Over emerald lawn and coppice, tall trees and brilliant flowers, the October sun shone gloriously. No fairer day ever smiled upon old earth. She stood for an instant—then turned slowly away and walked over to a mirror—had her night's vigil made her look wan and sallow? she wondered. No—she looked much as usual—a thought paler, perhaps, but it is appropriate for brides to look pale. No use thinking of a morning nap under the circumstances—she would sit down by the window and wait for them to come. She could hear the household astir already—she could even see Sir Victor, away in the distance, taking his morning walk. How singularly haggard and wan he looked, like anything you please except a happy bridegroom about to marry the lady he loves above all on earth. She watched him with a gravely thoughtful face, until at last he disappeared from view among the trees.

Seven o'clock! Eight o'clock! Edith's respite was ended, her solitude invaded at last. There was a tap at the door, and Lady Helena, followed by Miss Darrell's maid, entered.

Had they all kept vigil? Her ladyship, in the pitiless, searching glare of the morning sun, certainly looked much more like it than the quiet bride. She was pale, nervous, agitated beyond anything the girl had ever seen.

"How had Edith slept? How was her cold? How did she feel?"

"Never better," Miss Darrell responded smilingly. "The sore throat and headache are quite gone, and I am ready to do justice to the nice breakfast which I see Emily has brought."

She sat down to it—chocolate, rolls, an omelette, and a savory little bird, with excellent and unromantic appetite. Then the service was cleared away, and the real business of the day began. She was under the hands of her maid, deep in the mysteries of the wedding-toilette.

At ten came the bridesmaids, a brilliant bevy, in sweeping trains, walking visions of silk, tulle, laces, perfume, and flowers. At half-past ten Miss Darrell, "queen rose of the rose-bud garden of girls," stood in their midst, ready for the altar.

She looked beautiful. It is an understood thing that all brides, whatever their appearance on the ordinary occasions of life, look beautiful on this day of days. Edith Darrell had never looked so stately, so queenly, so handsome in her life. Just a thought pale, but not unbecomingly so—the rich, glistening white silk sweeping far behind her, set off well the fine figure, which it fitted without flaw. The dark, proud face shone like a star from the misty folds of the bridal veil; the legendary orange blossoms crowned the rich, dark hair; on neck, ears, and arms glimmered a priceless parure of pearls, the gift, like the dress and veil, of Lady Helena. A fragrant bouquet of spotless white had been sent up by the bridegroom. At a quarter of eleven she entered the carriage and was driven away to the church.

As she lay back, and looked dreamily out, the mellow October sunshine lighting the scene, the joy-bells clashing, the listless apathy of the past few days took her again. She took note of the trifles about her—her mind rejected all else. How yellow were the fields of stubble, how picturesque, gilded in the sunshine, the village of Chesholm looked. How glowing and rosy the faces of the people who flocked out in their holiday best to gaze at the bridal pageant. Was it health and happiness, or soap and water only? wondered the bride. These were her wandering thoughts—these alone.

They reached the little church. All the way from the carriage to the stone porch the charity children strewed her path with flowers, and sang (out of tune) a bridal anthem. She smiled down upon their vulgar, admiring little faces as she went by on the Earl of Wroatmore's arm. The church was filled. Was seeing her married worth all this trouble to these good people, she wondered, as she walked up the aisle, still on the arm of the Right Honorable the Earl of Wroatmore.

There was, of course, a large throng of invited guests. Lady Helena was there in pale, flowing silks, the bridesmaids, a billowy crowd of white-plumaged birds, and the bridegroom, with a face whiter than the white waistcoat, standing waiting for his bride. And there, in surplice, book in hand, stood the rector of Chesholm and his curate, ready to tie the untieable knot.

A low, hushed murmur ran through the church at sight of the silver-shining figure of the bride. How

handsome, how stately, how perfectly self–possessed and calm. Truly, if beauty and high–bred repose of manner be any palliation of low birth and obscurity, this American young lady had it.

An instant passes—she is kneeling by Sir Victor Catheron's side. “Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?” say the urbane tones of the rector of Chesholm, and the Right Honorable the Earl of Wroatmore comes forward on two rickety old legs and gives her. “If any one here present knows any just cause or impediment why this man should not be married to this woman, I charge him,” etc., but no one knows. The solemn words go on. “Wilt thou take Edith Darrell to be thy wedded wife?” “I will,” Sir Victor Catheron responds, but in broken, inarticulate tones. It is the bride's turn. “I will!” the clear, firm voice is perfectly audible in the almost painfully intense stillness. The ring slips over her finger; she watches it curiously. “I pronounce ye man and wife,” says the rector. “What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.”

It is all over; she is Lady Catheron, and nothing has happened.

They enter the vestry, they sign their names in the register, their friends flock round to shake hands, and kiss, and congratulate. And Edith smiles through it all, and Sir Victor keeps that white, haggard, unsmiling face. It is a curious fancy, but, if it were not so utterly absurd, Edith would think he looked at her as though he were afraid of her.

On her husband's arm—her husband's!—she walks down the aisle and out of the church. They enter the carriages, and are driven back to Powyss Place. They sit down to breakfast—every face looks happy and bright, except the face that should look happiest and brightest of all—the bridegroom's. He seems to make a great effort to be, cheerful and at ease; it is a failure. He tries to return thanks in a speech; it is a greater failure still. An awkward silence and constraint creep over the party. What is the matter with Sir Victor? All eyes are fixed curiously upon him. Surely not repenting his mesalliance so speedily. It is a relief to everybody when the breakfast ends, and the bride goes upstairs to change her dress.

The young baronet has engaged a special train to take them into Wales. The new–made Lady Catheron changes her shining bridal robes for a charming travelling costume of palest gray, with a gossamer veil of the same shade. She looks as handsome in it as in the other, and her cool calm is a marvel to all beholders. She shakes hands gayly with their friends and guests; a smile is on her face as she takes her bridegroom's arm and enters the waiting carriage. Old shoes in a shower are flung after them; ladies wave their handkerchiefs, gentlemen call good–by. She leans forward and waves her gray–gloved hand in return—the cloudless smile on the beautiful face to the last. So they see her—as not one of all who stand there will ever see her on earth again.

The house, the wedding–guests are out of sight—the carriage rolls through the gates of Powyss Place. She falls back and looks out. They are flying along Chesholm high street; the tenantry shout lustily; the joy–bells still clash forth. Now they are at the station—ten minutes more, and, as fast as steam can convey them, they are whirling into Wales. And all this time bride and bridegroom have not exchanged a word!

That curious fancy of Edith's has come back—surely Sir Victor is *afraid* of her. How strangely he looks—how strangely he keeps aloof—how strangely he is silent—how fixedly he gazes out of the railway carriage window—anywhere but at her! *Has* his brain turned? she wonders; *is* Sir Victor going mad?

She makes no attempt to arouse him; let him be silent if he will; she rather prefers it, indeed. She sits and looks sociably out of the opposite window at the bright, flying landscape, steeped in the amber glitter of the October afternoon sun.

She looks across at the man she has married—did ever mortal man before on his wedding–day wear such a stony face as that? And yet he has married her for love—for love alone. Was ever another bridal journey performed like this—in profound gravity and silence on both sides? she wonders, half–inclined to laugh. She looks down at her shining wedding–ring—is it a circlet that means nothing? How is her life to go on after this grewsome wedding–day?

They reach Wales. The sun is setting redly over mountains and sea. The carriage is awaiting them; she enters, and lies back wearily with closed eyes. She is dead tired and depressed; she is beginning to feel the want of last night's sleep, and in a weary way is glad when the Carnarvon cottage is reached. Sir Victor's man, my lady's maid, and two Welch servants came forth to meet them; and on Sir Victor's arm she enters the house.

She goes at once to her dressing–room, to rest, to bathe her face, and remove her wraps, performing those duties herself, and dismissing her maid. As she and Sir Victor separate, he mutters some half–incoherent words—he will take a walk and smoke a cigar before dinner, while she is resting. He is gone even while he says

it, and she is alone.

She removes her gloves, hat, and jacket, bathes her face, and descends to the little cottage drawing-room. It is quite deserted—sleepy silence everywhere reigns. She throws herself into an easy-chair beside the open window, and looks listlessly out. Ruby, and purple, and golden, the sun is setting in a radiant sky—the yellow sea creeps up on silver sands—old Carnarvon Castle gleams and glows in the rainbow light like a fairy palace. It is unutterably beautiful, unutterably drowsy and dull. And, while she thinks it; her heavy eyelids sway and fall, her head sinks back, and Edith falls fast asleep.

Fast asleep; and a mile away, Sir Victor Catheron paces up and down a strip of tawny sand, the sea lapping softly at his feet, the birds singing in the branches, not a human soul far or near. He is not smoking that before-dinner cigar—he is striding up and down more like an escaped Bedlamite than anything else. His hat is drawn over his eyes, his brows are knit, his lips set tight, his hands are clenched. Presently he pauses, leans against a tree, and looks, with eyes full of some haggard, horrible despair, out over the red light on sea and sky. And, as he looks, he falls down suddenly, as though some inspiration had seized him, upon his knees, and lifts his clasped hands to that radiant sky. A prayer, that seems frenzied in its agonized intensity, bursts from his lips—the sleeping sea, the twittering birds, the rustling leaves, and He who has made them, alone are to hear. Then he falls forward on his face, and lies like a stone.

Is he mad? Surely no sane man ever acted, or looked, or spoke like this. He lies so—prostrate, motionless—for upward of an hour, then slowly and heavily he rises. His face is calmer now; it is the face of a man who has fought some desperate fight, and gained some desperate victory—one of those victories more cruel than death.

He turns and goes hence. He crashes through the tall, dewy grass, his white face set in a look of iron resolution. He is ghastly beyond all telling; dead and in his coffin he will hardly look more death like. He reaches the cottage, and the first sight upon which his eyes rest is his bride, peacefully asleep in the chair by the still open window. She looks lovely in her slumber, and peaceful as a little child—no very terrible sight surely. But as his eyes fall upon her, he recoils in some great horror, as a man may who has received a blinding blow.

“Asleep!” his pale lips whisper; “asleep—as *she* was!”

He stands spell-bound for a moment—then he breaks away headlong. He makes his way to the dining-room. The table, all bright with damask, silver, crystal, and cut flowers, stands spread for dinner. He takes from his pocket a note-book and pencil, and, still standing, writes rapidly down one page. Without reading, he folds and seals the sheet, and slowly and with dragging steps returns to the room where Edith sleeps. On the threshold he lingers—he seems afraid—*afraid* to approach. But he does approach at last. He places the note he has written on a table, he draws near his sleeping bride, he kneels down and kisses her hands, her dress, her hair. His haggard eyes burn on her face, their mesmeric light disturbs her. She murmurs and moves restlessly in her sleep. In an instant he is on his feet; in another, he is out of the room and the house; in another, the deepening twilight takes him, and he is gone.

A train an hour later passes through Carnarvon on its way to London. One passenger alone awaits it at the station—one passenger who enters an empty first-class compartment and disappears. Then it goes shrieking on its way, bearing with it to London the bridegroom, Sir Victor Catheron.

CHAPTER XXII. THE DAY AFTER.

The last red ray of the sunset had faded, the silver stars were out, the yellow moon shone serenely over land and sea, before Edith awoke—awoke with a smile on her lips from a dream of Charley.

“Do go away—don't tease,” she was murmuring half smilingly, half petulantly—the words she had spoken to him a hundred times. She was back in Sandypoint, he beside her, living over the old days, gone forever. She awoke to see the tawny moonshine streaming in, to hear the soft whispers of the night wind, the soft, sleepy lap of the sea on the sands, and to realize, with a thrill and a shock, she was Sir Victor Catheron's wife.

His wife! This was her wedding-day. Even in dreams Charley must come to her no more.

She rose up, slightly chilled from sleeping in the evening air, and shivering, partly with that chill, partly with a feeling she did not care to define. The dream of her life's ambition was realized in its fullest; she, Edith Darrell, was “my lady—a baronet's bride;” the vista of her life spread before her in glittering splendor; and yet her heart lay like lead in her bosom. In this hour she was afraid of herself, afraid of him.

But where was he?

She looked round the room, half in shadow, half in brilliant moonlight. No, he was not there. Had he returned from his stroll? She took out her watch. A quarter of seven—of course he had. He was awaiting her, no doubt, impatient for his dinner, in the dining-room. She would make some change in her dress and join him there. She went up to her dressing room and lit the candles herself. She smoothed her ruffled hair, added a ribbon and a jewel or two, and then went back to the drawing-room. All unnoticed, in the shadows, the letter for her lay on the table. She sat down and rang the bell. Jamison, the confidential servant, appeared.

“Has Sir Victor returned from his walk, Jamison? Is he in the dining-room?”

Mr. Jamison's well-bred eyes looked in astonishment at the speaker, then around the room. Mr. Jamison's wooden countenance looked stolid surprise.

“Sir Victor, my lady—I—thought Sir Victor was *here*, my lady.”

“Sir Victor has not been here since half an hour after our arrival. He went out for a walk, as you very well know. I ask you if he has returned.”

“Sir Victor returned more than an hour ago, my lady. I saw him myself. You were asleep, my lady, by the window as he came up. He went into the dining-room and wrote a letter; I saw it in his hand. And then, my lady, he came in here.”

The man paused, and again peered around the room. Edith listened in growing surprise.

“I thought he was here still, my lady, so did Hemily, or we would have taken the liberty of hentering and closing the window. We was sure he was here. He suttingly hentered with the letter in his 'and. It's *very* hodd.”

Again there was a pause. Again Mr. Jamison—

“If your ladyship will hallow, I will light the candles here, and then go and hascertain whether Sir Victor is in hany of the hother rooms.”

She made an affirmative gesture, and returned to the window. The man lit the candles; a second after an exclamation startled her.

“The note, my lady! Here it is.”

It lay upon the table; she walked over and took it up. In Sir Victor's hand, and addressed to herself! What did this mean? She stood looking at it a moment—then she turned to Jamison.

“That will do,” she said briefly; “if I want you I will ring.”

The man bowed and left the room. She stood still, holding the unopened note, strangely reluctant to break the seal. What did Sir Victor mean by absenting himself and writing her a note? With an effort she aroused herself at last, and tore it open. It was strangely scrawled, the writing half illegible; slowly and with difficulty she made it out This was what she read:

* * * * *

“For Heaven's sake, pity me—for Heaven's sake, pardon me. We shall never meet more! O beloved! believe that I love you, believe that I never loved you half so well as now, when I leave you forever. If I loved you less I might dare to stay. But I dare not. I can tell you no more—a promise to the living and the dead binds me. A

dreadful secret of sin, and shame, and guilt, is involved. Go to Lady Helena. My love—my bride—my heart is breaking as I write the word—the cruel word that must be written—farewell. I have but one prayer in my heart—but one wish in my soul—that my life may be a short one.

“VICTOR.”

* * * * *

No more. So, in short, incoherent, disconnected sentences, this incomprehensible letter began and ended. She stood stunned, bewildered, dazed, holding it, gazing at it blankly. Was she asleep? Was this a dream? Was Sir Victor playing some ghastly kind of practical joke, or—had Sir Victor all of a sudden gone wholly and entirely mad?

She shrank from the last thought—but the dim possibility that it might be true calmed her. She sat down, hardly knowing what she was doing, and read the letter again. Yes, surely, surely she was right. Sir Victor had gone mad! Madness was hereditary in his family—had it come to him on his wedding—day of all days? On his wedding—day the last remnant of reason had deserted him, and he had deserted *her*. She sat quite still,—the light of the candles falling upon her, upon the fatal letter,—trying to steady herself, trying to think. She read it again and again; surely no sane man ever wrote such a letter as this. “A dreadful secret of sin, and shame, and guilt, is involved.” Did that dreadful secret mean the secret of his mother's death? But why should that cause him to leave her? She knew all about it already. What frightful revelation had been made to him on his father's dying bed? He had never been the same man since. An idea flashed across her brain—dreadful and unnatural enough in all conscience—but why should even *that*, supposing her suspicions to be true, cause him to leave her? “If I loved you less, I might dare to stay with you.” What rhodomontade was this? Men prove their love by living with the women they marry, not by deserting them. Oh, he was mad, mad, mad—not a doubt of that could remain.

Her thoughts went back over the past two weeks—to the change in him ever since his father's death. There had been times when he had visibly shrunk from her, when he had seemed absolutely afraid of her. She had doubted it then—she knew it now. It was the dawning of his insanity—the family taint breaking forth. His father's delusion had been to shut himself up, to give out that he was dead—the son's was to desert his bride on their bridal day forever. Forever! the letter said so. Again, and still again, she read it. Very strangely she looked, the waxlights flickering on her pale, rigid young face, her compressed lips set in one tight line—on her soft pearl gray silk, with its point lace collar and diamond star. A bride, alone, forsaken, on her wedding—day!

How strange it all was! The thought came to her: was it retributive justice pursuing her for having bartered herself for rank? And yet girls as good and better than she, did it every day. She rose and began pacing up and down the floor. What should she do? “Go back to Lady Helena,” said the letter. Go back! cast off, deserted—she, who only at noon to—day had left them a radiant bride! As she thought it, a feeling of absolute hatred for the man she had married came into her heart. Sane or mad she would hate him now, all the rest of her life.

The hours were creeping on—two had passed since she had sent Jamison out of her room. What were they thinking of her, these keen—sighted, gossiping servants? what would they think and say when she told them Sir Victor would return no more?—that she was going back to Cheshire alone to—morrow morning? There was no help for it. There was resolute blood in the girl's veins; she walked over to the bell, rang it, her head erect, her eyes bright, only her lips still set in that tight, unpleasant line.

Mr. Jamison, grave and respectful, his burning curiosity diplomatically hidden, answered.

“Jamison,” the young lady said, her tones clear and calm, looking the man straight in the eyes, “your master has been obliged to leave Wales suddenly, and will not return. You may spend the night in packing up. To—morrow, by the earliest train, I return to Cheshire.”

“Yes, me lady.”

Not a muscle of Jamison's face moved—not a vestige of surprise or any other earthly emotion was visible in his smooth—shaven face. If she had said, “To—morrow by the earliest train I shall take a trip to the moon,” Mr. Jamison would have bowed and said, “Yes, me lady,” in precisely the same tone.

“Is dinner served?” his young mistress asked, looking at her watch. “If not, serve immediately. I shall be there in two minutes.”

She kept her word. With that light in her eyes, that pale composure on her face, she swept into the dining—room, and took her place at the glittering table. Jamison waited upon her—watching her, of course, as a cat a mouse.

“She took her soup and fish, her slice of pheasant and her jelly, I do assure you, just the same as hever, Hemily,” he related afterward to the lady's maid; “but her face was whiter than the tablecloth, and her eyes had a look in them I'd rather master would face than me. She's one of the 'igh-stepping sort, depend upon it, and quiet as she takes it now, there'll be the deuce and all to pay one of these days.”

She rose at last and went back to the drawing-room. How brilliantly the moon shone on the sleeping sea; how fantastic the town and castle looked in the romantic light. She stood by the window long, looking out. No thought of sympathy for him—of trying to find him out on the morrow—entered her mind. He had deserted her; sane or mad, that was enough for the present to know.

She took out a purse, that fairies and gold dollars alone might have entered, and looked at its contents. By sheer good luck and chance, it contained three or four sovereigns—more than sufficient for the return journey. To-morrow morning she would go back to Powyss Place and tell Lady Helena; after that—

Her thoughts broke—to-night she could not look beyond. The misery, the shame, the horrible scandal, the loneliness, the whole wreck of life that was to come, she could not feel as yet. She knew what she would do to-morrow—after that all was a blank.

What a lovely night it was! What were they doing at home? What was Trixy about just now? What was Charley? She had made up her mind never to think of Charley more. His face rose vividly before her now in the moonrays, pale, stern, contemptuous. “Oh!” she passionately thought, “how he must scorn, how he must despise me!” “Whatever comes,” he had said to her that rainy morning at Sandypoint; “whatever the new life brings, you are never to blame *me!*” How long ago that rainy morning seemed now. What an eternity since that other night in the snow. If she had only died beside him that night—the clear, white, painless death—unspotted from the world! If she had only died that night!

Her arms were on the window-sill—her face fell upon them. One hour, two, three passed; she never moved. She was not crying, she was suffering, but dully, with a numb, torpid, miserable sense of pain. All her life since that rainy spring day, when Charley Stuart had come to Sandypoint with his mother's letter, returned to her. She had striven and coquetted to bring about the result she wanted—it had seemed such a dazzling thing to be a baronet's wife, with an income that would flow in to her like a ceaseless golden river. She had jilted the man she loved in cold bloody and accepted the man to whom her heart was as stone. In the hour when fortune was deserting her best friends, she had deserted them too. And the end was—*this*.

It was close upon twelve when Emily, the maid, sleepy and cross, tapped at the door. She had to tap many times before her mistress heard her. When she did hear and open, and the girl came in, she recoiled from the ghastly pallor of her lady's face.

“I shall not want you to-night,” Edith said briefly. “You may go to bed.”

“But you are ill, my lady. If you only saw yourself! Can't I fetch you something? A glass of wine from the dining-room?”

“Nothing, Emily, thank you. I have sat up too long in the night air—that is all. Go to bed; I shall do very well.”

The girl went, full of pity and worries, shaking her head. “Only this morning I thought what a fine thing it was to be the bride of so fine a gentleman, and look at her now.”

Left alone, she closed and fastened the window herself. An unsupportable sense of pain and weariness oppressed her. She did not undress. She loosened her clothes, wrapped a heavy, soft railway rug about her, and lay down upon the bed. In five minutes the tired eyes had closed. There is no surer narcotic than trouble sometimes; hers was forgotten—deeply, dreamlessly, she slept until morning.

The sun was high in the sky when she awoke. She raised herself upon her elbow and looked around, bewildered. In a second yesterday flashed upon her, and her journey of to-day. She arose, made her morning toilet, and rang for her maid. Breakfast was waiting—it was past nine o'clock, and she could leave Carnarvon in three quarters of an hour. She made an effort to eat and drink; but it was little better than an effort. She gave Jamison his parting instructions—he was to remain here until to-morrow; by that time orders would come from Powyss Place. Then, in the dress she had travelled in yesterday, she entered the railway carriage and started upon her return journey.

How speedily her honeymoon had ended! A curious sort of smile passed over her face as she thought it. She had not anticipated Elysium—quite—but she certainly had anticipated something very different from this.

She kept back thought resolutely—she would *not* think—she sat and looked at the genial October landscape flitting by. Sooner or later the floodgates would open, but not yet.

It was about three in the afternoon when the fly from the railway drove up to the stately portico entrance of Powyss Place. She paid and dismissed the man, and knocked unthinkingly. The servant who opened the door fell back, staring at her, as though she had been a ghost.

“Is Lady Helena at home?”

Lady Helena was at home—and still the man stared blankly as he made the reply. She swept past him, and made her way, unannounced, to her ladyship's private rooms. She tapped at the door.

“Come in,” said the familiar voice, and she obeyed. Then a startled cry rang out. Lady Helena arose and stood spellbound, gazing in mute consternation at the pale girl before her.

“Edith!” she could but just gasp. “What is this? Where is Victor?”

Edith came in, closed the door, and quietly faced her ladyship.

“I have not the faintest idea where Sir Victor Catheron may be at this present moment. Wherever he is, it is to be hoped he is able to take care of himself. I know I have not seen him since four o'clock yesterday afternoon.”

The lips of Lady Helena moved, but no sound came from them. Some great and nameless terror seemed to have fallen upon her.

“It was rather an unusual thing to do,” the clear, steady tones of the bride went on, “but being very tired after the journey, I fell asleep in the cottage parlor at Carnarvon, half an hour after our arrival. Sir Victor had left me to take a walk and a smoke, he said. It was nearly seven when I awoke. I was still alone. Your nephew had come and gone.”

“Gone!”

“Gone—and left this for me. Read it, Lady Helena, and you will see that in returning here, I am only obeying my lord and master's command.”

She took the note from her pocket, and presented it. Her ladyship took it, read it, her face growing a dreadful ashen gray.

“So soon!” she said, in a sort of whisper; “that it should have fallen upon him so soon! Oh! I feared it! I feared it! I feared it!”

“You feared it!” Edith repeated, watching her intently. “Does that mean your ladyship understands this letter?”

“Heaven help me! I am afraid I do.”

“It means, then, what I have thought it meant: that when I married Sir Victor yesterday I married a madman!”

There was a sort of moan from Lady Helena—no other reply.

“Insanity is in the Catheron blood—I knew that from the first. His father lived and died a maniac. The father's fate is the son's. It has lain dormant for three—and—twenty years, to break out on his wedding—day. Lady Helena, am I right?”

