A LIFE'S SECRET;
Or, WHO WAS SHE?
BY ARABELLA SOUTHWORTH.

CHAPTER I.
A DEATHBED PROMISE.

It was a stormy night in January. The wind shrieked and howled, and then died away in a long wail, as if recruiting its strength for another outburst; dashing the sleet against the window-panes, and rattling the ill-fitting ones in its fury, as if determined to force an entrance.

Pretty little Mrs. Stanniforth shivered, and drew her shawl more closely about her as she stooped over the cheerless fire smoldering in the little open stove.
With the tongs she picked up some cinders that had fallen, and replaced them, adding a few lumps of coal to coax the kettle to boil.

The Reverend Austin Stanniforth liked his cup of tea, about the only luxury in which he was able to indulge. He sat on the opposite side of the fire, his arm resting on the table, where stood the tea-tray.

His countenance wore a look of deep dejection as he watched his wife.

The sight of her pale face, and fragile, attenuated figure affected him.

One little blossom had come to them, only to fade away in a few weeks, and since that time Mrs. Stanniforth had never recovered her health.

Her husband was well aware that better air and a more nourishing diet were needed for her restoration, and these things he had no means of procuring for her.

He had been a tutor in her father’s family. The two young people had fallen in love, and plighted their troth to each other.

The young man’s presumption was discovered, and he was dismissed from his position; but having obtained a charge in the Five Points Mission, he succeeded in persuading pretty Alice Ruthven that love was better than houses or lands.

Her father’s doors were closed against her on her marriage, and she brought nothing to her husband but a pretty face, a sweet temper, and a pair of very incapable hands.

Mr. Stanniforth was not long in finding out that love alone would not pay house rent and butchers’ bills; and, pinch as they might, debts accumulated.

His labor of love among the haunts of vice and poverty, but poorly paid, and Mr. Stanniforth tried to eke out a living by writing for the magazines; but manuscript after manuscript was returned upon his hands as not suitable.

A letter lay beside him now, declining an article he had built much upon; and though a man of good courage, despondency had for the moment laid its heavy hand upon him, and he felt the burden of life too heavy to bear.

“I am afraid the tea is not very strong, but we must keep enough for the morning,” Mrs. Stanniforth observed, as she poured the boiling water into the teapot; “and as for milk, I am sure they must put water in down-stairs. But I daren’t say a word to Mrs. Cripps, she is so impertinent.”

“My poor darling!” Mr. Stanniforth ejaculated, fondly regarding his young wife.

“Not poor while I have you, Austin, dear!” she replied.

After setting out the remains of yesterday’s loaf and a scrap of salt butter, she went round to her husband’s side, and putting her arm about his neck, she leaned her head against his.

“I am sure some day, the President, or the Bishop of the diocese, or somebody, will get to hear what beautiful sermons you preach, and how good and clever you are,” she continued; “and then how nice it will be to be rich and popular.”

“I am afraid it will be a long time yet before I’m a bishop, Ally, dear,” replied Mr. Stanniforth, with a wan smile, and stroking the little thin hand that hung over his shoulder.

“A bishop? Oh, no; I don’t think I should care about that,” his wife returned, as she kissed his forehead, and then seated herself before the tea-tray; “but a nice, comfortable country charge. That would be the thing, wouldn’t it, where we could keep a cow and chickens, and have a garden?”

This was always Mrs. Stanniforth’s dream, to leave the squalid neighborhood in which their present lot was cast, to stronger hands, and to seek a more genial life in the country.

A furious gust of wind with driving sleet hustled against the window, making the scanty curtains sway, and the lamp on the table flicker, and startling Mrs. Stanniforth so that she almost dropped her cup.

“Hark!” she exclaimed, holding up her finger; “is it not the sound of wheels?”

Another sound certainly seemed mingling with the blast. Anything like a conveyance was rare in the evening in that poor, out-of-the-way street, and indeed in the morning also, the rag or ash-men’s carts excepted.

As the gust died howling away, a carriage or hack was plainly heard to draw up at the door, and presently a violent ring at the bell summoned the little lodging-house servant from her doze before the kitchen fire.

A murmur of voices, and then a tap at the parlor door.

“Please, sir, here’s a person as wishes to see you,” said the girl, showing a grimy face at the half-opened door.

But before he could reply she was pushed aside, and a fresh-looking, middle-aged woman, who might be a respectable servant from her appearance, entered the room.

“You are Mr. Stanniforth and a clergyman?” she stated rather than asked.

“At your service,” Mr. Stanniforth returned in some surprise.

“Rather at the service of the sick and unhappy, I hope,” said the woman. “I have been sent to fetch you to minister to one who is both.”

“My time is at your disposal,” Mr. Stan-
niforth answered, hastily swallowing the remainder of his cup of tea, and beginning to button up his coat, while his wife looked from one to the other, puzzled and anxious.

"Where am I to go? Who is it that wants me?" he added.

"You must be pleased to trust yourself to me, without asking questions," rejoined the good woman respectfully but firmly. "The carriage is waiting outside. Those who sent me will explain all that is necessary."

"This is very strange, Austin; do you think you will go?" cried Mrs. Stanniforth, in some alarm.

"My dear child, if it is a sick person who wants me, how can I do otherwise than go? Here, help me on with my overcoat, and don't trouble your little head with fears while I am away," said her husband.

"The lady has no cause for fear, or you either, sir," remarked the woman, somewhat grimly.

Mr. Stanniforth having declared himself ready, went out to the carriage and got in, followed by the woman.

He noticed by the light of the street lamp that the driver did not look like an ordinary hackman, but like a gentleman's servant.

As the carriage-door was closed, they drove off at a smart pace in spite of the wind.

The windows were down and blurred with rain; it was difficult to distinguish objects as they drove along.

Wherever it was they were going, the way appeared long and intricate. After a time the different sound made by the wheels denoted that they had passed beyond the streets into a softer road, and, as well as he could discern the houses were more scattered, with trees at intervals.

At length the carriage stopped, and the woman alighting, beckoned Mr. Stanniforth to follow.

She led the way down a dimly-lighted, narrow lane, to a door in a wall.

Opening it with a key she drew from her pocket, he found himself in a garden: thence his conductress led him through another door into a small, old-fashioned house, little more than a cottage.

It appeared to be one of those country retreats that are left stranded amidst the blocks of brown-stone fronts and desirable residences, run up by the hundred by enterprising builders, in the upper part of the city.

Mr. Stanniforth had, however, small time allowed him for observation.

The woman led him up-stairs, and opening a door to the right, ushered him into a room.

It was dimly lighted by one small lamp, which was placed upon the table by the side of the bed.

As his eyes recovered from the dazzle of the lamp after the outer darkness, he perceived the figure of a young woman stretched upon the bed, lying so fixed and still that he could not have said whether she was alive or dead.

Beside the bed sat another woman in walking attire, so closely vailed that no feature could be discerned.

As Mr. Stanniforth entered, this person rose from her seat, and with a stately air motioned him to approach.

"I trust I am not too late," he whispered.

The lady—for a lady it evidently was—made a gesture, but whether of assent or dissent he could not tell, adding, in a muffled voice, either broken by emotion or willfully disguised, "Come with me; I have to speak to you."

There was a slight movement from the bed; the dying woman opened her eyes.

As Mr. Stanniforth bent over her, she murmured, in faint accents, "Go; and the blessing of the dying be with you!"

There was a look of earnest appeal in the dark eyes. It seemed as if she wished to have said more, but strength failed; she could only repeat, "Go!"

Thus adjured, Mr. Stanniforth followed the vailed lady into an adjoining room, leaving the woman-servant to watch by the bedside.

"Sit down," she said, seating herself and pointing to a chair. "I have something to say of great importance, and a request to make, which I beg and pray you will not refuse."

Mr. Stanniforth bowed, and waited for the lady to proceed.

"What or who I am matters not," she continued; and Mr. Stanniforth thought he perceived something of hauteur in her manner. "If you accede to our request—which Heaven grant!—you will be put into communication with a firm of solicitors, who will guarantee our good faith; but it will be of no use to ask questions of them, as they are directed to answer none. See here!"

As she spoke, she drew aside a curtain, and revealed a cot, in which was lying, in the sweet sleep of innocence, a lovely female child, of about eighteen months old.

Mr. Stanniforth softly approached, and gazed upon the sleeping child, his face eloquent with tender emotion.

He was naturally tender-hearted and fond of children, and added to this was the remembrance of his loss. As this little creature was, his own might have been.

The lady watched his countenance narrow-
ly. She appeared satisfied with her examination.

While Mr. Stanniforth bent over the cot, she raised a corner of her thick vail, the better to scan his features, but dropped it again.

"This little innocent will soon be left without home or protector," she said, in a voice that trembled in spite of an evident effort at control. "Her father is a wicked man, who would bring her up to everything that is evil, and her mother's family are powerless to save her, except by placing her in some shelter, where she will remain unknown, at any rate, till she arrives at years of discretion. Mr. Stanniforth, I believe you to be a good man, and I believe your wife to be a loving woman. Never mind how I know; that is not to the purpose. Will you undertake the charge of this child? It shall be made well worth your while, from a worldly point of view."

Mr. Stanniforth was startled; such a proposition was so totally unexpected.

He could not help expressing this, and added that he scarcely knew how to decide upon so serious a question, without time for deliberation.

"Do you think there is much time to spare?" the lady asked, with a motion of her hand toward the room they had just left.

"If you would save a pure soul from contact with iniquity—if you would give ease to a mother in her dying moments, I adjure you to grant our request."

The lady clasped her hands, and bent forward toward him in the eagerness of her appeal.

Mr. Stanniforth was much moved.

It was a strange position in which to be placed.

But, after all, why should he not do as he was entreated? What reason was there for refusing?

His heart went out to the child, and already in imagination he saw it clasped in his Alice's arms.

"What is it exactly that you wish me to do?" he asked.

And in this question the lady saw that her request was already granted.

"We wish that the child should never know her real parentage until arrived at womanhood; that in all respects she should be brought up and educated as your own. Her baptismal name is Hilda; her other name matters not; she will go by the name of Hilda Stanniforth, and will know no other. Her nurse will accompany her—the woman who brought you here; she is a faithful soul, and pledged to secrecy. They will join you as soon as you can make arrangements to receive them. For their maintenance you will receive two thousand a year, payable quarterly. Hilda will have five hundred a year for her own use when she arrives at the age of eighteen. Does this satisfy you?"

Mr. Stanniforth was the least worldly-minded of men; but his heart beat faster, and a flush rose to his face, as he recognized the full meaning of this competence to him.

"It shall be as you wish," he said, in a voice that was a little beyond his control.

"And with the help of a guiding Providence, I will keep the maiden unspotted from the world."

"You must also pledge me your word of honor as a gentleman to keep our secret. Never must you, by word or sign, reveal what you have witnessed to-night, or attempt to penetrate the mystery that shrouds the child's birth. Only of one thing be assured, she is the offspring of an honorable marriage, and of no ignoble parentage."

The lady held out her hand as she spoke; Mr. Stanniforth took it, and, bowing over it, gave his solemn promise to keep the secret, and pledged himself also for his wife.

"It is enough," the lady replied, rising from her seat, and still holding him by the hand, she led him back to the room where the dying woman lay.

The vailed lady bent over her and whispered some words in her ear; while Mr. Stanniforth sunk on his knees by the bed in fervent prayer.

The sick woman had been lying with closed eyes in that weary apathy which precedes deeper shadows and more perfect rest; but at the whispered words, at the prayer from the lips of faith, she opened her large, melancholy eyes.

They rested upon the clergyman first with an inquiring glance, and then, as if satisfied, a sweet smile like a flower from Paradise stole over the white, worn face.

She strove to speak; but even in the effort a gray shadow fell frost-like, and she was gone.

The nurse, who had been holding her hand, laid it reverently across the bosom that had been so sorely troubled, but had, at last, found peace.

"Where the wicked cease from troubling!" she murmured, giving utterance to her inward thought.

The vailed lady stood for a minute with bowed head and clasped hands while Mr. Stanniforth spoke a few words of consolation, hesitatingly, for he was quite unaware in what connection the dead and the living stood to one another, nor, as the thick vail effectually concealed the features, could he
tell whether she was moved by grief or merely by instinctive human pity.

"I will not detain you longer," she said, in the disguised voice in which she had spoken throughout. "You will hear from my lawyers, and through them you will let me know when you are ready to enter upon your charge. The sooner the better. The carriage that brought you here is ready to convey you home."

With a stately bend of the head, she dismissed him, and the woman-servant once more led the way through the garden, and along the lane to where the vehicle stood waiting—led the way in silence, excepting for a respectful good-night, as the door closed upon him.

The storm had somewhat abated, and the man drove at a rapid pace.

Mr. Stanniforth had plenty to occupy his thoughts.

This charge that he had undertaken, that had seemed so strangely thrust upon him, appeared to him in the light of help from Heaven, and so he made no doubt that his wife would regard it.

It also determined him in a course his wife's delicate health had already prompted, which was to seek for a country charge.

He was a good man, and anxious to do his duty to the utmost; but he was not of the stuff to fight against the squalor, vice and misery of Five Points, New York.

It crushed and overpowered him; he felt impotent against it. He would surely somewhere find a flock that could be led by a gentle hand?

He found his wife sitting up for him, full of anxious fears.

By turns she was astonished, affected, rejoiced at the tale he had to tell, but finally the last feeling predominated.

"A little child—a dear little girl!" she exclaimed, even while her tears fell fast, partly for the poor mother's sake, partly in remembrance of her own lost darling. "Oh, Austin! how we shall love her!"

But further surprise awaited them.

On the afternoon of the following day the post brought a letter from Finch and Parminter, Counselors-at-Law, No. 4—Broadway, requesting the favor of a call from Mr. Stanniforth at his earliest convenience.

Needless to say, the next morning found him at the number designated, whence he returned radiant, with a first-quarter payment of five hundred dollars in advance in his pocket, and a something besides.

"Guess what it is! Guess what you would like best!" he said to his wife.

"You have heard of a country curacy?"

she cried, her pale cheeks flushing, her eyes brightening, almost breathless with hope.

Fortune had already done so much for them, need there be any limit as to what the reputed blind goddess would do?

"Better still, my darling," Mr. Stanniforth replied almost as breathless as herself with the delight of the news he had to tell. "Look at me, dear—look at me well! You see before you no less a person than the Rector of Beverly, Connecticut!"

CHAPTER II.

THE HAND OF FATE WAS ON THEIR MEETING.

Sixteen years passed away—years so long to look forward to, so short to look back upon.

In a charming little valley in the northern part of the state of Connecticut, a small, bright river winds its way through a fair landscape.

On one side are wooded heights, the advanced guard of higher hills; on the other, green, softly-rounded fields and orchards, divided here and there by small shallow ravines and sparsely sprinkled with dwellings.

A few farms, with their outhouses and fields of grain or pasture, and by the riverside the houses of a small village, with its gray stone church and parsonage half-hidden from sight by tall elms.

Beyond the village the stony road led upward to a residence of some pretension; a long two-storied mansion, shaded by elm and maple trees, and surrounded by well-kept gardens.

This, when she was in the country, was the residence of Mrs. Dacre, the lady paramount of the neighborhood.

One morning, in late summer, when a slight autumn tinge was discernible here and there among the dense green of the distant hills, a young man, sketching-block and color-box in hand, was striving to catch the effect of a storm-cloud rolling onward from the west.

He sat at the edge of a rough road, which, by a steep descent wound round the shoulder of a hill, to reach the valley below.

He had to blot in his sketch rapidly, for the shadow of the approaching storm had already fallen over the summit of the hill, and in another minute he closed his paint-box with an impatient sigh, as the sun-gleam altogether disappeared from the foreground.