But Lady Helena was sobbing convulsively now. Her sobs were her only reply.

“It is hard on *you*,” Edith said, with a dreary sort of pity. “You loved him.”

“And you did not,” the elder woman retorted, looking up. “You loved your cousin, and you married my poor, unhappy boy for his title and his wealth. It would have been better for him he had died than ever set eyes on your face.”

“Much better,” Edith answered steadily. “Better for him—better for me. You are right, Lady Helena Powyss, I loved my cousin, and I married your nephew for his title and his wealth. I deserve all you can say of me. The worst will not be half bad enough.”

Her ladyship's face drooped again; her suppressed sobbing was the only sound to be heard.

“I have come to you,” Edith went on, “to tell you the truth. I don't ask what his secret is he speaks of; I don't wish to know. I think he should be looked after. If he is insane he should not be allowed to go at large.”

“If he is insane!” Lady Helena cried, looking up again angrily. “You do well to say *if*. He is no more insane than you are!”

Edith stood still looking at her. The last trace of color faded from her face.

“*Not* insane,” she whispered, as if to herself; “*not* insane, and—he deserts me!”

“Oh, what have I said!” Lady Helena cried; “forgive me, Edith—I don't know what I am saying—I don't know

what to think. Leave me alone, and let me try to understand it, if I can. Your old rooms are ready for you. You have come to remain with me, of course."

"For the present—yes. Of the future I have not yet thought. I will leave you alone, Lady Helena, as you desire. I will not trouble you again until to-morrow."

She was quitting the room. Lady Helena arose and took her in her arms, her face all blotted with a rain of tears.

"My child! my child!" she said, "it is hard on you—so young, so pretty, and only married yesterday! Edith, you frighten me! What are you made of? You look like a stone!"

The girl sighed—a long, weary, heart-sick sigh.

"I feel like a stone. I can't cry. I think I have no heart, no soul, no feeling, no conscience—that I am scarcely a human being. I am a hardened, callous wretch, for whom any fate is too good. Don't pity me, dear Lady Helena; don't waste one tear on me. I am not worth it."

She touched her lips to the wet cheek, and went slowly on her way. No heart—no soul! if she had, both felt benumbed, dead. She seemed to herself a century old, as she toiled on to her familiar rooms. They met no more that day—each kept to her own apartments.

The afternoon set in wet and wild; the rain fell ceaselessly and dismally; an evening to depress the happiest closed down.

It was long after dark when there came a ring at the bell, and the footman, opening the door, saw the figure of a man muffled and disguised in slouch hat and great-coat. He held an umbrella over his head, and a scarf was twisted about the lower part of his face. In a husky voice, stifled in his scarf, he asked for Lady Helena.

"Her ladyship's at home," the footman answered, rather superciliously, "but she don't see strangers at this hour."

"Give her this," the stranger said; "she will see *me*."

In spite of hat, scarf, and umbrella, there was something familiar in the air of the visitor, something familiar in his tone. The man took the note suspiciously and passed it to another, who passed it to her ladyship's maid. The maid passed it to her ladyship, and her ladyship read it with a suppressed cry.

"Show him into the library at once. I will go down."

The muffled man was shown in, still wearing hat and scarf. The library was but dimly lit. He stood like a dark shadow amid the other shadows. An instant later the door opened and Lady Helena, pale and wild, appeared on the threshold.

"It is," she faltered. "It is—you!"

She approached slowly, her terrified eyes riveted on the hidden face.

"It is I. Lock the door."

She obeyed, she came nearer. He drew away the scarf, lifted the hat, and showed her the face of Sir Victor Catheron.

CHAPTER XXIII. THE SECOND ENDING OF THE TRAGEDY.

The morning dawned over Powyss Place—dawned in wild wind and driving rain still—dawned upon Edith, deserted more strangely than surely bride was ever deserted before.

She had darkened her chamber; she had forced herself resolutely to sleep. But the small hours had come before she had succeeded, and it was close upon ten when the dark eyes opened from dreamland to life. Strange mockery! it was ever of Charley and the days that were forever gone she dreamed now.

For hours and hours she had paced her room the evening and night before, all the desolation, all the emptiness and loss of her life spread out before her. She had sold herself deliberately and with her eyes open, and this was her reward. Deserted in the hour of her triumph—humiliated as never bride was humiliated before—the talk, the ridicule of the country, an object of contemptuous pity to the whole world. And Charley and Trixy, what would *they* say when they heard of her downfall? She was very proud—no young princess had ever haughtier blood coursing through her royal veins than this portionless American girl. For wealth and rank she had bartered life and love, and verily she had her reward.

She suffered horribly. As she paced up and down, her whole face was distorted with the torture within. She flung herself into a seat and tried to still the ceaseless, gnawing, maddening pain. In vain! She could neither sit still, nor think, nor deaden her torment. And when at last she threw herself face downward on her bed it was only to sleep the spent sleep of utter exhaustion. But she was “pluck” to the backbone. Next day, when she had bathed and made her toilet, and descended to the breakfast-room, the closest observer could have read nothing of last night in the fixed calm of her face. The worst that could ever happen had happened; she was ready now to live and die game.

Lady Helena, very pale, very tremulous, very frightened and helpless-looking, awaited her. A large, red fire burned on the hearth. Her ladyship was wrapped in a fluffy white shawl, but she shivered in spite of both. The lips that touched Edith's cheek were almost as cold as that cold cheek itself. Tears started to her eyes as she spoke to her.

“My child,” she said, “how white you are; how cold and ill you look. I am afraid you did not sleep at all.”

“Yes, I slept,” answered Edith; “for a few hours, at least. The weather has something to do with it, perhaps; I always fall a prey to horrors in wet and windy weather.”

Then they sat down to the fragrant and tempting breakfast, and ate with what appetite they might. For Edith, she hardly made a pretence of eating—she drank a large cup of strong coffee, and arose.

“Lady Helena,” she began abruptly, “as I came out of my room, two of the servants were whispering in the corridor. I merely caught a word or two in passing. They stopped immediately upon seeing me. But from that word or two, I infer this—Sir Victor Catheron was here to see you last night.”

Lady Helena was trifling nervously with her spoon—it fell with a clash now into her cup, and her terrified eyes looked piteously at her companion.

“If you desire to keep this a secret too,” Edith said, her lips curling scornfully, “of course you are at liberty to do so—of course I presume to ask no questions. But if not, I would like to know—it may in some measure influence my own movements.”

“What do you intend to do?” her ladyship brokenly asked.

“That you shall hear presently. Just now the question is: Was your nephew here last night or not?”

“He was.”

She said it with a sort of sob, hiding her face in her hands. “May Heaven help me,” she cried; “it is growing more than I can bear. O my child, what can I say to you? how can I comfort you in this great trouble that has come upon you?”

“You are very good, but I would rather not be comforted. I have been utterly base and mercenary from first to last—a wretch who has richly earned her fate. Whatever has befallen me I deserve. I married your nephew without one spark of affection for him; he was no more to me than any laborer on his estate—I doubt whether he ever could have been. I meant to try—who knows how it would have ended? I married Sir Victor Catheron for his rank and riches, his title and rent-roll—I married the baronet, not the man. And it has ended thus. I am widowed

on my wedding-day, cast off, forsaken. Have I not earned my fate?"

She laughed drearily—a short, mirthless, bitter laugh.

"I don't venture to ask too many questions—I don't battle with my fate; I throw up my arms and yield at once. But this I would like to know. Madness is hereditary in his family. Unworthy of all love as I am, I think—I think Sir Victor loved me, and, unless he be mad, I can't understand *why* he deserted me. Lady Helena, answer me this, as you will one day answer to your Maker—Is Sir Victor Catheron sane or mad?"

There was a pause as she asked the dreadful question—a pause in which the beating of the autumnal rain upon the glass, the sighing of the autumnal gale sounded preternaturally loud. Then, brokenly, in trembling tones, and not looking up, came Lady Helena's answer:

"God pity him and you—he is not mad."

Then there was silence again. The elder woman, her face buried in her hands and resting on the table, was crying silently and miserably. At the window, the tall, slim figure of the girl stood motionless, her hands clasped loosely before her, her deep bright eyes looking out at the slanting rain, the low-lying, lead colored sky, the black trees blown aslant in the high October gale.

"Not mad?" she repeated, after that long pause; "you are quite certain of this, my lady? Not mad—and he has left me?"

"He has left you. O my child! if I dared only tell you all—if I dared only tell you how it is *because* of his great and passionate love for you, he leaves you. If ever there was a martyr on this earth, it is my poor boy. If you had seen him as I saw him last night—worn to a shadow in one day, suffering for the loss of you until death would be a relief—even *you* would have pitied him."

"Would I? Well, perhaps so, though my heart is rather a hard one. Of course I don't understand a word of all this—of course, as he said in his letter, some secret of guilt and shame lies behind it all. And yet, perhaps, I could come nearer to the 'Secret' than either you or he think."

Lady Helena looked suddenly up, that terrified, hunted look in her eyes.

"What do you mean?" she gasped.

"This," the firm, cold voice of Edith said, as Edith's bright, dark eyes fixed themselves pitilessly upon her, "this, Lady Helena Powyss: That the secret which takes him from me is the secret of his mother's murder—the secret which he learned at his father's deathbed. Shall I tell you who committed that murder?"

Her ladyship's lips moved, but no sound came; she sat spellbound, watching that pale, fixed face before her.

"Not Inez Catheron, who was imprisoned for it; not Juan Catheron, who was suspected of it. I am a Yankee, Lady Helena, and consequently clever at guessing. I believe that Sir Victor Catheron, in cold blood, murdered his own wife!"

There was a sobbing cry—whether at the shock of the terrible words, or at their truth, who was to tell?

"I believe the late Sir Victor Catheron to have been a deliberate and cowardly murderer," Edith went on; "so cowardly that his weak brain turned when he saw what he had done and thought of the consequences; and that he paid the penalty of his crime in a life of insanity. The motive I don't pretend to fathom—jealousy of Juan Catheron perhaps; and on his dying bed he confessed all to his son."

With face blanched and eyes still full of terror, her ladyship looked at the dark, contemptuous, resolute speaker.

"And if this be true—your horrible surmise; mind, I don't admit that it is—would *that* be any excuse for Victor's conduct in leaving you?"

"No!" Edith answered, her eyes flashing, "none! Having married me, not ten thousand family secrets should be strong enough to make him desert me. If he had come to me, if he had told me, as he was bound to do before our wedding-day, I would have pitied him with all my soul; if anything could ever have made me care for him as a wife should care for a husband, it would have been that pity. But if he came to me now, and knelt before me, imploring me to return, I would not. I would die sooner!"

She was walking up and down now, gleams of passionate scorn and rage in her dark eyes.

"It is all folly and balderdash, this talk of his love for me making him leave me. Don't let us have any more of it. No secret on earth should make a bridegroom quit his bride—no power on earth could ever convince me of it!"

"And yet," the sad, patient voice of poor Lady Helena sighed, "it is true."

Edith stopped in her walk, and looked at her incredulously.

"Lady Helena," she said, "you are my kind friend—you know the world—you are a woman of sense, not likely to have your brain turned with vapors. Answer me this—Do you think that, acting as he has done, Sir Victor Catheron has done right?"

Lady Helena's sad eyes met hers full. Lady Helena's voice was full of pathos and earnestness, as she replied: "Edith, I am your friend; I am in my sober senses, and, I believe in my soul Victor has done right."

"Well," Edith said after a long pause, during which she resumed her walk, "I give it up! I don't understand, and I never shall. I am hopelessly in the dark. I can conceive no motive—none strong enough to make his conduct right. I thought him mad; you say he is sane. I thought he did me a shameful, irreparable wrong; you say he has done right. I will think no more about it, since, if I thought to my dying day, I could come no nearer the truth."

"You will know one day," answered Lady Helena; "on his death—bed; and, poor fellow, the sooner that day comes the better for him."

Edith made an impatient gesture.

"Let us talk about it no more. What is done is done. Whether Sir Victor Catheron lives or dies can in no way concern me now. I think, with your permission, I will go back to my room and try to sleep away this dismal day."

"Wait one moment, Edith. It was on your account Victor came here last night to talk over the arrangements he was making for your future."

A curious smile came over Edith's lips. She was once more back at the window, looking out at the rain-beaten day.

"My future!" she slowly repeated; "in what possible way can my future concern Sir Victor Catheron?"

"My child, what a question! In every way. You are honest enough to confess that you married him—poor boy, poor boy—for his rank and rent-roll. *There*, at least, you need not be disappointed. The settlements made upon you before your marriage were, as you know, liberal in the extreme. In addition to that, every farthing that it is in his power to dispose of he intends settling upon you besides. His grandmother's fortune, which descends to him, is to be yours. You may spend money like water if it pleases you—the title and the wealth for which you wedded are still yours. For himself, he intends to go abroad—to the East, I believe. He retains nothing but what will supply his travelling expenses. He cannot meet you—if he did, he might never be able to leave you. O Edith, you blame him, you hate him; but if you had only seen him, only heard him last night, only knew how inevitable it is, how he suffered, how bitterer than death this parting is to him, you would pity, you would forgive him."

"You think so," the girl said, with a wistful, weary sigh. "Ah, well, perhaps so. I don't know. Just now I can realize nothing except that I am a lost, forsaken wretch; that I *do* hate him; that if I were dying, or that if he were dying, I could not say 'I forgive you.' As to his liberality, I never doubted that; I have owned that I married him for his wealth and station. I own it still; but there are some things not the wealth of a king could compensate for. To desert a bride on her wedding-day is one of them. I repeat, Lady Helena, with your permission, I will go to my room; we won't talk of my future plans and prospects just now. To-morrow you shall know my decision."

She turned to go. The elder woman looked after her with yearning, sorrowful eyes.

"If I knew what to do—if I knew what to say," she murmured helplessly. "Edith, I loved him more dearly than any son. I think my heart is breaking. O child, don't judge him—be merciful to him who loves you while he leaves you—be merciful to me whose life has been so full of trouble."

Her voice broke down in a passion of tears. Edith turned from the door, put her arms around her neck and kissed her.

"Dear friend," she said; "dear Lady Helena, I pity *you* from the bottom of my heart. I wish—I wish I could only comfort you."

"You can," was the eager answer. "Stay with me, Edith; don't leave me alone. Be a daughter to me; take the place of the son I have lost."

But Edith's pale, resolute face did not soften.

"To-morrow we will settle all this," was her reply. "Wait until to-morrow."

Then she was gone—shut up and locked in her own room. She did not descend to either luncheon or dinner—one of the housemaids served her in her dressing-room. And Lady Helena, alone and miserable, wandered uneasily about the lower rooms, and wondered how she spent that long rainy day.

She spent it busily enough. The plain black box she had brought from New York, containing all her earthly belongings, she drew out and packed. It was not hard to do, since nothing went into it but what had belonged to

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her then. All the dresses, all the jewels, all the costly gifts that had been given her by the man she had married, and his friends, she left as they were. She kept nothing, not even her wedding-ring: she placed it among the rest, in the jewel casket, closed and locked it. Then she wrote a letter to Lady Helena, and placed the key inside. This is what she said:

* * * * *

“DEAR FRIEND: When you open this I shall have left Powyss Place forever. It will be quite useless to follow or endeavor to bring me back. My mind is made up. I recognize no authority—nothing will induce me to revoke my decision. I go out into the world to make my own way. With youth, and health, and ordinary intelligence, it ought not to be impossible. The things belonging to me when I first came here I have packed in the black box; in a week you will have the kindness to forward it to the Euston station. The rest I leave behind—retaining one or two books as souvenirs of *you*. I take nothing of Sir Victor Catheron's—not even his name. You must see that it is utterly impossible; that I must lose the last shred of pride and self-respect before I could assume his name or take a penny belonging to him. Dear, kind Lady Helena good-by. If we never meet again in the world, remember there is no thought in my heart of you that is not one of affection and gratitude. EDITH.”

* * * * *

Her hand never trembled as she wrote this letter. She placed the key in it, folded, sealed, and addressed it. It was dark by this time. As she knelt to cord and lock her trunk, she espied the writing-case within it. She hesitated a moment, then took it out, opened it, and drew forth the packet of Charley Stuart's letters. She took out the photograph and looked at it with a half-tender, half-sad smile.

“I never thought to look at you again,” she said softly. “You are all I have left now.”

She put the picture in her bosom, replaced the rest, and locked the trunk, and put the key in her purse. She sat down and counted her money. She was the possessor of twelve sovereigns—left over from Mr. Stuart, senior's, bounty. It was her whole stock of wealth with which to face and begin the world. Then she sat down resolutely to think it out. And the question rose grim before her, “What am I to do?”

“Go out into the world and work for your daily bread. Face the poverty you have feared so much, through fear of which, two days ago, you sold yourself. Go to London—it is the centre of the world; lose yourself, hide from all who ever knew you. Go to London. Work of some kind can surely be had by the willing in that mighty city. Go to London.”

That was the answer that came clearly. She shrank for a moment—the thought of facing life single-handed, poor and alone in that great, terrible, pitiless city, was overwhelming. But she did not flinch from her resolve; her mind was made up. Come woe, come weal, she would go to London.

An “A. B. C.” railway guide lay on the table—she consulted it. A train left Chester for London at eight o'clock, A. M. Neither Lady Helena nor any of her household was stirring at that hour. She could walk to Chesholm in the early morning, get a fly there and drive to the Chester station in time. By four in the afternoon she would be in London.

No thought of returning home ever recurred to her. Home! What home had she? Her step-mother was master and mistress in her father's house, and to return, to go back to Sandypoint, and the life she had left, was as utter an impossibility almost as though she should take a rope and hang herself. She had not the means to go if she had desired, but that made no difference. She could never go back, never see her father, or Charley, or Trixy more. Alone she must live, alone she must die.

The flood-gates were opened; she suffered this last night as women of her strong, self-contained temperament only suffer.

“Save me, O God! for the waters are come into my soul!” That was the wild, wordless prayer of her heart. Her life was wrecked, her heart was desolate; she must go forth a beggar and an outcast, and fight the bitter battle of life alone. And love, and home, and Charley might have been hers. “It might have been!” Is there any anguish in this world of anguish like that we work with our own hands?—any sorrow like that which we bring upon ourselves? In the darkness she sank down upon her knees, her face covered with her hands, tears, that were as dreadful as tears of blood, falling from her eyes. Lost—lost! all that made life worth having. To live and die alone, that was her fate!

So the black, wild night passed, hiding her, as miserable a woman as the wide earth held.

* * * * *

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The gray dawn of the dull October morning was creeping over the far-off Welsh hills as Edith in shawl and hat, closely veiled, and carrying a hand-bag, came softly down the stairs, and out of a side door, chiefly used by the servants. She met no one. Noiselessly she drew the bolt, opened the door, and looked out.

It was raw and cold, a dreary wind still blowing, but it had ceased to rain. As she stood there, seven struck from the turret clock. "One long, last, lingering look behind"—one last upward glance at Lady Helena's windows.

"Good-by!" the pale lips whispered; then she passed resolutely out into the melancholy autumn morning and was gone.

A TERRIBLE SECRET. A Novel.

PART III.

CHAPTER I. AT MADAME MIREBEAU'S, OXFORD STREET.

Half-past four of a delightful June afternoon, and two young ladies sit at two large, lace-draped windows, overlooking a fashionable Mayfair street, alternately glancing over the books they hold, and listlessly watching the passers-by. The house was one of those big black West-End houses, whose outward darkness and dismalness is in direct ratio to their inward brilliance and splendor. This particular room is lofty and long, luxurious with softest carpet, satin upholstery, pictures, flowers, and lace draperies. The two young ladies are, with the exception of their bonnets, in elegant carriage costume.

Young ladies, I have said; and being unmarried, they are young ladies, of course. One of them, however, is three-and-thirty, counting by actual years—the peerage gives it in cold blood. It is the Lady Gwendoline Drexel. Her companion is the Honorable Mary Howard, just nineteen, and just “out.”

Lady Gwendoline yawns drearily over her book—Algernon Swineburne's latest—and pulls out her watch impatiently every few minutes.

“What can keep Portia?” she exclaims, with irritation. “We should have been gone the last half-hour.”

The Honorable Mary looks up from her Parisian fashion-book, and glances from the window with a smile.

“Restrain your impatience, Gwendoline,” she answers. “Here comes Lady Portia now.”

A minute later the door is flung wide by a tall gentleman in plush, and Lady Portia Hampton sweeps in. She is a tall, slender lady, very like her sister: the same dully fair complexion, the same coiffure of copper-gold, the same light, inane blue eyes. The dull complexion wears at this moment an absolute flush; the light, lack-lustre eyes an absolute sparkle. There is something in her look as she sails forward, that makes them both look up expectantly from their books.

“Well?” Lady Gwendoline says.

“Gwen!” her sister exclaims—absolutely exclaims—“*whom* do you suppose I have met?”

“The Czarina of all the Russias, Pio Nino, Her Majesty back from Osborne, or the Man in the Moon, perhaps,” retorts Lady Gwendoline.

“Neither,” laughs Lady Portia. “Somebody a great deal more mysterious and interesting than any of them. You never will guess whom.”

“Being five o'clock of a sultry summer day, I don't intend to try. Tell us at once, Portia, and let us go.”

“Then—prepare to be surprised! Sir Victor Catheron!”

“Portia!”

“Ah! I thought the name would interest you. Sir Victor Catheron, my dear, alive and in the flesh, though, upon my word, at first sight I almost took him to be his own ghost. Look at her, Mary,” laughs her sister derisively. “I have managed to interest her after all, have I not?”

For Lady Gwendoline sat erect, her turquoise eyes open to their widest extent, a look akin to excitement in her apathetic face.

“But, Portia—Sir Victor! I thought it was an understood thing he did *not* come to England?”

“He does, it appears. I certainly had the honor and happiness of shaking hands with him not fifteen minutes ago. I was driving up St. James Street, and caught a glimpse of him on the steps of Fenton's Hotel. At first sight I could not credit my eyes. I had to look again to see whether it were a wraith or a mortal man. Such a pallid shadow of his former self. You used to think him rather handsome, Gwen—you should see him now! He has grown ten years older in as many months—his hair is absolutely streaked with gray, his eyes are sunken, his cheeks are hollow. He looks miserably, wretchedly out of health. If men ever do break their hearts,” said Lady Portia, going over to a large mirror and surveying herself, “then that misguided young man broke his on his wedding-day.”

“It serves him right,” said Lady Gwendoline, her pale eyes kindling. “I am almost glad to hear it.”

Her faded face wore a strangely sombre and vindictive look. Lady Portia, with her head on one side, set her bonnet—strings geometrically straight, and smiled maliciously.

“Ah, no doubt—perfectly natural, all things considered. And yet, even you might pity the poor fellow to-day, Gwendoline, if you saw him. Mary, dear, is all this Greek and Hebrew to you? You were in your Parisian

pensionnat, I remember, when it all happened. *You* don't know the romantic and mysterious story of Sir Victor Catheron, Bart."

"I never heard the name before, that I recall," answered Miss Howard.

"Then pine in ignorance no longer. This young hero, Sir Victor Catheron of Catheron Royals, Cheshire, is our next-door neighbor, down at home, and one year ago the handsome, happy, honored representative of one of the oldest families in the county. His income was large, his estates unincumbered, his manners charming, his morals unexceptionable, and half the young ladies in Cheshire"—with another malicious glance at her sister—"at daggers-drawn for him. There was the slight drawback of insanity in the family—his father died insane, and in his infancy his mother was murdered. But these were only trifling spots on the sun, not worth a second thought. Our young sultan had but to throw the handkerchief, and his obedient Circassians would have flown on the wings of love and joy to pick it up. I grow quite eloquent, don't I? In an evil hour, however, poor young Sir Victor—he was but twenty-three—went over to America. There, in New York, he fell in with a family named Stuart, common rich people, of course, as they all are over there. In the Stuart family there was a young person, a sort of cousin, a Miss Edith Darrell, very poor, kept by them out of charity; and, lamentable to relate, with this young person poor Sir Victor fell in love. Fell in love, my dear, in the most approved old-fashioned style—absurdly and insanely in love—brought the whole family over to Cheshire, proposed to little missy, and, as a matter of course, was eagerly accepted. She was an extremely pretty girl, that I will say for her"—with a third sidelong glance of malice at her *passee* sister—"and her manners, considering her station, or, rather, her entire lack of station, her poverty, and her nationality, were something quite extraordinary. I declare to you, she positively held her own with the best of us—except for a certain *brusquerie* and outspoken way about her, you might have thought her an English girl of our own class. He *would* marry her, and the wedding-day was fixed, and Gwendoline named as chief of the bridesmaids."

"It is fifteen minutes past five, Portia," the cold voice of Gwendoline broke in. "If we are to drive at all today—"

"Patience, Gwen! patience one moment longer! Mary must hear the whole story now. In the Stuart family, I forgot to mention, there was a young man, a cousin of the bride-elect, with whom—it was patent to the dullest apprehension—this young person was in love. She accepted Sir Victor, you understand, while this Mr. Stuart was her lover; a common case enough, and not worthy of mention except for what came after. His manners were rarely perfect too. He was, I think, without exception, the very handsomest and most fascinating man I ever met. You would never dream—never!—that he was an American. Gwendoline will tell you the same. The sister was thoroughly trans-Atlantic, talked slang, said 'I guess,' spoke with an accent, and looked you through and through with an American girl's broad stare. The father and mother were common, to a degree; but the son—well, Gwen and I both came very near losing our hearts to him—didn't we, dear?"

"Speak for yourself," was Gwen's ungracious answer. "And, oh! for pity's sake, Portia, cut it short!"

"Pray go on, Lady Portia!" said Miss Howard, looking interested.

"I am going on," said Lady Portia. "The nice part is to come. The Stuart family, a month or more before the wedding, left Cheshire and came up to London—why, we can only surmise—to keep the lovers apart. Immediately after their departure, the bride-elect was taken ill, and had to be carried off to Torquay for change of air and all that. The wedding-day was postponed until some time in October; but at last it came. She looked very beautiful, I must say, that morning, and perfectly self-possessed; but poor Sir Victor! He was ghastly. Whether even then he suspected something I do not know; he looked a picture of abject misery at the altar and the breakfast. Something was wrong; we all saw that; but no explanation took place there. The happy pair started on their wedding-journey down into Wales, and that was the last we ever saw of them. What followed, we know; but until to-day I have never set eyes on the bridegroom. The bride, I suppose, none of us will ever set eyes on more."

"Why?" the Honorable Mary asked.

"This, my dear: An hour after their arrival in Carnarvon, Sir Victor deserted his bride forever! What passed between them, what scene ensued, nobody knows, only this—he positively left her forever. That the handsome and fascinating American cousin had something to do with it, there can be no doubt. Sir Victor took the next train from Wales to London; she remained overnight. Next day she had the audacity to return to Powyss Place and present herself to his aunt, Lady Helena Powyss. She remained there one day and two nights. On the first night,

muffled and disguised, Sir Victor came down from town, had an interview with his aunt, no doubt told her all, and departed again without seeing the girl he had married. The bride next day had an interview with Lady Helena—her last—and next morning, before any one was stirring, stole out of the house like the guilty creature she was, and never was heard of more. The story, though they tried to hush it up, got in all the papers—'Romance in High Life,' they called it. Everybody talked of it—it was the nine-days' wonder of town and country. The actors in it, one by one, disappeared. Lady Helena shut up Powyss Place and went abroad; Sir Victor vanished from the world's ken; the heroine of the piece no doubt went back to her native land. That, in brief, is the story, my dear, of the interesting spectre I met to-day on the steps of Fenton's. Now, young ladies, put on your bonnets and come. I wish to call at Madame Mirebeau's, Oxford Street, before going to the park, and personally inspect my dress for the duchess' ball to-night."

Ten minutes later and the elegant barouche of Lady Portia Hampton was bowling along to Oxford Street.

"What did you say to Sir Victor, Portia?" her sister deigned to ask. "What did he say to you?"

"He said very little to me—the answers he gave were the most vague. I naturally inquired concerning his health first, he really looked so wretchedly broken down; and he said there was nothing the matter that he had been a little out of sorts lately, that was all. My conviction is," said Lady Portia, who, like the rest of her sex, and the world, put the worst possible construction on everything, "that he has become dissipated. Purple circles and hollow eyes always tell of late hours and hard drinking. I asked him next where he had been all those ages, and he answered briefly and gloomily, in one word, 'Abroad.' I asked him thirdly, where, and how was Lady Helena; he replied that Lady Helena was tolerably well, and at present in London. 'In London!' I exclaimed, in a shocked tone, 'my dear Sir Victor, and I not know it!' He explained that his aunt was living in the closest retirement, at the house of a friend in the neighborhood of St. John's Wood, and went nowhere. Then he lifted his hat, smiled horribly a ghastly smile, turned his back upon me, and walked away. Never asked for you, Gwendoline, or Colonel Hampton, or my health, or anything."

Lady Gwendoline did not reply. They had just entered Oxford Street, and amid the moving throng of well-dressed people on the pavement, her eye had singled out one figure—the figure of a tall, slender, fair-haired man.

"Portia!" she exclaimed, in a suppressed voice, "look there! Is not that Sir Victor Catheron now?"

"Where? Oh, I see. Positively it is, and—yes—he sees us. Tell John to draw up, Gwendoline. Now, Mary, you shall see a live hero of romance for once in your life. He shall take a seat, whether he likes it or not—My *dear* Sir Victor, what a happy second rencontre, and Gwendoline dying to see you. Pray let us take you up—oh, we will have no refusal. We have an unoccupied seat here, you see, and we all insist upon your occupying it. Miss Howard, let me present our nearest neighbor at home, and particular friend everywhere, Sir Victor Catheron. The Honorable Miss Howard, Sir Victor."

They had drawn up close to the curbstone. The gentleman had doffed his hat, and would have passed on, had he not been taken possession of in this summary manner. Lady Gwendoline's primrose-kidded hand was extended to him, Lady Gwendoline's smiling face beamed upon him from the most exquisite of Parisian bonnets. Miss Howard bowed and scanned him curiously. Lady Portia was not to be refused—he knew that of old. Of two bores, it was the lesser bore to yield than resist. Another instant, and the barouche was rolling away to Madame Mirebeau's, and Sir Victor Catheron was within it. He sat by Lady Gwendoline's side, and under the shadow of her rose-silk and point-lace parasol she could see for herself how shockingly he was changed. Her sister had not exaggerated. He was worn to a shadow; his fair hair was streaked with gray; his lips were set in a tense expression of suffering—either physical or mental—perhaps both. His blue eyes looked sunken and lustreless. It was scarcely to be believed that ten short months could have wrought such wreck. He talked little—his responses to their questions were monosyllabic. His eyes constantly wandered away from their faces to the passers-by. He had the look of a man ever on the alert, ever on the watch—waiting and watching for some one he could not see. Miss Howard had never seen him before, but from the depths of her heart she pitied him. Sorrow, such as rarely falls to the lot of man, had fallen to this man, she knew.

He was discouragingly absent and *distract*. It came out by chance that the chief part of the past ten months had been spent by him in America.

In America! The sisters exchanged glances. *She* was there, no doubt. Had they met? was the thought of both. They reached the fashionable modiste's.

“You will come in with us, Sir Victor,” Lady Portia commanded gayly. “We all have business here, but we will only detain you a moment.”

He gave her his arm to the shop. It was large and elegant, and three or four deferential shop-women came forward to wait upon them and place seats. The victimized baronet, still listless and bored, sat down to wait and escort them back to the carriage before taking his departure. To be exhibited in the park was the farthest possible from his intention.

Lady Portia's dress was displayed—a rose velvet, with point-lace trimmings—and found fault with, of course. Lady Gwendoline and the Hon. Mary transacted their affairs at a little distance. For her elder ladyship the train did not suit her, the bodice did not please her; she gave her orders for altering sharply and concisely. The deferential shop-girl listened and wrote the directions down on a card. When her patroness had finished she carried robe and card down the long room and called:

“Miss Stuart!”

A voice answered—only one word, “Yes,” softly spoken, but Sir Victor Catheron started as if he had been shot. The long show-room lay in semi-twilight—the gas not yet lit. In this twilight another girl advanced, took the rose-velvet robe and written card. The light flashed upon her figure and hair for one instant—then she disappeared.

And Sir Victor?

He sat like a man suddenly aroused from a deep, long sleep. He had not seen the face; he had caught but a glimpse of the figure and head; he had heard the voice speak but one little word, “Yes;” *but*—

Was he asleep or awake? Was it only a delusion, as so many other fancied resemblances had been, or was it after all—after all—

He rose to his feet, that dazed look of a sleep-walker, suddenly aroused, on his face.

“Now, then, Sir Victor,” the sharp, clear voice of Lady Portia said, at his side, “your martyrdom is ended. We are ready to go.”

He led her to the carriage, assisted her and the young ladies in. How he excused himself—what incoherent words he said—he never knew. He was only conscious after a minute that the carriage had rolled away, and that he was still standing, hat in hand, on the sidewalk in front of Madame Mirebeau's; that the passers-by were staring at him, and that he was alone.

“Mad!” Lady Portia said, shrugging her shoulders and touching her forehead. “Mad as a March hare!”

“Mad?” Miss Howard repeated softly. “No, I don't think so. Not mad, only very—very miserable.”

He replaced his hat and walked back to the shop-door. There reason, memory returned. What was he going in for? What should he say? He stood still suddenly, as though gazing at the wax women in elegant ball costume, swinging slowly and smirkingly round and round. He had heard a voice—he had seen a shapely head crowned with dark, silken hair—a tall, slender girl's figure—that was all. He had seen and heard such a hundred times since that fatal wedding evening, and when he had hunted them down, the illusion had vanished, and his lost love was as lost as ever. His lost Edith—his bride, his darling, the wife he had loved and left—for whom all those weary, endless months he had been searching and searching in vain. Was she living or dead? Was she in London—in England—*where*? He did not know—no one knew. Since that dark, cold autumn morning when she had fled from Powyss Place she had never been seen or heard of. She had kept her word—she had taken nothing that was his—not a farthing. Wherever she was, she might be starving to-day. He clenched his hands and teeth as he thought of it.

“Oh!” his passionate, despairing heart cried, “let me find her—let me save her, and—let me die!”

He had searched for her everywhere, by night and by day. Money flowed like water—all in vain. He went to New York—he found the people there he had once known, but none of them could tell him anything of her or the Stuarts. The Stuarts had failed, were utterly ruined—it was understood that Mr. Stuart was dead—of the others they knew nothing. He went to Sandypoint in search of her father. Mr. Darrell and his family had months ago sold out and gone West. He could find none of them; he gave it up at length and returned to England. Ten months had passed; many resemblances had beguiled him, but to-day Edith was as far off, as lost as ever.

The voice he had heard, the likeness he had seen, would they prove false and empty too, and leave his heart more bitter than ever? What he would do *when* he found her he did not consider. He only wanted to find her. His whole heart, and life, and soul were bound up in that.

He paced up and down in front of the shop; the day's work would be over presently and the work-women would come forth. Then he would see again this particular work-woman who had set his heart beating with a hope that turned him dizzy and sick. Six o'clock! seven o'clock! Would they never come? Yes; even as he thought it, half mad with impatience, the door opened, and nearly a dozen girls filed forth. He drew his hat over his eyes, he kept a little in the shadow and watched them one by one with wildly eager eyes as they appeared. Four, five, six, seven—she came at last, the eighth. The tall, slender figure, the waving, dark hair, he knew them at once. The gaslight fell full upon her as she drew her veil over her face and walked rapidly away. Not before he had seen it, not before he had recognized it—no shadow, no myth, no illusion this time. His wife—Edith.

He caught the wall for support. For a moment the pavement beneath his feet heaved, the starry sky spun round. Then he started up, steadied himself by a mighty effort, and hurried in pursuit.

She had gained upon him over thirty yards. She was always a rapid walker, and he was ailing and weak. His heart throbbed now, so thick and fast, that every breath was a pain. He did not gain upon her, he only kept her in sight. He would have known that quick, decided walk, the poise of the head and shoulders, anywhere. He followed her as fast as his strength and the throng of passers-by would let him, yet doing no more than keeping her well in sight.

Where Oxford Street nears Tottenham Court Road she suddenly diverged and crossed over, turning into the latter crowded thoroughfare. Still he followed. The throng was even more dense here than in Oxford Street, to keep her in sight more difficult. For nearly ten minutes he did it, then suddenly all strength left him. For a minute or two he felt as though he must fall. There was a spasm of the heart that was like a knife-thrust. He caught at a lamp-post. He beckoned a passing hansom by a sort of expiring effort. The cab whirled up beside him; he got in somehow, and fell back, blinded and dizzy, in the seat.

“Where to, sir?” Cabby called twice before he received an answer; then “Fenton's Hotel” came faintly to him from his ghostly looking fare. The little aperture at the top was slammed down and the hansom rattled off.

“Blessed if I don't think the young swell's drunk, or 'aving a fit,” thought the Cad, as he speeded his horse down Tottenham Court Road.

To look for her further in his present state, Sir Victor felt would be useless. He must get to his lodgings, get some brandy, and half-an-hour's time to think what to do next. He had found her; she was alive, she was well, thank Heaven! thank Heaven for that! To-morrow would find her again at Madame Mirebeau's at work with the rest.

At work—her daily toil! He covered his wasted face with his wasted hands, and tears that were like a woman's fell from him. He had been weak and worn out for a long time—he gave way utterly, body and mind, now.

“My darling,” he sobbed; “my darling whom I would die to make happy—whose life I have so utterly ruined. To think that while I spend wealth like water, *you* should toil for a crust of bread—alone, poor, friendless, in this great city. How will I answer to God and man for what I have done?”

CHAPTER II. EDITH.

The last light of the July day had faded out, and a hot, murky night settled down over London. The air was stifling in the city; out in the suburbs you still caught a breath, fresh and sweet scented, from the fragrant fields.

At Poplar Lodge, St. John's Wood, this murky, summer night all the windows stood wide. In the drawing-room two women sat together. The elder reading aloud, the younger busy over some feminine handicraft. A cluster of waxlights burned above them, shining full on two pale, worn faces—the faces of women to whom suffering and sorrow have long been household words. Both wore deepest mourning—the elder a widow's weeds, the hair of the younger thickly streaked with gray. Now and then both raised their eyes from a book and needlework, and glanced expectantly at the clock on the mantel. Evidently they waited for some one who did not come. They were Lady Helena Powyss and Inez Catheron, of course.

“Eight,” the elder woman said, laying down her book with a sigh as the clock struck. “If he were coming to-night he would be here before now.”

“I don't give him up even yet,” Inez answered cheerfully. “Young men are not to be depended on, and he has often come out much later than this. We are but dull company for him, poor boy—all the world are but dull company for him at present, since *she* is not of them. Poor boy! poor Victor! it is very hard on him.”

“I begin to think Edith will never be found,” said Lady Helena with a sigh.

“My dear aunt, I don't. No one is ever lost, utterly, in these days. She will be found, believe me, unless—”

“Well?”

“Unless she is dead.”

“She is not dead,” affirmed Lady Helena; “of that I am sure. You didn't know her, Inez, or you wouldn't think it; the most superb specimen of youth and strength and handsome health I ever saw in my life. She told me once she never remembered a sick day since she was born—you had but to look into her bright eyes and clear complexion to be sure of it. She is not dead, in the natural course of things, and she isn't one of the kind that ever take their lives in their own hands. She had too much courage and too much common-sense.”

“Perhaps so, and yet suffering tells—look at poor Victor.”

“Ah, poor Victor indeed! But the case is different—it was only her pride, not her heart, that bled. He loved her—he loves her with a blind, unreasoning passion that it is a misfortune for any human creature to feel for another. And she never cared for him—not as much as you do for the sewing in your hand. That is what breaks my heart—to see him dying before my eyes for love of a girl who has no feeling for him but hatred and contempt.”

Inez sighed.

“It is natural,” she said. “Think how she was left—in her very bridal hour, without one word of explanation. Who could forgive it?”

“No one, perhaps; it is not for that I feel indignant with her. It is for her ever accepting him at all. She loved her cousin—he would have married her; and for title and wealth she threw him over and accepted Victor. In that way she deserved her fate. She acted heartlessly; and yet, one can't help pitying her too. I believe she would have done her best to make him a good wife, after all. I wish—I wish he could find her.”

“She might be found readily enough,” Inez answered, “if Victor would but employ the usual means—I allude, of course, to the detective police. But he won't set a detective on her track if she is never found—he persists in looking for her himself. He is wearing his life out in the search. If ever I saw death pictured on any face, I saw it in his when he was here last. If he would but consult that German doctor who is now in London, and who is so skilful in all diseases of the heart—hark!” she broke off suddenly, “here he is at last.”

Far off a gate had opened and shut—no one had a key to that ever-locked outer gate but Sir Victor, and the next moment the roll of his night-cab up the drive was heard. The house door opened, his familiar step ascended the stairs, not heavy and dragging as usual, but swift and light, almost as it used to be. Something had happened! They saw it in his face at the first glance. There was but one thing that *could* happen. Lady Helena dropped her book, Inez started to her feet; neither spoke, both waited breathless.

“Aunt! cousin!” the young man cried, breathless and hoarse, “she is found!”

There was a cry from his aunt. As he spoke he dropped, panting and exhausted with his speed, into a chair and laid his hand upon his breast to still its heavy, suffocating throbs.

"Found!" exclaimed Lady Helena; "where—when—how?"

"Wait, aunt," the voice of Inez said gently; "give him time. Don't you see he can scarcely pant? Not a word yet Victor—let me fetch you a glass of wine."

She brought it and he drank it. His face was quite ghastly, livid, bluish rings encircling his mouth and eyes. He certainly looked desperately ill, and more fitted for a sick-bed than a breathless night ride from St. James Street to St. John's Wood. He lay back in his chair, closed his eyes, struggled with his panting breath. They sat and waited in silence, far more concerned for him than for the news he bore.

He told them at last, slowly, painfully, of his chance meeting with Lady Portia Hampton, of his enforced visit to the Oxford Street dress-maker—of his glimpse of the tall girl with the dark hair—of his waiting, of his seeing, and recognizing Edith, his following her, and of his sudden giddy faintness that obliged him to give up the chase.

"You'll think me an awful muff," he said; "I haven't an idea how I came to be such a mollicodde, but I give you my word I fainted dead away like a school-girl when I got to my room. I suppose it was partly this confounded palpitation of the heart, and partly the shock of the great surprise and joy. Jamison brought me all right somehow, after awhile, and then I came here. I had to do something, or I believe I should have gone clear out of my senses."

Then there was a pause. The two women looked at each other, then at him, his eager eyes, his excited, wild-looking, haggard face.

"Well," he cried impatiently, "have you nothing to say? Is it nothing to you that after all these months—months—great Heavens! it seems centuries. But I have found her at last—toiling for her living, while we—oh! I can't think of it—I dare not; it drives me mad!"

He sprang up and began pacing to and fro, looking quite as much like a madman as a sane one.

"Be quiet, Victor," his aunt said. "It is madness indeed for you to excite yourself in this way. Of course we rejoice in all that makes you happy. She is found—Heaven be praised for it!—she is alive and well—thank Heaven also for that. And now—what next?"

"What next?" He paused and looked at her in astonishment "You ask what next? What next can there be, except to go the first thing to-morrow morning and take her away."

"Take her away!" Lady Helena repeated, setting her lips; "take her *where*, Victor? To you?"

His ghastly face turned a shade ghastlier. He caught his breath and grasped the back of the chair as though a spasm of unendurable agony had pierced his heart. In an instant his aunt's arms were about him, tears streaming down her cheeks, her imploring eyes lifted to his:

"Forgive me, Victor, forgive me! I ought not to have asked you that. But I did not mean—I know *that* can never be, my poor boy. I will do whatever you say. I will go to her, of course—I will fetch her here if she will come."

"If she will come!" he repeated hoarsely, disengaging himself from her; "what do you mean by *if*? There can be no 'if' in the matter. She is my wife—she is Lady Catheron—do you think she is to be left penniless and alone drudging for the bread she eats? I tell you, you *must* bring her; she *must* come!"

His passionate, suppressed excitement terrified her. In pain and fear and helplessness she looked at her niece. Inez, with that steady self-possession that is born of long and great endurance, came to the rescue at once.

"Sit down, Victor!" her full, firm tones said, "and don't work yourself up to this pitch of nervous excitement. It's folly—useless folly, and its end will be prostration and a sick-bed. About your wife, Aunt Helena will do what she can, but—what can she do? You have no authority over her now; in leaving her you resigned it. It is unutterably painful to speak of this, but under the circumstances we must. She refused with scorn everything you offered her before; unless these ten past months have greatly altered her, she will refuse again. She seems to have been a very proud, high-spirited girl, but her hard struggle with the world may have beaten down that—and—"

"Don't!" he cried passionately; "I can't bear it. O my God! to think what I have done—what I have been forced to do! what I have made her suffer—what she must think of me—and that I live to bear it! To think I have endured it all, when a pistol-ball would have ended my torments any day!"

"When you talk such wicked folly as that," said Inez Catheron, her strong, steady eyes fixed upon his face, "I have no more to say. You did your duty once: you acted like a hero, like a martyr—it seems a pity to spoil it all by

such cowardly rant as this."

"My duty!" he exclaimed, huskily "Was it my duty? Sometimes I doubt it; sometimes I think if I had never left her, all might have been well. Was it my duty to make my life a hell on earth, to tear my heart from my bosom, as I did in the hour I left her, to spoil her life for her, to bring shame, reproach, and poverty upon her? If I had not left her, could the worst that might have happened been any worse than that?"

"Much, worse—ininitely worse. You are the sufferer, believe me, not she. What is all she has undergone in comparison with what *you* have endured? And one day she will know all, and love and honor you as you deserve."

He hid his face in his hands, and turned away from the light.

"One day," they heard him murmur; "one day—the day of my death. Pray Heaven it may be soon."

"I think," Inez said after a pause, "you had better let *me* go and speak instead of Aunt Helena. She has undergone so much—she isn't able, believe me, Victor, to undergo more. Let me go to your wife; all Aunt Helena can say, all she can urge, I will. If it be in human power to bring her back, I will bring her. All I dare tell her, I will tell. But, after all, it is so little, and she is so proud. Don't hope too much."

"It is so little," he murmured again, his face still hidden; "so little, and there is so much to tell. Oh!" he broke forth, with a passionate cry, "I can't bear this much longer. If she will come for nothing else, she will come for the truth, and the truth shall be told. What are a thousand promises to the living or the dead to the knowledge that she hates and scorns me!"

They said nothing to him—they knew it was useless—they knew his paroxysm would pass, as so many others had passed, and that by to-morrow he would be the last to wish to tell.

"You will surely not think of returning to St. James Street to-night?" said Inez by way of diversion. "You will remain here, and at the earliest possible hour to-morrow you will drive me to Oxford Street. I will do all I can—you believe that, my cousin, I know. And if—if I am successful, will"—she paused and looked at him—"will you meet her, Victor?"

"I don't know yet; my head is in a whirl. To-night I feel as though I could do anything, brave anything—to-morrow I suppose I will feel differently. Don't ask me what I will do to-morrow until to-morrow comes. I will remain all night, and I will go to my room at once; I feel dazed and half sick. Good-night."

He left them abruptly. They heard him toil wearily up to his room and lock the door. Long after, the two women sat together talking with pale, apprehensive faces.

"She won't come—I am as sure of it as that I sit here," were Lady Helena's parting words as they separated for the night. "I know her better than he does, and I am not carried away by his wild hopes. She will not come."

Sir Victor descended to breakfast, looking unutterably pallid and haggard in the morning light. Well he might; he had not slept for one moment.

But he was more composed, calm, and quiet, and there was almost as little hope in his heart as in Lady Helena's. Immediately after breakfast, Miss Catheron, closely veiled, entered the cab with him, and was driven to Oxford Street. It was a very silent drive; she was glad when it was over, and he set her down near the shop of Madame Mirebeau.

"I will wait here," he said. "If she will come with you, you will take a cab and drive back to Poplar Lodge. If she does not—" he had to pause a moment—"then return to me, and I will take you home."

She bent her head in assent, and entered the shop. Her own heart was beating at the thought of the coming interview and its probable ending. She advanced to the counter, and, without raising her veil, inquired if Miss Stuart were come.

The girl looked inquisitively at the hidden face, and answered:

"Yes, Miss Stuart had come."

"I wish to see her particularly, and in private, for a few moments. Can you manage it for me?"

She slipped a sovereign into the shopwoman's hand. There was a second curious look at the tall, veiled lady, but the sovereign was accepted. A side door opened, and she was shown into an empty room.

"You can wait here, ma'am," the girl said. "I'll send her to you."

Miss Catheron walked over to the window; that nervous heart beat quicker than ever. When had she been nervous before? The window overlooked busy, bright Oxford Street, and in the distance she saw the waiting cab and her cousin's solitary figure. The sight gave her courage. For his sake, poor fellow, she would do all human

power could do.

“You wish to see me, madame?”

A clear, soft voice spoke. The door had quietly opened and a young girl entered.