At the same instant he heard the sounds of a horse's hoofs coming at a rapid pace down the stony road.
Turning his head in the direction of the sound, he saw that the rider was a girl.
She wore no habit, and the tightly-fitting gray flannel dress that she had on, permitted the stirrup-foot to show.
A wide-brimmed straw-hat shaded a face lightened in bloom by her rapid course through the fresh air.
She was mounted on a rough Shetland pony, that she sat light as Diana.
Just as he was wondering to see this nymph-like figure alone among the hills, a few goats sprung down the rocky ledge that bounded the road on one side, right in the face of the pony, who shied and plunged.
He darted forward just in time to save the girl from being thrown; but as he placed her safely on the ground, the pony finding no restraining hand upon the reins, tossed his head in the air and galloped off, leaving his mistress to her fate.
The girl quickly released herself from the artist's supporting arm, and drew back a few paces, the color deepening in her cheeks, but rather from annoyance and displeasure, it seemed, than embarrassment.
"I never knew Frisk do that before—never!" she exclaimed, knitting her brows.
"It was the goats! Frisk can't bear goats, I don't know why."
"And now Frisk is gone, I am afraid," said the young man, who could not forbear a smile. "Are you far from home? How can I assist you?"
"You could assist me if you could catch Frisk; but that you can't do," she answered, with a little pout. "And now he will gallop straight home, and my father and mother will be frightened."
"And we shall have a deluge moreover," rejoined the artist, picking up his sketching-box and slipping his paint-box into the pocket of his corduroy-jacket. "If I could see you into some place of shelter I could walk on, and assure your friends of your safety."
"Would you?" she said; "that would be kind; but then you would get wet," she added, in a tone of compunction.
The young man glanced at the well-worn sleeve of his painting-jacket, and his rather shabby shoes, and became conscious of the battered gray felt wide-awake he had on his head.
There was something in the girl's manner that made him feel that she thought she was addressing some one in an inferior position.
He wondered for what she took him—for some traveling photographer, probably.
He smiled.
"I do not think the rain will hurt me much," he said. "But first, is any shelter at hand? I am a stranger here."
"Yes; there is a cottage at the turn of the road," she replied, moving onward as she spoke.
"Let us hasten, then," he returned, as large drops fell upon their hands and faces, the precursors of a downpour.
Swiftly as a fawn she began to run, he following with his longer strides, till breathless and panting they reached the cottage, and pushed the door open, just as a vivid flash of lightning and a crash of thunder gave notice that the storm was upon them.
Then came down the rain in a perfect deluge before they could well get the door closed again.
At the sound of the door opening and shutting, a tidily-dressed elderly woman came forward from an inner room.
She threw up her hands in astonishment as she saw who were the intruders.
"Eh, miss," she cried, "who'd hev thought of seeing you so far from home on such a day as this? And who may this be, pray?" she added, stroking down her apron, as she glanced at the girl's companion.
"I am an artist, a stranger in the neighborhood, and this young lady has been so kind as to lead me to a place of shelter," said the artist.
"You're kindly welcome. Sit you down, both of you," said the good woman, placing chairs near the fire, seldom allowed to go out in that part of the country.
"If you will direct me where to go, I will hasten at once and relieve the minds of your friends. I do not mind the rain in the least," said the young man, appealing to his companion in misfortune.
"No; I cannot allow you to expose yourself in this storm," she answered, with a pretty air of imperiousness. "Besides, it will not last long."
"You must e'en do what our miss bids you, sir," remarked the good woman of the house, with a kindly smile; then, turning to the young lady, she added, "Little Will is here; he shall run down by the short cut as soon as it holds up a bit."
"And he can bring back my pony," she returned.
Then she related to her hostess the accident that had occurred, and that so easily might have been serious.
"And now, if I am to be obeyed, Mrs. Johnson, you mustn't let us interrupt you, but just go back to your work, for I know you are busy," she added, with a playful smile.
"Nay for sure; there's no call to talk
He felt that he ought to go and leave her; that he ought not to intrude his companionship upon her when she so evidently wished none of it. He was somewhat amused. He had been so accustomed to be quite otherwise treated by the young ladies he met in society.

"It does not rain much now, so I will wish you a good-morning. Perhaps I may have the pleasure of meeting you again," he said.

He lifted his hat, and, with a bow and a smile that left her feeling a little puzzled and confused, he walked away.

She had small experience of young people in her own station of life; and of "gentlemen," beyond old Doctor Mowrbay and Mr. Elliot, the one lawyer of that vicinity, none.

The sons of the farmers she had never deigned to notice; and, looking at his garb, she had taken for granted that her rescuer was one of the working class, though she did not recognize him as belonging to the neighborhood.

But when he lifted his hat, which was a very bad one, and displayed fairly to view a head easily erect, covered with short rings of brown hair, a broad white brow, and a pair of bright, half-mocking blue eyes, which, with the smile on the well-cut lips, shaded by a soft brown mustache, seemed to say: "I am not what you take me for," then she felt at once intuitively that she had been mistaken.

This was no son of the soil; no ordinary mortal at all; a young hero, or demi-god, rather, who had descended from his natural abode, who home to appear for a few moments before the dazzled eyes of a mortal maiden.

He had called himself an artist; but the girl had but a very vague idea of the meaning of the term.

Mr. Elliot called her mother an artist, because she made pretty pictures, and she had read about great artists, Michael Angelo, and Raphael, and Titian, and many others, and seen engravings from their works at Dacre Hall.

Perhaps he was one of these, though she did not quite know whether any such lived in modern times.

She decided to ask her father. And now her speculations were cut short by the appearance of little Will on the guilty Frisk, and she was soon cantering homeward, Frisk in an evidently subdued mood, as if conscious of the impropriety of his late conduct.

The young artist, or whatever he might be, walked along the descending road for a while;
and then, instead of continuing downward to the village, he struck along a path skirting one of the wooded hills leading to Dacre Hall.

He, too, meditated upon his adventure. All his latent reverence and ideality had responded to the look in the girl's eyes as they had rested a moment on his in parting. He smiled to himself as the effect his appearance must have made upon her passed across his mind—the smile of a man who is quite aware that no disguise of well-used attire can altogether conceal nature's good gifts.

Who was she, this mountain sylph, who had so unexpectedly crossed his path? He would not have to bear suspense long, for his aunt, Mrs. Dacre, would be sure to know. He lifted his head as he drew near the Hall, and looked around him with an additional feeling of interest.

This estate, as well as the far larger Dacre property in New York, would be his father's in right of inheritance, and in due course of time his own. There was no one between. Mrs. Dacre never had a son, and her only daughter, who would have been her heiress, had been dead now many years.

Mrs. Dacre had never expressed a wish otherwise than that her property should go to her legitimate heir, her brother's son, although there had never been much communication between her and the members of her brother's family. Since the death of her husband and daughter, years before, she had expressed a wish that her nephew's son should visit her in her country home, in order that they might become acquainted.

He had only as yet passed one night at the Hall; but the acquaintance promised mutual pleasure, and Lionel Fountaine began to think he would not find the time of his country sojourn pass so heavily as he had at first feared.

When he met Mrs. Dacre at luncheon, he related to her his morning's adventure, inquiring, with an assumed air of indifference, who the fair equestrienne might be.

"So you have already met Hilda Stanforth," Mrs. Dacre observed, with a smile. Mr. Fountaine could not quite interpret.

"Stannforth! What the parson's daughter?" he returned, in some surprise.

"What is there in that to astonish you?" inquired his aunt.

"I don't know that I ought to be astonished; only one's idea of a country clergyman's daughter is different somehow. One expects something more prim—demure—I don't know what. I think I have always im-

|agined such a person in an old-fashioned gown and a close straw bonnet, with a bag of tracts upon her arm."

"I am afraid your experience is limited, Lionel," remarked Mrs. Dacre.

"Well, it is rather," he allowed. "Our rector's daughters at home are fast girls—hoysdens, who talk slang, and would ride on a bicycle if their father would let them. But, then, they are exceptions, I should hope."

Lionel spoke with an air of disgust that amused Mrs. Dacre.

"You will not find Hilda a hoyden, and she does not talk slang," she averred. "But you will have an opportunity of seeing more of her to-morrow; I have asked the Stanforth's to dinner."

"My dear aunt, beware how you lead me into danger!" cried Lionel, a look of pleasure irradiating his handsome face. Again the same inscrutable smile passed across Mrs. Dacre's face.

"Are you so very susceptible?" she asked.

"I don't think I am. At any rate, I have managed to keep tolerably heart-whole; and I suppose, at four-and-twenty, that is something to boast of.""Only don't boast too much. And now, what would you like to do with yourself this afternoon? To-morrow the gardener will be ready to accompany you to the shooting localities. I am told the partridge are plentiful this year."

Then Mrs. Dacre went on to describe the amusements he might be able to find in the neighborhood, and such society as the recurrence of the shooting season brought to that sparsely-populated part of the county.

"I have never myself had any acquaintance with the men who come here for their shooting among the hills. But I give you carte blanche, my dear boy. I do not wish that you should feel dull," she concluded, as she rose to return to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER III.

"NONE KNEW HER BUT TO LOVE HER."

The Beverly parsonage was an old, rambling, gray-stone house, stained with the weather and almost covered by the vines which climbed over it.

It stood close by the church, and, like it, was half-hidden away among elms and maples. In front a narrow patch of green divided it from the road, but behind was a large garden—kitchen and flower-garden all in one.

The long, grassy paths led between rows of gooseberry and currant bushes, and hoary apple and damson trees; while every vacant
nook unoccupied by the necessities of the culinary department was filled with roses, and stocks, and wallflowers, and sweet-peas, and other hardy and sweet-scented flowers, where the bees from the hives at the foot of the garden hummed through the summer days.

An ivy-covered wall separated the garden from a field in which a couple of cows grazed in the occasional company of Frisk; and from the yard beyond the wall to the right might be heard the cackling of fowls and quacking of ducks.

To any one coming from such a noble mansion as that of Mrs. Fountain, at Cornwallon-the-Hudson, the rooms at the parsonage would have looked small, and furnished in a way that denoted narrow means; and yet there was a beauty about them, too, born of a woman's hand—a touch of gentle refinement not always visible in more stately apartments.

The principal sitting-room at the back was long and low, with walls painted gray, and heavy beams across the ceiling. But a few pretty bright water-color drawings of flowers, framed in simple gilt moldings, hung here and there, and between them velvet-covered brackets supported classically-shaped vases and jugs of terra cotta or majolica ware, none the less elegant because the cost was small.

Here and there also, but not in too great profusion, were pieces of embroidery in rich but subdued colors, cushions and footstools, and a hand-painted fire-screen.

The windows of this pleasant room opened down to the ground. They were thrown open wide after the storm had passed over, to let in the cool, refreshing air that ruffled the curtains, and fanned Mrs. Stanniforth's brow as she sat at work.

Mrs. Stanniforth at thirty-seven looked almost prettier than she did at twenty. Her figure had become more rounded, her complexion was still fair and delicate as a girl's, and there was a look of utter peace and contentment in her blue eyes, and on her smooth, white brow, the result of sixteen years of placid happiness such as falls to the lot of few.

A reconciliation with her family took place before her father's death, which is a thought of comfort to her.

Her brothers are both in the West, and her sister, married in accordance with the wishes of her family, occupies a very different sphere.

She seldom sees her, therefore, though there is an occasional interchange of letters.

Mr. Stanniforth was sauntering up and down the garden, his hands behind him.

His study is in the front of the house, on the opposite side of the passage from the dining-room; but in the summer time he thinks out his sermons, or whatever else is engaging his attention, better in the open air, among his birds, and trees and flowers.

He also has found his right place in the world.

He is beloved and respected by young and old; and always a welcome visitor in the farms and cottages scattered throughout the parish, none the less so, perhaps, that he is generally accompanied by Hilda.

It was not of his next Sunday's sermon he was thinking now as he paced up and down, but of the child of his adoption.

She had grown up in this secluded nest from babyhood to most lovely girlhood.

He had kept her, as he had promised, unspotted from the world.

She was altogether sweet and charming; but there were little traits of character that showed themselves now and then that made him think of some bright-plumed bird in a dove's nest, from which it would one day take wing.

A something of pride, of imperiousness; a quickness to resent anything like wrong or injustice that she might see, that recalled to his memory what the vailed lady had said—that she came of no ignoble parentage.

He had been less strict with her than he would have been with a daughter of his own. He had allowed her natural bent, her natural impulses of freedom, from not knowing the position she might ultimately be called upon to fill; and for this same reason he had cultivated her mind assiduously, striving to strengthen her judgment and her reasoning powers, that she might be prepared for any fate that might befall.

Mr. and Mrs. Stanniforth had not been alarmed, as Hilda feared they would be, by the return of the pony; for Frisk, finding the gate leading to the yard open, had quietly betaken himself to his stable unperceived, and nothing was known of his arrival till little Will came for him, bringing the intelligence of Hilda's safety at the same time.

This accident, however, revived the hesitation he had sometimes felt before—whether it was well that Hilda, at her age, should be allowed to scamper about on her pony quite so much?

But when this was suggested, she always asked what harm could possibly happen to her? If he could point out any creature in the whole parish who would not take care of her, if need were? And then Mrs. Dacre had always made much of Hilda, and Mrs. Dacre made no objection to anything she did.

"Let the child have her freedom," she said.
"The time may come when she will have to act for herself."

This and similar speeches rather puzzled Mr. Stanniforth.

He had kept his secret religiously, and so, he was convinced, had old Molly, whilom nurse and now housekeeper.

Mrs. Dacre could not know that Hilda was not his own child. Why, then, did she occasionally speak as if some change of circumstances might be expected?

This possible change weighed very heavily upon Mr. Stanniforth's mind at this time.

Hilda would be eighteen in a few months. She would then have a separate income. And had he not been given to understand that then it might be necessary to make her acquainted with the secret of her origin?

Hilda believed him and his Alice to be her father and mother. She loved them devotedly, and what the effect of the disclosure would be upon her he could not tell. He dreaded it, both for her sake and his own, and most sincerely hoped that the mystery need never be revealed.

As he turned in his walk toward the house, he saw her come in; she stooped over Mrs. Stanniforth and kissed her, and seemed to be replying to some words of expostulation; then catching sight of him, she flew down the garden path to meet him.

"Father, I am so glad you did not know, that you were not frightened," she cried.

"It was the goats. Frisk never did so before."

She passed her hands through his arm, clasping them as she hung upon him lovingly.

"But, my dear, what has happened once may happen again; you must be careful," Mr. Stanniforth answered. "Little Will said a gentleman was with you; who was it?"

"I don't know, father He was sitting drawing by the roadside, and saved me from falling when Frisk began to plunge. Then we ran to take shelter from the storm in Mrs. Johnson's cottage. He offered to come through the rain to tell you I was safe, only I would not let him. Father, are there any great artists nowadays?"

"Yes, dear; yes, certainly. Why do you ask?"

"Because he told Mrs. Johnson he was an artist, and he did not look like anything common. He was not in the least like Jim Stubbs or Tom Burton; and he said he hoped we might meet again."

"I shall be glad to have an opportunity of thanking him, if that should be so," returned Mr. Stanniforth. It is very likely some one who has come into the country for the shoot-
“I was delighted to be of service,” Lionel replied.

“But I was not there to delight anybody,” Hilda interposed; “and it seemed altogether so stupid.”

As she turned her head away slightly, a piece of the honeysuckle she wore at her throat fell to the ground. Mr. Fountaine stooped, and picking it up, held it between his fingers.

“Who was stupid, you or I?” he asked.

“I said it,” returned Hilda, a little angrily, as she observed the amused expression of his face.