Inez Catheron turned round, and for the second time in her life looked in the face of her cousin's wife.

Yes, it was his wife. The face she had seen under the trees of Powyss Place she saw again to-day in the London milliner's parlor. The same darkly handsome, quietly resolute young face, the same gravely beautiful eyes, the same slender, graceful figure, the same silky waves of blackish-brown hair. To her eyes there was no change; she had grown neither thinner nor paler; she had lost none of the beauty and grace that had won away Sir Victor Catheron's heart. She was very plainly dressed in dark gray of some cheap material, but fitting perfectly; linen bands at neck and throat, and a knot of cherry ribbon. And the slim finger wore no wedding-ring. She took it all in, in three seconds; then she advanced.

“I wished to see you. We are not likely to be disturbed?”

“We are likely to be disturbed at any moment. It is the room where Madame Mirebeau tries on the dresses of her customers; and my time is very limited.”

The dark, grave eyes were fixed upon the close veil expectantly. Inez Catheron threw it back.

“Edith!” she said—and at the sound of her name the girl recoiled—“you don't know me, but I think you will know my name. I am Inez Catheron.”

She recoiled a step farther, her dark face paling and growing set—her large eyes seeming to darken and dilate—her lips setting themselves in a tense line. “*Well?*” was all she said.

Inez stretched out her hands with an imploring gesture, drawing near as the other retreated.

“Oh, Edith, you know why I have come! you know who has sent me. You know *what* I have come for.”

The dark, deep eyes met hers, full, cold, hard, and bright as diamonds.

“I don't in the least know what you have come for. I haven't an idea who can have sent you. I know who you are. You are Sir Victor Catheron's cousin.”

Without falter or flinch she spoke his name—with a face of stone she waited for the answer. If any hope had lingered in the breast of Inez it died out as she looked at her now.

“Yes,” she said sadly; “I am Victor Catheron's cousin, and there could be but one to send me here—Victor Catheron himself.”

“And why has Sir Victor Catheron given you that trouble?”

“Oh, Edith!” again that imploring gesture, “let me call you so—need you ask? All these months he has been searching for you, losing health and rest in the fruitless quest—wearing himself to a very shadow looking for you. He has been to New York, he has hunted London—it has brought him almost to the verge of death, this long, vain, miserable search.”

Her perfect lips curled scornfully, her eyes shot forth gleams of contempt, but her voice was very quiet.

“And again I ask why—why has Sir Victor Catheron given himself all this unnecessary trouble?”

“Unnecessary! You call it that! A husband's search for a lost wife.”

“Stop, Miss Catheron!” she lifted her hand, and her eyes flashed. “You make a mistake. Sir Victor Catheron's wife I am not—never will be. The ceremony we went through, ten months ago, down in Cheshire, means nothing, since a bridegroom who deserts his bride on her wedding-day, resigns all right to the name and authority of husband. Mind, I don't regret it now; I would not have it otherwise if I could. And this is not bravado, Miss Catheron; I mean it. In the hour I married your cousin he was no more to me than one of his own footmen—I say it to my own shame and lasting dishonor; and I thank Heaven most sincerely now, that whether he were mad or sane, that he deserted me as he did. At last I am free—not bound for life to a man that by this time I might have grown to loathe. For I think my indifference then would have grown to hate. Now I simply scorn him in a degree less than I scorn myself. I never wish to hear his name—but I also would not go an inch out of my way to avoid him. He is simply nothing to me—nothing. If I were dead and in my grave, I could not be one whit more lost to him than I am. Why he has presumed to search for me is beyond my comprehension. How he has had the audacity to hunt me down, and send you here, surpasses belief. I wonder you came, Miss Catheron! As you have come, let me give you this word of advice: make your first visit your last. Don't come again to see me—don't let Sir Victor Catheron dog my steps or in any way interfere with me. I never was a very good or patient sort of person—I have not become more so of late. I am only a girl, alone and poor, but,” her eyes flashed fire—literally fire—and her

hands clenched, "I warn him—it will not be safe!"

Inez drew back. What she had expected she hardly knew—certainly not this.

"As I said before," Edith went on, "my time is limited. Madame does not allow her working-girls to receive visitors in working hours. Miss Catheron, I have the honor to wish you good-morning."

"Stay!" Inez cried, "for the love of Heaven. Oh, what shall I say, how shall I soften her? Edith, you don't understand. I wish—I wish I dared tell you the secret that took Victor from your side that day! He loves you—no, that is too poor a word to express what he feels; his life is paying the penalty of his loss. He is dying, Edith, dying of heart disease, brought on by what he has suffered in losing you. In his dying hour he will tell you all; and his one prayer is for death, that he may tell you, that you may cease to wrong and hate him as you do. O Edith, listen to me—pity me—pity him who is dying for you! Don't be so hard. See, I kneel to you!—as you hope for mercy in your own dying hour, Edith Catheron, have mercy on him!"

She flung herself on her knees, tears pouring over her face, and held up her clasped hands.

"For pity's sake, Edith—for your own sake. Don't harden your heart; try and believe, though you may not understand. I tell you he loves you—that he is a dying man. We are all sinners; as you hope for pity and mercy, have pity and mercy on him now." With her hand on the door, with Inez Catheron clinging to her dress, she paused, moved, distressed, softened in spite of herself.

"Get up, Miss Catheron," she said, "you must not kneel to me. What is it you want? what is it you ask me to do?"

"I ask you to give up this life of toil—to come home with me. Lady Helena awaits you. Make your home with her and with me—take the name and wealth that are yours, and wait—try to wait patiently to the end. For Victor—poor, heart-broken boy!—you will not have long to wait."

Her voice broke—her sobs filled the room. The distressed look was still on Edith's face, but it was as resolute as ever.

"What you ask is impossible," she said; "utterly and absolutely impossible. What you say about your cousin may be true. I don't understand—I never could read riddles—but it does not alter my determination in the least. What! live on the bounty of a man who deserts me on my wedding-day—who makes me an outcast—an object of scorn and disgrace! I would die first! I would face starvation and death in this great city. I know what I am saying. I would sweep a crossing like that beggar in rags yonder; I would lie down and die in a ditch sooner. Let me go, Miss Catheron, I beg of you; you only distress me unnecessarily. If you pleaded forever it could not avail. Give my love to Lady Helena; but I will never go back—I will never accept a farthing from Sir Victor Catheron. Don't come here more—don't let *him* come." Again her eyes gleamed. "There is neither sorrow nor pity for him in my heart. It is like a stone where he is concerned, and always will be—always, though he lay dying before me. Now, farewell."

Then the door opened and closed, and she was gone.

CHAPTER III. HOW THEY MET.

Miss Stuart went back to the workroom, and to the dozen or more young women there assembled. If she was a shade paler than her wont they were not likely to notice it—if she was more silent even than usual, why silence was always Miss Stuart's forte. Only the young person to whom Miss Catheron had given the sovereign looked at her curiously, and said point blank:

“I say, Miss Stuart, who was that? what did she want?” And the dark, haughty eyes of Miss Stuart had lifted from the peach satin on which she worked, and fixed themselves icily upon her interrogator:

“It was a lady I never saw before,” she answered frigidly. “What she wanted is certainly no business of yours, Miss Hatton.”

Miss Hatton flounced off with a muttered reply; but there was that about Edith that saved her from open insult—a dignity and distance they none of them could overreach. Besides, she was a favorite with madame and the forewoman. So silently industrious, so tastefully neat, so perfectly trustworthy in her work. Her companions disliked and distrusted her; she held herself aloof from them all; she had something on her mind—there was an air of mystery about her; they doubted her being an English girl at all. She would have none of their companionship; if she had a secret she kept it well; in their noisy, busy midst she was as much alone as though she were on Robinson Crusoe's desert island. Outwardly those ten months had changed her little—her brilliant, dusk beauty was scarcely dimmed—inwardly it had changed her greatly, and hardly for the better.

There had been a long and bitter struggle before she found herself in this safe haven. For months she had drifted about without rudder, or compass, or pilot, on the dark, turbid sea of London. She had come to the great city friendless and alone, with very little money, and very little knowledge of city life. She had found lodgings easily enough, cheap and clean, and had at once set about searching for work. On the way up she had decided what she must do—she would become a nursery governess or companion to some elderly lady, or she would teach music. But it was one thing to resolve, another to do. There were dozens of nursery governesses and companions to old ladies wanting in the columns of the *Times*, but they were not for her. “Where are your references?” was the terrible question that met her at every turn. She had no references, and the doors of the genteel second and third-rate houses shut quietly in her face.

Young and pretty, without references, money or friends, how was she ever to succeed? If she had been thirty and pock-marked she might have triumphed even over the reference business: as it was, her case seemed hopeless. It was long, however, before her indomitable spirit would yield. Her money ran low, she pawned several articles of jewelry and dress to pay for food and lodging. She grew wan and hollow-eyed in this terrible time—all her life long she could never recall it without a shudder.

Five months passed; despair, black and awful, filled her soul at last. The choice seemed to lie between going out as an ordinary servant and starving. Even as a housemaid she would want this not-to-be-got-over reference. In this darkest-hour before the dawn she saw Madame Mirebeau's advertisement for sewing girls, and in sheer despair applied. Tall, handsome girls of good address, were just what madame required, and somehow—it was the mercy of the good God no doubt—she was taken. For weeks after she was kept under close surveillance, she was so very unlike the young women who filled such situations—then the conviction became certainty that Miss Stuart had no sinister designs on the ruby velvets, the snowy satins, and priceless laces of her aristocratic customers—that she really wanted work and was thoroughly capable of doing it. Nature had made Edith an artist in dressmaking; her taste was excellent; madame became convinced she had found a treasure. Only one thing Miss Stuart steadfastly refused to do—that was to wait in the shop. “I have reasons of my own for keeping perfectly quiet,” she said, looking madame unflinchingly in the eyes. “If I stay in the shop I may—though it is not likely—be recognized; and then I should be under the necessity of leaving you immediately.”

Madame had no wish to lose her very best seamstress, so Miss Stuart had her way. The sentimental Frenchwoman's own idea was that Miss Stuart was a young person of rank and position, who owing to some ill-starred love affair had been obliged to run away and hide herself from her friends. However as her hopeless passion in no way interfered with her dressmaking ability, madame kept her suspicions to herself and retained her in the workroom.

And so after weary months of pain, and shame, and despair, Edith had come safely to land at last. For the past five months her life had flowed along smoothly, dully, uneventfully—going to her work in the morning, returning to her lodgings at night—sometimes indulging in a short walk in the summer twilight after her tea; at other times too wearied out in body and mind to do other than lie down on the little hard bed, and sleep the spent sleep of exhaustion. That was her outer life; of her inner life what shall I say? She could hardly have told in the after-days herself. Somehow strength is given us to bear all things and live on. Of the man she had married she could not, dare not think—her heart and soul filled with such dark and deadly hatred. She abhorred him,—it is not too much to say that. The packet of treasured letters written in New York so long—oh, so long ago! it seemed—became the one spot of sunshine in her sunless life. She read them until the words lost all meaning—until she knew every one by heart. She looked at the picture until the half-smiling eyes and lips seemed to mock her as she gazed. The little turquoise brooch with the likeness, she wore in her bosom night and day—the first thing to be kissed in the morning, the last at night. Wrong, wrong, wrong, you say; but the girl was desperate and reckless—she did not care. Right and wrong were all confounded in her warped mind; only this was clear—she loved Charley as she had never loved him before she became Sir Victor Catheron's bride. He scorned and despised her; she would never look upon his face again—it did not matter; she would go to her grave loving him, his pictured face over her heart, his name the last upon her lips.

Sometimes, sitting alone in the dingy London twilight, there rose before her a vision of what might have been: Charley, poor as he was now, and she Charley's wife, he working for her, somewhere and somehow, as she knew he gladly would, she keeping their two or three tiny rooms in order, and waiting, with her best dress on, as evening came, to hear his step at the door. She would think until thought became torture, until thought became actual physical pain. His words, spoken to her that last night she had ever spent at Sandypoint, came back to her full of bitter meaning now: "Whatever the future brings, don't blame *me*." The future had brought loneliness, and poverty, and despair—all her own fault—her own fault. That was the bitterest sting of all—it was her own work from first to last. She had dreaded poverty, she had bartered her heart, her life, and him in her dread of it, and lo! such poverty as she had never dreamed of had come upon her. If she had only been true to herself and her own heart, what a happy creature she might have been to-day.

But these times of torture were mercifully rare. Her heart seemed numb—she worked too hard to think much—at night she was too dead tired to spend the hours in fruitless anguish and tears. Her life went on in a sort of treadmill existence; and until the coming of Inez Catheron nothing had occurred to disturb it.

Her heart was full of bitter tumult and revolt as she went back to her work. The dastard! how dared he! He was dying, Inez Catheron had said, and for love of her. Bah! she could have laughed in her bitter scorn,—what a mockery it was! If it were true, why let him die! The sooner the better—then indeed she would be free. Perhaps Edith had lost something—heart, conscience—in the pain and shame of the past. All that was soft and forgiving in her nature seemed wholly to have died out. He had wronged her beyond all reparation—the only reparation he could make was to die and leave her free.

Madame's young women were detained half an hour later than usual that evening. A great Belgravian ball came off next night, and there was a glut of work. They got away at last, half fagged to death, only to find a dull drizzling rain falling, and the murky darkness of early night settling down over the gas-lit highways of London. Miss Stuart bade her companions a brief good-night, raised her umbrella, and hurried on her way. She did not observe the waiting figure, muffled from the rain and hidden by an umbrella, that had been watching for her, and who instantly followed her steps. She hurried on rapidly and came at last to a part of the street where it was necessary she should cross. She paused an instant on the curbstone irresolute. Cabs, omnibuses and hansoms were tearing by in numbers innumerable. It was a perilous passage. She waited two or three minutes, but there was no lull in the rush. Then growing quite desperate in her impatience she started to cross. The crossing was slippery and wet.

"I say! look out there, will you!" half a dozen shrill cabbies called, before and behind.

She grew bewildered—her presence of mind deserted her—she dropped her umbrella and held up her hands instinctively to keep them off. As she did so, two arms grasped her, she felt herself absolutely lifted off her feet, and carried over. But just as the curbstone was reached, something—a carriage pole it appeared—struck her rescuer on the head, and felled him to the ground. As he fell, Edith sprang lightly out of his arms, and stood on the pavement, unhurt.

The man had fallen. It was all the driver of the hansom could do to keep his horse from going over him. There was shouting and yelling and an uproar directly. A crowd surrounded the prostrate man. X 2001 came up with his baton and authority. For Edith, she stood stunned and bewildered still. She saw the man lifted and carried into a chemist's near by. Instinctively she followed—it was in saving *her* he had come to grief. She saw him placed in a chair, the mire and blood washed off his face, and then—was she stunned and stupefied still—or was it, *was* it the face of Sir Victor Catheron?

It was—awfully bloodless, awfully corpse-like, awfully like the face of a dead man; but the face of the man whose bride she had been ten months ago—the face of Sir Victor Catheron.

She leaned heavily against the counter, feeling giddy and sick—the place swimming around her. Was he dead? Had he met his death trying to save her? “Blessed if I don't think he's dead and done for,” said the chemist. “It ain't such a bad cut neither. I say! does anybody know who he is?”

Nobody knew. Then the keen eyes of X 2001 fell upon Edith, pale and wild-looking, with evident terror and recognition in her face.

“I say, miss, *you* know, don't you?” Bobby suggested politely. “It was reskying you he got it, you know. You know this 'ere gent, don't you, miss! Who is he?”

“He is Sir Victor Catheron.”

“Oh,” said Bobby. “Sir Victor Catheron, is he? I thought he was a heavy swell.” And then his eyes took in Edith's very handsome face, and very plain dress, and evident station, and he formed his own surmise. “Perhaps now, miss, you knows too, where he ought to be took?”

“No,” she answered mechanically; “I don't know. If you search his pockets, you will most likely find his address. You—you, don't really think he is dead?”

She came a step nearer as she asked the question—her very lips colorless. An hour ago it seemed to her she had almost wished for his death—now it seemed too horrible. And to meet it saving her too,—after all her thoughts of him. She felt as though she could never bear that.

“Well, no, miss, I don't think he is dead,” the chemist answered, “though I must say he looks uncommon like it. There's something more the matter with him than this rap on the 'ead. Here's his card—case—now let's see: 'Sir Victor Catheron, Bart. Fenton's 'Otel.' Fenton's 'Otel. Bobby, I say, let's horder a cab and 'ave him driven there.”

“Somebody ought to go with him,” said X 2001. “I can't go—*you* can't go. I don't suppose now, miss,” looking very doubtfully at Edith, “*you* could go nuther?”

“Is it necessary?” Edith asked, with very visible reluctance.

“Well, you see, miss, he looks uncommonly like a stiff 'un this minute, and if he was to die by the way or hanythink, and him halone—”

“I will go,” interposed Edith, turning away with a sick shudder. “Call the cab at once.”

A four-wheeler was summoned—the insensible young baronet was carried out and laid, as comfortably as might be, on the back seat. Edith followed, unutterably against her will, but how was she to help it? He was her worst enemy, but even to one's worst enemy common humanity at times must be shown. It would be brutal to let him go alone.

“Don't you be afraid, miss,” the chemist said cheerfully; “he ain't dead *yet*. He's only stunned like, and will come round all right directly.”

“Fenton's, Bill,” and the cab rattled off.

CHAPTER IV. HOW THEY PARTED

That ride—all her life it came back to her like a bad nightmare. She kept her eyes turned away as much as she could from that rigid form and ghastly face opposite, but in spite of herself they would wander back. What Miss Catheron had said was true then—he was dying—death was pictured in his face. What if, after all, there was some secret strong enough to make his conduct in leaving her right? She had thought it over and wondered and wondered, until her brain was dazed, but could never hit on any solution. She could not now—it was *not* right. Whatever the secret was, he had known it before he married her—why had he not left her then—why in leaving her after had he not explained? There was no excuse for him, none, and in spite of the white, worn face that pleaded for him, her heart hardened once more—hardened until she felt neither pity nor pain.

They reached the hotel. Jamison, the valet, came down, and recoiled at sight of his master's long lost wife.

“My lady!” he faltered, staring as though he had seen a ghost.

“Your master has met with an accident, Jamison,” Edith said calmly, ignoring the title. How oddly it sounded to her. “You had better have him conveyed to his room and send for a surgeon. And, if Lady Helena is in town—”

“Lady Helena is in town, my lady. Will—” Jamison hesitated, “will you not come in, my lady, and wait until her ladyship comes?”

Again for a moment Edith hesitated and thought. It would be necessary for some one to explain—she could not go away either without knowing whether the injury he had received were fatal or not, since that injury was received in her service. She set her lips and alighted.

“I will remain until Lady Helena arrives. Pray lose no time in sending for her.”

“I will send immediately, my lady,” answered Jamison respectfully. “Thompson,” to a waiter, “show this lady to a parlor at once.”

And then Edith found herself following a gentlemanly sort of man in black, down a long hall, up a great staircase, along a carpeted corridor, and into an elegant private parlor. The man lit the gas and went, and then she was alone.

She sat down to think. What a strange adventure it had been. She had wished for her freedom—it seemed as though it were near at hand. She shuddered and shrank from herself.

“What a wretch I am,” she thought; “what a vile creature I must be. If he dies, I shall feel as though I murdered him.”

How long the hours and half hours, told off on the clock, seemed—eight, nine, ten,—would Lady Helena never come? It was a long way to St. John's Wood, but she might surely be here by this time. It was half past ten, and tired out thinking, tired out with her day's work, she had fallen into a sort of uneasy sleep and fitful dream in her chair when she suddenly became half conscious of some one near her. She had been dreaming of Sandypoint, of quarrelling with her cousin. “Don't Charley!” she said petulantly, aloud, and the sound of her own voice awoke her fully. She started up, bewildered for a second, and found herself face to face with Lady Helena. With Lady Helena, looking very pale and sorrowful, with tear-wet eyes and cheeks.

She had been watching Edith for the past five minutes silently and sadly. The girl's dream was pleasant, a half smile parted her lips. Then she had moved restlessly. “Don't Charley?” she said distinctly and awoke.

It was of him then she was dreaming—thoughts of him had brought to her lips that happy smile. The heart of the elder woman contracted with a sharp sense of pain.

“Lady Helena!”

“Edith!”

She took the girl's hand in both her own and looked kindly at her. She had liked her very much in the days gone by, though she had never wished her nephew to marry her. And she could hardly blame her very greatly under the circumstances, if her dreams were of the man she loved, not of the bridegroom who had left her.

“I—I think I fell asleep,” Edith said confusedly; “I was very tired, and it all seemed so quiet and tedious here. How is *he*?”

“Better and asleep—they gave him an opiate. He knows nothing of your being here. It was very good of you to come, my child.”

"It was nothing more than a duty of common humanity. It was impossible to avoid coming," Edith answered, and then briefly and rather coldly she narrated how the accident had taken place.

"My poor boy!" was all Lady Helena said, but there was a heart sob in every word; "he would die gladly to save you a moment's pain, and yet it has been his bitter lot to inflict the worst pain of your life. My poor child, you can't understand, and we can't explain—it must seem very hard and incomprehensible to you, but one day you will know all, and you will do him justice at last. Ah, Edith! if you had not refused Inez—if only you were not so proud, if you would take what is your right and your due, he *might* bear this separation until Heaven's good time. As it is, it is killing him."

"He looks very ill," Edith said; "what is the matter with him?"

"Heart disease—brought on by mental suffering. No words can tell what he has undergone since his most miserable wedding-day. It is known only to Heaven and himself but it has taken his life. As surely as ever human heart broke, his broke on the day he left you. And you, my poor child—you have suffered too."

"Of that we will not speak," the girl answered proudly; "what is done, is done. For me, I hope the worst is over—I am safe and well, and in good health as you see. I am glad Sir Victor Catheron has not met his death in my service. I have only one wish regarding him, and that is that he will keep away from me. And now, Lady Helena, before it grows any later, I will go home."

"Go home! At this hour? Most certainly you will not. You will remain here all night. Oh, Edith, you must indeed. A room has been prepared for you, adjoining mine. Inez and Jamison will remain with Victor until morning, and—you ought to see him before you go."

She shrank in a sort of horror.

"No, no, no! *that* I cannot! As it is so late I will remain, but see him—no, no! Not even for your sake, Lady Helena, can I do that."

"We will wait until to-morrow comes," was Lady Helena's response; "now you shall go to your room at once."

She rang the bell, a chambermaid came. Lady Helena kissed the girl's pale cheek affectionately, and Edith was led away to the room she was to occupy for that night.

It was certainly a contrast in its size and luxurious appointments to that she had used for the last ten months. She smiled a little as she glanced around. And she was to spend the night under the same roof with Sir Victor Catheron. If anyone had predicted it this morning, how scornfully she would have refused to believe.

"Who can tell what a day may bring forth!" was Edith's last thought as she laid her head on her pillow. "I am glad—very glad, that the accident will not prove fatal. I don't want him or anyone else to come to his death through me."

She slept well and soundly, and awoke late. She sprang out of bed almost instantly and dressed. She could but ill afford to lose a day. Before her toilet was quite completed there was a tap at the door. She opened it and saw Miss Catheron.

"I fancied you would be up early, and ordered breakfast accordingly. Aunt Helena awaits you down stairs. How did you sleep?"

"Very well. And you—you were up all night I suppose?"

"Yes. I don't mind it at all, though—I am quite used to night watching. And I have the reward of knowing Victor is much better—entirely out of danger indeed. Edith," she laid her hands on the girl's shoulders and looked down into her eyes, "he knows you are here. Will you be merciful to a dying man and see him?"

She changed color and shrank a little, but she answered proudly and coldly:

"No good can come of it. It will be much better not, but for my own part I care little. If he wishes to urge what you came to urge, I warn you, I will not listen to a word; I will leave at once."

"He will not urge it. He knows how obdurate you are, how fruitless it would be. Ah, Edith! you are a terribly haughty, self-willed girl. He will not detain you a moment—he wishes to make but one parting request."

"I can grant nothing—nothing," Edith said with agitation.

"You will grant this, I think," the other answered sadly. "Come, dear child, let us go down; Lady Helena waits."

They descended to breakfast; Edith ate little. In spite of herself, in spite of her pride and self command, it shook her a little—the thought of speaking to *him*.

A TERRIBLE SECRET. A Novel.

But how was she to refuse? She rose at last, very pale, very stern and resolute looking—the sooner it was over and she was gone, the better.

“Now,” she said, “if you insist—”

“I do insist,” answered Inez steadily. “Come.”

She led her to a door down the corridor and rapped. How horribly thick and fast Edith's heart beat; she hated herself for it. The door opened, and the grave, professional face of Mr. Jamison looked out.

“Tell Sir Victor, Lady Catheron is here, and will see him.”

The man bowed and departed. Another instant and he was again before them:

“Sir Victor begs my lady to enter at once.”

Then Inez Catheron took her in her arms and kissed her. It was her farewell. She pointed forward and hurried away.

Edith went on. A door and curtain separated her from the inner room. She opened one, lifted the other, and husband and wife were face to face.

He lay upon a low sofa—the room was partially darkened, but even in that semi-darkness she could see that he looked quite as ghastly and bloodless this morning as he had last night.

She paused about half way down the room and spoke: “You wished to see me, Sir Victor Catheron?”

Cold and calm the formal words fell.

“Edith!”

His answer was a cry—a cry wrung from a soul full of love and anguish untold. It struck home, even to *her* heart, steeled against him and all feeling of pity.

“I am sorry to see you so ill. I am glad your accident is no worse.” Again she spoke, stiff, formal, commonplace words, that sounded horribly out of place, even to herself.

“Edith,” he repeated, and again no words can tell the pathos, the despair of that cry, “forgive me—have pity on me. You hate me, and I deserve your hate, but oh! if you knew, even you would have mercy and relent!”

He touched her in spite of herself. Even a heart of stone might have softened at the sound of that despairing, heart-wrung voice—at sight of that death-like, tortured face. And Edith's, whatever she might say or think, was not a heart of stone.

“I do pity you,” she said very gently; “I never thought to—but from my soul I do. But, forgive you! No, Sir Victor Catheron; I am only mortal. I have been wronged and humiliated as no girl was ever wronged and humiliated before. I can't do that.”

He covered his face with his hands—she could hear the dry sobbing sound of his wordless misery.

“It would have been better if I had not come here,” she said still gently. “You are ill, and this excitement will make you worse. But they insisted upon it—they said you had a request to make. I think you had better not make it—I can grant nothing—nothing.”

“You will grant this,” he answered, lifting his face and using the words Inez had used; “it is only that when I am dying, and send for you on my death-bed, you will come to me. Before I die I must tell you all—the terrible secret; I dare not tell you in life; and then, oh surely, surely you will pity and forgive! Edith, my love, my darling, leave me this one hope, give me this one promise before you go?”

“I promise to come,” was her answer; “I promise to listen—I can promise no more. A week ago I thought I would have died sooner than pledge myself to that much—sooner than look in your face, or speak to you one word. And now, Sir Victor Catheron, farewell.”

She turned to go without waiting for his reply. As she opened the door, she heard a wailing cry that struck chill with pity and terror to her inmost heart.

“Oh, my love! my bride! my wife!”—then the door closed behind her—she heard and saw no more.

So they had met and parted, and only death could bring them together again.

She passed out into the sunshine and splendor of the summer morning, dazed and cold, her whole soul full of untold compassion for the man she had left.

CHAPTER V. THE TELLING OF THE SECRET.

Edith went back to the work-room in Oxford Street, to the old treadmill life of ceaseless sewing, and once more a lull came into her disturbed existence—the lull preceding the last ending of this strange mystery that had wrecked two lives. It seemed to her as she sat down among madame's troop of noisy, chattering girls, as though last night and its events were a long way off and a figment of some strange dream. That she had stood face to face with Sir Victor Catheron, spent a night under the same roof, actually spoken to him, actually felt sorry for him, was too unreal to be true. They had said rightly when they told her death was pictured on his face. Whatever this secret of his might be, it was a secret that had cost him his life. A hundred times a day that pallid, tortured face, rose before her, that last agonized cry of a strong heart in strong agony rang in her ears. All her hatred, all her revengeful thoughts of him were gone—she understood no better than before, but she pitied him from the depths of her heart.

They disturbed her no more, neither by letters nor visits. Only as the weeks went by she noticed *this*—that as surely as evening came, a shadowy figure hovering aloof, followed her home. She knew who it was—at first she felt inclined to resent it, but as he never came near, never spoke, only followed her from that safe distance, she grew reconciled and accustomed to it at last. She understood his motive—to shield her—to protect her from danger and insult, thinking himself unobserved.

Once or twice she caught a fleeting glimpse of his face on these occasions.

What a corpse-like face it was—how utterly weak and worn-out he seemed—more fitted for a sick-bed than the role of protector. “Poor fellow,” Edith thought often, her heart growing very gentle with pity and wonder, “how he loves me, how faithful he is after all. Oh, I wonder—I wonder, *what* this secret is that took him from me a year ago. Will his mountain turn into a mole-hill when I hear it, if I ever do, or will it justify him? Is he sane or mad? And yet Lady Helena, who is in her right mind, surely, holds him justified in what he has done.”

July—August passed—the middle of September came. All this time, whatever the weather, she never once missed her “shadow” from his post. As we grow accustomed to all things, she grew accustomed to this watchful care, grew to look for him when the day's work was done. But in the middle of September she missed him. Evening after evening came, and she returned home unfollowed and alone. Something had happened.

Yes, something had happened. He had never really held up his head after that second parting with Edith. For days he had lain prostrate, so near to death that they thought death surely must come. But by the end of a week he was better—as much better at least as he ever would be in this world.

“Victor,” his aunt would cry out, “I wish—I *wish* you would consult a physician about this affection of the heart. I am frightened for you—it is not like anything else. There is this famous German—do go to see him to please me.”

“To please you, my dear aunt—my good, patient nurse—I would do much,” her nephew was wont to answer with a smile. “Believe me your fears are groundless, however. Death takes the hopeful and happy, and passes by such wretches as I am. It all comes of weakness of body and depression of mind; there's nothing serious the matter. If I get worse, you may depend upon it, I'll go and consult Herr Von Werter.”

Then it was that he began his nightly duty—the one joy left in his joyless life. Lady Helena and Inez returned to St. John's Wood. And Sir Victor, from his lodgings in Fenton's Hotel, followed his wife home every evening. It was his first thought when he arose in the morning, the one hope that upheld him all the long, weary, aimless day—the one wild delight that was like a spasm, half pain, half joy—when the dusk fell to see her slender figure come forth, to follow his darling, himself unseen, as he fancied, to her humble home. To watch near it, to look up at her lighted windows with eyes full of such love and longing as no words can ever picture, and then, shivering in the rising night wind, to hail a hansom and go home—to live only in the thought of another meeting on the morrow.

Whatever the weather, it has been said, he went. On many occasions he returned drenched through, with chattering teeth and livid lips. Then would follow long, fever-tossed, sleepless nights, and a morning of utter prostration, mental and physical.

But come what might, while he was able to stand, he must return to his post—to his wife.

A TERRIBLE SECRET. A Novel.

But Nature, defied long, claimed her penalty at last. There came a day when Sir Victor could rise from his bed no more, when the heart spasms, in their anguish, grew even more than his resolute will could bear. A day when in dire alarm Lady Helena and Inez were once more summoned by faithful Jamison, and when at last—at last the infallible German doctor was sent for.

The interview between physician and patient was long and strictly private. When Herr Von Werter went away at last his phlegmatic Teuton face was set with an unwonted expression of pity and pain. After an interval of almost unendurable suspense, Lady Helena was sent for by her nephew, to be told the result. He lay upon a low sofa, wheeled near the window. The last light of the September day streamed in and fell full upon his face—perhaps that was what glorified it and gave it such a radiant look. A faint smile lingered on his lips, his eyes had a far-off, dreamy look, and were fixed on the rosy evening sky. A strange, unearthly, exalted look altogether, that made his aunt's heart sink like stone.

“Well?” She said it in a tense sort of whisper, longing for, yet dreading, the reply. He turned to her, that smile still on his lips, still in his eyes. He had not looked so well for months. He took her hand.

“Aunt,” he said, “you have heard of doomed men sentenced to death receiving their reprieve at the last hour? I think I know to-day how those men must feel. My reprieve has come.”

“Victor!” It was a gasp. “Dr. Von Werter says you will recover!”

His eyes turned from her to that radiant brightness in the September sky.

“It is aneurism of the heart. Dr. Von Werter says I won't live three weeks.”

* * * * *

They were down in Cheshire. They had taken him home while there was yet time, by slow and easy stages. They took him to Catheron Royals—it was his wish, and they lived but to gratify his wishes now.

The grand old house was as it had been left a year ago—fitted up resplendently for a bride—a bride who had never come. There was one particular room to which he desired to be taken, a spacious and sumptuous chamber, all purple and gilding, and there they laid him upon the bed, from which he would never rise.

It was the close of September now, the days golden and mellow, beautiful with the rich beauty of early autumn, before decay has come. He had grown rapidly worse since that memorable interview with the German doctor, and paralysis, that “death in life” was preceding the fatal footsteps of aneurism of the heart. His lower limbs were paralyzed. The end was very near now. On the last day of September Herr Von Werter paid his last visit.

“It's of no use, madame,” he said to Lady Helena; “I can do nothing—nothing whatever. He won't last the week out.”

The young baronet turned his serene eyes, serene at last with the awful serenity that precedes the end. He had heard the fiat not intended for his ears.

“You are sure of this, doctor? *Sure*, mind! I won't last the week out?”

“It is impossible, Sir Victor. I always tell my patients the truth. Your disease is beyond the reach of all earthly skill. The end may come at any moment—in no case can you survive the week.”

His serene face did not change. He turned to his aunt with a smile that was often on his lips now:

“At last,” he said softly; “at last my darling may come to me—at last I may tell her all. Thank God for this hour of release. Aunt Helena, send for Edith at once.”

By the night train, a few hours later, Inez Catheron went up to London. As Madame Mirebeau's young women assembled next morning, she was there before them, waiting to see Miss Stuart.

Edith came—a foreknowledge of the truth in her mind. The interview was brief. She left at once in company with Miss Catheron, and Madame Mirebeau's establishment was to know her no more.

As the short, autumnal day closed in, they were in Cheshire.

It was the evening of the second of October—the anniversary of the bridal eve. And thus at last the bride was coming home. She looked out with eyes that saw nothing of the familiar landscape as it flitted by—the places she had never thought to see more. She was going to Catheron Royals, to the man she had married a year ago. A year ago! what a strange, terrible year it had been—like a bad dream. She shuddered as she recalled it. All was to be told at last, and death was to set all things even. The bride was returning to the bridegroom like this.

All the way from the station to the great house she never spoke a word. Her heart beat with a dull, heavy pain—pity for him—dread of what she was to hear. It was quite dark when they rolled through the lofty gates, up

the broad, tree-shaded drive, to the grand portico entrance of the house.

"He is very low this evening, miss," Jamison whispered as he admitted them; "feverish and longing for her ladyship's coming. He begs that as soon as my lady is rested and has had some refreshment she will come to him at once."

Lady Helena met them at the head of the stairs, and took the pale, tired girl in her arms for a moment. Then Edith was in a firelit, waxlit room, lying back for a minute's rest in the downy depths of a great chair. Then coffee and a dainty repast was brought her. She bathed her face and hands, and tried to eat and drink. But the food seemed to choke her. She drank the strong, black coffee eagerly, and was ready to go.

Lady Helena led her to the room where he lay—that purple and gold chamber, with all its dainty and luxurious appointments. She shrank a little as she entered—she remembered it was to have been *their* room when they returned from their bridal tour. Lady Helena just opened the door to admit her, closed it again, and was gone.

She was alone with the dying man. By the dim light of two wax tapers she beheld him propped up with pillows, his white, eager face turned toward her, the love, that not death itself could for a moment vanquish, shining upon her from his eyes. She was over kneeling by the bedside, holding his hands in hers—how, she could never have told.

"I am sorry—I am sorry!" It was all she could say. In that hour, in the presence of death, she forgot everything, her wrongs, her humiliation. She only knew that he was dying, and that he loved her as she would never be loved again in this world.

"It is better as it is," she heard him saying, when she could hear at all, for the dull, rushing sound in her ears; "far better—far better. My life was torture—could never have been anything else, though I lived fifty years. I was so young—life looked so long, that there were times, yes, Edith, times when for hours I sat debating within myself a suicide's cowardly end. But Heaven has saved me from that. Death has mercifully come of itself to set all things straight, and oh, my darling! to bring *you*."

She laid her face upon his wasted hand, nearer loving him in his death than she had ever been in his life.

"You have suffered," he said tenderly, looking at her. "I thought to shield you from every care, to make your life one long dream of pleasure and happiness, and see how I have done it! You have hated me—scorned me, and with justice; how could it be otherwise? Even when you hear all, you may not be able to forgive me, and yet, Heaven knows, I did it all for the best. If it were all to come over again, I could not act otherwise than as I have acted. But, my darling, it was very hard on you."

In death as in life his thoughts were not of himself and his own sufferings, but of her. As she looked at him, as she recalled what he had been only a year ago, in the flush and vigor and prime of manhood—it seemed almost too much to bear.

"Oh, Victor! hush," she cried, hiding her face again, "you break my heart!"

His feeble fingers closed over hers with all their dying strength—that faint, happy smile came over his lips. "I don't want to distress you," he said very gently; "you have suffered enough without that. Edith, I feel wonderfully happy to—night—it seems to me I have no wish left—as though I were sure of your forgiveness beforehand. It is joy enough to see you here—to feel your hand in mine once more, to know I am at liberty to tell you the truth at last. I have longed for this hour with a longing I can never describe. Only to be forgiven and die—I wanted no more. For what would life have been without you? My dearest, I wonder if in the dark days that are gone, whatever you may have doubted, my honor, my sanity, if you ever doubted my love for you?"

"I don't know," she answered, in a stifled voice. "My thoughts have been very dark—very desperate. There were times when there seemed no light on earth, no hope in Heaven. I dare not tell you—I dare not think—how wicked and reckless my heart has been."

"Poor child!" he said, with a touch of infinite compassion. "You were so young—it was all so sudden, so terrible, so incomprehensible. Draw up that hassock, Edith, and sit here by my side, and listen. No, you must let go my hand. How can I tell whether you will not shrink from it and me with horror when you know all."

Without a word, she drew the low seat close to the bed, and shading her face with her hand, listened, motionless as a statue, to the brief story of the secret that had held them apart so long.

"It all begins," Sir Victor's faint, low voice said, "with the night of my father's death, three weeks before our wedding-day. That night I learned the secret of my mother's murder, and learned to pity my unhappy father as I had never pitied him before. Do you remember, Edith, the words you spoke to Lady Helena the day before you

ran away from Powyss Place? You said Inez Catheron was not the murderer, though she had been accused of it, nor Juan Catheron, though he had been suspected of it—that you believed Sir Victor Catheron had killed his own wife. Edith, you were right. Sir Victor Catheron murdered his own wife!

“I learned it that fatal night. Lady Helena and Inez had known it all along. Juan Catheron more than suspected it. Bad as he was, he kept that secret. My mother was stabbed by my father's hand.

“Why did he do it? you ask. I answer, because he was mad—mad for weeks before. And he knew it, though no one else did. With the cunning of insanity he kept his secret, not even his wife suspected that his reason was unsound. He was a monomaniac. Insanity, as you have heard, is hereditary in our family, in different phases; the phase it took with him was homicidal mania. On all other points he was sane—on this, almost from the first, he had been insane—the *desire to take his wife's life*.

“It is horrible, is it not—almost incredibly horrible? It is true, nevertheless. Before the honeymoon was ended, his homicidal mania developed itself—an almost insurmountable desire, whenever he was alone in her presence, to take her life. Out of the very depth and intensity of his passion for her his madness arose. He loved her with the whole strength of his heart and being, and—the mad longing was with him always, to end her life while she was all his own—in short, to kill her.

“He could not help it; he knew his madness—he shrank in horror from it—he battled with it—he prayed for help—and for over a year he controlled himself. But it was always there—always. How long it might have lain dormant—how long he would have been able to withstand his mad desire, no one can tell. But Juan Catheron came and claimed her as his wife, and jealousy finished what a dreadful hereditary insanity had begun.

“On that fatal evening he had seen them together somewhere in the grounds, and though he hid what he felt, the sight had goaded him almost to frenzy. Then came the summons from Lady Helena to go to Powyss Place. He set out, but before he had gone half-way, the demon of jealousy whispered in his ear, 'Your wife is with Juan Catheron now—go back and surprise them.' He turned and went back—a madman—the last glimpse of reason and self-control gone. He saw his wife, not with Juan Catheron, but peacefully and innocently asleep by the open window of the room where he had left her. The dagger, used as a paper knife, lay on the table near. I say he was utterly mad for the time. In a moment the knife was up to the hilt in her heart, dealing death with that one strong blow! He drew it out and—she lay dead before him.

“Then a great, an awful horror, fell upon him. Not of the consequence of his crime; only of that which lay so still and white before him. He turned like the madman he was and fled. By some strange chance he met no one. In passing through the gates he flung the dagger among the fern, leaped on his horse, and was gone.

“He rode straight to Powyss Place. Before he reached it some of insanity's cunning returned to him. He must not let people know *he* had done it; they would find out he was mad; they would shut him up in a madhouse; they would shrink from him in loathing and horror. How he managed it, he told me with his dying breath, he never knew—he did somehow. No one suspected him, only Inez Catheron, returning to the nursery, had seen all—had seen the deadly blow struck, had seen his instant flight, and stood spell-bound, speechless and motionless as a stone. He remembered no more—the dark night of oblivion and total insanity closed about him only to open at briefest intervals from that to the hour of his death.

“That, Edith, was the awful story I was told that night—the story that has ruined and wrecked my whole life and yours. I listened to it all as you sit and listen now, still as a stone, frozen with a horror too intense for words. I can recall as clearly now as the moment I heard them the last words he ever spoke to me:

“I tell you this partly because I am dying, and I think you ought to know, partly because I want to warn you. They tell me you are about to be married. Victor, beware what you do. The dreadful taint is in your blood as it was in mine—you love her as I loved the wife I murdered. Again I say take care—take care! Be warned by me; my fate may be yours, your mother's fate hers. It is my wish, I would say command, if I dared, that you never marry; that you let the name and the curse die out; that no more sons may be born to hear the ghastly story I have told you.'

“I could listen to no more, I rushed from the room, from the house, out into the darkness and the rain, as if the curse he spoke of had already come upon me—as though I were already going mad. How long I remained, what I did, I don't know. Soul and body seemed in a whirl. The next thing I knew was my aunt summoning me into the house. My most miserable father was dead.

“Then came the funeral. I would not, *could not* think. I drove the last warning he had spoken out of my mind.

I clenched my teeth—I swore that I would *not* give you up. Not for the raving of a thousand madmen, not for the warning of a thousand dying fathers. From that hour I was a changed man—from that hour my doom was sealed.

“I returned to Powyss Place, but not as I had left. I was a haunted man. By day and night—all night long, all day through, the awful warning pursued me. ‘My fate may be yours—your mother’s fate *hers!*’ It was my destiny, there was no escape; my mother’s doom would be yours; on our wedding—day I was fated to kill you! It was written. Nothing could avert it.

“I don’t know whether the family taint was always latent within me, or that it was continual brooding on what I had heard, but the fate certainly befell me. My father’s homicidal mania became mine. Edith, I felt it, felt the dreadful whisper in my ear, the awful desire stirring in my heart, to lift my hand and take your life! Often and often have I fled from your presence when I felt the temptation growing stronger than I could withstand.

“And yet I would not give you up; that is where I can never forgive myself. I could not tell you; I could not draw back then. I hoped against hope; it seemed like tearing body and soul asunder, the thought of losing you. ‘Come what may,’ I cried, in my anguish, ‘she shall be my wife!’

“Our wedding—day came; the day that should have been the most blessed of my life, that was the most miserable. All the night before, all that morning, the demon within me had been, battling for the victory. I could not exorcise it; it stood between us at the altar. Then came our silent, strange wedding—journey. I wonder sometimes, as I looked at you, so still, so pale, so beautiful, what you must think. I dare not look at you often, I dare not speak to you, dare not think of you. I felt if I did I should lose all control of myself, and slay you there and then.

“I wonder, as you sit and listen there, my love, my bride, whether it is pity or loathing that fills your heart. And yet I deserved pity; what I suffered no tongue can ever tell. I knew myself mad, knew that sooner or later my madness would be stronger than myself, and then it came upon me so forcibly when we reached Carnarvon, that I fled from you again and went wandering away by myself, where, I knew not. ‘Sooner or later you will kill her;’ that thought alone filled me; ‘it is as certain as that you live and stand here. You will kill this girl who trusts you and who has married you, who does not dream she has married a demon athirst for her blood.’

“I went wild then. I fell down on my knees in the wet grass, and held up my hands to the sky. ‘O God!’ I cried out in despair, ‘show me what to do. Don’t let me kill my darling. Strike me dead where I kneel sooner than that!’ And with the words the bitterness of death seemed to pass, and great calm fell. In that calm a voice spoke clearly, and said:

“Leave her! Leave your bride while there is yet time. It is the only way. Leave her! She does not love you—she will not care. Better that you should break your heart and die, than that you should harm a hair of her head.’

“I heard it as plainly, Edith, as I hear my own voice speaking now. I rose—my resolution taken—a great, unutterable peace filling my heart. In my exalted state it seemed easy—I alone would be the sufferer, not you—I would go.

“I went back. The first sight I saw was you, my darling, sitting by the open window, fast asleep. Fast asleep, as my mother had been that dreadful night. If anything had been wanting to confirm my resolution, that would have done it. I wrote the note of farewell; I came in and kissed your dear hands, and went away from you forever. O love! it seemed easy then, but my heart broke in that hour. I could not live without you; thank Heaven! the sacrifice is not asked. I have told you all—it lay between two things—I must leave you, or in my madness kill you. Edith, it would have happened. You have heard my story—you know all—the dreadful secret that has held us asunder. It is for you to say whether I can be forgiven or not.”

She had all the time been sitting, her face hidden in her hands, never stirring or speaking. Now she arose and fell once more on her knees beside him, tears pouring from her eyes. She drew his head into her arms, she stooped down, and, for the first time in her life, kissed again and again the lips of the man she had married.

“Forgive you!” she said. “O my husband, my martyr! It is I who must be forgiven! *You* are an angel, not a man!”

CHAPTER VI. THE LAST ENDING OF THE TRAGEDY.

An hour later, when Lady Helena softly opened the door and came in, she found them still so, his weak head resting in her arms as she knelt, her bowed face hidden, her falling tears hardly yet dried. One look into his radiant eyes, into the unspeakable joy and peace of his face, told her the story. All had been revealed, all had been forgiven. On the anniversary of their most melancholy wedding-day husband and wife were reunited at last.

There was no need of words. She stooped over and silently kissed both.

"It is growing late, Edith," she said gently, "and you must be tired after your journey. You will go up to your room now. I will watch with Victor to-night."

But Edith only drew him closer, and looked up with dark, imploring eyes.

"No," she said, "no, no! I will never leave him again. I am not in the least tired, Lady Helena; I will stay and share your watch."

"But, my dear—"

"O Lady Helena—*aunt*—don't you see—I must do something—make reparation in some way. What a wretch—what a wretch I have been. Oh, why did I not know all sooner? Victor, why did I not know *you*? To remember what my thoughts of you have been, and all the time—all the time—it was for me. If you die I shall feel as though I were your murderess."

Her voice choked in a tearless sob. She had hated him—loathed him—almost wished, in her wickedness, for his death, and all the time he was yielding up his life in his love for her.

"You will let me stay with you, Victor?" she pleaded almost passionately; "don't ask me to go. We have been parted long enough; let me be with you until—" again her voice choked and died away.

With a great effort he lifted one of her hands to his lips—that radiant smile of great joy on his face.

"She talks *almost* as if she loved me," he said.

"Love you! O Victor!—husband—if I had only known, if I had only known!"

"If you had known," he repeated, looking at her with wistful eyes. "Edith, if you really had known—if I had dared to tell you all I have told you to-night, would you not have shrunk from me in fear and horror, as a monster who pretended to love you and yet longed for your life? Sane on all other points—how would you have comprehended my strange madness on that? It is gone now—thank God—in my weakness and dying hour, and there is nothing but the love left. But my own, if I had told you, if you had known, would you not have feared and left me?"

She looked at him with brave, steadfast, shining eyes.

"If I had known," she answered, "how your father killed your mother, how his madness was yours, I would have pitied you with all my heart, and out of that pity I would have loved you. I would never have left you—never. I could never have feared you, Victor; and this I know—what you dreaded never would have come to pass. I am as sure of it as that I kneel here. You would never have lifted your hand against my life."

"You think so?" Still with that wistful, earnest gaze.