“That means Frisk and the goats.”

“Perhaps; but I wish you would forget all about it—make believe it never happened.”

“Agreed; our acquaintance starts afresh then from this hour,” he said, as he gave her his arm to lead her in to dinner.

Hilda, for the first time in her life, did not feel quite at ease. She had an idea that Mr. Fountaine was laughing at her.

What had she said?

What had she done?

Had she made herself very ridiculous in at first taking him for a common person, like Tom Burton, the miller’s son, just because he had on a painting-jacket and a not very good hat?

How was it she had not recognized at once, by his voice, by his manner, that he was an altogether superior being?

What a foolish, ignorant little country girl he must think her!

She had asked him to forget it, but she could not forget it herself.

Before the evening was over, however, all other sensations were merged in the new delight of this young companionship.

Mrs. Dacre told Lionel Fountaine that if he wished to explore the beauties of the neighborhood, he must persuade Miss Stanniforth to be his guide; and before they parted she had promised to show him the Millgill Waterfall and the brown-stone quarries, and other picturesque spots suitable for his pencil.

And when Lionel went to his room that night after smoking his solitary cigar, he told himself that he did not much care about making the acquaintance of any of the fellows who had come for the shooting.

Very likely he might go in for it one of these days, but he wasn’t in a hurry.

A few weeks went by, and autumn was in all its glory of the thousand-and-one tints which make the beauty of an October landscape.

Lionel Fountaine gave no sign of being wearied with his stay at Dacre Hall.

But, then, he had not much chance of being weary of the Hall, he spent so much of his time at the parsonage, or wandering about the hills and glens with Hilda; sometimes with Mr. Stanniforth as third, but just as often alone.

What was Mrs. Dacre about all this time?—for assuredly there was a fascination about Hilda that she ought to have recognized as dangerous.

Perhaps hers was not the dazzling attractiveness that seems to say, “Beware,” but none the less surely did she steal into the affections.

There is a story of a soft-voiced witch, who bound her victims with gossamer threads that were never felt in the twining, but became so strong as to be beyond mortal power to break. Probably Mrs. Dacre had never read that story.

Mr. Stanniforth was apparently more clear-sighted. He could not close his eyes to the fact that these two young people were learning to love each other.

It might be as yet but the sweet twilight of love, the half-hour before the dawn; but that they were drawn irresistibly toward each other there could be no doubt.

He was much exercised in his mind upon the matter. On the one side, if he understood Hilda’s position aright, a husband’s protection would at once place her in security from the danger of any other claim; but, on the other, had he any right to sanction the disposal of her hand?

There had hitherto been no thought or question of any proposals of marriage, but now, at her age, such contingencies must be taken into account; and he made up his mind that should Mr. Fountaine prove in earnest in his attentions, it would be his duty to write to Messrs. Finch & Parminter, and endeavor through them to communicate with those who had placed Hilda under his care.

And in the mean time Hilda was brightly, joyously happy. Her eyes danced, her lips smiled with the fullness of delight that was bubbling over in her heart; and yet within she was very quiet, finding it luxury enough to sit still, and in silence to brood over the precious hours spent by the side of one who had become so dear.

She never thought of asking herself to what this constant companionship might lead; but Lionel Fountaine did ask himself, not without twittings of conscience.

He loved Hilda fondly, devotedly, and had he been his own master would at once have asked her to be his wife.

But his father was a proud man, and he much feared his refusal to accept this daugh-
A LIFE'S SECRET.

CHAPTER IV.
AN INQUISETIVE STRANGER.

ABOUT two miles beyond Dacre Hall, up among a most picturesque portion of the hills were some old brown-stone quarries, which at present were unworked.

A couple of years back there had been a terrible accident there, owing to the falling of a large piece of rock, and since then they had been abandoned, and amid the more superstitions of the working classes had arisen the rumor that they were haunted—that the ghosts of the men killed in the accident could be seen at almost any time wandering around among the rocks.

Consequently the place was shunned by nearly every one in the village, and although affording a most charming view of the whole country for miles around, was rarely visited unless by strangers, or occasionally by the Stanniforths, who found it a delightful spot for impromptu excursions.

Lionel Fountaine had visited the place several times, and he was anxious, while the fine autumn weather lasted, to complete a sketch which he had begun there, of the valley and little river, with another range of hills in the distant background.

He asked Hilda to go with him, but a fit of shyness came over her, and for once she demurred.

"I am not quite sure that I can go," she said, hesitatingly. "I rather think I am wanted at home."

"If you could put off going till to-morrow," Mr. Fountaine, we could make a day of it," Mr. Stanniforth proposed. "The barometer is high. I do not think there is any fear of the weather changing. And Farmer Stubbs is so kind as to place his carriage at my disposal occasionally. I am going to drive Mrs. Stanniforth to Sandyvale to-morrow, to make some purchases. If you and Hilda like to walk to the quarries to-morrow, and then on to Sandyvale, we could all come home together."

"I shall be delighted," replied Lionel, eagerly embracing the proposal.

Hilda turned away her head, to conceal the pleasure that she knew must shine through her eyes.

How she rejoiced over the soft amber sunset sky and the morning mist that was sure to clear off and give place to sunshine.

Lionel arrived early in the forenoon, the knapsack containing his painting materials slung to a leather strap over his shoulder.

Hilda was ready in her well-fitting gray flannel and wide-brimmed straw hat.

She, too, carried a satchel, stocked by Molly; for it would be afternoon before they reached Sandyvale, and neither the beauty of the scenery nor the picturesqueness of their walk, would alone sustain exhausted nature.

The morning was fresh and beautiful.

As they went along, Hilda repeated some of the stories about the forsaken quarries, and they speculated as to what had given rise to them.

Hilda was rather inclined to regret that the days of romance were over.

"But are they over?" Lionel queried. "I don't feel as they if were. And how do we know that we may not meet with some strange and exciting adventure before the day is done?"

"I have never met with any adventures," Hilda replied. Then she laughed. "Yes, once. I asked you to forget it, and now I am reminding you of it. But I don't care now."

"You no longer care what I think?" he questioned, with something of pique in his tone.

"I thought you such a very imposing personage that night. It was the evening dress, I suppose," said Hilda, parrying the question.

"And the day before, when you considered me to be so unimposing a personage, it was the bad hat. I should like to know, Miss Stanniforth, how far you regard me merely as a clothes-peg? In deference to your prejudices I have discarded my favorite old gray wide awake, and I went to Sandyvale and bought this; but it is not nearly so comfortable."

Lionel raised from his head his brown felt hat, as he spoke, baring his brow to the fresh air and sunshine.

How handsome he looked, this young hero! Hilda, in her own mind, compared him to Sir Galahad, and thought him worthy to go upon any quest with an assurance of success.

Their talk when together was generally occupied with those harmless egotisms which young people in like circumstances exchange; for what could be so interesting to them as each other? Their outward experiences might be different, but their emotions and ideas were exactly alike, and must be unique, because they could not believe that any one had ever felt before quite what they did.

But latterly they had fallen into a more jesting mood, as if hesitating on the verge of some great event that would change all life's
aspects for them, and half-frightened to lift
the vail that should betray their hearts' secrets
to each other.

When they had climbed the hill where the
quarries were they paused a moment to
drink in the beauty of the prospect before
them.

The day was so calm that not the slightest
breeze moved the branches overhead.

The river rippled through the valley at
their feet, and from the little town sounds
reached them through the still air, just
enough to break the oppressiveness of si-
lence.

All around was so golden clear, so grand
and free, it seemed as if Nature had
power to break every fetter, and as though
nothing could breathe here that was not
allied to freedom and happiness.

It was some little time before Lionel
could summon resolution to unstrap his
knapack and set himself to work.

How could he picture by any art of color-
ing the magic glow over the landscape that
day—how by material means portray that
which was not of this earth, and only visible
to the eye of love?

Hilda placed herself on a fallen block of
stone a little apart. She sat leaning forward
a little, with her hands folded in her lap, let-
ting her unmastered thoughts play as they
would.

It was, perhaps, partly the influence of
the haunted ground—of the strange tales she
had been narrating—but fancies and dreams
began to take shape within her brain, whether
illusions or realities she did not ask herself,
but gave herself up to them for the moment,
as she did to the loveliness of the day. How
the time had passed she did not know.

All at once she started as a shadow fell on
the grass, and a courteous voice, slightly
foreign in accent, addressed Mr. Fountaine,
who rose to his feet unwarrantably displeased
at the interruption.

"The town of Beverly is down in the val-
ley, about three miles," he replied to the
stranger's question.

"Ah! yes, the town of Beverly; but it is
Dacre, the residence of a lady of that name,
for which I would inquire," the intruder ex-
plained.

"Oh, you mean Dacre Hall," said Lionel,
wondering, at the same time, what this per-
son could want with his aunt. "It is some
distance from here, about two miles; but not
difficult to find if you follow the road be-
low."

"Two miles!" the stranger repeated, twirl-
ing the end of his waxed mustache. "Then I
should say my best way would be to go back
to the town—Sandy cove, is it not?—and take
a caisse, if the town affords such a thing."

"That I cannot say," replied Lionel, in a
tone of studied indifference.

He began to put up his brushes, in the ex-
pectation that the man would take his de-
parture; but he stood tapping his boots
with the cane he carried, and gazing at
Hilda, who had turned partly toward them.
The look was not one that could be re-
sented; it was more of surprise, a sort of puz-
zled recognition, than impertinent admira-
tion, and yet it made Lionel feel angry.

The man inspired him with an unreason-
able feeling of distrust and aversion.

He was evidently what would be called a
gentleman; he was handsome in a showy sort
of way, his manner was graceful and cour-
teous, and yet Lionel felt that there was
something sinister in his appearance.

He wished he would go, and instinctively
drew nearer to Hilda, as if she might need
his protection.

Hilda had also risen.

"Have you finished your sketch, Mr.
Fountaine?" she asked.

"Not quite; but the effect has changed,"
Lionel answered.

At the sound of Hilda's voice the stranger
started, and again bent upon her the same in-
quiring, puzzled look.

"You are an artist, sir, I perceive," he
said, as Lionel was about to put up his block.

"May I be allowed?—ah, per bacco! that is
talent, wonderfully true and well handled. I
envy you," he continued, with a sigh. "Art
was one of the dreams of my youthful days;
but circumstances did not permit. One
must bow to circumstances. I should have
adored landscape," he went on in a superior,
languid sort of way, drawing his hand over
his face with a slow, self-admiring gesture;
while Mr. Fountaine remained wholly unre-
sponsive. "What could be finer than these
exquisite autumn tints?—what more precious
to the soul than that expanse of mountain
and valley? And then this air of balm!" he
went on, with a sweeping movement of his
hand, as if patronizing the scene before him.

Lionel replied in a few cold words, add-
ing, "Miss Stanniforth, I think we must be
going."

"Stanniforth did you say? Did I catch
the name aright?" said the stranger.

"Sir!" exclaimed Mr. Fountaine, haughti-
ly.

"No offense, sir, I hope?" returned the
other. "I am here to renew acquaintance
with some old friends, and the name struck
me as familiar."
It struck Lionel that he was telling an untruth; but not feeling interested in the matter, he merely raised his hat, with a distant bow, and followed Hilda, who had already begun to descend the path leading to Sandy-cove.

She stopped for a moment, and glanced back, as Lionel joined her.

"I wonder who that is?" she exclaimed, with a little shiver. "Is it possible he can be a friend of Mrs. Dacre's? I wish he had not come. I feel as if he had spoiled our day. I felt it the moment his shadow fell on the grass before us."

"You have been thinking of the quarry specters," rejoined Lionel, smiling; "but I acknowledge a similar feeling of repulsion. I hope I shall not find him at Dacre Hall when I go back, and have to play the host. But don't say he has spoilt our day. I dare say Mrs. Stanniforth is waiting for you to help her with her shopping; and then, after dinner, we will have a look at the boats, and row down to the mouth of the river, if you like."

"That would be delightful! I have never been in a boat. How kind you are to me—how kind every one is!" Hilda cried, in a burst of gratitude.

"Every one would be very hard-hearted who could help it," said Lionel, looking down into her sweet face.

Lionel began to question very strongly whether he had a right to go away without explaining himself, although it was to gain his father's sanction to his suit.

He ought to have gone before this—gone when the foliage was green on the trees.

Now it was beginning to fade into its winter russet.

Weeks had slipped away from under his feet; the passing days had rebuked his delay in vain.

He knew now that he could never give Hilda up even should his father disapprove; therefore he would speak—he would tell Hilda of his love.

It was the only thing that could justify all he had done and said; not only justify it, but make it eternally and sacredly right.

"I will make it clear, as an honorable man should, why I have let her see that I have thought her lovely and charming, and that I delighted to be with her."

So he argued with himself.

This was not the time, however, for any such declaration; they had to hasten their steps not to keep Mr. and Mrs. Stanniforth waiting.

Nor was he again alone with her all that golden afternoon.

They went on the water, and lingered about the little town, that had a quaint character of its own, and returned to Beverly through the soft, clear twilight.

Mr. Fountaine drove; so he had Mrs. Stanniforth with him on the front seat.

But he was fond of Mrs. Stanniforth.

Her refinement and prettiness and sweetness of manner suited his taste; and, then, she never talked very much; so he could listen to the tones of Hilda's voice, as she discussed the day's doings with her father, and perhaps in the garden, in the evening, he might find an opportunity for the words he wanted to say.

But when they reached the parsonage, they found a note from Mrs. Dacre, requesting Mr. Stanniforth to come to her as soon as possible after breakfast on the following morning, on a matter of great importance, and also a message for Mr. Fountaine to beg him to return at once to Dacre Hall, where a telegram awaited him.

"I trust you will find no bad news," said Mr. Stanniforth, as they shook hands, Lionel declining to enter the house after the message that met him at the door. "I am so out of the world, you see, that the sight of one of those yellow envelopes always startles me."

Lionel had turned a little pale.

His father had been anxious for him to visit Mrs. Dacre; but if he had telegraphed, it was most likely a summons home, and such a sudden summons might have a meaning he did not like to think about.

Had Mrs. Dacre spoken of Hilda in writing to her nephew, and had his father taken alarm?

"Oh, one has got so accustomed nowadays to 'wire' messages, I dare say it is nothing of consequence," he replied, turning it off lightly. "I shall see you to-morrow. By-the-by, I wonder if that unpleasant-looking individual who joined us at the quarries has anything to do with the business my aunt wishes to see you about? I suppose the rector is expected to be adviser to the neighborhood?"

"The rector is bound to do what he can," Mr. Stanniforth answered. "Will you kindly tell Mrs. Dacre I will be with her about ten o'clock in the morning? Good-night."

And so these men parted, not to meet again for a much longer time than either of them then anticipated.

CHAPTER V.

THE STORY OF HER BIRTH.

When Mr. Stanniforth went up to the Hall in the morning, he found Mrs. Dacre in her usual arm-chair, but so deep in
thought that she did not hear him announce-
ed.
He waited a few minutes before he spoke. Then she started, as if suddenly recalled to herself, and motioned him to a seat by her side.
She looked pale, and much distressed, and her heavy eyes bore witness to a sleepless night.
"I am afraid you are not well, Mrs. Dacre," Mr. Stanniforth began.
But she interrupted him.
"I am well in health, but sore in mind.
Much has occurred that is very painful. My nephew has left me. He received a telegram to summon him to his father, who, it is feared, is dying. Lionel left at once last night, or he perhaps might have helped us."
Mr. Stanniforth expressed his regret; but Mrs. Dacre scarcely seemed to hear him.
"It was not of this I wished to speak to you," she began again. "I have had a visitor—one whom I hoped I might never have to see again." Then she added, after another pause, "Mr. Stanniforth, do you ever think of what happened on a January night sixteen years ago?"
Mr. Stanniforth started, and the blood rushed to his cheeks.
Vague suspicions had occasionally crossed his mind.
Were they about to be confirmed? He bent forward with an earnest look.
"Have you never suspected the identity
of that unhappy woman who received you that night, and implored you to take the child under your care?"
"I cannot truly say that such a suspicion
has ever crossed my mind," Mr. Stanniforth replied. "But I was bound to secrecy, and I have always endeavored to stifle any curiosity on the subject."
"You are a good and honorable man, Mr. Stanniforth," returned Mrs. Dacre. "I am glad to take this opportunity of thanking you for so thoroughly carrying out my wishes and intentions. Perhaps I ought to apologize for the disguise I assumed, for keeping up a mystery with you; but my excuse must be that I did not then know you as I know you now, and the need was urgent. I knew that the daughter of my old school friend, Alice Ruthven, had offended her family by marrying a poor and obscure clergyman; but as there was nothing against you but want of means, I thought that in you I might find what I wanted. The result has proved that I was right. I trust you have had no cause to repent?"
"No, indeed," Mr. Stanniforth averred.
"Hilda would have been a source of unmix-
ed happiness to us, could we have felt more assured as to her future."
"Ah, that is the question," sighed Mrs. Dacre. "That monster, that viper had been so long silent, I began to hope that the world was quit of him; but he has found me out. He was here yesterday. I almost fear he suspects."
A strange light flashed from Mrs. Dacre's eyes as she spoke, and her lips became compressed till all the color disappeared.
She grasped the arm of her chair convulsively.
Mr. Stanniforth turned pale. He saw at once the danger threatened.
"You speak of Hilda's father?" he said, in a low tone.
"Yes," she replied, in an agitated voice; "I speak of Giulio Palmieri—of the man who injured, deserted, killed his wife; for there are other means of murder than bullet or dagger—the surer weapons of unkindness, neglect, unfaithfulness! She died as you saw. Months previous he had deserted her and his little child, leaving them to starve for anything he knew; and now he would like to get his daughter into his own hands, thinking by that means to extort money from me for one thing; but for another, he would make use of her to further his own ends. If she is beautiful, attractive, as he supposes she may be, she might act as a decoy. It was my daughter's refusal so to act that was the beginning of his cruelty to her."
Mr. Stanniforth shuddered.
"Good heavens!" he cried. "My Hilda! She had better die!"
He rose, and went to the window for a moment, till he could regain composure.
It was necessary to be calm, to keep all the weapons of clearness of judgment and presence of mind in good order, in combating such a foe.
"This man is an Italian, I presume, by his name," he said, resuming his seat.
"Yes, an Italian. He calls himself a patriot," Lady Dacre added, with an air of bitterest scorn. "But he is one of those dangerous incendiaries, dangerous to all Governments alike, promoting their own ends through their plots and agitations, careless what misery they may cause so that they can haggle upon the weaknesses of others, and conceal their evil deeds, like the cuttlefish, by perturbing and befouling all around them."
Mr. Stanniforth remained silent for awhile.
"You say he suspects. Do you mean that he suspects Hilda to be the daughter of whom he is in search? How can that be?" he inquired.
"It seems he met her and Lionel among the quarries yesterday, and was struck by her likeness to her mother. The likeness is indeed very remarkable."

There was silence again for a few minutes, then Mrs. Dacre said: "I am so much upset by this occurrence that I scarcely can trust my own judgment. What do you say? Would it be well to tell Hilda the truth, and warn her?"

"I think not," Mr. Stanniforth answered, thoughtfully. "I think her best safety lies in ignorance. Believing, as she does, that I am her father, she would at once repudiate any other claim that might be made upon her; otherwise she might be persuaded that it was her duty to obey this man. She has so little knowledge of evil, she would not understand to what she was lending herself. She spoke of having met this stranger at the quarries and he seems to have made an unpleasant impression both upon her and Mr. Fountaine. So far, that is fortunate."

"Ah, if Lionel had not been called away just now!" exclaimed Mrs. Dacre, regretfully. "Tell me, Mr. Stanniforth, have you not seen signs of an attachment springing up between those two, Lionel and Hilda?"

Mr. Stanniforth smiled, in spite of his mental disturbance and anxiety.

"Do you know, Mrs. Dacre, I have sometimes wondered whether you were blind where those young people were concerned."

"I brought Lionel here, hoping and praying that it might be so. But I kept my own counsel. I wished them both to be free. I could not keep Lionel when that telegram came; I could not have asked him to stay. If he had been here, he should have married Hilda at once, she would then have been safe. I would have taken it upon myself."

Mrs. Dacre bowed her head upon her hand, again lost in thought.

Mr. Stanniforth felt his heart tossed to and fro; his whole frame was troubled.

He had guarded the child who had been intrusted to him as the apple of his eye, and now a gulf of ruin seemed opening, a peril that must be met at once, without delay.

"It seems to me that the safest plan would be to send Hilda away for a time," he said, at last, "but not with either you or me—we should be too easily traced."

"It might be best; but with whom, or to where?" returned Mrs. Dacre, raising her head. "I am an old woman, and of late years have kept up little intercourse with the world. I know no one that I could trust. My nephew and his son are really the only relations I have in the world."

"Will you allow me to consult my wife, Mrs. Dacre? I have an idea, but I do not know till I speak to her if it is feasible. Poor Alice! this will be a sad grief to her; but we will hope to escape the threatened danger, and that all will end well," he concluded, trying to cheer his friend, though his own heart was very heavy.

"Go then," said Mrs. Dacre; "but come back as soon as you can, and tell me if you have been able to form any plan. I shall suffer till I know; and in the mean time, pray desire Hilda not to go beyond the garden without you."

"That I shall certainly do. I can rely upon her obedience."

Mr. Stanniforth pressed the hand of his old friend, and hurried away, his thoughts in a tumult.

He had looked forward with dread to the new year which should see Hilda's eighteenth birthday; but the serpent had already entered his Garden of Eden, and the blessed peace they had enjoyed for sixteen years was at an end.

If they could only shield the child of their adoption, that must be their first care, all personal feelings being laid aside.

But a few hours had passed before he was once more at Dacre Hall.

His countenance looked brighter.

He walked with a firmer step, as if he had brought hope and encouragement.

At the first glance at Mrs. Dacre's face, however, he perceived that some fresh trouble had occurred.

"My nephew is dying," she said, in sorrowful tones, laying her hand upon a telegram that she had placed on the small table that always stood at her right hand. "Perhaps even now, he may be no more. But you—you are very good to come back to me so soon. I think, by your face, you have come to give me comfort."

"We certainly have thought of a plan. It awaits your approbation," Mr. Stanniforth returned, after expressing his regret at the bad news.

Mrs. Dacre bowed her head, while her eyes questioned him.

"You are no doubt acquainted with Mrs. Pierre Caledon?" Mr. Stanniforth inquired.

"Cecilia Ruthven that was? Yes, slightly. She mixes in too gay a set for an old woman like me," Mrs. Dacre replied.

"Yes; Cecilia Ruthven, my wife's elder sister," rejoined the rector. "The two sisters have seen little of each other for many years, separated as they are by circumstances. But Mrs. Caledon has several times invited Alice to visit her. She is now at her country house, and Alice proposes to ask her to receive Hilda for awhile. What do you say?"
Mrs. Dacre thought for a moment.

"We could not ask Mrs. Caledon to receive Hilda as your daughter. She would have to be told. Does she know any of the circumstances already?" she said.

"Not a word. But I see, with you, that it would not be treating her well not to confide in her. She might justly turn round and say she had been led to receive Hilda under false pretenses, when the child's story comes to be known," observed Mr. Stanniforth, his face clouding a little. "I had better go to her rather than write. I can tell her just as much as I knew myself before you honored me with your confidence this morning, with the addition that I have had warning that danger threatens. There will be no need to mention names."

"No," Mrs. Dacre replied while a shiver ran through her frame. "I would gladly keep Hilda's connection with that bad man a secret forever if I could, even to herself. Go, then, my good friend. If Mrs. Caledon will receive her, I can think of no better plan. In a large household like that, Hilda will probably pass almost unnoticed, and at any rate, she will not be allowed to wander about alone."

"I will start this evening," the rector declared, with a more alert manner than was customary with him. "Should Mrs. Caledon consent, I will send Hilda in charge of old Molly. She is a very dragon," he added, with a smile.

"I knew what I was doing when I sent you Molly Armstrong," said Mrs. Dacre, her pale, careworn face relaxing into a smile. "The child will enjoy the change I should think," she concluded.

Mr. Stanniforth sighed. He was not at all sure that Hilda would enjoy being sent away from the place where she might have the chance of meeting Lionel Fountaine again. But he made no remark to that effect.

He had not sat down, but stood leaning with his arm on the chimney-piece near Mrs. Dacre's chair.

He now hastily took leave, in order to make preparations for his journey, Mr. Caledon's country villa, Beechwood, being situated in one of the suburbs around Boston, and as he knew from his wife, in a very select and aristocratic neighborhood.

Hilda felt no surprise when she heard that her father was leaving home that evening.

Secluded as was the life that Mr. Stanniforth led in the general way, he had never quite shut himself off from the world.

An occasional visit to Boston or to New York varied the monotony of his life, and kept his mind from stagnation. Sometimes Mrs. Stanniforth accompanied him, but Hilda was always told that she must wait till she was grown up before she left the shelter of the parsonage.

This time she expressed no wish to visit the world beyond Beverly; nor did she rebel even in thought when the rector charged her not on any account to stray beyond the garden till his return, unless in the company of Mrs. Stanniforth.

Frisk might enjoy his freedom in the meadow without hindrance from her.

She felt no longer any inclination to scamper over the hills.

It was enough for her to wander about the garden alone, and to think of Lionel Fountaine.

The beauty of the sky and landscape as she had seen them the day before seemed to live again in her eyes and heart, and she was content to wait.

Lionel had gone away, and she grieved that he had gone on so sad an errand.

She could feel for him, knowing what it would be to her had she been away and received a summons to her father's sick bed; but for the rest she had no doubts or fears.

She took it for granted Lionel would come back, and all would be the same as before.

What did she know, poor child, about change and vicissitude?

Would not the yellow leaves that fell around her now from the elms and maples be replaced by fresh verdure in the spring?

Would not the swallows that were taking flight to a warmer region return again to build their nests under the eaves?

And even so, when his father recovered, so would Lionel return; and in the mean time he seemed to be still present with her, for did not he meet her eye in every flower? and did she not hear his voice in every bird-note? and had not everything she thought and felt reference to him?

Mr. Stanniforth was glad that she allowed him to leave without question, partly guessing, indeed, how her mind was occupied.

Mrs. Dacre's revelation had been an immense comfort to him in respect of these two young people who seemed made for each other.

Let Hilda only be placed in security for a little while till Count Palmieri had been baffled in his search, then all would be well.

This plan was well laid; nor was it his fault if events turned out so as to overthrow his calculations.

CHAPTER VI.
A NEW LIFE.

Mr. STANNIFORTH returned on the third
day, his mission accomplished, and yet he appeared perturbed and ill at ease.

"I found Mrs. Caledon everything that is kind," he said, in reply to his wife's eager questions. "She declared that she would be delighted to receive Hilda for as long as we wished her to stay, and expressed herself much interested in the story. But I wish we could, in fairness to your sister, have kept the secret to ourselves. I would trust Mrs. Caledon's heart sooner than her judgment. I wish she had been more like you," he concluded, with a sigh.

"There never was much resemblance between Cecilia and myself," returned Mrs. Stanniforth. "I was never intimate with her. She is so much older that she was absorbed in the gay world while I was still a child, and married before I was out of the school-room. But I used to be fond of her, she was generous and good-natured. She was the beauty of the family and much admired and sought after."

"Her daughter, Cecilia, is very handsome, but in a different style," remarked Mr. Stanniforth. "I have no doubt her companionship will be good for our little Hilda in some respects. Hilda will have to learn to take her proper place in the world."

"It is a sad trial to part with her, our darling," faltered Mrs. Stanniforth, tears gathering in her eyes.

"Heaven knows I feel it," replied her husband. "But we always knew that this trial must come. Circumstances have brought it about a little earlier, that is all."

Mrs. Stanniforth acquiesced in stifling her sorrow. She did not wish to cast any shadow over what she desired to represent to Hilda as a visit of pleasure.

Hilda was much surprised when she heard what had been arranged for her.

It had never before occurred to her that her first entrance into society would have to be made alone without her mother's supporting presence.

But she was not in the least shy, she had been too universally loved and made much of in the only neighborhood she had ever known to have any fear or distrust of strangers.

Her heart fluttered with pleasurable anticipations, not the least delightful being the companionship of her own sex; for though by Mrs. Stanniforth's computation, Cecilia must have been two-and-twenty, quite a mature age in Hilda's eyes, she would surely be her friend in this new world to which she was going.

Mr. Fountaine still lingered, but still the attendant physician gave no hope of ultimate recovery.

Lionel could not leave his father's side. It might be long before he could return to Daere Hall. So Hilda set off for Beechwood on the day appointed, and under old Molly's escort, without any other regret than that caused by the temporary separation from those she had been taught to consider her father and mother.

It was a cheerless day on which to set out on a journey to unknown regions—a damp chilly day in late October. A clinging mist prevailed the whole valley. The leaves lay in rotting heaps as Hilda in the early morning took a farewell walk around the garden and churchyard.

The bare branches created, in the chill wind, almost the only sound, for there was no longer the hum of insect life, and the birds seemed to have sung all their songs for that year.

This was well calculated to produce a feeling of melancholy had Hilda been given to low spirits; but instead of this, she blamed herself, that she could feel happy when for the first time she was called upon to part from all she had hitherto held so near and dear.

When they arrived at the termination of their journey, a carriage was waiting to take them on to Beechwood. Molly was to stay for a few days to see her young lady settled, and then to return to Beverly.

So it had been arranged; but the faithful woman would fain have remained. She could not divest her mind of a foreboding of coming evil hanging over the head of her beloved nursling, whose sweet bright face beamed with pleasure at the novel life opening before her.

It was not a long drive from the station. They soon entered the lodge gates, and after passing through a long avenue of elms came in sight of the house.

It was of white stone, in the Italian style, with long wings, the windows separated by pilasters, the parapet ornamented with vases at certain intervals.

The entrance was attained by a semicircular flight of steps; an elegant structure, but chilly in its effect now the bright-colored flowers were all removed from vase and balcony and flower-bed, and only the sad-looking evergreens relieved the surface of white stone and bare earth.

Whatever chillness there might be without, however, there was none within.

Hilda found herself warmly received by Mrs. Caledon.

"Do you know how very lovely you are?" that lady exclaimed, holding her at arm's length to look at her. "It was so good of Alice to think of sending you here. You are to make a long stay, you know, to be
kept out of mischief," she added, with a smile intended to be arch, patting Hilda's hand the while. "You may call me aunt, you know; it will be better," she continued, nodding her head. "And now I must introduce you to Cecilia; you must be great friends."

This speech puzzled Hilda not a little.

But she felt that Mrs. Caledon intended to be kind, and she had no time to think as she was led by the hand across a large drawing-room to a smaller room beyond, partially concealed by rich damask curtains of dead gold, that hung between two columns with gilded capitals.

Mrs. Caledon was seven years older than Mrs. Stanniforth, but looked more, perhaps from an attempt at juvenility. She was fair and slight, with a complexion many a younger woman might have envied, and there was an airiness of tread and gesture about her that savored somewhat of affection; little airs and graces, turnings of the head, and movements of the hands, that had belonged to the time when she was young and beauty, in the fascination of which she would have been loth to disbelieve. For Mrs. Caledon had by no means laid aside her claims to admiration, though she had a grown-up daughter; and Cecilia was so very much grown up, as she sometimes playfully remarked.