"I *know* so—I feel it—I am sure of it. You could not have done it—I should never have been afraid of it, and in time your delusion would have worn entirely away. You are naturally superstitious and excitable—morbid, even; the dreadful excitement of your father's story and warning, were too much for you to bear alone. That is all. If you could have told me—if I could have laughed at your hypochondrical terrors, your cure would have been half effected. No, Victor, I say it again—I would never have left you, and you would never have harmed a hair of my head."

Her tone of resolute, conviction seemed to bring conviction even to him. The sad, wistful light deepened in his blue eyes.

"Then it has all been in vain," he said very sadly; "the suffering and the sacrifice—all these miserable months of separation and pain."

Again Lady Helena advanced and interposed, this time with authority.

"It won't do," she said; "Edith you *must* go. All this talking and excitement may end fatally. If you won't leave him he won't sleep a wink to-night; and if he passes a sleepless night who is to answer for the consequences? For

his sake you must go. Victor tell her to go—she will obey you.”

She looked at him beseechingly, but he saw that Lady Helena was right, and that Edith herself needed rest. It was easy to make one more sacrifice now, and send her away.

“I am afraid Aunt Helena is right,” he said faintly. “I must confess to feeling exhausted, and I know you need a night's sleep, so that I may have you with me all day to-morrow. For a few hours, dear love, let me send you away.”

She rose at once with a parting caress, and made him comfortable among his pillows.

“Good-night,” she whispered. “Try to sleep, and be strong to talk to me to-morrow. Oh!” she breathed as she turned away, “if the elixir of life were only not a fable—if the days of miracles were not past, if he only might be restored to us, how happy we all could be!”

Lady Helena heard her, and shook her head.

“It is too late for that,” she said; “when suffering is prolonged beyond a certain point there is but one remedy—death. If your miracle could take place and he be restored, he has undergone too much ever to live on and be happy and forget. There can only be one ending to such a year as he has passed, and that ending is very near.”

Edith went to her room—one of the exquisite suite that had been prepared for her a year before. She was occupying it at last, but how differently from what she had ever thought. She remembered this night twelve months so well, the strange vigil in which she had spent in taking her farewell of those letters and that picture, and waiting for her wedding-day to dawn.

To-night she slept, deeply and soundly, and awoke to find the October sun shining brightly in. Was he still alive? It was her first thought. Death might have come at any moment. She arose—slipped on a dressing gown, and rang the bell.

It was Inez who answered in person.

“I heard your bell,” she said as she kissed her good-morning, “and I knew what you wanted. Yes, he is still alive, but very weak and helpless this morning. The excitement and joy of last night were almost too much for him. And he remembers what anniversary this is.”

Edith turned away—some of the bitterness, some of the pain of loss she knew he was enduring filling her own heart.

“If I had only known! if I had only known!” was again her cry.

“If you had—if he had told—I believe with you all would have been well. But it is too late to think of that—he believed differently. The terrible secret of the father has wrought its terrible retribution upon the son. If he had told you when he returned from Poplar Lodge, you would have been happy together to-day. You are so strong—your mind so healthful—some of your strength and courage would have been imparted to him. But it is too late now—all is over—we have only to make him happy while he is left with us.”

“Too late! too late!” Edith's heart echoed desolately. In those hours of his death she was nearer loving her husband than perhaps she could ever have been had he lived.

“I will send breakfast up here,” said Inez, turning to go; “when you have breakfasted, go to him at once. He is awake and waiting for you.”

Edith made her toilet. Breakfast came; and, despite remorse and grief, when one is nineteen one can eat. Then she hurried away to the sick-room.

He was lying much as she had left him, propped up among the pillows—his face whiter than the linen and lace, whiter than snow. By daylight she saw fully the ghastly change in him—saw that his fair hair was thickly strewn with gray, that the awful, indiscribable change that goes before was already on his face. His breathing was labored and panting—he had suffered intensely with spasms of the heart all night, sleeping none at all. This morning the paroxysms of pain had passed, but he lay utterly worn and exhausted, the cold damp of infinite misery on his brow, the chill of death already on hands and limbs. He lay before her, the total wreck of the gallant, hopeful, handsome gentleman, whom only one year ago she had married.

But the familiar smile she knew so well was on his lips and in his eyes as he saw her. She could not speak for a moment as she looked at him—in silence she took her place close by his side.

He was the first to break the silence, in a voice so faint as hardly to be more than a whisper. “How had she slept—how did she feel? She looked pale, he thought—surely she was not ill?”

A TERRIBLE SECRET. A Novel.

"I?" she said bitterly. "O, no—I am never ill—nothing ever seems to hurt hard heartless people like me. It is the good and the generous who suffer. I have the happy knack of making all who love me miserable, but my own health never fails. I don't dare to ask you what sort of night you have had—I see it in your face. My coming brings, as it always does, more ill than good."

"No," he said, almost with energy; "a hundred times no! Ah, love! your coming has made me the happiest man on earth. I seem to have nothing left to wish for now. As to the night—the spasms *did* trouble me, but I feel deliciously easy and at rest this morning, and uncommonly happy. Edith, I talked so much last evening I gave *you* no chance. I want you to tell me now all about the year that has gone—all about yourself."

"There is so little to tell," she responded; "it was really humdrum and uneventful. Nothing much happened to me; I looked for work and got it. Oh, don't be distressed! it was easy, pleasant work enough, and I was much better busy. I begin to believe plenty of hard work is a real blessing to dissatisfied, restless people—you can't be very miserable when you are very busy—you haven't time for luxuries. I got along very well, and never was ill an hour."

"But, tell me," he persisted; "you don't know how I long to hear. Tell, me all about your life after—after—"

"Hush!" she interposed, holding his hands tight. "You were the sufferer, not I. O my poor boy! I never was half worthy such a heart as yours. I am only beginning to realize how selfish, and cruel and hard I have been. But, with Heaven's help, I will try and be different from this day."

She told him the story of her life, from the time of her flight from Powyss Place to the present, glossing over all that was dark, making the most of all that was bright. But he understood her—he knew how her pride had suffered and bled.

"I never thought of your going away," he said sadly. "I might have known you better, but I did not—I was so sure you would have stayed, if not with Lady Helena, then in some safe shelter; that you would have taken what was justly yours. I was stunned when I first heard of your flight. I searched for you everywhere—in America and all. Did you know I went to America, Edith?"

"Inez told me," she answered faintly.

"I could not find your father—I could not find the Stuarts. I must have been very stupid somehow—I could find no one. Then arrived that day when I saw you in the Oxford Street shop, when I tried to follow you home and could not. What an evening it was! Then came my last desperate hope when I sent Inez to you and failed. It seemed almost hardest to bear of all."

"If I had only known—if I had only known!" was still her cry.

"Yes, the trouble lay there. With your pride you could not act otherwise than as you did. For you are very proud, my darling," with a smile. "Do you know it?"

"Very proud—very heartless—very selfish," she answered brokenly. "Oh, no need to tell me how base I have been!"

"Yet, I think I like you the better for your pride; and I foresee—yes, I foresee, that one day you will be a happy woman, with as noble, and loving, and generous a heart as ever beat. I understand you, it seems to me now, better than you understand yourself. One day—it may be years from now—the happiness of your life will come to you. Don't let pride stand between you and it then, Edith. I hope that day may come—I pray for it. Lying in my grave, love, I think I shall rest easier if I know *you* are happy on earth."

"Don't! don't!" she said; "I cannot bear it! Your goodness breaks my heart."

"There is one thing I must ask, Edith," he resumed after a pause; "a last favor. You will grant it, will you not?"

"Victor! is there anything I would *not* grant?"

"It is this, then—that when I am gone, you will take what is your right and your due. This you must promise me; no more false pride—the widow of Sir Victor Catheron must take what is hers. Juan Catheron is married to a Creole lady, and living in the island of Martinique, a reformed man. He inherits the title and Catheron Royals, with its income, as heir-at-law. For the rest you have your jointure as my widow; and my grandmother's large fortune, which descended to me, I have bequeathed to you in my will. So that when I leave you, my dearest, I leave you safe from all pecuniary troubles. It is my last wish—nay, my last command, that you take all without hesitation. You promise me this, Edith?"

"I promise," she answered lowly. She could not look at him—it seemed like the Scriptural words, "heaping

coals of fire on her head.”

Then for a long time there was silence. He lay back among the pillows with closed eyes, utterly exhausted, but looking very happy. The bitterness of death was passed—a great peace had come. With the wife he loved beside him, her hand clasped in his, he could go forth in peace, knowing that in her heart there was nothing but affection and forgiveness—that one day, in the future, she would be happy. In his death as in his life he was thoroughly unselfish. It brought no pang to him now to feel that years after the grass grew over his grave she would be the happy wife of a happier man. He talked little more; he dozed at intervals during the day. Edith never left him for a moment. His aunt and cousin shared her watch off and on all day. They could all see that the last great change was near. Pain had left him—he was entirely at rest.

“Read to me, Edith,” he said once as the day wore on. She took up a volume of sermons that Lady Helena was fond of. She opened it, haphazard, and read. And presently she came to this, reading of the crosses and trials and sorrows of life: “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death; neither sorrow nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain.”

His eyes were fixed upon her with so radiant a light, so infinite a thankfulness, that she could read no more. Her voice choked—she laid the book down. Later, as the sunset came streaming in, he awoke from a long slumber, and looked at the glittering bars of light lying on the carpet.

“Open the window, Edith,” he said; “I want to see the sun set once more.”

She obeyed. All flushed with rose light, and gold and amethyst splendor, the evening sky glowed like the very gates of paradise.

“It is beautiful,” Edith said, but its untold beauty brought to her somehow a sharp pang of pain.

“Beautiful!” he repeated in an ecstatic whisper. “O love! if earth is so beautiful, what must Heaven be!”

Then she heard him softly repeat to himself the words she had read: “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death; neither sorrow nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain.” He drew a long, long breath, like one who is very weary and sees rest near.

“Darling,” he said, “how pale you are—white as a spirit. Go out for a little into the air—don't mind leaving me. I feel sleepy again.”

She kissed him and went. All her after life she was glad to remember their last parting had been with a caress on her part, a happy smile on his. She descended the steps leading from the window with unquestioning obedience, and passed out into the rose and gold light of the sunset. She remained perhaps fifteen minutes—certainly not more. The red light of the October sky was fast paling to cold gray—the white October moon was rising. She went back. He still lay as she had left him—his eyes were closed—she thought he was asleep. She bent over him, close—closer—growing white almost as himself. And then she knew what it was.

“And there shall be no more death; neither sorrow nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain.”

A cry rang through the room, the long, wailing cry of widowhood. She fell on her knees by the bed. An hour after, the passing bell tolled sombrely through the darkness from the steeple of Chesholm Church, telling all whom it might concern that Sir Victor Catheron had gone home.

CHAPTER VII. TWO YEARS AFTER.

One brilliant, August noonday a Cunard ship steamed gallantly down the Mersey and out into the open sea. There were a great number of passengers on board—every cabin, every berth, was filled. Every country under Heaven, it seemed, was represented. After the first two or three days out, after the first three or four times assembling around the dinner-table and congregating on the sunny decks, people began to know all about one another, to learn each other's names and histories.

There was one lady passenger who from the first excited a great deal of talk and curiosity. A darkly handsome young lady in widow's weeds, who rather held herself aloof from everybody, and who seemed all sufficient unto herself. A young lady, pitifully young to wear that sombre dress and widow's cap, remarkable anywhere for her beauty, and dignity, and grace. Who was she? as with one voice all the gentlemen on board cried out that question the moment they saw her first.

She was a lady of rank and title, an English lady, travelling with her two servants—otherwise quite alone—the name on the passenger list was Lady Catheron.

For the first two days that was all that could be ascertained—just enough to whet curiosity to burning-point. Then in the solitude and seclusion of the ladies' cabin the maid servant became confidential with one of the stewardesses, and narrated, after the manner of maids, her mistress's history as far as she knew it. The stewardess retailed it to the lady passengers, and the lady passengers gave it at third hand to the gentlemen. This is what it was:

Lady Catheron, young as she looked and was, had nevertheless been a widow for two years. Her husband had been Sir Victor Catheron, of Cheshire, who had died after the first year of married felicity, leaving an immensely rich widow. Miserable Sir Victor! thought all the gentlemen. She—Sarah Betts, the maid—had not known her ladyship during the year of her married life, she had been engaged in London, some months after my lady's bereavement, to travel with her on the continent. My lady had travelled in company with her aunt, the Lady Helena Powyss, and her cousin, a "Mrs. Victor." They had spent the best part of two years wandering leisurely through every country in Europe, and now my lady was finishing her tour of the world by coming to America—why, Betts did not know. Not many ladies of rank came to America alone, Betts thought, but she had heard my lady was American by birth. Everywhere my lady went she had been greatly admired—gentlemen always raved about her, but she seemed as cold as marble, very high and haughty, utterly indifferent to them all. She did not go into society—she had been awfully fond of her late husband, and quite broken-hearted at losing him so soon. That was Miss Betts' story, and like Sam Weller's immortal valentine, was just enough to make them wish there was more.

For the man servant and *avant courier* of my lady, he was a genteel, dignified, taciturn gentleman, like an elderly duke in difficulties, with whom it was impossible to take liberties or ask questions—a sort of human oyster: who kept himself and his knowledge hermetically sealed up. He told nothing, and they had to be contented with Betts' version.

So Lady Catheron became *the* lady of interest on board. Everybody saw her on deck, her railway rug spread in the sunshine, her low wicker-work chair placed upon it, a large umbrella unfurled over her head, reading or gazing over the sea toward the land they were nearing. She made no acquaintances, she was perfectly civil to everybody who spoke to her, friendly to a degree with the children, and her smile was bright and sweet as the sunshine itself. Her reticence could hardly be set down to pride. Before the voyage was over she was many times forward among the steerage passengers, leaving largesses behind her, and always followed by thanks and blessings when she came away. Not pride, surely—the great dark fathomless eyes were wondrously sweet and soft; the lips, that might once have been haughty and hard, tender and gentle now, and yet there was a vague, intangible something about her, that held all at arm's length, that let no one come one inch nearer than it was her will they should come. Lady Catheron had been their interest from the first—she was their mystery to the end.

Yes, it was Edith—Edith going home—home! well hardly that, perhaps; she was going to see her father, at his urgent request. He had returned once more to Sandypoint, he had been ailing lately, and he yearned to see his darling. His letter reached her in Paris, and Edith crossed over at once, and came.

Was there in her heart any hope of seeing, as well, other friends? Hardly—and yet, as America drew near and nearer, her heart beat with a hope and a restlessness she could no more explain than I can. In Naples, six months ago, she had met a party of Americans, and among them Mrs. Featherbrain, of light-headed memory. Mrs. Featherbrain had recognized an old acquaintance in Lady Catheron, and hailed her with effusion.

For Edith, she shrank away with the old feeling of dislike and repulsion, and yet she listened to her chatter, too.

“How sad it was,” said gay Mrs. Featherbrain, “about the poor, dear Stuarts. That delightful Charley, too! ah! it was very sad. Did Lady Catheron correspond with them? But of course she did, being a relative and everything.”

“No,” Edith answered, her pale face a shade paler than usual; “she had entirely lost sight of them lately. She would be very glad to hear of them, though. Did Mrs. Featherbrain know—”

“Oh, dear, no!” Mrs. Featherbrain answered; “I have lost sight of them too—every one has. When people become poor and drop out of the world, as it were, it is impossible to follow them up. She *had* heard, just before their party started, that Trixy was about to be married, and that Charley—poor Charley! was going to California to seek his fortune. But she knew nothing positively, only that they were certainly not to be seen in New York—that the places and people who had known them once, knew them no more.” That was all.

It could not be, then, that the hope of meeting them was in Edith's mind, and yet, her whole soul yearned to meet them—to ask their forgiveness, if no more. To clasp Trixy's hand once again,—honest, loving, impulsive, warm-hearted Trixy,—to feel her arms about her as of old, it seemed to Edith Catheron, she could have given half her life. Of any other, she would not let herself think. He had passed out of her life forever and ever—nothing could alter that.

“Everywhere she went, she was admired,” her servants had said, “but to all she was cold as marble.” Yes, and it would always be so while life remained. There had been but one man in all the world for her from the first—she had given him up of her own free will; she must abide by her decision; but there never would be any other. One loveless marriage she had made; she never would make another. Charley Stuart might—would, beyond doubt—forget her and marry, but she would go to her grave, her whole heart his.

They reached New York; and there were many kindly partings and cordial farewells. Lady Catheron and her two servants drove away to an up-town hotel, where rooms had been engaged, and all the papers duly chronicled the distinguished arrival. One day to rest—then down to Sandypoint, leaving gossiping Betts and the silent elderly gentleman behind her. And in the twilight of an August day she entered Sandypoint, and walked slowly through the little town, home. Only three years since she had left, a happy, hopeful girl of eighteen—returning now a saddened; lonely woman of twenty-one. How strangely altered the old landmarks, and yet how familiar. Here were the stores to which she used to walk, sulky and discontented, through the rain, to do the family marketing. Here spread the wide sea, smiling and placid, whereon she and Charley used to sail. Yonder lay the marsh where, that winter night, she had saved his life. Would it have been as well, she thought with weary wonder, if they had both died that night? Here was the nook where he had come upon her that wet, dark morning with his mother's letter, when her life seemed to begin—here the gate where they had stood when he gave her his warning: “Whatever that future brings, Edith, don't blame me.” No, she blamed nobody but herself; the happiness of her life had lain within her grasp, and she had stretched forth her hand and pushed it away. There was the open window where he used to sit, in the days of his convalescence, and amuse himself setting her inflammable temper alight. It was all associated with him. Then the house door opens, a tall, elderly man comes out, there is a great cry,—father and daughter meet, and for an hour or so, she can forget even Charley.

She remains a week—how oddly familiar and yet strange it all seems. The children noisier and ruder than ever, her father grown grayer and more wrinkled, her stepmother, shrill of tongue and acid of temper as of yore, but fawningly obsequious to her.

The people who used to know her, and who flock to see her, the young men who used to be in love with her, and who stare at her speechlessly and afar off now. It amuses her for a while, then she tires of it, she tires of everything of late, her old fever of restlessness comes back. This dull Sandypoint, with its inquisitive gapers and questioners, is not to be endured, even for her father's sake. She will return to New York.

In the bustling life there—the restless, ceaseless flow of humanity, she alone finds solitude and rest now. She goes, but she leaves behind her that which renders keeping boarders or teaching classics forever unnecessary to

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She goes back. What her plans are for the future she does not know. She has no plans, she cannot tell how long she may remain, or where she will eventually take up her abode. It seems to her she will be a sort of feminine Wandering Jew all her life. That life lacks something that renders her restless—she does not care to think what. She may stay all winter—she may pack up and start any day for England.

September passes, and she has not gone. A few of the acquaintances she made when here before with the Stuarts call upon her, but they can tell her nothing of them. If the Stuarts were all dead and buried they could not more completely have dropped out of the lives of their summer-time friends. It must be true, she thinks, what Mrs. Featherbrain told her. Trixy is married and settled somewhere with her mother, and Charley is thousands of miles away, “seeking his fortune.”

Then, all at once, she resolves to go back to England. Her handsome jointure house awaits her, Lady Helena and Inez long for her, love her—she will go back to them—try to be at peace like other women, try to live her life out and forget. She has some purchases to make before she departs. She goes into a Broadway store one day, advances to a counter, and says:

“I wish to see some black Lyons velvet.” Then she pauses, and looks at some black kid gloves lying before her.

“What is the number?” she asks, lifting a pair.

The young man behind the counter makes no reply.

She raises her eyes to his face for the first time, and sees—Charley Stuart!

CHAPTER VIII. FORGIVEN OR—FORGOTTEN?

Charley Stuart! The original of the pictured face that lies over her heart by night and day. Charley—unchanged, calm, handsome, eminently self—possessed as ever, looking at her with grave gray eyes.

She turns giddy, with the utter shock of the great surprise—she leans for a second heavily against the counter, and looks at him with eyes that cannot believe what they see.

“Charley!”

“Edith!”

Yes, it is his voice, his smile, and he stretches his hand across the counter and takes hers. Then she sinks into a seat, and for a moment the store, and the faces, swim about her in a hot mist. But her heart has given one great glad leap, and she knows she has found what all unconsciously she has been longing for, seeking for—Charley!

He is the first to recover himself—if indeed he has lost himself for an instant—and speaks:

“This is a staggerer,” he says; “and yet I don't know why it should be either, since everybody, high and low, who visits New York drops in here for the necessaries of life, sooner or later. I began to think, however, that you must have gone away again.”

She looks at him. He is in no way changed that she can see—the very same Charley of three years before. “You knew I was here!” she asks.

“Certainly, Lady Catheron. I read the morning papers, and *always* look out for distinguished arrivals. Like the scent of the roses, my aristocratic tastes cling to me still. I thought you would hardly endure a month of Sandypoint—delightful, no doubt, as that thriving township is. I don't need to ask you how you have been—I can see for myself you never looked better.”

He meets her steady, reproachful gaze with perfect *sang-froid*. “You knew I was here, and you would not come to see me,” those dark luminous eyes say. His perfectly careless, indifferent manner stings her to the quick.

“Trixy knew I was here too, of course!” she says in a very low voice.

“No,” Charley answers; “I don't think she did. *I* didn't tell her, and I am pretty sure if she had found it out for herself her family circle would have heard of it. I greatly doubt even whether she would not have taken the liberty of calling upon you.”

She lifts her eyes again, with a reproach her lips will not speak.

“I have deserved it,” that dark, sad glance says, “but you might spare me.”

“We were all very sorry to hear of Sir Victor Catheron's death,” Charley resumes gravely. “Hammond told us; he writes occasionally. Heart disease, wasn't it?—poor fellow! I hope Lady Helena Powyss is quite well?”

“She is quite well.”

Then there is a pause—her heart is full, and he stands here so utterly unmoved, talking common—places, and looking as though even the memory of the past were dead and buried. As no doubt indeed it is. She handles the gloves she still holds nervously, for once in her life at a loss.

“Your mother and Trix are well?” she says after that pause.

“Quite well.”

She looks up desperately:

“Charley,” she exclaims; “*mayn't* I see them? I have wanted to see them so much—to—” No, her voice breaks, she cannot finish the sentence.

“Certainly you can see them,” Mr. Stuart answers promptly; “they will be delighted, I am sure. They might not feel at liberty to call upon you, Lady Catheron, of course, but all the same they will only be too happy if Lady Catheron will so far honor *them*.”

He says this in the old lazy, pleasant voice, but it is quite evident he does not mean to spare her—his half—sarcastic accent makes her wince as though in actual bodily pain.

“I'll give you the address if you like,” he goes on; “it's not the most aristocratic neighborhood in the world, but it's perfectly quiet and safe.” He scribbles something in pencil. “Here it is—due east you see. Trix won't be home until seven; she's at work in a fancy shop in Sixth avenue, you know—no, you don't know of course, but she is, and I generally call round for her at closing—up time. But you're safe to find her at home any evening you may

name, Lady Catheron, after seven P.M.”

She takes the slip of paper very humbly—very unlike the Edith he used to know—her lips quivering, as he can see.

“May I go at once?” she asks in that humble little voice; “I can’t wait. I want to see your mother, and I will stay until Trixy comes.”

“My mother will be there, and charmed to see you. Of course you can go at once—why should you hesitate—it’s very kind of you and all that I would escort you there if I could, but unhappily I’m on duty. You’ll have no trouble at all finding it.”

He is perfectly cordial—perfectly indifferent. He looks at her as he might look at Mrs. Featherbrain herself. Edith, it is all over for you!

“I thought you were in California,” she says as she rises to go; “and that Trixy was married.”

“No, I have never left New York, and Trix is pining in single blessedness still. We are going to alter all that shortly though—for further particulars, apply to Trix. Are you going? good—by, for the present, Lady Catheron.”

She is out in the bright sunshine, feeling as though she were in a dream.

She summons a hack, and is driven away eastward to the address he has given her. She finds it—a tall tenement house in a close street, smelling of breweries, and she ascends a long flight of carpetless stairs, and knocks at a door on the upper landing. It is opened, and the well-remembered face of Aunt Chatty looks out.

“Mrs. Stuart!”

A darkly, beautiful face is before her, two black gloved hands are outstretched, two brown brilliant eyes shine upon her through tears. And Mrs. Stuart recoils with a gasp.

“Oh, dear me!” she says, “it *is* Edith!”

Yes, it is Edith, with tears large and thick in her eyes, who kisses the familiar face, and who is sitting beside her, how, Mrs. Stuart never knows in her amaze and bewilderment, in the humble little front room.

How changed it all is from the splendor of that other house in Fifth Avenue. How different this dingy black alpaca dress and rusty widow’s cap from the heavy silks and French millinery of other days. But Aunt Chatty’s good, easy, kindly face is the same.