As Mrs. Caledon led Hilda in between the gold-colored hangings, a young lady rose to receive her, and Hilda, metaphorically speaking, flung herself down at her feet, in worship at the first glance as to a goddess. A tall young lady, clad in a wonderful gown of dark blue velvet, slashed with gold-colored satin, with hair black as night, gathered into a coil low upon her neck; with an oval face of creamy white, blue eyes shaded by long black lashes, and scarlet lips.

She came forward to meet Hilda, and kissed and welcomed her kindly, but with none of her mother's gushing manner.

"You must be tired and cold," she said, in a low, musical, rather even-toned voice. "Come, I will take you to your room. You shall rest and have some tea."

She moved across the room with a stately step as she spoke, with a slow smile and a graceful inclination of the head, inviting Hilda to follow.

Arrived at the first floor, Cecilia led the way some little distance down a wide corridor that extended the whole length of the wing, with a large window at one end.

Opening a door, she allowed Hilda just to look into a room, the prettiest she thought she had ever seen—a room with olive-green walls, and a dark red dado, but made gorgeous by blue and white china and peacock's feathers, and scraps of rich draperies and embroideries flung here and there. There was a semi-grand piano in ebonized wood, an easel, and books on shelves and on the table.

"This is my sitting-room," said Cecilia. "I come here when I am tired of all the empty talk that goes on down below. I dare say you will be glad to sit here sometimes, too. It is not every one who has mamma's unlimited capacity for society."

Hilda fancied she detected a slight tone of superiority or contempt as her cousin pronounced these words.

But then had she not a right to hold herself as superior?

Diana probably at times felt the companionship of her attendant nymphs trivial and dull.

Cecilia closed the door again, and opened another a little further down the corridor.

"This is your room," she stated, as she ushered Hilda in. "It is near mine. I told Mrs. Knowles I wished to have it so. The ordinary guest chambers are in the other wing. My maid will wait upon you. I will send her to help you to remove your things. She shall bring you some tea here. I would advise you to lie down and rest till it is time to dress for dinner."

Cecilia was about to leave the room when she turned back again, perhaps catching in the mirror a look of forlornness on Hilda's countenance.

She took both her hands, and kissed her. "I hope we will be happy with us," she said in a kind, though calm and grave manner. "You must not mind if mamma is a little trying sometimes. She means well. If you are at a loss, or puzzled about anything, come to me. As for my father, as you are neither a horse nor a dog, he will not take much notice of you."

Again there was perceptible to Hilda's ear that touch of scorn she had noticed before.

"I am sure to be happy here, if you will let me love you!" she cried, with a look of admiring wonder that brought a smile to the elder girl's lips.

"Love me as much as you like or can," Cecilia replied, "only don't expect too much from me. But I think I shall be fond of you; I haven't much to be fond of. Now, if I do not leave you, you will get no rest. When you are dressed for dinner, join me in the room I showed you. We will go down together, and I will give you the carte du pays. There are not many people in the house just now. At Christmas we shall be full, I suppose."
To Hilda, the life that now opened before her was like a glimpse into fairyland. Visitors came and went, amusement succeeded amusement, and, to her inexperienced eyes, it seemed like one long holiday. How could she imagine that black care, or heartburnings, or bitter regrets, could lurk under the bright smiles and animated conversation of the guests assembled round Mr. Caledon's hospitable board? The party seldom assembled before luncheon; then there was always some occupation proposed to fill up the afternoon. In the evening, music, dancing, charade acting for the young, and cards for the old, set dullness at defiance.

Hilda soon found that Cecilia never played or sang in company; never took part in the charades, and but seldom danced. She was always surrounded by adorers, whom she raised to the seventh heaven by a smile, or annihilated by a frown. She indulged in no vulgar flirtations, but she lived in an atmosphere of adulation. She had a fine nature, but beauty, position and wealth had combined to spoil her. She was so conscious of her own superiority, that she received admiration, homage, as her right; it had never occurred to her that she need do more than express a wish to possess anything the world had to give. Sometimes she declared herself tired of it all, and spoke to Hilda of the wearisome monotony of all things, prophesying that she, too, after a few years, would cease to feel the keen enjoyment she now so artlessly displayed, and would become world-worn like herself.

"For you haven't a frivolous nature, my little Hilda," she would say. "You also were made for better things than a more butterfly existence."

CHAPTER VII.
DID HE LOVE HER?

Happy as Hilda was at Beechwood, her greatest delight lay in the letters she regularly received from home. They were much gratified by the kind reception that had been accorded to their darling, Mrs. Stannforth wrote after Molly's return.

Hilda must keep a journal of everything that occurred, in order that they might follow her in her daily doings.

Hilda, therefore, devoted an hour before dressing for dinner to the fulfillment of this request as far as concerned herself; and this, she was aware, was all that her father and mother would be anxious to know.

One piece of news speedily followed her to Beechwood, and gave her unfeigned pleasure. Mr. Fountaine did not die; his illness took a turn for the better, and it was soon announced that he was in a fair way of recovery.

Hilda rejoiced, for Lionel's sake, and also for Mrs. Daer's, Mr. Fountaine being dear to them both.

Christmas passed, and the New Year came in.

It had not been a favorable season for any outdoor amusement. There had been much rain, and mists hung shroud-like over the landscape.

Mrs. Caledon was unwarried, however, in contriving amusements; it was she who took all the trouble and fatigue.

Cecilia merely looked on, seldom even exerting herself to join in what was set on foot to relieve the tedium of the winter days and evenings.

"I sometimes wonder whether it is pride or indifference on your part," said Hilda to her one afternoon, laughingly.

"Or perversity?" questioned Cecilia.

It was by this time the middle of January. It had been freezing hard for some days; the ice on the lake had become strong enough to bear.

Mrs. Caledon had ordained that there should be a fête on the ice the following evening, similar to one that had proved a success two years previously.

A large tent was to be erected on the borders of the lake, warmed by portable stoves, where a band was to be stationed, and refreshments set out.

Lanterns were to be hung on Venetian masts round the margin, and attendants would also be present with flambeaux.

The evolutions of a quadrille were to be gone through by eight of the best skaters, Hilda being selected for one.

Each skater would wear attached to the button-hole or corsage, a tiny lantern of colored glass—red, green, blue, or yellow. Cecilia declined to join the quadrille—declined to skate at all, to Mrs. Caledon's evident vexation.

Hence Hilda's remark.

Cecilia sunk into a chair by the fire. Hilda was crouched on the white bear-skin rug in front of the blaze.

"I don't know how it is that I talk to you more openly than to any one else, though you seem such a child beside me," observed Cecilia, dreamily. "I think it is because I think you are true and sincere; and then I think that you love me."

"You know I love you," replied Hilda, warmly. "But then, does not every one?
It seems to me that you are like a queen before whom everyone bows."

"But that is not love," sighed Cecilia.

"If men bow before me, as you say, it is partly because they see I care so little for homage. I have had offers plenty; but a lover never! I was brought up, educated, with a view to dazzle. I was crammed with accomplishments. I was to have been a star of the first magnitude; but I did not choose to star it. I did not choose to be shown off, trotted out to display my points, like a filly. I disappointed them all. If I have had any success in society it has been by very opposite methods from what they intended. Both papa and mamma wish me to marry. I suppose they are tired of me. A man is coming to-morrow, an English lord. I refused him last spring. I told papa I would as soon marry one of his grooms.

He was very angry. I know the marquis is coming over to propose again; and I shall refuse him again; and then there will be a tempest in the house. I cannot help it!"

She spoke dreamily, gazing into the fire as the words dropped from her lips.

"I think you are quite right not to marry a man you do not love, if he were twenty times a marquis!" Hilda exclaimed.

"My dear Hilda, do you know you are talking heresy?" Cecilia answered with a low laugh.

"What are we girls educated and dressed and brought into society for, but to be sold to the highest bidder? I know mamma thinks it will be a slur upon her generalship if she allows you to return to Beverly unengaged. Indeed, I believe George Cleveland has already asked her sanction to address you. So prepare yourself for persecution, unless you are ready to become mistress of Cleveland Hall."

"That I am not!" returned Hilda, decidedly. "You only say that to tease me, but even as she spoke, words and signs gained significance to her mind that at the time passed, it not unnoticed, uncare for.

Sometimes, too, Mrs. Caledon had puzzled and rather troubled her.

Her aunt had not had much time or opportunity for lengthened speech, she was too much occupied; but her hints, her vague allusions, led Hilda to surmise that she believed there was some mystery about her, some romance attaching to her.

Now, to Hilda's own consciousness, nothing could be more matter-of-fact and common-place than her position in life.

The daughter of a country clergyman, just now, in virtue of her connections on the mother's side, associating with people of wealth beyond that to which she had any right, or any wish to aspire,

She only hoped her aunt did not suppose she had any ambition that way.

If she had accepted attentions, it was that she believed them to have been offered simply to Mrs. Caledon's niece.

But she must be more careful, she told herself.

It was some minutes before either of the girls spoke again.

Hilda raised herself from her crouching position and stood before the fire, one foot poised on the fender.

Cecilia sat quite still, holding a fire-screen between her face and the blaze.

It was Hilda who broke the silence.

"It seems to me strange to hear all this question about marriage, all these speculations about the meaning of attentions, and such like. There never was any talk of the kind at home. Why is it necessary that a girl should marry, whether she loves some one or not?"

A slow smile passed across Cecilia's passionless face as she answered: "It is positively refreshing to meet with any one unsophisticated as you, Hilda. I was going to say childlike, only our children are far more worldly-wise. It is necessary that we should marry, because in our sphere single women are so trammeled by conventionalities as to have very little freedom of action, at least till almost old. It would be difficult for us to hold any position in society, and so few are rich enough to maintain an establishment such as we have been accustomed to. Myself, for instance; I shall have enough for my own pin money, but I should have to alter my mode of life entirely if I had to live upon what I have."

"Cecilia, I believe you will marry Lord Exmoor, after all!"

"No. But I shall marry. Lord Exmoor is not the only one—there are others! After all I suppose I shall take pity upon Lionel Fountaine, though he is not a titled foreigner."

Cecilia pronounced the name calmly, without any evidence of emotion, but not so could Hilda bear it.

She flushed vividly, and then turned deadly pale. She felt as if a knife had stabbed her to the heart. And yet she had never thought of herself as Lionel Fountaine's wife—had never asked herself what might be the end of their happy companionship. Why should he not marry Cecilia? What was there in the idea that made her feel wretched?

She once more sunk down on the hearthrug, for her limbs were trembling.

"You are engaged, then?" she asked, in a voice somewhat higher pitched than usual, turning her face away as she spoke,
"No, we are not engaged; but it will come to that," Cecilia replied, quietly. "I had not made up my mind when the Newport season ended. Then I came here, and Mr. Fountaine went to visit an aunt in Connecticut. Ah, by the by, she lives in the neighborhood you come from. Do you know her? Yes; now I recollect, I have heard you speak of Mrs. Dacre. You must have met Mr. Fountaine, then. How odd that you should never have mentioned him!"

"I did not know you were acquainted with him," murmured Hilda, struggling bravely against a rush of tears that seemed as if they must force their way. "You love him very much, then, Cecilia?"

"I don’t think I ever loved any one," returned the elder girl. "But Mr. Fountaine, is at any rate, good and true. Did you not like him?" she inquired, as Hilda made no comment upon what she said.

"I? Oh what does it signify? cried Hilda, in a sharp tone. "Is he coming here? Cecilia you have all been so kind to me, but I think I should like to go home!"

She ended with a little sob.

Cecilia looked surprised. One less self-absorbed might easily have read Hilda’s secret in this hastily-expressed wish; but Cecilia would as soon have expected the heavens to fall as that she would have a rival, or that any obstacle could supersede when she condescended to declare an intention. She took what Hilda said as a childish whim.

"Why should you wish to go home?" she asked. "I hoped you were happy with us. Besides, you cannot go just now; you have been confined to us, and we intend to take care of you," she added, in her kindly patronizing manner.

Hilda did not answer.

She could not trust her voice for the moment. Her heart seemed to sink like lead within her.

"There are other visitors coming; two of mamma’s pet Italians among them," Cecilia went on. "I suppose they are engaged in some plot or other, and are in some danger, or they would not be interesting to mamma. But don’t be taken in by them, Hilda, they are not worth it."

"I know nothing of Italian politics," Hilda replied, thankful that Cecilia spoke no more of Lionel Fountaine.

"Do you think that mamma knows anything about Italian politics?" Cecilia queried, slightly raising her finely-pencilled eyebrows. "I don’t believe she knows whether these men are Monarchists, or Republicans, or Socialists, or what they are—only they are romantic. They have each and all some story to tell of exile, or imprisonment, or hair-breadth escapes, and to listen to them is as good as reading a sensational novel, with the advantage of having the hero before you in flesh and blood."

"But that must be interesting!" Hilda argued as she crouched before the fire.

Cecilia made a slight movement with her graceful shoulders.

"For a time, perhaps," she answered. "Only be warned. Don’t let these men fascinate you. They are not to be trusted."

Many anxious faces looked out upon the sky the following morning; many wistful glances were turned toward the weather indicators; but the barometer stood high; no fear of wind or snow. The thermometer registered several degrees below freezing point. The sky was blue, only flecked by a few fleecy clouds; nothing threatening to disturb the success of the fête that was to take place in the evening. The guests were requested not to go near the lake during the day, with the exception of two or three young men, who were told off to assist in directing the arrangements. Mrs. Caledon could do nothing without her staff. Dinner was to be at an earlier hour than usual, the later arrivals would be taken in charge by the house steward, and would join the party on the ice in due time.

It was truly a magic scene. Bonfires blazed on the shores of the lake; lanterns hung from Venetian masts formed a cordon of light; the tiny lanterns of colored glass fastened to the button-hole of each skater gave them the appearance of fire-flies darting hither and thither, or rather of those phosphenous creatures that illuminate the waters of the Pacific with their many-colored lamps; and over all, the clear frosty sky, sparkled with its myriad of stars. Gay voices and merry laughter mingled with the notes of the band, that "discoursed sweet music" unseen within the tent.

The skaters performed their quadrille to perfection, but there was one heavy heart beneath the costume of velvet and fur. Why was she so sad? Hilda asked herself. Why could she not rejoice in the prospect of meeting Lionel Fountaine again, as she would have done only two days ago? She had never mixed much with other young people till now. She had never heard any talk about lovers or probable husbands. In loving Mr. Fountaine she thought of him as a friend, without any consideration of the future. Why was it, then, that this bitter sense of loss, of desolation, had come over her since hearing that he belonged to Cecilia? What was it that whispered to her that as
Cecilia's betrothed he could never again be to her what he had been, and what no other could ever be in the future—of that, she was quite certain? A something, too, a feeling for which she could not account, made it impossible for her to confide to any one this strange unreasonable sorrow that overwhelmed her. Not even to her mother, had she been near, could she have told it.

How much less, then, could she write it in the daily journal she had been instructed to keep!

Impatient with her own thoughts, she skated away by herself after the quadrille was over, escaping from the attentions of her partner, Mr. George Cleveland, of whom Cecilia had spoken, and sought a more solitary part of the lake.

The rosy lantern that hung on the button of her velvet dress casts a glow over her face, pale with the inward struggle she had been undergoing.

As, at last, she glided toward the tent with the idea of taking off her skates and seeking Cecilia, her hands were suddenly caught in a strong, firm clasp, and a well-known voice sounded in her ear—a voice that made her pulses leap and the warm blood surge through her veins.

"Hilda, come and take a turn with me!"

Only those few words, but what joyousness and passionate tenderness they conveyed!

Without waiting for a reply, Lionel Fountaine took her two hands across.

Hilda felt compelled to raise her eyes to his, and then her heart stood still with terror, and yet with delight at what she read there.

What did it all mean?

He was here by her side again, her hands clasped in his, the old loving looks and tones the same as ever, and yet—he was Cecilia's; she must not forget that!

"When did you come?" she managed to ask, as she skimmed across the lake with him.

"Just now—not an hour ago; and you have not told me yet that you are glad to see me," he whispered, bending his face till it was in dangerous proximity to hers.

"You know I am, Li—Mr. Fountaine," she replied, striving to steady her voice.

"Mr. Fountaine! How formal we have grown since we have been with all these grand people!" returned Lionel, smiling down at her troubled face.

"They do not know here—" she began.

"That we are such old friends," he interrupted. "But they soon will know. We are not going to let any one come between us, are we, Hilda?"

Hilda was about to reply, when her eyes rested upon a group, of which Mrs. Caledon was the center, standing by the entrance to the tent where the band was stationed.

She started so suddenly that she would have slipped had not Lionel held her up.

"Look there!" she cried, in low and frightened accents. "Do you see that man in the fur coat and the black mustache? It is the man who joined us in the quarries that day, and who wanted Mrs. Dacre, do you remember! I wonder who he is? What brings him here?"

"Well, he is not particularly good to look at; but he need not trouble us, need he?" answered Lionel, lightly. "You are shivering, or actually trembling! Why, what a timid little mortal! Just one more turn, and then we will take off our skates and inspect the mysteries of the refreshment tent."

"Do you think there can be any truth in what is said about the evil eye?" asked Hilda, half-ashamed of her suggestion. "I could fancy that man having some malign influence over one. I suppose he is one of aunt's Italians that Cecilia spoke of."

"I can tell you his name, for I heard it from aunt Dacre. He is, or calls himself, Count Giulio Palmieri, and I don't think my good aunt admires him any more than you do," said Lionel. "As for the evil eye, the only evil eye I can imagine would be a cold look from one I love."

He dropped his voice as he concluded, pressing the hand he held to emphasize his words.

Hilda's heart beat fast. She felt dizzy with conflicting emotions.

She could not stop to think that Lionel Fountaine had no right to address her thus.

It all seemed so natural.

It was the idea of his belonging to another that was so difficult to entertain that for the moment it passed away into the background.

And still they glided swiftly along, while the bonfires blazed and the colored lights started to and fro, and the music sounded in spiringly.

Satisfied with the morning's observations, no one had noticed that toward evening the barometer had begun to fall, nor in the midst of their hilarity and enjoyment had those assembled on the ice observed that the sky had become overcast and the wind had veered suddenly to the south.

Several hours had now passed.

Some of the elders of the party, having had enough of the amusement, had returned to the house, remarking, however, that the cold had not been so intense as they expected.

Lionel Fountaine and Hilda were some
distance from the shore, when a sound like a pistol-shot was heard; then another, followed by screams and a general rush to the bank.

The ice was cracking!

A chasm had already formed between the part to which Lionel and Hilda had skated and the main body of the ice.

Hilda cried out in terror.

Lionel, quick as thought, wrenched off his skates, and lifting Hilda in his arms, sprung across the channel that was each instant widening.

Again the ice cracked beneath him, and he nearly lost his footing; but with another spring he gained the ice that was still solid, and hurried with his burden toward the tent.

She was saved!

He pressed her against his heart while a thrill of inexpressible tenderness, a passionate sense of possession passed through it.

He felt as if he had indeed won her and made her his own by saving her from that frightful risk.

He bent down and laid a kiss upon her lips unrebuked, for Hilda had fainted for the first time in her life.

Cecilia’s confidence, that seemed all at once to have robbed her life of its sunshine; Lionel Fountaine’s sudden appearance, the lover-like tenderness of his manner, that appeared to contradict the fact which she had been striving to contemplate calmly; her alarm on recognizing the face of the man who was evidently connected in some way with unpleasant associations at Dacre Hall; and lastly, the fright on the ice, had been too much for the poor girl, courageous as she was by nature.

It was not long before she recovered consciousness under the care of the women who were in attendance in the tent, and she soon declared herself quite able to walk to the house.

Mrs. Caledon, full of consternation at what might have proved a catastrophe, in going about among her guests to convince herself that all were safe, had missed Hilda; and on Mr. Fountaine’s report of what had taken place, hurried to the tent, to find her pale indeed, but prepared to proceed homeward.

“My dear child, what a fright you have given me!” exclaimed her aunt, embracing her young charge. “How shall we thank dear, good Lionel Fountaine for saving you from what might have been a frightful danger? But I must scold a little! How could you think of skating off all by yourself? Ah! I know some one who will be jealous of what Mr. Fountaine has done! George Cleveland has been wandering about, looking quite disconsolate; and here he is! Mr.

Cleveland.” Mrs. Caledon called aloud, “there is Miss Stanniforth, quite safe! Will you give her your arm to walk up to the house?”

Hilda hastened to her own room as soon as she reached the house, glad to lock the door and seek solitude, giving an excuse that she would at once go to bed.

But she did not seek rest at once; she could not.* Her eyes ached, her head ached.

She hastily took off her outer dress, and letting down her long hair, and wrapping her dressing-gown about her, sat down in a low chair by the fire.

She felt humbled to the dust, for she had only totally lost consciousness for a minute, and though unable to move or speak, had been aware of Lionel’s passionate kiss.

Would it not have aroused her, even if the shadows of death had been closing round her.

Did he, then, love her so dearly?

But then the bitter thought returned he might love her a little, but still he was to marry Cecilia.

What was she, the poor portionless, ignorant daughter of a country gentleman, to have a chance of regard in comparison with Cecilia, beautiful, wealthy, of a position in society equal to his own?

She hid her face in her hands, trying to shut out the pain, the sorrow, the shame, heedless of time and the passing hours.

She was young, and this first sorrow seemed too great a burden to be borne.

The fire burned low, but she sat quite still, but for the heaving of her bosom and her quick-coming breath.

She tried to think, to nerve herself for what was to come, but she was as yet unable to form distinct ideas for the multitude of bewildering fancies and memories that came crowding thickly through her brain.

Poor child, she little knew her troubles were only just beginning; that she would soon be tossed about in a sea of perplexity, not knowing which way to turn, because scarcely knowing in which direction lay the path of duty.

CHAPTER VIII.

A VILLAIN’S PLOT.

Snow lay heavy and white on the hills. All boundary lines and distinctions between fields were wiped out; the skeletons of the trees were clothed with a pure wonder.

The stream ran black, too rapid to freeze, though the frost hung projecting stones and bushes with icicles.

The sun shone from a cold blue sky; the atmosphere was windless and composed—so still that the shouts of the village children at play,
the rusty caw of a crow, or the shrill cock-crow, sounded into the far distance.

Mr. and Mrs. Stanniforth sat by the blazing fire in the study at the parsonage; a warmer room than the general sitting-room, looking out on the garden.

Mr. Stanniforth held an open letter in his hand as it rested on his knee.

This letter was the cause of the perturbed and anxious countenances the worthy rector and his wife turned to each other.

"I am in great perplexity and distress, and you only, dear father, can set me right," (so the letter ran).

"There is an Italian here, a Count Giullo Palmieri. His manner to me is very peculiar. He has made me quite afraid of him. He speaks to me of a little child, a daughter he lost, or who was stolen from him—so he insinuates—nearly seventeen years ago, and from hints he lets drop it would almost seem as if he believed me to be that child; and Aunt Caledon, ever since I have been here, has said things that make me think there was some mystery about me, till I have time to think, and to tell myself how ridiculous it all is. For how can there be any mystery about your child? And what can be done with Count Palmieri’s daughter? I am sorry for him, but I don’t like him, and I don’t believe he is a good man. There is another Italian here too, a friend of his, though a younger man, a Signor Cesare Rabottino; I don’t like him either. He began to pay me attention as soon as he was introduced to me, and smiles, and makes eyes, and throws himself into attitudes in the most absurd manner. He wishes to make me believe that he has fallen in love with me, but I believe it is all pretense. At any rate, I am not going to fall in love with him. I wish I were at home with you and darling mother and dear old Molly again! Aunt and Cecilia are very kind, but I have never been so happy since I left you. Sometimes I fancy I can never be quite so happy again, there are so many things in the world to make one sorry!"

So I am striving to shield our child from danger; we have driven her into the lion’s mouth! It is almost enough to make one cry, with the Mahomedans. ’Kismet—it is fate!’ cried Mr. Stanniforth, bitterly.

"I am glad to find that she shrinks from the man and feels him to be not good, though it is shocking to wish that a child should feel so toward a father! After all, you see, the natural instinct some people would persuade one exists so strongly goes for nothing," observed Mrs. Stanniforth.

"Austin, don’t you think you ought to go to our Hilda? she questioned, after a pause, placing her hand on her husband’s knee, to rouse him from the reverie into which he had fallen.

"I am sadly afraid my sister has not acted over wisely."

"I must go at once to Mrs. Dacre," said Mr. Stanniforth, rousing himself. "I fear it is a terrible affair. Count Palmieri is Hilda’s father, and she is under age. The law gives him power over her."

"But he may surely be bought off. Mrs. Dacre would do anything," replied Mrs. Stanniforth. "He can only have this claim in tracing Hilda out. What could he do with her—a grown-up daughter? She would only be an expense to him."

Mr. Stanniforth groaned as he shook his head.

"Who can say what projects one evil may have in his head?" he murmured, as he rose from his seat and began buttoning up his coat.

"And this companion or confederate of his, or whatever he may be—this Rabottino Hilda mentions—who is to measure the mischief they may be concocting?"

Mrs. Stanniforth followed her husband from the room, to make sure that he had put on his warmest overcoat and a comforter about his throat, for, after all, he lay the nearest to her heart, nearer even than the child of, their adoption, dearly as she was loved.

She stood at the door a minute, watching his tall figure till it disappeared at a turn in the snowy road, and then went back to the study to replenish the fire, and to read again Hilda’s letter, while she waited impatiently for her husband’s return, to know upon what course of action Mrs. Dacre had decided.

Mrs. Dacre had determined upon proceeding at once to Beechwood, and he was to accompany her himself.

They were to start the following morning, so Mr. Stanniforth informed his wife on his return, as he stamped the snow off his boots, and removed the comforter from his throat.

"She is inclined to set Palmieri at defiance; she thinks he will not dare to make a legal claim to his daughter’s guardianship," he added. "I am not altogether sorry that our secret will be at an end. Hilda must now know the truth."

"If only she does not think it her duty to go with her father when she discovers the relationship," returned Mrs. Stanniforth, with a sigh.

"She will not do that; she shall not," said the rector in a decided tone.

On the evening of the same day a conversation took place in a room in what was known as the “Bachelors’ Quarters” at Beechwood.

It was the room assigned to Palmieri, and Cesare Rabottino was his companion.

The wretched hour of night had struck, and the guests had dispersed to their respective rooms.

The two Italians were solacing themselves with cigars, having thrown some fresh coal on the fire with an expression, more forcible than polite, as to the severity of an American winter.

"As I said before, I am disappointed in you, my friend," said the elder man, throwing himself back in his chair and emitting a cloud of smoke. "I expected you would come, and see, and conquer. But you have come, and seen, and not con quered, it appears to me."

"I have held back," replied Rabottino, dexterously flipping the ash from his cigar. "It is out of compassion for that charming mese. I would not be cruel. There is a risk, don’t you see? You say the grandmother will leave her all the money. How do I know that? The old lady might say, ‘I do not wonder that you should be cedant, with Signor Rabottino; he is handsome, he is debonair, he is a lover of romance, I grant you; but I choose that you shall marry Mr. Cleveland, who has a red face and has not two ideas beyond his horses and dogs.’ What then? If the adorabele Miss Hilda should disobey, where is the money?"

"Tell you, Mrs. Dacre will never leave her
money away from her granddaughter, whatever she does," returned Palmieri. "And I don't particularly wish that she should marry you, as long as she likes you well enough to make her more willing to go with me and to prevent her from marrying either of those two Americans, who are dangling after her. She may be of use to me."

"So your excellent cousin thought that her mother would be of use to him," observed Rabottino. "I was only a boy at the time, but I think I remember she was not much use. She declined to make herself agreeable; so much so, that Count Giulio was under the painful necessity of leaving her to her own devices."

"She was stupid and obstinate. She had a conscience. Per Bacco! had I been in Giulio's place, I would have taught her what it was to have a conscience," exclaimed Palmieri, with an ugly frown. "I shall always believe she married that foolish young lord. Hundreds more might have been made out of him."

"Perhaps Miss Hilda might do the same," Rabottino remarked, coolly, examining his finger nails.

"She would not do it twice," returned Palmieri through his teeth. "You are sure that Madame Dacre had no suspicion that you are Alberto, and not Giulio?"

"How could she have any suspicion? In the first place, I don't suppose she knew that her son-in-law had a cousin Alberto. In the next place, we bore a great resemblance to each other; we were of the same height, the same complexion. It must be seventeen years or thereabouts since she saw Giulio. Seventeen years will account for many little differences. When Giulio died I got possession of all his papers. It was convenient to me just then to change my identity. If proof is wanting, there it is. No, she has no suspicion. Hilda will either go on believing me to be her father, or Mrs. Dacre must pay handsome for the privilege of keeping her granddaughter. What I want of you is to make Hilda love you—to make her willing to go. Do you understand? Anyway it will be worth your while to help me."

Rabottino smiled while he chose another cigar.

To make the beautiful young American lady desperately in love with him, just to pass the time while he had to remain in this triste country was all very well, an amusement to which he had no manner of objection.

But to shackle himself with a wife without having positive assurance as to the amount of her dowry was quite another thing.

Besides, he considered, as he stroked his well-waxed mustache, his friend, Alberto Palmieri, was of a rather slippery nature, a man apt to forget promises after he obtained all he wanted.

Might it not be worth his, Rabottino's while, should Mrs. Dacre seem inclined to buy off Count Palmieri's claims, just to blot to her that he had no claim at all? It was a question worth considering.

There were others under that roof little inclined for sleep. Before Lionel Fountaine had left Dacre Hall, when he was hastily summoned away on account of his father's illness, he had fully made up his mind that Hilda Stannforth, and no other, should be his wife.

He had no idea even yet that she was other than she seemed.

His hurried departure had prevented Mrs. Dacre from taking him into her confidence then, so she put it off till they met again, not choosing to trust her secret to writing.

Hilda was still therefore, to him, Mr. Stannforth's daughter. He had made no secret of his attachment to his father, and won his consent, though Mr. Fountaine might have preferred that his son should have looked higher in the social scale.

Lionel therefore accepted Mrs. Caledon's invitation full of joyful anticipations, knowing that he would meet Hilda, and believing that she loved him.

Her manner, however, since the evening on the ice puzzled him, and at times made him unhappy.

It would almost seem as if she tried to avoid him; and yet the flushing cheek, the downcast eyes, the flutter of the little hand whenever it met his, did not seem as if she had learned in difference.

She was evidently sad, too; something was weighing upon her mind, and she gave him no opportunity of asking her what it was that troubled her.

Sometimes, for awhile, she would be like her old self, especially when he spoke to her of the happy autumn days when they rambled together about the hills.

Then, as if some recollection came over her, she would suddenly draw herself away from him, as if she had done wrong in listening to him.

He noticed, too, that she was always more constrained with him in Cecilia's presence, and the girls were much together. It was difficult to find Hilda alone.

He determined to make an opportunity, and to plead his love with Hilda.