A hundred questions are asked and answered. Edith tells her how long she has been in New York, of how only an hour ago she chanced upon Charley, and found out their whereabouts. And now, if Aunt Chatty pleases, she is going to take off her bonnet and wait until Beatrix comes home.

“Of course you will wait! take off your things right away. Dear me! and it is really our Edith; won’t Trix be surprised and glad. It isn’t much of a place this,” says poor Mrs. Stuart, glancing about her ruefully; “not what you’re used to, my dear, but such as it is—”

An impetuous kiss from Edith closes her lips.

“Ah hush!” she says; “*you* are in it—and glad to see me. I ask no more.”

“And you are a widow too, dear child,” Mrs. Stuart sighs, touching her black dress compassionately; “it is very hard—so young, and only one short year his wife. Captain Hammond told us—he writes to Trixy, you know. Poor Sir Victor! so nice as he was, and that good pleasant Lady Helena. We were all so sorry. And you, my dear—how have you been?”

“Perfectly well,” Edith answers, but she will not talk of herself. Aunt Chatty must tell her all about their trouble. Aunt Chatty tells plaintively, only too glad to pour her sorrows into sympathizing ears.

“It was very hard at first—dreadfully hard. Poor Mr. Stuart died—it was too much for him. Everything was sold—everything—we were left beggars. Work was difficult to get—then I fell ill. Charley was in despair almost—he grew thin and hollow-eyed, the very ghost of himself. All our old friends seemed to drop off and only Providence sent Nellie Seton along, we might all have died or gone to the almshouse.”

“Nellie Seton?” Edith inquired; “who is she? what did she do?”

“She was a school friend of Trixy’s, in reduced circumstances like ourselves, who came to our succor like an angel in human form. She got Trix a situation in a fancy store, she nursed me, and kept me alive on wine and jellies when I could touch nothing else. She cheered up Charley and kept him from dying of despair. To Nellie Seton, under Heaven, we owe it that we are alive at all”

“She is a young lady—this good Miss Seton?” Edith asks, with a sharp contraction of the heart.

“Yes; about Trixy’s age, and wonderfully clever. She writes poetry and gets paid for it, and the prettiest stories

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for the magazines, and is quite rich. She is one of the family now almost,—very likely she will be home presently with Charley and Trix—they're always together. And now, if you will excuse me Edith, I'll go and get tea.”

She bustles away, and Edith sits in the little parlor alone. And she feels, with a heart like a stone, that what she has lost forever, this brave, good Nellie Seton has won. Well! she deserves it; she will try to like her, Edith thinks; but somehow even at the thought, her heart revolts. The old feeling for Mrs. Featherbrain, for Lady Gwendoline, tries to come back, in spite of her, for this unseen Miss Seton. She is an altered woman—a better woman, a more unselfish woman, but the old leaven of iniquity is not dead yet.

The moments drag on—it is drawing near seven. How will Trixy receive her, she wonders. Will she be generous, and forget the past, or will she make her feel it, as her brother has done? Seven. Mrs. Stuart has set the table. How odd, it seems to see Aunt Chatty working. The tea is sending its fragrance through the little rooms, the buttered toast is made, the cake is cut, the pink ham is sliced, everything looks nice and inviting. Suddenly there is the sound of footsteps on the stairs, of girls' gay tones and sweet laughter—then the kitchen door flies open, and Trixy's well-remembered voice is animatedly exclaiming:

“Ma! is tea ready? I am famished and so is Nell. What! the table set in the parlor in state. Goodness!”

Edith rises, white as the dainty Marie-Stuart widow's cap she wears—still and beautiful she stands. She sees Trixy's tall figure, a smaller, slighter young lady beside her, and Charley standing behind both. Half a minute later Trix sweeps in, sees the motionless figure, and recoils with a shriek.

“Trix!” Edith advances with the word that is almost a sob. And Trixy's face grows radiant.

“It is! it *is*! it IS!”

She screams, and rushes forward, and catches Edith in a perfect bear's hug, laughing, crying, and kissing, all in a breath.

CHAPTER IX. SAYING GOOD-BY.

No coldness about the welcome here, no ungracious remembrances of the past, no need ever to doubt Trixy's warm heart, and, generous, forgiving, impulsive nature.

All Edith's shortcomings were long ago forgotten and forgiven—it is in Edith's way to inspire ardent love. Trixy loves her as dearly, as warmly as she had ever done—she hugs, she kisses, she exclaims at sight of her, in a perfect rapture of joy:

“O darling!” she cries, “*how* good it is to see you again! what a surprise is this! Charley, where are you? look here! Don't you know Edith?”

“Most undoubtedly I know Edith,” Charley answers, advancing; “old age may have impaired my faculties, but still I recognize a familiar face when I see it. I told her I thought you would be glad to see her, but I didn't tell her you intended to eat her alive.”

“You told her! Where? when?”

“In the store—this afternoon. She came in 'promiscuous' for black Lyon's velvet, wasn't it, Lady Catheron? You didn't get it, by the way. Permit me to inform you, in my professional capacity, that we have a very chaste and elegant assortment of the article always in stock. Trix, where's your manners? Here's Nellie hovering aloof in the background, waiting to be introduced. Allow *me* to be master of the ceremonies—Lady Catheron, Miss Nellie Seton.”

Both young ladies bowed—both looked each other full in the face—genuine admiration in Miss Seton's—keen, jealous scrutiny in Lady Catheron's. She saw a girl of two or three and twenty, under-sized and rather plump, with a face which in point of beauty would not for one instant compare with her own or Trixy's either. But it was such a thoroughly *good* face. And the blue, beaming eyes, the soft-cut smiling mouth, gentle, and strong, and sweet, were surely made to win all hearts at sight. Not a beauty—something infinitely better, and as a rival, something infinitely more dangerous.

“Lady Catheron's name is familiar to me as a household word,” Miss Seton said, with a frank little laugh, that subdued Edith at once. “Trix wakes with your name on her lips, I believe, and goes to sleep murmuring it at night. Lady Catheron doesn't know how madly jealous I have been of her before now.”

Edith turns once more to Trix—faithful, friendly, loyal Trix—and stretches forth both hands, with a swift, graceful impulse, tears standing, large and bright, in her eyes.

“My own dear Trix!” is what she says.

“And now I'll run away,” Miss Seton exclaims brightly; “auntie will expect me, and I know Trix has ten thousand things to tell and to hear. No, Trixy, not a word. Charley, what are you doing with your hat? put it down instantly—I don't want you. I would very much rather go home alone.”

“Yes, it's so likely I'll let you. There's no earthly reason why you shouldn't stay; but if, with your usual obstinacy and strong-mindedness, you insist upon going—”

“I do insist upon going, and without an escort. You know you are rather a nuisance—in the way than otherwise—oh, I mean it I get home twice as fast when I go by myself.”

He looks at her—Edith turns sick—sick, as she sees the look. He says something in too low a tone for the rest to hear. Miss Seton laughs, but her color rises and she objects no more. Edith sees it all. A gray-kidded hand is extended to her.

“Good-night, Lady Catheron,” Miss Seton's bright, pleasant voice says, and Lady Catheron takes it, feeling in her heart that for once she cannot dislike a rival. This girl who will be Charley's wife—O blissful fate!—is worthy of him. They go out together, laughing as they go.

“Isn't she just the dearest darling!” cries Trix in her gushing way; “and O Edith! whatever would have become of us all without her, I shudder to think. In the dark days of our life, when friends were few and far between, she was our friend—our savior. She nursed mamma from the very jaws of death, she got me my place in the fancy-store, and I believe—she won't own it—but I do believe she saved Charley's life.”

“Saved his life?” Edith falters.

“It was such an awful time,” Trix says in sombre tones, “we were starving, Edith, literally starving. All our

old friends had forsaken us; work we could not get, 'to beg we were ashamed.' If you had seen Charley in those days, gaunt, hollow-eyed, haggard, wretched. He looks and feels all right now," goes on Trix, brightening up a bit, "but *then!* it used to break my heart to look at him. He tried for work, from morning until night, and day after day he came home, footsore, weary, despairing. He could not leave mother and me, and go elsewhere—she was sick, father was dead—poor pa!—and I was just crazy, or near it. And one dark, dreadful night he went out, and down to the river, and—Nellie followed, and found him there. Ah Edith, he wasn't so much to blame; I suppose he was mad that night. She came up to him, and put her arms around him, as he stood in the darkness and the rain, and—I don't know what she said or did—but she brought him back to us. And Providence sent him work next day—the situation in the store he has now. I don't know about his merits as a salesman," says Trix, laughing, with her eyes full of tears "but he is immensely popular with the ladies. Nellie says it isn't his eloquence—where the other clerks expatiate fluently on the merits of ribbons, and gloves, and laces, shades and textures, Charley stands silent and lets them talk, and smiles and looks handsome. I suppose it answers, for they seem to like him. So now you see we get on splendidly, and I've almost forgotten that we were ever rich, and wore purple and fine linen, and feasted sumptuously every day."

"You are happy?" Edith asks, with wonder and envy in her eyes.

"Perfectly happy," Trix replies cheerily; "I haven't a wish unsatisfied—oh well! now that you've come. I did want you, Dithy; it seems such ages and ages since we met, and I was troubled about you. I heard of *him*, you know, poor fellow."

She touches timidly Edith's widow's weeds. There is no answer—Edith's tears are falling. She is contrasting her own cowardice with Trixy's courage; her own hardness with Trixy's generosity.

"How do you know?" she asks at length.

"Captain Hammond. You remember Angus Hammond, I suppose?" Trix says, blushing and hesitating; "he wrote us about it, and"—a pause.

"Go on; what else did he write?"

"That there was trouble of some sort, a separation, I think—that you had parted on your very wedding-day. Of course we couldn't believe that"

"It is quite true," was the low reply.

Trix's eyes opened.

"True! O Dithy! On your wedding-day!"

"On our wedding-day," Edith answered steadily; "to meet no more until we met at his death-bed. Some day, Trix, dear, I will tell you how it was—not now. Two years have passed, but even yet I don't care to think of it. Only this—*he* was not to blame—he was the bravest, the noblest, the best of men, ten thousand times too good for me. I was a mercenary, ambitious wretch, and I received my just reward. We parted at the last friends, thank God! but I can never forgive myself—never!"

There was a pause—an uncomfortable one for Trix.

"How long since you came to New York?" she asked at length.

Edith told her—told her how she had been wandering over the world since her husband's death—how she had come to America to see her father—how she had tried to find them here in New York—how signally she had failed—and how to-day, by purest accident, she had come upon Charley in the Broadway store.

"How astonished he must have been," his sister said; "I think I see him, lifting his eyebrows to the middle of his forehead. Did he take you for a ghost?"

"By no means, and he was not in the least surprised. He knew I was here, from the first."

"Edith!"

"He told me so. He saw my arrival in the paper when I first landed."

"And he never told *me*, and he never went to see you! The wretch!" cried Trix.

"I don't know that he is to blame," Edith responded quietly. "I deserved no better; and ah! Trixy, not many in this world are as generous as *you*. So you are perfectly happy, darling? I wonder if Captain Hammond, now, has anything to do with it?"

"Well, yes," Tax admits blushing again; "I may as well tell you. We are to be married at Christmas."

"Trix! Married!"

"Married at last. We were engaged before I left England, three years ago. He wanted to marry me then, foolish

fellow!" says Trix with shining eyes, "but of course, we none of us would listen to so preposterous a thing. He had only his pay and his debts, and his expectations from a fairy godmother or grandmother, who *wouldn't* die. But she died last mail—I mean last mail brought a black bordered letter, saying she was gone to glory, and had left Angus everything. He is going to sell out of the army, and will be here by Christmas, and—and the wedding is to take place the very week he arrives. And, oh! Edith, he's just the dearest fellow, the best fellow, and I'm the happiest girl in all New York!"

Edith says nothing. She takes Trix, who is crying, suddenly, in her arms, and kisses her. Angus Hammond has been faithful in the hour when she deserted them—that is her thought. Her self-reproach never ceases—never for one hour.

"We go to Scotland of course," said Trix, wiping her eyes; "and ma—also, of course, stays with Charley. Nellie will be here to fill my place—don't you think she will make a charming sister?"

She laughs as she asks the question—it is the one little revenge she takes. Before Edith can reply she runs on: "Nellie's rich—rich, I mean, as compared with us, and she has made it all herself. She's awfully clever, and writes for magazines, and papers, and things, and earns oceans of money. *Oceans*," says Trix, opening her eyes to the size of saucers; "and I don't know really which of us ma likes best, Nellie or me. That's my one comfort in going. Here comes Charley now—let's have tea at once. I forgot all about it, but nobody has the faintest idea of the pangs of hunger I am enduring."

Charley sauntered in, looking fresh and handsome, from the night air.

It was quite dark now. Trix lit the lamp and bustled about helping to get supper. "You told Nellie?" she asked her brother in a low tone, but Edith caught the words.

"Yes," Charley answered gravely, "I told her."

"What did she say?"

"Everything that was like Nellie—everything that was bright, and brave, and good. She will be here in the morning to say good-by. Now, Mrs. Stuart, if you have any compassion on a famished only son, hurry up, and let's have supper."

They sat down around the little table where the lamp shone brightly—Edith feeling cold and strange and out of place. Trixy and Aunt Chatty might, and did, forgive the past but she herself could not, and between her and Charley lay a gulf, to be spanned over on earth no more. And yet—how beautiful and stately she looked in her little white widow's cap, her sombre dress, and the frill of sheer white crape at her throat.

"Edith!" Trix said involuntarily, "how handsome you have grown! You were always pretty, but now—I don't mean to flatter—but you are splendid! It can't be that black becomes you, and yet—Charley, don't you see it? hasn't Edith grown lovely?"

"Trix!" Edith cried, and over her pale cheeks there rose a flush, and into her dark, brilliant eyes there came a light, that made her for the moment all Trixy said.

Charley looked at her across the table—the cool, clear, gray eyes, perfectly undazzled.

"I used to think it impossible for Edith to improve; I find out my mistake to-day, as I find out many others. As it is not permitted one to say what one thinks on these subjects, one had better say nothing at all."

The flush that has risen to Edith's cheeks remains there, and deepens. After tea, at Trixy's urgent request, she sits down at the little hired piano, and sings some of the old songs.

"Your very voice has improved," Trix says admiringly. "Edith, sing *Charley he's my darling*, for Charley. It used to be a favorite of his."

She gives him a malicious sidelong glance. Charley, lying back in his mother's comfortable, cushioned rocking-chair, takes it calmly.

"It used to be, but it has ceased to be," he answers coolly. "Trix, go out like a good child, and get me the evening paper. Among my other staid, middle-aged habits, Lady Catheron, is that of reading the *Post* every evening religiously, after tea."

Never Edith any more—always Lady Catheron—never the girl he loved three years ago—whom he had said he would love all his life, but the richly dowered widow of Sir Victor Catheron. He will not generously forget, even for an instant, that he is an impecunious dry goods clerk, she a lady of rank and riches.

She rises to go—it is growing almost more than she can bear. Trix presses her to stay longer, but in vain; *he* never utters a word.

"Shall Charley call a carriage, or will you prefer to walk?" Trix asks doubtfully.

"She will walk," says Charley, suddenly looking up and interfering; "the night is fine, and I will see her home."

For one instant, at the tone of his voice, at the look of his eyes, her heart bounds.

Her bonnet and mantle are brought—she kisses Trix and Aunt Chatty good—night—they have promised to dine with her to—morrow—and goes forth into the soft October night with Charley.

He draws her hand within his arm—the night is star—lit, lovely. The old time comes back, the old feeling of rest and content, the old comfortable feeling that it is Charley's arm upon which she leans, and that she asks no more of fate. To—morrow he may be Nellie Seton's—just now, he belongs to her.

"Oh!" she exclaims, with a long—drawn breath, "how familiar it all is! these gas—lit New York streets, the home—like look of the men and women, and—you. It seems as though I had left Sandypoint only yesterday, and you were showing me again the wonders of New York for the first time."

He looks down at the dusk, warm, lovely face, so near his own.

"Sandypoint," he repeats; "Edith, do you recall what I said to you there? Have you ever wished once, in those three years that are gone, that I had never come to Sandypoint to take you away?"

"I have never wished it," she answers truly; "never once. I have never blamed you, never blamed anyone but myself—how could I? The evil of my life I wrought with my own hand, and—if it were all to come over again—I would still go! I have suffered, but at least—I have lived."

"I am glad to hear that," he says after a little pause; "it has troubled me again and again. You see, Hammond wrote us all he ever knew of you, and though it was rather incomprehensible in part, it was clear enough your life was not entirely a bed of roses. All that, I hope, is over and done with—there can be no reason why all the rest of your life should not be entirely happy. This is partly why I wished to walk home with you to—night, that I might know from your own lips whether you held me blameless or not. And partly, also—" a second brief pause;—"to bid you good—by."

"Good—by!" In the starlight she turns deathly white.

"Yes," he responded cheerily; "good—by; and as our lives lie so widely apart in all probability, this time forever. I shall certainly return here at Christmas, but you may have gone before that. To—morrow morning I start for St. Louis, where a branch of our house is established, and where I am permanently to remain. It is an excellent opening for me—my salary has been largely advanced, and I am happy to say the firm think me competent and trustworthy. I return, as I said, at Christmas; after that it becomes my permanent home. You know, of course," he says with a laugh, "why I return—Trix has told you?"

So completely has she forgotten Trix, so wholly have her thoughts been of him, that she absolutely does not remember to what he alludes.

"Trix has told me nothing," she manages to answer, and she wonders at herself to find how steady is her own voice.

"No?" Charley says, elevating his eyebrows; "and they say the age of wonders is over! Trix in the new roll of keeping her own secrets! Well, I very naturally return for *the* wedding—*our* wedding. It's extraordinary that Trix hasn't told you, but she will. Then—my Western home will be ready by that time, and we go back immediately. My mother goes with me, I need hardly say."

Still so absolutely wrapped up in her thoughts of *him*, so utterly forgetful of Trix, that she does not understand. *Our* wedding—he means his own and Nellie Seton's of course. His Western home, the home where she will reign as his wife. In the days that have gone, Edith thinks she has suffered—she feels to—night that she has never suffered until now! She deserves it, but if he had only spared her,—only left it for some one else to tell. It is a minute before she can reply—then, despite every effort, her voice is husky:

"I wish you joy, Charley—with all my heart"

She cannot say one word more. Something in the words, in her manner of saying them, makes him look at her in surprise.

"Well, yes," he answers coolly; "a wedding in a family is, I believe, a general subject of congratulation. And I must say she has shown herself a trump—the bravest, best girl alive. And you"—they are drawing near a hotel—"may I venture to ask your plans, Lady Catheron? how long do you think of remaining in New York?"

"I shall leave at once—at once," she replied in the same husky tone. To stay and meet Nellie Seton after

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to-night is more than she is able to do. They are close to the hotel now. Involuntarily—unconsciously, she clings to his arm, as the drowning may cling to a straw. She feels in a dull, agonized sort of way that in five minutes the waters will have closed over her head, and the story of her life have come to an end.

“Here we are,” his frank, cheery voice says—his voice, that has yet a deeper, more earnest tone than of old. “You don't know, Edith, how glad I am of this meeting—how glad to hear you never in any way blamed *me*.”

“I blame you! oh, Charley!” she says with a passionate little cry.

“I rejoice to hear, that with all its drawbacks, you don't regret the past. I rejoice in the knowledge that you are rich and happy, and that a long, bright life lies before you. Edith,” he takes both her hands in his strong, cordial clasp, “if we never meet again, God bless you, and good-by.”

She lifts her eyes to his, full of dumb, speechless agony. In that instant he knows the truth—knows that Edith loves him—that the heart he would once have laid down his life almost to win, is his wholly at last!

The revelation comes upon him like a flash—like a blow. He stands holding her hands, looking at her, at the mute, infinite misery in her eyes. Someone jostles them in passing, and turns and stares. It dawns upon him that they are in the public street, and making a scene.

“Good-by,” he says hastily once more, and drops the hands, and turns and goes.

She stands like a statue where he has left her—he turns a corner, the last sound of his footsteps dies away, and Edith feels that he has gone out of her life—out of the whole world.

CHAPTER X. THE SECOND BRIDAL.

Miss Nellie Seton came early next morning to see her friend, Mr. Charley Stuart, off. He is looking rather pale as he bids them good-by—the vision of Edith's eyes upturned to his, full of mute, impassionate appeal, have haunted him all night long. They haunt him now, long after the last good-by had been said, and the train is sweeping away Westward. Edith loves him at last. At last? there has never been a time when he doubted it, but now he knows he has but to say the word, and she will lay her hand in his, and toil, and parting, and separation will end between them forever. But he will never, say that word—what Edith Darrell in her ambition once refused, all Lady Catheron's wealth and beauty cannot win. He feels he could as easily leap from the car window and end it all, as ask Sir Victor Catheron's richly dowered widow to be his wife. She made her choice three years ago—she must abide by that choice her life long.

“And then,” he thinks rather doggedly, “this fancy of mine may be only fancy. The leopard cannot change his spots, and an ambitious, mercenary woman cannot change her nature. And, as a rule, ladies of wealth and title *don't* throw themselves away on impecunious dry goods clerks. No! I made an egregious ass of myself once, and once is quite enough. We have turned over a new leaf, and are not going back at this late day to the old ones. With her youth, her fortune, and her beauty, Edith can return to England and make a brilliant second marriage.”

And then Mr. Stuart sets his lips behind his brown mustache, and unfolds the morning paper, smelling damp and nasty of printer's ink, and immerses himself, fathoms deep, in mercantile news and the doings of the Stock Exchange.

He reaches St Louis in safety, and resumes the labor of his life. He has no time to think—no time to be sentimental, if he wished to be, which he doesn't.

“Love is of man's life a thing apart,” sings a poet, who knew what he was talking about. His heart is not in the least broken, nor likely to be; there is no time in his busy, mercantile life, for that sort of thing, I repeat. He goes to work with a will, and astonishes even himself by his energy and brisk business capacity. If he thinks of Edith at all, amid his dry-as-dust ledgers and blotters, his buying and selling, it is that she is probably on the ocean by this time—having bidden her native land, like *Childe Harold*, “One long, one last, good-night.” And then, in the midst of it all, Trixy's first letter arrives.

It is all Edith, from beginning to end. Edith has not gone, she is still in New York, but her passage is taken, and she will leave next week. “And Charley,” says Trix, “don't be angry now, but do you know, though Edith Darrell always liked you, I fancy Lady Catheron likes you even better. Not that she ever says anything; bless you! she is as proud as ever; but we women can tell. And last night she told ma and me the story of her past, of her married life—or rather her *un*-married life—of her separation from Sir Victor on their wedding-day—think of it, Charley! *on their wedding-day*. If ever anyone in this world was to be pitied, it was he—poor fellow! And she was not to blame—neither could have acted other than they did, that I can see. Poor Edith! poor Sir Victor! I will tell you all when we meet. She leaves next Tuesday, and it half breaks my heart to see her go. Oh, Charley! Charley! *why* need she go at all?”

He reads this letter as he smokes his cigar—very gravely, very thoughtfully, wondering a great deal, but not in the least moved from his steadfast purpose. Parted on their wedding-day! he has heard that before, but hardly credited it. It is true then—odd that; and neither to be blamed—odder still. She has only been Sir Victor's wife in name, then, after all. But it makes no difference to him—nothing does—all that is past and done—she flung him off once—he will never go back now. Their paths lie apart—hers over the hills of life, his in the dingy valleys—they have said good-by, and it means forever.

He goes back to his ledgers and his counting-room, and four more days pass. On the evening of the fourth day, as he leaves the store for the night, a small boy from the telegraph office waylays him, and hands him one of the well-known buff envelopes. He breaks it open where he stands, and read this:

“NEW YORK, Oct. 28, '70.

“Charley: Edith is lying dangerously ill—dying. Come back at once. BEATRIX.”

He reads, and the truth does not come to him—he reads it again. *Edith is dying*. And then a grayish pallor

comes over his face, from brow to chin, and he stands for a moment, staring vacantly at the paper he holds, seeing nothing—hearing nothing but these words: “Edith is dying.” In that moment he knows that all his imaginary hardness and indifference have been hollow and false—a wall of pride that crumbles at a touch, and the old love, stronger than life, stronger than death, fills his heart still. He has left her, and—Edith is dying! He looks at his watch. There is an Eastward-bound train in half an hour—there will be barely time to catch it. He does not return to his boarding house—he calls a passing Mack, and is driven to the depot just in time. He makes no pause from that hour—he travels night and day. What is business; what the prospects of all his future life; what is the whole world now? Edith is dying.