She was too truthful, too candid, not to tell him if she had indeed changed toward him, though this he would not permit himself to believe.

He was not jealous. He could not be blind to George Cleveland's intentions, but he perceived clearly that Hilda did not care for him. It was not that her fancy had turned toward another; there was some other reason for her altered manner, and this reason he must find out.

Hilda was more and more unhappy and perplexed as the days went on.

What was she to believe—what was she to think? How could she go on bearing this daily sacrifice? It was cruel of Mr. Fountaine to seek her society so constantly, to force her to listen to words she ought not to hear, when all the time he was pledged to another.

Her renunciation of her love would have been so much easier if she could have watched him devote himself to Cecilia. In that case she might have suffered just at first, but she would have overcome her weakness before long, and would have prayed for their happiness.
A LIFE’S SECRET.

But Lionel Fontaine never particularly sought Cecilia, never paid her attention further than what was due to her as the daughter of the house. She had occasionally spoken to him of Cecilia, hoping he would speak openly to her; but though he professed both admiration and esteem for Mr. Caledon’s daughter, it was with an air almost of indifference, and he soon changed the conversation to something more personal to themselves.

More than Hilda longed for the quiet and security of her home at Beverly, where these distracting feelings might have an end; and nightly her pillow was wet with tears of regret for what she told herself could never be.

Cecilia, too, was anything but easy in her mind, though it was her pride, more than her heart that suffered. She did not care very particularly about Lionel Fontaine, but she believed him good, believed him capable of making a woman happy. In her overweening pride and egotism, it had never occurred to her that she had anything to do but to hold out her hand to whomever she would; that the fortunate man on whom she desired to smile could have any sort of sentiment but unbounded gratitude and rapture.

The idea of a rival had never presented itself, and certainly never in the guise of a simple girl like Hilda Stanniforth. She was desperately angry with herself for having broken through her customary reticence so far as to have her inspection with respect to Lionel Fontaine to Hilda. She perceived now that it was not in her power to carry out any such intention, and it was a heavy blow to her self-love. She read Hilda’s position, too, very clearly; she saw how the girl suffered, and was quite aware that Hilda was sacrificing herself for her sake.

The more noble part of her nature prompted her to confess her error to Hilda, and set her free to accept the love she had won, but she could not yet make up her mind to stoop to this.

So altogether there were plots, and stratagems, and heartburnings, and heartburnings that prevailed amidst the luxury and gaiety that prevailed at Beechwood; and many more probably than have been enumerated, could the secret thoughts of all the assembled guests have been laid bare.

The frost set in again, with a heavy fall of snow, after the temporary thaw. Mr. Caledon offered to have a portion of the pond cleared of snow, but the most indefatigable skaters fought shy of the ice after so narrow an escape the previous week from what might have been a terrible accident.

If Lionel Fontaine found it difficult to gain Hilda’s ear, it may be supposed that Count Palmieri found it still more difficult.

It was impossible to misunderstand the utter repugnance with which she shrank from him; nor did she show much more favor to Signor Rabottino, though she did occasionally accept him as a partner in a dance, not to seem positively rude to one of Mrs. Caledon’s guests.

One evening, however, she had refused a second wait to Mr. Fontaine, under the plea of feeling tired, and had taken refuge behind a card-table in one of the smaller drawing-rooms, where she found an ottoman half-hidden by a curtain.

Here, Count Palmieri, who had been watching her movements, joined her.

She rose hastily to make her escape as he approached her, but he laid his hand gently on her arm to detain her.

“Will you not grant me a few minutes’ conversation, my dear young lady?” he began, in his most insinuating tones. “I have something very particular I wish to say to you.”

Hilda looked into the man’s face with some astonishment, but she only read there an expression of respectful entreaty.

The card-players were not far off, though not so near as, absorbed in their game as they were, to overhear a conversation carried on in a low voice.

Their presence was a protection, however, and Hilda, telling herself that it was childish to shrink so much from this man, who could do her no harm, bowed her head in acquiescence, and reiterated herself; the count drawing a chair nearly in front of her, and sitting with his back to the other occupants of the room.

“The question I am about to ask may seem strange to you,” he said; “but I beg you to go back as far as you can in your memory, and tell me if you find anything there at variance with what you have been led to suppose is your birth and station?”

“You have hinted at something like this before, Count Palmieri,” replied Hilda, raising her eyes frankly to his face. “I do not know what you mean, or what is your motive for such a question, but my earliest recollection is of Beverly. I believe I was not above eighteen months old when my father took the living, but of that I remember nothing.”

“And you have never had any reason to suppose that you are not the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Stanniforth?”

“Never!” Hilda exclaimed, turning pale—“at least, never till just lately,” she added, in her anxiety to be truthful. “I know there must be some reason more than I was told for sending me away from home, and since I have been here Mrs. Caledon has dropped hints occasion-ally that have seemed to point that way. I have tried not to think of it—not to let doubts enter my mind; they would make me very unhappy!”

“You acknowledge, then, the possibility that you may have been a stolen child?” urged Palmieri, bending forward, and speaking in a low voice.

“A stolen child, no!” cried Hilda, the color flaming into her cheeks: “but a child adopted out of the benevolence of him I have been taught to call father. That has presented itself to me as a possibility within the last few days.”

“And suppose it could be proved to you that you are of higher birth than you have been led to suppose?”

“It would not soften my regret in finding I had no real claim upon those dearest to me.”

“Would it, then, give you no pleasure to discover your real parentage—to find that you had a father ready to claim you, to open his arms to receive you? Would you not hasten to
him, and render him the obedience that would be his due?

"I would try to do what was right," Hilda replied, tears springing into her eyes; "but it seems to me that my love and obedience is due to those who fostered my infancy, and to whose loving care I owe all I have and all I am.

"Even if they were well remunerated for their care?"

The Italian's eyes glittered with an evil light as he asked the question.

If he could only sow distrust in the mind of this girl, it would be so far toward the achievement of his aim.

"Sir, I perceive you do not know Mr. and Mrs. Stanniforth," Hilda exclaimed, indignantly. "I have yet to learn that love can be bought and sold. We will end this conversation, if you please; it is painful to me."

"Do you think, then, that I shall let this matter drop as a thing in which I have no interest?" Palmieri persisted. "It grieves me, cuts me to the heart, when I think that the little child I lost nearly seventeen years ago has been brought up, not only in ignorance of her parentage, but that no instinct prompts her to throw herself into her father's arms."

He clasped his hands on his heart, and cast up his eyes with a theatrical gesture, as if asking Heaven to witness the profundity of his grief; but Hilda only shrugged from him with loathing.

"Your child—yours?" she cried. "No, signor; that I do not believe!"

"Are you not the image of your sainted mother, my adored wife? Does not the time, the age, the neighborhood, of Mrs. Dacre all go so far to prove that I have at last found the daughter I have been vainly seeking through all these years? Why were you sent away from Beverly, but because Mrs. Dacre found I had traced you out and strove to hide you from me again? But the fates have been merciful to a father's longings, and have led me here,

"Who, then, is Mrs. Dacre?" Hilda asked, with feeling.

Mrs. Dacre is your grandmother, the mother of my wife, and my enemy always," Palmieri replied.

He was about to add more, when the door of the larger drawing-room was thrown open, and two fresh guests were announced, whom Mrs. Caledon hastened to receive in her most cordial manner.

Hilda uttered a cry of joy, and darted forward to embrace Mrs. Dacre and Mr. Stanniforth.

"My guardian angel must have sent you!" she exclaimed, in delight.

CHAPTER IX.

HAPPINESS AT LAST.

Nothing passed that evening.

Mrs. Dacre was overcome with the fatigue of her journey, and retired to rest almost immediately, and Mr. Stanniforth had no opportunity of speaking to Hilda in private.

The next morning, however, she was made acquainted with her history.

She would have borne the revelation better but for the feeling of horror she had in finding herself, as they supposed, the daughter of Count Palmieri.

How was she to honor such a man as her father? How would it be possible to regard him with any respect—to give him any affectation? So she expressed herself to Mrs. Dacre, with many tears.

"Count Palmieri has forfeited all claim to your respect and affection," Mrs. Dacre replied, sternly. "Do not be led away by a false idea of duty. Your reverence, your love is due to him who has acted a father's part toward you.

What we have to do is to guard against that bad man having any claim upon you. Hilda, my dear, there is one relationship that can alone absolutely protect you—whose claim would supersede all others—a husband?"

Hilda had wept out all her tears. Through Mrs. Dacre's revelation, she seemed to herself to have lost father, mother, home—almost her own identity—all at one blow.

She sat at the elder lady's feet, leaning her weary head against her knee.

Here was her only comfort; here, at any rate, was one on whom she had a claim—one whom she could love and respect. Mrs. Dacre had spoken strongly, severely, while it was of Count Palmieri and his evil doings she had to speak; but, as she pronounced the last words, a tender smile softened her face, and she smoothed the girl's bright hair with a loving touch.

But Hilda sprung from her low seat, and drew back, trembling, shrinking, hiding her face.

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed. "Not that—anything but that!"

Mrs. Dacre looked surprised as well as distressed. She took Hilda's hand, and drew her toward her again.

"I cannot think you mean what you are saying, dear child," she returned, regarding Hilda earnestly. "Can you not guess who it is that pleads for your heart—for this little hand? And, need I add, with no qualification?"

"Yes! I can guess," replied Hilda, thinking of George Cleveland, and the proposals she had been so anxious to avoid—proposals that Cecilia had warned her would be urged upon her acceptance.

"I am much honored by his good opinion—I know I ought to be; but I can never be his wife. I do not care about him. Oh, grandmamma," she cried, speaking that name for the first time, and sinking on her knees by Mrs. Dacre's side, "you would not have me marry a man I could not love!"

"I do not understand this," said Mrs. Dacre, impatiently. "I did not think you were so capricious, Hilda."

"Capricious, grandmamma?" repeated Hilda, lifting up a face flushed with this unmerited accusation. "Indeed, indeed, I am not that! I have never given Mr. Cleveland any reason to think I cared for him in that way."

"Mr. Cleveland! Of whom are you speaking, Hilda?"

"I thought—was it not George Cleveland you meant?" Hilda murmured, her cheeks covered with blushes of shame at the idea that she had
been so vehemently refusing a man who had not offered himself.

"I know nothing about George Cleveland," replied Mrs. Dacre, perceiving Hilda's mistake, but still a little annoyed that the promptings of the girl's heart had not whispered to her her lover's name. "Is there no one you can think of but Mr. Cleveland?"

Hilda shook her head, while a deep sigh, that was almost a sob, vibrated through her frame. "My dear, do you not know—have you never divined, that Lionel Fountaine loves you?" Mrs. Dacre asked, gently.

Again Hilda sprang to her feet, clasping her interlaced fingers so tightly that the red marks showed on her delicate flesh.

"No; he ought not—he cannot!" she cried, in a voice broken with agitation. Then she added in tones rendered firmer by the sense of the re-nunciation, "Lionel Fountaine could never be guilty of anything base and treacherous. If he loved me, he would be both, since he is pledged to another."

"Pledged to another! What is it you are saying? You are dreaming, Hilda!" Mrs. Dacre exclaimed.

"No, I am not dreaming," Hilda replied. "I do not know how it can be if he fancies he loves me now, when she to whom he is bound is so beautiful, so noble, so in every way superior! Oh, grandmother, take me away from here!—take me away anywhere!" she continued, in a voice broken again in the anguish of her heart. "When he no longer sees me he will go back to his allegiance—he must! And I—you will let me stay with you, will you not, grandmother? and you will never say anything more about my—my marrying?"

"I do not understand this at all," said Mrs. Dacre, sadly troubled and perplexed. "I must speak to Lionel, and get at the truth of this."

"Oh, do not—do not, I implore you!" besought Hilda, clasping her hands and raising eyes full of agonized entreaty to her grandmother's face. "Do not put him to that shame; and me, too, if she thinks I have betrayed her secret. And she has been so kind—how could she come between them, and take away from her what she must value more than life?"

"It is very strange," said Mrs. Dacre, musingly; "but I suppose I must believe it. It seems that young men are all alike; but I must say I thought better of Lionel Fountaine."

"It can be nothing but a passing fancy he will soon forget," said Hilda, with a little gasp, as with all her force she repressed the cry of suffering that rose to her lips; "and I—1—shall not mind always."

"Then we had better go to New York, at once," said Mrs. Dacre, decisively. "I must see my lawyer; I must see what can be done to protect you against your father. You can be ready this afternoon, Hilda?"

"Yes, at once!" Hilda answered.

She was only anxious to get away. A few months ago, and the idea of going to New York would have delighted her. Now her only anxiety was to leave the place where she had suffered so much.

She had a brief interview with Mr. Stanniforth, to assure him of what, in fact, he never doubted—her unchanged, undying love and gratitude—and to send many loving messages to her whom she would always regard as the most tender of mothers. Then she sought Cecilia.

Cecilia felt it a relief when she found that Hilda was to leave Beechwood immediately. The conflict between her conscience and her pride had tried her sorely; but not then—not while Lionel Fountaine was there—could she confess the false impression she had given. After they had both left she could determine better what to do. Her manner toward Hilda was somewhat cold and constrained, nor was Hilda surprised at this. She felt that she had injured Cecilia, though involuntarily.

"Dear Cecilia, you will forgive me, because you well know how I love you!" she whispered, as she embraced her. "I am going away, first to New York, and then—ah, then I do not know. Life does not seem as if it could be a very happy thing for me. I do not wish grandmother to make sacrifices on my account."

"Wait, and do nothing rashly," Cecilia replied, in a softer and more kindly tone. "You are naturally agitated and depressed by what you have heard this morning. I was prepared for it. You do not know what fate may have in store for you yet. After all, your lot in life is likely to be happier than mine!"

"I do not see how that can be," Hilda returned. "But do not think I envy your happiness, Cecilia."

"You need not!" Cecilia answered, rather bitterly.

Then the two girls embraced, and Hilda went away to her room under pretense of packing, where she was thankful to shut herself in to think over all that occurred.

Mrs. Dacre and Hilda had been several days in New York. Her ladyship looked grave and fagged. Her interviews with her lawyers had not been altogether satisfactory.

They had, however, strongly advised her against any payment of money to Palmieri, if he insisted upon claiming her daughter's claim might be resisted as long as possible—it was very doubtful whether he would dare to take legal steps to enforce his claim to her guardianship; and, at any rate, every month gained brought the time nearer when Hilda—in future to be known as the Contessina Palmieri—would be of age, and her own mistress. Mrs. Dacre could also tie up the money her granddaughter would inherit, so that the father could not touch it.

Mrs. Dacre was reading over a draft will that had been prepared to this effect, when the door of her private sitting room at the "Langham" was opened, and the waiter approached her, bearing a card on a salver, at the same time telling that the gentleman begged permission to wait upon her on important business. On the card was written—not engraved—"Cesare Rabottino."

"Show him up," Mrs. Dacre desired, supposing he had come as an emissary of Count Pal-
mier. "Hilda, dear, I think you had better leave us awhile," she continued. "I do not know what the person may have to say."

A short time afterward, Signor Rabottino walked away with a thousand-dollar check in his pocket, and Hilda was summoned to hear the joyful news that all their dread was at an end.

"Signor Rabottino acknowledges that there might be a difficulty in proving this man to be Count Alberto; but he has put it in my power to certify to the death of Count Giulio, which is sufficient for us, let this other man be whom he may," Mrs. Dacre announced, in a tone that proved how great a burden had been lifted from her mind.

Hilda's first sensation, too, was one of infinite joy; not so much from the renewed feeling of personal security as from the knowledge that she was freed from any obligation of duty toward a man she so much disliked.