He reaches New York at last. It seems like a century since that telegram came, and haggard and worn, in the twilight of the autumn day, he stands at last in his mother's home.

Trix is there—they expect him to—night, and she has waited to receive him. She looks in his face once, then turns away and covers her own, and bursts into a woman's tempest of tears.

“I—I am too late,” he says in a hoarse sort of whisper.

“No,” Trix answers, looking up; “not too late. She is alive still—I can say no more.”

“What is it?” he asks.

“It is almost impossible to say. Typhoid fever, one doctor says, and *cerebro spinal meningitis* says the other. It doesn't much matter what it is, since both agree in this—that she is dying.”

Her sobs breaks forth again. He sits and gazes at her like a stone.

“There is no hope?”

“While there is life there is hope.” But it is in a very dreary voice that Trix repeats this aphorism: “and—the worst of it is, she doesn't seem to care. Charley, I believe she wants to die, is glad to die. She seems to have nothing to care for—nothing to live for. ‘My life has been all a mistake,’ she said to me the other day. ‘I have gone wrong from first to last, led astray by my vanity, and selfishness, and ambition. It is much better that I should die, and make an end of it all.’ She has made her will, Charley—she made it in the first days of her illness, and—she has left almost everything to you.”

He makes no reply. He sits motionless in the twilit window, looking down at the noisy, bustling street.

“She has remembered me most generously,” Trix goes softly on; “poor, darling Edith! but she has left almost all to you. ‘It would have been an insult to offer anything in my lifetime,’ she said to me; ‘but the wishes of the dead are sacred,—he will not be able to refuse it *then*. And tell him not to grieve for me, Trixy—I never made him anything but trouble, and disappointment, and wretchedness. I am sorry—sorry now, and my last wish and prayer will be for the happiness of his life.’ When she is delirious, and she mostly is as night draws on, she calls for you incessantly—asking you to come back—begging, you to forgive her. That is why I sent.”

“Does she know you sent?” he asks.

“No—it was her desire you should not be told until—until all was over,” Trix answered with another burst of tears; “but I *couldn't* do that. She says we are to bury her at Sandypoint, beside her mother—not send her body to England. She told me, when she was dead, to tell you the story of her separation from Sir Victor. Shall I tell it to you now, Charley?”

He makes a motion of assent; and Trix begins, in a broken voice, and tells him the sad, strange story of the two Sir Victors, father and son, and of Edith's life from her wedding-day. The twilight deepens into darkness, the room is wrapped in shadow long before she has finished. He never stirs, he never speaks, he sits and listens to the end. Then there is a pause, and out of the gloom he speaks at last:

“May I see her, and when?”

“As soon as you come, the doctors say; they refuse her nothing now, and they think your presence may do her good,—if anything can do it. Mother is with her and Nellie; Nellie has been her best friend and nurse; Nellie has never left her, and Charley,” hesitatingly, for something in his manner awes Trix, “I believe she thinks you and Nellie are engaged.”

“Stop!” he says imperiously, and Trixy rises with a sigh and puts on her hat and shawl. Five minutes later they are in the street, on their way to Lady Catheron's hotel.

One of the medical men is in the sick-room when Miss Stuart enters it, and she tells him in a whisper that her brother has come, and is waiting without.

His patient lies very low to—night—delirious at times, and sinking, it seems to him, fast. She is in a restless,

fevered sleep at present, and he stands looking at her with a very sombre look on his professional face. In spite of his skill, and he is very skilful, this case baffles him. The patient's own utter indifference, as to whether she lives or dies, being one of the hardest things he has to combat. If she only longed for life, and strove to recruit—if, like Mrs. Dombey, she would, “only make an effort.” But she will not, and the flame flickers, and flickers, and very soon will go out altogether.

“Let him come in,” the doctor says. “He can do no harm—he may possibly do some good.”

“Will she know him when she awakes?” Trix whispers.

He nods and turns away to where Miss Seton stands in the distance, and Trix goes and fetches her brother in. He advances slowly, almost reluctantly it would seem, and looks down at the wan, drawn, thin face that rests there, whiter than the pillows. Great Heaven! and this—*this* is Edith! He sinks into a chair by the bedside, and takes her wan, transparent hand in both his own, with a sort of groan. The light touch awakes her, the faint eyelids quiver, the large, dark eyes open and fix on his face. The lips flutter breathlessly apart. “*Charley!*” they whisper in glad surprise; and over the death-like face there flashes for a second an electric light of great amaze and joy.

“Humph!” says the doctor, with a surprised grunt; “I thought it would do her no harm. If we leave them alone for a few minutes, my dear young ladies, it will do *us* no harm either. Mind, my young gentleman,” he taps Charley on the shoulder, “my patient is not to excite herself talking.”

They softly go out. It would appear the doctor need not have warned him; they don't seem inclined to talk. She lies and looks at him, delight in her eyes, and draws a long, long breath of great content. For him, he holds her wasted hand a little tighter, and lays his face down on the pillow, and does not speak a word.

So the minutes pass.

“Charley,” she says at last, in a faint, little whisper, “what a surprise this is. They did not tell me you were coming. Who sent for you? When did you come?”

“You're not to talk, Edith,” he answers, lifting his haggard face for a moment—poor Charley! “Trix sent for me.” Then he lays it down again.

“Foolish boy!” Edith says with shining eyes; “I do believe you are crying. You don't hate me, then, after all, Charley?”

“Hate you!” he can but just repeat.

“You once said you did, you know; and I deserved it. But I have not been happy, Charley—I have been punished as I merited. Now it is all over, and it is better so—I never was of any use in the world, and never would be. You will let me atone a little for the past in the only way I can. Trix will tell you. And, by and by, when you are quite happy, and she is your wife—”

The faint voice breaks, and she turns her face away. Even in death it is bitterer than death to give him up.

He lifts his head, and looks at her.

“When she is my wife? when *who* is my wife?” he asks.

“Nellie—you know,” she whispers; “she is worthy of you, Charley—indeed she is, and I never was. And she loves you, and will make you hap—”

“Stop!” he says suddenly; “you are making some strange mistake, Edith. Nellie cares for me, as Trix does, and Trix is not more a sister to me than Nellie. For the rest—do you remember what I said to you that night at Killarney?”

Her lips tremble—her eyes watch him, her weak fingers close tightly over his. Remember! does she *not*?

“I said—I will love you all my life! I have kept my word, and mean to keep it. If I may not call you wife, I will never call, by that name, any other woman. No one in this world can ever be to me again, what you were and are.”

There is another pause, but the dark, uplifted eyes are radiant now.

“At last! at last!” she breathes; “when it is too late. Oh, Charley! If the past might only come over again, how different it all would be. I think”—she says this with a weak little laugh, that reminds him of the Edith of old—“I think I could sleep more happily even in my grave—if 'Edith Stuart' were carved on my tombstone!”

His eyes never leave her face—they light up in their dreary sadness now at these words.

“Do you mean that, Edith?” he says bending over her; “living or dying, would it make you any happier to be my wife?”

Her eyes, her face, answer him. “But it is too late,” the pale lips sigh.

"It is never too late," he says quietly; "we will be married to-night."

"Charley?"

"You are not to talk," he tells her, kissing her softly and for the first time; "I will arrange it all. I will go for a clergyman I know, and explain everything. Oh, darling! you should have been my wife long ago—you shall be my wife at last, in spite of death itself."

Then he leaves her, and goes out. And Edith closes her eyes, and lies still, and knows that never in all the years that are gone has such perfect bliss been hers before. In death, at least, if not life, she will be Charley's wife.

He tells them very quietly, very resolutely—her father who is there from Sandypoint, his mother, sister, Nellie, the doctor.

They listen in wordless wonder; but what can they say?

"The excitement will finish her—mark my words," is the doctor's verdict; "I will never countenance any such melodramatic proceeding."

But his countenance does not matter it seems. The laws of the Medes were not more fixed than this marriage. The clergyman comes, a very old friend of the family, and Charley explains all to him. He listens with quiet gravity—in his experience a death-bed marriage is not at all an unprecedented occurrence. The hour fixed is ten, and Trixy and Nellie go in to make the few possible preparations.

The sick girl lifts two wistful eyes to the gentle face of Nellie Seton. It is very pale, but she stoops and kisses her with her own sweet smile.

"You will live now for *his* sake," she whispers in that kiss.

They decorate the room and the bed with flowers, they brush away the dark soft hair, they array her in a dainty embroidered night-robe, and prop her up with pillows. There is the fever fire on her wan cheeks, the fever fire in her shining eyes. But she is unutterably happy—you have but to look into her face to see that. Death is forgotten in her new bliss.

The bridegroom comes in, pale and unsmiling—worn and haggard beyond the power of words to tell. Trix, weeping incessantly, stands near, her mother and Mr. Darrell are at one side of the bed. Nellie is bridesmaid. What a strange, sad, solemn wedding it is! The clergyman takes out his book and begins—bride and bridegroom clasp hands, her radiant eyes never leave his face. Her faint replies flutter on her lips—there is an indescribable sadness in his. The ring is on her finger—at last she is what she should have been from the first—Charley's wife.

He bends forward and takes her in his arms. With all her dying strength she lifts herself to his embrace. It is a last expiring effort—her weak clasp relaxes, there is one faint gasp. Her head falls heavily upon his breast—there is a despairing cry from the women, cold and lifeless, Charley Stuart lays his bride of a moment back among the pillows—whether dead or in a dead swoon no one there can tell.

CHAPTER XI. THE NIGHT.

At first they thought her dead—but it was not death. She awoke from that long, death-like swoon as morning broke—so near unto death that it seemed the turning of a hair might weigh down the scale. And so for days after it was—for weary miserable days and nights. The great reaction after the great excitement had come, all consciousness left her, she lay white and still, scarcely moving, scarcely breathing. The one beloved voice fell as powerless on her dulled ears now as all others, the dim, almost lifeless eyes, that opened at rare intervals, were blank to the whole world. She lay in a species of stupor, or coma, from which it was something more than doubtful if she ever would awake. The few spoonfuls of beef-tea and brandy and water she took they forced between her clenched teeth, and in that darkened room of the great hotel, strangely, solemnly quiet, Life and Death fought their sharp battle over her unconscious head.

And for those who loved her, her father, her friends, and one other, nearer and dearer than father or friend, how went those darkest days for *them*? They could hardly have told—all their after life they looked back, with a sick shudder, to that week.

For Charley Stuart he never wanted to look back—never to the last day of his life will he be able to recall, to realize the agony of those six days—days that changed his whole nature—his whole life.

They watched with her unceasingly—death might come at any moment. There were times when they bent above her, holding their own breath, sure that the faint thread had already snapped—times when they held a mirror to her lips to be sure she breathed at all. For her new-made husband, he never left her except when nature succumbed to the exhaustion of ceaseless vigil, and they forced him away. He forgot to eat or sleep, he sat tearless and still as stone by the bedside, almost as bloodless, almost as wan and hollow-eyed as the dying bride herself. The doctors stood gloomily silent, their skill falling powerless here.

“She needed only the excitement of this most preposterous marriage to finish her,” one of them growled; “I said so at the time—I say so now. She had one chance for life—perfect quiet—and that destroyed it.”

On the fourth day, a letter from England, in a woman's hand, and deeply bordered with black, arrived. Edith, in the first days of her illness, had told Trixy to open all her letters. She would have passed the power over to her brother now, but he waved it away impatiently. What did it matter whom it was from—what it contained—what did anything matter now?

His haggard eyes went silently back to the marble face lying among its pillows, so awfully still.

Trixy opened and read it. It was from Inez Catheron, and announced the death of her aunt, the Lady Helena Powyss.

* * * * *

“Her end was perfect peace,” said the letter; “and in her will, she has left her large fortune divided equally between you and me. If possible it would be well for you to return to England as speedily as may be. If wealth can make you happy—and I hope at least it will aid—my dearest Edith, you will have it. For me, I join a charitable Sisterhood here in London, and will try to devote the remainder of my life to the relief of my suffering and poor fellow-creatures. As to the rest, if you care at all to know, my brother reigns at Catheron Royals now! He is, in all respects, a changed man, and will not, I think, be an unworthy successor of him who is gone. His wife and children are all that can be desired.

“Farewell, my dear cousin. When you return to London come to the enclosed address, and see me. No one will welcome you more gladly than,

“INEZ CATHERON.”

* * * * *

So another large fortune had been left Edith—she was rich now beyond her wildest dreams. Rich! And yonder she lay, and all the gold of earth, powerless to add a second to her life. What a satire it seemed. Youth, beauty, and boundless wealth were hers and all were vain—vain!

The seventh night brought the crisis.

“This can hold out no longer,” the physician said; “before morning we will know the end, whether it is to be life or death.”

"Then—there is hope yet?" Trix breathed, with clasped hands.

He looked at her gloomily and turned away, the meaningless formula on his lips:

"While there is life there is hope."

"It will be little less than a miracle if she lives, though," the other added; "and the days of miracles are over. Hope if you like—but—"

"You had better not let *him* sit up to-night," said the first physician, looking compassionately at Charley; "he won't be able to stand it. He is worn out now, poor fellow, and looks fit for a sick-bed himself."

"He knows it is the crisis," Trixy answered; "he won't go."

"He has watched the last two nights," Miss Seton, interposed: "he *must* go, doctor; leave me an opiate—I will administer it. If—if the worst comes, it will be but a moment's work to arouse him."

The doctor obeyed.

"I will return at day dawn," he said, "if she be still alive. If not—send me word."

The twilight was falling. Solemn and shadowy it crept into the sombre, silent room. They went back to the bedside, pale and tearless; they had wept, it seemed, until they could weep no more. This last night the two girls were to watch alone.

She lay before them. Dead and in her shroud she would never look more awfully death-like than now. He sat beside her—ah, poor Charley! in a sort of dull stupor of misery, utterly worn out. The sharp pain seemed over—the long, dark watches, when his passionate prayers had ascended for that dear life, wild and rebellious it may be, when he had wrestled with an agony more bitter than death, had left their impress on his life forever. He could not let her go—he could not! "O God!" was the ceaseless cry of his soul, "have mercy—spare!"

Nellie Seton's cool, soft hands fell lightly on his head—Nellie's soft, gentle voice spoke:

"Charley, you are to leave us for a little, and lie down. You must have some rest, be it ever so short; and you have had nothing to eat, I believe all day; you will let me prepare something, and take it, and go to your room."

She spoke to him coaxingly, almost as she might to a child. He lifted his eyes, full of dull, infinite misery, to hers.

"To-night?" he answered: "the last night! I will not go."

"Only for an hour then," she pleaded; "there will be no change. For *my* sake, Charley!"

All her goodness, all her patience, came back to him. He pressed her hand in his own gratefully, and arose.

"For your sake, Nellie, then—for no other. But you promise to call me if there is the slightest change?"

"I promise. Drink this and go."

She gave him a glass of mulled wine, containing the opiate. He drank it and left the room. They listened breathlessly until they heard his door, further down the passage, open and shut—then both drew a deep breath.

"Thank Heaven," Trix said; "I couldn't bear to see him here to-night. Nellie, if she dies it will kill him—just that."

The girl's lips quivered. What Charley had been to her—how wholly her great, generous, loving heart had gone out to him, not even Trix ever knew. The dream of her life's best bliss was at an end forever. Whether Edith Stuart lived or died, no other woman would ever take her place in his heart.

The hours of the night wore on. Oh! those solemn night watches by the dying bed of those we love. The faint lamp flickers, deepest stillness reigns, and on his bed, dressed as he was, Charley lies deeply, dreamlessly asleep.

It was broad day when he awoke—the dawn of a cloudless November day. He sat up in bed suddenly, for a moment, bewildered, and stared before him. Only for a moment—then he remembered all. The night had passed, the morning come. They had let him sleep—it seemed he *could* sleep while she lay dying so near. Dying! Who was to tell him that in yonder distant room Edith was not lying dead. He rose up, reeling like a drunken man, and made for the door. He opened it, and went out, down the passage. It was entirely deserted, the great household was not yet astir. Profound stillness reigned. Through the windows he could see the bright morning sky, all flushed, red and golden with the first radiance of the rising sun. And in that room there what lay—death or life?

He stood suddenly still, and looked at the closed door. He stood there motionless, his eyes fixed upon it, unable to advance another step.

It opened abruptly—quickly but noiselessly, and Nellie Seton's pale, tired face looked out. At sight of him she came forward—he asked no questions—his eyes looked at her full of a dumb agony of questioning she never forgot.

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“Charley!” she exclaimed, coming nearer.

The first ray of the rising sun streaming through the windows fell full upon her pale face, and it was as the face of an angel.

“Charley!” she repeated, with a great tearless sob, holding out both hands; “Oh, bless God! the doctor says we may—*hope!*”

He had braced himself to hear the worst—not this. He made one step forward and fell at her feet like a stone.

CHAPTER XII. THE MORNING.

They might hope? The night had passed, the morning had come, and she still lived.

You would hardly have thought so to look at her as she lay, deathly white, deathly still. But as the day broke she had awakened from a long sleep, the most natural and refreshing she had known for weeks, and looked up into the pale anxious face of Trix with the faint shadow of a smile. Then the eyelids swayed and closed in sleep once more, but she had recognized Trix for the first time in days—the crisis was over and hope had come.

They would not let her see him. Only while she slept would they allow him now to enter her room. But it was easily borne—Edith was not to die, and Heaven and his own grateful happy heart only knew how infinitely blessed he was in that knowledge. After the long bitter night—after the darkness and the pain, light and morning had come. Edith would live—all was said in that.

“There are some remedies that are either kill or cure in their action,” the old doctor said, giving Charley a facetious poke. “Your marriage was one of them, young man. *I* thought it was Kill—it turns out it was Cure.”

For many days no memory of the past returned to her, her existence was as the existence of a new-born babe, spent alternately in taking food and sleep. Food she took with eager avidity after her long starvation, and then sank back again into profound, refreshing slumber.

“Let her sleep,” said the doctor, with a complacent nod; “the more the better. It's Nature's way of repairing damages.”

There came a day at last when thought and recollection began to struggle back—when she had strength to lie awake and think. More than once Trix caught the dark eyes fixed in silent wistfulness upon her—a question in them her lips would not ask. But Miss Stuart guessed it, and one day spoke:

“What is it, Dithy?” she said; “you look as if you wanted to say something, you know.”

“How—how long have I been sick?” was Edith's question.

“Nearly five weeks, and an awful life you've led us, I can tell you! Look at me—worn to skin and bone. What do you suppose you will have to say for yourself when Angus comes?”

Edith smiled faintly, but her eyes still kept their wistful look.

“I suppose I was delirious part of the time, Trixy?”

“Stark, staring crazy—raving like a lunatic at full moon! But you needn't look so concerned about it—we've changed all that. You'll do now.”

“Yes,” she said it with a sigh; “you have all been very kind. I suppose it's only a fancy of the fever after all”

“What?”

“I—Trixy! don't laugh at me, but I thought Charley was here.”

“Did you?” responded Trix; “the most natural thing in life. He *is* here.”

Her eyes lighted—her lips parted—a question trembled upon them, but she hesitated.

“Go on,” said Miss Stuart, enjoying it all; “there's something else on your mind. Speak up, Edie! don't be ashamed of yourself.”

“I am afraid you *will* laugh this time, Trixy—I know it is only a dream, but I thought Charley and I were—”

“Yes,” said Trixy; “were—what?”

“Married, then!” with a faint little laugh. “Don't tell him, please, but it seems—it seems so real, I had to tell you.”

She turned her face away. And Trixy, with suspicious dimness in her eyes, stooped down and kissed that thin, wan face.

“You poor little Dithy!” she said; “you *do* like Charley, don't you? no, it's not a dream—you were married nearly a fortnight ago. The hope of my life is realized—you are my sister, and Charley's wife!”

There was a little panting cry—then she covered her face with her hands and lay still.

“He is outside,” went on Trix; “you don't know what a good boy he has been—so patient—and all that. He deserves some reward. I think if you had died he would have died too—Lord Lovel and Lady Nancy, over again. Not that I much believe in broken hearts where men are concerned, either,” pursued Trix, growing, cynical; “but this seems an exceptional case. He's awfully fond of you, Dithy; 'pon my word he is. I only hope Angus may go

off in a dead faint the first time I'm sick and get better, as he did the other day. We haven't let him in much lately, for fear of agitating you, but I think," says Trixy, with twinkling eyes, "you could stand it now—couldn't you, Mrs. Stuart?"

She did not wait for a reply—she went out and hunted up Charley. He was smoking downstairs, and trying to read the morning paper.

"Your wife wants you," said Miss Stuart brusquely; "go! only mind this—don't stay too long, and don't talk too much."

He started to his feet—away went *Tribune* and cigar, and up the stairs sprang Charley—half a dozen at a time.

And then Miss Stuart sits down, throws her handkerchief over her face, and for the next five minutes indulges in the exclusively feminine luxury of a real good cry.

* * * * *

After that Mrs. Charles Stuart's recovery was perfectly magical in its rapidity. Youth and splendid vitality, no doubt, had something to do with it, but I think the fact that she *was* Mrs. Charles Stuart had more to do still.

There came a day, when propped up with pillows, she could sit erect, and talk, and be talked to as much as she chose, when blinds were pulled up, and sunshine poured in; and no sunshine that ever shone was half so bright as her happy face. There came still another day, when robed in a pretty pink morning-dress, Charley lifted her in his arms and carried her to the arm-chair by the window, whence she could look down on the bright, busy city street, whilst he sat at her feet and talked. Talked! who is to tell of what? "Two souls with but a single thought—two hearts that beat as one," generally find enough to say for themselves, I notice, and require the aid of no outsiders.

And there came still another day—a fortnight after, when looking pale and sweet, in a dark-gray travelling suit and hat, Mrs. Charles Stuart, leaning on her husband's arm, said good-bye to her friends, and started on her bridal tour. They were to spend the next three weeks South, and then return for Trixy's wedding at Christmas.

Christmas came; merry Christmas, sparkling with snow and sunshine, as Christmas ever should sparkle, and bringing that gallant ex-officer of Scotch Grays, Captain Angus Hammond—captain no longer—plain Mr. Hammond, done with drilling and duty, and getting the route forever, going in for quiet, country life in bonnie Scotland, with Miss Beatrix Stuart for aider and abettor.

Charley and his wife came to New York for the wedding. They had told Mr. Hammond how ill Edith had been, but the young Scotchman, as he pulled his ginger whiskers and stared in her radiant, blooming face, found it difficult indeed to realize. She had been a pretty girl—a handsome woman—happiness had made her more—she was lovely now. For Charley—outwardly all his easy insouciance had returned—he submitted to be idolized and made much of by his wife, after the calm fashion of lordly man. But you had only to see him look once into her beautiful, laughing face, to know how passionately she was beloved.

Mr. and Mrs. Angus Hammond had a splendid wedding; and to say our Trixy looked charming would be doing her no sort of justice. And again Miss Seton was first bridesmaid, and Mrs. Stuart, in lavender silk, sniffed behind a fifty dollar pocket handkerchief, as in duty bound. They departed immediately after the ceremony for Scotland and a Continental tour—that very tour which, as you know, Trixy was cheated so cruelly out of three years before.

Mr. and Mrs. Stuart went back South to finish the winter and the honeymoon among the glades of Florida, and "do," as Charley said, "Love among the Roses." Mr. Darrell returned to Sandypoint. Mrs. Stuart, senior, took up her abode with Nellie Seton, pending such time as her children should get over the first delirium of matrimonial bliss and settle quietly down to housekeeping. After that it was fixed that she was to divide her time equally between them, six months with each. Charley and his wife would make England their home; Edith's ample fortune lay there, and both loved the fair old land.

In May they sailed for England. They would spend the whole of the summer in Continental travelling—the pleasant rambling life suited them well. But they went down to Cheshire first; and one soft May afternoon stood side by side in the old Gothic church where the Catherons for generations had been buried. The mellow light came softly through the painted windows—up in the organ loft, a young girl sat playing to herself soft, sweet, solemn melodies. And both hearts bowed down in tender sadness as they stood before *one* tomb, the last erected within those walls, that of Sir Victor Catheron. Edith pulled her veil over her face—the only tears that had filled her eyes since her second wedding-day falling quietly now.

There were many remembrances of the dead man. A beautiful memorial window, a sombre hatchment, and a

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monument of snow-white marble. It was very simple—it represented only a broken shaft, and beneath in gold letters this inscription:

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF
SIR VICTOR CATHERON, of Catheron Royals, Bart.
DIED OCT. 3, 1867, in the 24th year of his age.

“His sun set while it was yet day.”

THE END.