Her father was dead. She was told he had been a bad man; but death softens the errors of those who have passed away beyond the reach of our disapprobation. And Hilda, unchekced and uncontradicted, might indulge in gentle imaginings of the father she never knew.

She might fondly hope that his character had been misunderstood and his faults exaggerated, and that he had lived, he might still have been worthy of her love.

But these tender thoughts of the dead she confided to no one, from a sort of shrinking of having her fancies confronted with too palpable facts.

The day was destined to prove an eventful one in Hilda's life. In the afternoon Mrs. Caledon and Cecilia called.

They had come up to town just for a few days, Mrs. Caledon said. She was evidently in a flutter of important excitement.

They remained to afternoon tea; and while the two elderly ladies sat by the small tea-table that was drawn up to the fire, Cecilia drew Hilda to the further end of the room, where they could talk without being overheard.

"I have a piece of news for you," she said, in her usual calm, stately manner. "I am going to be married. It was all settled the day after you left us."

The crimson blood rushed to Hilda's cheeks and brow, and then left her deadly pale and cold.

This announcement was only what she expected. It must have come sooner or later, she told herself.

Sick at heart, she managed to stammer out a few words of congratulation.

"But you have not asked me who is the bridegroom," said Cecilia.

"Do I not know?" murmured Hilda, turning away her face.

"I think not; because I remember making some objection respecting my future husband, and that I shall have to recant. I am going to marry the Marquis of Exmoor."

Hilda started; and, turning hastily, looked into her friend's face, as if to make sure that she had heard aright.

"The Marquis of Exmoor! But do you love him, Cecilia?"

"My father wishes it. I have no dislike to him. He offers a position that will suit me," Cecilia replied, with a smile, in a tone that had something of self-contempt in it.

"But I thought—" Hilda began.

"That I had some particle of romance in my composition; but, you see, I have none," Cecilia interrupted. "My dear child, don't look so troubled. Do I appear to you as if a calamity had befallen me? And see, mamma is in the seventh heaven. I have no doubt she is experimenting on the excellence of her future son-in-law at this moment, and the future greatness of her daughter."

"If you are only happy, Cecilia!" said Hilda, lost in wonder at this new turn in events—a turn that she had not yet sufficiently realized to think of its effect upon her own destiny.

"Happy? Who is happy?—or what is it to be happy?" exclaimed Cecilia, bitterly. "The shepherd after he has folded his sheep at night; the sailor on shore after a stormy voyage; the hardworking woman out for a brief holiday—that may be happiness. But what can we know of it! Luxuries pall, and amusements weary, and there is nothing new under the sun. What is there for us to do or to enjoy?"

She rose as she spoke, seeing that Mrs. Caledon was bidding Mrs. Dacre good-by.

"We shall look to see you and our dear Hilda among our guests on the happy occasion," she was saying. "No doubt Cecilia will wish Hilda to be one of her bridesmaids. I shall always think of her as poor Alice's daughter, though she is not so in reality. What name will she go by? Mademoiselle Palmieri? Her father was a count wasn't he? Only to think that Count Alberto should have called himself Count Giulio! It wasn't right, was it? But these foreigners really don't seem to have the same ideas of right and wrong that we have."

There is no saying how long Mrs. Caledon would have run on, had not her daughter interposed and drawn her away.

"Lionel Fountaine is still with us; have you no message to send?" Cecilia whispered to Hilda.

Again the hot blood mounted to Hilda's cheeks; she tried to speak, but words would not come.

"Never mind; I know all. You may trust me. I think you will see him here before twenty-four hours are over," said Cecilia.

And then she followed her mother down the stairs, and Hilda had no opportunity for question or expostulation.

Mrs. Dacre and Hilda had just returned from a drive the following afternoon, and the elderly lady, feeling tired, had expressed her intention of resting for an hour before tea, when again a visitor was announced, and Lionel Fountaine entered.

His handsome face was slight with joy; in his voice there was a passionate tremor that would have touched to the heart a woman who even loved him less than did Hilda.

She rose from her seat as if to meet him, the quick heating of her breast, her trembling limbs, her flushing cheeks, betraying her without disguise.

In another moment she was folded to her lover's breast.
"My Hilda, my own love, why did you run away from me?" he murmured, fondly, while he kissed her brow, her cheeks, her lips.

"Ah, Lionel, that you must never ask me!" Hilda replied.

"Then I must guess the reason."

"No; you must not even guess it. Be satisfied!"

"Do you not think I am, Hilda? But I would never have given you up; I would have fol- lowed you to Beverly! I would never have left you till you promised to be mine!"

The clearing up of this misunderstanding was all that was wanting to make Mrs. Dacre's happiness complete.

Hilda was not one of Cecilia's bridesmaids, for when Cecilia became the Marchioness of Exmoor, Hilda was away on her bridal tour.

By her own desire, she had returned to the parsonage to spend the last few months of her maiden life with those dear friends whom she would always regard with something almost more than filial affection.

Nor would she allow any other than Mr. Stanforth to give her away to her husband; another clergyman, therefore, had to perform the ceremony.

Mr. Fountaine was sufficiently recovered to be present. He testified to his satisfaction at his son's choice by magnificently gifts to the bride.

Mr. and Mrs. Lionel Fountaine had a town house of their own; but it was arranged, with the concurrence of all concerned, that the young couple should divide the summer and autumn months between Cornwall and Dacre Hall.

The Marchioness of Exmoor and Mrs. Fountaine are attached friends and although separated by an ocean, pay occasional visits to each other.

The marchioness is beautiful and stately as ever; but Hilda remembers what she said about being happy, and is thankful that such a lot has fallen to herself as to make it no difficult matter to answer the question, Who is happy?

THE END.

**DIME HAND-BOOKS.**

**Young People's Series.**

Beadle's Dime Hand-Books for Young People cover a wide range of subjects, and are especially adapted to their end.

Ladies' Letter-Writer.
Gents' Letter-Writer
Book of Etiquette.
Book of Verses.
Book of Dreams.

**Hand-Books of Games.**

Handbook of Summer Sports
Book of Croquet.
Chess Instructor.
Cricket and Football.
Guide to Swimming.
Handbook of Winter Sports—Skating, etc.

The above publications are for sale by all news-dealers or will be sent, post-paid, on receipt of price, ten cents each, by BEADLE AND ADAMS, 58 W. 13th STREET, N. Y.

**BEADLE AND ADAMS**

**STANDARD DIME PUBLICATIONS.**

**Speakers.**

Each volume contains 100 large pages, printed from clear, open type, comprising the best collection of Dialogues, Dramas and Recitations.

The Dime Speakers embrace twenty-four volumes, viz.:

1. American Speaker.
2. National Speaker.
3. Patriotic Speaker.
4. Comic Speaker.
5. Eloquence.
6. Humorous Speaker.
7. Standard Speaker.
8. Stump Speaker.
10. Spread-Eagle Speaker.
12. Exhibition Speaker.
13. School Speaker.
14. Ludicrous Speaker.
15. Komiak Speaker.
16. Youth's Speaker.
17. Eloquent Speaker.
18. Hall Columbia Speaker.
20. Select Speaker.
21. Funny Speaker.
22. Jolly Speaker.
23. Dialect Speaker.
25. Burlesque Speaker.

These books are replete with choice pieces for the School-room, the Exhibition, for Homes, etc. 75 to 100 Declarations and Recitations in each book.

**Dialogues.**

The Dime Dialogues, each volume 100 pages, embrace thirty-two books, viz.:

Dialogues No. One.
Dialogues No. Two.
Dialogues No. Three.
Dialogues No. Four.
Dialogues No. Five.
Dialogues No. Six.
Dialogues No. Seven.
Dialogues No. Eight.
Dialogues No. Nine.
Dialogues No. Ten.
Dialogues No. Eleven.
Dialogues No. Twelve.
Dialogues No. Thirteen.
Dialogues No. Fourteen.
Dialogues No. Fifteen.
Dialogues No. Sixteen.
Dialogues No. Seventeen.

15 to 25 Dramas and Dramas in each book.

**Dramas and Readings.**

164 12mo Pages, 90 Cents.

For Schools, Parliors, Entertainments and the Amateur Stage, comprising Original Minor Dramas, Comedy, Farce, Dress Pieces, Humorous Dialogue and Burlesque, by noted writers; and Recitations and Readings, new and standard, of the greatest celebrity and interest. Edited by Prof. A. M. Russell,

**Lives of Great Americans.**

II.—John Paul Jones. IX.—Tecumseh.
III.—Mad Anthony Wayne X.—Abraham Lincoln.
IV.—Ethan Allen. XII.—Pontiac.
V.—Marquis de Lafayette XIII.—Ulysses S. Grant.

The above books are sold by newsdealers everywhere, or will be sent, post-paid, to any address, on receipt of price, ten cents each. BEADLE AND ADAMS, Publishers, 58 West street, N. Y.
PUBLISHED EVERY TUESDAY.

Waverley Library.

THIRTY-TWO OCTAVO PAGES.

1 A Bride of a Day. By Mary Reed Crowell.
2 The Girl Wife. By Barthez T. Campbell.
3 Was It Love? or, Collars and Sweethearts. By Wm. Mason Turner, M. D.
5 Will She Marry Him? or, The Masked Bride. By Mrs. Mary Reed Crowell.
6 His Lawful Wife; or, Myra, the Child of Adoption. By Mrs. Ann S. Stephens.
7 A Fair Face. By Barthez T. Campbell.
8 A Mad Marriage. By Mrs. A. Denison.
9 Daughter of Eve; or, Blind Love. By Mrs. Mary Reed Crowell.
10 The Broken Heart. or, Love versus Hate. By Mary Grace Halpine.
11 The Bride of an Actor. or, Driven from Home. By the Author of "Alien in the World," etc., etc.
12 A Pair of Gray Eyes. By Rose Kennedy.
13 Without a Heart. By C. F. Lovett.
14 Alone in the World; or, The Young Man's Ward. By the Author of "The Bride of an Actor," etc., etc.
16 The Secret Marriage. By Sara Claxton.
17 Sister against Sister; or, The Rivals of Heart. By Mrs. Mary Reed Crowell.
18 Heart to Heart. By Arabella Southworth.
19 Sold for Gold. By Mrs. Mary V. Vickey.
20 Entangled; or, A Dangerous Game. By Henrietta Thackeray.
22 Trust Her Not. By Margaret Leestart.
23 Slain Against. By Clara Augusta.
24 A Loyal Lover. By Arabella Southworth.
26 His Idol. By Mrs. Mary Reed Crowell.
27 Flirtation; or, A Young Girl's Good Name. By John Barnard (Ralph Roby).
28 Now and Forever. By Henrietta Thackeray.
29 One of the Snake's Nest. By Arabella Southworth.
30 Charlotte Temple. By Mrs. Rowan.
31 The Little Helress. By Mrs. Mary A. Denison.
32 Leap Year; or, Why She Proposed. By Sara Claxton.
33 In the Name of Fate; or, Jeannette's Reformation. By S. B. Showard.
34 Her Face Was Her Fortune. By Eleanor Blanche.
35 The Cuban Helress. By Mrs. Mary A. Denison.
36 Only a Schoolmistress. By Arabella Southworth.
37 The Winged Messenger; or, Raising All for a Heart. By Mrs. Mary Reed Crowell.
38 Was She a Coquette. By Henrietta Thackeray.
39 One Woman's Heart. By George S. Kelone.
40 Love-Mad; or, Betrothed, Married and Divorced. By Wm. Mason Turner, M. D.
41 Fair as the Snow. By Sara Claxton.
42 The Bouquet Girl. By Aggie Peavey.
43 Mariam, the Prime Dames, By Arabella Southworth.
44 The Phan Mask. By Mrs. Mary Reed Crowell.
46 The Three Sisters. By Alice Fleming.
47 The Creole Sisters. By Mrs. Anna E. Porter.
48 A Marriage of Convenience. By Sara Claxton.
49 her Life's Secret. By Mrs. Jane Lewis.
50 Sir Archer's Bride. By Arabella Southworth.
51 Led Astray. By Octave Felicite.
52 Homeless; or, Two Orphan Girls in New York. By Albert W. Allen.
53 The Moxine Bride. By Margaret Blount.
54 Pledged to Marry. By Sara Claxton.
55 Cecil's Deceit. By Mrs. Juanita Davis Burton.
56 Afra, the Beautiful; or, Her Second Love. By Arabella Southworth.
57 Without Mercy. By Barthez T. Campbell.

58 The Baronet's Secret. By Sara Claxton.
59 Agnes Hope, the Actress; or, the Romance of a Fair Ring. By Wm. Mason Turner, M. D.
60 A Widow's Wiles. By Rachel Bernhardt.
61 Did He Love Her? By Hala T. Cump III.
63 Almost in His Power. By Lilian Lovejoy.
64 She Did Not Love Him. By Arabella Southworth.
65 Rebecca Raynor, the Work Girl. By Wm. Mason Turner, M. D.
66 A Brave Girl. By Alice Fleming.
67 Lord Roth's Sin. By Georgiana Dickens.
68 A Wicked Heart. By Sara Claxton.
69 His Heart's Mistress. By Arabella Southworth.
70 The Only Daughter. By Alice Fleming.
71 Why I Married Him! By Sara Claxton.
72 The Honor Bound. By Lilian Lovejoy.
74 His Own Agony. By Arabella Southworth.
75 The Adopted. By Jennie Davis Burton.
76 A Brother's Sin. By Rachel Bernhardt.
77 Because She Loved Him. By Alice Fleming.
78 A Strange Marriage. By Lilian Lovejoy.
79 For the Woman He Loved. By Agnes M. Shayton.
80 Forbidden Rains. By Arabella Southworth.
81 Two Young Girls. By Alice Fleming.
82 A Point of Honour. By Lilian Lovejoy.
83 A Woman's Witchery. By Sara Claxton.
84 A Scathing Ordeal. By Mrs. Georgiana Dickens.
85 Outwitted by Herself. By Arabella Southworth.
86 What Jealousy Did. By Alice Fleming.
87 A Woman's Manœuvre. By Lilian Lovejoy.
88 A Fateful Game. By Sara Claxton.
89 A Ministering Angel. By Georgiana Dickens.
90 Haunted Hearts. By Rachel Bernhardt.
91 Buying a Heart. By Lilian Lovejoy.
92 A Fateful Game. By Arabella Southworth.
93 Under a Cloud. By Sara Claxton.
95 He Loves Me Not. By Lilian Lovejoy.
96 What She Cost Him. By Arabella Southworth.
97 A Ritter Mistake. By Agnes Mary Shelly.
98 Parted by Treachery. By Harriet Irving.
99 Tempted Through Love. By Lilian Lovejoy.
100 The Hand of Fate. By Arabella Southworth.
101 Her Guardian's Sacrifice. By Sara Claxton.
102 Put on a Test. By Georgiana Dickens.
103 A Sister's Crime. By Ag. on Mary Shalton.
104 Is Love a Mockery? By Arabella Southworth.
105 A Willful Wife. By Lilian Lovejoy.
106 The Beautiful Demon. By Frances Helen Devorcr.
107 A Young Girl's Ordeal. By Sara Claxton.
108 Her Evil Genius. By Harriet Irving.
110 A Passion's Revolt. By Lilian Lovejoy.
112 Cherry; or, A Daughter of the South. By Arabella Southworth.

Beadle and Adams, Publishers,
No. 98 William street, New York.

113 An Idol of Clay. By Harriet Irving.
115 In His Power. By Mrs. M. L. Fordham.
116 Almost Won. By Harriet Irving.
117 A Life's Secret. By Arabella Southworth.

The Waverley Library is for sale by all newsdealers, five cents per copy, or sent by mail on receipt of six cents each.